



ELECTRYONE

ISSN 2241-4061



9 772241 406118

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Euripides in Ptolemaic Egypt

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Abstract: Papyri of Euripides in the Hellenistic Period far exceeded any other Classical author (except for Homer). Fragments of his plays were extracted for school use, for inclusion in anthologies, and for various types of performance. Many of the myths treated in these found plays are reflected in what Hellenistic poets write, including genealogies relevant to Ptolemaic self-fashioning and the linking of the space of the new city with old Greece.

Key words: Euripides, papyri, school texts, performance, cultural literacy.

Introduction

According to the following scholium on Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, the fourth Ptolemy wrote a tragedy on Adonis in emulation of Euripides, about which his minister (and lover) Agathocles wrote.¹

¹ Sch. Ar. *Thesmo.* 1059 (= *TrGF* 119). What Agathocles may have written is unclear, see Kotlińska-Toma (2015) 146-147.

ἐπεὶ εἰσήγαγεν κακοστένακτον τὴν Ἥχῳ ὁ Εὐριπίδης ἐν τῇ Ἀνδρομέδῃ,
 εἰς τοῦτο παίζει. ἐζήλωσε δὲ αὐτὸν Πτολεμαῖος ὁ Φιλοπάτωρ ἐν ᾗ πεποίηκε
 τραγωδίᾳ Ἀδώνιδι, περὶ ἧς ὁ ἐρώμενος αὐτῷ Ἀγαθοκλῆς γέγραπεν,
 ὁ ἀδελφὸς τῆς ἐρωμένης αὐτοῦ πάλιν Ἀγαθοκλείας.

When Euripides brought the distraught Echo on stage in his *Andromeda*, [Aristophanes] mocks this. Ptolemy Philopater [IV] imitated [Euripides] in his tragedy *Adonis*, about which his lover Agathocles wrote, the brother of Agathoclea, who was also his lover.

Given what we know about Ptolemy IV and Agathocles we should probably be grateful that this effort has not survived. However, the anecdote does capture the literary aspirations of the early Ptolemies and highlight the importance of Euripides in Alexandrian cultural dynamics. The centrality of Euripides' dramas for Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* is not in doubt, but the extent to which he may have influenced Hellenistic culture is often overlooked. In what follows, I provide an assessment of the various types of Euripides' texts that were found in Ptolemaic Egypt, using the papyri as my chief database, and consider their role in shaping the Greek imaginary of early Alexandria.

To judge by the number of papyri of his plays found in Ptolemaic Egypt, Euripides' importance was second only to Homer. Thanks to Trismegistus (cited as TM)² comparative data are quite accessible. These numbers include fragments from whole plays, many of which did not survive antiquity, excerpts for specific purposes (discussed in what follows), and citations of Euripides by later authors whose texts have been found in Ptolemaic Egypt.

² The Leuven Database of Ancient Books <https://www.trismegistos.org/ldab>. Figures were accessed in February 2026. In place of the extensive bibliography on the fragments I discuss, I give the reference to the database (TM number), since each entry has a bibliography that is kept up to date.

Number of papyri of selected poets found in Egypt

Poet	All Periods	Ptolemaic (3 rd -1 st BCE)
Euripides	311	82
Sophocles	71	13
Aeschylus	65	7
Menander	211	23
Aristophanes	93	6
Homer	2,380	194

Although there are also many early fragments of tragedy without a known author, collectively these are far fewer in number than the totals for Euripides. Of course, Homer stands out from the rest in overall totals (2,380), but surprisingly, given his importance as a school text, his numbers in the Ptolemaic Period are only a little over twice those of Euripides (194), and fragments from the *Odyssey* (61) are lower than the total for Euripides. To refine even further: to judge from find contexts and handwriting, 42 fragments of Euripides fall within the third-second centuries BCE; the remaining have been assigned dates within the second-first centuries BCE. In contrast, there are only five fragments of Sophocles including three of disputed attestation and two of Aeschylus from this early period (one is only a single line possibly used as a metrical exemplum).³ The find sites are in those regions of Upper Egypt closest to Alexandria—the eastern Fayum, where Philadelphus had opened new plots of land for his veterans. These locations included the cities that would have attracted Greek settlers—

³ TM1282 = P. Cairo Zenon 59651: ἰὼ Κάϊκε Μύσισαί τ' ἐπῖρροαί. Apparently the first line from Aeschylus' *Mysians*; it is cited in the scholia to Hephaestion as an example of a "pure iambic" (258, 7 Consbruch).

Philadelphia, Heracleopolis, and Hermopolis Magna, but Euripides is found also in locations whose populations are heavily Egyptian (Memphis, Tebtunis).⁴

As is typical of early Ptolemaic finds, most of these fragments have been extracted from mummy cartonnage. The variety of types give a clear indication that by the end of the second century BCE Euripides was not just a text in a library but had passed (unlike Aeschylus and Sophocles) into the lower reaches of the literate and the world of Greek learners in provincial Egypt. In addition to Hellenistic fragments from known plays: *Orestes* (15), *Phoenissae* (9), *Medea* (7), *Hippolytus* (7), *Bacchae* (5), *Electra* (4), *Iphigenia in Tauris* (3), *Iphigenia in Aulis* (3), and *Hecuba* (3), fragments from lost plays have also been found: *Cresphontes* (4), *Hypsipyle* (4), *Telephus* (3), *Archelaos* (2), *Phrixus I* (2), *Ino* (2?), *Aegeus* (1), *Antiope* (1), and *Meleager* (1). Many of these fragments will have been from copies of whole plays, but the majority come from lines of Euripides extracted to serve as school texts, collections of gnomic utterances (which are in part related to school use), one collection of prologues, another of lyric passages that might have been a Dionysiac artist's copy, and finally performance texts with musical notation. This range of types was already well established by the end of the third century BCE, and it is a pattern markedly different from what survives of the other tragic poets. Taken together these data suggest that Euripides' role was significant for transmitting Hellenic cultural values within Egypt in general, and for early Ptolemaic settlers in particular. He seems to have been second only to Homer, in this regard.

1. Euripides in the Schoolroom

Euripides is well represented in Ptolemaic schoolbooks and anthologies,⁵ the most famous of which is the *Livre d'écolier*, a schoolmasters' handbook said to have come from the Fayum.⁶ On the basis of an epigram that praises the fourth Ptolemy, who ruled from 222-204 BCE, it has generally been dated at the end of the third century, on the sensible assumption that epigrams praising Ptolemy IV are not likely to have circulated much past his lifetime. A series of columns from the book have survived, containing

⁴ No papyri have survived from Alexandria because, unlike the rest of the Nile valley, the soil was not sufficiently arid to prevent discarded material from decay.

⁵ For school texts see Cribiore (1996) nos. 233-50; for anthologies found on papyri see Pordomingo (2013) 181-208.

⁶ TM 59942 = Carrara no. 25 = Cribiore (1996) no. 379.

lists of deities, rivers, significant people—mythological and historical (including Callimachus), squares of numbers, and exercises in syllabification that included lines 529-534 from Euripides’ *Phoenissae* and four from the *Ino*. There was also a passage from the *Odyssey* (book 5.116-24—Calypso’s complaint that the gods are hard-hearted and unfair in their treatment of goddesses who love mortals), two short comic monologues on the cook, and a longer passage from Strato who castigates a cook for using Homeric words to name common kitchen items. Finally, there are two epigrams commemorating Ptolemies. We are obviously in the presence of a schoolmaster with eclectic tastes and a sense of humor. This is a thoroughly engaging collection of texts, but the two passages of Euripides are particularly relevant to this discussion. The *Phoenissae*—to judge from the number of later papyrus fragments found in Egypt—was Euripides’ most popular play. There are to date 35 fragments (9 more than its closest competitor, *Orestes*, currently at 26), and nine of them are Ptolemaic. It was particularly popular in the schoolroom, represented by passages that lent themselves to easy moralizing. The selection from the Fayum manual for example, contains lines from a speech of Jocasta:⁷

ἀλλ’ ἡμπειρία

ἔχει τι λέξαι τῶν νεῶν σοφώτερον. 530

τί τῆς κακίστης δαιμόνων ἐφίεσαι

Φιλοτιμίας, παῖ; μὴ σύ γ’ ἄδικος ἢ θεός;

ἐσῆλθε κάξῃλθ’ ἐπ’ ὀλέφρῳ τῶν χρωμένων·

Experience has something to say that is wiser than youth. Why do you pursue the worst divinity of all, Ambition, son? Do not. The goddess is unjust. She has entered many prosperous homes and cities, and she has left their owners in ruin.

⁷ TM59942 includes both *Phoenissae* and *Ino* fragments. About the *Phoenissae* Crihiore (2001:199) remarks “Education appropriated this text at every level, from the time when it was used as a copybook to improve penmanship to the point when a student engaged in a composition exercise” and that students “continued to revisit it even when the school years were over.”

This is followed immediately by four broken lines from the now lost play, the *Ino*, of equally sententious character, set out with syllables divided to facilitate reading:

ο: ραι: [.....] α: μα: κρω[
 ως: μι: κρα] γτα: και: cτι: γ[
 υ: πο: πτε[..... ..] πλου: το: οic: γὰρ [] ι
 ε: ξελ: πι: δ[...] πι: πτον: τα: υ: πτι[]: ρω:

The passage is cited elsewhere with an additional line, and this is the text that is usually printed:

ὄρῳ τυράννους διὰ μακρῶν ηὐξημένους
 ὥς μικρὰ τὰ σφάλλοντα, καὶ μί' ἡμέρα
 [τὰ μὲν καθεῖλεν ὑπόθεν, τὰ δ' ἦρ' ἄνω.]
 ὑπόπτερος δ' ὁ πλοῦτος οἷς γὰρ ἦν ποτε
 ἐξ ἐλπίδων πίπτοντας ὑπτίους ὄρῳ.

You see tyrants whose power has grown over a long period, how one day casts some down from a height, and raises others up. Wealth is winged. Those who once had it I see cast down from their hopes, on their backs.

The *Ino* passage is an excellent illustration of how performance and gnomic appropriation of Euripides' plays were intertwined. Plutarch's letter of condolence to Apollonius (*Moralia* 104a) is filled with sentiments culled from earlier authors. Among them are these lines from the *Ino*, said not only to have been quoted by Demetrius of Phaleron but emended. Demetrius remarked “μικρ' ἄττα τὰ σφάλλοντα, καὶ μί' ἡμέρα | τὰ μὲν καθεῖλεν ὑπόθεν, τὰ δ' ἦρ' ἄνω, but admirable as this sentiment was, it would have been better to say: “not one day” but “one second” (εἰ μὴ μίαν ἡμέραν ἀλλὰ στιγμήν εἶπε χρόνου). In fact, the Fayum text reflects Demetrius' comment in that it reads not καὶ μί' ἡμέρα, but καὶ στιγ[. These same four lines are mentioned much later

in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (7.5), where they are explicitly said to have been part of a tragic actor's performance and their force immediately directed against the consul of Asia, who was in attendance.

τραγωδίας δὲ ὑποκριτοῦ παρελθόντος ἐς τὴν Ἔφεσον ἐπὶ τῇ Ἰνοῖ τῷ δράματι καὶ ἀκροωμένου τοῦ τῆς Ἀσίας ἄρχοντος, ὃς καίτοι νέος ὢν φανερός ἐν ὑπάτοις ἀτολμότερον ὑπὲρ τούτων διανοεῖτο, ὁ μὲν ὑποκριτὴς ἐπέραινεν ἤδη τὰ ἱαμβεῖα, ἐν οἷς ὁ Εὐριπίδης διὰ μακρῶν αὐξηθέντας τοὺς τυράννους ἀλίσκεσθαι φησιν ὑπὸ μικρῶν, ἀναπηδήσας δὲ ὁ Ἀπολλώνιος ‘ἄλλ’ ὁ δειλὸς’ ἔφη ‘οὗτος οὔτε Εὐριπίδου ξυνήσιν οὔτε ἐμοῦ.’

When a tragic actor came to Ephesus [performing] in the drama, Ino, the governor of Asia was in the audience, who although young was distinguished among the consuls, but disposed to cowardice in such things [i.e., opposition to tyranny]; at the point when the actor finished the iambics in which Euripides says that tyrants who have grown in power for a long time are destroyed by small things, [Apollonius] leapt up and said “but this coward [the consul] knows neither Euripides nor me.”

The popularity of these lines endured until at least the fifth century CE. They are quoted by Stobaeus in his *Florilegium* (4.41.1 = *TrGF Ino* 420), a text intended as instruction for his son.

Two Roman fragments of this play have also been found: P. Oxy. 78.5131, from the third century CE, contains 25 lines from another section of this play with actor's part markings. The marginal note Ἀθάμας β indicates that the part of Athamas, Ino's husband, was played by the second actor. A second Roman fragment (*P. Phil. Nec.*) has recently come to light. It includes passages from the *Ino* as well as Euripides' *Polyidos*.⁸ The *Ino* is certainly relevant to literary production in early Ptolemaic Egypt: the story of Ino the stepmother of Phrixus forms part of the background for the tale of the Argonauts; Callimachus includes an *aition* on Ino and her son Melicertes (fr. 91 Harder) in the fourth book of the *Aitia*, and Athamas is named apparently in fr. 49 Harder. Given the much later context of the passage in Philostratus (where it is projected back to the

⁸ Edited by Gehad, Gibert, & Amrhein (2024).

time of Nero), it is worth considering whether the schoolmaster's inclusion of these lines might have been a covert reference to the abuse of power under the fourth Ptolemy.

If classroom texts exploited Euripides for moral lessons, Callimachus' epigram on the dedication of a tragic mask (*AP* 6.310 = 48 Pf. = G-P 26) in a schoolroom provides another perspective on how Euripides figured in the early Ptolemaic educational environment. It reads:

Εὐμαθῖν ἤτεῖτο διδοῦς ἐμὲ Σίμος ὁ Μίκκου

ταῖς Μούσαις, αἱ δὲ Γλαῦκος ὄκως ἔδοσαν

ἀντ' ὀλίγου μέγα δῶρον. ἐγὼ δ' ἀνὰ τῇδε κεχηνῶς

κείμει τοῦ Σαμίου διπλόον, ὁ τραγικός

παιδαρίων Διόνυσος ἐπήκοος· οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν

ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος, τοῦμὸν ὄνειρα ἐμοί.

Snub-nose (Simos), the son of Small (Miccus), dedicated me to the Muses and asked for zeal in learning. And they, like Glaucus [who exchanged golden armor for bronze] gave him a large gift in exchange for a small one. Now I, the tragic Dionysus, am set up here yawning twice as wide as the Samian as I listen. They are reciting: 'holy is his hair'.⁹ Old news.¹⁰

The epigram capitalizes on the fact that schoolboys declaimed Euripides' plays as part of their education, a practice so commonplace that Dionysus is yawning in boredom, Callimachus' sly explanation for the gaping mouth of the typical tragic mask. Here *eumathia*, a quality much praised by philosophers, seems to be equated with rote learning and may be a jibe at the banal uses to which tragedy is put in teaching the young. Note that the boys are reciting the opening words of an iambic trimeter (ἱερὸς ὁ πλόκαμος) as if it were a hexameter, thus seeming to have missed the point of the lesson.

⁹ Euripides, *Bacchae* 494.

¹⁰ See discussion in Stephens & Acosta-Hughes (2025) 306.

2. Euripides in Anthologies

Anthologies that group together short morally instructive passages from more than one source, usually poetic, were common in Hellenistic Egypt. These naturally differ in subject matter from selections of lyric poets made for sympotic performance, which are also found.¹¹ Euripides, like Menander, had a well-established position in *florilegia*, where gnomic lines might find themselves. One such text is P. Hibeh 1.7 (250-210 BCE), a very fragmentary piece of cartonnage from Mummy A, found near Hibeh in the Fayum. The recto contained lines from Lysias' *Against Theozotides*; identifiable lines of the verso are from an anthology that included short passages from Euripides, probably Epicharmus, and Menander.¹² The most readable passage is identified as Εὐριπίδου. These twelve lines are Orestes' meditation on the difficulty of predicting nobility (εὐανδρία) thought to be from the *Electra* 367-379.¹³ Later, a four-line passage contains a sentiment variously attributed to Euripides or Menander and famously quoted by St. Paul (*First Letter to the Corinthians* 15.33.2: φθείρουσιν ἥθη χρηστὰ ὁμιλίας κακαί, "evil communications corrupt good manners"). A second anthology is that of P. Petrie 1.3 (1) = P. Lit. Lond. 57 *descripsit* from third-century Gurob. It includes four lines on the unfortunate man (τις δυστυχῶν), headed Ἐπιχάρμου, followed by three lines on the fortunate (ἐν δ' εὐτυχῶν), headed Εὐριπίδου (from the *Antiope*).¹⁴ What characterizes both school and anthological extracts is their distillation of wisdom in short bites. In this they resemble the sayings of the Seven Sages but also the kind of material found in earlier Biblical and Egyptian wisdom literature.¹⁵ It is well-documented that the Ptolemies needed a Greek-literate population to run their imperial bureaucracy, and that they incentivized Egyptians to learn Greek.¹⁶ It is possible that the concentration on "wisdom" rich excerpts characteristic of Ptolemaic anthologies

¹¹ Pordomingo nos. 21-24.

¹² TM 59945 = Carrara no. 20 and Pordomingo no. 15.

¹³ These lines are athetized in modern editions of the play, but Carrara (2009) 120 observes, that they were preserved in the manuscript tradition of the play (Laurentianus 32.2, Parisinus gr. 2888).

¹⁴ *TrGF* 198 = Stob. 3.16.4 = Carrara no. 23. The verbal similarity of the sentiments has raised questions about the exact nature of the anthology: Slings (1979) 41-45, e.g., argues for a collection that was intended to demonstrate literary 'thefts'. The authenticity of the Euripides quote is guaranteed by its later appearance in Stobaeus (and see Carrara 123-124).

¹⁵ The Seven Sages were known for their encapsulated moral philosophy, see, e.g., Plato, *Protagoras* 342e-343b. For the various strands of Near Eastern wisdom literature see the essays in Adams & Goff (2020) especially 310-327.

¹⁶ Clarysse & Thompson (2006) 2.144-147 on 'tax-Hellenes'.

was dictated in part to provide Egyptian learners of Greek with a familiar form of instruction.

P. Hibeh 1.25 appears to have been a school text that contains the end piece that has found its way onto several of Euripides' plays—the *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Helen*, *Bacchae*, and with one line altered, the *Medea*.¹⁷ It is set out on a small scrap as follows:

[πολλὰ μο]ρφ[αὶ τῶν

δαιμ[ονί]ων πολ[λὰ

δ' ἀέλπτους κραι[νους

σι θεοί : καὶ τὰ δοκη

σαντ' οὐκ ἐτελέσθη,

τῶν δ' ἀδοκίτ[ων

πόρον ἤρε θεός.

τοιόνδ' ἀπέβη τό

δε πρᾶγμα.

Many are the forms of the divine, and the gods work in surprising ways...What we expect does not come to pass. God finds a way for the unexpected. Such was the end of this event.

Considering its sentiment, it is not surprising that this closure would be copied as a school exercise. But that may not be the whole story. W. S. Barrett in his addition of the *Hippolytus* remarks:¹⁸

Now Euripides, if any man, was an adept moralizer, and it would be extraordinary that he should content himself...with a repetition of the same undistinguished platitude; suspicion deepens when one observes that only in the *Alcestis* is the platitude really appropriate—in the *Andromache*, *Helen*, and *Bacchae* it is no more than tolerable, and in the *Medea* it is grossly out of place. I should judge that in four plays at least these

¹⁷ TM 59931 = P. Yale 1.20 = Carrara no. 24 = Cribiore no. 240.

¹⁸ (1964) 417-418.

lines were added later to cater for a public addicted to sententious commonplaces...the most likely culprits are the actors.

If the popularity of these lines results from the behavior of actors, clearly school texts should not be thought of in isolation, but in tandem with contemporary performance, because school practices like copying *sententiae*, undoubtedly formed public tastes as much as they were reflective of it. The brief passage from the *Ino*, found in a Ptolemaic school text and later quoted as from an actor's performance, supports this thesis. Presumably Demetrius of Phaleron in the third century BCE and Philostratus far later heard these lines in performance, but it was the aphoristic quality of the sentiment that remained with them, if not mythological details of the text.

3. Euripides in Performance?

Dramatic performance of Euripides' plays is well-attested in the Hellenistic Period, and professional groups of performers, the so-called *Technitai of Dionysus*, are found as early as the Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus (c. 278 BCE).¹⁹ The guild is well-attested, and not just in Alexandria. An inscription from Ptolemais-Hormou c. 250 BCE (*OGIS* 51, 31-36) makes it clear that they also operated in the *chora*. Against this background, it is worth considering some of the early Euripides papyri that various editors have identified as copied for use by performers. This group of texts has been the subject of increasingly thoughtful, if unresolved analyses over the last several years.

The first, P. Hamb. 118 + 119, dates from the 3rd century BCE, and is of unknown provenance.²⁰ It contains Euripidean prologues, four of which have been identified: from *Archelaos*, *Hecuba*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Hypsipyle*; three others remain conjectural—the *Alcmene*, *Ixion*, and *Thyestes*. This is not a collection arranged in alphabetical order, and it is written on the back of an earlier text. Thus, it is unlikely to be analogous to the numerous examples of hypotheses to be found on papyri from the Roman Period, but rather a set of extracts for personal use. It closely resembles collections of lyric passages that almost certainly were the product of a local

¹⁹ Athenaeus 198b-c. For the question of favorable tax status of actors see Clarysse & Thompson (2006) 2.52-53.

²⁰ TM 59934 = Carrara no. 15 = Pordomingo no. 6.

performance practice. There is some evidence for the recitation of speeches (*rheseis*) from tragedy as early as the 4th century. Theophrastus in his *Characters*, for example, describes his Grouch (15.10) as the sort who “would not sing or recite speeches or dance” (καὶ οὔτε ᾄσαι οὔτε ῥῆσιν εἰπεῖν οὔτε ὀρχήσασθαι ἂν ἐθελήσειεν) when asked.²¹ Later attested examples of the recitation of messenger speeches by actors make it inherently likely that prologues too would have been recited. Further Carrara makes the important observation that the copying and memorization of prologues serves a didactic function because the prologue compresses mythological information.²²

Another curiously ambiguous early papyrus is P.Hibeh 2.179.²³ It holds four fragmentary columns from a papyrus roll. While it contains lines that are clearly from the *Heracles Furens*, and in the same order as the play we now have, there are many omissions and occasional insertions: column I, for example, contains three trimeters that are not part of the prologue of the extant play. Both Wolfgang Luppe and Richard Janko have conjectured that this papyrus contains a much shorter, and slightly different version of Euripides’ extant play. Janko would place it in the same category as the two *Hippolytuses*. Martin Cropp ventured the hypothesis (elaborated by Bond) that the fragment represents a version that extracted selected lines from Euripides’ original then elaborated upon them, possibly for performance.²⁴

Whether or not these two former examples are to be connected to performance practice, with an early anthology of lyric passages from tragedies that include Euripides’ *Phoenissae* and *Medea* we are on much firmer ground. The third century BCE fragment from cartonnage, P. Strasbourg W.G. 306-307v, includes Euripides, *Phoenissae* (1500-1736) and *Medea* (844-65, 977-81, 1087-1115, 1251-92, 1389-1419) and an unknown tragedy that M. Fassino thought might be the *Ino*.²⁵ The recto contains selected Euripidean lyrics + tragic iambs ascribed to Astydamos’ *Hector*.²⁶ The verso in another, probably contemporary hand, contains extracts of mainly iambic and

²¹ See Prauscello (2006) 86-92 for a discussion of tragic excerpts from iambic speeches.

²² (2009) 102.

²³ TM 59926 = *TrGF* 5.2 Adespota **953c = Carrara no. 12 = Pordomingo no. 4.

²⁴ Cropp (1982), Bond (1988: xxxv), Carrara with a full discussion of the possibilities (2009) 84-90, and now Mecciarello (2019), who argues against two versions of the plays.

²⁵ TM 59920 = Pordomingo no. 5 = Carrara no. 16. The text was reedited by M. Fassino (1999). The fragment is reproduced in *TrGF* as unidentified (fr. **953m). Kannicht (*TrGF* 5.2, p. 952) tentatively accepts the identification (“*Inoni verisimilius sed non procul dubio recte* Fassino 40-3”); Finglass (2014) 76-77 rejects the identification but see now Gibert (2024).

²⁶ TM 59939 = *TrGF* 5.2 953m = Pordomingo no. 32.

choliambic verse. However, the anapests from *Medea* 1083-1089 are written as continuous lines, not broken out into cola. A similar example is the third century BCE fragment from Hermopolis Magna that contains a chorus from the *Phaethon*.²⁷ It is an elegantly copied column headed ἐμ Φαε[θοντι, which marks it as an extract, not a whole play. Because it lacks the name of the author, it must have been from an anthology of selections from Euripides.²⁸ Here too the choral ode is copied as *scriptio continua*. This feature was certainly found in early Ptolemaic poetic papyri, but in this case may not be the whole reason: P. Berol. Inv. 21257²⁹ is another third century papyrus of the *Medea* that includes the same anapests as in the Strasburg papyrus, but in an arrangement that differs from the textually transmitted tradition. This suggests (at the very least) that the textual transmission is not simple and that it would be adapted to accommodate various performance environments.

Finally there are the famous texts with musical notation, two of which are quite early: a lyric section from the *Orestes* on mummy cartonnage from Hermoupolis Magna from about 200 BCE.³⁰ Another scrap from the *Iphigenia in Aulis* contains Iphigenia's sung dialogue as she departs to be sacrificed, along with lines from the second choral stasimon.³¹ The anapests in the musical fragment—like those of the Berlin papyrus—seem to have been written as continuous text, while the presence of musical notation guarantees performance. This does not mean that whenever a tragic text lacks a colometric layout we should infer that it was intended for performance, but it does raise this as a *prima facie* possibility. As West points out: Colometry is not “characteristic of texts carrying musical notation. Instead, [they] are written in long lines of irregular lengths usually ending with a complete word.” He goes on to explain that the order of the passages “had nothing to do with the performance of the play, but rather with some sort of concert performance of musical highlights”.³² A central question that these texts raise—one continually discussed—is whether the notation is original with Euripides and thus reflective of fifth-century performance or a local adaptation. Lucia Prauscello

²⁷ TM 59920 = *TrGF* 733 = Pordomingo no. 1 = Carrara no. 17.

²⁸ Diggle (1970) 34.

²⁹ TM 59919 = BKT 9.16.

³⁰ TM 59935 = Pohlmann-West no. 3 = Carrara no. 18. It contains *Orestes* 338-344. See Prauscello's thorough discussion (2006) 123-159.

³¹ TM 59924 = P. Leiden inv. 510 = Pohlmann-West no. 4 = Pordomingo no. 2 = Carrara no. 19. It contains *IA* 784-792, 1500-1509. See Prauscello (2006) 161-178.

³² Pohlmann-West (2001: 20).

takes up the question as part of her study of Hellenistic musical practice in *Singing Alexandria*. She argues that these texts belonged to a living (and fluid) local practice, a that they are not simply a replication of the music of Euripides' original performance or the by-product of Alexandrian scholarship. The evidence she adduces is that both papyri seem to have taken slight textual liberties that are best explained not as mistakes but as accommodations to an alternative musical rendition or version for performance. In this she differs from Martin West, but her arguments are judicious and carefully circumscribed, and inherently plausible.

At the very least, all commentators conclude that that these musical fragments did not come from whole plays, but from lyric passages, selected for medley performance; as it were, papyrus versions of Euripides' greatest hits. This accords with other data about Hellenistic performance practice, and should not surprise, but there is one rather large conceptual implication. A by-product of performing only excerpts of dramatic artists meant that tragedy—and especially Euripides—would have been more often experienced by Ptolemaic Greeks not as an entire play, with its Aristotelian dynamic of *peripeteia* and catharsis, but as a series of emotional highs conveyed by selected lyric monodies and mythologically dense prologues and messenger speeches. Even stichic exchange seems to have been adapted to accommodate solo performance—that is, with both parts being played by only one actor. In effect, excerpting in these ways privileged mythological explication of rituals and cult over the dynamics of an unfolding narrative, and agonistic exchange recast for soloists would have provided a model for mimetic dialogue within a single text. Both these features are prominent in Callimachus' poetry: the *Aetia*, for example, offers a compendium of rituals from diverse parts of Greece; the *Hecale*, like Euripidean tragedy, ends with the establishment of a cult; while the hymns experiment with a variety of mimetic modes. The establishment of local cults on the Argonauts' journey is a prominent feature of the epic.

4. Euripides and Cultural Identity

Finally, an aspect of Euripides' plays that is relevant, not just for Callimachus or élite poetry, is their role in the construction of Alexandrian cultural identity thanks to the wide circulation of his poetry and the specific topics that he chose to dramatize. Alternatively, it may be that the narrative content of certain of his plays contributed to

his popularity in Hellenistic Egypt because they coincided with the new and evolving narratives of place.

Egyptian Alexandria was only one of the numerous cities founded in the wake of Alexander's conquests, though it is the one that subsequently was most closely associated with him. Mythmaking about Alexander began in his own lifetime and increased at his death as the successors used association with the now divinized king to enhance their political position. For example, Ptolemy Soter was assiduous in his efforts to promote himself as a legitimate successor to Alexander and to reinforce Alexander's status as a god. To that end he even hijacked the funeral cortege bringing Alexander's body back from Babylon, after which it was entombed in the new city.³³ The Ptolemies issued coinage featuring either Alexander in conjunction with themselves or members of the royal family in the accoutrements of Alexander, statues of Ptolemy and Alexander together are mentioned in the description of the procession for the *Ptolemaia* (Athenaeus 201d), and in his 17th *Idyll* Theocritus elevates Soter and Alexander (both now dead) to Olympus. The Ptolemies linked themselves to Alexander via mortuary cult and even went so far as to claim a blood relationship with him. Thus, ancestors of the Macedonian royal house--Argaeus, Coeneus, and Temenus, along with Alexander's other mythical ancestors—most notably Dionysus, Perseus, and Heracles—became the de facto ancestors of the Ptolemies. This is transparent: all of them are commemorated in the names used for Alexandrian civic units (demes). These include, for example, Argeadês, Koineus, Temeneios, Herakleios, Inacheios, Autodikeios (a daughter of Danaus), and Heleneios.³⁴

Euripides was not the architect of these imperial genealogies, but his plays surely provided the most accessible delineations for a Hellenistic audience. To begin with Macedon: according to the testimonia, Euripides went to the court of Archelaos, the reigning king of Macedon from 413-399, where he wrote his play named for that king. There are two fragments of this play from Egypt: the prologue mentioned earlier and P. Oxy. 3.419 (a scrap from the 2nd-3rd century CE).³⁵ The prologue inserts Archelaos, an

³³ Strabo 17.1.8 C794; Diod. Sic. 18.26-28 and see the discussion in Fraser (1972) 2.31-33, n.79.

³⁴ Fraser (1972) 1.44-48; Satyrus, *On the demes of Alexandria* = P. Oxy. 27.2465. fr.1 col. 2.

³⁵ *TrGF* 228 + 228a = Carrara no. 15.

ancestor of the king in question, into a line that includes Perseus and Heracles. Though the text has lacunae, its genealogical significance is clear:

Danaus, the father of fifty daughters, leaving the fairest waters of the Nile, ...who fills his streams from the black-peopled Ethiopian land when the snow melts and the sun drives his chariot through the sky. Coming into Argos he founded the city of Inachus and established the custom that those previously called Pelasgians be called Danaans throughout Hellas.

...from Lynceus Abas was born: his offspring was double: Proitos the father of three daughters driven mad, and Acrisius, who enclosed Danae in a bronze bridal chamber. Perseus was born from Danae from streams of golden drops. He, when he cut off the Gorgon's head, coming to Ethiopia, married Andromeda the daughter of Cepheus, she bore three sons by Perseus: Alkaios and Sthenelaus, who held the city of Argive Mycene, and the third was the father of Alcmene, Electryon. Zeus, entering the bed of Alcmene seeded the famous Heracles. And Hyllos was his son, and from his father Hyllos, was born Temenos, who dwelt in Argos as a descendent of Heracles.

Being childless, my father Temenos came to the folds of holy Dodona, desirous of children. And the priestess of Dione, named for Zeus (Dios), told Temenos these things. "O child born from the seed of Heracles, Zeus gives you a child, I prophecy, whom you should name Archelaos."

The *Archelaos* may never have been performed in Athens, but it was performed in the third century both at the Argive *Heraia* and in Dodona, and both locations are featured in the play.³⁶ The genealogy was especially important for Argos, which had in the fourth century dedicated ten statues along the Sacred Way at Delphi who represented the royal line from Danaos, including Lynceus, Abas, Acrisius, Perseus, Alectryon, Alcmene. These Argive ancestors, via Temenos and Achelaos, who later settled in Macedon, allowed the Macedonian kings to claim that they were really "Greek".³⁷ For the Ptolemies these Macedonian genealogies were enlisted to bolster their claims to legitimacy and to divine ancestors, but the Argive connection had another advantage for them: via Danaus the Egyptian turned Argive, and his kin, they could also claim

³⁶ *TrGF* 5.1 p. 313 ii b.

³⁷ See Hall's genealogical tables (1997) 83-84 with his discussion of "decoding the genealogical grammar" and of Macedonian claims to being Greek 154-157.

entitlement to Egypt. This connection seems to have been set out at the opening of Callimachus' epinician for Berenice where Danaus' Egyptian decent from Io is referenced as βουγενέος (fr. 54.4 Harder) and what seems to have been an adjacent fragment (54a Harder), while preserving only opening words of 23 lines mentions Inachus (2), Danaus (6), Aegyptos (7), and Proitus (10).

Euripides' *Helen* was equally important for this ideological self-fashioning: she is also mentioned in the opening of fr. 54.5 Harder. For Greeks Alexandria would have been an unfamiliar space. However, Euripides' *Helen* was set in the coastal region of Egypt that later became Alexandria, and by the play's reconfiguring of Homeric myth the new city could align itself with that older Greek world. Helen and Menelaus were central figures in the mythology of Alexandria, especially since Helen in Egypt was virtuous wife, not the conspicuous cause of the Trojan war. In Euripides' *Helen* Proteus (the old man of the sea in Homer, who is also mentioned at the opening of the *Victory of Berenice*, fr. 54.5-6 Harder), becomes an Egyptian king, noted for his wisdom, and the guardian of Helen until Menelaus can claim her. 'Helen's island' in the *Berenice* alludes not only to her sojourn in Egypt, but to the Egypt of prior Greek mythic narratives. Elsewhere, Theocritus gives us an epithalamium for Helen and Menelaus (*id.* 18) that seems eccentric in its celebration of the marriage of the two, unless we view it in its Egyptian context. Both poets emphasize Helen's quasi-divine status, and like Alexander she comes to function as a local hero.³⁸

Apart from these two plays in which Macedon and Egypt are central, a few others that are found early have features that would serve to reinforce emerging local identities: the *Iphigenia in Tauris* locates Orestes in Thrace (and Illyria), thus connecting central figures of Greek myth with the places important for Macedonian dynasts. The *Orestes* insists on the divinity of Helen, while the *diegesis* for Callimachus' *Pannyichis* (fr. 227 Pfeiffer) claims that Apollo sings a prologue to the Dioscuri and Helen and asks them to accept the sacrifice (*Dieg.* 10.6-9 Pfeiffer); this appears to take up a theme from the end of the *Helen* (1667-1669). The *Heracles* and the *Alcmene* are about a figure claimed as ancestor for the reigning house (Heracles), as is the *Bacchae* (Dionysus). Both plays insist on the divine or quasi-divine status of their protagonists, a claim central to Ptolemaic dynastic claims as well as claims to a Greek identity. The *Hypsipyle* focuses

³⁸ Acosta-Hughes/Stephens (2011) 163-165.

on the events that lead to the establishment of the Nemean games, where Berenice II won a victory commemorated by Callimachus (fr. 54-60j Harder). The *Phoenissae* with its prologue that delineates the Theban line would have been of some interest genealogically to the large population of Cyreneans in Hellenistic Egypt, since their founder, Battus, traced his descent from Cadmus and Laius. Finally, it is significant that many of the other third century papyri of Euripides have close parallels to Alexandrian literary production: the *Medea* needs no comment. In addition, three of the scenes on Jason's cloak: Amphion and Zethus building Thebes, Electryon and the Taphian pirates, and Phrixus and the speaking ram are arguably subjects familiar from Euripides tragedies. Amphion and Zethus had a prominent role in his *Antiope*; what survives from the *Alcmene*, who was Electryon's daughter, features the Taphians, against whom her husband (or betrothed) Amphitryon was fighting when Zeus inseminated her with Heracles; and we have the *Ino* (discussed above), who was Phrixus' stepmother, as well as slightly later fragments from Euripides' *Phrixus*. The demise of Phaethon in Apollonius (*Argonautica* 4.597-611) shares elements with Euripides' *Phaethon*.³⁹ Callimachus in the *Aetia* includes stories of Heracles and his son Hyllus (fr. 25b Harder), Ino and Melicertes (fr. 92a Harder), and Epops (the sometime husband of Antiope (fr. 137a Harder).

Conclusion

The total number of literary papyri from Hellenistic Egypt hovers around 1200, about 200 of which are Homeric. Extracts from and fragments of Euripides' plays constitute about 8% of the remaining fragments of poetry and prose. By the Roman Period the relative numbers of Euripides' papyri (again absent Homer) dropped to around 4%. That is significant: it suggests that the moral and emotional landscape that Euripides' plays provided was more important for the cultural literacy of Greek immigrants to Egypt (as well as Egyptians learning Greek for purposes of imperial administration) in the Hellenistic Period than later during the long Roman occupation. Albeit the overall numbers are small, but if plays like the *Alcmene*, *Antiope*, *Ino*, *Phrixus*, *Archelaos*, and *Helen* were accessible via education and/or performance to the Greek residents of Hellenistic Egypt, then contemporary poets may have included elements of these myths in their writing in preference to more familiar Homer-based myths, not as a preference

³⁹ Diggle (1970) 31-32.

for obscurity or a rejection of Homer, but as a function of a mythological remapping that reflected a new cultural landscape. Hellenistic Egypt was ruled by men from Macedon and populated by peoples who had emigrated from diverse regions of old Greece. If Homer's poems were central as a form of cultural glue—and the large numbers of papyri testify to this, Euripides provided a different kind of cultural literacy—moral sentiments largely absent from Homer, the dramatization of highly charged emotional moments, and myths of places that resonated with local populations.

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