

Pelôrios Aias: Size Isn't Everything
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Much has been written about the Sophoclean Ajax, but surprisingly little about his Homeric model. Sophocles' tragedy enacts the ellipsis between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey's* treatments of this hero: his madness and suicide. Indeed, the Odyssean *katabasis* circumnavigates those events, much as Homeric epic cannot, or will not, represent the actual death of Achilles. Those matters thus were taken up by the Epic Cycle, on which Sophocles also drew heavily. However, the *Iliad* does signal its awareness of the Cyclic Ajax through the language Homer uses to describe this figure.

This paper focuses on Ajax's epithet *pelôrios* and argues, first, that typical translations of it as denoting his immense size cannot be justified in the context of its usage in Archaic epic, and, second, that it signals the Cyclic Ajax, the berserk hero. In Archaic epic, *pelôrios* almost never designates humans, but monsters, gods and portents, uses that have little to do with physical size, but with certain inhuman qualities. When heroes receive this epithet it signals danger. While the Iliadic Ajax receives this epithet the most, the only other figure, whether human or divine, it designates more than once is the monstrous Achilles during his *aristeia*. In the *Odyssey* it most frequently describes the huge Cyclops, but the overwhelming tendency of *pelôrios* to indicate quality, not quantity, suggests this epithet marks the conduct, not the size, of Polyphemus, who thus becomes linked, unexpectedly, to Ajax. And yet because nothing in the *Iliad* suggests Ajax as such a sort of monstrosity, one must look elsewhere to justify this epithet, namely, in the accounts of his madness in the Epic Cycle, in which *pelôrios* resonates, to use the terms of Graziosi and Haubold (2005), who building on the work of John Miles Foley in relating Homer's language to the larger epic tradition.