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SUPPLIANT WOMEN
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Edited and Translated by
DAVID KOVACS

EURIPIDES

SUPPLIANT WOMEN

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DAVID KOVACS



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For Ellen

PREFACE

This volume, like its two predecessors, presents a new Greek text as well as a new translation. For an explanation of my editorial principles and of the simplified system for reporting manuscript readings, see the general introduction in Volume One. I have discussed in my *Euripidea Altera* (Leiden, 1996) some of the readings and conjectures adopted here. Readers unfamiliar with the conventions of classical editing should note that text (whether Greek or English) enclosed between square brackets is deemed to be spurious. Angle brackets mark words or lines thought to have been accidentally omitted by copyists. As in previous volumes, where I have marked a lacuna of a line or more I have usually filled in, purely by way of illustration, what the sense seems to require. Unattributed supplements are my own.

The translation contains one new departure from the practice of previous volumes: the treatment of lyric verse, those parts of the plays that were sung in the original performance. I have marked passages as lyric by translating them line-for-line to match the Greek in contrast to the prose typography I use for spoken verse.

I have received help of various kinds that I am delighted to acknowledge here. A grant from the Division of Research of the National Endowment for the Humanities, an

PREFACE

independent federal agency, enabled me to devote half of my time in the two academic years 1990-92 to this volume and its predecessor. In 1996-97 I received a second such grant to work on this volume and its successor. I am grateful to the Endowment for its support of my work. I was also elected, for that year, to a Visiting Fellowship at Balliol College, Oxford. My thanks to the Master and Fellows for their splendid hospitality. An exchange program between the University of Virginia and the Terza Università di Roma enabled me to check manuscript readings in the Vatican Library.

Several people discussed textual problems with me or criticized my translation. I have had profitable discussions with Martin West, James Diggle, Charles Willink, Jasper Griffin, and Chris Collard. George Goold's criticisms and queries have been invaluable, and he, Philippa Goold, and Margaretta Fulton have all improved the English translation. Finally, my wife supplied advice and encouragement at crucial points.

This volume carries a proud father's dedication to his daughter, to whose growing love of the theater he hopes it will contribute.

David Kovacs

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CONTENTS

SUPPLIANT WOMEN

Introduction	1
Text and Translation	12

ELECTRA

Introduction	141
Text and Translation	152

HERACLES

Introduction	301
Text and Translation	310

SUPPLIANT WOMEN

ABBREVIATIONS

BICS	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, London</i>
CA	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HSCP	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
MH	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
RhM	<i>Rheinisches Museum</i>
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
YCS	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>

INTRODUCTION

Suppliant Women, like *Children of Heracles*, mirrors the political realities of its day. It belongs to the late 420s B.C., perhaps being produced in 423, and is full of reflection on democracy and autocracy, the rule of law, and the undesirability—or necessity—of going to war. The action centers on the right of the dead to a proper burial, an issue that was a live one in the aftermath of the battle of Delium (424), when the victorious Boeotians refused the defeated Athenians permission to take up their dead. Contemporary theological reflection also comes to the fore in a debate about whether the gods govern the world with man's interest in mind and man has only himself to blame for trouble, or whether there is an element of tragedy in human life because of divine malice or indifference.

A fragment of ancient literary criticism, preserved in our only manuscript, says "The play is an encomium of Athens." It is true that in Attic tragedy Athens and Athenians are almost always sympathetically portrayed. But patriotic fervor alone does not explain why this play has been constructed as it has. The theological issues seem to make the largest and most encompassing frame for what is here, though it must be admitted that it is hard to be sure how the first audience reacted to some speeches or scenes and what contribution they make to the whole. The following

EURIPIDES

is a tentative attempt to describe the action and issues of the play.

In all versions of the legend of Thebes' dynasty the two sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, kill each other in battle as the result of their father's curse that they would "divide their inheritance with the sword." Polynices, in exile in Argos, appeals for help against his brother and together with six Argive champions mounts the expedition of the Seven Against Thebes. The attackers are defeated, and Creon, the new king of Thebes, refuses to grant them burial.

In our play Adrastus, king of Argos, and the mothers and sons of the Seven have come to Eleusis in Attica to appeal to the Athenians for help in burying their dead. They first approach Aethra, Theseus' mother, who is in Eleusis to sacrifice to the two goddesses of Eleusis, Demeter and Kore (Persephone). But then Theseus, king of Athens, arrives, and Adrastus addresses him. At first he refuses to help: Adrastus, he has learned, ignored warnings against the expedition from god and seer alike. Theseus does not want to involve himself in the affairs of such an imprudent person. He sets forth a view of the world in which the gods give mortal men everything they need to deliver their life from brutishness—including divination in regard to the uncertain future—and any tragedy in mortal life is the fault of men themselves. Theseus' views are up-to-date (this optimistic view of human life here has affinities with the late-fifth-century Sophists). But it is out of character, in an Athenian myth, for Athenians to refuse a request for help.

Aethra causes him to change his mind. After noting that it is unconventional for women to be in the public eye by giving advice, she points out that if Theseus takes up the

SUPPLIANT WOMEN

Argive cause he will be bringing about what the gods approve, winning credit for restoring the common laws of Hellas, and continuing the city's policy of studied vigor and activism. (With this view, that Athens flourishes by pushing herself forward even into matters that might be thought not to concern her, cf. Thucydides 1.70.) Theseus is persuaded and goes off to win the people's assent to this expedition: for although Athens is ruled by the people, Theseus is the man who gave the people their power, and he still retains much influence. Euripides' audience might have thought of Pericles, who had helped to make Athens more democratic but who seemed to enjoy an almost monarchical power and prestige, as Thucydides points out (2.65).

The next scene pits Theseus against a Theban herald, who has come to tell Athens to refuse Adrastus' request and to expel him from Attica before sundown. Before delivering his message he casts aspersions on democratic government, saying that its leaders are upstart knaves who impose upon a farmer citizenry who have no leisure to learn the art of government. Theseus replies by extolling the rule of law and the equality of citizens. He then tells the Herald that Athens will not take orders from foreign powers and that unless Thebes allows burial, he will come and bury them by force. He exits to join the army.

After a choral ode in which the mothers express their doubts about the justice of the gods, a messenger speech of unusual length and detail announces the result of the expedition. Creon and the Thebans, after once more refusing burial, have been defeated by the bravery and sagacity of Theseus. Theseus further distinguishes himself by his restraint in refusing to harm the defeated city once

EURIPIDES

he has recovered the dead and by his tender care for the bodies of the seven champions and their soldiers.

Theseus' heroism on behalf of the laws of the gods has been rewarded by success. But the rest of the play seems designed to show that the world, in spite of the occasional correspondence between deserts and reward, is full of tragic suffering. The Chorus respond to the news of their sons' imminent burial not with joy but with renewed grief. Their grieving is redoubled when the cortege arrives bearing the bodies of their sons, and Adrastus joins the Chorus in a long duet of lamentation.

Theseus asks Adrastus for an oration over the fallen, an explanation of their great courage. It was the custom at Athens for a public oration to be made each year over those who died for the city in war. Here Adrastus, in myth a speaker notable for his eloquence, is given the role that fell to Pericles and others in historical times. He describes the way of life adopted by the five men he praises, a life of modesty, poverty, and physical austerity. Training like this, he says, taught them to be brave. (Only Capaneus, Eteoclus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaeus, and Tydeus are eulogized by Adrastus. Amphiaraus' body is not available since both he and his chariot were swallowed up in the earth. Polynices himself was presumably buried in Theban soil.) The speech chimes in well with the democratic belief that virtue can be acquired by education and counters the aristocratic belief in the necessity of noble birth. After this speech Theseus announces that he is making a separate pyre for Capaneus, who as a victim of Zeus's lightning is holy; the others are to be cremated together.

Capaneus' pyre is the focus of the next scene. Evadne, Capaneus' widow, appears suddenly above the *skene* and

SUPPLIANT WOMEN

announces that she intends to join her husband in death by leaping onto his pyre. Her father Iphis comes on the scene looking for her, discovers her intention, and tries to dissuade her. But she is bent on making a glorious end for herself and surpassing all other women in wifely devotion. She leaps to her death, and Iphis is left to lament the loss of his daughter as well as of his son, who was one of the Seven. The Chorus again blame the ruinous fate of Oedipus for causing suffering in Argos.

The strains of tragedy continue when the sons of the Argive heroes, who form a second chorus, appear bearing urns containing their fathers' ashes. In the course of their antiphonal lament with the mothers they announce their intention of sacking Thebes once they grow to manhood. Though this will involve still more suffering, Thebes is, as we learn, fated to fall to the sons of the Seven.

Then Theseus addresses Adrastus and the mothers: he is giving them the ashes but asks them to remember for all time the gratitude they owe Athens. Just as they are making their final farewells, Athena appears aloft. She tells Theseus to exact an oath that Argos will never invade Attica and will help to prevent invasion by others. The terms of the oath are to be inscribed on a bronze tripod and dedicated in Delphi. As for the sons of the Seven, Athena predicts that they will one day take Thebes and win glory.

To find the whole to which these parts contribute is not at all easy. Most of the play's episodes, however, ring changes on the themes of heroism and the tragic view of life. Theseus in his first speech to Adrastus attempts to show that tragedy is avoidable. His mother corrects him and demonstrates that he must take up Adrastus' cause and heroically shoulder his burden. The debate with the herald

EURIPIDES

pits arguments of prudence from despotic Thebes against the noble altruism of democratic Athens, whose leader is willing to risk his life on behalf of Panhellenic law and the law of the gods. Athenian success in recovering the dead does not, however, change the basically tragic nature of human life, and the mothers' laments, the deaths of Evadne and Iphis, and the cries for vengeance of the sons show a world in which fate and the gods often bring misery on humankind. In almost the last words of the play, Athena promises the sons of the Seven that they will provide generations to come with a theme for song, one of the few consolations left to unhappy mortals whose lives have been crossed by inscrutable destiny.

One conundrum deserves mention here. The Chorus represents the mothers of the Argive heroes. They are described as seven in number (lines 12-13 by implication, 100-2, 963-5), but a tragic chorus in Euripides' time consisted of fifteen. There are also several references to "servants" or "attendants," probably of the mothers. Boeckh and Hermann suggested that seven mothers plus seven attendants made up a chorus of fourteen, an unlikely arrangement. Wilamowitz, though he remarks that the Athenian theatergoer did not expect realism as his modern counterpart does (since the chorus of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* had to represent the fifty daughters of Danaus), posits a chorus of mothers (presumably seven) and a chorus of attendants (presumably eight), who combine after line 286 and thereafter all represent the mothers. The situation is further complicated by the use of a second chorus of Sons of the Seven, which ought to be of the same size as the chorus of mothers. The solution adopted in this edition is that of Collard, who accepts Wilamowitz' admonition

SUPLIANT WOMEN

against literal-mindedness and draws the most natural conclusion, namely that a chorus of fifteen is being used to represent the collective notion of the mothers of the fallen. The chorus of sons would then also be fifteen. The attendants are referred to in the third person in the lines Wilamowitz assigns to them, and it is likely that they are stage extras rather than a separate chorus. I have called them attendants of the mothers since they seem closely identified with their fortunes, but it is just possible that they are identical with the attendants of the temple mentioned in line 2.

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