ΑΓΩΝ ΝΕΩΝ: AN UNRECOGNIZED METAPHOR IN THE ILIAD

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IN THE phrase ἀγὼν νεῶν, which occurs five times in the text of the *Iliad* (15. 428, 16. 239, 16. 500, 19. 42, 20. 33),[1] ἀγών is cited by the special lexica to Homer and the standard dictionaries of Greek as a prime example of the meaning "assembly, gathering."[2] Commentators on Homer, ancient and modern, have expressed the same opinion,[3] comparing a similar phrase, ἄγυρις νεῶν, which occurs once in the *Iliad*, at 24. 141.[4] Here ἄγυρις, an Aeolic form of ἀγορά, undoubtedly does mean "assembly."

It is true that the two phrases, ἀγὼν νεῶν and ἄγυρις νεῶν, have the same referent, the Greek ships drawn up on the beach before Troy,[5] but it does not follow from this that they have the same meaning, i.e., that they are totally synonymous. It is quite common for two words to possess a common referent, but different meanings. For example, the same men sitting in a courtroom may be called either a "group" or a "jury." In both cases, the referent is the same, but "jury" contains an added component or element of meaning which "group" does not. "Group" designates simply the collection of human beings; "jury" designates their function or activity as well, sitting in judgment.

In the matter of ἀγὼν νεῶν and ἄγυρις νεῶν, before concluding that the words ἀγών and ἄγυρις have the same meaning because they have the same referent, one must ask whether or not there is any difference in meaning to account for the use of different words. My intention in this article is to show that there is a

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1. These five occurrences are traditionally cited by the usual authorities. Two additional citations are given by H. J. Mette in *LfgrE*, I (Göttingen, 1955), *s.v.* ἀγών, sect. B 11. b (col. 135. 56–60): *Il.* 2. 558 and 11. 795*b*. The first citation refers to ἀγών', an emendation of ἄγων proposed by F. H. Bothe, *Homeri carmina: Ilias*, I (Leipzig, 1832), 130, in 2. 558: Αἴας δ' ἐκ Σαλαμῖνος ἄγεν δυοκαίδεκα νῆας, / στῆσε δ' ἄγων ἵν' Ἀθηναίων ἵσταντο φάλαγγες. No editor of Homer, so far as I have been able to determine, has accepted, and few even mention, this unlikely suggestion. The second citation, 11. 795*b*, concerns an extra line found in a papyrus fragment, but not in the manuscripts, of the *Iliad*: [. . . νεῶν ἐν ἀγ]ῶνι θοάων. This line occurs in a context very similar to that in which an actual occurrence of ἀγὼν νεῶν apears at 16. 239. Hence, the line has been rejected as either a late example of pre-Alexandrian rhapsodic variation (H. Diels, *SDAW* [1894], pp. 354–55; J. Menrad, *SBAW* [1894], p. 169) or the work of a late and mediocre interpolator (D. del Corno, *RIL*, XCIV [1960], 83). Since there is, therefore, no reason to accept either of these "occurrences" into the actual text of the *Iliad*, they need not be taken into consideration in the discussion below.

2. See the articles on ἀγών in H. Ebeling (ed.), *Lexicon Homericum*, I (Leipzig, 1880), sect. 4, "conventus"; Mette in *LfrgE* (n. 1), sect. B 1 (col. 135. 53–60), "Ensemble, Versammlung (Zusammensein einer Mehrzahl) . . . b) von Schiffen"; H. Stephanus, *TGL³*, I (Paris, 1831), cols. 588D–89B, "Ἀγὼν pro Multitudine, de navibus etiam dictum est"; *Passow's Wörterbuch der griechischen Sprache*, rev. W. Crönert, I (Göttingen, 1912), sect. II. 1 (col. 77. 22–23), "*Versammlung* 1. allg."; LSJ, sect. I. 1, "*gathering, assembly*."

3. For ancient views, see Schol. A on 15. 428: ὅτι ἀγῶνι τῷ

ἀθροίσματι τῶν νεῶν, ὅ ἐστι τῷ ναυστάθμῳ; Schol. A on 16. 239: ὅτι νηῶν ἀγῶνι τῷ ἀθροίσματι καὶ ναυστάθμῳ. Similar comments appear at Schol. T, D, Gen.²,³, Eust. on 15. 428; Schol. D, Gen.²,³, Eust. on 16. 239; Schol. A, B, T, D on 16. 500 (cf. Eust. on 16. 661, and, for other interpretations of 16. 500, n. 9 below); Schol. A, Eust. on 19. 42 (cf. Apollon. Soph., *s.v.* ἀγών); Schol. T², D, Eust. on 20. 33 (cf. Porph. on 7. 298, Schol. B² on 18. 376; and, *s.v.* ἀγών, *Lex. rhet. Cantab.*, *Etym. gen.*, *Etym. magn.*, *Etym. Sym.*, *Lex Vind.*, Zonar., *Anecd. Par.* [IV, 87]). Only two examples from recent commentaries need be given. W. Leaf (ed.), *The Iliad²*, II (London, 1902), 132, on 15. 428, says that ἀγὼν νεῶν "indicates that the original meaning of ἀγών was *assembly*"; K. F. Ameis, C. Hentze, and P. Cauer (eds.), *Homers Ilias*, 4th–8th ed. (Leipzig, 1905–32), II.1, 110, on 15. 428, comment simply: "*in der Vereinigen der Schiffe*, im Schifflager" (cf. also II.2, 19, on 16. 239; II.2, 36, on 16. 500 [see n. 10 below]; II.3, 5, on 19. 42; II.3, 31, on 20. 33).

4. See Schol. A on 24. 141: ὅπερ δι' ἄλλων λέγει "νηῶν ἐν ἀγῶνι" (cf. Schol. T, D, Gen.²,³, Eust. on 24. 141; Eust. on 15. 428, 16. 661; and Schol. Hes. *Theog.* 91); Leaf, *op. cit.* (n. 3), II, 548, on 24. 141: "The phrase is the same as νεῶν ἐν ἀγῶνι O 428, etc." (cf. II, 132, on 15. 428); Ameis–Hentze–Cauer, *op. cit.* (n. 3), II.4, 106, on 24. 141: "ἐν νηῶν ἀγύρει, sonst νεῶν ἐν ἀγῶνι: zu O 428" (cf. also II.1, 110, on 16. 428). Cf. H. Seiler in *LfgrE* (n. 1), *s.v.* ἄγυρις (col. 101. 68): "ἐν νηῶν -ει (cf. ἀγών!)."

5. The Greek ships are normally refered to elsewhere in the *Iliad* by the plural of ναῦς: θοὰς ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν (1. 12), κοίλῃσι . . . παρὰ νηυσί (1. 26), etc. Both ἀγὼν νεῶν and ἄγυρις νεῶν are rare enough to be conspicuous variations of this usage.

difference of meaning similar to the one which exists in the case of "group" and "jury" mentioned above, namely, that, whereas both ἀγών and ἄγυρις possess the meaning "assembly," ἀγών possesses in addition the component "contests, contesting."

To pose the problem in terms of the meaning of ἀγών alone, I intend to show that ἀγών in the phrase ἀγὼν νεῶν does not have the rare meaning "assembly, gathering," but is related to the more common, specialized meaning of ἀγών in the epic period, "assembly with games," i.e., "assembly of people gathered together to engage in and view contests."[6] This meaning occurs frequently in *Iliad* 23–24, where ἀγών is used to designate the assembly of Greeks gathered together to celebrate the funeral games in honor of Patroclus.

To be sure, the ships of the Greeks have nothing to do with athletic contests in the *Iliad;* the only contests which can in any way be associated with the ships are military contests. There are, in fact, several indications that the ships have a definite relationship to the fighting during the period of time covered by the narrative of the *Iliad* between the first (15. 428) and last (20. 33) occurrences of ἀγὼν νεῶν, a relationship which they have nowhere else. In order to determine what this relationship is, it will be necessary to consider closely the narrative context of the different occurrences of ἀγὼν νεῶν in the *Iliad.*

After Achilles withdraws from the fighting in Book 1, the Trojans gradually gain ground against the Greeks. As a result, the Greeks become apprehensive and construct a wall, εἶλαρ νηῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν (7. 338), and a ditch, around their camp. On the following day, the Trojans are so successful in the fighting that they spend the night in the plain between Troy and the Greek camp (Book 8).

The first three occurrences of ἀγὼν νεῶν appear in the description of the next day's fighting, which extends from Books 11 to 18. On this day the Trojans advance up to the camp and break through the wall. Although driven off for a short period, they reattack and push forward to the Greek ships.

Immediately before the first occurrence of ἀγὼν νεῶν in Book 15, the fighting is characterized as being in a state of equilibrium, with neither side making any headway. This is expressed in three ways. First, the situation of the two armies is described: the Greeks stand unmoved, but are unable to push the Trojans back; the Trojans are unable to break through the Greek line and reach the huts and ships (405–409). Second, a simile is used: the battle is stretched as evenly as the measuring line of a carpenter (410–13). Third, the scene focuses on the chief antagonists: Hector and Ajax are fighting for one ship; Hector cannot drive Ajax away and set fire to the ship, and Ajax cannot drive Hector away from the ship (414–18). At this critical point a significant event occurs (419–20): ἔνθ' υἶα Κλυτίοιο Καλήτορα φαίδιμος Αἴας, / πῦρ ἐς νῆα φέροντα, κατὰ

6. Thus Mette in *LfgrE* (n. 1), *s.v.* ἀγών, B (cols. 135. 45–46, 135. 60–136. 10), "1. *Ensemble, Versammlung* (Zusammensein einer Mehrzahl) . . . c) von Teilnehmern an Wettkämpfen (dies akzessorisch) . . . 2. (von 1 c aus) *Versammlungsplatz* der Wettkämpfer, so Il." (the distinction made here between the "gathering" and the "place" occupied by the gathering is covered by the single English word "assembly"; ἀγών in epic diction never designates a "place of gathering" unoccupied by the gathering—the gathering of people defines the place); Passow-Crönert, *op. cit.* (n. 2), *s.v.* ἀγών, II. 2

(col. 77. 17, 23–24), "*Versammlung . . .* 2. Kampfspielversammlung"; LSJ, *s.v.* ἀγών, I. 1, "*gathering, assembly,*" subheading "esp. *assembly met to see games,* freq. in *Il.* 23." (In my dissertation, "*Agôn*: Studies in the Use of a Word" [University of California at Berkeley, 1971], pp. 7–23, 137–261, 258–86, I attempt to demonstrate that ἀγών never means simply "assembly," but always designates a particular kind of assembly, one associated with contests. The present article is a revision of Chapter vi, pp. 196–216.)

στῆθος βάλε δουρί. This mention of bringing fire to the ships, although it does occur at an important point in the action, is rather unemphatic. All the same, the idea that the Trojans might burn the ships is important and has been carefully led up to in the preceding books.[7] What makes Caletor's action especially significant is that this is the first mention of an actual attempt to set the ships on fire. This suggests that the equilibrium is shifting, and that the Trojans are beginning to prevail to the extent that the ships of the Greeks are threatened with destruction. It is at this moment that ἀγὼν νεῶν is used for the first time: Caletor is killed by Ajax, and Hector, when he sees Caletor fall, calls upon the Trojans and Lycians not to give way (427–28): "ἀλλ' υἷα Κλυτίοιο σαώσατε, μή μιν Ἀχαιοὶ / τεύχεα συλήσωσι νεῶν ἐν ἀγῶνι πεσόντα."

The Trojans continue to press their attack on the ships, which are in so much danger that Achilles allows Patroclus and the Myrmidons to enter the battle (beginning of Book 16).

When a ship is actually set on fire (16. 122–23),[8] Achilles urges Patroclus to hurry (126–29). After Patroclus and the Myrmidons have left, Achilles offers a prayer to Zeus for their success. It is in this prayer that the second occurrence of ἀγὼν νεῶν appears (239–41):

"αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ἐγὼ μενέω νηῶν ἐν ἀγῶνι,
ἀλλ' ἕταρον πέμπω πολέσιν μετὰ Μυρμιδόνεσσι
μάρνασθαι."

Patroclus is successful and drives the Trojans away from the ships and back across the ditch surrounding the Greek camp. He kills many Trojans, including the son of Zeus, Sarpedon. The third occurrence of ἀγὼν νεῶν appears in the description of Sarpedon's death. With his dying breath, he calls upon Glaucon to stir up the Lycians and fight for his body (498–500):

"σοὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ ἔπειτα κατηφείη καὶ ὄνειδος
ἔσσομαι ἤματα πάντα διαμπερές, εἴ κέ μ' Ἀχαιοὶ
τεύχεα συλήσωσι νεῶν ἐν ἀγῶνι πεσόντα."

This occurrence of ἀγὼν νεῶν has caused problems for the commentators, since Sarpedon falls outside of the assembly of ships,[9] but the inaccuracy probably results from a careless repetition of 15. 428 (= 16. 500) in a place not completely appropriate to it.[10]

Patroclus advances to the walls of Troy, against the orders of Achilles, and is killed by Hector (end of Book 16). After fierce

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7. Cf. C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 135, in a passage in which he discusses fire as a poetic image in the *Iliad*: "Presently the threat takes a more definite form: Hector will burn the ships. This is his first thought when he recognizes the meaning of the lightning flashes; throughout the Embassy, the essence of the Greeks' fear is the image of burning ships, and during the whole central battle it remains the principal deed which Hector envisions in his victory, growing ever more imminent until at last he is at the ships and calls to his companions to bring the fire." Mention of burning the ships occurs at 8. 181–83, 217, 235; 9. 242–43, 347, 436, 601–602, 653; 11. 666–67; 12. 198, 441; 13. 319–20, 628–29; 14. 47; 15. 417, 420, 507, 597–98, 600, 701–702, 718, 743–44; 16. 81–82, 112–13, 122–24, 127, 293–94, 301; 18. 13; 22. 374 (most of these citations in Whitman, pp. 337–38, nn. 42–45, 54, 56, 58).

8. This is preceded by an invocation to the Muses, which indicates the importance of the burning of the ship (16. 112–13): Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι, / ὅππως δὴ πρῶτον πῦρ ἔμπεσε νηυσὶν Ἀχαιῶν (cf. Whitman, *op. cit.* [n. 7], p. 136).

9. Not only does Sarpedon fall outside of the area occupied

by the ships, but only a short while before it was said that Zeus specifically protected Sarpedon from falling at the hands of Ajax and Teucer among the ships (12. 402–403): ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς κῆρας ἄμυνε / παιδὸς ἑοῦ, μὴ νηυσὶν ἐπι πρύμνῃσι δαμείη. A number of ingenious solutions have been proposed for this difficulty, none of which is satisfactory. Of the suggestions in Schol. B, T, one proposes that νέων, "youths," be read for νεῶν, "ships" (cf. Bentley's proposed emendation νεῶν ἐς ἀγῶνα φέροντες in C. G. Heyne, *Homeri carmina cum brevi annotatione*, VII [Leipzig, 1802], 227); another says that some people understand ἀγῶνι as τῇ μάχῃ (a few modern commentators have adopted this expedient, e.g., F. A. Paley, *The Iliad of Homer*, II [London, 1871], 146; A. Pierron, *L' Iliade d' Homère: Chants XIII–XXIV*² [Paris, 1884], p. 160). Eustathius suggests that Sarpedon is incoherent, since he is at the point of death. Leaf, *op. cit.* (n. 3), II, 191, has a similar approach: "Perhaps it conveys a rhetorical reproach: it is more shameful that he should be despoiled just when he has stormed the enemy's stronghold."

10. Thus Ameis–Hentze–Cauer, *op. cit.* (n. 3), II.2, 36: "hier weniger genau als in der Parallelstelle und in Widerspruch mit M 403."

fighting over the body of Patroclus, the Trojans once again prevail and push the Greeks away from the city and back into their camp (Book 17). The Trojans are halted only when the unarmed Achilles appears at the ditch outside the wall and shouts aloud (Book 18).

The last two occurrences of ἀγὼν νεῶν appear in the account of the activities of the following day (Books 19–22). After Patroclus has been killed, Achilles decides to return to battle, but before he does, he calls the Greeks to assembly in order that he may have a public reconciliation with Agamemnon; at this point the fourth occurrence of ἀγὼν νεῶν appears (19. 41–44):

> ὦρσεν δ' ἥρωας Ἀχαιούς.
> καί ῥ' οἵ περ τὸ πάρος γε νεῶν ἐν ἀγῶνι μένεσκον,
> οἵ τε κυβερνῆται καὶ ἔχον οἰήϊα νηῶν
> καὶ ταμίαι παρὰ νηυσὶν ἔσαν, σίτοιο δοτῆρες.

The remaining part of Book 19 is concerned with details of the reconciliation and with preparations for the day's coming battle.

The final occurrence of the phrase ἀγὼν νεῶν, at 20. 33, is in as important a place in the narrative as the first. At the end of Book 19, Achilles arms himself for battle, his horses prophesy his death, and he rides forth. At the beginning of Book 20, the Greeks prepare for battle (1–2), as do the Trojans, who are encamped in the plain (3). The scene changes to an assembly of the gods in which Zeus permits the gods to take part in the battle, since, if they did not, Achilles would scarcely be held off even for a little while by the Trojans and would take Troy ὑπέρμορον (4–30). At the end of the assembly, Zeus stirs up war: Ὣς ἔφατο Κρονίδης, πόλεμον δ' ἀλίαστον

ἔγειρε (31), and the gods then depart to their favorite sides (32–33): βὰν δ' ἴμεναι πόλεμόνδε θεοί, δίχα θυμὸν ἔχοντες· / Ἥρη μὲν μετ' ἀγῶνα νεῶν καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη, along with Poseidon, Hermes, and Hephaestus. Ares, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Leto, and Xanthus go down to the Trojan side (38–40).

The occurrence of ἀγὼν νεῶν at 20. 33, designating the place where the gods on the Greek side go, appears at the exact moment when the battle breaks out and Achilles enters the fighting after his long absence. Achilles' return to battle clearly represents a turning point in the action, just as Caletor's bringing of fire to the ships did: the Greeks will now have the upper hand, and the result of this superiority is that the ships are out of danger.

All five occurrences of ἀγὼν νεῶν, then, appear in that part of the narrative which covers the period from the time the ships are actually threatened with destruction by fire (16. 428) to the time when they are finally released from danger (20. 33). This suggests that the phrase ἀγὼν νεῶν is used *precisely because the ships are considered the object of the fighting or contesting during this period of time.*[11]

But, before this conclusion can be stated definitely, it is clear that a serious objection can be made to this interpretation in terms of the events occurring between the first and last instances of ἀγὼν νεῶν. This objection concerns the figure of Patroclus and his part in the action. When Patroclus enters the battle in Book 16—he is sent with the express command of Achilles to save the ships from being burnt (16. 80–82) —and drives the Trojans away from the ships, does this not free the ships from

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11. The use of ἀγὼν νεῶν at *the exact instant* when the ships become contested for, and again *exactly* when they cease to be the object of contest is parallel to the use of ἀγών to designate the assembly of Greeks at the funeral games of Patroclus in *Iliad* 23–24. The word ἀγών is used when the assembly (at the games) is convened: αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς / αὐτοῦ λαὸν

ἔρυκε καὶ ἵζανεν εὐρὺν ἀγῶνα (23. 257–58), and when it is dismissed: Λῦτο δ' ἀγών, λαοὶ δὲ θοὰς ἐπὶ νῆας ἕκαστοι / ἐσκίδναντ' ἰέναι (24. 1–2). In other words, the use of the word ἀγών marks the time when the Achaeans become an ἀγών and the time when they cease to be an ἀγών, as is the case with the Greek ships.

danger? Is it possible to argue that ἀγὼν νεῶν means "assembly of ships as the object of contest" after this event takes place?[12]

I believe so. As a matter of fact, Patroclus' success is only apparent, not real. Patroclus' entry into battle does not change the status of the ships, because he is fated to die (11. 604, 16. 46–47; cf. 16. 83–96); only Achilles can stop Hector and save the ships. This is shown both by statements put into the mouth of Zeus concerning his plan and by the actual sequence of events in the latter part of the *Iliad*.

As early as Book 8, Zeus makes the following prediction (473–77):

"οὐ γὰρ πρὶν πολέμου ἀποπαύσεται ὄβριμος Ἕκτωρ,
πρὶν ὄρθαι παρὰ ναῦφι ποδώκεα Πηλεΐωνα,
ἤματι τῷ ὅτ' ἂν οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ πρύμνῃσι μάχωνται
στείνει ἐν αἰνοτάτῳ περὶ Πατρόκλοιο θανόντος,
ὣς γὰρ θέσφατόν ἐστι."

Despite the difficulty with lines 475–76,[13]

it is clear that Achilles alone is the one fated to stop Hector in his forward advance.

After Hector has killed Patroclus, Zeus allows the Trojans to advance on the ships again (17. 453–55):

"ἔτι γάρ σφισι κῦδος ὀρέξω,
κτείνειν, εἰς ὅ κε νῆας ἐϋσσέλμους ἀφίκωνται
δύῃ τ' ἠέλιος καὶ ἐπὶ κνέφας ἱερὸν ἔλθῃ."[14]

Zeus's intention, then, is that the Trojans continue to threaten the ships up to the very moment Achilles returns to battle.[15]

The sequence of events after Patroclus' entry into battle is in perfect accord with these pronouncements. After Patroclus is killed, the Trojans drive the Greeks back into their camp. They are halted in their forward advance only by the appearance of the unarmed shouting Achilles (18. 217). The Trojans then hold an assembly in the plain (245–313) and, although Polydamas urges them to go back to the city, Hector

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12. The facts (1) that the fighting does not actually take place among the ships after the Trojans are driven back by Patroclus and the Myrmidons (three occurrences of ἀγὼν νεῶν appear after this event, 16. 500, 19. 42, 20. 33); and (2) that there is a period of time in the narrative between 15. 428 and 20. 33 when no fighting is going on at all (this would affect mainly 19. 42), cannot be pressed as objections to the interpretation of ἀγὼν νεῶν offered here, "assembly of ships as the object of contest." In fact, the use of ἀγών to designate the assembly of Greeks at the funeral games of Patroclus in *Iliad* 23–24 is similar in both respects. (1) It is clear from the long description of the chariot race (23. 262–650) that the race begins and ends in μέσος ἀγών (cf. esp. 507), but the chariots proceed away from and out of sight of the people in the ἀγών to a turning place (cf. 448, 451, 495), i.e., the race does not take place in the ἀγών except for the very beginning and end. In the case of ἀγὼν νεῶν, the fighting for the ships is at first among the ships, then moves away from them, only to return to them after the death of Patroclus. The fighting, however, never quite reaches the ἀγὼν νεῶν again. (2) 'Αγών designates the "assembly at the games," even when no contesting is actually going on, cf. 23. 258 and 24. 1, quoted in n. 11, as well as ἀγών at 23. 273 (when Achilles announces the first contest), 617 (after the chariot race is over), 654 (before the boxing match), 799 (before the mock fight in heavy armor), 886 (before the spear throwing contest, which does not take place). Thus, there need not be an actual contest in progress for ἀγών to be used to designate the assembly at the games; it designates the assembly whose main purpose is to view and engage in contests, whether or not the assembly is actually viewing contests when ἀγών is applied to it (the same is the case with words designating groups with specific functions in English,

"audience," "orchestra," "class," "council," etc.). Similarly, ἀγὼν νεῶν is used to designate the assembly of ships when they are conceived as the object of contest, whether or not there is fighting going on at any particular time.

13. According to Leaf, *op. cit.* (n. 3), I, 363, these lines were "athetized by Aristarchos, on the grounds that ἤματι τῶι ought not to be used of an event which is to happen on the next day; that Achilles comes to the battle over Patroclus not ἐπὶ πρύμνηισι, but at the trench outside the ships; that στεῖνος means a *narrow place*, not a *strait* in the metaphorical sense ...; and finally, that the exact definition of the time is superfluous. None of these grounds except the first seems to be of weight. ἤματι τῶι is used of the future only here and in X 359." Ameis–Hentze–Cauer, *op. cit.* (n. 3), I.3, 72–73, bracket lines 473–76.

14. The Trojans, however, do not actually reach the ships (see above). The reason for this inaccuracy is that these lines are repeated from 11. 193–94, where they are more appropriate (cf. Leaf, *op. cit.* [n. 3], II, 247).

15. Cf. also Zeus's remarks in Book 15 on what will happen after Achilles returns to the fighting (68–71):

"τοῦ δὲ χολωσάμενος κτενεῖ Ἕκτορα δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.
ἐκ τοῦ δ' ἄν τοι ἔπειτα παλίωξιν παρὰ νηῶν
αἰὲν ἐγὼ τεύχοιμι διαμπερές, εἰς ὅ κ' Ἀχαιοὶ
Ἴλιον αἰπὺ ἕλοιεν Ἀθηναίης διὰ βουλάς."

These lines, however, appear in a group of lines which has been generally rejected. According to D. B. Monro and T. W. Allen, *Homeri carmina*[3], II (Oxford, 1920), *ad loc.*, Aristophanes and Aristarchus athetized lines 56–77, and Zenodotus omitted 64–77. Both Leaf, *op. cit.* (n. 3), II, 109, and Ameis–Hentze–Cauer, *op. cit.* (n. 3), II.1, 89–90, bracket 64–71.

still thinks he can achieve victory (293–96):

"νῦν δ' ὅτε πέρ μοι ἔδωκε Κρόνου πάϊς ἀγκυλομήτεω
κῦδος ἀρέσθ' ἐπὶ νηυσί, θαλάσσῃ τ' ἔλσαι Ἀχαιούς,
νήπιε, μηκέτι ταῦτα νοήματα φαῖν' ἐνὶ δήμῳ·
οὐ γάρ τις Τρώων ἐπιπείσεται· οὐ γὰρ ἐάσω."

The Trojans, of course, obey Hector and camp in the plain; thus, when the battle opens at the beginning of Book 20, the ships are still the object of contention.

It is the speech of Polydamas preceding Hector's which best illustrates what is meant by ἀγὼν νεῶν as opposed to the ships in their normal state: Polydamas urges the Trojans to return to the city, arguing that the Greeks were easier to fight with during the time Achilles was angry at Agamemnon ("χαίρεσκον γὰρ ἔγωγε θοῆς ἐπὶ νηυσὶν ἰαύων / ἐλπόμενος νῆας αἱρησέμεν ἀμφιελίσσας," 18. 259–60), but with the pending reappearance of Achilles on the field, he has changed his mind ("ἀλλὰ περὶ πτόλιός τε μαχήσεται ἠδὲ γυναικῶν," 265).

This statement provides a clear background for understanding the use of ἀγὼν νεῶν. Before the withdrawal of Achilles from the war, the object of the fighting is Troy. But once he departs, the situation gradually changes, until the Greeks themselves are attacked and the ships threatened. At the moment the ships are actually attacked with fire, they become the object of contention, an ἀγὼν νεῶν (15. 428). They remain an ἀγὼν νεῶν for as long as Achilles stays out of the war (16. 239, 16. 500, 19. 42). As soon as Achilles returns to the fighting, however, the ships are released from danger, and again the fighting is for

Troy. The success of Patroclus, therefore, is transitory and of no real significance.[16] The conclusion reached above stands, that the ships have a definite and unique relationship to the fighting in that section of the Iliad stretching from the first to the last occurrences of ἀγὼν νεῶν.

This interpretation of ἀγὼν νεῶν makes the occurrence of ἄγυρις νεῶν at 24. 141 especially significant. This phrase concludes a conversation between Thetis and Achilles. Thetis has come to Achilles with a message from Zeus that the gods are angry because he refuses to ransom Hector's body. Achilles agrees to do so, and the conversation is ended with these words (141–42): "Ὣς οἵ γ' ἐν νηῶν ἀγύρει μήτηρ τε καὶ υἱὸς / πολλὰ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἔπεα πτερόεντ' ἀγόρευον.

Ἄγυρις νεῶν occurs at a point in the narrative when all the events caused by the wrath of Achilles have been canceled out, i.e., after the Trojans have been driven back into the city, after the funeral games of Patroclus have been celebrated, and immediately after Achilles has agreed to give up the body of Hector. The appearance of ἄγυρις νεῶν marks the fact that the situation has returned to what it was before the wrath: the ships are again a mere collection forming the base of the Greek operations, and Troy is again the object of contention.[17]

A final question remains to be answered: what is the relationship between the common epic meaning of ἀγών, "assembly with games," and the meaning of ἀγών in the phrase ἀγὼν νεῶν, "assembly [of ships] as the object of contest"? One might posit a more general meaning which encompasses

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16. Hence, the use of ἀγὼν νεῶν at 16. 239 (in the prayer of Achilles for the safety of Patroclus, immediately after he sends him out to battle) and at 16. 500 (the dying words of Sarpedon, the most important of the Trojans killed by Patroclus) is especially ironic and pathetic, as is the first occurrence of ἀγὼν νεῶν (15. 428) in Hector's mouth as he storms the Greek ships.

17. This use of ἄγυρις νεῶν is for stylistic effect, not a

matter of meaning. Presumably ἄγυρις νεῶν could be used at any point in the narrative to designate the ships, including 15. 428–20. 33, since ἄγυρις νεῶν is general and may be used to designate the ships, no matter what state they are in (so long as they are gathered together). Ἄγυρις νεῶν includes ἀγὼν νεῶν, but not vice versa; if the interpretation offered here is correct, ἀγὼν νεῶν can be used of the ships only when they are the object of contest (15. 428–20. 33).

both, something like "assembly + contest." Since, however, the circumstances governing the use of this phrase are unique and entirely dependent on the story in the *Iliad*, ἀγών in the phrase ἀγὼν νεῶν can best be considered a striking, although hitherto unrecognized, metaphor based on the common epic meaning of ἀγών, "assembly with games."[18]

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18. On the similarities between the use of ἀγών to designate the assembly of ships as the object of contest and its use to designate the assembly of Greeks at the funeral games of Patroclus, see nn. 11 and 12. The transference of sense posited here is natural and unobjectionable. The word ἄεθλος, ordinarily used of athletic contests, is used once in the *Iliad* to designate contests in war: πολέας δ' ἐνέπασσεν ἀέθλους / Τρώων θ' ἱπποδάμων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων (3. 126–27). Similarly, μάχομαι, ordinarily used in the military sphere, is used in the description of the boxing match at the funeral games of Patroclus: οὐ γὰρ πύξ γε μαχήσεαι, οὐδὲ παλαίσεις (23. 621; cf. πυγμαχίη, 653, 665). In the classical period, when ἀγών comes to be used of the activity "contest, contesting" associated with the "assembly with games," it is transferred to military contests before being used of any other kind of contest, except athletic contests (cf. Ellsworth, *op. cit.* [n. 6], pp. 56–73).