

BOOK REVIEW

Cosmology and the Polis: The Social Construction of Space and Time in the Tragedies of Aeschylus. By RICHARD SEAFORD. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xiii + 366. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN 978-1-107-00927-1.

This bold and complex book develops a line of argument that Seaford has been pursuing since *Reciprocity and Ritual* (1994) and *Money and the Early Greek Mind* (2004). It shows how essential elements of the Greek polis—ritual, money, spatio-temporal structures—are also reflected in Greek drama and philosophy, with particular emphasis on Aeschylus.

Essential to Seaford's analysis is the notion of the *chronotope*, a spatio-temporal unity that correlates socially constructed conceptions of uniform and analogous spatial and temporal frameworks. These frameworks are cognitive structures corresponding to communal and socially integrative practices, such as ritual, which articulates both space (in the form of, e.g., space covered by sacred processions) and time (through, e.g. sacred calendars). Earlier (Homeric) chronotopes, configured by reciprocity and plunder rather than by spatially fixed (landed) property as the basic means for wealth acquisition, show little interest in consistently articulating spatial relations, and construct time principally in terms of genealogies and of reciprocal relations between ruling families.

By contrast, the ascendancy of the "aetiological" chronotope in the context of the polis foregrounds the interconnection of cultic, political, and cosmic space, by emphasizing comprehensiveness (it embraces all components of the cosmos) and collectivity (the community appropriates and structures space). Aetiological time, too, unites mythic past and cultic present, especially as ritual regularly re-enacts events of the mythic past in the present, and homogenizes, through repeated circularity, the perception of time as a linear sequence.

Finally, in the "monetized" chronotope, time and space are imagined as potentially unlimited, insofar as money has the same purchasing power at any place or time, and also (unlike pre-monetary wealth) the capacity to accumulate unlimitedly, as well as being unlimited in scope *qua* universal standard (it can be exchanged with all things). This is the chronotope informing some Presocratic philosophy (esp. Anaximander and Heraclitus) but also the political reforms of Solon.

Seaford is particularly interested in the tension between the (socially integrative) aetiological chronotope on the one hand and the (potentially disruptive) monetized chronotope on the other. By articulating distinctions, ritual imposes order on mythic or social chaos, and thus limits the potentially unlimited. Money, on the contrary, by collapsing distinctions through its imposition of a universal standard, permits unlimited exchanges and unlimited accumulation over space and time.

Seaford's insights into the tension between these two chronotopes are subsequently applied on Aeschylus, in what is perhaps the most engaging part of his book. In *Supplices*, he argues, the multiple crises caused by the Danaids' rejection of marriage—and their interstitial state as reflected in the location of their supplication at an altar that is neither in the royal abode nor in the agora—would have been resolved at the end of the trilogy, with the establishment of polis cult ordering gender relations, as well as relations between oikos and polis.

In *Septem*, the tension between the chorus' ritual lament, which integrates the polis, and its rejection by Eteocles, who embodies the introversion of the royal household, is resolved by the annihilation of the latter but also by its subsequent commemoration in hero cult and concomitant lamentation. Especially stimulating here is the discussion of how the new frame of thought represented by monetization is grafted onto older mythico-religious patterns, so that the ancestral curse is conceived (as it is in the *Oresteia*) in terms of a debt to be exacted in due time.

In *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra's initial control both of ritual and of geographic space (through the beacon sequence) perverts these into instruments of the royal house's destruction. Likewise, in *Choephoroi*, allusions to mystic ritual at the climactic scenes surrounding the tyrannicide are again perverse, since they facilitate matricide in a distinctly non-public context (the introverted royal house). In *Eumenides*, however, Orestes' supplication of Athena's image takes place in civic space, in contrast to his earlier supplication in the god's "house" in Delphi. Likewise, the Erinyes, who had threatened to pursue Orestes over limitless space, are eventually contained, through public ritual in civic space, within the confines of the earth, thereby linking polis and cosmos.

The same ritual also distinguishes and imposes order on the perverse unity of opposites represented earlier in the trilogy by the unending cycle of violent reciprocity. This unity has a parallel in the non-differentiation inherent in monetary transactions and in the accumulation of monetary wealth. It is embodied by the Erinyes, who stand for both chronological homogeneity (their power to exact pun-

ishment is equally valid at all times) and spatial homogeneity (they can exact punishment anywhere). In moments of crisis in tragedy, spatial and temporal homogeneity are emphasized: the remote space brings crisis into the immediate space (royal house), and structurally similar actions (e.g. violent revenge) are cyclically repeated. Ritual brings resolution by differentiating the opposites: space is reclaimed by the community, and cyclical, repetitive suffering gives way to permanent well-being.

The book also offers a wealth of insights into a variety of topics related to the interplay between the limitedness of ritual and the unlimitedness of monetized wealth. I single out the discussion of “form-parallelism”—the juxtaposition of words or phrases that are parallel and often antithetical—as a vehicle for conveying ideas both of antithesis and of a deeper unity. For instance, in *Septem* 911–14 form-parallelism in lamentation for the fratricidal brothers assimilates their unnatural opposition to their unnatural unity in both origin (incest) and death. In Aeschylus, this rhetorical device signifies the deferral or subversion of completion by emphasizing that the opposites are bound together in a relationship of endless tension—a conception (also Heraclitean) associated with the homogenizing power of money, which assimilates different commodities by remaining in itself always the same.

This is an important work that redefines our conception of central categories of early Greek thought: space, time, ritual, and money. It will be of interest to scholars and advanced students working in the areas of classical Greek literature, Greek history, philosophy, and theatre.¹

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¹ Though generally well produced, the volume has a high number of typos. Most are relatively unobtrusive (e.g., “facil<it>ated,” p. 119; Κύκλο<σ> and στεφάνο<σ> for Κύκλῶ and στεφάνῶ, p. 227). In a few cases, however, they may hinder comprehension (e.g., “see<k>ing gain,” p. 198; “penalties imposed <by> the polis,” p. 251; “benefaction <was> combined with hostility,” p. 268). On p. 211 delete n. 22 (it reappears, correctly, as n. 23). The coinage “endophony” (= intrafamilial murder, from *endon* and *phonos*) can be misleading, esp. since “antiphony” is also used in the book.