

the story, which they previously knew, presents a difficult problem, to be solved, if at all, by the reconstruction of the action and of the story which Aeschylus presupposed as known, and that as a solution of this problem the hypothesis of the Byzantine editors is quite unworthy of consideration, that it is in fact no solution whatever. It does not give a rational account of the facts or make the purpose of the author intelligible. We will turn rather to the positive and perhaps more fruitful side of the enquiry.

As a preliminary we will notice two or three salient points, which may serve to indicate the direction in which we should strike off. The first of these indications meets us, as if placed for the purpose (and indeed it is) at the very threshold of the play. The watchman upon the palace-roof, whose duty it is to look for the beacon announcing the fall of Troy, informs us in his first words that this outlook has been kept nightly *for a year*. Why for a year? Are we to understand that, when the war had already run eight or nine years, the king and queen, having hitherto thought the ordinary communications sufficient, suddenly established the beacons? It cannot be by accident that this 'year-long watch' exactly reproduces one feature in the story of Homer¹. In Homer the watchman of Aegisthus had been expecting Agamemnon 'for a year'. These words of Aeschylus, compared with the epic narrative, are in themselves enough to suggest and almost to raise a presumption, that in the Aeschylean narrative also the design of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra had been on foot for a year, and that the outlook kept by the watchman was closely connected with this design.

And for a second guiding-line, let us look again at the very remarkable speech of the queen which follows her description of the beacons and shortly precedes the entry of Agamemnon's herald². It is remarkable, as already observed, as directing our attention to the fact that, if the preceding story be true, the Greeks must be still in Troy. It is even more remarkable as showing, on the part of Clytaemnestra, a power of unconscious divination which Cassandra might have envied. She makes, it is true, the very natural mistake of supposing that the Greeks are in Troy; but on the other hand how wonderfully does she forecast the rest of their story! Except that she does not anticipate (small blame to her prophecy) the compression of the events into one night, her divination is perfect. She fears that the Greek army, not content with their legitimate triumph, may be tempted to plunder the sacred treasures of Troy. They have actually done so. She points out that

¹ *Od.* 4. 526.

² *v.* 332.