

FOREIGN BUT FAMILIAR GODS

Greco-Romans Read Religion in Acts

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Chapter 5

ACTS 17.16–34 AND AESCHYLUS' *EUMENIDES*

Most exegetes of the Areopagus narrative in Acts 17 have emphasized natural theology, Greek philosophy, the ἄγνωστος Θεός motif, Greco-Roman philosophical religion and historical questions.¹ I will not renew these discussions but explore a related and usually neglected subsidiary issue. A few scholars have noted a possible relationship between the mention of ἀνάστασις in both Acts 17.18, 32 and in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (647) without developing the parallel further.² In this chapter, I develop this parallel to tentatively suggest that Luke's audience may have observed an allusion to the Athenian literary tradition because of subtle parallels between Luke's narrative and that of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.

1. The literature is immense and beyond the scope of this monograph. Joseph A. Fitzmyer's commentary provides basic bibliography (*The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB, 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998]), pp. 613–17.

I summarize important and recent literature below.

(1) Natural theology: Most importantly, Bertil Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (ASNU 21; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1955). Also, Dean William Zweek, 'The Function of Natural Theology in the Areopagus Speech' (ThD dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1985), esp. pp. 1–42 for a comprehensive review of research, and pp. 220–60 for an exegesis of 17.24–29.

(2) Philosophy: most recently, Balch, 'The Areopagus Speech', pp. 52–79 and Neyrey, 'Acts 17, Epicureans, and Theodicy', pp. 118–34; and N. Clayton Croy, 'Hellenistic Philosophies and the Preaching of the Resurrection (Acts 17.18, 32)', *NovT* 39 (1997), pp. 21–39. There are several Greco-Roman philosophical parallels to Acts 17: the seventh-century BCE poet and sage Epimenides (quoted in Diogenes Laertius 1.109–15), Kleantes *Hymn to Zeus*, and the philosopher-mathematician Aratus (*Phaen.* 5). See also, from among many others, Seneca (*Ep.* 41.1–2, 44.1 and 95.47), Euripides (*Heracl.* 1345–46), Plutarch (*Stoic. Rep.* [= *Mor.* 1052D]), Dio Chrysostom (*Dei. cogn.* 83 [= *Or.* 12.83] and *Charid.* [= *Or.* 30.26]), and Cicero (*Tusc.* 1.28.68–69).

(3) Historical issues: Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989).

(4) ἄγνωστος Θεός: most importantly, Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte Religiöser Rede* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956) and P. W. van der Horst, 'The Altar of the "Unknown God" in Athens (Acts 17.23) and the Cults of "Unknown Gods" in the Graeco-Roman World', *ANRW* II/18, part 2, pp. 1426–56; repr. *idem*, *Hellenism-Judaism-Christianity: Essays on Their Interaction* (CBET, 8; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), pp. 165–202.

2. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 343; Bruce W. Winter, 'In Public and in Private: Early Christian Interactions with Religious Pluralism', in Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (eds), *One God One Lord in a World of Religious Pluralism* (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1991), pp. 112–34 at 129; Talbert, *Reading Acts*, p. 165; and Witherington, *Acts*, p. 532.

Allusions to Aeschylus

Because Paul discusses resurrection in Acts 17, Luke's Greco-Roman audience may have seen parallels to Aeschylus' *Eumenides* in at least three ways: (1) the mention of ἀνάστασις, (2) the mention of the Areopagus and its examination of the central character and (3) the introduction of new gods.³ Before exploring these parallels, I will briefly summarize the plot of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.

Aeschylus' Eumenides

At the beginning of the play, Orestes is a suppliant before Apollo at Apollo's oracle in Delphi (*Eum.* 1–234). The Erinyes have been pursuing Orestes to obtain vengeance for murdering his mother Clytemnestra (previously described in the *Choephoroi*), which he committed at Apollo's command. At Delphi, Apollo assures Orestes that he has been ritually cleansed from the pollution of homicide and sends Orestes to Athena's temple in Athens to seek asylum. Clytemnestra's ghost appears from the dead and verbally abuses the Erinyes for not completing the task of avenging her death. Orestes flees to Athens and begs asylum from Athena, who arrives just in time to prevent the Erinyes from destroying Orestes. Both the Erinyes and Orestes present their respective cases to Athena who concludes that she cannot decide the case alone. As a consequence, Athena founds the Areopagus as a trial court to decide cases of homicide. The Erinyes, Orestes and Apollo, speaking on Orestes' behalf, present their cases to the Areopagus. The vote is split and Athena decides for Orestes by casting the tie-breaking vote. The humiliated Erinyes then threaten to destroy Athens but Athena placates them by promising them a cult in Athens as both avengers of injustice and promoters of good with the cultic site located at the east end of the Areopagus. The play concludes with a celebratory procession of the Athenian citizens and the Erinyes, who now become the Eumenides. Thus the play serves to recount the etiological myth for the formation of the Areopagus council.

Methodology

How can one plausibly suggest that Luke's Greco-Roman audience could possibly have seen these three allusive intertextual parallels of ἀνάστασις, the Areopagus' examination of the central character, and introducing new gods? First, I will closely examine the parallels between Acts and *Eumenides* to see if there are sufficient similarities between the two works to suggest that Greco-Roman readers may have seen allusions to Aeschylus.

3. Basic Aeschylus bibliography in Alan H. Sommerstein, 'Aeschylus', in *OCD*, 3rd edn, pp. 28–29. Recent thorough bibliographies in James C. Hogan, *A Commentary on the Complete Greek Tragedies: Aeschylus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 307–18; Alan H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Aeschylus' Eumenides* (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. ix–xi; and Alan Shapiro and Peter Burian (trans.), *The Oresteia* (The Greek Tragedy in New Translations; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 281–85

Secondly, I will adapt criteria developed by Dennis Ronald MacDonald for determining intertextual dependence: accessibility, analogy, and motivation.⁴ MacDonald uses these criteria to answer the following: Was an alleged source text available to the author of the dependent text (the criterion of *accessibility*)? Did the supposed source text influence other texts (the criterion of *analogy*)? Is there a reasonable explanation for the use of the allusions (the criterion of *motivation*)? For my purposes, I consider accessibility and analogy together. Also, I adapt the criteria to pose the questions from the perspective of Luke's Greco-Roman audience: Was the alleged source (*Eumenides*) available to or known by this audience and did it influence other texts (*accessibility* and *analogy*)? Could a Greco-Roman reader not only see an allusion to *Eumenides*, but also perceive a purpose for such an allusion? Positive answers to these three questions reinforce the possibility that Greco-Romans may have noted an allusion to *Eumenides* in Acts 17.16–34.

The Parallels

Ἄνστασις

The word ἀνάστασις appears in both Aeschylus and Acts when the central character is about to appear before the Areopagus. Aeschylus uses the noun ἀνάστασις twice in his extant complete works: *Ag.* 589 and *Eum.* 647.⁵ In context, the first citation refers to the 'desolation' of a city. *Eumenides* 674 reads, 'once a man is dead, there is no raising him up [ἀνάστασις]'. In this context, ἀνάστασις means 'resuscitation', i.e., the revivification of a corpse. Apollo is saying that if

4. Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: the Odyssey, Plato, and the Acts of Andrew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 302–16. MacDonald uses seven different criteria and used them to determine the degree to which the *Acts of Andrew* is directly dependent upon Homer through citation, allusion, and structure. He later altered these criteria to evaluate the dependence of both Mark and Acts upon Homer: *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 1–23, esp. pp. 2, 5–6, 8–9 and *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer?: Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2003), pp. 2–5. He has stated to me that he now considers 'accessibility and analogy environmental issues somewhat difficult to apply to particular texts. I've dropped them as criteria, but use them to bolster the argument' (e-mail to author, 6 Feb. 1998).

MacDonald developed his criteria in order to study the literary dependence of one *entire* literary work on another *entire* literary work. Since I am studying the allusions to sections of one text found in a short section of another text, and a text's dependency upon not only literary works but also upon cultural phenomena, I retain MacDonald's criteria of accessibility and analogy for my purposes. I wish to thank Dr. MacDonald for discussing these issues with me and sharing early drafts of his work on Mark and Acts.

5. Vocabulary data from Henrik Holmboe, *Concordance to Aeschylus' Supplices* (Århus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1971); *idem*, *Concordance to Aeschylus' Prometheus Viteus* (Århus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1971); *idem*, *Concordance to Aeschylus' Persiae* (Århus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1971); *idem*, *Concordance to Aeschylus' Septem Contra Thebas* (Århus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1971); *idem*, *Concordance to Aeschylus' Agamemnon* (Århus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1972); *idem*, *Concordance to Aeschylus' Choephoroi* (Århus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1973); and *idem*, *Concordance to Aeschylus' Eumenides* (Århus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1973).

the Erinyes extract their murderous vengeance upon Orestes, then Orestes' life cannot be restored because Zeus made no provision for this. For Apollo, Orestes is entitled to life because he both obeyed Apollo's command to murder Clytemnestra and was ritually purified from blood guilt at Delphi.

This statement about death's finality is part of Apollo's defense argument before the Areopagus to save Orestes from the Erinyes' murderous, vengeful wrath. For the Athenian playwright, for his characters, and for his audience, there is no resurrection. Shortly before the end of the play, both the Areopagus and Athena declare Orestes innocent, and he returns home (754–77). Orestes retains his physical life; his only hope of life beyond the grave is his oath that his spirit will avenge Athens against all the rulers of his native Argos who march in military force against Athens:

Now I'll go home. But first I make this oath
to your land and people for all time to come –
never will an Argive leader march in here
with spears arrayed against you. If he does,
in violation of this oath of mine,
from the grave we'll see his effort fails.
We'll bring him bad luck, trouble on the march,
send birds of evil omen over him. (*Eum.* 762–71).⁶

The noun ἀνάστασις appears twice in Acts 17 (vv.18, 32). In 17.31, Paul uses the aorist participle ἀναστήσας in reference to Jesus. These three uses of 'rise/raised' terminology are clustered in and around Paul's discussion with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers and his speech to the Areopagus. Thus 17.18 and 17.31, both of which mention Jesus and the resurrection, form an *inclusio* for the speech.⁷ Also, the scoffing banter of the Athenian philosophers appears in the *inclusio* in 17.18 and 17.32. A reader may have noticed an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus by observing this literary device.

Aeschylus portrays Orestes as having only a shadowy post-mortem existence as a vengeful spirit. In Acts, an attentive reader would notice a reiteration of the importance of Jesus' resurrection as the proof of God's impending judgment upon the world (17.31). This emphasis on the resurrection recalls Luke's previous mentions of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1.22; 2.31; 4.2, 33).⁸ By noting this possible allusion to *Eumenides*, a Greco-Roman reader may have contrasted the

6. Trans. Ian Johnston, public domain (2003, online), http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/aeschylus/aeschylus_eumenides.htm. Accessed Dec. 16, 2005. Unless specified, all further translations *Eumenides* are by Johnston.

7. In 17.18 Luke overtly mentions Jesus by name, and in 17.30 Luke refers to Jesus by using the third person pronoun αὐτός, 'raising *him* [Jesus] from the dead'; a distinction that does not affect my overall argument. Spencer rightly concludes Christology is subordinate to theology throughout the Areopagus episode (*Acts*, 175).

8. Interestingly, all references to the resurrection before and including Acts 17.18, 32 are only about Jesus' resurrection. After Acts 17.32, there are four general references to resurrection or the hope of the resurrection (23.6, 8; 24.15, 21). The final Acts reference to the resurrection (26.23) refers to Jesus' resurrection and implicitly to the general resurrection. Does this change after Acts 17.16–34 signify a structural pattern in Acts?

emphasis on the resurrection in Acts to the blunt finality of the Athenian classical literary heritage, 'there is no resurrection' (*Eum.* 647).

The Areopagus, Social Order and the Innocence of Orestes and Paul

For Luke's audience, the references to the Areopagus in Acts 17 would have brought to mind aristocracy, respectability, antiquity and the divine establishment of the Areopagus. By writing his narrative in this way, Luke operated within the ancient mindset of 'reverence for antiquity', which assured the preservation of both social *and* religious order.⁹ By the first century CE the Areopagus, composed of local Athenian aristocrats, was eight centuries old and thus had an air of sacredness, immense respectability, and aristocracy.¹⁰ Cicero attests to the respectability of the Areopagus in the Roman period (*Nat. d.* 2.29.74, *Att.* 1.14.5, 5.11.6). Aelius Aristides called the Areopagus, 'most honorable and most holy' (*Or.* 1.367, also 46–48, 385). In imperial decrees and communications, Roman emperors consistently addressed the Areopagus: 'the council of the Areopagus, the council of the Six Hundred [or Five Hundred] and the people...'.¹¹ Because of its antiquity and aristocratic membership, the Roman emperor recognized the Areopagus as the first in importance among the three governing bodies of Athens.

Aeschylus connects the judgment and proclamation of Orestes' innocence to the foundation of the Areopagus. In the play Athena declares herself inadequate to judge the case alone and so appoints the Areopagus:

This is a serious matter, too complex
for any mortal man to think of judging.
It's not right even for me to adjudicate
such cases, where murder done in passion
merits passionate swift punishment.
...
Two options, each of them disastrous.
Allow one to remain, expel the other?
No, I see no way of resolving this.
But since the judgment now devolves on me,
I'll appoint human judges of this murder,
a tribunal bound by oath – I'll set it up

9. Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 1–5; pp. 141–43 nn. 1–25.

10. For the Areopagus' historical development, see Robert J. Bonner and Gertrude Smith, *The Administration of Justice from Homer to Aristotle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), I, pp. 88–107, 125–29, 163–69, 251–78, 364–65; II, pp. 167–71, 232–33, and *passim*; D.J. Geagan, *The Athenian Constitution after Sulla* (Hesperia Supplement, 12; Princeton: American School at Athens, 1967); *idem*, 'Ordo Areopagitarum Atheniensium', in Donald William Bradeen and Malcom Francis McGregor (eds), *ΦΟΡΟΣ: Tribute to Benjamin Dean Meritt*, (Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin, 1974), pp. 51–56; R.W. Wallace, *The Areopagus Council to 307 BC* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Hubert M. Martin Jr, 'Areopagus', *ABD* I, pp. 370–72; and D.W.J. Gill, 'Achaia', in Gill and Gempf (eds), *Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting*, pp. 447–48.

11. Among many inscriptions: *IG* II² 3500, 3501, 4104, 4129; *OGIS* 428). Also, Edward William Bodnar, SJ, *Cyriacus of Ancona and Athens* (Collection Latomus, 43; Brussels: Latomus, Revue D'Études Latines, 1960), pp. 171–73.

to last forever. So you two parties,
 summon your witnesses, set out your proofs,
 with sworn evidence to back your stories.
 Once I've picked the finest men in Athens,
 I'll return. They'll rule fairly in this case,
 bound by a sworn oath to act with justice. (*Eum.* 470–74, 481–89)

After Athena appoints the members of the Areopagus, they listen to the testimony and arguments of the Erinyes, Orestes, and Apollo. Athena then decides to establish the Areopagus as a permanent court of justice: 'Now and forever/this court of judges will be set up here (*Eum.* 681–84)'. The Areopagus casts its ballots and is equally divided for and against Orestes. Athena casts the deciding vote that allows Orestes to go free. Orestes then disappears from the play in an almost anti-climactic fashion.

The philosophers take Paul before the Areopagus.¹² The narrative is highly ambiguous about whether Paul was being formally examined by the Areopagus or simply conversing with Athenian philosophers and local civic officials who are interested in hearing something 'new' (17.21).¹³

Luke's Greco-Roman audience could have read this ambiguity in two ways. First, Luke's audience could have read his narrative as depicting a friendly discussion between Paul, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, and the Areopagus in the Stoa Basilica on the northwest corner of the Athenian agora.¹⁴ Secondly, Luke's audience could have interpreted his narrative as depicting a formal judicial proceeding investigating Paul's possible introduction of new gods to Athens. Viewing the narrative in this light, the readers/auditors could possibly associate the judicial functions of the Areopagus in the imperial period with its functions in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. In the Roman period, the Areopagus operated as both the government and chief judiciary of Athens with jurisdiction over cases of kidnapping, assault, and homicide (*Lucian, Bis acc.* 12, 15–17, *Tim.* 46, *Vit. auct.* 7; Pausanias 1.28.5), the regulation of weights and measures, fish sales, marketplace forgery and counterfeiting, the surveillance of contagious diseases, and the introduction of new

12. The philosophers take, ἐπιλάβομενοι, Paul to or before the Areopagus. ἐπιλάβω can mean 'seize, arrest' or, without hostile intent, 'take'. Concerning ἐπιλάβω, see Richard Wallace and Wynne Williams, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Companion* (Classical Studies Series; London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), p. 92.

13. Wallace and Williams, *Acts*, pp. 91–94 esp. 92–93.

14. Luke's narrative is unclear whether Paul appeared before the Areopagus on the hill of the same name or at the Stoa Basileios. The Areopagus council sometimes met at the Stoa during the imperial period; W.E. Wycherly, 'Two Notes on Athenian Topography', *JHS* 75 (1955), pp. 117–21; *idem*, *The Athenian Agora: Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1957), III, pp. 126–28 and nn. 117, 138, 407, 427, 511, 530, 543, 557, 636; *idem*, 'St. Paul in Athens', *JTS* 19 (1968), pp. 619–21; Homer A. Thompson and R.E. Wycherly, *The Athenian Agora: The History, Shape, and Uses of an Ancient City Center* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1972), XIV, 20, 34, 87, 88 n. 24, 107, 166, 168, 205; Colin J. Hemer, 'Paul at Athens: A Topographical Note', *NTS* 20 (1973–74), pp. 341–50; and Alan L. Boegehold, *et al.*, *The Athenian Agora: The Lawcourts at Athens: Sites, Buildings, Equipment, Procedure, and Testimonia* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1995), XXVIII, pp. 44–47, 126–35.

gods.¹⁵ Epigraphic and literary evidence suggests that the Areopagus could impose both exile *and* capital punishment during the Roman period.¹⁶ Paul is brought before the Areopagus because of its role as 'the effective government of Roman Athens and its chief court', including the introduction of new gods (see below).¹⁷ In this light Paul convinces a court that he is not introducing a new god to the Athenian pantheon. Once Paul mentions the resurrection, some members of the Areopagus scoff at him (cf. *Eum.* 647 where Apollo states, 'there is no resurrection'); others wish to defer discussion.¹⁸ But they do not find Paul culpable for anything. If Luke's Greco-Roman readers noted an allusion to *Eumenides*, they may have further reinforced the idea of Paul's innocence in their own minds because a renowned Athenian civic tribunal finds nothing to charge him with.

The Introduction of New Gods

Aeschylus introduces new gods into the Athenian pantheon and the 'conditions' that the new gods expect the Athenians to meet in *Eumenides*. A Greco-Roman reader may have detected a similar introduction of a new god to Athens and that god's 'demands' in Acts. In the *Eumenides*, the Furies become part of the Athenian civic pantheon and expect cult and social stability. In Acts, Paul introduces the 'Unknown God' and expects proper acknowledgment and repentance by the Athenians (17.30–31). In both texts the Areopagus is involved in judging the introduction of the new god(s). A Greco-Roman reader, familiar with the Areopagus' regulation of new gods, may have seen an allusion to *Eumenides* in Acts 17.16–34.¹⁹

At the end of the play, after Orestes' acquittal and return to his homeland (*Eum.* 754–77), the Furies remain unappeased and threaten to bring destruction to Athens (778–92, 808–22). After a series of moving speeches (774–806, 848–69, 881–91), Athena assuages their anger and convinces them to become part of the Athenian civic cult. The Erinyes will receive hearths or altars and sacred stones anointed with oil (806), the first fruits of the local crops will be offered to them (834), men and women will honor them with a procession (856–57), and the Athenians will honor them with sacrifices (1006–1037). The Furies, assured of a

15. Geagan *Athenian Constitution after Sulla*, pp. 32–50; T. D. Barnes, 'An Apostle on Trial', *JTS* 22 (1969), pp. 407–19; Gill, 'Achaia', pp. 447–48; Bruce W. Winter 'On Introducing Gods to Athens: An Alternative Reading of Acts 17.18–20', *TynBul* 47 (1996), pp. 71–90, esp. pp. 80–83. Geagan discusses the epigraphic evidence thoroughly.

16. Exile: B. Keil, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Areopags* (Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Leipzig; Philologische-historische Klasse, 71 Bd, 8; [1919?, 1920?]), pp. 52–53; cited by Barnes, 'An Apostle on Trial', p. 412 n. 5. Capital punishment: J. Delz, 'Lukians Kenntnis der athenischen Antiquitäten' (PhD diss.; Basel, 1950), pp. 108–109, 151ff.; cited by Barnes, 'An Apostle on Trial', p. 412 n. 6. For discussion and older bibliography about the ability of local governments to inflict capital punishment in the Roman provinces, see Barnes, 'An Apostle on Trial', p. 412 and p. 412 nn. 7–8.

17. Barnes, 'An Apostle on Trial', p. 413.

18. At Acts 24.25, the Roman governor Felix similarly dismisses Paul, 'Go for now. When I have time, I will call you'. Talbert understands both 17.32 and 24.25 as the postponement of decisive responses to Paul's proclamation, which in Acts equals unbelief (*Reading Acts*, 165).

19. See Winter 'Introducing Gods', pp. 71–90.

shrine, cult, and their due honor, promise to bless the citizens of Athens (*Eum.* 916–26, 938–48) but demand just behavior from the Athenians:

I forbid those deadly accidents
which cut men down before their time.
...
I pray man-killing civil strife
may never roar aloud
within the city – may its dust
not drink our citizen's dark blood.
nor passions for revenge incite
those wars which kill the state.
Let men give joy for joy,
united by their common love,
united in their enmities –
for that cures all human ills. (*Eum.* 958–59, 978–87)

The Furies, the new gods, will live in Athens provided they receive their due honors and the Athenians live justly. At the end of the *Eumenides*, the Athenians honor the Erinyes by escorting them in procession to their new shrine, a cave on the slopes of the Areopagus (1003–47). Aeschylus introduces a new cult, the Erinyes, into Athens after the founding of the Areopagus, the governing body that helped regulate the introduction of new gods.

Similarly, Greco-Romans may have understood Paul to be introducing a new god, the Unknown God or the god of the Christians, and associated that introduction of a new god with the Areopagus' official duties. The Athenian philosophers bring Paul before the venerable and ancient Areopagus to discuss his mention of new gods, Jesus and Anastasis.²⁰ At 17.30, God 'commands', παραγγέλλει, 'all humanity everywhere', τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ, 'to repent', μετανοεῖν. Paul's 'new god' demands repentance, i.e. a change in behavior.

Strikingly, Greco-Romans would have been aware of such 'repentance' or change in behavior within their own cultural context. Lucian's *Nigrinus* describes how a young man changes his life from a state of dissolution to moderation and highly ethical behavioral because of his 'conversion' to a philosophical school. This audience would probably have found the demand for repentance in Acts 17.30 as unremarkable, within the context of philosophical discussion (Paul's discussion with Stoics and Epicureans) except in relation to a future judgment by the resurrected Jesus. However, they would have, at least unconsciously, understood 'repentance' in mundane, daily religious life as a substantially different outlook than the usual practices of mundane, daily civic and popular religion.

A Greco-Roman audience may have viewed an allusion to *Eumenides* as ironic. In *Eumenides*, Athena introduces the Furies into the Athenian pantheon as 'new gods', i.e. the Athenians did not before give these gods public worship. In contrast, Paul states that the Athenians already worship the god they believe he is introducing (17.23). Paul's god is not a new god at all but the god the Athenians worship as Ἄγνωστος Θεός, the 'Unknown God'. Paul, and by implication the Christian

20. Winter, 'Introducing Gods', pp. 80–81.

movement, is not introducing a new god into the Athenian pantheon. Instead Paul is introducing the true god. The Athenian gods are mere human artistic products made of gold, silver, and stone who reside in temples of human construction and require human care (17.24–25, 29).

Greco-Romans may have seen a second level of irony in an allusion to *Eumenides*. In *Eumenides* the entire *polis* welcomes the Erinyes into the Athenian pantheon. In Acts, the Athenians, excepting Dionysius, Damaris and 'a few others' (17.34), *do not* accept God whom Paul proclaims as they accepted the Erinyes in *Eumenides*.

Accessibility and Analogy: Would Luke's Greco-Roman Audience Have Been Familiar with Aeschylus?

Based on the parallels cited above, I suggest that a Greco-Roman audience may have seen allusions to Aeschylus' *Eumenides* in Acts 17.16–34. A possible argument against my hypothesis is to deny any possibility that this audience had read or was aware of Aeschylus' work because the play was inaccessible to them. On the contrary, classical drama continued to be performed throughout the Mediterranean world at least into the third century CE.²¹ Mosaics, wall paintings, papyri and lead 'admission tickets' indicate that classical comedies and tragedies were performed before a wide cross section of society in Ephesus, Oescus, Mytilene, Pompeii, and especially Athens – which remained the center of drama in the ancient Mediterranean world.²²

John Edwin Sandys' examination of ancient literary scholarship shows that Aeschylus continued to be read and studied throughout antiquity.²³

1. Euripides was already criticizing Aeschylus' dramatic technique in his own plays.
2. The comic playwright Aristophanes sketched a satirical contest between Euripides and Aeschylus in his *Ranae* (*The Frogs*).
3. Ancient literary critics who commented on Aeschylus include Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 257–c. 180 BCE), Aristarchus of Samothrace (220–145 BCE), Didymus (65 BCE–10 CE), the anonymous author of *Περὶ Ὑψους* (*On the Sublime*, c. 30 BCE–early first century), and Dio Chrysostom (40–114 CE).
4. The Christian apologist Clement of Alexandria (c. 181–251 or 254? CE) mentions Aeschylus in his discussion of the Eleusinian mysteries (*Strom.* 2.461).

21. C.P. Jones, 'Greek Drama in the Roman Empire', in Ruth Scodel (ed.), *Theater and Society*, pp. 39–52.

22. Jones, 'Greek Drama', pp. 40–43. Excavators have unearthed pieces of stamped lead that appear to have given the bearer right of entry to ancient theatrical performances (Jones, 'Greek Drama', pp. 42–43).

23. From John Edwin Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship. I. From the Sixth Century B.C. to the End of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958; repr. New York: Hafner, 1967), pp. 24, 52–4, 65, 128, 132, 142.

Further, Philo (c. 20 BCE–40 CE) quotes Aesch. frg. 648: ‘And tell me where’s the sacred beam that dared the dangerous Euxine Stream? (*Omn. Prob. Lib.* 143)’²⁴

Additionally, the travel writer Pausanias, writing about 155 CE, describes the shrine of the Semnai Theai (the Erinyes) on the slopes of the Athenian Areopagus and mentions that Aeschylus was the first to depict the Erinyes with snakes in their hair (1.28.6).

The first- to third-century dates of Dio Chrysostom, Philo, Pausanias, and Clement show that the ancient Mediterranean world knew Aeschylus’ works during and after the time Luke wrote Acts. Dio Chrysostom compares and contrasts the tragic style of Euripides and Aeschylus in their treatment of the Philoktetes tale (*Philoc. Arc.* [= *Or.* 52]). Dio’s audience was obviously aware of both tragedians and their work; he expected his comments to be understood and appreciated. The educated Jewish writer, Philo, albeit a highly Hellenized writer, was familiar with, quoted, and appeared to expect his audience to catch a reference to Aeschylus. Pausanias was familiar with both Aeschylus’ radical new depiction of the Erinyes in his *Eumenides* and the relationship between the Areopagus, the Semnai Theai, and the Erinyes. Clement was familiar with scurrilous gossip about Aeschylus having divulged the secrets of Eleusis. It was fully possible for Luke’s Greco-Roman audience to be aware of and perhaps understand literary allusions to Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* in the first century CE.

Conclusions

If a Greco-Roman audience did perceive an allusion to Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* in Acts 17.16–34, what motivation might have they attributed to Luke for doing so? MacDonald points out that authors use an earlier text because they are friendly to it (writing a commentary, translation, or imitation) or antagonistic to it (parodying or somehow intentionally devaluing an earlier text).²⁵ Conversely, one can argue that an audience sees an author’s use of a source text as a friendly commentary on, translation or imitation of that source text. Also, an audience can see an author as antagonistically parodying or devaluing the source. If Luke’s Greco-Roman audience did observe an allusion to *Eumenides*, they may have understood this allusion as both a commendation and condemnation of Greek culture and religion as found in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*.

Luke’s Greco-Roman audience would have almost certainly noted that this entire narrative is set in an overwhelmingly Hellenistic context. They may have viewed a contrast between educated Athenian culture (and its classical heritage) and the Christian message.²⁶ He mentions the statues and altars of the Greek gods

24. Charles Duke Yonge (trans.), *The Works of Philo Judaeus: The Contemporary of Josephus, translated from the Greek* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1854–90). I thank N. Clayton Croy for this reference.

25. MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer*, pp. 6–7, 15 n. 46, 302, citing Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré* (Poétique; Paris: Seuil, 1982), pp. 201, 393, 418–19; English trans., Claude Doubinsky and Channa Newman (trans.), *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Stages, 8; Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 180, 343, 367. MacDonald limits himself to the act of direct textual copying or rewriting of one text in a later text.

26. Except for a brief mention in 17.17, Luke does not mention the Judeans in Acts 17.16–34.

that παροξύνω, 'enrage', Paul. Luke has Paul διαλέγομαι (17.16) and συμβάλλω (17.18), 'discuss' or 'dispute', with two major schools of Greek philosophy. Paul appears before the Areopagus, part of Athenian civic government. Paul's speech to the Areopagus possibly alludes to Epimenides, Aratus' *Phaenomena*, and Kleantes' *Hymn to Zeus* (17.28).²⁷

For a Greco-Roman reader, Paul's speech compares the Christian god with the Greek gods: God exists, is already worshipped by the Athenians as ἄγνωστος θεός, created humanity and the entire world, rules earth and heaven, calls humanity to repentance, and will judge the world through Jesus whom God raised from the dead. With the exception of the last two points, the Greek gods have all these attributes in common with the Christian God. Greek gods typically did not call their worshippers to repentance. (However, as already mentioned, membership in the philosophical schools required or produced a dramatic change in life.) The Greek gods will not judge humanity through a man raised from the dead (Acts 17.31).

The three possible allusions to Aeschylus' *Eumenides* that Greco-Romans may have seen in Acts 17 further reinforce these comparisons. First, if a Greco-Roman saw an allusion to Aeschylus' use of ἀνάστασις in *Eum.* 647, this allusion may have contrasted the importance and reality of resurrection in Luke-Acts to the Greek denial of resurrection found in the *Eumenides*. Second, if Greco-Romans perceived a parallel between the appearance of both Orestes and Paul before the Areopagus, they may have understood Paul and his message as innocent of any threat to social order. Third, this audience may have seen an ironic allusion to the introduction of new gods into Athens and the demands of these gods upon the Athenians at the conclusion of *Eumenides*. This allusion may have suggested to these readers that, within Acts, God cannot be introduced as a 'new' divinity with a new cult. Instead the Christian God is already worshipped as ἄγνωστος θεός, the 'Unknown God' who demands repentance or a turning away from traditional Athenian religion.²⁸

If a Greco-Roman audience did perceive an allusion to Aeschylus' *Eumenides* in Acts 17.16–34, they may have understood the allusion as both a challenge to and an acceptance of the Athenian classical literary heritage. Contrary to this heritage, a Greco-Roman may have seen an argument for Jesus' resurrection and a demand to turn away from the traditional gods of Greece and Rome. A Greco-Roman reader may have as well seen an allusion to *Eumenides* as an indication that the reader's classical heritage could be 'baptized', Aeschylus can be Christianized, and included as part of the Christian perspective.

27. Kirsopp Lake, 'Your Own Poets', *Beginnings*, V, pp. 246–51; Annewies van de Bunt-Van den Hoek, 'Aristobulos, Acts, Theophilus, Clement: Making Use of Aratus' *Phainomena*: A Peregrination', *Bijdragen* 41 (1980), pp. 290–99, and M.J. Edwards, 'Quoting Aratus: Acts 17, 28', *ZNW* 83 (1992), pp. 266–69.

28. Witherington, *Acts*, pp. 523–32.