Ezekiel's *Exagoge*, One Play or Four?

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IN A RECENT ARTICLE in this journal Thomas D. Kohn has argued that the remains of Ezekiel's tragedy the *Exagoge* come not from one play but rather from a connected tetralogy on the story of the Exodus from Egypt.[1] This is an interesting and potentially important thesis. Kohn's argument and reconstruction deserve to be assessed and evaluated.

Kohn's first argument against the traditional "one-play" view is that one play "leaves little room for adequate development of plot, or for suitable choral passages" (6). For the latter, we do not even know whether there were choral songs in the play nor do we have any idea what they might have been like if there were, since there is no extant evidence for the chorus' role in Hellenistic tragedy.[2] For the former, what exactly is "adequate development of plot"? Does Aeschylus' *Persae* have "adequate development of plot"? This is not argument or evidence, but rather unsupported opinion.

Much of Kohn's argument against the "one play" view centers on the absence of the unities of time, place, and especially action (6–7). But this argument is undermined (as Kohn himself somewhat recognizes) by our ignorance of the conventions of Hellenistic tragedy and also by the fact that the classical tragedians themselves did not always adhere to these Aristotelian unities. Kohn attempts to mitigate these objections by observing that "no one violates [these unities] to so great an extent

[1] "The Tragedies of Ezekiel," *GRBS* 43 (2002/3) 5–12.

[2] Unless, to be sure, we consider Seneca's plays evidence for Hellenistic drama.

as Ezekiel. It is hard to imagine how the extant fragments of the *Exagoge* could possibly be conceived of as a single plot" (7). To me it seems quite easy. It is a play about the Exodus that begins with the necessary preliminaries and concludes with the immediate aftermath. But in the final analysis Kohn wants to keep Ezekiel hostage to Aristotle's dictates, and that will not do.

To fill out what readers have always taken as one play so that it constitutes four, Kohn speculates. "The main action of the first play revolves around a foreign prince (Moses) who is betrothed to a local princess (Sepphora), incurring the wrath of an earlier lover … Clearly, an entire play would be necessary to develop adequately the implications of the marriage" (8–9). Let it be noted that this "main action of the first play" is almost entirely a creation out of whole cloth. There is no evidence. There is a character in the play called Chum who engages in a stichomythic dialogue with Sepphora that includes a reference to her marriage. To turn this into the central focus of the action of the whole play is special pleading.

That the dialogue between Sepphora and Chum "marks the end of Polyhistor's discussion of the first play" is supported, Kohn argues (9), by the fact that Polyhistor here turns away from Ezekiel and cites texts from a different author. But in fact Polyhistor's introduction here (Euseb. *Praep.Evang.* 9.29.1) of other versions has nothing to do with the structure of Ezekiel's play(s), but everything to do with Polyhistor's technique. Let it be noted that Eusebius' *Praep.Evang.* Book 9 chapters 17–37 is mostly Polyhistor's chronological account of Biblical history from the flood and tower of Babel till Solomon's Temple as represented in earlier Greek authors. Polyhistor (Eusebius) treats Biblical history in discrete segments, moving from one version of a particular segment to another. Thus, the shift from Ezekiel to Demetrius after the Sepphora-Chum dialogue is simply representative of Polyhistor's segmentation of Biblical history, not a reflection of a major pause (play-end) in Ezekiel's

drama(s). Thus, not only Ezekiel's work but those of Eupol-emus, Demetrius and Artapanus are broken up into pieces in these chapters. "If Polyhistor were quoting from a single tragedy," writes Kohn, "it seems odd and arbitrary for him to stop here" (9). But this would only be true if Polyhistor's main purpose here were to present Ezekiel's dramatic version of the Bible. It is not.

The second play, Kohn argues, starts with the extant discussion between Moses and Raguel, who is now his father-in-law. "If Polyhistor preserved a single play, an unreasonable span of time must be represented as elapsing after the previous scene with Sepphora and Chum; but if this is a new play, any amount of time can comfortably be allowed since the earlier talk of the impending nuptials" (9). I see no reason to believe this. Why must an unreasonable span of time be represented as elapsing? In the Biblical account Moses' marriage to Sepphora is followed by the burning-bush scene after a mere five verses, and the latter scene is even further on in Ezekiel!

The reconstruction of the second and third plays involves mostly speculation. I want here just to note Kohn's discussion of the fourth play (11). In fact, Kohn basically refrains from telling us what this play would have included, referring only to our two extant fragments, the description of an oasis and the appearance of the Phoenix. But these extant lines are rather complete and self-contained. What would have occupied the rest of the play? We are not told. Be this as it may, Kohn notes that this play, the fourth of his tetralogy, is not a satyr play. "Ezekiel was familiar enough with the works of Euripides to know that the fourth play did not literally have to involve satyrs, but it should be different in tone from the previous three. The relief of the Jews, … together with the strange account of the mystical bird, would suitably lighten the mood" (11). To be sure, the post-Red Sea events would provide a "happy ending" (but there are "happy endings" in a fair number of Euripides'

[non-satyr] plays). That the "tone" is different from the earlier plays I doubt. Even the appearance of the Phoenix, which Kohn seems to think would provide a light-hearted moment for the audience, is quite different from that. The appearance of the Phoenix would have been taken as an awesome, marvelous, and premonitory event—no light tone there. One further point here: the question of Ezekiel using a non-satyric play in fourth place on the basis of his general familiarity with Euripidean plays is not so simple. In fact, we have no evidence for any non-satyric play in fourth position in any Greek playwright (including Euripides) aside from the single example of the *Alcestis*. Thus, to justify Ezekiel's so doing requires that we assume not merely a general familiarity with Euripides' plays (which is undeniable), but that he specifically knew Euripides' *Alcestis* (for which we have no evidence) and that he knew it was a fourth-position play.

At this point, I turn from the content of Ezekiel's play and Kohn's reconstruction of the tetralogy to some more "technical" or historical matters.

Kohn observes (10) that Polyhistor (Euseb. 9.29.14), in one of his quotations from Ezekiel, refers to τῷ δράματι τῷ ἐπιγραφο-μένῳ ἐξαγωγή ("the play called the *Exagoge*"), which appears to undermine his view that *Exagoge* was the name of a tetralogy. He posits that the tetralogy as a whole and a single play within it (the third) were both called *Exagoge*. What he fails to note is that we do not have a single certain example of such a phenom-enon. Some have held that Aeschylus' trilogy that contains his *Supplices* was entitled the *Danaides* and also had as one of its constituent plays a *Danaides*. But this view was never well sub-stantiated and has now been generally discarded.[3] Compound-ing Kohn's problem is the fact that Clement, in quoting from Ezekiel, uses the same expression ("the play entitled *Exagoge*":

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[3] See H. Friis Johansen and E. W. Whittle, *Aeschylus: The Suppliants* I (Copenhagen 1980) 23.

Strom. 1.23.155.1), but he uses it of what is in Kohn's recon-
struction the first, not the third, play of the tetralogy and Kohn
is forced to assert that Clement was confused (10 n.18). To be
sure, neither Polyhistor's nor Clement's expression is any prob-
lem at all if we give up the notion that we are talking of four
plays, not one.

Along the above lines, I add one observation. In his very first
reference to the play itself (rather than merely to the author),
Polyhistor writes (Euseb. 9.28.3) ἐν τῇ τραγῳδίᾳ, "in his
tragedy" (with reference to what Kohn calls the first play).
Since he has not earlier referred to the play itself (only the play-
wright), this cannot mean "in the earlier mentioned tragedy" but
must mean "in his tragedy" and is thus an indication that the
Exagoge is but one play.

Kohn's argument necessarily depends on understanding
Exagoge as the title of the tetralogy. So it should be remarked
that such a title is inconsistent with all the names used of
trilogies and tetralogies known to us. As far as I know, every
such title provides reference to a central character(s) in the
tri(tetra)logy. Thus, titles are *Oresteia, Lykourgeia, Danaides* (pos-
sibly), *Oedipodeia, Pandionis*.[4]

Connected trilogies, in which a single story was told over the
course of three plays, such as Aeschylus' *Oresteia* or Kohn's con-
struction of the *Exagoge*, were apparently few and far between
in the history of Greek drama. There is little or no hard evidence
for even a single one after Aeschylus' time.[5] Of course, there
were trilogies or tetralogies that revolved around a particular

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[4]Of course, most individual Greek tragedies also have titles pertaining to a
leading character. But we do know of plays with names like ὅπλων κρίσις,
Νέμεα, ἆθλα, νίπτρα, ψυχοστασία.

[5]Even if we accept the view that our *Prometheus Bound* is not Aeschylus', it
is probably not more than a decade or so after his demise. Nor indeed is it
certain that this *Prometheus Bound* was then part of a connected trilogy; for
discussion of the possibilities, see M. Griffith, *The Authenticity of Prometheus
Bound* (Cambridge 1977) 246–252; also, his *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*
(Cambridge 1983) 32–35.

theme, for example the tetralogy that included Euripides' *Trojan Women*, but few or none that told a connected story like the *Oresteia* or Kohn's *Exagoge*. Not only that. The very notion of a four-play production was gone well before Ezekiel. By the middle of the fourth century tragedians no longer presented four plays, only three or two.[6] To think that Ezekiel ignored virtually all his predecessors and went back to Aeschylus (alone?) in choosing to write a connected series, and one made up of four plays to boot, would be taking "archaizing" (or rather "Aeschylizing") to an extreme.

Finally, two virtual certainties. First, there was never in the classical or Hellenistic period a connected tetralogy in which the fourth play was actually the conclusion of the entire "story."[7] Thus, there is no parallel at all for Kohn's connected tetralogy. Second, Hellenistic tragedy sometimes made use of a "five-act" structure.[8] And that, we may readily conclude, is what we have before us in Ezekiel's *Exagoge*.[9]

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[6] See A. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*[2] (Oxford 1968) 79.

[7] The closest possibility would seem to be the *Oresteia*, with its satyr-play *Proteus*. See D. F. Sutton, *Philologus* 128 (1984) 127–130, who shows how the *Proteus* could have been a connected concluding play for the story of the *Oresteia*, based on Menelaus' stay in Egypt. However, as he himself concedes, his reconstruction is entirely speculative and nothing that we have of the *Proteus* or know of it gives any support to the hypothesis.

[8] Otherwise, Horace's observation at *Ars Poetica* 189–190 would make no sense.

[9] I am indebted to my colleagues, Professors William M. Calder III and David Sansone, for their valuable help.