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ΑΧΙΛΛΕΥΣ ... ΩΜΗΣΤΗΣ ΑΝΗΡ

Ω 206 εἰ γάρ σ' αἰρήσει καὶ ἐσόψεται ὀφθαλμοῖσιν,
ὠμηστῆς καὶ ἀπιστος ἀνὴρ ἦ γε, οὐ σ' ἐλεήσει,
οὐδέ τί σ' αἰδέσεται.

Concerning Ω 206, D.B. Monro writes, in accordance with the Scholiast¹), 'αἰρήσει καὶ ἐσόψεται, an apparent ὕστερον πρότερον, the more important being placed first: «shall catch thee coming within his sight.»' He then compares this verse with Φ 537... οἱ δ' ἄνεσάν τε πύλας καὶ ἀπῶσαν ὄχθηας; 'the general statement, «opened the gates», is put before the detail, though that is earlier in time.'

The comparison of these two passages is not cogent. In the second case we have a more or less pure ὕστερον πρότερον, while in the first instance we have much more than a mere σχῆμα λόγου. It is not by chance that it is Hecuba who speaks these words, and she means what she says: 'for if he gets hold of you and discerns who you are, he will not pity, nor will he respect you, bloodthirsty and faithless as he is.'

Hecuba wants to say that Achilles is as ravenous and cruel as a wild beast that first seizes its prey by ambush and only then bothers to find out what it actually is.

We can well imagine a case, when a lion²) or wolf senses that its prey has come near, lies in wait, and with one jump catches it in its claws; only then does it come to discern whether it has a hare, a gazelle or a deer. Its priority is first of all to seize and secure its victim; since it is ὠμηστῆς, 'voracious,' it does not care about the species.

Achilles is of just such a nature and will behave likewise towards Priam; he will catch him first and only after that will he come to see

1. Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem, ed. H. Erbse, Ω 206 (p. 554), εἰ γάρ σ' αἰρήσει καὶ ἐσόψεται: ἀντιστρόφως· εἰ γάρ σε ὄψεται καὶ αἰρήσει, ἀντὶ τοῦ ἴσον ἐλεήσει, εὐθὺς αἰρήσει.'

2. The poet likens Achilles to a lion twice in Ω:v. 41... λέων δ' ὡς ἀγρία οἶδεν, / ὅς τ' ἐπεὶ ἄρ' μεγάλη τε βίη καὶ ἀγήνορι θυμῷ / εἴξας εἶσ' ἐπὶ μῆλα βροτῶν, ἵνα δαῖτα λάβῃσιν; v. 572... λέων ὡς ἔλτο θύραζε.

who the victim really is; the cruel Achilles will neither pity nor respect the old man. Thus putting the verb αἰρήσει first and then ἐσόψεται (δ-φθαλμοῖσιν) afterwards is not the figure of speech of a poet who wants to emphasize one thing more than another, nor is it strictly speaking a ὕστερον πρότερον in the sense that it goes against the order of things; in this and in similar cases wild nature acts impulsively and contrary to normally expected behavior.

Here also the poet succeeds in making Hecuba meticulously and precisely characterize Achilles. Her words are a contrast to the more restrained behavior of Priam and vividly depict the psychology of a mother bereft of so many of her children¹); their full expression and climax occurs in the verses 212 f. ... τοῦ ἐγὼ μέσον ἦπαρ ἔχοιμι / ἐσθέμεναι προσφῦσα, which means 'would that I might get hold of the core of his liver and firmly attached to it, devour it all.'

The word ὤμιστής, which Homer uses in only three²) books of the Iliad, supports this interpretation. The first instance is

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οἰωνοὶ

ὤμῃσται ἐρύουσι, περὶ πτερὰ πυκνὰ βαλόντες,

'the bloodthirsty birds of prey will rend you apart, throwing their wings around you.' It is part of Odysseus' address to Socos, son of Hippasos, after inflicting a deadly wound on him.

In X 67 Priam addresses his son Hector, trying to dissuade him from standing against Achilles:

αὐτὸν δ' ἦν πύματόν με κύνες πρώτῃσι θύρησιν
ὤμῃσται ἐρύουσιν³),

1. Contrary to the old woman's words, Achilles can also be very sensitive and have compassion and respect for the old man.

2. The word occurs also in its simple uncompounded form (Il. X. 347):

αἶ γάρ πως αὐτόν με μένος καὶ θυμὸς ἀνείη
ὄμ' ἀποταμνόμενον κρέα ἔδμεναι, οἷα ἔοργας,
ὥς οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅς σῆς γε κύνας κεφαλῆς ἀπαλάλκοι,

'would that somehow wrath and fury might let me free to cut your flesh and eat it raw, because of what you have done; for surely there will not be anyone that shall drive the dogs away from your head.' These verses reveal Achilles' furious temper, especially since he says this in reply to the wish that the dying Hector expresses, begging him to give his body back to his kinsfolk in exchange for valuable gifts. Hector in his last pangs of death says,

ἦ γάρ σοί γε σιδήρεος ἐν φρεσὶ θυμὸς.

3. In both cases ὤμῃσται ἐρύουσι refers to the rending apart of the corpses by the beasts of prey that do something instinctively as a matter of course.

'and ravening dogs shall rend me last of all at my doorsill.'

We come across the word two more times in Ω, v. 82 and v. 207. In the last case ὤμηστές (ἀνήρ) is used as a metaphor from the animal kingdom for Achilles.

We will deal more extensively with the verses Ω 80-83, since they present an interest of their own as well as supporting the previous argument:

ἡ δὲ μολυβδαίνη ἰκέλη ἐς βυσσὸν ὄρουσεν,
 ἡ τε κατ' ἀγραύλοιο βοὸς κέρας ἐμβεβαυῖα
 ἔρχεται ὤμηστήσιν ἐπ' ἰχθύσι κῆρα φέρουσα,

'she (scil. Iris) plunged into the depths of the sea like a plummet of lead, which, set into the horn of an ox of the field, goes down and brings bane to the voracious fishes.'

This passage is problematic and has presented difficulties of interpretation. The Scholiasts¹) were of the opinion that the κέρας in the shape of a tube slipped over the fishing-line and stopped just above or behind the hook in order to prevent the fish from biting through it; the μολύβδαινα ἐμβεβαυῖα would then refer to the bit of lead that was put into, or mounted on, the tube of horn and forced the line to sink.

A more recent explanation, however, takes the κέρας to be an artificial bait possibly shaped like a small fish, while μολύβδαινα ἐμβεβαυῖα would refer to the lead inserted into it. The only passage in Homer that could throw some light on this point is to be found in the Odyssey, μ 251-53²):

1. Op. cit., Ω 80 (535), ἡ δὲ μολυβδαίνη ἰκέλη: τῷ μολίβδῳ, ὃ πρὸς τῇ ὀρμιᾷ καὶ τῷ ἀγκίστρῳ ἐστὶ πρὸς τὸ θάπτον καθικνεῖσθαι τοῦ βυθοῦ. οἱ δὲ τὴν βολίδα. ἢ «μόλιβον» δὲ φησὶν (sc. Α 237) ἢ μολύβδον. 81α. βοὸς κέρας: ὅτι οὐ λέγει βοὸς κέρας βοὸς τρίχα, διὰ τὸ τρίχινον εἶναι τὴν ὀρμιάν· λιναῖς γὰρ ἐχρῶντο «ἐκ πόντοιο θύραζε λίνῳ ἐνὶ ἡνοπι χαλκῷ» (Π 408). οἱ δὲ νῦν οὐδὲ βοεῖαις χρῶνται, ἀλλ' ἰππεύαις. λέγοι ἂν οὖν βοὸς κέρας κυρίως κατεσκευάζον γὰρ σύριγγα ἐκ κέρατος βοεῖου, ἣν περιετίθεσαν τῇ ὀρμιᾷ ὑπὲρ τὸ ἀγκίστρον, ὅπως μὴ οἱ ἰχθύς ἀποτρώγῃσι τὸν λίνον. b. βοὸς κέρας: ὃ προσάπτουσι τῇ ὀρμιᾷ πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐσθίεσθαι καὶ δμόχρον εἶναι τῇ θαλάσῃ· οὐ γὰρ τὴν τρίχα, ἐπεὶ φησὶ «λίνῳ καὶ ἡνοπι χαλκῷ» (Π 408). οἱ δὲ τὸ κέρσιμον, ὃ πρὸς τοῖς ἄκροις τῶν καλάμων ἄπτουσι πρὸς τὸ «μὴ» κατάγνυσθαι τῷ βάρει τῶν ἰχθύων. οἱ δὲ νεώτεροι κέρας τὴν συμπολοκὴν τῶν τριχῶν ὁμοίαν κέρατι «τὸν κεροπλάστην ἄειδε Γλαῦκον» Ἀρχιλόχος (fr. 117 W. = 95 T.); so Aristarch, and, according to Plutarch Mor. 976-7, Aristotle.

2. Scholia antiqua in Homeri Odysseam, ed. A. Mai, μ 253, Βοὸς κέρας] Κέρας Ἀρίσταρχος τὸ κερᾶτινον συρίγγιον, ὃ ἐπιτιθέασι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐσθίεσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἰχθύος τὴν ὀρμιάν. ἐνιοὶ δὲ τὴν τρίχα. Q.

Βοὸς κέρας ἦτοι τὴν τρίχα λέγει, ἢ τὸ ἐπικειμενον τῇ ὀρμιᾷ κέρας. ἐπὶ κέρατος γὰρ ἡ

ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἐπὶ προβόλῳ ἄλιεύς περιμήκει ῥάβδῳ
 ἰχθύσι τοῖς ὀλίγοισι δόλον κατὰ εἶδατα βάλλων
 ἐς πόντον προΐησι βοὸς κέρας ἀγραύλοιο,

'as a fisherman on a jutting rock throws down to the little fishes his baits as a snare, when with his long rod he sends forth into the sea the horn of an ox of the field,' which is a simile that compares the way in which Scylla seized six of Odysseus' comrades to the way in which a fisherman catches his fishes. In both places the word κέρας is given particular weight; as Monro¹) observes 'the main difficulty in the ancient explanation of the passage is the prominence given to the κέρας, which is spoken of as if it were the chief feature of the fisherman's apparatus. The question naturally suggests itself, whether the κέρας might not be the hook²) itself, made, like so many utensils of primitive times, from the horn of an animal.'

E. B. Tylor on this point writes to the editor: 'Fish - hooks of horn are in fact known in pre - historic Europe, but are scarce and very clumsy. After looking into the matter I am disposed to think that the Scholiast knew what he was about, and that the old Greeks really used a horn guard where the modern pike - fisher only has line bound, to prevent the fish from biting it through.' In spite of this he sees the difficulty involved in the explanation of the Scholiast and has his reservations, when he writes next, 'such a horn guard, however, if used then, would probaly last on in use, anglers being highly conservative.'

On the other hand, καταβάλλων δόλον εἶδατα ἰχθύσι τοῖς ὀλίγοισι suits an artificial bait that the κέρας βοὸς would form much better than an edible bait in which the concept of guile is indeed minimal. C. E. Haskins (Journal of Philology, XIX 238 ff.) suggests that the κέρας was an artificial bait of horn, probably in the shape of a fish with hooks of χαλκός³) attached to it and filled with lead that forced it to sink as it was thrown into the sea and then drawn rapidly through the water.

ὄρμια τρέχει καθιεμένη καὶ ἀνιεμένη (Vulg. ἀνελκομένη). εἰῶθαι δὲ οἱ ἄλιεῖς μεταξύ τοῦ ἀγκίστρου καὶ τῆς σπάρτου κέρας βόειον προσάπτειν, ἵνα καταπιόντες τὸ ἀγκίστρον οἱ ἰχθύες μὴ τρώγωσι τὴν σπάρτον. Vulg. B. Q.

1. Homer Iliad (revised fourth edition), ad Ω 80.

2. Against this consideration we have the evidence (Il. II 408)

ὡς ὅτε τις φῶς / πέτρῃ ἐπι προβλήτι καθήμενος ἱερὸν ἰχθύν
 ἐκ πόντου θύραζε λίνῳ καὶ ἦνοπι χαλκῷ, (Od. δ 369)

αἰεὶ γάρ περὶ νῆσον ἄλωμενοι ἰχθυάσκον / γναμπτοῖς ἀγκίστροισιν,

which establishes that fishing - line and hooks of χαλκός were also parts of a fisherman's equipment.

3. Il. II 408... λίνῳ καὶ ἦνοπι χαλκῷ would fit well into this explanation

Leaf and Bayfield ad Ω 80 (p. 578) appear to favour this view, when they write, 'strange though it may seem, it is true that some savage races use such artificial baits while remaining ignorant¹) of the use of edible baits; and artificial baits of horn are still used in trout - fishing.'

After all this, when Hecuba describes Achilles as $\omega\mu\eta\sigma\tau\eta\varsigma$ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\eta\rho$ and puts $\alpha\iota\rho\eta\sigma\epsilon\iota$ before $\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\acute{\omicron}\psi\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ $\acute{\omicron}\phi\theta\alpha\lambda\mu\omicron\iota\sigma\iota\nu$ there is not much room for doubt that Achilles is taken to be like the ravenous fishes that seize the bait, very likely the artificial horn - bait, or the beasts of prey that ambush their victim, whatever it is, motivated by their greediness and voracity; only later do they realize what it actually is. Hecuba's point is that Achilles will not care about the fact that the man he has caught is δ $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\rho\omega\nu$ ²) $\Pi\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha\mu\omicron\varsigma$, and he will not pity or respect the old man who is stricken by misfortune.

Thus one may say that here the point in question is hardly a figure of speech, $\sigma\chi\tilde{\eta}\mu\alpha$ $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\gamma\omicron\upsilon$, as much as it is a vivid and effective way of characterizing the hero; something that comes out of the very nature, the wild and impulsive make - up of this particular being.

Hecuba's passion is excessive, although it is not far from the point, for Achilles' own words have come close to her characterization of him (Il. X 347, discussed above). Homer has achieved two points: he has vividly characterized Achilles and he has also contrasted the behavior and attitudes of Hecuba³) and Priam.

1. But we cannot completely agree with the editors. Use of an artificial fish as bait presupposes knowing that it stands for the genuine one that constitutes the basic food of the species. The editors' use of the term «ignorant» is only admissible in relation to a large range of possible baits. At any rate the preference of the artificial bait is generally due to practical or economic reasons; it does not get worn out or stale and does not need frequent replacement; its widespread use in our day can be taken as an indication of the sophistication of this technique.

2. Priam in Ω is characterized as $\pi\alpha\tau\eta\rho$, $\mu\epsilon\gamma\alpha\lambda\acute{\eta}\tau\omega\rho$, $\Delta\alpha\rho\delta\alpha\nu\iota\delta\eta\varsigma$, $\theta\epsilon\sigma\epsilon\iota\delta\acute{\eta}\varsigma$, $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$, $\delta\iota\omicron\tau\rho\epsilon\phi\eta\varsigma$ $\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$, but in connection with the camp of the Achaeans and in relation to Achilles, the poet attaches to him almost exclusively the epithet $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\rho\omega\nu$; he uses $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\alpha\varsigma$ only once in 477 in order to stress the implied contrast to $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\alpha\theta'$ $\epsilon\iota\sigma\epsilon\lambda\theta\acute{\omicron}\nu$.

3. Hecuba's objective may also be to inspire as much fear in Priam as she can in order to prevent him from going to the camp of the Achaeans; it is therefore in her interest to make Achilles seem as brutal as possible.