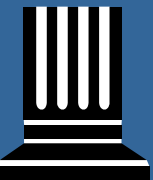
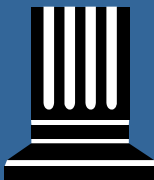




Overview of Greek Tragedy



- evidence of many playwrights producing tragedies during the Classical Age, not just the three whose work is preserved
 - e.g. **Agathon** who is mentioned Plato's *Symposium*
 - the same is true for comedy: not just Aristophanes, Cratinus and Eupolis
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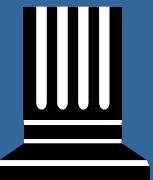
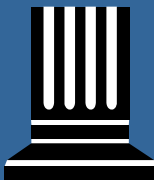
Pre-Aeschylean Tragedy

- **inscriptions** (epigraphical evidence)
- e.g. the **Athenian victory lists**
- also, the **Parian Marble**
 - ca. 275 BCE: history of Greece, mainly Athens
 - includes tragedy





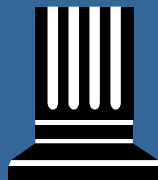
Pre-Aeschylean Tragedy

- early tragedians: **Choerilus** and **Pratinas**
 - no long quotes; few titles of plays known
 - the best known pre-Aeschylean tragic playwright is **Phrynichus**
 - *The Siege of Miletus*: fined for causing the Athenian people “too much grief”
 - *The Phoenician Women*: opens with a servant arranging chairs
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Aeschylus




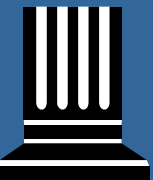
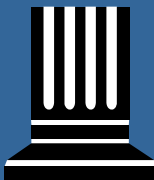
- The Life and Times of Aeschylus
- Aeschylus' Contributions to Greek Tragedy
- Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*
- The Other Surviving Tragedies by Aeschylus





Aeschylus

Life and Times

- the first tragedian whose work survives is **Aeschylus** (ca. 525 BCE - 456 BCE)
 - according to his tombstone, Aeschylus fought in the Persian Wars
 - but it does not mention his drama
 - according to him, then, his most important achievement in life was fighting for freedom, not writing plays
- 
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Aeschylus

Life and Times

- Aeschylus won the Dionysia for the first time in 484 BCE
- he produced his last known trilogy in 458 BCE: *Oresteia* (including *Agamemnon*)
- he wrote and produced over eighty plays during his life
- thus, he entered the Dionysia at least twenty times

Aeschylus


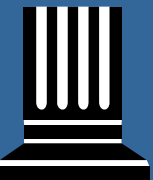
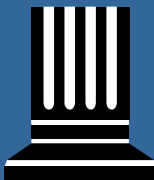
Life and Times

- but only seven of his plays have survived
- nevertheless, we can see that he was the most important playwright of his day
 - he won five or more victories at the Dionysia
 - later playwrights often referenced and imitated—and satirized!—his work
 - the audiences of the next generation enjoyed revivals of his drama



Aeschylus

Contributions to Drama

- Aeschylus introduced the second actor (*hypocrites/deuteragonist*) to the stage
 - thus, he was the inventor of dialogue in the conventional sense of the word, i.e. between actors (vs. actor and chorus)
 - later, the principal actor came to be called the protagonist (“first contender”)
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Aeschylus



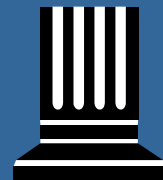
Contributions to Drama

- Aeschylus focused on creating language that was effective and affecting on stage
- his poetry is lofty, ornate and complex
- indeed, it is some of the most difficult to understand but most beautiful Greek ever written, cf. Shakespeare
- at times, his imagery is so dense that it was rumored he wrote his plays drunk!



Aeschylus

Agamemnon

- Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is the first tragedy in the ***Oresteia*** trilogy
 - in *Agamemnon*, **Clytemnestra** kills her husband Agamemnon when he comes back from Troy in triumph
 - in the next play of the trilogy (*The Libation-Bearers*), Agamemnon's son Orestes returns and murders his mother Clytemnestra in revenge
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon


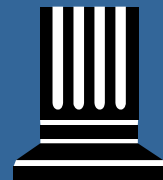
- in the final play of the *Oresteia* trilogy (*The Eumenides*), Orestes is put on trial and acquitted of Clytemnestra's murder
- this trilogy is Aeschylus' greatest work
- it was composed only two years or so before his death
- this shows that he stayed active in theatre and was a vital creative force well into later life



Aeschylus

Agamemnon



- not only did Aeschylus write and choreograph *The Oresteia* but he acted in it at its premiere
 - most likely, he played Clytemnestra, the main character in *Agamemnon*
 - even though there are no trilogues in the play, the dramatic action requires that there be at least two other actors
- 
- 

Aeschylus

Agamemnon

- one actor must play Clytemnestra (the protagonist's role), one must play Agamemnon and one must play Cassandra
- these three characters appear on stage in the one scene together
- a breakdown of the division of roles among actors shows why this is so



Aeschylus

Agamemnon



Actor 1

Actor 2

Actor 3

Watchman

Prologue: The long wait for Agamemnon to return

CHORAL ODE: The Chorus remembers Iphigenia

Clytemnestra

The Beacon Speech: The Greeks have won at Troy

CHORAL ODE: The Chorus thanks the gods for victory

Clytemnestra Herald

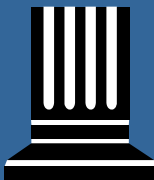
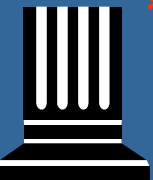
A Report from Troy: The Greeks are returning

CHORAL ODE: The Chorus remembers Helen

Clytemnestra Agamemnon (Cassandra)*

Clytemnestra greets Agamemnon

*Cassandra does not speak during this scene





Aeschylus

Agamemnon



Actor 1

Clytemnestra

Actor 2

Agamemnon

Actor 3

(Cassandra)*

Clytemnestra goes inside the palace with Agamemnon

CHORAL ODE: The Chorus has a sense of foreboding doom

Clytemnestra

(Cassandra)*

Clytemnestra tries to make Cassandra come inside

Cassandra

Cassandra foresees her own and Agamemnon's deaths

CHORAL ODE: The Chorus hears Agamemnon being murdered

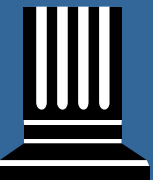
Clytemnestra

Clytemnestra (on the *ekkyklema*) gloats over Agamemnon's body

Clytemnestra Aegisthus

Aegisthus and the Chorus quarrel

*Cassandra does not speak during this scene


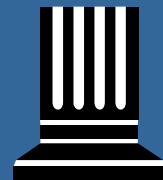




Aeschylus

Agamemnon



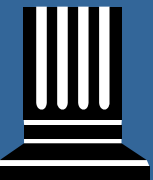
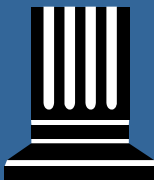
- the play opens with a servant—a Watchman—waiting for his master Agamemnon's return from Troy
 - the Watchman speaks from the roof of the palace (the *skene* building)
 - the time is dawn—plays at the Dionysia began when the sun rose
 - in the darkness, the Watchman's voice sounds as if the palace itself is speaking
- 
- 



Aeschylus

Agamemnon



- the chorus of Argive elders enters next
 - it is composed of elders because old men and young boys were the only males left in Argos during the Trojan War
 - once the chorus enters, it spends the entirety of the play on stage singing and dancing
 - and helping no one at all!
- 
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Aeschylus

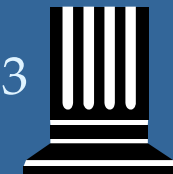
Agamemnon



- Aeschylus' odes are densely packed with imagery and poetic expressions:

Since the young vigor that urges
inward to the heart
is frail as age, no warcraft yet perfect,
while beyond age, leaf
withered, man goes three footed
no stronger than a child is,
a dream that falters in daylight.

Aeschylus, Agamemnon 76-83

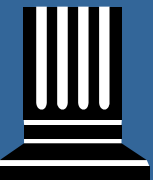
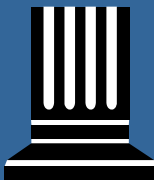




Aeschylus

Agamemnon




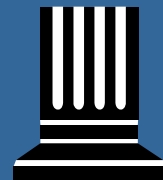
- at some point during the first choral ode, Clytemnestra enters
 - it is difficult to determine her precise movements in this play, which is unusual in Greek tragedy
 - normally, all characters' entrances and exits are announced
 - by withholding these announcements, Aeschylus is showing her sneakiness
- 
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon



- a Herald reports that the Greeks are returning
 - Clytemnestra tells him to leave and send in Agamemnon
 - the audience knows that, if Clytemnestra meets Agamemnon in the play, this actor will have to play him
 - this is a highly sophisticated technique called metatheatre
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon

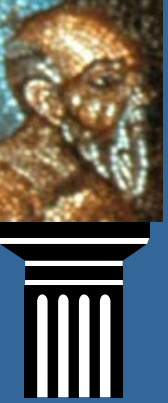


- when Clytemnestra finally meets Agamemnon, her speech is full of irony and concealed rage at her husband:

Had Agamemnon taken all
the wounds the tale whereof was carried home to me,
he had been cut full of gashes like a fishing net.

(*Agamemnon* 866-872)





Aeschylus

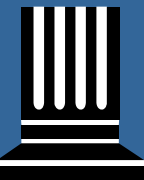
Agamemnon



- when Clytemnestra finally meets Agamemnon, her speech is full of irony and concealed rage at her husband:

If he had died each time that rumor told his death, he must have been some triple-bodied Geryon back from the dead with threefold cloak of earth upon his body, and killed once for every shape assumed.

(Agamemnon 866-872)



Aeschylus

Agamemnon


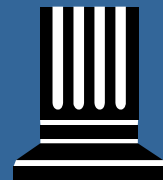
- to test whether Agamemnon knows about her plans and to see for herself how blindly self-absorbed he is, Clytemnestra rolls out a purple carpet for him to walk on as he enters the palace
- the purple carpet is actually a collection of tapestries, i.e. textile artwork from inside the palace



Aeschylus

Agamemnon



- the question Clytemnestra is asking herself is: Will Agamemnon commit *hubris* by walking on works of art?
 - “as Priam might have, if he had won”?
 - the stripe of purple running up the stage into the palace is a symbol foreshadowing the blood that is about to pour out of the door
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon

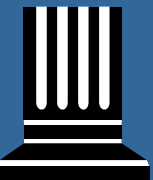
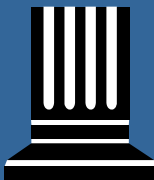
- Agamemnon proves to be as full of himself as he is in Homer and treads the carpet as he proceeds inside the palace
- he walks on a symbol of his own blood!
- but first he makes Clytemnestra agree to take Cassandra inside the palace
- concubines are not a Greek custom so this is a terrible insult to his wife



Aeschylus

Agamemnon




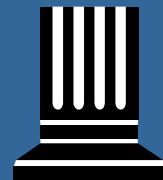
- but Clytemnestra is so pleased her husband does not know about her plan to kill him that she ignores the insult Cassandra represents to her wifely dignity and exults:
The sea is there, and who shall drain its yield? It breeds precious as silver, ever of itself renewed, the purple ooze wherein our garments shall be dipped. And by God's grace this house keeps full sufficiency of all. Poverty is a thing beyond its thought.
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon



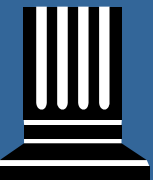
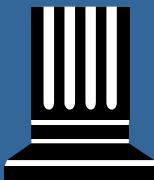
- Aeschylus' treatment of Cassandra is one of best aspects of the play
 - at first, she does not speak
 - the original Greek audience would surely have concluded that this part is being played by a mute actor
 - especially after the next scene when Clytemnestra tries to make her come inside the palace
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon



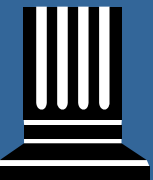
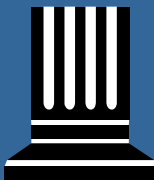
- but after remaining silent for two scenes and an entire choral ode, suddenly Cassandra not only speaks but sings!
 - the actor playing Cassandra at the premiere was, no doubt, a famous singer in the day whom Aeschylus has kept hidden thus far behind Cassandra's mask and costume
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon




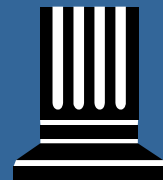
- Cassandra can see the future and knows that Clytemnestra is going to kill her as well as Agamemnon
 - she sees all time as happening at once
 - for instance, when she approaches the doors of the palace, she sees and smells the flesh of children roasting
 - they are Thyestes' sons eaten by him a generation before in that very palace
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon




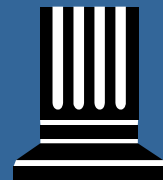
- in a brilliant stroke of theatre, Aeschylus shows how Cassandra can speak the future plainly but not be believed
 - her first words in Greek come in a wild, off-kilter meter called dochmiacs which make her sound insane
 - but as the scene progresses, she calms down and begins to speak more clearly in a normal cadence (iambs)
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon

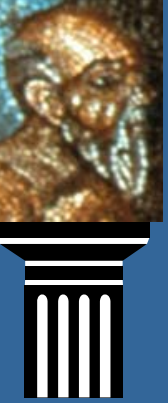


- but the clarity of her words comes too late to convince the chorus that her prophetic vision is valid
 - the chorus has already made up its mind that she is a madwoman and so they do not listen to her
 - thus, Aeschylus shows how Cassandra can speak the truth but not convince anyone to believe her
- 
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Aeschylus

Agamemnon

- in frustration, Cassandra throws down her staff and tears off her holy garland and stomps on it
- this is an act of heresy against the god Apollo
- she can no longer bear living and turns to enter the palace, in full knowledge she will be killed inside



Aeschylus

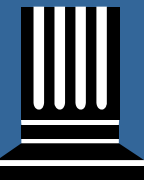
Agamemnon



- her last words are poignant:

Yet once more will I speak, and not this time my own death's threnody. I call upon the Sun in prayer against that ultimate shining when the avengers strike these monsters down in blood, that they avenge as well one simple slave who died, a small thing, lightly killed.

(Agamemnon 1327-1330)





Aeschylus

Agamemnon



- her last words are poignant:

Alas poor men, their destiny. When all goes well,
a shadow will overthrow it. If it be unkind,
one stroke of a wet sponge wipes all the picture out;
and that is far the most unhappy thing of all.

(Agamemnon 1327-1330)


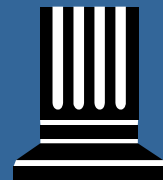




Aeschylus

Agamemnon



- almost immediately, the chorus hears Agamemnon's cries as Clytemnestra is butchering him in his bath
 - the chorus is confused and feeble, and they do nothing but debate what to do
 - the doors of the palace open to reveal Clytemnestra (on the *ekkyklema*) covered in blood, gloating in triumph over Agamemnon's body
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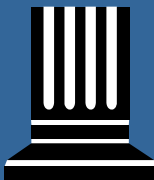
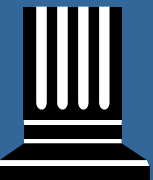
Aeschylus

Agamemnon



Clytemnestra:

I struck him twice. In two great cries of agony he buckled at the knees and fell. When he was down I struck him the third blow, in thanks and reverence to Zeus the lord of dead men underneath the ground. Thus he went down, and the life struggled out of him; and as he died he spattered me with the dark red and violent driven rain of bitter savored blood to make me glad, as gardens stand among the showers of God in glory at the birthtime of the buds.



Aeschylus

Agamemnon

- the play ends with Clytemnestra singing a triumphant dirge (*kommos*) over Agamemnon's corpse
- in the last scene, Aegisthus appears and quarrels with the chorus
- the final lines are trochaics (DUM-da) which show an increased pace of action

Aeschylus

Choephoroi (The Libation-Bearers)

- Orestes returns in disguise to Argos and runs into his sister Electra at the tomb of their father Agamemnon
- her (excessive) grief steels Orestes to do what he must, i.e. avenge their father's death at his mother's hand
- after killing Aegisthus, Orestes goes into town to confront Clytemnestra

Aeschylus

Choephoroi (The Libation-Bearers)

- an old Nurse (Cilissa) recalls changing Orestes' diapers ("Children's young insides are a law to themselves") but still agrees to help him
- when Orestes finally confronts Clytemnestra openly, she bares his breast to remind him where he came from and says:

I think, child, that you mean to kill your mother!

Aeschylus

Choephoroi (The Libation-Bearers)

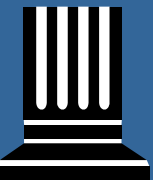
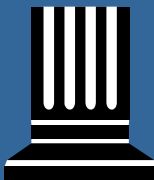
- having killed his mother, Orestes sees the Furies rising from her blood and runs off the stage
- end of Part 2 of *The Oresteia*



Aeschylus

The Eumenides (The Furies)



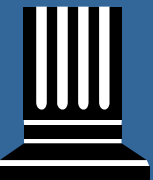
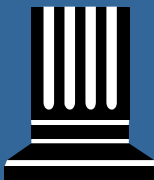
- Orestes flees to Delphi (the seat of Apollo's oracle), seeking the support of the god who ordered him to murder his mother
 - around him lie an exhausted chorus of Furies (on the *ekkyklema*) who have been chasing him
 - the ghost of Clytemnestra whips them awake and stirs them into "fury"
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Aeschylus

The Eumenides (The Furies)



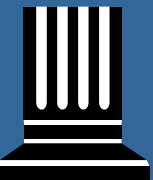
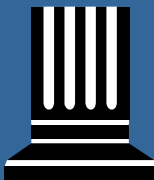
- their opening dance was so frightening to the audience that one ancient source reports pregnant women in the theatre went into labor
 - Apollo appears and the scene changes to Athens
 - where Athena agrees to serve as the judge in Orestes' case
- 
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Aeschylus

The Eumenides (The Furies)




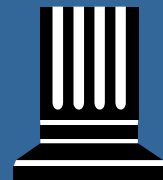
- the Furies play the part of the prosecutor
 - Apollo acts as Orestes' "defense attorney"
 - in the end, Athena acquits him on the grounds that a mother is not a true parent but only the "field" in which a man sows his "seed" (the child)
 - thus begins our long and glorious—and invariably just—judicial system
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Aeschylus

The Suppliants



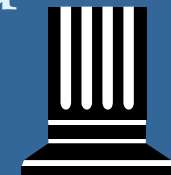
- second play in a trilogy about the Danaids (“daughters of Danaus”)
 - a myth about the resettlement of Greece by the descendants of Io (Isis of Egypt)
 - best scene: their cousins abduct the Danaids (the chorus) on stage and force them to marry them
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Aeschylus

Persae (*The Persians*)

- an in-your-face account of the Persians' defeat in the Second Persian War
- how they must have suffered back in Persepolis though no Greek actually saw that happen
- the first and last “historical” play surviving from ancient Greek drama
- best scene: Atossa performs a séance and resurrects from hell the soul of Darius



Aeschylus

The Seven Against Thebes


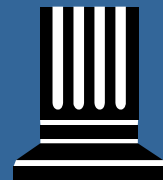
- a play about Polyneices and Eteocles, the incestuous offspring of Oedipus and Jocasta
- they kill each other in battle
- best scene: a presentation of the shields of the defenders of Thebes
- the last scene was added later by some later hand (not Aeschylus!) to accord with Sophocles' *Antigone*



Aeschylus

Prometheus Bound





- perhaps the last play Aeschylus wrote
 - for production in **Sicily** (where he died)?
 - the new king of heaven, Zeus punishes the Titan Prometheus for giving fire to humankind
 - opening scene: Hephaestus reluctantly nails his fellow “Titan” to a rock
 - from there on throughout the play, Prometheus never moves!
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Aeschylus

Prometheus Bound




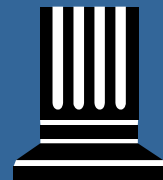
- a chorus of Oceanids (sea-goddesses) and Oceanus (a fellow Titan) try to convince Prometheus to apologize to Zeus and reconcile with him
 - is this the staunch democrat Aeschylus' condemnation of tyranny?
 - Byzantine copyists were so incensed by the negative depiction of Zeus as a tyrant that they wrote derogatory verses in the margins of the text
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Aeschylus

Prometheus Bound



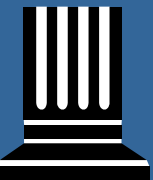
- next, another of Zeus' victims appears: Io, the mortal girl whom Zeus loved and was changed into a cow to hide her (unsuccessfully) from Hera
 - is Aeschylus again condemning the sexual excesses of tyrants?
 - in any case, the cow-girl being chased by an invisible gadfly is a powerful effect on stage
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Aeschylus

Prometheus Bound



- the play ends with the appearance of Hermes (“Zeus’ lackey”) who tries to force Prometheus to give in
 - when the Titan refuses, the stage swallows him up
 - how was *that* done on the ancient stage?
 - cf. the story of Satan (“bringer of fire”)
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