

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE ELDERS (THE *AGAMEMNON* OF AESCHYLUS)

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AESCHYLEAN scholars for the most part have underestimated the significance of *Agamemnon* 72–82, and have interpreted the chorus' words as a mere apology for the elders' exclusion from the expedition to Troy by virtue of their old age.<sup>1</sup> This is what the elders appear to be saying, but they elaborate on the subject of their age to such an extent that it is incumbent upon us to reconsider the passage, to ask why Aeschylus seems redundant in this description. The answer lies, I think, in Aeschylus' desire to authenticate the chorus' role as his spokesmen, i.e., to reveal the special quality which authorizes the elders to provide a link between the dramatic action and the lessons of the *Oresteia*.<sup>2</sup>

Aeschylus accomplishes this desired effect in part by contrasting the elders with the Atreidae. By repeating words which introduce this contrast in a clear and orderly manner (40–82), Aeschylus describes the two Atreidae as having led forth a military expedition, an ἀρωγή (47), "support for their cause" or "redress," and, with repetition of the word,<sup>3</sup> contrasts the position of the elders by leaving them out of this support: τῆς τότ' ἀρωγῆς ὑπολειφθέντες (73). For the leaders there is war, for the elders there is not. Thus the leaders loudly and with passion cry out "Ares," the war cry, and will go to Troy to avenge Paris (60 ff.). The elders, on the other hand, say that the young marrow

leaping up within their breast is like old age, that is, "Ares not in his place" or "Ares not in the field" (78).<sup>4</sup> Aeschylus repeats Ares' name with the word ἀρωγή at these two points to underline the repetition and the difference between the leaders of the Trojan War, dramatic vehicles of the play, and the chorus of elders, Aeschylus' spokesmen.

The difference is not limited, however, to the relationship of the two parties to one expedition. It lies in the reasons for the Atreidae calling on Ares and the elders not needing him. For the leaders, Ares, the first god called upon by name in the trilogy, is invoked because they have suffered a loss and want redress. Ares is appropriate to this need; for in Aeschylus' works, he consistently acts to see that opposing claims of dramatic characters are matched or balanced. In the *Septem*, for example, Ares, who feeds on the slaughter of men (244), represents both sides in the conflict (414, 469, and 497) and brings equal portions to the two brothers (945). In the *Persians* he is called ἑτεραλκῆς (952), a god of strength to both sides. And in the *Suppliants*, a play of opposition between the maidens and their male cousins, Ares is said to work in alternating fields (637 f.), but not when one side is alone (702).

In the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus supplements and stresses this need by skillfully creating a poetic context of differences in which Ares belongs, that is, he incorporates into

1. See, e.g., Denniston-Page, *Aeschylus: Agamemnon* (Oxford, 1960), p. 70.

2. This authority is customarily attributed to the elders. See, e.g., M. Croiset, *Eschyle* (Paris, 1965), p. 180, and E. Fraenkel, "Der Zeushymnos im Agamemnon des Aischylos," *Philologus*, LXXXVI (1931), 1 ff.

3. The repetition is noticeable since line 47 introduces a

simile comparing the Atreidae to birds, and line 73 is the first sentence which applies to the elders. ἡμεῖς δ' (72) signals the change of subject to the elders as δ' answers μὲν of line 40. See E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus: Agamemnon* (Oxford, 1962), II, *ad vs.* 73.

4. The problems of interpretation connected with this line are treated in n. 9 below.

the lines words denoting dichotomy. He describes the Atreidae as having a twofold power<sup>5</sup>—a twofold throne, twofold scepters and, as if to verify this, a power derived from Zeus, whose name sounds twofold: *διθρόνου Διόθεν καὶ δισκήπτρου* (43). This series is clearly intended to be noticed, for Aeschylus expands and repeats it in the first ode following the parodos. The chorus there emphasize the twofold nature of the two leaders. They say that the power of the Achaeans is a twofold throne, *δίθρονον κράτος* (109), that the kingly birds are twofold, one black and the other white of tail (115), that Calchas saw the tempers of the two leaders as twofold, *δύο λήμασι δισσοῦς / Ἀτρεΐδας* (122–23), and that the portents attending them at Aulis were twofold—favorable, yet unfavorable (145).

The repetition of the twofold, the dichotomy, to describe the Atreidae is emphatic in the beginning of the play and recurs near the end of the reported Trojan War, again in the context of Ares' name. The herald reports that not only the Trojans but many Greek men from many homes have died; the Greeks have been banished by a twofold whip in a double-weaponed death. He adds that this weapon, the twofold, is the one which Ares likes: *... διπλῇ μάστιγι, τὴν Ἄρης φιλεῖ, / δίλογχον ἄτην* (642–43). It is made very clear that, in references to Ares, Aeschylus attaches importance to the twofold. In the war god's realm he sees that two opposing claims of human agents are matched. If there is one extreme, he sees that there is a second to balance it. The weapon of the

god is two-sided because it lashes with both ends and reverberates upon the two opposing sides.<sup>6</sup> A blow must be paid for a blow. Thus even the Greeks, because they looted and sacked the temples of the gods at Troy, must pay after their victory.<sup>7</sup>

Ares is needed when there are differences on the level of dramatic action, but he does not affect the elders, who, reflecting that they are outside of the action, declare a desire to be neither the victor nor the conquered: *μήτ' εἶην πτολιπόρθης / μήτ' οὖν αὐτὸς ἄλους ὑπ' ἄλ- / λων βίον κατίδοιμι* (472–74). An indication that for them Ares is not in his place is revealed partly by the contrast between the Atreidae, who are introduced in a context of dichotomy, and the elders, who describe themselves as contradictory within themselves rather than in opposition to others. Aeschylus introduces this latter quality by stating that they are both young and old and then by repeating this antithesis three times in the parodos. The repetition prepares us for other passages in which this combination of youth and age appears not as a source of shame but as a source of authority. Since the elders occupy neither extreme, they may be said to resemble the gods of the trilogy, who are also internally contradictory. Artemis, for example, is envious, yet fair, shows pity, yet hates the meal of the eagles (135–38). Apollo is presented as the destroyer of Cassandra (1082), but the ally of Orestes (*Eum.* 64 ff.). And Athena, the divine authority of the third play, is a female, but born of a male father alone, and she sides with neither the

5. E. Fraenkel, *ad* vs. 43 f., says of *ζεῦγος* that "the 'two coupled together' constitute the double kingship, the *διθρόνος* καὶ *δισκήπτρος* τιμή."

6. See Fraenkel, *ad* vs. 642, for the various interpretations of this weapon. Cf. *Cho.* 938 and 372.

7. This role of Ares does not end with the *Agamemnon*. The twofold weapon works in the house of Atreus as well as on the battlefield of Troy. The chorus of the *Choephoroe*, for example, ask whether there will come an avenger, an Ares, with his "reversing Scythian bow" (160 ff.): *Ἰώ, τίς δορυσθενὴς <εἰς> ἀνὴρ / ἀναλυτὴρ δόμων, / Σκυθικά τ' ἐν χερσίν / παλίντων' ἐν*

*ἔργῳ βέλη πιπάλων Ἄρης / σχεδιά τ' αὐτόκωπα ναμῶν ξίφη*; (With the exception of *Σκυθικά τ'* [Robortello] and *ξίφη* [Pauw], the readings are those of M. The objections raised against the retention of *παλίντων' ἐν ἔργῳ βέλη*, bracketed by Murray [OCT, 2nd ed.], are that it is a gloss and not metrically sound. But as read above the meter consists of a series of dochmiacs interrupted by iambic metra, a scheme not without parallel.) Orestes answers for Ares' presence as he announces that Ares will meet Ares and in the same breath that Justice will meet Justice (461).

old Furies nor the young Apollo. To the extent that old age and youth coexist in the elders, there is also contradiction within them, which Aeschylus describes:

ἡμεῖς δ' ἀτίται σαρκὶ παλαιᾷ  
τῆς τότ' ἀρωγῆς ὑπολειφθέντες  
μίμνομεν ἰσχὺν  
ἰσόπαιδα νέμοντες ἐπὶ σκήπτροις.  
ὃ τε γὰρ νεαρὸς μυελὸς στέρνων  
ἐντὸς ἀνάσσων  
ἰσόπρεσβυς, Ἄρης δ' οὐκ ἐνὶ χώρᾳ,  
τό θ' ὑπεργήρων φυλλάδος ἥδη  
κατακαρφομένης τρίποδας μὲν ὁδοῦς  
στείχει, παιδὸς δ' οὐδὲν ἀρείων  
ὄναρ ἡμερόφαντον ἀλάνει [72–82].

But we, free from paying, with our aged flesh, were left out of the expedition at that time, and we wait, wielding a strength like that of a child upon our staves (or symbols of authority). For the young marrow leaping up within our breast is like old age, that is, Ares not in his proper place (or in the field), and now, when the leafage is already withering, the overly-aged moves along three-footed paths, but not at all more Ares-like than a child does it (he) wander, a dream appearing during the day.

Although the chorus are old and must support themselves on staves, they are like

8. The effect of these lines is particularly noticeable since Aeschylus uses neologisms and rare words such as *ἀτίται*, *ἰσόπαιδα*, *ἰσόπρεσβυς*, *ὑπεργήρων*, and *κατακαρφομένης* in the passage.

9. This rendering is natural if line 78 is read with the particle to mark apposition, as in *Ag.* 1405 and *Cho.* 190, or to mean *γάρ* for explanation of what precedes, as in *Eum.* 62, 579, and 588.

I follow the reading of Murray<sup>2</sup>, although I see no objection to using the epic preposition *ἐνὶ* of V (M *ἐνὶ* without accent; FTri *ἐν*). However, note that FTri read *διὰ* at *Ag.* 448 for the epic *διὰ*. Aeschylus employs many epic words in this parodos. This line differs from *Supp.* 749, *γυνὴ μονωθεῖσ' οὐδέν' οὐκ ἔνεστ' Ἄρης*. The noun *χώρᾳ* does not appear there, a noun which, as the object of the preposition, means the place where one normally resides, or one's place in society, Theogn. 152 and 822. I agree with Denniston-Page, *ad loc.*, that the syntax is *ἐνὶ* = *ἐστὶν ἐν*.

Smyth translates, without explanation, "Ares is not at his place"; Paley, "not at his post," i.e., not the military *ἡλικία*. Lattimore understands that there is not warcraft in age and youth, and Denniston-Page say that the warlike spirit is not in the proper place. Thomson follows the lead of the glossator in M and refers to the breast as Ares' place: "For, just as the young marrow reigning in the breast is like old age, for the War-god is not at his post, so extreme age is no better

children (75). The marrow of the young leaps up within their breasts, but like old age (76–78). Age with its withering foliage proceeds on a triple-footed path for them, but with the strength of a child. Within the elders, age and youth come together into one, as Aeschylus shows by matching *σαρκὶ παλαιᾷ* with *ἰσόπαιδα*, *νεαρὸς μυελὸς* with *ἰσόπρεσβυς*, and *ὑπεργήρων* with *παιδὸς*.<sup>8</sup> These antitheses seem directly related to a lack of Ares, since the phrase, "Ares not in his proper place or in the field" (78), is placed in apposition to the ideas which precede it.<sup>9</sup>

Aeschylus seems to suggest that, when two conflicting ideas are simultaneously present and balanced, Ares is not needed. This is why the elders are released from the action on the battlefield for exposition,<sup>10</sup> as Aeschylus further marks by calling them *ἀτίται*, "free from paying."<sup>11</sup> Their role is one of spokesmen, as they hint at the meaning of the trilogy. The riddle of the Sphinx—the triple-footed path (80)—suggests this power which they use at the end of the section. They say that their overly-aged strength is no more "Ares-like," *ἀρείων*,<sup>12</sup> than a child; for they

than infancy." The idea is *δὲς παῖδες οἱ γέροντες*, and it is elaborated in this passage with reference to the Pythagorean doctrine of the *μυελὸς* or *αἰὼν* in which the soul resides. See Fraenkel, *ad loc.*, for other renderings.

10. Cf. *Ag.* 757 f., *δῖχα δ' ἄλλων μονόφρων ἐλ- / μὲ*. This lack of activity explains the chorus' lack of support to Agamemnon when he is stabbed (1346 ff.). They recognize the need for Ares (1511) after the king's death, although they themselves cannot be the agents of the god. They make verbal attacks at the end of the play, but cannot intimidate Aegisthus. They exit to make way for a chorus which will be verbally effective upon the action of the dramatic characters. This chorus in turn will make way for the Furies, who are dramatic actors, protagonists of the *Eumenides*.

11. This legal sounding word is rare and found only once again, at *Eum.* 256 (cf. Hesychius), to describe Orestes when he has already paid the penalty of blood guilt.

12. A. W. Verrall, *The 'Agamemnon' of Aeschylus* (London, 1889), *ad loc.*, says that Aeschylus probably connected this word with Ares (78) "in fancy." The only other occurrence of the word in Aeschylus suggests, however, that he did intend a pun. See *Sept.* 305. (The adjective *ἀρειος* is used only twice in the *Oresteia*, at *Eum.* 685 and 690, where it means "Ares.") The riddle or pun in our passage is underscored by the use of *ἀρείων*, a masculine, after the neuter *ὑπεργήρων*. The chorus lie between idea and person.

wander, a vision appearing in the daytime (81 f.). The combination of age and youth is like that of another contradiction: a dream, belonging to night, appearing during the day and, therefore, not Ares-like.

This analysis of the elders' words would be overly subtle, had Aeschylus not validated it by resuming the themes<sup>13</sup> introduced in the parodos about the elders as he did for the Atreidae. The chorus tell us that they do indeed have the authority to teach us and tell what lies hidden in the trilogy. They have "the authority to sing out the power along the way, a fated power of men who are mature, i.e., neither overaged nor too young": *κύριός εἰμι θροεῖν ὄδιον κράτος αἴσιον ἀνδρῶν / ἐκτελέων* (104–5). The first word, *κύριος*,<sup>14</sup> signals the authority the elders have to sing out. They will sing here of the two-throned command of the Achaeans and Calchas' prophecy. The chorus continue by saying that with god's help their "age which has grown along with them" inspires persuasion, the strength of song: *ἔτι γὰρ θεόθεν καταπνεύει / πειθῷ, μολπᾶν ἀλκάν, σύμφυτος αἰὼν* (105–6).

The strength or prowess of the elders lies in song, i.e., persuasion, which the *Oresteia* legitimates as an important instrument of authority: it is Athena, once again a god, who uses persuasion to appease the Furies (*Eum.* 885). She says that Peithō watches over her mouth and tongue. Thus, given her authority, we can infer that her use of verbal exposition

provides a parallel for the elders' authority. Surely their age is in point here as the source of this authority; for *αἰὼν* means age, and the word echoes an attribute of the elders in the parodos—the marrow leaping up within their breasts. They are speaking once again of this combination of age and youth.

When they refer to their *αἰὼν*, they refer not only to their "age," but also to the "marrow" which they called the marrow of the young: *αἰὼν* means both.<sup>15</sup> The marrow leaps up within them, but as age which has grown with them, *σύμφυτος*. The *αἰὼν* is the whole input of youth and age into their present "age." It is the core of life. When it leaps up it is young, but like old age; this combination gives them the strength they need to sing and explains the words *ὄδιον κράτος αἴσιον ἀνδρῶν ἐκτελέων* (104 f.), the kind of authority they have. It is the power or authority of men who are in their prime. *ἐκτελής*<sup>16</sup> means that they are neither too old nor too young. Since *αἴσιον* and *ὄδιον* normally apply to portents and not to those receiving them,<sup>17</sup> here they describe, not the command of the Atreidae,<sup>18</sup> but the power of song. The power is one of omens along the path (*ὄδιον*) of the trilogy and an auspicious (*αἴσιον*) power. Although the noun *αἶσα* can mean a favorable or unfavorable fate, the adjective means auspicious as applied to omens. It makes little sense to call the command of the Atreidae auspicious; for the leaders, in spite of victory at Troy, are doomed to the inauspicious also—the

13. Fraenkel, *op. cit.*, p. 64, contrasts this to the anapaests of 72 ff., and the physical weakness of the elders.

14. It is used to describe Zeus's authority at *Ag.* 178.

15. R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 208, says that *αἰὼν* meaning "spinal marrow" has been regarded as a later and derivative meaning. He argues that it is easy to see the meaning "life" or "a period of existence" coming from life "fluid," rather than the other way around. With the connotation of "fluid," the parodos contrasts *μυελός* with *κατακαρφομένης*. The men have a lively fluid, are drying up. See also G. Thomson, *The Oresteia of Aeschylus* (Amsterdam, 1966) II, *ad vss.* 104 f.

16. See Fraenkel, *ad vs.* 105, for the problems connected

with this word. The reading *ἐντελέων* meaning "full-grown," as at *Cho.* 250, is equally attractive. It appears in Murray<sup>2</sup>.

17. Denniston-Page, *ad vs.* 104, notice this problem.

18. Fraenkel, *ad vs.* 104, is aware of the ambiguities surrounding the word *κράτος*, but concludes that, since it is used of the Atreidae in line 109 (*Ἀχαιῶν δῖθρονον κράτος*), "the pointed repetition" makes its application to the leaders certain. His interpretation creates a problem in the syntax, however, for he must admit that lines 105–6 interrupt the sentence, dividing the *ὅπως* clause from its verb *θροεῖν*. With my rendering, *κράτος* is an internal, almost adverbial, accusative, explained by lines 105–6 without any interruption or repetition of the object of the infinitive *θροεῖν*.

storm, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the destruction of their fleet, and Agamemnon's death upon his return. Only Menelaus, who has already suffered a loss, will be exempted from further evil. The repetition of *ὄδιος*<sup>19</sup> at line 157 strengthens this rendering, for the word is used there to describe omens *ἀπ' ὀρνίθων ὀδίων*, omens which are both unfavorable and auspicious for the Atreidae: *τοιάδε Κάλχας ξὺν μεγάλοις ἀγαθοῖς ἀπέκλαυξεν / μόρσιμ' ἀπ' ὀρνίθων ὀδίων οἴκοις βασιλείοις* (156–57). The outcome for the Atreidae, the twofold leaders, will be twofold, but for the elders there lies ahead the auspicious task of describing what is to come in the trilogy: the expedition to Troy, the power of portents, and the path along which Zeus leads men to understanding (176 ff.).<sup>20</sup>

By way of an epilogue, one should add that, while it is obvious that the god of war Ares acts when opposing claims exist, but is not needed when tensions are matched, his role in the parodos and first lyrics is a significant foreshadowing of the balance in the trilogy which will result as justice in the *Eumenides*. Athena duly honors

Ares with the Areopagus for his part, as she establishes a spot in memory of the war god, a spot where "respect" and "fear" are to restrain the citizens from breaking the laws. She emphatically repeats the name of Ares three times in her speech (*Eum.* 685–90), to make clear that the hill and the court are a visible monument to honor him. Once justice has been accomplished, however, she requests that the Furies not implant war in the hearts of the citizens (*Eum.* 861 ff.). Since Athens has suffered "contests of Ares" (*ἀρειφάτων*<sup>21</sup> . . . *ἀγώνων*, *Eum.* 913–14), strife is no longer needed. Zeus, the Furies, and the first god called upon by name in the trilogy, Ares, will continue to see that justice is maintained, but the tension need no longer be injurious: *νικᾷ δ' ἀγαθῶν / ἔρις ἡμετέρα διὰ παντός*<sup>22</sup> (*Eum.* 974–75). Through the path of the trilogy, we have come to understand what only the elders represented and thus could articulate in the beginning:<sup>23</sup> Aeschylus' message that justice is a balance of contradictions.

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19. *ὄδοῦν* appears first in Aeschylus and means "lead by the right path."

20. The repetition of the adjective *σύμφυτος* completes the circle begun in the parodos. To emphasize the difference between the elders and the Atreidae, Aeschylus repeats the idea of strife to confront the dramatic actors of the play. He warns of another sacrifice, a worker of strife: *νεκέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον* (152). It is a *σύμφυτος* worker of strife, grown together with the house of Atreus, just as the youth and old age have grown together in the elders. The strife in the house will predictably bring a reverberating, *παλινγοτος* (154) wrath

upon the Atreidae, because reverberation is the weapon or method of attack that Ares and his co-workers, the Furies, like.

21. W. B. Stanford, *Aeschylus in his Style* (Dublin, 1942), p. 19, is missing the point when he says that *ἀρείφατος* is used by Aeschylus as meaning little more than "martial." It means "killed by Ares," as in Homer.

22. *διὰ παντός* could refer to the action of the entire trilogy, since the sentence provides a logical fulfillment to the refrain of the first lyrics (*Ag.* 121 = 139 = 159; *τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω*).

23. Cf. *Ag.* 584, *αἰὲ γὰρ ἤβη τοῖς γέρονσιν εὖ μαθεῖν* (FTri).