

While the origins of dactylic hexameter remain subject to ongoing speculation and debate, there has emerged an apparent consensus in favor of a pre-Mycenaean stage in the evolution of Greek epic poetry composed in this meter. A crucial piece of evidence in support of this hypothesis is provided by the reconstruction of the vocalic /r/ as a formative element in several Homeric formulas (e.g.: West 1988, Ruijgh 1995, Horrocks 1997).

As early as 1909, Wackernagel commented on the anomalous scansion of Homeric *ἀνδροτήτα* (‘– ∪ – ∪’ instead of ‘∪ ∪ – ∪’) by pointing to a more general feature of Homeric language: “eine Silbe mit kurzem Vokal, dem ursprünglich Nasal + r folgte, bei Homer vor der Silbenfolge – ∪ – kurz gemessen werden konnte.” In confirmation he pointed to the spelling *ἀβροτάξομεν* (for *ἀμβροτάξομεν*) and suggested that *ἀνδροτήτα* should similarly be spelled “*ἀδροτήτα*” (1955.1116, n. 1). An alternative explanation was foreseen (and rejected) by Wackernagel: it is to posit a vocalic /r/ and read *anr tēta* to obtain the right scansion (∪ ∪ – ∪). Since Wackernagel’s discussion, the decipherment of Linear B has led to the recognition that Greek dialects had lost the vocalic /r/ at least half-a-millennium before the traditional dating for the writing down of the Homeric poems. Positing a vocalic /r/ as an intrinsic element of the formulaic apparatus of dactylic hexameter has much more far-reaching consequences for the antiquity of “Homeric” epic today than it did in the early 20th century.

Upon a review of the evidence, I argue for returning to Wackernagel’s explanation of the formulas of the *a(n)drotēta* type, based on inscriptional evidence for the reduction of nasals in the given consonantal sequence (further on this: Latacz 1965). Furthermore, I discuss the relevance of available metrical analyses of Homeric hexameter to the solution of this problem (Berg 1979, Tichy 1981), concluding that the hypothesis of a pre-Mycenaean hexameter epic tradition is a highly unlikely supposition.