

## BOOK REVIEW

*Aeschylus's Suppliant Women: The Tragedy of Immigration.* By GEOFFREY W. BAKEWELL. Wisconsin Studies in Classics. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013. Pp. x + 209. Paperback, \$29.95. ISBN 978-0-299-29174-7.

This book is a luminous contribution to the study of ancient Greek drama in two senses: (1) it offers a new reading of Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*, a relatively neglected tragedy; and (2) it enlightens contemporary Athenian ideology, raising awareness of the critical importance of the interconnectedness between culture and literature.

The book's provocative thesis is that the play constitutes an *aition* for the institution of *metoikia*.<sup>1</sup> Aeschylus dramatizes the Bronze Age myth of the flight of the Danaids from their Egyptian cousins-suitors in the light of a contemporary historical phenomenon, the flow of foreigners into Athens during the sixth and fifth centuries. The play provides a recent political development, the acquisition of juridical status to *metoikia* (sometime between mid 470s–460 BCE), with a mythic pedigree. For its first audience, it functions as a platform for deliberating on the pressing matter of securing the well-being of the *polis* and demarcating civic identity amidst increasing presence of immigrants. In order to exemplify this contemporary wariness over immigration and to firmly root text into context, Bakewell adopts a rigorously historicist approach, postulating for direct dialogue between history and drama.

A short introductory chapter ("Introduction") sets the argument and delineates the framework within which it develops: methodological (a political and historicist reading of tragedy) and historical (explication of term and institution of *metoikia*). Included also is an overview of the tragic play: myth, plot, date. The author rightly advocates for a first production in the latter half of the 460s. His support for a date prior to 459 on the grounds of non-use of a skene-building in the

<sup>1</sup> *Metoikia*: institution emerging sometime between the mid-470s and approximately 460 BCE in order to deal with the dangers to Athenian identity and well-being raised by the large flow of foreign immigrants into Greece during the sixth and fifth centuries. The metic is demarcated as a noncitizen who dwells in the city, paying an annual fee (the *metoikion*) towards some established needs of the city, subjected to various liturgies and military service, barred to owning houses and land.

play would benefit from further justification. Given the state of the textual evidence, its use in the two lost plays of the trilogy cannot be disqualified. What is more, the view for an early existence of a skene-building is gaining increasing currency in scholarship.<sup>2</sup> His grasp and sensitivity to issues of stagecraft is indeed otherwise commendable. In trying to establish the role of dramaturgy in casting the Danaids as foreigners to Argos in chapter 1, Bakewell exemplifies how theatrical space, blocking, gestures, costume and props feature the liminality of the newcomers. These elements along with Aeschylus' employment of legal terminology of *metoikia* (esp. vv.600-24, the Argive assembly's grant of *metoikia*) establish the play as crucial testimony for the history of the metic.<sup>3</sup>

Dramatic particulars in the presentation of Danaids and their father Danaus, Argives and their leader Pelasgus and the way these could be seen to allude to contemporary anxieties about the metics' intrusion into the political, sexual and economic life of the *polis* are examined in the three central chapters of the book. Fears about metic speech are evoked, the argument goes, via the emphasis on the different kind of speech norms of Danaids, Danaus and Pelasgus, attesting respectively to norms of violence, *dolos* and democratic *peitho* (chapter 2).

Bakewell revisits the treatment of the theme of marriage in play and trilogy in chapter 3, focussing on the way the play displays the dangers of the Danaids' relative independence from their *kyrios* and their sexual licentiousness. The difficulties in the economic realm concern chapter 4. The play casts Pelasgus and his people as descendants of their land (Pelasgus *Palaichthon*, Argives *gamoroi*). By contrast, the Danaids are barred from land or house ownership. The stress on the different relation of natives and newcomers with the land serves to foreground the Danaids' status as metics. It should also be read, the author maintains, in light of Athenian ideology of citizen autochthony. Bakewell brings into the discussion of historical context analyses of Pericles' citizenship law of 451/50, interpreted as restricting political activity of metics, the disincentives (and later absolute prohibition) to mixed-status marriages increasing around the 460s, the ban on metic *enktesis* (ownership of land or house). His main concern is with establishing drama as witness to the real citizen/metic divide; the historical response to the newcomer in contemporary Athens replicates, as in mirror reflection, the dramatic one to the

<sup>2</sup> For a skene-building as visible backdrop on the stage of Aeschylus' prior play, *Persians* (472 BCE), see e.g. Seaford, R. 2012. *Cosmology and the polis: the social construction of space and time in Aeschylus*, Cambridge, 206-214.

<sup>3</sup> The history of the female metic in particular is the subject of a new book by Rebecca Futo Kennedy (2014. *Immigrant women in Athens: gender, ethnicity and citizenship in the classical city*. New York).

foreigners in Argos. There is a large amount of historical material here, presented with economy and clarity.

The book's concluding part ("Conclusion") restates key thesis, while also pondering on similarities and differences with Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. The book is completed by the section of "Notes", a list of "References", a detailed "Index".

All in all, casting a wide net over historical and literary material, Bakewell offers erudite accounts of both. New perspectives in analysis are opened up, fresh attention is given to old critical questions, especially regarding lexical and structural features of the text. Nevertheless, this same approach seems uncomfortably reductionist in certain respects. It leads to perhaps too clear cut readings of the literature at points: of the play in question, where for instance the Danaids figure as both alien Egyptians *and* Greeks descending from Io, and of other dramatic plays brought into the discussion, for example *Medea*, read as "the most vivid example of the dangers posed by the sexual mores of foreign women" (85). There is plenty in Jason and Medea's intricate characterization (where Greek and barbarian qualities intermesh) to disturb Bakewell's assertion for the play as confirming Jason's view of marriage and condemning Medea merely as the paradigm of barbarian female licentiousness. More reserve and allowance for co-existence of other possible readings would nuance and thus buttress the persuasiveness of his argumentation.<sup>4</sup>

But altogether, this is a book to be taken seriously, even if one does not accept all of its suggestions. Bakewell's clear style, his sensitivity to philological and theatrical issues are exemplary. His discussion is somber, well researched, and bibliographically informed.<sup>5</sup> The effort, to use Bakewell's own phraseology (16), was certainly "well-omened" for the student and scholar interested in Aeschylean trilogy and Athenian history.

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<sup>4</sup>One is reminded of Pelling's words of caution for acknowledging the provisionalities of the task and the openness of one's conclusions, when attempting to read history into tragedy (Pelling C. ed. 1997. *Greek tragedy and the historian*. Oxford, 213-236).

<sup>5</sup>Papadopoulou's book (Papadopoulou T. 2011. *Aeschylus' Suppliants*. Bristol) must not have come out in time for serious consideration.