

## Aeschylus' Hidden Muse: *Agamemnon* 104-106

In the opening *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* (Ag. 40-257), Aeschylus stages a choral narrative recalling the seduction of Paris, the Trojan War, and the cycle of destruction which this perpetuates upon the already-cursed house of Atreus. Central to the piece is a unique, albeit vexed, passage in which the Chorus of old men speaks self-referentially about their own singing (Ag. 104-106). Before delving into details on Paris's abduction of Helen, they remind the audience of their authority (κύριος, 104) and their strong ability (κράτος... ἀνδρῶν / ἐκτελέων, 104-105) to retell the events in persuasive song (πειθὼ μολπὰν ἀλκὰν, 106). While the exact translation of this choral reflection (and in its significance to the drama as a whole) has been subject to widely varying interpretation (Raeburn and Thomas 2011; Denniston and Page 1957; Fraenkel 1950), few scholars have specifically re-examined the term through which the Chorus assert their confidence in their musical effectiveness: πειθῶ. In this paper, I argue that at Ag. 104-106, Aeschylus not reflects on the nature of song, but he implicitly associates πειθῶ with the artistic inspiration and effectiveness more often associated with Muses.

In the first place, I provide a close analysis of Ag. 104-106 focusing specifically on the connection between πειθῶ and the words with which it is syntactically connected—θεῶθεν (105), καταπνείει (105), and μολπὰν ἀλκὰν (106). With this analysis, I argue for a potential understanding of πειθῶ as a semi-personified, divine agent, i.e., the goddess Peitho (Smith 2011; Stafford 2000; Shapiro 1993). I then investigate genealogical connections between Peitho and the Muses such as their kinship with the nymphs in Hesiod's *Theogony* (349) and with nurturing deities in *Works and Days* (73-74). As both an Oceanid and a companion of the Charites in Hesiod and in the words of other poets (Ibyc.fr. 288PGMF; Pind. fr. 123. 13-15 (Snell)), Peitho could fall under the category of nymph-like goddesses whose field of action can extend beyond

that of bodily/erotic beautification of youths to poetic inspiration (Maslov 2016; Larson 2001; Pirenne-Delforge 1991; Buxton 1982). And at Ag. 106, her powers of inspiration can even extend to a Chorus of weak, elderly men (Murray 2005). On this reading, Aeschylus anticipates a more expansive understanding of Peitho that emerges in later vase paintings and literature where Peitho is depicted together with the Muses, or even as a Muse herself (MMA 37.11.23; Plut. *Quaest. Conv.* 745c; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 1.9-10). In this way, Aeschylus' association of Peitho with the poetic and inspirational power of the Muses (Ag. 104-106) reveals not only his reflective nature, but also the versatile potential of this personified abstract divinity.

#### Bibliography

- Aeschylus. 1950. *Agamemnon*. Edited by E. Fraenkel. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1957. *Agamemnon*. Edited by J. D. Denniston and D. L. Page. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus: A Commentary for Students*. Edited by D. A. Raeburn, Oliver R. H. Thomas, and D. L. Page. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Buxton, R. G. A. 1982. *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Peitho*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Larson, Jennifer. 2001. *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, and Lore*. Oxford University Press.
- Maslov, Boris. 2016. "The Genealogy of the Muses: An Internal Reconstruction of Archaic Greek Metapoetics." *American Journal of Philology* 137, no. 3: 411-446.
- Murray, Penelope. 2005. "The Muses: Creativity Personified?" In *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium*, edited by Emma Stafford and Judith Herrin, 147–159. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Pirenne-DelForge, Vinciane. 1991. "Le culte de la persuasion peithô en grèce ancienne." *Revue de l'histoire des religions*: 395-413.n

Smith, Amy C. 2011. *Polis and Personification in Classical Athenian Art*. Vol. 19. London, UK: Brill.

Stafford, Emma. 2000. *Worshipping Virtues: Personification and the Divine in Ancient Greece*. Oakville, CT: Duckworth.