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## **A Note on the Characterization of Okeanos in the *Prometheus Bound***

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### **In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views XXXIII, n.s. 8, 1989.341-346 34 1A NOTE ON THE CHARACTERIZATION OF OKEANOS IN THE PROMETHEUS BOUND The Okeanos scene (lines 284-396) in the Prometheus Bound has often been attacked by critics on the grounds that it contributes little or nothing of dramatic importance to the play.<sup>1</sup> Many of those who attack this scene are those who question the play's authenticity. For example, Schmid,<sup>2</sup> who was one of the first to question the play's authenticity, was also among the first to attack this passage as irrelevant. Griffith,<sup>3</sup> in his book, *The Authenticity of the "Prometheus Bound."* agrees with Schmid that "in dramatic terms there is no single scene in Aeschylus as weak as this." He believes that lines 270-439 could easily be eliminated without losing anything of real dramatic importance. In his recent commentary on the play he allows this scene the limited role of showing how Prometheus' "inflexible and independent character" contrasts with the diplomatic Okeanos, thus showing how difficult reconciliation

between Prometheus and Zeus will likely be." Similarly, West attacks the scene as interrupting the natural flow from lines 271-276, where Prometheus promises to tell the Okeanids about his sufferings, to lines 436 ff., when he finally fulfills his promise to them. West sums up his criticism as follows: The poet inserted it presumably because he found that his play was turning out too short or that the plot was advancing too rapidly. It is hastily written, dramatically weak and repetitious, inflated by the irrelevant digression on Atlas and Typhoeus (for whose suffering! Earlier versions of this article appeared in my Ph.D dissertation, *The Succession Myth in Aeschylus' "Prometheia"* (Princeton 1980) and in a paper read at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Canadian West at the University of Saskatchewan in 1985. I have used the Oxford Classical Text of Aeschylus edited by D. Page (Oxford 1972). The following books and articles will be cited by author's name: O.J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound": A Literary Commentary* (Toronto 1980); M. Griffith, *The Authenticity of the "Prometheus Bound"* (Cambridge 1977) = *Authenticity*; M. Griffith, ed., *Aeschylus, "Prometheus Bound"* (Cambridge 1983) = *APB*; O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977); M.L. West, "The Prometheus Trilogy," *JHS* 99 (1979) 138. 2 W. Schmid, *Untersuchungen zum Gefesselten Prometheus* (Stuttgart 1929) 5-20. 3 Griffith, *Authenticity*, 115-116. Griffith, *APB*, 139. West, 138. 342 DAVID W. DAHLE Prometheus was not responsible), and in the end ludicrous; no wonder the griffin becomes impatient. Taplin" also criticizes this scene as lacking a function within the play other than as an "elaboration of Prometheus's unyielding defiance." He faults the staging as being spectacular just for the sake of being spectacular in order to liven up a dull play. Conacher? thinks some of the criticism leveled against this scene is justified, but feels that the scene is important for the additional light it sheds on Prometheus' situation. This additional light is "the absolute nature of the confrontation between Prometheus and Zeus" and the impossibility of reconciliation until Zeus is forced by Prometheus' secret knowledge of a son to overthrow him to release Prometheus and restore him to a place of honour in the universe.! This scene is far from irrelevant, but rather has at least two important functions. First, as pointed out by others, "the awesome nature of Zeus' power-a power which could also be used against Okeanos should he attempt to intervene on Prometheus' behalf-is shown by the examples of Atlas, and, especially, Typhos. More importantly, however, the nature of Prometheus' prophetic wisdom is highlighted by the contrast that is drawn...

### A NOTE ON THE CHARACTERIZATION OF OKEANOS IN THE *PROMETHEUS BOUND*

The Okeanos scene (lines 276-316) in the *Prometheus Bound* has often been attacked by critics on the grounds that it contributes little or nothing of dramatic importance to the play.<sup>1</sup> Many of those who attack this scene are those who question the play's authenticity. For example, Schridl,<sup>2</sup> who was one of the first to question the play's authenticity, was also among the first to attack this passage as irrelevant. Griffith,<sup>3</sup> in his book, *The Authenticity of the "Prometheus Bound,"* agrees with Schridl that "in dramatic terms there is no single scene in Aeschylus as weak as this." He believes that lines 270-434 could easily be eliminated without losing anything of real dramatic importance. In his recent commentary on the play he allows this scene the limited role of showing how Prometheus' "affable and independent character" contrasts with the high-rank Okeanos, thus showing how difficult reconciliation between Prometheus and Zeus will likely be.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, West<sup>5</sup> attacks the scene as interrupting the natural flow from lines 271-436, where Prometheus promises to tell the Okeanids about his sufferings, to lines 436ff., when he finally fulfills his promise to them. West sums up his criticism as follows:

The poet inserted it presumably because he found that his play was moving on too slowly or that the plot was advancing too rapidly. It is, with a few weak, dramatically weak and superfluous, followed by the irrelevant digressions on Atlas and Typhoon, the whole suffering

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this article appeared in my Ph.D. dissertation, *The Sarcophagi Myth in Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound"* (Princeton, 1986) and in a paper read at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Canadian West at the University of Saskatchewan in 1985.

I have used the Oxford Classical Text of Aeschylus edited by E. Page (Oxford 1972).

The following books and articles will be cited by author's name: D.L. Crahan, *Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound": A Literary Commentary* (Toronto 1982); M. Griffith, *The Authenticity of the "Prometheus Bound"* (Cambridge 1977) - *Authenticity*; M. Griffith, ed., *Aeschylus, "Prometheus Bound"* (Cambridge 1983) = *APB*; G. Egger, *The Language of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1971); M.L. West, "The Prometheus Trilogy," *JHS* 91 (1971) 128.

<sup>2</sup> W. Schridl, *Untersuchungen zum Gefangenen Prometheus* (Stuttgart 1929) 5-22.

<sup>3</sup> Griffith, *Authenticity*, 115-116.

<sup>4</sup> Griffith, *APB*, 126.

<sup>5</sup> West, 138.



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