

Some thoughts on the *Eusyene* fragment (P.Oxy. LXXXIII 5356)

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Abstract

The new narrative fragment entitled *Eusyene* (P.Oxy. LXXXIII 5356) features a named heroine and contains indications of a novelistic plot, but it is too brief and broken to allow more than a faint glimpse into the work to which it belongs. The present paper proposes a number of textual improvements and contributes to the contextualisation of the *Eusyene* within the large body of Greek fictitious narrative literature by suggesting a parallel text that may hold clues to the broader plot of the new piece and provoke thought about its genre.

Keywords

Novel, Parthenios, Oxyrhynchus Papyri

Introduction

The new short fragmentary narrative, which was given the title *Eusyene* by its editor (P. J. Parsons; P.Oxy. LXXXIII 5356), is the latest addition to a number of novelistic narratives known exclusively from papyri.¹ The present article contributes to its study by suggesting a number of improvements to the text and by furthering its interpretation within the context of Greek prose narrative literature.

The new fragment is a small papyrus scrap of 17.5 x 12 cm, written in an informal hand. It is dated to the 3rd or 4th cent. A.D. on paleographical grounds. It only comprises eighteen lines, which are mostly fragmentary, but adequately legible to reveal plot elements that point to the direction of the novel. Here is a summary of the action: a woman called Eusyene is in the company of two men who are talking (one is a «father»), while another character has just left the scene. Eusyene leaves to visit a spring accompanied by attendants. The spring receives a brief but idyllic description, before turning

¹ These are collected in López Martínez 1998. Texts made known after this publication include P.Oxy. LXX 4762 (an ass story); P.Oxy. LXXI 4811 (*Panionis*); P.Oxy. LXXXI 5264 (on a queen and her pyramids).

into what appears to be a scene of violent action, at which point the papyrus is very fragmented. According to Parsons' reconstruction, Eusyene falls victim to abduction by twenty brigands, who were previously watching her, waiting for the right opportunity to attack. The style of the narration is vivid, and the action appears to move fast.

The name Εὐσὴνη

The name of the female protagonist is perhaps the most striking element of the piece. It is unattested, and its etymology is unclear. The following is a list of words that are close in sound to the personal name.

Σὴνη, mod. Aswan (city in Egypt)

Εὐσὴνη (town in ancient Pontos)

σὴνη· ἡ δερματοθήκη (Suda)

σuhnía (καὶ ὕhnía) «stupidity»

σuhnía· παραχή, ἀηδία, ἀπὸ τῶν συῶν (Hsch.)

σuanía· λoidopía. καὶ ἡ διὰ χειρὸς μάχη (Hsch.)

σύειος «of swine»

σύϊνος / εὐσύϊνος = οἰσύϊνος «of osier», «of wickerwork» (for weapons)

σύαινα «sow» (sea-fish)

Εὐσύης (personal name, Ephesos, 2nd cent. B.C.)

Συάνα (personal name, Plataiai, 2nd cent. B.C.)

As noted recently,² the similarity of the personal name Εὐσὴνη to vocabulary related to «stupidity» and «swine» is irrelevant for a novelistic character who seems to belong to a privileged class (judging by her leisurely visit to a spring in the company of attendants), as is the norm for novelistic heroines. The above-listed Suda entry σὴνη, the noun σύαινα and adjective σύϊνος can hardly be relevant either. Scholars have also pointed out the similarity of the name Εὐσὴνη to the toponyms Σὴνη (which is mentioned repeatedly by Heliodoros)³ and Εὐσὴνη, as well as to the anthroponym Εὐσύης.⁴ It is worth adding to the list the name Συάνα, which appears on a votive inscription from Plataiai (not included in IG VII) that cites numerous female names in Doric form

² Kádas 2019, 35.

³ Parsons.

⁴ Kádas *ibidem*.

(e.g. Νικαρέτα, Ξανθίππα, Μναςάρχα), followed by offerings (φιάλην, λαμπάδα κτλ.).⁵ Εὐσύνη appears to be a compound of the Ionic form of this name, with the auspicious prefix Εὐ-.⁶

Filling some gaps

In what follows, I review the text of the *Eusyene* line by line and offer some textual and interpretive suggestions. For reasons of convenience, I reproduce here Parsons' edition, on which my commentary is based.⁷

τεπεῖγον ἐξανέστη καὶ ἀπιὼν ὄχγετο. καὶ [ου] μετ' οὐ πολὺ
 καὶ ἡ Εὐσύνη τὸν [. . .] κην διαλεγόμενον τῷ πατρὶ ἐάσασα
 ἦκεν ἐπὶ τὴν πηγὴν[ν. ἐ]νθάδε ὕδωρ ἐξήει [. . .] καὶ διαυγές. καὶ
 ἡ μὲν ἐπεθεῖτο τὰς πηγὰς ἐσ[τῶσ]α μετὰ [τι]νων δύο ἄλλων
 5 . . .] .ς [θαλ]αμηπόλων καὶ πάνυ [.] η .εἰ προσδραμόν-
 τ εἴ]κοσι τὸν ἀριθμὸν οὐκ[.] τονα . .ε[]βως
] Εὐσύνην εκπαυ[c.12]ηρουν καιρον . . . [] . .
]χόμενοι .[c.16] .βουλῆς αὐτοῖς προς
] . . θαλαμηπόλ . . .
 10]εξ ἀπέκτειναν
] .αθέμενοι την
] .ιν . . . και . . . τριν . . .
] μεν διὰ τινων
] .σκληρῶν τε [.]
 15] .ροι . . δετο . . [.]
] τοσανα[.]
]ως ἐγνω [.]
] ε
] . [.]

2 [. . .] κην Parsons proposes to supplement a Persian name such as [Ἄρσ]άκην or [Μαζ]άκην. It is tempting to think that the name belongs to the novel's male hero, whom Eusyene

⁵ Richardson 1891, 407-409, 14 (Σ[υ]άνα).

⁶ This prefix is commonly found in names in the Hellenistic period (cf. Zgusta 1984, 178).

⁷ I have also studied the text from a digital scan of the papyrus, as well as the original kept in the Sackler Papyrology Room in Oxford. Thanks go to Dr. Daniela Colomo for making both possible.

leaves conversing with (her? his?) father. It would emerge, then, that a woman of Greek name is matched with a Persian man. The supposed ethnic origin of Eusyene in the story is hard to determine; heroines of Greek novels routinely bear good Greek names, whatever their supposed ethnicity (cf. Heliodoros' Ethiopian Charikleia and Achilles Tatios' Phoinician Leukippe). Assuming that Eusyene is Greek (or, in any case, not Persian), we may note that ethnically mixed marriages are not alien to the novel, as shows the culmination of Heliodoros' plot (Charikleia marries Theagenes, a Greek).

3. [. . .] καὶ διαυγές Parsons supplements π[ολ]ύ, but the space seems to allow for an additional letter before the opening bracket, hence another possible supplement is γλ[υκ]ύ. Cf. Athen. 11.7.11: ψυχρὸν δ' ἐστὶν ὕδωρ καὶ γλυκὸ καὶ καθαρὸν.

4 ἐπεθεῖτο The imperfect tense is suitable; the verb (a suggestion of W. B. Henry) is not attested, but the occurrence of a new compound cannot be excluded. We might also consider the past tense ἐθέασατο, which would fit the space, although it would not be as well suited to the descriptive tone of the passage.

5 καὶ πάνυ [.]η .ξα As an alternative to Parsons' suggested supplement καὶ πάνυ [ἐπίχαρις ἦν] ἡ θεά, we may consider the supplement καὶ πάνυ [μὲν ἤδετο τῆ] θεά.

The last word of l. 5 (προσδραμόν[τ[ε]ς) must start a new sentence, referring to the appearance of a number of hostile intruders on the scene. Due to the fragmentariness of the text, their identity remains uncertain.

6 εἴκοσι τὸν ἀριθμὸν οἰκ[After οἰκ[the text is illegible for a space equivalent to ca. twelve letters. Possible supplements for οἰκ[include οἰκ[έται : οἱ Κ[όλχοι : οἱ Κ[άσπιοι : οἱ Κ[ελτοί : οἰκ[οῦντες : οἱ + genitive. Among these possibilities, Parsons prefers the combination of article + ethnic (e.g. οἱ Κ[όλχοι). But the definite article would seem ill at place here. From the point of view of grammar, it is preferable to have it somewhere in the lacuna before the numeral (εἴκοσι), if at all, and not after it (cf. Thuc. 8. 69. 4: τούτων δὲ διατεταγμένων οὕτως ἐλθόντες οἱ τετρακόσιοι μετὰ ξιφιδίου ἀφανοῦς ἕκαστος, καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι καὶ ἑκατὸν μετ' αὐτῶν [Ἑλληνας] νεανίσκοι). Parsons' other suggestion, οἱ + genitive of the name of the group's commander, would also sound grammatically awkward. I would thus prefer to supplement οἰκ[έται. This reading gains support from the following parallels: Alciphron. 3. 7. 3: ἐπέστη ποθὲν Συμκρίνης ὁ δύστροπος καὶ δύσκολος· εἶπετο δ' αὐτῷ πλῆθος οἰκετῶν, οἱ δραμόντες ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ὄρμησαν. / Ach. Tat. 2. 16. 2: Καλλισθένης ... δείκνυσιν ἐν τῶν οἰκετῶν τὴν κόρην, ὃς ἦν αὐτῷ πιστότατος, καὶ κελεύει ληστὰς ἐπ' αὐτὴν συγκροτῆσαι, καταλέξας τὸν τρόπον τῆς ἀρπαγῆς. In the first passage, which belongs to a letter from Alkiphron's collection, the narrator describes an attack on him and his party of parasites by slaves. In Achilles Tatios, a slave is entrusted with the coordination of the abduction of a maiden.⁸

⁸ An additional parallel is provided by Parsons (Hld. 10. 30. 6: ὑπρέται προσδραμόντες), in which, however, the participle does not have a hostile sense (and instead of οἰκέται, we have the synonymous ὑπρέται). For προστρέχω with hostile purpose, cf. X., Cyr. 5. 4. 47.

7 εκπαυ[c. 12]ηρουν W. B. Henry proposed ἐκ πάν[των παρετ]ήρουν. This supplement may be a little too short for the available space, and the sense of ἐκ πάν[των is rather unsatisfactory («from all those present at the scene, [they] were watching (Eusyene)»; if this were the desired sense, then ἐκ πασῶν might have been preferable, given that there is only mention of Eusyene and her servant women as being present at the scene). A better solution might be to supplement either ἐκ παυ[τὸς τόπου ἐτ]ήρουν, or ἐκ παυ[τὸς τρόπου ἐτ]ήρουν «[they] were watching (Eusyene) “from every spot” or “in every way”» – provided that our author allowed the hiatus (-ου ἐ-).⁹

The following reconstruction emerges, from the end of l. 5 to the beginning of l. 9 of the text (from the end of l. 7, I print a selection from Parsons' proposed supplements of the damaged text): Προσδραμόν[τες δὲ εἵκοσι τὸν ἀριθμὸν οἰκ[έται ἐφύλατ]τον ἀ[κρ]ε[ι]β[ῶς].[Καὶ τὴν] Εὐσύνην ἐκ παυ[τὸς τόπου ἐτ]ήρουν, καιρὸν [ἐπιχειρήσεως?] (ἐκ)δε[χόμενοι, κ[αὶ ὁ τρόπος τῆς ἐπ]ιβουλῆς αὐτοῖς προσ|[φυέστατος?

The text is very fragmentary from l. 9 onwards. Parsons proposes the sense: «They seized and killed the attendants, and mounting Eusyene on a horse (camel) they rode off through [...]» The abduction scene is the product of an extensive supplement of ll. 11-12: ἀ]ναθέμενοι τὴν [[Εὐσύνην ἐφ' ἵππον?].¹⁰ The supplement is an attractive one, given the overall novelistic tone of the fragment, and the popularity of the abduction theme in the Greek and Roman novel; cf. the abduction of Kalligone in Achilles Tatios (2. 16. 2), of Chloe in Longos (twice, by Methymnian youths at 2. 20 and by a herdsman at 4. 28), and of Charite by robbers in Apuleius (4. 27. 2 ff.). For a woman being placed on a horse, a parallel is found in Lucian (*Tox.* 52). The diction used in Parsons' supplement finds support in the following parallel from Plutarch's report of Ktesias' account of a (failed) attempt to save the life of Kyros the Younger (*Artax.* 11. 7): τὸν δὲ Κῦρον ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς ἀναφέροντα χαλεπῶς καὶ μόλις εὐνοῦχοί τινες ὀλίγοι παρόντες ἐπεχείρουν ἐπ' ἄλλον ἵππον ἀναθέσθαι καὶ σώζειν. Parsons' alternative suggestion «camel» is less likely than «horse»; the riding of camels is indeed evoked in the novels (cf. Hld. 10. 5. 2: καμηλίτης), and a camel might offer a welcome exotic touch, but horses are more appropriate for the fast movement required in an abduction. The kidnap of Eusyene may signal the beginning of adventures, so we are perhaps early in the story (but not at the very beginning).

14 σκληρῶν As Parsons notes, the adjective may refer to men or terrain. A parallel for the former use is found in Longos (2. 14. 4: Οἱ δὲ ἀντείχοντο σκληροὶ γέροντες καὶ χεῖρας ἐκ γεωργικῶν ἔργων ἰσχυρὰς ἔχοντες). The adjective is used for the divine in Chariton (8. 6. 1: σκληροῦ δαίμονος).

⁹ Reeve's survey (1971) on hiatus in the Greek novelists has demonstrated that although most kinds of hiatus were avoided, there are various exceptions. In the case of fragments, the lack of context makes it hard to discern the author's preferences.

¹⁰ Parsons also suggests διαθέμενοι, in which case we might supplement δι]αθέμενοι τὴν| λείαν. The sense would be that the bandits divided up spoils; but what spoils would an attack on a party of women on a leisurely outing bring?

17]ως ἔγνω [If we read ὡς ἔγνω, this may be the moment that the male hero (or the «father» of l. 2) learns of the attack on the women and the kidnap.

A parallel text

The small *Eusyene* fragment contains several elements that are typical of the love-adventure novel: a central female heroine, handmaids, a *locus amoenus*, killing, and probably an abduction, which emerges from Parsons' appealing reconstruction of ll. 11-12. However, the abduction of Eusyene – assuming that this is the theme of the fragmentary lines – is not only reminiscent of similar events in the extant novels, but also finds a parallel in a text of a rather different kind. The eighth piece from Parthenios' collection of stories entitled Ἐρωτικὰ Παθήματα (*The sorrows of love*) tells the story of Herippe, who is abducted at Miletus by a Celtic raider, has the option to return to her husband, but betrays him and is put to death for perfidy. According to the “manchette” attached to Parthenios VIII, the source of this story, which may echo a historical event (the incursion of Gauls into Greece and Asia Minor, including Miletus, in the early 3rd cent. B.C.), is a collection of stories entitled Μυθικὴ Συναγωγή by Aristodemos of Nysa (*FGrH* 22; 2nd -1st cent. B.C.). Here is the beginning of the story that concerns Herippe's abduction:

Ὅτε δὲ οἱ Γαλάται κατέδραμον τὴν Ἰωνίαν καὶ τὰς πόλεις ἐπόρθουν, ἐν Μιλήτῳ Θεσμοφορίων ὄντων καὶ συνηθροισμένων <τῶν> γυναικῶν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, ὃ βραχὺ τῆς πόλεως ἀπέχει, ἀποσπασθέν τι μέρος τοῦ βαρβαρικοῦ διήλθεν εἰς τὴν Μιλησίαν καὶ ἐξαπιναίως ἐπιδραμὸν ἀνεῖλε τὰς γυναῖκας. Ἔνθα δὴ τὰς μὲν ἐρρύσαντο πολὺ ἀργύριον τε καὶ χρυσίον ἀντιδόντες· τινὲς δὲ, τῶν βαρβάρων αὐταῖς οἰκειωθέντων, ἀπήχθησαν, ἐν δὲ αὐταῖς καὶ Ἡρίππη, γυνὴ ἢ Ξάνθου, ἀνδρὸς ἐν Μιλήτῳ πάνυ δοκίμου γένους τε τοῦ πρώτου, παιδίον ἀπολιποῦσα διετέξ.

«During the invasion of Ionia by the Gauls and the devastation by them of the Ionian cities, it happened that on one occasion at Miletus, the feast of the Thesmophoria was taking place, and the women of the city were congregated in temple a little way outside the town. At that time a part of the barbarian army had become separated from the main body and had entered the territory of Miletus; and there, by a sudden raid, it carried off the women. Some of them were ransomed for large sums of silver and gold, but there were others to whom the barbarians became closely attached, and these were carried away: among these latter was one Herippe, the wife of Xanthus, a man of high repute and of noble birth among the men of Miletus, and she left behind her a child two years old». (transl. Gaselee)

Lightfoot tentatively calls Parthenios' narrative a «miniature, parodic novel»; indeed the lack of mythological motifs and the morally weighted conclusion point to the genre of the novel.¹¹ Herippe's story is thought to contain fictionalised historical elements; some novels, too, evoke historical events and persons (the evocation of late 5th cent. Greek history in Chariton's novel is a good example of this), although this is not true of all novels. Furthermore, as noted already, an attack by strange men on a woman leading up to an abduction is a typical novelistic incident, and is found in both Parthenios' tale and the *Eusyene* fragment; incidentally, the two texts use similar diction for this incident (Προσδραμόν|τρ[ες, *Eusyene* ll. 5-6; ἐπιδραμόν, Parthenios). On the other hand, the little that we have of the *Eusyene* suggests a plot that differs considerably from that of Parthenios' tale, most importantly with respect to the treatment of the aforementioned abduction theme. In Parthenios, the kidnap does not happen in a *locus amoenus*, like in the *Eusyene*, but inside a temple (in Miletus) during a religious celebration. Of course, since we have too little of the *Eusyene*, it is hard to guess what we may be missing (for example, whether this narrative too preserved an echo of historical events). It would be impossible to substantiate an intertextual connection between our fragment and Parthenios' tale. Still, Parthenios' narrative alerts us to the fact that the extant novels is not the exclusive literary form for female heroines in love-related adventures. Fictitious narratives that feature alluring females in adventure settings also come in other, indeed shorter forms. The fast narrative pace of the *Eusyene*, though not inconsistent with a long novel, would also be consistent with a shorter form of narrative. This provokes some thought about the possibilities of generic classification of the *Eusyene*.

Questions of genre affect the interpretation of several fragmentary narratives on papyri (to name one example, another recently published fragment, the *Panionis* [P.Oxy. LXXI 4811], has invited discussion of its connection with declamation¹²). In the case of the *Eusyene*, the comparison to Parthenios' tale opens up a rich field of possible intergeneric connections. There is no lack of studies of the similarities between the Ἐρωτικὰ Παθήματα and the novels, and these studies take into account the influence of mythical and historiographical narratives. The link between local myths (such as are found in Parthenios' stories) and the novel was noticed a long time ago,¹³ and there have followed studies on thematic motifs common to Parthenios and the novel (historical background, oracles, wars, bandits, captures).¹⁴ Such a mixing of traditions in literary texts can lead to generic ambivalence, which can greatly affect the interpretation of fragmentary texts that lack sufficient context to confirm genre.

¹¹ Lightfoot 1999, 257; 228.

¹² See further Kanavou 2018.

¹³ Lavagnini 1921.

¹⁴ E.g. Giangrande 1962, 148-149; Ruiz-Montero 1996, 60-61; Lightfoot 1999, 256-263. See also Francese 2001, 93-99.

A good example of such generic ambivalence is P.Mich. inv. 3793 (*Pamphilos and Eurydike*). This papyrus, now dated to the 1st cent. B.C.,¹⁵ contains two columns and a total of 27 lines of a prose narrative, which is very close to the celebrated episode of Pyramus and Thisbe (Ovid., *Met.* 4. 55-166). Like the *Eusyene*, the P.Mich narrative mentions a boy, a girl and a spring (κρήνην, col. 2 l. 8), hinting at a *locus amoenus* which will become the setting of unpleasant events.¹⁶ The hero of P.Mich., like a good novelistic hero, is the handsomest and bravest of all youths (col. 1 ll. 8-9), and its story (unlike Parthenios VIII) appears to have no footing in historical reality. On the other hand, if *Pamphilos and Eurydike* replicated the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, it presumably had a tragic ending, and thus it was less than a perfect fit for the genre of the romantic novel, which is associated with happy endings; but perhaps we are dealing with an exception to that rule,¹⁷ or the pair of Pamphilos and Eurydike are only secondary heroes in a larger novel, or they are indeed the protagonists, and their fate deviates from that of Pyramus and Thisbe.¹⁸ Whichever possibility is correct, the narrative of P.Mich. attests to the transformation of a mythical tale into a fictional prose narrative. In Stramaglia's sensible conclusion, *Pamphilos and Eurydike* is a love story with the stamp of the novelistic genre («un “διήγημα erotico” in sé concluso, d'impronta – diremmo oggi – “novellistica”»). Of particular interest is Stramaglia's further assumption, given the uncertainty about the original length of the P.Mich. narrative, that *Pamphilos and Eurydike* may have formed part of a collection like Parthenios' Ἐρωτικὰ Παθήματα or Konon's Διηγήσεις or Plutarch's Ἐρωτικοὶ Διηγήσεις, or of a collection of metamorphosis stories.¹⁹ Similarly, our *Eusyene* fragment may originate in a relatively short narrative of fictional or fictionalised content, like the ones that form part of the above-mentioned collections, and not in a lengthy novel.

The above remarks lead to no definitive conclusion about the genre of the *Eusyene*, but alert us to the variety of narrative forms that novelistic themes can take, as well as to the need for consideration of the inherent links between novel, mythography and historiography when interpreting prose narrative fragments.

¹⁵ See the relevant arguments of Gabriella Messeri ap. Stramaglia 2001, 81-82.

¹⁶ The use of a *locus amoenus* as a setting for violent action (kidnap and even murder) is familiar literary practice, especially in poetic retellings of traditional myths (cf. Apuleius 8.18-21). See the references collected in Haß 1998, 142; 145. Achilles Tatios' novel opens with the *ekphrasis* of a painting of Europa's rape from a flowery meadow.

¹⁷ On the possibility of bad endings for romantic novels, see Kanavou (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Thus Stramaglia 2001, 94.

¹⁹ Stramaglia 2001, 97.

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