

DEATH BY WATER:  
STRANGE EVENTS AT THE STRYMON (*PERSAE* 492–507)  
AND THE CATEGORICAL OPPOSITION OF EAST AND WEST

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A CENTRAL ISSUE FOR ANY INTERPRETATION of Aeschylus' *Persae*, which was given its first production in 472 B.C.E. (with Pericles as χορηγός), is specifying the attitude it adopts toward the Persians a scant eight years after Xerxes' invasion. For the most part, opinions on this question have divided into two camps. On the one hand, there is the time-honored perspective of liberal, antichauvinist humanism, which understands Aeschylus to have treated vanquished enemies with admirable generosity, and to have invested them with a dignity and humanity no less than that of the Greeks. Such, for instance, was the position taken by G. Murray, who wrote with an eye toward the First World War, while living in the midst of the Second.

[T]he Persians are treated in the heroic spirit. They are terrible men; full of pride, insatiable in their claims, and—as was natural in a practically monotheist nation—impious in their neglect of the gods. But there is no hatred of them; no remotest suggestion of what we may now call “war propaganda.” No Persian is in any way base: none is other than brave and chivalrous. The Elders are grave and fine; their grief is respected. Atossa is magnificent; not a word escapes her that is unworthy of a great Queen. Darius is a type of the old and good King. Father of his people. Xerxes himself, no doubt, as a contrast to Darius, has been wild and reckless, but even there the contrast is not between Persian and Greek; only between the Old King and the Young. This greatness of spirit in Aeschylus' treatment of the enemy is remarkable. . . . [T]o read the *Persae* during the Great War did indeed fill one with some shame at the contrast between ancient Hellas and modern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

For many years this view was close to hegemonic, and it still retains numerous adherents.<sup>2</sup> In recent decades, however, following some sugges-

1. G. Murray, *Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy* (Oxford, 1940), 127–28. Murray was a firm supporter of the British effort in both wars, and a committed advocate of the League of Nations. During the 1930s, he was antifascist and anticommunist, but entertained the idea that the vindictive policies and attitudes of the victorious allies toward Germany had contributed to the worsening world situation, as suggested in his Hibbert Lectures of 1938, *Liberalism and Civilization* (New York, 1938), 28. More broadly on his views during this period, see F. West, *Gilbert Murray: A Life* (New York, 1984), 227–31. Cf. R. Lattimore, “Aeschylus on the Defeat of Xerxes,” in *Classical Studies in Honor of William Abbott Oldfather* (Urbana, 1943), 82–93, for a similar, highly influential view from the same period.

2. Thus, for example: “[T]he conclusion will be that the *Persae* was intended to be a genuine tragedy, that the dramatist has on the whole been successful in carrying out his intention, and that the comparative

tive remarks of E. Said,<sup>3</sup> there are those who have adopted a more critical attitude toward the text and the ethnocentrism they believe it evinces. For them the *Persae* is hardly a respectful portrait of a vanquished foe, but a prejudicial and deeply coded construction of the Asian as "Other." E. Hall, whose book was published by the same distinguished press (the Clarendon Press) a half century after Murray's, has best articulated this position.

In *Persae* Aeschylus was using a powerful new range of effects to characterize a foreign people and culture; his barbarians are simultaneously anti-Greeks and anti-Athenians. . . . The passages illustrating the use of differentiation are so numerous and the effect so pervasive that it is totally inadequate to describe them as "eastern touches," the opinion of those who see the play's ethical interest as paramount. The tragedy is not ornamented by oriental colouring but suffused by it, indeed it represents the first unmistakable file in the archive of Orientalism, the discourse by which the European imagination has dominated Asia ever since by conceptualizing its inhabitants as defeated, luxurious, emotional, cruel, and always as dangerous.<sup>4</sup>

Although one must acknowledge that the portraits of Atossa, Darius, and the Persian elders are both admirable and moving, considerations beyond the delineation of character support Hall's reading more than that of Murray. Thus, the contrast of Greeks and Persians is repeatedly brought into alignment with other asymmetric binaries: democracy and kingship (lines 241–42, 762–64); silver and gold (with allusions to the theme of oriental wealth, luxury, and decadence: cf. lines 3, 9, 79–80, 159, 163, 250 for Persian gold; 238 for Greek silver); spear and bow (with a subtext of archers' cowardice, lines 26, 85–86, 147–49, 239–41, 278, 729, 926, 1016–25); day and night (with a subtext of Persian ignorance, in association with night, lines 357, 365, 377, and 382–84; cf. lines 386–87 for Greeks in association with day). As M. M. Sassi and others have observed, the tragedy also organizes a master contrast between Greek  $\omega\phi\rho\sigma\upsilon\nu\eta$  and Persian  $\tilde{\upsilon}\beta\rho\iota\varsigma$ .<sup>5</sup> Here, it is worth

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absence of patriotic bias is in keeping with the high moral tone of the play . . . If the doctrine is Greek, it takes no account of national differences—it concerns equally both Greek and barbarian" (H. D. Broadhead, ed., *The "Persae" of Aeschylus* [Cambridge, 1960], xvi); "[L]a défaite perse revêtait un caractère non plus national mais humain: elle devenait le signe des limitations et des devoirs imposés à tout homme" (J. de Romilly, ed., *Eschyle, "Les Perses"* [Paris, 1974], 16); "Es kam darin nicht nur eine wunderbare Fairneß gegenüber dem Feind zum Ausdruck, vielmehr hob Aischylos damit die Leiden der Perser weit über das 'Nationale' hinaus ins Allgemein-Menschliche" (C. Meier, *Die politische Kunst der griechischen Tragödie* [Munich, 1988], 91); "La rappresentazione della sciagura vista dalla parte dei vinti consentiva ad Eschilo di svelare anche l'altra faccia della guerra, al di là di sconfitte e vittorie. È non solo i templi incendiati e profanati, le case distrutte, ma lo strazio dei cadaveri galleggianti sul mare tinto di sangue, l'angoscia dei superstiti, la vana attesa delle madri e delle spose per quanti non torneranno più" (L. Achillea Stella, *Eschilo e la cultura del suo tempo* [Alexandria, 1994], 33).

3. E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), 56–57.

4. E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford, 1989), 99. Cf. P. George, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience* (Baltimore, 1994), 86: "[T]he *Persae* is a *Schadenfreudestück* in which the universe of the Persians in the orchestra operates antithetically to that of the Athenians in the tiers above, and contradicts Hellenic nature at every point with radically pathological human consequences."

5. M. M. Sassi, "I Barbari," in *Il sapere degli antichi*, ed. Mario Vegetti (Turin, 1985), 266. For further patterns of contrast within the play, see Meier, *Politische Kunst* (n. 2 above), 89–90; P. Ghiron-Bistagne, "À propos du vase des Perses au Musée de Naples: Une nouvelle interprétation?," *CGITA* 7 (1992/3): 145–58; S. Goldhill, "Battle Narrative and Politics in Aeschylus' *Persae*," *JHS* 108 (1988): 189–93; L. Belloni, "I Persiani di Eschilo tra Oriente e Occidente," *Contributi dell' Istituto di Storia Antica dell' Università del Sacro Cuore* 12 (1986): 68–83; J. Peron, "Réalité et au-delà dans les Perses d'Eschyle," *BAGB* (1982), 3–40.

noting that the central image of ὕβρις is the bridge Xerxes built for his passage from Asia to Europe, through which he took it upon himself to conjoin two continents and peoples the divine and natural order meant to keep sharply divided (lines 65–72, 130–32, 721–26, 744–52). With this image and all it implies, the text threatens to essentialize the difference of East and West, Europeans and Asians, which it theorizes as absolute and insuperable.

In this light, other verses of the play also acquire new significance. Of particular interest is a speech that has received less critical attention than it deserves: the messenger's wrenching account of what befell the retreating Persians in their attempt to quit Europe for Asia (*Pers.* 492–507):

Μαγνητικὴν δὲ γαῖαν ἔς τε Μακεδόνων  
 χώραν ἀφικόμεσθ', ἐπ' Ἀξίου πόρον,  
 Βόλβης θ' ἔλειον δόνακα, Πάγγαιόν τ' ὄρος,  
 Ἴδωνίδ' αἶαν· νυκτὶ δ' ἐν ταύτῃ θεὸς  
 χειμῶν' ἄωρον ὤρσε, πηγυσὺν δὲ πᾶν  
 ῥέεθρον ἀγνοῦ Στρυμόνος. θεοὺς δέ τις  
 τὸ πρὶν νομίζων οὐδαμοῦ τότε ἦρχετο  
 λιταῖσι, γαῖαν οὐρανόν τε προσκυνῶν.  
 ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλὰ θεοκλυτῶν ἐπαύσατο  
 στρατός, περᾶ κρυσταλλοπήγα διὰ πόρον·  
 χῶστις μὲν ἡμῶν πρὶν σκεδασθῆναι θεοῦ  
 ἀκτῖνας ὠρμήθη, σεσωσμένος κυρεῖ.  
 φλέγων γὰρ αὐγαῖς λαμπρὸς ἡλίου κύκλος  
 μέσον πόρον διήκε, θερμαίνων φλογί·  
 πίπτον δ' ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισιν· ἠτύχει δέ τοι  
 ὅστις τάχιστα πνεῦμ' ἀπέρρηξεν βίου.

We came to Magnesian land and the country  
 of the Macedonians, to the ford of Axios  
 and the reedy marsh of Bolbe, and Mount Pangaion  
 in Edonian land. On that night, God  
 aroused winter out of season, completely freezing  
 the stream of holy Strymon. And anyone who previously  
 had not honored the gods at all prayed then  
 with fervent entreaties, prostrating himself to heaven and earth.  
 And when the army stopped its many invocations  
 of the gods, it passed through the ice-congealed ford.  
 Whoever among us started before the god's rays  
 were spread out, he attained safety.  
 But when the bright orb of the sun, burning with its rays,  
 reached the middle of the ford, heating it with flame,  
 men sank, one on top of the other, and fortunate was he  
 whose breath of life was severed most swiftly.

Most commentators on this passage are in agreement that the events it describes—a fast, hard freeze and an equally sudden, catastrophic thaw—are physically impossible.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly so given that the time in ques-

6. Thus, for example, Broadhead, "*Persae*" (n. 2 above), 138; L. Belloni, ed. and trans., *Eschilo. "I Persiani"* (Milan, 1988), 168; L. Roussel, ed. and trans., *Eschyle, "Les Perses"* (Montpellier, 1960), 203 and 206. An exception is H. J. Rose, who maintained that "the strangeness of the whole affair is, to me, a strong

tion was well before winter: late October or early November at the latest.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to Herodotus, Xerxes constructed a bridge across the Strymon during his advance: presumably this would have remained available to his retreating troops.<sup>8</sup> Most scholars have been inclined to accept N. M. Horsfall's view that the scene is a fictive invention, the anomalies of which are meant to suggest divine intervention and help emplot the debacle as retribution for Xerxes' ὕβρις.<sup>9</sup>

All this is well and good, but it does not motivate the precise details of the passage, understanding of which helps sort out the ethnographic politics of the *Persae* and sheds light on the emergence of Greek theories concerning the opposed elementary qualities hot/cold, wet/dry, and the like. Let us begin by noting the precise location of the Strymon or, as it is known today, the Struma (fig. 1). Regularly associated with the cold north wind<sup>10</sup> and known for its heavy ice in winter,<sup>11</sup> the Strymon flows north to south, dividing Thrace from Macedonia.<sup>12</sup> According to Aeschylus, it was a holy river<sup>13</sup> that marked the easternmost limit of Pelasgus' realm,<sup>14</sup> a border second in importance only to the Hellespont itself.

These relations help us understand the organizing logic of the marvel the play locates at the Strymon. There, at dawn—the time that mediates day and night—two opposite entities are said to have encountered one another: ice, in the form of the congealed river, and fire, in the form of the sun's rays. Although the text embeds its analysis in a “science of the concrete,” it is easy enough to recode this opposition in abstract terms, as later philosophers would do, but for this we must understand how Greeks theorized fire and ice. Fire is easy: it was the hot/dry element par excellence. Ice, however, was much less frequently discussed and does not appear in conventional lists of the four elements, where water figures as the opposite of fire, being cold/moist.<sup>15</sup> When ice does receive critical attention, however, it is treated as a modification of water produced by additional cold. “Ice is frozen water,” Aristotle opined (*An. post.* 95a17–19): αἴτιον . . . ἔκλειψις

reason for supposing that it is true” (*A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus*, *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afdeling Letterkunde*, n.s., vol. 64, no. 1 [Amsterdam, 1957]: 161).

7. Calculation of the date follows from three facts: a) the battle of Salamis took place on the 20th of Boedromion; b) Xerxes' army covered the distance from Thessaly to the Hellespont in forty-five days (*Hdt.* 7.114); c) the Strymon stands approximately halfway along this journey.

8. *Hdt.* 7.24 and 7.113–14. The latter passage also describes how Xerxes offered sacrifices of white horses and nine human victims as charms (φαρμακείσαντες) to help him pass the river. By contrast, the hasty (if fervent) prayers of the retreating Persians must have seemed woefully inadequate.

9. N. M. Horsfall, “Aeschylus and the Strymon,” *Hermes* 102 (1974): 503–5.

10. *Hdt.* 8.118; Callim. *Hymn* 4.26; *Ov. Tr.* 5.3.21–22; *Steph. Byz.*, ad loc.

11. *Ael.*, *NA* 14.26; cf. *ibid.* 6.24 and *Plut. De Primo Frigido* 949d, where barbarians' caution in crossing frozen rivers is described, as is their use of foxes—the craftiest of animals—to test them.

12. Thus *Strabo* 7.7.4 and *Schol. Pers.* 497. Philip of Macedon later relocated this border to the Nestus, thereby increasing Macedonian territory.

13. He twice calls the Strymon ἅγιος, at *Pers.* 497 and *Supp.* 254–55. Cf. *Hes. Theog.* 339, which makes the Strymon a son of Oceanus and Tethys and one of the world's great rivers.

14. *Supp.* 254–59.

15. See the classic discussions of G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge, 1966; reprint, Bristol, 1987) and “The Hot and the Cold, the Dry and the Wet in Greek Philosophy,” *JHS* 84 (1964): 92–106.

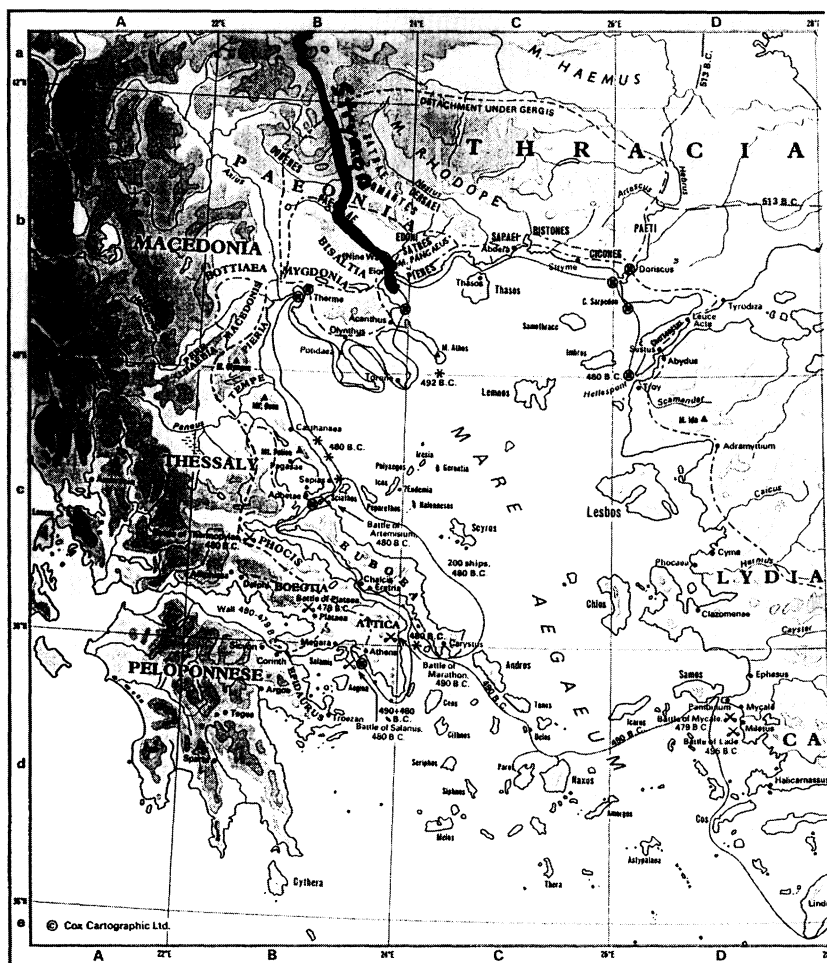


FIG. 1.—Location of the Strymon. After a map by David Cox, in *Atlas of the Greek and Roman World in Antiquity*, ed. Nicholas Hammond (Park Ridge, NJ, 1981).

θερμοῦ παντελῆς (“its cause is . . . total failure of heat”). Ice differs from water, then, in taking a solid, rather than a liquid form; otherwise, it shares the properties of water. Like water, it is incombustible, due to the moisture in it,<sup>16</sup> and it solidifies under the influence of cold, as do other substances composed of water, like snow, hail, and frost.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it is the predominance of water in certain forms of matter—not only ice, but metals, for instance—that gives them their ability to solidify and to melt, while in

16. Arist. *Mete.* 387a21–22: ὅσα δὲ μὴ ἔχει ἢ ἰσχυροτέραν, οἷον κρύσταλλος καὶ τὰ σφόδρα χλωρά, ἄκαυστα.

17. Ibid. 388b11: Τῶν δὲ συνεστώτων ὅσα μὲν πέπηγεν ὑπὸ ψυχροῦ, ὕδατος, οἷον κρύσταλλος, χιών, χάλαζα, πάχνη.

matter where elements other than water predominate, freezing and melting do not occur, as in the case of honey (which Aristotle took to be primarily made up of earth) or quicksilver (primarily air).<sup>18</sup>

Some of these ideas Aristotle took from Plato, who posited two different forms of the element water: the fluid (τὸ ὑγρόν) and the solid-but-meltable (τὸ χυτόν), the latter of which included ice and metals. The former subcategory encompassed liquid forms of water, which owed their mobility to the fact that their composite particles were small and uneven, thus ever shifting; the latter grouping included solid forms, whose stability derived from their larger and more regular particles. When fire enters such forms of water, however, it disrupts their particles, sets them in motion, and causes them to melt.<sup>19</sup> Beyond this, Plato suggested that the fluid forms of water have some portion of fire mixed in them. When these admixtures of fire and air are removed from (fluid) water, it becomes compressed, assuming its solid-but-meltable forms.<sup>20</sup> Similar ideas recur in a number of later authors,<sup>21</sup> but explicit discussions of ice are hard to find in the surviving fragments of the Presocratics. Closest, perhaps, are several suggestive snippets from Anaxagoras, which permit one to imagine how he might have theorized ice. The first two (Frgs. 46B11 and 46B8, respectively [DK]) make clear that he, like Plato, would have posited varying admixtures of fire in water, a move that would have allowed explanation of freezing and melting.

ἐν παντὶ παντὸς μοῖρα ἔνεστι πλὴν νοῦ, ἔστιν οἷσι δὲ καὶ νοῦς ἐνι.

There is a portion of everything in everything, with the exception of mind, and in some things there is also mind.

οὐ κεχώρισται ἀλλήλων τὰ ἐν τῷ ἐνὶ κόσμῳ οὐδὲ ἀποκόκοπται πελέκει οὔτε τὸ θερμὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ψυχροῦ οὔτε τὸ ψυχρὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ θερμοῦ.

The things in this one cosmos are not separated from one another, nor cut apart with an axe—neither the hot from the cold, nor the cold from the hot.

A third fragment shows that Anaxagoras worked with a system of four fundamental oppositions: hot/cold and moist/dry, to which he added dense/rarefied and light/dark. The passage (Frag. 46B15) offers analyses of the

18. Ibid. 385a32–b5: τὰ δὲ θερμοῦ στερήσει ὑπὸ θερμοῦ τίηται, οἷον κρύσταλλος, μόλυβδος, χαλκός. πῶμα μὲν οὖν πηκτά καὶ τηκτά, εἴρηται, καὶ ποῖα ἀτηκτά. ἀτηκτά δὲ ὅσα μὴ ἔχει ὑγρότητα ὕδατῳ, μὴδὲ ὕδατος ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ πλέον θερμοῦ καὶ γῆς, οἷον μέλι καὶ γλεῦκος (ὥσπερ ζέοντα γὰρ ἔστιν), καὶ ὅσα ὕδατος μὲν ἔχει, ἔστιν δὲ πλέον αἵρος, ὥσπερ τὸ ἔλαιον καὶ ὁ ἀργυρὸς ὁ χυτός, καὶ εἴ τι γλίσχρον, οἷον <πίττα καὶ ἱξός>.

19. Pl. *Ti.* 58d–e: τὰ δὲ ὕδατος διχῇ μὲν πρῶτον, τὸ μὲν ὑγρόν, τὸ δὲ χυτὸν γένος αὐτοῦ. τὸ μὲν οὖν ὑγρὸν διὰ τὸ μετέχον εἶναι τῶν γενῶν τῶν ὕδατος, ὅσα σμικρά, ἀνίσχων δυνάμει, κινητὸν αὐτὸ τε καθ' αὐτὸ καὶ ὑπ' ἄλλου διὰ τὴν ἀνωμαλότητα καὶ τὴν τοῦ σχήματος ἰδέαν γέγονε· τὸ δ' ἐκ μεγάλων καὶ ὁμαλῶν στασιμώτερον μὲν ἐκείνου καὶ βαρὺ πεπηγὸς ὑπὸ ὁμαλότητός ἐστιν, ὑπὸ δὲ πυρὸς εἰσιόντος καὶ διαλύοντος αὐτὸ τὴν ὁμαλότητα (ἀποβάλλει, ταύτην δὲ) ἀπολέσαν μετίσχει μᾶλλον κινήσεως . . .

20. Ibid. 59d–e: τὸ πυρὶ μεμιγμένον ὕδωρ, ὅσον λεπτὸν ὑγρὸν τε διὰ τὴν κίνησιν καὶ τὴν ὁδὸν ἦν κυλινδούμενον ἐπὶ γῆς ὑγρὸν λέγεται, μαλακὸν τε αὐτῷ τῷ τὰς βάσεις ἦντον ἐδραίους οὐσας ἢ τὰς γῆς ὑπέκειν, τοῦτο ὅταν πυρὸς ἀποχωρισθὲν αἵρος τε μονωθῇ, γέγονε μὲν ὁμαλώτερον, ξυνέωσται δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐξιόντων εἰς αὐτὸ, παγέν τε οὕτω τὸ μὲν ὑπὲρ γῆς μάλιστα παθὼν ταῦτα χάλασα, τὸ δ' ἐπὶ γῆς κρύσταλλος . . . τὸ δ' ἐπὶ γῆς ζυμπαγὲν, ἐκ δρόσου γενόμενον, πάχνη λέγεται.

21. Most notably Epicurus, as reported by Diog. Laert. 10.109; Pseudo-Aristotle *Mund.* 394a25; and Plut. *De Primo Frigido* 949b.

elements earth and aether following this schema, from which it is easy to extrapolate similar analyses of fire (hot/dry/rarefied/light), water (cold/moist/rarefied/light), and ice (cold/moist/dense/light).

τὸ μὲν πυκνὸν καὶ (τὸ) διερὸν καὶ τὸ ψυχρὸν καὶ τὸ ζοφερὸν ἐνθάδε συνεχώρησεν, ἔνθα νῦν (ἡ γῆ), τὸ δὲ ἀραιὸν καὶ τὸ θερμὸν καὶ τὸ ξηρὸν (καὶ τὸ λαμπρὸν) ἐξεχώρησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ αἰθέρος.

The dense and the moist and the cold and the dark assembled here, where now there is earth; the rarefied and the hot and the dry and the bright went out to the further part of the aether.

Finally, in a passage that treats questions of cosmogony, one finds a phrase that shows Anaxagoras understood cold to have the capacity to cause matter to solidify and become more dense (Frag. 46B16): ἐκ δὲ τῆς γῆς λίθοι συμπήγνυνται ὑπὸ τοῦ ψυχροῦ ("From earth, stones are solidified by the cold"). If stones thus originate from the action of cold on earth, what then of cold on water? The answer is obvious.

Returning to the Strymon passage of Aeschylus' *Persae*, we can now see that the text establishes the Persians as a people of the East, whose lives and well-being in the moment of their retreat depended on the night and the ice, but who found themselves trapped in the West, where their lives were threatened—and ultimately taken—not by human enemies, but by elements and qualities constituted as their natural antitheses: day and fire. Although the Greeks are not mentioned in this passage (*Pers.* 492–507), the system of oppositions it organizes invites one to set them in polar contrast to the Persians, thus:

Persians	:	[Greeks]
East	:	West
Night	:	Day
Cold/Dark	:	Hot/Bright
Ice	:	Fire
Cold/Moist/Dense	:	Hot/Dry/Rarefied

The analysis worked out in this passage is reminiscent of that advanced in the Hippocratic treatise *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, which is difficult to date, but is usually thought to have followed the *Persae* by at least some decades.<sup>22</sup> This text has survived only in truncated form. Thankfully, its theoretical sections are relatively intact, which developed a unified theory of geography, climate, physiology, and character (chaps. 1–11, 23–24).

22. On the nature and importance of this text, see C. Triebel-Schubert, "Anthropologie und Norm: der Skythenabschnitt in der hippokratischen Schrift *Über die Umwelt*," *MHJ* 25 (1990): 90–103; M. M. Sassi, *La scienza dell' uomo nella Grecia antica*, (Turin, 1988), 99–104; C. Calame, "Environnement et nature humaine: Le Racisme bien tempéré d'Hippocrate," in *Sciences et racisme* (Lausanne, 1986), 75–99; A. Ballabriga, "Les Eunuques scythes et leurs femmes: Stérilité des femmes et impuissance des hommes en Scythie selon le traité hippocratique *des airs*," *Méris* 1 (1986): 121–39; J. Jouanna, "Les Causes de la défaite des Barbares chez Eschyle, Hérodote, et Hippocrate," *Kièma* 6 (1981): 3–15; and W. Backhaus, "Der Hellenen-Barbaren-Gegensatz und die hippokratische Schrift *Peri aerôn hydratôn topôn*," *Historia* 25 (1976): 170–85. E. Hall (*Aeschylus*, "*Persians*," ed. and trans. E. Hall [Warminster, England], 144) has discussed the Strymon scene in connection with the ethnography and physiology of this Hippocratic text.

Here, the key variables hot/cold and moist/dry were understood to co-vary with points of the compass and to shape people in mind and body. Two examples were to follow: Libyans, representing the South, and Scythians, doing similar service for the North. The text has a large lacuna, however, and only the latter discussion survives, which treats the Scythians as so influenced by their cold, moist climate that they are weak, flabby, and—in a word—phlegmatic. From what remains, it is clear that the Libyans were construed as precisely the reverse: hot, dry, and bilious.

Like the Hippocratic treatise, the Strymon passage of the *Persae* thematizes ethnographic difference through a patterned contrast between paired elementary qualities. It is possible to pursue the analysis by coding these contrasts as marked and unmarked categories, with the mark reflecting the presence of heat and moisture (qualities normally associated with the capacity to sustain life).<sup>23</sup> In this regard, *Persae* initially codes Greeks and Persians as symmetric opposites: The Greeks, associated with the sun, are hot/dry (+/-) on the one hand, while the Persians, associated with ice, are cold (indeed, super-cold)/moist (--/+), on the other. Events at the Strymon, however, complete the process of elevating Greeks over Persians, and do so in conclusive fashion. Thus, the life of the Greeks is sustained by earth, the hot/moist element (+/+), and also by water (-/+), while the latter element—in the form of the thawed river—brings death to the hapless Persians.

Several important differences should be noted between *Persae* and the Hippocratic *On Airs, Waters, and Places*. Where the ethnographic focus of the former falls along an east-west axis, the orientation of the latter is decidedly north-south. The two texts differ also in the way they organize their constituent elements, for all that they do this toward similar ends. Thus, the *Persae* begins with a symmetric opposition between Greeks and Persians, which it modifies in ways preferential to the Greeks, who end up being favored by both fire *and* water. For its part, the Hippocratic treatise also begins with a symmetric opposition, but here Libyans and Scythians establish the terms of a comparison in which both the initial terms are equally devalued. Greeks enter at a later stage of the discussion as the mediating third entity—associated with the center, rather than with any of the cardinal points—whose perfect moderation is contrasted with the excesses and failings of North and South alike.

The differences between the details of the two texts are sufficient to make it unlikely that either one depends on the other in any direct fashion. Still, their strong family resemblances suggest they participated in a common discourse, which organized different peoples on geographic axes (north/south, east/west, center/quarters) and thematized their differences via concrete images of opposite qualities (hot/cold, moist/dry, light/dark, and rarefied/

23. Here, it is interesting to observe that Anaxagoras used an unusual term—τὸ διεπὸν—to denote the moist (Frgs. 46B4, 46B12, and 46B15). In adjectival form, from Homer on, this moisture characterized a vital, living being (*Od.* 6.201: ἀνὴρ διεπὸς βροτός). Aeschylus, *Eum.* 263, has the Furies use the same term with reference to Clytemnestra's spilt blood. See P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1968–80), 1:281 and R. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge, 1951), 254–56.

dense) in such a fashion that Greek preeminence was ultimately asserted. The result was a highly prejudicial, hellenocentric ethnography-cum-physiology. On the strength of *Persae* 492–507, it appears that this discourse was already emergent in the 470s.

It is beyond the scope of this paper, and perhaps impossible under any circumstances, to recover the origins of this discourse in any absolute fashion. Still, it seems likely that Anaxagoras played an important role. Ever since Anaximander, concrete entities like fire and mist, where the opposites were implicit, had figured in cosmological discussions. Anaxagoras, however, first articulated hot/cold and moist/dry as abstract qualities and gave them a salient position in his theories.<sup>24</sup> Arriving in Athens immediately after Xerxes' invasion (480/79, according to Kirk and Raven),<sup>25</sup> he quickly made contact with the circle of Pericles, where he met and influenced Aeschylus.<sup>26</sup> Particularly noteworthy in this regard is a fragment (293 Nauck), where the latter described the flooding of the Nile as the product of dialectical interaction between entities opposed in their elemental qualities, hot/dry and cold/moist:

... ἐν δ' ἥλιος πυρωπὸς ἐκλάμψας φλόγα  
τήκει πετραίαν χιόνα· πᾶσα δ' εὐθαλῆς  
Αἴγυπτος ἀγνοῦ νόματος πληρουμένη  
φερέσβιον Δήμητρος ἀντέλλει στάχυν.

... Moreover, the fire-eyed sun, having shone forth flame,  
Melts the mountain snow, and all flourishing  
Egypt, swelling her holy stream,  
Brings forth Demeter's life-bearing grain.

As W. Rösler has demonstrated, this fragment reflects Anaxagoras' views on the Nile, which are attested in numerous sources.<sup>27</sup> Following the philosopher, Aeschylus here integrated cosmology, climatology, and hydrology, but in the Strymon passage of the *Persae*, he went further still, subtly working ethnology into the mix. As I hope to have shown, the results of that innovation were highly consequential, for in this moment, as he introduced the idea that an elemental difference divided peoples, so also did he naturalize the supremacy of the West over its Oriental other.

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24. Lloyd, "The Hot and the Cold" (n. 15 above), esp. 92 and 95–100. See esp. Frags. 46B4, 46B12, and 46B15 (DK).

25. G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1983), 353–54.

26. For the fullest discussion, see W. Rösler, *Reflexe vorsokratischen Denkens bei Aischylos* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1970), 56–87.

27. See, inter alia, Diod. Sic. 1.38.4–5; Aët. 4.1.3; Sen. *Q Nat.* 4.2.17; Lydus, *Mens.* 4.107; Hippolytus 1.8.5; and Schol. Ap. Rhod. 4.269. See further, Rösler, *Reflexe* (n. 26 above), 59–60.