

# History of Ancient Greece

## Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

### Week 18: Euripedes





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What is the intellectual reality of 5thC Athens

450BC Time of rigorous rational critique of traditional religion

Specific attack: on prophecy and its implication that gods know future.

This attack is in pursuit of the human freedom that was at center of  
5thC Athens Credo. (Pericles)

Athens moving away from the old piety of Aeschylus toward scepticism  
of Thucydides and Euripedes

Protagoras: "the individual man is the measure of all things, of the  
existence of what exists and the nonexistence of what does not..."

# SOPHOCLES 450 BC

Sophocles living through this radical intellectual change with its drive toward total freedom of man. He senses and expresses the dangers in this play.

The play is about man who tries to avoid prophecy and cant!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The play is a warning about human pride seeking total freedom.

Play is filled with warnings about human drive to total freedom/lack of humility.

## Religion Hesiod: *The Theogony*

most thoroughly anthropomorphic mythology ever.

whole pantheon = human behavior / often poor behavior.

1. no system

2. begins at no fixed time / point / origin.

3. roots stretch back into unchronicled past.

4. no principle prophet or lawgiver (like Moses).

5. no sacred books.

6. no central organized priestly hierarchy (local.many. EX: Delphi).

7. no revealed cosmology (many conflicting).

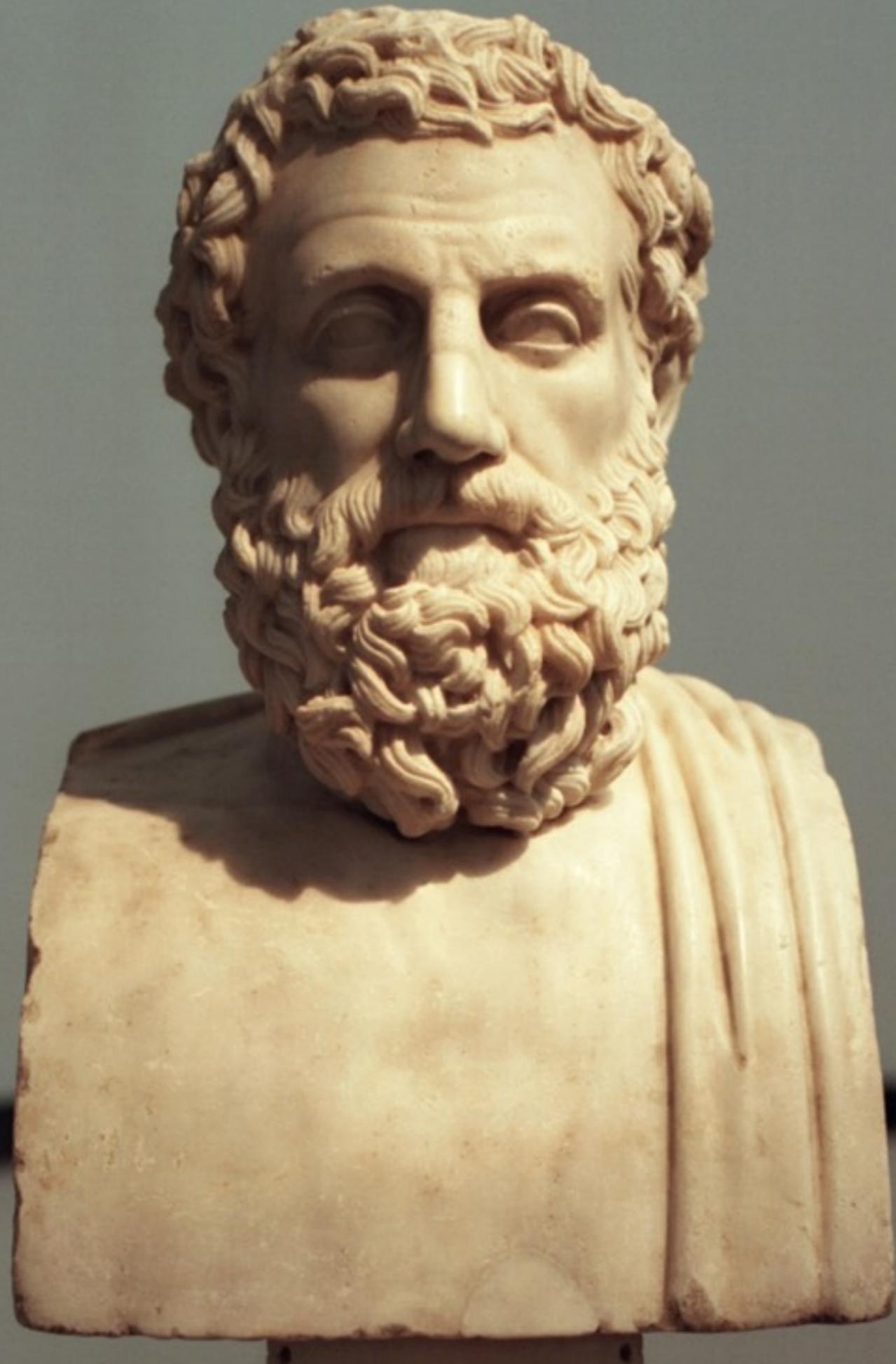
8. no national religious practices (localized / many ancient mystery)

9. no orthodoxy. just stories, many gods, be careful you dont make them mad at you.

10. no scheme of redemption.( in general afterlife is bad / drab / dull)

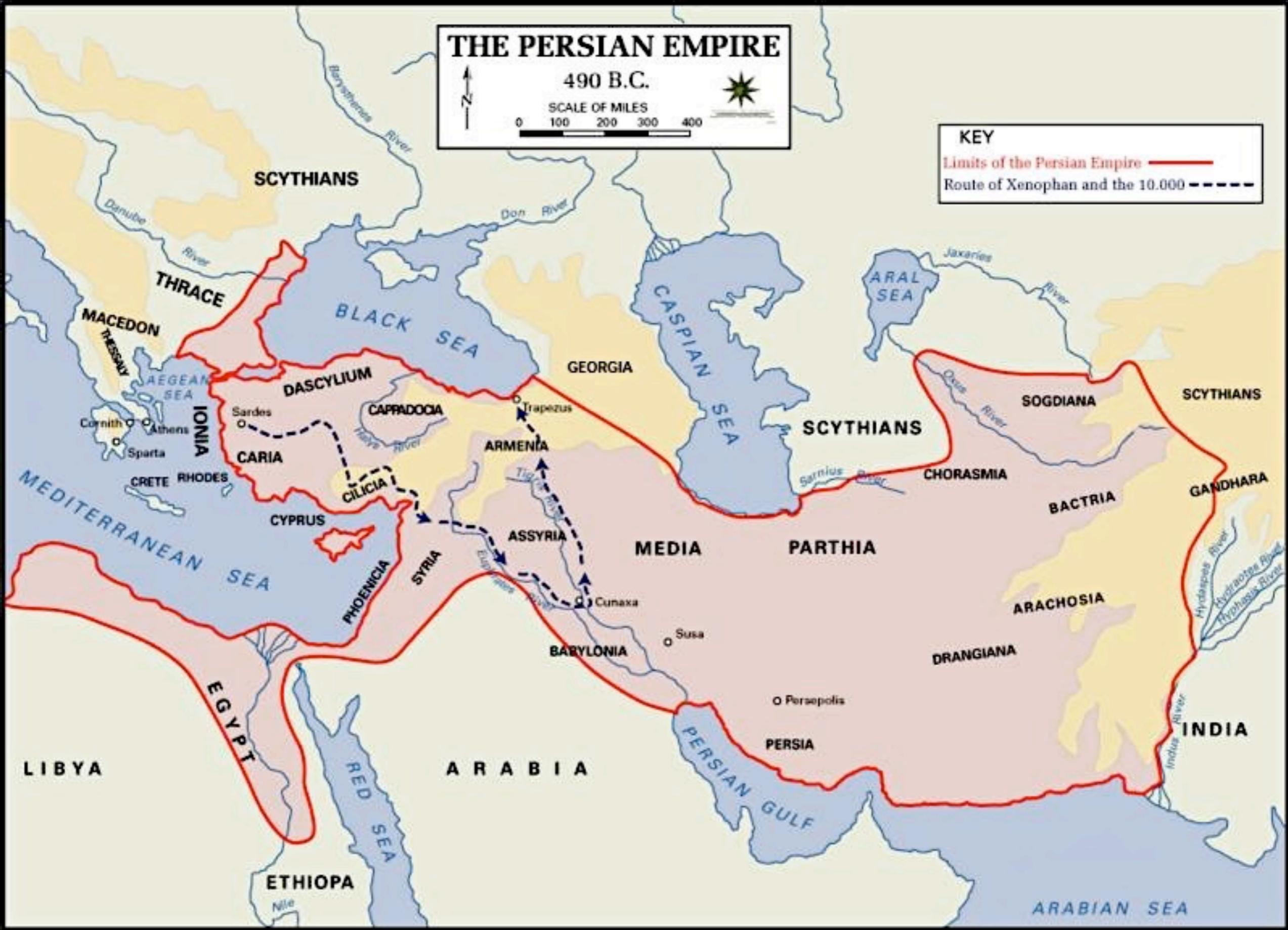
11. no divine model for human behavior.( Imitatio Christo).

religion in decline by time of Plato and Aristotle.



AESCHYLUS

525 BC to 455 BC



## GREECE THE FIFTH CENTURY BC

528 Death of Athenian tyrant Peisistratus

525 BIRTH OF AESCHYLUS

514 Assassination of Hipparchus, brother of Athenian tyrant Hippias

510 Deposition of Athenian tyrant Hippias, son of Peisistratus

507 Cleisthenes reforms the Athenian constitution

490 First Persian invasion of Greece;

490 Battle of **Marathon** **Aeschylus and his brothers fight at Marathon.**

480 Second Persian invasion of Greece; battles of **Thermopylae** and **Salamis**

479 The Persians are defeated by the Greeks at the battle of **Plataea** .

464 Sparta devastated by earthquake; revolt of the Spartan helots

460 democratic reform of the Athenian Areopagus Hall,

458 **Aeschylus's** tragic trilogy the **Oresteia** first performed, at Athens

455 DEATH OF AESCHYLUS

451 **Pericles** proposes a law restricting access to Athenian citizenship

444 Foundation of Panhellenic colony at Thurii in south Italy

432 Completion of the new **Parthenon**

431 Outbreak of **Peloponnesian War**;

431 first performance of Euripides' tragedy **Medea**

430 Pericles' funeral oration

429 Plague begins at Athens

425 Athenians score success against the Spartans at the battle of Sphacteria

413 Athenian campaign in Sicily ends in disaster

411 Oligarchic coup at Athens xt

525 AESCHYLUS born

born of a noble family at 525 BC in Eleusis, a small town about 27 kilometers northwest of Athens, which is nestled in the fertile valleys of western Attica, near Athens B.C.

490 He took part in the Persian Wars. He fought at Marathon.

470? At some time in his life he appears to have been prosecuted for divulging the Eleusinian mysteries, but he apparently proved himself innocent.

Aeschylus wrote more than seventy plays, of which seven have survived: The Suppliants, The Persians, Seven Against Thebes, Prometheus Bound, Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, and The Eumenides.

460. He visited Syracuse more than once at the invitation of King Hieron I.

455 he died at Gela in Sicily in 455 B.C. Aeschylus was recognized as a classic writer soon after his death.

# Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



The Oresteia is our rite of passage  
from savagery to civilization.

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



## Homer and Athenian Democracy

How to interpret Homeric themes in a democracy.

How to understand militant heroism in a society that requires communal co-operation.

Homer and all others understood the terrible dilemma

"Sing the anger of Peleus' son Achilles  
and its devastation  
which put pains thousandfold  
upon the Achaens ,  
hurled in their multitudes  
to the house of Hades  
strong souls of heroes  
but gave their bodies  
to be the delicate feasting  
of dogs....."

## Homer and Athenian Democracy

How to interpret Homeric themes in a democracy.  
How to understand militant heroism in a society that  
requires communal co-operation.

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



## The human life and suffering

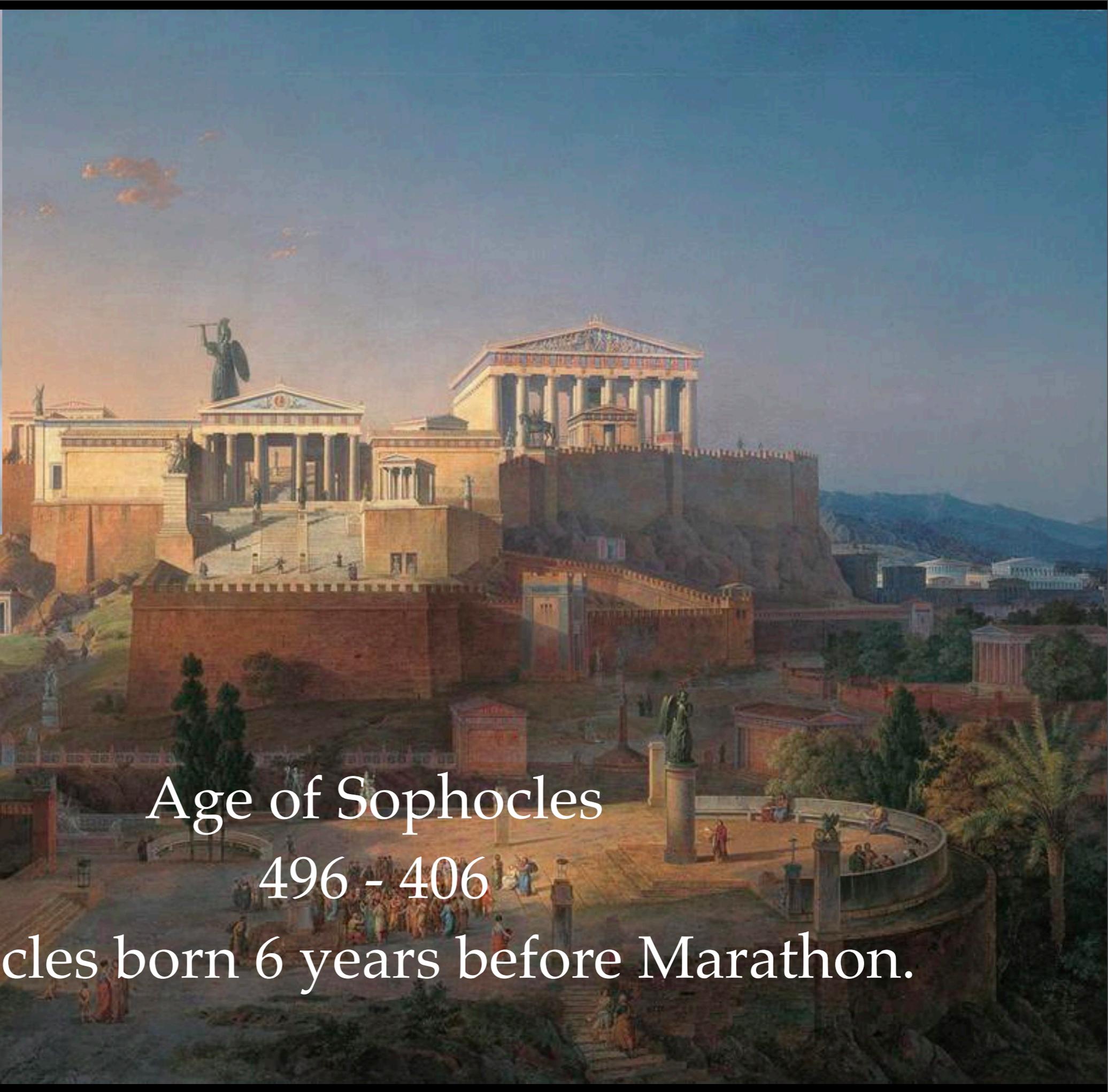
Aeschylus celebrates man's capacity for suffering, his courage to endure hereditary guilt and ethical conflicts, his battle for freedom in the teeth of fate, and his strenuous collaboration with his gods to create a better world.

Zeus, as the old men of Argos tell us, 'lays it down as law / that we must suffer, suffer into truth.'

Aeschylus & *The Oresteia*



*The Agamemnon* is like the rite of separation; the king is cut off from his society. *The Libation Bearers* is like the rite of transition; the son is at the threshold of maturity. But *The Eumenides*, the rite of aggregation, celebrates Orestes' initiation into Argos and our initiation into Athens.



Age of Sophocles

496 - 406

Sophocles born 6 years before Marathon.

# Athens, Sophocles, Antigone, 445 BC

## Sophoclean Tragedy

"The central idea of a Sophoclean tragedy is that through suffering a man learns to be modest before the gods . . .

When [the characters] are finally forced to see the truth, we know that the gods have prevailed and that men must accept their insignificance [their limited powers]."

C. M. Bowra

# Sophocles, *Antigone*, 445 BC , POLITICS

## TIME AND SCENE:

The royal house of Thebes.

It is still night, and the invading armies of Argos have just been driven from the city. Fighting on opposite sides, the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, have killed each other in combat.

Their uncle, CREON, is now king of Thebes.

Enter ANTIGONE, slipping through the central doors of the palace. She motions to her sister, ISMENE, who follows her cautiously toward an altar at the center of the stage.

## Creon's fate.

MESSENGER: Neighbors,  
friends of the house of Cadmus and the kings,  
there's not a thing in this mortal life of ours  
I'd praise or blame as settled once for all.

Fortune lifts and Fortune fells the lucky  
and unlucky every day.  
No prophet on earth can tell a man his fate.

Take Creon:  
there was a man to rouse your envy once,  
as I see it. He saved the realm from enemies,  
taking power, he alone, the lord of the fatherland,  
he set us true on course—he flourished like a tree  
with the noble line of sons he bred and reared ...

# What is the nature of Sophoclean tragedy?

that man so great, man so powerful, man so brilliant still fails.

thus the tragedy is his tragic contending against his own imperfect self.  
Not against gods and gods powers.

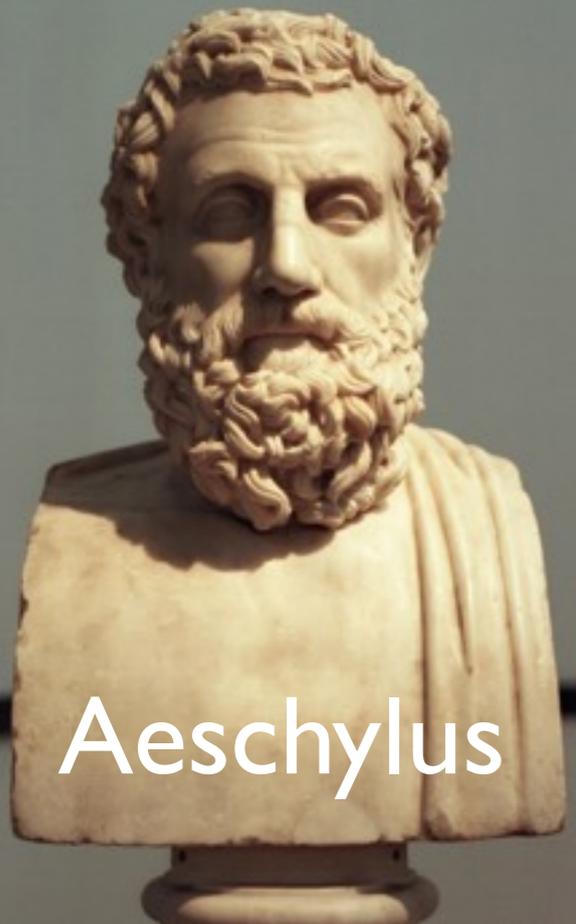
thus Sophocles' TRAGEDY

reflects perfectly the high ideals of Periclean Athens at mid-century

the balanced power of the figure of the Artemision Zeus:  
Man contending with self and own limitations.

Tragedy of life for Sophocles is that man is imperfect  
not that he is evil. (compare to Genesis)

Thus Sophocles dramatic method and his phil message are the same.

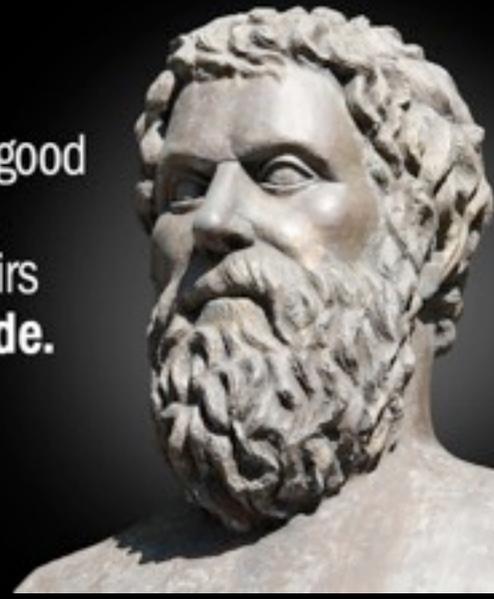


Aeschylus

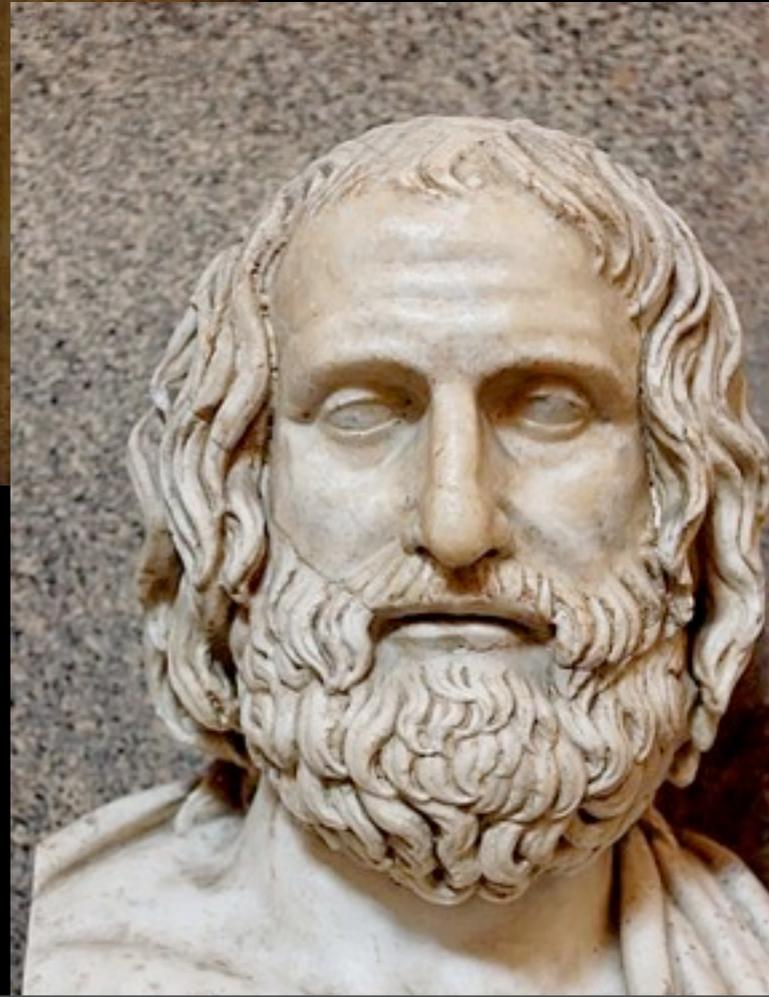
All men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong, and repairs the evil. **The only crime is pride.**

– Sophocles

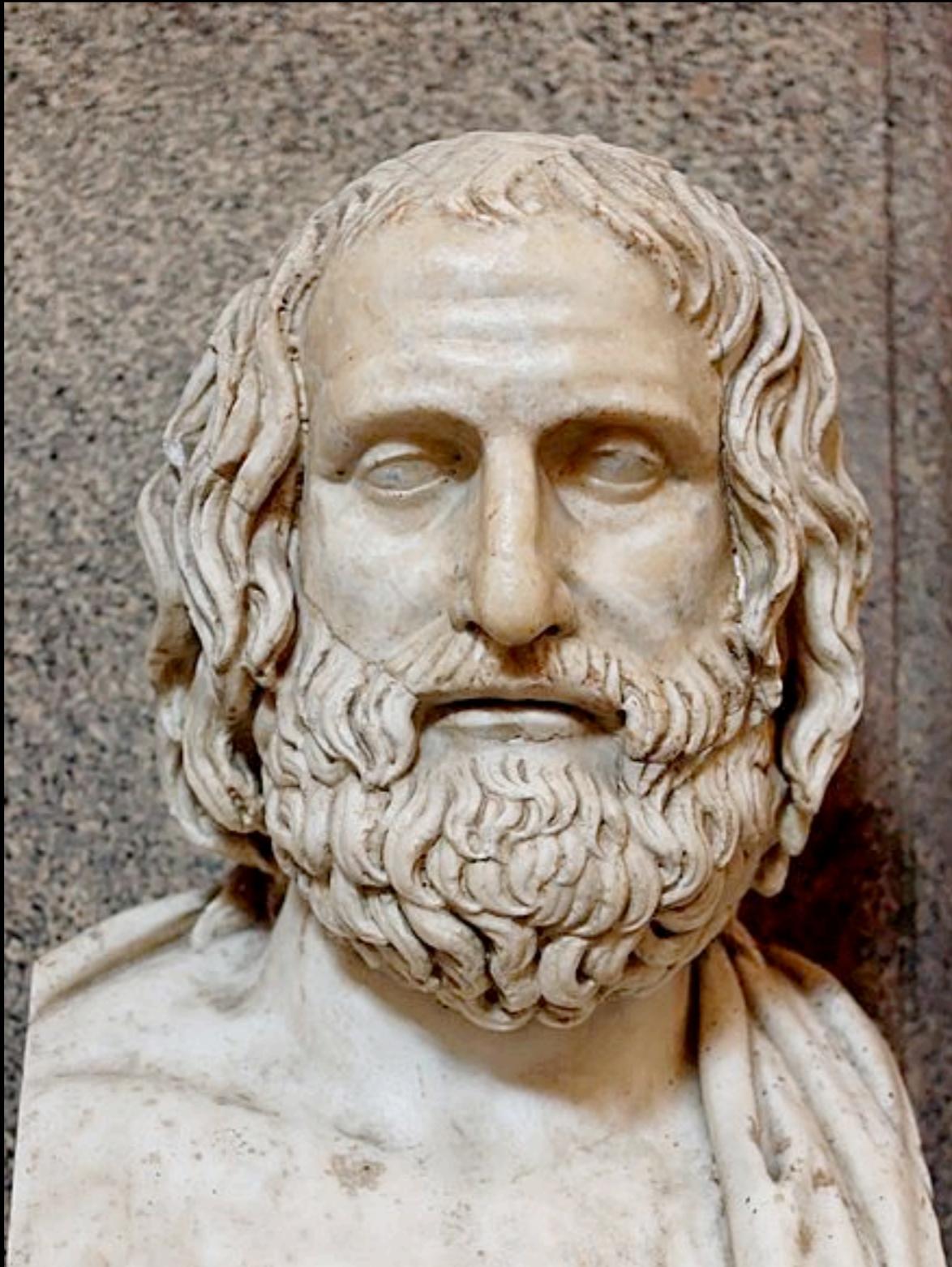
AZ QUOTES



Euripedes



# Euripides



Born Salamis 480  
died Macedon 406 BC

wrote 92 plays

18 survive

*Medea*, 431 BC

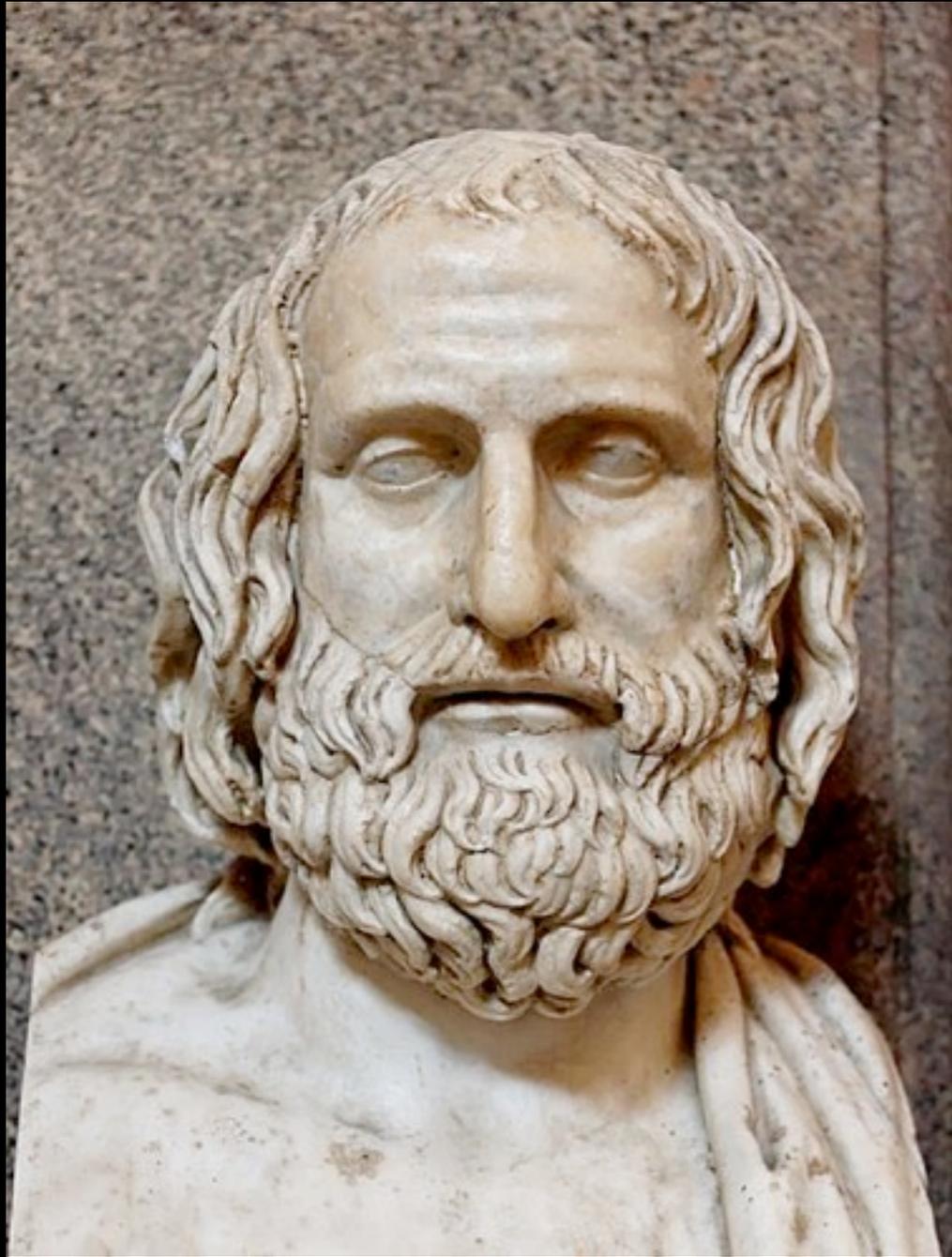
*Hippolytus*, 428 BC

*Electra*, c. 420 BC

*The Trojan Women*, c. 415 BC

*Bacchae*, 405 BC

Ancient biographers report that in the final years of his life Euripides accepted an invitation to leave Athens and take up residence at the court of Macedon;



Euripides is identified with theatrical innovations that have profoundly influenced drama down to modern times, especially in the representation of traditional, mythical heroes as ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. This new approach led him to pioneer developments that later writers adapted to comedy, some of which are characteristic of romance. Yet he also became "the most tragic of poets" (Aristotle)

## EURIPIDES,

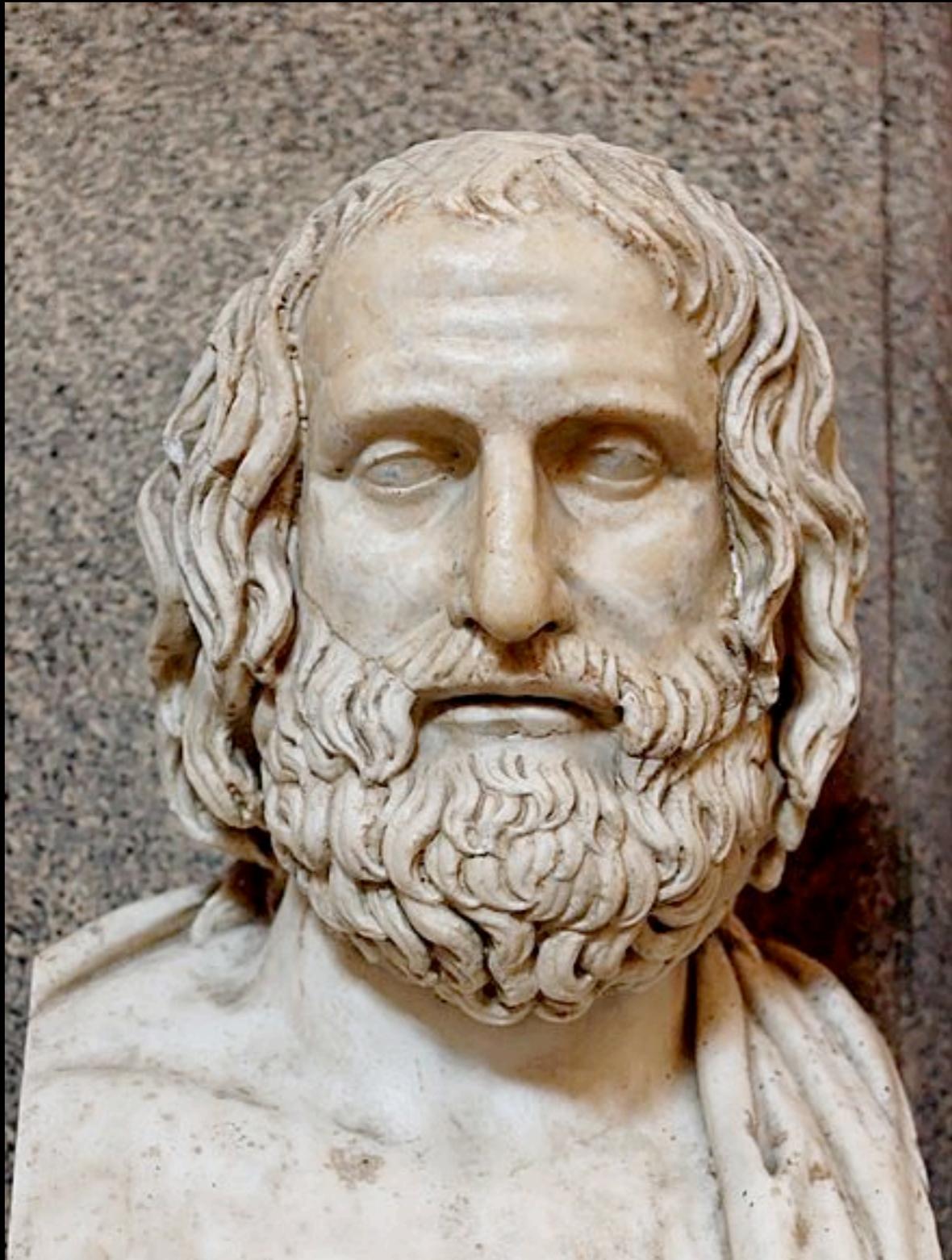
The youngest of the three great Athenian playwrights, was born around 485 BC of a family of good standing. He first competed in the dramatic festivals in 455 BC, coming only third; his record of success in the tragic competitions is lower than that of either Aeschylus or Sophocles.

Euripides.

The Bacchae and Other Plays  
(Penguin Classics) . Penguin Books Ltd.

. His work was controversial already in his lifetime, and he himself was regarded as a 'clever' poet, associated with philosophers and other intellectuals. Towards the end of his life he went to live at the court of Archelaus, king of Macedon. It was during his time there that he wrote what many consider his greatest work, the Bacchae.

Euripides. The Bacchae and Other Plays  
(Penguin Classics) . Penguin Books Ltd.



When the news of Euripides' death reached Athens in 406 BC, Sophocles is said to have dressed his chorus in mourning and appeared in this style of dress at the proagon, the public occasion on which dramatists presented themselves prior to the theatrical contests (Life of Euripides 3.11–14 = T1.20 Kovacs).

**Alcestis** (438 B.C.) His oldest surviving work about the devoted wife of Admetus, Alcestis, who sacrificed her life and replaced his in order to bring her husband back from the dead.

**Medea** (431 B.C.) This story is based on the myth of Jason and Medea first created in 431 BC. Opening in conflict, Medea is an enchantress who becomes abandoned by her husband Jason as he leaves her for someone else for political gain. To take revenge, she kills the children they had together.

**Hippolytus** (428 B.C.) This Greek play is a tragedy based on the son of Theseus, Hippolytus, (Phaedra) and can be interpreted to be about vengeance, love, jealousy.

**Andromache** (ca. 427 B.C.) This tragedy out of Athens shows the life of Andromache as a slave after the Trojan War. The drama focuses on the conflict between Andromache and Hermione, master's new wife.

**Hecuba** (425) is a tragedy by Euripides written c. 424 BC. It takes place after the Trojan War, but before the Greeks have departed Troy (roughly the same time as *The Trojan Women*, another play by Euripides). The central figure is Hecuba, wife of King Priam, formerly Queen of the now-fallen city. It depicts Hecuba's grief over the death of her daughter Polyxena, and the revenge she takes for the murder of her youngest son Polydorus.

**The Trojan Women** (415) is a tragedy by the Greek playwright Euripides. Produced in 415 BC during the Peloponnesian War, it is often considered a commentary on the capture of the Aegean island of Melos and the subsequent slaughter and subjugation of its populace by the Athenians earlier that year

**Iphigenia at Aulis** (405) The play revolves around Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek coalition before and during the Trojan War, and his decision to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to appease the goddess Artemis and allow his troops to set sail to preserve their honour in battle against Troy

# Euripedes and Women

More women main characters than other dramatists

Large number of plays are named after, and focused on female characters.

Most of Euripides' thinkers are women

Certainly Creon, Jason and Aegeus are easily outclassed by Medea, and in both the Trojan Women and Helen, Menelaus is inferior to his quick-witted wife.

# Euripedes and Dialog

spirited....sharp....fast

the way Euripedes' characters talk.

one of the central aspects of Euripides' work,  
his fascination with argument, ideas and rhetoric.

In the later fifth century BC professional teachers were instructing young men, in Athens and elsewhere, in the art of **rhetoric**, which in a democratic society could be seen as the key to political success. Types of argument were collected, methods of refutation categorized. It was possible, one of these experts claimed, 'to make the worse case defeat the better'. Euripides gives his characters the inventiveness and articulacy which these teachers sought to impart.

## Euripedes and the Gods

Many passages in which characters question the nature, or the very existence, of the Olympian gods.

**In the Trojan Women**, Hecabe, in need of inspiration in the agon, prays as follows:

"O you who give the earth support and are by it supported, whoever you are, power beyond our knowledge, Zeus, be you stern law of nature or intelligence in man, to you I make my prayers; for you direct in the way of justice all mortal affairs, moving with noiseless tread." (884–8)

## Euripedes and the Gods

**These lines in Th Trojan Women echo both traditional prayer-formulae and contemporary science; they involve contradictory conceptions of the supreme deity.**

They even hint at the theory that gods are merely externalizations of human impulses.

Little wonder that Menelaus remarks in response  
'What's this? You have a novel way of praying to the gods!'

## Euripedes and Intellectual ferment of times

Metaphysical teachings of a number of thinkers present in Euripedes: Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Gorgias and other figures known to us particularly through the writings of Plato and Aristotle.

Influence from philosophy or abstract prose has occasionally been detected in Aeschylus and Sophocles, but any such cases in their work are rare and unobtrusive; with Euripides we are dealing with something new. This introduction of modern ideas coheres with his general tendency to make the characters of myth less remote and majestic and full of new ideas.

# Euripides After Death

Euripides was preeminent after his death. Aeschylus seems to have become less popular after the fifth century BC: Aristotle in the *Poetics* mentions him far less often than Sophocles and Euripides, and we know of few revivals of his work. But although Aristotle more than once compares Sophocles and Euripides to the latter's disadvantage, he quotes examples as often from Euripides' *Iphigenia Among the Taurians* as from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, and acknowledges the younger dramatist's supremacy at the arousing of pity and fear. That Euripides was widely read is amply attested by the evidence of the papyri from Egypt, which have proved a treasure trove for the recovery of portions of plays lost from the manuscript tradition: the *Erechtheus*, *Hypsipyle*, *Cretans*, *Phaethon* and *Telephus* are among those which can now be reconstructed with some clarity.

Richard Rutherford, *Intro, Bacchae*

# EURIPIDES



# THE BACCCHAE

performed in original Ancient Greek

# Dionysus



# Is Bacchus and Dionysius the same?

**Bacchus** (/ˈbækəs/ or /ˈbɑːkəs/; Greek: Βάκχος, Bákchos),



# Dionysus



**Dionysus** is the god of the **grape-harvest, winemaking and wine**, of fertility, ritual madness, religious ecstasy, and theatre in ancient Greek religion and myth.

His worship became firmly established in the **seventh century BC**. He may have been worshipped as early as c. 1500–1100 BC by Mycenaean Greeks; traces of Dionysian-type cult have also been found in ancient Minoan Crete.

## **BUT HE IS ALWAYS SEEN AS A LATE ARRIVAL A Foreigner**

**FOREIGN** origins are uncertain, and his cults took many forms; some are described by ancient sources as Thracian, others as Greek. In some cults, he arrives from the east, as an Asiatic foreigner; in others, from Ethiopia in the South.

He is a god of epiphany, "the god that comes", and his "foreignness" as an arriving outsider-god may be inherent and essential to his cults.

He is a major, popular figure of Greek mythology and religion, becoming increasingly important over time, and included in some lists of the twelve Olympians, as the last of their number, and the only god born from a mortal mother.

**His festivals were the driving force behind the development of Greek theatre.**

# The Bacchae & Dionysus Euripedes: why choose Dionysus?

Dionysus is a particularly complex figure. He is a bringer of joy and celebration, but also the cause of violence and madness. Even the gift of wine is two-edged, but Dionysus is far more than the god of drinking: he is a god of inspiration and intoxication in every form.  
(VERSUS REASON=APOLLO)

Is Euripedes preaching about new eastern religions?

# The Bacchae & Dionysus Euripedes: why choose Dionysus?

**In this play he is also a god of the wild:**

he and his votaries are at home on the mountain-side, and the departure of the Theban women for the hills is seen by **Pentheus** as a threat to the political order of the male-dominated polis.

Dionysus is represented as a new arrival in Greece, exotic, alien, sinister, yet seductive. In the play itself he and the cult he represents are seen in many different lights, none of which does full justice to the god. Does he bring salvation or chaos, ecstasy or insanity? He himself declares that he is 'most gentle to mortals', but also 'most terrible' (861).



In *The Bacchae* there are two completely different versions of Dionysus.

First there is the god as he is described by the chorus, which is the god of wine and uninhibited joy and instinct.

However, Dionysus also appears as a character on the stage, has come for revenge, .....He is instead deliberate, plotting, angry and vengeful.

# THE GREAT POLARITY OF GREEK RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY DIONYSIUS VERSUS APOLLO



# EURIPIDES



# THE BACCCHAE

performed in original Ancient Greek

EURIPIDES

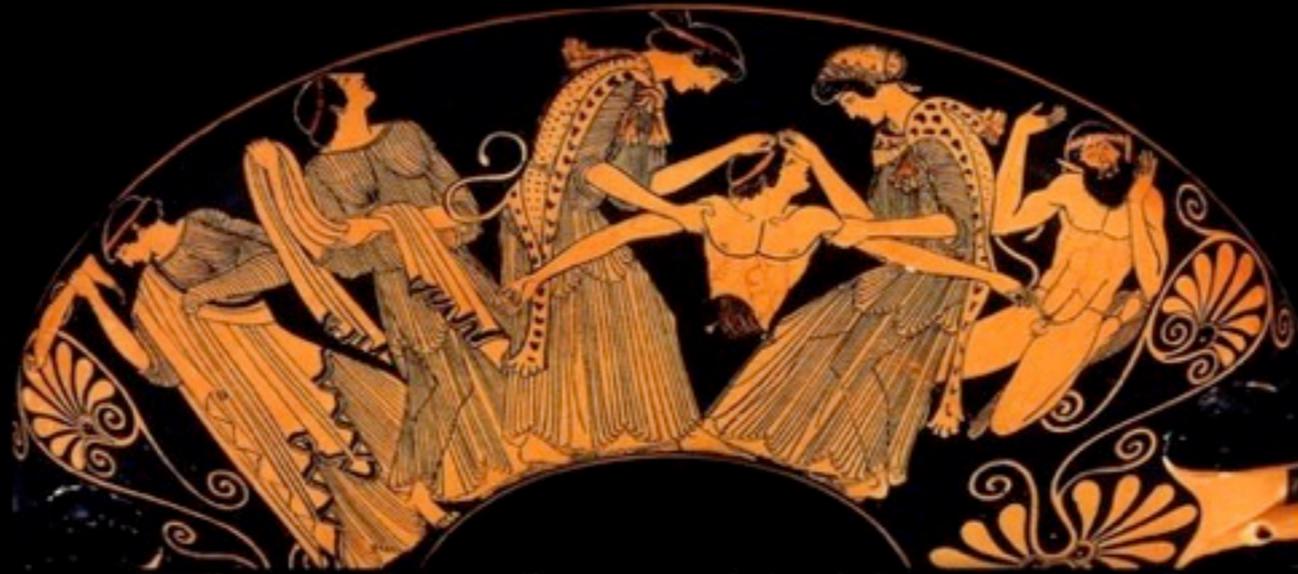


# THE BACCHAE

performed in original Ancient Greek

*The Bacchae* is considered to be not only Euripides' greatest tragedy, but one of the greatest ever written, modern or ancient. *The Bacchae* is distinctive for the facts that the chorus is integrated into the plot and the god is not a distant presence, but a character in the play.

# EURIPIDES



## THE BACCHAE

performed in original Ancient Greek

Bacchae (406)

The play is shorter than most of the other late dramas  
plot is more tightly constructed, proceeding in linear fashion  
concentrates on the central antagonism between Pentheus and Dionysus.  
number of characters is smaller than in the other late plays  
choral role is considerably larger, contributions are more significant,  
the poetic lyricism of the choral songs is less exotic  
their moralizing commentary more traditional;  
messenger-speeches, while still characteristically vivid, are kept within  
bounds and closely related to one another and to the central plot-line.

## CHARACTERS

DIONYSUS (also called Bacchus)

CHORUS of Bacchantes, women of Asia

TEIRESIAS, the blind prophet of Thebes

CADMUS, founder and former King of Thebes

PENTHEUS, King of Thebes and grandson of Cadmus

SERVANT of Pentheus

FIRST MESSENGER, a herdsman from Cithaeron

SECOND MESSENGER, a servant of Pentheus

AGAUE, mother of Pentheus and daughter of Cadmus

Guards, attendants

Dionysus, the god of wine, prophecy, religious ecstasy, and fertility, returns to his birthplace in Thebes in order to clear his mother's name and to punish the insolent city state for refusing to allow people to worship him. The background to his return is presented in the prologue, in which Dionysus tells the story of his mother, Semele, once a princess in the royal Theban house of Cadmus. She had an affair with Zeus, the king of the gods, and became pregnant. As revenge, Zeus's jealous wife Hera tricked Semele into asking Zeus to appear in his divine form. Zeus, too powerful for a mortal to behold, emerged from the sky as a bolt of lightning and burnt Semele to a cinder. He managed, however, to rescue his unborn son Dionysus and stitched the baby into his thigh. Semele's family claimed that she had been struck by lightning for lying about Zeus and that her child, the product of an illicit human affair, had died with her, maligning her name and rejecting the young god Dionysus.

The action of the play begins with Dionysus's return to Thebes years later. He arrives in town disguised as the stranger, accompanied by a band of bacchants, to punish the family for their treatment of his mother and their refusal to offer him sacrifices. During Dionysus's absence, Semele's father, Cadmus, had handed the kingdom over to his proud grandson Pentheus. It was Pentheus's decision to not allow the worship of Dionysus in Thebes. Dionysus tells the audience that when he arrived in Thebes he drove Semele's sisters mad, and they fled to Mt. Cithaeron to worship him and perform his rites on the mountainside.

As the ruler of the state and preserver of social order, **Pentheus** finds himself threatened by the Dionysian rites bringing the women from the city into the forest. Unconvinced of their divinely-caused insanity, he sees their drunken cavorting as an illicit attempt to escape the mores and legal codes regulating Theban society. His response is therefore a political one, as **he orders his soldiers to arrest the Lydian stranger and his maenads**, whom he sees as the root of the troubles. Deviously, Dionysus allows himself to be easily arrested and taken to Pentheus with the others. In the first of three encounters, Dionysus begins the long process of trapping Pentheus and leading him to his death. The encounter begins with the powerful Pentheus thinking he has caught the delicate stranger. He orders his androgynous prisoner to be chained, bound, and tortured but soon finds it impossible to do so. When Pentheus tries to tie Dionysus he ties only a bull, when Pentheus plunges a knife into Dionysus the blade passes only through shadow. Suddenly an earthquake shakes the palace, a fire starts, and Pentheus is left weak and puzzled.

In their second exchange, Dionysus tries to persuade Pentheus to abandon his destructive path, but Pentheus does not relent. A cowherd arrives and describes his sighting of the maddened women of Cadmus. All the women were seen resting blissfully in the forest, feasting on milk, honey and wine that sprang from the ground. They played music, suckled wild animals and sang and danced with joy. But when they saw the cowherd, they flew into a murderous rage and chased after him. The cowherd barely escaped, but the herd of cattle was captured and torn apart by hand by the maenads, including Pentheus's mother Agaue.

Pentheus is left intrigued and excited by the messenger's marvelous and frightening tale. Dionysus takes note of Pentheus's interest and offers him a chance to see the maenads for himself, undetected. Pentheus, on the verge of launching a military expedition to arrest the band, suddenly cannot resist the opportunity to see the forbidden. He agrees to do all Dionysus suggests, dressing himself in a wig and long skirts. The effeminate Pentheus, stripped of his masculinity and authority, is revealed as a vain, boastful and lecherous creature. Once in the woods, Pentheus cannot see the bacchantes from the ground, and wants to mount a tree for a better vantage. Dionysus miraculously bends a tall fir tree, puts Pentheus on top, and gently straightens the tree. At once the maenads see him, and Dionysus orders them to attack the vulnerable ruler. With rolling eyes and frenzied cries the women attack, bringing Pentheus down and dragging him to the ground. As he falls Pentheus reaches out for his mother's face and pleads with her to recognize her son. But Agaue, driven mad by Dionysus, proceeds to rip her son to death.

At the palace the chorus is exultant and sings the praise of Dionysus. Agaue returns home with Pentheus's head in her hands. She is still deluded and boasts to all about the young lion she hunted and beheaded. Old Cadmus, who knows what has happened, sadly approaches his daughter and draws her mind back to the palace, her family and finally what she is holding in her hands. Agaue begins to weep. Cadmus remarks that the god has punished the family rightly but excessively. In the end, Dionysus finally appears in his true form to the city. He banishes Agaue from Thebes and ordains that Cadmus and his wife will turn into snakes, destined to invade Greek lands with a horde of barbarians.

# Euripedes & Pentheus, central human character

He could have been made a majestic but misguided king, rather like Eteocles in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* or Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Or he might have been a stock tyrant, like Lycus in the *Heracles*, whose overthrow no spectator mourns: the play would have been a straightforward vindication of the god.

Instead we find something typically Euripidean ambiguity : a young ruler who shares some of the features of the tyrant (aggressive outspokenness, a tendency to bully, a refusal to listen to reason), but also one who is weak and perhaps uncertain of himself. He repeatedly assumes that the Bacchic rites mask some form of sexual orgy, persisting in this belief even after the messenger has insisted on its falsehood. His taunting of Dionysus for his good looks also has a whiff of sexuality about it.

DIONYSUS: Newly arrived in this land of Thebes, I am Dionysus, son of Zeus, whom Semele, child of Cadmus, once bore, delivered by the lightning-flame.<sup>1</sup> I have changed my appearance from a god's to a man's,<sup>2</sup> as I come to Dirce's stream and the waters of Ismenus. And here close by the palace I see the tomb of my mother, whose life the thunderbolt ended, and the wreckage of her home that smoulders with the still living flame of Zeus' fire, immortal token of Hera's [10] outrage against my mother. Cadmus has my approval: he has consecrated this ground as holy, where his daughter may have her tomb. But the green vine that clusters round it in a wreath was my work. I come from Lydia's fields<sup>3</sup> abundant in gold, and Phrygia's. Persia's sunny uplands have I traversed, Bactria's walled cities and the bleak land of the Medes, rich Arabia, too, and all of Asia that lies by the salt sea and boasts fair-towered cities full of mingled Greeks and barbarians together. [20] Now to this city of Greeks have I come first, to make my godhead plain for mortal men to see, now that I have set those peoples dancing and instituted there my worship.

CADMUS: Teiresias, from one old man to another; you have the wisdom. Night or day I will never tire of pounding my thyrsus on the ground; in my pleasure I have forgotten that I am old. TEIRESIAS: Then you feel as I do. I, too, am young again; I, too, will attempt the dance. CADMUS: Shall we not go to the mountain by carriage? TEIRESIAS: This would not be showing the same honour to the god. CADMUS: Shall I take you – one old man playing nursemaid to another? TEIRESIAS: The god will lead us there with no effort.

CADMUS: Are we the only Thebans prepared to dance for Bacchus?

TEIRESIAS: Yes; we are alone in being of sound mind; the rest are not.

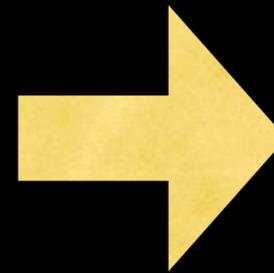
CADMUS: We waste time delaying; take hold of my hand! TEIRESIAS [stretching out his hand]: There, clasp it and make a pair of them. CADMUS: I am of mortal birth and so do not despise the gods. TEIRESIAS: We do not chop logic when speaking of divinity. The traditions of our forefathers that we have inherited, as old as time, shall not be overthrown by any clever argument, though it be devised by the subtlest of wits. CADMUS: It will be said I have no shame at my age, intending to dance with my head bound with ivy. TEIRESIAS: No; the god has made no distinction between young and old, in calling them to the dance. He wishes to receive honour from all alike and to be exalted without exception.

PENTHEUS: I've been out of the country, as it happens, but tales of strange goings-on in Thebes, criminal actions, have brought me back. They say our womenfolk have left home on a pretence of Bacchic worship, and are frolicking in the dark mountain-glens, honoring with dances the god Dionysus, whoever he may be. In the middle of their bands, I hear, stand mixing bowls filled to the brim, and one by one they creep off to lonely places to serve the lusts of men. In this, of course, they pretend to be inspired priestesses of their god, but actually they rank Aphrodite above Bacchus. Some of them I have caught, and my guards hold them fast with tied wrists in the public gaol. The rest who are still at large I'll hunt from the mountain; I'll bind them in iron nets and soon put an end to this pernicious revelling! They say that some foreigner has arrived from the land of Lydia, a wizard conjuror, with fragrant golden curls and the flush of wine in his complexion. In his eyes he has the charms of Aphrodite, and day and night he escorts young women, luring them with the prospect of his joyous mysteries. If I catch him inside the borders of this land, I'll cut his head off his shoulders and put a stop to his making his thyrsus ring and shaking his locks! This is the man who says that Dionysus is a god, this the man who says he was once sewn into the thigh of Zeus, when in fact he was destroyed by the fiery lightning bolt, he and his mother, because she falsely named Zeus as her lover!

PENTHEUS: But here's another sight to marvel at! It's the prophet Teiresias I see in dappled fawnskins and my own mother's father – how ridiculous – playing the Bacchant, complete with wand! [To CADMUS:] Sir, I am embarrassed by the sight of you both – so old, so foolish! Shake off that ivy! Rid your hand of the thyrsus, Grandfather! You're the one who put him up to this, Teiresias! You want to foist one more god as a novelty on mankind and so to scan the flight of birds and take more fees for burned sacrifice! If your grey hairs did not protect you, I'd have you bound and sitting among the Bacchants for seeking to import these pernicious rites! Where women are concerned, when the grape gleams liquid at feasts, I say there is nothing wholesome left in their ceremonies!

CHORUS-LEADER: What blasphemy! Stranger, have you no reverence for the gods, or for Cadmus who sowed the earth-born crop?<sup>28</sup> Will you disgrace the family of Echion, though you are his son?

TEIRESIAS: When a clever man has an honest case to make, it is no great task for him to speak well. You possess a fluent tongue, as if you were a man of sense, but your words lack all judgement. The good speaker whose influence rests on self-assurance proves to be a bad citizen; for he lacks intelligence. This new god whom you mock will achieve a greatness I cannot describe throughout Greece. Men enjoy two great blessings, young man: firstly, the goddess Demeter, the Earth – call her by whichever name you will – who sustains mankind by means of dry foods and.....



there is he who came afterwards, Semele's son, who invented the liquid draught of the grape to match her gift and introduced it to mortals. This it is that puts an end to the sorrows of wretched men, when they get their fill of the flowing vine, this that confers sleep on them and forgetfulness of daily troubles. There is no other antidote to suffering. He, a god himself, is poured out in honour of the gods, so that he is the cause of man's blessings.

CADMUS good advice to PENTHEUS: My boy, it is good advice that Teiresias has given you: live with us and not beyond the bounds of convention. For you are up in the air at the moment; you have your senses but you are senseless. **Even if, as you say, this god does not exist, say that he does.**

To declare that he is Semele's child is a lie that does us credit: people will think she gave birth to a god and the honour will reflect on us, on the whole family. You recall the pitiful end of Actaeon, torn apart by the ravenous hounds he had reared, because he boasted that he was a greater hunter in the mountain glades than Artemis.

## Pentheus reacts to reason:

PENTHEUS out of control: Hands off! Go and play your Bacchic games, but don't smear me with your stupidity! [Turning to face

TEIRESIAS: This man, though, your instructor in folly, will answer to me! [To his attendants:] Quick, one of you, go to this fellow's seat where he watches birds, heave it up with crowbars, and turn it upside down! Throw everything there into confusion, fling his holy ribbons to the winds and breezes! This way I will cause him greater torment than anything. And you others, go through the town and track down the womanish stranger, who infects our women with his new-fangled disease and pollutes their beds. Once he is caught, bind him and bring him here to face the penalty of being stoned to death, after seeing a painful end to his revelling in Thebes.

[PENTHEUS leaves, preceded by his attendants.]

## CHORUS

Holiness, queen among the gods! Holiness, who fly over the earth on your golden wings, do you hear these words of Pentheus? Do you hear his unholy contempt for the Roaring One, Semele's son, the god who is first among the Blessed Ones, where fair garlands adorn delightful pleasures? These are his gifts: to make men dance together as one, to rejoice at the sound of the flute, and to put an end to care, when the liquid gleam of the grape enters the feasts of the gods and in the ivy-wreathed feasts of men the wine-bowl casts its veil of sleep over them. [Antistrophe:] The end of tongues uncurbed and lawless foolishness is unhappiness; but the life of quiet contentment and good sense survives the buffeting of the sea and keeps homes together; for though they dwell far off in the sky, yet the heavenly ones observe the deeds of men.

## CHORUS

To be clever is not to be wise, and thoughts that go beyond mortal limits spell a short life. In view of this who would pursue great ambitions rather than accept his present lot? These are the ways of madmen, in my verdict, whose wits have left them. [400]

[Strophe:] Oh, that I might come to Cyprus, Aphrodite's isle, where dwell the Loves who cast their spell on mortal hearts, to Paphos, enriched without rain by streams of the barbarian river with its hundred mouths, and to the fairest land of Pieria, that the Muses have as their home, on the holy slope of Olympus. Oh, take me there, Roaring One, Roaring One, god who leads your Bacchants, spirit of joy! There are the Graces, there is Desire, there your worshippers have leave to celebrate your name.

DIONYSUS: I can tell you this without hesitation; it is easy to answer. You know of flowery Tmolus, I take it, from hearsay?

PENTHEUS: I do; it encloses in its embrace the town of Sardis.

DIONYSUS: That is my home, and Lydia is my native land.

PENTHEUS: How is it that you are bringing these rites to Greece?

DIONYSUS: Dionysus himself initiated me, the son of Zeus.

PENTHEUS: Is there a Zeus there who fathers new gods?

DIONYSUS: No, it is the one who wedded Semele here.

PENTHEUS: Did he compel you in the hours of night or to your face, when you were awake

DIONYSUS: He saw me and I him, and he gave me his rites.

PENTHEUS: What is the nature of these rites of yours?

DIONYSUS: They are secrets that only Bacchus' initiates may know.

PENTHEUS: What benefit do they bring to his worshippers?

DIONYSUS: You are not permitted to learn, but it is knowledge worth having.

PENTHEUS: A false answer but a clever one, to make me want to hear!

DIONYSUS: The god's rites hate the man who practises impiety.

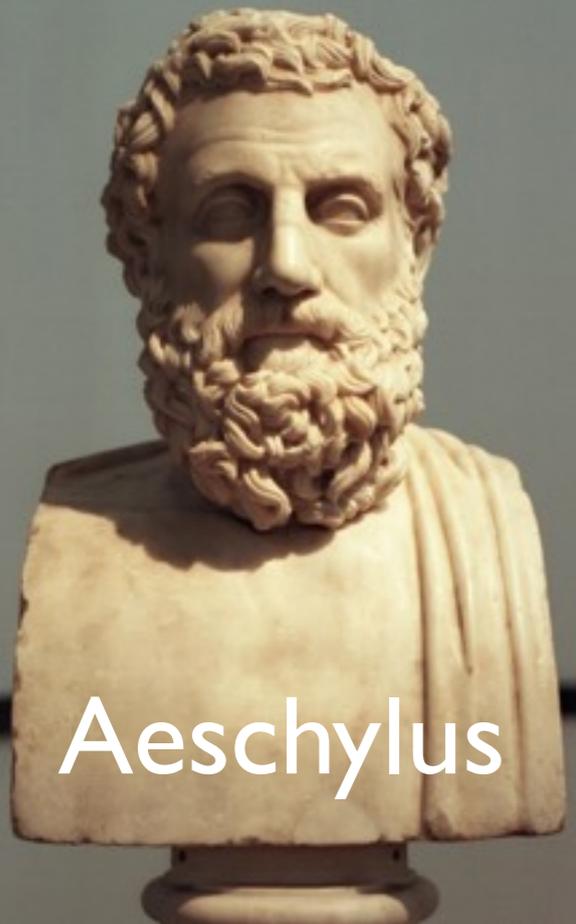
PENTHEUS: This god, since you say you saw him clearly, how did he look?

# EURIPIDES



# THE BACCCHAE

performed in original Ancient Greek

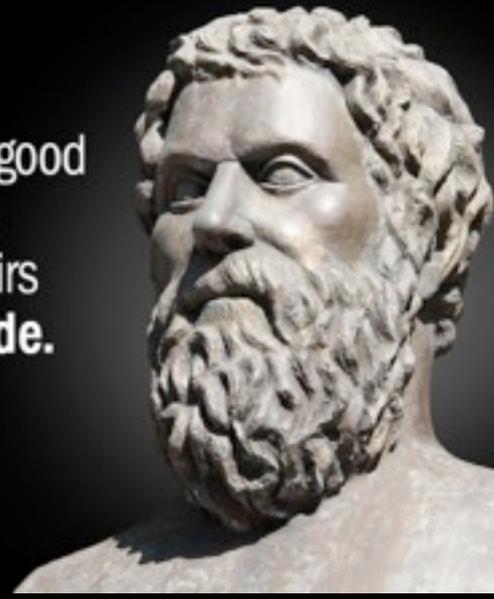


Aeschylus

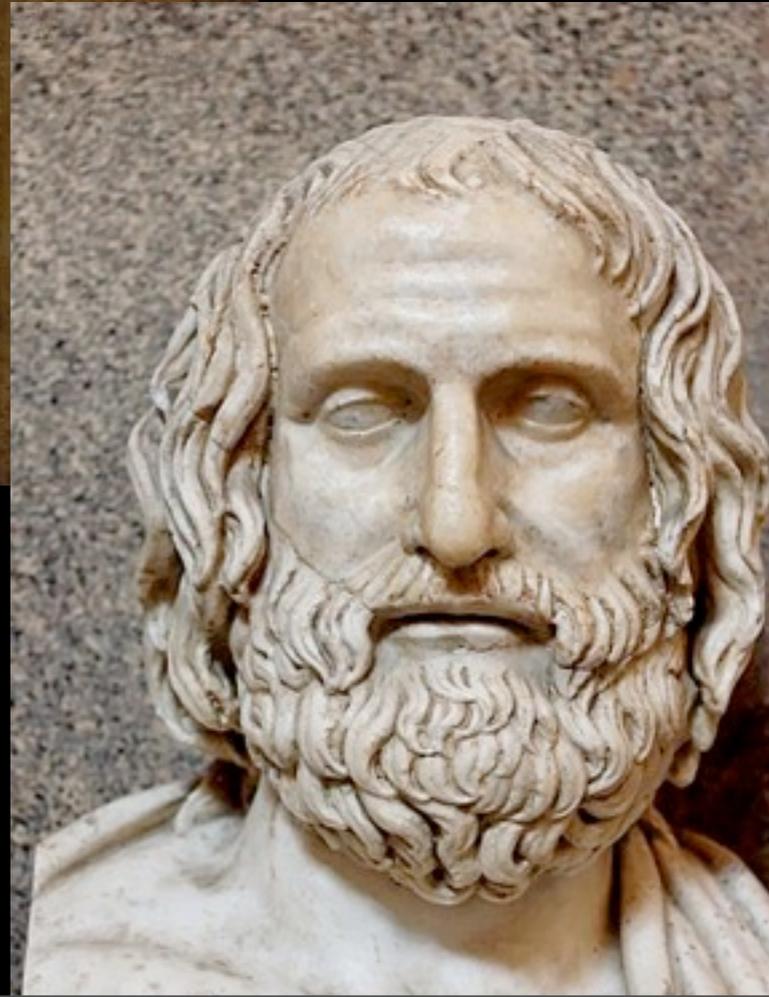
All men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong, and repairs the evil. **The only crime is pride.**

– Sophocles

AZ QUOTES



Euripedes



# History of Ancient Greece

## Institute for the Study of Western Civilization

### Week 18: Euripedes







