

Ears, Artifice, and Hephaestus' Automaton in *Iliad* 18

1. *Iliad* 18.372-9

τὸν δ' εὖρ' ἰδρῶντα ἔλισσόμενον περὶ φύσας  
σπεύδοντα· τρίποδας γὰρ εἴκοσι πάντας ἔτευχεν  
ἑστάμεναι περὶ τοίχον εὖσταθέος μεγάροιο,  
χρύσεια δέ σφ' ὑπὸ κύκλα ἐκάστω πυθμένι θήκεν, (375)  
ἄφρα οἱ αὐτόματοι θεῖον δυσαίατ' ἀγῶνα  
ἦδ' αἰτίς πρὸς δῶμα νεοίατο θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι.  
οἳ δ' ἦτοι τόσσον μὲν ἔχον τέλος, οὔατα δ' οὐ πω  
δαιδάλεα προσέκειτο· τὰ ῥ' ἦρτυε, κόπτε δὲ δεσμούς.

She found him sweating, constantly hurrying around the bellows;  
for he was constructing twenty tripods  
to stand along the wall of his well-built hall,  
and he set golden wheels under each base,  
so that they could, through their own motion, enter the gathering of the gods  
and return home again, a wonder to behold.  
They were completed to this extent, but their cunningly wrought  
*ouata* had not yet been attached; he was joining them and hammering the fastenings.<sup>1</sup>

2. Ears as “handles” in Homer and Hesiod

οὔς, οὔατος as “handles”  
Nestor's cup (*Il.* 11.633)  
Hephaestus' tripods (18.378)  
ὠτώεις, “with ear-handles”  
A tripod as first prize for the horse race (*Il.* 23.264, 513)  
A tripod as first prize for singing at the funeral games for Amphidamas (*Op.* 657)

3. English translations of *Il.* 18.378-9

Fagles: “But not quite finished yet ... the god had still to attach the inlaid **handles**”  
Fitzgerald: “The caldrons were all shaped but had no **handles**.”  
Lattimore: “These were so far finished, but the elaborate **ear handles** / were not yet on.”  
Lombardo: “They were almost done. The intricate **handles** / Still had to be attached.”

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are my own.

*LSJ*: “II. from resemblance to *an ear*, 1. *handle*, esp. of pitchers, cups, etc., οὐατα δ’ αὐτοῦ τέσσαρ’ ἔσαν *Il.* 11.633, cf. 18.378.”

*LfggrE*: “3c of vessels: *handles* Λ 633 ... Σ578”

#### 4. Hephaestus’ automatons in Homer

Automatic tripods (*Il.* 18.372-9)

Golden attendants (*Il.* 18.417-21)

Automatic bellows (18.468-73)

Gold and silver guard dogs (*Od.* 7.91-4)

(cf. automatic gates of Olympus: *Il.* 5.749 = 8.393)

#### 5. *Od.* 7.91-4

χρύσειοι δ’ ἐκάτερθε καὶ ἀργύρεοι κύνες ἦσαν,  
οὓς Ἥφαιστος ἔτευξεν ἰδυίησι πραπίδεσσι  
δῶμα φυλασσέμεναι μεγάλητορος Ἀλκινόοιο,  
ἀθανάτους ὄντας καὶ ἀγήρωσ ἤματα πάντα.

On either side of the door were gold and silver hounds  
which Hephaestus had constructed with his expert intelligence  
to guard the home of great-hearted Alcinous,  
that were immortal and ageless for all their days.

#### 6. *Il.* 18.468-73

Ὡς εἰπὼν τὴν μὲν λίπεν αὐτοῦ, βῆ δ’ ἐπὶ φύσας·  
τάς δ’ ἐς πῦρ ἔτρεψε κέλευσέ τε ἐργάζεσθαι.  
φύσαι δ’ ἐν χοάνοισιν ἐείκοσι πάσαι ἐφύσων (470)  
παντοίην εὐπρηστον αὐτμὴν ἐξανιείσαι,  
ἄλλοτε μὲν σπεύδοντι παρέμμεναι, ἄλλοτε δ’ αὖτε,  
ὅππως Ἥφαιστός τ’ ἐθέλοι καὶ ἔργον ἄνοιτο.

Speaking thus he left [Thetis] there and went to his bellows;  
he turned these to the fire and gave them orders to work.  
All twenty of the bellows blew on the melting pots,  
sending forth strong-blowing winds from all angles  
for Hephaestus as he hurried about from place to place,  
however he should wish, and the work was accomplished.

7. *Il.* 18.417-21

... ὑπὸ δ' ἀμφίπολοι ῥώνοντο ἀνακτι  
χρύσειαι ζώησι νεήνισιν εἰοικυῖαι.  
τῆς ἐν μὲν νόος ἐστὶ μετὰ φρεσίν, ἐν δὲ καὶ αὐδὴ  
καὶ σθένος, ἀθανάτων δὲ θεῶν ἄπο ἔργα ἴσασιν. (420)  
αἱ μὲν ὑπαιθα ἀνακτος ἐποίπνυον·

And his attendants moved quickly beneath their lord,  
golden, like living young women.  
In their minds is an intelligence, and within them is voice  
and strength, and from the immortal gods they learned their crafts.  
They hurried about under their lord's commands;

8. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253b

for if every tool could perform its own work when ordered, or by seeing what to do in advance [κελευσθέν ἢ προαισθανόμενον], like the statues of Daedalus in the story, or the tripods of Hephaestus which the poet says 'enter self-moved the company divine,'—if thus shuttles wove and quills played harps of themselves, master-craftsmen would have no need of assistants and masters no need of slaves. (trans. Rackham 1944)

9. Crates, *Wild Beasts*, fr. 16 (*Deipnosophistae* 6.267e)

Each article of furniture will come when he calls it. Place yourself here, table! You there, get yourself ready! Knead, oh kneading trough. Fill up, ladle! Where's the cup? Go wash yourself. (trans. Devecka 2013)

10. Wax, Ears, Sirens

Circe recommends using wax earplugs against the Sirens (*Od.* 12.47)  
Odysseus applies the wax to his companions' ears (*Od.* 12.177)  
The companions remove the wax (*Od.* 12.200)

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