Euripides’s Helena and Pentateuch traditions: The Septuagint from the perspective of Ancient Greek Tragedies

In some cases discussed below, the present form of the Septuagint is not representative of how Ancient Greek Tragedies were received by the LXX translators, but of how Old Testament traditions in Greek form were received by the tragedians.

Introduction

In the Ancient Greek tragedy, a great number of linguistic and conceptual elements affecting gender relations in the context of marriage, family and society, remind of the language and thoughts of the Greek Old Testament, the so-called Septuagint. How did it come to such similarities, has been answered inadequately up to now. All too often the cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean point to common traits or to general human or cross-cultural language and ideas, dressed in similar or comparable structures and reasoning patterns, widely used among the nations. The Ancient Jewish and Christian apologetic literature presented the thesis that Greek poets and philosophers knew Moses or were inspired by him. A more modern view is that a cultural exchange between Hebrews and Greeks took place not first in the Hellenistic period but already in the classical age. This proposal is often regarded with some hostility. However, it seems for those who are inclined to go the difficult path to survey the original documents that the possibility opens up to seek traces of an exchange (Dafni 2006a; 2006b; 2007; 2009a; 2009b; 2010).

On the basis of Euripides’s tragedy Helena¹, performed for the first time in the year 412 BC in Athens, this article would like to address the question of the influence of biblical thinking on Greek literature and, based on the original texts of Euripides² and of the Old Testament in its Hebrew and Greek version, to gain insights into the cultural exchange between Hebrews and Greeks in the classical age. These could open paths to discussions about gender relations and gender equality.

The myth of Helena

It is opinio communis that the Euripidean tragedy Helena³ represents the most radical transformation of the well-known aetiological myth of the Greeks about the cause of the Trojan War. This myth also forms the basis of the Homeric poetry (Lange 2002:115–151), standing at the beginnings of Ancient Greek literature. Helena, whose beauty was a stumbling block and rock of offence under the Greeks and Phrygians,⁴ provided for Euripides as well as for his predecessors Homer, Stesichorus and Herodotus narrative material to which they all referred back. But criticism and evaluation of this figure by each of these authors is different (Allan 2008:18–28; Kannicht 1969a:21–71).

In the form of a genealogy, well known not only from Ancient Greek mythology, but especially from the Ancient Near Eastern context and the context of the Old Testament, Homer describes the proud pedigree of a demigoddess of immortal beauty, who owes her good relationship to procreation and not to creation or adoption. Herein is reflected the most important distinction between the Ancient Greek and the Old Testament God-likeness and/or similarity-concept, which plays an important, albeit subtle, role in Euripides’s tragedy to be discussed. In Ancient Greek mythology, from which Euripides borrowed motives, the physical kinship or the natural union of divine and human in the person of Helena is clearly emphasised. For this most beautiful

1. I quote the translation of Helena by Kovacs (2003); cf. Ebener ([1979] 2010); Kannicht (1969a, 1969b), Allan (2008).
2. Cf. Nestle ([1901] 1969), Decharme (1906); Lesky (1972:275–538); Hose (2008).
3. Text-history by Kannicht (1969a:78–129).
4. See for example, Homer, Iliad 2:177f.; 3:156–160; 7:357f.; 24:759–775; Odyssey 11:438; 14:68f.; 17:118f; Hesiod, Opera 164f.
among women was the daughter of Zeus and Tyndareus' wife, Leda. It is noteworthy, that, in the Old Testament context, the term 'son' or 'sons of God' expresses neither genealogical attribution nor biological kinship between God and human, but it is connected, also with respect to a king or the Messiah and the chosen people, indelibly with the concepts of election and adoption.5

The plot of Euripides’ tragedy presupposes the Homeric myth about the abduction of the beautiful Helena: In a beauty contest between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite on Mount Ida Aphrodite wins, and she promises Paris-Alexandros, the son of king Priam of Troy, Helena as prize, although Helena was already the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Helena then cheats on her husband, marries Paris and follows him to Troy. So the Trojan War is kindled, for Menelaus, the betrayed and abandoned husband, will not permit or tolerate that his wife breaks the conjugal covenant with him, which brings shame and disgrace to him and destroys the social order and integrity in Greece. Claiming the collective sense of honour and awareness of the Greeks for solidarity and retaliation, Menelaus and his allies go to war against the Phrygians, to recover the most famous and most beautiful wooer of Greece, but this leads to mutual bloodshed and loss of life. In this unique way Homer connected the physical beauty and the spiritual wickedness of a woman, which has led to violent clashes.

For a better understanding of this Homeric evaluation of Helena’s figure, one must, in my view, not start from a general contrast between nature and culture, but from the specific question of what is moral and gender equality, as it already occurs in the Odyssey and the counterexample of the faithful and patient Penelope. This suggests that the Homeric ethics could probably have been inspired and guided by similar thoughts about moral behaviour and conjugal morality, as presented in the prohibition of adultery and desire in the Decalogue (Ex 20:14–17 with its parallel in Dt 5:18–21; cf. Hossfeld 1982; Noth 1961:134; Veijola 2004:168), even if the everyday experience rather speaks of continuous violations of the Divine Law and human missteps. Even Homer’s epic emphasises that one actually should not commit adultery and not covet another man’s wife.

Noteworthy is that Helena is not viewed by Homer as the property of her husband, that can be quietly sacrificed to a spatial condition, specifically reminiscent of the origin of the Septuagint. Egypt is not only the place of refuge for the beloved son of Jacob in the Old Testament (Gn 39ff.), but also the refuge for Helena. And the house of Proteus, the wisest herald of Zeus. Paris had only stolen Helena's living silhouette which had been created by Hera, and which had to be returned. Only a silhouette of Helena accompanied Paris to Troy and the murderous Trojan War had broken out in reality only for the sake of a mirage. Also Herodotus knows a similar version in the so-called Proteuslogos (Hist II. 112–120; Cf. Kannicht 1969a:41–48), which relates that Paris and Helena had fled to Egypt together.

Talking of an image or illusion of Helena in an ancient Egyptian context is probably no coincidence, because, as is well known, similar terminology was used in the context of royal ideology and theology of creation (Janowski 2004:183–214; Maag 1954:85–106; Maag 1955:15–44; Schmidt 1967:127–148). Already since the 18th Dynasty, the Pharaoh was considered and worshiped as ‘the image resp. as the living image, in the place of the god Re on earth’ (cf. Westermann 1974:210ff.). But this question exceeds the limit of the present investigation.

Euripides is even more radical than his predecessors, Stesichorus and Herodotus. His tragedy starts with a patrilineal genealogy of the royal house in the Nile Delta and on the island of Pharos, which granted Helena protection – a spatial condition, specifically reminiscent of the origin of the Septuagint. Egypt is not only the place of refuge for the beloved son of Jacob in the Old Testament (Gn 39ff.), but also the refuge for Helena. And the house of Proteus, the wisest of all men, gives asylon to her conjugal covenant (Hel. 61), like Moses, once an Egyptian prince, who highlights in the Decalogue the holiness and the divine protection of marriage.

By determining the ratio of Helena’s external essence to her inner essence, Euripides emphasises that at the arrival of Paris, Helena had already been brought up from Sparta to Egypt by Hermes, the messenger of the gods and herald of Zeus. Paris had only stolen Helena’s living silhouette which had been created by Hera, and which had no intellectual merits to show over the original. The Greek term here used is διάλογον ἔμπουν (Hel. 34.584). Thus, the Homeric myth is completely turned on its head. From the beautiful unscrupulous wooer a second Penelope is made, not only tolerates this moral failure, but also declares it to be legitimate and thus makes himself an accomplice.

Euripides knows the Homeric narrative perspective and Stesichorus’s original damning judgement of Helena and his a posteriori withdrawal.6 The price Stesichorus had paid for his allegations against Helena was to lose his eyesight. In the palinode, instead of reviling the adulteress, he has composed a hymn to the faithful wife, who was wrested by force from her husband and had just arrived with her kidnapper in Egypt, where the righteous king Proteus places her under protection for her rightful husband, and so Stesichorus got his sight back. Only a silhouette of Helena accompanied Paris to Troy and the murderous Trojan War had broken out in reality only for the sake of a mirage. Also Herodotus knows a similar version in the so-called Proteuslogos (Hist II. 112–120; Cf. Kannicht 1969a:41–48), which relates that Paris and Helena had fled to Egypt together.

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5. For example, Genesis 6:2–4; Exodus 4:22; Psalms 2:7; 81[82]:6; 88[89]:6; Isaiah 2:2; 45:11; Wisdom 2:18; 5:5.

6. Euripides, Helena 1276–1283. Plato, Politeia IX 586c; Phaedros 243b–b; Isocrates, Hellenes Enkomion 64. PÖxyr 2506 Fragment 26:1–12; cf. Kannicht (1969a:30–33).

7. Cf. (1) ἀπόλλω (2 Μακς 3:12) and ἄπλως [Pr 22:23; 2 Μακς 4:3ff.], (2) ἀναφηχθέν τεν ἄνωθεν τις ἁγίασθαι σφαλματικώς, in Exodus 21:13ff.; Deuteronomy 4:41ff.; Joshua 20:1ff.
Menelaus, prearranged by Hera, can certainly exist until eternity.

Helena’s replacement by a shadow image expresses not only the anger and vengeance of Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus, who was not Paris’s first choice in the beauty contest, but it should be pointed out that Hera still may be considered the patron of the sacred matrimony because Helena, in reality, has been a pious and faithful wife after the example of Penelope. Thus, the idea – allegedly standing behind the Homeric Helena – that for beautiful women it is preordained, or that it characterises their true nature, not to belong to one man, but to be conquered by the most powerful should be strongly rejected (cf. Sophocles Antigone 61ff.).

In Euripides, Helena is again threatened after Proteus’s death. Theoclymenus, his son and successor, wants to espouse her. Her fate is reminiscent of Penelope, who was besieged by suitors to marry one of them. But after the Euripidean view, Menelaus and Helena will find each other just like Odysseus and Penelope. It is noteworthy that the motif of a wife’s risks for her beauty occurs also three times in the Old Testament, specifically in the so-called duplicates in Genesis 12:9–20; 20:1–18; 26:1–13. These three parallel stories could be traced back to longer orally transmitted legends, in which the main characters and the narrative perspectives visibly or invisibly converge (cf. Auerbach 1959:9–27; Koch 1989:149ff.). In Genesis it is about the finessing or outwitting of (1) Pharaoh, (2) Abimelech, the king of Gerar, by Abraham and Sarah, and (3) Abimelech, the Philistine king, by Isaac and Rebekah. In all three cases, the beauty of the ancestress puts her husband’s life in danger. By a trick of the ancestor, his wife’s honour and his own life are protected and sealed by God through a promise of blessing. Noteworthy here is that the foreign-born kings unexpectedly hear God’s voice, who reveals his will in their conscience in a mysterious way (Dafni 2001a:306ff.). In Euripides’s tragedy, Theoclymenus is outwitted by Helena with the help of his sister. But, at last, he listens to the divine will, revealed to him by his sister and the Dioscuri, and did not die. Penelope’s suitors, however, because of their arrogance, meet their death. Helena’s rescue, compared to Penelope’s, runs bloodless; because of her living silhouette the blood in her family and in Troy has already flowed in torrents (Hel. 273–309).

Euripides thus contemplates the figure regarded by the Greeks as the cause of the Trojan War from different points of view, apparently not discussed by Stesichorus and Herodotus. It is not the intention of this article to treat the perspectives of Stesichorus, Herodotus and Euripides in detail (Kannicht 1969a:21–71; cf. Hose 2008:141–151), but to respond to the question: What has Euripides – usually claimed to be a woman hater (Harder 1993; cf. Assael 1985:91–103; March 1990:32–75) – to do with the Old Testament? What does the Euripidean narrative and figural perspective (Schmid 2008) contribute to the understanding of Old Testament ethics or Aretology and to the modern conception of gender justice (cf. Foley 2001; Pomeroy 1984; Zelenak 1998)?

The narrative principle of double naming and double nature

The most noticeable characteristic of Euripides’s tragedy Helena is that the speeches of the individual figures do not purely imitate oral traditions, but they incorporate artfully sealed narratives referring to Helena in the context of the Trojan War and in the Egyptian context. The principle which determines the development and the interdependence of the tragedy is the difference between a true and a false Helena, between archetype and image or silhouette, illusion, delusion, cloud or aerial or murder-seducing imagination, between phenomenon and reality, form and content, external and internal nature. Euripides adopts from his predecessor Stesichorus the motif of a double Helena (Hose 2008:141ff.). At the same time, he also invents a double theophoric name for the prophetic daughter of Proteus, a marine deity, who could change his shape and foresee the future. Thus Euripides combines the motives of (1) the double Helena, as the original and its copy, and (2) the double name of the prophetess Eidonoe with the multifaceted deity, believed to have passed the hereditary prophetic gift, and indicates completely new paths of understanding and explanation of the relationship between divine will and human action.

As is apparent from the study of the figure-specific wording of Euripides, material and spiritual aspects of the double Helena are marked linguistically. Her name and appearance are quite separate from her mental or spiritual essence. With Eidon or Theonoe, the daughter of Proteus, however, only the name that reveals her character plays a decisive role. With the help of the Euripidean language and narrative perspective, other thoughts subordinated to this principle (linguistic marking and revelation of nature) are already recognisable in the stories of the so-called Yahwist (Gn 2–3) and the priestly source (Gn 1) of the creation of man and woman, and have left echoes in the Old Testament understanding of prophecy (Dafni 2000). These are most clearly recognisable in the so-called Greek Bible, namely the Septuagint, specifically in qualitative differences from their Hebrew original which result from translation equivalents with interpretive character. In particular:

1. The basic aim of the tragedy Helena seems to be summarised in the second song (stasimon), where the Euripidean concept of God is clearly expressed (Hel. 1137–1150):

   
   ὅ τι θεὸς ἢ μὴ θεὸς ἢ τὸ μέσον,
   τῆς φησίος ἐρευνήσας βροτῶν
   μακρότατον πέρας εὑρεῖν
   ὃς τὰ θεῶν ἐσορᾷ
dὲ ἀντιλόγοι deō
   καὶ πάλιν ἀντλόγους
   πηδῶν' ἀνελπίστοις τύχαις;
   σοὶ Δώρον ἔφευ, ὦ Ελένα,
   θυγάτηρι
   πτανὸς γὰρ ἐν κόλποις σε Λή-
   σὺ Διὸς ἔφυς, ὦ Ἑλένα,
   πηδῶν' ἀνελπίστοις τύχαις;
   σοὶ Δώρον ἔφευ, ὦ Ελένα,
   ἃς τὰ θεῶν ἐσορᾷ
   καὶ πάλιν ἀντλόγους
   πηδῶν' ἀνελπίστοις τύχαις;
   σοὶ Δώρον ἔφευ, ὦ Ελένα,
   ἃς τὰ θεῶν ἐσορᾷ
   καὶ πάλιν ἀντλόγους
   πηδῶν' ἀνελπίστοις τύχαις;

   What mortal can search out and tell
   what is god, what is not god, and what lies between?
   The farthest bourne is reached
   by him who sees that what
   veers first this way,
   then that, and once more this
   way,
   with outcomes wavering and unexpected.
   You, Helena, are Zeus’s
dughter.

http://www.hts.org.za
doi:10.4102/hts.v71i1.2902
Euripides, influenced by a polytheistic concept of God, is in radical contrast to the Old Testament claim of Yahweh's exclusivity and the prohibition of images (Ex 20:3f., with its parallel in Dt 5:7f.), although this is expressed by similar or comparable linguistic means. This fact alone points out that the Greek Old Testament and Euripides’ Helena cannot be strangers to each other, but that they should have come in touch in a general-intellectual historical as well as in literary-specific sense.

2. Euripides’ understanding of God-man-relationship is revealed by the statement (560) ‘God is to recognize the friends’. Kovacs (2002:73) translated this: ‘To recognize your own is also something divine.’ Compare Helena 760: ‘to τοὺς θεοὺς ἔχων τις ἂν φίλους ἀρίστην μαντικὴν ἔχει δόμοις – ‘If a man has the gods’ friendship, that is the best prophecy his house can have’ (Kovacs 2002: 97). According to Kannicht (1969b:158), here lies a ‘conventional predicate’, which became possible since the 5th century BC. It epitomises and emblematises ‘overwhelming mental states or external circumstances’ and stands out ‘from the more or less conventional style of the other evidence by their clear internal credibility.’ But the whole statement strongly reminds of an expression found in Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 34:10, which briefly and succinctly summarise the meaning of the encounter of God and Moses in the Pentateuch narratives:

Exodus 33:11

And the Lord spoke to Moyses face to face.

As if someone should speak to his own friend

Deuteronomy 34:10

And there has not again arisen a prophet in Israel like Moyses whom the Lord knew face to face.

We encounter all these phrases (ἐνώπιος ἐνωπίῳ, πρόσωπος κατὰ πρόσωπον) in conjunction with the verbs λαλεῖν ['speak or talk'] and γιγνώσκειν ['know or recognise'], not only in the Septuagint, but also in the Hebrew original, probably due to redactional work of priestly circles, in the form פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים in the Hebrew text, however, uses different vocabulary that does not indicate exactly the same content and calls up other latent ideological perspectives, which cannot be discussed in this context.

It should be noted that the wordplay used by the Exodus translator in Exodus 20:3f. with its parallel in Deuteronomy 5:7f. is exactly equivalent to the terms (LXX εἴδολον – ὁμοίωμα for πολύς – πάντα) in Genesis 1:26 (LXX εἰκών – ὁμοίωμα for πάντα – πάντα) to distinguish between the true and false god image and likeness. The Hebrew text, however, uses different vocabulary that does not indicate exactly the same content and calls up other latent ideological perspectives, which cannot be discussed in this context.
our image and after our likeness’ (LXX-Gen 1:26 καὶ εἰκὼν ἡμῶν καὶ κατ’ ὅμοιον, see below). For the close proximity of God and man is depicted here in a unique way without the boundaries between the divine and human spheres being changed or moreover, abolished.

3. The question of God’s knowledge, likeness and image is not first raised in the Hellenistic period, but it was already discussed in the Greek world since Homer. It is significant that in the prologue of the Odyssey (1.21) Odysseus is designated as ὄντος (literally [Odysseus] as a god’s mirror image or reflection, instead of a god, i.e. godsimilar or godlike), not because of his physical form or his external appearance, but because of his fear of the gods, his reason and his universal knowledge, which he owed to his extensive intercultural learnability (1.3ff.). A comparable idea is pronounced in the anthropomorphism of LXX-Genesis 1:26a, which precisely at this point is formulated differently from the Masoretic Text:

The verbal abstractum ἡμετέρας occurs in priestly, exilic and post-exilic texts and is understood by the meaning of ‘illustration, copy, reproduce, design, appearance’ (Gesenius & Buhl 1962:165) or ‘replica, form, likeness’ (HAL I, 217), but the Septuagint renders it as ὁμοίωμα, ὁμοίωσις, εἰκών, κατ’ εἰκόνα and κατ’ ὅμοιον (Bratsiotis 1964–1967:227–306; cf. Barr 1968:11–26; Westermann 1974:203–214).

The Septuagint translation is especially meaningful for associations evoked by the Hebrew words in the Greek-Hellenistic readership. סף and תושע in the meaning of ‘image and likeness’ are considered to be two objectively not different, but equally significant terms. Since Irenaeus they are understood as a hint ‘to the double image of God in human beings, in a natural and a supernatural sense’ (Westermann 1974:205). Preuß (1977) noted:

Was konkret in Gen 1,26 gemeint ist, ist aber dann auch hier nicht durch eine Untersuchung der verwendeten Begriffe allein zu erschließen, sondern wird erst durch den weiteren Kontext ausgeführt (1,28) und als partnerschaftliche Anteilgabe an Herrschaft expliziert. (p. 276)

It should be mentioned with Heinisch (1930:101), that the priestly author or editor, who uses the anthropomorphism in Genesis 1:26, is aware that Yahweh is not ἄρτις [‘flesh’], and his theological thought is led by the prohibition of images.8 If he had represented God in a picture, as a statue, as it was the case in the environment of the Old Testament, then it would be as if he wanted to pull down ‘God from the spiritual realm into the sensual.’ Nevertheless, he dared to move the anthropomorphism by ‘the similarity of man with God not in a physical but in a spiritual sense’, because of human reason and will of freedom. Unlike the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint makes a distinction between εἰκῶν and ὁμοίωσις by addition of a κατ’, and his fear of the gods, his reason and his universal knowledge, which he owed to his extensive intercultural learnability (1.3ff.). A comparable idea is pronounced in the anthropomorphism of LXX-Genesis 1:26a, which precisely at this point is formulated differently from the Masoretic Text:

The Masoretic Text speaks of יִצְוָא and יָֽשֵׂע, while the Septuagint renders the Hebrew words into Greek as εἰκὼν and ὁμοίωσις (Bratsiotis 1964–1967:227–306; cf. Barr 1968:11–26; Westermann 1974:203–214).

4. Why precisely has this expression become possible about 600–400 BC under Greek and Hebrew speaking peoples, if an intellectual and linguistic exchange had not taken place, the traces of which we find in the literary legacy of both nations? If the biblical formulations in question have been made very late, then it is most likely that the Old Testament Pentateuch redactors knew the works of the Presocratics, Euripides or Plato. In the case of an early exchange, they were more likely to be regarded as evidence of mutual loan translations in Greek and Hebrew literature. But the respective direction of influence would still have to be determined.

Euripides seems to have made a selection of Old Testament motives from improvised Greek translations circulated in the diaspora, so that he could provide fundamental questions of philosophy and come nearer to his central theological problem. He makes recourse to both already formed linguistic tools – with which one could render Old Testament statements into Greek, requiring precursor translations to the Septuagint – as well as newly formed linguistic forms. His theological and anthropological concern arises from the most

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8. Genesis 1:26; 5:1–3; 2 Kings 16:10; 2 Chronicles 4:9; Psalms 58:5; Isaiah 13:4; 40:18; Ezekiel 1:5–6, 10, 13, 22, 26, 28; 8:2; 10:1–10, 21, 22, 23:15; Daniel 10:16.
9. Genesis 1:26–27; 5:3; 9:6; Numbers 33:52; 1 Samuel 6:5(K); 6:17; 2 Chronicles 23:17; Psalms 39:7; 73:20; Qumran-Ezechiel 23:14; Amos 5:26.
casual observations of the individual characters in the drama. For him, it is actually about the knowledge of God, which is linked insoluble with the question of God-man-likeliness. A similar concern arises from the above-mentioned relevant exilic or post-exilic Old Testament passages.

### Theonoe’s double name

The question: Who can distinguish between true and false, and how – that is really the most basic question of Old Testament prophecy. Euripides answers this by introducing the figure of the prophetess Theonoe and thus the weight of the narrative is shifted from the outside into the inner world of man.

He did not invent this figure but adopted it from Homer. Interesting is that he transforms the Homeric theophoric name of the seer in a special way. Homer speaks of Εἰδώθεα ['she who looks like a goddess']. But Euripides breaks the name up into its components and forms two theophoric names of one and the same person: Εἰδό and Θεονόη. While Eido refers to the sensory perception of the eye, Theonoe indicates first the mental perception, that is, ‘the mind of God or the mind of God-knowing’ (Kannicht 1969a:20). Noteworthy is that also in the LXX-Genesis 32:30f. the place where Jacob has seen God face to face and was rescued is called Εἰδός θεοῦ ['face of God']. The Masonic Text speaks ofadian ['vision of God']. The Masoretic Text speaks of vision of God’. Similar to Theonoe the name of her brother Theoclymenus is formed, referring to the senses of hearing and – with regard to his change of mind it means ‘he who hears god’. His name indicates the turn in the drama. Despite the hardening of his heart, which is reminiscent of the Pharaoh of Exodus, he repents, because he heard the voice of his sister and the Dioscuri telling him the divine will.

The theophoric name Theonoe recalls LXX-Isaiah 40:13:

> τις έγνω νοον κυρίου, και τις αὐτοῦ σύμβουλος ἀγλάιστο, ὡς συμββάθαι αὐτῶν;

NETS
Who has known the mind of the Lord, And who has been his counselor to instruct him?

The Euripidean statements presuppose a similar problem and imply a rational response.

1. Euripides’ Helena explains the double name Eido-Theonoe after the pattern of the Old Testament *Namengebungen and Namensätiologien* (Hel. 10–15):

> ἡ γεννήθη τε παρθένον
> Εἰδό, τὸ μητρὸς ἀγλάιστο, ὅτ’ ἦν βρέφος,
> ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐς ἤβην ἦλθαν ὁρασίαν γάμων;
> καὶ αὐτῆς ἀνήχθη Θεονόην:
> τὸ θέα γὰρ τὰ τ’ ἔντα
> καὶ μέλλοντα πάντ’ ἡμίπτετο,
>
> and a fine maiden called Eido. When she was a babe she was her mother’s glory, but when she came to womanhood and was old enough to marry they called her Theonoe: for she knew all that divination can tell, both present and future,

### 2. Euripides puts Menelaus an interpretation of the name Theonoe into the mouth (822):

> χρηστήριον μὲν τοῦνο

The name has a prophetic ring to it.

While the Greek text indicates the oracle, the German translations (‘Prophetic sounds like the name’) interpret the text according to the Bible and recognise Theonoe as a true prophetess. Kannicht (1969b:224) distinguishes between ‘a mysterious prophetic voice’ and ‘a Fama’, that is, a demonic helper of the power of Φήμη who since Kimon had been worshiped in Athens’, and opts for the second.

3. Euripides’ Helena paints the portrait of Theonoe as follows (819f.):

> Εἰς ἔστ’ ἔνδον αὐτῶ ξυμμάχος Θεοῖς ἴση.

He has indoors an ally powerful as the gods.

In Euripides, Helena’s and Menelaus’ appropriate helper or comrade-in-arms who seeks the restoration of their ancient, divinely ordained marriage, was a godlike being (θεοί ἴση). This must be understood as a response to people’s disparaging opinion that the exact match ally to the void target of the Greeks chasing the most beautiful woman of...
Greece and for her sake shedding human blood, was an imagination as vain as the wind.

Although he did not say it explicitly, Euripides makes from the seer a female figure comparable to the Old Testament prophets, with a theophoric name.

4. In *Helena* [757], Euripides expresses very aptly what other people think of true visionaries and what Theonoe thinks of herself:

[... θε. γνώμη δ ἁρίστη μᾶντες ἢ τε εὐθυγλῶν.]
[... The best way to tell the future is to be intelligent and plan ahead.]

Reasonable opinion (γνώμη) precedes emotionally controlled will (εὐθυγλῶν), which otherwise can fall to superstition with devastating consequences.

### The double Helena

Even Helena’s statement scēnēs: τι σοι ὀδί πίστεως σωστότερα (578 literally as: ‘Think what credible evidence you should still like to have?’’, Kovacs [2002:75] ’Just look! Why do you need clearer proof than that?’ —), raises the question: What is the relation of thinking and faith in connection with the possibility of differentiation between true and false, authentic and spurious, if the appearance is the same and the invisible nature differs? No other testimony than rationality, Helena stresses, may give a clearer answer. The problem is apparently that Helena’s true essence has fallen victim to her bad reputation, so that even her beloved husband could not recognise her.

Euripides, who concludes his Helena tragedy with the words of the chorus leader that the gods can appear in many shapes and unexpected prophecies and predictions (πολλαὶ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων/πολλὰ δ’ ἀέλπως κραίνουσι θεοί μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων/πολλὰ δ’ ἀέλπως κραίνουσι θεοί, 1688f.), opens it with the narrative of the twofold form of the demigoddess, Helena. Euripides takes the motif of the double shape or figure from Homer and redesigns it. Homer speaks namely of the sea god Proteus who could change his double shape or figure from Homer and redesigns it. Homer distinguishes clearly between eἰκών and ὁμοίωμα, the Greek version εἰκών, but in the Greek of the Septuagint καθ ὁμοίωσιν. ἡ γνώμῃ δ’ ἁρίστη μᾶντες ἢ τε εὐθυγλῶν, but far different.

The choice of terminology here is to point out that the gods can appear in many shapes and unexpected prophecies and predictions (πολλαὶ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων/πολλὰ δ’ ἀέλπως κραίνουσι θεοί, 1688f.), opens it with the narrative of the twofold form of the demigoddess, Helena. Euripides takes the motif of the double shape or figure from Homer and redesigns it. Homer speaks namely of the sea god Proteus who could change his double shape or figure from Homer and redesigns it. Homer distinguishes clearly between εἰκών and ὁμοίωμα, the Greek version καθ ὁμοίωσιν. ἡ γνώμῃ δ’ ἁρίστη μᾶντες ἢ τε εὐθυγλῶν, but far different.

The gods’ hatred be yours for the Greeks!

Teucer seems to transfer the bad properties of the image, held to be genuine, on the original, and wishes its destruction. He defines the relationship between image and original (prototype) by using of the adjectives ὁμοίως versus διάφορος in the frame of thanksgiving and benediction (160f.):

*Ελένην δ' ὁμοίως σῷμα ἑρευνήσεις*  
οὐ τὰς φρένα ἔχεις ὁμοίως ἀλλὰ διάφορους πόλο.

Though you resemble Helena in body, your heart is not the same as hers but far different.

The choice of terminology here is to point out that the woman standing in front of Teucer, although she has the same appearance as Helena, whom he knew, is mentally completely different. However a further distinction is also made, namely between body and mind (σῶμα vs. φρένες) or interior and exterior elements, although it is not clear why beautiful appearance and bad attitude represent necessarily Helena’s true nature.

### Menelaus’s perspective

Menelaus brought from Troy to the Greek ships a Helena as a dishonourable slave, and finds in Egypt another, enslaved, but dignified and pleading protection, before the tomb of the honourable and righteous king Proteus. Now he wonders, upset, if he has not to do with a lookalike (doppelgänger), but he is in fact husband of two women, that is, he had entered into a bigamous marriage, not like Jacob in the Old Testament, involuntarily and unavoidably, but unknowingly (571–577):
The theme of double marriage of a man or a woman seems to be Euripides’ favourite theme corresponding to his own experience and knowledge of and engagement with the Old Testament Jacob narratives, as it has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Dafni 2010:105–136). The dilemma, whether he knowingly or unknowingly commits an offence, arises not only in the Genesis narratives of the ancestor’s threat (see above), but also in Euripides, here, and especially in his tragedy Hippolytus.

Helena’s perspective

Due to her perception and attitude, two different aspects in the words of Helena can be recognised, one before and another after her encounter with Teucer: a sober one, to speak of sin and of living things, and a self-reflective aspect on the other.

1. Ἐδίδαλὼν ἔμπνουν (34,584) calls Helena the phantom, the shadow image, the living fallacy of her, which went to Troy with Paris. Euripides uses the determination ἔμπνουν programmatically to distinguish the Homeric idea of shadow image, the living fallacy of her, which went to Troy with Paris. Euripides uses the determination ἔμπνουν ὄμηρον σῴζειν ’ϊοί τοῦ ἄνδρος, ἄλλων δὲ ὄμηρον δίδωσι δ’ οὐκ ἔχων δόκησιν ἀναφέρεσθαι τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ ὃτι ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς ἐλήμφθη αὕτη κληθήσεται γυνή, καὶ σὰρξ ἐκ τῆς σαρκός μου· Τοῦτο νῦν ὀστοῦν ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων μου ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν καὶ ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς, καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν.

NETS
And God formed man, dust from the earth, and breathed into his face a breath of life, and man became a living being.

2. The spiritual and the material aspect of the true and the false Helena are characterised by Helena herself with the following terms: αἴθιριοι [‘etheric material or air’] and σῶμα [‘body’]. For this purpose, Euripides juxtaposes the term ὄνομα [‘name’] with the term σῶμα [body]. Unlike αἴθιριοι and σῶμα that are material, ὄνομα expresses the insubstantiability, the immaterial, the ephemeral, the untouchable. The term may also mean reputation. Therefore Helena responds to the legitimate question of Menelaus, how it is possible that she was also in Egypt and Troy, as follows (588):

’Ελ. τούτων γένοιτ’ ἄν πολλαχοῦ, τὸ σῶμα δ’ οὐ.

He. A name may be in many places, Though a body in only one.

This means that the name or reputation is omnipresent, but not the body. Hera had her name reviled everywhere among the barbarians, but not her body (1099f.).

The formulation ὄμωσα’ ἐμοί ἐδίδαλὼν ἔμπνουν and the associated thoughts remind of the LXX-Genesis 1:26 (καὶ εἶδαν καὶ καθ’ ὄμωσαν) and the LXX-Genesis 2:27 (καὶ ἐπάλησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐνοφόρησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ἁλίκης καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἀνθρώπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν). Both Genesis verses argue about the creation of humankind seem to be compressed and linked in three words, now referring not to humankind as a whole or even to a single man, but to Helena’s silhouette created by the goddess Hera to enter into a sham marriage with a predetermined man, Alexander-Paris (32). Thus, Genesis 2:23–24 comes into play.

23 καὶ ἐβατέν Ἀδαμ
Τοῦτο γὰρ ὕπότο τοῦ ἀντικείμενος αὐτοῦ καὶ σάρξ ἐκ τῆς σαρκός μου· αὐτή κληθήσεται γυνή, ὅτι ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ εἶναι ἡ ἐμμόρφωσις γυναικὸς ἐπεὶ ἐν αὐτῇ ὁ πατέρας αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μητέρα αὐτοῦ εἰς σάρκα μίαν.
NETS
23 And Adam said,
‘This now is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of her husband she was taken.’

24 Therefore a man will leave his father and mother
and will be joined to his wife,
and the two will become one flesh.

But the fact is, even in the background, that the abduction
of the true Helena wanted to change her predestination to
belong to a single, very specific man, Menelaus of Sparta.

In the New Testament, the Old Testament statement καὶ ἐσονται οἶδο εἰς σάρκα μίαν is complemented by δόθην ὁ Θεός συνεξεζε ἄνθρωπος μὴ χωρίζετα (Mt 19:6 with its parallel in Mk 10:9). That is to say: ‘And the people united by God in the covenant of marriage, may not be separated.’ The New Testament topos seems to presuppose both the Old Testament and the Euripidean statement. In Euripides, Hera has destined Menelaus and Helena to be together forever. But Paris, who preferred Aphrodite over Hera, tried to separate them. Hera comes now to restore artificially the broken covenant. She creates a silhouette as due price for Paris, who ignored her. Two interpretive ideas are here formulated: (a) the silhouette is of ethereal material, and (b) it is about a living entity as opposed to lifeless idols, or a deceased person who appears to the bereaved.

3. In the prologue of the tragedy, Helena says (44–48):

Αἰθήρ’ ἐσονται οἶδο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.
νερέλη καλώνας-οῦ γάρ
τίσις τῶν κατθανόντων ζῆι μὲν οὔ,
ἀνθρώποις ἡ γνώμην δ´ἔχει.
τε νερτέροις καὶ τοῖς ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν
ἀθάνατον εἰς ἀθάνατον
εἰς γῆν ἀπελεύσῃ.
Μενέλαιοι λέχος.

So Hermes took me up within the recesses of the sky,
shining me in a cloud (for Zeus had not forgotten me),
and put me down at this house of Proteus,
whom he judged the most virtuous man on earth,
suggesting that I might keep my bed unsullied for Menelaus.

The word αἰθήρ (44) describes not only the element from
which the silhouette was created, but also the way in
which Helena was raptured. Helena’s rapture as a sudden
and traceless disappearance recalls the eschatological
descriptions of Enoch’s and Elijah’s rapture in Genesis 5:21–
24 and 2 Kings 2:1–15 respectively (Schmitt 1982:34–49). This is a process limited in time, in this world, because Helena is
only temporarily brought to a place, Egypt, which remains
hidden from the Greeks and Phrygians, from which the return
is possible and even divinely ordained.

The rapture motif was first combined with Iphigenia’s fate. Homer lets the offering for the Trojan War be raptured.
Euripides, who makes Helena the actual victim of the same
war, speaks also of her rapture.

The Euripidean description of Helena’s rapture to Egypt
plays with the metaphorical, allegorical and literal meaning
of air and mist, reminiscent of the theophany at Sinai and in
the wilderness where God in the mist leads the people from
the Egyptian house of bondage to the Promised Land.

4. In the stichomythia between Helena and Theoclymenus,
he asks where her mirage body went from Troy. She gives the answer (1219):

Ἐς αἰθήρ... οἴχεται. Gone up into the sky.

This statement (in its Greek form and not in German or
English interpretive reproductions) is found in another
stichomythia of Menelaus and Helena paired with statements
about the creation of her silhouette (583ff.), reminiscent of
LXX-Genesis 3:19:

καὶ εἰς γῆν ἀποστρέψαι σε εἰς τὴν γῆν,
εξ ᾧ ἐλήμφθης ὃτι γῆ ἐλήμφθης
καὶ εἰς γῆν ἀποστρέψῃ.

NETS
until you return to the earth
from which you were taken,
For you are earth
and to earth you will depart.

The air or cloud image returned to the element from which it was created, namely to the air. For it was from air and vanished into air. Helena, however, returns to him from whom she was torn: her predetermined husband. In particular, the statement
about the creation of the false Helena by Hera from ether (thus heaven and not earth, from air and not the breath of life)
implies a rather deliberate parody of the biblical narratives (Gn 2:7 and 3:19). Yahweh takes the woman from the rib of man. The Hebrew God created a man out of earth and breathed into his nostrils the divine breath of life. The Greek goddess
creates a lively female figure alone from air. The Hebrew God is the creator of the woman who drags her husband into the
transgression of the divine command and the expulsion from
paradise. Hera’s work, a murderous seducing image, which became the cause of war, is of air and vanished into the air.

While also the spiritual element of man in the Old Testament
returns to him from whom it was taken, the Euripidean
eschatology in the mouth of Theonoes is different (1013–1016):

[καὶ γὰρ τὰτοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων διὸ
τοὺς τῶν κατθανόντων ἂνθρώπων
οὐ νόησαν ἐλήμφθην
ἵνα ἐν τοῖς ἄνωθεν
ἀθάνατον εἰς ἀθάνατον
ἐξ ἀνθρώπων]

In fact punishment for these deeds comes
to those below and to all men above.
For though the mind of dead men
does not live, it
has eternal sensation once it
has been hurled into the eternal
upper air.

It remains a mystery, what the eternal ether ‘upper air’ is, if it
is obviously not identical to the air from which comes the air

13. Cf. Isaiah 42–44 and Epistel Jeremias.

14.1 Samuel 28:11ff.
shape of the false Helena. Is it to be understood in the sense of
the Old Testament as divine breath of life from which the
Deuteronomist and Ecclesiastes say that it is separated from
man’s body after physical death and returns to the well from
which it was awarded, namely to Yahweh?

5. Given the renewed threat, the real Helena provides the
basic existential question (56):

Τί οὖν ἔτι ζῶ; Why then do I still live?

She replies to herself (56–59):

θεοῦ τὸ ἐσήκουσας ἔπος Ἑρμοῦ,
τὸ κλεῖνὸν ἔτι κατοικήσειν
ἐδώ τῷ Σπάρτης
σὺν ἀνδρὶ,
γνώντας ἐκ ἕως ὅσιον ὁκ
ἐκίνησον,
ἤν μὴ λέκτρ' ὑποστράψω τινί.

I have heard a prophecy from the
god Hermes
that I shall one day live in
Sparta’s plain
with my husband,
who will learn that I did not go
to Ilium-
Provided I do not share my bed with anyone.

The Euripidean statement ἤν μὴ λέκτρ' ὑποστράψω τινί is made
basically in line with LXX-Genesis 2:24 and the goal here is
the reunification in life with the legitimate husband, from
whom she was separated abruptly (and arbitrary).

Euripides’ aim is certainly not simply to rehabilitate Helena’s
individual character, but rather to transfer to this ambiguous
figure motif constellation beyond Homeric and Stesichorus’
myth. His tragedy seems to mediate and reveal to the attentive
reader covert references to Old Testament language and
thoughts. Euripides presumably adopts the schema ‘image
and likeness’ (Gn 1:26), taking into account the ban on images
according to Exodus 20 with its parallel in Deuteronomy 5
and applies it in order to re-interpret Stesichorus’ palinode.
He plays with language and thoughts of Genesis 1–3 with
reference to other relevant Old Testament motifs, especially
from the Jacob narratives of Genesis in order to describe the
marriage relationship. The tragic irony, Euripides highlights,
is that all Greeks were willing to engage in a senseless war with Troy for the mirage of the harlot Helena. Their goal was
pointless, their purpose bottomless, void. The idea that it
was god’s will that the legitimate husband would search the
world to find his loyal Helena again, would make sense and
be compatible with the Old Testament ethics.

Conclusions

There is mystical conversation between Euripides and
the Old Testament. Euripides does not emulate the Old
Testament. Neither citation nor paraphrasing, known in
the handling of the Jewish scribes with older biblical traditions,
characterises Euripides’ approach to the Old Testament,
but perspectivation according to the way oral and/or written
traditions were delivered to posterity and adapted in the
Ancient World.

Euripides’ use of Old Testament linguistic patterns and
motifs – presumably in improvised Greek translations
circulated in the Jewish diaspora before the Septuagint – is
eclectic. He picks up on essential components of the biblical
traditions about gender relations and gender equality,
viewed from the perspective of critically thinking Greeks
of his time, who had received an important impetus from
the Sophists. He transfers them to various figures of ancient
Greek mythology, which he mostly restructured and
reinterpreted. In this way, he makes here from the wretched
wooed a victim, a suppliant. But on one point, Euripides
remains faithful to the old myth: It was the divine will
that Helena and Menelaus for all eternity belong together.
Therefore, he changes everything else in myth and applies
this Old Testament principle.

The present form of the Septuagint in the cases discussed
above is in my opinion not representative of how Euripides
was received by the LXX translators. It indicates that there
were Greek translations of the Pentateuch going around
prior to the Septuagint translation. Old Testament traditions
in Greek form were received by Euripides as a means
of expression, which the classical Greek world offered to
the understanding of important Hebrew words and thoughts.
If this basic assumption of our article is correct, then its
importance for the Old Testament, Comparative Religious
and Cultural Studies would be seen in the possibility that it
allows an answer to the burning question of the tradition-
historical horizon of the Septuagint, namely: The Septuagint
presupposes other oral or written translations of the Hebrew
Bible into Greek. These mostly improvised preliminary
Greek translations of important Old Testament traditions
were known to Greek philosophers and poets and enabled
a unique dialogue between Hebrews and Greeks (Dafni
2008:85–95). Therefore, the decisive encounter of Greeks
and Hebrews, who would change the world, would have
taken place not only after Alexander the Great, but already
very early would have inspired the thinking of poets and
philosophers and fertilised their language, especially in
matters of religious belief for man-woman-relations in
marriage, family and society.

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