

### Razing the Roof: *kataskaphē* in *Agamemnon* and *Heracles*

A spectacular public punishment in Classical Athens, house-razing (*kataskaphē*) responded to an individual's crime against the *polis* by targeting his household (Connor 1985). This practice provides social context for how Greek tragedies depict not only the destruction of the household (*oikos*) but of the physical house (e.g. *Bacchae* 623-633, *Erechtheus* fr. 370.49 and 51, and *Orestes* 1590 and 1617-20). As Connor noted (89-90), two extant plays use the explicit vocabulary of a house's *kataskaphē*: Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Heracles*. In both the image is not isolated, but repeated imagery of house destruction underlies significant features of the dramas' constructions.

House-razing images highlight the individual household, whose stability is usually threatened in Greek tragedies. I argue that *kataskaphē* imagery in tragedy suggests a public perspective on the tragic household and reflects the importance of the *oikos* in the Athenian public sphere: individual *oikoi*, including the physical houses, defined who was a citizen (Ogden 1996, 83-135 and Scafuro 1994) and conveyed shared civic values and ideology of the house in public speeches (e.g. Humphreys 1983, Strauss 1993, 36-52, and recently Lehmann 2016). *Kataskaphē* also enacted a collective family punishment that Athenians frequently invoked, for instance, swearing by the destruction, *exoleia*, of their family members, possessions, and houses. *Kataskaphē* images thus suggest a new social reading of tragedy that considers the Attic audience's experience as *kyrioi* in their *oikoi*.

In *Agamemnon* the image of house-razing is a culmination of the play's insistent focus on the house (Wiles 1997, 168-9 and Taplin 1977, 452-9), which is a physical container of the family members' dysfunction. After Clytemnestra upset the household and polluted the house by murdering Agamemnon at its hearth, the chorus outside experience the house collapsing in a spectacular fashion

(1530-4); the chorus at the start of *Choephoroi* soon identify this event as a razing (κατασκαφαί, *Choe.* 48-53). The razing-image connects Agamemnon's house with Priam's: the messenger describes Troy's sack as a razing (κατασκάψαντα, 525) and in terms of the family's house that Paris "mowed down to the ground" (ἀπότοχθονον... ἔθρισεν, 536). The correspondence of these two *oikoi* highlights the guilt of Agamemnon in causing collective family destruction when he sacrificed Iphigenia, a crime he rehearses in his fateful step on the precious textiles belonging to his household, which he sees as a house-destruction (δωματοφθορεῖν, 948). Since Paris and Agamemnon both draw public opprobrium also, the image of the public punishment of house-razing aptly conveys the complex of relationships between individual, *oikos*, and *polis*.

In the later *Heracles*, which also centers on a homecoming, *kataskaphē* is even more prominent. While modern readers have often found this plot disjointed, I argue that the *kataskaphē* – motif unites the drama by highlighting Heracles' relation to his *oikos* as the play's central theme. Before Hera's intervention, Heracles' plan to raze the tyrant Lycus' house (566-7) is a justified use of the public punishment. Hera takes over this human punishment of razing (as Heracles afterwards describes, 1307) to target Heracles' position in his *oikos* and *polis* through intermediaries Lyssa and Iris, who will bring down Heracles' house (864). After the chorus see the house falling from outside (903-4) the messenger details the human agency involved in the punishment, describing Heracles' manic digging up and dismantling of his own home (943-6 and 998-9). In *Heracles*, *kataskaphē* activates a public perspective on Hera's punishment since her house-destruction reaggravates the fraught relationship between the Theban *dēmos* and Heracles' *oikos* from the first half of the play. Images of house-razing highlight Heracles' attachment to his *oikos* and how much he loses, as human *kyrios*, in losing his *oikos*.

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