The Ambiguities of Voluntary Self-Sacrifice: the Case of Macaria in Euripides' *Heracleidae*. A Dramaturgic Study

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Self-sacrifice is a well-known recurring theme in Euripides' tragedies: it appears, among the plays which were transmitted as complete, in *Alcestis, Heracleidae, Hecuba, Supplices, Phoenissae* and *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and among the fragmentary plays, in *Erechtheus, Phrixus B* and *Protesilaus*[1]. This comprehensive list actually consists of two distinct sub-groups, the first of which stages women sacrificing themselves for their husbands (Alcestis, Evadne, Laodamia), the second young people volunteering as σφάγια[2]: this latter type

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[1] The most notable contributions to the study of Euripidean self-sacrifice in terms of dramatic technique are Schmitt 1921, Strohm 1957, 50-63 and O'Connor-Visser 1987 (of which see p. 5-18 for a good *status quaestionis*). The very definition of self-sacrifice is of varying extension among scholars: O'Connor-Visser understands the term in a restrictive way, as referring only to the cases of human sacrifice converted by the victim into voluntary death (*Heracl., Hec., Erech., Ph., IA*); Schmitt gives the broader list cited above, including cases which can be described as sacrifices in the spirit, though not ritually speaking (*i.e.* love-deaths); building on this view, Strohm also takes into account other more limited Euripidean instances in which characters offer their lives for the sake of a φίλος (*e.g. Heracl.* 451-460).

[2] Bibliography on σφάγια, especially pre-battle ones, is abundant (see the references given by Jameson 1991, 221, n. 1, to which add Stengel 1886, Parker 2000, Dillon 2008 and Seaford 2017, esp. 225-227). These voluntary deaths could also be described as belonging to the φαρμακός type, which by the 430s had become the dominant paradigm to explain a sacrifice performed for the benefit of the community (see Bonnechère 1994, 252-253); but the term unsuitably applies to the cases of Iphigeneia and Polyxena, sacrificed at the beginning and the end of a military expedition, and not to avert a λοιμός oppressing the city (see Torrance 2017, 293). On the φαρμακός type (or *devotio*, in approximately corresponding Roman terms), see *e.g.* Versnel 1981, 139-143; Kearns 1989, 56-

only is now to be focused on. The pattern it shows is always quite similar: because of a military and political crisis, an oracle demands for the benefit of the community the life of a youth of noble birth, who then voluntarily surrenders to death[3]. Among the Greek tragedians, Euripides is apparently the only one who used this motif: while forms of *devotio* can already be found in Aeschylus' *Septem* or Sophocles' *Antigone,* death does not coincide there with a proper ritual[4]. As a matter of fact, when Aeschylus tells of Iphigeneia's sacrifice in *Agamemnon*, it is to enlighten its impious and murderous nature[5]. Quite opposite is Euripides' presentation of the same heroine, who willingly sacrifices herself for the defence of Greece and chants a victorious paean while marching to death. Of such characters, scholars have for long only retained the splendour – all the more conspicuous as Euripides' theatre rather exposes the villainy of human nature. Since *Heracleidae* and *Erechtheus* were staged during the Archidamian War, *Phoenissae* and *Iphigeneia* during the Decelean, self-sacrifice has commonly been viewed as celebrating and encouraging the devotion of young people to their city[6].

Such scenes undoubtedly aimed to elicit admiration, but the motif of self-sacrifice should not be set apart from its dramatic context – especially from the characterisation of the sacrificers and the cause for which the victim dies. For example, Iphigeneia's brave decision

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57. On the fusion between the two types, see LARSON 1995, 105. It should be borne in mind that, ritually speaking, φαρμακοί were not individuals of noble birth, as in drama and the old legends, but marginals expelled from the city for purification purposes – the very word was insulting (cf. Ar. *Eq.* 1405, *Lys.* 653) and its application to kings or princesses is a modern usage (on this dichotomy between the ideal scapegoats of myth and the actual scapegoats of ritual, see BREMMER 1983, 302, 304-305; PARKER 1983, 259).

[3] The voluntary character of the self-sacrifice probably mirrors that of the animal sacrifice, in which the victim was supposed to express consent by nodding its head (this ancient interpretation is attested by Plu. *Mor.* 435b-c, 437a, 729f, *schol. Il.* 1.449, *schol. Ar. Pax* 960, *schol. Ap.Rh.* 1.425 [see BURKERT 1983, 4, n. 13]). On the articulation of the theory of sacrifice and drama, see the overview given BIERL 2007, 33-37.

[4] In *Septem*, the φαρμακός nature of the sacrifice is never articulated by Eteocles as such (vs Menoeceus in *Ph.*) but results from mere dramatic juxtaposition: in the shield scene (375-719), one can see successively the brave commander averting the assaults of the Argive troops and the cursed son of Oedipus, taking position against his brother at the seventh gate. In *Antigone*, death is not the noble deed itself, but only the price to pay for it. Cases of human sacrifice are provided by Aeschylus' *Iphigenia* (see RADT 1985, 213-214), Sophocles' *Iphigenia* (see RADT 1999, 270-274; JOUANNA 2007, 633-634), *Polyxena* (see RADT 1999, 403-407; JOUANNA 2007, 655-656) and *Athamas B* (see RADT 1999, 99-102; JOUANNA 2007, 610-612), but they were probably not voluntary (cf. *schol. Ar. Nub.* 257 [on *Athamas B*]). As regards Sophocles' *Phrixos*, the plot itself is very uncertain (see JOUANNA 2007, 673-674).

[5] Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 218-21, 231-7. On this passage, see HENRICHS 2006, 67-74. On perverted sacrifice in the *Oresteia*, see most notably ZEITLIN 1965 and ZEITLIN 1966 (other references are given by FOLEY 1985, 41, n. 44, to which add GIBERT 2003); on perverted sacrifice in Euripides, see HENRICHS 2000.

[6] This chronological fact is well pointed out by REBUFFAT 1972, 14 (on the date of *Heracl.*, see ZUNTZ 1955, 81-88 and further n. 77; on the date of *Erech.*, see KANNICHT 2004, I, 394; on the date of *Ph.*, see MASTRONARDE 1994, 11-14). Unambiguously positive (though not necessarily political) interpretations of Euripidean self-sacrifice scenes, especially in *Heracl.*, have been frequently endorsed by scholars: see *e.g.* DECHARME 1893, 203-211; NESTLE 1901, 275-279; ROUSSEL 1922, 239-240; POHLENZ 1954, I, 355; KITTO 1939, 254-2555; ZUNTZ 1955, 31-32; STOESSL 1956, 217-218; FITTON 1961, 452-454; GOOSSENS 1962, 211; ROMILLY 1965, 33-34, 39, 41-42; WEBSTER 1967, 104; BURNETT 1971, 23-26; BURIAN 1977, 10; WILKINS 1990, 186-189; SANSONE 1991, 165-167; TZANETOU 2012, 87-100; YOON 2020, 38-39, 73-75.

does not erase the preceding base manoeuvres of Menelaus or Agamemnon and preludes to a war of aggression: as such, it is not devoid of bitterness[7]. The case is even neater in *Hecuba*, in which Polyxena is sacrificed to her city's enemy by the very murderer of her own father: her courage when facing death reveals, by contrast, the baseness of the Greeks forcing her to die. This has prompted a new trend in scholarly criticism, which questions the standard unproblematic approach of Euripidean self-sacrifice and rather envisages it in an ironic way, as a form of veiled protest[8]: by constantly showing the voluntary destruction of the most generous beings[9], Euripides would signal the contemporary corruption of the Greek cities, which cannot but ruin their best and most promising elements before they reach maturity. Several dramas, though, seem to resist this critical view at first sight[10]: those in which the sacrifice entails an unobjectionably positive effect, *i.e.* those which partake of the pure φαρμακός type. While it is highly improbable that any ancient spectator might have heartily applauded the departure of the Greeks from Aulis, whom he had previously seen so villainous, one must reckon with the fact that, in *Phoenissae*, Menoeceus' death saves Thebes from ruin and compensates for Eteocles' cynicism; that, in *Erechtheus*, the sacrifice of the daughter of the king prevents Athens from being conquered by Eumolpus; that, in *Heracleidae*, the *devotio* of so-called 'Macaria'[11], preserves her Athenian protectors and own family. This case is the one we now propose to examine under scrutiny.

Macaria's scene forms the second part of the second episode of Euripides' *Heracleidae* and enriches a play which initially appeared as a simple supplication tragedy[12]. The beginning of the drama concentrates in some 350 lines the whole bulk of Aeschylus' *Supplices*[13], and this simple fact shows that supplication is neither the major problem nor the driving

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[7] FOLEY 1985, 101-102 understands the bright conclusion of the drama as a mere poetic gesture. For a good description of the hollowness of self-sacrifice in *Hec.* and *IA*, see BURNETT 1971, 24. Positive readings of *IA* have been defended as well (see the references given by FOLEY 1985, 67, n. 4; SANSONE 1991, esp. 165-167).

[8] Since the 1970s, ironic interpretations of self-sacrifice have been increasingly defended: *e.g.* VELLACOTT 1975, 178-204; NANCY 1983; FOLEY 1985, 62; BONNECHÈRE 1994, 260-272; GALEOTTI PAPI 1995, 151-154; GÖDDE 2000, 140-141; GRETHLEIN 2002, 412-419; BONNECHÈRE 2013, 33, 60; PUCCI 2016, 103.

[9] Their perfection parallels that of the victims of an animal sacrifice (see BONNECHÈRE 2013, esp. 25-32).

[10] The problem of interpretation is well summarised by WILKINS 1990a, 181: "When the sacrifice is transferred from the soldiers in the army to the literal but equally voluntary sacrifice of the individual – where the individual is usually a young woman – are we to view this in any way as a perverted sacrifice, an act of barbarity, or as a city-saving patriotic act?" On the dangers of a systematically ironic appraisal of self-sacrifice scenes, see RUTHERFORD 2011, 92-98.

[11] The name is transmitted by the *hypothesis*, *dramatis personae* and *marginalia*, but not by the text itself. The original anonymity of Heracles' daughter is probably due to the fact she was invented by the poet (see WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF 1933, 62-72; SCHMITT 1921, 84-88; WILKINS 1993, xii, xvi, xix; *contra* ZUNTZ 1955, 111-112; LARSON 1995, 107-109). The oldest known occurrence of the name is given by Duris (*schol. Plat. Hipp. mai.* 293a = *FGrH* 76 F 94). For a good presentation of the problem, with relevant bibliography, see SCHMIDT 1992, 341-342.

[12] On the enrichment of this simple type of plot, see SCHMID 1940, 422; LATTIMORE 1964, 46.

[13] This point has been frequently noticed: see *e.g.* BURIAN 1977, 4.

force of Euripides' play[14]. Indeed, the positive μεταβολή which constitutes the turning point of a supplication tragedy is not here much dramatized, since Demophon cannot reject suppliants who are shown from the very beginning as innocent victims[15]. This apparent simplicity has to be understood with respect to the following episode, in which Euripides has set the first authentic reversal of the play: before the battle against Eurystheus, the king of Athens has consulted the seers[16]; these have come to agree that a noble virgin should be slain to Persephone, and that without such sacrifice, Athens could not be victorious[17]. Utterly dismayed, Demophon informs the Heraclids' protector, Iolaus, with the oracle and its consequences: as a civilised king, he cannot possibly force his fellow citizens into so horrid a deed; as a good father, he shuns away from shedding the blood of his own family (411-413). The situation being desperate[18], he asks Iolaus to find a way to save the children of Heracles without ruining Athens (420-422); the old man then offers his own life, but this would satisfy neither Eurystheus nor the oracle (464-467). The suppliants have thus no other choice but to leave the altar.

The interpretation of Macaria's sacrifice depends on how this introductory scene is to be appraised. Scholars of the ironic vein have duly pointed out some elements which could indicate the corruption of the city, the most prominent of which being the στάσις the oracle has entailed (415: πικρὰς… συστάσεις): the Athenians are indeed torn apart between those supporting their king and those criticizing him for having welcomed the suppliants and put the community into trouble (415-418). Demophon says it very plainly: if he dares to order human sacrifice, civil war (419: οἰκεῖος πόλεμος) will break out. In *Hecuba*, Achilles' blood-thirsty ghost causes similar dissension between the chiefs of the Achaean army; a demagogue (132: δημοχαριστής) then appears in the person of Ulysses, who succeeds to entice the troops into bloodshed. Still, this is not quite the situation of *Heracleidae*, in which civil strife is only impending and would result, on the contrary, from a shared reluctance to human sacrifice, which the Greeks of the Classical period would indeed regard as a barbaric, typically

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[14] This is consistent with the schematic nature of the sanctuary where the supplication is set, the temple and altar of Zeus Agoraios in Marathon, which is not even properly introduced in the opening monologue (cf. *Heracl*. 70, vs *Heracl*. 33), a unique fact in Euripides' tragedies.

[15] This fact is made even more striking when compared to other supplication tragedies (Aesch. *Supp*., Soph. *OC*), where the act of violence of the ἐχθρός against the ἱκέτης never intervenes in the first place, as in *Heracl*. On the reshaping of the supplication sequence, see BERNEK 2004, 225.

[16] These are chresmologues (cf. *Heracl*. 403: χρησμῶν… ἀοιδούς, *Heracl*. 488: χρησμῶν… ᾠδούς): Demophon had announced at the end of the first episode he was to consult the gods through sacrifices (cf. *Heracl*. 340: θύσομαι), but had not mentioned this other form of prophecy, which is resorted to as a surprise and is a convenient way for the dramatist to specify the necessity of the sacrifice of a virgin (for a similar collocation of sacrifices and prophecies before battle, cf. Hdt. 9.41-42; on the importance of chresmologues at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, see n. 77).

[17] This idea is made clearer by Diggle's text (which is also Kovacs'), with 402 transposed after 409 (as already suggested by Murray) and σωτήρια emended into σωτηρίαν. But if line 405 is to be preserved (*contra* Diggle), the destination of the sacrifice is already quite explicit. See DIGGLE 1982, 58-59.

[18] Adjective ἀμήχανος and verbs derived from it are recurrent in the episode (cf. *Heracl*. 464, 470, 485, 491, 494). On this motif throughout the play, see DANEŠ 2015.

Tauric or Punic practice (cf. [Plat.] *Minos* 315b-c). That clarification being made, it is nonetheless true that Athens no longer appears as glorious as before, but embarrassingly impeded. Visibly, Euripides wants to put ill-at-ease[19] his supposedly patriotic Athenian audience: after the oversimplified supplication tragedy of the prologue, *parodos* and first episode, which could easily be described as an ἐγκώμιον Ἀθηνῶν[20], the dramatist has reintroduced, under a discordant form, elements of Aeschylus' *Supplices*, his obvious paradigm for *Heracleidae*, which he had first conspicuously left behind. If nothing of Pelasgos' predicament survived in Demophon's initially unproblematic decision-making, the king of Athens is now as ἀμήχανος as his Aeschylean predecessor: the saviour of the first episode has been reduced to begging for salvation, a suppliant of suppliants[21]. The sovereign assembly he did not care to convene in the first episode, supported as he was by the assent of the Marathonians who make the chorus[22], now reappears at the centre of the attention, but under the shape of quarrelling factions. And while Aeschylus showed the reception of the suppliants as ideally resulting from the unanimous vote of an assembly otherwise permitting opposition and contradiction[23], Euripides, on the reverse, stages a seemingly relentless discord, set outside any deliberative institution[24].

As obvious a deflation of patriotism as this is, the conflict from which it originates is objectively inextricable and thus not morally determined – which makes it even more tragic. Athens, as staged in Euripides' *Heracleidae*, prefigures the civilised democracy of his time, ruled as is said in the prologue by a pair of leaders more akin to archons than to kings, "sorted out among the descendants of Pandion"[25]. As Demophon explains, he does not command his people as a king would Barbarians (423: οὐ... τυραννίδ᾽ ὥστε βαρβάρων ἔχω): his sovereignty is a temperate one, which pays attention to public opinion (422: πολίταις μὴ

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[19] On that peculiarity of Euripides' relationship with his audience, see MICHELINI 1987, 70-95.

[20] This expression, applied to Euripides' *Supplices* by the *hypothesis* of the play, is adapted to *Heraclidae* as well since the reception of Heracles' γένος by Athens was a *topos* of epideictic eloquence (see *e.g.* Plat. *Menex.* 239b, Aristot. *Rh.* 2.22; see GOTTELAND 2001, 168-198).

[21] On this point, see KOPPERSCHMIDT 1967, 154-155; GRETHLEIN 2002, 413; BERNEK 2004, 238-239.

[22] Like a Homeric king, Demophon alone made the decision and was content with the mere assent of his people (see CARLIER 1984, 185). Pelasgos too initially appeared as the only sovereign of his city (cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 249 sq.) but eventually resorted to the people's assembly as his personal dilemma grew increasingly difficult to sustain: this non-realistic merging of monarchy and democracy is prompted by dramaturgy (see BURIAN 1974).

[23] Cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 605, 982: οὐ διχορρόπως; 942-3: τοιάδε δημόπρακτος ἐκ πόλεως μία / ψῆφος κέκρανται. On the typically democratic use of the term ψῆφος, see LOTZE 1981, 214.

[24] In that respect, the discord resembles that of pre-democratic Ithaka: it cannot be purged by a formal vote which would define a majority (cf. *Od.* 24.463-466; on *stasis*, see LORAUX 1995).

[25] *Heracl.* 36: κλήρῳ λαχόντας ἐκ γένους Πανδίονος. On the democratic flavour of the expression, see ALLAN 2001 *ad loc*. This is in no way contradictory with the fact noted above that the democratic consultation of the people has been conspicuously omitted: all supplication plays stage hybrid forms of regimes, partaking both of monarchy and democracy, and dramaturgic purposes determine which aspect should be stressed at which point. Aeschylus' Argos grew into a successful democracy; Euripides' Athens is an aborted one because of the displacement and inversion of the μεταβολή in the supplication pattern.

διαβληθήσομαι[26]). In other words, it is because of their moderate government that the Athenians refuse to indulge into human sacrifice and, paradoxically, are driven to withdraw their support from suppliants whom piety also orders to respect. This contradiction is the reason why Iolaus is ready to forgive Demophon for his decision (435: συγγνωστά)[27] and keeps approving of his protectors (436: αἰνέσας δ' ἔχω), but simultaneously gives the impression he is blaming the city by his lament (461: μή νυν τήνδ' ἐπαιτιῶ πόλιν)[28]: seen from the outside, Athens is indeed acting just as all the Greek cities have done so far, when they cowardly expelled the Heraclids from their borders[29]. This sort of painful irony, which proceeds wholly from the plot and not from the characters, is typical of Euripides, who likes to stage, for example, close relatives on the verge of murdering each other out of sheer ignorance, as in *Ion* or *Cresphontes*. There is already a sense of this capricious and incomprehensible τύχη in the words uttered here by the chorus: "can it really be that a god forbids our city, which wants to, to help foreigners, who need to?"[30]. This should drive us away from simplistically condemning Athens as corrupt and Demophon as a coward or hypocrite[31]: he is rather tragically forced by the μῦθος into behaving in a way contrary to his true ἦθος, which is undoubtedly noble, as the first episode has shown and the audience would remember[32].

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[26] On the meaning of διαβάλλομαι + dative, which does not refer here to calumny, but to public disagreement, see PEARSON 1907, *ad loc.*

[27] If Demophon deserves συγγνώμη, he cannot be regarded as a true villain (cf. Aristot. *EN* 1146a: τῇ δὲ μοχθηρίᾳ οὐ συγγνώμη).

[28] Valckenaer emended the transmitted τήνδ' into τῶνδ' (so Diggle, Kovacs); if so, τῶνδ(ε) would refer to Iolaus' offer to surrender to Eurystheus and ἐπαιτιῶ should be understood as "make guilty of", not "accuse of" (see PEARSON 1907 *ad loc.*). But since this sense is not attested elsewhere, it is better to keep the transmitted text and understand ἐπαιτιῶ with reference to ἐκδοθησόμεσθα (442), which is even more abusive than the previous τῆσδ' ἀπωθούμεσθα γῆς (431): ἐκδίδωμι is indeed the technical verb used for an extradition (cf. *Heracl.* 97, 221, 319, 453) and suggests that Athens is giving over the suppliants; the violence of the term is emphasised by a pathetic δή (see DENNISTON 1954, 214-215), but mitigated by the passive, which does not directly incriminate the Athenians.

[29] The ambiguity of Iolaus' response is accounted for by the mixed nature of Demophon's decision, which can be qualified as both willing and unwilling (see Aristot. *EN* 1109b-1110a): the king is the author of his action, but the purpose of it was not decided by him; he is only acting διὰ φόβον μειζόνων κακῶν (1110a). A mixed action can deserve ἔπαινος or ψόγος, inasmuch as it is deemed voluntary, and συγγνώμη, inasmuch as it is deemed non-voluntary. Here we have both simultaneously. This ambiguity also explains Iolaus' words in the following scene (494 sq.): λέγει μὲν οὐ σαφῶς, λέγει δέ πως κτλ., which should not be read as denouncing the king's hypocrisy, but his tragic embarrassment. Subjectively, Demophon does not want the depart of the suppliants, and thus does not order it expressly; but objectively, the circumstances are such as to force the suppliants to leave.

[30] *Heracl.* 426-427: ἀλλ' ἦ πρόθυμον οὖσαν οὐκ ἐᾷ θεὸς / ξένοις ἀρήγειν τήνδε χρῄζουσιν πόλιν.

[31] This negative view has been endorsed by several scholars (see GARZYA 1956, 22 sq.; GARZYA 1962, 54; VELLACOTT 1975, 187-191; NANCY 1983, 23-24; HALL 1997, 120). Others envisage the king in more favourable way (see PEARSON 1907, xxvii; CONACHER 1967, 114; BURNETT 1976, 7; BURIAN 1977, 7-8, AÉLION 1983, II, 26-27; WILKINS 1990a, 189; GRETHLEIN 2004, 412).

[32] The submission of ἦθος to μῦθος prefigures Aristotle's view of tragedy (cf. *Poet.* 1450a: οὔκουν ὅπως τὰ ἤθη μιμήσωνται πράττουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἤθη συμπεριλαμβάνουσιν διὰ τὰς πράξεις). Demophon's fault against the suppliants, which is voluntary but not perverse, is a typical ἁμάρτημα (cf. Aristot. *Rh.* 1374b: ἁμαρτήματα δὲ ὅσα μὴ παράλογα καὶ μὴ ἀπὸ πονηρίας) and, as such, constitutes a properly tragic action in Aristotelean

The tragedy of Athens and its king is precisely what Macaria comes out to resolve[33]. After a brief informative exchange with Iolaus (474-499), she immediately volunteers for self-sacrifice. This suddenness is unique in Euripides' production, who usually sets a long scene between the announcement of the sacrifice to the future victim and the resolution to accept it, so that the final decision seems to be reached gradually[34]. The victims generally start by lamenting their misfortune, as Polyxena or Iphigeneia[35], and attend the discussion between those who support and resist their sacrifice without saying a word[36]. If their decision eventually comes out as a surprise, it is thus always a mitigated one. But the case here is quite opposite and made even more striking as the life of the young daughter of Heracles had not been expressly demanded by Persephone[37].

The following *rhesis* confirms Macaria should not be approached psychologically, for she speaks as if she were a man. Contrary to her Euripidean sisters, Polyxena and Iphigeneia, or even Antigone, she does not complain about her fate and very sparingly mentions the woman's condition she renounces, only to say it was hopeless had she lived (520-527). Her expression throughout the scene is devoid of pathetic bursts: she does not indulge into singing for a single moment; she has no passionate farewell stichomythy either, as Polyxena does, but says her second final speech with the same cold dignity as the rest of the scene[38]; and eventually, no touching narrative retraces her very last moments[39]. Like Hector in the

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terms (cf. Aristot. *Poet*. 1453a: μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἀλλὰ δι᾽ ἁμαρτίαν τινά).

[33] The *ad hoc* nature of her irregularly unannounced entry is proven by the comparison with the few other similar instances in Euripides, in which a character appears who has never been on stage before and will never show up again (cf. *Ion* 1320 [Pythia], *Hel*. 597 [Old Servant], *IA* 414 [Messenger]; an entry is regularly unannounced if it follows a chorus and is not part of a *tableau*; conversely, all entries are announced when taking place elsewhere than after a chorus and in the presence of more than one character on stage [see Hamilton 1978, 69-70]).

[34] This point has been well shown by Schmitt 1921, 16; Strohm 1957, 51.

[35] Cf. *Hec*. 197-215; *IA* 1211-1252, 1279-1335.

[36] Cf. *Hec*. 216-341; *Ph*. 911-959. In *IA*, the confrontation precedes the beseech and lament of Iphigeneia; it is a shorter scene staging Achilles (1338-1368) that serves as a preparation for the statement of self-sacrifice, which consequently appears as more abrupt than in *Hec*. and *Ph*. (it was famously criticised by Aristotle [*Poet*. 1454a] for introducing a dangerous ἀνωμαλία in the character).

[37] The anonymity of the victim (a nameless character herself) is a seemingly unique feature in Euripides' tragedies (*Erech*. is impossible to assess in that respect). This peculiarity may be due to the invention of the girl by Euripides (see n. 11) and in any case provided a convenient ground for Heracles' γένος to substitute for Athens as the active σωτήρ.

[38] The formal peculiarities of Macaria's scene are well registered by McLean 1934, 203-209, who extravagantly concludes that it was interpolated.

[39] The loss of this narrative or its equivalent was for long postulated by scholars, most notably by Kirchhoff and Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (for a good *status quaestionis*, see Wilkins 1993, xxviii-xxxx). Since Zuntz 1947, this hypothesis has been generally discarded and endorsed only marginally (see Guerrini 1973 and Lesky 1977). Two proper narratives in the same play would not be possible at this stage of Euripides' production and we already have one, in the fourth episode. That Macaria's death is not retraced is congruent with the fact that the dramatist does not want the pity of the audience to interfere with their enthusiastic admiration for the girl and patriotic feelings for Athens (see Galeotti Papi 1995, 148, n. 3). Similarly, Menoeceus' death is only very briefly

Iliad (22, 105-7), she uses the fiction of a censoring observer to emulate her sense of αἰδώς and ἀρετή (516-519)[40]; a true warrior, she takes from Tyrtaeus (fr. 10.18) the word φιλοψυ-χεῖν (519, 533) to refute it[41]. Actually, Macaria's *devotio* is much closer to Menoeceus' in *Phoenissae*, whose manly courage she announces, or to the one Praxithea decides for her own daughter in *Erechtheus*, in which the same sort of abstract reasoning[42] is resorted to without betraying the slightest inch of emotion. These are the pure φαρμακός plays mentioned above, in which the ironic character of the self-sacrifice can reasonably be doubted. Indeed Macaria's words share a lot with the properly patriotic rhetoric of these other two dramas, in which a member of the royal house is slain for the benefit of the civic community: for example, the parataxis she uses when considering the possibility of sparing her life (506: φευξόμεσθα μὴ θανεῖν) when the city is at risks bears a close resemblance with that of the Theban prince, when he puts in balance the courage of the many and the cowardice of one individual (999-1005; cf. *IA* 1387-1391); that is also the point of Praxithea when she says that one life cannot outweigh many (fr. 360 Kn. 19-20). These were the *topoi* of public speech at the time[43]: as early as in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Creon would deem naught the man who gives precedence to his private ties over those to the city (183-184; cf. 668-76); about the time at which *Heracleidae* was performed, Thucydides has Pericles saying in his last speech (II 60.3-4) that private misfortunes (ἰδίας ξυμφοράς) are the price to be paid for public welfare (τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς σωτηρίας). Here, Macaria has ironic words about the enviable fate of hers if the city were conquered (510-514); similarly, Praxithea wonders what the point could be of preserving her child for herself if Athens were taken (39-40; cf. 20-21: οὑνὸς οἶκος οὐ πλέον σθένει / πταίσας ἁπάσης πόλεος οὐδ' ἴσον φέρει). Without the πόλις, the individual amounts to nothing; it is thus plain logic that he should surrender his life to it.

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evoked (*Ph*. 1090-1092) – this should probably incite us to regard as authentic and referring to Macaria the allusive lines 821-822 (on this vastly discussed passage, see the references given by GUERRINI 1973, 46, n. 2; 48, n. 2; v. 822 has been emended so as to refer to regular animal sacrifices, but these seem to have been performed by v. 673, where the σφάγια have been carried *away from* the lines [παρῆκται… τάξεων ἑκάς] – and not *in front of* the lines, to be slaughtered [cf. Th. 6.69.2], as scholars usually understand).

[40] So did the brave but impotent Iolaus at the beginning of the play (cf. *Heracl*. 29-30).

[41] This word, which is indeed attached to the martial sphere (cf. Eur. *Hec*. 315, *Ph*. 597, *Erech*. 360 Kn. 30-31; cf. [Lys.] 2.25, [Demosth.] 60.28), is recurrent in Euripides' sacrifice scenes, where it is remarkably used by young girls (Macaria [533], Polyxena [348], Iphigeneia [1385]). In the same vein, παρίστημι (*Heracl*. 502: παρίστασθαι σφαγῇ) has been deemed a direct echo to the hoplitic παραστάτης (see GALEOTTI PAPI 1995, 146; MENDELSOHN 2002, 96-98; MASTRONARDE 2010, 265), but the reference seems to be forced, for the verb, used here with an abstract noun (cf. παραστῆναι ἐς τῶν Περσέων τὴν γνώμην Hdt. 6.99), does not simply denote a standing position, but also the movement leading to it (cf. Soph. *Aj*. 48, *Tr*. 748, *El*. 295). The verse rather echoes the previous description of the σφάγια (*Heracl*. 399-400), which Macaria substitutes for. For other touches of martial diction, see GALEOTTI PAPI 1995, 145, n. 1.

[42] This characteristic of Euripidean self-sacrifice scenes is well pointed out by STROHM 1957, 62-63; GARZYA 1962, 52, n. 14.

[43] On the comparison between this *rhesis* and the *epitaphioi logoi*, see GALEOTTI PAPI 1995, 146-147.

The sacrifice of a virgin to the city is furthermore copiously paralleled in the religion and myths of Athens during the Classical period[44]: let us mention the daughters of Erechtheus or Hyacinthids[45], to whose fate Euripides devoted a tragedy (fr. 370 Kn. 63-70; cf. *Ion* 277-280); the daughters of Leos, the eponymous hero of the Leontis tribe, who delivered Athens from a pestilence[46]; Aglaurus, the daughter of Cecrops who had originally disobeyed Athena's orders before throwing herself from the top of the Acropolis and was changed, at least in the 4th c., into a model of civic devotion (Philoch. *FGrH* 328 F 105). Those saviour girls were revered in the cult: Aglaurus' sanctuary is well-known, the Hyacinthids owned a *temenos* in the town (fr. 370 Kn. 68, 87), and the existence of a Leocorion is already attested by the late 6th c. (Th. 6.57, [Aristot.] *Const. Ath.* 18.3)[47]. They were particularly associated with the military sphere: the ephebes would take their oath by Aglaurus and in her sanctuary (cf. Plut. *Alc.* 15)[48]; it was in the Hyacinthids' ἱερόν that, according to the *Erechtheus' exodos*, νηφάλια were performed before a campaign (fr. 370 Kn. 83-89). In the 4th c., these φαρμακός figures were commonly evoked as inspiring models of patriotic devotion by the orators, to whom we owe most of our information on the subject[49]. This climate has to be taken into account if one tries to figure out the way under which Macaria could be perceived by the audience at the time: it is very likely that the patriotic flavour of her speech combined with her affinity to the brave virgins of Attica elicited the sympathy of the Athenian spectators, who would adopt her as belonging to their side. This view is supported by the remarkable resemblance between Macaria and Demophon: like the Athenian king, she is the offspring of a hero; like him, she makes her decision immediately and proves, by a noble act, her noble birth[50]; like him, she offers salvation to the suppliants (588: τὴν σώτειραν). This similarity

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[44] On that question, see Kearns 1989, 57-63; Wilkins 1990b, 333. The vogue of patriotic φαρμακοί is an even wider phenomenon during the Classical age: suffice it to mention king Codros (Pherecyd. *FGrH* 3 F 154, Hellanic. *FGrH* 323a F 23, Plat. *Symp.* 208d, Lycurg. 1.86) and, of course, Leonidas, whose heroic resistance, initially praised as a simple act of obedience to the laws of the city (cf. Hdt. 7.228), turned out to be the paradigm of patriotic self-sacrifice (cf. Hdt. 7.220; on the making of the legend, see Lupi 2014; Bouidghaghen 2017).

[45] On the probably late dissociation between the two names, see Bonnechère 1994, 80-81.

[46] Cf. [Demosth.] 60.29, Diod.Sic. 17, 15.2, Aristid. *Panath.* 1.87-8, *schol. Lib.* 27.605a, *schol. Thuc.* 1.20, Souda *s.v.* Λεωκόριον.

[47] A small heroon in the north-west corner of the Agora was restored in the years soon after 430, during the Great Plague, *i.e.* about the time at which the play was performed, and received numerous offerings dedicated to female deities: it could attractively be identified with the Leocorion (see Thompson & Wycherley 1972, 123; Thompson 1981, 347-348).

[48] On the oath, see Robert 1938, 296-307; Pélékidis 1962, 75-76, 110-113.

[49] Cf. Lycurg. 1.85 (Codros), Demad. fr. 110 (daughters of Erechtheus), Lycurg. 1.98-99, [Demosth.] 60.27 (Erechtheus himself), [Demosth.] 60.29 (the daughters of Leos). On the historical context, see Bonnechère 1994, 255. The patriotic use of φαρμακοί can be explained by a change in the manner of viewing the noble death, as is well shown by the *epitaphioi*: contrary to the epic warrior, who is praised for his *aristeia*, the civic combatant attains glory by his very death; death itself and the resolution to endure it become that which is worthy of celebration (cf. Th. 2.43.3: μνήμη παρ' ἑκάστῳ τῆς γνώμης μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ ἔργου ἐνδιαιτᾶται; see Loraux 1981, 100-101).

[50] This idea is emphasised throughout the scene and following *stasimon* (cf. *Heracl.* 513: πατρὸς οὖσαν εὐγενοῦς, 537: γενναίους λόγους, 553: λόγος… εὐγενέστερος, 626-627: ἄξια μὲν πατρός, ἄξια δ' εὐγενίας τάδε

need not be interpreted in an ironic way, as denouncing Demophon's impotence in the preceding scene[51], but can be understood as a response to the king's μνημονεύσεται χάρις (334) at the end of the first episode[52]. While the civic discourse and virtue were unsurprisingly taken up by Demophon in the first part of the play, this role now shifts to Macaria in the second episode: as a matter of fact, after she has walked on stage, Demophon keeps almost silent[53]; a bit later, in the battle narrative, the king of Athens similarly steps back behind Hyllus and Iolaus. As the play goes on and Heracles' family enters more and more the struggle against the Argives, the ἱκέται and ξένοι they were at the beginning of the play change into the allies and best weapon of Athens. This impression of close collaboration is enhanced by the fact that, though the family of Heracles is in the vanguard of the combat, the chorus still sings of the city of Athens in the *stasima*[54]. This seemingly harmonious merging is the result of Macaria's sacrifice – as much a daughter of Heracles as a virginal protectress of Attica[55].

But these patriotic features should not conceal Macaria's avowed motive for sacrificing herself: love for her γένος. That sets her scene apart from the cognates of *Erechtheus*, in which Praxithea says πόλις more than ten times in her fifty-line speech, and *Phoenissae*, in which Menoeceus makes it clear that he is dying for his soil (998, 1004, 1014: χθών), his land (1008, 1012: γῆ), his country (996, 1017: πατρίς, 1002: πάτρα). Here, Macaria, the foreigner, simply

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γίγνεται). Macaria's virtue appears to be similar with Demophon's: all in her is governed by her sense of αἰδώς (cf. *Heracl.* 200-201: ἡ γὰρ αἰσχύνη πάρος / τοῦ ζῆν παρ' ἐσθλοῖς ἀνδράσιν νομίζεται; 242: τό τ' αἰσχρόν, οὗπερ δεῖ μάλιστα φροντίσαι); hence the negative form of the arguments she resorts to (of the type "it would not be decent to…"). This way of reasoning is similar with Polyxena's and differs from the rest of Euripidean devotions, in which a positive element of exaltation is present: indeed, Macaria and Polyxena do not sacrifice themselves for their city.

[51] Such is the view of GRETHLEIN 2002, 416-417, who reads as painfully ironic the resemblance between Macaria and Athens/Demophon; but the textual parallels he adduces are sometimes to be taken with caution, as is the grouping of Macaria's serious devotion with Iolaus' subsequent comic one under a same section entitled "Komische Dekonstruktion und Subversion des Idealbildes".

[52] A bit later, when she refuses the designation of the victim by lots, Macaria justifies her choice saying: χάρις γὰρ οὐ πρόσεστι (548). In the previous scene, Iolaus said that Athens' defection did not destroy the χάρις bond that attached the Heraclids to their protectors (438). According to CONACHER 1967, 110, 114, the very notion of χάρις is pivotal as to the interpretation of the whole drama and Macaria's scene climactically exemplifies it.

[53] His brief speech (567-573) is attributed by ms. L to Iolaus but has been commonly given back to Demophon since Heath. The defence of the original attribution by STOESSL 1956, 228-229 does not fully convince, for it is up to the king to accept Macaria's demand.

[54] Suffice it to mention the remarkable reference to the Panathenaia festival in the fourth *stasimon* (777-783; on which see TADDEI 2020, 57-71).

[55] The impression that Macaria resembles a war virgin may also be supported by the staging: the girl probably exits with Demophon and his escort by the *eisodos* leading to the battlefield, not to the city (*contra* ALLAN 2001, 51 but his justification misses the development of the supplication play into a war action). This hypothesis cannot be proven unquestionably, but is required for the dramatic twist of the following episode, which is much more powerful if the audience first mistakes the Servant of Hyllos for a Messenger (who would come to narrate Macaria's death and the battle against the Argives): it is thus necessary that the Servant should ambiguously enter by the *eisodos* Macaria and Demophon used to make their exit, *i.e.* that which is opposite to the city.

says she is dying "for her brothers and [her]self" (532: ἀδελφῶν τῶνδε κἀμαυτῆς ὕπερ)[56]. As the scene draws to a close, this intention is relentlessly restated[57] and culminates in the final προύθανον γένους (590). When one reconsiders things under scrutiny, it appears that the seemingly patriotic *topoi* pointed out above have all to be referred to the strict limits of the family: for example, while Menoeceus feels guilty to be seen as a coward by his fellow citizens (*Ph*. 1003-1005), Macaria fears that her cowardice might offend the memory of her father (509). The εὐγένεια she ceaselessly proclaims and aspires to should be understood etymologically, as the virtue deriving from her γένος and aiming to its benefit only[58]. Earlier, in the first episode, Iolaus also praised the two sons of Theseus for their nobleness (297-303, 324-328): there, εὐγένεια coincided with the larger συγγένεια (229, 305), since Demophon showed himself of good stock by aiding suppliants akin to him. But in the second episode, the bonds of συγγένεια have been broken up by the emergence of new concerns, which go beyond the order of aristocratic mutual support: the question of asylum has become a civic one. With the oracle's demanding a victim of noble birth (411, 490: εὐγενής)[59], the πόλις reciprocally risks exploding into quarrelling γένη, eager to defend exclusively those of their blood. Under such circumstances, it comes as no surprise that the εὐγένεια Macaria now professes should also be of a restrictive kind. That clearly appears from her last words, which are purposely directed only to Iolaus and her brothers[60], to whom she dedicates her final vows (574-585). Athens is no more addressed: Macaria has only briefly thanked the city at the beginning of her first speech (505) and incidentally wished them victory over Eurystheus (530: νικᾶτε δ' ἐχθρούς)[61]. To Demophon, she pays no attention, except to ask from him indirectly in two lines the privilege to die afar from the eyes of men (565-566). The instructions

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[56] This expression shows that Macaria does not separate her fate from that of her family, of which she is a surrogate (cf. 506: σεσῶσθαι, with PEARSON 1907 *ad loc.*): though she is to die, she is nonetheless saved inasmuch as her γένος is. Her identification with her family is consistent with her anonymity (on this point, see YOON 2012, 105-106).

[57] Cf. *Heracl*. 536: ἀδελφῶν ἢ πάρος θέλει θανεῖν; 545: θνησκέτω γένους ὕπερ; 550-551: τὴν ἐμὴν ψυχὴν ἐγὼ / δίδωμ᾽ ἑκοῦσα τοῖσδ᾽; 557: ἀδελφοὺς <δ᾽> ὠφελεῖς θανοῦσα σούς; 579-580: τὴν ἐμὴν ὥραν γάμου / διδοῦσαν ἀντὶ τῶνδε κατθανουμένην; 582-583: γένοιθ᾽ ὑμῖν ὅσων / ἡμὴ πάροιθε καρδία σφαγήσεται.

[58] Cf. *Heracl*. 509, 512, 527, 537, 553, 626-627. On this theme in the scene, see FITTON 1961, 452-453; AVERY 1971, 541-542; BURIAN 1977, 8-9; MENDELSOHN 2002, 95.

[59] BERNEK 2004, 242 sees in the perfect fulfilment of this requirement a metatextual indication of the *ad hoc* nature of the character.

[60] This impression is probably emphasised by the staging, since Macaria has just been invited by Demophon to come closer to her family gathered around the altar (572-573): the γένος is thus presented as a united, not to say self-sufficient entity. This is in sharp contrast with another significant gesture at the end of the first episode: there, Iolaus asked the children to shake hands with the sons of Theseus as a token of friendship (307-308). Meanwhile, the γένος of Heracles has visibly turned in on itself.

[61] The χάρις bond, which can serve as a possible explanation for Macaria's sacrifice (see above), is never expressly mentioned by her. The only passage in her speech referring to a form of reciprocity would be: σφε (*i.e.* the Athenians) σῶσαι (506); but this emendation for the transmitted σεσῶσθαι is not necessary (the palaeographical explanation of the corruption given by WILKINS 1993 *ad loc.* is inappropriate to this case). For the meaning of the line, with the text preserved as transmitted, see above n. 56.

she leaves about her funerals are also worth to be noticed: it is not in Attica, where she is to die, but in Argos, her city, that the heroic virgin wishes to be buried when her brothers have managed to return there (586-588). This explains why no funeral honours are evoked in the rest of the play[62], contrary to what we encounter, for example, in the *exodos* of *Erechtheus*. Though made on the pattern of Aglaurus or the Hyacinthids, Macaria will not belong to the land of Athens.

For the chorus, there is no contradiction between the civic and the family dimension of the self-sacrifice, as they show in the following *stasimon*, where they sing praise of Macaria's "receiving her share in death both for her brothers and the country", that is for Athens (622: πρό τ' ἀδελφῶν καὶ γᾶς)[63]. This complementariness has been endorsed by scholars as well[64], of whom Daniel Mendelsohn has exposed the most fully developed view: he considers that Macaria adapts here the aristocratic masculine values of the self-centred γένος to the wider democratic πόλις, and enriches with her "otherness" the heroic code by which Iolaus and Demophon both abide, and which has been put into trouble by the *peripeteia* of the second episode[65]. This reading meets with Helen Foley's analysis of *Antigone*, in which she similarly assumes that the female heroine shows the incompleteness of the dominant masculine morality and works as an intermediary between the private and the public sphere[66]. But in *Heracleidae*, one important difference should be noticed: the city is not that of the virgin. The same objection could be raised against Anne Burnett's more conflictual interpretation of the play as staging competing types of legality: to the law of the city, which the divine decree expressed by the seers cause to fail, Macaria would substitute that of the tribe, which triumphs with Alcmene's vengeance upon Eurystheus at the end of the drama[67]. Here again, the play is envisaged as an abstract allegory: in reality, there is no tension between πόλις and γένος in

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[62] These are strangely mentioned by the *hypothesis* of play (ταύτην… εὐγενῶς ἀποθανοῦσαν ἐτίμησαν), which is why, following Kirchhoff, scholars have for long postulated a lacuna (see above n. 39; on this problem, see ZUNTZ 1947, 48-49). Eurystheus will eventually take Macaria's place as an unexpected saviour hero, himself buried in the soil of Attica (cf. *Heracl.* 1026 sq.). On that striking substitution, see MENDELSOHN 2002, 104.

[63] Such is the most natural interpretation since these are the words of the chorus. Still, γᾶς could also refer to the girl's and the Heraclids' country, Argos – and beyond Argos, ironically, Sparta, as the *exodos* well shows in Eurystheus' prophecy. That would give a much different and painful meaning to this innocent praise.

[64] See *e.g.* ROMILLY 1965, 42; AVERY 1971, 552, n. 23; BURNETT 1976, 16.

[65] See MENDELSOHN 2002, 89-91. According to him, *Heracl.* like many tragedies stages the difficult adaptation of the archaic values and mentality to a new democratic environment.

[66] Cf. FOLEY 1981, 153. Under a more expanded form, see also FOLEY 2001, 183: "By emphasizing the importance of the unwritten laws in the public sphere, the play refuses to confine Antigone and her ethics to the world of the *oikos* from which they largely derive. […] It shows the dangers of relying exclusively on universal principle and rigid impartiality." On the connections between the main characters of *Antigone* with aspects of democratic ideology, see FOLEY 1995. In *Heracl.*, the action of the girl would work the opposite way, by integrating public concerns into the γένος morality.

[67] BURNETT 1976, 13 establishes a parallel between Macaria's sacrifice and Alcmene's vengeance, and summarises the teaching of the grim finale as follows: "For a second time a divine decree has imposed duties which the city cannot carry out, and for a second time the female representative of an ancient tribe has been able to respond obediently." She then concludes that "the hero of the play is the *genos*" (14).

general, but between the city *of Athens* and the family *of Heracles*. As a matter of fact, this very conflict forms the background of the drama.

In the 5th c., the aid offered by the Athenians to the Heraclids was one of the common-places of public speech and a motive of civic pride, as is already shown by Herodotus (9.27)[68]; the myth implied that the Lacedaemonian kings, who descended from Hyllus, owed their existence to the generosity of the Athenians towards their remote ancestors[69]. When the war broke out, it is not difficult to guess in which way the story could be used at Athens: the Spartans were proving unworthy of the past χάρις by laying waste the very land which once had welcomed them[70]. To a dramatist like Euripides, this provided for sure a remarkable material for a tragic reversal: under the poor persecuted ἱκέτης of the myth, a contemporary harassing enemy was lurking. There is thus a double action running simultaneously throughout the play: the apparent one, of which the characters are the conscious agents, *i.e.* the supplication and the following battle and revenge; and the latent one, which is adumbrated to the audience only and prophesied to all at the end of the drama, *i.e.* the dire consequences of the preservation of Heracles' γένος by the Athenians. This word of γένος encapsulates in itself the conflict here underscored: in the play, it explicitly refers to the feeble suppliants gathered around the altar (479, 545, 590); but a γένος is also made of the descendants to come[71], and the Lacedaemonians will indeed be called 'Heraclids' as well[72].

That the suppliants of a supplication tragedy might appear to be ambiguous has nothing novel: Aeschylus' *Supplices* already fully exploited the tragic potential of their dormant threat, particularly in the *exodos*, where the initial φυξανορία of the Danaids was brought again in the forefront[73], while they entered the city singing praise of Argos, but on a barbaric rhythm and with double entendre words[74]. In the same way, the sons of Heracles finally

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[68] On the rhetorical character and doubtful historicity of the speech reported by Herodotus, see MEYER 1899, 219-222.

[69] On this idea and other pro-Athenian readings of the return of the Heraclids into the Peloponnese, see GOTTE-LAND 2001, 313-319.

[70] The original Marathonian legend was apparently well established enough for the Lacedaemonians to shun away from devastating the Tetrapolis (cf. *schol. Soph. OC* 701 [= Istros *FGrH* 334 F 30], Diod.Sic. 12, 45.1).

[71] It is made clear by Eurystheus' final speech, in which he announces the enmity of the Spartans stemming from Heracles' γένος (cf. *Heracl.* 1036: τοῖς τῶνδε δ' ἐκγόνοισι).

[72] Cf. Tyrt. fr. 11.1 W: Ἡρακλῆος γὰρ ἀνικήτου γένος ἐστέ.

[73] Danaos' last speech (980-1013) places at the conspicuous centre of its anular structure recommendations to the girls about their virginity: in the previous episodes, this important element of the play had receded into the background with the emergence of the political question (*i.e.* the Argive assembly, the quarrel with the Egyptian herald).

[74] It is uncertain whether the chorus splits into two halves, answers a secondary chorus or Danaos himself (see TAPLIN 1977, 230-238; for a recent appraisal, see BEDNAROWSKI 2011, 552-578), but this finale for sure gives an ambiguous impression as to the intentions of the suppliants (see *e.g.* κράτος νέμοι [*scil.* Ζεὺς] γυναιξίν, 1069-70). The use of the Ionic metre also recalls the Danaids' exotic origin precisely when they are integrated into the city. Aeschylus has thus shown that while the status of the suppliants has been clarified (they have been recognised of Argive stock, and formally accepted by a decree as *metoikoi*), they still retain a persistent and potentially threatening otherness.

leave the altar to make their much-postponed entry into the city only after Eurystheus has revealed their future betrayal[75]. Even before that, Euripides has craftily used tragic irony to highlight the ambiguity of the ἱκέται: at the end of the first episode, Iolaus prompts the Heraclids into a pledge of which the very words deliberately contradict the present experience of the audience[76]: while some lines earlier the spectator was explicitly engaged into identifying Eurystheus' invasion of Attica with that of the contemporary Lacedaemonians[77], it is now made clear that this simple correspondence will not last. In two other conspicuous places, at the end of Macaria's scene (587) and after the battle narrative (875-8), the so-called 'return of the Heraclids' is similarly alluded to and used as the brief but sombre final chord of an otherwise bright episode: as opportune and innocent as these mentions are in the mouth of the characters, they nevertheless remind the audience that the seemingly apolitical family of Heracles[78] has a city of their own, wishes to return there and will finally succeed, with all the consequences known to us.

This sheds a different light on Macaria's *devotio*: though its positive reception is undoubtedly wanted, as is repeatedly registered in the text, it should also be noted that the scene contains all the prodromes of the final tragic inversion of the play. Indeed, Euripides is showing nothing but a girl who sacrifices herself for her γένος, and her γένος only, demanding from her brothers to be buried in her land, and not in Attica, when they come back to the

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[75] It seems logical that they should use the *eisodos* leading to Athens, as is normal at the end of a supplication tragedy. The suppliants were expected to enter Athens already at the end of the first episode, but Iolaus strangely remained seated at the altar (344-352), unconsciously anticipating the reversal of the second episode, in which the suppliants are indeed on the verge of being expelled from the city.

[76] Iolaus successively mentions the return of the Heraclids into the Peloponnese (310), which will entail the foundation of Sparta, and the eternal bond of friendship that will unite Heracles' descendants and Athens (313: μήποτ᾽ ἐς γῆν ἐχθρὸν αἴρεσθαι δόρυ). It should be noted that, surprisingly, the pledgers here are children, κωφὰ πρόσωπα, who by essence are incapable of expressing their assent (cf. Arist. *EN* 1111b8): this signals an irregular oath (cf. the hypocrisy scene in the almost contemporary *Medea*, in which children are similarly forced into a false pledge [see ALLAN 2007, 115]; in *Heracl.*, of course, no character is conscious of the tragic irony, but only the spectator).

[77] There is a direct reference in the Herald's menacing exit words to the devastation of the cultures of Attica (281): if the play was staged in March 430, as Zuntz convincingly suggests, the memory of the ravages caused by the first invasion would still be very fresh. At the time, Pericles was heavily criticised for his strategy of abandoning the country to the enemy (cf. Th. 2.21-22, Plut. *Per*. 33.4; see DELEBECQUE 1951, 85), and the opposition between the leader and his people may be echoed by Demophon's predicament in the second episode. Similarly, the consultation of the chresmologues and the resort to βέβηλα καὶ κεκρυμμένα / λόγια (404-405) are paralleled in Thucydides' account of the beginning of the war (cf. πολλὰ μὲν λόγια ἐλέγετο, πολλὰ δὲ χρησμολόγοι ἦδον 2.8.2; χρησμολόγοι τε ἦδον χρησμοὺς παντοίους 2.21.3), and Eurystheus' prudent invasion of Attica through the mountains (393-394) may well recall Archidamus' in 431 (cf. Th. 2.18-19). The conjunction of these elements does not support the recent suggestion that the play might have been produced in the aftermath of the 446 invasion (see YOON 2020, 90-93) – it should be added that this hypothesis less adequately fits with the location of Eurystheus' tomb at Pallene (in 446, the Spartans did not go further than the Eleusis plain; in 431, they reached Acharnae [cf. Th. 2.21], but did not enter the Mesogaia: Pallene could thus be viewed as the impassable barrier).

[78] It is the chief argument Iolaus resorts to in his *agon* with the Herald (cf. *Heracl.* 185-189) This aspect has been studied at length by MENDELSOHN 2002, 78-85.

Peloponnese to found, among others, the State of Lacedaemon. Who but a girl, besides, to embody this absolute fidelity to kin and blood ties, this family order older than the Greece of the cities?[79] If the second episode were removed from the drama, not much, it seems, would be changed in the unfolding of the main action, the first scene (δέσις) being cancelled by the second (λύσις). But this apparent zero-sum game obscures the fact that the ἱκέται are not in the same position before and after Macaria's devotion: they have now become independent from their protectors. That this independence will eventually end up into hostility is made clear by the *exodos*, which stages a second female character, Alcmene, as a striking counterpart to Macaria[80]. There, the conflict between the Heraclids and the city is clear enough: full of rage, Alcmene wants to kill Eurystheus, who has been brought before her, but the right of the prisoners, which the chorus recalls, forbids it (961-980[81]); with a blatant sophism, the old woman agrees to give back the Argive to the Athenians, but as a corpse (1020-1025); and after Eurystheus has revealed his remains will serve them as a talisman, Athens gives in[82]. As in self-sacrifice, one σῶμα will benefit all; death, however, is no glorious deed anymore but amounts to the murder of a defenceless enemy[83]. The perfect balance between πόλις and γένος, which the chorus optimistically saw in Macaria's death, has now disclosed the danger it retained: the bloody vendetta of the tribe has superseded the laws of the city, and this sombre victory coincides with the announcement of the Heraclids' betrayal.

[79] It is indeed with respect to the γένος that the question of gender should here be dealt with. While Macaria's virile heroism certainly contradicts the expected ἦθος of a virgin, as she herself remarks (474-477), her attitude is not to be vaguely thought of as socially subversive (*e.g.* MENDELSOHN 2002, 100-104, for whom the girl is erased from the rest of the play because she has transgressed the masculine norms; similarly, ROSELLI 2007, 150-151 for whom Macaria metaphorically represents lower class males struggling for a better status; for a less ideologized approach of the question of gender in connection with self-sacrifice, see MASTRONARDE 2010, 264-8). Hyllos being absent and Iolaus very weak, Heracles' γένος is deprived of a defender, and a girl, a sister has thus grounds for acting on behalf of her family, just like Sophocles' Antigone or Electra, without necessarily threatening the social order (see FOLEY 1981, 152; FOLEY 2001, 161-164, 179-180). In *Heracl.*, the emergence of a paradoxical feminine heroism signals the crisis of the masculine world of the city as much as the pre-eminence of the family and shows that the former is successfully resolved by the latter.

[80] The parallel (and contrast) between Macaria and Alcmene is underscored by BURNETT 1976, 13, 25; MENDELSOHN 2001, 132-133; YOON 2020, 84. BERNEK 2004, 258 also convincingly points out Alcmene's resemblance with the impious and violent Herald of Argos: this is congruent with her negative characterisation and the inversion of the parts between ἱκέτης and ἐχθρός in the *exodos*. A positive appraisal of the old woman's revenge has been defended by BURNETT 1976, 21-26 and BURNETT 1998, 151-156; but to do so, one has to minimise the content of the final prophecy, which casts a very unfavourable light on Heracles' family.

[81] The lines attributed by Barnes to Alcmene are originally the Servant's in ms. L. For a good *status quaestionis*, see BERNEK 2004, 254, n. 98.

[82] On the question of the integrity of the end, which, according to Matthiae, was first doubted by G. Hermann, see BURIAN 1977, 19, n. 49 and WILKINS 1993, *ad* 1052. On the connected problem of the much emended χύσιν, see KOVACS 1996, 18-21 (his suggested χύσιν nevertheless implies a contradiction with line 1040, which would thus demand to be emended as well or that μήτε… ἐάσητ(ε) should be understood as 'do not omit', a meaning this verb does not usually have with a negation).

[83] The resemblance between Macaria's death and Eurystheus' is duly signalled by BURNETT 1998, 153. But the two scenes can hardly be described as equally positive, because of the content of Eurystheus' prophecy (see n. 80).

To sum it up, the horridness of human sacrifice in *Heracleidae* does not serve to denounce the villainy of the community ordering it, as it does in *Hecuba* or *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, but is not devoid either of a perversely dormant force. The anonymous παρθένος we call Macaria should not be envisaged as a full-fledged character, similar to Polyxena or Iphigeneia, whose touching purity is scandalously put to death; a purely abstract and functional figure, who is not mentioned a single time after she has walked off stage, the daughter of Heracles is of interest to the playwright only in that she enables him to replace the *praxis* of the πόλις, which formed the beginning of the play, by that of the γένος, of which the *exodos* will be the grim culmination. Macaria makes this transition as fluent as difficult to perceive: weakly characterised as she is, the Athenian spectator can easily identify with her seemingly patriotic speech and fails to see that, though practically serving the cause of the city, it is for her kin that she dies, as she says quite overtly. When saving her γένος, it is not only a group of shaky suppliants that she preserves, but also the troops of their descendants invading Attica in 431. A similar sort of irony blemishes, so it seems, the patriotic *devotio* of *Erechtheus*[84]. While Praxithea's famous speech, in which she surrenders the life of her daughter to the city, was certainly received as an unproblematic piece of public eloquence[85], the *exodos* of the play strikes a very different chord: the mother, who abnormally sacrificed her own child to the city[86], has just lost her husband and other two daughters, who committed suicide to accompany their sister into death; the queen now bursts into a passionate aria, in which she blames as an unholy deed the sacrifice which she once so highly praised[87]. Before the very official ending of the play, which stages Athena as a θεὰ ἀπὸ μηχανῆς, the brilliant eloquence of the beginning of the play has revealed, but too late, the perverse trap it kept hidden: in her cold and emotionless arguments, Praxithea pretended she was no mother anymore, and indeed the drama has taken away from her the three daughters she had. In other words, the secondary and implicit content of a *devotio* always comes out at some point. Contrary to the plays in which we pity the fate of young slaughtered heroines, the so-called 'political tragedies' erase pathos from the sacrifice scenes and let the audience rejoice with pompous words, so that they fail to see the objective reality they veil. Viewed as such, a patriotic drama amounts neither to a devout praise of Athens, nor to a strong protest against the city, but simply submits patriotic feelings to tragic reversal, in order that they may eventually be shown as false and deeply illusioned – here also, περιπέτεια and ἀναγνώρισις reign supreme.

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[84] On the difficulty of interpreting the general tone of this fragmentary play, see CROPP 1995, 154-155.

[85] It is indeed by a quote of Lycurgus' *Against Leocrates* (100) that this passage is first attested to us (also transmitted by Plut. *Mor*. 604d-e).

[86] The comparison with *Hec.*, *Ph.* or *IA* shows that she should have normally resisted the sacrifice, just like Hecuba, Creon or Clytaemnestra. It may be that Erechtheus was less inclined to it (cf. fr. 360 Kn. 1-3, 36-37; [Plut.] *Mor*. 310d mentions a consultation between the king and his wife about the sacrifice).

[87] However, the very wording of Praxithea's condemnation is uncertain (cf. 370 Kn. 41: ἀνίερον [ἱερὸν Diggle] ἀνίερον ὅσιον [<ἀν>όσιον Turner] ἀνόσιον; Diggle's conjecture would make a clear dochmiac).

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