

LINEAGE-BOASTING AND THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

There are in the *Iliad* nine examples of individuals, either human or divine, who recount their ancestry in some detail. The overlap of situation, assertion and vocabulary among these nine examples seems to be sufficient to constitute a theme of lineage-boasting.

Of the nine examples eight are evoked by a challenge of some sort, most usually a threat, a question, or an invitation; only in one case does the silent reproach of a dead victim evoke the boast. In all nine examples the response to the challenge involves an assertion of power largely based on ancestry and family connections, although in one case the assertion is more implicit than explicit, and in another case it is the putative family connections of the challenger that contribute to the respondent's assertion of power. In all nine examples the lineage is described from the top down: for the two examples involving divinities the two speakers are children of Kronos and so simply make up the second generation; the seven heroes who boast of their ancestry, both divine and human, belong to the eighth, sixth, fifth, fourth, fourth, third, and second generations. In all seven examples involving heroes somewhere in the report of ancestors there is emphasis not only on personal power but dominion over many peoples and/or great wealth.

That similarities among the nine are sufficient to characterize them as a theme can be further shown by examination of them individually. But that such individual examination will also show the uniqueness of the situation and outcome of each may be more surprising, given the general tendency for examples of some common themes to stress regularity and normalcy. What such variety may mean can best be considered after both the similarities of constituent parts and the differences of outcomes are examined.

In both of the two examples involving gods, the lineage-boast comes as a response to a challenge by Zeus. In Book 4 (37–49) Zeus somewhat grudgingly allows Hera to do as she wishes about destroying Troy but insists that he should equally have the right to destroy one of the cities she favours. In her response (4.50–67) Hera even more grudgingly admits his right, saying:

εἰ περ γὰρ φθονέω τε καὶ οὐκ εἰώ διαπέρσαι,
οὐκ ἀνύω φθονέουσ', ἐπεὶ ἡ πολὺ φέρτερός ἐσσι.
ἀλλὰ χρὴ καὶ ἐμὸν θέμεναι πόνον οὐκ ἀτέλεστον·
καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ θεὸς εἰμι, γένος δέ μοι ἔνθεν ὄθεν σοί,
καὶ με πρεσβυτάτην τέκετο Κρόνος ἀγκυλομήτης,
ἁμφότερον, γενεῇ τε καὶ οὐνεκα σὴ παράκοιτις
κέκλημαι, σὺ δὲ πᾶσι μετ' ἀθανάτοισιν ἀνάσσεις. (4.55–61)

Having thus asserted her power, she bids him send Athena down to engineer the Trojan treachery that will start the war up again and justify their defeat. No matter how formulaic Zeus' agreement (οὐδ' ἀπίθησε πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε 4.68) may be, the fact remains that he does her bidding without question, thus acknowledging, if not her claim to power, at least the rightness of her demand.

In Book 15, after Zeus sends Iris with a message to Poseidon on the battlefield ordering him to cease and desist from helping the Achaeans, Poseidon answers her:

ὦ πόποι, ἦ ῥ' ἀγαθὸς περ ἔων ὑπέροπλον ἔειπεν,
εἴ μ' ὁμότιμον εἶντα βίη ἀέκοντα καθέξει.
τρῆς γάρ τ' ἐκ Κρόνου εἰμέν ἀδελφεοί, οὓς τέκετο 'Ρέα,
Ζεὺς καὶ ἐγώ, τρίτατος δ' Αἰδῆς, ἐνέροισιν ἀνάσσω. (15.185–8)

Having thus asserted his power, he goes on to describe the three spheres over which each was lord, while earth and Olympus were common to all. He then urges that Zeus confine his authority to his own third and his domination to his children who are obliged to heed him. What is the outcome? Does Zeus obey, as in the case of Hera? No, for fortunately Iris is there to remind Poseidon of Zeus' elder status, and Poseidon backs down, only salving his pride with a threat of what all the pro-Achaian gods will do if Zeus spares Troy.

The two divine lineage-boasts end very differently. What of those of the heroes? Most complete, and with verbal echoes in two other boasts, is that of Glaukos in Book 6. Diomedes had asked: *τίς δέ σύ ἐσσι, φέριστε, καταβητῶν ἀνθρώπων* (123) and then threatened: *δυστήνων δέ τε παῖδες ἐμῷ μένει ἀντιώσιν* (127); both the question, although differently phrased, and the same threat are used by Achilles in his challenge of Asteropaios below. Glaukos, later echoed by Asteropaios, returns question for question: *Τυδείδῃ μεγάλθυμε, τίη γενεὴν ἐρεεῖνεις*; and proceeds to indicate how well known it is:

*εἰ δ' ἐθέλεις καὶ ταῦτα δαήμεναι, ὄφρ' ἐν εἰδῇς
ἡμετέρην γενεήν, πολλοὶ δέ μιν ἄνδρες ἴσασιν* (150–1)

(These two lines are used later by Aeneas in response to Achilles' challenge.) The lineage follows, beginning from Aiolos' son Sisyphos and proceeding down through Glaukos, Bellerophon, and Hippolochos to the Glaukos who is speaking, with anecdotes by the way and various collaterals named, including two uncles, an aunt, and a cousin. The wealth and power specified was that of his grandfather Bellerophon. Glaukos' conclusion is also used later by Aeneas:

ταύτης τοι γενεῆς τε καὶ αἵματος εὖχομαι εἶναι. (211)

The result of the lineage-boast here is the discovery of ancestral guest-friendship between Diomedes and Glaukos, so the unexpected outcome of this battlefield confrontation is an exchange of gifts as sign of that friendship's renewal.

Aeneas' lineage-boast (Book 20) is evoked not by a question about his identity but by Achilles' questioning his motives, his bravery, and his chances of continued divine help, ending with a threat:

*ἀλλὰ σ' ἐγωγ' ἀναχωρήσαντα κελεύω
ἐς πληθὺν ἰέναι, μῆδ' ἀντίος ἴστασ' ἐμείο,
πρὶν τι κακὸν παθέειν· ῥέχθεν δέ τε νῆπιος ἔγνω.* (196–8)

(These same three lines minus one word appear in Menelaos' counter-threat answering Euphorbos' demand in 17.30–2, and the positive command to stand up and fight appears in Idomeneus' counter challenge to Deiphobos in 13.448.)

Aeneas' response begins with a refusal to be intimidated by words and a claim of equality with Achilles in having a goddess mother, but then starts his paternal lineage with Zeus, following through with Dardanos and his son Erichthonios whose great wealth, particularly in horses, merits ten lines of description. Erichthonios' son Tros had three sons, one of whom was Aeneas' great grandfather through a succession of single sons: Assarakos, Kapys, Anchises, Aeneas. But the collateral lines lend even more distinction to Aeneas' lineage, with one of his great grandfather's brothers, Ganymedes, serving wine to the gods and the other, Ilos, founding the Trojan royal line and begetting Laomedon, whose sons include not only Priam and three Trojan elders but also another divine favourite, Tithonos. Summing up, Aeneas uses the same

line with which Glaukos ended the account of his descent (20.241 = 6.211) and proceeds to issue his own challenge:

ἀλκῆς δ' οὐ μ' ἐπέεσσιν ἀποτρέψεις μεμαῶτα
πρὶν χαλκῷ μαχέσασθαι ἐναντίον· ἀλλ' ἄγε θᾶσσον
γευσόμεθ' ἀλλήλων χαλκήρεσιν ἐγχείησιν. (256–8)

The resulting clash between the two heroes is aborted by Poseidon, lest it end in the death of Aeneas, thus incurring the wrath of Zeus for whom the continuance of Dardanos' line is all-important.

Asteropaios' account of his lineage (Book 21) is also revoked by Achilles, whose questions about the Paionian's identity contrast with his earlier recognition of Aeneas and whose threat echoes that of Diomedes in Book 6:

τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν, ὃ μιν ἔτλης ἀντίος ἔλθεῖν;
δυστήνων δέ τε παῖδες ἐμῷ μένει ἀντιώωσι. (150–1)

Asteropaios, like Glaukos in Book 6, asks:

Πηλεΐδην μεγάθυμε, τίη γενεὴν ἐρεῖνεις; (153)

and proceeds, having answered the second question first, to recount his lineage from its source, as it were: the river Axios who begat Pelegon, who was his father. Then, just as this whole encounter is briefer than that between Achilles and Aeneas, so Asteropaios' return challenge takes up less than a line:

νῦν αὖτε μαχώμεθα, φαίδιμ' Ἀχιλλεῦ. (160)

The following contest is an unusual one: Asteropaios throws both his spears at once, ambidextrously, hitting Achilles' shield without effect and grazing Achilles' arm so as to draw blood (surely the only wound that Homer allows that champion to suffer!); Achilles' single spear misses and penetrates the riverbank whence Asteropaios vainly attempts to pull it out for his own use as Achilles draws his sword and kills him.

That Asteropaios' death at Achilles' hands follows hard on his boast of his potamic ancestry is to be expected, given the two heroes' respective reputations. More surprising is Achilles' lineage-boast in reaction to that death, vaunting the superiority of his line stemming from Kronos and Zeus over all rivers. From Zeus came Aiakos, and from Aiakos came Achilles' father Peleus who ruled over many Myrmidons. This lineage-boast does not simply outbrag that of Asteropaios; it is hybriatic not only in its boast of power over rivers in general but also in its doubt of Skamandros' ability in particular to aid the fallen Asteropaios. In this way the lineage-boast of the river Axios' grandson Asteropaios serves to introduce the great river-fight of Book 21, evoking as it does Achilles' boast of superiority and Skamandros' infuriated demand that Achilles stop fouling his water with corpses.

Idomeneus' lineage-boast (Book 13) comes as a result of a confrontation with Deiphobos. After Idomeneus slaughters Othryoneus and Asios, Deiphobos aims at him but misses and wounds Hypsenor, over whom he boasts that he has avenged Asios. Then Idomeneus, after killing Alkathoos, not only outdoes Deiphobos' boast by claiming a score of three to one, but goes on to challenge Deiphobos to stand up to him:

δαίμονιε, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐναντίον ἴστασ' ἐμεῖο, (cp. 17.31; 20.197)
ὄφρα ἴδῃ οἷος Ζηνὸς γόνος ἐνθάδ' ἰκάνω,
ὃς πρῶτον Μίνωα τέκε Κρήτη ἐπίουρον. (13.448–50)

He then carries the lineage down through Deukalion to himself, emphasizing his kingship over many men in broad Crete. The effect of such a challenge is different

again from any other lineage-boast: Deiphobos indulges in another popular theme, that of internal debate. Here the question is whether he should accept the challenge or go and find a comrade. Since the challenge comes from a great grandson of Zeus, on the principle that discretion is the better part of valour Deiphobos goes to find Aeneas.

The challenge to which Diomedes responds with his lineage-boast (Book 14) is Agamemnon's wish for advice:

*νῦν δ' εἴη δς τῇσδέ γ' ἀμείνονα μῆτιν ἐνίσποι,
ἢ νέος ἢ παλαιός· ἐμοὶ δέ κεν ἀσμένω εἴη.* (14.107–8)

Because he is the youngest man present Diomedes asserts his right to be heard because of the distinction of his ancestry: Portheus of Pleuron and Kalydon had three sons, Agrios, Melas and Oineus; Oineus was the father of Diomedes' father Tydeus. To explain and document further his father's change of residence Diomedes mentions also his paternal grandfather, Adrestos of Argos about whose riches and power he also boasts. He then prefaces his advice thus:

*τῷ οὐκ ἄν με γένος γε κακὸν καὶ ἀνάλκιδα φάντες
μῦθον ἀτιμῆσαιτε πεφασμένον, ὃν κ' ἐν εἶπω.* (126–7)

And this lineage-boast serves to justify the readiness of the Achaians to take the young warrior's bold advice.

The ninth 'lineage-boast' is in some ways a parody of the other eight, since it comes in response to a challenge by a hero (Euphorbos) who is himself the subject of the boast and since it is recited by the subject's opponent (Menelaos) as he returns the challenge. Furthermore this second challenger characterizes the first by means of animal traits rather than in the terms of human ancestry. Thus in Book 17 Euphorbos, standing over Patroklos' corpse, orders Menelaos to back off, threatening him and asserting his right to the body, since he had been the first to strike Patroklos (12–17). Menelaos responds:

*Ζεῦ πάτερ, οὐ μὲν καλὸν ὑπέρβιον εὐχετάσθαι.
οὔτ' οὖν παρδάλιος τόσσον μένος οὔτε λέοντος
οὔτε σὺς κάπρου ὀλοόφρονος, οὔ τε μέγιστος
θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι περὶ σθένει βλεμναίνει,
ὅσσον Πάνθου νῖες εὐμμελῖαι φρονέουσιν.* (19–23)

He then boasts of how he killed Euphorbos' brother Hyperenor when he accused him of weakness as a warrior. His threat to Euphorbos ends with the three lines we have already heard Achilles use to Aeneas:

*ὥς θην καὶ σὸν ἐγὼ λύσω μένος, εἴ κέ μευ ἄντα
στήης· ἀλλὰ σ' ἔγωγ' ἀναχωρήσαντα κελεύω
ἐς πληθὺν ἰέναι, μῆδ' ἀντίος ἵστασ' ἐμείο,
πρὶν τι κακὸν παθεῖν· ῥεχθὲν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω.* (29–32)

However odd the animal-characterization may be both as a lineage-boast and in the mouth of an opponent, these last lines demonstrate the relationship of this speech to the general theme and the skill with which the poet manipulates that theme for varied effect. This time the threat is carried out, and Menelaos kills this second son of Panthoos. In only one other lineage-boast situation is killing the outcome, that is, in Achilles' slaughter of Asteropaios, but there the killer is the first challenger while here he is the second challenger.

This survey of two divine and seven heroic lineage-boasts has demonstrated both their similarity and thematic nature and the variety of the situations in which they appear as well as their very different outcomes. It is this latter characteristic to which the second half of my title refers. For although the repetition of themes and type-scenes which vary only in length or emphasis is all very well in the case of those activities that imitate the daily round and emphasize the recurrence of ritual, the last thing any audience wants in a tale of conflict, adventure or intrigue is 'the mixture as before' or the same ploy repeated without variation. In Homer's use of this particular theme he seems to be very much aware of both its adaptability to a variety of situations involving challenges and its open-endedness. And to some extent the very origin of both this theme and others like it may be explained by the potential variousness of their application. Thus Homer, like any other story-teller, may find that in pursuing a particular combination of circumstances to one conclusion or result he not only automatically excludes other possible solutions or results but is also thwarted and frustrated in being debarred from other results or solutions. He is naturally tempted to repeat that particular combination of circumstances, perhaps again and again, in order to follow out the other possible solutions or results, that is, to explore 'the road(s) not taken'. And it may well be that Homer's audience, enjoying as it apparently did the repetition of 'daily-round' themes, took equal delight both in anticipating possible variations on more potentially diverse themes and in appraising the bard's skill in using available options and introducing roads 'less travelled by'.

Is it thus with the carrying off of women? So that if the carrying-off of Helen leads to war, one may still want to explore the possibilities of the refusal to return a carried-off Chryseis leading to a plague and of the carrying-off of Briseis to spark a quarrel between two men. Or there is the goddess-carrying-off-a-man theme: in general myth Eos and Aphrodite provide a variety of examples, but in the *Iliad* the theme must be congruent with the battle-scene and heroic dignity. Even so, once Homer has had Aphrodite successfully rescue her favourite Paris from death at Menelaos' hands, there is still the possibility of her less successfully carrying off her son, with the sly implication that her forte is not mother love. These obvious examples immediately leap to mind, but surely other themes of the non-habitual sort may be seen to lead to a variety of results.

At least in the lineage-boast theme we have seen that the two divine examples have contrary conclusions or go in opposite directions. The seven heroic examples have equally diverse outcomes, exploring seven different roads or exits, all of which in their various ways put the lineage recounted to good use. In the Diomedes–Glaukos situation the friendly outcome is a direct result of the lineage-boast. For Achilles–Aeneas the lineage justifies divine intervention to prevent bloodshed. In the double boast of Asteropaios and Achilles the comparative weakness of river ancestry to that of Zeus explains Asteropaios' death and predicts both the river-battle and Achilles' eventual victory. Idomeneus' boast and threat to Aeneas justifies that hero's hesitation to join battle with a scion of Zeus. Diomedes' boast in council rather than battle explains and justifies one more about-face on the part of the hard-pressed Achaians. And Menelaos' boast of the Panthoids' animal spirits, though parodying the theme itself, sufficiently restores Menelaos' rather feckless reputation so that he can be instrumental in rescuing the body of Patroklos. All seven are different, so that the theme-nature of these examples does not obtrude itself to give attentive listeners or even close-reading students of Homer a feeling of repetitiveness.

Afterword: that the lineage-boast not only operates variously in challenge-

situations but may also be fertile in quite other circumstances is suggested by Lykaon's plea in Book 21 and Achilles' response, where both weigh lineage in the balance with death:

μινυνθάδιον δέ με μήτηρ
 γείνατο Λαοθόη, θυγάτηρ Ἄλταο γέροντος,
 Ἄλτεω, ὃς Λελέγεσσι φιλοπτολέμοισιν ἀνάσσει,
 Πήδασον αἰπήεσσαν ἔχων ἐπὶ Σατνιόεντι.
 τοῦ δ' ἔχε θυγατέρα Πρίαμος, πολλὰς δὲ καὶ ἄλλας·
 τῆς δὲ δῶν γενόμεσθα, σὺ δ' ἄμφω δειροτομήσεις. (21.84–89)

And Achilles answers:

ἀλλά, φίλος, θάνε καὶ σὺ· τίη ὀλοφύρεαι οὕτως;
 κάτθανε καὶ Πάτροκλος, ὃ περ σέο πολλὸν ἀμείνων.
 οὐχ ὀράας οἷος καὶ ἐγὼ καλὸς τε μέγας τε;
 πατρός δ' εἴμ' ἀγαθοῖο, θεὰ δέ με γείνατο μήτηρ·
 ἀλλ' ἐπι τοι καὶ ἐμοὶ θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταῖή· (21.106–110)

If a hero can face a human challenge by defining himself through lineage, it seems right and proper he should appeal to that same source of strength in the face of the final enemy.

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