BIGAMY AND BASTARDY, WIVES AND CONCUBINES: CIVIC IDENTITY IN ANDROMACHE\(^1\)

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When the plays of Euripides were first produced, the foremost purpose of marriage was the production of children.\(^2\) A wife in the fullest sense was a γυνὴ γαμετή, a duly married citizen who had borne a child to her husband. Andromache portrays two women, each partially entitled to recognition as Neoptolemus’ wife: a mother, the Trojan spear-won concubine, and the legally married but childless Greek spouse. The Spartan Hermione has the authority of marriage but has yet to transition from νύμψη to γυνὴ through childbirth.\(^3\) Although a mother, Andromache cannot legally become a γυνὴ because she is a foreign slave concubine.

The presence of the son is all important in this setting. Fantham (\(\text{1986: 268}\)) observes that “only Euripides gave Andromache a son by Neoptolemus at the time of his marriage to Hermione, thus creating the sexual triangle which leaves barren bride and fertile concubine confronting each other in his absence.”\(^4\) This dramatic situation evokes the historical issue of bigamy, formally acknowledged in the \(\text{413 BCE}\) relaxation of Pericles’ citizenship law that allowed Athenian men to beget legitimate children from two citizen women.\(^5\) Only one of these could be a

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\(^{1}\) The Greek text is Diggle’s.
\(^{2}\) Hence the agricultural metaphor in the formula uttered by a kurios betrothing bride to bridegroom, “I give her to you for the cultivation of legitimate children.” Cf. Oakley and Sinos 1993: 9–10.
\(^{3}\) King 1983: 111–112, describes the cultural conception of the gynē: “In a society in which women are valued above all for their reproductive capacities, it is expected that a biological event or series of events will be used to form the entry to the category ‘mature woman.’ … The temporal gap between parthenos and gynē would be short; the Greek process of becoming married, extending from betrothal to the birth of the first child, would govern it and the term nympha would be applied to those in the ‘latent period’.” Cf. also Oakley and Sinos 1993: 10.
wife. \(^6\) While *Andromache* was likely written and performed before 413, \(^7\) this does not preclude the possibility that its representation of a bigamous household anticipated the legal response to the disastrous Sicilian expedition. After all, the plague of 430/29 cut a broad swath through the male citizen body and may have suggested the inevitability—if not the practice—of acquiring legitimate offspring from two women.

*Andromache*, however, is not “about” bigamy. \(^8\) Its portrayal of a troubled bigamous household directs attention to the matter of civic identity. In the contest between the Greek spouse and foreign slave concubine mother, the latter emerges victorious; *Andromache* makes the transition to full wife. Her son is not only accepted into a Greek *oikos* but also divinely decreed to eponymously found the line of royal Greek Molossians, despite his weak claim to inherit fully from his father. \(^9\) In *Andromache*, enslaved foreigners become and beget Greeks and this begs the question as to how civic identity is being depicted. That a foreign queen is constructed as deserving of Greek marriage, motherhood, and perpetuating the line of the royal Aeacids will be used to argue that *Andro-

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\(^6\) Ogden 1996: 73 asserts that this was “full bigamy.” Ancient sources concur. Diogenes Laertius 2.26, states that Socrates married two women and Aulus Gellius NA 15.20, that Euripides had two wives. Both authors claim the Athenians held this as lawful. Neither uses a word that reflects our conception of bigamy proper, for no such ancient term exists.

\(^7\) Ancient records do not provide production date or place. Didascalic records are incomplete. Both hypotheses lack this information. A scholiast on 445, our only ancient source, supplies the following: the *date of Andromache* cannot be fixed for it was not produced in Athens, Callimachus ascribes it to Democrates, and it appears to have been written at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Internal evidence is inconclusive. Stevens 1971: 15–17, summarizes the dating discussions and concludes, “evidence of this kind is compatible with any date between 430 and 421.” For a very full recent discussion of the above, cf. Allan 2000: 149–160. Cropp and Fick, 1985: 23 locate *Andromache* between 424.8 and 421.3.

\(^8\) What *Andromache* is “about” has engendered wide-ranging responses. For an overview of the drama’s design, cf. Allan 2000: 40–48. Stevens 1971: 13 concludes that “the real theme of the play is the disastrous war, its trivial origin, and its tragic aftermath.” Kitto 1961: 230 suggests that *Andromache* is “not incidentally, but fundamentally, a violent attack on the Spartan mind.” Conacher 1967: 175 argues for a theme of “separation, through a series of struggles, of good and evil elements.” Other critics have sought to locate the play’s meaning in a single character. For instance, Erbse 1967: 297 decisively concludes, “Der wirkliche Heros unseres Dramas ist eine Frau, obendrein Barbarin und rechtlose Sklavin: Könige, Königinen und Prinzen messen sich mit ihr und unterliegen ihrer inneren Grösse, nicht nur dort, wo sie handelt, sondern auch da, wo sie schweigt oder blass durch ihr Vorbild wirkt.”