

THE EARLY CHRONOLOGY OF ATTIC TRAGEDY

Books give three dates earlier than 500:

535/3 Thespis' first production

523/0 Choerilus' first production

511/08 Phrynichus' first victory.

Can we trust them?

City archives, mined by Aristotle for his *Didaskaliai*, preserved a reasonably complete record of dramatic productions in the fifth century. But how far back did these archives go? The so-called Fasti, an inscription set up c. 346 and listing dithyrambic, comic and tragic victors year by year, must have been based on the same archives, but went back, it is thought, only as far as 502/1.¹ Its heading *πρώτον κῶμοι ἦσαν τῶι Διονύσῳ τραγωιδοὶ δ*[], however supplemented, implies an intention of going back to the beginning of things, in other words to the beginning of the archival record. This raises serious doubt as to whether that record went back to the alleged date of Thespis' *première*, or indeed to those given for Choerilus' and Phrynichus'.

We also note that in the list of victorious tragedians in *IG* ii².2325 (*TrGF* DID A 3a) there is space only for about eight poets before Aeschylus, whose name is the first preserved; that is, for eight who won victories before Aeschylus' first win in 484. If records reached back to c. 533, eight is a remarkably small number. The 112 years after 484, according to the same monument, produced 33 new victors, an average of one every 3.4 years. Extrapolation from this figure would put the beginning of the list c. 511. If it had begun in 533, we should expect fourteen or fifteen pre-Aeschylean victors by the same reckoning. If there were only eight in 49 years, we should have to assume that the literary tradition ignores several pre-Aeschylean tragedians who were on record as having won many victories.

Suspicious wax when we inspect the foundations on which those dates for Thespis, Choerilus, and Phrynichus rest. They come from the *Suda* entries on the respective poets. Each is given in terms of an Olympiad, without specification of the year or mention of an archonship. They are equidistant: Thespis comes three Olympiads before Choerilus, Choerilus three Olympiads before Phrynichus; while Phrynichus comes three Olympiads before Pratinas, who (again according to the *Suda*) *ἀντηγωνίζετο Αἰσχύλῳ τε καὶ Χοιρίλῳ ἐπὶ τῆς ο' Ὀλυμπιάδος* (= 499/6). This last date is perhaps soundly based. It certainly falls within the archival period, and the appearance of the three famous names in the same year in the *Didaskaliai* might well be seized upon by a chronographer as a starting-point.² But the three earlier dates look very much like a schematic construction designed to place the three known seniors of Aeschylus and Pratinas in their right order at suitable intervals.

¹ *IG* ii².2318; see E. Capps, *Hesperia* 12 (1943), 10f.; A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (2nd edn, rev. Gould and Lewis, 1968), pp. 71f., 101ff.; *TrGF* i².22–5. If another column is lost at the beginning, and if the dithyrambic victories (both men's and boys' choruses) began in 509 or 508 (Marm. Par. *FGrHist* 239 A 46), and if a choregic system already existed under the tyrants, there would have been space for tragic victories going back to 522 or 520; or, if the heading *τραγωιδῶν* was not repeated in each entry in that section, 528 or 526.

² This epoch is also mentioned in *Suda* s.v. *Αἰσχύλος* (= Aesch. T 2 Radt): *ἡγωνίζετο... ἐν τῇ ο' (θ' codd.) Ὀλυμπιάδι ἐτῶν ὦν κε'*. The age of twenty-five, in conjunction with the birth-date implied by other ancient reckonings, fixes the year as Ol. 70.2 = 498. Eusebius gave *Αἰσχύλος τραγωιδοποιὸς ἐγνωρίζετο* under 497/6 (Armenian) or 496/5 (Jerome), and again under 477/6 or 475/4.

The immediate source of the *Suda* entries was an epitome of Hesychius of Miletus' 'Όνοματολογικόν or Πίναξ τῶν ἐν παιδείᾳ ὀνομαστών. The question of Hesychius' sources is murky. One of them appears to have been some derivative of Callimachus' *Pinakes*. This will be the source of the play-titles which the *Suda* cites for Thespis and Phrynichus, and for the numbers given for Choerilus' and Pratinas' plays and victories.³ Besides these, the entries contain excerpts from a presumably Peripatetic account of the early tragedians' individual innovations, especially in regard to masks and costumes:

Thespis πρῶτον μὲν κρίσας τὸ πρόσωπον ψιμυθίῳ ἐτραγώιδησεν, εἶτα ἀνδράχνην ἐσκέπασεν... μετὰ ταῦτα εἰσήνεγκε καὶ τὴν τῶν προσωπείων χρῆσιν, ἐν μόνῃ ὁθόνῃ κατασκευάσας.

Choerilus κατὰ τινας τοῖς προσωπείοις καὶ τῇ σκηνῇ (1. σκευῇ) τῶν στολῶν ἐπεχείρησεν.

Phrynichus πρῶτος γυναικεῖον πρόσωπον εἰσήγαγεν ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ. καὶ εὐρετὴς τοῦ τετραμέτρου ἐγένετο.

Pratinas πρῶτος ἔγραψε Σατύρους.

This is the sort of history that Aristotle alludes to in *Poet.* 1449a37ff.: the identification of those responsible for each development in the art of tragedy, who invented masks, prologues, plural actors, etc.

The Thespis entry also contains the curious information that Thespis was ἑκκαδέκατος ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου γενομένου τραγωιδιοποιοῦ 'Επιγένους τοῦ Σικυνίου τιθέμενος · ὡς δέ τινες, δεύτερος μετὰ 'Επιγένῃν · ἄλλοι δὲ αὐτὸν πρῶτον τραγικὸν γενέσθαι φασίν. What kind of source was it that was able to name fifteen predecessors of Thespis, beginning with Epigenes of Sicyon? I nominate the fanciful Heraclides Ponticus, who in his *Συναγωγή τῶν ἐν μουσικῇ εὐδοκιμησάντων* filled out early literary history with crowds of legendary and semi-legendary poets and singers,⁴ and who cited as one of his authorities ἡ ἀναγραφὴ ἡ ἐν Σικυνῶν ἀποκειμένη, δι' ἧς τὰς τε ἱερείας τὰς ἐν Ἀργεὶ καὶ τοὺς ποιητὰς καὶ τοὺς μουσικοὺς ὀνομάζει.⁵ This Sicyonian inscription was itself a rather imaginative chronicle, set up by some local dilettante presumably earlier in the fourth century.⁶ No doubt it promoted Sicyonian claims to have invented tragedy (for which the famous reference in Herodotus 5.67.5 provided a handle), naming Epigenes and others in this connection.⁷

But against Heraclides' account of Thespis as the sixteenth tragedian the *Suda*'s source set the contrary view that he was the first. So here is an opponent of Heraclides who dismisses the ἀμνηνὰ κάρηνα of Sicyonian vanity and concentrates on historical Attic developments. We find a parallel to this in *Suda*/Phot. s.v. οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον:⁸ a first explanation that connects the saying with Epigenes of Sicyon, and then a preferred alternative (βέλτιον δὲ οὕτως) that connects it with the (supposed) evolution of tragedy from Σατυρικά. This is an Aristotelian perspective; and in this case the source is named: καὶ Χαμαιλέων ἐν τῷ περὶ Θέσπιδος τὰ παραπλήσια ἱστορεῖ (fr. 48 Giordano).

³ Aristophanes' work πρὸς τοὺς Καλλιμάχου Πίνακας may come into question. Cf. *Vita Sophoclis* 18 ἔχει δὲ δράματα, ὡς φησιν Ἀριστοφάνης, πλ'.

⁴ Fr. 157 Wehrli (ap. ps.-Plut. *De musica* 1131f ff.); cf. fr. 159.

⁵ Ps.-Plut. *ibid.*

⁶ Jacoby ad *FGrHist* 550.

⁷ Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1448a30–5 ἀντιποιούνται τῆς τε τραγωιδίας καὶ τῆς κωμωιδίας οἱ Δωριεῖς, τῆς μὲν γὰρ κωμωιδίας οἱ Μεγαρεῖς... καὶ τῆς τραγωιδίας ἔνιοι τῶν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ.

⁸ Cf. Apostol. 13.42. Snell in *TrGF* I T 18 gives precedence to the fuller form in the proverb-collection of Paris. Coisl. 177; but see the warning of W. Bühler, *Zenobii Athoi proverbia* i (1987), 278.

Chamaeleon's essay on Thespis was one of several he devoted to drama: *περὶ Σατύρων, περὶ Αἰσχύλου, περὶ ἀρχαίας κωμωιδίας* (this in at least six books) are also cited. We know of at least one other occasion on which he criticized his fellow-Heracléot Heraclides;⁹ though he was not the only one to assail the latter's ebullient frauds.¹⁰

The bulk of the *Suda*'s information on Thespis, then, may go back to Chamaeleon – author of the only known work *περὶ Θέσπιδος* – reflecting his polemic against Heraclides Ponticus. The parallel entries on Choerilus, Phrynichus, and Pratinas perhaps derive from the same original account, if not from other Peripatetic work.

The Olympiad chronology attached to them, however, must be attributed to a later source. It is not only expressed in Olympiads in the *Suda* but must have been conceived in Olympiads from the beginning, as the twelve-year intervals between poets do not represent natural units by any other reckoning. Timaeus was the first who made use of Olympiads for purposes of universal chronology, and the practice is foreign to the Peripatetics. In any case Chamaeleon's interest in literary history seems to have been of a jovial character and unconcerned with dates.

The first student of literature who dated by Olympiads – who, indeed, constructed a whole historical chronology expressed on the Olympiad system – was Eratosthenes.¹¹ His interest in the origins of drama is attested by a well-known fragment from his *Erigone*.¹² He seems to be the first who could have been responsible for spacing Thespis, Choerilus, Phrynichus, and Pratinas/Aeschylus at three-Olympiad intervals, and he is a plausible suspect. If it was not he, it was someone who used his method of reckoning.

The date constructed for Thespis by this procedure, Ol. 61 = 535/2, was close to other estimates. The Parian Marble, which is earlier than any likely date for Eratosthenes' chronological work, and anyway independent of it and still untouched by Olympiad reckoning, put Thespis somewhere between 538 and 528.¹³ Eusebius appears to have synchronized him with Simonides, Phocylides, and Xenophanes under the year 540/39 or thereabouts.¹⁴ The anecdote in Plutarch, *Solon* 29.6–7 (cf. D.L. 1.59), puts Thespis' inauguration of tragedy in the time of Pisistratus, though with Solon still alive and making tetchy comments on current affairs. It was the general belief, then, from as far back as we can see (i.e. from the time of the Parian Marble, 264/3 B.C.), that Thespis lived under Pisistratus.

⁹ D.L. 5.92 *Χαμαιλέον τε {τὰ} παρ' ἑαυτοῦ φησι κλέψαντα αὐτὸν τὰ περὶ 'Ησιόδου καὶ 'Ομήρου γράφαι* = fr. 57 Giordano.

¹⁰ Aristoxenus accused Heraclides of forging plays of Thespis (D.L. *ibid.* = Aristox. fr. 114 W., *TrGF* I T 24). Aristoxenus was given to making charges of forgery, cf. Wehrli *ad loc.*

¹¹ Cf. Jacoby *ad FGrHist* 241; R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, i (1968), 163f., 169; P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (1972), i.456f.

¹² Fr. 22 Powell; cf. Pfeiffer, *op. cit.* 169 n. 2.

¹³ Jacoby, *Das Marmor Parium* (1904), p. 172; *FGrHist* 239 A 43; *TrGF* I T 2. There is no justification for assuming, as is commonly done, that the Parian chronicle placed Thespis in the same Olympiad as does the *Suda*. (Sometimes one actually sees it cited as the source for this date.) What is preserved of its dating is *ἐτη HH[?]* [] (sc. years before 264/3). The number of letter-spaces in the gap is assessed at three, but it must be borne in mind that in these numerals two or three unit-signs can fit into one letter-space. Possible restorations are accordingly: [*ΔΔΙ*] = (Dionysia) 538 or 537 (the chronicler is inconsistent as to whether he uses inclusive or non-inclusive reckoning), [*ΔΔΙΙΙ*] = 536 or 535, [*ΔΔΙΙ*] = 535 or 534, [*ΔΔΙ*] = 534 or 533, [*ΔΙΙΙΙ*] = 531 or 530, [*ΔΙΙΙ*] = 530 or 529, [*ΔΙΙ*] = 529 or 528, [*ΔΙ*] = 527 or 526. But the archon-name, *Γναίου τοῦ προτέρου*, rules out 527 and 526, as the archons for these years are known.

¹⁴ Not 541 as in *TrGF* i DID D 3. The tragedian whose name has fallen out cannot be anyone but Thespis.

Eratosthenes – or whoever it was – may have made himself a more exact dating by reckoning back one 33-year generation (a unit presupposed elsewhere in Eratosthenes' system) from the appearance of Pratinas and Aeschylus in Ol. 70, using the conversion-formula '33 years before = the ninth Olympiad before'.¹⁵ This put Thespis a comfortable five years or so before the death of Pisistratus in Ol. 63.1. The nine-Olympiad period could be conveniently trisected to obtain starting-up dates for Choerilus and Phrynichus.

If the grounds for this analysis are judged reasonable, we should cease to treat the dates 535/2, 523/0, and 511/08 as fixed points in the early history of tragedy, however comforting it is to have such. We can accept that Phrynichus was somewhat older than Aeschylus, and Choerilus probably older still.¹⁶ As for Thespis, we can do no more than acquiesce in the ancient belief that his activity began under Pisistratus. It is sometimes conjectured, even asserted, that it began in connection with a reorganization of the City Dionysia by the tyrant. Obviously the Dionysia grew in magnificence in the second half of the sixth century; they continued to do so in the fifth. It is not implausible that Pisistratus should have assisted the process by some particular initiative of his own. But it should be remembered that this is a mere assumption. Books which refer to a reorganization in 533 are retailing speculation pegged to a date for Thespis which is itself unreliable.

Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, London

M. L. WEST

¹⁵ A strict reckoning from Ol. 70.2, however, would only have reached back to Ol. 62.1 (= 531). It is not certain whether Eratosthenes subdivided Olympiads. Possibly 531, arrived at by a parallel (but non-Olympiadic) calculation from 498, was the date on the Parian Marble.

¹⁶ The figure of 160 dramas attributed to him in the *Suda* would presuppose a long career; but it is scarcely credible. It contrasts violently with the figures of four for Thespis and nine for Phrynichus (even though the nine listed represent only a fraction of an alphabetic list). And if the *Didaskaliai* began in 502/1, there simply cannot have been room for so many titles of Choerilus.

AESCHYLUS, *AGAMEMNON* 72–5

ἡμεῖς δ' ἀτίται σαρκὶ παλαιᾷ
τῆς τότ' ἀρωγῆς ὑπολειφθέντες
μῖνοντες ἰσχὺν
ἰσόπαιδα νέμοντες ἐπὶ σκῆπτροις.

72

In the first of his three magisterial articles on the *Agamemnon* H. L. Ahrens showed that all the evidence then available best fitted the conclusion that ἀτίται derived from τίνω and not from τίω.¹ Subsequently Ed. Fraenkel in his own note on the word reviewed and supplemented the evidence gathered by Ahrens, and expressed the view that Ahrens' 'discussion, details apart, is final'; and there seems to be widespread agreement that on the linguistic side at least Ahrens' argument cannot be refuted.² If this means anything, it means that the sense of the word cannot be 'unhonoured' or 'dishonoured'. Yet Denniston–Page in their commentary say that "'unhonoured"

¹ 'Studien zum Agamemnon des Aeschylus. Erster Artikel', *Philologus*, Supplbd. 1 (1860), 248–9.

² See the remarks of H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Agamemnonea', *HSCP* 73 (1969), 97 and those of J. Bollack, *Agamemnon* 1, première partie (Lille, n.d.), p. 84. One can also reasonably infer from the translations of H. Weir Smyth, P. Mazon, W. Headlam (both prose and verse), and L. MacNeice, that they all agree with Ahrens' derivation of ἀτίτης from τίνω. Even Denniston–Page do not challenge the plausibility of Ahrens' position on the linguistic side.