THE QUEEN AND THE CHORUS IN AESCHYLUS' *PERSAE*

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Βα. εὖ γὰρ ἴστε, παῖς ἐμός
πράξας μὲν εὖ θαυμαστὸς ἂν γένοιτ' ἀνήρ,
κακῶς δὲ πράξας—οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος πόλει,
σωθεὶς δ' ὁμοίως τῆσδε κοιρανεῖ χθόνος. *Pe.* 211–214

Χο. τοὶ δ' ἀνὰ γᾶν 'Ασίαν δήν
οὐκέτι περσονομοῦνται,
οὐδ' ἔτι δασμοφοροῦσιν
δεσποσύνοισιν ἀνάγκαις,
οὐδ' εἰς γᾶν προπίτνοντες
ἄρξονται· βασιλεία
γὰρ διόλωλεν ἰσχύς.
οὐδ' ἔτι γλῶσσα βροτοῖσιν
ἐν φυλακαῖς· λέλυται γάρ
λαὸς ἐλεύθερα βάζειν,
ὡς ἐλύθη ζυγὸν ἁλκᾶς.
αἱμαχθεῖσα δ' ἄρουρα<ν>
Αἴαντος περικλύστα
νᾶσος ἔχει τὰ Περσᾶν. *Pe.* 584–597

THE QUEEN THINKS THAT even if Xerxes leads the Persians to defeat, he will suffer no adverse political consequences. The Persian Elders, on the other hand, think that such a defeat would undermine the entire Persian monarchy. I will argue here that this difference of opinion, made so obvious and explicit by my juxtaposition of these two passages, runs pervasively throughout Aeschylus' *Persae*.[1] Both the Chorus and the Queen come to realize that Xerxes, by destroying his people rather than protecting and nurturing them, has jeopardized the bond between the king and his nation. The Elders respond to this situation by emphasizing the effects of Xerxes' behavior on Persia, in the broadest sense. Their interest is in the suffering of all the Persian peoples, both true Persians and the disparate multitude of Asiatics, both those who fought at Salamis and those left behind.[2] It

[1] I will not discuss here the unusually historical subject of the play, except to say that I agree with Kitto, and others, in viewing *Persae* as "a play, not a historical treatise," *Poiesis* (Berkeley 1966) 74–115, at 91; cf. R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Zeus in Persae," *JHS* 93 (1973) 210–219 = *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983) 1–15, at 2, n. 4. While I cannot deny that an Athenian audience might thrill patriotically to certain lines in the play, I do not see the need to ask of it questions any different from those that we ask of other tragedies. As S. Goldhill argues ("Battle Narrative and Politics in Aeschylus' *Persae*," *JHS* 108 [1988] 189–193, at 189), *Persae* "is, like most other tragedies, set in and largely concerned with a place that is not Athens, and it involves characters who are other than Athenian citizens—females, barbarians, kings etc." Cf. J.-P. Vernant, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*, tr. J. Lloyd (Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1981) 9–10, where he refers to tragedy in general as "a debate with a past that is still alive."

[2] Ethnic multiplicity is much emphasized (as in the catalogues), but the Elders, true Persians themselves, express their sympathy equally for all those involved in the Persian expedition (Egyptians, Babylonians, Bactrians, etc.). I, therefore, use the expedient in

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is this emphasis that leads them to envision the collapse of the monarchy. The Queen, on the other hand, is more interested in the personal well-being of her son, and his continued prosperity, even in the face of the disasters he has wrought.[3]

These two perspectives, the national and the personal, not only co-exist, but create through their interaction a certain degree of tension. It is my contention that in the concluding kommos, in the interaction between Xerxes and the Chorus, that tension is finally released as the king and his people become united in mourning for the Persian losses.[4] Hence, our discussion will not only highlight one source of tension, if not conflict, in a play that has been maligned as excessively static; it will also offer some response to those who see the last scene as, at best, inorganic.[5]

The perspectives of the Queen and the Chorus are not, of course, mutually exclusive. In fact, there are scenes in this play that invite us to envision a Persia so unified behind its leader that the welfare of the king is essentially equivalent to the welfare of the state. The Darius scene, in particular, evokes a golden age of Persia, when the king was personally responsible for the security and prosperity of his state. Even in Persia under Xerxes we

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this paper of referring to all of them as Persians. The Elders' concern extends even beyond these people to the Persian land. See, on this last point, J. R. Wilson, "Territoriality and Its Violation in the *Persians* of Aeschylus," in Martin Cropp, Elaine Fantham, S. E. Scully (eds.), *Greek Tragedy and Its Legacy* (Calgary 1986) 51–57.

[3]While many have noted the existence of this duality, no one has pursued its significance. See, e.g., A. F. Garvie, "Aeschylus' Simple Plots," in R. D. Dawe, J. Diggle, P. E. Easterling (eds.), *Dionysiaca* (Bristol 1978) 63–86, who recognizes (67) that "*Persae* is the tragedy of both Persia and Xerxes and that each is as important as the other," and (68) "The Parodos is concerned principally with the tragedy of Persia as a whole; for the Chorus are its representatives." For the Queen, he continues, the "principal function is to present the tragedy of Xerxes . . . ." On the Queen, see also A. N. Michelini, *Tradition and Dramatic Form in the* Persians *of Aeschylus* (Leiden 1982) 92; D. J. Conacher, "Aeschylus' *Persae*: A Literary Commentary" in John L. Heller (ed.), *Serta Turyniana* (Urbana 1974) 143–168, 155–156; S. Dworacki, "Atossa's Absence in the Final Scene of the *Persae* of Aeschylus," in Glen W. Bowersock, Walter Burkert, Michael C. J. Putnam (eds.), *Arktouros* (Berlin and New York 1979) 101–108, at 104; H. D. Broadhead (ed.), *Aeschylus: The* Persae (Cambridge 1960) xxv–xxvi.

A. Sidgwick, in the introduction to his edition of *Persae* (Oxford 1903) x, presents an opposing view: "Some critics have made much of the shades of distinction shown in the sorrow of the various characters . . . . Such subtleties were not at any time characteristic of the poet: and in this case they seem altogether imaginary."

[4]Thus I agree with W. G. Thalmann, "Xerxes' Rags: Some Problems in Aeschylus' *Persians*" *AJP* 101 (1980) 260–282, at 261; and Garvie (above, n. 3) 67, that the kommos is the climax of the play; *contra* Michelini (above, n. 3) 74, who calls the Darius episode "the play's crowning event."

[5]Michelini ([above, n. 3] 72) calls *Persae* "of all Aeschylean plays . . . the most static in form." E. B. Holtsmark, *Some Aspects of Style and Theme in the* Persae *of Aeschylus* (diss., University of California, Berkeley 1963) 4–6, engagingly surveys a variety of reactions to the final scene.

can detect traces of a similar harmony. While the Persian Elders do more often address the sufferings of the Persian nation, Xerxes is never far from their thoughts, even if he does not dominate them, and, as Persian king, he never loses their loyalty, even when he loses their respect. Similarly, the Queen, so intent on the welfare of her son, is not entirely blind to the more universal effects of the Persian losses. Thus, the two perspectives overlap at times, and when they do we can glimpse the ideal of a sympathy, if not unity, between the Persian king and his nation. While these glimpses of harmony serve primarily to highlight the more prevalent disharmonies—just as the glorious presence of Darius intensifies, by contrast, the failure of his son—they also provide us with a model for the recreation of that harmony, for the renewal of the former Persian glory. They flash before us, in other words, reminders of the proper relationship between a king and his people, and thereby prepare us for the reconciliation in the kommos.

In the parodos, as so often in Aeschylean drama, the Chorus introduces the complexities of theme that will occupy us for the remainder of the play. The Persian Elders do not simply, or even initially, reveal a national bias, but begin by emphasizing their lofty status in the palace, a status that places them close to the king himself.[6] We learn from the first seven lines not only that the position of the Elders is one of great importance, particularly in light of the Persian emphasis on wealth in this play, but also that they were personally chosen by Xerxes. Even as the Elders sing of this attention given them by the king, however, we can already detect, in their self-effacing use of the neuter (τάδε, πιστά) and the third person, an opposing tendency toward the anonymous and the impersonal.[7] The Elders are not only individuals aligned closely with the royal family, but also a corporate body, a group that is sufficiently generic to represent the concerns of the Persian populace.

It is the latter half of this choral persona that comes to dominate their utterance, and we begin to see that tendency as early as line 12.[8] The Elders shift from their initial references to the sovereignty of the king, and their

[6] Aeschylus enhances this picture of responsible and reliable administrators by recalling, in the first line, the *Phoenicians* of Phrynichus. Instead of the eunuch who introduces the earlier work, here we see a group of Persian Elders, who are trusted by the Persian royalty.

[7] On the rare use of third person instead of first in choral self-introduction, see M. Smethurst, *The Artistry of Aeschylus and Zeami* (Princeton 1989) 102; also M. Kaimio, *The Chorus of Greek Drama in the Light of the Person and Number Used* (Helsinki 1970) 194; and T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley 1982) 96.

[8] In fact, the duality within the choral persona is marked even earlier, by the δέ in line 8 responding to μέν in the first line. F. Stoessl ("Aeschylus as a Political Thinker," *AJP* 73 [1952] 113–139, at 118) finds the duality so striking that he posits a division within the Chorus between "the martial, confident party" and those who are "fearful and pacific."

anxiety about his return, to consider Xerxes from the perspective of the entire army. The periphrasis for the armed forces, πᾶσα ἰσχὺς Ἀσιατογενὴς (11), is effective not only in introducing the unusual size of this armament, but also in pointing a contrast between the nation and Xerxes, between the sons of Asia and the son of Darius, ἄναξ ... Δαριογενὴς. And already, in this first juxtaposition of the personal and the national, we see a tension developing. In the agitation of their θυμός, the Elders imagine that the strength of Persia has become hostile toward their king, νέον δ' ἄνδρα βαύζει (13).[9]

For the remainder of the parodos, and throughout the play, the Elders continue to confront the division in their loyalties and sympathies. While they do come increasingly to view Xerxes as the destroyer rather than the preserver of their nation, they never lose sight of the fact that he is their king. In the anapaests of the parodos, the Elders remind us twice that all of the Asian leaders, great as they are, are subservient to the king, as both his subjects (24) and his escort (58). While Xerxes is only a νέον ἄνδρα at 13, in the lyrics he is the πολυάνδρου δ' Ἀσίας θούριος ἄρχων, and ἰσόθεος (74, 80).[10] Even in the first stasimon, where the Elders single out Xerxes as the author of their grief (550–553), they go on to sing of his narrow escape, referring to him respectfully as ἄναξ αὐτός (565, cf. 5).[11]

But certainly more evident, because more frequently and more emphatically expressed, is the anguish of the Elders for Persia. Prominent in the opening anapaests is the catalogue of the local kings and generals who accompanied Xerxes to Greece. This catalogue does indeed magnify the status of the leader, as we have seen, but it also gives us a concrete idea of the size and ethnic diversity of the armament itself and, perhaps even more importantly, the origins of that armament.[12] We hear three times in these anapaests that all of Asia has gone to war (12, 56–57, 61), and this wealth of names and geographic detail impresses on us the truth of that claim. Furthermore, the Elders are sensitive to the effect of that exodus on those left behind. They conclude these anapaests (59–64), and then again the

[9]The text and sense of lines 12–13 are much disputed. My position, more fully argued in a forthcoming article, is that νέον is wanted here, and that no lacuna need be posited after line 13. Cf., most recently, M. L. West, *Aeschyli Tragoediae* (Stuttgart 1990).

[10]Later in the play, Darius does use the word θούριος (754) with a negative connotation, and perhaps it carries some of that force here, but that cannot diminish the generally celebratory tone of these lines.

[11]There are, of course criticisms of Xerxes implicit in the contrast the Elders draw between the success and prosperity in the reign of Darius and the current misery, as at 670, 675 ff., 904 ff. I will treat those in my discussion of the Darius scene.

[12]As R. Lattimore notes (*The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* [Baltimore 1958] 35), the catalogue "makes resonant and realistic and saves from abstraction the *idea* of the bulk, wealth, and population of the Persian Empire."

lyric section of the parodos (134–139), with pathetic evocations of the ravages of the war on the parents and the wives of the combatants, and on the land itself, bereft of its occupants. With the Messenger, who shares their concerns,[13] the Elders lament the effects of the war on Asia, and on the women whose men were killed (as at 286–289). Again in the first stasimon, in both the anapaests (532–547) and the second antistrophe (576–583), the Elders sing of the grieving women, and, at 548–549, of the grieving Asian land.

In the final two stanzas of the first stasimon, quoted at the beginning of this paper, the Elders consider the possible political effects of the destruction of the Persian armament (584–597). Critics have complained about these stanzas that they have no dramatic function, and that their sole purpose is to gratify the Athenian audience with references, all too obvious, to the superiority of Athenian institutions.[14] This passage might well have aroused Athenian patriotism, but it is effective dramatically as well. We have heard from the Chorus repeatedly about the sufferings of Persia, and here we see the potential political and social consequences of that suffering.[15] What they describe is the complete overturning of the uniquely Persian way of life. Just as, in the Queen's dream, the former Persian wealth is reduced to rags, and, in the depths of their despair, the Elders claim that the vast population has given way to emptiness, here that same despair leads them to imagine that the Persian rule will fall from its hierarchical rigidity into complete disarray.

While the Chorus is thus focused on the totality of Persia, the Queen turns her attention and sympathy almost exclusively toward the person of Xerxes, her son. When the Queen first comes onstage, the Elders hail her by reciting the variety of her roles: ἄνασσα Περσίδων, μῆτερ ἡ Ξέρξου and Δαρείου γύναι (155–158). It soon becomes evident, however, that the Queen

[13]The Messenger's initial address is directed not to the Queen, nor even to the assembled Elders, but to the Persian land itself (249–250). While this sort of address is conventional, it effectively differentiates the Messenger from the Queen, and her single-minded interest in Xerxes. Like the Chorus, the Messenger catalogues the names of Persians (302–330); these Persians are dead, but the effect of the catalogue is similar in that it suggests the quantity and diversity of the Persians who have suffered. He does refer to Xerxes, but infrequently, and once even omits his name, glaringly (450). His conclusion, like his first words, emphasizes the national rather than the personal (508–514).

[14]See, for example, P. Groeneboom (ed.), *Aischylos'* Perser, tr. H. Sönnichsen (Göttingen 1960) *ad loc.*: "werde in dieser dritten Strophe und Antistrophe die dramatische Fiktion durchbrochen und es spreche ein Grieche."

[15]M. Gagarin, *Aeschylean Drama* (Berkeley 1976) 32, sees these lines as a specific reference to the liberating of the Ionian cities. The present tenses, however, must be prophetic (as Broadhead [above, n. 3] argues); while the audience might, of course, think of the Ionians, nowhere in the text does Aeschylus explicitly invite us to do so.

gives clear priority to only one of these, her role as mother of Xerxes.[16] The Elders, recognizing this limitation, appropriately modify their form of address; when she initially asks for their counsel, they call her once more ἄνασσα (173), but after they have learned the nature of her anxiety, they refer to her as μῆτερ (215).[17]

Almost all that the Queen says and does throughout the play reinforces that narrow identification with her son. In her references to Xerxes, she speaks of him not as a king, but as her son, παῖς ἐμός.[18] From the Messenger, who brings the news of the Persian defeat, she seeks information first about the safety of Xerxes (296–298, 300–301). When Darius claims that Xerxes was personally and solely responsible for the disaster, she tries to mitigate her son's disgrace by suggesting that evil advisors were to blame (752–758). Perhaps most explicitly illustrative of the Queen's concern for her son is her statement at 213–214, quoted above, that even if Xerxes fares badly, he cannot be held accountable, and will continue to rule. Disregarding the effects on the Persian people of a defeat in Greece, she is comforted by the thought of her son's continued prosperity.[19]

One of the most striking manifestations of the Queen's interest in the person of Xerxes is her obsession with his clothes.[20] In her dream, she envisions Xerxes, thrown from the chariot, in torn robes (199) and pitied by his father. Apparently her sleep was troubled by no thoughts about the fate of the woman who so calmly submitted to the yoke.[21] Even more telling is her claim, when instructed by Darius to reclothe Xerxes (832–838), that she is more upset by the state of her son's clothing than by the defeat of the entire Persian army (845–851). We do see elsewhere in

[16]This against Gagarin (above, n. 15) 43: "The queen also represents or can be identified with the whole of Persia ...." Gagarin supports this claim with reference to the Chorus's initial address, but does not note the subsequent limitations.

[17]As does Darius, 832, when he advises her on reclothing their son.

[18]As at 177, 189, 197, 211, 233, 352, 473, 476, and 529; and, with variations, at 227 and 609. Darius uses the same language in his speech of denunciation, at 739, 744, and 751.

[19]We might contrast the more civic-minded assessment of Eteocles in *Septem* 4–9: if there is success, the gods are responsible; if failure, then he alone would be blamed.

[20]This concern with clothes is often explained as an insight into the character of the Queen, either as a woman or as a Persian. Broadhead ([above, n. 3] 212) manages to include the worst of both positions when he explains that "women in general are much more alive to outward appearances than are men, and a Persian Queen would be more so than other women." As Kitto reminds us ([above, n. 1] 105), Aeschylus "is not making her say these things to show that she is the mother; rather does he make her the loving mother in order that she may say these things."

[21]In the actualization of the dream, as reported by the Messenger, Xerxes does rend his robes in response to the Persian losses (468); but lines 466–467, the description of his lofty vantage point, suggest a distance between the king and his troops that is perhaps more than geographical.

this play a more general equation of clothing, whether splendid or ravaged, with the fate of Persia at large,[22] but for the Queen the robes of Xerxes serve rather as a token of his personal status than as a measure of Persian prosperity.[23] It is only when Xerxes finally appears onstage, in tatters, that this distinction between personal and national becomes blurred as we witness in his exchange with the Chorus the reconciliation of the king with his people.

First, however, there intervenes the ghost of Darius. Before Xerxes comes onstage, alone and in rags, the ruin of his people, Aeschylus brings onstage the embodiment of the perfect integration of king and nation. Darius led the army successfully, preserving the lives of his men (652–656, 858–863); under his rule, Persia enjoyed law and order (852–857); and he appears clothed in the splendor appropriate to a prosperous Persian monarch (657–663). The Elders, the spokesmen for the nation throughout the play, fall prostrate and speechless at his feet (694–696, 700–702).

This vision of Persian harmony does, of course, serve as a contrast to the present situation. Xerxes clearly suffers by the comparison, not only with his father, the paragon of kingliness, but with all the kings listed here who have ruled Persia successfully and prosperously (765–780). Thus we might expect to find in this scene a portrayal of Xerxes as a complete failure, as a king who has so completely disgraced his fatherland and his throne that he deserves to share the fate of his unfortunate predecessor Mardos (774–775).

But Aeschylus does not write his scene like that. Xerxes has indeed acted rashly, he is personally responsible for the massive losses at Salamis (742–752), and he deserves to be punished (827–828). But he will continue to rule. That, at least, must be the assumption underlying Darius' specific advice about the treatment of Xerxes. The Elders are to warn him never to behave so impiously again (829–831) and the Queen is to restore him to his regal appearance by reclothing him (832–38).[24] Darius' view of the future also presupposes that Xerxes will rule in a Persia that has not been completely devastated by its losses in Greece. The punishment for Persian impiety is severe indeed as Darius describes it (816–820), but far from fatal. In fact, Darius prophesies the debacle at Plataea only in the context of warning the Elders not to attack Greece again (790–792). Such a warning makes sense only if Darius envisions a post-war Persia still able to go to war. And the

[22]Thalmann ([above, n. 4] 268–282) takes this too far, I think, in arguing that throughout the play the condition of clothing is emblematic of the relative health of the Persian nation.

[23]Cf. J. de Romilly (ed.), *Eschyle:* Les Perses (Paris 1974) *ad* 847–848: "Atossa ne pense qu'à son fils, et ses vêtements déchirés sont le symbole de son désespoir et de son humiliation."

[24]Even Darius' remark about accountability (εὔθυνος, 828) and Zeus' punishment is somewhat mitigated by the proximity of this forward-looking advice.

unwillingness of the Persian Elders to accept his advice (795) suggests that he is right. Also, in his parting comment to the Elders (840–842), Darius implies that the Elders still do live in luxury, that the Persian πλοῦτος, one of the defining characteristics of the traditional Persia, has not all been lost (despite the fears of the Queen, 161–164, and even Darius, 751–752).[25] This sudden intrusion of personal advice suggests that national and political issues have been somehow settled, that Darius foresees no insurmountable obstacles to the continuity of the Persian way of life.

Darius returns to the Underworld, the Queen sets off to prepare for Xerxes' arrival, and the Chorus remains to meet Xerxes. The Queen is no longer needed onstage because her role as the purveyor of the personal perspective is superseded by the appearance of the person himself.[26] Also, because of the very narrowness of the Queen's focus she would be a liability in a scene that brings about, as we will see, a compromise of sorts between the two thematic concerns of the play. Nor does Darius have any place in the final kommos. He has made his pronouncements about future events, and left instructions for future behavior, but his realm is the past, the glory that was Persia, and it is now time to move into the present, and to look toward the future.[27] Only through the direct confrontation between Xerxes himself and the Persian nation, represented by the Persian Elders, can there be any reconciliation, any drawing together of the two thematic strands I have been describing.

Xerxes comes onstage amid no fanfare, as the Elders neither announce his arrival nor prostrate themselves before him. Rather, in a complete reversal of the grand entry of the ghost of Darius, it is now the king who cannot stand in the presence of the Elders (908–917). This Xerxes is far

[25]As others have noted, these lines do smack of the conventional—see L. Belloni (ed.), *Eschilo:* I Persiani (Milan 1988) 233–234, for a collection of parallels—but their familiarity need not deprive them of meaning. Michelini ([above, n. 3] 147) points out that these lines emphasize the gulf between Darius and the present situation: "Dareios is characterized, not as the king he once was, but as the ghost of that king." While I think the passage more significant as a reflection on the health and future of Persia, it does also remind us of his "remoteness from life" and thereby helps explain his absence from the final scene.

[26]As Garvie sees ([above, n. 3] 70). U. von Wilamowitz, *Aischylos Interpretationen* (Berlin 1914) 46, suggests that the Queen's consolation has no place amidst the despair of the final exchange; cf. O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 119–121; Broadhead (above, n. 3) xxxix; and B. Alexanderson, "Darius in the *Persians*," *Eranos* 65 (1967) 1–11, at 7–9. Others see her absence as technically necessary, because the same actor played both Xerxes and the Queen. See esp. M. McCall, "Aeschylus in the *Persae*: A Bold Stratagem Succeeds," in *Greek Tragedy and Its Legacy* (above, n. 2) 43–50.

[27]The gulf between Darius, with his historical perspective, and the immediate concerns of the Chorus is manifest in lines 787–789, where the Coryphaeus asks for a concrete application of Darius' history lesson.

different from the image of Xerxes created in the Darius scene. There, we heard of a man whose senses were muddled by prideful delusions of grandeur. We see in the actual person of Xerxes, however, a man who has been humbled; he recognizes his mistakes and feels regret for the suffering he has caused. The Elders do rebuke Xerxes for his role in the debacle, but Xerxes so thoroughly chastises himself, so readily accepts the blame and responsibility for the defeat (931–934), and even, in terms so familiar to the Elders, expresses his longing for those who have died (988–991), that he lessens the force of the charges against him.

The actual Xerxes also differs considerably from the image of the king created by his mother. Whereas her narrowly focused attentions and concerns suggest a king who cares little about the welfare of his people, we see a relationship between Xerxes and Persia that is reminiscent of the unity, if not the prosperity, that was enjoyed during the reign of Darius. Xerxes, soon after coming onstage, claims that he has lost the strength of his limbs (913), and the Elders respond by remarking that all of Asia has been brought to her knees (929–930).[28] Even more telling is the role in this scene of Xerxes' clothing. Whereas the Queen, as I have argued, considers the condition of Xerxes' clothes a mark of his personal status or well-being, Xerxes himself presents his torn finery as emblematic of the suffering of Persia. He tells the Elders that nothing has survived the disaster except τὸ λοιπὸν τόδε τᾶς ἐμᾶς στολᾶς (1017). While some have followed the scholiast in taking that line as a reference to troops, most now agree that Xerxes is pointing to the remains of his clothing, and later to his empty quiver (1019, 1021) as emblematic of the Persian losses.[29] More explicit is Xerxes' explanation that he ripped his robes in response to the defeat of the Persians (1030). Finally, Xerxes refers to the loss of his companions, γυμνός εἰμι προπομπῶν (1036), using a metaphor that recalls his own relatively unclothed state. Xerxes himself, in other words, is suggesting a connection between the state of his clothing and the destruction of the Persian forces.[30] And that connection is now appropriate. Xerxes, by admitting his guilt and expressing his grief, has revealed his solidarity with his people and can therefore serve as spokesman, and visual representative, for all of the Persian suffering.

This portrayal of Xerxes, and particularly his attitude of remorse, is crucial to the reconciliation between king and nation. It does, of course,

[28]Taplin ([above, n. 26] 123) comments well on this visual reinforcement of the equation between Xerxes and his nation.

[29]Cf. Thalmann (above, n. 4) 272, esp. n. 37. The ambiguity in στολᾶς is perhaps significant, in that it invites the two interpretations that, in this case, overlap.

[30]*Ibid.* 272: "This passage would surely tell the spectators of the connection between the rags and the disaster to Persia ...." Where Thalmann goes wrong is in thinking that this use of clothing as symbol for the nation applies right through the play.

reveal the difference between Xerxes himself, so anguished by the suffering of his nation, and his former onstage representative, the Queen, whose concern rarely extended beyond the person and status of her son. It also suggests the completion of a cycle: we see in the chastened and bedraggled figure of Xerxes that ὕβρις has indeed led to ἄτη, but that out of that ruin has come just the sort of lesson that Darius outlined to the Elders.[31] Xerxes has paid for his errors, and in the process he has learned enough never to repeat them.

Thus, while the Elders do blame Xerxes for the disaster (922–924), and they do question him in accusatory tones (955–986), much more prevalent here is the degree of cooperation between the king and the Chorus, a cooperation that they enact through their participation in the responsive lament. Furthermore, as Xerxes becomes the leader of the lament, and the Elders his willing followers, they recreate onstage the proper relationship between a king and his people.[32]

In their first words to Xerxes, the Elders, as usual, treat him with a certain respect. He is still their king (βασιλεῦ, 918), and they echo his claim that a δαίμων was in some way involved (911, 921).[33] The echoes become more pronounced in the fourth strophic pair, where the Elders respond to Xerxes by repeating, in lines 1003, 1005, and 1009, his actual words. Then, from line 1038 through the end of the play, the structure of the exchange becomes fixed, as Xerxes, in all but two of his remaining 17 utterances, instructs the Elders in the form of their lamentation, and the Elders obey.[34] This obedience to their king, and more generally the communal nature of this kommos underline one of the important functions of the lament: it serves not only to mark the passing of the dead, but also to emphasize continuity and solidarity among the survivors.[35] Xerxes and the Elders leave the stage together, joined both physically and emotionally in their recognition of the extent of the Persian misery, and making manifest the

[31]As Winnington-Ingram remarks ([above, n. 1] 13), the Elders do fail to advise Xerxes as Darius had instructed. But this silence hardly marks a return "to the moral level and the religious ideas of the first half of the play." There is simply no need for the Elders to admonish Xerxes with the words of Darius, since Xerxes reveals that he has already learned the lesson on his own.

[32]Garvie ([above, n. 3] 70–71) comments well on the structural and metrical aspects of the kommos that contribute to this sense of cooperation.

[33]Our exact definition of the δαίμων—whether a specific divinity or just bad luck—is less important than our recognition that the king and Elders (as earlier, Darius and the Queen, 724–725) agree on its influence.

[34]Even earlier, at 941, Xerxes tells the Elders to raise a cry, and they respond obediently. Certainly, the onstage action—striking breasts, tearing hair, ripping robes—would underscore the extent of the Elders' obedience, and Xerxes' leadership.

[35]For a discussion of this idea, and a collection of parallels, see Holtsmark (above, n. 5) 145.

resolution of the dual themes of the play. They are mourning, to be sure, but they are mourning together.

This kommos, therefore, and its portrayal of the relationship between Xerxes and the Chorus, belies the worst of the Elders' earlier fears. The supremacy of the king has not been irreparably compromised, as they envisioned at 584–597, nor has the Persian way of life died with the troops at Salamis, as they lamented at 919. As the Elders, the spokesmen throughout the play of the Persian populace, obey their king instead of instructing or even blaming him, it becomes apparent that the fabric of Persian society is still in one piece, that the monarch, even if accountable for his mistakes, is nonetheless still in power.[36]

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[36]On this interpretation of the ending, cf. Gagarin (above, n. 15) 42; and A. J. Podlecki, "Polis and Monarch in Early Attic Tragedy," in P. J. Euben (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley 1986) 76–100, at 82. Thalmann, on the other hand, argues ([above, n. 4] 278) that "when Xerxes appears in rags it is clear that the disaster is total" and that the Elders escort Xerxes inside "in an atmosphere of unrelieved lamentation"; cf. Taplin (above, n. 26) 123–127. Missing from this latter view is any recognition of the relationship between Xerxes and the Elders in the kommos. Xerxes' rags, especially in contrast to Darius' robes, do suggest that Persia has fallen from her previous glory, but his reconciliation with the Chorus forms the foundation for rebuilding that glory.