

ΑΝΤΙΠΗΞ: A NOTE ON THE ION OF EURIPIDES

The word *ἀντίπηξ* occurs five times in the *Ion* of Euripides with reference to the container in which the new-born *Ion* was exposed by his mother.¹ The term, which is not used elsewhere in classical literature,² is still interpreted in the new edition of Liddell and Scott as a “*wheeled cradle or perambulator.*” This interpretation is based on the *ἀντίπηγος εὐτρόχῳ κύκλῳ* of line 19, and the *κύτος ἐλικτὸν ἀντίπηγος* of lines 39-40.³ Although the editors of the *Ion* show little agreement in their conception of the appearance of an *ἀντίπηξ*, none accepts the interpretation of Liddell and Scott. By an examination of the etymology of the word, of the words used as synonyms for it, and of the casual descriptive references to it in the play, I think we may form a clear idea of the appearance of an *ἀντίπηξ* and find illustrations in ancient works of art.

The word is derived from *ἀντιπήγνυμι*, *to fix or fashion in opposition*. The teeth of the crocodile are described by Timotheus of Gaza⁴ as *ἀντιπεπηγότες ἀλλήλοις οἱ ὀδόντες*. We should expect, then, an *ἀντίπηξ* to consist of two opposed parts fitting together like the jaws of a crocodile, and perhaps hinged. Paley⁵ interprets it as “something — — fastened in front or having a hinged lid or cover.” Late commentators define it as a *κιστός* or *κιβωτός*, *chest*. Ancient chests were hinged at the back, often having knobs projecting at the front of lid and body, around which a string could be tied to fasten down the lid.⁶ The use of *ἀναπτύσσω* (Lat. *evolvere*) in line 39⁷ suggests a hinged lid; the verb is used of gates which turn on hinges⁸ and

- ¹ Line 19: *κοίλης ἐν ἀντίπηγος εὐτρόχῳ κύκλῳ.*
 Line 39-40: — — — ἀναπτύξας κύτος
 ἐλικτὸν ἀντίπηγος, ὡς ὀρθῷ ὁ παῖς.
 Line 1338: *ὀρῶ παλαιὰν ἀντίπηγ' ἐν στέμμασιν.*
 Line 1380: *καὶ νῦν λαβὼν τήνδ' ἀντίπηγ' οἶσω θεῶ.*
 Lines 1391-92: *ἰδοὺ περίπτνυγμ' ἀντίπηγος εὐκύκλου*
 ὡς οὐ γεγήρακ' ἐκ τινος θεηλάτου — — —.

² It is given, excerpted from Euripides' *Ion*, by some of the lexicographers and late commentators: *Etymologicum Magnum*, Hesychius, and Eustathius. None is very helpful; the last (1056, 46; note on *Iliad*, XVI, 221) tells us that the word is a Mytilenean one, with *κιβωτός* its Laconian, *λάρναξ* its Attic, equivalent.

³ Liddell and Scott, *s. v.* *ἐλικτός*, in both old and new editions refer specifically to line 40 of the *Ion*, with the interpretation “*wheeled.*”

⁴ *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, IV, 264: Περὶ Κροκοδήλου.

⁵ F. A. Paley, *Euripides, with an English Commentary* (London, 1874), vol. II, p. 11, note on *Ion*, line 19.

⁶ G. M. A. Richter, *Ancient Furniture* (Oxford, 1927), pp. 89 ff.: *κιβωτός*, *λάρναξ*.

⁷ ἀναπτύξας κύτος ἐλικτὸν ἀντίπηγος.

⁸ Euripides, *Iph. Taur.*, 1286: *καλεῖτ' ἀναπτύξαντες εὐγόμφους πύλας.*

of military evolutions.⁹ The etymology of the word ἀντίπηξ, then, suggests an object consisting of two parts fitting together, and perhaps hinged.

The words used by Euripides as synonymous with ἀντίπηξ are three: κύτος,¹⁰ τεύχος,¹¹ and ἄγγος.¹² The three terms are used also by Sophocles as synonyms without distinction to describe the “narrow urn” supposedly containing the ashes of Orestes in the *Electra*.¹³ None of the words, however, is limited in meaning to the sense of a small urn or pot. Κύτος is used by Cassandra of the tub in which Agamemnon is to be murdered.¹⁴ A τεύχος can be a wooden chest in which miscellaneous articles are stored.¹⁵ Finally, it is interesting to note that ἄγγος is the word used by Herodotos for the vessel in which the infant Cyrus was placed, like the baby Ion, to be exposed.¹⁶ The three words used by Euripides as synonyms for ἀντίπηξ thus seem to be general terms covering a variety of forms and drawing more specific meanings from the contexts in which they appear.¹⁷ They can afford little help in the identification of the ἀντίπηξ.

Turning to the passages in the *Ion* descriptive of the ἀντίπηξ we find that it is round (κοίλης ἐν ἀντίπηγος εὐτρόχῳ κύκλῳ, line 19; ἀντίπηγος εὐκύκλου, line 1391); that it is covered (ἀναπτύξας κύτος ἐλικτὸν ἀντίπηγος, ὡς ὀρθὸν ὁ παῖς, lines 39-40; ἰδοὺ περίπτνυγμ' ἀντίπηγος εὐκύκλου, line 1391); and that it is woven (κύτος ἐλικτόν, line 39; πλεκτόν ἐξάρας κύτος, line 37). The references in lines 19 and 1391 can hardly leave any doubt as to the roundness of the vessel;¹⁸ the εὐτρόχῳ κύκλῳ of line 19, if we take it simply as a “well-run” or “even” circle¹⁹ rather than the “wheeled” circle of Liddell and Scott, merely emphasizes the round shape of the basket. That it must be a wickerwork basket is shown by the πλεκτόν—woven—of line 37.²⁰ Euripides

⁹ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VII, 5, 3.

¹⁰ Κύτος: lines 37, 39.

¹¹ Τεύχος: line 273.

¹² Ἄγγος: lines 32, 1337, 1398, 1412.

¹³ Sophocles, *Electra*: κύτος, line 1142; τεύχος, lines 1114 and 1120; ἄγγος, lines 1118 and 1205.

¹⁴ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1128.

¹⁵ Xenophon, *Anabasis*, VII, 5, 14: ξύλινα τεύχη.

¹⁶ Herodotos, I, 113.

¹⁷ Κύτος seems to have been a poetic word with high-flown connotations. Note the ridicule of high-sounding language in a fragment of Antiphanes' play Ἀφροδίσιος (Meineke, *F.C.G.*, I, p. 501):

πότερ' ὅταν μέλλω λέγειν σοι τὴν χύτραν, χύτραν λέγω,
ἢ τροχοῦ ῥύμαισι τεκτόν κοιλοσώματον κύτος
πλαστόν ἐκ γαίας ---.

¹⁸ Wilamowitz, however, in his edition of the *Ion*, note on line 1391, takes it as “kein runder, aber doch ein abgerundeter Spankorb, in dem ein Kind liegen konnte.” It is hard to see why a child could not lie in a round basket.

¹⁹ Such an interpretation of εὐτροχος presents no difficulties. In the present case it may well be that the word has a technical meaning belonging to the craft of basket-weaving. Compare the τροχαῖα πανία or running spools dedicated by the daughters of Lycomedes, *Anth. Pal.*, VI, 288, 5.

²⁰ In Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 554, the infant Erichthonios is placed in a *texta de vimine cista*.

could hardly have chosen a more literal word for the description of wickerwork than the *ἐλικτόν* of line 40 (the “*wheeled*” of Liddell and Scott); it clearly refers to the upward-spiralling strands of the sides of the basket, or to the strands spiralling out-



Fig. 1. Terracotta Relief from Lokroi

ward from the center of its lid. Our *ἀντίπηξ*, then, must be simply a round basket of wickerwork covered with a lid, and large enough to contain a new-born child.

Such a basket is represented on an archaic terracotta relief (Fig. 1) found at

Lokroi and now in the museum at Syracuse.²¹ The relief, which is not complete, shows a woman seated on a chair and engaged in opening a round, flat, woven basket with a deep lid; a small child lies in the basket. The scene has been interpreted as representing one of the daughters of Kekrops opening the chest²² containing the infant Erichthonios. The basket as shown on the relief appears to be hinged at the back. Another fragmentary relief from Lokroi seems to bear a similar representation of the same subject;²³ the open top of the basket appears, and the head of the child sitting within; the woman who opens the basket holds up the lid with one hand. A third relief²⁴ shows the lower part of the basket and the child seated within. Round wicker baskets of this kind are not uncommon; they are often represented as closed and resting on chests, or borne on the heads of women.²⁵ But Erichthonios is usually represented in one of these baskets; in addition to the reliefs from Lokroi we have a picture of the opening of the chest of Erichthonios on a late red-figured vase.²⁶ The child is shown sitting up in a deep round basket which rests on a pile of stones. He is guarded by two serpents; the top of the basket, which is represented as woven and decorated with a wreath of olive, lies at the foot of the rock pile. At the left Athena contemplates the scene; the guilty daughters of Kekrops hasten away on the other side of the vase. In this case the basket is of the same form as those shown on the Lokroi reliefs, but the lid is not fastened to the basket by a hinge. The basket of Erichthonios fits exactly the ἀντίπηξ as described by Euripides in the *Ion*.

There was a close family connection between Erichthonios and Ion, which Euripides did not fail to emphasize. In lines 268-274 the poet gives an account of the birth of Erichthonios and Athena's presentation of him to the daughters of Kekrops to guard unseen; there is a parallel between the mysterious birth and the hiding of Erichthonios in a chest, and the secret birth and exposure of Ion in a basket. In memory of the snakes which guarded Erichthonios Creusa placed a necklace of golden snakes in the basket with Ion. These snakes, which Creusa says were "moulded from Erichthonios' snakes of old"²⁷ later served as tokens by which Ion was enabled to recognize his mother. The birth of Erichthonios and the opening of the chest were subjects that would naturally appeal to the dramatic instincts of the ancient sculptor and painter. In line 271 (δίδωσι δ', ὥσπερ ἐν γραφῇ νομίζεται ---) Euripides is evi-

²¹ *Ausonia*, III, 1908, pp. 136 ff. and fig. 44, p. 193; also illustrated in Richter, *Ancient Furniture*, fig. 63.

²² Pausanias, I, 18, 2: κιβωτός, here a basket.

²³ *Ausonia*, III, 1908, p. 194, fig. 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 195, fig. 46.

²⁵ Richter, *Ancient Furniture*, fig. 242 and figs. 244-246.

²⁶ *Annali dell' Istituto*, LI, 1879, pp. 62 ff. and Tav. F. Also illustrated in Roscher's *Lexikon*, vol. I, p. 1307, and in Harrison and Verrall, *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*, p. xxxii, fig. 4.

²⁷ Line 1429, Way's translation.

dently thinking of a graphic representation of the scene. We know, moreover, from the Lokroi reliefs that the opening of the chest was represented in art before the time of Euripides. It seems quite possible, therefore, that there existed in Athens some well-known work of art depicting the story of Erichthonios,²⁸ and that Euripides had it in mind when he wrote the *Ion*. The picture of Ion exposed in his basket as drawn by Euripides may have been influenced by a representation of Erichthonios in art; the ἀντίπηξ described by Euripides is then the deep round basket of wickerwork with a cover which we see in the pictures of the opening of the chest of Erichthonios.

RODNEY S. YOUNG

AGORA EXCAVATIONS, ATHENS

²⁸ See the note on line 271 in A. S. Owen's *Euripides, Ion* (Oxford, 1939). It is much more probable that the Erichthonios myth should have been represented in art at Athens than at Delphi; the tale was a local Athenian one.