NOTES · KORT AANTEKENINGE

A PUZZLE IN ANTONINUS LIBERALIS 33

The thirty-third story in the Μεταμορφώσεων Συνογογή of Antoninus Liberalis begins with the passing of Heracles. It goes on to recount Eurystheus’ persecution of the Heracleidae, their flight from their ancestral land to Athens, and the subsequent battle fought on their behalf by the Athenians, which resulted in the defeat and death of Eurystheus. With the tyrant dead, so the account continues, Hylus along with the rest of the Heracleidae and their entourage settled back in Thebes. At this point in the narrative, the story of Alcmenē’s death is introduced:

ἐν δὲ τούτω καὶ Ἄλκμην κατὰ γῆρας ἀποθνήσκει καὶ αὐτὴν ἔξεκόμισαν Ἰρακλειδαῖ. ὄικουν δὲ παρὰ τὰς Ἡλεκτρας πύλας, ὑσίπερ καὶ Ἰρακλῆς ἐν τῇ ἄγορᾷ.

The second sentence of this passage, especially the phrase ἐν τῇ ἄγορᾳ, has always caused problems for readers of this story. There seems to be no obvious connection between, on the one hand, the fact that the Heracleidae and Alcmenē (till the time of her death) were living near the Electran Gates at Thebes and, on the other hand, some activity of Heracles in the agora, or at least some association of the hero with this site. The clause introduced by ὑσίπερ, moreover, makes no good sense in itself. And, in any case, the Theban agora was not near the Electran Gates.

A variety of solutions have been proposed. Among more recent critics, M. Papathomopoulos1 concludes that the words ἐν τῇ ἄγορᾳ must either be a (misinformed) gloss which has got into the text or a topographical blunder on the part of Antoninus.2 In his Budé edition, he favours the first of these alternatives, putting the relevant words in square brackets3 and translating

2 Of the conjecture ἐν τῇ ν. ἄρα, adopted in the text of the edition of E. Martini (Leipzig 1896), Papathomopoulos (note 1) 251 rightly says: ‘elle n’est qu’une pure fantaisie de philologue.’
3 E. Oder, De Antonino Liberali (Dissertation Bonn 1886) 26, reportedly deleted the entire
the sentence as follows: ‘ils habitaient près des portes Électres à l’endroit même où Héraclès avait aussi vécu.’

There are problems with this, however. In the first place, given that Heracles’ life was largely spent on the move, it seems unlikely that Antoninus or his source would use words suggesting a settled domestic arrangement at Thebes on the hero’s part. Secondly, it seems hard to explain how such a weird topographical gloss could have been made in the first place, let alone how it could have passed into the text.

Francis Celoria translates the sentence as follows: ‘They dwelled by the Electra Gate where Heracles led his public life.’ In his comment on the passage, however, after noting the literal translation of the text as ‘where [is] also Heracles in the Agora’, he writes: ‘This makes poor sense and it has been suggested that this is a flawed passage which originally referred to a building connected with or dedicated to Heracles, a Heracion.’ He is perhaps referring here primarily to the edition of I. Cazzaniga who, while accepting the manuscript text, asks in his apparatus criticus an Ἡράκλειον πρὸ Ἡρακλῆς?

This idea that some structure associated with Heracles is meant derives ultimately from information given by Pausanias (9.11.1-6) who notes three Heraclean phenomena in connection with the Electram Gates at Thebes. One of these (9.11.4) is indeed a Heracleion, complete with a Promachos statue. It is thus not impossible that the reference in the Antoninus passage may be to either the sanctuary as a whole or specifically to the statue.

However, the connection with the agora would still be puzzling, and it seems unlikely that either sanctuary or statue could be designated simply by

---

sentence from ὃλων on the grounds that it does not fit into the context, quite apart from the odd positioning of ἐν τῇ δύσῳ after Ἡρακλῆς and the faulty topography. I have not been able to consult Oder’s work at first hand.

5 Wilamowitz, ‘Die Sieben Thore Thebens’, Hermes 26 (1891) 191-242, especially 210 n. 2 and 235, dismissing the linguistic problems of the passage as ‘ohne Belang’, attempted to solve the topographical difficulty by suggesting that a second centre of public life at Thebes near the Electron Gates is meant, not the main agora in the north. However, Richard Holland, ‘Mythographische Beiträge’, Philologus 59 (1900) 344-61, specifically 358-61, seems justified in taking Wilamowitz to task and pointing out that ‘agora’ would naturally refer to the northern agora, and that Antoninus or his source would have had to use some clearly distinguishing language if he were referring to some other one.

7 Celoria (note 6) 200.
'Ηρακλῆς ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ. Moreover, in the Αντώνιος stories, comments about the existence of rites or structures in the time of the narrator always come at the conclusion of the narrative and concern the main subject, as for example with the heroon of Alcmene in 33 itself.9 There would thus be no exact parallel for such an incidental reference during the course of the narrative.

Of the two other links between Heracles and the Electran Gates noted by Pausanias, one is a memorial to Megara's children whom he murdered.10 It seems highly unlikely that this has any connection with the Antoninus passage. The other link, however, looks decidedly more promising.

Pausanias states (9.11.1) that to the left of the Electran Gates could be seen the ruins of the house where Amphitryon lived when he went into exile from Tiryns on account of the death of Electryon.11 Moreover, according to Pausanias, Alcmene's thalamos could be clearly identified. And he goes on later (9.11.3) to tell the story of Alcmene's prolonged labour and the trick that finally enabled her to give birth, events presumably to be located in this same thalamos.

Heracles' Theban birth was an important aspect of his mythology already in Homer. At Iliad 19.99, for example, Agamemnon introduces his account of Alcmene's delayed labour by setting the scene ἐνστεφάνων ἐν Θῆβῃ. And the comment in the Homeric Scholia T at this point is specifically to the effect that the hero was born near the Electran Gates.

In the light of all this, I suggest that ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ in the Αντώνιος passage is in fact a corruption of ἐγένετο, so that the sentence can be translated as follows: 'They lived near the Electran Gates, in the place where, in fact, Heracles had been born.'

The word ἐγένετο, whether in that form or in the plural form ἐγένοντο, is the usual word used by Antoninus of a birth, and appears in no fewer than twenty-three of the stories. It is certainly true that it usually comes at the beginning of a narrative, but there are a number of stories in which it occurs later. In story 29, for example, it is used initially of Galinthias, but then reappears halfway through the narrative in reference to the birth of Heracles when Alcmene was finally released from labour. The story which we are considering

9 Other examples are rites (1, 4, 14, 26, 29, 32), a tomb (12) and a statue (13).
10 The scholia to Pindar, Isthm. 4.104 speak variously of sacrifices offered by the Thebans at the Gates in honour of Heracles and the children, and of the Gates as being the scene of the murders.
11 Included in the scholia to Pindar, Isthm. 4.104 is the statement that Chrysippus said that Amphitryon lived at the Electran Gates.
begins with the ἀφανισμός of Heracles. A subsequent, incidental reference to the hero’s birth would certainly not be out of place, and could easily be triggered by the reference to the Electran Gates which, as we have seen, were closely associated with this birth.

It can, of course, easily be objected that the corruption of ἔγένετο to ἐν τῇ ἄγορᾷ would be difficult to explain, especially since, as has been noted, ἔγένετο occurs so frequently in Antoninus. This is certainly true. However, to accept such a corruption would be no more difficult than to understand ἐν τῇ ἄγορᾷ as in origin a gloss, strange in itself, which became incorporated in the text. Moreover, with ἔγένετο, the sentence for the first time makes good sense. The further possible solution, namely that a lacuna in the text is to be assumed,\(^\text{12}\) is naturally also to be taken into account, but cannot be demonstrated in any way.

Finally, I do not see a real problem in the fact that the ὀικοῦν ... ἄγοραί sentence is placed where it is rather than before the ἐν δὲ τούτῳ ... Ἑρωκλείδα sentence, in which case it would follow directly on from the sentence explaining that Hyllus and the other Heracleidae and their entourage κατοικίζουνται πάλιν ἐν Θῆβαις. The ὀικοῦν ... ἄγοραί sentence can be taken as an explanatory parenthesis which could as easily be generated by the mention of Alcmene’s death and ἐκφορά as by the reference to the family’s relocation to Thebes after the death of Eurystheus.

John Davidson

Victoria University of Wellington

\(^\text{12}\) Holland (note 5) 360-61, for example, ingeniously suggests that ὀικοῦν ... Ἑρωκλῆς should be treated as a parenthesis. A participle such as θάψωντες should then be supplied after ἐν τῇ ἄγορᾷ. Thus the sense would be that the Heracleidae were carrying Alcmene out to bury her in the agora. When they discovered the substitute stone in the coffin, they could not, of course, proceed with this plan, but instead deposited the stone, as the narrative tells us, in the grove where the Alcmene heroon became established.
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: