

ΓΟΝΙΑΣ, Aeschylus Cho. 1067

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*ὄδε τοι μελάθροισ τοῖς βασιλείοις
τρίτος αἰ χειμῶν
πνεύσας γονίας ἐτελέσθη.*

The penultimate word of this sentence is a problem. The scholiast has *ἀνεμος, ὅταν ἐξ εὐδίας κινήθῃ χαλεπὸν πνεῦμα*. Hesychius glosses: *γονίας· εὐχερής. Αἰσχύλος Ἀγαμέμνονι*. That the word denotes a wind, as both writers seem to assume, is clear. The termination *-ιας* is familiar in wind names¹). The word occurs nowhere else, but there is no reason to emend the text²). Names for winds are legion, and often differ from one region to another; we cannot suppose that we know them all. We must accept the tradition, however grudgingly, and likewise the fact that any attempt at explanation remains a shot in the dark. From the opposing explanations of Hesychius and the scholiast we may conclude that the word was opaque in antiquity. The word referred either to a favourable or to an unfavourable wind, and it was anybody's guess.

Most modern scholars have assumed that the word denotes an unfavourable wind, though not all have followed the scholiast's explanation. Conington³), for instance, explains the word as meaning 'family wind', conjecturing (as one must on this view) that the word was 'coined for the occasion, like Aristophanes' *συκοφαντίας*' (*Knights* 437). Sidgwick⁴) condemns this as 'grotesque', but the derivation from *γόνος* is perfectly normal; cf. *Ἑλλησποντίης* from *Ἑλλησποντος*, *ἐγκολπίας* from *κόλπος*, *ἀπαρκτίας* from *ἀρκτος*; the same examples also support the geographical nomenclature (a wind that blows 'in the family'). But there are two objections: 1. it seems somewhat venturesome to suppose that Aeschylus invented the word for this passage, merely because it is not attested elsewhere; 2. the adjective is otiose after *μελάθροισ τοῖς βασιλείοις*. Chantraine⁵) likewise derives the word from *γόνος*, but seeks to

¹) See P. Chantraine, *La formation des noms en grec ancien*, Paris 1933, p. 95.

²) If change were needed, Hesychius' gloss suggests **τονίας*, a wind which 'stretches', i.e. swells, the sails.

³) J. Conington, *The Choephoroe of Aeschylus*, London 1857, p. 159; cf. e.g. H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg 1960, I p. 320.

⁴) A. Sidgwick, *Aeschylus Choephoroi*², Oxford 1924, p. 79.

⁵) P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grec I*, Paris 1968, p. 223.

harmonize this derivation with the scholiast's explanation by rendering 'qui naît, subit'. But the notion of suddenness, which is vital to the scholiast's view, cannot be squeezed from the word. *γονίας* would indicate only that the wind is born, rises, and that is true of all winds, sudden or not. The scholiast's view is also accepted by Tucker⁶), who would derive the word from *γόνυ*; *γονίας* would describe a wind which comes round a bend or corner. One would expect *γονατίας*, but *γονίας* might be formed after the declension in *γοννός*, *γοῦνα* (*γόνα* Alc. 347.5 LP), *γούνων* (*γόνων* Alc. 44.7 LP), *γούνεσσι*. However, Tucker cites no evidence for the use of *γόνυ* to describe a geographical feature.

Since we have to choose between ancient guesses, we may perhaps resurrect Hesychius' explanation (favourable wind), with Hermann⁷), who observes: 'videtur *γονίας* ventus dici secundo flamine spirans'. *γονίας* may be derived from *γόνος* in the sense 'procreation'; i.e. *γονίας* *ἄνεμος* may be equivalent to *γόνιμος* *ἄνεμος*. For nomenclature according to function or effect we may compare *πηστήρ*, *ἀργεστής*, *ὄρνιθίας* (spring wind bringing, i.e. accompanying, the return of the birds), *κυματίας*. Impregnation by winds is enshrined in mythology, folk belief and science; see e.g. *Il.* 16.150, 20.223 ff., *Ar. Birds* 695, *Arist. HA* 539a31, 559b20, 560a6, 572a8, *Virg. G* 3.271 ff., *Plin. HN* 8.67, 10.80. The notion of wind impregnation (*ἐξανεμοῦσθαι*) may lie behind *γονίας*. Alternatively, just as the fair weather winds of spring, which blow when the birds return, are called *ὄρνιθίαι* (*Arist. Mete.* 362a22), so the winds of spring, when animals couple and plants come back to life, might reasonably be called *γονίαι*. The word may be used here in its most general sense ('favourable'), or it may refer to productivity, regeneration. The storm—the matricide—which has just devastated the royal house, has become a source of regeneration, which will guarantee the continuity of the family. *γονίας* is predicative, with *ἐτελέσθη*. The first sentence of the anapaests sets Orestes' act in the context of the history of bloodshed in the house. Vv. 1068 ff. expand the idea of the first sentence. The confident *γονίας* is resumed in *σωτήρ* 1073, but doubt sets in at 1074, and is continued in the wind imagery of the closing lines⁸).

⁶) T. G. Tucker, *The Choephoroi of Aeschylus*, Cambridge 1901, p. 235.

⁷) G. Hermann, *Aeschyli tragoediae*, Leipzig 1852, II p. 575.

⁸) My thanks to Mr R. C. M. Janko for discussion and encouragement.