

apparent, when we have supplied the omission by telling the story outright, as it was conceived by the Byzantine students of the eleventh century and is still, with whatever dissatisfaction, accepted.

Agamemnon, king of Argos, having sailed with a great armament to Troy, to avenge by the capture of the city the abduction of Helen, arranged with his queen Clytaemnestra¹, who governed at home in his absence, to transmit the news of his success, when it should be attained, by a series of beacons extending over the whole distance. At what time this arrangement was first made does not appear; but when after a war of ten years the city was taken, the beacons had been maintained, we learn, for at least a year. The chief part of the service, the transmitting of the message across the Aegaeon Sea, was accomplished by beacons established on Mount Ida in the Troad, on Lemnos, on Mount Athos, and on the highest point of Euboea. Thence the news was to be signalled by comparatively short stages to Mount Arachnaeus, within a few miles of Argos and visible from the royal palace, where a watch was nightly kept for the expected news. Accordingly on the night in which Troy was captured the system was put in operation, and worked so successfully that before morning the beacon upon Arachnaeus was duly seen by the palace-watch. (At this moment the action of the play commences.) The queen, being roused, at once sends out her commands for general rejoicing, without however disclosing either the receipt of the beacon-message or the purport of it, as appears from the fact that the elders of the city², who presently arrive before the palace to make enquiries, are not only ignorant of the event announced, but are still uncertain whether the nocturnal demonstration (for the fires of sacrifice are seen blazing in all directions) is made in honour of some good intelligence or not. After some time, and just upon daybreak (*v.* 291), the queen presents herself, and the elders respectfully ask whether it is her pleasure to enlighten them further.

The queen then informs them that Troy is actually taken. After a few moments of joyful amazement, their next question is, 'When did

¹ Aeschylus knew her as Κλυταιμήστρα *Clytaemestra*—for I agree with those who hold that we have no reason to dispute the testimony of the Medicean MS. Such variations in nomenclature are common. But she must remain *Clytaemestra* for us.

² I have tried throughout so to speak of these 'elders' as to avoid the not very profitable dispute, whether they are to

be regarded as councillors, a political *γερονσία*. It seems to me equally clear on the one hand that their character and behaviour would suggest such an idea to an audience imbued with Greek politics, and that on the other hand Aeschylus intentionally avoided precision on this and all points respecting the constitution of an imaginary state in the heroic times.