Playing the Tyrant: The Representation of Tyranny in Fifth-Century Athenian Tragedy

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Classical Studies in the Graduate School of Duke University

2017
Abstract

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In my dissertation, I trace the depiction of the tyrant-figure in fifth-century Athenian tragedy, and how this figure reflects Athenian changing self-identity over the course of the fifth century. Given the crucial function of tragedy in both Athenian civic display and introspection, the figure of the tyrant was deeply encoded in the matrix of tragedy. The “tyrant” was the most significant referent in the Athenian political imagination, the threatening Other that helped shape Athenian self-identity by inversely defining what values the city should hold.

I consider tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, considering the socio-political context for each playwright’s staging of tyranny. I begin with a reading of Aeschylus’ *Persians*, which stages the Greek victory at Salamis from the Persian point of view. By situating the drama in a foreign court, the tragedy foregrounds the non-democratic aspects of Persian monarchy and society, defining the anti-democratic aspects of the Great King’s court to better articulate Athenian democratic values. The *Prometheus Bound*, similarly distanced from contemporary Athens, takes place under the tyranny of Zeus; by portraying the god as the worst possible instantiation of a hubristic, violent human ruler, Aeschylus performs a *reductio ad absurdum* of tyrannical ideology that would seek to portray the human tyrant as divine.

In Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, by contrast, tyrants embody the ideological strain of the exercise of power that Athens experienced at the head of the Delian League. Both tragedies portray tyrants who, with praiseworthy motives
(and even, at times, with reasonable, democratic rhetoric), struggle under a burden of governance that they cannot sustain. Unlike the Aeschylean Xerxes or Zeus, who are distant, barely-seen figures that loom over their respective tragedies, Oedipus and Creon are the focal-points of their dramas. The tragedies exploit the tension between the Athenian political conception of tyranny, as a totally negative phenomenon opposed to equality and democratic freedom, and an earlier, Panhellenic (insofar as it did not originate in any one polis) conception that casts tyranny in a more equivocal light, as something worthy both of fear and of jealous awe. Invoking both views together, these tragedies problematize the straightforward depiction of tyranny as something wholly good or bad.

Writing in the last decades of the fifth century, during which time Athenian democracy grew increasingly embattled and unpredictable, Euripides’ tragedies collapse the tyranny/democracy dichotomy entirely. In the *Suppliant Women*, Theseus, a monarch, is cast as the robust defender of Athenian democracy, the overseer of a system in which logically he would have no place. While this contradiction is inherent to a traditional formulation of Theseus, the tragedy highlights the incongruity of the situation by imbuing the king’s dialogue with strikingly modern rhetoric, and making him proficient in contemporary sophistic modes of argumentation. Inversely, Euripides repeatedly employs the motif of the “tyrant mob”; in *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the tyrannical power of a quasi-democratic body exerts a terrible influence on events, unyielding to both logic and justice. The weaknesses of democracy, the poisonous power of persuasion and the unthinking nature of collective action are portrayed as the inseparable flip side of its virtues: mass participation and equality of speech.

Behind all three tragedians, the archaic moral conception of the tyrant stands as a model and foil. The traditional traits of tyranny are either reinforced or subverted, embodied in Zeus or given a new ideological charge by their application to collectives.
The figure of the tyrant (both in its political and moral conceptions) is an ideological reference point whose trajectory mirrors that of Athenian democracy itself, from a system predicated on opposition to sole rule and with mechanisms to prevent the consolidation of power to the means by which, by the end of the Peloponnesian War, single individuals wielded undue influence over a polis that itself ruled a significant portion of the Greek world.
Iordani optimae uxorum

Ἰορδάνη ἡ ἀρίστη γυναικών
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Preface

The tyrant occupies a crucial position in the Athenian political imagination. To an Athenian citizen, an inhabitant of a city that relied on public deliberation to make major political decisions, and that intentionally dispersed authority among different bodies and offices, the tyrant was the absolute ideological Other: the individual who forces a singular will upon a collective citizen body, whose whim instantly becomes law and who holds absolute authority over the entire community. The ideological significance of tyranny at Athens is attributable to the unique course of the city’s history. Like many poleis in the archaic period (c. 800–480 BCE), Athens was for a time subject to a tyrannical regime: that of Peisistratus and his sons Hipparchus and Hippias, known collectively as the Peisistratids (564–508). This aligns Athens with other contemporary poleis: with the notable exception of Sparta, whose inhabitants took pride in having been αἰεὶ ἄτυρῷ αναγεννητος, “forever ungoverned by a tyrant” (Thuc.

1. These dates, as with most dates in this chapter, are approximate. Nothing in my argument hinges on an exact chronology.
1.18.1), a period of tyrannical governance is a common element among the histories of many Greek city-states. In one significant respect, however, Athens was unique: until the late sixth century, it too was governed by tyrants, the Peisistratids, but after the expulsion of Hippias, its final tyrant, Athens became and long remained a democracy, converting their anti-tyrannical sentiment into a touchstone of Athenian self-identity. Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the assassins of Hippias’ brother, Hipparchus, were elevated to civic heroes, long remembered in the popular imagination as freedom-loving partisans who contributed greatly to the salvation of the state.

Just as the excesses of King George remain preserved in the American popular consciousness as the cause of the American Revolution and thus of the foundation of the American republic, so the Athenians celebrated the assassination, in 514, of Hipparchus and the subsequent expulsion of Hippias in 508 as the harbingers of Athenian democracy. Furthermore, just as a core component of the republican ideology of the young American state was concerted anti-monarchism, so did anti-tyrannical sentiment remain a major part of the Athenian ideological outlook. Legislation severely penalizing would-be tyrants and tyrant-sympathizers, as well as public oaths to forswear tyrannical action, were an integral part of Athenian governance long after the expulsion of Hippias.

Tyranny—in the most literal sense of the term—never returned to Athens, and, with the exception of two brief oligarchic episodes late in the fifth century, the city maintained a remarkable political stability during a period when many poleis would “oscillate” between different forms of government (Brock and Hodkinson 2000b, 9). Athens’ continued ideological, political and legislative opposition to tyranny

3. E.g. that quoted at Andoc. 1.96–98. Even later was the “Law of Eukrates,” on which see Ostwald (1955). There were, in addition, anti-tyranny laws predating the fifth century: cf. Ath. Pol. 16.10.
belie the regime’s general evanescence in the late sixth century. The end of the Peisistratid regime at Athens represents the end of sustained tyrannical rule on the Greek mainland (White 1955, 1; Raaflaub 2003, 62). Although tyranny had not completely vanished by the late fifth century—it remained a presence on Sicily and in Asia Minor—in Greece proper it became a political non-entity, essentially the relic of a previous age. Even in oligarchic poleis, authority was distributed among different bodies: Corinth, for example, was ruled by an assembly of eighty and an executive council of eight.

Tyranny was the object of both fascination and scorn for archaic poets. Archilochus and Semonides make reference to the power and splendor of tyranny in their verse, whereas Alcman uses “tyrant” as a term of abuse, and Solon, who perhaps declined the opportunity to himself become tyrant of Athens, decries its devastating effects in his verse. As tyranny receded into the past, however, two distinct conceptions of “the tyrant” developed: the word retained a politically-oriented meaning of “sole ruler” and portrayed in an equivocal light a ruler such as might inspire equally terror, admiration and jealous awe. At the same time, the label “tyrant” also acquired a metaphorical usage, inherently negative, that signified the moral faults attributable to cruel and extravagant autocrats. This tyrant was despicable and monstrous, a brutal ruler who lacked the σωφροσύνη, moderation, to control himself, and was thus prone to excess and υβρις. These characteristics in turn invited divine retribution.

It was in Athenian tragedy that the negative depiction of tyranny found its fullest expression. Tyrants and tyranny feature prominently in dramas of all three canonical tragedians: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. This is not surprising given tyranny’s prominence in Athenian political discourse. Tragedy was perhaps the most political of
Athenian art forms. Staged annually, as part of the civic festival of the City Dionysia, before an audience of both citizens and foreign dignitaries, tragedy represented Athens speaking both to itself and to the larger world. It acted as “a demonstration before the city and its many international visitors of the power of the polis of Athens” (Goldhill 1987, 61). Furthermore, it was a democratic medium, insofar as it was part of a public performance that was subsidized by the liturgy of the choregia, the wealth of prominent citizens turned toward civic ends. Tragedy was democratic, too, in that it presented a diversity of voices, giving the right to speak to those who, in reality, would never enjoy it (Burian 2011, 99–100).

But, as Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990) have observed, tragedy does not simply depict, but also calls into question. It highlights the disjunction between the mythic space on stage and the contemporary civic context in which that myth is presented; in doing so it exposes the contradictions inherent in Athenian civic ideology. One such contradiction is embodied by the figure of tyrant, the symbolic foil to the cherished democratic values of the polis. Thucydides’ History depicts how, as Athens grew more powerful, the city’s exercise of power became increasingly “tyrannical,” both domestically and internationally. On the latter front, Athenian naval supremacy led to a suspension of the pretense of primus inter pares relationship with members of the Delian League (P. J. Rhodes 2007, 35), as well as an increasingly reactive military stance, exemplified by the ruthless treatment of Melos in 416. Such behavior evinces several tyrannical traits: with an “obsessive fear of her allies”, Athens sought total control over them, driven by the “anxiety to eliminate all vestiges of opposition or neutrality” (Farrar 1988, 150). The comparison of Athenian power with tyranny

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5. On the choregia generally, see Wilson (2000). The cost could go as high as a half talent (three thousand drachmas), the annual salary of eight Athenian laborers (Harding 2015, 90).


7. See Thuc. 5.84–116.
is made explicit several times by Thucydides: when the Corinthians, in urging war with Athens, compare the city directly with a tyrant (1.122.3), when Pericles admits that the Athenians are in control of a tyranny and should act accordingly (2.63.2), when, during the debate over Mytilene, Creon similarly frames Athenian power (3.37.2) and when Euphemus, the Athenian ambassador to Camarina, notes the similar approaches of empires and tyranny as he characterizes “Athenian political strategy as an assessment of imperial expediency” (Scanlon 1987, 290).

Domestically, as well, Thucydides demonstrates how the δῆμος showed itself to be as capable of tyranny as any individual ruler. After the mutilation of the Herms, Athens was rocked by a paroxysm of fear over the possibility of a tyrannical conspiracy (Thuc. 6.53). Indiscriminately acting on every accusation voiced by informers, they arrested even the most upstanding citizens who fell under suspicion, even subjecting them to torture, an unrestrained emotionality and a modus operandi that could easily be assigned to a tyrant. Even the internal democratic process, the basis of the city’s ideological self-identity, was not as straightforwardly egalitarian as Athenian discourse would suggest (cf. Thuc. 2.65). In this dissertation I argue that the depiction of the tyrant-figure in tragedy reflects this crisis of Athenian ideological self-identity over the course of the fifth century, and that shifts in that self-image are legible in each tragedian’s representation of tyranny. The distinction central to Athens’ self-conception, that between tyranny and democracy, grew increasingly indeterminate as the fifth century wore on, and as this took place, the depiction of the tyrant as a

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8. ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐδ’ ἴμν αὐτοίς βεβαιοῦμεν αὐτῷ, τύραννον δὲ ἐξόμεν ἐγκαθεστάνα πόλιν, τοὺς δ’ ἐν μιᾷ μονάρχῳ βεβαιοῦμεν καταλύειν.
9. ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἴδη ἔχετε αὐτῇ, ἤ ἐνακούειν ἢν ἐκεῖνον δικαίως ἄκοιν ἃς ἐπικαίνενον.
10. οὐ σκοποῦντες ὧ ν τυραννίδα ἔχετε τὴν ἄρχην καὶ πρὸς ἐπιβουλεύοντας αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀκοντας ἄρχομένους...
11. ζηλοὶ δὲ τυφλοὶ τοῦ μόνον ἐν ἔχοισας οὐδὲν ἔλεγον ὅτι ἐξαιρέον οὐδ’ ἴσον ἢ τὴ μὴ πιστὸν.
straight-forwardly alien Other became increasingly problematic.

In this introductory chapter, I will briefly examine both the historical phenomenon of tyranny and its ideological manifestation, after which I will distinguish between two “models” of tyranny, the Panhellenic and the Athenian, before identifying their specific relationships to tragic tyranny. In the chapters that follow, I will consider the presentation of the tyrant in the dramas of each of the three canonical tragedians.

In the second chapter, I discuss how Aeschylus, the only one of the tragedians to have actually lived under a tyrant, foregrounds the exotic autocracy of the *Persians* in order to depict Athens through opposition, demonstrating what a democratic state is by emphasizing what the tyrant is *not*. The *Prometheus Bound* is a *reductio ad absurdum* of tyrannical rhetoric, taking a common trope, the godlike qualities of a ruler, and using it to depict a ruling Zeus with very human flaws. In the third chapter, I examine Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, and argue that the tragedies indicate the ideological strain that Athens experienced in their exercise of power. Both dramas portray tyrants who, with praiseworthy motives (and even, at times, with reasonable, democratic rhetoric), struggle under a burden of governance that they cannot sustain. Unlike the Aeschylean Xerxes or Zeus, who are distant, barely-seen figures that loom over their respective tragedies, Oedipus and Creon are the focal-points of their dramas. Finally, in my fourth chapter, I argue that Euripides muddies the tyranny/democracy dichotomy almost to the point of collapse. In the *Suppliant Women*, he casts a king, Theseus, as the robust defender of Athenian democracy, the overseer of a system in which logically he would have no place. While this contradiction is inherent to a traditional formulation of Theseus, Euripides highlights the incongruity of the situation by giving the king dialogue shot through with strikingly modern rhetoric and giving him proficiency in contemporary sophistic modes of argumentation. Inversely, Euripides repeatedly employs the motif
of the “tyrant mob”; in *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the tyrannical power of a quasi-democratic body exerts a terrible influence on events, unyielding to both logic and justice. The weaknesses of democracy, the poisonous power of persuasion and the unthinking nature of collective action, are portrayed as the inseparable flip side of its virtues: mass participation and equality of speech.

Behind all these dramas, the tyrant stands as a model and foil. The figure of the tyrant (both in its historical and its ideological instantiations) is a discursive reference point whose use mirrors the arc of Athenian democracy itself: from a system predicated on opposition to one-man rule, sharply distinct from tyranny, to, by the end of the fifth century, a political system that enabled single individuals to exercise power over a polis that itself held sway over a significant portion of the Greek world. The tyrant, too, shifts, from opposite to analogue.

**Tyranny as History**

*Attempting a Definition*

In spite of the word’s strong associations, tyranny is surprisingly difficult to define. There was no single standard definition of the term, and the rulers who are routinely described as “tyrants” do not necessarily share many traits in common. One productive place to begin an attempt at a definition is with Thucydides’ description of the rise of tyranny in Greece:

Δυνατωτέρας δὲ γιγνομένης τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ τῶν χρημάτων τήν κτήσιν ἐτι μᾶλλον ἢ πρότερον ποιομένης τὰ πολλὰ τυραννίδες ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν καθίσταντο, τῶν προσόδων μειζόνων γιγνομένων (πρότερον δὲ ἦσαν ἐπὶ ρήτοις γέρασιν πατρικαὶ βασιλείαι)...

As Greece grew more powerful and its acquisition of wealth became still greater than before, tyrannies were established in many of the cities as their revenues grew greater; earlier there were hereditary monarchies with fixed prerogatives... (1.13)
This “severe compression of history” (Gomme 1945, 1:121) is reducible into component characteristics. Tyranny is here associated with wealth, with the non-hereditary passage of power, and with offices that were unconstrained by “fixed prerogatives.” The passage also clearly distinguishes τὺραννος from βασιλεύς, a divide that in practice proves to be less clear-cut. But even with that clear distinction, the passage overall hangs on an ambiguity. If the participles in the genitive absolute opening phrase, γιγνομένης and ποιουμένης, are understood to be temporal (as I translate them), then Thucydides is indicating that these developments took place roughly contemporaneously. If, however, the participles are taken as causal, then the historian is positing a reason for the rise of tyranny, a different point entirely: “Because Greece grew more powerful and its acquisition of wealth became still greater than before, tyrannies were established…” Still, these criteria, roughly defined—wealth, usurpation and constitutional “flexibility”—have persisted in being understood as the defining features of tyranny as a system of governance, and have become the basis for the generally accepted definition of tyranny. But the difference can be fuzzy: Christine Yerly (1992, 6–7) provides a summary of the archaic literature highlighting the semantic proximity of τὺραννος and βασιλεύς. Victor Parker (1998) argues that the Greek tyrants were, for the most part, merely kings by another name, which is “how they presented themselves, as writers of non-Attic background saw them even down to the fourth century, and as their subjects in all probability thought of them” (172). G. Anderson (2005) concurs, finding no meaningful distinction between

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13. For another ancient description of these early kings, i.e. those with “fixed prerogatives” see Arist. Pol. 1285b.

14. Hornblower (1991, 41) briefly explores this crux, but does not make a determination either way.

15. E.g. Andrewes (1963, 7); Finley (1981, 102–5); Ehrenberg (2011, 19); Jeffery (1976, 46); Snodgrass (1980, 96); O. Murray (1993, 137) and Martin (2013, 91). G. Anderson (2005, 4) notes that this consensus dates back as far as Drummann’s De Tyrannis Graecorum, published in 1812.

16. As that quote would suggest, Parker (1998) further argues that because in Attica (unlike other parts of Greece) a long stretch of time separated those rulers who called themselves “kings” from
τύραννοι and other types of Greek rulers. It was only with the rise of civic-minded individualism at the start of the Classical period, he contends, and the concomitant loss of influence of strong aristocratic sole rulers within a political community, that the term τύραννος began to retrospectively take on autocratic overtones.17 As S. Lewis (2006a) observes, “the more various ancient kingship is seen to be, the less distinct its boundary with tyranny appears” (13).

Historical Tyranny

Etymology and Chronology

Tyranny, as a Greek concept, began outside Greece, in Lydia, a western Anatolian kingdom, with the seventh-century ruler Gyges (r. 680–45).18 As the common point of reference for both the historical phenomenon and the ideological construct of tyranny in the Greek mind, he is the “paradigmatic tyrant” (von Reden 1997, 170): the fragment of Archilochus naming him includes the first attestation of τύραννος, and is the source of many of the associations that would adhere to tyranny for centuries.19 That said, I will consider these two facets of tyranny—the historical and the ideological—as distinct, though interrelated, phenomena. To that end, I will here provide a brief historical overview of tyranny as a form of government before, in the following section, examining tyranny as a cultural construct.

The word τύραννος was brought into Greek from Lydian, a Near Eastern language of the Hittite-Luwian family. In inscriptions at the Lydian site now called Kula, τύραννος appears appended to the names of Zeus and the Phrygian lunar god Men, those who called themselves “tyrants,” the Athenian vocabulary is unique in making differentiating so sharply between βασιλεύς and τύραννος (Parker 1998, 169).

17. This is the conclusion, too, of Daniel Ogden (1997, 148–51) and Lynette Mitchell (2013).
18. For these dates, and for other aspects of his reign, see Hanfmann (1983).
19. See below on p. 21.
with the sense of “master” or “lord” (Radet 1893, 147). Although its complete linguistic
background will likely “remain tantalizingly shrouded in darkness” (Parker 1998, 145),
its etymology is not obscure for lack of effort: the question has been addressed by a
number of scholars within the last century.20 Georges Radet (1893, 146–48) draws
connections between τύραννος and the Lydian word for “fort” or “castle,” which itself
is a cognate of the Greek τύρας and the Latin turris. Dolores Hegyi (1965, 314–
18) back-constructs hypothetical earlier forms of τύραννος in an attempt to discern
its Luwian roots, but cannot entirely reconcile such forms with the phonology of
the Greek. Victor Parker (1998, 145–49) reviews these earlier studies and rejects
them, concluding that the search for Anatolian cognates of τύραννος, and thus for its
etymology, is “a hopeless task” (149).

There is comparably more clarity in the word’s chronology. The word τύραννος,
it was noted in antiquity, does not appear in Homer and Hesiod,21 providing a
rough terminus post quem for its introduction into Greek. Herodotus, conveniently,
mentions that Archilochus was a contemporary of Gyges (1.12).22 This would place
the introduction of τύραννος into Greek somewhere “in the middle third of the seventh
century” (Jacoby 1941, 101).

The historicity of Gyges not in doubt: Greek sources are supported by Lydian
archaeological evidence, as well as Assyrian documents recording that “King Gugu of
Ludu” sent embassies to Nineveh. Even so, it is problematic to call him a real-life
“tyrant,” since there is no contemporary Near Eastern (that is to say, non-Greek)
evidence for the label being applied to him.23 And yet in the Greek imagination

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20. I pass over the etymology posited in the Suda (s.v. τύραννος) linking “tyrant” with the
Tyrrenians, on account of their cruelty.
21. Suda (s.v. τύραννος); FGRH 6, fr. 6 = Argumentum Oedipodis Regis
22. For more on Archilochus’ chronology, see Rankin (1977, 10–36), Kivilo (2010, 111–15) and
23. On the historicity of Gyges, see Mellink (1991) and Hanffmann (1983). While Drews (1972,
Gyges stands at the head of the tyrant tradition. Later accounts of him and his reign, though often fantastical, contain elements that serve to thematically classify him as a tyrant.\textsuperscript{24}

Gyges is a significant figure for another reason: coinage. Herodotus (1.94) makes the assertion,\textsuperscript{25} which archaeological research has borne out, that Gyges was the first (or at least among the earliest) ruler to mint his own coins for widespread circulation.\textsuperscript{26} Lydian coinage, made of electrum, a naturally-occurring alloy in Lydia, remained a standard currency throughout Asia Minor until c. 600 (Greaves 2010, 86). Not only did the advent of coinage have widespread economic effects, it has been seen as intrinsic to the Greek phenomenon of tyranny.\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{The “Age of Tyrants”}

Two factors make the fine parsing of the historical record on Greek tyranny exceedingly difficult: that there was no contemporary definition of τύραννος, and that the word acquired such negative associations in the following centuries that those rulers known as “tyrants” were often vilified in retrospect. This latter point is especially true in anti-tyrannical Athens, the source of the overwhelming majority of extant literary evidence, such that sifting through later fiction to find contemporary fact becomes a complicated task. H. W. Pleket (1969) states the problem concisely:

\begin{quote}
The historian of the archaic period is...less handicapped by the scarcity of sources in general...than by the lack of contemporary sources. The
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{137} marshals convincing evidence to suggest that Lydians did not regard Gyges’ reign as legitimate, and that later Greek sources referred to him as a τύραννος rather than a βασιλεύς, it does not follow that his Lydian subjects thought of him as such.

\textsuperscript{24} For the Greek and Latin accounts on Gyges, see Pedley (1972, 18–22).

\textsuperscript{25} [Λυδο`ι] πρ῀ ωτοι δ` ε ᾿ ανθρ ΄ ωπων τ῀ ων ῾ ημε῀ ις ῎ ιδμεν ν΄ ομισμα χρυσο῀ υ κα`ι ᾿ αργ˚ υρου κοψ˚ αμενοι ᾿ εχρ˚ ησαντο

\textsuperscript{26} See Shell (1979, 11–62) and Kagan (1982).

\textsuperscript{27} See below on p. 32.
sources we have for a study of the Greek tyrants are to a high degree—if not completely—colored by the undeniable aversion to the tyrant in later, more democratic times...We really know extremely little about the contemporary reaction to the phenomenon of the tyrant, and such information as we have generally comes from biassed sources.\(^{28}\) (Pleket 1969, 19–20)

More recently, Robin Lane Fox (2000) remarked that early tyranny is “one of Greek history’s most challenging black holes” (38). Even applying the term τύραννος to a given historical figure is problematic. Consider the case of Pittacus, who ruled Mytilene from 586–579: Alcaeus labels him a τύραννος (fr. 163 LGS), but Aristotle refers to him as an αἰσιμνήτης, an obscure title of authority that the philosopher understands to be an elected tyrant (\textit{Pol.} 1285a30–37), whereas a Mytilenean popular song quoted by Plutarch calls him a βασιλεύς (\textit{Conv. sept. sap.} 14).\(^{29}\) Is the appellation τύραννος nothing more than a political label, a “propaganda-slogan” (Pleket 1969, 21)?

What can uncontroversially be said is that, between the middle of the seventh and the end of the sixth centuries, many Greek \textit{poleis} fell under one-man rule. There is contemporary evidence for some of these rulers being called τύραννοι, but none indicating that they themselves used the label. The term entered Greek as an equivocal designation, sometimes as an anodyne synonym for βασιλεύς, sometimes used with more opprobrium, but by the fourth century the more negative usage had eclipsed the neutral one.

\(^{28}\) Pleket further notes the equally strong—if not stronger—bias that the contemporary social and political situation can exert on a historian. He points to a 1946 article by Dutch scholar J. H. Thiel, who wrongly disputed a remark Plutarch attributed to Solon that seemed to cast tyranny in a positive light. “In 1946 the hate of the Germanic tyrant was so great that Solon simply had to be considered an arch-democrat who could never have said anything favorable or amusing about the tyrannis” (Pleket 1969, 22n12).

\(^{29}\) For a thorough discussion of Aristotle’s classification of Pittacus, see Romer (1982).

\(^{30}\) On this question, see White (1955, 2); Andrewes (1963, 22–23) and, more recently, Salmon (1997).
Accounts of τύραννοι, such as those in Herodotus, often depict rulers with similar traits.\textsuperscript{31} Typically, if they did not inherit a throne, they seized power through violence or trickery. Their reigns are sometimes portrayed as harsh or extreme. They acquired the reputation of extravagance, one which is strengthened by the large building projects that many tyrants undertook in their cities.\textsuperscript{32} Other than generalities such as these, however, very little can be said about tyrants as a class of ruler.\textsuperscript{33} By necessity, observations about archaic tyranny must be based primarily on the several rulers about whom any amount of information has been preserved. Among these are Pheidon of Argos, the Cypselid tyrants of Corinth, the Orthagorids of Sicyon, and the Peisistratids of Athens.

The uncertainty in the accounts of tyrants—and its implications for a broader understanding of tyranny—is evinced by the current picture of Pheidon, the tyrant of Argos who is generally considered to be among the earliest of the Greek tyrants (Köiv 2003, 239). Herodotus, the earliest source for the ruler, mentions him only in passing, identifying him as a tyrant and the one who “established weights and measures for the Peloponnesians and was the most hubristic of all the Greeks” (6.127.3).\textsuperscript{34} Aristotle cites Pheidon as an example of a ruler who became a tyrant already possessing royal authority (\textit{Pol}. 1310b28–32).\textsuperscript{35} Aristotle also, in his lost \textit{Constitution of the Argives}, mentioned Pheidonian measures, which were apparently the standard units of weight at that time (\textit{Ath. Pol}. 10.2).

\begin{quote}
Ephorus (as preserved in Strabo) (\textit{FGrH} 70 F 115 = Strab. VIII 358) provides the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} On specifically Greek tyrants in Herodotus, see Waters (1972, 5–13) and Dewald (2003, 40–77).
\textsuperscript{32} On this point, see P. H. Young (1980).
\textsuperscript{33} If indeed they were a class. See below.
\textsuperscript{34} Φείδωνος δὲ τοῦ τὰ μέτρα ποιῆσαντος Πελοποννησίων καὶ ύβρίσαντος μέγιστα δὴ Ἑλλήνων πάντων
\textsuperscript{35} εἰ μόνον βουλήθητεν, διὰ τὸ δύναμιν προσεκάκισαν τοὺς μὲν βασιλικὰς ἀρχὰς τοὺς δὲ τὴν τῆς τιμῆς· οἷον Φείδων μὲν περὶ Ἀργοῦ καὶ ἔτεροι τύραννοι κατέστησαν βασιλείας ὑπαρχούσης...
lengthiest account, naming Pheidon as the tenth-generation descendant of Temenus (and thus also a descendant of Heracles) who “surpassed his contemporaries in strength.” He recounts his conquest of the majority of the Peloponnese, which he frames as the restoration of ancestrally-held territory. Pheidon was infamous for assisting the Pisatans in expelling the Eleans from Olympia and presiding over the Olympic games himself, an act of presumption that violated not only customary but also religious practice. This outrage caused the Eleians to take up arms against him and, with Spartan cooperation, defeat him. Ephorus also claims that Pheidon was the first to mint silver coins, which he produced at Aegina. Nicolaus of Damascus (FGrH 90 F 35) relates the death of Pheidon in civil strife at Corinth. Pausanias (6.22.2) provides the date of Pheidon’s Olympic intervention: the eighth Olympics, of 748 BCE. Although various literary sources provide wildly divergent dates for his reign, the archaeological record strongly suggests an eighth century date for the ruler, given the growth of Argos, the high quality of grave goods and the clear influence of Argive pottery and metal casting throughout the Peloponnese (including at Olympia) during the Late Geometric period (760–700 BCE) as compared to the relative poverty of finds from the seventh century (Coldstream 2003, 132–35).

What can be ascertained from this evidence, the earliest of which is from several centuries after his death? Herodotus calls Pheidon a tyrant, and his ascription of ὕβρις strengthens that characterization. Aristotle also calls him a tyrant, but specifies that he was already a king before he became tyrant. Ephorus’ account

36. δυνόμει δ’ ὑπερβεβλημένον τοὺς κατ’ αὐτόν.
37. It is to this, I believe, that Herodotus is referring when he calls him ὑβρίσαντος.
38. As Kōiv (2003, 241) observes, however, Nicolaus appears to have worked from Ephorus; their accounts are in such agreement that a common source is extremely likely.
39. On the problematic dating of Pheidon, see Kelly (1976, 96–111) and Shaw (2003, 92f.).
40. I omit from the discussion the account at Plut. Mor. 772d–773b, in which Pheidon is portrayed as a mythical evil tyrant as a catalyst for the love story of Archias and Actaeon, and in which he is ultimately incidental to the action.
uses mythological genealogy to justify a real series of military actions, and also gives Pheidon credit for Greek coinage, which is an impossibility.\(^{41}\) We are left with the impression of an aggressive, expansionist ruler—probably hereditary—who exerted military power throughout the Peloponnese at a time of great prosperity for his city. Whatever motivates Aristotle labelling him a \(τ´υραννος\), whether a reflection of an aspect of his governance, a specific policy, or perhaps his seizure of Olympia, cannot be known with certainty.\(^{42}\)

Different complexities present themselves in the account of Cypselus, the tyrant of Corinth, whose dates are comparatively more certain.\(^{43}\) He came to power in a \textit{coup d’état} c. 655, deposing the city’s aristocratic governing dynasty, the long-ruling Bacchiads. He ruled Corinth until c. 627, when he was succeeded by his son Periander, who in turn ruled until c. 587. Having no sons, the tyranny passed to Periander’s nephew, Psammetichus, who ruled for about three years until he was assassinated (Arist. \textit{Pol.} 1315b26), at which point the tyranny came to an end. The two primary extant sources for Cypselus are Herodotus and Nicolaus of Damascus (which, again, is to say Ephorus), and these two depictions of his reign differ greatly from each other.

Herodotus’ account of the Cypselids (3.48–53, 5.92) is not a direct part of the overarching narrative of the text. In book 3, it is within a historical digression on the history of the relationship between Corinth and Samos, and in book 5 it forms part of a speech, set in 504, by the Corinthian Socles, who is arguing against the Spartan proposal to re-establish the Peisistratids at Athens so as to check their growing power.

\(^{41}\) This belief may, however, be a misunderstanding of Pheidonian weights. See Kraay (1988, 432ff.) and Köiv (2003, 287–94).

\(^{42}\) Köiv (2003, 242) observes that both Herodotus and Aristotle knew much more about Pheidon than they report in our sources, but either because of relevance or the assumption that such information was already well-known, they did not choose to elaborate on Pheidon and his reign. Herodotus’ use of the term \(τ´υραννος\) can be taken with a grain of salt, given his tendency to use it interchangeably with \(βασιλε´υς\).

\(^{43}\) On the chronology of the Cypselids, see Mosshammer (1979, 234–45).
Socles points to the suffering of his own city as an object lesson in the dire nature of tyranny, and why it should never be inflicted on any polis. This framing is thus anti-tyrannical, and Cypselus, whose early life and accession are recounted by Socles, is accordingly portrayed in a highly negative light.\textsuperscript{44}

Yet it is, perhaps, surprising how Herodotus presents Cypselus’ birth and childhood. The tale is told of Cypselus’ mother, the Bacchiad Labda, born with a birth defect. On account of her deformity, she is married to the commoner Eetion. When Eetion travels to Delphi to ask the oracle if he will ever have children, he is given the response:

\begin{quote}
\’Ηετ´ιων, οὕτις σε τίει πολύτιτον ἐόντα.
Λάβδα κύιει, τέξει δ’ ὁλοστρόχον: ἐν δὲ πεσέται
ἀνδράσι μουνάρχουσι, δικαιώσει δὲ Κόρινθον.
\end{quote}

Eetion, though you are worthy of honor, nobody honors you.
Labda is pregnant, and she will birth a boulder that will fall on the rulers, and will set Corinth aright. (5.92β.2)

These words reached the Bacchiads who grew fearful when they connected them with the prophecy they had received earlier:

\begin{quote}
αἰετός ἐν πέτρῃσι κύιει, τέξει δὲ λέοντα
χαρτέρων ὁμηρήν: πολλῶν δ’ ύπο γούνατα λύσει.
ταύτα νυν εὐ φράζεσθε, Κορινθιοί, οἱ περὶ καλὴν
Πειρήνην οἰκεῖτε καὶ ὕψρμόντα Κόρινθον.
\end{quote}

An eagle conceives in a rocky place, and will bear a lion, Savage and strong. It will loosen the knees of many.
Consider this well, Corinthians: you who inhabit the crags of Corinth, by the lovely Pirene fountain. (5.92β.3)

What follows is a familiar mythic pattern: after Labda gives birth, the Bacchiads dispatch servants to kill Cypselus, but the hirelings cannot bring themselves to murder a baby. When they steel their resolve, Labda hides her son in a chest to avoid detection, and the servants decide to simply tell their masters that the job had been

\textsuperscript{44}Interestingly, Periander is portrayed positively at 1.20–24.
done. Cypselus (named thus because of the salvific chest, a κυψέλη), of course, grows up and overthrows the Bacchiads. Herodotus relates one more prophecy, which was supposedly delivered to Cypselus before his attempt on Corinth:

ὦλβιος οὕτως ἀνήρ ὃς ἐμὸν δόμον ἔσκαταβαίνει,
Κύψελος Ὑπηδῆς, βασιλεὺς κλειτοῦ Κορινθοῦ
αὕτως καὶ παῖδες, παῖδων γε μὲν οὐκέτι παῖδες.

Happy is the man who enters my house,
Cypselus, son of Eetion, king of famous Corinth:
Happy this man and his sons, but his children’s children no more. (5.92ε.2)

Little is said about the Cypselus’ actual reign: only that he drove many into exile, deprived many of their estates, but the most, by far, he deprived of their life (5.92ε.3), and that after thirty years of rule he ended his life content. Herodotus then describes the reign of Periander, whom he depicts far more along the lines of a “typical tyrant” than his father.

But the overall account is curiously structured: with the foregrounding of the mythic elements surrounding the tyrant’s birth, Cypselus is being implicitly compared with Cyrus, whose birth (under very similar attendant circumstances) was already described in the first book. It is, if not an ennobling depiction, at least a sympathetic one, up until the brief account of his actions as tyrant. Given that the framing device, Socles’ speech, is advocating an anti-tyrannical argument, this take on Cypselus is very unexpected.

45. πολλοὺς μὲν Κορινθίων ἔδιωξε, πολλοὺς δὲ χρημάτων ἀπεστήρησε, πολλῷ δὲ τι πλείστους τῆς ψυχῆς.
46. ἀξίζαντος δὲ τοῦτον ἐπὶ τριάκοντα ἔτεα καὶ διαπλέζαντος τῶν βίων εὗ
47. See O. Murray (2001, 30).
48. Andrewes (1963) attempts to excuse this with what he perceived to be Herodotus’ natural simplicity as a writer: “The fairy-tale and the friendly oracles agree very ill with the general tendency of Herodotus’ account, and we can best explain their presence in his text by supposing that they were already traditional elements before his time, and that he took them over without quite noticing how they told against his speaker’s view of Cypselus” (46–47).
The other account of Cypselus’ reign, that of Ephorus, paints a very different picture. Here, Cypselus, as a young man, returned to Corinth, where his natural virtues shone bright in comparison with the violent and arrogant Bacchiads (Nic. Dam. fr. 56, ll. 19–21). He served in the office of polemarch, which he used to gain popular support—and soon enough, “the masses loved him” (ll. 32). Seeing how wretchedly the people were being treated by their leaders, he gathered a group of men together and slew the “lawless” king (l. 44). Throughout the account, Cypselus is depicted as a virtuous champion of the people, a far cry from his characterization in Herodotus.

This alternative view of Cypselus suggests that the view offered in the Histories was not the majority opinion. As Stewart Oost (1972, 20) observes, the very fact that Cypselus ruled for the rest of his life suggests that he was supported by, at minimum, a significant portion of the populace. This appraisal is shared by Aristotle, who refers to the longevity of the Cypselid regime on account of Cypselus being a δημαγωγός and notes that the tyrant regularly dispensed with his bodyguard (Pol. 1315b28). A positive depiction of the tyrant can be obliquely detected in Herodotus’ account; the prophecies that the historian quotes depict Cypselus as a champion of the city, someone who would sweep away the corrupt aristocracy and restore a just state of affairs. The oracles are, in short, shreds of Cypselid propaganda that Herodotus, despite his hostility to the tyrant, has preserved.

Both Cypselus and his son reigned as tyrant for decades. Therefore, as wicked

49. μάλιστα ἐν τῷ πλῆθει ἐστέργετο.

50. The word used to describe the Bacchiad king is παράνομον, which could indicate either “a lawless disposition” or “the state of being unlawful,” which in this context would suggest the illegitimacy of Bacchiad rule. This picture is complicated further by the belief, as at, e.g. Oost (1972, 16), that Cypselus was himself considered a Bacchiad.

51. This was not an uncommon mode of self-presentation by tyrants. See McGlew (1993, 65–67).

52. See the discussion at Parker (2007, 19–20).
as Herodotus paints them, they must have had their partisans. The distortion of Herodotus’ perspective becomes evident when his account is compared to that of Ephorus, and is even belied by some of his own evidence: one man’s tyrant is another man’s civic savior. The uncertainty in the negative depictions of tyrants such as Cypselus demonstrates that tyranny was more ambiguous a phenomenon than its name or reputation would suggest.

The question remains, why did a roughly 150-year period see the accession of numerous tyrants throughout Greece? What caused tyranny to become so widespread—and then attenuate to a fairly marginal form of governance by the early fifth century? A number of explanations have been suggested, and there has been a great temptation to seek a totalizing thesis to explain the phenomenon. The first such explanation was advanced by P. N. Ure (1922), who looked to the the effects of the advent of coinage in Greek society. He observed that successful tyrants “owed their position as tyrants to a financial or commercial supremacy which they had already established” before attaining power. In other words: “the tyrants were one and all first-class businessmen” (301). Using their wealth, in the novel form of easily-distributable coinage, these savvy tyrants were able to foment and exploit civil conflicts in order to gain authority, and then, once in power, could fund mercenaries to help keep it.

The link between tyranny and economic development is an important one, but Ure’s specific approach has been dismissed. If a proximate economic cause should be advanced for tyranny, a far more fruitful one would be the “agrarian crisis” of the late seventh and early sixth centuries, and the interrelation between tyranny and money is far more thoroughly and rigorously articulated by Richard Seaford later in

53. His insistence on universalizing his thesis, applying the same capitalist mechanism to the roughly contemporary consolidations of power by the Mermnads in Lydia, the Saite dynasty in Egypt and the Tarquins in Rome, and explicitly analogizing tyrants to the the great merchant families of Renaissance Italy, dilutes the force of his argument to almost nothing.

the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{55}

Another influential thesis, first advocated by Martin Nilsson (1929), looks to the advent of hoplite warfare for the sudden growth of tyranny.\textsuperscript{56} Although hoplites were an important tool of archaic tyrants, and in that respect connected with the rise of tyranny, the chronology of military development is too uncertain, and questions of the class composition and political allegiance of the hoplite army too substantial for it to stand as an explanation.\textsuperscript{57}

Another idea, which finds roots in Aristotle (\textit{Pol.} 1310b), sees \textit{τψφχνωι} as revolutionaries who harnessed popular discontent at aristocratic governance to propel themselves into power at the expense of the old elites, e.g. Herodotus’ account of Cypselus’ accession.\textsuperscript{58} While making intuitive sense, this theory fails to take into account the attitudes and actions of tyrants after taking power. Once they wielded authority, they acted very much like the aristocracy that they displaced: “their \textit{megaloprepeia}, their carefully cultivated links with Delphi and Olympia, and their extensive networks of influential connections all strongly suggest that they wished to be measured by the very same standards as other elite leaders” (G. Anderson 2003, 196). Further muddying the waters is the question of whether tyrants were even outside of the pre-existing aristocratic social networks. Cypselus, for example, as Oost (1972) demonstrates, was almost certainly a member of the Bacchiad family that he “deposed,” which suggests the general unreliability of so many aspects of received information on tyrants.

\textsuperscript{55}See p. 32 below.
\textsuperscript{56}See, e.g. Andrewes (1963, 31–42), Snodgrass (1965), Forrest (1966, 31–42) and Drews (1972, 140–43).
\textsuperscript{57}See the thorough discussion of Salmon (1977), as well as G. Anderson (2003, 195n61).
Tyranny as Ideology

While many aspects of the historical phenomenon of tyranny remain unknown, the cultural imprint that tyranny left in the collective Greek consciousness is a fruitful topic. Following Lowell Edmunds (2002), I believe that there are two distinct such imprints, which I will refer to as “models.” There was, on the one hand, a broadly Panhellenic model, that regarded tyranny as an object of fascination—albeit a dangerous one. The other model was localized at Athens, whose anti-tyrannical ideology supported a model of the tyrant as an uncontrollable, depraved monster. In this section, I examine the quintessential Archaic expression of these models in the verse of Archilochus and of Solon, respectively. Through a close reading of these poets, I will highlight how tyranny was, from the seventh century onward, associated with excess: in terms of material wealth, of political power and of the passions of the tyrant himself. But the Panhellenic and the Athenian models of tyranny depict this idea of excess differently. Concomitantly, I will emphasize how Archaic thought considers the effect that tyranny has on the people around the tyrant, both as subjects and as onlookers.

Archilochus

The poetic fragment that stands as the introduction of the word τύραννος into the Greek language establishes associations that would persist in the Hellenic perception of tyranny for centuries. As discussed above, on p. 9, the term appears in reference to Gyges:

οὐ μοι τὰ Γύγεω τοῦ πολυχρόσου μέλει,
oū μοι τὰ Γύγεω τοῦ πολυχρόσου μέλει,
oūδ’ εἶλε πώ με ζῆλος, οὐδ’ ἀγάλμαι
οὐδ’ εἴλε πώ με ζῆλος, οὐδ’ ἀγάλμαι
θεϊν ἔργα, μεγάλης δ’ οὕχ ἔρεω τυραννίδος·
thεϊν ἔργα, μεγάλης δ’ οὕχ ἔρεω τυραννίδος·
ἀπόπροθεν γὰρ ἔστιν ὀφθαλμὸν ἐμῶν.

The things of gold-rich Gyges are no concern of mine,
has jealousy seized me, nor do I envy
works of the gods, nor do I love a great tyranny:
for these things are far from my eyes. (Fr. 19 West)

It is fitting that the first use of the term in Greek was to describe a Lydian monarch, given the Lydian roots of τυραννίς and its cognates.\(^{59}\) The lines have been preserved in quotations by Aristotle and Plutarch, and although their fragmentary nature obscures their original context, the circumstances of their later citation provide some further information on the parts of the poem no longer extant. Aristotle, at Rhet. 1418b, refers to the lines as part of a discussion of moral character (ἠθος), noting that certain statements should not be written in propria persona but rather attributed to another speaker, lest they invite accusations of abuse or ill-breeding (λοιδορίαν ἢ ἀγροικίαν). He states that the poem, which he calls a lampoon (ἳμαθιον), was written in the persona of a carpenter named Charon. Presumably the remainder of the poem included the uncouth sentiments which Aristotle mentions, reconstructed by Hermann Fränkel (1975) as: “But when I see So-and-So pass me in the pride and power of dirtily gained money, then all I want is to throw my axe at his head” (138).

Plutarch quotes the same lines approvingly in De tranquilitate animi, in which he situates them in the context of the ever-present human desire to envy the more fortunate, no matter one’s present well-being: "οὕτως ἀεὶ τῶν ὑπὲρ ἐκατοντὸς ἐνδεβίς ὄντες οὐδέποτε τοῖς καθ᾽ ἐκατούρθες ἡμᾶς ἐξουσίες, "thus always in want of the things above them, people are never thankful for what’s appropriate to their standing” (De tranq. 10). Plutarch cites “Charon” as someone who, content with his lowly stature, is worthy of emulation.\(^{60}\)

\(^{59}\) Archilochus uses τυραννίς, not τύραννος, but Parker (1998) finds no “connotational distinction” (151n21) between the two words. On the possible Lydian origins of tyranny, see p. 9 above.

\(^{60}\) However, Plutarch immediately follows the quotation with the imagined objection Θάσιος γὰρ ἦν ἐκεῖνος, “But he was a Thasian,” as if the speaker’s origins had some bearing on his outlook. The remark indicates that Plutarch was unaware that Archilochus, who emigrated to Thasos, was not
The structure of the fragment strongly suggests that the larger poem was in a priamelic form, but, unfortunately, the quotation omits whatever the speaker intends to contrast with the specified foils. Fränkel (1975, 138), much like Plutarch, sees the lines as a repudiation of Gyges’ awe-inspiring wealth, noting that as early as the *Iliad* (3.60f) the carpenter was “the stock example of an industrious man.” Anne Pippin Burnett (1983, 67), on the other hand, sees Aristotle’s references to the abusive nature of the verse as an indication that the poet used Charon as a mouthpiece for some explicit, “extremely shocking” conclusion to the poem: “By speaking as Charon, Archilochus said to his audience: This is the kind of song that one pretends to disown!” Since the exact nature of the speaking persona cannot be determined with certainty, however, the question need not overly affect a reading of the fragment.

Below, I will focus on the concepts with which Gyges and his tyranny are associated in the fragment. These are, in order of appearance: vast wealth, a notional proximity to the divine, the awe-struck reaction such prosperity would engender in an onlooker, and the manifestly erotic appeal that such grandeur projected. These attributes would long endure as associations with tyranny. I would also note that, while the speaker in the fragment renounces tyrannical power, the poem is not a condemnation of such power per se. The passage may indeed be a “disavowal of tyranny” (Munn 2006, 113), but it is a personal disavowal, not a universal condemnation. In spite of its renunciatory tenor, the fragment makes the potential attractions of tyranny quite clear.

Speaking *in propria persona*. Indeed, H. N. Fowler (1890, 144) concludes that Plutarch did not read the lines in their original context but rather took them, already excerpted, from an anthology.

61. See Race (1982, 56). Burnett (1983, 65–67), comparing the fragment with the explicitly erotic Archilochean fr. 25W, assumes that 19W similarly “parodied the priamel,” but given the absence of a final item in the list, it is only an assumption.
The adjective πολυχρύσος (l. 1) has specific connotations of opulence and splendor, especially with regard to the wealth of a ruler and the city over which he rules. Such connotations are especially evident in its Homeric usage as part of a stock phrase, πολυχρύσου Μυκήνης (Il. 7.180, 11.46; Od. 3.305). It is likely that the formula was of long standing, “created when the wealth of Mycenae existed or was remembered” (Hainsworth 1993, 223). The epithet is also used in reference to two other proverbially rich cities in Homer: Troy at Il. 18.289, and Delphi at 9.404–5.

However, πολυχρύσος has other connotations, which have less to do with wealth than with magnificence—specifically divine magnificence. The word is a regular Hesiodic epithet of Aphrodite (Op. 521; Th. 980; Sc. 8, 47; frr. 185.17, 253.3) as well as in the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite at ll. 1 and 9. Deborah Boedeker (1974), surveying the Homeric instances of πολυχρύσος, rightly distinguishes the adjective’s distinct overtones when used as an epithet of Aphrodite, remarking that “‘wealthy Aphrodite’ has nothing to do with the goddess as she is characterized in epic poetry. Rather, πολυχρύσος as applied to Aphrodite refers to her shining beauty, and depends for its meaning on her distinctive fixed epithet χρυσή” (26). The conceit behind “golden Aphrodite” is not wealth but visual splendor. Barbara Breitenberger (2007, 126) posits that the poetic association between Aphrodite and golden radiance is notionally connected by golden cult-statues of the goddess.

Describing Gyges as πολυχρύσος, then, goes far beyond merely calling him “very

62. Sophocles employs the phrase ironically at El. 9, contrasting it with πολύφθορόν...δῶμαι in the following line.
63. It is also used to describe Delphi or its precincts at Pind. Ol. 6.8, Soph. OT 152a–b and Eur. IT 1275.
64. See Faulkner (2008, 74–75).
65. Boedeker (1974, 22) convincingly suggests a relationship between the descriptor χρυσή and the etymological root of the goddess’ name, Ἀφρο-δίτη, “bright cloud.”
wealthy,” but rather places him on a par with the wealthiest monarchs in the archaic Greek world, and suggests that such opulence imparts to him a numinous allure. Later instances of πολυχρύσος, perhaps following Archilochus’ usage here, carry the suggestion of “eastern luxury” (Kyriakou 2006, 405). Pindar employs the word in this sense (Pyth. 9.69), and Aeschylus will exploit and strengthen that association in the Persians by repeatedly using the adjective to describe the splendor of both the Persian palace and the Persian army.

 amet

Archilochus’ use of the verb ἀγαίομαι in 1. 2 raises interesting questions. As the line is usually translated, the two clauses in the second line essentially restate the same idea, a repetition reinforced by its οὐδ’...οὐδ’ structure: οὐδ’ ἔλειχε πώ μὲ ζῆλος, οὐδ’ ἀγαίομαι / ἅγαῖον ἔργα, “nor has jealousy ever seized me, nor do I envy / works of the gods...” This is not an intuitively incorrect translation given the renunciatory tenor of the lines as a whole, and such a reading is supported by the LSJ, which cites Archilochus’ use of the word in this fragment under the definition “to look on with jealousy or envy” (s.v. ἀγαίομαι I.1). But is the speaker simply repeating himself so as to reiterate and intensify the sense of jealousy?

The word ἀγαίομαι, an Ionic variant of ἀγαμα, covers a very broad semantic range. As Peter Samaras (1997) has demonstrated, a consideration of the verb’s roots and its use in the Homeric corpus contributes to a finer understanding of the word’s use

66. Gold, in particular, as form of wealth has connotations of the divine. Poulheria Kyriakou (2006, 405), commenting on Eur. IT 1275, suggests that “all things belonging to gods could be imagined to be of gold,” and Nan Dunbar (1995, 207) notes that, with one late exception, all “χρυσο- compounds describing personal attributes are reserved for divine beings.”

67. Thus, e.g. Barbara Hughes Fowler (1992): “I’m not jealous of him. I don’t envy / the deeds of the gods...” (49) The version of M. L. West (1994) is more nuanced: “I’ve never been prey to envy, I don’t marvel / at heavenly things...” (9)
by Archilochus, and reveals important nuances of the speaker’s reaction to tyranny. “To be jealous” is one translation of the verb, among several possible alternatives. The fullest meaning of ἀγαμαι is to experience, in Raymond Prier’s formulation, “a startled and immediate reaction to some experience of sight,” (1989, 78) be it a positive reaction—awe—or a negative one—anger, envy, or “negative wonder.” It is used throughout the Homeric corpus, and a brief overview of its usage therein will give a sense of the breadth of the word’s possible meanings.

At *Il.* 3.181, during the *teichoscopia* episode, Priam “marvels” at the noble appearance of Agamemnon (τὸν δ’ ὁ γέρων ἡγάσσατο). Similarly, at *Od.* 16.203, Odysseus reveals his homecoming to Telemachus and tells his son not to “wonder too greatly or be amazed” at his presence back at Ithaca (οὔτε τι θαυμᾶζειν περιώςιον οὔτ’ ἀγάσσαι), using ἀγάσσαι synonymously with θαυμᾶζειν.

The phrase μῦθον ἀγασσάμενοι appears six times in the *Iliad* (7.404; 8.29; 9.51, 431, 694 and 711), each time describing the reaction of a group of listeners to a speaker’s words. It is generally positive, suggesting the listeners’ awe at a striking speech, but at *Il.* 9.431 the phrase is used to describe the response of Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix after Agamemnon vows to sail back to Greece: a stunned silence, not the quiet awe of appreciation. Further, the phrase μῦθον ἀγασσάμενοι is twice followed, as an explanation for such a reaction, by a formulaic μῦλα γὰρ κρατερῶς ἀγόρευσεν, “for he spoke very vehemently.” In the instance at 9.431, however, it is followed by μῦλα γὰρ κρατερῶς ἀπέειπεν, “for he refused very vehemently.” The breadth of possible meanings of ἀγαμα is suggested by the same participial phrase applying to two wholly opposite situations.

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69. Interestingly, while the phrase is mostly used in situations of Greeks speaking among themselves, at *Il.* 8.29 it is applied to the Olympians’ reaction to a speech by Zeus.

70. At 8.29 and 9.694.
The verb, as its use in the Archilochus fragment suggests, has negative connotations as well. It is used by Diomedes (Il. 14.111–12) when he prefaces an address to the Greek chieftains not to begrudge him the right to speak on account of his young age. This sense of “begrudging” is perceptible, too, in Calypso’s repeated use of the verb in Od. 5. As she bitterly rebukes Hermes, who has been sent to force her to free Odysseus, she expounds upon the injustice of the situation, three times using the verb to emphasize the hypocrisy of the gods’ jealousy over goddesses’ intimate relations with mortal men (5.119, 122 and 129). The verb can also express divine wrath, without any overtones of jealousy, as at Od. 8.565 and 13.173, where it is used in reference to Poseidon’s anger towards the Phaeacians.

“The common point of focus of the wonder of gods and men is clearly, then, an ‘amazing deed.’ It is the ergon toward which their ‘lines’ of sight-wonder are directed...” (Prier 1989, 79). Indeed, three times in the Odyssey (2.67, 20.16 and 23.64) the verb is used with κακ’ α ᾑ εργα, the suitors’ impious actions, as its subject. Those instances dovetail nicely with the Archilochean usage, directed at θε῀ ων ᾑ εργα.

How, then, are we to read Archilochus’ usage of the verb here? Is he expressing amazement and admiration, or jealousy, or anger? The potential for all three reactions is inherent in the verb itself. Pierre Chantraine (1999) provides, I believe, some important context: “Avec un complément de personne au datif et parfois un complément à l’accusatif, pour exprimer l’idée d’un excès à contenir, à reprimer...” (s.v. ᾑ γαχ—). While it is true that, as Chantraine goes on to note, the verb is often used to characterize the attitudes of gods to mortals, insofar as divine jealousy checks an excess of human prosperity, the Archilochean speaker’s usage suggests rather the inverse: a human gazing up with indignation at a mortal possessing “things of the

71. μή τι κόσμον ᾑ γάςηςθε ᾑ καστος / σβεκα δὴ γενεήμι νεωτατός εἰμι μεθ’ υμῖν

72. In this sense, its etymology links it closely to the noun ᾑ γη, which shifts from meaning “admiration” in Homer to “envy” in later authors.
gods.” This reaction of “indignant awe” at tyranny is central to the Panhellenic model of tyranny, according to which tyranny can be admired, but always runs the risk of excessiveness, and thus divine retribution.

But what is it, exactly, that Charon is professing not to “envy”? Interpretations of the phrase θεῶν ἔργα have varied wildly. André Bonnard translates the phrase as “l’ordre établi par les dieux” (Lasserre and Bonnard 1958, 8). Hermann Fränkel (1975) reads the phrase in the sense “what the gods do,” considering it an allusion to the proverbial thought, “What the gods grant a man we do not begrudge but rather we praise his fortune” (138). Cataudella (1928, 251–52) sees it as a reference to Gyges’ god-given supernatural powers, i.e. his ring, an interpretation shared by D. C. Young (1968, 10n2), who compares it with Anacreon 361 (PMG) and Simonides 584 (PMG), both of which conclude similar rejections of great wealth and great power specifically with a brief consideration of a supernatural ability, namely unnatural longevity.

Samaras (1997, 19–20) points to two parallels for the phrase θεῶν ἔργα, both of them Homeric: at Od. 1.338, when Penelope asks the bard Phemius to sing of “deeds of men and gods which singers make famous” and at Il. 16.119–20, during the combat between Hector and Ajax, when the Trojan lops the head off of Ajax’s spear, Ajax shudders, recognizing that such a blow is the “works of the gods”. As Samaras observes, “in both cases the expression refers to the specific actions attributed to the gods.” From this he concludes that, by the phrase θεῶν ἔργα, Archilochus means the actions of the gods that have allowed Gyges to reach such heights, i.e. his “excessive good fortune.”

73. ἔργ' ἀνθρώπων τε θεῶν τε, τά τε κλείουσιν ἱκαιοδοί
74. γνῷ δ' Ἀλας κατὰ θυμόν θεῖμον ρήγησέν τε / ἔργα θεῶν
Such an interpretation ignores the concrete meaning of ἔργα, in the sense of “a thing wrought or made” (LSJ, s.v. ἔργον). While the word can signify either objects or deeds, depending on the specific context, it seems to exist in a state of indetermination here.⁷⁵ It is highly suggestive of the “great works” a monarch or a tyrant would build (a common usage in Herodotus, and used specifically of the tomb of Alyattes, a descendent of Gyges, in Lydia at 1.93), but there is not enough context to rule out the interpretation that Samaras offers.

ἔρως

The last concept that remains to be explicated is eros—as the speaker states, in conjunction with his lack of wonderment at θείων ἔργα, “I do not love a great tyranny” (l. 3). The connection between ἔρως and tyranny has been explored at length, by Samaras (1997) and, on a more theoretical level, Victoria Wohl (2002, 215–69). Indeed, situating the figure of the tyrant as a locus of ideological fantasy, Wohl declares the tyrant “a supremely erotic being” (220).⁷⁶

But what sort of “love” is Charon professing not to experience? In Homer, ἔρως is used a variety of senses, both erotic and non-erotic, which can be generalized as “a conscious tendency towards an action, a condition or an object” (Sissa 2008, 37). One notable example of the Homeric usage of ἔρως occurs at Il. 13.636–39, where, in the sense of “desire” broadly construed, it is distinguished from the physical act of love, φιλότητος: “There is satiety in all things: in sleep, and in lovemaking, and sweet singing, and excellent dancing, all of which one longs to satisfy eros for more than for war.”⁷⁷

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⁷⁵.For an overview of the debate surrounding the exact meaning of ἔργα, see Immerwahr (1960).
⁷⁶.The most prominent link between tyranny and erotic desire is found in the Republic. On tyrannical desire in Plato, see R. D. Parry (2007), D. Scott (2007) and Larivée (2012).
⁷⁷.πάντων μὲν κόρος ἐστὶ καὶ ὤπνου καὶ φιλότητος / μολιτής τε γλυκερῆς καὶ ἀμύμονος ὀρχήμωο, / τῶν πέρ τις καὶ μάλλον ἐξέλεται ἐξ ἔρον εἶναι / ἢ πολέμου.
Calame (1999), surveying the concept of eros in Archaic lyric, reproduces an observation of the Alexandrian grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus, who distinguished between φιλείν, which, taking an accusative subject, emphasizes the effect of love on the object of desire, and ἔφειν, which, taking a genitive subject, “seems to indicate passivity on the part of the [desirer], a state of dependency ‘that characterizes anyone whose reason has been impaired’” (22). Under this distinction, Charon’s οὐχ ἔφειν τυραννίδος thus implies that tyranny exudes a heady, intoxicating attraction, a self-evident allure.

This suggestion dovetails with the tradition, inaugurated by Charon’s disavowal, of viewing tyranny as the potential object of eros. This can be observed several times in Herodotus;\(^{78}\) Deioces, the despot who is the focus of a paradigmatic discussion of eastern autocracy, is described as ἔφειν τυραννίδος, “being in love with tyranny” (1.96.2), and later it is said of Pausanias that he ἔφειν της Ἐλλ’ αδος τυραννος γενεύσθαι, “had a passion to become tyrant of Greece” (5.32). One of the apothegms presented to Lycophron to induce him to take up the throne of Corinth is that τυραννίς χρήμα σφαλερόν, πολλοὶ δὲ αὕτης ἐκασται εἰσί, “tyranny is a perilous thing, and it has many lovers” (3.53.4). Indeed, the first full logos in Herodotus deals with a tyrant, Candaules, who in the very first sentence is characterized by his ultimately destructive desire (1.8.1).

The erotic draw of tyranny also finds expression in the comedies of Aristophanes. William Arrowsmith (1973), building on the Thucydidean association between the Athenian mindset and πολυπραγμοσύνη, conceptualizes Cloudcuckooland as “Eros’ capitol-in-the-air” (130). By this Arrowsmith means the fantasy city is the embodiment of Athenian libido dominandi, the driving force behind Athenian imperialism during the Peloponnesian War taken to a cosmic extreme, through which Peisetairos is able

\(^{78}\) See the discussion of Nagy (1990, 274–313) as well as a list of instances of tyrannical desire in Herodotus in Benardete (1970, 137).
to exert his “insatiable restlessness” to conquer the gods themselves. Arrowsmith emphasizes the role that desire plays in drawing various interlocutory figures—such as the roguish parricide and the hack poet Kinesias—to the city in the second half of the comedy: “No matter who they are, or where they come from, it is want and desire they have in common, and Cloudcuckooland is the terminus of their desire” (Arrowsmith 1973, 131). 79

Eros himself is also described as a tyrant, 80 a trope discussed by Bruce Thornton (1997), who conceptualizes the metaphor as a way of linking love and desire “to lawlessness and excess as well as to characterize them as compulsive forces without check or limit” (45). The image is a powerful one; just as desire can intoxicate an individual and compel him to perform all manner of acts, so can the tyrant, unrestrained by a system of legal checks, overpower any citizen and compel him to do whatever he wants. The image of lusting after tyranny expressing itself externally through the tyrant’s manic lusts casts a long shadow over Greek thought on tyranny.

The Panhellenic Model of Tyranny

In only four lines, Archilochus 19W expresses a closely-knit set of attributes that would characterize tyranny for centuries. The fragment stands as an exemplar of what I consider the Panhellenic model of tyranny, which comprises several associations fundamental to the tyrant’s alluring grandeur.

Money

One association is with great wealth, wealth so opulent as to suggest divinity (τὰ Γύγεω τοῦ πολυχρόσου). Tyrants possessed an incredible amount of wealth, which

79. For another consideration of Cloudcuckooland as tyranny, a view grounded in political theory rather than literary analysis, see Ambler (2012).
would have been visible both in the treasures that they sent to Delphi, such as Gyges’ golden kraters (Hdt. 1.13–14) or the intricate ivory “chest of Cypselus,” sent by Periander (J. B. Carter 1989), as well as in their building projects. At Athens, the wall built around the Academy by Hipparchus was so costly that “Hipparchus’ wall” became a proverbial phrase to denote an overly expensive building project (Suda s.v. τὸ Ἰππάρχου τειχίον). Certain tyrants were especially renowned for their wealth: Herodotus depicts Polycrates of Samos as being utterly obsessed with money, a destructive desire that led ultimately to his death. There was, certainly, a causal relationship between tyranny and wealth, insofar as wealth enabled tyranny, which in turn enabled the accumulation of more wealth. The linking of tyranny with the minting of money, as in the cases of Gyges and Pheidon, is a connection that has been explored at length by Richard Seaford (2004, 97–98), who contends that the advent of coinage enabled a single individual to centralize the administration of, inter alia, armies, building projects and festivals on a scale that would have been impossible in the absence of currency.

Divinity

However the phrase θείων ἔργα is read, it suggests a close affiliation with divinity, either in god-like deeds, stature, or good fortune. Given the Eastern provenance of tyranny, it is possible to view this association, at least in part, as a hold-over from a foreign model of kingship in which the monarch has a closer connection with the gods than other mortals (M. L. West 1997, 132f.). More fundamentally, however, this

82. Hdt. 3.123: ἰμείρετο γὰρ χρημάτων μεγάλως. It appears that, by the fourth century, Polycrates’ wealth was proverbial: Cf. Plat. Meno 90a.
83. cf. Thuc. 1.13, on p. 8 above.
near-divinity is intrinsically linked with the tyrant’s wealth: his immense resources endow him with an absolute freedom, the ability to do whatever he wants (Arist. Pol. 1310a32–33), just like a god. It is this near-divinity that was, further, seen as directly instrumental for the tyrant’s moral perversions: constrained by nothing other than his desire, the tyrant becomes “indifferent to the human and divine rules governing the relations between women and men and fathers and sons,” and hence grows “barbarous and even bestial in his appetites” (McGlew 1993, 29–30). Here, too, can be located the tyrannical ἔρως.

*Envy*

Archilochus’ Charon may deny that he envies the tyrant (l. 2: οὐδὲ εἶλε πῶ με ᾽ῥλος), but he is the rare mortal who does not jealously marvel at such power. Envy is intrinsically linked with tyranny in three ways: the tyrant can easily become the object of human envy, placing himself in danger (cf. Soph. OT 380–82 and 584–86; Xen. Hier. 1.9; Arist. Pol. 1311a30–31), and, on account of his unchecked appetites, the tyrant himself is especially vulnerable to envy:

καίτοι ἄνδρα γε τύραννον ἀφθονον ἔδει εἶναι, ἔχοντά γε πάντα τά ἀγαθά. τὸ δὲ ὑπεναντίον τούτου ἐς τοὺς πολίτας πέρακε· φιλονεί γὰρ τοίσι ἀρίστοις περίεσθι τε καὶ ὸώουσι, γὰρ καὶ τοῖσι κοινάσται τῶν ἀστῶν, διαβολὰς δὲ ἀρίστος ἐνδέκεσθαι. ἀναξιοσύνηται δὲ πάντων· ἤν τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸν μετρίως ὦμάζεις, ἀφθείται ὅτι σὺ κάρτα θεραπεύεται, ἢν τὸ θεραπεύῃ τις κάρτα, ἀφθείται ἀτε ὧσπί.

And yet a tyrant, having all good things, should be free from envy. But he becomes the opposite of this toward his citizens: he envies those who excel and live, and takes pleasure in the worst of his citizens, and he is the most avid listener of slander. He is the most impractical of all men, for if you admire him moderately he will be upset that you do not lavish attention on him, but if you pay him excessive attention, he will be upset at your flattery. (Hdt. 3.80)

Most important, however, is that the tyrant avoid divine envy, φθόνος θεῶν, a
fear of which is especially present in the picture of tyranny painted in Pindar’s victory odes.\(^8^5\) The very performance of such odes is dangerous: just as the paean is sung in praise of a god, so is the *epinikion* sung in praise of a victor, a comparison which just skirts the divinization of the laudandus.\(^8^6\)

These traits are the main components of the Panhellenic model, in which view the tyrant himself is an ambiguous figure. He is worthy of praise, but also of fear. He runs the risk of Ἵβρις, but he does not necessarily succumb to it. Tyrants, in this view, can indeed be generous and civic-minded, even if they are terrifying in their potential for excess. By contrast, the Athenian model of the tyrant presents an unreservedly negative figure.

*The Athenian Model of Tyranny*

*Solon*

Archilochus was the first to articulate key aspects of the Panhellenic model of tyranny; for the Athenian model, the equivalent poet is Solon, the lawgiver (νομοθήτης) who radically transformed core aspects of Athenian governance and society in the early sixth century.\(^8^7\) The Athenians of later eras saw him as one of the foundational figures of the democratic state, a position that in practice may have had the force of an ideological figurehead rather than an actual source of law.\(^8^8\)

Solon’s conception of tyranny was not drastically different from that of Archilochus. Like Archilochus, he saw tyranny as inextricably linked to wealth and power, but with this he combined the idea of excess, of surfeit. His view on the subject was colored, it would seem, by his own experiences: he was apparently given the opportunity to

\(^8^5\) On the significance of envy in Pindar, see Morgan (2015, 205–7).
\(^8^7\) For the date of Solon’s reforms, see Wallace (1983).
\(^8^8\) Cf. Andoc. 1.83
become tyrant of Athens, but turned it down. Yet even as lawgiver, Solon possessed
the equivalent of tyrannical authority: he was given carte blanche to rework the
state as he saw fit, a position that led Nietzsche to remark “Gesetzgeber sein ist
eine sublimierte Form des Tyrannentums” (McGlew 1993, 111). Solon intervened at
Athens at a time of crisis, which could have been addressed, just as directly, by an
outright tyrant: three factions were contending to shape the state to their liking, each
with backing among the powerful aristocratic families of Athens, giving rise to the
possibility of stasis (Ath. Pol. 13).89 But Solon was appointed as a mediator between
these groups, a neutral party whose only interest was the stability of the state. His
reforms entirely reworked the body of Athenian law, save the older Draconian law
on murder. He abolished the practice of debt-bondage, which was threatening to
consume the tenant farmer class of Attica, and enacted a general cancellation of debts.
He opened up the law courts and the Assembly to citizens of every economic class,
reorienting citizen life along an axis defined by the obligations imposed by the polis,
rather than by the family. A sense of his moral view is visible in poem 4W, a work at
once in praise of Athens and a jeremiad against those who would invite divine wrath
upon the city because of their unjust actions. Solon condemns those citizens who
χρήματα πειθόμενοι, “swayed by money” (l. 6), rule the people with ἄδικος νόος, “an
unjust mind” (l. 7). Of these he says:

...ο.eyein ἐτοίμον
"βρισός ἐχ μεγάλης ἄλγες πολλὰ παθεῖν
οὐ γὰρ ἐπίστανται κατέχειν κόρον οὐδὲ παροῦσας
10 εὐφροσύνας κοσμεῖν διατός ἐν ἡσυχίη
d...they are sure
to suffer many pains on account of their great insolence
for they do not know how to restrain their excess or enjoy
the festivities of the present feast in an orderly and peaceful way.

89. See also Sealey (1960).
Money is an inherently corrupting force for Solon, and in this poem Solon emphasizes its insidious nature with his usage of the participle πειθόμενος. Irwin (2005, 166) notes that the poet employs it three times as a line ending “in conjunction with wealth and its illicit acquisition.” She suggests that Solon signifies more than simple persuasion with the verb, but that his usage animates or personifies the associated dative nouns, so that the phrase can be understood as “trusts in,” “is persuaded by,” or even “obeys money.”

Solon’s usage of χόρος, “excess,” is absolute: it has no object of which it is too much, but rather it signifies simply “a desire to possess too much.” This is a departure from the word’s earlier attestations in Homer, where χόρος connotes “having satisfaction” or, less positively, “having satiety”; one can find, for example, humans having “satiety of battle-din” (Il. 19.221) and “satiety of icy lamentation” (Od. 4.103).

The connotation of excessiveness first appears in Alcman 1.64, and as with Solon’s use of χόρος, is specifically an excess of wealth (Helm 1993, 7). This use of χόρος became “a leitmotif of [Solon’s] disapproval and criticisms of both the aristocrats’ thirst for power and the new greed assailing the demos as a whole” (Noussia Fantuzzi 2010, 231). Such desire must be restrained, which the city’s leaders are unable to do. As elsewhere in Solon’s poetry, χόρος is connected to ὑβρις, a term with a broad range of possible meanings but with which Solon connotes “the excesses of an oligarchy” (Nagy 1985, 43). A few lines later, Solon describes the city’s leaders acting on their insatiable desire, and the terrible consequences of their actions (ll. 12–20):

οὐθ’ ἵερων κτεάνων οὔτε τι δημοσίων
φειδόμενοι κλέπτουσιν ἄφραττηγή ἄλλοδεν ἄλλος,
οὔδε φυλάσσονται σεμνὰ Δίκης θέμεθιλα,

90. φυλάσσονται σεμνὰ Δίκης θέμεθιλα
91. χόρος κρυπτοὶ γόοιο
In these lines, Solon warns that the actions of the impious leaders have aroused the vengeance of Justice, whose punishment takes a very specific form. The “terrible slavery” with which Justice threatens Athens is a reference to tyranny; though the fragment predates the rule of Peisistratos, scholars (Noussia Fantuzzi 2010, 247; Raaflaub 2004, 27) have argued that Solon could have reflected on an earlier attempt at tyranny at Athens, by Cylon, and thus foreseen the seizing of power by a single individual as the end result of the factionalism at Athens.

Later in the poem, Solon praises Lawfulness in contrast with Lawlessness, two personifications of different states of civic order. Of Lawfulness, he says:

τραχεα λειανει, παωει κυρον, υβριν άμαυροι,
ασαινε δ' άτης άνθεα φυμένα,
ευθονει δ' δικας σκολιας, ύπερήφανα τ' έργα
πραωνει: παωει δ' έργα διχοστασίς,
παωει δ' άργαλες έριδος χόλον...
She smooths out the rough, curtails excess,
weakens insolence and dries the blooming flowers
of ruin, straightens crooked judgments,
tames deeds of pride: she stops acts of stasis
and she stops the anger of awful strife... (ll. 34–38)

This passage identifies the ideological nexus that is central to understanding
Athenian attitudes toward tyranny: the relationship between κόρος, ὕβρις and ἀτη. Indeed, these lines are the earliest to configure the three terms in this way (Doyle 1984, 44). Excessive or unbounded desire (a manifestation of κόρος) leads to insolence (ὕβρις). This then invites ἀτη, which can be understood either as ruin directly brought on by a higher power or as self-destructive “infatuation” or “folly” (145), which itself may have a divine origin. As tyranny has been seen as an expression of limitless desire, it figures into this equation. The tyrant is hubristic and faces a reckoning, either from some divine or supernatural force, or from his own mental blindness.

The κόρος - ὕβρις - ἀτη relationship is restated in fragment 6W:

δήμος δ' ὁδ' ἄν ἄριστα σύν ἡγεμόνεσσιν ἔποιτο,
μήτε λίην ἄνευτις μήτε βιαζόμενος·
tίκτει γὰρ κόρος ὕβριν, ὅταν πολὺς ὀλβος ἐπητα
ἀνθρώποις ὀπόσος μὴ νός ἄρτιος ἢ

And in this way the people should best follow their leaders,
neither given too much freedom nor too restrained:
for excess breeds insolence, whenever great prosperity falls to humans whose are not sound in mind.

This concept, the inherently excessive and therefore self-defeating qualities of tyranny, forms the matrix of Athenian thought on tyranny. Significant, too, is the connection, visible in both frr. 4W and 6W, between the ἀτη called down by tyranny and the disastrous effects consequently wrought on the people whom the tyrant governs.
Introduction

Aeschylus was the only one of the three canonical Athenian tragedians to have experienced tyranny firsthand. Born, according to his *Vita*, during the sixty-fourth Olympiad (524–21), he was under ten years old when the tyrant Hipparchus was assassinated by Harmodius and Aristogeiton, and under fourteen when Hippias was driven from Athens.¹ By the time he reached the age of majority, Aeschylus had experienced the wholesale reorganization of Athenian life; born under a tyrant, he attained adulthood under a democracy and was enrolled in a tribe that had not existed only a handful of years before. He fought “heroically” against the Persians at Marathon, Salamis and Plataea (Lefkowitz 2012, 72), and by the time Aeschylus died in 456/5, Athens was enjoying the fruits of cultural and naval hegemony under the leadership of Pericles.

 Appropriately, the arc of Aeschylus’ life bears resemblance to the development of tragedy. The traditional timeline places the establishment of the City Dionysia—and

¹. For the Aeschylean *Vita*, see Lefkowitz (2012, 147–49). Aeschylus’ date of birth is almost universally accepted, with the exception of Richmond Lattimore (1959, 1–2), who argues for 513/12.
therefore of the first tragic competitions—under Peisistratus in the mid-530s. It was under Cleisthenes, not long after the fall of the Peisistratids, that the tribal dithyrambic contests were added, soon after which choregoi were introduced to fund the performances on behalf of the state. It was only in 487/6 that the “classical form” (G. Anderson 2003, 179) of the competition took shape, with the addition of comic competitions. An institution—as well as the genre with which it was associated—that had been brought to prominence by a tyrant was thus increasingly inflected toward a civic orientation, first by the formal incorporation of performances organized on a democratic axis and then by the channeling of private funds to public ends. With time, the influence of tyranny was thus obscured, or perhaps refined, yet still endured. I believe this is a useful way to conceptualize, too, the influence of tyranny on Aeschylus’ generation overall: still within living memory, the image of tyrant remained as something to react against, even as it preserved elements of its original form.

Bearing the significance of that lived experience in mind, in this chapter I will consider two tragedies. I will first discuss the Persians, in which Aeschylus explores, without using the term, the concept of tyranny through his portrayal of Xerxes and the institutions of Persian monarchy. As with Herodotus’ characterization of the Great King in the later books of the Histories, the moral characteristics often used to denigrate tyranny (such as cruelty, a boundless desire and a lack of restraint) are mapped onto a monarchical figure who is not, strictly speaking, a tyrant, but who serves as the tyrant’s moral and ideological equivalent.

2. This traditional chronology, which, on the authority of the Marmor Parium, places the advent of the Dionysia under Peisistratus, was advocated by Pickard-Cambridge (1988, 58), Hammond (1972, 390) and Herington (1985, 87), but came under attack by Connor (1989) and M. L. West (1989). Their argument was modified and strengthened by G. Anderson (2003, 178–84). If these more recent scholars are correct, the Dionysia dates to the last decade of the sixth century, after the fall of the Peisistratids, but this does not substantially affect the thrust of my argument.

3. On which, see Dewald (2003).
The tragedy’s assimilation of Persian monarchy to tyranny is motivated by a larger conflation, common in fifth-century Athenian thought, of tyranny in its “technical sense” (i.e. one-man rule as was common in the Archaic era) and the authoritarian monarchy of the Persian state. Such an ideological move is clearly signaled by the city’s re-erection of the tyrannicide statue group in 477/6 (M. W. Taylor 1991, 15), which had been carried off by the Persians during their sack of Athens in 480. This elision was motivated by two factors: the Greek perception of the institution of Persian kingship and the pro-tyrannical political sympathies of the Persian Empire.

I will then discuss the *Prometheus Bound*, in which the tragedy’s despotic Zeus is assimilated to a human tyrant. The metaphor of a powerful ruler as a god was common in Greek thought throughout the fifth century, and the despotic Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound* is an instantiation of that metaphor. Both the means by which Zeus obtains and holds power and the negative traits which he displays in the drama exemplify him as a tyrant *par excellence*.

Aeschylus’ depictions of tyranny in these two tragedies lean as heavily on the moral characteristics of the tyrants as on the political mechanisms of their regimes. By setting the *Persians* in the royal court of Susa, Aeschylus is able to get inside the enemy’s head, to show the operation of Xerxes’ royal authority as well as its breakdown. In the *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus relates the ascent of Zeus as if he were a real-life tyrant, and the god’s rule is discussed in language befitting that of a human ruler. These tragedies’ emphasis on the concrete aspects of their respective tyrannical regimes reflects the lived experience of the Peisistratids and of the Persian Wars. The negative moral attributes that characterize tyrannical rulers are also present, but share space in Aeschylus’ depictions with the specific ways in which

4 Such a conjunction was surely aided by Hippias’ return to Greece with Persian forces, and his presence at Marathon. The issue is explored by Brian Lavelle (1993, 36–42). On this point, see more below.
these tyrants deployed their power. By contrast, as I will discuss, in the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides, how negative moral attributes come to take precedence over that of the political mechanisms of the tyrannical regime. This process, which Lowell Edmunds (2002, 69) has called the “interiorization of tyranny,” culminates in the Platonic account of the tyrannical soul, whose despotic rule can be reduced to a reflection of its own moral deficiencies.

The *Persians*

*Introduction*

The *Persians* is a deeply idiosyncratic tragedy: no other extant drama openly engages with a recorded historical event, or is set so far from the Greek geographical, cultural and mythical spheres. But as it is the earliest complete preserved Athenian drama, first performed in 472, it is unclear how to distinguish the tragedy’s “archaic elements” (Michelini 1982, 27f.), its “stiffness and austerity” (Broadhead 1960, xli), loose construction and dearth of dynamic action, from the dramatic choices necessary to handle such unprecedented subject matter.

Aeschylus’ dramatization of events well within living memory has also provoked questions with overlapping implications. How would the tragedian have been constrained in depicting recent historical events—events in which a sizable portion of

5. The *Suppliants* was long thought to have been Aeschylus’ earliest preserved tragedy based on stylistic analysis, but the publication of *POxy*. 2256 shifted scholarly opinion in favor of dating *Persians* before *Suppliants*, though the exact year of the latter work’s performance remains uncertain. See Yorke (1954). For a recent defense of an earlier date for the *Suppliants*, see Scullion (2002).

6. See Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1914, 42–55) (“Es ist sehr beherzigenswert, daß Aeschylus noch 472 eine Tragödie ohne jede Einheit der Handlung bauen konnte” (48)), Broadhead (1960, xxxv–xl) and Golden (1966, 31–39), who also finds the characterization shallow and under-developed. For a summary of criticism, see Garvie (2009, xxxiii). Both Adams (1952) and Winnington-Ingram (1983b), however, turn the critique of the tragedy’s structure to its advantage.
the audience took part—as compared to traditional mythology? To what extent can the Persians be read as a comment on contemporary Athenian affairs, given that many of the city’s leaders during the Persian Wars were still alive and active in civic affairs when the tragedy was performed? Both questions emphasize the fact that the Persians is a fundamentally political tragedy. By this I do not mean “politically partisan,” but rather “evoking the Athenian polis”; because it is set in so foreign a milieu, without any explicit Greek frame of reference, and as it takes place in the recent past, the Persians must represent contemporary Athens and its citizens. More than any other extant tragedy, the Persians is about Athens.

If that term—political tragedy—is to be applied to the Persians, both its elements must pertain to the drama: it must be political, and it must be a tragedy. Yet some scholars have focused so intently on the former aspect that the latter is attenuated, or even ignored. The drama was long read as a paean in celebration of the defeat of the barbarian enemy. The persistence of such a view is attributable in great part to the influence of Aristophanes’ Frogs, in which the stodgily old-fashioned Aeschylus brags that with his tragedies he “taught [the Athenians] to always long for victory over the enemy,” a remark which prompts Dionysus to recall his delight at watching

7. See Lattimore (1943, 87); Hammond (1956, 40); Broadhead (1960, 322); Fornara (1966, 51); Kierdorf (1966, 64); Podlecki (1966, 8–9); Frost (1980, 133–34); Lazenby (1988, 185); Pelling (1997) and Ebbott (2000).

8. See Stoessl (1952, 121); Salanitro (1965, 198); Podlecki (1966, 12–13); Thomson (1967, 279); Meier (1993, 62–63) and Hall (1996a, 12).

9. I do not attach undue significance to the fact that, as per IG II² 2318, Pericles was Aeschylus’ choregos in 472. See, most recently, Millis and Olson (2012, 8ff.). Garvie (2009) notes that “there is no evidence to suggest that the [choregos] had any control over, or influence on, the poets’ choice of, or treatment of, their subject matter.” (xix)

10. See Blomfield’s preface in his nineteenth-century edition of Aeschylus (quoted at Broadhead (1960, xv)); Craig (1924); G. Murray (1940, 121); Clifton (1963) and Goldhill (1988). Taplin (2006) puts forward a version of the argument, situating the tragedy in the broader Greek “celebration culture” of the 470s. Garvie (2007, 174) makes the intriguing suggestion that the audience had expected a triumphalist tone based on the announcement in the proagon, only to subsequently view a far more nuanced drama.

11. ἐπιθυμεῖν ἔξεδδαξα / νικᾶν ἀεί τοὺς ἀντιπάλους
the choral lamentation of the death of Dareios (ll. 1026–29). The attitude of J. D. Craig (1924) is representative: “Is it likely that the Athenians were going to look on as neutrals, and extend to the Persians that measure of sympathy which would lead to the tragic κ΄ αθαρσις of pity and terror in view of their sufferings? ... They were to witness the punishment of ὑβρις, and the chastisement was to be at their own hands.”

While this view has fallen out of favor in recent decades, the tragedy does nevertheless emphasize the foreignness of the setting and characters. Indeed, E. W. Saïd (2003) sees the Persians as “profoundly influential” (56) in establishing the tropes that would characterize the idea of “the East” in the Western mind for the following two millennia. This othering takes a variety of forms. The language of the tragedy, for example, is marked as Persian by the inclusion of foreign words and grammatical forms, such as addressing the shade of Dareios as βαλλ΄ ην, “king” (ll. 657–58), the repeated recitation of catalogs of exotic Persian-sounding names (e.g. ll. 958–61, 966–72, 993–99), and by peppering the choral odes with mournful cries and

12. This reading is not without its difficulties, primarily that the scene Dionysus describes, the chorus hearing the news of the death of King Dareios, does not appear in the tragedy. On possible textual resolutions to this issue, see Dover (1993, 320). A more fundamental problem is posed by the assumptions implicit in the passage: that Aristophanes’ depiction of Aeschylus is a sufficiently accurate portrait of the real tragedian and, more importantly, that Dionysus’ reaction was not uncharacteristic of the Athenian audience.

13. For a thorough analysis of othering in the Persians, see Hall (1989, 76–100). However, see Garvie (2009), who demonstrating how much more Orientalization can be found in Aeschylus’ Suppliants, remarks: “there is very little, if anything, in this [tragedy] that can be shown to be definitely Persian and definitely un-Greek” (xiv).

14. On the possibly Phrygian βαλλαχαν, which Hall (1996a) cleverly translates as “Shah,” see Chantraine (1999, s.v.). At ll. 554 and 1076, Aeschylus employs βαρμος, an Egyptian term for boat, which in Herodotus denotes Nilotic barges (2.41.4–5, 60.1–2, 96.5 and 179). Non-Greek grammatical forms are used when evoking the shade of Dareios: he is called Δαρι῀ ανα in the accusative at l. 651 and Δαρι΄ αν in the vocative at ll. 662 and 672, forms that more closely approximate the Persian form of the King’s name, D¯ arayavahuš, than the Hellenized Δαρε΄ιος (Hall 1989, 78). See also Kranz (1933, 82).

15. Hall (1989) observes that, regardless of the historical veracity of the names, the use of real Persian phonetic elements in them “indicate[s]...a sensitivity to the sound of the Iranian language” (77). See also the analysis of Kranz (1933, 91–92) and the skepticism of Lattimore (1943, 86–87).
interjections, such as óξ (ll. 117, 122) and ἄς (ll. 651, 655), that suggest both foreign babble as well as the “unrestrained emotionalism” that was perceived as typical of barbarians (Hall 1989, 82).  

The gulf between Greek and Persian is highlighted, most fundamentally, by the projection of Greek ideology onto the Persian characters. This produces the vertiginous effect of Persians speaking like Greeks about Persia: the Queen, for example, laments the disaster that has befallen “the Persians and the whole barbarian race” (l. 434). Such projection is by no means unique to Aeschylus or the Persians, but this tragedy does represent the first instantiation of a rhetorical phenomenon that was to become extremely common. It stands out, as well, when, in the messenger’s account of Salamis at ll. 402–7, the four-line quotation of the rousing Greek battle cry is followed with: καὶ μὴν παρ᾽ ᾧμῶν Περσίδος γλώσσης ῥόθος / ὑπηντίαζε, “and then from among our ranks came the roar of Persian speech” (ll. 406–7). The word that is used to characterize the Persian language as inarticulate noise, ῥόθος, appears twice in the previous fifty lines, once, at l. 367, to describe the roar of the sea, and again at ll. 396–97, to describe the clamor of the Greeks’ oars.

If pushed far enough, however, this reading renders the tragedy unintelligible or, worse, untragic. A. O. Prickard (1895), for example, is certain that the final scene of lamentation would have been “nothing but ludicrous to any spectator” (121), and assumes an Aeschylean chauvinism: “The poet would have missed his patriotic

16. See W. C. Scott (1984, 153) as well as Haldane (1972). The repetition of long vowels α and η was perhaps meant to evoke the Persian language specifically (Morenilla-Talens 1989, 160–63). The cry óξ at l. 117 is noted by the scholiast as a “Persian lament,” and the mournfulness of the chorus’ songs appears to have made an impression on the audience, given Dionysus’ recollection at Ar. Ran. ll. 1026–29, quoted above.

17. αἰαί, κακῶν δὴ πέλαγος ἔφρωγεν μέγα / πέρσας τε καὶ πρόπαντι βαρβάρων γένει.

18. “Tragic rhetoric often treats its invented barbarians as a single category embodying the opposite of the central Hellenic values…” (Hall 1989, 161).

purpose if he had denied [the audience] their hearty laugh at their enemy’s expense” (Prickard 1895, xxix). But this plainly could not have been Aeschylus’ intent in writing the *Persians*. If the immediate purpose of composing the drama in the first place was to win a competition in *tragedy*, it would not make a great deal of sense to stage a drama that was suffused with mockery. As Garvie (2007) observes: “A satisfactory definition of ‘tragedy’ and the ‘tragic’ remains elusive, but probably most ancient audiences would share the view of most modern audiences or readers, that tragedy should deal with suffering and take it seriously” (174).

More recently, a new “consensus” position has formed: that the tragedy universalizes the Persians’ “experiences of terrible error and incalculable loss” (McCall 1986, 44), inviting the audience to sympathize with them even as they are represented as alien enemies. As Colin MacLeod (1982, 131) has remarked, “Aeschylus’ Persians represent human delusion, fear and suffering; and if there is praise of Athens in that play, it is designed to intensify the bewilderment and gloom of the characters on stage.”

To read the tragedy as inherently sympathetic, as stressing the ὅμοιότης, the identifiability that Aristotle understands as central to the evocation of tragic fear (*Poet.* 1453a), ascribes an admonitory character to the *Persians*, warning the Athenians that they were bound by the same moral laws as their enemies and the violation of those laws would lead them to the same fate. This interpretation is bolstered by the ode at ll. 864–906, in which the chorus, recalling the good old days under Dareios, lists a series of places that the late King had subdued. By 472, however,

20. For an extensive catalog of proponents of this view, see T. Harrison (2000, 51n1), although he himself is dismissive of the argument (108–11). Kitto (1966, 74–115) thoroughly dismantles the patriotic reading of the tragedy.

21. See Stoessl (1952, 120) and Rosenbloom (1995), but for an objection to this view see T. Harrison (2000, 108–11). Rosenbloom connects the laudatory portrayal of Athens in the tragedy with the view, formulated by Nagy (1990, 14 and passim), that all praise implicitly serves also as a warning. Gagarin (1976, 53), however, is skeptical: “If there is a warning, it is only implicit.”
these areas, primarily bordering the Hellespont, had fallen under Athenian control, a
hold that Athens was consolidating by means of its leadership of the Delian League
(Rosenbloom 1995, 93; Rehm 2002, 247–48). The *Persians* thus echoes the closing
chapters of Herodotus’ *Histories*, which also deal with the Athenian acquisition of
Hellespontine territory from the Persians, and which, recounting the brutal crucifixion
of the Persian Artayctes by Xanthippos, Pericles’ father, after the siege of Sestos,
have been read as containing a similar warning.\(^{22}\)

This is one way in which the Athenians have been read into the tragedy. The
identification of Athens with its enemies is bolstered by some of the tragedy’s language.
David Rosenbloom (1993, 191) observes that the calamities befalling the Persians
are phrased so as to evoke the *Athenian* experience of the wars: Susa is lamented
as having been “emptied out” (ἐξεκεῖνωσεν, l. 761) and Persia “entirely pillaged”
(διαπεπόρθηται, l. 714), descriptors that could be fittingly applied to the evacuated
and ravaged Athens in the final stretch of the war—during, in fact, the battle at
Salamis itself. Further, Dareios’ description of the Persian disaster as “unforgettable”
(ἀειμνηστον, l. 760) invokes standard language of Athenian military commemoration.\(^{23}\)

Simon Goldhill (1988) identifies Aeschylus’ “boldness” in “placing an audience
in the position of discovering tragic sympathy for such an ‘other’ as the Persian
invader” (193n35). He also draws an important and highly apposite comparison:
“A complex model of weeping with (though not precisely for) an enemy is provided
by the end of the *Iliad* in Achilles’ tears for his father and Patroclus, shared with
Priam’s tears for Hector.” Pelling (1997), too, sees similarities between the *Iliad* and
the *Persians*, calling such sorrow sympathetic to the enemy “compassionate insight”
(18). He identifies that quality in the tragedy, describing it with the words of Stephen

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\(^{22}\) See Fornara (1971, 55–56); Boedeker (1988); Stadter (1992) and Moles (1996).

\(^{23}\) See e.g. Meiggs and Lewis (2004, 54–57).
Greenblatt (1991): a “discovery of the self in the other and the other in the self” (127).

The hypothesis to the Persians provides additional context, giving a brief glimpse of Phrynichus’ earlier dramatization of the same events. The differences reveal Aeschylus’ conscious choice to reframe the Persian loss in a universalizing context:

Γλαῦκος ἐν τοῖς περὶ Αἰσχύλου μύθων ἐκ τῶν Φοινικαῖον Φρυνίχου φησί τοῖς Πέρσαις παραπεποιήσατα. ὁς ἐκτίθησι καὶ τὴν ἄρχῃ τοῦ δράματος ταύτην, τάδ’ ἐστὶ Περσῶν τῶν πάλαι βεβηρκότων. πλὴν ἐκεῖ εὐνοοῦχος ἐστὶν ἀγγέλλων ἐν ἄρχῇ Ξέρξου ἦτταν, στορνὺς τε ψύνους τινὰς τοῖς τῆς ἄρχῆς παρέδροις: ἐνταῦθα δὲ προλογίζει χορὸς προσβιτῶν.

In his treatise on the plots of Aeschylus, Glaucus says that the Persians was modeled on the Phoenician Women of Phrynichus. He claims that this was the opening line of the tragedy: “These things belong to the Persians who long ago departed.” But in that drama it was a eunuch who, at the beginning of the tragedy, announces the defeat of Xerxes, while arranging some thrones for magistrates of the empire, whereas here the prologue is delivered by a chorus of elders.

Aeschylus, then, intentionally deferred the Persians’ knowledge of their defeat, in contrast to Phrynichus’ version, in which it was announced ἂρχῃ, “at the beginning.”

Such a choice, in my view, militates strongly against a wholly celebratory reading of the tragedy. As the drama progresses, the audience observes the Persians’ increasing awareness of the distant cataclysm as they move from nervous apprehension to shocked sorrow. This is an inherently sympathetic depiction: no human being, not even the Great King, can be certain of future success. Only hindsight allowed the Athenian audience to know the final outcome.

Aeschylus, then, establishes a polarity which he proceeds to deconstruct. The Persians are utterly foreign in morals and in mentalité. Their defeat was both right and just. But so many of the elements in their downfall are not uniquely Persian, but

rather are common human characteristics. Furthermore, the tragedy defines Persian autocracy through the negation of Athenian democracy.

**Greek Perceptions of Persia**

Aeschylus’ depiction of Xerxes as a tyrant is closely bound up with preexisting Greek beliefs about Persian kingship and the status of the Great King in Persian society. These beliefs reflect an imperfect knowledge of the Persians and their mores, the product of centuries of encounters that were almost entirely negative.

The concrete political ties between Persia and various tyrants were one of the major causes of the ideological equivalence between the tyrant and the Great King. I will first discuss these ties, before examining the beliefs they engendered. It is unsurprising that discourse on tyranny should influence the Greek perception of Persia: the Persian King openly provided support to a number of tyrants in Asia Minor. At Athens, however, this association was particularly strong; the Persian court had taken in Hippias after his expulsion, and the erstwhile tyrant accompanied the invading Persian army in 490, guiding them into Attica en route to Marathon (Hdt. 6.107). Herodotus strongly suggests that the Persians intended, in the event of their victory, to restore Hippias to power; he records that an Athenian embassy was warned by Artaphernes, the satrap of Sardis and Dareios’ brother, to take the Peisistratid back as their ruler “if they wanted to be safe” (5.96). Their refusal to do so was the precipitant which finally led to open war between Athens and Persia.

25. As S. West (1999) has observed, “Greek ideas about the megalomania of the Kings of Kings may at times have been fostered by a failure to distinguish institutional from individual characteristics” (124).

26. See Cook (1985, 290–91): “The impression that we get of the Persians in the Greek writers is in some ways a deceptive one. Too much emphasis is laid on what is pejorative—the familiar clichés of the Persian Wars in which the weaknesses of the imperial people were exposed, and the commonplaces of a later era when decadence and corruption were plain to see.”

27. ὁ δὲ Ἀρταφέρνης ἐκέλευε σφέας, εἰ βουλόκατο σόοι εἶναι, καταδέχεσθαι ὀπίσω Ἐπικήν.
Herodotus’ emphasis on Hippias’ actions at Marathon suggests, furthermore, that the presence of the exiled tyrant strongly colored the Athenians’ view of the battle: “For Herodotus or, more likely, for his Athenian sources, the fight at Marathon was primarily against Hippias and tyranny; the struggle against the Persians there seems surprisingly to have assumed a secondary characteristic, at least in later Athenian memory” (Lavelle 1993, 43). The threat of a tyrannical restoration persisted after Marathon, looming over domestic Athenian politics during the 480s (Holladay 1978, 180–81; Lavelle 1993, 33).

While the association between Persian rule and tyranny was particularly strong for Athenians, it was, given the Persian Empire’s support of tyrants generally, likely one shared by other Greek poleis, especially in Asia Minor. Beginning with Cyrus’ conquest of Ionia in the mid-sixth century, it was official Persian policy to prop up tyrants as imperial surrogates, thus preserving for decades in and around Asia Minor a form of government that would all but disappear from the Greek world. Despite appearances, such support was not primarily ideological but was done in accordance with the Persian practice of maintaining stability by preserving whatever form of government existed in a region before its conquest (T. C. Young 1988, 68). M. M. Austin (1990) argues that the Persian custom of the Great King granting offices and remuneration to individuals in his service—even cultivating personal relationships with them—could be notionally assimilated to the networks of obligation- and benefit-based friendship that were familiar to the Greek elite. The Persian preservation of tyrants as imperial surrogates would therefore have given the impression to the Greeks that the Great King was palling around with tyrants. Dareios’ restoration of

28. I note also Miltiades’ exhortation to the polemarch Callimachus at 6.109, in which the general characterizes making the choice to fight the Persians at Marathon as equivalent to liberating Athens and leaving behind a memorial greater than that of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. The presence of the Persians is something of an afterthought.

29. See also Gillis (1979, 1–25) and Boffo (1983, 60–61).
Sylos in the tyranny of Samos on the basis of their close friendship, as recounted by Herodotus at 3.139–49, is a paradigmatic example: “Thus a tyrant dynasty which had initially come to power independently of the Persians, and perhaps in opposition to them, became associated with Persian power early in the reign of Darius...” (Austin 1990, 300).

Cultural mistranslations about the nature of these relationships between the Great King and his subordinates became a source of persistent misunderstanding among the Greeks, and directly influenced Aeschylus’ depiction of Persia. The relationships resulting from these practices only bound the Ionian tyrants more closely to the Great King, and thus making, in the minds of the Greeks, the Ionian Revolt a de facto battle against tyranny. Herodotus confirms this perception in his account of the meeting of Ionian rulers after Dareios’ failure to return from Scythia. When the possibility of betraying the Great King is raised, Histiaeus, the tyrant of Miletus, addresses the assembled rulers:

.HasPrefix

῾Ιστιαίου δὲ τοῦ Μιλησίου [γνώμη] ἐναντίη ταύτη, λέγοντος ὡς νῦν μὲν διὰ Δαρείου ἔκαστος αὐτῶν τυραννεύει πόλιος· τῆς Δαρείου δὲ δυνάμοις καταρεθείσης αὐτῶ Μιλησίων ὁ ἐπὶ ἐσεσθαι ἀρχειν ὡτε ἀλλον οὐδένα οὐδαμον θεολησθαι γὰρ ἐξάστην τῶν πολίων δημοκρατεῖσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ τυραννεῖσθαι.

But Histiaeus of Miletus was against the proposal to betray Dareios, saying that it was on account of Dareios that each of them was ruler over his city; should the power of Dareios be overthrown, none of them would be able to rule their cities, because each of the cities would prefer to live in a democracy rather than be ruled by a tyrant. (4.137)

How, then, was the Great King viewed in light of these associations? The pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De Mundo* provides an encapsulation of the Greek view of the Great King, vividly describing the Persian monarchy in the service of a larger metaphor of the transcendent power of the divine:

30. See my discussion of *bandaka* below, on p. 57.
The pomp of Cambyses and Xerxes and Darius was ordered on a grand scale and touched the heights of majesty and magnificence: the King himself, they say, lived in Susa or Ecbatana, invisible to all, in a marvelous palace with a surrounding wall flashing with gold, electrum and ivory; it had a succession of many gate-towers, and the gateways, separated by many stades from one another, were fortified with brazen doors and high walls; outside these the leaders and most eminent men were drawn up in order, some as personal bodyguards and attendants to the King himself, some as guardians of each outer wall, called Guards and the Listening-Watch, so that the King himself, who had the name of Master and God, might see everything and hear everything. Apart from these there were others appointed as revenue officials, leaders in war and in the hunt, receivers of gifts to the King, and others, each responsible for administering a particular task, as they were necessary. The whole Empire of Asia, bounded by the Hellespont in the West and the Indus in the East, was divided into nations under generals and satraps and kings, slaves of the Great King, with couriers and scouts and messengers and signals-officers. (398a11–32, Loeb translation)

While *De Mundo* is of uncertain authorship and date, the nexus of associations visible in this passage nevertheless accurately represents fifth-century Greek thought about Persian monarchy. Several attributes of Persian kingship in this description

31. See Thom (2014) for a comprehensive treatment of the text.
32. Cf., e.g., Herodotus’ account of Deioces’ kingship at 1.98ff.
find parallels in Aeschylus’ tragedy: the grand opulence of the palace at Susa, the awe with which the monarch was regarded and the hierarchical nature of Persian society, in which, compared to their Great King, “generals and satraps and kings” were no more than “slaves.” Athenian thinking on tyranny encompasses a great deal (though not all) of these associations, an overlap that helps assimilate the Xerxes depicted in the *Persians* to preconceived notions about the tyrant.

One association common to both tyranny and the Great King was wealth. As discussed in the previous chapter, wealth was linked with tyranny from the word’s first attestation in Greek: Archilochus’ renunciation of τὰ Γύγεω τοῦ πολυχρύσου. The selfsame word appears in the opening lines of the *Persians*, when the elders of the chorus call themselves πολυχρύσων / ἑδρῶν φύλακες, “guardians of the dwellings rich in gold” (ll. 3–4). This overlap of discourses will be discussed further in the next section. I will discuss the use of wealth as a motif in the *Persians* below, on p. 72.

Another confluence between Greek thought about tyrants and about the Great King concerns their perceived proximity to the divine. The passage from *De Mundo* given above notes that the King “had the name of Master and God.” Such a remark reflects the commonly-held (although incorrect) belief among the Greeks about the superhuman reverence with which Great King was regarded. Yet this was not so: the Persians regarded their King as an intercessor between the mortal and divine realms, a “man above men” (Briant 2002, 241). Elaborate and worshipful royal procedure developed around the King to acknowledge this special status, and it was these court practices that fostered the Greek misbelief. To the Greek eye, no mortal would ever be treated with such reverence.

Central to this misperception was the common Persian practice of *proskynesis*, the act of prostrating before a superior, a gesture that was, “in Greek eyes, reserved

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33. See my discussion of this trope as it appears in the tragedy at p. 71.
for the gods” (Briant 2002, 223). Proskynesis has been identified as a “fundamental difference” (Cotesta 2015, 9) between the Greeks and the Persians, indicating two highly dissimilar conceptions of the “symbolic relationship [that exists] between holders of power and the people.”

And then they continued inland to Susa and arrived in the presence of the King himself; when at first the bodyguards commanded them to make obeisance to the King, to bow before him and stretch out their hands to him in supplication, they said they would not do so, even if their heads were shoved down, for it was not the custom among them to make obeisance to a human... (Hdt. 7.136)

The gesture was long associated with the Persian east and in tragedy, especially Euripidean tragedy, it became a common signifier of barbarian status (S. Saïd 2002, 79–80). It is one more way in which Aeschylus suggests the radical foreignness of the Persian court. When the Queen enters, the chorus sings her praises and hymns her superhuman stature as the elders perform proskynesis before her as proclaiming προσπ΄ιτνω, “I bow low” (l. 152).

The act did not in any case signify the divine status of the King, but was rather

34. “Dislike of the Persian monarchy consequently crystallized round the notion of proskynesis...” (Momigliano 1979, 145).


36. E.g. Eur. Or. 1507, Isoc. 4.151, Plut. Vit. Them. 27.4–5. Alexander’s attempted adoption of the practice was highly contentious, and was viewed in the context of his assumption of divinity (Bosworth 1988, 279–90).

37. I disagree with Griffith (1998, 48–49) and Gruen (2012, 15), who read the scene as being within the bounds of respect given to humans in stage conventions. On the possibility of purely verbal “figurative supplication,” see Gould (1973, 77).

38. The question of Persian royal divinity in the tragedy is vexed. The reverence of the living Xerxes can be read as obeisant puffery that stands in contrast with the stark reality of his failure. However, given that Dareios’ prophecies prove correct, his divinity must at least be entertained:
a social signifier, a “reflex action” (T. Harrison 2000, 87–88); Herodotus notes that one could see it even in the street, whenever a Persian met another of much greater rank (1.134). Yet to a Greek it would constitute proof that the Persians made the fundamental mistake of revering human beings like gods.

This belief is intertwined with another association that the pseudo-Aristotelian passage exemplifies: the slavishness of the Persians. Persian society was seen as completely dichotomous: the Great King possessed such absolute sovereignty that all others, including “generals and satraps and kings” were merely slaves. The conflict between the Persians and the Greeks is thus cast as one between enslavement and freedom, a characterization prevalent throughout Greek literature but which finds its first sustained expression in the *Persians*. Appropriately, the central metaphor of the tragedy is the yoke, which B. Hughes Fowler (1967) has called “a symbol and more than a symbol” (5). It appears both in the context of Xerxes’ literal bridging of the Hellespont (l. 72: ζυγ` ον ᾿ αμφιβαλ ` ων α᾿ υχ΄ ενι π΄ οντου) and in the context of his attempt to subdue Greece under a “yoke of slavery” (l. 50). The metaphor is at the core of the verbal matrix of the tragedy; the disastrous potential of Xerxes’ actions is suggested when the chorus laments that the mass exodus of men has left the women

“The Persians’ view of Darius as divine cannot be regarded as barbarous blasphemy or as mere oriental color, since the audience also is obliged to accept it. The kletic hymn succeeds; and when Darius says that he is a great power in the underworld (691) there is no room to disbelieve him. All this gives his prophecies and his moral judgement the requisite authority” (Taplin 1977, 115). Cf. Podlecki (1993, 56–57).

39. ἐνυγχάνοντες δ’ ἀλλήλους ἐν τῇς ὀδοῖς, τῶδε ἢν τις διαγνοῦ ιον τις διὰσυντυγχάνοντες: ἀντὶ γὰρ τοῦ προσαγορεύειν ἄλληλους φιλέσοι τοις στόματι: ἢν δὲ ἢ οὔτερος ἄγενέστερος, προσπίπτων προσκυνεί τὸν ἔτερον.

40. c.f. Hdt. 7.233. By the fourth century, the distinction between Greeks and barbarians could be perfectly equated with that between free people and slaves, as per Arist. *Pol.* 1254b16–19. See Wrenhaven (2012, 139–49).

41. For comprehensive analyses of the yoke image see Dumortier (1935, 12–26); B. Hughes Fowler (1967, 1–10); Conacher (1996a, 21–23) and, stressing its psychoanalytic resonance, Kuhns (1991, 11–34).

42. ζυγόν ἀμφιβαλέεν δούλων Ἑλλάδι.
of Persia μονόζυξ, “singly yoked” (l. 137) and news of the king’s defeat breaks ζυγὸν ἀλχας, “the yoke of power” (l. 549) that had been cast over Asia. As an instrument typically used to control animals, the image of the yoke reinforces the perceived gulf between the King and those who serve him.

Perhaps the tragedy’s most famous line is l. 242, the chorus’ reply to the Queen’s inquiry about the nature of the Athenians: οἷτινὸς δοῦλοι κ᾽ εκλήναι φωτὸς οὐδ᾽ ύπ᾽ ἑκοοί, “They are called slaves and subjects of no man.” While this has been read as an pithy encomium of Athenian freedom, the remark also reflects, in its use of the word δοῦλοι in hendiadys with ύποχοα, the Greek view of life under Persian rule. To be a subject, in other words, was ipso facto to be a slave. As Roger Brock (2007) has discussed, this association originated in Athens, first appearing in Solon’s dire description of subjugation under a domestic tyrant, most famously at 4W, ll. 17ff. As early as the 520s, however, a permutation of this metaphor, the equation of slavery with foreign conquest, appears abroad, in a lyric of Anacreon: ἀμ᾽ υνων πατρίδος δουλη΅ ιην, “warding off slavery from the land.” (PMG 419)

After the Persian Wars, the trope became deeply embedded in the wider Greek conception of political freedom; it maintained a particular valence with regard to the Persians and their royal ideology, and was often liberally applied to all non-Greeks

43. Anthony Podlecki (1986), commenting on the line, remarks: “I would be surprised if the original audience did not react like the one of which I was a part in the summer of 1965 in the Odeion of Herodes Atticus in Athens, which rose to its feet en masse and interrupted the actors’ dialogue with cheers” (78).

44. See l. 234, where the Chorus explains to the Queen that Xerxes was eager to take Athens as all Greece would then be βασιλέως ύποχοας. Interestingly, “subjects” of the Delian League were also referred to as ύποχοας, as per Thuc. 7.57.3.

45. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1913, 105–6) dates the verse to before the poet’s departure for the court of Polycrates on Samos, i.e. 522. Martin Ostwald (1995, 49) observes that the phrase stands as “the earliest surviving example of the idea that country is ‘enslaved’ when it is occupied by an alien power.”
generally. This nexus of ideas is voiced by Helen in Euripides’ tragedy of the same name: τὰ βαρβάρου γὰρ δοῦλα πάντα πλὴν ἕνός, “Among barbarians, all are slaves except one” (l. 276). A trope that was originally used by the Athenians to think about tyranny thus migrated to apply to Persian monarchy, binding the two technically distinct forms of government with a strong notional link.

Given the rigidly hierarchical nature of Persian society, “that there existed a feudal relationship between the King and even his most exalted subordinates” (Brock 2007, 210), it would have seemed to a Greek whose political experience was as a citizen of a polis as though “even the highest Persian dignitaries were little more than slaves” (Raaflaub 2004, 100). Christopher Tuplin (2007) suggests that, in addition, the concept was used by harried Greeks within the Persian sphere of influence to “mock their tormentors (satraps and others) by suggesting that they were no better off than the people they tormented” (57).

Tuplin, along with Anna Missiou (1993), suggests that the conflation of subject and slave could in part stem from the misunderstanding of the Persian term bandaka. The word is attested only in Dareios’ Behistun Inscription, which dates to c. 520 BCE, a monumental trilingual document in commemoration of his military victories. In the text, Dareios refers to his generals as manā bandaka, a phrase that has been variously translated as “my subjects,” “my vassals” and “my slaves.” Missiou (1993), observes that, since the word is derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *Bhendh-, related to “bind,” “the notion of binding indicated by the root may imply bonds.

47. Herodotus speaks of the Persian “enslavement” of the Lydians at 1.94.7 and of the Ionians at 1.169.2. His use of the image is not restricted to Persian conquests, however. See 1.95.2, 120.5 and 126.5–6.

48. See also Eur. IA 1400–1 and Soph. fr. 873.

49. See also Brock (2013, 107ff.).

50. See Missiou (1993, 381) for a range of translations, as well as for a comprehensive bibliography on the inscription.
related to slavery, but also to friendship, loyalty or trust, notions essentially based
on reciprocity” (Missiou 1993, 382). She adds that the many references to “loyalty”
and “friendship” in the inscription give weight to such an interpretation.51 The term
exemplifies the difficulty experienced by outsiders—be they ancient Greeks or modern
scholars—in parsing Achaemenid social practices.

Thus, contemporary Greek ideas about the Persian kingship, as well as the
specifically Athenian view of Persian geopolitics, made the Great King a figure
ideologically compatible with the Athenian concept of the tyrant, a compatibility
which Aeschylus exploits. In the next section, I will discuss Aeschylus’ depiction of
Xerxes in the tragedy, and how the tragedian maps the moral failings imputed to
tyranny by Solon onto the figure of the King, portraying him as a τ’ υραννος in all but
name.

Xerxes the Tyrant

Aeschylus’ characterization of Xerxes as a tyrant is achieved with both political
and moral language. That is to say, the Persians depicts Xerxes ruling like a tyrant,
touching in many respects on the Greek conceptions of Persian kingship discussed in
the previous section, as well as possessing the mindset and appetites of tyrant. These
two factors together are put forward as a reason behind the catastrophe which befalls
the Persian state. In this section, I will examine the political language of the play,
and how the Persians creates a Persian monarchy which conforms to Athenian ideas
about tyranny.

Among Aeschylean monarchs, Xerxes is something of an exception. In their
respective tragedies, both Agamemnon and Pelasgus, though holding the title of king,

51.Missiou (1993, 381) draws an apposite comparison: the definition of bandaka as “slave” has
been bolstered by comparisons with later cognates. However, the definitional slippage of a word like
βασιλεϋς, from “holder of an office subordinate to the ἱναξ” to “monarch,” is a reminder that the
passage of time can significantly alter a word’s meaning.
appear to rule in conjunction with a deliberative body.\textsuperscript{52} By contrast, the Great King of the \textit{Persians} wields power alone. The King’s supremacy is emphatically asserted at the outset of the tragedy by the chorus, a group of Persian elders:

\begin{quote}
τάδε μὲν Περσῶν τῶν οἰχομένων
ʾΕλλάδ’ ἐς ἄλων πιστὰ καλεῖται, 
καὶ τῶν ἄφνεων καὶ πολυχρύσων
ἐθράνων φύλακες, κατὰ πρεσβεῖαν

5 οὗτος αὐτὸς ἄναξ Ξέρξης βασιλεὺς
Δαρειογενῆς
ἐΰλετο χώρας ἐφορεύειν.
\end{quote}

We are called the “trusted ones” of the Persians, who have departed for the land of Greece, we the guardians of these dwellings opulent and rich in gold, who, because of our age

5 Lord King Xerxes himself, born of Dareios, chose to watch over the land. (ll. 1–7)

These first lines of the tragedy immediately delineate the hierarchy of Persian governance. The elders derive their authority from the explicit decree of Xerxes, hence their designation as the “trusted” or “faithful” ones. This is a touch of authentic “exotic” color: \textit{πιστός} was a real Persian court title, first attested in this tragedy. Its later use, a century later, in several of the texts of Xenophon, who had first-hand knowledge of Persian culture and customs, argues for its authenticity, at least as a Greek translation of a Persian term.\textsuperscript{53} I see the use of the term \textit{πιστός} specifically as an attempt to assimilate a foreign class of political relationship, that between the Great King and his immediate inferiors, into more familiar Greek cultural terms.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{52} Specifically, Agamemnon at \textit{Ag.} 844–46 and Pelasgus at \textit{Supp.} 368f. On kingship in tragedy, see Easterling (1984). On leadership in Aeschylus specifically, see Callahan (1944).

\textsuperscript{53} See Xen. \textit{An.} 1.5.15; \textit{Oec.} 4.6, 4.8 and \textit{Cyr.} 5.4.1. Missiou (1993, 382), as well as Pierre Briant (2002, 623) and Tuplin (2010, 55), view \textit{πιστός} as the Hellenization of the Persian \textit{bandaka}, discussed at p. 57.

\textsuperscript{54} See above p. 51.
To be πιστός was one of the key attributes of being a loyal ἐταίρος and thus to be a participant in good standing in the aristocratic social network. Yet despite their status, their “trustworthiness” and their seniority (πρεσβείαν, l. 5), the chorus serve only as observers and fellow-mourners in the tragedy. They are immediately located high in the Persian political power structure, but they do not possess any authority to exercise, nor do they ever express any discontent at the fact.

Aeschylus heaps numerous titles, both Greek and non-Greek, on Xerxes; their abundance suggests much about the tragedy’s depiction of the relationship between the Persian ruler and the Persian ruled. The very first mention of Xerxes in the play, at l. 5, sandwiches his name between ἀνάξ and βασιλεύς, a formulation which stresses, in the former term, his absolute authority and, in the latter, his specific title. With the addition of the emphatic αὐτός, “the construction of the phrase seems to suggest that his personage literally radiates sovereignty as the reigning king” (Tourraix 1984, 132). In the following line, Xerxes’ legitimacy is endorsed with the epithet Δαρειογενής; as the monarchy is hereditary, Xerxes’ status as Dareios-born certifies his authority to hold the throne.

Other titles given to Xerxes in the tragedy include ἀρχων, at l. 72, although the term must be one of military rather than royal authority, since it is also applied to the Egyptian commander Arsames at l. 36. The King is also referred to as ὀρχαμος.

55. See Donlan (1985) and, on the idea of personal fidelity as a social trait more generally, Beuveniste and Lallot (1975, 2:115–21).

56. In this respect, they are the inverse of the chorus in Ag., whose views often act as a counterpoint to Clytemnestra’s, who come much closer to representing “the people,” and whose unnatural political impotence is made explicit. See Gantz (1983) and Dodds (1973a, 46f.).

57. “La construction de ce syntagme semble faite pour suggérer que l’intéressé irradie littéralement la souveraineté, en tant que roi régant...”. Garvie ad loc. observes a similarity with Eur. Or. 348–49, a passage describing the grand entry of Menelaus, but the effect is diluted by the words’ separation over two lines, and the ensuing syntax suggests βασιλεύς be taken as a noun: καὶ μὴν βασιλεύς δὲ δὴ στείχει, / Μενέλαος ἀνάξ... 

58. Later, at ll. 759ff. Dareios will complete the picture, tracing the authority of the Persian kingship back to Zeus.
at l. 129, a strongly Homeric word (Moss 1979, 1n1). His most frequently spoken title in the play, however, is βασιλεύς or βασιλείος, which is applied to him ten times (1n1).59 This, if anything, is his “official” designation, and it is in this tragedy that the use of “Great King” to describe the ruler of Persia first appears in Greek.60

The tragedy depicts another foreign aspect of Persian royal power: the ideological conflation of the royal house with the state. Xerxes is called a “child” with surprising frequency throughout the drama.61 This in spite of the fact that, as Alain Tourraix (1984, 132) has pointed out, the King was 40 years old in 480. Similarly, the Queen is called μητέρα four times,62 and Dareios, during his ritual of invocation, is twice addressed as πάτερ.63 These were not uncommon words with which to respectfully address one’s elders (Dickey 1996, 78ff.), but taken together with the tragedy’s repeated genealogical affirmations they suggest a pointedly un-Athenian mode of governance in which the most important political actor is not the collective citizen body of the polis, but rather the “royal oikos” (Rosenbloom 2006, 37). Mark Griffith (1998) argues that casting the state as the oikos writ large would have immediately communicated the authoritarian nature of the Persian state to the Athenian audience, who understood the role of the κυράς to be absolute: “The democratic principles of rotation of authority, scrutiny of officials before and after their tenure of office, equal votes and freedom of speech, have no place in a well-run patriarchal household” (68).

This view of the “state as household” can also be viewed through the lens of Aeschylean othering: the chorus’ reverence for the dead king creates the perception

59. Ll. 5, 8, 24, 58, 66, 144, 151, 234, 585, 929.
60. βασιλέως...μεγάλου (l. 24). It is, however, possible that Aeschylus’ usage is predated by the sixth-century “Song of Hybrias” (PMG 908), especially given that a corrupted line may contain a reference to proskynesis. See Tedeschi (2003, 24).
61. παις: ll. 177, 189, 197, 211, 227, 232, 352, 473, 476, 529, 609, 717, 739, 744, 751, 782, 834, 847, 850; τέχνος: ll. 218 and 754. This refrain also serves to infantilize the King and presage his failure.
62. Ll. 151, 156, 215, 832
63. Ll. 662, 671
that the Persians viewed their monarch as a paternal benefactor, a impression elsewhere strengthened by Herodotus’ reference to the Persians calling Cyrus “father” (3.89.3). Brock (2013, 30–31) sees Aeschylus’ use of “father” as another way of signaling the “Easternness” of the mise en scène, as well as how literally the Persian monarch “possessed” those below him. The metaphor is rooted in real-life practice, and may thus be seen as another touch of authentic “color”: the repeated use of such familial language, paired with the accumulation of royal titles (as at l. 5), may reflect Aeschylus’ attempt—a fairly accurate one—to imitate the honorifics of official Persian inscriptions (Moss 1979, 8–9). Pierre Briant (2002, 463f.) notes the usage of “the king’s household” as a synonym for the Persian realm in official Persian documents in various languages, and evidence for the Greek awareness of the trope is visible in the “Gadatas Letter”, a (possibly fraudulent) inscription purporting to record a letter from Dareios himself, in which βασιλ’ εως ᾖικωζ (ML 12.17–18) at one point stands in for Persia.64

Aeschylus positions Xerxes as a tyrant by the use of political and ideological language of democracy; but does so in the negative, invoking not the presence of democracy but specifically its absence. A key passage in which this occurs is the stichomythia at ll. 230–45, when the Queen, after describing her dream, for no apparent reason turns to the topic of Athens, about which she asks a series of questions. The transition is awkward and unprompted, as Broadhead (1960, xix) rightly observes,65 but is necessary in order to raise the subject of Athens.66 The

64. See, most recently, Tuplin (2009), who regards it as genuine. For an argument for its spuriousness, see Briant (2003).

65. His assumption, however, that the stichomythia was included solely for the sake of jingoism, in order “to eulogize the Greeks and (impliedly) to disparage the Persians” (Broadhead 1960, xix), does not necessarily follow from that awkwardness.

66. This is not, contra Seidensticker (1995), Aeschylus depicting the Queen as uninformed and as a typical woman who “has not given much thought to the Persian army’s operations” (158). Similarly, Sidgwick (1903), who calls her “an anxious, superstitious, ignorant woman” (x). Hughes Dominick
answers that the chorus provides sketch out Athens from the Persian point of view, demonstrate their cognitive biases, and allow Aeschylus to comment directly on his city’s role in the Persian Wars. When she is told that the city lies in the far west of the world, where the sun sets (l. 232), she asks with incredulity:67

Atossa: And yet my son wants to hunt this polis down?
Chorus: Yes, for then all Greece would become subject to the King.

235 Atossa: And such a great body of men is available to them?
Chorus: Large enough. It did great harm to the Medes.
Atossa: Are the bow and arrow well-suited to their hands?
Chorus: Not at all. They use spears for close fighting, and have shield-bearing armor.
Atossa: And what else in addition to this? Do they have sufficient wealth in their palace?

240 Chorus: They possess a spring of silver, a treasure in the earth.

The initial suggestion of Athens’ irrelevance, as indicated by its distance (as far off as the Ethiopians from Greece), is undercut by the statement at l. 234, the point at which an overtly pro-Athenian sentiment becomes briefly apparent.68 This is sustained in the following exchange (ll. 235–36), which, despite some textual

67. Both Page and Garvie, following Pohlenz, insert a two-line lacuna after l. 235, which I omit for the sake of space. Page postulates that the choral reply makes reference to Athenian naval power: naves habent satis validas.

68. Pace Hall (1996a, 11–13).
issues (Garvie 2009, 135), makes a fairly straightforward reference to the improbable Athenian victory at Marathon in spite of the numerical discrepancy between Greek and Persian forces. The distinction between the archer- and hoplite-based fighting in the ensuing exchange (ll. 237–38) reinforces the Greek distinction between the inherently cowardly nature of fighting with bows, a typically Persian method,69 and the hard-charging hoplite citizen-soldier.70 Lines 239–40 neatly contrast the Queen’s ignorance of Athenian government, that they surely must be ruled by a monarch,71 with the chorus’ knowledge of the Laurion silver mines, a point of Athenian pride and, more importantly, the resource that funded the Salaminian fleet. Thus far, the stichomythia has established the importance of Athens as the key to all of Greece, evoked the Athenian victory at Marathon, reiterated the Greek bias against Persian archery and made mention of the resource that, the audience knew, would subsidize the instrument of the Persians’ defeat.

But it is the next couplet, ll. 241–42, already mentioned on p. 56, that posits the clearest ideological distinction in the tragedy:

Ατ. τίς δ` ε ποιμάνωρ ἔπεστι κάπιθεσπόγχει στρατῷ;
Ξο. οὕτινός δούλοι κέχληνται φωτὸς σιδῶν ὑπήκοοι.

Atossa: What shepherd is set over them, and rules their people?
Chorus: They are called slaves and subjects of no man.

Once again, the Queen’s worldview is evident in her question. She takes for granted, of course, the authority of some ruler or master—a natural assumption for a

69.Cf. l. 85: ἔπαχε δουρικλίτως ἀνδρὶ τοξόθρυσαν Ἀρη
70.See Goldhill (1988, 190). For an illustration of this distinction see, e.g., the disparaging way in which Lycus characterizes Herakles’ archery at Eur. HF 157–64.
71.See the discussion on ll. 241–42 below. The reading of Rosenbloom (2006, 60), that the Queen is referring to private homes (to signify a wrong-headed assumption of the importance of private wealth at Athens) misses the point, especially given the Queen’s next question, about Athenian government.
Persian to make—and she phrases her question so as to evince her benign conception of monarchy: a king is a shepherd who herds his sheep, benevolently guarding his flock.\textsuperscript{72} But the chorus’ response is perhaps even more telling: Athens has no master. This is a key line in the tragedy’s dichotomy between Greek freedom and Persian autocracy, but it is not the answer that the audience would necessarily expect.

While it is true that Athens is an independent \textit{polis}, there is no follow-up explanation of Athenian popular sovereignty, such as in the later exchange between Theseus and the Theban herald in Euripides’ \textit{Suppliant Women}, when Theseus forcefully asserts that in Athens δῆμος δ’ ἀνάσσει, “the people rule” (l. 406). This is a pointed omission, and suggests that the concept of democracy cannot be expressed as a concept—let alone understood—by the Persians. Indeed, it is the Queen’s incredulity at the very idea of a leaderless people that drives the discussion onward, back to the topic of Persian failure:

\textit{Atossa:} How then could they withstand an invading hostile force?  
\textit{Chorus:} Enough to have destroyed Dareios’ great and glorious army.

That said, in spite of this ideological aporia, the underlying tenets of Athenian democracy do find their way into the \textit{Persians}, but in negative, rather than positive, terms. This is most visible in the chorus’ lament after learning of Xerxes’ defeat, as they bemoan the ensuing global diminution of Persian power:

\begin{quote}
\textit{At.} πῶς ἄν ὦν μένοιεν ἄνδρας πολεμίους ἐπῆλυδας;  
\textit{Ξο.} ὡστε Δαρείου πολύν τε καὶ καλὸν φθείραι στρατὸν
\end{quote}

\textit{Atossa:} How then could they withstand an invading hostile force?  
\textit{Chorus:} Enough to have destroyed Dareios’ great and glorious army.

\textsuperscript{72}While the notion of a “shepherd of the people,” usually expressed ποιμήν λαὸν, is a “standard example of metaphorical language” (Haubold 2000, 17) in Greek, it is originally of Eastern provenance, and thus doubly appropriate in the mouth of a Persian monarch. Both M. L. West (1997, 226–27) as well as Beuveniste and Lallot (1975, 2:89–95) discuss its origin, and Brock (2013, 43–52) examines its overall use. See also Sideras (1971, 173) for a consensus on its use in Aeschylus.
τοὶ δ᾿ ἀνὰ γὰν Ἀσίαν δὴν
οὐχέτι περσονομοῦνται,
οὐδὲ ἔτι δισμοφοροῦσιν
dεσποσύνοιοιν ἀνάγκαις,
οὐδὲ ἐξ γὰν προπίτνοντες
ἀζονται· βασιλεία

Not for long, now, will those who live
throughout Asia be governed by Persian law
Nor will they submit tribute
under their master’s compulsion
Or be compelled to make obeisance;
Royal power has been utterly extinguished.

No longer will mortals
keep their tongues in check: for the people
are free to speak freely,
since the yoke of force was removed. (ll. 584–93)

Given the yoke’s association with tyrannical domination in the tragedy, its slippage can be understood as an irruption of democracy. The collapse of Persian imperium is expressed in a series of negative clauses that, taken together, neatly encapsulate the democratic view of Eastern domination (Hall 1989, 98). First, the Great King will no longer enjoy the tribute of his subject peoples. The collection of δασμός was emblematic of Persian oppression,73 and appears to have been an object of fascination for the Greeks.74 Secondly, the peoples of Asia will no longer perform proskynesis to the (in Greek eyes, wrongly-assumed) divinity of the Great King.75 Finally, they will

73. See Hdt. 3.97, where it is noted that only the Persians are not compelled to offer δασμός or φόρος, and thus are the only people in the Persian imperium to enjoy ἀπέλεια.

74. Burn (1986, 314) posits that this fascination stemmed from monumental reliefs at Persepolis that depicted the subject peoples of the empire delivering tribute. See, however Root (1979, 70).

75. See my discussion of the Greek understanding of proskynesis at p. 54.
stop guarding their words or censoring themselves: they will enjoy freedom of speech. Democracy—relief from tribute, from forced worship of a ruler, and from restrictions on speech—is invoked by the characters on stage, but only inversely.

The chorus’ final item, freedom of speech, is the most significant of the three. The equivalency of freedom of speech with democracy as a whole was a common fifth-century rhetorical habit, and the metonymic substitution would have been immediately apparent to the audience. Whether formulated as ἰσηγορία, “equality of speech,” or παρρησία, “freedom of speech,” the right was understood as a necessary precondition for ἰσονομία, and for democracy itself. The centrality of the right was reinforced at the beginning of every meeting of the Assembly, when the herald would proclaim, τίς ἄγορεύειν βούλεται, “Who wishes to speak?”

In the Athenian mind, the freedom to speak in the Assembly was a guarantor of civic participation as well as an equalizer of participatory opportunity, allowing each citizen the chance to have his say and thereby ensuring that the actions of the Assembly were indeed the actions of the δῆμος as a whole. Herodotus provides a clear instance of this ideological pairing when, describing the growth of Athenian power after the reforms of Cleisthenes, at which time the principle of ἰσηγορία was thought to have been established, he uses ἰσηγορία “virtually as an equivalent to δημοκρατία” (RaafflauB 2004, 97):

76. On the equation of free speech and democracy, see Momigliano (1980); Monoson (2000, 51–63); Forsdyke (2001, 344) and RaafflauB (2004, 221–25).

77. See Dem. 18.169–73 for a slightly sensationalized example of this practice. See also my discussion of Eur. Supp., in which the question is quoted nearly verbatim.

78. See Dem. 21.123–24, where the possibility of rich men using money and intimidation to prevent other citizens speaking against them is depicted as a deprivation of both ἰσηγορία and ἔλευθερία. The importance of freedom of speech as a democratic principle was not a view limited to Athens. Polybius notes: ἰσηγορίας καὶ παρρησίας καὶ καθόλου δημοκρατίας ἅληθινής σύστημα καὶ προκέρασεν εἰλαχιστέραν οὐκ ἂν τύφοι τῆς παρὰ τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς ὑπαχρεότητας, “One could not find a political system and principle so favorable to equality and freedom of speech, in a word so sincerely democratic, as that of the Achaean league” (2.38.6, Loeb translation).

79. See Woodhead (1967) and J. D. Lewis (1971).
μούνον ἀλλὰ πανταχῇ ἢ ἱσηγορίη ὡς ἔστι χρήμα σπουδαῖον...，“The Athenians now flourished, showing that, not only in one but in every respect, equality of speech is an excellent thing...” (5.78). It is clear, then, from Aeschylus’ reference to unimpeded speech that the failures of the tyrannical Persian state have allowed democracy to sprout up in their wake. This democratic outburst was foreshadowed in the Queen’s attempts to reassure the chorus after describing her ill-omened dream:

εὖ γὰρ ἰστε, παῖς ἐμὸς
πράξας μὲν εὖ ὑθυμαστὸς ἃν γένοιτ’ ἀνήρ,
κακῶς δὲ πράξας, οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος πόλει,
σωθεὶς δ’ ὁμοίως τῇ σοφεὶ κοιρανεὶ χθονός.

Keep in mind that, should my son succeed, he would be remarkable indeed,
But should he fail, he is not accountable to the state
and, brought home safe, he is lord of the land as before. (ll. 211–14)

The description of Xerxes as οὐδ ὑπεύθυνος again underlines the authoritarian nature of the Persian state by making an oblique reference to a political mechanism that the Athenians saw as central to the democratic polis: the institution of εὑθυνα, the “settling of accounts,” to which all Athenian public officials were subjected at the end of their term of office.80 Under the process, every public official was subjected to the scrutiny of both other officials and of the δῆμος as a whole: a given official would submit his accounts to a board of assessors, who would investigate them and hold a hearing at which the official was compelled to testify before a jury. The results of the enquiry into his financial records would be announced, and any citizen was free to make an accusation of financial misconduct against the official, even if the accounts had been approved by the assessors.

Within the next three days, a panel of judges would convene to hear any complaints that were brought against the official, financially-related or otherwise. If a charge was submitted, the judges would investigate the claim and, if it was found legitimate, proceed with prosecution. Given that εὑθυνα were initiated against every public official, of which there were well over one thousand, and that the initial inspection process had to be completed by the end of the first month of the calendar year, it seems an understatement to say that the process “must have consumed a considerable amount of the jurors’ time” (Hansen 1990, 236). Even so, the εὑθυνα was an important weapon against the abuse of office and the extralegal accumulation of power by any one individual and one which, considering the amount of time and effort expended on it every year, would very likely have been the audience’s first association with the word.81

T. Harrison (2000, 78) has suggested the ideological force of the word in a dramatic context; the audience would not expect a literal εὑθυνα but the term’s usage would have evoked “the ethos underlying the institution of euthunai rather than the institution itself,” which is to say, the ethos of democratic accountability. This broadening of associations is borne out at ll. 369–71, when the messenger mentions that failure on the part of Persian sailors would be met with summary execution. The idea of accountability expands from simple financial accountability to the accountability secured by due process.

As a democratically-inflected foil to the attitudes and actions of stage tyrants, the concept of εὑθυνα appears elsewhere in the Aeschylean corpus; as will be seen, ὑπεὑθυνος is also applied to the despotic Zeus of the Prometheus Bound, and

81. Pace P. Rhodes (2003, 116–17), who observes that such practices of accountability were not limited to Athens, and were not inherently democratic. I would reply, however, that the Athenians would likely think of their own practices first and foremost, and that the absence of a process that even non-democratic poleis employed would be an effective indicator of the utter lack of civic rights in the Persian state.
Clytemnestra, at Ch. 715, harshly orders a slave to carry out a command ὡς ἀπευθυνον, “as one liable to give account,” at once reminding the audience that her sole authority stands in place of that of a citizen body and that she herself is under no such constraint. The invocation in the Persians of a process of public scrutiny reinforces the untouchable character of Xerxes’ position, not only because his position is for life and his legitimacy is conferred through birthright, but also because his subjects have no say in his performance.

Xerxes’ freedom from accountability, however, is not permanent. The Queen calling Xerxes ὁ ὑπευθύνονς is answered by Dareios’ later description of Zeus as εὐθυνος at l. 828; the Great King is answerable to an assessor after all.

Xerxes the Hubristes

The tragedy’s political portrait of the tyrant Xerxes is complemented by the inclusion of another set of characteristics that, rooted in Solonian language and the imagery of ἄβρας and the inevitable ἀτη that follows, assimilates Xerxes with Athenian discourse on tyranny, portraying him more pointedly as a tyrant. This task is, once again, made much easier by the ideological overlap between the condemnable moral failings of the tyrant and long-established Greek stereotypes about Persia. Aeschylus exploits this overlap to transform historical events, Xerxes’ invasion and the Greek victory at Salamis, into material for tragedy.

82. See Brock (1991, 168).

83. Griffith (1998, 62n136) suggests, albeit fancifully, that the tragedy’s closing kommos may be taken as a kind of dokimasia, at which a young citizen is interrogated by a council of his elders to determine his eligibility for military and civic service.
The Divinity of the Great King

The correspondence between the presumed divinity of the Persian King and that of the tyrant-figure breaks down on one important distinction. Greek discourse on tyranny, from its inception, analogized the wealthy, immensely powerful tyrant to a god.\(^{84}\) While tyrants were happy to exploit such associations, they did not literally claim divinity nor were they generally perceived to be divine. The Great King of Persia, on the other hand, was commonly thought to be worshipped as a god. Aeschylus’ depiction of the fawning Persian attitude towards their Kings, then, binds Xerxes more closely to the tyrant-figure by the amplification of a tyrannical trope that both binds Xerxes more closely to the tyrant-figure and emphasizes the superstitious slavishness of Persian society.

Throughout the Persians, the Great King is spoken of as superhuman, more akin to the gods than to mortals.\(^{85}\) As part of an hopeful, ennobling picture of Xerxes headed off to war, the chorus sings:

\[
\text{πολυ´ ανδρου δ´ Ασίας θο´ υριος ἄρχων}
\]

\[
\text{ἐπὶ πάσαν χθόνα ποιμανόριον θείον ἐλαύνει}
\]

\[
\text{δηγόθεν, πεζόνομος ἔκ τε χαλάσας, ὠχροίσι πετοῦθως}
\]

\[
\text{στυφελοῖς ἑφέταις, χρυσογόνου γενεάς ἱσόθεος φῶς}
\]

[80]

The raging leader of many-peopled Asia

\[
\text{δριβεῖ πόλεμον γενεάς ἰσόθεος φως}
\]

\[
\text{διχ´ οθεν, πεζον´ ομος ἐκ τε θαλ´ ασσας, ᾿οχυρο´ισι πεποιθ ` ως}
\]

\[
\text{στυφελο῀ ις ᾿ εφ´ εταις, χρυσογ´ ονου γενείς ἱσόθεος φῶς}
\]

[80]

drives his divine flock against the whole earth in two ways, by land and by sea, trusting his strong, harsh commanders, he equal to a god of a golden-born race.

(ll. 74–76, 80)

In war, he is “equal to a god” (80), an association strengthened by the adjective \(θο´ υριος\), a common Iliadic epithet of Ares. His flock is similarly “divine” (l. 75).\(^{86}\)

84. See also my discussion of this belief in a wider context on p. 53 above.
85. I emphasize that neither Xerxes nor Dareios is praised as actually divine.
86. Cf. The Queen’s question at l. 241.
Dareios, too, is spoken of as godlike: he is called ἵσοθεος (l. 856) and ἵσοδαίμων (l. 634), and the Queen tells him that she envies him for having died before the Persian defeat: βιοτον εὐάμωνα Πέρσας ὡς θεός διῄγαγες, “you lived a happy life, like a god to the Persians” (l. 711). The tragedy, then, recasts the (supposed) Persian religious veneration of their monarchs as hubristic aggrandizement, pushing that aspect of the tyrannical ideological framework to its logical conclusion.87 Although the Persians cower with misplaced awe before their mortal Kings, by the conclusion of the tragedy they see firsthand Xerxes’ human fallibility when he falters in the face of a true divine power.

Wealth

The association between wealth and tyranny finds a counterpart in the longstanding stereotype of luxuriant Persian decadence. The tragedy, however, goes further, depicting Persia as a place not only of tremendous wealth, but also of vast size, of boundless resources and of overwhelming military might: it is portrayed as a land of excess in every form.88 I do not intend to trace the theme of wealth throughout the entire tragedy,89 but a discussion of the parodos, in which this motif is especially present, will exemplify the theme’s use overall.

The parodos is replete with imagery and vocabulary of wealth, reiterating the splendor of Susa and the Persian state in several forms, as though Aeschylus were attempting to overwhelm the audience with imperial pomp and splendor. The chorus

87. On the question of Dareios’ divinity, see n. 38 above.
88. Indeed, even at the end of the tragedy, Persia remains associated with vastness, but, following the reversal of the King’s fortunes, it is Persian defeat, rather than prosperity, that is unimaginably huge.
89. For such a treatment, see Avery (1964), Michelini (1982, 86–94) and Rosenbloom (2006, 49–53). See also Rosenbloom (2006, 40) on the theme of “uncountability” in the parodos.
alludes to the gold of the palace (l. 4–5), of the Persian army (l. 9), of Sardis (l. 45), and of Babylon (l. 43–44). This effect is amplified by the repeated prefix: Persia is πολύχρυσος, "rich in gold." The addition of the πολυ- prefix is in keeping with the tragedy as a whole: the high frequency of πάς and πολύς, both by themselves and in compounds, creates "an effect of totality" (Avery 1964, 174). This abundance extends to the form of the parodos itself, much of which is taken up with a lengthy catalog of foreign contingents and their exotically-named commanders whom Xerxes led westward (ll. 21–58). The verbal parade of names and peoples suggests the inconceivable size and military capability of the Persian Empire, a force whose collective strength constitutes "the entire might of Asia" (l. 11).

Hubris

The audience would have known the ultimate fate of Xerxes’ army, rendering the description ironic in its grandiosity, in the manner of Shelley’s “Ozymandias.” And yet the army’s demise is presaged by the very words of the chorus. To return to the opening lines of the tragedy:

τάδε μὲν Περσῶν τῶν οἰχομένων
'Ελλάδ' ἐς αἷν πιστὰ καλεῖται

90. πολυχρύσων / ἐδράνων
91. πολυχρύσου στρατιάς
92. πολύχρυσοι Σάρδεις
93. Βαβυλών δ' / ἦ πολύχρυσος
94. This is the same term that Archilochus uses to denote the wealth of Gyges in fr. 19W.
95. Notably absent from the exhaustive list is mention of any of the numerous Greeks who fought for Xerxes (Hall, 1996a, 108).
96. πᾶσα ἰσχύς Ἀσιατογενῆς See, however, Rosenmeyer (1982), who sees the catalog in a more negative light, that it conveys “a sense of mass and movement, but a movement choked by the magnitude of its components” (114).
We are called the “trusted ones” of the Persians, who have departed for the land of Greece… (ll. 1–2)

I have translated the participle in l. 1, οἵχομένων, which modifies Περσῶν, as “departed,” and like the English word, the Greek term conveys both the sense of leaving and of dying. The chorus use the verb twice more, and the Queen once, in reference to the army, at ll. 13, 60 and 178. The ominous verb next appears among the first lines of the messenger who arrives to announce the news of Salamis: τὸ Περσῶν δ’ ἄνθος οἴχεται πεσὼν, “The flower of the Persians has fallen and is gone” (l. 252).

Just as the great wealth of Persia is, in the parodos, praised in the language that will also express its destruction, so is the overall motif of wealth subverted later in the tragedy. After the ghost of Dareios delivers his final, prophetic speech, his parting words are addressed to the chorus:

840 ὑμεῖς δὲ, πρέσβεις, χαρέτ’, ἐν κακοὶς ὀμοῖς
ψυχῇ διδόντες ἤδονὴν καθ’ ἡμέραν,
ὡς τοῖς θανόοις πλοῦτος οὐδὲν ὑψεῖτ.’

840 Farewell, elders! Even in difficult times
give your souls over to pleasure each day,
for wealth is of no value to the dead. (ll. 840–42)

The grandeur of Persia reached a point of excess, and thus was subject to the corrective effects of ὀμη. The same is true of Xerxes. His unprecedented ambitions—to conquer Greece, to unnaturally bridge continents—leave him open to ὑβρίς.

I will now discuss how Xerxes is portrayed as a ὑβριστὴς, thus embodying the quintessential moral attribute of the tyrant.

97. l. 13: οἵχομε; ll. 60 and 178: οἴχεται.
98. cf. ll. 59–60, where the chorus use the same phrase with the same verb: τοῖς άνθοις Περσίδος ἀκώς / οἴχεται άνθρωποι.
Xerxes the ὑβριστής

The word ὑβρις, the quintessential moral attribute of the tyrant, appears twice in the Persians, at ll. 808 and 821, spoken both times by Dareios. In response to the chorus asking about the Persian army that remained in Europe, Dareios gives a dire prophecy, foreseeing the disastrous Persian defeat at Plataea. He frames the disaster as divine punishment for the army’s impious acts of destruction:99

Their deaths shall be recompense for their hubris and godless thoughts,
since as they went to Greece they were not ashamed of
sacking the images of the gods or burning their temples;
altars have vanished, and shrines of the gods
have been overturned from their foundations, uprooted in chaos.
Hence they suffer terribly no less than what they have wrought,
and will suffer evils to come, and the foundation
of our ills is not yet beneath us, but is already being laid.
So great will be the gore from the bloody slaughter
from the Doric spear on the soil of Plataea. (805–17)

The compensatory nature of the disaster is emphasized by Aeschylus’ word choice; earlier, at ll. 201–4, the Queen recounted her attempt to perform a sacrifice after her unsettling dream, an attempt that was thwarted by a terrible omen. The term

99. Paul Perdrizet (1921) sees the lines as references to the sacrilegious actions of the Persians specifically at Eleusis and Athens.
for her offering, πέλανος, “a thick liquid consisting largely of meal, honey and oil” (Garvie 2009, 123), is the same word that at l. 816 signifies the “gore” from the Persian slaughter that the Greeks will perpetrate at Plataea. Further, the word σφαγή, “slaughter,” the second half of the word immediately following, αἷματοσφαγῆς, “bloody slaughter”, can refer to the ritual slaying of an animal. The two words together very strongly imply that the Persians’ impending defeat at Plataea will be a “sacrificial offering” of soldiers, a repayment for their king’s impiety.

The second instance of ὤβρις in the tragedy follows immediately after, and it is here that Xerxes is most vividly depicted within the Athenian tyrant tradition:

820 ὦς οὐχ ὑπέρφευ θνητὸν ὄντα χρῆ ὕφονεΐν:

Heaps of corpses will signify mutely
To mortal eyes—even three generations hence—
820 That a mortal must not think too lofty thoughts.
For his hubris, when it blossoms, bears
A crop of delusion, from which he
Reaps a sorrowful harvest.
Behold the punishments for such deeds
825 And remember Athens and Greece,
And let no one, despising their current circumstances
And lusting after other things, squander great prosperity.
For Zeus, punisher of overweening minds,
Stands above them, a stern assessor. (ll. 818–28)

100. Elsewhere in tragedy, πέλανος is used to signify clotted blood: cf. Aesch. Eum. 265; Eur. Alc. 851; Rhes. 430.
These lines echo a portion of a well-known poem of Solon, who was venerated by the Athenians as both a lawgiver and a poet. By describing ὑβρίς and its consequences in agricultural imagery, Aeschylus evokes Solon’s pronouncement on hubris, which employs similar metaphors: ['Ευνομία]... ὑβριν ἀμαυροῖ, / αὐάνει δ’ ἄτης ἄνθεα φυόμενα... “Civic harmony]... diminishes insolence and withers the burgeoning flowers of ruin...” (4W, ll. 34–35).101 Dareios, like Solon, situates ὑβρίς as a consequence of excess (ὑπέρφευ, l. 820; τῶν ὑπερχόμων ἄγαν, l. 827). Comparisons with harvesting are apposite: as Michelini (1978) observed, the fundamental metaphor implicit in ὑβρίς, an aspect of the term’s original connotations (via the verb ὑβρίζω) is that of plants growing excessively and needing to be pruned.

Viewing the Persians through Solon’s pronouncements on ὑβρίς brings to the fore an often neglected aspect of the tragedy. The lawgiver repeatedly warns of the destructiveness of ὑβρίς in elements of the population for the community as a whole, not only for those elements themselves (e.g. 4.5, 17–20).102 The communal nature of Solonian retribution is encapsulated in 4.26: οὐτω δὴμος κακίν ἐρχεται οἴκας’ ἐκ’ αστῶ, “Thus the public evil comes home to every man...”

The extreme inequality of Persian society, with so much wealth concentrated at the very top, is both a reflection and a consequence of the Great King’s κόρος. What Solon provides in a reading of the Persians is the reminder that the unequal distribution of societal wealth, motivated by the appetites of the well-born few, leaves a society in a fundamental state of injustice, which in turn leads to ἀτη befalling the entire community.103 The state with hubristic, rapacious rulers faces stasis and

101. Although such language is not uniquely Solonic, Aeschylus’ description contextualizes ὑβρίς in much the same way, with the injustices of a ruler bringing harm to the community: the similarity in language strengthens that connection.

102. At 4.19–20, Solon speaks of “slumbering war” coming upon the unjust city, “which obliterates the beloved youth of many,” a warning echoed by the chorus’ words at ll. 918–30 lamenting the destruction of the χώρας ἄνθος.

103. Cf. the discussion of Balot (2001, 91f.).
struggle. And it is such a fate that is befalling the Persian Empire by the tragedy’s end (e.g. ll. 584–96, 963–73). In the final scene, the chorus, mirroring the triumphal catalogue of the opening, laments a series of dead commanders in the manner of an ubi sunt litany, the varied names of the fallen suggesting the geographical breadth of the empire—and thus the global consequences of Xerxes’ failure.

Xerxes, then, fits the tyrannical archetype, even if he is never labelled as such. He has limitless wealth, is worshipped as an equal of the gods, and lives in a golden pleasure dome. In his possessions, his power and his ambitions he is the very embodiment of hubristic excess, and he—along with his people—pay the price for it. But while Xerxes is analogized to a tyrant through archetypal characteristics, Zeus in the Prometheus Bound is depicted as a tyrant outright.

Prometheus Bound

Introduction

Although it is set far from the inhabited world and featuring only a single (semi-bovine) mortal among its characters, the Prometheus Bound engages deeply with the concept of tyranny. The drama offers a vivid and unsettling portrait of life under tyrannical rule, the regime of the recently-enthroned Zeus. In a formal inversion of the Persians, the audience’s point of view is located squarely on the side of the tyrant’s subjects while the tyrant himself, although much discussed, does not appear on stage. The tragedy is also, however, the most clearly problematic Aeschylean work, both in terms of its dating and its attribution. In this section, I will discuss the political content of the Prometheus Bound (hereafter PV) and how its depiction of the tyrant Zeus complements that put forward in the Persians.

104. Such events were, of course, ahistorical. The Persian Empire did not disintegrate in 480, but persisted for another 150 years.
The intertwined questions of the PV’s authenticity and dating are unavoidable in any discussion of the tragedy, although its authorship is ultimately not of particular import to my thesis. The tragedy’s dating and authorship were not called into question until relatively recently; indeed, the drama had been transmitted alongside the other Aeschylean tragedies from the earliest preserved manuscripts. Alexandrian commentators, who had access to a far greater body of tragic texts than that which now exists, and who were “as alert to the possibility of misattribution as were any of their nineteenth-century German successors” (Herington 1970, 18), regarded the tragedy as authentic. And yet the PV has been called “inept,” with one scholar professing to be “sincerely puzzled as to why anyone who now reads [the tragedy] with critical faculties switched on should persist in ascribing it to Aeschylus” (M. L. West 1990a, 53).

The commonly cited evidence for the objections to Aeschylean authorship can be grouped into two categories: stylistic grounds and artistic sensibility. By “stylistic grounds,” I mean observations about some of the tragedy’s unusual formal features, such as grammatical constructions that are used in the PV but nowhere else in Aeschylus (Schmid 1929, 68ff. Griffith 1977, 190ff.). Scholars have also paid attention to the tragedy’s distinctive vocabulary: some words (dubbed by Wilhelm Schmid (1929, 74–76) Lieblingswörter) are repeated with a striking frequency, while others (Eigenwörter) are otherwise absent from the Aeschylean corpus (Schmid 1929, 43–46; Griffith 1977, 158–66). Notable among the Lieblingswörter is τύφαννος and its cognates, which appear twelve times in the text of the drama.

More recently, Mark Griffith has employed stylometric analysis as evidence against Aeschylean authorship of the PV. He finds that the tragedy’s lyric passages are so metrically divergent from the six other Aeschylean texts that, he concludes, if we

105. Herington (1970, 18) points to the skeptical first Hypothesis to the Rhesus as an example of Alexandrian willingness to identify texts they considered spurious.
possessed only the choral portions of the *PV* without attribution, “we would on metrical grounds reject absolutely the idea that Aeschylus could be their author” (Griffith 1977, 67). Furthermore, several features of the text are more characteristic of tragedies written later in the century, such as markedly reduced role for the chorus, and the use of dactylo-epitrite meter, found nowhere else in Aeschylus but common in the earlier works of Sophocles and Euripides. M. L. West (1990b) concedes that a very late composition date might explain the presence of a few stylistic features more common in the decades after Aeschylus’ death, however the preponderance of evidence militates definitively against such a possibility: “To suppose that in [a] brief period [Aeschylus’] whole technique suddenly transformed itself out of recognition is not an answer with which any honest scholar can feel comfortable” (1990b, 55).

In addition, certain complexities of staging and *mise en scène* have prompted some to consider the drama unperformable and thus spurious—perhaps even a *Lesedrama*. The most obvious problem is that Prometheus spends almost the entire tragedy chained to a rock, affixed with a method that a human actor could not survive: Kratos urges Hephaestus to “drive in the stubborn point of the unbreakable wedge right through his chest” (ll. 64–65). It was suggested by, *inter alios*, Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1914, 114) that the Titan could have been represented on stage by a puppet or mannequin, but this idea has been dismissed as “grotesque and unworkable” (Dodds 1973c, 37).

With the intentionally vague term “artistic sensibility,” I mean the characteristics—

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106. In the *PV*, the chorus’ lines constitute 18% of the text, whereas in other Aeschylean tragedies, they take up at least 42% of the text (Griffith 1977, 123).

107. For a comprehensive treatment of the challenges staging the *PV* would have invited, see Taplin (1977, 460–69). For the argument that the tragedy is in fact a *Lesedrama*, see Schmid (1929, 103ff.).

108. ἀδαμαντίνου νῦν σημήνας αὐθάδῃ γνάθου / στέρνων διαμπ` αξ πασσ` ἀλευ' ἀρρωμ` ενως

109. One consequence of such a dramatic choice would be the impossibility of later depicting the liberation of Prometheus on stage, a point to which Wilamowitz accedes.
poetic, theological or otherwise—that scholars impute to Aeschylus. The PV’s choral odes have, for example, come under scrutiny for the simplicity of the sentiments they express when compared to those of the Oresteia. The magisterial “Hymn to Zeus” in the Agamemnon, it is thought, could not possibly have been written by the author of the “agreeable but vacuous little songs” (M. L. West 1990a, 64) of the PV.

Another significant critique in this vein is theological: namely, Aeschylus’ treatment of Zeus in the PV. The god indisputably suffers by comparison to his evocation in the Oresteia, in which “in his capacities as ξένιος, ἔρκειος, σωτήρ and τέλειος he becomes, in effect, the personification of the moral, domestic and political necessity which works throughout the trilogy towards the restoration of a harmonious order...” (Griffith 1977, 251). In the PV, by contrast, he is a tyrant and a thug, a cosmic bully whom the audience is invited to hate. Schmid was clearly scandalized at the thought that the same poet who could create the solemn cosmic Zeus of the Agamemnon would also depict the god in a fashion more befitting Lucianic scoffing (1929, 89).110

But even as staunch an opponent of Aeschylean authorship of the PV as Griffith understands that the depictions of divine characters in different tragedies “must be interpreted within their dramatic context” as a question of theater and not “abstract theological discussion” (1977, 251). Thomas Rosenmeyer (1955) long ago forestalled any discussion of a theologian Aeschylus, arguing vigorously that the playwright’s stage versions of the gods are “not a theological proposition, but a manipulation of religious ideas... toward dramatic and purely dramatic ends” (1955, 259).

The issue of the tragedy’s characterization of Zeus, however, is related to a larger problem with the tragedy, one which is of greater concern to this discussion: the performance context of the Prometheus Bound. Was the tragedy part of a trilogy, or was it a standalone drama? It makes a great deal of difference whether the PV is part

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110. See also Lloyd-Jones (1983, 95).
of a larger work or not—whether the tragedy’s tyrannical Zeus remains tyrannical, the story unresolved, or whether, in a following drama, the god’s stance is softened and the release that Prometheus hints at in the PV is granted.

There are three distinct possibilities: that the PV was, like the component tragedies of the Oresteia, part of a trilogy (the so-called Prometheia);\(^{111}\) that it was a standalone drama, as we know e.g. the Persians to have been; or that it was part of a dilogy, a dramatic diptych consisting of two plays. Addressing the last possibility first, while there remain a number of surviving pairs of tragic titles without an obvious third member to complete a trilogy, there are no positively identified examples of dilogies (Gantz 1979, 297–99; Ruffell 2011, 17–18). This point has been linked to the larger question of the tragedy’s authorship; S. West (1994, 131) observes that, in this instance, the possibility of a dilogic form should not be ruled out \textit{a priori}, for if it can be assumed that the circumstances of the tragedy’s performance were unusual (such as Euphorion, Aeschylus’ son, having rummaged through his father’s desk, staging two of his tragedies posthumously),\(^{112}\) it is equally possible that its presentation format might be unusual as well. While one would expect a \textit{Prometheus Bound} to be followed by a \textit{Prometheus Unbound}, the third tragedy of the trilogy may have had a title that either did not contain the name Prometheus or has been lost.\(^{113}\)

The Medician MS lists two more Prometheus dramas, \textit{Prometheus Unbound} (Λυ’ ομενος), of which a number of fragments have been securely identified, and

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\(^{111}\)This widely-used term originated, as far as I can determine, with Erich Bussler (1893).

\(^{112}\)The idea that Euphorion completed and staged unfinished works from his father’s Nachlass was first advanced by D. S. Robertson (1938), who argued that Euphorion’s editing would account for the brevity and strangeness of the choral odes. Dodds (1973c, 38) found the theory appealing, and added that \textit{post mortem} emendations would also account for the “odd patchwork of meters” in Prometheus’ opening monologue.

\(^{113}\)See Gantz (1979, 297–99) for a discussion of possible Aeschylean dilogies. Like him, I believe any perceived dilogies are the result of unrecorded play titles. Cf. Sommerstein (1996, 320).
Prometheus Fire-Bringer (Πυρφ΄ ορος). Pollux (9.156) gives the title of one more, Prometheus Fire-Kindler (Πυρκαε΄ υς), and quotes a line (10.64), but, given its meter, it is very unlikely that the line was excerpted from a tragedy. Prometheus Fire-Kindler has now been confidently identified as the satyr play Prometheus of 472, which rounded out the tetralogy that included the Persians (Brown 1990, 52).

Prometheus Fire-Bringer has occasioned far more contentious debate. George Thomson (1932), following Westphal (1869, 206ff.), takes the title Πυρφ΄ ορος to mean “fire-bearer,” which he understood as a reference to Prometheus’ cult title at the Athenian festival of the Prometheia. He thus concluded that the tragedy dealt with the establishment of the festival’s ceremonial torch-bearing races (Thomson 1932, 33). Griffith is agnostic, admitting that the title could mean either “fire-bringer” or “fire-bearer” (1983, 202). A. L. Brown (1990), however, is adamant that “the only mythical occasion on which Prometheus bore fire is when he brought it to mankind” (52), and, comparing the confusion among ancient commentators surrounding other pairs of plays with similar titles, concludes that Fire-Bringer is a phantom tragedy, a mistaken doubling of Fire-Kindler, a position with which Sommerstein (1996, 320) agrees.

At first glance, the plot of the PV seems reasonably well suited to the middle drama of a trilogy, with the first part having been Prometheus’ original theft of fire and the last being his eventual release from captivity. The hopeless conclusion of the

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114. See the edition of Griffith (1983, 281–305) of the PV for the fragments of Prometheus Unbound and a discussion of their context.

115. Cf. the hypothesis to the Persians. Two further lines remain extant, TGF frs. 206 and 207: the former, quoted by Galen, is attributed simply to Aeschylus’ “Prometheus” without any epiklesis and is startlingly similar to Cho. 582. Plutarch contextualizes the latter as Prometheus warning satyrs to mind their beards as he presents them with fire, suggesting it is in fact a fragment of Fire-Kindler. This view is supported by Beazley (1939), who considers the line with reference to vase-paintings depicting Prometheus giving fire to satyrs. See also Podlecki (2009).

116. Pace Dodds (1973c, 38ff.), who describes Fire-Bringer as a “tantalizing ghost” but sees it not as a scribal error but as the proposed title for a tragedy Aeschylus meant to compose before his death.
"PV can be compared with the bleak ending of the *Libation-Bearers*. Both tragedies end with the protagonists tormented, and with no resolution to the larger conflict in sight. The similarity appears even stronger if the *Oresteia’s* cycle of retributive murders is analogized to the successive conflicts between the generations of gods: each is a seemingly endless chain of violence that will apparently continue without end. Only action by the protagonist—Orestes seeking out Apollo or Prometheus telling his secret to Zeus—can break the loop. Winnington-Ingram (1983a, 188ff.), however, argues against the *PV* having been the second member of a trilogy, on the grounds that the tragedy summarizes too much of what would have been performed immediately beforehand, needlessly contextualizing events that the previous tragedy would have just depicted.\(^{117}\) Brown (1990, 52) agrees, observing that the thematic importance of the newness of Zeus’ reign is too great for the *PV* to have been a middle tragedy.

The ending of the *PV* is as hopeless as it is inconclusive, a characteristic that Schmid (1929, 103ff.) saw as arguing further against Aeschylean authorship. Although the tragedy may seem static—little more than discussion takes place on stage—until its cataclysmic final passages, there is indeed movement in the drama (Sommerstein 1996, 302). The audience grows increasingly aware of Prometheus’ ace in the hole: his knowledge of what woman would bear Zeus a son who would overthrow him. Whatever may have happened in a subsequent tragedy, at the end of the *PV* Zeus still does not know her identity, meaning that his downfall is still a live possibility. As I will demonstrate, this point is vital for the tragedy’s characterization of Zeus as a tyrant.

\(^{117}\) As we only possess one (more or less) complete trilogy, we cannot be sure how much “needless” summary might have been the norm.
Zeus as Tyrant

The PV’s equation of Zeus with a human tyrant is the central metaphor of the tragedy, one with far-reaching implications. The importance of the image can be better understood after a consideration of the ways in which the tragedy reworks the relationship of Prometheus and Zeus from the Hesiodic sources. The changes suggest not only a diminution of Zeus’ status, but practically an inversion of his character as it appears in archaic verse.

Hesiod offers two markedly different accounts of Prometheus’ punishment. In the *Theogony*, he characterizes Prometheus as a trickster (Dougherty 2006, 27–45), describing him with the adjectives ποικίλον αἰολόμητην, “clever” and “full of wiles” (l. 511) and ποικιλόβουλον “wily-plotting” (l. 521). Hesiod foregrounds the Titan’s punishment by describing it at length before providing its cause. He incorporates a reference to Prometheus’ eventual release by Herakles into this immediate depiction of his punishment, thus framing the liberation as one more part of Zeus’ plan, a move that befits Hesiod’s overall portrait of the god:

Δήσε δ’ ἄλυκτοπέδησι Προμηθέα ποικιλόβουλον
desizōs ἄργαλεουσι μέσον διὰ χίον’ ἐλάσσας·
kai ói ἐπ’ αἰετόν δρος τανύπτερον· αὑτὸ δ’ ἦπαρ
ἥσιθεν ἄθλαντον, τὸ δ’ ἄξεστο ἴσον ἀπάντη·
νυκτὸς ὅσον πρόσαν ἦμαρ ἔδω τανυσίπτερος ὡρις.
τὸν μὲν ἂρ’ Ἀλκιμήνης καλλισφόρον ἄλκιμος ύιὸς
Ἡρακλής ἔκτεινε, κακὴν δ’ ἀπὸ νοῦσον ἄλκικεν
Ἱαπετιοῦδη καὶ ἐλύσατο δυσφροσυνόν
οὐκ ἄκεκτι Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου ύψωμέδοντος,
ὥρ’ Ἡρακλῆς Ἡθβαγενέος κλέος ἑῇ
πλεῖον ἐτ’ ἦ τὸ πάροιδεν ἐπὶ χόλον ποιυβότειραν.
ταῦτ’ ἄρα ζόμενος τίμη ἄρισκεκτον ύιὸν·
kai περ χωόμενος παύθη χόλου, ὃν πρὶν ἔχεσχεν,
οὗνεκ’ ἔριζετο βουλὰς ὑπερμενεῖ Κρονίωνι.

And [Zeus] bound wily-plotting Prometheus with
unbreakable, awful chains, driving a pillar through his middle:
and he let a long-winged eagle loose on him: and it
would eat his immortal liver, but by night it regrew
as much as the long-winged eagle ate the entire day.

Brave Heracles, son of beautiful-ankled Alcmene,
killed it, and warded off the evil plague
from the son of Iapetus, and released him from his anxieties—
Olympian Zeus ruling on high being quite willing—
so that the fame of Theban-born Heracles be
even greater than ever on the all-nourishing earth.
Respecting these things, Zeus honored his famous son;
and, although angry, put aside his wrath, which he previously
held,
because Prometheus challenged the plans of the all-powerful son
of Cronos. (ll. 521–34)

It is only after these lines that Hesiod describes Prometheus’ attempted deception
of Zeus in the division of the sacrifice, which is followed by Zeus’ forbidding the
human possession of fire, which in turn is followed by Prometheus’ theft and Zeus’
vengeance in the form of Pandora and all her attendant evils (ll. 535–612). Only after
almost ninety lines, in an elegant ring composition, does Hesiod return to Prometheus
and his punishment, with a gnomic statement presenting the “moral” of the entire
Prometheus episode:

So it is not possible to deceive or elude the mind of Zeus.
Not even gracious Prometheus, son of Iapetos,
escaped Zeus’ grievous anger, but by necessity
great chains confined him, though he was very wise. (ll. 613–16)

In the Works and Days, by contrast, the story of Prometheus and his deception is
dealt with briskly, framed not as an instance of Zeus’ supremacy but as the cause of
mortal suffering. The god’s anger at Prometheus’ theft provokes him to introduce misery to humanity, for which reason he creates woman as a negative counterweight to the benefit of fire. Prometheus’ name appears only once more, when Hesiod notes that the Titan had fruitlessly warned his brother never to accept a gift from Zeus (l. 86). Befitting the focus of the *Works and Days* on human enterprise, Prometheus’ sufferings go unmentioned. There are no significant disparities between these accounts, although Friedrich Solmsen (1949) distinguished the “Zeus of power” in the *Theogony* from the “Zeus of justice” in the *Works and Days* (1949, 133).

The Hesiodic relationship between Zeus and Prometheus, then, is clearly antagonistic, but tempered by the poet’s larger portrait of the god; in the *Theogony*, Hesiod states that Zeus was ultimately merciful toward Prometheus, being “quite willing” to let Heracles kill the bird that daily ate away at the Titan’s liver—though the poet does leverage the fame of Heracles to justify Zeus’ acquiescence. The Hesiodic Zeus is a cosmic force, all-knowing and all-powerful. Not even as cunning a trickster as Prometheus can truly outwit him, and the god is ultimately just; in the *Theogony* his punishment of Prometheus is portrayed as just recompense for the Titan’s attempted deception, and in the *Works and Days* his actions are one part of a larger theodicy.

The Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound*, by contrast, is a very different sort of god. The single most fundamental change that the author of the *PV* makes to the Hesiodic Zeus is to reduce his stature from that of an unmatchable deity to, essentially, that of a powerful ruler who happens to be divine. The plot of the tragedy hinges on this attenuation; the tension in the tragedy arises from Prometheus knowing something that Zeus does not. The explicitly stated moral of the *Theogony*, therefore, does not

118. τοῦνεν ἥ αρ’ ἀνθρώπωσιν ἐμήποστο κήδεα λυγρά (l. 49).

119. F. Carter Philips Jr. (1973, 298), by contrast, sees the Herakles digression as rooted in oral composition. Having mentioned Atlas and the Hesperides in l. 518, Hesiod’s mind, he argues, leapt to the hero, who he then needed to tie back into the story at the risk of making Zeus seem to have forgiven Prometheus.
apply—it is possible to deceive the mind of this Zeus.

The author of the tragedy makes other changes to the Hesiodic Zeus. In the *Theogony*, Prometheus is the child of the Titan Iapetus and the Oceanid Clymene (ll. 507ff.), whereas in the *PV* he is the son of Themis, whom Aeschylus “significantly” (Lloyd-Jones 2003, 53) assimilates to Gaia (ll. 209–10).120 This alteration is, indeed, quite significant. In the *Theogony* it is Gaia who advises Zeus and the Olympians to free the Hecatonchires so that they can aid them in the Titanomachy: “she explained everything to them at length, and, with [the Hecatonchires] on their side, how to achieve victory and a glorious reason for boasting” (ll. 267–68).121 In the *PV*, by contrast, Prometheus speaks about how his mother fed him information and he prudently decided to join forces with the Olympians to defeat the Titans:

More than once my mother Themis (also known as Gaia—she is one goddess with many names) had foretold to me how the future would come to pass, that it would not be by force nor violence but by deceit that they would defeat those more powerful. While I explained such things to them nevertheless they did not bother to consider my words at all. With all that being the case, it seemed best

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120. Herbert Weir Smyth (1969, 105) states, without citation, that this was “a syncretism known to Attic worship and not therefore derived from the play.”

121. ἐμοὶ δὲ μήτηρ ὅπιξ ἀπαξ μόνον Θέμις, καὶ Γαῖα, πολλῶν ὀνομάτων μορφή μία, τὸ μέλλον κραίνοιτο προτευθεσπίκει, ὡς οὐ κατ’ ἰσχύν οὐδὲ πρὸς τὸ καρτερόν χρείη, δόλῳ δὲ τοὺς ὑπερσχόντας κρατεῖν, τοιαύτ᾽ ἐμοὶ λόγους ἐξηγομένου οὐκ ἤξιωσαν οὐδὲ προσβλέψατο τὸ πᾶν. κράτιστα δὴ μοι τῶν παρεστώτων τότε ἐφαίνετ᾽ εἶναι προσλαβόντα μητέρα. 

1220 ἐκόνωτ᾽ ἐκόντι Ζηνί συμπαραστατεῖν.
to willingly join with willing Zeus,

Prometheus reiterates that the Olympians won only because of “my plotting” (l. 221). Yet despite these efforts Zeus exhibited no gratitude afterward. This is, once more, a pointed departure from Hesiod, in which Prometheus’ role in the Titanomachy goes unmentioned. With this change, the Zeus of PV becomes even worse, adding ingratitude to his long list of faults.

Prometheus’ crime, as well as the motivation behind his offenses against Zeus, are also extensively reconfigured in the PV. The Titan’s role as helper of humankind is expanded to the point where Prometheus is less its benefactor than its savior:

As soon as Zeus seated himself on his father’s throne, straight away he distributed prizes to the other immortals and set in place the power structure: yet he had no care for miserable mortals, but instead wanted to annihilate the whole race and plant an entirely new one. And nobody opposed this plan—except me. Yes, I dared: I liberated the mortal race so that they not head down to Hades, annihilated. (ll. 230–38)

It is for this act, Prometheus explains, that Zeus has punished him; he mentions his theft of fire almost as an afterthought several lines later, at l. 254, as an incidental

122. ἐμαὶς...βουλαῖς.
act, and not, as in Hesiod, his central offense. Yet Prometheus’ role as fire-bringer is, somewhat paradoxically, freighted with far greater significance. In one of the more celebrated and controversial sections of the tragedy, he delivers a long monologue detailing the sorry state of humanity before his intervention and the innovations he taught them (ll. 436–71, 476–506). Among the technologies he introduced are arithmetic and reading (ll. 459–61), animal domestication (ll. 462–66), sailing (ll. 467–68), medicine (ll. 478–83), the interpretation of omens (ll. 484–99) and mining (ll. 500–503). He concludes the *rhesis* with an apt summation: “All the technical skills that mortals possess come from Prometheus” (l. 506).123

In light of these changes, Zeus becomes a figure far removed from his portrayal in the Hesiodic poems, in which he too is a benefactor of humanity insofar as he bestows upon them “justice, which is by far the best” (*Op*. 11.279–80).124 Instead, Zeus, now a determined opponent of mankind and an exactor of unyielding punishment, is described primarily with the language of tyranny. Such overtly political references would do much, in the eyes of the Athenian audience, to recontextualize the god as a political rather than purely divine figure.

This reconfiguration of Zeus as a tyrant is at the heart of the tragedy, and is most evident in the playwright’s use of τύραννος or a cognate term twelve times, instances which make up the preponderance of the word’s appearance in the Aeschylean corpus. S. Saïd (1985) is correct in observing that, “the very vocabulary used by Aeschylus to designate the power of Zeus in the *Prometheus Bound* suffices to demonstrate the change in orientation [from the Hesiodic depiction of the god]...” (287), but equally important is the terminology not used to describe Zeus in the tragedy.125 Notably,

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123. πᾶσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως.
124. ἀνθρώποις δ’ ἐδώκε δίκην, ἤ πολλὰν ἀρίστη / γίγνεται
125. “Le vocabulaire même employé par Eschyle pour désigner le pouvoir de Zeus dans le *Prométhée enchaîné* suffit à montrer ce changement d’orientation...”
he is never referred to as βασιλεύς, one of his most traditional titles. He is called ἀναξ once, ironically by Io as she begs Zeus to end her suffering: μηδ’ ε μοι φθον’ ηση, ἀναξ, “Don’t begrudge me my prayers, lord” (ll. 585–86). Vincenzo di Benedetto (1978) remarks acerbically that addressing Zeus as ἀναξ had, by the fifth century, long been associated with the context of prayer, but “the situation in the Prometheus leaves little room for prayer” (57).126

In place of more traditional language suggesting elevated divinity, Zeus is referred to, throughout the tragedy, with explicitly political terminology. At l. 96 Prometheus calls him ὁ νέος ταγός μακρόων, “the new commander of the gods,” ταγός being a Thessalian title that, to an Athenian, would have been “charged with the contempt that one associates with novel titles, contempt at the pretensions of a newcomer who claims to rule over the world of gods and men” (Helly 1995, 350), and would carry extremely strong associations with foreignness (344).127 At l. 169, Prometheus styles Zeus μακρόων πρύτανες, “chief of the gods,” a title that likely would have, in this context, simultaneously evoked two very different associations: on the one hand, the Athenian πρύτανες, the council of fifty that exercised executive authority on a rotating tribe-by-tribe basis, while on the other hand the title πρύτανες was elsewhere, and in other contexts, used as a designator of supreme authority.128 A. J. Podlecki (2005) reads the title sarcastically: given the context of the line—Prometheus explaining that Zeus will have need of him in the future—the implication is that, “for all his impressive

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126. “Questo si spiega con il fatto che già in Omero, e anche in Eschilo, questo termine era dotato, tra le altre, di una risonanza che portava nella direzione della preghiera, e la situazione del Prometeo non lasciava molto spazio a preghiere.”

127. “Le mot doit être chargé du mépris qu’on attache aux titres nouveaux, à la prétention d’un parvenu qui prétend régner sur le monde des dieux et des hommes.” Helly argues that the Thessalian title ταγός, originally deriving from τάττενες/τάξις dates from the seventh century, when command of hoplite forces was an important marker of political power, the very situation that has been identified as a primary motivator for tyranny. See above on p. 20.

128. See, e.g., Pind. Pyth. 2.58, applied to Hieron, but also Pyth. 6.24 and Eur. Tro. 1288, applied to Zeus.
sounding titles as supreme ruler, Zeus is vulnerable” (Podlecki 2005, 166). Finally, the chorus, at l. 149, refers to the recently-enthroned Olympians as νέοι ... οἰκονόμοι, “new steersmen,” a hapax invoking the “ship of state” metaphor that suffuses Greek thought. Elsewhere in tragedy, however, the “captain” or “steersman” of the ship of state is invariably a mortal ruler.129

Other characteristics of Zeus and his rule help assimilate his portrayal in the PV to that of a mortal tyrant. A repeated accusation is that Zeus has rejected existing laws in favor of his own innovations. To call Zeus unjust or lawless is an especially mordant touch, given the more traditional portrayal of the god as the father or consort of Δίκη.130 The contrast between his portrayal in the PV and in other Aeschylean tragedies is perhaps best exemplified by the trio of names that Elektra appeals to at Cho. 244–45: Zeus, Κράτος and Δίκη. In the dark world of the PV, Κράτος still stands with Zeus, but Δίκη, justice, has been replaced by Βία.

This Zeus, indeed, imposes new laws with no heed for justice. The chorus complains to Prometheus: νεόχωμοι δὲ δὴ νόμοις Ζεὺς ἄθετοις κρατύνει· τὰ πρὶν δὲ πελώρια νῦν ἀκόστοι, “Zeus governs lawlessly with new-fangled laws: those who were mighty before he now destroys” (ll. 150–51). Later in the tragedy, they elaborate:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{ἀμέγαρτα γὰρ τάδε Ζεὺς} \\
& \text{ἰδίοις νόμοις κρατύνων} \\
& \text{ὑπερήφανον θεοῖς τοῖς} \\
& \text{πάρος ἐνδείκνυσιν αἰχμάν} \\
\end{align*}
\]

For Zeus, ruling over these unenviable things with self-appointed laws,

129. On the ship of state image, see Brock (2013, 53–67). Instances in tragedy include Aesch. Sept. 2–3, 62, 652, Pers. 767, Soph. Ant. 994, OT 923 and Eur. Med. 523. At PV 515, however, a more abstract formulation incorporates divine guidance; in response to a question of the chorus, Prometheus states that the Fates and the Erinyes are the Ἀνάγκης ... οἰκοστρόφος.

displays towards the former gods

an arrogant might. (ll. 402–5)

The fear that a ruler could sweep away a city’s established laws and write his own—that he would be able, in effect, to do whatever he wanted—is a very old one, and is at the heart of Athenian anxieties over tyranny: established law represents a bulwark against the limitless desire of the tyrant. This idea is typified in the biographies of Solon and other archaic lawgivers, who left their cities after the establishment of their legal codes so as to demonstrate the supremacy of the law and forestall any tyrannical potentiality (Szegedy-Maszak 1978, 207f.).

The same line of thought is visible in Demosthenes’ rhetorical question to a jury in Against Meidias: what it is that gives them the authority to determine matters of state? He quickly answers his own question: the fact that the laws are strong (21.223). One can look also to Herodotus’ Otanes, who, although Persian, expresses a very Greek concern in asking: “How could monarchy be a convenient thing, since it is possible for [the ruler], unchecked, to do whatever he wishes?” (Hdt. 3.80.3) Aristotle raises the same question, and the point has been incorporated into the discussion of historical tyranny by a number of scholars.

The PV portrays Zeus as not only tyrannically inventing new laws but also coming to power in a manner strongly reminiscent to that of a tyrant. Recounting the beginning of the Titanomacy, Prometheus says:

ēπει τάχιστ’ ἔρξαντο δάμονες χόλου
200 στάσις τ’ ἐν ἄλληλοισιν ὦροθύνετο,

131. See also my discussion of Eur. Sup. 429–32, where Theseus expresses the same anxieties.
133. κός δ’ ἀν εἰπ’ χρήμα κατηρτιμένον μοιναρχή, τῇ ἔξεστι ἀνευθύνῳ ποιέων τὰ βούλεται·
134. Pol. 1295a17–23. See Andrewes (1963, 7) and Snodgrass (1980, 96). However Salmon (1997) argues that archaic tyrants actually represented a more responsive and responsible model of the rule of law than the arbitrary aristocratic regimes that often preceded them (e.g. Hesiod’s bribe-devouring kings), one aspect of tyranny’s popular appeal. For an exhaustive list of citations of this trope in tragedy, see Allen (2000, 92a97).
ο῾ι μὲν θέλοντες ἐξβάλειν ἔδρας Κρόνον,
ὡς Ζεὺς ἀνάσσοι δῆθεν, οἱ δὲ τοῦποιλων
στειούντες, ὡς Ζεὺς μῆποι ἄρξειεν θεῶν... 

As soon as the divinities began their anger,

faction broke out among each other,

those wanting to cast Kronos from power

so that Zeus might truly reign, and those intent on the opposite:

that Zeus never rule the gods... (ll. 199–203)

Describing the Titanomachy with the word στάσις (instead of, e.g., πόλεμος or μάχη)\textsuperscript{135} implies that the struggle was more like one between rival factions within a polis rather than between two distinct political entities (Finley 1974, 5–6).\textsuperscript{136} Stasis, internecine strife, is identified in archaic verse as one of the worst fates to befall a city, as well as a precondition for tyranny. In summarizing the rise of Peisistratus, Herodotus uses the word (and cognate terms) multiple times:

Hippocrates, not at all wishing to follow the advice of Chilon, afterwards had as a son Peisistratus, who, when there was strife between the people of the coast, under the leadership of Megacles, son of Alcmeon, and the people of the plain, under the leadership of Lycurgus, son of Aristolaides, brought together a third faction with his eye on the tyranny: he gathered factionalists and, on the pretense of supporting the highlanders, planned the following. (1.59.3)

Solon, too, saw stasis as an evil attendant on injustice; heportrays stasis as that which befalls a community as a result of corrupt and unjust leadership, an ill that

\textsuperscript{135}Hesiod himself describes the Titanomachy with the epic term ὀσμίνη.

\textsuperscript{136}See also Hdt. 8.3.
can only be mended by the restoration of just rule.\textsuperscript{137} He frames corrupt leadership as a failure of \textit{σωφροσύνη}, and this charge, too, is made against the Zeus of the \textit{PV}.

Throughout the tragedy, Zeus’ emotional state is depicted as one of intractable anger. His \textit{γόλος}, “anger,” is mentioned at ll. 29 and 376 (and the Titanomachy, as discussed above, is described as an “anger” at l. 199). Prometheus says the god is \textit{σοφρονόν}, “thinking stubborn thoughts” at l. 907. At l. 35, Hephaestus, trying to reason with Prometheus, tries to rationalize Zeus’ actions with an empty justification \textit{ἅπας δὲ τραχύς ὄστις ἄν νέον κρατῆ}, “everyone who rules is harsh at the beginning” (l. 35). Even Kratos, Zeus’ henchman, admits to having \textit{ἄμμοι} \textit{οργῆς τε τραχὺτητα}, “stubbornness and harshness of temperament” (ll. 79–80).\textsuperscript{138} Solmsen characterized Zeus’ anger in the tragedy a signal of “the mark of a tyrannical temperament” and remarked that the god’s “proneness to wrath and absence of \textit{sophrosune} [is] typical of the man drunk with power and carried away by the confidence in overbearing might” (1949, 136). Zeus’ inability to moderate his anger when it would be reasonable to do so is a mental sickness—like Prometheus he suffers from an \textit{ὄργη νοσοῦση}—and is another sign of his tyrannical nature.

The god’s mind is afflicted in another way typical of a tyrant. Complaining about the god’s ingratitude, Prometheus laments:

\begin{quote}

tοιάδ’ εξ ἐμοῦ

ὅ των θεῶν τύραννος ὑψηλημένος

κακαίσι ποιναῖς ταῖσθέν μ’ ἐξημεύσατο.

ἔνεστι γάρ πως τοῦτο τὴ τυραννίδι νόστημα, τοῖς φίλοις μὴ πεποίθεναι.

\end{quote}

Having been aided by my efforts, the tyrant of the gods

\textsuperscript{137} See fr. 4W, ll. 19, 37

\textsuperscript{138} Prometheus is, nevertheless, the mirror image of Zeus: he too is \textit{σοφρονός} (ll. 436, 964, 1012, 1034, 1037).
repaid me with these awful torments.
For this disease is somehow inherent
in tyranny: not to have faith in one’s friends. (ll. 223–27)

This last remark is, in a sense, an inversion of the moral stated in the *Theogony* at ll. 613–16. Prometheus’ punishment, rather than signifying the cosmic infallibility of Zeus, points to the god’s very human flaws. Like many a mortal tyrant, Zeus has succumbed to paranoia and cannot trust those around him, even those who, like Prometheus, have willingly taken his side. Aristotle would later, in the *Politics*, identify this trait as one of the most salient characteristics of tyranny: “And while kingship is maintained by friends, it is characteristic of a tyrant to be greatly distrustful of friends, on the grounds that all people desire power—his friends most of all” (1313b).139

Portraying Zeus as a ruler first and a god second allows the playwright to characterize him with these all too human flaws. This plays with one of the central conceits of tyranny: the idea of a ruler as a god.140 Furthermore, the inverse of this trope, referring to Zeus as “king” or “lord,” is ubiquitous throughout Greek literature. The *PV* is simply literalizing the association, exploring tyranny on a cosmic scale in order to see it more vividly, much as Socrates uses the city to better examine the soul (Pl. *Resp.* 368e).

Nor is the *PV* the only drama to toy with this trope. In Aeschylus’ *Suppliants*, the chorus of Danaids begs King Pelasgus to intercede on their behalf and to protect them from their cousins, the sons of Aegyptus. Pelasgus demurs, explaining that such a decision must be approved by the people before he can act. The chorus’ response is

139. καὶ ἡ μὲν βασιλεία σφηκτα διὰ τῶν φίλων, τυραννικὰν δὲ τὸ μάλιστ’ ἀπιστεῦν ταῖς φίλοις, ὡς βουλομένων μὲν πάντων δυναμένων δὲ μάλιστα τούτων.

140. See above, p. 32. See more generally Brock (2013, 1–14). Implicit comparisons between human and divine power politics can be found elsewhere: Brock (2013, 5) highlights a fragment (*FGrH* 457 F8) describing Epimenides’ account of Typhoeus attempting to seize Olympus and notes how similar the language is to descriptions of historical tyrannical coups.
But you are the city, you are the people!
An executive beyond accountability,
you rule the altar, the hearth of the land,
with your nods, with your votes
and your scepter alone, enthroned,
you bring everything to pass. (ll. 370–75)

The Danaids make their appeal in language poised between monarchical absolutism and democratic accountability, strikingly similar to that applied to Zeus in the PV. Pelasgus’ authority is framed in both straightforwardly autocratic terms—μονοσκήτρωσι—as well as, paradoxically, autocratic terms that have been given a democratic veneer—μονοψήφοσι, practically an oxymoron (Easterling 1985, 2; Podlecki 1986, 83–85). The Danaids’ characterization of the king as a πρύτανες ἄρχιτος is reminiscent of descriptions in the Persians of both Xerxes (σὺ ὑπεύθυνος πέτησι, l. 213) and Zeus (τραχὐς μόναρχος ὑπεύθυνος κρατεῖ, l. 324). The forceful verb κρατεῖ, rooted in κράτος, appears in both tragedies. The appeal ends with χρέος πάν ἐπιχραίνεις, a phrase more fitting for a god such as Zeus than a mortal ruler.141 Pelasgus is, in effect, being addressed as Zeus. It is logical that the Danaids would demand unilateral action from Pelasgus, and speak to him as though he were a god. They are, after all, foreigners who are used to living under the sort of ruler that can act without popular approval and should be addressed with the respect due a divinity.

141. E.g. with Zeus as subject at Il. 15.599.
The equation of a ruler with a god is, also, the very foundation of Aristophanes’ 
*Birds*, in which two Athenians, Peisetaurus and Euelpides, who have grown sick of the 
hectic pace of life and the myriad annoyances in their home city, seek an escape and 
decide to build a city in the air, Nephelokokkugia. In order to convince the birds to 
assist them, Peisetaurus fills them with righteous indignation and argues that birds 
were the original deities whom the Olympians displaced. He urges them to wage war 
on the gods, which they successfully do in a struggle that bears a strong resemblance 
to the Gigantomachy (Dunbar 1995, 7–9). But despite his even-handed rhetoric, 
Peisetaurus takes advantage of the gods’ defeat and, by the end of the comedy, has 
usurped Zeus’ place in the cosmos and reigns supreme.

The *Birds* incorporates the ruler-as-god trope as part of a number of parodic 
references to the *PV*.\(^{142}\) The Aeschylean tragedy has been so securely identified as 
the object of Aristophanes’ parody that the date of the *Birds*’ first production, 414, 
has been taken as a *terminus ante quem* for the tragedy’s composition (Flintoff 
1983, 1). One way in which the *PV* is referenced is through the representation of 
Prometheus himself, who appears in the *Birds*, at ll. 1493–1551, in a role that is 
clearly a send-up of his earlier portrayal. Cowering beneath a parasol so as not to be 
spotted by the gods, he sneaks into Nephelokokkugia to encourage Peisetaurus, telling 
him that he has nearly won the war and some of the gods have begun to argue for 
surrender. He explains his motivation for helping humanity at l. 1547, remarking, 
\[\text{μισῶ δὲ ᾧ ἄπαντας τοὺς θεοὺς, ὡς ὀσῶα σύ, “I hate all the gods, as you are aware.”} \]

The line rephrases *PV* l. 975, \[\text{ἄπλῳ λόγῳ τοὺς πάντας ἐχθαῖρω θεοὺς};\] and winks at its own 
referentiality in its final three words. Everard Flintoff takes the reference to signify 
that, by 414, “the line of the *Prometheus Bound* was already a classic quotation” 
(1). The Prometheus depicted in the *Birds* also refers back to the *PV* insofar as his 

\(^{142}\) See Herington (1963) and Flintoff (1983), as well as Anderson and Dix (2007).
advice once more concerns divine marriage: he urges Peisetairus to demand the hand of the goddess Basileia as a condition of making peace with Zeus.

Divine power is depicted similarly in the PV and the Birds: Aristophanes twice refers to Zeus’ rule as as a τυρραννίς (ll. 1605 and 1643). The use of the loaded word exploits the connotations of god-like power that it conveys. Both instances of τυρραννίς are spoken by Poseidon, who is fretting about Zeus’ impending loss of power. By using the term, the god is foregrounding his fear of the terrible fate in store for the Olympians once a mortal gets ahold of Zeus’ thunderbolt.

Peisetairus’ apotheosis in the final scenes of the Birds is marked in no uncertain terms; his arrival with his new bride Basileia is announced grandiloquently, by a herald bidding the assembled birds δέχεσθε τὸν τύραννον ὀλβίῳς δόμως, “receive the tyrant in his blessed halls” (l. 1708), a formula “typical of divine epiphanies” (Kavoulaki 1999, 315). Anderson and Dix (2007, 324) see in the image of Peisetairus’ triumphal entrance in a chariot alongside a female divinity a resemblance with Peisistratus’ return to Athens with “Athena” in 556, a similarity that, I agree, would not have been lost on the audience.

The tyrannical Zeus of the PV seems to have become intimately associated with the tragedy, so much so that, as in the case of the Birds, referencing a divine ruler of that type references, in effect, the tragedy itself. Like Xerxes in the Persians, Zeus is a ruler without accountability and whose temperament leads him to ever greater acts of violence. Unlike Xerxes, however, the PV breaks off before the consequences of such hubris come tumbling down on Zeus. The issue that remains unresolved at the

143. Sommerstein (1987) translates both instances as “sovereignty.”
144. While Dunbar (1995, 745) suggests τύραννος is used paratragically, as an uncharged synonym for “king,” I feel that the unsettling undertones of Peisistratus’ supremacy would bring out the negative resonances of the term. See Anderson and Dix (2007, 324).
145. E.g. Callim. Hymn 5, 137–38, on which see Bulloch (1985, 244).
146. See Hdt. 1.60.
end of the tragedy—whether or not the god will learn the name of the woman whose child will overthrow him—leaves that particular sword dangling over Zeus’ head. As I see it, the tragedy suggests that the god’s tyrannical nature would have earned him such a fate, even if it never truly comes to pass.
Introduction

The shadow of contemporary politics falls sharply on the tragedies of Sophocles. This can be attributed, in part, to Sophocles’ civic engagement, some record of which has been preserved, as well as to his longevity; his life spans almost the entirety of the fifth century, thus permitting a broad range of possible political influences. Born, according to his *Vita*,¹ in 495/4, too late to have experienced Peisistratid tyranny or the turbulent early years of Athenian democracy firsthand, Sophocles’ life encompassed Athens’ rise to hegemony and its protracted struggle with Sparta.

Few of Sophocles’ dramas can be dated securely; his first tragedy, *Triptolemus*,² which very possibly him earned his first victory, was staged in 468 and his last, *Oedipus at Colonus*, in 401, five years after his death (Scodel 2012, 25). Sophocles’ prominence in Athenian civic life, however, has resulted in the preservation of far

¹. The Sophoclean *Vita* is, in the opinion of Lefkowitz (2012, 78), a reliable source. She notes that its compiler appears to have had access to a number of biographies and compiled his sources “with some discrimination.”

². For the possible connection between the rise in popularity of the figure of Triptolemus (not only in Sophocles but primarily in vase painting) and Athenian politics, see Matheson (1994).
more information about his non-theatrical career than has remained about the lives of Aeschylus or Euripides. According to the Athenian Tribute Lists, “Sophocles of Colonus” served as Hellenotamias, the treasurer of the Delian League, in 443/2, during which time the levies imposed by the League on its member states were reassessed, a year ahead of schedule (Lewis 1992, 141; McGregor 1987, 98). This reassessment (which, notably, mostly lowered the amounts levied) appears to have been an important political move by Pericles, an attempt to retain the good will of the League’s member states (Kagan 1989, 150), and Ruth Scodel has suggested that, given this political maneuvering, the position of Hellenotamias would have been seen as being of particular importance at that time (Scodel 2012, 30).

Sophocles was elected to a board of ten generals in 441/0, a year that “was supposed to be uneventful” (Tyrrell 2012, 26) given the treaties in effect between Athens and both the Peloponnesians and the Persians. Nevertheless, during that year the Athenians’ intervention on behalf of the Milesians in a dispute between their city and Samos nearly precipitated the Peloponnesian War a decade early; after Pericles installed a friendly regime on Samos, Samian partisans acquired military assistance from the Persians to recapture their island. Samos then declared itself an enemy of Athens and looked to the Spartans for assistance. Had the Spartans acted on their appeals it would have meant open war against Athens, perhaps with Persian backing, a situation that could have been catastrophic for Athens (Kagan 1989, 170–75). Sophocles, it seems, did not distinguish himself in the course of these events, but he could not have come across too poorly, given that he was later

3. For a comprehensive overview of the identification of the name inscribed on the tribute list with Sophocles the tragedian, see Jouanna (2007, 677–80).

4. However, Avery (1973) disputes reading the name on the Tribute List as Sophocles and, furthermore, doubts the existence Sophocles’ entire political career.

5. See Thuc. 1.115f. Legon (1972, 149) sees the Athenian intervention as an instance of the interference about which the Mytileneans complained to the Spartans in 428.
reelected to the generalship. It is here that the literary and political sides of Sophocles’ biographical tradition run together; the first hypothesis to the *Antigone*, attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium, states that Sophocles was elected general by the Athenians because of their high estimation of the *Antigone*.\(^6\)

Sophocles is recorded as having held one more public office. In 413, after the Sicilian expedition, Sophocles is counted among a council of *probouloi*, senior commissioners appointed to propose constitutional reforms.\(^7\) In this capacity, Sophocles voted to establish the Four Hundred as Athens’ governing body. Aristotle reports that the playwright admitted that the decision was a bad one, but that there was no better option.\(^8\) It is clear from his biography that Sophocles was a member of the Athenian elite (Jouanna 2007, 31) and had a personal involvement with Athenian governance, first in fiscal and military matters and, finally, as an elder statesman during the first stage of the city’s defeat.

Sophocles was not, like Aeschylus, of the Marathon generation, who could boast that they themselves had beaten back the Persians. He was a member of the succeeding generation, which celebrated their predecessors and enjoyed the fruits of their sacrifices. The generational relationship of the two tragedians is perfectly encapsulated by a detail in Sophocles’ *Vita*: after Aeschylus fought at Salamis, Sophocles is said to have led a chorus in honor of the victory.

The position of Athens in the Mediterranean world, accordingly, was very different during Sophocles’ life than during that of Aeschylus, and the way in which Sophocles depicts political power in his tragedies must be understood in that context. Celebrating a city for defeating a foreign invader and defending its ideological principles is very

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\(^6\) φασὶ δὲ τὸν Σοφοκλέα ἠξίῳσθαι τῇ ἔν Σάμῳ στρατηγίᾳ εὐδοκησάντα ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τῆς Ἀντιγόνης. On the difficulties of using this claim as a basis for dating the *Antigone*, see R. D. Lewis (1988).


\(^8\) Arist. *Rh.* 1419a: οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἄλλα βελτίω.
different from doing so as the city is attempting to impose its principles on others. Athens’ hegemony informs Sophocles’ political tragedies in a number of ways, and his use of tyrant imagery and language is markedly different from those in the Aeschylean tragedies discussed in the previous chapter.

In both the *Persians* and the *Prometheus Bound*, the stage tyrant represents entirely a figure out of the Athenian past: a harsh and oppressive autocrat whose immoderation and folly lead him to ruin. The tyrant is, furthermore, seen from a distance, whether ideologically, as with Xerxes in the *Persians*, or literally, as with Zeus in the *PV*, who is perpetually being discussed, both by accomplices and enemies, but who is too far above the action on stage to possibly appear in it. By contrast, in the two Sophoclean tragedies I will discuss, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, although tyranny is still marked by an ideological stain, the perspective of each drama brings the tyrannical figure far nearer than the *Persians* or the *Prometheus Bound*, which view their tyrants at a cultural and political remove and with an emphasis on the point of view of the oppressed subject. Oedipus is, by contrast, the protagonist of his eponymous tragedy, the only stage tyrant to occupy such position (Edmunds 2002, 68), while Antigone is led away about two-thirds of the way through the work bearing her name, leaving the remainder of the drama to focus on Creon.

By the time of these tragedies’ composition, the figure of the tyrant had become ideologically displaced. Although it maintained its position in the Athenian political imaginary, the stage tyrant then signified an individual in a position of great power rather than, quite literally, a tyrant. Both Sophoclean tragedies, accordingly, play with the idea of tyranny as a form of government; it makes little sense to speak of the Theban throne remaining within the ruling family with a family tree as deformed as the Labdacids’. If, further, the definition of tyrant as “non-hereditary monarch” is accepted (on which further below), then the question of Oedipus’ tyranny becomes yet
another facet in the tragedy’s complex dramatic irony. Furthermore, in the *Antigone*, Athenian political language is deployed in order to muddy the picture of Creon’s power; his decrees carry the force of law, but clearly not the legitimacy imparted by the endorsement of a citizen body.

The exercise of power and the problems inherent to it were, of course, questions facing the Athenians for most of the second half of the fifth century. I do not read Sophocles’ tragedies as veiled references to contemporary politics, as Victor Ehrenberg (1954) famously contended, nor do I think, as did Bernard Knox (1998), that Oedipus is meant to stand in for Athens itself, but the issues that the Athenian ruling class had to confront in directing the Delian League loom large in these two tragedies. What is legitimate political authority, and where can it be located? Do desperate times call for desperate measures? Does acting unilaterally, even in the best interests of the governed, really make one a tyrant?

*Oedipus Tyrannus*

*Introduction*

Unsurprisingly for a tragedy called *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Sophocles’ most famous drama engages deeply with the Greek perception of tyranny. The *OT* plays with some of its definitional attributes, problematizing the idea of “the tyrant” in the figure of Oedipus. The Oedipus who first appears on stage is, although a tyrant, depicted in a positive light: he is a non-hereditary monarch—but one who acquired his throne non-violently, for the benefit of Thebes—and he is treated very nearly as a god. Over the course of the tragedy, these positive attributes are ripped away, revealing wrath and hubristic arrogance, traits that the Athenians would have found much more familiar.
One way in which the tragedy conceptually engages with “tyranny” is through its associated characteristics, and the one that the OT explores most fully is the comparison of the tyrant with a god, a topic I discussed in the first chapter. This trope is front and center in the OT, especially in the drama’s first scene. Oedipus’ entrance at the beginning of the tragedy is a moment of power and splendor, in which he is portrayed as the all-capable savior of Thebes and (unbeknownst to him) a moment that marks the apex of his fortunes. As Stephen Scully (1999, 75) has put it, the tragedy’s initial depiction of Oedipus “reveals instantly his great civic power.” And yet the opening of the tragedy is also a profoundly strange scene. The drama begins when a priest of Zeus leads a band of suppliants bearing olive-branches onstage. They seat themselves before the central door, representing the Theban palace. It is only then that Oedipus makes his entrance. The sight of a priest of Zeus making obeisance to not a god but—as it is revealed upon Oedipus’ entrance—a human being is practically sacrilegious, or at the very least “some confusion of religious practices,” especially if the staging included instances of “objectionable proskynesis” (Naiden 2006, 237).

9. See above on p. 32.

10. This pace Taplin (1977, 134–36), who sees the entrance of the suppliant band at the opening of the OT as a “cancelled” entry, which is to say the audience would not have viewed the suppliants’ arrival as part of the dramatic action. On his reading, the tragedy would not have been perceived as truly starting until the entrance of Oedipus. Cf. Burian (1977, 91–94), David Seale (1982) and David Fitzpatrick (2000). On the implications of θοὐ αζετε, used in l. 2 to describe the actions of the suppliants, see Green (2013).

11. Naiden (2006, 237) infers the act of proskynesis, even though the text does not specify it. He draws a parallel with Oedipus’ suppliant appeal to Teiresias at ll. 326–27, where the word does occur: μὴ πρὸς θεῶν φρονῶν γ’ ἀποστραφῆς, ἐπεὶ / πάντες σε προσκυνομένον οὐδ’ ἴκτημι, “By the gods, if you know [how to save the city], don’t turn your back on us, since / we suppliants all bow to you.” The majesty of Oedipus’ entrance appears to have been well communicated by the opening moments of Max Reinhardt’s monumental 1912 production of Oedipus Tyrannus at Covent Garden, which made use of one hundred extras: “The play began with the trumpet clarion and the entrance of the half-naked torch-bearers, who streamed through the darkened circular performance space. They were followed by the vast crowd who engulfed the space in front of the palace steps and

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The priest’s response to Oedipus’ initial questions further suggest the king’s superhuman stature: ὅρᾳς μὲν ἡμᾶς ἡλίκιοι προσήμεθα / βωμοίσι τοῖς σοῖς, “You see the ages of us who are sitting at your altars” (ll. 15–16).12 The suggestion that Oedipus is a deity at whose altars the suppliants are seated is strengthened in the second half of the sentence, when the priest contrasts the “us” before Oedipus with “the rest” sitting before the double shrines of Pallas (ll. 20–21). It is possible that the altars belong to Oedipus (as does Thebes itself, as the priest notes at l. 14) because they are in front of his palace, as the phrase has been taken to mean (Kamerbeek 1967, 4:35), but I believe Jean Bollack (1990, 12:16) is right to argue that there is at least an intentional ambiguity.

One point of staging immediately communicates the benevolence of Oedipus. Although he is a tyrant, he is not the fearful ruler of the “Athenian model,” a point signalled by the absence of bodyguards.13 This impression of benevolence goes hand in hand with his divinity, a point that recurs several times in the priest’s reply. After describing the severity of the plague afflicting Thebes, he explains:

ὠσαίσι μὲν νυν οὐκ ἱσομενὸς σι’ ἔγω
οὐδ’ ὁδε παῖδες ἐξομευθ’ ἐφεστοι,
ἀνδρῶν δὲ πρώτων ἐν τε συμφοράς βίου
κρίνοντες ἐν τε δαιμόνων συναλλαγάς.

began chanting for Oedipus. A murky blue light broke through the darkness, partially revealing the chanting, groaning crowd; and after a strong yellow light had been cast over the altar and steps, the entrance of John Martin-Harvey’s Oedipus from the central doors, dressed in a brilliant white gown, was captured in spotlight” (Macintosh 2013, 348).


13. E.g. Aegisthus in the Agamemnon and the Libation Bearers is quite the opposite, and his retinue of bodyguards is remarked on in both tragedies. D. M. Carter (2007, 85) sees the presence of bodyguards on stage as one of the primary signifiers of a tyrant. For the historical connection between bodyguards and tyrants, see McGlew (1993, 78). Recall, as well, the allegation that Cypselus was so beloved that he didn’t need any guards, on p. 18 above.
Now, not because I equate you with the gods
do I and these children sit at your hearth,
but because we judge you first among men
at handling life’s fortunes and dealing with gods. (ll. 31–34)

I read these lines as less explanatory than apotropaic, the priest tempering his praise of Oedipus to ward off divine jealousy. He goes on to say, at ll. 47–48, that “the land now calls you savior,” σωτήρ being an epithet commonly applied to Zeus (as well as many other gods), even as, in the previous sentence at l. 46, he addresses Oedipus as “best of mortals.” The divinizing overtones of the term are reinforced only a little later in the tragedy, when the priest departs with the prayer: Ψάφος δ’ ὁ πέμψας τάσσοντας ἀμα / σωτήρ θ’ ὄκοιτο καὶ νόσον παιστήριος, “May Phoebus Apollo, the one who sent these prophecies / come as our savior and concluer of this sickness!” (ll. 149–50) Apollo and Oedipus, if not alike in power, at least have the same appellation. Oedipus himself acknowledges this later, in dialogue with Teiresias, when he exclaims πόλιν...ἐξέσωσ’, “I saved the city” (l. 443).

Bernard Knox (1998, 160) observes, given that the first choral ode in the OT (ll. 151–215) takes the form of an invocation to several deities who are asked to come to the aid of Thebes, Oedipus’ dialogue immediately following appears almost as a response to the prayer, thus revealing a “god-like attitude”:

αἰτεῖς· ὃ δ’ αἰτεῖς, τὰμ’ ἐὰν θέλης ἐπη
κλύων δέχασθαι τῇ νόσῳ ὅ’ ύπηρετεῖν
ἄλκην λάβοις ἃν κάνακούριση κακῶν.

14. σὲ νῦν μὲν ἔδε γῆ σωτήρα κλῆσέν.
15. There was a long-standing cult of Zeus Soter at Athens, on which see Raaflaub (2004, 108–10). The use of the epithet σωτήρ by kings became common in the Hellenistic period, e.g. Ptolemy I Soter (r. 323–283) and Antiochus I Soter (r. 281–61), but it was rare, if not unheard of, during the Classical period.
16. ὃ βροτῶν ἰριστ’...
17. See Knox (1998, 181) for a list of verbal correspondences throughout the tragedy between Oedipus and a divinity.
You ask; and what you ask, if you’re willing
To listen and receive my words and to take on the plague,
you may get protection and release from your evils. (216–18)

Most telling in these lines is Oedipus’ use of αἰτεῖν: the verb was often used in the
formulaic language in answers attributed to the Delphic oracle,¹⁸ as in Herodotus’
account of the oracular response to their inquiry about conquering all of Arcadia:
"Ἀρκαδίην μ’ αἰτεῖς· μέγα μ’ αἰτεῖς· οὐ τοι δόσω," "You ask me for Arcadia? You ask for
much—I won’t give it to you" (Hdt. 1.66). Also like the Pythia, Oedipus speaks in
riddles, with the crucial difference that he does not realize he is doing so—even though
he is the “the best at figuring out such things” (l. 440).¹⁹ The divinity reinforced by
Oedipus’ Pythian language is particularly ironic, given the role the oracle has played
in his life.

But Oedipus is not a god. Several later moments in the tragedy disassociate the
king from divinity, just as the opening scene implies a strong association. Oedipus is
addressed by the priest as ὁ κρατήρ Οἰδίπους χωρας ἐμῆς, “O Oedipus, ruler of my
land” (l. 14).²⁰ Later, in the third ode, the chorus, in despair, calls out to Zeus, ὁ
κρατήρ...Ζεὺς, “O, ruler Zeus!” (l. 904). The repetition of the adjective suggests
that the chorus has already abandoned Oedipus as their savior and has instead turned
to more traditional gods.

Oedipus’ definitively human stature is signaled, too, by the negation of the
triumphal opening scene. At l. 911, Jocasta enters with garlands and incense and,
as a suppliant, prays to Apollo for aid. The altar at which she prays is the “altar of

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¹⁸. Knox (1998, 225n4) cites Socrates’ definition of prayer in the *Euthyphro*: τὸ δ’ εὐχεσθαι αἰτεῖν
tοὺς θεοῖ (14c).

¹⁹. ὁ εὐκον σὺ ταῦτ’ ἁριστὸς εὐρίσκεσαι ἐρυς; Granted, this is a sarcastic question posed to Oedipus
by Teiresias, but he does not deny the characterization (Vernant 1990, 117–18).

²⁰. The title κρατήρ suggests both a ruler and a strengthener or supporter, i.e. one who would
give aid in a crisis.
Oedipus’,21 the same one at which the band of suppliants gathered to seek help from Oedipus. Jocasta’s brief prayer, a dramatic pause just before the messenger from Corinth arrives, is a total inversion of the opening scene: the queen comes to the altar in supplication for an act of private devotion. The god on whom she calls is Apollo, an act that reclaims the altar for a “real god” and demonstrates that Oedipus has, as a divinity, been superseded.22 Dawe (2006, 152) comments on the most ironic aspect of this inversion: “We are now looking for help for Oedipus, not from him”.

Another characteristic trait of tyranny emerges in Oedipus’ opening dialogue, and is similarly inverted by the end of the tragedy: Oedipus is the object of everyone’s attention. He acknowledges this when he grandly identifies himself as ὁ πᾶσι κλειν` ος Ο᾿ιδ΄ιπος καλο`υμενος, “I am called Oedipus, famous to all” (l. 8). This self-identification is even more fulsome than that of Odysseus when introducing himself to the Phaeacians: “I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, I am known to all men / for my deceptions, and my fame reaches the stars” (Od 9.19–20).23 The king’s awareness of his fame leads him to say not “I am Oedipus,” but “I am called Oedipus.”24 This fame will be replaced with infamy by the tragedy’s end: he will instead be ashamed of what men call him, “the bridegroom of she who bore me” (ll. 1358–59),25 and he will beg the chorus to throw him into the sea, so he will be someplace “where you will never look upon me again” (l. 1412).26 His unparalleled visibility will turn, in fact, to complete blindness.

There is tyrannical excess in Oedipus’ success, and there is excess as well in his

22. David Wiles (1997, 178) proposes that the object of supplication in these scenes, “Oedipus’ altar,” is in fact the thymele, the actual altar of Dionysus located in the center of the orchestra.
23. εἶμ’ Ὄδυσσε`υς Λαερτι`αδῆς, ὃς πᾶσι δύλοισιν / ἀνθρώπουσι μέλοι, καὶ μεν κλέος οὐφεν ἔχει.
24. Oedipus returns to this theme in his apostrophe to tyranny at l. 380.
25. νυμφίος / βροτοῖς ἐκλήθην ὃν ἔφυν ἤπο.
26. ἐνθα μήποτ’ εἰσόψεσθ’ ἔτι
downfall: he is, as Segal (1981) describes him, a “man of superlatives...without mediation between the extremes” (227). Just as he is the “first among men” (l. 33), the “best of mortals” (l. 46), so does he become τὸν καταρατότατον, ἤτι δὲ καὶ θεοῖς / ἐχθρότατον βροτῶν, “the most accursed, and furthermore the most despised of mortals by the gods” (ll. 1344–45).

The Title Turannos

The word τυράννος and cognate terms appear fifteen times in the text of the tragedy, with a variety of connotations. In some instances, the term is used as a neutral synonym for ruler, with no ideological intent. In others, it is clearly used in pessimam partem to express the worst aspects of tyranny as the Athenians saw them. In still others, the usage is ambiguous. The slipperiness of the referent of τυράννος throughout the play mirrors Oedipus’ increasing uncertainty about his own identity. Similarly, the implications of what it means to be a “tyrant” are, too, destabilized over the course of the tragedy.

Three times, at ll. 128, 799 and 1043, the term is used to describe the late king Laius and his reign, instances that carry no negative associations. 27 Similarly neutral usages occur when, in the first episode, Oedipus charges Creon with being ληστής τ’ ἐναργής τῆς κυριαρχίας, “the manifest thief of my sovereignty” (l. 535); when, later in the drama, the Corinthian messenger enters inquiring about the location of τοῦ τυράννου δωματ’...Οἰδίπου, “the palace of King Oedipus” (l. 925); when he soon thereafter tells Jocasta that the Corinthians will crown Oedipus τυράννον...χθωνός / τής Ἰσθμίας, “ruler of the Isthmian land” (939–40) and when the chorus, in a moment

27. See, however, Pietro Pucci (1992, 115), who reads Oedipus’ description of Laius as a τυράννος at l. 799, during his account of the fatal incident at the crossroads, as Oedipus “inscribing [Laius] in the realm of violence and chance that characterizes their encounter...”

of false hope, hymn Mt. Cithaeron as being ἐπὶ ἦρα φέροντα / τοῖς ἐμοῖς τυράννοις, “bringing pleasing gifts to our king” (ll. 1094–95).

In other instances, τύραννος cognates are used with a more ambiguous purpose, such as in the two confrontation scenes that fill out the first half of the tragedy, between Oedipus and Teiresias (ll. 316–462) and then between Oedipus and Creon (ll. 513–630). The scenes initiate the stripping away of the king’s benignly confident demeanor, and in doing so start to investigate the implications—both positive and negative—of tyranny. It becomes quickly apparent that, when he is not addressing the city at large, Oedipus is a different kind of ruler. Confronting Teiresias, he is quick to take offense at the prophet’s reticence to speak, and then grows even angrier after he is told by Teiresias that he is the very murderer he seeks. Teiresias tauntingly observes the king’s growing rage (ll. 337–38, 343–44 and 364). Oedipus responds to his accusations with an apostrophe to tyranny itself:

380 ὁ πλοῦτε καὶ τυραννὶ καὶ τέχνη τέχνης
ὑπερφέρουσα τῷ πολυζήλῳ βίῳ,
ὅσος παρ᾽ ὑμῖν ὁ φθόνος φυλάσσεται,
εἰ τῆσδε γ᾽ ἄρχης οὖνεχ’, ἣν ἐμοὶ πόλις
δοριθῶν, οὐχ οἰτητῶν, εἰσεχεῖσθαι,
385 ταῦτας Κρέων ὁ πιστὸς, οὗ ἄρχης φύλος,
λάβῃς μ’ ὑπελθόν ἐκβαλεῖν ἵμεραίται,
ὡς χαῖς μάγον τοιάνδε μηχανορράφον,
δόλον ἀγ´ ώτην, ὡστὶς ἐν τοῖς κέρδεσιν
μῶνον δέδορκε, τὴν τέχνην δ’ ἐφ’ τυριλός.

380 O wealth and tyranny and skill surpassing skill
in a much-envied life, how much
jealousy you foster, if it is on account
of this authority, which the city handed to me,
freely given though unasked for,
385 that trusty Creon, my friend from the start,
as he crept up to me in secret, longs to cast me out,
having recruited this scheming charlatan,
this clever vagabond, who can see only
for his own gain, but in his art is blind!

As signaled by the τυραννι on l. 380, Oedipus’ rhesis directly invokes a number of tyrannical tropes. The long-standing association of tyranny with wealth takes on a thematic significance in the tragedy, and will also find expression in Oedipus’ exchange with Creon. As I read it, τέχνη τέχνης ὑπερφέρουσα (l. 380–81) makes it clear that Oedipus is speaking to his own situation, not about kingship in general. Thus the “skill surpassing skill” is the mental dexterity that allowed Oedipus to defeat the Sphinx and thus become king of Thebes.²⁹

Oedipus then shifts his focus from intrinsic to extrinsic characteristics of tyranny, once again bringing up its conspicuous appeal. While φθόνος is inherently negative, the adjective on l. 381, πολύξηλος, can be taken to mean “much-envied” or “much-desired”, a span of emotion that accurately captures the double-edged desirability of tyranny.³⁰ Via this issue of desirability, Oedipus pivots to his own suspicions of Creon, which are all the more striking because they seem to have come from nowhere: Creon’s name only came up two lines before the start of the rhesis, when Oedipus replied to Teiresias’ warnings of the his impending doom with the sudden question Κρέοντος, ἢ τοῦ ταύτα τάξιςφρήματα “Are these Creon’s fabrications—or whose?” (l. 378). When his brother-in-law was last on stage, Oedipus had nothing but good words for him (ll. 132–34 especially), but this sudden turn lays the groundwork for the bitter dispute between the two characters in the following scene. The turn also reveals the second significant crack in Oedipus’ tyrannical façade. Arguing with Teiresias, Oedipus demonstrated his tendency to anger, and he now voices suspicious fears, both emotions that have been marked as “tyrannical.”

²⁹. Another interpretation, that Oedipus is speaking more generally and thus that the τέχνη τέχνης ὑπερφέρουσα is the art of rulership, has a number of proponents. For an exhaustive survey of critical opinion, see Bollack (1990, 2:239–41). For the traditional motif, most prominent in Herodotus, of tyrant as a clever interpreter, see Gray (1996, 377–79) and Hollmann (2011, 167–68, 216n12).

³⁰. Cf. Deianira’s description of Herakles as her πολύξηλον πόσιν at Soph. Trach. 185.
To complement the rapidly souring portrait of the tyrant Oedipus, Teiresias responds to this invective with his own political language, speaking in a democratic register as a contrast to the king’s praise of tyranny:

εἰ καὶ τυραννεῖς, ἔξισωτέον τὸ γοῦν
᾿ισ’ ἄντιλέξχε· τοῦδε γὰρ κἀγὼ κρατῶ.

Even though you are a ruler, responding in opposition, at least, should be claimed as a right equally: in that I too have power. (ll. 408–9)

The phrase ᾿ισ’ ἄντιλέξχε has been read as an oblique invocation of the Athenian right of ᾿ισηγορία, and thus, anachronistically, an instance of “the tyranny of Oedipus coming into conflict with the norm of equality established in Athenian ideology” (Edmunds 2002, 75). By using the verb τυραννεῖς to describe Oedipus’ authority, Teiresias throws the king’s words back in his face, ping-ponging τῦραννος cognates across their semantic range in just a few lines. While Teiresias is being completely accurate in his use of the verb, he is also clearly communicating his low opinion of the ruler, “tapping the well of opprobrium which could...attach to τυραννίς” (Dawe 2006, 110). This negatively-charged τυραννεῖς, like a signpost, marks the introduction of overtly democratic language, which has thus far been absent from the tragedy. Line 408 demonstrates a pointed rhetorical balance between tyrannical and popular authority: “you may be a ruler / but the right must be claimed.” The word ἔξισωτέον neatly encapsulates the very idea of a “norm of equality”—so pointedly, in fact, that Dawe (2006) has complained that “the linguistic pudding is somewhat over-egged” (110).32

31. See also Edmunds (2000, 46–48).
32. Edmunds (2002, 76) notes that the theme of ᾿ισηγορία is briefly taken up again in one of Creon’s replies to Oedipus, when part of his response to the king includes the remark ἀντὶ τῶν εἰρημένων / ᾿ισ’ ἄντικοισον (ll. 543–44).
Teiresias uses democratic language once more, but gives it a menacing tone. After enumerating the future woes that Oedipus is blind to, Teiresias concludes:

\[ \text{ἄλλων δὲ πλήθος οὐκ ἐπαισθάνει κακῶν,} \]
\[ \text{ἄ σ' ἐξισώσει σοὶ τε καὶ τοῖς σοῖς τέκνοις.} \]

You do not perceive the host of other evils,

which will make you equal with your children. (ll. 424–25)

These lines are (fittingly for a prophet) enigmatic. Dawe (2006, 111), given two missing lines just before, sees the reference to Oedipus’ children as problematic, but this need not be so. Oedipus has already spoken with his “children”—that is, the citizens of Thebes—several times.\textsuperscript{33} The political valence of \textgreek{ἐξισώσει} earlier in Teiresias’ speech serves to clarify the meaning of \textgreek{ἐξισώσει} here; the prophet is warning Oedipus that he will soon lose the privileges of authority in which he is exalting, and will have no more status than the citizens he currently rules.

The following scene, between Oedipus and Creon, contains the next instance of a τύραννος cognate in the tragedy, and constitutes a further interrogation into tyranny. Immediately upon entering, Creon says:

\[ \text{ἄνδρες πολίται, δεῖν' ἔπη πεπυσμένος} \]
\[ \text{κατηγορεῖν μου τὸν τύραννον Ὁιδίπουν} \]
\[ \text{τάρειμ' ἀτλητῶν.} \]

Citizens, having learned that King Oedipus accuses me of terrible things, I have arrived in a state of outrage. (ll. 512–14)

The lines are a testament to the power of context: the last instance of τύραννος came as a stinging rejoinder to Oedipus’ authority, and so here the theoretically

\textsuperscript{33} ll. 1, 6, 58.
patently descriptive phrase τὸν τύραννον Οἰδίπουν—the very title of the drama—sounds more like an epithet than a title. This negative valence is heightened by Creon’s other opening words, his appeal to the chorus as ἀνδρὲς πολίται, a phrase more suited to an orator addressing his co-equals.34

A negative view of tyranny is later evoked in an exchange in which Creon defends himself against the charge of harboring any desire for power, the very fear Oedipus expressed at ll. 385–89. When Oedipus re-enters after Creon’s arrival, assuming his intentions he harangues his brother-in-law for his obvious plotting, and ends with a pointed question:

540 ἢδ' οὐχὶ μῷρόν ἐστι τούγχειρημά σου,
ἐνευ τε πλήθουσα καὶ φίλων τυραννίδα
ὑπεράν, ὥ πλήθεις χρήμασίν ὅ' ἥλισκεται:

540 And isn’t your attempt a foolish one,
lusting after the throne without followers or supporters,
which is captured with followers and money?

Oedipus’ question invokes what might be termed the “Athenian standard model of the tyrannical coup”; the same trio of terms can be seen, also at Eur. Or. 1156–57 (Dawe 2006, 121).35 Other accounts of putsches (successful or attempted) emphasize the importance of followers and of manpower, i.e., the πλήθους καὶ φίλων of Oedipus’ question. This is well-demonstrated by two accounts of Cylon’s attempted coup at Athens in 632. Herodotus notes the importance of the resource of manpower:

οὗτος ἐπὶ τυραννίδι ἐκόμησε, προσποιησάμενος δὲ ἐταιρηθὴν τῶν ἠλικιωτέων καταλαβέειν
tὴν ἄκροπολιν ἐπειρήθη...，“This man [i.e. Cylon] set his sights on the tyranny and, procuring for himself a band of men of the same age, attempted to seize the Acropolis...” (5.71.1).

34. As at, e.g. Antioch. 3.1.1, Xen. Hell. 2.4.13 and 2.4.20.
35. οὐκ ἐστίν οὐδὲν κρείσσον ἢ φίλος σαφῆς; / οὐ πλούτος, οὐ τυραννίς.
Thucydides’ version of the same event does much the same: ὁ δὲ παρὰ τε τοῦ Θεαγένους δύναμιν λαβὼν καὶ τοὺς φίλους ἀναπείσας, ἐπειδὴ ἐπήλθεν Ὄλυμπia τὰ ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ, κατέλαβε τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ὡς ἐπὶ τυραννίδι... “And after having acquired forces from Theagenes and having persuaded friends to join him, [Cylon], when the time of the Olympic festival came around, seized the Acropolis in order to become tyrant...” (1.59.3). In describing the rise of Pisistratus, Herodotus (1.59.3) also discusses the faction that helped the tyrant come to power; as such tactics were typical in tyrannical endeavors, the association between tyranny and stasis, as discussed in the first chapter, is unsurprising. Hornblower (2014, 211) suggests that such groups of friends are effectively “precursors” to the hetaireiai with whom Peisander conspired to incite violence in order to ensure the passage of the legislation that empowered the Four Hundred (Thuc. 8.54.4). That Thucydides narratively links the Four Hundred to the Peisistratids and that, as M. C. Taylor (2002, 91n2) has noted, the historian here and only here glosses democracy with ἔλευθεριας, “freedom,” suggests that he viewed the two events as being of a kind.

Ironically, the very act of Oedipus asking the question gives himself away as possessing one of the most characteristic traits of the tyrant: the tyrant is, paradigmatically, always afraid of potential successors. It is for that reason that Aristotle observes that, in contrast to kings, who are buoyed by their friends, τυραννικὸν δὲ τὸ μάλιστ’ ἀπιστεῖν τοῖς φίλοις, ὡς βουλομένων μὲν πάντων δυναμένων δὲ μάλιστα τούτων, “it is characteristic of the tyrant to distrust his friends, because although his friends have the desire, his friends most of all have the capability [to kill him]” (1313b30).

36. Thucydides’ account of the authorization of the Four Hundred is followed soon thereafter by the infamous remark: χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἦν τὸν Ἀθηναίων δῆμον ἐπὶ ἐκεί ἐκατοστὶ μᾶλιστα ἐπειδὴ οἱ τύραννοι κατελύθησαν ἑλευθερίας παῦσαι, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἡ ὑπόθεσιν ἄντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ᾧ ἡμοῦ τοῦ χρόνου τούτου αὐτῶν ἄλλων ἀξίωμα εἰσῴκητα. “For it was a difficult thing to bring the freedom of the Athenian people to an end, a century after the tyrants were overthrown, since the city had not only not been a subject state but was rather accustomed, during half of that time, to rule over subjects of its own” (8.68.4).
Creon’s response to Oedipus can, like Teiresias’ reference to free speech, be read as oblique political content:

οἴσϑ’ ὡς πόησον· ἀντὶ τῶν εἰρημένων
 ᾿ις’ ἄντάκουσον, κῆτα κρῆν’ αὐτὸς μαθών.

Do you know what you should do? Listen equally in turn to the things I’ve said, and then judge once you’ve heard them.
(ll. 591–92)

Creon thus charges Oedipus with not “listening in turn,” as a participant at the Assembly should do. Like Teiresias, Creon asserts his right to talk back to his king. After some heated stichomythia, Creon defends himself against Oedipus’ charges by raising an old trope:

σκέψαι δὲ τοῦτο πρῶτον, εἶ τιν’ ἂν δοξεῖς
 ἄρχειν ἐλέσθαι ξῦν φόβοισι μᾶλλον ἦ
 ἄτρεστον εὕδοντ’, εἰ τὰ γ’ αὖθ’ ἔξει κράτη

First consider this, whether you think anyone would prefer to rule full of terrors rather than sleeping without fear, at least if he’ll enjoy the same authority. (ll. 584–86)

The mental disturbances and constant fear wrought by the wielding of tyrannical power have already been exemplified by the Zeus of the Prometheus Bound. By discussing the Theban throne in such terms, however, Creon implicitly admits that he sees Oedipus as such a figure: a paranoiac jealously guarding his power. He briefly touches on another trope when he adds, several lines later:

νῦν μὲν γὰρ ἐκ σοῦ πάντ’ ἄνευ φθόνου ψέρω,
 εἰ δ’ αὐτὸς ἤρχον, πολλὰ κὰν ἄκουν ἐδρων.

37. For a thorough analysis of Soph. OT 584–86, see Pope (1991, 62f.).
As things stand, I can obtain everything from you without arousing jealousy,
but if I myself had power, I’d have to do so many things unwillingly.

Creon touts the advantages of being the queen’s brother, being able to live without fear and without inviting envy but still enjoy a great deal of royal power.  

Thus far, the non-anodyne instances of τύραννος in the tragedy are used pointedly, either in defense of the institution or as part of a program of subtle democratic technique. The next instance, however, is the most difficult and most discussed in the OT: in antistrophe α of the second stasimon of the tragedy:

\begin{verbatim}
 ὑβρὶς ὕμει τύραννον· ὑβρὶς, εἰ πολλῶν ὑπερπλησθῇ μάταν,
 ἀὴ ἐπίκαιρα μηδὲ συμφέροντα,
 ἄχροτατα γείοι ἀναβάς,
 ἀπότομον ὄρουσεν εἰς ὁνὰγκαν
 ἔνθ' οὐ ποδί χρησίμω
 χρῆται. τὸ καλῶς δ' ἔχων
 τολεί πάλαισμα μὴτοτε λύ-
 σαι θεόν αἴτούμαι.
 θεόν οὐ λήξω ποτὲ προστάταν ἱσχων.
\end{verbatim}

Insolence has a child who is a tyrant; insolence, if vainly satiated with profusion that is not right or fitting, mounts to the topmost cornice and rushes to the edge of an abyss where its feet can do it no service. But I pray the god never to undo the wrestler’s throw that brought good to the city; never shall I cease to hold the god for my protector. (ll. 873–82, Lloyd-Jones OCT text and translation)

These lines pose two interlinked questions: what do they mean, and how do they apply to the situation in the OT? The language is broadly Solonian, with its connection between the tyrant and ὑβρὶς, its use of biological imagery (φυτεύει) and

38. The φόδου at l. 590 is an emendation of Blaydes for φόβου, which Dawe accepts but Lloyd-Jones does not. The substitution seems logical to me, as Creon already touched on fear several lines earlier.
its concern with the fate of the population under an ill-ruler, as in Solon 6W, ll. 3–4:

\[\text{τίκτει γάρ κόρος ὑβριν, ὠταν πολὺς ὄλβος ἔπηται / ἀνθρώποις ὀποσοὶ μὴ νόος ἀρτιος ἦ,} \]

“For excess breeds hubris, whenever much prosperity comes / to men (however many) not of sound mind.” The lines, according to Aristotle fr. 57, paraphrase a proverb:

\[\text{τίκτει γάρ κόρος μὲν ὑβριν, ἀπαιδευσία δὲ μετ’ ἔξουσίας ἄνοιαν, “For excess breeds hubris and a lack of education combined with authority, folly” (Podlecki 1993, 12).}^{39}\]

The broader interpretation of the passage, and of the role of τύραννος within it, is complicated by a proposed emendation to the text, first proposed by Blaydes in 1859 and more recently promulgated in Dawe’s 1975 Teubner edition, which reads l. 873 as ὑβριν φυτεύει τυραννίς, “tyranny begets hubris.” Dawe (2006, 147–48) defends this change on the grounds that “hubris begets tyranny” is a statement of limited applicability, as it is only in a small number of instances that a hubristic individual became a tyrant, whereas the inverse is a commonplace akin to “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” In Dawe’s view, the stasimon amounts to Chorus wondering aloud “whether even the admirable Oedipus may not have been corrupted...” with the chilling alternative being that “Oedipus may be guiltless in intent and doomed by the gods before he was even born.” Dawe has won over a number of critics, including Winnington-Ingram (1980c, 191ff.), Burton (1980, 164) and James Diggle (1982, 14).^{40}

It is frustrating that the passage in the tragedy that engages most directly with tyranny is the site of such a crux. I do not see one reading preferable over another, as in my view the relationship between tyranny and hybris is very much a “chicken and

39. Podlecki (1993, 13) also notes a near repetition of the sentiment at Thgn. 153–54, as well as two similar but significantly altered statements; at Eur. fr. 438 Nauck, it is πλούσιος that engenders hubris, and at Pind. Ol. 13.6–10, the koros-hybris relationship is reversed.

40. Dawe does not entertain the suggestion of Eduard Fraenkel: ὑβρις φυτεύει τύραννον ὑβριν, “Hubris begets the tyrant hubris.” (Lloyd-Jones 1983, 193)
egg” situation: the absolute power afforded by tyranny can spur a ruler to hubristic acts, but it also has been the case that hubristically-minded people are attracted to the power of tyranny. What the antistrophe does communicate in the context of the ode, however, is the chorus’ fervent wish for divine justice and the efficacy of oracles. These desires form a part of the moral universe described in the antistrophe, in which hubristic excess and impious deeds are punished. In my reading, the impious ῦ υβριστής of the antistrophe and the next strophe is not meant to be Oedipus, but rather some violator of the moral law, the sort of which Oedipus is now pursuing. The chorus is expressing their confidence in their king, the underlying irony being clear: they are condemning Oedipus without knowing they do so.

This irony reflects, in my view, the self-contradictory doubleness of tyranny in the OT overall. Oedipus the efficacious and godlike tyrant is shown to be distinct from Oedipus the hubritic, incestuous monster, even though they are the same person. Similarly the referent for the man deserving of punishment—and on whose punishment the entire cosmic order rests—is the same person who is thought to be carrying out divine justice. The insoluble problem of tyrannical power is that, while it can be put to noble ends in the right hands, the very exercise of it inclines the wielder towards ῦ υβρις, and thus toward destruction.

*Oedipus the Tyrant?*

It is taken as a given that Oedipus is a tyrant. He displays the “salient characteristics of the tyrant’s modus operandi... usurpation of power by killing the former king, its consolidation by marriage to the widowed queen, and the gratification of even the more abhorrent and illicit lusts...” (Burian 2009, 111). But consideration of these attributes is, in a sense, secondary—after all, the word “tyrant” is right there
in the title of the tragedy.\textsuperscript{41} This, of course, begs the question, but the question remains: what does that epithet really communicate?

That the tragedy acquired the \textit{epiklesis} τῷ ὑραννος only in order to distinguish it from \textit{Oedipus at Colonus} is born out by a consideration of the earliest citation of the drama: it was called simply \textit{Oedipus} at least as late as the middle of the fourth century, given that Aristotle refers to it as such three times in the \textit{Poetics} (Verhasselt 2015, 616).\textsuperscript{42} The earliest attestation of the title with the \textit{epiklesis} is in the its third hypothesis, which is attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 257–180 BCE).\textsuperscript{43} If, then, the tragedy was called \textit{Turannos} only in order to distinguish it from the other Oedipus tragedy of Sophocles (just as, e.g., Euripides’ two surviving Iphigenia tragedies came to be identified as Ίφιγένεια ἐν Αὐλίδι and Ίφιγένεια ἐν Ταύροις), the title cannot necessarily be taken to signify anything more profound than that distinction.

As I discussed earlier in this section, the \textit{OT} contains two distinct depictions of the tyrant. These depictions can be reconciled with two different conceptions of tyranny: one, the god-like Oedipus who appears at the outset of the tragedy, benevolent and capable, bears a resemblance to the heroic self-image that was projected by several archaic tyrants (e.g. Cypselus), as the heroic outsider who comes to the oppressed city’s aid. Given the mythological matrix of extant knowledge of Cypselus’ early life, it is easy to imagine a hypothetical historical account of an “Oedipus, tyrant of

\textsuperscript{41}As for \textit{why} the tragedy is titled \textit{Oedipus Tyrannus}, see second hypothesis to the \textit{OT}. Headed “Why [the Tragedy] is Entitled 
\textit{Tyrannus},” the text begins: “The \textit{Oedipus Tyrannus} is titled so as to distinguish it from the other [tragedy, i.e. \textit{Oedipus at Colonus}]. Everyone cleverly calls it \textit{Tyrannus}, because it stands out above all of Sophocles’ work, even though it was defeated by Philocles, as Dicaearchus says. There are also those call it the First Oedipus, not \textit{Oedipus Tyrannus}, because of the dates of the productions and because of the events [in the tragedy].” From here the hypothesis proceeds to try to etymologize τῷ ὑραννος and gives a brief history of its use. This, unfortunately, explains very little.

\textsuperscript{42}On the near impossibility of dating the \textit{Poetics}, see Halliwell (1998, 324–30).

\textsuperscript{43}See Verhasselt (2015, 625).
Thebes,” who took power after deposing the reigning Theban king, an event that was mythologized, in separate versions, either as a roadside slaying or as the defeat of the mythical Sphinx. We would have reason to believe that “Oedipus” had dynastic links with Corinth, and that in spite of some evidence suggesting he was a popular ruler, the tradition depicts him ending his days as an incestuous exile—but this is probably later partisan propaganda.

As the plot unfolds, Oedipus’ character darkens, and the second conception of tyranny comes to the fore, one that hews close to the critiques of the “Athenian model.” This is a tyrant with many of the expected flaws: he is paranoid, seeing conspirators all around him, and he is excessively angry (cf. ll. 337–44). While his cleverness is one of his salient characteristics, Oedipus’ life was just as deeply influenced by his rage. He describes his initial attack on Laius quite straightforwardly: πα΄ιω δι’ ᾿ οργ῀ ης, “I struck him out of anger” (l. 807). The king’s rage emerges most violently late in the tragedy, when the Corinthian shepherd’s reticence drives him to have the old man bound and nearly tortured to force him to speak (ll. 1150–60).44

The king’s god-like nature, too, comes to appear as mere arrogance. He is, as I have discussed, stripped of the divine associations built up around him earlier in the tragedy. Further, after Jocasta flees with horror into the palace at her realization, Oedipus declares himself the “child of Fortune” (l. 1080), thus claiming a divine genealogy so as to reassure himself that he is capable of finding out the truth. This is quite distinct from his earlier divine appearance; it is rather hubristic self-aggrandizement, demonstrating the tyrant, in desperation, making sacrilegious claims in order to bolster his authority.

44.Dawe (2006, 171–72) suggests that the Athenian audience would not have considered such measures to be extreme, since by law slaves could only give evidence under torture. This would be a more credible view if the interrogation scene had more legalistic trappings; as it stands, Oedipus’ behavior and demeanor here are in stark contrast with those he presented at the beginning of the tragedy.
Here, then, is the tyrant of Athenian fears. The same τύφωνος who promised to be the defender of his people, who rhetorically united himself with the polis (e.g. ll. 330–31), who was earnestly trying to fulfill the commands of Apollo, is also the fearful and irascible τύφωνος who employs threats of violence to achieve his ends, and who is revealed to be the very criminal he has been seeking. The gradual transition from one to the other is definitively marked by a shift in the tragedy’s focus: the king’s investigation into the cause of the plague leads him inexorably to look into his own background. What begins as a inquiry into a public catastrophe slowly narrows to become the exposé of private shame. The plague, the event that drives the plot, falls away from the tragedy, seemingly forgotten. This shift in focus represents the private oikos of the royal family subsuming the city as a whole, a charge that has been leveled against tyranny. This same shift can be seen, as Burian (2009, 109) has observed, in the vocabulary of the tragedy: the word πόλις occurs twenty-five times in the drama up to l. 880, and not once thereafter. The OT, by depicting Oedipus’ compulsive examination of his past, represents the tyrant’s private world engulfing

45. E. D. Francis (1992) argues that, in addition to these traits, an Athenian audience would have detected overtones of Eastern despotism in the king’s depiction, particularly in his description of Creon at l. 385 as ὁ πιστός—“trusty,” to be sure, but also the title of Persian court officials as in the opening lines of the Persians—see above on p. 57—and, two lines later, his insulting Teiresias with the title μάγος, a term of derision that originated with the Μάγοι, the “hereditary sacerdotal caste” (Zaehner 1961, 21) that formed a part of Persian society. These Eastern impressions are, Francis contends, reinforced by repeated references to Oedipus as “father” to the Theban people, a title that, as was discussed in the previous chapter, is suggestive of the relationship between Great King and his subjects, which would give an authoritarian air to the Theban ruler. See also Rigsby (1976).

46. Mitchell-Boyask (2008, 62–63), however, reads the messenger’s statement at l. 1293, τὸ γὰρ νόσημα μεῖζον ἦ φέρειν, “His disease is more than he can bear,” as evidence that the plague has “mutated” to enter the body of Oedipus himself. Cf. Segal (2001, 74–77). The loose thread of the Theban plague did not go unnoticed by later dramatists: Seneca’s Oedipus, as he takes leave of Athens, declares mortifera mecum vitia terrarum extra ho, “I am drawing out with me the fatal maladies of the land” (l. 1058). In the 1659 Édipe of Pierre Corneille, immediately after the departure of the king, it is announced that the plague has abated and all those who were just before at the point of death are singing hymns of praise in thanksgiving (5.9.1954–62). Similarly, the final scene of Voltaire’s 1718 Oedipus adaptation begins with the priest arriving to report the plague’s disappearance.

47. See above, at p. 61.
the public sphere until the two become co-extensive.

The OT, in playing the two conceptions of the tyrant off one other, illustrates the difficulty in distinguishing the exercise of tyrannical power from the moral failings that such power exacerbates. Oedipus is, the audience knows, fated from the first to suffer as he does, yet that does not mean his motives as king were not civic-minded or that he was *ipso facto* a bad ruler. Through the character of the priest, Sophocles makes it clear that Oedipus did not rule through violence and fear, and that he was beloved by his subjects.

Oedipus represents the dangers of tyranny, to be sure, as is the case with the Aeschylean tyrants discussed in the previous chapter, but there is no absolute equation of tyranny with moral turpitude. In my reading of the *Antigone*, this is also, in a more limited sense, the case with Creon.

The *Oedipus Tyrannus* thus performs a sly substitution; it invokes many of the tropes of the tyrant, but presents the audience with a tyrant who does not conform to them. And yet Sophocles’ Oedipus is not without *any* tyrannical characteristics. Ironically, the events of the tragedy’s plot impel him toward typically tyrannical behavior, such as his paranoia when arguing with Teiresias and Creon, as well as the reliance on physical violence, when, at ll. 1150f., he orders that the shepherd withholding the last vital piece of information to be painfully restrained. It may be, as well, that the Oedipus with whom the play opens, the benevolent savior who can set the city right again, would have recalled the self-presentation of historical tyrants as reformers and agents of justice (McGlew 1993, 196ff.).

The instability of Oedipus’ personal identity is mirrored by the instability of his identity as a tyrant. At the beginning of the tragedy, when Oedipus understands himself to be the non-dynastic ruler of Thebes, he is benevolent and civic-minded. As the plot unfolds, he becomes more “tyrannically” paranoid, more forceful and more
focused on his own plight than that of the city. By the tragedy’s end, of course, he is neither tyrant nor king.

Considered in this way, Oedipus’ behavior as the tragedy progresses does not seem entirely dissimilar from Creon’s actions in the Antigone, even though the latter ruler is usually viewed with far less sympathy than Oedipus. This speaks to the salient differences between the OT and the Antigone, which forms the basis of the next section of this chapter.

Antigone

Introduction and Interpretations

The depiction of tyranny in the Antigone appears, at first glance, far more clear cut than the one in the OT. Creon, the violent and impulsive ruler of Thebes whose ἀτη blinds him to the disastrous consequences of his actions until it is too late, would appear to fit the expectations established by the Athenian model of tyranny almost perfectly. Like Oedipus, however, his relationship with that model is complex, and as with the OT, the complexity of the Antigone is greatly obscured by the general familiarity of the drama. In this section, I examine the ambiguities of the tragedy, especially those surrounding Creon, whom I view as a “reactive tyrant.”

That is to say, Creon, like Oedipus in the OT, becomes more and more indistinguishable from the Athenian “standard tyrant” the more he is challenged. One of the tragic ironies of the Antigone is the fact that the principles that Creon espouses—and his intentions as ruler of Thebes—are not in themselves tyrannical, but the tenacity with which he clings to them, far beyond the point of reasonableness, is what triggers the emergence of his radically authoritarian persona. A parallel fault can be attributed to Antigone: like her father in the OT, Antigone declares her course of action and
doggedly follows it to her doom. The fundamental similarity of Antigone and Creon has spawned an interpretative dichotomy that divides much of the scholarship on the tragedy.

The overriding question that has faced scholars, and that must be confronted in looking into the matter of Creon’s “tyranny,” is the degree to which Antigone is seen as being the “heroine” and Creon the “villain” of the tragedy.\textsuperscript{48} The most common reading of the tragedy sees Antigone unambiguously as the “heroine” of the drama. Robert M. Torrance (1965, 300) summarizes the view thus: “... [Antigone] is the story of a brave and uncompromisingly heroic girl who defends the laws of family and of the gods—and is destroyed for her pains.”\textsuperscript{49} Pared down to its essentials, this reading unambiguously contends that “Antigone is completely right, Creon is completely wrong” (Oudemans and Lardinois 1987, 107). This interpretation, the so-called “orthodox view” (Hester 1971, 12), has had numerous adherents, including Hegel,\textsuperscript{50} Virginia Woolf,\textsuperscript{51} and Allan Bloom.\textsuperscript{52} The orthodox view also clearly undergirds many of the modern adaptations of Antigone, such as those of Jean Anouilh, Bertolt Brecht and Athol Fugard, in which Creon is depicted as a representative of fascism

\textsuperscript{48} See the taxonomy of historical interpretations of Antigone’s role at Honig (2013, 7): “heroic conscientious objector...,” “humanist lamenter of the dead...,” or “monstrous creature of desire...” For the purposes of this study, however, I must omit any discussion of Hegel’s monumentally influential reading of the tragedy. For a summary of Hegel’s view, see Oudemans and Lardinois (1987, 110–17). For considerations of Hegel’s view and its place in the historical discourse surrounding the Antigone, see Leonard (2005, 96ff.) and Burian (2010).

\textsuperscript{49} See, e.g., Lane and Lane (1986). On the reception of Antigone and the variety of reactions to her stance, see Liapis (2013, 81n1). The most comprehensive single work on the subject is Steiner (1984), but see also Hester (1971). For a survey of the numerous ways in which Creon has been portrayed, both in antiquity and later, see Steiner (1983).

\textsuperscript{50} Hegel writes of “the heavenly Antigone, that noblest of figures that ever appeared on earth...” (Hegel 1962, 360).

\textsuperscript{51} Woolf refers to Antigone as “heroism itself... fidelity itself” (Woolf 1984, 27).

\textsuperscript{52} Bloom glosses Antigone’s character by writing that “accepting the consequences for affirming what really counts is what gives... her nobility” (Bloom 1987, 228). For an exhaustive list of scholarly works that follow the orthodox view, see Hester (1971, 48ff.).
or of authoritarianism.  

But the orthodox view is not without its problems. Just as Aristotle considers a tragedy portraying a bad individual passing from prosperity to misfortune as inherently untragic, he casts in the same light a tragedy in which a good individual undergoes the same transition: πρῶτον μὲν δήλον ὅτι  οὔτε τοὺς ἔπιστειχίς ἄνδρας δεῖ μεταβάλλοντας φαίνεσθαι ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν, οὐ γὰρ φοβερὸν οὐδὲ ἐλεεινὸν τοῦτο ἄλλα μισρὸν ἔστιν, “It is clear that one shouldn’t show good men changing from good to bad circumstances, for this does not induce pity or fear, but rather repulsion” (Arist. Poet. 1452b34–36). Furthermore, the orthodox view relies heavily on ten lines of the tragedy, Antigone’s statement of principle at ll. 450–60, sentiments that are complicated, if not undermined, by her self-pitying lamentation in her final scene (ll. 853–943). As Torrance (1965, 300) has said, “Antigone, beneath its balanced antitheses, tight dramatic structure, and seemingly traditional patterns of ideas, conceals vast potentialities of unreason and chaos.”

Uncomfortable with Antigone’s despairing doubt in these later lines, some scholars, following A. Jacob in 1821, have regarded ll. 902–13 as spurious, on the grounds of style—the lines have been characterized as full of “contorted argument and awkward locutions” (Winnington-Ingram 1980a, 145)—as well as content. In those lines, Antigone makes a significant modification to her stance: that she would only have gone to the lengths she did for a dead brother, not dead children or a dead husband. This stark statement falls short of the complete obedience to the ἁγραπτα κ᾿ ασφαλ῀ θε῀ ων / ν᾿ ομιμα (ll. 454–55) on which she had earlier insisted.  

Current scholarly consensus, however, is in favor of regarding the lines as genuine.  

53. Fugard once described the Antigone as “the first play that raised the issue of standing up and being counted in a situation that involved oppression and injustice” (Jenkins 2003, 18).

54. For a discussion of this argument’s relation to its likely Herodotean source, see S. West (1999, 129ff.).

55. See Griffith (1999, 277–78) for a balanced consideration of the evidence, and Hester (1971,
Many of the objectors to the orthodox view share the opinion that the Antigone is too often read through the ideological accretion that the tragedy has accumulated over the centuries. 56 Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood (1989), one of the more vigorous opponents of the orthodox view, has cautioned against reading the tragedy without first closely examining the preconceptions that we as readers bring to it: “If we apply to the Antigone—even if only to question it—the perceptual model ‘individual opposing the state to obey his conscience’, we run the risk of structuring the play through an alien schema and of introducing a multifaceted distortion” (135).57 To retroject modern concepts about, e.g., the relationship between the individual and the state threatens anachronistic distortion: “It is doubtful whether the Greeks would have recognized the essentially romantic problem of the individual in revolt against the state” (Oudemans and Lardinois 1987, 3).

Objectors to the orthodox view have also focussed on the negative aspects of Antigone’s character, both in terms of her potentially deleterious effects on Theban civic unity at a time of crisis as well as of the ways in which she perpetuates the incestuous curse of the Labdacid line, “her family’s (self-)destructive introversion” (Liapis 2013, 81).58 But, if pushed beyond a certain point, this reading faces a fundamental difficulty: Antigone is shown to be in the right. The alternative reading “fails to account for the undeniable fact that Antigone is, eventually, vindicated, and that Creon is made to see the error of his ways” (81).

The ambiguity at the heart of the tragedy is a consequence of the fundamental similarity of Creon and Antigone. Each settles on a particular course of action

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55–58) for a discussion of the disagreement, with a copious bibliography.


57. On this point, see Holt (1999, 672).

58. For a critique of Antigone’s actions in the tragedy, see Foley (2001, 196–200).
before the tragedy begins, and the consequences of their resolute single-mindedness form the events of the play (Knox 1964, 62). The drama could, indeed, be read as much as a tragedy of Creon as of Antigone.\textsuperscript{59} Knox (1964, 62) identifies both Creon and Antigone as displaying the typically Sophoclean “heroic temper”: they both are “…unreasonable almost to the point of madness, suicidally bold, impervious to argument, intransigent, angry. [The hero’s] loyalty to his conception of himself, and the necessity to perform the action that conception imposes, prevail over all other considerations” (28). But in Knox’s view Creon’s heroism is ultimately shown to be empty; he chooses to compromise his position and thus seals his fate.

In my discussion of the \textit{Antigone}, I will examine the several ways in which the tragedy configures Creon’s authority: his exact position at the time of the events of the tragedy, the character and potential implications of his decree, and how his character, sliding into “incremental tyranny,” compares with the characteristics of tyranny I have already identified.

\textit{Creon’s Law}

It is possible to imagine a version of the \textit{Antigone} that, like the \textit{OT}, opens with a triumphant leader addressing his people and reassuring them of his ability to see them through a crisis—but that is not the tragedy Sophocles wrote. Instead, the first thing the audience hears is the minority report: the voice of Antigone. Even an audience with no foreknowledge of the tragedy is thus predisposed toward Antigone and against Creon.\textsuperscript{60} Both Creon and Antigone discuss the ruler’s new decree, but it is Antigone, speaking to her sister Ismene, who does so first:

\textsuperscript{59}See Torrance (1965, 299), who views such a tragedy as fitting in neatly with other dramas that follow a ὀβραξ-ᾼτη formula, and Kitto (1973, 106–11).

\textsuperscript{60}Sourvinou-Inwood (1989, 135) stresses that it is in such a state, i.e. being ignorant of the tragedy’s outcome, that the \textit{Antigone} should be read in order to be most clearly seen.
Hasn’t Creon deemed that one our brothers is worthy of burial, the other of dishonor? Eteocles, they say—since Creon thinks it right to properly observe the custom, he buried him, honored down among the dead. But the corpse of Polynice, who pitifully died, he has proclaimed, they say, to the citizens that no-one may bury or mourn over him, but leave unwept and unburied, a pleasant meal for the birds on the lookout for food. Such a edict, they say, the good Creon has proclaimed to you and to me—yes, I say to me, too—and he is coming here to proclaim it clearly to those who haven’t learned of it. Nor is he treating the matter lightly, but for anyone committing any of these acts he has laid down the death penalty: public stoning before the people. (ll. 21–36)

It is this characterization, then, the audience will instinctively regard as “default.”

In her description of the decree, Antigone stresses its manifest unjustness, but she also repeatedly uses words with the root κηρυγ- (l. 25: ἐκρύψε; l. 27: ἐκκεκηρὔχθαι; l. 32: κηρύζαντ’; l. 34: προκηρύξοντα), which reinforce her description of the decree as a
χήρυγμα, a “proclamation,” at l. 8. Creon’s order is, as a χήρυγμα, of human origin, and therefore implicitly imperfect. This sets up a comparison that she will fully frame, later in the tragedy, in contrast with the divine νόμος, a juxtaposition that is at the heart of many discussions of the tragedy. Ismene’s responding dialogue casts the king in a different, more terrifying, light, a depiction perhaps more in line with the feelings of the Theban citizenry. Cautioning her sister against taking action, she contrasts their position with that of their dead brothers’, and she speaks very differently of the decree that Antigone intends to contravene:

νῦν δ’ αὖ μόνα δὴ νῶ λελειμμένα σκόπει
dos chóast’ ὀλούμεθ’, ei νόμου βία
ψήφον τυράννων ἢ κράτη παρέξιμαι.

But now consider in turn, we two having been left alone, how much more awfully we’ll be destroyed if we transgress the decree or the power of tyrants, in defiance of the law. (ll. 58–60)

Ismene refers to the decree as a νόμος, although in the same sentence calls it a ψήφος, and then generalizes her conception to simply κράτη. While it has been suggested that “it is all one and the same thing” (Kamerbeek 1967, 3:47) to Ismene, each of the three terms highlight very different aspects of the decree. With νόμος, Ismene emphasizes the normative power that the decree has already assumed—it is not Creon’s νόμος, it is simply the νόμος: it is the law. On the other hand, ψήφος, indicates the political nature of the decree. The word means “pebble,” such as those used for casting votes, and thus metonymically “s” (LSJ). v. a resolve or decree. Its overtones evoke the means by which decision-making takes place in a democratic

61. Heralds (χήρυγμα), appropriately enough, were closely associated with the retrieval of the dead after battles. See Lateiner (1977).
62. E.g. that of Edward M. Harris (2004).
polis, an association that emphasizes that, in Creon’s Thebes, the same result is achieved by fiat. This evocation is even further marked as part of the oxymoronic formulation ψήφων τυράννων. Both νόμος and ψήφος are reduced by Ismene to the final term: κράτη. This third word suggests that it ultimately does not matter which edict, however ratified, Antigone intends to disobey: as women, and as daughters of Oedipus, their fate is sealed simply by the act of disobedience.

In the following scene, Creon gives his own, very different, account of his decree. His words are given extra weight by their specific context: they immediately follow the parodos in which the chorus has vividly reenacted the catastrophe that Thebes barely survived. Creon’s rhesis, in which he again stresses the chaos from which the city has escaped, is followed by a series of eminently reasonably generalities on loyalty and rulership. But then:

τοιοῦτοι ἔγ’ ἐγὼ νόμοισι τήνὶ αὐξω πόλιν, καὶ νῦν ἀδελφὰ τῶν ἰχρῆξας ἔχω ἀστοί θαλάτων τῶν ἀπ’ Οἰδίπου πέρι· Ἐτεοκλέα μὲν, ὡς πόλεως ὑπηρμαχῶν ὀλωλε τῆς τῶν, πάντ’ ἀριστευόμενον δόρει, τάφρω τε κρύσσαι καὶ τά πάντ’ ἀφανύσια ἀ τοῖς ἀρίστοις ἔρχεται κότῳ νεκρῶς, τὸν δ’ αὐξύναμον τοῦθε, Πολυνείκη λέγω, ὡς γῆν πατρὸν καὶ θεοῦ τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς

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ψυγάς κατελθὼν ἡθέλησε μὲν πυρὶ πρῆσαν εἰς ἀναφαράς, ἡθέλησε δ’ ἀματος κοινοῦ πάσασθαι, τοὺς δὲ δουλώσας ἄγεν, τούτον πόλει τῆδ’ ἐκεκεκρυκται τάφρῳ μὴ τε κατερίζειν μήτ’ ἀκοῦσαι τῖνα, ἐὰν δ’ ἀδαπτόν καὶ πρὸς οἰωνῶν δέμας καὶ πρὸς κυνῶν ἐδεστὸν αἰνισθέν τ’ ἱδεῖν, τοιὸν’ ἐμὸν φρόνημα, κοῦπτοτ’ ἐκ γ’ ἐμοῦ τιμὴν προέξουσ’ οἱ κοινὶ τῶν ἐνδικῶν· ἄλλ’ ὡς εὖνοις τῇ τῇ πόλει, θυάνων

200

καὶ ζών ὀμοίως ἐξ ἐμοὶ τιμήσεται.

205

With such laws will I strengthen the city,
so now I’ve issued decrees akin to them
to the citizenry, concerning the sons of Oedipus:
Eteocles, who fell defending this city
and bested all in battle, shall be buried
in his tomb with every ritual due to the best dead below.
And yet the sibling of that man, I mean
Polyneices, who returned from exile intending
to burn down to the ground his native city and
his family’s gods, and to drink its people’s
blood after enslaving them—it is decreed
to the city that no-one shall bury or lament him
but shall leave his body unburied, food for
birds and dogs, and so see him tortured.

Such is my thinking, and under my authority
bad men will never surpass the just in honor,
but he who is faithful to this city, in life
and in death alike will be honored by me. (191–210)

In this context, Creon’s proposal is presented in perhaps the most sympathetic
possible light. Winnington-Ingram (1980a, 120) rightly characterizes the speech as
Creon “saying things...to which an Athenian audience might well respond favorably.”
The potential appeal of the speech to an Athenian audience is strongly suggested by
the fact that an earlier portion of the speech (ll. 175–90), in which Creon vows to safely
steer the ship of state and to treat friends and enemies appropriately, were quoted by
Demosthenes (19.247) in a wholly positive context.63 Demosthenes uses the soundness
of Creon’s apothegms to mock Aeschines, his opponent, who in his previous career had
been a tritagonist. After the lines are read to the court, Demosthenes sarcastically
laments that Aeschines “ignored the wise Sophocles” in traitorously making favorable
terms with Athens’ Macedonian enemies, and that instead of steering the ship of
state, Aeschines “capsized and sank it.” The orator’s choice to quote Creon’s words
approvingly, with no attention whatsoever given to their larger context, indicates
that the ideas expressed by the words themselves were seen as laudable, regardless

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63. On this quotation see Shalom Perlman (1964, 71–72). On quotation in fourth-century oratory
more generally, see Wilson (1996).
of who spoke them in what circumstances. Similarly, someone today might quote Polonius’ axiom in *Hamlet*, “To thine own self be true” (1.3.78), approvingly, without meaning to suggest that she sees herself as a doddering pedant. Creon’s sentiments in this opening speech, then, mark the starting point of his “incremental tyranny.”

The question of how the audience would have perceived the law, however, depends greatly on whether the punishment that Creon dictates would have been considered unreasonably severe. Although it is true that in military contexts the intentional exposure of enemy corpses was exceedingly rare, with burial rites potentially even extended to enemy barbarians, prohibition against burial was nevertheless a recognized practice in Athenian law. The penalty was imposed, for example, on Themistocles, who was condemned as a traitor and whose remains were officially forbidden from interment in Attic soil, requiring his relatives to smuggle his bones home (Thuc. 1.136.6). Such a punishment, however, is substantially different from forbidding an individual’s burial anywhere, which would in any case be an impossibility for Athens (or any other ancient political actor), as there was no mechanism to enforce a

64. See, however, Bowra (1944, 68), who reads Demosthenes as not just endorsing the sentiments of Creon but demonstrating the “general acceptability” of his character as well, a view with which Knox (1964, 181n54) agreed.

65. Malcolm Heath (1987, 75) argues that Creon’s sensible words in his opening *rhesis* serve as a foil to his tyrannical “development” over the course of the play, but this seems to me an argument for having one’s cake and eating it too.

66. For a historical survey of the phenomenon of victors abusing the corpses of the vanquished, see Pritchett (1985, 235–41). Victor Rosivach (1983, 196) finds three prominent examples: the aftermaths of Delium (Thuc. 4.97ff.) and Haliartus (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.24), and Thucydides’ account (4.48) of the victors in the Corycyrian *stasis* piling the corpses of their slain enemies on wagons and carting them out of the city. In the last instance, exposure is only implied, but Rosivach points out that if there were no survivors on the losing side, the corpses would remain unclaimed and thus unburied. In Thucydides’ account of Delium, the vehemence with which the Athenian herald condemns the Theban treatment of the Athenian war dead, and his appeal to national tradition (᾿ αλλ’ α κατ’ α τ’ α π’ ατρια τ’ υς νεκρ’ υς σπ’ ενδουσιν ἀναιρείσθαι) should be noted (4.98.7–8).

67. According to Pausanias (1.32.5), the Athenians claimed to have buried the Persian dead at Marathon, but he could find no grave. On the question of how widespread such a custom was, see Harris (2004, 54n66).

universal decree.

Nevertheless, leaving bodies to be exposed was not a completely unheard-of practice. Diodorus reports that this was the punishment that the Greeks generally inflicted on temple-robbers (16.25.2).\(^{69}\) Moreover, the desecration of exposed corpses would have been a trope familiar to the Athenian audience if only from its repeated appearances in Homer, a connection no doubt reinforced by Creon’s mention of birds and dogs at ll. 205–6, which calls to mind the opening lines (ll. 1.4–5) of the *Iliad*, in which the same animals are mentioned feeding on corpses.

Yet it is also in the *Iliad* that the unburied state of a corpse, specifically Hector’s, is shown to directly incur divine wrath, a reaction that Hector presages in his dying words to Achilles (22.358–60).\(^{70}\) The anger of Apollo at the treatment of Hector’s body is later voiced directly, when the gods discuss Achilles’ actions (ll. 24.34–54),\(^{71}\) and the poem underscores Zeus’ outrage in particular through repetition (Harris 2004, 37). Zeus’ warning to Achilles that he is especially angry (ἐξοχά) is heard twice: once when Zeus tells it to Thetis (ll. 24.113–15) and again, almost verbatim, when she relays it to her son (ll. 24.134–36).

That the final books of the *Iliad*, a panhellenic cultural touchstone, revolve around divine displeasure at the mistreatment of a corpse indicates the gravity of the punishment, and how seriously the Athenian audience would likely have viewed it. Furthermore, the audience may have felt they had an especially significant stake in the outcome of the events portrayed in the tragedy, even if Athens is never mentioned.

\(^{69}\) ... παρὰ πάσι τοῖς Ἕλληνισ τοῖς νόμοις ἐστὶν ἀτέφοις ἀπίπτεσθαι τοῖς ἱεροσύλοις. Peter Burian, in conversation with the author, noted that the law, as quoted, specifies only that the temple-robber’s corpse is to be exposed, not that his family (or anyone else) is prohibited from burying it anywhere.

\(^{70}\) The sentiment is repeated in the *Odyssey* when Elpenor warns Odysseus to bury his body lest he invite the anger of the gods (11.73). In both passages, divine ire is signified by the rare word μνήματα, and the two instances constitute the only appearances of the word in Homer (Richardson 1993, 143). See also Parker (1996, 70).

\(^{71}\) For the thematic significance of Apollo’s speech in this scene, see Segal (1971, 58).
In their mythic past, under Theseus, the Athenians fought against the Thebans to retrieve the corpses of the Seven against Thebes—including Polyneices—after their failed invasion of Thebes, and then accorded the corpses funeral rights at Eleusis. The story makes the Athenians out to be not merely pious but willing to risk their own lives to ensure that foreigners are properly buried and the gods satisfied. The story has been called “one of those defining moments in the mythological past for Athenian identity” (Harris 2004, 38) and was a “popular topos in funerary orations” (Foley 1995, 140). Harris (2004, 38, 54n67) has also noted the conspicuous absence of consideration of the story from many other discussions of Antigone.

Judith Fletcher (2008, 89) has observed that Antigone specifies a punishment for breaking the decree, public stoning (l. 36), whereas Creon does not, an incongruity that she attributes to the arbitrariness of the law. Only later in the tragedy, once Creon has ascertained who has broken the law and how, does he punish Antigone with entombment (ll. 773–80). This would suggest a law that, unlike the standard formulaic legal language that Antigone seems to quote (“If anyone should do any of these things...”), has been tailored to a particular instance and targets a particular individual, something that Athenian law specifically forbade (Harris 2004, 30).

**Creon the General**

Setting aside the specific content of Creon’s decree, the context in which it is discussed would have had familiar overtones to the fifth-century Athenian audience. The edict is characterized almost immediately at the start of the drama, when Antigone asks her sister, καὶ νῦν τί τοῦτ’ αὖ φασι πανδ’ ημών / κ’ ἡρυγμα θείων τὸν στρατηγὸν ἄρτιως· “And now what is this proclamation they say the general has announced just now to the whole citizen body?” (ll. 7–8) Referring to Creon as

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72. The fullest example of the topos is Lys. 2.7–10, although other accounts include Isoc. Paneg. 55–56, Hdt. 9.27 and, of course, Eur. Supp., which I discuss at length in the following chapter.
στρατηγός, “general” (a title he is given only here), and classifying his proclamation as a κήρυγμα legally contextualizes the edict and strongly implies the unspoken circumstances surrounding the events of the drama.

The title στρατηγός literally means “leader of the army” and thus “general.” This would suggest a purely military sphere of authority, but this “essential magistracy of classical Athens” (Azoulay 2014, 29) wielded as well a great deal of political power. Created as part of the Cleisthenic reforms in 501/0 (Hansen 1991, 34), στρατηγοί initially oversaw military affairs either in conjunction with the polemarch,73 one of the nine archaic archontes, or perhaps under him.74 With reforms implemented just after the Persian Wars, however, the authority of the polemarch was relegated to ceremonial and domestic legal matters, while the στρατηγοί grew pre-eminent. The office was now one of the few directly elected positions in Athenian government and there was no limit on the number of terms a person could serve.

If Creon is taken to be a στρατηγός in the Athenian sense, then Antigone’s references to his edict as a κήρυγμα goes far to characterize it, reinforced by Creon himself using κηρύξας at l. 192.75 The term itself carried neither specifically democratic or autocratic connotations (Griffith 1999, 122).76 Griffith suggests that Creon’s edict was given “on the battlefield,” a sphere in which generals had an extremely wide latitude to issue orders, including the implementation of the death penalty (A. R. W. Harrison 1971, 2:31f.). That Sophocles is signaling Thebes to be in a

73. Hdt. 6.109
74. Ath. Pol. 22.2. The exact relationship between the polemarch and the board of generals in the early years of the fifth century is unclear: see Hamel (1998, 79ff.).
75. On the possibility that Sophocles’ depiction of Creon was aimed at the most prominent general, Pericles, see Ehrenberg (1954, 142–47).
76. The verb κηρύσσα, with its κηρυγ- root, was used to signify the authority of a general (or, more broadly, of some official) to cashier individuals, or to send them into exile. This accords nicely with Creon’s edict, controlling the movement and status of people just as Creon prohibits Polyneices’ corpse from being buried.
“state of emergency” is further suggested by the chorus’ words just before Creon’s first entrance:

155 ἀλλ’ ὃδε γὰρ δῆ βασιλεύς χώρας, ἠμελεύον ὁ Μενοικέως, τε νεαρὰ ἵσι... συντυχίας

χωρεῖ, τίνα δὴ μὴν ἐρέσσων, ὅτι σύγκλητοι τήνδε γερόντων

160 προὔθετο λέσχην, κοινῷ κηρύγματι πέμψας.

155 But here comes the new king of our land,
Creon the son of Menoeceus,
under the new circumstances from the gods—
implementing what new plan,
which he he put forth to this convened assembly
160 of elders, having issued a general proclamation? (ll. 155–62)

By referring to itself as a λέσχη, the chorus positions itself as possessors of some kind of governing authority, and, modified by the adjective σύγκλητος, they imply that the assembly has been hastily convened to discuss urgent matters of state (i.e. νεαρὰ... συντυχίας).\(^{77}\) Griffith (1999, 154) even suggests that Creon’s initial entrance may be straight from the battlefield, with the ruler still wearing his armor. Broadly speaking, such a scenario would not have been entirely foreign to the Athenian audience; generals were ex officio members of the Boule, and it is thought that they themselves had the authority to call a meeting of the Ekklesia (Sinclair 1988, 81).

**Creon the Tyrant**

But how does Creon’s portrayal in the *Antigone* relate to the larger conception of tyranny? I find it significant that Creon is not definitively shown to be a tyrant from

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\(^{77}\) The phrase ἐκκλησία σύγκλητος has been taken by some to mean specially-convened assembly. The exact phrase, however, is not attested before the fourth century, and in inscriptions not before the second century. See Hansen (1991, 133–35).

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the outset of the drama. Rather, a steady “progression of complications” (Holt 1999, 672) hardens his resolve and pushes him toward hubristic overreach.

And yet despite the unobjectionable—even praiseworthy—statements that Creon makes in his initial speech (as discussed on p. 133, above), his tyrannical character is signified almost immediately thereafter. One choral remark in particular hints at this strongly. After Creon’s first *rhetis*, the chorus states:

σοι ταύτ’ ἀφέσκει, παῖ Μενοκέως, ποεῖν,  
τὸν τῆδε δύσνουν καὶ τὸν εὑμενή πόλει  
νόμο ὁ ἐχρήσια παντί, τούτ’ ἐνεστὶ σοι  
καὶ τὸν υπάντων χώποσοι ἔπειν πέρι.

It is pleasing to you, son of Menoeceus, to act  
thus to the man hostile and the man well-disposed to the city:  
and it is possible for you to make use of  
every law concerning both the dead and we who live. (ll. 211–14)

These lines are “studiously non-committal” (Winnington-Ingram 1980a, 123), their ambivalence emphasized by the σοι in l. 211, “it is pleasing to you...”; either out of fear or respect, “[the chorus] do not protest, they want to be loyal subjects” (Kamerbeek 1967, 3:68). Their reluctant tone suggests a disinclination to speak frankly, and thus the absence of παρρησία. Furthermore, the idea mentioned so casually in these lines, that a ruler’s authority could be all-encompassing (even in conjunction with an existing set of laws), is downplayed by being expressed off-handedly; a sovereign with such a broad, unchecked prerogative is by definition a tyrant.

78.Griffith favors another reading of l. 213, νόμο δὲ χρήσια παντί πού γ’ ἐνεστί σοι, “it is in your power, surely, to make use of every law...,” in which a sarcastic ποῦ further emphasizes the choral ambivalence.

79.Sourvinou-Inwood (1989, 242), however, reads these lines as a choral endorsement of the absolute power of the polis that in this case is embodied by Creon.
The first glimpse of the tyrannical Creon comes when the chorus raises the possibility that Polyneices’ furtive burial might have been an act of divine intervention:

"King, for some time my anxiety has been suggesting to me that this might be some god-sent act" (ll. 278–79). Again, the chorus hedges its bets when addressing their king; the initial ἐμοὶ τοῖς emphasizes that they speak only for themselves, and the use of μή with an (implied) indicative lends their statement a tentative tone (Griffith 1999, 172).

Hearing this idea expressed, even with such hesitancy, infuriates Creon:

280 αὕσαι, πρὶν ὅργῃς καὶ μὲ μεστῶσαι λέγων,
μή ἔχεις τὸν δόξαν τοῦ νεκροῦ ἄνω,
λέγεις γὰρ οὐκ ἀνεκτά δαίμονας λέγων
πράνοιαν ἵστητε τοῦτο τοῦ νεκροῦ πέρι.

285 ἔκρυψαν αὐτὸν, ὅσιοι ἄγαλμαν
ναῶν πυρόσωσαν ἥλιο τὰ κάναλαματα
καὶ γῆν ἐσκόπων καὶ νόμους διασκεδῶν·
ἡ τοὺς κοχοὺς τιμῶντας εἰσορᾶς θεοὺς·
οὐχ ἔστων.

Stop speaking, before your words truly enrage me,
so you don’t seem foolish as well as old.
You’re saying something intolerable if you claim
that the gods have any concern for that corpse.
Was it to do him great honor as a benefactor
that they were concealing him, he who came
to burn their well-built shrines,
their offerings, their land, and shred their laws?
Are you picturing the gods honoring evil men?
It isn’t possible. (ll. 280–89)

It does not bode well that Creon is set off so easily; χόλος is one of the hallmarks of the tyrannical mind. But why should this suggestion be so aggravating to him?

It is, effectively, a direct assault on Creon’s political ideology, in which the νόμοι of the gods are identical to the νόμοι of the polis. Creon “finds it inconceivable that
anything other than the polis and its interests might be the measure by which to judge what is, and what is not, proper political and religious behavior” (Liapis 2013, 97). In other words, Creon believes that if his edicts are beneficial for Thebes then they must *ipso facto* have the support of the gods. Anyone arguing otherwise must be, at best, foolish or, at worst, both impious and treasonous. The moral principle that Creon espoused earlier, his commitment to honor the just and to spurn the unjust, is religiously sound, so how is it possible that the gods could contravene it? Creon, much like Euthyphro, faces an unpleasant choice: it is either the gods or his values that are unjust. But he refuses to choose either one of these options, and instead he digs in his heels and gives vent to his indignation.

Creon follows this outburst with another problematic *rhetorics*, in which axioms about the destructive power of money, sentiments “entirely along the lines of a typically Greek tradition of thought” (197), are mixed with paranoid fantasy:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{‘} & \text{άλλα ταύτα καὶ πάλαι πόλεως} \\
\text{290} & \text{ἀνδρὲς μόλις φέροντες ἔρροδον ἐμοὶ,} \\
& \text{χρυφὴ κάρα σέιοντες, οὐδ’ ὑπὸ ζυγῷ} \\
& \text{λόφον δυσαίως εἶχον, ὡς στέργενε ἐμέ.} \\
& \text{ἐὰν τὸνδε τοῦτοις ἐξετίσταμαι καλῶς} \\
& \text{παρηγιμένους μισθοῖσιν εἰργάσθαι τάδε.} \\
& \text{295} & \text{οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀνθρώπωσιν οἶον ἄργυρος} \\
& \text{κακῶν νόμισμα’ ἔβλαστε. τοῦτο καὶ τόλεως} \\
& \text{πορθέι, τόδ’ ἄνδρας ἔξανιστιν δόμον} \\
& \text{τοῦτ’ ἐκδιδάσκει καὶ παραλλάσσει φιλόνες} \\
& \text{χρηστάς πρὸς άσυγχρα πράγματ’ ἵστασθαι βροτῶν} \\
& \text{300} & \text{πανουργίας δ’ ἔδειξεν ἀνθρώπωις ἔχειν} \\
& \text{καὶ παντὸς ἔργου δυσσέβειαν εἰδέναι.} \\
& \text{ὅσοι δὲ μισθαρνοῦσιν ἤγισσαν τάδε,} \\
& \text{χρόνῳ ποτ’ ἐξέπραξαν ὡς δοῦναι δίκην.}
\end{align*}
\]

And yet from the very start men

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{290} & \text{of the city, only just bearing my rule, caused a ruckus} \\
& \text{as they secretly stirred up citizens, not bending} \\
& \text{their necks justly under the yoke of my rule, to accept me.}
\end{align*}
\]
I know with absolute certainty it was those men
who bribed the guards to do these things.

For nothing so evil as money
ever gained currency among men. Money
destroys cities, money drives men from their homes,
money teaches and transforms virtuous minds
toward being inclined to deeds shameful for mortals.

Money shows them how to commit base acts
and to come to know every unholy deed.
But those hirelings, however many there are
have ensured that, in time, they’ll pay the penalty. (ll. 289–303)

It is supremely ironic that someone whom Oedipus earlier accused of plotting against the Theban throne out of desire for lucre espouses the same paranoid sentiments now that he himself is in power.80 Seaford identifies this moment as the point in the text at which Creon begins to evince “tyrannical practices”: “Here...the high-sounding principle becomes tyrannical vice.” (Seaford 2003, 105)

Creon is able to argue on behalf of his tyranny when Haemon confronts him over his sentencing of Antigone. In this crucial scene, Creon expresses overtly tyrannical sentiments:

Creon: Shall the city dictate to me how I must rule?
Haemon: Do you see how you’ve spoken so much like a child?
Creon: Is it I who will rule this land, or another man?
Haemon: There is no city that belongs to one man.

80. Such a comment assumes a continuity between the OT and the Antigone that did not exist for Sophocles (i.e. the “Theban trilogy” often performed or published), given that the latter tragedy predates the former, but the resemblance between the two monarch’s sentiments is striking nonetheless.
Creon: Is it not customary that the city belongs to the one in power?
Haemon: How well you’d rule in a desert, all by yourself.

Creon here argues for the elision of the monarch and the city he rules, just as Oedipus did in the OT a position that, at the time Creon completely rejected. The language of Haemon’s critique evokes typical Athenian tropes of tyranny; Creon is charged with being ὡς ἄγαν νέος, a phrase that neatly combines the idea of excess with that of inexperience, recalling both the Aeschylean Xerxes and Zeus. Haemon’s reply at l. 737, πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἔσθ’ ἂνδρός ἐσθ’ ἐνός, can be seen as a succinct summary of the democratic ethos: the rule of one man precludes his subjects from constituting a proper polis, a term which connotes self-determination.

A remark made by Creon at the start of the scene, however, underlines exactly how much of the governmental prerogative he has taken upon himself. Haemon’s entrance prompts Creon to ask: ὡ παῖ, τελεῖαν ψήφον ἄρα μεὶς μελλοντ’ υμνῷ πατρ’ λυσσα’ινοι π’ αρεῖ· ἥ σοι μ’ εν ἡμεῖς πανταχ’ δρ’ ωντες φ’ιλοι· "My son, since you’ve heard the authoritative vote against your bride-to-be, have you come angry with your father? Or are we dear to you, no matter what we do?" (ll. 632–34). Creon’s passing reference to his τελεῖαν ψήφον speak to his philosophy of rule. The judgement against Antigone was one he made unilaterally, without consulting anyone else, and yet it has the force of a “vote.” Creon speaks as though he was the entire citizen body. His tyrannical paranoia comes out, too, as the first words he says to his son are, in effect, a request for swearing a loyalty-oeath.

And once again, as in the OT, Teiresias arrives to speak the truth to the monarch, albeit less circumspectly than in the earlier tragedy. The prophet calls Creon a tyrant and then—ironically given the king’s earlier invective—charges him with a love of

81. OT l. 630: Creon rebutted: κ’ αμοί π’ ολεως μ’ ετεστίν, ο’ υχ’ ι σοί μ’ ονω ͺ, “I too have a claim to the city.”
“shameful gain” (l. 1056). He also informs Creon that he has acted against divine laws. The king’s certainty that his politics and his theology were in perfect alignment was, unfortunately for him, incorrect.

It is in this regard, too, that Creon resembles the Oedipus of the OT. Both rulers made assumptions, one about his parentage and life, the other about the theological realm, that prove to be disastrously false. If the OT is a “tragedy of ignorance,” than so too is the Antigone. And in both tragedies, political concerns loom large in the first episode until they are slowly subsumed by personal concerns, until, by the end of the Antigone, Creon is alone, burying his familial dead. Once again, the Theban ruling oikos swallows the polis.

The Antigone portrays a ruler who undergoes a slow slide into tyranny. Creon is, at the outset, a well-intentioned ruler, but his own hubristic assumptions compel him to express tyrannical sentiments, to ignore clear warnings to the contrary, and to commit violent acts. By the end of the tragedy, he is no longer a στρατηγός but rather a tyrant—a title he is called to his face—and he suffers the ἀτη that befits one. Yet as in the case of Oedipus, the audience is given the opportunity to understand his motives. An Athenian audience would most likely condemn Creon for his methods of ruling, but the gap between his presentation and that of Xerxes in Aeschylus’ Persians is enormous.

Both Creon and Oedipus are tyrants who are problematically tyrannical. They are rulers whose great power enables them to help their poleis in times of crises, but that same power enables them to act unreasonably and violently, allowing them to commit rash deeds and to refuse to listen to unpleasant truths. It is certainly possible,  

82. αἳσχροκαρδεῖαν φιλεῖ

83. Liapis (2013, 108) argues that, in this regard, Antigone and Creon are nearly identical, insofar as each claims knowledge of divine matters that are inherently unknowable (e.g. Antigone’s remark at l. 521: τίς οἶδεν εἰ κάτω στὶν εὐαγγηλία ὀδεῖ, “Who knows if these things are sacred in the Underworld?”)
both in case of Oedipus and of Creon, to blame their choleric personalities, or their hubristic lack of proportion. I see both tyrant-figures, however, as object lessons in the difficulties of exercising power. Neither character is an irredeemable monster, like Xerxes, but rather they are benevolent rulers who find their self-restraint swamped by circumstances.

The dating of both the OT and the Antigone has long been less than certain, based on Sophocles’ biography and on historical events that would seem to have a bearing on the tragedy. But both, it can be presumed, were written after the outbreak of the First Peloponnesian War in 460. Both tragedies also depict rulers attempting to follow the course they perceive as best while being aware (even if, in the case of Creon, to intentionally ignore) the needs and desires of their subjects. The two tragic rulers offer compelling exempla for a city in a position such as Athens, locked in a battle against an enemy while simultaneously attempting to ensure that allies remained placated and subservient. I would not argue that these tragedies represent Sophocles giving specific advice, or referencing specific events, but they speak to the precariousness of Athens’ hegemony. I read them as warnings that the exercise of tyrannical power is not in itself an evil, but even a well-intentioned democracy can fall victim to the extent of its own power and become a tyrant.

Both Oedipus and Creon exist within a political framework, which is not the case with Aeschylean tyrants, and yet both are still open to the same moral faults. This politicization will continue in the tragedies of Euripides.

84. See R. D. Lewis (1988) for a summary of the debate surrounding the Antigone’s date.
Introduction

Euripides, in his life and his work, represents a sharp break with his predecessors, a trait that extends even to his biographical tradition. Whereas the vitae of Aeschylus and Sophocles situate their subjects firmly within an Athenian context (Aeschylus as a patriotic warrior and Sophocles as a general), the same cannot be said for Euripides. His biography does not record him performing any non-dramatic service for his home polis\(^1\)—it does not, in fact, depict him as particularly Athenian at all.\(^2\) Rather, it relates that Euripides was called ξενοφιλότατον, “most beloved by foreigners.”\(^3\)

The appellation is only the bluntest way in which Euripides’ Vita positions him

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1. See Stevens (1956, 91), *pace* G. Murray (1913, 89), who takes it as a given that Euripides served in the military.

2. Euripides’ *Vita* reports, however, that he was born on the same day as the battle of Salamis (in September, 480 BCE) on the island itself. In a symbolic sense, this assertion aligns his life with those of Aeschylus and Sophocles: on the day of Euripides’ birth, Aeschylus was fighting at Salamis, a victory in honor of which Sophocles would soon lead a chorus. On the manuscript tradition of the Euripidean biography, see Delcourt (1933). On the biography itself, see Lefkowitz (1979; 2012, 87–103).

3. On the valence of this term, see Peter Bing (2011, 2), who considers the word in light of Euripides’ later Panhellenic popularity. See also Johanna Hanink (2008).
as markedly non-Athenian. Despite the biography’s silence on any duties he carried out for Athens, it does make mention of Euripides’ foreign honors: that he eventually relocated to Magnesia and was awarded προξενία and ἀτέλια, and that from there he traveled to Macedonia where King Archelaus installed him in a sinecure. Then, after Euripides’ death, Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, is said to have purchased the tragedian’s harp, tablet and stylus, which he enshrined in a temple of the Muses. It was for this reason, the biography concludes, that Euripides was seen as ξενοφιλωτός.4

Euripides’ tragedies, too, are starkly disparate from his predecessors’, in form, in style and in outlook. They present a very different view of the universe, and of Athens, a change attributable in part to the city’s declining political circumstances in the last third of the fifth century. The tragedies I discuss in this chapter all date to the latter part of Euripides’ career, the final three decades of the fifth century, during which time Athens struggled in the face of Peloponnesian opposition before finally being defeated in 404. The death of Pericles in 429, under whose vigorous leadership Athens had flourished for decades, would prove to be a significant blow to Athenian power, and a turning point in the course of the war (Yunis 1996, 67). Thucydides, in his “obituary” for the general (2.65), shows up the city’s ideological claims and in doing so lays bare the sociopolitical dynamic that undergirds so many of Athens’ political decisions, both domestically and abroad, for the remainder of the war. The same dynamic simmers just beneath the surface of a number of Euripides’s tragedies: the tug of war between formidable leaders and the masses over whom they held authority.

In his valedictory description of the general, Thucydides depicts Pericles as a magisterially authoritative leader, whose position approaches that of sole ruler,

4. See also Gell. NA 15.20.9, on the Macedonians’ reluctance to repatriate the poet’s body to Athens.
but one who, crucially, was able to exert a moderating influence on the δήμος.5

After remarking that he governed μετρίως...καὶ ἀσφαλῶς, “moderately and steadily” (2.65.5),6 Thucydides expounds on Pericles’ relationship with the people:

Pericles, influential on account of his reputation and his wisdom as well as manifestly incorruptible, exerted a free7 rule on the multitude; he was not led by them, but he led them. For as he had not acquired power through improper means, he did not speak flattering of them, but rather, on account of his reputation, angered them by contradicting them. Whenever he saw that they were overly insolent and emboldened, he would speak and thus instill them with terror, and whenever they were unreasonably fearful he would restore them to confidence. The city, though a democracy in name, came to be under the rule of its foremost citizen. (65.8–9)

By contrast, the historian disparages Pericles’ successors, specifically in their dealings with the δήμος: οἱ δὲ ὑστερον ἵσοι μᾶλλον αὐτοὶ πρὸς ἄλληλους ὄντες καὶ όρεγόμενοι τοῦ πρώτος ἐκαστὸς γίγνεσθαι ἐτράποντο καὶ ἡ ἰδιονὰς τῷ δήμῳ καὶ τὰ πράγματα ἐνδιδοῦνα, “But those who succeeded him, instead, being roughly equal to one another and each striving to be first himself, surrendered power to the whim of the people” (65.10). The disasters that were to befall Athens were, Thucydides argues, the result of precisely this last failing: an inability to properly manage the people.8 This point is strikingly emphasized by Thucydides leaping forward in time,

5. On the issue of Periclean autocracy, see the discussion of Connor (1971, 110f.) and the objections of Yunis (1996, 69ff.).


7. For an analysis of the subtleties of ἐλευθερως in this passage, see A. Parry (1989, 144f.).

8. Ober (1989, 91f.) attributes the dearth of politicians with military experience (as well as of
in the very next sentence, to catalogue the failures and reversals that were waiting for the Athenians in the years to come: allies in revolt, cooperation between the Persians and the Spartans, the coming of civil strife to Athens, but most of all the Sicilian expedition.

Thucydides concludes his discussion of Pericles by offering, for one wrenching sentence, a glimpse of what might have been: τοσούτον τῷ Περικλῆι ἐπερίσσευσε τότε ἄρ’ ὃν αὐτὸς προέγνω καὶ πάνυ ἄν ρεθίσεις περιγενέσθαι τὴν πόλιν Πελοποννησίων αὐτῶν τῷ πολέμῳ, “So great were the grounds on which Pericles foresaw that Athens very easily could have triumphed over the Peloponnesians in war” (65.13). Connor (1984, 76) observes that the immensity of the leadership vacuum left behind by Pericles is communicated by Thucydides’ choice to forego describing the political wrangling to be his successor, and to not depict a dominant Athenian leader until a significant part of the way into the third book.

This, then, was the state of affairs in the last twenty-five years of the war: erratic leadership in the field and stasis—as well as a fractious and unruly popular assembly—at home.

Euripides’ depictions of tyranny reflect this chaotic state of affairs. In place of the sole ruler at the focal point in the tragedy (either on stage, as in Sophocles or in absentia as in Aeschylus), Euripides presents contradictions; the Suppliant Women generals with political experience) to Pericles’ probable “discouragement of potential rivals” during his time in power.

9. This assessment is echoed by the author of the Constitution of the Athenians: ἦσος μὲν οὖν Περικλῆς προετιστέχει τοῦ δῆμου, βελτίω τὰ κατὰ τὴν πολιτείαν ἦν, τελευτήσαντος δὲ Περικλέους πολὺ γείρω. πρώτον γὰρ τότε προστάτην ἔλαβεν ὁ δῆμος οὐκ εὐδοκιμοῦντα παρὰ τοῖς ἐπιεικέσιν ἐν δὲ τοῖς πρότερον χρόνοις ἂει διετέλουν οἱ ἐπιεικεῖς δημοκρατῶντες. “So long as Pericles was the leader of the people, the state fared better, but after his death it fared much worse. For it was the first time that the people adopted a leader who was not well regarded by the respectable class, whereas previously it was they who continuously governed the people” (28.1).

10. This must, of course, be qualified: Euripides’ extant depictions of tyranny. The concept appears in a number of fragmentary texts (frr. 76, 171, 275, 626 et al.), and the titles of some of Euripides’ lost tragedies (e.g. Oedipus and Antigone) indicate the possibility of more “conventional” Euripidean tyrants.
contains a nakedly political argument over the comparative merits of tyranny and democracy, in which democracy is defended by a king, while the Hecuba and the Iphigenia at Aulis both depict democratically deliberative bodies displaying traits characteristic of the tyrant. In short, Euripides collapses the dichotomy between tyranny and democracy, a distinction that is at the very heart—that is the very heart—of Athenian civic self-identity.

**Suppliant Women**

**Introduction**

The Suppliant Women, famously regarded by an ancient commentator as an “encomium of Athens,” is the preeminent political tragedy of Euripides.\(^{11}\) The tragedy is not subtle in displaying its political character: it “virtually shouts the patriotic slogans of Athenian democracy” (Wohl 2015, 89). In spite of this, the tragedy’s evocation of democracy is far from straightforward—it is not, as an earlier commentator argued, simply pro-Athenian “propaganda” (Delebecque 1951, 221), nor is it reducible to partisan pamphleteering, though a number of scholars have understood it as such.\(^{12}\) Such a reading does a disservice to the complexity of Euripidean tragedy, diminishing it to simple political allegory; as Burian (1985b) states, “all these scholars assume that Euripides must be writing not about his ostensible subject but about something else that can only be ferreted out by a kind of allegorical interpretation” (213).

\(^{11}\)Hereinafter, unless otherwise stated, every reference to the Suppliant Women will refer to the Ἰκέτεις of Euripides, not the tragedy of the same name by Aeschylus.

\(^{12}\)Theseus has been interpreted variously as Pericles (Morrison 1950, 77; Goossens 1962, 435; Croally 1994, 210; Podlecki 1976), Alcibiades (Delebecque 1951, 212–13), Nicias (Goossens 1962, 440–46) and as an anti-Cleon. See also the bibliography at Mendelsohn (2002, 5). Theseus did, however, play a propagandistic role in Athenian political discourse since the sixth century, on which see Walker (1995, 35ff.).
Rather, the drama explores the contradictory aspects of Athenian democracy and its concomitant ideology, particularly of the tension inherent in the relationship between the δῆμος and those who would act on its behalf. This tension is personified in the protagonist of the tragedy, Theseus, who is at once a king and an arch-democrat. He demonstrates aspects of both the old-fashioned values of conservative, aristocratic Athens, as well as the contemporary, dynamic, expansionist Athens of the latter half of the fifth century. As I will discuss, the key to these seeming contradictions is ὑβρις and its political manifestation—tyranny. Just as tyranny perpetually served as foil to democracy in Athenian political discourse more generally, so here a Theban herald arguing on behalf of tyranny is set against Theseus in a debate, initiating the tragedy’s most self-conscious episode of political discourse. And yet the debate serves not so much to sharply distinguish as to blur the distinctions between the two forms of government: the herald inverts the rhetoric of democratic attacks against tyranny, applying it instead to democracy itself, and, while Theseus’ defense of democracy is nothing less than full-throated, he employs vocabulary more traditionally associated with conservative social traditions, and elsewhere in the tragedy he stands for values far more in line with aristocratic than democratic values. The paradoxical nature of this scene, of Theseus and of the Suppliant Women more generally reveals the extent to which the tragedy problematizes the key definitional distinction in democratic ideology.

The Myth

The Suppliant Women dramatizes a mythical episode held in high regard by the Athenians. In the aftermath of the unsuccessful siege of Thebes by Polynoeices and Adrastus’ Argive forces, Creon, now king of Thebes, forbids the burial of the invaders’ corpses. Adrastus and the mothers of the dead travel to Athens to beg Theseus to
intercede on their behalf. Although Theseus initially refuses, Aithra, the king’s aged mother, upbraids him, reminding him that his honorable and courageous reputation demands that he aid the suppliants. Theseus is convinced, but, before he can take action, a herald arrives from Thebes. He argues with Theseus and mocks his resolve to attack Creon. Nevertheless, Theseus marches on Thebes and successfully retrieves the corpses. He returns with them to Athens, but he forbids the grieving mothers from seeing their sons’ bodies before having them cremated. After Adrastus delivers a funeral oration for the fallen, Evadne, the wife of one of the most honored Argive warriors, Capaneus, appears on the rocks above her husband’s tomb, and sings a mournful monody before leaping to her death, despite the cries of her elderly father, Iphis. The children of the fallen Thebans enter, bearing their fathers’ ashes, which they deliver to the chorus, their grandmothers, as they promise vengeance. Before Adrastus departs, Theseus reminds him that Argos is now in Athens’ debt. Even though Adrastus happily acknowledges this point, Athena, a *dea ex machina*, appears in order to cement it, thus consecrating the bond between the two cities. At the close of the tragedy, she foresees that the children of the Argive warriors will grow up to sack Thebes and avenge their fathers.

Theseus’ retrieval of the Argive dead was viewed with great civic pride, as the episode’s repeated evocation in oratory suggests.¹³ Herodotus (9.27) records how highly-regarded the episode was, when the Athenians include it among other great achievements, on par with the victory at Marathon.

The *Suppliant Women* is thus a fitting drama to serve as a civic encomium, as it dramatizes a great Athenian victory that is as much martial as moral: Theseus is

¹³.e.g. Lys. 2.7–10; Isoc. Paneg. 54–8; Panath. 168–74; [Dem.] 60.9. A variant of the story has survived in which Athenian diplomacy is sufficient to convince the Thebans to turn over the corpses without bloodshed, as at Plut. *Vit. Thes.* 29.4–5; see Walters (1980, 11), McDermott (1991, 125–27) and Collard (1975, 3) for a list of *testimonialia*. On the use of mythological episodes in funeral oratory for the purpose of civic encomium and their relationship to tragedy, see Brock (1998) and Hanink (2013).
praised by the messenger reporting his triumph, as an exemplar of self-restraint. After routing the enemy, the king sees the Theban population, expecting that their city was about to be sacked, in fearful lamentation. He then proclaims: ὃ γὰρ ὡς πέρσων τὸλυν / μολείν... ἀλλ’ ἀπατήσων νεκροὺς, “I came not to destroy the city but to ask for the dead” (ll. 724–25). Theseus’ conduct—and by extension that of Athens—is beyond reproach, and the city’s role as protector of suppliants and observer of sacred rites is upheld.

**Theseus and the Herald**

The agon between Theseus and the Theban herald in the second episode is, for my purposes, the most fruitful entrée into the tragedy, despite the fact that it has been condemned as a “flagrant irrelevancy” (Grube 1941, 88), a scene shoehorned into an otherwise coherent tragedy. Yet nowhere else is the political character of the *Suppliant Women* more apparent, and no other passage in Euripides contains so straightforward a treatment of tyranny as a political phenomenon. The herald’s arrival initiates a debate that may have little bearing on the action of the drama but is central to the ideological framing of the tragedy: for 65 lines, the herald argues with Theseus over the comparative merits of tyranny and democracy. Only then is Athens’ harboring of Adrastus addressed.

During the debate, the pretense of the setting, the Athens of the mythical past, fades away as the characters engage in an argument couched in “the language of contemporary politics and political thought” (Mills 1997, 120). For this reason the scene has been charged with “violent anachronism” (Grube 1941, 88)—but “anachronism”

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14. Lloyd (1992, 80) makes a similar (though more measured) observation, calling the agon “the most extreme example in Euripides of the agon as abstract debate, apparently detached from the issues of the play.” See also Conacher (1981, 23–25).

15. See Conacher (1967, 93n1) for a catalogue of politically-oriented readings of the drama.
seems to me the wrong lens through which to view the debate. The term suggests either an intentional transposition for the sake of storytelling, as in the novels of Sir Walter Scott, or of incongruity, as in Monty Python and the Holy Grail, or by mistake, like the striking of the ancient Roman clock in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. But this retrojection of fifth-century discourse is ideologically motivated, aimed at conveying not incongruity but congruity: it is the means by which Euripides establishes the continuity of Athenian democracy and the inherently democratic character of the city. Further, he reinforces the association between Athens’ virtuous behavior and its democratic government (both in the mythical illud tempus and the fifth century), thereby also creating a similar associative link between the impiety of Thebes and tyranny (Mills 1997, 120).

The dispute is sparked by the question the herald asks immediately upon entering:

τίς γῆς τύφανηος; πρὸς τίν’ ἄγγειλαί με χρή
λόγους Κρέοντος, ὡς κρατεῖ Κάδμου χθονός
Ετεοκλέους νεκρόντος ἀμφ’ ἐπταστόμους
πῦλας ἀδελφής χειρὶ Πολυνείκους ὑπὸ;

Who is the ruler of this land? To whom shall I announce a message from Creon, who rules the land of Cadmus after Eteocles was killed by the seven gates at the hand of his brother, Polyneices? (ll. 399–402)

The word τύφανηος at l. 399 leaps out at Theseus, prompting his angry response, but such a reaction seems—at least initially—unwarranted: what exactly does the

16. See also Morwood (2009, 355). On anachronism in tragedy generally, see Easterling (1985); on the anachronistic character of this scene specifically, see Easterling (1985, 9).

17. “It is necessary, for exciting interest of any kind, that the subject assumed should be, as it were, translated into the manners as well as the language of the age we live in” (S. W. Scott 1820, xvii).

18. 2.1.208–9. I exclude from this definition any generic element of tragedy that does not properly belong to the period of the setting, e.g. Bronze Age warriors speaking fifth-century Greek.

19. See Zeitlin (1986) on the depiction of Thebes in Athenian tragedy. She describes Thebes as depicted in the Suppliant Women as “a bleak and bitter portrait of the tyrant and the tyrannical city, which respects no laws or institutions and knows only violence and wrath” (120).
herald mean by τύραννος? The term is ambiguous, and can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, there is a recognized tragic usage of τύραννος as a non-pejorative synonym for “ruler,” and it is not unprecedented for a tragic messenger to not know the identity of the local ruler upon arrival. On the other hand, the herald soon reveals an officious nature, suggesting that perhaps he arrives eager to pick a fight.

Theseus’ choice of interpretation becomes more vexed if the context in the tragedy is considered: earlier, Adrastus, ashamed that a man of his royal status must supplicate himself before another, refers to himself as πολι` ος ᾿ αν` ηρ τ΄ υραννος ε᾿ υδα`ιμων π´ αρος, “a grey-haired man, formerly a prosperous ruler” (l. 166), a descriptor that occasions no comment from Theseus, and the word is applied again to the Argive king, this time in passing, at l. 1189.

Regardless, Theseus takes the herald’s question at face value, and responds with righteous indignation:

Firstly, stranger, you started your speech falsely by looking for a tyrant here. This city is not ruled by one man—it is free. The people rule with an annual succession of offices, not giving most power to the wealthy but giving the poor, too, an equal share. (ll. 403–8)


21. Storey (2008, 47) suggests another possibility: that Theseus’ combative reaction is a comment on the notorious Athenian love of debate. This would certainly explain Theseus’ immediate response, but not how the agon and its political content should be understood in the context of the tragedy. A sarcastic aside from the herald would evoke the same trait more effectively.
With these lines, the tragedy is pulled into the orbit of contemporary political discourse. The patriotic tenor, especially at ll. 404–5, recalls the response of the Persian messenger at Pers. l. 242, that the Athenians “are slaves and subjects of no man.” The specifically contemporary character of Theseus’ sentiments here can be highlighted through a comparison between Theseus and another “democratic monarch,” King Pelasgus of Argos in Aeschylus’ Suppliants. In the earlier tragedy, discussed above on p. 96, Pelasgus insists on obtaining the support of the people before acting (ll. 368–69) despite being reminded of his unilateral authority (ll. 370–75). Aeschylus describes the Argives’ method of ratification: gathering to hear their king’s appeal followed by a show of hands (ll. 605ff.). By contrast, Theseus’ words, both those quoted above and those later in the agon, suggest a far more developed democratic apparatus than the tallying of hands at a popular assembly. By referring to the succession of magistracies ἐν μέγετα, at l. 406, Theseus suggests that his mythical Athens contains the political mechanisms of a complete modern polis. His mentions of economic class—and the balancing of class interests—connotes a fully-fledged δήμος with both the power and the problems of contemporary Athens. Most importantly, while Pelasgus insists on democratic procedure, Theseus defends democratic ideology: at l. 408 he speaks of the poor and the rich having ἰσόν, “an equal share,” a formulation that, as I have discussed, formed the basis of the Athenian understanding of rights and access to governmental recourse. The concept of ἰσότης will, accordingly, be a key point in Theseus’ attack on tyranny.

In response, the herald makes a thoroughgoing attack on democracy. He begins by turning Theseus’ assertion of popular rule on its head, bragging πόλις γὰρ ἓς

22. Ironically, the procedure that Pelasgus undertakes is closer to actual Athenian practice at the time than that of Theseus in Euripides’ tragedy. See Tzanetou (2012, 13).

23. The image of the δήμος μόναρχος is here undoubtedly positive, but see by contrast Ar. Eq. 1330 and Arist. Pol. 1292a15f.
The city I come from is ruled by one man, not by the mob” (ll. 410–11). In this inverted formulation, ὄχλος, “the mob” responds to Theseus’ praise of the δῆμος at l. 406: the two terms are effectively used as synonyms, but with opposing ideological charges. Following this pronouncement, the herald makes a series of critiques: that a democracy easily falls under the sway of demagogues (ll. 411–12), that the δῆμος cannot know how to govern a city without the art of speechmaking (ll. 417–22)—even an ἀνήρ πένης who is not ἀμαθὴς will be too busy with his own labor to devote himself to civic affairs—and that when a man of low birth, a former nobody (πονηρὸς... ἄνήρ..., οὖδὲν ὄν τὸ πρέπειν), gains respect, it sows discord by distressing the upper classes (ἀμείνοσιν) (ll. 423–25).

Theseus replies to these points at length, but he does not answer the herald’s criticisms directly. Rather, he launches into a broad denunciation of tyranny that revolves around the absence of equality (that is to say, ἰσότης in a variety of forms) under a tyrannical regime. He begins, however, by blaming the herald for starting the argument: ἐπεὶ δ’ ἀγὼνα καὶ σὺ τὸν ἤγωνισα, / ἀκου· ἀμιλλαν γὰρ σὺ προθυμας λόγον, “Since it was you who initiated this argument, / listen: you were the one who began this contest of words” (ll. 427–28), a strange accusation as it was Theseus’ initial reaction that immediately turned the agon toward politics.

Beginning with the thesis statement that “nothing is more hostile to a polis than a tyrant” (l. 429), Theseus argues that in a tyranny there are no common laws.
(νόμοι κοινοί), but rather they belong to the tyrant alone, so there can be no equality
(οὐκέτ᾽ ἔστ᾽ ἴσον) (ll. 430–32). This stands in contrast to a state in which the rich
and poor alike have recourse to “equal justice” (δίκην ἴσην) (ll. 433–34), essentially a
restatement of ἰσονομία.

Theseus devotes the final portion of his reply to attacking tyranny. He raises
familiar criticisms, that the tyrant is fearful (l. 446) and that his appetites—for both
wealth and sexual gratification—are vast and destructive (ll. 450–55). Subjects living
under a tyrant, Theseus insists, endure collective harm, harm so severe that the
damage borders on the existential: why should they toil for wealth or raise children
when it all will be siphoned up for the enjoyment of the tyrant? With Theseus’
exclamation, “May I perish if my children are married in violence!” (ll. 454–55), the
debate returns to the purpose of the herald’s visit. The political portion of the agon
ends inconclusively, with the Theban shrugging, “you have your opinions and I have
mine” (ll. 465–66).

One important differentiating factor in the distinction Theseus draws, between a
free state and a state without ἰσονομία, is public access to the law and the concomitant
need to record the law in writing (l. 431–33). This taps into a vein of anxiety that
runs through Athenian political thought, and in fact is the earliest attestation of the
idea. It was considered fundamentally true that the transcription and public display
of the laws were guarantors of accessibility, and therefore of equality before the law.

28. μὴ ἔχον ἔτι, / εἰ τάμα τέκνα πρὸς βίαν νιμφεύοσθαι.
30. As T. C. W. Stinton observed, “Written law as a guarantee of democracy, or more exactly of
equality before the law, is explicit only here in the C. 5...” (Collard 1975, 441–42). The importance
of written law for the state, however, may be hardwired in Greek history; L. H. Jeffery (1990, 51)
suggests that the general use of public writing in Greek poleis is datable to the middle of the seventh
century, the same period during which law codes and official magistracies were being developed. See
also Thomas (1992, 65).
31. Perhaps the best example of this concept can be found in the “decree of Teisamenos” quoted at
However, the immutability of the written word, its ability to be “transmitted through space and time in concrete, precise and permanent form” (Missiou 2011, 25) was not itself a perfect check on authoritarian power; Solon’s laws were apparently left undisturbed on display during Peisistratus’ reign, a move seen as a testament to the tyrant’s political canniness (Hdt. 1.59.6; Thuc. 6.54.6; Ath. Pol. 16.8).

Throughout the agon, Theseus conflates “fairness” and “equality,” arguing that the ability of the democratic state to equalize the political power of citizens from different classes is itself a civic good. Boldly asserting that “this is freedom” (l. 438),32 he asks, τίς ἁθέλει πόλει / χρηστ' ον τι βούλευεν ἔχων, “Who wishes to put forward worthwhile advice in public, having for the benefit of the city?” (ll. 438–39), a variant of the question asked at each meeting of the Assembly to open the floor. He caps the illustration with a rhetorical flourish: “What is more equitable for a city than that?” (l. 441)33

Despite its unresolved ending, the agon bears a significance beyond the *Suppliant Women*. Elements of each speaker’s arguments constitute the basis for Greek political discussion in later decades; this is particularly true of the herald’s attacks, which would become standard criticisms of democracy. Indeed, the *Suppliant Women* is one of four political texts, all dating roughly from the 420s, that contain the first sustained ideological attacks on democratic deliberation (Yunis 1996, 36ff.): these are, in addition to the tragedy, the Constitutional Debate in Herodotus’ *Histories* (3.80–83), the pseudo-Xenophontic *Constitution of the Athenians* and Aristophanes’ *Knights*. Morwood (2009), with only slight exaggeration, describes the *Suppliants* “one of the Urtexts of political theory” (356).

But the tragedy does not simply reproduce these arguments. Theseus’ words and

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Andoc. 1.83–84, on which see Sickinger (1999, 99–104).

32. τούλευθερον δ’ ἔχεινο·
33. τί τοῦτον ἔστι’ ἰσαίτερον πόλειν.
his actions in the drama are not in perfect harmony. His role as representative of the Athenian δήμος problematizes his democratic advocacy. There are three aspects to the contradictory nature of Theseus in the tragedy. The first stems from the tradition situating Theseus as both king and democrat, as the founder, in fact, of Athenian democracy. It is a tradition that long predates Euripides, having arisen at some point in the sixth century, and endured long after the disappearance of Athenian democracy. The fundamental incoherence of the concept of Theseus the “democratic king” is best exemplified by the Marmor Parium, which identifies him as having bestowed self-determination upon the Athenians, and then dates succeeding events by the reigns of the kings of Athens—starting with Theseus himself. Euripides himself has been suggested as the source of portraying Theseus as the literal founder of democracy (Walker 1995, 145).

The second contradictory aspect of Theseus’ role is inherent to the form of tragedy itself, and has been recently explored by Victoria Wohl (2015, 89ff.). For all of Theseus’ advocacy of democracy, the Athenian people themselves are conspicuously absent from the drama. One consequence of the antiphonal structure of Greek tragedy, composed of an elite protagonist and a chorus which is rarely politically representative and which does not typically interfere directly in the plot, is the literal impossibility

34. There is disagreement over whether Theseus was adopted as a symbol by the Peisistratid regime or by Cleisthenes; the issue is summarized by Walker (1995, 35ff.), who argues the multiplication of artistic representations of the king after the expulsion of Hippias indicates his use in a democratic ideological program. See also Mills (1997, 97–104).

35. In the second century CE, Pausanias describes a painting in the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios depicting Theseus alongside the personified Δημοκρατία and Δήμος. Observing that the painting δηλοί δὲ ἡ γραμή Θησέα εἶναι τὸν καταστήσαντα Ἀθηναίοις ἐξ ἰσοῦ πολιτεύσαται, “represents Theseus as the establisher of political equality for the Athenians” (1.3.3), he scoffs at the wide acceptance of such a nonsensical belief, which, in his view, could only be held by the credulous sort who believe what they hear in choruses and tragedies.

36. There is possible evidence in some Atthides that the tradition predates the tragedian. See the discussion in Walker.

37. The one exception I would make is the chorus of the Choephoroi persuading the Nurse to omit the need for bodyguards from her message for Aegisthus, but Peter Burian has drawn my attention
of staging collective politics. But even so, one could imagine a chorus consisting of an elite stratum of the Athenian δῆμος, who could, in effect, reinforce the democratic imprimatur of Theseus’ actions—instead, the chorus is composed of grieving Argive mothers. As a result of this, “although we hear much about the demos, we never see the Athenian people onstage, and they intervene in the plot (a plot that intimately affects them) only inasmuch as they are represented by their king” (Wohl 2015, 93).

These first two points, taken together, lead to the third aspect of contradiction: several times in the tragedy, Theseus describes the democratic process in ways that are not entirely democratic. Theseus repeatedly undermines his own democratic rhetoric. The most illustrative instance of this occurs just after Aethra convinces the king to help the Argives, when he mentions the important step of receiving popular consent before taking action:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{δόξαι δὲ χρῆσιν καὶ πόλει πάση τόδε.} \\
\text{δόξης δὲ ᾐμοὶ ἄλοντος· ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου} \\
\text{προσδοὺς ἐχομὶ ἐν δήμον εὐμενέστερον.} \\
\text{καὶ γὰρ κατέστησε· αὐτὸν ἐς μοναρχὸν} \\
\text{ἐλευθερώσας τῆνδ' ἵσοφηρον πόλιν.} \\
\text{λοβὸν δ' Ἀδραστον δείγμα τῶν ἐμὸν λόγων} \\
\text{ἔς πλῆθος ἀστῶν εἶμι· καὶ πείσας τάδε,} \\
\text{λεκτοὺς ἀθροίσας δεύτ' Ἀθηναίων κόροις} \\
\text{ηῖμω.}
\end{align*}
\]

But I require this to be approved by the whole city, and they will approve it, since I desire it so. Yet if I provide them with the proposal I can make them better-disposed. For it was I who set the people in power to the chorus of sailors in the Ajax and their suggestion that Odysseus mediate the dispute between Teucer and Agamemnon.

38. To illustrate this point, Wohl (2015, 93) draws a comparison between the tragic chorus and the far more demotic contemporary comic choruses.

39. This is not to suggest that the choice of chorus is an arbitrary one; the action of the drama is motivated by their appeal, with profound significance for Athens. Furthermore, a play called Suppliant Women without any suppliant women in it would be nonsensical.
by freeing the city and providing an equal vote to all.
So, bringing Adrastus as proof of my proposal,
I’ll go to the assembly of citizens, and after
convincing them, I’ll return
having mustered the elite young men of Athens.

Theseus appears to be praising the power of the democratic process while simultaneously assuming its favorable outcome. Wohl (2015, 95) aptly summarizes the tone of the passage: “This debate... is a beneficence granted by the mythic monarch to his people, as is their sovereignty and equality; democracy itself is a royal largesse that ensures the king’s continued rule under the demos’s monarkhia.” Theseus strikes a similar note later, when, having returned to the stage after receiving popular consent, he remarks on the ease with which he was able to convince the city to vote in favor of going to war: καὶ μὴν ἐκούσα γ ὑμὲν τ ἐδέξατο / πόλις πόνον τόνδ’, ὡς θέλοντά μ’ ἔσθε, “The city was willing, even glad, to take on this task, once they understood that I wanted them to do so” (ll. 393–94). Theseus is, in short, both representative and leader of the δήμος, a position that analogizes him as an Athenian general, much as in the quotation from Thucydides (2.65) in in the introductory section of this chapter.

The problematic nature of Theseus’ authority is also visible in what motivates his actions. When Adrastus first supplicates the king, Theseus refuses to help, replying with a condescending speech (ll. 195–249). He describes his worldview, Panglossian avant la lettre, in which the gods bring good things to mankind, and only those who are ungrateful or arrogant enough to buck their will meet misfortune, among whose number he places Adrastus. His response dismays the king and the chorus, and causes Aithra to burst into tears. She chides her son for refusing, and urges him to change his mind with an argument that utilizes two main points: helping the Argives will bring him honor (ll. 301–13), and will prevent others from labeling him a coward (ll. 313–16).
These arguments, however, are almost entirely personal, not political, in nature. In other words, we see Aithra, the mother of a king, successfully persuade her son to change his mind with a speech appealing to his own sense of honor. Although he will later gain the approval of the people, at this point in the tragedy Theseus is acting very much like a monarch who is only accountable to the gods, and to himself. The fact that it is his mother, too, who prompts his change of heart suggests a conflation of the household with the state, a trope which was closely associated with tyrannical rule.40

Theseus, in condemning tyranny, employs a striking metaphor:

\[
\text{πῶς οὖν ἐτ' ἄν γένοιτ' ἂν ἰσχυρὰ τόλις}
\text{ὅταν τις ὡς λειμὼν ἥρινοῦ στάχυν}
\text{τόλμας ἀφηρῆ γὰρ κῶπολωτίξῃ νέους·}
\]

How then could a city still be powerful
if some [tyrant] deprives the city of its bold youth,
mowing them down like stalks in a springtime meadow? (ll. 447–49)

This recalls a vignette from Herodotus’ *Histories*, in which Periander, the tyrant of Corinth, sends a messenger to the Milesian tyrant Thrasybulus to ask how to best manage his city. As a reply, Thrasybulus leads the messenger to a field of grain, where he wordlessly walks down the rows, lopping the heads off of any grain stalk protruding above the rest, after which he would throw the head away. “It was in this way,” Herodotus remarks, “he destroyed the best and tallest portion of the crop” (5.92.2).41 Upon returning to Corinth, the puzzled messenger relates the incident to Periander, who is able to take Thrasybulus’ meaning:

40. See Brock (2013, 25ff.) and my discussion of the *Persians* above.
41. ἐς δ’ τοῦ λῆψον τὸ κάλλιστὸν τὲ καὶ βαθύτατον διήφθηρε τρόπῳ τοιοῦτῳ.
Περίανδρος δὲ συνείς τὸ τοιχίζου καὶ νῶ ἀσχολοῦ ὡς οἱ ὑπετύθητο Θρασύβουλος τοὺς ὑπειράχους τῶν ἀστῶν φονεύειν, ἐνδεχόμενο δὴ πᾶσαν κακότητα ἐξερήσας ἐγκαρδήτωμεν τῶν πολιτῶν.

Periander, however, understood what had been done, and grasped that Thrasybulus was advising him to murder the eminent members of his citizenry, and so he then began to exhibit his wickedness to his citizens. (5.92η1)

This parable is well known and, following Herodotus’ treatment, is generally taken as both anti-tyrannical and pro-democratic in character; Theseus’ reference to it here is not surprising. But there are two, very different interpretations possible: as Sara Forsdyke (1999) demonstrates, the story very likely originated as one that, during the intra-aristocratic strife of the sixth century, the civic elite might use to illustrate the perils of allowing one man too much power, and thus promote “group solidarity” (365) in the face of tyrannical opposition (or at least, the proposition of handing authority to one man). There is nothing inherently democratic about the story; Thrasybulus’ message, after all, does not advocate the wholesale decimation of the community but rather a culling of τοὺς ὑπειράχους τῶν ἀστῶν (5.92η1).

And yet, as Aristotle observes at Pol. 1284a26ff., the removal of powerful and prominent individuals who rise above the status quo is not limited to tyrannical states: the process of ostracism accomplishes the identical goal in democracies. What differentiates the two regimes, however, is intent, i.e. whether citizens are being

42. Morwood (2007, 180) finds contemporary resonances in citation, namely the saying that Aristotle attributed to Pericles comparing the loss of Athens’ youth in wartime to a year without spring (Rhet. 1365a34). Collard (1975, 230), however, insists that Euripides is not referring to Pericles but rather that “Pericles’ mot may have influenced E.’s choice from familiar literary resources.”

43. For a parallel argument that is historical rather than literary, see Salmon (1997).

44. Forsdyke (1999, 367) points to Herodotus’ unusual word choices in the passage as indicating an authorial intent to provide democratic coloring: ἀστάχως, “head of grain,” rather than στάχως and λῆσος, “grainfield,” rather than ἱερό, in order to pun on ἀστῆς and λαός. Aristotle’s retelling of the story, at Pol. 1284a26ff. and 1311a20ff., she observes, uses the more common terms.

45. The story would likely have less resonance if Thrasybulus simply burned the field to the ground.

46. Aristotle attributes this similarity to the deviant constitutions of both forms of government (1284b21).
removed for public or private good. The exercise of power, then, by both a tyranny and a democracy can appear quite similar. Again I return to the passage of Thuc. 2.65; the appearance of democracy can mask one-man rule.

Tyranny is thus the fulcrum between two overlapping but ultimately irreconcilable ideologies in the *Suppliant Women*, the result of which is the confusion of values characteristic of the tragedy. This stems from a confluence of opposition; Panhellenic moral discourse, from Homer onward, regarded ὑβρίς as an offense, and characteristically mapped it onto the figure of the tyrant, as in the poetry of Solon. Michelini (1994) observes that the hubris matrix derives from traditional heroic ideology by an inversion in which the negative side of this ideology is privileged (223). On this view, the tyrant is a hubristic ruler who violates the moral and legal norms of the community he rules, norms which stem from aristocratic codes of conduct and honor. However, in the Athenian democratic political imagination as it developed in the decades after the expulsion of Hippias, ὑβρίς was also seen as a defining attribute of tyranny, but on this view the hubristic tyrant did not violate traditional norms but rather democratic ones. Two strongly opposed value systems, one aristocratic and one democratic, each regarded themselves as the negation of tyranny. The consequences of this are visible in the *Suppliant Women*, wherein Athenian opposition to tyranny requires that the both ideologies come together, resulting in the fundamental “ambivalence” (Gamble 1970) of the embodied anti-tyrant, Theseus, and of the drama more generally.

*Contemporary Political Discourse*

The herald’s argument is recognizable as part of a prominent political discourse of the later fifth century that was opposed to democracy—specifically to democratic

47. See the discussion in the first chapter.
deliberation—on the grounds that democracy is by its very nature uncontrollable, as it relies on the ignorant and easily-swayed masses, and that it leads to despotism, either by creating conditions for a tyrant to come to power or, more directly, by making the “rule of the many” effectively the rule of a collective tyrant, the δῆμος.\textsuperscript{48}

The Constitutional Debate

The fullest, and most famous, articulation of this argument is in the Constitutional Debate of the Persians in Herodotus’ \textit{Histories}.

The debate takes place after the assassination of the false King Smerdis by a junta of Persian nobles. When the conspirators assemble to discuss the question of what form of government to adopt,\textsuperscript{52} three Persians, Otanes, Megabyzus and Darius, each speak in favor of a type of regime: Otanes expresses anti-monarchical sentiments and suggests that Persia should become a democracy. Megabyzus argues against popular rule, instead proposing an oligarchy. Darius, in turn, dismisses both options, advocating for monarchy—and subsequently becomes King of Persia.

\textsuperscript{48}Harvey Yunis (1996, 36) identifies four texts as part of this tradition, and dates them all to the 420s: the \textit{Suppliants}, the Constitutional Debate in the \textit{Histories}, the pseudo-Xenophontic \textit{Constitution of the Athenians} and Aristophanes’ \textit{Knights}.

\textsuperscript{49}The bibliography is vast. For overviews of the sources, see Lasserre (1976, 5n1), Evans (1981, 79), Raaflaub (2004, 203ff.) and Lateiner (2013, 197–99nn.11–15).

\textsuperscript{50}Herodotus twice insists on the authenticity of the debate (at 3.80.1 and 6.43.3). See Brann (1963) and Ostwald (1969, 178–79) for overviews of literature on the debate’s authenticity. The current consensus is that the entire theoretical framework of the debate indicates that the interlocutors are essentially “speaking Greek” (Hartog 1988, 325).

\textsuperscript{51}Pind. \textit{Pyth.} 2.86–88 expresses a similar differentiation, but not as part of a systemic discussion of governance, as in Herodotus. See footnote 57 below.

\textsuperscript{52}Ann Ward (2008, 91) perceptively observes that the question that is under debate is, in fact, not what the ideal form of government for Persia would be, but rather “what regime is most in accord with universal standards of human nature unaffected by custom or law.”
It is primarily in the argument of Megabyzus, the pro-oligarchic speaker,\textsuperscript{53} that correspondences with the \textit{Suppliants} occur, as it is he, not Darius, who criticizes democracy more. He does not make a factual argument, but instead depicts the dangers of the democratic system as \textit{moral} failings, in a manner very much like the traditional criticism of tyranny that I have discussed. Many of these failings are a result of the central mechanism of democracy, whereby the δήμος, although composed of many individuals, becomes a collective “one”:

\[ \text{όμιλου γάρ ἁχρήσιον ὦδεν ἐστὶ ἀξιωτότερον ὀδη ὑβριστότερον. καίτοι τυράννου ὑβριν φεύγοντας ἀνδρὰς ἐς δήμῳ ἄκολοστοι ὑβριν πεσέιν ἐστὶ ὁμοίως ἄνασχετόν. ὦ μὲν γάρ εἰ τι ποιέει, γινώσκων ποιέει, τῷ δὲ ὀδη γινώσκειν ἐνι: κῶς γάρ ἄν γινώσκοι ὃς οὔτε εὐδιάχυθη οὔτε εἴδε καλὸν ὀδη, οὐκ ἔχει τὸ ἐμπεσόν τὰ πρήγματα ἄνευ νόος, χειμάρρῳ στόμῳ ἐκείνῳ.} \]

There is nothing more foolish or insolent than a useless mob. That men fleeing the insolence of a tyrant could fall prey to the insolence of the unrestrained mob is intolerable. Whatever a single man does, he does knowingly, but for the other [i.e. the mob] knowledge is not possible; how can that which has not learned or seen what is best be knowledgable? But instead it always rushes violently forward, sweeping away what is before it thoughtlessly like a swollen river? (3.81.1–2)

As his repeated use of γιγνώσκειν suggests, Megabyzus emphasizes that this collective entity, the δήμος, is by its very nature ignorant. This assertion is typical of fifth-century anti-democratic thought: the belief that that “the many” cannot act with intelligence is “an assumption common to the entire ancient discussion of political deliberation” (Yunis 1996, 40). But the δήμος is not merely ignorant, it is also ἄκολοστος, which signifies both uncontrollability and licentiousness. The epithet thus marks the δήμος with the same accusation of lack of restraint as the τύραννος.\textsuperscript{54}

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\textsuperscript{53} The matter of oligarchy itself, which never gets a hearing in tragedy, must be left aside. It barely gets a hearing here, considering that Megabyzus’ speech is almost half as long as either Otanes’ or Darius’. As has been observed, the absolute bipolarity of the tyranny/democracy dichotomy is especially striking in tragedies written after the oligarchic coup of 411 (Papadopoulou 2012, 399). Cf. Carter (2007, 123): “the tyrant was a more effective political bogeyman than the oligarch.”

\textsuperscript{54} One salient difference is that the tyrant could theoretically check himself and exhibit σωφροσύνη,
This lack of intelligence, concomitant with a lack of restraint, thus slots the δῆμος neatly into the place of the tyrant in anti-tyrannical discourse: the limitless, perverse desire of the τύραννος is replaced by the unrestrained, unpredictable desire of the δῆμος. By depicting the ὄβρες of the tyrant and the people as identical threats that differ only in source, and by calling the people ὄβρωστος, Megabyzus clearly invokes the cosmic ὄβρες that was long closely associated with the tyrant. Both the tyrant and the mob, in his view, are creatures of pure id, unrestrained and unrestrainable.

A comparison with the herald’s words in the Suppliants shows that he is arguing something slightly different than Megabyzus. While he also questions the intelligence of the δῆμος (ll. 420–22), his example points to the non-moral focus of his argument: a hypothetical ignorant ἀνηρ πένης whose circumstances do not permit him to gain the knowledge necessary for successful governance, and who is held up as a fitting representative of the δῆμος. 55 Although this image is absolutely compatible with Megabyzus’ view of the people, this is a different, fundamentally more grounded concern, dealing not with the moral character of the people but their practical inability to effectively rule.

Megabyzus’ comparison between the δῆμος and a raging river has a long history in anti-democratic discourse. The image originates at Hom. Il. 2.144–49, when the Greek army, chaotically rushing to the shore in their eagerness to return home, is compared to large waves whipped up by the wind. (Moulton 1977, 38–42). 56

55. See, however, Thuc. 2.40.2, where Pericles affirms the ability of those outside the political class to make informed judgments. He points to open debate itself as the means by which these people are educated, thus allowing a large number of people to participate wisely in the political process, an Athenian virtue. See Yunis (1996, 42). See also E. Or. ll. 917–22, where the speaker advocating for rewarding Orestes for murdering tyrants is described as an ἄκολοχος, a “yeoman,” who doesn’t often venture into town but is nevertheless both ξυνετός, “wise” and άσεφος, “incorruptible.” This Mr. Smith of Sparta is the sole voice of democratic reason in the report of the chaotic assembly.

56. See also Thgn. 347–48, which has an explicitly political context, and Soph. Ant. 712f.
Il. 2.148 the adjective λάβρος, “furious” or “boisterous,” is used to describe the west wind. The adjective λάβρος connects the Constitutional Debate in Herodotus to a significant precedent for anti-democratic thought, a passage in Pindar’s Second Pythian:

ἐν πάντα δὲ νόμων εὐθύγλωσσος ἀνήρ προφέρει,
παρὰ τυραννίδι, χωπόταν ὁ λάβρος στρατός,
χώταν πόλιν οἱ σοφοὶ τηρέωντι.

And under every regime the straight-talking man excels:
in a tyranny, when the boisterous people rule,
or when the wise watch over the city. (Pind. Pyth. 2.86–88; Race text and translation)

Pindar’s poem predates the Histories, although its exact date cannot be determined (Most 1985, 65–66). What these verses demonstrate, aside from the fundamentality of the tripartite division of forms of government, is the ancient pedigree of these anti-popular (if not anti-democratic) sentiments. While it is not an uncommon synonym for λαός, the poet’s use of στρατός is striking given the Homeric paradigm of the unruly, potentially violent army that Euripides draws upon in the Hecuba and Iphigenia at Aulis, which are discussed below.

A brief comparison of the arguments for popular rule in Euripides and Herodotus reveals a similar difference of emphasis between the two authors. The case Otanes makes in favor of popular rule barely mentions the mechanisms of democratic governance, but instead relies heavily on the traditional critiques of the ruler’s moral failings; he advocates for democracy first and foremost by means of denigrating tyranny. Pointing to the violence only recently perpetrated by the mad king Cambyses, Otanes warns that even the best of men would be tempted to excess by the


58. This method of argumentation a contrario has, perhaps unfairly, been taken as a sign of the weakness of Otanes’ position, as though he “cannot think of positive arguments for democracy”
power of μουναρχή. Once again in moral terms, he observes that once a ruler is endowed with sole rule, the results will be predictable:

εγγίνεται μὲν γὰρ ὁ ὑβρικ ὑπὸ τῶν παρεῖντων ἀγαθῶν, φυλόνος δὲ ἄρχηθεν ἐμφύεται ἀνθρώπω. δῶ δ’ ἔχων ταύτα ἦσε πᾶσαι κακότητα, τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὑβρὶ κεχυρημένοις ἔρει διὰ πολλὰ καὶ ἀτάσηθα, τὰ δὲ φυλόν. καίτοι ἄνδρα γε τύραννον ἄφθονον ἔδει εἶναι, ἐχοντα γε πάντα τὰ ἀγαθά. τὸ δὲ ύπεναντίον τούτου ἐς τοὺς πολιτικὰς πέφυκε: φυλοεῖ γὰρ τοίς ἀριστοις περιεύσοι τε καὶ ζώοις, ἀλλ’ ἔχει δὲ ταύτα κακότοις ἀρχόντων ἀκριβοὶ διὰβολας δὲ ἀριστος ἐνδέχεσθαι.

Insolence is fostered in him by the presence of good things, while envy exists inherently in man. Once he has both, he possesses absolute wickedness; for once he is satiated he performs many ignoble acts, some from insolence and some from envy. And yet an absolute ruler should be free from envy, since he possesses all good things. But, to his citizens, he is the opposite: for he envies the best who live and who excel and delights in the worst of the citizenry, and he is the best audience for slander. (3.80.3–4)

Like Theseus, Otanes identifies “equality” as the fundamental concept underpinning democracy, but unlike the king he does not not offer any concrete instances of democratic equality. The preponderance of his speech is devoted to the evils of tyranny, and it is only in its final sentences that he makes gestures toward a positive case for popular rule—although even then Otanes is frustratingly vague. He posits a fundamental distinction very much in accord with Theseus’ line of argument: πλήθος δὲ ἄρχων πρῶτα μὲν οὐνομα πάντων κάλλιστον ἔχει, ἵσονομιή, δεύτερα δὲ τούτων τῶν ὁ τῶν οἱ μούναγοις ποιέοι αὐθέν, “first, the rule of the multitude has the most beautiful name of all: ἵσονομια, and secondly it does none of the things that a monarch does” (3.80.6).59 Otanes’ use of the word ἵσονομιή where the modern reader would expect ἵσονομια, (Flory 1987, 131). Stewart Flory further observes that Otanes’ criticisms of monarchy are not borne out by most of the sole rulers depicted in the Histories, but the issue is more complex than he lets on. For a much fuller account, see Carolyn Dewald’s (2003) analysis of the representation of tyranny in Herodotus.

59.Seth Benardete, immediately after quoting this statement, wryly remarks “but Otanes is silent about what democracy does do” (Benardete 1970, 87).
δημοκρατία is conspicuous, especially as the term appears later in the Histories.\textsuperscript{60} In the following sentence he addresses the fundamental formal characteristics of democracy: offices are determined by lot, officials are held accountable, and all deliberation takes place in the open (3.80.6).\textsuperscript{61}

In marked contrast, Theseus' attack on tyranny in the Suppliant Women downplays this strain of rhetoric in favor of denouncing the concrete harms that a tyrant inflicts on his subjects, a difference similar in kind to that between the anti-democratic arguments in the two authors. This difference, a de-emphasis (although not an abandonment) of the traditional moral criticisms about tyranny, reflects Euripides' overall usage of tyrant language and imagery, which is more overtly political than the usage by Aeschylus or Sophocles.

The Constitution of the Athenians

This dim view of the δῆμος, as an inherently ignorant and uncontrollable mob evincing the same characteristics as an overbearing tyrant, is also found in the Constitution of the Athenians, a text that at one point in antiquity was attributed to Xenophon, but since at least the first century C.E., this attribution has been in doubt.\textsuperscript{62} Very possibly dating to the 420s, the same decade as both Herodotus' Histories and the Suppliants,\textsuperscript{63} the text is an examination of Athenian government

\textsuperscript{60}On this point, see Vlastos (1964), Ostwald (1969, 111–13) and Saxonhouse (1996, 50). Pelling (2002, 135f.) believes the absence of the expected δημοκρατία is due to the connotative significance of ἰσονομία in Otanes' argument; democracy is only a form of government, but isonomia, as the underlying mechanism as well as the goal of democracy, is the term on which Otanes wants to focus.

\textsuperscript{61}πάλι μὲν ἄρχης ἄρχει, ὑπεύθυνον δὲ ἄρχην ἔχει, βουλεύματα δὲ πάντα ἐς τὸ κοινὸν ἀναφέρει. As numerous commentators have observed, this is an evocation of a clearly Athenian form of democracy.

\textsuperscript{62}Diogenes Laertius (II.57) includes at the tail end of his list of Xenophon's works, but adds ἢν φησιν οὐκ εἶναι Θενοφῶντος ὁ Μάγνης Δημητρίος, "which Demetrius of Magnesia [a writer of the 1st century BCE] says is not by Xenophon." On the question of authorship, see Marr and Rhodes' introduction to their text (2008, 6–12).

\textsuperscript{63}This is the date advocated by Yunis (1996, 38), who contends that the absence of Pericles as significant, Others, notably Bowersock (1967, 33–34), place its composition earlier, in the 440s.
and society from a conservative, aristocratic point of view. For this reason, the author has come to be labelled the Old Oligarch.

The Old Oligarch denigrates the δήμος in much the same way the Theban herald and Megabyzus do. Although he concedes the justice of the many possessing more than the aristocratic few in light of the people’s meritorious service in the navy, the backbone of Athenian military strength, he makes the contemptuous assumption that intelligence and ability correspond exactly to social status (and thus wealth):

ἔστι δὲ πάση γῇ τὸ βέλτιστον ἐναντίον τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ. ἐν γὰρ τοῖς βελτίστοις ἐνι ἀσκολασίᾳ τῇ ὁλογιστῇ καὶ ἠδοκίᾳ, ἀκριβείᾳ δὲ πλείστη εἰς τὰ χρηστά, ἐν δὲ τῷ δήμῳ ἠμαθίᾳ τῇ πλείστῃ καὶ ἀταξίᾳ καὶ πονηρίᾳ: ἣ τε γὰρ πενία αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον ἁγετὴ ἐπὶ τὰ σιγχρά, καὶ ἢ ἀπαιθεύσει καὶ ἢ ἠμαθίᾳ δι᾽ ἐνδειαν ψηφιώσεως (ἐνι) ἐνίοις τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

In every land, the best element of society is opposed to democracy. For in the best men there is the least amount of intemperance and injustice, but in the people, there is the greatest amount of ignorance, indiscipline and scurrilousness; for poverty rather often leads them into shameful acts, and in the case of some people lack of education and ignorance results from their lack of money. (1.5)

Here, again, the δήμος is criticized as a tyrant-equivalent, unjust and unbounded. While the word δήμος should refer to the entire citizen body, the Old Oligarch uses it practically as a term of denigration, designating only the poorest (and thus “worst”) citizens.64

The class bias of the Old Oligarch notwithstanding, criticism of the chaotic nature of Athenian democratic deliberation is not without merit. The tyrannical potential of the δήμος is especially visible in the accounts of the trial of the Arginusae generals by Xenophon (Hell. 1.7) and Diodorus Siculus (13.101–2). The trial demonstrates how quickly a δήμος can become an ὀχλος.

In conclusion, the Suppliants demonstrates the ways in which Euripides’ handling

64. See Xen. Mem. 4.2.37, where the δήμος is referred to as τοὺς πένητας τῶν πολιτῶν.
of tyranny is markedly different from his predecessors’. Rather than primarily illustrating tyrannical traits via example, portraying tyranny as a wicked moral disposition, Euripides also discusses tyranny explicitly as a form of government. Engaging with a discourse that appears to have been a “hot topic” (Raaflaub 2002, 161) at the time, he extends the idea of tyranny to the \( \delta ημος \). This concept of the “people as tyrant”, what I call the \( τ′ υραννος \; ώχλος \), appears in a number of his other tragedies, which I discuss below.

**Phoenician Women**

The section of the *Phoenician Women* relevant to my discussion of tyranny is the “great agon” in the first episode, taken by many scholars to be the focal point of the tragedy.\(^{65}\) The agon, in turn, is the “sommet dramatique” (Amiech 2004, 339) of the episode. The focus of the scene is Jocasta’s attempt to reconcile her warring sons in the hope that they can come to an agreement, thereby averting Polynæces’ attack on Thebes. Unusually, the agon is comprised of three rather than two \( \text{rheseis} \): Polynæces’, Eteocles’ and Jocasta’s. This follows from its formal structure, which resembles that of an arbitration, the two brothers representing the litigants and Jocasta the judge.\(^{66}\) Polynæces, as the plaintiff, speaks first. He makes a highly polished speech that summarizes the events leading up to the present crisis before proposing a truce.\(^ {67}\) As a response, Eteocles launches into a grandiloquent speech, which contains an encomium to Tyranny itself:

\(^{65}\) See Duchemin (1968, 122) and Lloyd (1992, 84).

\(^{66}\) Cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 583–84. For the representation of judicial procedure in tragedy, see Lloyd (1992, 13–15) and Sommerstein (2010). The resemblance between a staged agon and a judicial proceeding was especially marked in Euripides’ oeuvre (Lloyd 1992, 13).

\(^{67}\) While Polynæces’ peace offer has generally been read as honest and even “unimpeachable” (Mastronarde 1994, 280), Lloyd sees “disturbing aspects” (1992, 86) in the \( \text{rhesis} \), centrally that Polynæces, even as he portrays himself as being in the right, never takes the necessary step of explaining how his claim to the throne justifies the invasion of his homeland.
εἰ πάσι ταῦτῶν καλὸν ἔρι σοφὸς υἱὸν ἰμα,
οὔχ ἦν ἐν ἄμφιλεκτος ἀνθρώπος ἐρή
νῦν δ᾿ ὦ ὦ ὦ ὅμοιον οὐδὲν ὁυτ᾿ ἵσον βροτοῖς,
πλὴν ἄνόμασα: τὸ δ᾿ ἔργον οὐχ ἔστιν τόδε.
ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐδέν, μήτερ, ἀποκρύψας ἐρώ· ἀντρον ἄν ἐλθοῦμι ἱλίου πρὸς ἀντόλας
καὶ γῆς ἐνερήθεν, δυνάτας ὡν δράσαι τάδε,
τῆν θεῶν μεγίστην ὡστ᾿ ἔχειν Τυραννίδα.
τοῦτ᾿ οὖν τὸ χρηστὸν, μήτερ, οὐχί βούλομαι
ἀλλω παρέίναι μᾶλλον ἢ σῶζειν ἐμοί:
ἄνανδρῖα γὰρ, τὸ πλέον ὀστὶς ἀπολέσας
tοῦλασσον ἐλαβέ, πρὸς δὲ τοῖς ἀσχύνομαι,
ἐλθόντα σὺν ὠπλοῖς τόδε καὶ παραβοῦντα γῆν
tυχεῖν ἂρχεῖν: ταῖς γὰρ ἐν Ὁμήρως τόδε
γένοιτ᾿ ὁνείδος, εἰ Μυκηναίου δορὸς
φόβῳ παρεῖναι σκῆπτρα τάμα τῶν ἔχειν.
χρῆν δ᾿ αὐτόν οὐχ ὠπλοία ταῖς διακαλλαγάς,
μήτερ, ποιεῖσθαι: τὰν γὰρ ἐξαρεί λόγος
ὁ καὶ σιδηρὸς πολεμίων δράσειν ὃν.
ἄλλ᾿, εἰ μὲν ἄλλος τὴν γῆν ὀικεῖν θέλει,
ἐξεστ᾿ ἐκεῖνο δ᾿ οὐχ ἔκων μεθήρομαι.
ἀρχεῖν παρὰ μοι, τῶδε δουλεύσω ποτέ: πρὸς ταῦτ᾿ ἵτω μὲν πῦρ, ἵτω δὲ φάσαγανα,
ζεύγνυσθε δ᾿ ἵππος, πεδία πίμπλαθ᾿ ἄρμάτων,
ὡς οὐ παρῆσον τῶν ἔμην τυραννίδα.
ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος πέρι
κάλλεστον ἀδικεῖν, τάλλα δ᾿ ἐυσεβεῖν χρεῶν.

If all were at one in their ideas of honor and wisdom,
there would be no strife to make men disagree;
but, as it is, fairness and equality have no existence in this world
beyond the name; there is really no such thing.
I will tell you this, mother, without any concealment:
I would go to the rising of the stars and the sun,
or beneath the earth, if I were able so to do,
to win Tyranny, the greatest of the gods.
Therefore, mother, I will not yield this blessing
to another rather than keep it for myself;
for it is cowardly to lose the greater
and to win the less. Besides, I am ashamed
to think that he should gain his object by coming with arms
and ravaging the land; for this would be a disgrace to Thebes,
if I should yield my scepter up to him for fear of Mycenaean might.

He ought not to have attempted reconciliation by armed force, mother, for words accomplish everything that even the sword of an enemy might effect. Still, if on any other terms he cares to dwell here, he may; but that I shall never willingly let go.

Shall I become his slave, when I can rule?
Therefore come fire, come sword! Harness your horses, fill the plains with chariots, for I will not give up my tyranny to him.

For if we must do wrong, to do so for tyranny is the fairest cause, but in all else piety should be our aim. (ll. 499–525, Coleridge Loeb translation)

In contrast to the balanced construction and subtle use of rhetoric in Polyneices’ speech, Eteocles’ reply is a jumble of thoughts, tied together by an obsessive desire for power. Most striking in the speech is its deification of tyranny as “the greatest of the gods” (506), an identification with very little precedent. The tone of the speech reflects the excessive, extravagant aspects of tyranny itself; to describe the lengths to which he would go to hang on to power, Eteocles employs two *adunata* that encompass the entire universe.

This passage represents a sharp break with Aeschylus’ and Sophocles’ handling of tyranny. Other overt discussions, as in the second stasimon of the *OT*, invoke the standard moral framework of ὑβρις—κ΄ ορος in which tyranny has traditionally been implicated. Here, however, Eteocles is speaking from *within* that framework, and in the language of contemporary intellectual debate.

Eteocles’ equivocating argument is unexpected. He doesn’t defend the justness of his claim to the throne or attack the injustice of his brother’s actions—rather, he denies the very existence of fairness. Such a rhetorical move marks him out as, like Aristophanes’ Pheidippides, “a young man who can use the glittering σοφία of the

sophists for personal advantage” (Mastronarde 1994, 288).\(^69\) The assertion of a total relativity of values is predicated on an absolute dichotomy between ὄνομα and ἔργον, terms equivalent to νόμος and φύσις, that moral concepts do not possess an inherent worth but are assigned one by customary usage. This is a characteristically sophistic argument, put forth at length by Callicles in Gorg. 482c4–486d1.\(^70\)

Startling too is the portrayal of power as a zero-sum proposition. Eteocles argues that if he is not to have power, then Polyneices will—and who would willingly give that up? This point of view is encapsulated perfectly by his rhetorical question at l. 520: ἀρχεῖν παρ᾽ ὑμι, τῷ ῥελεύσω ποτέ; “Should I be his slave, if I can rule?”\(^71\) This choice is absolute—it is either rule or be ruled.

This stance evokes the attitude of the Athenians in Thucydides’ Melian Dialogue. There, too, the suggestion of compromise is met with scorn, and refusal predicated on a similar argument: δίκαια μὲν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπεῖν λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῆς ἵσης ἀνάγκης κρίνεται, δυνατὰ δὲ οἱ προῦχοντες πράσσουσι και οἱ ἁσθενεῖς ἔγχρωσιν, “in the human sphere, justice can be decided only between equal powers, whereas the strong do what they are able and the weak acquiesce” (5.89). Later, the Athenians reassert the principle on a cosmic scale: ἡγούμεθα γὰρ τὸ τε θεῖον δόξῃ τὸ ἀνθρώπιν τε σαράντα διὰ παντὸς ὑπὸ φύσεως ἀναγκαίας, οὔ δὲ κρατῇ, ἀρχεῖν, “For we believe it of the gods, and know it of men, that by an absolute law of nature they rule wherever they have power” (5.105). With such justifications, neither the Athenians nor Eteocles argue for the rightness of their actions, but instead point to the reality of their power and the consequential irrelevance of justice.\(^72\)

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69. Or, more negatively, as “a child of sophistic amoralism” (Mastronarde 1986, 205).

70. For an overview of this topic, see Kerferd (1981, 111–30).

71. Diggle, following Kirchoff, athetizes this line.

72. See MacLeod (1974, 399) and Brunt (1969, 200). Hornblower (2008, 219) likens these sentiments to the fable of the Hawk and Nightingale at Op. 202–11, but Hesiod’s tale is explicitly used to justify the underlying δόξῃ of Zeus.
Jocasta’s lengthy reply is at once traditional and modern. The core of her appeal to Eteocles is the “standard” condemnation of tyranny, predicated on a traditional reference to the authority granted by age. She attacks tyranny as unjust (ὅδεος, l. 532; δοξή, l. 548; ὀδόκων, l. 549), and strikes a Solonian chord in warning of the danger it visits upon whole communities (πολλοὺς δ’ ἐς οἴκους καὶ πόλεις εὐδαίμονας / ἐσῆλθε καξέξηδ’ ἐπ’ ἀλέθρῳ τῶν χρωμένων, ll. 533–34). At l. 560, Jocasta reiterates this point, posing her own stark question: πότερα τυραννεῦν ἢ πόλιν σώσα αθέλεις, “Do you want to rule, or to save the city?” and disdains fleeting material wealth (πολλ’ ἔχων, l. 552; τὰ χρήματ’, l. 555; ὁ πλούτος, l. 566). Intertwined with these “orthodox and traditional” (Mastronarde 1986, 205) arguments, however, are a number of strikingly modern topoi. Jocasta demonstrates that she too can answer sophism with sophism.

She begins by renaming Τύραννος:

535 ἐφ’ ἦ σὺ μάνη.

Why, my son, do you long for Ambition, that worst of divinities? Do not! She is an unjust goddess; in many homes, many cities, she has come and gone after the destruction of those who trucked with her—she whom you lust after. (ll. 531–35)

This renaming marks out one of the salient concepts behind tyranny—the never-ending desire for more—in a contemporary turn of phrase; it was in the later fifth century that φιλότιμος acquired a pejorative meaning, shifting from a reverential “enjoying honor” as at Aesch. Eum. 1032 to “grasping at” or “eager for honor” (205n22). Romilly, considering Thucydides’ repeated use of the term to denote a cause of civic

73. Cf. Solon fr. 4W.
ruin, sees φιλοτιμία as having been “in the air” (1965, 36) in the last decade of the Peloponnesian War. This particular name, in other words, would have a familiar—and ominous—ring. Jocasta then counters Eteocles’ deification of Τύραννας with a personification of her own:

535 κεῖνο χάλλιον, τέχνον, Ίσότητα τιμάν, ἢ φίλους ἀεὶ φίλοις πόλεις τε πόλει τιμᾶν τε συμμάχοις συνδεῖ: τὸ γὰρ ἱσον νόμιμον ἀνθρώποις ἐρυ, τῷ πλέον δ᾽ ἀεὶ πολέμον καθίσταται

540 τοῦλασσον ἐγκράτεις θ᾽ ἡμέρας κατάρχεται.

It is better, child,
to honor Equity, who always unites friend with friend,
city with city, ally with ally; for equality is by nature lawful among men, but the lesser is always hostile to the greater, and brings about the day of hatred.

As the opposite of Φιλοτιμία, Ίσότης embodies the metaphorical link between justice and political harmony (as with Solonian ἱσονομία). Jocasta goes on to argue that Equity is a universal principle, demonstrating its existence in the cosmic realm, in the alternation of day and night and in the cycle of the seasons, as well as the human realm, with the creation of weights and measures (ll. 541–45). I read this as, in part, a reply to Eteocles’ two adunata at ll. 504–5: however far Eteocles may go in pursuit of Τύραννας, there will he find Ίσότης.

74. See further Romilly (1965, 36–41). For examples of the term’s use, see Thuc. 2.65.7 and 8.89.3. In the detailed account of the Corcyran stasis, he identifies the cause: πάντων δ᾽ υπότων ἄρχη ἢ διὰ πλεονεξίαν καὶ φιλοτιμίαν (3.82.8).

75. The language with which Jocasta discusses Equity’s involvement with human affairs is suggestive: καὶ γὰρ μέτρον ἀνθρώπου καὶ μέρη σταθμῶν / Ίσότης ἔταξε καρδιῶν διάφορα (ll. 541–42). To say that she “laid down” weights and measures and “determined” numbers specifically “for humanity” casts her in a Promethean light, portraying her as both benefactor and universal law.

76. Many commentators (Mastronarde 1986, 202; 1994, 303–5; Craik 1988, 198; Amiech 2004, 360) have observed the “philosophical” tendencies of these lines. Central to this characterization is the supposition of a universe arranged perfectly in order, a κόσμος. This idea is put forward by the

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Responding to Eteocles' division of ὄνομα and ἔργον, Jocasta poses her son a series of rhetorical questions. In doing so, she employs his own methodology against him:

550 τί τὴν τυραννίδ’, ἀδικίαν εὐδαίμονα,
tιμᾷ ὑπέρφευ καὶ μέγ’ ἡγήσαι τόδε·
περιβλέπεσθαι τίμιον· κενὸν μὲν οὖν.
ἡ πολλ’ ἔχων ἐν δόμαισι
βούλης· τί δ’ ἔστι τὸ πλέον· ὄνομι ἔχει μόνον·
ἔπει τά γ’ ἀρκοῦνθ’ ἰκανὰ τοῖς γε σώφροσιν.

Why excessively honor tyranny, an unjust prosperity, and hold it in high esteem? Is it a great honor to be admired? No, it’s empty. Or do you want to toil by piling up wealth at home? Is that an advantage? In name only: wise men are satisfied by what is sufficient. (ll. 549–54)

These lines serve as a stinging refutation of Eteocles’ grandiloquent claims: by a nifty bit of self-elenchos, Jocasta proves that the power Eteocles so desperately seeks to retain is as hollow as he argued τὸ κάλον was. She shows, with a sophistic paradox, that τὸ πλέον is less than τὸ ἐλάσσον. But even here, in a portion of the rhesis in a sophistic mode, traditional elements appear; Jocasta’s condemnation of wealth and the troubles it brings echoes Creon’s comments at Soph. OT 584–89. Jocasta’s cogent, thoughtful argument, of course, fails to persuade Eteocles to abandon his grasping ways. Praising harmony and the pleasures of sufficiency seems perhaps the wrong argument to make to a bloody-minded usurper; these lines, in fact, are

Pre-Socratics, and Amiech (2004, 360) notes the strong resemblance between Jocasta’s account of the role of Ἰσότης here and the picture of a universe ordered by Ἰσότης ἤ γεωμετρική, “geometric equality” that Socrates describes to Callicles at Gorg. 507e–508a.

77. Adriaan Rademaker (2005, 148), discussing the similarities between Jocasta’s and Creon’s arguments, notes that both appeal to the standard of being σώφρον. Rademaker takes this as a political statement, reading the term as referring to the “prudential σώφροσύνη of the democratic citizen” (137).
“formulated in a way that seems to draw the public’s attention to this inefficacy” (Rademaker 2005, 149). The agon will end, like so many of those in the tragedies of Euripides, without agreement. This scene shows the ways in which Euripides modifies and broadens the traditional discourse about tyranny, emphasizing less the political regime of tyranny and more the mental disposition that tyranny enables, thus pointing the way toward the “interiorization” (Edmunds 2002, 69) of tyranny and, eventually, Platonic discussions of πλεονεξία.

The Tyrant Mob

A number of words in fifth-century Greek discourse referred to collective groups of non-elite—which is to say, non-wealthy—men.78 The moral valences of these terms, however, were often flexible, so that, depending on context, relatively anodyne words could be employed as epithets. The word δῆμος, for example, was a semantic battlefield: while it could denote, without judgment, the inhabitants of a location or area (e.g. Il. 3.50; Aesch. Pers. 732), it took on two antipodal political associations, either “the people” exercising their political power via democracy (e.g. Sol. 3.7; Eur. Supp. 406) or the impoverished “rabble,” the rapacious lower classes to whose whims democracies were thought, by some, to pander (e.g. Thgn. 847).

One markedly negative term, however, was ὄχλος. From a root denoting movement or agitation (Chantraine 1999, s.v. ὄχλος), the word was applied to any crowd or throng (e.g. Aesch. Pr. 827; Eur. IA 191), but most often to crowds of people, in which case the term was very often (but not universally) pejorative: “the mob.” Even in non-derogatory contexts, ὄχλος refers to the worse elements of “the people”, as at Gorg. Hel. 13, where a speech “written with skillful language but not meant

truthfully” is described enchanting the “large throng.” The word was common in anti-democratic discourse of the period.

In the following section, I will examine, in several of Euripides’ tragedies, the appearance of what I term the τύραννος ὁχλος. By this I mean the assumption of “tyrannical power” by a collective or a mob. This phenomenon appears in a number of different forms, but all display certain basic similarities: in Hecuba and Iphigenia at Aulis, the Greek army effectively dictates the actions of Greek generals who at least notionally are in charge of them. The language used in these situations is similar: subverted democratic terminology. The τύραννος ὁχλος operates like a collective, but wields the absolute power of the tyrant. In these tragedies the warnings of the Theban Messenger in the Suppliants are validated; in addition to tyrannical power, the τύραννος ὁχλος also displays the tyrant’s vast appetites and moral failings. The finality of their power, and of decisions they make, is comparable to that of a tyrant or a god, which demonstrates the inherent character of Euripides’ moral universe.

Hecuba

The Hecuba presents a scenario that mirrors, with bleak irony, a famous episode in the epic cycle. At the opening of the play, the audience is informed by the ghost of Polydorus, Hecuba’s son of whose death she is still unaware, that the Greek army has been prevented from returning home by a supernatural agent: the ghost of Achilles. The spirit demands that a sacrifice be offered at his tomb so that it not remain ἀγέραστος. The tragedy thus presents a situation correlative to the army’s departure from Greece, when the winds were similarly stilled by a higher power, Artemis, who

79. ἐς λόγος πολὺν ὄχλον ἔτερψε καὶ ἔπεσε τέχνη γραφεῖς
81. The phenomenon is visible also in Orestes, which I do not discuss here, in the messenger’s report of the chaotic assembly vote on Orestes’ guilt.
also demanded a human sacrifice. The episode is, of course, depicted in Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, which I discuss below.

Similarly, the scenario of Achilles hindering the Greek army for want of a *γέφυρα* in the form of a female captive sharply recalls the opening of the *Iliad*, and the event that drives the epic’s plot.\(^8^2\) This signals the particular importance of the *Iliad* as an intertextual reference for the tragedy. As Justina Gregory (1991, 87) observes, the core traits of the Homeric heroes in the tragedy are reprised: “once more Achilles shows himself wrathful and exigent, Agamemnon an indecisive womanizer, Odysseus crafty and manipulative.” But these traits are twisted to accommodate the dictates of the plot: “the Homeric poems and especially the heroism of the *Iliad* are our constant points of reference as we see Achilles’ singleness of purpose transmuted into the inexorability of a bloodthirsty ghost and Odysseus’ resilient adaptability turned into treacherous shiftiness and lying” (Segal 1990, 304–5).

Also as in the *IA*, the Greek army is an significant, although unseen, character. Portrayed as an unruly ὀχλος that must be appeased, it drives the action in both tragedies. In the *Hecuba*, it is because of the needs of the army that Polyxena is slaughtered, and it is out of fear of the army that both Odysseus and Agamemnon refuse to aid the Trojan queen. It exerts a constant pressure on every character. As an ὀχλος, the army also serves as an ersatz democratic body, and its actions are often discussed in technical democratic language. This is the primary anti-democratic metaphor in the tragedy: the easily agitated, easily swayed corps of soldiers is like the easily agitated, easily swayed citizens of a city, neither of whom (the logic dictates) should be given that much political authority. This theme is established in the *parados*, when the chorus of captive Trojan women enter and recount the army’s

\(^{82}\) Katherine Callen King (1985, 51–52) sees Euripides’ presentation of Achilles as a “grim parody” of the hero’s actions and demeanor in the first book of the epic. See also O’Connor-Visser (1987, 50–72) and Anderson (1997, 59–61).
disagreement over how to proceed (ll. 93–153). Significantly, the question of sacrifice is introduced with probouleutic terminology:

\[
\text{δόξα δ' ἐχώρει διχ' ἀν' Ἑλλ' ἑνων}
\text{στρατόν αἰχμητήν, τοῖς μὲν διδόναι}
\text{τύμβῳ σφάγιον, τοῖς δ' οὖχι δοκοῦν.}
\]

Opinion ran in two directions among the warrior-army of the Greeks, those to whom it seemed best to offer a sacrifice at the tomb, and those to whom it did not. (ll. 117–19)

The verb δοκοῦν can be read in its technical sense: in Athenian legal language it indicates the resolution of a deliberative body, as in the English formula “be it resolved.” The verb thus analogizes the Homeric-era army with the contemporary Athenian ἐκκλησία, comparing their discussion to deliberation over an “open probouleuma,” a decree passed by the council under consideration by the assembly that permitted a true choice between alternatives rather than simply an opportunity to endorse what the council had already decided upon (P. J. Rhodes 1972, 58).

This analogy is soon reinforced by the chorus’ description of two speakers, the twin kings of Athens Demophon and Acamas, as ῥήτορες (l. 124), a term which by the 420s had become “a popular word for politicians” (Connor 1971, 116–17).\(^{83}\)

Agamemnon, as in the Homeric tradition torn between “public and private obligations” (Gregory 1999, 62–63), argues against the sacrifice of Cassandra, but is opposed by the aforementioned speakers, who accuse the general of valuing “Cassandra’s bed above Achilles’ spear” (ll. 127–29).\(^{84}\)

The outcome of the debate is marked by further blending of the Homeric military setting with contemporary political terms and ideas:

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83. See also Finley (1974, 13). Huart (1973, 102–3) would add to this their use of γνώμη, which he reads as a play on the word’s technical sense, “rider appended to a resolution.”

84. τὰ δὲ Κασάνδρας / λέξτρ’ οὐκ ἐφάτην τῆς Ἀχιλείας / πρόσθεν θήρεν ποτὲ λόγχης.
The fervor of the contending speeches was nearly equal, until the clever-minded honey-tongued, crowd-charming shark the son of Laertes persuaded the army not to spurn the Best of the Danaans for the sake of the sacrifice of a lowly girl nor let any of the dead standing by Persephone say that the Danaans left the Trojan plains ungrateful to the Danaans who died for Greece.

Odysseus, renowned for his persuasive wiliness, is described as ποικιλόφρων, an adjective that strongly resembles the Homeric ποικίλομήτης (II. 11.482). Such similarity of language, however, belies the disjunction between the Homeric world and the dark reality of this tragedy: what was clever persuasiveness in epic here becomes rank demagoguery.85 This effect is emphasized by Odysseus’ use of the phrase ἄριστον Δανάων to describe Achilles, a variation on one of the warrior’s central Iliadic epithets, ἄριστον Ἀχιλλής.86 It is an ironically appropriate description: Gregory

85. This is not to say that this cynical characterization has absolutely no basis in epic; Mossman (1995, 38) finds precedents for the “cold and logic-chopping” Euripidean Odysseus at II. 4.339 and 10.382ff. Furthermore, Buxton (1982, 172) observes similarities between this Odysseus and the one described by the chorus hostile to him at Soph. Aj. 148ff., and that this Odysseus “holds the same instrumental view of morality” as the one in the Philoctetes. His presence as a “sinister, malign influence” in the Trojan Women and IA is discussed by Stanford (1963, 102ff.). For an overview of the tradition of Odysseus as a morally ambivalent πανούργος, see Montiglio (2011, 38ff.).

86. On this phrase and its significance, see Nagy (1999, 26–41).
(1999, 64) observes that its occurrence in the Iliad coincides with instances related to the grievances that prompted Achilles to withdraw from fighting; this discussion is a debate over whether to deprive the hero of yet another γέρας.

The political character of the scene—and the altered nature of this Odysseus—is again confirmed by the adjective δημοχαριστής. The thought of a persuasive speaker “charming the people” ties directly into the criticisms expressed by the Theban herald in the Suppliant Women. The audience is able to see these changes in action when, coming in person to deliver the news about the impending sacrifice of Polyxena, Odysseus appears on stage. Judith Mossman aptly describes his demeanor in this scene as that of “a wily politician now playing to a smaller audience than the one he has just beguiled” (Mossman 1995, 103):

γύναι, δοκῶ μέν σ’ εἰδέναι γνώμην στρατοῦ ψηφών τε τὴν κρανθείσαν ἄλλ’ ὁμώς χράσω.

Εὐδοξ’ Ἀχαιῶν παῖδα σὴν Πολυξένην σφάζαι πρὸς όρθὸν χόμ’ Ἀχιλλείου τάφου.

It is resolved by the Achaeans to sacrifice your daughter, Polyxena, at the standing mound of dirt that is Achilles’ grave, and that I be the attendant and escort of the girl to the tomb, and the son of Achilles is appointed presider and priest of the sacrifice.

The technical, formulaic language used by the chorus earlier is echoed by Odysseus, as though he were reporting the minutes of an assembly meeting.88 His language, with

87. Gregory (1999, 63) suggests that the word connotes the ability that Thucydides ascribes to Pericles in contrast to his successors at 2.65.8–10: to actively lead the people as compared to succumbing to their whims.

one passive and one impersonal verb, portrays the decision as communal, effectively
without an author. The formal component of his arrival, however, as the πομπο` υς κα`ι
κομιστίας, is quickly undercut by his next remarks, urging Hecuba not to resist lest
he drag Polyxena away by force (ll. 225–26). At this point, the mask of procedure
falls off, and Odysseus cautions Hecuba: γίγνοσκε δ᾿ ἀλήθην καί παρουσίαν κακῶν /
tῶν σῶν σοφὸν τοι κὰν κακοῖς ἂ δεῖ φρονεῖν, “Be aware of your own strength, and the
presence of your troubles. It is wise, even in adversity, to be disposed as you must” (l.
228–29).

In the stichomythia that follows (ll. 229–50), Hecuba reminds Odysseus of the
debt he owes to her: during the war, he snuck into Troy in disguise, and was secretly
brought before her by Helen. After he begged her for his life, Hecuba let him go.
Reminding him of this charitable deed, the queen launches into a rhesis that chastises
Odysseus for his ingratitude and, as she supplicates him in turn, begs that Polyxena
be spared.89 It would seem that Hecuba intuits Odysseus’ role in the army’s decision,
for in the middle of her rhesis she reprises the demagogic characterization that
appeared in the parodos:

255 ἀγάπασαν ὑμῶν σπέρμα, ὥσις δημηγόρους
ζηλοῦτε τίμας· μηδὲ γεγυνώσκοισθε μοι,
οἳ τοὺς φίλους βλάπτοντες οὐ φροντίζετε,
insula πολλοίς πρὸς χάριν λέγητε τί.
ἀτὰρ τί δή σήμισμα τοῦθ᾽ ἤγομενοι
ἐς τὴνδε παῖδα ψήφον ὄρισαν φόνου·

An ungrateful race, you demagogues
striving for honors! Would that you were unknown
to me, you who harm your friends without a second thought

89. Lloyd (1992, 8–9) does not classify this passage (ll. 234–437) as an agon, due to the absence
of angry dialogue after the two speeches, and that neither character subsequently leaves the stage.
This in spite of the the fact that the scene shares characteristics with other Euripidean agones, e.g.
an abusive opening (Lloyd 1992, 26) and a section of hypophora (29–30). Duchemin (1968, 74–75),
however, does treat the scene as an agon.
if it wins the favor of the many!
But what clever trick did they call it
when they cast their murderous vote against my daughter?
(254–59)

These lines, headed by a pun on Odysseus’ previous description as δημοχαριστής,90 are the entirety of Hecuba’s overtly “political” language in this scene.91 She proceeds to berate Odysseus for subordinating her demands—she who spared his life!—to those of a dead man. With “Shylockian subtlety” (Buxton 1982, 175), Odysseus replies that his debt is owed to Hecuba, not Polyxena (ll. 301–2). To justify this refusal, he points to the army: ἵ δ’ εἶπον εἰς ἱπον ε᾿αντα λέον κα ᾿ρνήσεσα, “I will not retract what I said before the entire army” (l. 303). This formulation of events portrays Polyxena’s death as the Greeks’ obligation and duty: to do otherwise would force the soldiers to slight Achilles, and Odysseus would be putting his honor—or his life—at risk to now advocate against it. He appeals to an uncontroversially broad principle, that all too often brave men go unhonored by their cities, thereby justifying the conclusion that Polyxena must die.

The τύραννος ὀχλος next appears in Talthybius’ account of Polyxena’s death (ll. 518–82), where it serves as an active—and potentially unruly—audience to the sacrifice. Narrating the scene just before the beginning of the ritual, he describes the army as an ὀχλος: παρῄν μέν ὀχλος τᾶς Αχαιοῦ στρατοῦ / πλῆρησ πρὸ τοῦμβου σής κόρης ἐπὶ σφαγῆς, “The whole mob of the Achaeans was nearby; / out in force at the tomb for the sacrifice of your daughter” (ll. 521–22). That the army is completely and entirely present is underscored by Euripides’ pleonastic use of both πᾶς on l. 521

90. Gregory (1999, 76) notes the ironic echo of Odysseus’ warning to the army at l. 139, that not honoring Achilles with the sacrifice of Polyxena would create the rumor among the dead that the Greeks were ἀχάριστοι.

91. However, Hecuba’s request that Odysseus go speak to the army again to convince them to spare Polyxena’s life “appears to be modeled on the Athenian provision for bringing a decision of the assembly to a vote for a second time, i.e. ἀναψηφήσαν” (81).
and πλήρης placed prominently at the start of the following line.\textsuperscript{92}

Talthybius, notably, plays an active part in his own messenger-speech.\textsuperscript{93} Neoptolemus gestures for him to call for silence, and the messenger does so, repeating his words in direct speech (ll. 529–33). This quotation gives the effect of emphasizing “the verbal efforts to impose silence [rather than] the objective presence of a silent crowd” (Montiglio 2000, 14), suggesting it took particular effort to quiet the unruly mob. Talthybius’ \textit{oratio recta} is capped with the statement: νὴν ημον δ’ ἐστησ’ ὀχλον, “I settled the mob into calm” (533). This phrase, using νὴν ημον, “windless” metaphorically, reprises the Homeric image of an unruly mob as an agitated ocean.\textsuperscript{94} It is unclear for how long the army keeps silent, for the messenger reports that “the entire army prayed with him” (542).\textsuperscript{95}

The army makes two more appearances in the speech’s narrative. At l. 553, it roars its approval (ἐπερρόθησαν) after Polyxena demands to remain untouched, the verb once again associating the army with chaotic noise (albeit, in this instance, positive noise). Then, after narrating her death, Talthybius describes the variety of tasks that the Argive forces immediately launch into in preparation for Polyxena’s funeral pyre (ll. 571–80). They were so moved by the sacrifice, he reports, that soldiers who seemed to be slacking off were even berated by their colleagues for failing to show proper respect to she who was εὐχαρίσιον / ψυχή τ’ ἀριστη ὤν, “so courageous

\textsuperscript{92}The interpretation of Matthiessen (2010, 321), that the full army is present out of respect for both Achilles and Polyxena, appears to be an assumption on his part.

\textsuperscript{93}While notable, it is not unprecedented in Euripidean messenger-speeches. See De Jong (1991, 9–13), who observes that ll. 529–30 would have been sufficient to communicate the action; the \textit{oratio recta} of ll. 532–33, then, “takes advantage of his position as narrator” insofar as he “pays lavish attention to his own role” (5n10) in the events. While I do not disagree with her interpretation, I find it strange that so sympathetic a narrator as Talthybius (cf. ll. 489–500, 518–20) would use the occasion for a bit of self-aggrandizement.

\textsuperscript{94}See the discussion of this image at p. 169.

\textsuperscript{95}πᾶς δ’ ἐπηρίζειστα στρατός. On the significance of the auditory nature of ancient Greek prayer and on the ritual silence that was consequently required, see Montiglio (2000, 9–17).
and excellent in her soul” (ll. 579–80). While I would not minimize the pathos that watching Polyxena’s sacrifice would have aroused, the vehemence with which the army subsequently performs its assigned tasks indicates its suggestibility. This validates one of the criticisms of the ὄχλος, its volatility: it undergoes wild shifts in emotion without any restraint.

The status of the Greek army as an ὄχλος is referred to again in the same scene. Before he departs, Hecuba asks Talthybius to perform a service:

σὺ δ’ ἐλθὲ καὶ σήμην Ἀργείως τάδε,
μὴ υἱγγάνειν μοι μηδὲν’, ἀλλ’ εἴργειν ὄχλον,
tῆς παιδός. ἐν τοι μυρίῳ στρατεύματι
ἄκαλλα λαθεὶς ὄχλος καυτική τ’ ἀναφία
κρείσσων πυρὸς, κακὸς δ’ ὁ μὴ τι δρέων κακὸν

Go and deliver this message to the Argives,
that no one is to touch my daughter, but keep the mob away from her body. In an immense host
the mob is unrestrained and the wild behavior of sailors
is more powerful than fire: anyone not doing evil is thought evil.

In these lines, Hecuba recognizes, and disdains, the chaotic nature of the army.96

The army’s influence is seen once again in the third episode, in the exchange between her and Agamemnon (ll. 726–904). This scene is in many respects a mirroring of her earlier debate with Odysseus. Both scenes are conversations with a severely lop-sided power dynamic, in which Hecuba attempts, unsuccessfully, to persuade one of her captors to grant a request. In both scenes, Hecuba’s claim is fundamentally just: Odysseus does indeed owe Hecuba his life, and Polymestor’s calculated murder of Polydorus is obviously a violation of established law. Her requests are also

96. Ll. 606–8 were considered interpolated by Page, a judgment with which Mossman (1995) concurs: The lines “are inappropriately bombastic in tone, and jar with the dignity of the rest of the speech... They totally ignore Talthybius’ reporting of the Greek reaction to Polyxena’s death” (246). However, both Diggle and Kovacs retain them.
symmetrical: she begs Odysseus to spare her daughter’s life, with Polyxena present on stage, whereas she begs Agamemnon, standing over the corpse of Polydorus, to aid her in avenging the murder of her son. The gulf between these two requests indicates how much the Trojan queen has lost in the interim.

After a stichomythia in which the facts of Polydorus’ murder is established (ll. 726–85), Hecuba falls to her knees in supplication. Halfway through the rhesis expressing her demand, however, Agamemnon turns his head away—much as Odysseus did at l. 342–44—to signal his refusal to consider her request. Despite a series of repeatedly desperate proposals, the king stands firm in his refusal. He then explains his reasons:

850  ἐγὼ σὲ καὶ σὸν παῖδα καὶ τύχας σέθεν, Ἐκάξης, δὲ οὕτων χειρά ὑ’ ἰκεσίαν ἐχω, καὶ βοῦλομαι θεῶν θ’ οὐνεκ’ ἀνόσουν ξένον καὶ τοῦ δικαίου τήνδε σοὶ δούναι δίκην, εἶ πως φανεῖ γ’ ὡστε σοὶ τ’ ἔχειν κολῶς,

855  στρατῷ τε μὴ δόξαι Κασάνδρας χάριν Ἡρῆας ἀνακτής τὸν δικαίου τὸν βουλεύσα φόνον. ἔστιν γὰρ ἤ ταφαμός ἐμπέπτωκέ μου· τὸν ἄνδρα τούτων φιλίων ἡγεῖται στρατός, τὸν καταλεῖντα δ’ ἐχθρόν· εἰ δὲ σοὶ φίλος

860  ὅδ’ ἐστί, χωρὶς τούτο κοῦ κοινὸν στρατῶ. πρὸς ταῦτα φρόντιζ’· ως θέλοντα μέν μ’ ἔχεις σοὶ ξυμπονῆσαι καὶ ταχ’ ἐσαι, βραδ’ δ’, Ἀχαῖοις εἰ διαβληθῆσομαι.

850  I pity you, and your son, and your misfortune—and your suppliant hand. For the sake of the gods and justice too I want your impious host to pay for what he did to you, if it were possible for matters to go well for you as well as

855  I not appear to the army to sentence the lord of Thrace to death for Cassandra’s sake. For there is one point that gives me pause: The army considers this man a friend

860  and your murdered son, an enemy. If your son were a friend of mine, that’s my business,
not the army’s. Think about that, since in me
you’ve got a willing partner to share your burdens
and quick to come to your aid, but if it means
being slandered by the Achaeans—then I’m slow. (ll. 850–64)

Once more it is the army that constrains the actions of otherwise powerful
characters; Agamemnon doesn’t dare to even seem to be acting on self-serving
motivations. Hecuba comments as much, when she reassures the king that he need
not share in the murder itself: ἐπεὶ δὲ ταρβεῖς τῷ τ’ ὑλῇ πλέον νέμεις, / ἐγὼ σε
θῆσο τοῦ’ ἐλεύθερον φόβον, “Since you are terrified, and defer too much to the
mob, / I’ll set you free from this fear” (ll. 868–69). She thus puts her finger on the
dynamic between the τῷραννος ὑλῇ and the king who purports to rule it. This
characterization of Agamemnon, however, is not created out of whole cloth. The
Agamemnon of the Hecuba is, like the Iliadic Agamemnon, torn between his own
private desires and his public role as commander-in-chief, and deeply concerned with
saving face in front of the army. Furthermore, as Gregory (1999, 146) observes,
Agamemnon here acts much as Aegeus in the Medea (ll. 719–30) and Demophon
in the Children of Heracles (ll. 410–23) do, as a king who regretfully explains that,
although willing, he is unable to provide help to another character, suggesting a
Euripidean pattern.

The word ὑλῇ makes one further appearance in the text of the tragedy, and
a telling one. Only a few lines after the passage quoted above, after Hecuba has
revealed that she has a plan for revenge that would require only Agamemnon’s
intentional inattention, the king asks who Hecuba has to aid her. She replies, στέγει
κεκεύτθασ’ αἰδὲ Τρῳδόν ὑλῇ, “This tent conceals a mob of Trojan women” (l. 880).
By transferring the term to her own retinue, Hecuba emphasizes their capacity for
wild violence, a capacity soon to be enacted on stage.
Iphigenia at Aulis

The same dynamic—the threat of a uncontrollable ὀχλος overwhelming its putative leaders—is visible in one of Euripides’ last tragedies, Iphigenia at Aulis (hereafter IA). The tragedy dramatizes the events surrounding Agamemnon’s decision to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, in order for the assembled Greek forces to be able to depart for Troy. Before the drama opens, Agamemnon has learned that he must sacrifice his daughter in order for the expedition to be able to depart. For that reason, he has summoned his wife, Clytemnestra, to come to Aulis with Iphigenia on the pretext that she is to be wed to Achilles. In the first scene, however, the general agonizes over his choice and dispatches a servant to intercept them and deliver a second message, telling them not to come. However, the message is intercepted by Menelaus, who comes to Agamemnon in a rage; without the sacrifice, the war to retrieve his wife cannot take place. If, following Conacher (1967, 249–50), the tragedy is regarded as three distinct “movements,” Agamemnon’s distress at his predicament, followed by Clytemnestra and Achilles’ realization of the full scope of Agamemnon’s plan, and finally Iphigenia’s sudden choice to sacrifice herself, the army comes to be the driving force behind each: it is the army’s desires that weigh on Agamemnon, the army that Achilles, Clytemnestra and Iphigenia find themselves suddenly set upon by, and it is the army who witness her death and, the tension thus resolved, continue onward to Troy.

At the beginning of the tragedy, Agamemnon is trapped by opposing forces, horrified at the prospect of killing his own daughter, but also explicitly constrained by his own army, who are eager to depart. Although unseen, they are a looming, ominous presence throughout the tragedy. When the messenger enters to tell Agamemnon that his wife and daughter have arrived, he describes the army’s reaction her arrival, depicting them as a voyeuristic, almost paparazzi-like throng:
I have come in advance so you’ll be prepared:
the army has learned—the swift rumor
flew through the ranks—that your daughter has arrived.
The entire corps is coming at full speed
so that they may see your daughter: the fortunate
are famous to all, and are looked upon by all mortal eyes. (ll. 424–29)

Although the messenger leaves on a joyful note (as Iphigenia has come to supposedly be wed), Agamemnon groans, the description of the army clearly having troubled him:

What an advantageous thing is lowly birth!
For it is easy for that sort to weep
and to say anything! But such things
are sorrows to the high born! Our prestige is the
controller of our lives, and we are slaves to the masses! (ll. 446–50)

This lament inverts not only the expected fortunes of the social classes—just above, on l. 428, Agamemnon and his family were called εὐδαίμονες, whom he now complains suffer ἄνολβα—but the distribution of rights as well: it is the poor who
have παρρησία, while the rich must hold their tongues. The word ὀχλος appears at l. 450, suggesting the contempt that Agamemnon holds for such people.  

Agamemnon lays out the facts of the situation plainly when Menelaus changes his position and shows pity for his brother’s plight. When Agamemnon states that he cannot send his family back, Menelaus asks τίς δ’ ἀναγχάσει σε τήν γε σήν κτανείν’, “Who’s going to force you to kill your own kin?” (l. 513), his brother replies: ἄπας Ἀχαίων σύλλογος στρατεύματος, “The entire Greek army, assembled here.” (l. 514). The political metaphor inherent in the τύραννος ὀχλος begins to come to the fore, introducing several now-familiar tropes to the drama. Explaining why he cannot rely on Odysseus to help him, Agamemnon says: ποικίλος ἀεὶ π’ εφυκε τὸ ὀχλοῦ μ’ εται, “He’s a clever one, always on the side of the mob” (l. 526). Menelaus agrees, chalking this up to φιλοτιμία, the same destructive ambition that Eteocles lauded.

As in the Hecuba, Odysseus is cast as a demagogue, a comparison that is made more explicit in Agamemnon’s account of his fears:


Don’t you expect that, arising in the midst of the army he’ll reveal the omens that Kalchas interpreted, how I promised to make a sacrifice to Artemis and reneged? Once he has the Greek army in his pocket, won’t he order them to kill you and me and to slaughter my girl? (ll. 528–33)

97. The word is also used to pun on ὀγκος.

98. Lloyd (1992, 15–16) notes that Menelaus’ change of heart represents the single instance of a Euripidean agon resulting in one of the interlocutors being convinced.

99. See, however, Conacher (1967, 256), who reads Agamemnon’s assignation of blame as a cop-out.
Agamemnon paints a picture of Odysseus as a demagogue in all but name. He rises to speak, as though addressing the Assembly from the βῆμα, and his rhetoric is so persuasive that he συναρπάζειν, literally “grabs and runs off with” his listeners. It is significant that the ode sung by the chorus (ll. 543–89) immediately after this scene is in praise of moderation, which, although the song is explicitly about immoderation in love and the dangers love has wrought, I see as also commenting obliquely on the verbal picture Agamemnon has just recently painted, the famed ability of demagogic speaks to drive his listeners to emotional extremes (as in Thucydides’ description of Pericles at 2.65).

Irrational love is further linked with the volatile state of the army, when Agamemnon gives a speech in a feeble attempt to absolve himself of blame for his daughter’s impending death. One of the factors forcing his hand, he observes, is the massed Greek army, eager to head off to Troy. Agamemnon says of them: μέμηνε δ’ Ἀφροδίτῃ τις Ἑλλήνων στρατῷ / πλεῖν ὡς τάχιστα βαρβάρων ἐπὶ χθόνα... “A lust rages through the Greek army / to sail off to foreign soil as quickly as possible...” (ll. 1264–65). This desire erupts into violence by tragedy’s end, when Achilles is shouted down and pelted with rocks for attempting to defend Iphigenia. Odysseus is once again portrayed as the inciter of mob violence. The subtlety of his rhetorical acumen is suggested by an exchange between Clytemnestra and Achilles. When the queen learns that Odysseus will be at the head of the mob coming to drag Iphigenia off, she asks: ἵδια πράσσων, ἦ στρατοῦ ταχθεῖς ὁπο: “Will he be doing so of his own accord, or appointed by the army?” to which Achilles responds: αἵρεθεῖς ἔχων “He’ll been chosen—but willing” (ll. 1362–63).

One more comparison can be made between the army in the IA and the restive Athenian δήμος: Foley (1985, 66) observes that Calchas’ prophecy was contingent:

Κύλχος δ’ ὁ μάντις ἀπορία κεχρημένος
At a loss, when we consulted him, the prophet Calchas proclaimed that should we sacrifice my own daughter Iphigenia to Artemis who dwells in this land, we would sail and raze the Phrygians, but if we didn’t sacrifice her, these things would not happen. (ll. 89–94)

Agamemnon does not contend that Iphigenia must have been sacrificed, but only that if she should be killed, then the expedition could carry on. This is the greatest irony of the entire tragedy—that the event on which the plot is predicated is needless. The scene of her sacrifice as described by the messenger, the text of which is partially corrupt, is that of a huge crowd first awed, then dazzled and finally jubilant as they head off to war, is remarkably similar to Thucydides’ account of the departure of the fleet at the triumphal launch of the Sicilian expedition (6.30–32). That military endeavor, like Iphigenia’s death, was needless, brought about by the manipulation of mass sentiment. The political overtones of the events of the IA are underscored by, with the exception of Calchas’ prophecy, the absence of any divine intervention (Foley 1985, 93).

Better than any other extant tragedy, the IA demonstrates the fearsome uncontrollableness of the τύραννος ὁχλος. Exerting the pressure of necessity on the characters of the tragedy, the τύραννος ὁχλος has taken the place of the traditional τύραννος figure, while sharing some of its essential qualities. Euripides’ tragedies present a view of tyranny that has been reduced to its essential characteristics, in which the pursuit and exercise of great power has become its primary signifier. The concept of excess, which had earlier taken physical form in manifestations of wealth or opulence,
has been turned inward, so that “tyranny” becomes as much a psychological state as a set of political signifiers. In this way, Euripides looks ahead to fourth-century discussions of tyranny, such as Plato’s, that center on the “tyrannical soul.”
Regarded diachronically over the course of the fifth century, the tyrant as an ideological construct retains a negative valence even as it finds an increasingly varied modality of expression. This variation is most visible in its depiction in Athenian tragedy, in which the political and moral associations bound up with the tyrant are instantiated. Each tragedian presents a different view of tyranny, the progression of which reflects the development of Athenian political power during that same century.

The tragedies of Aeschylus originate in the lived experience of tyranny, a quality discernible both in how the tyrant-figure is ideologically framed and physically depicted in his work. Ideologically, his tyrants are exemplars of the “Athenian model” of tyranny: more than anything else, they are creatures of excess, which invites their own undoing. This is especially true in the *Persians*, in which “excessiveness” is perhaps Xerxes’ defining trait, whether in respect to the unimaginable wealth of his kingdom, his intention to yoke the Hellespont and subdue Greece, his downfall or, finally, his grief. The particularly “Athenian” conception of Xerxes as a tyrant is confirmed by the ghost of Dareios, who paraphrases Solon to illustrate the way in which the king’s hubristic folly has brought about the ruin of him and his people. Zeus
of the *PV* is less explicitly marked with excessiveness, but his ruthless determination to achieve absolute power (despite his divine status) is perhaps the greatest goal possible, a supremacy that, we know from Prometheus, would contain the seeds of his own undoing.

The physical depiction of the two tyrants, too, conjures the atmosphere of life under real-life tyrannical regimes, albeit from opposite ends of the power dynamic. The Susan court of the *Persians* is the scene of lavish displays of foreign pomp, the sort of slavish obeisance that the Greeks generally believed to be standard practice before the Great King. The Queen, the chorus and Dareios all speak about Xerxes in his capacity as ruler, and the political fallout from his defeat at Salamis is one of the explicit points of concern voiced by the chorus. In the *PV*, Zeus is portrayed very much as a human tyrant who happens to possess divine power, a violent and paranoid ruler who tortures and exiles his opponents. The way in which Prometheus describes the Titanomachy is strongly suggestive of incidents of real-life *stasis*, from the way in which the tyrannical coup takes place to the effects that are brought to bear on the larger society. The depiction of both Xerxes and Zeus hearken back to facets of the historical phenomenon—and the personal experience—of tyranny.

The example of the *Persians* is especially relevant in this context; these depictions of tyrants were staged before an Athens that had only recently achieved significant prominence in the wake of the defeat of the Persians. The city’s position as hegemon of the Delian League was, from the first, based on the need to defend the Greek world from another attack by their eastern neighbors, a role that the League played effectively for some time (Raaflaub 2004, 120).¹ The tensions between Athens and other *poleis* were only just bubbling to the surface,² and the city benefitted from the

¹ Meiggs (1972, 86) views the Athenian subjugation of Thasos some ten years after the first production of the *Persians* (465–63) as the city’s first “unambiguous sign of tyranny.”

² E.g. Thucydides’ account of the apprehensions of the Spartans and others at Athens rebuilding
good governance under the Areopagus Council, which at that time was powerful on account of its steady, competent leadership during the final stage of the Persian War (*Ath. Pol.* 23).

The two Aeschylean tyrants are, then, unequivocally negative figures that embody the worst aspects of tyranny and of democracy’s absence: they are thus figures of civic self-definition. Sophocles, however, depicts two rulers, Oedipus and Creon, whose tyranny is problematized. Unlike Xerxes or Zeus, they initially have good intentions for their subjects, and are not gripped by *libido dominandi*. As their rule is challenged, however, they feel the need to take stronger measures to achieve their goals, and slowly but steadily take on the negative traits of the tyrant. It is difficult to say at what moment they definitively assume the wholly negative mantle of tyranny: in their steady shift from the “Panhellenic” to “Athenian” models of tyranny, they personify the uncertainty of the boundary separating the two paradigms.

One conclusion that can be taken away from the *OT* and the *Antigone*, however, is that the exercise of power—even tyrannical power—is not *ipso facto* a bad thing. It may skirt ἴβρις and have a tendency to corrupt, but benign tyranny is nevertheless possible. The dates of these two tragedies have not been securely identified, but performances not long before 431, the first outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, can be reasonably postulated. Athens at that time was defending its hegemony, which its enemies (and perhaps Athens itself) viewed as tyranny. Thucydides portrays a polis that justifies any action to maintain its supremacy with a logic not unlike that of Creon.

Euripides further complicates the portrayal of tyrannical power. In his tragedies, tyranny is conceptualized in a variety of forms: as a political system in opposition to democracy in the *Suppliant Women*, as a cast of mind in the *Phoenician Women*, its walls (1.89–93).
and, in the *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*, as a power dynamic. In the *Phoenician Women*, however, even as Theseus makes a robust defense of democracy, the Theban herald attacks it with rhetoric that would prove long-lived by inverting critiques of tyranny to apply them to democracy. The primary point of his argument is to cast the δῆμος as nothing more than a tyrant by another name, but one that must act without knowledge, driven solely by fear and desire.

This dynamic of the τύραννος ὅχλος plays out in both the *Hecuba* and the *IA*, in which the Greek army is explicitly analogized to a democratic citizen body. In these tragedies, this collective body inflicts the same sort of violence on individuals as would a tyrant. These instances of a group acting irrationally and being persuaded by demagogic speakers enacts the criticisms of democracy from the *Suppliant Women*. This “tyrannical” view of the δῆμος parallels Sophocles’ treatment of tyranny, insofar as it problematizes democracy domestically in contrast to internationally.

This picture of a tyrannical δῆμος corresponds to Thucydides’ picture of the Athenian people: emotionally volatile, prone to suspicion, in need of moderation, which is something that only Pericles was able to provide. The virtues of democracy, mass participation and equality of speech, are shown to be inextricably linked to corresponding vices, the madness of the crowd and a lack of restraint, which enable a collective able to tyrannize as much as any individual despot. The foundational values of Athenian democracy are thereby shown to embody their own negations, and, increasingly, the exercise of power in itself is enough to turn a person—or a group—into a tyrant. The tyrant thus stands as a polysemous symbol, representing all that Athenian democracy opposed as well as the logical end result of the qualities it valued, the ideological Other that can be found at the very heart of Athenian power. Tragedy, as the pre-eminent civic art form, was in a unique position to comment upon this connection, and tyranny was the ideological matrix through which it did so.
Bibliography


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