Two Adjectives in Seneca's *Agamemnon*

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In his tour de force of a messenger speech, Eurybates uses a geographical ecphrasis (558–578) to set the scene for the storm that will wreck the Greek fleet as it rounds the promontory of Caphereus. It includes a series of evocative proper names (562–567):[1]

> arx imminet praerupta quae spectat mare
> utrimque geminum: Pelopis hinc oras tui
> et Isthmon, arto qui recuruatus solo
> Ionia iungi maria Phrixeis uetat,   565
> hinc scelere Lemnon nobilem, hinc et Chalcida
> tardamque ratibus Aulida.

> 566 hinc et chalcida *recc.* (*teste Delrio*), *postea Auantius* (hinc chalcida
> *Scaliger*) : hinc calchedona *P CS* : et calchedona *E* : h. calidona *Leid.2*
> : h. chalcodona *I. Gronouius* : h. anthedona *Gronouius*

Some at least of the places listed have mythological connections appropriate to the context. As Tarrant notes, in 566 "Seneca may have called attention to Lemnos and its history for the sake of a veiled reference to Agamemnon's death."[2] I would add that describing Aulis as *tarda ratibus* in the next line puts the emphasis not on the gathering of the fleet there but on the long delay before it sailed, a delay that ended only when Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter: in 162–173, Clytemnestra gives this as one of her reasons for killing him.

It is always hard to decide just how far to go with this sort of analysis. Sinister connotations for Pelops (563) are obvious, and Seneca uses some of these in the first lines of this play, as Thyestes describes the scene (*hoc est uetustum Pelopiae limen domus*, 7) and alludes to cannibal feasts (*hic epulis locus*, 12): it is surely relevant that Pelops, like Thyestes' sons (though less permanently) had been cooked and eaten. In the

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[1] Text and apparatus are quoted from Tarrant. Zwierlein's Oxford Classical Text (1986b) omits some of the variants and prints *Anthedona* in 566, with a colon after the last word quoted. Fitch's new Loeb text (2004) is identical to Tarrant's, but with a semicolon at the end of 565.

[2] Like Agamemnon, the men of Lemnos were murdered by their wives after they had turned to slave-women for companionship, though that was from disgust at their wives' foul smell rather than the difficulties of maintaining a long-distance relationship.

description of the Isthmus of Corinth in 564–565, the adjective *Phrixeis* must allude not to Phrixus himself but to his sister and her watery death, as if it meant 'Hellean' rather than 'Phrixean'.[3] Though this myth has no direct link with the house of Pelops, it refers to violent death caused by a homicidal female relative (a stepmother rather than a wife), and alert (or pedantic) readers might wish to draw the parallel. It is interesting that the allusion (if it is that) to the death of Helle is brought in at the expense of another that is arguably more appropriate. Seneca could have written *Myrtois* to allude to Pelops' murder of Myrtilus: he will use the adjective in *Thyestes* 660. The Isthmus is of course where Pelops murdered Myrtilus and acquired the curse that was to be fulfilled in part by his grandson Agamemnon. A Senecan chorus summarizes the story in *Thyestes* 139–143.

Textual corruption makes it difficult to see whether Seneca intended another allusion in the second half of 566. The transmitted reading *Chalcedona* is geographical nonsense, located in the wrong direction, "absurdly and pointlessly hyperbolic" (Tarrant), and does not explain the variants *et* and *hinc*: it seems to come from Christian misreading. I know two possible solutions. The less bold and more popular is *hinc et Chalcida*, which improves the geography and neatly explain the variants. However, Gronovius' conjecture *hinc Anthedona* would introduce another mythological allusion. As Tarrant notes, Anthedon was the home of Glaucus, and he would make an excellent match for Helle in some ways. He jumped into the sea and was saved, while she fell in and drowned, though her brother was saved. However, this is not a very appropriate myth, since being saved does not fit the context. That is, the myth of Glaucus is parallel in plot but incongruous in tone, since Glaucus' leap brings salvation rather than death. More on this point below.

All this leaves only the *Ionia maria* of 565 unaccounted for. The phrase must indicate the Corinthian gulf to contrast with the Phrixean Aegean. If the preceding analysis is correct, and all or most of the other place names have significance beyond the merely geographic, the adjective in this phrase does not seem to be pulling its intertextual weight, as it were. I suggest that that is because it is corrupt, and that Seneca wrote:

> et Isthmon, arto qui recuruatus solo

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[3] Helle's name does not seem to have any adjectival form in Greek or Latin, though Seneca could surely have created one if he had wished. Of course, neither *Helleis* nor *Hellaeis* would scan without further changes.

> ***Inoa*** iungi maria Phrixeis uetat

If we assume for the moment — more on this below — that Ino's leap took place from the west side of the Isthmus, *Inoa* is far more pointed, since it provides a matched pair of related myths. Ino jumped into one sea with her son Melicertes while being pursued by her husband Athamas after murdering her other son Learchus, and Phrixus' sister Helle fell into the other sea while the two were being pursued by Ino. In each case, one child survived while the other died or was killed not long before. The fact that Ino was the stepmother of Phrixus and Helle, and that she hated them, is why the Isthmus in its inarticulate mercy forbids their seas to be joined.

Parallels for corruption of *Ious* to *Ionius* are not far to seek. In *Ars Amatoria* 3.175–176, Ovid wrote *ecce tibi similis, quae quondam Phrixon et Hellen / diceris Inois eripuisse dolis* and Kenney's apparatus reads "176 inois *RAς* : ioniis (*uel sim.*) ς." In *Thebais* 4.59, Statius wrote *it comes Inoas Ephyre solata querelas* and the apparatus of the latest edition (Hall-Ritchie-Edwards 2007) reads "**59** inoas D G*ul* P E*pc* n U4+: ionias G S*pc cett. mei*: inonias S*ac* O5 s*pc+*." A similar error has been suspected in another geographical catalogue in Seneca, *Phoenissae* 610, where all the manuscripts read *hinc qua reliquit nomen Ionii maris*, but Zwierlein and Fitch print Bentley's *mare*,[4] and Wilamowitz (*apud* Leo) emends to *Inois mari*. The change is very nearly ana-grammatic — only a minim's difference. Though dismissed as unnecessary by Frank, and not even mentioned by Zwierlein or Hirschberg, this seems very likely to me.

Of course, that still leaves the question I have been postponing: did Ino leap from the west side of the Isthmus into the Corinthian Gulf, or from the east side into the Aegean? Or rather, since she is a mythological character, what would Seneca and his audience (whether in the theater or reading the play at home) have thought plausible? In his note on Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.525, Bömer gives an exhaustive discussion, with a roughly equal division between east and west. Writing roughly a century after Seneca, Pausanias (1.44.7–8) gives a precise eastern location, but that seems likely to come from a mythographer's or tourist guide's *horror vacui*: because it is an excellent place for a leap into the sea, someone famous must have leapt from it. Seneca's own *Phoenissae* (23),

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[4]   Fitch (2004) also emends *hinc* to *hac*.

also later than *Agamemnon*, makes the *Inoa rupes* part of Mount Cithaeron, which points rather to the west, since the main mass of Cithaeron comes right down to the sea on the west side of the Isthmus:[5]
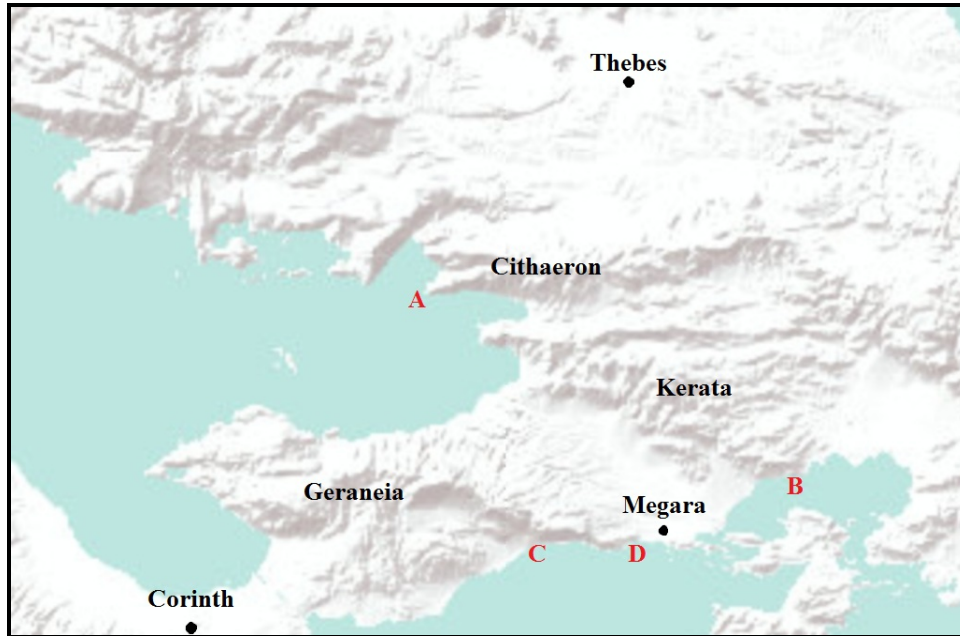
As the map shows, Mount Cithaeron certainly runs along the sea on the west side of the Isthmus for many miles east and north of the point I have labeled A. If we take Mount Kerata as an extension or subdivision of Cithaeron, it also comes down to the sea for a short stretch on the east side of the Isthmus (B). However, that does not agree with Pausanias, who places Ino's leap at the Molurian Rocks (not labeled in the Barrington Atlas) on the narrow part of the road between Megara and Corinth, and therefore somewhere between C and D. That is only part of Cithaeron if we extend the latter to include not only Kerata but Geraneia as well, though the latter two are hardly connected. To sum up, though the evidence for Seneca's opinion is not entirely unambiguous, it points more to the west than the east. There is certainly no obstacle to presuming a western leap in *Agamemnon*.

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[5]   Frank (ad loc.) is circumspect: "If Pausanias can be relied upon, Seneca is stretching the tradition somewhat by associating the *Inoa rupes* with Cithaeron itself, although the extension of the Cithaeron range did run southwards into Corinth and thence from west to east across Megaris, and the section of the road on which Pausanias locates the *Inoa rupes* ran through these mountains." As my illustration shows, a western leap is far more plausible. I wish to thank Chris Gist of the University of Virginia Scholarslab for making it for me.

Finally, my argument looks as if it ought to help with two other textual problems:

First, it should help us decide between *hinc Anthedona* and *hinc et Chalcida* in the next line. *Anthedona* would give us a veritable orgy of glancing allusions to Theban myths of metamorphic leaps into the sea. However, two such allusions seem sufficient, and it seems unmethodical to go from one to three by a pair of emendations. On the other hand, *et Chalcida* would still leave one name unmythed, which tends to detract from my argument for *Inois* over *Ioniis*. Although still torn, I lean towards *Anthedona*, supposing that Seneca, with his well-stocked mental library of myths cross-referenced six different ways, could not resist adding one place name to his catalogue that was only marginally relevant.

Second, it helps a bit with 506, *sed trunca toto puppis Ionio natat*, which certainly refers to the waters on the east side of the Isthmus. The contrast with 565 inspired Housman (*ad* Manilius 4.767) to emend to *in ponto*, Wilamowitz (*apud* Leo) to *Icario*. As Tarrant puts it in his note on 506, "The question is . . . whether S. can be permitted the loose sense of *mare Ionium* here since the proper sense occurs in 565f. below." Although he finds the inconsistency acceptable, my emendation removes it, though it would be better to remove the looser of the two uses of *Ionius*. It is worth noting that Wilamowitz' *Icario* would introduce yet another mythological character who leaps or (in this case) falls into the sea, which makes it all the more tempting. The southern end of Euboea is a long way from the island of Icaria, but not too far from the direct route between Crete and Athens. Would that suffice to call those waters 'Icarian'? I will leave it to others to decide.

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A little further on, Eurybates describes the effects of the storm (571–576):

> haerent acutis rupibus fixae rates;
> has inopis undae breuia comminuunt uada,
> pars uehitur huius prima, pars scopulo sedet;
> hanc alia retro spatia relegentem ferit
> et fracta frangit. iam timent terram rates   575
> et maria malunt.

576 et maria malunt *E* : uoluntque maria *A* : maluntque m. *recc.*

Line 573 is inelegant: we might have expected either *pars prima . . . pars postera* or just *pars . . . pars*. The latter seems preferable, since *prima* is otiose or irrelevant: why should it matter which end of the ship is caught on the rocks and which carried off by the wind and waves? At the same time *uehitur* ("is carried off") could use some help: although Tarrant provides parallels for this "violent sense of *ueho*", it still looks rather bare. When we find a superfluity and a defect in one line, they are likely to be related. It seems to me that Seneca most likely wrote *pars uehitur huius **prona**, pars scopulo sedet*: "part of this one is carried away downwind (or downcurrent), part settles on a crag." The adjective *pronus* is used of rivers flowing towards the sea and of the sea itself "imagined as flowing downwards to the shore from the horizon" (*OLD s.v.* 5.c and 5.d). Our passage would combine the flowing current of the one with the location of the other. Perhaps the best parallel for my conjecture is *Phaedra* 181–183:[6]

> sic, cum grauatam nauita aduersa ratem
> propellit unda, cedit in uanum labor
> et uicta prono puppis aufertur uado.

This would be the best possible parallel, if it were not slightly ambiguous: the coauthors of the latest commentary disagree with each other. In the introduction to their joint edition, Coffey calls this "the simile of the helmsman who uses his skill in vain to control his laden vessel against overwhelming seas" (23), while Mayer, in the note on line 183,

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[6] There is no better source for parallels than the same author writing in the same genre at about the same time. Fitch (1981) has shown that *Agamemnon* and *Phaedra* were likely written around the same time, though only relative dating is possible.

implies that the sea is a river, quoting parallels for *uadum* used of a river's waters.[7] Although the passage of Vergil on which Seneca bases this one (*G.* 1.201–203) certainly refers to a river, Seneca surely rewrote it as a marine metaphor, which suits the context far better. Phaedra is suffering from a raging storm of lust, not a steadily flowing current, which would better describe happy marital relations, or perhaps a long-term love affair with no significant ups and downs. A storm-at-sea metaphor also provides appropriate implications of danger and imminent disaster, since a ship caught in a storm, whether struggling to reach port, or just to avoid being blown onto a reef or a rocky shore, is in far more danger than a ship whose captain would like to sail up a river but cannot because the current is too strong, or there is an adverse wind, or his oarsmen are too few or too tired. The latter can generally tie his ship to the riverbank and wait for a better opportunity. The parallel in the *Agamemnon* (as emended) supports my interpretation of the *Phaedra* passage, though the necessity of emendation makes this part of my argument semicircular.

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[7]   Who wrote which parts is defined in the preface (vii).

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