

THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

Translated by S. G. Benardete

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

IT HAD always been thought by modern scholars that *The Suppliant Maidens* was the earliest Greek play still preserved, and the date of its production was given as *circa* 490 B.C. This opinion was based on stylistic considerations as well as on the fact that the protagonist of the play is the chorus itself, which Aristotle tells us to have been the early condition of the drama. A papyrus recently published, however, would seem to suggest that the trilogy, of which *The Suppliant Maidens* is the first part, was first produced after 470 B.C. Should this prove to be the case, it will be a real puzzle why Aeschylus kept the play in his drawer for twenty years; for it is hardly likely that he should have reverted to the archaism of *The Suppliant Maidens* after having written *The Persians*.

The plot of the play is simple. The fifty daughters of Danaus, descendants of the Argive Io, flee from Egypt to Argos because their Egyptian cousins wish, without their consent, to marry them. They come to a sacred grove near Argos, where the rest of the action takes place. Pelasgus, the King of Argos, is unwilling to grant them sanctuary unless the populace seconds his request; and the populace, convinced by the king and their own father, does grant it. But it is not a moment too soon; for after the maidens hear they are saved, their father informs them that the Egyptian cousins are just landing, and while he goes to bring aid, a herald of their cousins comes to take them away. Pelasgus, however, returns with an armed force, and the herald, threatening war, is forced to withdraw. Then Danaus returns again, counseling them to behave decently, and the play ends with a song of deliverance. Since the second and third parts of the trilogy are lost, and only a few scattered notices of the plot remain, we cannot be certain what Aeschylus' purpose was. In the second play the maidens were somehow forced to marry their cousins (per-

haps because Pelasgus dies), but they swear to their father to kill them on their wedding night. All except Hypermnestra fulfil their oath, while she—"splendide mendax," Horace calls her—out of love for her husband saves him. In the last play Hypermnestra is forced to stand trial because she violated her oath; and in a scene reminiscent of that in the *Eumenides*, Aphrodite herself appears and defends her. Part of her speech survives:

As the sacred heaven longs to pierce the earth,
So love takes hold of earth to join in marriage,
And showers, fallen from heaven brought to bed,
Make the earth pregnant; and she in turn gives birth
To flocks of sheep and Ceres' nourishment—
A marriage that drenches the springtime of the woods—
For all this I am in part responsible.

The Suppliant Maidens is an international play. The Danaids are refugees, Greeks by descent, Egyptians in appearance (ll. 234-37, 277-90, 496 ff.), and according to Egyptian law they have no legal right to refuse to marry their cousins. For when Pelasgus wishes to know what right they have, the maidens in reply only declare their hatred of their cousins, implying by their evasion of the question the absence of any legal claim to his protection (ll. 387-91). Thus both by nature and by law they are defenseless. If they really looked like Greeks, as well as were Greeks by an obscure genealogy, and if they had some legal justification, Pelasgus might have been willing to take up their defense without the consent of the people; but once it becomes a case of pure or natural justice independent of all legality, with the maidens' arbitrary dislike of their cousins their only motive, Pelasgus must defer to the will of the people. Since the maidens insist upon the rights of the will alone, Pelasgus allows in turn the people's will to sanction it and make it law. In the second play the oath of the Danaids becomes law, and Hypermnestra, in violating it, repeats her sisters' original defiance of Egyptian law; but as on this occasion it is not a human law that she has betrayed, a goddess must justify her conduct. Aphrodite insists upon the prerogatives of love, a force that transcends even the sacredness of

oaths. Thus the trilogy is complete. At first the Egyptians embodied law, though strangely enough lust also supported them, while the Danaids represented a freedom that was not bound by any positive enactments. But once this freedom has been approved by law, Hypermnestra alone remains outside it; and as she cannot be defended merely by a democratic procedure, a universal divine law, more authoritative than even the people's will, must rescue her. Having only the first part of the trilogy, we cannot be confident that Aeschylus' purpose was exactly this; but the claims of the city as opposed to claims still more powerful would seem to underlie the play, claims that at each stage become more contrary to one another and more difficult to resolve.

The Suppliant Maidens as a play is not very exciting, and we can easily see why the chorus was later abandoned as the protagonist. A chorus can convey only a lyrical mood; it can hardly support any genuine passion. The Danaids, for example, say they are frightened when the Egyptians are coming, but we do not believe them: their songs, divided into strophe and antistrophe,* betray their detachment, and they always talk more like commentators on their actions than like the actors themselves. Although the choruses of *The Suppliant Maidens* are some of the most beautiful Aeschylus ever wrote, the dialogue seems extremely artificial and forced, with the air of set speeches directed more to the audience than to the other actors. *The Persians*, on the other hand, suffers from the opposite fault: the speeches, even though long, are dramatic, while the choral songs are far inferior to those of *The Suppliants*. Only in the *Oresteia* did Aeschylus achieve a perfect balance between them.

* Throughout this play and *The Persians*, strophes and antistrophes are marked by the symbols — and = respectively.

THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS

CHARACTERS

Chorus of maidens, daughters of Danaus
Danaus, their father
Pelagus, King of Argos
Herald of Egyptians, cousins to the Danaans

SCENE: *A sacred grove near Argos, adorned with statues of Greek gods.*

Chorus

Zeus Protector, protect us with care.
From the subtle sand of the Nile delta
Our ship set sail. And we deserted:
From a holy precinct bordering Syria
We fled into exile, condemned
Not for murder by a city's decree,
But by self-imposed banishment abhorring
Impious marriage with Egyptus' sons.

10

Danaus, father, adviser and lord,
Setting the counters of hope,
Picked the smallest pawn of grief,
Quickly to fly through the sea,
And find anchor at Argos,
Whence we boast to descend,
By the breathing caress of Zeus
On a cow driven wild.

With suppliant olive branch,
To what kinder land could we turn?

20

Whose city, whose earth and bright water,
Olympian gods, ancient gods below
Possessing the tomb, and Zeus Savior,
Keeper of pious men, receive
(Respectful the air of this land)
These suppliant maidens well.

But that thick swarm of insolent men,
Before ever landing in this swamp waste,
Return them and their ship to the sea;

30

And by the winter sting of hurricane,
Facing the wild sea, by thunder and lightning,
By rain-winds may they die;
Before appropriating what law forbids,
Cousins to lie on unwilling beds.

Now I invoke
The calf of Zeus Avenger
Beyond the sea:
A child from grazing
Cow, genetrix,
Held by the breath of Zeus,
Born with a fateful name:
Epaphus, Caress.—

Him I invoke:
In pastures here our mother
Suffered before:
I'll show a witness
Faithful but unexpected to natives here.
They shall know the truth
At last and at length.=

And if some neighbor here knows bird cries,
Hearing our bitter passion he will think
He hears the hawk-chased, sad bird Metis,
The wife of Tereus,—

Who weeps with passion
Barred from rivers and the countryside;
Who sang a child's death-dirge, whom she killed,
Perverse her wrath.=

Thus melancholy I
With Ionian songs
Eat my Nile-soft cheek,
My heart unused to tears.
We gather blooms of sorrow,

Anxious if a friend,
Someone, will protect us,
Exiles from a misty land.—

But gods ancestral, hear!
Behold justice kindly.
Truly hating pride
Grant nothing undecreed:
So just you'd be to marriage.
Even war has havens,
Bulwark for the weary
Exile, a respect of gods.=

May his will, if it's Zeus's, be well,
His will not easily traced.
Everywhere it gleams, even in blackness,
With black fortune to man.—

And so certain it falls without slips,
By sign of Zeus fulfilled.
Dark are the devices of his counsel,
His ways blind to our sight.=

From towered hopes
He casts men destructive,
No violence
He armors.
All providence
Is effortless: throned,
Holy and motionless,
His will is accomplished.—

On mortal pride
Look down, how it waxes
And flourishes
By marriage
Remorselessly:
Intent in its frenzy,

Spur inescapable,
Deceived to destruction. =
110 I sing suffering, shrieking,
Shrill and sad am weeping,
My life is dirges
And rich in lamentations,
Mine honor weeping.
I invoke your Apian land,
You know my foreign tongue.
Often I tear my Sidonian veils. —
120 We grant gods oblations
Where all is splendid
And death is absent.
O toils undecipherable!
Where lead these billows?
I invoke your Apian land.
You know my foreign tongue.
Often I tear my Sidonian veils. =
130 Linen-bound ship, secure from the sea,
With fair winds brought me;
Nor do I blame.
May Father, timely omniscient,
Perfect a gracious end, that
140 Seeds mighty of solemn mother
Escape, O woe,
Unwed, virgin to the bed of man. —
Daughter of Zeus pure, may she behold,
Who guards walls sacred,
Willing my will.
May virgin, rescuing virgins,
In all her power come, that
150 Seeds mighty of solemn mother
Escape, alas,
Unwed, virgin to the bed of man. =

But if not,
A sunburnt race
Shall go beseeching
To Zeus of the dead
(Gracious to strangers),
Hanging ourselves,
If Gods Olympian heed not. 160
O Zeus! Sought out by the gods,
By snake-hate of Io:
I know Hera's madness
Conquering all.
Winter comes by sharp winds. —
Then Zeus in
Injustice hates
His son begotten,
And that is unjust: 170
Face now averted
Away from my prayers.
But would that Zeus hearken!
O Zeus! Sought out by the gods,
By snake-hate of Io:
I know Hera's madness
Conquering all.
Winter comes by sharp winds. =

Danaus

Prudence, my daughters; prudently you came
With an agèd father as your trusted pilot.
And now, with foresight, I advise your taking
Care to seal my words within your mind.
I see dust, the silent clarion of arms, 180
But not in silence are the axles turned;
Crowds I see, armed with shield and spear,
Followed by horses and curvèd chariots.
Perhaps the princes of this land have come

To meet us, informed by messenger;
 But whether kindly purposed or provoked
 To savageness they speed their armament,
 Here it is best to act the suppliant,
 This rock, this altar of assembled gods,
 Stronger than ramparts, a shield impenetrable.
 Now quickly prepare white suppliant wreaths,
 Sign of Zeus sacred, held in the left hand;
 Mournful, respectful, answer needfully
 The strangers; tell distinctly of an exile
 Unstained by murder. Let nothing bold
 Attend your voice, and nothing vain come forth
 In glance but modesty and reverence.
 Not talkative nor yet a laggard be in speech:
 Either would offend them. Remember to yield:
 You are an exile, a needy stranger,
 And rashness never suits the weaker.

Chorus

With prudence, father, you speak to the prudent.
 I shall keep a watch on your discreet commands.
 May Zeus, my ancestor, look on us.

Danaus

May he look then with propitious eye.

Chorus

Now would I wish to be near your side.

Danaus

Delay not.

Chorus

O Zeus, compassion ere we die.

Danaus

If Zeus is willing, this will end well.
 And now that bird of Zeus invoke.-

Chorus

Preserving rays of the sun we call.

Danaus

Call on Apollo, the god, who from heaven once fled.

Chorus

So knowing this fate, may he have compassion.

Danaus

Let him be compassionate, defend us with care.

Chorus

What other gods must I invoke?

Danaus

I see

This trident, a god's symbol.

Chorus

Who brought us

Here well: may he receive us now well.

Danaus

And that is another Hermes, a Greek custom.

220

Chorus

May he be a good herald to those who are free.

Danaus

All gods here at a common altar worship.
 Settle on the sacred ground like doves
 Clustering together, fearing the winged hawks,
 Who hatefully pollute their very blood.
 Bird consumes bird, how could it be pure?
 How, unwilling brides, myself unwilling,
 Could they be pure? Who not even in hell,
 Where another Zeus among the dead (they say)
 Works out their final punishment, can flee
 Their guilt of lust. Fix your eye on that
 In answer, that victory be with you well.

230

(Enter the King of Argos and company.)

King

Whence come these barbarians?
 What shall we call you? So outlandishly

Arrayed in the barbaric luxury
 Of robes and crowns, and not in Argive fashion
 Nor in Greek? But at this I wonder: how
 240 Without a herald, without a guide, without patron,
 You have yet dared to come, without trembling.
 The suppliant olive branch before these gods
 You've placed (it is custom); but Greece no more
 Than that will guess: in other things I could
 Conjecture only, unless your voice will guide.

Chorus

You did not lie about our dress. But to whom
 Do I speak? an Argive citizen, or a herald
 With his sacred staff, or the city's head?

King

Answer me with trust: I am Pelasgus,
 250 Founder of this land, and son of Palaechthon
 Earth-born. Pelasgians bear my royal name,
 And reap the fruits of this earth. I rule the lands
 In which the pure Strymon turns, where the sun
 Sinks in the west, and limits the Perrhaebi,
 Beyond the Pindus, near the Paeoni
 And the mountain Dodona: oceans bound my rule:
 I lord it over all within that frame.
 It is called Apia, after a surgeon
 260 Of ancient times, the prophet Apis, son
 To Apollo, who from Naupactus once did come,
 And cleansed this land of deadly, monstrous
 Serpents, that the earth, soaked in old
 Curses of blood, had sprung and smeared in wrath.
 His remedies and herbs did work a cure
 For Argos, where his pay's remembrance found
 In litanies. There are my testaments.
 270 And now you must tell your own ancestry.
 The city, though, 's impatient with long speeches.

Chorus

Brief and clear is my tale: by race we claim
 Argos, the offspring of a fruitful cow.
 I'll tell you how close truth clings to it.

King

You speak beyond my credence, strangers, claiming
 Argive birth: more like Libyans you seem
 280 Than like to women native here; or the Nile may foster
 Such a likeness; or the images
 Of Cyprus, carved by native craftsmen;
 And of the camel-backed nomads I've heard,
 Neighbors to the Ethiopian;
 I should have thought you were the unwed
 Barbarous Amazons, were you armed with bows.
 But, once instructed, I should more fully know
 How your birth and ancestry is Argive. 290

Chorus

Wasn't Io once in Argos charged
 With Hera's temple?

King

Io was, the tale
 Is prevalent.

Chorus

And wasn't Zeus to a mortal
 260 Joined?

King

Which was from Hera unconcealed.

Chorus

How end these royal jealousies?

King

A goddess
 270 Changed a woman to a cow.

Chorus

And Zeus,
 Did he approach the hornèd cow? 300

Chorus

Who buys a master
From kin? . . . (*Some verses are missing.*)

King

So greater grows the strength of mortals.

Chorus

To desert those distressed is easy.

King

How

With piety could I act?

Chorus

Deny the demand

340

Of Egyptus' sons.

King

But hard's *your* demand to wage

A new war.

Chorus

But justice protects her allies.

King

If only she shared from the start.

Chorus

Respect the ship of state thus crowned.

King

I shudder before these shaded altars.

Chorus

Yet hard is the wrath of Zeus the protector.
Son of Palaechthon,
Listen to me with a caring heart,
Lord of Pelasgians.
Protector, behold an exile surrounded:
A calf, wolf-pursued, on steep rocks,
Confides in the herdsman's strength,
And bleats her pains.—

350

King

I see this crowd of gods assenting, each
Shadowed by the fresh-cut olive branch.
Yet may this friendship conceal no doom,
Nor strife for us arise in unexpected
And unpremeditated ways.

Chorus

Daughter of Zeus,
Master of lots, may behold a flight
Innocent, Themis!
And thou from the younger, ancient in wisdom,
Learn, . . .
Respecting the suppliant,
A holy man.=

360

King

You are not suppliants at my own hearth.
If the city stains the commonweal,
In common let the people work a cure.
But I would make no promises until
I share with all the citizens.

Chorus

You are, yes, the city, the people,
A prince is not judged.
The land, the hearth, the altar you rule
With the single vote and scepter;
Enthroned you command,
And fill every need.
Of pollution be watchful.—

370

King

Pollution on my enemies! Without
Harm I cannot aid you; nor is it sensible
To despise these your earnest prayers.
I am at a loss, and fearful is my heart,
To act or not to act and choose success.

380

Chorus

Regard him, above, the protector,
A watchdog of men
Distressed who sit at neighboring hearths,
But obtain no lawful justice.
Yet anger of Zeus
The Suppliant remains,
Who is charmed by no pity. =

King

If Egyptus' sons rule you by customs
Native to your city, claiming nearest
Of kin, who would wish in that to oppose them?
According to laws at home you must plead,
How over you they lack authority.

390

Chorus

Yet subject to men would I never be!
I plot my course under the stars,
An escape from a heartless marriage.
Take as an ally justice.
Choose the side of the gods.—

King

The choice is not easy: choose me not as judge.
I said before that never would I act
Alone, apart from the people, though I am ruler;
So never may people say, if evil comes,
“Respecting aliens the city you destroyed.”

400

Chorus

Both sides he surveys, of related blood
Zeus is, impartial his scales,
To the evil and lawful weighs out
The holy and unjust fairly.
Why fear to act justly? =

King

We need profound, preserving care, that plunges

Like a diver deep in troubled seas,
Keen and unblurred his eye, to make the end
Without disaster for us and for the city;
That neither strife may bring reprisals, nor,
If we should give you back, seated thus
On seats of gods, we settle the god, destructive
Alastor, in this land, who even in Hades
Never frees the dead. Seem we not
To need preserving counsel?

410

Chorus

Take care and be,
Justly, the pious protector,
Exile betray not,
Exile pursued by,
Cast out by, the godless.—

420

See me not seized,
From seat of gods to be seized,
O lord with full power.
Know the pride of men,
Beware of god's anger. =

Bear not to see
A suppliant by force
Led from these statues,
Seized by my garments,
Like a horse by the bridle.—

430

Do what you will,
Thy house remains to pay,
Fined in thy children:
Justice is equal.
Mark the justice of Zeus. =

King

I have pondered, and here I'm run aground:
'Gainst you or them necessity is strained

440

For mighty war, as fastly drawn as ships
 Held by the windlass: yet anchorage is never
 Free from pain. When wealth is sacked and homes
 Are pillaged, Zeus yet another fortune may bestow;
 Or when the tongue has failed, a healing word
 May spread a counter-balm: but if consanguine
 Blood is to stay unshed, we must sacrifice
 To slaughter many kine to many gods, 450
 A cure of grief. I am spent by this dispute:
 I wish an ignorance more than art of ill:
 Against my judgment may it turn out well.

Chorus
 But hear the end of my reverent prayers.

King
 Well?

Chorus
 Clasps and belts and bands I have.

King
 They are doubtless proper for women.

Chorus
 Here, you know,
 Are fine devices.

King
 Tell me. 460

Chorus
 Unless you promise—

King
 What would your bands accomplish?

Chorus
 Statues with new tablets to adorn.

King
 Speak simply.

Chorus
 . From these gods to hang.

King
 A whip to the heart.

Chorus
 Now you understand, for eyes I gave you.

King
 Alas! everywhere I'm gripped in strangle holds,
 And like a swollen river evils flood:
 Embarked on a sea of doom, uncrossed, abysmal, 470
 Nowhere is anchorage. If I leave
 This debt unpaid, you've warned of pollution
 That shall strike unerringly; but if
 I stand before these walls, and bring the battle
 To the very end against Egyptus'
 Sons, wouldn't that become a bitter waste—
 Men to bleed the earth for women's sake?
 But yet the wrath of Zeus the Suppliant—
 The height of mortal fear—must be respected.
 Now then, agèd father of these maidens, 480
 Gather those wreaths in your arms; and at other
 Altars of the native gods replace them:
 Then no one of the native people, who delight
 In blame, by seeing proof of your arrival,
 Could reproach me; and pity they may feel
 For you, and hate those men's arrogance.
 May the people be gracious! Everyone,
 To those weaker than themselves, is kind.

Danaus
 To have found a stranger, reverent and kind, 490
 We highly prize. And now, let native guides,
 To grant me safety as I go, escort me
 To the temple altars: nature made
 My shape unlike to yours, even as the Nile
 And the Inachus bear no resemblance
 In their nurture. Beware lest rashness burgeon
 Into fear: ignorance has often killed
 A friend.

King

Attend: the stranger speaks well.
 Guide him to the civil altars, the seats
 Of gods; and say no more than this to whom
 You meet: "To the gods' hearth we bring a sailor."

(Exit Danaus, attended.)

Chorus

Him you instructed, and he is gone; but I,
 How shall I act? What sign of confidence
 Is yours to give me?

King

Leave your wreaths here,
 A sign of grief.

Chorus

And here I leave them by your
 Command.

King

Toward that grove now turn.

Chorus

But how

Would a public grove protect me?

King

Never

To rape of birds shall we expose you.

Chorus

But to them more hateful than heartless snakes?

King

Propitiated, speak auspiciously.

Chorus

You know how fear does fret impatiently?

King

Excessive fear is always powerless.

Chorus

Soothe then my heart in word and deed.

King

Your father will not long desert you; and I,
 Assembling all the native people, shall
 Make the commons well disposed, and teach
 Your father all that he must say.
 Now remain here, and beseech the native
 Gods with your prayers to bring what you desire.
 I shall go arranging all: may Persuasion
 And Fortune attend me!

520

(Exit King.)

Chorus

Lord of Lords most bless'd,
 Most perfect strength of bless'd,
 Happy Zeus obey
 And let it be:
 Remove the pride of men,
 Pride well hated;
 And cast in a purpled sea
 The black-benched doom.—

530

Look upon our race
 Ancient of ancestor loved,
 Change to a happy tale
 Favoring us:
 Remember many things,
 You touched Io.
 We claim a descent from Zeus,
 And birth from this land.=
 To my mother's ancient track I turned,
 In a rich pasture eating flowers
 She was seen, whence Io
 By gadfly raged
 Distraught escaped;
 Passing many races,
 Cutting in two the land,
 The raging strait defined;—

540

Through lands of Asia fast she went,
 And across Phrygia grazing sheep;
 And the city of Teuthras passing,
 And Lydian vales, 550
 Cilician hills,
 Race Pamphylian hurried
 Through ever-flowing streams,
 And land of Aphrodite. =
 She came by dart distressed
 Of a cowherd winged
 To rich groves of Zeus,
 A pasture fed by snow and attacked
 By Typhon's rage, 560
 The Nile-waters by disease untouched;
 Herself crazed,
 With grief, stinging pains,
 Bacchant of Hera. —
 And men who then lived there
 At her strangeness trembled,
 With pale fear at heart,
 Beheld a creature vexed, half-breed,
 In part a cow,
 And woman in turn, a monster marveled at. 570
 Who then charmed
 The wretch wandering-far
 Furious Io? =
 Of endless sovereignty
 Lord Zeus charmed,
 By strength gentle of Zeus
 And divine breaths
 Was she cured, weeping
 Her grievous shame,
 Bearing the burden of Zeus, 580
 Told without falsehood,
 She bore a blameless child, —

Through great time bless'd;
 All earth shouts,
 "Of Zeus fruitful in truth
 This race: who else
 Would cure her of sly
 Diseases of Hera?"
 There is the working of Zeus,
 Here is Epaphus' race:
 Of both the truth is spoken. =
 Whom beside him 590
 More justly would I call?
 Father our gardener, worker, and lord,
 A craftsman aged in wisdom,
 Propitious the wind is of Zeus. —
 Stronger none rule,
 Beneath no one enthroned,
 Seated above he respects none below.
 His deeds are quick as words,
 He hastens what counsel decrees. =

(Enter Danaus.)

Danaus

Take heart, my children, well are cast the people's
 Final vote. 600

Chorus

 O hail, my envoy, my dearest
 Herald. Tell us what end's been authorized?
 And where the populace, by show of hands,
 Has thrown its weight.

Danaus

 The Argives have decreed
 Not doubtfully, so as to change my aging
 Heart to youth again; so bristled thick
 The air with hands, resolving thus the law:
 Free we are to settle here, subject

Neither to seizure nor reprisal, claimed
 Neither by citizen nor foreigner.
 But if they turn to force, whoever rich
 In lands refuses succor, shall be stripped
 Of offices and banished publicly.
 The king persuaded, prophesying Zeus
 The Suppliant would fatten rich his wrath
 To feed insatiate suffering,
 And show itself as twin defilements,
 In and outside the city. Hearing this,
 The Argives, not even summoned, voted all.
 They heard, and easily were convinced by supple
 Rhetoric; but Zeus still crowned the end.

Chorus

Come then, let us offer
 For the Argives good prayers,
 A return for good things.
 And may Zeus Stranger behold
 From the mouth of a stranger
 Offerings in true frankness,
 A perfect end for all things.

And now Zeus-born gods
 Might you hear our prayers,
 When libations we pour:
 Never slain by fire
 This Pelasgian land,
 Never wanton War
 Found a danceless cry,
 Harvesting mortals
 In a changed harvest;

For compassion they showed us,
 And voted with kindness,
 Respecting Zeus's suppliants,
 This wretched flock of sheep.—

610

Nor cast they their votes
 On the side of men
 By dishonoring us;
 Watching Zeus Avenger
 (Like a spy he sees)
 Who is hard to fight:
 Who desires his home
 Stained in its rafters?

650

620

For he heavily presses.
 The suppliants of Zeus sacred,
 Related blood, they respected.
 Then to gods shall they be pleasing
 With altars scoured clean.=

So out of shadowed lips let fly
 Honorable prayers:
 Never a plague
 Empty the city,
 Strife never bleed
 With native dead the land.

660

Flower of youth may it ripen unplucked,
 And partner of Aphrodite, War,
 May he cut not their bloom.—

630

And laden altars, welcoming,
 Set them ablaze.
 Well would be ruled
 Cities respecting
 Zeus above all,
 Who guides by ancient law.

670

Other protectors we pray to be born
 For always, and Hecate-Artemis
 Birth by women protect.=

640

Let no murderous plague
 Come upon the city destroying,
 Without the dance, without lute

680

Father of tears Ares arming,
 And the intestine war's shout.
 May the bitter swarms of ill
 Far from the people sit;
 May the Lycian Apollo
 To all the youth be kind.—

And may Zeus to perfection
 Bring the fruit of each season;
 And many young in the fields
 Pasturing cattle beget:
 May they obtain from gods all.
 May the pious songs be sung
 At altars by minstrels;
 May the lyre-loving voices
 From holy lips arise.=

May the people who strengthen the city
 Protect its dignity well;
 Whose rule's providential in common counsel;
 And before arming Ares,
 To strangers without grier
 May they grant justice.—

May the gods who possess the city
 Be honored by citizens well
 With sacrificial laurel, ancestral.
 For respect of one's parents
 Is third among laws
 Written by Justice.=

Danaus

Thank you, dear children, for these modest prayers;
 But from your father tremble not to hear
 New intelligence. From this outpost,
 Protector of suppliants, I spy that ship;
 Clearly it shows; nor do I fail to mark
 How its sails are trimmed and sides made fast,

And how her bow does seek the way with painted
 Eye; and the ship, obedient, hears all too well
 Her tiller's governance. And the men on board
 I see, black in limb, their clothes white linen.
 All the other ships and allied force
 I see; but under land the lead, its sail
 Now furling, rows with timèd beat. And you
 Must, quietly and temperately facing
 The event, ignore none of these gods.
 And I, with advocates, shall come. Perhaps
 An envoy or a herald comes, desiring
 To lead you away as reprisals.
 But nothing shall happen. Never fear him.
 Still it is better, if we are slow,
 That refuge to remember. Take heart.
 Surely in time the day shall come when all
 Who had dishonored the gods shall pay.

Chorus

Father, I fear, as swift ships come;
 No length of time does stand between us.
 Terror holds me, excessive fear,
 If flights of wandering profit not.
 Father, I am spent by fear.—

Danaus

As final was the Argive vote, my daughters,
 Take heart: they shall fight for you, I know.

Chorus

Mad is the race Egyptian, cursed,
 In war unsated: I speak what you know.
 Dark ships they have, and strongly built;
 They sailed and so succeed in anger
 With an army large and dark.=

Danaus

But here many shall they find, whose limbs
 The sun's made lean in noonday heat.

690

700

710

720

730

740

And Father, seeing the battle,
Behold with just eyes
Violence unkindly.
Respect your suppliants,
Protector, omnipotent Zeus!—
Proud and heartless Egyptians—
Men pursuing an exile,
Intent on capturing me,
With shouts many and wanton.
But you completely,
Zeus, hold the beam of
The balance. What without you
Is brought to completion for men? =

(Enter Herald of Egyptians, attended.)*

Cry! O woe! Alas!
Here, this ravisher from the ship!
Before that, ravisher, would you die!
I see this beginning of my woes.
Alas! O woe! Escape!
Stern-hearted in insolence,
Hard to bear on land, at sea,
Lord of the land, protect us!

Herald

Hurry!
Hasten to the boats
Fast as you are able.
Lest torn and pricked,
Pricked and scratched you'll be,
Bloody and bloodstained,
Your heads cut off!
Hurry, hasten, curses! curses! to the boats!

Chorus

On the flowing salt-path
With your masterful pride

* The Herald sometimes speaks in "broken Greek."

With your bolted ship
Would you had died!

Herald

Cease your cries. Leave your seats.
Go to the ships. You without honor,
You without city, I cannot respect.—

Chorus

Never fruitful water
Might I see again, whence
Grows the living root—
Murder!—and blooms.

Herald

I shall lead—I am brave—
Down to the ship, up on the ladder.
Willing, unwilling, you shall go. =

Chorus

Oh, alas, woe.
Oh, would that you had helpless died
By the sea-washed grove
Wandering at Sarpedon's tomb,
Piled up with sand
Among wet breezes.

Herald

Shriek and shout and call the gods.
You shall not jump the Egyptian ship.
Bewail and shout and mourn with sorrow.—

Chorus

Oh, alas, woe.
Outrage! when you howl off-shore,
With your boasts overflow;
Whom the great Nile might behold
Raging in your pride,
And drown your violence.

Herald

Board the swift boat at once!
Let no one falter: I'll have no awe
Of precious curls when I shall drag you.=

Chorus

Alas, father, to the sea he leads me;
Like a spider, step by step,
A dream, a black dream,
Cry, O woe, cry!
Earth, Mother Earth,
Avert his fearful cry.
O son, son of Earth, O Zeus.

890

Herald

I do not fear these gods before me: they
Did not nurse me, their nursing did not age me.—

Chorus

A two-footed serpent quivers near,
Like a viper, bites my foot,
A poisonous thing.
Cry, O woe, cry!
Earth, Mother Earth,
Avert his fearful cry.
O son, son of Earth, O Zeus.

900

Herald

Your finery I shall not pity, if
None will go to the ship resignedly.=

Chorus

We perish, lord, we suffer pain!

Herald

O many lords, Egyptus' sons, you soon
Will see—take heart!— and blame no anarchy!

Chorus

O first commanders, undone am I!

Herald

As you're not hasty to heed my words,
It seems I'll have to drag you by the hair.
(Enter the King, attended.)

910

King

You there! What is done? By what insolence
Dare you insult this land of Pelasgian men?
Think you you have come to a woman's land? You are
Barbarians, and you trifle insolently
With Greeks, and, off the mark in everything,
In nothing upright stand.

Herald

How did I err?

What do I do without justice?

King

You know

Not how to be a stranger.

Herald

Though finding what I lost?

King

To what patron did you speak?

Herald

To Hermes the Searcher,

920

The greatest patron.

King

You speak of gods but have

No reverence.

Herald

The Nile deities I revere.

King

And these gods are nothing?

Herald

I'll lead them away,

If no one robs me.

King

You shall regret it,

If you touch them.

Herald

You speak unkindly to strangers.

King

The thieves of gods I shall not befriend.

Herald

I shall tell Egyptus' sons.

King

What's that to me that I should yield my flock?

Herald

But if I knew, more clearly could I tell—

930

A herald should report exactly each

Particular. What shall I say? Who's he

That robs me of these cousins? Yet Ares gives

His verdict without witnesses, nor in the grip

Of silver quits his suit, but first many

Are thrown and kick off life.

King

Why must you tell a name?

You and your shipmates will know soon enough;

Though, were these willing, with good will of heart,

You could lead them away, if pious speech

940

Persuaded them: thus unanimous the vote

Decreed, never to surrender them to force.

Joined, doweled, and bolted stays this law,

That neither scratched on tablets, nor book-sealed,

You hear announced by the tongue of freedom's voice.

Now get out of my sight!

Herald

We seem to wage new wars.

950

May victory and conquest fall to men!

King

And men is what you'll find here, who don't

Guzzle a brew of barley-beer!

(Exit Herald.)

Now all of you, attended by your maids,

Take heart and go to the well-protected city,

Locked by towers in dense array. And many

Homes there are of public property, and I

Am also housed with a lavish hand; there you may

With many others live; or if it pleases

960

More, you may live alone. Of these the best

And most agreeable choose. Myself and all

The citizens protect you, whose voted will

Is now fulfilled. Why wait for those with more

Authority?

Chorus

In return for good things,

May good things teem,

Best of Pelasgians!

Kindly escort my father here,

Danaus, prudent, brave and wise.

970

His is the counsel where to dwell,

Kindly disposed the place with good

Fame and repute among the people:

Everyone's quick to blame the alien.

May it be for the best!

(Exit King. Enter Danaus, attended.)

Danaus

My children, to Argives it is meet to pour

980

Libations, pray and sacrifice as to gods

Olympian, who unhesitant preserved us.

What had been done, for native friends kindly,

Bitterly against your cousins, they heard;

And gave these armed attendants as a meed

Of honor, that no spear-wielded fate be mine

In dying, lest I burden on the land
 An ever-living grief. You must be grateful
 Even more than I for what I have obtained. 990
 Above my other counsels cut this wisdom:
 Time becomes the touchstone of the alien,
 Who bears the brunt of every evil tongue,
 The easy targe of calumny. I beg
 You not to bring me shame, you who have
 That bloom which draws men's eyes: there is no simple
 Guard for fruit most delicate, that beasts
 And men, both winged and footed, ravage: 1000
 So Venus heralds harvests lush with love;
 And all, at the sleek comeliness of maidens,
 Do shoot enchanted arrows from their eyes,
 Overcome by desire. Let no shame for us,
 But pleasure for our enemies, be done,
 For which, in great toil, great seas were ploughed.
 We have the choice (mere luck) of living either
 With Pelasgus, or at the city's cost. 1010
 Only regard this command of your father:
 Honor modesty more than your life.

Chorus

All else may gods Olympian bless; but, father,
 Be not anxious for our summer's blush,
 For, lest the gods deliberate anew,
 We'll hold to the course our past intent has set.

Chorus A (of maidens)

Come now to the city,
 Praising blessèd lord gods,
 Who shelter the city
 And about the Erasinus dwell. 1020
 Take up and accompany,
 Servants, the song, and praise
 For the city, no longer the Nile,
 Respect with your psalms,—

But streams, that with quiet
 Through the land fulness pour,
 And gladden this earth with
 Waters brilliant and rich. 1030
 May Artemis sacred see,
 Pitying us: by force
 Of Aphrodite no marriage come,
 A prize for the hated. =

Chorus B (of servants)

But careless not of Cypris this gracious song:
 With power equal to Hera nearest to Zeus,
 Honored the goddess sly-intent
 In rites sacred and solemn;
 Which share with a fond mother
 Desire and, to whom no denial, 1040
 Persuasion; and Aphrodite
 A province to Concord bestowed,
 And Eros whispering wanton. —

But bitter winds, and harsh and evil grief,
 And battles bloody and deadly I fear before.
 How did they sail so easily
 In swift-wingèd pursuit?
 Whatever is doomed becomes.
 Infinite the mind is of Zeus,
 Who cannot be bypassed. 1050
 To many a woman before
 Has marriage come as an ending. =

Chorus A

May great Zeus ward off
 An Egyptian marriage for me.

Chorus B

That would be best.

Chorus A

Would you charm the intractable?

Chorus B

But the future you know not.—

Chorus A

But Zeus's mind profound,
How am I to plumb?

Chorus B

Pray for the mean.

1060

Chorus A

What limit do you teach me now?

Chorus B

Ask the gods nothing excessive.=

Chorus

Lord Zeus may he deprive us
Of an ill marriage
And a bad husband,
As Io was released from ill,
Protected by a healing hand,
Kind might did cure her.—

And strength may he assign us.

I am content if ill

1070

Is one-third my lot,

And justly, with my prayers,

Beside the saving arts of god,

To follow justice.=

(Exeunt omnes.)

Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore

A E S C H Y L U S • I I

T H E S U P P L I A N T M A I D E N S

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T H E P E R S I A N S

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S E V E N A G A I N S T T H E B E S

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