

Geographic Identity and the Topography of the Citizen in Athenian Tragedy

This paper explores the idea of geographic identity in classical Athens with a specific focus on evidence found in tragedy. The paper begins by re-contextualizing the myth of autochthony, specifically as it informs notions of Athenian ethnic identity. Recent scholarship has already considered autochthony as a “racialist” concept (Lape, 2010). I set his myth instead within the theoretical framework of fifth-century ideas concerning geographic, climatic, and, topographical determinism and within the socio-political context of changes in demographics in Athens in the same period due to migration and immigration during the Peloponnesian War.

During the classical period, population grew rapidly in the urban corridor of Athens-Piraeus, while it seems to have declined in the Attic countryside. With shifts in Athenian military and economic interests, a politically active population of non-land owning Athenian citizens also emerged. These factors, I suggest, influenced the way the Athenians conceptualized their relationship to the land and to citizenship. The socio-political context for the dynamics of citizenship represented in the plays stretches back at least to 451 BCE and the passage of the Citizenship Law, but may go back further, to the 470s and the establishment of *metoikia* (for this date, see Bakewell 1997 and 2013, and Kennedy 2014; cf. *Eumenides*, *Suppliants*). At the same time as laws developed restricting interactions between citizens and not, Athens experienced demographic changes as a result of territorial expansion and colonization, immigration, and the impact of continual warfare, all of which put pressure on political and social structures. Amidst this change, the Athenians developed a highly refined myth of identity rooted (mythically) in autochthony. Athenian citizens were men who traced their descent from Attic soil itself through their ancestor Erechtheus--it was an identity dependent on both birth and a stake in a specific land. This identity was forged, I argue in this paper, both as a result of these shifting and unstable

historical conditions and as an attempt to ground citizen and ethnic identity for the Athenians during a period a continual flux and rapid change.

While topographical and geographical references are common in Athenian tragedy, references specifically to Attica and Athens (instead of foreign regions) are more frequent during the years of the Peloponnesian War. This paper focuses on the interplay between local geography and topography with identity in four plays: Euripides' *Ion*, *Erechtheus* (fragmentary), and *Heracleidae*, and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. In each of these plays, the relationship between land of Attica and ethnic and civic identity is a key element, either expressed explicitly through considering autochthony *per se* (*Ion* and *Erechtheus*; cf. Clements, forthcoming and Leão, 2012) as a defining feature of belonging or more implicitly by seeking ways to incorporate foreign bodies within the land itself to subsequently serve as protectors of the land (*Heraclidae* and *Colonus*; Kennedy, 2014). The interplay of topographical and geographic references with the discourses of identity and foreignness with these plays is especially intriguing when considered together with broader trends connecting identity and environment in the fifth century (e.g. Hippocrates *Airs, Waters, Places* and Herodotus *Histories*) and to changing demographics within Athens due to migration within Attica (Taylor, 2011), immigration to Athens from outside of Attica, and the increase in freed slaves from Asia and north Africa (Lewis, 2011) entering into the resident population. This paper considers the geographic and topographic references as part of a larger discourse of linking citizen identity through autochthony to environmentally deterministic concepts of ethnicity in the second half of the fifth century BCE.

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