

POLYMETIC HEROISM IN THE WANDERINGS OF ODYSSEUS, ODYSSEY 9-12 (*THE APOLOGUE*)

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In the Wanderings of Odysseus in Books 9 to 12 of the *Odyssey* (the *Apologue*), success is garnered by acts of trickery which help the hero overcome foes / surpass obstacles, while victims of tricks are depicted in helpless, supplicative, soporific, or weakened states. In tandem with this, I observe how the absence of polymetic prowess, demonstrated either through a focus on isolated *bie* (physical strength) or through what is otherwise represented as a certain mindlessness or foolishness, leads to failure in the interactions. The Wanderings in *Odyssey* 9 to 12 have the important function in the *Odyssey* of solidifying Odysseus' outstanding quality as a polymetic hero, acting as a proving ground for this means of heroic achievement.

Keywords: Homer; Odysseus; hero; metis; tricks.

There is yet to be a study which tracks the relationship throughout the Wanderings of Odysseus in Books 9 to 12 of the *Odyssey* between polymetic¹ prowess — i.e. a talent for intellectual cunning (*metis*)² and plotting (*boulai*), and which is demonstrated through acts of trickery (*doloi*)³ — and heroic accomplishment, i.e. overcoming an opponent or surpassing a tough obstacle.⁴ This analysis scrutinizes

¹ *Polymetis* is the epithet most frequently attached to Odysseus' name, cf. Austin 1975:25-30. Other related epithets include *polyphron*, *poikilophron*, *polymechanos*, and *polykerdes* (Clay 1983:31). In the proemium, Odysseus' name does not appear at first, but he is identified only through the adjective *polytropos* (1.1) (cf. Clay 1983:26-29).

² '[C]unning, shrewdness' (Pucci 1987:16).

³ '[T]ricks' (Pucci 1987:17; cf. *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos (LfgrE)* 1991:329-330). The term *doloi* refers to many varieties of conceit envisioned and enacted (cf. Detienne & Vernant 1974:17-18).

⁴ '[A] trick is viewed as a weapon or a resource for self-protection from, or self-enhancement amid, enemies' (Pucci 1987:61). Besides being polymetic, Odysseus is also: (i) a suffering / wandering hero, cf. Cook 1999; de Jong 2004:6; Nagler 1990:337; (ii) a civilizing hero, cf. Austin 1983:14; Reinhardt 1996:81-83; Segal 1962:34; or even (iii) an ecological hero, cf. Austin 1983:20-22; Nagler 1996:154-157. The thematic importance of the Wanderings of *Odyssey* 9-12 (also called the *Apologue*) has been interpreted variously: for example, as a battle between the civilized and the savage (cf. Dougherty 2001:95-100), or as a sphere deprived of Greek hospitality (cf. Reece 1993:124). Some attention has also been given to the persuasive elements of Odysseus' speech to his Phaeacian audience (cf. Doherty 2008:63-76, Hopman 2012:21-23, Most 1989).

the pervasive role and effectiveness of polymetic ability in the encounters of Odysseus and his Ithacan companions with the various antagonists of the Wanderings. In tandem with the success which frequently accompanies acts of trickery, a corresponding failure will also be viewed in their absence, either through the prioritizing of isolated *bie*,⁵ physical violence, or through a lack of mental resources in interactions with tricks, deceptive objects, or trickster characters.

In the first major episode of the Wanderings in *Odyssey* 9 to 12, Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops, Polyphemus' *bie* is emphasized from the outset. The lofty topography and vegetation around the ogre's home reflect the sheer physical scale of the resident giant: a tall cave, σπέος ... ὑψηλόν (9.182-183),⁶ a high-walled courtyard, ἀυλή ... ὑψηλή (9.184-185),⁷ tall pine trees, μακρῆσιν ... πίτυσιν (9.186), and high oaks, δρυσὶν ὑψικόμοισιν (9.186);⁸ not to mention, the comparison of the monster to a wooded peak among the high mountains, ῥίω ὑλήεντι / ὑψηλῶν ὄρέων (9.191-192).⁹ Odysseus describes his premonition of their encounter with an individual, marked out by lawlessness, wildness (9.215), and sheer physical strength — μεγάλην ... ἀλκήν (9.214). Upon returning to his cave, Polyphemus throws down a heavy bundle of firewood, ὄβριμον ἄχθος / ὕλης ἀζαλέης (9.233-234),¹⁰ and closes the entrance with a rock which is qualified by three adjectives denoting its scale, μέγαν ... ὄβριμον ... ἤλιβατον (9.240-241, 243); and the act of moving the boulder is given further enormity through likening the monster's strength to a force greater than 22 wagons (9.241-242). Polyphemus' *bie* even seems transferred from his physique to 'his thundering voice',¹¹ φθόγγον τε βαρύν (9.257), which causes the Ithacans to shrink back in fear (9.257). When Odysseus asks Polyphemus to respect the laws of the gods and hospitality, the giant replies that the Cyclopes have no need to, being naturally far stronger, πολὺ φέρτεροί (9.276). And Polyphemus soon gives the most patent indication of his

⁵ On the competition between Odysseus and Achilles as traditionally based upon a *metis* / *bie* opposition, cf. *Il.* 9.346-352, *Od.* 8.73-78; Dunkle 1987:1; Nagy 1979:45-47; contra Wilson 2002:140-141. On *metis* / *bie* in the Iliadic funeral games, cf. Dunkle 1987. On *metis* / *bie* in the songs of Demodocus, cf. Clay 1983:101-102, 107; Olson 1989.

⁶ Unless otherwise stated: (i) line references refer to Homer's *Odyssey*; (ii) Greek text is based on the TLG edition; (iii) translations and paraphrases from Greek text are my own.

⁷ An example of a transferred epithet: the courtyard, *aule*, is 'high' in the sense that it is surrounded by a 'high wall'.

⁸ '[W]ith high foliage' (Shewring 1980:103).

⁹ De Jong 2004:235-236.

¹⁰ '[A] stout bundle of dry firewood' (Shewring 1980:104).

¹¹ Shewring 1980:105.

apparently unmatched *bie* when he kills and devours Odysseus' men (9.288-293). The disparity in power between the ogre and the men is analogous to that between a lion (9.292) and puppies (9.289).¹²

In a battle of physical strength, Odysseus is grossly outmatched by Polyphemos; in a battle of wits, though, the hero gradually gains mastery over the man-eating giant.¹³ The first trick, ironically enough, is instigated by the ogre, when he enquires of the whereabouts of Odysseus' ship (9.279-280). Polyphemos' interrogation is a ruse, a seemingly innocuous question which houses a concealed, ulterior motive, to pluck information out of Odysseus, which will be to the great detriment of the other Ithacans left behind at the shore. The cunning behind Polyphemos' request is at once recognized by Odysseus (9.281-282). The Ithacan supplies the ogre with the participle, *πειράζων* (9.281), indicating that his 'host' is in some respect making a trial of the hero;¹⁴ but, importantly, the trap does not deceive Odysseus: *ἐμὲ δ' οὐ λάθην εἰδότα πολλά* (9.282).¹⁵ Odysseus, a master at *metis*, declares that he has complete knowledge, *εἰδότα* (9.282), of many things, *πολλά* (9.282), and thus cannot be deceived, *οὐ λάθην* (9.282).¹⁶

Odysseus, in turn, provides his own crafty speech, *δολίοισ' ἐπέεσσι* (9.282), a fabrication of how the Ithacans were shipwrecked on the ogre's shore by Poseidon, in order to match the deceit of the giant (9.283-286).¹⁷ Odysseus easily outfoxes Polyphemos. The giant assumes the truth of what is a blatant lie. He makes no further verbal response to the hero (9.287), no further enquiries as to the presence of other men outside the cave, who are therefore saved courtesy of Odysseus' ingenuity. Indeed, after this brief verbal sparring, Polyphemos reverts to his characteristic *bie*, seizing and devouring two of the companions (9.288-293).

Odysseus' subsequent tussle with Polyphemos involves several acts of trickery.¹⁸ It might be considered that the action of blinding the ogre with a wooden stake is a performance of *bie*, a collaborative act of physical might by the team of Ithacans over an opposition. Odysseus' use of this physical prop, however, stems from a realization that outright might will not in itself carry the day. After the initial slaughter, the hero considers slaying the monster through an act of *bie*

¹² The mountain lion simile conveys connotations of rage and savagery, especially employed in military contexts in the *Iliad*, cf. Schein 1970:75; Scott 1974:58-62; Magrath 1982:208-209.

¹³ Clay 1983:113; Weinberg 1986:27.

¹⁴ *Lfgre* 2004:1103-1104.

¹⁵ '[B]ut I knew the world and guessed what he was about' (Shewring 1980:105). Cf. Clay 1983:118.

¹⁶ Schein 1970:78.

¹⁷ Clay 1983:118.

¹⁸ The wine and false name are departures from the original folktale of the ogre-figure (Schein 1970:77).

(9.299-305): inspired by courage, *μεγαλήτορα θυμόν* (9.299),¹⁹ the warrior thinks of drawing his weapon, *ξίφος* (9.300), and of striking, *οὔτάμεναι* (9.301), his enemy. But while Polyphemos himself could be destroyed in this way, so too would all the Ithacans be, stuck inside the sealed cave (9.303-305). Physical strength does not permit a successful outcome for the Ithacans;²⁰ it would consign them to an imminent death, *ἀπωλόμεθ' αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον* (9.303), because they, unlike Polyphemos, do not possess '22-wagon-power' force (*cf.* 9.240-243). Furthermore, the very ability of Odysseus to recognize the inapplicability of physical force in the situation, and to check his attacking impulse, is presented as a product of his mental prowess, *ἕτερος δέ με θυμὸς ἔρυκεν* (9.302).²¹

Odysseus turns from physical impulse to his cerebral faculties for help, devising the plan, *βουλή* (9.318), of using a wooden stake.²² This plan is a cunning employment of force, which will render the ogre physically incapacitated such that he cannot harm the men, but which will also enable the monster to unseal the cave. And it might not be coincidental that, before Odysseus comes up with his actual *βουλή*, the hero ponders whether Athena, a divine practitioner of *metis*,²³ would help him take vengeance upon Polyphemos (9.316-317). One might note the appropriate choice of wood for the stake (9.320), since the olive tree is associated with the goddess.²⁴ Alternatively, it has been suggested that olive wood and the olive tree are more generally associated with the hero's salvation in the *Odyssey*.²⁵

In order to ensure the success of the stake assault, Odysseus engages in several minor acts of deception along the way: fashioning the stake while Polyphemos is absent (9.315-316); concealing his weapon in the dung in the cave (9.329-330); and employing wine to lull the ogre to sleep, in preparation for the

¹⁹ *Lfgre* 2004:59-60.

²⁰ Segal 1983:27.

²¹ Schein 1970:78. There are two *thumoi* at work (9.299-305): *μεγαλήτορα θυμόν* (9.299) is an impulse towards anger, the violent behaviour of the warrior; *ἕτερος θυμὸς* (9.302) is an impulse towards restraint, a trait of the trickster; here the impulse of the trickster overcomes that of the angry warrior (Cook 1999:154). The presentation of *bie* as a product of an impulse means that it also involves some interior, albeit brief, mechanism; for further discussion on the mechanism and nuances of *thumos* in this passage, *cf.* Barnouw 2004:7-18.

²² Friedrich 1991:22; Weinberg 1986:29.

²³ Clay 1983:32; Heatherington 1976:227; Pucci 1987:16. Athena is *polyboulos* in the Homeric poems (*cf.* *Il.* 5.260, *Od.* 16.282); and Athena compares Odysseus' cunning intelligence to her own famous abilities (13.297-299).

²⁴ Weinberg 1986:28. The olive stake contrasts with the metal spit of the stock folktale ogre (Schein 1970:75).

²⁵ Schein 1970:75-76.

attack (9.333). Regarding the last of these, Odysseus displays his *metis*²⁶ very early on in this encounter by foreseeing the need to bring the wine (9.212-215).²⁷ Furthermore, the extensive narrative digression on the bestower of this wine, the Priest Maron (9.196-211; cf. 9.161-168), lends the drink further weight in the story as an important spatial object.²⁸ The wine is described as extremely potent. It is given to Odysseus in an unmixed form, ἀκηράσιον (9.205) and is a drink for the gods, θεῖον ποτόν (9.205). Not only is it a strong drink, but it has an irresistible quality: Maron hides it from his servants (9.205-207), for the temptation to indulge in the wine cannot be suppressed (9.210-211). The quality of this wine is the basis for Odysseus' next deception, in response to another violent assault by Polyphemus (9.343-344).²⁹

Odysseus' crafty speech (9.345-352) disguises his real motive for tempting Polyphemus with the intoxicating wine (to render the giant helpless/inebriated) with a secondary, false narrative, which presents the wine as an object of appeasement to the monster, a gift to render him a favourable host. Thus Odysseus' action in holding the cup with both hands is performed in the manner of a libation, an offering to soothe the monster (9.346), and this gesture is confirmed in his speech, when he directly refers to the drink as a libation, λοιβήν (9.349). Secondly, by referring to the pity which he had wrongly expected from Polyphemus, εἴ μ' ἐλέησας (9.349), Odysseus implies that this libation was originally intended as part of the Ithacan's initial supplication³⁰ towards the ogre (cf. 9.266-271), which failed to stir Polyphemus 'pitiless heart' (9.287).³¹ Thirdly, Odysseus also invokes the ogre's duty as a host in providing a *xeineion* in the form of a passage home, οἴκαδε πέμψειας (9.350); and, accordingly, Odysseus then vilifies Polyphemus as a host, declaring that he will no longer be chosen by any man as a potential host (9.351-352). In short, Odysseus' speech (9.345-352) cleverly frames the wine as an object which was intended as a libation, for the purposes of supplication and of ensuring his host's good hospitality.

That Odysseus' speech has deceived Polyphemus is indicated by the ogre's immediate acceptance of the drink (9.353), his request for seconds (9.354), and his imbibing of the potent wine on several occasions (9.360-361). Odysseus' false narrative is, ironically, repeated by the ogre, who offers the Ithacan a rather

²⁶ Odysseus displays his *thumos* (9.213). On *thumos*=*metis* at times, cf. Clay 1983:116; also Pelliccia 1995:266-267.

²⁷ Clay 1983:116.

²⁸ De Jong 2004:237-238.

²⁹ De Jong 2004:238.

³⁰ On supplication, cf. Adkins 1972:16-18; Gould 1973:74-103; Roisman 1982:35-36; Thornton 1984:113-142; Wilson 2002:28-29.

³¹ On pity in the Homeric poems, cf. Gagarin 1987:300-303; Scott 1979:1-14.

macabre form of hospitality, the gift of dying last (9.369-370), in exchange for the gift of wine (9.355-356). Deceived by the hero's crafty speech into drinking the 'libatory' alcohol, Polyphemus is physically overcome by the effects of the wine, falling into a helpless, drunken, vomiting stupor (9.371-374). Subsequently, Odysseus succeeds in blinding Polyphemus, in part an act of *bie*;³² yet his achievement is captured in two similes, one of a shipwright (9.384-386), the other of a metalworker (9.391-393), both of which convey the success of the knowledgeable, civilized man over the ignorant savage.³³

Two further obstacles for the Ithacans (the threat of Polyphemus' countrymen and the necessity to vacate the cave) are overcome by tricks. The first is brilliantly dealt with by a verbal con. After Polyphemus has asked Odysseus his name (9.355-356), the hero replies that his name is 'Nobody' — Οὐτις ἐμοί γ' ὄνομα (9.366).³⁴ Odysseus' verbal play works on two levels.³⁵ On a simple level Polyphemus only understands *Outis* as the fake name which Odysseus gives to himself; he does not comprehend here the sense of 'nobody' (lowercase), which lies behind Odysseus' construction. Thus when the other Cyclopes, having heard the shouting of their neighbour and having come to his aid (9.403-412), use the words, *me tis*, a syntactically different form of *ou tis*, to ask their compatriot: 'surely, nobody (*me tis*) has driven off your livestock or is threatening you with trickery or force', it is Polyphemus' ignorance not to make the connection between *me tis* and *ou tis*, but instead to regard *Outis* only as a proper name. 'Nobody' (uppercase)³⁶ has threatened him, which is of course understood by the neighbouring Cyclopes as answering in lowercase to their enquiry of *me tis*.³⁷ The giants walk away and leave Polyphemus to himself. Polyphemus' misunderstanding of the hero's name carries on for a while after the Cyclopes

³² Cook 1999:155.

³³ Bergren 1983:47; Clay 1983:113, 118-119. On Odysseus' skilful defeat of the ogre as a triumph of the civilized human over the primitive, physical strength of nature, cf. Austin 1983:14, 20-22; Reinhardt 1996:81-83; Segal 1962:34. In the context of Cyclopean society, the trick of employing wine, specifically, gains added significance as a measure of their intellectual shortcomings. Although Zeus has provided the Cyclopes with wine-bearing grapes (9.110-111), their lack of *techne* results in a poor yield of wine (9.355-359) (Austin 1975:145). Austin sees the Cyclopes' lack of 'curiosity about cereal agriculture' (145) as critical in leading to Polyphemus' falling prey to the strong wine of Maron.

³⁴ 'My name is Noman' (Shewring 1980:108). A trick absent in other versions of the folktale, cf. Schein 1970:79.

³⁵ Schein 1970:79.

³⁶ On the symbolic importance of Odysseus as a 'Nobody' in this encounter, as opposed to a 'Somebody', and on notions of heroic rebirth cf. Bergren 2008:64-72; Frame 1978:65-66; Segal 1962:23, 38; Simpson 1972:22-25.

³⁷ Podlecki 1961:130; Schein 1970:80.

depart (9.455, 460), until Odysseus finally announces his name to him (9.504-505).³⁸

The greater significance of the trick lies in the double sense of *me tis* (two words) as ‘nobody’ and *metis* (one word) as ‘cunning’ or ‘guile’.³⁹ Given the role which *metis* has played in this encounter and its later announcement at 9.414, a reader/listener of the poem might be encouraged to substitute ‘cunning’ (*metis*) for ‘nobody’ (*me tis*) throughout this exchange.⁴⁰ Firstly, when the Cyclopes question Polyphemos as to whether *me tis* (‘somebody’; grammatically, ‘nobody’) has driven away his sheep, *σευ μῆλα ... ἐλαύνει* (9.405), it is ironic that it is later through Odysseus’ great *metis* that the ogre’s sheep are attached to the Ithacans and later transported to their ship — in short, ‘cunning’ has indeed driven his sheep away. Secondly, the Cyclopes ask whether *me tis* (‘somebody’) has killed Polyphemos through trickery or force, *κτείνει δόλω ἢ ἐ βίῃφι* (9.406). The neighbouring Cyclopes have inadvertently hit upon the primary struggle in the encounter, between Odyssean guile (*metis* / *dolos*) and Cyclopean might (*bie*); replacing *me tis* with *metis* in line 406 points to the fact that it is certainly *metis* / *dolos* and not *bie* which had led to Polyphemos’ downfall, *σ’ αὐτὸν κτείνει* (9.406).⁴¹ Tellingly, Polyphemos himself says as much in the following line, declaring that he has been defeated by cunning, *δόλω* (9.408), and not by force, *οὐδὲ βίῃφι* (9.408).⁴² Ironically, Polyphemos’ declaration that he has been the victim of assault by *dolos*, rather than *bie* (9.408), occurs in the very line where he is once again the unwitting victim of the Ithacan’s verbal craft.

Finally, when the Cyclopes reply to Polyphemos’ statement, in reading *me tis* as *metis*, one can conclude that it is indeed ‘shrewdness’ which has harmed the solitary ogre, *εἰ μὲν δὴ μή τις σε βιάζεται* (9.410),⁴³ although naturally the Cyclopes themselves are not conscious of the layered meaning behind their words. There is a humorous paradox in the fact that it is intelligence, *metis* (9.410), which is markedly portrayed as the agent of physical violence, *βιάζεται* (9.410) in this phrase.⁴⁴ Appropriately, Odysseus directly attributes his victory to the triumph of his *metis*: *ὡς ἄρ’ ἔφην ἀπιόντες, ἐμὸν δ’ ἐγέλασσε φίλον κῆρ, / ὡς ὄνομ’*

³⁸ De Jong 2004:244; Cf. Podlecki 1961:131.

³⁹ It might also allude to the mother of Athena, *Metis*.

⁴⁰ De Jong 2004:244; Podlecki 1961:130.

⁴¹ Schein 1970:80.

⁴² Cook 1999:155, Schein 1970:79.

⁴³ ‘If no man [*read*: shrewdness] is doing you violence’ (Shewring 1980:109).

⁴⁴ Schein 1970:80. Cf. Clay 1983:120. On Poseidon as a figure of *bie*, cf. Cook 1995:55-56; Schein 1970:80.

ἐξαπάτησεν ἔμὸν καὶ μῆτις ἀμύμων (9.413-414).⁴⁵ And when Odysseus does later recollect the encounter with Polyphemos, it is twice with reference to the battle between his wits and the brawn of the ogre (12.209-212, 20.19-20).⁴⁶

Blinded and abandoned by his compatriots, Polyphemos is all but conquered. He groans aloud, στενάχων (9.415), and is assailed by pains, ὠδίνων ὀδύνησι (9.415) — the latter phrase perhaps being a linguistic pun referring to Odysseus' name, and the pain he has caused the ogre.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the monster resorts to *bie* one final time, a pitiful attempt to use bodily strength to stop the Ithacans from escaping from the cave. He gropes with his hands, χερσὶ ψηλαφόων (9.416), at the open entrance of the cave, expecting to catch some of the fleeing Ithacans as the sheep leave for the pastures. It might be argued that Polyphemos is trying his hands at a *dolos* again, offering the open cave door (9.416) as a temptation for the Ithacans to flee his abode. But Odysseus belittles this ploy by imagining what a fool, νήπιον (9.419),⁴⁸ one would have to be to fall for such a weak deception. This adjective, a term of derision denoting intellectual inadequacy,⁴⁹ is an important indicator of Polyphemos' ultimate failure to comprehend the *metis* of Odysseus in this encounter (cf. 9.273, 442). In response to the 'folly' and *bie* of the ogre, blindly snatching with his hands for a morsel, Odysseus turns to his characteristic planning, βούλευον (9.420), cunning, μῆτιν (9.422), and trickery, δόλους (9.422).⁵⁰ The hero ties his men to the underside of the ogre's sheep and clings himself onto the wool of Polyphemos' favourite ram. As a contest between *metis* and *bie*, Odysseus' tussle with Polyphemos demonstrates the superiority of polymetic ability in achieving a triumph for the Ithacan hero (cf. 12.208-212).⁵¹

In Book 10, Aeolus provides Odysseus with a gift, a clever device to aid the hero's quest to return to Ithaca; the god collects all the unfavourable winds, and

⁴⁵ 'With these words they left him again, while my own heart laughed within me to think how the name I gave and my ready wit had snared him' (Shewring 1980:109).

⁴⁶ De Jong 2004:244. Cf. Hopman 2012:5-6. For Cook (1999:155), in assuming the identity of trickster, Odysseus becomes a heroic 'nobody'; cf. Friedrich 1991:22; Hopman 2012:4-5; Segal 1983:34.

⁴⁷ Schein 1970:83. Cf. de Jong 2004:14; Segal 1962:34-35. On Odysseus' name, cf. Dimock 1956:52-70; Pucci 1998:128-129, 136; Sacks 1987:8-9.

⁴⁸ For a summary of the different contextual usages of *nepios* in the *Odyssey*, cf. de Jong 2004:230.

⁴⁹ *Lfgre* 2004:369.

⁵⁰ Podlecki 1961:131.

⁵¹ Cook 1999:156; Friedrich 1991:22. Odysseus' *metis* suffers a lapse when he hubristically mocks the ogre and boasts his real name (9.502-505), with disastrous consequences (9.528-535) (Cook 1999:155; Friedrich 1991:23-24; Hopman 2012:5; Segal 1983:34-35).

then imprisons and hides them in a pouch,⁵² which Odysseus is to keep in the hold of his ship, while the remaining favourable western wind pushes the Ithacans homeward (10.17-27).⁵³ The cunning art of the wind-bag deceives Odysseus' men, fooled by this act of divine concealment and believing the sack to contain rich gifts of hospitality from Aeolus to Odysseus (10.34-45). They therefore open the bag and the winds, once unleashed, send them back to Aeolus' isle (10.46-55). Central to their failure to reach Ithaca is the *hetairoi*'s thoughtlessness, ἀφραδίησιν (10.27), and their bad planning, βουλή ... κακή (10.46).⁵⁴

In the next episode, it is his characteristic *metis* which leads Odysseus to moor his ship outside the Laestrygonian harbour (10.95-96), while the rest of his men head into the perilous bay.⁵⁵ Odysseus' gesture of raising his sword — ἐγὼ ξίφος ὄξυ ἐρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ (10.126)⁵⁶ — when his men are being skewered from above by the giants (10.121-124), is suggestive of an act of heroic *bie* in the midst of combat. However, the hero's subsequent employment of his sword to cut the ropes fastening his ship to land and to retreat over the seas is, ironically, a means of avoiding conflict. When faced with antagonists who are proficient in *bie*, hurling heavy rocks (10.121-122) down at the ships, Odysseus' only hope for survival is the avoidance of physical engagement. Similarly, Polyphemus, also a hurler of boulders (9.481-486, 537-542), cannot be beaten by a sword (*cf.* 9.300).⁵⁷

In Aeaëa, Circe has enchanted, κατέθελξεν (10.213), mountain lions and wolves with evil drugs, κακὰ φάρμακα (10.213). These creatures do not exhibit the normal behaviour of wild animals, charging at the Ithacan ambassadors, οὐδ' οἳ γ' ὠρμήθησαν ἐπ' ἀνδράσιν (10.214), but, instead, wag their tails like dogs fawning before their masters (10.215-219). Yet the *hetairoi* do not perceive the witchcraft

⁵² For *askos* at 10.19, *cf.* 9.196.

⁵³ Another divine artifice is displayed by the cuckolded Hephaistos, who employs a net to catch the adulterous Aphrodite and Ares (a god of *bie*) (8.272-299) (Detienne & Vernant 1974:51; Olson 1989:137). On narrative parallels between Hephaistos, who is *polyphron* (*Il.* 21.355, 367) and *polymetis* (*Od.* 8.297, 327), and Odysseus as trickster, *cf.* Olson 1989:138. While gods renowned for polymetic ability (Athena, Circe, Hephaistos, Hermes) do seem to gain a certain prominence in the *Odyssey*, there are equally other instances of gods (Poseidon [5.282-296], Zeus [12.399-419]) achieving their desired ends through violence; indeed, Athena herself instigates Odysseus' purging of the suitors (22.224-235). *Metis* cannot thus be deemed an intrinsically divine characteristic, any more than *bie*; rather, the fluctuation between *metis* and *bie* on the human level is reflected on the divine plane.

⁵⁴ '[C]ounsels of folly' (Shewring 1980:114).

⁵⁵ Clay 1983:114; Frame 1978:58; Niles 1978:49. Cook (1999:160) considers the position of Odysseus' ship to be an aggressive manoeuvre.

⁵⁶ 'I snatched the keen sword from my thigh' (Shewring 1980:116).

⁵⁷ Cook 1999:160.

behind the strange behaviour of these animals, and their immediate response is to fear, ἔδδεισαν (10.219), these monsters, πέλωρα (10.219). Their reaction anticipates customary animalistic *bie* (10.214). Such a fearful response is certainly appropriate when the *hetairoi* meet the monstrous, πελώριος (9.187), Polyphemus (cf. 9.235-236, 256-257). At 10.214-219, however, the Ithacans are not encountering vicious beasts, governed by *bie*, but amiable pets; they have misunderstood the effects Circe's enchantment has produced. Their inability to comprehend and deal effectively with the witch's tricks continues in the remainder of the episode.

Upon spying the Ithacans, Circe's first act is to charm the travellers into entering her home. Her seduction is marked out by her physical beauty, θεᾶς καλλιπλοκάμοιο (10.220),⁵⁸ her lovely voice, ὀπι καλῆ (10.221), and her skill at weaving fine and charming work, λεπτά τε καὶ χαρίεντα καὶ ἀγλαὰ ἔργα (10.223).⁵⁹ Polites praises her singing as καλόν (10.227) and the singer herself as god-like (10.228), after which he recommends that the Ithacans summon the goddess (10.228). The witch hears them, calls them inside, and all the men, except Eurylochus, follow her because of their ignorance, ἀἰδρεῖησιν (10.231).⁶⁰ In the face of Circe's δόλον (10.232), the *hetairoi* are guilty of insufficient thought (cf. 10.27, 46), not displaying any *metis* when confronted with trickery. Unsurprisingly, the Ithacan companions quickly fall victim to Circe's traps, drinking the offered porridge (10.237), which has been doctored with an amnesia-inducing drug (10.235-236), and then being enclosed in pig pens as soon as she has struck them with her wand (10.237-238), thereby undergoing a transformation into swine in the process (10.239-240). Their only response to Circe's machinations is utter helplessness, weeping as they are locked in their sties, οἱ μὲν κλαίοντες ἐέρχато (10.241).⁶¹ Eurylochus fares somewhat better, recognizing the trap (10.232) and not following the herd, οἱ δ' ἅμα πάντες (10.231). Nevertheless, his subsequent reaction on the beach, once Odysseus suggests returning to the witch's house (10.261-263), is indicative of his inability to deal with Circe's sorcery and deceptions — clutching the hero's knees (10.264) in the manner of a destitute suppliant,⁶² and weeping (10.265).

Before Odysseus arrives at the witch's home, he receives rather exceptional divine guidance from Hermes, a divinity renowned for his *metis* / *doloi*, who counsels Odysseus in the appropriate ways of countering Circe's tricks.⁶³ Hermes

⁵⁸ '[T]he goddess of braided hair' (Shewring 1980:118).

⁵⁹ '[D]elicate, gleaming, delectable ... handiwork' (Shewring 1980:118).

⁶⁰ *Lfgre* 1955:278.

⁶¹ Cf. Segal 1983:35-36.

⁶² Cf. Gould 1973:76.

⁶³ Cook 1999:161; Pucci 1987:23-25.

will not allow the Ithacan to fall into the same predicament as his comrades (10.286).⁶⁴ The god identifies each of the destructive arts, ὀλοφώϊα δήνεα (10.289), which Circe will use, and then recommends certain counter-tricks to defeat the goddess. Hermes first informs Odysseus of the drug that the witch will conceal in his food (10.290). Appropriately, Hermes' ploy is for the hero to meet Circe's deception of a concealed drug with another concealed drug, φάρμακον (10.287), a herb called μῶλυ (10.305). The consumption or utilization of this plant will mitigate the magic of Circe's drugged porridge: ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὧς θέλξει σε δυνήσεται· οὐ γὰρ ἐάσει / φάρμακον ἐσθλόν, ὃ τοι δώσω (10.291-292).⁶⁵ Indeed, Circe's later employment of her drug fails to enchant Odysseus, οὐδέ μ' ἔθελξε (10.318). Hermes has helped Odysseus fight trickery with trickery.

Circe's second trick will be to suddenly strike Odysseus with her magic wand (10.293; cf. 10.237-238). Hermes advises that Odysseus counter this attack with a direct assault of his own, charging upon the witch with his sword (10.294-295). This is not an instance of genuine *bie*; instead, it is feigned *bie*, a simulation of force — ὧς (10.295). Hermes' counter-trick parallels Circe's original trick. In both cases, instruments are used by the tricksters and in both cases the trick is conducted as a surprise attack: Circe strikes the *hetairoi* with her wand immediately after their meal, αὐτίκ' ἔπειτα (10.237); Odysseus rushes at Circe with his sword after she commands him to head to the pig sties. The witch's surprise is indicated by her panicked reaction: ἡ δὲ μέγα ἰάχουσα ὑπέδραμε καὶ λάβε γούνων / καὶ μ' ὀλοφυρομένη ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα (10.323-324).⁶⁶ Circe responds to Odysseus' 'assault' with vocal distress: ἰάχουσα (10.323), and ὀλοφυρομένη (10.324; cf. 10.241). Then Circe turns into a suppliant, putting herself at the mercy of Odysseus' assault and grabbing his knees (10.323; cf. 10.264).

Circe's reactions to Odysseus' tricks indicate his superiority over her in this encounter; he has employed counter-tricks which are similar to Circe's original ploys, but which, through Hermes' divine aid, help him in overcoming Circe.⁶⁷ Indeed, Circe hails Odysseus' status as a πολύτροπος (10.330) hero, after his successful defeat of her machinations.⁶⁸ In the same breath she mentions another

⁶⁴ 'I am ready to save you from all hazards' (Shewring 1980:120).

⁶⁵ 'Yet even so, she will not be able to enchant you; my gift of the magic herb will thwart her' (Shewring 1980:120).

⁶⁶ 'She shrieked, she slipped underneath my weapon, she clasped my knees and spoke in rapid, appealing words' (Shewring 1980:121).

⁶⁷ Austin 1975:212.

⁶⁸ Clay 1983:30.

polytropic individual, Hermes, as the one who warned her of the Ithacan's arrival.⁶⁹ In contrast to his mindless comrades (*cf.* 10.27, 46, 231), Odysseus, according to Circe, has a mind, νόος (10.329), which is protected from the witch's magic, ἀκήλητος (10.329).

Hermes warns Odysseus of Circe's third form of trickery, seducing Odysseus to go to bed with her and then emasculating him (10.296, 301).⁷⁰ This manoeuvre is to be countered by Odysseus' insisting that Circe swear an oath against harming him or emasculating him (10.299), which she duly does (10.345). Circe's seduction is derided by Odysseus when the hero wonders just how silly, ἥπιον (10.337), Circe thinks him to be: with his friends animalized (10.338), the δολοφρονέουσα (10.339) woman commands him to go to bed with her (10.340). The term ἥπιον (10.337) is employed by the superior trickster to deride the inferior cunning of Circe.

In Book 11, in Agamemnon's recounting of his death in the Underworld (11.421-434), Clytemnestra, described as δολόμητις (11.422),⁷¹ is an infamous practitioner of trickery. Machinations lie behind her actions, μετὰ φρεσὶν ἔργα βάληται (11.428), since she disguises a place of murder as a festive banquet (11.410-411, 430-432). Odysseus explicitly describes her perfidious actions as a form of trickery: σοὶ δὲ Κλυταιμνήστρη δόλον ἤρτυε (11.439);⁷² she and Helen both ruined their husbands because of their feminine plotting, γυναικείας διὰ βουλᾶς (11.437). Clytemnestra's deceit utterly conquers Agamemnon, who can muster no suitable response to her machinations.⁷³ Like Eurylochus (*cf.* 10.264-265), Agamemnon resorts to pitiful supplication; all he can do in opposition to his wife's deceit is to plead to the Underworld for vengeance against her crime, ποτὶ γαίῃ χειῖρας ἀείρων (11.423).⁷⁴ The failure of Agamemnon's brand of heroism is also evident in Book 9, when Odysseus identifies himself to Polyphemus through the fame of the leader of the Greeks (9.263-266). Agamemnon's *kleos* (9.264) is built upon *bie*: sacking a town, διέπερσε πόλιν (9.265), and slaughtering his enemy, ἀπόλεσε λαοὺς (9.265); Odysseus' boast, however, does not have the

⁶⁹ Clay 1983:30-31. On the ambiguity of the term *polytropos*, as referring both to Odysseus' spatial wanderings and his mental wanderings, a suffering hero and a trickster hero, *cf.* Clay 1983:29, 31, de Jong 2004:7, Pucci's 1987:62.

⁷⁰ On the encounter as a sexual power struggle, *cf.* Nagler 1996:156, Pucci 1998:160, Van Nortwick 2009:54-55.

⁷¹ *Lfgre* 1991:328-329. For another negatively characterized instance of *dolos*, *cf.* *Il.* 15.14; Pucci 1987:61, n. 21.

⁷² '[N]ow there is this betrayal by Clytemnestra, plotted [against you]' (Shewring 1980:138).

⁷³ Segal 1983:31-32.

⁷⁴ Heubeck & Hoekstra 1989:103. Agamemnon's helplessness, his lack of heroic agency, is illustrated by his 'transformation' into an ox, primed for slaughter (11.411); Agamemnon's companions become 'swine' (11.412-415).

slightest effect on his ‘host’. Associating himself with a practitioner of *bie* does Odysseus little good.⁷⁵

In Book 12, the danger of the Sirens is first related to Odysseus by Circe (12.39-54), who, like Hermes (10.281-301), guides Odysseus, describing the seductive trap of the Sirens and the required trick to bypass them. Like Hermes, dubbed *polytropos* in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (lines 13, 439), Circe is given the epithets *δολόεσσα* (9.32) and *δολοφρονέουσα* (10.339) in the *Odyssey*.⁷⁶ In both encounters Odysseus is thus aided by a supernatural master of trickery in overcoming a foe[s] who is an accomplished trickster.⁷⁷

There are further points of tangency between the trickery of the Sirens and Circe (as a witch [W], not as a guide [G]). The Sirens overcome their opponents through their vocal abilities: they endanger passing travellers who overhear their voice[s], *φθόγγον ἀκούση* (12.41), a seduction which is comprised of a clear singing voice, *λυγυρή ... ἀοιδῆ* (12.44).⁷⁸ Moreover, their voice seems to contain a certain magical quality which is an essential ingredient in overcoming their victims: they enchant men, *θέλγουσιν* (12.40), with their song (12.44), and this charm is so potent that no men, *πάντας / ἀνθρώπους* (12.39-40), can resist it. Similarly, Circe’s (W) trickery is manifested through her vocal abilities (10.221, 227) and has an overwhelming effect on the Ithacans (10.231). While Circe’s magical ability is not explicitly linked to her vocal seduction, there are multiple references to her skill in enchantment: *κατέελξε*ν (10.213), *θέλξει* (10.291), *ἔθελε* (10.318), and *ἐθέλχθη*ς (10.326).⁷⁹

The failure to deal with the Sirens’ trap is explained in terms of a mindlessness or a witlessness. Circe refers to the ignorance, *ἄτρεψι* (12.41), of those travellers who come near to the Sirens and are overcome by their enchanted melodies (12.39-43) (*cf.* 10.231, 257). The victory which the Sirens’ enchanted song wins over passing sailors is twofold: the victim of the magical voices of these creatures will forget about his homecoming, *οἴκαδε νοστήσαντι* (12.43; *cf.* 10.236), his wife, *γυνή* (12.42), and his children, *τέκνα* (12.42); and, furthermore, he will die in a horrible manner, as revealed by the grim remains of men on their island (12.45-46).⁸⁰ Circe (G) counters a trick with a trick. The sailors’ ears are to be stuffed with wax to safeguard against their vocal bewitchment (12.47-49), while Odysseus is to be tied to the ship’s mast to allow him to be, briefly, seduced (12.49-52). Both trick and counter-trick are in some respect ‘sweetened’: the

⁷⁵ Segal 1983:33; *cf.* Griffin 1980:56.

⁷⁶ *LfgRE* 1991:328, 330-331.

⁷⁷ Pucci 1987:22.

⁷⁸ Segal 1983:38.

⁷⁹ Segal 1983:38.

⁸⁰ For parallels between the Lotus Eaters and the Sirens, *cf.* Segal 1983:40.

honeyed voice of the Sirens, μελίηρον (12.187), versus the honey-sweet wax of Circe, μελιηδέα (12.48); a sweetened trick requires a suitably sweetened trick as an antidote.⁸¹ Circe's instructions are heeded by the Ithacans when they approach the Sirens' island (12.173-200).

The Sirens' song provides a further temptation for Odysseus, presenting an Iliadic model of heroism. The promised content of their song is based on the sufferings of the Greeks and Trojans in Troy, and the divine caprice behind their toils (12.189-190).⁸² Odysseus is addressed as μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν (12.184),⁸³ a title which is only bestowed upon him here in the entire *Odyssey*, and which is generally far more prevalent in the *Iliad*.⁸⁴ Reversion to an 'Iliadic model'⁸⁵ (*cf.* 9.259-266) threatens Odysseus with failure in his quest to return home; the Sirens are trying to persuade Odysseus to become a hero of *bie*, one of the great Trojan warriors who fought on the battlefield, but such a temptation leads only to ruin, as the rotten corpses on the Sirens' island indicate. To become a hero of *bie* is to live in the fetid stagnation of the past.⁸⁶

Scylla is primarily a character who employs *bie*, and her slaughter of the Ithacan sailors must to a large extent be considered a result of her physical prowess (12.86-100). Certainly, the ability to devour six men at once (12.110) and to pluck cetaceans from the ocean (12.95-97) indicates that *bie* is her chief attribute. At the point of her attack she is compared to a fisherman who throws down bait, δόλον (12.252),⁸⁷ in order to catch fish (12.251-254), which is reminiscent of a fish-catching simile applied to the crafty Odysseus later in the poem, after his plotting against the suitors has paid off (22.383-389).⁸⁸ If Scylla were to employ bait in her assault, she might indeed be considered a trickster figure. The point of comparison in the simile, however, does not lie in the throwing of bait by the agent (12.251-253), but, instead, the manner in which the captured men and fish are hauled out of the water / from the ship:⁸⁹ ἀσπαίροντα δ' ἔπειτα λαβῶν ἔρριψε θύραζε, / ὥς οἱ γ'

⁸¹ Segal 1983:38.

⁸² Cook 1995:59; Segal 1983:38-39.

⁸³ '[Y]ou pride and glory of all Achaea' (Shewring 1980:147).

⁸⁴ On the competition between Achilles and Odysseus to become the 'best of the Achaeans', *cf.* Nagy 1979:22-25.

⁸⁵ Other modes of heroism are possible in the *Iliad*, including via *metis*, *cf.* Dunkle 1987.

⁸⁶ Segal 1983:38-40. Desire for death on the battlefield is a defining characteristic of the Iliadic hero, *cf.* Clay 1983:108-109; Finkelberg 1995:1.

⁸⁷ For the origin of the Greek vocabulary of *dolos* and *metis* in physical acts of hunting and/ or fishing, *cf.* Detienne & Vernant 1974:54-56.

⁸⁸ *Cf.* Detienne & Vernant 1974:53-54; Sluiter 2014:821-824.

⁸⁹ Sluiter 2014:822.

ἀσπαίροντες αἰείοντο προτὶ πέτρας (12.254-255).⁹⁰ The writhing of the captured fish/men is manifestly compared through the repetition of ἀσπαίροντα (12.254) and ἀσπαίροντες (12.255), and whereas the fisherman throws the fish out of the water, ἔρριψε θύραζε (12.254), Odysseus' men are raised from the sea and their ship onto the land / the rocks of Scylla's home, αἰείοντο προτὶ πέτρας (12.255).

Scylla's attack does not entail any actual lure. While some fish similes in later Greek literature⁹¹ might be associated with an act of luring, the Homeric similes occur more frequently in contexts of violent slaying, between a rampaging warrior (fisherman) and his helpless victims (fish) (*cf.* *Il.* 5.487, 16.406, 21.22, *Od.* 10.124).⁹² They are more appropriate to scenes of *bie* than scenes of *metis*, wherein a character makes use of brute force to overwhelm his opponent(s).⁹³

Against Scylla's *bie*, Odysseus is determined to confront the monster with *bie* himself. After Circe's explicit preparation regarding the monster's dangers (12.86-110), the hero enquires whether he might make a defence, ἀμυναίμην (12.114), against her, so that he does not lose any of his men (12.114).⁹⁴ Circe censures Odysseus's intended *bie*, asking the Ithacan whether his mind is set on warfare, πολεμῆϊα ἔργα (12.116) — a phrase which only occurs here in the *Odyssey*.⁹⁵ Scylla is not to be engaged in battle, οὐδὲ μαχητόν (12.119), since physical strength is futile against her, οὐδέ τις ἔστ' ἀλκή (12. 120); any attempted arming on Odysseus' part, κορυσσόμενος (12.121) will only result in the death of even more of his sailors (12.122-123).⁹⁶

Odysseus forsakes the good advice of the goddess, and, when his ship is approaching the hazards of Scylla and Charybdis, the hero chooses to arm himself (10.12.223-231). The arming sequence is elaborate, and distinctly Iliadic in the choice of vocabulary.⁹⁷ At no other time in the Wanderings does Odysseus go to such lengths to prepare himself for battle. And yet this preparation has absolutely no effect on the outcome of his encounter with Scylla: the men are plucked from the ship with a sudden assault which catches Odysseus totally unawares (12.243-

⁹⁰ 'Then [the fisherman] seizes the creatures one by one and throws them ashore still writhing; so Scylla swung my writhing companions up to the rocks' (Shewring 1980:148).

⁹¹ *Cf.* Detienne & Vernant 1974:53-54.

⁹² Scott 1974:75; *cf.* de Jong 2004:305; Sluiter 2014:822-824. On fish in Homer, *cf.* Berdowski 2008.

⁹³ Hopman 2012:16.

⁹⁴ *Cf.* Hopman 2012:13.

⁹⁵ Hopman 2012:13-14.

⁹⁶ *Cf.* Hopman 2012:14.

⁹⁷ Hopman 2012:14-15.

250). The armour and the weapons have no use. Heroic *bie* fails to assist Odysseus to defend his men.⁹⁸

In all the examined episodes, polymetic ability, or a lack thereof, determines the success of the hero / characters involved in the interactions. Odysseus defeats the pure *bie* of Polyphemus through a detailed sequence of several deceptions; Circe easily gets the better of Odysseus' mindless men through her craft and natural wiles; Odysseus, in turn, with the help of the cunning Hermes, subdues Circe through counter-tricks; deceitful Clytemnestra overcomes the helpless hero Agamemnon, who, at least in the Wanderings, is to be associated with actions of *bie*; Odysseus deals with the Sirens' trickery by employing a trickster's counter-tricks; and, finally, Scylla inflicts damage on the Ithacans despite Odysseus' foolishly electing a martial approach.

The interactions in the Wanderings in *Odyssey* 9 to 12 have the important function of solidifying Odysseus' outstanding heroic quality: his practical intelligence, leading to his brilliant employment of tricks, through which he outwits his various adversaries and overcomes obstacles. This prowess has broader relevance to the story of the Return. Odysseus' polymetic ability is a powerful way in which the poem unites husband and wife, Odysseus and Penelope.⁹⁹ Penelope's own *kleos* as a woman, her characteristic fidelity (11.444-446), is dependent on her exhibition of *dolos*, primarily through her nightly deception of the suitors in weaving and un-weaving the shroud on her loom, on completion of which she would marry one of them (*cf.* 19.136-137).¹⁰⁰

And the hero's successful vanquishing of the suitors in his home is, in several ways, a result of his polymetic abilities.¹⁰¹ (i) His disguise as a beggar affords him entry into his *oikos* without arousing the suspicions of the suitors; (ii) he advises Telemachus to stow away armour and the weapons so that the suitors cannot get their hands on them — and this act of concealment also involves the manufacturing of a lie to deceive the suitors (19.4-13); (iii) he restrains himself from openly attacking the treacherous maids who have been sleeping with the suitors (20.18-21), until he has devised a suitable plan for dealing with the suitors

⁹⁸ Cook 1999:161-162; Griffin 1980:56-57; Reinhardt 1996:74-75; Segal 1983:26-27. Indeed, in proof of the ineptitude of mere force, we are told that the six strongest of Odysseus' men, οἱ χερσὶν τε βίηφι τε φέρτατοι ἦσαν (12.246), were consumed.

⁹⁹ *Cf.* Fredricksmeyer 1997; Harsh 1950.

¹⁰⁰ Segal 1983:30-32. For trickery as a device associated often with women, and its connection to metaphors of weaving and spinning, *cf.* Murnaghan 1995:64. On the importance of weaving in the poem, *cf.* Felson-Rubin 1996:167-168, Schein 1996:26-27. On the Wanderings, in general, as a femininized sphere of action, *cf.* Schein 1995:19, Van Nortwick 2009:50-61.

¹⁰¹ Hopman 2012:24.

(20.22-30); and (iv) immediately prior to the attack on the suitors, Odysseus gets Eumaeus and Philoetius to ensure that all exits from his house are sealed, denying the suitors an escape from the hall (21.234-241). In short, in the build-up to the purging of the suitors, Odysseus' tricks include disguise, concealment, crafty speech, and entrapment.

Odysseus' trap certainly does play out with a grotesque amount of violence, *bie*, and Odysseus, like the reckless Polyphemus earlier in the poem, is compared to a lion in his slaughter of the suitors (22.402).¹⁰² But just as in Odysseus' defeat of Polyphemus, it is not so much the absence of *bie* in an heroic endeavour but rather its partnering with *metis* which ensures the success of an action.¹⁰³ Pure, reckless violence, 'unrestrained *bie*',¹⁰⁴ however, without any thought behind it cannot achieve victory in the *Odyssey*, and Odysseus is, accordingly, admonished by Athena at the end of the poem when the desire for heedless slaughter takes hold of him (24.537-538).

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¹⁰² Wilson 2002:140-141; cf. Allan 2006:23-25; Nagler 1990:341-342.

¹⁰³ Cf. Cook 1995:32

¹⁰⁴ Wilson 2002:141.

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