

Periklutos: A Deeper Meaning In A Formulaic Epithet

In this paper I will demonstrate that a deeper meaning lies in the core of the traditional epithet *periklutos* that will illuminate and clarify the connection between the archaic Greek *aidos*, his audience and his tradition. The ancient Greek word *periklutos* means famous, noble or renowned. It is a compound of *peri*, acting adverbially as an intensifier to the adjective *klutos*, meaning famous. The root of *klutos* derives from the verb *kleo*, meaning to tell of. *Periklutos* as a formulaic epithet describing the *aidos* in archaic Greek poetry has a force that is resonant within the tradition. This word occurs 12 times during each of the Homeric epics, once in Hesiod's *Works and Days* and twice in his *Theogony*, as well as during the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. The word *periklutos* only occurs five other times throughout the remainder of Greek literature, mostly later and in contexts insignificant to the study of oral traditional poetry. Not all of the occurrences of *periklutos* modify *aidos*, however. At times it also modifies the god Hephaestus (thirteen times), cities (three times), and occasionally people. In archaic epic, this epithet regularly appears in the same position in the line, the third and fourth feet, modifying a noun that does not necessarily precede or follow immediately but is present in the line.

This epithet, by its regular formulaic use, should be considered a traditional Homeric epithet, and a particular rather than general or ornamental one. Its regular use around a limited set of nouns in a single position within a dactylic line indicates that it is being used by a composer in way that corresponds to Milman Parry's theory of oral traditional composition set forth in his 1928 theses. However mechanical this application of an adjective to a noun may seem, there is also a corresponding traditional meaning that is derived by its use. An etymological analysis of the epithet as well as an analysis of the subjects it modifies sheds some light on the larger picture of how traditional epithets are both convenient metrically for the orally

composing bard, but convey a greater meaning, a meaning which John Miles Foley calls *immanent*. The fame of a thing, in the ancient Greek mind, comes from its report abroad. The process by which this report is made is not written, it is not graphically painted, nor is it even simply spoken of, but it is sung. Not only is this an ancient Greek phenomenon, but it actually extends throughout other Indo-European epics and modern oral cultures.

The types of things that are made famous by song, here, are bard, Hephaestus, cities (*astu/ea*), and people. The bard, at the core, is a vessel for his songs, and are therefore made famous by them, while at the same time they may make famous others as well, such as gods, cities, and peoples. These subjects are not made famous for heroic deeds, they are not seekers of *kleos* like Odysseus and Achilles. Hephaestus, as a craftsman, is a skillful joiner of things together. A city as a construct, is skillfully joined together to make a functional whole. A group of *laoi* is more than merely an anonymous group of people, but it is a group of people who work together to achieve a common goal, typically led by a separate individual who is not necessarily a member of the collective. In the occurrences when the epithet modifies an individual hero, he only becomes “well-renowned” when he is sung of. *Periklutos* as a traditional epithet refers to a cooperative constructive effort. The bard, as a singer of tales, collects verses and stitches them together to form a larger whole, more meaningful and ultimately more full of renown than merely the sum of its parts. The bard as a subject of one of these very epithets is made famous by creating and transmitting his tradition. In this formulation, like the constructive activities of the *laoi* or the parts of a city that must cooperate together in order to function, a bard and his audience cooperate to build a tradition. With the *aoidos* as the creator of this particular performance, he is as the builder of the city or the leader of the *laoi* or even as Hephaestus, who crafts things which are often put to use by others. Even though the Homeric bard is most

deliberately associated with Apollo and the Muses, within the tradition itself is an underlying association with craftsmanship and the reciprocal uses to which his craft is adapted.