Commentary on the Iliad, Book XIV, Lines 166-186

In Book XI, Zeus, who was initially asked by Thetis on Achilles' behalf to intervene in the Trojan war, now turns his rage upon the Achaeans by showering them in a storm of blood. The actions of Zeus allow Hector to break the Achaeans' fortifications, giving the Trojans the upper-hand (and the ultimate divine favoritism) in this long war. Zeus believes his work is finished for the moment in Book XIII, so Poseidon seizes this rare opportunity to divinely intervene and bestow some aid to both the Great and Little Ajax and the rest of the Achaeans. Hera, who (like Poseidon) is on the side of the Greeks, notices the actions of Poseidon and realizes that as soon as Zeus becomes aware of such plans, they will surely go to ruin. So, in Book XIV, Hera devises a crafty scheme of her own. In this following passage, Hera beautifies herself and adorns herself in the finest robes so that she may seduce Zeus in order to put him off Poseidon's scent. To make sure her plan is as effective as possible, after beautifying herself Hera seeks out Aphrodite to ask her for a magical girdle that will make her utterly irresistible to Zeus. Then Hera will go to Sleep bribing him with a prize of one of the Graces as a bride so that he will cast a deep sleep on Zeus after their interlude. Hera's cunning plan allows Poseidon to help the Greek attack the Trojans and simultaneously knock out Hector. Hera's actions seems to be the justified result of spite for Zeus after their fight and his threats to her in Book I (and are solidified in Hera's mind after Zeus lists the numerous women with whom he has had affairs.) Though perhaps Book XIV does not in itself advance the plot, it does make one wonder the vast repercussions that petty fights between the gods will have upon the fates of mortals.

In this passage, Hera's adornment of herself is reminiscent of that of a warrior preparing himself for combat, such as Paris and Menelaus dressing themselves for battle with each other in Book III and that of Poseidon in Book XIII. Hera even has a special “weapon” just as other warriors do (or will, when she cheats Aphrodite out of her magical girdle) such as the spear of Achilles, Athena's aegis, or Achilles' corselet. This mock combat preparation and the subsequent “battle” scene with Zeus provides comedic elements amidst tense and bloody mortal battle scenes.

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A similar cleansing and adornment scene occurs in Book VIII of the *Odyssey* where Aphrodite makes herself up so that she may seduce Ares. It is of interest to note that Hera will visit Aphrodite after her preparations so that she may deceive the goddess of love in aiding her with a seduction. Homer's irony is keenly felt.

167

ἐπῆρσεν- 3rd sing. aor. act. ind. From ἐπᾰρᾰρίσκω, here “to fit/fasten upon.” This form appears only once more on 14.339.3

πυκινάς- fem. acc. plur. Agreeing with θύρας. From πῠκῑνός/πυκνός, which can mean “shrewd” or “close.” Here, it is better loosely translated, as it is describing doors (θύρας), as “sturdy.” It can be translated as such as in 9.475 and 21.535, θύρας are described as “πυκινῶς ἀραρυίας,” with the adverb of πυκινός describing the participle of ᾰρᾰρίσκω that modifies θύρας.

This same formular description of doors occurs also seven times in the *Odyssey*, whereas θύρας are only described as πυκινάι once more in Homer's works in 14.339.4

169

ἐπέθηκε- Difference of opinion. Leaf says ἐπέθηκε is better read as ἐπιθεῖσα, because of the asyndeton in the following line.5 Kirk states that θύρας ἐπέθηκε φαεινάς is formular, as it occurs six times in the *Odyssey* alone.6 Both variations, however, make good grammatical sense.

170

ἰμερόεις (“lovely” here) describes Hera's skin (χροὸς.) This same adjective describes Aphrodite's skin in her own seduction of Ares in 3.397.

172

τεθυωμένον ἣν- 3rd sing. neut. nom. plupf. periphrastic. From θυόω- “to fill with sweet fragrance.” The relative τό, which refers to ἔλαιον (“oil”) in 171, is the subject.

οἱ- an dative enclitic referring to Hera might be better left untranslated, as it could alter the meaning of the sentence (e.g.- the perfume filled with sweet fragrance for her only.) This conveys the wrong sense of the sentence, as Hera is not the only one who can smell the perfume.

ἐδανός- this word is obscure in antiquity (once, here, in Homer), and is often etymologically linked to ἡδύς (“sweet”).7

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5 Leaf, *Iliad*.
Concerning ἑδανός on 172- The obscurity provides the questions as to whether it was a misprint for ἑανός, meaning “robe.” The formular ἀμβρόσιος ἑανός is found in the Iliad in 14.178, 21.507, 5.338. Though this alternate reading could potentially (albeit slightly) change the meaning of the line, it is not out of the question completely. 18.595 and Od 7.107 both mention robes that are scented with oil.

- A robe scented with oil, however, would make better sense contextually with κινυμένοιο. It would be more believable that the robes that are scented with oil would move rather than the oil itself.
- Both variations ἑδανός and ἑανός appear to work equally fine in a grammatical sense.

δῶ- neut. sing. shortened Epic formation of δῶμα (“house”).

- χαλκοβατὲς δῶ (“the bronze floored house”) is an epithet of the house of Zeus that is often used by Homer: 1.426, 14.173, Od 8.321. It is also an epithet of King Alcinoüs' house in Od 13.4.

In the next following lines, there is a plethora of poetical devices:

- Alliteration and assonance-
  - 173- καὶ κινυμένοιο Διὸς κατὰ χαλκοβατὲς
  - 176- πεξαμένη χερσὶ πλοκάμους ἔπλεξε
  - 178- ἀμφὶ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἀμβρόσιον ἑανὸν ἕσαθ᾽

- There is also entomological play:
  - ἑανὸν ἕσαθ- ἑανός (“robe”) is entomological derived from ἕννυμι (“to clothe”). ἕσαθ is the 3rd. sing. aor. mid from ἕννυμι.
  - ζώσατο δὲ ζώνῃ- ζώνη (“belt”) is etymologically derived from ζώννυμι (“to gird”). ζώσατο is the 3rd. sing. aor. mid from ζώννυμι.

- Excessive word/phrase repetition:
  - ἀμβροσίη/ἀμβρόσιος appears four times: ἀμβροσίῃ in 170, ἀμβροσίῳ in 172, ἀμβροσίους in 177, and ἀμβρόσιον in 178.
  - καλός appears three times: καλοὺς in 177, καλῷ in 185, and καλὰ in 186.

πλόκαμος (“locks of hair”) appears only here in Homer.

κράατος is an ancient genitive form of κράς with an Aeolic α. It is also seen in 19.93 and Od.22.218.

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8 Ibid.
Much like this robe (ἑανὸν) that Athena made for Hera, it was mentioned in 5.735 that Athena had also wrought herself a robe, likewise with tassels (θυσανόεσσαν) as Hera's is mentioned as having in 181 with θυσανόεις.

179-181

The ἑανὸν that Athena crafted for Hera is of an ambiguous nature as there are only a few telling clues given to the audience/reader:

- 179~ ἔξυσ᾽- This explains that Athena, when making it, smoothed out the fabric of the robe to a very smooth texture, which indicates the high quality of the fabric (though it is somewhat obvious for a divinely wrought garment.)
- 179~ ἀσκήσασα- This also explains that Athena made the robe carefully and with skill, though it does not explain further.
- 180~ The garment is pinned on the chest (κατὰ στῆθος) with χρυσείῃς ἐνετῇσι (golden pins.) Again, this does not help the reader to envision it very much, as apparent as it may have been to the contemporary Greek audience member.
  - It is also uncertain what specifically the ἐνετῇ refers to due to the infrequency of its appearance. It can simply be translated as “brooch” or “pin”, but if it refers to the latter, what kind of pin? It is impossible to tell whether it was a type of pin used to hold up a peplos, or just a type of decorative fibulae.
- A peplos, however, might be ruled out due to the decorative nature of the tassels (θυσάνοις) in 181. The overhanging folds of the peplos would surely cover the tassels.
  - The θυσάνος could be potentially Assyrian nature, as they are often depicted on the female garments of statues in such a fashion as Homer describes. It may help to envision a robe of a similar style as to that of the Assyrians then.

181

The ζώνη (“belt”) has θυσάνος, much like the ones found on Athena's aegis in 2.448. Since Athena made Hera's robe, it is only logical that it would resemble an icon of Athena.

182

A double hiatus, which are generally avoided in Greek poetry, appears in this line-
ἐν δ᾽ ἄρα ἕρματα ἤκεν.

183

μορόεις- “skillfully wrought” or even “dark-hued.” It can, however, mean “like mulberries”. This could be interpreted as that the earrings were shaped like mulberries growing in clusters. τρίγληνος, which is best translated as “with three pearls/drops”, helps to corroborate this idea by emphasizing the bunched growth of mulberries.¹⁴
- In Book XVIII of the Odyssey, Penelope also wears a pair of earrings described as τρίγληνος μορόεις.
- τρίγληνος μορόεις also reappears in 18.298.

184

κρήδεμνον is here a woman's headdress. It is not exactly a veil, as it would not cover the woman's face.¹⁵ It is attached to the back of the head and reaches the height of her shoulders.¹⁶
- κρήδεμνον can also be translated as “lid of a wine jar” as in Od 3.392 or “battlements atop a city's walls” as in 16.100 and Od 13.388. The translation of it as crowning battlements connects this beautification scene back to the preparation of a warrior for battle.
- In Od 2.165, Penelope also wears a κρήδεμνον, and it is specified that is does not cover her face.

185

λευκόν is perhaps better translated “bright” rather than the typical “white.”
- ἠέλιος ὥς- seen twice in the Odyssey after Penelope cleanses and adorns herself in 19.234; in 6.45 when Odysseus at the house of king Alcinous. It could be a common phrase used at the completion of beautification scenes. ¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid, 177.
¹⁵ Leaf, Iliad.
¹⁶ Ibid.
Works Cited


*TGL online was used for vocabulary entries.*