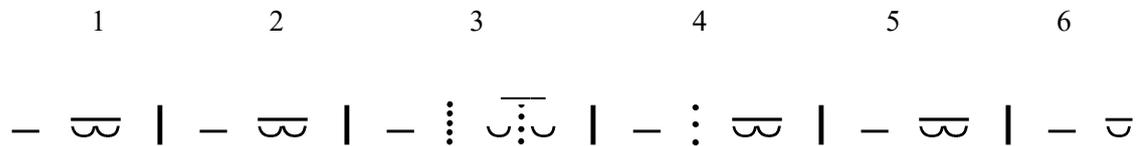


Greek and Latin Metre III

The Dactylic Hexameter: Greek



- ὁ ἑξάμετρος Lat. *hexameter* = Six feet / μέτρα / *pedes* of dactyls (—Ɀ), the last a spondee or equivalent, since a final short is treated as a long because of the natural pause (*brevis in longo*).
- A stichic metre (στίχοι, ‘rows’) that can be repeated *ad lib.* without a closing formula.
- The ‘biceps’ (two shorts: ⱿⱿ) of each foot can be replaced by a single long (‘contraction’) to create a spondaic foot (—); the first element (‘princeps’) of each foot must always be long.
- Spondees are rare in fifth foot (just over 5% in Homer) and relatively rare in third foot.
- 6 Homeric lines are entirely spondaic, e.g. *Il.* XXIII.221 ψυχὴν κικλήσκων Πατροκλῆος δειλοῖο.

Some Homeric Openings:

Iliad A 1: Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος

Odyssey α 1: Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλά

Hymn to Hermes 1: Ἐρμῆν ὕμνει, Μοῦσα, Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱόν

Batrachomyomachia 1: Ἀρχόμενος πρώτης σελίδος χορὸν ἐξ Ἐλικῶνος

Caesurae:

The hexameter was not divided into two halves (3 + 3 feet), perhaps because of the rhythmical tedium that would ensue. Instead, word division within feet (*caesurae*) was required to separate the line at one (or more) of the three following places:

- (i) After the first long (*longum*) of the third foot ('penthemimeral caesura'): e.g. *Il.* I.1:

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, ∷ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος

This is typically known as the 'strong' or 'masculine' caesura.

- (ii) After first short of biceps (∪∪), i.e. after trochee (−∪), of third foot: e.g. *Od.* I.1:

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, ∷ πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλά

This is typically known as the 'weak' or 'feminine' caesura. Note, however, that (ii) is slightly more common than (i), occurring with the approximate ratio 4 : 3. Almost 99% of Homer's lines have (i) or (ii).

- (iii) After first long of fourth foot ('hepthemimeral caesura'), if third is undivided: *Od.* IX.19:

εἴμ' Ὀδυσσεὺς Λαερτιάδης, ∷ ὃς πᾶσι δόλοισιν

This 'strong' fourth-foot caesura is rare: 1.4% in *Iliad*; 0.9% in *Odyssey*; 2.2% in Hesiod.

- Elision can occur at, i.e. over, the caesura.

- The caesura was generally avoided after prepositives (definite article, prepositions, καί, ἦδέ, ἀλλά) and before enclitics and postpositives (δέ, γάρ, μέν, ἄν)

In connection with the discussion of caesurae we should mention a place at which word-division within feet was exceptionally rare:

After the first short of the biceps of the fourth foot: e.g. *Od.* V.272:

Πηλιάδας τ' ἔσορῶντα καὶ ὄψε | δύνοντα Βοώτην

This latter tendency is known as 'Hermann's Bridge'. It is violated only once in about every 550 Homeric verses.

Νήϊδες ἔστὲ μέτρων, ᾧ Τεύτονες· οὐχ ὁ μὲν, ὃς δ' οὔ.

Πάντες, πλὴν Ἑρμάννος· ὁ δ' Ἑρμάννος σφόδρα Τεύτων.

The Germans in Greek | Are sadly to seek; | Not five in five score, |

But ninety-five more: | All; save only HERMANN, | And Hermann's a German.



Gottfried Hermann (1772-1848)

Diaereses:

Whereas the *caesura* is word division within the foot, *diaeresis* is word division between feet, i.e. at metrical boundaries. A few tendencies may be observed:

Word division is comparatively rare:

- (i) at the end of the third foot: e.g. *Od.* I.3:

πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν | ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω.

- (ii) after a spondaic fourth foot (because of the so-called bucolic diaeresis, see below; so-called Naeke's Law), e.g. *Od.* I.14:

νύμφη πότνι' ἔρυκε Καλυψώ, | δῖα θεάων

- (iii) it was yet rarer after a spondaic fifth foot (so-called Meister's Bridge), e.g. *Il.* XI.723:

ἐγγύθεν Ἀρήνης, ὅθι μείναμεν Ἡῶ δῖαν

Bucolic diaeresis:

A particularly favoured diaeresis (with a sense pause) was after a dactylic fourth foot, e.g. *Il.* II.76(-7):

ἦτοι ὅ γ' ὡς εἰπὼν κατ' ἄρ' ἔξετο· τοῖσι δ' ἀνέστη
Νέστωρ

More striking is a case such as *Il.* VII.212, where standard morphology has been rejected in order to secure this favoured cadence:

μειδιῶν βλοσυροῖσι προσώπασι· νέρθε δὲ ποσσίν

N.B. προσώπασι not προσώποις < πρόσωπον

This particular pause became especially common in later writers, particularly those of a pastoral or bucolic nature (whence its modern name). Cf. Theocritus *Idyll* 1.1-6:

ἀδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα καὶ ἅ πίτυς, αἰπόλε, τήνα,
ἅ ποτὶ ταῖς παγαῖσι μελίσδεται, ἀδὺ δὲ καὶ τύ
συρίσδες· μετὰ Πᾶνα τὸ δεύτερον ἄθλον ἀποισῆ.
αἴ κα τήνος ἔλη κεραὸν τράγον, αἴγα τὺ λαψῆ
αἴ κα δ' αἴγα λάβη τῆος γέρας, ἔς τὲ καταρρεῖ
ἅ χίμαρος· χιμάρω δὲ καλὸν κρέας, ἔστε κ' ἀμέλξης.

Complete hiatus:

After long vowels:

Because of digamma, e.g. *Od.* I.16: ἄλλ' ὅτε δῆ || ἔτος ἦλθε περιπλομένων ἐνιαυτῶν

but extended elsewhere, e.g. *Od.* I.21: ἀντιθέω || Ὀδυσῆϊ πάρος ἦν γαῖαν ἰκέσθαι

After short vowels:

Because of digamma, e.g. *Od.* I.248: τόσσοι μητέρ' ἐμὴν μνῶνται, τρύχουσι δὲ || οἶκον

but extended elsewhere, e.g. *Od.* VII.6: ἡμιόνους ἔλυον ἐσθῆτά τε || ἔσφερρον εἶσω

Epic correption:

A final long vowel or diphthong in hiatus before a word beginning with a vowel or diphthong *can* be shortened for the sake of metre (necessarily this occurs in one of the two shorts of the biceps). E.g.:

Od. I.17: τῶ οἶ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ οἰκόνδε νέεσθαι

Od. I.23: Αἰθίοπας τοὶ διχθὰ δεδαίαται, ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν

Some other scansional oddities:

'Lengthening' of final short syllables (typically limited to the first syllable of each foot):

Od. VIII.238: χωόμενος ὅτι σ' οὔτος ἀνήρ ἐν ἀγῶνι παραστάς

Od. X.141: ναύλοχον ἔς λιμένα καί τις θεὸς ἡγεμόνευεν

Initial liquids (ρ λ), nasals (μ ν) and sibilants (σ) *can* prolong the final short open vowels of preceding words. This is either because they were sometimes prolonged in pronunciation, or because of their earlier linguistic form (in many cases: ρ- < *sr- / wr- ; ν- < *sn- ; μ- < *sm- ; λ- < *sl-). Sometimes apparent 'lengthening' arose because of the prosodic influence of the digamma (F), long since lost:

Od. XIII.116 ὑμεῖς δ' οὐκέτι καλὰ μεθίετε θούριδος ἀλκῆς

Lengthening *metri causa*:

Many metrically intractable words were given an artificial scansion in order to fit the constraints of the line, e.g. ἀθάνατος should scan $\cup\cup\cup\bar{\cup}$ but the first α was artificially lengthened to allow choriambic scansion ($-\cup\cup\bar{\cup}$);

also, e.g., ἀκάματος, διογενής, ἐννοσίγαιος (for ἐν-), Πριαμίδης, ὕδατι etc.

A (possible?) pre-Mycenaean relic:

ψυχὴ δ' ἐκ ῥεθέων πταμένη Ἀιδόσδε βεβήκει

ὄν πότμον γοόωσα, λιποῦσ' ἀνδροτῆτα καὶ ἦβην (Il. XVI.856-7 = XXII.362-3)

ἀνδροτῆτα must scan $\cup\cup\cup$ to make metre, yet the first (short) *a* precedes *v-δ-ρ* ≠

A possible solution? Hypothesised Proto-Gk (pre-c.1500 B.C.) form *a-nr-tā-ta* with syllabised *r* (before the epenthesis of *d* for pronunciational reasons).

Alternatively, could nasal + liquid (here *vr-*) *once* be pronounced together?

Unnerving metrical irregularities at line beginning:

Opening trochee: Il. XXIII.493: Αἴαν' Ἰδομενεῦ τε, κακοῖς, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ ἔοικε.

Opening iamb: Od. IV.13: ἐπεὶ δὴ τὸ πρῶτον ἐγείνατο παῖδ' ἐρατεινήν.

Opening tribrach: Od. XII.423: ἐπίτονος βέβλητο, βοὸς ῥινοῖο τετευχώς.

Some have thought that these occasional irregularities bear witness to the early (pre-)history of the hexameter, when it was the fusion of two early metrical cola (related to the glyconic), both of which allowed some metrical freedom at their beginnings.

The later hexametric tradition:

The hexameter was used as the regular metre for epic literature, didactic, bucolic, wisdom poetry, hymns, oracles and more mundane purposes. As the hexameter developed, although its linguistic content remained informed by the Homeric poems, certain metrical features were tightened up: by the Hellenistic period, a caesura in the third foot was essential, the weak caesura being even more favoured than in Homer, and elision over the caesura being phased out. The frequency of hiatus was reduced; Hermann's Bridge was rarely broken, and Callimachus, the most refined hexameter poet, never broke Naeke's Law.

We can talk about precious things, like love and law and poverty: these are the things dactyls mean. (Morrissey)

Why not scan the following (Od. XI.593-8)?

καὶ μὴν Σίσυφον εἰσεῖδον κρατέρ' ἄλγε' ἔχοντα

λᾶαν βαστάζοντα πελώριον ἀμφοτέρησιν.

ἦ τοι ὁ μὲν σκηριπτόμενος χερσίν τε ποσίν τε

λᾶαν ἄνω ὤθεσκε ποτὶ λόφον· ἀλλ' ὅτε μέλλοι

ἄκρον ὑπερβαλέειν, τότε' ἀποστρέψασκε κραταίς·

αὐτίς ἔπειτα πέδονδε κυλίνδετο λᾶας ἀναιδῆς.