Telegonus and the Bow of Odysseus: Reconsidering A Red-Figure Vase Fragment in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts

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Abstract: This article explores the relationship between the surviving testimonia and reception of the *Telegony*, the final part of the Epic Cycle in which Odysseus' death on Ithaca was recounted, and the only certain extant iconographical depiction of his killer: Telegonus, his son with Circe. This fragment (50.101), which also depicts Circe, resides in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. Although published and discussed in the art historical literature, it has remained largely unexamined by scholars interested in the *Telegony* and its reception. A closer examination of this unique depiction of Odysseus' son reveals a version of the Telegonus myth that contains hitherto unrecognised details about the youth's relationship with his father.

Key words: Telegonus; *Telegony*; Odysseus; Circe; Sophocles

Telegonus, Odysseus' son by Circe, was a figure much more recognisable in antiquity than today. We know, for example, that the youth played a major role in the *Telegony*, an epic in two books that formed the final part of the Trojan Cycle, that he is mentioned at the end of Hesiodic *Theogony* as king over the Tyrsenoi of Italy and figures in later tradition as the legendary founder of Praeneste and Tusculum in Latium, and that he appeared in at least one fifth-century BCE Athenian tragedy[1]. He is also alluded to more briefly in extant texts by several other authors, and we can surmise that he probably appeared in many other now-lost ancient works[2].

The iconographical record relating to Telegonus is, however, very different: only one certain depiction of Odysseus' illegitimate son remains to us from antiquity. This image is found on an enigmatic fragment of Apulian red-figure pottery in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest (50.101: **plate 1**)[3]. Despite its fragmentary state, we know that Telegonus is depicted on this vase because he is labelled beside his mother Circe, whose name is also inscribed. Only one element of the scene remains clear: Circe is handing a bow to her son. None of our extant textual sources seem obviously to relate to this scene. In fact, in the tradition as we know it, Telegonus is never associated with a bow, though in many versions of the story he was well-known for another famous weapon: a stingray-barb-tipped spear that delivered

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1 The longest testimonia relating to the young hero's interactions with his father Odysseus are those of the *Telegony*, an early 6th-century Cyclic poem attributed most often to Eugammon of Cyrene (for fragments see Bernabé 1996, 100–105); Σ ad. *Od*. 11.134; Apollodorus *Epit.* 7.16. 7.36–37; Hyginus *Fab*. 127; Dictys Cretensis 6.15. For important recent discussions of the *Telegony* see West 2013, 288–315; Burgess 2014, 111–122 and Burgess 2019, 136–157; Tsagalis 2015, 380–401; Sammons 2017, 121–123. 198–199. 216 and Sammons 2019, 48–66.

2 Other extant references to Telegonus' place in the mythic tradition include Hes. *Theog.* 1111–1114; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.45.1; Ovid *Tr.* 1.1.114; Opp. *Hal.* 2.497–505; Lucian *VH* 2.35; Lucian *Salt.* 46; Stat. *Silv*. 1.3.83; Lycoph. A*lex.* 793–814; Nic. *Ther.* 828–836.

3 This vase fragment has been a constant topic of discussion over the authors' almost thirty-year friendship and scholarly apprenticeship with Árpád, our *laudandus*. It first came to our attention when it was shown to Peter as an undergraduate by János György Szilágyi, to whose memory this chapter is dedicated. We also want to thank Lauren Heilman for her encouragement and learned observations about lyres and bows, and András Kárpáti for his critical comments on poetic and artistic tradition.

death to Odysseus 'away from/out of the sea' (θάνατος δέ τοι ἐξ ἁλὸς αὐτῷ, 11.134) as the seer Teiresias prophesies regarding the hero's demise in the *Odyssey.*

This chapter will examine this red-figure fragment alongside the surviving textual sources relating to Telegonus' story to assess what it can tell us about the youth's relationship with Odysseus in various ancient versions of the myth. The first section will explore what we know about the fragment's context and iconography, and consider it alongside surviving textual sources relating to Telegonus. The second will examine the place of bows in the Odyssean tradition in the context of father-son relationships and assess what we can learn from the extant testimonia about the relationship between Telegonus, Telemachus and Odysseus. The final section will then discuss the potential relationship between the images depicted on the vase fragment and the version of Telegonus' story represented in Sophocles' *Odysseus Acanthoplex* (*Odysseus Struck-by-a-Spine*), a lost fifth-century tragedy of failed recognition which related the story of the hero's death on Ithaca at the hands of his lost son and his stingray spear. Ultimately this close examination of the Budapest vase fragment will show that it depicts a version of the Telegonus myth that contains hitherto unrecognised details about the youth's relationship with his father, and that it must be considered more seriously alongside the surviving textual sources relating to the *Telegony* and its reception.

1. Telegonus' Weapons: Contextualising the Budapest Fragment (50.101)

The Apulian vase fragment in Budapest first appeared in 1843, when it was mentioned in that year's bulletin of the Instituto di Correspondenza Archeologica in Rome[4]. The fragment may have been found in Sicily, though there is a degree of uncertainty on this point[5]. Welcker was the first to publish a drawing of the fragment in 1851: he tells us that he saw the piece in Naples in the collection of 'G.R. Steuart' – undoubtedly the Scottish antiquarian John Robert Steuart (1780–1848)[6] – and that the latter had obtained the piece from Baron Gabriele Iudica (1760–1835) in Palazzolo Acreide (ancient Akrai) in Sicily[7]. Baron Iudica was the famous excavator of the site of Akrai, and it is possible that the Telegonus fragment is connected to his excavations there, although it was never apparently displayed along with other finds from the site in the local museum in Palazzolo. Nor is it clear whether the fragment was found at Akrai, or collected by Iudica after being discovered elsewhere[8]. We do know, however, that the fragment was in Rome in 1853 when a second drawing of it was published by Overbeck[9].

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4 *Bulletino dell'Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 1843, 81–82; cf. also Welcker 1851, 459–461, vol. 3, pl. XXX 1,2 and Overbeck 1853, 817–819, vol. 2, pl. 33, 21.

5 The first mention of the fragment in the *Bulletino* refers to it as 'siciliano' but there is no further elaboration on whether this reflects the findspot or the location of the perceived workshop to which the fragment was thought to be related.

6 Steuart sold several vases and coins to the British Museum, see https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG98999 (09.04.2025) and was the author of *A description of some ancient monuments, with inscriptions, still existing in Lydia and Phrygia* (London 1842).

7 Welcker 1851, 461 and Szilágyi 1951, 115–116.

8 Iudica published his finds at Akrai in 1819 in *Le antichità di Acre scoperte, descritte ed illustrate, illustrazioni di Giuseppe Politi,* Messina. On the collecting history of the Telegonus fragment, see further Szilágyi 1951, 116–117 and Szilágyi 2016, 87–93.

9 Overbeck 1853, vol. 2, pl. 33, 21.

It was then purchased on the Roman art market at some point c. 1855 by Antal Haan (1827–1888), a Hungarian painter, who visited Rome as a political refugee in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution. He attained a degree of success there for some years, painting society portraits and genre scenes, and also formed a small collection of antiquities[10]. Haan eventually returned to Hungary and left this collection to the Békés County Museum in the market town of Gyula, an institution close to his hometown of Békéscsaba. There the works were first displayed in 1874; their number somewhat winnowed by wartime losses, they eventually entered the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest in 1950. It was here that the Telegonus fragment resurfaced in an article published by the head of the museum's Antiquities Department, János György Szilágyi, who recognised it from the Overbeck drawing, which had been reproduced several times, the fragment itself having until then been written off by scholars as lost[11]. Since then the fragment has been noted by art historians and published in *LIMC* as being the only surviving ancient depiction of Telegonus. It has, however, been ignored by students of Greek poetry and drama[12].

Apulian red-figure fragment attributed to the Parasol Painter (Budapest 50.101)

The fragment, which measures 8.4 × 12 cm, comes from the upper part of a vase, and dates to c. 400 BCE[13]. It is attributed to the Parasol Painter, an artist closely connected to the Sisyphus

[10] On Haan's collecting habits and the history of his collection in Hungary, see Szilágyi 2016, 87–93. From 1874 to 1908, when the Antiquities Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts was founded, Haan's small assemblage of vases, small bronzes and other interesting pieces was the only serious public collection of ancient art from outside Roman Pannonia in Hungary. Haan eventually returned to Italy, dying on Capri. We are very grateful to Árpád M. Nagy for further elucidating the fragment's history in the collection of the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts. For more on the history of collecting in Hungary, see Nagy 2013.

[11] Szilágyi 1951, 113–119.

[12] The fragment is mentioned in Cambitoglou–Trendall 1969, 424–425; Trendall–Cambitoglou 1978, 3–4. 21–22 and Zimmerman 2009, 1191–1192 in the *LIMC* Supplement.

[13] For the measurements, see http://hyperion.szepmuveszeti.hu/en/targy/430 (09.05.2025).

Painter, an early pioneer of Apulian red-figure painting[14]. The style is very close to late fifth-century Attic work, reflecting the strong ties between workshops in Attica, Apulia and Sicily in the first generation of South Italian red-figure vase painting. Two figures are shown. On the left, half of a male youth's face is visible in three-quarter profile, along with the top of his shoulder. He is clad in a himation which is slightly gathered at the shoulder. Next to the top of his head the letters ΤΗΛΕΓΟΝΟΣ have been inscribed on the vase post-firing. Facing him on the right is a clothed female figure. Her face is in profile, though we can only see her nose and the bottom of her chin; her right shoulder and breast are visible, along with a plump upper arm, clothed in what appears to be a sleeveless peplos. Her right elbow and lower arm are lost, but the hand is visible, reaching clearly towards Telegonus on her right. She proffers him a recurve bow, the top half of which is visible, and the wrapped grip of which can be seen under her fingers and thumb. To the left of the woman's head the letters KIPKH have been diagonally inscribed on the vase post-firing[15].

Though little remains of this scene between mother and son, it has plausibly been suggested that this is a departure scene where Circe hands Telegonus a weapon as he prepares to leave their island home Aiaia in search of his father Odysseus[16]. We know from the summaries of the *Telegony* by Proclus and Hyginus that on reaching manhood the youth set out from his homeland in search of Ithaca and Odysseus (see *Telegony* Argumenta 1–2 Bernabé)[17]. Many sources also include two other distinctive elements of Telegonus' journey: a failure of recognition, and a very peculiar spear[18]. When he makes landfall in Ithaca, Telegonus, not realising where he is, begins to raid the houses and drive off the cattle. Odysseus, the old king, leads out his retainers to defend the island against what he thinks is a pirate attack, and Telegonus inadvertently kills him with the famous stingray-barbed spear, which in some versions was given him by Circe[19]. This tragic dénouement thus appears to offer a seemingly literal fulfilment of Teiresias' earlier, mysterious prediction in the *Nekyia* that death will come to the hero »away from« or »out of the sea: | a gentle death who will slay you when you are already burdened under the threshold of a fat old age, | and around you the people will be living happily« (θάνατος δέ τοι ἐξ ἁλὸς αὐτῷ | ἀβληχρὸς μάλα τοῖος ἐλεύσεται, ὅς κέ σε πέφνῃ | γήρᾳ ὕπο λιπαρῷ ἀρημένον· ἀμφὶ δὲ λαοὶ | ὄλβιοι ἔσσονται. Od. 11.134–137)[20]. Teiresias surely saw things clearly enough, but his oracular words leave plenty of ambiguity concerning the ultimate(?) fate of the Ithakan hero[21]. Certainly he will die as a wise and good king who has made his people prosperous and happy; certainly the death that claims him will in some way be the fulfilment or end of his lifelong mariner's quarrel with Poseidon and the sea. There, however, modern interpreters, who tend to read ἐξ ἁλὸς as meaning 'away from the sea/on dry land' (with Odysseus' death thus unfolding among friends and family far from the terror and majesty of the element that defined his career as a wandering hero), part ways with the

[14] On the Parasol Painter's work and his place in the Sisyphus Group, see Stenico 1958, 948; Cambitoglou–Trendall 1969, 424–425; Trendall–Cambitoglou 1978, 3–4. 21–22.

[15] Only the top of the final letter H is visible due to the breakage of the fragment.

[16] Welcker 1851, 461, either mistakenly or because he had failed to notice the inscription above Telegonus' head, suggests that Circe is handing Odysseus a bow on his departure; Szilágyi 1951, 118 also suggests that this is a departure scene.

[17] Bernabé 1996, 101–103. See also Apollod. *Epit.* 7.36; Dictys Cretensis 6.15.

[18] On the importance of the themes of recognition and non-recognition in relation to Odysseus and his sons in the *Telegony* and the *Odyssey*, see especially Arft (2019) 158-179.

[19] See Bernabé 1996, 100–105. See also Apollod. *Epit.* 7.36; Opp. *Hal.* 2.497–505.

[20] All translations are our own.

[21] See Heubeck and Hoekstra 1989, 86 *ad loc*. for the older discussions.

mythological imagination of the *Telegony* poet or his tradition[22]. Inspired it seems by the very lack of clarity in the seer's words, and thinking of the hero's constant feud with the sea-god, the later singers seem to have found a way, through reinterpretation, to resolve (in a manner of speaking!) what looked in the older epic like a gap or empty space filled with potential for tragic irony, tying the loose ends of the story together and bringing Odysseus at the end of his life face to face with his long-lost child. (One could also imagine, of course, a situation in which the *Odyssey*-poet drew a veil of allusive and ironic mystery over a story with which he and his audiences were intensely familiar.) The instinct for tying up loose ends is evident, too, in the bizarre pair of weddings with which the story ended in at least one part of the tradition, as Telegonus conveys Odysseus' body to his mother for burial, after which he weds the presumably rather aged Penelope and Telemachus marries Circe, with everyone living happily ever after in a state of heroized eternal youth[23]. After such elaboration, the story's tragic and dramatic potential, its burden of human error and irony, was there for the taking. As we will see, Sophocles' tragedy very much accomplished this reorchestration of the myth, much in tune with his plotting of other famous myths, most importantly that of Oedipus.

The stingray-barbed spear, that bizarre weapon with its obvious connection to the sea and the traditions of Odysseus' death, plays such a central role in the post-Homeric traditions about Telegonus that the image of the hero on the Budapest fragment becomes very hard to explain. If Telegonus is to kill his father with the stingray-spear, what is the purpose of Circe's gift to him of a bow? The vase painter thus presents us with an iconographical puzzle, one that also impinges perhaps on our understanding of the texts. It is worth exploring in further detail how we might make sense of the painter's very pointed focus on the bow.

2. Telemachus, Telegonus and Bows in the Odyssean Tradition

Perhaps the vase painter's apparent substitution of the bow for the stingray spear is not in fact all that hard to explain. Though bows play no part in the scanty surviving testimonia of Telegonus-epic, it is certainly worth bearing in mind that they play a central role in the wider Odyssean tradition, especially in the context of the recognition of a father-son relationship. This is nowhere clearer than in the final books of the *Odyssey*, when the recognition of the eponymous hero depends upon his ability to string and shoot the famous bow he had left at home twenty years before, as he set out on the journey to Troy. The bow contest of *Odyssey* 21 provides the catalyst for the poem's climactic and bloody end, when Penelope announces that she will marry whoever is able to string and wield Odysseus' great bow. Her disguised husband duly reclaims both his wife and his true identity at the moment he succeeds in this endeavour, where he is also simultaneously cast in the metapoetic role of the aoidos, a creator of epic song, through the Homeric narrator's use of a famous simile that likens the bow itself to a chirping swallow and the hero to an epic singer of tales (Od. 21.404–411):

ἀτὰρ πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς,
αὐτίκ᾽ ἐπεὶ μέγα τόξον ἐβάστασε καὶ ἴδε πάντῃ,

[22] For the *scholia vetera* and Eustathius *ad loc*. see Bernabé 1996, 104–105: what we identify as the »modern« interpretation is already prefigured in the latter.

[23] See Proclus' summary and the testimonium of Eustathius 1796.35 (*Telegonia* test. I Allen; Bernabé 1996, 105 [F5]).

ὡς ὅτ᾽ ἀνὴρ φόρμιγγος ἐπιστάμενος καὶ ἀοιδῆς
ῥηιδίως ἐτάνυσσε νέῳ περὶ κόλλοπι χορδήν,
ἄψας ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἐυστρεφὲς ἔντερον οἰός,
ὣς ἄρ᾽ ἄτερ σπουδῆς τάνυσεν μέγα τόξον Ὀδυσσεύς.
δεξιτερῇ ἄρα χειρὶ λαβὼν πειρήσατο νευρῆς·
ἡ δ᾽ ὑπὸ καλὸν ἄεισε, χελιδόνι εἰκέλη αὐδήν.

> But Odysseus of many devices, as soon as he raised the great bow and examined it all over – just as when a man skilful in lyre and song easily stretches a string around a new peg, fastening the well-twisted sheep gut on both sides – just so then Odysseus strung the great bow without effort. Then holding it in his right hand he tried the string, and it sang sweetly beneath his hand, with a voice like a swallow's.

The slaughter of the suitors that follows permits Odysseus to reclaim his *oikos* in Ithaca and resume his role as husband, father and king on the island. The bow is crucial to this process: it represents a metaphorical reclamation of his past roles, as well as being the literal tool of retribution which clears the household of its parasitical suitors. Through the bow, Odysseus is recognised by others as the hero he is, rather than the beggar in whose guise he initially appeared[24].

But it is not the recognition of Odysseus' role alone that the bow plays a crucial role in the *Odyssey*. It also allows us to recognise that Telemachus is truly his father's son. Telemachus' struggles to live up to the reputation of his father, to accept his own identity as Odysseus' son, and to transition from the social role of a child to an adult are all key themes of the *Odyssey* from its opening four books, which focus on the youth and his plight[25]. In *Odyssey* 21, the questions about whether Telemachus can potentially match Odysseus are finally answered when the youth becomes the first to test his strength and skill with the weapon (21.124–129):

στῆ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἐπ᾽ οὐδὸν ἰὼν καὶ τόξου πειρήτιζε.
τρὶς μέν μιν πελέμιξεν ἐρύσσεσθαι μενεαίνων,
τρὶς δὲ μεθῆκε βίης, ἐπιελπόμενος τό γε θυμῷ,
νευρὴν ἐντανύειν διοϊστεύσειν τε σιδήρου.
καί νύ κε δή ῥ᾽ ἐτάνυσσε βίῃ τὸ τέταρτον ἀνέλκων,
ἀλλ᾽ Ὀδυσεὺς ἀνένευε καὶ ἔσχεθεν ἱέμενόν περ.

> And then he went and stood on the threshold and began to test the bow. Three times, being eager to draw it, he caused it to quiver, and three times he relaxed his grip, though in his heart he longed to string it and shoot his arrow through the iron axes. And now drawing it up on the fourth attempt he would have strung by force, but Odysseus nodded 'no' and held him back, though he was eager.

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[24] For a recent reading of the significance of Odysseus' actions in the bow contest as a means of reclaiming his identity on Ithaca, see especially Ready 2010, 133–157, which also contains many references to previous scholarship.

[25] See e.g. Austin 1969, 45–63; Jones 1988, 496–506; Martin 1993, 222–240; Roisman 1994, 1–22; Olson 1995, 65–90; Heath 2001, 129–157; Petropoulos 2011; Sammons 2019, 48–66.

The narrator is here very clear that it is only Odysseus' gesture which prevents Telemachus from symbolically winning his mother and reclaiming his household. All the others there, apart from he and Odysseus, fail in what they see as a test of strength, meaning that only these two are capable of such a feat (the young man admittedly accomplishing with brute force what his older and wiser father easily accomplishes with *metis*). Though the youth refrains from stringing the bow in this instance, we are left in no doubt of his capabilities. Furthermore, this scene marks the moment when questions about whether Telemachus will be capable of aiding his father in the forthcoming fight to reclaim the household are answered. His testing of the bow confirms the youth's strength, and is swiftly followed by his first kill when the fighting breaks out and he must slaughter Amphinomus to prevent him from injuring Odysseus[26]. Through the bow-contest, Telemachus' transition from a callow youth into a capable adult warrior able to protect and even to match his father is rendered complete.

The significance of the bow in the Odyssean tradition in the context of Odysseus' reclamation of Ithaca and the recognition and confirmation of Telemachus' role as a son capable of matching his father is certainly worth considering in relation to the Budapest Telegonus fragment. Although it is clear that the bow on the fragment cannot literally depict the famous bow of *Odyssey* 21, since that weapon was deliberately left in Ithaca and never went to Troy, a viewer seeing Telegonus, a son of Odysseus, in receipt of a bow may have been reminded of the significant role that such a weapon plays in the *Odyssey*-tradition, especially in the context of recognition and the father-son relationship between the hero and his other son, Telemachus. Moreover, the problem of recognition and the issue of the relationship between father and son are key themes both of the *Telegony* and later versions of the Telegonus myth, as the next section will demonstrate.

3. The Bow as an Odyssean Recognition Token: Odysseus, Telegonus and Telemachus in Sophocles' *Odysseus Acanthoplex*

The leaving of a weapon with a bastard child as a potential future recognition token is a common *topos* in the Greek mythical tradition. Perhaps the most famous example is the sword left by Aegeus to his son Theseus, a weapon which prevents disaster by allowing father and son to recognise one another before the latter is killed by the former[27]. A bow brought from Troy to Aiaia by Odysseus and left with Circe for any future son the hero had yet to meet is thus a potentially attractive addition to a variant of the Telegonus myth. It may even have been a basic motif of the myth, which is preserved only on the Parasol Painter's vase. Or it may represent a later invention[28]. Either way, the Budapest vase fragment, our sole surviving source for the motif of the bow in this particular myth, would then depict the moment of Telegonus' departure in which Circe hands him a bow left by Odysseus with which the youth might hope to be recognised by his father on Ithaca. The bow is especially apt for this role in this case because it is the same weapon with which Odysseus' first son, Telemachus, is recognised as his father's true son and heir on Ithaca. Furthermore, the implicit parallel drawn by the vase painter between Telegonus and his elder brother Telemachus as wielders of Odyssean bows is apt for

[26] *Od*. 22.89–104.
[27] Recounted most fully at Plutarch *Vit. Thes*. 3. Cf. also e.g. Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.16; Ovid *Met*. 7.421–423.
[28] Thanks again to András Kárpáti.

another reason. In the testimonia of the *Telegony* we discover that after Odysseus' death the poem ended with the marriage of Telegonus to Penelope and Telemachus to Circe on Aiaia[29]. In the *Odyssey*, Telemachus' stringing of Odysseus' bow on the fourth attempt would have represented a (hopefully symbolic) winning of his mother as a bride and wife, since these are the terms Penelope herself sets during the bow contest. Of course, this is avoided in Homer's epic in relation to Telemachus – but it is striking that the Budapest vase fragment represents Telegonus, Penelope's future second husband in the *Telegony*, wielding a (presumably) Odyssean bow when the possession and use of such an object is key to re-winning Penelope as a bride in the *Odyssey*.

If this idea of an Odyssean resonance of the bow depicted on the Budapest vase fragment is correct, the question then becomes whether this image relates to any known version of the Telegonus myth[30]. As mentioned earlier, there is no explicit mention of a bow in the scanty sources on the Telegonus myth that remain to us. There is, however, one curious line of Sophocles' lost *Odysseus Acanthoplex* that may be best understood as referring to such a recognition token, as we shall see. Szilágyi downplays the *Acanthoplex* as a possible source for the Parasol Painter, since it is usually assumed that here, too, Telegonus killed his father with the stingray spear and not a bow[31]. But in fact the picture might be less clear cut, and a bow can have functions other than killing. To see this, it is necessary first to think about the place of recognition in the *Odysseus Acanthoplex* more broadly, since it was a central theme of the play which involved both of Odysseus' sons, Telemachus and Telegonus, in a complex web of tragic misrecognitions involving their father on Ithaca[32]. From what we can discern from the

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[29] See Bernabé 1996, 100–105. On the end of the *Telegony* and the various traditions surrounding the death of Odysseus and the marriages which supposedly ensued, see especially Burgess 2014, 111–122 and Burgess 2019, 136–157.

[30] A potential connection to tragedy has been suggested by Welcker 1851, 460–461, Overbeck 1853, 818–819, Szilágyi 1951, 118, though none of these examine the fragment in relation to the evidence for tragic versions of the Telegonus story in any detail.

[31] See Szilágyi 1951, 115 (arguing for a lost textual source or, more likely, an iconographic tradition independent of the texts), and 118.

[32] The *Odysseus Acanthoplex* may also have been known by the name *Niptra* (*The Footwashing*) in antiquity, though there is uncertainty over whether this is an alternate name, a separate play or neither of the above. Certainly Pacuvius' *Niptra* seems to have dealt with at least some elements of the plot of *Odysseus Acanthoplex*: see Pearson 1917, vol. 2, 105–114; Sutton 1984, 88–94; Lloyd-Jones 1996, 236–237; Radt 1999, 373–378; Manuwald 2003, 88–89 and 2011, 213; Schierl 2006, 386–417; Wright 2019, 106–107. For the purposes of this discussion the identity of a potentially Sophoclean *Niptra* is not crucial: what is important is the fact that the *Odysseus Acanthoplex* and Pacuvius' *Niptra*, which is at least partly based on that play, both seem to have dealt with themes related to recognition and father-son relations. Moreover, Sophocles' *Euryalus* – another play that we only know about from later brief testimonia – also seems to have dealt with a narrative about Odysseus' relationship with one of his non-Penelopean sons. According to a brief summary mentioned by Parthenius in his *Erotica Pathemata* (3), after killing the suitors Odysseus travelled to Epirus and there had a relationship with Euippe, the king's daughter, before returning to Ithaca. A son, Euryalus, was born from this union. After reaching manhood Euryalus sought his father in Ithaca bearing recognition tokens. Penelope discovered his identity first and became jealous: she told her husband that the stranger was plotting to murder him and thus Odysseus killed Euryalus before discovering that he was his son. In another brief mention of the play in Eustathius (*Commentary on the Odyssey,* 1796.50) Telemachus in instead named as the killer of Euryalus. Either way, this story of filicide/fratricide thus seems to echo and reverse some of the most prominent motifs of the *Telegony* and its treatment of father-son relationships. On the plot of Sophocles' *Euryalus* see Radt 1999, 194–195; Pearson 1917, vol. 1, 145; Sutton 1984, 46; Lloyd-Jones 1996, 82-83; Wright 2019, 90-91. On the significance of recognition and non-recognition in the Epic Cycle's *Telegony* and *Odyssey*, see especially Arft (2019) 158-179.

testimonia and fragments, the play also involved another most Sophoclean device, a misunderstood and misinterpreted oracle. This prophetic message came from Dodona and informed Odysseus that he will be killed by one of his sons; he fails to recognise that Telemachus (his 'only' son) is not the son in question, and so probably banishes him from Ithaca in an attempt to avoid fate[33]. Soon Telegonus arrives in Ithaca in search of his father but – in an echo of Odysseus' own arrival back home at *Odyssey* 13.187–189 – does not at first realise what island he has landed on. Odysseus also fails to recognise his bastard son and assumes the stranger who has just arrived by sea means to attack his homeland: a confrontation ensues, and Odysseus is fatally wounded by a stingray-barbed weapon wielded by Telegonus[34]. His death, however, does not seem to have been quick: similarly to Heracles' fate in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, the hero painfully lingered before he passed away, and was allotted time on stage to bemoan his painful wound, just as the hero of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is[35]. It was presumably during these dying scenes that Telegonus' true identity was finally recognised and Odysseus' realisation that Telegonus, not Telemachus, is the patricidal son of which the oracle from Dodona warned, took place.

The question of how this tragic recognition occurred in Sophocles remains, but the use of a defined recognition token to confirm Telegonus' identity would accord with many other recognition scenes in fifth-century tragedy[36]. In this case, a bow left on Aiaia with Circe for adult Telegonus, as depicted on the Budapest fragment, would be an ideal device by which father and son might recognise one another. Moreover, such a choice of recognition token encodes within it a high degree of Sophoclean irony, since the spectacle of Odysseus and his son with a bow would surely remind the audience of the famous weapon of *Odyssey* 21, with which Telemachus – the son mistakenly banished in this play for fear of his supposed patricidal intentions – had proved himself to be his father's son. Moreover, the possible parallels this object would create with Sophocles' *Philoctetes* are also tantalising. Matthew Wright has recently noted how closely connected some of the main themes of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and *Odysseus Acanthoplex* seem to be and has suggested that »it is reasonable to assume that they formed some sort of intertextual dialogue« with one another, not least because how Odysseus' injured plight in the latter play provides an uncanny echo and reversal of his role in the former[37]. The inclusion of Telegonus' bow in the *Odysseus Acanthoplex* would further reinforce these tragic connections given Odysseus' role in relation to Philoctetes' fateful bow in the play bearing his name.

Moreover, the inclusion of a bow as a recognition token in the *Odysseus Acanthoplex* also potentially sheds light on a fragment of the play which has long proved an interpretative crux.

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[33] The oracle of Dodona is referred to in fragments 455. 456. 460. 461. The synopsis of the Telegonus story at Hyginus *Fab.* 127 (long thought dependent on Sophocles' play: see Hartmann 1917, 115–122 and West 2013, 303 mentions that Odysseus had received an oracle warning he would die at the hands of his son, a detail which seems to accord with the fragments of the *Odysseus Acanthoplex.* On Odysseus' mistaken fear of Telemachus and the latter's possible banishment, see Pearson 1917, vol. 2, 109–110; Post 1922, 30–31; Sutton 1984, 91l; West 2013, 303.

[34] Certainly the play's name – *Acanthoplex* ('Struck-by-a-Spine') – makes clear that the stingray barb was the mode of Odysseus' death on Ithaca. There is no reason that this weapon could not have been the familiar stingray spear in Sophocles' play, though the use of a bow with stingray-barbed arrows is another potential option if Telegonus was also associated with that weapon in this version of the myth.

[35] This is suggested by Cic. *Tusc*. 2.48 ff. See Pearson, 1917, vol. 2, 110; Sutton 1984, 92; Wright 2019, 107.

[36] See e.g. Aristotle's long discussion of tragic recognition via tokens at *Poetics* 1454b19–1455a21.

[37] Wright 2019, 107. West 2013, 292 also notes »points of contact« between these two Sophoclean plays.

Fragment 453 Radt, derived from a scholion on the *Grammar* of Dionysius Thrax, preserves a question that runs as follows: ποδαπὸν τὸ δῶρον ἀμφὶ φαιδίμοις ἔχων | ὤμοις (»where does the gift on your glorious shoulders come from?«). This fragment has usually been thought to refer to the oar which Teiresias tells Odysseus to carry until he meets men who mistake it for a winnowing fan in *Odyssey* 11.119–137, and has been connected with another surviving line from the play, fragment 454 Radt, which refers to Teiresias' prophecy explicitly: ὤμοις ἀθηρόβρωτον ὄργανον φέρων (»bearing a tool for winnowing on my shoulders«)[38]. The repetition of the word ὤμοις in both fragments has led to this connection, though in the first fragment the difficulties it creates in understanding who is asking the question posed, and why the oar/winnowing fan might be called a gift (δῶρον), have long been noted[39]. The latter issue has proved a particular concern: for example, Lloyd-Jones asked: »Why is the oar called a gift?« and concluded that »The word may be corrupt«[40].

Attempts to emend δῶρον have been made, but thus far have not proved entirely convincing. Marshall rightly notes that though the repetition of ὤμοις in fragments 453 and 454 has naturally led to attempts to connect the two, this is not necessarily a strong reason to do so, particularly as this creates problems in understanding why the oar should be called a gift. His solution is to suggest that δῶρον should be emended to read δοῦρας: the line would then refer to Telegonus' stingray-barbed spear[41]. There are, however, no attested uses of this form at the time Sophocles is writing. Another interpretation, building on Marshall's hunch that this line does not refer to Odysseus' oar, but to a weapon belonging to Telegonus, is also possible. If the Budapest vase fragment reflects a version of the Telegonus myth familiar to Sophocles, the »gift« referred to in this line may be the bow gifted to his bastard son via Circe and relied upon as an eventual recognition token. This line would therefore relate to this moment of recognition, as the dying Odysseus recognises the weapon left to his as-yet-unknown son and begins to understand that the patricidal oracle from Dodona has come true after all. (The sudden revelation that the bow is a recognition token rather than the murder weapon would itself have borne a certain irony.) This interpretation would also invoke further elements of Sophoclean irony because the line would contain a potential allusion to the moment Odysseus sets forth to confront Circe after catching sight of her at her loom at *Odyssey* 10.261–262. There he tells us that he arms himself with a sword and a bow slung around his shoulders (ξίφος ἀργυρόηλον | **ὤμοιιν** βαλόμην, μέγα χάλκεον, **ἀμφὶ δὲ τόξα**): this is the bow he presumably left for Telegonus, and this initial approach to his mother Circe is what the audience are now potentially reminded of in Odysseus' dying recognition of their son.

Of course, we cannot be certain that the image of Telegonus on the Budapest fragment relates to Sophocles' play, but given the prevalence of depictions from tragedy on late fifth-century South Italian vases, this is certainly an attractive prospect. The evidence for the explosive spread of Attic theatre, and the plays of the three canonical tragedians in particular, on South Italian vases is overwhelming, and Sicily in particular seems to have been a major scene for the expansion of theatrical culture. If the fragment came out of the ground at Palazzo Acreide,

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[38] This line is preserved in a scholion on *Od.*11.128. The mention of »glorious shoulders« in fragment 453 and »shoulders« in fragment 454 recalls *Od.*11.126–128 (see Pearson 1917, vol. 2, 110–111).

[39] This suspicion of δῶρον seems to begin with Nauck 1889, 230, who declares: »*verba vix sana*«. See Pearson 1917, vol. 2, 111 for a summary of early suggested emendations, none of which he considers convincing; cf. Radt 1999, 375; Marshall 2000, 1–8.

[40] Lloyd-Jones 1996, 239.

[41] Marshall 2000, 2–3.

it certainly would have been at home there[42]. Szilágyi has emphasised the interest shown by the painters to whose group the Budapest fragment belongs in images of Attic tragedy and its plots[43]. The significance of Telegonus as a mythic ancestor of various Italian peoples and as a crucial link between Odysseus and the West may also have rendered depictions of the young man and his mother Circe, whose home Aiaia was often localised in Italy, appealing in a western Mediterranean or Italiot context[44]. Certainly the depiction of the bow on the Budapest fragment seems to refer to a version of the Telegonus myth which recalls and tragically inflects the scene of Odysseus and Telemachus' testing of the bow in *Odyssey* 21 and presents us with tantalising new evidence that the ancient Greek *Telegony* tradition may have been even more complicated than previously thought.

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[42] On the spread of Attic drama particularly in Italy and Sicily, see most importantly Bosher 2012.

[43] Szilágyi 1951, 118.

[44] See e.g. Hes. *Theog*. 1111–1114; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom*. 4.45.1; Hor. *Odes* 3.29.8; Ov. *Fast*. 3.87; 4.63; Hyg. *Fab*. 127; Stat. *Silv*. 1.3.83; Sil. *Pun*. 12.526 on the connections between Telegonus and various Italian ancestors. On the traditions localising Circe in Italy, see Lightfoot 2022, 69–81. On the *Telegony* and the traditions surrounding Odysseus' burial and his role in Italy, see Burgess 2014, 111–122 and Burgess 2019, 136–157.

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