

Loosening Down: Non-lethal Uses of *λύω γυῖα

The phrase λῦσε δὲ γυῖα appears throughout the *Iliad* to denote the death of a warrior, and it has been suggested that the phrase always implies a lethal strike (Lowenstam 1981; Purves 2006). On the contrary, as Philpott 2016 suggest, variants of this formula are employed to describe a non-lethal state of physical exhaustion or extreme emotional distress outside of combat. Although Philpott suggests this point, he does not demonstrate it rigorously. It is the aim of the paper to illustrate the extension of the formula to non-lethal contexts.

Even though these latter scenes take place off the battlefield, they remain connected to their martial analogues by their setting and structure. By comparing the narrative context and formal structure of these scenes, it becomes clear that even in non-battle scenarios, the poetics of the text evoke the scenes of combat. First, examining the general senses of λύω and γυῖα sets the basis for understanding the lethal and non-lethal uses of the phrase. Then, combining the parts, the paper proceeds to consider the structure of the death scene, particularly those involving λῦσε δὲ γυῖα. Then, finally, the non-lethal scenes are treated in content and form and compared to the lethal, death scenes. The cause of loosening of limbs and the situations in which it occurs illuminate the connections between the two senses. Although the end result may differ (life vs. death), the formal and literary characteristics of the scenes remain remarkably similar to the extent that one may observation a transformation of the formula in order to evoke its more common context. The use in a non-lethal sense brings the narrative to the brink of death, so that this same language does not “register to the moment of death,” but denotes a final limit before it (Purves 2006).

Bibliography

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