

Proprio l'individuazione di reperti, principalmente epigrafici, provenienti da scavi realizzati dal Fortunati e in seguito conservati presso palazzi privati e ville, ha permesso di venire a conoscenza di non altrimenti documentati rapporti con famiglie nobiliari fortemente interessate all'antico e intenzionate ad arricchire le loro collezioni: questo il caso della famiglia Wolkonsky presso la cui villa in Laterano, oggi residenza dell'Ambasciatore Britannico, si trova ancora un cospicuo numero di iscrizioni provenienti proprio da terreni indagati dal Fortunati.

Grazie all'espedito della cronistoria Erpetti riesce a concentrare l'avventurosa vita dello scopritore, fornendo un flusso continuo di notizie, riccamente documentate e dalle quali potranno anche essere avviati ulteriori approfondimenti.

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JOSHUA BILLINGS: *The Philosophical Stage: Drama and Dialectic in Classical Athens*. Princeton University Press, Princeton – Oxford 2021. ISBN 978-0-691-20518-2; ISBN (e-book) 978-0-691-21111-4. XII, 271 pp. EUR 39.80, USD 39.95, GBP 30.00.

The diverse intellectual culture of antiquity is enthralling, particularly because the cultural spheres or categories overlap and are more or less unorganized. This is less familiar to later generations on account of the natural processes of cultural differentiation and classification that we employ today. Joshua Billings' book introduces a novel approach with regard to this topic. *The Philosophical Stage* deals with the essential but complex relationship between early philosophical and poetic thought. More precisely, it discusses how ancient Greek drama and philosophical thought before the discipline of philosophy proper are interconnected. As is well known, various philosophical questions are dealt with in classical drama, and Billings states explicitly that ancient Greek drama is essentially philosophical and reflects the development of early Greek philosophical thought. As he puts it, "[the] dramatic texts are themselves developments in philosophical thought, and should be recognized as part of the canon of early Greek philosophical writing" (p. 2, italics removed).

Billings' main aim is to elucidate the view that drama is in itself philosophical, and is thus a philosophical form. Methodologically, he does not wish to refute the established picture, which is related especially to German idealism and represents a more historically oriented method. Consequently, *The Philosophical Stage* is not particularly revisionist. Instead, Billings propounds a twofold approach. First, his approach is based on synchrony, so that the selected material of each chapter is conceived of as an independent whole. More precisely, Billings considers that the

late fifth century BCE is “a constellation of sources”, and its relations are “conceptual rather than chronological” (p. 10). Second, Billings’ approach is based on dialectic in a broad and non-specific sense. According to Billings, ancient Greek dramatic texts are ongoing and open-ended since they are expressive and processual, that is, the texts themselves enact the process of thinking on stage. Furthermore, the three topics of the book are the form of the cultural catalogue, the form of intrigue prologues, and the form of debate. The first form deals with the position of the human species in the hierarchy of existence, the second with the problematic and dubious tools of political authorities, and the third concerns intellectual debate and struggle. Billings analyses, explicates and interprets in detail the contents of these forms using various sources.

The main concept of *The Philosophical Stage* is “authority”, which refers to an agent or agents whose voices are the most important within a society. Billings also believes that “a negotiation of authority” (p. 19) is central to all selected material of the ancients. He means by this that Athenians had become conscious of new modes of thinking, which is manifested in the dramatic texts. As a result, a process of “democratizing of authority” is visible, and “monologue gives way to dialogue and debate” (p. 21). Moreover, the distinction between *mythos* (μῦθος), “mythical”, and *logos* (λόγος), “rational”, which Marcel Detienne has studied, is, according to Billings, relevant because both were used to justify beliefs. In consequence, the notion of *alētheia* (ἀλήθεια), “truth”, had political, practical, and social aspects.

Following the introduction, Billings focuses on the form of the cultural catalogue. This catalogue concerns the hierarchy of existence and relations of power, that is, the separation of powers between gods, demigods, humans and non-human animals. Billings discusses mythical inventors, such as Thoth, Palamedes, Prometheus and Theseus, and various human capacities and important inventions, such as literacy, so that differences in the catalogues can be noticed. Billings also deals with the myth of Sisyphus in the coda. This particular myth manifests doubt about the potentiality of human abilities and scepticism about the existence of the gods, which to my mind also belong to the characteristics of modern man. One of Billings’ conclusions is that two parallel inquiries can be ultimately found: the proper catalogues, which describe the present state and achievements of human civilization, as well as theories about cultural development.

In the book’s second part, Billings deals with the form of intrigue prologues. Late fifth-century BCE drama includes questions about language, truth and existence. Furthermore, the dramatists at this time explored how political scheming and rulers’ deceptions are manifested in society. Billings refers to Sophocles’ *Electra* and *Philoctetes*, Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*, all of which famously deal with lying, plotting, manipulation, betrayal, false identity, trickery and sacrifice in attempting to achieve political objectives. In this context, the key term is *apatē* (ἀπάτη), “deception”, which has ethical, social and political orientations, with

connections to ontological and epistemological questions. As a result, truth is frequently neglected, and *logos* or rationality is separated from truth.

In the third and last part of the book, which concerns the form of debate, Billings examines how *agōn* (ἀγών), “struggle”, and *sophia* (σοφία), “wisdom”, “skill”, or “expertise”, are interconnected in ancient Greek drama, and how *sophia* was understood. Regarding *sophia*, new forms of intellectual authority appeared beside religious tradition in the fifth century BCE, and led to the trend of intellectualism. At the time, one of the forms *sophia* took was agonistic debate. Billings uses the term *agōn sophias*, which concerns the different meanings of *sophia* and debates on what it means to be *sophos*. In this part of the book, he discusses how the term appears in Euripides’ *Antiope* and *Bacchae* and in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*.

In the conclusion, Billings explores the classical discussion between the righteous and intellectual but reclusive Socrates, and Callicles, who advocates natural superiority and personal gain. This debate, which appears in Plato’s *Gorgias*, reflects the *agōn sophias* concerning Socrates’ and Callicles’ opposed views about the ultimate good.

Billings’ book has many strengths. It is well written, its argumentation is sound, it is wide ranging, it is diligently researched, and, above all, it is stimulating. Overall, it has no significant faults, and it unquestionably succeeds in its aims. I have in fact only minor complaints. First, brief commentaries regarding Giorgio Colli’s *La nascita della filosofia* (1975) and Albert Camus’ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) might have been useful. Second, although the index is clearly adequate, some minor words are missing, such as καταβάλλω, *sophismata* and *stasis*. Third, I would like to have read more about direct or indirect connections between drama and pre-Socratic natural philosophy. Overall, Billings’ study, with its novel approach, is a valuable and versatile resource. It is undoubtedly a useful addition to research concerning the complex relationship between early Western philosophical thought and ancient drama.

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VANESSA ZETZMANN: *Tragische Rhetorik: Darstellungsweise und dramatische Funktionen scheiternder Reden in der attischen Tragödie*. Hypomnemata 211. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2021. ISBN 978-3-525-33607-6; ISBN (e-book) 978-3-647-33607-7. 292 S. EUR 90.

Zetzmann’ *Tragische Rhetorik* is a broader version of her dissertation on the agonistic speeches in old Attic tragedy (Philipps-Universität Marburg, 2020). Agonistic speeches were an important