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‘Sleeping the Brazen Slumber’ – A Cognitive Approach to Hom. *Il*. 11.241

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Abstract: Due to the general acceptance of oral poetry theory, Homeric metaphors have generally been regarded as formulaic set pieces with little or no contextual meaning and have correspondingly received little attention. This paper aims to demonstrate that metaphors in Homer can nevertheless fulfil cognitive functions in their respective contexts by the analysis, as an exemplary case, of a unique metaphor of death: in *Il*. 11.234–247 it is narrated that the Trojan Iphidamas is killed by Agamemnon and “sleeps the brazen slumber” (*Il*. 11.241). The metaphorical representation of death as a kind of falling asleep is an instantiation of the well-known conceptual metaphor DEATH IS SLEEP, while the description of the sleep of death as “brazen” permits several interpretations which all highlight the pathos of the killing and make the death of Iphidamas appear premature and regrettable. A comparison with two passages in Vergil’s *Aeneid* which adapt the phrasing “iron sleep” (*Aen*. 10.745–746; 12.309–310) indicates that the Homeric metaphor is particularly well suited to its context and contributes to the effect of the passage.

Keywords: Homer, *Iliad*, metaphor, cognitive theory of metaphors

For a long time, Homeric metaphors were largely neglected by Homeric scholars, most prominently by M. Parry,[1] and even commentators often pass over metaphorical expressions without giving them the attention they deserve. As an unfortunate consequence of the oral poetry theory, Homeric similes received intensive study, while metaphors were disregarded as formulaic phrases serving as mere substitutions for more literal expressions and thus lacking in content and devoid

1 Cf. Parry (1931) and Parry (1933); Parry claims that metaphors in Homer are both non-deliberate and conventional according to the terminology recently proposed by Steen (2011) 38–39.

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of a deeper meaning.[2] Now, despite the fact that there has been no extensive study of figurative language in Homer, the *communis opinio* has become that Homeric metaphors are an expressive poetic device which merits further attention.[3] This new evaluation is most likely due to the increased interest in metaphors in the wake of the comprehensive cognitive theory of metaphors which postulates the existence of conceptual metaphors linking an idea from a target domain to another source domain to improve understanding of the original idea. According to this approach, these conceptual metaphors exist in the mind prior to being expressed in language, and accordingly, several individual linguistic metaphors may rely on a common underlying conceptual metaphor.[4] As such, the cognitive theory of metaphors does not necessarily contradict or invalidate other theories which so far have focused exclusively on linguistic metaphors; rather, it offers a possibility to classify, analyze, and assess individual metaphors more succinctly by referring to the fundamental structures of metaphor production. In 1989, in the first chapter of their book on poetic metaphors, the cognitive linguists G. Lakoff and M. Turner analyzed examples of metaphorical expressions of the complex concepts of life, death, and time in order to demonstrate that even highly poetic language mostly uses the same basic conceptual metaphors that are also found in common and everyday speech.[5] But in comparison to the familiar conventional

2 Despite predating the oral poetry theory, this sentiment is already expressed in the introductory sentence to the disappointingly short section on metaphors in the *Iliad* in Keith (1914) 33–43: "The most striking difference that the metaphors of the *Iliad* present as distinguished from the similes is the almost universal lack of deep feeling." Similarly Stanford (1936) 120: "But in quality, emphasis, vividness and imagination, the similes heavily outweigh the more frequent metaphors." Stanford disregards Homeric metaphor on the basis of his hypothesis that the Homeric diction was not developed enough to allow imaginative figurative language for the sake of clarity (ibid. 122–127). Despite this claim, he cites a considerable wealth of metaphors in Homer (cf. ibid. 129–139).

3 In one of the few treatments of Homeric metaphors, Moulton (1979) acknowledged the lack of attention Homeric metaphors received so far. In his own study he looks at a few selected examples in order to "illustrate the range and sophistication of figurative language in Homer" (279) and concludes that "metaphor is a vital, significant part of the language of Homer" (293). Most recently Nieto Hernández (2011) 516–517: "There is, then, considerable evidence for active metaphors in Homeric language, which is as rich, and even innovative, in this dimension as in so many others."

4 For the cognitive theory of conceptual metaphors in general cf. first Lakoff/Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1993), for an overview over the established terminology of cognitive linguistics cf. Evans (2007) esp. 33–35. A recent assessment of the theory can be found in Steen (2011). To make a clear distinction, the term 'linguistic', or 'textual', metaphor denotes metaphors how they actually appear in spoken or written discourse as opposed to conceptual metaphors, i.e. the abstract metaphorical conceptualization on which they are based, also cf. p. 200, note 13 below.

5 Cf. Lakoff/Turner (1989) 1–56.

metaphors in spoken or prosaic language,[6] metaphors that we perceive as poetic are often developed in novel or unusual ways and occur in combination with other linguistic devices.[7] The following remarks are based on the assumption that the cognitive theory of conceptual metaphors may also fruitfully be applied to ancient texts in order to enhance our understanding of poetic expressions. In turn, if the cognitive approach yields further insights and affords a better understanding of metaphors in an ancient Greek text, it adds further validity to this method of interpreting metaphors in poetry.[8]

To illustrate this, I will proceed to discuss in detail a verse from Homer's *Iliad* which employs a metaphor to describe death on the battlefield.[9] The following lines are taken from the killing of the Trojan Iphidamas at the hands of Agamemnon (Hom. *Il.* 11.234–247):

ὣς ὃ μὲν αὖθι πεσὼν κοιμήσατο χάλκεον ὕπνον 241
οἰκτρός, ἀπὸ μνηστῆς ἀλόχου, ἀστοῖσιν ἀρήγων,
κουριδίης, ἧς οὔ τι χάριν ἴδε, πολλὰ δ' ἔδωκε·

There Iphidamas fell, and slept the brazen slumber,
pitiable man, helping his countrymen and far from his wedded wife
his bride, from whom he had no joy, though he had given much.[10]

Even though *Il.* 11.241 has the ring of a formulaic expression, neatly completing the hexameter after the penthemimeres, the phrase occurs only once in Homer and nowhere else in early Greek epic poetry. However, the phrase has been appropriated by the Latin poet Vergil who in his *Aeneid* twice uses similar

6 The term 'conventional metaphor' is employed in this context to denote a common, and probably even idiomatic, instance of figurative language which nevertheless still retains its metaphorical character and is not lexicalized, also cf. Steen (2011) 33–36.

7 Cf. Lakoff/Turner (1989) esp. 67–106 and Semino (2008) 42–54.

8 Also cf. Nieto Hernández (2011) 517 for more examples of occurrences of conceptual metaphors, i.e. abstract cross-domain mappings conceptualizing one thing in terms of another which underlie the production of individual linguistic metaphors, in Homer.

9 In his otherwise very comprehensive study of Homeric death descriptions, Garland (1981) 46 comments on the phrase: "A bolder use of language, perhaps not wholly metaphorical, is the expression 'he slept the sleep of bronze', which occurs only once (11,241)." Unfortunately, he does not further explain why the expression would not be "wholly metaphorical" in his opinion.

10 Passages of Homer's *Iliad* are taken from the edition of van Thiel (2010), translations (with minor adaptions) from Verity (2011). The phrase "brazen slumber" comes from the translation of Lattimore (1951).

wording which is obviously modelled on the Homeric precedent.[11] In both instances, the verses are found at the end of battle encounters to signify the death of Orodes at the hands of Mezentius and the death of Alsus at the hands of Podaleirius respectively (Verg. *Aen*. 10.745–746 ≈ 12.309–310):

> *olli dura quies oculos et ferreus urget*
> *somnus, in aeternam clauduntur* (12.310: *conduntur) lumina noctem.*
>
> Grim repose and an iron sleep press down his eyes
> and seal his eyes in a dark that never ends.[12]

Modern commentators as well as ancient scholiasts have glossed over these verses without offering an explanation of how the metaphor works, and only the cognitive theory of metaphors provides the instruments to unravel the structure of the metaphorical expression: to a certain extent, the metaphor is understood intuitively (presumably also the reason why the extant scholia offer no comment on the verse), since the passages obviously make use of the conventional conceptual metaphor DEATH IS SLEEP, linguistically realized in κοιμήσατο ... ὕπνον and *somnus*.[13] The similarities between sleep and death give rise to their mythological relationship as twin brothers (Hom. *Il*. 16.672, 682; Hes. *Th*. 212, 758–766, also cf. *Od*. 13.79–80), and death is conceptualized as a sleep from which there is no awakening (for the early use of this conceptual metaphor cf. *Il*. 14.482; Hes. frg. 278.12 M.-W.).[14] The general paucity of instantiations of this particular conceptual

11 Cf. Williams (1973) 370 ad Verg. *Aen*. 10.745–746; Harrison (1991) 250 ad Verg. *Aen*. 10.745–746; Tarrant (2012) 165 ad Verg. *Aen*. 12.309–310.

12 The text of Vergil's *Aeneid* is taken from the edition of Conte (2009), translation Fagles (2006).

13 Cf. Lakoff/Turner (1989) 18–19. To postulate the existence of a certain conceptual metaphor familiar in modern languages for an ancient language requires further consideration, since conceptual metaphors are not universal, even though they usually have a grounding in human bodily experience, cf. Lakoff/Johnson (1980) esp. 56–68. Nevertheless, if there are several individual metaphors in any language which clearly have the same underlying conceptualization, it is justified to assume the existence of a conceptual metaphor. Note the convention in cognitive linguistics to print conceptual metaphors (as opposed to individual linguistic metaphors) in small capitals to indicate that they do not appear as such in texts, but are deduced from individual textual metaphors.

14 The origin of this particular metaphor might lie in the belief that the direct mentioning of a negative term is to be avoided, cf. Stanford (1936) 130–131 who refers to metaphors of this kind as "*euphemism* or *taboo* metaphors". However, in the light of the cognitive theory of conceptual metaphors and the observation that Homeric epic is not normally reluctant to name death, it seems more plausible to assume that this is a further instance of the human mind attempting to conceptualize something vague, and possibly frightening (death) in terms of something more familiar (sleep). On similarities of the metaphorical properties of death and sleep cf. Cairns (2012) 182 n. 36.

metaphor in the *Iliad* is presumably due to the fact that the rather tranquil conceptualization of death as sleep is not in tune with the Iliadic image of violent heroic death, which makes its occurrence here even more noteworthy.[15] Still, the use of sleep in the metaphor is rather straightforward, since it draws on a well-known conceptual metaphor, and was already explained by ancient commentators.[16] Nevertheless, the unconventional development of the metaphor through the adjectives χάλκεος "brazen" and *ferreus* "of iron" respectively requires further examination of why the sleep of death would be described as made of metal, or why this description contributes to our understanding that the sleep mentioned here is no real sleep, but death.

In this case, the conventional metaphor of imagining death as sleep is elaborated by the addition of the material of the sleep (which is only possible by an intermediary generic-level metaphor STATES ARE PHYSICAL OBJECTS[17]).[18] Commentators usually understand this elaboration by assuming that a property of the metal is mapped onto the sleep of death, either its hardness and durability,[19] its unfeelingness,[20] or its mercilessness[21] (cf. the only other figurative usages in *Il.*

15 Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood (1981) 19: "Sleep may appear to us a natural metaphor for death, but Homer only uses it once (*Iliad* 11.241), while in Hesiod dying as though overcome by sleep is a blessing belonging to the utopian golden race of the past (*Works and Days* 116). So the event of death is perceived in terms of hostility, with almost no peaceful connotations."

16 The verse does not receive any commentary in the scholia, but Apollonius Sophista (1st/2nd centry AD) identifies the metaphor in his *Lexicon Homericum* s.v. ὕπνος: ὕπνος ἐπὶ μὲν τοῦ εἰδωλοποιουμένου θεοῦ "ὕπνε ἄναξ," ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ πάθους "ὕπνῳ καὶ φιλότητι," ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ θανάτου "ὣς ὁ μὲν αὖθι πεσὼν κοιμήσατο χάλκεον ὕπνον" (text quoted from Bekker 1833).

17 On generic-level metaphors cf. Lakoff/Turner (1989) 80–83 and Lakoff (1993) 231–235, or the definition by Evans (2007) 90: "schematic or abstract level of metaphoric representation which provides structure that can be inherited by specific-level metaphor."

18 On the poetic devices of extension and elaboration of metaphors cf. Lakoff/Turner (1989) 67–69.

19 This seems to have been the interpretation of Hesychius, cf. χ 68: χάλκεον· ὀχυρόν. σκληρόν B 490 ... ἄλλοι 'ὕπνον', [ἢ] θάνατον Λ 241 (text quoted after the edition of Hansen/Cunningham 2009). Cf. Leaf (1900) 484 ad loc.: "χάλκεον ὕπνον, as though the sleep of death bound a man with bands that he could not break." Similarly also Moulton (1979) 283–284 and Hainsworth (1993) 250 ad *Il.* 11.241 who both refer to parallels in *Il.* 2.490 and 18.222 without actually explaining the metaphor. Also cf. LfgrE s. v. χάλκε(ι)ος (B 6): "'metaph.' (für Festigkeit, Dauer, Unwandelbarkeit)."

20 This seems to be the way in which Plutarch understood the passage in question in his *Consolatio ad Apollonium* 107E3–5: πού φησι [sc. Ὅμηρος] τὸν θάνατον εἶναι "χάλκεον ὕπνον," τὴν ἀναισθησίαν ἡμᾶς διδάξαι πειρώμενος (text quoted from Defradas/Hani/Klaerr 1985). Still, it is not clear whether Plutarch is referring to the adjective specifically, since sleep in itself also entails a kind of unfeelingness.

21 Cf. Harrison (1991) 250 ad *Aen.* 10.745 citing Macleod (1982) 105 ad *Il.* 24.205 who compiled a list of σιδήρειος qualifying ἦτορ (*Il.* 24.105; *Od.* 23.172), μένος (*Il.* 20.372), θυμός (*Il.* 22.357; *Od.*

2.490: χάλκεον ἦτορ "heart of bronze" and 18.222: χάλκεον ὄπα "brazen voice"). If 'brazen' or 'iron' is thus taken to signify hardness and indelibility, this usage of χάλκεος/*ferreus* is based on a metonymy, since a more specific term is used instead of a generic term; if the adjective is taken to refer to the metal's unfeelingness or lack of pity, this reading is predicated on an ontological metaphor, since it presupposes a generic metaphor ENTITIES ARE PERSONS in order to ascribe human feelings to the inanimate object.[22]

Attempting a more literal approach, we find that occurrences of χάλκεος in Homer usually specify a hero's weapon, especially the spear (χάλκεον ἔγχος, eighteen times in the *Iliad*; δόρυ χάλκεον, five times in the *Iliad*[23]). Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that χάλκεος and *ferreus* might refer to the material of the warriors' weapons,[24] and thus the adjective could be interpreted as an expression of the conventional metonymy that the material of an object can be made to stand in for the object itself.[25] Both χαλκός "bronze" and *ferrum* "iron" are commonly employed metonymically in epic language to denote weapons and armour made of these metals.[26] Accordingly, a 'sleep of metal' would be a complex poetic metaphor either for the sleep of death brought about by the effect of a metal weapon, or for death as the sleep which one sleeps in armour. Since χαλκός in Homeric Greek is used most often as a metonymy for a weapon, especially the spear, but also the sword (Iphidamas is killed by a sword, *Il.* 11.240: τὸν δ' ἄορι

5.191), κραδίη (*Od.* 4.293), and μένος/γυῖα (*Od.* 12.280) signifying either lack of pity or relentlessness. Also cf. the common metonymic phrase νηλέι χαλκῷ "with pitiless bronze" (*Il.* 3.292; 4.348; 5.330; 12.427; 13.501, 553, 761; 16.345, 561; 17.376; *Od.* 4.743; 8.507; 10.532; 11.45; 14.418; 18.86; 21.300; 22.475).

22 For the description of personifications as ontological metaphors cf. Lakoff/Johnson (1980) 25–35. That personification is a type of metaphor, the "transfer from animate to inanimate", was already noticed by Aristotle, cf. *Rhet.* 1411b30–32: καὶ ὡς κέχρηται πολλαχοῦ Ὅμηρος, τὸ τὰ ἄψυχα ἔμψυχα ποιεῖν διὰ τῆς μεταφορᾶς (text quoted from Ross 1959).

23 *Il.* 3.317; 4.481; 5.620; 13.184, 296, 404, 408, 503, 595; 16.318, 610; 17.305, 526; 20.163; 21.200, 393; 22.275, 367: χάλκεον ἔγχος; *Il.* 13.247; 16.346, 608, 862; 23.896: δόρυ χάλκεον. Besides, χάλκεος/χαλκός/χαλκήρης are also applied to arrows, the sword, the shield, or the whole panoply, cf. the occurrences compiled in Prendergast/Marzullo (1983) 401–402.

24 Cf. Tarrant (2012) 165 ad Verg. *Aen.* 12.309–310, who adduces the parallel in *Aen.* 12.284: *tempestas telorum ac ferreus … imber* ("torrent of spears and iron rain").

25 On metonymies and their interactions with metaphors in poetic language cf. Lakoff/Turner (1989) 100–106. This particular metonymy is also listed by Edwards (2011) 749.

26 Cf. LSJ s.v. χαλκός (II): "in Poets freq. for *anything made of metal*, esp. of arms." LfgrE s.v. χαλκός (B 2a–d) notes that χαλκός can metonymically denote all items of the panoply, but refers most often to spears or lances. OLD s.v. *ferrum* (2–7) shows that *ferrum* in Latin is predominantly used as a metonymy for swords. Note that this reading would also account for the change from Homer's more archaic bronze to Vergil's iron.

πλῆξ' αὐχένα, λῦσε δὲ γυῖα), the first variation of this reading seems more likely. However, there are also a few instances of χαλκός referring to armour (cf. *Il.* 16.130; 19.233; 23.130; *Od.* 21.434; 22.125; 23.369), and since Homeric heroes normally take off their armour to sleep, but put it on for battle and thus wear it when killed on the battlefield, the second possible association should not be neglected and deserves to be mentioned.

In a last step, it is necessary to take a look at the function of the metaphor in context. According to Parry, Homeric metaphors are unconsciously used formulaic phrases with no deeper significance to their context, and the metaphorical expression 'sleep the brazen slumber' would be a simple ornamental substitution for a literal phrase like 'die a violent death'. On the other hand, if the metaphor is context-sensitive and affords additional cognitive value that exceeds the meaning of the substituted expression, it was most likely employed deliberately rather than automatically as a mere formula.[27] The Vergilian parallel, in comparison, is certainly not novel or inventive (and thus, by default, conventional), insofar as it is a conflation of several well-known Homeric formulas.[28] The lines Vergil uses, and then re-uses almost word by word (*Aen.* 10.745–746 ≈ 12.309–310) mark the conclusion of a narrative sequence which ends with the death of an inferior warrior.[29] It seems reasonable to assume that the purpose of Vergil's lines consists in delighting the audience with an allusion to Homer and to reproduce his Greek phrases in Latin. Thus, the cognitive value of Vergil's metaphor is intertextual and aesthetic rather than contextual.

In contrast, the Homeric metaphor is singular, as far as we can tell from our limited textual basis of early Greek epic poetry, and it remains to be determined whether it serves a cognitive function in its context.[30] If we accept the proposed interpretation of the adjective hinting at the metal of the killer's weapon, the phrase is highly poetic and cannot satisfactorily be replaced by a periphrastic expression because it creates a tension between the usual peacefulness of sleep and the violent manner in which the sleep of death is brought about. Of course, the poet could have used a different phrase to describe the death of Iphidamas, but he chose to employ this particular metaphor in this particular situation, for additional cognitive value can be gleaned from its immediate narrative context.

27 On the importance of context for metaphors cf. Stern (2008) 271–274.

28 Besides the unique χάλκεον ὕπνον, the Vergilian lines also recall the more frequent Homeric formulas τὸν δὲ σκότος ὄσσε κάλυψεν (*Il.* 4.461, 503, 526; 6.11; 13.575; 14.519; 16.316; 20.393, 471; 21.181) and κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρεβεννὴ νὺξ ἐκάλυψεν (*Il.* 5.659; 13.580; 22.466), also cf. Harrison (1991) 250.

29 Cf. Tarrant (2012) 154.

30 On the cognitive significance of metaphors cf. Stern (2008) 276–277.

The following necrologue uses the motif of the regrettable *mors immatura* by relating how the dead Iphidamas could not enjoy his young wife for whom he had given much dowry (*Il*. 11.242–245): he did not live to indulge in sleeping with his dear wife, but instead he sleeps the 'brazen sleep of death', with the possible association of the discomfort of the bronze armour in which he was killed. The contrast between these two types of sleep creates pathos which is a typical feature of Homeric death scenes (cf. esp. *Il*. 11.142: οἰκτρός).[31] If we opt for one of the other readings of the adjective, the lack of an awakening or the unfeelingness of the sleep of death also serve to exacerbate the same contrast by stressing the loss of the comfort of his wife which Iphidamas is unable to feel in death.[32]

It is one of the insights of the cognitive theory of metaphors to point out that there is not necessarily objective truth in metaphorical language since the significance of any metaphor relies on individual cognition in the minds of the recipients,[33] and consequently there is no need to give preference to one of the interpretations outlined above. Some readings may seem more plausible than others, but since all have a grounding in Homeric linguistic usage, it is impossible to retain only one interpretation as correct to the exclusion of all others. Poetic metaphors are often complex and may work on several different levels, and their power ultimately results from the recipients' process of understanding, but different recipients may favour different interpretations. Due to the combination of a metaphor with a metonymy, this particular metaphor weaves a rich and dense fabric of associations and meanings, not only through the numerous connotations the conceptualization of death as sleep evoked, but also through the allusions the mention of hard metal entailed for the audience: recipients familiar with the poetry of Homer would certainly, either consciously or unconsciously, recall the literal, metonymical, and metaphorical uses of χαλκός/χάλκεος in the *Iliad*. Even if the Homeric phrase κοιμήσατο χάλκεον ὕπνον in *Il*. 11.241 was ever formulaic, and thus conventional, the metaphor is nevertheless deliberately employed in this particular context and has lost nothing of its cognitive value and its vivid imagery.

31 On pathos in Homeric battle scenes cf. esp. Griffin (1980) 103–143. He mentions the passage on pp. 133–134 as an example of the motif of the death of the young husband, but does not explain the metaphor. Also cf. Postlethwaite (2000) 156 ad loc.: "Pathos is lent to his early death by the fact that he had known no delight from his bride, and also by the metaphor of his brazen slumber." Moulton (1979) 284 is similarly vague: "The finality of Iphidamas' encounter with Agamemnon is accentuated by the unique metaphor for his death."

32 Note that the only other occurrence of χάλκεον ὕπνον in Greek epic poetry also appears in a nuptial/erotic context (Nonn. *D*. 16.298).

33 Cf. Lakoff/Johnson (1980) 159–194.

To conclude, I have chosen an exceptionally rich and complex metaphor to illustrate the potential of Homeric metaphors if subjected to a close reading with the tools of cognitive linguistics, but it is my belief that other instances of figurative language in Homer will also yield a comparable wealth of associations and contextual meaning[34] and are consequently an aspect of Homeric language which merits closer study.

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34 For another example cf. Horn (2015).

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