

## Once again, the Duals in Book 9 of the *Iliad*

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The duals in *Iliad* 9.182ff. are a notorious crux in Homeric criticism<sup>1</sup>). The difficulty about the passage is caused by too narrow a notion of the meaning of the dual. It is assumed that the dual always denotes two items, two, in number, of people, bodily organs, objects etc. It is not realized or rejected as unacceptable, for no particular reason as far as I can see, that the dual may also denote 'two groups' of items, or one individual and one 'group'. According to Chantraine<sup>2</sup>), 'Le duel a pu s'employer pour associer deux groupes (ou une personne et un groupe)'. It is a pity that he weakens this statement by saying: 'C'est du moins ainsi que l'on a tenté d'expliquer quelques passages qui font difficulté'. According to Kühner-Gerth<sup>3</sup>), 'Die Sprache hat die Dualform geschaffen, nicht etwa um den Begriff der Zahl zwei, sondern um den Begriff der Zweiheit, der paarweisen Zusammengehörigkeit auszudrücken'.

The following examples discussed by Chantraine bear out his description:

- 2.123f. two groups of people, viz. Achaeans and Trojans (*ἄμφο*) cf. Ameis-H. '... der Dual, beide Völker als Einheiten gefaßt'.  
5.485ff. one person (Hector addressed by Sarpedon) and a group of people, the men or the men and women of Troy; cf. Ameis-H. 'der Dual von den zwei 485 genannten zusammengehörigen Teilen'.  
16.371 many horses yoked together in pairs.

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<sup>1</sup>) T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London, 1958) 248. D. L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Univ. of California Press, 1959) 297ff. G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962) 217f. A. Lesky, *R. E.*, s.v. Homeros (1968), cols. 789f. Ch. Segal, 'The Embassy and the Duals of Iliad 9.182-98', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968) 101-114. D. Lohmann, *Die Komposition der Reden in der Ilias* (Berlin, 1970) 225ff. A. Köhnken, 'Die Rolle des Phoenix und die Duale im I der Ilias', *Glotta* 53 (1975) 25-36. Cf. A. Heubeck, *Die Homerische Frage* (Darmstadt, 1974) 71ff.

<sup>2</sup>) P. Chantraine, *Grammaire Homérique* (Paris, 1958, 3rd ed.) II 27, par. 35.

<sup>3</sup>) Kühner-Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache* (Leverkusen, 1955, 4th ed.) I 69.

- 17.387 the two fighting parties, the Trojans and the Achaeans (*μαρναμένουν*, cf. 396).  
 23.413 one person, Antilochus, and a group, two horses (*ἀποκηδήσαντε φερώμεθα*), cf. Ameis-H. 'der Dual faßt den Redenden und die beiden Rosse zusammen'.

From these passages, it is clear that in Homer the dual can denote not only two as a number, but also two groups or one item and a group.

It is interesting to note that in a numerical temporal sequence the first arrival may be two people, Diomedes and Odysseus, the second, one person, Agamemnon (*ὁ δεύτερος ἦλθεν* 19.51). Here the first item consists of a group, the second of one individual. There is nothing peculiar here, if one treats *δευτερος*, as if it were a temporal adverb, which it is not. If it is, properly, taken as an adjective, it presupposes that number one is a group (which is in this case expressed by a dual).

The embassy consists of one individual and a group. This is immediately indicated in Nestor's proposal when he says that Phoenix 'first of all' is to 'lead', and that 'next' Aias, Odysseus and the two heralds are to 'go with him'. The colon at the end of line 169 in the Oxford text and other editions leaves that line without a verb, which is not easily supplied (cf. Ameis-H. 'Aus *ἡγησάσθω* ist hier welches Verbum zu entnehmen?'), and it breaks up the 'group' following on *ἔπειτα*. There should be a comma after line 169, as in 11.472 *Ὡς εἰπὼν ὁ μὲν ἦρχ', ὁ δ' ἄμ' ἔσπετο ἰσόθεος φώς* where Menelaos leads, and Aias follows.

Why does Nestor proclaim Phoenix leader of the Embassy? Phoenix has not been mentioned before. We readers of today know nothing about him at this point. But the ancient audience must have known what we can glean from later passages of the epic. They would know it from other oral epics, or from an oral tradition of story telling. The same is the case with Patroclus who is given an order by Achilles in the first book, and obeys his 'dear companion' (1.345). The importance of Patroclus in his death becomes apparent in Zeus' prophecy in 8.476, without any explanation. The close friendship between Achilles and Patroclus is shown only from Book 9 on. In view of this, it is reasonable to use what we are told about Phoenix later to explain why he is proclaimed as the leader of the Embassy at 9.168. We know that he, in fact, belongs to the retinue of Achilles, being an *ὀπάων* of his father Peleus (23.360), and that he is one of the five leaders of the Myrmidons when Achilles sends them into battle (16.171 and 196). We know of his intimate

relationship to Achilles from his speech in Book 9, which could not have been described earlier, since it is part of Phoenix's plea to Achilles, as Köhnken points out<sup>4</sup>).

One might well wonder why Phoenix is then found among the Achaean leaders in Agamemnon's tent. He is himself a leader, if not one of the great ones. The fact that the Myrmidons, debarred from fighting through their master's angry withdrawal, 'wandered here and there through the camp' is stated explicitly in 2.779. The great concern of Phoenix for the suffering Achaeans (9.431) would certainly lead him into the assembly and the council. If these facts are taken together, it becomes evident why Phoenix stands over against Odysseus, Aias and the heralds: he belongs to the side of Achilles, they to the party of Agamemnon. He must be expected to lead, for he is going 'home', as it were.

Why does, in actual fact, Odysseus take the lead, as soon as the ambassadors approach Achilles (192)? Nestor's proposal of an embassy to Achilles and his choice of ambassadors have been accepted (173). After a libation to Zeus, the ambassadors leave Agamemnon's shelter. As they move out, Nestor gives much instruction to them, looking at each one, most of all at Odysseus, that they might try to persuade noble Achilles (179ff.). This carefully shaped description rounds off the council in Agamemnon's shelter. Let us note that Nestor is particularly emphatic in his instructions and his glances in the direction of Odysseus.

'The two parties went' (τὼ δὲ βάρην 182) along the beach to the shelter of Achilles with a prayer to Poseidon. They find Achilles singing to the lyre, with Patroclus at his side. They step forward, and Odysseus leads (192). Nestor had been bound to declare Phoenix the leader—officially. But the fact that, in the presence of Achilles, Odysseus takes the lead implies that the particular instructions by Nestor to Odysseus (179–80) were concerned with Odysseus, actually, taking the lead. In response to Odysseus' move, Achilles himself takes his seat opposite him when the meal is prepared. When it is finished, Aias nods to Phoenix, but Odysseus notices it, and anticipates him in addressing Achilles (323f.). This is an exquisite piece of characterization. The mind of Aias is straight and simple, totally ignorant of the deviousness of diplomacy<sup>5</sup>) so well understood by Nestor and Odysseus. Aias takes Nestor's appointment of Phoenix as the leader at its face-value. When Odysseus is

<sup>4</sup>) Köhnken (cf. n. 1) 26.

<sup>5</sup>) This is precisely why Aias speaks after Achilles' heart in the end (645).

represented as anticipating Phoenix, he acts in collusion with Nestor in face of a difficult situation. On the grounds of both diplomacy and poetic construction, Phoenix could certainly not have been the first speaker. The strength of his plea rests on his close and very intimate relationship to Achilles. The persuasive power of this relationship would have had no scope in a first speech which was bound to convey the full extent of Agamemnon's message. This task was the right one for Odysseus, particularly also, because he was shrewd enough to omit Agamemnon's last words demanding from Achilles submission to his superior royal power and greater age (158ff.), which could only incense Achilles afresh. The offensiveness of these last words of Agamemnon is already implicitly criticized by Nestor when he praises Agamemnon's offer of gifts, but says nothing about his speech (164), as Lohmann points out<sup>6</sup>). Achilles, in his reply, is aware that something is amiss, and feels up against deceit. With magnificent irony, the poet makes him liken the deceiver—whether it is Odysseus or Agamemnon—to Hades, just as Agamemnon, in words not conveyed to Achilles, had compared Achilles with Hades. Once the official message, with its last explosive part omitted, is conveyed, Phoenix will have scope to unfold his serious and loving message to the great warrior who is to him as his own child.

The circumstances through which Phoenix, though by Nestor's appointment an ambassador of the Achaeans, is set apart from the other ambassadors, are made explicit by Achilles himself. For, he tells him not to confuse his (Achilles') spirit by wailing and grieving, currying favour with Agamemnon: 'It does not become you / to love this man, for fear you turn hateful to me, who love you. / It should be your pride with me to hurt whoever shall hurt me.' (613ff., tr. Lattimore). Then, he proposes that Phoenix should stay the night in his shelter, and return home with him, if they so decide. Phoenix does not return to Agamemnon with the other ambassadors, but spends the night with Achilles (657ff.).

The leader of the returning embassy is Odysseus. It is clear why there are no more duals; the reason is, according to the interpretation of this paper, that one of the two parties does not return. Plurals can, of course, take the place of duals in Homer, but it is noteworthy that when in Book 1 two heralds are sent to fetch Briseis from Achilles and return with her, there are duals throughout their mission, including their return (1.320ff. and especially 347).

<sup>6</sup>) Lohmann (cf. n. 1) 225 n. 22.