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Andreas Markantonatos, *Brill's Companion to Euripides* (2 vols). Leiden; Boston, Brill 2020. Pp. XXX-1183. ISBN 9789004269705. €269.00

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Preview

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“A Goliath of a manuscript” issued a Goliath of a book. In the aftermath of the *Brill's Companion to Sophocles* (2012), Andreas Markantonatos’ (professor of Greek at the University of Peloponnese) editorial achievement is a survey of the entire Euripidean spectrum¹. The organization of the content, explained on p. 7-8, greatly facilitates reading: part 1, “the poet and his work”, includes studies on the individual plays and the fragments; parts 2-7 guide us through “dominant themes, overriding ideas and prevailing motifs”; finally, part 8, “Euripides made new”, deals with modern reception and translation. The latter is limited to English, but we welcome the advice to learn ancient Greek for a personal approach to the original text.

The two indexes, in particular the first one (subjects), greatly facilitate the reading. Each of the 49 erudite chapters includes a relevant and updated multilingual bibliography suitable even for undergraduates under appropriate guidance.

The book begins with a “life of Euripides” based on the ancient sources, and a chapter on the textual tradition, explaining the division of the extant plays in the so-called “Selection” and the “alphabetical” group, then surveying papyri and the printed editions (starting from Janus Lascaris 1494 and the Aldine of 1503). Modern though it may be, the poem “Εὐριπίδης, Ἀθηναῖος” by the 1963 Nobel laureate Giorgos Seferis (1900-71) would have perfectly complemented the “life”².

Then come the essays on the plays, including *Rhesus* whose authenticity remains an open debate, “the only play whose subject is entirely taken from the *Iliad* while the single one from the *Odyssey* is *Cyclops*” (studied 465-91, “Euripides and satyr drama”), the only satyr play “extant in its entirety” handled by Euripides in a traditional mode but posing some innovative philosophical/ethical questions (the monstrosity of the “bad”, the final victory of men, not gods, the enslavement of a noble man); then a study of the fragmentary plays, mostly *Alexandros* (ca. 415 B.C.), reconstructed thanks to textual evidence (papyri are instrumental), interpreted as a “family reunion” and a “catastrophe survived” Trojan play.

Alcestis is clearly considered a tragic play influenced by the folktale tradition. Its interpretation focuses on the “equation” of Admetus’ life on earth and Alcestis’ in Hades.

For a broader understanding of *Medea*, one can take into account the two chapters in the reception section: “Medea in Argentina” (an infanticide mother, an “indigenous” Medea) and “Euripides performed in Japan” including the traditional kabuki, highlighting Medea’s Euripidean status as a discriminated strange(r) *woman* in the post-imperialistic and post-WWII context.

¹ Information on contributors: XVIII-XXX.

² English translation by Edmund Keely and Philip Sherrard:

<https://poetrywalks.blogspot.com/2013/03/euripides-athenian-by-seferis.html>

It goes without saying that *Heracidae* is created for the stage, not intended to be a political manifesto, even though it mostly focuses on the ideal Athens (see also p. 866-70). The analysis is based on values and counter-values, yet the question of the motivation of [Macaria's] sacrifice should occupy a more prominent place.

In *Hippolytus*, the three main characters, the Nurse, Phaedra and Hippolytus highlight the same central term/concept of destructive σοφρωσύνη. Phaedra's failed rhetoric and realistic expression of feelings, as well as the "contagious" erotic desire are examined in the chapters on rhetoric, realism and emotions.

Multiple themes are at stake in *Andromache*, a play "in the shadow of the *Iliad*" (see also p. 509-10), including the ideal wife, individual or collective responsibility of wrongdoing, and the role of ἔρις in the starting of the Trojan war.

The study of *Hecuba* focuses on political power (or abuse thereof), as well as on the heroine's revenge as a "mirror of the violence that she has suffered", which dehumanizes and alienates her. There is no in-depth analysis of Polyxena's sacrifice in this chapter, but a parallel with Hector's courage in p. 511, and, more interestingly, emphasis on her beauty and "artistic" value as ἄγαλμα.

The couple Aethra-Theseus plays a key role in the *Suppliant women*, the mother being the intercessor between her son, the king of the "imperfect democracy", Athens, and the Argive women. The scene where Theseus instructs his herald is "the only extant example" where a message is staged before it is delivered.

Although challenging, the innovative interpretation of *Heracles* is not based on the so-called "critical readings", but on the rhetorical concept of *amplificatio*, i.e. "enlarging, heightening and intensifying an idea or sequence of ideas", applied to the steepness of Heracles fall, its "undeservedness", and the nobility of the Heracles-Theseus friendship.

Ion is a play with a happy ending about rape, as well as the Athenian fundamental value of autochthony. The study also focuses on the theatrical presentation of the two places of the plot, Delphi and Athens.

Troades features three apparently disconnected episodes, whose coherence is based on Hecuba's dialogue with Cassandra, Andromache and Helen, the (alleged) cause of the Trojan war. The historical context of the representation (415 B.C.) is related to the Sicilian disaster and, moreover, the massacre the Athenians committed in Melos. The play could not be Euripides' direct response to this event (cf. the scholarly controversy p. 880-82), but is indeed a condemnation of war. Its modern Anglo-American reception deals with the future of the survivors; the Japanese one with Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The study of *Electra* includes innovation (a married Electra introducing her husband the Peasant), realism (domestic affairs), and distance from the traditional myth. Modern reception (Giraudoux, Anouilh, Yourcenar, Kiš) emphasizes revenge related to justice.

In the *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, Iphigenia is no more a passive victim (as in the *Oresteia*), but an active agent of Orestes' initiation and of her own destiny. The erotic aspect of the Pylades-Orestes couple linked to pederasty is discussed. The representation of the recognition scene between Orestes and Iphigenia by the Iliupersis painter is examined in the chapter on iconography.

Helen is also a play where women, Helen and priestess Theonoe, are σοφαί, more active and inspired than their male counterparts Menelaus and Theoclymenos. The play is studied in relation to Gorgias' *Encomium* and Stesichorus' *Palinode*, focusing on the

prevalence of illusion upon reality. The Modern Greek poem “Helen” by Seferis focuses on this very theme: the phantom, not Helen, was in Troy and caused the bloodshed³.

Phoenician Women was one of the most popular plays in the Byzantine period. Its complexity was criticized in Antiquity, so the essay focuses on its unity. Menoeceus’ sacrifice is only examined as a breaker of the “doomed heritage”, without any allusion to his specificity as the only male sacrificial victim in Euripides. The materiality of the dead (Eteocles and Polynices) or living (Antigone, Jocasta) bodies, and the “sense perception” perspective is studied on p. 763-66.

Perhaps the last play presented in Athens (408 B.C.) before Euripides’ immigration to Macedonia, *Orestes* raises questions about madness and the curative power of friendship, pre-democratic values and an allegedly democratic vote in an assembly. Homeric intertextuality (*Odyssey*, *Iliad*, *Nostoi*) and topographic realism creating an illusion of a “real” Argos are also considered.

Bacchae is not a “palinode”, i.e. Euripides’ “reassessment” of his rationalism, but an innovative transformation of the myth. Other topics include: costume change linked with *Helen*, *Heracles*, *Telephus* and Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazousai*; mystic Dionysiac cults; and modern questions on violence, metatheatre, gender and cultural exchanges.

Iphigenia at Aulis highlights the “mutual education” of Iphigenia and Achilles. The transformation of the Homeric Achilles and the important place of affective bonds are also considered. The “paternal”-patriotic motivation of Iphigenia’s sacrifice would have been a supplementary argument in favor of the cohesion of the play⁴.

In the thematic section, one can find an overview of the scholarship: intertextuality; language, rhetoric and realism (a parallel is made with the 19th cent. French and English literary movement); emotion; iconography, mostly vase-paintings in Magna Graecia (430-end of the 4th cent. B.C.); stagecraft; the Chorus, an “ideal spectator”; a chapter on religious ritual, refuting the “ritualistic” approach which denies the Chorus its place as a *dramatis persona*, reducing it to the real one performing in the festivals; Athenian imperialism; women’s voices; minor characters; heralds; a chapter on philosophy, with an interesting view on Euripides as a “dangerous populizer” of scientific thought (Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Diogenes of Apollonia); Aristophanes’ reception.

Some chapters of this section attract our attention: “art, artifacts and the technical vocabulary of crafts” suggests that Euripides’ predilection for οἰκεῖα πράγματα includes familiarity with artisanship, which can be part of his proximity with Socrates; “the aesthetic of embodiment” studies “material women’s” bodily experience (sense, sensitivity, sensuality); “ancient reperformances” collects the epigraphic, literary and biographical testimonies of Euripides’ performances outside Athens (mostly in Sicily); “mystical religion” (Eleusinian, Orphical, Cretan) upholds the opinion that Euripides does not unveil the mysteries, but uses them to enhance the tragic plot; “affective attachments” insists on the dynamic nature of emotions and regards *Andromeda* (412 B.C.) as the earliest tragedy featuring the *process* of falling in love.

³ English translation <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51361/helen-56d22f0b36c82>

⁴ Dina Bacalexi, « Personal, paternal, patriotic: the threefold sacrifice of Iphigenia in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* » *Humanitas* 68, 2016, 51-76 https://doi.org/10.14195/2183-1718_68

Typographical imperfections are a drop in the ocean in this monumental work. Yet, we are intrigued to read (p. 827) that Medea “tells her children to supplicate Jason’s new bride to allow them to remain in *Thebes*”, instead of the correct “to remain in *Corinth*”. We warmly recommend this *Companion* to any reader. It is a voluptuous immersion in Euripides’ demanding yet seductive theater.