

## SHORTER NOTES

## NHΣAI IN SOPHOCLES, FR. 439 R.

πέπλους τε νῆσαι λινογενεῖς τ' ἐπενδύτας

τε νῆσαι *Canter* : τε νίσαι *Poll.*<sup>A</sup> : τάνυσαι *Poll.*<sup>FS</sup>

*nēsai* mantles and outer garments born of flax

Greek has three verbs νέω: (A) 'swim', (B) 'spin' and (C) 'heap up, pile'. The aorist infinitive of both (B) and (C) is νῆσαι. LSJ (followed by Ellendt<sup>1</sup>) takes Sophocles, fr. 439 R. (from *Nausicaa or Washing-women*) to be an instance of νέω (B). Pearson comments: 'νῆσαι is loosely used for ὑφαίνειν. The process of spinning, being preparatory to that of weaving, was apt to be regarded as part of the same operation rather than as a distinct art ... Soph. probably had in mind η 96 πέπλοι | λεπτοὶ ἐϋννητοὶ βεβλήατο, ἔργα γυναικῶν' (cloth spread on the seats in the banqueting hall of the Phaeacian king Alcinous).<sup>2</sup> Lloyd-Jones accordingly translates the fragment 'to weave robes and tunics made of linen'.<sup>3</sup>

This is very difficult sense. A poet might reasonably refer to garments or the like as ἐϋννητοὶ (also *Il.* 18.596; 24.580, both of χιτῶνες), meaning 'made of (fabric produced from) well-spun thread'. But spinning—the process by which cleaned and carded wool is converted into thread—and weaving—the process by which thread is worked on a loom to produce fabric—are entirely different operations, and in the classical period νέω (B) is otherwise used consistently and specifically of the former (*Eup.* fr. 344 K.-A. τῆ χειρὶ νῶσαι μαλθακωτάτην κρόκην ['(women) spinning an exceedingly soft woof-thread with their hand']; *Ar. Lys.* 519 στήμονα νήσω ['I'll spin a warp-thread']; *Pl. Plt.* 282e–3a [systematically analysing the vocabulary of wool-working]; *Men.* fr. 664 K.-A. κρόκην δὲ νήσεις, στήμονα ['you'll spin a woof-thread, a warp-thread']).<sup>4</sup> Put another way, one does not 'spin' clothing.

<sup>1</sup> F. Ellendt, *Lexicon Sophocleum* (Berlin, 1931), s.v.

<sup>2</sup> A.C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1917), 93. Pearson (92, in his introduction to the play), none the less, maintains that the action in the play is unlikely to have involved a change of scene, *sc.* from the beach where Nausicaa and her slave-girls find the hero to the palace in the city. Hypotheses can be devised to deal with this problem, e.g. that Nausicaa merely describes the situation in the palace to her visitor. But if one's basic thesis is that Sophocles' play adapted the action in *Odyssey* 6, it is inelegant to argue for an allusion to *Odyssey* 7, unless no other interpretation of the evidence is available.

<sup>3</sup> H. Lloyd-Jones (ed. and trans.), *Sophocles: Fragments* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1996), 226.

<sup>4</sup> For weaving, spinning and the associated vocabulary, see R.J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, vol. 4 (Leiden, 1964<sup>2</sup>), 196–211, esp. 203–5; E.J.W. Barber, *Prehistoric Textiles: The*

I suggest that Sophocles' νῆσαι is not from νέω (B) but from νέω (C),<sup>5</sup> and that the items in question are to be placed in a pile. Although Homer does not speak of Nausicaa and her slave-girls piling up the clothes, he does refer twice to folding them (*Od.* 6.111, 252), obviously preparatory to stacking, and νηέω, the Homeric form of the Sophoclean verb, is used at *Iliad* 24.276 of loading goods (clothing prominent among them; *Il.* 24.248–51) onto a wagon. There is little point or profit in attempting to reconstruct the details of the plots of emphatically lost tragedies. But if one thing can be taken as certain about a play called *Nausicaa* or *Washing-women* and apparently based at least in part on *Odyssey* 6,<sup>6</sup> it is that laundry—whether heaped in Nausicaa's room (*Od.* 6.26), or on the wagon that takes her and her slave-girls to and from the river mouth (*Od.* 6.74–5, 90–1, 252),<sup>7</sup> or on the shore after it has been washed and dried in the sun (*Od.* 6.93–4), or on the wagon again to be transported home—played a significant part in the story, *inter alia* as a means of providing the naked, shipwrecked Odysseus with something to wear before he went to meet the princess' mother and father (*Od.* 6.178–9, 214). At some point—Sophocles, fr. 439 R. suggests—a character in the play at least imagined putting that laundry in a heap.<sup>8</sup>

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## A TEXTUAL NOTE TO PLATO, *GORGIAS* 465a4\*

*Gorgias* 465a2-7

τέχνην δὲ αὐτὴν οὐ φημι εἶναι ἀλλ' ἐμπειρίαν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει λόγον οὐδένα ᾧ προσφέρει ἃ προσφέρει ὅποι' ἄττα τὴν φύσιν ἐστίν, ὥστε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου μὴ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν. ἐγὼ δὲ

*Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages with Special Reference to the Aegean* (Princeton, 1991), 39–78.

<sup>5</sup> For νέω (C) in contemporary Athenian literature, see e.g. *Ar. Nub.* 1203; *Lys.* 269. The Dindorf brothers, in their *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* s.v. νέω, note in passing that the same suggestion was put forward by Gottfried Jungermann, the early seventeenth-century editor of Pollux, 'etsi νεοπλαυήης'—a now-discredited reading at *Poll.* 7.45, the source of the fragment—'ostendit referri potius ad praecedens Νέω', i.e. νέω (B).

<sup>6</sup> *Ath.* 1.20F tells us that Sophocles himself performed a ball-dance in the play, presumably referring to a version of the action at *Od.* 6.100, 115–16 that leads to the encounter between Odysseus and Nausicaa. Nothing is known of the content of the plays entitled *Washing-women* or *Nausicaa* and *Nausicaa* by the comic poets Philyllius and Eubulus respectively, except that someone was very hungry in the latter (fr. 68 K.-A.).

<sup>7</sup> Fr. 441 R. λαμπάνη (glossed by Pollux 'a type of wagon on which they ride. Some [call it] an ἀπήνη') can reasonably be taken as evidence that Nausicaa's wagon—referred to specifically as an ἀπήνη at e.g. *Od.* 6.57, 69, 75—was mentioned in the play.

<sup>8</sup> The laundry is visible in two roughly contemporary vase-paintings (Munich 2322, an amphora and the name-vase of the Nausicaa Painter, c. 440 B.C.E.; Boston MFA 04.18a–b, a pyxis by Aison, c. 420 B.C.E.), but in both cases is being actively processed by the women or hung to dry. Thanks are due to Benjamin Millis, David Sansone and the anonymous reader for *CQ*.

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