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Homeric *hapax legomena* and Vergilian *unica*: Style, Theme, and the Lexicography of the Intertext

Hellenistic poets were clearly interested in Homeric lexicography. One symptom of this interest is their use of unusual Homeric vocabulary in their own poetry. *Hapax legomena* and related phenomena (e.g. words that appear once and Homer and nowhere else; words that appear once in Homer but commonly elsewhere; words that appear once in the *Iliad* but several times in the *Odyssey*, or vice versa; *dis legomena*; etc.) seem to have exerted a kind of fascination on the minds of these poets, and attention to such matters is without doubt a characteristic feature of their poetry.

Roman poets adopted a number of Hellenistic practices, many of which are now taken for granted by students of Latin poetry. That they were interested in lexicographical rarities, however, is neither readily acknowledged nor securely established. To date, only a few examples have been adduced to suggest that they were aware of *hapax legomena* and made use of them in their own poetry.

In this paper, I will try to assess just how important this aspect of the Hellenistic aesthetic actually was to Roman poets. My test case will be Vergil, whose intertextual engagement with Homer in the *Aeneid* is pervasive and has been studied systematically, but with only sporadic attention to the phenomenon in question. Some of the questions that I will attempt to answer are:

- Did Vergil refer to Homeric *hapax legomena* to a greater or lesser extent than his Hellenistic predecessors?
- Was he independent of his predecessors in finding and selecting rare words for use in his own poetry, or did he generally follow their lead?
- Did he simply borrow rare Greek words directly from Homer (with or without the guidance of his Hellenistic predecessors), or did he imitate the lexical texture of Homer's Greek by the careful deployment of rare Latin words as well?
- How is Vergil's interest in these matters to be understood? Does he indulge his interest in lexical rarities for its own sake, or is this aspect of his poetics connected in some way to the major themes of his life's work?

Finally, I will try to suggest why this kind of study should be interesting to students of Latin poetry.