

In Search of Euripides

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In the summer of 1965, I went to Europe to collate several important manuscripts of Euripides in preparation for my Teubner edition of *Hecuba*. I had examined manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, at the Biblioteca Vaticana in Rome, and at the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. I then proceeded to Greece where I attended several performances of the Drama Festival at Epidauros. I intended, while in Athens, to obtain a visa for Jordan in order to examine the Jerusalem palimpsest of Euripides, the oldest extant medieval manuscript to contain large selections of Euripidean tragedy. The manuscript, probably written 1000-1100 CE, is housed in the library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate which was then situated in the Jordanian sector of divided Jerusalem.

My intention was momentarily frustrated when I learnt that there was no Jordanian consulate in Athens that could grant me a visa. Fortunately, I was advised by Professor Moshe Amit of the Hebrew University, who happened to be in Athens at the time, to inquire at the office of the Lebanese Mideast Airlines. They had flights from Athens to Jordanian Jerusalem. Upon inquiry at their office, I was told that I could book a flight from Athens to Jerusalem and then obtain a Jordanian visa upon my arrival at the Jerusalem airport.

At this point, I had a moment of hesitation. What if, on arrival at the airport, the officials asked background questions, including religion? Although I am a non-observant secular Jew, I had no intention of denying my Jewish identity. I assumed that if they learnt that I was Jewish, they would not give me a cordial welcome to Jordan. They might send me back to Athens, they might put me in prison as a supposed spy, or who knows? I decided, however, to give it a try, taking my cue from Hecuba herself, who declares in the Euripidean tragedy, 'Dare I must, whether or not I do succeed!' (τολμᾶν ἀνάγκη, κἂν τύχω κἂν μὴ τύχω, line 751).

And so I flew from Athens to Jerusalem with an overnight stop in Beirut. When we arrived at the airport, the Jordanian officials led us to a large shed and collected all our passports, which they then took into a small room. The door of this room was left ajar and I could see the official comparing the passports with some sort of list (of personae non gratae?). After the passport scrutiny was completed, the official returned, called out our names one by one, and stamped each passport with a visa. When my turn came, the official gave me a hard look, then stamped my passport. No questions, no answers.

Now it was a matter of finding lodgings. A fellow passenger suggested that I try the new YMCA Aelia Capitolina. I went directly from the airport to the YMCA and took a room which happened to overlook the Mandelbaum Gate, a dividing point between the Jordanian and Israeli sectors. I could see the Israeli soldiers on their side, tending their garden and chickens. I telephoned the Patriarchate at once and was told by Archbishop Vassilios, the Chief Secretary, that if I came immediately, the library would still be open.

With no knowledge of Jerusalem geography, and with only a street map in hand, I dashed out of the YMCA, sped down Nablus Road, rushed through the Damascus Gate,

and then plunged into the Old City. I immediately got lost. Speaking neither Hebrew nor Arabic, I painfully gained some directions from a few anglophones, and finally groped my way to the Patriarchate shortly before the library was about to close. (Library hours were 9-11 am.)

When I entered, the librarian asked what work I was looking for. I gave him the supposedly official call number of the manuscript, *Taphou* 36. He and his assistant searched and searched, and then told me that they could not find the manuscript. My heart sank. Had I come all the way from New York on a wild goose chase? Seeing my dismay, they asked what sort of a manuscript I was seeking. In my lame modern Greek, I replied, 'Palimpsestos Euripidis'. 'Ah, palimpsestos!', they exclaimed. They immediately went to a shelf, took down a manuscript, and handed it to me. I opened it and could see at once that it was indeed the Euripidean palimpsest. The supposedly official call number, *Taphou* 36, was wrong! The right call number is *Patriarcalis* 36.

When my heart returned to normal, I asked the librarian if I could sit down at the table (the only one in the room, under an only light bulb) to begin examining the manuscript. They replied that this was impossible since that day was Saturday and they had to begin preparing for Sunday religious services. 'Come back on Monday. Ah, no. Monday is the holiday for St. Peter. Come back on Tuesday. Ah, no. Tuesday is the holiday for St. Paul. Come back on Wednesday'. And so, thanks to these two saints, I had an unexpectedly long holiday weekend.

During this enforced holiday, I was able to become acquainted with some of the important historical sites in the Jordanian sector and elsewhere in Jordan (including a fascinating trip to Petra). The YMCA had arranged for a Jordanian guide to take a small group of tourists to visit the Jerusalem sites, including the Western Wall and the shamefully desecrated cemetery on the slope of the Mount of Olives. At the Western Wall, I asked the guide if Israelis were permitted to worship at the Wall during the high holidays. 'No', he replied. I asked then if non-Israeli Jews were permitted such worship. 'No Jews', he again replied. 'Very interesting', I commented, and left the Wall.

Nunc ad rem. On Wednesday morning, I arrived 9 am at the Patriarchal Library. Examining the manuscript closely, I came to the reluctant conclusion that a systematic collation of the Euripidean text with the naked eye was impossible. Although a number of words of the lower Euripidean layer could be seen, most were completely covered by the upper layer of writing (a commentary on the prophets of the Old Testament, probably written 1300-1400 CE). What was needed was an ultraviolet lamp, similar to one that I had used in the Vatican Library, which could bring forth the words of the lower layer of writing. But despite my extensive inquiry, no ultraviolet lamp could be located in the Jordanian sector. Obviously, inquiry in the Israeli sector was not possible.

I then asked Mr. N. Albina, official photographer of the Palestine Archaeological Museum, to make photographs of the palimpsest pages with the best equipment he had in his possession, in the hope that his photographs would reveal more than the naked eye. To little avail. His photographs, taken under traditional tungsten light, were only an insignificant improvement over the naked eye. I was quite discouraged, particularly since my visa, already once renewed, was about to expire. Then, the unexpected. Mr. Albina came to me and said that he now remembered that the Museum had in the past acquired an ultraviolet lamp, rarely used, and that it was in the Museum storeroom. The rub was

that the Museum curator would not allow the lamp to leave the Museum. How then could the ultraviolet lamp and the palimpsest be brought together?

These were desperate scholarly conditions which required desperate action. Again taking my cue from Hecuba, I decided to dare all. With the Librarian's assistant, I went to the home of the Librarian after his siesta. I harangued him with all the Demosthenic oratory I could muster about the importance of the information that the palimpsest could reveal, and told him how I had gained difficult information by using an ultraviolet lamp with manuscripts in the Vatican Library. He hesitated, but I could see the wheels turning: if the Catholic Vatican Library could gain difficult information with an ultraviolet lamp, why not the Orthodox Patriarchal Library?

Following much further haranguing and assurances for the safety of the manuscript, the Librarian finally gave authorization for his assistant to take the manuscript in my company to the Museum. And so the assistant tucked the manuscript tightly under his black cloak, and, like two thieves in the night, we made our way stealthily through the back streets of Jerusalem from the Patriarchate to the Museum. At the Museum, members of the staff were waiting with the ultraviolet lamp. We opened the manuscript to one of the palimpsest pages and shone the ultraviolet light onto the page. The words of Euripides began to glow and became clearly visible for the first time in several hundred years! It was almost as if we were witnessing a miracle.

Now that we had seen the flash of illumination, the next step was to try to make permanent that evanescent vision. This could only be accomplished through ultraviolet photography of the palimpsest. Unfortunately, according to the terms of my already extended visa, I had to leave Jordan the next day. I commissioned Mr. Albina, the Museum photographer, to attempt the ultraviolet photography, assuring him that I would send him full instructions concerning the necessary technique. Upon my return to the United States, I gathered information from professional photographers at the Institute of Fine Arts and the Morgan Library in New York, and from the Kodak Institute in Rochester. I conveyed this information to Mr. Albina, but, to my disappointment, he replied that he did not have, nor could he acquire, the necessary equipment to do the ultraviolet photography. It became clear that the only way that I would be able to complete this scholarly project was to make a second pilgrimage to Jerusalem, this time armed with full instructions, two ultraviolet lamps, and complete photographic equipment.

Upon my return next summer to the Patriarchal Library to begin the ultraviolet photography, I was asked to give a \$1000 deposit against any possible damage to the manuscript. Feeling confident that the ultraviolet lamp could do no damage, I was about to give them a check, but thought I should first consult with some other foreign scholars then doing research in Jerusalem. Experienced in the ways of the Middle East, they all vigorously dissuaded me from giving the deposit, saying that someone would undoubtedly find some supposed damage to the manuscript and thus confiscate my deposit. I then decided to plead my case before His Beatitude, Benediktos, Patriarch of Jerusalem. His Beatitude kindly granted me a hearing in his throne room, where he was surrounded by other high dignitaries of the Patriarchate. I explained to them the importance of the palimpsest for the study of Euripidean tragedy, and how all other research libraries used ultraviolet lamps to study old manuscripts without any damage to the documents. I even presented him with a small ultraviolet lamp that I had brought

with me as a backup for the main lamp, and demonstrated how secret messages could be written and only deciphered with an ultraviolet lamp. The Patriarch was favorably impressed and granted his authorization for the ultraviolet photography without any deposit.

And now to work. Mr. Albina, the photographer, and I worked every morning that the Library was open (9-11 am). The process of ultraviolet photography of the seventy-one palimpsest pages was not only delicate, requiring special film and special filters, but also very time-consuming. Each page required an exposure of several minutes. After each day's session, Mr. Albina would take the exposed film to his laboratory to develop the photographs and check to see that they were as clear as possible. Some photographs had to be redone to achieve greater clarity. We were making slow but steady progress when, towards the end of the second week, an official whose cooperation was essential, became visibly impatient, even hostile, and kept asking us when we would be finished. He said that he had to leave soon for the river Jordan for religious services. Finally he announced that the Library would be closed in two days. He would not allow anyone to open the Library. Fortunately, we were in the process of photographing the last few pages. We were just able to finish. I had originally hoped, after all the photographs were developed, to compare certain unclear passages in the photographs with the original manuscript, but this was now impossible. An appeal to the Patriarch was in vain. Neither I nor Mr. Albina, who had in the past done much work for the Patriarchate, could understand the change of attitude of the official. When we asked the Chief of Protocol of the Patriarchate why the person in question had become so unfriendly, he asked, 'Did you give him a gift?' I replied that I had indeed thought of this, but had heard that he was extremely wealthy and that any small gift that I could offer might be considered an insult. The Chief of Protocol answered, 'Yes, it is true that he is extremely wealthy, but he has eyes like holes'.

In any case, the photographs turned out to be of excellent quality, and were eventually published as part of my book, *The Jerusalem Palimpsest of Euripides: a facsimile edition*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969.

But there is a sequel. In the facsimile edition of the Jerusalem palimpsest, I did a complete collation of the Euripidean *text* of the palimpsest with that of the Oxford Classical Text, edited by G. Murray. However, in the upper, lower, and side margins surrounding the palimpsest text of Euripides, are found many *scholia*, commentaries on the text written in various scribal hands. In the facsimile edition, for lack of time, I gave only summary treatment to the scholia. It was my hope that some other textual scholar with experience in Greek paleography would undertake a detailed study of these scholia and report the results. Several years passed without anyone taking up the challenge. A number of colleagues then urged me, as one having the most recent experience with the palimpsest, to tackle the job. I somewhat reluctantly agreed.

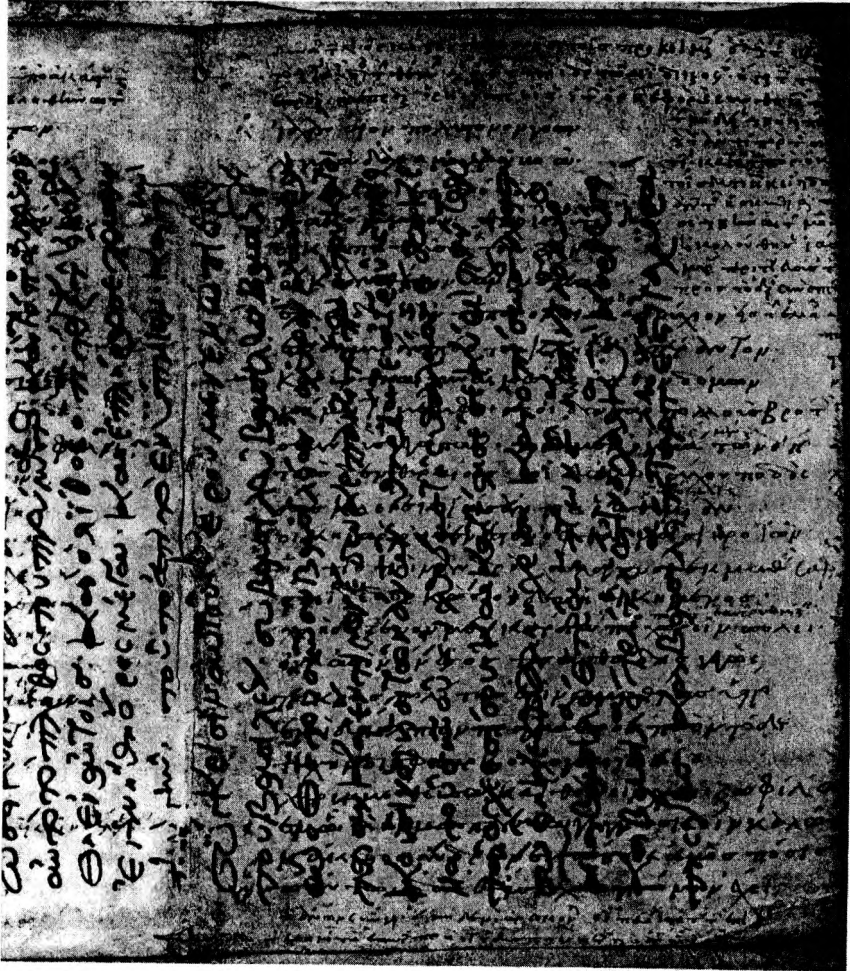
Deciphering the Euripidean scholia in the palimpsest represented an even more complicated task than that of deciphering the Euripidean text. When the original Euripidean manuscript was torn apart to make a new manuscript, many of the margins were severely clipped, thus deleting words in some places, cutting off word endings in other places with letters left dangling in empty space. Moreover, the writing of the surrounding scholia was much smaller and more cramped than that of the actual text. All of this made a collation of the palimpsest scholia with the scholia of the other principal

manuscripts of Euripides extremely difficult. It was clear that the only way of achieving maximum accuracy in a study of the scholia was to examine closely the manuscript itself once more under ultraviolet light. This resulted in two additional trips to Jerusalem, the first in 1972, the second in 1973. But this time I arrived in a re-united Jerusalem. There were, however, once more some unusual obstacles to my research activities. When I went to the Greek Patriarchate to seek permission to continue my examination of the palimpsest under ultraviolet light, the Chief Secretary refused permission, claiming that the ultraviolet light might harm the manuscript. In vain my argument that my previous use of ultraviolet light had in no way damaged the manuscript, and that ultraviolet light was regularly used for the examination of manuscripts in most major libraries. He was adamant. Fortunately, a colleague of mine from the City University of New York, the eminent scholar, Professor Abraham Halkin, who happened to be in Jerusalem at that time, suggested that I speak to the Minister of Religion. He might be of help, Professor Halkin said. I went at once to the Minister's office, showed him the published facsimile edition of the palimpsest, and explained the nature of my research project. He asked me to wait while he made a phone call to the Chief Secretary. A few minutes later, he returned to say that the Chief Secretary had agreed to the use of the ultraviolet lamp for my research on the palimpsest. I was struck with admiration and gratitude for the Minister's power of persuasion.

Once back at the Patriarchate, I was placed with the manuscript in an antechamber next to the Chief Secretary's office. A monk was assigned to watch over me, presumably to make sure that I did not devour the manuscript. This security measure was not terribly effective, since the monk frequently dozed off, or left his post to chat with another monk. But at least he did not disturb me. The Chief Secretary, however, would frequently emerge from his office, show me some correspondence, and ask me, 'Is this correct English? Is this the way you spell the word?' Despite these unusual conditions for research, I was able, over a period of ten days of close examination of the actual palimpsest, to clarify, both in the scholia and in the Euripidean text itself, words which were insufficiently clear in the photographs. All this information was gathered and eventually published in my book, *The Scholia in the Jerusalem Palimpsest of Euripides*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1979.

After I completed my research at the Patriarchate, I went to what I took to be the appropriate office, and said that I wished to make a modest contribution to the Patriarchate in gratitude for their kind hospitality. I asked the person in charge whether I should make the check out to the Patriarchate, or to him personally. He replied that I should make the check out to him. Months later, when the cashed check was returned to me, I discovered that it had been deposited into his account in a bank located in Brazil.

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Plate 1: A Page of the Jerusalem Palimpsest

(From Stephen G. Daitz, *The Jerusalem Palimpsest of Euripides: A Facsimile Edition* [Berlin, 1970])