

ten Vergleiches narrativer, motivischer und inhaltlicher Parallelen zwischen dem akkadisch-sumerischen Gilgamesch-Epos und den beiden homerischen Epen gezeigt, dass nicht-triviale altorientalische Einflüsse auf die früheste griechische Epik zwar unverkennbar vorhanden und nachweisbar sind, dass jedoch die spezifische Physiognomie, die charakteristische Welt- und Menschensicht der homerischen Epen, ihre "Gesamtkonzeption in Verbindung mit der dichterischen Atmosphäre und der Darstellungsweise" (S. 223), ebenso klar *nicht* aus der altorientalischen Vorstellungswelt entlehnt sein können. Bei allen unzweifelhaft existenten motivischen und thematischen Bezügen, die die homerischen Epen zum Gilgamesch-Epos aufweisen und die kaum auf Zufall beruhen können, erweisen sich *Ilias* und *Odyssee* in der Summe – sozusagen auf einer 'höheren Ebene' – gleichwohl als genuin 'griechische' Produkte. Kurz gesagt: Trotz allem, was das Griechentum dem Osten ohne Wenn und Aber verdankt, liegt Europa letztlich eben doch nicht in Asien.

Szlezáks beide Bücher sind in durchgehend brillanter Sprache mit zuweilen nachgerade essayistischer Sprengkraft, dabei immer mit bestechender intellektueller Schärfe sowie einem gelegentlichen Hang zur feinen, jedoch immer gänzlich unpolemischen Ironie geschrieben. Die Lektüre ist somit von der ersten bis zur letzten Seite ein Hochgenuss. Leicht macht es Szlezák seinem Leser freilich nicht: So sehr ihm, was das Formale angeht, die besonders in deutschsprachigen akademischen Publikationen zuweilen zu beobachtende, ärgerliche Tendenz zur sprachlichen Verdunkelung zwecks *tuning* schaler Inhalte fremd ist, so sehr liegen ihm im Inhaltlichen Vereinfachung, Verflachung oder gar opportunistische Annäherung an den vorherrschenden intellektuellen Mainstream fern. Gerade darin liegt jedoch m.E. die eigentliche Meisterleistung Szlezáks: Das detaillierte Wissen um Vermächtnis, Einfluss und Geltung der griechischen Antike auf das heutige Europa soll und darf selbstverständlich nicht nur "eine[r] besondere[n] Gemeinde von Philhellenen, Humanisten oder Bildungsbürgern" zugänglich sein, sondern vielmehr "alle[n] Europäer[n] [...], die sich als solche fühlen" (*Europa* S. 2) – doch sind diese Einsichten, salopp gesagt, nicht 'kostenlos' zu haben, sondern erfordern die Bereitschaft zur vertieften geistigen Beschäftigung mit einer an Gehalt und Komplexität reichen, doch dafür auch umso lohnenderen Materie.

Wer sich mit Fragen, die die eigene Zukunft betreffen, befasst, muss sich zwangsläufig auch mit der eigenen Identität beschäftigen. So gesehen, kommt eigentlich niemand, der sich Gedanken über die Zukunft eines (wie auch immer gearteten und zu definierenden) Europa machen will oder muss, ohne entsprechendes Wissen um und über die griechische Antike aus. Szlezáks beide Bücher sind hervorragend geeignet, diese Bildungslücken wo vorhanden zu schliessen und gleichzeitig zum vertieften Weiterdenken jenseits von ausgetretenen Pfaden und vorgefertigten Schablonen anzuregen.

*Silvio Bär*

PETER J. AHRENSDORF: *Greek Tragedy and Political Philosophy: Rationalism and Religion in Sophocles' Theban Plays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2009. ISBN 9780521515863. X, 192 pp. USD 80.

This relatively concise book (178 pages) stands on the middle ground between classical and political-philosophic studies. It discusses classical Greek tragedy but its focus is on questions

of political and moral philosophy. At the beginning of the study, Ahrens Dorf (= A.) observes that since the end of the Cold War, the importance of religion in politics has increased. It seems, however, that most modern studies on political theory are written in the spirit of a certain democratic liberal *ratio* and that they tend to underestimate the weight of religion. A. states that the first turn to the irrational instead of the rational in modern times can be traced back to F. Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872 and 1886), in which Nietzsche severely attacked the western science-oriented, optimistic, so-called 'Socratic' world view. Nietzsche argued that it is the grimly tragic world-view, as shown in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, that describes the true nature of our hard existence and that hence, tragic heroes should be looked upon as ideal human beings. According to Nietzsche's view, rationality is the weakness and inability to face the chaos of the universe, whereas suffering is courageous, and accepting one's fate makes one strong. Tragic heroes did exactly this, for they confronted the irrational universe, and through their suffering at the mercy of blind coincidence they became noble. The leading tragic hero for Nietzsche is Sophocles' *Oedipus*. Nietzsche's tragic philosophy is controversial (and has probably been misinterpreted from the very beginning), but, as A. notes, surprisingly it does seem to resonate in our times. A. has not, however, written this book to study Nietzsche, but to re-examine the Theban plays and Nietzsche's interpretation of Sophocles as a pious anti-rationalist tragic poet, whose views were totally opposed to those of Socrates and other 'rationalists'. In short, A. questions if Sophocles' description of Oedipus' story confirms Nietzsche's conclusion that Sophocles supported a human's resignation from reason and his submission to fate and blind faith. In the study, A. re-examines the relationship between rationality and religious piety in Sophocles' Theban plays, *Oedipus Tyrannus* (*OT*), *Oedipus at Colonus* (*OC*) and *Antigone*, asking if Sophocles in his plays really supports such anti-rationalism and submission to fate as Nietzsche claims. A. dedicates a chapter to each play, the overall ethos of which he summarizes in the concluding chapter (p. 178) as the "political rationalism" of *OT* (Chapter 1), the "religious anti-rationalism" of *OC* (Chapter 2) and the "pious heroism" of *Antigone* (Chapter 3).

In *OT*, Oedipus makes the full turn from a person who has based all his achievements on pure human reason to one who, after realising that he has committed horrible crimes, albeit unknowingly, deserts reason completely, which leads to his total destruction. He solved the Sphinx's riddle alone, a task divine soothsayers couldn't accomplish. He saved Thebes with his wit alone and guided the city and his family successfully for many years. Yet, when the plague strikes the town, Oedipus does an irrational thing by consulting the Delphic oracle, a deed that triggers the horrible downfall of a man and his whole family as the result of patricide and incest having been revealed. A. looks at the relationship between Oedipus and his actions from several angles and argues that Sophocles seems to indicate that Oedipus falls partly because his government was based on pure political rationalism, which in the face of death is not enough for human beings. On the other hand, Sophocles also demonstrates that turning to absolute irrational piety does not lead to good results for the society and, as Oedipus' case shows, can lead to the unnecessary suffering of one's nearest and dearest. Sophocles in fact implies that things could have gone differently had Oedipus clung to some form of rationality. His pious but irrational behaviour (self-blinding and voluntary exile) seems to be motivated by vanity and his love of himself and it this irrationality that destroys his family. According to A.'s reading of the play, Sophocles, the author himself, by no means approves of his protagonist's total resignation of *ratio*.

In the *OC* (which in this study once again is described as a reversal of *OT*), the formerly proud King of Thebes is now a blind and despicable outcast who wanders around with his daughters. He ends up in Colonus and understands that it his destiny to die there. Oedipus begs the citizens of Colonus for pity, King Theseus shows sympathy towards him, Oedipus gains a moral victory over his enemies and at the end of play dies, is buried in Athens and is rewarded by the gods (possibly with immortality). A. discusses in detail the arguments for Oedipus not being responsible for his crimes and for him to deserve the gods' favour and forgiveness. In A.'s analysis, Theseus is the real hero of the play who sees the self-contradictory and destructive nature of Oedipus' piety, but he also understands that Oedipus' weakness is essentially humane, which again underlines Sophocles' pragmatic view of religion and devotion to the gods. Sophocles, according to A., does not dismiss Oedipus' pious anti-rationalism, but tends to show its dangers; it is in this respect that Nietzsche errs in his interpretation.

*Antigone* is all about divine laws and piety. Both protagonists, Antigone and Creon, believe that they are pious and devoted to justice. Creon is not just a lawless tyrant but Thebes is his highest priority. In his logic, Polyneices attacked Thebes and killed its lawful king Eteocles. The gods saved the city and therefore it is simply in accordance with the divine law to bury Eteocles and leave Polyneices unburied. For Antigone the highest justice is her family and she wants to bury her bad brother Polyneices, although she does not deny his crimes. Antigone does not give in to the authorities and defies Creon's commands. Creon and Antigone are both destroyed because of their piety, Antigone kills herself and Creon loses his family. As A. formulates it, this is not a battle between "godly right" and "godless might" (p. 88); instead the audience is forced to ask whom the gods supported and whom they punished, which one of the two was more pious. In the course of the play, Antigone, unlike Creon, begins to doubt the justification of her piety. A. argues that this self-doubt makes Antigone more courageous and strong than Creon, and that this is how Sophocles shows his own humane wisdom. A. underlines at several points that Sophocles, the author himself, can be detected in all the characters of the plays, not only in Oedipus. The characters of Teiresias, Ismene and Antigone recur in all his plays, and A. does a great deal to put them on the map of Sophoclean morality.

A. concludes (Chapter 4) his study by comparing Nietzsche's, Plato's and Aristotle's views of tragedy and the relationship between tragedy and philosophy. A.'s starting point is that because tragedy shows the unjust suffering of its heroes, it is in natural conflict with philosophy, the goal of which is to gain wisdom by rationality and happiness through wisdom. Somewhat disappointingly, since much of the study was meant to challenge Nietzsche's views, A. focuses on Nietzsche relatively briefly. Instead, Plato's idea of tragedy and his rejection of Homer, "the first tragic poet", from his ideal state is covered at length. A.'s remarks on this matter are illuminating and he manages to show that despite the harsh rejection of tragedy from the ideal state, the views of Plato are more complicated and that he shows deep understanding of tragic heroes. A. rounds up his study with a discussion of Aristotle's theory of tragedy's cathartic effect and how it assists people to use calm reason in the terrible twists of life. A's conclusion is that Sophocles and Plato were not so far from each other as Nietzsche claims.

Those interested, for example, in the history and context of the composition of Sophocles' Theban plays will probably not make much of this study. A. seems to ignore the fact that these plays were not written in the order they are published today and that they can be understood as a trilogy only with some caution. Given that this book is not a philological or a purely literary study, this might be excused. More problematic is the fact that in the few cases where

the Greek text of the plays is quoted, no accents or other diacritical marks are used (except on some few occasions when they are used erroneously, as, e.g., on p. 175). This strikes me as odd and surprising for a publisher as prominent as Cambridge University Press. I also object to the system of referring to older studies with the publication year of the edition after the author, e.g., Nietzsche 1968, Montaigne 1958. There are some strange repetitions in certain parts of the book, too, e.g., the sentence "Socrates issues a devastating attack on tragic poetry in the *Republic*" starts two successive paragraphs on p. 152.

Despite these critical remarks, I must conclude that this book has been written with intellectual clarity and that the author's views of Greek tragedy and philosophical literature are clearly worth becoming acquainted with.

Tiina Purola

LAWRENCE KIM: *Homer between History and Fiction in Imperial Greek Literature*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-19449-5 (hb). XI, 246 pp. GBP 61.

Le livre de Lawrence Kim est le remaniement de sa thèse de doctorat, soutenue sous le titre *Supplementing Homer: creativity and conjecture in Ancient Homeric criticism*, à Princeton, en 2001. La publication dans la collection "Greek Culture in the Roman World" fut couronnée par le "Goodwin Award of Merit", en 2011. L'étude est divisée en sept chapitres dont le premier est l'Introduction et le dernier l'Epilogue.

Dans le Chapitre I (pp. 1–21), Kim présente les principes de sa problématique et retrace l'influence d'Homère sur les auteurs de l'époque impériale. Kim s'occupera de quatre textes de cette époque: la *Géographie* de Strabon, le *Discours Troyen* de Dion de Pruse, les *Histoires Vraies* de Lucien et les *Héroïques* de Philostrate. Ces quatre textes, dit-il, traitent d'Homère non seulement comme poète, mais aussi comme source historique sur l'époque des héros et reflètent la relation de chaque écrivain avec lui.

Le Chapitre II (pp. 22–46) examine l'attitude de Thucydide et d'Hérodote envers Homère. Selon Kim, cela est important pour sa recherche car les deux historiens classiques furent les premiers à essayer de confirmer ou de réfuter l'historicité de la poésie homérique. Il étudie l'épisode d'Hélène dans le deuxième livre des *Histoires* d'Hérodote et l'"Archéologie" de Thucydide et conclut que les deux auteurs considèrent Homère comme une source historique peu fiable de l'époque héroïque. Les deux auteurs sont sûrs qu'Homère connaissait la vraie histoire de la guerre de Troie puisqu'ils trouvent des allusions à la réalité historique dans ses épopées.

Le Chapitre III (pp. 47–84) est consacré à Strabon, le "défenseur obstiné de la sagesse universelle d'Homère", un auteur qui qualifie le poète épique d'historien et géographe idéal au point d'interpréter les lieux et les monstres des aventures d'Ulysse comme des transformations des lieux et des créatures existants (la "mythification homérique de l'histoire"). Selon Strabon, la légende c'est l'élaboration de quelque chose de vrai, et le but du récit des mythes et légendes est l'amusement des auditeurs, tandis que le but du récit des faits réels est leur éducation. Homère connaît la vérité mais il se détourne d'elle pour des raisons de poésie.

Le Chapitre IV (pp. 85–139), le plus long de tous, est un commentaire exceptionnel du onzième discours de Dion Chrysostome où l'orateur raconte la "vraie" histoire de la guerre de