

Foreword

The project of yet another collection of papers on ‘Politics and Attic Drama’ requires some words, if not of apology, at least of explanation. Literature on this topic – scholarly articles, monographs, miscellaneous volumes – is incredibly vast, and nothing suggests that its proliferation will decrease in the next future. With this said, we do hope that the present collection will prove useful to students of Greek literature, Attic theatre, and ancient political thought. Our aim is not to provide an overall assessment of the relationship between drama and democracy in classical Athens, nor are we so bold as to believe that every reader will find here what she/he expected to find. But we are confident that some readers will in fact find both answers to their questions and further hints to reflect upon.

A number of distinguished scholars have agreed to take part in this project (some more had accepted, but later had to withdraw for various reasons), and their contributions brilliantly show that, if much has been written in this field, there is still room for innovative research.

The volume includes eight papers on tragedy (Dugdale & Gerstbauer, Finglass, Kierstead, Mills, Pattoni, Perris, Saxonhouse, Sommerstein), five on comedy (Lauriola, Magnelli, Olson, Pellegrino, Sonnino), and one on satyr-play (Di Marco). This is perhaps less unbalanced than one could think, if we put thirty-two tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides (including the controversial *Prometheus Bound* and the certainly spurious *Rhesus*) on one scale, and the eleven Aristophanic comedies on the other – though the bulk of comic fragments might, to some extent, produce a different picture. But that is not the point. What is worth stressing is that balance was not our priority: we had not planned to edit a companion-like volume. We selected a number of contributors who had something new (and interesting) to say, no matter whether they preferred to choose one topic or another. As a result, we have only one paper devoted to Euripides, and we are perfectly happy with that – all the more since it is a very valuable one. Four papers on comedy out of five deal with Aristophanes, and it was quite predictable that he would get the lion’s share. But we are glad to have a paper on Eupolis too (Olson’s), aptly reminding of the importance of fragmentary plays for a better understanding not just of a given author, but also of wider literary and historical topics.

We hope that readers will enjoy the innovative ideas of these contributions, many of which, albeit primarily conceived for an audience of well-equipped classicists, even aim to reach a wider one. Students of law history and political science will find much of interest in the paper of Dugdale & Gerstbauer, reconsidering Aeschylus' *Eumenides* with special focus on the (a little less studied) post-trial phase of the play: there they identify a relevant evolution from a 'retributive' to a 'restorative' judicial perspective, to the point that the whole tragedy may be read as 'a study in the limitations of criminal justice'. This is a thought-provoking approach that will surely prompt further discussion. Other papers provide us with welcome antidotes against commonplaces and *idola scholae*. We have often been told – not only by scholars with strong anthropological interests – that Sophocles' *Antigone* implies an opposition between the written laws of the *polis* and the oral (not to say 'tribal') laws of the *genos*, and that Creon, evil-tempered as he might be, had his reasons after all: both Kierstead and Sommerstein give us quite a different picture, seeing Creon as 'the antitype of the epistemic humility that was one of the foundational ideals of Athenian democracy' (Kierstead), and highlighting his failure as a leader insofar as he does not care of his people's opinions (Sommerstein). Mills, without trying to radically dismantle the traditional view of tragedy as promoting self-critique among Athenian citizens, nonetheless argues that, in some cases at least, it rather reassures them, reaffirming their beliefs about their own city. And Di Marco aptly questions some recent (or less so) interpretations of satyr-play, especially those reading it as an exhibition of virility intended to balance tragedy's alleged 'feminine' perspective. The papers by Saxonhouse and Lauriola invite us to rethink the very idea of 'democracy' in Attic drama, leaving aside modern prejudices and exploring all the possible nuances – even the negative ones – that the word may have in the political context of classical Athens. Many transformations occurred in that world between the fifth and the fourth centuries: it is therefore quite obvious that some contributions focus on evolution, be it the change in Aristophanes' utopian fantasies (Sonnino, Magnelli), or the gradual migration of Old Comedy's political function to satyr-play (Di Marco).

We have been as meticulous as possible with bibliographical items and quotations of ancient sources: for the rest, we have edited with quite a light hand. We had no interest in urging our colleagues to conform to a particular scholarly style, or to give their papers a particular shape. On the contrary, we are persuaded that the variety of both their interests and their methodological approaches turns out to add value to this volume. Contributions, indeed, range from very wide topics (Saxonhouse, above all) to detailed chronological problems (Olson). We like this, and we remain faithful to the old, yet evergreen

concept of scholarship as concerned with the leaf, the tree, and the whole forest. The fact that both editors are classicists with a quite traditional taste does not prevent them from appreciating whatever good may come from the realms of sociology, structuralism, narratology, and so on. Roland Barthes comes out in a contribution on Aristophanes (Pellegrino's), and deservedly so. New methodologies are always welcome when they are combined with a sound historical perspective. For the same reason, we do not avoid the challenge of 'reading more' in a text, if such reading is based on solid philological foundations. Finglass convincingly shows that lines 1047-1090 of Sophocles' *Ajax*, far from just characterizing the king of Sparta as an unpleasant figure ('Menelaus is an animal', Eduard Fraenkel used to say in his famous Italian seminars on Sophocles), imply a criticism of authoritarian governance presumably aiming to have an impact not only on Athenian men, but also on individual Greeks from other cities. Pattoni, through a careful investigation of political language in Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*, illustrates the poet's aim to revisit the myth with a 5th-century eye, by using ancient Argos to produce a kind of pedigree for Greek (even Athenian) democracy. In Euripides' *Medea* we can see a totally different situation: in Perris' persuasive analysis, Corinth is antithetical to the Athenian idea of the *polis*, and the community of citizens is almost completely absent from the play – this does not rule out political interpretations of the *Medea*, rather suggests to set them in another, more complex framework. These texts, as any true 'classic', have not ceased to disclose the multi-faceted riches of their meaning.

We express our gratitude to all the contributors, whose scholarly competence and great commitment has produced, we dare to say, a collection of papers of outstanding quality; to Kyriakos Demetriou, Executive Editor of *Polis*, for his kind assistance; to the staff of Brill, who produced this volume with exemplary professionalism; and to our families, who (together with Aristophanes) have been a constant source of joy and relief.

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