Persians , a Long *Thrēnos*

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ARTICLES

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ABSTRACT: Starting from the idea that in *Persians* Aeschylus was attempting to arouse fear and pity in the audience (rather than glee at victory over the enemy), I propose to demonstrate that one of the resources he deployed to this end was the use of vocabulary and formulas typical of the genre of funerary epigraphy. This enabled him to present Persian grief in terms very familiar to the Athenian–and more generally, the Pan-Hellenic–audience. The influence of funerary epigraphy has not yet been analyzed in relation to *Persians*, but such an approach may shed new light on our understanding of this play.

KEYWORDS: Aeschylus, *Persians*, *thrēnos*, funerary epigrams

I. Approach

Most of the studies published this century agree that Aeschylus' play elicits compassion rather than pride at victory.[1] In contrast to a long es-

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[1] But see *contra*, recently, Boedeker and Raaflaub 2005: 124. Given the vast number of studies on the meaning of *Persians*, whether as a work intended to inspire patriotism and to a greater or lesser extent demean the enemy, or more or less as a plea for empathy, for the specific question under discussion I shall limit myself to the most relevant studies published in the present century: Librán 2005: 145–54 (with a detailed discussion of the subject); Dué 2006: 57–58 (who suggests that the chorus's laments transcend the distinctions between Greeks and barbarians and instead help to reveal the feelings that unite them, underscoring the idea that *Persians* does not elicit vainglory but compassion); Rabinowitz 2008: 93 (who notes the dual demands of the play, presenting the enemy people as different, but at the same time coaxing the audience to identify with them); Hopman 2013 (who focuses on aspects of the chorus in *Persians* that challenge the ethnic contrast); and Felson and Slatkin 2016: 263 ("the *Persae* does create for its audiences a possible space for reflections on universal suffering, precisely through its perspectivalism"). Cf. the extensive bibliography in Garvie 2009: xxi n40 and Gruen 2011: 10n4 (bibl. in favor of Hellenic superiority), n5 (bibl. in favor of an empathetic and universalist interpretation)

tablished "orientalist" perception of the *Persians*, my study is based on the idea, consolidated in recent decades, that Aeschylus was not trying to emphasize the differences between the Greeks and the Persians, but quite the contrary. This notion is not incompatible with the possibility, or rather the certainty, that Aeschylus exploited real and imaginary differences between the two peoples, at least for visual impact (Dué 2006: 61). However, he also attempted to render the Persians' suffering familiar to the Greeks, rather than strange or exotic.[2] Thus, the audience could feel that neither the chorus of elders nor the so frequently mentioned young widows deserved the pain visited upon them. The play required the audience to do two things simultaneously: to see the enemy Persians as different while also experiencing the possibility of identifying with them.[3]

Here, I suggest that one of the resources Aeschylus deployed to excite the audience's sympathy was the use of formulas and vocabulary common to funerary epigraphy, so that the Persians' grief was expressed in a way that would have been very familiar to Greek spectators.[4] I will

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and n6 (bibl. with intermediate positions). All of these authors, to whom can be added Rehm 2002: 243, more or less explicitly echo the theses of Hall 1989, 1995, 1996, 2006. One could also add Swift 2010: 326–27, who contends that the dispute over whether the Persians are represented as the "Other," or whether Aeschylus' play is intended to arouse the audience's empathy, is based on an artificial dichotomy, because the defeated enemy's laments provoke empathy, but at the same time, the way in which the Persians lament breaks Greek convention serves to remind the audience of the differences between the two peoples. Calame 2013: 54–55 notes that the question of the feminization of the chorus is controversial, but agrees that the final lament is exaggerated: "the final lament of the *Persians* certainly raises the feelings of terror and compassion in the audience, according to the suggestions made by Aristotle on the conclusive *catharsis*-effect of Attic tragedy; and that even more so if it offers some characteristics of barbarian exaggeration". I suggest that Aeschylus quite deliberately creates echoes of funerary epigraphy throughout the piece–not only in the final lament–as a means to make the lament of the chorus in *Persians* sound familiar and not strange; thus, my intention is to focus on the elements in keeping with the Greek tradition, without denying that there are at the same time strange echoes, such as the allusions to the Mariandynoi (see note 17).

[2] Cf., among others, Rehm 2002: 239–51.

[3] Rabinowitz 2008: 93: "One could argue that it is the quintessential example of the power and demands of theater." Cf. also Rehm 2002: 242. Pelling 1997: 18: "So the national polarity survives; but that is not to deny that it is explored, and explored in ways which the audience would have found arresting. Not many, as they entered the theatre, would have foretold that there would be even a possibility of empathizing with the fate of Greece's greatest enemy; not many would have expected to enter imaginatively into a thought-world which viewed the great national triumph in a wholly different light."

[4] In one of the few studies on the specific question of the influence of epigraphy on theater, Julia Lougovaya has analyzed allusions to epigraphy in Aristophanes and Euripides.

attempt to show that this device is much more important than the insistence on differences; for example that the chorus' lament was "exaggerated" because it was Persian or strange because it came from the mouths of men, not women.

Greeks of the Archaic and Classical periods–and therefore the audience of tragedy–would have been well acquainted with the genre of epitaph; it was customary to site memorials along roads so that passers-by would stop, remember and lament on reading aloud the text inscribed on the stele. In addition to individual epitaphs, there were lists of the war dead, which are especially relevant to the study of *Persians*. Although the abundance of documents from Attica has meant that Athens–and more specifically, democratic Athens–has been considered the main and almost sole representative of the custom of honoring those who died in combat, the fact is that successive archaeological campaigns in other parts of Greece have shown that this was a widespread and well-established custom in other regions as well, albeit perhaps not in such an elaborate form as in Pericles' funeral oration.[5]

Throughout this paper, I assume that the audience and, of course, Aeschylus himself, were familiar with epigrams commemorating the war dead.[6] This idea can be accepted in the case of Aeschylus even if one calls into question the anecdote narrated in the *Vita Aeschyli* (TGF III 33–34.), according to which Aeschylus left Athens for Sicily because he felt abandoned by an audience that increasingly looked to Sophocles and because he had been defeated by Simonides in a competition for the commission of a ἐλεγεῖον honoring the fallen at Platea. Although the dispute remains unresolved between those who believe they have

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As the only example of the influence of epitaphs in Euripides, she gives the well-known epigram for Astyanax imagined by Hecuba in *Tr.* 1188–1191, suggesting that an attentive audience would have identified ποτέ (known as the inscriptional ποτέ, Young 1983) as an element common to funerary epigraphy: τί καί ποτε / γράψειεν ἄν σοι μουσοποιὸς ἐν τάφωι; / 'Τὸν παῖδα τόνδ' ἔκτειναν Ἀργεῖοί ποτε / δείσαντες'; αἰσχρὸν τοὐπίγραμμά γ' Ἑλλάδι; Lougovaya 2013: 265.

[5] As Pritchett 1985: 94–100 notes, one of the most consistent international laws in the Greek world concerned the treatment of the corpses of those killed in battle: it was the victor's right to decide what to do with them, and returning the enemy's dead was a demonstration of the victor's virtue.

[6] See, in this same sense, Swift 2010: 314: "The public nature and longevity of the epigram must have made it influential in determining general attitudes towards mourning, for whether or not a fifth-century Athenian was familiar with formal *thrēnoi* or women's lamentation, he must have regularly seen grave stelai from an earlier period encouraging the passer-by to notice and lament the dead."

discovered both Aeschylus' and Simonides' elegies (Oliver 1935) and those who doubt that the term ἐλεγεῖον refers to an epigram,[7] the anecdote retains its value.

The Athenian and, more generally, the Pan-Hellenic public's familiarity with the epitaph genre, both with private epitaphs and public ones in honor of those who had died for the homeland, would explain some of the characteristics of *Persians* which in my opinion have been misinterpreted, obscured by the powerful influence that the construction of the Persian as "Other" has exerted on readings of this play, yielding an interpretation of the characters in this tragedy as being diametrically opposed to the democratic Athenian spectators.

II. Casualty Lists, a Pan-Hellenic Custom Echoed in *Persians*

Various types of documentation both prior to and contemporary with *Persians* are related to the expression of lament for the war dead. There are the elaborate private metrical epitaphs from the Archaic period (individual, associated with the aristocratic class and containing verses with "Homeric" overtones) and the public lists of the war dead, which have been recorded from the sixth century BC but which are mainly known from the following century.[8] In both cases, it is the memorials that include epigrams, i.e. inscriptions in verse and not limited to a personal name or a list of names, which are of interest here.[9]

In the Athenian lists, the names of the fallen appeared under the name of the phyle. There was no patronymic or demotic, which were, however, included in other Athenian lists, such as those of the magistrates or the winners of the Games. This has been taken as a sign of democratization. My point here though is that this was a Pan-Hellenic custom, as evidenced by fifth-century BC inscriptions from Athens'

[7] Cf. discussion in Boedeker 1995; Boedeker and Sider 2001: 4 n.4; Kowerski 2005: 3, 12.

[8] The pioneering studies on this genre are those by Smith 1919 and, half a century later, Bradeen 1969. Cf. also Pritchett 1985: 139–45.

[9] In relation to public lists of the war dead, Thucydides recounts that "someone" added the delivery of a funeral oration to the custom of honoring the dead in battle. Known as the *epitaphios logos* (the reference study is Loraux 1981), this was a public speech paying tribute to all those who had fallen each year, although without naming them in particular. In the absence of more data, it may be that this speech was exclusively Athenian, but the custom of honoring the fallen and erecting stelae listing their names was not, for there is evidence of this in many other places.

non-democratic neighbors in Attica, such as the oligarchic cities in Boeotia, or the city of Megara, which only had a brief democratic interlude in the 420s BC. Despite the claims made in Athenian literature, these places also honored those who had lost their lives defending their homeland (Low 2003).[10] This is an important point because it supports the argument that familiarity with these lists of the dead was Pan-Hellenic, as was the audience of tragedy. Thus, the allusions to or echoes of all such memorials, whether public and private, in Aeschylus' poetry would have been perceived by all Greeks, not only by the Athenians.

Although very rarely, similarities have been pointed out between the messenger's account in the passage in which he recites a long list of Persian warriors who have lost their lives at Salamis (302–330) and the Athenian casualty lists (Ebbott 2000). The deceased's name, origin, military role and place of death are recorded in *Persians* and the Athenian lists alike.[11] Although it has often been argued that the list of dead warriors in this passage from *Persians* has epic resonances, Ebbott has concentrated more on the differences, such as the dead "hero" being named but not the one who killed him, something which does happen in epic, focused as it is on the *kleos* of the victor. Thus, she claims that for the Athenian audience, these lines spoken by the messenger would evoke not epic but the lists of the fallen in combat, since there would be certain recognizable conventions[12] (Ebbott 2000: 93):

> Just as a messenger in the drama relates the names of the dead to the Persians back home, so also to the Athenians a messenger would have listed the names of their soldiers who died in the Battle of Salamis. In the case of the Athenian soldiers, the messenger would be reporting names of those who had been properly buried, whereas the speech in the *Persians* emphasizes the unburied state of their dead warriors.

The scene would have been very familiar to the audience because, although the Athenian casualty lists have been transmitted to us in the

[10] As Low indicates, the Athenian lists also included non-citizens and even slaves, but this is seldom highlighted because it is inconsistent with the political discourse of a democratic city identified with its citizens. These lists united citizens and non-citizens by the common fact of having died for the homeland; Low 2003: 102.

[11] Obviously, this information does not always appear systematically either in the casualty lists or in the various passages in *Persians*.

[12] In any event, the Athenian casualty lists also evidenced what is called epic "coloring"; consequently, the Homeric air in *Persians* could be an indirect result of imitating the lists of the fallen.

form of written, epigraphic testimony, the importance of reading and oral recitation should never be overlooked, and even more so in this case: it was a matter of *kleos*, which occupied a privileged place in the oral tradition. This passage functions as an effective device to arouse empathy: the same language used in the casualty lists is here used to remember combatants who have not received funeral honors.[13]

This same passage in *Persians* has been interpreted in a very different manner by Simon Goldhill,[14] who argues that the intention behind listing the names of the warriors in the Persian army but not those of Greek warriors, was to contrast Athenian democratic ideology (the subordination of the individual to the collective) with Persian customs. In support of this argument, he cites the anonymity of soldiers in the well-studied genre of *epitaphios logos*. However, several things could be said in support of Ebbott's thesis. The first is that, even when it deals with contemporary issues, tragedy is informed by the timeless world of heroes; in its scenes and vocabulary, epic is its quintessential referent. The second is that the comparison acquires a different slant if we take not the political genre of the *epitaphios logos* as our reference but the casualty lists, which display no such anonymity, or the Archaic epitaphs of young men such as that of Croesus, as I shall try to show. Lastly, the absence of patronymics is not exclusive to the Athenian lists of the war dead but is also found in oligarchic cities. Consequently, it is not at all clear that this absence can be interpreted as an unequivocal exaltation of democratic ideology in *Persians*, nor is it clear that the play can be considered the earliest (but at the same time perfectly established) testimony of the well-known Greek/barbarian opposition reflected above all in the contrast between democracy and tyranny.[15]

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[13] Ebbott 2000: 95: "The familiar language and form of the casualty list thus become sinister in this tragedy, and this strangeness might in turn create a feeling of fear associated with leaving corpses unburied." Other studies have observed, albeit in passing and without elaborating on the subject, that the messenger's list (302–333), "reads like a series of almost funerary epigrams which associate a name with a death, and give Aeschylus space to explore the poetry of a general's demise. Throughout, the rhetoric is tightly controlled: each name or set of names is made the subject of a brief epigram which might be read as the inverse of the epigrams Simonides made a career out of giving to the victorious Greek dead in the battles of Thermopylae or Marathon. The atmosphere of defeat, combined with the foreign names, indeed creates the impression of an inversion, as though Aeschylus were here configuring the Persian defeat as no more than the obverse of Greek victory" (Gurd 2013: 124).

[14] Goldhill 1988: 192. Although with differences in nuance, Swift 2010: 329–30 concurs with Goldhill.

[15] In the fifth century BC, the "barbarian" was not yet seen as an inferior; cf. Isaac 2004 and Gruen 2011. The construction of this idea was gradual and it does not seem to

Below, I shall attempt to show that Aeschylus makes frequent recourse in *Persians* to the vocabulary and images of the funerary epigram and uses this device for a dual purpose: primarily to elicit the audience's empathy in relation to the suffering of the Persian people but also to provoke the spectators by inverting their expectations. I shall focus mainly on private epitaphs, which have not been studied to date in relation to *Persians*.

III. *Persians*, a Long *Thrēnos*[16]

The subject of *Persians* is the Greek victory at Salamis, or rather the Persian defeat in this famous battle; however, this is merely history, mythologized because it is a tragedy, but history nonetheless. Thus, from a strictly literary point of view, if we accept that what is remarkable about this play is that, rather than rejoicing in victory, it shows compassion in the face of overwhelming misfortune, the poet has to decide what resources to employ to elicit the audience's empathy. I believe that evoking a very well-known and familiar lament, that for young men dying before their time in its most specific and heroic version of death in war, is the foremost of these resources.

Although the studies on *Persians* place particular emphasis on the role of the lament in the *kommos* between Xerxes and the chorus in the final part of the play (908–1077),[17] the fact is that the lament for Persian

have become consolidated until the second half of the fifth century BC. Although Herodotus (8.144.2–3) says that the Greeks share the same blood, language, shrines, sacrifices and customs, he was not contemporary with the events he described, but instead lived around the time of the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Cf. Konstan 2011, who argues that the Persian Wars played an important role in shaping Greek identity in opposition to the barbarians, while also doubting that this discourse became fully consolidated before the second half of the fifth century BC.

[16] I use the term *thrēnos* here in a broad sense, in reference not to a specific literary genre, of which we have examples in Pindar and Simonides (see Cannatà Fera 1990), but to lamentation in general. This was one of the meanings of the word *thrēnos* in the fifth century BC, Swift 2010: 310–14. On the genre of lament in tragedy, albeit not in reference to Aeschylus' *Persians*, see, recently, Weiss 2019. Swift 2010 has already indicated the difficulty in detecting allusions to lyric *thrēnos* in tragedy, given that the conventions of funerary ritual in the tragic genre and in real life are very different. Accordingly, the purpose of her study was to examine, more generally, the way in which tragedy engages with and responds to real-life mourning practices (2010: 298–99). My purpose is also very specific, but I adopt a different focus by exploring possible echoes of funerary epigrams in the way in which the Persians lament in Aeschylus' play.

[17] See Suter 2008: 161-163 and Swift 2010: 327-335, who focus particularly on the *kommos* (908–1077) and also on the passage in which the chorus reacts to the news of the army's disaster at Salamis (255–289). Claude Calame's observation (2013: 48) concerning

youths, with its similarities to the epitaphs for young men killed in war, resonates throughout the work, not only in the exodus.[18]

The first mention of "the flower of Persia" appears in the parodos, in reference to the young men who had accompanied Xerxes on the expedition:

> τοιόνδ' ἄνθος Περσίδος αἴας οἴχεται ἀνδρῶν,
> οὓς περὶ πᾶσα χθὼν Ἀσιῆτις
> θρέψασα πόθωι στένεται μαλερῶι,
> τοκέες τ' ἄλοχοί τ' ἠμερολεγδὸν
> τείνοντα χρόνον τρομέονται.[19]
>
> (60–64)

> Such is the flower of men from Persian land that has departed,[20] for whom the entire land of Asia, that which raised them, groans with vehement longing, and parents and wives, counting the days, tremble as time goes by.

Although it is not yet known at this early point in the play that the young men have died, the ambiguity of the verb οἴχεται coupled with the fact that the audience did know that "the flower of Persia" had died endow these lines with an epitaphic quality. Shortly afterwards, in the messenger's first speech, this idea is confirmed:

> ὦ γῆς ἁπάσης Ἀσίδος πολίσματα,
> ὦ Περσὶς αἶα καὶ πολὺς πλούτου λιμήν,
> ὡς ἐν μιᾶι πληγῆι κατέφθαρται πολὺς

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the exodus of the piece is especially interesting: "The *choreutai* of Aeschylus relate their own song to the mournful voices of the Thracian singers of *thrēnoi*, well known in the musical tradition of Jonia. The Mariandynoi were famed for singing a funerary lament to mourn the untimely death of a local hero named Bormos." The chorus' allusion to the Mariandynian mourner, in the final *kommos*, can be understood as a recapitulation of the play's ultimate meaning: a lament for the young men who died before their time. On ethnic allusions in the chorus's song–Mariandynian (937) and Mysian (1054)–see the detailed study by Bachvarova and Dutsch 2016.

[18] Although he focuses almost exclusively on the *kommos*, Calame 2013: 51 has suggested that the chorus's final laments become a ritual *thrēnos*, which in turn transforms the whole tragedy into "a ritual funerary song, a dramatic dirge."

[19] The edition used in this article is West 1998. The translations are by the author.

[20] See Dué 2006: 64: "The depiction of the Persian army here and elsewhere as the flower of the land is reminiscent of Athenian traditions in which soldiers who have died fighting for their city are consistently imagined to be at the peak of youth or beauty, or *hêbê*."

ὄλβος, τὸ Περσῶν δ' ἄνθος οἴχεται πεσόν.
ὤιμοι, κακὸν μὲν πρῶτον ἀγγέλλειν κακά·
ὅμως δ' ἀνάγκη πᾶν ἀναπτύξαι πάθος,
Πέρσαι· στρατὸς γὰρ πᾶς ὄλωλε βαρβάρων.

(249–255)

O cities of the whole land of Asia! O Persian land, the haven of so much wealth! How in one fell swoop has been destroyed your great good fortune: the flower of the Persians lies on the ground. Woe is me, it is terrible to be the first to announce misfortunes; however, it is necessary to unfurl (=enumerate) all the suffering; Persians: the entire army of the barbarians has been destroyed.

David Rosenbloom has observed that the metaphor in line 254, ἀνάγκη πᾶν ἀναπτύξαι πάθος ("it is necessary to unfurl all the suffering"), is inspired by necessity of unrolling the papyrus to be read, and, according to Herodotus, a scribe accompanied Xerxes to record the invaded peoples and the name, patronymic, city of origin and commanders of the combatants who distinguished themselves at Salamis (7.100.1; 8.90.4). Thus, quite possibly, the details that appear in the messenger's list in *Persians*–the names, military offices and origins–were derived from this type of record (Rosenbloom 2006: 62–63). Throughout the play, we shall witness the "unfurling" of the names of the fallen.[21]

To the messenger's words announcing the misfortune, the chorus of elders gives a response that definitively places us in the situation:

ἦ μακροβίοτος ὅδε γέ τις αἰ-
ὼν ἐφάνθη γεραιοῖς, ἀκού-
ειν τόδε πῆμ' ἄελπτον

(263–265)

Life has certainly turned out to be very long for us elders, when we have to hear of this unexpected misfortune.

Why is the life of these elders too long, μακροβίοτος? Because before they themselves die, they must witness and mourn their sons' deaths, which goes against the laws of nature and which in all times and places

[21] Rehm 2002: 243 indicates the importance of the fact that a total of 51 Persians are called out by name, a litany of the leaders killed by the Greeks, which Hall refers to as "cacaphonous catalogues." Rehm, on the other hand, notes the Homeric resonances of these lists.

has been considered one of the greatest evils that can befall humankind. In the context of the idea, well established in Greek thought, that a man cannot be said to be happy until the day he dies (the story of King Croesus of Lydia is always cited as an example), it is clear that these old men have seen the possibility of being considered happy at the end of their days vanish. They will die having witnessed the death of their sons, and it will not be possible to say of them, in their epitaphs, that they died happy. Significantly, the term εὐδαίμων ("happy, fortunate") is used in funerary epigraphy as a qualifier solely and exclusively for those who have reached an advanced age and have seen their children's children.[22] Scholars rarely dwell on this assertion by the chorus, perhaps because it seems simple and self-explanatory;[23] not even Garvie, who notes the interesting contrast between the fate of Atossa and that of her husband Darius (the former witnesses the disaster that befalls Susa whereas the latter died before it happened, 709–712), clearly indicates that the lives of these elders have turned out to be μακροβίοτος for a very specific reason: that of having suffered the death of their sons before their own (Garvie 2009 ad loc).

Bearing in mind that this is a–if not the–core issue in *Persians*, the spectacle of a chorus of elders lamenting the premature death of their sons should not be seen, as it sometimes has been, as being intended to help feminize the enemy.[24] The fact that it is a male rather than female chorus that sings the lament has been interpreted, erroneously in my opinion, as feminization. Much has already been written convincingly on the error of uncritically associating weeping with women and forgetting the numerous examples in epic and tragedy of men lamenting without any indication of their famous "self-control,"[25] and the testimonies of

[22] At least this is the case in the funerary epigraphy from the Archaic and Classical periods. On one occasion, the idea is very explicitly expressed that a timely death renders pain much more bearable: *CEG* 477, Attica, *ca*. 400–390 BC. Stele of Littias, who died at the age of 100, found in Piraeus (Museum of Piraeus). The epigram inscribed on the stele of this centenarian says that he left his children a ὡραῖον πένθος; see González González 2014.

[23] Hall 1996 ad. loc merely states that their lives are μακροβίοτος "since they have to hear about the unforeseen disaster".

[24] Hall 1996: 169, commenting on the *kommos*, states that "even lamentation in other tragedies, usually performed by women, is set in the distant mythical past." Sommerstein 2010: 61 seems to be of the same opinion, arguing that the Greeks, who considered the collective lament "the province of women," would find it highly significant that this *thrēnos* was led by Xerxes himself. Swift 2010: 331 is of the same opinion, considering that the chorus is characterized as unmanly.

[25] Librán 2005: 150: "there is no lack of examples in Greek tragedy of valiant Greek men, not women or barbarians, indulging in *kommoi* replete with wailing, cries and

funerary epigraphy serve to illustrate the same point. In the epitaphs of young men killed in war, it is not uncommon for the father to both commission and be the subject of the lament. An example is provided by the epitaphs of Chairedemos and Xenophantos, both from Attica and dated to the mid and late sixth century BC, respectively,

> Χαιρεδέμο τόδε σ̂εμα πατὲρ ἔστε[σε | θ]ανόντος
> Ἀνφιχάρ‹ε›ς ἀγαθὸν παῖδα ὀlοφυρόμενο[ς].
> Φαίδιμος ἐποίε.[26]
>
> This tomb of Chairedemos, dead, was raised by his father Anphichares, mourning a noble son. Phaidimos made it.
>
> [σ]ε̂μα τόδε, Χσενόφαντε, lπατέρ σο‹ι› θε̂κε θανόντι l
> Σόφιλος ἡôι πένθος lθε̂καs ἀποφθίμενος. l
> Ἀριστοκλε̂ς ἐποίεσεν.[27]
>
> This tomb, Xenophantos, was raised for you, dead, by your father Sophilos; by dying you have left him in mourning. Aristocles made it.[28]

Having discussed the appropriateness of it being a chorus of male elders who mourn the death of their sons, as further illustrated by the funerary epigraphy, I shall now turn to the echoes in *Persians* of some specific epitaphs. One of the oldest and best known memorials to the war dead

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physical displays of pain as 'violent' and 'exaggerated' as in the final *thrēnos* in *Persians*, without anyone to date having accused them of being hysterical or effeminate, or the tragedy in question of being a *Schadenfreudestück."* Cf. also Garvie 2009: 340, in reference to the final *thrēnos*: "given that the Chorus for good dramatic reasons is male, and given also that there is no place for Atossa in this *kommos*, there was nothing else that Aeschylus could do." Although Dué 2006 argues that the lament for the death of the Persian youth belongs to a profoundly Greek tradition (above all, analyzing floral metaphors and their association with erotic poetry), she also suggests that by putting the lament into the mouths of a male chorus, as opposed to what happens in Phrynichus' *Phoenician Women*, Aeschylus feminizes the Persians and characterizes them as different from the Greeks. On this question, I am more convinced by Hopman 2013: 77, who applies the narratological concept of perspective to analyze how the chorus assumes different points of view, most particularly that of the Persian women, and how it opposes Xerxes in numerous passages. Of particular interest is her commentary on lines 115–125 (2013: 65). The intertextual relations between Aesch. *Pers.* and Phrynichus' *Phoenician Women* are studied in detail in Bachvarova and Dutsch 2016.

[26] *CEG* 14 (= *GVI* 159), *ca*. 560–550 BC, Attica. New York Metropolitan Museum, n. 16.174.6.

[27] *CEG* 50, *ca*. 510 BC, Attica. Kerameikos Museum, n. I 389.

[28] Cf. further examples in González González 2019: 52–66.

is the epitaph of Croesus, *ca.* 540 BC, which is highly illuminating in this respect. The epigram, an elegiac couplet, reads:

> στῆθι : καὶ οἴκτιρον : Κροίσο | παρὰ σῆμα θανόντος :
> ὃν | ποτ' ἐνὶ προμάχοις : ὄλεσε | θοῦρος : Ἄρες,[29]
>
> Stay and pity at the tomb of Croesus, dead, who one day on the front line of battle, raging Ares destroyed.

The first line entreats the passer-by to stop and lament (στῆθι καὶ οἴκτιρον), while the second says that he died "on the front line of battle" (ἐνὶ προμάχοις), as befits one who dies heroically in battle and which also appears in other epitaphs, whether public, such as that of the Athenians who fell at Potidaea (*CEG* 10, *ca*. 432 BC), or private, such as that of Phanes in Boeotia (*CEG* 112, *ca*. 500 BC).

The verb used in Croesus' epitaph to refer to the death of the young man is ὄλεσθαι, as is customary in these memorials to young men killed in battle, as opposed to the more common θανεῖν (Derderian 2001: 97). The same verb appears in *Persians* 278 when the messenger says πᾶς δ' ἀπώλλυτο / λεὼς δαμασθεὶς ναΐοισιν ἐμβολαῖς ("the whole army perished, subdued by the spurs of the ships"). In her commentary, Edith Hall highlights the use in the following line of the verb δαμάζω, which she argues is indicative of the femininization of the vanquished as "subdued";[30] however, it is also stated that the entire army has perished and this is expressed with a verb that in Attic funerary epigraphy is used for young men of the aristocracy who have died in battle. This verb appears again in reference to the Persians in lines 461 (ὤλλυσαν) and 483 (στρατὸς δ' ὁ λοιπὸς ἔν τε Βοιωτῶν χθονί / διώλλυθ').

To return to Croesus, his memorial says that he was destroyed by Ares, an Ares θοῦρος, a Homeric epithet[31] which is applied in *Persians* to the young men who had accompanied Xerxes on his expedition: τὸν αἰχμάεντα θοῦρον εὐνατῆρ' ἀποπεμψαμένα (137). Furthermore, on three separate occasions, Aeschylus refers to Xerxes as θούριος (74, 718, 754), and, although the last two are spoken by Xerxes' mother the queen and could be considered an expression of blind love for her son, the

[29] *CEG* 27. González González 2019: 45–47.

[30] Cf., however, *CEG* 114 *ca.* 479 BC, Boeotia, a private epitaph for a war casualty, which uses δαμασθὲς.

[31] *Il.* 5. 30, 35, 355, 454, 507, 830, 904; 15. 127, 142; 21. 406; 24. 498.

first, spoken by the chorus, uses the exact words πολυάνδρου δ' Ἀσίας θούριος ἄρχων, a way of referring to both the king and his army that belies any characterization of these as "feminized."

The Homeric tone of Croesus' epitaph is highly significant and a useful example to explain the way in which I think the "Homeric air" and the "epigrammatic air" function in *Persians*. In book 7 of the *Iliad*, before engaging in single combat, Hector imagines that he kills an Achaean warrior and even conjures up an epitaph for the enemy whose life he is about to take:

> 'ἀνδρὸς μὲν τόδε σῆμα πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,
> ὃν ποτ' ἀριστεύοντα κατέκτανε φαίδιμος Ἕκτωρ.'
> ὥς ποτέ τις ἐρέει, τὸ δ' ἐμὸν κλέος οὔ ποτ' ὀλεῖται.
>
> (*Il.* 7.89–91)

> This is the tomb of a man long dead, who in days of yore, while displaying his courage, was killed by the illustrious Hector. So someone will speak one day, and my fame shall never perish.

Although some authors have seen a direct influence of these Homeric lines in the epitaph of Arniadas, found at Corcyra and dated *ca.* 600 BC,[32] Andrej Petrovic (2016: 51) argues persuasively that if there is one epitaph that deliberately recreates Hector's imagined epitaph for his enemy, it is that of Croesus:

> [T]he structure of the second line of each epigram is identical. The first two words which dislocate death into a timeless dimension (ὃν ποτ'), are followed by praise of the heroic death of the warrior (ἐνὶ προμάχοις vs. ἀριστεύοντα). After these the verb denoting killing follows (ὄλεσε vs. κατέκτανε), and both lines end with the names of the slayers with identical grammatical disposition in the verse, i.e. as grammatical subjects (θῶρος Ἄρες and φαίδιμος Ἕκτωρ).

It should be noted that in his imagined epitaph, Hector uses the "inscriptional ποτέ" characteristic of epitaphs, which are directed at future readers, and which I mentioned at the beginning of this paper when

[32] The epitaph reads: σᾶμα τόδε Ἀρνιάδα. χαροπὸς τόνδ' ὄλεσεν Ἄρες / βαρνάμενον παρὰ ναυσὶν ἐπ' Ἀράθθοιο ϱhoϝαῖσι / πολλὸν ἀριστεύϝοντα κατὰ στονόϝεσσαν ἀϝυτάν. A Homeric influence on this memorial has been suggested by Lumpp 1963 and Raubitschek 1968: 6–7 (cited indirectly via Petrovic 2016). On the epitaph that Hector imagines for his rival, cf. Strauss Clay 2016.

discussing the epigram that Hecuba imagines for her grandson Astyanax. This detail is significant because it is no longer just a question of the well-studied influence of Homer on funerary epigraphy but also of the possible influence of funerary epigraphy on Homer. As Petrovij points out (2016: 46), influence and concurrence are not mutually exclusive in this case, and I would suggest that the same may be true of the relationship between the tragic genre and the funerary epigrammatic tradition.

Another epigram, that of the young Tetichos *ca.* 575–550 BC, evidences further similarities with some lines in *Persians*. The memorial reads as follows:

> [εἴτε ἀστό]ς τις ἀνὲρ εἴτε χσένος | ἄλοθεν ἐλθὸν
> Τέτιχον οἰκτίραι̣ς ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν παρίτο,
> ἐν πολέμοι | φθίμενον, νεαρὰν hέβεν ὀλέσαν|τα.
> ταῦτ' ἀποδυράμενοι νεσθε ἐπ |ὶ πρᾶγμ' ἀγαθόν.[33]
>
> [Whether some townsman] or a stranger coming from elsewhere, pass way in pity of Tetichos, a noble man, fallen in battle, his tender youth ruined. Mourn these things, then return to noble affairs.

This epitaph uses the well-known formula ὀλέσατε ἥβην, which also appears, sometimes with the variant ἀγλαὸν ἥβην, on other memorials to young men killed in battle, whether private (on an epitaph from Argos[34] and another from Attica[35]) or public (the memorial that the Parians erected in honor of Tokes[36] and public monuments to the Athenians killed in the war[37]). Constant references are made in *Persians* to the loss of the young army, spoken by the messenger, who says that the city must groan in vain longing for the beloved youth of the land (ποθοῦσαν φιλτάτην ἥβην χθονός, 512), by Darius, who laments that his son brought ruin on their young allies (ὦ μέλεος, οἵαν ἄρ' ἥβην ξυμμάχων ἀπώλεσεν, 733), and by the chorus, which says that the land weeps for the young men lost because of Xerxes (γᾶ δ' αἰάζει τὰν ἐγγαίαν / ἥβαν

[33] *CEG* 13. González González 2019: 47–49.

[34] *CEG* 136, *ca.* 525–500 (ἐν πολέμοι [φθ]ίμενον νεαρὰν hέβαν ὀλέσαντα).

[35] *CEG* 82, *ca.* 450–425 (ἀπώ[λεσας ἀγλα]ὸ[ν ἥβην]).

[36] *CEG* 155, 476–5 BC (hἦβην . . . ὤλεσε).

[37] *CEG* 4, 458-7 BC (ὀλέσατε hέβεν), *CEG* 6, *ca.* 447 BC (ἀπόλεσαν ἀγλαὸν hέβεν). This latter epigram is mentioned in Dué 2006: 64, n. 23.

Ξέρξαι κταμέναν, 923–924). Unsurprisingly, as fathers of many of the deceased, the elders of the chorus reiterate this idea with several variations, such as νεολαία (νεολαία γὰρ ἤδη κατὰ πᾶσ' ὄλωλεν, 670) and ἄνθος, "flower" (60, 252, 926).

The idea that the death of the young warriors plunges not only their families but the entire city into grief is common in funerary epigraphy, appearing, for example, in the Ambracian *polyandrion*, dated to the mid-fourth century BC (πατρίδ' ἀν ἰμερτὰν πένθος ἔθαλλε τότε[38]), and on the memorial to the Athenian dead at Potidaea (ἄνδρας μὲμ πόλις hέδε ποθεῖ καὶ δε[μος Ἐρεχθέος], *CEG* 10, *ca*. 432 BC). This is, again, an idea that is taken up in *Persians*:

> ὦ Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ, νῦν < > Περσῶν
> τῶν μεγαλαύχων καὶ πολυάνδρων
> στρατιὰν ὀλέσας
> ἄστυ τὸ Σούσων ἠδ' Ἀγβατάνων
> πένθει δνοφερῶι κατέκρυψας
>
> (532–536)
>
> O Sovereign Zeus, now < > of the Persians boastful and numerous after destroying the army, the cities of Susa and Ecbatana you have covered with dismal sorrow.

A similar expression appears a little earlier, in reference to the grief visited on the city of Sardis because of the death of Ariomardus (ὅ τ' ἐσθλὸς Ἀριόμαρδος, Σάρδεσι / πένθος παρασχών, 321–322), although this example should be viewed with caution as the text presents problems.[39]

IV. Contrast and Irony

Sometimes, these similarities with, or echoes of, funerary epigraphy in *Persians* create a strong impact by shattering expectations because they refer to very different circumstances from those in which such expressions are normally used. It would be no surprise if the audience were familiar with the epigrams in honor of the fallen at Salamis, for example the one dedicated to the Corinthians killed in this battle:

[38] *SEG* 41.540. Cf. D'Alessio 1995.
[39] Cf. Garvie 2009, ad. loc.

ὦ ξ<εῖ>νε, εὔhυδρόν ποκ' ἐναίομες ἄστυ Ϙορίνθο,
νῦν δὲ hα<μὲ> Αἴαντος νᾶσος ἔχει Σαλαμίς.
ἐνθάδε Φοινίσσας ν<ᾶ>ας καὶ Πέρσας hελόντες
καὶ Μέδος hι<α>ρὰν hελλάδα ῥυ<σά>μεθα.[40]

Oh, stranger, once we lived in the city of beautiful streams, Corinth, but now Salamis, the island of Ajax, holds us. Here, seizing the Persian and Phoenician ships, we saved sacred Greece from the Medes.

Recorded by Plutarch, this epigram is one of the many honoring the Greeks who fell in this battle, on the shores of the island of Salamis, known as the island of Ajax. The audience would readily remember epigrams such as this one and perceive a contrast with the images of Persian sailors whose corpses still floated in the waters of Salamis without having received funeral honors or a burial:

{Αγ.} πλήθουσι νεκρῶν δυσπότμως ἐφθαρμένων
Σαλαμῖνος ἀκταὶ πᾶς τε πρόσχωρος τόπος.
{Χο.} ὀτοτοτοῖ, φίλων
ἁλίδονα σώματα πολυβαφῆ
κατθανόντα λέγεις φέρεσθαι
πλαγκτοῖς ἐν διπλάκεσσιν.

(272–277)

{Messenger} Full of corpses, wretchedly slain, are the shores of Salamis and all the land nearby.
{Chorus} Alas, alas! The corpses of our people submerged over and over again, rejected by the sea, dead, you say, and dragged on drifting ships' timbers.

Similarly, the messenger says that Tenagon, ἄριστος, now wanders around the island of Ajax (i.e. Salamis), and then mentions those whose corpses are still crashing against the rocks (306–307), Τενάγων τ' ἄριστος Βακτρίων ἰθαγενὴς /θαλασσόπληκτον νῆσον Αἴαντος πολεῖ ("The excellent Tenagon, of the line of the Bactrians, wanders around the island of Ajax, tossed by the sea). These descriptions show respect for the Persian nobles and recall their glorious deaths, as in the case of Syennesis, who in very Greek fashion obtains glory in death by wreaking destruction on his enemies:

[40] *CEG* 131, 480 BC, Corinth, public monument, quoted in Plutarch *Mor.* 870E. Cf. Boegehold 1965.

> Συέννεσίς τε, πρῶτος εἰς εὐψυχίαν,
> Κιλίκων ἄπαρχος, εἷς ἀνὴρ πλεῖστον πόνον
> ἐχθροῖς παρασχών, εὐκλεῶς ἀπώλετο
>
> (326–328)

> And Syennesis, foremost in courage, leader of the Cilicians, who single-handedly caused the most harm to his enemies, he died obtaining glory.

However, this does not preclude a painful contrast with the memorials and public lists of those who fell in this battle on the Greek side and who did receive the corresponding public honors. Irony can even be seen in the reference to the dead Artabes the Bactrian, now a "metic" in a hard land: Ἀρτάβης τε Βάκτριος, /σκληρᾶς μέτοικος γῆς, ἐκεῖ κατέφθιτο, (319). Obviously, the unfortunate Artabes did not attain the status of metic, and Aeschylus plays with this evocation of the casualty lists, which sometimes included the status as citizen or not of the soldiers mentioned on the stele.[41]

In contrast to these powerful and terrible images of the young Persian nobles, Aeschylus employs a somewhat biting tone when revealing that Xerxes has saved his own life. Although I contend here that Aeschylus espouses empathy with the defeated, this does not preclude pride in victory and criticism of the invading enemy, but such censure is directed at Xerxes.[42] The messenger announces that the King of Kings is alive, using a customary expression for one who is alive, Ξέρξης μὲν αὐτὸς ζῆι τε καὶ φάος βλέπει (299),[43] which contrasts with the opposite formulas in funerary epigraphy indicating death.[44]

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[41] Garvie 2009 ad loc.: σκληρᾶ may suggest that the hard land does not allow him to be buried at all.

[42] On the different treatment of Xerxes and the rest of the Persians in the play, see Dué 2006: 87–88: "But while Darius' speech certainly sets up the defeat of the Persians as punishment for a wrongful attack on the part of Xerxes, the Persian war dead, as we have seen, are consistently lamented in terms that humanize and glorify the fallen warriors."

[43] Hall 1996 ad loc. recalls the Homeric expression ζώειν καὶ ὁρᾶν φάος ἠελίοιο (*Il.* 18.61, *Od.* 4.540).

[44] Tsagalis 2008: 63–86. 64: In fourth-century Attic grave epigrams, light-imagery is based on the use of the following two terms: (a) φῶς/φάος, either in connection with the sun (ἠελίο λαμπρὸμ φῶς: *CEG* 511) or on its own (φῶς δ' ἔλιπ' εὐδαίμων παῖδας παίδων ἐπιδοῦσα: *CEG* 566 / εἰς φῶς παῖδ' ἀνάγουσα βίου φάος ἥν[υσας αὐτή]: *CEG* 604 / λιποῦσα φάος | μοιριδίωι θανάτωι: *CEG* 543 / οὐδὲ φάος λεύσων ὅ γε δαίμοσιν ἦν ἀγέραστος: *CEG* 595 / <δ>ή<μ>ου φῶς: *CEG* 599); and (b) αὐγήν/-άς, always with the genitive of the word for sun (λίπον ἡλίου αὐγάς: *CEG* 590. The word for light is used either in its Attic form

Xerxes' fate is very different from that of the young noblemen whom he has dragged to perdition, and it is also very different from that of his late father Darius, whose death was timely and was deeply mourned (ὦ πολύκλαυτε φίλοισι θανών, 674). Darius was enviable in life and is enviable now, in contrast not only to his son but also to his wife, who has lived to see the city's defeat. Darius contrasts with his son because he no longer sees the light and must be invoked to briefly return him to life, to bring him back "into the light:" Γῆ τε καὶ Ἑρμῆ, βασιλεῦ τ' ἐνέρων, / πέμψατ' ἔνερθεν ψυχὴν ἐς φῶς ("Earth and Hermes, ruler of the dead, send up his soul, into the light," 629–630) .

He also contrasts with the queen, his wife, who shares with the chorus of elders the fate of having lived too long and having known misfortune:

> ὦ βροτῶν πάντων ὑπερσχὼν ὄλβον εὐτυχεῖ πότμωι,
> ὡς ἕως τ' ἔλευσσες αὐγὰς ἡλίου ζηλωτὸς ὢν
> βίοτον εὐαίωνα Πέρσαις ὡς θεὸς διήγαγες,
> νῦν τέ σε ζηλῶ θανόντα πρὶν κακῶν ἰδεῖν βάθος.
>
> (709–712)

> O you, whose fortunate fate surpassed the bliss of all mortals, envied as you watched the sun's rays, you lived a happy life, as a god for the Persians, and now I too envy you, dead before seeing the depth of these evils.

The queen says that Darius was envied (ζηλωτός) in life, when he saw the light, but–and this detail is important–he is also envied now for the very reason that she and the chorus elders are not. Darius resembles the old εὐδαίμωνες of whom I spoke earlier, those whose funerary epigraphs said that they had died in a timely manner leaving their children alive. Their memorials also refer to them as "enviable:" thus, the epitaph of Euphranor, says he died at the age of one hundred and five and went to Hades blissful (εὐδαίμων) and envied by many (Εὐφράνωρ πολλοῖσιν ἔβη ζηλωτὸς ἐς Ἄιδου; *SEG* 43.88, Ramnunte, fourth century BC), while that of the old woman Hedition says that at the age of ninety, she made her way, envied, to Persephone's chamber (στείχω ζηλωτὴ Φερσεφόνης θάλαμον; *CEG* 592, Attica, *ca*. 350-317 BC. Library of Hadrian, n. M 1324).

(φῶς) or its Ionic equivalent (φάος), and both forms are once combined in the same line: εἰς φῶς παῖδ' ἀνάγουσα βίου φάος ἤν[υσας αὐτή] (*CEG* 604). αὐγή means light of the sun and αὐγαί rays, beams.

V. δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου

The chorus of elders' expressions of grief and their lament for the young Persians who died in their prime, abandoned in the waters of Salamis, are phrased using resources rooted in quintessentially Greek traditions such as Homeric epic and the epigraphic genre of the epitaph, which undoubtedly contributed to arousing an empathy that was particularly difficult to achieve given the proximity of the events and the spectators' involvement in the episodes being discussed. They served an important function, which was no other than to render *Persians* what it was intended to be, a tragedy. In the debate between those who see *Persians* as a patriotic and celebratory play and those who see it as a matter of *pathos* and *pothos*, what is at stake is whether or not *Persians* is a tragedy that Aristotle would not have hesitated to consider as such.[45] More specifically, there is tragedy in the sense that there is *peripeteia* (the magnificent Persian army has vanished and Xerxes returns in rags), but would the spectators have achieved *katharsis* through pity and fear if Aeschylus had fueled their patriotic pride by humiliating the vanquished and characterizing them as opposed to the audience in every way? Probably not.

According to Aristotle, tragedy had to achieve its effect on the audience through pity and fear (δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου). In his *Rhetoric*, he defines both emotions, which are quite similar:

> Let fear (φόβος), then, be a sort of pain (λύπη τις) or disturbance coming from the appearance of a future destructive or painful evil. For people do not fear all evils (for example, that one will become unjust or slow-witted), but rather those that are capable of [causing] great pains or great destructions, and if they appear not far off but close at hand, and so about to happen. For people do not fear what is very far off. For they all know that they will die, but because it is not close at hand, they care nothing about it.
>
> (Arist. *Rh.* 2.5, 1382a21–6)

> Let pity (ἔλεος), then, be a sort of pain (λύπη τις) at an apparently destructive or painful bad thing happening to someone who does not deserve it, and one that a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer, and this when it appears close at hand.
>
> (Arist. *Rh.* 2.8, 1385bl3–16)[46]

[45] Librán 2005: 145–54. See also Munteanu 2012: 151–63.

[46] Translation by Reeve 2018.

Would the spectators of *Persians* have felt these emotions? Aeschylus certainly did everything he could to ensure that they would.[47] The Athenians would have felt fear (φόβος) and pity (ἔλεος) because it was perfectly conceivable that something similar could happen to them, having already come so close to suffering a crushing defeat, and it was not impossible that this might happen again.[48] Furthermore, the way in which the pain of the vanquished is presented in *Persians* made it easy for the audience to feel that neither the old men in the chorus nor the so frequently evoked young widows had deserved their unbearable misfortune.

In blurring the boundaries between victor and vanquished, Aeschylus locates himself in a tradition that can be traced back to Homer,[49] but he also employs the resources of another, less studied tradition, that of Archaic funerary epigraphy, which would have had the same effect: the way of mourning the dead would have been familiar –rather than exotic– to the audience and would have aroused empathy.

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[47] Cf., in the same sense, Hopman 2009, especially 369–76.

[48] Those who insist on the celebratory tone of the play may be forgetting that in 472 BC, the year that *Pers.* was first staged, the Persian threat had not been entirely dispelled. In this regard, see, among others, Pelling 1997.

[49] Dué 2006: 62 indicates that "For Hall, there is no continuum that can be traced from the *Iliad* through the Archaic period and into the Classical. Aeschylus' *Persians* is for Hall one of the first and foremost examples of a new trend. But the poetry of Aeschylus is steeped in the Homeric tradition, and there are many points of continuity between the treatment of the Trojans in epic and that of the Persians in Aeschylus' tragedy." In the same vein, Pelling 1997: 18. On the Homeric influence, cf. Hopman 2009: 364n13; and Munteanu 2012: 161.

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