

## NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

### ANTILOCHUS' STRATEGY: THE CHARIOT RACE IN *ILIAD* 23

During the chariot race in Book 23 of the *Iliad*, Antilochus manages, despite having slower horses, to overtake Menelaus.<sup>1</sup> He holds his lead (barely) until the finish line, thereby finishing second, although a dispute later arises between them concerning the prize for second place. The precise strategy by which Antilochus overtakes Menelaus has never been clearly explained, but commentators have generally accepted Menelaus' claim that Antilochus somehow cheated in order to get ahead.<sup>2</sup> It is also assumed that Antilochus either ignores or misapplies Nestor's earlier advice on how to win the race. The details of Antilochus' strategy may be unclear because the epic poet does not care to make them clear, but on the principle that we should seek the most coherent reading possible I present the following interpretation of the scene, which accounts for the details of Antilochus' strategy by connecting the description of his maneuver closely with his father's advice. This interpretation will not remove all the inconsistencies present, but it will, I believe, give a better overall sense than anything thus far proposed.

When Achilles calls for entrants in the chariot race, five men present themselves (287–301, 351). The order in which they come forth clearly indicates the relative speed of their horses, which is taken to be fixed: after Eumelus and Diomedes, Menelaus is third, Antilochus fourth, and Meriones fifth. As Antilochus steps forth, Nestor “speaks intelligently for his benefit, and he understands it well.”<sup>3</sup> Nestor begins with the general point (306–14) that even though Antilochus' horses are slower he can compensate for this disadvantage by his greater skill (*μητις*) in horsemanship. Nestor's specific advice focuses on making the turn, at which Antilochus is already particularly skillful.<sup>4</sup> The less skilled driver will let his horses wander wide around the turn,<sup>5</sup> whereas the more skillful charioteer shows his skill by holding his horses tight to the post (319–25). This advice should be even more useful to Antilochus since Nestor already knows the turning-post (*τέρμα*) Achilles has selected for this race (333). It is a tall stump (327) with two white stones leaning against it (329) “at a narrowing of the road, and there is smooth horse-running around it.”<sup>6</sup> Antilochus must hold as tightly as possible to this post

1. For the text of the *Iliad*, I use the edition of D. B. Munro and T. W. Allen (Oxford, 1920).

2. Cf. 585 δόλω. J.-P. Vernant and M. Detienne, “La mêtis d'Antiloque,” *REG* 80 (1967): 70, speak of “une manoeuvre plus ou moins frauduleuse.”

3. Μυθεῖτ' εἰς ἀγαθὰ φρονέων νοέοντι καὶ αὐτῷ (305).

4. Οἶσθα γάρ εὐ περὶ τέρμαθ' ἐλίσσόμεν (309).

5. Most translators and commentators take ἐπὶ πολλὸν ἐλίσσεται (320) to mean “turns wide [around the turning-post],” though some, e.g., P. Chantraine and H. Goube, “*Iliade*” (Paris, 1964), ad loc., see the phrase as describing a zig-zag course. The clear contrast with 322–25 supports the former view.

6. Ἐν ξυνοχῇσιν ὁδοῦ. λείος δ' ἵπποδρομος ἀμφίς (330). On the sense of ξυνοχῆσιν, see LSJ, s.v. συνοχή II.1. Commentators, e.g., W. Leaf, *The “Iliad”* (London, 1888), ad loc., find the expression difficult and most take it to refer to a “joining” or “intersection” either of the two laps of the race or of the

without touching it (334–43), driving carefully and thoughtfully. And if he goes ahead at the turn, no one will overtake him (344–48).

It is regularly noted by critics that despite Nestor's clear and detailed advice Antilochus, according to the standard interpretation of the scene, makes no use of this advice but instead passes Menelaus on the home stretch. Discrepancies of this sort are, of course, common in the Homeric poems, and analysts did not hesitate to mark Nestor's speech as an interpolation.<sup>7</sup> More recent critics, however, are less ready to accept such solutions and seek instead to account for such discrepancies in terms of the poem itself,<sup>8</sup> but no such account has been given for this case. Rather than explain the discrepancy I suggest we try to eliminate it by understanding Antilochus' actual behavior in the race in terms of Nestor's advice. This will create a new but more manageable discrepancy, and the result will be a more satisfactory overall interpretation of the scene.

After Nestor speaks, the contestants take their positions. Achilles then shows them the turning-post, visible far away on the level plain,<sup>9</sup> and sends Phoenix to observe the race at this point. Phoenix presumably observes the part of the race near, and especially behind, the turning-post, which would not be visible to the other spectators, and makes certain that all the competitors actually round the turning-post. By having Phoenix sent off to observe this part of the race the poet suggests the possibility that something significant will happen here, though as it turns out Phoenix is not called on to testify, since Menelaus and Antilochus settle their dispute peacefully.

The race now begins (362) and the poet first describes the fortunes of the two frontrunners, Eumelus and Diomedes, apparently after they have rounded the turn.<sup>10</sup> Behind Diomedes are Menelaus (401) and Antilochus (402), who urges his horses to make every effort and catch up with Menelaus (403–14). If they run as quickly as possible, he tells them, he himself will contrive to pass Menelaus in a narrow part of the road.<sup>11</sup> For a while the horses pursue more quickly and then "suddenly battle-enduring Antilochus saw a narrowing in the hollow road. There was a break in the ground where confined winter water had cut away part of the track and lowered the whole place."<sup>12</sup> Menelaus makes for this narrow piece of

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racetrack and some other road. But no sense of *συνέχω* or *συνέχομαι* supports a meaning "intersection" for the noun, whereas the sense "contraction" (i.e., narrowing) is easily derived from the passive of the verb. *Ἰππόδρομος* seems to designate an area not just on the track (*ὁδός*) but all around the turning-post, including the ground inside the road next to the post.

7. See, e.g., Leaf, *The "Iliad,"* p. 380, who regards the speech as typical of the advice inserted by the interpolator as his own comment on the action.

8. See, e.g., the cases discussed by B. Fenik in *Studies in the "Odyssey"* (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 105–30.

9. Σήμνηνε δὲ τέρματ' Ἀχιλλεύς / τηλόθεν ἐν λείῳ πεδίῳ (358–59); there is no reason to doubt that this is the *τέρμα* described earlier by Nestor.

10. Ἄλλ' ὅτε δὴ πύματον τέλεον δρόμον ὠκέες ἵπποι (373).

11. Ταῦτα δ' ἐγὼν αὐτὸς τεχνήσομαι ἥδ' ἐ νηῶν. / στενωπῷ ἐν ὁδῷ παραδύμεναι, οὐδέ με λήσει; οὐδέ με λήσει echoes similar expressions in Nestor's speech (323, 326).

12. Αἶψα δ' ἔπειτα / στείνος ὁδοῦ κοίλην ἵδεν Ἀντίλοχος μενεχάρμης. / ῥωχμός ἔην γαίης. ἥ χειμέριον ἀλὲν ὕδωρ / ἐξέρρηξεν ὁδοῖο. βάθυνε δὲ χώρον ἅπαντα (418–21). The details of this description are not entirely clear. The *χειμέριον ἀλὲν ὕδωρ* must be (as *ἀλὲν* indicates) water with a restricted flow of some sort, perhaps a kind of backwater left after winter flooding has subsided. This has produced a depression which cuts into the road from one side, thereby narrowing it and making it appear "hollow." I do not think the Greek can be describing an ordinary dry creek bed, along which or through which the track runs, as most critics assume.

track to prevent any other chariot from coming alongside (422); presumably he moves to the center of the track. Antilochus then turns aside "off the track, and he pursued for a little, leaning aside";<sup>13</sup> apparently the side of the track is relatively smooth here. Antilochus' action worries Menelaus, who shouts at him to hold back his horses in this narrow part of the track and wait to pass on the wider track coming up, lest there be a collision destroying them both (425–28). But Antilochus drives on even more eagerly in pursuit for a while,<sup>14</sup> until Menelaus slackens the reins and his horses fall back to avoid a crash (429–37). Menelaus rebukes Antilochus and adds that he will not get the prize without an oath (438–41). Then Menelaus spurs on his horses and at the finish line he is only inches behind. Had the race been any longer, he would have beaten Antilochus (516–27).

The traditional understanding of this event is that it takes place on a straight stretch during the return leg of the race. This view is supported by the explicit statement of 373–74 (see n. 10) but otherwise presents several serious difficulties. First, in a race on a level plain with only one turning post the two legs of the race have essentially the same track, so that the road would have to be narrow on both the way out and the way back; thus one must suppose that Antilochus missed his first chance to pass. Second, it is hard to see how the break in the ground described in the text (see n. 12) can narrow a road on an open plain, since the track can simply skirt the edge of the depressed area or, if it is very large, cross through it without becoming any narrower. Third, if Antilochus is behind Menelaus when he sees the narrowing, how can he with his slower horses pull even, thus threatening a collision? While Menelaus keeps to the center of the track, Antilochus veers off it and thus ought to be slowed even more; at least he can have no advantage by being off the track.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Nestor has stated that, if Antilochus is leading after the turn, no one will catch him, and yet Menelaus all but catches him even though (on this view) Antilochus did not take the lead till after the turn; it seems that, if Antilochus had been leading when they left the turn, Menelaus would have easily passed him before the finish line.

These difficulties are eliminated if we assume that Antilochus follows his father's advice and passes Menelaus on the turn. Reading the scene with that advice in mind, we should expect Antilochus to look for the narrowing of the road at the turn and to take advantage of his greater skill in turning and his foreknowledge of the track to pass Menelaus at that point. Only at the turn, moreover, where the turning-post limits one side of the track, could a backwater cause an unavoidable hollowing out and narrowing of the track. With the post on one side and the depression on the other the track narrows, though there is probably still some running room on the inside of the track next to the post. Menelaus sticks to the center of the track and turns rather widely; Antilochus moves off the track on the inside and sticks closer to the post. As they near the narrowest part of the

13. Ἐκτός οδοῦ, ὀλίγον δὲ παρακλίνας ἐδίωκεν (424); παρακλίνας may recall κλινθῆναι in 335.

14. Antilochus runs in close pursuit for the length of a discus throw (431–33), perhaps about forty yards. Presumably Menelaus moves to the center of the track and Antilochus moves off it in pursuit some distance before they reach the narrow stretch ahead.

15. It is hardly likely that the track itself is rougher than the ground alongside it, for in that case the track would have been moved to the smoother ground.

road, perhaps halfway through the turn, they are even and Menelaus fears they will collide if one of them does not pull back.<sup>16</sup> Antilochus dashes ahead and barely keeps his lead till the finish, just as Nestor had predicted. Thus he comes in ahead *κέρδεσιν, οὐ τι τάχει γε* (515 “by his skill, not by his [horses’] speed”), just as Nestor had advised him.<sup>17</sup> Antilochus has the advantage of prior information about the track and this may be considered unfair, but he beats Menelaus not by cheating but by using his skill in a daring maneuver.

Against this interpretation one might object that Homer never mentions the turning-post in his description of the actual events, nor does he specifically state that Antilochus was following his father’s advice. But the poet reminds us at the beginning of this scene (402) that Antilochus is driving his father’s horses; Antilochus anticipates a narrowing of the track (415–16), presumably because he recalls Nestor’s description of the track around the turning-post (330); the poet’s summary comment that Antilochus won by skill rather than speed certainly recalls Nestor’s reflections on the dichotomy of skill and speed; and, finally, Nestor’s prediction of victory is fulfilled. These points, together with other small echoes of Nestor’s advice,<sup>18</sup> indicate that the description of the race is meant to reflect Nestor’s advice.

A more serious objection is that, as we have noted, the horses are said (373–74) already to be on the return leg of the race. There is no way to avoid this discrepancy, but one can make two observations with regard to it. First, the fortunes of Eumelus and Diomedes are also described (375–400) after they apparently have entered the return leg, and yet Idomeneus, who can see the entire course except for the area behind the turning-post, asserts that Eumelus must have come to grief when he was rounding the turn: Idomeneus assumes that “the charioteer lost the reins, was unable to hold the horses properly around the post, and failed to make the turn.”<sup>19</sup> It thus appears that the events related at 375–400 took place behind the turning-post rather than on the return leg, and the same discrepancy exists here as in the case of Menelaus and Antilochus.

The second observation is that the information that the charioteers are in the return leg of the race is formulaic; identical words are used of the runners in the footrace (768), where the action which follows does in fact take place near the end of the race. This suggests that we may be able to account for the discrepancy in the description of the chariot race by recalling “the well-known characteristic of Homeric poetry that the ready-made phrase or line is frequently pressed into service even in circumstances where its precise meaning becomes stretched and unclear.”<sup>20</sup> As a means of heightening narrative tension it is natural that significant events in any race would be placed near the end, and a formulaic description of

16. It is not certain that they would necessarily collide if Menelaus did not pull back. Nestor’s information that there is “smooth horse-running around” the post (see n. 6) may indicate to Antilochus that there is actually room for both of them all the way around the turn. Menelaus does not know this and therefore pulls back.

17. Cf. 322 *κέρδεα*.

18. See nn. 11, 13.

19. *Ἦέ τὸν ἥρῳχον φύγον ἦνία, οὐδὲ δυνάσθη / εὐ σχεθέειν περὶ τέρμα, καὶ οὐκ ἐτύχησεν ἐλίξας* (465–66). Many editors, e.g., K. F. Ameis and C. Hentze (Leipzig, 1906), delete the preceding lines (462–64), where Idomeneus says he saw the horses of Eumelus in first place *περὶ τέρμα βαλοῦσας*, since in view of what follows he could not have seen them go all the way around the turn. But the phrase may imply only that he saw the horses start into the turn in first place.

20. Fenik, *Studies*, p. 124.

this point in the race would easily evolve. The poet introduces the significant events in the chariot race with this traditional designation, overlooking for the moment that both events actually take place as the contestants are rounding the turn, before they enter the return leg.

The general vagueness of the description of Antilochus' overtaking Menelaus may be explained with reference to the dispute which arises between them later (566–613). Though Antilochus may be thought to confess to foul play when Menelaus later challenges his prize, he does not in fact admit this charge. He ignores the oath offered by Menelaus and with abundant deference says that he is young and headstrong and that Menelaus is the better man. He then offers to give Menelaus the prize "which I won" (592), as well as anything else he wishes, but in the end Menelaus lets him keep the prize. From Menelaus' point of view Antilochus cheated, but the more objective view is that he used skill to compensate for his slower horses (515), just as Nestor had advised him. The vagueness of the description of the actual events allows the poet to suggest that both sides may have some justification for their positions and to preserve the dignity and honor of all involved.

In sum, the assumption that a formulaic line has been used imprecisely to heighten the tension allows us to attain a more satisfactory interpretation of Antilochus' strategy. Nestor's advice does not go unheeded but rather gives Antilochus just the information he needs to make use of his greater skill and beat Menelaus despite his slower horses.<sup>21</sup>

MICHAEL GAGARIN  
University of Texas

21. I would like to thank the anonymous referee for some helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

#### ON CATULLUS 11

The several interpretations offered by scholars of the unity of Catullus 11 do not entirely account for the apparent awkwardness of the transition from the invocation/excursus of lines 1–14 to the invective of lines 17–20.<sup>1</sup> The tendency has been to argue either for oddity or for the preparation of a brutal surprise by the poet,<sup>2</sup> but Ross has shown how the handling of geographical allusion by Catullus here, as frequently, combines the stuff of Hellenistic and Roman practice to achieve an epic effect.<sup>3</sup> Certainly that is the practical force of the references

1. The basic bibliography includes L. Richardson, Jr., "Furi et Aureli, Comites Catulli," *CP* 58 (1963): 93–106; T. E. Kinsey, "Catullus 11," *Latomus* 24 (1965): 537–44; D. O. Ross, *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Harvard, 1969), esp. pp. 173–74; M. C. J. Putnam, "Catullus 11: The Ironies of Integrity," *Ramus* 3 (1974): 70–86; G. S. Duclos, "Catullus 11: Atque in Perpetuum, Lesbia, Ave Atque Vale," *Arethusa* 9 (1976): 77–89; D. Mulroy, "An Interpretation of Catullus 11," *CW* 71 (1977–78): 237–47; A. J. Woodman, "Catullus 11 and 51," *LCM* 3 (1978): 77–79.

2. See, e.g., Kinsey, "Catullus 11," pp. 538–42, who points out that the comparison of the first part of the poem with Hor. *Odes* 2. 6 "only serves to reveal the oddity of Catullus' logic." If the comparison were apt, one might have expected Catullus to ask Furius and Aurelius to meet him somewhere, as Horace was prepared to ask of Septimius. See also K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London and Basingstoke, 1970), pp. 125–26.

3. Ross, *Style and Tradition*, pp. 95–98. See also Putnam, "Catullus 11," pp. 70–73; Duclos, "Catullus 11," pp. 84–85; Mulroy, "An Interpretation," p. 243.