

EURIPIDES' ELECTRA 1351–1352: A NEW INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ

Eur. *El.* 1351–1352 has always been problematic for editors and translators. Usually, they supply the article τὸ with ὅσιον in order to translate ὅσιον (“piety”) and τὸ δίκαιον (“justice”) as coordinated nouns. At the same time, editors never add the article to their texts because it gives a metrically incorrect line. Another issue is that there are no examples in Greek where the article governing two coordinated nouns is given with the second noun but has to be supplied for the first (where it is strictly necessary). This paper proposes that ὅσιον is in fact an *adjective* (i.e., “pious”), which is not connected to the noun τὸ δίκαιον but to the adjective φίλον (“loved”). This interpretation can be justified through the work itself and also by exploring the use of the adjective ὅσιος in different tragedies by Euripides and in other authors.

Les vers 1351–1352 de l'Électre d'Euripide ont toujours été problématiques pour les éditeurs et traducteurs. Généralement, ils suppléent l'article τὸ devant ὅσιον afin de traduire ὅσιον (« piété ») et τὸ δίκαιον (« la justice ») comme des noms coordonnés. En même temps, les éditeurs n'ajoutent jamais l'article à leur texte car il serait incorrect métriquement. Par ailleurs, il n'existe pas d'exemple en grec de situation où l'article coordonnant deux noms est donné pour le deuxième tandis qu'il doit être suppléé pour le premier (alors qu'il est strictement nécessaire). Dans cet article, nous suggérons donc que le mot ὅσιον est en réalité un adjectif (« pieux ») qui n'est pas lié au nom τὸ δίκαιον mais à l'adjectif φίλον (« aimé »). Cette interprétation peut être justifiée par l'œuvre elle-même, mais aussi en étudiant l'usage de l'adjectif ὅσιος dans les différentes tragédies d'Euripide et chez d'autres auteurs.

Near the end of Euripides' *Electra*, the Dioscuri appear above the palace as *dei ex machina* in order to explain the things that Moira and Zeus have accomplished for Orestes. It is in this final moment that Castor specifies whom the Dioscuri help and whom they save:

διὰ δ' αἰθερίας στείχοντε πλακὸς
τοῖς μὲν μυσσαροῖς οὐκ ἐπαρήγομεν,
οἷσιν δ' ὅσιον καὶ τὸ δίκαιον
φίλον ἐν βίῳ, τούτους χαλεπῶν
ἐκλύοντες μόχθων σῶζομεν.

As we pass along the plain of heaven we do not lend aid to those who are defiled, but we rescue from hard toils and save all those who in their lives love piety and justice. (Eur. *El.* 1349–1353)¹

Eur. *El.* 1351–1352 has always been either emended or explained ad hoc in order to translate ὅσιον (“piety”) and τὸ δίκαιον (“justice”) as coordinated nouns. However, this explanation is hardly justifiable based on the Greek text because there are no other documented cases of the omission of the article in the first part (ὅσιον) and its expression in the second part (τὸ δίκαιον). For this reason, it is absolutely necessary to supply the article in the first part, according to Denniston and Distilo.² Despite the discrepancy, though, the same forced interpretation is continually given in translations and commentaries.³ Cropp, who translates the lines as “those who hold to what is holy and right in life,” explains that “τό belongs ‘in common’ with both abstracts.”⁴ Cropp follows here Fraenkel’s view of Aesch. *Ag.* 926, an interpretation which is rejected by Denniston and Page.⁵ Most recently, Peels simply draws attention to the rarity of the nominalized construction in this passage and explains it as “Castor and Pollux save people to whom ὅσιον is dear in their lives.”⁶ The different, and not altogether satisfactory, emendations that have been proposed are collected in Denniston and Distilo.⁷

¹ Text and English translation from Kovacs 1998: 298–299.

² Denniston (1939: 212), who expresses doubt over the soundness of the text, considers that the article τὸ is imperatively required with ὅσιον if it appears here “in the abstract sense ‘holiness’” (considering Ἄοσία, the goddess Piety, supplied by van Herwerden [1899: 233] to be highly probable). Distilo (2012: 641–642) does not think it necessary to modify the original expression, reading it as a parallel structure (i.e., ὅσιον καὶ τὸ δίκαιον) despite there being no other examples of this structure in Greek. Distilo acknowledges, however, the possibility that ὅσιον is a textual corruption of an original ὁσία.

³ In a study of the adjectives ὅσιος and εὐσεβής, Bolkestein (1936: 40) translates lines 1351–1352 as “maar hen, wien het zedelijk goede en het rechtvaardige ter harte gaat,” (“but those to whom virtuosity and righteous concern”) identifying those who do not feel τὸ ὅσιον and τὸ δίκαιον as μωσαροί (“onrein, bezoedeld,” i.e., “impure”). In this way, Bolkestein is linking the passage to the semantics of ἀνόσιος (“impious”) related to impurity that appear in other tragedies (e.g., Eur. *Hel.* 868–870). Similarly, Parmentier and Gregoire (1968: 244) give their translation of 1351–1352 as “mais les hommes à qui la piété et la justice sont chères dans leur vie,” while Luschnig and Woodruff (2011: 62) read it as “those who hold what’s right, holy, and dear in life.” Finally, Roisman and Luschnig (2011: 232) instruct the reader to “supply τὸ from the following coordinate phrase [i.e., τὸ δίκαιον].”

⁴ Cropp 2013: 131, 242.

⁵ Fraenkel 1950: 419–420; cf. Denniston and Page 1957: 149–150; Judet de La Combe 2015: 207–208.

⁶ Peels 2015: 32.

⁷ Denniston 1939: 212; Distilo 2012: 641–642.

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The underlying issue is that the article τό taken ‘in common’ can be dismissed, and the addition of τό before ὄσιον cannot be accepted because it gives a metrically incorrect line, something which explains why editors never add the article to their texts. But the text does *not* need any emendation if it is considered that καί joins the adjectives ὄσιον and φίλον (“loved”), both of which modify τὸ δίκαιον: “those to whom in their lives justice is pious and loved”. This leaves καί in a very unusual position, but it must be kept in mind that this would be a poetical hyperbaton which places the most important word in the first position (after the relative pronoun that introduces this clause). If this reading of the text is in fact true, then it suggests that ὄσιον is intentionally placed early in order to emphasize its importance. And this is precisely one characteristic of the hyperbaton: to place the emphatic word early in violation of natural order.⁸ As Dik writes, “most of us will accept hyperbaton as a marked ordering of words,” and “the element that occurs ‘early’ (i.e., the word subject to prolepsis, and the first element of a phrase in hyperbaton) should always be considered marked.”⁹ Besides, following Dik’s words, we must consider that “preposing an adjective, or putting a word early in a clause, produces a certain communicative effect.”¹⁰ Therefore, it makes sense that ὄσιον would be placed early in order to emphasize its importance. Moreover, hyperbaton with the word order of adjective-noun-adjective can be found in other literary texts:¹¹ (a) Hom. *Il.* 19.357–358: ταρφειὰ νιφάδες Διὸς ἐκποτέονται / ψυχραὶ (“thick cold snowflakes flutter down from Zeus”); (b) Hom. *Il.* 24.796: πορφυροῖς πέπλοισι καλύψαντες μαλακοῖσιν (“covered with soft purple robes”); however, the usual word order is adjective-καί-adjective-noun if the adjectives are united by καί: (a) Hom. *Od.* 2.312: ἐκείρετε πολλὰ καὶ ἐσθλὰ / κτήματ’ ἐμὰ (“you wasted many and excellent possessions of mine”); (b) Dem. 2.1: δαιμονία τινὶ καὶ θεία παντάπασιν ἔοικεν εὐεργεσία (“this has the appearance of a supernatural and divine favour”); (c) Thgn. 1.615: οὐδένα παμπήδην ἀγαθὸν καὶ μέτριον ἄνδρα (“no man is entirely good and reasonable”); but other word order can also be found with καί:¹² (a) Dem. 11.2: μεγίστους ὑμῖν ὑπάρχειν συμμάχους καὶ βοηθούς (“your mightiest and auxiliary allies”); (b) Thgn. 1.497: ἄφρονος ἀνδρὸς ὁμῶς καὶ σώφρονος (“of the foolish and prudent man alike”); (c) Thgn. 1.889–890: ἀλλ’ αἰσχρὸν παρεόντα καὶ ὠκυπόδων ἐπιβάντα / ἵππων μὴ πόλεμον δακρυσέντ’ εἰσεῖν (“But it is shameful not to look tearful war in the face when it is here and comes mounted on swift horses”).¹³ Considering the

⁸ Denniston 1952: 47–59.

⁹ Dik 2007: 24–25.

¹⁰ Dik 2007: 251, 253–254.

¹¹ See Devine and Stephens 2000: 170, 219, 243–245, 261, 281.

¹² For more exceptions, see Devine and Stephens 2000: 286–289.

¹³ My English translation follows the interpretations of Garzya 1958; Carrière 1975; Calderón Dorda 2010.

evidence, it is plausible that Eur. *El.* 1351–1352 is a rare example of hyperbaton being used in a very simple expression to emphasize the most important term (i.e., ὅσιον). In addition, it is important to take into consideration that in an earlier passage from the play *Castor* also uses ὅσιον in hyperbaton: θάρσει, Παλλάδος ὄσιαν ἤξεις / πόλιν (“Have courage, you will go the holy city of Pallas,” 1319–1320).¹⁴ Here, due to the irregular anapaest after the dactyl, Denniston prefers the word order proposed by Weil, who “gives ὄσιαν a strongly emphatic position”: ὄσιαν, θάρσει, Παλλάδος ἤξεις / πόλιν.¹⁵

With regard to the relation between ὅσιος and δίκαιος, they are often united in Greek literature—and it is for this reason the two terms are usually linked at Eur. *El.* 1351–1352. But there are other examples in Greek writing as well where the adjective ὅσιος describes the noun τὸ δίκαιον. One such example is found in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, when τὸ ὅσιον and τὸ δίκαιον are discussed by Socrates and Euthyphro: ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ πᾶν τὸ δίκαιον ὅσιον; ἢ τὸ μὲν ὅσιον πᾶν δίκαιον, τὸ δὲ δίκαιον οὐ πᾶν ὅσιον, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν αὐτοῦ ὅσιον, τὸ δὲ τι καὶ ἄλλο (“But is everything that is right also holy? Or is all which is holy right, and not all which is right holy, but part of it holy and part something else?” Pl. *Euthyphr.* 11e7–12a2).¹⁶ In the same way, the expression ὀσίη δίκη is utilized by Theognis: οὐδὲν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι πατρὸς καὶ μητρὸς ἄμεινον / ἔπλεθ’, ὅσοις ὀσίη, Κύρνε, μέμηλε δίκη (“There is nothing among mankind better than a father and a mother, Cyrnus, who care about holy justice,” 1.132).¹⁷ In Eur. *El.* 1351–1352, *Castor* just expresses the modus operandi of the Dioscuri: they only help those to whom τὸ δίκαιον (i.e., “justice”) is ὅσιον (i.e., “pious” or “holy”). Furthermore, in addition to Eur. *El.* 1351–1352, there are examples in which ὅσιος appears with the dative case¹⁸ and also with derivatives of δίκη.¹⁹ The relation between the terms ὅσιος and δίκη

¹⁴ Further examples of strong *hyperbata* in the play are found in *Castor*’s speech: 1238–1239 (δίπτυχοι δέ σε / καλοῦσι μητρὸς σύγγονοι Διόσκοροι, “the twin sons of Zeus, your mother’s brothers, are calling you”), 1241 (δεινὸν δὲ ναυσὶν ἀρτίως πόντου σάλον, “just the swell of the sea, terrible for ships”), 1257, 1265–1266 (ἴσαι δέ σ’ ἐκώσουςι μὴ θανεῖν δίκη / ψῆφοι τεθεῖσαι, “votes cast will be equal and will save you from dying by the verdict”), 1271–1272, 1302; together with weaker *hyperbata*: 1248, 1251, 1259, 1267, 1274, 1277, 1279, 1287, 1291, 1296–1297, 1352–1353, 1355.

¹⁵ Denniston 1939: 210; cf. Distilo 2012: 631–634.

¹⁶ Text and English translation from Fowler 1914.

¹⁷ Text and English translation from Gerber 1999.

¹⁸ Eur. *IT* 1045: θιγεῖν γὰρ ὀσίον ἐστ’ ἐμοὶ μόνη, “For it is permissible for me alone to touch it” (text and English translation from Parker 2016); Eur. *Or.* 935–936: εἰ γὰρ ἀρσένων φόνος / ἔσται γυναιξίν ὀσιος, “If killing of men is to be holy for women” (text and English translation from Willink 1989).

¹⁹ Pl. *Prt.* 331c3–4: εἰ γὰρ βούλει, ἔστω ἡμῖν καὶ δικαιοσύνη ὄσιον καὶ ὀσιότης δίκαιον, “If you like, let us say that justice is holy and holiness just” (text and English translation from Taylor 1991).

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(and their derivatives) appears in other tragedies by Euripides in various ways,²⁰ which illustrate how the relation between them is *especially* flexible and diverse in Euripides. Depending on the circumstances, the terms are not always related in the same way.

Turning to the issue of *Electra*, the description of “justice” (τὸ δίκαιον) as “pious” (ἴσιον) makes sense in a tragedy where all of the characters—even the Dioscuri at the end of the play—give their opinions on justice. Thus, Clytemnestra expresses the injustice that she suffered by Iphigenia’s death (“I was wronged”: ἡδίκημένη, 1030)²¹ and invites Electra to explain how Agamemnon did not die “justly” (οὐκ ἐνδίκως, 1050). The Chorus admits there is justice in her words but also reproaches Clytemnestra because “it is shameful justice” (ἡ δίκη δ' αἰσχρῶς ἔχει, 1051). The injustice committed by Clytemnestra is beyond doubt to the other characters, who demand (and praise) her punishment (e.g., the Chorus: 483–484, 1189; Orestes: 584, 1190; Electra: 920, 1146; Castor: 1244).²² According to Electra, given the fact that Clytemnestra insists that her crime was just,²³ it will also be just if she and her brother kill their mother (1096) even though they have never before wronged her (1087).²⁴ Orestes is so convinced of the justice of his intentions that he goes as far as to affirm that “I am confident: otherwise we must no longer believe in the gods if injustice is triumphant over justice” (πέποιθα δ' ἢ χρὴ μηκέθ' ἡγεῖσθαι θεοῦς, εἰ τὰδικ' ἔσται τῆς δίκης ὑπέρτερα, 583–584).²⁵ The siblings state that they are committing their

²⁰ Eur. *Hipp.* 1081: he who acts “piously” (ἴσια) towards his parents is “just” (δίκαιος); *Hel.* 1638: one is allowed to act “piously” (ἴσια) but not “unjustly” (ἐκδικα); *HF* 772–773: the gods realize who are “unjust” (ἄδικοι) and who are “pious” (ἴσιοι); *Hec.* 1234–1235: he who is not “pious” ἴσιος is not “just” δίκαιος; *Phoen.* 492–493: a deed “without justice” (δίκης ἄτερ) is carried out in the “most impious way” (ἀνοσιώτατα); *Or.* 500–501: according to Tyndareus, Orestes must not kill Clytemnestra but impose a “pious punishment” (δίκην ἴσιαν) on her and expel his mother from the palace. On this interpretation, see Paley 1860; Bolkestein 1936: 38, 182; Chapouthier 1968; Willink 1989: 169; Diggle 1994; Kovacs 2002; cf. West (1987: 217), who considers ἴσιαν a noun and places a comma after δίκην; see also Murray 1919; Biehl 1975; Medda 2001; Peels 2015: 32, 233.

²¹ Despite making this claim, Clytemnestra explains that she killed Agamemnon because he had brought Cassandra back with him (1031–1038).

²² Harder (1995: 24) notes that all the characters admit that Clytemnestra needs to be punished. There are also references to the injustice committed by Aegisthus (878, 943, 953).

²³ As Electra explains, Clytemnestra defends herself by stating that one crime justifies another (1094), so that the mother does not consider it “fair” (δίκαιον) that Electra hates her (1015–1017).

²⁴ Electra expresses the same reproach to Aegisthus’ body (915); his murder forms part of the accepted parameters of applying justice (771, 878, 952–958). On this point of view, see Lloyd 1986: 15–16.

²⁵ Text and English translation from Kovacs 1998.

crime as they consider it fair to avenge their father's murder,²⁶ a statement which is echoed by the Chorus and Castor. In a passage (671–693) that is a subject of controversy,²⁷ prayers are offered to Zeus, Hera, Agamemnon, and Lady Earth for the siblings to be successful in their vengeance “if our demand is just” (εἰ δίκαι' αἰτούμεθα, 675).²⁸ When Clytemnestra is killed, the Chorus emphatically affirms that god dispenses “justice” (δίκαν, 1169) sooner or later,²⁹ and then insists on the righteousness of the act (δικαίως, 1189). Indeed, it was *necessary* to avenge the death of Agamemnon in accordance with Apollo's oracle (967–987); although the problem of its justness still arises after Clytemnestra's death.³⁰ Orestes responds by blaming the oracular god for his “obscure justice” (δίκαι' / ἄφαντα, 1190–1191) while Castor admits that Clytemnestra's punishment was just, but maintains there is no justice in Orestes' deed (1244). However, Castor establishes in the end that Apollo will take the blame (1245–1246, 1266–1267, 1296–1297) and Orestes will not be polluted.³¹

As we have seen, establishing what is δίκαιος and which justice is correct is a main theme in *Electra*. However, the problem presented in *Electra* is that necessary justice entails a crime of equal characteristics in conflict with the appropriate relations with the gods—a view which is reinforced by Eur. *El.* 1351–1352. In the middle of delivering his lines at 1349–1356,³² Castor is not saying he helps those who care for “piety” (<τὸ> ὄσιον) and “justice”

²⁶ Electra warns Orestes that he will be “impious” δυσσεβής towards the gods if he does not avenge his father (976).

²⁷ This passage is a subject of controversy in terms of certain readings and the order and distribution of the lines among the different characters. Some editors respect the order of the manuscript, e.g., Kovacs 1998; Distilo 2012: 324–334; other editors vary the distribution of lines, e.g., Denniston 1939: 134–135; Basta Donzelli 1995; Roisman and Luschnig 2011: 179; Cropp 2013: 188–190; van Emde Boas 2017: 190–204.

²⁸ See Lloyd 1986: 15–16.

²⁹ The Chorus already mentions the power of justice in a textually difficult passage (1155–1156), which seems to suggest that justice comes back to human life so that it can impose order; see Paley 1858: 378; Denniston 1939: 192; Distilo 2012: 564–565; Cropp 2013: 226. Electra and the Chorus make similar suggestions concerning the death of Aegisthus (771, 952–958).

³⁰ Orestes expresses his fear on this matter earlier in the play (977).

³¹ This is confirmed by Castor's final words: τοῖς μὲν μυσαρῶις οὐκ ἐπαρήγομεν (“we do not lend aid to those who are defiled,” 1350). On the reading of this passage, see Cropp 2013: 239, 242; cf. Denniston 1939: 208; Distilo 2012: 621–627.

³² These lines (1347–1356) have been interpreted as a reference to the mutilation of the Herms and the profanation of the Mysteries before Athens dispatched its fleet to Sicily in 415 BC (or the second fleet in 413 BC); see Denniston 1939: xxxiii, 211–212; Schiassi 1956: 221; Ebener 1977: 109; Ferguson 1987: 76; Roisman and Luschnig 2011: 232; Luschnig and Woodruff 2011: 62; cf. Cropp 2013: 242: “Euripides would have been ill-advised to raise such a dangerous issue during the campaign, and just as Athens was about to dispatch a second fleet to Sicily.”

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(τὸ δίκαιον); rather, he is defending the need for “justice” (τὸ δίκαιον) that is “pious” (ῥοῖον).³³ In this way, Castor is saying that they (i.e., the Dioscuri) “save all those to whom in their lives justice is pious and loved.” Therefore, the characterization of τὸ δίκαιον at the end is key: “justice” (τὸ δίκαιον) must be not only “loved” (φίλον) by mortals *but also* “pious” (ῥοῖον) towards the gods. Finally, the stylistic arrangement also endorses this reading since both adjectives are arranged around the noun that they modify. In conclusion, as the interpretation of ῥοῖον as a noun (i.e., “piety”) cannot be accepted at *El.* 1351–1352, I propose here to consider ῥοῖον as an adjective (i.e., “pious”). It is a poetical hyperbaton which places the most important word, ῥοῖον, in the first position. We have seen other examples of this kind of hyperbaton in Euripides’ plays and in other authors. Castor himself uses this same adjective earlier in hyperbaton while referring to the city of Athens (1319–1320), where justice will be done. And justice, the right kind of justice, is a central topic in this tragedy. Therefore, it makes sense that the Dioscuri, *dei ex machina*, establish how justice should be at the end of the play: humans must appreciate justice, but at the same time this justice has to be carried out piously towards the divinities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sincere thanks to the anonymous referees of the journal for their valuable feedback. I would also like to express my gratitude to M. Domingo Gyga (Princeton University), E. Calderón Dorda (University of Murcia), V.M. Ramón Palerm (University of Zaragoza), and to Research Project FFI2016–75632-P (AEI/FEDER, UE), *Irreligiosity, Agnosticism and Atheism in Ancient Greece: A Study of Lexical Semantics in Classical Literature*, financed by the Government of Spain.

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³³ In other words, Castor is contrasting the justice they defend, which is “pious” (ῥοῖος) thanks to Apollo, with Clytemnestra’s justice, which is “impious” (ἀνόσιος) from the point of view of the other characters (e.g., *Orestes*: 600, 677, 683; the *Old Man*: 645; *Electra*: 926; the *Chorus*: 1170). In a similar way, the *Chorus* reproaches *Electra* (φρονεῖς γὰρ ῥοῖα νῦν, τότε οὐ / φρονοῦσα, “now you think piously, but you did not before,” 1203–1204) when she and *Orestes* lament the matricide and its consequences. However, Castor clarifies later that they are cleared of blame because he attributes the crime to Apollo, so that the negation by the *Chorus* of ῥοῖος is no longer valid.

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