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by DIA M.L. PHILIPPIDES

The passage below (Euripides's *Medea* 476-513),¹ the first of the play's three major confrontations between Medea, the wronged wife, and Jason, the husband who had betrayed her trust (the full confrontation actually runs ll. 446-626), is an illustration of an extraordinary incidence of metrical variation in the dialogue meter (the iambic trimeter) of ancient Greek tragedy:

ἔσωσά σ', ὥς ἴσασιν Ἑλλήνων ὅσοι
ταῦτ' οὖν συνεισέβησαν Ἀργῶν σκάφος,
πεμφθέντα ταύρων πυρπνόνων ἐπιστάτην
ζεύγλαισι καὶ σπεροῦντα θανάσιμον γύην·
δράκοντά θ', ὃς πάγχρυσον ἀμπέχων δέρας 480
σπείραις ἔσφζε πολυπλόκοις ἄνπνος ὦν,
κτείνας' ἀνέσχον σοὶ φάος σωτήριον.
αὐτὴ δὲ πατέρα καὶ δόμους προδοῦσ' ἐμοῦς
τὴν Πηλιῶτιν εἰς Ἰωλκὸν ἰκόμην
σὺν σοί, πρόθυμος μάλλον ἢ σοφωτέρα· 485
Πελίαν τ' ἀπέκτειν', ὥσπερ ἄλγιστον θανεῖν,
παίδων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, πάντα δ' ἐξεῖλον δόμον.
καὶ ταῦθ' ὑφ' ἡμῶν, ὦ κάκιστ' ἀνδρῶν, παθὼν
προὔδωκας ἡμᾶς, καὶνὰ δ' ἐκτίσω λέχη,
παίδων γεγῶτων· εἰ γὰρ ἦσθ' ἅπαις ἔτι, 490
συγνωστὸν ἦν σοὶ τοῦδ' ἐρασθῆναι λέχους.
ὄρκων δὲ φρούδη πίστις, οὐδ' ἔχω μαθεῖν
εἰ θεοὺς νομίζεις τοὺς τότε· οὐκ ἄρχειν ἔτι,
ἢ καὶνὰ κεῖσθαι θέσμι' ἀνθρώποις τὰ νῦν,

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With the help of the concordance, such paradigmatic tables (or formulaic systems) can easily be constructed, e.g.:

- 12 κρατεῖ τον στήν ἀγκάλῃ του, μὲ δάκρυα τὸν ἐφίλειε
(Er. E 13)
κι εἶχε τη στήν ἀγκάλῃ της, κλαίγοντας τὴν ἐφίλειε
(Er. Γ 1200)
κι εἶχε τον στήν ἀγκάλῃ του, μὲ σπλάγχνος τὸν ἐφίλειε
(Er. E 1406)
καὶ σπλαχνικὰ συχνὰ συχνὰ στὸ στόμα τὸν ἐφίλειε
(Er. E 118)
γονατιστῇ, τρεμάμενη, στὰ πόδια τὸν ἐφίλειε
(Er. Δ 390)
Σ' τσ' ἀγκάλες του τότε κρατεῖ, φιλεῖ τον εἰς τὰ χεῖλη
(Er. Δ 1907), etc.
He holds him in his arms, being in tears he
kissed him
she had her in her arms, she cried and kissed her
he had him in his arms, he compassionately
kissed him
compassionately, repeatedly, he kissed him in the
mouth
on her knees, trembling, she kissed his feet
In his arms he holds him, he kisses him in the
lips

Formulas, allomorphs and synonyms are easier to find in half-line and whole-line lengths, but often come in couplets, also, because the rhyming couplet is a typical carrier of meaning. For instance:

- 13 περμάζωξε ὅλη τὴν ἀντρεία καὶ δύναμην, ἂν ἔχεις,
καὶ νὰ σὲ μάθω νὰ μιλεῖς, γιατί κακὰ κατέχεις.
(Er. B 2347-48)
Περμάζωξε ὅλη τὴν ἀντρεία, βάλε τὴ δύναμή σου,
λέγω σου ἐδὰ παρὰ ποτὲ βαρίσκω καὶ βλεπήσου.
(Er. Δ 1775-76)
muster all the courage and strength, if you have,
and I will teach you to speak (well), for you are
ill-advised.

Muster all your courage, do your best,
I warn you that now more than ever I smite so
take care.

- 14 Τὴν τέχνη καὶ τὴ δύναμη παρὰ ποτὲ μαζώνου
καὶ ποῦ νὰ κάμουν κοπανιά καλύτερη ξαμώνου.
(Er. B 2285-86)
παρὰ ποτὲ ὁ Ρώκριτος τὴ δύναμη μαζώνει,
τ' Ἀρίστου δίνει κοπανιά, γιὰ πάντα τὸν σώνει.
(Er. Δ 1869-70)
Their craft and strength they muster more than
ever
and aim at where they'll make the best blow.
more than ever Rotokritos musters his strength,
gives a blow to Arístos and finishes him for ever.
- 15 καὶ λέγει καὶ τοῦ φίλου του: «Ἀπόψε κάνει χρεια
νὰ δείξομε τὴ δύναμη κι ὅλη μας τὴν ἀντρεία.
(Er. A 529-30)
μὰ στὸ κονταροχτύπημα ἐτοῦτο κάνει χρεια
νὰ δείξομε κι ἐσὺ κι ἐγὼ ὅλη μας τὴν ἀντρεία.
(Er. B 1689-90), etc.
and he tells his friend: "Tonight we need
that we show all our strength and courage.
but in this tilt we both need
to show, both you and I, all our courage."

I have only been scratching the surface, but should not fail to mention here the most characteristic elements of modern Greek formulaic style: not repeated groups of words with a specific meaning, but patterns of relationships of meaning, noticeable between various segments of the line. The dominant such patterns, which serve as foundations of verse construction and receptacles of meaning, are the parallelism (often also in the form of antithesis) and the tricolon crescendo, both of which are of venerable antiquity, and characteristic of oral and popular poetry since the time of Homer. They are everpresent in folksongs, frequent in the Byzantine vernacular poetry, where their density is directly proportionate to the degree of demoticism of the linguistic register (the closer to spoken demotic the language of a poem the more lines are mod-