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THE POTIDAEA EPIGRAM AND EURIPIDES' *SUPPLIANT WOMEN*: AN INTERTEXTUAL READING*

ABSTRACT

CEG *1.10 shows striking parallels in language and thought with Euripides'* Suppliant Women *531–6 (c. 423), with both passages describing the departure of the soul into the upper air (*aithêr*) after death. This article argues that rather than being a commonplace in fifth-century Athens, the mention of this eschatology in* Suppliant Women *is a deliberate reference to* CEG *1.10; and that the significance of this reference is the recontextualization of the lines from* CEG *1.10 to describe the battle of Delium (423), thus expressing the war-weariness and disillusion of Athens.*

Keywords: eschatology; Potidaea; Athens; *Suppliant Women*; sepulchral epigram; Delium; *aithêr*

1. INTRODUCTION

CEG 1.10 (= *IG* I^3 1179, *CIG* 1.170) is a brief elegiac poem composed in six elegiac distichs commemorating the Athenian soldiers who fell at Potidaea in 432.[1] The text survives in two fragments of a marble stele; the bulk of the poem is preserved on a marble now in the British Museum, while the other fragment was found later and now resides in the Museum of the Athenian Agora.[2] Where exactly it stood is now unknown, but according to Hansen it was either near the Academy or within the walls of the city in the Kerameikos. The inscription can be dated to the year 432, though not with certainty.[3]

* I thank Andrej Petrovic for comments on earlier drafts of this paper; the participants in the Greek Epigraphy seminar at the University of Virginia in autumn 2022; and *CQ*'s reader. Translations are mine.

[1] Thucydides 1.63 records that 150 Athenians and their general, Kallias, died in the battle; they were later buried in the Kerameikos. However, several scholars discuss the possibility that the poem refers not to the 432 battle, but to the subsequent siege in 429 (cf. Thuc. 2.70) or the entire Potidaea campaign: H. Mattingly, 'Some fifth-century Attic epigraphic hands', *ZPE* 83 (1990), 110–22, at 111; A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. 1, Introduction and Commentary on Book I* (Oxford, 1956), 220; M. Tentori Montalto, *Essere primi per il valore: gli epigrammi funerari greci su pietra per i caduti in guerra (VII–V sec. a.C.)* (Pisa and Rome, 2017), 130–4. The 432 battle seems the most likely occasion to me, as there is a clear resonance between the battle described in Thuc. 1.63 with that of *CEG* 1.10 (an Athenian victory after killing some of the enemy, with the remainder of the enemy fleeing to their wall), whereas Thuc. 2.70 mentions no battle or Athenian deaths, only a truce to end the siege of Potidaea.

[2] The anaglyph accompanying the inscription represents three warriors, one apparently wounded and lying on the ground, another shaking his spear as though fighting, and another standing between them (P.A. Hansen [ed.], *Carmina epigraphica graeca: saeculorum VIII–V a. Chr.n.* [Berlin, 1983], 8, quoting A. Boeckh). See comments on the marble and the epigraphy of the inscription at C. Clairmont, 'New light on some public Athenian documents of the fifth and fourth century', *ZPE* 36 (1979), 123–30, at 126–9.

[3] The battle of Potidaea is securely dated to 432; although a monument would not necessarily have been erected immediately after the event, scholars have assumed that it was in this case. Cf. the arguments for dating at G. Zuntz, *The Political Plays of Euripides* (Manchester, 1955), 88, and discussion and bibliography of the dating at A. Lesky, *Greek Tragic Poetry* (New Haven, 1983), 464 n.

Although written continuously as if the entire text were a single poem, there seem to be three separate elegies.[4] The whole text reads as follows:[5]

(i) (nomina incisa in stela quae nunc deperdita est.)
(ii, litteris maioribus incisus)
ἐμ Πο̣τ̣[ειδαίαι Ἀθεναίον hοίδε ἀπέθανον].
(iii) ἀθάνατόμ με θα[νο ⏑̄ – ⏑̄ – ∪∪ – –] |
σεμαίνεν ἀρετ[ὲν – ∪∪ – ∪∪ –] |
καὶ προγονοσθενες[– ⏑̄ – ⏑̄ – ∪∪ – –] |
νίκεν εὐπόλεμομ μνε̣μ' ἔλαβομ φθ[ίμενοι]. |
αἰθὲρ μὲμ φσυχὰς ὑπεδέχσατο, σὸμ[ατα δὲ χθὸν] | 5
τὸνδε· Ποτειδαίας δ' ἀμφὶ πύλας ἔλ[υθεν]. |
ἐχθρὸν δ'οι μὲν ἔχοσι τάφο μέρος, hο[ι δὲ φυγόντες] |
τεῖχος πιστοτάτεν hελπίδ' ἔθεντο [βίο]. |
ἄνδρας μὲμ πόλις hέδε ποθεῖ καὶ δε̂[μος Ἐρεχθέος], |
πρόσθε Ποτειδαίας hοὶ θάνον ἐμ πρ[ο]μάχοις | 10
παῖδες Ἀθεναίον· φσυχὰς δ' ἀντίρρο[π]α θέντες |
ἐ[λλ]άχσαντ' ἀρετὲν καὶ πατρ[ίδ'] εὐκλ[έ]ισαν.

At Potidaea these Athenians died … me, immortal … gave a sign of their virtue … and the strength of their ancestors(?) … Though perishing, they received well-won victory as their memorial.

The *aithêr* received their souls, the earth their bodies—but they were destroyed about the gates of Potidaea. Some of their enemies received the grave as their portion, some—those who fled—made a wall their trustiest hope for life.

This city and the people of Erechtheus miss the men who died in the front lines before Potidaea as children of Athens. But they weighed their souls in the scale, and for their lot they received virtue and glorified their country.

The words in (iii).5 are striking for their eschatology—a clear and public expression of the view that the soul separates from the body upon death and ascends into the *aithêr*.[6] This passage marks the first time that the ψυχή/σῶμα antithesis appears in inscriptions.[7]

126. Hansen cites the epigram as '432 (uulgo)'. I see no reason to doubt the conventional dating to 432, given that there is no evidence of a lapse of time before the erection of the monument in this case; but if the epigram refers rather to the 429 siege (cf. n. 1), or if the monument was raised some years after the battle, it would bring the date down nearer to that of *Suppliant Women* (cf. n. 9).

[4] Hansen writes that 'the verses are exhibited as though belonging to one epitaph, but clearly there are three epigrams' ('uersus ut unius tituli praebentur, sed manifeste sunt tria epigrammata') (Hansen, *CEG*, 9). E. Bowie, 'Epigram as narration', in M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic and I. Petrovic (edd.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigrams* (Cambridge, 2010), 313–84, at 370–2 argues that the three elegies were written as part of a competition; cf. *SEG* 60.1925.

[5] Text of Hansen, *CEG* 1.10.

[6] For the eschatology of the soul entering the *aithêr* and celestial immortality, see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *'Reading' Greek Death: To the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford, 1995), 194 (with bibliography at nn. 340–2); also E. Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (tr. W.B. Hillis; London, 1925), 546–54; F. Egli, *Euripides im Kontext zeitgenössischer intellektueller Strömungen. Analyse der Funktion philosophischer Themen in den Tragödien und Fragmenten* (Leipzig, 2003), 94–8 gathers all the passages in which this eschatology is expressed in Euripides with brief comments on each. It is debatable whether these passages imply hope for a post-mortem existence. W. Jaeger, 'Tyrtaeus on true *arete*', in W. Jaeger, *Five Essays* (Montreal, 1966), 101–42, at 136 claims not; *contra*, M.R. Lefkowitz, *Euripides and the Gods* (New York, 2016), 81 says that '[Theseus'] words imply … a kind of immortality'.

[7] Cf. A. Skiadas, *Ἐπὶ τύμβῳ. Συμβολὴ εἰς τὴν ἑρμηνείαν τῶν ἑλληνικῶν ἐπιτυμβίων ἐμμέτρων ἐπιγραφῶν* (Athens, 1967), 80–2.

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Striking enough on its own, *CEG* 1.10 becomes even more interesting when compared with the following passage in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* that expresses the same dichotomy in nearly identical language (531–6):[8]

> ἐάσατ' ἤδη γῆ καλυφθῆναι νεκρούς,
> ὅθεν δ' ἕκαστον ἐς τὸ φῶς ἀφίκετο
> ἐνταῦθ' ἀπελθεῖν, πνεῦμα μὲν πρὸς αἰθέρα,
> τὸ σῶμα δ' ἐς γῆν· οὔτι γὰρ κεκτήμεθα
> ἡμέτερον αὐτὸ πλὴν ἐνοικῆσαι βίον,
> κἄπειτα τὴν θρέψασαν αὐτὸ δεῖ λαβεῖν.

Let their corpses now be hidden in the earth, and let each part return to where it came into the light—spirit to *aithêr*, and body to earth. For we do not possess the body as our own except to dwell in it for a lifetime, and then the earth that raised it must receive it.

Here are two passages, one from a sepulchral epigram, the other from a tragedy, written nearly contemporaneously,[9] resembling each other closely in form and meaning. So why this close connection between the two? What does this short passage of a play by Euripides have to do with an inscription for Athenian soldiers who died nearly a decade earlier? Both the *Suppliant Women* passage and *CEG* 1.10 have received ample treatment individually;[10] when the similarities between these two passages have been noted, it has usually been as evidence that the *aithêr*-eschatology was a commonplace in fifth-century Athens,[11] often in

[8] Text of J. Diggle, *Euripidis fabulae. Tomus II* (Oxford, 1981). These particular lines were athetized by some past editors, as they are attributed in Stobaeus to a certain Moschion; cf. Egli (n. 6), 95; Collard (ed.), *Euripides: Supplices*, 2 vols. (Groningen, 1975), 1.39–40, 2.250–1.

[9] *CEG* 1.10 and *Suppliant Women* were probably written within a decade of each other. Although neither are securely dated by external means, there are reasons for assigning *CEG* 1.10 to around 432 (cf. n. 3 above), and *Suppliant Women* to *c.* 423. For *Suppliant Women*, cf. the extensive discussion and bibliography at A. Giannotti, *Euripide. Supplici* (Milan, 2023), 48–56; Collard (n. 8), 1.8–14. D. Kovacs (ed.), *Euripides: Suppliant Women, Electra, Heracles* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 3 tentatively dates the play to 423, reasoning from the contemporary issue of the Boeotians' refusal to give the Athenians their war dead. Cf. J.E.G. Whitehorne, 'The dead as spectacle in Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Supplices*', *Hermes* 114 (1986), 59–72, at 68; and M. Toher, 'Diodoros on Delion and Euripides' *Supplices*', *CQ* 51 (2001), 178–82, at 180 on the similarity of the battle in *Suppliant Women* 674–96 to Thucydides' description of the battle of Delium (Thuc. 4.96). G. Mastromarco, 'Per la datazione delle *Supplici* di Euripide', in *Studi di filologia classica in onore di Giusto Monaco*, 4 vols. (Palermo, 1991), 1.241–50 dates the play to 423. Zuntz (n. 3), 89–91 dates the play to 424 both on metrical grounds and because, he argues, its mood and themes are suitable only to that year.

[10] For literature on *CEG* 1.10, cf. Skiadas (n. 7), 81–2; Tentori Montalto (n. 1), 130–4, with additional bibliography at 130; M. Obryk, *Unsterblichkeitsglaube in den griechischen Versinschriften* (Berlin and Boston, 2012), 14–17; N.T. Arrington, *Ashes, Images, and Memories: The Presence of the War Dead in Fifth-century Athens* (Oxford, 2015), 116; also E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951), 257–8 n. 29. Some of the relevant literature on *Suppliant Women* is C. Collard, 'The funeral oration in Euripides' *Supplices*', *BICS* 19 (1972), 39–53; R.B. Gamble, 'Euripides' *Suppliant Women*: decision and ambivalence', *Hermes* 98 (1970), 385–405; E. Kornarou, 'The display of the dead on the Greek tragic stage: the case of Euripides' *Supplices*', *BICS* 51 (2008), 29–38; for ample treatment of commentaries and interpretative works up to 1975, see Lesky (n. 3), 463–4 n. 121 and Collard (n. 8), 1.23–31.

[11] E.g. A. Mihai, 'Soul's aitherial abode according to the Poteidaia epitaph and the Presocratic philosophers', *Numen* 57 (2010), 553–82, at 558: 'the same popular idea' is in *Suppliant Women* 531–6 and *CEG* 1.10; Jaeger claims of the *aithêr*-eschatology that it 'was quite widespread at the time of Euripides' (Jaeger [n. 6], 136); similarly, Dodds writes that it was 'a fairly common fifth-century view' (Dodds [n. 10], 153); Collard (n. 8), 2.251–2. The motif becomes much more common in the fourth century and later; cf. M.A. Tueller, 'Sea and land: dividing sepulchral epigram', in M. Kanellou, I. Petrovic and C. Carey (edd.), *Greek Epigram from the Hellenistic to the Early Byzantine Era* (Oxford, 2019), 192–210, at 202; K. Gutzwiller, 'Heroic epitaphs of the Classical age: the Aristotelian *peplos*

conjunction with citations from later inscriptions or poetry.[12] This article offers another explanation: that the similarities in thought and language in these two passages are not to be explained as multiple instances of a commonplace, but as Euripides' deliberate imitation of the sepulchral epigram for a specific dramatic purpose suited to the context of *Suppliant Women*.[13]

2. *AITHÊR*-ESCHATOLOGY IN FIFTH- AND FOURTH-CENTURY ATHENS

The first striking similarity between *CEG* 1.10 and the *Suppliant Women* passage is the sense—the soul and body separate at death, with the soul ascending into the *aithêr*. Although short, both *CEG* 1.10 and *Suppliant Women* share the same, non-Homeric view of the soul's fate upon death.[14] A second link between the two passages is a strong linguistic similarity,[15] beginning with the structure of the clauses: both are short clauses consisting of just a few words, and both contain a μέν/δέ construction, contrasting the soul and *aithêr* on the one hand with the body and earth on the other.[16] Besides the identical word αἰθήρ, there is a close correspondence between the two passages for each of the other nouns—the inscription's σώματα is answered by *Suppliant Women*'s σῶμα, χθών by γῆ, and ψυχή by πνεῦμα.

and beyond', in M. Baumbach, A. Petrovic and I. Petrovic (edd.), *Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram* (Cambridge and New York, 2010), 219–49, at 235–6.

[12] The Potidaea epigram and *Suppliant Women* 531–6 have been explicitly compared in scholarship at least since the earliest edition of Rohde, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (Freiburg im Breisgau and Leipzig, 1894), 549–50; before Rohde, Kaibel noted the Euripidean resonance of the epigram, without citing *Suppliant Women* specifically: 'ne in funebri quidem publica laudatione noua Euripidea philosophandi ratione abstinetur' (G. Kaibel, *Epigrammata graeca ex lapidibus conlecta* [Berlin, 1878], 8). Later, the two passages were connected by J. Burnet, 'The Socratic doctrine of the soul', *PBA* 7 (1915–16), 235–59, at 248–9; Dodds (n. 10), 174 n. 112; Mihai, (n. 11), 558–9; Lefkowitz (n. 6), 81–2; Skiadas (n. 7), 81–2 (also listing previous bibliography); Collard (n. 8), 2.252; Tentori Montalto (n. 1), 132 n. 11; Giannotti (n. 9), 114–15 n. 138. Egli (n. 6), 98 not only notes the similarity, but even goes so far as to suggest that Euripides was the author of the Potidaea epigram.

[13] For the mutual influence of the genres of epigram and tragedy see E. Fraenkel (ed.), *Aeschylus: Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950), 2.290 (on the similarity of *Ag.* 577–9 to dedicatory inscriptions); M. Fantuzzi, 'Epigram and the theater', in C.P. Bing and J.S. Bruss (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram: Down to Philip* (Boston, 2007), 477–95 (on the use of tragedy in Hellenistic epigram); M.T. Dinter, 'Epigram in epic and Greek tragedy: generic interactions', in C. Henriksén (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Epigram* (Hoboken, 2019), 145–62, at 148–58 (on epigrams in tragedy and 'epigrammatic moments'); M. González González, '*Persians*, a long thrēnos', *CW* 116 (2022), 1–22 (on the use of vocabulary and formulas from funerary epigraphy in Aeschylus' *Persians*).

[14] Tueller (n. 11), 202 and Lefkowitz (n. 6), 81–2 argue that this eschatology is not completely outside the mainstream of contemporary Greek thought. However, others assert that the eschatology in Homer is incompatible with *aithêr*-eschatology (e.g. Dodds [n. 10], 179–80).

[15] Cf. Mihai (n. 11), 558.

[16] There are some aspects of the epitaphic vocabulary that are missing in both passages; we might look for the so-called 'inscriptional ποτέ' (D.C. Young, 'Pindar *Pythians* 2 and 3: inscriptional ποτέ and the "poetic epistle"', *HSPh* 87 [1983], 31–48), or for certain deictic pronouns such as τόδε (σῆμα), or family- or deme-names. Another marker is the word for 'earth' in each; cf. C.C. Tsagalis, *Inscribing Sorrow: Fourth-Century Attic Funerary Epigrams* (Berlin, 2008), 216–19. In the archaic and early classical periods the place of burial was indicated by either τόδε (σῆμα) or the adverb ἐνθάδε, whereas in fourth-century Athens the burial-place was more often signified by non-deictic phrases like γῆ, γοῦν or χθών with the verb καλύπτω or κατέχω. For fourth-century uses of ἔχω-compounds in epitaphs, cf. Gutzwiller (n. 11), 232. Despite *Suppliant Women* passage not having all of the elements of sepulchral epigram, 'epigrammatic moments' in tragedy need not contain every formal element of epigram, as Dinter observes, because the information conveyed in an epigram is often already shared with the audience in the course of the play (Dinter [n. 13], 150).

This *aithêr*-eschatology is attested in many other passages of literature and in inscriptions;[17] however, out of these many attestations, *CEG* 1.10 and *Suppliant Women* are the two earliest dateable instances.[18] Despite the assertion by several authors that this is a widespread notion in fifth-century Athens, it is not common to find this notion of the soul's ascent into *aithêr* at the time. If the *aithêr*-eschatology did become a commonplace in the literature of fourth century Athens and beyond, it is at least in part because Euripides made it so.[19] The reason for its use here in *Suppliant Women*, in apparently the first passage in which he refers to it, should not be explained away merely as 'contemporary speculation' on Euripides' part—since although it does include contemporary philosophical and political language, recourse to such an explanation is potentially dismissive of Euripides' artistic purpose here. At least without further nuance, the explanation in terms of 'contemporary speculation' holds the danger of forestalling the investigation as to why Euripides introduced such contemporary references.[20] Rather, if we imagine that Euripides adopted the idea first here, as particularly suited to this passage of his drama, paying close attention to the dramatic context of *Suppliant Women* 531–6, we will see that it resonates with and amplifies the themes of the play as a whole, and that its use here is far more than a mere instance of a common topos.

[17] References here are limited mostly to those dating from an early (fifth/fourth century) date; from Euripides' works: *Electra* 59, *Helen* 1014–16, *Orestes* 1086–8, fr. 757.120–8 K. (*Hypsipyle*), fr. 839.8–14 (*Chrysippus*), fr. 908b, fr. 971, fr. 1013; cf. J.D. Denniston, *Euripides: Electra* (Oxford, 1939), 60 on *El.* 59 and Egli (n. 6), 94–8. Outside Euripides, there is Sophocles' *Ajax* 1192–6. Gutzwiller notes instances from the Aristotelian *Peplos* (Gutzwiller [n. 11], 235–6); also a fragment attributed to Epicharmus, fr. 213 K.–A. (B9 DK). Among inscriptions: *CEG* 1.10; *CEG* 2.535; 2.545; 2.558; 2.593; 2.737; *SEG* 38.440 (cf. the passages gathered in Egli [n. 6], 95–9); Tueller (n. 11), 202 n. 21 notes the resilience of the topos in Greek even up to the ninth century A.D. See also the references at Mihai (n. 11), 562.

[18] As for the dates of Euripides' references, *Electra* is dated to either 413 or *c*. 420, *Helen* to 412, and *Orestes* to 408 (Kovacs [n. 9], 3, 142; and D. Kovacs [ed.], *Euripides: Helen, Phoenician Women, Orestes* [Cambridge, MA, 2002], 400); the fragments cannot be dated with certainty. Egli (n. 6), 98 cites *Suppliant Women* as the earliest appearance of the *aithêr*-eschatology in Euripides. Of the inscriptions, none of those cited featuring *aithêr* are earlier than *CEG* 1.10. In literature outside Euripides, the only apparent earlier mention of the *aithêr*-eschatology is Sophocles' *Ajax* 1192–6 (dated tentatively to the 440s, though not excluding the late 450s or early 430s by P.J. Finglass, *Sophocles: Ajax* [Cambridge, 2011], 10–11), which, while it does mention a person's going into the *aithêr* as an equivalent for death, is not necessarily the same as the eschatology of *CEG* 1.10 and *Suppliant Women*: it lacks the soul/body antithesis featured in the latter.

[19] Cf. Skiadas (n. 7), 81 n. 4; Collard (n. 8), 2.252. For the close association of Euripides especially with *aithêr*, consider Aristophanes' parody of Euripides by having him invoke the *aithêr*, along with his agile tongue, intelligence and sharp sense of smell, instead of the traditional gods (*Frogs* 892–3); similarly, Aristophanes parodies Socrates by presenting him swearing by the *aithêr*, air and clouds (*Clouds* 264–6; *Thesmophoriazusae* 272). The characters' lack of traditional piety, materialistic views and intellectual distance from common Athenians are all targeted in this use of *aithêr*.

[20] E.g. A.M. Bowie, 'Tragic filters for history: Euripides' *Supplices* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes*', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997), 39–62, at 47: 'contemporary scientific thinking'; Zuntz (n. 3), 3: 'the poet's desire to show his knowledge of the most recent philosophical developments'; G.M.A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London, 1941; repr. London and New York, 1961), 236; M.H. Shaw, 'The ἦθος of Theseus in *The Suppliant Women*', *Hermes* 110 (1982), 9–10. But cf. also P. Burian, '*Logos* and *pathos*: the politics of the *Suppliant Women*', in P. Burian (ed.), *Directions in Euripidean Criticism* (Durham, NC, 1985), 129–55, at 140 for a defence of Euripides against criticism that contemporary references 'caused him to lose control of his play'. For discussion of critical opinions from before 1955, see references at Zuntz (n. 3), 3–4.

3. USE OF THE POTIDAEA EPIGRAM IN *SUPPLIANT WOMEN*

Suppliant Women touches on a vast number of episodes.[21] This range of actions and themes is so bewildering that it is difficult to find a convincing theme that unifies the entire play.[22] It is clear, however, that divine and human justice, particularly the burial of the dead, are at the centre of the plot.[23] Lines 531–6 belong squarely in the middle of this theme of justice.[24] The immediate context of these lines is a debate between Theseus and the Theban herald on the superiority of democracy or monarchy, respectively. Theseus, indignant at the herald's denigration of democracy and Thebes' importunity in giving orders to Athens—orders against panhellenic custom, no less—speaks 531–6 as a counter-demand for Thebes.

The messenger's speech establishes that the Thebans obstinately refuse burial and are ready to go to war with Athens—a Boeotian crime that would have resonated for Euripides' 423 audience as well.[25] Lines 531–6 are issued as a command, and are thus, in a sense, counterfactual—a statement of what *ought* to happen, and a demand made on the Thebans, not the reality of the situation. Thus, in *Suppliant Women*, the emphasis of the idea that the soul ascends into the *aithêr* , while the body returns to the earth, is on the unreality of the statement—the bodies of the dead are precisely not received into the earth. The Thebans' actions have prevented the proper separation that should occur at death, for the earthly parts of the dead to be hidden in the ground, away from the light of day, and for only the spirit to ascend into the *aithêr*.[26] The natural harmony of the elements exemplified in the dichotomy between *aithêr*/soul and earth/body are spoiled, since the men's bodies still remain in the light of day—or, in the case of Amphiaraus, soul and body together were swallowed whole into the earth (925–7). Even in this elemental sense of the dissolution of the corpses, it has been made impossible to render to each element its due—the Theban action has upset a law older than the city of Pandion (561–3), and higher than any ruler of Greece, or even any panhellenic custom. In a sense, the Thebans have perpetrated an injustice against the gods, who ordained such a law to apply everywhere in the course of nature.

By pitting Thebes against the natural order in 531–6, Theseus in his speech effectively characterizes Thebes (and, by extension in the context of this argument over constitutions, monarchy) as overreaching and prone to disrespect law. Meanwhile, he frames himself (and democracy) as an exemplar of justice, courageously standing on the side of suppliants and the natural order against a despotic affront to human and divine law. Thus, in their immediate context, the lines about *aithêr* seem to score a point against monarchy and in favour of democracy. However, by reading here a reference to the

[21] The variety of themes and episodes in *Suppliant Women* has been a major critical problem for scholars who have dealt with the play: Kornarou (n. 10), 31; Collard (n. 10), 45; Gamble (n. 10), 385; W.D. Smith, 'Expressive form in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*', *HSPh* 71 (1967), 151–70, at 153; Burian (n. 20), especially 139–40; Kovacs (n. 9), 7–8.

[22] According to the fragmentary summary prefixed to the play (*hypothesis* 2–3 Diggle), *Suppliant Women* was meant as a praise of Athens (ἐγκώμιον Ἀθηνῶν), however that phrase is best understood. Different interpretations are contrasted in Burian (n. 20), especially 212–13 n. 1.

[23] Cf. Kovacs (n. 9), 3; Bowie (n. 20), 51; Lefkowitz (n. 6), 85–6; on display of the bodies, cf. Whitehorne (n. 9), 67–72; Kornarou (n. 10), 38.

[24] For discussion of the debate between Theseus and the Theban herald, and various interpretations of it, cf. Burian (n. 20), 139–44 with notes.

[25] On the memory of the battle of Delium in the tragedy, cf. M. Sordi, 'Teseo-Pagonda nelle *Supplici* di Euripide', in L. Belloni, G. Milanese and A. Porro (edd.), *Studia classica Iohanni Tarditi oblata*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1995), 2.931–7.

[26] On this separation and other plays in which it is thematically important, cf. Tueller (n. 11), 206–9.

Potidaea epigram and thus engaging their funerary context, the effect is more sinister: though Theseus insists on the close tie between democracy and justice (here in the form of defending the right to burial), Euripides' audience would recognize the contemporary scandal of failing to retrieve the bodies from Delium. The close tie between democracy and justice is severed, as democratic Athens failed to retrieve the lost or render them their natural due by burial. What remains of Theseus' noble claims when that tie has been dissolved, except a pretext for war?

The chorus's questioning of the justice of the gods afterwards dovetails with the problem of the injustice of the Thebans. The gods failed to preserve the natural order in not rebuking the victorious Thebans and by allowing the corpses of the Argives to lie exposed to the light. The chorus's questions become more pointed by referring the gods' injustice not just to the outrage to their sons' bodies (which is, after all, rectified in the course of the play by Theseus), but to the outcome of the battle of Delium. When the Boeotians defeated the Athenians, they, like the Thebans, refused burial to the conquered dead, but unlike in *Suppliant Women*, the real-life situation was not rectified.[27] Thus, the line about the *aithêr* has been preserved in a broadly similar context to that in which it originally occurred—the commemoration of fallen soldiers—and yet at the same time, by being repeated in an alien context, the similarity only heightens the contrast between the situations of 432 and 423: the dead remain unburied, their praise cannot offer consolation.

4. CONCLUSION

Suppliant Women is a play staged at a peak of the Peloponnesian War about the injustice of leaving the dead unburied, meant as a comment on the contemporary scandal of the battle of Delium, alluding to an epitaph from a decade earlier in the Peloponnesian War. Intertextuality operates here on several levels. Firstly, the effect of placing the words of an old epitaph in the mouth of Theseus, preserver of panhellenic custom, is that rather than describing an accomplished fact, they describe an ideal—a moral imperative rather than a commemoration. Within the tragedy, that ideal can be realized, but the dead subjected to dishonour at Delium never received their burial. Whereas *CEG* 1.10 was inscribed on a monument to the valour of the men who had died and received their reward—a glorious name and the gratitude of the city—*Suppliant Women* 531–6 problematizes the valour of the Seven because they cannot be buried and receive a monument. In the context of the tragedy, it even elicits questions about the justice of the gods. And on still another level, by referring *Suppliant Women* 531–6 to the outcome of the battle of Delium, the valour of the dead and the justice of the gods are made even more problematic because the dead can never be given justice. The kind of balance described in *CEG* 1.10, where the dead are honoured and the elements each receive their due portion, is not a reality.[28] In spite of Theseus' speech exemplifying a rational and

[27] Even within *Suppliant Women*, there is a shadow of this inability ever to fully resolve the lack of burial—the women, even in the play, are never allowed the chance to behold their sons' bodies, but are kept away by Theseus (944), in spite of the longing they express (69–70, 815–18).

[28] The paradoxical, unnatural situation is described elsewhere in the play by other recurrent paradoxes: the childless mothers (35), the 'chain that is no chain' of their supplication (32), and the mothers' quest to bury those who should have buried them (174–5); cf. Burian (n. 20), 130.

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optimistic world, in which even the dead have their elemental rights to burial and dissolution, reality puts the lie to such optimism. Those who died at Delium sacrificed themselves for their state as did those who died at Potidaea, but the former lack the reward of a tomb and a glorious memory, nor do they have a Theseus to vindicate them like the Seven against Thebes.

Epigram has become refracted by tragedy: what was glorious and unproblematic in the genre of epitaph (*CEG* 1.10) became sordid in reality, but grand and magnified in tragedy. The effect of placing the poem in a tragic context has not lessened the loss of Delium (unless a fictitious resolution could provide solace to a real event), but rather has brought home the consequences and the full impact of the dishonour visited on the dead. The neglect of the corpses remains a painful matter, one that calls for grief and lament, and that has not been alleviated by its expression in impressive form on stage in tragedy; but by taking centre stage, the facts that were so pitiful and horrific are brought home in their most fitting context—sombre tragedy—and at least the stage dead receive their proper burial. The tragedy reveals something about the non-burial of the dead, and about the epigram too—it reveals the neglect of the corpses to the audience as a subject of tragedy.[29]

Taking *CEG* 1.10 as an intertext with *Suppliant Women* makes the latter's theological questions much more pointed. The state of affairs that Theseus stands up for—rendering the elements of the bodies of the dead to their natural places—becomes a reference to a burial properly conducted and justice fairly rendered. Bringing *CEG* 1.10 and *Suppliant Women* 531–6 into contrast highlights the lack of both a human monument and justice according to nature for the dead in the latter. The contrast is even sharper between *CEG* 1.10 and the contemporary events to which *Suppliant Women* refers, the indignities to the dead at Delium that were never righted.

It seems that Euripides took the formulation of the burial of the dead from a recent monument commemorating the burial of the dead, and used it to express poignantly the lack of burial for the Seven against Thebes, who are in turn a representation of the dead at the battle of Delium. The correspondences between the two texts are best explained, not as variations on a bit of popular wisdom, but as Euripides' conscious borrowing of the epigram's diction for tragic effect.[30] This paper has attempted to prove this conscious borrowing from sepulchral epigram in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, and to show that the borrowing has a very specific force in lending both tragic pathos and a sense of futility and sorrow to the continuing Peloponnesian War. This article has addressed primarily the place of such epigrammatic borrowing in Euripides' work and an interpretation of its effects in the particular case of *Suppliant Women* 531–6; but this interpretation also has bearing on the general interpretation of this play. *Suppliant Women* has often been maligned as one of Euripides' lesser works, and in particular, it has attracted criticism for

[29] For the broader implications of the use of history in this tragedy, cf. J. Morwood (ed.), *Euripides*: Suppliant Women (Oxford, 2007), 26–30; S. Tufano, 'The speech of Pagondas (Thuk. 4.92) and the sources on the battle of Delion', *Klio* 103 (2021), 409–35, at 411–16; Giannotti (n. 9), 30–2, with further bibliography at 32.

[30] They might both be due to the influence of Anaxagoras; Egli (n. 6), 96 points out the resemblance between a fragment of Euripides (fr. 839 K.) and Anaxagoras B17 DK. Diogenes Laertius 2.10 describes Euripides as the pupil (μαθητής) of Anaxagoras, and the scholia to Apollonius of Rhodes 1.496–511 as acquainted with him (γνώριμος αὐτῷ). That does not necessarily mean actual, personal acquaintance; it may be the rationalization of a later century to account for their similarity (cf. H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy: A History of Greek Epic, Lyric, and Prose to the Middle of the Fifth Century* [New York, 1973], 262).

being a tool of political thinking or inserting contemporary references anachronistically into the mythic past. The argument advanced above supports a more charitable interpretation, that Euripides did not merely insert contemporary discourse and events into this play for anachronism's sake, but did so for the sake of complex interactions between the contexts of the original and of his own drama.

University of Virginia WILLIAM NICHOLS
wn3rp@virginia.edu

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