STESICHORUS AND THE FABLE

Collaborations between classical scholars have not always ended happily, so it is a cause for rejoicing that the fruit of my collaboration with Patrick Finglass has now appeared in the form of a new edition of and commentary on the lyric poet Stesichorus[1]. The following paragraphs do not particularly reflect a disagreement between us. They are rather an elaboration of a viewpoint expressed a little more mildly and briefly than I might have wished, towards the end of a book that was already approaching nearly six hundred pages long and had some further way still to go.

Fragment 324 of our edition consists of a fable about a farmer and a snake preserved by Aelian *de natura animalium* 17.37, who attributes it to Stesichorus. Our commentary supplies some grounds for scepticism. These may be strengthened by an examination of the words in which this attribution is couched, an attribution which is credited to Crates of Pergamon (fr. 83 Broggiato), who is alleged to have said ὑπὲρ τούτων καὶ τὸν Στησίχορον ᾄδειν ἔν τινι ποιήματι οὐκ ἐκφοιτήσαντί που ἐς πολλοὺς σεμνόν τε καὶ ἀρχαῖον ὥς γε κρίνειν ἐμὲ τὸν μάρτυρα εἰσάγων. The verb φοιτάω, either *simplex* or with appropriate preverb, is Aelian's stock word for introducing (anonymous) sources for the traditions he reports: cf. *VH* 3.3 δημώδης καὶ εἰς πολλοὺς ἐπεφοίτηκεν[2]. I now think our commentary took this verb too seriously (p. 599: "[it] might indicate that Aelian… had not read the poem himself. The expression… may go back to Crates [who] … may not have read the poem either"). On the contrary it may well indicate an all too frequent sort of game. The negative form of the verb in our passage "smacks of forgery", as M. L. West once suggested to me. Consider [Alexis] fr. 26 K.-A. (for whose status as forgery see Arnott *ad loc*.)[3]. This is quoted by Athenaeus 8.336d-f on the authority of Sotion fr. 1 Wehrli [Supplbd. 2.31] (compare the relationship between Aelian and Crates in our fragment), to the effect that the play in question was not catalogued in Alexandria by Callimachus or Aristophanes of Byzantium or in Pergamon. Compare further e.g. the suspicious δέλτους τῶν ὑπομνημάτων οὔπω γιγνωκομένας in Philostr. *VA* 1.3[4]. Also perhaps Anacreon *PMG* 380 = Himerius *or*. 47, a verse cited ἐκ τῶν ἀποθέτων τῶν Ἀνακρέοντος (forged documents are often alleged to

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[1] Cambridge 2015.

[2] Other examples are collected by L. Prandi, *Memorie storiche dei Greci in Claudio Eliano*, Rome 2005, 193.

[3] Cambridge 1996, 819-822.

[4] On which see E. Champlin, "HSCP" 85, 1981, 209-210.

have been discovered in remote 'archives' *vel sim*.)[5]. The innocent-seeming phrase σεμνόν τε καὶ ἀρχαῖον also points in the same direction, since forgers of every time and place have stressed the antiquity and venerable nature of their 'source' (e.g. Geoffrey of Monmouth *Historia Regum Brittaniae* 1.1 on the *vetustissimum librum Britannici sermonis* which he received from his learned friend Walter Archdeacon of Oxford). As for the citing of and by Crates of Pergamon[6], note the feature of forgery identified[7] as the "authenticating method" whereby we are offered "the provision of a textual... guarantee of authority... the name... of some past writer who stands as *witness* to the fraud" (my italics: cf. μάρτυρα in our passage). The scholar cited is exemplifying the case of the nineteenth century English forger Thomas Chatterton who invented two authors in corroboration of his forgeries. Stesichorus did exist (as did Crates, who in fr. 80 Broggiato on Hes. *Th*. 142 "was bold enough to substitute an alternative [line], possibly of his own manufacture")[8]. But forgers sometimes ascribe their forgeries to real authors (as did e.g. Giovanni Nanni of Viterbo)[9]. So our passage may be in some sense a "forgery"[10]. Certainly, Crates' interest in lyric poetry could hardly be less attested without ceasing to exist (see frr. 82 and 84 Broggiato). Aelian quotes Stesichorus again at *VH* 10.18 = fr. 323, another problematic citation (see our note *ad loc*.); cf. *ibid*. 4.6.

Even if not Stesichorean, the fable is extremely interesting. I quote our summary (p. 598) of its contents: "on the way to fetch water from a spring, a reaper rescues an eagle from a snake. Later, the eagle returns to the reaper and dashes a cup of wine from his hand. The reaper rebukes the bird for ingratitude, but then sees his companions, who had already drunk the wine, choking and dying. He realises that the spring from which he brought the water to dilute the wine must have been contaminated by the poison of the snake". Note that Aphthonius' fable of the eagle and the snake, which we quote from Perry's Loeb *Babrius and Phaedrus* (p. 495) as "particularly close" to our passage, is a more economical narrative. In the first place it

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[5] Studies of supposed source citations in the *Historia Augusta* supply numerous instances. Note too Plato *Phaedr*. 252b with D. Fehling, "Rh. Mus." 122, 1979, 195. Cf. Arnobius *Adversus Nationes* 5.3 *ex reconditis antiquitatum libris*.

[6] On whom see R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* I, Oxford 1968, 238-243; M. Broggiato, *Cratete di Mallo. I frammenti*, La Spezia 2001 (repr. Rome 2006).

[7] By A. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* Princeton 1990, 58, from whom this quotation is taken.

[8] Pfeiffer (cit. n. 6), 241 with n. 6. Cf. West *ad loc*.

[9] Discussed by Grafton (cit. n. 7): see his Index s.v.

[10] For some bibliography on forgery in the ancient world see Arnott (cit. n. 3), 821 n. 3, Grafton (cit. n. 7), 151-153.

features only one farmer rather than the sixteen (!) of our passage – a number which creates difficulties when it has to be explained how the farmer comes to drink last of all: he has been acting as wine-pourer for his companions. And then it dispenses with any trip to a spring – the cup is already poisoned.

It is sometimes difficult to decide how far to range in search of the most basic and fundamental aspects of a story-pattern. In the present case it may not be enough to limit investigation to eagle, snake, and poisoned water. If we move outside that sphere we come across item B 360 in Stith Thompson's famous *Motif Index*[11], which reads "animals grateful for rescue from peril of death", perhaps a more capacious and illuminating category (with B 375.3 and B 375.3.1 "bird/eagle released grateful" as interesting subcategories). And within that subcategory we find a fairly close analogy to our passage in Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus* 296 (p. 480), a prose paraphrase of Babrius which again features a farmer, an eagle, and a narrow escape from death. The farmer releases the snake from a snare and the latter repays him by snatching the cap from his head when he is resting in front of a wall that is ready to give way. The angry farmer chases the bird, which drops the cap. When the farmer returns to the wall he finds that it has collapsed. We see here too the folk-tale[12] notion of the "grateful animal"[13] who requites a good

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[11] *Motif Index of Folk-Literature*, Indiana 1956.

[12] It would be interesting to ask what features actually identify our passage as a fable rather than a folk-tale. Van Dijk, Αἶνοι, Λόγοι, Μῦθοι: *Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature*, Leiden 1997, 154 n. 123 can hardly cite any stylistic feature assigning our narrative to the genre of fable other than the participle ἐπιστραφείς near its end which he says "prepar[es] the *dénouement*". In fact, one needs to distinguish carefully (as van Dijk does not) between two usages: this and similar participles, e.g. *Fab. Aes.* 99.6 Hausrath-Hunger which lead up to a speech conveying the 'moral' of the fable (on these see my remarks in "Glotta" 78, 2002, 39 f.); and the less pointed instances such as occur in our passage and e.g. *Fab. Aes.* 84.8 H.-H., also cited by Van Dijk, which merely have a character turn round without utterance. The long speech of reproach which stands near the end of our narrative but before the relevant participle without in the slightest representing the tale's 'moral' seems to me an index of artificial adaptation of the fable form to serve a new purpose.

[13] For 'grateful animals' in folk-tale see, for instance, Thompson's *Motif Index* B 330-360; L. Röhrich, *Märchen und Wirklichkeit*, Wiesbaden 1974³ = *Folktales and Reality*, Bloomington 1991, 73 ff. For the eagle in particular as grateful and helpful animal, who specifically saves humans from death, see H.-J. Uther's article s.v. 'Adler' in *EM* I 107 f. It is striking how often the human deed that evokes later reciprocal rescuing involves a snake. Thus the Kirghiz hero Töštük "escapes to the Middle World on the back of the Cosmic Eagle, whose chicks he has saved from the Serpent at the foot of the World Tree": A. T. Hatto, *Shamanism and Epic Poetry in Northern Asia* (Foundation Day Lecture), London 1970, 18 = *Essays on Medieval German and Other Poetry*, Cambridge 1980, 137. Cf. Thompson B 365 and 365.1 "animal/bird grateful for rescue of young". On snake-eagle combat see further e.g.

deed (like the mouse for the lion in one of the best-known Greek fables); also the interesting narrative complication whereby the animal's action is initially mistaken as ingratitude, a misunderstanding which evokes an eloquent denunciation from the farmer in our passage. In each case the farmer exemplifies the process of *opsimatheia*, or late learning of the truth, a frequent feature of fables[14], though usually without a happy ending, in a more pessimistic context, with the relevant figure learning the truth too late.

Mention of a more pessimistic ending and of learning the truth too late can lead us on to consideration of an adjacent circle of stories with some features shared with those we have been considering. These features are summarised by Stith Thompson's *Motif Index* B 331 as follows: "helpful animal killed through misunderstanding". Particularly relevant is B 331.2 "Llewelyn and his dog: dog has saved child from serpent. Father sees bloody mouth, thinks the dog has eaten the child and kills the dog". Grief and repentance follow, one might add, and B 331.1.1 has a like fate befalling a faithful horse. I cannot help suspecting that this group of stories contains the clue to the otherwise surprising intensity and length of the reproaches addressed by the farmer to the supposedly ungrateful bird in our narrative. An eagle is not so easily taken and put to death as horse or hound. May not the indignant complaints represent a milder, a 'watered down' version of the slaying of the helpful animal (if words could kill…)?

On the other fable attributed to Stesichorus in antiquity, that of the horse and the rider (Aristotle *Rhet*. 2.1393b6 = Ta 33 (i) Ercoles), see Ercoles' commentary *ad loc*.[15]

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ABSTRACT
The 'fable' that is Stesichorus fr. 324 Davies–Finglass, cited by Aelian *NA* 17.37, is examined both from the point of view of its authenticity (which is shown to be extremely doubtful) and that of the narrative motifs it contains.
KEYWORDS
Stesichorus, Aelian, Folk-Tale, Forgery, 'helpful animals'.

R. Wittkower, "JWI" 2, 1938/39, 293-325 = *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, London 1977, 15-44.

[14] On *opsimatheia* see my remarks in "Prometheus" 33, 2007, 17 ff. and also in *Tradition and Originality: Anecdote and Fable in Callimachus Epigram One* (forthcoming).

[15] *Stesicoro. Le testimonianze antiche*, Bologna 2013, 352 ff.