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On the correct way to supplicate the gods in *Seven against Thebes*

Sobre a maneira correta de suplicar aos deuses em *Sete contra Tebas*

MARTA GONZÁLEZ GONZÁLEZ [1] *(University of Málaga — Spain)*

Abstract: The Chorus in *Seven against Thebes* is made up of maidens who have the important task of supplicating the gods in the crucial moment before battle, and they must do so correctly for their plea to be effective. This is one of the central themes in Aeschylus' play: what is the correct way to supplicate? Here, I suggest that the Chorus maidens' behaviour is both rational and effective, and that an examination of the statues of the gods occupying the stage and the manner in which the Chorus invokes them is highly illuminating as regards the maidens' religiosity.

Keywords: Aeschylus; prayer; ritual.

(I) *Seven against Thebes*[2], performed at the Great Dionysia in 467 BCE, was the last play in a themed trilogy, preceded by *Laius* and *Oedipus* and followed by the satyr drama *The Sphinx*. The action is set in the Cadmea, the ancient citadel inside the city of Thebes, and there are statues of the gods in the *orchestra*. The Chorus is made up of maidens frightened that the city may fall into the hands of an invading army. The audience would have been familiar with the context: Eteocles is now the ruler of Thebes and his brother Polynices has set out to regain power by force, backed by an army from Argos. The play opens with Eteocles on stage, urging Theban men of all ages to defend the city; his speech is interrupted by the arrival of a scout who says that Polynices' army is about to attack and is determined to win or else die in the attempt. Eteocles invokes the gods and withdraws to make the necessary preparations for the city's defence. At that moment, the Chorus of maidens enters, terrified at the prospect of the city being taken, and Eteocles reappears on stage and sourly confronts them. My discussion of the correct way to supplicate shall focus especially on this first part of the play, i.e. on the end of the prologue, the *parodos* and the first episode.

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[1] martagzlez@uma.es.

[2] I have used WEST's edition (1998[2]) for this study.

When Eteocles re-enters the scene in the first episode, he rhetorically asks the members of the Chorus whether they think that the best way to save the city and instil courage in the army is to howl and prostrate themselves before the statues of the gods. The Chorus maidens reply that as soon as they heard the roar of the enemy army, they rushed to the statues of the gods to plead for Thebes. Shortly afterwards, the Theban ruler adds that it is for men to make sacrifices and consult the oracles before battle and for women to remain silent and stay at home. The Chorus asks what evil can come of their supplications and Eteocles again demands that they calm themselves. Although it seems for a moment that an understanding will be reached between Chorus and ruler, from line 245 onwards, Eteocles' impiety resurfaces as he mixes warnings and reproaches with mockery. When the Chorus pleads not to fall into slavery, he responds that it is the Chorus that is enslaving the entire city; when the Chorus asks Zeus to turn his bolts against the enemy, he invokes Zeus to reproach the god for the wretched gift he bestowed on men by giving them the race of women (the famous *genos gynaikôn*, γένος γυναικῶν). Eteocles continues to berate the maidens when he sees them lamenting while clinging to the statues. In lines 265-85, he instructs them on how they should address the gods and exhorts them to utter the *ololygê*, the triumphal cry (268), without groaning or weeping.

(II) To better situate the problem of supplication in *Seven against Thebes*, we must return to the first line of the play, spoken by Eteocles: *Citizens of Cadmus, the right words must be said* (Κάδμου πολῖται, χρὴ λέγειν τὰ καίρια). This opening line has left its mark on commentaries on the confrontation between Eteocles and the Chorus, as if we should believe in the infallibility of the Theban prince, a young man ready to defend the city with a solid and well-thought-out strategy, as opposed to a Chorus that because it is female and almost childish, can only incite panic and bring misfortune on the city. Although not the first to do so, it was Cameron who most forcefully underlined the importance in this play of the correct way to supplicate, and of the care that should be taken to avoid saying something that might have dire consequences:

> *Any suggestion of misfortune made to the gods, even if it is a prayer to ward off that misfortune, may have terrible consequences. An innocent statement may contain a hidden meaning which will have an adverse effect, and any careless statement must be followed by an apotropaic formula such as ὃ μὴ γένοιτο,* v. 5[3].

Eteocles' task, we are told, is not only to use the right language himself, but also to ensure that others do the same.

Commentaries on this confrontation between Eteocles and the Chorus have sometimes been marred by overly structuralist readings that have forced the text to reflect various oppositions, especially the one that pits the masculine against the feminine. Thus, in her essay on *eusebeia* (piety), Louise Bruit Zaidman's starting point for her reading of this play was that "*Les Sept contre Thèbes* peut servir d'observatoire sur le partage entre pieté masculine et pieté féminine, en étroite relation avec le partage des rôles masculin et féminin dans la cité"[4]. Immediately afterwards, in a summary of the action, she says "À peine est-il sorti (*sc*. Eteocles) que les femmes qui constituent le choeur envahissent l'*orchestra*, dans une première antithèse aux propos mâles et guerriers d'Étéocle"[5]. However, as we shall see, this very first observation already exhibits a degree of prejudice, since it is not at all certain that the Chorus "invades the scene" rather than entering it in a more or less orderly fashion.

It is also said that Eteocles' voice is the voice of the polis, and that it is no surprise that the ruler should reproach the Chorus for its terrified anticipation of the fall of the city and propose instead that it utter the *ololygmos* (ὀλολυγμός), the cry of victory that anticipates success. This statement does indeed contain a grain of truth, but should nevertheless be qualified, because if anyone is anticipating disaster, it is Eteocles himself when he invokes the Curse and Erinys on line 70 (ὦ Ζεῦ τε καὶ Γῆ καὶ πολισσοῦχοι θεοί, / Ἀρά τ' Ἐρινὺς πατρὸς ἡ μεγασθενής).

The interpretative framework that attempts to force all the information to fit this opposition of genders has exerted a very powerful influence, not

[3] Cameron (1970) 97.

[4] Bruit (2001) 118.

[5] Bruit (2001) 119.

only, of course, in Bruit's work[6]. Some recent scholarship still reflects the view that Eteocles' role in this matter of supplication to the gods is to guide the Chorus maidens away from their initial frenzied lamentation harmful to the city, and towards behaviour in which their words conform to correct practice. If at first the maidens emitted wild sobs (ἄγρια ποιγύγματα, 280), now, it is said, following Eteocles' intervention, they help the army by crying the ὀλολυγμός[7].

Linked to the masculine/feminine opposition is another that places Eteocles on the side of *euphemia* ("good words", words of good omen) and the Chorus on the side of *dysphemia* ("bad words", words of bad omen). It has been suggested that what concerns Eteocles is the way in which the Chorus addresses the gods (its "heteropraxy"), not what it believes (its "heterodoxy"), understood in the context of the religion of the Athenian polis in the fifth century BCE. An opposition is thus established between the civic religiosity of the hoplites, embodied in Eteocles and manifested in ritual acts of sacrifice and prayer that are described in terms of reciprocity (*euche* - εὐχή), and the religiosity of the Chorus, based on an attitude of supplication (*hiketeia* - ἱκετεία), wailing lament and supplicatory prayers (*lite* - λιτή), which Eteocles considers detrimental and ineffective[8]. This is the thesis of Giordano-Zecharya, who opposes *euche* (εὐχή) and *lite* (λιτή) in terms that in my opinion are debatable[9].

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[6] This approach is illustrated in statements such as the following, by Froma Zeitlin, and it is perhaps time it ceased to be dogma: ZEITLIN (1990) 68-69, "From the outset, it is essential to understand that in Greek theatre, as in fact in Shakespearean theatre, the self that is really at stake is to be identified with the male, while the woman is assigned the role of the radical other (...) Women as individuals or Chorus may give their names as titles to plays; female characters may occupy center stage and leave a more indelible emotional impression on their spectators than do their male counterparts (as does Antigone, for example, over Kreon). But functionally, women are never an end in themselves, and nothing changes for them once they have lived out their drama onstage. Rather, they play the role of catalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers and sometimes helpers or saviors for the male characters".

[7] See GIORDANO-ZECHARYA (2006), (2011).

[8] GIORDANO-ZECHARYA (2006) 55.

[9] GIORDANO-ZECHARYA (2006) 63-64, "The difference between λιτή and other forms of εὐχή seems to lie not in the invocation to the gods, or in the requests, but in the lack of

To what extent is *euche* (εὐχή) definitively associated with reciprocity? In line with Rudhardt's now classic study, we can accept that *euche* (εὐχή) involves an invocation and a petition and does not usually, therefore, imply a passive attitude on the part of the supplicant but rather the contrary. Indeed, Rudhardt considers line 266 of *Seven against Thebes*, ξυμμάχους εἶναι θεούς, *may the gods become allies*[10], spoken by Eteocles, to be an example of the "quintessence" of *euche*. We might therefore accept it as perfectly appropriate to use the term εὐχή to refer to Eteolces' act. However, is it justified to oppose, as Giordano-Zecahrya does, this *euche* (εὐχή) which she calls simply "prayer" (εὐχή) and what she terms "supplicatory prayer" (λιτή), associating them with male and female piety, respectively?

In fact, reciprocity is an obvious component in supplications of the type *da ut dem*, *da quia dedisti* and *da quia dedi*, especially the latter, which Puellyn also calls "εἴ ποτε prayer". Well, a prayer of the *da quia dedi* type is implicit in the following words spoken by the Chorus: φιλοθύτων δέ τοι πόλεος ὀργίων / μνήστορες ἔστέ μοι (*do not forget the city's sacrificial rites*)[11]. This type of prayer is usually uttered by those who are not in a position to offer a sacrifice, which rarely goes unheeded and is particularly effective[12]. Neither the association of *lite* with the feminine sphere, nor the absence of reciprocity in feminine piety, is therefore demonstrated.

Pulleyn sees no great difference in the use of εὔχομαι, ἀράομαι or λίσσομαι. These may sometimes function as equivalent terms, but that does not mean the ancient Greeks had no clear conception of what a supplication was, nor that it is impossible to attempt to reach a more precise definition of ἀρά and λιτή as opposed to the generic εὐχή; what we can say is that they are all prayers and have no place in the framework of a masculine / feminine opposition[13].

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reciprocity, which we have defined above in the Homeric form of prayer as the argument, and in being uttered with a lamenting tone".

[10] RUDHARDT (1992) 187-202 on the vocabulary of supplication.

[11] VV. 180-181. PULLEYN (1997) 34.

[12] PULLEYN (1997) 29.

[13] PULLEYN (1997) 6-7.

(III) So far, I have argued that we should not place too much faith in Eteocles' control of the situation, and also that rather than being useful tools for analysis, the rigid, schematic interpretations that draw sharp oppositions between the masculine and the feminine[14] — which have largely prevailed in recent decades — have occasionally become a source of over-simplification and misunderstanding. The Chorus in *Seven against Thebes* has been a clear victim of this.

Of course, it is not only rigidly understood structuralism in its male/female oppositions that has conditioned the interpretation of the role of the Chorus in this play. There is also the prejudice concerning a duality in the character of Eteocles, whereby he goes from being an undaunted strategist and defender of the city to an "accursed" son of Oedipus willing to spill his brother's blood[15]. Meanwhile, in counterpoise to this duality, the Chorus in this first part of the play has been seen as utterly lacking in judgement, a failing which would be quite unexpected in a tragic chorus. Furthermore, later on, when the Chorus must confront Eteocles and sensibly advises him not to fight against his brother, we find that Wilamowitz proposed that just at this precise moment, the maidens have been replaced by a chorus of wise elders[16].

Let us review the role of the Chorus. To begin at the beginning, it is not at all clear that the maidens enter the scene running in disorderly fashion, albeit the dochmiac metre employed implies great agitation, that is true. Although Oliver Taplin is frequently cited in this respect, he does not actually claim that the maidens enter the stage in this manner, but rather that such an entrance would create a fitting contrast to Eteocles' stance. However, the text provides no firm basis for a definitive conclusion. Taplin opposes "Eteocles' calm exit" with "the wild flight of the women", but without any actual

[14] And others that have been constructed around it, such as Greek / barbarian, rational / irrational, etc.

[15] I refer to Míriam Librán Moreno's robust analysis of this matter and I concur with her proposal concerning the unity of the character, affected by a madness induced by well-localised external agents: *Ate* (Obfuscation, or Blindness), Erinys and *Ara* (Curse), LIBRÁN MORENO (2005) 162-196. See also WINNINGTON-INGRAM (1977) for details of this dispute over the unity or otherwise of the character of Eteocles.

[16] LIBRÁN MORENO (2005) 245.

evidence, only as a possibility, as an "attractive hypothesis". In fact, his proposal is a combination of hypotheses: we can imagine, he says, that in most of the plays the Chorus enters the stage in an orderly fashion, and so, he speculates, we can also imagine that if here (and in *Eumenides*), the Chorus made its entrance in a disorderly manner, it would function as a striking dramatic device[17]. Not even the expression πρόδρομος ἦλθον, on line 211, which the Chorus uses when responding to Eteocles, proves that they rushed in; rather, it could be translated as "I have come as the advance party, in the vanguard", an idea that fits perfectly with their lines in the *parodos*, when they invoke the gods as allies, addressing the statues one by one and thus also taking charge of the strategy for defending the city[18] (see *infra*).

As for the advice that the Theban prince gives the Chorus, some have insisted that Eteocles urges the maidens to cease their fearful behaviour, embracing the statues and contemplating defeat, and instead to anticipate victory by shrieking the *ololygmos* (ὀλολυγμός), an onomatopoeic word referring to a kind of shout of triumph or jubilation, "some kind of emotional counterpoint to the act of shedding blood"[19], very much — but not exclusively — associated with the ritual sphere. In this case, what we can say is that it is a sound associated exclusively with women[20].

While it is true that Eteocles enjoins the Chorus to accompany the sacrifices made by men with this victorious and propitiatory shout of jubilation, the probable irony behind the Chorus's reference to this same *ololygmos* at the end of the play, when the maidens learn of the city's salvation and the death of the two brothers, has rarely been noted:

> *In clear reference to Eteocles' wrong and misguided attitude towards the gods, and with slight irony, they ask if they should rejoice, and intone now their song of victory, the ololygmos (πότερον χαίρω κἀπολολύξω, 825), as Eteocles had summoned them to do before (267). In light of the survival of the city, the cry could signify the victory, but looking at the extinction of the royal family the ololygmos*

[17] TAPLIN (1977) 141-2.

[18] In line 80, the Chorus itself describes the enemy cavalry's approach at a gallop as πρόδρομος and this does not imply disorder (Míriam Librán, *privatim*).

[19] PULLEYN (1997) 178.

[20] PULLEYN (1997) 179. In contrast to the ὀλολύζω of women, there is the ἀλαλάζω of men.

> *turns out to be the wailing cry that accompanies and overshadows the tragic 'sacrifice' of the brothers*[21].

In view of the results, it is not at all clear that Eteocles' religious practice is the correct one:

> *The maidens represent the traditional worldview that the power of gods stands above that of men. The conflict is not between different modes of prayer and ritual attitudes towards the gods, between euphemic and dysphemic litai, that is, one euchai positive, normative and civic, the other negative, marginal and threatening (...) I believe instead that Eteocles' use of ritual tends to pervert the civic religion by subordinating the gods to the polis, whereas the ritual practice of the women not only undermines the civil discourse, but also affirms the ties of the polis with the cosmos, and strengthens the traditional religiosity that aims at genuine protection by the gods. Women enjoy a certain independence in ritual affairs. In the extreme situation of danger the reaction of the female Chorus is not only problematic, but also to some extent defendable and natural. They completely trust in the true polis gods to become their saviours and protectors*[22].

As for the Chorus' invocation of the *Litai*, the opposition that Giordano-Zecahrya establishes between the prayer *euche* (εὐχή) and the supplicatory prayer *lite* (λιτή) — masculine and feminine, respectively — seems to me unjustified, whereas Benveniste's proposal regarding the meaning of λιτή[23], which has nothing to do with the sex of the speaker, is inspired but as far as I know has been ignored by everyone who has commented on this text except Stefano Amendola.

The etymology of *lite* is unclear, but Benveniste explains that we can only compare λιτή, the root of the denominative *lissomai*, "to supplicate", with the Latin *litare*. The problem is that *litare* does not exactly mean "to supplicate", but rather "to obtain a favourable omen" after a sacrifice or "to present a favourable omen" when speaking of the victim offered. From this, the meaning is amplified in the sense of "to propitiate a deity, to obtain from it what is desired, to placate it". The Romans were aware of the relationship between these terms (Festus 103, 13), but modern opinion is not unanimous.

[21] BIERL (2018) 41. On the ritual cries ὀλολυγμός and ὀλολυγή, see RUDHARDT (1992) 178-180. Herodotus places the origin of this ritual cry in Libya, 4.189.3.

[22] BIERL (2018) 30.

[23] BENVENISTE (1969) vol. 2, 247-250.

Benveniste's view is that the Latin *litare* (denominative of **lita*) is taken from the Greek λιτή and that it is necessary to reconsider "accepted translations" in order to clarify the meaning of *lissomai*, of which "to supplicate" is a simplified version. To this end, he draws on a passage from the *Iliad* in which Phoenix invokes the *Litai* in his attempt to convince Achilles:

> *Then, Achilleus, beat down your great anger. It is not*
> *yours to have a pitiless heart. The very immortals*
> *can be moved; their virtue and honour and strength are greater than ours are,*
> *and yet with sacrifices and offerings for endearment,*
> *with libations and with savour men turn back even the immortals*
> *in supplication (λισσόμενοι), when any man does wrong and transgresses.*
> *For there are also the spirits of Prayer (λιταί), the daughters of great Zeus,*
> *and they are lame of their feet, and wrinkled, and cast their eyes sidelong,*
> *who toil on their way left far behind by the spirit of Ruin (ἄτη):*
> *but she, Ruin, is strong and sound on her feet, and therefore*
> *far outruns all Prayers, and wins into every country*
> *to force men astray; and the Prayers follow as healers after her.*
> *If a man venerates these daughters of Zeus as they draw near,*
> *such a man they bring great advantage, and hear his entreaty;*
> *but if a man shall deny them, and stubbornly with a harsh word*
> *refuse, they go to Zeus, son of Kronos, in supplication*
> *that Ruin may overtake this man, that he be hurt, and punished.*[24]

Therefore, says Benveniste, individuals supplicate (λισσόμενοι) the gods when they have committed a transgression or error, and this supplication (λιτή) is aimed at obtaining forgiveness, at atoning for the offence committed against the gods[25]. This enables us to bridge the gap between the Latin *litare* and the Greek *lissomai*. The intervening Latin form, **lita*, would mean "prière pour offrir réparation à un dieu qu'on a offensé", as would the Greek λιτή[26].

As I noted above, Amendola has been the exception in taking Benveniste's argument into account, and he suggests that the λιταί, the Prayers, daughters of Zeus responsible for repairing an earlier transgression, could be

[24] *Il*. 9. 496-512. Translation by LATTIMORE (1951).

[25] There are also examples in the *Iliad* where it is a man, not a god, who is wronged.

[26] Benveniste draws attention to the fact that translations often deprive ancient terms of their specific meaning.

used by the maidens of the Chorus to protect Thebes from the curse of Oedipus evoked by Eteocles, rectifying the latter's preceding εὐχή in which he had invoked not only Zeus, Gaia and the city gods, but also the paternal Erinys and the Curse that hangs over Oedipus' offspring (ὦ Ζεῦ τε καὶ Γῆ καὶ πολισσοῦχοι θεοί / Ἀρά τ' Ἐρινὺς πατρὸς ἡ μεγασθενής, 69-70)[27].

This importance of the *Litai* invoked by the Chorus is not incompatible with the idea that Eteocles' mention of the Erinys is not as deranged as it might at first appear: Eteocles does not know at the time that the paternal curse means he will die at the hands of his brother Polynices[28]. However inappropriate its mention in the prayer seems, it is this reference to the curse launched by Oedipus — whatever form it may take — that explains the Chorus' mention of the *Litai*.

Thus, while it is true that there are religious differences between Eteocles and the Chorus with respect both to the type of prayer that should be employed and the specific practice that should be adopted in relation to the gods, this difference is not established in terms of correct/incorrect or effective/ineffective because the Chorus's supplication to the gods and the way in which the maidens "animate" the statues of the gods is both appropriate and effective. Again, in Bierl's words:

> *As a ritual group the Chorus adhere to traditional religion and popular piety. Of course, as a female character, due to their extreme fear and distress, they perform typically female rites and practices. In dancing and singing the goos, in lamenting and intimately clinging to the statues that surround the inner space of Thebes, they make the gods come alive, to actively help defend the walls and save the city.* [29]

[27] AMENDOLA (2006) 55.

[28] TORRANCE (2007) 52 states that "To pray to a spirit whose function is to destroy him is a remarkably inappropriate action on Eteocles' part". This would only be the true if Aeschylus had assumed that not only the audience but also each of the characters in his play knew in advance and in detail all that would happen on stage, which was palpably not the case given the wide scope for innovation that the tragedians enjoyed. See LIBRÁN MORENO (2005) 219-222, "Oedipus' son mistakenly believes that the Curse can help him defend Thebes".

[29] BIERL (2018) 35. On the religious attitude towards statues of the gods, see BREMMER (2013).

(IV) In connection with this last quotation, I would like to devote the final part of this paper to the statues of the gods occupying the stage of *Seven against Thebes*. Besides the cast of characters, the first pages of any edition or translation of this play tell us that the stage represents Cadmea, the citadel of Thebes, and that the statues of its gods are standing there. It is important to consider these statues and their position, as well as the Chorus's behaviour towards them, in order to understand the play and the specific issue of the Chorus's religiosity.

The Chorus maidens embrace the statues, "animating" them so that they become *symmachoi* and defenders of the city. We must remember that there were no clear boundaries between the gods and their images, but rather a striking fluidity. In a paper entitled "The Agency of Statues"[30], Jan Bremmer noted that the first mention of a statue in Western literature is found in book 6 of the *Iliad*, when Hector asks Hecuba to court Athena's favour by offering her a peplos and twelve heifers. Hecuba obeys him and goes to the temple of the goddess (295-310). This is a fundamental passage for understanding how the statues of the gods were conceived:

> *She went on her way, and a throng of noble women hastened about her.*
> *When these had come to Athene's temple on the peak of the citadel,*
> *Theano of the fair cheeks opened the door for them, daughter*
> *of Kisseus, and wife of Antenor, breaker of horses,*
> *she whom the Trojans had established to be Athene's priestess.*
> *With a wailing cry all lifted up their hands to Athene,*
> *and Theano of the fair cheeks taking up the robe laid it*
> *along the knees of Athene the lovely haired, and praying*
> *she supplicated the daughter of powerful Zeus: "O lady,*
> *Athene, our city's defender, shining among goddesses:*
> *break the spear of Diomedes, and grant that the man be*
> *hurled on his face in front of the Skaian gates; so may we*
> *instantly dedicate within your shrine twelve heifers,*
> *yearlings, never broken, if only you will have pity*
> *on the town of Troy, and the Trojan wives, and their innocent children."*
> *She spoke in prayer, but Pallas Athene turned her head (ἀνένευε) from her.*[31]

[30] Originally published in 2013, see now BREMMER (2019) 121-122.

[31] Translation by LATTIMORE (1951).

Bremmer recalls that the scholiasts later said that attributing this gesture to a statue was ridiculous. This confusion between a statue and the deity it represents is exemplified in the well-known scene of Cassandra's rape by Ajax. In one of the most famous depictions of Athena, from the sixth century BCE, Cassandra embraces the statue of the goddess, which appears to be directly confronting Ajax as if it were alive, indistinguishable to the untrained eye from the real goddess[32]. In this scene from the *Ilioupersis*, which is widely depicted in literature and art, Athena is only clearly represented as a statue from the end of the sixth century BCE onwards[33].

As a result of this "confusion", accounts of the statues' "agency" must have seemed less strange at first than they subsequently did once the gods were clearly distinguished from their images: "It is therefore, perhaps, not surprising that we find such agency more mentioned from the fifth century onwards"[34].

In this context, Stefano Amendola's comparison of the defence that Eteocles assigns to the city (seven warriors against seven attackers) and that chosen by the Chorus (seven divinities) is extremely eloquent. The women call themselves a *hikesios lokhos*, a "supplicatory company" (ἱκέσιος λόχος, 110), an expression in which the first term refers to their status as supplicants (ἱκετής) and the second (λόχος) is a military term; that is, they liken themselves to a militia. The seven Argive captains and their troops are opposed by the λόχος of maidens who, embracing the statues, address each of the seven deities they represent[35]. The Chorus maidens respond to the question of who will save them, who will save the city (92-94) by addressing the deities (Athena, Poseidon, Ares, Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis and Hera[36]).

[32] Attic amphora with black figures, sixth century BCE. Würzburg Museum, L249.

[33] BREMMER (2019) 105.

[34] BREMMER (2019) 106-107.

[35] AMENDOLA (2006) 55-56.

[36] Amendola understands Onca to be a different deity to Athena and does not mention Hera. TORRANCE (2007): 39 also notes the importance of these statues, and his list includes Zeus instead of Hera: "The statues of the gods are significant stage properties in *Seven*, and although they do not become the focus for attention until the Chorus supplicate them in the *parodos*, it should not be forgotten that they are constant presences throughout, casting a watchful eye over the action. The gods appealed to through formal supplication

Amendola also notes that much emphasis has been placed on elements in the *parodos* apparently indicating irrationality and confusion, whereas other aspects that endow the Chorus's intervention with unity, such as metre, have received little attention[37].

If the Chorus maidens entered the stage invoking the gods and embracing the statues standing there, it is easier to imagine that they did so in an orderly fashion rather than running frantically around the stage. This is suggested by the very order of the invocations: Athena, Poseidon, Ares, Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis, Hera / Artemis, Apollo, Aphrodite, Athena-Onca. Not only do the maidens invoke the deities in an orderly fashion, as one would expect and as can be seen if one follows Aeschylus' text, but they do so according to a pattern, invoking Athena and Poseidon, united in Athenian myth; Ares and Aphrodite, parents of Harmonia; and Apollo and Artemis, the twin children of Leto[38]. Thus, the meaning of the expression I mentioned above, πρόδρομος ἦλθον (211), "I have come as the advance party, in the vanguard", becomes clear: the Chorus is effectively trying to take the lead in the city's defence by making the gods its allies.

(V) The reading which opposes Eteocles and the Chorus in terms of male versus female religiosity, and above all, of male rationality versus female irrationality, is gradually ceasing to be *communis opinio*. When Eteocles tries to silence the Chorus by dismissing their words as mere hysterical shouting (αὔειν and λακάζειν) and rhetorically asking them if they think that this is the best way to save the city and instil courage in the popu-

in the *parodos* and, we must presume, represented among the statues are: Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, Ares, Aphrodite, Apollo, and Artemis. At each god's image the Chorus prostrate themselves and embrace the statue (92-150). (...) Hera is invoked in this first of two strophic pairs (at 152), along with other deities already mentioned, but it is tempting to suppose that, given the significance of the number seven in this play there were seven statues on display, representing each of the seven gods who receive a physical appeal".

[37] AMENDOLA (2006) 52, "La stessa analisi metrica conferma questo schema: se il ritmo docmiaco conferisce un timbro dolente e patetico alle parti dove il coro descrive suoni e immagini della battaglia, le invocazioni alle divinità presentano una soluzione metrica più varia. La parodo, quindi, pur nella sua lunga e complessa articolazione, non è priva di organicità".

[38] HUTCHINSON (1985) ad. loc.

lation (181-186), we can indeed respond that yes it is, that the development of the play shows that the Chorus's behaviour is more fitting than that of Eteocles.

It is also interesting to link the Chorus's attitude in that moment with the one it exhibits at the end of the second episode, when Eteocles, on learning that his brother Polynices is about to attack the seventh gate, decides to fight him himself. I said earlier that the dualistic view of Eteocles as a sensible strategist at the beginning of the play but an "accursed" son of Oedipus by the end, had determined the interpretation of the Chorus, which, opposed to the ruler of Thebes, was hysterical and foolish at the beginning and strangely rational by the end. We can now, however, affirm the unity of Eteocles and also that of the Chorus, right at the beginning and right at the end: it is the maidens in the Chorus who warn Eteocles of the threat of *miasma* and of the fall of the house of Labdacus if he fights his brother, and who beseech him not to let himself be carried away by the *daimon* (677-719)[39]. With their warnings, the maidens in the Chorus are behaving more wisely, temperately and pragmatically than Eteocles, as well as being more respectful of social and religious taboos.

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[39] See ROISMAN (2004) 97, "The play links the fear and apprehension that had led the Chorus to their earlier panicked lamentations with their apprehension of the consequences of Eteocles fighting his brother (...) In the end, it is not the Chorus's frank expression of fear that leads to disaster, as Eteocles had predicted, but his own arrogant denial of his fear and his headlong, unthinking rush into combat with his own brother".

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Resumo: O Coro em *Os sete contra Tebas* é composto por donzelas que têm a importante tarefa de suplicar aos deuses no momento crucial antes da batalha e devem fazê-lo corretamente para que sua súplica seja eficaz. Este é um dos temas centrais da peça de Ésquilo: qual é a maneira correta de suplicar? Aqui, sugiro que o comportamento das donzelas do Coro é racional e eficaz, e que um exame das estátuas dos deuses que ocupam o palco e a maneira como o Coro as invoca é altamente esclarecedor no que diz respeito à elucidação da religiosidade das donzelas.

Palavras-chave: Ésquilo; súplica; ritual.

Resumen: El coro en *Los Siete contra Tebas* está formado por doncellas que tienen la importante tarea de implorar a los dioses en el momento crucial antes de la batalla y deben hacerlo correctamente para que su súplica sea eficaz. Este es uno de los temas centrales de la obra de Esquilo: ¿cuál es la forma correcta de suplicar? Aquí, sugiero que el comportamiento de las doncellas del Coro es a la vez racional y eficaz, y que un examen de las estatuas de los dioses que ocupan el escenario y de la manera cómo el Coro las invoca resulta muy esclarecedor para dilucidar la religiosidad de las doncellas.

Palabras clave: Esquilo; plegaria; ritual.

Résumé : Le chœur dans *Les Sept contre Thèbes* est composé de jeunes filles qui ont la tâche importante de plaider auprès des dieux au moment crucial qui précède la bataille, ce qu'elles doivent faire correctement pour que leurs suppliques soient efficaces. C'est l'un des thèmes centraux de la pièce d'Eschyle : quelle est la manière correcte de supplier ? Je suggère ici que le comportement des jeunes filles du Choeur est rationnel et efficace, et qu'un examen des statues des dieux qui occupent la scène, ainsi que de la manière dont le Choeur les invoque, met en lumière l'élucidation de la religiosité des jeunes filles.

Mots-clés : Eschyle, prière ; rituel.