

**Zeitschrift:** Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

**Band:** 73 (2016)

**Heft:** 2

**Artikel:** "Furious wasps" and "tuna in the frying-pan" : animal metaphors, intertextuality, and cognition in Lycophron's Alexandra

**Autor:** Horn, Fabian

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-632150>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 15.07.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# **“Furious Wasps” and “Tuna in the Frying-Pan”: Animal Metaphors, Intertextuality, and Cognition in Lycophron’s *Alexandra***

*Fabian Horn, München*

**Abstract:** This paper aims to demonstrate that the metaphors of Lycophron’s *Alexandra* are more than mere substitutions, but often convey additional information in comparison to literal expressions: this notion of additional cognitive content proves to be a valuable tool in approaching and interpreting otherwise obscure or seemingly tedious metaphors. On the basis of the numerous animal metaphors it is argued that the poet made use of the potential of metaphors to form intricate and meaningful relationships not only with their immediate context, but also through intertextuality with their respective pretexts which add to their meaning in the new context. In the two passages which will be treated in greater detail (Lyc. 180–182, 377–383), this intertextuality is shown to be employed as part of the ideology of the *Alexandra*. Examining the metaphors of Lycophron’s poem with their additional cognitive content in mind can account for the appeal the poem would have had for its Hellenistic audience.

## I

The *Alexandra* commonly ascribed to the Hellenistic poet Lycophron of Chalcis (3rd century BCE) is probably the most peculiar literary work to survive from antiquity. Its form corresponds to a tragic messenger speech in iambic trimeters in which a Trojan watchman reports to king Priam of Troy the cryptic prophecies of his daughter Cassandra, who is here called Alexandra in allusion to her brother Alexandrus, better known as Paris. Thus, the title is already indicative of the poet’s penchant to hardly ever call anything by its proper name,<sup>1</sup> but rather employ obscure and erudite metaphors, periphrases, and mythological allusions. It was the curse of Cassandra to always foresee the truth, but never be believed

\* This paper was written during a postdoctoral research fellowship in group C-2: *Space and Metaphor in Language, Cognition and Texts* of the Exzellenzcluster 264 TOPOI: *The Formation and Transformation of Space and Knowledge in Ancient Civilizations*, Berlin.

1 As a matter of fact, obvious exceptions of figures in the *Alexandra* actually called by their *nomen proprium* can be explained by their particular obscurity, such as Prylis (222), Aescus (224), Munitus (498), Cepheus and Praxandrus (586), Baeus (694), Setaea (1075) or Meda and Cleisithera (1221–1222), cf. esp. C. von Holzinger, *Lykophron’s Alexandra: Griechisch und Deutsch mit erklärenden Anmerkungen* (Leipzig 1895) 16: “Die wirklichen Personennamen, die Lykophron nennt, ohne irgend eine Willkür auszuüben, gehören zumeist wenig bekannten oder ganz verschollenen Specialmythen an, so dass der Name allein nur selten einen Leser aufklärt.” Similarly E. Sistakou, “Breaking the Name Codes in Lycophron’s *Alexandra*”, in: C. Cusset/É. Prioux (eds.), *Lycophron: éclats d’obscurité. Actes du colloque international de Lyon et Saint-Étienne 18–20 janvier 2007* (Saint-Étienne 2009) 237–257, at 249: “It appears that only unattested heroes or secondary characters are mentioned in the *Alexandra* by name.”

(cf. Lyc. 1454–1456), which gains a further dimension in Lycophron's *Alexandra*: form and content of the poem are closely intertwined, for Cassandra's prophecies could not be believed, because they were not even understood:<sup>2</sup>

"Every line of the poem is an enigma. Persons, gods, places are almost never called by their names but referred to by the most remote and abstruse allusions; if the allusion strikes the reader as recognizable he is surely wrong, for some more remote and more paradoxical reference is intended. (...) To modern readers the work, happily unique in its kind, appears to be the chef d'œuvre of an erudite madman."<sup>3</sup>

The excessive use of figurative language, intensified by Lycophron's propensity for obscure vocabulary, largely accounts for the oracular character of the poem's diction and the overall effect of being one huge and elaborate riddle.<sup>4</sup> However, even though Cassandra's prophecy is indecipherable for king Priam, who constitutes the internal audience of the poem, the *Alexandra* is a work of literature and the poet wanted his work to be understood and appreciated by his audience. If Lycophron was an 'erudite madman', then the cryptic and periphrastic words of Cassandra are an expression of his learning: they often draw on remote mythological and literary knowledge and require similar philological acumen from the reader<sup>5</sup> to comprehend the poem.<sup>6</sup> Printed translations of the *Alexandra*, whose annotations usually offer the solutions to the poem's cryptic references without going into much detail how they are understood, disguise the effect that each circumlocution is meant to force the reader to consider the connotations evoked by the 'vehicle' and find points of contact with likely 'tenors'<sup>7</sup> from the context

- 2 Also cf. N. Hopkinson, *A Hellenistic Anthology* (Cambridge 1988) 230 and S. West, "Lycophron's *Alexandra*. Something Old and Something New", in: J.A. López Férez (ed.), *Mitos en la literatura griega helenística e imperial* (Madrid 2003) 79–95, at 85.
- 3 Quotation from M. Hadas, *A History of Greek Literature* (New York/London 1950) 192–193.
- 4 Aristotle already noted that an overuse of metaphor results in an ἀνίγμᾱ "riddle" (Aristot. *Pol.* 22 (1458a18–25); *Rh.* 3.2.12 (1404a34–b5); also cf. Quint. *Inst. or.* 8.6.14). Also cf. the characterization of the poem as a γρίφος 'riddle' by K. Ziegler, "Lykophron" (8), *RE* 13,2 (1927) 2316–2381, at 2334. On the seamless transition from metaphor to riddle see now G. Calboli, "Enigma, dalla metafora alla macchina per criptare", in: S. Monda (ed.), *Ainigma e griphos. Gli antichi e l'oscurità della parola* (Pisa 2012) 21–45, esp. at 25–32; on the relationship between symbols and riddles see P.T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts* (Princeton/Oxford 2004), esp. 21–76.
- 5 The question of the genre of the *Alexandra* and whether the poem was intended to be performed or read has been the subject of discussion, cf. e.g. A. Fountoulakis, "On the Literary Genre of Lycophron's *Alexandra*", *AAntHung* 38 (1998) 291–295, but is not essential for the scope of this paper. However, I will occasionally refer to Lycophron's audience as 'readers', since I lean towards the opinion that the *Alexandra* was produced as a 'Lesedrama'.
- 6 As an example for Lycophron's complex and intricate use of the Homeric poems and Alexandrian Homeric scholarship see esp. A. Rengakos, "Lykophron als Homererklärer", *ZPE* 102 (1994) 111–130. Also cf. the description of Lycophron as "ein extreme[r] Alexandriner" by Ziegler (supra n. 4) 2334.
- 7 I am employing the terms developed for metaphors by I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York/London 1936) 96–97, who stressed that a metaphor consists of two components,

until he finds a match. The developing connotations and connections account for the cognitive potential of substitutive language in Lycophron's poem.

Since the cognitive potential of metaphors in particular has been the subject of extensive research,<sup>8</sup> this paper will focus on some of the poem's numerous animal metaphors which represent a typical feature of oracular diction. The following study discusses the literary and cognitive potential of metaphors and their ability to convey metaphorical knowledge, first in general terms, followed by an analysis of one very specific way in which Lycophron made use of the effects of figurative language.

## II

The numerous animal metaphors in the *Alexandra* are a conspicuous feature of Lycophron's diction, which is meant to evoke the cryptic language of oracles,<sup>9</sup> and a challenge to interpreters of the poem. A particular difficulty for the decipherment and interpretation of Lycophron's oracular language lies in its instability and inconsistency which occurs in two different forms: on the one hand, the same personages are not consistently referred to with identical periphrases, and vice versa one particular metaphor may be employed to denote several different figures.<sup>10</sup> Considering this instability of individual metaphors, it is inevitable that the cognitive value of metaphors in their specific contexts varies, and in some cases metaphors may almost be simple one-to-one substitutions.<sup>11</sup> But the decision about a metaphor's cognitive potential always has to be reached by

which in English are commonly referred to as 'vehicle' (the term or phrase with is used metaphorically in context) and 'tenor' ('the underlying idea of principal subject which the vehicle or figure means').

- 8 Cf. the growing field research into metaphor conducted in cognitive linguistics. However, the cognitive potential of metaphors was already noted by Aristotle, on this aspect see J.E. Mahon, "Getting Your Sources Right: What Aristotle *Didn't* Say", in: L. Cameron/G. Low (eds.), *Researching and Applying Metaphor* (Cambridge 1999) 69–80.
- 9 The animal metaphor seems to be one of Lycophron's favourite naming strategies, cf. M.G. Ciani, "«Scritto con mistero»: osservazioni sull'oscurità di Licofrone", *GIF* 4 (1973) 132–148, at 134–138, or the lists in G. Lambin, *L'Alexandra de Lycophron* (Rennes 2005) 236–241. For a general appraisal of animal metaphors in Greek poetry see D. Steiner, *The Crown of Song. Metaphor in Pindar* (Oxford/New York 1986) 99.
- 10 Cf. Ziegler (supra n. 4) 2345 and esp. the lists in Ciani (supra n. 9). Also see C. Cusset/A. Kolde, "The Rhetoric of the Riddle in the *Alexandra* of Lycophron", in: J. Kwapisz/D. Petrain/M. Szymański (eds.), *The Muse at Play: Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry* (Berlin/Boston 2013) 168–183, at 169–177 on the polysemy of the dog metaphor; on the use of the wolf metaphor see C. Cusset, "Le bestiaire de Lycophron: entre chien et loup", *Anthropozoologica* 33/34 (2001) 61–72.
- 11 The same observation applies to the frequent use of obscure cult epithets for deities which sometimes, but certainly not always, possess relevance for the situation in which they occur, e.g., calling Demeter Ἐνναία (152; from Enna, the place where the rape of Persephone happened, cf. Eur. *Hel.* 388) and Θουρία 'the raging one' (153) in the context of the story of Peleus provides the reason why she unheedingly ate from his shoulder (152–155). For a theoretical

an individual analysis regarding the immediate context:<sup>12</sup> animal metaphors are regularly used as substitutes of proper names with only the context providing additional information to decode their true meaning, but they also contain further meaning which the straightforward mention of the name would not convey. This form of avoidance of naming people and things directly produces a double effect: on the one hand it complicates understanding and accounts for much of the obscurity of the *Alexandra*, while on the other hand periphrastic figures necessarily provide information beyond the proper name they came to replace. It has been stressed by theoreticians of metaphor that only very simple metaphors can be explained as mere substitutions, but usually they add to the meaning of the word which they replace and thus offer a kind of contextual metaphorical knowledge which I shall call 'additional cognitive value'.<sup>13</sup>

In the simple cases of metaphors in the *Alexandra*, additional cognitive value is based on the ground of the metaphor:<sup>14</sup> calling a hero a 'lion' characterizes him as a brave fighter<sup>15</sup> and using birds of prey as metaphors emphasizes the rapaciousness and mercilessness of a warrior,<sup>16</sup> while the dove metaphors, which are often employed for female characters, presumably stress their helplessness and lack of strength.<sup>17</sup>

This effect of figurative language can be further utilized by the poet in different ways. For example, periphrases often involve additional mythological material for identification purposes by alluding to other stories which would not have been included otherwise, especially in the form of compound epitheta which often facilitate and assist metaphor comprehension.<sup>18</sup> If a metaphor resonates metonymically with the story of the character it veils, it implicitly alludes

approach to the connection between context and metaphorical knowledge see J. Stern, *Metaphor in Context* (Cambridge, Ma./London 2000).

12 Cf. A. Sens, "Hellenistic Tragedy and Lycophron's *Alexandra*", in: J.J. Clauss/M. Cuypers (eds.), *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature* (Chichester/Malden 2010) 297–313, at 309.

13 Cf. esp. M. Black, "Metaphor", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1955) 273–294 who discusses different views of metaphor and concludes that in most cases of metaphor, literal periphrasis results in the "loss of cognitive content" (p. 293).

14 The term 'ground' for the basis of a metaphor was established by Richards (supra n. 7) 117: "[W]e call the common characteristics the ground of the metaphor."

15 Cf. the lion metaphor for Neoptolemus (324), Castor (555), Castor and Polydeuces (517), Romulus and Remus (1233), and (presumably) Alexander the Great (1441). The famous example of the lion metaphor for a brave warrior is already discussed by Aristotle, *Rh.* 3.4.1 (1406b20–26).

16 Cf. e.g. Achilles as an eagle (261), Hector and Protesilaus as hawks (169 and 531 respectively), Locrian Ajax as a vulture (361), etc.

17 Cf. e.g. the abducted Helen as a dove (87, 131), Cassandra being raped as a dove (361), the concubine Clytia as a dove (423).

18 E.g. the compound adjective τριέσπερος 'of three nights' facilitates comprehension of the following lion metaphor (33) by alluding to the story that Heracles was conceived by Alcmene in a single night which Zeus extended to triple length (cf. Pherecyd. 13c Fowler = Σ AT II. 14.324b; D.S. 4.92.2; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.8; Nonn. 25.243). Similarly, the unique compound adjective δειρό-παις 'giving birth through one's neck' specifies the ground on which Medusa can be



to certain elements of his story, such as Heracles, who is not only the slayer of the Nemean lion but also wearing his skin, being called a 'lion' (33, 459, 697, 917), Telephus, the son of Heracles and Auge, being also referred to with a lion metaphor (213),<sup>19</sup> or Tydeus, the father of Diomedes being called a 'boar' (1066).<sup>20</sup> These examples already make it clear that the *Alexandra* requires an erudite reader intimately familiar with Greek literature and mythology and that the quest for additional cognitive value of individual instances of figurative language accounts for much of the literary allure of the poem: any reader of the *Alexandra* is constantly wondering whether they might have missed something and thus searching for hidden meaning.<sup>21</sup>

### III

Other than being a primary literary device to obfuscate the prophecies of Cassandra, animal metaphors can also serve as a means to establish an intertextual connection:<sup>22</sup> an intertextual metaphor evokes its original context and causes it to be read in comparison or contrast with the present context, which may be essential for the full understanding of a passage. For instance, when Cassandra refers to herself as a 'swallow' (1460: χελιδόνα) she highlights the unintelligibility of her prophecies, presumably through an allusion to a passage in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* where she is called a swallow by Clytaemnestra when she fails to answer when being addressed in Greek (Aes. Ag. 1050–1051: χελιδόνος δίκην / ἄγνώτα φωνήν βάρβαρον κεκτημένη; cf. Hesych χ 325 s.v. χελιδόνος δίκην).<sup>23</sup> In Greek literature, foreign speech was often likened to the twittering of birds,<sup>24</sup>

metaphorically called a weasel (Lyc. 843), since in antiquity it was believed that weasels gave birth through the neck (cf. Ov. *Met.* 9.323; Anton. Lib. 29). Cf. esp. Ciani (supra n. 9) 136–142.

19 So far, this has not been suggested by commentators, but the lion metaphor for Telephus could be an allusion to a less prevalent version of the myth which is only preserved in a fragment of the Telephus-Frieze of the Pergamon Altar, according to which Telephus was suckled by a lioness after having been abandoned by his mother Auge (panel 12 of the north wall of the frieze). In this case, the scholia do not offer any additional information, probably because the variant of the myth was not known to the scholiast either.

20 The boar metaphor supposedly alludes to an oracle given to king Adrastus of Argos that he would marry his daughters to a lion and a boar, which turned out to be Polyneices and Tydeus who both came to his court as refugees (cf. Eur. *Hik.* 140–146, *Phoen.* 408–423; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.1; Hyg. *Fab.* 69), also cf. S. Hornblower, *Lykophron: Alexandra. Greek Text, Translation, Commentary, and Introduction* (Oxford 2015) 385 ad loc.

21 Also cf. Ziegler (supra n. 4) 2334–2335: "Der Zweck der alexandrinischen Lehr- und Rätsel-poesie ist in der Regel nur die Erregung des intellektuellen Vergnügens am Lehren und Lernen und am Aufspüren der verborgenen Beziehungen, die der gelehrte und scharfsinnige Verfasser in sein Werk hineingeheimnißt hat."

22 The potential of metaphorical language to establish intertextual relations is also briefly hinted at by E. Semino, *Metaphor in Discourse* (Cambridge 2008) 28–29.

23 Cf. first F. Spiro, "Prolog und Epilog in Lykophrons *Alexandra*", *Hermes* 23 (1888) 194–201, at 198.

24 Cf. the doves in Hdt. 2.57, swallows in Aes. Ag. 1050; Ar. Av. 1681, Ra. 680–682.

but in Lycophron, the swallow serves as a metaphor not for barbarian, i.e. non-Greek, speech, but for incomprehensibly obscure utterances:<sup>25</sup> this use of the swallow metaphor also draws on the context of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where Cassandra goes on to speak her prophecies in Greek in front of the chorus, but is not understood (cf. e.g. Aes. Ag. 1105: ἄιδρίς εἰμι τῶν μαντευμάτων; 1112–1113: οὐπὼ ξυνῆκα· νῦν γὰρ ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων / ἐπαργέμοισι θεσφάτοις δυσμηχανῶ). Therefore, I would suggest that the intertextuality in Lyc. 1460 has an additional function in context beyond providing the ground of the swallow metaphor and serves as a means to stress Cassandra's awareness of the futility of her prophecies and her bitterness since she herself knows that they will only be understood when it is already too late.<sup>26</sup>

In the following sections, I examine two instances of a very specific, intricate way in which metaphors have the potential to provide more information than a simple naming in order to explore how the notion of additional cognitive value can be necessary for interpretation in context.<sup>27</sup>

#### IV

Another instance of intertextual use of a metaphor, whose implications are more complex than in case of Cassandra's swallow metaphor, occurs in line 181, where a wasp metaphor is employed to refer to the Greek warriors in their battle fury coming against Troy:<sup>28</sup>

Lyc. 180–182: χῶ μὲν παλιμπόρευτον ἵζεται τρίβον,  
σφήκας δαφοινοὺς χηραμῶν ἀνειρύσας,  
ὅποῖα κούρος δῶμα κινήσας καπνῶ.

And he (i.e. Paris) shall come upon his homeward path  
raising the tawny wasps from their holes,  
even as a child disturbs their nests with smoke.<sup>29</sup>

25 Cf. V. Gigante Lanzara, *Licofrone*, Alessandra. *Introduzione, traduzione e note* (Milano 2000) 433 ad Lyc. 1457–1460.

26 Spiro (supra n. 23) 198, and commentators after him, such as von Holzinger (supra n. 1) 386 ad loc., M. Fusillo/G. Paduano/A. Hurst, *Licofrone*, Alessandra. *Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento* (Milano 1991) 315 ad loc., A. Hurst/A. Kolde, *Lycophron*, Alexandra. *Texte établi, traduit et annoté* (Paris 2008) 317–318 ad loc., and Hornblower (supra n. 20) 499 ad loc. merely note the word as a reference to Aeschylean tragedy.

27 For a theoretical approach to the context sensitivity of many metaphors cf. esp. Stern (supra n. 11).

28 See also A. Kolde, "Parodie et ironie chez Lycophron: un mode de dialogue avec la tradition?", in: C. Cusset/É. Prioux (eds.), *Lycophron: éclats d'obscurité. Actes du colloque international de Lyon et Saint-Étienne 18–20 janvier 2007* (Saint-Étienne 2009) 39–57, at 47–48.

29 Quotations of Greek text are taken from the Teubner edition of L. Mascialino (ed.), *Lycophronis Alexandra* (Leipzig 1964), translations are my own attempt to reproduce the original syntax of Lycophron's cryptic lines in English as precisely as possible, in some places drawing on

Despite having a reputation for stinging and being aggressive, wasps are not animals traditionally employed metaphorically for describing warriors, where lions and boars are the usual animals of choice. However, the use of the short Lycophranean wasp metaphor can be accounted for by considering intertextuality, since it seems to draw on an extended simile from the *Iliad*:<sup>30</sup>

*Il.* 16.259–267: αὐτίκα δὲ σφήκεσσιν ἐοικότες ἐξεχέοντο  
 εἰνοδίοις, οὓς παῖδες ἐριδμαίνωσιν ἔθοντες  
 αἰεὶ κερτομέοντες ὁδῶ ἔπι οἰκί' ἔχοντας  
 νηπίαχοι· ξυνὸν δὲ κακὸν πολέεσσι τιθεῖσι.  
 τοὺς δ' εἴ περ παρὰ τίς τε κιὼν ἄνθρωπος ὁδίτης  
 κινήσῃ ἀέκων, οἳ δ' ἄλκιμον ἦτορ ἔχοντες  
 πρόσσω πᾶς πέτεται καὶ ἀμύνει οἷσι τέκεσσι.  
 τῶν τότε Μυρμιδόνες κραδίην καὶ θυμὸν ἔχοντες  
 ἐκ νηῶν ἐχέοντο· βοὴ δ' ἄσβεστος ὀρώρει.

The Myrmidons came streaming out like wasps at the wayside  
 when little boys have got into the habit of making them angry  
 by always teasing them as they live in their house by the roadside;  
 silly boys, they do something that hurts many people;  
 and if some man who travels on the road happens to pass them  
 and stirs them unintentionally, they in heart of fury  
 come swarming out each one from his place to fight for their children.  
 In heart and in fury like these the Myrmidons streaming  
 came out from their ships, with a tireless clamour rising.<sup>31</sup>

Admittedly, the verbal echoes connecting the two passages in this case are rather tenuous (*Il.* 16.259: σφήκεσσιν – Lyc. 181: σφήκας; *Il.* 16.264: κινήσῃ – Lyc. 182: κινήσας), but the motive of the wasps being disturbed by children (*Il.* 16.260–261: παῖδες ἐριδμαίνωσιν ἔθοντες / αἰεὶ κερτομέοντες – Lyc. 182: κοῦρος δῶμα κινήσας καπνῶ) and the identical context of the Greek warriors attacking Troy clearly establish the intertextual relation. Surely Lycophron could presuppose an intimate knowledge of the Homeric poems on the part of his audience,<sup>32</sup> so he likely intended his wasp simile as an intertextual reference to the Iliadic passage. However, the comparison with the pretext does not only make Paris, who to Cassandra is the hated destroyer of his and her fatherland (cf. e.g. the accusations in Lyc. 86, 90, 137–138, 1363), appear in a bad light, since clearly he is the boy who foolishly stirred up the wasps intentionally (cf. the sg. in Lyc. 182:

the Loeb edition A.W. Mair/G.R. Mair (eds.), *Callimachus, Hymns and Epigrams. Aratus, Phaenomena. Lycophron*, Alexandra (2nd ed., Cambridge, Ma./London 1955).

30 Cf. the commentaries of von Holzinger (supra n. 1) 194 ad Lyc. 180/182, Fusillo et al. (supra n. 26) 176 ad Lyc. 180–182, Hurst/Kolde (supra n. 26) 125 ad Lyc. 181–182, and Hornblower (supra n. 20) 164 ad Lyc. 181.

31 Passages of Homer's *Iliad* taken from the edition of H. van Thiel, *Homeri Ilias* (2nd ed., Hildesheim 2010), translations from R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago 1951).

32 Cf. esp. Rengakos (supra n. 6).



κοῦρος δῶμα κινήσας καπνῶ instead of the more general παῖδες in *Il.* 16.260).<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, instead of the heroic tone of the Iliadic simile where the wasp fight to protect their offspring (cf. *Il.* 16.265: ἀμύνει οἷσι τέκεσσι), the wasps in the Lycophronean adaption are excited by mere smoke, harmless and volatile.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the valour and battle fury of the Greek warriors is tainted, as has been aptly pointed out by Kolde: “Quant à l’ardeur des guerriers, glorifiée par la comparaison homérique avec les guêpes, elle est rabaissée, par la même comparaison, à une excitation stupide, privée de toute raison.”<sup>35</sup> The function of this mock-heroic reversal of the Iliadic wasp simile in the context of the *Alexandra* is the same which I am going to propose for the next example.

## V

A second instance of intertextual use of an animal metaphor, whose significance has not been analyzed in detail so far, occurs in the narration of the fate of the Greek fleet after the fall of Troy. The Greeks will suffer because of the sacrilege committed by Locrian Ajax (cf. 365) and in her dark vision of their misfortune after their departure from the Troad, Cassandra paints a gruesome picture in an apostrophe to the cliffs of Euboea, thereby referring to the ship-wrecked Greeks metaphorically as ‘tuna fish’:

Lyc. 377–383: (...)
   
ὅσων στεναγμῶν ἐκβεβρασμένων νεκρῶν
   
σὺν ἡμιθραύστοις ἰκρίοις ἀκούσετε,
   
ὅσων δὲ φλοίσβων ῥαχίας ἀνεκβάτου
   
δίναις παλιρροίοισιν ἔλκοντος σάλου,
   
ὅσων δὲ θύννων ἡλοκισμένων ῥαφὰς
   
πρὸς τηγάνοισι κρατός, ὧν καταιβάτης
   
σκηπτὸς κατ’ ὄρφνην γεύσεται δηουμένων,
   
(...)
   
(...)
   
what groaning of corpses smashed on the shore
   
with half-splintered planks will you hear,
   
what crashing of the inescapable surge

- 33 Cf. Fusillo et al. (supra n. 26) 176 ad loc.: “[L]a trasformazione dei «fanciulli» omerici (παῖδες) nel singolare colpisce ovviamente l’infantilismo di Paride.” Also Hurst/Kolde (supra n. 26) 125 ad Lyc. 181–182: “Ce terme (i.e. κοῦρος) remplace les παῖδες homériques, mettant en exergue le comportement infantile et la responsabilité de Pâris.” Other than the shift from plural to singular, κοῦρος seems to be a synonymous lexical *variatio* of παῖδες.
- 34 Also cf. A. Hurst, “Étincelle dans l’ombre?”, in: C. Cusset/É. Prioux (eds.), *Lycophron: éclats d’obscurité. Actes du colloque international de Lyon et Saint-Étienne 18–20 janvier 2007* (Saint-Étienne 2009) 195–208, at 201 who notes that the Lycophronean version lacks the immediacy of danger of the Homeric passage.
- 35 Kolde (supra n. 28) 56. Also cf. Fusillo et al. (supra n. 26) 176 ad loc. who already commented: “[U]sata da Cassandra, l’immagine assume una connotazione spregiativa nei confronti del valore guerra, assente nel modello omerico dove è puramente quotidiana.”

when the sea drags men back with flowing swirls,  
 what tuna-fish with the sutures of their heads torn  
 on the frying-pans, of whom the descending  
 thunderbolt in the dark shall taste as they perish,  
 (...)

The connection between ship-wrecked sailors and tuna-fish is not particularly salient, but, as in the wasp example, intertextuality can account for the choice of metaphor. This metaphorical depiction obviously draws on a simile in Aeschylus' *Persae*, where a similarly atrocious image of the Persian defeat at Salamis is described:

Aes. *Pers.* 421–428: ἀκταὶ δὲ νεκρῶν χοιράδες τ' ἐπλήθουν.  
 φυγῇ δ' ἀκόσμως πᾶσα ναῦς ἡρέσσετο,  
 ὅσαιπερ ἦσαν βαρβάρου στρατεύματος.  
 τοὶ δ' ὥστε θύννους ἢ τιν' ἰχθύων βόλον  
 ἀγαῖσι κωπῶν θραύμασιν τ' ἐρειπίων  
 ἔπαιον ἐρράχιζον, οἰμωγὴ δ' ὁμοῦ  
 κωκύμασιν κατεῖχε πελαγίαν ἄλλα,  
 ἕως κελαινὸν νυκτὸς ὄμμ' ἀφείλετο.

The shores and reefs were also full of corpses.  
 In disorderly flight every ship was being rowed away  
 as many as there were remaining of the Eastern armada.  
 Meanwhile, as if they were tunny or some other catch of fish,  
 the enemies with broken pieces of oars and spars from the wreckage  
 were clubbing men and splitting spines, and mixture of shrieking  
 and wailing filled the expanse of the sea,  
 until the dark face of night blotted it out.<sup>36</sup>

The word θύννοι 'tuna' occurs only in Aeschylus in extant Greek tragedy, and commentators of the *Alexandra* have simply stated that the metaphor is a reference to the simile in *Persae*.<sup>37</sup> However, the function of this reference has not received any attention and the additional cognitive value of the metaphor has been neglected.

Compared to the first example, the connection between the two texts is more immediate and elaborate, for there are other features connecting the two passages beyond the tuna metaphor. The intertextual link is established by addi-

36 Greek text from the Teubner edition by M.L. West (ed.), *Aeschyli Tragoediae cum incerti poetae Prometheo* (Stuttgart 1990), translation adapted from the Loeb edition by A.H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Aeschylus Vol. 1* (Cambridge, Ma./London 2008).

37 Again, cf. the information given in the most important commentaries, von Holzinger (supra n. 1) 228 ad Lyc. 381, Fusillo et al. (supra n. 26) 200 ad Lyc. 373–283, Gigante Lanzara (supra n. 25) 259 ad Lyc. 381–383, Lambin (supra n. 9) 85 ad loc., and Hurst/Kolde (supra n. 26) 156 ad Lyc. 381–383, and Hornblower (supra n. 20) 202 ad Lyc. 381. On the numerous intertextual connections between Lycophron's *Alexandra* and the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides see C. Cusset, "Tragic Elements in Lycophron's *Alexandra*", *Hermathena* 173/174 (2002/2003) 137–153, at 143–152.

tional verbal echoes (*Pers.* 421: νεκρῶν – *Lyc.* 377: νεκρῶν; *Pers.* 425: θραύμασιν – *Lyc.* 378: ἡμιθραύστοις) and common motives, for the setting is in both cases characterized by the coming of darkness (*Pers.* 428: κελαινὸν νυκτὸς ὄμμ' – *Lyc.* 383: κατ' ὄρφνην), the groaning of the dying (*Pers.* 426–427: οἰμωγὴ δ' ὁμοῦ / κωκύμασιν – *Lyc.* 377: στεναγμῶν), and the violently torn corpses (*Pers.* 426: ἔπαιον ἐρράχιζον – *Lyc.* 381–382: ἡλοκισμένων ῥαφὰς / ... κρατός).<sup>38</sup> Lycophron obviously wanted his readers to have the Aeschylean simile in mind as an intertext against which his own text should be read.

However, the image of the dead fish in Lycophron's *Alexandra* is not left at that, but extended in an unexpected, yet not illogical direction: since tuna is an edible fish, the metaphor affords access to the semantic field of food, and the ship-wrecked corpses thus described can be imagined as ingredients of a dish being prepared.<sup>39</sup> The following τήγανα 'frying-pans' (382) belong to the language of comedy, and are an unusual metaphor for the rocks on which the torn corpses are lying (cf. the literal phrase before in 367: χοιράδων ἐφημένους).<sup>40</sup> The combination of death or dying with vocabulary from the context of food and dining (and often a notion of cannibalism with it) is not in itself unusual for Lycophron's *Alexandra*,<sup>41</sup> but the association of τήγανα with comic language creates a new context for the Aeschylean θύννοι and modifies the tragic tone the passage would have had otherwise. The culinary imagery is further extended by the thunderbolt striking down from the sky being imagined as 'tasting' the dead bodies (383: γεύσεται).<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, the Lycophronean use of the tuna metaphor

38 It has been surmised by von Holzinger (supra n. 1) 228 ad loc. that the Aeschylean phrasing is borrowed from a passage of the *Nostoi* in which a shipwreck was described, but this is uncertain and there can hardly be any doubt that the lines of the *Persae* were the model for Lycophron's adaption.

39 On the term 'metaphor extension' for the use of two or more metaphorical expressions from the same semantic field referring to the same topic cf. Semino (supra n. 22) 25–26.

40 Also cf. the brief and succinct explanation in the scholia, Σ ad *Lyc.* 381: ὅσων δὲ θύννων· θύννους μὲν καλεῖ τοὺς Ἑλληνας· τήγανα δὲ εἰσιν αἱ πλατεῖαι πέτραι (quoted from P.L.M. Leone [ed.], *Scholia vetera et paraphrases in Lycophronis Alexandram* [Galatina 2002]). The image is also explained by Hornblower (supra n. 20) 202 ad *Lyc.* 382 who, however, does not note the relation to the language of comedy: "[T]he point of this vivid piece of imagery seems to be to compare the rocks of Euboea, on which the bodies of the drowned men will be broken, to the frying pans in which the heads of tunny-fish are split open before being fried and eaten." On Lycophron's familiarity with the language of comedy also see Hurst (supra n. 34).

41 Cf. E. Sistakou, *The Aesthetics of Darkness. A Study of Hellenistic Romanticism in Apollonius, Lycophron and Nicander* (Leuven/Paris/Walpole 2012), esp. 186 with n. 188.

42 The alienating combination of tragic elements with comic colouring was already pointed out by von Holzinger (supra n. 1) 228, more general see *ibid.* 31–4, and is also stressed by Gigante Lanzara (supra n. 25) ad loc. and Hurst/Kolde (supra n. 26) 156 ad loc. Also cf. G.W. Mooney, *The Alexandra of Lycophron* (London 1921) 40–41 ad *Lyc.* 382: "(...) Lycophron's grim joke seems to be that the torn bodies are thrown on the rocks as sliced tunnies are thrown in a frying-pan and then the lightning tastes the bodies as a dish that has been cooked."

in this passage is comically grotesque, or parodic, rather than tragic.<sup>43</sup> It has been noted that Lycophron's poem contains several instances where a myth is presented in a presumably comic way, but no commentator has ever approached the question as to why the poet might have included these un-tragic elements.<sup>44</sup>

For this particular passage, an explanation of the purpose of the animal metaphor with comic overtones may be brought forward in light of the intertextual allusion to the Aeschylean simile.<sup>45</sup> The use of the θύννοι metaphor does not only fulfil the function of characterizing the sailors as helpless and hapless victims, but additional cognitive value is to be gleaned from the original context of the tuna metaphor: re-using a phrase from Aeschylus' *Persae*, a text which for Lycophron's erudite audience was originally connected to a Greek success over Asia, and re-casting it to denote the ultimate failure of the Greek expedition against Troy is indicative of the anti-Greek tenor of the *Alexandra*.<sup>46</sup>

To this end, the tuna metaphor in line 381 facilitates a complex net of references: the phrase is an intertextual allusion to the Aeschylean model, but it converts its pretext in order to stress the Greek failure against the background of the Persian defeat at Salamis. It also affords a point of contact for the alimentary imagery and thereby adds an element of grim comedy to the scene which is not only in tune with the poem's penchant for sinister and morbid imagery, but also an expression of Cassandra's ideology: the tuna metaphor is obviously informed by her hatred for the Greeks and her desire to ridicule and further discredit both them and their suffering.

43 Also cf. Sistakou (supra n. 41) 180–181, who discusses the passage as an example of the grotesque and the uncanny in Lycophron.

44 Cf. von Holzinger (supra n. 1) 31–35, who is very careful and tentative in applying the term 'comic' to the *Alexandra*, but asserts that the poem contains: "(...) Märchenstoffe, die man in keiner Weise tragisch finden kann" (p. 32), among which he also lists Lyc. 381. On the humour of the *Alexandra* see also A. Hurst, "Lycophron: la condensation du sens, le comique et l'*Alexandra*", in: id., *Sur Lycophron* (Geneva 2012) 47–58, at 47–50.

45 On intertextuality as a function of the animal metaphors in the *Alexandra* see esp. Cusset (supra n. 10) 63–65, and Kolde (supra n. 28) 50–52 who both focus esp. on the connection of Lycophron's poem to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Cases of intertextuality with parodic intent are also discussed by Kolde (supra n. 28) 47–55, who does not mention this particular passage.

46 The "Greek-adverse perspective" ("griechenfeindliche[r] Standpunkt") was already noted in passing by Ziegler (supra n. 4) 2335. On Cassandra's hostility towards the Greeks also cf. more recently C. McNelis/A. Sens, "Trojan Glory: *kleos* and the Survival of Troy in Lycophron's *Alexandra*", *Trends in Classics* 3 (2011) 54–82 and D. Meyer, "Lykophron", in: B. Zimmermann/A. Rengakos (eds.), *Die Literatur der klassischen und hellenistischen Zeit* (Munich 2014) 94. For more instances of negative evaluation of the Greeks and especially Odysseus see G. Schade, *Lykophrons Odyssee, Alexandra 648–819* (Berlin/New York 1999) 19–20. Also note that the victory of Salamis is not mentioned in the later passage dealing with the Persian Wars, cf. Hornblower (supra n. 20) 488 ad Lyc. 1412–1434: "Naturally Greek success, including the battle of Salamis itself, is absent."



## VI

In conclusion, the close reading of the wasp metaphor in line 181 and the tuna metaphor in 381, with particular focus on their additional cognitive value, shows that these animal metaphors are more than mere substitutions of literal phrases: they are highly context sensitive, require considerable interpretive effort, and their use is motivated by their potential to establish an intertextual relation to well-known pretexts. Indeed, without recourse to their respective pretexts the Lycophronean metaphors are difficult to understand and the additional cognitive value they derive from their intertextuality is essential for their function in the context of the *Alexandra*. It has been noted that in an attempt to vindicate her doomed fatherland, Cassandra resorts to different strategies to malign the Greeks, most conspicuously the re-interpretation of well-known events in favour of the Trojans and the negative re-evaluation of Greek heroes and their families: the description of Helen as a 'Pephranian bitch' (87: Πεφρναίᾱς κυνός) evokes the Homeric pretext (*Il.* 3.180; 6.344, 356),<sup>47</sup> but in this case the original metaphor is already intended to be derogatory. Otherwise, the most striking examples for the re-interpretation of traditional material include calling Achilles a 'peddler of corpses' (276: νεκροπέρνας) and alluding to his presumed timidity and his attempt to avoid the war dressed as a woman on Scyrus (cf. 276–278),<sup>48</sup> denouncing the travelling hero Odysseus as a mere 'thief' (658: κλωπα)<sup>49</sup> and a 'coatless suppliant, a babbler about his bitter sufferings' (763: ἄχλαινος ἵκτης πημάτων λυγρῶν κόπις, concrete reference to *Od.* 14.469–506), and his wife Penelope as a 'vixen, a dignified whore, hollowing out her houses with parties by pouring out the wealth of her miserable husband' (771–773: βασσάρα / σεμνῶς κασωρεύουσα κοιλανεῖ δόμους, / θοίναισιν ὄλβον ἐκχέασα τλήμονος, cf. Penelope demanding gifts from the suitors in *Od.* 18.275–280).<sup>50</sup> The mocking re-evaluation of the Greeks jumping from their burning ships as 'divers jumping from their seats, bloodying the foreign soil' (296–297: κυβιστητῆρες ἐξ ἐδωλίων / πηδῶντες αἰμάξουσιν ὀθνεῖαν κόνιν) seems to be a reversal of Patroclus' taunting simile for the dead Cebriones in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 16.745–750) to the same purpose.<sup>51</sup>

47 Cf. Fusillo et al. (supra n. 26) 164 ad Lyc. 86–89.

48 Cf. Fusillo et al. (supra n. 26) 188 ad Lyc. 276–280: "Cassandra introduce tre elementi che contraddicono l'immagine eroica di Achille." Similarly Gigante Lanzara (supra n. 25) 241 ad Lyc. 276–278: "Dall'odio di Cassandra emerge distorta la figura dell'eroe acheo, che nelle sue parole appare un vile pronto a nascondersi in veste femminili per sfuggire alla guerra."

49 The designation is usually taken as a reference to Odysseus' venture to Troy and the acquisition of the Palladium, cf. Σ ad loc. and Schade (supra n. 46) 66 ad loc. This episode from the *Little Iliad* was traditionally a heroic exploit, but becomes a mere theft in the eyes of Cassandra.

50 Some commentators have attempted to interpret σεμνῶς as a defense of Penelope's virtue, but the allegation is rather aggravated by the supposition of hypocrisy, cf. von Holzinger (supra n. 1) 283–284 ad Lyc. 771, Schade (supra n. 46) 175 ad Lyc. 772, and Gigante Lanzara (supra n. 25) 330–331 ad Lyc. 772–773.

51 The phrasing in Lyc. 296: κυβιστητῆρες echoes *Il.* 16.745, 749: κυβιστῆ; 750: κυβιστητῆρες, and Lyc. 296: ἐξ ἐδωλίων probably takes up *Il.* 16.749: ἐξ ἵππων, obviously with parodic intent, but

This overview gives an impression of the variety of techniques employed by the poet of the *Alexandra* to introduce Cassandra's anti-Greek attitude, and the animal metaphors in the passages under discussion are obviously informed by the same ideology:<sup>52</sup> the conflict between Europe and Asia fills the last section of Cassandra's prophecy (1283–1450), but significantly and conspicuously, the naval battle at Salamis is not mentioned there, likely because of Cassandra's reluctance to predict one of the greatest victories of the hated Greeks in the Persian wars. By adopting the tuna metaphor at an early point of the poem, Cassandra turns the seemingly undebatable triumph of the Greeks at Salamis against their ancestors. Moreover, the tragic tone of the original context of the tuna metaphor is tainted by the cynical mockery of imagining the heroes who fought before Troy as 'tuna-fish' split open in a metaphorical frying-pan being eaten by lightning.<sup>53</sup> The wasp example indicates that the use of an animal metaphor as a means to establish an intertextual connection with parodic intent in order to discredit the Greeks is not a singular instance. In both passages – and it is to be expected that more examples can be found – Lycophron does not use animal metaphors as mere γρίφοι for their own sake, but makes use of their potential to convey additional cognitive value and employs the intertextual allusions they trigger as devices to express Cassandra's ideological disdain for the invaders of her homeland. In this, Lycophron relies on the ability of his readers to recognize and appreciate this intellectual engagement with well-known pretexts and the undermining or reversal of their original meanings. Despite the distinct possibility that we are unable to identify all instances of intertextual allusion in the *Alexandra* due to the loss of some of the possible pretexts (especially in the field of tragedy and comedy),<sup>54</sup> it is to be expected that, upon closer inspection of their additional cognitive value, more of Lycophron's enigmatic animal metaphors might reveal similar treatment of elements of intertextuality and ideologically founded parody in their respective contexts.

Correspondence:

Fabian Horn

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Schellingstrasse 3

D-80799 München

fabian.horn@klassphil.uni-muenchen.de

this intertextual allusion has been noted only by Hornblower (supra n. 20) 185 ad loc. so far; he describes the use of κυβιστητήρες as an 'inversion of Patroklos' black humour at *Il.* 16. 749–50.'

52 For ideological purposes as a possible function of metaphors cf. A. Goatly, *The Language of Metaphors* (2nd ed., London/New York 2011) 161–164.

53 Cf. Sistakou (supra n. 1) 256, who also notes that many of Lycophron's naming strategies originate from ancient comedy, but concludes that "(presumably) he does not intend to produce comic effect with his narrative."

54 Among the works which have been identified as likely sources and pretexts of the *Alexandra* (cf. esp. the discussion in Ziegler [supra n. 4] 2336–2341) there are numerous texts of which only paltry fragments, if any, have survived.