

# Paris' μαχλοσύνη, a Mistranslated Aeschylean Fragment, and the Meanings of μάχλος (Hom. *Il.* 24.30; Aesch. fr. 325 Radt)

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**Abstract** An Aeschylean fragment (325 Radt) in which a grapevine is called μάχλος is twice quoted by Eustathius of Thessalonica, who explains μάχλος as meaning ῥεομένη 'flowing', in connection with lewdness (καταφέρεια) and specifically μαχλοσύνη 'feminine sexual arousal', hapax in Homer (*Il.* 24.30) but well attested afterwards. In modern times Aeschylean μάχλος has systematically been mistranslated, and the botanical background of ῥεομένη completely ignored. As a matter of fact, both the probable Indo-European etymology of μάχλος and Eustathius' explanation point to an original meaning 'wet', which soon became specialised as a sexual term for vaginal wetness linked to sexual arousal (cf. German *läufig*). This means that μαχλοσύνη was more specific and disturbing than our 'lasciviousness' and helps explain the ancient attempts at getting rid of it at *Iliad* 24.30.

**Keywords** Aeschylus. Ancient scholarship. μάχλος. Etymology. μαχλοσύνη. Sexual meaning. Homer. *Iliad*.

I am very glad to offer Willy Cingano, the author of many significant contributions to the understanding of archaic Greek poetry and culture, a discussion of a thorny semantic problem posed by both a Homeric noun and an Aeschylean adjective.



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1). As I tried to show in a recent article, the 'improper' terms of 29-30 are highly significant, not just μαχλοσύνη, but also νείκεσσε and μέσσαυλον (Cassio 2019, 33-4).

At line 30 ἦ (= Ἀφροδίτη) οἶ (= Πάριδι) πόρε μαχλοσύνην ἀλεγεινήν posed remarkable problems to Aristarchus, who athetised the whole line: Eust. ad Hom. *Il.* 24.30 (= 4. 864.3-6 van der Valk) Ἀρίσταρχος δὲ διὰ τὴν τῆς μαχλοσύνης λέξιν ἀθετεῖ τὸν στίχον. νεωτέρων γὰρ ἡ λέξις καὶ Ἡσιόδειος, ἐκείνου πρώτου χρησαμένου αὐτῆ ἐπὶ τῶν Προίτου θυγατέρων. καὶ ἔτι μαχλοσύνη, φησί, κοινῶς ἐστὶν ἢ ἐν γυναιξὶ μανία, ἐπὶ ἀνδρῶν δὲ οὐ τίθεται.

In short, Aristarchus said that the whole line 30 was not Homeric since οἱ νεώτεροι and Hesiod (in fact the pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*)<sup>3</sup> were the first to use μαχλοσύνη which, in its turn, was a word used for *female* lust, and as a consequence inapplicable to men (Paris/Alexandros in this case). There is hardly any need to remind that μαχλοσύνη is based on μάχλος, which LSJ translate as "lewd, lustful, of women"; similar translations are found in other dictionaries, which perfectly accords with Aristarchus' explanation of μαχλοσύνη as ἢ ἐν γυναιξὶ μανία.

However, Aristarchus used some correct information in the wrong way.<sup>4</sup> It is true that μαχλοσύνη refers primarily to female lust,<sup>5</sup> is found in the 'Hesiodic' passage he mentions (in fact the *Catalogue of Women*, [Hes.] fr. 132 M.-W. = 47 Hirschberger εἶνεκα μαχλοσύνης στρυγερῆς τέρεν ὤλεσεν ἄνθος) and in the authentic Hesiod, *Op.* 586 μαχλόταται δὲ γυναῖκες. But μαχλοσύνη can be regarded as 'recent' and 'Hesiodic' only if we delete the Homeric line, so Aristarchus' reasoning is circular. Besides, in this same book at line 316 a special type of eagle is called μόρφνος,<sup>6</sup> a term completely isolated in Homer and then found for the first time in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles* (134) – a situation exactly parallel to that of line 30, so one would expect Aristarchus to have resented μόρφνος as he had resented μαχλοσύνη, but as far as we know line 316 was not deleted by Aristarchus or anybody else.

As to μαχλοσύνη used for female lust, Aristarchus seems to have forgotten – or ignored – that e.g. in Aesch. *Supp.* 635 ff. the god Ares is called μάχλος since he is an adulterer (the reference is to the story told in *Od.* 8) and consequently from the ancient Greek viewpoint,

<sup>3</sup> It is well known that Aristarchus went to any length to separate the language of Homer from that of the νεώτεροι (Hesiod being their earliest representative): Severyns 1928, 31-70.

<sup>4</sup> I have dealt in detail with this and other problems in Cassio 2019.

<sup>5</sup> On μαχλοσύνη in Homer and the reaction of ancient scholars to this word see especially Sonnino 2015, 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> Μόρφνον θηρητήρ', δν καὶ περκνὸν καλέουσι.

a 'woman'; obviously the same applies to Paris.<sup>7</sup> Note that μάχλος is a two-ending adjective, so that the same grammatical forms are applicable to both women and men (μάχλος γυνή, μάχλος άνήρ).<sup>8</sup>

In any case μαχλοσύνη of line 30 was unpalatable to Aristarchus, and not only to Aristarchus. It is no accident that Aristophanes of Byzantium and various κατά πόλεις editions did not read ή οι πόρε μαχλοσύνην άλεγεινήν but ή οι κεχαρισμένα δώρ' όνόμηνε "[Aphrodite] who presented him with pleasant gifts".<sup>9</sup> This change was probably meant to bring this verse into line with the 'official' story (Aphrodite offering Paris Helen as a bride), but ή οι κεχαρισμένα δώρ' όνόμηνε also had the advantage of removing μαχλοσύνη; as Richardson 1993, 279 suggests, the removal may have been due to prudishness, which may also have been the 'hidden reason' behind the Aristarchean deletion of line 30.<sup>10</sup>

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Interestingly enough, ancient prudishness may not have been devoid of a *raison d'être*. I strongly suspect that there was an important reason, and one unexplored so far, which prompted the ancients to do away with 'recent' μαχλοσύνη in Homer: its embarrassing peculiar sexual meaning, which made this term more disturbing than our "licentiousness" or similar terms. For this reason it is appropriate to deal with the problems posed by μάχλος and the Aeschylean fragment 325 Radt in which a grapevine is called μάχλος. This fragment, transmitted in two passages of Eustathius, has not seriously been re-examined for a long time. It appears in Radt's edition as "μάχλον (άμπελον)" with άμπελον in brackets for no clear reason;<sup>11</sup> in the apparatus its meaning is not discussed, and we are only informed about the lost plays of Aeschylus to which the fragment had tentatively been attributed (*una ex Lycurgiae fabulis* according to Hermann 183, 19, specifically the *Edonoi* according to Hartung 1955, 50 and Deichgräber 1939, 255).<sup>12</sup>

**7** To the ancient Greeks adulterers and womanisers were 'women': *Cho.* 302 ff. τὸ μὴ πολίτας... δυοῖν γυναικοῖν [Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus] ὧδ' ὑπηκόους πέλειν; see also Sonnino 2015, fn. 31. See e.g. also Eustath. 1.645.1 ff. van der Valk ad *Il.* 3.242 ὁμολογεῖ... ἡ Ἐλένη αἰσχρὸν πρᾶγμα ποιῆσαι... τὸ εἰς Τροίαν ἀκολουθεῖσαι τῷ μοιχῷ Πάριδι.

**8** Many other Greek words are based on μαχλ- (see e.g. Chantraine 1968, 673 s.v. "μάχλος"); μαχλάς is especially frequent, e.g. Hesych. μ 429 μαχλάδα· πόρνην.

**9** *Sch. A ad 30* ή οι πόρε μαχλοσύνην άλεγεινήν: παρ' Ἀριστοφάνει καί τισι τῶν πολιτικῶν "ή οι κεχαρισμένα δώρ' όνόμηνε".

**10** Severyns 1928, 146. On Aristarchus' moralistic stance see Sonnino 2015, 9 fn. 39.

**11** Obviously, as noticed by Radt himself, μάχλον in the accusative is taken wholesale from Eustathius' sentence, and we have no idea of the grammatical case in which this word occurred in Aeschylus' text.

**12** As a matter of fact in Deichgräber 1939, 255 fn. 4 the Aeschylean fragment is quoted without any translation or explanation.

We know the Aeschylean fragment thanks to two different quotations in Eustathius' commentaries on Homer:

(a) Eust. 827.28 ff. = 3.138, 26-139.4 van der Valk has a digression devoted to the alleged tendence of βλασφημία, often found in comedy, to distort 'honest' meanings *in peius*: hence in his opinion (or his source's) 'positive' ἀρρενωπός, meaning 'manly', was turned by comedy into ἀρρενώψ 'androgynous' (τὸν ἐπαινετῶς ἀρρενωπὸν ἀρρενώπα<sup>13</sup> ἔφη [scil. ἡ κωμῳδία] παρονομήσασα ψογερωῶς. He goes on to say: οὕτω δὲ καὶ Αἰσχύλου (fr. 325 Radt) μάχλον, φασίν, ἄμπελον εἰπόντος τὴν ῥεομένην, ἡ κωμῳδία μάχλον εἶπε τὸν ὑπὸ καταφερείας δίυγρον "in the same vein, Aeschylus having called μάχλος a grapevine that secretes liquid, comedy called μάχλος the person wet with lust". His interpretation of the data seems to be that Aeschylus had used for a grapevine the adjective μάχλος in the technical and 'innocent' meaning 'exuding liquid', which was then 'degraded' by comedy to become a sexual term.

Eustathius returns to the Aeschylean fragment and the sexual meaning of μάχλος in his commentary on *Od.* 8; the main components are the same, yet the scene has changed significantly: the person "wet with lust" has a name, namely Paris, and the relationship between his μαχλοσύνη and the Aeschylean fragment is reversed:

(b) Eust. 1597.32-33 μάχλος δὲ, ἀφ' οὗ καὶ ἡ κατὰ τὸν Πάριον μαχλοσύνη, ὁ δίυγρος ὑπὸ καταφερείας. ὅθεν, φασί, καὶ Αἰσχύλος τὴν ῥεομένην ἄμπελον μάχλον ἔφη: "μάχλος, whence Paris' μαχλοσύνη, is the one wet with lust; therefore they say that Aeschylus, too, called μάχλος the grapevine that secretes liquid". The basic material is virtually the same, yet in the commentary on *Od.* 8 the δίυγρος person is no longer anonymous, and the use of μάχλος in Aeschylus does not look as 'innocent' as in the commentary on *Iliad* 11 of the same Eustathius.

The mention of a "flowing grapevine" coupled with this embarrassing 'double interpretation' has caused disarray among many scholars, leading to improbable translations and interpretations. Nauck 1848, 165-7, who believed that (a) was based on Aristophanes' of Bizantium treatise *Περὶ βλασφημιῶν*,<sup>14</sup> translated the Aeschylean μάχλος ἄμπελος as *vitis...vegeta et quasi lasciviens (ut nos dixerimus der üppige Weinstock)*.<sup>15</sup> Nauck clearly altered the explanation involving wetness (ῥεομένην, δίυγρος) provided by Eustathius' sources, and managed to influence various entries in old and new lexica: μάχλος ἄμπελος appears s.v. "μάχλος" as "der üppig rankende"

**13** Cratin. fr. 417 K.-A. ἀρρενώπας prompted Nauck 1948, 166 to correct ἀρρενώπας here, but the transmitted ἀρρενώπα is likely to be right; an \*ἀρρενώψ is perfectly possible in view of ἐλίκωψ, παραβλώψ, see Schwyzer 1939, 425-6.

**14** Not included in Slater 1986.

**15** Nauck 1848, 167.

(Pape 1914, 2: 103). “*della vite, lussureggiante*” (Rocci 1939, 1187), “wanton, luxuriant ἄμπελος” (LSJ<sup>9</sup>, 1085), “luxuriant, of a grapevine” (Montanari 2015, 1288). The same goes for the commentaries on Aeschylus’ *Suppliant Women*, 636 κτίσαι μάχλον Ἄρη, where our fragment is duly quoted: Friis Johansen, Whittle 1980, 3: 14 translate “an over-luxuriant ἄμπελος” and Sommerstein 2019, 268 “a vine that is growing out of control”. But why on earth a vine growing out of control should be described as ῥεομένη, “flowing”?

The problem is that very few, if any, bothered to gather some information on what happens to real grapevines. As a matter of fact, the ancients knew well that, once grapevines are pruned or cut for whatever reason, they secrete sap in plenty. Athen. *Deipnosoph.* 11.465a “they enthused over water mixed with wine”: Θεόφραστος δ’ ἐν τῷ περὶ Μέθης (fr. 121 Wimmer) φησὶν ὅτι τοῦ Διονύσου τροφοὶ αἱ Νύμφαι κατ’ ἀλήθειαν. αἱ γὰρ ἄμπελοι πλεῖστον ὑγρὸν χέουσι τεμνόμεναι καὶ κατὰ φύσιν δακρύουσι (Theophrastus in his treatise *On Drunkenness* says that the Nymphs are in truth nurses of Dionysus. In fact the grapevines, once they are pruned, secrete a good deal of moisture and weep, as is natural to them to do).<sup>16</sup> In many passages of the botanical works of Theophrastus grapevines are ὑγραὶ and “weep”, e.g. *de causis plant.* 1.6.8 τὴν μὲν ἄμπελον προαποτέμνουσιν ἡμέραις τρισὶ πρότερον, ὅπως προαπορρυῆ τὸ δάκρυον (they cut the grapevine three days in advance, to make sure that the ‘tears’ have already flown down): note the verb (προαπο)ρρέω, a perfect match for Eustathius’ ἄμπελον τὴν ῥεομένην.

In spite of this, as we have seen, modern interpreters seem to have gone to any length in order to avoid the most obvious and natural translation of τὴν ῥεομένην ἄμπελον, “the grapevine that pours out sap” which perfectly matches the definition of Paris as “wet” (δίυγρος). Correct translations of τὴν ῥεομένην ἄμπελον are remarkably rare. Gottfried Hermann (1834, 19) provided both an accurate translation of the fragment and a rightly cautious general evaluation of its meaning in a lost context: *irriguam vitem si Aeschylus lascivam dixit, debuit id ex verbis quae adiecerat cognosci*. Other accurate translations are rare and apparently forgotten: Boisacq 1916, 616 and Bailly 1935, 1231 render μάχλον ἄμπελον with “qui épanche sa sève”. Friis Johansen, Whittle 1980, 3: 13 ff. were at a loss to explain δίυγρος, which they tentatively (and wrongly) translated as “fickle” with a question mark; they however hit the nail on the head when they realised that δίυγρος “attributes an unattested meaning to μάχλος”; unattested but probably primary, as we shall see.

<sup>16</sup> The mention of the Nymphs refers to the water used to dilute neat wine; see Timoth. fr. 780.5 Page ἀνέμισγε δ’ αἶμα Βακχίου νεορρύτοισι δακρύοις Νυμφᾶν, Euenus 2.3 West χάρει κινράμενος δὲ τρισὶν Νύμφαισι τέταρτος.

The real reason for the frequent modern mistranslations of the Aeschylus fragment is twofold. On the one hand Theophrastus' ἄμπελοι ὑγρὸν χέουσαι were blithely ignored – or, more probably, never taken into consideration; on the other hand in both Eustathius' passages the wetness of a plant is immediately linked to sexual wetness, a notion especially embarrassing for nineteenth century scholars; Nauck's "üppiger Weinstock" set the tone for almost all the following translations of μάχλος ἄμπελος. As a matter of fact, "luxuriant grapevine" *vel similia* betray a strange conglomerate of ignorance, awareness and prudishness: ignorance of what happens to real grapevines once they are pruned, awareness of the 'disturbing' sexual implications of "wetness" abundantly made clear by Eustathius' δίνυγρος ὑπὸ καταφείας, and willingness to find a 'cover up' for an embarrassing sexual concept.

As Gottfried Hermann wisely said a long time ago,<sup>17</sup> the reason why Aeschylus used μάχλος for an *irriguam vitem*, a flowing grapevine, *debut... ex verbis quae adiecerat cognosci*, and unfortunately the *verba* in question are lost. That in Aeschylus' time μάχλος and ὑγρός were interchangeable, μάχλος being used for any type of wetness, seems very unlikely to me, although this is implied in Eustathius' (or more probably his source's) interpretation (*a*); the sexual meaning of the adjective was already deep-rooted in the language, yet it was clearly linked to the notion of a running liquid. The least improbable solution of the riddle is that μάχλος started its career in the mists of time with a general meaning "wet", but soon specialised as a sexual term for vaginal wetness linked to sexual arousal. Interestingly enough, M. Malzahn and M. Peters (2010, 267) suggested that the original meaning of the Greek μαχε/o- stem was "run", which soon developed an aggressive meaning and ended up as "fight" (μάχομαι); in their opinion the related adjective μάχλος originally meant 'running', soon developing a sexual meaning, and one "parallel to ModHD [modernes Hochdeutsch] *läufig* 'in heat' (also said of females only).

What conclusions can be drawn from this complex set of data and interpretations? A good deal will become clear if we assume that μάχλος started its career in the meaning "wet", "flowing", and soon specialised as a sexual term linked to female arousal; yet the primary meaning did not get lost. As a consequence, μαχλοσύνη must have sounded far more specific than such terms as English *lasciviousness*, French *luxure* or Italian *lussuria*. A long time ago Jacob Wackernagel devoted some illuminating pages (1916, 224 ff.) to epic poetry's refusal of 'low' sexual language: *Il.* 24.30 is an exception – in all likelihood a deliberate one – which ancient scholars strongly resented. Obviously, the μαχλοσύνη of male adulterers, Ares and Paris, was a

<sup>17</sup> Hermann 1834, 19, already quoted.

secondary development due to the abovementioned reasons (adulterers perceived as 'women'), but this, I believe, only enhanced the piquancy of the meaning.

The Aeschylean combination of the grapevine's natural secretion of sap and the wetness typical of female sexuality had its *raison d'être* in the widespread notion that wine, for which grapevines bear the 'ultimate responsibility', is likely to increase sexual arousal: οίνου δὲ μηκέτ' ὄντος οὐκ ἔστιν Κύπρις (Eur. *Bacch.* 773). As Gottfried Hermann said long ago (see above), the reason why Aeschylus qualified as μάχλος an *irrigua vitis* would become clear to us only if we could know its lost context, but his idea that the fragment must have belonged to one of the plays of the lost *Lycurgia* should be taken into serious consideration.

As a matter of fact, towards the end of his discussion of the *Edonoi*, Hermann 1834, 18 brought attention to an Aeschylean fragment (448 Radt)<sup>18</sup> in which the Bacchantes are called χαλιμάδες, a term which combines the use of unmixed wine (χάλις) with sexual debauchery.<sup>19</sup> As noted by Eric Dodds in his commentary on Euripides' *Bacchae* (1960, xxxii), this "suggests that the allegations of immorality put by Euripides into Pentheus' mouth are traditional charges", and, although Hermann did not mention any specific character in the play, it is highly probable that the charges against the Bacchantes were levelled by Lycurgus, the king of the Edonoi.<sup>20</sup> Now, in a context in which Lycurgus charged the Bacchantes with intoxication and immoral behaviour, ἄμπελος alone could easily be vilified as the ultimate source of drunkenness and debauchery; even more so a μάχλος ἄμπελος (note the grammatically feminine noun!), with her more specific and disturbing quality linked to feminine sexual arousal. It is likely that the Aeschylean Lycurgus already exhibited some of the traits of the Euripidean Pentheus, "the dark puritan whose passion is compounded of horror and unconscious desire, and it is this which leads him to his ruin" (Dodds 1960, 97-8 *ad Bacch.* 222-223).

**18** Quoted by a scholion on Ap. Rhod. 1.473 Αἰσχύλος δὲ καὶ τὰς Βάκχας 'χαλιμάδας' φησὶ λέγεσθαι.

**19** LSJ<sup>9</sup> 1940 s.v. "χαλιμ-άς, ἄδος, ἦ": "a shameless woman, Hsch."; = πόρνη, Suid. (χαλιμα codd.); of the βάκχαι (χαλωμένες εἰς συνουσίαν), EM 805.9; also expld. as ἡ ὑπὸ μέθης χαλωμένη, Eust. 1471.3; χαλιμίας and χαλίδας (of the βάκχαι) are vv.ll. in A. Fr. 448 (ap. Sch. A. R 1. 473)".

**20** Lycurgus or Pentheus according to Dodds 1960, xxxii.



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