

Homeric ἄρα: An (In)consequential Particle

In *Greek Particles*, Denniston sets out two competing views about the function of ἄρα. First, there is the position of Kühner–Gerth and Schwyzer–Debrunner (further refined in Grimm 1962), that it shows that the host sentence follows naturally as a consequence of the preceding material (“so, then”; henceforth, consequential ἄρα); second, there is Hartung’s view, which Denniston himself endorses, that it marks the author’s lively interest in the new clause (“look!”; henceforth, visualizing ἄρα). This second position has won more adherents of late: cautiously followed by Ruijgh (1971: §351–3), it was extended by Bakker (1993: 16–23), who views ἄρα as signaling that the speaker is making a statement based on the evidence before him; it thus contributes to the dimension of epic performance concerned with reenactment. Graziosi and Haubold (2010) go still further and treat the particle as directing the audience’s attention almost cinematically, telling listeners where to turn their gaze. But the conflicting accounts of Homeric ἄρα in other recent commentaries show that there is still no consensus: de Jong (2012) notes several examples of visualizing ἄρα in *Iliad* 22, but also reminds us of Ruijgh’s admonition that it is sometimes used simply as metrical filler; Steiner (2010), ad *Od.* 17.454 and 18.71, suggests that ἄρα marks surprise or lively interest, but, ad 17.481, says that it is used “with its frequent sense, ‘as was to be expected’”, which seems quite the opposite. Considering just how common this word is—it occurs 27× in *Iliad* 1 alone—it is important to attempt a reconciliation of these views.

Now, as Denniston notes, it is very easy for both sides to pick examples that confound the other. But neither he nor the discussions that follow do much to show where the center of gravity lies. Accordingly, this study begins with a panoptic look at the 105 examples of ἄρα (including ἄρ, ῥα, and ῖ’) in *Iliad* 1, 6, and 22: a sample of this size is not overwhelming, but there are still

enough examples for definite clusters of usage to emerge, and, importantly, for the relative frequency of those clusters to become apparent. A methodological problem presents itself immediately: how does one determine whether any given ἄρα is consequential or visualizing? Although many cases must remain indeterminate, certain environments strongly encourage one interpretation over the other. Proponents of visualizing ἄρα point to its use in counterfactual protases (e.g. *Il.* 6.75), where its host clause details an event that the usual narratological thrust of the Homeric counterfactual is likely to establish as unexpected: “Then the expected outcome would have ensued, if—ἄρα!—this surprising event had not forestalled it”. Other collocations, however, support the consequential reading. Consider *Il.* 1.457–8:

ὥς ἔφατ' εὐχόμενος, τοῦ δ' ἔκλυε Φοῖβος Απόλλων.

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' εὔξαντο καὶ οὐλοχύτας προβάλλοντο...

Here we see the typical use of an αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ clause: it takes the conclusion of the preceding narrative element (“Now when they had prayed...”) and uses it as the starting point for the next stage of the sequence. Considering that the connection with the previous line is so close that the verb is repeated (εὐχόμενος ~ εὔξαντο), it seems far preferable to take ἄρα here as consequential. Much the same holds true for the numerous examples of ὥς ἄρα φωνήσας, and, in the end, indisputable examples of consequential ἄρα clearly outnumber their visualizing counterparts. Furthermore, not enough has been done to contrast similar lines that differ only in the presence or absence of ἄρα: if one juxtaposes, for instance, αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ clauses that have ἄρα with those that don't, it is hard not to see it as a mere metrical convenience—a reading more compatible with consequential ἄρα.

The *Iliad* is, of course, poetry with a strong degree of visualization. But what creates that visualization is not the rampant use of ἄρα, but the orderly sequence of exceptionally vivid

images presented by the poet. When he says of Apollo, ἔκλαγξαν δ' ἄρ' ὄϊστοὶ ἐπ' ὄμων
χωομένοιο, we remember this picture not because of ἄρα, but because of virtually every other
word in the line. However much one might like a particle as common as ἄρα to have rich epic
significance, it is in fact rather closer to a semantically bleached “then”.

Bibliography

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