

Introduction: Aims and Scope

This book consists of two main, interrelated thematic units: the reception of Aeschylus' Dionysiac plays in *Bacchae* and the refiguration of the latter in the Byzantine drama *Christus Patiens*. In both sections the common denominator is Euripides' *Bacchae*, which is approached as a receiving text in the first unit and as a source text in the second. Each section addresses dramatic, ideological and cultural facets of the reception process, bringing forward pivotal Dionysiac motifs that both the ancient and Byzantine treatment share.

The first section delves into Euripides' reception of two Aeschylean tetralogies, *Lycurgeia* and the so-called "Theban" tetralogy, both of which dealt with the plot pattern of *theomachia*, the powerful opposition to Dionysus of Lycurgus, King of Edonians in Thrace, and of Pentheus, King of Thebes, respectively. Notwithstanding the flourishing field of classical reception, the refiguration of fragmentary tragic texts has not been widely explored so far.¹ This unit will seek to suggest the ways in which Aeschylus' Dionysiac plays were reworked, transformed and represented in *Bacchae* within the socio-cultural framework of fifth-century Athens.

The direct evidence for Aeschylus' two tetralogies comprises 40 book fragments and a group of papyrus fragmentary texts (*P.Oxy.* 2164), now attributed to *Semele* or *Hydrophoroi* fr. 220a–c Sommerstein (= *Xantriae* fr. 168, 168a–b R.). The book fragments derive from quotations in later authors and Gnostic Anthologies, ancient Scholia, Aristophanic paratragedy (*Ar. Th.* 136 = *Edonoi* fr. 61 R.), and lexicographers (Appendix I). Ancient Scholia and the Aristophanic paratragic quotations offer good sources of evidence, since they showcase correspondences of style and dramatic technique between plays.²

The indirect evidence comprises all the ancillary information, such as mythographic narratives on the stories of Dionysus and Lycurgus, references in earlier and later texts (Homer and other epic poets, historians, Roman authors) and artistic representations. Iconographic evidence depicts aspects of the plot and staging mainly of *Lycurgeia* and partly of plays of the "Theban" tetralogy. The pieces of indirect evidence contribute to the recovery, to some extent, of the dramatic action of Aeschylus' Dionysiac lost plays. Regarding especially *Edonoi*, the first

¹ Cf. Karamanou 2019, 1. On the range of classical reception studies, see e.g. Hardwick 2003, 2–11, Martindale/Thomas 2006, Hardwick/Stray 2008, 1–5, and recently Butler, 2016.

² See Tosi 1988, 59–86 and for the informative value of scholia and Aristophanic paratragedy, in particular, Dickey 2007, 28–34, Farmer 2017, 67–113.

play of *Lycurgeia*, the pieces of evidence complement to some extent each other, thus contributing to shaping the general outline of Aeschylus' lost play.

However, despite the variety of their transmission these book fragments have been preserved only in few verses (1 to 12), thus providing very limited information in quantitative and, in certain cases, also in qualitative terms.³ Consequently, any attempted reconstruction of these lost plays would be based on few and, in some cases, uninformative texts which may lead to false inferences. Speculation towards dramatic reconstruction — no matter how erudite it might be — needs to be avoided, for it entails the risk of producing unsafe results.

By all means, there is no perfectly rational way of getting from a fragmented to a complete text.⁴ As Mastronarde has aptly pointed out in his case-study on *Phoenissae* as a 'lost' play (on the basis of the evidence beyond the manuscript tradition),⁵ skepticism arises "about how much we can accurately deduce about lost plays from the fragments and testimonia we have". Even with the many testimonia we possess for *Phoenissae*, due to the vast popularity of this tragedy in antiquity, if the whole play had not survived, it would have been impossible to appreciate the various stylistic features, the development of the thematic and verbal motifs and all the qualities of the extant play as we know it. Consequently, the task of achieving a good appreciation of lost plays would certainly be more difficult and risky with the scanty fragments and the limited testimonia on *Lycurgeia* and the "Theban" tetralogy of Aeschylus, as compared to the rich evidence for the 'lost' *Phoenissae*.

Therefore, caution and controlled, text-based inferences seem to be a wise way of dealing with fragments and testimonia which do not provide adequate information about the plot-structure and dramaturgy of lost plays. Taking these remarks into consideration, this book comprises mainly commentaries on the fragmentarily preserved Dionysiac plays of Aeschylus along with accounts of their

³ On the evaluation of fragmentary material, see e.g. Most 1997, vi–viii and 2009, 10–19 and for tragic fragments, in particular, see esp. Kannicht 1997, 67–77; Sommerstein 2003, 15–17; Collard 2005, 49–51; Wright 2016, xi–xxvi.

⁴ Grumbrecht 1997, 327.

⁵ Thus Mastronarde 2009, 76, following his experiment which proved that the image resulting from the reconstruction of the 'lost' *Phoenissae* on the basis of the preserved fragments was quite elusive. Similar results were produced by Dover 2000 and Handley 1990, 126–128 with regard to Aristophanes *Frogs* and Menander's *Dyscolus*, respectively. Many years before, Linforth 1931 had expressed similar views concerning the account related to Euripides' *Alcestis* in *Catasterisms* 29, which would have led to misleading conclusions about the action of the play, if it had not survived in its extant form: see below on *Bassarae*. For the methodology of exploring fragmentary plays, see also Kannicht 1997, 67–77; Collard 2005, 49–51; Cropp 2005, 271–272.

plot outline (though not full reconstructions of their plots, due to the insufficiency of evidence).

The commentary on the fragments is hoped to contribute to a close examination of the information provided by each text.⁶ The different pieces of evidence, mythographic, literary and iconographic, are interrogated, so as to shed light on aspects of the story of Dionysus and Lycurgus, of the lost plots, the concepts, the imagery, and the vocabulary of Aeschylus' two tetralogies. The preserved scanty evidence needs to be investigated on firm grounds, as far as possible.

Since, as indicated above, Euripides' *Bacchae* is explored as a receiving text, that is, as a work refiguring aspects of Aeschylus' Dionysiac plays, special attention is drawn on core and particular correspondences between these texts, such as themes, plot patterns, concepts motivating the action and features of the character-drawing of the main *dramatis personae*. The investigation of these equivalences gives rise to a series of questions, which need to be tackled in the course of this book: What were Euripides' motives in revisiting Aeschylus' Dionysiac plays? What is the role of the ritual element and its implications in the Aeschylean and Euripidean treatments of these legends? Why does Euripides turn to Dionysiac cult at the end of the fifth century, that is, in an era pervaded by the concept of *οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον* ('nothing to do with Dionysus')?

To explore effectively the reception of these Aeschylean fragmentary plays in E. *Bacchae*, the context of their reception needs to be primarily taken into consideration.⁷ Therefore, it is worth exploring in what ways Euripides' correspondences with and divergences from the Aeschylean treatment can be associated with the context of the development of dramaturgy within the course of the fifth century. How can the socio-political and cultural framework of classical Athens have affected Euripides' creative transformation of the Aeschylean material?

Considering also that reception is perceived as a 'dialogic' process,⁸ an ongoing interaction between the source text and the receiving work, it is worth investigating how this reciprocal relation between *Bacchae* and the Aeschylean Dionysiac tetralogies is shaped. In what ways can the reception of Aeschylus' plays in *Bacchae* elucidate facets of both the source and the receiving text?

⁶ On commentary writing, see, in particular, Kraus 2002, 1–2, 23–24; Stephens 2002, 67–88; Kraus/Stray 2016, 8–10.

⁷ Context exploration as a key principle of classical reception was primarily propounded by Martindale 1993, 11–18.

⁸ Jauss 1982 stressed the interaction between the source text and the receiving work in relation to the receiver's socio-cultural environment. See also Hardwick 2003, 6–9 and Martindale 2006, 3–6. For further references on this topic, see Karamanou 2019, 5 and n. 21.

The investigation of *Bacchae* and *Christus Patiens* may yield more insight into the reception process than when dealing with fragmentary plays, for both the source and the receiving plays have survived in their entirety.

Christus Patiens, a poem of 2531 verses, provides a specimen of Byzantine drama. Nonetheless, the criteria for approaching this dramatic form cannot be the same with those of ancient Greek plays, in view of the remarkable divergences from Greek tragic stagecraft. The poet is not interested in producing a unified dramatic plot and reproducing consistently ancient dramatic conventions. Concerning its form and plot, the poem comprises very long speeches with repetitions of theme, and often without clear signs of the change of scenes and of *dramatis personae*.

The poet seems not to be concerned with the scenic difficulties of his text for onstage production.⁹ The successive Laments (Θρήνοι) of Theotokos colour the text with pathetic overtones and powerful expressions of emotion, often imbued with moralizing reflections.

This Byzantine poem is a cento¹⁰ involving quotations from Greek dramatic poetry, *Old and New Testament* and *Apocrypha*.¹¹ This fusion of ancient and Christian citations was depreciated by earlier scholars.¹² Subsequently, emphasis was posed on a simple identification of quotations, in particular, of Greek drama and especially Euripides.¹³ However, apart from this approach, the reception of Euripidean plays in this Byzantine drama has not attracted much scholarly attention so far. There has been a recent revival of interest in *Christus Patiens* from the viewpoint of the transformation of the tragic material into religious drama beyond the investigation of merely stylistic correspondences.¹⁴ Accordingly, the scope of this book, as far as *Christus Patiens* is concerned, is not to repeat the many stylistic resemblances with tragedy or to deal with the much-discussed question of its authorship. Rather, it is to further enhance this current trend in the interpretation of the play, by offering a treatment that explores from a fresh perspective the multifaceted reconfiguration of themes, plot patterns, dramatic technique, situations and concepts of Euripides' *Bacchae* in this so-called "tragédie chrétienne par excellence".¹⁵

⁹ Cf. Puchner 2017, 79, and earlier *id.* 1995, 51–113.

¹⁰ On the character, transmission, structure, and style of *Christus Patiens*, see below 2.1, 2.1.1–2.1.2.

¹¹ Hunger 1977/1978, 102ff., Pollmann 1997.

¹² E.g. Krumbacher 1897, 746–748; Dieterich 1902, 45–49; Creizenach 1911, 259.

¹³ E.g. Tuilier 1969 cites them in an Apparatus.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Pollman 1997, 2017, Friesen 2015.

¹⁵ Tuilier 1969, 17.

In this case too, it is of particular importance to address some crucial questions: In what ways have elements of Dionysiac cult, ritual, and thought been transplanted into a Byzantine religious drama? As regards dramatic technique, how do ancient dramatic conventions and situations function in the plot of *Christus Patiens*?

In stylistic terms, how is the appropriation of poetic diction from a pagan tragedy refigured and perceived from a Christian perspective in Byzantine contexts? More specifically, did the author of *Christus Patiens* resort to 'plagiarism', as has been thought of in earlier scholarship, or did he manage to offer a creative adaptation of tragic lines? And if so, does the receiving text acquire new meaning in its own culturally different milieu?

From this viewpoint, I aim at investigating the ways in which *Bacchae*, the last and probably the most complex tragedy of Euripides, has been reconfigured in the socio-cultural framework of the Byzantine era. By showcasing the persistence of keystones of thought from the classical age to Byzantium, on the basis of the interaction between source and receiving text in this case, I hope to bring forward the continuing cultural power of *Bacchae* in a diverging socio-cultural context.

On the whole, as it will be argued in the course of this book, *Bacchae* on the one hand amply appropriates concepts, thematic and structural patterns of Aeschylus' Dionysiac tetralogies; on the other hand, this play provides a valuable *exemplum* for pivotal aspects of dramatic technique, situations and values represented in *Christus Patiens*.

