

ATHENA'S 'OX'

By Patrick Michael Tilton

When I first became an Oxfordian, back in the late 1980s, having learned that the pseudonym 'William Shake-speare' most probably was a reference to the Greco-Roman goddess Athene/Athena = Minerva, I searched through my copy of Volume 57 in the Loeb Classic Library, where I found the 28th Homeric Hymn, an 18-line tribute addressed to Athena:

XXVIII

ΕΙΣ ΑΘΗΝΑΝ

Παλλάδ' Ἀθηναίην, κυδρὴν θεόν, ἄρχομ' αἰείδεις
 γλαυκῶπι, πολύμητιν, ἀμείλιχον ἦτορ ἔχουσαν,
 παρθένον αἰδοίην, ἐρυσίπτολιν, ἀλκήεσσαν,
 Τριτογενῆ, τὴν αὐτὸς ἐγένεατο μητίετα Ζεὺς
 σεμνῆς ἐκ κεφαλῆς, πολεμῆια τεύχε' ἔχουσαν,
 χρύσεια, παμφανόωντα· σέβας δ' ἔχε πάντας ὀρώντας
 ἀθανάτους· ἦ δὲ πρόσθεν Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
 ἐσσυμένως ὤρουσεν ἀπ' ἀθανάτοιο καρῆνου,
σεισασ' ὄξυν ἄκοντα· μέγας δ' ἐλελίζετ' Ὀλυμπος
 δεινὸν ὑπὸ βρίμης γλαυκώπιδος· ἀμφὶ δὲ γαῖα
 σμερδαλέον ἰάχησεν· ἐκινήθη δ' ἄρα πόντος,
 κύμασι πορφυρέοισι κυκώμενος· ἔκχυτο δ' ἄλμη
 ἔξαπίνης· στήσεν δ' Ὑπερίονος ἀγλαὸς υἱὸς
 ἵππους ὠκύποδας δηρὸν χρόνον, εἰσότε κούρη
 εἴλετ' ἀπ' ἀθανάτων ὤμων θεοεῖκελα τεύχη
 Παλλὰς Ἀθηναίη γήθησε δὲ μητίετα Ζεὺς.

Καὶ σὺ μὲν οὕτω χαῖρε, Διὸς τέκος αἰγιόχοιο·
 αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ καὶ σεῖο καὶ ἄλλης μνήσομ' αἰοιδῆς.

XXVIII

TO ATHENA

I BEGIN to sing of Pallas Athene, the glorious goddess, bright-eyed, inventive, unbending of heart, pure virgin, saviour of cities, courageous, Tritogeneia. From his awful head wise Zeus himself bare her arrayed in warlike arms of flashing gold, and awe seized all the gods as they gazed. But Athena sprang quickly from the immortal head and stood before Zeus who holds the aegis **shaking a sharp spear**: [*my emphasis, here and above*] great Olympos began to reel horribly at the might of the bright-eyed goddess, and earth round about cried fearfully, and the sea was moved and tossed with dark waves, while foam burst forth suddenly: the bright Son of Hyperion stopped his swift-footed horses a long while, until the maiden Pallas Athene had stripped the heavenly armour from her immortal shoulders. And wise Zeus was glad!

And so hail to you, daughter of Zeus who holds the aegis! Now I will remember you and another song as well.

— translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, M.A.¹

It should be noticed — and noted — that the first three words in the ninth line, $\sigma \epsilon \iota \sigma \alpha \sigma ' \acute{\omicron} \zeta \acute{\upsilon} \nu \acute{\alpha} \lambda \omicron \nu \tau \alpha$ [*seisas' oxun akonta*] are translated 'shaking a sharp spear' by Evelyn-White. The first word, $\sigma \epsilon \iota \sigma \alpha \sigma '$ [*seisas*'] comes from the Greek verb **ΣΕΙ'Ω** [*SEIŌ*], meaning 'to shake, move to and fro, brandish'², the word from which the English word *seismic* is derived, relating to earthquakes.

The third word, $\acute{\alpha} \lambda \omicron \nu \tau \alpha$ [*akonta*] comes from the verb $\acute{\alpha} \lambda \omicron \nu \acute{\iota} \omega$ [*akontizō*], 'hurl a javelin', 'to throw, fling, dart: to dart at', and 'to shoot forth rays, of the moon', and the noun $\acute{\alpha} \lambda \omicron \nu \tau \iota \omega$ [*akontion*], 'a dart, javelin'³ — a diminutive form of the word $\acute{\alpha} \lambda \omicron \nu$ [*akōn*], which has two definitions: 'a javelin, dart, smaller and lighter than ἄκρον' and 'against one's will, perforce'⁴.

I saved the middle word for last, the Greek word $\acute{\omicron} \zeta \acute{\upsilon} \nu$ [*oxun*, or *oxyn*, depending on whether the third letter, *upsilon*, is transliterated with a 'u' or a 'y']. At first glance, it would seem that this word is from the verb $\acute{\omicron} \zeta \acute{\upsilon} \nu \omega$ [*oxum* /

oxym], ‘to make sharp or pointed, to sharpen’⁵ – derived from ὀξύς [*oxus* / *oxys*], ‘sharp, keen, pointed’⁶. On the other hand, ὀξύς might also be from the noun ‘ΟΞΥΛΑ or ὀξύλη, ἦ, a kind of *beech*. II. *a spear-shaft* made from its wood : generally, *a spear*.⁷. Interesting . . . a Greek word that means ‘to sharpen’ and ‘a spear’ which sounds like the English word ‘**oxen**’!

Is it likely that Edward de Vere was aware of this Homeric Hymn to Athena, and that he perhaps noted this word, which means both ‘sharp’ and ‘spear’? What about the third word [ἄκοντα, from ἄκων / *akon*], with that tantalizing meaning ‘against one’s will’? ‘**Shaking a sharp spear**’ . . . ‘against one’s **will**’ . . . might not our poet/dramatist Earl of Oxford have derived his *nom de plume* from this self-same Greek phrase?

The Greek word ἄκόντιον [*akontion*] means ‘a dart, javelin’ . . . as does the Latin word ‘**vērūtum** -i, n. (veru), *a javelin*: Caes., Liv.’, from ‘**vērū** -ūs, n. (1) *apit*: Verg., Ov. (2) *a javelin*: Verg., Tib.’⁸. Interesting, that the same word translated by Evelyn-White as ‘spear’ is translated as ‘javelin’ by Liddell & Scott, the same word used in Cassell’s Latin Dictionary to translate *verutum/veru*, a meaning which a wordsmith like Edward de **Vere** would surely have known.

Incidentally, the English word ‘javelin’— according to the *Encarta World English Dictionary* (p. 962c) — is defined as a ‘spear’, coming into English from the Middle French *javeline*, a diminutive of the Old French *javelot*, possibly from, ultimately, a Celtic source, ancestor of Welsh *gaflach* ‘feathered lance’. Thus, the words ἄκόντιον, *veru*, and *verutum* could also justifiably be translated by the English word ‘spear’ as well as ‘javelin’. One must wonder, too, if the word ἄκοντα [*akonta*], in the ears of the Earl of Oxford, lent itself to the homophonous pun: ‘a count’— as in the French *comte*, the Italian *conte*, the English *count*, i.e. an Earl.

Maybe I’m stretching things a bit too far with this last possibility: the word translated ‘shaking’ by Evelyn-White, σείσασ’ [*seisas*], which Liddell & Scott translate as ‘to shake, move to and fro, brandish’ . . . might it not be considered a terrestrial equivalent of the oceanic-related concept of an ‘eddy’? Walter W. Skeat has this to say on the matter: ‘**Eddy**. (Scand.) Icel. *íða*, an eddy, whirl-pool;

cf. *ida*, to whirl about ; Swed. dial. *ida*, *idá*, Dan. dial. *ide*, the same. Formed from Icel. *id-*, A.S. *ed-*, Goth. *id-*, back ; only found as a prefix.⁹

Oh, I can already hear a Stratfordian protest that *back-and-forth* motion is not the same as *angular rotation* . . . but one does not *swirl* a spear, one *shakes* a spear. Yet one must grant that an object swirling around a pivot point *is* found on opposite sides every half-swirl, say, when at the 12 and the 6 o'clock positions, a kind of back-and-forth motion. I can't find the word '*swirl*' in *The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare*, but I *did* find the words '*whirl*', '*whirl'd*', '*whirled*', '*whirligig*', '*whirlpool*', '*whirls*', '*whirlwind*', '*whirlwinds*', and '*whirring*'.¹⁰ Is it just me, or does the word 'whirl' sound more than a bit like the word 'earl' . . . ? 'Eddy' and 'Eddie'. Greek '*Oxyn*' and English 'Oxen'.

There are those who suspect that the poet who wrote *Romeus and Juliet* ['Arthur Brooke'] was none other than our favourite Earl of 'Ox'+*'ford'* . . . as the word '*rother*' (a near-homophone for '*arthur*') is an old word for 'an animal of the ox kind', and a '*brook*' is a kind of *ford*.¹¹ Shakespeare was an inveterate punster. I have little doubt that many of his puns got the eyes rolling and the groans groaning, as over-punning tends to do. But perhaps *I'm* just seeing something that isn't really there, like when Cervantes' mad knight was quixotically *tiltin*' at windmills, deeming them to be giants . . .

References

1. *HESIOD · HOMERIC HYMNS · EPIC CYCLE · HOMERICA* · With an English Translation by Hugh G. Evelyn-White [Loeb Classical Library 57] : Harvard University Press: 452–5.
2. *A LEXICON Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* : Oxford University Press 1963: 631b.
3. Ibid. 27a.
4. Ibid. 30a.
5. Ibid. 491b.
6. Ibid. 492a.
7. Ibid. 491a.

8. CASSELL'S LATIN DICTIONARY : Cassell & Company Ltd. and Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1959 : 638.
 9. The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology : Walter W. Skeat : Wordsworth Editions Ltd. 1993 : 131a.
 10. THE HARVARD CONCORDANCE TO SHAKESPEARE : 1974 : 1499b.
 11. Charlton Ogburn : *The Mysterious William Shakespeare, The Myth and The Reality*, EPM Publications, Inc. : 450.
-