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Penelope's Fat Hand Reconsidered (Odyssey 21, 6)

Summary – In this paper I briefly examine the ancient and modern views on the appropriateness of the formula *χειρὶ παχείῃ* used of Penelope at Odyssey 21, 6, and then argue that this phrase can be fully appreciated only if examined within the overall context of Book 21. *χειρὶ παχείῃ* at Od. 21,6 belongs to a network of martial images shared by Odysseus and Penelope throughout Odyssey 21. The formula functions as a *σήμα* (in J. M. Foley's terminology) that operates through traditional referentiality and aims at attuning the audience to the ensuing martial imagery, which links Odysseus and Penelope and underscores their unity of mind and purpose (ὁμοφροσύνη).

“Oh Homer! How could you!” *

At the beginning of Odyssey 21, Athena inspires Penelope to set the bow-contest. The Ithacan queen first goes to her chamber to fetch the key to the store-room where Odysseus' bow had been hanging during the previous twenty years. At line 6 we are told that Penelope

εἶλετο δὲ κληῖδ' εὐκαμπέα χειρὶ παχείῃ
“she took the curved key with her fat hand.”¹

The phrase *χειρὶ παχείῃ* at the final adonian has caused difficulties to commentators, ancient and modern.² Homer uses *χειρὶ* both with and without an epithet,³ while he employs the formula *χειρὶ παχείῃ* when referring to male

* The epigraph is from W. J. Woodhouse, *The Composition of Homer's Odyssey*, Oxford 1930, 200/201, who comments on the attribution of a “fat hand” to Penelope. He emphasizes that “[I]t is not legitimate, however gallant, to try to thin it down in translation; the word is of size, turn and twist it as one likes.” (201).

¹ All translations are mine.

² See S. Lowenstam, *The Scepter and the Spear. Studies on Forms of Repetition in the Homeric Poems*, Lanham 1993, 14–17.

³ Cf. N. Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon. Poetic Problems in Homer's Odyssey*, Berkeley 1975, 73. For an overview of the adjectives used with *χείρ*, see Lowenstam (above n. 2, 28/29). T. Eide, *Poetical and Metrical Value of Homeric Epithets: a Study of the Epithets Applied to χείρ*, SO 61 (1986), 8, discussing the metrically equivalent formulae *χειρὶ βαρείῃ* and *χειρὶ παχείῃ*, proposes that “βαρύς has a set of connotations that παχύς does not have, involving potential danger or intention of harming.” However, those instances in which a warrior seizes his weapon (or an object he intends to use as a

characters, often warriors seizing weapons.⁴ The only female figures of whom *χειρὶ παχείῃ* is used are Athena and Penelope. The two applications of the formula to Athena occur in the “theomachy.” At Il. 21, 403 she hurls a boulder against Ares; later (21, 424) she strikes Aphrodite on the breast.⁵ One may consider *χειρὶ παχείῃ* appropriate to a warrior goddess, but how appropriate is it for Penelope to grasp the key with a “fat, thick, or stout hand”? The poet could have used *χειρὶ Φαραιῇ*, modifying *χείρα ἀραιήν* that occurs at Il. 5, 425 in the same sedes.⁶ Does the adjective perhaps have a different meaning here? Or are we to consider the “fat hand” a positive quality of a female character? Such questions have occupied scholars for a long time. I shall first give a brief sketch of the answers proposed regarding the meaning of *χειρὶ παχείῃ* and then offer my own views on both the sense and the function of the formula.

From the ensuing analysis it will become clear that even the most plausible of the interpretations proposed for the meaning of *χειρὶ παχείῃ* at Od. 21, 6 do not pay adequate attention to the context in which the formula occurs, but treat the phrase in isolation. Simply asking whether Penelope’s hand was fat (or: thick, stout, firm) amounts to posing only half the question. The formula (and its appropriateness) can be fully appreciated only when examined within the overall context of Odyssey 21. In what follows I argue that the phrase is the first in a series of martial images that run throughout Book 21 and link the actions of Penelope and Odysseus, i. e. the setting of the bow-contest and the killing of the suitors. At the same time this cluster of images is a further indication of Odys-

weapon) with his “fat hand” imply imminent “danger” or “intention of harming” and thus do not support Eide’s distinction; see following note for examples.

- ⁴ As expected, the phrase occurs far more frequently in the Iliad than in the Odyssey. In most cases a (male) character seizes a weapon, or a wounded warrior leans on the ground; so at Il. 5, 309; 7, 264; 10, 31; 11, 355; 14, 385; 17, 296; 20, 261; 21, 175; Od. 19, 448; 20, 299; 22, 326; at Il. 3, 376 Menelaus grasps Paris by the helmet *χειρὶ παχείῃ*. There are some apparent exceptions to this usage: at Il. 8, 221 Agamemnon grasps a *μέγα φᾶρος*; at Il. 10, 454 Dolon intends to touch Diomedes’ chin as a suppliant; but *χειρὶ παχείῃ* may point here to a contradiction: Dolon’s “fat hand” should save him through the use of a weapon rather than supplication. Finally, at Od. 6, 128 Odysseus seizes branches in order to cover his nakedness when he perceives Nausicaa and her maids; here *χειρὶ παχείῃ* may carry martial connotations either metaphorically (Odysseus intends to use the branches as a “shield” against his nakedness) or ironically (the hero is embarrassed).
- ⁵ Notice, however, that some ancient commentators objected to those lines and a variant reading also existed; cf. Σ^{Am} Il. 21, 403 ἐν ἄλλῳ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη, and Σ^{Ge} Il. 21, 424 πρέπει τῇ παρθένῳ χειρὶ βαρείῃ, οὐ παχείῃ.
- ⁶ This was indeed proposed as an emendation by T. L. Agar, *Homeric Emendations and Elucidations of the Odyssey*, Oxford 1908, 373–375, on aesthetic grounds. But ἀραιός may not be a positive attribute as H. Hayman, *The Odyssey of Homer*, London 1882, observes on Od. 21, 6, citing Il. 18, 411.

seus' and Penelope's ὁμοφροσύνη (or likemindedness), since without previously consulting her husband (whom she has not yet recognized),⁷ Penelope essentially paves the way for his revenge.⁸ Far from being a blunder of formulaic composition, the formula *χειρὶ παχείῃ* then subtly fulfils a function similar to the so-called "reverse similes" that frame the return of Odysseus and emphasize the unity of purpose and character between Odysseus and Penelope.⁹

In my analysis I shall pursue J. M. Foley's notion that a formula is a *σῆμα* in oral poetics, i. e. a phrase that operates as "a concrete signal pointing institutionally toward a traditional network of associations."¹⁰ Such *σήματα* "function as idiomatic markers to index 'secret' meanings knowable in no other way. In short, they bear implications beyond their literal sense. They project traditional referentiality" (emphasis in the original).¹¹ In other words, a formula's function is not simply determined by its sense in its immediate context; rather, it opens up a world of associations known to the audience by virtue of their previous experience of oral performances but sometimes not so obvious to a modern (reading) audience. For, as L. Muellner observes, "a conventional, traditional medium like Homeric epic has the capacity to omit from the surface of its discourse elements that are admitted to social memory, that are evoked by the traditional poetic language in the poet and his audience but not in us."¹² The

⁷ For a review of the scholarship on whether Penelope recognized Odysseus before setting the bow-contest, see N. Felson-Rubin, *Regarding Penelope. From Character to Poetics*, Princeton 1994, 152/153 n. 14; cf. also S. Murnaghan, *Reading Penelope*, in: S. M. Oberhalm - V. Kelly - R. J. Golsan (edd.), *Epic and Epoch. Essays on the Interpretation and the History of a Genre*, Lubbock 1994, 76–96, and S. L. Schein, *Female Representations and Interpreting the Odyssey*, in: B. Cohen (ed.), *The Distaff Side. Representing the Female in Homer's Odyssey*, Oxford 1995, 24.

⁸ Notice that the poet characterizes the contest as *φόνου ἀρχήν* at 21, 4, as does the suitor Amphinomus at 24, 169.

⁹ See H. Foley, *Reverse Similes and Sex Roles in the Odyssey*, in: J. Peradotto - J. P. Sullivan (edd.), *Women in the Ancient World. The Arethusa Papers*, Albany 1984, 59–78 (originally published in *Arethusa* 11 [1978], 7–26). For the concept of ὁμοφροσύνη, see S. Bolmarich, *ὁμοφροσύνη in the Odyssey*, *CPh* 96 (2001), 205–213.

¹⁰ See J. M. Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art*, University Park 1999, 31; also 220/221 specifically on the application of *χειρὶ παχείῃ* to Penelope: due to its resonances, the formula has the effect of elevating Penelope to heroic status as it "slots" her setting of the bow-contest as a heroic deed, undertaken without foreknowledge of success or failure and idiomatically honorable and brave."

¹¹ See J. M. Foley (above n. 10, 4). For the "traditional referentiality", Foley's adaptation of the "horizon of expectations" from Iser's Reception theory, see J. M. Foley, *Immanent Art. From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*, Bloomington 1991, 38–60 (and above n. 10, 13–34).

¹² See L. Muellner, *The Simile of the Cranes and Pygmies. A Study of Homeric Metaphor*, *HSCPh* 93 (1990), 66.

idea of “social memory,” which is akin to Foley’s concept of “traditional referentiality,” applies not only to similes (the context in which Muellner uses it), but also to other traditional elements of Homeric poetry, such as the formulae, its basic building blocks.¹³

(1.) Ancient and modern reactions to the formula *χειρὶ παχείῃ* at Od. 21, 6

To begin our brief survey, the vast majority of the manuscripts transmit *χειρὶ παχείῃ* at Od. 21, 6. The variant *χερσὶ φίλησι*, “with her own hands,” is found on a Ptolemaic papyrus¹⁴ and is recorded in the *Etymologicum Genuinum*, an indication that already in antiquity some commentators felt that the phrase had been inappropriately used of Penelope.¹⁵ The same concern is reflected in Eustathius’ comment ad loc. (= 1897, 60–1898, 2 Stallbaum):

Τὸ δέ, *χειρὶ παχείῃ*, ἀπλῶς οὕτω κείται παραρρήφεν ἐπὶ τῇ Πηνελόπῃ· ἀνδρὶ γὰρ μᾶλλον γενναίῳ ἐπιπρέπει ἢ παχεῖα χεῖρ, γυναικὶ δὲ τὸ λευκώλενον καὶ ῥοδόπηχυ καὶ εἴ τι τοιοῦτον. διὸ καὶ κατὰ ἀκυρολεξίαν οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐνταῦθα κείσθαι τὴν λέξιν φασίν, ὡς καὶ ἐν Ἰλιάδι πλατύτερον δεδήλωται. εἰ δὲ δαίφρων ἢ Πηνελόπῃ ἐρρέθη που ὡς ἀνδρεία γυνή, ἀρμόττει ἂν αὐτῇ διατοῦτο καὶ ἡ παχεῖα χεῖρ διὰ τὸ τοῖς ἀνδρείοις τοιαῦτα ὡς ἐπιπολὺ τὰ ἀκρωτήρια εἶναι.

“As for *χειρὶ παχείῃ*, it is loosely used of Penelope; for a ‘fat’ hand befits more a valiant man, whereas ‘white-armed’ and ‘rose-armed’ and the like suit a woman better. Therefore, the ancients say the phrase is used here incorrectly, as

¹³ Cf. E. J. Bakker, *Poetry in Speech. Orality and Homeric Discourse*, Ithaca 1997, 159–165, who goes as far as to propose that the noun-epithet formulae effect an epiphany of the hero they describe.

¹⁴ P. Lefort 1 (= 1145 M.-P.³, 3rd/2nd c. BC); editio princeps in W. Lameere, *Aperçus de paléographie homérique. A propos des papyrus de l’Iliade et de l’Odyssée des collections de Gand, de Bruxelles et de Louvain*, Paris 1960, 15–53, esp. 27/28 and 34 with plate I and Vb. On the dating, see also J. Bingen, *Review of W. Lameere, Chron. d’Égypte* 36 (1961), 216. The papyrus actually reads *χε[ι]ρσὶ φίλησι*: it looks as if the scribe had begun writing *χειρὶ παχείῃ* but changed it, perhaps influenced by the opinion of the μεταγράφαντες. The papyrus is also discussed in S. West, *The Ptolemaic Papyri of Homer*, Köln 1967, 278/279.

¹⁵ See M. E. Miller, *Mélanges de littérature grecque*, Paris 1868, 308/309: *χειρὶ παχείῃ* σημαίνει τὸ ἐρρωμένη καὶ εὐτραφεῖ ἔνιοι δὲ μετέγραψαν τὸ *χερσὶ φίλησιν*, ἵνα μὴ δοκῇ ἀκύρως ἐπὶ γυναικὶ εἰρησθαι τὸ *παχείῃ*· ἐπὶ ἀνδρῶν γὰρ μᾶλλον νοεῖται, “with (his) fat hand; it means “strong” and “fat”; some altered the reading into *χερσὶ φίλησιν* in order that it may not seem that *παχείῃ* had been said of a woman contrary to proper usage; for it is rather used of men.” This quotation is from the *Etymologicum Genuinum*, entitled *Etymologicum magnum de Florence* in Miller’s edition.

was explained in more detail in the *Iliad*.¹⁶ But if Penelope has somewhere been called δαίφρων¹⁷ as a woman with manly qualities, the 'fat hand' is therefore appropriate to her since manly characters usually have such extremities."

Eustathius transmits two different views. First, the opinion of those ancient commentators who maintained that the expression had been used incorrectly (κατὰ ἀκυρολεξίαν). However, he states that the use of the formula at Od. 21, 6 may be justified by taking into account Penelope's characterization elsewhere in the poem. Those commentators who followed this line of interpretation thought that Odysseus' wife had qualities appropriate to men and thus considered χειρὶ παχείη fitting.

Some modern interpretations are reminiscent of these ancient views. The inappropriateness of χειρὶ παχείη has sometimes been explained through the oral-formulaic theory. Thus F. Combellack saw at Od. 21, 6 one of those formulaic inconsistencies which are manifestations of the "oral law" according to which "the general takes precedence over the particular." When someone grasps an object, his hand is regularly described as sturdy; likewise, when Penelope grasps the key, her hand is also called sturdy even though we would not expect her (as a woman) to have such a hand.¹⁸

¹⁶ Eustathius refers to Il. 3, 376 (= 426, 25–28 van der Valk), where he states: Χείρα δὲ παχείαν τὴν τοῦ Μενελάου δεόντως νῦν λέγει διὰ τὸ τοιαῦτα εἶναι τοῖς ἀνδρικοῖς τὰ ἀκρωτήρια. ἐν μέντοι τῇ Ὀδυσσεΐα παχείαν χεῖρα τῆς Πηνελόπης κατὰ τὸ παρῆλκον φησὶ καί, ὡς οἱ παλαιοὶ λέγουσι, κατὰ ἀκυρολεξίαν, εἰ μὴ ἄρα ὡς καὶ ἐκείνης δαίφρωνος. ("He now properly calls Menelaus' hand "fat" because men's extremities are such. However, in the Odyssey he calls Penelope's hand "fat" redundantly and, as the ancients say, against proper usage, unless because she too is δαίφρων".) Eustathius discusses χειρὶ παχείη also in his comment on Il. 7, 409, where he connects this formula to another notoriously problematic phrase, Ἀρναῖος ὄνομα ἔσκε, τὸ γὰρ θέτο πόντια μήτηρ (= Od. 18, 5), repeating his remark that κατὰ γὰρ τοὺς παλαιοὺς ἔνια ὁ ποιητὴς ἀκύρως προστίθησιν, "according to the ancients the poet adds some words in improper sense." Already Demetrius of Skepsis, fr. 45 Gaede (= Strabo, 12, 3, 22/23), maintained that χειρὶ παχείη is one of those expressions that Homer uses inappropriately (ἀκύρως προστιθέμενα).

¹⁷ This is a curious statement since nowhere in the Odyssey is Penelope actually characterized δαίφρων; most of the times, the epithet is used of Odysseus himself, and less frequently of other characters. The only female character who is δαίφρων in the Odyssey is Anticleia, Odysseus' mother (15, 256). Penelope is called περίφρων and ἐχέφρων, and shares the latter epithet with Odysseus.

¹⁸ See F. M. Combellack, *Some Formulaic Illogicalities in Homer*, TAPhA 96 (1965), 49. While discussing of the poet's and the audience's indifference to the meaning of the generic epithet, M. Parry (in: A. Parry [ed.], *The Making of Homeric Verse. The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, Oxford 1987, 151) considered the application of χειρὶ παχείη to Penelope odd, and compared it to other phrases where the epithet is ill-matched with its noun (e. g. ἀμύμων Αἴγισθος, ἀντίθειοι μνηστήρες). However, χειρὶ παχείη and "blameless Aegisthus" do not present exactly the same problem: ἀμύμων (if it indeed

The oral-formulaic explanation has not been universally accepted; not all scholars were willing to understand *παχείη* as devoid of meaning or misapplied at Od. 21, 6. Instead, it has been proposed that the phrase was misunderstood. Thus, according to Schlesinger, the formula means “in her clenched i. e. ‘thick’ hand, as opposed to the open, flat hand.”¹⁹ He further suggested that Penelope hid the key in her fist so that the suitors and her disloyal maids might not notice it.²⁰ But the narrative does not motivate such an action: Penelope is about to announce the bow-contest to the suitors. Moreover, Schlesinger’s interpretation does not accord with the realia. Nobody would be able to hide the key in their fist. As H. Diels explains, the key to which Homer refers is the so-called *Tempelschlüssel*. This type of key was rather long and heavy and was carried on the shoulders.²¹

T. Eide, on the other hand, concluded that “Penelope’s *χειρὶ παχείη* is neither inappropriate nor in need of a special explanation. Her ‘grasping firmly’ (or

means “blameless”; cf. A. A. Parry, *Blameless Aegisthus. A Study of ἀμύμων and Other Homeric Epithets*, Leiden, 1973) should not have been combined with *Aegisthus* in the first place, while *χειρὶ παχείη* as a combination is unproblematic in the vast majority of its occurrences. Along similar lines G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer*, Cambridge 1962, 66 considered *παχείη* a metrical filler and claimed that when the adjective is applied to Penelope, the result is potentially “ludicrous.” M. Treu, *Von Homer zur Lyrik. Wandlungen des griechischen Weltbildes im Spiegel der Sprache*, München 1968, 48 suggested that one ought to see “a clumsy and not exactly meaningful use of the formulaic epithet” (“... einen ungeschickten und nicht gerade sinnvollen Gebrauch des formelhaften Epithetons ...”). Likewise, B. Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey*, Wiesbaden 1974, 50–53, treats our formula as one of the many “compositional slips resulting from the inappropriate use of familiar details in a setting that does not perfectly accommodate them” and maintains (51) that “Penelope ... is given a ‘fat hand’ by the poet whose inherited diction was better designed to describe the hands of the warriors than of gentle ladies.” Finally, S. Reece, *The Stranger’s Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene*, Ann Arbor 1993, 118, considers *χειρὶ παχείη* in Od. 21, 6 derivative and “somewhat uncomfortably applied to Penelope,” while suggesting that the formula has been ineptly adapted (119).

¹⁹ See A. C. Schlesinger, *Penelope’s Hand*, CPh 64 (1969), 236/237. Cf. P. Vivante, *The Epithets in Homer. A Study in Poetic Values*, New Haven 1982, 113, who suggests that *χειρὶ παχείη* “conveys ... the sense of a close enveloping hold. This is intrinsic to any hand that firmly clasps an object, and it is so, of course, also in the case of Penelope (Od. 21, 6).”

²⁰ This had already been proposed by A. Pierron, *L’Odyssée d’Homère*, Paris 1875, II 325.

²¹ See H. Diels, *Antike Technik: sieben Vorträge*, Osnabrück 1965 (= repr. ³1924), esp. 45–49. Diels renders Od. 21, 6 “und griff fest mit der Hand nach dem wohlgebogenen Schlüssel.” For depictions of such keys, see Diels (46) and H. C. Ackermann - J.-R. Gisler (edd.), *Lexikon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zürich 1990, 5, 468–471, s. v. *Iphigeneia*. For the semantics of *κλητῆς*, see H. Bannert, *GGA* 250 (1998), 150–154 (review of *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos*, 14. Lieferung), with further bibliography.

'lifting with a firm hand) the 'key' can naturally be compared to a hero e. g. lifting a spear, and the heroic formula aptly characterizes Penelope's determined and decisive step at this turning-point in the Odyssey."²² Eide's interpretation is on the right track, but I believe that this formula goes beyond a simple comparison between Penelope's and a hero's decisiveness, as I shall show below.

A different approach is that of Wyatt, for whom *χειρὶ παχείῃ* reflects Penelope's beauty, recalling Od. 18, 195, where Athena rendered Penelope taller (*μακροτέρην*) and bigger (*πάσσονα*); he consequently renders "plump, well-turned hand."²³

Yet others have preferred to read the formula in more symbolic terms. N. Austin emphasizes the "resolute energy" required for Penelope to seize the key and paraphrases *χειρὶ παχείῃ* as a "determined hand,"²⁴ while M. Nagler stresses

²² See T. Eide, A Note on the Homeric *χειρὶ παχείῃ*, SO 55 (1980), 25. Cf. also above, n. 10.

²³ W. F. Wyatt Jr., Penelope's Fat Hand (Od. 21, 6/7), CPh 73 (1978), 343/344; in his note entitled Elpida's Fat Hand, CPh 78 (1983), 234/235, Wyatt offered parallels from Modern Greek literature (A. Karkavitsas) and folklore for the notion that a beautiful woman is full-figured. This opens up the issue of the cultural continuity between ancient and modern Greece, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Cf. also K. F. Ameis-C. Hentze, Homers Odyssee für den Schulgebrauch erklärt, Leipzig 1894, II 2, 66, who render "mit der fleischigen vollen Hand." Although this interpretation is plausible, especially if we disregard the contemporary (western) notions of female beauty, one wonders why the poet chose to characterize only Penelope's hand through this formula, when many other beautiful females (e. g. Calypso whom Odysseus himself compares to Penelope at Od. 5, 215–218) appear in the poem. Lowenstam's (above n. 2, 32) interpretation combines the notions of strength and beauty: Penelope's hand is strong (due to the various tasks she had to perform), but also big, i. e. beautiful. Cf. W. B. Stanford, The Odyssey of Homer, London 1958, II 357, who considers the view that the epithet has been used ineptly a result of "romantic idealizations of later centuries" and compares Athena's "sturdy" hand at Il. 21, 403 and 424; he points out that "the key may have been large and heavy, not easy to 'aim' ... with a weak hand (like Leodes) ... and Homeric queens and princesses worked hard with their hands." Along these lines, D. W. Roller and L. K. Roller, Penelope's Thick Hand (Odyssey 21, 6), CJ 90 (1994/1995), 19 saw in *χειρὶ παχείῃ* a reflection of Penelope's skill in weaving. Although Penelope is indeed the weaver par excellence in the Odyssey no allusion to this role of hers is made in Od. 21, except for a passing reference at 21, 351, where Penelope is urged to return to her quarters and mind the works appropriate to a woman. Furthermore, while other female characters are represented as weavers in the poem (Calypso and Circe), none of them is said to have a "fat hand." One would expect that as divine weavers, these female characters would have similarly (if not more) skilled hands. Notice that when *χειρὶ παχείῃ* is used of Athena, the context suggests the warrior goddess, not the Athena Ergane (cf. above, p. 8).

²⁴ Austin (above n. 3, 73/74). He remarks that "[t]he moment is charged with significance for her and the key to the palace storeroom is full of symbolic meaning" as "she will be quite literally surrendering her rights ... as the wife of Odysseus, lord of Ithaca." On the issue of Penelope's determination, cf. also Eide's conclusion cited on p. 12f. above.

the formula's association with warriors, compares it with Il. 21, 424 (where the formula is used of Athena about to strike Aphrodite on the breast), and thus considers Od. 21, 6 the beginning of "the very episode which will establish control over women to enable fighting to go on."²⁵ However, at Il. 21, 403 the formula was used of Athena hurling a boulder against Ares and thus need not specifically imply action against women.

(2.) The context:

Let us now look more closely at the context in which *χειρὶ παχείῃ* appears and examine how it can illuminate the use of this formula. At Od. 21, 46–51 we read:

αὐτίκ' ἄρ' ἦ γ' ἰμάντα θοῶς ἀπέλυσε κορώνης,
 ἐν δὲ κληῖδ' ἤκε, θυρέων δ' ἀνέκοπτεν ὀχῆας
 ἅντα τιτυσκομένη· τὰ δ' ἀνέβραχε ἦυτε ταῦρος
 βοσκόμενος λειμῶνι· τόσ' ἔβραχε καλὰ θύρετρα
 πηγέεντα κληῖδι, πετάσθησαν δέ οἱ ὦκα.
 ἦ δ' ἄρ' ἐφ' ὑψηλῆς στανίδος βῆ ...

"Then she immediately loosed the strap from the door-handle, and she inserted the key, and attempted to push back the door-bolts taking sure aim; and the doors creaked loudly just like a bull grazing in a meadow; so loudly did the beautiful doors creak, struck by the key, and quickly they spread wide open. And she [sc. Penelope] went on the high platform ..."

The poet describes Penelope's inserting the key to open the storeroom-door through the phrase *ἅντα τιτυσκομένη* (Od. 21, 48). *τιτύσκεσθαι* is regularly used in Homer in the sense "to aim."²⁶ What is more, the phrase *ἅντα τιτυσκομένη / τιτυσκόμενος*, "with sure aim," is confined to the *Odyssey* (though forms of *τιτύσκεσθαι* occur in the *Iliad* as one would expect) and is used only of Penelope, Odysseus, and Odysseus' allies in the battle against the suitors. At 21, 420/421 the poet employs this phrase of Odysseus who easily manages to string the bow and shoot the arrow through the axes. Moreover, this formula recurs (in the plural) at 22, 266 after Odysseus' exhortation to his allies in the battle with the suitors, and in Amphimedon's speech at Od. 24, 180/181 where he describes to Agamemnon how he and the rest of the suitors met their death at

²⁵ M.N. Nagler, *Penelope's Male Hand: Gender and Violence in the Odyssey*, *Colby Quarterly* 29 (1993), 255. Nagler also thinks that "the heaviness of Penelope's hand is indeed inappropriate" and suggests that one is tempted "to feel an aesthetic repugnance when Penelope is almost physically masculinized" (Nagler, 256; emphasis mine).

²⁶ See LSJ, s. v. *τιτύσκομαι* II for relevant examples.

the hands of Odysseus. Thus in the *Odyssey* the formula is intimately connected with Odysseus' side.

The visual image of Penelope's "taking sure aim" is accompanied by an acoustic image: as it opens, the storeroom-door resounds "like a bull grazing in a meadow." This simile does not merely suggest loudness, but has martial connotations and foreshadows death, as E. Katz-Anhalt has shown.²⁷ ἀνέβραχε (and the simple ἔβραχε), a verb used only here in the *Odyssey*, recurs twelve times in the *Iliad*, always in martial contexts.²⁸ Significantly, in some of its occurrences (ἀνα)βραχεῖν is directly associated with wounding (Il. 5, 858/859) or death (Il. 12, 395/396 = 14, 419/420 = 13, 180/181; 16, 467/468). In addition, bulls in the Homeric poems appear usually as sacrificial victims,²⁹ while βοσκόμενος λειμῶνι suggests the reversal of a state of tranquility through violent death. Forms of βόσκεισθαι occur in the *Iliad* in brief similes in which warriors attack their helpless opponents who are likened to grazing animals.³⁰ In the *Odyssey* the same verb is employed in two (more extended) similes where the suitors, who are fated to die at the hands of Odysseus, are compared to a grazing doe who, attacked by a lion, meets her death along with her younglings.³¹

²⁷ See E. Katz-Anhalt, *A Bull for Poseidon: the Bull's Bellow in Odyssey 21, 46–50*, CQ 47 (1997), 15–25. The death of the suitors (as well as the violation of *xenia*-laws) is also foreshadowed by the poet's digression on the bow's history (Od. 21, 13–41).

²⁸ Cf. Il. 4, 419/420; 12, 395/396 = 13, 180/181 = 14, 419/420; 16, 565/566; 19, 12/13 (the clashing of an armor); 5, 837/838 (the noise produced by the chariot axle carrying Diomedes and Athena: δεινὴν γὰρ ἄγεν θεὸν ἄνδρα τ' ἄριστον); 5, 858–863 (Ares' cry when wounded by Diomedes); 16, 467/468 (a horse, struck by a spear, falls dead); 21, 8/9 (the roaring of Scamander filled with dead bodies); 21, 386/387 (the earth resounds during the theomachy). See Katz-Anhalt (above n. 27, 17/18) for a discussion of the martial connotations of (ἀνα)βραχεῖν and ἅντα τιτυσκομένη (which she considers a link between Penelope's and Odysseus' actions).

²⁹ Il. 1, 40/41; 1, 315/316; 2, 549/550; 11, 727/728; 16, 487–489; 20, 402/403; 21, 130/131; Od. 1, 24; 3, 5/6; 3, 8; 3, 177/178; 11, 130/131; 13, 180/181; 13, 184; 23, 277/278.

³⁰ Il. 5, 161/162; 15, 690/691; 17, 61/62.

³¹ Od. 4, 335–340 = 17, 126–131. βόσκεισθαι recurs also at Od. 11, 108 of Helios' cattle; though these cattle are not explicitly associated with martial imagery, we should note Teiresias' warning at 11, 110–117 that Odysseus and his comrades should not harm the animals, otherwise death awaits the comrades while Odysseus will encounter trouble in Ithaca. We know, finally, that some of these cattle did not escape death. See Katz-Anhalt (above n. 27, 18–22), who further pursues the bull imagery as applied to the suitors: at Od. 22, 299–301 their reaction to Odysseus' attack is likened to the fearful flight of a herd of cattle, while at 22, 402–406 Odysseus, who has just killed all the suitors, is compared to a lion spattered with blood and gore after feeding on an ox. Cf. Hymn Hom. Merc. 27 (not mentioned by Katz-Anhalt), where Hermes encounters the tortoise βοσκομένη ... ἐριθηλέα ποιῆν; soon the animal meets its death in a manner reminiscent of the cows' "sacrifice" later in the Hymn (118/119).

Penelope's key deserves some examination as well. The key in question is the so-called Tempelschlüssel (cf. above p. 12f. with n. 21). Interestingly, the poet characterizes it as "bent" (εὐκαμπέα) at 21, 6. This epithet is used elsewhere in Homer only at Od. 18, 368, where it describes a sickle (δρέπανον).³² However, it is also an attribute of the bow both in archaic and later epic.³³ By virtue of its association with the qualifying εὐκαμπέα, the key is likened to a weapon in the hands of Penelope. This metaphorical understanding of the key conforms to the usual way the formula ἄντα τιτυσκομένη/τιτυσκόμενος is employed: it is preceded by mention of the weapon with which one aims, and followed by the death of the adversary.³⁴ At 21, 48–50 this pattern is realized implicitly: the "weapon" preceding ἄντα τιτυσκομένη is Penelope's key, while the death of the opponents is indirectly hinted at via the bull-simile. The poet, however, draws attention to the martial dimensions of this image through the phrase πληγέντα κληίδι at 21, 50; πλήσσειν is elsewhere used of striking someone with a weapon.³⁵ If we are right in understanding the key as a weapon, then the formula χειρὶ παχείῃ may not be as inappropriate as has been thought, and both Penelope and Odysseus appear to wield a weapon in their hands.

But there is more. To open the storeroom-door, Penelope must first remove the bolt-strap from the κορώνη. κορώνη was a hook-like projection functioning both as a door-handle and as the place to fasten the bolt-strap. Significantly, κορώνη was also the hook at the tip of the bow to which the bow-string was fastened.³⁶ The first part of the contest Penelope sets for her suitors is precisely to fasten the bow-string to the κορώνη.³⁷ At Od. 21, 46 the word designates a

³² Cf. Ap. Rhod. 3, 1388 ἄρπην εὐκαμπῆ νεοθηγέα χειρὶ μεμαρπώς; Opp. Hal. 5, 257 εὐκαμπῆ δρεπάνην; at Opp. Hal. 3, 128 εὐκαμπέος is used of a hook.

³³ Cf. Hymn Hom. 27, 12; Theoc. Id. 13, 56; Callim. Hymn 3, 10 εὐκαμπές ἄεμμα; [Orph.] Argon. 588; also καμπύλα τόξα at Il. 3, 17; 5, 97; 10, 333; 12, 372; 21, 552; Od. 9, 156; 21, 359; 21, 362; Hymn Hom. Apol. 131; Hymn Hom. Merc. 515. One may add that the type of key referred to in the Odyssey resembled a bow in that it was curved and could be carried on the shoulder, just like a bow (cf. Il. 1, 45).

³⁴ Cf. Od. 22, 266; 24, 181. At 21, 420/421, when Odysseus shoots the arrow through the axes, the formula is preceded by mention of a weapon (οἰστόν) but is not followed by an immediate death; however, Antinoos' death follows soon (22, 15–20).

³⁵ Cf. Il. 3, 362; 5, 147; 5, 763; 10, 489; 11, 240; 12, 192; 16, 115; 16, 332; 17, 294; 17, 296; Od. 10, 162. For the combination of πλήσσειν and κληίς (= "collarbone") in a martial context, cf. Il. 5, 146/147; for κληίς in the Iliad, see the examples collected in Katz-Anhalt (above n. 27, 17).

³⁶ The only certain occurrence of κορώνη in this sense is at Il. 4, 111, where the poet describes Pandaros' bow. For ancient bows and their parts, see W. Reichel, *Homerische Waffen. Archäologische Untersuchungen*, Wien 1901, 112–120; H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments*, London 1950, 276–305.

³⁷ Cf. Od. 21, 75.

part of the door-mechanism, but the poet evokes later the other meaning of κορώνη as well. Twice in Odyssey 21 Homer repeats κορώνη and the bow/arrow in the same context. When Telemachus and Leiodes fail in their attempts to string the bow and acknowledge their lack of success, we are told (Od. 21, 136–139 ≈ 163–166):³⁸

ὥς εἰπὼν, τὸ ξοῦν μὲν ἀπὸ ἔο θῆκε χαμᾶζε,
κλίνας κολλητῆσιν ἐυξέστης σανίδεσσιν,
αὐτοῦ δ' ὠκὺ βέλος καλῆ προσέκλινε κορώνη,
ἄψ δ' αἶτις κάτ' ἄρ' ἔζετ' ἐπὶ θρόνου, ἔνθεν ἀνέστη.

“thus having spoken, he placed the bow away from himself onto the ground, having leaned it against the close-fitted, skilfully fashioned door-boards, and he leaned the swift arrow there close to the beautiful κορώνη³⁹ and immediately he sat on the seat whence he had risen.”

These verses raise two questions. First, what is the precise sense of κορώνη here? Is it the door-hook or the bow's notch? And second, why bring up specifically the κορώνη again? Would it not suffice to mention that both Telemachus and Leiodes leaned the arrow against the door? Cunliffe, s. v. κορώνη, takes the word to mean the part of the door here, which is possible. However, the only thing certain is that Telemachus (and Leiodes later) stands the bow against the double door; nothing in line 138 forces us to choose one sense of κορώνη over the other.⁴⁰ This ambiguity is related to the repetition of κορώνη which, I believe, aims at suggesting to the audience that the actions of Penelope (opening the storeroom-door) and Odysseus (stringing the bow) are intimately linked to each other. At Od. 21, 46 the unfastening of the strap from the κορώνη is instrumental in procuring the bow whose string Odysseus later fastens on its κορώνη. The repetition of κορώνη (accompanied by variation in sense) that I posit here is by no means unique in this passage. Od. 21, 137 and 164 provide a further reference to Od. 21, 46–51 by echoing σανίς, and just as with κορώνη, this

³⁸ Only the first line of this passage differs slightly; Od. 21, 163 runs ὥς ἄρ' ἐφώνησεν καὶ ἀπὸ ἔο τόξον ἔθηκε.

³⁹ προσκλίνειν need not mean “lean against something/someone”; cf. Od. 6, 308 ἔνθα δὲ πατρὸς ἑμοίου θρόνος ποτικέκλιται αὐτῆ, “and there my father's throne has been set up close to her (sc. Arete).”

⁴⁰ Both renderings of κορώνη would yield satisfactory sense here, i. e. “he leaned the swift arrow by the door-handle” or “he leaned the swift arrow close to the bow's notch.” At any rate, Fernández-Galiano's claim (in: J. Russo - M. Fernández-Galiano - A. Heubeck [edd.], *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, Oxford 1992, III 139) that Telemachus “leans the bow against the wall” is contradicted by the text. Notice, finally, that Pandarus' bow in the *Iliad* has a golden κορώνη, which further makes the identification of the “beautiful κορώνη” with the bow's notch possible here.

repetition of *σανίς* is accompanied by variation in meaning: at Od. 21, 50 it is a type of platform, while at 21, 137 and 164 it refers to the door-boards.

One may object that at the moment when Odysseus strings his bow, the poet does not employ the term *κορώνη*. This, however, does not weaken the present argument, for there are other elements that link Penelope's and Odysseus' actions as well. We have already remarked on *ἄντα τιτυσκομένη/τιτυσκόμενος* (p. 14). Significantly, Odysseus strings his bow quickly "without effort" (*ἄτερ σπουδῆς*, 21, 409),⁴¹ just as Penelope unfastened the door-strap from the *κορώνη* "quickly" (*θοῶς*) at 21, 46. In addition, both actions are accompanied by an acoustic image. The opening of the storeroom-door is compared to the roaring of a bull, as previously mentioned (p. 15). Odysseus' stringing of the bow is likewise described in acoustic terms: the hero is compared to an expert phorminx-player who fastens a new string on his instrument. Once Odysseus has strung the bow, he tests (*πειρήσατο*) the string which produces a beautiful sound, compared to the voice of a swallow.⁴² The comparison of Odysseus to a bard stringing his lyre (as well as the sound produced when Penelope opens the storeroom-door) belongs to a series of acoustic omens occurring in the last part of the *Odyssey* that signal Odysseus' return and foreshadow the death of the suitors. These omens include Telemachus' sneeze (17, 541), Zeus' thunder (20, 103), the mill-grinder's prayer (20, 120), and the thunder at 21, 413 and 24, 359.⁴³ At the same time, by presenting Odysseus as incorporating features of both an archer and a phorminx player, the poet implicitly likens him to Apollo, the god of archery and the lyre, whose festival the Ithacans are celebrating at the time of the bow-contest.⁴⁴ Thus the simile foreshadows Odysseus' imminent victory at both the bow-contest and the ensuing battle against the suitors, and just as *ἀνέβραχε* earlier it hints at the death of the suitors.

A final link between Penelope's unlocking the storeroom-door and Odysseus' stringing his bow and shooting an arrow through the axes is conveyed by the sexual undertones the two images share. Both the unlocking of the door and the passing of an arrow through the narrow opening of the axes can be interpre-

⁴¹ Cf. also Od. 21, 407 *ῥῆϊδιώς ἐτάνυσσε νέφ' ἀπὸ κόλλοσι χορδήν*.

⁴² Cf. Od. 21, 410/411 *ἢ δ' ὑπὸ καλὸν ἄεισε, χελιδόνι εἰκέλη ἀυδὴν*. On this simile, see E. K. Borthwick, *Odysseus and the Return of the Swallow*, G&R 35 (1988), 14–22 who offers abundant parallels for the swallow's association with homecoming and conjugal fidelity. For the turn of phrase, cf. Hymn Hom. Merc. 53/54, (*πλήκτρῳ ἐπειρήτιζε κατὰ μέρος, ἢ δ' ὑπὸ χειρὸς / σμερδαλέον κνάβησε. θεὸς δ' ὑπὸ καλὸν ἄειδεν*, "[Hermes] was testing [the strings] one at a time, and it [sc. the lyre] resounded terribly underneath his hand. And the god sang beautifully in accompaniment."); also Hymn Hom. Merc. 419/420 and 501/502.

⁴³ See Borthwick (above n. 42, 16).

⁴⁴ Cf. Od. 20, 156; 20, 276–278; 21, 258–268.

ted as phallic images, and this is in keeping with the significance of the two scenes.⁴⁵ By succeeding in both parts of the bow-contest Odysseus shows that despite the years that have passed he is still capable of re-claiming his wife who had resisted the sexual advances of numerous suitors. Likewise, Penelope's opening the storeroom-door may be interpreted in the light of the "key and lock" metaphor of the sexual act. When Penelope opens the storeroom-door, she shows herself determined to put an end to the long period of sexual abstinence by remarrying someone who can perform a feat such as only her lost husband could; as it turns out, the only male on Ithaca able to achieve this is Odysseus himself. At the same time, inserting the key into the door interestingly puts Penelope in the role of the male, which is in keeping with her having a "masculine" fat hand.⁴⁶

(3.) Conclusion:

The application to Penelope of phrases and terms with martial associations (the formula ἄντα τιτυσκομένη, the sound produced when she actually opens the door "... like a bull grazing in a meadow ...", and the key which can be envisioned as a weapon) sets up a parallelism that holds the action of Odyssey 21 together: at the beginning Penelope grasps her "weapon", the curved key, with which she opens the storeroom-door to fetch Odysseus' weapon; she unleashes the door-strap from the κορώνη and inserts the key ἄντα τιτυσκομένη. Towards the end of the same Book, Odysseus grasps the bow, strings it (i. e. fastens the bow-string to its κορώνη), and shoots (ἄντα τιτυσκόμενος) the arrow that goes through all the axes. The repetition of bow / arrow and κορώνη reminds the audience of the relation between Penelope's and Odysseus' actions.⁴⁷ In this

⁴⁵ See J. Russo, *Odysseus' Trial of the Bow as Symbolic Performance*, in: A. Bierl - A. Schmitt - A. Willi (edd.), *Antike Literatur in neuer Deutung. Festschrift für Joachim Latacz anlässlich seines 70. Geburtstages*, München 2004, 101, who adduces parallels from Sanskrit literature for the phallic symbolism of the arrow. The image of the key and keyhole/lock is a sexual metaphor known from many cultures and literatures. It is attested in Attic comedy; cf. J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse. Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, Oxford ²1991, 119 ss. vv. βάλανος and βαλανοῦν. See further M. Moore, *On the Signification of Doors and Gates in the Visual Arts*, *Leonardo* 14 (1981), 203, who cites evidence ranging from *The Song of Songs* (4, 12–16; 8, 9) to Freud and Nabokov. One may also compare the *repagula pudoris* in *Carm. Bur.* 72, 2b.5/6.

⁴⁶ Cf. Nagler (above n. 25) who remarks on Penelope's masculinization via χειρὶ παχείη; also above, p. 10f., for ancient commentators who detected masculine characteristics in Penelope.

⁴⁷ Odysseus' and Penelope's actions are similar and Penelope proves an equal of Odysseus. They both trick the suitors: Penelope by her various delaying tactics, including weaving Laertes' shroud, and Odysseus through his disguise. Penelope is likened to a just king at

light, Penelope's *χειρὶ παχείῃ* seems fully appropriate. I believe that the poet was aware of the formula's martial implications and he expected his audience, experienced in oral traditional poetry, to understand them as well. While we are unable to tell with absolute certainty whether the original audience was at first surprised when hearing that Penelope grasped the key with her "fat, firm, thick, or stout hand" (as many ancient and modern commentators certainly were), we can nevertheless understand how the application of *χειρὶ παχείῃ* could have been aimed at attuning the audience to the ensuing martial parallels between Penelope and Odysseus. Thus *χειρὶ παχείῃ* at Od. 21, 6 can be viewed as a *σῆμα*⁴⁸ that triggers in the audience's mind a network of associations, operates through traditional referentiality, and equates Penelope with an epic hero, indeed Odysseus, with whom she shares the ideal of *ὁμοφροσύνη*.⁴⁹

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19, 109–114, while Odysseus is described in similar terms elsewhere in the poem (5, 8–12; 14, 61–66). Most important, the bow-contest leads to great sorrow for the suitors and their families, but joy for Odysseus' and Penelope's household and family (cf. Od. 6, 182–185 οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρείσσον καὶ ἄρειον, / ἢ ὄθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχητον / ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή· πόλλ' ἄλγεα δυσμενέεσσι / χάρματα δ' εὐμένετησι μάλιστα δέ τ' ἔκλυον αὐτοί, "for there is nothing stronger or more valiant than when a husband and a wife possess the household with unity of thought (*ὁμοφρονέοντε*); they cause much grief to their enemies, but joy to their friends; and they themselves enjoy the best reputation"). Their *ὁμοφροσύνη* is so pervasive that it leads Amphimedon to conclude that the bow-contest had been orchestrated by Odysseus and Penelope together in order to rid themselves of the suitors (Od. 24, 167–169): αὐτὰρ ὁ ἦν ἄλοχον πολυκερδείῃσιν ἄνωγε / τόξον μνηστήρεσσι θέμεν πολὶόν τε σίδηρον, / ἡμῖν αἰνομόροισιν ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχὴν ("then in his cunning he [sc. Odysseus] ordered his wife to set the bow and the gray iron for the suitors, a contest and the beginning of our murder"). For the mental similarity between Odysseus and Penelope, see Schein (above n. 7, 22).

⁴⁸ For the term *σῆμα*, see above p. 9.

⁴⁹ I would like to thank Jenny Strauss Clay and Zachary Biles for reading earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to J.-Th. Papademetriou and the Editors of *Wiener Studien* for their suggestions.