

ALEXANDRA ROZOKOKI

Ακαδημία Αθηνών

rozok@Academyofathens.gr

## THE EVIDENCE IN PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS* FOR THE STESICHOREAN *PALINODE*

**Περίληψη.** Η Παλινωδία του Στησιχόρου χρησίμευσε στον Πλάτωνα ως πρότυπο προκειμένου να συνθέσει στον Φαίδρο την παλινωδία του Σωκράτη για τον Έρωτα. Η μαρτυρία στον Φαίδρ. 243a3-b3 σχολιάζεται λεπτομερώς και ανιχνεύονται οι δυνατές πληροφορίες που μπορούν να εξαχθούν σχετικά με τη στησιχόρεια Παλινωδία. Έπισημαίνεται η πρόθεση του Πλάτωνα για μείωση του Όμηρου και έλέγχεται η ορθότητα της συλλογιστικής του φιλοσόφου στο συγκεκριμένο χωρίο.

**Abstract.** The *Palinode* by Stesichorus was useful for Plato as a model for him to compose Socrates's recantation on Eros in the *Phaedrus*. The evidence at *Phaedr.* 243a3-b3 is commented on in detail and the potential information that can be garnered on the Stesichorean *Palinode* is traced. Plato's intent to denigrate Homer is noted and the correctness of the philosopher's thinking in this passage is examined.

In the *Phaedrus* (243a<sub>3</sub>-b<sub>3</sub>, cf. also fr. 192 *PMGF*) Plato comments, with customary Socratic irony, on the cases of two poets who erred in their treatment of the mythological material and were punished for this. One was the celebrated Homer, who remained in a permanent ignorance and a state of blindness because he did not comprehend the reasons for his punishment and thus never corrected himself. The other was Stesichorus who, because he had spoken ill of Helen in one of his poems, was deprived of his sight. Yet, because he was a *μουσικός* man (says Plato), he eventually understood the cause of his punishment and so, after composing the whole of the so-called *Palinode*, regained his sight once more. The great gift that Plato offers us in this passage are the three famous lines that he records from the *Palinode* (οὐκ ἔστ' ἔτιμος λόγος οὗτος / οὐδ' ἔβας ἐν νηυσὶν εἵσσειμοις / οὐδ' ἴκεο πέργαμα Τροίας here the poet addresses Helen in the second person and proclaims categorically that in reality she never followed Paris or went to Troy).

Stesichorus, who as a poet used Homer as his model (cf. 'Longinus', *Subl.* 13.3 where Stesichorus is described as *ὀμηρικώτατος*), appears thus in Plato as superior to Homer! Plato took his cue for comparing the two

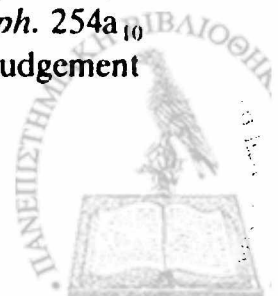


poets from Stesichorus himself, as in his *Palinode* Stesichorus blamed Homer for representing in his epics the real Helen as being in Troy, and not her phantom (cf. fr. 193 *PMGF* μέμφεται [sc. Στησίχορος] τὸν Ὅμηρον ὅτι Ἑλένην ἐποίησεν ἐν Τροίᾳ καὶ οὐ τὸ εἶδωλον αὐτῆς).

In Plato's comparison, Stesichorus is presented as a μουσικός man whilst Homer is not; this is not simply a contrast between a lyric and an epic poet, but something more is being implied: the μουσικός man is sensible, good (*Resp.* 349e) and his whole behaviour is marked by harmony (*Resp.* 403a<sub>8</sub>). He is for certain inspired by the ὀρθή Muse, who delights the excellent people, those who are distinguished by virtue and education (*Leg.* 658e<sub>8</sub>-659a<sub>1</sub>, 668b<sub>5-6</sub>). By contrast, the ἄμουσος is foolish, bad (*Resp.* 349e) and follows the ἡδεῖα Muse, who offers pleasure and pain but circumvents the law and rational principle (*Resp.* 607a<sub>5-8</sub>, *Leg.* 668b<sub>5</sub>). As such, the μουσικός is a superior, a true artist. K. Bassi ('Helen and the Discourse of Denial in Stesichorus' *Palinode*', *Arethusa* 26 (1993), 54-55) observes that in the *Phaedrus* Homer is presented as naive and Stesichorus as a well-educated poet.

The allusive and multilevel language used by Plato can also be seen in the verb οὐκ ᾔσθετο (*Phaedr.* 243a<sub>4</sub>), as αἰσθάνομαι means: 'to perceive i. through the senses, ii. through the mind'. Homer never felt purification either physically (by having his vision enlightened) or intellectually (by having his mind enlightened). As the unmusical man that he was, he never understood that there was such a purification. His mind was not enlightened so as to show him the cause of his physical blindness and nor was his physical blindness able to make him consider its cause and rectify it. In contrast, the loss of his physical sight was of concern to Stesichorus; being musical, devoted to the Muses, as he was, his mind was enlightened and he diagnosed the cause. Thus, by correcting his error, his eyes were immediately illuminated. The composition of the *Palinode* and its treatment of the true myth cured the poet both intellectually and physically. In other words, this poem is proof that true myth leads to the light.

In the *Phaedrus* (243a<sub>3</sub>-b<sub>3</sub>) the philosopher teaches us just how closely knowledge (= intellectual enlightenment), on the one hand, is connected to physical enlightenment, and on the other, ignorance (= intellectual blindness) is connected to physical blindness. The enlightened poet tells the truth, whilst the blind poet does not touch it (cf. *Resp.* 600e<sub>6</sub>, τῆς δὲ ἀληθείας οὐκ ἄπτεσθαι). Plato has also elsewhere connected blindness with ignorance (cf. *Gorg.* 479b<sub>7</sub>, τυφλῶς ἔχειν καὶ ἀγνοεῖν, *Resp.* 484c<sub>6,7</sub>) and had spoken metaphorically about the eyes of the soul (*Soph.* 254a<sub>10</sub> ψυχῆς ὄμματα); blindness of the mind does not help in correct judgement



but instead pushes aside the truth (cf. *Leg.* 731e<sub>5-7</sub> where love is the cause of blindness)<sup>1</sup>.

The Stesichorean *Palinode* well serves the philosophical aims of Plato that run through the *Phaedrus*. Just as Stesichorus failed with his slander of Helen, so Socrates failed in his first speech περὶ Ἔρωτος (*Phaedr.* 237a<sub>7</sub> ff.), as this speech contains neither a single sound meaning nor any truth (ibid. 242e<sub>5</sub>-243a<sub>1</sub> μηδὲν ὑγιές ... μηδὲ ἀληθές). Before anything bad happened to Socrates because of his blasphemy towards god (ibid. 243b<sub>4-5</sub> διὰ τὴν τοῦ Ἔρωτος κακηγορίαν), just as happened to Stesichorus with δια τὴν Ἑλένης κακηγορίαν, Socrates will recant with a true and encomiastic speech περὶ Ἔρωτος (ibid. 244a ff., 257a<sub>3-4</sub> καλλίστη καὶ ἀρίστη ... παλινωδία).

Plato, influenced by the misfortune of Stesichorus, dramatises the scenes as follows: he presents Socrates as delivering the πρότερος λόγος (*Phaedr.* 244a<sub>1</sub>), that is the εὐήθης and ἀσεβής (ibid. 242d<sub>7</sub>) one, with his head covered as a result of his shame (ibid. 237a<sub>4-5</sub>, 243b<sub>6-7</sub> ὑπ' αἰσχύνης ἐγκεκαλυμμένος). As such, the slander is spoken when Socrates' mind and eyes are in the dark. By contrast, the palinode is proclaimed with the head bare (ibid. 243b<sub>6-7</sub>); in other words, Socrates' mind and eyes are bathed in light. Plato attributes Socrates' blame to Phaedrus, in other words Phaedrus pushed Socrates to give a blasphemous speech (ibid. 242d<sub>5</sub> ἠνάγκασας εἰπεῖν, 243b<sub>4-5</sub> τὴν τοῦ Ἔρωτος κακηγορίαν) and he bewitched his mouth (ibid. 242e<sub>1</sub>). Plato copied this trick from the Stesichorean *Palinode*, where Stesichorus attributes the blame for his previous blasphemous ode (*Ἑλένης κακηγορία*) to the earlier great poets Homer and Hesiod (cf. fr. 193 *PMGF*).

Stesichorus must have acted as a model for Plato at this point as well where Socrates, through his recantation, asks that the god Eros forgives him and hopes that from now on he will be εὐμενής and ἰλεως to him (*Phaedr.* 257a); Stesichorus would ask for something similar from the goddess Helen in his own *Palinode*. Plato offers the basic reason as to why nothing bad should be said of Eros: because he is a god. I note that the same can just as well be said of the goddess Helen. According to the philosopher a god can

1. For the association between the mind and the eyes see also *Mimn.* 5.8 West βλέπει (sc. γῆρας) δ' ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ νόον ἀμφιχυθέν. On the metaphorical and literal use of the adjective τυφλός see respectively *Pind. Nem.* 7.23 f. τυφλὸν ἦτορ, *Rae.* 7b 18 τυφλαὶ φρένες and *Soph. OT* 371 τυφλὸς τὰ τ' ὄτα τὸν τε νοῦν τὰ τ' ὄμματα εἶ.



never be thought of as something evil (ibid. 242e). In such an instance, the sin is great and the impious must be punished implacably. Graphic examples of this for Plato are those of Homer and Stesichorus. Plato stops at the divine punishment because as a philosopher he does not (at least in an initial, direct phase) have to face a further difficulty of the poet, by which I mean the public. Amongst the audience, some are pious, others very religious and the majority would certainly react negatively if a divinity whom they honour and respect is insulted. Plato would not have been familiar with an audience's punishment (or their disapproval, in the least troublesome situation), which Stesichorus had to undergo<sup>2</sup>.

The names also happen to lead to allusions and serve Plato's intentions. The philosopher enjoys his wordplay (*Phaedr.* 244a<sub>1,3</sub>): the censorious speech on Eros was that of Phaedrus ('bright, cheerful') of the deme Myrrhinus (*μυρρίνη*, ἡ, 'myrtle, plant associated with festivities, cf. *Resp.* 372b<sub>5</sub> ff.'). Thus, the speech that was given for the sake of being delivered is marked as jovial (that is, it is not necessary to take it seriously). The *ἔτυμος* (= true) speech about Eros that will follow is presented as a speech by Stesichorus, son of Euphemus<sup>3</sup> of Himera. The name *Εὐφρημος* refers to *εὐφρημέω* (= 'i. to maintain silence at religious rituals, ii. to praise, speak well of'), and the toponym *Ἰμέρα* to *ἴμερον* (= 'erotic desire', at *Phaedr.* 251c-e erotic desire is channelled to the soul when it sees true beauty with the result that it opens its pores and sprouts wings. On the wordplay, see also G. J. De Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* p. 113 f., E. Heitsch, *Platon Phaidros* p. 28 n. 20).

In short, both Stesichorus and Socrates extolled with their palinode, the former the goddess Helen and the latter the god Eros. These are two divinities with a deep relationship between them (see A. Rozokoki,

---

2. I note B. Gentili's accurate observation that 'Reinterpretation of heroic themes and reproduction of occasionally contradictory versions of the same myth are explicable in terms of the poet-patron-public relationship' (see *Poetry and Its Public in Ancient Greece: From Homer to the Fifth Century*, trans. A. T. Cole, The Johns Hopkins University Press 1988, p. 126). For the worship of the goddess Helen at Sparta, Sicily and elsewhere, see A. Rozokoki, 'The Significance of the Ancestry and Eastern Origins of Helen of Sparta', *OUCC* 98 (2011), 60 ff., 65, and 66 n. 1.

3. In addition to Plato, Stesichorus' father's name is given as *Εὐφρημος* by Stephanus Byzantius (s.v. *Μάταυρος*), the *Suda* σ 1095 (alongside another four different names) and an anonymous elegiac poem to the nine lyric poets (see Schol. in Pind. vol. I p. 10 Drachmann).



QUCC 98 [2011], 57 f.). Plato chose to mention the Stesichorean poem for the following reasons: a. to diminish Homer and his poetry, and b. to utilise the clever device of the palinode as he too will rehabilitate a god (Eros) related to a goddess (Helen), whom a poet from long before had to rehabilitate. In the *Phaedrus* (244a ff., 251a ff.) the nature of personal love is described as a mania for beauty. But Helen did not cause something different, as her beauty produced a mania amongst men. The subject of both the Stesichorean *Palinode* and the Platonic *Phaedrus* is similar (rehabilitating two related divinities). The difference lies in the nature of the authors doing the rehabilitating: one acts as a poet (Stesichorus), while the other as a philosopher (Plato).

And while Plato comments on the physical and intellectual blinding of two poets, it is worth reminding ourselves how another fine poet defended his art: Hesiod presents the Muses as declaring that they know how to tell many lies that are similar to the truth but they also know how to tell, when they wish, truths (*Theog.* 27-28). These Muses taught Hesiod to compose beautiful songs (*ibid.* 22), and they breathed a divine voice into him (*ibid.* 31-32).

The poet is certainly neither a historian nor a philosopher, to be searching permanently for the truth. Under the influence of Plato, we can incorporate into the first Hesiodic version regarding the Muses (*Theog.* 27 ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα) the poetry of Homer and, as such, how this poet presented Helen in his epics, whilst into the second Hesiodic version (*Theog.* 28 ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρῦσασθαι) we can incorporate Stesichorus' *Palinode*. If we combine the passage from the *Phaedrus* (243a<sub>3</sub>-b<sub>3</sub>) with the above lines from Hesiod, then we can see that Homer has erred and told many lies about Helen, whilst Stesichorus retracted them and told the truth.

Of course, Plato is not being entirely honourable in the above passage from the *Phaedrus*. He knows the content of the *Palinode* well (see directly below), in which Stesichorus criticises not only Homer but also Hesiod for inaccuracies against Helen (cf. fr. 193 *PMGF*), yet Plato chooses to censure only Homer. There are two reasons for this: a. the example of the blind Homer suits Plato's theories of natural and intellectual blinding. Although Hesiod blasphemed against Helen (for example, fr. 176.7 M.-W.), he did not suffer any kind of punishment, and b. (most of all) Plato constantly aimed at undermining Homer as he considered him a great threat to his philosophical structure. In the *Republic* Plato gives an exhaustive explanation of why he considers Homeric poetry dangerous (his critique begins at 377c<sub>5</sub> ff.). Homer, the pedagogue of Greece, must be exiled from



the ideal city in order to pave the way for a new educational system in which poetry will be replaced by philosophy (see also P. Murray, *Plato on Poetry: Ion; Republic 376e-398b<sub>9</sub>; Republic 595-608b<sub>10</sub>*, Cambridge University Press 1996, p. 19 ff.).

In the *Republic* 586c<sub>3,5</sub> it is stated that Stesichorus presented Helen's phantom at Troy as περιμάχητον, there, the young men fought, in ignorance, to the death for a phantom and not for the real Helen (τὸ τῆς Ἑλένης εἶδωλον ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Τροίᾳ Στησίχορος φησι γενέσθαι περιμάχητον ἀγνοία τοῦ ἀληθοῦς). Both this evidence as well as the mention of the three lines from the *Palinode* (*Phaedr.* 243a<sub>8</sub>-b<sub>1</sub>) and, above all, the description πᾶσαν (ibid. 243b<sub>2</sub>) show that Plato had a close knowledge of the Stesichorean poem. Plato had either read the poem or had consulted a very good source that provided a detailed description with the original lines. It should be noted that of the almost five lines that we have of the *Palinode* three are to be found in Plato whilst the other two survive in a papyrus dating to the 2nd century AD and containing a commentary on Greek lyric poets (P. Oxy. 2506 fr. 26 col. i, cf. fr. 193 *PMGF*). All other authors (cf. fr. 192 *PMG* and *PMGF*) limit themselves to the famous instance of the blinding and/or some details on the poem's plot (see also A. Kelly, 'Stesikhoros and Helen', *MH* 64 [2007], 14 n. 55).

I consider it very possible that Plato had read the poem as the description πᾶσαν (*Phaedr.* 243b<sub>2</sub>) implies a good knowledge of its content<sup>4</sup>. πᾶσαν alludes to a long text that contains various episodes. The possibility that this was a long poem is reinforced by the evidence of the ancient commentator (fr. 193 *PMGF*) that there were actually two *Palinodes*, in one of which Stesichorus blamed Homer and in the other Hesiod. Moreover, the formulation πᾶσαν τὴν καλουμένην Παλινοδίαν (*Phaedr.* 243b<sub>2</sub>) gives the impression that the term *Palinode* does not fully cover the content of the poem. D. Sider ('The Blinding of Stesichorus', *Hermes* 117 [1989], 426 n. 14) was the first to observe that nowhere else in Plato is the title of a work accompanied by the qualifier καλούμενος. As such, on the basis of Plato's claim it cannot be certain that the term *Palinode* was the actual title of Stesichorus' poem.

One large, thorny problem is the correlation of the *Palinode* with the previous blasphemous ode of Stesichorus. Scholars are divided into two

---

4. As N. Austin (*Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom*, Cornell University Press 1994, p. 96) aptly observes, 'The *Palinode* was more talked of than read, if indeed it was read at all after the time of Plato.'



camps: some argue that these are two parts of the same poem, and others believe that there were two different poems<sup>5</sup>. Plato's claim that Stesichorus was blinded *διὰ τὴν Ἑλένης κακηγορίαν* does not clearly indicate just where the poet slanders the heroine; in addition to the blasphemous ode Helen could have been censured by Stesichorus in other poems by him (*Sack of Troy, Oresteia*). On the other hand, the term *Palinode* means an ode that is against a previous ode (cf. Hesych. π 216). In a new poem, one refutes an earlier one. Dio Chrysostom suggests it is *ἡ πρότερον ᾠδή* (*Or.* 11.40-41), Philostratus calls it *ὁ πρότερος λόγος* (*V A* 6.11.14), Maximus of Tyre (21.1) *ἡ ἔμπροσθεν ᾠδή* or *ὁ ἔμπροσθεν ψόγος* and the *Suda* (σ 1095) describes it as *ψόγος Ἑλένης*. Plato's phrase (*διὰ τὴν Ἑλένης κακηγορίαν*) is a general phrase but not a vague one: it is accompanied by the definite article and is in the singular. In the dialogue it is correlated with *τὴν τοῦ Ἔρωτος κακηγορίαν* which is clearly *ὁ πρότερος, ἀλμυρὸς λόγος* of Socrates on Eros, which is about to be retracted (*Phaedr.* 237a<sub>7</sub>-241d<sub>3</sub>, 243a-b,d, 244a<sub>1</sub>). The above, along with the meaning of the word *Παλινωδία*, lead me to conclude that the *Ἑλένης κακηγορία* refers to Stesichorus' previous blasphemous ode on Helen.

The three lines that Plato quotes (*οὐκ ἔστ' etc.*) come from the *Palinode*; they must have been near the beginning, but not right at the beginning. This data, along with the first surviving line of the *Palinode* (fr. 193 *PMGF* *δεῦρ' αὐτε θεὰ φιλόμολπε*) show that it was the second part of an ode dedicated to Helen. The first part certainly contained various episodes from her wedding with Menelaus (oath of the candidate suitors, selection of the groom, etc., see frs. 187-190 *PMGF*). I plan to provide a detailed description of the Stesichorean *Helen* and its relationship to the

---

5. C. L. Blomfield apud O. F. Kleine, *Stesichori Himerensis Fragmenta*, Berlin 1828, p. 22, J. Vürtheim, *Stesichoros' Fragmente und Biographie*, Leiden 1919, p. 59), L. Woodbury ('Helen and the Palinode', *Phoenix* 21 [1967], 168 ff.), R. Kannicht (*Euripides Helena*, Heidelberg 1969, vol. 1 p. 29) and A. Kelly ('Stesichoros and Helen', *MH* 64 [2007], 1, 6, 12 ff.) believe that the blasphemous ode and the *Palinode* are two parts of the same poem. In contrast, C. M. Bowra ('The two Palinodes of Stesichorus', *CR* n.s. 13 [1963], 246), J. A. Davidson (*From Archilochus to Pindar. Papers on Greek Literature of the Archaic Period*, London 1968, p. 205 f.) and F. D'Alfonso ('Stesicoro corale nelle due principali testimonianze sulla "Palinodia" (Isocr. *Hel.* 64; Plat. *Phaedr.* 243a)', *Helikon* 33-34 (1993-1994), 423 f.) argue that they are two different poems. All the above scholars base their arguments primarily on the evidence of Plato (*Phaedrus* 243a<sub>3</sub>-b<sub>3</sub>) and Isocrates (*Hel.* 64).



*Palinode* in a later study).

Scholars also appear to be divided on the issue of the blinding. Some argue that Stesichorus was talking literally about a physical blinding whilst others believe it was allegorical, that the poet was alluding to a blinding of the mind. The former position is advocated by J. A. Davison (*From Archilochus to Pindar. Papers on Greek Literature of the Archaic Period*, London 1968, p. 208), G. Devereux ('Stesichoros' Palinode: Two Further Testimonia and Some Comments', *RhM* 116 [1973], 206-209), D. Sider ('The Blinding of Stesichorus', *Hermes* 117 [1989], 428 ff.) and A. Kelly ('Stesichoros and Helen', *MH* 64 [2007], 8-10). Proponents of the latter position include C. M. Bowra (*Greek Lyric Poetry. From Alcman to Simonides*, Oxford 1961, p. 108), L. Woodbury ('Helen and the Palinode', *Phoenix* 21 [1967], 172 ff.), D. E. Gerber (*Euterpe. An Anthology of Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac, and Iambic Poetry*, Amsterdam 1970, p. 149) and E. Robbins ('Public Poetry', in: D. E. Gerber, *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets*, Mnemosyne / Supplementum 173, Leiden 1997, p. 240). Nonetheless, all the ancient evidence – including that of Plato – refers clearly to a physical blinding (*Phaedr.* 243a<sub>5</sub>-b<sub>3</sub> and Schol. Herm., Isocr. *Hel.* 64, Hor. *epod.* 17.42 ff. and Schol. Porphy.; also Schol. Pseudacr. in Hor. c. 1.16.1, Conon 26 F1.18 FGH, Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.40, Paus. 3.19.13, Hippolyt. *Adv. Haer.* 6.19.3, *Suda* σ 1095). It should also be noted that the second mythological version offered in the *Vita Romana* on the physical blinding of Homer (§ 5 ed. West) has been copied to a great extent from the sufferings of Stesichorus.

From the evidence in Plato it is not clear if a little or a lot of time passed between Stesichorus' blinding to the diagnosis of its cause (*Phaedr.* 243a<sub>5,7</sub> τῶν γὰρ ὀμμάτων στέρηθεις [sc. Στησίχορος] οὐκ ἠγνόησεν, ἀλλ' ἔγνω τὴν αἰτίαν). However, what is clearly stated is that Stesichorus composed the *Palinode* directly after diagnosing the cause of his blindness (ἔγνω τὴν αἰτίαν καὶ ποιεῖ εὐθύς).

Finally, Plato advances the following reason as to why Stesichorus was able to diagnose the cause of his misfortune: ἅτε μουσικὸς ὢν (*Phaedr.* 243a<sub>6,7</sub>). Of course, this is a subjective explanation on the part of the philosopher to serve his own purposes (I mean, the disparagement of Homer as not being μουσικός in contrast to Stesichorus, see above p. ). Nonetheless, the reader of Plato may well ask: but how could Stesichorus as a μουσικὸς ἀνὴρ (that is, virtuous, wise and a follower of the ὀρθή Muse) commit such a great error and compose τὴν Ἑλένης κακηγορίαν? But this question, it seems, did not concern the great philosopher at all.

