

Original Paper

Under State Protection Aeschylus' the Suppliants and the Shift from Clan to State

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Received: November 11, 2020 Accepted: November 28, 2020 Online Published: February 27, 2021
doi:10.22158/assc.v3n2p1 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v3n2p1>

Abstract

Aeschylus' tragedy The Suppliants in this article related to an opposition between clan and state—and more specifically with the development in ancient Greece from barbarism to civilization, from a lawless, uncultivated and disorganised world, to a clan-based social order and from there to a state-based organisation, which in many ways would set the pattern for the development in Europe for centuries to come. In the play, fifty sisters are fleeing from Egypt to Argos, persecuted by their fifty male cousins. The women seek protection and therefore refer to their shared origins with the population of Argos.

The fact that Danaus has fifty daughters but no son, implies that if the daughters marry their cousins the legacy will stay within the clan. What the daughters' uncle Aegyptus and his sons demand is that Danaus and his daughters should act in accordance with the regulatory framework of the clan system. This stipulates that in cases where fathers in patrilineal systems only have daughters, these daughters must marry endogamically (that is inwards) instead of exogamic ally (outwardly, and in the corresponding way for sons in matrilineal systems).

The article shows how Argos, governed by King Pelasgus, is depicted in the play in contrast to the claustrophobic catatonia of incestuous relations, the latter illustrated by an imagery that stems from archaic Greek mythology. The claustrophobic feeling that links the family and kin in The Suppliants, through events such as incestuous marriages and family-related cannibalism, gives a picture of the individual's room for manoeuvre being strictly regulated—in fact almost non-existent—in the extended family. It is such a claustrophobic world that the women in The Suppliants (like Orestes in Oresteia) are fleeing from.

Instead they seek out a city state based on fundamentally different ideas than the family, kinship and

clan-related organisation principles of the Egyptians. The Greek city state thereby appears to aim to liberate the archaic human from a claustrophobic captivity.

Keywords

clan, Aeschylus, suppliants, Orestia, democracy

1. Introduction

In archaic and ancient Greece the conflict between barbarian and non-barbarian, the civilised and uncivilised, was highly relevant—as it always is in cultural circles that know how to appreciate the always arduous struggle against traditions that shackle the individual. Then it is another story that the conflict is to some extent relative.

In *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus and his men reach the land of the cyclops, it is described as uncultivated and disorganised. Might makes right always applies there. The land is not farmed. People do not collaborate. The eating of human flesh appears to be a consequence of the country lacking an overriding structure that binds people to each other: “Neither assemblies for council have they, nor appointed laws, / but they dwell on the peaks of mountains in hollow caves, / and each one is lawgiver to his children and his wives, / and they have no regard for one another.” (IX, pp. 112-115, p. 325) (Note 1)

This is, in short, how it can be imagined that *homo sapiens* lived before the cognitive revolution 70 000 years ago. Symptomatically, it is through cognitive faculties that Odysseus succeeds in outwitting the cyclops Polyphemus.

How far is it not then from the cyclopes that “lived apart, obedient to no law (IX, p. 189, p. 329), and “knew nothing of rights or laws” (IX, p. 213, p. 331) to the administration of justice represented on Achilles shield in *The Iliad*? There a picture is given of two men in dispute over blood money (man price)—over the compensation to be paid or that has been paid for committing a murder. The two men present their respective arguments to a gathering of elders, who are to arbitrate in the case. The proceedings take place in a square, before relatives and friends gathered to express their support for one or the other party (XVIII, pp. 496-508, pp. 323-326) (Note 2).

It is hard not to see the scene—with its ritual setting (between the men there are “two talents of gold”)—as typical for the compensatory administration of justice of the clan society. The man price (or blood money) should be seen as payment to create a balance between two different tribes, extended families or clans. The process is still today similar in clan-based societies: the murderer’s clan (or a subdivision of it) collects an agreed amount for the clan to which the murdered man belonged. The alternative to blood money is avoided at any cost: a blood feud. That threatens to rip asunder social communities for several generations to come.

A story considered to originate from the Hittite Empire, assumed to have disappeared in the 1200s BC, concerns the queen of Kanesh, who gives birth to thirty sons in one year. The sons are put in baskets on the river and ultimately end up in the country of Zalpuwa. (Note 3) Some years later the queen gives

birth to thirty daughters. She looks after them herself.

Many years later the sons arrive, as muleteers, at the town of Tamarmara. There they learn that the queen of Kanesh is living with her thirty daughters, but that she had previously given birth to thirty sons. The men then go to the queen—to meet the mother they had sought. When they arrive the gods have prevented the queen from recognising her sons. She offers her daughters to the thirty men. In turn, they do not understand that the women are their sisters. However, the youngest son realises the situation and objects to the arrangement. Unfortunately that is where the text fragment comes to an end. The Hittites' story about the importance of keeping the thirty sons separated from the thirty daughters leads one's thoughts to the "alliance theory" of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, which in turn is linked to the incest taboo that was a central component of his structuralist analysis. (Note 4)

The Goose Girl, published by the Brothers Grimm, could be cited as an example. It is about a princess sent from home by her mother with a handkerchief with three drops of the mother's blood. Eventually the princess arrives in another kingdom. But before that, she loses the handkerchief, she is dethroned and usurped by her maid. In the new kingdom the real princess has to work as a goose girl and is courted by the goose boy Conrad.

However, order is restored in the resolution of the fairy tale. An alliance of the kind described by Lévi-Strauss is set up between two kingdoms, an alliance that is worth considerably more to the families of the princess and the king than an alliance would have been between the families of the princess and Conrad—or between the families of the king and the maid.

What the Hittites' story seems to illustrate is the transition implicit in Homer: the development from the uncivilised world of Polyphemus to the ritualised administration of justice illustrated on Achilles' shield. Lévi-Strauss' alliance theory shows how a structuring of society based on clan is emerging, in that the daughters are used as currency in the hunt for mutual alliances in networks that with time become increasingly large and complex. In order to avoid incest, by consistently removing either daughters or sons from their father's house, an organic, amoeba-like system arises, held together by the same mechanisms at both micro and macro level.

When the Scottish clan system was attacked—at macro level—in the mid-1700s, the highland clans joined together in force on the side of the pretender to the throne, Charles Edward Stuart, against the British army. Nonetheless, they lost the battle of Culloden in 1746. This meant that the highland clans lost their positions of power and all of Scotland was finally incorporated into the United Kingdom. In that way a new penal system could be introduced in the highlands instead of the clan-based system.

The introduction to the Epic of Gilgamesh, which like the Hittites' myths originates from the second millennium before the birth of Christ, describes how King Gilgamesh is deprived of the privilege of having sex with all newly-wed women before their husbands. (Note 5) Like the Hittites' story, the opening of the Epic of Gilgamesh communicates aspects of the fundamental conditions for the emergence of the very oldest civilisations; namely the importance of regulating sexuality to avoid incest. According to the 19th century American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, it was exactly

through the procedure described several decades later by Lévi-Strauss in his alliance theory that the clan structures were created: by separating daughters and sons from each other. (Note 6) One family's daughters were transferred to another family's sons, and the latter family's daughters to the first family's sons.

What distinguishes societies organised round clans is that humans are defined on the basis of collective belonging instead of as individuals.

In a modern state governed by the rule of law, a person who commits a crime against another person is individually liable. If I am run over by a person driving a car when I am on a bicycle, the person driving the car is held liable. If the person concerned cannot atone for their crime or replace my damaged bicycle, I (or my relatives) do not seek out the driver's relatives to find a solution. They are not considered as having anything to do with the matter. (Note 7) But in a clan culture they are.

Development in ancient Greece, away from a clan-based social order to a state-based organisation, continued for several hundred years and in many ways determined the pattern of development in Europe for centuries to come. (Note 8)

In the seventh century a type of rudimentary monetary economy grew increasingly strong, which had two important consequences. In the short term it meant widening differences between land-owning magnates and small farmers. Aristotle (or rather one of his students) speaks in the *Athenian Constitution* (around 332 BC, revised 10 years later) about how small farmers were forced to borrow money from the magnates at high interest rates (one sixth of what they produced) for day-to-day expenditures. The small farmers thus got into debt and in practice became serfs. Not infrequently they had pledged themselves for their loans and so when they became insolvent were therefore sold as slaves by the creditors (II, pp. 13-15). (Note 9)

But the monetary economy also meant that new social groups grew stronger in the seventh century. Merchants, craftsmen and sailors could profit from the landowning families' need to sell agricultural products. As time went on, the increasingly rich tradesmen and craftsmen demanded to have a say and mobilised disaffected small farmers to their cause.

To resolve the conflicts that were the consequence of this antagonism a legislator was finally called in to create order with unrestricted powers. In 594 Solon was tasked with reforming the State and creating harmony between the warring groups (V, pp. 21-23). The system of debt and pledges was forbidden and the farmers that had been enslaved in this way were freed from slavery. Solon thereby started a process that gave the individual greater room for manoeuvre.

Solon's actions were the first step towards rejection of birth as a means to reach official positions and categorise inhabitants. It is true that only a minority of Athens' inhabitants were classed as citizens, but having achieved citizenship, high and low had the right to elect representatives. The core of Solon's constitution was the right of every citizen to vote and speak. Aristotle describes it as "the people, having the power of the vote, becomes sovereign in the government." (VII, p. 33).

What was really revolutionary about Solon's reforms was the principle of equality before the law—or

as he himself, according to Aristotle, expressed it: “rules of law alike for base and noble, [...] I drafted.” (VII, p. 39). Demosthene in turn quoted a poem by Solon in which he writes about his laws that their purpose was to make “all things among men [...] fitting and rational”. (Note 10)

After the uneasy years around 510, that is, fifty years after the death of Solon, Athenian society was further reformed in a democratic direction—now by Cleisthenes. In 508 he supplemented and updated Solon’s reforms. Cleisthenes created a new point of departure for people’s solidarity: citizenship in the city state. (Note 11)

He broke up the birth-based division of Athens, which Solon had preserved. Aristotle describes how Cleisthenes “divided the whole body into ten tribes [*phylai*] instead of the existing four, wishing to mix them up, in order that more might take part in the government” (XXI, p. 63). (Note 12) Members of the same class could now belong to different tribes. Cleisthenes then founded a Council of 500 people, fifty from each tribe.

Attica was then divided into three parts [*trittues*]. City, coast and inland. Each of these three parts were in turn divided into ten parts. Each tribe was given a geographical area, a *dēmos*, in each part. People in each *dēmos* were exhorted to name themselves after their *dēmos* and not their father’s name. Thus the geographical area was a person’s primary identity, not the family. However, according to Aristotle, within the *dēmos* people were allowed to organise themselves on the basis of clan origin [*genos*] and kinship [*phratría*].

The ten tribes were each allocated a new tribal father, chosen by the Delphic oracle (XXI, pp. 65-67). It is said that the original hundred names of heroes were voted on by the Athenians.

The level of truth within Aristotle’s historical account could of course be questioned, but it is obvious that the picture given of Cleisthenes is largely based on the idea that collectively based clan loyalties were replaced by a system where the people were defined primarily as individuals and citizens of a state.

The smallest component of the system that Cleisthenes finally broke up was the household [*oikos*], which was subordinate to the clan [*genos*], which in turn was part of the tribe, *phylē*. Whether *phratría* (kinship) was an intermediate group between *genos* and *phylē* is a matter of discussion. In the introduction to the *Iliad* Agamemnon is encouraged by Nestor to “separate the men by tribes [*phyla*], by clans [*phrētras*], [...] so that clan may aid clan and tribe tribe.” (II, pp. 362-365). (Note 13)

At least partly and from some perspectives the autonomous individual is absent in the *Iliad*. Many researchers have pointed out that for Homer’s heroes honour [*timē*] must be upheld at any price. (Note 14) In line with the collectivist nature of the concept of honour it is striking to how small a degree individuals are responsible for their actions. In that respect the picture of King Agamemnon, for example, changes from *The Iliad* to Aeschylus tragedy *Oresteia* written a few hundred years later.

The basic conflict in *The Iliad* derives from Agamemnon’s taking Achilles’ war trophy, the beautiful Briseis. This is done after Agamemnon has been forced to give up his mistress, Chryseis. However, Agamemnon recognises no guilt over the way he acts towards Achilles. To be sure, the consequence of

this was that the Greeks' best fighter, Achilles, decided to go on strike. But as Agamemnon explains, the ultimate responsibility lay with the gods. It is they, in particular *Atē*, the misguiders, who are to blame (XIX, pp. 86-92, p. 341). *Atē* is a kind of god-sent blindness that makes people act in a way they would not otherwise have done if guided by reason.

Cynthia Farrar's study, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking* (1988) shows how Agamemnon's guilt in *Oresteia*—as regards sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia—marks a development towards the kind of individual responsibility that Herodotus perceived in his writing of history as a consequence of the political reforms in which the individual was regarded as a free, autonomous actor. (Note 15) On courage Herodotus states: "while they were oppressed [by authorities] they willed to be cravens, as men working for a master, but when they were freed each one was zealous to achieve for himself." (Note 16)

In his tragedies Aeschylus returns to problems associated with the transition from clan to state. In *Oresteia*, performed for the first time in 458, it emerges that while king Agamemnon was fighting in Troy, his wife Clytemnestra started a love affair with her husband's cousin Aegisthus. When the king returns home he is murdered by his wife.

There are several reasons for Agamemnon meeting such a cruel fate. In part he is being punished for sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia in order to reach Troy. In part he is being punished for arrogance, *hybris*, on his return. In part—and mainly—his murder stems from the curse on his family, the Atreus family.

The family curse goes back to his great grandfather Tantalus, who murdered his son Pelops—and then served him for dinner to his father Zeus. The curse that Zeus then hurled at his son resulted in Pelops' son Atreus murdering the sons of his twin brother Thyestes, after Atreus' wife was unfaithful with Thyestes. But Thyestes' sons were not just murdered, they were cooked. They were then served to Thyestes by Atreus.

After Thyestes realised that he had eaten his heirs, he raped his own daughter, who then bore him a son, Aegisthus—the one who later got together with Agamemnon's wife. But before that Aegisthus, after some complications, murdered his uncle, Atreus, who was the father of king Agamemnon. After a period of exile in Sparta Agamemnon returned to Mycenae and seized power from his uncle Thyestes.

When Orestes later, in the second part of the trilogy, *The Libation Bearers*, in revenge for the murder of his father, kills Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, this is an act of revenge that was preceded by a chain of blood feuds over several generations.

But this chain ends when Athena, in the third part of the trilogy, *The Eumenides*, sets up a court in Athens. Orestes is then acquitted after Athena's casting vote.

In a way this trilogy covers a period of 7–800 years. From the time of Agamemnon's return (in mythology) from Troy, to the (real) Athens where in the time of Aeschylus an embryo of the Western State had been created. The purpose of creating this prototype of a modern state, was precisely to tackle clan rule and the chains of blood feuds over many generations that serve as the background to the

events in *Oresteia*.

The clan as a form of organisation generally strives towards balance and harmony. But in so far as the clans cannot agree on conciliation, blood feuds tend to take over. This upsets the balance and a spiral of violent vendettas are likely to escalate for decades. Then the opposite of balance and harmony prevails: Chaos.

In *Oresteia* the spiral of violence is broken by Athena. She keeps the goddesses of revenge away from Orestes and finally brings about justice that is not based on either compensation or Hammurabi's principle of *an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth*... Instead she organises an impartial examination of the case. What can resolve the family curse is no less than the Athenian people's sworn judicial assembly.

Here emerges also the reason for creating such a judicial system. The latter is the magic formula that can liberate society from the justice of the clan culture, which is likely to have the consequence of an increasingly bloody chaos of vendettas, with innocent lives at stake.

In that way *Oresteia* can thus be said to paint the picture of a development from clan to a state with a judicial system that is independent of the rich magnates and clan leaders. In this kind of judicial system, judgments are based on an idea that all individuals are equal before the law; not based on the accused being a member of a particular family.

This is the very foundation of the development that starts with the Greek city states—in which the state increasingly stands as the guarantor of the individual's autonomy and freedom and the positive side effects of which emerged already in the time of ancient Greece in the form of the autonomy of art and science. In both cases a free thinking was encouraged that would lead to exceptional cultural, aesthetic and scientific progress—for the continued development of civilisation; for the continued movement further away from the semi-blindness of the cyclops.

These side-effects presented themselves already in ancient Greece. Aeschylus' drama *The Suppliants* cannot only be read as a description of developments from barbarism to civilisation. The tragedy also exemplifies the searching, self-critical approach of Greek civilisation in the fifth century.

If *Oresteia* could be said to take place over a period of more than a half a millennium, the time frame of *The Suppliants* is even greater. The drama's events go back to the mythical period when various peoples of Greece are thought to have been created. Thus we find ourselves just before the time according to myth when the Danaids emerged as a people. "Danaids" later became a generic name both for people living in Argos and for Greeks in general.

In the drama the Danaids' ancestress Hypermnestra and her forty-nine sisters of Argos, come fleeing from Egypt. They are being persecuted by their fifty male cousins. The women seek protection and therefore refer to their shared origins with the population of Argos.

Danaus' fifty daughters in fact originate from Io, who originally was a priestess at a temple in Argos, devoted to Hera. In the present we thus find ourselves close to a type of archaic prehistoric state, just five or six generations further in time from the Argive patriarch, the river god Inachus and the fleeing

Io. At the same time the Argos to which Danaus' fifty daughters flee has a court of a relatively modern type, seemingly coming into existence at the time of Aeschylus, in the 5th century BC.

On the one hand then, there is the kind of court advocated by Solon and Cleisthenes. On the other hand the mental presence of the ancestress Io, who in a tragedy attributed to Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, meets the Titan Prometheus. (Note 17) (The latter is chained to his mythical rock as punishment for having stolen fire from the gods.)

In Prometheus' version of the myth, Io has been driven from her home by her father, after he consulted the Delphic Oracle to find out how to interpret his daughter's dreams. In them a voice pleaded with her to satisfy Zeus' desire by doing his will. Her father condemns her to be driven from family and home. But also from humanity: "I grew horns, as you now see" (p. 674, p. 517). (Note 18) In *The Suppliants*, however, it is Hera who is said to have changed Io into a heifer, "half-human beast that their minds could not handle, with some features of a cow and some of a woman" (v, pp. 568-570, p. 365). The reason is Zeus' desire for Io. When Argos, who is set to guard Io, is killed, Hera sends a supernatural gadfly to chase Io on a "long flight from this land" (p. 309, p. 329).

In *Prometheus Bound* Prometheus tries to alleviate Io's suffering by telling her what is to come. During her flight Io is to cross the sound that "will be named after it—Bosporus" (*bous*, ox/bovine animal/cow + *poros*, passage: *passage of the cow*, 733, p. 523). She eventually arrives in Egypt and there gives birth to the black son Epaphus, begotten through Zeus "touching", by his "laying his hand on you" (849, p. 537).

In that Zeus touched and breathed on Io she not only got pregnant but regained her human form. Her son Epaphus then became king of Egypt. And his grandson Belus fathered Danaus and Aegyptus. They appear in *The Suppliants* as fathers of the fifty sisters and fifty brothers.

Five generations forward in time, predicts Prometheus, Danaus' daughters will flee to Argos from Egypt, "in flight from a kindred marriage to their cousins". After them, they will have Aegyptus' sons, with "their minds excited by lust"—like "hawks following close behind the doves" on a hunt for marriage "that they should not have been hunting" (pp. 854-860, p. 537).

There is—as is often in archaic myths—a layer of the story that concerns sexual maturity and that thus links Io with Danaus' daughters. The young woman matures sexually, which relates her to wildness—to animals and barbarian customs. The myth describes in this case a circular movement in which Danaus daughters are returned to the place just outside Argos where Io had grazed as a heifer.

It all then ends with the sisters—probably in the next, lost, part of the trilogy—murdering the men they are fleeing from. When relating the myth Prometheus states that one of the sisters, Hypermnestra, "in her desire for children" abstains "from killing her bedfellow". Faced with the choice, "she will choose the alternative of being called a coward rather than a polluted murderer". In that role she will establish "a royal house in Argos" (pp. 864-869, p. 539), that is the Danaids. (Note 19) Both in the case of Io and the fifty sisters protection is given from persecution in a town in which a royal dynasty is then established.

And thus the main features of the action, in the background to as well as in the events after *The Suppliants*, are retold.

The town to which the fifty sisters flee is presented as being founded on entirely different principles than the world they have escaped from. The Egyptian world order is illustrated with a series of mythological oriented pictures that relate to the archaic descriptions discussed above, based in part on the Hittites' myth about the thirty brothers and their sisters, in part on Homer's description of the Cyclops, in part on the Atreus family curse—the curse that cannot be broken until a non-clan-based court has been established.

Initially reference is made in *The Suppliants* to the myth of Tereus, Philomela and Procne. The sisters from Egypt describe their lament in “a voice like that of Tereus' wife”: “shut off from her green river-banks, [she] utters a grieving lament for her familiar haunts and sings the story of her son's death, how he perished by her own kindred hand, experiencing her unmotherly anger.” (pp. 60-70, pp. 297-300).

The passage refers to King Tereus, described far later by Ovid and T S Eliot (in *The Waste Land*), who rapes his wife Procne's sister Philomela. To prevent her telling her sister of the assault, Tereus cuts off Philomela's tongue. Philomela later relates the events, but in a tapestry. Procne takes revenge on her husband by killing their son and then boiling him and serving the meat to Tereus as a meal.

There is a remarkable parallel here—in the issue of cannibalism and transforming the main characters of the myth to birds—both to *Prometheus Bound*, and Danaus' speech in the introduction to *The Suppliants*. In the latter case Danaus compares the sort of endogamy marriage that his daughters are fleeing from with cannibalism that involves close relatives: “How could a bird eat of another bird, and not be polluted? How could a man marry the unwilling daughter of an unwilling father, and not become unclean? (pp. 225-228, p. 317.)

This can be related to the description of the fifty brothers in *Prometheus Bound*: with “their minds excited by lust”—like “hawks following close behind the doves”—on a hunt for marriage “that they should not have been hunting” (pp. 854-860, p. 537).

After Tereus has understood that he has eaten up his son, the sisters flee, transformed into birds: a swallow and a nightingale. Tereus chases them, he too transformed into a bird—in Aeschylus' version a hawk.

In *The Suppliants* the myth of Philomela thus offers another example of women being hunted, here too in a situation initiated by male, inappropriate, sexual desire—and female innocence. We can also note how both the primordial myths of Io and of Philomela link the sexual desire they arouse with transformations from human to animal.

At the same time the myths emphasise, through the parallels established between incest, endogamy and eating one's own children—that the Egyptian persecutors' customs are uncivilised. We remember the Cyclops in Homer, where cannibalism is linked to a type of *homo sapiens* original state, before any form of civilisation.

To eat representatives of one's own kind is equated in the drama with incest—with behaviour that indicates a non-human, barbaric state, but also a state of claustrophobic confinement of the individual. In contrast to a theme that is related to the incestuous relation's claustrophobic catatonia there is Argos governed by King Pelasgus. He says the form of government goes back to King Apis, a son of Apollo who symptomatically is said to have "cleansed this land of the man-destroying creatures which the angry earth, stained by the pollution of old bloodshed, had sent up from below, a hostile horde of serpents sharing our home. From these Apis effected, beyond all cavil, a decisive, liberating cure for the Argive land, and in return won as his reward the right to be remembered in prayers" (pp. 263-271, p. 321).

The drama as a whole contrasts what can be regarded as a modern form of government with archaic ideas of human communities of the type personified by the hunting brothers—likening them, as we have seen, to birds eating birds.

Kung Pelasgus faces a dilemma. If he allows Danaus' daughters to stay, he and his people risk vengeance from the cousins' family, Aegyptus—that is thus linked to the type of "old bloodshed" (see above) that is the mark of the clan culture and from which Argos has been liberated.

If, on the other hand, the king rejects the sisters, there will loom "a pollution terrible beyond compare" (pp. 472-473, p. 353). (Note 20) This will be the consequence of the women carrying out the threat of in desperation hanging themselves at the shrine.

Considering the delicate nature of the matter, the king believes that popular endorsement is required for the decision that is to be made: "I cannot make a binding promise beforehand, but only after making this matter known to the whole citizen body." (pp. 365-367, p. 339). When he then returns after consulting with "the, people, which rules the city" (pp. 698-699, p. 379), he states: "That is the unanimous vote that has been passed and enacted by the people of the city, never to surrender this band of women by force. This decision has been nailed down with a nail that has pierced right through, so that it stays fixed." (pp. 942-945, pp. 411-414).

After that announcement King Pelasgus welcomes the women—implying that the democratic process itself guarantees them a good reception: "I am your patron, as are all the citizens who have made and enacted this decree." (pp. 962-963, p. 415.)

The political system of Argos is on a collision course with the values governing the Egyptian culture from which the women are escaping. When the Egyptian men's herald, learning of how the citizen body has voted, relates how the fifty brothers are to act, he announces that now the level has been exceeded for the clan system's compensatory arbitration system, which aims to maintain harmony. The consequence is a blood feud: "[The god of war] Ares will be the judge of this matter, and not on the basis of witnesses' evidence; he does not settle quarrels by a payment of silver—no, before that many men must fall to the ground and end their lives in convulsions (pp. 935-938, p. 411).

How far is it not between these echoes of the justice illustrated on the shield of Achilles and Pelasgus' words concerning the decision of the citizen body: "This decision has been nailed down with a nail that

has pierced right through, so that it stays fixed.” These words are not written on tablets, nor sealed up in a folded sheet of papyrus: you hear them plainly from the lips and tongue of a free man.” (pp. 943-948, p. 413).

It is difficult not to interpret these words as a consequence of the development the country is said to have undergone at the beginning of the drama: “Apis[. . .] cleansed this land of the man-destroying creatures which the angry earth, stained by the pollution of old bloodshed [. . .].” (pp. 262-265, p. 321).

What then is the reason for the fifty brothers wishing to marry the fifty sisters? Perhaps it becomes comprehensible in the light of the state-clan relationship? In the introductory exchange between Pelasgus and the chorus, in which the sisters try to persuade the king to allow them to stay in the country, the king wonders why the women have left their home city. The leader of the chorus replies that she had the luck to reach Argos where she can reject “with disgust a marriage-tie with my close kindred through loathing of the marital bed” (pp. 329-332, p. 333).

Pelasgus, however, is not satisfied with the reply and wants to know the reason for this disgust. Is it due to personal hatred or because the men are considered to be requiring something they are not legally entitled to? “Who would love someone whom she was buying as an owner?”, replies the chorus (p. 337, p. 333).

As George Thomson pointed out, the latter translation clarifies that the sisters insist that the arrangement is unethical due to the incestuous element. (Note 21) Paradoxically, this reason (why the marriage should be regarded as unlawful), is the same as the reason Aegyptus’ sons put forward for why they should marry Danaus’ daughters: they are cousins.

The latter argument for the wedding is made clear by Pelasgus’ line, in which he states that such a marriage increases power and well-being: “That is how people increase their strength. “The chorus leader points out, however, in her reply that the person with the opportunity for liberation is the prospective husband.

The logic is as follows: Pelasgus’ line, “That is how people increase their strength”, gives a picture of the intention of the marriage. The fact that Danaus has fifty daughters but no son, means that his legacy is at risk of disappearing from the extended family, the clan—when his daughters marry. If we recall the alliance theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss, we realise that in cases such as these there is a risk of building alliances that do not strengthen but weaken the family.

However, if the daughters marry their cousins the legacy will stay within the clan. What the uncle Aegyptus and his sons demand is that Danaus and his daughters should act in accordance with the regulatory framework of the clan system. This stipulates that in cases where fathers in patrilineal systems only have daughters, these daughters must marry endogamically (that is inwards) instead of exogamically (outwardly—and in the corresponding way for sons in matrilineal systems, such as the Hittite system). (Note 22)

In this light the chorus leader’s reply becomes understandable, when she replies to Pelasgus’ statement that such a marriage increases power and well-being—her reply can be interpreted approximately

as: "For who, ultimately?" For, as she says, the woman's husband has the right to leave her when he has enjoyed her fortune.

Based on this scenario few benefits exist for the individual in marrying in a way that benefits the family. Such subordination tends to only strengthen the clan, while the individual, the woman, if she subjugates herself to the clan's rules, sees two probable future scenarios: living with a man she does not love or being deprived of her fortune and abandoned by the same man.

What is problematical in this context is that in the Greek legal systems—despite their innovative power and endeavours on several levels to move away from clan rule—there nevertheless remain archaic remnants. Such a persistent remnant from long ago was the law that stipulated that where there were only female heirs, they must be married endogamically, that is with as close a relative as possible. (Note 23)

This has caused controversies among those researching Aeschylus over the primary message of the tragedy as such and of—mainly—the trilogy of which the tragedy was originally a part, the rest of which have been lost: *The Egyptians* and *The Daughters of Danaus* (as well as the satyr-play *Amymone*). The dispute concerns the extent to which it would be probable that Aeschylus' stage production would go against its own society's legal system.

George Thomson, in his major study *Aeschylus and Athens* (1946) disagrees with Donald Robertson, who believed that the drama leads to the view that the woman should have the right "to refuse to be forced into marriage. [. . .]The crime of the sons of Aegyptus is their determination to force themselves on unwilling brides." (Note 24)

According to Thomson, Robertson thus disregards the fact that the subordinate status of women was generally accepted in the Attic world of the time. (Note 25)

An interesting way to solve this controversy is offered by Richard Seaford in an ingenious study, *Cosmology and the Polis* (2012). He focuses on the Danaians' reply to Pelasgus' point about the advantages of the marriage of cousins, "That is how people increase their strength". Divorce is easy, they reply, *but* in this particular case entirely negative for the woman.

The point is that if a woman marries exogamically within the framework of a clan structure, there is a balance of power that is lacking in the endogamic marriage. In the first case the woman can obtain help from her family of origin, if she is rejected by her husband. In an endogamic marriage, on the other hand, for natural reasons there is no division of power between the woman's clan of origin and her husband's clan. This is the underlying implication in the drama's exchange between Pelasgus and the chorus about the extent to which the endogamic marriage can increase the family's well-being. (Note 26)

Seaford points out that in the Athens of Aeschylus, *epiklēroi*, women with no father or brothers, had the protection of the State when married. Due to the vulnerable position of these women citizens generally had the right—without risk of reprisal—to bring legal action in cases where *epiklēroi* were treated badly. Perhaps, reasons Seaford, the third part of the trilogy ended in the creation of a similar law. In that case

Aeschylus would land up in taking the part of the state instead of the clan as the ultimate authority for organising the human community. As I showed above, this ideological stance is in line with the tragedy's image in general of the clan culture the Egyptians are bound by.

The claustrophobic feeling that links the family and kin in Aeschylus, through events such as incestuous marriages and family-related cannibalism, gives a picture of the individual's room for manoeuvre being strictly regulated—in fact almost non-existent—in the extended family. It is such a claustrophobic world that the women in *The Suppliants* (like Orestes in *Oresteia*) are fleeing from.

Instead they seek out a city state based on fundamentally different ideas than the family, kinship and clan-related organisation principles of the Egyptians.

The fifty brothers thus clarify the idea of city states such as Argos in *The Suppliants* and Athens in *Oresteia*. Seen in relation to the culture from which Danaus' daughters flee, the Greek city state appears to aim to liberate the archaic human from a claustrophobic captivity. In the process of liberation the individual emerges from the darkness of history. Tradition and history may have been affirmed in that development, though not as a normative foundation for administering justice.

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Notes

Note 1. The parenthetical citation refers to Homer, *Odyssey*, book IX. References to books 1–12 in *Odyssey* are henceforth made parenthetically in my text and refers to book, verse and page in Homer (1919).

Note 2. The parenthetical citation refers to Homer, *Iliad*, book XVIII.

References to book 13–24 in *Iliad* are henceforth made parenthetically in my text and refers to book, verse and page in Homer (1925).

Note 3. Hoffner (1990), pp. 81-82.

Note 4. See Lévi-Strauss (1947).

Note 5. See tablet 1, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (2001).

Note 6. See Morgan (1878), pp. 227-236.

Note 7. Cf Weiner (2013), pp. 39-41.

Note 8. Regarding the following historical exposition: Cf Starr (2014), chapter II–VI.

The existence of clans during the period before the 6th century BC is a contro-versial question. 19th century ancient historians as Niebuhr, Grote och Mommsen interpreted the ancient Greek and Roman culture as dominated by *genos*, often translated to clans. Cf Varto (2014), pp. 500-523.

One of those who denies the existence of clans are Felix Bourriot. Cf Bourriot (1976).

Note 9. The parenthetical citation refers to Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, II.

References to *The Athenian constitution*, are henceforth made parenthetically in my text and refers to book and page in Aristotle (1935), pp. 13-15.

Note 10. Demosthene, 19, 254-256 [fragment 4:39i], Tyrtæus, Solon, Theognis, Mimnermus (1999), p. 117.

Note 11. See Glassman (2017), p. 992.

Note 12. Cf Starr (2014), p. 91.

Note 13. Homer (1924), p. 89.

Note 14. Starr (2014), p. 4.

Note 15. Farrar (1988), pp. 16-19.

Note 16. Herodotus (1922), p. 87.

Note 17. Since the 1960s philologists have questioned Aeschylus as author of *Prometheus Bound*. Some of them have attributed the tragedy to his son Euphorion.

Note 18. The parenthetical citation refers to Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound*. References to *Prometheus Bound* and *Suppliants*, are henceforth made parenthetically in my text and refers to line and page in Aeschylus (2009).

Note 19. There is an ambiguity in the words *paidon* and *himeros*. On the one hand the words could be interpreted as “desire (*himeros*) made one of the girls (*paidon*)...”, and on the other hand: “longing (*himeros*) [for] children (*paidon*) made ...”

I have chosen the latter with reference to the arguments presented in Rose (1957).

Note 20. Cf Parker (1983), pp. 32-42 and pp. 183-185.

Note 21. Thomson (1946), p. 304.

Note 22. On endogamy in ancient Athen as a way of retaining wealth and power in the family: See Cox (1988), pp. 32-34.

Note 23. Thompson (1967), p. 275. The law is discussed by Plato in *The State*, Book 5, Section 460E, and by Aristotle in *Politics*, Book 7, Section 1335a.

Note 24. Robertson (1924), p. 53.

Note 25. Thomson (1946), pp. 306-307.

Note 26. Seaford (2012), pp. 319-320.