

A Sign of Zeus' Favor: The Use of *Χειμών* in the *Iliad*

A general understanding of the semiotics of natural phenomena is ubiquitous in Homeric poetry and is often related to concepts of divine favor or scorn: thunder and eagles represent Zeus, earthquakes come from Poseidon, deer belong to Artemis. While such natural phenomena such as sneezes and bird signs have been addressed by modern scholarship (Lateiner, 2005; Lonsdale, 1989), no one has fully investigated the implications in Homeric poetry of winter, *χειμών*, “winter, winter storms”. Rosenmeyer (1978) and Cronin (2001) both discuss the significance of winter weather portents, but they situate their conversations within the context of later Greek works. On the contrary, my study of *χειμών* will narrow its scope to the *Iliad* exclusively and argue that *χειμών* is used to signify Zeus's favor towards an individual or group of people.

This paper limits itself exclusively to the use of *χειμών* within the *Iliad*. Previous scholarship discussing the implications of winter weather depended on later sources to draw their conclusions. As evidenced by the very discussion of weather lore in later sources, it is probable that the use of natural phenomena enjoyed a general meaning for a Greek speaking audience. However, by examining a term's use, in this case *χειμών*, within the Homeric context alone, a baseline interpretation can be established. Within the *Iliad*, Rosenmeyer (1978) treated *νιφάς*, noticing that it appeared only within similes in the *Iliad*. The aim of his research was to decipher what quality of snow the similes were concerned with be it speed, or density, or violence. With the knowledge that special attention was given to winter language within the *Iliad*, as opposed to the *Odyssey*, this study focuses its attention on the former work.

This paper will examine each of the instances of the forms of *χειμών* used within the *Iliad*. When compared with other wintery language, *νιφάς* and *χιών*, the frequency of *χειμών* is lopsided within the text. Of its eleven uses, *χειμών* and its forms appear only twice after book 17. I argue that the reason for this drastic decrease is owed to the removal of Zeus' favor from the Trojan side of the battle. The work indicates *χειμών*'s affiliation with Zeus by using it in tandem with other natural phenomena indicative of his presence (Homer, *Iliad* 3.2-4, 17.548-549). Furthermore, *χειμών* and its forms appear within several metaphors describing the Trojan attacks against Greeks (Homer, *Iliad* 2.291-294, 12.279-281, 13.136-139). The comparisons between the Trojans and *χειμών* decrease after Zeus removes his favor from the Trojans and Achilles returns to combat. While most of the uses of *χειμών* can be understood in terms of Trojan might, its use in describing the martial strength of Diomedes and Telemonian Ajax (Homer, *Iliad* 5.88, 11.493) disproves that *χειμών* is specific to the Trojan force. Rather, a careful reading of the metaphors in which *χειμών* appears shows that its presence indicates Zeus' favor. By uncovering a consistent meaning of *χειμών* within the *Iliad*, this study provides the groundwork for later scholarship interpreting its implications among the natural phenomena in the ancient Greek culture.

Bibliography

- Cronin, Patrick. 2001. "Weather lore as a source of Homeric imagery." *Ελληνικά* 51, no. 1: 7-24.
- Lateiner, Donald. 2005. "Telemachos' one sneeze and Penelope's two laughs (Odyssey 17.541-50, 18.158-68)." In *Approaches to Homer, ancient & modern*, edited by Rabel, Robert J. and Burgess, Jonathan Seth. Swansea: Classical Press of Wales. 91-104.
- Lonsdale, Steven H. 1989. "If Looks Could Kill: Παπταίνω and the Interpenetration of Imagery and Narrative in Homer." *The Classical Journal* 84, no. 4: 325-33.

Rosenmeyer, Thomas G. 1978. "On Snow and Stones: In Memory of Hermann Fränkel." *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 11: 209–25.