The first (and only surviving) play of the Danaid tetralogy. Danaos has led his 50 daughters from Egypt to Argos, to escape marriage with their cousins, the 50 sons of Aigyptos. He persuades the king, Pelasgos, to grant them asylum, even though this means war with Aigyptos. An attempt to repatriate the girls forcibly is thwarted, and they are given sanctuary in Argos.

THE SUPPLIANTS
By Aeschylus

Translated by Andrew Wilson
If tragedy can be viewed as a kind of recurrent masculine initiation, for adults, as well as for the young, and if drama, more broadly, is designed as an education for its citizens in the democratic city, ... the self that is really at stake is to be identified with the male, while the woman is assigned to the role of the radical other... Drama tests masculine values only to find these alone are inadequate to the complexity of the new situation.

Froma Zeitlin in Nothing to do with Dionysus? 63-96
THE DANAID TETRALOGY

I

THE SUPPLIANTS

[THE ASYLUM SEEKERS]

This tantalising papyrus fragment (POxy 2256), added to what was previously known, gives a clue to the date of the first production – if line 1 refers to the archon Archidemides, it would be 463 BC, four years before Aeschylus’ Oresteia tetralogy (of which the satyr play is lost). Like the Oresteia, the Danaid tetralogy won first prize (line 2), beating Sophocles into second place (line 4).

The names of two of the four plays are given (line 3) : the third play (The Danaids) and the fourth, the satyr play Amymone. The Suppliants and The Egyptians are assumed to be the first two plays – but scholars disagree about which actually came first.

My translation uses the text of Alan H Sommerstein’s edition (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics). According to CUP publicity:

“A long-neglected Greek tragedy about refugees, gender, race, war and political deception.”

I have re-imagined the final three plays, using clues in the Suppliants, in surviving fragments and in references in other ancient literature.

Suppliants: page 2
Characters

CHORUS of the DAUGHTERS OF DANAOS
DANAOS
PELASGOS, King of Argos
CHORUS of EGYPTIANS
HERALD
CHORUS of ARGIVE CITIZENS

Protagonist: Danaos
Deuteragonist: Pelasgos, Herald

In the translation, the anapaestic, choral and lyric passages attempt to reproduce Aeschylus’ rhythms as far as possible in English.
Scene: The play is set not far from the sea-coast, somewhere near the city of Argos, in the land of Pelasgia (later Hellas). There is a low wooded mound upstage, a sanctuary, which displays around a dozen tall statues, representing the Twelve Olympian gods, and a prominent altar. There are two points of entry, one leading to the sea, the other to the city.

The chorus, the 50 daughters of Danaos (Danaids) enter from the shore, and climb up onto the mound. They are quite exotic in appearance – some dark faces, some paler, with veils and “un-Greek” dress. They carry the traditional emblems (recognised by Greeks) of suppliants – olive branches wound with wool.

Their father, Danaos, is probably already on the mound to guide them – though he doesn’t say anything for quite a while!

[The anapaestic, choral and lyric passages attempt to mimic Aeschylus’ rhythms as fas as possible in English.]

PARODOS

Chorus [entering from the direction of the sea]

Zeus who defends all refugees look on us

And our journey by boat with favour! Be kind!

We set out from the sand-blown mouths of the Nile’s Delta. We fled from our homeland,

And abandoned our lovely country. We were not

Guilty of crime! We have not killed anyone!

No popular vote condemned us!

We ran of our own free will to avoid

Being forced into marriage with Aegyptus’s sons.

It was wrong! And illegal! We loathed the idea.

Our dear father Danaos urged us on;

He moved the pieces, the rebel in chief!

He thought the best of our options

Would be to get on a ship and escape,

Sailing straight to Argos, the place where

Once our ancestors lived, descendants of Zeus

When with his touch he healed her, she who was transformed

Into a cow and tormented by gadflies.

There is no land, then, better than this one

We could have landed on,

Suppliants: page 4
Holding in our hands these symbols of hope
For asylum: wool-covered branches.
Some city! Some land! Such sparkling streams!
All you gods up above, gods of the earth, who
Are protecting those precious gravestones,
And you who rescued us, Zeus, most of all,
As a guard who champions men who are just,
Please, welcome us, us refugees, us girls,
Warmly and gently. But when the male mob,
Violent, swarming, Aegyptus’s sons,
Tries to set foot here down in the sand-dunes,
Drive them back to the sea, and their warship.
Let them meet whirlwinds, wintery storms, and with
Loud thunder and lightning crashing around,
Gales blowing, fierce rain stinging; and may they die
In the friendless waste of the ocean,
Better they die before they can take us!
We’re cousins; it’s breaking the law, if they
Climb in our beds when we’ve refused them.

First half chorus (strophe 1)

Now it’s my turn to invoke
Our own champion back home. The heifer’s calf who Zeus was father to and
Planned his conception. Then Io, his mother
Was in the form of a cow who was grazing out there in the flowery meadow.
Zeus caressed her. When later she gave birth,
Second half chorus (antistrophe 1)

The baby was called “Epaphus”

It means “Child of a Touch”. In the place where she suffered, I remind

You of her pain. I shall show to you shortly

Incontrovertible evidence all this is true, though not what you expected.

Time will tell, and the truth will all come out.

First half chorus (strophe 2)

If there is some person nearby knows about birds,

Some local who’s hearing my lament,

Would he think that my weeping was the sad nightingale’s song?

Tereus’s bride’s pitiful cries,

Her terror - stricken by the hawk.

Second half chorus (Antistrophe 2)

She had been forced out of her land, the rivers she knew,

Lamenting at what her life had become.

Telling all of his death, death of her son, son that she killed,

How he had died, died by her hand

His mother’s hand, no mother she.

First half chorus (Strophe 3)
Just like the nightingale, I am in love with lamenting - in Greek style -
My soft cheeks – they are brown, tanned by Egyptian sunshine -
I scratch them: but weeping feels strange.
My fear is opening like a flower,
Terror blooms. Can I find someone who cares?
Friend to an exile who ran off
From a land where danger hides?

**Second half chorus (Antistrophe 3)**

Listen you gods who preside over sexual relations:
Cool their blood! May you quench their adolescent passion!
They'll break all the rules to have their way,
Unless you save the marriage laws.
It’s like war. If you need somewhere to hide,
There is a place where you’re safe:
An altar which the gods protect.

**First half chorus (strophe 4)**

Suppliants: page 7
My true wish is that Zeus shall make all
Well. But the wishes of Zeus
Are not easy to fathom
His mind’s paths are obscure,
They’re invisible or
Else are dark, and to find’s not easy.  

Second half chorus (antistrophe 4)
If Zeus does give a nod, then it’s cer-
tain that his will shall be done;
There’s no chance of its failing.
Everywhere does it blaze
Through the blackness, still too
Dark for mortals to see it plainly.  

First half chorus (strophe 5)

The hopes all mortals have
Are high like towers; Zeus, though, will smash them down.
He doesn’t need to use his great strength:
All the gods do is without sweat.
God merely sits enthroned on high
No need to budge from where he is:
All that he wants he just does!

Second half chorus (antistrophe 5)
Does god see arrogance,
The kind that makes human youth turn to lust? 105
Inflaming their urge to wed us?
Stubbornly they won’t accept “no”.
Madly persistent, on they charge
Goaded by drives they can’t escape.
Not knowing ruin’s waiting.

First half chorus (strophe 6)

This dirge in my pain and my grief is the one song I sing
It can be shrill or sound broken-up with tears,
Aiyee, aiyee! Such sounds are fit for funerals. 115
Though I’m alive, I praise death.

Refrain
Back me up, please, Peloponnesian hills!
You understand my strange language well,
How I would tear my veil, ripping it to tiny shreds,
Finest Phoenician linen.

Second half chorus (antistrophe 6)
When you’re secure, no threat of death, of course
You give the gods respect, trust them, yes,
But when a tidal wave looms, and you don’t know what to do, 125
Screaming is all you can do.
Refrain

Back me up, please, Peloponnesian hills!
You understand my strange language well,
How I would tear my veil, ripping it to tiny shreds,
Finest Phoenician linen.

First half chorus (strophe 7)

With oars, a hull that’s watertight,
A properly-built ship that’s seaworthy
Has brought me safely here – there were
No storms. Thanks! So far, so good.
But may our Father, who
sees all, give us today,
Please, a happy ending.

Refrain

Io’s brood prays to its holy mother:
Keep us [they scream]
Unwedded, unbedded by brutal men.

Second half chorus (antistrophe 7)

Then may a willing Artemis,
As I trust she will, watch over me,
Unshakeable, her face all stern,
At full power, the virgin who
Looks after virgins; who
Detests the evil men who
Hunt us down: protect us!

Refrain

Io’s brood prays to its holy mother:
Keep us [they scream]
Unwedded, unbedded by brutal men.

First half chorus (strophe 8)

But... if not...the black flowers,
Nation darkened by the sun,
We’ll go and ask for asylum somewhere else,
To Earthbound Zeus who welcomes all,
God of those whose rest is won:
Hang ourselves and greet death.
No support comes from gods who rule the sky.

Mesode
O Zeus! Goddess ... Fury,
Huntress, hounding Io!
I know the hate
Of the wife who gets her own way.
There’s a wind blowing, and a storm is coming.

Second half chorus (antistrophe 8)

Zeus then will deserve blame,
Rightly be held culpable,
For disrespecting the heifer’s child, whom he,
He himself was father to.
Now he turns his head, and won’t
Look at us, ignores our prayers.
Zeus, we beg you to listen when we call.

Danaos emerges from among his daughters on top of the mound

Danaos
You must be wise, my daughters. You got here
Thanks to that wise old captain, your papa!
I’ve thought how I can keep you safe on land,
So please take careful note of all I say...

He interrupts himself
I see some dust, an army’s tell-tale sign;
I hear the noise, the clattering wheels of carts.
A horde I see, equipped with shields and spears,
And cavalry, and chariots of war.
Perhaps the king has found we’re here through spies
And now has come in force to check us out.
Whether his army comes in peace, or if
It’s hostile, angry, primed to kill, my girls,
It’s better if you sit down on this mound,
Protected by the Olympian gods. Altars
Are stronger than a fort: a solid shield.
Quick as you can, your branches wrapped with wool,
The asylum symbols, guaranteed by Zeus,
Hold them correctly in your left hands, and
Politely, tearfully, appealingly,
Address these strangers like good immigrants:
It’s true you’re exiles, but you’ve shed no blood.
But when you speak, first, sound a little shy,
Don’t be too forward, modesty is best,
But make eye contact with a steady gaze.
Speak when you’re spoken to but have your say.
These people will be quick to take offence.
Don’t answer back. You’re refugees, in need.
Your lower status means you watch your tongue.

Chorus
No need to patronise; we understand.
Be sure I’ll bear your thoughtful words in mind.
May Zeus, our nation’s ancestor, look to us!

Danaos
Look to, indeed, with his benevolent eye.

Chorus
If he is willing, all will turn out well.

Danaos
Then no delay. And may our plan succeed.
Chorus
I’d like to take my seat beside you – here!

Danaos
<I’m pleased to have my daughters with me safe.>

Chorus
Pity our struggle, Zeus, don’t let us die!

Danaos
And call upon the eagle, Zeus’s bird.

Chorus
We call upon the Sun our saviour.

Danaos
Apollo, too, the god exiled from heaven.

Chorus
He’d sympathise with those who share his fate.

Danaos
Let’s hope he does, and stands with us, a friend.

Chorus
Which god remains for me to call upon?

Danaos
I know that trident is the symbol of a god ...

Chorus
He helped us get here: welcome us as well!

Danaos
This other one is Hermes - in Greek style.

Chorus
May he bring welcome news that we’re still free.

Danaos
These gods all share an altar: worship them.
Be like a flock of doves who perch secure,
Fearing the hawks, though they are birds as well
Who hate their kin, a disgrace to their breed.
Can it be holy, bird to prey on bird?
Can it be holy, if you force a bride
To wed against her will, and father’s will?
He won’t escape his punishment, that man
Who did this crime, not even after death,
In Hades’ realm. A Zeus is there, they say,
Who passes final judgment on mens’ sins.
Keep this in mind, and answer in this way:
So that our enterprise may meet success.

Danaos retires, disappearing again among his daughters. Pelasgos, king of Argos, enters, attended by local soldiers.

King
What country sends this foreign-looking swarm,
That I’m addressing? So un-Greek, flaunting
Their strange costumes and exotic head-dress?
No local girl, no Greek would dress this way.
I am amazed how you, unheralded,
Unsponsored, without guides, dared venture here
So fearlessly? Those branches, though, you have
With you, beside the statues of the gods,
Tell me you seek asylum, suppliants.
This indicates you may be Greek; until
Your voice confirms it, I would have to guess.

Chorus
Your thoughts about my outfit are correct.
But do I address a private citizen?
A priest with holy rod? The city’s king?

King
<I’ll answer you and tell you who I am,>
And in return, don’t be afraid to answer me.
I am Pelasgos, son of earth-born Palaikhthon,
King of this land; and ruled by me, its people

Suppliants: page 15
The Pelasgians – well-named – now cultivate
Our soil. And all the land through which the sacred
Strymon flows towards the setting sun, I own.
These lands all lie within my boundaries:
Perrhaibia, and, beyond, the Pindos range;
The Chaiones next door; the mountains of
Dodona. There the sea restricts my rule,
Thus far’s all mine. Here where we stand, the plain
Of Apia, long ago received its name
From Apis, son of Apollo the Healer,
Himself a healer, too. He crossed the gulf
From Naupaktos, to purify our land,
Rid it of monsters eating human flesh,
Things which the angry earth threw up, defiled,
Polluted by blood spilt in ancient times,
A swarm of serpents, hateful immigrants.
Apis excised the cancer with complete
Success, and set us free, and ever since
In Argos we all name him in our prayers. 260

You’ve heard now my credentials: it is time
For you to clearly state what race you are.
Be brief. We don’t like lengthy speeches here.

Chorus
Our story’s short and simple. We are proud
Argives by descent, offspring of the cow.
I shall show evidence to prove this true.

King
Your tale sounds most improbable to me.
How could a race like yours have Argive blood?
You look much more like Libyans; you don’t
Look anything at all like local girls. 280
Perhaps the Nile could breed a crop like yours?
I’ve heard there are in India nomads
Who outrun horses perched on camel-back,
Close neighbours to the Ethiopians;
And what of the Amazons, who live on meat,
And have no men? If you had bows, I’d say
That’s what you were. Enlighten me. Explain
Just how your ancestry makes you Argives?

Chorus
They say that Io once became priestess
Of Hera, in her temple here in Argos.

King
And so she did! That’s what most people say.

Chorus
And that Zeus fell in love with this young girl?

King
Indeed! Hera was unaware – at first.

Chorus
<But she was furious when she found out!>

King
What was the outcome of this royal row?

Chorus
Hera transformed the girl into a cow.

King
But Zeus still chased her – horns and all?

Chorus
He made himself a bull and mounted her.

King
And how did his temperamental wife react?

Chorus
She set a sharp-eyed guard to watch the cow.
What kind of cowherd can see everything?

Chorus
Argus, the earthborn. Hermes killed him, though. 300

King
Then what did Hera plan for the poor cow?

Chorus
She sent a cattle-herder who had wings!

King
A fly that never leaves the cows in peace?

Chorus
A gadfly, as it’s known along the Nile.

King
All that you say chimes with the tale I know. 310

Chorus
And then she reached Canopus, Memphis too.

King
Egypt! The fly, then, drove her far from here?

Chorus
There Zeus just touched her, and she bore a child.

King
Who was this calf the cow produced for Zeus?

Chorus
Epaphos, whose name means “child of a touch”.

King
<Epaphos had a child – and who was that?>

Chorus
Libya, who ruled a mighty continent.

King
And did this queen have children of her own?

Chorus
Belus, the father of my father here!

King
His name's significant, I'm sure. Tell me.

**Chorus**
Danaos. His brother has fifty sons!

**King**
What is his name? Don't keep it to yourself.

**Chorus**
Aigyptos. Now you know my pedigree,
Please now support our group as true Argives.

**King**
You do belong, it seems, to this country!
Since ancient times! But say, how could you bear
To leave your fatherland? What forced you to?

**Chorus**
Men's troubles come in many hues, good king,
If you look hard, no two are quite the same.
Who'd have imagined we would sail away
To Argos, to escape a marriage with
Our cousins, loathing them, afraid of rape?

**King**
What do you ask our patron gods -explain -
Clutching fresh branches wound with wool?

**Chorus**
Not to be slaves to Aegyptus's sons!

**King**
Because you hate them? Or it's somehow wrong?

**Chorus**
An owner's not a lover. Obviously!

**King**
But such a marriage strengthens families.

**Chorus**
Divorce is easy, though, when things get tough.
Well, anyway, what do you want of me?

**Chorus**
Don’t give in to Aegyptus’ sons’ demands.

**King**
Not easy. That way we would start a war.

**Chorus**
Justice is on your side. She’ll fight for you.

**King**
Yes, if she was with you from the start ...

**Chorus**
Respect this special place, these symbols, too.

**King**
You sitting there, protected, make me scared:
Zeus the protector’s wrath is to be feared.

**Chorus**

Palaikhthon’s son, o listen to me,
King of Pelasgians, and show sympathy,
See one who looks for asylum, on the run with no home,
Just as a heifer, who, over the sun-baked rocks,
Chased by a pack of wolves,
Bellows in pain and calls in hopes
The herdsman she trusts will hear her.

**King**
I see the crowd who shade themselves with fresh-cut
Branches, appealing to our patron gods.
This mission of our migrant citizens
Won’t pose a problem, if there’s no dispute
Within the city. That we do not need.

Chorus

I pray that Themis will, backed up by Zeus,
Accept we’re not a problem; we’re refugees.
You have the wisdom of a man who is more mature.
Could you not learn from us who are much younger, how
Gods always give rewards
Freely to someone pure who hears
Suppliants’ pleas in friendship?

King

You do not sit at my hearth, in my home:
The city’s worried, the community,
If it might be polluted, and so all
Must share in this decision. I myself
Can’t promise something they have not discussed.

Chorus

You are the city, and the people too!
There is no one to obstruct
The king! Since you control the sanctuary,
The only vote is yours; just nod your head;
Alone you hold the sceptre and the throne!
Power is all yours. Guard yourself against guilt.
King
The only guilt would fall upon my enemies.
I cannot help you without consequence.
It would be foolish to ignore your pleas;
To act or not to act, or wait and see?
I’m at a loss – but every choice brings fear.

Chorus
A god, on high’s looking at you. Beware!
He who’s protector of those
Who suffer wrong, and beg their friends for help,
But get no justice, as the law demands.
And Zeus, suppliants’ defence, detests
All who offend, hearing no excuses.

King
Though if Aegyptus’ sons have guardianship
Under **Egyptian** law over you, and they say
They are your next of kin, who’d want to go
Against them? Your defence must be conducted
According to **your** country’s laws, to prove
That they have no authority over you.

Chorus
Never may I be found under the thumb of men
Under the power of males! A marriage so vile -
I’d be prepared to fly into the starry sky
To flee from! Let gods be on your side, respect
Justice that comes from heaven.
**King**

Your case is not an easy one to judge.
Don’t make me judge it! As I said before
I am the king, but cannot act against
My people’s wish. If I did that, they’d say
“You wrecked your own city, for foreigners”.

**Chorus**

Zeus, god of kinship, looks closely at what goes on:
So that the scales are fairly balanced, but gives
Evil for evil, blessing to the innocent.
The weighing is fair, so there’s no reason why
You shouldn’t do the right thing!

**King**

Keeping us free from danger needs deep thought,
Just as before he plunges in the sea, a diver
Needs a sharp eye and head that’s clear – no wine!
To keep my city free from harm comes first,
Make sure things turn out well for me, and Argos,
And not let war rob us of what we love.
But I can’t betray the suppliants who sit
Before the gods, lest we invite the god
Of vengeance to our home, obnoxious guest,
From whom there’s no escape, not even death.
Surely it’s obvious that we need deep thought?

**Chorus**

Give it thought, thoroughly, so you become
Our sincere champion
Don’t betray the refugee,
Forced to leave, and impiously
Driven far away from home.

Don’t just watch, when they’re dragging me away,
From this place, home of gods,
You exercise full command!
Men can become arrogant:
Gods get angry as you know.

You cannot shut your eyes to suppliants
Being led off and torn from gods’ sanctuary,
Broken like horses are,
As I am grabbed – my veil, and my brocaded dress.

Know this. Your children and family
Whatever course you choose, will be inheriting
A debt that must be paid.
Consider this. With Zeus, doing what’s right wins out.

King
I’ve thought it through. But fear I’ve run aground.
It seems I can’t avoid a mighty war
With these – or those. It’s all nailed up, my ship,
Add tightening ropes, we are all set to launch.
Whichever way I sail, I come to grief.
Things that are stolen from your house can be
Replaced, much thanks to Zeus, who guards our wealth,
Sometimes with even more than we had lost;
And when you fire off words unthinkingly
Which cause offence, and tempers duly rise,
Kind words can cancel out the angry ones.
But to stop cousins shedding cousins’ blood,
That needs big offerings and sacrifices
To the gods, to forestall pain and misery.
So in this quarrel, I’ll not get involved,
I’d rather know nothing than be someone
Who’s schooled by evil. I don’t think they can,
But anyway, let’s hope things turn out well.

Chorus
You’ve heard my final argument. Hear this!

King
I’m listening, so tell me. I’m all ears!

Chorus
To keep our dress in place we’ve straps and belts.

King
Presumably, what women always wear.

Chorus
We know a brilliant trick to do with them

King
What are you getting at? Do please explain.

Chorus
Unless you make a promise we can trust ...

King
What did you mean about your trick with belts?

Chorus
Strange offerings will clothe these images!
King
Mysterious! Just put it simply, please.

Chorus
We’ll us these images to hang ourselves.

King
The gods? That lashed my heart! That hurt!

Chorus
You understood! You see more clearly now.

King
I’m wrestling with it, but this problem’s hard!
Troubles are coming at me like a flood.
I’m launched into a sea that’s hard to cross
And bottomless; no port to shelter in.
If I do not perform this task for you,
You say the price I pay is very high,
An offence to Zeus beyond imagining.
But if I take my stand with you in battle
Against your cousins, Aegyptus’s sons,
How can I not suffer a grievous loss?
Staining the ground with my men’s blood all spilt
For womens’ sake? Nevertheless, I must
Beware the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants’ god
His is the power that all men fear the most.
You then, old man, the father of these girls,
<Can give assistance. Go now into town.>
Pick up those branches, take them in your arms,
Put them on other altars to our gods,
So all our citizens can see these symbols –
Forestalling any criticism of me.
People just love to run their rulers down.
Also, perhaps, if people saw these things,
They’d hate the violence of this pack of males:
And thus be more in sympathy with you –
For everyone supports the underdog!

**Danaos**

I very much appreciate all this,
To find a compassionate champion.
But send some local men with me as guards
And guides, so that I can locate the gods’
Altars and sanctuaries in the town,
And feel secure as I walk through the streets.
My colour shows I can’t be native born:
Men from the Nile are racially distinct
From Argives! You cannot be sure I won’t
Have cause to fear. It’s often happened that
Someone has killed a friend through ignorance.

**King**

Our guest talks sense. Go with him, men,
Show him the city altars and the shrines.
There’ll be no careless talk with those you meet:
“Just some asylum-seeking mariner”.

*Danaos leaves with an escort of soldiers.*

**Chorus**

You’ve given him his task and off he goes:
But me? What reassurance can you give?

**King**

Leave the branches, as symbols of your pain.

**Chorus**

We leave them then – we follow your advice.

**King**

Now make your way into this open field ...
Will we be safe in such a public space?

**King**

We won’t expose you to those birds of prey!

**Chorus**

Or snakes? Though they’re more poisonous than that!

**King**

Let’s not use words like that. Sorry I spoke!

**Chorus**

But you must realise how scared we are.

**King**

Anticipating trouble causes fear.

**Chorus**

Just say you’ll do something to calm our fears.

**King**

You won’t be left without your father long.
I’ll get the people of the town together,
Convince them, show how they should be your friends.
And I’ll instruct your father what to say.

Stay here therefore, and with your prayers beseech
Our country’s gods to grant you what you wish.
I’m on my way to get things organised.
If I persuade them, all will turn out well.

The Chorus leave the sanctuary, as Pelasgos and his entourage depart for the city.

**Chorus**
Strophe 1
O king of kings, god of all gods
The mightiest, who with his power,
Can consummate anything that is desired,
O happy Zeus, o hear us,
And save your kin, stop men’s abuse: you hate it!
Drown deep down in the shimmering ocean
Rowers on doom-black benches.

Antistrophe 1
Our family belongs to a race
That’s famous, its women demand
Attention; remember the love you once had
For Io: we’re her offspring.
To her you once made love, don’t you forget that!
We are proud to be Zeus’s descendants,
Natives of Argos – this land!

Strophe 2
I’ve come home where my mother’s hoofprint
Long long ago could be found in meadows
Where she was watched, grazing amongst the flowers,
Place that she fled from so fast
Maddened and stung by the fly,
Passing by so many nations of men,
Europe she left, Asia she reached,
Ploughing the sea, swimming the strait, named as was fit -
Bosporus: where the cow crossed.

Antistrophe 2
She charges straight down the Asian coastline,
Passing through Phrygia, land where sheep graze,
Then Teuthras’ city, Mysia’s country, [my SEE a, or moo-SEE-a]
Valleys of Lydia next,
On past Cilicia’s peaks,
Leaping Pamphylia’s mountains, and by
Rivers so deep, flowing all year,
Wealthy domains, plains rich in corn, territories
Nurtured by Aphrodite.

Strophe 3
Her gadding ends, propelled by gadfly’s stings,
Her assiduous herdsman’s.
She’s reached Zeus’s rich pasture,
Lush Gardens that are fed by snowmelt, when the Nile,
That cures all ills,
Whipped up by wind-power, floods the landscape;
Driven insane, and seared by pain -
Never deserved - the crazy wretch,
Punctured by Hera’s sting-wounds.

Antistrophe 3
The men who lived there, in that land that day,
Trembled, paralysed, fear-struck,
Quite unnerved by the creature,
Livestock such as they’d never seen, a freak, half cow,
Half woman, not
A human. They boggled at the monster.
Who was it then whose magic touch
Healed the poor wretched Io, long
Homeless and gadfly-bitten?

Strophe 4
The one who healed her? Zeus, the ruler
Unresting, everlasting.
Through strength that caused no pain, through no
Force except for his gentle
Breath she came to a halt, and washed
Shame away with her teardrops.
She took on board the load of Zeus, and all agree,
The child that she bore was perfect,

Antistrophes 4
The son lived long, prosperity stayed
Throughout: all in the land cry
“He is the son of Zeus, it’s true!
Zeus breathed life to this family.”
Who could ever have stopped the pain
Hera’s plotting inflicted?
An act no one could do but Zeus. You’re right to say
“Epaphos founded your race.”

Strophe 5
Which god could be more justly called on,
590
Than Zeus by me, in view of our past?
Great father Zeus himself, the king, our ancestor
Engendered us by his own hand,
Cure-all; designer; wise for all time.

Antistrophe 5
No one gives orders he must jump to:
He is inferior to no one.
He has no need to show respect to one above;
His word at once becomes a deed.
Nothing takes place that's not in Zeus’ mind.

Danaos returns, accompanied by his local bodyguard.

Danaos
It's great news, girls. The local people say it's fine.
The motions have been passed by parliament.

Chorus
Greetings, papa – your news sounds very good.
But what exactly was decided? Tell!
How was the people's crucial vote achieved?

Danaos
The Argives said yes, overwhelmingly.
It made my aged heart feel young again!
The whole assembly raised their hands – they looked
Like ears of corn stiff in the summer breeze,
As they passed this decree: that we should have
Right to remain, and make our home here, free,
Immune from deportation, or
Arrest, our persons sacrosanct, secure,
No one, native or foreigner allowed
To make us leave against our will. And if
A person forcibly attempted this,
Any citizen not defending us
Will lose his civic rights and be expelled.
Such was the powerful speech he made for us,
The king of the Pelasgians. He warned
That Zeus, asylum seekers’ god, one day
In time to come, well might indulge his rage,
Saying if asylum were not granted us,
There’s be a double curse, on Argos and
Its guests, thus breeding pain no one could bear.
When they heard this the people raised their hands
Before the speaker even called the vote.
The populist’s persuasive skills convinced
The people: Zeus it was that saw it through.

Chorus

Anapaestic prelude
Come along, let us pray, for the people, the land.
Let good be returned for the good they did us.
May Zeus, god of strangers, now watch over those,
Who honoured the words of a stranger who’d come
To the end of a journey. We’ll not forget.

Strophe 1
Gods who are Zeus’s kin,  
Listen to me as I sing
Prayers for my kin, the Argives.
Don’t let him ever, fierce Ares, in love with war,
Waste the Pelasgian land with fire, as he harvests
A crop of men; he reaps battlefields, never cornfields.
Why? Because they were friendly,
Well-disposed when they voted,
Showed respect to this wretched flock
Under Zeus’s protection.

Antistrophe 1
They didn’t cast their vote
Biased towards the mens’ side,
Spurning the womens’ viewpoint.
Always there is a spy, Zeus’s avenger, who
Cannot be thwarted: vital fact they understood.
Is there a house enjoys it perched on their roof?
Ominous? They respect us
Kindred, seeking asylum,
Helped by Zeus, which is why their pure
Sacrifices delight him.

Strophe 2

Thus, through our veils, from our
Lips let our prayers wing forth,
Eager to show them honour.

May not their city suffer
Plague which destroys its people,
Do not let war pollute their land
Stained with its citizens’ bloody slaughter.

Youth’s brief flower, may it not be
Plucked! May man-killing Ares
Aphrodites’ seducer, not
Cull the best of their manhood.

Antistrophe 2
And may the elders find
Plenty of offerings,
When they attend the altars.
And may the city be ruled
Well, as they honour mighty
Guardian of strangers, Zeus, who
Orders the land with his ancient law-code.
We pray others be born, who
Will watch over our country,
And may Artemis, archer, look
After women in childbirth.

_Strophe 3_
May there be no attack, murderous march of death,
Slaughtering Argos’ people:
Nobody at a dance, nobody playing the lyre:
Just tears, cruel Ares spreading mayhem.
May no flock of diseases,
Mirthless power, overcloud them;
May Apollo the healer be
A fair friend to our young men.

Antistrophe 3
Also, we pray may Zeus see that their crops grow strong,
All bearing fruit in season.
May their animals that graze keep on giving birth to more,
Let gods’ power grant them all they ask for.
May their singers make music
Pleasing god at the altars,
From their throats let the voice resound,
Heart, harp, truly harmonious.

Strophe 4
May Argos’ people wielding full power,
Protect the rights of the people fully,
And rule with thought, foresight for the people,
Make enemies sit down and talk
Not rushing straight into war,
Deciding they could agree without pain.

Antistrophe 4
The gods who own this land for ever:
May Argives ever give them respect with
Traditional lavish sacrifices.
Respect for forebears is an
Important unwritten law,
Decreed by Justice, most highly honoured.

Danaos
Girls, these your prayers make perfect sense. Well done!
Don’t panic at what your father’s about to say:
Unwelcome news you weren’t anticipating.
From this lookout, your sanctuary, I see
The boat! Plainly. My eyes are not deceived,
The sail, the canopies that shield the crew,
The bow, the painted eyes that scout her course,
The tiller at the stern that she obeys:
Too well, it seems, as if she’s not our friend!
And now the men on board can be made out:
Black arms and legs show dark against white clothes;
And now the other boats, the entire force,
Is plain to see. The leading ship, near land,
Has reefed her sail, and is powered just by oars.
The gods are here – do not forget them, but... [gesturing to the deities on the mound]
It’s most important to keep calm, approach
This crisis sensibly. I’ll go and fetch,
Some allies who will help us, back our cause. [He moves as if to go, but realises how terrified the girls are]
They may perhaps come to negotiate:
More likely though to snatch you, take you off. [Registering the girls’ panic]
No, no, I’m sure they won’t! Don’t be afraid of them.
It’s better, though, if finding help takes time,
Not to forget this shrine provides security.
Be brave! It may take time, but one day all
Who disrespect the gods will pay for it.

Chorus
I’m scared, papa. The ships that sail so fast
Are here! In no time their attack will come!

Can you not see that I’m out of my wits with fear?
Did it do any good, running so far from home?
I am beside myself, gripped by dread,

Danaos
The Argives voted as one man to help.
Be brave. They’ll fight for you, my girls, I’m sure.
Chorus
Aegyptus' tribe are madmen, loathsome, spoiling
For a fight: no need to tell you this!
   They have got well-made ships, painted with eyes of blue
   In them they've sailed here, with so much rage and speed;
   Their storm-black multitudes close behind.

Danaos
But they will find a matching multitude,
Their forearms leather-hard from midday sun.

Chorus
Don't leave me all alone, papa, I beg.
Women alone don't count. War's not for them.

    Liars and cheats, malevolent they are to us,
    Unclean, loathsome, black, a flock of carrion crows
    Fouling the gods' pure altars.

Danaos
The gods hate them as much as you do, girls,
Everything is going to be all right!

Chorus
For sure they will be so afraid of tridents and
This “panoply” they won't lay hands on us! [ironically indicating the statues on the knoll]
   Arrogant, hate-filled, minds fired up for evil deeds
   They're quite raving mad, a pack of slavering dogs
   Flouting the gods’ commandments.

Danaos
There is a saying that the noble wolf
Can vanquish any dog. Men who eat bread
Can conquer those who suck papyrus juice.

**Chorus**

But these aren’t men, they’re lecherous animals.
Beware the power of these ungodly brutes.

**Danaos**

Believe me, it takes time to put to sea,
And time to get ashore: they need to fix
The mooring ropes, the “shepherds of the ships”
Are busy making sure the anchors hold,
Especially as there is no harbour where
They’ve landed, and it’s getting late.
Night causes problems even for an expert Helmsman. There is no way an army can
Be disembarked before the ships are safe
At anchor. Yes, you’re scared: just concentrate
On honouring the gods. And meanwhile I
Shall go and find assistance. I am old:
Argos will take my message seriously.
I’ll give it straight, just like a younger man. *Exit*

**Chorus**

*Strophe 1*

You Argive hills, you land we rightly love,
What will become of us? Is there in Apia
A deep dark cave somewhere where we could hide away?
Or else become mist, a cloud,
That in the dark sky neighbours Zeus?
May I just disappear, invisible, swirling
Unnoticed, scattered, blown like flying dust.

Antistrophe 1

An escape route there would no longer be.
With dark foreboding my poor heart is quivering.
Our father looked to sea and saw our doom. I’m dead
With fear. I’d be glad to hang
Myself, meet fate with knotted rope,
Before an odious man can paw this flesh of mine.
I’d rather die: Hades will be my husband.

Strophe 2

Where could I find a seat high up above, near which
The clouds that carry moisture turn themselves to snow,
Or some bare crag the goats avoid,
Lonely cliffs well out of sight,
Lair of vultures, which would see
Me leap off into the abyss,
I’ll do that before - against my will -
This lethal wedding kills me.
Antistrophe 2
And when I’m dead I’m not too proud to be the prey, A meal for dogs and birds that haunt the countryside. For one who dies is freed: Evil, grief and tears all end. Bring on death, far better than Married hell one can’t escape. How can I find any route From marriage, free from bondage?

Strophe 3

Let’s shout it out, chanting, so that the gods, And the goddesses too can listen to our pleas, Although it’s not clear just how they will help, Watch over us, Zeus, save us from the storm. Be angry, hostile; when you see Violent acts – uphold the law! Honour asylum-seekers, Zeus the almighty, earth lord.

Antistrophe 3
Aegyptus’ tribe, rampant, over-sexed
Impossible men, invincibly male -
And now they are tracking me, soon to attack,
Bellowing their lust, their minds fixed on rape,
They hunt the helpless refugee,
You hold the scales, the choice is yours.
Everything mortals suffer
Happens through your decision.

A terrifying horde of Egyptians – not the sons of Aegyptus themselves - (probably the same number as the Danaids – 50) burst on to the scene. Their Greek is poor, although they have a more “civilised” spokesman.

As the Egyptians surge forward they chant ‘ooh!’

The Danaids rush to claim sanctuary on their mound, and they scream ‘aah!’

Egyptians
Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!

Danaids (Chorus)
Aah! Aah! Aah!

Egyptians
Me here grab you. You no stay land. You go ship.

Chorus
Over your dead bodies. You no take us.

Egyptians
(Hissing and spitting noises)

Chorus
(Disgusted noises)

Egyptians

Chorus
What father said would happen’s happening.
Knowing our fate, I cannot help but scream.
I realise the awful pain awaiting us ...

[They scream in terror as they flee to sanctuary]
Come on! Let’s make it to the sanctuary.
Now they are close, we see what hideous
Vile repulsive animals they are.
Zeus, and you other gods, protect us, please!

**Egyptians**

Move, be moving! Arses on boat! Chop chop!
Else. Else grab hair, drag hair.
Runaway. Slaves. We brand you. Tattoo red hot iron.
We bloody kill you. We cut off heads.

**Chorus**

Wish you’d gone down with your ship,
Wish all that timber had sunk,
Down through the salt and the surf,
You, and your arrogant masters’ plotting.

**Egyptians**
Me make you all bleeding, sit boat now.
You want smash head, bang bang?
Stop noise! No scream! By order!
You like go dead?
You come out sitdown place, go ship.
People here good people, People here no like you.

**Chorus**

Hope you never again see
Nile’s flood, watering cattle,
Water the source of human life,
Water essential for blood and growth.

**Egyptians**
Me big fella great man strong fella.
You hurry up hurry up!
Get in ship. Ship!
Like no like, want no want, missis.
Strong! Strong make happen plenty thing.
Get on now now now. Or me power
Bugger up you nice clothes, you nice face.

**Chorus**

Aiai! Aiai!
I want: struggling, helpless, shipwrecked -
You to drown in the salt-deep
Far away, far from your home, lost, on a strange coast, you to be washed up,
And no one to find you!

**Spokesman for the Egyptians (Herald)**
I order you to step into this splendid boat.
Quick as you can, ladies. No time to waste
It would be a shame to spoil your nice coiffures.

**Chorus**
Oioi! Oioi!
In Hades shall you
Be paid back for this outrage! Puffed up
Little popinjay! May you
Find you're crushed, obliterated for the violence of your onslaught:
Mighty Fate is waiting.

**Spokesman**
Protest and scream and call upon the gods!
Once in our boat try jumping overboard!
We’ll give you something you can scream about.

**Chorus**

Oioi! O Zeus, the statue gives us no protection! I am being abducted, being dragged to sea, like in a nightmare, like in a bad dream, by some huge great spider. Ototototoi!

Mother Earth, mother Earth, help! Zeus, child of Earth, save us!

**Spokesman**

Your local gods don’t scare an Egyptian! I never heeded them and never shall.

**Chorus**

A snake in human form lurks near, and eyes me up for a lethal strike. Is it a viper, armed with venomous fangs to bite? Or has it a plan to crush, squeeze me to death?

Ototototoi!

Mother Earth, mother Earth, help! Zeus, child of Earth, save us!

**Spokesman**
If a person does not obey and board the ship,
Her lovely dress might incur some damage.

**Chorus**

We’re finished. Lord Zeus, Nothing we can do now.

**Spokesman**

There’s Lords aplenty, by and by, you’ll see!
Aegyptus’ sons! Cheer up! You’ll have your lord.

**Chorus**

Help, city leaders, they are too strong for me.

**Spokesman**

It seems I’m forced to drag you by the hair,
Since you are deaf to my polite requests.

_Suddenly King Pelasgos arrives with soldiers_

**King**

What do you think you’re doing, man? What is
The idea? This is an insult to the men,
The people of this land, Pelasgians!
Did you think all of us were women here?
You barbarians think yourselves better
Than us: a grave mistake you’ll soon regret.

**Spokesman**

What mistake? All I’ve done’s within the law.

**King**

You’ve no clue how a foreigner should act!

**Spokesman**

How so? I’m here to fetch lost property!
King
You’ve got an Argive, then, to vouch for you?

Spokesman
I got a pass from Hermes, god of luck!

King
I thought you said you don’t believe in gods?

Spokesman
I do, but only in Egyptian ones.

King
And ours you mean are not significant?

Spokesman
I’m taking them. Would someone like to stop me?

King
You’ll be sorry if you touch them. Just wait!

Spokesman
Not quite the welcome strangers usually get!

King
There’s none, if they defile god’s holy ground.

Spokesman
I shall report this to Aegyptus’ sons!

King
I’m trembling! So scared! Go on, do your worst.

Spokesman
To proceed, may I know to whom I speak?

I need to make an accurate report,
As agents must. On whose authority
Am I robbed of these ladies, cousins of
My principals? The fight, when it occurs,
Will not be in a court of law. We don’t
Seek cash in compensation, damages
Though will be paid, with blood and many lives.

King
No need to know my name. You'll learn it soon
Enough, both you and your “associates”.
You may take these girls, provided only that
You can persuade them, and that they consent,
Happily, of their own free-will. The city's
Democratic vote was unanimous:
Never give up the girls to violent threats.
Their verdict's nailed down tight, it will not budge.
Their message isn't veiled in bureaucratic
Statutes, or locked away in ancient tomes:
You hear a free people’s voice, loud and clear!
Make yourself scarce, be off, it’s time to go.

Spokesman
It seems you are already set on war.
And may the men, the male sex, win out!

He sweeps out, followed by the rest of the Egyptians.

King [to his receding back]
You'll find the people here are real men,
Wine drinking, not cock-suckers swilling beer!
All of you girls must now be strong. Go with
Our friends here and be safe inside the town, [Indicating some of the soldiers he came with]
Protected by its high encircling walls.
Argos has many houses fit for guests:
I live in quite a splendid one myself.
Houses are ready for you, you can stay
With company, or if you really like,
You could have one entirely to yourself!
We’re offering you our very best, we want
You to be happy. I, with all the city,
Am on your side. It’s what they voted for.
What are you waiting for? It's all arranged.

**Chorus [anapaests]**

May everything good come to you, you've been good
To us, noble Pelasgian.
Be good once again, let our father come here,
Free of fear - our inspiration and guide.
It is right that it's he who decides where we live,
Find a place where we're welcome. That's best!
An accent that is foreign can trigger ill-will.
Let's keep everyone friendly so no one gets cross.

*Music. Probably there originally was a chorus at this point during which Pelasgos disappears and Danaos enters, with some Argive soldiers.*

**Danaos**

Girls, you must pray, sacrifice and pour out
Libations for the men of Argos, as if
They were Olympian gods! There is no doubt
They are your saviours. Sympathetically
They heard what I had done to help their kin,
Reacting angrily to what your cousins did.
They granted me this trusty bodyguard,
To show how they respect me, and to keep
Me safe from fear of assassination,
A thing to stain this land for evermore.
<Such were the honours heaped on me today:
I'm ranked in status just below the king.>
We owe a heartfelt debt of gratitude.
Add now these words of wisdom to the sound
Advice your father's given you before:
Time proves what unknown groups are like...
An immigrant’s a target for abuse:
Hate speech springs readily to uncouth tongues.
And so I beg you, don’t make me ashamed.
You’re young and pretty and you turn mens’ heads.
Ripe, juicy fruit’s not easy to resist.
Men, animals too, attack it. Why not?
Creatures with wings, and those that tread the earth
Are told by Aphrodite succulent,
Sweet fruit makes them delirious with lust.
So, smitten by desire, a man who passes
By a woman flaunting her beauty,
Lets fly an arrow which ensnares her heart.
Let it not happen! A thing that would negate
Our trauma, our travel across the sea
Disgracing us, delighting enemies.
You’ve two options for accommodation:
One from Pelasgos, and the people’s one,
Both free of charge. I see no problem here.
Only observe your father’s instructions:
Value your chastity more than your life!

Chorus
All else we trust the gods will bring to pass,
Our fruit is safe, though, father, have no fear!
Unless the gods have some new plan in mind,
I shall not stray from my determined path!

EXODOS

Chorus
Let us all go to the city
Let us honour the immortal
City gods, and those who dwell by Erasinus’ Holy streams. You, men of Argos,
Please accept our songs that praise you,
Let our thanks be spread all over the Pelasgian City! No more shall we sing hymns
To the Nile, the Delta – no more

To the channels irrigating,
Bringing water, bringing life blood,
To the thirsty land of Egypt, with the flood-stream,
Precious moisture for the parched soil.
And may chaste Artemis guard us

Having pity on us females. I would rather
Welcome death than be a victim
Of a marriage that’s forced on me!

The young Argive soldiers, that have been present throughout suddenly (and unexpectedly) find a voice, possibly regarding themselves as suitable compromise bridegrooms for the Danaids!

Argives
Not a good thing to belittle Aphrodite.
She's the closest of the gods to Zeus almighty,
But for Hera. Venerated
And seductive, she's the love queen.
She is mother to her colleagues: both Desire who
Can't be thwarted, and Persuasion,
Tender charmer softly tempting.
Aphrodite oversees Coming Together, and she orders
The caress, the whispered love-talk.

I am fearful for the future: refugees still
Must expect pain, punishment and bloody warfare.
Tell me why did their pursuers
Catch them up so very quickly?
If the gods want it to happen, then it will do!
The decisions made in Zeus' mind
Can't be questioned, can't be fathomed.
Many women would have suffered such a marriage
In the past: it isn't just you!

Chorus
Mighty Zeus may he protect me
From the marriage to Egyptians!

**Argives**
If he did it would be best, but ...

**Chorus**
I’m resistant to your sweet talk!

**Argives**
Can’t you see though what will happen?

**Chorus**
There’s no way one can see what’s there
In the deep thinking of Zeus’ mind!

**Argives**
Use restraint then in your prayers.

**Chorus**
Do you tell me how to pray now?

**Argives**
Don’t go asking for too much. Yes!

**Chorus**
Zeus our king, may he prevent
Marriage with vile men we hate,
He who once rescued Io
Saved her from her suffering,
Calmed her down, soothed her with his healing hand,
Exercising gentle force.

May he give the women power!
What I want is not the best
But not the worst: I’ll take it.
Fate though should reflect what’s just:
Should be my prayers deserve to save me from
One immortal’s devious plot!

The Danaids move off to the (temporary) safety of the city. The Argive soldiers escort them – or maybe, as their advice has been ignored – follow them.

AMW Completed at Marshfield, March 30th 2020, in isolation!
Some (possibly significant) dates:

525  Aeschylus born
508/7  Expulsion of “accursed” Alcmaeonids.
500  Pericles born
490  Battle of Marathon
480  Battle of Salamis, in which Aeschylus fought.
472  *The Persians* with Pericles as choregos

468  Innovation of 10 generals appointed as judges for dramatic competition (included Kimon, who was general each year until his ostracism in 461). Sophocles won 1st prize, beating Aeschylus for the first time.

463/2 Archonship of Archidemides

Prosecution of Kimon by Ephialtes and Pericles

*The Danaid tetralogy* wins 1st prize, with Sophocles 2nd.

462/1 Ephialtes and Pericles strip Areopagus of political power

Payment for dikastai introduced

Alliance of Athens and Argos

Ostracism of Kimon

Murder of Ephialtes

458  *Oresteia*

? [Unknown date in 460s] Pericles married his cousin, almost certainly the Alcmaeonid “princess” Deinomache, to whom he probably remained married until c.452/1 when his liaison with Aspasia may have begun. Pericles was her second husband (after Hipponicus, father of Kallias, the richest man in Athens), and she later married Kleinias, and became the mother of Alcibiades. If Pericles was choregos for *The Danaids*, her wealth would have helped pay for the huge choruses, and whatever else made the tetralogy a winner! Perhaps Pericles was susceptible to female philosophical influences before he met Aspasia, and the young, and rich, Deinomache was her predecessor.