

Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 750-1

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I should like to offer to Ra'anana Meridor, who has done so much to increase the number of people in Israel who know Greek and has effectively contributed to the interpretation of Greek tragedy, a conjecture in Aeschylus which occurred to me many years ago. I have hesitated to publish it, because it rests upon a somewhat complex argument, but I very much hope it may be acceptable to the scholar whom we wish to honour.

Just before the Areopagus is to vote to determine the fate of Orestes, Apollo charges the jurors to count the votes carefully and justly. Then he adds these words, according to the manuscripts (750-1):

γνώμης δ' ἀπούσης πῆμα γίγνεται μέγα
βαλοῦσα δ' οἶκον ψῆφος ὠρθωσεν μία.

“βαλοῦσα”, writes A.H. Sommerstein in his valuable commentary in 1989, “gives no satisfactory sense if taken as transitive, and an intransitive sense ‘being cast’ cannot be adequately paralleled (see Fraenkel on *Ag.* 1172) and would contribute virtually nothing to the meaning of the sentence”. Sommerstein goes on to mention and reject various conjectures; his own tentative suggestion καμόντα seems hardly much better, nor does any of the emendations listed by Wecklein on pp. 283 and 391 of the second volume of his edition of 1885 and Dawe on p. 171 of his *Repertory of Conjectures on Aeschylus* of 1965.

What would the context lead us to expect Apollo to say at this point? Having said that in the absence of γνώμη, solid judgment, great trouble results, one might well expect him to say “but when sound judgment is present, a single vote can reestablish a family”.

This sense can be obtained if we postulate one of the commonest corruptions in Greek texts, what Ellendt-Genthe on p. 117 of the second edition of the *Lexicon Sophocleum* (1872, reprinted 1958) call the “perpetua horum verborum confusio” and emend βαλοῦσα to λαβοῦσα. Then the sense will be, “but if it has acquired (i.e., ‘has’) good judgment, a single vote can reestablish a family”.

λαμβάνειν in the sense of “acquire” can certainly be used of people’s acquisition of mental qualities which they have not previously possessed; thus at *S. Phil.* 1078 Neoptolemus expresses the hope that he and his men may find that Philoctetes has acquired a better understanding (thus, in substance, Webster, interpreting the ethic dative more correctly than Jebb with his rendering “he may come to a better mind concerning us”, or R. G. Ussher with “a point of view that better suits our interest” (τάχ’ ἄν φρόνησιν ... λάβοι λώϊω τιν’ ἡμῖν); and at *Aj.* 345 the sailors of Ajax express the hope that at the sight of them their master may acquire αἰδώς (τάχ’ ἄν τιν’ αἰδῶ κάπ’ ἐμοὶ βλέψας λάβοι). A person, then, may be said to acquire (λαμβάνειν) a mental quality; but can a ψῆφος?

The word which originally meant “pebble” and so acquired the meaning “vote” also acquired the meaning “decision”; thus at *S. Ant.* 60 Ismene says ψῆφον τυράννων when referring to the arbitrary decision of Creon, and in 1.632 of the same play Creon himself describes the “fixed doom” (Jebb’s rendering of τελείαν ψῆφον) of Antigone. Although this manner of expression is easier to understand if it is used of a person than if it is used of a vote or a decision, it seems to me not unnatural for λαβοῦσα here to mean “if it has acquired, with the addition of, if it has γνώμη, wise judgment”. If a ψῆφος can be called φοινία, “bloody”, by Electra at *E. Or.* 975 and φλεγυρά a word glossed by Hesychius as ὑβριστική, in Cratinus fr. 62 K.-A., if it can be called εὐφρων by the Danaids (*A. Suppl.* 640) and can be said to “catch” (μάρψει) its victim by the Eumenides (597), then surely it can be said to acquire, to possess, γνώμη.

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