

Movement and Sound on the Shield of Achilles in Ancient Exegesis

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THE MODE OF EXPRESSION employed by Homer in his description of the shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.478–608) has been subject to intense discussions throughout the modern era. This is largely due to the influence of the great renaissance literary theorist Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558), who in his comparison between Homer and Virgil in the fifth book of his *Poetice* designated the shield as one of the strongest arguments for the decided superiority of the Roman poet.¹ What bothered Scaliger were mainly the exuberant effects of movement and sound in the Homeric passage. How could Hephaestus—on the static surface of the shield—show that the young men setting up an ambush (18.514–522) first moved forward (ἴσαν), then arrived (ἵκωνον) and afterwards encamped (ἵζοντο)? And how could the artist show that the boy singing among the male dancers (569–572) did so “with a delicate voice” (λεπταλέη φωνῆ)?

Scaliger’s critique was adopted as one of the main arguments by the detractors of Homer—the ‘Moderns’—in the famous *Querelle des anciens et des modernes* that raged in France and England at the turn of the seventeenth century. The objective of their opponents—the ‘Ancients’—therefore became to prove that the description was not as impossible as the Moderns claimed; through detailed commentary and comic-book style episodic ‘reconstructions’ of the divine artwork they sought to demonstrate that the multitude of actions could indeed be

¹J. C. Scaliger, *Poetices libri septem* ([Lyon] 1561) 232.

represented.² Both parties were eventually famously refuted by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), arguing on semiotic grounds that poetry as opposed to visual art *should* narrate actions in time, not describe static bodies in space. This principle was essentially fulfilled by Homer: the poet did not describe the finished product but chose instead to narrate the process by which Hephaestus created the armor. And more importantly: he did not restrict himself to simply describing the surface of the artwork, but reinterpreted the scenes engraved on the shield into a free narrative.³

It is difficult to overstate Lessing's influence over the subsequent centuries of scholarship on this passage. Criticism of the effects of movement and sound in the Shield as arising from 'confusion' more or less vanished, but the question remained whether or not Homer's choice to narrate rather than describe was aesthetically justifiable, and Homer's inability to produce 'real description' was occasionally seen as a flaw of the text.⁴ It has been emphasized that the epic language at the poet's disposal was primarily designed to narrate; when describing the shield Homer "reverts to narrative" since this is the natural form of expression for a poet working in the oral tradition.⁵

² There are many surveys of this debate: see G. Finsler, *Homer in der Neuzeit von Dante bis Goethe* (Leipzig 1912) 137; J. M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca 1991) 121–244, and *The Autonomy of History: Truth and Method from Erasmus to Gibbon* (Chicago 1999) 121–147 and 212–217; A.-M. Lecoq, *Le bouclier d'Achille: un tableau qui bouge* (Paris 2010) 29–109. Note that most arguments were anticipated by the characters Clarimond and Philiris in the debate on the merits of fiction and literature in the thirteenth book of Charles Sorel's *Le Berger extravagant* III (Paris 1628) 30–31 and 119–120.

³ G. E. Lessing, *Laokoon, oder über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie* (Berlin 1766) chapter 19, ed. W. Barner, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Laokoon, Briefe, antiquarischen Inhalts* (Frankfurt am Main 2007) 138–144.

⁴ P. Friedländer, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentiarius* (Leipzig/Berlin 1912) 2–3.

⁵ E. Minchin, *Homer and the Resources of Memory: Some Applications of Cognitive Theory to the Iliad and the Odyssey* (Oxford 1999) 128–131.

Moreover, during the twentieth century the ancient rhetorical technical term *ekphrasis* (“a description that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes”)⁶ was narrowed down to mean “literary descriptions of visual art works.”⁷ A new ancient textual category was defined as one in which a dialogue is established between word and image, in which the text meditates on a visual object and often by analogy also on itself. If the Shield had previously been invoked as one of many examples of *ekphrasis* according to the old definition of the term, it now became recognized as *the* quintessential example of this kind of text, as the origin and touchstone of a genre and an icon of Western inter-arts theory. Lessing’s reading became more popular than ever, since from this perspective Homer’s narrativization of the shield was deemed a feature of utmost poetical virtuosity: it illustrates how a human being interprets and animates a work of art in her imagination.⁸ Since Hephaestus had often been perceived as standing in for the poet (not least during the twentieth century),⁹ this reading also came

⁶ Only one of the ancient treatises (Nicolaus *Progymn.* 69.4–11 Felten) mentions statues and paintings as one of many potential subjects for *ekphrasis*.

⁷ See esp. L. Spitzer, “The ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, or Content vs. Metagrammar,” *Comparative Literature* 7 (1955) 203–225, at 207 and 218; J. A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago 1993) 3; cf. R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham 2009) 1.

⁸ See A. S. Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis* (Lanham 1995); J. A. Francis, “Metal Maidens, Achilles’ Shield, and Pandora: The Beginnings of ‘Ekphrasis,’” *AJP* 130 (2009) 1–23, at 11. Cf. the observations in K. Reinhardt, “Der Schild des Achilleus,” in *Freundesgabe für Ernst Robert Curtius* (Bern 1956) 67–78, esp. 76–77.

⁹ See e.g. W. Schadewaldt, *Iliasstudien* (Leipzig 1938) 166; Reinhardt, in *Freundesgabe* 67–78; W. Marg, *Homer über die Dichtung* (Münster 1957) 20 and 26; H. Erbse, *Untersuchungen zur Funktion der Götter im Homerischen Epos* (Berlin/New York 1986) 76; W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*² (Stuttgart 2011) 259; J. M. Hurwit, *The Art and Culture of Early Greece* (Ithaca 1985) 72–73; O. Taplin, *Homeric Soundings* (Oxford 1992) 204–205; R. Nünlist, *Poetologische Bildersprache in der frühgriechischen Dichtung* (Stutt-

to include literary art, the Shield being read as a description of how a reader responds to literature.¹⁰

Occasionally we also find the explanation that within the fiction of the *Iliad* sound actually emerges from the figures on the shield as they magically move over the surface of this supernatural weapon.¹¹ The interpretation was recently dismissed as “untenable” in a lucid study of this aspect of the description,¹² but it was often discussed by ancient and medieval readers of this passage. Their arguments are hardly ever revisited or even mentioned by scholars today, and so the aim of this paper is to survey and examine the history of this pre-modern debate. After a brief discussion on a selection of ancient creative receptions of the Shield, we will turn to the fragments of the different views on the matter ascribed to Dionysius Thrax and Aristonicus. In section three we deal with the supernatural status of the Achilles’ shield in general, and in the final part we examine discussions found in Byzantine texts.

1. Three Ancient Imitations of the Shield

The figures on the shield are not explicitly described as similar to living creatures, but it is rather that we might get this impression from the way in which Homer states that things

gart 1998) 84–85. Cf. the criticism raised by A. Ford, *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton 2004) 116–117, and his review of Becker, *The Shield of Achilles*, in *JHS* 117 (1997) 214; B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer: The Early Reception of Epic* (Cambridge 2002) 19 n.20 and 42 n.83.

¹⁰ Heffernan, *Museum of Words* 10–22; Becker, *The Shield of Achilles*; for a persuasive case of implicit self-advertisement and poetological reflection in the Shield, see now I. J. F. de Jong, “The Shield of Achilles: from Metalepsis to Mise en Abyme,” *Ramus* 40 (2011) 1–14.

¹¹ See references in de Jong, *Ramus* 40 (2011) 1 n.4, and e.g. H. Schrader, *Götter und Menschen Homers* (Stuttgart 1952) 78–96, esp. 79–80 (cf. the criticism by W. Marg in *Gnomon* 28 [1956] 1–17, at 8–9, and J. Kakridis, *Homer Revisited* [Lund 1971] 108–124); Reinhardt, in *Freundesgabe* 77–78, and *Die Ilias und ihr Dichter* (Göttingen 1961) 409–411.

¹² De Jong, *Ramus* 40 (2011) 1.

simply happened in the engravings: the young male dancers “were whirling around” (494), flutes and lyres “were sounding” (495), people “were shouting in applause” (502), warriors “were rushing out” (527), workers “were driving and turning teams of oxen” (543), corn “was falling to the ground” (552), a boy “was playing the lyre” (570), and dogs “were barking” (586). A rare exception is found where the gods and spirits join in the battle raging nearby the city at war (539–540):

ὠμίλουν δ' ὡς τε ζωοὶ βροτοὶ ἠδ' ἐμάχοντο,
νεκρούς τ' ἀλλήλων ἔρπον κατατεθνηῶτας.

They were joining in battle, fighting like living mortals and dragging away from each other the bodies of the slain.

Even here the phrase “like living mortals” could apply to the gods from within the narrative of the depicted episode, meaning that they joined in battle as though they were not gods but human beings, but it can also refer to the representations of the human combatants, meaning that the figures moved like living creatures.¹³

Such comments are more frequent in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles* where combatants rush together “as though they were alive” (ὡς εἰ ζωοὶ περ ἔόντες, 189) and women tear their cheeks “like living beings” (ζωῆσιν ἴκελαι, 228).¹⁴ There is still, however, an ambiguity in whether such expressions imply a true conviction that the objects are divinely animated or rather should be understood as hyperbolic metaphors for the

¹³ The question is further complicated by the fact that lines 535–538 (where the gods are introduced) may be an interpolation from [Hes.] *Sc.* 156–159. It would follow that the subject of ὠμίλουν is definitely the two armies (cf. M. W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary* V [Cambridge 1991] 220–221). In any case the lines would have been present in the editions used by our ancient commentators. See also H. Philipp, *Tektonon daidala: Der bildende Künstler und sein Werk im vorplatonischen Schrifttum* (Berlin 1968) 17, and N. Himmelmann, *Über bildende Kunst in der homerischen Gesellschaft* (Mainz 1969) 19.

¹⁴ Cf. Philipp, *Tektonon daidala* 16–18, and R. Kassel, “Dialoge mit Statuen,” *ZPE* 51 (1983) 1–12, at 2–4. See verses 189, 194, 209, 215, 228, 244.

impact of a visual artwork on the human mind.¹⁵ This is also the case with the shorter description of figures made by Hephaestus on Pandora's headband in Hesiod's *Theogony* (581–584):

τῆ δ' ἐνὶ δαίδαλα πολλὰ τετεύχαστο, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι,
κνώδαλ' ὅσ' ἤπειρος δεινὰ τρέφει ἠδὲ θάλασσα·
τῶν ὅ γε πόλλ' ἐνέθηκε, χάρις δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄητο,
θαυμάσια, ζωοῖσιν ἑοικότα φωνήεσσιν.

On this were contrived many designs, highly wrought, a wonder to see, all the terrible monsters the land and the sea nourish; he put many of these into it, wondrous, similar to living animals endowed with speech, and gracefulness breathed upon them all. (transl. Most)

Pandora is a statue made of clay, yet she is very much alive and speaks. But do the figures on her headband possess this power as well, or do they merely *seem* to be alive?

Another example is found in Pindar's celebration of the Rhodian boxer Diagoras' victory at Olympia in 464 B.C.E., where we learn that Athena bestowed upon the athlete's ancestors artistic skillfulness, and that they put up in their streets "works resembling living and walking beings."¹⁶ Ancient scholars commented on these verses that the works of the Rhodians *looked as though* they were given life and moved because of their surpassing artistic skill.¹⁷ Similarly, Patrick O'Sullivan, in a reading of this ode as championing the superiority of the poet's own artistic medium (compare the famous introduction to *Nemea* 5), interprets this verse as a comment on the illusory nature of art: "when something is described as 'like' something

¹⁵ For more examples see M. Delcourt, *Héphaïstos: ou légende du magicien* (Paris 1957) 48–64; C. A. Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses: Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual* (New York 1992) 18–35; A. Corso, "Ancient Greek Sculptors as Magicians," *NAC* 28 (1999) 97–111.

¹⁶ *Ol.* 7.50–53, ἔργα δὲ ζωοῖσιν ἐρπόντεσσί θ' ὁμοῖα. Note also that a Rhodian painter is summoned to produce an animated portrait in *Anacreonta* 16 West.

¹⁷ Schol. *Pind. Ol.* 7.95a.

else, this can be a way of saying that in reality it is deceptively different.”¹⁸ But this is clearly not a rule that may be applied in all cases. When Thetis visits Hephaestus in the *Iliad* (18.416–422) the divine artisan is aided by handmaids, golden automata of his own creation, described as “similar to living creatures” (ζωῆσι νεήνισιν εἰοικυῖαι). Only through allegorical interpretation can these lines be read as an expression of the verisimilitude of perfected visual artworks, but within the mythical narrative they clearly are divinely animated and ensouled statues.

Quintus of Smyrna (third or fourth century C.E.), in his description of Achilles’ shield in the context of the ‘Judgement of the Arms’ (*Posthomerica* 5.1–101), seems to follow the ps.-Hesiodic shield in this aspect; yet he makes it clear that the figures do not really live but are merely lifelike. He tells us that birds “flew around” (ἀμφεποτῶντο, 5.12) in the sky and adds “you would say they were alive” (φαίης κε ζῶντας, 5.13); the artifices on the shield “are like living and moving creatures” (δαίδαλα ... ζωῶσιν εἰκότα κινυμένοισι, 5.42).¹⁹

We have a similar situation in Philostratus the Younger’s *ekphrasis* of a painting (probably imaginary) of Achilles’ son Pyrrhus and his opponents, the Mysians. The young hero is portrayed with the arms of his dead father, and when we get to the shield Philostratus more or less offers a paraphrase of the Homeric passage, but the Homeric effects of movement and sound are unambiguously reused as expressions for the vivacity of the painting. To give but a few examples, where the cattle depicted on the shield in the *Iliad* “were hurrying to their pasture with a bellowing along the sounding river” (18.575–576), Philostratus explains that one can *almost hear* their bellowing in the painting, that the river *seems* to sound, and he even

¹⁸ P. O’Sullivan, “Pindar and the Statues of Rhodes,” *CQ* 55 (2005) 96–104, at 101.

¹⁹ Cf. A. James and K. Lee, *A Commentary on Quintus of Smyrna, Posthomerica V* (Leiden 2000) 35, 42, and 50. See verses 12–13, 24, 28, 42, 68, 90, 96.

adds the question “How is this not the height of vividness [*enargeia*]?” (*Imag.* 10, 409.20–26 Kayser). Especially in ambiguous passages there is a tendency in this text towards distinguishing between description and interpretation in the Homeric account. Where the epic narrator tells us that the men on the shield “were fighting like living mortals” (18.539), Philostratus explicitly ascribes this to the imagination of the describer: “The men are so terrifying in their onslaught and glance that they seem to me to differ in no way from living beings in their onslaughts” (οἱ δ’ ἄνδρες φοβεροὶ τῆς ὀρμῆς καὶ τοῦ βλέμματος ὡς οὐδὲν διαλλάττειν ἐμοὶ ζώντων ἐν ταῖς ὀρμαῖς δοκοῦσιν, 408.14–16). A similar thing occurs in the trial scene on the shield where in Homer “the elders were sitting upon polished stones in the sacred circle, [...] and in their midst lay two talents of gold, to be given to the one among them who should utter the fairest judgement” (18.503 ff.). In Philostratus we read: “The gold in the middle, these two talents, I do not know the purpose for. But, by Zeus, one must guess that it is wages for the person who shall judge truly” (τὸ δὲ ἐν μέσῳ χρυσίον τάλαντα μὲν δύο ταῦτ’ οὐκ οἶδ’ ἐφ’ ὅτῳ ἢ, νῆ Δί’, εἰκάσαι χρή, ὡς μισθὸς τῷ ὀρθῶς ἐκδικάσοντι, 407.1–3). This tendency to clarify the difference between what the describer sees and imagines in these two Second Sophistic responses to the Shield represents a specific interpretative position in respect to the effects of motion and sound in the model.

2. A Hellenistic Controversy

Turning from creative appropriations of the Homeric shield to the scholars, the oldest datable opinion on movement and sound on the shield is found in an entry in the exegetical scholia. It derives from an Imperial age commentary but reports a debate between the schools of two Hellenistic scholars:²⁰

²⁰ Schol. T 18.483–606 (IV 530.13–15 Erbse).

καὶ οἱ μὲν περὶ Διονύσιόν φασιν αὐτοκίνητα αὐτὰ εἶναι ὡς τοὺς τρίποδας, οἱ δὲ περὶ Ἀριστόνικον ἐναντιοῦνται, ἐπεὶ μὴ εἴσι παρὰ θεοῖς.

And the school of Dionysius claims that they move by themselves, as do the tripods, but the school of Aristonicus argues against this point of view, since they are not among the gods.

If we are to believe the scholiast, the Hellenistic grammarian Dionysius Thrax (fr.42 Linke) and his pupils on Rhodes argued that Homer's exuberant descriptions of the scenes depicted on the shield reflect not only the effect of artistic illusion but a supernatural feature of Hephaestus' artworks; Aristonicus and his pupils in Alexandria disagreed and pictured instead a non-animated shield.

The fact that the scholiast uses the phrase "like the tripods" indicates that Dionysius perhaps referred to Hephaestus' animated artifices described by Homer earlier in the same passage: the twenty tripods with the ability to move on their own (18.368–379), his handmaids (416–422), and his automatic bellows (469–473). In the exegetical scholia we find comments on these verses that seem to support such a view: we are told that the tripods "uphold the credibility of the making of the shield,"²¹ the handmaids are characterized as "a preparation for the making of the arms,"²² and when we get to the bellows the scholiast asks: "If his works are ensouled, then why should anyone find the objects he creates incredible?"²³ These comments invoke the widespread criterion in ancient literary criticism that certain passages need to be logically motivated beforehand in order to achieve narrative coherence.²⁴ The argument of the Imperial age scholars who followed Dionysius

²¹ Schol. bT 18.373c, πίστιν ... τῆς ἀσπιδοποιίας ἔχει.

²² Schol. T. 18.418–420, προπαρασκευὴ εἰς τὴν ὄπλοποιάν.

²³ Schol. T 18.470b, εἰ δὲ ἔμψυχα αὐτοῦ τὰ ἔργα [read ἐργαλεῖα?], διὰ τί χρὴ ἀπιστεῖν περὶ τῶν κατασκευαζομένων;

²⁴ R. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia* (Cambridge 2009) 30.

seems to have been that if Homer struggles to introduce elements that will prepare the reader for a description of a magically animated artwork, we should assume that the shield possesses this power.

The same interpretation is also found regarding the passage in which Achilles later receives the armor from his mother and Homer tells us “all the cunningly wrought artifices roared (ἀνέβραχε)” (19.13). Here an exegetical commentator pointed out (schol. bT 19.13b):

ἐψύχωσε δὲ τὰ ὅπλα διὰ τοῦ ἔβραχεν, ὡς καὶ ἐπὶ Ἄρεος “τόσον ἔβραχ’ Ἄρης ἄτος πολέμοιο.” τοιοῦτον <τὸ> “ἔκλαγξαν δ’ ἄρ’ οἴστοί” πρὸς τὸ “Τρῶες μὲν κλαγγῆ.” ἐντεῦθεν τινες ἔμψυχα τὰ ὅπλα ἐνόμισαν εἶναι. διὰ τοῦτο εἰκότως καὶ οἱ Μυρμιδόνες δεδοίκασιν.

He gave life to the arms through the word ἔβραχεν, since he also uses it about Ares: “so did Ares, insatiate of war, roar (ἔβραχε)” [*Il.* 5.863]. In a similar way “the arrows clanged” [1.46] is comparable to “the Trojans [advanced] under a clanging sound” [3.2]. For this reason, some have suspected that the arms are animated. Therefore it is suitable that even the Myrmidons were struck with fear.

Since the onomatopoeic verb βραχεῖν is elsewhere used to describe the roaring of Ares when struck by Diomedes’ spear,²⁵ the scholiast argues that Homer “gave life to” (ἐψύχωσε) the arms. This does not mean that the poet supernaturally animated them but that he employed a certain sort of metaphor, speaking about an inanimate object as though it were alive (ἀπὸ ἐμψύχων ἐπὶ ἄψυχα). This relates to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (3.11, 1411b–12a) where it is noted that Homer often uses metaphors of this kind in order to achieve “vigorousness” (*energeia*).

²⁵ It is also used of horses and cattle, *Il.* 16.468 and *Od.* 21.46. P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique*² (2009) 184 s.v. βραχεῖν, compares the onomatopoeia to that of βρυχάομαι; cf. also *Il.* 4.420, 12.396, 13.181, 14.420, 16.566 (the crashing of brazen armor); 5.838 (the shrieking of an oak-wood axle, ἐμψυχῶς according to schol. bT ad loc.), 21.9 (the sound of water streams), 21.387 (roaring of the earth).

Among other examples Aristotle mentions the Iliadic verses where we are told that spears hurled against Ajax missed their target and “stood in the ground, yearning (λιλαιόμενα) to take their fill of flesh” (11.574). As pointed out by Kokolakis in discussing “Homeric animism,” it is difficult to discern whether any such statement is a metaphor or an actual assertion that the object is animated, either as part of the poetic fiction or as a remnant from a primeval animistic mind-set ossified in the oral tradition. For instance, when Hephaestus’ chains “fell around” (ἀμφὶ ... ἔχυντο) Ares and Aphrodite in the *Odyssey* (8.296–297), this is most certainly not a metaphor, but the chains bound them of their own accord.²⁶

The need to make this distinction was to some extent realized already by ancient critics. Our exegetical scholiast on Achilles’ “roaring” arms in 19.13 refers us to the scene at the beginning of the poem (1.46–49) where Apollo’s arrows “screeched” (ἔκλαγξαν) and his bow gave rise to a terrible “screech” (κλαγγή). In one entry in the exegetical scholia on these lines (schol. bT 1.49a) it is noted that the same word is used to describe the screeching bird-like battle cry of the Trojans.²⁷ However, in another exegetical scholium (bT 1.46) Apollo’s screeching arrows are offered as an example of Homer’s piety, since it shows that even inanimate objects (τὰ ἄψυχα) feel the presence of the divine power, and the scholiast here even compares it to the roaring of the arms at the beginning of the nineteenth book. Thus the debate hinted at at the end of the scholium on 19.13 quoted above (“for this reason some have believed that the arms are ensouled”) also seems to be one of metaphoric statement versus animism. What we learn is that “some” readers went beyond the view that Homer only gives life to the arms through his poetic language and claimed that they are actually supernaturally animated.

²⁶ M. M. Kokolakis, “Homeric Animism,” *MPhL* 4 (1980) 89–113; cf. Edwards, *The Iliad* 51.

²⁷ *Il.* 3.1, κλαγγῆ τ’ ἐνοπῆ ἴσαν.

The final words in the same scholium explain that this power of the shield also accounts for the Myrmidons being struck with fear in the following lines. The same sort of association between the fear instilled by the arms in its beholder and the verisimilitude of the figures is found in Quintus' description of a group of Gorgons on Achilles' shield (*Posthom.* 5.40–42):

ἀπειρέσιον δ' ἄρα θαῦμα
δαίδαλα κείνα πέλοντο μέγ' ἀνδράσι δειῖμα φέροντα,
οὔνεκ' ἔσαν ζωῶσιν ἑοικότα κινυμένοισι.

These cunning artifices were a measureless marvel, bringing tremendous fear to men, because they seemed as though they were alive and moved.

It is almost tempting to hypothesize that Quintus read the *Iliad* with the very same commentary from which our scholium derives. It has been suggested that this is the case with Servius.²⁸ In his commentary on the scene in the *Aeneid* where the shield made by Vulcan for the Trojan hero comes down from the heavens with the sound of thunder, the Latin commentator refers to Achilles' shield which was also said to possess “some sort of movement and soul/breath.”²⁹

From these fragments it seems probable that the scholars who followed Dionysius Thrax based their view on the supernatural status of the shield on three elements in the Homeric text: the animated artworks presented in the scene that precedes the making of the shield, the exuberant description itself, and the “roaring” of the arms at the beginning of the following book.

As for the line of reasoning behind the position ascribed to Aristonicus we must resort, again, to piecing together various smaller fragments. In the scholium quoted at the beginning of this section (200 above) the only reason reported is that the

²⁸ M. Mühlert, *Griechische Grammatik in der Vergilerklärung* (München 1965) 120–121, and M. Saffai, *La presenza di Omero nei commenti antichi a Virgilio* (Bologna 2006) 403–404.

²⁹ Serv. *ad Aen.* 8.527 (*motum quendam et spiritum*) and 529.

arms “are not among the gods.” This means that the moving tripods and the other Hephaestian animated artifices introduced before the making of Achilles’ armor should not lead us to believe that the shield’s images were animated too, because they were made for a human being and not a god. In the same scholium this problem is discussed through a series of polemical questions and answers (IV 530.15–17 Erbse):

τί οὖν οἱ κύνες Ἀλκινόου; τοῦτο πλάσμα ἦν. ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο πλάσμα· δίδονται γοῦν τῷ ναυαγεῖν μέλλοντι Ὀδυσσεῖ. ἄρα δὲ ἄτρωτα τὰ Ἥφαιστότευκτα; καὶ πῶς οὐκ ἄτοπον τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς τιτρώσκεσθαι, τὰ δὲ ἔργα αὐτῶν μή; οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐδέησε πεντάπτυχον ποιῆσαι τὴν ἀσπίδα.

“Then what about the dogs of Alcinous?” “That was a fiction.” “But this is also a fiction! [The arms] are in any case given to Odysseus when he is about to suffer shipwreck.” “But are the works made by Hephaestus invulnerable?” “Would it not be absurd if the gods could be wounded, while their works could not? For otherwise it would not have been necessary to make the shield with five layers.”

Leaving aside the scholiast’s denial of the invulnerability of the arms,³⁰ we shall concentrate on the reference offered, in support of Dionysius, to the animated dogs given by Hephaestus to Alcinous according to *Od.* 7.91–94.³¹ As a potential counter-argument this anonymous Imperial-age scholar pointed out that the story of the dogs is only a fiction, but this argument proves to be without merit since Achilles’ arms evidently form part of the same fiction: they were later awarded to Odysseus himself to the disadvantage of Ajax in the Judgement of the Arms.

The principle that Hephaestus does not make animated works for human beings may also be reflected in a mythographical excerpt preserved in the V-scholia (to *Od.* 7.91) on the same Odyssean passage. Here we are told that Hera gave

³⁰ Cf. schol. T *Il.* 20.265a1. Note that this also goes against the view of Aristarchus/Aristonicus (schol. A 20.266a, 269–272a; 21.165a, 594).

³¹ On these animated guardian statues see Faraone, *Talismans* 18–35.

the dogs to Poseidon and that he in turn granted them to his grandson Alcinous. The point seems to be that animated Hephaestian works would never originally have been made for a human being. A similar idea seems to be reflected in the Chaeroneans' veneration of Agamemnon's scepter as an ensouled artifact,³² since Homer (*Il.* 2.102) famously relates that it was originally made by Hephaestus for Zeus but then passed through Hermes to Pelops.

As for the “roaring” arms at the beginning of Book 19 it is likely that Aristonicus would have preferred the metaphorical interpretation in keeping with the Aristotelian tradition of criticism. The Homeric line where the spears “stood in the ground, yearning to take their fill of flesh” (*Il.* 11.574), given as an example by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, was marked by Aristarchus with a *diple*, the reason according to Aristonicus being that Homer here uses a metaphor of this sort (schol. A 11.574a).³³ There are several entries in the exegetical scholia that clearly argue against an animistic interpretation in a similar manner. When Homer tells us that flutes and lyres “were sounding” among the young male dancers on the shield (18.495), it is carefully noted: “Not because any sound was achieved, but as if the figures were [shaped] as though playing their flutes and strumming their lyres.”³⁴ Another example occurs later where the gods join the battle “like living mortals” (18.539; see 196 above). An exegetical commentator noted: “the figures engraved [on the shield] are not alive, but like living creatures.”³⁵

³² Paus. 9.40.11; cf. E. Ehnmark, *The Idea of God in Homer* (Uppsala 1935) 40–41.

³³ The suggestion of S. Pulleyn, *Homer, Iliad I* (Oxford 2000) 137, that the reason for Zenodotus' athetization of 1.46–47 was the use of κλάγγω would fit this image: the reason why Aristarchus disagreed (schol. A 1.46–47) would be that he recognized metaphors of this sort as characteristically Homeric.

³⁴ Schol. bT 18.495c, οὐχ ὡς ἀποτελουμένου ἤχου τινός, ἀλλ' οἷον τὰ εἶδωλα ὡς ἀλυσόντα καὶ κιθαρίζοντα ἦν.

³⁵ Schol. bT 18.539, οὐκ ἄρα ζῶν ἦν τὰ ἐπιγεγραμμένα, ἀλλ' ὅμοια

In these instances the effects of movement and sound are regarded as hyperboles expressing artistic vivacity, but a vivacity that lies within the reach of any skilled visual artist. The two alternative perspectives emerge clearly in the scholia on the plowing scene at 18.548–549,

ἦ δὲ μελαίνετ' ὄπισθεν, ἀρηρομένη δὲ ἐφάκει,
χρυσείη περ ἐοῦσα· τὸ δὲ περὶ θαῦμα τέτυκτο.

The earth turned black behind them, and looked like a ploughed field, although it was made of gold. This marvel was truly an extraordinary work.

On these verses some scholars provided the rationalizing explanation that “it seems as though a shadow was put in the silver,”³⁶ whereas other critics accepted the supernatural effect as part of the Homeric fiction and instead focused on the rhetorical means employed by the poet in order to persuade the reader: “this is incredible, but Homer made it credible by calling it a wonder.”³⁷

We should moreover note that there are inherent ambiguities in this heavily fragmented discourse on viewing and artistic illusion. Therefore it is often difficult to determine how (or even if) some of the comments relate to this debate. At the point in the description where we learn that the two armies surrounding the city at war “were divided in opinion” (δίχα ... σφισιν ἦνδανε βουλή) as to whether they should sack the city or divide its riches among themselves in equal shares (18.511), an exegetical commentator reacted to this articulation of what the represented characters have in mind and noted: “The picture is given life, so as to show even what is invisible to the viewers.”³⁸ Did this animation take place in Hephaestus’ forge or only in

ζῳοίς.

³⁶ Schol. A 18.548–549b, σκιὰν οὖν εἰκὸς ἐγκεῖσθαι τῷ χρυσῷ.

³⁷ Schol. T 18.548–549a, ἄπιστον δέ, καὶ αὐτὸς διὰ τοῦ θαυμάζειν πιστὸν εἰργάσατο.

³⁸ Schol. bT II. 18.511a, ἐψύχεται ἡ γραφή ὡς καὶ τὰ ἀφανῆ δηλοῦσθαι τοῖς ὀρώσιν.

Homer's poetic language? Where Homer (18.575) similarly tells us that the cattle "hurried" (ἐπεσσεύοντο) out over the pasture "with a bellowing" (μυκηθμῶ), it is noted "incredibly he even imitated the sound";³⁹ was this sound represented through outstanding artistic illusion or a magically animated creation?

Finally, we should note that Lessing's idea of the poet translating the artwork into a free narrative is never anticipated in the scholia, and Homer's language is generally interpreted as describing the figures on the surface of the shield, not the represented realities. This critical stance occasionally led to explanations that may be difficult for most modern readers to accept. For example, where the lions are devouring a bull and the herdsmen set their dogs on them "in vain" (αὐτως), Aristonicus commented (schol. A 18.584a):

αὐτως ἐνδίδεσαν: ὅτι Ζηνόδοτος γράφει "οὕτως," οὐ νοήσας ὅτι τὸ αὐτως ἐστὶ κενῶς καὶ πρὸς οὐδέν, διὰ τὸ εἶδωλα εἶναι.

αὐτως ἐνδίδεσαν: Zenodotus writes οὕτως, not realising that αὐτως means "in vain" and "for nothing," because they are images.

Aristonicus' main objective here is to defend the reading αὐτως as "in vain," but the reason is not, as we might expect, that the depicted dogs are no match for the lions, but that they are nothing but images.

3. The Supernatural Weapon

We shall also consider a legend about the shield as a divinely animated object, although the texts do not refer specifically to the figures. Pausanias (1.35.4) reports that people living in Ilium in his day claimed that after Odysseus' shipwreck (*Od.* 12.416–425) the arms of Achilles were carried on the waves to the tomb of Ajax on the promontory of Rhoeteum at the mouth of the Hellespont. According to Photios,⁴⁰ a similar account was given by Ptolemy Chennos who also claimed that

³⁹ Schol. bT 18.575, παραδόξως καὶ τὴν φωνὴν ἐμιμήσατο.

⁴⁰ *Bibl. cod.* 190, III 70–72 Henry.

the shield remained by the grave until the next day when it was struck by lightning and destroyed. This miracle of the arms voyaging over the Mediterranean back to the Troad may or may not have influenced an epigram of the Hellenistic poet Antipater of Sidon (*Anth.Gr.* 7.146; 7 G.-P.):

σῆμα παρ' Αἰάντειον ἐπὶ Ῥοιτηίσιβ ἀκταῖς
 θυμοβαρῆς Ἄρετὰ μύρομαι ἐζομένα,
 ἀπλόκαμος, πινόεσσα, διὰ κρίσιν ὅττι Πελασγῶν
 οὐκ ἀρετὰ νικᾶν ἔλλαχεν, ἀλλὰ δόλος.
 τεύχεα δ' ἂν λέξειεν Ἀχιλλῆος· “Ἄρσενος ἀλκᾶς,
 οὐ σκολιῶν μύθων ἄμμες ἐφιέμεθα.”

By the tomb of Ajax on the Rhoetean shore, I, Virtue, sit and mourn, heavy at heart, with shorn locks and squalid clothes, because through the judgement of the Greeks virtue did not triumph, but trickery. Achilles' arms would say: “We want manly valor, not crooked words.”

The first quatrain follows closely in content an epigram of Asclepiades where Virtue likewise sits by Ajax' tomb and laments the poor decision of the Greeks when favoring Odysseus over Ajax.⁴¹ But in the closing couplet Antipater introduces a new element: Virtue assures us that the arms of Achilles “would say” that they preferred Ajax' strength over Odysseus' lies. It is not absolutely necessary to suppose that an animistic force forms the basis for this ability of the shield to speak; after all, Hellenistic poetry abounds in talking objects of all sorts, a poetic feature that was highly influenced by the convention in Archaic and Classical inscribed epigrams of the object addressing the reader in the first person.⁴²

However, in this particular case it is tempting to see a connection between the object's voice and the legends of the animated shield. This is clearly the case in a later anonymous epigram on the same theme, the last in a series of late antique

⁴¹ *Anth.Gr.* 7.145; Asclepiades 29 G.-P.

⁴² See e.g. D. Meyer, *Inszeniertes Lesevergnügen. Das inschriftliche Epigramm und seine Rezeption bei Kallimachos* (Stuttgart 2005); M. A. Tueller, *Look Who's Talking: Innovations in Voice and Identity in Hellenistic Epigram* (Leuven 2008).

poems⁴³ preserved in the ninth book of the *Greek Anthology*. The first two pieces thematize the opposition between Poseidon and Athena and praise the former in that the sea “corrected” the mistake of the Greeks by carrying the arms to Ajax’ grave, not to Ithaca. But the third and final epigram (9.116) has a different take on the subject and expands on the concluding couplet in Antipater:

ἄσπις ἐν αἰγιαλοῖσι βοᾷ καὶ σῆμα τινάσσει
 αὐτόν σ’ ἐκκαλέουσα, τὸν ἄξιον ἀσπιδιώτην·
 “Ἐγρεο, παῖ Τελαμῶνος, ἔχεις σάκος Αἰακίδαο.”

The shield cries aloud on the shore and beats against the tomb. It is calling for you, its worthy bearer: “Rise, son of Telamon, yours is the shield of the descendant of Aeacus.”

Instead of the hypothetical situation in Antipater’s epigram (“the shield would have said”), the shield here actually lies on the shore beside the hero’s tomb. The punch-line concerns the fact that Achilles and Ajax were first cousins, both descendants of Aeacus, but note the dramatic movement and sound ascribed to the shield: it “cries” and “beats against the tomb.” Like the scholars following Dionysius Thrax, this poem presents us with a shield that really could “roar,” as a divinely animated weapon.

4. The Animated Shield in Byzantine Texts

An interesting innovation in the topic of the moving image was introduced with Prokopios of Gaza’s (ca. 460–530) *ekphrasis* of a monumental water clock (*horologion*) in his city. At the beginning of the text the describer surrenders before the superiority of the mechanical artisan and compares him to the god of metalworking (*Horol.* 1):⁴⁴

⁴³ L. M. Cavero, *Poems in Context: Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200–600 AD* (Berlin/New York 2008) 90 n.302.

⁴⁴ E. Amato, *Rose di Gaza: gli scritti retorico-sofistici e le Epistole di Procopio di Gaza* (Alessandria 2010) 204.8–13.

ειδυίας οὖν ἔχων φρένας καὶ σῶμα ἐφ' ἐνὸς ἰδρυμένον χωρίου
 νῦν μὲν τὴν ἀσπίδα τὴν Ἀχιλλέως, ἔργον ἐξαίσιον, Ὀμήρῳ ποιεῖ,
 καὶ διακονοῦσιν αὐτῷ πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν ζῆν εἶδωλα δοκοῦντα
 καὶ τὴν φλόγα ζωπυροῦσιν αὐτομάτῳ φορᾶ. εἰς τὴν Φαιάκων δὲ
 νῆσον ἐλθὼν, κύνες ἦσαν Ἀλκίνοῳ φύλακες τῆς αὐλῆς· οἱ δὲ
 κύνες οὐχ οἱ συνήθεις οὗτοι καὶ ζῶντες, χρυσοῦ δὲ νῆ Δία καὶ
 ἄργυρος τὴν Ἥφαιστου κίνησιν ἔχοντες.

For having a wise mind and a body that remains in one single place [Hephaestus] makes the shield of Achilles for Homer, an extraordinary work, and images that seem to be alive, help him in his work, and kindle the fire through their movement. And after he came to the island of the Phaeaceans, Alcinous had guardian dogs for his royal hall. But these were not regular living dogs. No, by Zeus, they were made of gold and silver and had Hephaestus' movement.

Prokopios goes on to refute these stories of Hephaestus' ensouled artworks as fiction, but then turns to the real mechanically animated artwork of his own description, and we soon learn that the water clock is decorated with a Gorgon's head with moving eyes and other figures that indicate the time through their changing positions. Although there is no explicit reference to the shield as animated, it is notable that Hephaestus' automata in the realm of myth are juxtaposed to true hydraulic statues in an *ekphrasis*.

As for scholarly engagement with this question of the moving figures during the early Byzantine period we may look at the b-redaction of the exegetical scholia, which seems to have been produced around this time.⁴⁵ To judge from the selection of material there appears to be a clear anti-animistic tendency: the debate between Dionysius and Aristonicus is not included, and where T—on the “roaring” of the arms in *Il.* 19.13—reports that “some believe that the arms are animated,” b instead simply assures us: “the arms are certainly not animated,

⁴⁵ See H. Erbse, “Zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung der Iliasscholien,” *Mnemosyne* SER. IV 6 (1953) 1–38, at 9.

they just ‘rang’.”⁴⁶ In his study of these and other omissions and changes introduced by the redactor of b, Marchinus van der Valk concluded that they follow a pattern of criticism based in Christian theology, and that the b-scholia often reject the materialistic view of the soul. Thus “the typical Homeric idea that lifeless objects can be animated and are provided with a soul, is unacceptable.”⁴⁷

After this we find no clear dialogue with this aspect of the Homeric text until the *Iliad* commentary of Isaak Porphyrogenitos (1093–after 1152), the younger brother of Anna Komnene. On the public pleading of the two parties in the trial scene he comments:⁴⁸

ταῦτα δὲ περὶ τῶν ἀψύχων τούτων εἰκόνων διαλαμβάνων ὁ ποιητῆς ὡς οἶαπερ ἐμψύχους καὶ διαλεγόμενας ταύτας δῆθεν παρίστησιν.

The poet handled these things about these lifeless images as though they were ensouled and thus presents them as speaking.

Homer metaphorically speaks about an inanimate object as though it were alive (ἀπὸ ἐμψύχων ἐπὶ ἄψυχα, see section 2 above). Hence Isaak interpreted the ambiguous exegetical scholium on 18.511 (ἐψύχεται ἢ γραφή) to the effect that the animation is ascribed only to Homer’s language.

In the same century we have the archbishop of Thessalonike Eustathios (ca. 1115–1195) and his massive *Parekbolai* on the *Iliad*. As always, Eustathios excerpts a vast array of material from the scholia, including most of the notes quoted in section 2 above. Hence we are provided with different answers to the same questions about the nature of the shield as we proceed through the work. This should not be explained as mechanical incorporation of everything Eustathios could find in the

⁴⁶ Schol. b 19.13b2, οὐκ ἄρα οὖν ἔμψυχα ἦν, ἀλλ’ ἤχησαν.

⁴⁷ M. van der Valk, *Researches on the Text and Scholia of the Iliad I* (Leiden 1963) 136.

⁴⁸ Edited by F. Pontani, “The First Byzantine Commentary on the *Iliad*: Isaac Porphyrogenitus and his Scholia,” *BZ* 99 (2006) 551–596, at 576.

scholia, but rather by the main principle of the *Parekbolai*: to include at its proper place anything that might prove useful for the reader—the Byzantine writer who wants to put the Homeric text to creative reuse.⁴⁹

Moreover, it is problematic to distinguish between accepted and rejected interpretations since Eustathios divides the meaning of the epics into true historical accounts (*historiai*), fictive stories (*mythoi*), and “allegory” (*allēgoria*) or “elevation” (*anagōgē*), i.e. the hidden physical, ethical, or historical significations of the myths.⁵⁰ Hephaestus’ production of the shield clearly belongs to the realm of myth. It is a fiction (*plasma*) invented by Homer mainly for the purpose of showing off his skills in *ekphrasis* in this otherwise somber poem (compared to the *Odyssey*).⁵¹ On the allegorical level it contains philosophical doctrine (it is an account of the making of the cosmos),⁵² but this does not in any way cancel Eustathios’ interest in the myth as such. Unlike his contemporary John Tzetzes (ca. 1112–after the 1160s), who conceived of his task as an exegete as uncovering the true allegorical meaning within the false myths,⁵³ Eustathios praised his predecessors who had “first of all set forth the myths in the way they were stated and inspected their

⁴⁹ Eust. *Il.* 2.23–39; see now R. Nünlist, “Homer as a Blueprint for Speechwriters: Eustathios’ Commentaries and Rhetoric,” *GRBS* 52 (2012) 493–509. Note, however, that we are not dealing with a “suggested method” (Nünlist 497 and *passim*) but a widespread phenomenon in rhetorical theory (see e.g. Hermog. *Id.* 2.4 [336.20–338.18 Rabe] and ps.-Hermog. *Meth.* 30) and practice (see F. Kolovou, *Die Briefe des Eustathios von Thessalonike* [Munich 2006] 25*–75*).

⁵⁰ See e.g. Eust. *Il.* 3.24–32, *Od.* 1387.22–25; F. Pontani, “Il proemio al ‘Commento all’Odissea’ di Eustazio di Tessalonica,” *BollClass* 21 (2000) 5–58, at 20–25; P. Cesaretti, *Allegoristi di Omero a Bisanzio: Ricerche ermeneutiche (XI–XII secolo)* (Milan 1991) 248–251.

⁵¹ Eust. *Il.* 1154.2–6.

⁵² See Eust. *Il.* 1154.42–1155.3 (from Demo); cf. e.g. Heracl. *Qu.Hom.* 48.6; M. Broggiato, *Cratete di Mallo: I frammenti* (La Spezia 2001) 157–164.

⁵³ Tz. *Exeg.* *Il.* 5.9–12 Papatomopoulos, cf. 7.5–7, 43.10–12; Cesaretti, *Allegoristi* 155.

fabrication and credibility, through which a certain truth is represented in myths.”⁵⁴ For Eustathios, Homer is the ideal teacher of rhetoric,⁵⁵ and accordingly his stories about the gods (*mythoi*) are no different than the homonymous short moral fables (*mythoi*) that students of rhetoric traditionally learned to compose as their first *progymnasmata*. Therefore Eustathios defines Homeric fiction in the same way as the ancient treatises describe this exercise, as “a false story giving an image of truth” (*λόγος ψευδῆς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν*).⁵⁶ Eustathios’ students must not pass up the opportunity to carefully study the way in which Homer sets forth these stories, in order to learn the art of lying persuasively and virtuously. Occasionally Eustathios even recognizes a measure of futility in the act of rationalizing interpretation. He hesitates, as he puts it, to “measure out the vast sea of myth with the ladle of allegory,”⁵⁷ and insists that certain myths are “incurable” and used only for the sake of the marvel that they inspire in the reader.⁵⁸

On the subject of the moving tripods Eustathios refers to the disagreement between Dionysius and Aristonicus (*Il.* 1148.16–17), but sides with the latter and omits the scholiast’s comparison to the dogs of Alcinous, which is to be expected since Eustathios in his *Parekbolai* on the *Odyssey* denies the supernatural status of these artifices, claiming that their alleged animation and immortality is just Homer’s way of expressing their

⁵⁴ Eust. *Il.* 3.24–26, τοὺς μύθους τὰ πρῶτα μὲν τίθενται οὕτως ἔχειν ὡς λέγονται καὶ ἐπισκέπτονται τὴν πλάσιν αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν ἐν αὐτῇ πιθανότητα, δι’ ἧς ἐν μύθοις ἀλήθειά τις εἰκονίζεται.

⁵⁵ See M. van der Valk, *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes* I (Leiden 1971) xciii n.4 and e.g. Eust. *Il.* 161.39–40, 908.6–8; M. Hillgruber, *Die pseudoplutarchische Schrift De Homero* I (Stuttgart/Leipzig 1994) 61–63.

⁵⁶ Ael. Theon *Progymn.* 72.28 Spengel; Aphthon. *Progymn.* 1.6 Rabe; Nic. *Progymn.* 6.9–10 Felten. See also R. Meijering, *Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia* (Groningen 1987) 82–84.

⁵⁷ Eust. *Od.* 1385.18–19.

⁵⁸ Eust. *Il.* 83.23–25, 549.28–30, 612.37–38.

excellence and the high quality of the materials, gold and silver, which are not liable to rust (*Od.* 1570.41–46). Similarly, the movement ascribed to the figures is simply a way of saying that they were lifelike. The tone towards the Dionysian interpretation is perhaps slightly more sympathetic when Eustathios (*Il.* 1151.31–37) gets to the golden handmaids and quotes the scholia dealing with these as a preparation of the reader for the production of a supernatural artwork (see section two above):

εἰ δὲ αὐτὰ τοιαῦτα φαίνεται, ὅποια ἐλπιδέον ἔσεσθαι τὰ ἠφαιστότευκτα ζῶα, ἢ πάντως ζῶντα ζῶα; διὸ καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως ἀσπίδος ζῶα, ὡς καὶ πρὸ βραχέων ἐρρέθη, αὐτοκίνητα πρὸς τινῶν ὑπενοήθησαν.

If these things appear to be such, what kind of works should one expect the Hephaestean figures to be if not wholly living figures? Therefore it has been believed by some that the figures on the shield of Achilles, as I mentioned earlier, are self-moving.

Although Eustathios simply records that some have believed the figures to be self-moving, it is noteworthy that he does not reject the position and seems to ascribe some validity to the argument concerning the handmaids as a preparation for a marvelous passage. Such features would after all be the means by which Homer renders his myth as “an image of truth.”

However, Eustathios later refutes this stance when he elaborates on the exegetical scholium on the battle scene where the combatants join fighting “like living mortals,” adding that the figures are not alive “as some who unnecessarily indulge in marvels believe” (καθὰ τινες πλέον τοῦ δέοντος τερατεύονται). It is noteworthy that he immediately goes on to present us with a mechanical explanation (*Il.* 1160.49–50):

ἴσως δὲ καὶ μηχανῇ τινι ἐκινῶντο, ἔκκρουστα ὄντα καὶ οὐ διόλου προσηλωμένα τῷ σάκει. καὶ οὕτω ἐφάνταζον τοῖς ὀρώσι τὸ αὐτοκίνητον, ὅποιον δὴ τι πλάττει καὶ Αἰσχύλος ἐν τοῖς Ἑπτὰ ἐπὶ Θήβας.

But perhaps they were moved by some mechanism, being embossed and not completely fixed on the shield. Thus they created the illusion of self-movement to those who looked upon them. A similar thing is in fact told by Aeschylus in *Seven against Thebes*.

This refers to the part of the Aeschylean play (539–542) where a scout reports that he has seen Parthenopaeus standing outside the city gates of Thebes, and that he “wielded” (ἐνώμα) the image of the Sphinx “cleverly fastened with bolts” (προσμεμηχανημένην γόμοις) on the shield, “a shining embossed body” (λαμπρὸν ἔκκρουστον δέμας). In Aeschylus, “wielded the image of the Sphinx fastened on the shield” is a metonymy for “wielded the shield bearing the image of the Sphinx.” Eustathios seems instead to have construed that Parthenopaeus had a mechanism by which he could literally set the sphinx image in motion on the surface of the shield.⁵⁹ This interpretation is also found in the Aeschylean scholia where ἔκκρουστον is explained to mean: “Hanging from the surface by some mechanism” (ἔξω αἰωρημένον διὰ τινος μηχανῆς).⁶⁰ In any case, the way in which Eustathios leaves the mechanical interpretation open is reminiscent of Prokopios’ rivaling the Homeric shield in his description of an automaton.

The thought that the animation simply takes place in Homer’s language seems to be entertained for *Il.* 18.573–586, where lions are attacking a bull. Eustathios (1165.38–39) notes that Homer speaks about them as though they were “living creatures” (ὡς ἐπὶ ἐμψύχων ζώων) and not sculpted figures and notes that this is “astounding” (τερατωδῶς) and “sweet” (γλυκέως), since this sort of metaphor is connected to the type of style termed “sweetness” by Hermogenes.⁶¹ Eustathios later revisited this section and added a note in the margin of his manuscript, emphasizing that it is not simply a stylistic effect but reflects a particular feature of this artwork (1165.39–41):

⁵⁹ Note that the Aeschylean scholia interpret ἐνώμα with ἐκίνει “set in motion” (schol. Aesch. *Sept.* 542c–d). Shields with a sphinx as a separate construction fastened to the surface are found in the archaeological material from Olympia: G. O. Hutchinson, *Aeschylus: Septem contra Thebas* (Oxford 1985) 128.

⁶⁰ Schol. Aesch. *Sept.* 542 g–h (the idea seems to be that it derives from ἐκκρεμάννυμι rather than ἐκκρούω).

⁶¹ Hermog. *Id.* 2.4 (333.16–335.23 Rabe).

ζωοῖς γὰρ εἰκότα τετεύχεται δαίδαλα ἐπὶ τῆς ἀσπίδος, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τοιαύτη τερατώδης φαντασία καὶ φράσις ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς γίνεται.

For the cunningly wrought artifices on the shield are made to resemble living beings, and therefore such an astonishing conception and phrasing is used for them.

Homer’s animated style expresses the illusory nature of the artwork. Eustathios thereafter goes on to mention that even outside fiction (δίχα μύθου), that is, according to ἱστορία, there have been artworks that *appeared* to be alive because of their realism. From this it seems clear that Eustathios is unwilling to ascribe magical motion not only to the shield of historical Achilles but also to that produced by mythical Hephaestus; it exceeds the limits of poetic license to indulge in *terateia*. But elsewhere the text is more ambiguous:⁶²

ἰστέον δὲ καὶ ὅτι τὸ “ὕμέναιος ὀρώρει” ἐγράφη οὐχ’ ὅτι ἐξηκούετο, ἀλλ’ ὅτι τῷ σχήματι τῆς ζωοπλαστίας οὕτως ἔφκει. τοιοῦτον δὲ καὶ ἐξῆς τὸ “αὐλοὶ βοῆν ἔχον,” καὶ τὸ “ἄνδρες ἐνεΐκεον,” καὶ “λαοὶ ἐπήπυον,” καὶ “πάϊς ἄειδε λεπταλέη φωνῆ,” καὶ “βόες ἐπεσεύοντο μυκηθμῷ,” καὶ ἕτερα ὅμοια. ἐν πᾶσι γὰρ τούτοις οὐ φωνὴ ἐξηκούετο, εἰ καὶ ὁ φίλος Ἡφαίστω μῦθος οὕτως ἐθέλει, ἀλλ’ εἰκασμῷ ἐνέφαινε φωνὴν ἢ τῶν ζώων ἀκριβῆς ἐμφῆρεια.

Know also that the phrase “a wedding song was spurring them on” is written not because it was heard, but because it seemed as if it were so through the shape of the sculpted figure. Similar to this are the “*auloi* were sounding” [18.495], “the men were quarreling” [498], “the people shouted in applause” [502], “a child sang with a delicate voice” [571], and “the cattle hurried on with a bellowing” [575], and other such examples. In all these cases no voice was heard, even if the myth, which is benevolent towards Hephaestus, wants it that way. No, the voice was displayed through conjecture [on the part of the interpreter] by the precise likeness of the figures.

In what seems to be a clear renunciation of Dionysius’ inter-

⁶² *Il.* 1157.24–7; cf. also 1164.25–27 and 43–57.

pretation, the possibility remains that within the realm of myth, which seeks to celebrate Hephaestus, the figures move magically.

In John Tzetzes' *Homeric Allegories* the signification of the shield is treated at length (18.452–789) but no attention is paid to the expressive mode employed by Homer, since the focus is the scene's 'true' allegorical meaning.⁶³ The apparent status of the making of the shield as a fiction staged in heaven resulted in its exclusion from Byzantine narratives dealing with Achilles' return to battle. Thus in the same author's *Little Big Iliad* the whole event is reduced to half a verse (2.234–236):⁶⁴

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ βαρῦμηνιν ἔπαυσε χόλον Πηλεΐδης,
Ἄτρείδης ἐσπείσατο σὺν δ' ὄπλα χρύσεια τεύξας,
ἦϊεν εἰς πόλεμον, πολέας δὲ Τρώων πέφνεν.

And so when the son of Peleus quit his heavy wrath he made peace with the son of Atreus and armed himself in golden armor, and went into the battle, slaying many of the Trojans.

The scene was similarly omitted in Constantine Hermoniakos' *Iliad*,⁶⁵ but an allusion to the Homeric description can perhaps be detected in the Naples *Achilleid* in the description of Achilles reaching manhood (138–140):⁶⁶

ἀπῆρεν καὶ εἰς τὰ χέρια του σκουτάριν καὶ κοντάριν.
τὸ δὲ σκουτάριν ἐκ παντὸς τίς νὰ τὸ ἀνιστορήσῃ;
εἶχεν γὰρ ἔργα θαυμαστά, χρυσογραμμίες μεγάλες.

He took in his hands a spear and a shield. But who could describe the shield in all aspects? For it included marvelous works, great golden images.

The trope of ineffability is frequent in this work,⁶⁷ but this time

⁶³ Ed. J. F. Boissonade, *Tzetzae Allegoriae Iliadis* (Paris 1851) 241–256.

⁶⁴ Ed. P. L. M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Carmina Iliaca* (Catania 1995).

⁶⁵ Ed. E. Legrand, *La guerre de Troie* (Paris 1890) 331.

⁶⁶ O. L. Smith, P. A. Agapitos, K. Hult, *The Byzantine Achilleid. The Naples Version* (Vienna 1999) 19.

⁶⁷ See the discussion in I. Ševčenko, *Society and Intellectual Life in Late Byzantium* (London 1981) 77 n.23.

the rhetorical question has an answer: only Homer can describe it.

5. Summary and Conclusions

Irene de Jong initially lists four interpretations of Homer's descriptive method in the Shield: (1a) the figures really move; (1b) the figures merely suggest a movement which is decoded by the narrator; (2a) the narrator narrates stories rather than describes the shield; (2b) the narrator subtly blends description and narration.⁶⁸ We have seen that pre-modern readers usually subscribed to 1a or 1b, but sometimes they slip between them owing to an ambiguity in their phrasing. Moreover, in some instances the effects of motion and sound are described as metaphorical expressions about inanimate objects as though they were alive (ἀπὸ ἐμψύχων ἐπὶ ἄψυχα), which could be regarded as a pre-Lessing equivalent to 2a (the animation lies solely in Homer's use of figurative language). Eustathios combines this position with 1b (Homer uses the metaphor *because* the artwork is lifelike). We also find the curious suggestion that the figures move mechanically on the shield.

So far we have not seen any example of 2b. This is the position taken by de Jong, who further argues that Homer in "the Shield with its conspicuous blurring of boundaries between narration and description is not only celebrating Hephaestus' 'marvellous' visual art but at the same time his own 'marvellous' narrative art" (10). This is reminiscent of a text we have not considered yet, the pseudo-Plutarchan *On the life and works of Homer*. Towards the end of this celebration of Homer as the source of all arts and sciences, the poet is presented as a teacher of visual arts. He was a painter of images to the mind's eye and a sculptor of the medium of language. The author ends by praising Hephaestus and thereby implicitly also Homer, blurring the boundary between the two (216):

⁶⁸ See de Jong, *Ramus* 40 (2011) 1.

ὁ δὲ τὴν ἀσπίδα τῷ Ἀχιλλεῖ κατασκευάσας Ἥφαιστος καὶ ἐντορεύσας τῷ χρυσῷ γῆν, οὐρανόν, θάλασσαν, ἔτι δὲ μέγεθος ἡλίου καὶ κάλλος σελήνης καὶ πλῆθος ἄστρον στεφανούντων τὸ πᾶν καὶ πόλεις ἐν διαφόροις τρόποις καὶ τύχαις καθεστῶσας καὶ ζῶα κινούμενα καὶ φθεγγόμενα, τίνας οὐ φαίνεται τέχνης τοιαύτης δημιουργοῦ τεχνικώτερος;

And Hephaestus, making the shield of Achilles and sculpting in gold the earth, the heavens, the sea, even the mass of the sun and the beauty of the moon, the swarm of stars that crowns the universe, cities of various sorts and fortunes, and moving speaking creatures—what practitioner of arts of this sort can you find to excel him? (transl. Lamberton and Keaney)

Once more we come across a rather ambiguous phrase in “moving speaking creatures.” What is the nature of their motion and speech? And, considering that the overall aim is to praise Homer’s poetic craftsmanship: who animates them? The statement seems to blend all categories in de Jong’s list. If we can learn anything from the Shield’s history of effect presented in this survey, it would perhaps be that this ambivalence is not necessarily at odds with the Homeric method of description but harmonizes with a vagueness or even plurality in levels of motivation inherent to it. With such an energetic description following directly after the display of various golden automata in Hephaestus’ forge, will we ever be able to shake the idea that the sound and motion issue from Hephaestus’ divine power?⁶⁹

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