

Aetiology and Justice in the Danaid Trilogy

In its capacity as a trilogy, Aeschylus' *Danaides* may be the second most famous ancient Greek dramatic work today. To be sure, this hunch of a specialist is not saying much, as like all ancient dramatic trilogies apart from the *Oresteia* of the same author, it is mostly lost. But the perceived importance of *The Suppliant maidens* (Gr. Ἰκέτιδες, Lat. *Supplices*), the sole remaining play of the trilogy, and of the mythological narrative that it represents, has increased sharply through changes of perspective in the last half-century. Not only did the reassessment of the date enforced by a papyrus in 1952 transform the extant tragedy from a primitive curiosity to a mature work of Aeschylus, but concurrently, the changes in our political landscapes taking place after that date inverted the political significance of the narrative.¹ Arguably, to a reader in the colonial era, the tale of swarthy female refugees arriving in Europe, escaping and ultimately slaying unwanted male suitors, quaintly depicted the opposite of the apparent natural order of international and sexual affairs – that of white men leaving Europe to take possession. To a Western reader in the first half of the 21st century, the action reflects the three most agonizingly topical political obsessions of our time, sexual politics, ethnical politics, and migration to the West.

Still, and despite three commented editions having just recently appeared,² one suspects that even more attention would have been paid to the drama in the last couple of decades, had it not been so difficult and, frankly, unsatisfying. The opaque Aeschylean language and notorious textual corruption aside, it remains hard to elicit a meaningful, constructive narrative out of the single tragedy that remains combined with the external mythological sources. The tale ultimately seems to be about the foundation of a kingdom upon deception and murder. This is similar to reality, but from Greek tragedy of the Aeschylean variety, our expectations are of cathartic release and even constructive political reconciliation following the destruction of life. Neither seems to work here, despite the attempts that have been made to justify the scenario. In the present article, we will look into the problem of the

¹ The hard evidence concerning the date is given by the *didascalia* preserved in *P Oxy.* 2256.3 (Lobel 1952; *Didasc.* C6 S; Aesch. *test.* 70 R). See Garvie 1969; Garvie 2006, xii–xv; Bowen 2013, 10–21 for scholarly analyses. The evidence of the papyrus is interpreted by some as indicating the precise date 463, but any date after the debut of Sophocles is possible, indicating the 460s or the year 470 (cf. *Didasc.* D3 S). Scullion 2002, 87–101 argues for a date in the mid-470s, doubting the evidence concerning the age and debut of Sophocles found in Roman-age authors.

² Bowen 2013; Sommerstein 2019; Miralles, Citti & Lomiento 2019 (henceforth: “MCL”).

reconstruction of the trilogy once again, with an attempt to harmonize the hypothetical action and authorial message with the known tendencies and value system of Aeschylus and his contemporary audience, as well as with certain indications identified in the text of the *Suppliant maidens* and the *Prometheus bound*, the latter of which also deals with parts of the myth. As all reconstructive attempts, the one here presented will be hypothetical and speculative, and should be regarded merely [128|129] as a possible alternative to the suggestions that have hitherto been put forward. With regard to the question of an authorial message, the aspect of *aetiology*, the mythological origin of an important subject, will be addressed with some greater confidence.

The Suppliant maidens

The extant tragedy stages the arrival of the fifty daughters of Danaus (most likely represented by a chorus of 12 or 15 members) in Argos together with their aged father. They have come from Egypt by ship, trying to escape their cousins, the fifty sons of Aegyptus, who insist on marrying them. They come to Greece on account of being descendants of Zeus and a priestess of Hera, Io, who were lovers in Argos many generations ago, but Hera turned Io into a cow and expelled her forcefully to Egypt. In exile, Io was restored by Zeus and gave birth to Epaphus, the great grandfather of the brothers Danaus and Aegyptus. This happened many years ago. Now having arrived back in Greece, the land of their ancestral mother, the daughters of Danaus try to persuade king Pelasgus of Argos to give them asylum and protection from the sons of Aegyptus. They are ultimately successful, and when the Aegyptiads arrive, sending servants ashore to claim the women, the embassy is unkindly dismissed by the king with the support of a democratic decree of the citizens.

Such is the course of action of the static, lyrical drama that has been preserved. It has usually been thought to be the first part of a trilogy, a view that I and perhaps a majority of

experts still share.³ What happened in the other two parts is up for debate and speculation.⁴ In particular, scholars have tried to deduce which actions would have led up to, and which consequences would have been the precise legal and political result of, the most notorious act of the legend of the Danaids, the Wedding night murder.

[129|130]

The problem of the murder

All sources agree on the major act, to which the action of the *Suppliant maidens* is the overture. The marriage between the fugitives and their cousins eventually takes place, but the women all kill their husbands on the wedding night, except one, Hypermestra, who spares her husband Lynceus. This couple end up as king and queen of Greece, founders of a royal line, and ancestors of Heroes such as Perseus and Heracles. On the details surrounding this scenario, for instance the ultimate fate of king Pelasgus, Danaus, his many homicidal daughters, and Aegyptus, sources are in disagreement or silent.⁵ An abundance of problems present themselves with regard both to the dramatic composition of the trilogy, given the space available and the formal restrictions implied by extant tragedy, and to the moral and political outcome to be expected from the genre and perhaps from Aeschylus in particular. I maintain that the most central problem has not received a satisfactory hypothetical solution. Indeed most discussions relating to the reconstruction of the trilogy, including my own short

³ That the work took the form of a trilogy encompassing the dramas *Supplices*, most likely *Aegyptii* (Αιγύπτιοι), and *Danaides* (Δανάιδες), accompanied by a Satyr play *Amymone*, is hardly in doubt today, although it should be remembered that this, too, is a conjectural reconstruction (see Radt 1985, 111–12 and the following footnote). Some early students of the drama, headed by Schlegel 1809, 158, conjectured that the *Supplices* took the second place, a case that has been revived with significant although in my view ultimately unconvincing arguments in more recent times: Rösler 1993; Sommerstein 1995; Sommerstein 2010, 100–107; Sommerstein 2019, 16–18; Sommerstein 2020. See below, n. 114, on the feature of the Oracle of Danaus, with which this hypothetical order is today intimately associated.

⁴ Some fragments of the two lost tragedies have been collected, almost all stemming from the last play *Danaides*; and all with one significant exception (fr. 44 R) being rather meagre and uninformative: fr. 5, 43–46 and possibly 451h R; in addition now *P Oxy.* 5160 (see Luppe 2013). The plot of the Satyr play *Amymone* can be reconstructed with some probability from later sources. One of the sisters, Amymone, was molested by satyrs, but rescued by Poseidon, who showed her the springs of Lerna: [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.14; Hyg. *Fab.* 169; Aesch. fr. 13–15 R.

⁵ Friis Johansen & Whittle 1980 (henceforth: “FJW”), I 44–55, give the most informative presentation of the ancient sources for the myth with respect to their importance for the Danaid trilogy; see also Beriotta 2016 for an incisive and updated analysis of the myth of the Danaids in Greek literary tradition without particular focus on the trilogy of Aeschylus. Garvie 2006, 163–233 gives the most comprehensive treatment of the reconstruction of the trilogy.

introduction eighteen years ago, gloss over what now seems to me to be the greatest dilemma of all.⁶ If a marriage took place and Danaus gave his daughters away according to legal code or precedent, the murder of their husbands is a crime that should be punished by death. Unless some factor makes the marriage illegal, the audience could have accepted nothing less. Garvie observed that most critics before his time (with some exceptions, notably Robertson) had ignored this question, accepting the Danaids to be in the moral right, whether because of the foreignness or the unpleasantness of the Aegyptiads.⁷ But these are not faults that would justify to an Athenian audience the murder of men by women who have been given to them legally in marriage, and who are thereby *de jure* virtually their property.⁸ Surely some kind of justice must be done for the drama to have an acceptable conclusion. Do we have to suppose that the chorus of the Danaids are led out to their execution at the final exodus, as Garvie diffidently suggests as a real possibility?⁹

But the death by state execution or even personal revenge, seemingly the only alternative to a legal acquittal of the Danaids, is also unpalatable and unlikely. Apart from a scholium to Euripides being the only source that refers to the premature death of the Danaids (through an act of revenge by Lynceus), [130|131] as opposed to the dominant tradition, including Pindar and Herodotus, which states that they marry Argive men (and/or get impregnated by gods), the girls are depicted in the *Suppliant maidens* not as, with all their faults, villains, but clearly as refugees from villains, in their own view and that of their father, like doves or nightingales pursued by hawks.¹⁰ I doubt if an execution of forty-nine young women could ever be presented as a just and satisfactory outcome, or even a tragic event purging fear and pity, rather than one arousing horror and dejection, but it would certainly be entirely unacceptable unless the girls were portrayed as thoroughly hideous and obviously in the wrong already from the beginning, which they are not. The Danaids are in many ways peculiar in their

⁶ Sandin 2003, 12–13.

⁷ Garvie 2006, 206–14; Robertson 1924.

⁸ Harrison 1968, 30–32, 108–115.

⁹ Garvie 2006, 210; cf. Garvie 2017, 35.

¹⁰ Death of Danaids: schol. Eur. *Hec.* 886. Ov. *Her.* 14.116–17 imply, *pace* FJW I 49, Sommerstein 2019, 9, and a “pre-published” draft of my own (Internet link provided in n. 61 below; see p. 1), that the sisters are lost, “ruined”, to Hypermestra not by dying, but through their unforgivable crime: *quique dati leto quaeque dedere fleo: | nam mihi quot fratres, totidem periere sorores*, “I cry over the men who were given to Oblivion and over the women who gave them: | for as many sisters were lost to me, as were brothers”. Both parties are equally lost to Hypermestra, but the latter are still alive, as is clear from 15 *paeniteat sceleris Danaum saevasque sorores* (cf. Sommerstein 2019, 9 n. 39). Danaids marry and reproduce: Pind. *Pyth.* 9.112–16; Hdt. 2.98; Pherec.Ath. *FGrH* 3 FF 8, 37a; schol. in Ap.Rhod. *Argon.* 1.230–33a (ex Pherec.Ath.? Cf. *FGrH* 3 F 104b); Paus. 7.1.16; [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.22; Hyg. *Fab.* 170. “Nightingales pursued by hawks”: Aesch. *Supp.* 62, 223–26.

manners, doing and saying things that are not always in perfect agreement with the ideal of bashful virgins, and being sometimes outright threatening, but the overall impression is that their cause, the escape from followers who are portrayed as foreign and villainous, is something that the audience will wish to succeed. While this has been the intuition of a majority of critics, no one has been able to suggest a plausible reason why Aeschylus, seeing matters of law, piety and morals as central to his dramatic philosophy, would present a case of basically sympathetic protagonists in the role as unpardonable criminals. If Aeschylus instils sympathy in the audience for the Danaids in the first play, and they later commit this act unlawfully and through deceit, the result should be revulsion and dismay, not the first prize in the competition that the trilogy was awarded.¹¹ One instead expects a proper justification, both to the conscience of the Athenians and before the eyes of the gods, of the horrible event that will occur.

Danaus and the Egyptians

The attempts that have been made at justifying the scenario so far are unsatisfactory.¹² The currently prominent theory highlights the role of Danaus. [131|132] According to the recent commentaries of Sommerstein and, more emphatically, Bowen, Danaus may be cast in the role as villain and go down as scapegoat, whereas the Danaids get away with a ritual cleansing, despite having committed mass murder.¹³ This hypothetical reconstruction falls back on a seminal argument by Winnington-Ingram, according to which we were to imagine that “the wronged women of the *Supplikes*” were “driven to murder by desperation and by the ill-judged counsels of their father” and that they would be pardoned in the minds of the audience through the emotional manipulation of the “lyric genius of Aeschylus”, being

¹¹ *P Oxy.* 2256.3 = Aesch. *test.* 70 R, *Didasc.* C6 S.

¹² Already Hermann 1820, 11–17 (= 1827, 330–36) observed that the tenor of the drama and content of the myth should require that all protagonists be eventually absolved: Danaus, Hypermestra, and her sisters. He was obviously wrong, though, in seeing cousin marriage as criminal incest justifying murder in the eyes of the contemporary audience. Towards the other end of the history of scholarship on the *Supplikes*, the notion that a marriage against the will of the brides should justify murder, as Sommerstein 2019, 20, 27 almost seems to imply, is also anachronistic; the important matter was the will of the father, not the women. Sommerstein is reticent about the legal resolutions of the scenario, though (cf. *ibid.* 29–31 and MCL 29–31 on allegedly pertinent political and ideological aspects concerning tyranny and democracy).

¹³ Sommerstein 2019, 14–20, 31, 35–36; Sommerstein 2010, 100–107; Bowen 2013, 9, 23, 28, 30–31. MCL 10, 29, 156, 174–75 tentatively identify the Hybris of the Danaids, consisting in misandry and gamophobia and in the exclusive appropriation of the γένοϋς of Zeus for themselves, resulting ultimately in the violence of the wedding night, as a central tragic theme of the trilogy, but they do not address the hypothetical dramatic conclusions that this thematic might lead to.

conceived of still after the murder as victims.¹⁴ This must be rejected as anachronistic chivalry. To an audience without negative prejudice against Danaus, the picture painted in the *Suppliant maidens* might seem the opposite. Rather than being emotionally manipulated by their father, the girls have strong minds of their own, sometimes containing an undertone of aggression, which comes close to the surface in their assertive dialogue with the king of Argos, at the end of which they threaten to kill themselves, and in the horrifyingly ominous “song of blessings” for Argos, which emphasizes the picturesque qualities of death and disease.¹⁵ Danaus does not urge them on but is at pains to check their emotions, more than once stressing that they must act with restraint.¹⁶ Nor does he insist on their perpetual maidenhood, as has been argued, only that they should not be forced to take their cousins as husbands, nor have *illicit* sexual encounters, willingly or forced, in Argos.¹⁷ So far from sinister manipulation, this input is surely the fully conventional and commendable, according to the standard of the ancients, attitude of a prudent [132|133] parent towards passionate offspring.¹⁸ The idea that Danaus should assume the role of villain is also gainsaid by one important aspect of his speeches, which seems to have evaded the attention of critics. Danaus is portrayed not only as a cautious and wise old man but also, very significantly, as profoundly pious. He talks about the Greek gods in *every one* of his *rheseis*, beginning with

¹⁴ Winnington-Ingram 1961, 143, cf. 149–50; cf. also Robertson 1924, 52–53; Hall 1989, 123 (see below, n. 37); Bakewell 2008, 307, “Danaus outranks his daughters and directs their movements throughout the play”; Sommerstein 2019, 15, “Danaus must have brought up his daughters to think and feel thus.”

¹⁵ Aesch. *Supp.* 274–467, 625–709. See also MCL 174, 210, 235 on alleged instances of *δυσφημία*, improper language, of the Danaids (not all of which I agree to be problematic: on Greek *δυσφημία*, see Sandin 2018). The foreign birth and culture of the girls, though, of which all their peculiarities of speech, values, dress, and complexion may be indications (cf. below, n. 54), do not make them evil, only somewhat strange.

¹⁶ Aesch. *Supp.* 176–203, 991–1005. See FJW I 39 for a concise and sensitive reading of the characterization of the Danaids and the relational dynamics between them and their father.

¹⁷ Aesch. *Supp.* 227–29, 991–1005.

¹⁸ Pace Sommerstein 2019, 14–15, 26, Sommerstein 2020, 156, 160–61, who in particular sees Danaus’ admonishment to his daughters to be on guard against the powers of Eros and Aphrodite in 996–1007, 1012–13 as suspiciously long and elaborate. I cannot agree that this passage hints at a motive that would not have been obvious to any member of the audience: to avoid at any cost a *bad* or *illegitimate* marriage or sexual union of one’s daughters. That would mean, literally, their “destruction” (as in *κόρην διαφθείρειν*) in the latter case, and the decline and ruin of the *γένος*, in the former. Sommerstein 2019, 14 admits that the sentiment is what the audience would expect from a responsible father in the situation. The relatively large emphasis laid on the matter here, which he finds questionable, is surely due to the thematic being central to the dramatic trilogy (cf. Aesch. fr. 44 R, cited below), and to the likelihood that this danger, or indeed temptation, would be on top of everyone’s mind considering the situation at hand (cf. MCL 18). Fifty foreign girls are adrift, protected by no family apart from their aged father, and by no compatriot guardians, only the Argive *polis*, the male citizens of which have shortly before with great enthusiasm (Aesch. *Supp.* 607–8) agreed to receive them.

the following admonition to his daughters, in the speech with which he introduces himself on stage:¹⁹

ἄμεινόν ἐστι παντὸς οὔνεκ', ὧ κόραι,
πάγον προσίξειν τῶνδ' ἀγωνίων θεῶν.
κρεῖσσον δὲ πύργου βωμός, ἄρρηκτον σάκος.

Best is on all accounts, girls, to sit nearby the rock of these Gods of the Assembly. Greater than the fortlet is the Altar, a shield unbreakable.

A detailed account follows of the women worshipping at the father's repeated behests several of the individual Greek gods.²⁰ After the prayer, Danaus assures his daughters of the eschatological justice of the gods with particular respect to their violent followers.²¹ In every single one of Danaus' longer speeches later in the play, and many shorter lines of dialogue, the importance of the reverence of the Greek gods is a topic.²² The honesty of this piety is not in question, but it is an intentional means of characterization, the tell-tale sign of a good man, indeed of a *Greek* of sorts, with respect to central cultural values at least. Besides his old age and caution, this is the only consistent and iterated representation of the *ēthos* of Danaus in the drama, and that it is a positive indicator should become evident in the marked contrast with the behaviour of the *Egyptian* herald, who is openly and repeatedly [133|134] contemptuous of the Greek gods, and in the numerous accusations against the sons of Aegyptus for ἀσέβεια, “impiety”, and ὕβρις (*hybris*), “outrageous behaviour”, sometimes associated with the concept of ἄτη (*ātē*), “mind-destructive ruin”.²³ These latter concepts may refer not only to the brothers' impetuous pursuit, but might later in the trilogy have been shown to be connected with their religious attitude. A hint at such a significance is given by the repeated occurrences of ὕβρις and ἄτη in a related passage of the *Persians*, where the

¹⁹ Aesch. *Supp.* 188–90.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 191–223.

²¹ *Ibid.* 227–31.

²² *Ibid.* 492–95, 616–17, 725, 730–33, 753–54, 773, 980–83, 1014 (which may be correctly attributed to Danaus in the ms.).

²³ Impiety of Egyptian Herald: Aesch. *Supp.* 872, 893–94, 920–23, 927 (cf. Allan 2004, 119 n. 32). ἀσέβεια, ὕβρις and ἄτη of Aegyptiads: 9, 421–30, 751–52, 757–79; 81, 103–11, 426, 487, 528–30, 816, 845, 880–81.

ghost of Darius condemns the destruction of the Greek gods by the invading army of his son Xerxes:²⁴

οὐ σφιν κακῶν ὕψιστ' ἐπαμμένει παθεῖν
ὑβρεως ἄποινα κἀθέων φρονημάτων·
οἱ γῆν μολόντες Ἑλλάδ' οὐ θεῶν βρέτη
ἠιδοῦντο συλᾶν οὐδὲ πιμπράναι νεώς·
[...]
ὑβρις γὰρ ἐξανθοῦσ' ἐκάρπωσε στάχυν
ἄτης, ὅθεν πάγκλαυτον ἐξαμαῖ θέρος.
τοιαῦθ' ὀρῶντες τῶνδε τάπιτίμια
μέμνησθ' Ἀθηνῶν Ἑλλάδος τε.

... where the utmost of ills awaits them to be suffered, ransom of *hybris* and **godless thoughts**: they who, coming to Hellas, were **unashamed to despoil the holy images of gods** and burn the temples. [...] *Hybris in bloom bore a crop of *aitē**, whence it reaps an all-tearful harvest. Seeing that such is the penalty for these things, remember Athens and Hellas.

Precisely the same language is used to describe the Aegyptiads in the *Suppliant maidens*, in (unfortunately textually corrupt) passages where the gods are being asked to help, “denouncing marriage to Aegyptus’ sons and their **impious <intention>**”, and (in passionate lyrical strains) “look at mortal *hybris*, **how it juvenesces, a stem that has bloomed** through (the desire for) our marriage in **transgressing, ill-purposing minds** with frenzied intention as a goad inescapable, with *aitē* ...”.²⁵ The Egyptian herald openly admits, “**I do not fear the gods here**”, [134|135] stating that he only respects the gods of Egypt.²⁶ A direct parallel to the Persian invasion is suggested by the king of Argos, who to the face of the impious herald

²⁴ Aesch. *Pers.* 807–10, 821–26. See the commentary of Garvie 2009 *ad loc.*; and also Nardiello 2018, 27–35, for a comparison of the *hybris* of the Aegyptiads with that of Xerxes in the *Persians*.

²⁵ Aesch. *Supp.* 9–10 γάμον Αἰγύπτου παίδων ἀσεβῆ τ' ὀνοταζόμεναι <διάνοιαν>, 104–11 ἰδέσθω δ' εἰς ὑβριν | βρότειον οἷα νεάζει, πυθμῆν | δι' ἀμὸν γάμον τεθαλῶς | δυσπαραβούλοισι φρεσίν | καὶ διάνοιαν μαινόλιν | κέντρον ἔχων ἄφυκτον, αἰτᾶ δ' †ἀπάται μεταγνοῦσ†. The last part is desperately corrupt; I have earlier suggested ἀπατῶν ἀνάγνους, “deluding the impious ones” (Sandin 2003, 101): cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 93–100.

²⁶ Aesch. *Supp.* 893 οὔτοι φοβοῦμαι δαίμονας τοὺς ἐνθάδε (see below, n. 29), 922.

refers to the Egyptians as “**despoilers of gods**”.²⁷ Immediately, this refers to the attempt of the Egyptian servants to abduct the girls from the protection afforded by the gods of the sanctuary, an outrageous act – “embodiment of all that is cruel, beastly, and rapacious” – which has been staged just prior to the dialogue between the King and the Herald.²⁸ This act would have been represented as an attack against the Greek gods, present on stage, as much as against the women.²⁹ The theme, the lack of awe and respect of foreign enemies for the Greek gods, a prominent source of outrage after the Persian invasion, accordingly looks like something that is set up to have a central role in the trilogy, probably contributing to the portrayal of the sons of Aegyptus as villainous barbarians deserving of death.³⁰ The Danaids, on the other hand, through their repeated religious acts, instigated by Danaus, are confirmed, despite their foreign clothes and dark faces, as essentially non-barbarian, or while actually foreign, as partaking in a universal core of decent cultural practice: proper religious worship.³¹

While a century old and old-fashioned in tone, Nestle’s observation is still valid, according to which the positive outcome of the Persian invasion served as a *theodicy* [135|136] for the Greeks.³² The gods had repelled and punished the blasphemous despoilers that invaded Hellas. This convinced the Greeks, for a short while, that “the gods rule righteously”.³³ The

²⁷ *Ibid.* 927 τοὺς θεῶν σπλήτορας; cf. *Pers.* 809–10 θεῶν βρέτη ... σπλᾶν, cited above.

²⁸ Aesch. *Supp.* 825–910; Taplin 1977, 216.

²⁹ Cf. esp. 885–86, desperately corrupt but with βρέτεος ἄρος restored (Abresch 1763 after the scholium, for the ms. βροτιοσαροσ), “the virtue of the holy image”, and the Herald’s immediately following assurance, with violence simultaneously acted on stage, that he “does not fear the gods here” (893–94). While there is an epic paradigm for the assault with a Greek in the role of perpetrator, the lesser Ajax against Cassandra and the image of Athena in *Iliupersis* (Procl. *Chrest.* ll. 261–67 Sev.; cf. Alc. fr. 298 V; Eur. *Tro.* 69–70), this is for the moment deemphasized and forgotten. Athena is not mentioned, nor indeed any female deity, among the gods present in the Argive sanctuary in 209–21.

³⁰ Nardiello 2018, 37–42, addresses the theme of religious error in the descriptions of the Aegyptiads in the *Suppliant maidens* (“l’insistenza sulla connotazione religiose della colpa degli Egizi”).

³¹ A nucleus of the reading here promoted was presented by Herbert Newell Couch at the Proceedings of the American Philological Association in 1932. Apparently, his arguments and research on the matter were never published, but an abstract of the lecture is found in Couch 1932. Some of the terminology Couch employs is outdated and now considered offensive, but I believe that the text of the *Suppliant maidens*, in particular the repeated emphasis on the positive religious attitude of Danaus and his daughters in contrast to the blasphemy of the Egyptian Herald and the Aegyptiads as described, supports the idea of a religious and accordingly cultural conflict. The focus should be on religion rather than the anachronistic colonial concept of “lower culture”, though, which is not applicable to Egypt from the point of view of the Greeks in the time of Aeschylus. The culture of Egypt was ancient and awe-inspiring, if strange (see Smelik & Hemelrijk 1984, 1870–79, and Rutherford 2016, 20–22 with further references, on Greek attitudes towards Egypt in the Classical era). The following assessment of Couch I believe is correct, though: “The sons of Aegyptos have become an impious and insolent race, who despise the Greeks and mock the gods.” (Couch 1932, lv; cf. Smelik & Hemelrijk 1984, 1871–72).

³² Nestle 1974 (1930), 256.

³³ *Ibid.*

outcome also helped them to the self-righteous conviction that they themselves had been sufficiently just and pious. Their apparent incomprehension of the notion of religious war, in which mutually exclusive gods and existential world views fight to the point of extinction, is attractive, though. According to the educated position, held by Aeschylus, while there may be minor local deities, Zeus and the major gods are not exclusively Greek, but *universal*, worshipped under other names in other parts of the world.³⁴ The adversaries following the Danaids take the opposite, exclusivist view, which explains, without justifying, their blasphemous attitude; but Danaus is consistently depicted as the responsible father figure who retains his daughters within the sphere of universal religious decency and adequate Hellenism.³⁵

Apart from old, pious and anxious that his daughters should be careful, Danaus may be portrayed as *intelligent*, but his prominent and repeatedly showcased *ēthos* in this respect is prudence, σωφροσύνη, not menacing cleverness, despite his having planned the escape from Egypt and instructing the girls on how to speak and act in their encounter with the Greeks.³⁶ There is nothing in these actions or his overall behaviour that would make a neutrally or positively inclined spectator identify him as a villain.³⁷ Nor is he unusually selfish; that he

³⁴ The subject is vast, but see Allan 2004, 116–20, concisely, on the syncretism – and the appropriateness of the application of the term – of the Greek religion of the archaic and early classical eras; and von Lieven 2016 on the Greek principle of identifying foreign gods as identical to their own (*interpretatio Graeca*) with reference to the gods of Egypt.

³⁵ With respect to (pan-)Hellenism, the Altar that is the focal point of the first action of Danaus and his daughters on stage might be compared with the famous altar of Zeus at Plataea that was raised after the Greek victory over the Persians, which exhibited an epigram attributed to Simonides, ending Πέρσας ἐξέλασαντες ἐλευθέρῃ Ἑλλάδι κόσμον | ἰδρύσαντο Διὸς βωμὸν Ἐλευθερίου, “Having driven the Persians out, the Greeks founded this Altar to Zeus the Liberator, an ornament for the Free Hellas.” (Page, *FGE* 736–39 = [Simon.] in *Anth.Pal.* 6.50; Plut. *Arist.* 19.7; *Malign. Herodot.* 873b). See Mitchell 2007, 79 on the symbolic Panhellenic significance of the altar.

³⁶ Cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 198, 710, 724, 992, 1013 for the central role of σωφροσύνη in the advice of Danaus to his daughters. Sommerstein (1977, 67; 2010, 104; 2019, 11–12n.) and Bakewell 2008 make much of the attributes βούλαρχος, “head of counsel” (also hinting at the sense “wishing to rule” according to Sommerstein), στασίαρχος, “head of opposition”, and πεσσονομῶν, “game strategist”, by which Danaus is characterized by his daughters at the beginning of the play (Aesch. *Supp.* 11–12). These characteristics are significant and may foreshadow later actions of a more bold and aggressive nature (see further below), but they are not negative. They are virtually Odyssean (a hero to Aeschylus: see below, n. 88) and necessitated by the situation. Cold reasoning, oppositional daring, and strategic risk-taking are necessary competence in the face of evil, none of the attributes being in themselves indicative of a manipulative and power-hungry nature. They are not so in the case of Danaus, unless everything he says and does in the preserved drama is lies and disguise.

³⁷ Winnington-Ingram’s notion of Danaus as a villainous manipulator has been politically refined by Hall 1989, 123 (followed by Turner 2010, 45–46), who maintains that all advice given to his daughters concerning speech and behaviour, even the exhortation to proper reverence of the gods (186–90), should be understood as stereotypical expressions of the “generic cunning of the Egyptians”. This illustrates the phenomenon that any act of a human being may be interpreted maliciously if one is inclined to do so. The part of the ancient Athenian

once refers [136|137] to his personal honour and enemies in relation to the prospect of his daughters' success or failure is so utterly conventional to the morality of the ancient Greeks that it hardly deserves comment.³⁸ Danaus' only perhaps slightly negative trait, often noted by critics, is that he is inactive and reticent in comparison with his passionate daughters, indeed absent for long periods of time, leaving his daughters to fend for themselves against the aggressive pursuers. This conduct may partly be explained and justified by his advanced age, a characteristic that is repeatedly stressed in the drama and seems unique to Aeschylus. The old age and retired, inactive conduct of Danaus are in turn dramatically motivated by the desired highlighting of the Danaid collective as active protagonist.³⁹ As we shall see in the more speculative part of this essay, the old age of Danaus may also be advantageous to the author in the construction of a final outcome of the trilogy that is satisfactory and emotionally acceptable to the audience.

The aetiology of the Danaan people

The sympathetic tone in the *Suppliant maidens* taken with regard to both Danaus and, with some ambiguity, his daughters, suggests that Aeschylus would have taken the task upon himself to save the reputation of these seminal actors in the construction of Greek national identity. Aeschylus would want to justify the outrageous event of the wedding night and reconcile the Greeks with having such a grisly foundation myth. This last issue, the foundational and aetiological aspects of the myth and trilogy, needs to be addressed with proper attention. Most hypothetical aetiological themes and ideological purposes of the trilogy that have been suggested take an overly abstract and, I maintain, inadequate form. The focus has been on religious and political institutions in Greece and the state of Athens. An origin of the prevalent line of thinking is Herodotus' information that the Danaids introduced the religious festival of the Thesmophoria to Greece, which has been understood by a number of scholars as a major aetiological theme of the trilogy.⁴⁰ The idea has been [137|138] developed,

polis that would have been prepared to interpret religious piety and promotion of σωφροσύνη as sinister manipulation and barbarian cunning was small to negligible and excluded Aeschylus.

³⁸ Aesch. *Supp.* 1008–9; see Dover 1974, 180–84, 226–29. It is yet unclear who these enemies are, though, the statement being perhaps like the subsequent talk of housing a foreboding premonition (see below, text for n. 87).

³⁹ Taplin 1977, 204–6, 211–15; Garvie 2006, 126–30, 136–38.

⁴⁰ Hdt. 2.171; early proponents of the theory are Tittler 1838, 975; Robertson 1924, 53; influential is Zeitlin 1996, 163–69. See Sommerstein 2019, 19 n. 75 for a concise critique, highlighting important problems of this theory.

prominently by Seaford, to include broader aspects of the institution of marriage.⁴¹ An additional inspiration for the notion that the *Danaïdes* featured the aetiology of a religious cult or ceremony is the *Eumenides*, in which is depicted the origin of the worship of the goddesses of this appellation in Athens, and which is often used as a template for comparison with the Danaid trilogy. In many respects, there are good reasons for the comparison, but in the case of an aetiological theme, we should be looking elsewhere. Unlike the chorus of Erinyes, the Danaids are humans, indeed human immigrants, and we should consider an aetiology that is concretely geo- and ethnopolitical rather than religiously institutional, seeing that a concrete geopolitical aetiology is inherent in the myth, independently of the dramatic trilogy. We will have to go back to Welcker and the mid-nineteenth century to find explicitly suggested the theory that I certainly believe is correct, and which at the very least must not be ignored to the degree that it has been. Welcker assumed that the “Hauptzug” of the Danaid trilogy was the foundation of the Δαναοί, the Greeks of Homeric epic, or Danaans according to English name style.⁴² According to the etymology accepted in Greek tradition, the Danaans took their name from Danaus.⁴³ Not marriage and procreation in the abstract or institutional sense, but the concrete result of particular marriages should be considered. Rather than the *Eumenides*, Ennius and Virgil are the relevant points of comparison from the point of view of aetiology, describing the parallel case of foreign refugees, that is Aeneas and his band of Trojans, founding an ethnic or geopolitical entity in Europe. Curiously, this suggestion has been all but ignored by later literary scholars in the study of the trilogy, or when briefly addressed, curtailed and made less convincing. Following Hermann, Welcker had assumed that the ascendancy of Danaus on the throne of Argos must be an integral part of the main theme.⁴⁴ Later scholars who have acknowledged the theme have spoken exclusively about Danaus and his nephew and daughter and the creation of the *dynasty* of the house of Lynceus, ignoring the collective, ethnographical aspect.⁴⁵ Superficially, the narrow focus might seem to be supported by a passage in the *Prometheus bound* (cited and discussed below), which highlights the importance of the royal line descendant from Hypermestra and Lynceus.⁴⁶ But

⁴¹ Seaford 2012, 144–57, 304–12, 317–18, involving a complex projection of Pythagorean theology. Cf. also Seaford 1987, 116–17; Thomson 1971; Thomson 1973, 289–95, maintaining that the conflict between endogamy and exogamy was central to the theme of the trilogy; and Calame 2009, 143–46, who emphasises the general importance of sexuality and fertility in the context of marriage. This last thematic points in the right direction.

⁴² Welcker 1846, 486, cf. 483, 502; Welcker 1824, 399; Kruse 1861, 12–13.

⁴³ E.g., Eur. fr. 228 K.

⁴⁴ Hermann 1820, iv–vi (1827, 322–24); Welcker 1846, 486.

⁴⁵ Cf. e.g. Weil 1866, xiii; Eitrem in *RE* XIII, 2471; Schmid 1934, 199; Harsh 1944, 42; Calame 2009, 142, 145.

⁴⁶ [Aesch.] *PV* 869–73 (see below, text for nn. 73–77).

[138|139] as Garvie observes, the relevant issue in that passage is the lineage of Heracles, central to the myth of the bound Prometheus and of course to the latter who is the speaker, knowing that Heracles is eventually to release him.⁴⁷ In contrast, to the Athenian audience of the *Suppliant maidens*, the narrow focus on the royal line of Lynceus will make the issue irrelevant. Soon there will be many kings in Greece, then there will be none, and the old Athenian kings were in any case not related to Lynceus. How the Danaan name should accommodate an ancestral father Lynceus, son of Aegyptus, who may even have taken righteous vengeance upon the criminal Danaus, is also problematic to say the least. Garvie, unimpressed by all hypothetical aetiologies suggested, argues that none is needed at all.⁴⁸ But in all honesty, how could the significance of the name of Danaus and the foundation of the *Danaan people* be ignored in a dramatic trilogy about his daughters? The tenor of the extant drama suggests that it cannot. While the old kings of Argos may be irrelevant, the subjects of ethnopolitics and geography, Greeks and Egyptians, lineage and inheritance, positively saturate the *Suppliant maidens*.

When the Danaids arrive, Argos is not a Classical city state or Homeric local kingdom, but the capital of a Greece united.⁴⁹ The central role assumed of the city of Argos need be no more complicated or politically allusive than as an antiquarian aetiology for the name of “Argives” alternating with “Danaans” in Homer as a designation of the united Greeks, also used repeatedly in the *Suppliant maidens*. In addition to Argives, the people already living in Greece are called Pelasgians, after the present king Pelasgus, which indicates the aetiological significance of the arrival of Danaus, about to change the regime and national direction.⁵⁰ Aeschylus makes it clear that the Pelasgian aborigines are *Hellenes*, though, that is, Greek in speech and culture, unlike the Danaids themselves.⁵¹ The aetiological impact of the arrival of the Danaids is not one of people replacement, but limited to the input of the holy seed of Zeus into an already existing people. Even so, the impact is greater than in the Roman parallel, as one may observe in the aetiological fate of the names involved. Whereas the son of Aeneas, Iulus, gave name to the *gens Iulia* and the imperial line of Caesar, Danaus and his dark-skinned, violent daughters gave their family name to the entire people of the land now called

⁴⁷ Garvie 2006, 227.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 228.

⁴⁹ As carefully explained by the king to the Danaids and to the external Athenian audience in 250–70. The Panhellenic ethos of the drama has been noted by Seaford 2012, 323–24.

⁵⁰ Welcker 1846, 486.

⁵¹ Explicitly so in 220, 234, 237, 243, 914. See Hall 1989, 171–72; Sommerstein 2019, 27.

Greece. The input of the seed of Zeus will arguably transform the Pelasgian people into something new and better, or at least more glorious, for the age of Heroes is about to begin. The *ethnogenesis* of the Danaan people, consisting in the transformation of the [139]140 complacent Pelasgian Hellenes into heroic Danaan Hellenes, will be the important issue to Aeschylus and his audience. An interest in the origin of the heroic Greeks of epic poetry is plausible in light of the patriotic tendency awakened in the Classical era by the experience of the Persian invasions, which united the Greeks in a similar fashion, it was imagined, as did the Trojan expedition. The “Argive”, “Danaan”, “Hellenic” people changed name and remained politically divided (until losing their independence completely), but the common idea in Athens after the Persian wars was that the Greek-speaking peoples were culturally and religiously unified to a significant degree, preferably under the cultural and political hegemony of Athens.⁵²

Not the almost forgotten kings of pre-Homeric Argos, but the origin of the Danaan people would attract the original audience of Aeschylus and convince the judges of the Dionysian festival to award the first prize. Welcker’s intuition that the birth of the Danaans must have been the aetiological theme of the trilogy is certainly correct. I believe that rather than the aged Danaus and later his nephew taking over the rulership in the state of Argos, Aeschylus would attempt to showcase the Danaid women as the collective vessel for this Panhellenic Origin. While in antiquity it is sometimes questioned if women transfer genetical substance to their offspring, in the case of the substance being the supernatural seed of Zeus, this will not be in doubt, even after generations of mortal dilution, if the poet and the myth portray it so. Indeed, the significant aetiological event of the myth is not the murder, but the tradition that the Danaids eventually marry Argive men (with Danaus willingly giving them away).⁵³ Thus, like later the Trojan men taking Latin spouses, these fifty women of a hardy, resourceful and fertile line, originated by Zeus, constitute the credible foundation of a “race”.

The topic of γένος

Apart from the myth itself presenting the obvious aetiological subject, the literary elaboration evident in the preserved drama of the themes of bloodlines, family and nationality goes far beyond what is to be expected on the average even in an ancient literary work. Addressing the themes of fertility symbolism and the institution of marriage as well as the royal bloodline of

⁵² See Hall 1989, 1–3, 6–9, 162–65; Mitchell 2007, xv–xxiv, 77–112 and *passim*.

⁵³ See above, n. 10.

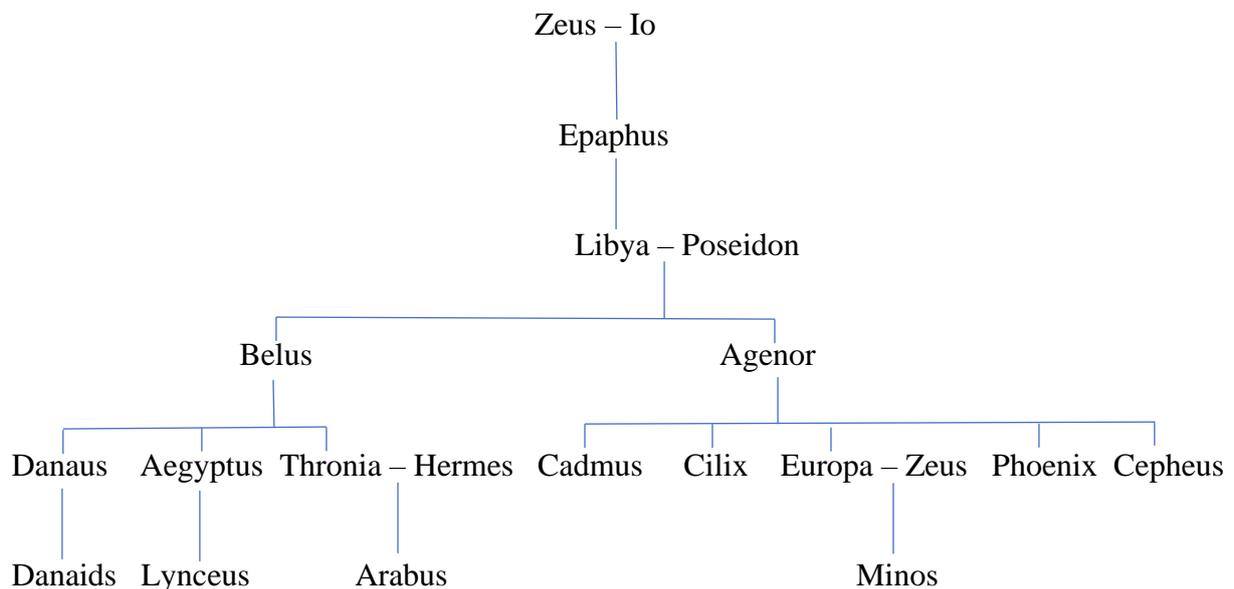
Lynceus, critics have avoided the “national” aspect of this complex, perhaps as being unsavoury, generally so in recent times, earlier possibly due to the notion that the glorious Danaans should descend from a band of barbarian, explicitly dark-skinned women.⁵⁴ But the theme is unavoidable. The abstract noun γένος (*genos*) occurs [140|141] 21 times in the drama (to be compared with a median of six in the tragedies of Aeschylus), in addition to related terms γεννάω, γείνομαι, γενέτης, γόνος, γένεθλον, and ἐγγενής.⁵⁵ The basic meaning of *genos* is “birth” or “breed” in the sense of assumedly inherited characteristics and identity of an individual or group of people. Depending on the context, the word can be translated in English as “family”, “tribe”, “nation(ality)”, “kin”, “stock”, and “race”. The question of biological inheritance, centred on the Danaids’ descendance from Zeus and Io, is accordingly an extremely prominent leitmotif. The national aspect is central to the theme; in the first half of the play, the focus is on deciding whether the fugitive women are Ἀργεῖαι γένος, “of Argive nationality”. They prove this by reference to Io, their lineage from whom is described in detail in a stichomythic debate with the king of Argos.⁵⁶ In the lyrical passages, which

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Vürtheim 1928, 54, briefly on the fertility symbolism of the motif of the bovine coupling of Io and Zeus; and more recently Calame 2009, 136–51, Seaford 2012, 144–57, and MCL 26–27 on generalized and *polis*-related aetiological aspects of marriage and sexuality (“ordering of gender relations”, Seaford 2012, 156; “the fertility that is essential to the life of the human race”, Calame 2009, 143 n. 34; “fecund sexual procreation and all its consequences”, Calame 2009, 144; “il fatto che l’eros sia fondamentale per la comunità cittadina”, MCL 27). It is remarkable that for all the fertility- and gestation-related imagery evident in the *Suppliant maidens* and the obvious literary parallel presented by Virgil, the question of the birth of the Danaan people is virtually unaddressed in commentaries, apart from in the briefest of passings in accompanying discussions of the myth as gestated *before* Aeschylus (Wilamowitz 1914, 16–17; Vürtheim 1928, 9–11; Garvie 2006, 172, 176, 227). Bernal 1991, 89–90 may well have a point on the alienation of older (“Aryanist”) critics with regard to the Egyptian aspects of the myth and play in this respect (cf. Sommerstein 2010, 109). Aeschylus anchors the Danaids in an Argive ancestral mother, but he is cheerfully explicit and unconcerned about their foreign racial characteristics: the Danaids describe themselves as μελανθῆς ἠλιόκτοπον γένος, “a dark sun-struck race” (Aesch. *Supp.* 154–55; see Mitchell 2006, 211–15 for further review of the examples or the foreign appearance and culture of the Danaids). The father of Danaus is Βῆλος (Aesch. *Supp.* 319), that is Ba’al or Bêl, “der Vertreter der asiatischen Semiten” in the words of Wilamowitz *loc.cit.* (who with obvious distaste speaks of “primitiven ethnologischen Kombinationen”). One will have to turn to expert anthropologists and historians for comprehensive accounts of the mythical ethnogenesis of the Danaans. Finkelberg 2005, 103–5, offers an interpretation of this aspect of the Danaid myth (but not the Aeschylean trilogy), but her inclination to positivistic interpretation of each of the elements of the mythical narrative as significantly correlated to historical reality seems (like Bernal) a little wayward. I will not address the historical realities behind the myth here, though; see Rutherford 2016, 2, with references, on the earliest indicated contacts between Greece and Egypt. Meyer 1892, 78–89, presents a comprehensive, but in literary respects uneven account of the significance of the myth as gestated in Aeschylus and the epic *Danaïd* (almost altogether lost). He is very uncongenial to the literary value of the myth and play (“gesunkene poetische Schöpfungskraft”, 81; “Dürftigkeit”, “geflickte Lumpenkönige”, 88). The reluctance of the seminal German philologists to address the birth of the Danaans as a literary motif seems to have made it invisible to subsequent enlightened and apolitical scholars.

⁵⁵ Aesch. *Supp.* 42, 73, 169, 288, 311, 329, 578, 982.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 291–324.

makes for a larger percentage of this play than of any other Greek drama, the coupling of Io and Zeus is prominent from the start. Its significance is deeper than the mere question of Greek ethnicity, though. The very first thing mentioned in song in the drama is the [141|142] “calf of Zeus and son of the cow”:⁵⁷ this is Epaphus, the fated son of Zeus and Io in Egypt. In Greek myth, the role of Epaphus is not limited to the creation of the Danaans, but he is responsible for the ethnogenesis of a significant part of the *oikoumene*, as indicated by the names of his descendants: Libya, Aegyptus, Arabus, Phoenix, Cilix, Thasus and Europa are eponymic of places and people (Phoenicia, Cilicia and the island of Thasos in the less obvious cases); Cadmus, Minos and Cepheus founded and ruled states or countries (Thebes, Crete, Ethiopia). The family is traditionally referred to as the Inachids after the father or ancestor of Io, but in the conception of Aeschylus, Inachus is irrelevant, the focus being on the holy triad of Zeus, Io, and their son Epaphus. From the latter, “Black Epaphus” as he is later called in the *Prometheus bound*, all these eponymic and foundational characters descended, as did Danaus and the Danaids, giving their name to the Danaan people.⁵⁸



While most of these names do not appear in the extant drama, the mythical significance of the Inachids, known to the educated parts of Aeschylus’ audience, underscores the aetiological significance. Not only the Danaans, according to these (in Wilamowitz’s terms) “primitive ethnological associations”, but the entire civilized world “descended” from Zeus and an

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 40–48 Δῖον πόρτιν ... ἰνὴν τε ... βοός.

⁵⁸ [Aesch.] *PV* 851: see below, text for nn. 73–77.

Argive woman.⁵⁹ The glorious Danaans/Argives/Hellenes take a seminal role in the gestation of the international community.⁶⁰

The topic of *genos* is not abandoned after the women have proved their descent. The central and programmatic part of the play with regard to this [142|143] leitmotif is the mid-drama *stasimon*. Having secured the goodwill of the king but awaiting the decision of the democratic council, the Danaids turn to Zeus with a hymnic entreaty, the eulogic passages of which contain some of the most intensely religious poetry preserved in ancient Greek.⁶¹

ἄναξ ἀνάκτων, μακάρων
μακάρτατε καὶ τελέων
τελειότατον κράτος, ὄλβιε Ζεῦ,
πείθου τε καὶ γένει σῶι
ἄλευσον ἀνδρῶν ὕβριν εὖ στυγήσας·
λίμνῃ δ' ἔμβαλε πορφυροειδεῖ
τὰν μελανόζυγ' ἄταν.

τὸ πρὸς γυναικῶν <δ'> ἐπιδῶν
παλαίφατον ἀμετέρου
γένους φιλίας προγόνου γυναικός
νέωσον εὐφρον' αἴνον·
γενοῦ πολυμνήστωρ, ἔφαπτορ Ἴουδς·
Δῖαί τοι γένος εὐχόμεθ' εἶναι
γᾶς ἀπὸ τᾶσδ' ἐνοίκου.

⁵⁹ Wilamowitz 1914, 17.

⁶⁰ West 1985, 144–54 and Hall 1989, 36 discuss the development of the Inachid genealogical stemma in the context of the widening of horizons of the Greeks in the archaic era. For the argument that the Danaid trilogy problematizes and even “subverts” Greek–barbarian polarity, “locat[ing] the Greeks in a ‘whole world space’”, see Mitchell 2006, 223.

⁶¹ Aesch. *Supp.* 524–37. See, e.g., Fraenkel 1931, 12 n. 30; Wilamowitz 1914, 31–32; FJW II 407–8. The constitution of the text and significance of some key passages and concepts will be treated fuller elsewhere; a draft commentary of the entire ode is currently available at https://www.academia.edu/39950498/Aeschylus_Supplikes_Excerpt_from_new_Introduction_with_text_translation_and_commentary_on_vv.524_624_work_in_progress (accessed by the author 25 August 2021).

*Lord of Lords, most Blessed of Blessed, most Consummate of Consummate Powers,
Prosperous Zeus, let yourself be persuaded and avert from your kin the Hybris of men,
hating it well. Cast the black-yoke Ātē down into the purple mere.*

*See to the side of the women and kindly renew the anciently spoken word of our Genos
of the beloved ancestral woman: become much-remembering, Seizer of Io. We assert to
be the Genos of Zeus and of the inhabitant of this earth.*

Following this invocation, the ode turns to narrative, describing the passion of Io and her forced journey to Egypt, the scenario being presented as parallel to that of the Danaids. It is crucial to note that Zeus is here, and consistently in the *Suppliant maidens*, depicted as Io's saviour and benign helper. There is nothing in the text of this ode or the entire drama to support the notion of the supreme god acting deceitfully or even inappropriately, as the seduction of mortal women is his divine prerogative.⁶² Those who wish to interpret the drama [143|144] as a negative portrayal of Zeus and Danaus have to assume an all-pervading irony in the poetical gestation, which does not make any sense either from an artistical or religious perspective or with respect to a coherent message. There is an ironic element present, consisting in the anticipation of a happy ending shared by audience, author, and Zeus, but the particulars of which elude the distressed women. What is not ironic, but on the contrary an earnestly and consistently promoted message, is the notion of the *Justice of Zeus*. While as always problematic, this belief was unreflectingly shared by most of the audience, with which, like the religion of Danaus, the religious pathos of the women creates a bond of sympathy and respect. The Danaids are the unwitting instruments of a divine plan, but according to the mainstream value system of Aeschylus' contemporaries, the plan is *benign*. However naïve, old-fashioned or philosophically untenable the view may seem, for Aeschylus, Zeus is the upholder and father of *Dike*, Right; he is the righteous king of the universe and the leader of the other, almost if not entirely equally righteous gods.⁶³

⁶² So, e.g., Golden 1962, 20, "Zeus appears in the *Suppliants* most impressively and most frequently in the role of the protector of the weak and innocent"; Grube 1970, 47, "We may also note that, in the tale of Io, Zeus is mentioned as her healer and deliverer"; cf. Lloyd-Jones 1983, 90.

⁶³ Nestle 1974 (1930), 263: "Zeus linkt die Dinge so, daß am Ende immer „das Gute siegt“. So ist die Tragödie des Aischylos Eine große *Theodizee*, erwachsen aus der eigenen Lebenserfahrung des Dichters". Cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 402–6, 437; *Sept.* 662; *Ag.* 173–78, 787–88, 927–28, 1563–66; *Ch.* 948–51, 957–58; *fr.* 70, 281a R. No doubt this is an unfashionable reading today. Parker 2009 makes the argument, to the general acclaim of many of his peers (Griffith *et al.* 2009), that nothing of what the chorus or individual characters say in Aeschylus about Zeus or other gods may be taken at face value. Such is the nature of the *personae* proper to dramatic poetry.

Accordingly, the mid-drama stasimon is an honest lyrical theodicy, justifying a chaotic and *prima facie* amoral mythical scenario. As repeatedly stated, there are grave problems to address, not least what looks like a bloody mass murder among the descendants of the offspring of Zeus and Io. But everything in the surviving text and the known authorial tendencies of Aeschylus indicates that he intended to *redeem* this scenario, a theological feat that may seem astonishing, but which should be compared to his later, hardly less breathtaking redemption of the matricide of Orestes and the Athenian custom of worshipping the Erinyes, demon goddesses from Hell.

Other versions of the myth have described Zeus's role in relation to Io as dishonourable, Hesiod apparently attributing her bovine transformation to [144|145] him.⁶⁴ This ode insists on his honourable conduct towards Io throughout the affair, and on his righteous intentions and global plan in impregnating her. When Io has arrived in Egypt, Zeus removes the gadfly that has been tormenting her, restores her to human shape, and comforts her.⁶⁵ The narrative part of the ode culminates in her giving birth of Epaphus.⁶⁶

λαβοῦσα δ' ἔρμα Δῖον ἀψευδεῖ λόγῳ
γείνατο παῖδ' ἀμεμφῆ

δι' αἰῶνος μακροῦ πάνολβον·
ἔνθεν πᾶσα βοᾷ χθών
φυσίζοον γένος τόδ' ἧ
Ζηνός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς.
τίς γὰρ ἂν κατέπαυσεν ἼΗ-
ρας νόσους ἐπιβούλους;

Their limited perspective may be used for ironic effect. I will make the less safe counterclaim, that any *positive* statement made about Zeus in lyrical strains in Aeschylus should be regarded *not as irony* but as the religious truth of the author. The chorus may get the particulars of divine plans and actions wrong, but they are *not mistaken* when they praise Zeus in song. Certainly, there is no way to prove this, but we shall do well to remember that the choral passages of tragedy are likely to have originated as parts of religious rite (cf. Jouanna in Griffith *et al.* 2009, 163–64). At least Parker (128–29) accepts the ghost of Darius in the *Persians* as a representative of the religious truth of the author and accordingly the validity of the justice of Zeus in this case (see above, text for nn. 24–33).

⁶⁴ Hes. fr. 124 M–W *ap.* [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.5, schol. Pl. *Symp.* 183b.

⁶⁵ Aesch. *Supp.* 571–79.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 580–89. On ἔρμα, “support”, see Bowen 2013 *ad loc.*

Διὸς τόδ' ἔργον, καὶ τόδ' ἄν γένος λέγων
ἐξ Ἐπάφου κυρήσαις.

*Taking the support of Zeus, she begets by truthful word a faultless child,
who was all-prosperous through a long age. Hence, all the earth proclaims of this life-
engendering Genos: “verily, truly it is of Zeus.” For who else could have put a stop to the
hostile plagues of Hera? This is the work of Zeus. And saying this Genos stems from
Erampus you would be right.*

That all the earth praise the *genos* of Erampus alludes to the global prominence of his seed, as does the epithet πάνολβον, “all-prosperous”, echoing the initial address of Zeus in the ode as ὄλβιε.⁶⁷ The *genos* is φυσίζοον, “life-engendering”.⁶⁸ These adjectives determining Zeus, Erampus, and the *genos*, epitomize the aetiological significance of the event. Zeus has in the begetting of Erampus intended the creation of the Danaans and the civilized world.

Appropriate praise is bestowed later in the ode:

[145|146]

<αὐτὸς ὁ> πατήρ φυτουργὸς αὐτόχειρ ἄναξ,
γένους παλαιόφρων μέγας
τέκτων, τὸ πᾶν μῆχαρ, οὖριος Ζεύς.

*The Father <himself> — with own hand Gardener lord; great Constructor, with ancient
foresight, of the Genos; Remedy of all things: Zeus of fair winds.*

The ironic aspect lies in the Danaids’ being oblivious, even as they sing, to the ultimate significance of the parallel that they promote between Io and themselves. Unwittingly, they

⁶⁷ For ὄλβος designating success with respect to procreation, cf. Hom. *Od.* 4.207–8. The taumorphic form of the Zeus ὄλβιος of later attested cult (Cook, *Zeus* III 628–56) is particularly relevant, the bull being one of the most potent symbols of male fertility.

⁶⁸ The epithet φυσίζοος belongs to the impersonal sphere of nature and is infinitely more suitable to γένος than to the person of Zeus (φυσιζόου Schütz 1797, accepted by most editors). In early epic poetry, the epithet is always used of land (Hom. *Il.* 3.243, 21.63, *Od.* 11.301, *Hymn.Hom.Ven.* 125), the true etymology of the -ζοος suffix being not ζωή but probably ζειά, “barley” (see Kirk 1985 on Hom. *Il.* 3.243–44). Only very late does the word appear as a personal epithet (*Anth. Pal.* 11.400; Nonnus, *Dion.* 39.146).

themselves are to become the vessel for the crowning of this ancient plan, eventually to marry Argive men and create the Danaan people. Such is the will of Zeus.⁶⁹ This irony gently touches the naivety of the girls, but it does not affect the truth and appropriateness of their praise of Zeus. However we may feel today about divine planning and using of humans and seduction of women and boys, and indeed generally about the views and opinions of ancient people, an attitude of indignation and subversion with respect to such a scenario cannot be assumed from the author and his contemporary audience. On the contrary, as argued further below, the very appropriate side result of this *pia fraus* is the gentle chastisement of the daughters of Danaus for what may possibly be a mild *hamartia*: fear and hatred of marriage and men.

Justification of the actions

The apparent aetiological theme and Aeschylus' positive portrayal of Danaus and his daughters in the *Suppliant maidens* make his alleged later role as a villain and mass murderer unacceptable. The Athenian audience would not welcome a tragedy in which it was explained how the Danaan people took their name from a criminal and his murderous daughters. "We need to be clear that Lynceus and his descendants will rule in Argos", Bowen argues with regard to a just outcome of the trilogy, but why then are the Homeric Greeks not called Lynceans or Aegyptians?⁷⁰ Rather than of the defeat and punishment of Danaus and the ascendancy of the line of Aegyptus, the Athenians would like to hear why this seminal event was not so unlawful and ill-omened as it might seem from mythical sources, and why the foundation of the *Danaan people* through the offspring of [146|147] the *Daughters of Danaus* was its just and proper outcome. This is a difficult propagandistic task, given the mythological facts. Still it is what must be expected.

At the centre of the problem is the apparent crime of mass murder. Later tradition, in particular the Roman authors, tends to view the killings as an atrocity to be condemned, which may arguably be the expected attitude in an era where Hellenic political nationalism had

⁶⁹ Cf. Seaford 2012, 146–47. The ultimate *telos* is not "marriage" and "sexual union" though, but the biological purpose and natural consequence of heterosexual union: *genos*.

⁷⁰ Bowen 2013, 31. Indeed, as not seldom, he also exhibits the right intuition: "there could be an aetiological note about Argives and Danaans being the same people in Homer." In no way is such a positive aetiology compatible with the scenario he hypothetically assumes for the later trilogy, though.

ceased to be a viable position.⁷¹ But the Classical Greek authors did boldly pardon the women to the extent that they were allowed to live and marry Argive men.⁷² An indication that the deed itself may actually have been justifiable, rather than a criminal act, is also found in the only unarguably relevant external source of the myth with regard to the *Suppliant maidens*: the *Prometheus bound*. The most important events relating to the progeny of Io are here presented in a prophecy by the enchained Titan. If Aeschylus is not the author of the *Prometheus*, the drama was without doubt presented as if he was, and it is reasonable to assume that the sequence of events and moral interpretation of them that we find are in accordance with that given in the Danaid trilogy, seeing also that specific imagery relating to the conflict is recycled and expressions from the *Suppliant maidens* paraphrased:⁷³

ἐπώνυμον δὲ τῶν Διὸς γεννημάτων
 τέξεις κελαινὸν Ἔπαφον, ὃς καρπώσεται
 ὄσπην πλατύρρους Νεῖλος ἀρδεύει χθόνα·
 πέμπτη δ' ἀπ' αὐτοῦ γέγνα πεντηκοντάπαις
 πάλιν πρὸς Ἄργος οὐχ ἔκοῦσ' ἐλεύσεται
 θηλύσπορος, φεύγουσα συγγενῆ γάμον
 ἀνεψιῶν· οἱ δ' ἐπτοημένοι φρένας,
 κίρκοι πελειῶν οὐ μακρὰν λελειμμένοι,
 ἥξουσι θηρεύοντες οὐ θηρασίμους
 γάμους, φθόνον δὲ σωμάτων ἔξει θεός·
 Πελασγία δὲ δέξεται < ὤ — ὦ —
 ὤ — ὦ — ὤ — ὤ — > θηλυκτόνῳ
 Ἄρει δαμέντων νυκτιφρουρήτῳ θράσει·
 γυνὴ γὰρ ἄνδρ' ἕκαστον αἰῶνος στερεῖ
 δίθηκτον ἐν σφαγαῖσι βάψασα ξίφος.
 τοιάδ' ἐπ' ἐχθροὺς τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἔλθοι Κύπρις.
 μίαν δὲ παίδων ἴμερος θέλξει, τὸ μὴ

⁷¹ Hor. *Carm.* 3.11.33–36; Verg. *Aen.* 10.497–98; Ov. *Her.* 14. [Pl.] *Ax.* 371e, probably also from the Roman era, is the earliest source for the motif of the punishment of the Danaids in Hades.

⁷² Pind. *Pyth.* 9.112–16; Hdt. 2.98; Pherec. Ath. *FGrH* 3 FF 8, 37a (see above, text for nn. 10, 53).

⁷³ [Aesch.] *PV* 850–69. On the relevance of the drama in relation to the Danaid trilogy, see Winnington-Ingram 1961, 141; FJW I 45–47; Lloyd-Jones 2003, 61–62; Sommerstein 2010, 100; Sommerstein 2019, 5; MCL 14–16. For an attractive hypothesis concerning its posthumous, pseudo-Aeschylean production, see West 1990, 67–70.

κτεῖναι σύνευνον, ἀλλ' ἀπαμβλυνθήσεται [147|148]

γνώμην· δυοῖν δὲ θάτερον βουλήσεται,

κλύειν ἀναλκίς μᾶλλον ἢ μαιφόνος.

αὕτη κατ' Ἄργος βασιλικὸν τέξει γένος.

You will give birth to a child named after the begetting of Zeus, black Epaphus, who shall harvest as much land as is washed by the broad-flowing Nile. The fifth generation from him, of fifty children of female kind, shall come again to Argos against their will, fleeing kindred marriage to cousins. The latter, excited in their minds, hawks not far behind doves, shall arrive hunting marriages not to be hunted, since a god will grudge them their bodies. Pelasgia will receive < > subdued by female warlike killer spirit and nocturnal vigilant daring; for each woman will deprive each man of his life, immersing a double-edged sword in their throats. Such may the Cyprian come upon my enemies! Desire for children will enchant one,⁷⁴ so as not to kill her bedfellow, and she will take the edge off her mind; she will choose the former of twain, to be called unvalourous rather than bloodthirsty. She will give birth to royal offspring for Argos.

Unlike the Roman poets, Prometheus expresses no moral outrage with regard to the act of the Danaids. As in the *Suppliant maidens*, they are likened to doves pursued by hawks, which prepares for seeing the murder as an act of self-defence.⁷⁵ The wedding-night slaughter is presented as a gruesome event, attributable to a ferociousness in the minds of the girls, but not as an abominable crime. Prometheus emphasises that this violent end would be suitable for his own enemies, too, the Aegyptiads by this remark being portrayed as the legitimate enemies of the Danaids. As we shall see, in the context of the Danaid trilogy, this may be the key to a

⁷⁴ Or: “desire [*sc.* for her husband] will enchant one of the children [i.e., ‘girls’]”, which enjoys greater consensus (e.g., Nardiello 2018, 168 n. 116; Sommerstein 2019, 8; MCL 14–15). But the Danaids were referred to as “women” only three verses before (862), which makes their sudden identity as παῖδες, “children”, somewhat inapposite. The initial μίαν, “one”, in fact seems to recall γυνή, “woman”, in the same metrical position in that verse, and παίδων ἕμερος, “desire for children”, is immediately taken up by Hypermestra’s generation of royal offspring in 869. It is also paralleled in Mimmern. fr. 2.13–14 W ἄλλος δ’ αὖ παίδων ἐπιδεδεῖται, ὧν τε μάλιστα | ἱμεῖρων κατὰ γῆς ἔρχεται εἰς Αἴδην. For the objective, possessive and comparative genitive of nouns before caesura and with headword(s) following in this position of the trimeter, cf. *PV* 47, 257, 378, 453, 841, 913, 922, 966, 1026. The high frequency arguably indicates a stylistic preference. Out of these examples, 453 presents a fair parallel with verse-initial subject not construed with following genitive: μύρμηκες ἀντρῶν ἐν μυχοῖς ἀνηλίσις.

⁷⁵ Aesch. *Supp.* 62, 223–26.

justification of the wedding-night slaughter: a scenario in which the men remain legitimate foes, rather than bridegrooms with a rightful claim. Prometheus says that the Aegyptiads will pursue a marriage that a god [148|149] denies them, that is Aphrodite, as hinted in 864, or indeed ultimately Zeus. The act of the Danaids on the other hand is described with basically positive attributes: Ἄρης, “Ares” or “warlike spirit”, and θράσος, “daring”, often a good thing in tragedy.⁷⁶ Of the adjectives θηλυκτόνος, “female killer”, and μαιφόνος, “bloodthirsty”, the former is purely descriptive, not judgemental, and the latter is a standard epithet of Ares in the *Iliad*, used here as a contrast to ἀναλκις, “unvalourous”, to describe an accusation to be expected (κλύειν) but which is not necessarily founded. The accusation of insufficient valour on the other hand is levelled at Hypermestra, who spares Lynceus. Nonetheless, she becomes the ancestral mother of a line of kings, and of Heracles.⁷⁷ Hypermestra is apparently not in the wrong here, but if her sisters were, one would have expected this to be expressed, and strongly condemned, by the virtuous Titan. Evidence suggests that not only the Romans but already some Greek works of the later fifth century may have taken a judgemental and depreciative stance with regard to the Danaids.⁷⁸ But if Prometheus is considered to be a fair judge and the general tone of the *Suppliant maidens* correctly interpreted as predominantly sympathetic towards Danaus and his daughters, it appears as if for Aeschylus, both actions are to be justified, the slaying, despite being a horrifying act of pollution, and the sparing. Prometheus strengthens the intuition already exhibited by Hermann, that Aeschylus in the Danaid trilogy wanted to work out a reconciliatory outcome, saving the entire Danaid family, as well as one of the Aegyptiads, from condemnation.⁷⁹ This would relate the outcome to the *Oresteia*, where Orestes is acquitted for his horrifying matricide, and the Erinyes on the other hand, while losing the right to pursue him, are given new honours in return.

Intuition and circumstantial evidence compel us to search for a legal justification of the scenario. Albeit no less speculative than other theories of reconstruction, there is one viable path with regard to this problem that has not been explored before, unsurprisingly perhaps, as it seems not to be hinted at in any of the extant sources for the myth. But there is one thing

⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.* 505, 955; and for Ἄρης, 749.

⁷⁷ [Aesch.] *PV* 872–73.

⁷⁸ Cf. Eur. *Or.* 872–73; fr. 846 K; and Isoc. *Hel. enc.* 68 and *Panath.* 80, who considers Danaus an invading barbarian. This view is perhaps not unlikely to have been advanced also by Theodectes, the disciple of Isocrates, in the tragedy *Lynceus*, where Danaus appears to have been killed in the finale either by the protagonist or by *polis* justice (Theodect. fr. 3a *S ap.* Arist. *Poet.* 1455b, 1452a; cf. Beriotta 2016, 69–77). See further below, n. 114.

⁷⁹ Cf. above n. 12.

that would make the marriage illegitimate, and hence the murders justifiable according to Classical Greek legal standards, and that is if it takes place not only against the secret will, but also without the express permission of the father. The consent of the father, giving his ἐγγύη, “pledge”, is the crucial point, not whether the suitors are nice or loathsome, Egyptian or Greek.⁸⁰ If the invading Egyptians defeat Argos and let [149]150 Danaus live, his consent as part of a peace agreement remains consent. A *reservatio mentalis* will not exculpate him and his daughters. The often endorsed scenario that has Danaus taking over as king of the Argives after the death of Pelasgus, and making a peace settlement with the Egyptians through promising them his daughters, results in the severe dilemma here described.⁸¹ Such a scenario is indeed narrated or implied in some mythographical sources from the Roman era, but it is dissonant with the content and tenor of the *Suppliant maidens*, which is also the case with many other details of these late versions, wherefore they need not be relevant for the reconstruction of the trilogy.⁸² The patriotic imperative should not be ignored in this endeavour. To the Athenian audience of the 460s, Argos, representing not the city state of the Periclean age, but all of Greece, surrendering to or making a peace settlement with Egyptian invaders on the terms of the latter, will be an unpleasant scenario. It will not be made more palatable by having the Greek losers illegally and dishonourably breaking the settlement, violating the σπονδαί. There are hints in the *Suppliant maidens* of a coming war, and also that war means suffering (which is true in Antiquity for all sides participating), but no passage in the drama hints that the Argives are going to lose the war.⁸³ Certainly the audience would prefer the Greeks to win the war against “the despoilers of gods”, as they did in the recent paradigm, the Persian invasion.⁸⁴ This, an eventual Greek victory on the battlefield, is what may be hinted at in some chauvinistic sentences on the strength of Greeks in comparison with barbarians found in the last quarter of the *Suppliant maidens*.⁸⁵

A way to achieve this desirable outcome, an honourable victory for the Greeks and a legal justification of the notorious wedding night slaughter, suggests itself if the Danaids are removed by force from the guardianship of their father. The force need not be excessive. Pelasgus or, better, a less conscientious ruler, for instance his brother, son, or nephew, having

⁸⁰ Harrison 1968, 3–9; MacDowell 1978, 86.

⁸¹ E.g., FJW I 50–51; Bowen 2013, 31; Sommerstein 2010, 105–6; Sommerstein 2019, 17; cf. MCL 11.

⁸² [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.15; Hygin. *Fab.* 168; Serv.Dan. ad *Aen.* 10.497.

⁸³ Pace Bowen 2013, 27, citing 377, 442 and 1047–49.

⁸⁴ See above, text for nn. 24–33.

⁸⁵ Aesch. *Supp.* 760–61, 951–52.

taken over the rule after his death, might decide that the girls are not worth a war, and invite the Aegyptiads to marry them against the will of their father. Tradition has conveniently preserved the name Gelanor as an alternative to Pelasgus as king of Argos before Danaus.⁸⁶ Having killed Pelasgus and taken power, this man may be the individual villain of the drama of the *Aegyptii*. The scenario of the girls taken captive would make some sense of the seemingly irrelevant talk about which quarters they should use during their stay in Argos, which is elaborated upon towards the end of the *Suppliant maidens*: the king's private [150|151] ones in the palace, or the public ones.⁸⁷ If they choose or are assigned the former, the king will conveniently control them, and decide that in his house, as a king, he may assume guardianship. Danaus, a seemingly harmless old man, need not be imprisoned or killed, but he would be powerless, his rights as a father violated, which would make his situation similar to a Homeric model, Laërtes in the *Odyssey*.⁸⁸ The marriage being then illegal, the slaying of the Aegyptiads may be construed as, while gruesome, still in the end a legitimate defence of the chastity of the girls and of their father's ownership of their maidenhood. Here, too, the case of Odysseus slaying the unwelcome suitors of his wife may serve as a literary-canonical justification. The legal status may and logically should be reinforced by a situation where a battle is eventually fought between the Argives and the Egyptians, but one taking place after the wedding night carnage, and in which the Greeks win and repel the invaders, resulting in the slayings of the Aegyptiads being retroactively counted as casualties of war. Hypermestra, sparing her husband, whether or not with the marriage consummated, will be the one in need of defence.

The rights of the father is not an important theme in the *Suppliant maidens*.⁸⁹ Danaus once argues that a marriage "to an unwilling bride with an unwilling father-in-law" is a crime before the gods, which will be punished in Hades, but he does not insist on his own legal rights in this world, and one passage may indeed suggest that king Pelasgus assumes that the Aegyptiads have the right to marry the Danaids according to the laws of their homeland, the rights of the male next of kin overriding the rights of the father according to the endogamic

⁸⁶ Plut. *Pyrrh.* 32.10; [Apollo.] *Bibl.* 2.13; Paus. 2.16.1, 2.19.3–4.

⁸⁷ Aesch. *Supp.* 957–63, 970–74, 1009–11. See Seaford 1990 on the symbolic power of the motif of the imprisonment of women in Greek tragedy.

⁸⁸ Aeschylus produced a trilogy based on the *Odyssey* (see Radt 1985, 113–14; cf. Aesch. frs. 113a–115, 187, 216–220, 273–278 R), apparently similar in many respects to the Danaid trilogy. See Sommerstein 2010, 250–51 on the related problem of a chorus of villains that are to be slain in the second part of the trilogy, and the presumably reconciliatory and redemptive ending of the last.

⁸⁹ See FJW I 35–36.

traditions in Egypt.⁹⁰ This is not evidence that this theme was not problematized in the second play, though. Indeed, it would have had to be, in order to make the conflict comprehensible. That the legal issue is largely absent from the first play and the status of the claim of the Aegyptiads left in the open, may be because Aeschylus wanted to focus on the immediate and physical aspects of the drama to begin with, the pursuit and desperate situation, and the feelings and peculiar passive-aggressive *ēthos* of the Danaids, rather than have the potentially torrid question of rights and legal principles dominate the introduction.⁹¹ But a large number of complicated legal issues is at stake, and it is impossible to see how they could be left unresolved. The rights of the Aegyptiads and Danaus with regard to this marriage, the rights of the Danaids [151|152] to annul the marriage in such a horrifying way, and finally the rights of Hypermestra to opt out of the annulment and spare her husband, all have to be sorted out. An abundance of conflicts of legal principles have to be resolved in the second and third part of the trilogy.

As for the last mentioned one, the most important fragment left from the lost parts of the trilogy, attributed to the *Danaides* and put in the mouth of Aphrodite, looks like a defence speech resorting to the natural principles of love, sexuality and, most importantly, reproduction:⁹²

ἐρᾶι μὲν ἀγνὸς Οὐρανὸς τρῶσαι χθόνα,
 ἔρωσ δὲ Γαῖαν λαμβάνει γάμου τυχεῖν·
 ὄμβρος δ' ἀπ' εὐνάεντος Οὐρανοῦ πεσών
 ἔκυσε Γαῖαν· ἡ δὲ τίκτεται βροτοῖς
 μήλων τε βοσκὰς καὶ βίον Δημήτριον.
 †δένδρων τισ ὥρα† δ' ἐκ νοτίζοντος γάμου
 τέλειός ἐστι· τῶν δ' ἐγὼ παραίτιος.

The sacred Sky desires to penetrate the land; desire for union overcomes Earth. The rain that falls from the flowing sky impregnates Earth; she gives birth to pasturage for cattle and Demeter's produce. †A season of trees† is fulfilled by the wet union; for these things, I am responsible.

⁹⁰ Aesch. *Supp.* 227–31, 387–91.

⁹¹ Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1961, 143–44; FJW I 36.

⁹² Aesch. fr. 44 R *ap.* Ath. 13.600b.

As most scholars have argued, this suits the defence of Hypermestra, who in later tradition is represented as imprisoned and tried for sparing her husband.⁹³ Divine intervention apparently saves her. As we shall see, if her husband Lynceus unlike his brothers has also been portrayed as a good man, this may be construed as an acceptable outcome.

As for the right of the father's next of kin to marry *ἐπίκληροι*, that is orphaned female heiresses without brothers, the Athenian law is well attested, if not clear in every detail.⁹⁴ Even if there is no obvious estate, the law is still relevant, all sisters becoming formally *ἐπίκληροι* at the death of Danaus, standing to inherit a share in the ship if nothing else. In the present case, Aegyptus, followed by his sons (on the assumption that there are no more interested brothers), as the male next of kin of Danaus, would have a claim according to the law of Athens with regard to the estate and appended heiresses if Danaus dies without male issue.⁹⁵ Aegyptus might surrender his own claim for that of one of his sons, as is the case suggested here. However, Danaus, while alive, might still theoretically produce an heir, or formally adopt one, and marry one of the [152|153] heiresses to him. The cases where Athenian marriages were dissolved after the death of the bride's father or brother due to the claim of the male next of kin to her inherited estate are complicated, but there is no reason to suppose that a legal marriage to an adopted heir could be annulled in this way.⁹⁶ Most importantly, it is clear that none of these hypothetical claims, apart from that of Lynceus, will ever come into force, as Danaus is still alive, and the conflict eventually will be resolved in the accustomed manner of tragedy.

But the Aegyptiads act as if they already have a claim. This may be as they consider Danaus to be so old as to make his producing of an heir an irrelevant theoretical formality without foundations in reality, or possibly, but rather awkward, that they claim the women as the duly won prize of a previously fought war.⁹⁷ But it may also be, as Friis Johansen and Whittle attractively argue, and as is perhaps suggested by 387–91, that Aeschylus represented the ancient Egyptian law as more strongly in favour of the male next of kin than the contemporary Athenian one, due to the notoriously strong endogamic traditions in Egypt.⁹⁸

⁹³ [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.21–22; *Ov. Her.* 14.3; Paus. 2.19.6; see Garvie 2006, 205–8.

⁹⁴ Harrison 1968, 10–12, 132–38, 309–11.

⁹⁵ On the case of several daughters, *ibid.* 134.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 309–11.

⁹⁷ Wilamowitz 1914, 16, 19; cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 741–42.

⁹⁸ FJW I 36; cf. Sommerstein 2019, 387–91n.

There is no evidence that Egypt in the time of Aeschylus did have laws to give men the right to marry their next of kin regardless of the wish of the living father, but this is of no consequence, as the drama took place in very ancient times. Perhaps not accepting the “Egyptianized” regime of Aegyptus, then, Danaus and his daughters, having returned to the ancient motherland, could claim to be held accountable according to Greek, not Egyptian law. The right to this must also be the consequence of the Danaids finally being afforded status as μέτοικοι, “non-citizen residents”, and in particular of their being given legal assurances of protection against unwanted marriage.⁹⁹

Avoiding being too assertive with regard to the details of a speculative reconstruction, we will at least make the claim that there is nothing prohibiting Aeschylus from using a perceived violation of the rights of Danaus to justify the slaying of the Aegyptiads in legal terms, if we take for granted that the ancient law of Argos was represented as more or less identical with the law of Athens in his own time.¹⁰⁰ A useful result of such a turn of events would also be that Pelasgus or (better) the usurper, who performs the violation, will have to nullify the verdict of the people in order to bring about the marriage, and accordingly turns into an unpopular tyrant.¹⁰¹ This will awaken popular support for his opponent, Danaus, eventually making him into *de facto* leader of the state, a position for which his pretension has always been weak, resting solely [153|154] on his being the progeny of Zeus and Io many generations back.¹⁰² But if Danaus would be perceived as a popular leader removing a bad tyrant, and would command the Argive army to defeat of the invaders, his rightful place at the helm of the Ship of State will be proved. Plutarch preserves a version in which king Gelanor is removed by popular revolt (or “party strife”, στάσις) to be replaced by Danaus as king in Argos.¹⁰³ The bodyguards assigned to Danaus by the state of Argos in the *Suppliant maidens* are often interpreted as a premonition of his tyranny, following the note of Aristotle on the paradigmatic *topos* of the taking of bodyguards as a sign of scheming for tyranny.¹⁰⁴ However, of the three examples mentioned by Aristotle, Dionysius of Syracuse was not yet born in Aeschylus’ time, and it is highly doubtful if the (probably fictional) story of the

⁹⁹ Aesch. *Supp.* 609–14, 940–44; see FJW I 38.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Wilamowitz 1914, 13.

¹⁰¹ Aesch. *Supp.* 600–614. On the vices of the tragic tyrant, including “attacks on religion, perversion of ritual” (here the marriage ritual), see Seaford 1994, 232–34.

¹⁰² Cf. Garvie 2006, 199.

¹⁰³ Plut. *Pyrrh.* 32.10; cf. Paus. 2.19.3. These versions are incompatible in several respects with the *Suppliant maidens*.

¹⁰⁴ Aesch. *Supp.* 985–88; Arist. *Rh.* 1357b. See Sommerstein 2010, 105; Bakewell 2008, 304–7.

bodyguards of Theagenes of Megara was known to him. The one of the three Aristotelian tyrants that is relevant to Aeschylus, Peisistratus of Athens, may still have been seen as a predominantly positive figure, with whom Danaus might even be profitably compared as a foundational character.¹⁰⁵ Peisistratus was known to have become old in function.¹⁰⁶ As for Danaus, he is portrayed as an old and retired man in the *Suppliant maidens*, but we may observe that the favourable verdict of the Argives in the second half of the drama makes him feel young again, a feeling which returns later as he looks forward to practice the art of persuasive speech, and turns into something looking like an important topic appearing for a *third* time in a fragment of the *Danaides*.¹⁰⁷ The rejuvenation of men in the context of battle and strife is an attested literary topic, for instance in the old Paedagogus of the *Ion* of Euripides.¹⁰⁸

There is no direct evidence for this course of events, only occasional, disparate pieces fitting into a puzzle, the major reconstructed parts of which might have looked completely different. The suggestion is accordingly not put forward as a certain reconstruction, but as one hypothetical means that would have been [154|155] available to Aeschylus to solve the legal and moral dilemmas arising through the necessity to combine the *Suppliant maidens* with the notorious later events of the myth. Legal justification aside, some moral problems also remain, in particular concerning the revenge of Lynceus.¹⁰⁹ If the trilogy is to achieve a finale in terms of reconciliation, with the Danaids surviving and marrying locals, Lynceus will have to forfeit avenging his brothers. Even if this is apparently the case in most extant versions of the myth, it remains a problem in the context of an ascending king of Argos in the finale of a tragedy. The problem is arguably lesser than that of the justification of the murder. Sommerstein has argued that the forfeit of revenge of the relatives of the suitors of Penelope

¹⁰⁵ Isocrates bashes both Peisistratus and Danaus (*Panath.* 80, 148; *Hel. enc.* 68; cf. above n. 78). The account of Herodotus (1.59–64) is silly and full of relativistic and ambiguous morality, but in 1.59.6 he explicitly describes the rule of Peisistratus as just, competent, and conservative in its first period. This may have been the *communis opinio* in Athens until the rivalry with Sparta, the Peloponnesian war, and the unbearable oligarchic regimes that followed had distilled favourable opinion of democratic and conservative institutions into a general dislike of all domestic strongmen with new policies. Evidence for Peisistratus (as opposed to his sons) as a “good tyrant” is found also in Arist. *Ath. pol.* 14.3, 16.7 (“golden age”).

¹⁰⁶ Thuc. 6.54.2. Incidentally, both Danaus and Peisistratus are anecdotally associated with the symbol of the *wolf*, with which Danaus also compares the Hellenic people in the *Suppliant maidens*: Aesch. *Supp.* 760; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 32.10; Paus. 2.19.3; *Suda* ss.vv. Λύκειον, Λυκόποδες.

¹⁰⁷ Aesch. *Supp.* 606, 775; fr. 45 R *ap.* Hsch. κ 78 καθαίρομαι γῆρας, “I am cleansed of old age”.

¹⁰⁸ Eur. *Ion* 1041–44; cf. *Heracl.* 702–3; Ar. *Lys.* 668–70; Tyrtæus fr. 10.19–30 W. See also below, text for n. 115.

¹⁰⁹ See Garvie 2006, 206–7.

is likely to have been the reconciliatory outcome of Aeschylus' *Odyssey* trilogy, with which we compared the present trilogy above.¹¹⁰ As already hinted, the fate of Klytaemnestra's Erinyes may also serve as comparison. The Furies forfeit revenge and are given official honours in Athens in return.¹¹¹ A similar trade could be offered to Lynceus, who becomes king of Argos after the death of Danaus in battle. As in the case of the *Oresteia*, such an arrangement is feasible with the presence of a god on stage. Having acquitted Hypermestra, the god balances her judgement by pronouncing that Lynceus will not have the right to take physical revenge on the Danaids but will receive a weregild: the kingdom of Argos.

All of this will hardly be possible unless Aegyptus and Danaus are both removed, for instance, like Eteocles and Polynices in the *Seven against Thebes*, killing each other in battle outside the city.¹¹² This would remove the problem of the living Aegyptus still having a legal claim on Hypermestra, and lead to Lynceus receiving the legal right to marry her according to the law of Athens. In the case of Danaus, this outcome may perhaps find some support in the much debated scholium, which states that the marriage of the Danaids and Aegyptiads is illegal διὰ τὸ μὴ θανατωθῆναι τὸν πατέρα.¹¹³ This certainly means “because the father has not been killed”, rather than states a purpose, “because the father must not be killed”, referring to the mythical oracle which some, and prominently Sommerstein, have argued played a role in the trilogy.¹¹⁴ Still, the verb θανατωθῆναι [155|156] curiously refers to a violent death. One

¹¹⁰ Sommerstein 2010, 251–52. See above, n. 88.

¹¹¹ Aesch. *Eum.* 881–1047.

¹¹² Aesch. *Sept.* 805–11. On the possible arrival of Aegyptus in Argos, see Garvie 2006, 209. Aegyptus is not present on the ship with his sons in the *Suppliant maidens* (see Sommerstein 2019, 7), but they have also not brought an armada, even if several ships and an ἐπικουρία, “auxiliary force”, are mentioned (721). A fleet with an army will have to be dispatched from Egypt in answer to the diplomatic snub by Pelasgus (950), and it will be suitable for Aegyptus to command it in person.

¹¹³ Schol. in Aesch. *Supp.* 37.

¹¹⁴ Sommerstein (2019, 16 n. 69; 2020, 155) now agrees with Garvie 2006, xviii–xix, that the scholium must be read this way, but still promotes the oracle as a not unlikely feature of the trilogy. The oracle, of which there is no hint in the *Suppliant maidens*, but which is known from late sources, stated that Danaus incurred a risk by marrying his daughters to their cousins (schol. Eur. *Or.* 872) or would be killed either by a son of Aegyptus (schol. Aesch. *PV* 853; schol. Hom. *Il.* 1.42; Lactant. *ad Stat. Theb.* 6.290–91) or by any son-in-law (Lactant. *ad Stat. Theb.* 2.222). To my speculative intuition, this has the flavour of a post-Sophoclean innovation by someone who wanted to stage Danaus as a flawed tragic antihero or villain in the style of Oedipus, Jason or the Sophoclean Odysseus, perhaps with xenophobic undertones (cf. Eur. *Or.* 872–73; Isoc. *Panath.* 80, *Hel. enc.* 68; Theodect. fr. 3a S *ap.* Arist. *Poet.* 1455b, 1452a). However that may be, and while there is no evidence for the myth having been the central theme of a drama by Euripides (see Beriotto 2016, 39–41), the style implied by the oracle is not in harmony with the characterization of Danaus in the *Suppliant maidens*, nor with the known authorial tendencies of Aeschylus. Already the idea that Danaus, as an old man, would value his own life above the prospect of progeny for his daughters, is very awkward. See further Kyriakou 2011, 65–74; and also Beriotto 2016, 48–52, who argues that the oracle is likely to have been a part of the archaic literary tradition, against which Aeschylus introduced significant innovation.

possible explanation is that the scholiast knew that Danaus is killed in the end, and that the rights of Lynceus thereby will come into force. We might thus hypothetically identify several dramatic purposes for the conception of Danaus as an old man, which seems unique to Aeschylus: first to make room for the more active role of the Danaids in the first play; secondly to make his situation as disenfranchised father in the second play less dishonourable and more realistic (the tyrant would have had to kill a younger man, perceived as more able); and finally to make his death in battle not a grievous but an honourable and for an old man indeed enviable outcome.

With the rights of Lynceus in force, the honourable death of Danaus also helps produce a rationale, if the Aegyptiads are really unacceptable suitors, for Hypermestra and Lynceus marrying. The natural principles of love, sexuality and reproduction, argued by Aphrodite, will not be enough argument to justify this if a war has been fought on account of the Danaids against the invading army from Egypt, as becomes unavoidable after the slaying of the Aegyptiads. But if both Danaus and Aegyptus die in the war, the marriage will become Lynceus' legal right according to Athenian law. As for a moral justification, the obvious solution, which also to some degree eases the forfeit of revenge, is that the other Aegyptiads will be shown on stage to be thoroughly unsuitable due to their lack of piety and respect for the Greek gods, as we have argued is hinted in the *Suppliant maidens*, whereas Lynceus may be portrayed as the positive exception, coming into conflict with his brothers for this reason. Unlike his brothers, Lynceus might, like the Danaids themselves, have retained proper awe and respect for the Olympian gods.

One of these gods appearing on stage will sort the matter out. We have reason to expect a *deus ex machina*-related resolution in the finale, in which divine authority sanctions Aeschylus' chosen solution of the legal and moral problems presented by the myth. We know that Aphrodite appears and speaks in the *Danaides*, and despite the multitude of deities mentioned by Pausanias and others as active in the mythological scenario, there is hardly room for more than one theophany, whether we are restricted to three actors, or, as is probable, [156|157] two, as in the *Suppliant maidens*. It is also unnecessary to bring Athena, Artemis or any other god than Aphrodite on stage, since she as the daughter of Zeus, according to the Homeric genealogy, could speak on his behalf. Arguably she has special prerogative to do so in this case, as the entire situation arose from Zeus's superficially submitting to her powers (albeit with a plan and a righteous purpose). Aphrodite accepts the right of the Danaids to defend themselves against the enforcement of an illegal and unwanted

γάμος, but on the other hand she insists that they should marry the men that are now eligible, the Argives.

If legally justified according to the suggested scenario, the Danaids still commit an act of pollution, which probably has to be expiated through ritual purification.¹¹⁵ Apart from that, they are shown in the *Suppliant maidens* as not faultless in their character and behaviour.¹¹⁶ In a quasi-trial of Hypermestra overseen by Aphrodite in the finale of the last play, resulting in her acquittal and queenhood, the faults of the Danaids might be highlighted and corrected, the theme having previously in the play been elaborated upon in dialogue between the chorus and Hypermestra and/or representatives of the state of Argos. Apart from their questionable attitude towards men and marriage, some of the things they say and do in the trilogy, including the murder, however legally justified, would have been provocative to an Athenian audience, and signs both of improper and unfeminine eccentricity and, perhaps, foreign culture. But the suitable “punishment” is that they must after all, and hopefully in the end not unwillingly, marry.

Motivation of the actors

Thus far we have advanced a speculative theory of legal and moral justification of the known actions and events, according to the values prominent in Aeschylus’ Athens. A related but arguably lesser problem is that of motivation. Why, in the first place, will Danaus not accept this perfectly reasonable, soon to be legally enforceable marriage? That his daughters are reluctant to marry their cousins does not constitute a great mystery, all things considered, but which are their explicitly expressed objections and, while attractive to a modern audience, why is the opinion of the women even a topic, considering the normal priorities of ancient Greek society? Why, on the other hand, less explored by scholars, do the Aegyptiads want the marriage so much, as there is apparently no substantial estate involved, and if there was, Danaus has forfeited it through his exile? Did he bring with him an abundance of gold and treasure on the ship? Are the young men simply very much in love, driven not by economic considerations but by [157|158] Eros (as perhaps hinted by the Danaids and also by Prometheus)?¹¹⁷ Or is the endogamic principle so important to the Egyptianized noblemen,

¹¹⁵ [Apollod.] *Bibl.* 2.22.

¹¹⁶ Cf. FJW I 38–39.

¹¹⁷ Aesch. *Supp.* 109–11; [Aesch.] *PV* 856.

that they have to marry within the family at all cost; anything else would weaken the bloodline?

It is not certain that the problem of motivation was explored in detail in the trilogy. For the audience it would not have been as important as defining good and bad and justifying the exceptional acts of the Danaids and Hypermestra. In any case, mythical tradition said that the Aegyptiads pursued this marriage, and that the Danaids tried to escape it. As for taking the female point of view into account, this may be abnormal in the socio-political context of Athens in the Classical era, but it is not so in the Greek drama. The myth does offer the young women as primary agents of the narrative, eventually to become manslayers. Dramatical considerations plainly make their attitude towards the marriage a central, unavoidable topic. If the Aegyptiads, as we suspect, in the second play were shown to be as the Danaids describe them in the first, villains without respect for the Greek gods, the rationale or motivation for the rejection of marriage need not be made more explicit than it already has been.

On the other hand, as the Danaids express themselves strongly on the subject, a much debated question has been whether the girls are, or think that they are, inimical to the very idea of marriage and men, or only to their present suitors.¹¹⁸ The general tone of their statements in the *Suppliant maidens* may hint at the former attitude, in which case this is an aspect of motivation that might be important, if perhaps only as a secondary motif, made more prominent in the last play of the trilogy, which bears their name. Wilamowitz adduced four, and Garvie ten examples from the *Suppliant maidens* in support of the notion that the Danaids consider themselves intrinsically averse to any union with men.¹¹⁹ While none of them in itself constitutes incontrovertible proof, as Friis Johansen and Whittle have scrupulously demonstrated,¹²⁰ their combined strength, the repeated tirades against “men” and “marriage”, together with other features like the final song of the drama, containing a dialogue in which Argive men and/or handmaidens argue against the stubbornness of the Danaids, Aphrodite’s warm defence of the principles of love and reproduction in the *Danaides*, and the presumed acquittal and queenhood of Hypermestra marrying Lynceus, all suggest that the passionate refusal of the Danaids, while perhaps being, like the chastity of Hippolytus, partly heroic and a source of valour, might at the same time be a *hamartia* to be corrected. Still, upon scrutiny their attitude may turn out to be no more profound than a mistaken generalization of their bad

¹¹⁸ See now Nardiello 2018, 127–84, for a comprehensive treatment.

¹¹⁹ Wilamowitz 1914, 15; Garvie 2006, 221.

¹²⁰ FJW I 31–33.

experiences with their cousins. In contrast to the *Hippolytus*, the intervention of Aphrodite will be benign, and the correction will occur not through death, [158|159] but through the reconciliatory outcome of an eventual marriage to proper bridegrooms, including an enlightened acceptance of the regular fate of women.¹²¹

Hypothetical reconstructions

In the following are sketches of central scenes which according to the suggested scenario might have appeared in the second and third part of the trilogy. The details should not be taken more seriously than as aids for the imagination. The concrete evidence for this scenario is only indirect, lying in the fact that it would solve the dilemma of the culpability of the Danaids and explain the Argive acceptance of the kingship of Danaus and later Lynceus in a manner that harmonizes with the genre and the tendencies of the author and presumed expectations of a contemporary audience. The solution may be too good in the eyes of later tradition, as the Danaids are often depicted as both criminals and as punished in Hell.¹²² This is not a major objection, though; the particularities of individual works of art need not be followed by the major tradition, and there is little evidence for the later plays in this trilogy having had any impact at all on the literary tradition.¹²³ The second play may in fact have been lost at a very early stage.¹²⁴

The reconstructions resort to the use of divided or supplementary choruses in the second play, the *Aegyptii*, which is not strictly necessary to reconstruct a plot in accordance with the argument presented here, but arguably justified by the use of at least one such chorus in the *Supplices*, and by the peculiar character of the dramatic fable, which has the collective agent of the Danaids as protagonist, and a group of men, the Aegyptiads, as their main adversary. In the reconstruction of the lost plays have been included all fragments explicitly in antiquity assigned to the trilogy that may be construed as having any bearing on the plot, as well as one that has been conjecturally attributed to the *Aegyptii* by modern scholarship.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Cf. Seaford 2012, 306–7.

¹²² Cf. above, n. 71.

¹²³ FJW I 44; see also Garvie in Beriotto 2016, vi; Beriotto 2016, 65–95.

¹²⁴ Unless Aesch. fr. 451h R is really from this play, which is of course highly uncertain: see below, text for nn. 126–127.

¹²⁵ Aesch. fr. 451h R (Cunningham 1953).

Aegyptii

Scene: Royal palace courtyard. *People:* Danaus, Gelanor, Lynceus, Leader of Bodyguard.

Chorus: Divided between Aegyptiads and Danaids.

[159|160] Prologue by Gelanor, the nephew of Pelasgus, presenting himself as the new king, acting in the interest of the Argive state. Enter Danaus, dialogue commences. The following becomes clear. Aegyptus has arrived in Argos with an army, having set up camp by the seashore, after having destroyed the sanctuary. Gelanor has taken power in the city, and Pelasgus is dead, probably or certainly killed by Gelanor. Gelanor has ceded to the demands of the Aegyptiads and invited them to marry their cousins in the evening. He controls the Danaids, who are kept in the palace, whereas the sons of Aegyptus are lodged, against the will of the people, in the public quarters. Danaus is free to go as he pleases, being considered a harmless old man by Gelanor, who also does not want to challenge public opinion too much. The dialogue demonstrates the villainous character of Gelanor, a young and presumptuous man, who mocks Danaus for his old age and helplessness.

Exit Gelanor. Enter a chorus of Danaids. They sing a dirge over Pelasgus and praise his hospitality.¹²⁶ A dialogue with Danaus commences, in which they express fear and loathing, with veiled references to a desperate way out. Enter a chorus of Aegyptiads, and the Danaids perhaps leave at the sight of them. The Aegyptiads give ample evidence of impiety and despicable character. Lynceus appears as a single character and tries to restrict their obscenities and ill behaviour, but he becomes angry with them. He pays proper respects to Danaus, his prospective father-in-law. Gelanor later joins the Aegyptiads in mocking Danaus, who makes it clear that this marriage is against the will of both him and his daughters and suggests that the tyrant instead man up and lead the Argive people to the sea shore to drive the intruders away. He is laughed out of court. We meet the leader of the bodyguard that was entrusted to Danaus, who is not happy with the new regime.¹²⁷ Hints and allusions, possibly in front of the Aegyptiad chorus, lead up to the final inevitable scene: the marriage. The Danaids enter again in marriage costume. Together with the Aegyptiads, and with Danaus and Gelanor present, they sing wedding songs full of dark and ominous undertones. Finally, all march out, the Aegyptiads and Danaids in one direction, towards the private quarters of the latter, and Danaus and Gelanor in the other.

¹²⁶ Aesch. fr. 451h R.

¹²⁷ Cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 985–88.

Danaides

Scene: Royal palace courtyard. *People*: Danaus, The Leader of the Bodyguard, Hypermestra, Lynceus, Aphrodite. *Chorus*: Danaids (supplementary chorus of Argive soldiers).

[160|161] Prologue by Danaus, armed, outside the palace. It is still night. He talks about pacified bridegrooms and girls and boys singing.¹²⁸ Enter the Danaids with bloody daggers. Dialogue clarifies the situation. Danaus has slain Gelanor (with a sword furnished by his ally, the leader of the bodyguard), and his daughters have slain their bridegrooms with daggers somehow furnished by Danaus. Relief, but the horror of blood and pollution, and the anticipation of war.

Enter the leader of Danaus' bodyguard, perhaps with a silent retinue. The treason of Gelanor is made manifest, and the justice of Danaus in slaying him. Danaus is now *de facto* leader of the city. He is to lead the Argive army to the Egyptian camp, the leader of his bodyguard being second-in-command. Danaus is shorn of old age.¹²⁹ They leave as the sun rises.

Enter Hypermestra. She has let Lynceus live, but his whereabouts are unknown. Dialogue between the coryphaeus and Hypermestra commences, both horrified by the action of the other.¹³⁰ The Danaids sing of the horrors of love and marriage.

The leader of the bodyguard returns, perhaps with a silent retinue. Battle is won, with the Egyptian army slain or fleeing, but Danaus, slaying Aegyptus, became mortally wounded and is now dead. The crime of Hypermestra in sparing Lynceus becomes the topic. Dialogue commences between Hypermestra and the leader of the bodyguard. Hypermestra is considered guilty and is led out by the supplementary chorus and/or the leader of the bodyguard. The Danaids sing a dirge over of their father, and of the horrors of love and marriage.

Enter Aphrodite in the company of Lynceus. The goddess speaks.¹³¹ She speaks for Zeus. Hypermestra must be acquitted. Her marriage is made legitimate by the intercession of the gods, with Lynceus' rights as next of kin coming into force with Danaus slain. Lynceus is a good man, and is to become king after Danaus, on the condition that he accepts the slaying of

¹²⁸ Aesch. fr. 43 R.

¹²⁹ Aesch. fr. 45 R.

¹³⁰ *P Oxy.* 5160.

¹³¹ Aesch. fr. 44 R.

his father and brothers without demanding further retribution. He is to settle in the land of his ancestral mother and fulfil the fate of the progeny of Io. The Danaids will not be punished, but must accept Aphrodite and marry local men, after the pollution has been cleansed by proper ritual. Children will be the result and the people will flourish. Exit Aphrodite. The Danaids sing about the goddess.

Enter Hypermestra, perhaps followed by a supplementary chorus of Argives, now friendly. Reconciliatory dialogue commences, the Danaids sing with regret of the bloodshed and the loss of their father, but with cautious acceptance of marriage and procreation.¹³²

[161|152]

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¹³² Cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 1060–66.

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Abstract

The Danaid trilogy showcased the *aition* of the birth of the Danaans, the heroic Greeks of epic poetry. In the *Suppliant maidens*, Danaus and his daughters are staged as basically positive characters, in particular through the repeated emphasis on their proper religious conduct, presenting a marked contrast to their adversaries, who are depicted as blasphemous. The action hints at a parallel to the experience from the Persian invasion with its notorious destruction of Greek sanctuaries. The reconstruction of the trilogy should aim for a full redemption in legal and moral terms of the problematic later scenario. A justification of the wedding night slaughter is possible if the Danaids are removed by force from the guardianship of their father, making the marriage illegal, while the latter is allowed to keep his life and freedom, similar to Laërtes in the *Odyssey*.

Keywords: Danaid trilogy, *Supplices*, *Suppliant maidens*, Aetiology, Persian war, Inachids, International relations