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SHORTER NOTES

ILIAD 24.649: ANOTHER SOLUTION

J. T. Hooker argues that at *Il.* 24.649 ἐπικερτομέων must mean 'taunting' and, since 'taunting' makes no sense, that ἐπικερτομέων must have entered our *Iliad* at this point from a version of the *Iliad* slightly different from ours in which it did make sense.[1] I wish to argue that ἐπικερτομέων has a meaning different from 'taunting', which makes good sense of this, and every other, context.

Heubeck, as Hooker notes, shows that κερτομέω carries the primary idea of provocation: 'the κερτομ- word indicates the provocation of another person into behaving in a certain way, whether that is the behaviour desired by the speaker ... or not'.[2] Hooker's own analysis of the meanings of κερτομέω in their Homeric contexts supports Heubeck's analysis but I should like to place strong emphasis on one particular point: to κερτομέω someone is to speak in such a way as to provoke (whether intentionally or not) a powerful *emotional* reaction. Thus, I will argue, κερτομέω should mean 'utter stinging words at', 'pierce to the heart', 'cut to the quick', rather than merely 'provoke'. The text of Homer nowhere militates against such a meaning, and in many places actively supports it. I now re-examine briefly the fifteen examples of κερτομ- words discussed by Hooker:[3]

***Il.* 2.256:** Odysseus accuses Thersites of speaking κερτομέων. Odysseus' and the army's reaction shows very clearly that Thersites' words were indeed ones which 'cut to the quick'.

***Il.* 4.5–6:** Zeus tries to ἐρεθίζω Hera κερτομίοις ἐπέεσσι. Both Athene and Hera are furious at what Zeus says (χόλος, 23–4).

***Il.* 5.418–19:** Athene and Hera now ἐρεθίζω Zeus κερτομίοις ἐπέεσσι, and Athene enquires whether Zeus κεχολώσεαι at what she says (421). Athene is attempting to stir Zeus to an unwise emotional reaction, but Zeus coolly smiles at her (426). The κερτομίοισι of Hera at *Il.* 1.539 provoke a similarly cool reaction from Zeus at first (544–50) but when Hera goes too far, Zeus threatens her and she ἔδεισεν (568).

***Il.* 16.259–61:** the famous wasp simile. The point of the simile is that the wasps react with great ferocity to the κερτομέοντες boys.

***Od.* 8.153:** Laodamas, encouraged by his brother Euryalos, politely invites Odysseus to take part in the games. Odysseus asks

Λαοδάμα, τί με ταῦτα κελεύετε κερτομέοντες;

But there is no question of Laodamas 'taunting' Odysseus here. He has been the soul of tact and courtesy. What he has done is make an offer which (unintentionally) cuts Odysseus to the quick. As Odysseus says later, Laodamas' word was θυμοδακής (185) – a good synonym for the basic meaning of κερτομ- words. This is an important passage. It makes clear that A can address B without intending to provoke a reaction, but nevertheless causing one.

***Od.* 9.474:** Odysseus addresses the Cyclops κερτομίοισι and Cyclops χολώσατο κηρόθι μᾶλλον (480).

***Od.* 16.85–7:** Telemachus is afraid that the suitors κερτομέωσιν Odysseus. This will result in ἄχος for Telemachus.

***Od.* 18.346–50:** Athene provokes the suitors into bringing yet more ἄχος into Odysseus' heart (cf. θυμοδακής at 8.185). As a result, Eurymachus speaks κερτομέων Ὀδυσῆα, and makes his

[1] J. T. Hooker, 'A Residual Problem in *Iliad* 24', *CQ* 36 (1986), 32–7 (hereafter 'Hooker'). I am grateful to Mr Hooker for comments on an early draft of this paper.

[2] Hooker, 35, commenting on A. Heubeck 'Zwei homerische πεῖραι (*Od.* 24.205ff.–*Il.* 2.53ff.)', *Živa Antika* 31 (1981), 73–83. [3] Hooker, 33–5.

companions *laugh*. The connection between κερτομέω and laughter is very significant. Nothing was more likely to 'cut to the quick' a Homeric hero than an attempt to humiliate him. Odysseus replies insultingly to this act of κερτομία, and Eurymachus ἐχολώσατο κηρόθι μᾶλλον (387).

***Od.* 20.177:** Melanthios attacks Odysseus κερτομίοισι. He makes no reply, but clearly feels deeply about the insult (184):

ἀλλ' ἀκέων κίνησε κάρη, κακὰ βυσσοδομεύων.

***Od.* 20.263:** Telemachus announces that he will restrain the κερτομίας and χεῖρας of the suitors. His purpose is to prevent ἔρις and νεῖκος arising (267).

***Od.* 24.240:** Odysseus decides to test Laertes κερτομίοις ἐπέεσσιν. Laertes reacts to this with strong emotional outpouring (280, 315–17). Whatever the purpose of this 'cutting to the quick', it seems to be an accepted feature of deception scenes. Odysseus accuses Athene of speaking to him κερτομέουσαν (*Od.* 13.326–7) when she finally reveals herself after their long cat-and-mouse on the beach in Ithaca, and Odysseus says that he intends to ἐρεθίζω his wife and servants during their night meeting (*Od.* 19.45).

This analysis covers all but two of Hooker's examples (*Il.* 20.201–2 = 432–3, *Od.* 7.14–17), and neither of these offers evidence for the meaning of κερτομ- words either way. Finally, note *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 300 (not in Hooker): Apollo addresses Hermes κερτομέων and Hermes' reaction is violent: he leaps up (304), blocks his ears (305–6), and demands to know why Apollo *irritates* (ὀρσολοπεύεις) him so *angrily* (χολούμενος) (307–8).

Etymology too may help the argument. Although Chantraine and Frisk both give up on the derivation of κερτομέω, LSJ[8] is surely right to follow the ancient lexicographers and derive it from κῆρ + τέμνω, 'I cut the heart'. Phonologically this derivation is unproblematical: either *kerd-tom- > κερτομ- or *kerd-tom- > *ker-stom- > κερτομ- is possible. But even if the etymology is rejected, a popular association with 'heart' and 'cut' is surely enough for our purposes. As A. M. Davies says (in correspondence) 'from a Greek point of view the word is absolutely transparent and, whatever the etymology, every good Greek must have interpreted it in that manner'.[4]

In the light of this, I turn to *Il.* 24.649. Priam has asked Achilles if he may be allowed to sleep (635), Achilles gives instructions to the servants to set up beds for Priam and his herald outside, in the αἴθουσα (644), and when that is done, Achilles turns to Priam and

τὸν δ' ἐπικερτομέων προσέφη πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς.

Retaining the basic meaning of κερτομέω, I translate:

> 'And [*unintentionally*] cutting him to the quick, swift-footed Achilles addressed him'.[5]

And cut him to the quick Achilles certainly does. Priam has risked his life to ransom Hector's body. In an act of moving personal courage, he has dared face his son's slayer and bitterest enemy alone and, against every expectation, and not without false steps when his mission teeters on the very edge of disaster (560–70), he has finally reached agreement with Achilles that his son will be released in the morning (600–1). All that is therefore required is for the night to pass, and the mission is accomplished.

[4] I am very grateful to J. G. F. Powell and A. M. Davies for help on this point. Professor Davies also pointed me to Troxler, *Sprache und Wortschatz Hesiods* (1964), 119ff., for the revival of this ancient etymology.

[5] Possibly 'intentionally'. One must never underestimate Achilles' desire to stay on top, and his mood changes swiftly in this encounter (cf. e.g. 559–70).

Now, after *all* that, Achilles warns Priam that he cannot, after all, expect to enjoy the safety of his tent for the night: one of the Greeks may come and see him and tell Agamemnon (650–4): if that happens, there will be a delay in the return of the body (655). Therefore, Priam must sleep *outside* (650).

Priam's reaction to this is, as we would expect, fear. Once Achilles has sorted out the details of the length of time Priam requires to bury Hector, he prepares to usher him outside and takes him 'by the wrist, lest the old man be afraid in his heart' (671–2). Since there is no threat in Achilles' words at 669–70 ('It will be as you say, Priam: I shall hold up the war for as long as you say'), Priam's fear here must refer to Achilles' words at 650–5. Now that the time has actually come to leave the safety of Achilles' tent, it is no surprise that the old man should need comfort and this is what Achilles' kindly gesture of taking him by the wrist (cf. *Od.* 18.258) is meant to afford. That Achilles *has* reassured him is later acknowledged by Hermes at 683–4.

The theory is clinched by subsequent events. Hermes, understanding only too well the danger Priam is in, reminds him that his mission is accomplished ('you have released your son and given much for him' (685)) but warns him that if Agamemnon and the Greeks get to know of his presence, he will have to be ransomed at three times the cost of the release of Hector (686–7). Observe that both Achilles and Hermes agree on the reason for Priam's danger (the Greeks may get to know of his presence: 687–8, 653–4): they merely differ in their interpretation of the consequences. Priam's reaction to Hermes' words is the same as it was to Achilles': 'So he spoke, and the old man *was afraid*' (689).

This explanation seems to me to be considerably more satisfactory than those which propose that ἐπικερτομέων means 'bantering' (Willcock) or 'mystifying, teasing' (Macleod).[6] Achilles does not 'banter' with Priam at this important moment: he is in deadly earnest, and that is why Priam is so afraid. The fact that Hermes deploys precisely the same premisses as Achilles did also suggests that Achilles' warning is meant seriously. There is, at any rate, no suggestion in the text that Hermes is 'bantering'.

At this point, linguistic objection obtrudes. While I have covered all Homeric usages of κερτομ- words in my earlier analysis, I cannot simply assume that ἐπικερτομ- words have the same force, and there is indeed one passage which seems at first glance to undermine my thesis. At *Il.* 16.744, Patroclus has killed Cebriones and:

τὸν δ' ἐπικερτομέων προσέφης, Πατρόκλεες ἱππεῦ.

The objection is obvious: it is difficult to see how one can 'cut to the quick' a corpse, so as to generate a powerful emotional reaction. Can one 'provoke' a corpse in Greek, any more than one can in English?

I think one can. The dead in Homer have an afterlife, and it is clear that in the afterlife they still possess the feelings they did on earth. Achilles feels joy in Neoptolemos' achievements (*Od.* 11.540). Ajax cannot bring himself to respond to Odysseus' offer of reconciliation (*Od.* 11.563–4). Achilles is afraid that the dead Patroclus may become angry with him for returning Hector to Priam (*Il.* 24.591–5). When Hector threatens to become a μήνιμα to Achilles, Achilles sees fit to answer him even though Hector is by now dead (as the poet stresses: *Il.* 22.355–66, especially 364; cf. Elpenor at *Od.* 11.72–3). In other words, the hero who vaunts over or taunts a dead man is not merely proclaiming his own triumph. His words are also addressed

[6] M. M. Willcock, *The Iliad of Homer*, Books XIII–XXIV (London, 1984) on 24.649; Macleod (see note 9) on 649.

to the spirit of the slaughtered warrior. I conclude that ἐπικερτομέω does not have a meaning greatly different from κερτομέω in Homer.[7]

One final point remains to be cleared up. In disposing of Macleod's argument that Achilles is mystifying or teasing Priam, Hooker argues that it is quite *normal* for guests to sleep in the πρόδρομος under the αἴθουσα (as Macleod did in fact acknowledge). But if this is the case, how can Achilles be said to be 'cutting Priam to the quick' by asking him to sleep outside? Would not Priam be expecting it?

I would wish to argue that we press πρόδρομος and αἴθουσα into too rigid a mould if we interpret them in this sense in this passage. In Odyssean palaces, it is perfectly true that guests traditionally sleep there.[8] If we argue that Achilles' κλισία is not a palace (cf. *Il.* 1.306, 9.185, cf. 663–6), it has all the appurtenances of one in *Il.* 24 (pine timbers, thatch, courtyard, massive gate and *megaron*, 449–56, 647). As Macleod argues, there is a purpose in all this.[9]

But the crucial question is, not what Achilles' κλισία looks like, but how it *functions*. Should we expect a hut, however grand, on a beach outside Troy to function like an Odyssean palace? The answer must surely be 'no'. *Xenia* only has meaning between people from different social units. An army encamped on a plain besieging a city is a homogenous unit. Strangers do not wander into the camp asking for a bed for the night. The only 'outsider' is, of course, Achilles, who has taken the conscious decision to distance himself from his fellows; and when people from the army come to visit him, there is an expectant air about the proceedings. The complexity and formality of the *xenia* scenes when the ambassadors visit Achilles in Book 9 and Priam visits him in Book 24 are unmatched in the *Iliad* and, in both cases, the issue of 'staying the night' is raised (a commonplace feature of *xenia* in the *Odyssey*, of course, but unique to the *Iliad* in these two books). The differences are instructive. In Book 9, Phoenix alone of the ambassadors is offered a bed for the night. There is, in fact, no *need* for this. He, like Ajax and Odysseus, has his own κλισία to return to. But the offer of a bed for the night is an indication of Achilles' signal favour to his old tutor. The interesting question from our point of view is – where does Phoenix sleep? It is not stated precisely: but Achilles says he should sleep αὐτόθι (9.617), and when the bed is made up, nothing is said to indicate that he is *not* sleeping in the κλισία with Patroclus and Achilles (9.658–68). But as we have seen, when Priam asks for a bed for the night in *Iliad* 24, Achilles very firmly instructs him to sleep *outside*. Now the whole tone of the argument in Book 24 anyway suggests to me that Priam was not expecting this, and the Phoenix episode in Book 9 seems to me to confirm (or at worst not to undermine) that view. If this is the case, there is no problem in arguing that Homer in *Iliad* 24 applies the technical vocabulary of the αἴθουσα and πρόδρομος to circumstances for which it is not precisely fitted.[10] When Achilles orders Priam to sleep in the πρόδρομος under the αἴθουσα (644, 673), he is asking him to do the equivalent of sleeping under the flysheet or the lean-to and this is not normally done to visitors to soldiers' κλισίαι on the beach at Troy. Such guests would normally sleep inside the tent, as Phoenix appears to do in Book 9.

University of Newcastle upon Tyne P. V. JONES

[7] See further E. Rhode in *Rhein. Mus.* 50 (1895), 600ff., abbreviated in *Psyche*, chapter 1 (8th edition), translated by W. B. Hillis (London, 1925). Professor Trevor Saunders points me to Plato, *Laws* 865c–866b for the 'ancient tale' of the man murdered by violence who turns his fury upon the murderer.

[8] e.g. *Od.* 3.399, 15.5, etc.

[9] C. W. Macleod, *Homer: Iliad Book XXIV* (Cambridge, 1982) on 448–56.

[10] Compare, for example, Eumaios' hut in *Odyssey* 14, which has a πρόδρομος (5), an αὐλή (5), and a πρόθυρον (34) (but no αἴθουσα is mentioned) even though the building is described as a κλισία (48). These are flexible and indeterminate expressions.