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978-1-108-01209-6 - The Agamemnon of Aeschylus

Edited by W. Headlam and A. C. Pearson

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The Agamemnon of Aeschylus

Published posthumously in 1910, this is the last great work of the eminent classical scholar Walter Headlam (1866–1908), who devoted most of his short life to the study of Aeschylus. On Headlam's death, Alfred Pearson was commissioned to finish the project, and the care and precision of both scholars are evident in this well-edited text. Pearson added a commentary and explanatory notes to Headlam's translation and introduction, both of which were nearly complete when the author died. The text is set out with the English translation facing the original Greek, making them easy to compare. The substantial introduction includes background about the House of Atreus as well as a detailed plot summary, a discussion of the moral and religious content of the play and a description of the characters. Pearson's commentary and notes are equally comprehensive and informative.

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The Agamemnon of Aeschylus

*With Verse Translation,
Introduction and Notes*

EDITED BY W. HEADLAM
AND A.C. PEARSON
AESCHYLUS



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AGAMEMNON
OF
AESCHYLUS

WITH VERSE TRANSLATION, INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES

BY

WALTER HEADLAM, LITT.D.

LATE FELLOW AND LECTURER OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

EDITED BY

A. C. PEARSON, M.A.

Cambridge :
at the University Press
1910

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“I am honoured and gratified by your proposal to dedicate to me your version of the *Agamemnon*. I regard the *Oresteia* as probably on the whole the greatest spiritual work of man.”

Extract from a letter to
Walter Headlam from A. C. Swinburne.

October 2nd, 1900.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

AT the time of his death in 1908 Dr Walter Headlam had been for some years under engagement to prepare an edition of the *Agamemnon* for the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press. Unfortunately he was not able to complete it; but the Syndics were nevertheless desirous that a book the preparation of which had engrossed long periods of enthusiastic labour, should if possible be published.

With this end in view the existing material was entrusted to me to be sifted and arranged for the Press. The various parts of the work proved on investigation to be in different stages of progress; for, whereas the Introduction and Verse Translation were nearly complete, and had undergone considerable revision at the hands of their author, the recension of the text had not been carried through, there were no critical notes, and the commentary only existed in fragments. The deficiencies were however less serious than might appear from this statement. Dr Headlam had devoted himself for twenty years to the study of Aeschylus; he had ransacked the whole of the extant Greek literature in order to equip himself for the task of emending, explaining, and illustrating his favourite author; he had published from time to time in the philological periodicals critical studies on most of the difficulties which the text of the *Agamemnon* presents; and, when repeatedly working through the play, he had collected in note-books and in the margins of his printed copies abundant stores of evidence, which though not in their final shape were available in support of the conclusions he had reached.

I must now endeavour briefly to explain how I have dealt with this material.

So far as it went, the Introduction was finished, with the exception of the opening pages; but there can be no doubt that

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at least a section bearing on the textual criticism of the play would have been added. In order to make the critical notes intelligible, I have added a short account of the most important MSS., taken principally from Wecklein. The Verse Translation had undergone constant revision, as will be apparent from a comparison of such extracts as have appeared in the occasional contributions with the complete text as now printed. The author was a severe critic of his own productions, and finality was not easily reached. The manuscript bears many indications that the text had not been definitely settled; and I have sometimes been compelled to choose between alternatives, neither of which was considered entirely satisfactory. The number of cases where the addition of a word or words was necessary is fortunately so small as to be negligible.

In constituting the text I have been guided mainly by the evidence contained in an interleaved copy of Wecklein's *Aeschylus* (1885). This book was intended by Dr Headlam to be the basis of his own recension, and here he was accustomed to enter such textual corrections as he considered final. Further assistance has been derived from the notes to the prose translation written for Messrs Bell's Classical Translations (London, 1904), in which he professed to record such of the readings adopted as were likely to be unfamiliar. In the few cases where these notes conflicted with the 'final' Wecklein, the testimony of the latter was taken as conclusive. There remained a number of passages where the editor had not made up his mind on the reading to be printed; but in most of these either the translation, verse or prose, or the notes show what he considered to be probable, and the actually doubtful points are both few and unimportant.

For the convenience of readers I have added below the page a brief record of the MS. evidence, wherever the text departs from it. For the most part this is taken from Wecklein's apparatus, whose authority I have generally followed in attributing to their authors such conjectures as it was necessary or desirable to mention.

The material available for the commentary was as follows: (1) note-books and loose sheets containing notes in course of

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preparation ; (2) notes and references written in the margin of printed copies of the play, the most important of which were in the interleaved copy of Wecklein already mentioned ; (3) printed contributions to the *Classical Review* and *Journal of Philology*, and the notes to the prose translation. Dr Headlam had planned his commentary on an elaborate scale, seeking by illustrations drawn from every age of Greek literature to rest his criticism and interpretation upon the secure foundation of established usage. The complete design was never realised : the written notes which remain are intermittent and generally incomplete, and so far as they exist cover only a small portion of the text. On the other hand, many of the notes previously published required modification before they could be suitably incorporated in a commentary ; and many others being superseded by later views had ceased to be of importance. In spite of these difficulties, it was thought better not to miss the opportunity of collecting the permanent results of Dr Headlam's criticism on the *Agamemnon* ; and it is hoped that the new matter will be welcomed by those who are already familiar with his published work. It must be understood that, though in many instances I am responsible for the outward form which the note has ultimately assumed, the substance is in every case taken from one or more of the sources indicated above. No attempt has been made to work up rough material unless the design of the author in collecting it was established beyond reasonable doubt. Those who have endeavoured to sift numbers of references not always easy to find with the object of discovering the clue which holds the secret of their connexion will realise that the task I have undertaken is not without difficulty. I can only say that I have acted according to the best of my judgment, and if the result is to preserve for students some valuable fruits of the labours of one who has illuminated so many dark places in Greek poetry, I shall be more than satisfied. In the few cases where I have made additions to the notes I have distinguished them by square brackets

For the principles by which the translator was guided in composing his version readers must be referred to the Preface to the *Book of Greek Verse* (Cambridge University Press, 1907) ;

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but I am permitted to quote the following extract from a letter written to Miss J. E. Harrison on Feb. 3rd, 1903, which has a peculiar interest as referring to the translation of the *Agamemnon*:

“The blank verse seemed to me to require the large language of the dramatists and Milton (without the slang of the dramatists)...The trouble comes with the Lyrics. They had to be in the same language to harmonise with the rest. That limits you very much in metre; you must forgo in the first place anapaestic rhythm. And whatever metre you use, there is one condition that prevents them ever being done to satisfaction. In the Greek they were the words written for music, to be sung; and in English there is nothing corresponds. English unhappily is not a singing language, as Italian is, or German; and the moment you try to write in English what is singable—which is hard in itself—you get for our ears too much tune. English ‘lyrics’ such as Shelley wrote are capable of the loveliest and subtlest effects, but they are effects for reading; and the lovelier and subtler they are, the less they can be sung.”

I desire to thank the proprietors of the *Classical Review* and of the *Journal of Philology* for permission to make use of the various articles which have appeared in those periodicals; Messrs George Bell and Sons for a similar liberty in respect of the notes to the prose translation; Mr J. T. Sheppard, who not only lent me a series of notes taken in 1904, when he was reading the play with Dr Headlam, but also looked over some of the proof-sheets; Mr H. H. Sills for sending me several Lecture-Room papers containing passages from the *Agamemnon*; and Mr L. W. Haward for information on sundry points of detail.

A. C. P.

23rd July 1910.

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ERRATUM

p. 181, note on l. 76 ff. *for ὑπεργήρως read ὑπέργηρως*