

PART I

Approaches

1 | Introduction: Embarking on a Voyage around Black Sea Theatre

DAVID BRAUND

The ancient Black Sea is opening up for international study – perhaps slowly, but very surely. This book is intended as a major stride forward in our appreciation of the cultural life of Greeks and their neighbours there, for it offers the first ever substantial study of ancient theatrical and performance culture around the whole Black Sea region, stretching in time from the early archaic age until the Roman world and – ultimately – the emergence of Byzantine Christianity. For in many ways these essays amount also to a study of religion, especially of Dionysus and Apollo, whose festivals and concerns provided so much of the context for ancient drama and performance. Meanwhile, we shall consider, too, the advantages to be gained by studying together the different plays which are closely associated with or located in the Black Sea region. These may seem a tight and tragic group (*Prometheus Bound*, *Medea*, *Iphigenia among the Taurians*) until we bring into our discussions also the many plays that have survived only as fragments or titles, as well as the many comedies which connect with the region – not to mention dramatists who themselves came from these parts.

The principal aim of this book is to bring the Black Sea region into the many-sided scholarship on ancient Greek theatre and performance, while at the same time assembling a substantial body of new scholarship which will also make theatre a more familiar and central concern among specialists in the study of the Black Sea region. The sheer range of places and material requires the cooperation of a team of scholars, to bring not only particular regional knowledge, but also familiarity with the study of Greek theatre. Accordingly, the authors here are drawn from different specialisms and different intellectual traditions. We are confident, however, that the studies collected here (by historians, epigraphers, students of theatre, archaeologists and more) not only exhibit a remarkable cohesion, but constitute an intellectual contribution which is far more than the sum of its parts. More particularly, the volume contributes to the current scholarly project which has placed greater emphasis on the performance of theatre and performance culture outside Athens.

A particular inspiration in this direction has been the volume of essays gathered by Kathryn Boshier, which has done so much to reconnect drama and theatre studies between Greece and southern Italy and Sicily.¹ This development has in turn been a necessary consequence of the challenge to Aristophanes' myth, as elaborated in *Frogs* (405 BC), that tragedy had declined swiftly and terminally after Euripides and Sophocles had died, shortly before the end of the Peloponnesian War. The challenge was formulated in a pathbreaking article by Easterling in 1993.² This led to simultaneous expansions of the chronological and geographical parameters of mainstream scholarship on Greek theatre,³ especially in the fourth century, consummated by a collection of essays edited by Eric Csapo, Hans Rupprecht Goette, J. Richard Green and Peter Wilson which was published in 2014.⁴

Two chapters in that volume extended the topographical horizons of Greek theatre far beyond Greece; Le Guen discussed theatrical activity in the Middle East, West Asia and Egypt during Alexander's expedition, and two of the editors of this current volume contributed a pilot article on the Black Sea evidence.⁵ In the same year, Braund and Hall published a discussion of one of the most important pieces of evidence for enthusiastic attitudes to theatre in ancient Black Sea communities: a fragment of an Athenian krater probably made between 430 and 420, an image of which is reproduced on the cover of this volume.⁶ Four figures are shown in spectacularly patterned costumes and in profile: an aulos-player, another musician, and two animated male dancers in female masks with brilliant white faces, with artificial hair attached, and inscriptions saying they are beautiful, but in using the linguistic gender of the roles they are assuming, rather than their biological sex.

¹ Boshier (2012a). Boshier died tragically young in 2013. Her unfinished monograph, *Theater on the Periphery*, which will significantly expand the findings of her edited collection, has been prepared by Edith Hall and Clemente Marconi posthumously for publication by Cambridge University Press: Boshier (2019).

² See Easterling (1993).

³ See e.g. Easterling and Hall (2002); Hall (2012); Hall and Wyles (2008).

⁴ Csapo, Goette, Green and Wilson (2014). See also Hall (2007).

⁵ Le Guen (2014); Braund and Hall (2014a).

⁶ Braund and Hall (2014b). The significance of the fragment has only begun to be grasped quite recently, since it was discussed in Froning (2002). But it was found in 1962 in the excavations of a dwelling conducted under the direction of L. M. Slavin (Field ref: 0-62/1344) in Sector E of the city. It is kept in the Archaeological Museum of the Institute of Archaeology, which belongs to the National Academy of Sciences in Kiev (item no. AM 1097/5219). The fullest discussion of the fragment before Braund and Hall (2014b) was Skrzhinskaya (2010a), especially 200–1. The fragment is also shown as the Frontispiece.

The current volume is intended as a beginning for future work, not an end: time will tell. Certainly, the sustained archaeology that is in progress around the region, albeit to different degrees, will continue to expand our knowledge and understanding, particularly through the discovery of theatrical paraphernalia, masks, instruments and more, as is already apparent in these essays. In comparing the sometimes-modest Black Sea evidence with that of southern Italy and Sicily (notably in painted vases), we do well to follow Rusten's key observation here that in the Euxine we often benefit from an archaeological context that will never be known for so many of the key artefacts of the western Greeks.

While this book will be very much concerned with connections of all kinds between the Black Sea region and the Greek mainland, most importantly Athens, we shall also seek to bring the Pontic periphery together with better-known processes and phenomena that are attested in southern Italy and Sicily, or 'Great Geece'. While a few Greeks (most strikingly Herodotus) were active in both parts of this shared colonial periphery and even brought them together in broader analysis, the much more usual tendency in antiquity and in modern scholarship has been to treat them separately. In this volume, Oliver Taplin considers both regions and their theatrical and performance culture(s). He traces the principal evidence for early theatre in Magna Graecia, especially in Sicily, where available patronage famously took Aeschylus. As he indicates, the process around the Black Sea seems to develop a little more slowly, but nevertheless we seem to have an established Black Sea theatre culture on the north coast of the Euxine by the end of the fifth century, at around the time that Euripides was drawn to Macedonia and when Isocrates' *Trapeziticus* (his *Oration* 17) gives us glimpses of sustained interaction between Athens and the Bosporean kingdom that was economic and political, but also explicitly cultural. Through the fourth century, in the Black Sea we find not only stone theatres, but also playwrights whose birth cities lay on the southern coast of the Black Sea, specifically at Heraclea Pontica and Sinope.

Stephanie West stresses the reputation of the Black Sea in Greek culture as a deadly and dangerous environment, set about with non-Greek peoples who were similarly rebarbative. The epic tradition of the Argonauts was built upon these images of difficulty and death, but also established the region as part of the broader world, to which Greeks might go. By the end of the fifth century, Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* had staged an entire play in the forbidding setting of the Crimean clifftops, the first to survive on this theme and a play which was to become one of the most well-known Greek tragedies in antiquity. Artemis had saved Iphigenia

from sacrifice at Aulis by transporting her to the Crimea, but in so many ways her life had ended even so. While she would never marry or have children, her putative husband at Aulis would himself be transported in death to the remarkable island of Leuke ('White Island'), which lay on a shipping route from the west coast across to the Crimea. It was remarkable not because it was big or grand (though it remains white on approach), but because it is the only true island in the whole Black Sea, where otherwise we can point only to a few offshore rocks and would-be peninsulas. Its remarkable cult of Achilles, however, may also return our thoughts to the west and the comparable island cult of Diomedes that is known in the Adriatic. As West observes, the expedition of Pericles c. 437 BC and the *Histories* of Herodotus, completed about a decade later, were part of a fast-developing Greek (and especially Athenian) engagement with the region, soon exemplified by Euripides' play too

From these introductory chapters we proceed to a series of particular places in Part II. In the next chapter Edith Hall pursues these lines of thought to the Black Sea itself, and especially the southern coastlands. She demonstrates the Athenian engagement particularly with Heraclea Pontica and Sinope. Drama is to the fore, certainly, for, as she shows, we not only know of playwrights from this area, but also see something of functioning theatre in these cities. However, she calls attention to the broader social and intellectual context of the Greek culture of these cities, including for example the historian and mythographer Herodorus and the philosopher Bryson of Heraclea. Importantly, she further notes, at Heraclea, the particular interest(s) and use of drama by the ruling tyrants, akin to the patronage deployed by tyrants of Sicily (from Hieron and Aeschylus onwards) to show their Hellenic credentials and, more specifically, to broadcast and magnify their activities. Finally, she observes a tendency which emerges from our available data, and may have a substantial importance. For she has noticed that, while Heraclea tends to be associated with works of tragedy, we hear much more at Sinope about comedy and comic playwrights, not to mention the wicked humour of Diogenes the Cynic, who famously came from Sinope.

Jeffrey Rusten pursues the theme of comedy and takes us north across the Black Sea to the city of Phanagoria, located on the Taman peninsula, immediately to the east of the Crimea. This was the eastern portion of the Bosporean kingdom, in which the huge settlement at Phanagoria was its great eastern capital. There, in a rich burial of a young female, was located a small, well-painted vessel, a little *chous*, which (as Rusten stresses) is one of the most important vases to have survived as evidence of the Greek

theatre. It was made about 400 BC in Athens and depicts comic actors in characteristic padding, surrounded by props, masks and ivy. Interestingly, this little vessel was deposited in the ground after some seventy years or so of an existence whose details are beyond our knowledge, though it clearly reached the Black Sea at some stage and, as Rusten suggests, most likely spent many years in the possession of one of the wealthy families of the area. For among the many important aspects of this vessel is the fact that it was excavated in context: Rusten observes how knowledge of context is an advantage that we do not have for the more famous ‘theatrical vases’ of Magna Graecia.

David Braund extends this important consideration of context in a wide-ranging analysis of what we know or may plausibly infer from the larger scatter of evidence (literary and material) on theatre and performance in the Bosporan kingdom. In so doing, he draws particular attention to another image of comic actors, closely contemporary in production at Athens with Rusten’s *chous*, and found quite recently at Kepoi (or Cepi), whose settlement may be seen across the bay from neighbouring Phanagoria. Archaeology shows that this terracotta served to decorate (appropriately enough) a winery over very many years. However, Braund shows how theatrical culture of all kinds flourished in the kingdom, sponsored by its wealthy elite (notably the stone theatre at Nymphaeum) and watched over by the rulers of the kingdom themselves. He observes too the cult of Aphrodite Ourania (its centre close to Phanagoria), which seems to have been a particular focus of poetry and performance on themes including Tiresias, the goddess’s destruction of the Giants (with Heracles) and more besides that was connected with her cult. Throughout we see both Dionysus and Apollo as key deities across the kingdom.

Next, Sergey Saprykin shifts our focus from the Bosporan kingdom westwards to the city of Chersonesus, by the modern city of Sevastopol in the south-western Crimea. As he observes, it was founded from Heraclea Pontica, and seems to have maintained relations with its mother city, close across the waters of the Euxine. We may wonder, therefore, how far the theatre culture of Heraclea drove the development of theatre and performance in its Crimean colony too. Certainly, we have a stone theatre, close to the centre of the ancient settlement, not far from its acropolis, where stood the temple of Parthenos (who has much in common with Artemis, otherwise absent from the city). Byzantine and modern construction have obstructed archaeology there, so that dates of all kinds are seldom beyond serious question and doubt. However, Saprykin draws valuable attention to the remains from the theatre, which was most probably constructed in the

later fourth century BC or soon after. Of particular interest is a relief, found beneath the orchestra, which, he argues, is not an Amazonomachy, but Perseus killing Medusa or the like.

From Chersonesus Valeriya Bylkova takes us north-westwards to the important city of Olbia at the great estuary of the river Bug (ancient Hypanis) which is itself part of the huge expanse that forms the estuary of the mighty Dnieper (ancient Borysthenes). She observes that chance epigraphy attests a theatre in the cityscape of Olbia in the last decades of the fourth century BC, though we can only guess at when it may have been built (in stone?). Archaeology has yet to reveal its remains, so that we should probably suppose it to have stood in the lower portion of the city, now under the waters of the Bug estuary, where the auditorium would have stood with its back to the major elevation on which the city is constructed and the audience there would have looked out towards the sea, as at Nymphaeum and elsewhere. In addition to epigraphy, she also gathers important indications of theatre culture in the material remains of the city, in marble, vase-painting and terracotta, including theatrical masks. All this she sets in the context of Dionysiac cult in the city, which will later be discussed further by Braund.

From Olbia we proceed westwards and down the west coast of the Black Sea. At Istros and Tomis, in particular, Dana brings out the ubiquity of Dionysiac and Apolline festivities and their importance in the civic life of these communities. In setting out the considerable epigraphic evidence, together with our other data, she illuminates especially the Hellenistic and Roman periods. However, earlier evidence from the region allows her plausibly to suggest that this theatre and performance culture was already in place to a significant extent in the classical period: of particular interest is mention of what seems to be a tragic actor on a fragment of pottery (from the mouth of the Danube at Istros) that is certainly classical, even if the graffito presents other problems. She also discusses an important dipinto (again, from Istros) which seems to show a dancer in lively action.

In similar vein, down along the western coast and its hinterland, Alexander Minchev deploys the considerable available evidence to set out the theatre and performance culture of the cities whose territories now lie in Bulgaria. Here too the bulk of the evidence is from the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Of particular interest is a silver figurine of a slave, evidently from New Comedy, which was deposited with many other valuable objects in the burial of a boy, who evidently belonged to the elite of Odessus. Among much else of interest, too, are the small terracotta masks found in burials at Mesembria, where a theatre seems to have been built

around 300 BC. At about that very date a small terracotta mask, showing an aged and bald satyr face, was deposited in a burial there. Also from the fourth century onwards the several necropoleis of the city of Apollonia Pontica (with its great cult of Apollo) regularly include burials with terracotta figurines and masks redolent of the stage. As Minchev further indicates, in the west Pontic cities, as elsewhere, theatres offered an opportunity for cities to bestow seating privileges and other honours upon those it favoured.

The next group of chapters, in Part III, are concerned especially with particular plays. We start with the *Prometheus Bound*, where precise geography is hard to find. In some sense we are in distant Scythia, while Arrian, touring the coast of Colchis, was shown a conical peak in the western Caucasus, which was said to be the very place where Prometheus was chained to his crag (*Periplus* 10; cf. 15, citing the lost second play of the trilogy, the Aeschylean *Prometheus Unbound*).⁷ Of course, the drama was concerned, as Bakola shows, with an atmosphere of desolation rather than with any precise geography. Indeed, the irreconcilable idiosyncrasy of some of the geography in the play offers support for its orthodox dating to around 440 BC, before Pericles led an Athenian expedition into the region. Bakola draws particular attention to aspects of the drama which are not always observed in the written text of a play, namely the look of it on stage and especially the sound of the chaining of Prometheus as metal strikes metal. At the same time, she also observes the particular connections of the region of Scythia with metallurgy and the hardness and violence which often went with it.

The Prometheus trilogy immediately leads us to consider the fragments of Athenian drama about the Black Sea or importantly connected with it. Rosie Wyles not only shows us the considerable list of tragedies which fall into that category, but also suggests that by taking a geography-led approach we might learn lessons about the treatment of the Black Sea region that could be transferable in some sense to other parts of the ancient world treated in drama. In particular, she explores the consequences of the fact that, from a Greek (and indeed Athenian-Ionian) perspective the Black Sea is very much colonial space. Moreover, the region evokes particular texts and concepts (from Homer onwards). In consequence Wyles can show the power and dramatic value of the Black Sea as a setting with its own energy and challenge to the audience.

⁷ He saw himself as something of an Argonaut (Ap. Rhod. 2. 1247ff.); cf. Arr. *Anab.* 5,3,1; *Indica* 5 (Alexander-geography extended the Caucasus from the Euxine to the Himalayas).

Rather as with the arguments of Bakola and Wyles, so Medea can also repay attention to her particular space in the region. For the marshy flatlands of Colchis, Medea's homeland, had abundant associations for a Greek audience, while Euripides' version of her tragedy was one of his most daring and impactful compositions. Edith Hall makes a series of important observations about the play, starting from the key point that Medea is not simply a princess and barbarian, but very specifically a Colchian. Medea's story – variously told – was not only the ultimate disaster of the Argonautic adventure, but also central to a skein of origin myths, for cults and cities that ranged from the Black Sea to the Adriatic and Magna Graecia. Hall pays particular attention to three ways in which the play may better be understood by looking harder at the associations of Colchis and the back story of Euripides' play there: she focuses in turn on coins, metals and religion.

Tackling Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, Felix Budelmann takes a very different approach. His concern is not with the region as such, but with the extraordinary nature of the story itself. As he suggests, the characters participate in an astonishing process of discovery, which stretches credibility almost as much as the desire of Orestes and Pylades to die in each other's stead. Of course, it is the divine plan of Apollo and his sister which brings a kind of possibility to the meeting and just-in-time recognition of Orestes and his sister Iphigenia, and so enables a certain cleansing of a family history that shocks even the barbarian Thoas, king of the Taurians. Budelmann observes, however, that, even so, the audience is presented with a wondrous event which stretches the limits of cognition and may well cause the audience to reflect upon the boundaries of knowledge, whether with or without a supernatural framework. Perhaps the Black Sea, rather as Wyles argued, was a particularly suitable locale for the remarkable and possibly unknowable.

Such reflections help to further the analysis of Edith Hall on the same play. She is concerned here primarily with depictions of Orestes, Pylades and Iphigenia at the temple among the Taurians, where the ghastly human (and family) sacrifice is to take place. For this is the particular context where so much of what matters in the play is on show – the bond between Orestes and Pylades, the almost inversion of Iphigenia's role from Aulis, and above all the recognition scene, where brother and sister open a new relationship that will settle (however miserably) their ghastly family past. More specifically, Hall notes and seeks to explain the popularity of vases bearing this scene as an object found suitable for deposition in burials in Magna Graecia. She asks what the choice of these scenes implies about

theatre and knowledge of this particular play and myth in southern Italy, while opening also the important issue of how drama may have featured in the burial ritual itself. Finally, noting a vase which shows the trio escaping with the statuette (*xoanon*) of the goddess, she locates the image (popular on later sarcophagi) among the nest of local traditions in Magna Graecia concerning the arrival of Orestes there from the Black Sea.

Next, we have Part IV, which addresses performance(s) from a range of perspectives. In a ground-breaking discussion, Marina Vakhtina explores the culture of performance on the northern shores of the Black Sea. While the Greek cities are shown to have the spread of music, dance and the rest that we might have expected of other Greek cities, for example in Magna Graecia, the evidence from Scythia is striking. For Vakhtina shows the limitations of Greek stereotypes about dour Scythian austerity. Drawing especially upon archaeological discoveries (not least in funerary contexts), she provides a fresh sense of the music and dance that was practised among Scythian nomads, which included sounds designed to impress enemies in battle, but also the kind of music and instrumentation that was appropriate to more festal contexts. From these broad considerations we move to a specific site on the Taman peninsula, Volna 1, where there have been important new finds of musical instruments in burials of the local Bosphoran elite as well as a life-size mask of local production there. Reporting on these very recent discoveries, Vladimir Bochkovoy, David Braund, Roman Mimokhod and Nikolay Sudarev consider the reasons for the deposition of grave goods which have associations with Dionysus, in particular. They suggest that the god brings together theatre and large issues of life, death and afterlife, and that we are touching here upon themes at the very heart of ancient Greek culture.

Dionysus is central also to the following chapter, in which Manana Odisheli takes us to the east coast of the Black Sea and Colchis, with Iberia beyond (together now as modern Georgia). Her principal concern there is the cult of Dionysus, especially as evidenced in material culture. She adduces a series of Dionysus-related artefacts and locates them in the strong wine culture of all Georgia, attested repeatedly through antiquity and still very much alive today. It is no surprise that the first Christian cross in Georgia was said to have been made from sections of grapevine. Among the objects discussed, the relatively new discoveries at Vani of a silver belt showing (*inter alia*) the serving of what must be wine, deserves particular note, as does also the inclusion of Dionysus on a magnificent elephant-headed lampstand.