BLOOD OR FATE: A NOTE ON *CHOEPHORI* 927

In a note to his edition of Aeschylus' *Choephori*, Frederick Blaydes suggests the emendation of αἶσα to αἶμα in line 927.[1] I here argue, in support of this emendation, that the usage of αἶσα in this line would be without parallel and that αἶμα, in view of the workings of the theme of blood in the trilogy and the play, makes better sense.

The line in question occurs towards the end of Orestes' final exchange with Clytemnestra, after her attempts at self-defence have all met with rebuttal. The text as it stands in M reads as follows:

> Κλ. ἔοικα θρηνεῖν ζῶσα πρὸς τύμβον μάτην.
> Ορ. πατρὸς γὰρ αἶσα τόνδε σ' ὁρίζει [from πορίζει] μόρον.
> Κλ. οἲ 'γώ, τεκοῦσα τόνδ' ὄφιν ἐθρεψάμην.
> Ορ. ἦ κάρτα μάντις οὐξ ὀνειράτων φόβος.
>   κάνες γ' ὃν οὐ χρῆν, καὶ τὸ μὴ χρεὼν πάθε.   (926–30)[2]

Commentators on 927 have for the most part been concerned with the emendation of its verb. The manuscript gives πορίζει, corrected to σ' ὁρίζει, both unmetrical, and numerous emendations have been proposed; the most widely accepted is Elmsley's σοὐρίζει, with crasis for σοι ὁρίζει.[3] The line is then to be translated by something like 'My father's destiny marks out this death for you'.[4] The sense seems straightforward enough. Agamemnon's fate – his having been killed by Clytemnestra – has led to her death in turn. The line suggests the chain of retribution, of linked deaths, that runs through the trilogy and gives rise to its central problem. It also echoes two earlier lines in the scene. In one Orestes assigns responsibility for Clytemnestra's death to the fate she has invoked:

> καὶ τόνδε τοίνυν Μοῖρ' ἐπόρσυνεν μόρον   (911)

and in the other he assigns it to Clytemnestra herself:

> σύ τοι σεαυτήν, οὐκ ἐγώ, κατακτενεῖς   (923).

The line's apparent clarity and appropriateness, however, have obscured the oddity of αἶσα here. The word, rarely attested in prose, occurs only thirteen times in extant

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[1] F. H. M. Blaydes, edition with commentary of Aeschylus' *Choephori* (Halle, 1899). Blaydes also notes his proposal in *Adversaria in Aeschylum* (Halle, 1895), p. 266, but in neither place does he give any supporting argument. No previous argument for αἶμα in this line is mentioned in the appendix to the G. Vitelli–N. Wecklein edition of Aeschylus (Berlin, 1885). R. D. Dawe reports the suggestion in his *Repertory of Conjectures on Aeschylus* (Leiden, 1965), but to the best of my knowledge it has received no further attention.

[2] Most editors follow Pauw in emending κάνες· γ' ὃν to ἔκανες ὄν.

[3] See Elmsley's footnote to p. 88 of his edition of Euripides' *Medea* (Oxford, 1818; p. 75 in the Leipzig, 1822 edition); he is followed by Blass, Murray, Page, Rose, Sidgwick, Smyth, and Wilamowitz. Elmsley's conjecture is based primarily on a parallel in Aristophanes, *Thesm.* 158: σοὔπισθεν from σοι ὄπισθεν, and he notes the rarity of this crasis. Indeed, there seems to be no other evidence, and the Aristophanic parallel disappears if we assume σοὔπισθεν to represent σου ὄπισθεν. Groeneboom and Mazon therefore follow Headlam in preferring crasis to σωρίζει or σωρίζει (see W. Headlam, 'Some Passages of Aeschylus and Others', *CR* 17 [1902], 248). The parallel here is Headlam's ὠρν[ι]θο[κ]λέ[π]ται with crasis for οἱ ὀρνιθοκλέπται (a ἅπαξ) at Herodas 6. 102, but this is not evidence for Attic. Nor does A. Lucius cite any Attic examples of crasis for οι + o in his dissertation *De Crasi et Aphaeresi* (Strasbourg, 1885).

Given this paucity of evidence, alternative conjectures abound. But none seems to me more plausible than Elmsley's.

[4] μόρος, like αἶσα, can mean destiny or portion, but in Aeschylus it consistently means death. See E. Fraenkel in his commentary on the *Agamemnon* (Oxford, 1950) *ad* 1146 and 1600.

tragedy (nine times in Aeschylus, twice in Sophocles, twice in Euripides), and all but three of these instances are lyric.[5] It is, however, with μοῖρα, one of the common Homeric expressions for fate, and is found in the lyric poets as well. The original meaning of αἶσα, like that of μοῖρα, seems to have been portion or share.[6] As fate, it may refer either to destiny in a larger sense or to an individual's lot in life: some particular event or achievement that is or is not fated for him, the sort of fortune he meets with, his life span. Detailed accounts of its range of meanings are available elsewhere;[7] what is significant here is that an investigation of the occurrences of the word in Homer, Hesiod, lyric and elegiac poetry and tragedy reveals no instance in which one person's αἶσα is said actively to have affected another person.[8]

There is no difficulty in the treatment of αἶσα as an agent. At *Choephori* 674, for example, Αἶσα is described as joining with Δίκη and Ἐρινύς to bring Orestes home as an avenger; in Sophocles' *Ajax* (256), an αἶσ' ἄπλατος holds Ajax in its grip.[9] But at *Choephori* 927 it is neither Fate nor Clytemnestra's fate but Agamemnon's fate that is bringing about Clytemnestra's death, and for this agency of one person's fate in another's fate there is no parallel.

We might try to understand the usage of αἶσα here in a different way. αἶσα in the general sense of destiny could surely be said to include both Agamemnon's death and Clytemnestra's, just as Μοῖρα is said to be responsible for both at *Choephori* 910–11. Presumably an individual's αἶσα could include his effect on others.[10] Clytemnestra's

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[5] Aeschylus, *Cho.* 77, 369, 647, 927, *Pr.* 104, *Supp.* 80, 215, 545, 673; Sophocles, *Ajax* 256, *Trach.* 111; Euripides, *Andr.* 1203, *Supp.* 623–5. αἶσα also occurs in Kannicht/Snell *TrGF* fr. ad. 279h, attributed to Euripides by H. Hommel, 'Euripides und der Tod', *Euripides, Wege der Forschung* 89 (1968), 124–53 (= *Epigraphica* 19 [1957], 136–64).

[6] On the etymology of αἶσα see U. Bianchi, *Dios Aisa* (Rome, 1953), pp. 1–8, P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire Etymologique* (Paris, 1968), H. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1954–72), v. 1, Lief. 1 s.v., W. Krause, 'Die Ausdrücke für das Schicksal', *Glotta* 25 (1936), 143–52, M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, p. 362, and U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* I (Berlin, 1931), p. 352.

[7] The literature on the Greek concepts of fate is enormous, and concentrates on the Homeric poems. For an extended discussion of αἶσα in epic, see Bianchi, op. cit., especially pp. 1–47; my understanding of the word is particularly indebted to his observations. B. C. Dietrich takes a somewhat different point of view in his *Death, Fate, and the Gods* (London, 1965), pp. 249–60, 276–7, 339–40; his book usefully includes a section on modern scholarship on fate in Homer, pp. 179–93. See also E. Leitzke, *Moira und Gottheit im alten griechischen Epos* (diss. Göttingen, 1930), and the works by Krause, Nilsson, and Wilamowitz cited in note 6.

[8] There is virtually no evidence outside tragedy for the word's usage specifically in Attic. αἶσα is not common in funerary epigrams, where it might have been expected, and most occurrences are late and non-Attic. The single example of αἶσα I have found in a fifth-century Attic inscription adds little to our understanding of the word; see W. Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften* I (Berlin, 1955), no. 95 (= G. Kaibel, *Epigrammata Graeca* [Berlin, 1878, repr. Hildesheim, 1965], no. 87 and G. Pfohl, *Greek Poems on Stones* I (Leiden, 1967), no. 117). In this paper I have made use of Homeric as well as tragic evidence. It cannot, of course, be argued that because a particular usage of αἶσα does not occur in Homer it could not occur in Attic tragedy. But especially given the word's rarity in tragedy it is necessary to consider Homeric usage in order to dismiss the possibility of borrowing.

[9] As both Bianchi (op. cit., pp. 42–3) and Nilsson (review of Bianchi, *Gnomon* 26 [1954], 480) observe, αἶσα is the subject of an action in Homer much less frequently than is μοῖρα. For further examples of αἶσα as agent, see Homer, *Od.* 11. 61 and the inscription cited in note 8.

[10] The only explicit example I have been able to find – and its exact sense is debatable – is *Iliad* 16. 707–9, where Apollo says to Patroclus:

οὔ νύ τοι αἶσα
σῷ ὑπὸ δουρὶ πόλιν πέρθαι Τρώων ἀγερώχων,
οὐδ' ὑπ' Ἀχιλλῆος, ὅς περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων.

If we take τοι here as the emphatic particle, Apollo is making a comment on αἶσα in the larger sense; R. Lattimore (*The Iliad of Homer*, Chicago and London, 1951) translates, 'it is not

death, however, cannot be caused by Agamemnon's αἶσα in the sense of being a part of it, for the limits of a person's αἶσα are the limits of his life.

Again, we might suggest that since it is obviously Agamemnon's death rather than some other element of his destiny that is significant in line 927, αἶσα here simply means death. We then translate 'My father's death determines this death for you', and the difficulty ceases to exist. But this will not do. Although αἶσα may in a given context *refer* to death, it does not in itself *mean* death, as μοῖρα and μόρος may. Bianchi notes that in Homer '...αἶσα, nel senso astratto di sorte, non significa per sè sorte mortale, senso che essa assume solo attraverso il contesto'.[11] In tragedy, only three of the uses of αἶσα (besides our passage) may even be said to refer to death. At *Choephori* 369 Electra speaks of a θανατηφόρον αἶσαν; at *Choephori* 647 (cited above) Αἶσα is said to prepare a weapon for vengeance; at *Andromache* 1203, in response to the death of Neoptolemus, the chorus remarks: θεοῦ γὰρ αἶσα, θεὸς ἔκρανε συμφοράν. In each of these examples, αἶσα brings death, but in none is it appropriate to regard αἶσα as equivalent to death or to translate it by the word death.[12] And it is precisely some such mental translation that has led us to overlook the oddity of αἶσα in 927.

Two commentators argue for emendations of the verb in 927 which involve a kind of metaphorical treatment of αἶσα. Tucker proposes ἐσουρίζει, and sees Agamemnon's fate (with word play on αἶσα and ἀίω, ἄημι) as a wind that wafts events towards Clytemnestra's death. Verrall proposes συρίζει as the verb, and suggests that 'the fate of Agamemnon is personified under the form of a threatening snake which hisses death at Clytemnestra'.[13] Even if one finds these proposals unconvincing, they are correct to this extent: if αἶσα is to be read in this line, whatever the verb, it must be by a kind of personification which transforms a person's αἶσα into an entity capable of acting in the world after that person's death.

Given Aeschylus' characteristic boldness of expression, we cannot dismiss this possibility, but both the lack of parallels and the sense of αἶσα render it unlikely. Nor does an investigation of the uses of μοῖρα (whose range of meanings is not identical with but overlaps that of αἶσα) offer any real parallel.[14]

destined | that the city of the proud Trojans shall fall before your spear | nor even at the hand of Achilleus, who is far better than you are'. But αἶσα is commonly found in Homer with the dative of the person whose destiny is in question (see Bianchi, op. cit., pp. 24–5, n. 5), and we could translate 'it is not your destiny that Troy fall by your spear, nor yet at the hand of Achilles'. If this line includes Achilles' hypothetical taking of Troy in Patroclus' destiny, it might be argued that we have here a parallel to the usage of αἶσα in *Choephori* 927. But the line does not read 'it is not your destiny that Troy fall to Achilles', and in the paratactic style of the epic the addition of Achilles does not make his destruction of Troy part of Patroclus' αἶσα. Dietrich (op. cit., p. 249) says of this passage 'Apollo tells Patroclus that it is not his *aisa* to sack Troy, nor that of his much superior companion Achilles', and argues that here as generally in the formula αἶσά ἐστι the fate of a particular person is practically identical with the 'impersonal' μοῖρα that governs events (pp. 249–50).

[11] Bianchi, op. cit., p. 45, as part of a general discussion on the differences between αἶσα (on the one hand) and μοῖρα and μόρος (on the other); cf. also p. 21.

[12] αἶσα is also associated with but not identified with death in Kannicht/Snell fr. ad. 279h, cited above in note 5; see Hommel's translation and subsequent remarks (op. cit., pp. 129, 137).

[13] T. G. Tucker, edition with commentary and translation of the *Choephori* (Cambridge, 1901) *ad loc.* (cf. Hermann's suggestion of ἐπουρίζει, followed by Dindorf and Weil); A. W. Verrall, edition with commentary and translation of the *Choephori* (London and New York, 1893) *ad loc.* Tucker's emendation (in any case unexampled) seems, like Hermann's, weakly motivated in the context. On Verrall's see note 19 below.

[14] There is a passage in the *Agamemnon* which appears to speak of μοῖρα affecting μοῖρα (1025–6), but its meaning is much debated, and none of the likely interpretations appears to me to provide a true parallel; see E. Fraenkel (op. cit.) and J. D. Denniston–D. L. Page, *Agamemnon* (Oxford, 1957) *ad loc.*

The sense required in this passage is clear: what is going to kill Clytemnestra is the fact of Agamemnon's death. But this is expressed equally well, and with an ease of idiom and a thematic appropriateness, by αἶμα. The centrality of the theme of blood in the *Oresteia* needs no argument. Both as the shed blood of murder and as the shared blood of kinship, αἶμα is a pervasive presence in the trilogy.[15] Blood is also an active force. Drops of blood demand other blood (*Cho.* 400–2), and the mother's blood draws the Erinyes (*Eum.* 230); the father's blood is thus a fitting determinant of Clytemnestra's death. Furthermore, the word αἶμα participates with great versatility in Aeschylean metaphor. The smell of blood can smile in welcome (*Eum.* 253); blood can doze (280); blood can be reaped (*Sept.* 718). There should therefore be no difficulty in the use of αἶμα here with ὁρίζειν.[16]

There is yet a further argument for the thematic appropriateness of Blaydes's conjecture. An association between Agamemnon's tomb, Agamemnon's blood, and the dream of Clytemnestra is established in the first half of the *Choephori*; if we read αἶμα in 927, we may understand 926–9 as a recapitulation of this complex of motifs.

The association is suggested at the start of the play. When Orestes first appears, he prays and makes offerings at his father's tomb (4–5). The chorus then arrives with Electra for a similar purpose, reveals that Clytemnestra has had a dream that is said to signify the anger of the dead (32–40), and speaks of the impossibility of washing away shed blood (48, 66–7).

After Orestes' appearance and reunion with his sister, and after his account of the oracle's command, the siblings address their father's tomb at length in the great kommos (360–478). At 400–2, the chorus asserts that blood shed in murder calls for more blood, and at 471 ff. that the ills of the house can only be cured from within, through bloody strife. Shortly afterwards, at 526–50, Orestes is told of Clytemnestra's dream and interprets the snake she gave birth to as himself.

The snake of Clytemnestra's dream is linked with tomb and blood not only by association or because Orestes is the avenger of his dead father. Snakes are chthonic creatures, associated with chthonic cult and with tombs. This snake, like the Erinyes with which the oracle threatens Orestes, is the product of his father's blood; the blood in the dream follows from the bloody image of fertility and conception at *Agamemnon* 1387–92 as Orestes' deed follows from his mother's.[17]

At 926–9, if we follow Blaydes, the motifs of tomb, blood, and dream-snake recur immediately before Clytemnestra is killed. The apparently proverbial language in which Clytemnestra admits her helplessness in line 926 has a further significance in context, as some commentators have seen;[18] her efforts to appease the dead by

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[15] The word αἶμα appears fifty times in the *Oresteia*. By contrast, it appears only thirteen times elsewhere in Aeschylus, five in the *Seven Against Thebes*, four in the *Suppliants*, and four in the fragments.

[16] For this observation on the uses of αἶμα in metaphor (and for many other useful comments on this paper) I am indebted to Professor C. J. Herington.

[17] I have argued the link between the image of conception and the dream birth at slightly greater length in a forthcoming paper, 'Orestes as Fulfillment, *Teraskopos*, and *Teras* in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*'. R. Fagles and W. B. Stanford, in the introductory essay to Fagles' translation of the *Oresteia* (New York, 1975), suggest a link between the image of fertilization in the *Agamemnon* and Orestes' later arrival and vengeance, described as a new birth, but no one to my knowledge has made the connection between image and dream explicit. See also A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Washington, D.C., 1971), p. 130.

[18] The scholium notes the proverbial language. H. J. Rose, *A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus* II (Amsterdam, 1958), G. Thomson, *The Oresteia* (edition with commentary, 2nd ed., Prague, 1966), and Verrall (op. cit.) comment on the presence of Agamemnon's tomb in relation to line 926.

offerings at the tomb have been turned against her, and Orestes, the dead man's representative, stands before her unmoved. Verrall is the only one who comments at any length on the sequence in these lines; he notes that the connection between 926 and 928 lies in the audience's association of snake and tomb, and argues (as noted above) that we should see the snake image in 927 as well by reading συρίζει as the verb.[19] But a reading of αἷμα for αἶσα provides an equally strong sequence. A reference to Agamemnon's blood follows naturally from the mention of his tomb, while the snake in the dream has associations with both.

Other major forces of the play are alluded to in this final exchange between mother and son: the oracle and the gods, Μοῖρα, the curses of Clytemnestra, the Erinyes of both parents. Blaydes's suggestion gives us an allusion to the power of the dead Agamemnon, immediately before the accomplishment of his purpose, which recalls the expression of that power in the images of tomb, blood, and dream at the opening of the play.

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[19] See Verrall's commentary (op. cit.) *ad loc.* Verrall cites as a parallel *Pr.* 355, συρίζει φόβον, but there the subject is the monster Typhon, which might be expected to hiss, whereas here neither subject nor object naturally goes with συρίζει. αἷμα may indeed provide a likelier subject for this verb than does αἶσα, given the association of blood and snake and given the various activities blood performs in the trilogy. But τόνδε μόρον – a specific death – is not a true parallel to the φόβον of the *Prometheus* passage or even to the suggested reading φόνον; both of these are general. Elmsley's emendation is still to be preferred, though a reading of αἷμα may open the way to further speculation.