LYCOPHRON, *ALEXANDRA* 261–2 AND HOMERIC
ΑΓΚΥΛΟΧΗΛΗΣ

At Lycophron, *Alexandra* 258–80, Cassandra laments the coming death of her brother Hector at Achilles' hands. In the opening lines of the passage, she identifies Achilles as a ferocious eagle (258–62):

> ἐκεῖνό σ’, ὦ τάλαινα καρδία, κακὸν
> ἐκεῖνο δάψει πημάτων ὑπέρτατον,
> εὖτ’ ἂν λαβράζων περκνὸς αἰχμητὴς χάρων
> πτεροῖσι χέρσον αἰετὸς διαγράφων
> ῥαιβοῖ τυπωτὴν τόρμαν ἀγκύλῃ βάσει

> 262 ῥαιβοῖ Scheer : ῥαιβῷ codd.

The imagery of the passage is complex, and combines two separate but closely related ideas. On the one hand, in treating Achilles as a raptor who will swoop down and carry off Hector (cf. 265 ἁρπάσας μετάρσιον), the passage makes concrete the bird similes of *Iliad* 22, where first Achilles (139–44) and then Hector (308–11) are compared to birds of prey as they engage in their final battle. On the other, as the scholia observe, verses 261–2 draw on the image of a chariot or other vehicle cutting a track in the ground as it rounds a stadium course (χέρσον … διαγράφων / ῥαιβοῖ τυπωτὴν τόρμαν). The language thus simultaneously evokes Achilles' dragging of Hector's corpse behind his chariot and anticipates Cassandra's characterization of the Greek hero as a ploughman cutting furrows in the earth (268 λευρᾶς βοώτης γατομῶν δι’ αὔλακος) as he defiles the body.

The phrase ἀγκύλῃ βάσει contributes to the conflation of avian and vehicular imagery.[1] At one level, the phrase is appropriate to the progress of the round wheels of a chariot (cf. Soph. *El.* 718, τροχῶν βάσεις, i.e. 'rolling wheels'). At the same time, the context simultaneously allows βάσις to be understood in the sense 'feet', as often (LSJ, s.v. II), and the noun–adjective combination to refer to the curved talons of an eagle. Thus the phrase as a whole serves as a linchpin that brings together the images of Achilles as a bird of prey, on the one hand, and a charioteer rounding the bend of a racecourse, on the other.

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[1] If the MS reading ῥαιβῷ, presupposed by the gloss of the scholia ad loc. (p. 53 Leone), ῥαιβῷ δὲ τῷ ἐπικαμπεῖ, is retained, the phrase wants a verb. Scaliger transposed 268 after 262, so that the participle γατομῶν governs τόρμαν and both ῥαιβῷ and ἀγκύλῃ are adjectives governing βάσει. Leaving aside the odd redundancy of the adjectives, transposition remains a desperate and unattractive solution, and it is better to find a verb in either ῥαιβῷ or ἀγκύλῃ. C. von Holzinger, *Lycophron's* Alexandra (Leipzig, 1895) prints ἀγκύλλῃ in the sense 'rounds', while A. Hurst, *Lycophron:* Alexandra (Paris, 2008), 139, retains ἀγκύλῃ but understands it as a verb. The latter is improbable: the aorist subjunctive would be odd in context, especially given its coordination with χραίσμῃ. ἀγκυλῇ, canvassed but not printed by Holzinger, requires taking ἀγκυλέω in a different sense from that found at Satyrus F 20.22 Schorn; other passages presume ἀγκυλόω (cf. Hsch. α 568). The separation of noun and adjective if ἀγκύλη is or masks a verb is not impossible (Holzinger adduces 247 κρηναῖον … γάνος), but since editorial intervention seems necessary in any case, Scheer's ῥαιβοῖ (accepted by Fusillo in M. Fusillo, A. Hurst and G. Paduano [edd.], *Licofrone:* Alexandra [Milan, 1991]) appears the better solution. At the risk of circularity, it may be said that, if the suggestion proposed in this note is correct, adjectival ἀγκύλη takes on special significance.

In this polyvalent context, the adjective ἄγκυλος evokes a disputed Homeric epithet for birds of prey. The epithet ἀγκυλοχήλης or ἀγκυλοχείλης appears thrice in Homer, always in reference to carnivorous birds, including, at *Od.* 19.538–9, an eagle:

ἐλθὼν δ' ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχήλης
πᾶσι κατ' αὐχένας ἦξε καὶ ἔκτανεν

Both the meaning and orthography of the Homeric epithet were debated in antiquity. Some scholars treated the word as deriving from χεῖλος and referring to the bird's beak, while others connected it to χηλή and treated it as a reference the bird's talons.[2] The majority of MSS have –χειλ–, though others have χήλ–. Even some critics who read ἀγκυλοχείλης believed it to be a compound of χηλή. Others objected that if the word referred to talons it would be tautologous after γαμψώνυχες in the description of vultures at *Il.* 16.428 = *Od.* 22.302 = Hes. *Sc.* 405 (οἳ δ' ὥς τ' αἰγυπιοὶ γαμψώνυχες ἀγκυλοχεῖλαι [–χῆλαι]).[3] Outside the scholarly tradition, the word occurs occasionally in other literature: the comic playwright Aristophanes and the author of the *Batrachomyomachia* both use the adjective to refer to curved claws, or hands,[4] but it remains uncertain whether their use of the word reflected their interpretation of the Homeric adjective or was intended as a comic distortion of it.[5]

Alexandra 262 may offer better evidence on this score. Given the overt engagement with Homer in this passage, we suggest that in using the phrase ἀγκύλῃ βάσει in reference to the feet of a carnivorous bird Lycophron glosses the Homeric epithet,[6] and thus subtly implies his endorsement of the view that at *Od.* 19.538 the Homeric epithet ἀγκυλοχείλης/-χήλης (whatever its orthography) referred to the eagle's curved talons. The phrase should thus perhaps be added to the list of instances identified by A. Rengakos in which Lycophron stakes out a position on a Homeric *zetema*.[7]

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[2] Cf. B. Snell and H. Erbse (edd.), *Lexicon des frühgriechischen Epos* (Göttingen, 1955–), s.v.

[3] Cf. Hdn. περὶ παθῶν, *Grammatici Graeci*, vol. 3.2, pp. 361–2; and περὶ κλίσεως ὀνομάτων, *Grammatici Graeci* vol. 3.2. p. 688–9, who discusses the view that ἀγκυλοχείλης is a Boeotian form of ἀγκυλοχήλης; Ap. S. p. 8.16–17, Hsch. α 573; *EM* p. 11.16–25.

[4] Ar. *Eq.* 204–5, τί δῷ ἀγκυλοχήλης ἐστίν; · αὐτό που λέγει, / ὅτι ἀγκύλαις ταῖς χερσὶν ἁρπάζων φέρει (cf. 197–8); *Batrach.* 294 (of crabs).

[5] For the former view, see F. Bechtel, *Lexilogus zu Homer* (Halle, 1914) 7; P. Chantraine, *Grammaire Homérique*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1973), 8; contra, R. Janko, *The* Iliad*: A Commentary, Volume IV: Books 13–16* (Cambridge, 1992), 374 (on *Il.* 16.428). That the Aristophanic joke at *Eq.* 204–5 is an *ad hoc* distortion finds some support from the oracle a few lines earlier (*Eq.* 197–8,) where the juxtaposition of ἀγκυλοχήλης and γαμφηλῇσι (of a βυρσαίετος) might be taken to support the connection of –χείλης with a bird's beak.

[6] By contrast, Σ^DEFGQ Pi. *P.* 1.8 adduces *Od.* 19.538 to explain the use of the phrase ἀγκύλῳ κρατί to refer to the curved beak of the sleeping eagle of Zeus.

[7] A. Rengakos, 'Lykophron also Homerererklärer', *ZPE* 102 (1994), 111–30.