

New Directions in Greco-Roman Mythography: Texts, Contexts and
Intertexts

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“Modern and Ancient Mythography and Ecdotics”

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“There is nothing smaller than a full stop or a comma.” (Conte 2013, 9)

0. Outlining the problem

Modern philology has been able to assess the significance of punctuation—*distinctio* between parts of the discourse—within textual editing. A minimal intervention may have a crucial relevance to the meaning of a text—and sometimes with unpredictable consequences. Some cases are well known, like the doctrinal controversy over the addition of the word *filioque* in the Nicene Creed, which remain a primary cause for the schism between the Eastern Orthodox and Western churches.

In this paper it is our goal to reassess the results and consequences that minor interventions into a text may have for the reception of Greek myth, that is to say to reflect on the relationship between ecdotics and mythography. We are well aware that the problem we are dealing with, of a colossal magnitude, concerns the relationship between text and interpretation—in other words it bears on the status and limits of philology.

In theory-oriented North-American and Anglo-Saxon criticism the term philology has become a foreign, even picturesque and old-fashioned term. Although the “least sexy ... of the branches of learning associated with humanism”, as Edward Said would put it, the Palestinian American scholar contended that philology “is the most fundamental and the most creative interpretative method” and “the abiding basis for all humanistic practice”. From a ‘continental’ perspective, on the other hand, traditional techniques of reconstructing a text with authorial intent has had a certain preeminence since the institutionalisation of philology in 19th century Germany.

Speaking for ourselves, as disciples of Prof. Cuartero, who pioneered the study and edition of Greek mythographers in Post-Franco Spain, we inherited from him a straight philological approach to ancient texts—in other words, an in-depth and humble attention to those documents that have come down to us from Antiquity. Cuartero uses to quote a precept of his teacher Miquel Dolç: if you wish to be well acquainted with an author, translate him; if you wish to be better acquainted with him, do a critical edition of his text. Throughout this paper we shall use an even more eccentric term, a term that is also far from usual in academic English (and “generally unknown in the US”)—*ecdotics*. In the Spanish usage, by contrast, *ecdotics* is taken as equivalent to textual criticism. But the etymological connection with ἐκδίδωμι and ἔκδοσις links its meaning with the notion of ‘issuing forth’ and ‘bringing to light’ and hence to the concept of establishing an actual text for publication. Thus, we will use this word to refer to those issues concerning formal variants, orthography, and, to be more exact, orthotypography and punctuation and graphic presentation of texts. First of all, it ought to be stressed out that ancient and medieval texts were scarcely, if at all, complete with

punctuation marks. It is the modern scholar who is compelled to take crucial decisions and to give a definite form to ancient narratives.

As philologists, we strongly support getting back to texts. But as philologists devoted to the study of Greek myth and mythography, we are entitled to investigate the contribution provided by this textual approach towards the understanding of myths. A close reading of mythographic narratives requires a deep knowledge of the literary transmission of a given text in Antiquity, which includes, as Albert Henrichs put it, an examination of

“problems of authorship, dating, composition or source criticism that are typically encountered by those interested in a given mythographical work [...] a major mythographical component [...] or a particular myth”.

A philological mythography envisages a commentary on the text as aimed at describing the mythical story in connection to other versions and variants thereof and, if possible, at identifying its source or its branch of tradition (a «source-critical scrutiny» in the words of Albert Henrichs). Thus the mythical story shall be contextualized within its historical-literary frame. It is the responsibility of the philologist to stay close to the text in order not to tear the myth away from its textual fabric. To do so, he will not yield to what we might call the “temptations of interpretation”. If the major obstacle to mythographic research is the mythology itself, this is because the twentieth century was able to recognize, within myth, an autonomous form of thought (*Denkform*), with a meaning that goes beyond the textual support by which a particular myth has survived. Myth, according to the famous proposal of Claude Lévi-Strauss, is not so much an object as an instrument of reflection.

Driven by this notion, many scholars have attempted multifarious interpretations without taking into account the raw material: that is, the ancient texts themselves. By contrast, our mythographic commentary demands to be a philological one. It is the task of the philologist to describe myths prior to, or instead of, interpreting them.

And yet. Attempting a philological mythography, given the plastic and tantalizing nature of myth, is not such an easy undertaking, as the following examples will show.

1. Argo

The first case-study addresses the the creative capability of mythographers, both ancient and modern, and more precisely the fact that punctuation and textual interpretation may produce new mythical variants or even characters. The text we are dealing with is Hyginus' fabula 145. It starts providing a genealogical catalogue of the Argive family and a narrative on Io. We will focus on the sentence on Piranthus' descendance. See on the handout (marked in bold):

*NIOBE SIVE IO. Ex Phoroneo et Cinna nati Apis et Nioba; hanc Iuppiter mortalem primam compressit; ex ea natus est Argus, qui suo nomine Argos oppidum cognominavit. [2] ex Argo et Euadne Criasus Piranthus Ecbasus nati: **ex Pirantho <et> Callirhoe Argus Arestorides Triopas**; hic <...> ex hoc <et> †Eurisabe† Anthus Pelasgus Agenor; ex **Triope** et Oreaside Xanthus et Inachus; ex Pelasgo Larisa, ex Inacho et Argia Io. [3] hanc Iuppiter dilectam compressit et in uaccae figuram conuertit, ne Iuno eam cognosceret ...*

HANDOUT [Text 1]

The sentence has been interpreted in different ways. Indeed, the lack of punctuation signs in ancient text allows it. Most of the translators assume that Argos, Arestorides and Triopas are three different sons. But other scholars—among them the most recent critical editor of this text—consider them to be only two: Argos Arestorides (the son of Arestor) and Triopas. This modern mythographic construction is supported by a variant of Pherecydes of Athens, according to which Argos is the son of Arestor. Apollodorus corroborates this genealogical version after Asclepiades—or Pherecydes if we accept the textual emendation. And also Apollonius Rhodius uses Arestorides as an epithet of the Argos who built the ship.

HANDOUT [Texts 2 and 3]

The Argos which Hyginus, Phercydes and Apollodorus refer to is Argos Panoptes, Io's watcher. All these authors know also another Argos in the argive genealogy, an eponym hero, son of Zeus and Niobe, and sometimes father, other times grandfather or grand-grandfather of Argos Panoptes. The Argos builder of the ship of the Argonauts belongs to a different tradition but shares the paternity and epithet Arestorides. Therefore, the name Argos and the patronimic Arestorides might have been frequently next to each other and at some point of the mythographical reinterpretation of this genealogy the patronimic might have lost its meaning and developed into a new character—that is to say, it created a new figure, interpreted as Argos' brother.

As regards Triopas, there is no modern translation or commentary that assimilates him to Argos. Quite surprisingly, however, the same passage of Pherecydes which makes Argos the son of Arestor (fr. 66) also describes him as triophthalmic:

Ἄργος ὁ Διὸς γαμεῖ Πειθῶ, τὴν Ὠκεανοῦ. τοῦ δὲ γίνεται Κρίασος, τοῦ δὲ Ἐρευθαλίων, ἀφ' οὗ Ἐρευθαλίη πόλις καλεῖται ἐν Ἄργει, καὶ Φόρβας. τοῦ δὲ γίνεται Ἀρέστωρ, τοῦ δὲ Ἄργος, ὃ Ἥρη ὀφθαλμὸν τίθησιν ἐν τῷ ἰνίῳ καὶ τὸν ὕπνον ἐξαιρεῖται, καὶ ἐφιστᾷ φύλακα αὐτὸν τῇ Ἰοῖ. ἔπειθ' Ἑρμῆς αὐτὸν κτείνει.

HANDOUT [Text 3]

In fact, Hesychius defines the term τριοπην as τριόφθαλμον as found on the **HANDOUT [Text 4]**. Thus, Τριόπας can be easily interpreted as a “three-eyed” character—and indeed it has long been interpreted that way. This anthroponym is widely attested in the Thessalian genealogy and also in Rhodes and Asia Minor. But it also appears variously connected to the Argive genealogy in other sources besides our text. Since Pherecydes’ fragment depicts Argos as a figure with three eyes, we suggest that the anthroponym Triopas might have been introduced in this genealogical slot as a consequence of the image of a three-eyed Argos. In such a case, we would have again a splitting of Argos and his epithet (Triopas) into two different characters. If our proposal is correct, Argos, Arestorides, the son of Arestor, and Triopas, he of the three eyes, would have been one and the same character which mythographers, in the need of genealogical expansions, would have split into three. Be as it may, the different interpretation of these three word (Argos, Arestorides, and Triopas), as found both in ancient texts and in modern retellings, account for the creative potential of mythography.

2. The Lemian women

The second case study addresses a story on the Lemnian androchthony as transmitted by the scholia to Apollonius. Other mythographical sources provide similar accounts of this episode. In all of them the women of Lemnos are said to have neglected Aphrodite's cult, except for one—a scholium to the *Iliad* attributed to Asclepiades of Tragilos, which says it were the men who had neglected her cult. This first mistake represents the earliest step in a chain of events that will eventually lead to the killing of all the males in the island:

Sch. A. R. 1.609–19a <ἐνθ' ἄμυδις>: αἱ Λήμνιαι γυναῖκες ἐπιπολὺ τῶν τῆς Ἀφροδίτης τιμῶν κατολιγορήσασαι, καθ' ἑαυτῶν τὴν θεὸν ἐκίνησαν. πάσαις γὰρ δυσσομίαν ἐνέβαλεν, ὡς μηκέτι αὐτὰς τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἀρέσκειν. τῶν δὲ πρὸς Θρᾶκας ἐχόντων πόλεμον καὶ παλλακὰς ἐκεῖθεν αἰχμαλώτους λαμβανόντων καὶ ἀποστραφέντων τὰς γνησίας γαμετὰς κατὰ τὴν τῆς θεοῦ ὀργήν, ἐψηφίσαντο αἱ γυναῖκες νύκτωρ τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀνελεῖν. καὶ οὐ μόνον τοῦτο ἐποίησαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς αἰχμαλώτους ἀνεῖλον, καὶ δεδοικυῖαι, μὴ οἱ παῖδες ἀνδρωθέντες τιμωρίαν πατρῶν ζητήσωσι λαβεῖν, πᾶν ὁμοῦ τὸ ἄρσεν γένος ἀνεῖλον.

HANDOUT [Text 5]

As the Lemnian women neglected Aphrodites' honours very often, they set the goddess against themselves. Thus, she sent them a pestilence, so that they wouldn't please their men. As the men waged war against Thracia, they took young girls as captives from there and rejected their lawful wives due to the goddess' wrath. The women voted by night for killing the men. And they didn't do just that, but they also killed the captives and, fearing their male

sons would demand justice for their fathers when becoming adult, they killed the entire male population.

The scholiast mentions the *δυσοδμία* as the punishment sent to the women for their misbehaviour towards the goddess. But, as if this pestilence wasn't enough to make the men reject their wives, he goes on to tell that Aphrodite's wrath also caused the men's infidelity. We don't know which was the scholiast's source, but he clearly relies on sources other than Apollonius' poem, as he includes details not found in the *Argonautica*. So he is probably combining motives from different versions. On the other hand, multiplication of motives and faults are typical in Greek myths and we do not need to seek coherence across them. Nevertheless, the question as to who committed the first crime is not a minor issue in ancient Greece, as shown in Herodotus' preface. When inquiring about the causes of war, the historian scrutinized the very first violent action which lead to the conflict (δι' ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἀλλήλοισι).

In this text there is a certain tension within the explanation as towards whom Aphrodite's wrath was directed. Whereas the first sentence clearly states that the women were the first to commit a fault, the period *παλλακάς ἐκεῖθεν αἰχμαλώτους λαμβανόντων καὶ ἀποστραφέντων τὰς γνησίας γαμετὰς κατὰ τὴν τῆς θεοῦ ὀργήν* ("they took young girls as captives from there and rejected their lawful wives due to the goddess' wrath"), as edited by Wendel makes the men's infidelity a consequence of the divine furor, which can be interpreted as if Aphrodites' wrath was directed to the males.

Be that as it may, it is crucial to note that the overall interpretation of the passage rests on Wendel's edition and his placing of a comma after the phrase *κατὰ τὴν τῆς θεοῦ ὀργήν*. Indeed, according to this

punctuation, the divine wrath causes the men's infidelity, as we just pointed out. The syntagm, however, could also be related to the following period. If we switch the punctuation of the passage and we place the comma before that phrase, the overall meaning of the text would change. In that case, the women's decision to kill their husbands and fathers would have been caused by Aphrodite's wrath. Let's draw attention to the fact that Hyginus' text includes both options (Hyg. *Fab.* 15):

cuius ira uiri earum Thressas uxores duxerunt et priores spreuerunt. at Lemniades eiusdem Veneris impulsu coniuratae genus uirorum omne quod ibi erat interfecerunt.

HANDOUT [Text 6]

Thus, the place of the comma would also raise discussion on further topics, such as the role of the gods, in this case Aphrodite, concerning human experiences and motivation. Quite interestingly, the ambiguous interpretation in the mythographical scholium to Apollonius is also to be found in Apollonius' poem itself, as even in this text a certain ambiguity hinders the interpretation of the passage, as the object of Aphrodite's wrath and the first crime against her cult it is not made altogether clear:

A.R. 1.609-616: Ἐνθ' ἄμυδις πᾶς δῆμος ὑπερβασίησι γυναικῶν /
νηλειῶς δέδμητο παροιχομένῳ λυκάβαντι. / δὴ γὰρ κουριδίας μὲν
ἀπηνήναντο γυναῖκας / ἄνδρες ἐχθήραντες, ἔχον δ' ἐπὶ ληιάδεσσι /
τρηχὺν ἔρον, ἅς αὐτοὶ ἀγίνεον ἀντιπέρηθεν / Θρηκίην δηοῦντες·
ἐπεὶ χόλος αἰνὸς ὄπαζε / Κύπριδος, οὐνεκά μιν γεράων
ἐπὶ δηρὸν ἄτισσαν. / ὦ μέλαι ζήλοιο τ' ἐπισμυγερώς

ἀκόρητοι· / οὐκ οἶον σὺν τῆσιν ἐοὺς ἔρραισαν ἀκοίτας / ἀμφ'
εὐνή, πᾶν δ' ἄρσεν ὁμοῦ γένος, ὥς κεν ὀπίσσω / μή τινα
λευγαλέοιο φόνου τείσειαν ἀμοιβήν.

HANDOUT [Text 7]

Here the whole of the men of the people together had been ruthlessly slain through the transgressions of the women in the year gone by. For the men had rejected their lawful wives, loathing them, and had conceived a fierce passion for captive maids whom they themselves brought across the sea from their forays in Thrace; for terrible wrath of Cypris came upon them, because for a long time they had grudged her the honors due. O hapless women, and insatiate in jealousy to their own ruin! Not their husbands alone with the captives did they slay on account of the marriage-bed, but all the males at the same time, that they might thereafter pay no retribution for the grim murder. (Trans. Seaton)

Here, the period ἐπεὶ χόλος αἰνὸς ὄπαζε / Κύπριδος, οὐνεκά μιν γεράων ἐπὶ δηρὸν ἄτισσαν is traditionally interpreted as referred to men, who are mentioned before. But it could also be pointing to the women, who appear in the text just after that sentence. Therefore, again, the overall interpretation of the passage depends on the syntax of that phrase and on how we punctuate the passage. As a matter of fact, the oldest version of the episode merely refers to the Lemnian conflict in a general way. According to Aeschylus (*Ch.* 631-636), the whole island was punished and ceased to exist by means of this sexual war.

The discussion of the scholium on Apollonius has shown, on one hand, how intimately related ecdotics and mythography are. On the

other hand, the diversity of versions found in parallel accounts of this episode (as in Asclepiades, Apollodorus, or Hyginus), offers another example of the creative capability of mythography—in this case ancient mythography. Indeed, the implicit ambiguity in the most ancient versions on the reasons behind the aggression may have prompted the mythographical search for the first cause which led to the androchthony in Lemnos. Therefore, whose was the first crime, relevant as it may seem, appears to be a secondary product of this retelling of the same story—or even maybe of our philological (and ecdotal) decisions.

3. The Thessalian trick

The third case study addresses an allusion to the Thessalian women pulling down the moon in a passage of Plato's *Gorgias*. Socrates is pondering Callicles' idea of seizing the power in the polis:

μη γὰρ τοῦτο μὲν, τὸ ζῆν ὅποσονδὴ χρόνον, τόν γε ὡς ἀληθῶς
ἄνδρα ἑατέον ἐστὶν καὶ οὐ φιλοψυχητέον, ἀλλὰ ἐπιτρέψαντα περὶ
τούτων τῷ θεῷ καὶ πιστεύσαντα ταῖς γυναιξὶν ὅτι τὴν εἰμαρμένην
οὐδ' ἂν εἶς ἐκφύγοι, τὸ ἐπὶ τούτῳ σκεπτέον τίς ἂν τρόπον τοῦτον
ὄν μέλλοι χρόνον βιώσθαι ὡς ἄριστα βιοίη, ἄρα ἐξομοίων αὐτὸν τῇ
πολιτείᾳ ταύτῃ ἐν ἣ ἂν οἰκῆ, καὶ νῦν δὲ ἄρα δεῖ σὲ ὡς ὁμοιότατον
γίγνεσθαι τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Ἀθηναίων, εἰ μέλλεις τούτῳ προσφιλεῖς
εἶναι καὶ μέγα δύνασθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει· τοῦθ' ὄρα εἰ σοὶ
λυσίτελεϊ καὶ ἐμοί, ὅπως μή, ὦ δαιμόνιε, πεισόμεθα
ὅπερ φασὶ τὰς τὴν σελήνην καθαιρούσας, τὰς
Θετταλίδας· σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις ἢ αἵρεσις ἡμῖν ἔσται
ταύτης τῆς δυνάμεως τῆς ἐν τῇ πόλει. εἰ δέ σοι οἶει
ὄντινοῦν ἀνθρώπων παραδώσειν τέχνην τινὰ τοιαύτην, ἥτις σε

ποιήσει μέγα δύνασθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει τῆδε ἀνόμοιον ὄντα τῇ πολιτείᾳ
εἴτ' ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον εἴτ' ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, οὐκ ὀρθῶς
βουλεύῃ, ὦ Καλλίκλεις· οὐ γὰρ μιμητὴν δεῖ εἶναι ἀλλ' αὐτοφυῶς
ὅμοιον τούτοις, εἰ μέλλεις τι γνήσιον ἀπεργάζεσθαι εἰς φιλίαν τῷ
Ἀθηναίων δήμῳ καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία τῷ Πυριλάμπους γε πρὸς. (Pl. *Grg.*
512d-513b)

HANDOUT [Text 8]

For surely a real man should forget about living some particular length of time, and should not be anxious about his life. He should leave all this to the god, and believe the women when they say that not a single man can escape destiny. Then he should consider the next question; how best to live, for however long he is to live, should he live conforming himself to the political system he lives under, and should you now become as much like the Athenian people as possible, if you are to be a friend of theirs and gain great power in the city? See if this benefits you and me, so that the same thing doesn't happen to us, my excellent man, as they say happens to the women who draw down the moon, the Thessalian women; for we will risk what is dearest to us when we choose this power in the city. But if you think anyone will pass on to you some craft which will make you powerful in this city when you are unlike this political system, better or worse than it, then I think you are planning wrongly, Callicles. For you shouldn't be an imitator, but like them in your own nature if you are to achieve anything genuine towards friendship with the Athenian demos, yes, with Demos the son of Pyrilampes too. (Trans. Irwin)

Scholars commenting on this passage point to the widespread belief that Thessalian women suffered mutilation or loss of their relatives when they pulled—or claimed that they pulled—down the moon. As regards the text, all editors follow Bekker’s punctuation according to which the syntagm τοῖς φιλτάτοις belongs to the following period and they put a full stop after θετταλίδας. The phrase σύν τοῖς φιλτάτοις is taken as a neutrum meaning “the most dear things”. Hence translations of this passage run approximately as follows: “... obtaining (or choosing) this power in the city will be at the price of the most dear for us”.

However, this is far from satisfactory. On the one hand, the preposition σύν with τοῖς φιλτάτοις raises some trouble and scholars struggle to justify the translation of σύν by “at the price of”. On the other hand, none of the commentaries or interpretations account satisfactorily for Plato’s use of the Thessalian sorceresses as an exemplum in the context of a political discussion in which Socrates is pondering the relationship between the politician and his fellow citizens. The standard commentaries (such as Dodds’) point vaguely to the fact that Thessalian women lose their more valuable things, i.e. their sight and their relatives. If we analyse the passage in the light of the mythographic tradition we may find clarification. Indeed, texts alluding to the punishments suffered by Thessalian women upon performing the spell do show their relevance. It is worth noting that some of these texts state that the women suffered the loss of their children or brought destruction upon their relatives and fellow citizens or even upon the whole city. Both the scholia to Apollonius Rhodius and Olimpiodorus refer to the loss of the relatives using the terms οἰκείων or τὰ παιδιά καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες καὶ αἱ πόλεις:

ἦ <θαμὰ δὴ καὶ σεῖο>: μεμύθευται, ὡς ἄρα αἱ φαρμακίδες τὴν
σελήνην ταῖς ἐπωδαῖς κατασπῶσι. τοῦτο δὲ ποιεῖν δοκοῦσιν αἱ
Θεσσαλαὶ σφαλεῖσαι τῆς ὑπολήψεως· καθὸ Ἀγλαονίκη, Ἡγέμονος
θυγάτηρ, ἔμπειρος οὖσα τῆς ἀστρολογίας καὶ εἰδυῖα τὰς ἐκλείψεις
τῆς σελήνης, ὁπότε μέλλοι αὐταῖς ἐγγενήσεσθαι, ἔφασκε τὴν θεὸν
κατασπᾶν, καὶ παραχρῆμα **περιέπιπτε συμφοραῖς, τῶν
οἰκείων τινὰ ἀποβαλοῦσα**. ὅθεν κατὰ τὸν βίον λέγεται
παροιμία ἐπὶ <...> ‘τὴν σελήνην κατασπᾶ’.

Sch. A.R. 4.59-61a

HANDOUT [Text 9]

The myth runs that witches pull down the moon with their spells. Thessalian ones are reputed to do this although they have been let down in their expectations. Accordingly, Aglaonice, the daughter of Hegemon, being skilled in astronomy, and knowing the eclipses of the moon, whenever it was going to be involved with them [eclipses] used to say that she was drawing down the goddess, and immediately used to fall into calamities, losing one of her household. Whence it is from her life that the proverb is told, “On ... draws down the moon.”

ἡ δὲ ἱστορία ἐστὶν αὕτη· ὡσπερ νῦν ἐν ταῖς ἐκλείψεσιν νομίζουσι μάγους καταφέρειν τὴν σελήνην, οὕτω καὶ πάλαι ᾤοντο τὰς Θετταλικὰς γυναῖκας λέγειν τινὰ, καὶ εἰ μὲν δυνηθείησαν, φασίν, καταγαγεῖν, ἐποίουν τὸ σπουδαζόμενον, εἰ δὲ ἀδυνάτως ἔσχον πρὸς τὸ καταγαγεῖν, **πρόρριζοι ἀπώλοντο αὐταί τε καὶ τὰ παιδιά καὶ οἱ ἄνδρες καὶ αἱ πόλεις**. τοῦτο οὖν λέγει, ὅτι ὁ ὁμοιοῦμενος τῇ κρατούσῃ πολιτείᾳ πρόρριζον τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπόλλυσιν.

HANDOUT [Text 10]

And this is the story: the same way that nowadays, when there are eclipses, magicians are believed to pull down the moon, in ancient times it was believed that Thessalian women said something and if they could pull it down, they accomplished anything they endeavoured, but if they were unable to achieve the descent, they certainly killed themselves, their children, their husbands and their cities. This means that the one who becomes similar to the *politeia* which rules the power utterly destroys his soul.

Lexicographical entries commenting on the expression Ἐπὶ σαυτῷ τὴν σελήνην καθαιρεῖς give the variant of the loss of the eyes and the feet. But one of them gives the alternative reading παίδων for ποδῶν:

Zen. 4.1, p. 83-84 Leutsch: “Ἐπὶ σαυτῷ τὴν σελήνην καθαιρεῖς”: αἱ τὴν σελήνην καθαιροῦσαι Θετταλίδες λέγονται τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ τῶν παίδων στερίσκεσθαι. Εἴρηται οὖν ἐπὶ τῶν ἑαυτοῖς τὰ κακὰ ἐπισπωμένων ἢ παροιμία.

2 καθαιροῦσαι Leutsch : καθελοῦσαι codd.; Θετταλίδες Leutsch ex Sud. ε 2559 : ἑταιρίδες P : ἑτερίδες cett. codd. : καθαιρετίδες Schott.

HANDOUT [Text 11]

‘You pull down the moon against yourself’. It is said that when Thessalian women pull down the moon, they are progressively deprived of the eyes and the children. This expression is said, indeed, about those who bring misfortunes upon themselves.

This text is paralleled by Asclepiades of Tragilos (τέκνα):

ἐπὶ σαυτῶ τὴν σελήνην καθαιρεῖς· Ἀσκληπιάδης φησὶ τὰς
Θετταλὰς ἐκμαθούσας τὰς τῆς σελήνης κινήσεις προαγγέλλειν, ὡς
ὑπ' αὐτῶν μέλλοι κατάγεσθαι, τοῦτο δὲ πράττειν οὐ χωρὶς τῆς
αὐτῶν κακώσεως· ἢ γὰρ καταθύειν τῶν τέκνων ἢ τὸν ἕτερον τῶν
ὀφθαλμῶν ἀπολλύειν· λέγεται γοῦν ἐπὶ τῶν κακὰ
ποριζομένων. Δοῦρις δὲ φησιν ἀστρολόγον προαγορεύοντα τὰς
τῆς σελήνης ἐκλείψεις οὐκ εὖ ἀπαλλάξαι. (FGH 12F20 = fr. 20
Villagra = *Paroemiographi Graeci*, I/p. 83 Leutsch)

HANDOUT [Text 12]

‘You pull down the moon against yourself’. Asclepiades says that Thessalian women learned the movements of the moon and announced them, as if they were pulling it down and that they did that not without disgraces upon themselves, as they either sacrificed their children or they ruined one of their eyes. In fact this is said about those who bring sufferings upon themselves. Douris says that an astrologist who predicted the moon’s eclipses didn’t fare well.

Thus, the tradition on the Thessalian sorceresses losing their children is already attested in the fourth century BCE, if the Asclepiades mentioned by the Bodleian manuscript of Zenobius is indeed the author of the *Tragodumena*. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the scholiast to Apollonius uses the term οἰκείων, which is paralleled by Plato in several passages of the *Gorgias* in the context of protecting

friends and family from injustice. And this is just the opposite to what Thessalian women do.

Let's go back to the passage we are dealing with. The text is inserted in the discussion between Callicles and Socrates on what is preferable: to suffer or to exercise injustice, and by which means can we obtain the power of not being a victim of injustice. In the paragraphs immediately preceding our text, Socrates is arguing that the desire of survival should not dictate the life or the actions of a good man. This is a response to Callicles' notion on politics and rhetoric as the most desirable activity because it provides the power to protect oneself as well as relatives and friends. Behind Socrates' criticism runs the platonic idea that the only way to be a good politician is trying to help citizens to be as good as possible, so that they become in turn a source of goodness for the community.

Therefore, it is our claim that Plato is here making use of the Thessalian witches as a parallel to Socrates' specific conception of power. These women have the great power of pulling down the moon but they may also cause death to their relatives. Thus their τέχνη is manqué. In the same way, says Socrates to Callicles, if you think you can seize the power without taking into account those who are nearest to you and you fail to resemble the *demos* and to achieve friendship with it (513b: τι γνήσιον ἀπεργάζεσθαι εἰς φιλίαν τῷ Ἀθηναίων δήμῳ), your political and rhetorical τέχνη will fail, too. Both aspects belong closely together. The condition of acquiring power in a proper way is posited explicitly after the allusion to the Thessalian witches:

εἰ δέ σοι οἷε ὄντινοῦν ἀνθρώπων παραδώσειν τέχνην τινὰ
τοιαύτην, ἥτις σε ποιήσει μέγα δύνασθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει τῆδε

άνόμοιον ὄντα τῇ πολιτεία εἴτ' ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιον εἴτ' ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον,
ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, οὐκ ὀρθῶς βουλευή.

Each τέχνη has its limits and its requital: both the magic τέχνη and the political τέχνη can show their 'dark side' and are likely to fail if those who practice them do not take into account the closest ones (the δῆμος for the politician or the φίλτατοι for the Thessalian sorceress). As a consequence, the parallels of the Platonic text with other mythographic pieces invite us to make a proposal regarding ecdotics. Our suggestion is to switch the full stop after σὺν τοῖς φιλάτοις, as we reckon that this syntagm refers to the relatives whom the witches lose. According to our interpretation, the translation of the whole passage would run as follows:

See if this benefits you and me, so that the same thing doesn't happen to us, my excellent man, as they say happens to the Thessalian women with their closest ones when they pull down the moon. We will be seizing this power in the city. But if you think anyone will pass on to you some craft which will make you powerful in this city when you are unlike this political system, better or worse than it, then I think you are planning wrongly, Callicles.

4. Conclusions

As a conclusion, the debate so far encourages reflections in the following two directions. In the first place, the intimate bond between ecdotics and mythography has become clear. But contrary to our assumption at the beginning of this paper, namely that a philological mythography should describe the mythical narrative prior to, or

instead of, interpreting it, we have now reached the opposite conclusion. Delving into the meaning of the Thessalian trick or the Lemnian crime has turned out to be the prerequisite for resolving the punctuation of the text of the *Gorgias* and the scholia to Apollonius.

In other words, a merely textual analysis does not provide the required tools to establish the mythical narrative and describe its form and content. On the contrary, the interpretation of the mythical and religious constituents of the story appears to be a precondition to endeavor the “source-critical scrutiny” favored by Albert Henrichs. Indeed, from the strictly point of view of textual criticism, a full stop before, or after, the phrase *σὺν τοῖς φιλτάτοις*, and before, or after, *κατὰ τὴν τῆς θεοῦ ὀργήν*, are equipollent variants, since we are not able to make a choice on the basis of an intrinsic value of each of them. If we examine the text of the manuscripts as it stands, there is no clear evidence as to which punctuation would Plato or the scholiast to Apollonius have preferred. But modern typographic conventions compel the editor to make ecdotic decisions concerning orthotypography and punctuation. As a modern mythographer, the classical scholar has to dive into ancient mythology and to be able to give modern form to ancient myths, which may mean to recreate them—or *tout court* to create them (as the first example has shown).

Thus, in order to acquire the tools necessary for evaluating and taking an ecdotic decision, a preliminary task has to be accomplished—that is, an investigation on the mythological, religious, or philosophical meaning of the narrative piece within its context. Here is where philological mythography opens up to other, more or less related historical and anthropological disciplines. To take up the distinction drawn at the end of our introduction and to put it the other way round,

interpretation should precede—or run parallel to—description of myth: “One cannot step outside the hermeneutic circle”.

In the second place, the text of Plato prompts another reflection concerning the status of mythography as a literary genre and as a scientific discipline. Using a philosophic text as a source for reconstructing mythologic traditions on magic poses a major challenge—namely having to face the limits and scope of mythography. Mythographic handbooks have long been considered as typically Alexandrian bookish artifacts and been described as Hellenistic and Imperial collections produced in a “world of libraries, official texts, and institutionalized research”. But the epoch-making volume by Robert Fowler (2000) devoted exclusively to the early mythographers has forced scholars of antiquity to rethink their notions on mythography as a clear-cut literary genre, its scope and rules, and above all its periodization.

And yet, notwithstanding the blurry limits of mythography as a genre, we are entitled to ask whether the Platonic allusion to the Thessalian witches is to be considered a mythographic narrative. The parallel texts that we have provided while discussing the passage of *Gorgias* can help to elucidate this question. To the extent that Asclepiades Tragilensis is considered a mythographer (he takes number 12 in Jacoby’s collection and Wendel would rank him as no less than the first mythographer), it is taken for granted that Asclepiades’ fr. 20 belongs to the mythographical genre. On the other hand, the analysis of the vocabulary in the other two parallels encourages us to take them as pieces of mythography, as shown by μεμύθευται (in the scholia to Apollonius) and ιστορία (in Olympiodorus: ἡ δὲ ιστορία ἐστὶν αὕτη), a word that is widely used to introduce mythographic narratives both in the scholia and in scholarly literature. The fact that the Platonic

allusion is embedded in a philosophic discourse should not prevent us from acknowledging its similarities to these mythographic parallels, and from assigning it to the same tradition.

Let us not avoid the crucial issue: the question at stake is ultimately the very status and concept of myth. A clear-cut distinction between a mythographical narrative and an allusion embedded in a philosophical text would assume that we are in possession of a substantive notion of the object myth—that is, a kind of traditional story defined by characteristics peculiar to it. The research of some specialists in Greek myth, however, during the last decades of the last century, raised the suspicion that this notion is unfounded. According to these critics, the modern concept of myth has no equivalent in ancient Greece. Myth would thus be nothing but a modern construction, projected onto Greek antiquity only after the fact: this kind of traditional tale seen as an “indigenous” Greek category has lost its consistency. According to our perspective, mythography should track mythical narratives within whatever textual artifact might have caught them in its net. Given the persistence of myths in all genres in Antiquity (with the well known and yet controversial exception of scientific texts), any mythical allusion, reference, or rewriting should be susceptible to mythographic analysis. To paraphrase Marcel Detienne’s dictum, myth is a “poisson soluble dans les eaux de la mythographie”.