

Aigai in Alkaios

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THE NEW Cologne fragment of Alkaios¹ begins in the middle of a sentence. The sense at the beginning seems to be “. . . <putting to shame (?)> those who <had acted (?)> unjustly. We must tie a noose (?) about his neck and stone him . . . it would have been far better for the Achaeans if they had killed <the man who had offended against the gods>; then as they sailed past Aigai they would have found the sea more gentle . . .” The supplements are made likely by a papyrus commentary² on the poem, four verses of which particularly concern us here:

[] 'Αχάϊοισ' ἤς πόλυ βέλτερον
5 [] . . ηγτα κατέκτανον
[] π]αρπλέοντες Αἴγαις
[]ς ἔτυχον θαλάσσης

The entire fragment includes parts of some forty-nine lines in all. In his commentary on them Professor Hugh Lloyd-Jones³ writes of Aigai in line 6 as follows:⁴ “Merkelbach must be right in thinking that a place of that name in Euboea is in question,” and again, “The storm struck the fleet as it was passing Aegae (v.6). Merkelbach must be right in taking this to be the place in Euboea variously called Aige, Aigai and Aigaia and identified by Stephanus of Byzantium with Carystus.⁵ In the Towneleian scholia to the *Iliad* (13.21), this is said to be the Aegae to which Poseidon repairs from Samothrace to harness his chariot before travelling to Troy; the same view is taken by Strabo 386 (cf. 405). The unidentified author of a work called *Nesias*, ‘the book of islands’, cited in the scholia to Apollonius 1.1165 (p.105 Wendel) takes this to be the place from which the name of the Aegaeen sea

¹ PColon. inv. no.2021, published by R. Merkelbach in *Zeitschr. für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 1 (1967) 81ff.

² Alkaios fr.298 L.-P. See also D. L. Page, *Lyrica Graeca Selecta* (Oxford 1968) p.75.

³ “The Cologne Fragment of Alcaeus,” *GRBS* 9 (1968) 125–39.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, *op.cit.* 130 and 138.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones here refers to *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos* (Göttingen 1955–) 241f s.v. *Αἴγαι*.

derives.” “Der Lokrer Aias ist auf der Heimfahrt bei Euboea gescheitert,” says Merkelbach.⁶

Even if Alkaios is referring to Euboia here, Strabo ought not to have been cited in support of the theory that the poet is thinking of the Achaean fleet sailing past or near Karystos, which lies in the southern part of the island—Lloyd-Jones thinks that Alkaios had the rocks of Kaphereus in mind when he wrote *Αἴγαιος*. Strabo (405) in discussing the western coast of Euboia to the north of Chalkis declares: “They say that along this coast lies the Aigai in Euboia, in which is the sanctuary of Poseidon Aigaïos; we have made mention of it earlier also. The distance from Anthedon to Aigai is one hundred and twenty stades, and from the other places (on the mainland) much less; the sanctuary lies on a high hill, and there was once a town too. Nearby is Orobiai.” The earlier mention, recalled by Strabo here, is in 386, where Poseidon’s journey to an Aigai in the *Iliad* (13.21) is noted; Strabo here distinguishes the Euboian Aigai from an Achaian Aigai, and says that it is better to identify the Aigai to which the god goes with the Euboian; as 405 makes clear, this Aigai faced across the strait to Opountian Lokris. It can, therefore, have nothing to do with Karystos and its neighbourhood.⁷ In 386 Strabo also suggests that the Aegaeon sea took its name from the Euboian place called Aigai.

The author of the *Nesias* as quoted in the scholia to Apollonius Rhodius 1.1165b stated: “Some say that the Aigaion Pelagos had its name from Aix near Kanai, others from the land of Karystos which was called Aigaie. The Aigai visited by Poseidon is over against Peloponnese in the neighbourhood of Krisa. And there are some who say that the Aegaeon is so called because throughout the entire sea the adjacent land is visible.” Stephanos of Byzantium, s.v. *Αἴγαι* (p.38–39 Meineke), notes several places of the name, including one in Euboia, “which Homer <mentions> in Book 13,” but Stephanos does not assert that Aigai in Euboia had anything to do with Karystos—in fact, as often, he may well be agreeing with Strabo here. In his article s.v. *Κάρυστος* (p.362–63 Meineke) Stephanos says: “It was also called Aigaia from Aigaion its ruler, who gave the Aigaion Pelagos its name.” These notices are not strong support for a theory which would

⁶ *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) p.86.

⁷ Some scholars would place it at Limni, some at Politika: see L. H. Sackett and others in *BSA* 61 (1966) 49 and 53; both places are far from Karystos. Cf. *Der Kleine Pauly* I (1964) 155 s.v. AIGAI 1.

identify the Aigai in Alkaios with Karystos. Stephanos says that Karystos was called Aigaia, the author of the *Nesias* that the Karystia was called Aigaie. Strabo's Aigai in Euboia was nowhere near Karystos, and even if the rocks of Kaphereus were thought by Alkaios to be in territory of Karystos (an assumption we need not make), why did the poet then not call them by their proper name, or even by the poetical name Aigaia? Karystos in fact faces southwards to the Kyklades, not northwards as does Kaphereus towards Troy.

Thus the confident assertion that Aigai here in Alkaios must refer to Kaphereus is perhaps (I respectfully suggest) too strongly made.⁸ Lloyd-Jones remarks that Proklos in his summary of the *Nostoi* of Agias tells that the storm struck the fleet off Kaphereus; true, but in the view a Lesbian lyric poetess took of the *Returns* (for which she may have been indebted to Lesches, the epic poet of Pyrrha in Lesbos), the storm struck long before the fleet drew near to Euboia. Sappho (in fr.17 L.-P.) calls upon Lady Hera, "to whom the Atreidai made prayer (?) when, having accomplished many labours, first around <Ilios, then on the sea> after they departed hither, they could not <fulfil their journey> until they summoned" her and Zeus and Dionysos. If the supplement 'Ατ[ρ]εΐδαι in line 3 of the fragment is correct, then Sappho's view of the *Nostoi* differs from that of the *Odyssey* (3.130ff), where of the Atreidai only Menelaos is said to have put in to Lesbos; she believed Agamemnon to have been present beside Menelaos in Lesbos,⁹ if the supplement is correct. In the *Odyssey* Agamemnon stays in the Troad with half the army to appease Athena by sacrifice; the other half under Menelaos, Nestor and Odysseus go to Tenedos, whence, after a quarrel, Odysseus leads a force back to Agamemnon. Nestor with Diomedes sails to Lesbos, and Menelaos follows him thither. In Lesbos they stayed praying to Zeus for a sign about their onward voyage. The god told them not to go inside Chios but to make straight over the Aegaeon to Euboia.

In Sappho, however, it is almost certain that a storm had struck

⁸ There is also to be borne in mind the island Aigai or Aige off Euboia (if the place ever in fact existed): Hesych. s.v. *Αἰγαί*, *Etym.Mag.* s.v. *Αἰγή*, and schol. ad Pind. *Nem.* 5.67a (3.95 Drachmann). See IG XII 9 p.168 and Wilamowitz, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* I (Berlin 1931) 336 n.3. *Etym.Mag.* (loc.cit.) declares that the island sank beneath the waves; there is in any case no sign that Alkaios had it in mind here. Statius, *Theb.* 7.370f, clearly distinguishes an Euboian Aigai both from Karystos and from Kaphereus: *non te, saxosa Caryste, non humiles Aegas altumque Capherea dixi.*

⁹ D. L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1955) 60.

the Atreidai and the fleet long before they came near to Euboia; indeed—a point not made in the *Odyssey*—that they were driven by a storm into Lesbos when they were still not far from the Troad. According to the very attractive supplements in Page's edition, Sappho wrote of the Atreidai,

ἐκτελέσαντες μ[άλα πόλλ' ἄεθλα,
 πρῶτα μὲν πὲρ Ἴλιον, ἔν τε πόντῳ
 τυίδ' ἀπορμάθε[ντες, ὄδον περαίνην
 οὐκ ἐδύνατο.

Since Alkaios may well have taken a view of the *Nostos* tradition similar to Sappho's, it is worth asking whether the storm to which he refers in lines 5 to 7 of the Cologne fragment was first sent by Athena against the fleet, not off Euboia, but somewhere between the Troad and Lesbos, where, according to Sappho, the Achaeans were storm-bound after their efforts on the main. Two points favour the hypothesis that Alkaios refers here to the northeastern Aegean near Lesbos. (1) The storm was due to Athena's anger at the rape of Cassandra by Lokrian Aias. Immediately after his mention of the terrible impiety, Alkaios in the Cologne fragment says (lines 24–27) that Athena went “and <her eyes burned (?)> terribly beneath her brows, and she darted over the wine-dark sea and suddenly stirred up the hidden blasts of the storm . . .” The passage is at least consistent with the view that Alkaios declared Athena to have stirred up trouble as soon as, or quite soon after, the fleet sailed from the Troad. (2) There was a prominent sailing mark near Lesbos called Aix, Aiga, or a similar name. We have already seen that the author of the *Nesias* refers to it. It is the point of the mountain range *Κάνη* or *Κάναι* opposite to the southeastern tip of Lesbos, and the most important sailing mark for anyone navigating southwards between Lesbos and the Aeolic coast. Strabo (615) states that this prominent feature was called Aix or Aiga, which was originally the name of the whole mountain of *Κάνη* or *Κάναι*. It is not wanton to conjecture that a plural name ‘Aigai’ corresponding to Kanai was also used of the cape, which, says Strabo, gave its name to the Aigaion Pelagos. Later the name Aiga or Aix or ‘Aigai’ was confined to the promontory, Kane and Kanai being reserved for the remainder. Strabo's text here (III p.62 Kramer) reads: ὕστερον δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀκρωτήριον Αἰγᾶ †κεκλήσθαι, ὡς Σαπφῶ, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν Κάνη καὶ Κάναι. The words ὡς Σαπφῶ could

be an intrusive marginal note or an interpolation¹⁰—but, even so, the reference to Sappho may be none the less true; the poetess may well have mentioned the promontory, but not necessarily in the context of the *Nostoi* (fr.dub. 170 L.-P.). She would have looked across to Aiga and the Black Mountain of Kane countless times. If *ὡς Σαπφώ* is not an interpolation—and it need not be one—then we should, I suggest, set out the text of Strabo as follows: ὕστερον δὲ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀκρωτήριον Αἰγὰ κέκληται <ἢ Αἶγαι>, ὡς Σαπφώ <φησι>, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν Κάνη καὶ Κάναι. Stephanos of Byzantium *s.v.* Αἰγά (p.38 Meineke) draws on this passage of Strabo. There is no difficulty over the variant plural Αἶγαι: Strabo (387) noted that north Peloponnesian Αἶγαί was also called Αἰγά. Aigai the inland Aeolic town must of course be distinguished from the Aigai at Kane. “The sheer mount of Auto-kane” in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* (35) is almost certainly the Aeolic Kane facing Lesbos.

To sum up: it is likely that according to Sappho and Alkaios, who drew on a local Lesbian tradition, the Achaean fleet was driven by Athena’s storm from the Troad, through the gulf of Adramytteion, past Aiga and Mount Kane, and took shelter in the two great natural harbours in the south of Lesbos. Neither poet need have rejected the tale of a storm off Euboia, but in the opinion of each of them the storm sent by Athena had, it seems, already begun when the fleet was still close to Lesbos. I do not claim that this interpretation *must* be correct; but it has at least as much likelihood as the assumption that when Alkaios wrote “sailing past Aigai” he paradoxically meant “being wrecked on Kaphereus,” which, in any case, is some distance from Aigaie-Karystos and has nothing to do with the Aigai on the west coast of Euboia discussed by Strabo in 386 and 405. The only Achaeans to sail past that Aigai would have been the Lokrians, who, we learn from Apollodoros (*Epit.* 6.20 p.222 Wagner), had the greatest difficulty in reaching home.

As for the ancient problem of the Aigai to which Poseidon went in *Iliad* 13.21, I have one small suggestion to make. The traditional objection to the Euboian Aigai as the place from which the god drove his chariot and team is that it is so far off Poseidon’s course from Samothrace to Imbros and Tenedos. That is not an insuperable difficulty if the god wanted his equipment nearer to him when he was

¹⁰ See W. Leaf, *Strabo on the Troad* (Cambridge 1923) 337. κέκληται Groskurd.

on the battlefield; and if the original story told, as Leaf *in loco* suggested, of a journey from Olympos to Imbros and Tenedos, a route by way of Euboian Aigai was hardly more direct.¹¹ What is perhaps needed is an Aigai as close as possible to Samothrace, Imbros and Tenedos. According to our texts of Stephanos of Byzantium s.v. *Αἰγαί*, there was a place of the name *τῆς Θρακησίων Χερρονήσου*—not, surely, in the Thrakesian theme of the Byzantine empire, for the theme did not exist when Stephanos wrote: we should emend to *τῆς Θρακικῆς Χερρονήσου*. This could in Homer's view be the place visited by Poseidon: it need have nothing to do with Aigospotamoi, but a point on the Aegean coast, near the entrance to the Hellespont, would suit the poet's geography. The god would view the fighting on the Trojan plain, looking from Samothrace over Imbros. He would hasten from Samothrace to the southern shore of the Chersonese, collect his team, and leave them between Imbros and Tenedos. Thence it is a short step to the battlefield. Another possible objection to identifying the Aigai in *Iliad* 13.21 with the place on the west coast of Euboia is that Euboian Aigai seems to have been sacred to Dionysos also, not exclusively to Poseidon—though this does not tell conclusively against the identification: the Townley scholium on 13.21 places here the wondrous vine which within one day has a complete life cycle from shoots to grape harvest. Here, perhaps, is the *Εὐβοῖς αἶα* to which Sophokles referred in the *Thyestes*, where the miraculous vine is lovingly described by the poet (fr.255 Pearson).¹²

Let us return to Alkaios: according to the summary of Agias' *Nostoi*, the lesser Aias was wrecked after the storm blew up off Kaphereus. The summary does not entail that the hero was in that poem said to have been wrecked at Kaphereus: he may only have been overtaken there by the gale. Other authorities placed his wreck on Mykonos or nearby. Alkaios did not reserve his pity, surely, for the impious Aias, but for the Achaeans who suffered because Aias sinned. The sufferings began for them, according to Sappho, long before the ships reached Kaphereus, as we have seen; they began, almost certainly, close to Lesbos. The point, I think, strengthens the moral of Alkaios' poem. The Achaeans suffered here, close to our

¹¹ Cf. H. T. Wade-Gery, *The Poet of the Iliad* (Cambridge 1952) 81–82.

¹² For other places whose names are formed from the root *αἰγ-* (possibly a pre-Greek word meaning 'waves') see Allen, Halliday and Sikes on the Homeric Hymns to Apollo (32) and Poseidon (3), and W. Spoerri in *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos* II.241–42.

home in Lesbos, because they had failed to condemn Aias to death. We too are now suffering (in Lesbos, presumably), because we failed to stone a sinner to death.¹³

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