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The πόλις *between Fear and Respect.*
A Reassessment of Menelaus' Speech in Sophocles' Ajax[*]

Abstract
Within Sophocles' *Ajax*, Menelaus is generally regarded as an unsympathetic, authoritarian, and typically Spartan character. Indeed, scholars have often treated him as a common despotic ruler who, despite his wise words about civic order, was inevitably hated by the audience. The first part of this paper contextualises Menelaus' speech on the principles of fear of and respect for the law within the πόλις, suggesting it was actually a rather legitimate statement which included universally shared (*i.e.* Panhellenic) political views paralleled by several fifth- and fourth-century BC historical, philosophical and literary sources. While appreciating Sophocles' technique in portraying 'negative' mythological figures and assigning 'positive' features, the second part of this discussion analyses the resulting conflict between the particular situation of the tragic world and the universal principle of fearing and respecting the law, which may have led the audience to wonder about the possible injustices ensuing from the creation of a world governed by such an extreme and prevailing principle theorised by Menelaus.

Nell'*Aiace* sofocleo Menelao è generalmente considerato come un personaggio sgradevole, autoritario e tipicamente spartano. Infatti, molti studiosi hanno spesso trattato il suo personaggio come un classico governatore dispotico che, nonostante le sue sagge parole sull'ordine civico, era indiscutibilmente odiato dal pubblico. La prima parte di questo contributo contestualizza la tirata di Menelao sui princìpi di paura e rispetto della legge all'interno della πόλις, suggerendo quanto questo, in realtà, fosse un discorso piuttosto legittimo che includeva visioni politiche universalmente riconosciute (*i.e.* panelleniche), delle quali si ritrovano paralleli in fonti letterarie, filosofiche e storiche di V e IV secolo a.C. Nell'apprezzare la tecnica sofoclea di raffigurare personaggi mitologici "negativi" e conferire loro caratteristiche "positive", la seconda parte della discussione analizza la risultante tensione (tra la situazione particolare del mondo tragico e la necessità universale della paura/rispetto della legge) che avrebbe potuto lasciare il pubblico con importanti quesiti nel considerare le potenziali ingiustizie dovute alla creazione di un mondo retto dal principio così estremo e dominante teorizzato da Menelao.

1. *Premise*

Menelaus' tirade on the rule of law in Sophocles' *Ajax* prompts a crucial question: was the idea of a Greek city based on fear (δέος/φόβος) of and respect (αἰδώς/αἰσχύνη) for authority a hateful political thought?

[*] Rivolgo qui i miei sentiti ringraziamenti alla Redazione della rivista per la gentilezza e professionalità dimostrate e ai due revisori anonimi, i commenti e suggerimenti dei quali si sono rivelati profondamente utili e preziosi al fine di un deciso miglioramento del presente contributo.

Patrick J. Finglass[1] has contextualised two mentions of πόλις in Sophocles' *Ajax*, by focusing on the hero's words before his death in ll. 845-65 and Menelaus' speech to Teucer in ll. 1052-90. In the former passage, Ajax's mention of three distant πόλεις (Salamis, Athens and Troy) sympathetically emphasises the hero's isolation, while stressing the civic diversity of the audience. Menelaus' speech too highlights the isolation of Ajax within the civic context: his hubristic behaviour is incompatible with Menelaus' depiction of a balanced πόλις, which must be ruled by fear and respect. Finglass highlights these passages in relation to the heterogeneous audience attending the performance, and argues that both Athenian and non-Athenian or non-democrat spectators «would have been outraged by Menelaus' nostrums» and would have rebuffed «the idea of a society based completely on fear, especially when that idea is advocated by an obviously odious character»[2]. Indeed, scholars have stressed this negative characterisation. Malcolm Heath has argued that «the audience should not be disposed to take too favourable a view of anything that Menelaus says», and that it is «with a firm prejudice against the Atreidae that we should approach to the scenes of conflict […] for they are […] moral failures, despicably unheroic»[3]. Jon Hesk has described Menelaus' vileness as «a deliciously transgressive quality which the audience must have enjoyed hating»[4], and related Menelaus' character to a «tyrannical, fifth-century and Spartan standard of hierarchy and discipline»[5] stereotype, a characterisation that, in the scholar's opinion, «partly stems from the play's historical context and partisan political ideology»[6].

Conversely, an interesting argument has come from Edward Harris, according to whom «when Sophocles was composing his plays, the Athenians, the metics at Athens, and the foreigners who came from the Greek *poleis* to attend the Dionysia all believed that citizens should obey not any one individual or group, but the laws, which embodied everything they considered good and just», and that «the average Athenian male citizen who came to see the plays of Sophocles learned about the rule of law by serving as judge in court»[7]. Thus, the audience (or, at least part of it) was prepared to listen to speeches about the rule of law, and may have judged them on the basis of their notions about the rule of authority within the πόλεις. It follows that Menelaus' speech may have been a

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[1] Cf. FINGLASS (2017).
[2] FINGLASS (2017, 311).
[3] HEATH (1987, 173 and 206f. *passim*). Cf. also ROSE (1995, 74) who, convinced of the Spartan menace embodied by Menelaus and Agamemnon, regards the Atridae «as a blatant binary image of masters "set over" (cf. *ephestōtōn*, 1072) their slaves (*doulōn*, 1235) where the dominant cohesive force is the naked fear (cf. 1076, 1079, 1084) of the oppressed, and where hollow snobbery about questionable lineage is the sole justification for the status of the masters».
[4] HESK (2003, 111).
[5] HESK (2003, 112).
[6] HESK (2003, 111). However, it must be noted that the date of the play is highly uncertain. All the criteria considered by FINGLASS (2011, 1-11) lead him to tentatively put the *Ajax* in the 440s BC, without ruling out the early to mid 430s or very late 450s BC as the possible date.
[7] HARRIS (2012, 287f. *passim*).

topic of discussion for spectators, and it is precisely this issue regarding the audience's competences which compels the attention of Douglas Cairns when he notes: «the point, in any case, is not whether one could take Menelaus' words out of the context as an orthodox expression of civic virtues (for clearly one could)[8], but whether, by the stage of the play at which they are delivered, the audience is disposed to be favourable towards them»[9].

I shall demonstrate here that Sophocles provided his spectators with an accurate and stimulating piece of political and military rhetoric in a moment in which they could at least partly agree on[10]. Sophocles presented a στρατηγός whose rhetoric and political views could be accepted within contemporary society, while nonetheless proving problematic within that specific tragic world where Homeric/archaic values (strength, bravery, and individual prowess) were being replaced by new ones (shared belonging, discipline, and cooperation)[11]. The consequent immobilism of the two Atridae's lessons is reflected in their behaviour as they swing from common-sense principles to authoritarian attitudes – here, the focus will be on Menelaus rather than on Agamemnon inasmuch as the former provides a much deeper consideration of political matters than the latter. Hence, the question is: did the 'failure' of Menelaus' political thoughts affect their positive value? If not, what was Sophocles aiming to do by staging this 'new'[12], political theorist?

By focusing on the topic of fear of and respect for law within the πόλις, the playwright offered a critical treatment of a contentious issue, as the long tradition of debate on the rule of law from the fifth and fourth centuries shows. To join that debate, Sophocles could not characterise Menelaus as a hateful Spartan; instead, around this traditionally unpleasant character he constructed a system of contemporary ethico-

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[8] Even in ancient times: as a parallel example, Dem. 19.247 isolates and approvingly quotes that part of Sophocles' *Antigone* of the late '40s of the fifth century in which Creon highlights patriotism as civic virtue (ll. 163-210).

[9] CAIRNS (2006, 126 n. 64).

[10] If one thinks about Sophocles' two versions of Odysseus (in the *Ajax* and in the *Philoctetes* of 409 BC), it is clear that the playwright was free to re-shape fixed mythological figures – consider also MAZZOLDI (2000)'s analysis of the double Odysseus (*agens* and *narratus*) in the *Ajax*. Such a paradoxical (or double) portrayal can be applied to Ajax too: as CAIRNS (2006, 113) notes, Sophocles makes a man and cult hero accepted by the fifth-century Athenian audience transgress mortal limits and reject the world of alternation, but this does not prevent Ajax' rehabilitation: «Ajax is not unique in his transgressions, but he is unique in using them as a stepping stone to greatness».

[11] This is not to posit that Menelaus *is* a full representative of fifth-century democratic values, but only that he asserts communal principles which do not agree with either the living Ajax's excessive individualism or with the moderation that his death requires. For an analysis of Ajax and Odysseus as representatives of two opposed ethical as well as military value-systems in Sophocles' *Ajax*, cf. GASTI (1992). Both GASTI (1992) and STOLFI (2022, 147-63) consider Odysseus the real cooperative character who goes beyond the dichotomous logic of the Atridae and Teucer.

[12] For a detailed analysis of Menelaus' figure in archaic literature, art, and religion, cf. STELOW (2020).

political principles [13] concerning the rule of law. Far from being an «unworthy spokesman»[14] on behalf of the πόλις, Menelaus advocates reasonable principles. That Menelaus' character was loved by the audience is out of the question, but it does not follow from this that he was hated *a priori*. It is generally (and rightly) acknowledged that the *Ajax*'s Odysseus stands for the perfect synthesis between the Homeric hero and the man of the moderately democratic πόλις, distant from the extremisms of aristocratic autarky and radical democracy[15]. Still, Menelaus and his γνῶμαι represent a first (though forced and unsuccessful) step towards an ordered and balanced system. Hence, in order to fully appreciate Menelaus' mixed appeal and compelling function, his traits should be newly examined in the light of Greek political thought and action.

2. *Contextualising Menelaus and assessing the Panhellenic character of his speech*

Mark Griffith's seventh principle for discussing the interpretation of Greek tragedy states that plays «were received by their original audiences "both" *(a)* <to some degree> as a kind of instruction (moral, civic, aesthetic, existential) about how (not) to live in this (their) world "and" *(b)* <to some degree> as a kind of fantasy (play, "what if…", make-believe) and temporary escape from (and distortion of) mundane reality»[16]. However, Menelaus' speech leans more towards the former meaning than towards the latter: Sophocles, who is interested in those circumstances in which his characters endorse acceptable political principles, shows how unexpected tragic circumstances or neglected character traits can reveal the ethico-political limits of such principles. As such, Menelaus' character, role, and words must be contextualised in order to understand their value and meaning.

Before Menelaus' speech, the audience has heard nothing about the Atridae[17]. In the *Ajax*, the first thing that the audience is told about them is the «incomprehensible» (21), «violent» (40), «daring» (46), «bold» (46), and «bloody» (50) act committed by Ajax, who has caused damage to the whole Greek army by slaughtering the flocks and those in charge of them. In the first part of the play, the focus is on Ajax's anger towards the two commanders (l. 718)[18], guilty of refusing honour Ajax (98) by taking Achilles' weapons away from him (100). The hero's fury – caused by an irreverent Athena – does not spare Odysseus, who is called a «most welcome» (though imaginary) prisoner (105),

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[13] Several of which have been already noticed by many commentators. Cf. JEBB (1896, 163), STANFORD (1963, 194), WINNINGTON-INGRAM (1980, 63), DI BENEDETTO (1983, 76-78), KNOX (1983, 12), GARVIE (1998, 223f.), CIANI – MAZZOLDI (1999, 206f.), UGOLINI (2000, 91-112), HESK (2003, 111-13), FINGLASS (2011, 436-43).
[14] KNOX (1983, 13).
[15] Cf. MAZZOLDI (2000, 143).
[16] GRIFFITH (2011, 2).
[17] Cf. also STOLFI (2022, 150). Henceforth I will be quoting the text and translation by FINGLASS (2011).
[18] Cf. also ll. 928/9-33.

«deceitful» (148-50), «perpetual instrument of all evils» (379-80), «the most vile and filthy trickster from the army» (381), «arch-deceiver» and «evil trickster» (388-89). To find hateful references to the Atridae we have to wait until l. 620/1, where the two commanders are described as «friendless and miserable». Nevertheless, the two are described as ἄρχοντες (668) and this, as we will see, is in line with their (especially Menelaus') arguments in favour of unwavering obedience to the laws and most magistrates (l. 1243). Indeed, the two Atridae are usually described through democratic terminology and Ajax's deception speech (ll. 646-92) includes several somewhat polemical allusions to democratic politics[19]. However, Ajax does not insult or oppose the Atridae from a political point of view; rather, he independently acknowledges that they represent a different order from the one he belongs to. More generally, he is so convinced that his fall is caused by the moral baseness of the Atridae that he curses them in ll. 835-42. But besides κακούς and πανωλέθρους (839) and the allegedly interpolated ll. 839-42, this passage primarily offers invective against the Atridae rather than a sketch of their character and politics. Accordingly, Tecmessa and the Chorus unreasonably foreshadow an enslavement by the «ruthless» Atridae (ll. 944-48)[20], and think that the two commanders will laugh at Ajax (ll. 959f.). However, it is the πολύτλας ἀνήρ (*i.e*. Odysseus) who «makes mockery in his dark soul» and «laughs loudly at these frenzied sufferings» (954/5-8)[21], and Tecmessa soon realises that «[it is the gods that killed him, not they (*sc*. the Atridai), no!]». Indeed, we might say that the Atridae do not act at all throughout the play[22]. Their bestowing of Achilles' weapons on Odysseus, which caused Ajax's anger, does not belong to the action of the play, as it took place before the current situation. Here Sophocles deals with Ajax's madness caused by Athena. Such a context hardly shows that the audience has been given a sufficiently despicable overview of the two Atridae so far[23].

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[19] Cf. KNOX (1961, 23-25).

[20] As LANZA (2019, 176) states, Tecmessa, though not paradoxically, «paventa quel che in realtà ha già subito».

[21] The first to laugh at Ajax is Athena at l. 79. Cf. also ll. 148-53 and 382 for Odysseus' responsibility in the army's laughter. Conversely, the army insults Teucer at ll. 721-28.

[22] Even Ajax's burial is a «gesto che rimane però una scelta di Odisseo, non un atto disposto da Agamennone» (STOLFI 2022, 154).

[23] This hateful opinion about the Atridae springs from their role during the famous epic ὅπλων κρίσις. When Teucer says to Menelaus «Yes, because you were found to have suborned the votes, to rob him» (1135), it is unclear what tradition Sophocles is referring to. Our surviving evidence shows that Menelaus played no particular role during the judgement. Pindar (*Nem*. 7 and 8) more generally says that the Achaeans' vote is what caused Ajax's death. The *Aithiopis* seems to show that only Ajax, Odysseus, and Agamemnon (with or without Athena's assistance: cf. BRILLANTE 2013, 39 n. 1) were the only protagonists of the judgement, while the *Little Iliad* (fr. 2 B. = *schol*. Aristoph. *Eq*. 1056a; cf. also Procl. p. 74, 3-5 B.) includes more characters in a novel way. Lastly, Hom. *Od*. 11.547, where Odysseus ascribes the judgement to young Trojans and Athena, remains unclear (cf. BRILLANTE 2013, 39-42). However, just like Ajax's similar accusation at 445-49, «Teucer's claim lacks specific, and he fails to counter Menelaus' denial» (FINGLASS 2011, 457) at l. 1136. Moreover, Agamemnon says at ll. 1242-43 that the decision was resolved by the

When Menelaus enters the stage, the Chorus describes him as an enemy that has come to mock them (ll. 1042f.). Yet Teucer addresses Menelaus just as «a man from the army» (1044) approaching the scene. To be sure, Menelaus' first words denote an authoritarian attitude (1047f.: «You there, I tell you not to join in moving this corpse with your hands, but to leave it as it is»), but at the same time it is worth noting that the verbs used by Menelaus are φωνεῖν (1047) and προφωνεῖν (1089)[24], which are quite distant, for example, from Creon's κηρύσσειν in *Antigone*: the former indicate an informal proclamation, the latter an official and imposed edict (κήρυγμα)[25]. In any case, it is the Atridae's aim to leave Ajax unburied (l. 1050), and Menelaus explains why:

> Ὁθούνεκ' αὐτὸν ἐλπίσαντες οἴκοθεν
> ἄγειν Ἀχαιοῖς ξύμμαχόν τε καὶ φίλον,
> ἐξηύρομεν ξυνόντες ἐχθίω Φρυγῶν·
> ὅστις στρατῷ ξύμπαντι βουλεύσας φόνον
> νύκτωρ ἐπεστράτευσεν, ὡς ἕλοι δορί·
> κεἰ μὴ θεῶν τις τήνδε πεῖραν ἔσβεσεν,
> ἡμεῖς μὲν ἂν τήνδ' ἣν ὅδ' εἴληχεν τύχην
> θανόντες ἂν προὐκείμεθ' αἰσχίστῳ μόρῳ,
> οὗτος δ' ἂν ἔζη. Νῦν δ' ἐνήλλαξεν θεός
> [τὴν τοῦδ' ὕβριν πρὸς μῆλα καὶ ποίμνας πεσεῖν].
> Ὧν οὕνεκ' αὐτὸν οὔτις ἔστ' ἀνὴρ σθένων
> τοσοῦτον ὥστε σῶμα τυμβεῦσαι τάφῳ,
> ἀλλ' ἀμφὶ χλωρὰν ψάμαθον ἐκβεβλημένος
> ὄρνισι φορβὴ παραλίοις γενήσεται.
> Πρὸς ταῦτα μηδὲν δεινὸν ἐξάρῃς μένος.
> Εἰ γὰρ βλέποντος μὴ 'δυνήθημεν κρατεῖν,
> πάντως θανόντος γ' ἄρξομεν, κἂν μὴ θέλῃς,
> χερσὶν παρευθύνοντες. Οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ' ὅπου
> λόγων γ' ἀκοῦσαι ζῶν ποτ' ἠθέλησ' ἐμῶν.
> Καίτοι κακοῦ πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἄνδρα δημότην
> μηδὲν δικαιοῦν τῶν ἐφεστώτων κλύειν.

> Because, after hoping that we were bringing him from home as an ally and friend for the Achaeans, we found in our dealings with him that he was a worse enemy than the Phrygians. This was the man who plotted death for the whole army and made war against them by night, to kill them with the spear. And if one of the gods had not quenched his attempt, we would have perished by the fortune which is his lot, and be lying in a most miserable death, while this man would be alive. But as it is, a god has changed it round. For that reason there is no man strong enough to bury the body in a tomb. But cast out somewhere on the yellow sand, he will become food for the birds of the shore. In view of this, do not rouse your grim wrath. For if we couldn't control him alive, at least we'll master him dead, even if you're against it,

majority of judges and Teucer does not reply to that. For the democratic arguments of the two Atridae, cf. STOLFI (2022, 155f.).

[24] For προφωνεῖν, cf. Aesch. *Suppl*. 617, *Eum*. 466, 503f., Soph. *OT* 223, Eur. *El*. 685 (as an exclamation), *Hipp*. 956. It indicates an order in Aesch. *Pers*. 363.

[25] The only (still informal) order uttered by Menelaus is at l. 1140: οὐχὶ θαπτέον.

> controlling him in our hands. As for my words, he never wanted to listen to them when he was alive. And yet it is the mark of a bad man when a commoner does not deign to listen to the authorities.

Menelaus' speech has been regarded as militaristic, inasmuch as it is violent and close-minded, and considers Ajax's case only from a military perspective. But the military aspect of Menelaus' speech exists precisely because of his role, which all too often has been overlooked: Menelaus is a στρατηγός[26]. Indeed, Sophocles approached the debate through a play whose characters (with the exception of the Chorus, Tecmessa, and the Messenger) were all στρατηγοί, an office which had become fundamental in fifth-century Athenian politics[27]. The myth of Ajax gave Sophocles the chance to discuss fear of and respect for the authority *also* from a military point of view (but not necessarily with a negative acceptation)[28]. The myth of Ajax is nothing but an example of a dispute between five generals on an ethical issue which has three different shades: military (Ajax's behaviour within the army), political (the rule of fear of and respect for authority within the community), and religious (Ajax's disputed right to be buried). In this way, Menelaus' words can be contextualised and regarded as understandable by considering his *status*. As a general leading his army, Menelaus had to maintain order among soldiers: hence, he had to stick to hierarchical principles. Ajax clearly had destabilised that order and deserved to be punished. Generals knew that discipline was essential to achieve victories[29]. In our case, Menelaus – being a general – had the right to punish Ajax and – not being a fifth- or fourth-century general – had no fear of not being re-elected: this might justify his lack of moderation[30].

As a former «ally» and «friend» of the Atridae (1053)[31], Ajax however brought shame upon himself through betrayal and attempted murder. Ajax's soldiers are so aware of their leader's crimes that they feel ashamed and wish to avoid punishment (ll. 251/52-

[26] As STOLFI (2022, 150 n. 137) notices, στρατηγός is the most employed word to describe the Atridae: ll. 49, 1106, 1109, 1116, 1232, 1386.

[27] Through the reforms of 487 and 457 BC, generals became powerful leaders within Athenian politics. For detailed analyses of the Athenian office of the ten generals, cf. HAMMOND (1969), FORNARA (1971), HAMEL (1998).

[28] Sophocles' *Antigone* faces the same issue from a politico-legislative perspective through Creon. In Soph. *Ant*. 8, Antigone refers to Creon as a στρατηγός, yet this is meant generally as «ruler/magistrate».

[29] For Lamachus, Alcibiades, and Iphicrates punishing soldiers with death because of betrayal or indiscipline, cf. Lys. 13.67, Xen. *HG* 1.1.15, Front. *Strat*. 3.12.2. For further imprisonments (discusses by ALLEN 1997), expulsions, and fines imposed by generals, cf. [Aristot.] *Ath*. 61.2, [Dem.] 50.51, Lys. 3.45, 9.6-12, 15.5, and Plut. *Arist*. 13.3.

[30] Our poor evidence suggests that it was not customary for generals to punish their troops with great severity since they were also subject to the disciplinary authority of the Athenians, who might not re-elect them: cf. HAMEL (1998, 61f.).

[31] Ajax too (despite his criticism of the Atridae as friendless) does not respect the reciprocal rules of φιλία (for a general and updated overview of which, cf. VAN BERKEL 2020, 9-32) as, first of all, he regards the Atridae as enemies and, secondly, his heroic individualism cannot fit the community life imposed by the Atridae.

56). Indeed, the Messenger says that Teucer has risked being stoned by the army at l. 728, as death was the main punishment for betrayal. Nevertheless, in their exchange with Teucer neither Menelaus nor Agamemnon threaten anyone with stoning or enslavement. Indeed, neither Tecmessa's enslavement nor any stoning will take place during the play. The point is that Menelaus' anger *as* στρατηγός could not be considered hubristic and the audience could hardly condone Ajax's behaviour: he posed a concrete danger to the army and its commanders, which in the fifth century were considered the military core of the πόλις[32]. When Menelaus asks Teucer «so it's just that this man should enjoy good fortune after killing me?» (1126) and then says that he did not die «because the god is my deliverer; so far as his efforts are concerned, I'm dead» (1128), we sense Menelaus' fear of Ajax's attempted murder. The hero had to be punished and Sophocles too may have recognised that. Indeed, he himself had been a στρατηγός and knew the rules of στρατηγία[33]. With *Ajax* (and then *Antigone*), Sophocles did not write politico-military treatises, yet he dealt with those issues of authority, obedience, law, and punishment within a community: issues that must have been at least somewhat familiar to him[34]. As Sophocles himself was a στρατηγός and depicted Menelaus as an «homme d'État réaliste»[35] willing to punish an undisciplined Ajax, he could hardly have had Menelaus behave any differently. Menelaus must thus be seen as a fifth-century general enforcing order and discipline among his hoplites. Unfortunately, on the one hand Ajax cannot respond to Menelaus' military principles inasmuch as he, besides not being a hoplite of Menelaus', is still a Homeric hero who considers individualism, competition and honour as fundamental values[36]. On the other hand, Menelaus still preserves the attitude of the Homeric authoritarian king striving for power over the masses: it is not the content of his words, as Mary Blundell argues, but his mythical role that is marked by an ugly authoritarian tone[37]. Hence, Ajax stands as a clear example of military ὕβρις, as his arrogance and disobedience towards his commanders and the whole army were inacceptable within the new and cooperative military system of the fifth century. At the same time, Menelaus represents a new military order, albeit imperfectly.

From an ethico-political point of view, if we follow the *fil rouge* of order and obedience underlying the play, we find that Menelaus' words are linked to the Panhellenic

[32] Cf. ROSIVACH (1975).
[33] In 441/0 BC (and perhaps also in 438 BC) he was likely a στρατηγός during the revolt of Samos, which switched from being an ally to an enemy and deserved to be punished. For an overview of Sophocles' political career, cf. JOUANNA (2018, 14-59).
[34] However we know that Melissus of Samos, during the absence of Pericles who had sailed south towards the Phoenician fleet, defeated the Athenian fleet led by Sophocles and the other «inexpert» στρατηγοί (cf. Plut. *Per*. 26.2).
[35] DE ROMILLY (2011^2, 113).
[36] Cf. GASTI (1992, 84f.).
[37] Cf. BLUNDELL (1989, 91).

(and diachronic) notions that «law is master of everything»[38] and then coincides with «order»[39]. Menelaus' speech conceptually – but also chronologically (considering the time in which the play was staged) – stands between the pre-Classical idealisation of law and the fourth-century philosophical justification of law as reason and order, reflecting different shades of political ideology and ethics. As a whole, Menelaus' speech is clear: there is a *subject* (himself, his brother Agamemnon and the Greek army), an *object* (Ajax and his rage), and a precise *space* and *time* (Troy and the Trojan War). However, Menelaus' lesson on political theory (ll. 1073-85) has no direct references; rather those lines are impersonal and universal:

> Οὐ γάρ ποτ' οὔτ' ἂν ἐν πόλῃ νόμοι καλῶς
> φέροιντ' ἄν, ἔνθα μὴ καθεστήκοι δέος,
> οὔτ' ἂν στρατός γε σωφρόνως ἄρχοιτ' ἔτι,
> μηδὲν φόβου πρόβλημα μηδ' αἰδοῦς ἔχων.
> Ἀλλ' ἄνδρα χρή, κἂν σῶμα γεννήσῃ μέγα,
> δοκεῖν πεσεῖν ἂν κἂν ἀπὸ σμικροῦ κακοῦ.
> Δέος γὰρ ᾧ πρόσεστιν αἰσχύνη θ' ὁμοῦ,
> σωτηρίαν ἔχοντα τόνδ' ἐπίστασο·
> ὅπου δ' ὑβρίζειν δρᾶν θ' ἃ βούλεται παρῇ,
> ταύτην νόμιζε τὴν πόλιν χρόνῳ ποτὲ
> ἐξ οὐρίων δραμοῦσαν εἰς βυθὸν πεσεῖν.
> Ἀλλ' ἑστάτω μοι καὶ δέος τι καίριον,
> καὶ μὴ δοκῶμεν δρῶντες ἂν ἡδώμεθα
> οὐκ ἀντιτίσειν αὖθις ἂν λυπώμεθα.

> For the laws could never function properly in a city where fear is not firmly established, nor, for that matter, could an army be ruled with due consideration without the protection afforded by fear and restraint. But a man, even if he grows an enormous frame, must expect to fall through even a small affliction. For when fear and respect together attend a man, know that he possesses security. But when a man can indulge in wanton violence and do as he likes, be assured that this city, though previously sped by favouring breezes, in time will fall to the depths. No, let me have established a proper sense of fear, and let us not think that we can act according to our pleasure and not then in turn pay a penalty which causes us pain.

Just as the Chorus will say, Menelaus is delivering wise γνῶμαι about fear and respect (l. 1091). Hence, since Menelaus is not explicitly referring to Ajax's case, we should probably look for a different context (as well as addressee) for his principles. Despite the opening reference to «those who have been appointed» (1072: τῶν ἐφεστώτων)[40],

[38] Pind. fr. 169a M. Cf. also Hall (1989, 198-200) for the concept of the rule of law as the basis of Greek and democratic identity.
[39] Aristot. *Pol*. 1287a.18 (at 1287a.20-1 he says that «it is better to have the law rule rather than one of the citizens»). For parallel evidence and an exhaustive analysis of this concept cf. Canevaro (2017, 211-18). Cf. also de Romilly (2011^{2}, 155-78).
[40] This is a rare way of indicating the generals or the superiors. Cf. Eur. *Andr*. 547 (where Menelaus, being the superintendent of the sacrifice, is called τόν τ' ἐφεστῶτα), Xen. *Mem*. 3.5.19 and *Oec*. 21.9.

Menelaus' references to fear and respect now seem to concern more the broader context of the πόλις than the office of military leader alone. A similar tendency can be observed in his reference to the army: at ll. 1069-72 Menelaus refers to the soldier's duty to listen[41] – λόγων ἀκοῦσαι (1070) and κλύειν (1072) – to the authorities, but there are no explicit references to fear and respect. It is at ll. 1075f. that fear and respect are mentioned in relation to the army, which is intended as a broader and united type of society[42]. Fear and respect are related to the πόλις as a wide community, which included both a citizen body and an army: the lines devoted to the leading of the army should not be considered separate from the discourse about the πόλις, because l. 1073 (related to the πόλις) and l. 1075 (related to the army) are connected by οὔτ'…οὔτ'; hence, the city and the army represent the same object[43].

There is, however, a relevant as well as ambiguous detail in Menelaus' speech that makes the city and the army distinct especially from an emotional point of view, that is the general's use of the word 'fear'. Indeed, Menelaus uses δέος three times (ll. 1074, 1079, 1084) and φόβος once (l. 1076): while φόβος is specifically associated with the army, the term δέος is associated with the State as a whole. The distinction between the two words is quite clear, since φόβος, as a sudden feeling that induces one (especially a soldier) to flee[44], was considered in a negative light, while δέος[45], indicating a fearful display of respect and caution implying rational thinking, was regarded positively. This double use is meaningful, as Menelaus' major focus on δέος confirms that he aims to provide his audience with a commonsense principle for a broader organisation of the community that should depend on 'good' fear. Significantly, Sophocles makes Menelaus' speech more centred on δέος than on φόβος, because the former concept had a rational and thoughtful nature that was traditionally associated with good political (especially democratic) activity and prudence in Thucydides, and with σωφροσύνη and ἀρετή in Lysias[46]. The fact that Menelaus does not manage to avoid mentioning and hoping for φόβος, *i.e.* negative fear, might instead convey the idea that his character is caught between the ideas of archaic authoritarianism and modern civic order: this can be read as

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[41] For a list of Sophoclean passages in which the hero/heroine fails to listen, cf. KNOX (1992², 18f.).

[42] Cf. *e.g.* RAAFLAUB (2000, 27-34) and CARTLEDGE (2009, 29-40). KNOX (1983, 11) says: «*Polis* and στρατός are different sides of the same coin; what goes for one goes for the other». Cf. also WINNINGTON-INGRAM (1980, 63).

[43] Accordingly, there is continuity and coherence in Menelaus' words, which relate for example to Solon's γνώμη: «the best way would be for the people to follow their leaders» (6.1 W), where the leaders rule both over the army and the citizens. In Heraclitus of Ephesus' opinion, obedience was even a law: «law is even to obey to one's will» (33 DK), where that *one* «is worth ten thousand people if he is the best» (49 DK). For a contextualisation of these last two fragments, cf. SENZASONO (1996, 53-75) and FRONTEROTTA (2013, 289-91 and 301-304).

[44] Cf. CHANTRAINE (1980, 1183 *s.v.* φέβομαι): «surtout fuite due à la panique».

[45] CHANTRAINE (1968, 255 *s.v.* δείδω) states that the term is «de caractère plus général que φόβος», but the opposite opinion can be found in LÉVYSTONE (2006, 352).

[46] Cf. all the references in DE ROMILLY (2005, 223-29) and LÉVYSTONE (2006, 352f.).

an hint at Menelaus' limits. At the same time, Menelaus' mention of φόβος at l. 1056 may be linked to his being Spartan, as in Sparta there was the cult of Φόβος[47]. However, in that same line, Menelaus also mentions αἰδώς and – considering that a cult of Αἰδώς existed in Athens[48] – the φόβος-αἰδώς connection, possibly in the spectators' minds, might have reinforced the idea of Panhellenism and universality conveyed by Menelaus' speech[49].

Even if they exclusively refer to the military context, Menelaus' words would be congruent with his office of commander. In the fourth century, Xenophon, for example, in *Mem.* 3.5.5-19, shows that fear and respect were indeed essential to soldiers. There Socrates and Pericles discuss the Athenian army's lack of discipline[50], but Socrates also broadly states that «fear makes *men* more attentive, more obedient, more amenable to discipline»[51]. In replying to Socrates, Pericles relates discipline and obedience to the achievement of virtue, fame, and happiness[52]. After all, obedience to law characterised the Greeks' lives (in war, politics, popular customs, and philosophy) because it entailed discipline and civilisation, as fifth- and fourth-century sources show: as Herodotus' Demaratus argues, Spartans «are free, yet not wholly free: law is their master, whom they fear much more than your men fear you (*sc*. Xerxes)»[53]; Sophocles' Theseus explains that Athens is «a city that practices justice and sanctions nothing without law»[54]; Euripides' Jason tells Medea: «you now live among Greeks and not barbarians, and you understand justice and the rule of law, with no concession to force»[55]; Aeschines points out the Athenians' duty to respect the law and punish its transgressors in order to protect the democratic State[56]; Plato claims that in Lycurgus' monarchic Sparta the law ruled over people and the state was a slave to it[57]. In de Romilly's words, «pour des peuples libres comme les Grecs, la victoire dépendait du bon ordre, et le bon ordre de l'obéissance aux lois: le respect des lois garantissait donc leur salut»[58]. Therefore, «pour eux, déjà, la

[47] Cf. Plut. *Cleom*. 9.
[48] Cf. Paus. 1.17.1.
[49] The connection δέος-αἰδώς can be found in Hom. *Il*. 15.657-58, *H.Cer.* 2.190, and Plat. *Euthyph*. 12b (perhaps quoting Stasinus of Cyprus).
[50] Cf. Thuc. 7.14.2 where Nicias complains about the difficult character of Athenian soldiers.
[51] Cf. Xen. *Cyr*. 1.5 and 8.1.2-4.
[52] Cf. Xen. *Mem*. 3.5.7-8.
[53] Hdt. 7.104.4 (cf. also EPPS 1933; cf. also Xen. *Lac*. 8.2-3 and Plut. *Mor*. 16.71.236e). Cf. KANTZIOS (2004) on fear in Aeschylus' *Persae*. In Tyrt. fr. 4 W the Spartan δημόται ἄνδρες (just like Ajax at l. 1071) are subordinated to the authority of the kings and the γερουσία (cf. ROMNEY 2018, 557-61; for parallels concerning δημότης, cf. FINGLASS 2011, 441).
[54] Soph. *OC* 914.
[55] Eur. *Med*. 536-38.
[56] Cf. Aeschin. 1.6 and 3.6.
[57] Cf. Plat. *Ep*. 354b-c. At 334c he suggests that Dion's relatives and friends put Sicily under the control of the law. Conversely, the sophists highly criticised the rule of law (cf. DE ROMILLY 2002², 51-114), so much so that Hippias, considered the law the «tyrant of men» (Plat. *Prt*. 337e).
[58] DE ROMILLY (1975, 74).

liberté se définissait comme l'obéissance aux lois»[59] in any context. Menelaus' words about order within the community are a practical consideration: how could anyone doubt the importance of fear, respect, and order within an efficient, disciplined, and powerful army? Hesk recognises such a double interpretation of the role of fear and respect, stating that «there is nothing in what Menelaus says about the need for discipline which could not have been uttered by an *Athenian* general or demagogue»[60]. Even Thucydides' Pericles says: «in our public life we are restrained from lawlessness chiefly through reverent fear (διὰ δέος), for we render obedience to those in authority and to the laws, and especially to those laws which are ordained for the succour of the oppressed and those which, though unwritten, bring upon the transgressor a disgrace which all men recognise»[61].

Such «reverent fear» inevitably recalls the δεινόν of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* of 458 BC (ll. 517-65, 690-93, 696-702)[62], whose similarity with Sophocles' *Ajax* has already been noted by several scholars. In Aeschylus' play, an individual and the πόλις are involved in the Chorus' Panhellenic reasoning on the need for fear in a community: the Erinyes, like Menelaus, debate the necessity of fear both on the individual level and within the broader civic context[63]. Already in Aeschylus, the newborn democratic πόλις needs fear in order to respect δίκη and attain salvation[64]. The similarity between Aeschylus and Sophocles regarding the non-specification of the πόλις is clear: both playwrights probably sought to refer to any Greek city and spectator. Also, Menelaus' stress on the necessity to fear the authority of the laws (ll. 1073f.) and on the concept of ruling σωφρόνως (l. 1075) recalls Aesch. *Eum*. 535-37, in which mental-health (clearly opposed to the mental state of Ajax) ensures prosperity for the whole community. According to Menelaus, a healthy-minded man knows that he can fall (l. 1078), just as a

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[59] DE ROMILLY (2002², 23).
[60] HESK (2003, 112) (he too quotes the parallel from Thuc. 2.37.3 and Aesch. *Eum*. 696-99). However, can we already speak of demagogues in relation to 440s BC? Cf. also KNOX (1983, 12) and PADUANO (1982, 230 n. 59).
[61] Thuc. 2.37.3. BOWRA (1944, 52) thought that Menelaus' character, «like a typical Spartan», recalls the doctrine of fear of the Spartan king Archidamus in Thuc. 1.84.3 and 2.11.4-5: «it was a common defence of autocracy and distasteful to Athenian democrats» (quoting Thuc. 2.39.4 and 2.40.3; a similar view in WHITMAN 1951, 78). But cf. the reply by DI BENEDETTO (1983, 77 n. 19), who linked the concepts of obedience and fear to the Athenian thought without any problem. At any rate, I would not argue that Sophocles aimed to allude to Pericles but I think, as UGOLINI (2000, 106) does, that the Atridae «rappresentano in questo senso la concezione di un regime democratico estremo e intransigente» and that Sophocles was more inclined to moderate democracy.
[62] The new Areopagus will inspire respect (σέβας) through good fear and, because of this, Aeschylus' use of terms like δεινόν and δέδοικα makes sense. However, the court originates and takes its prerogative from the frightful and archaic Erinyes and hence the playwright's additional mention of φόβος and τάρβος is understandable. For the politics of fear in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, see GIANNOTTI (2018).
[63] SOMMERSTEIN (1989, 177) argues that the use of the second person by the Chorus «gives the impression of a specific appeal to each individual human being» and «every spectator will feel himself individually addressed».
[64] Cf. GEWIRTZ (1988, 1046f.).

man who does not fear and respect the Erinyes will fall (l. 377). As in Aeschylus, lack of fear of and respect for the law «will at once unite all mortals in total licentiousness» (494f.), so Menelaus warns to «let us not think that we can act according to our pleasure» (1085): attachment to the law is mandatory and advantageous. Indeed, as the Athenians in the *Eumenides* will obtain a bulwark (*sc.* the Council of the Areopagus, which personifies fear and respect) that can save (701: σωτήριον) the land and the city, so a man who fears and respects the law will obtain σωτηρία (cf. Soph. *Aj*. 1080)[65].

Menelaus' nostrums clearly reflect the ancient Greeks' recurrent political concern about the failure of laws and the state: to quote Heraclitus, «the people need to fight for the law as (if it were) the walls (of the πόλις)» (44 DK). Menelaus is not portraying an image of the Spartan πόλις «completely based on fear», but an undefined Greek πόλις[66] (including its military community) where the law and its representatives are both feared and respected, since this alone can ensure order and discipline[67]. This view agrees with that of Plato's Socrates (*Crit*. 47a-d), while demonstrating that a disciple of a specific discipline must respect and fear only the opinions of the expert(s) in that specific discipline: thus soldiers must respect and fear Menelaus *qua* general. Later on, the Laws[68] will say to a hypothetically fleeing Socrates: «Tell me, Socrates, what have you in mind to do? Are you not intending by this thing you are trying to do, to destroy us, the laws, and the entire state, so far as in you lies? Or do you think that that state can exist and not

[65] It goes without saying that Aeschylus' religious dimension becomes more prosaic and realistic in Menelaus' words: the general's devotion to obedience evokes the military/pedagogical context of the fourth-century ephebic oath, especially the fifth clause of the text (11-14): «I will obey those who for the time being exercise sway reasonably (ἐμφρόνως) and the established laws and those which they will establish reasonably (ἐμφρόνως) in the future». SIEWERT (1977, 104) has argued that this text «seems to be a reliable copy of the archaic Athenian civic oath», and he has analysed several fifth-century works (including, Aeschylus' *Persae* and Sophocles' *Antigone*) which may allude to such a mysterious document. The document is important as it is an official oath, and it underscores the respect for laws and authority expected from Athenian soldiers and society. Their promises were made in order to achieve a well-organised and safe community, and recall Menelaus' exhortation to rule σωφρόνως. Indeed, the oath uses the adverb ἐμφρόνως twice in relation to rulers and laws: «obedience to them is required without reservation» and, in accordance with the Athenian constitution, «obedience to magistrates and future laws is required by the oath until the Areopagus declares them "unreasonable"» (SIEWERT 1977, 103f. *passim*]). Hence, SIEWERT (1977, 104) argues that «the double ἐμφρόνως reveals an interesting attempt to balance the need of obedience, in the state's interest, with the danger for the state resulting from possible abuse of this obedience clause by officials and legislation». In the fourth-century oath there is a balance between (and provided by) respect for laws and authority without which the πόλις would collapse: while the salvation of the πόλις depends upon fear of and respect of the law, it is also guaranteed by the soldier-citizens who willingly die in the name of the laws of their homeland. In our case, Ajax died without respecting the law of his army-community, thereby undermining the order established by the rule of those laws which operate in the interest of any city and its citizens.

[66] However, it is important to point out that the Athenians considered democracy the only form of government which included the ideal of the rule of law: cf. HARRIS (2006, 41f.).

[67] As Eteocles says in Aesch. *Sept*. 224f., discipline/obedience (πειθαρχία) «is mother of Success and wife of the Saviour». In much the same way, Creon states that «what saves the lives of most of those that go straight is obedience!» (Soph. *Ant*. 675f.).

[68] On the representation of which cf. COLSON (1989, 45) Cf. also FUSELLI (2017).

be overturned, in which the decisions reached by the courts have no force but are made invalid and annulled by private persons?» (*Crit*. 50a-b). Socrates is an «offspring and slave» of the Laws (*Crit*. 50e) which must be feared and respected in all cases: just as the Laws say (through Socrates)[69] that private disrespect for laws would overturn the state, so Menelaus says that «when a man can indulge in wanton violence and do as he likes, be assured that this city, though previously sped by favouring breezes, in time will fall to the depths» (Soph. *Aj*. 1081-83)[70]. Interestingly, the Laws tell Socrates that he could have gone to Sparta, Crete, Thebes, or Megara, but even in those well-governed cities and among just men (Plat. *Crit*. 53c) he would be found guilty. Again, the rule and respect of law is not only established as a fundamental feature of political life, but is ensured in multiple communities[71]. Following Menelaus' predictions, Plato shows that a city filled with licentiousness cannot be well-ordered: «thinking themselves knowing, men became fearless; and audacity begat effrontery. For to be fearless of the opinion of a better man, owing to self-confidence, is nothing else than base effrontery; and it is brought about by a liberty that is audacious to excess»[72]. Even more clearly: «Next after this form of liberty would come that which refuses to be subject to the rulers; and, following on that, the shirking of submission to one's parents and elders and their admonitions; then, as the penultimate stage, comes the effort to disregard the laws»[73].

Plato's discussions on law were a reaction to sophistic arguments questioning the value of law and justice. Furthermore, the Peloponnesian War caused a political crisis during and after which brutal reality overturned order[74]. There is a text seemingly dating from the end of the fifth century, and close to the milieu of the Socratics and Sophists, that discusses the need for fear and respect in a πόλις: it occurs as the twentieth chapter of Iamblichus' *Exhortation to Philosophy* and is considered an isolated treatise, which P.S. Horky had titled *On Excellence*[75]. Chronologically speaking, it is the closest philosophical-political treatise to Sophocles' *Ajax*. For our purposes, fragments 6-8 DK of the text, constituting the most political section (on how to achieve virtue), offer an

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[69] We should also bear in mind that Socrates respected his own city's laws even when they condemned him (cf. *e.g.* Plat. *Ap*. 19a).
[70] On the collective order through the obedience to the law, cf. DE ROMILLY (2002[2], 140).
[71] COLSON (1989, 46) claims that «when it is said that Socrates must obey οἱ νόμοι, we commit a grave error if we take this assertion to mean that he owes obedience to any specific statute that may pass or to any command that may be issued; likewise, we err if we take "ἡ πόλις" or "ἡ πατρίς" to denote some particular institution or other».
[72] Plat. *Leg.* 3.701a-b.
[73] Plat. *Leg*. 3.701b. Cf. also Plat. *Resp*. 4.424b, 4.424e and 4.425a. Cf. also Democr. 47 and 248 DK.
[74] Cf. Thuc. 2.54.3. Conversely, Sophocles' *Ajax* was very likely staged before the Peloponnesian War, in a (long) troubled period which goes from the First Peloponnesian War and the disaster of the Egyptian campaign to the Second Sacred War, some internal political protests of the conservatives towards the democrats' exploitation of the allies' tributes, and the revolt of Samos. This as well, thus, was a period in which fear that order could be overturned was a concrete constant.
[75] Cf. HORKY (2020, 262-92). Cf. also HORKY – JOHNSON (2020, 455-90) on the fragments of *On Law and Justice* from Archytas from Tarentum (who was himself a στρατηγὸς αὐτοκράτωρ).

accurate discussion on the rule of law. Many passages recall Menelaus' speech. First, it is said that obedience to law must not be considered cowardice; next, men cannot live together without laws[76], and, consequently, laws and justice must rule (ἐμβασιλεύειν) without being removed; the so-called *Superman* – that is, he who is «invulnerable in his flesh, immune to disease and affections, of supernatural ability, adamantine in body and life» – cannot live *without* laws either; rather, he can live only by allying himself (συμμαχῶν) with them; respect for law (εὐνομία) is the best thing in life, whereas lack of respect for it (ἀνομία) is the worst; also, respect for law guarantees trust, benefits, and good fortune (cf. frr. 7-8 *passim*); most importantly, lack of respect for law generates tyranny. This last detail is important as it defines the political dimension of Anonymous Iamblichi's treatise: as Horky has inferred from the frequent mention of the majority and the need to benefit it throughout the text, respect for law «is not the strike service of aristocratic ideology, nor some sort of appeal to the archaic ancestral constitution (e.g. in the case of Lycurgan Sparta)», but it «would appear to have transformed in this text into a democratic value»[77]. Again, these democratic – or, at least, non-Spartan – features of the treatise's principles further confirm that Menelaus, while upholding a similar discourse, does not represent any specifically Spartan political ideology, but rather a commonly held view.

Menelaus' principles were consistently maintained over time and are indeed reflected in the fourth century by Aristotle's *Politics* (1308a.25-30), according to which «constitutions are kept secure not only through being at a distance from destroyers but sometimes also through being near them, for when they are afraid the citizens keep a closer hold on the government; hence those who take thought for the constitution must contrive causes of fear, in order that the citizens may keep guard and not relax their vigilance for the constitution like a watch in the night, and they must make the distant near». Menelaus' certainty is akin to Aristotle's vivid guidelines, and their common task is to oppose lawless (Aristot. *EN* 5.1129a32: ὅ παράνομος)[78]. It is clear that labelling Menelaus' impeccable principles as «Homeric» and «contemptible»[79] means oversimplifying the longstanding political tradition surrounding his maxims, as well as neglecting his role as στρατηγός (in the fifth-century meaning of the term). Sophocles lived in a time of heated political debate, and clearly made Menelaus a spokesperson of

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[76] Also, it is specifically said that it is worse for men to live without laws than to be alone. This reminds us of Ajax's condition according to Menelaus' words: Menelaus does not highlight Ajax's isolation, but rather his lawless life, which according to Anonymous Iamblichi is much worse.

[77] HORKY (2020, 286). But according to [Xen.] *Ath.* 1.8-9, εὐνομία and democracy are irreconcilable. Throughout the fifth century there was a debate about the compatibility of democracy with the rule of law: cf. CANEVARO (2017, 224-30).

[78] Cf. Aristot. *EN* 5, which is entirely devoted to the theme of justice. At 5.1130b24 the law commands (προστάττει) and forbids (κωλύει). However, following Aristotle's logic at 5.1135a16-23, Ajax is not unjust (ἄδικος) inasmuch as he did not act voluntarily (concerning the complex issue of voluntary actions in antiquity, though, cf. DE LUISE – ZAVATTERO 2019).

[79] HEATH (1987, 204).

specific principles regarding the fear of and respect for law which mostly belonged to democratic propaganda – but the commonsense nature of many of these principles also explains why they were shared by many non-Athenian and/or non-democratic authors. To deny this is to remove the play from its context, at least its external one.

What can be regarded as Homeric and close-minded, we will see, is only the figure and behaviour of Menelaus. And this has to do with the internal context of the play. But, where do Menelaus' Panhellenic principles apply? Hesk and Garvie argue that Menelaus still «revolts us because of his application of these principles of discipline to the particular case of Ajax and his refusal to grant a burial»[80]. If it is undeniable that the audience's perception of Menelaus was influenced by his will to leave Ajax unburied, it is not equally true that Menelaus was applying his principles specifically to Ajax's case. The principles of fear of and respect for the law are rather laid out in the positive context of an impersonal and general reasoning (ll. 1071-1083): there are no explicit references to said principles pertaining to the case of Ajax's burial, either in these twelve lines or in any other lines spoken by Menelaus. Moreover, it is no coincidence that at the two ends of Menelaus' political address two first-person pronouns occur – which are not found within ll. 1071-83 – namely λόγων ἐμῶν (1070) and μοι (1084): the impersonal ethico-political section lies between these pronouns. Menelaus' speech has an A-B-A structure: in sections A1 and A2 (1052-70 and 1084-90) we find explicit references to Menelaus, Ajax, and his behaviour and actions, whereas in section B (1071-83) we find the tirade on fear and respect within the πόλις, with no references to Menelaus, the Greek army at Troy, or to Ajax. It is as if Menelaus briefly ceased speaking in the first person in order to describe a well-ordered society through democratic as well as Panhellenic γνῶμαι: his words are anything but a «sour note»[81]. Rather, they are a paradoxical note describing a state of affairs to which Ajax does not and cannot belong. It is precisely this feature that prompts us to finally judge Menelaus' character assessing him within the framework of the tragic episode.

3. *Evaluating Menelaus*

To put it in Cairns' terms[82], what happens when a figure from the mythical past, a figure generally rejected by fifth-century Athenian audiences, not as cult hero, but as a mortal man, advocates civic/military order in a tragedy that represented its transgression? We

[80] HESK (2003, 112). The same statement already occurs in GARVIE (1998, 223-49). Cf. also PADUANO (1982, 230f. n. 59). Conversely, there is an interesting passage by Antiphon (1.27), in which we find the principle of respect/sense of honour and it is said that, as for voluntary and premeditated crimes, if one acts without respect (like Ajax in the Atridae's opinion), one should not receive respect: this would be the most righteous punishment.
[81] KNOX (1983, 13) (in the same way, EVANS 1991, 80).
[82] CAIRNS (2006, 110).

cannot answer on behalf of fifth-century audiences, but the ancient political perspectives illustrated above demonstrate that Menelaus' nostrums cannot be rejected or internally questioned by any character. Sophocles has created a paradox comparable to that of Ajax: while Ajax's paradox is solved through the establishment of his hero cult, Menelaus' one is partially solved within the play by the military figure he embodies and externally solved by those fifth- and fourth-century authors who 'shared' his views. Therefore, we can understand Menelaus' arguments, but at the same time we can also understand why these do not find application in the plot. The playwright enjoyed testing the audience's negative perception of Menelaus. He portrayed Menelaus as the one who «does not make Ajax the man, […], a model of virtue for any citizen to follow»[83]. Menelaus – whose perspective is close to Xenophon's Cyrus' view of man and law[84] – pragmatically unmasks Ajax's behaviour, aiming to remove any feeling of pity towards him by showing that he deserved to be punished. It seems that Menelaus is convinced in an Aristotelian way that behaviour drives human actions and serves as a parameter of judgment. This hyper-pragmatism characterises Menelaus as more close-minded than hateful. Thus, he proclaims nothing but the Platonic γνώμη that «it is really necessary for men to make themselves laws and to live according to laws»[85]. The laws defended by Menelaus are clear and Ajax transgressed them; hence, Ajax is contemptible. However, as Canevaro has demonstrated, the normative ideal regarding the rule of law «amounted to a veritable consensus […] that a well-governed city is one in which laws, not men, are sovereign»[86]. In this respect, Menelaus favours the rule of men over that of law. Despite the practical section about fear and respect (where law is the protagonist), the rest of Menelaus 'speech is marked by personal outbursts. Lines 1052-70 and 1084-90 are full of personal pronouns, and each sentence is an attempt to go beyond the law or, perhaps, to *become* the stringent law. The violence of κράτος risks overcoming νόμος[87]. But what νόμος?

Like Agamemnon, Menelaus aims to apply the common laws of the πόλις through arguments which mirror both some τόποι of Athenian democratic propaganda and earlier – as well as later – political theories about the supremacy of law in human society. In this regard, Sophocles' *Antigone* is a useful term of comparison, as there Creon represents a despotic ruler who imposes despotic regulations and whose recklessness causes many deaths among his family: the Theban king is furious (l. 280), blasphemous in disbelieving that the gods might take care of a dead (ll. 282f.), paranoid (ll. 289-94), and repeatedly threatening (ll. 308f.). There is a clear distance, even in terms of complexity, between

[83] CAIRNS (2006, 118).
[84] Cf. Xen. *Cyr*. 8.1.22.
[85] Plat. *Leg*. 9.874e.
[86] CANEVARO (2017, 217).
[87] Such a feature is anticipated in Ajax's deception speech (ll. 646-92). When Ajax says that he must revere and surrender to the Atridae as they are the rulers/leaders (ll. 667f.), he also says: «for even the terrible and the most powerful yield to prerogatives» (669f.). Cf. also STOLFI (2022, 158f.) on the 'tyrannical subjects' of Sophocles' theatre.

Creon and Menelaus: compared to the latter's desire for authority and revenge, the former deems the πόλις more important than any kind of φιλία. This is a key point inasmuch as while Creon represents the ultimate examples of a protector of the community clashing with his own authoritarianism and selfishness (thus showing a much greater inner complexity), Menelaus is a kind of herald of good political principles who neither understands the incompatibility between such principles and his archaic morality nor realises the new context after Ajax's death.

Only he who takes both human laws and divine laws into account will be great in his city and uphold civic order. Just as in the *Antigone* «there existed some uncertainty about what qualified as a *nomos*, and Sophocles exploited this uncertainty to create tragic misunderstanding» [88], in much the same way Sophocles in the *Ajax* exploits the boundaries of νόμος, in terms of who can support just laws and where they can be applied. As Harris notes, Demosthenes (25.16) states that «the law is that which all men ought to obey for many reasons, but above all because every laws an invention and gift of the gods, a tenet of wise men, a corrective of errors voluntary and involuntary, and a general covenant of the whole community, in accordance with which all men in that community regulate their lives». Menelaus' principles include each of these aspects (human reason, moral improvement, and the agreement of the community) with the crucial exception of δαιμόνων νόμοι, the laws of the gods, which require one to bury even deceased enemies. Yet we do not find Creon's fury in Menelaus' neglectful approach. Rather, Menelaus does not consider καλός the fact that death equalises friends and enemies (ll. 1129-32) and this is what prevents him from fully and successfully applying his principles to the new context (*i.e.* once Ajax is dead), as Menelaus still sticks to the traditional heroic morality based on 'helping friends and harming enemies'. But precisely because Ajax is dead, he must now be treated according to a different set of laws, which command respect for the dead[89]. Menelaus believes in the gods, knows their laws, but misinterprets here those concerning burial. He hated Ajax «when it was proper to do so» (1347), *i.e.* when he was alive and harmful to society, but now that he is dead, Odysseus – representing the true moderate man of the πόλις who values human φιλία – refuses to «take pleasure in unrighteous advantages». Conversely, Menelaus still considers Ajax a πολέμιος (1133), using a term that, unlike ἐχθρός, specifically indicates the enemy of the state: *this* goes beyond both the rigour of a στρατηγός and the moderation of a man of the democratic city.

Just as Aeschylus' frightening Erinyes could not convey the goodness of their ethical message and needed to become Eumenides in order to be integrated into the πόλις, in much the same way in Sophocles' *Ajax* it is this fearful character which must be

[88] HARRIS (2006, 44). Cf. PEPE (2017) for an inquiry on the relationship between the written and unwritten laws, and on their value as sources of fifth- and fourth-century Athenian law. Cf also STAVRU (2021).
[89] Cf. HARRIS (2006, 65-67).

assimilated as a cult-hero[90]. Menelaus' will to personify and establish fear is an obstacle to Ajax's integration. More than this, Menelaus' fear-based approach aims to dishonour and shame Ajax, in accordance with Archytas' fragment 4c HM, where «legal penalties inflicting shame will encourage orderly or honourable behaviour»[91]. Yet people do not obey shame, but fear[92]. This imposing-obeying mechanism is part of the educational purpose of laws in ancient political thought[93], and only would work if Ajax were alive and his fault remediable. Only in that case could Menelaus follow Socrates' principle according to which «it is fitting that every one under punishment rightly inflicted on him by another should either be made better and profit thereby, or serve as an example to the rest, that others seeing the sufferings he endures may in fear amend themselves»[94]. Menelaus would like his speech to stand as an *exemplum* of good behaviour, akin for example to the function of the hortatory intention clause of fourth-century honorific decrees[95]. But whereas the latter aimed to encourage the civic audience to behave in an honour-seeking way, Menelaus, in wanting Ajax to be ἄτιμος[96], lacks both φιλανθρωπία («humanity»), a virtue which guarantees civic order and social relationships[97], and τοῦ νόμου ἡ φιλανθρωπία (Dem. 21.48), which protects even slaves from ὕβρις. Hence, Menelaus cannot judge, punish, and benefit[98] Ajax because he fails to show humanity specifically towards Ajax's condition: Menelaus paradoxically admits even the dead man's perception of the world of the living (ll. 1067-69)[99], but ignores that a dead body cannot follow the rules of the living.

Whilst Creon failed in considering his κήρυγμα a νόμος[100] and did not consult the gods or governmental bodies, Menelaus is a general who asserts the importance of order and discipline, but at the same time gives himself away at 1084 by stating: «let me have established a proper sense of fear». It is fear of Menelaus himself, not of the law, which underpins the order he describes[101]. Thus, Menelaus is wrong in considering himself the

[90] Cf. HENRICHS (1993, 165-80).
[91] HORKY – JOHNSON (2020, 476).
[92] Aristot. *EN* 10.1179b10-11.
[93] Cf. DE ROMILLY (2002², 227-50).
[94] Plat. *Grg*. 525b. Cf. also *Prt*. 324a-b and 326d.
[95] Cf. *e.g.* HENRY (1996). Cf. also SICKINGER (2009, 95f.), who mentions «a few formulae of disclosure [which] prescribe actions whose purpose was to encourage obedience to the laws», which «was not a peculiarly Athenian or democratic value» (cf. also HEDRICK 1999, 417).
[96] For a brief overview of ἀτιμία in relation to Greek tragic characters (and specifically in Euripides' *Medea*), cf. GIANNOTTI (2022).
[97] Cf. CHRIST (2013).
[98] Cf. Archyt. fr. 5 HM.
[99] Cf. DOVER (1994², 243-46). Agamemnon is even more extreme than his brother as he considers Ajax a 'nobody' (l. 1231).
[100] Creon does even more than that: when Haemon warns him that he is committing injustice, he equates justice, power, and himself by replying: «Am I? Just by respecting my prerogatives?» (Soph. *Ant*. 744).
[101] As CARTER (2004, 21) has posited, Creon «places himself at the centre of the city's good governance», as in his «these are the rules by which I make our city great» (191): «it is Creon (emphatically, ἐγώ) with the help of the laws, not the laws themselves, who will restore Thebes».

law[102] and in believing that he can elicit fear in place of the law, when he too should be subject to it. Yet he is less a ὑβριστής towards Ajax than towards the legal code he is asserting. Unlike Fisher, Cairns shows that ὕβρις entails both the act (including the speech act) and the attitude/disposition[103], but Menelaus does not fulfil his threat: he himself claims that he is «chastising with words» rather than force (ll. 1159f.). Menelaus is not blinded by ἄτη and does not commit ὕβρις because of such blindness; rather, he voluntarily takes pleasure in «thinking big» (1088) in response to Ajax's ὕβρις: «an eye for an eye»[104]. He loses the self-control he had displayed moments before. Consequently, when the Chorus utters «Menelaus, don't lay down wise precepts and then yourself commit outrage against the dead» (1091f.), it means «do not throw away all the good/understandable things you have said so far!». But Menelaus' reaction to Ajax's attempted murder is impulsive, recalling the Athenian chaos during the plague (Thuc. 2.53.4), when «les risques physiques créés par l'imminence de la mort font sauter le respect des lois»[105].

While it is true that Menelaus' «description of himself as "thinking big" alerts the audience to the possibility of *hybris* on his own part»[106], it is once again[107] the ephebic oath which explains his extreme will. When the ephebes swore to «obey those who for the time being exercise sway reasonably and the established laws and those which they will establish reasonably in the future», we find a particular stress on the adverb «reasonably/prudently» (ἐμφρόνως) whose composition, ἐν + φρήν, indicates the limits of reasonable thought/behaviour/actions. This clearly reveals the contrast between the ἐν of ἔμφρων, which indicates the limits of reason, and Menelaus' μέγ' αὖ, which expresses the trespassing of reason. In light of this, Menelaus' μέγα φρονεῖν is the trespassing of the reasonable borders settled by laws, rulers, and discipline. His sentence sounds like a provocation: «did Ajax dare to cross laws' (and their representatives') restrictions? Fine. Now I will show you how I will go beyond the rules»[108]. Menelaus' determination not to bury Ajax does appear arrogant, yet it is worth stressing again that his orders go unfulfilled. Menelaus leaves the stage without having accomplished his aims and Teucer

[102] Cf. Aristot. *Pol*. 3.1284a14.
[103] Cf. FISHER (1992) and CAIRNS (1996).
[104] This is a sort of «retaliatory *hybris*», as CAIRNS (1996, 12) says.
[105] DE ROMILLY (2002^2, 105). In this respect, we should not forget that, unlike Creon, Menelaus risked being killed by Ajax and his violating the laws to mete out punishment is at least partially justified by the danger he had just run (ll. 1126-28).
[106] CAIRNS (1996, 12).
[107] Cf. *supra* n. 65.
[108] As STOLFI (2022, 160) maintains, in a tragedy where «dispotismo e violazione del limite, empietà e dismisura, tracotanza e violenza, diffidenza e rifiuto di qualsiasi mediazione, reazioni smodate e rivendicazione della propria superiorità a ogni regola» involve «tanto chi dispone del *krátos* […] quanto chi ne sia privo, ma non si pieghi al suo esercizio da parte altrui», «l'unica libertà è nell'eccesso».

does not seem to take his outburst seriously, since he continues to prepare Ajax's grave (ll. 1183f.)[109].

4. *Conclusions*

Menelaus' words are a wise admonishment for the internal and external audience: the Chorus recognises this (but rejects Menelaus' last words and his overly rigid friends-enemies distinction) and Teucer does not reply because he cannot but tacitly accept the validity of the maxims. Teucer instead confronts Menelaus on account of his unjustified claim to rule over Ajax, and Ajax's right to be buried. Winnington-Ingram has hypothesised that «it is a purpose of this episode to bring out a certain kinship between the old heroic anarchy and a post-heroic despotism (here masquerading as military and political discipline), both operating upon a similar emotional basis, productive of *hubris* and counter-*hubris*. But it serves to re-introduce the theme of boasting»[110]. But the clash between heroic morality and post-heroic morality already marks the character of Menelaus: even though he embodies the new traits of a fifth-century στρατηγός, his wise words do not fully fit his traditional authoritarian and monarchic background. Furthermore, he reveals the contemporary polarity (or contradiction) between the sovereignty of law and that of the people. Sophocles' Menelaus foreshadows the fifth-century πόλις in its constant search for new leaders, rights, and laws, which required it to face the challenge of specific events and/or pre-existing customs and ideas. The episode of Menelaus and Teucer, and indeed the second part of the play as a whole, bring out the tension between the kinship represented by Menelaus (*i.e.* between the law and its civic subjects) and the timeless relationship between the rules from above and those from below.

Theory *vs*. practice, words *vs*. deeds, prerogatives *vs*. the exercise of power, disposition *vs*. reaction: these are the tensions explored by Sophocles, which bear witness to his interest in testing his tragic characters' behaviours under specific circumstances (rather than his undeniable will to take the distance from Menelaus[111]) in testing his tragic characters' behaviours under specific circumstances. The tragedian notably chose Menelaus to tackle those tensions. It goes without saying that the surface message of the play is that the just man (whether a general, soldier or citizen), as a member of an ordered community, must revere both human and divine laws. But Sophocles slightly shifted the

[109] One reason why Menelaus fails to apply his orders and principles is the context in which he is speaking. MEDDA – PATTONI (1997, 26) are right to stress that the grove where Teucer and the Atridae verbally fight lacks the institutional character which the dispute would have if it took place in the Greek camp: the environment and the presence of Ajax's body underlines «l'incommensurabile distanza fra la dimensione di Aiace e quella degli Atridi».
[110] WINNINGTON-INGRAM (1980, 64).
[111] Cf. DI BENEDETTO (1983, 78).

tension from Menelaus' speech to the wider sphere of the νομομανία of the πόλις, against both the ineluctability of the tragic world and a much desired form of moderation (personified by Odysseus). In this way, the playwright both showed how a typically unsympathetic character could hold accepted principles and revealed to his audience that contemporary socio-political precepts could never be successful if they were applied without considering critical circumstances, as in the case of the private burial of an enemy (who, once dead, should no longer be treated as an enemy)[112]. Sophocles highlighted the Achaean leader's mistakes by having him treat Ajax as a simple common soldier and conceive of the divine laws wrongly. That Menelaus' insolence towards a dead man was the key problem is confirmed by the appearance of his brother, Agamemnon: if Menelaus' words on fear and respect were really the most negative part of his speech, Sophocles would have had Agamemnon further espouse that same negative discourse to emphasise the incorrectness of Menelaus' ideology. However, in Agamemnon's words we find no reference to the πόλις, army, or community, or to fear of and respect for the law[113]. Given the ambiguous role played by Menelaus, Agamemnon had to be a wholly negative character. Indeed, his tirade, besides being full of insults against Teucer, represents the extremism of the power of the majority, which must always prevail yet ends up trampling on justice (l. 1335).

Here Sophocles invites his audience to understand both Menelaus and Teucer, in consideration of civic/military order and burial rights. Menelaus is the representative of a positive and timeless political thought which clashes with his heroic morality and the overall tragic action, as much as Teucer is the defender of unwritten laws which clash with pragmatic rules. Odysseus, «l'uomo della nuova ἀρετή»[114], will overcome these tensions by representing the medium through which the issue can be solved. But what interests us here is the fact that Sophocles provides a realistic picture in which theoretical principles and their application run up against concrete problems, possibly proving that the former are not applicable to the complex circumstances generated by the latter[115]. In the case of Ajax «la loi non écrite fournit un alibi, qui laisse la loi écrite à ses périls»[116], and Menelaus' excellent political lesson does not ultimately provide a stronger alibi. Thus Sophocles makes Menelaus the champion of a specific view of the legal world and, in doing so, he discloses to his audience a reality where the concept of law is constantly debated as far as its applicability to specific contexts is concerned.

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[112] DI BENEDETTO (1983, 76-81) identifies such a tension with Sophocles' «operazione di dissociazione del rito dalle strutture del potere».
[113] With the exception of l. 1352.
[114] MAZZOLDI (2000, 145). *I.e.* the σωφροσύνη that the Chorus would like Agamemnon and Teucer to show (ll. 1264f.).
[115] As DE ROMILLY (2002², 241) puts it, the problem is that «ceux qui parlent de lois sont Platon et Aristote, qui n'en ont jamais fait une seule».
[116] DE ROMILLY (2002², 49).

To answer the question as to how Menelaus' positive principles could be upheld and accepted in the real world, but rejected in the tragic world, it may be argued that Sophocles sought to dismantle all categorical views by introducing those principles into the theatre and submitting them to a critical test, so as to affirm their existence yet also relativeness[117]. Through a 'realistic' character, Sophocles provided the audience with further parameters to evaluate Ajax's case and ultimately left his spectators with the same stimulating question which Alcibiades asks Pericles: «Can you teach me what law is?»[118].

[117] The Athenians will experience the brutality of a similar specific circumstance in 424 BC at Delium, when Athenian soldiers' bodies will be left unburied by the Thebans for several days (cf. *e.g.* GIANNOTTI 2021 and 2023, 27-32).
[118] Xen. *Mem*. 1.2.41.

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