

OEDIPUS COLONEUS 1583–1584

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THE MSS ARE ESSENTIALLY UNANIMOUS in their transmission of OC 1583–1584:

XO. ὄλωλε γὰρ δύστηνος;
 AG. ὥς λελοιπότα
 κείνον τὸν αἰεὶ βίοντον ἐξεπίστασο.

The only variation, as given in Dawe's Teubner *apparatus*, is between αἰεὶ, in AUΥ, and αἰί, in LKQRV. To avoid the nonsense of having the messenger declare that Oedipus has "left his everlasting life," both Dawe and Dain (in the Budé edition) accept the conjecture λελογχότα for λελοιπότα;¹ Dawe calls this a correction. It does indeed correct nonsense into sense, but it is highly questionable whether the sense thus created—the messenger is made to declare that Oedipus, by his death, has gained everlasting life—is appropriate. The status of ἥρωες is not easily defined in detail.² The hero and his power and his cult are inextricable from his place of burial; to that extent a hero who has passed from life on earth is dead. But heroes can also *appear*, and hence their power after death is in some way connected with a *persona* that is different from the Homeric, wraith-like continuation that seems still, through the fifth century and beyond, to have been the usual concept of the *psyche* of ordinary mortals after death.³ But the evidence about beliefs is notoriously varied and contradictory, and the borderlines between deity and hero, hero and mortal are often indistinct.⁴ Thus the meaning provided by λελογχότα cannot be said to be impossible. On the other hand, so definite an asseveration of immortality for a human being is extraordinary (outside the

¹Ascribed by Dawe to Mudge and Meineke, by Dain to Wilamowitz, this conjecture presumably appears first, credited to Zachary Mudge, in Benjamin Heath's *Notae sive Lectiones* (1762); cf. R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments. Part II: The Oedipus Coloneus* (Cambridge 1907) lv. Wilamowitz, in proposing this reading, on pages 366–367 of his son Tycho's *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (Berlin 1917), seems unaware that he has been anticipated. The conjecture had little appeal to editors before Wilamowitz's espousal of it.

²A full and authoritative study of this complex topic is made by A. D. Nock, "The Cult of Heroes," *HTR* 37 (1944) 141–166. For brief discussion and references see W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass. 1985) 203–208, and W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston 1950) 231–235.

³Cf. Burkert (above, n. 2) 194–199.

⁴The evidence adduced by Nock (above, n. 2) makes this clear.

language of the mystery religions⁵) and hence it is risky to force Sophocles into making it.⁶ Moreover, it is far less likely for βίος to be used for life after death than for life on earth.⁷

Kamerbeek's doubts about this conjecture are well-founded.⁸ He adopts it "after much hesitation," notes the problem of this meaning for βίος, but defends it with two parallels, Euripides *Medea* 1039 (about which he expresses reservations; and σχῆμα βίον need not in fact refer to life after death) and *Hipp.* 195, which does indeed provide a kind of parallel, though a very imperfect one. What the Nurse appears to say (the text is partly uncertain) is that mankind clings to this life on earth δι' ἀπειροσύνην ἄλλου βίτου, "through ignorance of another life." The similarity of meaning is not close.

In short, if the text tradition had given λελογχότα . . . τὸν αἰεὶ βίον we would presumably accept it as an interesting and most unusual description of the fate of a hero after his mortal life, but to assume, against the evidence of the mss, that this is what Sophocles wrote is extremely improbable. Nowhere else in the play is there language conveying an assertion of immor-

⁵In descriptions of the life after death enjoyed by initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries and other cults emphasis is on the blessedness of their state rather than on its permanence. For references and analysis see F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin 1974) ch. 3 ("Die Jenseitsdichtung").

⁶The concept of individual immortality is foreign even to the Eleusinian Mysteries according to M. P. Nilsson, "Die Eleusinische Religion," *Die Antike* 18 (1942) 210–231: "Dieser Glaube ist nicht der Glaube an die Unsterblichkeit des Individuums . . . sondern es ist der Glaube an das stets sich erneuernde Leben, an die Unsterblichkeit des Geschlechts. Dieser Glaube ist allein der alten Zeit gemäss . . ." (220). The presence of the definite article tells against the conjecture, implying as it does that immortal life is to be expected for Oedipus.

R. Renehan, *Studies in Greek Texts*, (Göttingen 1976, *Hypomnemata* 43) 54–55, discusses OC 1583–1584 and maintains that λελογχότα, which he ascribes to Wilamowitz, "has a good chance of being correct." He cites passages in earlier and contemporary literature with similar declarations about the achievement of immortality. In my opinion none of his examples is quite parallel in sense to what is created by λελογχότα here. Empedocles 115 DK concerns δαίμονες, Pindar *Ol.* 2.28 concerns Ino, who became a deity; Sophocles *Fr.* 278 Pearson lacks adequate context for judgment. The rest refer to initiates. Renehan's citation of Hypereides *Epitaphios* 27–28, which he call the "best commentary" on the Sophoclean passage, is interesting. Hypereides is ascribing immortal life to the dead warriors, but it is clearly only an immortality of fame, much like the Homeric κλέος ἄφθιτον, and hence not at all the same status as those who accept λελογχότα at 1583 ascribe to Oedipus. Nowhere in the play is Oedipus described as a δαίμων; he is a mortal hero. Some of Hypereides' words echo Sophocles' (τὸν βίον ἐκλιπόντες, ἐκλελοιπέναι τὸν βίον) and hence give better support to the traditional text of 1583 than to the conjecture.

⁷Wilamowitz (above, n. 1) cites the use of βίος at lines 91 and 1551 of this play, but neither passage refers clearly to life after death rather than life on earth. Indeed the phrase ταλαίπορον βίον fits very well with the emendation of 1584 to be proposed here. The closest parallel I know of is Pindar *Ol.* 2.28, where Ino has been granted βίος ἄφθιτος as a Nereid. The use of βίος at *Ol.* 2.63 is not relevant, because it refers to a cult belief concerning reward after death for initiates.

⁸J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries, Part VII: The Oedipus Coloneus* (Leiden 1984) 216.

tal life. On the contrary, both before and after the disappearance of Oedipus, references are consistently and openly to his death. Oedipus' words at 1551, τὴν τελευταῖον βίον / κρύψων παρ' Αἶδην certainly sound more like an anticipation of death than of everlasting life.⁹ I am strengthened in my conviction that the proposed reading of 1583 is wrong by its rejection by Walter Burkert in a recent paper¹⁰ and by the concurring opinion expressed to me, by letter, by Friedrich Solmsen, for whose advice in this note I am grateful.

Jebb's view was that the corruption is in or around the word αἰεί,¹¹ and I believe that he was right. As he and others observe, none of the numerous conjectures proposed for αἰεί have been persuasive: ἄρτι, ἄνδρα, and others even less winning. Nevertheless, this is the right point of attack, and I propose to substitute for αἰεί the adjective αῖον, "dry," "withered." While by no means a rare word, it is sufficiently unfamiliar (it occurs nowhere else in what we have of Sophocles), especially in this metaphorical use, to be liable to corruption.

αῖος occurs several times in Homer with the literal sense of "dried out." Twice in the *Iliad*, 12.137, 17.492–493, βοαὶ αἶαι "dried oxen," are "ox-hide shields;" once in the *Iliad* (23.327, ξύλον αῖον) and twice in the *Odyssey* (5.240, 18.309) αῖον refers to dried wood. At *Iliad* 12.160 it refers to the "clashing" sound of helmets (or perhaps, as Willcock suggests,¹² "hollow"). Hesiod bids the farmer plough at ploughing time, whether the season is dry (*Op.* 460, αῖην . . . ὥρην) or wet; at *Op.* 743, αῖον ἀπὸ χλωροῦ occurs in the advice not to cut off the "dried" finger nails at the wrong time. The word is not certainly in our texts again until the fifth century,¹³ but the related verb αὔαινειν is used by Solon, 4.35 (West), αὔαινει¹⁴ δ' ἄτῃς ἄνθεα, "(Eunomia)

⁹Note also 1521, (Oedipus) σὺ με χρή θανεῖν and 1688–1690, (Ismene) κατὰ με φόνιος Ἀΐδας ἔλοι πατρί ξυνθανεῖν. Such expression as κάμψειν . . . βίον (91) and τὸν αἰεῖ κατὰ γὰς σκότον εἰμένος (1700–1701) are normal poetic references to death. Cf. also Antigone at 1705–1707, the Chorus at 1720–1721, and Theseus at 1763.

The text of 1551 has been questioned. Dawe accepts the conjecture τὴν τελευταίην, βίον, but most editors keep the reading of the mss. The idiom of τελευταῖον, though unusual, is within the range of this adjective, not unlike the idiom of *El.* 271, τελευταίην ὕβριν. Cf. also Arist. *Pol.* 1298a31 and 1312b35.

¹⁰W. Burkert, "Opferritual bei Sophokles. Pragmatik—Symbolik—Theater," *Der altsprachliche Unterricht* 28.2 (1985) 5–20.

¹¹Burkert (above, n. 2) 244.

¹²M. M. Willcock, *The Iliad of Homer. Books I–XII* (London 1978) 316.

¹³Most scholars believe that Heraclitus 118 DK should be read αῖη ψυχὴ σοφωτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη as conjectured by Stephanus, rather than αὔγη ξηρὴ ψυχὴ σοφωτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη, the predominant ancient text of this much-quoted saying. In any case, whether described as αῖη or ξηρὴ, this dry Heraclitean soul belongs to a very different semantic development from that of most of the word's occurrences.

¹⁴West prints αὔ-, because there is evidence—in compounds, for example—that in its post-Homeric form αῖος and its cognates were aspirated. Both LSJ and Chantraine, *Dictionnaire*

withers the flowers of *ate*.” The compound καθααίνειν occurs in Archilochus (West 107, πολλούς . . . Σείριος καθααανεί/ὄξυς ἐλλάμπων), where the context, in Plutarch’s quotation of the passage, shows that the meaning is “dry out,” “wither.”

In late fifth- and in fourth-century usage a metaphorical meaning occurs. Earlier, in Aeschylus *Eum.* 333, the song of the Furies is said to be αὐονὰ βρότοις, “a shrivelling to mortals,” which may or may not be metaphorical. (The noun αὐονή [αὐ-] seems, in some of its uses, to be related to αὖω, sometimes, as here to αὖος.) In Aristophanes *Lys.* 385 αὐός εἰμ’ ἤδη τρέμων and several passages in Menander, *Epit.* 901, αὐός εἰμι τῷ δέει, *Sam.* 515, αὐός δέει καὶ πέπηγα, *Pk.* 353, αὐός εἰμι (with fright), the metaphorical use is clear, though the adjective may, in some of these places, indicate rigidity rather than dryness. In *Lys.* the context suggests dryness—the koryphaios insists that he won’t respond to watering. In any case, these examples show clearly enough that the word can be used to indicate a withered, dried out condition that applies very well to the βίος of one, like Oedipus, whose “way of life is false into the Seare, the yellow Leaf.”¹⁵

There are other circumstances that fortify the word’s probability here. Though Sophocles nowhere else that we know of used αὖος, the verb αὐαίνειν occurs twice, in contexts that bear a resemblance to our passage. Electra says (*El.* 819) ἄφιλος αὐανῶ; Philoctetes (*Phil.* 954) αὐανοῦμαι τῷδ’ ἐν αὐλίῳ μόνος; both lament that their lives will wither away. The metaphor is, then, probable enough in Sophoclean diction. As for the probability of confusion in the tradition of the text between αἰεῖ (αἰεῖ) and αὖος, a passage in Theocritus, 16.12, provides exactly this situation. I quote from Legrand’s *Budé apparatus*: “αἰεῖ codd. pl.: αὐεῖ A αὐή (vel αὐήν) P Antt.” (Antt. = the four earliest printed editions of Theocritus). While all recent editors choose αἰεῖ, with Gow not even mentioning the variants in the mss, there is a good deal to be said for αὐή, as the arguments for it presented by Onians clearly show.¹⁶

What is being proposed here is, then, the restoration of a relatively unfamiliar word (it is glossed in Hesychius, by ξηρός) displaced by a common word. While there is no impressive argument on palaeographical grounds, the confusion in Theocritus suggests that there is no improbability in this respect. To retain αἰεῖ requires us to understand the phrase τὸν αἰεῖ βίοντον to

étymologique, so spell it, but since the matter has no bearing on the point at issue, I shall follow the practice of most editors and use the psilotic form.

¹⁵Shakespeare, *Macbeth* v.iii.22–23. The relationship between plant life and the withering of age is nicely illustrated by a passage in Aristotle, *Resp.* 17 (478b28–29): τοῖς μὲν οὖν φυτοῖς αὐανσις, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ζώοις καλεῖται τοῦτο γήρας. For a special connection between dryness and old men cf. Plutarch *Quaest. conviv.* 650a–d.

¹⁶R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge 1951) 223. Onians’s study of this word and of the whole question of “dry” and “moist” in Greek thought is of great interest.

mean something like “his (seemingly) interminable life,” or “the vicissitudes of his life,”¹⁷ neither of which is probable. Above all this note is intended to voice a protest against the violence done to 1583 by recent editors. I propose, then, to read 1584 as κείνον τὸν αὐτὸν βίον ἐξεπίστασο and leave 1583 unchanged.¹⁸

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¹⁷Burkert (above, n. 10) understands the phrase as “das Leben, was immer es war, mit Gutem und Bösem, Auf und Ab.”

¹⁸Several colleagues made constructive suggestions for the betterment of this note: Kevin Clinton, David Mankin, Phillip Mitsis, Alan Nussbaum, and Richard Thomas. I am most grateful to them for their help. Special thanks are due to David Sansone, whose scholarly criticisms as referee for *Phoenix* were exceptionally careful and valuable.