

Did Euripides Expect the Audience of His *Troades* to Think of Melos? Did They Do So?

From about 1900 (Steiger) onward there was a consensus in classical studies, shared by scholars working on tragedy and scholars of ancient history alike, that since in 416 the Athenians reduced Melos, killing its men and enslaving its women and children, and since the following year Euripides put on a play in which a city is reduced, its men killed, and its women enslaved, the play must allude to the historical event. A typical formulation is that of Norwood 1948: 244: “No spectator could doubt that ‘Troy’ is Melos, ‘the Greeks’ Athens.” Scodel 1980: 139 expressed reservations based on a rough calculation that Euripides would undoubtedly have written his play long before the siege of Melos, to say nothing of its surrender. The 1987 article by van Erp Taalman Kip elaborated this argument from chronology. Die-hard believers in the connection between play and event have attempted to get around the chronological difficulty (Croally 1994, Kuch 1998), but in other quarters the old dogmatism has been replaced by skepticism about the connection (Hornblower 2002: 219, Sidwell 2001, Green 1999, Roisman 1997) and an awareness that the hypothesis that Euripides is scolding his countrymen for their foreign policy has been a red herring that has distracted attention from what is actually in the play.

The proposed paper will summarize some of the newer arguments against the connection and add some that have not been mentioned. Among them are: (1) The large number of plays set in the aftermath of the fall of cities means that no one in Euripides’ audience is going to think that something is “up” just because they are seeing a play about the fall of Troy; it would take something more pointed to make them suspect a contemporary allusion. (2) A sensible poet intending to shame Athens for launching an attack on the Melians by presenting them allegorically as the victims of Athenian aggression will studiously avoid suggesting that the gods

destroyed Melos, yet in our play it is repeatedly said that the gods destroyed Troy: see 10, 23-4, 46-7, 59, 72, 561, 597, 612-3, 775-7, 857-8, 867, 1060-70, 1203-6, and 1240-5. (3) The prominence of Helen, repeatedly named as the destroyer of Troy, corresponds to nothing in the Melos affair. (4) We have no evidence that the Athenians, either with or without Euripides' help, were conscience-stricken about what they had done at Melos, and there is some evidence (a jocular allusion in *Birds* 185-6) that they felt complacent about it. I end with further instances where "Melianism" has impoverished the reading of the play.

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