

ARISTOPHANES, *FROGS* 1463–5

AI. τὴν γῆν ὅταν νομίσωσι τὴν τῶν πολεμίων
εἶναι σφετέραν, τὴν δὲ σφετέραν τῶν πολεμίων,
πόρον δὲ τὰς ναῦς, ἀπορίαν δὲ τὸν πόρον.

THIS passage has long embarrassed interpreters, and many, beginning with Kock, have condemned it as spurious (generally bracketing 1460–6). But this would mean that Aeschylus' only answer to Dionysus' question (1436) 'what <way to> safety have you for the city?' would be, in effect, 'none' (1458 πῶς οὖν τις ἂν σώσειε τιοιούτην πόλιν); and this would hardly justify the general confidence expressed in the final scene (1501 f., 1530 ff.) that Aeschylus will in fact be able to save the city. The most recent editor, Stanford,¹ rightly rejects the idea of interpolation here.

Two difficulties have been seen in the lines: one of syntax, and one of sense and relevance. The syntactic difficulty is supposed to be that the speech consists entirely of a subordinate clause, with the main proposition ('the Athenians will be saved') unexpressed; but this, so far from being evidence for positing a lacuna before 1463 as Dörrie² supposed, is precisely the form of Euripides' answer to the same question (1443 f.); and if the irregularity in Euripides' case is explained away on the supposition that he is interrupted before finishing his sentence, the same possibility must be allowed in Aeschylus' case.

The more serious problem has been the supposed irrelevance of Aeschylus' advice to the war situation at the time of production. Those who retain the lines in the text have generally felt it necessary to assume that Aeschylus is deliberately being made anachronistic in recommending policy suited to the Archidamian war (Stanford) or the Persian war (Barrett).³ But this too is not satisfactory. Euripides in 1446–50 has offered what Aristophanes clearly thinks a highly relevant and essentially correct piece of advice, since it is advice already given in the parabasis (727 ff.).⁴ If Aeschylus then gives advice which shows he is still fighting the last war but one, why is he the one chosen as saviour of the city?

Dörrie has come closest to a solution, though his transference of 1446–50 to Aeschylus is, as MacDowell has shown, unacceptable.⁵ He points out that the

¹ *Aristophanes: The Frogs*, ed. W. B. Stanford, 2nd edn., London and New York, 1963. Wilamowitz (*Hermes*, lxiv [1929], 474) deletes only 1462–6, and sees Aeschylus' refusal (1461) to answer the question while in the underworld as explaining and indeed necessitating Dionysus' decision to take him back to the upper world; this ignores not only 1420 f. (see page 26), but also Dionysus' blunt instruction (1460) 'Find <a way to save the city>, if you want to go back up there again'.

² *Hermes*, lxxxiv (1956), 296–319.

³ *Aristophanes: The Frogs and other plays*, tr. D. Barrett, Harmondsworth, 1964.

⁴ In the parabasis the advice is in a

purely positive form (*χρήσθε τοῖς χρηστοῖσιν*, 735), whereas Euripides' advice is both positive and negative—to trust one group of citizens and not to trust another group; but this difference is unlikely to be significant.

⁵ D. M. MacDowell in *C.Q.* ix (1959), 261–8. MacDowell's own arrangement of the contest, however, does not meet the objection of Apollonius (*Σ* 1437) that Euripides, after being asked for one *γνώμη* (1435), is allowed to give two, nor does it satisfactorily account for the *μέν* of 1442; and the simple solution proposed long ago by Dindorf still seems the best: that 1437–41 + 1451–3 on the one hand, and 1442–50 on the other, are alternative versions, probably

advice to hold 'the ships your <sole> resource' corresponded precisely to the actual situation of 406/5 and that 'counting your own land as the enemy's' was making a virtue of necessity; if both maxims would also have been valid in earlier wars (Athens' strength at sea and weakness on land being almost a constant factor in the fifth century), that did not make them any the less valid in 406/5.

Dörrie's explanation of the other two clauses of Aeschylus' advice is, however, less convincing. He takes ἀπορίαν δὲ τὸν πόρον to mean 'den Landweg [soll Athen] dagegen als unwegsam [ansehen]'; but it is very difficult to assign πόρος the sense this requires. The primary sense of πόρος, indeed, is something much more like 'Seeweg', and it seems never to be used of a land journey or route in contrast to a sea journey or route. When Aristophanes does pun on two senses of πόρος (*Wasps* 308), the second sense is, as we would expect, 'sea crossing, strait' (πόρον Ἑλλάς ἱερὸν), which in the *Frogs* context would be totally inappropriate. There can thus be no pun on πόρον in 1465; in the second half of the line, as in the first half, the word means simply 'resource'. In plain language the line means that resources not spent on ships are now worthless.

The first clause of Aeschylus' speech (1463-4a) is the most difficult. The traditional interpretation is approximately 'when they regard the enemy's land as their own <to ravage as they did during the Archidamian war>'; Dörrie reverses this and understands the clause to mean 'when they regard the enemy's land <with as much solicitude> as <if it were> their own <and therefore refrain from ravaging it>'. Despite this apparent opposition, both interpretations are bedevilled by the same tacit assumption, which was derived by early editors from the scholia, and which it is high time was got rid of.

The assumption is that 'the enemy's land' means the Peloponnese, in particular Laconia. From the general similarity between Aeschylus' recommendations and the policy of Pericles as reported by Thucydides (1. 143. 4; 2. 13. 2; 23. 2) and carried out in the early years of the war, it was deduced that Aeschylus was in fact recommending Pericles' policy; and so the scholiasts flatly state.¹ But their statements are not evidence; they bear no marks of depending on any source of information not available to us; they are as purely based on deduction as if they had been made by a modern scholar. Starting from another assumption—that, in order to make sense of the result of the contest, the advice given by Aeschylus must at the very least not be less relevant and reasonable than that of Euripides—we may well arrive at a different conclusion.

Advice either to raid the Peloponnese, or not to raid it, is alike irrelevant in 406/5. No one, so far as we know, was even thinking of doing so. The Athenian fleet was based at Samos and was fully occupied in the eastern and northern Aegean, partly in keeping the Hellespont open for Athens' food supply,² partly in securing the control of, and military and financial support from, as much as

stemming from the two productions of the play (see Hypotheses I and III), which were conflated at an early date. This solution makes transpositions, lacunae, and deletions alike unnecessary.

¹ I quote as typical the scholia of R: 1463 τὴν Περικλέους γνώμην λέγει: 1465 καὶ τοῦτο κατὰ τὴν Περικλέους γνώμην, ὅς

ἐκέλευεν Ἀθηναίους εἰσβαλόντων (ἐκ- R, corr. Rutherford) μὲν Λακεδαιμονίων εἰς τὴν Ἀπτικὴν μὴ ἐπεξιέναι ἀλλ' ἔσω τείχους μένειν, αὐτοὺς δὲ διὰ τῶν πλοίων ἐπιέναι τῇ Λακωνικῇ.

² It was the loss of Lampascus, and with it of control over the Hellespont, that brought the Athenian fleet to Aegospotami.

possible of the former empire. In 406 we hear of an unsuccessful Athenian attempt to surprise Chios, now a Spartan ally,¹ and in 405 the Athenians ‘attacked the King’s land and sailed against Chios and Ephesus’.² It was on this, then, that all Athenian efforts were bent. It was with this that the Athenian navy had been occupied for the past six years. It must surely be on this that Aeschylus is urging the Athenians to concentrate.

This interpretation requires *τὴν γῆν τὴν τῶν πολεμίων* to be taken as referring to the states, formerly allies of Athens, now under Spartan or Persian control; and it may be argued that Aristophanes’ audience would not naturally understand the phrase in this sense. But the meaning of phrases like ‘enemy territory’ changes with the situation. No better illustration of this could be found than our two chief literary sources for the events of this year. Xenophon (*H.G.* 2. 1. 18), describing Athenian naval movements in 405, says *ἡ Ἀσία πολεμία αὐτοῖς ἦν*; and even more strikingly, Diodorus (13. 100. 6), speaking of Athenian raids on the islands and the Asian mainland, says *τὴν τῶν πολεμίων χώραν ἐπόρθουν*, using almost the same phrase as Aeschylus. This was the sense in which raiding enemy territory had long been Athenian policy, and this is the sense in which the expression would naturally be taken in 405.

Aeschylus’ advice is thus: ‘Forget about everything else, throw all your resources into the fleet, recognize the fact that you cannot drive the enemy from Attica, and concentrate on gaining full control of the Aegean.’ In other words, Athens’ existing strategy was right, but must be pursued with more single-mindedness. All the financial resources (*πόρος*) which the *πορισταί* (1505) were scraping together should be considered no better than resourcelessness (*ἀπορία*); the only resource that counted was the fleet.

Thus the advice on *ωρηρία* of Euripides and Aeschylus is seen to be equally valid and to the point. Why then is that of Aeschylus preferred? It has often been thought mistaken to seek a serious reason, and certainly Dionysus gives none when actually stating his decision. However, the following considerations must be taken into account.

(1) Dionysus starts out with a strong prejudice in favour of Euripides (66 ff.), and even after the literary contest and the question about Alcibiades he is still undecided (1411 ff., 1433 ff.). There must be *some* explanation, even if it is not one that a rational person would think sufficient, for the completion of his reversal of view.

(2) This *a priori* probability is supported by the fact that Dionysus expresses approval of Aeschylus’ final answer (*εὖ* 1466) but makes no comment on that of Euripides.³

(3) Dionysus introduces the political test by saying (1420 f.) ‘Whichever gives the city good advice, that one I will take with me’, suggesting a serious test; and the test itself is treated seriously on the whole, buffooning comments by Dionysus being all but absent. (Line 1466 is not so much a buffooning comment as a serious remark on the treatment as a sacred cow, even in times of crisis, of the daily pay of thousands of jurors.)

(4) As we have already observed, the triumph of Aeschylus is greeted as the salvation of the city, while Euripides is dismissed as one who merely ‘sits next to Socrates and blethers’ (1491 f.). This would not be an appropriate

¹ Xen. *H.G.* 1. 6. 3 and 38.

² Xen. *H.G.* 2. 1. 16.

³ Line 1451, as was seen by Dindorf,

belongs to the version in which Euripides’ advice is a piece of ingenious ludicrousness.

comment on a contest in which the merits were equal and the decision frivolous.

It is not wholly unreasonable, therefore, to ask : in the framework established by the play, in what respect(s) is Aeschylus' advice superior to that of Euripides?

In his answer to Dionysus' final question, as throughout the contest, Euripides puts his faith in words and persuasion. The stem *πιστ-* occurs six times in five lines in his answer (1443-7). He has throughout shown himself a true worshipper of 'the whirling tongue' (892). He prides himself on having taught the Athenians to talk (954), reason, and investigate (971 ff.); for him *Πειθῶ* is *ἔπος ἄριστ' εἰρημένον* (1395). Aeschylus, on the other hand, reckons it his achievement as a tragedian to have made people 'noble six-footers, not runaways or loungers or tricksters or villains like nowadays, but they breathed spear and lance and white-crested helmets and casques and greaves, with hearts seven oxhides thick' (1014 ff.); and it is in keeping with this that his final advice is for total concentration on the national effort. Euripides' arts of persuasion encouraged rich men to lie their way out of trierarchies (1065 ff.); this was not the road to salvation. Euripides is presented as the poet of words, Aeschylus as the poet of action. All through their contest this is a major point of contrast between them; and it is on this, in the end, that the contest is decided.

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