

AESCHYLUS, *AGAMEMNON* 195

The Chorus sing of the opposing winds at Aulis:

πνοαὶ δ' ἀπὸ Στρυμόνος μολοῦσαι  
κακόσχολοι, νήστιδες, δύσορμοι,  
βροτῶν ἄλαι, ναῶν <τε> καὶ πεισμάτων ἀφειδεῖς, 195  
παλιμμήκη χρόνον τιθεῖσαι  
τρίβῳ κατέξαινον ἄν-  
θος Ἀργείων

(Text: West 1998)

“Blasts coming from Strymon, bad-idling, famished, ill-anchoring, mortals’ wanderings, unsparing of ships and cables, making time as long again, were carding with grinding the blossom of the Argives.”

In this veritable gale of dazzling enallage and metaphor, βροτῶν ἄλαι, “mortals’ wanderings”, at 195 is a curious fizzle. I look at various attempts to explain the phrase, and the few efforts to emend it, and propose a new reading.

The *Scholia* in M (Smith 1976, 8) compare the wandering of Odysseus’ men in search of game food when they were stranded for a month on Thrinacia by contrary winds (*Od.* 12.330, καὶ δὴ ἄγρην ἐφέπεσκον ἀλητεῦντες ἀνάγκη), and that comparison has satisfied many. Fraenkel (1950) thought it “sensible”, and Denniston-Page 1957 report approvingly K.J. Dover’s additional comparison of the Athenian sailors’ risky forays ashore for fuel, food, and water during the Syracusan campaign (Thuc. 7.4.6; 13.2). Fraenkel imagined boredom too as motivation for the wandering (“The crews wander to and fro on land, partly looking for provisions, partly because they have no serious occupation...”), but Bollack 1981-82, 271 stresses the primacy and immediacy of hunger, detecting a profound intertextual ‘rapport’ with the Odyssean narrative: just as hunger drives Odysseus’ men to the sacrilegious slaughter of Helios’ cattle, and consequently their own destruction, so will the Argives’ hungry desperation at Aulis force the Atreidai to sacrifice Iphigeneia, a costly act of sacrilege with deadly consequences at Troy and beyond. This is an imaginatively attractive reading but is perhaps too bookish and scholarly, for even if a reference to food or foraging had accompanied ἄλαι, it is hard to believe that Aeschylus’ decidedly demotic audience would have heard an allusion to that sacrilegious hunger on Thrinacia. Besides, there are significant differences between the Thrinacrian and Aulidian scenarios. Odysseus and his men have already disembarked and set up camp on the lush island and may conveniently “wander” about to catch game, and even take their time to fish (331-2), whereas the Argives, in their thousands, must be thought of as still languishing by

their ships (cf. 194, *κακόσχολοι... δύσορμοι*). Agamemnon will have made his fateful decision to sacrifice Iphigeneia and gain favourable winds *before* his men could wander away from the ships – and, in effect, desert (cf. 212, *λιπόνους*). In short, the entry in LSJ, s.v. ἄλη II, “winds that *keep* men *wandering*”, should not be taken as the last word on *βροτῶν ἄλαι*.

With literal “wanderings” hard if not impossible to accommodate, some have taken ἄλαι as mental wanderings or derangements; so, for example, Schneidewin 1856 (“die Menschen... in die Irre treibend”), Wecklein 1888 (“Irrsal für die Menschen, weil der fortdauernde Wind Befangenheit des Kopfes erzeugt”), and Denniston-Page 1957 (“... distractions (madness)... would run smoothly in this context”). A figurative use of ἄλη cannot be ruled out, but neither can it be paralleled securely. LSJ, s.v. ἄλη 2. “wandering of mind, distraction”, cite Eur. *Med.* 1285 (Hera sent out Ino) *δωμάτων ἄλαις*, but a metaphorical sense is not certain there (cf. Mastronarde 2000, ad loc.). And even if such a sense could be paralleled, the appropriateness of “wanderings in mind” (= madness) in Aeschylus’ line would be questionable, for while the stranded Argives were starving and possibly even mutinous, they were hardly “mad” or mentally incapacitated; when the winds changed, after all, they were able to navigate across the Aegean without incident and start laying siege to Troy.

Just as speculative as the claims of figurative “wanderings” have been suggestions that ἄλαι may be related to a verb quite distinct from ἀλάομαι (“wander”). Citing ἄνθος κατέξαινον Ἀργείων τρίβῳ (“so I should arrange the words”), Housman 1888, 290 (1972, 90) posited ἀλέω, “grind”, with *βροτῶν ἄλαι* “grindings or tribulations of men, winds that wear men away ἀπλοῖα κεναγγεῖ”. But considering the strong metaphorical sense of that very κατέξαινον, “were carding” (cf. Borthwick 1976, 7), those “grindings” may be thought somewhat otiose. Mackworth 1909 proposed εἴλω, “coop up”, “hem in”, so that *βροτῶν ἄλαι* might mean “cooping up of men”. Thomson 1938, 21 judged this reading “effective and appropriate”, adducing in its support *Od.* 19.200-01 (of men cooped up by the wind), εἴλει γὰρ Βορέης ἄνεμος μέγας. Yet the Argives’ “cooping-up” is already implicit in εὐτ’ ἀπλοῖα κεναγγεῖ βαρύ-/νοντ’ Ἀχαιικὸς λεώς, “when the Achaian folk were hard pressed by stomach-empty non-sailing” (188-89).

There have been several emendations. Karsten 1855 printed *βορῶν ἄλαι* (*Aquilonum agmina*) and Keck 1863 *ροῶν σάλα* (“durch das Wellenschaukeln der Strömung”). Both conjectures were dismissed by Schmidt 1864: *Aquilonum* in Attic should be (unmetrical) *βορρῶν*, and it is doubtful that *σάλα*, which elsewhere means *φροντίς*, could be equated with *σάλος*, “tossing”. Schmidt himself proposed *στροβῶν ἄλα τε* (or *ἄλαισι*), supposing, like Keck, a reference to the churning waters of the Euripus strait,

but the conjunction of “wanderings” with watery “whirlings” seems implausible. Blaydes 1898 read βροτῶν βλάβαι, citing *Od.* 12. 286, ἀνεμοὶ χαλεποὶ, δηλήματα νηῶν, hardly an apt parallel. He also considered ἄλῃ, yet seemed to have second thoughts about ἄλῃ in his *Addenda et Corrigenda* (p. 377): “sensus fortasse est the distraction (vexation, bane) of mortals (by the inaction which they cause)”; his comparison of Eur. *Or.* 56, ἄλῃσι πλαγχθεῖς, is scarcely valid since ἄλῃσι there refers to Menelaus’ physical “wanderings”. With βροτῶν ἄσαι, Campbell 1956, 120 similarly favoured “vexations” since “the men are bored, disgusted” by the delay – surely an understatement, given the critical situation implied by the need to sacrifice Iphigeneia.

I would suggest that ἄλῃ conceals a noun which captured the men’s fractious state, especially in their deprivation of food, twice emphasized (at 188, ἀπλοῖα κεναγγεῖ, and 193, νήσιδες). Increasingly desperate, they will have complained mutinously and quarrelled and fought among themselves for whatever rations were still available. Aeschylus, then, may have written, not βροτῶν ἄλῃ but βροτῶν λύαι, men’s “contentions”, “quarrellings”, “strifes”. Λύη (the Attic form attested by Herodian Gr., below) is an old and rare word (cf. Bowie 1981, 175-76), used of civil strife by Alcaeus (F 70.10 Voigt, τὰς θυμοβόρω λύας, and F 36.11 Voigt, συνθέμενοι λύαις), and by Pindar (*Nem.* 9.14, βιασθέντες λύα), and glossed with στάσις, στάσεις by Hesychius (s.vv. λύα, λύαι) and the grammarians Herodian (Lentz 1867=1965, 306), Arcadius (Barker 1820, 103), and Theognotus (Cramer 1963, 22). But just as στάσις was not limited in meaning to political strife (cf. Fraenkel on Ag. 1117, στάσις δ’ ἀκόρετος, and Garvie 2009 on *Pers.* 188, τούτῳ στάσιν τιν’... / τεύχειν ἐν ἀλλήλῃσι), neither presumably was λύη, denoting radically as it must the dissolution of common bonds; cf. λύω at Call. F 43.74 Pf., ἀλλήλοις δ’ ἐλύησαν (they “quarreled with each other” about the founder of the new city), and see Frisk s.v. λύω). The στάσις or fractious, internecine strife of the winds was a familiar metaphor; so, for example, *Il.* 16.765, Εὐρὸς τε Νότος τ’ ἐριδαίνετον ἀλλήλοιν; Alc. F 208.1 Voigt, ἀσυνκ’ ἐτήμμι τῶν ἀνέμων στάσιν; Aesch. *Prom.* 1085-86, σκιρτᾷ δ’ ἀνέμων πνεύματων πάντων / εἰς ἀλλήλα στάσιν ἀντίπνουν ἀποδεικνύμενα (cf. Nisbet & Hubbard 1970, 30, on Horace’s *Africum decertantem*, *Odes* 1.3.13). If Aeschylus did in fact write λύαι, the possessive βροτῶν, “of mortals” or “human”, will serve to associate – contrastively – the men’s (all too human) “strifes” with that (super-human) characteristically windy στάσις. Their λύαι therefore may stand in unsurprising apposition to πνοαὶ... ἀπὸ Στρυμόνος, “winds from Strymon... (causing) men’s contentions”. Corruption of this λύαι to the manuscripts’ ἄλῃ will have started with simple metathesis, υλ- < λυ-, perhaps encouraged by pre-

ceding μ-ολ-ούσαι and κακόσχ-ολ-οι; cf. βα-ρύνεται < ἄβ-ρύνεται (1205) and χ-ρε-ῶν < χ-ερ-ῶν (1594), with Young 1964, 94, and χό-λον < ὄχ-λον (*Prom.* 313). Correction of ὕλαι to ἄλαι then followed.

As a final note on this λύαι, let me recall that Britain's late Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes, included factional strife in his free – and fully theatrical – translation (1999) of Aeschylus' lines on the winds:

“... Explosions of boredom, screaming quarrels,  
Senseless killing. Mutinies, desertions,  
Feuds between factions...”.

Penn State University

ARCHIBALD ALLEN

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## ABSTRACT.

The manuscripts' βροτῶν ἄλαι at Aesch. *Ag.* 195 is said to be in loose apposition to πνοαὶ... ἀπὸ Στρυμόνος in 192, "winds... that cause men's wanderings". But "wanderings" has not been convincingly explained. I propose emending to βροτῶν λύαι, "men's mutinous quarrellings, contentions, strifes" as they languish starving at Aulis.

## KEYWORDS.

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, text, winds, *stasis*.