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THE SETTING OF EURIPIDES' *ANDROMACHE*: AN INQUIRY ABOUT THETIDEION¹

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ABSTRACT - This paper shows that Euripides' *Andromache* is set in Thetideion, a toponym whose precise 'nature' has been much discussed. Euripides uses the toponym "Thetideion" in reference to the cult of Thetis near Pharsalus: the paper tries to deal with this matter by paying a special attention to the presence and the role of Thetideion in the Euripidean drama and to other primary and secondary sources. The analysis of the sources leads to the conclusion that Thetideion was the name given by the Thesalian people both to a sanctuary to Thetis and to a little territory nearby Pharsalus. They chose that name in memory of the wedding between Peleus and Thetis.

KEYWORDS - Euripides; *Andromache*; Thetideion; setting; polis; sanctuary

Euripides' *Andromache* begins with a suppliant scene where Andromache goes to Thetis' shrine³ and asks her protection⁴. This beginning is common to the prologues of other Euripidean tragedies: a supplication⁵ is made to the altar of Zeus *agoraios* in the *Heraklides*; to the altar of Zeus in the *Heracles* and to the

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³ Thetis was one of the Nereids, daughter of Nereus and Doris (e.g. Hes. *Th.* 240-244; Hom. *Il.* 1. 358; 18. 36; Pind. *P.* 3. 92; Apollod. 1. 11; for a general summary of the literary sources about the goddess see RE s.v. *Thetis*, coll. 218-221). In the *Iliad*, Thetis is a nurturing mother (*kourotrophos*) and protective deity (Slatkin 1991: 7), but she is also quite human (e.g. Griffin 1980: 190-191). The nurturing function of the goddess, symbolized by the image of the vegetal growth, as e.g. at Hom., *Il.* 18. 437-438, concerns the relationship between the goddess herself and the *kouros* (Slatkin 1991: 41, n. 26; Merkelbach 1971: 80; Vidal-Naquet 1968: 947-949). Thetis's *kourotrophic* function was discussed and compared with the one of Cheiron by E. Aston (2009).

⁴ According to Euripides, Thetis is the Nereid *par excellence*: he often underlines her leading role among her sisters and her strong relationship with the sea (Jouan 1966). This strong relationship is evident in her epithet θαλασσία, given by Euripides exclusively to her: *Andr.* 17; fr. 885 N: ὦ παῖ τῆς θαλασσίας θεοῦ (Matthiae 1829 ad fr. 199: *sermo spectat ad Achillem*; Kannicht ad loc.); almost analogous to this clause and always referred to Achilles, see also Eur. *IA* 836: ὦ θεᾶς παῖ ποντίας Νηρηΐδος; [Eur.] *Rh.* 974: πένθος τῆς θαλασσίας θεοῦ [scil. *Thetidos*]. Liapis 2012 ad loc. cites the parody of this verse made by Aristophanes at *Ran.* 840.

⁵ Among the recent works about the *biketeia*, for a complete introduction see Naiden 2006.