

AESCHYLUS' *AETNAEANS*, THE PALICI AND CULTURAL POLITICS IN DEINOMENID SICILY

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Abstract: This paper re-evaluates the role of the Palici, a pair of indigenous Sicilian deities, in Aeschylus' fragmentary tragedy *Aetnaeans*. Past readings of this play focus on 'linguistic colonialism', through which Greeks took possession of native gods and thereby demonstrated their cultural superiority. By contrast, this analysis situates the play within more nuanced models that envision cultural contact as a two-way process and highlight the diversity inherent within the categories of 'Greek' and 'Sikel'. By reading the play in its fifth-century Sicilian context, particularly in light of new archaeological discoveries at the sanctuary of the Palici (Rocchicella di Mineo), this study establishes that – although the play does constitute a form of cultural imperialism – nonetheless we can gain more from focusing on the play's politics of negotiation and accommodation, rather than appropriation and displacement. A reassessment of three aspects of the *Aetnaeans* – the birth of the Palici, their parentage and the play's multiple settings – shows that Aeschylus had access to reliable information about the Palici and reworked it in his play in order to develop a new and uniquely Sicilian cultural synthesis in which indigenous deities play an important role.

Keywords: Aeschylus, Sikels, Palici, Deinomenids, Sicily

Aeschylus' fragmentary tragedy *Aetnaeans*, written in the late 470s BC under the patronage of Hieron, tyrant of Syracuse, highlights a pair of indigenous Sicilian deities, the Palici. The cult of these twin gods, who are identified by Aeschylus as the sons of Zeus and Thalia, a local nymph and daughter of Hephaestus,¹ was among the most important for the island's native Sikel communities. Aeschylus is said to have been the first writer to bring the Palici into Greek literature (Macrob. *Sat.* 5.19.17), and they are the subject of the play's main surviving fragment, which offers a Greek etymology of their name (*fr.* 6 Radt). The decision to build a Greek tragedy around non-Greek deities is a striking one: by contrast, Aeschylus' *Persians*, written at nearly the same time, shows Persians worshipping Zeus but does not name Persian divinities. The play therefore opens an important window into the cultural politics of fifth-century Sicily, a famously multicultural island. What role could these indigenous deities have played in the culturally sophisticated court of Hieron?

Since Carol Dougherty's ground-breaking 1991 article, the inclusion of the Palici in the *Aetnaeans* has been read as an expression of 'linguistic colonialism', through which Greeks took possession of the indigenous deities, familiarized and Hellenized them, and thereby demonstrated their cultural superiority over the native Sikels. This model focuses on the discourses of power that enable a dominant culture to engage in a process of appropriation – the repurposing of the cultural products of another culture (such as its deities) – in order to subordinate and even displace the latter, while remaining itself unchanged. This emphasis on the play's cultural positioning was

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¹ Aesch. *fr.* 7 Radt = Steph. Byz. *s.v.* *Palikē*; cf. Macrob. *Sat.* 5.19.18. Other sources give other versions of their parentage, to which we will return in due course. On the play's title (either Αἰτναῖαι, Αἰτναί or Αἰτνη), see Poli-Palladini (2001) 311–13.

a revolutionary development in its time, part of a larger scholarly turn towards bringing postcolonial theory (particularly the New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt and others) into classical studies,² and it has been widely followed.³

Two developments in recent years, however, suggest that this interpretation of the *Aetnaeans* should be revisited. First, new archaeological discoveries at the sanctuary of the Palici beginning in 1995, which I outline below, have not yet been integrated fully into an assessment of Aeschylus' play. A vivid picture has emerged of a sanctuary that was an integral part of a rich and changing Sikel culture in the fifth century. The new data invite an interdisciplinary approach to the play that incorporates both archaeological and cultic evidence as well as literary and cultural studies in order to analyse Aeschylus' deployment of the Palici within their full cultural context.

Second, more nuanced analyses of cultural contact have gained currency; these emphasize how Greeks in colonial situations adapted to new environments and were influenced by local cultures. Scholars have therefore given more attention to processes of negotiation and accommodation through which people from different backgrounds in a multicultural environment find ways to bridge the gap between them.⁴ Moreover, the high degree of diversity among the Greeks of Sicily has come into focus, underscoring the need to avoid reifying either Greeks or Sikels as a single monolithic bloc, and the very idea of a dichotomy between Greeks and 'barbarians' has been widely questioned. A model of one-way appropriation does not capture the complexities of the situation. These new approaches help make sense of the picture emerging from archaeological research, and they should be applied to the play as well.

The *Aetnaeans* is a highly fragmentary text, for which the available witnesses consist mainly of a single four-line fragment, together with the passage of Macrobius in which it is embedded, as well as a hypothesis preserved on papyrus.⁵ As a result, a high degree of uncertainty must pertain to any reconstruction or interpretation, and the conclusions I draw here should be seen as provisional. Nevertheless, we should investigate the nature of the play using all available evidence (literary and otherwise), rather than resting our conclusions on outdated models and questionable assumptions. Moreover, the widely shared critical assumption of multivocality suggests that plays give voice to a plurality of viewpoints, leaving open many possible interpretations which would appeal in different ways to different audience members. Christopher Pelling, for instance, has emphasized for the *Persians* that the audience's reaction would be mixed and multiple, rather than monolithic.⁶ Many of those who saw the *Aetnaeans* performed in Syracuse in the late 470s may have seen it as a proclamation of Greek superiority, as Dougherty does. Yet we should be attentive to other possible readings, including ones that position the Palici very differently in relation to the powerful Greek city. In what follows, I will argue that the *Aetnaeans* also portrays a new and uniquely Sicilian cultural synthesis – a new way to be Greek in Sicily – in which Sikel deities play an important role.

² Greenblatt (1991); cf. Dougherty (1993) and the contributors to Dougherty and Kurke (1993). Earlier scholarship on the play had mainly pursued formalist questions, debating the attribution of fragments and whether the play adhered to canonical models of tragedy: for example, Fraenkel (1954); Grassi (1956); Cataudella (1964–1965).

³ For example, Luraghi (1994) 342–44; Poli-Palladini (2001) 319–21; Bonanno (2010) 142–47; Morgan (2015) 98–105.

⁴ See, for example, White (1991); Malkin (1998); (2005); contributors to Dougherty and Kurke (2003); Antonaccio (2004); Malkin (2005); Gruen (2011); Vlasopoulos (2013).

⁵ *Fr.* 6 Radt = *Macrob. Sat.* 5.19.17; *P.Oxy.* 2257 *fr.* 1. Much discussion has centred around the so-called 'Dike fragment' (*fr.* 281a–b Radt = *P.Oxy.* 2256 *fr.* 9a–b), which was ascribed to the *Aetnaeans* by Fraenkel (1954); accepted by Cataudella (1964–1965) 378–86; Corbato (1996) 69–70; Stewart (2017) 106–07. However, this attribution must remain uncertain, and so I restrict my analysis to fragments securely assigned to the *Aetnaeans*; cf. Poli-Palladini (2001) 313–15; Morgan (2015) 100–02; Totaro (2011) 154–62.

⁶ Pelling (1997) 13–17; cf. Sourvinou-Inwood (1989); Foley (1995).

I. Greeks, Sikels and the Palici

Greeks and Sikels in the fifth century inhabited a rapidly shifting cultural landscape. Many Sikels were adopting elements of Greek culture – a process formerly known as ‘Hellenization’ – and it has become increasingly clear that Greeks, too, were well aware of Sikel cultural forms and had developed a keen interest in them.⁷ The Palici, as we will see, played a key role in the Sikel side of this transformation, and the way they were worshipped at their sanctuary may also lie behind their appearance in the *Aetnaeans*.

The excavations at the sanctuary of the Palici have revealed the twin gods’ role in articulating a new vision of Sikel culture that incorporated Greek elements. Located at Palikè (modern Rocchicella di Mineo), the sanctuary was centred around the ‘Craters’, an unusual pair of volcanic lakes (see further below). A second spatial pole of the sanctuary consisted of an open grotto in a hillside, several hundred metres from the lakes, which was the focus of building activity from the seventh century onwards.⁸ In the mid-fifth century – soon after the performance of the *Aetnaeans* – new building projects radically transformed the grotto. Its new centrepiece was not a temple but a *hestiatērion* – a Greek-style building intended for ritual dining and public activities, and paralleled at many Greek sanctuaries – along with two new stoas.⁹ The *hestiatērion*, in particular, was built to extremely high standards, showing that the craftsmen who worked on the building were trained in the Greek cities that used such advanced masonry techniques; some of them may even have been Greek.¹⁰ The expense involved suggests that a high degree of symbolic significance was accorded to the sanctuary and to the *hestiatērion* itself. In fact, four of the *hestiatērion*’s rooms are suitable for a standard Greek arrangement of dining couches, suggesting that ritual meals in the Greek fashion had become a regular and important practice for those who came to the sanctuary. Sikels were changing what it meant to worship their deities, as Greek-style dining became one of the key activities that took place at Palikè.

Yet the traditional *locus* of the cult, the Craters, remained central to the sanctuary. In fact, the *hestiatērion* and the stoas were carefully aligned to create an architectural axis between the grotto and the lakes, which accentuated the close relationship between these sectors, as two parts of a single system.¹¹ The Hellenizing activities in the grotto did not replace but rather supplemented traditional Sikel practices, and the deities themselves were never assimilated to Greek ones. The changes at Palikè thus align closely with those seen at many other sites throughout Sicily during the sixth and fifth centuries, where select aspects of Greek culture were incorporated into new Sikel contexts.

Moreover, these changes must be understood in light of the sanctuary’s considerable cultural and even political value for Sikels. Only a few years after the *Aetnaeans* was performed, the site became a backdrop for the career of Ducetius, a Sikel leader who spent 20 years in the mid-fifth century carving out an independent Sikel federation.¹² The excavators, probably rightly, attribute the renovation of the sanctuary to Ducetius.¹³ He also refounded a small settlement on the hill above the grotto as the city of Palikè, a name that advertises the city’s close relationship with the sanctuary, and made it the capital of his federation (Diod. Sic. 11.88.6). This allowed him to capitalize on the Palici as a widely shared focal point of Sikel identity, around which he could rally support.

⁷ On the problematic concept of ‘Hellenization’ in Sicily, see Albanese Procelli (1996); Leighton (1999) 219–68; De Angelis (2003); Antonaccio (2004); Hodos (2006) 99–157; Giangiulio (2010); Spatafora (2013); Shepherd (2014); Frasca (2015).

⁸ On the excavations in the grotto, see especially Maniscalco and McConnell (2003); Maniscalco (2008a).

⁹ The excavators cite the so-called *prytaneion* at Megara Hyblaea as the closest parallel, along with the Old Bouleuterion at Athens: Maniscalco and McConnell

(2003) 157–59, 164–66.

¹⁰ Maniscalco and McConnell (2003) 159–63; McConnell (2008) 310–43.

¹¹ Maniscalco and McConnell (2003) 163–64.

¹² Ducetius’ career is usually dated 459–440: see in general Consolo Langher (1997) 61–69; Jackman (2006). The only written source is Diodorus (11.76, 78, 88–92, 12.8, 29).

¹³ Maniscalco (2008b) 131–34.

Both the rebuilding of the sanctuary and Ducetius' rise to prominence post-date the *Aetnaeans* by at least a decade. Nevertheless, both episodes reflect pre-existing patterns that stand in the background of Aeschylus' play. In particular, in order for Ducetius to profit politically from an association with the Palici, they must have *already* been seen as a cult widely shared among Sikels. In other words, the Sikel leader did not create but rather successfully exploited a significance that the sanctuary already bore.¹⁴ Similarly, the building activities at Palikè should be seen not so much as a single event but as the culmination of an ongoing process of cultural change at a site that had long embodied Sikel identity. Greek material culture was adapted to shape a public space that was central to Sikel cultural consciousness, yet, even as the cult was transformed by Greek models, its cultural importance depended on it remaining Sikel. Thus, the sanctuary of the Palici was a crucial *locus* for articulating new ideas of what it meant to be Sikel.

Nonetheless these major changes in Sikel culture should not be allowed to overshadow similar attitudes among Greeks. Their awareness of and interest in Sikel culture, and its impact on the Greeks of Sicily, has been less appreciated, but it is no less important. Greek naming practices, for instance, provide evidence for contemporary attitudes. Thucydides records etymologies for the names of four Greek poleis that derive from Sikel words or names.¹⁵ While we should not necessarily take them at face value, they were clearly known and thought plausible in the fifth century (especially by Thucydides' likely source, Antiochus of Syracuse). Similarly, the name of Sikanus, a Syracusan general during the Athenian invasion of 415, shows that Syracusan elites saw value in linking themselves to the indigenous Sikanians of central Sicily.¹⁶ The influence of Sikel culture has also been seen in some other distinctive practices of Sicilian Greeks, albeit on a limited scale and with significant alterations to fit within a Greek context. These include the practice of multiple burials (which was rare in post-Mycenaean Greece but standard among Sikels), the appearance of examples of native metalwork as dedications at mainland Greek sanctuaries and even the cultivation of the famous local Hyblaean honey.¹⁷ While there is little direct evidence for Greek attitudes towards the Palici specifically, the sanctuary's location – squarely on a major route between the plain of Catania and the southern coast, along the river Caltagirone¹⁸ – suggests that travellers would have passed by regularly. Such a high-profile cult in this location would have been familiar to many Sicilian Greeks, and they would have understood the *Aetnaeans* in the light of what they knew of it.

Of course, not all cultural changes are equally significant. Religious practices at Palikè were drastically altered by contact with Greeks, while Greek use of Sikel culture seems relatively superficial. In this way, Greek attitudes towards the Palici differ from, for instance, those at Cyrene towards Zeus Ammon, a Libyan god (with an oracle at the Siwa oasis) who was fully integrated into the city's pantheon.¹⁹ Still, while in Sicily these cultural shifts were not symmetrical, they were real, and they suggest a certain degree of cultural flexibility among Greeks, who were willing to adopt Sikel names and practices. Moreover, as we have seen, the Palici were deeply implicated in the creation of a new cultural synthesis for Sikels, which makes Aeschylus' decision to incor-

¹⁴ That the political significance of the Palici was a long-term phenomenon, rather than an idiosyncrasy of Ducetius, is also strongly suggested by an episode during the Second Slave War (104 BC), more than three centuries later, when a group of slaves escaped from Syracuse and made their way to the sanctuary of the Palici, where their leader crowned himself king (Diod. Sic. 36.3.3, 7.1).

¹⁵ 6.4: Gela and Akragas (local rivers); Zancle (the Sikel word for sickle); Megara Hyblaea (the Sikel king Hyblon). Another source (Steph. Byz. s.v. Gela) derives the name Gela from the verb *gelaō*, showing that these

etymologies mattered enough to be contested; cf. Dougherty (1993) 47.

¹⁶ A second Syracusan individual, Adranodorus, son-in-law of Hieron II, in the late third century, presents a similar picture.

¹⁷ Burial: Shepherd (2005) 118–20; (2014) 123–24. Dedications: Antonaccio (2013) 244–47. Honey: De Angelis (2003) especially 41–42.

¹⁸ Adamesteanu (1962) 174–81; Cardete del Olmo (2010) 113; Cusumano (2013) 172–73.

¹⁹ Malkin (1994) 158–68; Vlassopoulos (2013) 150–51.

porate the Palici – and not other Sikel deities²⁰ – into his play an extremely resonant one. As a real-life religious phenomenon, the cult of the Palici can scarcely be understood apart from its role in cross-cultural negotiation, and their appearance in the *Aetnaeans* cannot be disentangled from this function. A play that drew on these attitudes could easily find a place in the cultural landscape of fifth-century Sicily, and we should keep an open mind about its broader implications.

In the following sections, a re-examination of several aspects of the *Aetnaeans* suggests that Aeschylus had access to reliable information about the Palici and their cult, which he reworked within a Greek dramatic setting. By incorporating these data, I suggest, Aeschylus highlighted the contributions of both Greeks and natives to the social and religious landscape of Deinomenid Sicily.²¹ This is still a form of cultural imperialism: it is a play about Sikel deities, written in Greek by a Greek author, under the sponsorship of a Greek tyrant, within a broadly Greek cultural framework. Moreover, the play suppresses the substantial violence, directed against both Greeks and Sikels, by which Gelon and Hieron, the two rulers of the Deinomenid family, built their empire. Nonetheless, this interpretation offers a very different outlook on cultural change in fifth-century Sicily. Rather than promoting Greek cultural domination and the suppression of Sikel culture, the play offers a new way of being Greek in Sicily, in which Sikel deities play a significant role. This cultural synthesis is visible in three aspects of the surviving information about the play: the myth of the birth of the Palici, their parentage and the play's various settings.

II. Born from the ground

The birth of the Palici from the ground, a story known from Macrobius (*Sat.* 5.19.18), is one of the most striking and unusual features of their mythology. Their mother, Thalia, a nymph on Mount Etna and daughter of Hephaestus, was raped by Zeus; fleeing the anger of Hera, she then sank beneath the earth, allowing her twin sons to be born from the ground. Since Macrobius tells this story in order to introduce his quotation of four lines from the *Aetnaeans*, it must derive from Aeschylus: it could hardly act as context for the quotation otherwise.²² Moreover, the fragment itself displays Aeschylus' interest in this myth, as he offers a Greek etymology of their name (*fr.* 6 Radt = Macrob. *Sat.* 5.19.24):

- A. τί δῆτ' ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ὄνομα θήσονται βροτοί;
 B. σεμνοῦς Παλικῶς Ζεὺς ἐφίεται καλεῖν.
 A. ἢ καὶ Παλικῶν εὐλόγως μένει φάτις;
 B. πάλιν γὰρ ἴκουσ' ἐκ σκότου τόδ' εἰς φάος.

- A. What name will mortals establish for them?
 B. Zeus ordains that they call them the holy Palici.
 A. And does the name of the Palici remain reasonable?
 B. Yes, since they come back from darkness to this light.

The etymology offered by Aeschylus – that the name Palici derives from ‘they come back’ (πάλιν ἴκουσι) – is the centrepiece of the argument for ‘linguistic colonialism’. According to this model, giving something a name is an expression of power. Whatever the name meant in Sikel or to Sikels is ignored in favour of an invented signification, meaningful only in Greek and to Greeks, thus perpetuating Greek cultural authority. Explaining an indigenous cultural element in terms of the language of the colonizer thus becomes ‘part of a larger system of cultural appropriation and

²⁰ On Sikel religion more broadly, see Cusumano (2006).

²¹ Cf. the brief comments of Cataudella (1964–1965) 396–97; Culasso Gastaldi (1979) 66; Corbato (1996) 67; Stewart (2017) 107–08.

²² So Basta Donzelli (1996) 87–99; Poli-Palladini (2001) 304–05. Macrobius also names the same parents as Aeschylus – data not recoverable from the fragment itself – showing that he drew on the play for more than the etymology alone.

representation, celebrating and legitimizing Greek presence in a foreign context'.²³ Such appropriations are indeed a common form of colonial discourse in Archaic and Classical sources, and at least some Sicilian Greeks may well have understood Aeschylus' etymology in this way.

Still, this etymology should be placed within the context of the larger myth of the Palici, to which it is intimately linked. Inherent in Dougherty's analysis are two assumptions: first, that Aeschylus invented not only the etymology but also the story of the birth of the Palici and, second, that Sikel religious practice at Palikè was irrelevant to the play. Indeed, portions of the story recounted above could easily be Aeschylean invention. For example, the role of Hera, whose wrath caused the twins' mother to flee, presents a variation on a Greek story pattern with a long pedigree.²⁴ Yet this narrative element is readily detached, and other parts of the story are not so easily regarded as Greek innovations. In particular, the birth from the ground fits uneasily with Greek narrative patterns.²⁵ If, however, we eliminate the assumption that the myth originated with Aeschylus and simply explore its implications, we can see that it serves to link the twins to their sanctuary and to Sikel religious practice.

Central to any analysis of the Palici are the Craters at their sanctuary: a pair of volcanic lakes that displayed a variety of unusual geological activity, including geysers, the release of gases such as carbon dioxide and a sulphurous odour. Diodorus' description of the site (11.89) gives a vivid glimpse of a sense of numinous divine presence and particularly a connection to another world underground. It is unclear how Sikels would have understood the nature of this lower world, and we certainly should not import Greek ideas of Hades or the land of the dead. Nevertheless, the Palici are clearly constructed as mediators between the upper world on earth and a different world below.²⁶ For example, the twin gods were perceived as the protectors of 'the greatest oaths', and the procedure for swearing such oaths is highly suggestive. The oath would be written on a tablet and cast into one of the lakes, which acted (with the gods' help) as a conduit to the world below.²⁷ This ritual procedure firmly anchors the gods' role as protectors of oaths to the volcanic lakes themselves, as a place where the upper and lower worlds come together. In fact, a third-century source reports that the Craters were the brothers of the Palici, further emphasizing their rootedness in the sanctuary and its geology.²⁸

Remarkably, Aeschylus' play seems to offer a similar conception of the Palici. The myth of their birth shows them crossing the boundary between the upper and lower worlds, and constructs for them a privileged place as intermediaries between them, just as the oath-swearing ritual suggests. The phrase 'they come back from darkness to this light', quoted by Macrobius, must be treated cautiously, due to the fragmentary nature of the text. Nevertheless, the only known event to which *πάλιτιν ἴκουσι* could refer is their birth. Thus, not only the myth but even Aeschylus' etymology itself participate in linking the Palici to Sikel conceptions of the deities and to their ritual practices. In fact, the myth is so tightly linked to cultic practices and the nature of the sanctuary itself that, although certainty is impossible, the story may well have originated in an indigeneous context. Aeschylus would thus have adapted a Sikel belief as the core of his tragedy.

Even if Aeschylus did invent the story, however, it clearly stands in conversation with Sikel cult practice and the volcanic nature of the sanctuary. In either case – invented or adapted – the conclusion is the same: the play cannot be seen as insulated from external religious practices, and

²³ Dougherty (1991) 127, *cf.* 120.

²⁴ *Cf.*, for example, the myths of Callisto (treated by Aeschylus in a lost play) and Io (described in the *Prometheus Bound*): Poli-Palladini (2001) 304.

²⁵ However, *cf.* Zeus, who at his birth was hidden in a cave and later returned (Hes. *Theog.* 482–84).

²⁶ On the cult, see Croon (1952); Cusumano (1991); (2006) 123–31; Meurant (1998).

²⁷ Diod. Sic. 11.89.5–6; [Arist.] *Mir. ausc.* 57; Polemon *FHG* 3.140 *fr.* 83 (= Macrobian *Sat.* 5.19. 26–29). The use of writing is notable, suggesting the deep incorporation of a cultural practice that the Sikels had originally learned from Greeks: Cusumano (2013).

²⁸ Callias of Syracuse *FGrH* 564 F1 = Macrobian *Sat.* 5.19.25.

the incorporation of recognizable aspects of Sikel culture should be understood as integral to the play. Far from an expression of Greek superiority that attempts to displace Sikel constructions of the Palici, Aeschylus' etymology displays a productive blending of indigenous beliefs with Greek linguistics and articulates a vision of Sicilian culture as distinctively mixed.

III. Sons of Zeus

Meanwhile, Aeschylus' decision to make the twins sons of Zeus indicates for Dougherty a further cultural conquest. In this interpretation, Aeschylus detaches the Palici from the indigenous pantheon and inserts them into a Greek genealogy and cultural system, thereby placing the Greek gods in a position of superiority over the native ones. Moreover, the Greeks of Sicily can thereby claim the Palici as kin, whose presence in Sicily prepares the way for legitimate Greek settlement.²⁹ This, too, was a common form of Greek colonial discourse; such a model of appropriation would likely have resonated with some in the audience, yet it fails to consider the full context of Aeschylus' myth.

Other versions of the genealogy of the Palici are also attested, and a fuller exploration of these mythical variants yields important insight into the twins' mythical associations. For Aeschylus, as we have noted, they were the sons of Zeus and Thalia, a Sicilian nymph who was the daughter of Hephaestus. On the other hand, according to Silenus of Caleacte, a Sicilian historian of the second century BC, their parents were Hephaestus and Aetna, daughter of Ocean.³⁰ Although this second version is attested only in Hellenistic times, Nicola Cusumano has argued that it may also have originated in the Deinomenid period; certainly the second century is merely a *terminus ante quem*.³¹ What both of these genealogies share is a strong sense that the origins of the Palici are rooted in the land of Sicily and Mount Etna in particular; this in turn firmly grounds them in the volcanic phenomena for which their cult was known.

In the context of Deinomenid Syracuse, Aeschylus' Zeus would certainly have been understood more specifically as Zeus Aetnaeus, god of Sicily's most famous mountain and also tutelary deity of Hieron's new colony of Aetna; he famously appears on the city's coins. Moreover, the cult of Zeus Aetnaeus was specially promoted by Hieron, and Aeschylus was surely attuned to this.³² Still, such an appeal to Hieron's preferences does not necessarily mean that the genealogy was invented out of whole cloth, as has often been assumed. Instead, we should note that this genealogy develops a relationship between the Palici and Sicily's volcano – a link that was dramatized in the play's opening scene, set on Mount Etna (see below).

Both Aeschylus and Silenus also trace the twins' ancestry to Hephaestus, as either father or grandfather. The association of the god of fire with Mount Etna was particularly prominent in the early fifth century, due to its spectacular eruption in 476. Pindar describes the eruption with the poetic expression 'most terrible streams of Hephaestus', while Simonides describes a contest between Demeter and Hephaestus – judged by the nymph Aetna – over who would be the patron of Sicily.³³ More explicitly, the *Prometheus Bound* (perhaps by Aeschylus) makes Etna the site of Hephaestus' forge.³⁴ Moreover, in both versions of the genealogy, the mother of the Palici – either Aetna herself or Thalia, daughter of Hephaestus – adds to the same web of associations between mountain, fire god and the Palici. Linking the Palici to the Mediterranean's largest volcano

²⁹ Dougherty (1991) 127–29; Basta Donzelli (1996) 94–95.

³⁰ Aesch. *fr.* 7 Radt; Silenus *FGrH* 175 F3; both references derive from Steph. Byz. *s.v.* *Palikē*. Servius (*ad Aen.* 9.581), using Aeschylus indirectly, presents a jumbled combination of these two versions.

³¹ Cusumano (1991) 138–42; (1992) 167–70.

³² On Zeus Aetnaeus, see Luraghi (1994) 339–40;

Nicholson (2011) 96–97; Morgan (2015) 66–67; for the coins, see also Kraay (1976) 212–13.

³³ Simon. Page, *PMG* 552 = schol. Theoc. 1.65–66a; Pind. *Pyth.* 1.25–26: κείνο δ' Ἀφάιστιοιο κρουνοῦς ἐρπετόν δεινοτάτου ἀναπέμπτει.

³⁴ *PV* 368–71; cf. Eur. *Tro.* 220; *Cyc.* 599. On the often-doubted authenticity of the *Prometheus Bound*, see Griffith (1983) 31–35.

strengthens a key aspect of their divine persona, namely their worship at a site of impressive geological phenomena. Consideration of their full ancestry strengthens the conclusion reached above, that the mythology of the Palici links them to their sanctuary and to the role they play in Sikel religious practice.

In fact, the close junction between these genealogies and the cult at Palikè suggests that, rather than assuming that Aeschylus discarded Sikel stories in favour of his own, we should ask whether Sikel beliefs may also have informed his choice. One reference in Hesychius (*s.v. Palikoi*), which names Adranus as the father of the Palici, does perhaps point in this direction. A Sikel deity whose sanctuary was located on the slopes of Mount Etna, Adranus was closely associated with volcanism, fire and mountains, and may have originally been the tutelary deity of the volcano.³⁵ While no source explicitly identifies Adranus with Hephaestus, many scholars have made that connection, and for contemporary Greeks, who linked Hephaestus with Mount Etna, the identification would have been natural.³⁶ Of course, Hesychius is a very late source, and the idea of Adranus as father of the Palici may post-date the *Aetnaeans*.³⁷ Nevertheless, we cannot *a priori* exclude the possibility that later writers drew on pre-existing mythical frameworks that related Adranus to the Palici and to Hephaestus. Aeschylus may therefore have followed another common Greek procedure, *interpretatio graeca*, changing the deity's name but otherwise maintaining a degree of continuity with a Sikel story.

If Hesychius' notice does transmit genuine information on Sikel beliefs, then we should recognize that Aeschylus' representation remains faithful to the core of their story by presenting it in terms that made sense to Greeks. As Cliff Ando has recently emphasized on the Roman side, *interpretatio graeca* is a far more complicated intercultural procedure than a simple appropriation or demonstration of cultural power.³⁸ Instead, it requires knowledge about the deities in question, careful processing of various data about them, and selection of which data to foreground. This process is certainly susceptible to self-interested manipulation, which surely enabled Aeschylus to choose Zeus over Hephaestus as the twins' father, but it begins from knowledge of foreign beliefs. If this model is correct – if Sikel myth in fact posited Adranus as the father of the Palici – Aeschylus has indeed transformed the parentage of the Palici along Hellenic lines, but this is no mere appropriation. Instead, he has carefully constructed his genealogy to include Hephaestus, thereby articulating a core aspect of the Palici as they were seen by Sikel worshippers. This should be understood as no more than a possibility, but it is one that highlights the assumptions inherent in the cultural-imperialism approach.

On the other hand, if we reject Hesychius' testimony as relevant only to later understandings of the Palici, we should still not jump to conclusions about the origins of Aeschylus' genealogy. Absence of evidence for a Sikel genealogy is not evidence of its absence, especially since we have so little fifth-century evidence of any kind about Sikel religion. Rather than simply assuming that Aeschylus invented a story in order to appropriate Sikel deities, we should keep an open mind and observe how the poet responds to the contexts for which we do have evidence. By establishing both Zeus and Hephaestus among the progenitors of the Palici, Aeschylus triangulates between the play's Deinomenid and Sikel contexts, finding a way to accommodate both within his mythic

³⁵ Cusumano (1992); (2006) 131–39. The main ancient sources are Ael. *NA* 11.3, 20 (= Nymphodorus of Syracuse *FGrH* 572 F9) and Plut. *Tim.* 12.

³⁶ For example, Manni (1980) 13–14; Cusumano (1992) especially 152; Meurant (1998) 19–20, 82–87. The identification is based partly on their similar competencies and partly on the striking similarities between two cults, one of Hephaestus and one of Adranus, described at Ael. *NA* 11.3 and 11.20.

³⁷ In particular, Cusumano (1992) 171–82 argues that the Adranus version originated with Philistus in the early fourth century, at a time when Dionysius I was promoting Adranus as a way of establishing Syracusan control over the Sikels of interior Sicily.

³⁸ Ando (2005); *cf.* Malkin (2011) 119–41; Parker (2017).

vision. Zeus nods to Hieron's cultivation of Zeus Aetnaeus, while the inclusion of Hephaestus links the twins closely to the volcanic landscape of eastern Sicily and to the cult practices of the sanctuary, specially marked by geological phenomena, where they were worshipped. Even in Aeschylus' genealogy they remain Sikel to a partial but important extent.

Aeschylus does, of course, present the Palici as descended from Greek gods. But how would this have been understood at the time? Zeus had many foreign sons, including Belus, an Egyptian king and son of Io, and Targitaus, a Scythian founder. So did many Greek heroes, such as Heracles and Perseus (whose son Perses became ancestor to the Persians). As Erich Gruen has recently shown, such mythical liaisons did not necessarily represent hierarchical attempts to subordinate foreign peoples to Greeks. Rather, they articulated relationships between different peoples, drawing connections between them and often bringing them closer together – a technique not of imperialism but of integration and accommodation in a multicultural world.³⁹ Genealogical thinking can serve a wide variety of purposes, including imperialism and ethnocentrism but also the promotion of one family over others or the building of ties between one community and another.

By way of comparison, a closer look at the two other sons of Zeus just mentioned finds little trace of Greek colonial dominance. Herodotus attributes the story of Targitaus, son of Zeus and of a daughter of the river Borysthenes (and thus very much parallel to the Palici), to the Scythians themselves (4.5). This ascription should not necessarily be taken at face value, but it does suggest that Herodotus, at least, did not understand it as a Hellenic appropriation of the Scythian founder or an expression of Greek superiority over Scythians.⁴⁰ Instead, it was simply a natural way for the first member of a people to appear: descended from the land itself. Meanwhile, the foreign descendants of Belus actively contributed to Greek civilization in the person of Danaus, who returned from Egypt to take the throne of Argos – a story treated by Aeschylus in the *Suppliants*. The point is not whether Egypt or Argos could claim any form of superiority but rather that the two nations are inextricably intertwined.⁴¹ Both Belus and Targitaus are human, of course, while the Palici are divine. Still, why should the genealogy of foreign gods lead to a different conclusion than that of demigods? Treating the Greek Zeus as the father of indigenous Sicilian deities suggests the integration of an island shared by both Greeks and Sikels, rather than the subordination of one to the other.

A careful reading of the birth and parentage of the Palici within the Sicilian context of the *Aetnaeans* thus suggests that an interpretation focusing on the appropriation of Sikel deities by Greeks fails to account fully for the available evidence. After stripping away a layer of prior assumptions, we see that the myths of the Palici tightly link them to their cult at Palikè and possibly to Sikel beliefs and stories. This rich relationship indicates that Aeschylus both had access to reliable information about them and adapted this source material to serve his poetic goals. The play does not, of course, aim to preserve an authentically Sikel voice, but neither does it proclaim Greek cultural superiority by appropriating Sikel deities. Rather, the *Aetnaeans* – or at least the segment from which fragment 6 derives – appears instead to articulate a composite mythology of the Palici. Moreover, the Palici were worshipped with a set of practices that blend Greek and Sikel elements, and Aeschylus deploys them in a very similar way, allowing him to negotiate between the cultural traditions of Greeks and Sikels and blend the two cultures of the island into a new synthesis. We must next consider what little we know of the rest of the play, beyond this one fragment.

³⁹ Gruen (2011); cf. Hall (2005) 260–65; Patterson (2010) 46–59; Malkin (2011) 119–41.

⁴⁰ The story can be interpreted through Iranian parallels as authentically Scythian: Corcella (2007) 575–77; cf. Hartog (1988) 19–27. A second Scythian origin story in Herodotus, in which they are descendants of Heracles

(4.8–10), is attributed to the Greeks living in the Black Sea area and may aim 'to assimilate the origins of the barbarian people to Greek mythology': Corcella (2007) 578.

⁴¹ Miller (2005) 75–79; Mitchell (2006); Gruen (2011) 229–33.

IV. From Aetna to Syracuse

The shifting settings of the *Aetnaeans* – which encompassed six locations, all in eastern Sicily – further dramatizes the integration of the region. A hypothesis preserved on papyrus lists the locations of the various scenes of the play (fig. 1):

κατὰ μὲν γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον μέρος αὐτοῦ ἡ σκηνὴ ὑπόκειται Αἴτνη, κατὰ δὲ τὸ δεύτερον Ξουθεΐα, κατὰ δὲ τὸ τρίτον πάλιν Αἴτνη, εἴτ' ἀπὸ ταύτης εἰς Λεοντίνους μεταβάλλει καὶ γίνεται ἡ σκηνὴ Λεον[...], μετὰ δ' αὐτὸν Συρακοῦσσαι, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ [ἐν Τεμενί]τη διαπεραίνεται, ὅς ἐστι τοπ[⁴²

In the first act of the drama the scene is Aetna, in the second Xuthia, in the third Aetna again; next from there it changes to Leontini and the scene becomes Leon[tini], after that Syracuse, and the remainder finishes [in Temenit]e, which is a pla[ce within the city].

This unusual structure (which is paralleled, however, in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*) led Eduard Fraenkel to conclude that the *Aetnaeans* did not display the unity of plot that typically characterizes tragedy but rather consisted of a series of unconnected scenes.⁴³ More recent commentators, however, have rightly recognized that the play's unity is actually constituted in part by its movement from scene to scene.⁴⁴ The action crosses a landscape that by the early fifth century had been incorporated into the Deinomenid realm, and so the succession of scenes within a single play enacts the spatial unity of the region. This political union was in fact quite recent; only over the previous few decades had the multiple poleis and independent Sikel communities of eastern and southern Sicily been unified into a single territorial state. Nevertheless, the play retrojects this situation into the mythical past and creates a form of aetiological legitimacy for the creation of the Deinomenid empire.

But what kind of unity is portrayed? The last three scenes take place in space that is marked as Greek: the colonies of Leontini and Syracuse (or rather, their future sites), as well as Temenite, the district within Syracuse where the theatre was located.⁴⁵ Since the first three scenes are not so clearly marked as Greek, the play seems to enact not only a spatial but also an ideological movement, from non-Greek to Greek, and also looks forward aetiological to the foundation of Greek settlements in Sicily.⁴⁶ Some have therefore argued that the play presents a celebratory progression from Sicilian origins toward the *telos* of Syracusan and Deinomenid rule over Sicily and the replacement of Sikel power with that of Greeks.⁴⁷ In particular, ending the play at Temenite, the district within Syracuse where the theatre was located, brings the action home for the audience and highlights in the strongest possible terms the relevance of the play's action and message for contemporary Syracusans. The *Eumenides*, with its aetiological scene on the Areopagus, would again provide a close parallel. To an extent this is surely correct: the play, which an ancient *vita* says was produced 'to give omens of a good life to those founding Aetna',⁴⁸ likely ended with a celebration of the Deinomenid regime and the peace, prosperity and social order that it created.

⁴² The text is that of Radt in *TrGF*, based on the *editio princeps* by Lobel (*P.Oxy.* 2257 fr. 1). The widely accepted supplement of Temenite is by Pfeiffer (*apud* Lobel); the missing word should be a toponym and a first declension masculine noun. For the locations, see fig. 1.

⁴³ Fraenkel (1954).

⁴⁴ Luraghi (1994) 343–44; Basta Donzelli (1996) 87–93; Poli-Palladini (2001) 290–94; Smith (2012) 132–33; Stewart (2017) 107–08; *cf.* Taplin (1977) 416–18.

⁴⁵ With many scholars, I prefer to see the entire play set in mythical times, rather than the present: in particular, setting the play in contemporary Syracuse could

hardly have avoided bringing Hieron on stage, for which there is no known parallel: see Poli-Palladini (2001) 289–94 with references.

⁴⁶ Poli-Palladini (2001) 292–94.

⁴⁷ Dougherty (1991) 129–30; *cf.* Cataudella (1964–1965) 376–77; Bonanno (2010) 144–45.

⁴⁸ *Vit. Aesch.* 9: ἐλθὼν τοίνυν εἰς Σικελίαν, Ἰέρωνος τότε τὴν Αἴτνην κτίζοντος, ἐπεδείξατο τὰς Αἴτνας, οἰωνίζόμενος βίον ἀγαθὸν τοῖς συνοικοῦσι τὴν πόλιν. *Cf.* Luraghi (1994) 343–44; Corbato (1996); Poli-Palladini (2001) 306; for a sceptical view, see Smith (2017) 19–30.

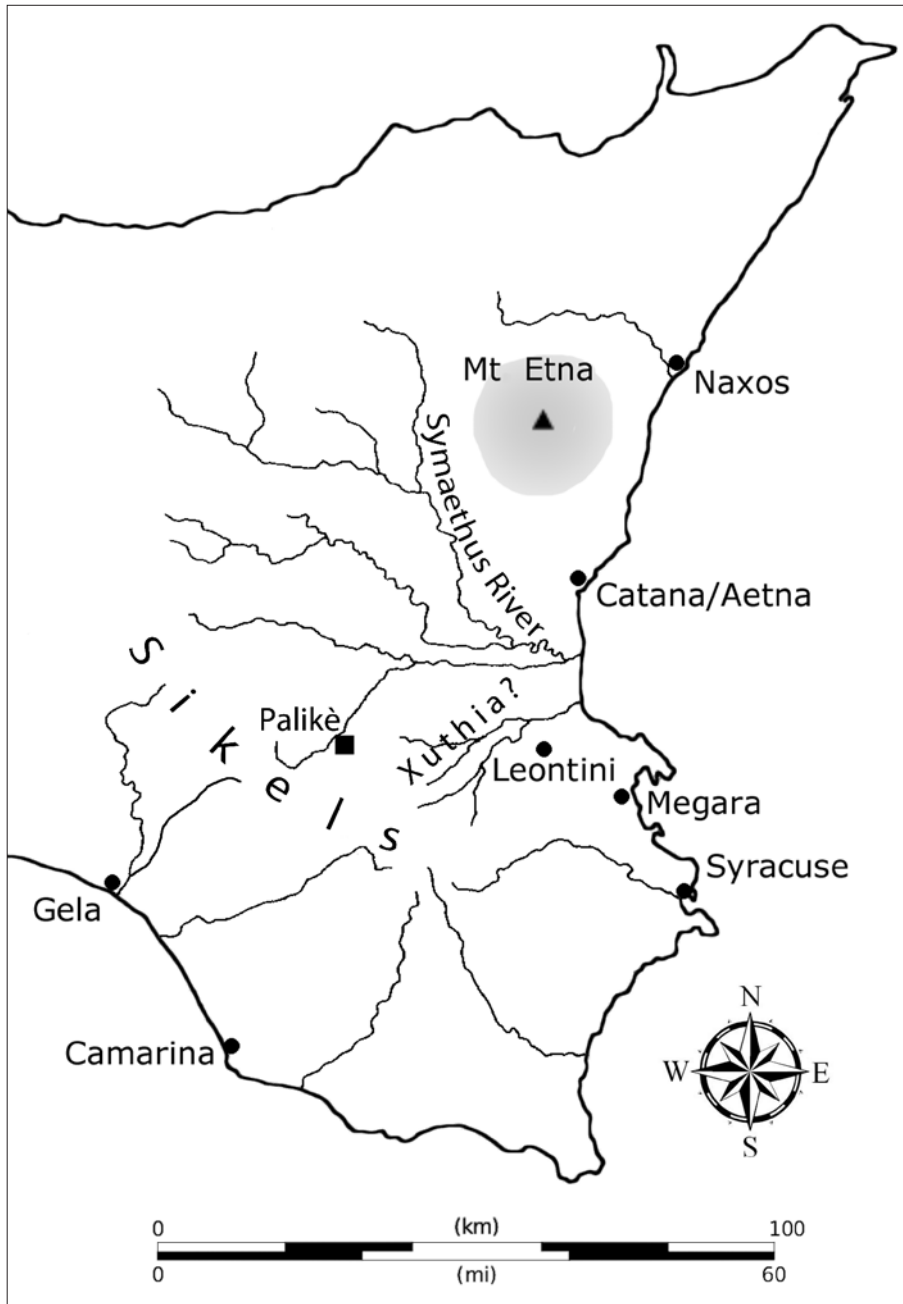


Fig. 1. Map of eastern Sicily, with sites mentioned in the text (by the author).

Yet problems with this picture emerge immediately. Focusing on ‘Greek’ dominance ignores the much more complex realities of divisions among the Greeks, within a kingdom inhabited by both Dorian and Ionian Greeks, as well as Sikels. The Deinomenid state had been created through a lengthy series of violent acts. Continuing a process begun by their predecessor, Hippocrates of Gela (498–491), Gelon and Hieron established their control of eastern Sicily by attacking other Greek cities. They destroyed five of them outright; some of their people were forcibly moved to other locations, while others were sold into slavery. In particular, the expulsion of the people of Catana was what enabled Hieron to found his colony of Aetna on the same site. While Leontini was not destroyed, it lost its independence (becoming part of the Syracusan state) and was forced

to receive those who had been expelled from Catana and Naxos.⁴⁹ Far from happily co-existing and sharing power over native Sicilians, as a simplistic reading of the play would have it, Syracuse and Leontini – Dorian and Ionian communities respectively – were usually hostile. Sikels were affected by this period of warfare as well: Hippocrates had attacked the Sikel town of Hybla, along with various Greeks, and more recently Hieron had expropriated land from Sikels and given it to the colonists of Aetna.⁵⁰ The Deinomenid regime – and the unity of Sicily described in the *Aetnaeans* – were thus founded on a basis of violence and imperialism.

Thus, if the appearance of Leontini in the latter half of the play is part of a movement towards prosperity under Syracusan rule, it also suppresses this history of conflict and the contemporary reality of Deinomenid power. Its appearance would suggest a mythical precedent that creates legitimacy, in an aetiological mode, for the peaceful integration of fifth-century Leontini into the broader Deinomenid realm. The scene at Xuthia, the identification of which is a perennial puzzle, may function in a similar manner. Other sources describe Xuthia as a region near Leontini, though they should not be identical, since Aeschylus seems to have carefully distinguished the two. David Grant Smith has argued that Xuthia represents – via its possible mythical eponym, the Heraclid Xuthus – a Syracusan claim to the plain of Catania, the largest and richest alluvial plain in Sicily, located between Catana and Leontini, and controlled by Ionians. By identifying this region as Xuthia, Aeschylus would be presenting Hieron (who emphasized the Dorian ethnicity of Aetna and led a city founded by the Heraclid Archias) as the rightful ruler of a Dorian-Heraclid area.⁵¹ This identification is far from certain, but, if it is accurate, the scene would also support through myth Syracuse's claim to power over Leontini and its territory.

Yet there is more to both of these scenes, and in fact both also highlight the diversity of Sicily's populations. If the play's movement from Leontini to Syracuse mirrors a real-life shift in the balance of power, it also serves as a reminder of the island's many separate peoples. Ionians, we are asked to recall, form a constituent element of the Deinomenid realm, and not all significant actions in the play take place at Syracuse. The role of Xuthia is similarly complicated by the sequence from Xuthia to Leontini to Syracuse: if the Xuthia scene is meant to legitimize Syracusan possession of territory, what happens when Ionian control interposed between them? Instead, perhaps Xuthia should be identified with the site of Palikè, which equally well fits the description of Xuthia as 'near Leontini'.⁵² If true, this would further heighten the prominence of the Palici in the play's settings and that of the Sikels more broadly. Regardless of the precise significance of Xuthia, it is clear that Hieron's kingdom, as depicted by Aeschylus, consists of far more than Syracusans alone.

The first scene, meanwhile, brings indigenous Sicily on stage and prepares the ground for the synthesis of Greek and Sikel cultures. The play opens at Aetna, which – since the play was set in the mythical past – should refer to the mountain and not Hieron's colony.⁵³ The scene's content can broadly be inferred from Macrobius' narrative of the birth of the Palici (*Sat.* 5.19.18), beginning with Zeus' rape of Thalia 'near the Symaethus river', which flows for much of its length around Mount Etna. Thus, the location of the opening scene suggests that it may well have dealt with the

⁴⁹ The affected cities were Camarina, Megara Hyblaea, Euboea, Naxos and Catana; half of the population of Gela was also removed to Syracuse: Hdt. 7.154–56; Diod. Sic. 11.49. See especially Lomas (2006); cf. Luraghi (1994) 288–304, 335–42; Mafodda (1996) 71–80; Bonanno (2010) 127–39; Morgan (2015) 52–61.

⁵⁰ Hdt. 7.154–55; Diod. Sic. 11.76.3; cf. Mafodda (1998).

⁵¹ Smith (2012); cf. Basta Donzelli (1996) 89–92; Poli-Palladini (2001) 297–301; but see also the reserva-

tions of Stewart (2017) 148–50. On Hieron's Dorian credentials, see Pind. *Pyth.* 1.60–66; with Thatcher (2012) 76–83; Morgan (2015) 333–36.

⁵² La Rosa (1974) 157–63.

⁵³ Some have argued that the first scene took place on the mountain while the third scene represented the city (La Rosa (1974) 152–54; Bonanno (2010) 145), but the word *palin* in the hypothesis speaks against this; cf. Cataudella (1964–1965) 376–77; Poli-Palladini (2001) 291–92.

rape of Thalia and its aftermath. The conception of the Palici sets the play's action in motion, and their presence informs the remainder of the play. Moreover, as we saw earlier, whether or not Zeus in this scene was explicitly labelled as Zeus Aetnaeus, the audience would probably think of exactly this divine figure in a scene set on Mount Etna. This is a deity whom Hieron specially favoured, and his appearance on his eponymous mountain might seem to claim it as Greek territory. Yet his role here is to father Sikel deities – and moreover ones whose mythology is clearly linked to the volcano on which they were conceived. Thus, the setting of the play's opening scene aligns Mount Etna with the indigenous components of Sicilian culture just as much as the Greek ones; in fact, the conception of the Palici on Mount Etna serves as a metaphor for cultural synthesis.

At the same time, the geographic course of the river Symaethus – which originates on the western side of Mount Etna and flows around its flanks before meeting the sea just south of Catana/Aetna – draws a link between the mountain and the colony, which is further supported by homonymy between the two. The rape by the Symaethus could have occurred along the mountainous upper reaches of the river or near its mouth at the future site of the colony. Both the name and the story invite a deliberate ambiguity between mountain and city, a blurring of both spatial and chronological categories that unifies past and present, Greek and Sikel. Aeschylus essentially brings the Palici from Mount Etna to the colony of Aetna and then to Syracuse, underscoring their continuing importance in Deinomenid Sicily.

Aeschylus does seem to have celebrated Hieron and the prosperity of his kingdom, yet the manner in which he does so repays close attention. Scholarly focus on the play's ending has obscured its beginning. While the play did celebrate a progression towards Syracuse and the Deinomenids, we should equally highlight the role of the Palici in this development. In the light of this, the play's overall plot takes on new meaning, since its culmination at Syracuse comes only at the end of a lengthy sequence in which non-Syracusans – especially the indigenous deities worshipped at Palikè – predominate. While the play's spatial and ideological movement reaches its climax at Temenite, we should not forget that it began with the Palici. Only through Sikel deities can we arrive at the site of the performance itself, and their relevance to the contemporary audience could not be plainer. Similarly, it is surely no accident that Aeschylus named the twins' mother Thalia, or 'abundance', mythically underscoring the contribution of the Palici to their island's prosperity. Aeschylus in fact encourages the audience to see the importance of Sikels for the foundation of their society by proposing a view back to its origins. Seen from this perspective, the *Aetnaeans* paints a portrait of fifth-century Sicilian culture as emerging from the contributions of three different peoples – Dorians, Ionians and Sikels – whom the play's various settings highlight. Hence, the vision of the Deinomenid empire promoted by the play should be understood to include not only the Dorians of Syracuse but all the peoples of Sicily.

This re-reading of the *Aetnaeans* should not be taken too far. Not only can we draw very limited conclusions from such scanty data, but its propagandistic value was quickly eliminated with the fall of the Deinomenid regime in 466. The play must not be whitewashed entirely: the action is generated, after all, through an act of violence, the rape of Thalia, which eventually enables Greek settlement and power in Sicily. Aeschylus' vision of a cultural synthesis only emerges in the context of prior violence and imperialism – much as, historically, the Deinomenid state originated from the destruction of cities and the mass removal of populations. Nevertheless, shocking violence has frequently co-existed with modes of cultural negotiation and accommodation. As Richard White wrote about another arena of cultural contact, 'This world was not an Eden, and it should not be romanticized. Indeed, it could be a violent and sometimes horrifying place.'⁵⁴ This imbalance of

⁵⁴ White (1991) x, whose original Middle Ground concept described North America in the 17th and 18th centuries. Note, however, that this model – which depends on a balance of power in which 'no side has

overwhelming superiority and cannot dictate or dominate' (Malkin (2014) 16) – does not describe Deinomenid Sicily very well.

power between Greeks and Sikels mirrors the asymmetry in cultural exchange that is noted above, in which Sikels are impacted deeply, but Greeks superficially. While we should recognize the importance of Sikel agency in the broader cultural realities of fifth-century Sicily (especially at Palikè), it is clear that Hieron and Aeschylus are the active agents in the play's production, and the world it portrays is dominated by Greeks and ruled by Hieron. Nevertheless, this portrait is built not by suppressing Sikel culture but by presenting a positive Sikel contribution to Deinomenid society. Just as rethinking their worship of the Palici helped Sikels find a new way to be Sikel, so too writing about them enabled Aeschylus to describe a new way of being Greek in Sicily. This view provides an important corrective to overly simplistic representations of the cultural ramifications of Greek colonialism.

Undoubtedly Dougherty's interpretation of the *Aetnaeans*, with its message of Greek superiority, would have appealed to many Syracusans, whose city dominated much of the island. Yet, I suggest, other readings were also available, which give the Palici – and, by extension, the Sikels – a very different relationship with the powerful Greek city. Reading the *Aetnaeans* in its fifth-century Sicilian context suggests that more can be gained from focusing on the play's politics of negotiation and accommodation, rather than appropriation and displacement. In this model, the culture of the Sikels is not buried beneath an onslaught of culturally superior Greeks, but instead exercises an important influence on Sicilian culture. For mainland Greeks, the Palici mattered little, but for Sicilian Greeks the native deities of the island took on a much greater significance. Aeschylus, a *vir utique Siculus*, thus contributed to the development of a separate and distinctively Sicilian culture, different from that of mainland Greece, in which all Sicilians could participate and take pride.

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