

Enrico Medda, *Euripide. Le Fenicie. Introduzione, premessa al testo, nota al testo, traduzione e note. Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli. Classici Greci e Latini*. Milano: RSC Libri, 2006. Pp. 361. ISBN 88-17-00960-1. €10,80.

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Medda's *Phoenissae* brings to 13 the number of Euripidean plays that have now appeared in the BUR collection. Several of these have been edited by the distinguished senior Hellenist Vincenzo Di Benedetto or by his students. Each volume contains a Greek text with facing Italian translation, an extensive introduction, notes beneath the text and translation, and more specialized notes on problems of textual readings and authenticity collected at the end. The level of scholarship is very high, and these editions are in general much fuller than the Loeb (constrained, as it is, by its format) and more ambitious than many of the entries in the Aris & Phillips series of Euripidean plays. Medda himself is one of a group of fine Hellenists trained during Di Benedetto's long career at the Scuola Normale Superiore and the Università di Pisa. He co-authored with his teacher a magisterial study of stage conventions and dramatic technique, *La tragedia sulla scena: la tragedia greca in quanto spettacolo teatrale* (Torino 1997), and just five years ago produced an excellent BUR edition of another particularly challenging play, *Orestes*.

The *Introduzione* has nine sections. The first, "Arcaismi e innovazioni," touches briefly on the conscious intertextual dialectic of recall and contrast Euripides creates between his play and Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, and reviews the chief points of Euripidean innovation or creativity in the refashioning and complication of the story. In the second section Medda explicates the various effects of the *teichoskopia* (*Phoen.* 88-201) and the ways its details play off against both Homer and Aeschylus. The next part, "Il coro straniero," provides a detailed appreciation of the contributions made by the chorus of foreign maidens, a chorus that both evokes the rich mythic background of the day's events and embodies a voice that is relatively remote and aloof, more often that of an internal spectator than of an emotionally-engaged partner of the characters. The great *agon* (*Phoen.* 469-585) is the subject of sections 4 and 5: the first analyzes the moral and political dimensions of the arguments of Polyneices and Eteocles, while the second emphasizes the "democratic" significance of Jocasta's praise of equality and justice. Like most modern critics, Medda recognizes (in section 6) the central importance of the Menoeceus-scene to the themes of family and city and to the working out of the tangled complex of early causes and events referred to by the chorus and Teiresias. In the following two sections we find a very perceptive analysis of the battle narratives in the two messenger-scenes, with good observations on the differences from the Aeschylean treatment and on allusions to and reshaping of Homeric passages. A nice example is his treatment of the Homeric comparison of a falling warrior to a diver (*Iliad* 12.385-86 as well as 16.742-50). At p. 58, Medda relates this to what he perceives as the more "democratic" portrayal of the battle for Thebes in Euripides (as against the epic tradition and Aeschylus): "the most interesting point to note, however, is the displacement

whereby the image of the diver, applied in Homer to the death of a single warrior, is transferred by Euripides to the mass of anonymous warriors who lose their lives falling from the wall. The tragic poet, in the very moment in which he adorns his narrative with an epic element suited to heightening its stylistic level, bends it to the new requirements of a narrative in which it is not the feats of prowess of the commanders that are to determine the outcome of the battle” (58). The ninth and final section is “Una riflessione sull’*esodo*,” in which Medda concisely presents his opinion on the much-disputed final scenes of the play. He argues well for the appropriateness of the lyrics of Antigone and Oedipus and the theme of Oedipus’ exile to the structure and themes of the play. He admits more uncertainty about the motifs of Polyneices’ burial and Antigone’s marriage to Haemon, explaining how they fit well with previous themes and developments, but admitting that he sees much to doubt in various details of the text. He is thus, with all due caution, generally aligned with editors and critics like Wilamowitz, Pearson, Conacher, and myself as against those who have rejected large portions or all of the *exodos* (Page, Fraenkel, Diggle, etc.). Like all except the most conservative critics of this text, he considers the lines from 1737 to the end definitely inauthentic. More details of his judgment on these problems are provided in the notes to the text and the notes at the end of the volume.

In a shorter section entitled “*Premessa al testo*” Medda deals efficiently and persuasively with chronology, details of role-assignment and staging, and the transmission and manuscript tradition. After a bibliography of previous editions and critical studies of the play, the text and translation follow.

As a textual editor, Medda is thorough in deliberation and cautious in his approach, closer to the approach of my own edition (Teubner 1988) and commentary (Cambridge 1994) than to the editions of Diggle and Kovacs, editors who take a more interventionist approach, accepting more emendations and bracketing a greater number of lines as spurious. Medda’s text in fact uses that of my 1994 edition as its basis [[1]], but he alters it with a number of different choices of readings and brackets more passages. Among examples of such differences may be cited: (1) passages where he retains the reading of the mss (21 $\delta\omicron\upsilon\zeta$ instead of Markland’s $\nu\delta\omicron\upsilon\zeta$); (2) passages where he marks a corruption or marks a larger stretch of text as corrupt than I do (186-89, 361, 646-48, 792-93, 1730); (3) places where he accepts an emendation I mentioned only in apparatus or commentary (235, 1028-30, 1195, 1694); (4) places where he accepts a different emendation from the one I chose, usually in places where such disagreement is very much to be expected (748, 846, 1232). So far as I can judge the Italian style, the translation seems quite clear and forceful, and it is highly accurate (I mention a few quibbles below).

In the matter of bracketing lines as inauthentic, Medda deletes more often than I, but the only substantial passage on which we disagree is lines 1104-40, the catalogue of the seven Theban attackers in the first messenger speech. Among the passages I defended or left unbracketed in my edition, this is certainly the one passage of extended length I myself felt and feel least tenacious about. In his rejection of the passage Medda puts considerable weight on his view (related to one argued earlier by Mueller-Goldingen) that

Euripides is radically revising the battle narrative in a more “democratic” direction by emphasizing the anonymous mass of fighters on both sides and reducing the role of the traditional epic champions on each side. His explanations for the “exceptions” made for particular treatment of the heroes Parthenopaeus and Capaneus (pp. 59-62) are suggestive, and he is again very good on the way Euripides refashions Homeric passages in the lines about Parthenopaeus. But I remain doubtful that the effects of the battle narrative should be viewed in such a clear either-or light and that there is a necessary contradiction between attention to the champions and attention to the masses of ordinary soldiers. There are several shorter passages in which Medda joins Fraenkel, Diggle, or other editors in bracketing: 376-78, 438-442, 548, 974, 1183, 1369-71, 1582-83, 1688-89, 1703-7 (the notes indicate his strong suspicion of 1233-35, but not quite enough for the use of brackets). At 51-52, he rejects deletion of the pair of lines (Leutsch, Fraenkel), but deletes 51 rather than 52.

The annotation is, as mentioned above, on a fairly ambitious level. As well as some needed explication of mythological persons and places, there are excellent remarks on many aspects of dramatic technique, on uncertainties of interpretation, and on textual difficulties and questions of possible interpolation.

The most interesting innovation in Medda’s text is his adoption of Di Benedetto’s view that Creon’s scene at lines 1308ff. is genuine, but that Creon departs from the stage at the end of 1353, with the chorus-leader speaking 1354-55, the invitation to the messenger to give his full account of the events he has just reported in brief. In *RIFC* 130 (2002) [2005] 386-405, Di Benedetto has presented this interpretation at length, prefacing the discussion with the publication of two letters written to him by Eduard Fraenkel in September 1961 that clarify the genesis of the suspicion of Creon’s presence at this part of the play. Previous scholars had noticed the unusual length of Creon’s silence from 1356 to 1584 in the transmitted text, and Di Benedetto himself had pointed out to Fraenkel a few years earlier that Creon is nowhere acknowledged as an addressee in the messenger’s *rheseis* and that he has no lines at the end of the messenger’s report. Di Benedetto posited that Creon was not present during the speeches. Fraenkel added to this anomaly the fact that Creon’s intervention at 1584f. is a typical entrance-motif. In his first letter of 1961 Fraenkel reminds Di Benedetto that he (F.) had tried out the hypothesis that between 1353 and 1354 some original lines had been lost in which Creon said that he had to return at once to his own home (perhaps to deal with the *prothesis* of Menoeceus). Rudolf Pfeiffer, however, had convinced Fraenkel that such a departure would be entirely anomalous as well, and so Fraenkel felt himself at an impasse. In the second letter, a few days later, Fraenkel tells of his new thought, that Creon never appeared at all, that is, that lines 1310-1331 and 1339-53 are not by Euripides, and this is view that he eventually published in his 1963 monograph (in this case, 1308-1309, which announce Creon’s arrival, also have to be deleted). Di Benedetto now makes it clear that he himself never originated or endorsed the view that Creon did not appear at all in 1308ff. He discusses thoroughly the scenic conventions relevant to the problem, and makes some justified criticisms of several arguments I used in my commentary. I cannot do justice to his analysis in a short paraphrase, but in essence he argues that Euripides gives Creon a sung response to the messenger’s news in the preliminary section (what Di Benedetto calls the

“anticipo”). He suggests that if Creon had stayed until the end of the report, he would have had to appear insensitive, or he would have duplicated and pre-empted Antigone’s lament. In the text so reconstructed, Creon’s lyrical section is an exceptional procedure, invented by Euripides to avoid what Di Benedetto regards as an “unmanageable situation.” But this is not very satisfactory. Creon’s departure after 1353 would be, in my opinion, a very startling anomaly in terms of dramatic technique (as Pfeiffer already argued to Fraenkel, who accepted Pfeiffer’s view). In the end, as in many disputes related to possible interpolations or to alternative stagings where arguments are based on rules of dramatic technique, there is a problem involving how we deal with anomalies. One solution is eliminate all anomalies by extensive deletions (Fraenkel’s final solution here). If one is unwilling to follow that course, then one must ask what dramatic effects are gained by the playwright’s adoption of an anomalous procedure. If the anomaly we accept is Creon’s departure, I do not find convincing an inferred psychological explanation of this departure (that is, one unsupported by an explicit statement by Creon himself in the text at the point of departure). The washing and preparation of Menoecus’ corpse is not, by any known Greek custom, such a matter of pressing urgency that it would require Creon to avoid spending a few more minutes to hear the full messenger speech and await the arrival of the corpses of his own sister and nephews. But one still might consider accepting the anomaly by asking what advantages there are to the playwright, that is, to the emotional and thematic course of the drama, if the playwright actually created this anomaly. Alternatively, the lack of address to Creon in the messenger’s *rheseis* and Creon’s extended silence until 1584 are also anomalous, but the same question should be asked about the possible advantages of doing something in this unusual way. If we are going to accept one anomaly or the other, which is more glaring, which more understandable?

Finally, a few comments on specific details:

p. 14, note 15: Medda believes that a criticism of Euripides underlies a corrupt passage in the sch. Phoen. 88 (I.261, 7-8 Schwartz) † ἐνόμιξε γὰρ διὰ τὸν πάσης τῆς πόλεως κίνδυνον δεῖν τὴν τῆς κόρης ἀμελείσθαι ποιεῖν εὐταξίαν, and suggests the original sense was something like “he [identity unclear] believed that because of the danger to the entire city it was necessary to show no concern for the girl and to prepare an effective arrangement” [“riteneva (il soggetto di questo verbo è oscuro) che a causa del pericolo per la città tutta fosse necessario disinteressarsi della ragazza e preparare uno schieramento efficace”]. That requires a καί between the two infinitives and the change of τὴν τῆς κόρης to τὴν κόρην. The previous lines of the scholion, however, are apparently written as a defense of Euripides against a criticism of impropriety. It is much more likely that this final corrupt sentence continued (note γὰρ) the foregoing praise of Euripides’ portrayal of the careful guarding of Antigone. The previous sentence is “Therefore he [sc. the old servant] comes out with her in no careless way, but only after checking for the absence of witnesses.” As Valckenaer already saw (his suggestion is not even recorded in Schwartz’s too austere edition), a logical continuation would arise by restoring a negative and deleting the superfluous ποιεῖν (also absent in the ms Mn). Valckenaer added οὐ before δεῖν, but better idiom and sense can be obtained by adding οὐδὲ after γὰρ: “for he [sc. the old servant, or possibly the poet] believed that not even

because of the danger to the entire city should the proper comportment of the maiden be neglected.” εὐταξία here is not that of the military forces, but quite properly Antigone’s, as this word is sometimes associated with σωφροσύνη as a desirable trait of women as well as men (cf. Plut. *Mor.* 142A).

line 330: “sempre vivo” is an almost unique instance in the translation where Medda seems to have added something not in the Greek; αἰεὶ here simply indicates that Oedipus is always mourning for the troubled situation of his family.

line 588-89: with “sinora abbiamo perso del tempo” Medda prefers the retrospective rather than prospective sense of χρόνος οὖν μέσῳ, and it is unclear whether he is thus translating present ἀναλοῦται (the emendation in all modern texts, and printed here) or prefers Elmsley’s ἀνήλωται (ἀνάλωται is transmitted).

line 796-97bis: in this textually uncertain passage, Medda takes the army that is object of κοσμήσας as the Argives, with κατὰ λάινα τείχεα as “sotto le mura di pietra”; I prefer to take it as the Thebans (cf. Kovacs’ translation “whom you have decked in bronze along the battlements of stone”) but if the other view is adopted, then κατὰ with acc. would more precisely be “over against” (cf. Craik).

line 1016: Medda translates διέλθοι as “spendesse”; I remain convinced that this is not a paralleled sense of the verb and a different translation is needed (Kovacs: “examine it thoroughly”). Since, however, we agree the passage is interpolated, it is always possible to say the author of the line is using the verb in an unexampled or “incorrect” way.

line 1450: Polyneices asks for burial in his native soil “anche se ho distrutto la mia casa”; rather, in view of the traditional form of Oedipus’ curse about the inheritance of his sons (they will get not the estate and the kingship, but only enough Theban soil to be buried in), “even if I have lost my house” (that is, failed to get the inheritance and power I fought my brother for).

lines 1747-50: in this passage that Medda and I (with many others) regard as post-Euripidean, Medda prints Diggle’s line order (1749[emended]-1747-1748-1750) and says he prefers that in his textual note, but the translation still reflects the lines as printed in my edition (1747-1750-1749[unemended]-1748).

There are very few typographic errors, and none will cause difficulty except for ἐν by mistake for ἔν in the last line of note 134 on p. 201. And textual critics will be intrigued by the psychological error by which on p. 125 note 20 there is an interchange of kinship terms so that Adrastus is described as husband of Eriphyle, sister of Amphiarus, rather than as brother of Eriphyle, wife of Amphiarus (the correct relationships are recorded in p. 136 note 43).

In conclusion, this is a very fine work of scholarship, and students and scholars of tragedy who can read Italian should avail themselves of this helpful resource, and indeed of the whole series of BUR Euripides volumes.

NOTES

[[1]] When I agreed to review this volume, I was not yet aware that the text was based on my own.