



BAKER-NORD
CENTER FOR
THE HUMANITIES

THE DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS PRESENTS THE CITY DIONYSIA LECTURE

Angeliki Tzanetou

6:00 p.m. • Clark Hall Room 206 • 11130 Bellflower Road

Euripides's *Hecuba*: A Political Interpretation

Much of the criticism on Euripides's *Hecuba* is focused on the character of Hecuba as victimized mother who rightfully avenges her son's death and those who argue for Hecuba's moral deterioration over the course of the play's two main movements, sacrifice and revenge. This talk departs in a new direction by analyzing how the historical and political background informs the key themes of the protection due prisoners of war and the treatment of the vanquished. Viewed against the Athenian empire's policies in the 420s BCE, *Hecuba* focuses on the obligations of the strong toward the weak and of masters toward slaves, lending the lead character's voice to the perspective of the vanquished, the subaltern, the colonized subject. The use and abuse of *charis* (favor) anchors the political interpretation of the play within the contemporary public discourse on empire. Supplication and *xenia* that are based on reciprocity and the exchange of favors offer the framework for extending politics to an understanding of the motives and psychology of Hecuba's problematic act.

Angeliki Tzanetou is Associate Professor of Classics and Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is the author of *City of Suppliants: Tragedy and the Athenian Empire* (University of Texas Press 2012) and co-editor with Maryline Parca of *Finding Persephone: Women's Rituals in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Indiana University Press 2007). She has

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published articles on ritual and gender in drama and on tragedy and politics. Her current projects include the publication of two volumes of articles on Geography and Gender, on new approaches to Greek and Roman Drama as well as a study of Euripides, *Hecuba*, a book on motherhood and a project on subaltern voices in Greek tragedy.

Photo Credit: Hecuba, Hekábē, Hecabe, Hécube, Εκάβη Project, EnkeFezzolari, Theseum a Theater for the Arts



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