

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

LITERATURE

MOST (G.) and OZBEK (L.) *Eds Staging Ajax's Suicide* (Seminari e Convegni 43). Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, 2015. Pp. 345. €25. 9788876425677.
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This engaging and challenging volume, comprising an introduction, 14 papers and an appendix, springs from the eponymous conference at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa in 2013 and explores the production of Ajax's suicide in Sophocles' *Ajax*. Glenn W. Most's introduction outlines the contentious debate: does the scene change for Ajax's suicide? Where and how does the suicide occur? Is Ajax's sword visible? How is Ajax's corpse portrayed – is it replaced by a dummy? The volume's goals include 'to clarify further Sophocles' compositional technique and his dramaturgical choices, to attempt to arrive at a plausible solution of a problem of considerable importance ... and to explore the modes of philological argumentation and the possibilities (but also the limits) of philological knowledge' (11). A representative sample must unfortunately suffice here for brevity's sake.

Maria Luisa Catoni investigates the lengthy iconographic tradition of Ajax's suicide and how it may inform scholars' decisions on staging. Crisp illustrations (329–45) keyed to various chapters accompany iconographic discussions. Catoni's contribution helps contextualize other contributors' comprehensive philological examinations, 'showcasing the problematic relationship between pots and plays ... in quite extreme terms' (15).

Alex F. Garvie explores the dramaturgical possibilities for Ajax's death and ends with a reconstruction of the suicide. Typical controversies include the use of the *ekkyklēma* for displaying Ajax's corpse and the role of the *skênē*. Garvie rejects the use of the *skênē*-door to enter a grove, citing a lack of 'clear evidence' (35), and, following Patrick Finglass, rejects the *ekkyklēma*. His reconstruction requires minimal set-dressing: no central *skênē*-door, a dummy substituted for Ajax's corpse and a screen to depict the grove.

Christine Mauduit describes staging problems in ancient drama (especially the *Ajax*) and proposes criteria for reconstructions: *cf.* the famous suggestion in Σ *ad Soph. Aj.* 815a that the *skênē* becomes 'a deserted place', ἐρήμου τινός χωρίου (48, n. 2). A comprehensive reconstruction of Ajax's suicide follows: the *skênē* represents a grove in the second half (*contra* Garvie et al. this volume: screens or similar décor); the suicide occurs onstage and the *ekkyklēma* displays Ajax's corpse. Mauduit's reconstruction even highlights comic parallels (*cf.* Vayos Liapis' chapter on tragic and comic dramaturgical intersections). Also germane is Oliver Taplin's contribution illuminating the Troad's mytho-historical geography and spatial relationships.

Scott Scullion formerly (*Three Studies in Athenian Dramaturgy*, Stuttgart 1994) rejected a scene-change, citing 'inadequate verbal guidance' (77), herein a minority opinion. He maintains this view, but considers Mauduit and Most's scene-changing reconstructions the 'least obtrusive' (77). Scullion engages in a friendly rivalry, critiquing Finglass' reconstruction (*Sophocles: Ajax*, Cambridge 2011) throughout, and implores scholars to see the forest for the trees, likening quibbles over the scene-change and other elements to the 'straining of a gnat ... [and] swallowing the camel' (95).

Maria Chiara Martinelli contemplates the visibility of the sword, and Ajax's corpse, to the audience and the sword's role in staging. The use of deictics is also problematic: τῶδε (*Aj.* 828, 834) may indicate the sword's visibility, since a deictic should not govern an invisible object (*cf.* Liapis, Finglass and Mauduit). The corpse can also be moved offstage by various means: mobile elements onstage; the *ekkyklēma*; a raised stage-platform to display the corpse, blocking the Chorus' line of sight (*cf.* Liapis).

Luigi Battezzato focuses on the treatment of Ajax's corpse, arguing that the corpse cannot be moved, at least during *Aj.* 925–36; many scholars assume otherwise. Battezzato painstakingly surveys actors' movements from *Aj.* 646 to 1409, and proposes, like Martinelli and others, using screens, the *ekkyklēma* or doors to manipulate the corpse's visibility. A scene-change, Battezzato

argues, simplifies the play's movements and resolves potential problems.

Leyla Ozbek compares *Ajax* to Sophocles' fragmentary *Niobe*, which portrays, likely onstage, Apollo and Artemis' violent slaughter of the Niobids. Luigi Zanetto similarly sees parallels to Ajax's suicide in Greek novels by Xenophon of Ephesus and Chariton (*cf.* Alan Sommerstein's chapter on Ajax's corpse as a character, with Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* and *Nereids* as *comparanda*).

In the appendix, Most proposes a personal reconstruction of Ajax's suicide, not intended 'as a joint statement by the contributors' (289). The *skênê* represents Ajax's hut until 815, then becomes a thicket and the *eisodoi* function after Taplin's arrangement (*A* leads west, towards the Greek camp, and *B* in the opposite direction). Ajax falls, invisibly, upon the sword inside the *skênê*.

The *ekkyklêma* displays Ajax's impaled body, which becomes visible after *Aj.* 1003. Most's reconstruction carefully synthesizes contributors' previous arguments.

This fabulous collection includes many questions and answers. Despite our gaps in knowledge of staging ancient drama, this volume challenges us to reframe these problems and propose solutions. Temporal distance may render our attempts 'enriched by analysis of the literary, exegetical, and iconographical sources for Ajax's suicide as well as by general study of Sophocles' literary technique and plotting...' (11). No reconstruction is perfect, but these contributions are scrupulously researched and certainly plausible.

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