

Damning Hesiod in Homer's Underworld

In this paper I argue that the description of Heracles' sword belt at the close of *Odyssey* 11 constitutes an agonistic response to the Ps. Hesiodic *Aspis*. Such reference supports the tradition of an Athenian phase in the development of the Homeric text, lends focus to the comparison of Odysseus and Heracles, and provides insight regarding the genesis of ancient disapprobation for the *Aspis*.

Odysseus' description of the baldric ends with a striking wish: $\mu\kappa\tau\epsilon\chi\eta\sigma\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \mu\eta\delta'\ \omicron\lambda\lambda\omicron\ \tau\iota\ \tau\epsilon\chi\nu\sigma\alpha\iota\omicron\ / \omicron\varsigma\ \kappa\epsilon\iota\nu\omicron\nu\ \tau\epsilon\lambda\alpha\mu\iota\nu\alpha\ \omicron\omicron\ \omicron\gamma\kappa\tau\theta\epsilon\tau\omicron\ \tau\epsilon\chi\nu\omicron$ (Od. 11.613-14). The apparent disjunction with the initial description has been a point of contention from antiquity and some have rejected the lines as an interpolation (cf. Heubeck 114-15). Stanford (403-4) and Heubeck (ibid.) both emphasize the role of these verses as a fearful response to the horrific, orientaling imagery of the $\omicron\omicron\rho\tau\eta\rho$. However, context also suggests an agonistic reading of the passage. As Galinsky (11-12) and Clay (93-6) have observed, rivalry between Heracles and Odysseus is central to the passage. Indeed, the comparison employs the language of contests and rewards, $\omicron\acute{\epsilon}\theta\lambda\omicron\iota$ and $\omicron\acute{\epsilon}\theta\lambda\alpha$ (Od. 11.622, 644).

The description of the baldric suggests the *Aspis* as the primary point of competitive reference. Heracles approaches, $\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\omicron\nu\ \pi\alpha\pi\tau\alpha\omicron\nu\omicron\nu\ \alpha\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon\ \beta\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\omicron\tau\iota\ \omicron\omicron\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ (Od. 11.608). The hemistich $\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\omicron\nu\ \pi\alpha\pi\tau\alpha\omicron\nu\omicron\nu$ is metrically equivalent to $\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\omicron\nu\ \delta\epsilon\rho\kappa\omicron\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta$, used of the gorgon at the center of Agamemnon's shield (Il. 11.37) and of the Ker upon Heracles' (Sc. 160). The use of $\omicron\omicron\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ with active participle for timeless, vivifying effect is a distinguishing feature of the *Aspis* (Gow ad Theoc. 1.41). The foremost property of the baldric is its terrifying aspect; it is $\sigma\mu\epsilon\rho\delta\alpha\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ (Od. 11.609). Similarly, the focal-point of Heracles' shield is $\phi\omicron\beta\omicron\varsigma\ \omicron\ \tau\iota\ \phi\alpha\tau\epsilon\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ (Sc. 144). $\sigma\omicron\epsilon\varsigma\ \chi\alpha\rho\omicron\pi\omicron\ \tau\epsilon\ \lambda\omicron\nu\omicron\tau\epsilon\varsigma$ appear upon the belt (Od. 11.611), a collocation found only at Sc. 177. Also present are $\phi\omicron\nu\omicron\iota\ \tau'\ \omicron\nu\delta\rho\kappa\tau\alpha\sigma\omicron\iota\ \tau\epsilon$ (Od. 11.612), another Hesiodic pairing (Sc. 155, cf. Hes. Th. 228). The concluding verses of the passage recall this nexus. Odysseus stops his description in fear lest Persephone send a $\gamma\omicron\rho\gamma\epsilon\omicron\eta\nu\ \kappa\epsilon\phi\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu\ \delta\epsilon\iota\nu\omicron\omicron\ \pi\epsilon\lambda\omicron\rho\upsilon$ (Od. 11.634-5). The phrase is not only identical with the centerpiece on Athena's aegis (Il. 5.741), but also recalls the gorgoneion trophy of Perseus at Sc. 223 ($\kappa\omicron\rho\eta\ \delta\epsilon\iota\nu\omicron\omicron\ \pi\epsilon\lambda\omicron\rho\upsilon$). These echoes give metapoetic force to Odysseus' wish at 613-4. The composer diminishes and negates alternative ecphrases in favor of the $\omicron\nu\acute{\alpha}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha$ which Odysseus performs for the Phaeacians.

Such a reading lends support to the tradition that the Homeric texts took definitive form in Peisistratid Athens. The battle of Heracles and Kyknos is one of the most popular artistic themes in surviving 6th century Attic pottery, and many examples appear to reflect the *Aspis* specifically (Shapiro 523-5). Moreover, Clay (95-6) sees a conflict between $\beta\acute{\iota}\alpha$ and $\mu\kappa\tau\iota\varsigma$ in this passage. Evocation of the *Aspis* strengthens this observation, for it is a poem in which Heracles, a Doric hero, attains victory through unbridled martial fury (Sc. 386-92). Through his wish, Odysseus rejects not only $\tau\kappa\ \delta\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}$ but also this related $\beta\acute{\iota}\alpha$. In their place, carefully woven poetic echoes serve to glorify $\mu\kappa\tau\iota\varsigma$, a quality profoundly associated with Athena and Athens. The agonistic subtext evokes Late Archaic rivalries both poetic and political.

This interpretation has implications for our understanding of a much maligned ancient poem. According to its *hypothesis*, vituperation of the *Aspis* begins with "Megacles" (usually identified with Megaclides) of Athens. *Odyssey* 608-14 complements this tradition. However, it also draws our attention to the possibility that examination of the *Aspis* should begin, not with philosophical and rhetorical ideals of later periods (as has been the norm), but with questions of rhapsodic performance appropriate to the Late Archaic Age.

Bibliography

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