SHORTER NOTES

AESCHYLUS' *SUPPLICES* 11–12: DANAUS AS *ΠΕΣΣΟΝΟΜΩΝ**

In the parodos of Aeschylus' *Supplices*, the chorus enters the theatre accompanied by a lone male figure.[1] After describing themselves as refugees from Egypt, they identify their companion thus:

> Δαναὸς δὲ πατὴρ καὶ βούλαρχος
> καὶ στασίαρχος τάδε πεσσονομῶν
> κύδιστ' ἀχέων ἐπέκρανεν
> φεύγειν ἀνέδην διὰ κῦμ' ἅλιον,
> κέλσαι δ' Ἄργους γαῖαν...   (11–15)

> Danaus, our father and councillor
> and leader, making these moves
> ordained it as the most honourable of evils
> for us to flee pell-mell through the sea's wave
> and reach the land of Argos...[2]

Three unusual terms describe their father, with each making its earliest attested appearance in the present passage: βούλαρχος, στασίαρχος and πεσσονομῶν. The first and second, translated here by LSJ as 'adviser of a plan' and 'chief of a band or company', relate directly to the play's background.[3] Danaus has literally orchestrated[4] his family's flight to Argos. The participle πεσσονομῶν comments on how he has done so.[5] The verb from which it is formed appears in only one other place in Greek literature,[6] and has the primary meaning of 'set the πεσσοί in order for playing; play at πεσσοί'.[7] In short, Danaus is like someone playing a board game, and

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[1] O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1977), 193–4.

[2] All translations are my own. On the rendering of κύδιστ' ἀχέων see H. Friis Johansen and E. Whittle, *Aeschylus The Suppliants* (Copenhagen, 1980), 2.18.

[3] LSJ s.v.

[4] On the significance of Danaus as στασίαρχος see below.

[5] It is perhaps fitting that, like board games themselves, Danaus' family was once known in Greece and then vanished, only to be reintroduced from Egypt after a hiatus. See E. Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley, 1979), 77–80.

[6] Crates Com. 7.

[7] LSJ s.v.

his ability to outwit his opponent under difficult circumstances is a testament to his strategic vision and tactical abilities.[8]

Yet as scholars have noted, these same terms operate in multiple registers. Friis Johansen and Whittle see in βούλαρχος καὶ στασίαρχος a hendiadys with sinister accents; 'Danaus' βουλαρχία, the more general term, amounts in fact to a στασιαρχία, a leadership of sedition'.[9] The surrounding context suggests that both nouns look backwards in time to Danaus' quarrel with his brother about who should rule Egypt.[10] However, Sommerstein rightly argues that the description is also proleptic: the meaning of βούλαρχος here encompasses 'one who desires to rule'.[11] Later in the trilogy Danaus in fact becomes ruler of Argos.[12] Moreover, the term βούλαρχος does more than point out his objective; it is suggestive about the ways he acquires and maintains power.[13] The first part of the compound (βουλ-) hints at a link to βούλευσις, the intentional killing of another by means of an agent, and thus to the Danaids' impending murder of the Aegyptids.[14]

The term στασίαρχος is likewise multifaceted. As we have seen, Danaus directs the chorus' initial entrance.[15] However, as Taplin and Wilson have shown, music in general and choral activity in particular often have important political implications in tragedy.[16] In the Oresteia, for instance, the Erinyes form a chorus, at first figurative and later literal, which is repeatedly linked to political stasis.[17] And Sommerstein correctly notes that in Supplices στασίαρχος has the added meaning of 'one who begins civil strife'.[18] At lines 492–6 Danaus asks Pelasgus for a citizen bodyguard to help him move safely through the city to its altars, arguing that his non-native appearance could get him killed. His justification may have reminded spectators of events at Athens nearly a century earlier. In 561/0 B.C. Peisistratus claimed he had been attacked by his enemies and requested a citizen bodyguard; with these attendants he promptly took the Acropolis.[19] Herodotus (1.59.3) explicitly describes the period as

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[8] See Friis Johansen and Whittle (n. 2), 2.17–18. There may be an additional allusion to a race-type game (on which see R.G. Austin, 'Greek board-games', Antiquity 14 (1940), 259); Danaus has got his daughters safely off the board before the Egyptians can catch them.

[9] Friis Johansen and Whittle (n. 2), 2.16.

[10] On the details of the quarrel see A.F. Garvie, Aeschylus' Supplices: Play and Trilogy (Cambridge, 1969), 164–6.

[11] A. Sommerstein, 'Notes on Aeschylus' Suppliants', BICS 24 (1977), 67–82, at 67. He notes that Danaus makes a total of three entrances in the play (here with the Danaids, and again at lines 600 and 980). 'Just before his second entrance we hear the words ἀρχᾷ (595) and βούλιος (599)'; he is again described as βούλαρχος shortly before the third entrance (970).

[12] For possible scenarios see R.P. Winnington-Ingram, 'The Danaid trilogy of Aeschylus', JHS 81 (1961), 141–52, at 145.

[13] On Danaus as tyrant see C. Turner, 'Perverted supplication and other inversions in Aeschylus' Danaid trilogy', CJ 97 (2001), 27–50, at 36–8.

[14] Sommerstein (n. 11), 67. On βούλευσις see S.C. Todd, The Shape of Athenian Law (Oxford, 1993), 274, and P.J. Rhodes, A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia (Oxford, 1993²), 643.

[15] P. Wilson, The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia: The Chorus, the City, and the Stage (Cambridge, 2000), 315, n. 42 emphasises the relationship between 'social divisions and their ritual-festival counterparts in khoroi'. He further notes that 'in khoreographic terms, stasis was one's 'position' within the choral unit'.

[16] O. Taplin and P. Wilson, 'The 'aetiology' of tragedy in the Oresteia', PCPS 39 (1993), 169–80.

[17] Taplin and Wilson (n. 16), 172 cite the Erinyes' description as a χορός at Ag. 1186 and e.g. Eum. 307, and their link with στάσις at Ag. 1117 and Eum. 311.

[18] Sommerstein (n. 11), 67.

[19] Friis Johansen and Whittle (n. 2), 3.277; A. Sommerstein, Aeschylean Tragedy (Bari, 1996), 148.

a time of στάσις,[20] and Peisistratus as the leader of one of its factions: ἤγειρε τρίτην στάσιν, συλλέξας δὲ στασιώτας…('he raised up a third faction, and having collected his partisans…'). *Supplices*' presentation of a στασίαρχος asking for an escort is ominous.[21]

The chorus' description of Danaus as βούλαρχος καὶ στασίαρχος is thus programmatic for the subsequent trilogy.[22] And the image of him as πεσσονομῶν builds on the implications of the first two terms. As Kurke has shown, game-playing is a politically charged activity.[23] While the noun πεσσός ('stone', 'piece') does not appear in the play, its semantic cousin ψῆφος occurs repeatedly in political contexts.[24] Near the start of the parodos, the Danaids deny that their flight is prompted by religious pollution: οὔτιν' ἐφ' αἵματι δημηλασίαν / ψήφωι πόλεως γνωσθεῖσαι ('we have not been sentenced to exile for blood-guilt by vote of a city', 6–7). Here the phrase ψήφωι πόλεως refers to the collective judgment of a political entity. We subsequently see that ψῆφοι can be employed in various ways to reach political decisions. After hearing the Danaids' plea for sanctuary, Pelasgus decides to refer the matter to the Argive citizenry as a whole (365–9).[25] The women respond with an impassioned outburst:

> σύ τοι πόλις, σὺ δὲ τὸ δήμιον·
> πρύτανις ἄκριτος ὤν
> κρατύνεις βωμόν, ἑστίαν χθονός
> μονοψήφοισι νεύμασιν σέθεν,
> μονοσκήπτροισι δ' ἐν θρόνοις χρέος
> πᾶν ἐπικραίνεις.   (370–5)

> You are the city, you the people:
> councilman in charge, subject to no judge,
> you administer the altar, the hearth of the land,
> with your single-pebbled nods,
> and on your single-sceptred thrones
> you arrange every matter.

Easterling notes that the passage combines 'the language of monarchy (thrones, nods) and the language of Athenian democratic institutions'.[26] The anomalies are however not so much anachronisms as subversions revealing the Danaids' antipathy to democracy.[27] Of primary concern to us here is Pelasgus' resemblance to the

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[20] The followers of Megacles and Lycurgus are described in a genitive absolute as στασιαζόντων.

[21] On the basis of Pl. *R.* 566b and Ar. *Rh.* 1357b30–6, Friis Johansen and Whittle (n. 2), 3.277 claim that such a request was 'a routine step towards making oneself a tyrant'.

[22] Whether *Supplices* was the first or second play of the trilogy does not materially affect the views advanced here. (For the now-ascendant claim that *Aigyptioi* came first see W. Rösler, 'Der Schluß der *Hiketiden* und die Danaiden-Trilogie des Aischylos', *RhMus.* 136 (1993), 1–22, at 7–10.)

[23] L. Kurke, *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece* (Princeton, 1999), 251.

[24] On the use of ψῆφος as a synonym for πεσσός see LSJ s.v. II.2.

[25] See P. Burian, 'Pelasgus and politics in Aeschylus' Danaid trilogy', *WS* 8 (1974), 5–14.

[26] P. Easterling, 'Anachronism in Greek tragedy', *JHS* 105 (1985), 1–10, at 2.

[27] To give but one example: in democratic Athens πρυτάνεις were the tribal representatives in the βουλή to whom the presidency rotated for one month of each conciliar year. Pelasgus resembles a πρύτανις in that he helps to set the agenda for the assembly and to manage the city's response to a crisis. Yet by the Danaids' reckoning he has no colleagues and is accountable to no one (on ἄκριτος as a synonym for οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος see Easterling (n. 26), 2). Finally, the additional

chorus' earlier depiction of Danaus. Both men are said to arrange matters with the verb ἐπικραίνω (ἐπέκρανεν, 13; ἐπικραίνεις, 375). Moreover, both men's actions are linguistically linked to stones or counters: Danaus uses πεσσοί (πεσσονομῶν, 12), Pelasgus ψῆφοι (μονοψήφοισι νεύμασιν, 373).

The short but crucial episode at lines 600–24 shows that ψῆφοι can also be deployed in more democratic contexts. Here Danaus relates how an Argive assembly modelled on the Athenian ἐκκλησία unanimously granted metic status to the newcomers.[28] In keeping with Athenian custom, the vote was taken by show of hands rather than with ballots (πανδημίαι γὰρ χερσὶ δεξιωνύμοις / ἔφριξεν αἰθὴρ τόνδε κραινόντων λόγον, 'the air bristled with the right hands of those unanimously approving this resolution', 607–8).[29] Even so, the presence of the participle κραινόντων in a voting context deserves our attention.[30] The chorus subsequently use ψῆφος to refer to both individual votes cast and the measure as a whole (ψῆφον δ'εὔφρον' ἔθεντο, 'they voted in a kindly way', 640).[31] And at lines 942–3 Pelasgus sums up the Argives' action: τοιάδε δημόπρακτος ἐκ πόλεως μία / ψῆφος κέκρανται ('a unanimous vote of the people has accomplished such things on behalf of the city').[32] In short, the term ψῆφος frequently has a political dimension in *Supplices*, particularly when it appears in connection with a form of -κραίνω.

Let us now move to our endgame. Kurke has noted that two specific types of πεσσοί games emerged during the archaic period. The first, often called *polis*, was a 'battle game' whose objective was to keep one's own forces together, and to use them to disperse and then capture the enemy. The second, a more enigmatic one known as *pente grammai*, involved a king-piece (βασιλεύς) and 'movement from a holy line' (ἱερὰ καλουμένη γραμμή). A fragment of Heraclitus (B 52 DK) implies that the object of the game was to capture the kingship.[33] Now many of the Athenians in attendance doubtless indulged in playing games themselves. As such, they might naturally have wondered which sort of game Danaus was playing.

We might frame the question more broadly, arguing that the appearance of the participle πεσσονομῶν early in the play, together with the subsequent uses of ψῆφοι, permits us to interpret the action of the trilogy as game-playing writ large. Kurke has claimed that of the two πεσσοί games, '*polis* analogizes the democratic city…[and] is played with many pieces, all of equal status, on an undifferentiated gameboard'.[34] Pelasgus' confrontation with the Egyptian herald is suggestive in this regard. We saw above that he and the Argives are of a predominantly democratic cast. Now, when asked his name, Pelasgus responds indirectly, saying τί σοι λέγειν χρὴ τοὔνομ';

meaning of ἄκριτος as 'continual, unceasing' (LSJ s.v. I.2) suggests that Pelasgus enjoys his powers in perpetuity, rather than for the statutory maximum of two months in his lifetime.

  [28] See G. Bakewell, 'Μετοικία in the *Supplices* of Aeschylus', *CA* 16 (1997), 209–28.

  [29] M. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Norman, 1999²), 147. In dikastic contexts voting by ψῆφος was the rule: see A. Boegehold, 'Toward a study of Athenian voting procedure', *Hesperia* 32 (1963), 366–74.

  [30] See further lines 621–2, where Danaus says that τοιαῦτ' ἀκούων χερσὶν Ἀργεῖος λεὼς/ ἔκραν' ἄνευ κλητῆρος ὡς εἶναι τάδε ('hearing such [arguments], without a herald calling a vote, the Argive people enacted this with their hands').

  [31] For these senses of ψῆφος see LSJ s.v. II.5.a, b, c. At line 601 Danaus refers to the decree with another term etymologically linked to ψῆφος (ψηφίσματα).

  [32] On this understanding of μία / ψῆφος see Friis Johansen and Whittle (n. 2), 3.249.

  [33] Kurke (n.23), 260–3.

  [34] Kurke (n. 23), 265.

('Why should I tell you my name?', 938).[35] Given the Argives' unanimous support for the women, his individual identity is not important. He himself is simply an ἐλευθεροστόμου / γλώσσης ('a free-mouthed tongue', 948–9) representing the Argives as a whole,[36] an ordinary citizen of a homogeneous city without political hierarchy or differentiation.[37] When the Egyptian herald departs, Pelasgus is in for a battle proper in which he must seek to outmanoeuvre his foes and drive them from the field.[38]

By contrast, the second πεσσοί game, *pente grammai*, 'mimes the form of oligarchy…[and is played with] pieces in competition for supreme status, on a board whose space is itself differentiated and hierarchized'.[39] As κύριος, Danaus outranks his daughters and directs their movements throughout the play.[40] With his move to the altars in the centre of the city (βωμοὺς ἀστικούς, θεῶν <θ'> ἕδρας, 501) he assumes a position on the 'holy line'.[41] And he subsequently ventures forth alone in a bold effort to gain dominion at Argos.[42]

To conclude, one might say that everyone in *Supplices* is playing πεσσοί. And a substantial portion of the subsequent tragedy stems from the fact that while Pelasgus and the other Argives play a poor game of *polis*, Danaus proves to be a champion at *pente grammai*.

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[35] The contrast with his response to a similar request made earlier by the Danaids is striking: see lines 247–59.

[36] P. Vasunia, *The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to Alexander* (Berkeley, 2001), 141 argues that Pelasgus 'is reiterating the Argives' decree orally, and that he is not just speaking out but reading out a public notice of that decree'. K. Raaflaub, 'Des freien Bürgers Recht der freien Rede', in W. Eck, H. Galsterer, and H. Wolff (edd.), *Studien zur antiken Sozialgeschichte: Festschrift Friedrich Vittinghoff* (Köln, 1980), 7–57, at 14–18, traces the relationship between ἐλευθεροστομεῖν in Aeschylus and the ἰσηγορία characteristic of the Athenian democracy.

[37] Here too Aeschylus' Argos bears a strong resemblance to democratic Athens. On Cleisthenes' reshaping of social and political topographies see P. Lévêque and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Cleisthenes the Athenian: An Essay on the Representation of Space and Time in Greek Political Thought*, trans. D. Curtis, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1996), 52–3.

[38] Kurke (n. 23), 261 notes that in this context 'an isolated man brought danger to himself and to his side'.

[39] Kurke (n. 23), 265.

[40] At lines 188–9 he tells them to climb a hill and enter a rural sanctuary; at lines 1009–11 he directs their movements into the ἄστυ proper and specifies where they should lodge. Friis Johansen and Whittle (n. 2) 1.43 argue that 'the motif of habitation appears to have been introduced by the poet as a technical preparation for the murder of the Aegyptiads'. Cf. Garvie (n. 10), 182, and Bakewell (n. 28), 214–15.

[41] Kurke (n. 23), 265 suggests that 'the 'holy line' as the mid-most of five lines may evoke the temples and sanctuaries that tend to occupy the acropolis at the centre of the city'.

[42] According to Eustathius, the 'move from the holy line' was a proverbial expression for the actions of those in dire straits. See Kurke (n. 23), 262.