

## HORACE'S *EPOD.* 17, 10

The beginning of Horace's Epode 17 takes the traditional form of a palinode, i. e. a poem written to retract accusations expressed in an earlier work.<sup>1</sup> Pleading with Canidia to temper justice with mercy, Horace makes some mythological examples of an anger quitted. Among others there is Achilles' anger against Hector and the Trojans, when he harkens to Priam's supplication and allows Hector's dead body to be buried. The Epode contains verses 10–14 as follows:

*unxere* matres Iliae additum feris  
alibus atque canibus homicidam Hectorem,  
postquam relictis moenibus rex procidit  
heu pervicacis ad pedes Achillei.

The Iliion mothers *anointed* the body of the man-slaying Hector, who had been condemned to wild birds and dogs, after the king having left the city prostrated himself at the feet of the too obstinate Achilles.

The manuscript tradition attests two variants for the first word of the passage: *unxere*, which means 'they anointed', and *luxere*, which means 'they bewailed'.<sup>2</sup>

As both readings are possible textologically and the common opinion considers the two textual traditions of Horace as equivalent, we can rely only on the context of the passage to decide whether anointing or bewailing was intended in the original text.

Brink<sup>3</sup> and Watson<sup>4</sup> have systematised the arguments to support each reading:

Pro *luxere*:

– The subject accompanying the disputable predicate is the plural *matres* which implies an action that could be done by many women and that usually happened with the ritual lamentation, but not with anointing.

---

<sup>1</sup> Epode 17 can be a palinode for Epode 5 (and perhaps 8 and 12). Canidia is mentioned also in *Sermones* (1, 8; 2, 1, 48; 2, 8, 95).

<sup>2</sup> *luxere*  $\Xi$  acc.  $\lambda$ : *unxere*  $\Psi$  acc. Q.

<sup>3</sup> C. O. Brink, "Horatian Notes III", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* N. S. 28 (1982) 44–47.

<sup>4</sup> L. C. Watson, *A Commentary on Horace's Epodes* (Oxford – New York 2003) ad loc.

- In the *Iliad* the Trojan women do not anoint Hector’s body (it was done by Achilles’ slaves before giving the corpse away [*Il.* 24, 587–588], and earlier by Aphrodite [*Il.* 23, 185–187]), but bewail him (*Il.* 24, 725–775).
- Bewailing was a crucial part of Greek funeral rituals (cf. epic expression ἄκλαυστος καὶ ἄταφος, ‘unwept and unburied’).

Pro ‘*unxere*’:

- Anointing explicitly requires the corpse, while bewailing is possible without it: the Trojans bewail Hector’s death before the ransom of the body: *Il.* 22, 405–11; 430–436; 477–515. Meanwhile in a ritual aspect and as a part of funeral cults, bewailing required the dead body in place either.

All mentioned arguments are controversial. Expression *matres Iliae* is somewhat strange and might have been intended as an imitation of the Homer’s Τρῶες ἄλοχοι (‘the Trojan wives’).<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile even in the case of anointing the Epeode reader can miss a dissonance between the usual ritual practice and the plural in the sentence.

It is also unclear how closely Horace follows Homer’s narration. The poet might have used the plot without exact following details of the poem (see below a similar case of Horace using Homer).

Besides, the question of whether the reading *luxere* describes the ritual bewailing is extremely relevant.<sup>6</sup> If in this passage the verb *lugeo* has a more general meaning (‘to bewail’, i. e. ‘to mourn’, ‘to lament’, etc), then, as E. Wickham points out,<sup>7</sup> an ambiguity appears, since the phrase “the Trojan wives have bewailed Hector” has two possible interpretations: “they bewailed his death” and “they bewailed his burial”.

As the arguments of both sides are not conclusive, opinions of the editors and commentators have been divided: Lambinus in edition of 1561, Bentley, Brink, Campbell and Shackleton-Bailey accept *luxere*, while Lambinus’ edition of 1567,<sup>8</sup> Kiessling and Heinze, L. Müller,<sup>9</sup> Klingner and Borszák prefer *unxere*.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Brink (n. 3) supposes it does, and Watson and Mankin refer to his argument.

<sup>7</sup> E. C. Wickham (ed.), *The Works of Horace* (Oxford 31896) ad loc.

<sup>8</sup> Lambinus changed his mind mainly by referring to examples when bewailing had been performed with a body absent.

<sup>9</sup> Q. Horati Flacci *Carmina*. Rec. L. Mueller (Lipsiae 31904) ad loc.

<sup>10</sup> According to my observation, the latest commentators (Watson [n. 4], D. Mankin [ed.], *Horace, Epodes* [Cambridge 1995] and Brink [see n. 3]) prefer the *luxere*, perhaps as it gives more opportunities to discuss Homer’s text and realities related to funeral rites, which is not relevant for answering the question.

Without claiming to solve this long-discussed question, I would like to put forward two new arguments to support the reading *unxere*. The first is lexical and the second derives from the similarities between the discussed fragment and the *Carm.* 1, 10.

The question of whether the verb *lugeo* can stand for ritual bewailing, which implies the presence of the dead body, is the first to be considered. Of the two contexts given by the *OLD* only one<sup>11</sup> refers to funeral circumstances. Moreover, the emotion-related meaning (grieve) is more typical for this verb than action-related (cry, bewail the dead aloud). The latter meaning is more usual for Latin verbs *flere* (a general verb with the meaning 'to cry') and *plorare* ('to weep aloud', 'to wail', 'to deplore'). The verb *lugeo* could be thus perfectly used in a scene of the Trojans' mourning for their hero, without allusions to bewailing as a part of the funeral ritual, which consists of certain actions and words rather than emotions. Therefore the ambiguity, which should be avoided, remains, as the Trojans could have bewailed Hector's death before the ransom of his body.

The second argument concerns a relationship between Homer's narration and Horace's poems.

In this regard, verses 13–16 of Ode 1, 10 (hymn to Mercury) are relevant, as they contain the same plot, i. e. Priam's visit to Achilles:

Quin et Atridas duce te superbos  
 Ilio dives Priamus relicto  
 Thessalosque ignis et iniqua Troiae  
 Castra fefellit.

And the wealthy Priam too under your guidance having departed from Ilium deceived the proud sons of Atreus, and the Thessalian watch-lights, and the camp unfair to Troy.

Here, like in the case of the Epode, the text of the *Iliad* might have served as a source; in the meantime, the way of using a model by Horace is more explicit in this poem. To make the action more expressive, Horace introduces details that have not been mentioned in Homer, i. e. watch-lights of the Myrmidons.

Especially because of the same myth mentioned in this poem, these verses show that Horace uses events from the *Iliad* with an addition of his own details. Meanwhile, some arguments on behalf of *luxere* are based upon absolute correspondence of Horace's poem to the *Iliad* text, even in details: the Trojans do not anoint, but bewail Hector's body, which is annointed by Achilles' slaves. Both details seem to be insignificant and could be easily missed by ancient and contemporary readers alike, as for example two lines only describe the anointing in a camp scene.

---

<sup>11</sup> Stat. *Silv.* 3, 3, 132.

Thus, the arguments supporting the reading *luxere* are getting significantly fewer in number which makes both readings equal and we have to resort to the arguments based upon images created with these two verbs. To my mind, as anointing is a material process, it gives a stronger impression by conjuring up a picture of a family that has received the dead body. Moreover, this reading does not lead to an ambiguity as anointing undoubtedly implies a body present at the funeral. For the first position in a strophe a verb with a stronger meaning would be preferable: a poet would not have taken a risk of ambiguity at the beginning of a mythic exemplar.

At the same time, this argument is not be conclusive by its nature, and thus one should admit that other arguments on behalf of one or the other reading balance up remarkably well: palaeographical and codicological data do not help solving the problem, the usage of both verbs makes sense, and even the correlation with Homer's narration can be used in both cases. Comparing these two readings seems to result in their recognition as equal, as the editors of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries did. Nevertheless, to choose the better option in view of usage, one should prefer the reading *unxere*.\*

Sofia Egorova  
*St. Petersburg State University*  
*Bibliotheca classica Petropolitana*

Автор рассматривает рукописные варианты *unxere* и *luxere* в *Эпиде* Горация 17, 10 (*unxere / luxere matres Iliac <...> Nestorem...*). Часть аргументов в пользу чтения *luxere* ('оплакали') основана на понимании его как обозначения *ритуального оплакивания*, а также на сопоставлении стихотворения Горация с текстом *Илиады*. В статье приводится критика обоих положений, тогда как второй вариант – *unxere* ('умаслили') – как обладающий более сильным значением признается предпочтительным.

---

\* I would like to thank Olga Lysenko and Natalie Tchernetska for improving the English of this article.