

**THE CHRONOLOGY OF
THE EXTANT
PLAYS OF EURIPIDES. A
DISSERTATION**

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THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE
EXTANT PLAYS OF EURIPIDES

BY

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A DISSERTATION

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THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE EXTANT PLAYS OF EURIPIDES

Of the eighteen extant plays of Euripides eight are securely dated by ancient testimony. These are the *Alcestis* (438), the *Medea* (431), the *Hippolytus* (428), the *Troades* (415), the *Helen* (412), the *Orestes* (408), and, for all practical purposes, the *Bacchantes*,¹ and the *Aulid Iphigenia*. Still another, the *Phoenissæ*, may be placed within certain narrow limits on the strength of statements ancient but—unfortunately—incomplete.

The criteria which serve in determining the date of the remaining dramas are of various kinds: parodies in the comedies of Aristophanes which afford *termini ante quos*, allusions to past and contemporaneous political events, the attitude of the poet toward politics and religion, and the character of the play itself. The extant dramas which are exactly dated range from 438 B. C. to the year of the poet's death. They are sufficient in number to show a development of technique and a growth of mannerism which are important factors in determining the dates of the remaining dramas. Indeed three groups of plays, separated by stylistic differences, are easily discernible among the surviving plays, in spite of the fact that the earliest of them, the *Alcestis*, was composed when Euripides was already more than forty years old.

The points of technique which distinguish the groups are both metrical and linguistic. In the metre the increasing number of resolutions in the iambic trimeter, the use of trochaic tetrameters, the revival of which was a phenomenon attending the increasing freedom of the trimeter, the extension of the use of mixed dochmiacs, and the greater range of variety in the

¹ Produced after the death of Euripides.

metres employed are points indicative of an advance on the part of the poet along certain lines which are of value in assigning a play to certain years, or rather to certain periods. Further considerations are the metrical constitution of the choruses in the matter of responsions, the growing lack of symmetry in the threnodies, the extended use of monodies and *ἀμοιβαία*, the alternate songs of actors. Another test of the period to which a play belongs is the relative relevancy of the songs sung by the chorus to the situation in which the singers find themselves. It is recognized that irrelevancy to the plot and situation on the part of the chorus is more and more marked in Euripides's later dramas. The verbal style increasingly lacks restraint as the lyrical parts expand. Repetitions of musical words and the subjection of sense to sound in the lyric portions mark even the finest of the later dramas, and the gradual growth of this mannerism gives an indication which is of use in assigning a play to the group to which it belongs. Another important consideration is the inter-relation of the plays in point of borrowed phrase, motive, or situation. This borrowing or repetition may be of such a nature as to be absolutely inconclusive, or there may be so plain an indication of an advance in technique, or at any rate of an adaptation of material, as to settle the question of priority. The relation of the art of Sophocles to the art of Euripides is another question which forces itself upon us in discussing certain plays of Euripides with reference to chronology. The two poets inevitably affected one another's work, contemporaries and rivals as they were, contesting for the same prizes, and each treating subjects which had been handled by the other. There is the plainest evidence of their mutual influence in the work of both poets. And thus a play of Sophocles may afford a *terminus post* or *ante quem* for a play of Euripides.

The problems which are to be solved by some or all of these means according to the individual play have been essayed by various scholars of the last two centuries. Several chronologies of the plays have been published either separately or in con-