

Abstract for the 13th Conference of the FIEC

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Preferred Panel: Language of the Body

Title of the Paper: Language of Hand in Homeric Epic

Length of the Paper: 20 minutes

Outline of the Content:

The paper focuses on the uses of hand in Homeric epic, i.e. the meanings and functions of hand during verbal (phrases) and non-verbal (gesticulation) behavior of the characters.

The *Iliad I* is a clear example that offers functional diversity of the word hand. The basic uses of hand in the *Iliad I* are as follows:

- Passages of human daily life and work where hand is the main human instrument: a man usually does his work by his hands; the priest fills a bowl for sacrifice with his hands, etc.
- Passages of supplication and prayer: the gesture of raising up one's hand in prayer shows a desire of divine power perception. Cryses prays to Apollo *xeira\j o)regnu/j*. The act of supplication depends on hand contact with parts of the body, i.e. knees and chin. In the episode of Thetis asking Zeus to help Achilles, she places her left hand on his knees and touches his chin with her right hand.
- Passages including formulae of oath and threat that reveal symbolic meaning of hand = strength, power (both of justice and violence). Calchas asks Achilles to take an oath as a security guarantee: *...su\ d\le\ su/nqeo kai\ moi o)/mosson h\ m\en moi pro/frwn e)/pesin kai\ xersi/n arhcein (Il. I. 76-77)*. Agamemnon asks his heralds to take Briseis by the hand and bring her to him: *Xeiro\j e(lo/nt)a)ge/men Brishi+/da kallipa/r\$on (Il. I. 323)*. The verbal expression of the action (taking her by the hand) emphasizes and demonstrates his power.

The paper discusses the issues of literal and illiteral meaning of the word *kheir* on the evidence of Homeric epic and reveals the peculiarities of the hand language and its reflections in the language of Homer.