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ON SHELF



ANIMALS IN THE GREEK THEATRE



ANIMALS IN THE GREEK THEATRE

By P. D. ARNOTT

ANIMALS on the stage are usually more trouble than they are worth, and producers are notoriously chary of using them. There are several instances in ancient drama, however, where they seem to be essential to the plot; and it may be worth while to consider the Greek approach to the problem, and see their stage technique for overcoming the difficulties involved.

Horses are used frequently in tragedy to draw chariots in which the principal characters make an entrance. The spectacular effect of such a device would be considerable; the more the pomp and dignity of a character is stressed on his first appearance, the greater the contrast with his eventual downfall. Thus Aeschylus introduces Agamemnon in a chariot in which he stands to address the Chorus and Klytaimestra,¹ leaving it only to walk on the ominous purple carpet to his doom. The ancient commentary on the play claims that Cassandra follows him in a second chariot. This assumption is unwarranted, and there is no evidence in the text to support it, though it may well reflect a concession to the growing love of spectacle in later revivals. Similarly Atossa in the *Persai* makes her first entrance in a chariot (ll. 159 ff.). This is nowhere stated, but is implied by her words on her second appearance later in the play (ll. 598 ff.), where she makes a point of having come this time on foot. Thus the pomp of her first entrance, before receiving news of the Persian disaster, is an effective visual contrast to the humility of her second, to invoke the ghost of Dareios, and to the pitiful entrance of Xerxes at the end of the play, bereft of followers and in ragged clothes.

Athena in the *Eumenides* probably made her first entrance in a chariot, at least in the original production, though the text at this point is confused:

ἔθεν διώκουσ' ἦλθον ἄτρυτον πόδα,
 πτερῶν ἄτερ ροιβδοῦσα κόλπον αἰγίδος
 πῶλοις ἀκμαίοις τόνδ' ἐπιζεύξασ' ὄχον. (403 ff.)

Lines 404 and 405 are obviously incompatible; the Oxford text suggests that they are alternatives. In l. 404 the goddess speaks of herself as having come without wings, but with the power of her aegis (still implying flight); from 405, however, it would appear that she rides in a chariot. τόνδε suggests that the chariot was visible, and thus I cannot accept the

¹ *Ag.* 783.



view of those editors who would reconcile the lines by taking πώλοις ἀκμαίοις metaphorically, as meaning the swift winds. It is more likely that in the first production Athena entered in a chariot, and that in later revivals producers could not resist using the μηχανή, which as a device to give the illusion of flight was developed by Euripides, and inserting l. 404 as a substitute for the original 405.

Sophokles tended to despise such spectacular effects, but Euripides makes full use of them. Thus chariots are used for the entrance of Klytiamestra and Iphigeneia,¹ for Rhesos,² and for Klytimestra again.³ There would be no difficulty in using horses in their normal duties for this purpose. Wilamowitz, however, conjectures that a horse was used in a far from normal situation, to represent Pegasus in the *Stheneboia* of Euripides.⁴ This view, which other scholars have accepted without question, he supports from the evidence of vase-paintings. One must beg leave to doubt whether this was the case. To use a real animal for such a purpose would be unique. It is certain that Pegasus was shown on the stage, but a horse would be uneasy in a large pair of dummy wings. Pegasus in the same author's *Bellerophon*, as we know from Aristophanes' parody, was required to fly, and so must have been represented by a dummy figure at the end of the μηχανή, and it is highly probable that the same device was employed in the *Stheneboia*.

What the horse is to tragedy, the donkey—then, as now, the common Greek beast of burden—is to comedy. The donkey is familiar, everyday, and undignified, and it is probably with this in mind that Euripides brings in the captive Andromache in a mule-cart;⁵ the contrast between this humble conveyance and the normal trappings of stage royalty would have presented itself at once to the minds of the audience. In the *Frogs* of Aristophanes Xanthias rides in on a donkey. This presumably remains on stage throughout the opening scene with Herakles, and is led off when Dionysos boards Charon's boat and Xanthias is dismissed; we hear no more of it on his reappearance. In a production of the play at Cambridge the animal wandered in later to be mistaken for Empousa, but this amusing idea was probably not intended by Aristophanes. Thus there is no objection to having the donkey in the *Frogs* played by a real animal.

That in the *Wasps*, however, is another matter. Philokleon is locked in his house by his son Bdelykleon and two slaves. He attempts to escape by hanging underneath a donkey, in a parody of Odysseus' escape underneath the ram. Any actor might well jib at being asked to place himself

¹ *Iph. in Aulis*, 590 ff.

² *Rhes.* 370.

³ *El.* 988.

⁴ *Class. Philology*, iii (1908), 225 ff.

⁵ *Troad.* 572.

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in such an unpleasant position. That the donkey was, however, of the 'pantomime horse' variety is indicated by ll. 179–81, where he is required to bray on his cue—κάνθων τί κλάεις; and again, τί στένεις, εἰ μὴ φέρεις | 'Οδυσσέα τιν'; The two dogs put on trial later in the play (ll. 903 ff.) must be represented by actors, as they have to bark on their cue and move about the stage as required. It is likely that both these parts and that of the donkey were taken by 'supers'.

The *Cyclops* of Euripides presents a more formidable problem in the shape of a flock of sheep and goats, which are assumed to be herded in by the satyrs on their first entrance and shut inside the cave. It would be a foolish producer who trusted a flock of sheep on his stage, and various indications suggest that they were left to the imagination of the audience. The *parodos* describes their movements in such detail as to suggest that this was the only indication of their presence. Again, when Silenos first hears the satyrs approaching, he announces that they are dancing a *sikinnis*; they could not both dance and herd sheep. It is significant that at the end of the play Odysseus does not escape under a ram, as in Homer, but by slipping out in one direction while the chorus distract the Cyclops' attention in another; and that the lambs which Silenos brings out to sell are already crated for transportation (cf. ll. 224 f., ὄρω γέ τοι τούσδ' ἄρνας ἐξ ἄντρων ἐμῶν | στρεπταῖς λύγοισι σῶμα συμπεπλεγμένους), and could thus conveniently be represented by dummies.

Similarly in the *Birds* so much is demanded of the crow and jackdaw which Peisthetairos and Euelpides carry to assist their search as to make it doubtful whether they were represented. They are required to crow to order (l. 20) and change their tune (l. 24), and to point in specific directions. They could be represented by dummies, though this is unconvincing and makes their eventual 'flying away' difficult. As they would hardly be noticeable in the large Greek theatre, it is most probable that they were indicated solely by the mime of the actors.

It thus appears that the Greeks were no less sensitive than modern producers to the difficulties of allowing animals on stage; and that where the plot required them, they resorted to convention or impersonation rather than face the unrehearsed effects which would otherwise assuredly follow.