Phasis 15-16, 2012-2013

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The Thessalian Centauromachy and Common Greek Identity in Homer

In the 5th century BC, against the backdrop of the Persian Wars, the image of Centaurs as a barbaric foreign force ignited and bolstered the sense of a common Hellenic identity among Greeks, who were segmented in different and loosely federalised, but linguistically interconnected city-states and tribal nations of the Aegean region. The Centaurs, which decorated various important Hellenic temples built after the Persian invasion – the temple of Zeus at Olympia, the temple of Poseidon at Sounion, the Parthenon at Athens, the temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae, the Hephaisteion, etc. – represented not only the foreign aggressor, but also the non-Greek "Other" in general. They epitomized the alien power, antagonistic towards, and at sword's points with the Hellenic world.[1] The grounds for such an interpretation of Centaurs in Hellenic art ought to be sought for in the thinking of the pre-Classical period, primarily in Homeric poetry, insofar as it offered not only an ethnonym collectively describing various autonomous Greek contingents,[2] but also an ideological framework for the cultural convergence to be defined as emerging Panhellenism,[3] and against such a frame of reference the poet also gave a germane interpretation of the image of Centaurs. When the scene of the battle between the Centaurs and the Lapiths was being carved by pupils of Phidias on the southern metopes of the Parthenon, a major work designed for the eyes of the entire Greek world, it was devised to serve as a mythical parable for

1 Cf. Kaldellis, 2009, 15.

2 Cf. Finkelberg, 2011, I, s.v. Achaeans, Argives, and Danaans.

3 For Homeric Panhellenism and about representing the Trojan society as non-Greek in the *Iliad*, see Ross S., 2009, 36-44.

what just on the opposite side, on the north metopes, there was embossed a historical archetype too: the Greco-Trojan war. Phidias perceived the logicality of the association chain in the fine arts:

Centaurs – peril for the Panhellenic – common Hellenic identity

Consequently, it is necessary to carefully examine the image of Centaurs in the *Iliad*, the poem depicting a collective Achaean (i. e. Hellenic) enterprise against one common enemy, to the extent that already in it may believably be traceable creative interpretation of Centaurs as a mythopoetic image arousing corporate Greek awareness.

Before coming to the analysis of the *Iliad* passage which interests us, it is worth noting that Homer's *Iliad* is particularly alive with paradigms, i. e. mythical digressions from the immediate theme which are introduced for exhortation or consolation, and which empower a hero to prevail upon other(s) to follow his suggestion.[4] The most classic case of such a mythical digression from the main narrative in the poem, the paradigm of paradigms, is the Niobe myth as narrated in the passage *Il.*, 24.599–620: Achilles persuades Priam to eat, although he is mourning the death of Hector, by telling him the story of Niobe, whose children were all killed by Artemis and Apollo in a single day: the detail that Niobe ate despite her mourning for twelve children implies that Priam, in a situation like Niobe's, though less extreme, should follow her example by eating. As has already been pointed out, in this passage Homer produces the mythical parallel by use of the traditional Niobe story. In the original, pre-Homeric mythology, there was no such legend that Niobe had eaten food after Apollo and Artemis had killed all her twelve children,[5] nor was there such a myth after Homer.[6] It is the poet himself who invents the nuance within the traditional framework of the Niobe mythology, and thus creates a poetic myth; a paradigm which in fact succeeds, as Priam stays to eat with Achilles.[7] To the general characteristics of the Homeric paradigm itemized

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4 For the definition of the paradigm and its main characteristics, see Willcock, 1964, 147.

5 Cf. Oehler, 1925, 5–7; Kakridis, 1930, 113–122; Kakridis, 1949, 96–105; Willcock, 1964, 141 f.

6 Save late authors, for example Lucian (*De Luctu*, 24), who actually quote the poetic myth from the *Iliad*.

7 See the lines immediately following Achilles' speech:

> Ἦ, καὶ ἀναΐξας ὅϊν ἄργυφον ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεὺς
> σφάξ'· ἔταροι δὲ δερόν τε καὶ ἅμφεπον εὖ κατὰ κόσμον,
> μίστυλλόν τ' ἄρ' ἐπισταμένως πεῖράν τ' ὀβελοῖσιν,
> ὤπτησάν τε περιφραδέως, ἐρύσαντό τε πάντα.
> Αὐτομέδων δ' ἄρα σῖτον ἐλὼν ἐπένειμε τραπέζῃ
> καλοῖς ἐν κανέοισιν· ἀτὰρ κρέα νεῖμεν Ἀχιλλεύς.

by Willcock should be added a frequent effectiveness of this rhetorical device. This holds true, for example, also for the paradigm given in *Il*., 1.393–412, which is similarly effective: Thetis does what Achilles asks of her with the help of a paradigm. In this respect, the first paradigmatic narrative in the *Iliad* (1.254–284), which constitutes the topic of the present article, is a marked exception to the almost general function of this rhetorical scheme: it is not only ineffective and fails to persuade, but also seems pointless at a first glance. The passage *Il*., 1.53–303 Homer dedicates to an assembly of the Achaean army, summoned by Achilles, the best of the Achaeans; as well as to the quarrel that erupts between the son of Peleus and Agamemnon. Agamemnon insists on the provision of a prize to compensate for the loss of Chryseis, who should be returned to her father, and threatens to replace her by taking the girl who is Achilles' own prize of honour, Briseis. As the two argue, Nestor, the sweet-speaking king of Pylos intervenes, and thus addresses the quarrelling leaders:

ὦ πόποι, ἦ μέγα πένθος Ἀχαιΐδα γαῖαν ἱκάνει·
ἦ κεν γηθήσαι Πρίαμος Πριάμοιό τε παῖδες
ἄλλοι τε Τρῶες μέγα κεν κεχαροίατο θυμῷ,
εἰ σφῶϊν τάδε πάντα πυθοίατο μαρναμένοιϊν,
οἳ περὶ μὲν βουλὴν Δαναῶν, περὶ δ' ἐστὲ μάχεσθαι.
ἀλλὰ πίθεσθ'· ἄμφω δὲ νεωτέρω ἐστὸν ἐμεῖο·
ἤδη γάρ ποτ' ἐγὼ καὶ ἀρείοσιν ἠὲ περ ὑμῖν
ἀνδράσιν ὡμίλησα, καὶ οὔ ποτέ μ' οἵ γ' ἀθέριζον.
οὐ γάρ πω τοίους ἴδον ἀνέρας οὐδὲ ἴδωμαι,
οἷον Πειρίθοόν τε Δρύαντά τε ποιμένα λαῶν,
Καινέα τ' Ἐξάδιόν τε καὶ ἀντίθεον Πολύφημον,
Θησέα τ' Αἰγεΐδην, ἐπιείκελον ἀθανάτοισιν·
κάρτιστοι δὴ κεῖνοι ἐπιχθονίων τράφεν ἀνδρῶν·
κάρτιστοι μὲν ἔσαν καὶ καρτίστοις ἐμάχοντο,
φηρσὶν ὀρεσκῴοισι, καὶ ἐκπάγλως ἀπόλεσσαν.
καὶ μὲν τοῖσιν ἐγὼ μεθομίλεον ἐκ Πύλου ἐλθὼν,
τηλόθεν ἐξ ἀπίης γαίης· καλέσαντο γὰρ αὐτοί·
καὶ μαχόμην κατ' ἔμ' αὐτὸν ἐγώ· κείνοισι δ' ἂν οὔ τις
τῶν οἳ νῦν βροτοί εἰσιν ἐπιχθόνιοι μαχέοιτο·
καὶ μέν μευ βουλέων ξύνιεν πείθοντό τε μύθῳ·
ἀλλὰ πίθεσθε καὶ ὔμμες, ἐπεὶ πείθεσθαι ἄμεινον·[8]

(*Il*., 1.254–284)

οἷδ' ἐπ' ὀνείαθ' ἑτοῖμα προκείμενα χεῖρας ἴαλλον.
(Homer, *Iliad*, 24.621–627)

8 The text of the *Iliad* is cited from the edition of Monro and Allen (Monro D. B., Allen T. W. (eds.), *Homeri Opera*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1920).

Well, now! Truly great grief has come upon the land of Achaea.
Truly Priam would and the sons of Priam rejoice,
and all the rest of the Trojans would be glad in their hearts,
were they to hear of all this fighting between the pair of you,
who excel among the Danaans in both counsel and fighting.
Come, listen to me. You are both younger than me,
and I once joined with warriors who are better men
than you, and never did they make light of me.
Such warriors have I never since seen, or shall see,
as Peirithous was and Dryas, shepherd of the people,
and Caeneus, and Exadius, and godlike Polyphemus,
and Theseus, son of Aegeus, peer of the immortals.
Mightiest were these of all men reared upon the earth;
mightiest were they, and with the mightiest did they fight,
with the Centaurs that had their lair among the mountains, and they dealt them an appalling death.
With these men I joined, when I had come from Pylos,
from a far distant land; because they themselves summoned me.
I gave a good account of myself in the fighting; and against them
no man of all mortals who now live upon the earth could fight.
And they listened to my advice and obeyed my words.
In the same way do you also pay heed, for to heed is better.[9]

His credentials as authoritative spokesman and counsellor notwithstanding, the Pylian king fails to get either man to heed him, and the assembly unceremoniously dissolves. Nestor's failure to persuade led some classicists to regard the passage as pointless. As a result, a number of scholars considered the excerpt as a late interpolation or an autoschediasm.[10] Additionally, more often than not while discussing the passage, classicists tend to emphasise the point that Nestor's reminiscence of the pre-Trojan War experience is applied to defuse the quarrel between the two heroes. Consequently, the understanding of the passage does not go beyond its interpretation as a mere exhortation to reconciliation.[11]

Nestor's speech makes effective use of the Centaurs' image to convey for the first time in poetry the idea of a common Achaean identity. The inclusion of Nestor in the traditional legendary battle of the Centaurs and

[9] Transl. Murray and Wyatt (Homer, *The Iliad,* 1999, trans. A. T. Murray. Revised trans. by W. F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1999), slightly altered.

[10] So, for example, La Roche, 1860, 41–51; Niese, 1882, 116; Mülder, 1910, 47; von der Mühll, 1952, 24, n. 29; Reinhardt, 1961, 78; Kleyn, 1998, 235. Cf. also Leaf, 1900; 23, ad 265 and Giordano, 2010, 173, ad. 263–268.

[11] So, for example, Lang, 1983, 141 f.

the Lapiths constitutes a Homeric innovation.[12] This innovative detail, that the Lapiths listened to the counsels Nestor gave and heeded his bidding, enables the king of Pylos to demand that Agamemnon and Achilles obey his advice. The poet accentuates the Pylian king's departure from his city-state to side with the Lapiths against the Centaurs in far-off Thessaly, which – if line 1.265 is not an interpolation,[13] together with the involvement of the Athenian hero Theseus in the war between the Lapiths and the Centaurs – reinforces the idea of a unity of heroes from different territories, from one land of Achaia against a common foe.

Nestor commences his μῦθος by emphasising common Greek unity.[14] The oppositions "Greek–Trojan" and "Greatest Greeks–barbaric Centaurs" are given in Nestor's discourse itself:[15] the first opposition is alluded to in lines 1.254–258, and the other in verses 1.260–268. Nestor's only ἀρετή in

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12 Cf. Cantieni, 1942, 70 and Lang, 1983, 140 f.

13 See Kirk, 1974, 155, who, without argumentation, supposes Theseus' association with the Lapiths to be a creation of the tyrant Peisistratus who had Thessalian allies. Cf. also Meyer, 1892, 371-376; Russo, 1965, 120, ad 182; Kirk, 1985-1993, I, 80, ad 263-265; West, 1999, 186 f.; Latacz, 2000–: Band I, Faszikel, 1: 18 and Band II, Faszikel, 2: 108 ad loc.; West, 2001, 186; Giordano, 2010, 173 f., ad. 265; West, 2011, 91, ad [265]. For further details, see Herter, 1936, 222 f., Herter, 1973, 1046 and Walker, 1995, 4 f. Scholars considering line 1.265 to be an interpolation defend their opinion by pointing out its word for word repeat in the *Aspis* attributed to Hesiod (*Scutum,* 182). However, until the possibility that, in very deed, it is pseudo-Hesiod who repeats the Homeric epic formula in his *Aspis* is not ruled out by eloquent evidence or incontestable proof, the assumption remains hypothetical. Properly speaking, it is exactly the poet of the *Aspis* who time and again imitates passages of the *Iliad* and plagiarizes verses from it (cf. van der Valk, 1953, 265–282). Taking into account the import the image of Theseus bears in the *Iliad* passage under consideration as well as the image's quality of being without function in the *Aspis*, the view that it is not the *Iliad* line, but the *Aspis* line that is an interpolation seems tenable (see van der Valk, 1963-1964, II, 519-522 [with bibliography]; cf. also Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 1884, 260, with n. 23; Brommer, 1982, 104). Moreover, as Davison, 1955, 17 observes, Megarian historians Dieuchidas and Hereas, who accused Peisistratus of some hanky-panky with the Athenian entries in the *Iliad*, do not seem to have cast doubts upon the mention of Theseus in *Iliad* 1.265. Finally, as Pulleyn, 2000, 198, ad 265 notes, Theseus may well be drawn in the Thessalian Centauromachy by mention of his close friend Peirithous.

14 The point Nestor is making should be defined as μῦθος (vs. 1.273). On the understanding of the μῦθος within the epic frame of Homeric poetry, see Martin, 1989, 12, 37–42 and Nagy, 2007, 53 f. As Martin notes, "muthos is, in Homer, a speech-act indicating authority, performed at length, usually in public, with a focus on full attention of every detail" (Martin, 1989, 12).

15 Martin's observation that reveals how Nestor's discourse comprises of binary structures that present a rhetorical model, or icon, for two-sidedness is noteworthy in this regard (see Martin, 1989, 101 f.).

the *Iliad* is not his military excellence, but his advice as a senior warrior who has already experienced situations similar to those the Greeks encounter in the war against Troy. This is indicated *inter alia* by the unparalleled and elaborate introduction provided for him (vss. 1.248–253).[16] Before Nestor's comrades-in-arms – not only Agamemnon and Achilles, but also the assembly of the entire Greek army – begin to understand Nestor's μῦθος, they must not lose sight of the fact that the problem is a question of common Greek unity. Thus, the king of Pylos starts his μῦθος by emphasising that the argument between Achilles and Agamemnon is a great grief not merely for the realms of the two leaders, or for those warriors who fight against Troy, but for the whole land of Achaea (vs. 1.254), and a joy not only for Priam and his sons, but all the Trojans (vss. 1.255 f.).[17] It is doubtful that Homer introduced the speech of Nestor in this passage simply in order for the king of Pylos to persuade Achilles and Agamemnon to stop quarrelling.[18] An interesting point which has not yet been emphasised, seemingly because lines 1.254–258 had been left out of consideration, is that Nestor's words aim not purely at reconciling one hero with the other and at making peace,[19] but at the unity of *all* the Achaeans. In order to grasp the essence of the Centaurs' image in the passage, we ought to make allowance for the overall tone of the excerpt, and for every undercurrent of Nestor's speech, every emphasis, bar none. In lines 1.254–258, Homer gives prominence to the juxtaposition of the two most important representatives of the warring sides: Priam and his sons – of whom the youngest is the reason for the outbreak of the war, and the oldest, the greatest Trojan warrior – are opposed to Agamemnon and Achilles. Furthermore, the Trojans' joy is set in contrast to the Achaeans' grief. This polarity, in accordance with the poet's generalization, implies the confrontation of two unities, two identities: in the μῦθος of Nestor, ἡ Ἀχαιΐς γαῖα is an identity which clashes with Troy as with a foreign, non-Achaean identity. In consequence, what the Pylian king intended to emphasise in the very beginning of his speech was the common Achaean self-awareness. However, Homer's poetic conception was to weave the narrative around the confrontation between Agamemnon and Achilles, as well as the outcomes brought about by this conflict.

16 Cf. Lang, 1983, 140 f.

17 This feature was rightly observed by Louden, though without emphasis (Louden, 2006, 119: Nestor's "initial strategy, hoping to unite both Greeks against their common enemy, is to point that this quarrel would delight the Trojans"). Cf. also Segal, 1971, 91.

18 Louden, 2006, 119.

19 So, for example, Morrison, 1992, 29 and Papaioannou, 2007, 100.

By that account, it naturally follows that the contending speakers do not make peace with each other even after Nestor's exhortation, and their strife ends unbecomingly (vss. 1.285–305). Thus, Homer introduces the idea of Greek unity against the background of a quarrel between two of the best Achaeans, in counsel and in fighting (vs. 1.258). In the speech of Achilles against Agamemnon, before Nestor's intervention, the motif of division in poleis, the motif "I for myself, you for yourself" is voiced,[20] which implies that neither man will have any expectation of the other. What Nestor takes a stand against is, above all, this break-up in separate realms, the kind of self-awareness and thinking that disrupts the emerging pan-Hellenic idea, the corporate Achaean identity, and common Greek ideals.[21] That is why the point foregrounded in subsequent lines of the venerable Pylian king's μῦθος (vss. 1.260 ff.) concerns the unification of heroes from distant parts of what he calls ἡ Ἀχαιΐς γαῖα (vs. 1.254) against the alien non-human force (φῆρες – vs. 1.268). Thessalian Peirithous and company summoned (καλέσαντο γὰρ αὐτοί – vs. 1.270) Nestor, at the time reigning far away in remote Pylos, and asked him to side with them.[22] Theseus too, assuming that line 1.265 is authentic, was introduced as a hero who joins other mighty and strong men like himself in another region of the Ἀχαιΐς γαῖα. In addition, Homer gives a symbolic character to the images of both Lapiths and Centaurs, and extends the borders of the traditional mythology about the Thessalian Centauromachy to the idea of the Greek–antagonistic non-Greek "Other" antithesis, which later, after the Greco-Persian Wars, was intensified and immortalized in the architectural sculpture of the Classical period. In the *Iliad*, the Thessalian Centauromachy develops a sense of an opposition, human/non-human, culture/nature, though this innovative Homeric feature added to the traditional mythology cannot be overestimated. In the passage, both confronted sides are κάρτιστοι. How can this be so? Do they represent the same category of beings? Who are they, Lapiths and Centaurs? Homer does not say. On one side we have the strongest human force and strongest cultural warriors; they are reared on the earth, where there is culture and civilization (κάρτιστοι δὴ κεῖνοι ἐπιχθονίων τράφεν ἀνδρῶν – vs. 1.266). On the other side we see the most powerful "beasts", who are

[20] Consider, for example, the words of Achilles in lines 1.150–171.

[21] This point was rightly noted by Mackenzie: "The quarrel is harming the Greek cause" (Mackenzie, 1978, 9).

[22] Naturally, according to the traditional mythology, it is Magnesia that is presumed as the field of battle between the Centaurs and the Lapiths (see, for instance, Diod. Sic., 4.70.3–4).

mountain-bred (φηρσὶν ὀρεσκῴοισι – vs. A 268); they dwell in mountain-caves, in those uncanny places where there is no civilization.[23] Homer's designation of the Lapiths is not accidental: he does not name the Lapiths by their collective tribal name, but enumerates them individually as paradigms of ἀρετή, and then remarks that they were the most puissant.[24] This choice creates the impression that the poet tries to give a picture of the doughtiest individual heroes,[25] who, as prototypes of different Greek heroes rallied against Troy, have banded together under the idea of common Achaean clime (ἡ Ἀχαιΐς γαῖα) versus a corporate adversary.[26] The story about the mightiest warriors of a previous generation is intended by its narrator as a model for the state of affairs in that moment. This allusion is, in fact, one of the main themes of the passage. We may say that it is in this speech, and by Homer, that the analogy in question is drawn for the first time in Greek art, and the battle between the Centaurs and the Lapiths, as well as the image of Centaurs themselves now becomes a metaphor for the conflict with the external "Other". Consequently, Nestor's μῦθος should be understood not purely as an attempt to pacify Agamemnon and Achilles, but also as an incentive to leading Greek warriors, and Greeks in general to stand together as their puissant predecessors stood against the Centaurs. During the war against Troy, outstanding Greek men and Greeks in general are supposed to stand side by side, and not with that individualistic Achaean thinking which may

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[23] The compound adjective ὀρεσκῷος, in Homer and in the pre-Classical period in general, is associated with animals and wild nature. The word recurs also at *Od*., 9.155, where it describes goats. In the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite,* the adjective refers to Nymphs (*H. Aphr*., 257), who in early times were envisaged not as the romantic creatures of later imagination, but as savage and dangerous beings capable to easily drive a man mad, or even kill him as Narcissus discovered to his cost (see Der Kleine Pauly, IV, 212). Cf. Thesaurus Graecae Linguae, VI, 2166, s.v. ὀρέσκοος; Kirk, 1985–1993, I, 80 f., ad 268; Pulleyn, 2000, 198 f., ad 268; Latacz, 2000–: Band I, Faszikel, 2: 108, ad 268; Faulkner, 2008, 285, ad 257. On the etymology of the word, see Allen and Sikes, 1904, 218, ad 257 and Heubeck, West, Hoekstra, Hainsworth, Russo and Fernández-Galiano, 1988–1992, II, 23, ad 155.

[24] Cf. Adkins, 1982, 298.

[25] Quite the contrary is the case in "Hes." *Sc*. 178–182, where the Lapiths are first mentioned by their tribal name and then enumerated. Theseus' sudden appearance in the list is absolutely *malapropos*, anything but germane.

[26] Cf. Segal, 1971, 92: "Nestor is describing a manly struggle of companions united against a recognized, dangerous foe. His account… serves to recall us to the image of a unified heroic society undividedly directing its energies against an external aggressor, an image which, we may hazard, Nestor implicitly regards as valid for the present conflict between Greeks and Trojans with which the speech began (254–255)."

lead any of them to say to a companion from the Achaean land: "your enemy is not my enemy."[27] If Nestor's exhortation is purely intended to reconcile the two men *without* the idea of common Hellenic unity, it would be very difficult to justify its presence in the poem, because it fails: after the Pylian king's intervention, Achilles and Agamemnon do exactly the opposite of what they had been advised: Achilles still withdraws from the Achaean army, and Agamemnon still abducts Briseis, against the will of Nestor, the one elder for whom Agamemnon held esteem (vs. 2.21). After the honorific presentation of Nestor in lines 1.248–252 as venerable, well-intentioned, and eloquent,[28] his utter failure to solve the dispute seems astonishing,[29] and gives a basis to the above interpretation. If we read the excerpt as more than an exhortation to reconciliation, but rather as the idea of unity and an appeal to common Achaean thinking, the passage acquires a distinctive poetic import. The image of Centaurs functions as a call to unity, an image to summon a common Hellenic identity and self-awareness. In interpreting the traditional mythological image of Centaurs in this manner, Homer anticipated Phidias and Greek art in general by centuries, before the sculptor immortalised corporate Greek force, common Greek identity, prompted and incited by the Centaurs' image, on the southern metopes of the Parthenon.

In his μῦθος, Nestor has in mind the fierce battle that burst out as a result of the Centaurs' attempt to rape the bride Hippodameia and other Lapith women at the wedding of Peirithous, who had benevolently invited them.[30] Consequently the Lapiths, Theseus, and Nestor make a stand against these bride-stealing barbarians: the Thessalian Centaurs. Seen from this angle, the Greeks of the main narrative of the *Iliad* face the

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[27] Cf., for instance, Achilles' words to Agamemnon in lines 1.150–157, 169 f. and 295 f., where it is indicated to the lord of men that his behaviour hinders an Achaean to defend common Hellenic interests together with him, and that, in consequence, neither this war against Trojans is none of the Phthian king's business, nor the commands of the σκηπτοῦχος βασιλεύς, ᾧ τε Ζεὺς κῦδος ἔδωκεν (vs. 1.279), concern any more the best of the Achaeans.

[28] On Nestor's resemblance of the perfect praise-poet in the ideology of the Indo-European tradition, suggested *inter alia* by his epithet ἡδυεπής, with which he is introduced (vs. 1.248) and which refers to divine speech within Greek archaic poetry, see Schmitt, 1967, 255, 526–527, who cites a passage from the *Rig Veda* with the cognate phrase (*Rig Veda,* 1.114.6ab) and Martin, 1989, 102. Aelian (*Varia Historia,* 11.2) says that the battle was sired on the subject of an early epic poem by Melesander of Miletus, but his work is lost.

[29] Cf. Taplin, 1992, 90, who also note this singularity.

[30] Cf. Alden, 2000, 79, with notes 17 and 18, and Papaioannou, 2007, 100.

same challenge: to fight the Trojans who have abducted Helen, just as the Lapiths had done against the Centaurs.[31] The Greeks are supposed to follow the example of their ancestral puissant heroes, who were from different city-states and had formed a corporate military power, and try in this way to recover another bride, stolen by the external foe (the Trojans). With the help of the Gerenian charioteer's guidance (καὶ μέν μευ βουλέων ξύνιεν πειθοντό τε μύθῳ – vs. 1.273) the Lapiths managed to defeat the most powerful barbarians (ἐκπάγλως ἀπόλεσσαν – vs. 1.268), which means that Nestor's counsel to the Lapiths did not only intend simple reconciliation.[32] The Pylian king does not verbalise what his advice to the Lapiths actually was, but we know precisely his counsel to Agamemnon and Achilles (vss. 1.275–284). Nestor's concrete proposal for concrete action does not simply mean that "Agamemnon is not to deprive Achilles of Briseis, and Achilles is not to wrangle openly with the king."[33] What is essential for the Pylian king is that Agamemnon and Achilles defend the principle from which these or those concrete actions (not stealing the maiden from Achilles and not openly condemning ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν) follow naturally. The indispensability of this principle seems to have been galvanised both in the Lapiths and in Nestor by the Centaurs, who – in keeping with the Homeric interpretation of the myth – were severely beaten by the principle of unity that they themselves had provoked in their adversaries. The sweet-voiced orator calls upon the two leaders to observe the overall principle:

> … ὥς οἱ πρῶτα δόσαν γέρας υἷες Ἀχαιῶν.
> (*Il.*, 1.276)

> … ὃς μέγα πᾶσιν
> ἔρκος Ἀχαιοῖσιν πέλεται πολέμοιο κακοῖο.[34]
> (*Il.*, 1.283 f.)

and

> … ἐπεὶ οὔ ποθ' ὁμοίης ἔμμορε τιμῆς
> σκηπτοῦχος βασιλεύς, ᾧ τε Ζεὺς κῦδος ἔδωκεν.
> (*Il.*, 1.278 f.)

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[31] For more in detail, see Alden, 2000, 80–82.

[32] This point was rightly observed by Papaioannou, 2007, 100.

[33] Alden, 2000, 82.

[34] Consider how masterfully Homer chooses Achilles' epithet in keeping with the general idea he gives to the passage: in this verse, the son of Peleus is not characterized banally as the bravest or something like that. He is ἔρκος, though not in general, but πᾶσιν Ἀχαιοῖσιν (i. e. for all the Greeks).

It becomes evident that Nestor demands respect from Agamemnon for the common Achaean decision, and common Achaean will. Only with the help of this common identity can the destructive foreign power be vanquished. With respect to the Pylian king's exhortation to Achilles: the son of Peleus is καρτερός and his mother is a goddess; but common Achaean unity can win a victory over an antagonistic non-Greek force only when its most puissant representative (in this case Achilles) submits to the king in possession of the sceptre of Zeus, the ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν.[35] In the present article I have drawn attention to this principle, evoked by the Centaurs' wild, powerful, unconquerable,[36] barbaric, non-Achaean force, which was defeated only by the common Hellenic idea. Nestor's insertion in the Thessalian Centauromachy is an impressive poetic innovation: Homer modifies traditional mythology about the defeat of the Centaurs by the Lapiths, and depicts a hero coming from the remote south to Thessaly to see the Lapiths through battle. The image of the wild φῆρες (Centaurs) evokes for the first time the idea of common Hellenic identity, and this innovative literary interpretation of the myth regarding the Thessalian Centauromachy deserves due attention.

It is outside the scope of the present article to determine a strict historical unity of the Greek world in the period of the Trojan War, but

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[35] In this regard, it is worthy of note that Homer, while mentioning a number of heroes as kings, including Achilles and Agamemnon, makes a distinction between three different ranks or categories of kings (cf. Schachermeyr, 1986, 61, Gordeziani, 2012, 236). At a purely terminological level, the difference between the diverse ranks of kings in Homer is conveyed by strictly chosen words: 1) βασιλεύς – this term signifies a ruler of a small territory, such as, for example, Odysseus; 2) ἄναξ – this title indicates a swayer of a relatively large unit (for example, Nestor and Idomeneus). Existence of palaces of these swayers is confirmed also archaeologically; 3) ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν – in the *Iliad* this rank is given only to the king of Mycenae and the commander-in-chief of all the Achaeans, Agamemnon. Besides, it is only Agamemnon who is in possession of a royal sceptre (*Il.,* 2.107. Cf. Hogan, 1981, 51; Collins, 1988, 73 f., 89, with n. 64; Taplin, 1990, 64, with n. 6). About Homer's wish to present Agamemnon not as a leader of a unique expedition, but as a traditional king, see Lowenstam, 1993, 60-69. It cannot be excluded that the idea of common Hellenic identity indicated in the passage and the Homeric conception of Achaia as a group of people under a single main ruler is an echo of Mycenaean reality. Significant observations in this regard will be found in Donlan, 1982, 162 f.; Palaima, 1995, 123 f., 135–138; Wilson, Donna, 2002, 63; and especially Gordeziani, 2012, 233-241 (with bibliography).

[36] As Nestor says, the Centaurs were puissant to such extent that no one of mortals living upon the earth could fight them (vs. 1.271 f.). In this line, the pronoun *κείνοισι* indicates the Centaurs. Cf. schol. *Iliad*, 1.271c.

such unity is certainly suggested by modern-day classical studies.[37] Still, it maybe that an exact historical reality does not provide a basis for the idea of common Hellenic identity, but this cannot prevent a poet from exercising his poetic license. Thanks to the novel Homeric approach to the myth of the Thessalian Centauromachy, this idea acquired a literary reality. Centuries would pass, narrative scenes involving the Centaurs would become less common in art, but the idea of common Hellenic identity would lend distinction to the Thessalian Centauromachy and make it an eternal symbol of what the Greeks treasured most in architectural sculpture: the triumph of the world's progressive values over an unruly, chaotic force whose violence and aggression threaten to destroy the order of civilization.

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[37] On the topic, see most recently Kelder, 2008, 49–74.

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