

An unnoticed Greek tragic fragment

In the doxographico-medical work *de natura hominis* of Meletius Monachus (9th century A.D.), the etymology of οἶλον, “gum,” is treated¹⁾; this leads to a discussion of various roots in οὐλ-, among them οὐλος:

καὶ οὐλος ὁ ὀλέθριος, παρὰ τὸ ἄλλω – ὀλοῖτο κείνος ἐξ ἀνδρῶν κτλ.²⁾
The ultimate source for Meletius’ etymological passages is the treatise *περὶ ἐτυμολογιῶν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* by the great Greek physician Soranus, *methodicorum princeps*, who practised under Trajan and Hadrian. This work was remarkable for its wide learning; even quotations from the poets abounded in it.³⁾ The words cited above (ὀλοῖτο – ἀνδρῶν) are clearly such a quotation;⁴⁾ the use of ἄλλωμι for ἀπόλλωμι and κείνος for ἐκείνος both belong to poetic vocabulary. The meter is the iambic trimeter (X – ὀλοῖτο κείνος ἐξ ἀνδρῶν U –), and this suggests the drama. More specifically, we should think of *tragedy*, since ἄλλωμι is a very common tragic word. It occurs about 50 and 70 times respectively in Aeschylus and Sophocles, and over 200 times in Euripides.⁵⁾ By contrast, it appears only twice in Aristophanes (as against almost 200 instances of ἀπόλλωμι) and never in Menander. The index to Meineke’s collection of comic fragments cites four instances; of these, one may be corrupt and another is a quotation from Euripides. Furthermore, this use of the aorist middle of ἄλλωμι in an imprecation is almost a *vox technica* of the tragic vocabulary (nine instances in Aeschylus, eleven in Sophocles, and about thirty in Euripides).⁶⁾

1) PG 64. 1193 D ff; also in J. Cramer, *Anecdota Oxon.* III. 82. 29ff.

2) The editors print the impossible form ὀλλοῖτο, a corruption that seems due to the immediately preceding ἄλλω; the aorist is the tense used in such imprecations.

3) Cf. *PW* s. v. *Soranus*, coll. 1117–1118.

4) To my knowledge, the only scholar who discusses these words is Fr. Ritschl (*Opuscula Philologica* I. 699), who merely observes “*Laceri senarii reliquiae videri possunt: ὀλοῖτο κείνος – U ἐξ ἀνδρῶν U –.*” It is not clear to me why he divided the words so.

5) Exact figures cannot be given because of some doubtful readings; they are unnecessary for the argument.

6) Professor Bruno Snell has called my attention to the fact that the adjective οὐλόμενος is applied to a person or thing to or of whom it may be said ὀλοιο or ὀλοῖτο (cf. J. Classen, *Beobachtungen über den Homerischen Sprachgebrauch*, p. 60ff) and that the οὐ- of this adjective agrees well the οὐ- of οὐλος in Meletius.

ὄλοιτο κείνος ἐξ ἀνδρῶν should, therefore, be accepted as a fragment from some tragedy; the poet must remain anonymous. For the expression, compare *Il.* 18. 107 ὡς ἔρις ἔκ τε θεῶν ἔκ τ' ἀνθρώπων ἀπόλοιτο; *LXX Ex.* 30. 38 ὃς ἂν ποιήσῃ ὡσαύτως... ἀπολεῖται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ; *Jb.* 18. 17 τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτοῦ ἀπόλοιτο ἐκ γῆς; *Prov.* 15.6 οἱ δὲ ἀσεβεῖς ὀλόρριζοι ἐκ γῆς ὀλοῦνται; *Greg. Naz.* PG 38. 104 ὄλοιτ' ὄλοιτο χρυσὸς ἐκ μέσου βροτῶν.?)

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