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USES OF THE SOMATIC WORD *HAND* IN OATH, PRAYER, SUPPLICATION AND REVENGE FORMULAE IN *ILIAD I*

Somatic words belong to the ancient lexical fund and the phraseological expressions formed by the participation of these words reflect many archaic semantic and morphological features that are valuable for the development of the history of language and thinking. In this paper I shall attempt to focus on the formulae of oath, prayer, supplication and revenge (anger). Hinting on the parts of the body in the above-mentioned phrases appears to be a usual practice closely connected with ancient imaginations, e.g. common revenge formula *I'll drink your blood* seems to be emerged from the ancient mythopoetic tradition: blood is a life symbol, it is a carrier of the human soul (cf. in Homer a soul flies away from the wound by blood, etc.). This formula is a metaphor implying a great desire of revenge, of annihilating (mainly referring to an enemy). Numerous examples of the formulae of oath, prayer, supplication and revenge (anger) can be found in Homer's poems. I turn now to considering the formulae containing the somatic word *hand* on the evidence of *Iliad I*.

There is a variety of word combinations and phraseological expressions formed by the word *hand* in general. This word appears to be very fruitful in the word creation process. It is to be mentioned that there are quite many formulae of this kind in *Iliad I*. This is not unusual. The song deals with the anger of Achilles and if we decide to find out the key word for this song it should be the very first word of the poem μένος (anger, passion). The whole composition of this song turns round the main point i.e. μένος.¹ Here is the list of the somatic words represented in the formulae of oath, prayer and anger in the 1st song of "Iliad": χεῖρ (hand), αἷμα (blood), λύθρον (defilement from

¹ B.B. Powell, *Homer*, Oxford, 2004, 66-113.

blood), θυμός (life, heart, anger), φρήν (mind, heart), νόος (mind), ἀνθερεών (chin), γόνυ (knee)...

Having observed the given formulae one can reveal some notable details. Here I would like to cite the opinion of J. Vandryes about the metaphorisation of the somatic elements. He speaks about the frequency of somatic words regarding the process of metaphorisation and mentions that the metaphor of *hand* is one of the most widespread examples. According to the scholar, hand is the main human instrument; a man usually does his work by his hands and there is a variety of jobs done with the help of hands.² Having considered the above-mentioned opinion the frequency of the metaphorical phrases containing the word *hand* becomes evident (cf.: Monkeys do not have hands, they have body parts for catching the things. A hand is a human attribute; the attribute of the creature that has speaking ability i.e. cognition³).

The 1st song of *Iliad* offers us a clear depiction of the functional diversity of the word *hand*. The priest fills a bowl for sacrifice with his hands; hand plays an important role in the ritual of prayer. Archaeological finds i.e. human figures with their hands raised prove the same. "Greeks rarely knelt in prayer; the usual practice was to extend the hands to the gods".⁴ Chryses prays to Apollo the following way – χειρᾶς ὀρεγνύς. Pulleyn pays attention to the given form and notices that the form ὀρεγνύς is unique in Homeric prayer. In other passages ὀρέγων (delivered from the same stem) is found in prayers (*Il.* 15.371 and *Od.* 9.527). The scholar assumes that the latter (ὀρέγων) form was common but ὀρεγνύς was chosen just because it fitted the metre at the end of the line... Other authors used the following forms for the prayer: ἀναπτᾶς, ἀνασχῶν.⁵

Another episode I want to focus on is as S. Pulleyn calls it *the first example of full physical supplication of a god in Greek literature*.⁶ It is the episode of Thetis asking Zeus to help her son Achilles. She slips down before Zeus, her left hand placed on his knees and her right hand held up to cup his chin. Thus she makes her plea to him. The passage is debatable. It is a kind of a mixture of prayer and supplication; the language is prayer, the action is supplication.⁷

² J. Vandryes, *Language (in Russian)*, Moscow, 1937, 203.

³ M. Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?*, Tübingen, 1954, 51.

⁴ Homer *Iliad I*, edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by S. Pulleyn, Oxford, 2000, 215.

⁵ Homer *Iliad I*, 215.

⁶ S. Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*, Oxford, 1997, 57.

⁷ J. Gould, *Myth, Ritual Memory, and Exchange (Essays on Greek Literature and Culture)*, Oxford, 2001, 22-78.

S. Pulleyn, 56-70.

One can find the given episodes as indicating the differences between Homer's conceptions of human and god. Human world is regulated by the definite rules, while the world of gods has the rules of its own. Human symbolic actions (prayer, supplication) differ from god's ones. It should be noted that Achilles prays to his blood mother – the goddess Thetis as ordinary mortals do. This detail might denote the distance between mortals and gods.

Thus, *hand* is a significant part of the body that appears in supplication and prayer. In supplication the ritual act depends essentially upon physical contact with parts of the body (knees and chin) which are regarded as having a peculiar sanctity.⁸ The gesture of rising up one's hand in prayer shows a desire of divine power perception. The hand has a function of a mediator, as well as a kind of a medium. From this point of view the function of a *hand* as an orientator is significant in ancient Greek expressions. A hand helps one to find direction and location. When Greeks wanted to say: where? In what direction? – they did ask in the following way: *ποτέρας τῆς χείρος*;⁹ But it should be said that this feature is not characteristic of Greek cultural area only, as such expressions as "on the left hand" or "on the right hand" are common for other languages.

Apart from the prayer and supplication gestures some impressive gestures of anger can also be found in *Iliad I*. In the episode of quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, Achilles replies to Agamemnon's cruel words with the gesture of anger. He places his hand on his sword (this is his first reaction) that is followed by the verbal formula of anger.¹⁰ Placing one's hand on the sword, gun and etc. seems to be a common gesture of anger or revenge. It is a sudden furious reaction that is widely used in phrases in various languages. This very gesture denotes the main symbolic meaning of a *hand* – strength, power. Taking the sword in one's hand or placing one's hand on it is a demonstration of power. It is worth mentioning that hand is a symbol of power beginning with the ancient times. And significant examples on the given issue can be found in Homer's poems.

The formulae of oath and threat reveal the following meanings of the lexeme *hand*: 1. Hand is a protector; a person who takes an oath believes in his own physical abilities and promises others to protect them with his power i.e. with his hand; 2. Hand is an instrument of a certain kind of punishment leading to justice in the whole world (e.g. when Odysseus threatens the bridegrooms); 3. Hand is an instrument of violence.

⁸ J. Gould, 26.

⁹ H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1968.

¹⁰ For the commentary see especially Homer *Iliad I*, 186-187.

Before Calchas explains to Achilles the reason of Apollo's anger, he asks him to take an oath as a security guarantee. ... σύ δὲ σύνθεο καὶ μοι ὄμοσον ἢ μὲν μοι πρόφρων ἔπessin καὶ χερσὶν ἀρήξιν (*Il. I. 76-77*). ("And you pay attention and swear to me that you will indeed readily help me with words or with [the strength of] your hands"). And Achilles promises him: "I swear by Apollo, never shall any man lay hands on you" (*Il. I. 186-91*). It may be argued that the given phrases contain two symbolic ideas. The first is of *hand* as a symbol of power struggling for justice. It is the source of punishment aimed to revive justice that is destroyed. Here I have to mention that Calchas's request (asking Achilles to protect him by his hand) reminds us of Chryses's prayer to Apollo; Chryses asks the god to protect him by means of his arrows and thus help him revenge on Danaans (in this case a hand and an arrow introduce the same idea). On the contrary, *hand* is an instrument of violence; Agamemnon asks his heralds to go to the hut of Achilles, take Briseis by the hand and bring her to him: Χειρὸς ἐλόντ' ἀγέμεν Βρισηΐδα καλλιπάρηρον (*Il. I. 323*). The word ἐλόντ' (αἰρέω, to own, to catch smth.) indicates that Agamemnon just wants to demonstrate his power. Pulleyn pays attention to this passage: "Why does Agamemnon specify this physical contact? The heralds could presumably just say "Come with us". Perhaps the thought is that Briseis will need some physical persuasion to leave Achilles. It is also possible that the imposition of the hand (cf. *mancipatio* in Roman Law) was a formal legal gesture denoting acquisition".¹¹ I find the latter version more acceptable as the text in question does not provide enough arguments for proving that Briseis was somehow bound to Achilles. Besides, the word χεῖρ (χειρὸς) seems to support this opinion. Agamemnon is very angry and the verbal expression of his action i.e. taking her by hand only emphasizes and strengthens his emotions.

What conclusion can be drawn from the given examples? The two definitions of *hand* (justifiable and violent powers) are quite vivid. There are some valuable remarks on this issue: "Eide has pointed out that, of the five epithets applied to hands in Homer, namely παχύς, στιβαρός, βαρύς, θρασύς, ἄπαιτος, the first two describe the hand in action, whereas the other three are more emotionally laden and denote the hand as an instrument of harm. Thus, the metrically equivalent formulae χειρὶ βαχείη and χειρὶ βαρείη are not in fact interchangeable."¹² In my opinion the above mentioned orientation-definition scheme may help us to make some points clear. A hand is an instrument of finding the orientation as it shows the direction. It is also an orientator of one's prosperity, and it may actually be discussed as a moral orienta-

¹¹ Homer *Iliad I*, 208-209.

¹² Homer *Iliad I*, 148-149.

tor, as that of the moral choice. Homer's characters, gifted with the freedom of choice, have to decide themselves whether to use their power for justice or violence. Though it must be also mentioned that there exists a supreme power over that of a man's i.e. Big Hand (Χεὶρ Μεγάλη, *Il.* 15. 695). The given expression can be found in as the symbol of divine power, Zeus in Homer. Although the physical power is not enough to achieve the main goal; Calchas asks Achilles to protect him by his hand and words (χείρ - ἔπος). In another episode Thetis asks Zeus to protect Achilles by his word and deed (ἔπος - ἔργον). χεὶρ and ἔργον appear to be semantic correlates in this case, as they both are the opposites of ἔπος (word) and this opposition is discussed as one concept. One may consider the unity of word and deed as the most important guarantee of security as well as the basis for human perfection and harmony. Thus, it can be concluded that the words directed towards Achilles emphasize the distinguishing features of his character.