

The Winning of Hippodameia

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The winning of Hippodameia is recounted memorably if also sparingly by Pindar in his first Olympian ode, composed for Hieron of Syracuse, winner of the horse race in the Olympic Games of 476 B.C.E.¹ The princess was the prize in the archetypal athletic contest at Olympia, instituted by King Oinomaos of Pisa when he offered his daughter Hippodameia to the first youth who should beat him in a chariot race; suitors who lost the race forfeited their lives. Oinomaos outraced a succession of challengers but eventually lost to Pelops, a youth from Lydia or Phrygia. Since the king perished in the race, Pelops acquired both a bride and a kingdom. The young monarch presently enlarged his realm, naming it Peloponnesos, and in one tradition also went on to found the Olympic Games.²

The legend presents a number of problems. At least three irreconcilable versions of how Pelops wins his famous race are attested. In two influential articles, Johannes Kakridis ingeniously attempts to reconstruct the development of the legend, arguing that each new version—some of them attested and others hypothetical—emerged from the last in a linear sequence. But his reconstruction is ultimately unsatisfactory because it rests upon a series of more or less arbitrary assumptions for which he adduces no real evidence. Nor does his reconstruction take all attested versions of the legend into account.³ Despite the conjectural nature of his conclusions, scholars often follow Kakridis in supposing that Pindar himself invents the version of the Pelops story that he recounts, in which Pelops receives aid from the god Poseidon in winning Hippodameia.⁴ Kakridis argues

¹On the ode see in general the commentaries by Gerber and Fisker.

²For a brief discussion of the legend in literature and art see Gantz 540–45. For a brief survey of the iconographic tradition see Shapiro 78–83, and for more extensive treatments see the relevant articles in *LIMC*: Pipili 1990; Triantis 1992, 1994a, 1994b; Müller 1992. On Pelops' founding of the Olympic Games see Burkert 95 and Nagy 73–77.

³Kakridis (1928, 1930) makes no mention of the form of the story that I call the Killos version (see below).

⁴Kakridis (1928, 1930), followed by Köhnken, Krischer, Shapiro (1994: 79), and others; cf. Fisker 32. See also Sergent 63–64.

that in order to avoid the offensiveness of the story according to which Pelops' victory is owed to the treachery of Myrtilos, Pindar invents a new version on the analogy of the myth of Zeus and Ganymedes; in this invented story Poseidon and Pelops have an affair, and the grateful god subsequently helps his former lover.

I offer here a different approach to the legend. I compare the Pelops legend with its closest analogue in oral story, arguing that the winning of Hippodameia represents a Greek adaptation of an international oral story and that the major versions of the Greek legend, including Pindar's, are most easily understood as developments emphasizing different aspects of the international tale. First I consider the evidence for the Greek legend of Pelops and Hippodameia, distinguishing the three principal versions; then I characterize the international tale; after comparing the stories, I explore some implications of the parallels.

Pelops and Hippodameia

According to Pindar (*O.* 1.23–89), Poseidon fell in love with Pelops, and, when Pelops' father Tantalos invited the gods to a banquet in Sipylon, Poseidon seized the boy, bringing him on golden horses to Olympos. After Tantalos offended the gods, they sent Pelops back to earth.

When, towards the time of fair-blooming appearance, a growth of hair was covering and darkening his (= Pelops') chin, he began to consider a marriage that was at hand: to obtain glorious Hippodameia from her Pisaian father. Approaching the sea alone in the darkness he called the deep-roaring Fair Trident (= Poseidon). The god appeared almost at his feet, and Pelops said to him: "If the kindly gifts of Kypris pleased you at all, constrain Oinomaos' bronze spear, convey me to Elis on the swiftest of chariots, and bring me to power. He has destroyed thirteen men, suitors of his daughter, putting off her marriage. But great danger chooses no weakling. Since everyone must die, why should a man sit in obscurity and idly occupy himself with an anonymous old age, without a share in any good thing? For me this contest shall be my appointed task. From you I wish the result that is dear to me." So he spoke, and he did not lay hold of fruitless speech. Honoring him the god gave him a golden chariot and horses with tireless wings. He overcame the might of Oinomaos and took his daughter as bride. She bore him six sons, leaders of the people, eager in valor.

In this version Pelops is assisted by Poseidon in gratitude for his part in their love affair, the assistance taking the form of the god's lending the youth his own golden chariot and winged horses.

The same version is likely, but not certainly, implied in all sources that portray Pelops' horses as winged, the earliest of which is an illustration on the chest of Kypselos (ca. 570 B.C.E.) that predates Pindar's poem by about a century. Pausanias saw it in the temple of Hera at Olympia:⁵ "Oinomaos is chasing Pelops, who has Hippodameia. Each man has a pair of horses, and those of Pelops have wings growing from them." From later sources we learn that Pelops needs special steeds in order to compete successfully because Oinomaos has supernatural horses of his own. Even in Pindar's mythologically restrained account, the exceptional swiftness of Oinomaos' horses is implied by the fact that he outraces every challenger prior to Pelops, thirteen in all. Although the poet economizes on many details of the story, especially the race itself, it is clearly implied that Pelops owes his victory to the chariot and supernatural horses that Poseidon provides him, which are the god's own equipment. In this form of the story, then, Pelops has Poseidon as helper, and his victory is a consequence of the special resources that the god grants him. I shall call this account the *Poseidon version*.

A second form of the story, recounted by the historian Theopompos, is preserved by a scholiast to Homer.⁶ The *Killos version* possibly belongs to a tradition in which Oinomaos rules not in the Peloponnese but on Lesbos, not far from Pelops' own home country of Phrygia or Lydia:⁷

⁵Paus. 5.17.7 = LIMC VII: 21 no. 16. The chest does not survive, but for an illustration on an Attic black-figure vase dating to ca. 500–490 B.C.E., approximately contemporary with Pindar, see Shapiro 81, figs. 52–54.

⁶Σ A Hom. II. 1.38 = Theopomp. (FGH 115 F350): Πέλοψ ὁ Ταντάλου καὶ...κατὰ μισθὸν παιδικῆς ὥρας λαβὼν παρὰ Ποσειδῶνος ἵππους ἀδαμάστους σὺν τῷ ὀχήματι ἔσπευσεν εἰς Πίσαν τῆς Πελοποννήσου ἐπὶ τὸν Ἱπποδαμείας γάμον, τὸν μνηστηροκτόνον αὐτῆς πατέρα Οἰνόμαον καταγωνίσασθαι ἐπιθυμῶν. γενομένῳ δὲ αὐτῷ περὶ Λέσβον Κίλλος ὁ ἡνίοχος τελευτᾷ τὸν βίον, ὅς καὶ καθ' ὕπνον ἐπιστὰς τῷ Πέλοπι σφόδρα ὀδυνηρῶς ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἔχοντι ἀπωδύρετό τε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀπώλειαν καὶ περὶ κηδείας ἡξίου. διόπερ ἀναστὰς ἐξερυπάρου τὸ εἶδωλον διὰ πυρὸς, εἶθ' οὕτως ἔθαψε τὴν τέφραν ἐπιφανῶς τοῦ Κίλλου, ἡρίου ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἐγείρας· καὶ πρὸς τῷ ἡρίῳ αὐτοῦ ἐδείματο ἱερὸν, Κιλλαίου Ἀπόλλωνος προσαγορεύσας, διὰ τὸ αἰφνιδίως τὸν Κίλλον ἀποθανεῖν. οὐ μὲν ἀλλὰ καὶ πόλιν κτίσας Κίλλαν ὠνόμασεν. ὁ μὲντοι Κίλλος καὶ μετὰ θάνατον τῷ Πέλοπι δοκεῖ συλλαβέσθαι, ὅπως περιγένηται τοῦ Οἰνομάου περὶ τὸν δρόμον. ἡ ἱστορία παρὰ Θεοπόμπῳ.

⁷The Lesbian tradition is known to the scholiast on E. Or. 990: "Oinomaos was king on Lesbos and had swift horses, which no one beat except for Pelops. Pelops' charioteer was Killos." In this version Pelops must journey north from Lydia (if he is a Lydian) or west from Phrygia (if he is a Phrygian) to the coast opposite Lesbos, where Killos dies.

Pelops, son of Tantalos and..., got from Poseidon as a reward for their love-affair unbeatable horses along with Poseidon's chariot, and hastened to Pisa in the Peloponnese for a marriage with Hippodameia, desiring to prevail against her suitor-slaying father Oinomaos. When he was in the vicinity of Lesbos however his charioteer Killos died. The latter appeared in a dream to Pelops, who was in a state of extreme grief over him. Killos lamented his own destruction and also asked for a funeral. So when Pelops arose he burnt the body to ashes with fire, and then buried the ashes in a public ceremony and piled a mound over him. In addition to the mound he had a temple constructed, calling it a temple for Killaion Apollo, on account of Killos' sudden death. He also founded a city that he called Killa. Even after his death, moreover, Killos seemed to assist Pelops in overcoming Oinomaos in the race. The story is found in Theopompos.

This form of the story emphasizes the aid that Pelops receives from the ghost of his recently deceased charioteer Killos. The latter presumably acts out of gratitude for the extraordinarily lavish funeral honors accorded him by Pelops, who not only buries the man nobly but also constructs a temple in his honor and even founds a city memorializing his name. Since the scholiast's account is summary and his interest is in the founding of the town of Killa rather than in the eventual race of Pelops and Oinomaos, he does not explain just how the ghost of Killos assists Pelops in the contest. Another scholium gives an additional detail.⁸

Killos was a charioteer of Pelops who died in the vicinity of Lesbos. He appeared to Pelops, who was feeling disheartened, and told him that he would win if he sacrificed to Killaion Apollo, on account of his (= Killos') sudden death. From this event the city (= Killa) got its name.

Perhaps the sense of these events is as follows. Pelops and Killos come to the site of the future Killa, where Killos dies a sudden death. The ghost of Killos, lamenting its fate, appears to the despondent Pelops in a dream and asks for a funeral. In addition, Killos suggests that if Pelops should consecrate a shrine to

and then across the water to Lesbos; see further Str. 13.1.62–63, Eust. on Hom. *Il.* 1.38. Scholars have expended much ink on the question of the priority of Lesbos or the Peloponnese in the development of the Pelops legend; see Robert 187–88 n. 35 (Lesbos); Weizsäcker 767–72 (Peloponnese); Kakridis 1928 (Lesbos); Lacroix (Peloponnese).

⁸Σ bT Hom. *Il.* 1.38: Κίλλος ἡνίοχος Πέλοπος περὶ Λέσβον ἀποθανών. ἀθυμοῦντι δὲ αὐτῷ παρέστη, κελεύων Κιλλαίῳ Ἀπόλλωνι θύειν διὰ τὸν αἰφνίδιον θάνατον, καὶ νικήσειν· ὅθεν καὶ τῆς ὀνομασίας ἔτυχεν ἡ πόλις.

Apollo—since the phenomenon of a man’s sudden, mysterious death is ascribable to Apollo, Killos infers that the place is a haunt of the god—the god may in turn look favorably upon Pelops’ forthcoming race against Oinomaos. Grateful for the extraordinary funeral honors he receives, the ghost helps Pelops in some unspecified way in his race; and/or grateful for the cultic honors accorded him by Pelops, the god helps him somehow in his contest.

There is a third version of how Pelops gains his victory. In this “darker tradition,” as Gantz calls it,⁹ Pelops again owes his victory to a helper, in this case to the treachery of Oinomaos’ charioteer Myrtilos, who secretly sabotages Oinomaos’ vehicle before the race. The *Myrtilos version*, attested in literature as early as Pherekydes, is the form of the story most frequently recounted or implied by ancient authors. The east pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia (ca. 460 B.C.E.) probably portrays this version, for according to Pausanias and his local guide the sculptures show Oinomaos with Myrtilos, Pelops with Killas, and unwinged horses.¹⁰ The presence of a living Killos seems to rule out the Killos version, at least as it was known to Theopompos, and the ordinary horses appear to exclude the Poseidon version. The principal texts of the Myrtilos version are Pherekydes (Ph), Apollodoros (A), Pausanias (P), a scholiast on Euripides (Σ), Hyginus (H), and Servius (S).¹¹ Here follows a composite account.

Because Oinomaos, king of Pisa (A, S) or Lesbos (Σ), received an oracle that he would be slain by his son-in-law (Ph, A, H), or because he was in love with his own daughter Hippodameia (A, Σ), he was unwilling to give Hippodameia away to a suitor. He established a contest for which the prize was marriage with her (Ph, A, H, S). A suitor had to take Hippodameia in his chariot (A, Σ) and, starting from the Kladeos River (Ph), flee to the Isthmus of Corinth (Ph, A, Σ). The armed Oinomaos then pursued him in his own chariot, killing the youth if he caught him (A, P, Σ). In this way the king slew twelve (A, Σ), thirteen (Ph), or many (H, S) suitors, whose heads he

⁹Gantz 541.

¹⁰Paus. 5.10.7: “The man who drives Pelops’ chariot is named Sphairos according to Troizenian tradition, but the guide at Olympia said that he was Killas.” The spelling of the latter’s name varies in the sources between Killos and Killas.

¹¹Pherecyd. (FGH 3 F37a and 37b); Apollod. *Epit.* 2.3–2.9; Paus. 8.14.10–12; Σ E. *Or.* 990; Hyg. *Fab.* 84; Serv. *ad Verg. G.* 3.7. Sophokles and Euripides each wrote plays entitled *Oinomaos*, but little is known of them. I do not include every detail in my summary, and I am content sometimes to approximate rather than to represent slight differences in the accounts. Notice also that some narrators record variant accounts and so preserve apparently contradictory details.

cut off and nailed to his house (A, H). Oinomaos himself possessed horses and weapons given him by Ares (A), who was his father (Ph, H); begotten by the winds (S), his steeds were swifter than the north wind (H). When Pelops came to woo, Hippodameia fell in love with him and persuaded her father's charioteer Myrtilos to help him (Ph, A, Σ), promising him first sexual rights to her (S); or Pelops induced Myrtilos to betray Oinomaos, swearing an oath to let him sleep with Hippodameia for one night (P) or promising him half of the kingdom (H). Myrtilos himself was in love with Hippodameia (A, P, Σ). So he did not insert the linchpins into the axle (Ph, A, Σ, H), or he made linchpins or axles of wax (Ph, S), so that during the race the wheel rolled off and Oinomaos fell from the chariot (Ph), or so that Oinomaos became entangled in the reins and was dragged to death (A, H), or Pelops killed him (A, Σ). Pelops thereby won Hippodameia. As Pelops, Hippodameia, and Myrtilos were returning, Myrtilos started to kiss Hippodameia (Ph, Σ) or tried to rape her (A, Σ), or he reminded Pelops of his oath (P) or Hippodameia of hers (S), or Pelops thought it would be a reproach to him to keep faith with Myrtilos (H), so that Pelops cast him into the sea, where he drowned (Ph, A, P, Σ). From him the Myrtoon Sea got its name (Ph, A, Σ, H, S).

In this version Oinomaos announces a contest for the hand of his daughter, and Pelops or Hippodameia makes a pact with Oinomaos' charioteer Myrtilos in which the latter agrees to aid Pelops by sabotaging Oinomaos' chariot. In return for his help, he may be promised a share of Pelops' eventual winnings, such as a night with the bride or half of the kingdom. Even when a text does not specifically mention a pact, Myrtilos acts *as if* he has a claim of some sort on Hippodameia, for presently he makes a bold sexual pass at her, seeking as it seems to collect his due.

Pelops thus never wins Hippodameia on his own but always succeeds with the aid of a helper (Poseidon, Killos, or Myrtilos), and it is the identity and actions of the helper that distinguish the major versions. Although the different means by which Pelops wins his bride—Poseidon's winged horses, Killos' unspecified help, Myrtilos' sabotage—are not really reconcilable into a single narrative, ancient authors do often combine elements of different versions. So Theopompos has Pelops win with the help of Killos, but he also equips Pelops with Poseidon's horses. Pherekydes mentions Pelops' winged horses and also the help of Myrtilos, and Apollodoros mentions a winged chariot as well as the

treachery of Myrtilos.¹² Nevertheless, mixed accounts do not really result in a different version of the story, for one version is always dominant while the other belongs to the inactive background, and the inactive features are always the winged horses or winged chariot of the Poseidon version, which we may suppose became attached to Pelops iconically even when they played no actual narrative role in deciding the outcome of the race. In sum, the means by which Pelops wins Hippodameia is overdetermined in the legend as a whole, though not in the individual texts.

Although the major versions of the legend are not and cannot be reconciled, they are not equally different from one another. For, just as there is a dark tradition, there is also a light tradition; indeed, the legend as a whole divides into two branches, the Poseidon and Killos versions belonging to the lighter branch, the Myrtilos version to the darker. In the noble branch both the hero and his helper behave with generosity. The Poseidon and Killos versions must indeed be close kin, for although they are dissimilar on the surface they are quite identical in their underlying structure. Pelops gives his love to Poseidon, and Poseidon subsequently helps Pelops win the race. So also Pelops buries Killos lavishly, and Killos subsequently helps Pelops win the race. That is, in both versions the protagonist gives generously and without expectation of return, and presently his beneficiary turns benefactor, repaying the favor with like generosity. Notice also the supernatural status (god/ghost) of the helper in these two versions. Presumably either the Killos version is a development of the Poseidon version, or the Poseidon version of the Killos version, or both are developments of an earlier form of the story.

By contrast, in the ignoble branch the hero and his allies are thoroughly duplicitous. Myrtilos conspires with Pelops or with Hippodameia to sabotage Oinomaos' chariot in exchange for a reward; and when Myrtilos tries to collect, Pelops murders him. There is nothing admirable in Myrtilos, who betrays Oinomaos; nor in Hippodameia, who betrays her father; and least of all in Pelops, who wins the race by sabotage and then, having won, kills his helper.

So the Greek legend developed two extreme branches, a lighter branch and a darker branch, and the lighter branch in turn developed two subforms, one featuring the god Poseidon and the other the ghost Killos. Although the different helpers distinguish the branches and the versions, the helpers are not entirely dissimilar. In particular, Killos and Myrtilos are both charioteers, and Poseidon provides the hero with a chariot, all of which suggests that the three helpers in

¹²In the same way, probably, Sophokles (*El.* 509–11) and Euripides (*Or.* 988–94) allude to both Myrtilos and winged horses; see also Sergeant 66.

the Pelops legend derive ultimately from the same character, who had something to do with chariots.¹³

The Bride Won in a Tournament

Although the Greek legend of Pelops and Hippodameia has no obvious analogue in international oral story, there is an international story with very suggestive parallels, an un-obvious analogue, as it were, with which I wish to compare it. This tale is classified by folktale scholars as AT 508, *The Bride Won in a Tournament*. To judge from the literary treatments it has received, the tale was especially popular during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, probably because it was a good vehicle for expressing chivalric themes. In modern times the tale has exerted less appeal, having been collected from oral narrators in small numbers and in few countries.¹⁴ It is in the nature of things that no one knows how old the tale is.

In this story the protagonist learns that a certain king has established a tournament and promised the hand of his daughter to the man who should win it. On his way to the contest the hero comes upon the corpse of a man who has been denied burial. The hero arranges for the proper burial of the corpse, sometimes at so great an expense to himself that he scarcely has sufficient resources to proceed to the contest or to participate in it (he may give up all his resources, including even his weapons and horse). But he encounters a man (a knight, merchant, etc.) who furnishes him with a fine steed (and equipment, if needed), usually on the condition that the hero share half of whatever he should win. After the hero is victorious in the tournament, winning the princess and the kingdom (or half the kingdom or other wealth), his benefactor reappears and asks for his

¹³There is, in a sense, a fourth means by which Pelops secures his victory, one in which he acts without benefit of a helper. Pelops buries a magical object beside the race course, causing Oinomaos' mares to be thrown into confusion. Pausanias mentions this event as one of several current explanations for the notorious Taraxippos, or Horse-Confunder, at the hippodrome at Olympia (6.20.15–20). Presumably what Pelops buries is a curse tablet or a non-inscribed object that contains a binding spell, thereby hindering Oinomaos' horses in the race and assuring his own victory, but the curse continued to frighten horses at the spot ever afterwards. Since this idea never appears as an element in any ancient narration of the Pelops legend, I do not count it as an independent version of the legend; rather, it belongs to the repertory of popular conjectures concerning the puzzling phenomenon of the Taraxippos at Olympia, as its mention by Pausanias in this context illustrates. On the Taraxippos see Frazer (1898) IV: 84–85; Höfer 1916–24. For the burial of curse tablets at hippodromes and elsewhere in historical times see Faraone 3–32; Gager 42–77.

¹⁴See Liljeblad 58–59; Thompson 52 and 179; AT Type 508.

share. He may demand the bride or the possessions, or he may demand to share the bride. The hero may offer his possessions in order that he may keep his bride, or he may offer his bride in order that she not be harmed. When the hero thus signals his willingness to keep his bargain, his benefactor declines to take anything, explaining that he is the man whose corpse the hero ransomed and buried. Then the ghost disappears.¹⁵

This ghostly helper, a character known to folk-narrative scholars as *the grateful dead man*, appears in *The Bride Won in a Tournament* as well as in several other international folktales. In most such stories the hero comes upon the corpse of an unburied man and expends his resources in arranging for a proper—often a lavish—burial. Presently he encounters a stranger who agrees to form a partnership with him or to help him in the task he is undertaking, on the condition that they divide their eventual winnings equally. After the hero wins a wife, the partner reappears demanding that they divide that which the hero has acquired, including his child or his wife. When finally the protagonist agrees to honor their bargain, the stranger relents, explaining that he is the dead man whom the hero once buried. Then the helper, whom we now perceive is a revenant, mysteriously disappears.¹⁶ Although the routine of the protagonist and the grateful dead man is more or less constant from tale to tale, the means by which the hero acquires his bride varies, and it is primarily this variation that distinguishes the several different folktales in which the grateful revenant figures. In the type under consideration, the hero wins his bride in a tournament.

I illustrate the type with two texts given here in summary; five additional texts are summarized in the Appendix. As usual with oral and orally-inspired narratives, such as the different texts of the Mytilos version of the winning of Hippodameia, each text of the present story shows its own peculiarities, agreeing and disagreeing in different ways with the plot that I abstract from the texts as a set. For example, although the dead man is often a knight, he may otherwise be a merchant, a poor man, or a murdered man of unspecified status. The hero and the helper normally agree to divide eventual winnings in equal shares, but one text mentions no pact at all. And so on.

A. In *Rittertriuwe*, a Middle High German poem from the thirteenth century, Graf Willekin von Montabour learned that a rich and

¹⁵See Gerould 33–40; Bolte-Polívka III: 507; Liljeblad 58–63; Röhrich 309–10.

¹⁶For the tales that feature the grateful dead man see AT 505–8. The principal surveys of the tradition are by Gerould, Liljeblad, and Röhrich. Sporadic evidence for the international currency of narratives of this kind in antiquity can be found in Greek and in Hebrew/Jewish literature; see Hansen.

beautiful maiden had established a tournament, promising her hand to the knight who should win it. He went there and found lodging at the house of a man who would receive him only if he should pay the debts of a dead man, whose body lay in the dung. Moved by the story, Willekin used almost all his money to ransom and bury the corpse. For the tourney itself he borrowed a horse from a knight he did not know, on the condition that they would divide everything he should win. Willekin won and married the maiden. A couple of days later the stranger came to his room and demanded a share in his marital rights. When the stranger refused to take all Willekin's possessions instead, Willekin started to yield the bed to him, whereupon the stranger explained that he was the ghost of the dead man, and disappeared.¹⁷

The story of Graf Willekin is typical of the type, deviating slightly in two features. First, the tournament is usually announced by the maiden's father rather than by the maiden herself. Second, the idea of sharing the bride sexually is uncommon in the texts we have, though not unparalleled. In a modern Greek folktale from Mytilene, "the Naked Man" (= the grateful dead man) shows up after the hero's wedding and demands his share of the hero's winnings. When the prince tells him to take half of his wealth, the Naked Man insists on having half of the princess as well, whereupon the prince asks angrily if the Naked Man expects to have the prince's wife for five days, after which the prince would have her for another five. No, the Naked Man says, he means to divide her otherwise, and rushes at the princess with his knife.¹⁸ In this text the protagonist and the grateful dead man themselves debate whether sharing the bride means cutting her in half or sharing her as a wife. So the sexual sharing of the princess, although not the most common form of the motif, is attested occasionally in the tradition.¹⁹

B. In a folktale in Straparola's *Pleasant Nights*, composed in the sixteenth century, a man died, leaving three hundred ducats to his son Bertuccio, who was something of a simpleton. The youth asked his mother for a hundred ducats. Setting out on his travels, Bertuccio came upon a thief who had just killed a merchant on the public highway. Bertuccio pitied the dead man, whose corpse he purchased from the highwayman for eighty ducats and carried to a nearby church, where he arranged for an honorable burial, leaving the rest of

¹⁷Gerould 36; Bolte-Polívka III: 508–9; Röhrich 309–10.

¹⁸Dawkins 1953: 207–26 no. 36.

¹⁹For a hint of the motif in ancient Hebrew tradition, see Hansen 359.

his ducats to be spent for masses for the dead man's soul. Since he now had no money, Bertuccio returned home. When he told his mother how he had spent his money, she reproached him for his folly.

Bertuccio got the remaining ducats and came to a wood where he found soldiers with a maiden they had captured arguing over who had the stronger claim to her. Bertuccio persuaded them to hand the girl over to him in exchange for the ducats. Not knowing that the girl was Tarquinia, daughter of King Crisippo of Navarre, the soldiers made the trade, and Bertuccio took her home to his mother. Soon the king, seeking his lost daughter, located her in the house of Bertuccio. Before she departed she instructed Bertuccio that, if her father should be minded to give her in marriage, Bertuccio should come to Navarre and give her a certain signal, for she wished to wed no other man but him.

Presently her father proclaimed that he wished to find a husband for her. Hearing this, Bertuccio set out on an old mare. On the way he encountered a noble cavalier, who asked him his business. When the cavalier perceived the youth's courtesy and simplicity, he bade him exchange clothes and horse with him, making however one condition, that when Bertuccio returned, he should give the cavalier back his clothes and horse together with half of whatever he might have won. Bertuccio agreed. The youth rode to court and, giving the agreed sign, was recognized by the king's daughter and chosen as her husband. As Bertuccio was conducting his bride home he came to his benefactor again. The youth gave up the horse and the clothing and handed over half of the gifts given him by the king, but the cavalier pointed out that he had not yet divided his wife. When Bertuccio asked how they could possibly divide her, the cavalier replied that they could cut her in half, whereupon the youth told the cavalier to take her. When the cavalier saw how simple and kindly Bertuccio was, he gave Bertuccio everything he had. He explained that he was none other than the spirit of the man to whom Bertuccio had given honorable burial, the man for whose soul Bertuccio had caused many masses to be said. Then the spirit vanished. Rejoicing, Bertuccio returned home with Tarquinia.²⁰

This narrative doubles the feature of the hero's selfless piety, which appears first in its usual form as his ransoming and burial of a stranger's corpse and then once more as his ransoming and caring for a captive maiden. Recounted as a folktale,

²⁰*Le Piacevoli Notti*, eleventh night, second tale. For an English rendering see Straparola II: 273–83.

it presents the aristocratic tournament in an attenuated form as a vague kind of contest in which the suitors vie by their mere presence to be chosen by the princess.

Comparison of the Traditions

I turn now to a comparison of the Greek legend with the international story. Just as the international tale consists of all its texts, so also the legend is the sum of its tellings. But for the sake of simplicity I consider the three ancient versions one at a time, beginning with the version that actually features a grateful dead man.

Brief though its source may be, the Killos version agrees with *The Bride Won in a Tournament* in important ways. (1) A king announces a sporting contest (2) for which the prize is his daughter. (3) The hero sets out with the intention of engaging in the contest. (4) During his journey he encounters a dead man and (5) generously expends his resources in giving the man a proper or even lavish burial. (6) Subsequently the ghost of the dead man assists the hero in winning the contest. If we tried to imagine an ancient Greek version of *The Bride Won in a Tournament*, the following story would be approximately what we would construct: a protagonist in the form of a noble youth, extraordinary piety toward the dead man expressed in Greek ways (public funeral, burial mound, construction of a temple, foundation of a city), and an athletic contest of the sort that Greek aristocrats loved (chariot racing).

In the Poseidon version Pelops lacks adequate equipment for the contest and acquires it when the god lends the youth his own winged horses and golden chariot. This is in fact the form of the motif that we find in *The Bride Won in a Tournament*, where it is regularly the case that the hero borrows his horse and sometimes other equipment from a distinguished benefactor whom he encounters on the way to the contest. Thus, Willekin borrows a horse from a knight (Text A), and Bertuccio exchanges horses and clothing with a noble cavalier (Text B). In other texts, Richars acquires from the White Knight the man's own fine steed to replace the poor horse that Richars himself is riding (Text C); Dianese obtains money, a horse, and weapons from a merchant (Text E); and Pippin gets his horse from a man on a noble steed (Text F).²¹ In the international tale the benefactor is the grateful dead man, that is, the man for whom the hero generously provided burial, just as in the Poseidon version the hero's benefactor is the grateful god, that is, the personage to whom the hero previously granted sexual favors.

²¹Texts C–G appear in summary in the Appendix.

The action of the Poseidon version is most clear (= the helper assists the hero in winning the contest by supplying him with the necessary horses and equipment) at the point at which the Killos version, because of the abbreviated account we have, is most vague (= the ghost assists the hero somehow in winning the contest). Combining the action of the former and the character of the latter, we can exactly parallel the corresponding incident in the international tale (= the ghost of the dead man assists the hero in winning the contest by supplying him with the necessary horses and equipment). Taken together, in any case, the Poseidon and Killos versions, or lighter branch of the legend, show parallels to the important features of the international story.

Or, rather, to all but two. Two important features of the international story that are missing in these versions are the pact made by the hero with his helper and the correlative episode at the end in which the two characters negotiate how to share the hero's winnings. In *The Bride Won in a Tournament* the protagonist makes a pact with his helper that they will share the hero's eventual acquisitions, which prove to be the princess and wealth in some form (the kingdom, part of the kingdom, or unspecified riches). Then at the end of the tale the helper demands his share, and the two discuss options. The pact and the sharing of the winnings are handled with considerable variation in different realizations of the story. Sometimes the helper demands that the hero give up either the princess or his possessions (Texts C, D, E); the hero may offer to yield his possessions in order to keep the princess or to keep her intact (Texts A, F). At other times the helper wants half of the princess and half of the possessions, if any (Texts A, B, F, G), and the hero may yield his marital rights to her (Text A) or yield her entirely in order that she not be cut in half (Text B). The story itself ends when the hero and his partner come to terms, and the helper explains who he really is, renounces his share, and disappears.

We can perceive in the Myrtilos version the correlative themes of the pact and the sharing of the bride and probably a trace of the helper's final disappearance from the story as well. In the ancient accounts that agree most closely with the international tale, Pelops conspires with Myrtilos, promising him in return for his help a night with Hippodameia (so Pausanias) or half of the kingdom (Hyginus). Subsequently, after Pelops wins the princess and the kingdom, Myrtilos reminds Pelops of their agreement (Pausanias), or he tries to kiss or rape Hippodameia (various authors).²² Myrtilos' erotic moves against

²²Kiss or rape: Pherekydes, Σ to Euripides, and Apollodoros. In some accounts the deal is made between Myrtilos and Hippodameia; so, according to Servius, Hippodameia promises Myrtilos first sexual rights to her (*primi coitus pactione*) in return

Hippodameia are therefore a form of the motif in which the helper demands his share of the winnings.

The international tale usually expresses the hero's obligations in the pact in indefinite terms: the hero promises to share with his helper *whatever* he should win. But it is always a bride and some form of wealth that he eventually wins. The Greek legend differs by expressing the hero's obligations in specific terms: the hero promises to share with his helper precisely the *bride* (Pausanias) or the *kingdom* (Hyginus) that he may win. Although the conditions are differently expressed, the results are precisely the same.²³

Moreover, whereas the international tale presents the sharing of the protagonist's winnings as a choice between wife and possessions or as a sharing of the wife (by physical division or sexual sharing), the ancient texts speak more simply either of a sharing of the wife sexually (Pausanias, Servius) or of a sharing of the kingdom (Hyginus). The prizes are the same, but the ancient hero faces no moral choice between love and wealth, for sharing in the Greek legend means either sharing the bride or sharing the possessions, and sharing the bride always means sharing her sexually.

Finally, the plot concludes with the hero's helper disappearing from sight and from the story. In the international tale this character, after identifying himself as the man whom the hero once buried, renounces his claim on the hero's winnings, and mysteriously vanishes, returning (we assume) to the realm of the dead. The Greek legend lacks these features or, perhaps more accurately, lacks them in this form, for the corresponding themes seem to appear in the legend where they are assigned instead to the hero. Rather than Myrtilos' abruptly

for his helping Pelops, and it is subsequently she (not Pelops) whom Myrtilos reminds of their agreement.

²³In fact, this same kind of variation can also be found in folktales of the grateful dead man. The narrative is more effective when the conditions are stated in indefinite terms (= "whatever") because the particular application of the rule (= the necessity of the hero's somehow sharing his wife and/or child and/or wealth) then comes as a dramatic surprise. Although the tale is usually recounted in this way, some narrators, presumably anticipating the final scene, proleptically state as explicit conditions of the pact that which is usually its surprising application. So in a French folktale the hero and the grateful dead man agree that in return for the latter's help the hero will give him half of that which is most dear in the world to him, his child (= indefinite condition as well as its application); subsequently the helper demands half of the man's child (Massignou 44–48 no. 10). It would have been more dramatically effective if the narrator had the hero agree to share with his helper that which was dearest to him (= general condition) and for the helper subsequently to demand half of the hero's child (= particular application).

renouncing his claim, Pelops renounces it on his behalf, as it were, by denying his claim. And rather than Myrtilos' disappearing on his own, Pelops causes him to disappear by casting him into the sea; or, expressed otherwise, rather than Myrtilos' returning to death on his own, as the revenant in the folktale does, Pelops brings about his death.

Viewing the legend now as the sum of its versions and treating the helpers in the individual versions as developments of a single character, we observe that the legend parallels in a recognizable way every important feature of *The Bride Won in a Tournament*. I sum up the correspondences. (1) A king announces an athletic contest (2) for which the prize is the hand of his daughter. (3) The hero sets out with the intention of engaging in the contest, and during his journey he (4) encounters a dead man and (5) generously expends his resources to give the man a proper or lavish burial. Subsequently (6) a grateful supernatural being helps him in the contest (the ghost of the man he buried helps the hero win, or the god with whom the hero had an affair supplies him with horses and equipment). (7) The hero makes a pact with a helper according to which, in return for the helper's aid, he will share with him whatever he wins (or specifically his bride or his kingdom). (8) After the hero wins the contest the helper steps forth to collect his share of the bride or the kingdom. But in the end (9) he does not do so (he renounces or is denied his share), whereupon (10) he exits from the action (he vanishes or is drowned).²⁴

Some Implications

It follows that the legend of the winning of Hippodameia, taken as a whole, is essentially the same story as *The Bride Won in a Tournament*. The extensive and in some cases unusual correspondences are explicable only if the Greek story and the international tale are genetically related. It would be inconceivable for the international tale to have developed from the Pelops tradition, for it cannot derive from any single version of the Pelops legend known to us but only from all three versions put together; on the other hand, there is no difficulty in supposing that the story of the winning of Hippodameia is a development of the international story.²⁵ I infer therefore that the Greek legend derives from an

²⁴Presumably the character dies in one way or another, Myrtilos perishing and the ghost returning to death.

²⁵It makes no difference if we imagine that the international tale derives from the ancestor of the present Pelops and Hippodameia story, that is, a form of the story before it ramified into different versions, for that is just another way of saying that the Greek legend and the international tale as we now know it share the same ancestor, whose precise form is unknown to us. For parallels between another part of the Pelops legend

early form of the story of *The Bride Won in a Tournament* and that in time the Greek legend developed several variant forms, each one preserving and emphasizing different features of the parent narrative while retaining the central story of the protagonist's winning a princess in a contest.

The present analysis reconciles the three versions of the Greek legend genetically by demonstrating how they can be understood as developments of a single story. The analysis also has the virtue of giving due acknowledgment to the Killos version, which is usually dismissed or ignored.²⁶ The present conclusion is fatal to any unilinear reconstruction of the development of the Pelops legend. Since the Pelops legend and *The Bride Won in a Tournament* are historically related traditions, and since each of the three forms of the Greek legend preserves unique features of the international tale—the Killos version preserving the pious burial and the grateful ghost, the Poseidon version the grateful supernatural being who provides the hero with horses and equipment, and the Myrtilos version the pact with the helper and the sharing of the bride—the several versions of the legend could not have developed in strict unilinear succession, one issuing from the other. Rather, the Greek story must have developed by ramifying, polarizing first into a noble branch and an ignoble branch and then into sub-traditions. Each branch modified the routine of the hero and the grateful dead man in a particular way, one foregrounding the spirit of giving freely that is characteristic of the earlier part of the tale, the other developing the atmosphere of negotiation that is characteristic of the later part.

It is a commonplace in the literature on the Pelops legend that the bridal contest developed out of an earlier narrative of bridal capture; indeed, these are the first two stages in Kakridis' reconstruction.²⁷ But the genetic connection

(the episode of the gods' cannibalistic feast and Pelops' ivory shoulder) and an international folktale, pointed out nearly a half-century ago but overlooked in discussions of the Pelops legend, see Schmidt.

²⁶For example, Kakridis (1928, 1930) makes no mention at all of the Killos version. Scherling, writing in Pauly-Wissowa, does mention it but asserts without argument that Killas is modeled after Myrtilos (1935: 1155) and has no significance for the legend (1940: 850). *Der Kleine Pauly* (s.v. Killas) declares without argument that his connection with Pelops is secondary.

²⁷Robert 1881: 187–88 n. 35 and 1920: 206–21; Weizsäcker 769–70; Cornford 219; Kakridis 1928 and 1930; Scherling 1935: 1153 and 1940: 852; Devereux. According to the reconstruction argued by Kakridis, in the original legend Pelops *kidnaps* Hippodameia from her home on Lesbos and flees with her across the sea in a chariot drawn by winged horses that some deity has provided him; in the next stage of the legend's development, Pelops *wins* Hippodameia in a contest on Lesbos.

between the Pelops legend and *The Bride Won in a Tournament* reveals that a contest, not an abduction, was the central agonistic feature of the parent story and therefore that the bridal contest in the Pelops legend has always been a bridal contest.

It is true nevertheless that the chariot race devised by Oinomaos has strange rules. It is odd enough to have to race against one's potential father-in-law for the hand of his daughter, as though, rather than being the maiden's father, he were another suitor competing for the same prize.²⁸ It is odder for the race to be one in which the father gives the challenger a head start, and the aim of the pursuer is to catch up with the challenger and spear him from behind. And it is stranger still for the father to declare that his daughter should ride as a passenger alongside the fleeing suitor, as though she were being abducted, or as though the king were daring the suitor to try to take his daughter away from him. These are unrealistic, even bizarre, conditions, and this is therefore an unrealistic race.²⁹ But the rules of Oinomaos' race characterize him strikingly and appropriately, and this must be their narrative function. These features are precisely what make the contest, and so also the story, as memorable as it is. Here is a man, after all, whose father is the fierce god Ares, who is in love with his own daughter and wishes no other man to have her, and who affixes the heads of the suitors he has slain to the outside of his house for all to see. Rather than the policies of Oinomaos' race being half-digested motifs, pointlessly frozen midway between an older idea of bridal capture and a newer idea of bridal race, they are part of the artfulness and appeal of the story. That is presumably why ancient narrators retained the motif of Hippodameia's riding as passenger during the race, although they had centuries in which to modify it in the direction of greater realism and credibility.

The present analysis of the winning of Hippodameia and *The Bride Won in a Tournament* ties in the Poseidon version as well, the early date of which is supported by the evidence of the sixth-century chest of Kypselos, mentioned

²⁸Devereux 6–7; see further Calame (238–44). Devereux, however, is wrong in supposing that the situation is unique in Greek mythology, for it is almost exactly replicated in some versions of the story of Euenos, Idas, and Marpessa; see Frazer (1921) I: 62–63; Gantz 196.

²⁹Oinomaos' rules are not the only unrealistic features in the race. Consider also Pelops' winged horses or winged chariot, a motif that prompts the rationalist mythographer Palaiphatos (no. 29, p. 40 Festa) to declare that Oinomaos would hardly have allowed Pelops to put his daughter Hippodameia in a winged chariot. Then consider Myrtilos' sabotaging the wheels of the very chariot that he himself will drive, as though disabling the chariot did not threaten the driver's safety as much as the passenger's.

above, whose representation of Pelops racing with winged horses is most easily and naturally interpreted as an illustration of the Poseidon version of the legend. Since the Poseidon version largely agrees with the corresponding episodes of *The Bride Won in a Tournament*, this version is certainly a development of the international tale rather than a sheer invention by Pindar for the convenience of his ode to Hieron. The Poseidon version retains the feature of the favor done by the protagonist, his generosity. It retains the feature of the hero's subsequent need for horses and equipment in order to enter the contest for the hand of the princess. It retains the feature of the grateful supernatural being, and, like the international tale, it presents him as a distinguished personage. It retains the feature of the helper's lending his own fine steeds and equipment to the hero in his need. What it modifies is the nature of the supernatural helper, the grateful ghost becoming a grateful god. And it modifies the nature of the favor done by the hero, piety toward the dead becoming acquiescence to a lover. Pederastic abduction is easily paralleled in Greek mythology and society, so that the abduction of Pelops by Poseidon and their subsequent erotic relationship are understandable reflections of the fantasies and practices of Greek males regarding the love of adult men for youths.³⁰ Pindar himself likens the abduction of Pelops to the abduction of Ganymedes by Zeus; ritualized pederastic abduction is attested on ancient Crete; and of course many other instances of pederasty are found in Greek mythology, literature, and art, with or without the element of abduction, indicating that it was a theme of considerable interest to the Greeks.³¹

Appendix: Other Versions of *The Bride Won in a Tournament*

C. In *Richars li Biaus*, a French romance of the thirteenth century, the knight Richars, impoverished from having wasted his patrimony in knightly exercises, heard that the King of Montorgueil had promised his daughter to the victor in a tournament. Richars, thanks to the generosity of a provost, was able to set out with a horse, several attendants, and an amount of money. On the way he stayed at a house in which the corpse of a man lay exposed and learned that it was the body of a knight who had died owing money to the owner. Richars gave all he had in order to secure the release and burial of the

³⁰See, e.g., Dover.

³¹On Cretan ritual pederasty see further Vernant 19–20 (referring to Ephoros *FGH* 70 F149); Dover 189–90; Sergent 7–54; and Halperin 54–71. For speculations concerning the implications of the Cretan institution for the history and significance of the Pelops legend, see Sergent 61–67; Nagy 83–84; Moreau 235 n. 14. For earlier hypotheses about the ritual significance of the Pelops legend see Cornford and Devereux.

man and proceeded alone with a poor, borrowed horse to the tournament. On the way a White Knight joined him, offered him help in the contest, and gave Richars his own fine steed. After winning the tournament and the princess, Richars offered the White Knight his choice of the lady or the property, but the stranger declined, explaining that he was the ghost of the knight whom the man had buried, and disappeared.³²

D. In the Old French romance *Lion de Bourges*, Lion was reared by a knight, whose property he wasted in chivalry after he grew up. Hearing that King Henry of Sicily had established a tourney and promised his daughter to the knight who should win it, he set out for the court. On his way there he ransomed the corpse of a knight who was unburied because of his debts. Before the event he won the favor of the princess, Florentine, and a White Knight provided him with a charger, which he had lacked, on the condition that he share his winnings except for the princess. With the knight's help Lion won the tourney. When the White Knight bade him give up either the princess or the whole kingdom, he yielded the kingdom. But then the stranger declared that he was the ghost of the knight whom Lion had ransomed, and disappeared.³³

E. In an Italian work, *Novella di Messer Dianese*, the knight Dianese wasted his substance. When he learned that the King of Cornwall had announced his daughter and half of his kingdom as the prize for the knight who should win the tourney he was sponsoring, Dianese set out with borrowed equipment. He passed through a town in which a corpse lay on a bier in public, unburied because his creditors had not been paid. Dianese paid them and arranged for the man's burial at the cost of all his own possessions except for his horse. He was subsequently joined in his journey by a merchant, who promised him money, a horse, and weapons in return for half of what Dianese should win in the tournament. The protagonist agreed and won the contest, thereby obtaining the princess and half of the kingdom. He set out for home with his bride and the merchant. As they neared their destination, the merchant demanded either his bride or his possessions. Choosing the princess, Dianese departed with her, after

³²Gerould 33–34; Bolte-Polívka III: 507–8. Commenting upon the White Knight, Bolte-Polívka (III: 507 n. 1) observe that white is traditionally the color of departed souls.

³³Gerould 34.

which the merchant rejoined him, renounced the treasures, explained that he was the ghost of the debtor, and disappeared.³⁴

F. According to a story found in a Swedish manuscript of the thirteenth century, the daughter of the King of France promised to wed whatever knight should win the tourney that she announced. Hearing this, Duke Pippin of Lorraine set out for France. On the way he lodged with a widow whose deceased husband was so poor that she could not bury him properly. Pitying her, Pippin paid for the man's funeral. Going on, he encountered a man on a noble horse who gave him the steed on the condition of receiving half of whatever Pippin should win. Pippin agreed and by means of the horse won the tourney. After he had wed the princess, his helper bade him fulfill his promise. When the hero, in order to retain his wife, offered his kingdom, the man revealed that he himself was the ghost of the poor man and that his horse was an angel of God.³⁵

G. *Sir Amadas*, an English poem of around the late fourteenth century, recounts how the impoverished Amadas set out for seven years of errantry with a mere forty pounds, which he spent to ransom and bury the body of a merchant who had died in debt. Reduced to penury, Amadas met a White Knight, who promised to help him on the condition of receiving half of his gains. Subsequently the protagonist came upon a rich shipwreck, from which he appareled himself well, and went to court, where he won wealth in a tourney and the princess' heart in a banquet. He wed the princess, and she bore a son. The stranger reappeared, demanding that their agreement be kept. Amadas hesitatingly agreed to divide his wife and child, whereupon the knight stopped him, explaining that he was the ghost of the merchant.³⁶

³⁴Gerould 35; Bolte-Polivka III: 508.

³⁵Gerould 35–36; Bolte-Polivka III: 509–10.

³⁶Gerould 37; Bolte-Polivka III: 509–10.

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