



## HIKETEIA AND ASYLIA IN ANCIENT GREEK MYTHICAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

Fecha de recepción: 15 julio 2019 / Fecha de aceptación: 13 septiembre 2019

ELENI ALEXANDRI  
*University of Ioannina*  
(Grecia)  
elealexan@gmail.com

STERGIANI TZIRVITZI  
*University of Ioannina*  
(Grecia)

*Abstract:* This article, using as a starting point the concept of supplication and asylum seeking in archaic Greek thought, examines cases of supplication which either succeeded and therefore asylum was granted, or were rejected and the pleas for asylum failed. The article focuses on two cases from Greek Drama and one case from Attic Oratory and investigates the features of supplication, the terminology and the argumentation that was considered crucial in order for the supplication to be accepted while moving from the world of myth, drama and religion to the world of oratory, city states and civic identity.

*Keywords:* supplication; asylum; refugees; ancient Greece; drama; oratory.

*Resumen:* Este artículo, utilizando como punto de partida el concepto de súplica y solicitud de asilo en el pensamiento arcaico griego, examina los casos de súplica que o tuvieron éxito y así se concedió el asilo, o bien se rechazaron y las solicitudes de asilo fallaron. El artículo analiza dos casos de drama griego y uno de Oratoria Ática e investiga las características de la súplica, la terminología y la argumentación que se consideraron cruciales para aceptar la súplica pasando del mundo del mito, el drama y la religión al mundo de la Oratoria, las ciudades estado de Grecia y la identidad cívica.

*Palabras clave:* súplica; asilo; refugiados; Grecia antigua; drama; oratoria;

### INTRODUCTION

*“Could anyone find someone more unfortunate than one who lost everything - city, land, possessions - in one day and now, lacking every possible necessity,*



*is reduced to vagrant and beggar, unsure where to turn, unhappy wherever he stops? The one who passes no day without tears but spends all his time longing for home and lamenting the change that has come upon his life” (Isocr. Plataicus 47).*

This is how Isocrates, the famous teacher of rhetoric, describes in the fourth-century B.C. the situation of being an immigrant, a refugee, an asylum seeker supplicating for help. Many years before Isocrates though, in the fifth-century B.C., the tragic poets Aeschylus and Euripides described the situation of people who were exiled from their homeland and supplicated for granting political protection:

*“Behold me, your suppliant, a fugitive, running around [...]” (Aesch. The Suppliants 350), “But I beg you by your beard and by your knees and I make myself your suppliant: have pity, have pity on an unfortunate woman, and do not allow me to be cast into exile without a friend, but receive me into your land and your house as a suppliant” (Eur. Medea 709-713), “What city will receive me? What friend will give me a safe country and a secure house and rescue me?” (Eur. Medea 386-388).*

Those questions reflect the unfavourable position of those who were outside the city, totally unprotected and trying to find a way to deal with the reality of exclusion in terms of rights, politics and protection, seeking ways of acceptance, procedures, and means to acquire a status in a new city as a foreigner. Migration and displacement have emerged in the last few years as a critical political and policy challenge in matters such as integration, displacement, safe migration and border management all over the world<sup>1</sup> and particularly in modern Greece, where the

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\*This work is funded by the Operational Programme Espa   . We would like to express our gratitude to Prof. Emer. Ariadni Tatti for proposing and supervising this project, to Prof. Mike Edwards for his useful comments on this paper and to the anonymous reviewers for their recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> MCAULIFFE, M., RUHS, M., «Migration and migrants: A global overview», in *World Migration Report* (2018), pp. 13-42 [<https://www.iom.int/wmr/world-migration-report-2018>, accessed 11 July 2019]. In 2015, there were an estimated 244 million international migrants globally, an increase from an estimated 155 million people in 2000 (2.8% of the world’s population).



phenomenon is of critical importance as the number of asylum seekers arriving in the Eastern Aegean Islands rise every year<sup>2</sup>. Migration is not a recent phenomenon though; on the contrary it stretches back to the earliest periods of human history<sup>3</sup> and had already been proved to be a major problem in ancient Greece as well. The theme of non-citizens who were seeking asylum was recurrent in the Attic law courts and theatre, in an Athens that was often represented as the city where every exile could find a refuge. Within this perspective, the aim of our investigation is to extend further knowledge of the multiple aspects of the subject of supplication and asylum seeking, focusing on the ways in which ancient Greek drama and oratory had dealt with this issue. We hope that the identity, position, type of request, special conditions and the argumentation, will lead to the greater understanding of a long-lasting and global phenomenon. Our purpose is to highlight the coexistence and common plots of myth with reason, written and unwritten law, mythology and history, deliberation and political implications, and dramatic and rhetorical language. The paper is divided into two sections. The first analyses two indicative cases of supplication and asylum seeking in drama, namely the cases of Aeschylus' *The Suppliants* and Euripides' *Medea*, in which foreigner heroes aim at political asylum. The second one examines the case of Isocrates' *Plataicus*, a rhetorical discourse which is on the whole a supplication of one polis to another, and a case of supplication which is rejected.

Let us first begin by presenting some of the features and terminology of “*hiketeia*” and “*asyilia*” in ancient Greece. The status of the suppliant and the seeking

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<sup>2</sup> A total of 32,494 persons arrived in Greece by sea in 2018, compared with 29,718 in 2017. Greece received 11% of the total number of applications submitted in the EU, meaning that it was the Member State with the third largest number of applications, see «Country Report Greece», in *Asylum Information Database*, March 2018, p.14 [<https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece>, accessed 11 July 2019].

<sup>3</sup> Ideas about sanctuary, asylum and refuge have an ancient lineage and are found in written records and oral traditions worldwide. The obligation to protect certain displaced people, fugitives and those abandoned by their communities of origin has often been seen as a social priority and has been closely associated with the well-being of the wider society, see MARFLEET, P., «Refugees and history: why we must address the past», in *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26.3 (2007), pp. 136-148, p.138.



of asylum were not always synonymous procedures nor did they have the same historical course, although they were often difficult to distinguish. In ancient Greece, refuge appears as “*asylon*” (*asylum* – usually secured within religious sites). The Greek language used many words to describe the act of supplication and the act of asylum seeking depending on the situation each time<sup>4</sup>. The terms “*ἀσυλία*” and “*ἄσυλος-ον*” can be used with a variety of meanings in the ancient sources, such as the inviolability of a sanctuary, the personal inviolability of an individual, the prohibition of reprisals agreed upon by two communities, or the inviolability of certain sanctuaries recognized by kings, cities, and confederations<sup>5</sup>. Regarding “*ἰκεσία*”, supplication<sup>6</sup>, “*ἰκέτης*”, the suppliant, is a frequent word from the Homeric poems onwards and denotes the one who approaches, who comes to seek aid or protection, a suppliant, in a very close relation to the asylum seeker and the “*ζένος*” (foreigner or stranger). There are many examples in ancient Greek literature of supplication connected with asylum, either because asylum was granted or because asylum was refused. Moving from the world of Homer to the civic identity of the city states the obligations of the individual to a suppliant become less evident as other obligations emerged which were no longer connected to religion, but were dependent

<sup>4</sup> For the issues see GARLAND, R., *Wandering Greeks: The Ancient Greek Diaspora from the Age of Homer to the Death of Alexander the Great*, Oxford 2014.

<sup>5</sup> For the terms see mostly GAUTHIER, P., *Symbola. Les étrangers et la justice dans les cités grecques*, Nancy 1972, who questioned the distinction between persons and places and investigates the terminology drawing attention to the legal aspects and suggesting that the concept of asylum had more to do with commerce and the economy than religious matters. See BRAVO, B., «Sulân. Représailles et justice privé contre des étrangers dans les cités grecques», in *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa III* 10 (1980), pp. 675-987, CHANIOTIS, A., «Conflicting Authorities. Asyilia between Secular and in the Divine Law in the Classical and Hellenistic Poleis», in *Kernos* 9 (1996), pp. 65-86, RIGSBY, K.J., *Asyilia: Territorial Inviolability in the Hellenistic World*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1996 and NAIDEN, F.S., «So-Called “Asylum” for Suppliants», in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 188 (2014), pp. 136-138.

<sup>6</sup> NAIDEN, F.S., *Ancient Supplication*, Oxford-New York 2006 examines many aspects of the practice by investigating the gestures, the types of requests, the arguments, and the role of the supplicant. Most recently PEDRINA, M., *La supplication sur les vases grecs. Mythes et images. Biblioteca di “Eidola”* 2, Pisa-Roma 2017 focuses on the notion of supplication and its visual and literary representation.



on the political needs of the city and appropriate argumentation<sup>7</sup>. It is therefore challenging to examine cases of supplication accepted or refused in order to understand the multiple aspects of the subject through mythological examples from fifth-century drama and oratorical discourse of the fourth-century B.C.

## 1. SUPPLICATION AND ASYLUM ON THE TRAGIC STAGE

In the following part of our paper we will investigate cases of supplication followed by the granting of asylum in Greek tragedy, as this phenomenon seems to have been at the heart of tragic inspiration<sup>8</sup>. Dramatic poetry is full of suppliants<sup>9</sup>, but we are obliged to limit ourselves in this investigation to actual scenes of supplication that lead to the granting of asylum and the way the mythological plot is

<sup>7</sup> The rhetorical means of supplication should establish first of all, the reasons why the supplicated should help the refugees; it is expressed in many different ways, most of the times in terms of kinship or friendship, and the legality of the request see ZELNICK-ABRAMOVITZ, R., «Supplication and Request: Application for Foreigners to the Athenian Polis», in *Mnemosyne* 51 (1998), pp. 554-573, p. 566. See also GRAY, B., *Stasis and Stability: Exile, the Polis, and Political Thought, c. 404-146 B.C.*, Oxford 2015, p. 297.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the granting of asylum in drama see the studies of DERLIEN, J., *Asyl. Die religiöse und rechtliche Begründung der Flucht Zu sakralenorten in der griechisch-römischen Antike*, Marburg 2003, GRETHLEIN, J., *Asyl und Athen. Die Konstruktion kollektiver Identität in der griechischen Tragödie*, Stuttgart 2002. Particularly in Aeschylus see: DREHER, M., «Hikesie und Asylie in den Hiketiden des Aischylos», in *Das antike Asyl. Kultische Grundlagen, rechtliche Asylgestaltung und politische Funktion (Akten der Gesellschaft für Griechische und Hellenistische Rechtsgeschichte)* 15 (2003), pp. 59-84, ID. «Die fremden Hiketai und die verfremdete Asylie in den Hiketiden des Aischylos», in *Xenophobie-Philoxenie. Vom Umgang mit Fremden in der Antike*, ed. RIEMER, P., Stuttgart 2005, pp. 103-113.

<sup>9</sup> A cursory list of such heroes comprises the Danaids in Aeschylus' *The Suppliants*, Orestes in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Argive mothers in Euripides' *The Suppliants*, children of Heracles in *Heracleidae*, Andromache and Medea in Euripides' homonymous tragedies, Creusa in *Ion*, the son of Ajax in Sophocles' *Ajax*, Oedipus and Polyneices in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and many others. For supplication in drama see KOPPERSCHMIDT, J., *Die Hikesie als dramatische Form. Zur motivischen Interpretation des griechischen Dramas*, Ph.D. Thesis, Tübingen 1966, BURIAN, P., *Suppliant Drama: Studies in the Form and Interpretation of Five Greek Tragedies*, Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton 1971, FREYBURGER, G., «Supplication grecque et supplication romaine», in *Latomus* 47.3 (Juillet-Septembre 1988), pp. 501-525, LEGANGNEUX, P., «Les scènes de supplication dans la tragédie Grecque», in *Lalies* 20 (2000), pp. 175-188 and the most recent study of TZANETOU, A., *City of Suppliants: Tragedy and the Athenian Empire. Ashley and Peter Larkin series in Greek and Roman culture*, Austin 2012 associates supplication in tragedy with Athenian imperialism.



devised and organized so as to present a major political issue on the tragic stage. Answers to questions, as for example: “*how do the asylum seekers appear (outward appearance-character)?*”, “*in which way does a supplication take place?*”, “*what are the characteristics of a public or private supplication in drama?*”, “*how do the supplicated react?*”, “*what prerequisites should be fulfilled for the granting asylum?*” and “*what political solution do the tragic poets offer?*”, form the purpose of the following part of the paper and require particular research. However, because we cannot cover all the tragic productions, we will focus on cases of foreigner heroes, who aim at political asylum, as they appear in Aeschylus’ *The Suppliants* (463 B.C.) and Euripides’ *Medea* (431 B.C.). We have chosen these two specific tragic plays because they present the asylum application in ancient Greek tragedy clearly, as the heroes are foreigners, barbarians, and seek refuge in Greece. Both plays are interesting for the ways in which attitudes to the barbarian world were being confronted, contested and changed in the fifth-century. In Aeschylus’ *The Suppliants*, the fifty maidens, the Danaids, arrive in Argos from overseas under the guidance of their father Danaus, fleeing from a forced marriage to their Egyptian cousins. They claim protection from the king, Pelasgus, based on their Argive ancestry. On the other hand, Euripides’ hero, Medea, who has escaped from her fatherland following the leader of the Argonauts, Jason, and is now living with him in Corinth, comes from Asia. She also admits that she comes from “*a land of barbarians*” (Eur. *Med.* 256) and particularly from Colchis.

In order to have a complete view of the subject, it is interesting to highlight the main points of each drama by focusing initially on their appearance. The Aegyptiads and especially Danaids are described by Aeschylus as physically different, as having a dark appearance<sup>10</sup> (dark skin, sun-burned race) and as non-Greek (Aesch. *Suppl.*

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<sup>10</sup> Regarding the complexity of darkness in Aeschylus’ *The Suppliants* we can refer the study of KARAKANTZA, D.E., «Dark Skin and Dark Deeds: Danaids and Aegyptioi in a Culture of Light», in *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion. Greek Studies: Interdisciplinary*



71, 155, 234, 237). The notion of colour appears in connection with the history of the family and relates to their origin. It is obvious that the tragic poet uses as a starting point the colour of their skin in order to highlight their otherness, to demarcate the Greek from other non-Greeks, and to state the antithesis of Greek and barbarians<sup>11</sup>. When Pelasgus, the political leader of Argos, first meets the Danaids, he asks: “*From what country should we say this unhellenic company has come luxuriating in barbarian robes and wrappings? For it is not the clothing of Argive women nor even from the ways of Hellas*” (Aesch. *Suppl.* 234-237). Then, the Argive king in his attempt to describe the maidens more aptly, compares them to Libyans, Egyptians and Indians (Aesch. *Suppl.* 279-286)<sup>12</sup>. The Danaids also perceive themselves as different mainly because of their barbaric speech (Aesch. *Suppl.* 972) and costume<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, Euripides’ description of Medea focuses on her character, as all her abominable actions are connected with her barbarian origin and magic powers rather than her appearance<sup>14</sup>.

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*Approaches*, ed. CHRISTOPOULOS, M., KARAKANTZA, D.E., LEVANIIOUK, O., Lanham 2010, pp. 14-29.

<sup>11</sup> Ivi, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> MOREAU, A.M., *Eschyle: La violence et le chaos*, Paris 1985 and JOUANNA, J., «Le Chant Mâle des Vîerges: Eschyle, Suppliantes, v. 418-437», in *Revue des etudes grecques* 115 (2002), pp. 738-791 highlight the male side of the Danaids. On the contrary, BACHVAROVA, R.M., «Suppliant Danaids and Argive Nymphs in Aeschylus», in *Classical Journal* 104.4 (April-May 2009), pp. 289-310, pp. 293-294 argues that their femininity is emphasized, because they insist that “*a woman abandoned to herself is nothing. There is no Ares in her*” (Aesch. *Suppl.* 748-749).

<sup>13</sup> HELMER, E., «Savoir être étranger»: la question des réfugiés dans *Les Suppliantes* d’Eschyle (draft version), University of Puerto Rico (USA), Philosophy Department, pp. 1-8. GKIRGKENSIS, S., *Politics, Ideology and Institutions of Hegemonic Athens in the Suppliants of Aeschylus*, Ph.D. Thesis, Thessaloniki 2009, p. 181 adds (apart from those above, i.e. language and costume) as barbarian characteristics the theocratic perception of the absolute monarchy and mixed Greek-Oriental religion.

<sup>14</sup> PAPADOPOULOU, TH., «Anthropology, Sociology and Literary Tradition: The Female element in Greek Tragedy», in *Ancient Greek Tragedy*, ed. MARKANTONATOS, A., TSAGALIS, CH., Athens 2008, pp. 149-177, p. 151.



It is worth elaborating on the places<sup>15</sup> and methods<sup>16</sup> of the heroes' supplication. In Aeschylus, the scene of supplication begins with the maidens sitting peacefully at an altar in the centre of the orchestra, which belongs to the “*ἀγώνιοι θεοί*”, assembled gods (Aesch. *Suppl.* 188-190). They, also, carry in their left hand suppliant white wool-wreathed branches (sacred emblems of the merciful Zeus) (Aesch. *Suppl.* 22, 159, 191-192) asking for their supplication to be accepted. After a conversation referring to their ancestor Io, which establishes who they are and what they want, the maidens begin their plea<sup>17</sup>. They plead for the city of Argos and its gods to protect them from their possible persecution by their uncle's sons. Their supplication could be characterized as aggressive, as they threaten to pollute and blight the city with their suicide by hanging themselves, if their demands are not satisfied and if Zeus does not save them from their Egyptiad cousins, who want to marry them against their will.

<sup>15</sup> In the tragic plays of the fifth-century B.C. there are several places (altars, temples and even tombs) to which the heroes-suppliants resort, as for example the altar of “*ἀγώνιοι θεοί*” assembled gods at Argos (Aeschylus' *The Suppliants*), the altar of Apollo in Thebes (Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*), the altars of Zeus and Hestia in Thebes (Euripides' *Heracles*), the altar of Zeus in Marathon of Attika (Euripides' *Heracleidae*), the temple of Apollo at Delphi (Aeschylus' *Eumenides*), the temple of Athena on the Acropolis (Aeschylus' *Eumenides*), the temple of Thetis at Phthia (Euripides' *Andromache*), the temple of Demeter and Persephone in Eleusis (Euripides' *The Suppliants*), the tomb of Agamemnon in Argos (Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*), the tomb of Proteus in Egypt (Euripides' *Helen*).

<sup>16</sup> For the gestures and the established rules in the act of supplication (position, arguments, questions, demands, gestures) see LÉTOUBLON, F., «Le vocabulaire de la supplication en grec: performatif et dérivation délocutive», in *Lingua* 52 (1980), pp. 325-336, ALBERT, L., BRULEY, P., DUFIEF, A.S., «La Supplication: un langage à haut risque», in *La Supplication. Discours et représentation*, ed. ALBERT, L., BRULEY, P., DUFIEF, A.S., Rennes 2015, pp. 9-26. Especially in tragic plays of the fifth-century B.C. the heroes' supplication is presented in various ways. Some of them are depicted carrying suppliant branches (Euripides' *Heracleidae*, Aeschylus' and Euripides' *The Suppliants*, Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and *Choephoroi*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*), while others kneel down and touch the face or beard (Euripides' *Andromache*, *The Suppliants*, *Hecuba*, *Medea* and *Orestes*). Some invoke *Hikesios* Zeus (Euripides' *Hecuba*) or offer incense to the god (Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*). We also encounter the case of embracing the divine statue (Aeschylus' *Eumenides*).

<sup>17</sup> GKIRGKENSIS, S., *Politics, Ideology*, cit., p. 69 highlights that the vocabulary of kinship associates the suppliants with their protectors and it is presented the motif of aid to the threatened by the enemy overseas relative. So, he proves that Aeschylus in this way reproduces consciously the conditions of the Greek colonial movement.



At this point, we should emphasize that the general behaviour of the suppliants-maidens is motivated by their father-guardian, Danaus. He guides and consults them about the method of their supplication from beginning to end. It is known that refugees were not inviolable by definition, unless they remained in a temple or touched an altar. Thus, the care of Danaus to present his daughters as modest, laconic and compliant to the Argive people is justified, since he knows that a suppliant is always considered needful and in a disadvantaged position. Nevertheless, the Argive king expresses his concern about the fearless presence of the Danaids and their old father in Argos without a patron (*proxenos*)<sup>18</sup>. Also, it is known that those who arrived at a place should appear to the king accompanied by a guarantor, a patron who was their compatriot, but also a resident of the city to which they fled or, at least, by a messenger who represented them and undertook to submit their request to the king. In *The Suppliants*, this “rule” is circumvented due to the urgency of the suppliants’ appeal. Later, when they prove the kinship between them, they ask Pelasgus to become their patron.

On the other hand, the Euripidean scene of supplication that led to granting asylum involves the Athenian king, Aegeus, who is travelling back home after consultations with an oracle when he happens to meet Medea in Corinth. Then, she makes an appeal for *asylum* to him: “*But I beg you by your beard and by your knees and I make myself your suppliant: have pity, have pity on an unfortunate woman, and do not allow me to be cast into exile without a friend, but receive me into your land and your house as a suppliant*” (Eur. *Med.* 709-713). The supplication scene

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<sup>18</sup> Regarding the concept of *proxenia*, as protection by a member of one polis of all the members of another polis see MAREK, C., *Die Proxenie*, Frankfurt 1984, CALDAS, M.J., «The problem of the early proxenia and the Greek sanctuary», in *Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos din Galați. Seria Istorie* 3 (2004), pp. 7-17, SALAZAR SUTIL, N., «Inmigración, Suplicancia y la Política de Asilo en la Antigua Grecia», in *Cyber Humanitatis* 38 (2007), pp. 1-19 [<http://www.cyberhumanitatis.uchile.cl/index.php/RCH/article/view/10528/10582>, accessed 11 July 2019]. For the role and characteristics of the *proxenos* in ancient Greece and the modern world see BUONO-CORE VARAS, R., «Embajadores Griegos: ¿Una Diplomacia Profesional?», in *Intus-Legere Historia* 4.2 (2010), pp. 9-17, p. 16.



begins when Medea kneels down and touches Aegeus' beard in the posture of a suppliant while she begs him not to leave her without protection and exiled but to accept her into his city and his household. Medea also refers to herself as “ἄπολις”, without city or stateless and persuades Aegeus to provide her with sanctuary in Athens before she wreaks vengeance on Jason. Her phrase “ἔρημος ἄπολις” (Eur. *Med.* 255)<sup>19</sup>, without relatives or city is used in political terms by the heroine, on the one hand to declare her emotional upsurge (anger or passion) and on the other to emphasize the utmost importance of remaining without a city<sup>20</sup>. She is depicted by Euripides as a woman not only devoid of protection, but also undesirable in her own fatherland. Her status has been exaggerated, because she is foreigner, barbarian and woman. The tragic poet describes her being out of the social sphere, isolated and abandoned by her family and relatives. This ensures the sympathy of the Chorus, thus demonstrating female solidarity (Eur. *Med.* 230)<sup>21</sup>. As a foreigner her only option is to try hard “to make herself likeable to the city” (Eur. *Med.* 222). She claims that she conforms to the customs and honours the values of her host city, without maintaining an autonomous attitude<sup>22</sup>. However, as a woman constantly moving she is always considered as exiled and suspicious never being accepted in any place<sup>23</sup>.

Euripides points out the private and individual character of a supplication of a human being, who is in a weak position towards a powerful person, such as a king. Although the act of supplication at the altar of a god is the centre piece in many plays in Euripides, this does not happen in *Medea*. She begs the Athenian king face to face in order to ensure her acceptance and protection in Aegeus' house in Athens, after

<sup>19</sup> On this see VIDAL-NAQUET, P., «Note sur la place et le statut des étrangers dans la tragédie athénienne», in *L'Etranger dans le monde grec*, ed. LONIS, R., Vol. II, Nancy 1992, pp. 297-311, p. 300.

<sup>20</sup> MASTRONARDE, J.D., *Euripides Medea*, Cambridge 2002, p. 276.

<sup>21</sup> LUSCHNIG, C.A.E., «Interiors: Imaginary Spaces in *Alcestis* and *Medea*», in *Mnemosyne* 45 (1992), pp. 19-44, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> MASTRONARDE (2002), p. 276.

<sup>23</sup> KUNTZ, M., *Narrative Setting and Dramatic Poetry*, Leiden, New York and Köln 1993, p. 126.



her exile from Corinth. In other words, her political protection will be achieved through the granting of asylum in the royal house. On the contrary, Aeschylus in *The Suppliants* presents a supplication in public view. The Danaids flee to an altar of the city, i.e. a public space, and by invoking the gods, they use two means of persuading Pelasgus to grant them asylum: the vengeance to be exacted by the gods and the pollution to be incurred if the maidens commit suicide<sup>24</sup>. The Danaids deny that their flight is prompted by religious pollution because they “*have not been sentenced to exile for blood-guilt by vote of a city*” (Aesch. *Suppl.*6-7), which refers to the collective judgment of a political entity<sup>25</sup>, but because they are forced to marry.

In plays that concern supplication for protection from a city or its king rather than a private individual, the themes of pollution, vengeance and future prosperity are prominent, but each plot combines them in a different way<sup>26</sup>. In *Medea* the supplication is defensive. She gives or offers gifts to the supplicated in order to be accepted and granted asylum. In Aeschylus’ *The Suppliants* despite the pressure of time and the imminent danger for the heroines, the maidens are trying to gain asylum directly, while Medea appeals for asylum in a mild and diplomatic way. The behaviour of Medea as a suppliant is that she goes through a series of gestures and procedures that together constitute total self-abasement. She comes forward with her hands empty and outstretched, and adopts a physical posture of inferiority towards the object of her supplication, i.e. Aegeus<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> BACHVAROVA (2009), p. 297. So, according to TURNER, C., «Perverted Supplication and Other Inversions in Aeschylus’ Danaid Trilogy», in *Classical Journal* 97 (2001), pp. 27-50, the Danaids become persecutors instead of victims and Pelasgus a victim instead of a protector as the maidens attempt to defend a cause for which they can offer no supporting arguments the king would consider justifiable.

<sup>25</sup> BAKEWELL, W.G., «Aeschylus’ *Supplices* 11-12: Danaus as ΠΕΣΣΟΝΟΜΩΝ\*», in *Classical Quarterly* 58.1 (2008), pp. 303-307, p. 305.

<sup>26</sup> BACHVAROVA (2009), p. 294.

<sup>27</sup> GOULD, J., «Hiketeia», in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 93 (1973), pp. 74-103, p. 94.



The second point that it is interesting is the response of the supplicated. How do the supplicated react to the requests of the suppliants? In *The Suppliants*, after hearing the Danaids' plea for sanctuary, Pelasgus initially hesitates to respond to their demands<sup>28</sup>. Although the person who is supplicated has more power than the person who begs, in public supplication it is difficult for the supplicated to reject the suppliants<sup>29</sup>. The Argive king accepts the claim of the Danaids to be of Argive ancestry, but their status as suppliants is at stake. Pelasgus identifies the tension between the interests of foreigners and the interests of the state and because of the possibilities of war he will not act without the consent of the people (Aesch. *Suppl.* 398-401)<sup>30</sup>. In the outcome the king of Argos decides to refer the matter to the Argive assembly, where they will reach a political decision through voting (Aesch. *Suppl.* 365-369)<sup>31</sup>. In *Medea*, the response of the supplicated is quite different. Upon hearing Medea's plea for asylum, Aegeus is inclined to help her. As good reasons to respond to her plea for asylum, he cites the potential favour of the gods and her promise to provide him with drugs (Eur. *Med.* 415) that will help him bear children. He also agrees to protect her by offering asylum in Athens<sup>32</sup>, but he does not take the responsibility of removing her from Corinth (Eur. *Med.* 729). It would be blameworthy if he became an accessory to her escape. In addition, Aegeus gives a vow to seal their agreement, through which it seems that the poet gives to Medea a

<sup>28</sup> For the general behaviour of Pelasgus see HELMER (draft version), p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> CLARK, M., «Chryses' Supplication: Speech Act and Mythological Allusion», in *Classical Antiquity* 17.1 (1998), pp. 5-24, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> MITCHELL, G.L., «Greeks, Barbarians and Aeschylus' *Suppliants* », in *Greece & Rome* 53.2 (2006), pp. 205-223, p. 215.

<sup>31</sup> Many scholars such as EDINGER, G.H., «Aeschylus *Suppliants* 673», in *Classical Philology* 67 (1972), p. 46, ROBERTSON, G.I.C., «Asylum at Argos: The Suppliants of Aeschylus», Lecture in the production of the «Suppliants» by the Classics Drama Group at Trent University, pp. 1-5, BAKWELL (2008), p. 305 and BACHVAROVA (2009), p. 298 have approached the play from a political perspective, analyzing its presentation of the Argive king Pelasgus wrestling with the difficulties involved in ruling a state which appears to show some democratic characteristics.

<sup>32</sup> SFYROERAS, P.V., «The Ironies of Salvation: the Aegeus Scene in Euripides' *Medea*», in *Classical Journal* 90.2 (1994-1995), pp. 125-142, p. 129 clarifies that Medea does not refer to her children, but Aegeus' positive response guarantees only her safety.



political role. Consequently, the response of the supplicated Pelasgus to the Danaids is related to the consent of the people, while the reaction of Aegeus to Medea's supplication is directly related to her offer. However in both cases the granting of asylum to the Danaids and Medea is a fact, as we will see below. But what political solution is offered by ancient Greek mythological thought in each case? We will try to answer taking into account the main political conditions of the fifth-century and throwing light on the relation between literature and social-political institutions in ancient Greece.

As already mentioned, in *The Suppliants* the claim of asylum by the Danaids is brought to the Argive assembly. The Argive king disclaims the responsibility of protecting the maidens on his own initiative. The non-Greek Danaids cannot understand a political system in which the people hold the final decision-making powers (Aesch. *Suppl.* 370-375). Although they are confident about their right to be suppliants on the basis of their kinship, they are concerned about the reception of their supplication and their status as foreigners and suppliants, *xeinai*<sup>33</sup>. Danaus and his daughters are outsiders, and so are fearful of their status in the city of Argos. In *Medea*, the Athenian king takes on the responsibility of offering asylum to the homonymous heroine without a second thought. Initially, feeling pity about the status of Medea as exile and “*apolis*” and then influenced by her promise to enable him to have children, the Athenian king decides to accept her into his city and to host her in his house. His personal benefit overlooks the public interest of the city, since -without knowing it- he is facilitating a future murder. Medea is an outsider, but is not fearful of her status in the forthcoming city of Athens. Aeschylus presents the Argive people as protecting the Danaids. The maidens convince the reluctant king to persuade the Argive assembly to endow them with the status of *metics*<sup>34</sup>. The

<sup>33</sup> MITCHELL (2006), p. 214.

<sup>34</sup> For the institution of *metoikia* see BAKEWELL, W.G., «*Μετοικία* in the *Supplikes* of Aeschylus», in *Classical Antiquity* 16.2 (1997), pp. 210-228, p. 211, GANTZ, T., «Love and Death in the *Suppliants*



daughters of Danaus gain the status of *metics*, those who lived on the borders of a city-state but did not come from it, because they are both insiders and outsiders. They are acceptable as insiders because they are descendants of Io like the Argives (Aesch. *Suppl.* 16-19, 274-276, 291-324). Also, they have “*Hellenic*” aspects: they are modest, honour Greek gods and pray to Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon and Hermes “*in his Hellenic form*” (Aesch. *Suppl.* 210-223). However, they are outsiders and inherently suspicious because of their “otherness”. Pelasgus sums up the ambiguity of their position, when he calls them “*astoxeinoi*”, citizens and strangers at the same time<sup>35</sup>. Although they are of Argive ancestry and take up residence within the city walls, they never refer to themselves as “*πολιται*” (citizens) or “*ἄστοι*” (*astoi*, residents of the city)<sup>36</sup>. As *metics*, the Danaids receive a cluster of rights protecting themselves and their property. By offering the Danaids partial incorporation into the polis but not citizenship, Pelasgus hopes to maintain the city’s borders and autochthonous identity, and at the same time to avoid the immediate threat of bloodshed and pollution<sup>37</sup>. In each case the citizen assembly<sup>38</sup> shows its willingness to extend the protection of the community to a non-citizen. In this regard the play corresponds to

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of Aischylos», in *Phoenix* 32.4 (1978), pp. 279-287, p. 282, BACHVAROVA (2009), p. 289. Regarding the obligations, roles and rights of *metics* and especially their financial duties, legal privileges, military service, and religious participation see HESLEP, C.L., *The Metics and their Social Position: Foreign Residents in Athens during the Classical Period*, Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia 2012.

<sup>35</sup> MITCHELL (2006), pp. 215-217.

<sup>36</sup> BAKEWELL (1997), pp. 210-228.

<sup>37</sup> In short, they should be residents “*μετοικεῖν*” in land of Argos, free and immune against distraint “*ἀρρησιάστον*” and with protection from seizure “*ἀσολία*” by men. Their asylum will be assured and the penalty (that is exile) is stated for those who violate the decree’s intent by failing to protect the newcomers in time of need (Aesch. *Suppl.* 613-614). Neither citizen nor foreigner should carry them off, “*ἀγειν*”, but, if anyone should use violence on them, the citizen of Argos who did not rescue them should lose his rights with banishment ordered by the people (Aesch. *Suppl.* 605, 609-614). According to LINTOTT, A., «SULA-Reprisal by Seizure in Greek Inter-Community Relations», in *Classical Quarterly* 54.2 (2004), pp. 340-353, p. 343 the text uses legal terminology, which may reflect that used to protect non-citizen *metics* in Attica from seizure by citizens of communities other than Athens, who were pursuing a complaint against them - the sort of protection that was available to Athenians by virtue of their citizenship.

<sup>38</sup> Regarding the Athenian assembly as social-political institution cf. the study of GOTTESMAN, A., *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 26-43.



the situation in fifth-century Athens, where the metic and his property were protected by the Athenian court system, and the standard legal avenues for redress of grievances stood open to him<sup>39</sup>.

On the other hand, Euripides presents Medea as independent and self-reliant, even though she is a foreigner, a woman without political rights. She manages the situation by herself without a protector / patron (*proxenos*) (as happens in the case of the Danaids) and tries to secure her position in any way she can as an exile. After failing to persuade Creon, the Corinthian king, to remain in Corinth, she then asks Aegeus, the Athenian king, to accept her in Athens. In exile, insecurity drives the alien to unnatural deeds: a husband to abandon his wife for greater security, a mother to kill her children in spiteful revenge. The insecurity and dangers in exile are everywhere. The exile was an object of pity and a subject of asylum. Cut off from every family, religious and community tie, the exile was a suppliant who deserved protection and hospitality<sup>40</sup>.

In addition, we can point out that although supplication in the Greek world often took the form of a request for temporary assistance and refuge, Medea, and Danaus and his daughters take up permanent residence in Athens and Argos respectively. In *Medea* the king solves the problem of asylum privately, differentiating the interests of the polis from those of his household (acceptance and

<sup>39</sup> BAKEWELL (1997), pp. 213, 223, 226 notes that demographic factors, including population growth resulting from net immigration, increased pressure on land, and the concomitant development of a densely settled urban core, the “*ἄστυ*”, led to Pericles’ measure. So, *The Suppliants*’ depiction of “*μετοικία*” should be understood not only within the context created by Cleisthenes’ reforms, but also within the climate leading to Pericles’ citizenship law. They do not take up residence in the countryside, but instead enter the city and go where Pelasgus directs them. Thus, *The Suppliants* fits well within the general context of immigration and urban development surrounding Pericles’ law and Cleisthenes’ reforms.

<sup>40</sup> As is well known, hospitality is commonly recognized as an important value in the ancient Greek world and the Greek word “*ξένος*” indicates the guest, but also the stranger and the foreigner. *Xenia* was a political and religious institution and through the practices of supplication, strangers and foreigners demanded to be received into aristocratic houses (as Medea did) or into whole cities (as the Danaids did). In Greece (in Athens and Argos) there is no distinction between Greeks and barbarians over their protection. All (exiles, suppliants, asylum seekers etc.) are welcomed.



incorporation of the homonymous hero in the royal house). On the contrary, in *The Suppliants* the king solves the problem in public view. Special emphasis must be placed on the fact that these are women. This means that it was at least dangerous for a woman to move beyond the limits of her house (with or without a man to protect her). Generally, the integration of individuals into a house<sup>41</sup> was of the utmost importance in ancient Greece. For this reason Medea asks Aegeus to accept her in his house through an oath.

In conclusion, in each case asylum was granted, but not before much deliberation concerning both the justness of the suppliants' plea and the political implications. Asylum, then, though a humanitarian and god-fearing gesture of pity and piety, was also an act with political implications that could be ignored only at the peril of the host, as in the case of Aegeus. The whole process associated with asylum seeking follows a formal political settlement that is particularly presented in *The Suppliants*. Aeschylus describes in the political terms of democratic Athens<sup>42</sup> in the fifth-century (assembly, referendum) the institutions related to social organization. The assembly functions as a judicial system in the city that marks a change in politics, as the problems are now dealt with by social institutions. The protection of the Danaids has double meaning: they are women and suppliants. Women, like suppliants, are outsiders who must be converted into insiders. Thus, it seems that Aeschylus is ahead of his era. While the suppliants invoke the gods and their origin, their requests are finally accepted through a democratic process. On the contrary, Euripides, who produced *Medea* about thirty years after Aeschylus' *The Suppliants*, presents a different social organization. It refers to a pre-polis era of Athens, an old-fashioned kingdom with Aegeus as king. Although the poet addressed

<sup>41</sup> Regarding this theme see FOXHALL, L., «Household, Gender and Property in Classical Athens», in *Classical Quarterly* 39.1 (1989), pp. 22-44.

<sup>42</sup> GKIRGKENSIS, S., *Politics, Ideology*, cit., pp. 49, 277 highlights Aeschylus' athenocentrism and gives some interpretations connected with it.



the Athenians of the fifth-century, he describes an earlier timeframe, where the granting of asylum was still not legally and politically valid. It is also worth noting that *The Suppliants* is chronologically the first tragedy dealing with an issue of “international law”, since women are exiles-fugitives from a foreign country. Through the asylum procedure political and diplomatic issues should be solved in front of the city. For the leader of a state, the fear of *miasma* (pollution from the refusal to grant asylum to fugitives) is as important as his bad political handling of the case, for it can have devastating consequences for the people of a city. Consequently, the co-existence of religious and political elements in the frame of granting asylum is obvious. Fifth-century literary sources do not present a clear picture that could help us to choose between either of these dual perspectives. Therefore, study of the two examples of mythical asylum in the form in which it was presented on the Athenian stage in the fifth-century B.C. proves that asylum granting was an institution in progress with an unspecified legal process. In addition, dramaturgical rules do not always refer to the historical course of a phenomenon<sup>43</sup> and, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet has observed, tragic discourse is different from that of the documents relating to legal or political practice, even though it takes them as a point of reference<sup>44</sup>. On the other hand, an extensive body of the “language” of drama exists in the oratory and narrates stories about the openness of Athens to any suppliant. We shall examine this “openness of Athens” in the second part of the paper.

## 2. ISOCRATES' *PLATAICUS* AND POLITICAL SUPPLICATION

Up to now, we have examined two cases in which, after deliberation, asylum was granted; let us now turn to Isocrates' *Plataicus*, a quite different case. The

<sup>43</sup> We will not deal here with the relationship between theatre, history and social institutions.

<sup>44</sup> VIDAL-NAQUET, P., «Note sur la place», cit., pp. 297-311.



discourse was written by Isocrates sometime around 374/3 B.C. or later<sup>45</sup>. Plataea was a small city which fought at Marathon by the side of Athens; during the Peloponnesian War, it was besieged and then sacked by Thebes. The refugees who reached Athens were welcomed and given the rights of citizenship<sup>46</sup>. In 386 the city was rebuilt, but in 373 Thebes destroyed it once again and exiled the inhabitants<sup>47</sup>. Then, the Plataeans took refuge at Athens, as they had done before, but this time history did not repeat itself, as no help was given and their supplication was rejected. Thus, the situation is different in *Plataicus*, as we are in the fourth century before the Assembly of Athens, the alleged supplication is evidence of an oratorical discourse, the supplicant is a Greek city, the supplicated is a Greek city as well, and the result is negative, as the supplication is not accepted. This case of oratorical supplication, however, has been overlooked, and it is a neglected theme in a rather neglected Isocratic discourse. The classical approach of previous research on *Plataicus* has tended to focus on whether Isocrates wrote this discourse for actual delivery or as political pamphlet or educational model<sup>48</sup>. More recently, Elena Isayev examined

<sup>45</sup>This is the date usually given. The terminus post quem is the destruction of Plataea. For a recent discussion of the date see BLANK, T., *Logos und Praxis: Sparta als politisches Exemplum in den Schriften des Isokrates*, Berlin 2014, p. 253.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. DIODORUS (15.46.6): *μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα οἱ μὲν Θηβαῖοι τὰς Πλαταιὰς κατασκάψαντες [...] οἰδὲ Πλαταιεῖς εἰς Ἀθήνας μετὰ τέκνων καὶ γυναικῶν φυγόντες τῆς ἰσοπολιτείας ἔτυχον διὰ τὴν χρηστότητα τοῦ δήμου.*

<sup>47</sup> See also PAPILLON, T.L., *Isocrates*, Vol. II, Austin 2004, pp. 228-229.

<sup>48</sup> The most recent scholarship examines mainly the political dimension of the speech considering the political agenda that Isocrates had in mind. NICOLAI, R., *Studi su Isocrate. La comunicazione letteraria nel IV sec. a. C. e i nuovi generi della prosa*, Roma 2004, pp. 109-110 studies *Plataicus* as a speech written to put a stop to Theban imperialism. BLANK, T., *Logos und Praxis*, cit., pp. 253-269 offers an excellent analysis of the historical context and the political background of the discourse and examines the three different types of foreign policy that Athens, Sparta and Thebes represent in *Plataicus*. BOUCHET, C., *Isocrate l'Athénien, ou la belle hégémonie: étude des relations internationales au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle a.C.*, France 2014 focuses on Isocrates' views on interstate politics in the fourth-century. PAPILLON, T.L., *Isocrates*, cit., pp. 228-229 summarizes previous research and concludes that as there is no evidence that the speech was actually presented to the Athenian Assembly, even if Isocrates wrote it for actual delivery by a Plataean representative, but all the other possibilities exist. This means that may have been an exercise for Isocrates' pupils to use as a model, an advertisement for his school, or a political pamphlet in favour of Athens or against Thebes. Recently, GRAY, B., *Stasis and Stability*, cit., p. 299, suggested that *Plataicus* is probably a pamphlet written to promote a number of causes, including more humane treatment of Plataean and other



*Plataicus* in the context of asylum and persuasively argued that the Plateans did not present themselves as passive, waiting victims, but as actors who keep the pressure on to have their claims addressed<sup>49</sup>. As the speaker declares in the proem “*we have this contest not only against the Thebans but also against the most powerful orators, whom the Thebans have bribed with our own money to speak on their behalf*” (4). That means that we are dealing with a discourse that reflects the rhetorical arguments that had succeeded the stereotypical ritualistic gestures of the previous centuries and could have been used in a plea for help by a powerless city towards Athens<sup>50</sup>. Therefore, it is very intriguing to identify in the argumentative strategy the oratorical features (style, vocabulary, arguments) present in such circumstances, even if the speech is perhaps just a mimesis of supplication<sup>51</sup>. Thus, the paper examines *Plataicus* as an oratorical sample of a political supplication.

First of all, regarding terminology, the terms that we are interested in and which are used to denote the act of supplication as well as the act of asylum seeking

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refugees at Athens. NAIDEN, F.S., *Ancient Supplication*, cit., pp. 181-182 in his analysis of *Plataicus*, examines it in the context of supplication, but even if he describes it as “the longest record of any act of ancient supplication”, his examination, in the context of a broader study of supplication, is limited and focused mainly on the legal arguments and the entreaties.

<sup>49</sup> ISAYEV, E., «Between hospitality and asylum: A historical perspective on displaced agency», in *International Review of the Red Cross* 99.1 (2017), pp. 75-98.

<sup>50</sup> Isocrates would not have used arguments and terminology that it would not have been rhetorically appropriate for his purpose; he always claimed that he was teaching the commonly accepted virtue and the commonly accepted values (*Antid.* 84); on this see ALEXIOU, E., «Rhetorik, Philosophie und Politik: Isokrates und die homologoumene arete», in *Rhetorica* 25.1 (2007), pp. 1-13 and ALEXANDRI, E., *Archaic Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Attic Oratory: Isocrates*, Ph.D. Thesis, Ioannina 2014, pp. 33 ss. For the same opinion see NAIDEN, F.S., *Ancient Supplication*, cit., p. 182 who thinks that the discourse doubtless contained the arguments that Isocrates believed an Assembly listening to suppliants would expect, and STEINBOCK, B., *Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse*, Michigan 2013, p. 198 who follows Naiden.

<sup>51</sup> We cannot be sure of the procedure that the actual Plataean refugees had followed. As has been shown by ZELNICK-ABRAMOVITZ, R., «Supplication and Request», cit., p. 555, in the fourth-century B.C. there were established methods and procedures as supplication had become an institutionalized form of ancient practice. The laws and attitudes to outsiders have been discussed by previous studies, and especially the legal aspects and citizenship procedures regarding immigration by KAPPARIS, K., «Immigration and Citizenship Procedures in Athenian Law», in *Revue Internationale des droits de l'Antiquité* 52 (2005), pp. 71-113, p. 74 and CHANIOTIS, A., «Conflicting Authorities», cit., pp. 65-86.



are the words “*hiketeia*”, supplication and “*asylia*”, *asylum* and their derivatives<sup>52</sup>. In the introduction of the *Plataicus* discourse we observe that Isocrates uses an explicit verb to name the action of supplication, the Plataeans have come (“*ἤκομεν ἰκετεύσοντες*” 1, “*ἰκετεύοντες*” 6) to supplicate the Athenians. For the peroration (56-63), where the speaker reserves his appeal to pity, we find words denoting supplication as well (“*ἰκέτας*” 53, “*ἰκετῶν*” 53, “*ἰκέτεον*” 54, “*παρεκάλουν*” 54, “*ἰκετεύομεν*” 56). Isocrates does not use the term *asylum*, but instead he uses terms connected with the *asylum*-seeking procedure (“*καταφυγόντων*” 1, “*καταφυγεῖν*” 28, “*καταφυγοῦσαν*” 52 and “*καταφυγήν*” 55), literally denoting the place of refuge, the *asylum*<sup>53</sup>. Thus, regarding terminology, the context of a formal political act of supplication is set with the use of strong and articulate words.

In order to fulfill the oratorical purpose of a supplication, as we will argue, Isocrates combines elements from the three rhetorical genres, deliberative, forensic, and epideictic, creating a speech similar to a “*logos presbeutikos*”, an envoys’ speech, as it is spoken by a representative of one polis to another<sup>54</sup>. What is important is that this is not a case of supplication that uses religious conventions such as the fear of the gods and especially Zeus’ revenge<sup>55</sup>. Instead, Isocrates uses political and

<sup>52</sup> See notes 5 and 6.

<sup>53</sup> The orators use the word “*καταφυγήν*” to describe the place of refuge. Elsewhere, Isocrates describes Athens as offering the securest “*καταφυγήν*” (*Paneg.* 41, 54-56), Aeschines describes Athens as the common refuge of the Greeks, “*ἡ κοινὴ καταφυγή τῶν Ἑλλήνων*” (*In Ctesiphontem* 134).

<sup>54</sup> See RUBINSTEIN, L., «Envoys and Ethos» in *La Rhétorique Du Pouvoir: Une Exploration de l’Art Oratoire Deliberatif Grec*, ed. EDWARDS, M.J., DERRON, P., Switzerland 2016, pp. 79-128, p. 80. We have to keep in mind that classification is not helpful when dealing with Isocrates’ work, as there are grounds on which we can assign all the corpus (apart from the six forensic speeches) to epideictic oratory, composed for written dissemination and not for live delivery, see LIVINGSTONE, N., *A commentary on Isocrates’ Busiris*, Leiden 2001, p. 10, on these issues see as well TOO, Y.L., *The Rhetoric of Identity in Isocrates*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 10-35. Here, we are not trying to classify the discourse but to present the elements from the three genres. See also, EDWARDS, M.J., «Rhetoric and Technique in the Attic Orators and Aristotle’s technê rhêtorikê», in *Inspiration and Technique: Ancient to Modern Theories on Beauty and Art*, ed. ROE, J., STANCO, M., Bern 2007, pp. 35-48.

<sup>55</sup> On this see also ISAYEV, E., «Between hospitality and asylum», cit., p. 86, who notes that the Plataeans make no recourse to Zeus as the protector of guests and suppliants in their historic plea to the Athenians.



moral arguments to draw firstly the picture of the suppliants and to prove the worthiness of the city that supplicates. In this respect, he stresses that the beneficiaries were virtuous and deserving of help, thus the supplication is lawful (1-2). The supplicants are represented as friends, hence, they are integrated in a context of mutual obligations, i.e. excepting help or expecting to have the same friends and same enemies<sup>56</sup>, especially as they were twice besieged, because of their friendship with Athens (26). Secondly, they are benefactors (1) which reminds us that, when an opportunity arrives, they are expecting reciprocity according to Greek values. Additionally, they are relatives (51), as in the peroration the speaker reminds the Athenians that after the destruction of Plataea in 427, they offered citizenship to the Plataeans, a decision that related them through kinship and intermarriages (51). This argument is expanded and refined by reminding the audience in the peroration of the common memory of the Athenians and Plataeans, when they fought together against the Persians (58-61). By highlighting concord, Isocrates appeals with an emotional power to their common pride in their past achievements, but, at the same time, he offers an argument that appeals to reason, based on the idea that the Athenians should not allow the Thebans to destroy the land of Plataea, since it contains the greatest sign of the the excellence of the Athenians, the trophies from the battle of Plataea (59). Those trophies are the memorials of the Thebans' medism, which is the reason they want to destroy this land as a reminiscence of their shame (60)<sup>57</sup>. This is an argument that has double strength, as at the same time it reminds us that the

<sup>56</sup> On the Greek popular thought that is pervaded by the assumption that one should help one's friends and harm one's enemies see HERMAN, G., *Ritualised friendship and the Greek City*, Cambridge and New York 1987 and BLUNDELL, M.W., *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies. A study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics*, Cambridge 1989.

<sup>57</sup> According to HERODOTUS (9.85) the Greeks buried the dead at Plataea. Plataea held a place particularly dear in Athenian public discourse because of the service at Marathon in 490 B.C. and the mistreatment by Thebes at the outset of the Peloponnesian War, see NUDELL, J., «“Who Cares about the Greeks Living in Asia?”: Ionia in Fourth-Century Attic Orator», in *The Classical Journal* 114.2 (2018-2019), pp. 163-190, p. 173. On the medism of the Thebans see also STEINBOCK, B., *Social Memory*, cit., pp. 102-103.



Athenians and the Plataeans share the same past and the same enemies, and that this particular enemy, the Thebans, are betrayers of the whole of Greece (62, cf. 30). All these things create sentiments of familiarity between the non-domestic audience and the supplicants and lead to the enmity that the speaker will try to create between the audience and the Thebans. As Chris Carey has noticed, the contexts for Greek oratory are explicitly or implicitly triangular; two speakers or groups are competing for the favourable judgment of an audience, and in that competitive context this almost inevitably has a negative counterpart, the creation of an emotional distance between the audience and one's opponent<sup>58</sup>. Admittedly, Isocrates builds the argumentation regarding the justice of the suppliants' plea on claims and evidence that prove the injustice of the Thebans in a rather forensic way, attacking the Thebans as if they were the litigants in a court procedure. In doing so, in the introduction (1-6) and the narration (7)<sup>59</sup>, where he presents the events and the destruction of the city by the Thebans, Isocrates addresses the assembly in the first-person plural, making use of the common places and style appropriate to the epideictic genre. But when it comes to the proof (8-55) he starts speaking in the first person singular, as he proceeds to the forensic part of the speech. He then presents the logical argumentation and a contradiction of the arguments that the Thebans might use, drawing a hostile picture of them. He starts with the violation of the treaties and wonders what definition of justice the Thebans would employ to justify their behaviour. For, if they examine ancestral customs, they will see that they should not be ruling others but rather should be paying taxes to Orchomenus. And if they hold that the treaties are valid, which is just “*δίκαιον*”, they must admit that they are acting unjustly “*ἀδικοῦν*” and violating its terms, for this treaty requires that both large and small cities be autonomous

<sup>58</sup> CAREY, C., «The rhetoric of diabolé», in *The interface between philosophy and rhetoric in classical Athens - an international conference organized by the University of Crete*, 29-31 October 2004, Rethymno, Greece.

<sup>59</sup> Isocrates does not present in detail the narrative portion, as often in deliberative speeches, based on the assumption that the historical information is clear and known to the Assembly, see PAPHILLON, T.L., *Isocrates*, cit., p. 230.



(10)<sup>60</sup>. The Thebans have committed injustice both on the basis of the ancestral laws and on the basis of the treaties they have violated. The argument the speaker believes that the Thebans would use as a proof that they were acting justly is that they have benefited their own allies (11). This is an argument which could be accepted by the Greeks, as it expresses the view that it is considered just to help friends and to harm enemies. However, the speaker opposes to this hypothetical argument that no grievance or accusation should be more powerful than oaths and treaties (12). The Thebans use force to claim and redistribute land belonging to others. Their greed is so big that they want to dominate the weaker, believing they are equal to the strongest (20). The speaker in this part of the speech uses strong words to attack the Thebans. He accuses them of violation of the law (“*παρανομίαν*” 5, 23), hubristic behaviour (“*ὑβρις*” 16)<sup>61</sup>, and a shameless attitude (“*εἰς τοῦτον ἀναισχυντίας*” 19), finishing this part of his accusation with the even stronger one of greed (“*πλεονεξία*” 20, 25). This behaviour is marked again as hubristic and arrogant (“*ὑβρις*” 27), as cowardly and base (“*ἀνανδρία καὶ πονηρία*” 28), as perfidy (“*ἀπιστίαν*” 29), as betrayal of the whole of Greece (30), and as a longstanding enmity against Athens (31). This category of arguments, used under the umbrella of the proof that the supplication is just and lawful, because the opponent has committed acts of injustice, is the one based on the forth-century discussion on the concept of justice, on what is greed and, finally, on what are the benefits from the preference of justice to injustice<sup>62</sup>. In 40

<sup>60</sup> The treaties that had been signed had as an absolute condition the autonomy of the Greek cities, whether they were large or small. For the Peace of 374 B.C. see DIODORUS (15.38) and DIDYMUS (*On Demosthenes* 7.59 ff.).

<sup>61</sup> For a recent discussion on the term “*ὑβρις*” see CAIRNS, D.L. «Hybris», in *The Encyclopedia of Greek Tragedy*, Vol. II, ed. ROISMAN, H.M., Malden 2014, pp. 702-706.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. AESCHYLUS, *The Suppliants* (342-343), where the King expresses his fear of taking upon himself a dangerous war and the Chorus tries to persuade him by reminding him that justice protects her allies. The tragic poets, the historians, the orators and the philosophers, all tried to answer questions on the theory of justice and to find ways to link it to advantage and to apply it for the public benefit. There is a vast amount of scholarship on the issue of the concept of justice in archaic and classical Greece, which is beyond the purpose of this paper. For the concept of justice in Isocrates see RUMMEL, E., *Examination of Isocrates' moral ideas and their background*, Ph.D. Thesis, Toronto 1976 and ALEXANDRI, E., *Archaic Moral Values*, cit., pp. 185 ss.



“*δίκαιον*” is the cooperative behaviour that won the favour of the allies based on loyalty and gentleness, and this is a turn to a more humanistic conduct. Concluding in 52 with a reminder that the supplicants have suffered misfortunes unjustly, that is the reason why the Plataeans deserve their supplication to be accepted. He ends the entire discourse with the term “*δίκαιον*” as the last and most emphatic word.

Having established that the suppliants are friends and their opponents are enemies, who act against justice and the common good, Isocrates sets new parameters leaving behind the abstract idea of what is just and preparing his readers or audience for the concerns of a deliberative discourse. The arguments now are lawful, expedient, honourable and practicable (cf. *Rhetoric to Alexander* 1421b21 ss.), adequate to a speech, deliberative in nature, that attempts to urge an action, in this case the acceptance of the supplication. Admittedly, from 33 to 45 he grounds his arguments in practical utility, based on advantage and on practicality, stressing the tradition of the city to fear acts of infamy and dishonour, not danger. He refers to danger because granting asylum to a supplicant involved interfering with the Thebans and asylum had a political significance; a decision to help the Plataeans could probably precipitate war (38). However, a refusal to grant asylum could be construed as a sign of political weakness<sup>63</sup>. Besides, the Athenians will not face any risk if they decide to help the Plataeans, on the contrary they will gain advantage, namely new allies (42, 43) as they will establish themselves as people who govern in a just manner. At the same time Isocrates is using emotional appeals to ask the Athenians to avoid dishonour by neglecting and turning away the suppliants; the Athenians should follow their ancient customs and tradition not to fear danger, but mostly bad reputation and shameful behaviour (39, cf. *Panath.* 185-186, *Paneg.* 100-128). The Plataeans, go further, as Elena Isayev has noticed, by warning that the Athenian response to their plea will affect the balance of international diplomatic

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<sup>63</sup>See also PRICE, E.M., *Rethinking Asylum: History, Purpose, and Limits*, Cambridge 2009, p. 30.



relations and alliances. In other words, if Athens does not accept the supplication, it will lose its allies and her ancestral reputation of being kind to strangers<sup>64</sup>. This aggressive character of the supplication reminds us in a different way of the threat of pollution found in drama, but here the punishment will not be sent by the gods. As is stated in the proem, if the Athenians assist Plataea at this occasion, that will cause the entire world to regard them as the most scrupulous and the most just of all the Greeks (2), and this is not an appeal to act in a moral way, but rather to act in a useful way that will bring more alliances and hence power.

Isocrates cleverly combines the above with the traits of the epideictic speech which he assumes to shape the image of the supplicated. In consistence with the imperial ideology of the polis, he highlights benevolence, respect for the law, acquittal of favours and aid to refugees as distinctive characteristics of Athens. From the beginning of the discourse the Athenians are presented as people who come to the rescue of victims of injustice, requite their benefactors with gratitude<sup>65</sup> and, most importantly, many people in the past have taken refuge with them (“πολλῶν καταφυγόντων” 1). All this belonged to the usual repertoire of the standard patriotic myths that the Athenians used to narrate in public speeches in order to shape their identity<sup>66</sup>. Finally in this context, using the circle technique, in the peroration Isocrates employs, as one might expect, the well-known myth of Adrastus and the

<sup>64</sup> ISAYEV, E., «Between hospitality and asylum», cit., p. 84. Similarly in the context of supplication the idea of just retribution of evil and just reward for good found in *The Suppliants* of Aeschylus (433-437).

<sup>65</sup> The appeal to reciprocity, the acquittal of favours is a convenient characteristic of Athens for the purpose of the discourse. In addition, arguments from negative reciprocity are also being used: the Athenians should punish the *hybris* of the Thebans, see LOW, P., *Interstate Relations in Classical Greece*, New York 2007, pp.74-75.

<sup>66</sup> In *Panathenaius* 94, Isocrates, trying to depict the Athenians' character, draws a description between the Lacedaemonians who committed wrongs both against the benefactors of Hellas and against their own kinsmen and the Athenians who gave the Plataeans who had escaped all the privileges which they themselves enjoyed. The idea that Athens is a city open to outsiders, well-known from Thucydides' *Funeral Oration*, is expressed as well in Euripides' *Heracleidae*. Regarding Athens as an open city see SALAZAR SUTIL, N., «Inmigración, Suplicancia», cit., pp. 9-10, TZANETOU, A., *City of Suppliants*, cit. and GRAY, B., *Stasis and Stability*, cit., p. 298.



story of the *Seven against Thebes* (53)<sup>67</sup>. This popular myth allows Isocrates to stress that this acceptance of a “*hiketeia*” gave the Athenians an undying reputation, a reputation that they should not betray now and acts as a point in reference to which Athenian superiority can be shown. The myth, as used by Isocrates, becomes indeed a very appropriate argument as at the same time it combines the appeal to the emotion and to the self-presentation of Athenian superiority, presents the example of Athens accepting a supplication, and most conveniently an accepted supplication against Thebes. Moreover, as there is a correspondence between the situation of the Argives and their own, the Plataeans draw the parallels, but, at the same time, a comparison is allowed that results in the current supplication being presented as more just and lawful (54). For the Argives came as suppliants after they had invaded an alien territory, whereas the Plataeans came after having lost their own. While the Argives asked for help to take up the bodies of their dead, the Plataeans asked for the rescue of the survivors; and most importantly, the Argives asked that the dead should not be denied burial, but the Plataeans asked that the living should not be despoiled of their fatherland without a refuge (“*μηδεμίαν ἔχοντα καταφυγήν*”, 55). These *a fortiori* arguments are used not only to remind the audience of the details of the story, avoiding the narration of an already known myth, but also to make the supplication even stronger. The paradigm serves not just as an analogy but as a comparison that proves that they are even more deserving of the Athenians’ support than the Argives had been in the mythical past<sup>68</sup>. Additionally, the forensic features at the end of the speech allow Isocrates to make the transition from the logical arguments to the most emotional ones with an appeal to pathos. Returning to the first-person plural he is

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<sup>67</sup> In this story king Adrastus led the Argives against Thebes in support of Polyneices son of Oedipus but he was defeated. After that, he turned to Athens and supplicated for help in recovering the dead bodies of those who died in the expedition. The Athenians accepted his supplication. The same myth is used in *Panegyricus* (4.54-60) and in *Panathenaicus* (12.168-171) in two different versions. Apart from Isocrates, the myth can be found in EURIPIDES, *The Suppliants*, HERODOTUS 9.27, [LYSIAS] Or. 2. 6-11, [PLATO] *Menex.* 239, XENOPHON *Hell.* 6.5.46, DEMOSTHENES 60.8

<sup>68</sup> On this see also STEINBOCK, B., *Social Memory*, cit., pp. 198-199.



shifting the emotion from eloquence to lament telling in a few lines the story of a refugee: could anyone find someone more unfortunate than the supplicants, who lost everything, city, land, possessions in one day and spend their time longing for home and lamenting the change that has come upon them (46-47). The supplicants, Isocrates continues, raise their children without the hopes they had for them, reduced to slaves, reduced to labourers. And the worst of all is the separation, the separation from one another, citizen from citizen, wives from their husbands, and daughters from their mothers. They face “all the other shameful effects of poverty and exile” (50). All these appeals to pity through visual imagination are in combination with a wording that recalls the wisdom of the poets<sup>69</sup>. Isocrates, that way, substitutes the lack of verbs denoting performance of significant gestures such as embracing and grasping the knees, or touching the chin, and, instead, uses the commonplace of the unhappiness that exile brings to create images and make the Assembly witnesses on his behalf<sup>70</sup>. The supplicants, he continues, reminding his audience of Homeric images, had been reduced to vagrants and beggars, which is the worst position that anyone in ancient Greece could see himself in (cf. *Od.* 11. 489-91, *Pl. Rep.* 516d.), and at the same time, the terminology of “*hiketeia*”, (“*ἱκετῶν*” 53, “*ἱκετεύομεν*” 56) offers to his appeal the sanctification of supplication.

<sup>69</sup> The appeal to pity at the end of the speech is a characteristic of the forensic oratory, see also KONSTAN, D., «Pity and Politics», in *Pity and power in Ancient Athens*, ed. STERNBERG, R.H., Cambridge 2005, pp. 47-66, pp. 49-50.

<sup>70</sup> For the gestures and the established rules in the act of supplication see note 16. We have gestures referred to in oratory, in *Against Demosthenes* 1 written by Dinarchus, for example, the Thebans had reached the Arcadians with difficulty by sea and were bearing a suppliant’s olive-branch and heralds’ wands. The established gestures, later in the court, became part of the hypokrisis. On the issue see EDWARDS, M.J., «Hypokritēs in action: delivery in Greek rhetoric», in *Profession and Performance: Aspects of Oratory in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. KREMMYDAS, C. et al., vol. 123, School of Advanced Study, University of London 2013, pp. 15-26 and recently O’CONNELL, P.A., *The Rhetoric of Seeing in Attic Forensic Oratory*, Austin 2017, p. 1, who approaches the performance aspects of classical Athenian oratory and visualization techniques, and demonstrates that they were a persuasive method displayed in the Athenian courts. On the issue of performance in Athenian lawcourt oratory see also SERAFIM, A., *Attic Oratory and Performance*, London-New York 2017.



*Plataicus* is a discourse that exhibits great rhetorical power concerning the description of the place of a suppliant who is the victim of the cruelty of war and imperialism. Isocrates offers, as in many other cases, a ground for humanitarian values to be grown and flourish later in the Hellenistic period<sup>71</sup>. But there is always the limitation of the pragmatism of Isocrates' "*philosophia*"<sup>72</sup>. Even if *Plataicus* puts an emphasis on humanity, the aid that the speaker proposes is not an unconditional aid for humanitarian reasons or out of philanthropic concern<sup>73</sup>. Apart from the rhetorical commonplaces and a peroration that has been found to "*have a true and noble pathos*"<sup>74</sup>, appropriate for the end of the speech, Isocrates is not only inviting sympathy for the suppliants but is advocating the application of humanitarian values to political decision-making about the displaced. Most importantly, he lists many practical reasons why the supplicants deserved to be accepted in a political and civic context based on advantage, reciprocity, human justice, kinship and Athens' status as a free land and powerful city. In the actual historical context, the Assembly chose to reject the supplication made by the Plataeans. Perhaps, as Fred Naiden argues, some in the Assembly made counter arguments about the treaties cited by the Plataeans, as international agreements brought new factors to the decision for the acceptance of a supplication<sup>75</sup>. The point is that this decision, as the first decision in Euripides' *The Suppliants*, was perfectly within the Assembly's rights. The acceptance of supplication was not presupposed, and Isocrates had to find feasible means of persuasion and speak in terms specific to the culture of the polis. However, the polis had every right to decide that another political act, rather than the acceptance of the "*hiketeia*", would be more useful and advantageous.

<sup>71</sup> GRAY, B., *Stasis and Stability*, cit., p. 299.

<sup>72</sup> On Isocrates pragmatism see SCHIAPPA, E., «Isocrates' *Philosophia* and contemporary pragmatism», in *Rhetoric, Sophistry, Pragmatism*, ed. MAILLOUX, S., New York 1995, pp. 33-60.

<sup>73</sup> See GRAY, B., *Stasis and Stability*, cit., pp. 298, 339, 383.

<sup>74</sup> JEBB, R., *The Attic Orators*, Vol. II, London 1876, p. 182.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. and NAIDEN, F.S., *Ancient Supplication*, cit., p. 183.



## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have described features of ancient Greek supplication and asylum seeking the terminology and the argumentation that was considered crucial in order for a supplication to be accepted and asylum to be granted or not, while moving from the world of myth, drama and religion to the world of oratory, city states and civic identity. We have examined two tragedies, Aeschylus' *The Suppliants* and Euripides' *Medea*, from the fifth-century B.C. and Isocrates' *Plataicus* as an example from fourth-century rhetoric. In the case of drama we have found that the sanctity of suppliants and asylum seekers follows an unwritten law. The suppliants' inviolability still has religious features, as asylum could be granted to any foreigner seeking refuge in the temple or at the altar of a local god. Nevertheless, the whole process of supplication and granting asylum included political hints associated with the social organization, the institutions and the city's legal-judicial system. So, we cannot have a clear picture about it, because religious and political elements co-exist in ancient Greek tragedies. Regarding *The Suppliants* and *Medea* we emphasized the fact that these are two supplications by women, barbarians and exiles-fugitives, who sought refuge in Greece and were accepted by the authorities. However, in *The Suppliants* the claim of asylum by the Danaids is brought to the Argive assembly and their requests are accepted through a democratic process, while in *Medea* the king solves the problem of Medea's asylum privately, differentiating the interests of the polis from those of his household. In the case of Isocrates' *Plataicus* we have argued that the speaker is fully aware of the fact that the acceptance of the supplication is not presupposed and that he must argue effectively against the case of the Thebans, presenting moral and political reasons to make the Athenians accept the plea for asylum. The mythical threats of pollution have now become political arguments, and the otherness of the suppliants has now been covered by oratorical features in a "*logos presbeutikos*". At the same time, as Isocrates always does, he uses the language of his times to respond to contemporary



discussions of the attachment of ethical values to political and moral conduct, creating a shift to a more humanistic behaviour that was of great importance for the later procedures and institutional framework in the Hellenistic period.

As stated in the introduction, our main objective was to extend further our knowledge of the multiple aspects of the subject of supplication and asylum seeking, focusing on the ways with which ancient Greek drama and oratory had dealt with this issue by examining the identity of the suppliants-refugees, the special conditions and the argumentation. Taken together, the results give us a picture of the general characteristics of the image of the refugees. Their status is similar to the state of modern refugees, the sense of abandonment, the nostalgia of the mother country, the dangers of the journey, the isolation upon arrival, the fear for the future. At the same time our investigation suggests that in the examined cases supplication is associated with the application of political asylum. Supplication and the status of asylum seeking were not just issues related to the religious or ethical identity of the Greeks. Greek religion had a special interest in people who were coming and asking for help, while the Pan-Hellenic institution of “*ξενία*”, hospitality, could reinforce their case. Nevertheless, the civil protection of the refugee or suppliant was not unconditionally granted. It was a serious decision for a city to grant asylum with many implications, thus the supplication could as well be refused. The works discussed, however, are not simple portraits of the refugees or merely poetic or oratorical transformations of the political solutions that were found in the fifth and later in the fourth-century. The most important consequence is that the refugee becomes a central political figure in issues of international law, and evidence for the political and diplomatic solutions emerges as far back as Greek antiquity.