Lycophron, ἄρδις, and the Death of Paris

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Lycophron offers two, contrasting, perspectives on the death of Paris: that of his Trojan wife, Oenone (Alex. 57-68), and that of Philoctetes, the Greek hero who killed him (Alex. 911-929).¹ Lycophron uses the death, not to lament Paris, but to explore the destructive power of Eros and to denigrate Greek heroism.² He deploys a rare noun, ἄρδις (‘arrow point’), one used by both Herodotus and Callimachus, to develop these themes.³

It is characteristic of Lycophron to invite intertextual readings through the use of a single word.⁴ Here, however, he deploys allusions to earlier authors in order to highlight two different strands, a Scythian and an erotic, of the same

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¹ I quote Lycophron from Hornblower (scholia from Leone 2002); Herodotus from Wilson 2015; Callimachus from Harder 2012 and Pfeiffer 1949; Dosiadas from Kwapisz 2013. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. CA = Powell 1925; Hornblower = Hornblower 2015.
² For the powerful role of Eros in the poem see, e.g., West 1984, 147-149 and Hornblower ad 34; that the Alexandra offers a thoroughgoing denigration of Greek κλέος, see, e.g., McNelis and Sens 2016, 101-130. On the death of Paris in the Little Iliad, note West 2013, 186-188; on Paris and the complex question of culpability in the Alexandra, see McNelis and Sens 2016, 225-229.
³ Lycophron deeply engages with both authors: see, e.g., Hornblower 19-20 (Herodotus); 27-31 (Callimachus). Hornblower ad 930 and 941 persuasively argues that the Alexandra is most likely post-Callimachean. Lycophron also knew A. Pr. well; see, e.g., McNelis and Sens 2016: 54-55. The nine attestations of ἄρδις are: Herodotus 1.215.1; 4.81.4, 5, 6; A. Pr. 880; Call. Fr. 70.2; 71. Harder; Lycophron Alex. 63, 914; Dosiadas 18. ἄρδις at Alex. 63 was unusual enough for the scholiast to gloss it: τόξοις.
⁴ For example, Herodotus, among others, used the (slightly more common) word, ἀμφίβληστρον, in its literal sense of ‘net’ (1.141.2; 2.95.2). Aeschylus, however, deployed it metaphorically to refer to the fatal garment (εἷμα) that Clytemnestra threw round Agamemnon in his bath (Ag. 1382; Ch. 492), an extension in meaning that the other tragedians enthusiastically adopted and adapted (S. Tr. 1052; E. Hel. 1079; IT 96; A. Pr. 81). When Lycophron then refers to the murder of Agamemnon (Alex. 1101; 1375), he also uses ἀμφίβληστρον, the exact Aeschylean metaphorical usage for the same scenario.
meaning of the same word. Lycophron associates Philoctetes with Scythia through the use of ἄρδις. In the Greek imaginary, Scythia was one of the most potent signs of the Other and it embodied all that was barbarian and servile. When Lycophron connects Philoctetes to this established tradition, he powerfully degrades him. Lycophron also alludes to Callimachus’ Acontius and Cydippe episode wherein we first find the erotic strand of ἄρδις. Lycophron uses this allusion to present the broken Oenone and Paris as the polar opposites of the happy Acontius and Cydippe: the ἄρδις of Eros that earlier produced love in Acontius and eventually led to his marriage to Cydippe now strikes Oenone with desire and leads to her doom along with Paris.

ἄρδις had Scythian associations. Herodotus describes an enormous bronze vessel in Scythia that was made after a census: the Scythian king, Ariantias, ordered each citizen, on pain of death, to bring him an arrow point (4.81). He then made a vessel from the vast quantity that had been deposited. Herodotus uses ἄρδις three times in this section (4.81.4-6). He also does so when he describes the ways in which the Massagetae live and wage war like the Scythians. Herodotus notes that the Massagetae had only bronze arrow points: ὅσα μὲν γὰρ ἐς αἰχμὰς καὶ ἄρδις καὶ σαγάρις, χαλκῷ τὰ πάντα χρέωνται (“they use bronze for all their spear points and arrow points and battle-axes,” 1.215.1). The nuance of the only attested use of ἄρδις in tragedy now becomes clearer. In Prometheus Bound, a play prominently set in remotest Scythia, the frenzied Io refers to the gadfly that drives her from that land by the kenning, οἴστρου δ’ ἄρδις ... ἀπυρος

5 With his treatment of ἄρδις, Lycophron thus mirrors the well-known device of using the same word in different senses (e.g., Hornblower ad 895 εὐχάς; cf. Alex. 288; 620), a stylistic feature common in Hellenistic poets (e.g., Call. Ap. 76 with Williams 1978 ad οὖλος Ἀριστοτέλης; etc.).

6 On the fundamental role that Scythia played in the formation of the Greek opposition between Hellene and Barbarian see Hartog 1988; etc. It could be a strong slur to allege that a fellow Greek was a barbarian or descended from one (e.g., D. 21.148-150). An accusation that someone was Scythian was a particularly venomous form of this slur: in Attic comedy see Ar. Ach. 704 (the Chorus assails Euathlus: τῇ Σκυθῶν ἐρημίᾳ) with Olson 2002 ad Ach. 706-707; Ehrenberg 1974, 175; in tragedy, see Hall 1989, x, 113-116, 138-139, and General Index, s.v. “Scythia, Scythians”; in fourth century oratory, Aeschines’ violent attack on Demosthenes: Σκύθης, βάρβαρος, ἑλληνίζων τῇ φωνῇ (3.172); etc.

7 ἄρδις at 1.215.1 is attested only in A; all of the other principal MSS (Wilson’s d) read φαρέτρας. Aristarchus in his ὑπόμνημα on the first book of Herodotus felt the need to gloss σαγάρις here (P. Amherst 12 col. II 10-16). Strabo draws upon this Herodotus passage for his own description of the Massagetae; he keeps σαγάρις, but offers the banal τόξα in place of ἄρδις: τόξοι δὲ χρώνται καὶ μαχαίραις καὶ θώραξι καὶ σαγάρεσι χαλκαῖς (11.8.6).