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THE THRAX OF EUPHORION

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THE THRAX OF EUPHORION

PSI 1390 (Supplementum Hellenisticum 413-415) shows the Thrax to have been a curse poem. Euphorion wishes upon his enemy a Thyestean banquet, a disastrous marriage, shipwreck, and sufferings worse than those of various mythological characters. The enemy seems to have committed a murder (SH 415, col. ii. 24 ὅς τεο λαυκανίην ἡμάξατο), and the poem ends with words of consolation addressed to his victim (ibid. line 26 χαίροις εἰ ἐτεόν τι πέλει καὶ ἐν Ἄϊδι χάρμα).

The Editors of SH suggest (p.199)¹ that the victim may have been not a human being but an animal, e.g. a dog; this could account for the poem's title Thrax, which might be the dog's breed² or even its individual name. My purpose is to draw attention to a neglected piece of evidence³ which might support this line of thinking. We already knew that Euphorion in the Thrax spoke of the sons of Hippocoön (fr. 29 Powell) who killed Oionos,⁴ an associate of Heracles, thus provoking a war in which many died. The scholia on Clement of Alexandria tell us why the Hippocoontidae killed Oionos:

ἀγανακτήσαντες ἐπὶ τῷ πεφονεύσθαι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κύνα αὐτῶν

Of course we cannot know in what degree of detail Euphorion related the myth.⁵ In a curse poem the writer's usual purpose in mentioning mythological characters is to wish their fate upon his adversary; nonetheless it might be useful to have a parallel from mythology in which the very same crime had led to disastrous consequences.

If this view of the Thrax were confirmed, it would emerge a large-scale version of the kind of epigram⁶ which laments the death of an animal, usually a domestic pet (Anth. Pal. 7, 189ff). Such epigrams often contain harsh words about the person or creature responsible for the death.⁷ Euphorion's Thrax may, therefore, have started from a domestic incident, like his Ἄραϊ ἢ Ποτηριοκλέπτῃς (cf. fr. 8 Powell ὅστις μεν κελέβην Ἄλυβηίδα μόνος ἀπήύρα).⁸

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¹ Cf. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *Academic Papers: Comedy etc.* (Oxford, 1990), 249.

² For the excellence of Thracian dogs cf. Babrius 85, 11, [Oppian] Cyn. 1, 371.

³ Prof. Lloyd-Jones tells me that it was not in his mind when he made the suggestion.

⁴ It seems very unlikely that οἰωνο[in SH 414, 16 is a proper name.

⁵ We can say with confidence only that Euphorion mentioned the Hippocoontidae as rivals in love to the Dioscourai.

⁶ As, for example, Callimachus' Lock of Berenice (fr. 110 Pf.) can be considered a large-scale version of the kind of epigram in which a dedicated object is made to speak.

⁷ 'A bad man destroyed' the dog in the anonymous Suppl.Hell. 986, 2; Agathias in Anth.Pal. 7, 205 vows vengeance on the cat which killed his pet partridge.

⁸ One small point: in SH 415, col. ii. 22 (the section wishing shipwreck on the enemy) the editors consider restoring ἀ]γγάροος Ὠ[ρί]ω[vo]ς, commenting 'procellosus maxime Orio cum occidit, id est mari appropinquat'. It would be worth comparing Horace, *Odes*, 1, 28, 21 'devexi Orionis' (also in the context of shipwreck, with the proper name forming a σπονδειαζών).