

The Atreidai and the Early Mythographers

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Abstract This paper will focus on some mythographic fragments concerning a minor character who appears to be related to Agamemnon and Menelaos already in Homer – namely Echepolos, a Greek hero who managed to skip involvement in the Trojan war. The hero's genealogies traced by Pherekydes and Akousilaos do not synchronize with the Homeric one and are independent from it. Particularly, Pherekydes' arrangement does not seem unrelated to the pro-Spartan policy of Kimon and his resolute philolaconism.

Keywords Greek mythology. Homer. Pherekydes. Akousilaos. Echepolos. Kimon.

Summary 1 Preliminary Remarks. – 2 Echepolos in Homer and Beyond. – 3 Pherekydes and the Clan of Kimon. – 4 The Atreidai in the Post-Kimonian Period.

1 Preliminary Remarks

A handmaiden of mythology (as Albert Henrichs put it), Greek mythology has attracted scholarly attention in the last decades.¹ Following in Fowler's critical edition and commentary of the earliest mythographers (2000 and 2013), a number of critical studies on this fragmentary literature have provided, and can still provide, relevant insights into the heroic traditions of Archaic and Classical Greece.

The traditional view stresses a dependent relationship between the mythographical prose and epic archaic poetry. In general, it is

¹ Cf. Henrichs 1987, 243.



accepted as fact that the first mythography was a direct continuation of epic tradition, which it attempted to complete, correct, adapt, comment on and interpret.² Furthermore: in the history of the reception of myths, the contribution made by mythographers seems to fit comfortably into the chronological gap between Homer, Hesiod and the Cyclic Epics on the one hand; and history and tragedy on the other.³

Fragmentary mythography has come down to us mainly within scholia by means of quotations of grammarians and ancient critics. It is my contention that conditions of preservation, and means of transmission, of these fragmentary texts have shaped the way we approach them. In other words, it is the very process of reception of epic poetry through the exegetic and grammarian tradition that distorts our view and leads us to see mythography as being dependent on, or engaging with, Homer or Hesiod. However, there is very little indication that early mythographers would mention the epic poet explicitly in order to correct it, discuss it, or explain it.

Better knowledge of archaic and classic mythography in recent years has provided more accurate details on the context of production and purposes of the fragmentary works by Hekataios of Miletus, Akousilaos of Argos, Pherekydes of Athens or Hellanikos of Lesbos, among others.⁴ For example, the origins of Pherekydes' *Histories* seem firmly rooted in the Athens of the first third of the fifth century BCE (and specifically in the circle of Kimon and the Philaidai family).⁵ The work of this Athenian mythographer fits comfortably into the intellectual and artistic entourage (along with Polygnotos, Sophokles, Ion, or Bacchylides) that surrounded the Philaidai, and contributed to strengthening the identity and the political aspirations of this clan. All of this prompts us to reappraise the contribution made by mythographers to the process of receiving and appropriating myth. Although the use of prose writing made it possible to address an abstract audience, regardless of a specific place or time, they transcribed both family memories and stories from a particular perspective. To do so, each had his own agenda and programme, which has to be explained within its context and not, from a purely historic-literary perspective, like an appendix, a continuation or an exegesis of the epic tradition.

2 Cf. Fowler's (2013, XVI) emphatic formulation at the beginning of his colossal commentary: "The entirety of the archaic poetic tradition was their [*scil.* mythographers'] raw material".

3 Cf. Fowler 2013, 5: "Mythography staked out different territory, between Homer, Hesiod's *Catalogue*, and the Cyclic Epics on one side, and history and tragedy on the other".

4 For a survey, cf. Pàmias 2022.

5 Cf. Dolcetti 2001. Cf. also Pàmias 2017. To be precise, Pherekydes' work can be dated to the early 470 (cf. Huxley 1973).

2 Echepolos in Homer and Beyond

It is my aim to choose a case study to prove my point. I will focus on a fragment concerning a minor character that appears related to both Atreidai, Agamemnon and Menelaos, already in Homer. It is Echepolos, a Greek hero who managed to skip involvement in the Trojan war by paying Agamemnon off with a beautiful horse (Hom. *Il.* 23.293-300):

τῷ δ' ἄρ' ἐπ' Ἀτρεΐδης ὄρτο Ξανθὸς Μενέλαος
διογενής, ὑπὸ δὲ ζυγὸν ἤγαγεν ὠκέας ἵππους
Αἴθην τὴν Ἀγαμεμνονέην τὸν ἐόν τε Πόδαργον·
τὴν Ἀγαμέμνονι δῶκ' Ἀγκισιάδης Ἐχέπωλος
δῶρ', ἵνα μὴ οἱ ἔποιθ' ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἠνεμόεσσαν,
ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ τέρποιτο μένων· μέγα γάρ οἱ ἔδωκε
Ζεὺς ἄφενος, ναῖεν δ' ὅ γ' ἐν εὐρυχόρῳ Σικυῶνι·
τὴν ὅ γ' ὑπὸ ζυγὸν ἤγε μέγα δρόμου ἰσχανόωσαν.

After him rose the son of Atreus, fair-haired Menelaos
the sky-descended, and led beneath the yoke the swift horses,
Aithe, Agamemnon's mare, and his own Podargos.
Echepolos, son of Anchises, gave her to Agamemnon
as a gift, so as not to have to go with him to windy Ilion
but stay where he was and enjoy himself, since Zeus had given him
great wealth, and he made his home in the wide spaces of Sikyon.
This mare, who was straining hard for the race, Menelaos
harnessed. (Transl. Lattimore)

This hero, Echepolos son of Anchises, appears only once in this line of the *Iliad*. It is such an obscure character that ancient scholars, as the grammarian Aristonikos, would ask themselves whether Echepolos is a proper name (Ἐχέπωλος) or an epithet (ἔχέπωλος):⁶

Ἀγκισιάδης Ἐχέπωλος : ἡ διπλῆ ὅτι ἄδηλον πότερόν (cod. ποῖον)
τὸ κύριον ὄνομα, μᾶλλον δὲ τὸ Ἐχέπωλος.⁷

Echepolos, son of Anchises: there is a *diple* because it is unclear which one is the proper name. It is rather Echepolos.

⁶ Another Echepolos appears in *Il.* 4.458 (Θαλυσιάδην Ἐχέπωλον). Again, the scholiast testifies the existence of this ambiguity (proper name or epithet?): cf. schol. ad Hom. *Il.* 4.458a ὅτι ἄδηλον πότερον κύριον, ὁ Θαλυσιάδης ἢ ὁ Ἐχέπωλος, 4.458b Θαλυσιάδην Ἐχέπωλον: κύριον τὸ δεύτερον.

⁷ Ariston. *Il.* 23.296 (p. 331 Friedländer; cf. schol. ad Hom. *Il.* 23.296a [A] Erbse).

In fact, as a *nomen parlans*, Echepolos fits perfectly well to the story he was involved in.⁸ And ancient lexica register also the word ἔχepωλος as a common name or an adjective.⁹ In antiquity this character was widely held as anonymous by Plutarch, who referred to him as often as five times, but never by his proper name.¹⁰ Ancient critics, however, struggled to provide him with a full-fledged identity. Scholia to the passage attest to this effort. The scholium *b* to line 296 says:

Ἐχepωλος: τύραννος Σικυώνιος τις ἦν ὑπὸ Ἀγαμέμνονα.¹¹

Echepolos: a tyrant of Sikyon under the rule of Agamemnon.

If this is not an autoschediasma produced by the grammarian himself, Echepolos turns out to be the ruler of Sikyon, which was part of the realm of Agamemnon during the Trojan war (as it appears in the *Catalogue of ships*: Hom. *Il.* 2.570-3). Much more relevant is scholium *c* to the very same line 296. An ancient critic turned to these two mythographers in order to offer a complete genealogy of this character:

Ἀγχισιάδης Ἐχepωλος: Ἀκουσίλαος ἐν τρίτῳ Γενεαλογιῶν κύριον ἦκουσε τὸ Ἐχepωλος οὕτως Κλεωνύμου δ' Ἀγχίσης τοῦ δὲ Ἐχepωλος. καὶ Φερεκύδης ἐν τῷ γ'. Κλεωνύμος δὲ ὁ Πέλοπος ᾧκει Κλεωνῆσι καταστήσαντος Ἀτρέως τοῦ δὲ γίνεται Ἀγχίσης, τοῦ δὲ Ἐχepωλος.¹²

Akousilaos in the third book of his *Genealogies* understood Echepolos to be a proper name as follows: “Anchises was the son of Kleonymos and Echepolos the son of Anchises”. And Pherekydes in his third book: “Kleonymos, the son of Pelops, settled in Kleonai when Atreus established him there. Anchises is born to him and Echepolos is the son of Anchises”. (Transl. Toye; modified)

According to the scholiast, Akousilaos understood Echepolos as a proper name (κύριον ἦκουσε). That is to say, Echepolos, son of Anchises, was given a slot within Akousilaos' *Genealogies* and Pherekydes' *Histories*. However, there is no clear indication that Akousilaos or

⁸ Cf. García Ramón 2020, 40.

⁹ Cf. Hsch. s.v. ἔχepωλοι: ἵππικοί, ἵπποτρόφοι; Sud. s.v. ἔχepωλος: ὁ ἔχων ἵππους.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Plu. *Mor.* 32f τὸν πλούσιον ἐκείνον τὸν τὴν Αἴθην χαρισάμενον; or Plu. *Mor.* 498b ὁ μὲν γὰρ Σικυώνιος ἐκείνος ἵπποτρόφος εὐφρονῶν ἔδωκε τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν Ἀχαιῶν θήλειαν ἵππον δρομάδα δῶρον. The other instances are Plu. *Mor.* 209b; Plu. *Mor.* 988a; and Plu. *Ages.* 9.7.

¹¹ Schol. ad Hom. *Il.* 23.296b [T] Erbse.

¹² Schol. ad Hom. *Il.* 23.296c [T] Erbse = Acus. fr. 3 = Pherecyd. fr. 20 Fowler.

Pherekydes were completing or commenting on the line of the *Iliad* nor that they were involved in the scholarly controversy concerning the word Ἐχέπωλος / ἔχέπωλος (an adjective or a proper name?) in Homer as if they were grammarians and Homeric critics *avant la lettre*. Rather, using Akousilaos and Pherekydes as external authorities, the scholiast establishes the connection between Homer and the mythographers and, thus, creates the illusion that the mythographer depend upon the poet. In fact, this relationship is taken for granted by modern scholarship. The last example of this approach is to be found in the most recent edition of Akousilaos by Ilaria Andolfi (2019, 40), who affirms: “This fragment presents a clear case of Homeric exegesis”.

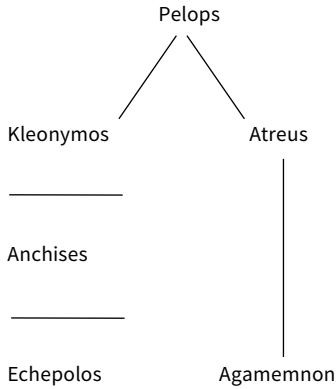
It is my understanding, however, that these two mythographers did not take Homer as a starting point for their genealogies of Echebolos. As a matter of fact, upon closer inspection, the scholium yields some details which are independent of, and do not conform to, the passage of the *Iliad*. Rather they strongly disagree with it. I shall begin by pointing out a curious fact. The scholiast cites two mythographers attesting the same genealogy – namely that Echebolos was the son of Anchises, who was the son of Kleonymos. Both Akousilaos and Pherekydes coincide for once on this particular issue. Yet, besides this three-generation span, the scholiast attributes to Pherekydes three additional and precious pieces of information. First, Echebolos’ genealogy is now attached to the Pelopidai – as Kleonymos, Echebolos’ grandfather, is made the son of Pelops.¹³ Second, Echebolos’ genealogy now hovers over Kleonai – and not Sikyon, as in Homer. And third, it was Atreus, according to Pherekydes, who set up Kleonymos as the ruler of Kleonai.

These are relevant ingredients, as long as they appear to be specifically attributed to Pherekydes’ *Histories* and, by implication, they are absent from Akousilaos’ *Genealogies*. As a result of this arrangement, the genealogy traced by Pherekydes does not conveniently synchronize with the Homeric one. In fact, for Homer, Agamemnon and Menelaos are coeval with Echebolos. Therefore, Anchises, Echebolos’ father, needs to be coeval with Atreus. However, for Pherekydes, it is not Anchises but Anchises’ father, Kleonymos, who is made coeval with Atreus. The mythographer has therefore produced an unbalanced stemma [stemma 1].¹⁴

¹³ This filiation is confirmed by schol. ad Eur. *Or.* 5 p. 128 Mastronarde Πέλοπος δὲ καὶ Ἴπποδαμείας Ἄτρεως, Θυέστης, Δίας, Κυνόσουρος, Κόρινθος, Ἴππαλκμος, Ἴππασος, Κλεωνός, Ἀργεῖος, Ἀλκάθους, Ἐλειος, Πιπθεύς, Τροίζην, Νικήπτη, Λυσιδίκη καὶ ἕκ τινος Ἀξιόχης νόθος Χρῦσιππος (cf. also Κλεωνός in *Tz. Ex.* p. 68 Hermann). Kleonos is to be seen as a *Kurzform* of Kleonymos. Cf. Maass 1888, 620: “Bei Eponymen begegnet es keineswegs vereinzelt, dass die den Vollnamen tragen, während der zugehörige Ort mit der Kurzform erscheint. So Kleonymos neben Kleonai...”. The name is Kleones in Paus. 2.15.1 (παῖδα δὲ εἶναι Πέλοπος Κλεώνην λέγουσιν). Cf. Marchand 2008, 81-2.

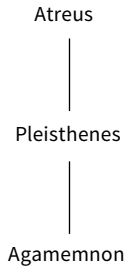
¹⁴ Cf. Peersman 1993, 207.

Stemma 1



There is one way to correct this disruption and make both lines parallel to each other. Starting with the Hesiodic *Catalogue*, some traditions include a name between Atreus and the Atreidai, namely Pleisthenes. Pleisthenes is a baffling character that tends to disappear from the genealogy of the Atreidai and has left no traces in the Homeric tradition [stemma 2].¹⁵

Stemma 2



So it can be argued that this is the genealogical scenario that both Akousilaos and Pherekydes envisaged. However, what was their need to proceed this way? Had the mythographers wished to explain the Homeric line, they could have done it better and complied with the Homeric arrangement by simply tracing a two-generation lineage. Did they have a particular reason to renounce the synchrony of the two

¹⁵ Papatomopoulos 1992.

families? What was the reason for Pherekydes to remove the family line from Sikyon and to establish it in Kleonai? And what was the need to make Echebolos a Pelopid?

3 Pherekydes and the Clan of Kimon

As stated before, the relationship between the early mythographers, like Pherekydes, and the epic tradition needs to be approached afresh. This author is working in conformity with his own programme and agenda, which should be explained in its historical context – that is to say the Athens of Kimon and the clan of the Philaidai. Pherekydes' connection of Kleonymos with Pelops may have a remarkable significance as it turns the Pelopidai into the aristocracy of Kleonai. On the other hand, as Atreus sets up Kleonymos as the ruler of Kleonai, this event locates Atreus in the northern Peloponnese and probably assumes that Atreus is entrusted the kingdom of Mykenai, which is in keeping with the traditional view.¹⁶ In the *Catalogue* of book 2 of the *Iliad*, Agamemenon is portrayed as having some kind of dominion over a large topographical area which does not include the entire Argolid, but instead extends to the north to include Kleonai, Corinth, and Sikyon, that is to say the northern Peloponnese.¹⁷

At least from the sixth century BCE, Pelops was a figure to whom sons were all too ready attached.¹⁸ As various towns in the Peloponnese desired to express their relationship, Pelops acquired other sons who became eponymous heroes in various places (τούτων ἄλλοι μὲν ἄλλη ὄκησαν, as a scholiast to Euripides has it).¹⁹ Indeed, Pherekydes deals with another son of Pelops in one of his fragments:

Φερεκύδης δὲ ἰστορεῖ οὕτως Ἀργεῖος ὁ Πέλοπος ἔρχεται παρ' Ἀμύκλαν εἰς Ἀμύκλας, καὶ γαμῆ τὴν Ἀμύκλα θυγατέρα Ἥγησάνδραν. ἐκ τούτου δὲ γίνεται Ἀλέκτωρ· ἔστι δὲ ἀδελφὸς τούτου καὶ Βοήθοος, <οὗ> Ἐτεωνεύς. συγγενὴς οὖν Μενελάου Ἐτεωνεύς καὶ θεράπων αὐτοῦ, ὡς Ἀχιλλέως Πάτροκλος.²⁰

Pherekydes relates as follows: Argeios son of Pelops comes to Amyklas at Amyklai, and he marries Amyklas' daughter Hege-sandra. From this man is born Alektor. His brother was Boethoos from whom is descended Eteoneus. So, Eteoneus is a relative of

¹⁶ Cf. Marchand 2008, 91 and Thuc. 1.9.2.

¹⁷ Cf. Allen 1921, 63.

¹⁸ Cf. West 1985, 109-10.

¹⁹ Schol. ad Eur. *Or.* 5, p. 128 Mastronarde.

²⁰ Schol. ad Hom. *Od.* 4.22 [HM^a] Pontani = Pherecyd. fr. 132 Fowler.

Menelaos and he is his servant, as Patroclus is to Achilles. (Transl. Morison; modified)

As it is well known, Greek heroic tradition does not supply clear evidence for kingship being transmitted from father to son.²¹ Starting from Pelops, who became king in Elis in virtue of his marriage to Hippodameia, daughter of the local king Oinomaos, his sons became kings elsewhere in the Peloponnese rather than in Elis itself. According to Pherekydes, Argeios, son of Pelops, goes to Amyklai, where he marries Amyklas' daughter Hegesandre. In the regular tradition, Amyklas plays a crucial role in Laconian genealogy, as he is son of Lakedaimon and Sparte.²² But this relationship between Argeios and Amyklas and his Laconian family is unattested elsewhere and it seems to be an invention by Pherekydes himself.

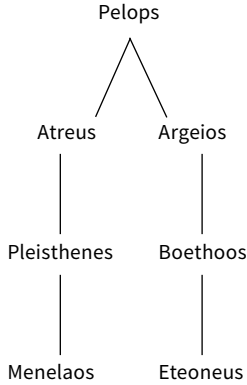
As Fowler (2013, 438) puts it, Argeios "looks like a filler-name" and cannot be an eponym of Argos.²³ The eponym of the city of Argos is Argos. However, Pherekydes' choice is hardly unintentional and begs for an explanation. Being homonymous with the adjective ἀργεῖος (from Argos, Argive), the hero Argeios is however removed from the city of Argos and transferred to the Laconian Amyklai. He is therefore located under Spartan influence where he succeeds his father-in-law, Amyklas, as the ruler of this city. As a result of that, the kingship of Amyklai falls upon a Pelopid, a fact which consolidates the presence of this family in Laconia. Furthermore, Argeios' son Boethoos is the father of Eteoneus. Eteoneus was a relative and an attendant of Menelaos and as a κρείων in Homer (*Od.* 4.22) he enjoyed a high status. In other words, the Atreid Menelaos appears firmly anchored in Sparta and the southern Peloponnese, where he has an attendant in Amyklai (in the same way Agamemnon in the northern Peloponnese has in Echebolos an ally in Kleonai) [stemma 3].

²¹ Cf. Finkelberg 2020.

²² Cf. Calame 1987, 164-6.

²³ Cf. Hall 1997, 89: "These characters [*i.e.* Argeios ('Argive'), among others] are 'fillers' and are normally encountered sandwiched between better-known personages; they rarely occur at the beginning or end of any genealogeme".

Stemma 3



Pherekydes' arrangement does not seem unrelated to the pro-Spartan policy of Kimon and his resolute philolaconism (cf. Plu. *Cim.* 16.1 ἀπ' ἀρχῆς φιλολάκων). As long as Kimon remained a hegemonic figure in Athenian politics, there were few possibilities of cooperation for Argos and Athens and Argos remained isolated in Greece.²⁴ Pherekydes' severing ties of the Pelopid Argeios from Argos, as well as his marrying in Laconia, seem to conform with the political strategy of Kimon. Pherekydes' genealogies reflect the isolationism of Argos, while at the same time they establish the Atreidai in strategic points of the Peloponnese, where they appear closely associated with powerful allies. In fact, Kleonai was located on one major route and at a crossroads of travel through the northeastern Peloponnese and it was a natural access for the Spartans moving towards the Isthmus. In order to avoid the territory influenced by Argos entirely, one would have to turn north at Phlious and head for Sikyon.²⁵

²⁴ Cf. Kelly 1974, 82.

²⁵ Cf. Pritchett 1989, 3.

4 The Atreidai in the Post-Kimonian Period

To conclude, a brief mention will be made to the place of the Atreidai in the period immediately following the activities of the early mythographers under scrutiny here. There is no need to insist on the crucial role that Attic tragedy played in the subsequent construction of the identity of the Atreidai. After a long period in which Kimon's philo-Spartan programme held sway, at the end of the 460 the most radical democratic party took over the power in Athens. Kimon was banished by ostracism for ten years and a crucial mutation in Athenian external politics occurred. Athens broke the alliance with Sparta whereas links with Argos, the traditional adversary of Sparta, started to consolidate.

The dwelling place of the Atreidai in the *Oresteia* (458 BCE), as already Wilamowitz suggested, needs to be understood within this context.²⁶ Aischylos avoided the name Mykenai because Athens was in friendly terms with Argos at that time and the destruction of her rival, Mykenai, had taken place only a few years before. Balances of power had shifted radically.

According to Diodorus Siculus (11.65), in the fifth century BCE the Mycenaean attempted to lay claim to the Nemean Games. As a result, Argos and her allies attacked Mykenai and destroyed the city (ca. 465 BCE). Diodorus refers only to unnamed allies of Argos, but Strabo (8.6.19) specifies that they were the Kleonaians and the Tegeatians:

μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἐν Σαλαμῖνι ναυμαχίαν Ἀργεῖοι μετὰ Κλεωναίων
καὶ Τεγεατῶν ἐπελθόντες ἄρδην τὰς Μυκίνας ἀνεῖλον καὶ τὴν
χώραν διενείμαντο.

But after the naval battle at Salamis the Argives, along with the Kleonaians and Tegeatians, came over and utterly destroyed Mykenai, and divided the country among themselves. (Transl. Jones)

I would like to insist that the contrast between Akousilaos and Pherekydes is relevant at this point. Akousilaos' Kleonymos is not related to Atreus nor appears to be located within the Mycenaean sphere of influence in Kleonai. There is nothing to be astonished at, as Akousilaos is writing from Argos and most probably reflects an Argive point of view in his work. If Pherekydes' genealogy of Echepolos can be seen as a reflection of the expansion of Mycenaean predominance northwest through Kleonai, in the post-Kimonian period the state of affairs had changed in Athens. Kleonai had by then become an ally of Argos against Mykenai. All of a sudden, the ancient dwelling place of the Atreidai, Mykenai, had become an embarrassing place for the Athenian audience.

²⁶ Cf. Wilamowitz Moellendorff 1895, 11. For an excellent survey of the historical and political context of the *Oresteia*, cf. Medda 2017, 11-17.

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