AESCHYLUS' *SUPPLIANTS*

P. SANDIN: *Aeschylus'* Supplices. *Introduction and Commentary on vv. 1–523*. Pp. vi + 251. Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 2003. Paper, €25. ISBN: 91-628-5920-X.

Of all Aeschylus' works, *Supplices* has been, and in many respects remains, arguably the most contentious. For decades it was confidently declared the playwright's earliest extant play and dated to the 490s. The prominent, even pivotal, rôle of the chorus and the shadowy use of the second actor, itself an invention of Aeschylus, seemed to locate the play at a time still strongly under the influence of the genre's choral beginnings. Then a meagre piece of papyrus that did not even name the play but did name Sophocles forced a radical reappraisal of both the evidence for dating and the conclusions to be drawn from that dating. Then again, as ostensibly the first element in its trilogy, one might expect *Supplices* to be relatively transparent in the development of its themes—after all, it is on this that the following two instalments are built. Yet there is much that remains thematically uncertain—not least the fundamental reason for the Danaids' rejection of marriage to their cousins, something that continues to tantalize modern critics. And in terms of textual preservation the play seems all too often little more than an exercise in corruption, a series of conundrums, with problems piled one upon another without end. It is small wonder, therefore, that in beginning a study into the text of Aeschylus Sandin found himself increasingly drawn into concentrating on this play. Not that *Supplices* has been neglected in the past. Garvie's 1969 study of the play, followed by the magisterial edition of Friis Johansen and Whittle (1980), West's Teubner (1990), and his *Studies in Aeschylus* (1990), may seem to have exhausted the potential for anything new but, as S. shows, much remains contentious, and posited solutions to problems are constantly in need of revision, not least to prevent the creation of an orthodoxy as potent as the one so recently overturned.

By the same token, S.'s work shows graphically that besetting obstacle to modern scholarship—the need to publish or be damned. What we have is essentially a fragment: a doctoral dissertation, ten years in the writing, on half a play, a study that provides introduction, translation, and commentary, but no Greek text. For this we must refer to West's Teubner edition except where footnotes in the translation indicate a departure from it. Dealing with only half the play also places a severe restriction upon thematic investigation, since clearly there are many aspects that range over the whole of the action and require the whole play if any meaningful treatment is to be given. The result is a work heavily slanted towards the discussion of textual *cruces*, which at times gives a feeling of dealing with a jigsaw puzzle inside a crossword, rather than a work of drama experienced by an audience. S. promises a full edition, and readers of the present work will doubtless recognize here something of the quality that will be the result. One can only hope that it is not too long in appearing.

In his introduction S. discusses a number of topics germane to the play and its production, most of them already treated elsewhere, but here updated and amplified. He begins with the play's date, discussing *inter alia* Scullion's recent questioning of the play's location in the 460s. From this he turns to examine the Danaid myth, other dramatic productions of it, the constitution of Aeschylus' trilogy and the position of *Supplices* within it, not least Rösler's (1993) arguments for placing it second in the trilogy. The introduction is rounded off by a short discussion of the physical nature of the Theatre of Dionysus at the time of *Supplices*: the shape of the orchestra, the

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existence or otherwise of a stage building, the height of the stage above the orchestra, the presence of a raised area in the orchestra indicated in a number of passages of the play, and the position of any permanent altar in the theatre.

Following the translation, which reads well apart from a few oddities of vocabulary and phrasing, comes the commentary. As S. says, this is heavily philological, but there is much that is of use, even if most is a recycling of earlier (at times very much earlier) material—in total about thirty new conjectures are advanced and discussed. My own feeling is that in assembling his material the author might have shown a greater discrimination for what is of significance. At times, for instance, he seems simply to be advancing the accepted position; at others the point discussed is so minor as to be hardly worth the mention. So, for instance, at 88 do we read παντᾷ (Murray, Page et al.) or πάνται (Wilamowitz, Friis Johansen-Whittle, West)? Do we prefer πεντηκοντόπαις or πεντηκοντάπαις at 321? Would the original audience have noticed or cared? Do we? Similarly, is there much to be gained from a discussion of whether repeated refrains such as 117–22 = 128–33 should be termed ephymnia or not? Yet for all this there are valuable specific and general observations to be found here, not least a reiteration of the point made variously in the past: that distinguishing what at times seems Aeschylus' penchant for obscurity of wording from textual corruption demands fine judgement and not a little intuition. Similarly S.'s cautionary excursus on the transposition of lines, something of an obsession with some editors, is wholly to be welcomed (cf. the discussion of 290–323).

Space prevents a detailed discussion of much in S.'s work. As he says, it is a beginning, but for anyone working on the text of the play it makes a worthy contribution to further discussion, and for that reason alone is to be welcomed.

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AJAX

J. Hesk: *Sophocles:* Ajax. (Duckworth Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy.) Pp. 208. London: Duckworth, 2003. Paper, £10.99. ISBN: 0-7156-3047-4.

The series to which this volume belongs aims to provide 'accessible introductions to ancient tragedies'. Readers of H.'s introduction to the *Ajax* therefore have a right to expect a reliable and comprehensive summary and discussion of significant recent scholarship on the play, and a responsible and clearly expressed original reading of the play itself to enable them to see the debate being furthered. In this, they will not be disappointed.

H.'s organization of his material is exemplary. He starts with an excellent contextualization of the play in terms of Athenian history and its own staging, drawing particular attention to the pre-play ceremony of the orphans of the state's fallen parading in the hoplite armour the city had awarded them in thanks for their fathers' sacrifice. Equally well contextualized is the tradition surrounding Ajax from hero-cult to Homer to Pindar, in which the idea of intertextual listening and reading is

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