

ARCUS IN HORACE, CARM. 3. 26. 7

Vixi puellis nuper idoneus
et militavi non sine gloria:
nunc arma defunctumque bello
barbiton hic paries habebit

laevom marinae qui Veneris latus 5
custodit: hic, hic ponite lucida
funalia et vectis et arcus
oppositis foribus minacis...

6 lurida Nisbet 7 †et arcus† Shackleton Bailey, Nisbet–Rudd : securesque Bentley : et harpas Cunningham : et uncus Bisconius et postea Holder : et asses G. H. Müller (i.q. axes, i.e. ligna quaedam sectilia in modum arietis adhibita) : aduncos Giangrande (“fort. recte” Shackleton Bailey) : sacrata Housman : et ascias O. Keller

The first two stanzas of the poem are based on the conventional metaphorical comparison of love and war. Verses 6–8 refer to a popular motif of ancient comedy, also frequent in the Roman love elegy: a youth, usually taking part in a κῶμος (*comissatio*) and flushed with wine, assaults the doors of his mistress’ house.

Having left behind his “military service”, the poet dedicates to the temple of Venus his “arms” and the lyre that has completed its stint at “warfare”. Three items appertaining to these arms are given further mention: the servants are ordered to place crowbars, torches made of tarred ropes, and something called *arcus* (normally a “bow”; the plural might be understood as a poetic rendering) at the temple of Venus. In all likelihood, all three items are meant to be understood as threats to oppositional doors (v. 8).¹

¹ Formicola 1997, 114–115, points out that *minax* with the dative of the object is poorly attested (normally it is used either singly or with *adversus*), for the article in *ThLL* s.v. cites only two examples of this, the one being the passage in question, the other unsatisfactory: Luc. *Phars.* 6. 285 *Torquato ruit ille minax...* (*Torquato* may also be dependent on *ruit* as a poetical *dativus directionis* or *incommodi*). Accordingly,

The word *arcus* has been preserved and transmitted by all manuscripts, including those of Porphyrius and Ps.-Acro, but has been deemed suspect ever since Bentley.² Scholarly opinions on the subject divide into three groups: (1) *arcus* implies a common bow; (2) the text must be corrupted; (3) *arcus* is a *hapax legomenon* for some tool used for breaking and entering.³

Bentley has plausibly argued that “bow” in this context does seem problematic, for it is unclear how it might threaten the doors. As Housman put it, “Of all weapons the one which doors and door-keepers can best afford to laugh at is an ‘*arcus*’ in any known sense of word”.⁴ One might suggest a kind of metonymy: a bow not threatening the doors but rather the custodian or inhabitants of the house;⁵ or else it might be a mere attribute of the carousing youth who tried to break in.⁶ Yet neither of these explanations is satisfactory for two reasons.

Firstly, it is important to the discussion that torches, mentioned along with crowbars and *arcus*, were used by revelers not only for lighting but for breaking in⁷ and were employed in a similar manner as crowbars. Examples of this use of torches in the context of a *comissatio* would in fact seem to be even more numerous than those of crowbars;⁸ that is, of

Formicola takes *minaxis* to be used in an absolute sense and interprets *oppositis foribus* not as a dative dependent on *minax*, but as *ablativus absolutus* with concessive meaning (“bows that were menacing despite the closed doors”). However, it is much easier to assume that we are dealing with an unusual poetical syntax; besides, in Horace verbal adjectives sometimes govern the same case, or require the same preposition as the verb, like participles (*Carm.* 2. 13. 11–12 *lignum ... caducum ... in domini caput*). On the problems of interpreting *arcus* as a bow, see below.

² Bentley ²1713, 229–230.

³ For survey of scholarly opinions see also Henderson 1973, 66 n. 45.

⁴ Housman 1882, 190 (= 1972, 3).

⁵ Gloss. codicis Reginensis: *quibus ianitores terrerent*; thus Olsson 1885, 66–67; Romano 1991, 824.

⁶ Cf. Orelli 1837, 408: “*arcus magis ioci causa, quam ut sagittis figerent ianitores aut aemulos, interdum gestasse comissatores consentaneum est*”. Needless to say, both grounds and evidence for this suggestion are lacking.

⁷ As was rightly pointed out by Nisbet–Rudd 2004, 315; cf. Bentley ²1713, 229–230.

⁸ Breaking through a door (1) with torches and fire: Ar. *Lys.* 249–250 (ὄν γὰρ τοσαύτας οὐτ’ ἀπειλάς οὔτε πῦρ ἤξουσ’ ἔχοντες ὥστ’ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς πύλας...); Men. *Dysc.* 60 (κατακάω); Theocr. 2. 127–128 (πελέκεις καὶ λαμπάδες); Herod. 2. 65 (τὰ ὑπέρθυρ’ ὀπτά, cf. 36–37 οὐδ’ ἔχων δάιδας τὴν οἰκίην ὑφήψεν); Plaut. *Pers.* 569 (*exurent fores*); Turpil. *CRF* 200 (*fores exurere*); Ov. *Amor.* 1. 6. 57–58 (*ferroque ignique*); *Ars amat.* 3. 567 (*nec franget postes nec saevis ignibus uret*); Strato *AP* 12. 252. 1 (“Ἐμπρήσω σέ, θύρη, τῆ λαμπάδι...); Iambl. *Vit. Pyth.* 112 (ἐπιμπρήσῃ); Aeschin. (Ps.-) *Epist.* 10. 10 (καταπρήσοντες); (2) with crowbars:

the three items mentioned by the poet as threats to oppositional doors the first two are tools customarily used for breaking in. It would be very odd indeed if the third item, placed just before the words *oppositis foribus minaces*, were to stand apart from the rest and refer to something that has nothing to do with the doors themselves.

Secondly, a bow is a long-range weapon that could hardly be used in a close-quarters scuffle. Standard everyday violence – be it robbery, abduction or a brawl – could be carried out with knives, daggers, sticks, lashes or fists; but examples of such encounters where bows were used are lacking.⁹ F. Copley is right in saying that “the bow was not the weapon that the Roman would normally have carried”.¹⁰

G. Giangrande’s attempt to explain the bow in this context through its symbolic reference to Cupid (and moreover as “Cupid’s real bow” – “a divine *arcus* could possibly be *minax* to any *oppositae fores*”)¹¹ remains incomprehensible to me. Giangrande refers to “the motif of the poet appropriating Cupid’s bow” (Meleager, *AP* 5. 179. 1 ff.).¹² Threatening to destroy Cupid’s bow (as if such were physically possible) is also a conventional fiction of the epigrammatic genre;¹³ but to declare that a certain god’s instrument has literally come into one’s possession and to then dedicate this item to a real temple along with real objects is another matter entirely and one that requires parallel examples. This major difficulty is increased by the unduly vague connection between *minacis* and Cupid’s bow (mentioned subsequent to those instruments habitually used for breaking and entering) as well as by the overall brevity of the alleged allusion to Cupid.¹⁴

Ter. *Eun.* 774 (*agmen cum vecti*); Lucil. 839 Marx (*vecti atque ancipiti ferro*); (3) with axes: Theocr. 2. 127–128 (πελέκεις καὶ λαμπάδες); Plaut. *Bacch.* 1119 (*securibus*); Lucil. 839 Marx (*vecti atque ancipiti ferro*).

⁹ Formicola, who at length defends *arcus* in the sense of a “bow”, cites Ter. *Eun.* 786–787: *fundam tibi nunc nimi’ vellem dari, / ut tu illos procul hinc ex occulto caederes: facerent fugam*. However, it was meant as a joke and therefore this parallel cannot be taken seriously. In reality neither a sling nor a bow are conceivable as weapons used against the inhabitants of a house.

¹⁰ Copley 1956, 160 n. 88.

¹¹ Giangrande 2005, 127–129.

¹² *Ibid.*, 129.

¹³ Strictly speaking, Meleager does not threaten to “appropriate” Cupid’s bow and quiver but rather to burn them as well as cut his wings and bind his feet – as if the god and his ammunition were physically present; or as if the poet were addressing a statue of Cupid whose inflicted damage was thought to affect the god himself.

¹⁴ Nisbet–Rudd 2004, 315: “...such an object would be out of place with *funalia* and *vectes*, the plural would be awkward, and Cupid could not be mentioned in such a condensed and casual way”. Giangrande’s objections to this are unconvincing.

It thus seems impossible to interpret *arcus* here as a “bow”, whether real¹⁵ or mythical, which leaves us with two options: either *arcus* is corrupt¹⁶ and must be emended, or it is to be interpreted as some kind of tool for breaking in.

Bentley suggested *securēs* (though not reproducing Horace’s text with this emendation but only mentioning it in the commentary) because axes – along with torches and crowbars – seem to be the only instruments used for this purpose.¹⁷ As unlikely as it might appear, palaeographically speaking, *securēs* could indeed be regarded as a diagnostic conjecture. Keller’s *ascias*¹⁸ is worth considering, as it makes perfect sense and is tempting palaeographically albeit problematic from a prosodic standpoint.¹⁹

Other conjectures seem far less plausible. Giangrande’s *aduncos*²⁰ would give crowbars an epithet, thus chiasmatically balancing them with *lucida funalia*. Housman’s *sacrate* is based on the idea that medieval scribes sometimes perpetrated palindromic corruptions (*sacrate* > *et arcas* > *et arcus*) but the only example that he cites in support of this is questionable.²¹

The third group of scholars regards *arcus* as a tool used for breaking in. The weak point in this interpretation is that this usage of *arcus* is unattested in lexicography – we have to assume a *hapax legomenon*.

To suggest that it could imply some form of catapult through analogy to *arcuballista*,²² would of course be an impossible exaggeration.

Interpreting *arcus* as props for crowbars²³ seems both too vague and invented ad locum. Why should these props be called *arcus*?

¹⁵ Henderson’s view (Henderson 1973, 66 n. 45) is as incomprehensible to me as Giangrande’s: “The weapons are mentioned here as being among those of a soldier who in the literary convention becomes the soldier of Venus, yet keeps the formidable arms as a token of his military preparedness in the cause of love”.

¹⁶ Cruces are put by Shackleton Bailey 1985, 94, and Nisbet–Rudd 2004, 315.

¹⁷ See n. 8 above.

¹⁸ Keller 1863, 279; 1879, 271–274.

¹⁹ Horace does use *-i- consona* in *Epodes* (12. 7 *vjetis*) and *Odes* (3. 4. 41 *consilj(um)*; 3. 6. 6 *principj(um)*), but both examples from the *Odes* happen to fall before caesura of Alcaic hendecasyllabus and with elision, which is insufficient in proving that *ascjas* could stand at the end of enneasyllabus (pace Keller 1879, 272; synzesis in Horace’s hexameters is, of course, not relevant for the discussion).

²⁰ Giangrande 1966, 82–84.

²¹ Housman 1882, 190–191 (= idem 1972, 3–4); he refers to Prop. 3. 5. 24 *sparsarit et nigras alba senecta comas*, where *et nigras* was corrupted to *integras* in some manuscripts.

²² Gesner in Baxterus–Gesnerus 1815, 198; Page 1884, 122; Birt 1925, 95. Cf. n. 9 above.

²³ “fulcra, quibus vectes imponuntur”: incerti teste Orellio (1837, 408–409).

F. Copley imagined a “pinch bar with a curved end”.²⁴ But first of all a metal stick with a hooked or curved end would be described as a “hook” (*uncus*) rather than as a “bow”, and secondly *arcus* would then be just another type of crowbar (*vectes*) and thus making for a somewhat insipid repetition.

The most well-reasoned interpretation of *arcus* as a tool was defended at length by two researchers whose professional occupation was other than classical philology. They assume that *arcus* is a “drill bow”, a very old tool used as early as ancient Egypt (for its working principle see fig. 1). It does look exactly like a bow with arrows: a cord is wound round the wooden cylinder to keep it fixed and is then stretched like a bowstring between the ends of an actual “bow”. The upper end of the cylinder has a cap to fix and press the drill;²⁵ the lower end has a metal point for boring.

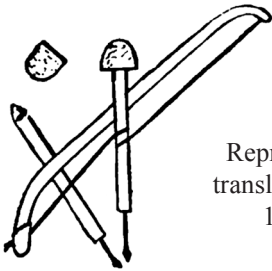


Fig. 1. Ancient Egyptian bow drill.
Repr. from: G. Maspero, *Egyptian Archaeology*,
transl. A. B. Edwards (New York – London ²1892)
190 fig. 177 (cf. Bidder 1920, 117 fig. 3).

This interpretation of *arcus* was argued by G. P. Bidder, a marine biologist.²⁶ The focus of his article is on boring techniques in antiquity. Bidder convincingly shows that Romans could not always get by with a simple hand drill (fig. 2a); they must have had some mechanical means of rotating the drill, one of which was a drill bow (referring to one illustration in H. Blümner’s indispensable study²⁷ and to descriptions of

²⁴ Copley 1956, 160 n. 88; cf. Düntzer 1846, 139–140: “Wären es etwa kleine mit einer Krümmung versehene eiserne Instrumente zum Aufsperrn?”

²⁵ Humphrey–Oleson–Sherwood 2003, 332–333 are right in saying that in *Od.* 9. 383–390 Odysseus and his men used similar technique to put out the Cyclope’s eye; a bow, however, is not mentioned there, only a thong, ἰμάξ. Ulrich 2007, 32–33 along with fig. 3.24 on p. 36 identifies it with a strap drill, a more powerful drill that requires an assistant pulling a strap. Otherwise, hardly correct, E.-M. Voigt, *LfrgE* 7 (1973) 1122 s. v. ἄπτω.

²⁶ Bidder 1920, 113–127. He claims that this idea was originally suggested by his brother, Major H. F. Bidder.

²⁷ Blümner 1879, 222–228.

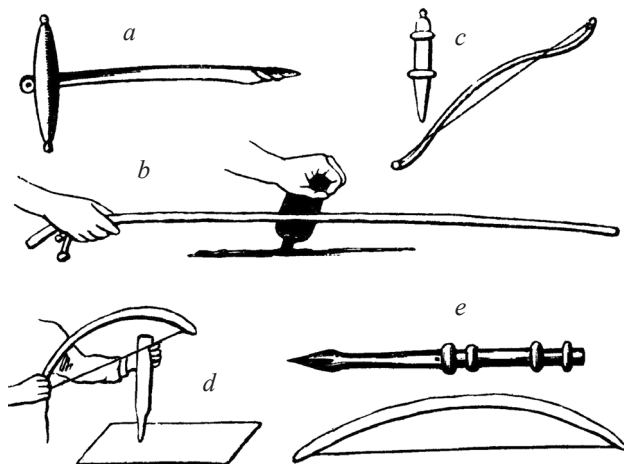


Fig. 2. Ancient Greek and Roman hand drill (a) and drill bows (b–e).
Repr. from: Blümner 1879, 226 fig. 43 (cf. figs. 4, 5, 9, 10)

a medical drill bow²⁸). Indeed the use of drill bows in classical antiquity is undeniable (see figs. 3–10).²⁹

Bidder admits that *arcus* has not been attested in the sense of a drill bow, but points out that the term for this tool in Romanic languages is a diminutive of *arcus* (Fr. *archet*, It. *archetto*; cf. Ger. *Bogenbohrer*, Russ. *лучковая дрель*).

The name for the tool has allegedly not been preserved in Latin, but in Greek it was called ἄρις. This word is found in the dedicatory epigrams of carpenters and was also applied to a trephine instrument as well as to a military implement for boring through besieged walls.³⁰

²⁸ Caton 1914, 116–117; cf. Blümner 1979, 224 n. 6.

²⁹ For archaeological evidence see Blümner 1879, 225–226 along with figs. 43b–e, 344 along with fig. 58, as well as Ulrich 2007, 28–32 along with figs. 3.17, 3.19–3.21, 3.23 and Casson 1933, 202–209 along with figs. 81–82 (see here figs. 2–11). Artists using bow-drills are also shown on the two early gems mentioned by Casson 1933, 203–204 along with fig. 81 (not reproduced here).

³⁰ See Blümner 1879, 224 along with n. 5–6, and 225 along with n. 1 (he remarks that in some cases ἄρις may refer to a string rather than a bow that rotates it); LSJ s. v.; Pollux 7. 113, 10. 146. Apollodor *Poliorc.* 148. 7 mentions ἄρις in a military context (ἵνα ἄριδι στρέφεται [scil. the wooden cylinder that holds τὸ τρύπανον] ἢ ἄστερίσκοις ἢ χερσίῃ). Based on the tools analyzed by Caton 1914, 116–117 (here figs. 15–16), and manuscript illustrations of a huge military drill bow in Schneider 1908, Taf. II–III (here figs. 12–14), the identification of ἄρις with a drill bow is almost certain; cf. Moog 2004, 128–129 along with n. 43–44.



Fig. 3. A carpenter boring a hole in the chest of Danae and Perseus (the string of a bow is visible). Attic red-figure hydria, first half of the fifth century BC. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts. BA no. 202466. Drawing by the author (cf. Casson 1933, fig. 82).



Fig. 4. A carpenter boring a hole in the chest of Danae and Perseus. Attic red-figure crater, ca. 490 BC. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage. BA no. 203792. Repr. from: Ch. M. Gayley, *The Classic Myths in English Literature and in Art* (Boston 1893) 208 fig. 116 (cf. fig. 2b).



Fig. 5. Icarus at work, a bow and drill at his feet. Part of the fresco in Pompeii, House of the Vettii. Mid-first century AD.

Repr. from: М. Е. Сергеевко, *Ремесленники древнего Рима* (Leningrad 1968) pl. s. n. (cf. Ulrich 2007, 29 fig. 3.17 and fig. 2c).



Fig. 6. Workshop of a smithy (there is a bow drill hanging on the wall).

Attic black-figure vase from Orvieto. BA no. 2188;

CVA Boston, 1. 27–28, fig. 30, pl. (659) 37.2.

Repr. from: F. Baumgarten, F. Poland, R. Wagner, *Die hellenische Kultur* (Leipzig–Berlin ³1913) 276, fig. 255.



Fig. 7. Funerary relief from Frascati, Italy (a bow and a drill are depicted on the right border). Late first century, The British Museum.
CIL XIV 2721/2 (cf. Ulrich 2007, 32 fig. 3.20).

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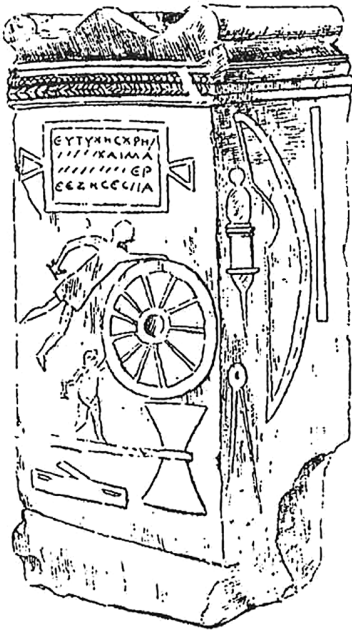


Fig. 8. A funerary altar from the Priolo cemetery of Sicily (a bow and a drill are depicted on the right side).

Third–fourth century.

Syracuse, Museo Nazionale.

Repr. from: P. Orsi, “Priolo”,
Notizie degli scavi di antichità 4 (1891) 359
 (cf. Ulrich 2007, 33 fig. 3.21).

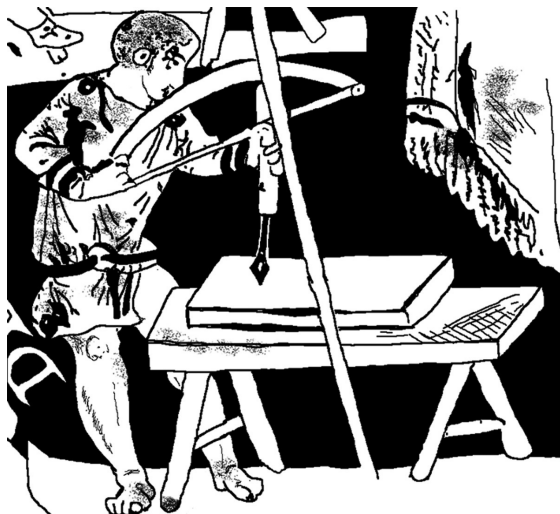


Fig 9. Part of the Vatican gilt glass vessel depicting the tools of the shipwright. Early fourth century AD. Museo Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Drawing by Roger B. Ulrich.

Repr. from: Ulrich 2007, 35 fig. 3.23 by permission of the author (cf. fig. 2d and Blümner 1879, 344, fig. 58).

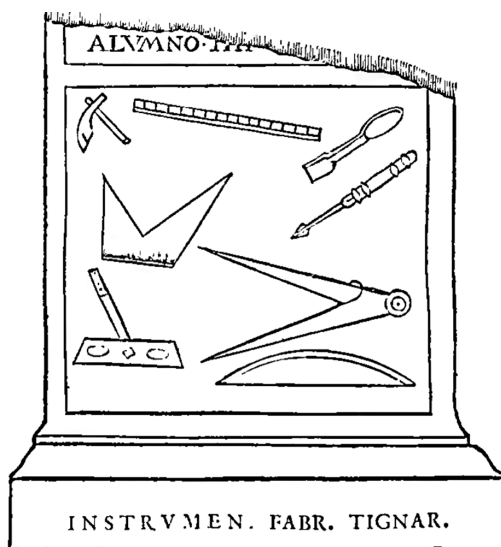
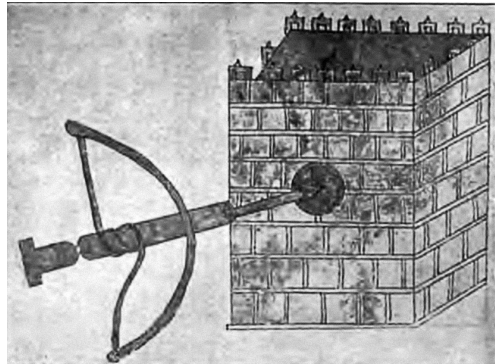
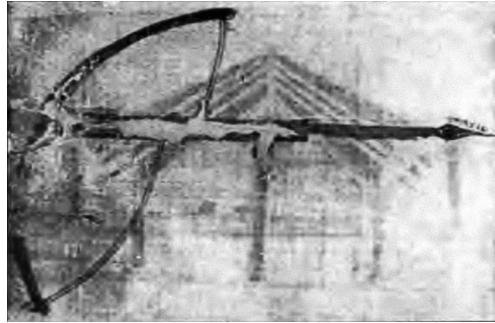
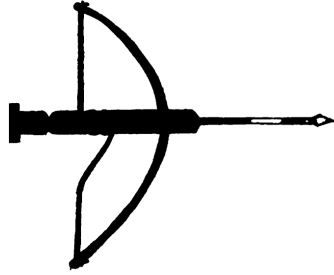


Fig. 10. Roman funerary monument.

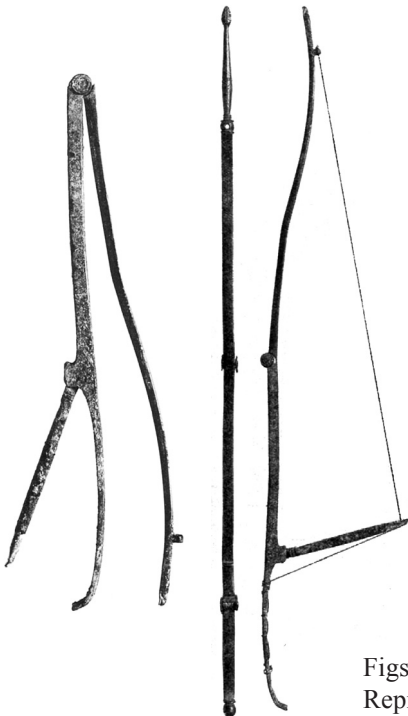
Repr. from: Ian. Gruterus, *Corpus inscriptionum...*, T. 1, pars 2 (Amsterdam 1707) 664, no. 2 (cf. fig. 2e).



Fig. 11. Drill and stock of a bow drill from Hawara, Egypt. Roman period. University College, London. Repr. from: W. M. F. Petrie, *Tools and Weapons by the Egyptian Collection in University College, London* (London 1917) pl. LI (cf. Ulrich 2007, 31 fig. 3.19).



Figs. 12–14. Military drill bows from medieval manuscripts. Repr. from: Schneider 1908, pl. II–III.



Figs. 15–16. Surgical drill bows. Repr. from: Caton 1914, 116 fig. 2; pl. XI no. 23.

The interpretation of *arcus* as a drill bow is therefore quite tempting. It was supported in a short notice by M. Cary³¹ and recently put forward independently by F. P. Moog.³² Moog, like Bidder, points out that judging from the context *arcus* must be a burglary tool, and he also cites the fact that drill bows were familiar to Romans. He lays special stress on the use of drill bows in a military context, which is apposite to the love-war metaphor.

Nisbet and Rudd found Bidder's interpretation worth considering, but put forward three objections to it:

- (1) *arcus* or its derivatives have not been attested to mean "drill bow" in Latin;
- (2) Gk. ἄρις is not attested in the context of a *comissatio*;
- (3) a drill bow "seems altogether too mechanical for the ardent lover".

However, one crucial piece of evidence in favour of Bidder's interpretation has gone unnoted by scholars: *arcus* in the sense of a drill bow is in fact attested in the corpus of Greek-Latin glosses (Goetz, *CGL* II [1888] 244. 35, *glossae graeco-latinae ex codice Harleiano* 5792):

Αρις arcus

Goetz was puzzled by this and suggested emending the gloss with a question mark so that this *arcus* would refer to an arch ("an ἄρις?").³³ Now that we know the true meaning of ἄρις, there is no need for any emendation. Fortunately Bidder's suggestion can be confirmed: *arcus* might indeed mean a bow drill.³⁴ The first and strongest objection to this interpretation is thereby disposed of.

The second objection of Nisbet and Rudd is weak. Surviving passages that describe *comissatores* attacking doors are not exactly numerous; those that mention specific tools used for this purpose are scarce (I listed all those sources with which I was familiar in n. 8). The word ἄρις is very

³¹ Cary 1924, 68. All depictions of drill bows listed by her (except one, here fig. 5) had already been mentioned in Blümner 1879.

³² Moog 2004, 124–132. The author's field of knowledge is the history of medicine. His analysis contains useful references for evidence pertaining to the use of drill bows in carpentry, surgery and military campaigns, but he fails to take into account some of the important literature on the subject (e.g. Bidder, Blümner and Nisbet–Rudd).

³³ Goetz, *CGL* VI (1899) 90.

³⁴ The second volume of *ThLL* (1900–1906) saw print shortly after the *Thesaurus glossarum* (*CGL* VI [1899], VII [1901]) so that this remarkable gloss went unmentioned there s.v. *arcus*; but this fact was overlooked by modern Latin scholars who had grown accustomed to *ThLL* covering all usages of the word.

rare and its usage in the sense of a carpenter's drill bow can be counted on the fingers of one hand. It would clearly be unreasonable to demand the adduction of passages where a drill bow is mentioned in the context of a *comissatio*.³⁵

The third objection is a reasonable one: a drill bow is less common than torches and crowbars, which are always available – and the boring of holes takes time and effort. The skill and diligence of a craftsman are not qualities usually associated with a drunken youth – we would rather expect him to grab whatever might be to hand and thus break through the door. Yet in view of the numerous advantages of Bidder's interpretation, this counter-argument should hardly loom as an impediment.

Arcus is the manuscript reading and it is also attested in Latin in the sense of a “drill bow”. This tool was familiar to Romans and could be used for such things as breaking through a door. It fits well with the love-war metaphor. Perhaps large and impressive drill bows would not seem petty and despicable. In antiquity the ways of breaking through the door of one's mistress might have been more technologically sophisticated than has hitherto been imagined.

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³⁵ So as to corroborate the interpretation in question, it would perhaps suffice in citing a door-drilling example that was not in the context of a *comissatio*. Admittedly I can only refer to a case where the wooden floor was drilled by burglars (*BGU* I 321; 322 τοῦ τόπου ὑπερφῶου ὄντος ἐκ τοῦ ποδώματος διατρηθέντος, see Riess 2001, 102; 391 along with n. 116 for references) though examples from Egyptian papyri listed by Riess 2001, 375–395 (“Anhang: Papyrologische Quellen (Raub- und Diebstahlpetitionen)”) often refer to certain manipulations of doors: *SBU* 13.2239 μετάραντες ὑπερφ[αν] θυρ[ι]δαν; *POxy* 10.1272 τὴν τοῦ πεσσοῦ θύραν ἐπηρ[μ]ένην; *BGU* 15. 2461 τὰς θύρας κατέαξαν; *PTebt* 2.332 τὰς θύρα[ς] ἐξηλώσαν[τ]εις; *POxy* I 69 [θυρίδα συμ]πεφραγμένην πλίνθοις φέρουσαν εἰς δημοσίαν ῥύμην ἀνατρέψαντες ἴσως προσερείσαντες τῷ τόπῳ ξύλον...; *POxy* 58.3926 κατασχίσαντες πάσας τὰς θύρας; *PCairIsid* 75 τὰς μὲν θύρα[ς] κατ[ασχ]ίσαντες.

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The author defends G. P. Bidder's suggestion that *arcus* in Hor. *Carm.* 3. 26. 7 implies a drill bow. An important argument in its favour is that this meaning of *arcus* has been attested in Greek-Latin glosses (*CGL* II [1888] 244. 35: ἀρις *arcus*).

В статье защищается выдвинутое Дж. П. Биддером предположение о том, что слово *arcus* у Горация (*Carm.* III, 26, 7) указывает на лучковую дрель. Важный аргумент в поддержку этого толкования – то обстоятельство, что такое значение *arcus* засвидетельствовано в греко-латинских глоссах (*CGL* II [1888] 244. 35: ἀρις *arcus*).

CONSPECTUS

Preface	181
DMITRI PANCHENKO	
The Sixth-Century Samian Foot of 26.25 cm and Evolution of the Greek Linear Measures	185
NATALIA PAVLICHENKO, OLGA SOKOLOVA	
Fragments of Lead Letters from Nymphaion	192
EDWARD M. HARRIS	
The Nature of Self-Defense in Draco's Homicide Law: The Restoration of <i>IG I³ 104</i> , lines 33–35	203
STEPHEN LAMBERT	
The Selective Inscribing of Laws and Decrees in Late Classical Athens ..	217
MICHAEL J. OSBORNE	
The Changing Face of Athenian Government (403/2–168/7)	240
STEPHEN V. TRACY	
Sophilos, Son of Aristotle, of Phyle	263
ALEXANDER K. GAVRILOV	
Ein Zweiter epigraphischer Beleg für den Skythen Saumakos (<i>IosPE I² 353</i>)?	270
ANGELOS CHANIOTIS	
Pankrates: a Senior Statesman from Aphrodisias	282
DENIS KEYER	
<i>Arcus</i> in Horace, <i>Carm.</i> 3. 26. 7	293

ALEXANDER DEMANDT	
Pilatus und das Blut der Galiläer	308
KENT J. RIGSBY	
A Dancer in Syria	313
T. COREY BRENNAN	
The Discovery (and Rediscovery) of a Temple Dedication to Hercules by P. Aelius Hieron, Freedman of Hadrian (<i>AE</i> 1907, 125)	322
KLAUS HALLOF	
De titulo Veronensi metrico	337
OLGA BUDARAGINA	
A Foundation Stone Inscription from the Petrischule in St. Petersburg ...	340
Key Words	347
Правила для авторов	349
Guidelines for contributors	351