

PENELOPE'S FAT HAND (OD. 21. 6-7)

εἴλετο δὲ κληῖδ' εὐκαμπέα χειρὶ παχείῃ
καλὴν χαλκείην· κώπη δ' ἐλέφαντος ἔπηνεν.

Translators¹ and scholars² have been much troubled by the phrase *χειρὶ παχείῃ*, which they find demeaning of Penelope. They forget, however, that Homer had earlier referred to her as *πάσσονα* (18. 195-96):

καὶ μιν μακροτέρην καὶ πάσσονα θῆκεν ἰδέσθαι,
λευκοτέρην δ' ἄρα μιν θῆκε πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος.

Χειρὶ παχείῃ in 21. 6 recalls the *πάσσονα* of 18. 195 (and of the whole scene) and reminds us that Penelope is still beautiful and desirable: she has not withered since her appearance before the suitors in 18. 208 and Odysseus in 19. 53 ff. That the poet intended *χειρὶ παχείῃ* to remind us of Penelope's beauty as described in 18 seems indicated also by the intervention in both scenes of Athena (18. 158-59 = 21. 1-2) and the repeated mention of ivory.³ The reason that he singled out the forearm and hand is that they are the most prominent visible parts of Penelope's body in this scene.⁴ Thus *χειρὶ παχείῃ* is a term of approval, was intended as such by the poet, and perhaps could better be rendered "plump, well-turned," provided only that we recall that Greek ideals of feminine beauty demanded more substance than do our own, and that a woman's arms were objects of admiration.⁵

Granted that the above reflects Homer's intent, we have not fully answered scholarly observations which have to do with both formulaic usage and the listeners' understanding. Surely at least one of the reasons that Homer chose *χειρὶ παχείῃ* is that it was a formulaic phrase and readily available for the end of a hexameter line. Indeed it occurs descriptive of men in 20. 299 (Ctesippus) and 22. 326 (Odysseus) in more or less its Iliadic meaning, "stout, strong." The question then is whether Homer's hearers realized that he was referring back to 18. 195-96, or whether they thought of suitors casting a hoof (20. 299) or of Odysseus grasping a sword (22. 236).⁶

We cannot answer this question because we cannot know whether the phrase from its use elsewhere in epic had acquired the connotation—independent of context—of massiveness and strength. If it had, Homer failed of his intent, and

1. E.g., A. T. Murray (Loeb) "strong," T. E. Shaw (Galaxy) "firmly carrying," R. Fitzgerald (Anchor) "clenched," W. H. D. Rouse (Mentor) "got out the key," A. Cook (Norton) "stout," S. H. Butcher and A. Lang (Modern Library) "strong," E. V. Rieu (Penguin) with his "shapely" and H. Ebeling (*Lexicon* [Leipzig, 1885], s.v.) with his "volle, runde Hand" come very close to my own view.

2. F. M. Combellack, "Some Formulaic Illogicalities in Homer," *TAPA* 96 (1965): 41-56; W. B. Stanford (ed.), *The "Odyssey" of Homer*² (London, 1967), vol. 2 ad 18. 357.

3. On the significance of ivory in connection with Penelope I follow Anne Amory (Parry), "The Gates of Horn and Ivory" (*YCLS* 20 [1966]: 3-57) as against A. B. Lord, "Homer as Oral Poet" (*HSCP* 72 [1967]: 1-46, esp. 34 ff.).

4. In this connection it is well to recall that *χείρ* refers not merely to the hand, but also to the arm as far as the elbow. Cf. R. J. Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (London, 1924; reprinted Norman, Oklahoma, 1963), s.v., 4; and LSJ, s.v., I. 2.

5. As proved, e.g., by the epithet *λευκώλενος*, and, in art, by feminine attire which bared only the arms (and the ankles).

6. Adam Parry, "Language and Characterization in Homer" (*HSCP* 76 [1972]: 1-22) has speculated helpfully on the audience's consciousness of formulas and epithets.

his listeners must have been as shocked as we tend to be upon hearing 21. 6.⁷ I prefer to assume that the phrase always meant "full" (in a visually pleasurable sense), and that it derived its connotative associations from the context in which it occurred: it did not impose these associations from without. *Χεῖρι παχείῃ* is a phrase of approbation for both men and women. Clearly the nature of the *πάχος* will differ along sexual lines, denoting massiveness and strength in men,⁸ beauty in women.

7. Informal (and far from compelling) evidence that the audience grasped Homer's intent is the fact that neither he nor subsequent scribes and scholars were moved to alter the phrase.

8. And in goddesses: *Il.* 21. 403, 424; *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 340. Other honorific adjectives and epithets are used of both men and women with a different connotation. Among them are *ἀνύμων*, on which see Anne Amory Parry, *Blameless Aegisthus*, Mnemosyne, suppl. 26 (Leyden, 1973), *passim* and pp. 138-43 (of Penelope); and *ἰφθίμος* (ibid., appendix 2, list 6 [1-7]), whatever its meaning: cf. J. Warden, *Phoenix* 23 (1969): 143-58 and A. Athanassakis, *Glotta* 49 (1971): 1-21. And one will also recall that the phrase in *Od.* 18. 195 quoted above, with variations and with the appropriate change of gender, is used also of males in the *Odyssey*, always of a member of the family of Odysseus: of Odysseus himself (6. 230, 8. 20, 23. 157), of Laertes (24. 367).

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A MISUNDERSTOOD PHRASE IN LIVY 21. 43. 8

satis adhuc in vastis Lusitaniae Celtiberiaeque montibus pecora consecrando nullum emolumentum tot laborum periculorumque vestrorum vidistis; tempus est iam opulenta vos ac ditia stipendia facere et magna operae pretia mereri, tantum itineris per tot montes fluminaque et tot armatas gentes emensos.

In *CP* 72 (1977): 315 David O. Ross, Jr. wrote that the phrase *pecora consecrando* in this passage "cannot be right"; in place of it he conjectured *decora consecrando*. The conjecture is a clever one, and does good service in calling attention to an expression which is perhaps, at first sight, obscure to us. However, the proposed change will not bear scrutiny. The transmitted text, when properly understood, appears to be in harmony with Livy's language and patterns of thought elsewhere.

Ross raises three objections to *pecora consecrando*. (1) The verb *consecrari* normally means to pursue or to strive after, "neither of which meanings is at all appropriate or possible for herding, or following, flocks." (2) The sense is absurd. "Did the Carthaginians spend those twenty years in Spain tending flocks? What are the labors and dangers of the shepherd's life?" (3) The style is objectionable. "... in the rhetorically inflated context . . . , the idea of shepherding is a flat anticlimax. . . ."

These objections assume that, if the text is sound, *consecrari* would bear an abnormal meaning and that there would be a reference to shepherding on the part of Hannibal's troops. Neither is the case. Moreover, there is no place in this sentence for a reference to military decorations and glory (*decora*); Livy rather presents a clear contrast between *then* and *now*. "Hitherto you have received no material rewards (*emolumentum*) for your *labores periculaque*; now there is an opportunity (*tempus est*) to remedy that." *Decora* introduces an extraneous thought which would interrupt the natural rhetorical balance of the sentence.