

A DISPUTED COMPOUND IN AESCHYLUS (χαλκοκέραυνος)

φονικόπεδόν τ' ἐρυθρᾶς ἱερὸν
 χεῦμα θαλάσσης
 χαλκοκέραυνόν τε παρ' Ὠκεανῶ
 λίμναν παντοτρόφον Αἰθιόπων
 ἔν' ὁ παντόπτας Ἥλιος κτλ. (fr. 192 Nauck).

THE epithet *χαλκοκέραυνος* has perturbed many, though the most recent English editors (Murray, Thomson, and Sidgwick) have printed it without comment. The new Liddell and Scott betrays uneasiness in its 'epithet of the sea, perhaps false reading for *χαλκαμάργος*, *gleaming like copper or bronze*'. Overseas scholars flatly reject it. Wilamowitz poured scorn on it in his *Interpretationen* (p. 57, footnote 1) and commented in his larger edition (p. 68) *neque intelligitur et frustra temptatum est*. Weir Smyth obelizes it. Bothe, Hermann, Weil, and others offered emendations. In *Bursians Jahresberichte*, ccxxxiv, p. 104 (1932) W. Morel observed (apparently with a sigh of relief) *Von Erz und Blitz befreit uns Bruhns χλιαρόκρουνος*. This is emancipation indeed.

The compound literally means 'bronze-thunderbolting' which is nonsense, or 'bronze-thundering-and, (or,) -lightning' which is a mouthful but not nonsense. Let us consider it in detail. The word *κεραυνός* vaguely combined the notion of thunder and lightning together to the pre-scientific Greeks—the din of the thunder and the flash and stroke of the lightning. The emphasis is generally on the visual aspect, as its commonest epithets show. In Aeschylus it is *πυρωπός*, *πυροφόρος*, *ἐκπνέων φλόγα*, in Homer *ψολόεις*, in Hesiod *αἰθαλόεις*. The rarer auditory aspect is implied in Aristophanes' *κεραυνοβρόντης* and the papyrus fragment's *κεραυνοκλόνος* (v. L. and S.). Sometimes both are submerged in the dynamic aspect, its striking force, as in Herodotus viii. 37, *Od.* xii. 416, and elsewhere.

Similarly *χαλκός* took its meaning from its three chief powers of cutting, of reflecting a lurid light, and of emitting a harsh, ominous sound. The whole *Iliad* is pervaded with its flashing and clashing and cleaving, as the bronze-clad kings move on their meteoric paths. It is significant for our purpose that bronze is compared to lightning (*στεροπή*) in *Il.* x. 153 and xi. 65. This simile becomes a metaphor 'the lightning of bronze' in xix. 363 and in *Od.* iv. 72. The quality of bronze's sound is illustrated when Achilles' threatening shout in *Il.* xviii. 222 is called 'brazen' and Stentor in v. 785 is *χαλκεόφωνος*, as is Cerberus in Hesiod, *Theog.* 311, and Ares in Sophocles, *O.C.* 1046. The adverbial phrase in the *Shield of Heracles* 243 αἰ δὲ γυναικες ἐνδμήτων ἐπὶ πύργων χάλκεον δξύ βόων has been variously modified by editors. Later, with Aeschylus and Sophocles, the sound of bronze bells and trumpets is added to the din of battle. According to Porphyry (*Vit. Pythag.* 41) Pythagoras thought that the sound of a bronze gong was the voice of a demon shut up within.

Aeschylus with brilliant poetic imagination is describing a tropical sea. His vision of the lurid, glowing expanse reminds him of the *χαλκοῦ στεροπή* of Menelaus' palace, of the heroic *ἀγῇ χαλκείῃ* (*Il.* xiii. 341), of the *ψολόεις*, the *αἰθαλόεις*, *κεραυνός*, of the *οὐρανός πολύχαλκος* of *Il.* v. 504. He combines them in a brave and effective compound *χαλκοκέραυνος*. It is as splendid and inviolate as Yeats's 'That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea' (*Byzantium*) which no one has yet begun to emend.

But Aeschylus may have meant even more, for he was an adept in pregnant uses of words. When Kipling wrote 'An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost the Bay' he said something that for all its illogicality seizes our imaginations and suggests a true experience. Kipling expressed something similar when in a short story (*A*

Matter of Fact) he wrote about a tropical sea that 'The sun rose in a perfectly clear sky and struck the water with its light so sharply that it seemed as though the sea should clang like a burnished gong'. And, independently no doubt, Jules Romain has 'Le lac sonnait midi d'un tel coup de lumière que l'eau même semblait une forme de feu'. Aeschylus could use such phrases as 'The trumpet-call set all the shores ablaze with sound' (*Pers.* 395),¹ or 'a rayless odour' (*P.V.* 115). It is not impossible that he intended to blend two sense impressions—primarily the lurid light, secondarily the suggestion of harsh, menacing sound—in χαλκοκέρανος. Though the author of the *Περὶ Ὑψους* and others might consider this as one of Aeschylus' 'woolly' (ποκοειδής, *Περὶ Ὑψ.* xv. 5) concepts, many modern poets, at least, would accept it as authentic and fine.

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¹ It is perhaps no more than a curious coincidence that Euripides in his *Phoenissae*—a very Aeschylean play—imitates this (l. 1377 f.) while in the same play he recalls χαλκοκέρανος with

κατάχαλκον ἅπαν πεδίων ἀστράπτει (ll. 110–11). I have discussed some other synaesthetic metaphors in *Greek Metaphor*, pp. 47–61.