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RHEUS: — A POOR POET’S PLAY

Abstract. The poet of Rhesus abuses of the pi-alliteration, showing a higher frequency than in any other extant play of Euripides. After presenting the evidence, the author concludes that the play is not likely to be by Euripides.

Twenty years ago, William Ritchie has eloquently and forcefully argued for the authenticity of Rhesus, dating it as the earliest extant play of Euripides (somewhere between 455 and 440)1. While considering the alliteration of the play, Ritchie admitted that, „Alliteration is perhaps slightly more frequent in Rhesus than is usual in Euripides“, only to reach this conclusion: „But some of his plays have as much or more, the device being especially prominent in the Suppli­ces... Here again therefore there seems to be general conformity with the style of Euripides“ (p. 242).

It is this conclusion that I wish to challenge here. I feel that the poet of Rhesus shows a poor taste by abusing of the pi-alliteration, which shows a higher frequency than any other extant play of Euripides. For the sake of brevity, I shall leave apart here the words of a line with two initial pis only2, and concentrate on the clauses with at least three initial pis. Here is the evidence (the figure refers to the number of words with an initial, not internal, pi)3.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Clause</th>
<th>Initial Pis</th>
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<tr>
<td>V. 5—7</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>26—28</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>41—44</td>
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<td>61—63</td>
<td>4</td>
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2 No matter how impressive some of them may be. Here are such pi-alliterations of the play: 18; 95; 153; 182f.; 213; 231 (Lyr.); 240 (Lyr.); 307f.; 335; 384 (Lyr.); 396; 398; 408 Πάγγαιόν τε Παιάνων τε γην/; 468 / πραξαΐ παρέξω; 532 (Lyr.); 538 (Lyr.); 543 (Lyr.); 562 (Lyr.); 572; 587; 616; 618; 634 τού πεπερωμένου πλέον /; 655; 656f.; 674; 695 (Lyr.); 747f. (Lyr.); 771; 786; 838; 846; 865; 869; 927; 934; 941; 946; 955; 966.
3 The edition used here is that by Dietrich Ebener, Rhesos: Tragödie eines unbekannten Dichters (Schriften und Quellen der Alten Welt, 19). Berlin, Akademie—Verlag, 1966.
Consider these striking examples of exaggeration in the employment of the πi-parechesis (selection only):

278 ποίας πατρώας γῆς ἔρημώσας πέδον;
282f. καὶ πῶς πρὸς Ἡθῆς ὄργαδ θαίρεται,
286 πλαγχθείς πλατείας πεδιάδος θ' ἀμαξιτῷ;
311 κλύοντα πλήρη πεδία πολέμιας χερῶς.
489f. πολλοί μὲν ἵππης, πολλά πελταστῶν τέλη
685 μὴ συνεμπρήσαι νεὼν
πρύμνας, πονήσας τὸν πάρος πολύν χρόνον

Plus a number of internal pis.
The conclusion to be drawn from this evidence is that *Rhesus* is "a poor poet's play". It just cannot be the work of a Euripides (not even twenty years old). Thus, pace Ritchie, I would side with Wilamowitz first, with, say, H. D. F. Kitto last in believing that *Rhesus* is a spurious play.

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ARISTOTLE AND MENANDER ON EDUCATION

1. Obviously, Aristotle shared the view of the old Solon (Fr. 27 West) in believing that the human lifespan could be divided into seven-year periods (hebdomads): *Polit.* H 17, p. 1336 b 37 Ross, Δ' εἰσίν ἡλικίαι πρὸς ας άναγκαίον διηρήσθαι τήν παιδείαν, πρὸς τήν ἀπό τῶν ἕπτα μέχρι ἡβης καὶ πέλαυρ πρὸς τήν ἀφ' ἡβης μέχρι τῶν ἕνως καὶ εἰκοσιον ἕτων. οἱ γὰρ ταῖς ἐβδομάσι διαιροῦμεν τὰς ἡλικίας ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ λέγουσιν οὐ κακῶς, δει δὲ τῇ διαιρέσει τῆς φύσεως ἐπακολουθεῖν.

2. The age of seven (and not fourteen or twenty-one) seems to be crucial for Aristotle. For it is then that a man becomes "mature", in the sense that he becomes capable of distinguishing between good and evil. Compare Aëtius 5.23 and Ps. Galen *Philos. hist.* 127: Ἡράκλειτος καὶ Οἱ Στοιχεῖον ἄρχεσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τῆς τελειότητος περὶ τήν δεινο-