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AGAMEMNON

EDITED WITH A COMMENTARY

BY  
R. J. TARRANT  
*Associate Professor of Classics,  
University of Toronto*



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TO  
MY PARENTS

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## PREFACE

When Friedrich Leo published his edition and critical studies of Seneca's tragedies a century ago, he made little effort to conceal his scorn for the author whose interpretation he had advanced so greatly. This attitude toward Seneca no longer seems appropriate, since literary critics of the past two generations have provided a more adequate framework for the evaluation of his work. Released from unequal competition with his Greek predecessors, Seneca can now be judged on his own merits as a powerful, though limited, poet, whose depictions of disordered personalities in a violent and unstable world have taken on a new interest in the present century.

In this edition of *Agamemnon* the text has been constituted directly from the manuscripts. The introduction devotes most attention to sources and manuscripts, and is brief on subjects about which much has already been said or on which little may usefully be said. The commentary has a twofold purpose: to discuss what Seneca wrote and what his words mean, and to place his work in a wider context. I have tried in particular to illustrate Seneca's debt to Greek and Latin drama, Augustan poetry (that of Ovid above all), and declamatory rhetoric, in an effort to isolate more clearly what is characteristic and original in his writing. Because of this double aim, and also because of the almost complete absence of modern commentaries on the plays, I have made the commentary rather full. Even so, it is far from exhaustive; some omissions are deliberate (p. 156 below), but many others are the result of ignorance or lack of perception. I hope that by analysing a single play in detail I have made some contribution to the general understanding of the plays.

This book is based on an Oxford thesis for which I received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1972. The typescript was first sent to the Press in August 1974, but references to works which have reached me since then have been inserted where possible.

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## PREFACE

For financial support or assistance I wish to thank the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission, the Danforth Foundation, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and University College, Toronto. I am particularly grateful to Corpus for providing me with splendid facilities for research while I was P. S. Allen Junior Research Fellow. I must also thank the Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes in Paris for supplying microfilms of several manuscripts. The staff of the Cambridge University Press have dealt expertly and patiently with an often trying author and typescript.

That I was able to write this book at all is due to the help given me by my supervisors. Professor R. G. M. Nisbet suggested *Agamemnon* as a subject for research, and my commentary derives much of its approach as well as many specific ideas from him. Sir Roger Mynors led me to take an interest in the medieval transmission of the tragedies and guided my work on the text. I owe a great deal to their instruction and their friendship. The examiners of my thesis, M. E. Hubbard and Professor E. J. Kenney, removed numerous errors from the work and offered useful suggestions for its improvement. Professor H. D. Jocelyn very kindly read a late version of the commentary and made many suggestions, almost all of which I have gratefully adopted. Professor C. O. Brink and Professor F. H. Sandbach gave me valuable comments on a draft of the entire book. For criticism, advice, and information of various kinds I am indebted to L. E. Boyle, G. P. Goold, A. P. MacGregor, R. H. Rouse, D. A. Russell, O. P. Taplin and Otto Zwierlein.

There is one scholar whom I hesitate to name here, since he neither directed nor read my work on Seneca. But I should feel less than honest if I did not record my gratitude for the encouragement, the teaching, and the example of Eduard Fraenkel.

R. J. T.

May 1976