

Grated cheese fit for heroes

The scene in *Iliad* 11 where Nestor's slave Hekamede prepares a restorative *κυκεών* for his guests in his great cup, which only he can lift when it is full, has often been cited in connection with the skyphos from Ischia, dated to c.735-720 BC, with its verse inscription that alludes to Nestor's *εἰποτον ποτήριον*.¹ Now that scholarly opinion is increasingly swinging towards a seventh-century dating for the *Iliad*,² it seems more prudent than ever to see the Ischia inscription as a reflex not of our *Iliad* but of a similar Nestorian drinking episode in earlier epic tradition. His cup, as described, has features of a Bronze Age vessel; and the motif of the mighty goblet is paralleled in the Ugaritic Baal epic, current not later than the fourteenth century.³

Here I want to consider another element in the scene, namely the grated cheese which Hekamede adds to her posset. I hope to show, by a combination of metrics and archaeology, that this too, even though it cannot be traced back to the Bronze Age, belongs to a traditional account that is many generations older than our *Iliad*.

First the metrics. Lines 638-40 read as follows:

ἐν τῷ ῥά σφι κύκησε γυνή εἰκυῖα θεῆισιν
οἴνωι Πραμνεῖωι, ἐπὶ δ' ἀλγειον κνή τυρόν
κνήσῃ χαλκείῃ, ἐπὶ δ' ἄλφῖτα λευκά πάλυνε.

In that (cup) she mixed (it) for them, the woman like goddesses, with Pramnian wine, and she grated goat's cheese over it with a bronze grater, and sprinkled white flour over it.

The long monosyllable κνή in line 639 stands in a place in the verse where a long monosyllable is exceedingly uncommon: occupying the fifth biceps. The only parallels in the entire *Iliad*, if I am not mistaken, involve a monosyllable contracted from two shorts: so 6.438 θεοπροπίων εὐ εἰδώς, and similar phrases elsewhere with a genitive noun + εὐ εἰδώς (2.718; 4.196 = 206, 310; 5.245; 12.350 = 363; 15.525, 679). At 9.57, 11.389, and 13.54 παῖς can be read either παῖς or πᾶις; the manuscripts agree in the latter spelling. In the *Odyssey* we do find two irresolvable examples in 4.604 κῆ λυκόν and 12.64 λις πέτρῃ, both indivisible noun-epithet formulae which apparently 'singulorum vocabulorum habebantur instar'.⁴ There is also 17.208 ὕδατο-

τρέφῃων ἦν ἄλσος, one of fifty Homeric passages where ἦν occupies the biceps of a foot and is followed by a vowel. It has long been conjectured that ἦν in such cases has replaced a disyllabic *ἔεν, and *Od.* 17.208 lends some weight to the hypothesis.

Our κνή, therefore, is also likely to conceal an older disyllabic form. A grammarian of around AD 100, Heraclides of Miletus (fr. 61 Cohn, ap. Eust. 872.18), actually knew a reading κνέε, which he ascribed to 'some of the Aristarchean texts' (τινὲς τῶν Ἀριστ-αρχεῖων ἐκδόσεων). This κνέε is unlikely to have been a genuine survival from an early phase of the tradition; more probably it was a conjecture prompted by the sense that a fifth biceps with word-end ought to be disyllabic—the same sense that led copyists to write πᾶις and Πατρόκλειες in this position, although, where these words end in the fourth foot before a vowel, they are happy to write παῖς and Πατρόκλεις.

κνή, considered in the abstract, might be either an athematic form, from *κνήμι (perhaps earlier *κνώμι), or a thematic one, from *κνήω (perhaps earlier *κνώω), in which case it is contracted from *κνήε. It is usually taken to be athematic.⁵ But if it is contracted from a disyllable, only a thematic form comes into question.⁶ And if that disyllabic form was scanned as two shorts, we must assume a shortening of the root vowel at some stage: *κνώε > *κνώε, or *κνήε > κνέε. But neither of these would contract into κνή: the first would give *κνώ, and the second *κνεῖ.

Was the root originally κνα- or κνη-? Many authorities favour the latter on the basis of Lithuanian and Germanic comparisons. But κνα- (whether inherited in this form or a secondary development) is well established for Greek by the Ionic and Koine paradigm forms κνάι, κνάν, etc., by Boeotian τυροκνασσιδῆς (*SEG* 24.361: Thespieae, fourth century), and by Theoc. 7. 110 κνάσατο (if this is not hyper-Doric). Note also the secondary formation κνάτω.

In the Classical attestations of the verb the contraction of the root with thematic ε yields in Ionic κνᾶ-, in Attic κνη-.⁷ The Attic forms are in accord with the expected development *κνᾶε- > *κνηε- > κνη-, but

observes *ad loc.*, 'perhaps arises from adaptation of a formula such as *Il.* 9.639' (σὺ δ' Ἴλαον ἐνθεο θυμόν); and the cacometric fifth century Attic epitaph *CEG* 83.5 οἶτος ἀνήρ, δς ἔ<σ>ωισεν Ἀθηναίων τρεῖς φυλάς.

⁵ So Schwyzer i. 675-6; Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* i. 297, 307, 362; *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos* s.v. κνή. The philological analysis in the following paragraphs (which do not claim to offer a complete historical account of this knotty little verb) has profited distinctly from the learning and insight of Anna Morpurgo Davies, to whom my thanks.

⁶ Cf. D.B. Monro, *Homeric Grammar* (2nd ed., Oxford 1891) 22, 'the metre points rather to the uncontracted κνώε' (than to an athematic form). κνώε seems first to have been conjectured by C.G. (K.W.) Müller, *De cyclo Graecorum epico et poetis cyclicis* (Leipzig 1829) 144.

⁷ Ionic: Hdt. 7. 239. 4 κνάν; Hippocr. *Fract.* 21 (ii. 79.3 Kühlewein) κνάται v.l. κνήται; Herondas 8. 8 κνώ (imperative). Attic: Com. adesp. 519 K.-A. κάπκνήν (quoted explicitly for Attic κνήν); Pl. *Gorg.* 494c κνήσθαι; Xen. *Mem.* 1. 2. 30 προσκνήσθαι (v.l. -κνήσασθαι). At Ar. *Birds* 1586 editors rightly adopt Cobet's correction of the manuscripts' (Koine) ἐπικνάις to ἐπικνήις.

¹ Hom. *Il.* 11. 624-41; *CEG* i. no. 454 (cf. ii 304).

² Cf. E. Heitsch, *GGA* 220 (1968) 180-1; W. Burkert, *WSI* 89 (1976) 5-21; O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings* (Oxford 1992) 33-5; W. Kullmann, *Homeric Motive* (Stuttgart 1992) 264; H. van Wees, *GR* 41 (1994) 1-18, 131-55, and in I. Morris and B.B. Powell (eds.), *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden & New York 1997) 692; M.L. West, *MH* 52 (1995) 203-19; J.P. Crielaard in J.P. Crielaard (ed.), *Homeric Questions* (Amsterdam 1995) 274; M.W. Dickie in Ø. Andersen and M.W. Dickie (eds.), *Homer's World* (Bergen 1995) 29-56; W. Kullmann, *ibid.* 57. In *JHS* 117 (1997) 216 van Wees writes 'it looks like 1995 was the year in which Homer left the Dark Age and at last became an archaic poet'.

³ See M.L. West, *Mus. Helv.* 52 (1995) 205, and *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford 1997) 376.

⁴ J. van Leeuwen, *Enchiridium dictionis epicae* (2nd ed., Leiden 1918) 46. He notices also *Hymn. Dem.* 204 καὶ Ἴλαον σχεῖν θυμόν, where the abnormal rhythm, as N.J. Richardson

the Ionic forms presuppose the same shortening of *κνῶε- to *κνῶε- that we have inferred from the Homeric phrase. This divergence between Attic and Ionic must presumably be dated sometime after the Ionian migrations but before the shared raising of $\bar{\alpha}$ to η .

Conclusion: at the time when the epic hemistich 'and he/she grated goat's cheese over it' was coined, the verb was *κνῶε. In the course of the tradition this must have contracted into *κνῶ. But $\bar{\alpha}$ contracted from $\alpha\epsilon$ would not have been affected by the Ionic shift $\bar{\alpha} > \eta$, which had occurred at an earlier epoch. The κνῶ in our text may have to be accounted for as an Atticism of the transmission, based on spoken Attic $\xi\kappa\eta\eta$.⁸

The description of cheese-grating, then, entered the epic tradition before the Ionic-Attic contraction of $\alpha\epsilon$ to $\bar{\alpha}$. This contraction must have been completed well before 700, given the frequency in the extant epics of forms that presuppose it (Chantraine, i. 51-2). We must surely put it back at any rate to the first half of the eighth century, if not before. The implication is that the cheese-grating description very probably goes back to the ninth century. On the other hand it belongs to the Ionic phase of the epic; we cannot put it back to the Aeolic phase, let alone the Mycenaean, because they would not have had a form of the κνῶ- verb that could be scanned as two shorts. They might, of course, have expressed the same idea by some differently worded phrase, but the particular expression used in the Homeric text seems to be a coinage dating from the earlier stages of the Ionic phase.

There seem to be good reasons for thinking that Euboea played an important role in the development of the epic tradition between 950 and 750.⁹ But what can be said about the status of grated cheese in Euboea at that period? It is here that archaeology comes into the picture.

David Ridgway has recently drawn attention to the discovery of bronze cheese-graters, together with weapons, in three ninth-century warriors' graves at Lefkandi.¹⁰ He rightly raises the question whether we should imagine these warriors as spurred by epic poetry to the use and esteem of the cheese-grater or whether the epic poet was drawing from life:

ὦ Ὀμηρε καὶ βίε,
πότερος ἄρ' ὑμῶν πότερον ἀπεμμήσατο;

And he decides, no less rightly, for the second:

I submit that bronze cheese-graters at Lefkandi make perfectly good sense as part of a warrior's personal property. A grater could have been regarded as essential both to the preparation of an effective pain-killer and to the kind of serious non-medical drinking that is not uncommon in military circles.¹¹

But need we think of cheese being grated only into wine? Hard cheese was a practical, easily portable, and nourishing foodstuff for a soldier on campaign to carry with him. It could have been broken into hunks and eaten with bread, though this combination, so familiar to us, is rarely mentioned by ancient sources.¹² With a grater to hand, it could be grated into dough, or over fish or meat as available. That will account for the grater's presence as a recurrent item in the Lefkandi warriors' kit. They might well have been acquainted with the particular usage described in the Hekamede scene, especially when coming off the field and in need of quick refreshment. But they will not have carried their cheese-graters exclusively for that one recipe.

It is not suggested that cheese-graters were peculiar to ninth-century Euboea. They were, for instance, common in seventh-century Italy, as Ridgway's material shows, perhaps as a result of Euboean activity in the West. But it is in Euboea that they appear first, and as soldiers' kit. The convergence of the archaeological and linguistic arguments is striking. My thesis is that Nestor's huge goblet was an older element in the tradition, going back to Mycenaean poetry, and that a Euboean poet of the ninth century was the first to fortify its contents with grated cheese, following a custom of his own day.

That the two did not belong together from the beginning may be indicated by the way in which the vessel has suffered a change of use. Instead of Nestor raising it and drinking from it, it is employed as a mixing-bowl in which the ingredients are put together and from which the guests are served. The underlying thought seems to be, 'the heroes of the past drank from cups as big as mixing-bowls are now'.

M. L. WEST

All Souls College, Oxford

⁸ This would still be the case if κνῶ arose as a mis-transcription of KNE representing κνῶε < *κνῶε. But the attested Attic and Ionic forms of the verb seem to preclude the existence of *κνῶε at any point in either line of development.

⁹ M.L. West, 'The rise of the Greek epic', *JHS* 108 (1988) 166-72.

¹⁰ D. Ridgway, 'Nestor's cup and the Etruscans', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 16 (1997) 325-44. I should have overlooked this but for the author's kindness in sending me an offprint.

¹¹ Ridgway (n.10) 330.

¹² See W. Kroll, *RE* x. 1493-62.