

The Date of *Prometheus Bound*

Dana Ferrin Sutton

WE HEAR on a number of occasions of spurious or doubtfully authentic plays,¹ and so it is clear that Alexandrian scholarship was alive to the need for establishing authentic canons of playwrights' works. If inauthentic plays did circulate in antiquity bearing the names of notable poets, there seem to be no grounds for excluding *a priori* the possibility that the Alexandrians could have been fooled and spurious plays eluded their detection.

The date and circumstances of production of *Prometheus Bound* are not known. Its authenticity appears to have been unanimously accepted in antiquity; the one conceivable exception to this generalization can easily be set aside.² But in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a number of authorities have doubted or denied its attribution to Aeschylus.³ Indeed, of the two leading historians of Greek literature of this century, one vigorously denied its authenticity and the other regarded its attribution as an open question.⁴ Although in 1970 C. J. Herington defended the play's authenticity,⁵ Mark Griffith has more recently subjected *Prometheus* to a battery of stylometric tests and examined various other aspects of the play, producing results that in his opinion tell against attribution to Aes-

¹ Some of the evidence is noted by C. J. Herington, *The Author of the Prometheus Bound* (Austin/London 1970) 17–21.

² Soph. fr.1141 Radt *dubia et spuria* (schol. BECQ on Pind. *Pyth.* 5.35d [II 177.5 Drachmann]) states that Sophocles made a word-play on Prometheus ~'foresight'. Boeckh and Herrmann thought that the reference was to *PV* 86, anything but an obligatory conclusion.

³ R. Westphal, *Prolegomena zu Aeschylus* (Leipzig 1896), was the first doubter. The strongest proponents of the anti-Aeschylus case are W. Schmid, *Untersuchungen zum gefesselten Prometheus* (Tüb.Beitr. 8 [1922]) and *GGL* I.3 296, and Mark GRIFFITH, *The Authenticity of 'Prometheus Bound'* (Cambridge 1977: hereafter 'Griffith'); cf. also Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1978) 465, and M. L. West, "The Prometheus Trilogy," *JHS* 99 (1979) 130–48, who considers Griffith's case "overwhelming" (130).

⁴ Schmid, *GGL* I.3 296; Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*² (London/New York 1977) 254f; Griffith 1–7 gives a succinct history of the problem and its surrounding literature.

⁵ Herington (*supra* n.1). See the important review of this work by S. Tracy at *CP* 68 (1973) 305.

chylus.⁶ Griffith's arguments have persuaded or won the more cautious respect of some, but failed to convince others.⁷

Recently E. Flintoff has pointed out parodies of *Prometheus* in Aristophanes.⁸ This of course suggests that Aristophanes regarded the play as Aeschylean, a telling point. It also establishes that the play was written before the final quarter of the fifth century B.C. Is there any evidence that it was written appreciably earlier?⁹ An important part of the anti-Aeschylus argument is that *Prometheus* allegedly shows signs of having been written significantly later than 456 B.C., the death-date of Aeschylus.¹⁰ In the following pages will be presented several considerations that, taken in combination, suggest that this chronological assessment may well be wrong.

The first such chronological index involves the so-called *pagos*. N. G. L. Hammond has recently shown that Aeschylus had at his disposal a rock outcropping at the side of the orchestra, dubbed the *pagos*, which would be employed as a scenic feature.¹¹ Likewise, he showed that the fixed stage-building was not available to Aeschylus before his last years. In the *Oresteia* it is likely that the *pagos* was used to represent the Areopagus and perhaps also Agamemnon's tomb. Hence at the time of the *Oresteia*'s production the playwright seems to have been free to focus the action at either the stage-building or the *pagos*, and to ignore either *ad libitum*.

Oliver Taplin has argued that by the time of the production of *Prometheus* the *pagos* had been razed.¹² M. L. West has rightly scouted this claim and argued that the *pagos* was employed to represent Prometheus' crag. But West may have erred to the other extreme in suggesting that the *pagos* may have been preserved as late as perhaps ca 430 B.C.¹³ For he does not explain why, if the *pagos* lingered so

⁶ Griffith's remarks on the authenticity problem in the introduction to his new edition and commentary on the play (Cambridge 1983) leave the question undecided and otherwise add little new to the debate.

⁷ Cf. the reviews of Griffith's work at *AntClass* 47 (1978) 607f (van Looy), *LEC* 47 (1979) 64 (Diez), *AJP* 100 (1979) 420–26 (Herington), *JHS* 99 (1979) 172f (Garvie), *CR* 29 (1979) 5–7 (Davies), *Gnomon* 51 (1979) 628–34 (Müller), and *PhQ* 58 (1979) 116–18 (Herington). The strongest negative reaction to the anti-Aeschylus argument is D. J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound: A Literary Commentary* (Toronto 1980) 141–74.

⁸ E. Flintoff, "Aristophanes and the *Prometheus Bound*," *CQ* 33 (1983) 1–5.

⁹ According to West (*supra* n.3) 141, other parts of the *Prometheia* may well have been parodied in Cratinus' *Ploutoi* (429 B.C.).

¹⁰ Cf. Griffith's index (388), "*Prometheus Bound*: date of."

¹¹ N. G. L. Hammond, "The Conditions of Dramatic Production to the Death of Aeschylus," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 387–450.

¹² Taplin (*supra* n.3) 449.

¹³ West (*supra* n.3) 135f.

long, poets later than Aeschylus failed to employ it as a stage resource, even though it would have been handy for staging *anodoi* and for representing such scenic features as tombs.

To be sure, various paintings of the middle of the fifth century and after depict the satyr-assisted *anodos* of a female divinity, Pandora or Persephone, occurring in the vicinity of a rock-heap, a scene which may be inspired by the Sophoclean satyr plays *Iambe* and *Pandora or Sphyrokopoi*.¹⁴ If so, these vases may well reflect the employment of the *pagos* in those plays. But these vases commence *ca* 450 B.C., and, regarding the later ones in the series, the argument is available that the rock-heap could have remained a feature of the iconography of this scene for some time after the elimination of the *pagos*. Then too, it is well known that vases inspired by given plays sometimes appear many years after the production of the play in question.¹⁵ Except for these vases there is no evidence for the use of the *pagos* in the post-Aeschylean theater.

It is worth pointing out, by the way, that the use of the *pagos* establishes beyond doubt that *Prometheus* was written for production in the theater of Dionysus at Athens and nowhere else.¹⁶

Few modern authorities would deny that the first scene of *Prometheus* requires a third actor. The idea that Prometheus was played by a lay figure or by an oversized doll, while his lines were spoken by an offstage actor, or that one of the actors only 'became' Prometheus after the prologue, is thoroughly discredited.¹⁷ But the rest of the play requires only two actors. And in the prologue, while three actors are on stage, one remains silent as the other two engage in dialogue. This is precisely what happens in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Even in

¹⁴ D. F. Sutton, "The Staging of *Anodos* Scenes," *RivStCl* 23 (1975) 347–55. Vases in this series include the Attic red-figure volute krater Ferrara T 579 by the Painter of Bologna 279 (*ca* 450 B.C.), the Oxford G krater (V) 525 (*ca* 450), the bell krater Stockholm 6 by a member of the Group of Polygnotus (*ca* 450–440), a Lucanian bell krater at Matera by the Pisticci Painter (*ca* 440–430), and the Naples neck amphora London F 147 by a member of the Owl and Pillar Group (last quarter of the fifth century).

¹⁵ This phenomenon has been pointed out by A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania and Sicily I* (Oxford 1967) 25–27.

¹⁶ This excludes Herington's theory (*supra* n.1) 112–14, after F. Focke at *Hermes* 65 (1939) 259–304, that the peculiarities of *Prometheus* might be understood by thinking the play to have been written for Sicilian production. On this idea *cf.* also Taplin (*supra* n.3) 463 and M. Griffith, "Aeschylus, Sicily and *Prometheus*," in *Dionysiaca. Studies . . . D. Page*, ed. J. D. Dawe (Cambridge 1978), 105–39.

¹⁷ For this idea, which originated with F. G. Welcker in the early nineteenth century, *cf.* Roy C. Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and Its Drama*⁴ (Chicago 1936) 166f. To be sure, H. J. Rose in his 1957 commentary on *Prometheus* (*ad* 8, 247, etc.) retained this idea, to the dismay of his reviewers (*e.g.* William M. Calder III at *CP* 64 [1964] 276).

the next approximately datable play that uses a tritagonist, Sophocles' *Ajax*,¹⁸ the technique for the use of the tritagonist is somewhat more advanced. Here is a hint that *Prometheus* might be written in chronological vicinity to the *Oresteia*.

Beginning ca 450 B.C. vase paintings appear showing Io as a *boukeros parthenos*, a girl with horns sprouting from her hair. It has been suggested that this change in the Io iconography is ultimately inspired by production of *Prometheus*.¹⁹ After all, a quite similar mask for 'horned Actaeon' seems described by Pollux *Onom.* 4.141 (I 243.6 Bethe). Griffith has sought to cast doubt on this contention by suggesting that this new representation of Io may have been provoked by the appearance of Io in Sophocles' satyric *Inachus*. This suggestion is easily rejected. In the first place, it is far from certain that Io appeared as a character in *Inachus*. No fragment attests her on-stage presence, and it is possible to reconstruct the action of the play without postulating her as a speaking character.²⁰ Furthermore her transformation is described at *Inachus* 300ff (fr.269a.36ff Radt):

κόρης δὲ μυκτὴρ κρᾶτ .[
 ἐκβουτυποῦται κα . .[
 φύει κάρα ταυρῶ[
 ἀνχὴν ἐπ' ὄμοι[ς
 ποδῶν δὲ χηλ[αῖ
 κροτοῦσι θράν[

One may argue whether Sophocles represented Io's transformation as wholly or partially boviniform.²¹ In any event we can be certain that he did not represent her as a *boukeros parthenos*—and this in turn diminishes the chances that she appeared as a stage character, unless she was represented as a real cow!²² Therefore *Prometheus* remains the only known play that could have exerted an influence on the vase-painters' representation of Io at this time.

Sophocles' *Inachus* seems to have been an unusually serious satyr play that distinctly recalls *Prometheus*. Its center of interest was Inachus' angry reaction to Zeus because of the ruination of his daughter and of his kingdom. As can be seen especially in fr.269c Radt (*P.Tebt.*

¹⁸ For the date cf. n.27 *infra*.

¹⁹ Louis Séchan, *Études sur la tragédie grecque dans ses rapports avec la céramique*² II (Paris 168) 13 n.6.

²⁰ D. F. Sutton, *Sophocles' Inachus* (Meisenheim am Glan 1979) 52–72.

²¹ Richard Carden, *The Papyrus Fragments of Sophocles* (Berlin/New York 1974) 65f; Sutton (*supra* n.20) 53f.

²² Suggested by William M. Calder III, "The Dramaturgy of Sophocles' *Inachus*," *GRBS* 1 (1958) 151.

III 692.i–iii), both Inachus and the chorus of satyrs hurl imprecations against both Zeus and his evidently unprincipled lackey Hermes. Thus it would seem that the meaning Sophocles placed on the Io episode was congruent with that found both in *Prometheus* and in Aeschylus' *Supplikes*:²³ Zeus was characterized (or at least perceived by the protagonist) as a wilful and unjust god, and the mistreatment of Io served to illustrate these aspects of his character; despite Hermes' attempts to bully him into silence, Inachus remains a vociferous recusant against Zeus and may well have taken a stand that the gods should be fair in their dealings with mankind.

The strong Aeschylean affinities of *Inachus* are underscored by the play's remarkably Aeschylean vocabulary and unusually florid imagery.²⁴ More particularly, the similarity of the treatment of Hermes in *Inachus* and *Prometheus* is emphasized by the fact that at fr.269c.21 he is called a *τρόχης*, as at *PV* 941. Likewise in the Tebtunis fragments of *Inachus* Hermes is thrice called a *λάτρης*, which seems calculated to recall *PV* 966 *τῆς σῆς λατρείας*.²⁵

To be sure, the date of *Inachus* is unknown. Extant vases inspired by the play commence only later in the century, although a considerable interval between the production of a play and the appearance of vases inspired thereby sometimes occurs, as noted above. Hence *Inachus* may be a considerably earlier play. For both the contents and the style of the play strongly suggest that it belongs to Sophocles' early, Aeschylean period attested by his celebrated autobiographical statement preserved by Plutarch.²⁶ On the showing of *Ajax*, now more securely datable to *ca* 450 B.C.,²⁷ this Aeschylean period must have ended well before the middle of the fifth century. Hence *Inachus* may offer important indirect evidence for the dating of *Prometheus*, being the earliest literary work to reflect its existence.

These considerations would seem to point to a dating slightly prior to the middle of the fifth century, *i.e.* to the decade 460–450 in proximity to the *Oresteia* (especially because of the use of the tri-

²³ Cf. Sutton (*supra* n.20) 72–76.

²⁴ Sutton (*supra* n.20) 39–51.

²⁵ First appreciated by A. Körte, "Literarische Texte mit Ausschluss der christlichen," *ArchP* 11 (1935) 255f.

²⁶ *Mor.* 79B; to the references to discussions of this passage given by A. A. Long, *Language and Thought in Sophocles* (London 1968) 4 n.11 should be added Wilamowitz' observations at *Hermes* 40 (1905) 150f. The most important study is Sir Maurice Bowra, "Sophocles on His Own Development," *AJP* 61 (1940) 385–401 [*Problems in Greek Poetry* (Oxford 1953) 108–25]. Most authorities, including Wilamowitz, think the passage pertains to the development of poetic style. Bowra makes a persuasive case that substance is also at stake.

²⁷ Cf. the vase published by K. Schefold at *AntK* 19 (1976) 71–78.

tagonist). Particularly in the absence of any undoubtable anachronisms,²⁸ the possibility that *Prometheus* was written before 456 B.C., when the Athenian stage was dominated by Aeschylus and the young Sophocles,²⁹ can scarcely be eliminated. Thus that part of the anti-Aeschylus argument that is based on the supposed late date of *Prometheus* can be set aside.

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²⁸ Although in making the argument that the sophistic influence visible in *Prometheus* tends to tell against Aeschylean authorship, Griffith admits that such influence is not necessarily anachronistic (217–21), we might note that according to G. B. Kerford, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge 1981) 43, Protagoras may well have been functioning as a sophist at Athens as early as 460 B.C. No strict chronological construction can be placed on Griffith's discovery (190–201) of "syntactical modernisms" in *Prometheus*.

²⁹ For signs of Sophoclean influence on *Prometheus* see B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1964) 45–50, and Griffith 390 s.v. "Sophoclean elements in *Prom.*"