

Ezekiel's *Exagoge*: A Typical Hellenistic Tragedy?

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IT IS A STRANGE ACCIDENT of history that the most extensive surviving fragments of tragedy from the Hellenistic period were written not by a Greek, but by a Jew called Ezekiel. Extracts of his play, the *Exagoge*, were preserved third hand by Eusebius of Caesarea (*Praep.Evang.* 9.28–29), who had himself discovered these quotations in a now lost work *On the Jews* (Περὶ Ἰουδαίων) by Alexander Polyhistor. The subject matter is biblical and covers the events of Exodus 1–15. This tragedy cannot have been composed later than the time of Polyhistor, in the early decades of the first century BC, and it cannot be earlier than the creation of the Septuagint in the third century. Alexandria, with its sizable and Hellenized Jewish community, remains the most probable location for the *Exagoge*'s performance, though the precise origin of our poet and the details of his life are a mystery.¹ The only information provided by Polyhistor is that he was an author of tragedies (Ἐζεκιήλος ὁ τῶν τραγωδιῶν ποιητής, Euseb. *Praep.Evang.* 9.28.1). Clement of Alexandria describes Ezekiel in similar terms as a poet of Jewish tragedies (ὁ τῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν τραγωδιῶν ποιητής, *Strom.* 1.23.155.1). The *Exagoge*, which is called a “drama” (ἐν τῷ ἐπιγραφομένῳ δράματι Ἐξαγωγή) in both Clement's and Eusebius' account (9.29.14), was clearly one of those tragedies. As the only certain work of ‘new tragedy’ from which substantial fragments survive it is thus an extremely important text for the history of

¹ See H. Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge 1983) 5–17; A. Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy: Texts, Translations and a Critical Survey* (London 2015) 220–222.

Greek drama.

But was it really the same kind of tragedy as those produced by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides? Bryant Davies raises precisely this question: “in what sense can the *Exagoge* be considered a tragedy at all?” The answer: “it is not.”² Instead, a Greek literary form is appropriated by the Diaspora community of Alexandria as an alternative to the Passover sacrifice at Jerusalem.³ “The *Exagoge* is not transformed into a tragedy in the way that one would expect from fifth century classical models,” she concludes, “because its ultimate aim is not simply to be a Greek tragedy.”⁴

Bryant Davies’ view is fairly representative of a longstanding scholarly consensus. It is generally accepted that the play imitates the extant works of tragedy in its language and metre, while some of the usual features of the genre, such as a prologue and messenger speech, are clearly discernible in the surviving lines.⁵

² R. Bryant Davies, “Reading Ezekiel’s *Exagoge*: Tragedy, Sacrificial Ritual, and the Midrashic Tradition,” *GRBS* 48 (2008) 393–415, at 400; cf. Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy* 227: “problems also concern discerning a sense of tragedy or drama in Ezekiel’s play.” P. Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge d’Ézéchiel le Tragique. Introduction, texte, traduction et commentaire* (Leiden 2006) 16–21, however, argues that such a view is based upon an anachronistic understanding of ‘the tragic’.

³ Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge* 57–68, similarly suggests that the play was intended for performance at a Jewish festival; on the distinctively Jewish ‘Grundidee’ of the play see B. Snell, *Szenen aus griechischen Dramen* (Berlin 1971) 185; on the play as a hybrid of Greek and Jewish culture see T. Whitmarsh, “Pharaonic Alexandria: Ezekiel’s *Exagoge* and Political Allegory in Hellenistic Judaism,” in E. Subías et al. (eds.), *The Space of the City in Graeco-roman Egypt. Image and Reality* (Tarragona 2011) 41–48; on the Hellenistic literary context see J. Heath, “Ezekiel Tragicus and Hellenistic Visuality: The Phoenix at Elim,” *JThS* 57 (2006) 23–41.

⁴ Bryant Davies, *GRBS* 48 (2008) 395.

⁵ B. Snell, “Die Jamben in Ezechiels Moses-Drama,” *Glotta* 44 (1966) 25–32, at 32: “mit der ihm gegebenen Sprache versucht er ehrlich und erfolgreich, den Stil des 5. Jh.s zu erreichen”; cf. K. Kuiper, “De Ezechiele poeta Iudaeo,” *Mnemosyne* 28 (1900) 237–280, at 264; Snell, *Szenen* 171–172; Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 23–24; and G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, “The *Exagoge* of

Yet it is in its narrative and staging that the differences primarily lie. Whitmarsh summarizes the prevailing orthodoxy well: “there is little that is tragic, in the Aristotelian sense, about the *Exagoge*’s narrative: no cohesion of action (it presents at least five different locales and times) and no negative *peripeteia*.”⁶ Virtually every single commentator on the *Exagoge* has dutifully repeated this same observation: that the play violates Aristotle’s ‘unities’.⁷ If the *Exagoge* is indeed a single play, then it encapsulates within it the action of more than one day and involves several changes of scene.⁸ Moses in the opening prologue meets the daughters of

Ezekiel and Fifth-Century Tragedy: Similarities of Theme and Concept,” in B. Zimmermann (ed.), *Rezeption des antiken Dramas auf der Bühne und in der Literatur* (Stuttgart 2001) 223–239.

⁶ Whitmarsh, in *The Space of the City* 42.

⁷ A. Kappelmacher, “Zur Tragödie der hellenistischen Zeit,” *WS* 44 (1924–5) 69–86, at 82–83; I. Wieneke, *Ezechielis Judaei Poetae Alexandrini. Fabulae quae inscribitur ΕΞΑΓΩΓΗ fragmenta* (Münster 1931) 117–118; A. Lesky, “Das hellenistische Gyges-Drama,” *Hermes* 81 (1953) 1–10, at 8–9; O. Zwierlein, *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* (Meisenheim 1966) 139–141; G. M. Sifakis, *Studies in the History of Hellenistic Drama* (London 1967) 123; Snell, *Szenen* 175; R. J. Tarrant, “Senecan Drama and its Antecedents,” *HSCP* 82 (1978) 213–263, at 228; P. Fornaro, *La Voce Fuori Scena. Saggio sull’ Exagoge di Ezechiele con testo Greco, note e traduzione* (Turin 1982) 39–41; Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 30; R. G. Robertson, “Ezekiel the Tragedian,” in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha II* (Peabody 1983) 803–819, at 805; A. Kleczar, “The *Exagoge* of Ezechiel. Analysis of the Dramatical Structure of the Play,” *Eos* 87 (2000) 113–118, at 115; Xanthakis-Karamanos, in *Rezeption des antiken Dramas* 224; G. Manuwald, *Fabulae Praetextae. Spuren einer literarischen Gattung der Römer* (Munich 2001) 256; Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge* 15, 21; Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy* 225–226; a rare and early voice of dissent was Kuiper, *Mnemosyne* 28 (1900) 269–270.

⁸ For the suggestion that the *Exagoge* was in fact a trilogy see T. D. Kohn, “The Tragedies of Ezekiel,” *GRBS* 43 (2002/3) 5–12. This idea received tentative support from B. Le Guen, “‘Décadence’ d’ un genre? Les auteurs de tragédie et leurs oeuvres à la période hellénistique,” in B. Le Guen (ed.), *À chacun sa tragédie? Retour sur la tragédie grecque* (Rennes 2007) 85–139, at 107, but is convincingly disputed at length by H. Jacobson, “Ezekiel’s *Exagoge*, One Play or Four?” *GRBS* 43 (2002/3) 391–396, and has generally not been accepted.

Raguel, perhaps at a well (cf. Exodus 2:15–16); we then hear of the marriage of Moses to Raguel's daughter Sepphora; then comes the vision of the burning bush (on Mt. Horeb in Exodus 3:1) and in the following messenger speech we learn of the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea; finally, Moses is shown the oasis at Elim. "So much then for the Aristotelian unities of time and place," concludes Jacobson in his commentary.⁹ Most scholars, of course, would agree that some flexibility was possible in the classical period. Yet Jacobson concludes that any 'defence' of Ezekiel based on such precedents misses the point: "for the qualitative differences in the nature of his 'violations' reveal that he is operating under a quite different set of dramatic assumptions than did the fifth-century tragedians."

Many scholars have thus taken the *Exagoge* as evidence for the development of a distinctive 'post-classical' tragedy during the fourth and third centuries BC.¹⁰ From this perspective, the

⁹ Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 30.

¹⁰ This tradition goes back to Nietzsche's 'death' of Greek tragic theatre: "Diesen Todeskampf der Tragödie kämpfte Euripides," F. W. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (Leipzig 1872) ch. 11. Snell, *Szenen* 170, begins his discussion of the *Exagoge* using noticeably similar language: "mit dem Tod von Sophokles und Euripides in den letzten Jahren des 5. Jhdts. v. Chr. stirbt die grosse attische Tragödie." Compare also the recent remark by E. Sistikou, *Tragic Failures: Alexandrian Responses to Tragedy and the Tragic* (Berlin 2016) 11: "classical Athens was the necessary and sufficient condition for tragedy to exist and develop from its very beginnings until its maturity and inevitable 'death'." For a crisis in the theatre of the late fifth century see P. Ghiron-Bistagne, "Die Krise des Theaters in der griechischen Welt im 4. Jahrhundert v. u. Z.," in E. C. Welskopf (ed.), *Hellenische Poleis. Krise, Wandlung, Wirkung* III (Berlin 1974) 1335–1371. For further bibliography see the recent discussion in E. Csapo, "Introduction," in E. Csapo et al. (eds.), *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century BC* (Berlin 2014) 1–12, at 1–3. From the 1990s onwards, it has become more common to refer not to tragedy's demise, but rather a 'change'—neutral or even positive—in its nature: e.g. E. Hall, "Greek Tragedy 430–380 BC," in R. Osborne (ed.), *Debating the Athenian Cultural Revolution: Art, Literature, Philosophy and Politics 430–380 BC* (Cambridge 2007) 264–287, at 269: tragedy in around 380 BC was "qualitatively different" from what it had been in 430.

Hellenistic period becomes one stage in the evolution of drama from ‘Athenian’ tragedy to the ‘Rezitationsdramen’ of Seneca.¹¹ The symptoms of change most commonly adduced by scholars, including the two most recent studies on Hellenistic tragedy, are, briefly, as follows: the ‘Athenian’ theatre of the *polis* was transformed into a more Panhellenic spectacle; audiences came to value actors and acting style more highly than poets and poetic content; as the singing parts for actors increased, choruses became dispensable (even if they did not disappear from the tragic stage entirely); and plays were now commonly performed as excerpts or disconnected scenes and at private recitations as well as in the public theatres.¹² And in the midst of this transformation is Ezekiel’s *Exagoge*.¹³ In the latest commentary on the play, Lanfranchi sees the *Exagoge* as a marker for just such a stage in the history of drama: “L’ *Exagoge* participe-t-elle à cette évolution? Vraisemblablement oui.”¹⁴

¹¹ See Sistikou, *Tragic Failures* 20: “the dramatical production and theatre practices of the last three centuries BC paved the way for Roman drama, thus marking not a decline but a critical stage in the development from classical to imperial tragedy.”

¹² Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy* 4–8, and Sistikou, *Tragic Failures* 12–27. See also G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, “Hellenistic Drama: Developments in Form and pperformance,” *Platon* 45 (1993) 117–133, at 119–122. The suggestion of an ‘anthological culture’ in which plays were performed as excerpts derives largely from B. Gentili, *Theatrical Performances in the Ancient World: Hellenistic and Early Roman Theatre* (Amsterdam 1979), especially 21–22; cf. Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge* 24. This view has, however, been challenged by S. Nervegna, “Staging Scenes or Plays? Theatrical Revivals of ‘Old’ Greek Drama in Antiquity,” *ZPE* 162 (2007) 14–42.

¹³ Tarrant, *HSCP* 82 (1978) 230, adduces Ezekiel’s “freedom in the handling of time and place” as a feature typical of “post-classical tragedy”; cf. Zwierlein, *Rezitationsdramen* 146. Snell, *Szenen* 186–187, makes a similar comparison between Ezekiel and Naevius; for a comparison with Roman *fabulae praetextae* see Manuwald, *Fabulae* 254–258.

¹⁴ Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge* 20. This approach to the play is by no means original: cf. Kappelmacher, *WS* 44 (1924–5) 84: “das Zwischenglied zwischen der Technik der attischen Tragödie und der des Seneca, es scheint mir gefunden und darin liegt meiner Auffassung nach der bisher verkannte Wert

Recent scholarship on fourth-century and Hellenistic drama, however, should prompt us to revisit these longstanding and comfortable assumptions. Le Guen, among others, has attested to the rude health of theatre in this period, at least in terms of the numbers of festivals and contests for new tragedy, and so exploded the old orthodoxy of the 'death' of tragedy.¹⁵ By the same token, we should perhaps be equally sceptical of a linear evolution in the nature of tragedy between the fourth and first centuries BC, for which the evidence is surprisingly weak. As Le Guen has demonstrated, many of our prior assumptions are based on only two sources, Aristotle and Horace, neither of whom belongs to the Hellenistic period.¹⁶

In the light of these developments, it seems appropriate to revisit the *Exagoge*. This paper aims to test, against the evidence of the text, the assumption that Ezekiel's *Exagoge* represents a major break with the theatrical traditions known in classical Athens and summarized by Aristotle. Since the main confirmation for our *a priori* assumptions about Hellenistic tragedy comes from a particular interpretation of the fragments of the *Exagoge*, this interpretation cannot rely for support on these very assumptions. Otherwise the argument risks becoming circular. Before commencing this task, however, it is as well to note two major caveats. First, it is not my intention to deny that over the

unseres Stückes." See also W. Dindorf, *Eusebii Caesariensis Opera* (Leipzig 1867) I xxv, for the similar belief that the *Exagoge* was an early form of 'Lesedrama' typical of the Hellenistic period.

¹⁵ See G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth Century Tragedy* (Athens 1980); P. E. Easterling, "The End of an Era? Tragedy in the Early Fourth Century," in A. H. Sommerstein et al. (eds.), *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis* (Bari 1993) 559–569; and B. Le Guen, "Théâtre et cités à l'époque hellénistique: 'Mort de la cité' – 'Mort du théâtre'?" *REG* 108 (1995) 59–90; B. Le Guen, *Les Associations de Technites dionysiaques à l'époque hellénistique II* (Nancy 2001) 9–11, and in *À chacun sa tragédie?* An early pioneer in the study of fourth-century drama was T. B. L. Webster, "Fourth Century Tragedy and Poetics," *Hermes* 82 (1954) 294–308, who denied that the fourth century was a period of decline, while admitting that fourth-century drama was characterized by its derivative nature and interest in rhetoric.

¹⁶ Le Guen, in *À chacun sa tragédie* 108–114.

four centuries from the death of Sophocles to the battle of Actium no development, great or small, occurred in the production of tragedy. Hellenistic theatres may well have presented a mix of both archaizing traditionalism and more recent innovation. The question is merely whether the play must *necessarily* constitute a radically different form of drama, produced under “a quite different set of dramatic assumptions,” as Jacobson has it. Second, one may well object that, since there is so little evidence, any alternative interpretation is itself little better supported than the traditional view. I do not dispute this: the intention here is merely to suggest that such an alternative is worthy of consideration, no more.

Themes and narrative

Although the play concerns the early history of a non-Greek people, the Hebrews, it shares with classical tragedy several common themes: travel and exile, the foundation of new cults, and the foundation of new cities. Travel is a key but, until recently, much neglected theme of fifth-century tragedy.¹⁷ The *Exagoge* begins with Moses, as a wanted killer, wandering in exile from his original homeland of Egypt (καὶ νῦν πλανῶμαι γῆν ἐπ’ ἀλλοτέρμονα, 58). He will eventually find sanctuary with the priest-king of Libya, Raguel. Aristophanes mocked Euripides for introducing outcast beggars and exiles into his plays (*Ach.* 418–430), yet the figure of the wanderer is in fact a typical element of classical tragedy in general. Banishment due to the pollution of homicide is also not uncommon in Greek literature. Prominent examples mentioned by Aristophanes include Telephus, who fled to Mysia following the murder of his uncles, and Bellerophon, who at the start of Euripides’ *Stheneboea* (fr.661.15–18 *TrGF*) has been welcomed and purified by Proetus, the king of Tiryns. We might also mention Oedipus, who in Sophocles’

¹⁷ See E. Stewart, *Greek Tragedy on the Move: The Birth of a Panhellenic Art Form c.500–300 B.C.* (Oxford 2017) 22–31; cf. E. Hall, *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides’ Black Sea Tragedy* (Oxford 2013) 47–68, who characterizes the *Iphigenia in Tauris* as “travel tragedy,” a term which may fairly be used to describe much of the surviving tragic corpus.

Oedipus at Colonus is granted protection by Theseus, the ruler of Athens.

The tragic hero frequently does not know the name of the land to which he has come. Sapphira's statement that Moses has arrived in Libya (Λιβύη μὲν ἡ γῆ πᾶσα κλήζεται, ξένε, 60) has been compared to a fragment from Sophocles' *Mysians*, in which Telephus learns that he is now in Asia (Ἀσία μὲν ἡ σύμπασα κλήζεται, ξένε, fr.411.1 *TrGF*).¹⁸ Xanthakis-Karamanos has similarly contrasted Moses' arrival with that of Oedipus in Attica.¹⁹ Like Moses, Oedipus announces that he is a wanderer in the prologue (τὸν πλανήτην Οἰδίπουν, *OC* 3; cf. 124–125, 347) who is also lost and in need of direction (11–13). Another equally hapless traveller is Io, who asks the chorus of the *Prometheus Bound* to tell her where she has come to in her wanderings (σήμηνον ὅποι / γῆς ἢ μογερὰ πεπλάνημαι, 564–565). In Greek literature, as in Exodus, it is not uncommon for a hero to be met by a young woman at a well or water course. Orestes discovers his sister while she is returning from a spring in Euripides' *Electra* (77–78, 107–111). Amphiarus, in Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, similarly encounters the play's title character while he is lost in the vicinity of Nemea. He first wishes to know who owns the house by which he is standing and later asks Hypsipyle to direct him to a spring (fr.752h.22–25, 29–30 *TrGF*). In passing, he remarks on the wretchedness of travel in an unknown country (ὡς ἐχθρὸν ἀνθρώποισιν αἶ τ' ἐκδημία, fr.752h.15). Again, the status of the tragic hero as a suffering wanderer is clearly apparent.

The *Exagoge* presents not only the arrival of the hero, but also, as is common with much of tragedy, his departure. As in the biblical narrative, tragic heroes frequently leave under the direction of a divine figure. We have already noted Io, to whom the titan Prometheus reveals her final destination in the *Prometheus Bound* (786–876). Another parallel to the *Exagoge* may be Sophocles' *Triptolemus*. In this play Demeter instructs her acolyte

¹⁸ Wieneke, *Ezekielis* 57.

¹⁹ Xanthakis-Karamanos, in *Rezeption des antiken Dramas* 229.

Triptolemus on his coming journey around the world, in the course of which he will deliver the goddess's rites to all of humanity.²⁰ In many cases, the purpose of such expeditions is to found a dynasty or city. Although the Hebrews will not be permitted to enter Canaan within the lifetime of Moses and his generation, nevertheless the *Exagoge* could be seen as a dramatization of just such a foundation myth. In this regard, the play resembles Euripides' *Andromache*. Here the heroine begins as an exile in a foreign land and the concubine of a foreign prince, Neoptolemus; yet in the final moments of the drama she will be sent by the goddess Thetis to Molossia, where Andromache's son Molossus is fated to establish a royal dynasty (1243–1252). Comparison can also be made with Euripides' *Archelaus*. Like Moses, the hero of this tragedy is an exile in a foreign land who is initially welcomed by a local king and offered the hand of his daughter in marriage.²¹ Unlike Moses, however, the king cheats Archelaus of his bride and makes an unsuccessful attempt on his life. According to Hyginus, whose account of the myth is largely based upon Euripides' play, Archelaus, following the direction of an oracle from Apollo, is led by a goat to found the Macedonian capital of Aegae.²² This sign may have been foretold by a *deus ex machina* in the closing scene.

And with new cities come new cults. Aeschylus' *Aetnaeae* both predicted good fortune for a new city, the tyrant Hieron's foundation at Aetna, and also concerned the origins of a local Sicilian cult, the Palici.²³ In Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Athena instructs Orestes and Iphigenia on the foundation of cults for Artemis at Halae Araphenides and Brauron (1446–1467), just as

²⁰ Frs. 597–617 *TrGF*; see A. H. Sommerstein and T. H. Talbot, *Sophocles: Selected Fragmentary Plays II* (Oxford 2012) 222–224.

²¹ See Stewart, *Greek Tragedy* 120–121.

²² *Inde profugit ex responso Apollinis in Macedoniam capra duce, oppidumque ex nomine caprae Aegeas constituit*, Hyg. *Fab.* 219.

²³ Aetna: *Vit. Aesch.* 9 *TrGF*; Palici: Aesch. frs. 6–7 *TrGF*; see Stewart, *Greek Tragedy* 103–108.

God in the *Exagoge* commands Moses to institute the Paschal rites (152–174).²⁴ In both tragedies, the emphasis is on the future continuation and commemoration of these rituals. In Attica the people will sing hymns to Artemis into the future (τὸ λοιπὸν ὑμνήσουσιν Ταυροπόλον θεάν, 1457), while the Hebrews will each year (ἕτος κατά, 170) consume nothing made with yeast for seven days. This latter command is described in the Septuagint as a lasting ordinance for future generations (εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς ὑμῶν, Exodus 12:14, cf. 12:17, 24–8). Lanfranchi has claimed that a Greek audience would not have found the recitation of the Passover regulations interesting, yet it is exactly this kind of aetiology that one would expect to find in a tragedy.²⁵

The *Exagoge* is recognizably a tragedy, not only because its author competently employs a form of language and verse that is typical of the genre, but also because it shares common themes with many of the works of the fifth-century masters. It is a ‘travel tragedy’ in which an exiled hero is despatched by a god to found a new polity and a new cult. The difference is that the *Exagoge* concerns the history of a non-Greek people.

The staging

We now move to consider perhaps the primary and most serious objection: the staging. The task here is to question whether Ezekiel could have employed dramatic conventions similar to those known to fifth- and fourth-century dramatists. The traditional view holds that this is not the case and that some change in theatre design, technology, or audience expectations is necessary to account for the play’s form. Any reconstruction of ancient staging must be speculative, especially when it is based on a fragmentary text. Once again, I do not hope to prove that the reconstruction presented here is correct, but only that it is plausible. And if it is plausible, this should be enough to cast reasonable doubt on the proposition, hitherto unquestioned, that the *Exagoge* is, in terms of its staging, an exceptional or typically Hellenistic tragedy.

²⁴ On cult in Euripides’ play see Hall, *Iphigenia* xxix–xxxi.

²⁵ Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge* 58, 64–65.

Libya

Following the Horatian model, most scholars have attempted to divide the play into five acts. The first three ‘acts’ are thought to be set in roughly the same locality, Libya or Scripture’s Midian, yet they involve as many as three possible locations: the well at which Moses meets Sepphora, the palace of Raguel, and the site of the burning bush.

The play begins conventionally enough with a ‘Euripidean’ prologue speech, followed by the introduction of the seven daughters of Raguel (ὄρω δὲ ταύτας ἑπτὰ παρθένους τινάς, 59). In extant plays of Euripides, the approach of the chorus or another actor is often spied from a distance and similarly announced by the actor who delivers the prologue.²⁶ This pattern is also found in earlier tragedy: Orestes concludes the prologue of Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers* by announcing the arrival of his sister and her companions (10–18). In a variation on the same theme, Prometheus hears the approach of the chorus of Oceanids before he sees them (*PV* 114–126). Moses’ and Sepphora’s use of the deictic pronoun to refer to the sisters (ὄς ἔστ’ ἔμοδ τε καὶ τούτων πατήρ, 65) confirms their presence on stage. It is a reasonable assumption, and one made by most commentators on the play, that the daughters of Raguel formed a chorus.²⁷ If the play involved a confrontation between the girls

²⁶ *Cyc.* 36–37; *Hipp.* 51–2; *El.* 107; *Ion* 78–79; *Phoen.* 196–197; *Or.* 132–133; see Kuiper, *Mnemosyne* 28 (1900) 241; Kappelmacher, *WS* 44 (1924–5) 76; Wieneke, *Ezechielis* 30; Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge* 128.

²⁷ Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 88; Lanfranchi, *L’Exagoge* 29; Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy* 226–227. The only absolutely dissenting opinion is that of Wieneke, *Ezechielis* 30; cf. Tarrant, *HSCP* 82 (1978) 222 n.45, on the *Exagoge*’s “complete lack of an active chorus.” Fornaro, *La Voce* 12–14, argues that a small chorus of only seven sisters is evidence for the gradual decline of the tragic chorus; yet, as Sifakis, *Studies* 123, observed, if Aeschylus did not need a chorus of fifty to represent the Danaids in his *Suppliants*, we should not assume a chorus of seven here. On the supposed diminution or absence of tragic choruses in Hellenistic theatres, see A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (Oxford 1946) 192–197, 240–241; and *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1988) 233. Epigraphical evidence, however,

and local herdsmen, as in Exodus 2:17, then this chorus may have played an active role in the plot, as in earlier tragedy rather than New Comedy. In a fragment of a tragic text preserved on a first or second century AD papyrus (*P.Oxy.* XXXVI 2746 = *TrGF* II 649), a chorus similarly interacts with the protagonists. The chorus' interjections are clearly marked by the sign χο(ρός). On the basis of the language and style, Coles identified this play as a "post-classical" tragedy.²⁸ The so-called 'Gyges play' (*P.Oxy.* XXIII 2382 = *TrGF* II 664), which is also thought to date to the fourth century or later, may have included an exchange between a chorus and the queen of Lydia.²⁹ And finally the *Rhesus*, if it is a fourth-century tragedy, involves extensive interaction between actors and chorus, presumably in the orchestra. This play's mix of unusually busy staging with features from earlier Aeschylean drama, such as Rhesus' probable arrival in a chariot, may not be untypical of later tragedy.³⁰

It has been assumed that the innovation of a high *proscaenium* stage in the Hellenistic period created a new mode of performance in which the (increasingly diminished) chorus in the orchestra was demarcated from the actors on the stage, as in the comedies of Menander, and that communication between the two was no longer convenient or necessary.³¹ Yet there is no

suggests that choruses continued to feature at Hellenistic tragic contests: see Sifakis, *Studies* 116–118.

²⁸ R. A. Coles, "A New Fragment of Post-classical Tragedy from Oxyrhynchus," *BICS* 15 (1968) 110–118; cf. Le Guen, in *À chacun sa tragédie?* 103.

²⁹ Snell and Kannicht (*TrGF* II p.248) suggest the word προσκυνῶ (line 9) implies that a queen is being greeted by a chorus. On the dating of the fragment see Lesky, *Hermes* 81 (1953) 1–10; Le Guen, in *À chacun sa tragédie?* 101.

³⁰ See V. Liapis, "Staging Rhesus," in G. W. M. Harrison and V. Liapis (eds.), *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre* (Leiden 2013) 235–253, at 237.

³¹ C. Robert, "Zur Theaterfrage," *Hermes* 32 (1897) 421–453, at 447–453; Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus* 190–198; R. Beacham, "Playing Places: The Temporary and the Permanent," in M. McDonald and M. Walton (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre* (Cambridge 2007) 202–226, at 211; Sifakis, *Studies* 130–135, argues that intercourse

evidence that this was a fixed and unbreakable convention of Hellenistic tragedy. Flexibility would have been necessary if Hellenistic theatres were to meet the needs of performers of both old and new tragedy during the course of the same festivals.³² Even in theatres with *proscenium*, movement between the stage and orchestra remained possible either by means of a set of steps placed against the stage, or ramps on either side.³³ Moretti has further argued that even after the adoption of the high stage from the fourth century the orchestra remained the main performance space: “the *proskenion* stage building seems not to be a new form responding to new uses, but a new form adapted to old uses.”³⁴ If performances of old tragedy were still possible, must new tragedy have always resembled new comedy?

We now move on to the aspect of the *Exagoge* most regularly cited as typical of later drama: the scene changes. According to the traditional view, it is only developments in theatre-design and dramaturgy in the Hellenistic period, including the separation of stage and orchestra into two separate performance areas, that made the changes of scene in the *Exagoge* possible. Taplin, for example, argues that a consequence of the high stage was that “between the acts [in later tragedy] the scene was invariably empty of actors; the scene might then change and time elapse.”³⁵ However, in the theatre known to fifth-century poets, orchestra

between chorus and actors was only restricted but not prevented entirely; on the ‘inaccessibility’ of the orchestra for actors in New Comedy see G. W. Arnott, “Menander’s Use of Dramatic Space,” *Pallas* 54 (2000) 81–88, at 87.

³² See Nervegna, *ZPE* 162 (2007) 18–21; Stewart, *Greek Tragedy* 177–178.

³³ Ramps: Plut. *Demetr.* 34.3; steps are known from fourth-century vase painting (e.g. *RVAp* 339, no. 11) and from third- and second-century inscriptions from Delos (*IG XI.2* 199.B.95–96; 203.43; *ID* 403.44–45).

³⁴ J.-C. Moretti, “The Evolution of Theatre Architecture Outside Athens in the Fourth Century,” in E. Csapo et al., *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century* (Berlin 2014) 107–137, at 133.

³⁵ O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Entrances and Exits in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1977) 49 n.2; see also Sifakis, *Studies* 135: “as soon as the space of action was detached from the orchestra the chorus ceased to be an obstacle to the change of scene.”

and stage could on occasion be viewed as two separate locations and, moreover, changes of scene could be effected by the movement of actors between these spaces. Given the fragmentary state of our evidence, we cannot ignore the possibility that Ezekiel made use of the same conventions employed by his predecessors.

The first apparent change of scene is from the well in the countryside to the palace of Raguel. In lines 66–67 Sepphora announces that she is to be married to Moses, while lines 68–89 contain a dialogue in which Raguel, called Moses' father-in-law by Polyhistor (πενθεροῦ, Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 9.29.4), interprets Moses' dream. If Sepphora's first encounter with Moses takes place outside the city, it is reasonable to suppose that the action has now moved to a more domestic setting. However, such changes of scene can be managed using the dramatic conventions of earlier tragedy. In Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* the play begins at the tomb of Agamemnon. Burials should properly be situated some distance from dwelling places and beyond the city limits.³⁶ This alternative space is represented by the orchestra, where the tomb, as the destination of the chorus in the *parodos*, would be most conveniently situated.³⁷ However, by line 653 Orestes is knocking on the door of the palace, even though the chorus have not left the performance area. In his earlier references to the doors (561 and 571) Orestes neglected to use any deictic pronoun that would suggest their close proximity to the tomb. Although the chorus remain in the orchestra after 653, we are to assume that they have travelled with Orestes to the palace, where they meet Cilissa and Aegisthus. The movement of the actors from orchestra to stage building, together with attendant verbal cues, may have been sufficient to indicate such a change of location. The high stage of the Hellenistic period may indeed

³⁶ As S. Scullion, *Three Studies in Athenian Dramaturgy* (Berlin 1994) 71, notes, in exceptional circumstances the tombs of heroes can be placed in inhabited areas, but Aeschylus (unlike Euripides at *Hel.* 1165–1168 and *Bacch.* 6–9) does not indicate that this is the case here.

³⁷ Taplin, *Stagecraft* 339; G. Ley, *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus* (Chicago 2010) 27–35.

have made it easier for the audience to imagine the two spaces as distinct locations, but we do not have here a fundamental change in dramatic conventions.

Elsewhere, the separate locations of the Athenian acropolis and the Areopagus court on the neighbouring hill are seemingly combined in the *Eumenides*. When Orestes arrives in Athens he clings to the statue of the goddess (πάρειμι δῶμα καὶ βρέτας τὸ σόν, θεά, 242), which may suggest that he is understood to be inside the temple, just as when he sought sanctuary at Apollo's *omphalos* in Delphi (40). Yet when Athena convenes the court she refers to its situation on the Areopagus using the deictic pronoun (πάγον δ' ἱ' Ἀρειον ἱ' τόνδ', Ἀμαζόνων ἔδραν, 685). Athena could admittedly be pointing to the hill from the acropolis, as Scullion suggests, but then it is hard to see why the first meeting of the court would not have taken place in the location Athena ordained for it.³⁸ Aeschylus' presentation of space seems deliberately vague, as once again two distinct locations are merged into one performance area.

A similar change of scene may have occurred in Sophocles' *Ajax*. Here the play begins at the stage building: Odysseus is said to be prowling around the *skēnai* of the Greek encampment (σκηναῖς ... ναυτικαῖς, 3), near the door of Ajax's hut (τήσδε ... πύλης, 11). In the ensuing scene, Athena calls Ajax out of the house and the two converse on the threshold. Later, during the 'deception-speech', Ajax announces that he is going to the washing places near the shore (λουτρὰ καὶ παρακτίους / λειμῶνας, 654–655) and to an isolated untrodden place (χῶρον ... ἄστιβῆ, 657). He then leaves the stage. Following the revelation of Chalcas' oracle, the chorus and Tecmessa also leave in search of Ajax. He next appears at a grove not far from running water, where Tecmessa and the chorus find his body (ποταμοὶ θ' οἶδε, 862–863, νόπους, 892): conceivably the same

³⁸ Scullion, *Three Studies* 78–79; for a combination of spaces see Taplin, *Stagecraft* 390–391; D. Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning* (Cambridge 1997) 83–84.

location mentioned at 654–657. Most scholars, ancient and modern, have supposed that a change of scene must have taken place.³⁹ It is impossible to know exactly how this was staged and more than one option was probably available to the ancient producer. For our purposes, it may suffice to note that from 815 none of the actors need enter or exit via the stage building and the audience are thus encouraged to imagine that it is some distance away. As in the *Libation Bearers*, the action moves from being centred around one location, the stage building, to another, the wood and orchestra. Ajax's corpse, though unburied, becomes for his family the equivalent of a tomb.⁴⁰ If, as some have suggested, the object representing Ajax's body was placed in a central position in the orchestra, it could have resembled the grave of Agamemnon in the *Libation Bearers*.⁴¹

While such a change of scene is comparatively rare, the orchestra and stage building are regularly envisaged as distinct spaces in the plays of Euripides. The use of tombs and altars to indicate free-standing structures, separate from the palace / stage building, has been examined in detail by Ley.⁴² A notable example is Euripides' *Helen*. Unlike Agamemnon, in the *Helen* Proteus has a grave that is unusually close by the palace (1165–1168). This could have been positioned either to the side of the

³⁹ The one exception is Scullion, *Three Studies* 89–128, and “Camels and Gnats. Assessing Arguments about Staging,” in G. W. Most and L. Ozbek (eds.), *Staging Ajax's Suicide* (Pisa 2015) 75–107, who is largely followed by M. Heath, and E. OKell, “Sophocles' *Ajax*: Expect the Unexpected,” *CQ* 57 (2007) 363–380. His arguments, however, are convincingly refuted by P. J. Finglass, *Sophocles. Ajax* (Cambridge 2011) 11–20, and V. Liapis, “Genre, Space and Stagecraft in *Ajax*,” in *Staging Ajax's Suicide* 1211–58, at 130–134. And since ancient scholars (schol. *Soph. Aj.* 813 and 815a Christodoulou) believed that the text indicated a change of scene, ancient producers could also have attempted to effect such a change.

⁴⁰ A. Henrichs, “The Tomb of Aias and the Prospect of Hero Cult in Sophocles,” *CLAnt* 12 (1993) 165–180, at 173.

⁴¹ See Heath and OKell, *CQ* 57 (2007) 373–374; Finglass, *Sophocles. Ajax* 376–379.

⁴² Ley, *Theatricality* 47–65.

skene door or in the orchestra.⁴³ The latter is perhaps more attractive, since Helen's passage back from the house to the tomb spans more than twenty lines (528–556). Neither Helen, as she comes from the palace, nor Menelaus, at the tomb, are aware of each other until 541. While her pace may be leisurely at first, the final stage of her journey after 546 is completed at a run past Menelaus (λαίψηρόν πόδα, 555). However these lines were enacted, a director would need to allow sufficient space. This may have made the orchestra appear more convenient than the stage.

In the *Exagoge*, the focus of the action could thus have moved from the orchestra—the countryside (with an object perhaps signifying a well)—to the stage building, representing the palace of Raguel. The orchestra could also have been used later as the site of the burning bush, to which the actor playing Moses perhaps returned in a second movement away from the palace at line 90. The 'performability' of this later scene has been demonstrated in detail already by others and need not detain us here.⁴⁴ It may suffice to note that this scene presents no greater difficulties for the ancient director than the flaming tomb of Semele in Euripides' *Bacchae* (596–599) or the earthquake in the *Prometheus Bound* (1080–1093). It may, however, be objected that although a single change of scene is effected in the *Libation Bearers* and *Ajax*, more than one such change is unparalleled in extant tragedy. Yet we do know of at least one play, Aeschylus' *Aetnaeae*, in which no fewer than four scene changes took place.⁴⁵

The text does not indicate that the chorus of sisters returned with Moses but we should not dismiss this out of hand, especially if the burning bush appears in roughly the same area as Moses' first meeting with Sephora. Josephus (*AJ* 2.259) noted that the

⁴³ See W. Allan, *Euripides Helen* (Cambridge 2008) 30–31, and Ley, *Theatricality* 57–61, who both prefer a setting in the orchestra.

⁴⁴ Kuiper, *Mnemosyne* 28 (1900) 273; Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 98–99; A. Fountoulakis, "Greek Dramatic Conventions in Ezekiel's *Exagoge*," *Platon* 47–48 (1995–1996) 88–112, at 91–94; Xanthakis-Karamanos, in *Rezeption des antiken Dramas* 233–234; Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge* 35–38.

⁴⁵ *P.Oxy.* 2257. fr. 1.8–14; see Stewart, *Greek Tragedy* 107–108.

girls had charge of their father's flocks and that this was in accordance with local customs. Could they also have accompanied Moses into the wilderness following the interpretation of his dream? On the other hand, if the chorus did leave the performance area, either through an *eisodos* or into the stage building, this again would not be unparalleled in earlier tragedy. Such an exit occurs no fewer than five times in extant tragedy (that is, in 15% of surviving plays): these are at Aeschylus' *Eumenides* 232–243, Sophocles' *Ajax* 814–866, Euripides' *Alcestis* 746–861, *Helen* 385–515, and the *Rhesus* 564–675. The maximum of 102 lines of extant dialogue between God and Moses (90–192) is still comfortably shorter than the longest period in which an actor is left alone on the stage in fifth century tragedy: 130 lines in *Helen*.

Now that we have dealt with the supposed unity of place, one final issue to consider in the early scenes of the *Exagoge* is the unity of time. As Kappelmacher observed, in the biblical narrative Moses spends a considerable period of time in Midian before his return to Egypt.⁴⁶ If we accept that the *Exagoge* is a single drama, it included within it both the arrival of Moses, his betrothal to Sepphora, and the vision of the burning bush. Yet such 'violations' of the unities are painfully common in fifth-century tragedy. The best example may be Euripides' *Stheneboea*. A hypothesis of the play preserved by John Logothetes reveals that Bellerophon managed to depart for Caria from Tiryns and then return and then leave again all within the course of a single drama.⁴⁷ From the extant tragedies, a single choral ode of thirty-two lines is needed in Euripides' *Suppliants* (598–634) to indicate the passage of time in which Theseus gathered his army,

⁴⁶ Exodus 2.23; Kappelmacher, *WS* 44 (1924–5) 83.

⁴⁷ Tiia *TrGF*. B. Zühlke, "Euripides' *Stheneboia*," *Philologus* 105 (1961) 198–225, and D. Korzeniewski, "Zum Prolog der *Stheneboia* des Euripides," *Philologus* 108 (1964) 45–65, attempted to explain away this violation of the unities, but the hypothesis' account is supported by the evidence of the surviving prologue (fr.661.27 *TrGF*) and their arguments are refuted by A.-M. Braet, "La tragédie *Sthénébée* d' Euripide: Exception à 'la règle de l' unité de temps?'" *AntCl.* 42 (1973) 82–112.

travelled from Eleusis to Thebes, and won a major battle. Only sixty-one lines are needed in the *Andromache* (1009–1070) to fill the space in which Orestes traveled to Delphi and arranged the murder of Neoptolemus. During an actor's absence from the stage, multiple events and journeys of many miles are thus accomplished in impossibly short passages of time. Moses' stay at the house of Raguel could have been represented by just such a choral performance.

Egypt and Elim?

Up to this point, none of the play's supposed oddities—including changes of scene, the departure of the chorus from the performance area, or the swift passage of dramatic time—is unparalleled in earlier tragedy. A potentially more serious divergence from fifth-century norms occurs in the putative fourth and fifth acts. Jacobson claimed that “it is beyond reasonable dispute that there are at least three different locales in the play (near Midian, in Egypt, near Elim).”⁴⁸ We have already noted the scenes in Midian/Libya. A change of scene to the oasis at Elim is indeed, as Jacobson claims, indisputable. In the final two fragments provided by Eusebius (243–269), a scout describes for Moses the nearby palms and springs (cf. Exodus 15:27) and adds news of a strange bird, the Phoenix. The scene has clearly changed because Moses is standing within sight of this desert haven (ἔστιν γάρ, ὡς πού καὶ σὺ τυγχάνεις ὄρων, / ἐκεῖ, 245–246). This change is of a different sort to the Midian episodes: Moses has moved to a completely different locality, from Libya to the deserts in the region of Mt. Sinai in Arabia. Yet, again, such a change is not unprecedented. Ezekiel had the earlier example of the *Eumenides*, in which the temple of Apollo at Delphi is transformed into the Athenian acropolis, and probably also of the *Aetnaeae*.

The move to Egypt is more problematic, however. It depends on the assumption that lines 175–192 and 193–242 are delivered to individuals in Egypt. Yet in neither case is this made clear in the text. In lines 175–192 someone repeats God's earlier instruc-

⁴⁸ Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 30.

tions on the rites of the Passover, with added details. The comment of Polyhistor is: “and again about this same festival he says that he has said the following more accurately in addition” (καὶ πάλιν περὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ταύτης ἑορτῆς φησὶν ἐπεξεργαζόμενον ἀκριβέστερον εἰρηκέναι, *Praep.Evang.* 9.29.13). The subject of the main verb is probably Ezekiel (as at 9.29.12: ταῦτα δὲ φησὶν οὕτως καὶ Ἐζεκιήλος). It is not clear, however, who the subject of the infinitive εἰρηκέναι is. The most probable interpretation is that lines 175–192, like 132–174, are also to be understood as the words of God.⁴⁹ However, the perfect tense of the infinitive suggests that these may be reported commands delivered by Moses to the Hebrews. This interpretation is further strengthened by the fact that the speaker here refers to the Israelites in the second person plural and to God in the third person singular. Furthermore, in Exodus (12:21–3) it is Moses who gives these instructions to the Hebrew elders. Jacobson concluded therefore that, as in the biblical narrative, the *Exagoge* included a dialogue between Moses and the elders in Egypt.⁵⁰

After this passage, Polyhistor informed his readers that Ezekiel brought a messenger on stage to announce the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptians (παρεισάγων ἄγγελον λέγοντα τὴν τε τῶν Ἑβραίων διάθεσιν καὶ τὴν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων φθορὰν οὕτως, *Praep.Evang.* 9.29.14). This man was himself part of Pharaoh's army (οὐμός ... στρατός, 204). Kappelmacher, who likened this speech to the account of the battle of Salamis in Aeschylus' *Persians*, deduced that the messenger, an Egyptian, must be speaking to an Egyptian queen in front of her palace.⁵¹ The text, however, provides no information on the messenger's addressee.

⁴⁹ Cf. Wieneke, *Ezechielis* 71: “in altera parte 175–192 Deus longius atque accuratius exponit, quomodo pascha sacrificandum sit.” Alternatively, Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge* 243–244, suggests that the note could be by Eusebius rather than Polyhistor; in that case the two subjects would be, firstly, Polyhistor and, secondly, Ezekiel.

⁵⁰ Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 35, 121–124.

⁵¹ Kappelmacher, *WS* 44 (1924–5) 81–82; cf. Wieneke, *Ezechielis* 93; Snell, *Szenen* 174; Fornaro, *La Voce* 38; Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 136.

If Kappelmacher and Jacobson are correct, we have here a definite break with the dramatic conventions of the classical period. Although, as we have seen, changes of scene are possible in old tragedy, in all of the known examples the entire focus of the action shifts to the new scene. This involves the movement of not only the protagonist but also the chorus. And according to this reconstruction, both Moses and the original chorus of the daughters of Raguel are absent during the course of the messenger speech.

Yet although an Egyptian scene may at first seem a reasonable hypothesis, there are in fact several difficulties. In Exodus (3:20), God in the burning bush only hints briefly at the future afflictions he will visit upon Egypt. The instruction to turn the Nile to blood, as the first of the plagues, is only given at 7:14–19, following Moses' return there. Yet from line 132 in the *Exagoge*, Moses' future actions are foretold by God in the burning bush. These include not only the summoning of the plagues but also the instructions for the Passover, which in Exodus are only delivered in a further series of commands at 12:1–20. In short, Ezekiel has compressed the entire Egyptian episode into the narrative at the burning bush. For Jacobson's reconstruction, however, we need several additional missing scenes to dramatize precisely these events. Some indication is required to show that the plagues have already happened: effectively, another messenger speech or, as Wieneke suggested, a lamentation by the queen on the fate of her people.⁵² The address to the Hebrews presents a further difficulty: their departure is still in the future when this speech is delivered. How then do they leave? At a minimum Jacobson has to fit in another scene or another messenger speech to indicate both that the Hebrews have left and that Pharaoh has followed after them.⁵³ And in addition, he expects to find room for Kappelmacher's confrontation between

⁵² Wieneke, *Ezekielis* 93.

⁵³ Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 35–36.

Moses, Aaron, and Pharaoh.⁵⁴ As we have seen, in classical tragedy actions that require many days or even months can be accomplished off stage in the space of a few lines. However, we know of no case where time passes as quickly on stage. There is in fact no evidence for any of these additional scenes.

Jacobson has created a monster of a tragedy and it is not entirely surprising that Kohn took the radical step of breaking down the *Exagoge* into a connected trilogy.⁵⁵ The traditional view explains this unusual creation as a precursor to Roman, and in particular Senecan, tragedy. Yet we know of no tragedy from any period that is truly comparable with Jacobson's *Exagoge*. Ennius' *Ransom of Hector* and *Medea in Exile* have been cited as examples of a loosening of the unities of time, in the former case, and of place in the latter.⁵⁶ However, the evidence is far from compelling. The argument that the *Ransom of Hector* dramatized the events of *Iliad* 16–24 depends on the interpretation of only one fragment (148 Ribbeck) in which a speaker refers to some people who want to give Achilles weapons. This could refer to an arming sequence for Achilles after the death of Patroclus, but other contexts are possible.⁵⁷ The case is equally uncertain with Ennius' *Medea*. Most of the surviving fragments correspond closely to the text of Euripides' *Medea* and indicate that the setting is Corinth. Yet in lines quoted by Nonius from a play entitled *Medea*, a character is invited to contemplate a view of Athens (243–244 Ribbeck). If Ennius spliced together Euripides' *Medea* with his *Aegeus*, it is difficult to know how he could have found room for the action of both works within a single drama. Alternatively, Jocelyn suggested that we may in fact have two

⁵⁴ Kappelmacher, *WS* 44 (1924–5) 81; cf. P. W. Van Der Horst, "Some Notes on the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel," *Mnemosyne* 37 (1984) 354–375, at 359, who doubts that such a scene could have been staged.

⁵⁵ See n.8 above.

⁵⁶ Gentili, *Theatrical Performances* 34–35; Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge* 23.

⁵⁷ H. D. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius* (Cambridge 1967) 290–303.

plays.⁵⁸ The title *Medea Exul*, which is cited three times by Nonius, was probably used to differentiate the Corinthian drama from a second *Medea* set in Athens. Manuwald's recent comment may thus suffice here for a summary on early Roman stage conventions: "although no law of unity of time and place is known for the Republican period, the action presented on stage tended to be condensed into one significant day."⁵⁹

We will similarly struggle to find parallels for Jacobson's *Exagoge* from imperial Rome. In Seneca's *Troades*, the only certain location on stage is the tomb of Hector in act three (503–512). At lines 1086–1087, however, the tomb is said to be off stage, which suggests that the action has moved to an undisclosed location between the walls of Troy and the sea. As in fifth-century tragedy, this change may be caused by the exit and re-entry of the chorus.⁶⁰ All the scenes take place within the same broad area, the plain of Troy, and within a relatively narrow time period. The *Phoenissae*, with its loose structure and absence of choral odes, is sometimes thought to resemble the *Exagoge*; but we may not possess the entirety of this play and, even if it is complete, such a structure is at least unparalleled in the Senecan corpus.⁶¹ In the *Phoenissae* the stage is seemingly divided into two locations: Oedipus intends to watch events unfold from a wooded hill at 358–359, while in the next scene Iocasta and her daughter must occupy a different vantage point, probably the battlements of Thebes. Such a separation between 'town' and 'country' could have been facilitated by the innovation of the περίακτοι, but it is not fundamentally different from the earlier

⁵⁸ Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius* 342–345.

⁵⁹ G. Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre* (Cambridge 2011) 74. She cites as evidence Pacuvius fr.115, 347; Ennius 95–96, 177–180; and Accius 123, 693 Ribbeck.

⁶⁰ See C. W. Marshall, "Location! Location! Location! Choral Absence and Dramatic Space in Seneca's *Troades*," in G. M. W. Harrison (ed.), *Seneca in Performance* (Swansea 2000) 27–51, at 39.

⁶¹ Wieneke, *Ezechielis* 118; Tarrant, *HSCP* 82 (1978) 229–230.

examples we have considered above.⁶² Changes of scene, we may conclude, are not significantly more common among Roman tragedies than their classical Greek exemplars.

The *Exagoge* as it is currently reconstructed is not a lost ancestor of Senecan tragedy; it is an aberration. It breaks with the conventions not only of the fifth century but of ancient tragedy in general. We are effectively meant to imagine a series of loosely interconnected tableaux that resemble Elizabethan drama more closely than the plays of Seneca. Such a reconstruction cannot be ruled out entirely, since the *Exagoge*, as the lone surviving example of Jewish tragedy, is after all an exceptional play. However, we should not treat it as certain until we have ruled out all other possibilities, and I wish here to offer an alternative reconstruction. In the process, it is suggested that Ezekiel could have staged the final scenes of his play in a way that conformed to the traditions known from other extant tragedies. Again, the aim is not to prove this hypothesis correct—this is not possible given the current state of the evidence—but to show that it is worthy of consideration in the absence of other more likely options. Unless further fragments of the play are discovered, this exercise must remain merely a ‘thought experiment’, but it is hoped one of some value nonetheless.

As we have seen, the text as we have it provides no confirmation that lines 175–192 and 193–242 are indeed delivered to individuals in Egypt. But who can the addressees be, if not, in the one case, Hebrew elders and, in the other, an Egyptian queen? For lines 175–192 the surviving fragments suggest an alternative: Moses’ brother Aaron, with perhaps some silent attendants from among the Hebrews. In the earlier dialogue, God promised to send Aaron to Moses (116–119):

Ἄαρωνα πέμψω σὸν κασίγνητον ταχύ,
 ᾧ πάντα λέξεις τάξ ἐμοῦ λελεγμένα,
 καὶ αὐτὸς λαλήσει βασιλέως ἐναντίον,
 σὺ μὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ὁ δὲ λαβὼν σέθεν πάρα.

⁶² On *περίακτοι* see Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus* 234–235; Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy* 252–253.

I will send Aaron your brother soon, to whom you will relate everything I have said, and he himself will speak before the king, you will speak to me and he will receive my words from you.

These lines conflate Exodus 4:10–17 and 6:30–7:2, where Moses fears to follow God’s commands to be his messenger, first to the Hebrews and then to Pharaoh himself. At both points in the biblical narrative, God tells Moses to let Aaron speak for him. In the Septuagint, Aaron is said to be already on his way to meet Moses (καὶ ἰδοὺ αὐτὸς ἐξελεύσεται εἰς συνάντησίν σοι, 4:14), which corresponds to Ezekiel’s ταχύ. The meeting between Aaron and Moses took place outside Egypt on the mountain of God (συνήνητησεν αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ ὄρει τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:27). Ezekiel could conceivably have set the meeting in ‘Libya’ directly after the vision of the burning bush. Since in Ezekiel’s version Moses receives the Passover instructions in Libya, he could have imparted this message to Aaron and his companions before they departed for Egypt. The audience would thus be able to see that he was following God’s command to use Aaron as his prophet (cf. Ααρων ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἔσται σου προφήτης, Exodus 7:1). Such a scene would also encourage the audience to look forward to the departure of the Hebrews following the Passover as though it were an imminent event.

Moses and Aaron could then have left the stage for Egypt. At this point the scene is still the palace of Raguel and its surroundings. But then who receives the messenger speech? I suggest it is the chorus and Raguel. We have already noted that in classical tragedy off-stage events can move rapidly and journeys can be completed impossibly quickly. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that a lost survivor from Pharaoh’s army could have stumbled upon the house of the Ethiopian king. The arrival of Aegeus in Corinth in the *Medea* (663–823) is equally sudden and unexpected, as is that of Orestes in the *Andromache* (881–1008) and the Corinthian messenger in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* (924–1072). The closest parallel, however, may be Teucer in Euripides’ *Helen* (68–163). He is a lost wanderer who brings Helen important information: Troy has fallen and Menelaus has vanished and is reported dead. However, after a

relatively brief dialogue Teucer moves on and plays no further role in the action. The Egyptian messenger, who becomes a fugitive following another disastrous campaign, may have fulfilled a similar function.

In support of this argument, we may note that the messenger unusually refers to the Egyptian force as “my army” (ἐπεὶ δ’ Ἑβραίων οὐμὸς ἦντησε στρατός, 204). If the messenger were speaking to fellow Egyptians, we might expect “our army” instead (as indeed is the case elsewhere in the speech). The charioteer in *Rhesus*, another survivor from an unexpected defeat, refers to the Thracian force as “our” army in narrating the events that led to Rhesus’ death (λεύσσω δὲ φῶτε περιπολοῦνθ’ ἡμῶν στρατὸν / πυκνῆς δι’ ὄρφνης, 773–774). In the *Helen*, Menelaus does bewail the loss of “my army” (αἰαῖ· τὰ κλεινὰ πῶδ’ ἔστι μοι στρατεύματα; 453). However, here Menelaus is a general who is referring to the forces he used to lead. The messenger in the *Exagoge* cannot mean that the army belongs to him. This would be untrue and also inappropriate if addressed to his queen. He must be referring to ‘the army to which I belonged’. This perhaps makes most sense if he is speaking to someone who is neither a Hebrew nor an Egyptian. The Ethiopian chorus and king would qualify in this case.

The location of the early scenes in Libya is also significant. The precise setting of Raguel’s palace is vague but it must be broadly in the continent of Africa. At line 60, Ezekiel thus diverges from the text of the Septuagint significantly. The home of Raguel and Sepphora in the Bible is called Midian and later authors unanimously identify this land as Arabia.⁶³ At Numbers 10:29–31, Hobab the Midianite and son of Raguel acts as the Israelites’ guide in the wilderness, which again suggests that Midian is roughly synonymous with Arabia and the region around Sinai. Ezekiel may have had good reasons for relocating Sepphora and her father to Ethiopia. If he intended for the messenger speech to be delivered to Raguel and his daughters,

⁶³ Artapanus ap. Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 9.27.17–19; Ptolemy *Geog.* 6.27.7; Philo *Mos.* 1.47.

a location in Libya would make perfect sense. The lone Egyptian survivor must have remained on the western shore of the Red Sea and Raguel would be best placed to encounter him on the African coast.

For biblical scholars (assuming there were any in Ezekiel's audience) such a setting for Midian, though uncommon, was not unacceptable. Ezekiel could have pointed to the Greek translation of Numbers 12:1, where a wife of Moses is described as an Ethiopian (γυναικα Αιθιοπίσσαν ἔλαβεν). Another passage quoted by Eusebius supports the identification of Sepphora with the 'Ethiopian' wife. The third century BC historian Demetrius, in his work *On the Kings of Judea*, stated that Sepphora was a descendant of Abraham and his second wife Keturah. Here he is following *Genesis* (25:1–2), where Midian is one of the sons of Keturah. In the Septuagint, Abraham sent his second family to the land of the rising sun, in the east (εἰς γῆν ἀνατολῶν, Gen 25:6). Demetrius suggested that it was for this reason that Sepphora was known as an Ethiopian in Numbers.⁶⁴ In Greek poetry, the people near the rising of the sun are called Ethiopians.⁶⁵

However, while the Libyan setting is explicable it is still surprising. Demetrius does not explicitly state that Midian is in Ethiopia, and indeed from Abraham's perspective in the Negev an instruction to move to the east could hardly point to Ezekiel's Libya or the Ethiopia known to Ptolemaic geographers. Josephus, like Demetrius, claimed that the founder of the city of Midian was a son of Keturah; yet he situated Midian on the Red Sea, in the region of Mt. Sinai, and explicitly distinguished it from Ethiopia, the site of Moses' earlier adventures while he was still a prince in Egypt.⁶⁶ Ezekiel is thus the only author known to

⁶⁴ φησὶ γὰρ τὸν Ἀβραὰμ τοὺς παῖδας πρὸς ἀνατολὰς ἐπὶ κατοικίαν πέμψαι· διὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ Ἀαρὼν καὶ Μαριάμ εἶπεῖν ἐν Ἀσηρῶθ Μωσῆν Αἰθιοπίδα γῆμαι γυναικα (Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* 9.29.3; *FGrHist* 722 F 2.3).

⁶⁵ E.g. [Aesch.] *PV* 807–809; fr.192 *TrGF*; see Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge* 156–157.

⁶⁶ On Midian's location on the Red Sea, see *AJ* 2.257 (εἷς τε πόλιν

have definitively placed Midian in Africa. The messenger speech may be the key to understanding this unusual choice.

If the messenger speech is delivered in Ethiopia, how did the scene then change to Elim? Here the text of Exodus may have provided a solution. At 18:1, the father-in-law of Moses and priest of Midian, here known as Jethro, hears everything the Lord has done for Israel (ἤκουσεν δὲ Ἰσθὼρ ὁ ἱερεὺς Μαδιαμ ὁ γαμβρὸς Μωϋσῆ πάντα, ὅσα ἐποίησεν κύριος Ἰσραηλ τῷ ἑαυτοῦ λαῷ). We already have an explanation in Ezekiel's messenger speech for how the news reached him. At 18.5 Jethro and Sepphora set out to meet Moses in the wilderness. Kuiper had already suggested in 1900 that the *Exagoge* could have ended with Sepphora's arrival at Elim.⁶⁷ This would be a change of scene similar to that in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: the chorus and Raguel follow Moses to a new location, just as the Erinyes and Apollo follow Orestes from Delphi to Athens. Jethro then offers advice on how Moses should delegate some of his responsibilities to judges (18:13–27). In Ezekiel's tragedy Raguel could also have acted as Moses' advisor, though here in explaining the significance of the Phoenix. Just as he had provided a positive interpretation of Moses' earlier dream, Raguel could have suggested that this vision had in effect been fulfilled and that the Phoenix was a sign of longevity for the people of Israel.

There are perhaps echoes of Moses' dream in the narrative of Jethro's stay with Moses in Exodus. In the vision, Moses sees and is then seated upon a great throne on Mt. Sinai (*Exagoge* 68–69). Raguel predicts that Moses will unseat someone great from his throne (ἀρά γε μέγαν τιν' ἐξαναστήσεις θρόνου, 85), and judge and lead mortals (καὶ αὐτὸς βραβεύσεις καὶ καθηγήσει βροτῶν, *Exagoge* 86).⁶⁸ The unseating of a ruler is perhaps a reference to

Μαδιανὴν ἀφικόμενος [sc. Moses] πρὸς μὲν τῇ Ἐρυθρᾷ θαλάσσει κειμένῃ), and on Mt. Sinai as the site for the burning bush see 2.264–265; on Moses in Ethiopia see 2.238–253.

⁶⁷ Kuiper, *Mnemosyne* 28 (1900) 270.

⁶⁸ On the text and meaning of line 85, see Kuiper, *Mnemosyne* 28 (1900) 249; Jacobson, *Ezekiel* 55, retains the manuscript reading of θρόνον and

the fall of Pharaoh. Raguel's claim that he will be judge, however, echoes the description of Moses in the wilderness, where Jethro finds him sitting as judge for the Hebrews (συνεκάθισεν Μωυσῆς κρίνειν τὸν λαόν, Exodus 18:13). In Ezekiel's version, Raguel wishes that he might still be alive when the dream is fulfilled (ζῶην δ', ὅταν σοι ταῦτα συμβαί<v>η ποτέ, 84); perhaps by the end of the play he indicates that this wish is about to come true.

Conclusion

The *Exagoge* is certainly an unusual tragedy in terms of its subject matter. Like Philo (*Mos.* 1.2) in the first century AD, Ezekiel might have suspected that not everyone in his audience would be equally familiar with the contents of the Pentateuch. This consideration may have prompted our Jewish poet to present the major events of Moses' life in a single drama. Yet though some Greeks may have had relatively little knowledge of Jewish history, they could easily have identified in the *Exagoge* a form of 'travel tragedy', in which a hero suffers hardship and exile to found a new polity and cult. Furthermore, it does not necessarily follow that by including more than one event in his narrative Ezekiel ignored or flouted the dramatic conventions of earlier tragedy. The surviving fragments in fact provide evidence for only one major change of scene (between Libya and Elim) and a further division of the performance space in the early episodes between the house of Raguel and the surrounding countryside. Neither movement is unprecedented in earlier tragedy. For a century, the *Exagoge* has been a key piece of evidence for either a decline in the standard of tragic poetry (the so-called 'death of tragedy') or, more positively, a major change in theatre culture in the Hellenistic period. Scholars have sought to present Ezekiel as an innovator, who took advantage of the

translates line 85 as "you will establish a great throne" and is followed by Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge* 178. However, at p.93 Jacobson admits that it is hard to find parallels in which ἐξάνιστημι means 'I establish'. Line 85 in fact refers back to line 76, where the king of the vision abandons his throne (αὐτὸς ἐκ θρόνων χωρίζεται).

new possibilities for scene changes and dramatic spectacles that the post-classical theatres afforded. Yet another interpretation is still possible: that of an author who, like his co-religionists Philo and Josephus, had diligently studied the corpus of earlier Greek literature and who attempted to create what was to Greeks recognizably a tragedy by the standards of the fifth-century classics.

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