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LANGUAGE DICTATES
(Fabula and logic of the text in the development of the plot of the Iliad)

Abstract: The article is concerned with the Catalogue of Ships in the Second Book of Iliad; the author endeavors to demonstrate how a language metaphor can influence the development of the plot. It is show that the "ship-state" metaphor was especially avoided so that the narrative contains a range of similia. Their appearance may be explained from the Greek language.

This paper is concerned with a question, which already has a long story of research and revision. The point of view from which I propose to look upon this issue is suggested by Russian poetry and modern literary criticism. I would like to note, though, that the modern essence of this basis must be taken *cum grano salis*, as the examples cited from modern poetry are limited to poems created by improvisators such as Joseph Brodsky.[1] The view of this problem proposed here will follow a course set by a paradox saying of Brodsky: "the poet is an instrument of the language"[2]; therefore, the topic of this article may be seen as an answer to the question: in what respect did a poet, who created orally a poem equal to the Iliad in size, improvise. That is, in what way was Homer as an improviser "an instrument of the language", or, putting it differently, how much did the language dictate the plot development and architectonics of an epic work.

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[1] Naiman, Interviews. Joseph Brodsky. Razmerom podlinnika (the Dimentions of the Original). Volume to the 50th anniversary of J. Brodsky. B. m., 1990. pp. 136-137: "all those long descriptions... this is the real Brodsky. He made poetry work for him. This can't be exactly said about every poet. One can not say that Brodsky 'polishes the language'."

[2] From the interview with N. Gorbanevskaya (cit. Joseph Brodsky. In the Dimentions of the Original. Volume to the 50th anniversary of J. Brodsky. B. m., 1990. pp. 137, 152).

I will content myself with one example, in order to expose the logic[3] of poetic narration, according to which the Catalogue of Ships was included into the plot of the Iliad.

The appearance of the Catalogue of Ships in the Iliad is usually considered an interpolation. All the flaws of including a catalogue in an epic poem are generally recited. Neither its definition as an "anti-climax", given most condescendingly by George Kirk, nor more strict mechanistic explanations give a good answer to the main question: why was the Catalogue placed where it is (in the end of Book Two). Not in Book Five, not in Book One, as the catalogue of Indian tribes in Longfellow, and not in the last books, as the catalogue of Frankish troops in Chanson de Roland.

According to Kirk[4], the interpretation of the structure of Book 2 contains two main difficulties. Kirk claims that it is impossible to conceptualize logically the appearance of the Catalogue from the point of view of the plot. He supposes a misconnected succession of various versions and themes, developed in pre-Homeric oral tradition[5]. Then he adds some precautions which we will follow in our discussion: «*what needs to be stressed here is that it would be a mistake on the reader's part either to overlook those difficulties completely or to exaggerate their effects on a listening audience.*» And concludes: «*Book 2 can be seen as a whole as an elaborate and interrupted description of the process of carrying Zeus's oath into effect*[6] .... *The technique is not solely a device to create suspense, although suspense is certainly created thereby.*»

Kirk regards the Catalogue as a "literary" device that creates both expectation and suspense at the same time. This idea deserves attention. But the reason for using this device remains unclear; and the question, why is the Catalogue placed where we find it and not earlier (for example, it could be inserted while the troops sleep) remains unanswered.

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[3] "... il n'y a aucune exagération à prétendre avec moi que la composition artistique se construit suivant des lois très rigoureusement logiques. Mais la logique de la poèsie ne se trouve pas à la surface; elle est au fond. Elle n'est pas mécanique ni stériotypée, mais organique". H. Larsson, *La logique de la poèsie*, Paris 1919, p. 193.

[4] G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Vol. 1: Books 1-4, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985, p. 47-48.

[5] G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad...* Loc. cit.: "the imperfect incorporation of different versions and additional themes pre-existing in the oral tradition."

[6] G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad...* Loc. cit.

Let us look at the plot development in Book 2. It starts with an interval in the development of the plot: both men and gods, including Zeus, go down to sleep. Then Zeus breaks the pause. He wants to confuse Agamemnon, while he is thinking of a way to help Achilles. He knows Achaean troops only too well – he's Zeus and nobody else. Voicing his meditations – for example, telling how he looks over the chiefs and names the troops – would be the same anti-climax as including the Catalogue in the end of Book 2. The poet didn't make use of this opportunity. He obviously found it insufficiently reasoned.

Neither in this part of the story, nor in the following part do we find any kind of anti-climax. In the opening lines of the book Zeus himself weighs the offence indicted to Achilles and plots revenge. This looks more like a climax, in which Achilles' anger is no longer limited by quarrels between Greeks, but affects fates of the whole world. A logical continuation that is apparent, but for some time hidden from the audience would be Zeus's idea to cast a false dream (a vision of Nestor) upon Agamemnon. In accord with that dream Agamemnon delivers two speeches; the first one at the Council of Achaeans, the second one – addressing the people. After the second speech the people "surged to and fro like the waves of the Icarian Sea" (line 144) and ran down to the ships to "take away the stays", draw them into the sea and go home.

They would have returned, had not Hera complained to Athena and had not the latter darted to Odysseus who at once started to call the troops to order. People return to the place of gathering. Then follows the argument with Thersites, to which Odysseus answers with the strike of his scepter, and a long speech by Odysseus himself. Then Nestor delivers a speech. Finally, Agamemnon decides that the great battle will take place. And once again the people are compared to the sea (395). Sacrifices to Zeus are made, and Agamemnon orders the troops to get armed for battle. A number of comparisons follows: the troops glitter like fire, the warriors are compared with flocks of birds, leaves on the trees, flowers on spring meadows and flies. The chiefs are like goat shepherds.

Right after this the Catalogue of Ships begins. Like a pendulum[7], it takes us to the Trojans who are holding a council in Priam's palace. The Trojans get armed and the Trojan Catalogue follows. A transition of such type is widespread in archaic Greek literature and

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[7] This device was found by van Gronningen in the early fifties (B.A.van Groningen, *La composition littéraire archaique grecque,* Amsterdam, 1958, p. 114.)

is regular in battle descriptions. In this respect, the transition of the description from the Greek troops to the Trojan army does not require special comments either from the point of view of the whole plot, nor from the point of view of the transition itself that takes place around verse 780.

Ships as a given fact, a *realia* appear in Book 2.26 where their being mentioned is not metaphorical. Zeus sends Dream (II.5) to Achean ships (repeated in line II.11). Taking the shape of Nestor, Dream appears to Agamemnon. He gathers a public meeting, and after his second speech as it was mentioned before the people "surged to and fro like the waves of the Icarian Sea" (II.144) and ran down to the ships.

The flight from the ships took place; the flight to Fatherland would have taken place as well, had not Hera boasted to Athena and the latter had not darted down to Odysseus (the poet explains that choice by calling him "peer of Zeus in counsel") and had not repeated Hera's plea (a common epic repetition) to bring Achaeans to reason. Taking his staff, Odysseus takes Agamemnon with him, and they walk around the ships, reminding everyone that it is Zeus who gives power to kings. He can not and does not speak on the shore, where the ships are all ashore and lie on their side "let us straighten our ships", because the metaphor and the reality combined would only urge Greeks to go home. After Odysseus' speech people ran once again to the place of public gatherings, and then once again follows the comparison with the rough sea and waves beating against the shore:

οἳ δ' ἀγορήνδε
αὖτις ἐπεσσεύοντο νεῶν ἄπο καὶ κλισιάων
ἠχῆι, ὡς ὅτε κῦμα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης
αἰγιαλῶι μεγάλα βρέμεται, σμαραγεῖ δέ τε πόντος.   210

Thersites delivers an ardent speech full of accusations against the high command in general and especially against Agamemnon. Finally, after Odysseus' speech the Greek troops are once again compared to sea waves.

Ἀργεῖοι δὲ μέγ' ἴαχον, ὡς ὅτε κῦμα
ἀκτῆι ἐφ' ὑψηλῆι, ὅτε κινήσηι Νότος ἐλθών,   395
προβλῆτι σκοπέλωι· τὸν δ' οὔ ποτε κύματα λείπει
παντοίων ἀνέμων, ὅτ' ἂν ἔνθ' ἢ ἔνθα γένωνται.

Finally, the poet moves on to the Catalogue of Ships that starts with a separate invocation:

ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι᾽ Ὀλύμπια δώματ᾽ ἔχουσαι –
ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε, πάρεστέ τε, ἴστέ τε πάντα,   485
ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν, οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν –
οἵ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν.

Let us note the fact that in this part of the text – starting from Agamemnon's dream and down to the Achaeans rushing into the battle – people's gathering is repeatedly compared to the raging sea. This metaphor, given three times, is a triple iteration that is quite typical for an epic text. The description of a raging sea passes into a scene of a public gathering that rages like a sea. The poet inserts another metaphor that breaks the ship-state metaphor: he compares the gathering to a rustling field: but here there is no menace, nothing connected with danger – it will not capsize and sink the ship.

Urged by Athena, Odysseus goes out to stop the flight of troops. He changes the metaphorical code, using the metaphor of a strict divine order that comes down from Zeus. This switch of code from sociomorphic to another (the one related to the real shipping) and backwards, reminds us of data known from Ancient Greek cosmogonic texts[8].

I think it is possible to see the intrinsic logic of the episode succession in this metaphor that equals the state (it was the Greek commonwealth that came to besiege Troy) to a ship.

Let us note, that the comparison with the field lies between the troops' flight to the ships and the comparison of people with a raging sea. I think, the purpose was to break the "state-ship" metaphor that stands behind the verse "when Zephyrus sweeps over a field of corn and the ears bow beneath the blast". I am inclined to consider this auxiliary comparison dependent on the ship-state metaphor that the poet had to divide in order to destroy the unique association. The field metaphor is doubtlessly weaker than the other one – waves bring peril and the field may rustle at its own will. One can follow the transition from the ships stand – the Achaean camp, Achaean organized life – to the raging sea of public gathering. The poet deliberately wants to weaken the ship-state metaphorical bond, but compares the gathering to the sea three times. From my point of view the triple appearance of this metaphorical hint is not accidental, and neither is the transition

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[8] A.V. Lebedev, "ΠΑΤΗΡ - ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΟΣ - ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ. Synonimics of Metaphorical Codes in Ancient Greek Philosophical Cosmogonic Texts", *Balcano-Balto - Slavica. Sypmosium on text structure*. Preliminary materials. M., 1979, pp. 24-27.

to the other metaphor (of the field under gusts of the wind). The intrinsic unity of the two metaphors is obvious: Notus and Eurus are replaced with Zephyrus, and the simile is destroyed by the fact that there is nothing in human behavior backgrounds that can be compared to the work of the wind.

The poet twice associates the state with the ship[9], but he never fully expresses the metaphor. Finally, after the third comparison of the crowd to a raging sea he introduces the final component of the ship-state metaphor: the Catalogue of Ships. From this point of view the catalogue appears to be very reasonably placed. It rounds up a theme based on a metaphor already incorporated into language of the *époque*. I suggest to see in this case a direct effect that a "language metaphor" can have on the plot construction, that is, an example of a linguistic metaphor dictating a plot development that contradicts the development of the *fabula*. The retardation in the plot is built on the basis of a linguistic metaphor, and the same metaphor limits the freedom of composition, making it necessary to use an auxiliary comparison, as we have seen in case with the field metaphor.

Therefore, there is no need to assert, that it was accidentally that the Catalogue was placed in that very place in Book 2. There is no reason to speak of an "anti-climax"; but it is possible to speak of a compositional idea which was from the very beginning based on a "linguistic metaphor": violent argument passes into social order; violent discussion (people raging like the sea) passes into the strict Catalogue of Ships. The development of the "raging sea" theme finds its conclusion in the Catalogue.

The poet needs the list of the ships because it presents a picture of the harmony of Achaean order that counterweighs the violent discussions before it. The next steps in plot development are much more obvious: only having shown both armies ready for battle can the poet move to the duel between Alexander and Paris. Here the logic of the *fabula* overthrows the logic of the linguistic metaphor.

My report was dedicated to the logic that dictates that the Catalogue appear after the dream sent by Zeus, and not before it; that is, the connection between and Catalogue and the previous text. I have tried to find the explanation in the linguistic "state-ship"

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[9] For more on the state-ship linguistic metaphor, see "K predistorii metafory "gosudarstvo-korabl" v grecheskoj kulture // Intellektualnaja elita antichnogo mira, SPb., 1995. pp. 18-21, where you can find materials that let us date this metaphor back to Mycenaean times.

metaphor, which the poet suggests three times and camouflages it either by covering it with another comparison, or by introducing κοίρανες λαῶν that send us to the *teichoscopy* in Book 3. In this kind of text construction not only the positive effect of the metaphor itself is important, but also the obstacles it presents to the plot development. The thread of comparisons in line 145 with a visible weakening (I am quite ready to see an anti-climax here), is as notable from the textual point of view as the general plot development in Book 2.

The poetic logic is versatile. It leaves space for the dictate of the language that makes a poet its instrument. The linguistic logic can manifest itself quite unexpectedly, and among other things may dictate the basis for plot construction and limit the composition.