

Non-temporal ούκέτι/μηκέτι

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Summary

The article begins by exploring spatial ούκέτι/μηκέτι (particularly in Herodotus) and then attempts to group its many figurative applications in Greek literature of the classical period. These include: 'the pillars of Herakles theme' in Pindar, the passage from knowledge to ignorance in Greek Tragedy, limits to the application of general principles in Plato, the 'rhetorical' use in Tyrtaeus and Pindar, etc.

In his recent edition of *Oedipus Rex*, R. D. Dawe speaks (ad 115) of "a still unrecognized idiom [of ούκέτι/μηκέτι] which is best understood if the word is split into its component parts ούκ and ἔτι. The underlying sense is 'not the further and perhaps expected step.'" Dawe exaggerates, as a look at West's note on Hesiod, *Erga* 174 or Gow's note on [Theocritus] 23.2 will show. Nevertheless, the idiom is sufficiently puzzling and varied in its manifestations to warrant further inquiry.

The temporal meaning "no longer" or, in repeated action, "not again" is, for most authors, by far the most common if not the only meaning of the word and needs no illustration. In Herodotus, however, seven of the forty two instances of ούκέτι are local and geographic in sense, and it is from this usage that it is convenient to begin.¹⁾

From the traveller's point of view, boundaries of space and time coincide when, at a certain moment in the journey, a border is crossed. At that moment, 'no longer' is also 'no further.' Thus for the northern traveller who has crossed the river Tanais, the country is 'no longer' Scythia (which extends, 'no further' than the river): *Τάναϊν ... διαβάντι ούκέτι Σκυθική* (4.21). Similarly, king Sesostriis sails up the Red Sea until he comes to a point where he can 'no longer' sail: it is ούκέτι πλωτήν, "not further navigable" (2.102.2). The same idiom is found at Thucydides 3.106.2: the Peloponnesians entered into the territory of the Agraiοi (they were no longer in Acarnania, but were in friendly territory): *ἐπέβησαν τῆς Ἀγραίων, ούκέτι Ἀχαρνάνας, φιλίας δὲ σφίσιν*. Note that even these simple instances, though readily understandable, sometimes elude direct translation.²⁾

¹⁾ See J. E. Powell's exemplary *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge 1938).

²⁾ Other examples of geographic ούκέτι without the comparative are Hdt. 2.8.3; 4.125.6; 4.185.1. Plato *Crat.* 402 e 2.

When ούκέτι modifies a comparative, it is particularly suited to express the limits of penetration of an explorer or an invader. King Sesostri of Egypt extended his conquest of Europe as far as Thrace, where he set up pillars, τὸ δὲ προσωτέρω τούτων ούκέτι, “but not any further than these pillars” (2.103.1). In view of the very common use of positive ἔτι to strengthen comparatives, it seems very likely that in negatives the -ετι element can serve the same function.³⁾ Similar is Thucydides 2.21.1 (= 1.114.2): Pleistoanax invaded only as far as Eleusis and then withdrew ἐς τὸ πλεον ούκέτι προελθών, “without advancing any further.” The same idiom may be applied to an aborted mission: at Herodotus 3.45.1 it is reported that some Samians who had been ordered to sail to Egypt had second thoughts and decided τὸ προσωτέρω μηκέτι πλέειν, “not to sail any further.”

The furthest one is supposed to sail is to the Pillars of Herakles, and it is in this connection that we meet a familiar Pindaric theme.⁴⁾ If, as is the case, Aristokleides has reached the height of excellence, ούκέτι πρόσω / ἀβάταν ἄλλα κιόνων ὕπερ Ἡρακλέος περᾶν ευμαρές, (N. 3.19). Here -ετι enhances πρόσω, which has something of a comparative force.⁵⁾ At I.3/4.31 Melissos has reached the pillars of Herakles and is urged μηκέτι μακροτέραν σπεύδειν ἀρετάν, “not to pursue a still more distant excellence.” Once more the -ετι element underlines the comparative. Again, at O.1.114, after learning that the limit is reserved for kings, we (or Hieron) are told not to look “still further:” μηκέτι πάπταινε πόρσιον. It is interesting to observe how Democritus, whose ethical language is quite conservative, makes a similar point with μηκέτι and the comparative: μηκέτι πλειόνων ἐπιθυμέοντι συμβαίνει κακοπαθεῖν τῇ ψυχῇ (191.15).

With the pillars of Herakles theme, we have already moved to a figurative mode of speech, and it is not surprising to find ούκέτι/μηκέτι applied to other than geographic boundaries. An example is

³⁾ For ἔτι with comparatives see, e.g., Eduard Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik*, II 185 d.

⁴⁾ The connection between ούκέτι / μηκέτι and the ‘pillars of Herakles’ topic was pointed out by E.L.Bundy, *Studia Pindarica* II (= *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 18 no.2) 59 n.55 and summarized as ‘one must seek no further for surpassing greatness.’ It is worth pointing out that there are no assured instances in Pindar of ούκέτι / μηκέτι in the common sense of “no longer” except for οὐκ ἔτι = ούκέτι at N.9.14. At *Dithyramb* 4(b).6 the context is insufficient to determine the meaning.

⁵⁾ In general compare N.9.47 (ἄνδρ’ οὐκ ἔστι πόρσω θνατὸν ἔτι σκοπιᾶς ἄλλας ἐφάψασθαι / ποδοῖν), though here ἔτι is separated from οὐκ and modifies ἄλλας.

the passage from knowledge to ignorance (always, it seems, in that order). At *Oedipus* 1251, the messenger knows what has happened to Jocasta only up to a certain point: *χῶπως μὲν ἐκ τῶνδ' οὐκέτ' οἶδ' ἀπόλλυται*. Dawe's paraphrase (ad 115) is: "and how after that she died, this is a further point about which I have no knowledge." Similar is Euripides *Or.* 1498, *τὰ δ' ὕστερ' οὐκέτ' οἶδα*, which also occurs in narration.⁶⁾ In both examples the *-ετι* element emphasizes the boundary between knowledge and ignorance.⁷⁾ Akin to these passages is the fragment from a narrative speech at Eur. fr. 621 (N.): *τὰ δ' ἔνθεν οὐκέτ' ἂν φράσαι λόγῳ / δακρύων δυναίμην χωρίς*. The messenger cannot *go on* to describe the sequel without weeping. The same sense of 'going on' is to be found in an epigram by Meleager (Gow-Page 37.5 = AP 5.177.5). The poet says a lot about Eros, but can't *go on* to indicate his paternity (so Gow-Page ad loc.): *πατρὸς δ' οὐκέτ' ἔχω φράζειν τίνος*. At *Odyssey* 12.223 the narrator deliberately refuses to continue a sequence. Odysseus tells his men how to avoid Charybdis, but doesn't "go on" to mention Scylla: *Σκύλλην δ' οὐκέτ' ἐμυθεόμην*.⁸⁾

At Aesch. *P. V.* 520 it is the listener rather than the narrator who is confronted with a boundary: *τοῦτ' οὐκέτ' ἂν πύθοιο*, "you shouldn't inquire about this further point." Similar to some degree is Pindar *O.* 1.5: *μηκέθ' ἀλίου σκόπει ἄλλο θαλπνότερον ... ἄστρον*, "Don't look for another star of greater warmth than the sun." Here the *-ετι* element probably reinforces *ἄλλο*, like *ἔτι* at N. 9.47.⁹⁾ In any case, as in several other passages in Pindar, *-ετι* emphasizes the sense of limit, of *ne plus ultra*.

In Plato there are several instances, all with comparatives or quasi-comparatives, where the speaker refuses to continue or urges others not to do so. At *Alc.* II 149b4 the laconic spokesman for the oracle at Ammon uttered "so much and not a word more:" *τοσαῦτα εἰπεῖν*,

⁶⁾ The idiom is rare enough to produce a *lectio facilior* of *οὐ κάτοιδα* for *οὐκέτ' οἶδα*. Much the same occurs at Aesch. *P. V.* 520.

⁷⁾ Cf. also fr. 209a.31 (Radt): *οὐκέτ' ἴδρις εἰμὶ*, already connected by Pfeiffer (SB München 1958, 17 f.) with *O. T.* 1251.

⁸⁾ It is possible that the formula is later applied in the same sense to Zeus' action, who during Odysseus' solitary return to the area allowed Charybdis to act but (12.455) *Σκύλλην δ' οὐκέτ' ἔασε... / ἐσιδέειν*, "did not take the further step of allowing Scylla to notice." The phrase, however, could be rendered temporally as "did not again allow her to notice."

⁹⁾ For *οὐκέτ' ἄλλο* cf. Plato, *Rep.* VII 354e3 (of extension in height: dialectic is the *ne plus ultra* of education).

ούκέτι περαιτέρω. At *Phaedrus* 241 d 2 Socrates refuses to continue the pseudo-lover's speech: ούκέτ' ἂν τὸ πέρα ἀκούσαις ἐμοῦ / λέγοντος. At *Rep.* V 471 e 2 further discussion of the ideal *politeia* is discouraged by Glaucon until the possibility of realizing it is discussed: μηκέτι πλείω περὶ αὐτῆς λέγε.

As one might expect in Plato, ούκέτι several times denies logical progression: an argument may be correct or a principle may apply up to a certain point, but not beyond it. For example, at *Lysis* 219 c 6 we arrive at a principle (ἀρχή) ἣ ούκέτ' ἐπανοίσει ἐπ' ἄλλο φίλον. Similarly at *Sophist* 247 b 7 the materialists don't "go on to answer" certain questions in the same unqualified way as before: τοῦτο ούκέτι κατὰ ταῦτ' ἀποκρίνονται πᾶν. At *Laws* VI 757 b 6 true equality is contrasted with numerical equality. The one is easy to discover, but the other goes beyond it and is not at all easy to see: τὴν δὲ ἀληθεστάτην καὶ ἀρίστην ἰσότητα ούκέτι ῥάδιον παντὶ ἰδεῖν.¹⁰⁾

A curious use of ούκέτι is to describe an expected extension of qualities that does not in fact occur. At Hesiod, *Scut.* 49 f., Alkmene, after being impregnated by a god and a man, produces twins: διδυμάονε γείνατο παῖδε / ούκέθ' ὁμὰ φρονέοντε, κασιγνήτω γε μὲν ἦσθην. West paraphrases (ad *Erga* 174): 'the likeness did not extend to their dispositions.' Similar is [Theocr.] 23.2, where we have a discrepancy between physical beauty and character: τὰν μορφὰν ἀγαθῶ, τὸν δὲ τρόπον ούκέθ' ὁμοίω. Here, too, we should perhaps include a passage in Euenus (fr. 1.2 West): some people have the habit of disputing everything equally: ὀρθῶς δ' ἀντιλέγειν, ούκέτι τοῦτ' ἐν ἔθει, "but further than that, it is not their habit to dispute soundly" (translation Gulick).

In two instances, ούκέτι describes an action that reflects a change of mind. In an epigram by Statilius Flaccus (Gow-Page 11 = AP 12.25), the poet promises to sacrifice a cock to Apollo on the safe return of Polemon. Polemon does return, but not to him, hence he no longer feels obligated: ούκέτι σοι θύω τὸν ἀλέκτορα. As Gow-Page comment: "The meaning is not strictly 'I no longer sacrifice'

¹⁰⁾ For other instances see *Men.* 73 a 4; *Laws* XII 968 c 3; *Phaedr.* 235 b 6 (Socrates can believe that Lysias' speech has some qualities, but cannot go so far as to believe that it is beyond improvement).

Professor Dr. H. Erbse has kindly pointed out to me a related use of ούκέτι in the grammarians to describe a rule of limited application. Uhlig, who introduces it by emendation at Apollonius Dyscolus *Synt.* p. 496.1, refers *exempli gratia* to *De pron.* 14.6, 15.5 and 17.4 (cf. also 17.8) and translates *non item, non pariter*.

but 'I shall not proceed now (as I intended before) to sacrifice'" Similarly at *Iliad* 9.598 Meleager has warded off destruction from the Aetolians, τῷ δ' οὐκέτι δῶρ' ἐτέλεσσαν, "but they didn't go on to give him the gifts (as they had originally intended)."

At Pindar P. 4.243 οὐκέτι underlines a negative expectation. To the dismay of Aietes, Jason had triumphed in the ploughing contest, but (whatever happened before) Aietes does not expect that Jason will "go on" to complete the next task: ἔλπετο δ' οὐκέτι οἱ κείνόν γε πράξασθαι πόνον.

In Homer and Hesiod we find the combination μηκέτ' ἔπειτα, where the -ετι element merely emphasizes the break between before and after. At *Odyssey* 10.297 Odysseus is advised, at the stage when Circe invites him to her bed, not to reject her "from that point on:" ἔνθα σὺ μηκέτ' ἔπειτ' ἀπανήνασθαι θεοῦ εὐνήν. At *Erga* 174 the poet, after having described the four earlier generations of man, abruptly introduces the fifth age with a wish that he were not a part of it: μηκέτ' ἔπειτ' ὄφελλον ἐγὼ πέμπτοισι μετεῖναι / ἀνδράσιν. As West comments, "μηκέτ' ἔπειτα marks a transition: '(up to this point life was all right, but) after this point ...'"

Sometimes the effect of -ετι is so tenuous that we can, with Verdenius (*Mnemosyne* 22 [1969] 345), speak of rhetorical μηκέτι. At Tyrtaeus 10.14 (West), the poet urges self-sacrifice, ψυχέων μηκέτι φειδόμενοι, "not sparing life at all." In a similar category is the exhortation at Pindar, N. 5.50: μηκέτι ῥίγει, "do not hold back at all (but engage in enthusiastic praise)." In both cases litotes is employed to create a strong positive command: (whatever the situation before), be reckless now!

In all the examples so far, we have followed a linear model, in which progression is imagined and denied beyond a frontier. In two instances, however, a return is envisaged and -ετι refers to the home stretch. At Sophocles O.T. 115 Creon says that Laios did not (to quote Dawe) 'take the further and expected step of returning [from Delphi]:" θεωρός ἐκδημῶν πάλιν / πρὸς οἶκον οὐκέθ' ἔκετο ... At Herodotus 5.23.3 Megabazus persuades Darius ποιέειν ὅπως μηκέτι κείνος ἐς Ἑλλάδας ἀπίξεται, "to see to it that he [Histiaeus] not come back to Greece at all."¹¹)

¹¹) μηκέτι ... ἀπίξεται of the return portion of a trip is similar to οὐκέτι ... ἀπικνέοντο at 4.125.6 of an aborted invasion.