

DIDASKALIA 

The Journal for Ancient Performance



Didaskalia is an electronic journal dedicated to the study of all aspects of ancient Greek and Roman performance

DIDASKALIA

Volume 11 (2014)

<http://didaskalia.net>

ISSN 1321-485

About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

Didaskalia is an English-language, online publication about the performance of Greek and Roman drama, dance, and music. We publish peer-reviewed scholarship on performance and reviews of the professional activity of artists and scholars who work on ancient drama.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of the field. If you would like your work to be reviewed, please write to editor@didaskalia.net at least three weeks in advance of the performance date. We also seek interviews with practitioners and opinion pieces. For submission guidelines, go to didaskalia.net.

2014 Staff

Editor-in-Chief:	Amy R. Cohen	editor@didaskalia.net +1 434 947-8117
		<i>Didaskalia</i> Randolph College 2500 Rivermont Avenue Lynchburg, VA 24503 USA
Associate Editor:	C.W. (Toph) Marshall	
Assistant Editor:	Jay Kardan	assistant-editor@didaskalia.net
Interns:	Grace Gardiner Kiaorea Wright	intern@didaskalia.net

Advisory Board

Caterina Barone	Oliver Taplin
John Davidson	Peter Toohey
Gary Decker	J. Michael Walton
Mark Griffith	David Wiles
Mary Hart	Paul Woodruff
Kenneth Reckford	

Editorial Board

Dorota Dutsch	Dan McCaffrey
Fred Franko	Marianne McDonald
Allison Futrell	Peter Meineck
Mary-Kay Gamel	Paul Menzer
John Given	Tim Moore
Mike Lippman	Nancy Rabinowitz
Fiona Macintosh	Brett Rogers
Willie Major	John Starks

Copyright

Readers are permitted to save or print any files from *Didaskalia* as long as there are no alterations made in those files. Copyright remains with the authors, who are entitled to reprint their work elsewhere if due acknowledgement is made to the earlier publication in *Didaskalia*. Contributors are responsible for getting permission to reproduce any photographs or video they submit and for providing the necessary credits.

Website design © *Didaskalia*.

Didaskalia is published at Randolph College.

DIDASKALIA
VOLUME 11 (2014)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

11.01	Review - <i>If We Were Birds</i> at the Nimbus Theatre Clara Hardy	1
11.02	Review - <i>All Our Tragic</i> at the Den Theatre Ruth Scodel	6
11.03	Review - <i>All Our Tragic</i> at the Den Theatre Daniel Smith	9
11.04	Review - 50th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Aeschylus's <i>Oresteia</i> and Aristophanes' <i>Wasps</i> Caterina Barone	13
11.05	Currency Exchange: Staging Aristophanes' <i>Wealth</i> in New Orleans Karen Rosenbecker and Artemis Preeshl	16
11.06	Review - <i>Agamemnon</i> at Savannah State University Ruth Scodel	37
11.07	<i>Philoctetes</i> as a Health Educator Robert Hackey	39

Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 11 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

Agamemnon

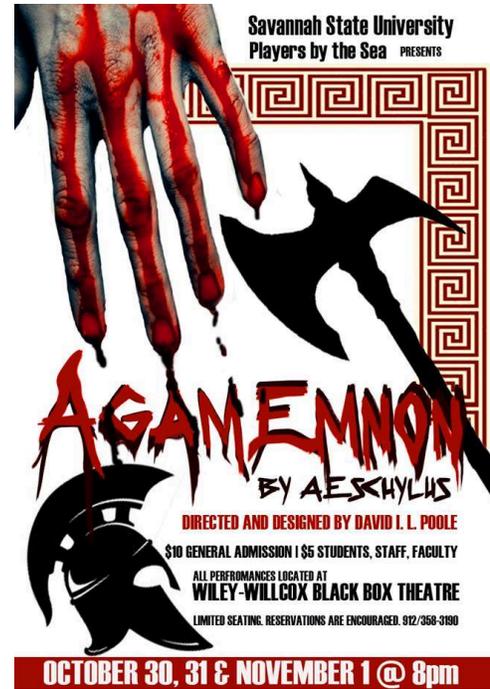
Directed and Designed by David L. Poole
 October 30-31 and November 1, 2014
 The Wiley-Wilcox Black Box Theatre
 Savannah State University

Reviewed by **Ruth Scodel**
The University of Michigan

Until I saw the poster for this production, I had never considered *Agamemnon* as a Halloween entertainment, but it has almost enough blood for a slasher movie and is a ghost story besides. Also, I would probably not have selected a tiny black box theater as the ideal venue, thinking of the vast spaces that the play evokes. But a small, dark theatre has advantages. Insofar as the chorus represents the city, the city itself seems an extension of the house. While I found Cassandra was a little overplayed when she threw herself against the walls, in memory the effect feels right—she is trapped, and the audience experiences some of that same claustrophobia.

The chorus, though, was not a straightforward group of Argive elders. They were masked—the rest of the cast were not. The masks were convenient, enabling the chorus members to take other roles. The masking was especially effective when, during the parodos, one chorus member removed his mask and became Calchas—the switch broke up the long narrative and powerfully conveyed the slippage between past and present. These masks, though, also made the chorus uncanny: they were not flexible or naturalistic, but were hard and distinctly creepy, with long beards. Sometimes the chorus members were a group of Argive elders, especially in their final confrontation with Aegisthus, but sometimes something else, hard to define: spirits of the lingering past, perhaps, or articulate zombies.

This production had a mostly student cast, and Savannah State University is a historically black institution. It does not offer Greek or Latin, it is not a wealthy college, and 90% of its students receive financial aid. Yet Aeschylus was hard to understand even for audiences in the late fifth century BCE, and for a modern audience—people who don't know the history of the Pelopids, the system of Greek orrithomancy, or the problems of theodicy with which the choral songs grapple—he is harder still. Using Ted Hughes's adaptation helped; his version unpacks Aeschylus' dense language. I would never use his translation for teaching, because too often his elaborations distort. In the theatre, though, an audience cannot stop to puzzle through ambiguities, and Hughes's version conveys enough meaning and is real poetry. Cutting also helped, since this production omitted, for example, some choral song and the herald's account of the storm and Menelaus' disappearance. During the parodos, chorus members displayed the eagles on sticks along with the hare; it felt cheesy to me, but was probably helpful for audience members who didn't know the play. On the other hand, a few moments earlier, when they waved a piece of fabric to represent Aulis and the shadow of birds appeared through it, the effect was



Poster for Savannah State University's production of *Agamemnon*. Photo courtesy SSU Players by the Sea Box Office's Facebook.

truly mysterious and numinous; the gods were communicating, but their message was predictably unsure.

This production was almost a lesson in how effective and useful stage resources can be, both those available to the ancients and those not. Agamemnon, wearing armor, entered on a single chariot, with Cassandra huddled in it and no other booty displayed. The oversized chariot by itself announced what the Agamemnon of this production was. In the carpet scene, I did not feel that this Agamemnon felt any real fear of offending the gods or exceeding human limits. He resisted because he would automatically resist Clytemnestra, and at the moment when he agreed that she had "won," he turned and violently kissed Cassandra before descending from the chariot, as if to declare that Clytemnestra's small victory was irrelevant. This bit of stage business was brilliantly shocking.

The main set had a short flight of stairs leading to the palace facade. The chorus was at the level of the front row of audience seating, while Clytemnestra could stand on the stage at the top of the stairs, above the chorus without being completely cut off from them. After the murders, though, the stairs were pushed to the side so that there was a narrow raised stage at house left with no direct access from the choral space. Clytemnestra came out standing over the corpses in a shallow, square basin—it was, in effect, an *eccyclema*. Aegisthus then spoke down to the chorus from the side stage, so that the staging reinforced his lack of involvement in the earlier action and his failure to engage the chorus. Aegisthus wore an orientaling costume with a fez that made me think of a toy monkey with cymbals, an image that fits the character pretty well.

I have often wondered what could make Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, although she must need a male figurehead, accept this weakling. This production did not bring out quite sharply enough how his arrival interrupts her attempt to make a bargain with the evil spirit of the family—that she will take only a little of the wealth if it will leave the house in peace (1575–6). This is probably not a workable bargain anyway, but Aegisthus, who wants all the wealth and power, has no interest in it. However, seeing the play performed by an African-American cast gave this aspect a new resonance, one I have not yet been able to think through. Agamemnon is a *miles gloriosus*, though not at all an amusing version of the type, while Aegisthus is a nasty little tyrant, almost but not quite a complete puppet—he will let Clytemnestra mostly control him as long as he can push around others.

These are the men between whom Clytemnestra can choose, and seeing this production invited me to wonder what this matriarch could have been like if she had ever had a man worth having. The family curse expresses itself not just in her need for revenge, but in the men's greed for wealth and power. That greed is eternal, so that the play can work even without many of its great meditations on the causes of human ruin. The house is haunted, but the ghosts would not come out if we didn't invite them.