

## The Persuasions of Pelasgus in Aeschylus' *Supplikes*

The acceptance of the Danaids at Argos is central to Aeschylus' *Supplikes*. Burian rightly emphasized the king's referral of the matter to the citizenry. More recently, scholars have cast Pelasgus in a negative light. According to them, he is less a statesman than a politician who manipulates the assembly and brings about disaster. Yet Aeschylus' Pelasgus is not a deceiver, but the epitome of virtuous democratic speech.

The main criticism advanced against Pelasgus is that he withholds crucial information from the assembly. While stressing the possibility of ritual pollution and divine hostility, he apparently does not mention that war that will follow upon the women's acceptance. Yet the spectators hear only highlights of the assembly in a secondhand report. The second charge brought against Pelasgus stems from Danaus' summary of the proceedings: δημηγόρους δ' ἤκουσεν εὐπειθῆς στροφᾶς/ δῆμος Πελασγῶν (623-24). Sommerstein construes the phrase δημηγόρους . . . στροφᾶς as pejorative. But neither of the adjective's components has inherently negative connotations. Similarly, Friis Johansen, Whittle, and Farenga all understand the noun to denote rhetorical tricks. Yet Athenian orators needed talent and training to speak to open-air assemblies: δημηγόρους . . . στροφᾶς may simply refer to common oratorical techniques.

Pelasgus represents the ideal of citizen speech in a democracy. When asked his identity by the Egyptian herald he answers τί σοι λέγειν χρῆ τοῦνομ'; ἐν χρόνῳ μαθῶν/ εἴσηι σύ (938-9). He then rehearses the Argives' decree. His concluding description of himself as an ἐλευθεροστόμου/ γλώσσης (948-9) alludes to the operating principles of a citizen assembly. Raaflaub has traced the link between Aeschylean locutions such as ἐλευθεροστομεῖν and the democratic concept of ἰσηγορία. This then is the Pelasgus portrayed by Aeschylus in the 460s B.C.E.: a free-speaking, anonymous "everyman" who participates in and stands behind his community's decisions.

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