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MICHAEL PSELLOS ON *PROMETHEUS BOUND*: REINSTATING A JUDGMENT

ABSTRACT: All modern studies concerning the authenticity of *Prometheus Bound*, as well as passing references to the issue, trace this thorny question back to the mid-nineteenth century. In this study we will attempt to show that at least the notion of *Prometheus* as a drama deviating from the rest of the Aeschylean production is in fact much older, and therefore the conception of this idea can now be backdated. More specifically, Michael Psellos, an erudite scholar of eleventh-century Byzantium, in a comparative treatise on the versification of George of Pisidia and Euripides, makes a condensed comment about *Prometheus*, which adumbrates the current argument against the Aeschylean origin of the drama. The main purpose of this paper is to ascertain why, and also in what way, does Psellos question, not the authenticity of course, but the typical nature of a renowned composition, traditionally considered to be part of the Aeschylean canon. By bringing Psellos' reference about *Prometheus* to the fore, we can now establish this Byzantine scholar as the first questioning voice as regards the un-Aeschylean nature of the disputed play, and the eleventh century CE as the historical time in which this kind of pondering was expressed for the very first time.

Prometheus Bound is traditionally attributed to Aeschylus, and no evidence exists that its authenticity was ever disputed in antiquity. Unlike what is the case for the pseudo-Euripidean *Rhesus*, there is no extant ancient source whatsoever informing us of any scholars doubting the Aeschylean origin of *Prometheus*.[1] Nowadays, *Prometheus* is considered spurious by the majority of classicists,[2] and this turn of events is thought to be the product of the modern era. As Mark Griffith points out in his book on the authenticity of *Prometheus Bound*, undoubtedly the most thorough philological approach on the matter to date, "the first discordant voice

1. For the authorship of *Rhesus* see Liapis (2012) intr. lxvii-lxxv; Fries (2014) 22-8.
2. The current consensus on this issue has been the product of a cumulative process for classicists, and there are still a few exceptions to what now seems to be a "majority rule", see e.g. Podlecki (2005) 200; Hall (2010) 230.

[as regards the Aeschylean status of the play] was raised by R. Westphal in 1869."[3] As a matter of fact, in a metrical study of Greek tragic and lyric poetry published by A. Rossbach and R. Westphal in 1856, explicit suspicion is already voiced concerning the authorship of certain parts of *Prometheus*. More specifically, the two scholars argue that none of the choral odes in this play can be made to accord with the Aeschylean craftsmanship.[4] In addition, following G. Hermann's indications, the same scholars also comment on the rather idiosyncratic handling of the iambic trimeters in the play under discussion —especially as regards to the high frequency of first foot anapaests.[5] In 1869 Westphal returns to this discussion in his *Prolegomena zu Aeschylus Tragödien*. He argues that the evident structural differences between *Prometheus* and the other Aeschylean plays are due to some revision that this drama suffered in the hands of some later author,[6] and he is closely followed in this respect by various other scholars.[7] Almost twenty years later, Kussmahly (1888) 18 is the first scholar to thoroughly defend the Aeschylean origin of *Prometheus*.[8] At the end of the nineteenth century E. Bethe, moving along the same lines as Westphal and his immediate successors, argues that a revision of the problematic play took place sometime after Aeschylus' death —highlighting the demanding stagecraft of the drama to support this view. In practice, Bethe maintains that a series of additions were made to Aeschylus' simple, archaic composition to make it more spectacular.[9] This kind of (crude) skepticism concerning *Prometheus*

3. Griffith (1977) 1. Cf. Ruffell (2012) 14.
4. Rossbach / Westphal (1856) pref. xi. The reasons adduced for such a doubt are tied to the unparalleled shortness and metrical peculiarities of these odes, compared to all the rest in the Aeschylean corpus.
5. Id. pref. xvii.
6. Westphal (1869) 6, 13, 97.
7. See Wecklein (1893) 26 n. 1 for the bibliography.
8. The next scholar to make a thorough, *mutatis mutandis*, attempt to defend the authenticity of *Prometheus* is Jean Coman in 1946.
9. See Bethe (1896). However, the discussion about the revision of Aeschylean dramas can, in fact, be traced back to antiquity. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.1.66, notes that *tragoedias primus in lucem Aeschylus protulit, sublimis et gravis et grandilocus saepe usque ad vitium, sed rudis in plerisque et incompositus: propter quod correctas eius fabulas in certamen deferre posterioribus poetis Athenienses permisere: suntque eo modo multi coronati*. In his 1552 edition of the ancient scholia on Aeschylus' tragedies, the Renaissance humanist Francesco Robortello, considering this — suspicious to say the least — information to be accurate, reproaches the Athenians for their disrespectful action. Robortello, who in the preface of his edition draws up a list of 19 points of criticism towards *Prometheus*, mainly conserning its many deviations from the Aristotelian model of tragedy, is, technically, the first "modern" scholar to introduce the concept of *fabulas correctas* for the Aeschylean plays and especially for *Prometheus*.

gradually led to more rigorous studies on its authorship. Gercke is the first scholar to claim in 1911 that the whole play is spurious, and that there is no room for any revision theories.[10] Wilhelm Schmid, in 1929 and 1940, strongly supports this idea, through a monograph and an entry in *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* —but it is Griffith's book which, eventually, establishes this notion in the field of classics.[11]

Despite what has been said up to this point, there is a neglected reference concerning the peculiar nature of *Prometheus*, which clearly shows that skepticism about the divergence of the disputed drama from the other plays in the Aeschylean corpus is a much older story than we thought. The eleventh century Byzantine scholar Michael Psellos (1018-1078 CE), in a brief treatise he composed to compare the poetic caliber of George of Pisidia to that of Euripides[12] entitled: *Ὁ αὐτὸς ἐρωτήσαντι "Τίς ἐστίχιζε κρεῖττον, ὁ Εὐριπίδης ἢ ὁ Πισίδης;"* (*The same man to one who raised the question "Who wrote better verses, Euripides or Pisides?"*),[13] notes the following as regards Aeschylus and *Prometheus*:

> *Σοφοκλεῖ μὲν οὖν καὶ <δὴ> Αἰσχύλῳ βαθύτερα τὰ νοήματα καὶ ἡ τοῦ λόγου κατασκευὴ σεμνοτέρα, καὶ οὐ πα<ν>ταχοῦ χάριτες οὐδὲ ῥυθμοὶ εὔκροτοι, ἀλλὰ σεμνότερα τὰ πλείω καὶ οὕτως εἰπεῖν εὐσχημονέστατα. Α<ἰσχύλος γοῦν> εἰς μὲν τὸν Προμηθέα ἀναρτώμενον βραχύ τι τοῦ οἰκείου παρεκβαίνει ἤθους καὶ χαίρων <λίαν> καθαροῖς ἰάμβοις καὶ λεξειδίοις τισὶ τὴν ἀκοὴν σαίνουσι γλαφυρώτερον τῆς ὑποθέσεως <ἐφή>ψατο· ἐν δέ γε ταῖς λοιπαῖς αὐτοῦ δραματικαῖς ὑποθέσεσι, μάλιστα ἔνθα τὰ Δαρεικὰ μιμεῖται πρόσωπα, δεινός ἐστι τὰ πολλὰ καὶ δυσέκφραστος, καὶ οὐκ ἄν τις αὐτοῦ γνοίη μὴ τετελεσμένος οὕτως εἰπεῖν τὰ θεοφάνεια.*[14]

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10. Gercke's student F. Niedzballa recorded in his 1913 dissertation the *Eigenwörter* of *Prometheus* —those words that occur only in this play and in no other text in the Aeschylean corpus. Thus, he introduced one of the first quantitatively significant criteria in the study of the authorship of the disputed drama.
11. For a review of the stages of the discussion concerning the athetesis of *Prometheus* see seriatim Zawadzka (1966) 213 ff.; Bees (1993) 4-14; Lefèvre (2003) 11-19. See also Sommerstein (2010) 228-32, and 326 for some further bibliography on the authenticity question.
12. Psellos' scholarly curiosity is common knowledge. For the pertinence of the treatise under discussion to *De ideis* of Hermogenes of Tarsus and the works of Dionysius of Halicarnassus see Dyck (1986) 31-3. Psellos has also been associated with an anonymous Byzantine treatise on tragedy, see Browning (1963) 67 ff., and the edition and commentary by Perusino (1993). For Psellos' view on ancient drama, and the Byzantine view on the subject in general, see Marciniak (2009), cf. id. (2013); White (2010). See also Puchner (2002) 307.
13. For the motivation, themes, and arrangement of the treatise see Whitby (1996) 113-5.
14. "Now Sophocles and Aeschylus have more profound ideas and a more dignified linguistic

According to Psellos, the ideas that Sophocles and Aeschylus address in their plays, if compared to Euripides' ideas of course, are more profound, and the linguistic structure they employ more dignified. For the most part, their plays have great dignity and elegance, and they are not full of charming phrases and mellifluous rhythms.[15] Nevertheless, Aeschylus in *Prometheus Bound* slightly deviates from his usual style,[16] employing with high frequency[17] pure iambs,[18]

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arsenal, and though they are not always graceful and their rhythms not always mellifluous, yet their works, on the whole, have greater dignity and, as it were, elegance. Thus, in regard to the *Prometheus Bound* Aeschylus deviates a bit from his proper character and, taking excessive delight in pure iambs and in little words which flatter the ear, attacked his subject too smoothly. In the rest of his dramas and in particular in his treatment of the house of Darius, he is for the most part forcible and difficult to interpret, and, without being, as it were, an initiate, one would not understand his mysteries." For the text and translation see Dyck (1986) 44-5 (ll. 54-64).

15. Cf. Psellos' opinion on the diction of the Greek novel in his *Περὶ χαρακτήρων συγγραμμάτων τινῶν* treatise: *Οἱ τὸ τῆς Λευκίππης βιβλίον καὶ τὸ τῆς Χαρικλείας, καὶ εἴ τι ἄλλο ἐπιτερπὲς καὶ χάριτας ἔχον ἀναγιγνώσκοντες* […] *δοκοῦσί μοι οἰκίαν μὲν ἐπιβεβλῆσθαι οἰκοδομεῖν, πρὸ δὲ τῆς τῶν κρηπίδων καταβολῆς καὶ τῆς τῶν τοίχων καὶ τῶν κιόνων ἀναστάσεώς τε καὶ τάξεως, τῆς τε τοῦ ὀρόφου συγκορυφώσεως, βούλεσθαι περιανθίζειν ταύτην γραφαῖς καὶ ψηφῖσι καὶ ταῖς λοιπαῖς χάρισι. Καὶ τοῖς μὲν πολλοῖς δοκοῦσί τι κατωρθωκέναι οἱ οὕτως ἐπιχειρήσαντες·* […] *ἐνταῦθα δέ, εἴ γέ τις βούλοιτο τελειώτατος ἀγωνιστὴς εἶναι τεχνικοῦ λόγου καὶ ἀκριβοῦς, τὸ σίμβλον πρότερον, εἶθ' οὕτως περὶ τὰ ἄνθη πραγματεύεσθω. Κἀγὼ γὰρ τὴν πρώτην οὕτως ἐπικεχειρήκειν* […]. *Μεθεὶς οὖν ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν τὰς Χάριτας* [meaning the rhetorical ornaments], *περὶ τὰς Μούσας* [meaning the "serious" studies] *ἐσπούδαζον, οὐδεμίαν ἀφεὶς τῶν πασῶν* […]. *Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἱκανῶς τούτων τῶν ἀνδρῶν* [sc. *Δημοσθένους, Πλάτωνος, Λυσίου, Γρηγορίου, Θουκυδίδου*…] *εἶχον, ἔδει δέ μοι τῷ μεγέθει τοῦ λόγου καὶ χάριτος, οὕτως ἤδη καὶ τὰ Χαρίκλεια καὶ τὰ Λευκίππεια, καὶ ὁπόσα τοιαῦτα τῶν βιβλίων ἐστίν, εἰς τὴν ὅλην συνηρανιζόμην παρασκεύην.* For the text see Boissonade (1964) 48-52. Cf. also Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.8.1408b-1409a for rhythm and its metric divisions.

16. Dyck (1986) 45 translates *τοῦ οἰκείου ἤθους* as "his proper character", and Wilson (1983) 178 as "his usual character." Wilson's "usual" is more accurate (less ambiguous) than Dyck's "proper", which can also mean appropriate.

17. Dyck (1986) 45 translates *χαίρων <λίαν>* as "taking excessive delight", and Wilson (1983) 178 as "takes pleasure". I maintain that the most adequate translation would be "to be wont to…", as in the idiomatic phrase *χαίρω ποιῶν τι*, see LSJ s.v. *χαίρω* A.3.b. I would like to thank I. M. Konstantakos for his well-aimed comment on this.

18. Dyck (1986) 60 mentions a quite short rhetorical exercise of Psellos, in which the Byzantine scholar refers again to *ἴαμβοι ἁπλοῖ*. Dyck indicates that *καθαροὶ* (and *ἁπλοῖ*) *ἴαμβοι* are, broadly speaking, the unresolved iambic feet, as opposed to spondees, tribrachs, pyrrhics. The Byzantine scholar might also have in mind here the unsyncopated iambic metres in the lyrics (cretics, bacchei, molossei, spondees). As regards the trimeter parts of *Prometheus*, Psellos' (theoretical) remark is astonishingly precise, since, if we take into account the rate of resolution only in the plays of Aeschylus' byzantine triad, *Persae*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Prometheus Bound*, the disputed drama is clearly more reserved than the other two, see Schein (1979) 78, table XXX.

and also charming wording[19] which excites the ear.[20] Hence, from a stylistic point of view, in this particular play the dramatist addresses his subject in a more "polished" or "pleasing" way than in his other compositions.[21] Psellos

19. Dyck (1986) 45 translates *λεξειδίοις* as *little words*. Nevertheless, what Psellos seems to be signifying here is, more broadly, a form of attractive diction. Shortness is, of course, characteristic of words used in such kind of diction, but certainly not the only one. Additionally, other Byzantine scholars — before and after Psellos — use *λεξείδια* instead of *λέξεις* with no further implication whatsoever. In Psellos' works the word *λεξείδια* occurs one more time, with clearly negative implications, in an iambic poem addressed to one of his enemies (*Τοῦ Ψελλοῦ πρὸς τὸν Σαββαΐτην* [poem 21, v.163, for the text see Westerink (1992) 259-69]): *γλωττοκρότων τε τεχνῖτα λεξειδίων*. The word here has quite a derogatory sense, since it describes a sweet-sounding but utterly shallow kind of vocabulary. In this context *λεξείδια* can indeed be translated as *little words*. Yet, this is not the case for Psellos' reference to *Prometheus*. Further, it can be added here that, as Podlecki (2006) 15 shows, at least as far as compound adjectives are concerned, *Prometheus* is totally in line with Aeschylus' grandiose style.

20. It is interesting that the verb *σαίνω*, which Psellos uses in the Greek text to signify "flattering", is relatively frequent in Aeschylus and Sophocles, occurring 6 times in the extant dramas and fragments of each poet, but very rare in the works of Euripides: it occurs only once in 18 extant plays (at *Ion* 685) and in various surviving fragments. In spite of its generally negative meaning in classical Greek (viz. *to fawn*, *to pay court*, even *to deceive*), Psellos uses the verb here in a positive sense. In this case it means *to gladden* (see LSJ s.v. *σαίνω* III, 3), *to throb pleasantly*, exciting the listener. This becomes clear from a parallel passage in which Psellos is providing some advice to the emperor as regards the use of rhetoric (*Τοῦ αὐτοῦ σύνοψις τῆς ῥητορικῆς διὰ στίχων ὁμοίων πρὸς τὸν αὐτὸν βασιλέα* [poem 7, vv. 460-1, for the text see Westerink (1992) 103-22]): *τὰ σαίνοντα τὴν αἴσθησιν, τὰ τοῖς προαιρέτοις προαίρεσιν προσπλάττοντα, γλυκὺ γὰρ τοῦτο πάντως*. In this evidently positive context, charming speech is being associated with the subject matter of an oration.

21. Psellos' *γλαφυρώτερον* seems to be associated with the second of the three general types of composition of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Dionysius in *De compositione verborum* 21.2-3 (for which see Aujac-Lebel [1986] 9-55; Donadi-Marchiori [2013] 13-80 —cf. Dionysius' *Demosthenes* 36-42) states that: *ἐν ποιητικῇ τε διαλέκτῳ καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ πάσῃ τοῖς αὐτοῖς ὀνόμασι χρώμενοι πάντες οὐχ ὁμοίως αὐτὰ συντίθεμεν. τὰς μέντοι γενικὰς αὐτῆς διαφορὰς ταύτας εἶναι πείθομαι μόνας τὰς τρεῖς,* […] *ἐγὼ μέντοι* […] *καλῶ τὴν μὲν αὐστηράν, τὴν δὲ γλαφυράν (ἢ ἀνθηράν), τὴν δὲ τρίτην εὔκρατον*. The austere type of composition (*αὐστηρά*), i.e. the Aeschylean style in Psellos' and Dionysius' view (see 22.7), *τραχείαις τε χρῆσθαι πολλαχῇ καὶ ἀντιτύποις ταῖς συμβολαῖς οὐδὲν αὐτῇ διαφέρει, οἷαι γίνονται τῶν λογάδην συντιθεμένων ἐν οἰκοδομίαις λίθων αἱ μὴ εὐγώνιοι καὶ μὴ συνεξεσμέναι βάσεις, ἀργαὶ δέ τινες καὶ αὐτοσχέδιοι· μεγάλοις τε καὶ διαβεβηκόσιν εἰς πλάτος ὀνόμασιν ὡς τὰ πολλὰ μηκύνεσθαι φιλεῖ· τὸ γὰρ εἰς βραχείας συλλαβὰς συνάγεσθαι πολέμιον αὐτῇ, πλὴν εἴ ποτε ἀνάγκη βιάζοιτο* (22.2-3). […] *ἐν δὲ τοῖς κώλοις ταῦτά τε ὁμοίως ἐπιτηδεύει καὶ τοὺς ῥυθμοὺς τοὺς ἀξιωματικοὺς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεῖς* (22.4), […] *ἥκιστ' ἀνθηρά, μεγαλόφρων, αὐθέκαστος, ἀκόμψευτος, τὸν ἀρχαϊσμὸν καὶ τὸν πίνον ἔχουσα κάλλος* (22.6). Dionysius' polished type of composition (*γλαφυρά*), on the other hand, *ἔοικέ τε κατὰ μέρος εὐητρίοις ὕφεσιν ἢ γραφαῖς συνεφθαρμένα τὰ φωτεινὰ τοῖς σκιεροῖς ἐχούσαις. εὔφωνά τε εἶναι βούλεται πάντα τὰ ὀνόματα καὶ λεῖα καὶ μαλακὰ καὶ παρθενωπά, τραχείαις δὲ συλλαβαῖς καὶ ἀντιτύποις ἀπέχθεταί που* (23.3-4). According to him, the only tragedian who developed this type of style is Euripides (23.9). Taking into account all the above, it becomes evid-

observes that Aeschylus in his other plays, especially in *Persae*, makes use of words and ideas that are exceedingly grandiose and hard to interpret, and thus, if not deeply initiated into his style, one would not be able to understand his writings.

Psellos' general — rather neutral — remark concerning the stylistic divergence of *Prometheus* is quite clear. However, there are two points in this short passage that need further clarification. The Byzantine scholar claims that in composing *Prometheus* Aeschylus brought forth a drama more refined than he used to. Hence, one gets the impression that Psellos is, to a certain extent, reproaching Aeschylus for his crude stylistic choices in his other plays.[22] This impression is rather strengthened by the following sentence in the scholar's text, concerning the laborious reading that the other works of Aeschylus make for —especially *Persae*. Yet, when Psellos says that the poet *δεινός ἐστι τὰ πολλὰ καὶ δυσέκφραστος,* he does not mean that Aeschylus is deliberately obscure to the point of being unintelligible, but, as he already pointed out at the beginning of the passage, that Aeschylus' ideas and diction are more cryptic and intricate, and hence more difficult to explain in a simple way. If Psellos wanted to actually reproach Aeschylus for the obscurity of his style, he would have done so explicitly —as he does for example as regards Aelius Aristides, when he comments that *μονοειδής τέ ἐστι καὶ προσκορὴς καὶ τὴν λέξιν τὰ πολλὰ ἀσαφής*, or as regards Pythagoras' instructions, when he states that *Πυθαγόραν μὲν ἀσύμβολον οὐκ ἂν εὕροις ποτέ, διὰ τοῦτο δυσερμήνευτός ἐστι περὶ ὧν τίθεται.*[23]

In fact, the Byzantine scholar does express more elaborately his opinion on Aeschylus' style in another treatise, and his view is rather commending. More specifically, in *Εἰς κοινολεξίαν, τό, ὅτι ἔφθασεν* Psellos comments on stylistic composition in regard to the three tragedians:

> *οὐ γὰρ ἁπλῆ τις ἡ συνθήκη τῶν λέξεων, οὐδὲ μονοειδὲς τὸ καλόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μέν, ἐκ τῆς τῶν ὀνομάτων λειότητος, τὸ δέ, ἀπὸ τῶν δυσηχεστάτων στοιχείων καὶ ὅσα μὴ εὔσχημον ἔχῃ τὴν προφοράν, ἡ δὲ μέση ἁρμονία ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν ἄκρων συμμέμικται. Ζηλωταὶ δὲ ἑκάστου τῶν χαρακτήρων ἄλλοι*

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ent that, when composing his treatise, Psellos was more than familiar with Dionysius' specific classification.

22. Dyck's (1986) 45 translation of *γλαφυρώτερον τῆς ὑποθέσεως <ἐφή>ψατο* as "attacked his subject too smoothly", adding a rather negative tone to the phrase, is misleading. Wilson (1983) 178, closer to the Byzantine scholar's mentality, translates: "he approaches his theme more elegantly."

23. Psellos, *Theologica*, opus 98, ll. 123-4, Id. opus 106, ll. 121-2. For the text see Gautier (1989) 381-6, 417-22 respectively.

> *ἄλλου γεγόνασι, ποιηταί τε καὶ λογογράφοι* […]. *Αἰσχύλος μὲν τραχύνει τὴν ἀκοὴν οὐκ εὐήχοις ὀνόμασιν, ἀλλὰ τραχέσι καὶ δυσφώνοις εἰς ὄγκον ἐξαίρων τὴν ποίησιν· μικρόν τι τούτου ἀποδεῖ Σοφοκλῆς, λειότερον δὲ τὸν λόγον μεταχειρίζεται ὁ Φλιάσιος Εὐριπίδης.*[24]

Psellos maintains that the development of fine diction (as far as the use of different sorts of words is concerned) is no simple matter, and a fine sentence, and consequently a fine text, does not take only one form. There is a type of style which is based on elements that are harsh and their pronunciation is inelegant,[25] another type based on words that are smooth in their sound, and also a "middle ground" which results from the harmonious osmosis of linguistic features derived from both former types.[26] There are authors tied to the harsh style and others tied to the smoother one. Aeschylus, and also Sophocles, who closely follows in his footsteps, employ rough tones, using words that are not sweet-sounding. Euripides, on the other hand, uses a more "rounded" style, employing in his plays words that sound smoother. According to the Byzantine scholar, Aeschylus' choice of style allows him to elevate poetry to a level of high dignity. This remark, which is practically the only evaluative point of this whole passage concerning the three tragic poets of the Athenian canon, shows that Psellos clearly holds in high esteem the harsh dignity of Aeschylean poetry.

The second point that needs clarification in the treatise under discussion, complementary to the first, concerns the rather enigmatic last phrase of

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24. "(Fair) language composition is not an easy thing (to achieve), and beauty is not confined to a single form, but one of its (two) aspects does stem from the smoothness of diction, while the other from features that are most cacophonous and inelegant in delivery. The mixed style (stems) from the blending of the two extremes. Different authors, poets and prose-writers, have been enthusiasts of each of the two styles. […] Aeschylus employs untuneful words, that sound rough and discordant to the ear, lifting poetry up to dignity. Sophocles barely falls short of him in that, while the language Euripides of Phlius uses is smoother." For the text see Sathas (1876) 538. The translation is mine.

25. Cf. *δυσέκφραστος* in Psellos' reference to *Prometheus*. This word could also mean "hard to pronounce" in a Byzantine context, see Photios *Bibl.* cod. 138, Bekker p. 97b, l. 39. In our case, though, it evidently means "hard to understand and explain."

26. Cf. n. 18 above. Dionysius' mixed style, which Psellos most probably has in mind when writing about *μέση ἁρμονία*, is also described in *De compositione verborum*: *ἡ δὲ τρίτη καὶ μέση τῶν εἰρημένων δυεῖν ἁρμονιῶν, ἣν εὔκρατον καλῶ σπάνει κυρίου τε καὶ κρειττονος ὀνόματος, σχῆμα μὲν ἴδιον οὐδὲν ἔχει, κεκέρασται δὲ ὡς ἐξ ἐκείνων μετρίως καὶ ἔστιν ἐκλογή τις τῶν ἐν ἑκατέρᾳ κρατίστων* (24.1). However, it is quite interesting that while Dionysius considers Sophocles to be a representative of the "middle" style (24.5), Psellos classifies him with the "harsh" authors, considering him to be only slightly different from Aeschylus.

Psellos' reference to *Prometheus*. The scholar closes his quite concise comment on Aeschylus by saying that "without being, as it were, an initiate, one would not understand his mysteries."[27] At first reading, the word *τετελεσμένος*, which Psellos uses for the initiate in the mysteries of the Aeschylean poetry, could be regarded as a reference to the dramatist's ties to the Eleusinian Mysteries.[28] Nevertheless, this connotative explanation seems rather improbable. It appears that Psellos' wording is a witty, a humorous way of emphasizing the difficulty of interpreting Aeschylus' plays. This is evident from a close parallel of the whole phrase occurring in the "jesting" *Calvitii encomium* (7.6) of Synesius of Cyrene:[29] *ὁ δὲ ἄρτι παραγγείλας εἰς φαλακρούς, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ νεοτελής, ὁ μεμνημένος τὰ θεοφάν(ε)ια*. In Synesius' droll wording, *ὁ μεμνημένος τὰ θεοφάν(ε)ια* is someone who has just lost his hair. In more general terms, this is simply a reference to a person who has acquired a mundane kind of knowledge or experience, and it has, of course, no esoteric implications.[30] Along similar lines, Psellos, with his *τετελεσμένος τὰ θεοφάνεια*, seems to be signifying someone who has studied in depth the dramas of Aeschylus, and is thus able to decipher the "mysteries" of his language.

Apart from the specific phraseology in the references under discussion, something must also be said about Psellos' general attitude towards the deviation of *Prometheus* from the regular Aeschylean style. Dyck (1986) 59 maintains that, even though Psellos "is not opposed to an author's change of character *per se*", in this case he disapproves of Aeschylus' departure from his ordinary practice in *Prometheus*, "because of the inappropriateness of the subject matter." However, the text itself does not support this assertion, mainly because Psellos does not seem to associate, in either a negative or a positive way, the subject matter of *Prometheus* with Aeschylus' stylistic choices. The Byzantine scholar does not express any kind of explicit or implicit "complaint" as regards Aeschylus' stylistic deviation; he simply states it as a fact. The only relevant judgment in the passage is the observation of the divergence

27. The translation is by Dyck (1986) 45. Wilson (1983) 178 translates: "one cannot know him unless one is as it were initiated into divine visions", followed by Whitby (1996) 128 n. 52.

28. See indicatively Sommerstein (2010) 8-10.

29. For this work see Lamoureux-Aujoulat (2004) 1-46.

30. According to Ljubarskij (2003), who has studied the varied nuances in the use of irony and humor in Psellos' oeuvre, "among the senses that "awoke" in the 11th-12th C. in Byzantium the sense of humor was one of the most important." Cf. Braounou (2015). Kaldellis (2006) 217 notes that "the *Chronographia* comes closer to postmodern narrative technique and deeply ironic character-portraiture than virtually any other pre-modern work of literature."

itself: Psellos, evidently familiar with Aeschylus' other dramas, was surprised to see that in *Prometheus* the poet followed a rather different stylistic path. If we were to deduce whether this surprise was in any way pleasant or unpleasant for the scholar, then we would have to admit that the former is most probably the case. To a great extent, Psellos' treatise on George of Pisidia and Euripides is an encomium of the latter: the younger of the three tragedians is called *εὔχρηστος* (sc. "useful" as a model in the art of poetry) (see l. 1) — we should always keep in mind that the first and foremost reason for which the Byzantine scholar is reading ancient Greek literature is to "collect" ideas and various elements of diction for his own writings (either in prose or poetry) — and it is argued that "he had a thorough understanding of the art of poetry as [no one] else has had":[31] *<τὴν> ποίησιν ὡς <οὐδεὶς> ἄλλος ἀκριβωσάμενος* (see l. 33). The dramatist is characterized as "a master in character-drawing, when character must assume a solemn air, [and] a master in the delineation of passion when the victims' sufferings overflow" (see ll. 38-40).[32] Euripides is *ἁπανταχοῦ ἀγαλματίας καὶ χαρίεις, οὐκ ἐν ταῖς χάρισι μόνον τοῦ λόγου, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς πάθεσι· καὶ πολλάκις γε τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἐπικαίρως δραματουργήσας εἰς πλεῖστα κατήνεγκε δάκρυα· ᾤοντο γὰρ τὰ λεγόμενα ὁρᾶν ὡς γινόμενα* (see ll. 65-8).[33] From Psellos' point of view, in Euripides' plays *πανταχοῦ διὰ σπουδῆς ἡ ῥυθμικὴ φράσις καὶ τὸ τῆς λέξεως εὔγλωττον καὶ τὸ τ<ο>ῦ ῥυθμοῦ ἐμμελές. ἀτεχνῶς γοῦν τὴν μουσικὴν ξύμπασαν καὶ αὐτὰς δὴ τὰς ῥυθμικὰς ἀγωγὰς εἰσ<ά>γει* […] *καὶ οὔτε διαστημάτων αὐτῷ οἱ λόγοι ἄμοιροι οὔ<τε μὴν γλω>τ<ημά>των μεταβολῆς. καὶ μάλιστα πεφρόντισται ὁ ἀνὴρ <ἐν ἅ>λλοις· <τὰ μὲν> γ<ὰ>ρ <μέ>τρα καὶ τὴν λέξιν μετατίθησι καὶ ποικίλλ<ει τὴν> φρά<σιν> κατ<ὰ δύναμιν ὁ σο>φός.*[34]

The most probable reason why the Byzantine scholar brings up the notable stylistic discrepancy between *Prometheus* and Aeschylus' other plays, is that this particular drama, as far as diction and metre are concerned, stands

31. The translation is by Dyck (1986) 43.

32. Ibid.

33. See ll. 77-83: "Euripides […] is always full of grace and charm, not in the graces of diction alone, but even in the passions themselves. Many a time his apt dramaturgy drove the Athenians to tears: they fancied that they beheld the spoken word as living action." See Dyck (1986) 45 for the translation.

34. "He (Euripides) always handles rhythmical language, euphony of diction and the appropriateness of rhythm with such care. He brings literally the entire art of music, including even tempi, into his own poems, nor are his speeches void of pitch-intervals or of a variety of obsolete words. He has taken most thought in other matters; the clever man varies his metres and language and uses a rich variety of diction [to the utmost of his ability]." See Dyck (1986) 47 for the translation.

much closer to the commendably sweet-sounding Euripidean style than to the solemnly "craggy" Aeschylean one. Overall, the most remarkable observation from Psellos' point of view is that *Prometheus* is more lucid and comprehensible than the other dramas of Aeschylus.[35] For this particular poet to write a play on the grandiose subject of a Titan's crime and punishment was surely expected. But to do so in a less "dark" way than he used to, this was a rather agreeable surprise for Psellos, and also proof that the stylistic range of olden Aeschylus could in fact have been broader than the Byzantine scholar might have thought.[36] Where the scholar expects to find *ῥήμαθ' ἱπποβάμονα, ἱππόκρημνα καὶ γομφοπαγῆ*, he discovers clear ideas and concepts, and a kind of diction that resembles the smooth and pleasant flow of Euripidean Greek.[37] Hence, in his treatise he feels that he should separate — in the manner of a literary critic — the unexpectedly accessible *Prometheus* from the rest of the Aeschylean oeuvre, which brims with verbal and conceptual riddles.[38]

In conclusion, what we are actually in a position to say is that Michael Psellos, in his literary criticism treatise on George of Pisidia and Euripides, makes a very special reference to *Prometheus*. This reference can be regarded

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35. We are in no position to say which other Aeschylean dramas Psellos had in mind when writing his treatise. He specifically mentions *Persae* there, and in the second verse of the *πρὸς τὸν Σαββαΐτην* iambic poem (*τὴν τῶν κακῶν θάλασσαν ἢ τὴν πλημμύραν*) he uses diction which closely resembles *Seven Against Thebes* 758. Additionally, in the second of his *Orationes panegyricae* (l. 725, for the text see Dennis [1994] 18-50) he mentions Capaneus from the *Seven* 422, 440. Thus, we can assume with some confidence that all the plays of the Byzantine triad were readily available in his memory. Furthermore, cod. Laurentianus 32.9, containing all seven dramas ascribed to Aeschylus now fully extant, is dated at around 1.000 CE, some years before Psellos' birth. Hence, it is only natural to presume that he had also read the *Oresteia* and the *Suppliant Women* —or at least *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides*, bearing in mind that the Byzantine triad is a pentad at the first quarter of the fourteenth century CE, when the metrical work of Triclinius is dated. From the now lost plays of Aeschylus there is very scant evidence that Psellos may have read the whole or maybe parts of *Lycurgus satyricus*, see Radt (1985) 235. For the manuscript tradition of the Aeschylean plays see in detail Dawe (1964).

36. Yet, in one of his letters (No. 154: see Sathas [1876] 404 for the text) Psellos emphasizes how Aeschylus can compose a drama with many new elements.

37. Manousakis (2016) 161-181, 191-7, employing unsupervised and supervised Machine Learning techniques of Automated Authorship Attribution — more specifically, Principal Components Analysis (see concisely Juola [2006] 259-60, 273-5), Cluster Analysis (see id. 276-7), and Burrows' *Delta* (see id. 279-81) — has shown that as far as the distribution of function words (the shortest words in any language) is concerned, *Prometheus* is rather un-Aeschylean. This study is soon to appear as a monograph in English.

38. For the impression of simplicity and clarity that *Prometheus* gives when compared to the other dramas in the Aeschylean corpus see indicatively Earp (1945), cf. Griffith (1977) 225.

as the oldest documented judgment concerning the stylistic idiosyncracy and uniqueness of this drama —when set next to the other plays in the Aeschylean corpus. This very notion, reinstated as Psellian for the first time in the present study, has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. It gradually took the form of a major hermeneutical problem in Aeschylean studies, and it gave grounds for the athetesis of the play. Psellos, of course, does not express even the slightest doubt about the authenticity of the drama in his treatise. To him *Prometheus* is simply a somewhat "different" composition of Aeschylus. Nevertheless, his mere (subtle) reference to the stylistic divergence of this text, which was most probably the first Aeschylean play to be studied by schoolchildren in Byzantium[39] — in all likelihood due to its "limpidity" —, pushes the question of the singularity of *Prometheus Bound* to a much earlier time, relocating the first astonished voice to be heard on this issue from the nineteenth century all the way back to the eleventh.

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39. So Wilson (1983) 112, followed by Whitby (1996) 117. For some doubts concerning the use of Aeschylean plays in Byzantine schools see Marciniak (2009) 315. *Prometheus* is still in many schools worldwide the first "Aeschylean" drama that students read.

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