REREADING EURIPIDES IN THE NEW OXFORD TEXT (TOM. I)

BY

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I. General Remarks

After circa three-quarters of a century Murray's Oxford text of Euripides is being replaced by James Diggle's magnum opus: Tome II was published in 1981, tome I in the summer of 1984. In the course of the last fifteen years many articles have borne eloquent testimony to Diggle’s intensive studies preparatory to his immense editorial task.

In many respects this task has been admirably performed so far:

(1) His knowledge of the manuscript tradition is very vast indeed and is based, for the greater part, on his own collations (except, in tome I, the many collations of the Hecuba text lent to him by K. Mathiessen).

(2) His apparatus is full and clear throughout provided the reader has mastered the refined sigla system. Due regard has been paid to the forty papyri with fragments of Alc., Med., Hipp., Androm., Hec. (Among these: eleven as yet unedited, put at Diggle’s disposal by P. J. Parsons).

(3) In the Praefatio of tome I he gives a very useful survey of the principal Euripides editions from the XVIth century up to the present day. He does not claim to be complete, but his critical remarks are sound and fair.

(4) Without embarking upon a history of the codices and their interrelation he states the main facts of their transmission (referring to Turyn, to Zuntz—accepting the latter’s convincing argument on the relation between L and P—, and to Barrett) and proceeds briefly to discuss the mss on which his text of each individual play is based.
When we study Diggle’s text together with its apparatus it becomes clear that his knowledge of the textual criticism bestowed upon Euripides throughout the ages is extensive and profound. Wheresoever a choice had to be made between vv. II. or between possible corrections, his decisions, as a rule, strike the reader as the outcome of well-pondered consideration. His own conjectures often bear testimony to his critical acumen.

Notwithstanding these great merits I can not forbear from formulating two general objections against this edition.

1) In my opinion Dr. Diggle is too prone to assume interpolation. Of course there are not a few interpolations in the text of Euripides, but there are also the seemingly irrelevant digressions in the rhesis of ratiocinating heroines which are characteristic of Euripidean dramatis personae echoing the discussions of his time (Hec. 599-602 is a case in point). There is the element of the irrational in the speeches of passionate beings. Should we really follow Bergk and Reeve in athetizing Med. 1056-1080? Page was better inspired than his pupil in retaining the passage (except 1062-3); and see his comment ad 1058.

2) There is too great a number of conjectures in the text which belong to the category ‘not necessary’ (to use a term invidious to radical critics). The norms by which linguistic usage and metrical forms are criticized are sometimes too strict. Or put otherwise: although few people’s knowledge of Euripides’ diction, idiom, metre etc. etc., at this moment, will match Diggle’s expert skill, such a skill runs the risk of excluding, too rashly, the uncommon, the extraordinary, the rare, the irregular, the abnormal. Euripides is a poet and as such, up to a point, unpredictable. So, in my opinion, it is exaggerated to put ἐν χείρεσσι Alc. 756 and ὀδίξ ib. 780 between daggers; here, at least, there are no conjectures in the text. But the fairly innocent Ionism νῆς Cycl. 239 has been altered into νῶς (with Blaydes).

II. Remarks on particular passages

a. Cycl.

6. ἔβδωκε instead of γετῶς L; Kassel’s conjecture is convincing, but I see no reason why λαβὼν 15 should be replaced by ἔβδωκε (as suggested by Diggle in apparatu).