

THE CHARIOT RITE AT ONCHESTOS: *HOMERIC HYMN TO APOLLO* 229-38\*

**Abstract:** The Onchestos passage in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (229-38) has been discussed extensively, most usefully by A. Schachter (*BICS* 23 (1976)102-14) and G. Roux (*REG* 77 (1964) 1-22). Further consideration of the disputed verbal forms in lines 235 and 236 and the plurals of 233-6 suggests that the plurals do indeed indicate a two-horse chariot team but that the presence of a team is not incompatible with the test of a single colt, and that if a chariot is wrecked by the unguided horses, it is righted and left *in situ* (with the horses removed) while prayers of supplication are made to Poseidon. The events referred to are interpreted as elements of a religious ritual with explicit military implications, dating from the Mycenaean period. It is, however, noted that a Babylonian ritual parallel might suggest a Near Eastern (and possibly non-military) origin.

THE most recent extensive discussion of the difficult Onchestos passage in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (229-38) is Albert Schachter's 1976 study in the *Bulletin of the Institute for Classical Studies*.<sup>1</sup> Observing that the 'passage has had almost as many interpretations as it has had commentators,'<sup>2</sup> Schachter conveniently provides a broad selection of previous comments on, and translations of, the passage, noting that his own interpretation is indebted principally to that of G. Roux.<sup>3</sup>

The present discussion builds on these two and proposes to add (1) a resolution of the dilemma posed by the plural forms of lines 233-6; (2) further discussion of the disputed verbal forms in lines 235 (ἄγησιν/ἀγήσιν/ἀγήσιν) and 236 (κλίναντες); and (3) a new account of the original purpose of the rite which has the advantage of explaining, among other things, the most difficult aspect, never satisfactorily treated; namely, why, if the intent is indeed to test the training of a new-broken colt, the charioteer should descend from the chariot and leave the horses without guidance.

The text: *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 229-38:

ἔνθεν δὲ προτέρω ἔκιες ἑκατηβόλ' Ἄπολλον, 'Ογχηστὸν δ' ἴξες Ποσιδήϊον ἀγλαὸν ἄλσος·	230
ἔνθα νεοδμῆς πῶλος ἀναπνέει ἀχθόμενός περ ἔλκων ἄρματα καλά, χαμαὶ δ' ἔλατῆρ ἀγαθός περ ἐκ δίφροιο θορῶν ὁδὸν ἔρχεται· οἱ δὲ τέως μὲν κεῖν' ὄχεα κροτέουσιν ἀνακτορίην ἀφιέντες, εἰ δέ κεν ἄρματ' ἀγήσιν ἐν ἄλσει δενδρήεντι,	235
ἵππους μὲν κομέουσι, τὰ δὲ κλίναντες ἑῶσιν· ὥς γὰρ τὰ πρότισθ' ὅσῃ γένεθ'· οἱ δὲ ἀνακτι εὔχονται, δίφρον δὲ θεοῦ τότε μοῖρα φυλάσσει.	

Schachter's translation (231-8):<sup>4</sup>

There, the newly-broken colt catches its breath,  
worn out as it is from drawing a fine chariot,  
and the charioteer, excellent man, leaps to the  
ground from the chariot and proceeds on foot;  
meanwhile the horses, being rid of restraint,  
make the empty chariot rattle along. But if

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<sup>1</sup>'*Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, lines 231-8 (The Onchestos Episode): another interpretation', *BICS* 23

(1976) 102-14, amplified in *Cults of Boiotia, 2: Herakles to Poseidon* (*BICS* Suppl. 38.2, London 1986) 219.

<sup>2</sup> Schachter (1976) (n.1) 100.

<sup>3</sup>'Sur deux passages de l'Hymne homérique à Apollon', *REG* 77 (1964) 1-22.

<sup>4</sup> Schachter (1976) (n.1) 112.

ever a chariot breaks down<sup>5</sup> within the tree-filled grove, they take care of the horses, turn the chariot and let it go. For this is how the rite first came to pass; they pray to the master, and then the god's apportioned power protects the chariot.

Roux's interpretation (in Schachter's summary):<sup>6</sup>

The rite is a way of finding out if the training of a young horse has been successful. The test naturally takes place at a sanctuary of Poseidon Hippios/Taraxippos. The young horse mounts up to the sanctuary with the charioteer in the vehicle. At the entrance, the charioteer jumps off; the horse, left without direction, pulls the chariot calmly through the trees (this happens if the training has been successful: it means that Poseidon has taken the horse under his protection); but if the horse is disorientated and frightened by the noise of the empty chariot, it will gallop and break the chariot. This means that the horse is too nervous and not yet ready. Poseidon is invoked, and the owner of the horse celebrates the *hosie*, 'rite d'éleveurs, rite rural'. The god's rôle is to protect the chariot (and by extension its rider) against another accident. Afterwards, the rider takes the horse and chariot away.

Schachter's interpretation (1986):<sup>7</sup>

The pass at Onchestos is potentially dangerous, because it is a pass and not on the level. Horses drawing a chariot over it, especially if one of them is a colt, not fully grown, may find it difficult to make the ascent, so their charioteer will leap off and allow them to climb the pass themselves. This is where the danger comes in, for, on reaching the top of the pass, the horses will find the going easier (in fact, the pass is so short that the descent starts almost at once), and there is a risk that they will run out of control. In that event, the chariot might easily run off the road. This might be regarded as an event of ill omen. The thing to do then is to calm the horses, set the chariot back on the road, and let it go. This, says the poet, is the origin of the rite of praying to the god in the hope that he will protect the chariot thereafter.

Schachter notes with approval that Roux's analysis 'de-mystifies' the text; yet he finds even here too much 'reading-in' and too much reliance on post-epic literary sources. He objects further to what he sees as a lack of 'proper notice' taken of 'the switch from singular to plural in line 233, or of the meaning of the participle in line 236'.<sup>8</sup>

The switch from the singular *πῶλος* of 231 to the plural *οἱ* (*sc.* ἵπποι, *cf.* ἵππους 236) in 233 has indeed caused commentators difficulty. Roux's view is that the rite is a test of the training of a colt; there is only one horse per chariot and one charioteer; the plural forms indicate merely generality of application and continuity of the rite.<sup>9</sup> Schachter, on the other hand, takes the plural references to horses, rightly, as indicating a two-horse chariot.<sup>10</sup> However, he then makes the assumption that 'if there is more than one horse drawing the chariot, it cannot be a test of only one of them' and draws the conclusion that, therefore, 'there is no test of horse or chariot involved' and the charioteer must be, consequently, simply an ordinary traveller passing through the sanctuary which lay 'athwart the Steni Pass'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Schachter (1986) (n.1) 219 and n.1, taking note of Burkert's criticism (*Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley 1979) 119 n.19; *cf.* K. Förstel, *Untersuchungen zum Homerischen Apollonhymnus* (Bochum 1979) 465 n.650) that 'a broken chariot (v.235) cannot be "set to rights" by turning it (v.236)', proposes instead of 'breaks down' 'goes astray'.

<sup>6</sup> Roux (n.3) 1-22; Schachter (1976) (n.1) 106.

<sup>7</sup> Schachter (1986) (n.1) 219.

<sup>8</sup> Schachter (1976) (n.1) 109.

<sup>9</sup> Roux (n.3) 14.

<sup>10</sup> Schachter (1976) (n.1) 110-11.

<sup>11</sup> Schachter (1976) (n.1) 113.

For a way out of this quandary (as of some others in this much-disputed passage) it is useful to consider what we can learn from modern practice in the training of harness horses, which on the whole reflects remarkably closely the evidence we have of ancient practice, whether from Xenophon, Virgil, the Hittite horse-training texts or the Hurrian Nuzi tablets.<sup>12</sup> The eminent British trainer, Sallie Walrond, for example, advises that the ideal method for breaking a young horse to harness is to put 'the youngster... in alongside an older schoolmaster on the other side of the pole'.<sup>13</sup> There is, therefore, in our passage, no difficulty with the plurals, nor are they incompatible with the test of a single colt. In lines 231-2, the focus is on the new-broken colt whose training is being tested; in lines 233-6, the focus shifts from the colt to the team of which he is a member, alongside his 'older schoolmaster'. The presence of the schoolmaster does not vitiate the value of the test; it takes only one horse to wreck a team, as Plato well knew; the Charioteer allegory in his *Phaedrus* depends on the danger posed to a chariot team by a single wayward horse.

If, then, the rite is a test for new-broken colts, why do we find the additional detail of the charioteer descending? After all, the charioteer will naturally be expected, in the normal course of events, to have firm control of the reins when driving, whether on the road or on the race-course, these being the only possible sites considered by Roux, and implicitly by other commentators, for chariot driving.

There is, however, a site where a charioteer might well be compelled to relinquish control of his horses and that is on the battlefield, where he may be struck from the chariot by the blow of a weapon or be obliged to descend to aid a fallen comrade.<sup>14</sup> In such a case his life itself will depend on the *sang-froid* and response to voice command of his horses;<sup>15</sup> that is reason enough to submit them to the god's test.

On this interpretation, the rite originally would have pertained to the training of chariot-horses for warfare (the primary use to which chariot-horses were put in the ancient world) and could well have survived, as have so many equestrian practices even in our own day, long past its original purpose. Moreover, while such a rite could have been a later importation, it is more likely to date from the Mycenaean period, which still retained at least vestiges of the Near Eastern practice of chariot-warfare.<sup>16</sup> The deity invoked is Poseidon, chief god of the Mycenaean pantheon at Pylos (as clearly attested in the Linear B tablets) and, evidently, at Thebes (as indicated in the Hesiodic *Aspis*),<sup>17</sup> and the horse-soldier's god throughout Greek antiquity.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Xen. *De re eq.*; Virg. *Georg.* 3; Hittite: A Kammenhuber, *Hippologia Hethitica* (Wiesbaden 1961); Hurrian: T. Kendall, *Warfare and Military Matters in the Nuzi Tablets* (diss., Brandeis University 1974).

<sup>13</sup> S. Walrond, *Breaking a Horse to Harness* (London 1981) 103.

<sup>14</sup> As recounted in numerous Iliadic passages; see esp. *Il.* 15.453, the horses reared, κείν' ὄχεα κροτέοντες. (One is reminded of the skills of the *apobates* but this feat evidently never involved the charioteer descending.)

<sup>15</sup> For a modern parallel, compare Western films and the cowboy in dire straits whistling for his horse; cf. *Il.* 5.229-38: Pandaros declines to take the reins of Aeneas' horses for fear they would not respond to a voice other than that of their accustomed charioteer.

<sup>16</sup> Imported from Anatolia (F. Schachermeyr, *Poseidon und die Entstehung des griechischen Götterglaubens* (Salzburg 1950) 148-55) or the Levant (via Crete) (J.H. Crowell, *Chariots and Other Means of Land Transport in Bronze Age Greece* (Amsterdam 1981) 148-9); cf. M.A. Littauer, 'The military use of the chariot

in the Aegean in the Late Bronze Age', *AJA* 76 (1972) 145-7. (And we hear echoes of Mycenaean Greek (e.g. *wo-ka*) in the passage (ὄχεα 234).)

<sup>17</sup> 104-5, τὰύρεος Ἐννοσίγαιος/ὄς Θήβης κρήδεμνον ἔχει ῥύεται τε πόλῃα, 'the bull-like Earthshaker, who holds the citadel of Thebes and guards the city'. I have suggested elsewhere, on political and religious grounds, that this passage reflects the Mycenaean situation ('The guardian of Thebes', unpublished ms., presented to the Boiotian Symposium, McGill University, Montreal, 17 March 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G.R. Bugh, *The Horsemen of Athens* (Princeton 1988) 28 and n.103. There are, moreover, compelling indications that, in his military and political aspects, as well as in his role as *Quellöffner*, Poseidon is to be connected with the Anatolian Stormgod, chief deity of the Hittite pantheon in the Empire period and principal war-god, in concert with the Sungoddess of Arinna, of the Hittite chariot-warriors. I have explored these connections elsewhere: 'Poseidon's Indo-European heritage', presented at the Thirty-Sixth Annual Conference of the

Poseidon's sanctuary at Onchestos is well-placed to overlook the Teneric Plain on the east and the Kopaic basin on the west. As Schachter notes, to the east and especially to the west of the ridge the land is flat and 'suitable for wheeled horse-drawn traffic'.<sup>19</sup> It is tempting to speculate that the horse-training grounds of the region's Mycenaean charioteers may have been located in this vicinity, in or adjacent to the sanctuary of their patron god. Although we have no firm evidence for cult activity in Bronze Age Onchestos, evidence from pottery finds shows that the site was occupied during this period.<sup>20</sup>

Not only the flatness but also the fertility of the land around Onchestos makes the area suitable horse country. The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* has the god hurrying 'down the plain through grassy Onchestos' (πεδίονδε δι' Ὀγχηστόν λεχεποίην, 88; cf. Ὀγχηστοῖο ποιήεντος, 190),<sup>21</sup> while the Iliadic Catalogue of Ships refers to 'grassy Haliartos' (ποιήενθ' Ἀλῖαρτον, 2.503, as well as Ὀγχηστόν θ' ἱερόν, Ποσιδήϊον ἀγλαὸν ἄλσος, 506), the same Haliartos that laid claim to Onchestos in the fifth and early fourth centuries BC. Indeed, the poet of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* has Apollo travel on from Onchestos to 'grassy Haliartos' (εἰς Ἀλῖαρτον ποιήεντα, 243) and thence to the 'sacred springs' of Telpousa nearby, where he is dissuaded from locating his temple on the grounds that he would be disturbed by the stamping of swift horses and mules watering at the spring, and, moreover, his great temple and its many treasures would be neglected by the local people who would prefer to look at well-made chariots and the pacing of swift-footed horses (244-76).<sup>22</sup>

The question of what happens to the chariot in the Onchestos rite and what is subsequently done with it depends on the meaning of ἀγῆισιν in line 235<sup>23</sup> and of κλίναντες in 236. First, it seems clear that ἀγῆισιν in 235 refers to the *breaking* (wrecking) of the chariot.<sup>24</sup> The verb (ἄγνυμι) is used in the Homeric epic of objects (usually wooden) being broken in pieces or shattered: spears, sticks, branches, masts, ships, even a sword;<sup>25</sup> of chariots it is used in a general sense of 'wrecking' (involving breaking, not just overturning; an overturned chariot would almost certainly be broken at some point, at least in the joins, if not in the actual components) or of the 'breaking' of a particular part of the construction, the yoke or the draught pole, or the join of the pole to the yoke: compare Zeus's threat to Hera and Athena to maim their horses, throw them to the ground and shatter (ἄξω) the chariot; Adrastus' horses, entangled in a tamarisk-bush, broke (ἄξαντ(ε)) the chariot at the end of the pole; Nestor's advice to Antilochus: lean into the turning-post but beware of touching the flanking stone lest you injure the horses and shatter (ἄξεις)

International Linguistic Association, New York, April 1991; 'The Knossos Linear B Tablet KN V52', presented at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of Canada, The University of Prince Edward Island, May 1992. See also my 'Greek Athena and the Hittite Sungoddess of Arinna', in S. Deacy and A. Villing (eds.), *Athena in the Classical World* (Leiden 2001). Cf. V. Haas, *Geschichte der hethitischen Religion* (Leiden 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Schachter (1976) (n.1) 113.

<sup>20</sup> Schachter (1986) (n.1) 211 and n.2; he notes further that our first attestation of a connection between Onchestos and Poseidon is the Homeric Catalogue of Ships, in which the Boiotoi are said to occupy Ὀγχηστόν θ' ἱερόν, Ποσιδήϊον ἀγλαὸν ἄλσος, *Il.* 2.506; see further 213-14 on the question of the antiquity of Poseidon at Onchestos. (In this context one wonders about the site approximately 800 metres west of the Pass which appears to have been part of the later sanctuary. Schachter (208) notes that this site 'covers a very large area (upwards of 75 metres in each direction) and consists of the foundations of a series of rectangular build-

ings... around an open space'. The foundations are dated from the fourth century BC to the Roman period but might have replaced earlier buildings on the same site.)

<sup>21</sup> Schachter (1986) (n.1) 208 n.1 remarks that the foundations of the buildings to the west of the pass 'are not so easy to notice during the summer, when most foreigners visit Greece, the vegetation being higher than'.

<sup>22</sup> For chariot-racing at Onchestos, see Pind. *fr.* 94b.44-6 and *Isth.* 1.52-4; cf. 32-3 and 4.19-29.

<sup>23</sup> Cobet's emendation (ἀγῆισιν) of the manuscript reading ἄγησιν is accepted by Schachter (1976) (n.1) 111, but written ἀγῆισιν 'on the analogy of πίεσι on "Nestor's cup"'; cf. T.W. Allen, W.R. Halliday and E.E. Sikes, *The Homeric Hymns* (2nd edn, Oxford 1963) *ad v.* Cf. E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik* 1.661, 791.

<sup>24</sup> ἀγῆισιν has passive or, better, stative force (cf. ἄγη *Il.* 3.367, 16.801; ἐάγηι, *Il.* 11.559); cf. A.L. Sihler, *New Comparative Grammar of Greek and Latin* (New York and Oxford 1995) 563-4 (§508).

<sup>25</sup> *Il.* 6.306, 13.162, 16.801, 21.178; 11.559; 16.769; *Od.* 10.213; 5.316; 3.298, 10.123; *Il.* 3.367.

the chariot;<sup>26</sup> Athena broke (ῆξε) the yoke of Eumelos' horses in the funeral games; in the Achaean trench many horses broke (ἄξαντ(ε)) their chariots at the end of the pole; a missing charioteer is assumed to have fallen and wrecked (ἄξα) his chariot.<sup>27</sup>

The Onchestos charioteer's purpose in relinquishing control of the reins is evidently to see whether the horses, unguided, will draw the chariot safely or not; if it were simply a practical matter of getting through the pass, the charioteer would surely *lead* the horses. In the event that a chariot is in fact wrecked by the unrestrained team, 'they', that is, the charioteer and his helper(s) – squires, grooms, trainers, perhaps his warrior-companion – take care of the horses. This is the first priority. Anyone who cares about the welfare of his horse – and that most certainly includes anyone whose life depends upon his horse – will see to his horse first, and only then his equipment, and only then himself. In particular, great care must be taken to soothe the colt; such a frightening experience in the early training of a horse can ruin the animal forever.<sup>28</sup> In order to take proper care of the horses it will be necessary to unyoke them from the wrecked chariot. In the process or subsequently, the charioteer and his helper(s) do something with the chariot that is described as κλίνοντες ἑῶσιν: what, precisely, do they do? What does it mean to 'κλίνειν' a chariot?

The verb κλίνω has many intransitive uses but in a transitive sense it is regularly used in the construction 'to lean something on or against something' (κλίνειν τι πρὸς τι): a bow against a doorpost, a whip against the yoke, a spear against a bush.<sup>29</sup> While objects such as these, however, can be easily 'leaned' against a stationary object, it is not immediately obvious in what sense one would 'lean' a chariot against a wall, the usual sense assumed for the formulaic line ἄρματα δ' ἔκλιναν πρὸς ἐνώπια παμφανόωντα, of the Horai tending Hera's chariot at *Il.* 8.435, and of Menelaos' squires tending Telemachos' chariot at *Od.* 4.42.

However, κλίνω can also be used with a direct object alone, with no support specified *against* which that object is leaned or toward which it is inclined. A problematical use of this type is *Il.* 3.427 of Helen 'turning back her eyes' (ᾔσσε πάλιν κλίνασα). But a passage where the sense is admirably clear is *Il.* 19.223: men soon have enough of battle when Zeus inclines the scales (ἐπὴν κλίνησι τάλαντα / Ζεύς). In this case we have an object composed of parts, one of which moves up, the other down (toward the earth)<sup>30</sup> when the object is 'inclined'.

It is perhaps in just the same way that we should understand the notion of 'leaning' or 'inclining' a chariot. We know that chariots were stored indoors, covered with a cloth and (perhaps regularly) elevated on a block, with the wheels removed<sup>31</sup> (although the draught pole remained permanently attached to the chassis).<sup>32</sup> In the interim following use, before the chariot can be cleaned and put away, it rests on the wheels and, once the horses have been removed from beneath the yoke, the chariot will 'tip' in one direction or the other, front to back, depending on the placement of the axle<sup>33</sup> and the relative weight of the box and pole (with the yoke attached or removed); that is, the pole will incline either to the ground at its forward end, tipping the box forward, or it will tip upward, with the box inclining backward.<sup>34</sup> The former arrangement is the

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Il. Parv.* 23 = *Certamen* 100-1.

<sup>27</sup> Zeus: *Il.* 8.403; Adrastus: *Il.* 6.40; Nestor: *Il.* 18.341; Athena: *Il.* 22.392; trench: *Il.* 16.371; fallen charioteer: *Il.* 23.467.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Walrond (n.13) 94 and 102.

<sup>29</sup> *Od.* 22.121; *Il.* 23.510, 21.18.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Il.* 8.68-74.

<sup>31</sup> *Il.* 2.777-8, 5.194-5, 722-3, 8.441, and Kirk *ad vv.*; cf. the Linear B chariot tablets and ideograms, M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (2nd edn, Cambridge 1973) 361-9.

<sup>32</sup> M.A. Littauer and J.H. Crouwel, 'Chariots in Late Bronze Age Greece', *Antiquity* 57 (1983) 188-9; Ventris and Chadwick (n.31) 361, 368; *Il.* 5.729 and Kirk *ad v.*

<sup>33</sup> As Littauer (n.16) 154 (and ill. 8) notes, Mycenaean depictions show variations of axle placement from central to full rear; her discussion (154-5) of the respective advantages and disadvantages of the different types is particularly useful.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Roux (n.3) 17: 'soit que le timon prenne appui sur le sol, soit que le poids de la caisse, basculant sur l'essieu, le maintienne en position haute, obliquement dirigé vers le ciel!'

more likely; since Greek chariots were light enough to be carried,<sup>35</sup> whatever the type of wood used in a particular model, the length of the pole would almost certainly cause it to overbalance the box; Eumelos' fate in the funeral games indicates just such a result: when Athena broke the yoke of his horses, they swerved to either side, whereupon the pole (i.e. the forward end) fell to the ground, bringing movement to an abrupt stop, and Eumelos was thrown from the chariot.<sup>36</sup>

If this is indeed the sense in which ἔκλιναν should be understood in *Il.* 8.435 = *Od.* 4.42, πρὸς ἐνώπια would then indicate merely that the chariot was placed in its resting position *against* the wall, that is, adjacent to the wall, touching it or nearly so, and, moreover, *parallel* to the wall for obvious purposes of protection, both of the chariot itself and of anyone who might otherwise run foul of the jutting pole.

This interpretation would yield a very satisfactory sense for the passage in the *Apollo Hymn*. The 'wrecked' chariot, broken and most likely overturned as well, is righted and placed in the proper position for a 'parked' chariot, with the pole inclined in such a way that its forward end rests upon the ground. When they have thus arranged the chariot, they 'let it be' (ἔωσιν), that is, they leave it in its present location and condition, at least for the time being, perhaps specifically while they make their prayers to the god. The point of including this particular detail is perhaps to emphasize the contrast with a similar situation such as that of the chariot race in *Iliad* 23, where the hapless Eumelos, his chariot and his hopes demolished by Athena's intervention, comes in last, driving his horses before him and dragging his wrecked chariot behind.

Unlike Eumelos, the Onchestos charioteer leaves his wrecked chariot where it is while he prays to Poseidon to protect the chariot in future,<sup>37</sup> including, we may surely assume, the team and charioteer. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the most reasonable assumption is that the charioteer or his delegate (or the palace grooms) will afterwards collect the damaged chariot for repair. There would be little point in praying to Poseidon to *guard* the chariot if it was to be left in its damaged state in the sanctuary of the god. The ancient Greeks, including certainly the Mycenaean, while decidedly religious, were not wholly impractical, and, while no doubt the early period saw, as did the later, the dedication to the gods of objects of a wide variety of types and conditions, it is worth noting that the Linear B tablets indicate the presence of damaged chariots in the Mycenaean palace storerooms.<sup>38</sup>

The areas most likely to suffer damage would be the draught pole or the wheels, the most vulnerable parts of the construction. Damage to the pole, which was rigidly and permanently attached to the box,<sup>39</sup> would require the services of a professional chariot-maker; replacement of wheels, however, could be provided directly to the Mycenaean charioteer from the palace storerooms. Just such a circumstance is indicated on the tablets from both Knossos and Pylos, e.g. PY Sa02, with Ventris and Chadwick's translation:

*ke-ro-ke-re-we-o / wo-ka we-je-ke-e* WHEEL+TE ZE I

One pair of wheels with *tyres, fit for driving*, belonging to Khêroklewēs.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Il.* 10.503-5 and Hainsworth *ad v.* 505; J. Spruytte, *Études expérimentales sur l'attelage* (Paris 1977) 93; *cf.* Crouwel (n.16) 150; Littauer (n.32) 187-92.

<sup>36</sup> *Il.* 23.392. The Homeric descriptions in this passage and elsewhere attest to accurate knowledge on the part of the poet(s), at least at second-hand if not first, of the workings and the vulnerabilities of chariots; *cf.* Crouwel (n.16) 150-7.

<sup>37</sup> I take the clause of 238, paratactically introduced by δέ, to express the object of the prayer (and γάρ in 237 to indicate that the events involving the chariot and horses are part of the ὄσση).

<sup>38</sup> Ventris and Chadwick (n.31) 361-75; *cf.* Crouwel (n.16) 150.

<sup>39</sup> See n.32 above.

<sup>40</sup> Ventris and Chadwick (n.31) 373 (285).

The interpretation proposed here situates the events reported in the Onchestos passage of the *Apollo Hymn* in the practical reality of Mycenaean life, in particular warfare, a sphere which, like all others in this and later periods of Greek culture, was informed by religious considerations. There is, however, a very real possibility that practical concerns have no place in an account of the Onchestos episode; that, instead, it is a reflection (whose origins and import were perhaps obscure to the hymnist and his audience) of a Near Eastern religious ritual reaching back far into the second millennium. The most arresting and unaccountable feature of the episode recorded by the Apollo hymnist is the empty chariot, rattling along in Poseidon's sanctuary, drawn by horses without the guidance of a charioteer. Just such an enigmatic reference is found in relation to the Akîtu festival, the great Babylonian New Year's Festival celebrated at the vernal equinox.<sup>41</sup> In Neo-Assyrian explanatory texts, offering accounts of (often much older) ritual in terms of theology and mythology, we find the following tantalizing reference in the episode known as 'Marduk's Ordeal':

The chariot, which goes to the Akîtu temple. It goes with no driver. Without a driver, it rocks about.<sup>42</sup>

The similarity is perhaps no more than a coincidence; but the empty chariot in its sacral setting, in the precinct of the god and noted specifically for its unsteadiness ('rocking', 'rattling') without its driver, is a striking enough parallel that we are compelled at least to consider the possibility of the transmission of a religious ritual from the East to Greek lands, perhaps in the second millennium.<sup>43</sup> Since the Mycenaean chariot was an import from the East, it would not be surprising if it arrived accompanied by some of its Eastern cultic associations.<sup>44</sup>

The chariot is prominent in Mycenaean religious contexts, and its use in racing is documented for this period as well.<sup>45</sup> These uses are continued in the first millennium, in the athletic

<sup>41</sup> Although some texts indicate that the festival was also celebrated, perhaps variously in various historical periods, in the autumn; see S.A. Pallis, *The Babylonian Akîtu Festival* (Copenhagen 1926).

<sup>42</sup> A. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford 1986) 221 (90); cf. 243 (66), 249 (13). (In his Commentary (230 (90)) Livingstone offers no explanation of the passage.)

<sup>43</sup> For religious and other parallels between Greece and the Near East (especially in the first millennium BC but also to some extent in the second), see W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, MA 1992) and M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford 1997), especially 609, Mycenaean cult idols at Ugarit, and 621, Asian shrines at Mycenae and Phylakopi; for various connections between Bronze Age Anatolia and the Aegean, see my 'Greek Athena and the Hittite Sungoddess of Arinna' (n.18), with references. For possible Eastern influences specifically in Bronze Age Thebes, see R.B. Edwards, *Kadmos the Phoenician: A Study in Greek Legends and the Mycenaean Age* (Amsterdam 1979).

<sup>44</sup> See M.A. Littauer and J.H. Crouwel, *Wheeled Vehicles and Ridden Animals in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden 1979) 95. A Babylonian hymn of praise to the

divine chariot, partially preserved in a bilingual Sumeru-Akkadian fragment of what appears to be a cultic text dating to the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I, begins,

Chariot of the king of the gods, fashioned by Enlil [...]  
Wagon of great Marduk, which, among the gods [...]  
and goes on to mention and extol the various component parts (W.G. Lambert, 'A new fragment from a list of antediluvian kings and Marduk's chariot', in M. A. Beek, A. A. Kampman, C. Nijland and J. Rijckmanns (eds.), *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl Dedicatae* (Leiden 1973) 277). We are reminded of the elaborate description of the divine chariot at *Il.* 5.720-32. Among the Hittites as well, the chariot figures prominently in cultic contexts and the motif of the charioteer relinquishing the reins (in this case to another individual) is found in both Hittite and Babylonian documents (see S. Dalley (ed. and transl.), *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford 1989) 257, and O.R. Gurney, *Some Aspects of Hittite Religion* (Oxford 1977) 36). West (n.43) 589 notes that various features of Hittite cult usage, prayer formulas and funerary ritual appear to have found their way into Greek texts, and (446-7) that the title Bēl(u), 'lord', 'master' (Semitic Baal), which was used especially of Marduk, the patron god of Babylon, is also the name of a son of Poseidon (Belos) by Libye of the Theban divine lineage; the title in Greek translation forms the first part of Poseidon's name (Potei-).

<sup>45</sup> Crouwel (n.16) 145.

games and in religious processions.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the continuity of cult practice involving the chariot on the mainland may have been, in some areas, as striking as that recorded on Cyprus where it has been observed, in large part on the basis of chariot use, that 'there is no doubt ... that the history and nature of the cult [of Apollo at Kourion] continued the traditions of the Bronze Age', that in fact 'Bronze Age and archaic customs were telescoped into one'.<sup>47</sup>

There is sufficient circumstantial evidence, therefore, to encourage reasonable speculation that the Onchestos passage might reflect Mycenaean religious ritual which itself might have continued Near Eastern cult usage. Inconclusive as the evidence is (and is likely to remain), however, the question of the purpose of the Onchestos rite remains open.

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<sup>46</sup> Such as that at Eretria, recorded by Strabo (10.1.10), which included sixty chariots as well as six hundred riders and three thousand foot soldiers. (I am indebted for this reference to the anonymous reader for the *Journal*.) Cf. J.H. Crouwel, *Chariots and Other Wheeled Vehicles in Iron Age Greece* (Amsterdam 1992) 60; cf. also E. Bevan, *Representations of Animals in*

*Sanctuaries of Artemis and Other Olympian Deities* (BAR International Series 315 (i), Oxford 1986) 194-219 and 428-31.

<sup>47</sup> B.C. Dietrich, *Tradition in Greek Religion* (Berlin 1986) 174, 151; see further Crouwel (n.16) 150-1 on the continuity with the Mycenaean past represented by the chariot.