

APXH — Its Earliest Use

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Ἄρχή occurs three times in the *Iliad*, eight times in the *Odyssey*, eight times in Hesiod's *Theogony*, probably twice in his fragments and never in his *Works and Days*.¹ The dictionaries offer two meanings for its earliest use: H. Ebeling (*Lexicon Homericum I-II*, 1880-1885, I 179-180) "exordium, initium", C. Capelle (*Vollständiges Wörterbuch* 1889⁹, 92) "Anfang, Veranlassung", H.G. Liddell R. Scott H.S. Jones (*A Greek-English Lexicon I-II*, 1940, I 252) "beginning, origin" and J. Anastassiou and B. Mader (in: *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos I*, 1979, 1370-1372) "Anlaß, Beginn".² This seems to me to be neither adequate nor satisfactory.

In the eleventh song of the *Iliad* the poet describes (602-605), how Patroclus, being addressed by Achilles, leaves his hut like Ares, and he adds: κακοῦ δ' ἄρα οἱ πέλεν ἀρχή, "of the catastrophe this, then, was for him (not just the beginning, but) the origin, the action that brought about all the others which followed".³ Similarly, in the twenty-second song Homer makes (114-117)

¹ Z 356 ἀρχῆς is found in some papyri and manuscripts and also in a citation by Apollonius (*Synt.* II 79, p. 185 Uhlig), see also H. Erbse (ed.), *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (Scholia Vetera) II*, 1971, 193 (*ad* Z 356); H.W. Allen in his edition *Homeri Opera I, Iliadis libros I-XII continens*³, 1920 ascribes this in the *apparatus criticus ad* Z 356 to Zenodotus (not in his later *editio maior* of 1931); Zenodotus suggests ἄτης for ἀρχῆς of the manuscripts at Γ 100, see H. Erbse (ed.), *Scholia Graeca ... I*, Berlin 1969, 376. At Ω 28, too, some conjecture ἀρχῆς, see H. Erbse (ed.), *Scholia Graeca ... V*, Berlin 1977, 523.

² In the *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos*, s.v. ἀρχή, 1372, two other meanings are recorded, one for a passage of the later *certamen* (line 78-79) "ἀρχήν (Adv.) mit folgender Negation *gar nicht, überhaupt nicht*", the other ("Herrschaft, Reich") for the fragment which A. Traversa (ed.: *Hesiodi Catalogi sive Eoearum Fragmenta*, Naples 1951, frg. 16) ascribes to Hesiod, but R. Merkelbach for various reasons regards as later (*Gnomon* 27, 1955, 5). The epic fragment *Papiri greci e latini 14*, Florence 1957, 1385 A is also later. — W. Pape, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch I-III*³, 1888, I 365 s.v. ἀρχή lists only one meaning for Homer ("Anfang, Beginn") and has no references to Hesiod, G. Delling in R. Kittel (ed.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament I*, Stuttgart 1933, 477-483 does not refer to early usage at all.

³ On ἄρα see J. Grimm et al. in: *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos I* 1126-1163, on this passage 1140-1141: "Ein Ereignis wird von der Zukunft aus betrachtet"; B. Hainsworth, *The Iliad: A Commentary. Vol. III: Books 9-12*, 1993, 288 on Λ 604 remarks: "the poet likes to notice the ἀρχή of something cf. 5.63, 22.

Hector refer to the abduction of Helen by Alexandros (Paris) and comments on this: ἦ τ' ἔπλετο νεΐκεος ἀρχή. It would be pointless here simply to understand “the beginning“, “the first phase of the strife“. What Homer wants to say, undoubtedly, is that without Alexandros going to Sparta and bringing Helen to Troy with all her possessions, there would not have been a war — just as without Patroclus leaving his hut, there would not have been a catastrophe for him. When Menelaus in the third song (97-100) speaks of the κακὰ πολλά which the Greeks and the Trojans have suffered because of his quarrel and Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἀρχῆς, “because of what Alexandros started“, he is not merely referring to what he did in Sparta, the initial stages of his activities, but to the whole chain of events which was set off by him. There is no need, I think, in view of the other two passages to read ἄτης with Zenodotus, though this occurs in similar phrases in Ζ 354-358 and Ω 25-30 and modern scholars seem to be wavering.⁴

I have to resist the temptation at this stage to discuss all words deriving from the stem ἀρχ- in the Homeric poems. But it seems appropriate at least to draw attention to ἀρχέκακος used for Alexandros' ships (Ε 62-64), because he sailed on them to Sparta and this led — later — to the suffering of the Trojans and of Alexandros himself (63-64: αἱ πᾶσι κακὸν Τρώεσσι γέγοντο οἱ τ' αὐτῶ). Obviously, the ships do not merely mark the beginning of the suffering for both the Trojans and Alexandros, who do not suffer during the journey or immediately afterwards, but only much later; they were, as one might say, the source of the later suffering or, as G.S. Kirk aptly translates, “initiators of evil“.⁵

A similar usage is found in the *Odyssey*: Homer mentions Demodocus' song at Alcinous' feast about the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles, as prophesied by Apollo to Agamemnon. To indicate the time he says (θ 81-82) τότε γάρ ῥα κυλίνδετο πῆματος ἀρχή Τρωσί τε καὶ Δαναοῖσι Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλᾶς. Since Agamemnon consulted the oracle before the actual fighting began, one has to translate: “It was when the calamity for the Trojans and Greeks originated (lit.: the origin .. was rolled upon the ..)“. In φ 31-35 the poet talks of Iphitus and Odysseus exchanging gifts and characterizes this as ἀρχή ξεινοσύνης προσκηδέος: This is the constituting act of their relationship as guest-friends. Strictly speaking, it is Odysseus' weapons (as gifts) which are described in this manner: They form the basis of this (still lasting) friendship. A similar meaning is to be assumed for ἀρχή in φ 1-4 (and ω 167-169), where Homer calls the bow and the twelve axes which Penelope gives to the suitors

116, *Od.* 8. 81, but as a reflection on the past course of events. Here he is looking forward, but looking a remarkably long way (cf. 10. 336, 11. 163)”. I would say he looks forward, but in doing so also from the end of the chain of events to their origin.

⁴ Cf. G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary. Volume I: Books 1-4*, 1985, 277, see also the literature referred to by J. Anastassiou and B. Mader in the *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos* 1371.

⁵ See G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary. Volume II: Books 5-8*, 1990, 61.

ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχήν, “instruments for the contest and prerequisites for the massacre“ — clearly not just the beginning of the killing.⁶

In the first song Athena, disguised as Mentès, talks to Telemachus and explains (185-188) why on the journey from his home — wherever the Taphians may have lived - to Temesa he anchored at Ithaca: ξεῖνοι δ' ἀλλήλων πατρώιοι εὐχομεθ' εἶναι ἐξ ἀρχῆς. To say “we are proud to enjoy an inherited mutual guest-friendship“ and to add “from the beginning“, “since we started being friends“ seems rather pointless to me. What the poet wants to convey, surely, must be something like “since we made a beginning“ in the sense “since we established this relationship which still survives and flourishes“.⁷ The same applies to the phrase οἱ τε οἱ ἐξ ἀρχῆς πατρώιοι εἰσιν ἑταῖροι (β 254, similar: ρ 69); the phrase describes a relationship or companionship which has lasted (not “from of old“, vaguely alluding to some event in the distant past, but) since it was established (pointing to a specific act the consequences of which are still in evidence).

The most difficult and interesting example is found in λ 436-438. Replying to the account which Agamemnon's ghost gives in the Underworld of his fate Odysseus says:

ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ γόνον Ἀτρέος εὐρύσπα Ζεὺς
ἐκπάγλως ἤχθηρε γυναικείας διὰ βουλάς
ἐξ ἀρχῆς.

Zeus showed his hatred of Atreus' family through plans of women: “from of old“ would be feeble and vague; for in the following sentence Odysseus gives the clarifying illustration: He refers to Helen and Clytaemestra (437-438). It is more appropriate, therefore, I think, to translate ἐξ ἀρχῆς “since it all began“, taking this together with γυναικείας διὰ βουλάς, i.e. “Zeus started it all by means of plans conceived of and carried out by women“.

In the *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos* J. Anastassiou and B. Mader state (1371 s.v. ἀρχή) that ἐξ ἀρχῆς denotes a) “ein bestimmter zeitlicher Anfang“ — this is correct — or b) “verallgemeinert ... von jeher, überhaupt“; this is not correct, as the interpretation of the three (or four) passages has shown which they adduce for this meaning: λ 438; α 188; β 254 = ρ 69. They also observe — rightly — that “Der Anfangspunkt wird sonst auch durch πρῶτον, πρῶτιστα usw. ausgedrückt“ and that ἐξ ἀρχῆς differs from πάλαι or παλαιός in that it does not merely contrast Old and New, but emphasizes the “Anfang und Ursprung“. However, they add that there are instances of πάλαι or παλαιός, “wo

⁶ J. Anastassiou and B. Mader, *Lexikon ...* 1371 comment on these passages: “... eher *Beginn* als *Anlaß*, die finale Nuance ,damit das Morden seinen Anfang nehmen könnte‘ liegt im Kontext, nicht in ἀρχή.“ This seems not the right alternative to me. — J. Russo et al., *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey. Volume III. Books XVII-XXIV*, 1992, 148 remarks: “the φόνου ἀρχήν of 4 must refer only to Athena's intention”.

⁷ Neither J. Anastassiou and B. Mader, *Lexikon ...* 1372 “von je her, überhaupt“ nor S. West in: A. Heubeck et al., *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey. Volume I. Introduction and Books I-VIII*, 1988, 101 on α 188 (also referring to II 254 XI 438, XVII 69) “from of old“ do justice to the meaning here.

man eher ἐξ ἀρχῆς erwartet“, referring to Π 441 = P 179 and Z 215. This seems to me again to be mistaken.⁸ When one puts Z 215 side by side with α 187-188 and β 254 = ρ 69, one realizes at once a difference. Diomedes wants to focus on the beginning of the friendship which was established by his grandfather Oineus and Bellerophon, the grandfather of Glaucus to whom he is speaking; for he continues by describing the further stages of this relationship of the two families and referring to Glaucus and himself in the last line (Z 231), whereas in the passages in the *Odyssey* the two speakers (ρ 61 the poet himself) stress in one and the same sentence that the relationship has lasted for a long time, is a friendship of long standing. A comparison of Π 441 (Hera about Sarpedon = X 179 Athena about Hector, both speaking to Zeus: ἄνδρα θνητὸν ἕοντα, πάλαι πεπρωμένον αἴσῃ) with O 209-210 (Poseidon to Iris about Zeus: ἰσόμορον καὶ ὁμῆ πεπρωμένον αἴσῃ) leaves no doubt that in the first two instances πάλαι is deliberately and well chosen for someone who was destined to his fate at one particular moment in the past, by an act a long time ago. This element is omitted in Poseidon's remark which focusses on the present time and lays the emphasis on the equality of the two quarellers. In Π 441 = X 179 ἐξ ἀρχῆς would have stressed that the act of the past continued to determine the whole life of the person concerned which is clearly not what the poet intends to say.

Before I venture to summarize my observations I turn to Hesiod's *Theogony* which may be older than the *Odyssey*. Ἀρχή is always used with a preposition, mostly with ἐξ, once with ἀπό. In 43-45 we learn that the Muses in their song first celebrate θεῶν γένος αἰδοῖον ... ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὓς Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανὸς εὐρύς ἔτικτεν. As M. L. West points out rightly in his commentary,⁹ ἐξ ἀρχῆς refers to “the beginning of the θεῶν γένος”, i.e. the γένος since it has come into being, from the first generation onwards, but also including the following ones (see 46). In 114-115 (if genuine¹⁰) the same meaning is intended: the family of the gods from its very origin, with the first generation being given special prominence by yet another expression in the rest of 115.

Verses 154-156 confirm this interpretation and translation of ἐξ ἀρχῆς. Hesiod lists the offspring of Γαῖα and Οὐρανός and adds .. all their children “were vexed with their father from the beginning“, i.e. from their beginning, continuously since they were born. One should note that where the initial stage only is being referred to (without the following ones) πρῶτα is used, here as elsewhere in Hesiod and also in Homer.

There seems to be no need to discuss such other passages as 203-206, 450-452¹¹ and 509-512; for invariably one has to understand ἐξ ἀρχῆς not as “from

⁸ Πρῶτον and πρῶτα mark one point in time, in the past; like παλαιός and πάλαι they are never connected with ἐκ or ἐξ, but only with ἐξ οὗ (A 6; Γ 168) or ἐξ ἧς (ψ 224) or e.g. ἐπεὶ δὴ πρῶτα A 234-236; ὡς τὰ πρῶτα θ 266-269; ὅτε πρῶτον Γ 443-444; Z 345; Ξ 295-296 (v.l. πρῶτιστον); τ 338-339; ὅτε πρῶτιστον κ 462-46.

⁹ M.L. West (ed.), *Hesiod, Theogony*, 1966, 172.

¹⁰ 114-115 are athetized by Seleucus, 115 by Aristarchus.

¹¹ 450-452 are bracketed by F. Solmsen (ed.), *Hesiodi Theogonia Opera et Dies Scutum*², 1983, 24 following Paley, but see M.L. West, *Theogony* 290.

the beginning of all time“ “from of old“, but “from his or her or their beginning, from their coming into being, their birth, the beginning of their existence“. However, it may not be superfluous here to point to 405-408: Hesiod speaks of Leto and calls her first *μείλιχον αἰεὶ*, then again in 408 *μείλιχον ἐξ ἀρχῆς, ἀγανώτατον ἐντὸς Ὀλύμπου* “gentle right from the start and ever since“. Indeed, the meaning is very similar to *μείλιχον αἰεὶ*, but such a manner of emphasizing a particular quality is not without parallel.¹²

The other passage which requires a word of comment is 423-425 where a papyrus and most manuscripts read *ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς* in 425, the meaning being roughly the same as of *ἐξ ἀρχῆς*.¹³ Zeus did not take anything away from Hecate of what she had been allocated among the former gods, the Titans; but she held it as she did when the division was made first, from the beginning and for all time, henceforth. It may be that here, too, *ἐξ ἀρχῆς* should be read; but in any case neither *ὡς τὸ πάρος γ’ ἐξ ἀρχῆς* seems likely nor a translation “the distribution from the kingdom“ with *ἀρχῆ* in a meaning “not found earlier than the fifth century“.¹⁴

The interpretation of the usage of *ἀρχή* and its meaning offered so far is supported by its occurrence in the Hesiodic catalogue of women. The poet, speaking of Heracles’ fight with Eurypylos, says *τῷ δὲ καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὀλίγης Διὸς ἄλκιμος υἱὸς ἔπραθεν ἱμερόεντα πόλιν* (frg. 43, 61-62). Clearly, a purely temporal meaning is impossible: It is a small beginning, a minor event or cause that prompts Heracles to take action; to put it differently, it is based on a matter of little importance (but of considerable consequences).

Finally, a word on *ἀρχαῖος* which also occurs in a fragment of Hesiod’s works (322): *ὡς κε πόλις ῥέζησι, νόμος δ’ ἀρχαῖος ἀριστος*. It is adequately translated by I. Reese-Hoog and B. Mader in the *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos* (1368): “von Anfang an bestehend“ who add that this *νόμος* was “wohl bei der Gründung der Stadt eingesetzt und von diesem Zeitpunkt an in Geltung“; a little later they observe “ἀρχή und besonders ἐξ ἀρχῆς impliziert eine Folge“; this is a correct and important statement.

In summing up we can say that the early usage of *ἀρχή* leaves no doubt that it does not mark merely a beginning in time, a first point in the distant past, but the first link of a chain, the first step which is followed by others and has consequences as foundation or as determining factor. There is no need to emphasize at length what this means for its use by the first Greek philosophers.¹⁵

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¹² See M.L. West, *Theogony* 281 (ad 408).

¹³ Cf. F. Solmsen’s edition 23 in *apparatu critico* (425) and M.L. West, *Theogony* 284 (ad 425).

¹⁴ See M.L. West, *Theogony* 284 (ad 425).

¹⁵ I am most grateful to Hans Bernsdorff for critical comments on this article.