

# The A Commentary on Aeschylus: Author and Date

Ole L. Smith

IT HAS SOMETIMES been suggested, but so far as I know never proved, that Ioannes Tzetzes wrote a commentary on Aeschylus. There are several references to him and some quotations from his works in the MSS of Aeschylus,<sup>1</sup> so it was at least a fair guess that there might be some connection between him and the most widely read Byzantine commentary on Aeschylus, the so-called **A** commentary.<sup>2</sup> The precise nature of this connection can now be proved, I believe, and in this paper I shall present evidence for the view that Ioannes Tzetzes was the author of the **A** commentary, and that this work was composed at a time later than the appearance of Eustathius' commentary on the *Iliad*.

The proof of Tzetzes' authorship is found in a MS which for some reason has been allowed to remain unexplored, *Athos Iviron* 161 (symbol I in Turyn's notation).<sup>3</sup> This MS from the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century has never been collated in the scholia, though enough has been known about it to suggest that it was a highly interesting witness. It is too early to say anything definite about the exact relationship between I and the other MSS, but as far as my preliminary analysis goes, I can state that the scholia in the original part of the MS, mainly the scholia on the *Septem*, are **M**-type scholia, and sometimes better than those actually found in **M**.<sup>4</sup> The original scholia in I were entered by the scribe who also wrote the poetic text, but in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. Wendel, *RE*<sup>2</sup> 7 (1948) 1972; C. J. Herington, *The Older Scholia on the Prometheus Bound* (Leiden 1972) 44 [hereafter 'Herington'].

<sup>2</sup> On the **A** commentary see Herington 22ff.

<sup>3</sup> On *Iviron* 161 see A. Turyn, *The Manuscript Tradition of the Tragedies of Aeschylus* (New York 1942) 120 and further *The Byzantine Manuscript Tradition of the Tragedies of Euripides* (Urbana 1957) 325ff. The nature of the poetic text in this MS has been discussed by R. D. Dawe, *Collation and Investigation of Manuscripts of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1964) 28. I have used a microfilm kindly lent me by the Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes, Paris.

<sup>4</sup> A discussion of these aspects will be found in my forthcoming edition of the scholia on the *Septem*.

the space between the marginal scholia and the inner and outer margins there are several long additions from the **A** commentary written by a contemporary scribe.<sup>5</sup> One such addition is found on f.56<sup>r</sup> explaining *Sept.* 374:

ὁ δὲ Τζέτζης· ἔοικε, φησί, ὁ ἄγγελος ἐκ τῆς ἄγαν ἐπιφαινομένης σπουδῆς μὴ ἔδρασμένον ἔχειν τὸν πόδα, ἀλλ' ἐκκρεμάμενον ἐπιφέρειν.

This view of the passage is the one given in the **A** commentary in almost exactly the same words:

ἔοικε δέ, φησί, καὶ ὁ ἄγγελος ἐκ τῆς ἄγαν ἐπιφαινομένης σπουδῆς μὴ ἠδρασμένον ἔχειν τὸν αὐτοῦ πόδα, ἀλλ' ἐκκρεμῆ τούτον ἐπιφέρειν καὶ ἄστατον (cf. Dindorf's edition 343.3–5).

There can be no doubt that the scholium in **I** refers to the **A** commentary and moreover ascribes it to Tzetzes. This particular **A** scholium is found in a larger number of **A** scholia mss, so that its status as a 'majority' scholium as defined by Herington<sup>6</sup> cannot be doubted. I have found it in eleven mss (**BHNCPPdSjVWYYaYb**).

If Tzetzes composed the **A** commentary this work must be dated in the later part of this scholar's life, for the **A** commentary contains verbatim extracts from Eustathius' commentary on the *Iliad*.

On *Sept.* 72 there is in the **A** commentary a scholium on the word *ἐκθαμνίσητε*, printed in Dindorf's unreliable edition<sup>7</sup> as two different notes. I give the text of the scholium here from a collation of almost all extant mss of the **A** scholia together with the most necessary critical notes:

- 1 *ἐκθαμνίσητε· δίκην θάμνου ἐκριζώσητε. θάμνος γὰρ ἐστὶν εἶδος χαμαιζήλου φυτοῦ καὶ πολυκλάδου παρὰ τὸ θαμὰ ἐνυμολογούμενος. οὐ γὰρ μονοστέλεχος κατὰ τὸ δένδρον ἄνεισιν, ἀλλὰ πυκνὸς ὁ θάμνος καὶ πολυστέλεχος εὐθύς ἐστιν ἐκ ριζῶν.*
- 5 *θάμνοι δὲ οὕτω ῥᾶον πυρὶ πίπτουσιν. οὐ γὰρ δήπου μέγ-  
άλα δένδρα. ἢ δὲ πτώσις διὰ τὸν ἄνεμον καὶ διὰ τὸ πολὺ  
πῦρ ἐξικμάζον τὴν συνεκτικὴν τῶν λεπτῶν θάμνων ὑγρότητα.*

<sup>5</sup> Many of these additions are difficult to read; the script has almost vanished, and the book is so tightly bound that scholia added in the interior margin have not been adequately reproduced on my microfilm. A good example of the work of this other hand occurs f.55<sup>v</sup>: the original scribe wrote schol. *Sept.* 355 but only the part also found in **M** (Dindorf 340.11–13), then the other hand added the remaining part of the **A** scholium.

<sup>6</sup> On 'majority' and 'minority' scholia see Herington 28ff. I have some doubts as to the importance of this distinction, especially when the number of mss is so small as in Herington.

<sup>7</sup> Dindorf used the mss **C** and **P** in addition to older printed sources.

## CDNcNdPPdSjVWXXaYaYb

1 ἐκθαμνίσσητε—ἐκριζώσητε om. DX γὰρ om. DX 2 φυτοῦ χαμαιζήλου YaYb 2–3 ἔτυμ. δὲ π.τ.θ. DX 2 θαμὰ καὶ συχνῶς YaYb post ἔτυμ. add. ὃ ἐστὶ στέλεχος YaYb 3 μονοστέλεχον CNdPdXaYa τὰ δένδρα PPdSjVW 4 θάμνος] κλάδος PPdSj 4 εὐθύς—ρίζων om. D 5–7 om. PPdSj 5 οἱ θάμνοι YaYb οὕτω] οὔτοι CYaYb 6–7 ἢ δὲ—ὕγρότητα om. DX

It will be seen at once, I believe, that most of this scholium does not illustrate Aeschylus and is out of place, even though scholiasts very often do indulge in displays of irrelevant learning. This particular note was written to accompany *Iliad* 11.156f:

πάντη τ' εἰλυφόων ἄνεμος φέρει, οἱ δέ τε θάμνοι  
πρόρριζοι πίπτουσιν ἐπειγόμενοι πυρὸς ὄρμη,

and was lifted verbatim from Eustathius' commentary on the *Iliad* (838.3–4). I print van der Valk's text:<sup>8</sup>

θάμνος δὲ ἀρσενικῶς μὲν ἐνταῦθα εἶρηται, εἶδος δὲ ἐστὶ χαμαιζήλου φυτοῦ καὶ πολυκλάδου, παρὰ τὸ θαμὰ ἔτυμολογούμενος. οὐ γὰρ μονοστέλεχος κατὰ τὸ δένδρον ἄνεισιν, ἀλλὰ πυκνὸς ὁ θάμνος καὶ πολυστέλεχος εὐθύς ἐστὶν ἐκ ριζῶν. θάμνοι δὲ ῥᾶον οὕτω πυρὶ πίπτουσιν. οὐ γὰρ δήπου μεγάλα δένδρα. ἢ δὲ πτώσις διὰ τὸν ἄνεμον καὶ διὰ τὸ πολὺ πῦρ ἐξικμάζον τὴν συνεκτικὴν τῶν λεπτῶν θάμνων ὕγρότητα.

There can be no doubt of the authorship of this note; the scholium was written to explain Homer, not Aeschylus. This means that the author of the A commentary used Eustathius<sup>9</sup> and thus we obtain a quite certain *terminus post quem*. Though the precise date of Eustathius' commentary on the *Iliad* still is an open question, I think it can be said with his recent editor that the work was finished before 1175 when Eustathius was consecrated bishop of Thessalonica.<sup>10</sup>

There are further excerpts and borrowings from Eustathius in the A commentary; for example the one at schol. *Prom.* 10 (Herington), which Herington has printed in the PPd version though this particular recension is known to innovate and rewrite on a

<sup>8</sup> *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes* III (Leiden 1979) 174–75.

<sup>9</sup> Against the possibility that the A scholia and Eustathius used the same source I may emphasize the close similarity of the wording and the fact that van der Valk has found no parallel. Cf. also the cases mentioned below where the use of Eustathius by the A commentary is the only possible explanation.

<sup>10</sup> Van der Valk (*supra* n.8) I (Leiden 1971) cxxxix.

large scale. Thus the provenance of this note has been obscured. As Herington remarks, C. M. Francken saw that this scholium had something to do with Eustathius on *Iliad* 1.25, and in fact the other MSS of the A commentary give a version that is much nearer to Eustathius than the one printed by Herington. It should be emphasized, however, that only a few MSS have this scholium—but this can be explained by the fact that many of our best witnesses do not have the *Prometheus* at all, or only the later part of the play. Three MSS used by Herington have this note in a form different from the PPd version, and a fourth follows more or less PPD (this is the wildly erratic Ya, *Vienna phil.gr.* 197, whose behaviour can be seen from the apparatus on schol. *Sept.* 72 given above). In the MSS Sj, W, and Xc the text is:

τὴν Διὸς τυραννίδα (*lemma om. SjW*) · σημείωσαι ὅτι τὸ τύραννος ὄνομα βασιλικὸν ἦν (*ἦν add. WXc*) τοῖς παλαιοῖς. βλασφημεῖται δὲ νῦν. χυδαῖοι οἱ πεπλησμένοι, νῦν δὲ οὐδαμνοί. πολλοστὸς οὐχ ὡς πάλαι ὁ πολὺς καὶ ἔνδοξος, ἀλλ' ὁ μηδὲν ὦν. ὠμὸς καὶ οὐχ ὁ στερρός ἀλλ' ἐπὶ φανλότητος νῦν. ἐξαίσιον τὸ ἔκδικον καὶ τὸ ἔξω τοῦ αἰσίου καὶ δικαίου. νῦν δὲ ἀγαθολογούνται (*-εῖται Xc*)

This is, with few changes and transpositions, a verbatim excerpt from Eustathius p.29 (I 48 van der Valk).

There is another scholium also lifted verbatim from Eustathius that throws an interesting glimpse into Tzetzes' method of work. On *Sept.* 154 there is a long and very irrelevant note on the word *χνοαί* and the names for the various parts of the wheel. This scholium consists almost exclusively of extracts from Eustathius' long-winded commentary on *Iliad* 5.722–32, p.597.40ff (II 178ff van der Valk). Dindorf printed the Aeschylus scholium from P in his edition (318.12–20), and I have found the note in the MSS WYaYb. In this passage Eustathius refers to Sophocles (p.598.13f) and thus Tzetzes was led to the scholia on Sophocles, from which he took the only part of this scholium on Aeschylus not derived from Eustathius—the note on the accentuation of *χνοαί*, which he took over from the schol. *El.* 716 (printed in Dindorf 318.20–23 from P and also found in DWXcYb). Finally I may mention that the same passage in Eustathius (p.599.3–6) was the source of schol. *Pers.* 189 (Dindorf 438.34–439.3 = Dähnhardt p.68.10–14).

In this way we arrive at a date of the A commentary after 1175 and before the death of Tzetzes, the date of which is not known. Tzetzes was alive at least in 1180, as is proved by his poem on the

death of Manuel Komnenos,<sup>11</sup> but he can hardly have lived for very long after this date. If Tzetzes is the author, the **A** commentary was composed in the learned circles of Constantinople in the last quarter of the twelfth century, as perhaps the last major work of this prolific author.

In conclusion I should mention an evident obstacle to the theory propounded here. We have a number of commentaries on the classical poets by Tzetzes where there is no doubt as to his authorship. To put the matter mildly Tzetzes does not as a rule conceal himself and this might be an argument against the theory of his authorship of the **A** commentary. But there are other possibilities. If the commentary is by Tzetzes, it is a late work and might have been left unfinished. Also the fact that only one MS ascribes the commentary to him might point this way: the **A** commentary was not finished in the way that Tzetzes' other commentaries were. I think the style of the commentary, the paraphrastic technique could very well point to him, but one misses the self-promotion and the disrespect for other scholars' work so often found in his commentaries. But I should emphasize that I think the documentary evidence more important. We should start from the fact that the Athos MS ascribes a well-known **A** note to Tzetzes and begin from there; possibly our view of Tzetzes as a scholar and a person may thus be less one-sided.<sup>12</sup>

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN  
October, 1980

<sup>11</sup> Wendel (*supra* n.1) 2001f.

<sup>12</sup> For some pertinent observations I wish to thank the anonymous referee.