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The Argive Decision in Favour of the Danaids in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*

When Hecuba contemplates her revenge on Polymestor in Euripides' *Hecuba*, Agamemnon wonders how women can overcome a man (883). This question, uttered by the figure whose eventual murder by his wife was a well-known datum of myth, is surely filled with irony not to be left undetected by the audience. The aged former queen of Troy bases her confidence on the combination of multitude (*plêthos*) and guile (*dolôi*) (884) and adduces as proof the mythical exempla of the murders performed by two female groups, the Danaids and the Lemnian women (886-887). Hecuba and the throng of Trojan women eventually succeed in taking revenge on Polymestor in a way mimicking these mythical examples. The use in particular of the murder of the Aegyptiads by the daughters of Danaus as a well known example attests to the wide-spread familiarity with this myth in *c.* 425 BC, when Euripides' *Hecuba* was produced¹. This particular myth was famously dramatized by Aeschylus several decades earlier in the Danaid trilogy, of which only *Suppliants* has survived intact². The trilogy was produced in *c.* 463 BC³, in a crucial period for the establishment of democracy in Athens⁴. In Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, the first extant suppliant tragedy, the Danaids, who are both protagonists and the Chorus

¹ For the date, see SYNODINOU 2005, vol. 1, 21-25.

² On the Danaid myth and on the Danaid trilogy by Aeschylus, see PAPADOPOULOU 2011a, 25-38 and 15-24 respectively. The most detailed analysis of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* as part of the Danaid trilogy is GARVIE 2006².

³ On the date, see PAPADOPOULOU 2011a, 15-17.

⁴ For the political background of the institution of democracy and the allusions in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* (which the author dates, 112, in 463 BC), see RAAFLAUB 2007. For the origins of democracy, in Athens, see EHRENBERG 1950 and the collection of essays in RAAFLAUB, OBER, WALLACE 2007.

of the play⁵, arrive in Argos from Egypt⁶, accompanied by their father Danaus, in an attempt to escape enforced marriage to their cousins, the sons of Aegyptus.

The Aeschylean play directly and inextricably associates the religious institution of supplication with domestic and international politics: the suppliant Danaids' request for asylum in Argos makes the Argives run the risk of engaging their city in war with Egypt⁷. The dramatic intertwining of supplication, civic decision-making and foreign policy first occurs in this tragedy. As a motif, it is later further explored and developed in tragedies centered on Athens, notably in the Euripidean *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants*⁸. In these Euripidean plays Athens goes so far in protecting helpless groups of suppliants that she engages in war with insolent Argos and Thebes respectively. In both cases political myth serves as a medium to glorify Athens: protecting the oppressed at the risk of war was a fundamental aspect of Athenian civic ideology, attested to in both tragedy and prose, especially oratory⁹. For example, Isocrates notes in *Panegyricus* (4.42) with regard to the Athenians¹⁰:

many and dread and great, were the struggles they sustained, some for their own territories, some for the freedom of the rest of the world; for at all times, without ceasing, they have offered the city as a common refuge and as a champion to the Hellenes whenever oppressed.

In a similar manner in Xenophon's *Hellenica* (6.5.45), Procles the Phleisian has this to say while addressing the Athenians¹¹:

⁵ For the Danaid chorus in relation to other female choruses, see MURNAGHAN 2005.

⁶ On the portrayal of Egypt in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and in Euripides' *Helen*, see VASUNIA 2001, 33-74.

⁷ On supplication and the request for asylum in the play, see DREHER 2003.

⁸ See in brief PAPADOPOULOU 2011a, 71-72. For Athens as helper of the weak in Greek tragedy, see TZANETOU 2012. On suppliant dramas and politics, see GÖDDE 2000; BERNEK 2004; CARTER 2011, part V. On Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants*, often referred to as Euripides' 'political plays', see esp. ZUNTZ 1955; MENDELSON 2002; BERNEK 2004.

⁹ See e.g. MILLS 1997; TZANETOU 2005.

¹⁰ The translation is quoted from NORLIN 1928.

¹¹ The translation is quoted from BROWNSON 1918.

In former days, men of Athens, I used from hearsay to admire this state of yours, for I heard that all who were wronged and all who were fearful fled hither for refuge, and here found assistance; now I no longer hear, but with my own eyes at this moment see the Lacedaemonians, those most famous men, and their most loyal friends appearing in your state and in their turn requesting you to assist them.

This glorifying portrayal of Athenian grandeur spans various periods, linking historical past and remote myth. For example, Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1396a6) associates the praise owed to the Athenians with a reference to their valorous deeds in Salamis, Marathon, and their intervention on behalf of the children of Heracles.

The present paper aims at exploring how Aeschylus' *Suppliants* functions as the prototype for the political discourse further developed in plays such as Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants*. In particular, it will examine how Aeschylus brings forward, in a spermatic form, the ideology that closely associates democracy with foreign policy¹², and how the dramatist models the latter on the former, by presenting fundamental values with strong democratic overtones, such as freedom¹³, as the factors that guide political behavior both within the civic/domestic space and in the international sphere. To begin with, an important difference between Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and the Euripidean *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants* is that in the Aeschylean play the city that offers help is not Athens but Argos. It goes without saying that this is owed to the details of the Danaid myth: the Danaids flee to Argos due to their kindred relation to the city through their descent from Argive Io¹⁴. But Argos also serves as a mirror of Athens and the play never fails to echo principles that are strongly reminiscent of Athenian values. In what follows I shall try to pinpoint the factor that directly links Argos and Athens precisely

¹² On various aspects of the impact of Athenian democracy on foreign policy specifically regarding war, see the collection of essays in PRITCHARD 2010.

¹³ For a diachronic examination of the concept of freedom and its political dimensions in ancient Greece, see RAAFLAUB 2004.

¹⁴ On Io in the play, see MURRAY 1958; BRILL 2009, 173-180.

in the democratic constitution and all its various associations, in an attempt to account for the reasons behind the Argive decision to help the Danaids.

Aeschylus' *Suppliants* draws a polarity between the eastern-type, authoritarian Egyptian monarchy and Argive 'democracy'¹⁵, namely, the idiosyncratic type of Argive constitution, which mingles mythic kingship with contemporary democracy. Pelasgus is the earliest example in extant tragedy of a 'democratic king',¹⁶ followed by Demophon (literally 'Voice of the People') and Theseus in Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants* respectively¹⁷. Already in the first scene between the Danaids and the Argive king, the dramatist emphatically stresses the maidens' assumption that Pelasgus has the absolute power, as the monarch, to decide their case (370-375)¹⁸:

You are the city, I tell you, *you* are the people! A head of state, not subject to judgement, you control the altar, the hearth of the city, by your vote and nod alone; with your sceptre alone, on your throne, you determine every matter.

The Danaids' words follow immediately after the king's declaration that for such a serious matter, where pollution threatens the entire city, he cannot decide without consulting with his people (365-369)¹⁹. Even after Pelasgus expresses his concern in case his citizens censure him and repeats his inability to decide alone (397-401), the maidens insist that he is the absolute ruler

¹⁵ On the portrayal of a 'democratic' Argos in the play, see BURIAN 1974. For Aeschylus' *Suppliants* as a democratic play, see CHOU 2012, ch. 3. For early authors on democracy, including Aeschylus, see ROBINSON 1997, 45-62.

¹⁶ For the characteristics of the 'democratic' king, see PAPADOPOULOU 2011a, 68-69, 71-72.

¹⁷ In Euripides' *Suppliants* Theseus has even conceded his monarchy to the Athenians, giving them freedom and equal votes (352-353). This play also stresses the superiority of democracy over monarchy in the debate between Theseus and the Theban herald (403-462), which has several similarities with the constitutional debate in Hdt 3.80-82. Cfr. SISSA 2012, 247. For other related sources of early political theory, see MORWOOD 2007, 173.

¹⁸ The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008.

¹⁹ ROHWEDER 1998, 148, compares Aesch. *Eum.* 470-489, where Athena defers the decision about Orestes' case to the people due to its gravity.

of the land (424-425). In fact, they seem to view Pelasgus' monarchy as parallel to Zeus's rule in terms of absolute power (cfr. 595-599). The Danaids' 'inability' to understand the 'democratic' constitution of Argos serves as a dramatic means: since the Danaids have a double ethnic identity (both foreign-Egyptian and native through descent from Io) it functions as a strong reminder of their alien status. In a play which variously focuses on ethnic contrasts²⁰, several dramatic devices are employed throughout to either affiliate the Danaids to or alienate them from Argos. In this respect too, Pelasgus' long description of the Danaids' exotic appearance, which is indicative of his disbelief in their alleged Argive descent, serves as an alienating medium (279-90)²¹:

What you say, strangers, is unbelievable for me to hear, that this group of yours is of Argive descent. You bear more resemblance to the women of Libya – certainly not to those of this country. The Nile, too, might nurture such a crop; and a similar stamp is struck upon the dies of Cyprian womanhood by male artificers. I hear, too, that there are nomad women in India, near neighbours to the Ethiopians, who saddle their way across country on camels that run like horses; and then the man-shunning, meat-eating Amazons – if you were equipped with bows, I'd be very inclined to guess that you were them. If you explain to me, I may understand better how your birth and descent can be Argive.

In terms of the likely reception by the original audience, Pelasgus' reference, in particular, to the Amazons, must have had a special impact. To begin with, the comparison of the Danaids with the Amazons is successful because they share an opposition to marriage. But within the Athenian ideological framework the Amazons represented 'otherness' and the Athenians' victory over the Amazons who marched against Athens constituted a canonical mythic exploit that celebrated masculine national identity²². Hence, Pelasgus' comment on the Amazon-like Danaids

²⁰ See PAPADOPOULOU 2011a, 69-75.

²¹ The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008.

²² It was a topos in funeral orations, cf. Lysias, *Epitaphios* 1-4. See TYRRELL 1991, ch. 8, for a discussion of the use of such examples in funeral speeches. On Amazons, see TYRRELL 1984.

here may serve as a dramatic means to help approximate Aeschylean Argos to Athens. Therefore, Pelasgus' remark strongly problematizes the question of the openness of a city to foreigners and evokes for the Athenian audience the self-picture of their own city as both open to foreigners and as protectress of the weak.

Ever since their introductory self-identification, the Danaids continuously stress their plight as well as the urgency of the situation. They clearly express their strong opposition to the prospect of enforced marriage with their cousins²³, whom they portray as violent, hubristic and lustful (cfr. 30, 81, 104, 109-10). Aeschylus also implicitly raises a juxtaposition between marriage imposed by the Aegyptiads against the maidens' will on the one hand and the gentle union between Zeus and Io, the Danaids' remote ancestor, on the other. As early as ll. 17-18 the union between the god and the gadly-driven heifer, to which Io was transformed, is described in a delicate and smooth manner as Zeus's 'touch and breath' on her. This gentleness is also implied in the Danaids' invocation of Epaphus, the child conceived by the breath and touch of Zeus (40-49). Overall, the sense of tenderness in the case of Io and Zeus sharply contrasts the violent lust of the Aegyptiads, whose passion amounts to frenzy (109-110).

The Danaids significantly evoke the myth of Tereus and Procne (58-67), a well-known mythical exemplum of rape, revenge and pursuit. Tereus, the king of Thrace and husband of Procne, raped his wife's sister, Philomela, and cut out her tongue to prevent her from revealing the crime. When Philomela managed to inform Procne by weaving a tapestry depicting the crime, the two sisters took revenge on Tereus by killing Itys, the son of Tereus and Procne, whom they cut into pieces and fed to his father. Tereus in rage pursued the sisters until the gods transformed Procne into a nightingale, who constantly mourns her dead son, and the speechless Philomela into a swallow. The Danaids refer to the myth to parallel themselves to Tereus' wife, through the idea of threnodic lament, and implicitly to parallel their suitors to

²³ For a discussion of the motives behind the Danaids' aversion to marriage in the play, see PAPADOPOULOU 2011a, 51-64.

Tereus. Tereus' illicit sexual passion and rape cast a dark shadow over the Aegyptiads' pursuit of their cousins, where the implication is the idea of violation of another person's will.

There is emphasis throughout on the fact that the marriage envisaged by the suitors is against the Danaids' consent. Aeschylus thus raises the question of free will and the right to self-determination. In the Danaids' case, it is important that lack of consent or the idea that the prospect of the marriage with their cousins is against their will is clearly stated by themselves in the parodos (*aecontôn*, 'unwilling', 39). In the first episode, soon before the arrival of Pelasgus, Danaus repeats this idea by using a rhetorical question (227-228): «how could someone marry the unwilling (*hakousan*) daughter of an unwilling (*hakontos*) father and remain pure?». Danaus' words stress the fact that the Aegyptiads' insistence on enforcing marriage violates the free will of both Danaus and his daughters. The idea of self-determination is thus constantly brought to the fore by Aeschylus in his presentation of the Danaids' cause. It is the importance of free will that lies behind the explicit reference that the maidens make to the notion of freedom. While invoking the gods upon looking on the divine images in the shrine, they significantly wish that the Greek god Hermes may bring good news 'to the free' (*eleutherois*, 221). Here the Danaids affirm their free status, raise the contrast between freedom and slavery, and clearly link self-determination with freedom and the violation of free will with slavery. In a similar vein, during the third stasimon, which has the character of an escapist ode²⁴, the Danaids deplore the prospect of a marriage 'by force' (*biai*, 798). In opting for death instead of involuntary wedlock, thus stressing their despair, they employ the common idea (802-803) that whoever dies is 'freed' (*eleutheroutai*) from evils. It is the choice of the specific verb that helps stress further the very idea of freedom as a core principle in the Danaids' frame of mind.

Overall, the importance that the Danaids seem to give to the ideas of freedom, free will, and self-determination is an im-

²⁴ On this stasimon in relation to the Danaids' death-wish, see GARRISON 1995, 84-87. On escape songs in Greek tragedy, see GARRISON 1995, 83-101.

portant element which proves to be effective, as it is properly recognized by Pelasgus and his people. In other words, as it will be discussed below, the principle of freedom is highly valued in democracy²⁵, hence the Danaids' emphasis on it will, eventually, not fall on deaf ears. This becomes evident for example in the exchange between the Argive king and the Egyptian herald. When the herald explicitly threatens Pelasgus with war if he refuses to hand over the Danaids to the Egyptians, Pelasgus assertively responds with the following words (940-949)²⁶:

You may take these women so long as they consent with friendly heart [*hekousas*, 940], if pious words of yours should persuade them [*pithoi*, 941]; <but you may not take them against their will>. That is the unanimous vote that has been passed and enacted by the people of the city, never to surrender this band of women by force [*biai*, 943]. This decision has been nailed down with a nail that has pierced right through, so that it stays fixed. These words are not written on tablets, nor sealed up in a folded sheet of papyrus: you hear them plainly from the lips and tongue of a free man [*eleutherostomou glôssês*, 948-949]. Now get out of my sight at once.

Pelasgus' excursus and assertive dismissal of the herald is the climax of the scene in which the Argive king's prompt arrival thwarts the escalation of violence onstage, as the insolent envoy was ready to seize the maidens and drag them by force away from the altar (905-909). Pelasgus' line of argumentation starkly juxtaposes the categories 'Greek' and 'barbarian' as well as reveals the democratic ethos of the Argives. Pelasgus clearly rejects violence and argues in favour of persuasion and consent. Persuasion is the polar opposite of violence. If the Egyptian herald, the representative of the Aegyptiads, is not willing to discuss the matter but is quick to revert to threats once his demand is rejected, Argos has a democratic assembly, where the people freely deliberate various matters.

²⁵ Plato, *Rep.* 557 b 4-6 makes freedom the defining feature of democracy; see further HANSEN 2010, 22. For the Athenian view of freedom as a democratic ideal, see HANSEN 1996.

²⁶ The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008.

During such rhetorical procedures the skill of persuasion is of crucial importance. Pelasgus too has to rely on his own oratorical skills in order to take the majority of the Argives on his side and secure their favourite response to the Danaids' request. He had earlier also stressed the importance of persuasion in his exchange with Danaus and the Danaids (517-523). His own decision to help the Danaids was agonizing and his dilemma²⁷ proved to be excruciating (468-479): on the one hand the Danaids have threatened to commit suicide if they are not granted asylum and thus to cause an incurable pollution to the land and on the other hand the land will be stained with blood if Argos and Egypt fight a war. Above all, the Argive king thinks that he cannot offend Zeus, the guardian of suppliants, by rejecting the supplication. So far there is the clear impression that Pelasgus is manipulated, in fact blackmailed, into deciding to help the Danaids. But when he goes on to instruct Danaus he adds some telling remarks regarding the operation of pity (481-489)²⁸:

You now, aged father of these maidens,<approach the altar>, quickly take these boughs in your arms, and place them on the other altars of our native gods, so that all the citizens may see the evidence of this supplication and no hostile words be thrown out against me – for the people are very inclined to criticize their rulers. Perhaps those who see them will take pity [*oiktisas*, 486] and detest the outrageous behavior [*hubrin*, 487] of that band of males, and the people be more friendly towards you. Everyone has kindly feelings for the underdog [*tois hēssosin*, 489].

First of all, Pelasgus' words here clearly demonstrate that the Argive assembly is free to decide either in favour or against the Danaid case, hence the king has to persuade the citizens in matters that require serious deliberation²⁹. But it is also telling that he finds it likely that the Argives should feel pity for the plight of the Danaids, the victims of insolence, and he concludes with the maxim according to which it is natural for someone to sympa-

²⁷ On Pelasgus' dilemma in the play, see esp. TARKOW 1975.

²⁸ The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008.

²⁹ On the nature of Pelasgus' power, see PAPADOPOULOU 2011a, 68-69 and n. 20.

thize with those in a helpless state. This is not the first time that the audience hear that helpless victims arouse pity and that suppliance is a means to secure help. To begin with, Danaus as a 'stage-director' had earlier instructed his daughters that they should keep a low profile when the king arrived, given that talking with boldness does not suit people who are in a weak position (203). The difference with our passage here is that, when Pelasgus now comments on the helplessness of the suppliants as arousing pity, he explicitly links pity and politics. Significantly, this very association between pity and foreign policy in particular was an important aspect of the self-image of Athens, all the more prominent during her change into a hegemonic city-state after the Persian Wars and during the Peloponnesian War³⁰. Thus, when Pelasgus instructs Danaus to act in a way which aims at engendering pity in the Argive assembly³¹, his words are not merely restricted to the maxim «people tend to be well-disposed toward the weak», but may evoke the selfless image of democratic Athens. In this respect, it is telling that he does not refer to people in general but to the *dêmos* (488), that is, the democratic citizen-body (cfr. 601). Overall, Pelasgus finds it likely that the citizens will react in favour of the Danaids, in accordance with the democratic values they cherish, i.e. they are expected to condemn the violence inflicted upon unwilling victims, and to feel pity and be ready to help the defenseless victims of outrage.

What is at this point envisaged by Pelasgus is verified in the course of the drama. It is significant that in their choral ode of thanks to Argos the Danaids clearly associate the favourable verdict of the people with the operation of pity: *ôiktisan hêmas, | psêphon d'euphron' ethesan*, «they took pity on us and cast a kindly vote», 639-640³². At the same time the play shows a stark contrast between the pity felt by the democratic citizen-body and the

³⁰ For the association between pity and politics in the literature and society of classical Athens, see STERNBERG 2005.

³¹ His instruction to Danaus to leave suppliant branches in altars has sometimes been interpreted in negative terms, i.e. as turning supplication into a publicity stunt or machination; see GOTTERSMA 2014, 89.

³² The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008.

overall pitiless behavior of the Egyptian envoy, vividly expressed also in the vocabulary employed: at 904 the Egyptian herald notes that *lakis khitônos ou katoiktioi*, «your finely worked clothes will be ripped without mercy», literally, «tearing will not pity the work of your (inner) garment»³³.

In the second episode, Danaus corroborates Pelasgus' persuasive skill (615, 623) and expresses his joy in what turned out to be a unanimous decree (605-14)³⁴:

The Argives have resolved [*edoksen Argeioisin*, 605], with no divided voice, but in such a way that my aged heart felt young again – for the air bristled with their aptly named right hands as the entire people ratified this proposal – that we shall have the right of residence [*metoikein*, 610] in this land in freedom [*eleutheros*, 609], with asylum and protection from seizure by any person; that no one, whether inhabitant or foreigner, may lay hands upon us; and that if force be applied, whoever among these citizens fails to come to our aid shall lose his civic rights and be driven into exile from the community. The king of the Pelasgians persuaded them to make this decision by delivering a speech about us, in which he declared how great could be the wrath of Zeus god of suppliants, who might at a future time bring it heavily to bear against the city, and saying that the double pollution, in relation both to foreigners and to citizens, which the city would be bringing into being, would be an irremediable breeder of grief. Hearing this, the Argive people resolved, without waiting to be called, that the motion should be carried. The Pelasgian people heard and obeyed the guidance of the orator, and Zeus had brought about the decisive outcome.

The verdict of the Argive *dêmos* is both introduced (*edoksen*, 605) and set forth (609-14) in the formal language of Athenian decrees³⁵. At the same time the process of voting by show of hands (604, 607, 621), which ratifies Pelasgus' request and gives the decree full authority, intertwines the citizens' vote with the very

³³ The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008. For the contrast between the positive Argive response and the Egyptian lack of pity, see KONSTAN 2005, 61.

³⁴ The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008. On the Argive decree, see PÉTRE 1986.

³⁵ For the association between drama and the legal procedures in Athens, see in general HARRIS, LEAO, RHODES 2010.

idea of democracy. At 604, the phrase *dêmou kratousa kheir* («the people's ruling hand») is a pun on 'democracy' and provides our earliest extant paraphrase of this term, whose metrical form does not easily fit into poetry³⁶. A similar pun is found at 699 in the phrase *to damion, to ptolin kratunei*, «the people, which rules the city»³⁷, in a strophe which reflects democratic ethos: according to the Chorus, the sovereign people as a collective body protect the individual rights of the citizens, aiming at promoting the common good³⁸. In Danaus' words the Argives are presented as extremely eager to help the suppliants, who are presented as both foreigners and citizens. In fact, the double identity of the Danaids as both alien (Egyptian) and native (descent from Io), properly described by Pelasgus with the term 'citizen-foreigners' (*astoxenôn*, 356), is now redefined through the Argive decree in a way which implies that the Danaid family is given the status of metics (resident aliens) in the city (cfr. the term *metoikein*, 609)³⁹. The Danaids' wish for freedom is now officially granted by the democratic collective citizen-body, that is, the citizens who value freedom and guarantee the protection of the Danaid family from any threat either domestic or foreign.

At this point, it must be noticed that the play also seems to leave open the question of an orator's influence on the people. The people in the assembly, as Danaus reports, heard and approved of the speaker's view, yet the phraseology used (*strophas*, 'turnings/tricks', 623) may also hint at the manipulative power of words meant to deceive. Sommerstein 1997, 75, in fact argues that Pelasgus manipulates the citizens by laying emphasis exclusively on Zeus's wrath and suppressing the dangerous prospect of war⁴⁰. This view seems to be corroborated by the very destructive outcome, namely, the Argive defeat and Pelasgus' own death in

³⁶ On these puns and the democratic connotations, see EHRENBERG 1950; cfr. RAAFLAUB 2007, 108.

³⁷ The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008.

³⁸ Cfr. SOMMERSTEIN 2008, 378 n. 139.

³⁹ See further BAKEWELL 1997 and, more generally on metics, BAKEWELL 2013. On women immigrants in Athens, see KENNEDY 2014.

⁴⁰ Cfr. SOMMERSTEIN 2010², 290-292.

the rest of the trilogy. However, the audience hear the report by Danaus (605-624) and his description does not necessarily imply that Pelasgus was dishonest to his people. The Argive decision to protect the suppliants against any violence (611-614) stresses the Argives' determination to defend the Danaids at all costs, including fighting a war (cfr. 739-740). In other words, the Argives are aware of the dangers, yet decide to protect the Danaids at all costs.

In the Argive decree, the image of the democratic city as the champion of the oppressed and unjustly treated is crystallized. Yet Danaus' words rather reveal that the foremost reason for the Argives' positive vote was the fear for Zeus's wrath (cfr. 444-5, where Pelasgus was primarily motivated by the same reason). The fact that an additional motive is the Argives' opposition to violence against helpless victims is also raised of course, but the audience have to wait until a later scene, in order to hear this more explicitly: the citizens' bitterness against the insolent Aegyptiads is explicitly brought to the fore when Danaus narrates how he managed to get armed attendants (980-988)⁴¹:

Children, we ought to pray, sacrifice and pour libation to the Argives as if to the Olympian gods, for they have unquestionably been our saviours. They gave a hearing to my news of what happened which was friendly to their kin and bitter towards your cousins; and they assigned to me these spearmen as attendants, so that I might have an honourable mark of distinction, and so that I may not perish unwitnessed by the surprise stroke of a weapon, thus loading the country with a burden it will never cast off.

Here it is made explicit that the Argives condemn the outrageous behavior of the Aegyptiads. Hence, this specific reaction against insolence is revealed as an important factor in the Argives' favourable attitude towards the suppliants.

In the confrontation scene between Pelasgus and the Egyptian herald, it is the barbarian outrageous violence which promp-

⁴¹ The translation is quoted from SOMMERSTEIN 2008. SOMMERSTEIN 2010², 105, takes the allocation of an armed bodyguard to Danaus as a sinister development associated with the establishment of tyranny.

ts Pelasgus to reassert the Argive decree to protect the Danaids against any threat. The scene thus adds weight to the notion that the Argive decision is in direct alignment with the democratic championship of freedom and consent against outrage. Pelasgus alludes to freedom of speech⁴², a fundamental democratic value, and attests to the strength of the unanimous vote of the Argive assembly. Once fixed, the Argive decision will not change but will guarantee the protection of the Danaids (cfr. Danaus' confidence at 739-740). It is implied that a democratic city which fully appreciates the utmost importance of freedom is ready to go as far as to engage in war in order to extend the privilege of freedom to those who are threatened to be violently deprived of it. Viewed as a whole, Aeschylus' play may in fact be read as an important step towards the recognition of the private rights of a free person⁴³.

In this scene with the herald, Pelasgus also invests the clash between Argos and Egypt with the vocabulary of masculinity versus effeminacy: The Argive king confirms the superiority of Argos by asking the Egyptian envoy whether his insult against Argos implies that he considers it to be the land of women (912-913). Similarly, when the herald exits wishing that victory should be bestowed to men, Pelasgus quickly asserts the virility of the Argives as opposed to the Egyptians' alleged effeminacy (951-953).

Ethnic polarity put forward in terms of gender hierarchies does not appear here for the first time in Aeschylus. The dramatist uses a similar contrast as an aspect of Greek self-definition by juxtaposing Greek masculinity with Persian effeminacy in the *Persians* (472 BC). This polarity confirms the superiority of the Greeks and partly accounts for their military victory. At the same time, the *Persians* also constructs the superiority of Greece over Persia politically, in terms of a polarity between freedom and slavery⁴⁴. The Athenocentric character of this play after all describes the deficient Persians as lacking characteristics which

⁴² Cfr. *eleutherosomou/glôssês*, «free speaking tongue», 948-949, a phrase which refers both to Pelasgus and the Argive assembly.

⁴³ See CUNIBERTI 2001, 154-155.

⁴⁴ On these juxtapositions in *Persians*, see HALL 1996, 13.

are typical qualities of the Athenian democratic constitution. In fact, the very image of Athenian democracy is further enriched and consistently projected as the polar opposite of Persian monarchy⁴⁵. For instance, Athenian democracy, contrary to Persian despotism, is based on freedom, checks the policies exercised by magistrates whereas the Persian king is accountable to no-one (213), respects freedom of speech, whereas those subject to the Persian rule have no right to speak freely as long as the Persian empire is not defeated (591-4), and has a fully developed legal system whereas the Persian king can easily inflict capital punishment if he wishes (371). Especially the fundamental importance of freedom in the Athenians' mental framework is echoed in the account of the Messenger, who quotes the battle-cry uttered by the Greeks, where the emphatic imperative 'liberate', uttered twice, conveyed strong connotations in democratic Athens⁴⁶. Here too the paramount importance given by the Athenians in particular to freedom within their democratic system informs the notion of external sovereignty and extends to the idea of liberating the whole of Greece from the threat of Persian despotism.

After all, the self-portrayal of Athens in tragedy and oratory as the selfless city, adherent to the values of freedom and equality, champion of justice and defender of the weak irrespective of risks involved, was already explicit in her role as the city who defied the Persians and did not hesitate to fight a war as liberator of Greece⁴⁷. In fact, even before the Persian Wars, Athens had responded favourably to the Ionians' appeal for help, as reported by Herodotus (5.97). The high degree of appreciation for freedom and solidarity among citizens within the civic/domestic

⁴⁵ On the Persians as both anti-Greeks and anti-Athenians, see further HALL 1989, 56-100, esp. 99. See also GOLDHILL 2002. For a discussion of the association of courage with democracy in Aeschylus' *Persians* and in Herodotus, see SSSA 2012, esp. 246; BALLOT 2014, ch. 4.

⁴⁶ See HALL 1996 on Aesch. *Pers.* 402-5.

⁴⁷ The Athenian political concept of freedom emerged in the Persian Wars and was later employed as a propaganda slogan during the gradual transformation of Athenian democracy into a hegemonic city-state on the international level. For the rhetoric of freedom in association with the change of Athens from liberator of Greece from Persia into an empire, see RAAFLAUB 2004, chs. 3-5.

context of Athens was also an important constituent aspect of Athens' ideological self-image as the champion of the weak, helpless, oppressed and wronged. This image is fully developed during the Peloponnesian War, as Athenian democracy is gradually transformed into an imperial power on the international sphere. This ideological construct is given by Thucydides in the famous funeral oration, attributed to Pericles, which glorifies Athens by displaying the laudable collective Athenian self⁴⁸. Pericles begins from the ancestors, praising autochthony and the continuous freedom of the city of Athens (Thuc. 2.36.1)⁴⁹.

I shall begin with our ancestors: it is both just and proper that they should have the honour of the first mention on an occasion like the present. They dwelt in the country without break in the succession from generation to generation, and handed it down free [*eleutheran*] to the present time by the valour [*dí' aretên*].

Autochthony was of paramount importance in the civic ideology of Athens and was often adduced to corroborate the idea of Athenian superiority⁵⁰. In this respect, Pelasgus' assertion of Argive autochthony at the beginning of his excursus on the history of Argos and the large geographical expansion of Argive territory (249-270) may have added political relevance and be interpreted as a dramatic device which contributes to building a parallel between Aeschylean Argos and historical Athens⁵¹.

Following his reference to the forefathers and autochthony, Pericles finds it necessary to dwell on the constitution of Athens, hence he soon embarks on a description of democracy. This is revealing: by doing so, he wishes to stress that the principles of democracy educate the Athenians and guide them both in peace and in war as well as both in intrastate and interstate affairs. In

⁴⁸ On the political and democratic character of the genre of funeral oration, see esp. LORAUX 2006. See also ZIOLKOWSKI 1981. On Thucydides' focus on Athenian character as a prototypical study of political psychology, see FORDE 1986.

⁴⁹ The translation is quoted from CRAWLEY 1910.

⁵⁰ On the importance of autochthony for Athens, see esp. LORAUX 1993. See also ISAAC 2004, 114-124.

⁵¹ Cfr. BAKEWELL 2013, 92.

other words, democracy shapes people's attitudes, as it lays the foundations for all high qualities exhibited by the citizens both in their relations to one another and in their relations to foreigners. In a telling passage the Athenian statesman says the following (Thuc. 2.36.4-2.37.3)⁵²:

But what was the road by which we reached our position, what the form of government [*politeias*] under which our greatness grew, what the national habits out of which it sprang; these are questions which I may try to solve before I proceed to my panegyric upon these men; since I think this to be a subject upon which on the present occasion a speaker may properly dwell, and to which the whole assemblage, whether citizens or foreigners, may listen with advantage. Our constitution [*politeiai*] does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy [*demokratia*]. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if no social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom [*eleutherôs*] which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured [*ep' ôpheliai tôn adikoumenôn*], whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace.

Overall, according to Pericles the citizens of Athenian democracy are raised in freedom and equality and learn to respect the laws, especially those that aim at protecting the oppressed. In particular, the intervention on behalf of people wronged was

⁵² The translation is quoted from CRAWLEY 1910. On some aspects of Pericles' praise of Athenian democracy in the *Epitaphios*, see HARRIS 1992.

closely associated to democracy. According to Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.* 9.1), one of the most democratic features of Solon's constitution was the right of anybody who wished to exact redress on behalf of whoever suffered injustice⁵³:

This then was the nature of his reforms in regard to the offices of state. And the three most democratic features in Solon's constitution seem to be these: first and most important the prohibition of loans secured upon the person, secondly the liberty allowed to anybody who wished to exact redress on behalf of injured persons, and third, what is said to have been the chief basis of the powers of the multitude, the right of appeal to the jury-court-for the people, having the power of the vote, becomes sovereign in the government.

Pericles also goes on to single out the Athenians «who, fearless of consequences, confer their benefits not from calculations of expediency, but in the confidence of liberality [*eleutherias*]» (Thuc. 2.40.5)⁵⁴. A telling historical event occurred in 462 BC, that is, in a period close to the production of Aeschylus' *Suppliants*⁵⁵, when Athens helped Sparta when the latter was faced with a revolt by the helots. Plutarch narrates the event and how Cimon managed to persuade the Athenians contrary to Ephialtes' opposition. Cimon was of course in favour of Sparta, but the eventual decision of the citizen-body to help their rival city-state and not let her perish is revealing as to the city's values (Plut. *Cimon* 16.4-8)⁵⁶:

the Helots were got together from the country about, with design to surprise the Spartans, and overpower those whom the earthquake had spared. But finding them armed and well prepared, they retired into the towns and openly made war with them, gaining over a number of the Laconians of the country districts; while at the same time the Messenians, also, made an attack upon the Spartans, who therefore dispatched Periclidias to Athens to solicit succours, of whom Aristophanes says in mockery that he came and «in a red

⁵³ The translation is quoted from RACKHAM 1935.

⁵⁴ The translation is quoted from CRAWLEY 1910.

⁵⁵ For the possible link between this historical event and the Aeschylean play, see SOMMERSTEIN 1997, 76-79. For historicist readings of the Aeschylean *Suppliants*, see PAPADOPOULOU 2011a, 66-67.

⁵⁶ The translation is quoted from DRYDEN 1906.

jacket, at the altars seated | with a white face, for men and arms entreated». This Ephialtes opposed, protesting that they ought not to raise up or assist a city that was a rival to Athens; but that being down, it were best to keep her so, and let the pride and arrogance of Sparta be trodden under. But Cimon, as Critias says, preferring the safety of Lacedaemon to the aggrandisement of his own country, so persuaded the people, that he soon marched out with a large army to their relief. Ion records, also, the most successful expression which he used to move the Athenians. «They ought not to suffer Greece to be lamed, nor their own city to be deprived of her yoke-fellow».

So far it has been argued that democracy is the basis or precondition which determines the type of foreign policy Athens prides herself on. The fact that the ways in which the citizens behave in their civic context under the democratic regime affect their decisions in international politics is evident also in Cleon's speech in Thucydides 3.37.1-2, where he focuses on what he perceives as negative influences and hence censures his fellow-Athenians with the following words⁵⁷:

I have often before now been convinced that a democracy is incapable of empire, and never so than by your present change of mind in the matter of Mytilene. Fears or plots being unknown to you in your daily relations with each other, you feel just the same with regard to your allies, and never reflect that the mistake into which you may be led by listening to their appeals, or by giving way to your own compassion [*oiktôî*], are full of danger to yourselves, and bring you no thanks for your weakness from your allies; entirely forgetting that your empire is a despotism and your subjects disaffected conspirators, whose obedience is ensured not by your suicidal concessions, but by the superiority given you by your own strength and not their loyalty.

If Pericles (Thuc. 2.40.5) had earlier expressed that the Athenians' strong belief in the value of freedom makes them eager to benefit others, Cleon here, a few years later and during the Mytilenean debate, tries to show that pity, this well-known association of Athens, was a failing in an empire, as he considers it to be

⁵⁷ The translation is quoted from CRAWLEY 1910.

a serious and potentially fatal weakness for the Athenians⁵⁸. Be that as it may, it is important that he clearly considers democracy and foreign policy as interrelated in the sense that the principles of the democratic constitution determine international politics.

There are also other ways in which democracy may influence foreign policy. For example, Athenian democracy is associated with manliness and courage⁵⁹. Herodotus attributes the Athenians' martial superiority to the political change from tyranny to democracy, which he denotes by using the term *isêgoriê* (freedom and equality in speech) (Hdt. 5.78)⁶⁰:

Thus did the Athenians increase in strength. And it is plain enough, not from this instance only, but from many everywhere, that freedom [*isêgoriê*] is an excellent thing since even the Athenians, who, while they continued under the rule of tyrants, were not a whit more valiant than any of their neighbours, no sooner shook off the yoke than they became decidedly the first of all. These things show that, while undergoing oppression, they let themselves be beaten, since they worked for a master; but so soon as they got their freedom, each man was eager to do the best he could for himself.

As in Aeschylus' *Persians*, so in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* manliness and courage are associated with democracy. Above all, the superiority of Argos is demonstrated in Pelasgus' defiant refusal to hand over the suppliants when faced with the direct threat of war (935, 950). Having fixed their decision to help the suppliants at all costs and led to this decision by the principles of their democratic constitution, the Argives are ready to fight a war instead of submitting to the insolent Egyptians. This courageous and selfless attitude is further exploited in Euripides' *Children of Heracles*⁶¹, which actually stages a scene strongly reminiscent of

⁵⁸ On the rhetoric of pity in relation to international politics in Greek tragedy and in Thucydides, see PAPADOPOULOU 2011b.

⁵⁹ See BALOT 2010 and esp. BALOT 2014.

⁶⁰ The translation is quoted from RAWLINSON 1997. Cfr. Hdt. 5.91.1, where the Laeodemonians believe that tyranny makes the Athenians weaker whereas freedom makes them stronger. Already in Hdt. 1.62 the value of freedom is contrasted to tyranny. For the association between democracy and valour in Herodotus, see SISSA 2012, 237.

⁶¹ See further PAPADOPOULOU 2011b, 383-396.

Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, when the Argive herald knocks Iolaus to the ground and treats Heracles' children as his property (66-67, 75). Here an Argive envoy demands the handing over of the suppliants and threatens Demophon, the king of Athens, with war if he refuses. Similarly to Pelasgus, Demophon states that his monarchy is not like that of the barbarians (423) and also expresses his fear for his people's censure (415-424). Athens' help to the Heraclids in the Euripidean play is portrayed throughout not simply as a brave altruistic act, but as a decisive refusal to submit to the will of another city (Argos), which would imply fear and admission of her inferiority in the context of interstate antagonism and international power relations. As Demophon aptly puts it, «if I allow this altar to be violently pillaged by a foreigner, I shall not be thought to govern a free country [*eleutheran*] but to have abandoned suppliants for fear of Argives» (Eur. *Hclld* 243-5)⁶². In this respect, the Athenian decision is an assertive affirmation of Athens' sovereignty and superior rank in the sphere of interstate relations. In Euripides' *Suppliants* too Athens fights a war against Thebes, as a result of her determination to help the suppliants and uphold justice. As in the *Children of Heracles*, her moral superiority is combined with an affirmation of her external sovereignty and political superiority, when she does not yield to Thebes' ultimatum («either surrender the suppliants or face war»).

In both plays by Euripides, Athens is victorious. By contrast, in the remaining of Aeschylus' Danaid trilogy Argos is defeated by Egypt and Pelasgus is killed. This difference is important but it should not detract from the overall similarities, which begin with the important element of autochthony. The fundamental common denominator is that the democratic constitution with all its values based on freedom cultivates a certain mentality in its people, which in turn leads them to behave liberally among one another and to foreigners. The Argives of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and the Athenians in Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants*, have one telling thing in common: they share principal democratic values, hence, they respond favourably to the oppressed and are

⁶² The translation is quoted from ALLAN 2001.

proven morally superior to their insolent opponents, namely, the Egyptians, the Argives, and the Thebans respectively. If the two Euripidean plays fully explore the democratic framework as well as the political self-image of democratic Athens as protectress of the weak, and if they reveal the propagandistic connotations of this ideological construct in terms of Athens' hegemonic aspirations, Aeschylus' earlier play gives a glimpse of the association between democratic constitution and domestic as well as international politics. Hence, in terms of the likely reception by the original spectators, Argos may have been an interesting city to explore, while its eventual defeat might have been mitigated by the fact that it was not the audience's city, Athens, to have been beaten. At all events, Aeschylus' *Suppliants* is a play diachronically interesting to think with, as it poses a number of questions relating to power relations, human rights, the intervention on behalf of the helpless, the provision of refuge and asylum, the openness of societies to unprivileged people and the values which such openness, if it occurs, may be said to be founded on.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines Aeschylus' *Suppliants* as the prototypical suppliant tragedy which both links religion and politics and foreshadows the development of the ideological construct of Athens as the protectress of the weak and as the champion of justice in Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and *Suppliants*. In attempting to account for the reasons for the Argives' favourable response to the Danaid cause, it is argued that the link between Aeschylean Argos and Euripidean Athens begins with autochthony and culminates in the democratic constitution. By discussing a number of parallel texts, the paper goes on to explore how democracy creates a liberal mentality by promoting values that inform both domestic and foreign policy.

KEYWORDS

supplication - suppliant dramas - politics - democracy - 'democratic king' - freedom - self-determination - political myth - civic ideology - national identity - Argos - Athens - autochthony - ethnic polarity - gender hierarchy - asylum - domestic and foreign policy - sovereignty - hegemony - funeral orations

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