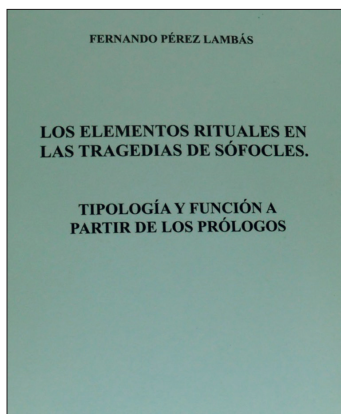


LOS ELEMENTOS RITUALES EN LAS TRAGEDIAS DE SÓFOCLES



PÉREZ LAMBÁS, FERNANDO (2018). *Los elementos rituales en las tragedias de Sófocles. Tipología y función a partir de los prólogos*. Classical and Byzantine monographs 93. Turnhout: Adolf M. Hakkert. 444 pp., 80,00€ [ISBN 978-9-0256-1332-7].

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THE BOOK UNDER REVIEW, A REVISED DISSERTATION originally submitted to the University of Valencia, aims to discuss certain aspects of Sophoclean tragedy in relation to ritual, with a particular focus on the prologues and the impact that they have on the plays that follow.

After preliminary material, the book contains an opening chapter on methodological considerations, followed by a chapter on each of the seven surviving plays in roughly chronological order: *Ajax*, *Trachiniae*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*. A very short conclusion is followed by a detailed bibliography and two indexes: of Greek, and of cited passages. The latter is too extensive, and seems to include virtually every citation, whether important or not, when a more focused approach would have better assisted the reader; we also miss an index of subjects.

The opening chapter focuses first on Sophoclean prologues, then on the meaning of ritual and the previous application of that category in classical scholarship. The chapter on *Ajax* begins by looking at the evidence for hero cult of Ajax, before examining the staging of the prologue, the relationship between the goddess Athena and the two human characters Odysseus and Ajax, the symbolic importance of Ajax's sword, and the use of sacrificial language. *Trachiniae* is discussed principally with reference to the oracles, nuptial rites, and the significance of Zeus for the play. For *Antigone*, unwritten laws, issues of burial, funerary lament, and 'marriage to death' are highlighted as themes. With *Oedipus the King*, there is a focus on supplication, miasma, and oracles. The chapter on *Electra* analyses the presentation of the dramatic space and its divinities, Apollo's oracle and the consequent plan of deceit, and the funerary offerings. In the chapter on *Philoctetes* sacral spaces, ephebic initiation rites, the bad smell of Philoctetes' foot, and Lemnian fire are all examined. Finally, *Oedipus at Colonus* is examined with reference to the reception of the hero, sacred spaces, and the oracle and divine signs.

Throughout the chapters Pérez Lambás shows how ideas prominent in the prologue continue to be of importance throughout the tragedy that follows. This focus on prologues would have been more illuminating if Sophocles' prologues had been analysed alongside other tragic prologues, as well as prologues from comedy, epic, lyric, and other genres. What, if anything, is distinctive about how Sophocles handles the openings of his works? The organisation of the book, with a separate chapter on each of the plays that survives complete, makes it harder to ask that kind of interesting question, or to identify common threads across Sophocles' dramas and indeed Greek tragedy as a whole. It also involves simply ignoring the considerable evidence for Sophoclean tragedy that survives in fragmentary form.

A further problem is that the promised focus on ritual elements is blurred. As the summary above indicates, some of the topics discussed are clearly related to ritual; but others are not, and it is not clear why they are to be found in a book dedicated to this topic. As a consequence, Pérez Lambás's monograph falls short of the standard set by Adriana Brook's *Tragic Rites. Narrative and Ritual in Sophoclean Drama*, published in the same year as his by The University of Wisconsin Press, and reviewed by me at *AJP*, 140, 2019, pp. 369-373. Brook's analyses remain focused on ritual activity, and are informed by an understanding of the literature on that topic both within the discipline of Classics and beyond; Pérez Lambás's book, by contrast, is better viewed as a general introduction to the seven surviving plays, which highlights key themes in each, some of which are relevant to ritual activity, and pays particular attention to how Sophocles begins each individual drama. Recharacterised in that way, the book is a success, and will provide readers with a helpful overview of the subject.