

Sabine FÖLLINGER, Aischylos. Meister der griechischen Tragödie. München: C.H. Beck 2009, 224 S., 5 Stammtafeln und 5 Abb. im Text

This book is designed to introduce Aeschylus to students and general readers who may not have much if any previous knowledge of Greek drama or of the ancient world generally. After a brief introduction, it begins with a series of short essays (mostly of 2-4 pages each) on various features of Greek tragedy, of Aeschylus' work and of its background; there follow chapters on the individual dramas (the *Oresteia* being treated as a single unit), a quick glance at Aeschylus' satyr-dramas (focusing on *Diktyoulokoï*) and at his fragmentary plays (focusing on the Achilles trilogy and *Niobe*), and a chapter on reception which in twelve pages manages to range very widely, though no productions or adaptations are mentioned more recent than 1986. Evidently as a matter of policy, there are no footnotes and very few specific references to modern scholarly literature, but the concluding bibliography (pp. 201-216) provides a good guide to further reading.

Each of the chapters on individual dramas consists of a brief summary of the play ("Inhalt"), a general discussion of it ("Einführung"), and a more detailed "reading" ("Interpretation"). *Prometheus Bound*, very properly, is included; in her discussion of the question of authenticity (pp. 168-9) Föllinger does not take sides, but in her study of the play itself she consistently refers to the author as Aeschylus, and her comments on issues relevant to the authenticity debate show clearly that this is no oversight (yet the paragraph on this question in the bibliography mentions no work on the pro-authenticity side of the debate).

In many ways this book will be found enlightening and challenging. Several of the introductory essays give just the kind of orientation that the target readership will need – for example on tragedy's treatment of myth (pp. 24-26), on the key features of Greek religion and some still popular misconceptions about the gods in tragedy (pp. 30-33), on characterization (pp. 36-37) – though some of the others rely too heavily on the authority of Aristotle; and Föllinger does well to emphasize the importance, in a masked theatre, of vocal and gestural means of expression (p. 45). She sees Aeschylus as primarily interested, not (as was once thought) in theological or moral issues, nor (as has more recently been popular) in civic or political concerns, but in the "Problemkomplex von menschlichem Handeln und seinen Folgen", in the impact of the past on the present, and in the impact of the individual's actions on the community (pp. 50-52). Her interpretations of individual plays will often be found controversial, but she always signals this. The least satisfactory, perhaps, is that of *Persians*, which finds a major

concern of the play to be the “Vater-Sohn-Konflikt” between Darius and Xerxes; if Aeschylus had this at the front of his mind, he made a great mistake when he made Atossa, in her dream, see Darius not condemning Xerxes but *pitying* him (*Pers.* 197-8) and an even greater one when, in the play’s concluding scene, he forgot to have either Xerxes or the chorus make any reference at all to Darius. On the other hand, Föllinger’s argument that the play does not directly or indirectly disparage the Persians (pp. 59, 66-68) seems to me entirely sound. The chapter on *Suppliants* is excellent, and there is much that is good in the *Oresteia* chapter too. In particular, Föllinger makes some shrewd points to the discredit of Apollo. He does not succeed in removing the taint of blood from Orestes, nor does he satisfactorily protect him against the pursuing Erinyes (pp. 152-3); and his argument that a mother is no kin to her child is refuted in advance by Orestes’ unprompted admission (*Cho.* 1038) that they are of the same blood (p. 159). She also lays valuable emphasis on the limited vision of the chorus of *Agamemnon*, whose minds have the inflexibility of age and who understand the past better than the present or future (pp. 133-4). Whether the conclusion of the trilogy is “ein Ende, aber keine Lösung” (p. 126) is a matter of definition; one can certainly agree (p. 164) that it does not free Athens entirely from the danger of the Erinyes’ wrath – but then Athena accepts that too, emphasizing their power to do harm (*Eum.* 930-7, 954-5) and provide the element of fear without which justice cannot be maintained (*Eum.* 990, cf. 698-9), and giving these ancient divinities an honourable place in her new order, just as the Areopagus Council had retained an honourable place in Athens’ new, more radical democracy (p. 162). Striking is Föllinger’s constant (and justified) emphasis on the possibility, and importance, of free individual decision – a theme that was also prominent in her earlier book, *Genosdependenzen: Studien zur Arbeit am Mythos bei Aischylos* (Göttingen, 2003).

I was baffled for some time by the statement that we shall never know for sure whether Aeschylus wrote *Prometheus Bound* “solange nicht Papyrusfunde o. ä. neuen Aufschluß bringen” (p. 169); but perhaps Föllinger is thinking of the redating of *Suppliants*, which she mentions later in the same paragraph, and is envisaging the possible discovery of similar didascalic information about *Prometheus* (the only surviving Aeschylean play for which we lack it). Certainly, if we learned that the play had been produced in, say, 454 BC, that would persuade many that it was, after all – whatever other evidence might suggest – a very late work of Aeschylus put on stage after his death; if the date was, say, 431, few, I imagine, would be willing to believe that Euphorion had kept a genuine play of his father’s under wraps for a quarter of a century.

There are a number of flaws which one hopes can be removed in a future edition. The origin of the term *tragōidia* cannot have had anything to do with satyrs (p. 12), since early satyrs had horselike, not goatlike features. Athenian tribes were not “Verwaltungsbezirke” (p. 16), though demes were (p. 20). It is not true that a tragedy could not present “ein positives Ereignis” (p.28). In the discussion of the textual tradition (pp. 46-47) we are told that the manuscript M was written “im Jahr 1000”, and we are not told anything about the special position of the so-called Byzantine triad (*Prometheus, Seven, Persians*) which is transmitted in far more manuscripts than the other four plays. It was not the survivors of the naval battle that were wiped out at Psyttaleia (pp. 53-54); it was an elite force of Persians who had been stationed there *before* the battle. Xerxes’ act of folly cannot have been to take to the sea (p. 57 etc.) because, as we are reminded in *Pers.* 868-897, Darius’ generals had repeatedly done so with success. It is not true that Xerxes refuses to take blame on himself (p. 74); see *Pers.* 933-4 (and Xerxes’ shame on seeing the Elders, 913-4). On p.120 it seems to be assumed that Apollo is on stage during the Pythia’s second speech. On pp. 129 and 165 it is insinuated (though perhaps not quite asserted) that Athena refuses to judge the case of Orestes herself because she does not think herself wise enough, even though we are rightly told elsewhere (p. 156) that she co-opts a panel of Athenian judges because the verdict may have grave consequences for Athens. In *Prometheus*, the female whose son may overthrow Zeus is not a “menschliche Frau” (pp. 166, 167), nor is the nature of the threat to Zeus made explicit in the *parodos*. Danae can hardly have become the wife of Dictys at the end of *Diktyoulokoï* (p. 184), since that would have made Polydectes’ subsequent wooing of her, and therefore the heroic exploits of Perseus, impossible.

Several stories and sayings reported in ancient sources, which Föllinger reproduces without any “health warning”, are probably or even certainly late inventions, e.g. that Aeschylus went to Sicily because he was angry at being defeated by Sophocles (p. 22) or that he dedicated his works to Time (p. 200; mistranslated on p. 25; classical Greeks did not think of Time as a god). As in *Genosdependenzen* (see my review in *Gnomon* 77 [2005] 167-9), Föllinger is a little too ready to discount evidence suggesting that particular features of Aeschylus’ treatment of a myth were already known before his time; but in a book like this, there may well be something to be said for erring in this direction, to counteract the very widespread tendency to think of “myth” or “mythology” as some kind of fixed corpus. And at least once she does not go far enough: in Homer, the punishment of kindred-murder is not even one among many functions of the Erinyes (p. 152) – it is never associated with them at all (the Erinyes are invoked against Meleager, *Iliad* 9.571-2, not because he has killed his uncles but because he has wronged his mother).

Föllinger's persistent use of *Protagonist* in the sense of *dramatis persona* (she can even apply the term to a *persona muta*, p. 153) is unfortunate, given that it was and is a technical term for the chief actor.

Sometimes one gets the impression that the author had a struggle to compress her text to fit an imposed length limit, and that clarity has suffered as a result. Occasionally an important fact, likely to be unknown to a large proportion of the likely readership, is omitted – e.g. that Atossa makes her first entrance in a carriage; that Io's son Epaphus was engendered "by touch and breath"; that by keeping Electra unmarried Clytaemestra and Aegisthus are committing a great wrong against her; and that in Euripides, though married, she is still a virgin. Föllinger refers casually on p. 32 to "die Handlungsverläufe der Trilogien" at a point where the reader has as yet not been told anything at all about the typically Aeschylean phenomenon of the connected trilogy; and in the section about "Gewalt auf der Bühne" (pp. 33-36) it is never made clear that in marked contrast with modern drama (including many modern adaptations of Greek tragedy) acts of physical violence were not normally shown on the Greek tragic stage. Some conclusions still hotly debated are asserted as if uncontroversial, e.g. that the *orchestra* was circular (p. 42; E. Pöhlmann ed. *Studien zur Bühnendichtung und zum Theaterbau der Antike* [Frankfurt, 1995] might usefully have been included in the bibliography), that *Egyptians* preceded *Suppliants* (p. 102), that Athena's vote in Orestes' trial makes (rather than breaks) a tie (p. 121 and several times more; argued for, inadequately, only at p. 163). And sometimes a statement is repeated without apparent awareness that it has been made before, e.g. that the Danaids' descent from Io is an innovation by Aeschylus (pp. 105, 111) or that the poet Swinburne described the *Oresteia* as "the greatest achievement of the human mind" (pp. 8, 126).

And may one possibly hope that those who are thinking of using the cliché "an eye for an eye" (p. 128) in a discussion of revenge – particularly when contrasting this with judicial punishment – might also first think of looking it up in its original contexts (Exodus 21.23-25; Leviticus 24.19-20; Deuteronomy 19.21), in all of which it plainly refers not to private revenge but precisely to judicial punishment?

The main title of the Festschrift for Alex Garvie edited by Cairns and Liapis (p. 202) is *Dionysalexandros*; but as less than half of that volume is about Aeschylus, it would probably have been preferable to list M. Lloyd ed. *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Aeschylus* (Oxford, 2007). Speaking of Garvie, his book on *Suppliants* has been reissued with addenda (Exeter, 2005); his edition of *Persians* (Oxford, 2009) of course appeared too late to be noticed.

All in all, this book should prove a valuable introduction to Aeschylus for the readers at whom it is aimed; and its interpretations of the plays should also be thought-provoking for more advanced students of Aeschylus, whether in the end they agree with them or not.

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