SHORTER NOTES

A SPEAR 'LIKE A BALL': A NOTE ON SOPHOCLES, FR. 781

Etymologicum Magnum s.v. ἔγχος (313, 3):

ὁ δὲ Σοφοκλῆς τὴν σφαῖραν ἔγχος κέκληκεν, οἷον 'τὸ δ' ἔγχος ἐν ποσὶ κυλίνδεται'.

Sophocles has called a ball *egkhos* ('spear'), as in 'and the *egkhos* rolls to (someone's) feet'.

The quoted fragment is generally assigned to Sophocles' *Nausicaa* (or *Plyntriai*). This suggestion dates back to nineteenth-century scholarship, is found in the editions of Pearson and Radt, and has been accepted by LSJ (s.v. ἔγχος II. 'of Nausicaa's *ball*').[1] Certainly, the *Nausicaa* will have included a version of the famous scene in which the Phaeacian princess and her maidens enjoy a game of ball.[2] Pearson thought it probable that the words are part of Odysseus' speech at the court of Alcinous (cf. *Od.* 7.290), in which he would have recalled Nausicaa's misdirected cast (cf. 6.115). The feet, on this view, are Odysseus' own. According to Welcker, Odysseus calls the ball an ἔγχος, 'because it reached him like a missile'.[3] This is awkward: an ἔγχος is properly a thrusting spear and, at any rate, the quality of being thrown does not enter into the immediate image, as the fragment's object is said to reach someone's feet rolling.[4]

Of course, in *Odyssey* 7, Odysseus does not specifically mention Nausicaa's cast to her parents for an obvious reason: he did not witness the event, being fast asleep when it occurred. Nor did the ball end up at his feet. How could it? Odysseus was lying behind bushes. Instead, it flew straight into an eddy, never even touching the ground. The hero only woke up from the girls' shriek that followed the ball's disappearance. If the fragment's words are supposed to refer to Nausicaa's cast, Sophocles first must have

[1] G.C.W. Schneider, *Sophokles Tragödien*, Vol. 8: *Bruchstücke* (Weimar, 1827), 135; T. Bergk, *Commentatio de fragmentis Sophoclis* (Leipzig, 1833), 22; F. Ellendt, *Lexicon Sophocleum*, Vol. 1 (Königsberg, 1835), 471; F.G. Welcker, *Die griechischen Tragödien mit Rücksicht auf den epischen Cyclus*, Vol. 1 (Bonn, 1839), 230; A.C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1917), 29–30 (on fr. 781); S.L. Radt, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Vol. 4: *Sophocles* (Göttingen, 1999^2), 537 (on fr. 781). The fragment does not meet the criteria for inclusion in H. Lloyd-Jones, *Sophocles: Fragments* (Cambridge, MA, 2003^2).

[2] Sophocles himself is famously claimed to have performed the role of Nausicaa and received great credit for his skill with the ball: Ath. 1.20f, Eust. *Od.* 1553, 64 (cf. Eust. *Il.* 381, 10).

[3] Welcker (n. 1), 230: 'weil er wie ein Geschoß ihn erreichte'.

[4] It is true that, in tragedy especially, the meaning of ἔγχος is sometimes extended: it may denote simply 'weapon' (e.g. Soph. *OT* 170), 'sword' (e.g. Soph. *Aj.* 287) or even 'arrows' (Eur. *HF* 1098, ἔγχη); in Soph. fr. 535, it qualifies Hecate's 'holy fire', i.e. her torch. These are intriguing cases, and I aim to devote another study to some of them. Suffice it to say, for present purposes, that the idea of ἔγχος as referring to 'ball' is by no means an obvious further extension. Searches for closer parallels in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* have yielded no results.

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altered the ball scene drastically so as to have Odysseus wake up with (and from?) her ball at his feet. How do we imagine could such a scene have continued? After waking up, Odysseus gallantly supplicates the princess: θεός νύ τίς, ἢ βροτός ἐσσι; 'Oh, I believe this is yours …'. Was the *Nausicaa* a satyr play?

If the fragment's ball is not that of Nausicaa, whose could it be? The *Manteis* (or *Polyidus*) might have included a reference to a ball, provided that Sophocles agreed with Hyginus' version of the boy Glaucus' death: while playing with a ball, he fell into a jar of honey (Hyg. *Fab.* 136). But this ball too can hardly have rolled to anyone's feet. Glaucus was alone.

Perhaps our understanding of the curious fragment may benefit from focussing on the text before considering the value of the explanation offered by the *Etymologicum Magnum*. In the *Iliad*, as Janko noted in his commentary, 'fallen objects rolling noisily on the battlefield are a topos'.[5] In three instances, the description is very similar to the fragment's phraseology:

(1) 13.578–9 (of Deipyrus' helmet struck from his head):

… καί τις Ἀχαιῶν
μαρναμένων **μετὰ ποσσὶ κυλινδομένην** ἐκόμισσε.

… and one of the Achaeans
picked it up **as it rolled among the feet** of the fighters.

(2) 14.411 (of stones used to prop up the Greek ships):

πὰρ ποσὶ μαρναμένων **ἐκυλίνδετο**.

they rolled at the feet of the fighters.

(3) 16.794 (of Patroclus' helmet struck from his head):

ἡ δὲ **κυλινδομένη** καναχὴν ἔχε **ποσσὶν ὑφ'** ἵππων

and with a clang **it rolled under the feet** of the horses

If the *Iliad* influenced Sophocles' choice of words, perhaps the epic also supplied the object referred to: not a σφαῖρα but something that is treated σφαιρηδόν. I mean the head of the Trojan ally Imbrius, which in a particularly gruesome instance of the Iliadic topos is cut from his lifeless body by the Locrian Ajax, who sends it whirling among the fighting crowd *like a ball*. The severed head lands at Hector's feet (13.202–5):

κεφαλὴν δ' ἀπαλῆς ἀπὸ δειρῆς
κόψεν Ὀϊλιάδης κεχολωμένος Ἀμφιμάχοιο,
ἧκε δέ μιν σφαιρηδὸν ἑλιξάμενος δι' ὁμίλου·
Ἕκτορι δὲ προπάροιθε ποδῶν πέσεν ἐν κονίῃσι.

and the head from the tender neck
the son of Oileus cut away, in anger for Amphimachus,
and he sent it whirling like a ball among the crowd;
and in front of Hector's feet it fell in the dust.

[5] R. Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Vol. 4: *Books 13–16* (Cambridge, 1994), 112 (on 13.526–30), further referencing 11.147, 13.579, 14.411, 16.117–18, 16.794.

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The *Etymologicum Magnum*'s claim—ὁ δὲ Σοφοκλῆς τὴν σφαῖραν ἔγχος κέκληκεν—seems to be an incongruent abridgement of the actual point of the fragment. The playwright is using ἔγχος as a metaphor not for an actual ball but for an object that resembles a ball: Imbrius' head. But why? Interestingly enough, a specific Iliadic thrusting spear, the enormous ship-pike used by Telamonian Ajax during the *Battle for the Ships*, closely matches Imbrius' fate in yet another example of the aforementioned topos. This weapon is called a ξυστὸν ναύμαχον (15.677) when Ajax first picks it up, thrice an ἔγχος (15.730, 15.742, 15.745) when he is fighting with it, and a δόρυ μείλινον (16.114) when Hector finally shears off its head.[6] See *Il.* 16.114–18:

> Ἕκτωρ Αἴαντος δόρυ μείλινον ἄγχι παραστὰς
> πλῆξ' ἄορι μεγάλῳ αἰχμῆς παρὰ κουλὸν ὄπισθεν,
> ἀντικρὺ δ' ἀπάραξε· τὸ μὲν Τελαμώνιος Αἴας
> πῆλ' αὖτως ἐν χειρὶ κόλον δόρυ, τῆλε δ' ἀπ' αὐτοῦ
> αἰχμὴ χαλκείη χαμάδις βόμβησε πεσοῦσα.
>
> Hector drew close to Ajax and struck his ashen spear
> with his great sword behind the socket of the spearhead,
> and sheared it clean away, so that Telamonian Ajax
> brandished in his hand a docked spear, and far from him
> the bronze spearhead fell ringing to the ground.

This incident, willed by Zeus himself, causes the retreat of Telamonian Ajax as the last defender of the Greek ships and paves the way for the Trojans to set them on fire—a major turning point in the *Iliad*. If indeed this 'decapitation' is being used for comparison, Sophocles is using ἔγχος as a *totum pro parte*, since Imbrius' head properly compares to the spear's αἰχμή. The *tertium comparationis* consists of the quality, implicit in the case of (the head of) Ajax's ἔγχος, of rolling over the ground σφαιρηδόν. The feet mentioned in the fragment must be those of Hector, not of Odysseus.

From what play could the fragment be? Since the warrior Imbrius himself lacks mythopoetic substance, one assumes that the mutilation of his corpse was brought up to underline its very cruelty, as an illustration, then, of the atrocities of which the Locrian Ajax was capable. The likeliest candidate is therefore the *Aias Lokros*, which revolved around the hero's sacrilegious violence against Cassandra in the temple of Athena during the sack of Troy.[7] In their folly, the Greeks failed to punish Ajax and, while sailing home, divine retribution followed in the form of a tremendous storm that claimed Ajax's life and many of the Greek ships. In the play, the offended goddess herself appeared to raise the question of Ajax's nasty character: τίν[ος ποτ' ἀνδρὸ]ς εἰκάσω τάδ' ἔργ[ματα; (fr. 10c, 7)—apparently referring to the seizing of Cassandra and to the pulling down of the statue of the goddess.[8] At some point, Odysseus will doubtlessly have entered the stage to argue for Ajax's punishment (cf. Paus. 10.31.2), and recalling the Imbrius incident could have served the purpose of casting his target in an unfavourable light. However, this view would imply that the Ithacan king showed

[6] On the weapon, see R.M. Frazer, 'Ajax's weapon in *Iliad* 15.674–16.123', *CPh* 78 (1983), 127–30.

[7] For discussion of the play, see A.C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1917), 8–15; M.W. Haslam, '*P.Oxy.* 3151', *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 44 (1976), 1–23; D.F. Sutton, *The Lost Sophocles* (Lanham, MD, 1984), 7–9; Lloyd-Jones (n. 1), 12–17; D.G. Fitzpatrick, 'Sophocles' *Aias Lokros*', in A.H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Shards from Kolonos: Studies in Sophoclean Fragments* (Bari, 2003), 243–59.

[8] On the line's reconstruction, see M.W. Haslam, 'Sophocles, Αἴας Λοκρός: *P.Oxy.* XLIV 3151', *ZPE* 22 (1976), 34; H. Lloyd-Jones, '*P.Oxy.* 3151, fr. 2 (Sophocles, Aiax Locrus)', *ZPE* 22 (1976), 40.

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some care for the fate of his Trojan enemies, which seems unlikely. Furthermore, it is unclear what Odysseus could have gained by using a rather abstruse metaphor.

These objections disappear when we assign the words instead to Cassandra, who probably had a speaking part too.[9] Imbrius was married to her half-sister, Hector was her brother, and her language is generally enigmatic. Sophocles could have enabled the prophetess to evoke the battlefield-incident in a vision. The present tense (κυλίνδεται) seems fitting in this respect. Perhaps she might have 'seen' both the past crime of Ajax and the divine retribution that was to follow his recent crime. This would not be dissimilar to Cassandra's role in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where she vividly recalls the past horrors of the House of Atreus and foresees those yet to come. If so, the *Aias Lokros* may have ended with the Greeks failing both to grasp the meaning of Cassandra's riddling words to the extent that they concern their future (in line with the rule that her prophecies are never believed), and to do what was necessary to avert the consequences of Athena's wrath.[10]

This reconstruction perhaps also permits some brief speculation as to the desired effect of comparing Imbrius' decapitation in *Iliad* 13 to that of Telamonian Ajax's ἔγχος in *Iliad* 16. Sophocles might have sought to create an associative link between the first iniquity of the Locrian Ajax and the near destruction of the Greek ships at Troy to foreshadow the causal relationship that existed between his second iniquity and the destruction of the Greek ships at sea. But in absence of any contextual details this remains a mere guess.

Radboud University Nijmegen BOB CORTHALS
bobcorthals@gmail.com
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[9] This likelihood stems not just from the fact that Cassandra was the victim of Ajax's crime. She is also the most plausible addressee of fr. 15, which references a character's prophetic powers: τί σοι ὁ Ἀπόλλων κεκιθάρικεν; Cf. Welcker (n. 1), 165; Sutton (n. 7), 8; Fitzpatrick (n. 7), 10. But one cannot rule out Calchas either. The ancient ascription of this fragment to Aeschylus' *Aias Lokros* is generally taken as a mistake for Sophocles' play with the same title, as Aeschylus did not write one. Cf. Pearson (n. 7), 13.

[10] This interpretation of the play's finale corresponds to the suggestions of Fitzpatrick (n. 7), 255–6. Differently, Pearson (n. 7), 10 suggested that a messenger related Ajax's death, but we lack both an obvious location and obvious addressees for such a speech. So correctly Lloyd-Jones (n. 1), 14–15, who himself favours a *deus ex machina* appearance from Athena. This view too is improbable: the goddess' searching comments in fr. 10c fit the heart of the play better, and it is not apparent why the Greeks would have ignored a future warning coming straight from Athena (or from Calchas, for that matter). Neither Pearson nor Lloyd-Jones entertained the option of a conclusion involving Cassandra. A. Kiso, *The Lost Sophocles* (New York, 1984), 11 notes the plausibility of a prophecy of Ajax's death, but does not consider the question of who delivered the prophecy.

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