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From Earth to Heaven Two Notes on Psellos' *synkrisis* of Euripides and George of Pisidia

ABSTRACT: A fresh inspection of ms. Vat. Barb. gr. 240, the only (and partly fragmentary) primary witness to Michael Psellos' treatise *Who wrote better verse, Euripides or George of Pisidia?*, yields several important corrections to A. R. Dyck's 1986 edition of this text, and allows a more accurate restoration of Psellos' reflections on the tragic skill of Euripides (and Aeschylus), as well as on the reason for George of Pisidia's ultimate victory over the ancient playwright in the comparison that concludes the treatise.

KEYWORDS: Byzantine scholarship; Michael Psellos; Euripides; tragedy; Greek manuscripts; Codex Vaticanus Barb. gr. 240

INTRODUCTION

Even if the anonymous treatise *On Tragedy* (Περὶ τραγωδίας) is no longer ascribed to him (and may indeed belong to a later period)¹, Michael Psellos can still claim the status of the first Byzantine author “to devote considerable critical energy to the discussion of ancient drama”². This is due chiefly to his rather unusual essay written in response to the question *Who wrote better verse, Euripides or George of Pisidia?* (Τίς ἐστὶ χιζε κρεῖττον, ὁ Εὐριπίδης ἢ ὁ Πισίδης;). This short text, long known through Leone Allacci's transcription³, was rediscovered by Aristide Colonna in ff. 202v–204r of the badly flaked late 13th-century ms. Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. gr. 240 (*Diktyon* 64786: it had also been Allacci's sole source), whence it was newly edited by Colonna himself and then by Andrew R. Dyck⁴.

Dyck's text remains the standard one⁵, but it has been thoroughly revised by no less a connoisseur of Byzantine erudite prose than Athanasios Kambylis⁶. Alas, Kambylis' suggestions—both new readings of the manuscript (of which he inspected a reproduction, though not the original) and new interpretations of the many lacunose or disrupted passages—did not result in a new critical edition⁷: they ought, however, to be seriously considered by anyone quoting or discussing Psellos' text.

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¹ M. L. AGATI, *Il De Tragoedia* barocciano. Leuven 2020, argues for a dating in the 13th century. Psellian authorship was still deemed possible by F. PERUSINO (a c. di), Anonimo. *La tragedia greca*. Urbino 1993. The treatise is included, albeit with some hesitation, in C. BARBER – S. PAPAIONANNOU, *Michael Psellos on Literature and Art*. Notre Dame 2017, 82–98.

² S. PAPAIOANNOU, *Michael Psellos. Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium*. Cambridge 2013, 115.

³ Prepared in the 17th century and transmitted to this day—in the hand of the erudite librarian Raffaele Vernazza (1701–1780: see O. MONTEPAONE, *Carte Allacci: Notes on the Fate of Leone Allacci's Papers in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Rome*. *Atene e Roma* n.s. 16 (2022) 105–120) – in the mss. Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, *Carte Allacci* CXXX (*Diktyon* 56235, section 81a-b, ff. 357–363: a fairly comprehensive transcription, including the lacunae) and LXIII (*Diktyon* 56194, ff. 574–575: here only the more legible parts): these were the sources for the *editio princeps* in I. A. FABRICIUS – C. G. HARLES, *Bibliotheca Graeca*, vol. XII. Hamburg 1809, 7–9.

⁴ A. COLONNA, *Michaelis Pselli de Euripide et Georgio Pisida iudicium*. *SBN* 7 (1953) 16–21. A. R. DYCK (ed.), *Michael Psellos. The Essays on Euripides and George of Pisidia and on Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius*. Wien 1986, had no access to the manuscript, but could rely on a photograph, on a transcription by N. G. Wilson and on selective collations by D. L. Blank.

⁵ It is the basis for A. LITTLEWOOD, *To One Asking 'Who Wrote Verse Better, Euripides or Pisides?'*, in: BARBER – PAPAIONANNOU, *Michael Psellos* 176–185, who nevertheless emends some passages.

⁶ A. KAMBYLIS, *Michael Psellos' Schrift über Euripides und Pisides. Probleme der Textkonstitution*. *JÖB* 44 (1994) 203–215; A. KAMBYLIS, *Michael Psellos' Schrift Tis estichize kreiton o Euripidēs ē o Pisdēs*. *JÖB* 56 (2006) 135–149.

⁷ Except for ll. 1–11 DYCK, presented as a sample in *JÖB* 44 (1994) 215–216.

The present contribution, based on a new inspection of the Barberinianus, attempts to amend Dyck's text in two passages that for different reasons may prove relevant to the overall understanding of Psellos' argument. While this *synkrisis*—even beyond its direct sources⁸—has been studied as a specimen of Byzantium's thoroughly rhetorical approach to ancient tragedy and literature in general⁹, and as a landmark in the Byzantine sensitivity to the rhythm of the iambic trimeter and the dodecasyllable (more about this below § 2)¹⁰, the reappraisal of these passages may help reassess its terminology, its evaluation of earlier tragedians, as well as its final verdict, which has puzzled generations of scholars due to the poor state of the manuscript precisely in the last lines of the text.

STYLE, PLOT, AESCHYLUS

Psellos' discussion of Euripides' style is dominated by the description of the playwright's metrical and rhythmic qualities, but it also offers (ll. 33–54 DΥCK) a considerate general overview of tragic style, whose core business (τελεώτατον κεφάλαιον) is πάθη (“passions”, l. 41 DΥCK), and thus the need to differentiate poetic diction according to the different characters, be they messengers, Phrygians, captive women, or the like¹¹. In this respect, Psellos argues (ll. 54–77 DΥCK), Aeschylus and Sophocles present a more dignified and solemn style (with the exception of Aeschylus' *Prometheus*, keener on “pure iambs” and on flattering words¹²), whereas Euripides is always charming even when πάθος is at stake, as in the early scenes of *Orestes*, where the chorus interacts with Electra and sings in its own, peculiar pitch. “In this way is Euripides careful everywhere in rhythmic speech, verbal eloquence, and appropriateness of rhythm” (ll. 77–78 DΥCK: οὕτως αὐτῷ πανταχοῦ διὰ σπουδῆς ἡ ῥυθμικὴ φράσις καὶ τὸ τῆς λέξεως εὐγλωττον καὶ τὸ τ[ο]ῦ ῥυθμοῦ ἐμμελές).

I suggest that what follows in Psellos' treatise (ll. 78–90 DΥCK) corresponds precisely to these three headings:

- 1) rhythmic speech in ll. 78–81 (μουσική and ῥυθμικαὶ ἀγωγαί, a particular strength of Euripides' art)¹³
- 2) verbal eloquence in ll. 81–85 (see below)
- 3) appropriateness of rhythm in ll. 86–90 (μελοποιΐα, another strength of Euripides due to his skilful use of rhythm, metre and the appropriate musical instruments: I assume that τὸ τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ ἐμμελές in l. 78, as a *Stichwort* conceptually and etymologically connected to μελοποιΐα, can cover all these aspects).

⁸ See M. WHITBY, Michael Psellus on Euripides and George of Pisidia, in: *The Reception of Texts and Images*, ed. L. Hardwick – S. Ireland. Milton Keynes 1996, 103–131; DΥCK, Michael Psellus 29–33 on the role of Hermogenes and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and on some possible contacts with the sources of Tzetzes' iambic poem *On Tragedy* (Περὶ τραγωδίας), edited by G. PACE, Giovanni Tzetzes. La poesia tragica. Napoli ²2011, and now by B. VAN DEN BERG (ed.), John Tzetzes on Ancient Poetry. Washington DC, forthcoming.

⁹ See e.g. the pivotal role of ῥητορικὸς λόγος (l. 29 DΥCK), with PAPAIOANNOU, Michael Psellos 117; J. N. LJUBARSKIJ, Ἐπροσῶπικότης καὶ τὸ εἶδος τοῦ Μιχαὴλ Πσελλοῦ. Athina ²2004, 197–224: 202.

¹⁰ See M. D. LAUXTERMANN, The Velocity of Pure Iambs. Byzantine Observations on the Metre and Rhythm of the Dodecasyllable. *JÖB* 48 (1998) 9–33.

¹¹ See on this WHITBY, Michael Psellus.

¹² On Psellos' presentation of *Prometheus* and on his possible intuition about its spurious nature see L. R. CRESCI, Arist. *Po.* 1454a22–3 – Psell. *Eur. et Georg. Pis. comp.* 92–97 Dyck. *Eikasmos* 27 (2016) 285–290, and M. MANOUSAKIS, Michael Psellos on *Prometheus Bound*: Reinstating a Judgment. *Logeion* 7 (2017) 1–13.

¹³ This is Kambylis' text (*JÖB* 44 [1994] 207 and 56 [2006] 139): ἀτεχνῶς γοῦν τὴν μουσικὴν ζύμπασαν καὶ αὐτὰς δὴ τὰς ῥυθμικὰς ἀγωγὰς εἰσ[ά]γει [το]ῖς οἰκείοις ποιήμασι[ι] καὶ οὔτε διαστημάτων αὐτῶ οἱ λόγοι ἄμοιροι οὔτ. .τ...γ...τόνων. “He simply brings into his own poems the whole art of music and even the tempi themselves, nor do his speeches lack pitch-intervals or” In DΥCK's text (translated by LITTLEWOOD, *To One Asking* 182) the last word of the pericope was γλωττ[ημά]των (which Kambylis rightly rejected), and the ensuing μεταβολῆς (l. 81 DΥCK, see below) was misplaced, so as to pertain to the aforementioned sentence.

Let us consider the second of these pericopae (ll. 81–85 DΥCK): I offer a tentative text that—while remaining hypothetical in the longer supplements—radically modifies both Dyck's and Kambylis', and I consequently also adapt Littlewood's translation.

μεταβολῆς δὲ καὶ μάλιστα πεφρόντισται ὁ ἀνὴρ [ἐν ἄλλοις: [τὸν μὲν] γ[ὰρ] χαρακτῆρα καὶ τὴν λέξιν μετατίθησι καὶ ποικίλλ[ει τὴν] φρά[σιν] κατ[ὰ] δύναμιν ὁ σο[φ]ὸς οὗτ[ος] ἀνὴρ, τὰς ὑποθέσεις [δραμάτων παριδών, αἱ παρ' Αἰσχύλου οἷον ἐν Πέρσαις ἢ ἐν Ἀγαμέμν[ονι] μάλιστα τῶν ἄλλων ἐπραγματεύθησάν τε καὶ ἐπονῆ[θησαν].

He has taken much thought over variety in other matters too, for this wise man varies style and language and, as much as he can, diversifies his phraseology, [overlooking] the plots [of the plays, which] were elaborated and worked on more than the others¹⁴ [by Aeschylus e.g. in the *Persians* or in the *Agamemnon*].

In this reconstruction I offer two new readings: first of all, the word *χαρακτῆρα* can be clearly discerned in the manuscript: [μέ]τρα (l. 82 DΥCK), that was previously read in its place¹⁵, is not only incompatible with the traces, but also inappropriate in the context, for here Psellos is arguing about Euripides' ability to vary his style, not the metres of his choruses, which will rather become the focus of the following section¹⁶. By restoring *χαρακτήρ* in this passage (in the sense of “style”, see *LSJ* II.5), we gain an important *terminus technicus* for Psellos' treatise, and one that chimes in very well with his other extant σύγκρισις, that between Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius¹⁷.

As for the big lacuna following ὁ σοφὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ (l. 83), my reconstruction is of course largely hypothetical¹⁸. Firstly, however, it takes into account the neat traces of the letters *σχ* and *μν*—overlooked by all previous scholars—in the first line from the top in f. 203v; secondly, it reads τὰς ὑποθέσεις as the object of a participle swallowed by the lacuna¹⁹; thirdly, it shares Dyck's idea that the form ἐπραγματεύθησαν must convey a passive meaning, as always in later Greek (by an obvious symmetry, this also guarantees the passive form ἐπονῆ[θησαν] rather than ἐπονῆ[σαντο])²⁰.

If, as I surmise on the basis of the traces, Psellos is comparing here Euripides with Aeschylus rather than with Sophocles (as believed by Dyck), this chimes in well with Aristotle's chapter about stylistic μετάθεσις in *Poetics* 22, 1458b20 (where Euripides' lexical choice is deemed superior to

¹⁴ This may be taken to mean “more than by the other dramatists” (as kindly suggested by the anonymous reviewer) or “more than the other elements” (of tragedy).

¹⁵ This was first read by COLONNA, Michaelis Pselli (as in n. 6), 20, followed by Dyck: Allacci (ms. Vallic. Allacci CXXX, f. 360v), while giving some slightly different readings in the words nearby, left a blank space before καὶ τὴν λέξιν.

¹⁶ This is section 3 above, ll. 86–90 DΥCK (uncontroversial reading): Εὐριπίδῃ τούτων μὲν [ἦ]τ[ρον] ἐμέλησεν, ἐπραγματεύσατο δὲ πλέον ἐκείνου περὶ τε τ[ῆ]ν με[λοποι]ᾶν ... “Euripides was less concerned with these matters, but gave more elaboration than him to musical composition ...”.

¹⁷ Also edited by DΥCK, Michael Psellos (as in n. 6), 90–99: see esp. 98, l. 104 κεφαλαιώδεις ἐπιτομὰς τῶν χαρακτήρων σοι πεποιήκαμεν “I have presented you with an account of their respective styles”. See also, in Psellos' writings, *Theologica* I, 112 (ed. P. GAUTIER. Leipzig 1989, p. 441, l. 85) ἐνήλλακται μοι τοῦ λόγου ὁ χαρακτήρ; *Theologica* II, 1 (ed. L. G. WESTERINK – J. M. DUFFY. München – Leipzig 2002, p. 5, l. 134) μεταβολὴν τοῦ χαρακτήρος τῶν μελῶν; *Oratoria minora* 10.59 (ed. A. LITTLEWOOD. Leipzig 1985) τὸν Θεουκυδίδειον ἢ Ἀριστείδειον χαρακτήρα; *Orationes panegyricae* 17.292 (ed. G. T. DENNIS. Stuttgart – Leipzig 1994) Ἰσοκρατικὸς τούτω ὁ χαρακτήρ.

¹⁸ This is DΥCK's text (ll. 83–85, marred by several misreadings) and translation: οὗτ[ε] ἀνὴρ τὰς ὑποθέσεις [ὑπερορᾷ οὔτε τὰ τῶν προσώπων ἦθη, καίτοι ἐν τούτοις αἱ Σοφοκλέους τραγωδία] μάλιστα τῶν ἄλλων ἐπραγματεύθησάν τε καὶ ἐπονῆ[θησαν]. “Nor does he neglect plots [or characterization, although in these matters Sophocles' tragedies] were elaborated and labored over more than those of others”.

¹⁹ KAMBYLIS, *JÖB* 56 (2006) 140 posited δ(έ) at the beginning of the lacuna, and thus looked for a finite verb, e.g. τὰς ὑποθέσεις [δ' οὐκ ἐξοργεῖται ... Note that Allacci read δρα after τὰς ὑποθέσεις (ms. Vallic., Allacci CXXX, f. 360v).

²⁰ See e.g. Anna Comnena XV 11, 9 (ed. D. R. REINSCH. Berlin 2001). In our treatise, the middle voice in l. 86 ἐπραγματεύσατο has an active meaning, as elsewhere in Psellos. Kambylis, *JÖB* 56 (2006) 141 on the other hand, read ἐπραγματεύθησάν τε καὶ ἐπονῆ[σαντο] “elaborated and worked on” (active meaning), whereby the plural subject had to be something like Αἰσχύλος καὶ Σοφοκλῆς: but this would then leave unexplained the subsequent comparison with one tragedian only (πλέον ἐκείνου “more elaboration than him”, see above note 16 and DΥCK, Michael Psellos (as in n. 6), 64) in ll. 86–87.

Aeschylus')²¹, and with Aristotle's criticism of Euripides' insufficient οἰκονομία in *Poetics* 13, 1453a29²². In this context it is tempting (albeit, I insist, very speculative) to imagine that the -μν- could belong to the title of one of Aeschylus' famous plays, singled out as a particularly effective masterpiece in terms of dramatic development and structure: one must admit, however, that Psellos seems to be quoting first-hand only *Seven* and *Prometheus*, and that there is little evidence of his acquaintance with non-triadic plays such as the *Agamemnon*; indeed it has been argued that his knowledge of Attic theatre was confined to texts in the school syllabus²³.

WHO WINS?

In Psellos' treatise, the section devoted to George of Pisidia is surprisingly short (ll. 100–132 ΔΥΣΚ): the author insists on the lesser metrical and rhythmical variety of George's verse, and on the relative lack of dramatic and stylistic ποικιλία (ll. 100–107 ΔΥΣΚ); but he then bestows praise on his "unforced diction", ἀβίαστος φράσις (or λέξις?), stressing how naturally and easily the verses flow from his pen ("reading them as they lay before his eyes", ἀναγινώσκοντι ταῦτα προκείμενα²⁴), and recommending the exactitude and the skill of his diction in whatever domain he tackles, be it medicine, the heavenly Chain, the dance of the Horai, the Horai's four-horse carriage, or military technique (ll. 119–130 ΔΥΣΚ)²⁵.

This section is rounded off by a strong statement (ll. 131–132 ΔΥΣΚ):

ὥσ[περ] δὲ ἀπὸ σφενδόνης αὐτῶ οἱ [στ]ίχοι ἄλλονται [ἅμα το]ῖς ποσὶ καὶ τῷ μέτρῳ τοῦ [λ]όγου συμπεραίνοντες τὴν δ[ι]άνοιαν.

His verses leap forth as if from a sling, conjuring up the sense of the phrase together with the feet and the metre.

This sentence has been studied in recent years by Marc Lauxtermann, who has detected here the first Byzantine scholarly *Auseinandersetzung* with the meaning and workings of the "pure" or unresolved iambic metre, i.e. the antecedent of the dodecasyllable²⁶. Lauxtermann's interpretation, however,

²¹ See M. HOSE (ed.), Aristoteles. Poetik, Bd. I. Berlin – Boston 2023, 357.

²² Aristotle praises Euripides on his general preference for unhappy endings, but adds εἰ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα μὴ εὖ οἰκονομεῖ: see HOSE, Aristoteles. Poetik, 290–291, and C. GALLAVOTTI (a. c. di), Aristotele. Dell'arte poetica. Milano 1974, 152, about Aristotle's further observations on single plays of Euripides (who in 1456a17 is indirectly commended for the unity of his plots).

²³ See C. SIMELIDIS, Aeschylus in Byzantium, in: Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus, ed. R. Futo Kennedy. Leiden – Boston 2018, 179–201, and particularly the disparaging verdict of WHITBY, Michael Psellos (as in n. 8), 125–127.

²⁴ Ll. 107–109 ΔΥΣΚ ἐν πᾶσι δὲ ἀβίαστος αὐτῶ [ἢ φράσις] (Dyck's supplement, ἢ λέξις also possible; Allacci has ἀρμονία) ὥσπερ οὐκ ἐνθυμουμένῳ οὔτε τὰ νοήματα οὔτε τὰ ῥήματα ἀλλ' ἀναγινώσκοντι ταῦτα προκείμενα (this is the reading rightly restored against Dyck's {τ}αὐτὰ <τὰ> προκείμενα, by D. A. CHRESTIDES, rev. of DYCK 1986. *Hell* 37 (1986) 371–377, at 374; E. V. MALTESE, rev. of DYCK 1986. *Maia* 39 (1987) 169–171, at 171; KAMBYLIS. *JÖB* 44 (1994) 207–208). The translation is taken from LITTLEWOOD, To One Asking (as in n. 5), 184.

²⁵ Despite Pisides' undoubted use of technical terms (from medicine, law, astronomy etc.), and of non-poetic vocabulary (see J. D. C. FRENO, The significance of technical terms in the poems of George of Pisidia. *Orpheus* 21 (1974) 45–55; J. D. C. FRENO, Special aspects of the use of medical vocabulary in the poems of George of Pisidia. *Orpheus* 22 (1975) 49–56; L. TARTAGLIA, L'exkursus zoologico dell'"Esamerone" di Giorgio di Pisidia. *NRh* 2 (2005) 41–58), this praise has created some embarrassment, for many of the *Realien* listed by Psellos as proof of Pisides' accuracy (from χουνκίδες "wheel-naves" to οὐραγός "commander of the rear-guard") do not in fact appear in extant poems of Pisides. Against the idea that these terms might derive from lost poems of Pisides see A. PERTUSI (ed.), Giorgio di Pisidia. Poemi, vol. I. Ettal 1960, 30–31, who takes them as "amplificazioni retoriche vaghe ... e per di più intinte di classicismo", and credits Psellos with a relatively limited knowledge of Pisides' output.

²⁶ LAUXTERMANN, The Velocity (as in n. 10), 28: "Psellos simply states that Pisides' verses are structured according to the ἔννοια, the logical and syntactical constituents of a sentence, and that they therefore seem to rush on in a γοργός style, 'leaping forth as if shot from a sling' ... As far as I know, Psellos is the first Byzantine scholar to comment on the rhythmical verse structure of the dodecasyllable". See also M. LAUXTERMANN, Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres, Bd. II. Wien 2019, 349, again on Hermogenes' idea of γοργότης.

depends heavily on the reading τὸ γοργόν in l. 132 DYCK, a suggestion by N.G. Wilson that does not match the extant traces and should therefore be abandoned in favour of Allacci's old and correct τοῦ λόγου²⁷.

But the most difficult and debated part of the entire treatise is the epilogue (ll. 133–138 DYCK) that comes immediately after the passage about the leaping lines: physical damage to the manuscript has so far prevented scholars from reaching consensus on the real outcome of this *synkrisis*²⁸. This is how these lines read in Dyck's edition:

Εἰ μὲν οὖν πρὸς τ[ὴν τρα]γικὴν [ποίησιν], φημὶ [δ]ὴ Εὐριπίδου, [τὰ Π]ισιδειακὰ μέτρα συγκρ[ίν]οις καὶ τοὺς ῥυθμούς, ἥττ[ο] ἐκείνου [...ca. 35...]. λέξεως καὶ τὸ ἀπὸ γῆς εἰσορῶν αἶμα καὶ το. [...].τοσμητα σ.[.....] κατὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὰ πρεσβεῖα. οὐ γὰρ οἶδα εἴ τις κάλλιον τούτου ἐ[πίσταται] ἱαμβίζειν, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ ἠ[ρωί]ζειν, εἰ μὴ βραχεῖς καὶ εὐαριθμήτους τοὺς ἠρωϊκοὺς στίχους ἐποίησεν²⁹.

Kambylis already spotted some mistakes or infelicities in this text³⁰. I wish now to pursue his efforts by rectifying one crucial detail:

Εἰ μὲν οὖν πρὸς τ[ὴν τρα]γικὴν [ποίησιν], φημὶ [τὴν τ]οῦ Εὐριπίδου, [τὰ Π]ισιδειακὰ μέτρα συγκρ[ίν]οις καὶ τοὺς ῥυθμούς, ἥττ[ω] ἐ[ρ]ρήσεις τ[ῶν] ἐκείνου. [εἰ δὲ ἴδοις τῆς Γεωργίου]³¹ λέξεως καὶ τὸ ἀπὸ γῆς εἰς οὐρανὸν ἄλμα καὶ τὸ π[ῶς] ἢ διάνοια κ[ε]κόσμηται, ..σ.[.....]³² κατὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὰ πρεσβεῖα. οὐ γὰρ οἶδα εἴ τις κάλλιον τούτου ἐ[πίσταται] ἱαμβίζειν, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ ἠ[ρωί]ζειν, εἰ μὴ βραχεῖς καὶ εὐαριθμήτους τοὺς ἠρωϊκοὺς στίχους ἐποίησεν.

Now if you were to compare the Pisidian metres and rhythms with tragic poetry – I mean that of Euripides—you would find them worse than those of his opponent. But if you look at ... of George's style, at his leap from the earth to the sky, and at how he adorns the sense, ... the prize of honour over the poet. For I doubt that anyone would know how to write iambic verse more finely than he, just as no one would write better heroic verse, had he not made his heroic lines so few and easily countable.

²⁷ Allacci's τοῦ λόγου (ms. Vallic., Allacci CXXX, f. 361v), followed by COLONNA, Michaelis Pselli (as in n. 6), and restored by CHERSTIDES (as in n. 24), 374, is guaranteed by the palaeographical comparison with other points of the same f. 203v of ms. Vat. Barb. Gr. 240: while the article τοῦ occurs in identical shape in l. 8 of that folio, the shape of λόγου matches that of the same noun (λόγῳ) with superposed letters in l. 20. Despite some hesitation, KAMBYLIS (*JÖB* 56 [2006] 146–147) reads τὸ γοργόν like Wilson and Dyck, but on syntactical grounds he then deletes the article τό and takes the neuter in an adverbial sense ("die Verse springen vorwärts wie von einer Schleuder <abgeschossen> und ... vollenden schnell das 'Gedachte', den Gedanken").

²⁸ U. CRISCUOLO, rev. of DYCK 1986. *BZ* 81 (1988) 56–58, at 58, believes that both poets were considered equal (l. 136 DYCK εἴ τις would thus refer not to George's superiority over Euripides but over contemporary poets in trimeters and hexameters). LITTLEWOOD, *To One Asking* (as in n. 5), 185 note 44 is more cautious, but admits that the final section is surely in praise of Pisides. Earlier judgments—often very divergent, or else very cautious—are reviewed by DYCK, Michael Psellus (as in n. 6), 34–36, who then concludes that "the outcome was not wholly unfavorable to George", and stresses Psellos' *penchant* for contests between authors (37 note 61).

²⁹ "Now if you were to compare the Pisidian metres and rhythms with tragic poetry—I mean that of Euripides—... of diction and seeing the blood from the earth ... the superiority over the poet. For I doubt that anyone knows how to write lovelier iambic verse than he, just as no one would write better heroic verse, had he not made his heroic lines short and few." On the meaning of βραχεῖς in the last line see also MALTESE (as in n. 24), 171 and the criticism of A. PONTANI, rev. of DYCK 1986. *JÖB* 37 (1987) 377–380, at 378–379.

³⁰ In *JÖB* 44 (1994) 208 he restored φημὶ [τὴν τ]οῦ and ἐ[πίσταται] for the common ἐ[πίσταται]; in *JÖB* 56 (2006) 148 he proposed the neuter ἥττ[ω] τῶν Εὐριπίδου, while formerly the inferiority was referred to the poet himself—however Εὐριπίδου is not compatible with the traces, and Dyck's ἐκείνου should be retained: ηττον ευρ...ἐκείνου (probably the beginning of εὐρήσεις or the like) also appears amongst the doubtful and undeciphered fragments collected in the last page of the copy of Allacci's transcription (ms. Vallic., Allacci CXXX, f. 361v).

³¹ Possible attempts: τὸ ἀφελές, or τὸ γλαφυρόν.

³² Possible attempts: Πισίδου ἔσσονται, or Πισίδης λήγεται.

Let us begin from what is certain in these lines. The last sentence (οὐ γὰρ οἶδα etc., ll. 136–138) must necessarily refer to George of Pisidia, who wrote some (refined) hexameters³³, as opposed to Euripides, who never did. Hence κατὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὰ πρεσβεῖα must refer to George’s victory over “the poet” (namely Euripides), in keeping with his pivotal role as the ἀρχέτυπον of iambic poetry in the later anonymous treatise *On the four parts of the perfect speech* (Περὶ τῶν τεσσάρων μερῶν τοῦ τελείου λόγου), once attributed to Gregory of Corinth³⁴.

This victory, however, is not straightforward: from ll. 133–134 ΔΥΚΚ the conclusion seems incapable that Euripides is deemed superior to George in terms of μέτρα and ῥυθμοί (which incidentally have kept Psellos busy throughout the larger part of his essay)—and this despite the otherwise very favourable judgment bestowed on George’s poetic technique by critics from ancient times to Paul Maas³⁵. Hence, the reason for George’s final victory must be sought in the lacunose ll. 135–136. In order to make some progress, I suggest returning to the criteria of the *synkrisis* set out by Psellos in the essay’s proem (ll. 8–10 ΔΥΚΚ), according to which it will be “not difficult” (οὐ πάνυ χαλεπὸν) to determine which poet deserves priority: thanks to Chrestides’ and Kambylis’ restorations³⁶ we can now identify them as ἐπιστήμη μετρική (“metrical skill”), τὸ περι τοὺς ῥυθμοὺς ἀξιόλογον (“notable rhythmical competence”), and τὸ περι³⁷ τὰ μέτρα καὶ τοὺς πόδας ὑψηλόνουν καὶ θεωρητικόν (“lofty and theoretical knowledge about metres and feet”).

Now, whereas the first two features (metre and rhythm) are strictly technical (and, as mentioned above, can be recognised in Psellos’ presentation of Euripides’ tragic skill in the first part of the treatise, as well as in the priority allotted to Euripides in ll. 133–34 of the concluding paragraph), the third one may carry a different overtone, leaning as it does on a passage in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (270a1)³⁸, namely on Socrates’ famous argument against the rhetoric of Lysias and Thrasymachus, and in praise of Pericles, “the most complete of all with respect to rhetoric” (269e1: πάντων τελεώτατος εἰς τὴν ῥητορικὴν). In Socrates’ view, while in other τέχναι learning and exercise (ἐπιστήμη τε καὶ μελέτη) can suffice, orators have a different fate:

πᾶσαι ὅσαι μεγάλα τῶν τεχνῶν προσδέονται ἀδολεσχίας καὶ μετεωρολογίας φύσεως περὶ τὸ γὰρ ὑψηλόνουν τοῦτο καὶ πάντη τελεσιουργὸν εἰσὶν εἰσιέναι.

³³ Despite what Psellos says in l. 101 ΔΥΚΚ ποιητῆς μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπῶν: MALTESE (as in n. 24), 171, is aware of the apparent contradiction, but rightly believes that Pisides is presented as being *not primarily* a hexametrical poet; see also M. LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres*, Bd. I. Wien 2003, 57–58. On the quality of Pisides’ hexameters see F. GONNELLI, *Il De vita humana di Giorgio Pisida. Bollettino dei Classici* s. III 12 (1991) 118–138; M. D’AMBROSI, *L’esametro accentuativo in Giorgio Pisida. Bollettino dei Classici* s. III 24 (2003) 105–133; G. AGOSTI, *Late Antique Poetry and Its Reception*, in: *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry*, ed. W. Hörandner – A. Rhoby – N. Zagklas. Leiden 2019, 115–148, at 129–130.

³⁴ See the edition of this treatise in W. HÖRANDNER, *Pseudo-Gregorios Korinthios, Über die vier Teile der perfekten Rede. MEG* 12 (2012) 87–131, p. 108, l. 162 ἔχεις ἀρχέτυπον τὸν Πισίδην (with the notes on pp. 128–129; Pisides’ excellence is stated particularly for τὸ ἐνθυμηματικόν, “knappes Argumentieren”, ancient prototypes being Gregory of Nazianzus and Sophocles), and G. CAVALLO, *Paradeigmata*. Berlin – Boston 2024, 158 and 162, for Ps.-Gregory depending on Psellos in this respect.

³⁵ See Pisides’ epigram 107 (ed. L. STERNBACH, *Georgii Pisidae Carmina inedita. WSt* 13 [1891] 1–62; 24 [1892] 51–68), of doubtful authenticity (see LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry* I 329–334), on Pisides as a writer ἰάμβων εὐκρότως ἐσκεμμένον (l. 2); see also P. MAAS, *Der byzantinische Zwölfsilber. BZ* 12 (1903) 278–323, at 321 (“der letzte Dichter, der die antike Prosodie so gut wie ausnahmslos befolgt”); D’AMBROSI, *L’esametro* 107 and 116, and R. ROMANO, *Teoria e prassi della versificazione: il dodecasillabo nei Panegirici epici di Giorgio di Pisidia. BZ* 78 (1985) 1–22.

³⁶ CHRESTIDES (as in n. 24), 373 restored the manuscript’s τὸ instead of Dyck’s τὴν in l. 9, but it was KAMBYLIS (*JÖB* 44 [1994] 214–215) who read [εἶ] τι[ς ἄρ’ αὐ]τοῖν καὶ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχει τὴν μετρικὴν κτλ., and rightly referred these skills not to the observer or judge (see LITTLEWOOD, *To One Asking* [as in n. 5], 179 note 4, still relying on Dyck’s text: “Psellos here most probably refers to himself”), but to the poets that are the object of the *synkrisis*.

³⁷ A major difficulty is represented here by the fact that in place of this (rather self-evident and apparently inevitable) τὸ περι, the ms. carries something hardly legible and hardly intelligible, perhaps τῆ τιτι (?).

³⁸ The reference was spotted already, though without further comment, by ΔΥΚΚ, *Michael Psellus* (as in n. 6), 54.

All sciences of importance require the addition of babbling and lofty talk about nature; for the relevant high-mindedness and effectiveness in all directions seem to come to a man from some such source as that. [trans. C. ROWE]

In Plato, the rare adj. ὑψηλόνουν (for which Psellos' θεωρητικόν might be a sort of technical equivalent) refers to the “high-brow” and speculative gaze that Pericles has taken from Anaxagoras (270a3 ἐκτήσατο), and that enables him to devise grand and wide-ranging speeches³⁹. Just as it happens with medicine, which ought to examine the patient's body as part of the “whole” (ὅλον, *Phaedr.* 270b1-c2), it is the hold on this “nature of the whole” and on the “essential nature” (*Phaedr.* 270e3 τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς φύσεως) of the soul that leads to real superiority in oratory; without the knowledge of the soul (clearly proceeding from a philosophical training), no style can prove ultimately effective. In much the same way—we read shortly earlier in the dialogue—Sophocles and Euripides would argue that no narrowly technical approach to the skilful composition of single scenes or speeches can be deemed conducive to the creation of “tragedy” (*Phaedr.* 268d καταγελεῖεν εἴ τις οἶεται τραγωδίαν ἄλλο τι εἶναι ἢ τὴν τούτων σύστασιν πρέπουσαν ἀλλήλοις τε καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ συνισταμένην): those elements and skills will represent at best “the preliminaries to tragedy” (269a, τὰ πρὸ τραγωδίας).

Considering the aforementioned criteria at the beginning of Psellos' work, and despite the fact that Euripides himself was presented by several ancient sources as a pupil of Anaxagoras just like Pericles⁴⁰, it is this kind of “philosophical” advantage that leads George to overcome Euripides' technical supremacy in the domain of rhythmical variety and metrical skill. I therefore suggest that George's primacy was explained in the epilogue by a *trikolon* of reasons, variously affected by the lacuna at the beginning of f. 204r:

- The third element (τὸ πῶς ἢ διάνοια κεκόσμηται, where κεκόσμηται can be read in the manuscript with some confidence) might imply a reference to the way (so different from Euripides') in which the διάνοια or ἔννοια—as opposed to the λέξις, as always since *Arist. rhet.* 3 (1404a19)—is adorned in Pisides: precisely this *unctura*, which is frequent throughout Greek philosophical prose, has been tentatively restored by Kambylis in a difficult passage of the section on Pisides (l. 104 ΔΥΣΚ μηδὲ κατασκευὴ δραματικὴ μηδὲ ποικίλη [κοσμεῖ τὴν διάνοιαν])⁴¹.

- Of the first element we have nothing but the final genitive λέξεως, which means that the easy and natural flow of George's style (ἀφέλεια? γλαφυρόν? any guess will be *exempli gratia*)—as described earlier in ll. 107–113 ΔΥΣΚ—was almost certainly implied.

- The second element, albeit hitherto misread (Dyck's εἰσορῶν αἶμα in l. 135 is incompatible with the traces), remains the only clearly readable one: τὸ ἀπὸ γῆς εἰς οὐρανὸν ἄλμα, the “leap from the earth to the sky”. This expression chimes in beautifully with the meaning and context of Plato's ὑψηλόνουν, as is shown by a similar reformulation of the *Phaedrus* passage—another “leap” towards the heights of the Platonic philosophy of ideas—in Damascius' *Life of Isidorus*⁴². Indeed, the idea of

³⁹ Modern exegetes view this passage as ironic and even sarcastic against Pericles (e.g. C. J. ROWE [ed.], *Plato. Phaedrus*. Warminster 1986, 204–205; E. HEITSCH [Hrsg.], *Platon. Phaidros*. Göttingen 1997, 166; H. YUNIS [ed.], *Plato. Phaedrus*. Cambridge 2011, 209), but beyond this irony “si ribadisce la convinzione che non si può dare vera retorica senza vera conoscenza, vale a dire senza filosofia” (M. BONAZZI [a. c. di], *Platone. Fedro*. Torino 2011, 203 with further bibliography. On the broader purport of the dialogue see T. IRANI, *Plato on the Value of Philosophy*. Cambridge 2017, part. 170–176, and D. S. WERNER, *Myth and Philosophy in Plato's Phaedrus*. Cambridge 2012, 162–163). Be that as it may, Plato's words are taken very seriously by Plutarch, *Life of Pericles* 8, 2, as well as (about the role of philosophy) by Themistius, or. 18, 222b5; 21, 248d7; 26, 329c7.

⁴⁰ From *Satyr. fr.* 37 SCHORN to *Vit. Eur.* T 1, IA, 7–8 KANNICHT: see S. SCHORN, *Satyros aus Kallatis: Sammlung der Fragmente mit Kommentar*. Basel 2004, 197–226.

⁴¹ KAMBYLIS. *JÖB* 56 (2006) 145, where the proposal to change the nominative into a dative κατασκευῆ etc. is also quite attractive (the subject would thus remain throughout the same, namely the poet George).

⁴² *Phot. bibl.* 242, 337a–b = Damascius *vit. Isid.* 33, 1 ZINTZEN: τὸ ὑψηλόνουν καὶ τελεσιουργὸν εἶχεν οὐ περὶ τὰ κάτω στρεφόμενον, ἀλλ' εὐθὺς ἀναθρῶσκον ἀπὸ μικρᾶς ἀφορμῆς ἐπὶ τὰ πρεσβύτατα τῶν θεαμάτων “Il avait l'esprit élevé et

the soul moving as a chariot towards the divine quarters was not only crucial to Plato's dialogue, but also well received by Psellos elsewhere in his *œuvre*⁴³.

Moreover, the imagery of the "leap" also looks back to Psellos' former use of the verb ἄλλεσθαι: in his introductory disclaimer about the degeneration of the ἰαμβικὸν μέτρον across the centuries, Psellos states (ll. 19–20 and 23–24 ΔΥΣΚ) that nowadays metre πάσης μὲν ὑπεράλλεται β[άσεως, π]αντὸς δὲ ῥυθμοῦ ὑπερίπταται ("jumps over every metrical unit and flies over every rhythm", transl. LAUXTERMANN, *JÖB* 48 [1998] 31), whereas tragic poetry [οὐκ] ἐξορχεῖται τὰς ὑποθέσεις οὐδ' ὑπεράλλεται ("does not completely dance out or overleap its subject matter").

In the conclusion of the treatise, it is no longer Euripides' metre that leaps, but George's verse and poetry *en bloc* (see l. 131 ΔΥΣΚ οἱ στίχοι ἄλλονται, discussed above): by choosing once again the metaphor of ἄλλα, Psellos makes a stronger case for George's ability to go beyond the technical qualities of iambic versification, and to tackle issues and represent images that a pagan, down-to-earth poet such as Euripides would never have approached or considered. It can be surmised that something even more specific is intended here than the Christian setting and context of much of Pisides' verse, or the ideological context of e.g. John Geometres' famous comparison between both poets' cultural *foci* (Athens and Constantinople) in epigr. 106, 1–2 VAN OPSTALL Ἐρεχθέως ἀνήκεν ἡ γῆ τὴν πόλιν / ἀλλ' οὐρανὸς καθῆκεν Ἰώμην τὴν νέαν⁴⁴.

Psellos' reference (ll. 115–118) to the chain from heaven described at the beginning of Pisides' poem *Contra Severum* (ll. 1–8 PERTUSI), implies that poetry can be so useful as to raise man to τὰ ἐν ὕψει δόγματα. Even more importantly, the repeated references to George's *Hexaemeron* (ll. 289–92 and 338–44 GONNELLI are overtly alluded in ll. 118–23 ΔΥΣΚ) evoke the main rationale of that long theological poem, namely, to find the trace of God's power in every single item of His creation, even the smallest ones (compare Hexaem. 1234 GONNELLI τὰ μικρὰ καὶ σχεδὸν τετμημένα and 1250 ἔργα τοσαύτης λεπτοουργίας with l. 126 ΔΥΣΚ τὰ τελευταῖα τῆς τέχνης⁴⁵). Nature, as a "mirror of the substance beyond the intellect" (Hexaem., subscr. 8 GONNELLI ἔσοπτρον τῆς ὑπὲρ νοῦν οὐσίας), deserves gaze, attention (the verb βλέπω occurs frequently in the *Hexaemeron* as the act that leads man to admire *in re* God's perfection) and unconditional praise *qua* trace of the Creator, who has ordered the material world in the best possible way (cf. e.g. Hexaem. 1469–88 GONNELLI on the utility of all created things).

This perspective clarifies the *iunctura* "the leap from earth to heaven": the painstaking attention paid by George to details of the sublunary world is propaedeutic, in Psellos' view, to recognising the overarching ordering role of the Creator. This is of course a criterion that transcends significantly both metrical and rhythmical strategies, but it perhaps explains the deep motivation of George's final victory over Euripides in this fascinating treatise.

pratique; il ne l'appliquait pas aux choses d'ici-bas mais il l'élevait d'emblée d'un point de départ ténu jusqu'aux contemplations les plus vénérables" (transl. HENRY).

⁴³ I refer to the remarkable exegesis on *Phaedrus* 246a–b discussed by P. GOLITSIS, Michael Psellos' Exegesis of the Expedition of Gods and the Chariot Flight of the Soul, in: *The Reception of Plato's Phaedrus from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. S. Delcomminette – P. d'Hoine – M.-A. Gavray. Berlin – Boston 2020, 217–227. More generally on the conspicuous presence of the *Phaedrus* in Psellos' rhetorical work see BARBER – PAPAIONANNOU, Michael Psellos (as in n. 1), *ad indicem*.

⁴⁴ Ed. E. M. VAN OPSTALL, Jean Géomètre. Poèmes en hexamètres et en distiques élégiaques. Leiden – Boston 2008.

⁴⁵ On Pisides' poem as "un itinerario attraverso il cosmo avente come meta il fine ultimo a cui naturalmente aspira l'umano intelletto: la conoscenza di Dio" see L. TARTAGLIA (ed.), *Giorgio di Pisidia. Carmi*. Torino 1998, 25.

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