IBYCUS: POLYCRATES, TROILUS, POLYXENA

by Martin Robertson

PLATES I and II

Dr J. P. Barron in his brilliant article *Ibycus: to Polycrates*[1] has shown that this poem is by no means the botch it has sometimes been condemned as, but a careful piece of construction, cunningly designed for a particular purpose. I find his general reconstruction, and the detailed analysis on which it is based, entirely convincing except at one point: the allusion to Troilus[2] must, it seems to me, be taken differently; and it is possible that a different interpretation can be made to support and slightly extend Barron's elucidation of the structure and nature of the poem.

It has commonly been felt a puzzle that, after concluding a list of Greek heroes arriving at Troy with two who surpassed the rest in beauty, the poet should suddenly introduce the Trojan Troilus as gold to their orichalc. This led Barron formerly[3] to emend τῶι . . . Τρώιλον to τὸν . . . Τρωίλωι. He has now abandoned this rather brutal solution, following Mr David Campbell,[4] who takes the meaning to be that Zeuxippus (only the second of the two Greeks is actually compared to the Trojan boy) and Troilus were indistinguishable for beauty as gold and orichalc are indistinguishable to the eye.

I cannot read the passage in quite this way. It is true that to take ὀρείχαλκος as meaning brass or 'fool's gold', as Barron formerly did, seems (as Barron now persuades me) not to be justified. It is sometimes mentioned by archaic poets alongside gold in descriptions of elaborate metal-work in a way which implies that the two are esteemed at much the same high rate;[5] and later writers express this more explicitly. Servius indeed says *apud maiores orichalcum pretiosius metallis omnibus fuisse*;[6] but the rest of his remarks suggest that he was influenced by the false Latinization *aurichalcum*. Much more important is a passage of Plato, where he is describing the mineral wealth of his fabled Atlantic continent of yore: τὸ νῦν ὀνομαζόμενον μόνον – τότε δὲ πλέον ὀνόματος ἦν τὸ γένος ἐκ γῆς ὀρυττόμενον ὀρείχαλκον κατὰ τόπους πολλοὺς τῆς νήσου, πλὴν χρυσοῦ τιμιώτατον ἐν τοῖς τότε ὄν.[7] This clearly defines the philosopher's conception of orichalc as something very precious indeed in ancient days, but not quite so precious as gold; and exactly this I take to be the implication of Ibycus' passage: τῶι δ' ἄρα Τρωίλον ὡσεὶ χρυσὸν ὀρειχάλκωι τρὶς ἄπεφθον. Structure and phrasing are surely against an interpretation as a simple comparison of like to like, rather assert a contrast. One could indeed take the contrast either way: that even the purest gold is not as good as orichalc; or

that, good as orichalc is, it is still not thrice-refined gold. The second interpretation corresponds to Plato's view of the legendary metal, and I shall try to argue that this makes a better point in Ibycus' poem than does the other, though while we only possess the end of the poem this argument has to remain purely conjectural.[8]

Barron speaks of Troilus as "only casually introduced".[9] If Campbell is right that no contrast is implied in the simile, then the introduction does appear casual, and somewhat pointless. If there is contrast, and orichalc is above gold, the object must be to underline the beauty of the Greeks by making it greater than that of the young Trojan prince. This has a little more force than the simple comparison, but is not very compelling. If gold is above orichalc, then the introduction cannot be casual but a punch-line which must make some particular point. Can we guess what such a point could be? One step seems to follow. The unique quality of gold is its incorruptibility. Does not ἄφθιτον in the next line pick up and express this latent idea, underlining the contrast implicit in the simile and placing Polycrates with gold and Troilus against Zeuxippus and orichalc?

Barron has demonstrated that the beautiful princes of Sicyon, Cyanippus and Zeuxippus, are of Argive lineage or association, and that they are introduced here as a side-kick at the anti-Argive propaganda of the tyrant Clisthenes, which included a drastic recension of the city's legendary history. Ibycus had evidently been in the service of Clisthenes, or of his successor Aeschines, but had then quarrelled with his patron. Barron follows Bowra in his convincing interpretation of the evidence as showing that Ibycus came from Sicyon to Samos, and that his poetry there entered on a new phase; and that this poem is a 'prospectus' in which the poet offers his services, in his new manner, to Polycrates.[10] It is, I think, compatible with this to read a further meaning into the allusion to the Sicyonian princes: not only is Clisthenes' claim that Sicyon was never dominated by Argos nonsense; the Sicyonians anyway, even the Argive ones, are not quite of the first water. The brief, allusive character of this end of the poem would be natural if it contained references to themes stated at the beginning, something perhaps like this: "I have made many songs, but now that I see you, Polycrates, and your Samos, the Muses inspire me to a different measure and new heights." The end would then mean: "The songs I made for the Sicyonians were as orichalc; the immortality of pure gold shall be yours, Polycrates, and mine with you."

None of this explains why Troilus should be chosen for the comparison, and it is possible that no special reason need be sought. This youngest son of Priam has his immortality in later verse, but in the literature which has reached us from antiquity he is a shadowy figure. In the sixth century, however, this was certainly not the case. Among the favourite themes of archaic art, especially but very far from exclusively Attic vase-painting, are four episodes from the story of his death at Achilles' hands: the ambush at the fountain; the pursuit (boy on horseback, Greek running – the classic example of that fleetness of foot which gave Achilles his most constant epithet); the slaying at the altar of Thymbraean Apollo; and the battle joined over the mutilated body.[11] In whatever form or forms it was told, this was evidently a well-loved tale; and if an exemplar of youth and beauty were needed, Troilus was an obvious choice. As Barron has pointed out, however, nothing is said directly of Polycrates' beauty; and it may well be that this, though the quality in which Troilus is gold to Zeuxippus' orichalc, is not that for which Polycrates is promised immortality.[12] If Polycrates' beauty is the point, the poem must surely have been addressed to the young crown-prince, the elder tyrant's son; but Barron has shown the difficulty of this.[13] Moreover, such a direct comparison would seem an awkwardly ill-omened one: poor Troilus' youth and beauty brought him little happiness. If, on the other hand, as Barron has made most probable, the poem is addressed to the elder Polycrates already in *la force de l'age* (in 564-60 B.C.), the omen could be turned to good. The importance of Troilus' death in the Trojan tale was that one of three charms on which the safety of the city depended was his living to be a man.[14] It seems to me likely that here too we have an allusion

back to a passage earlier in the poem, to the effect: "The well-being of Samos depends on you, Polycrates, as Troy's safety depended on Troilus. You live and Samos flourishes. Troy was less fortunate. Troilus fell to Achilles, and the Greeks destroyed Priam's great city." Such a passage could link the kind of opening I have envisaged for the poem to the point where our fragment begins; but of course, even if these conjectures are on the right lines, there may have been many more loops on the way. Ibycus could, for instance, not merely have alluded to Troilus, but told the story of his death. This was recounted, we know, in the Cypria;[15] but given its popularity, attested by the pictures, in the archaic period, it is extremely likely that it was retold in lyric form, as it was in dramatic form in the next century by Phrynichus and Sophocles.[16] Stesichorus might well have included a digression on the Three Charms in his Iliupersis, and Ibycus might have told the story of Troilus here. The summary, allusive character of the sketch of the Trojan war in the surviving lines seems to me compatible with there having been – perhaps would seem more natural if there had been – a more detailed treatment of one episode from it earlier. The lines in which the poet disclaims the intention of singing of Paris, Cassandra and the "other children of Priam" and the day of the city's capture, would certainly read differently (perhaps better?) if he had already sung an event with a direct bearing on the capture, the story of one of Priam's children; or possibly of two.

A scholiast on Euripides tells us that Ibycus, like Euripides, said that Polyxena was sacrificed by Neoptolemus, but that the poet of the Cypria told that she was wounded during the sack by Odysseus and Diomede and buried by Neoptolemus.[17] At first sight there is no obvious reason for imagining that it was in this poem that Ibycus touched on this subject, but looked at closer it becomes a possibility worth considering. The events covered by the narrative of the Cypria lie all before those of the Iliad; the sack is well outside them, and this episode from it can only have been told in parenthesis. The story of Troilus' death lies within the period and was told in the poem. In pictures of the ambush and of the pursuit the boy is constantly accompanied by a girl (*Pl.* Ia), identified in one case by a fragmentary inscription as Polyxena.[18] She evidently featured in a literary version of the story popular in the sixth century; and it seems if not a safe at least a plausible conjecture that the tale of her death was told in the Cypria in connexion with that of her brother. We have seen that Ibycus might have included the story of Troilus as a structural part of his poem to Polycrates; in a work so loaded with epic echoes it would not be unnatural that he should introduce Polyxena in the same connexion, and either tell her story or at least make allusion to her death – the scholium does not allow us to assume that he did more, wherever the reference occurred.

The version of Polyxena's death given by Ibycus was evidently the one which became canonical:[19] that she was sacrificed by Neoptolemus on his father's tomb, to appease the injured spirit and assure the Greeks a fair wind home – a pendant to Iphigenia at Aulis ten years before. This form of the story too comes in the epic tradition: it was told in its place in the Cycle, in the Iliupersis ascribed to Arctinus.[20] It is further attested before the middle of the sixth century by a copiously inscribed Attic vase (*Pl.* Ib):[21] Neoptolemus cuts the throat of Polyxena, who is held by Anphilochos, Antiphates and Aias Iliades. Behind Neoptolemus stands Diomedes, behind him Nestor Pylios, both looking on; while the scene is closed at the other end by another old man, Phoinix, but he, like the decent character he always appears, has turned his back on the dreadful scene. It is possible that Anphilochos is a mistake for Antilochos, Nestor's son; but Amphiaraus' son Amphilochus is sometimes named as taking part in the Trojan war.[22] An Antiphates appears in late lists of Greeks in the Wooden Horse.[23] The low mound on to which the victim's blood flows has a fire built on top and appears to be an altar rather than the tomb; but another Attic vase, from the end of the century, which though uninscribed plainly illustrates the same story, does show this feature: a warrior with drawn sword holds a woman by the wrist and leads her (other warriors and a chariot behind) towards a large mound, a snake beside it, an *eidolon* – a minuscule winged warrior – flittering above.[24]

One vase seems most probably to illustrate the story recorded from the Cypria: Polyxena wounded by Odysseus and Diomede. Painted in Etruria around the middle of the sixth century or not much later, in the Greek manner if not by a wandering Greek, it shows on one side (*Pl.*IIb) Achilles dragging Troilus from his horse. On the other (Pl. IIa), a woman mounts the steps of an altar, looking back at two warriors in pursuit, the leader drawing his sword on her, the other threatening with raised spear.[25] If this does represent Polyxena with Odysseus and Diomede, the pairing with the Troilus picture is interesting. The story is curious, particularly the statement about Neoptolemus. Did he bury her in his father's tomb? Late writers tell a story of Achilles' love for Polyxena.[26] There is no clear evidence that this was an early theme, but it is of interest that a few pictures of Achilles in ambush at the fountain (from late in the series, the beginning of the fifth century) do not show Troilus at all but only the girl with her pitcher.[27]

Direct evidence that it was in this poem that Ibycus described or alluded to the manner of Polyxena's end is likewise lacking; but it is perhaps not absurd to suggest that the naming, among the other children of Priam about whom he does not mean to sing, of a daughter, Cassandra, as well as a son, Paris, would take a new point if he had just told the stories of one son and one daughter.

Lincoln College,
Oxford

NOTES

1 *BICS* 16 (1969) 119-49.

2 Lines 41-5; Barron p.131.

3 *CR* 11 (1961) 185, n.3.

4 *Greek Lyric Poetry* (London 1967) 309.

5 E.g. *H. Hom.* 6.9; Hesiod *Sc.* 122. Professor Handley points out to me that in Ezra 8.27, where the *AV* speaks of "two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold", the *NEB* has "fine red copper" with the note "red copper: or orichalc". The *Septuagint* has σκεύη χαλκοῦ στίλβοντος ἀγαθοῦ ἐπιθυμητὰ ἐν χρυσίῳ.

6 On *Aen.* XII.87. I owe this reference to Dr Barron.

7 *Critias* 114e. I owe this reference to Mr Barrett, through Dr Barron.

8 This part of the poem is thick with echoes of epic and especially of the Iliad, and Barron has shown that this is not lack of invention but deliberate art. I wonder if, in such a context, a reader might not be expected to think, when χρυσὸς is contrasted with ὀρείχαλκος, of the poor exchange, χρυσὸς against χαλκὸς (Z 232-5), made by Glaucus with Diomede, though the opposition here is of a subtler nature.

9 *Loc. cit.* 131.

10 *Loc. cit.* 136-8.

11 Brommer *Vasenlisten*^{2} 264-6 (ambush); 266-8 (pursuit); 268-9 (death and battle); Kunze *Archaische Schildbänder* (*Olympische Forschungen* II, 1950) 140-2; and see the mythological indexes to Beazley's *ABV* and *ARV*^{2}

12 *Loc. cit.* 135; and see next note.

13 *Loc. cit.* 149, n.86.

14 The Three Charms most clearly stated by Plautus *Bacchides* 953 ff., 987 ff. and Servius on *Aeneid* II.13. See my remarks in *GRBS* 11 (1970) 24-6.

15 Proclus' Summary: Homer *OCT* V, 105 l.12.

16 See Jebb and Pearson, Sophocles *Fragments* II 253-62 (Phrynichus *ibid.* 254; *TGF* 723).

17 Page *PMG* fr.307 (Ibycus 26); Cypria fr.26.

18 François Vase: Beazley *ABV* 76, Kleitias no.1, with some refs.; this detail: FR pll.11-12; Arias and Hirmer pl.44. Only the letters ...σεν.. survive, but the restoration can hardly be in doubt. A girl is more often than not shown in pictures of the ambush and the pursuit. The vase on pl.1a is London B.M. 97.7-21.2; Beazley *ABV* 86 (*Paralipomena* 32) Painter of London B 76 no.8, with refs. See also below n.27.

19 For us particularly in Euripides' *Hecuba*.

20 Proclus' summary: Homer *OCT* V, 108 l.7 f.

21 Neck-amphora in London, B.M. 97.7-27.2; Beazley *ABV* 97 (*Paralipomena* 37), Tyrrhenian Group no.27, with refs.

22 See Stoll in Roscher I 305.

23 Schirmer *ibid.* 384.

24 Hydria in Berlin, 1902; Beazley *ABV* 363 (*Paralipomena* 161) Leagros Group no.37, with refs.; *Jb* 29 (1914) 225.

25 'Pontic' neck-amphora in Paris, Louvre E 703; Dohrn *Die schwarzfigurigen etruskischen Vasen* (Berlin 1937) 146, Parismaler no.74, with refs.; Gerhard *AV* 1.185; Jacobsthal *Ornamente griechischer Vasen* (Berlin 1927) pl.10c (Troilus); Ducati *Pontische Vasen* (Berlin 1932) pl.9b (Polyxena?). On the Group and the Painter see Dohrn *loc. cit.* 33-4. I am grateful to M. Chuzeville for the photograph here reproduced in Plate II and to the authorities of the Louvre for permission to reproduce it.

26 Dictys III.2; Dares XXVII. See Escher in *RE* I 238; Jebb and Pearson, Sophocles *Fragments* II 163, with notes 3 and 4. There is also evidence for Achilles loving Troilus: Lycophron 307-13 (see Jebb and Pearson *loc. cit.* 254). The interrelation of the stories of Troilus and Polyxena is a fascinating theme I hope some time to take up.

27 Red-figure hydria, Leningrad 628; Beazley *ARV*^{2} 210 (*Paralipomena* 510), Berlin Painter no.174, with refs.; *Berlin Maler* pl.24,1; Peredolskaya *Cat.* no.38, pl.28. There are several contemporary black-figure examples: Haspels *ABFL* 150 with n.6, 250 no.40, 256 nos.78-9, with refs.; Beazley *Paralipomena* 261 and 285.