

ELWIRA KACZYŃSKA  
Chair of Classical Philology  
University of Łódź

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## REMARKS ON μίτρην λύειν IN CALLIMACHUS AND HESIOD

*Abstract:* Both the formula μίτρην λύειν ‘to loose a girdle’ and the equation μίτρη = ζώνη are analyzed, especially on the basis of the poems by Callimachus and Hesiod.

The formula μίτρην (ἀνα)λύειν ‘to loose a girdle’ is a paraphrase of Homeric ζώνην λύειν, e.g. *Odyssey* 11.245: λύσε δὲ παρθενίην ζώνην ‘(Zeus) loosed the maiden-girdle’, *H.Hom.* 5.164: (Anchises) λύσε δὲ οἱ ζώνην.

Callimachus in his fourth hymn repeats the Homeric construction: λύσατο δὲ ζώνην ‘(Hera) loosed her girdle’ (*H.* 4.209), however in the subsequent report, he prefers a similar phrase: Λητώ τοι μίτρη ἀναλύεται (*H.* 4.222). In both these cases the use of the middle voice is natural when the woman herself undertakes the operation. The active voice, as used by Homer, indicates that the girdle is loosened by someone other than the wearer<sup>1</sup>.

In his Hymn to Zeus (*H.* 1.21) Callimachus says that ‘Rhea loosed her girdle’ (‘Ρῆη ὄτε λύσατο μίτρην). Although the loosening of the girdle refers here not to a virgin’s *primus coitus*, as e.g. in Homer, but to giving birth<sup>2</sup>, it seems indisputable that the famous poet from Cyrene equates μίτρη with ζώνη regularly (for the third time, cf. *Fr.* 75.45).

According to H. Brandenburg’s opinion<sup>3</sup>, the above equation becomes common beginning in third century (save Callimachus, see

<sup>1</sup> A notable exception to this rule is Apollonius Rhodius’ phrase: (Alcimedea) μίτρην ... ἔλυσα (1.288), which follows ‘the use of the active of the wearer in lyric and tragedy’ (so G. R. McLennan, *Callimachus. Hymn to Zeus. Introduction and Commentary*, Roma 1977, p. 52).

<sup>2</sup> According to G. W. Mooney, ‘loosening the girdle’ is a common euphemism for either copulation (e.g. *Od.* 11.245; *AP* 7.324.2) or childbirth (e.g. Pindar, *O.* 6.39; Hyperides, *Fr.* 67; Apollonius 1.288). See *The Argonautica of Apollonius Rhodius*, edited with Introduction and Commentary by G. W. Mooney, Dublin 1912, p. 88 (note to *Apoll.* 1.288).

<sup>3</sup> H. Brandenburg, *Studien zur Mitra*, Münster 1966, p. 9, n. 1.

Apollonius 1.288, 3.1013, 4.1024; Moschus 2.73, 164, etc.; Ps.-Theocritus 27.54; Musaeus 272 and so on). G. R. McLennan, a conscientious commentator of Callimachus' first hymn, follows Brandenburg, agreeing with him that the use of μίτρην for ζώνη „is Hellenistic” [sic!] and adding: „In Homer μίτρην always refers to the armour of warriors”<sup>4</sup>. D. W. Tandy conjectures that „Callimachus may have initiated this new meaning”, admitting carefully that „If Callimachus is in fact responsible for this new meaning his motivation is difficult to determine”<sup>5</sup>.

It cannot be denied that Homer's μίτρην determinates always a male's protective device, apparently a metal guard worn round the waist (e.g. *Il.* 4.137.187.216; 5.857)<sup>6</sup>. Later the meaning has changed considerably<sup>7</sup>. By the time of Alcman it may designate a 'female's headband' (Parth. 67; cf. Eurypides, *Hec.* 924, Ba. 833.929.1115; Aristophanes, *Th.* 257). Pindar uses the term in question to denote the winner's garland (*O.* 9.84, I. 5.62; cf. *Bacchylides* 13.196; Eurypides, *El.* 162<sup>8</sup>). The Hellenistic poets attest not only the sense 'maiden's girdle', but also a similar one, namely 'brassiere' (Callimachus *Ep.* 38.3<sup>9</sup>; Apollonius 3.867).

Who is responsible for the common equation ζώνη = μίτρην? The answer was accessible to all the above-mentioned commentators of Callimachus' hymns, but remained unnoticed. R. Merkelbach and M. L. West<sup>10</sup> cite the beginning of the prooimion to Hesiod's

<sup>4</sup> McLennan, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> D. W. Tandy, *Callimachus, Hymn to Zeus. Introduction and Commentary*. Diss. Yale University, New Haven 1979, p. 84.

<sup>6</sup> See Aristarchus to *Il.* 5.857.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Theocritus*, edited with a translation and commentary by A. S. F. Gow, vol. II, Cambridge 1950, pp. 329–300. A full description of meanings can be found in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, revised and augmented throughout by Sir H. S. Jones, Oxford 1968, p. 1138.

<sup>8</sup> Also μίτρην in Callimachus' Hymn to Delos (4.166) defines alternatively some sort of „crown” (as correctly translated by A. W. Mair in his useful edition belonging to the Loeb Classical Library, cf. *Callimachus, Hymns and Epigrams, Lycophron* with an English translation by A. W. Mair, *Aratus* with an English translation by G. R. Mair, London 1921, revised edition 1955, reprinted in 1989, p. 99). See P. Bing, *The Well-Read Muse. Present and Past in Callimachus and the Hellenistic Poets*, Göttingen 1988, p. 135. Liddell & Scott, *op. cit.*, prefer the meaning 'diadem'.

<sup>9</sup> The traditional interpretation of ep. 38 (Pfeiffer) is, however, far from being certain. Alternatively, the Callimachean formula ξηθηκε τήν τε Μίτρην / ... τόν τε Πᾶνα / (if both these words begin with initial large letters) may be comprehended as follows: „[Simon] dedicated [to Aphrodite] one image of Aphrodite-Mitra and one of (the god) Pan”.

<sup>10</sup> *Fragmenta Hesiodica*, ediderunt R. Merkelbach et M. L. West, Oxonii 1967, p. 3. The 1968 Supplement to *A Greek-English Lexicon* (p.101) adds: „μίτρα 1.2, after 'girdle', insert 'Hes. in POxy. 2354.4'”. This reference was omitted by both McLennan and Tandy.

Γυναικῶν Κατάλογος *sive* 'Hoῖαι, which is known to us through the medium of an Oxyrhynchus papyrus, edited first by E. Lobel (*P.Oxy.* 2354) as early as 1956<sup>11</sup> :

- 1 Νῦν δὲ γυναικῶν, φύλον ἀείσατε, ἥδυέπειαι  
Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο<sup>12</sup>,  
αἱ τὸτ' ἄρισται ἔσαγ [καὶ κάλλιστα κατὰ γαῖαν]  
μίτρας τ' ἀλλύσαντο ἃ[ἰὰ χρυσέην τ' Ἀφροδίτην]  
5 μισγόμεναι θεοῖσ[ιν θεοεἰκελα τέκνα τέκοντο.]

The partially preserved verses 4–5 read that the Boeotian poet was going to describe such women who „loosed girdles” (μίτρας τ' ἀλλύσαντο<sup>13</sup>) to „be in love with the gods” (μισγόμεναι θεοῖσ[ιν]). It is clear now that the postulated „Hellenistic” or „Callimachean” construction has much earlier occurred in common use. Thus the meaning ‘maiden’s girdle’ for μίτρη had to have appeared as early as Hesiod is dated (i.e. 7th century B.C.). The visible difference between the Homeric and Hesiodic meaning of μίτρη cannot astonish us, moreover, it should appear as natural. What wonder that Hesiod, a Boeotian farmer, for whom all war-struggles are quite strange, knows and uses this word only with a non-military sense?

Undoubtedly, the Hesiodic words μίτρας τ' ἀλλύσαντο belong to these poetical phrases of the archaic Greek verse, which were abundantly imitated and anew used by Callimachus and other Hellenistic poets<sup>14</sup>.

I would like to finish my remarks with the following conclusion: If some scholars were more cautious in their premature decla-

<sup>11</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part XXIII, edited with notes by E. Lobel, London 1956, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Verses 1–2 are securely restored, because they create a final sequence in many MSS of Hesiod’s *Theogony*, see Merkelbach-West *ad loc.* Verses 3–5 are tentatively supplemented after A. Colonna, cf. *Esiado, Opere. Teogonia – Catalogo delle donne – Opere e giorni – Poemati pseudo-esiodei*, a cura di A. Colonna, Milano 1993, p. 124.

<sup>13</sup> For the compound ἀλλύσαντο (from ἀνα-λύω), see Callimachus H. 4.222 (μίτρην ἀναλύεται). See Lobel’s comments on μίτρας τ' ἀλλύσαντο: „here in allusion to wedlock, as appears from μισγόμεναι [...] Otherwise it might be taken as in allusion to childbearing” (Lobel, *op. cit.*, p. 3).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. especially J. J. Clauss, *Hellenistic Imitations of Hesiod Catalogue of Women Fr. 1, 6–7 M.W.*, QUCC 65:3, 1990, pp. 129–140. For the Hesiodic influences in Callimachus, see H. Reinisch-Werner, *Callimachus Hesiodicus. Die Rezeption der hesiodischen Dichtung durch Kallimachos von Kyrene*, Berlin 1976; A. Barigazzi, *Esiado e la chiusa degli 'Aitia' di Callimaco*, Prometheus 7, 1981, pp. 97–107; M. L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women*, Oxford 1985; A. Rengakos, *Der Homertext und die hellenistischen Dichter*, Stuttgart 1993; the same, *Apollonios Rhodios und die antike Homererklärung*, München 1994.

rations, there would be no need to correct their obvious mistakes, which, unfortunately, are continuously repeated.