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Pelasgus, Danaus *Tyrannus* and the Return of the King

Many have commented that in Aeschylus' *Supplikes*, Pelasgus demonstrates a concern for the people of Argos (e.g., at 365-9; 398-400) disproportionate to its relevance to the plot. Some have suggested that Pelasgus' emphatic attachment to the democratic process foreshadows the important part that the Argive *demos* will play in the rest of the trilogy (Podlecki 1966, 50; Garvie 1969, 153; Winnington-Ingram 1983, 67-9). This theory is misguided in its emphasis on the ruled, rather than on the ruler. Pelasgus' democratic leanings and other clues in the *Supplikes* suggest that over the course of the Danaid trilogy, Aeschylus envisioned a movement from democratic monarchy to despotic tyranny, and back again.

Danaus serves as a foil to Pelasgus' example of kingly justness by succeeding him to the throne as a despotic tyrant. Danaus' acquisition of a bodyguard at 985-88 prepares us for his succession to the throne after Pelasgus' probable death in an Argive-Aegyptid war. The Danaids' ironic "Argive benediction" -- inasmuch as it prays against a war that likely occurs and bloodshed that surely does -- suggests that Danaus will be a despot who does *not* "take common counsels" (699) in ruling a "well-regulated" Argos (670). Danaus' greatest failing as a ruler will be exposing Argos to the pollution brought by ordering the murder of the Aegyptids.

In the trilogy's denouement, the Aegyptid Lynceus deposes Danaus the tyrant, and founds a new ruling line at Argos. I follow D. J. Conacher in understanding Pelasgus' digression on Argive history at 260-7 to foreshadow the eventual cleansing of the pollution caused by the Aegyptid murders. Moreover, the Greek-Egyptian duality of Apis' name suggests Lynceus as the agent of the purification to come, in that he is an Egyptian who is also Greek through his descent from Io. In curing the pollution that threatened the welfare of the *polis*, and in deposing the tyrant responsible, Lynceus shows himself a beneficent king in the Pelasgan mold.