EURIPIDES IN BYZANTIUM*

BARRY BALDWIN

“Euripides? You Mend-a Dees!”—antique Marx brothers jest.

No need here¹ to Baldwinly go where Turyn (1957), Wilson (1983), and Zuntz (1965) have gone before. Instead, a mini-rama of how Euripides affected Byzantine sensibilities. Despite those who plump for Justinian or Heraclius, Byzantine history began on May 11, 330. Ammianus (27. 4. 80) celebrates Euripidis sepulchrum, tragoediarum sublimitate conspicui, albeit omitting the romantic details recorded elsewhere.² Eunapius (fr. 1 Blockley) ridicules those who attach significance to “some poet” being born on the day of Salamis. Later (fr. 48), he rehearses Lucian’s tale³ of theatregoers driven mad by the Andromeda—early Beatlemania. Apart from shifting it from Hellenistic to Neronian times, Eunapius (unlike Lucian) lavishes praise on Euripides for “the dignity and profundity of his words, structure, metre, sharp characterisation, and appropriate tone.”

Collard-Cropp-Lee (1995: 5) “cannot fully appreciate” this play’s impact on Aristophanes’ Dionysus. The short answer may be the heroine’s implied nudity—Madonna appropriated this scene for her notorious Sex picture album (1992). Later (Ar. Ran. v. 545), this deity unabashedly masturbates. In the Byzantine verse novel Callimachus and Chrysorrhoe, where (vv. 450–497) a naked damsel hangs by her hair from the dragon’s castle, there is a slight concordance in its mention of “Silence” (v. 712) with Andromeda, fr. 159, possibly suggesting that this latter should be assigned to Andromeda rather than Perseus (Collard-Cropp-

¹ Thanks to Rob Cousland and Jim Hume for this chance to add a crumb to Martin Cropp’s great Euripidean banquet.

² Though omitting the romantic details of Pliny, HN 31. 19. 28, and Aulus Gellius, NA 15. 20; cf. Anth. Pal. 7. 43–51 for poetic amplifications.

³ How to Write History 1. The anecdote is introduced by “They say,” suggesting it had become a classic. Lucian specifies that people who had seen the Andromeda were haunted by its spectacle of Perseus brandishing Medusa’s head.

“Apollo applauds Euripides who even now is played upon the stage.” Thus Eusebius, whose concept of Divine Providence has been traced back to Phoenissae 637. Whoever penned the cento Christus Patiens began, “Now shall I tell the sufferings of the Saviour in Euripidean manner.” Eustathius dubs the Susannah of John Damascene “entirely Euripidean in style.” Ignatius the Deacon’s Life of George of Amastris (64.15–65.1) repeats from Gregory Nazianzenus (Oration 4—against Julian) “the Taurian slaughter of strangers,” harking back to Iphigenia in Tauris 53. Robert Browning (1968: 401–410) traced three (Alcestis, Andromeda, Iphigenia in Aulis) borrowings and four possible indirect echoes (likewise from Sophocles) in Ignatius’ playlet on Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, asking “Est-ce Ignace qui a lui-même retrouvé Sophocle et Euripide?” St Basil’s quotation “Against enemies anger arms the hand,” has been proposed as a fragment missed by Nauck.

No surprise that the emperor Julian (Eunapius’ hero, Gregory’s bête-noire) should quote Euripides eleven times in his speeches, four in his letters, and thrice in the satirical Caesars. He varies on no obvious pattern between naming the play/playwright and expecting his recipient to catch the allusions. Both extant and lost plays are cited, most frequently the Andromache, Orestes, and Phoenissae. Gilbert Murray (Preface to his OCT, 1902: 5) suggested Julian’s tutor “Sallust” (i.e., Saturninius Secundus Salutus) may have chosen the ten “school plays.”

Christodorus of Thebes (Anth. Pal. 2. 32–35) describes the statue (fourth in sequence) of Euripides (neither Aeschylus nor Sophocles warranted one) in Constantinople’s Baths of Zeuxippus (burned down in

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4 Preparation for the Gospel 5. 32. See G.W. Lampe’s Patristic Greek Lexicon for other Christian usages.
5 By R.M. Grant (1980: 144 n. 12), albeit phrase and sentiment are paralleled in Herodotus 3.108 and Sophocles, OC 1180.
6 Its traditional ascription to Gregory Nazianzenus is nowadays widely doubted. My favourite alternative is his contemporary Apollinaris of Laodicea who (Socrates, Ecclesiastical History 8.18) “wrote tragedies in the Euripidean manner.”
7 PG 136: 508, Preface to his Interpretation of John’s iambic poems.
8 By the Loeb (1934: 4, 402 n. 3) editor, R. Deferrari of his Address to Young Men Reading Greek Literature. Wilson in his edition (London 1975: 58) assumes it is simply a misquotation of Rhesus 84. Basil occasionally quotes Euripides in his letters, e.g. 63.189A.