

Ἀρχοῦς αὖ νεῶν ἐπέω:
A Programmatic Function
of the Iliadic Catalogue of Ships

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The enumeration of Greek contingents that makes up much of the second book of the *Iliad* (2.494–759), commonly known as the ‘Catalogue of Ships,’ has functioned as a kind of mirror for each generation of Homerists, attracting as it does a mixture of fascination and scorn. At the beginning of the last century, many scholars expressed confidence that the Catalogue documented the political geography of the Bronze Age Aegean, even if it was a dreadful piece of poetry. By the century’s end, the combined work of archaeologists and specialists in oral poetics had made it clear that the Catalogue cannot be considered anything like an accurate picture of Mycenaean Greece; and literary critics had come to the more enlightened conclusion that the Catalogue is only dreadful when judged by modern standards.¹

The age-old debate about which historical framework best fits the Catalogue of Ships that has dominated its interpretation seems to me unlikely to affect our understanding of the *Iliad* in any profound way. The Catalogue may very well preserve details specific to the Bronze and Early Iron Ages, but it is not the lack of a sufficiently precise historical context that complicates our understanding of why this section of the *Iliad* was expanded to such an extent at so prominent a point in the poem. Similarly, from the perspective of literary quality, it is certainly important to read the Catalogue in the context of contemporary catalogue poetry such as that attributed to Hesiod, but the simple fact that the ancient Greeks had an appreciation for versified lists again does little to explain why the Catalogue takes the form it does where it does.

What the past century of scholarship has demonstrated is that problems of interpretation, such as the question of why the narrative of the *Iliad* is brought to a standstill early on in order to survey the Greek and

1 Sammons 2010, 5–7 and 137 offers a recent survey of representative opinions on the Catalogue.

Trojan forces, are often approached most productively from the perspective of performance. Now one of the incompletely understood aspects of early Greek epic is the manner in which oral poets and their audiences kept track of the sprawling action and large casts of characters in poems that would require many hours to perform. Scholars in the past century to be sure have done much to explain how large-scale narratives were assembled, drawing attention to, for example, ring structures and story-patterns such as withdrawal-and-return. Nevertheless, when faced with the monumentality of the epics, we have difficulty accounting for the mnemonic abilities of highly trained but illiterate singers who may have ‘nodded’ on occasion, but who still somehow maintained control over who does what to whom, and when and where. As Jenny Clay recently observed of the *Iliad*, “the poet is remarkable in his ability to keep his characters on the battlefield straight.”²

During the kinds of oral performances from which our text of the *Iliad* ultimately derives, maintenance of narrative control by the poet will naturally have depended on an array of mutually reinforcing strategies. Thus, for instance, in the Hesiodic and Homeric poems, techniques such as foreshadowing, flashbacks and ring structure help to maintain the coherence of narratives as they unfold, and to define the relationship of a given narrative to the larger body of Greek myth. In the case of the *Iliad*, such structural themes as the divine council scenes in Books 1, 4, 8, 15, 22 and 24, under the coordination of an over-arching plan of Zeus, serve to orient the poem with respect to events that have already transpired and those that are to come, within and even beyond the bounds of the poem’s own narrative.

My suggestion here is that the structure of the Iliadic Catalogue of Ships can be explained in part in terms of the operation of another such organizing strategy, or theme,³ one that helps to establish the relationships among the characters. My interpretation does not claim to offer a comprehensive blueprint for the *Iliad*, or for the position of every contingent in the Catalogue itself, but rather suggests one way to account for which characters, in particular lesser ones, appear in which settings as the poem progresses. Specifically, I shall be exploring the tendency of Iliadic characters to appear in scenes together with other characters that are listed near them in the Catalogue of Ships.

2 Clay 2007, 234.

3 My understanding of “theme” is informed by Lord 1960, 68–88.

It is to begin with obvious that the Catalogue does have such programmatic force at least at the level of individual contingents. For because the Iliadic fighting units are composed of men who hail from the same homeland, any character in battle is likely to be accompanied by soldiers with whom he sailed to Troy from Greece. The phenomenon is particularly clear in the case of lesser characters, such as the Boeotian warriors who lead the first contingent listed in the Catalogue. Thus when Prothoenor falls in Book 14 (450–471), he is in the company of fellow Boiotians Promachus (476–485) and Peneleos (487–496). Peneleos for his part is accompanied in two of his three other appearances in the *Iliad* by another of the three Boeotians named in the Catalogue, Leitus (13.91–92, 17.597–605), while the other two, Arcesilaus and Clonius, die in close succession during the same battle scene in Book 15 (329, 340).⁴ These and other associations, such as those of the Cretans Idomeneus and Meriones, and of the Argives Diomedes and Sthenelus, further illustrate a point that, perhaps owing to its obviousness, has I think been insufficiently explored, namely that decisions about who appears in which scenes are in part informed by a tendency to group the characters according to homeland. As a consequence, the Catalogue of Ships, being a comprehensive account of the homelands of the Greek warriors, establishes connections among characters that persist throughout the narrative.⁵

Less often observed is the extent to which these connections transcend the level of homeland. The continued grouping of characters from different but adjacent contingents documented here suggests that the contours of the Catalogue may in some cases have been informed by, and in other cases may have given rise to, associations that helped to keep track of the *Iliad's dramatis personae*. Approached this way, the geography of the Catalogue responds as much to the demands of the

4 The fact that Peneleos and Leitus track particularly closely together is consistent with the observation of Kullmann (2009, 2–3) that the two are together in Ps.-Apollodorus (1.9.16, as Argonauts; 3.10.8, as suitors of Helen).

5 In this respect the Catalogue can be seen to function *prospectively* and *intratextually* in a manner that complements its *retrospective* and *intertextual* function as described by Tsagalis (2010a, 330), in which it, as a kind of dynamic hypertext, “aims at anchoring the distant past of the Homeric world into the audience’s cognitive scripts, which will, in their turn, allow for the reactivation of schemas of coherence”. By my interpretation, the Catalogue at the same time anchors relationships among characters in the immediate present of the Homeric narrative, for later reactivation throughout the narrative.

narrative as it does to any historical conception of ancient Greece. Conversely, the narrative can be said to be informed in part by a conception of ethnography and geography that has at least its roots in the historical Greek world.

I first became alerted to the possibility of such a programmatic function for the Catalogue of Ships while exploring the association between Odysseus and a lesser character, Thoas of Aetolia, that occurs in a lying tale told by the disguised hero in *Odyssey* 14.⁶ In attempting to account for the seemingly *ad hoc* appearance of Thoas in Odysseus' tale, I recalled that Thoas' entry in the Iliadic Catalogue as leader of the Aetolians occurs immediately after Odysseus' entry as leader of the Cephallenians (2.636–638). When I pursued further the association between the two I noted that, as the *Iliad* proceeds, Thoas is often in the company of Odysseus: he is the next Greek after Odysseus to slay a foe in the first Iliadic battle (4.494–504, 527–531); the two are named in a single verse among the heroes who cast lots to face Hector in the second duel sequence (7.168); and Thoas is among those who help Odysseus to gather up Agamemnon's gifts for Achilles when the two are reconciled (19.239).

Consulting the secondary literature, I found that scholars seem to have remarked on groupings among characters that trace back to the Catalogue of Ships only in passing. Thus for instance Jan Gaertner lists among motivations for the inclusion of Homeric catalogues in general the possibility that “the information provided in the form of a catalogue may also foreshadow subsequent events and create suspense,”⁷ while Mark Edwards has suggested that, in the case of some of the other Homeric catalogues, the form itself may serve as a basis for the narrative.⁸ More specifically, Karl Reinhardt explained the association of the aforementioned Thoas with Idomeneus in *Iliad* 13 with reference to the fact that the latter's Cretan contingent follows the former's Aetolians in the Catalogue,⁹ and G. S. Kirk in his commentary on *Iliad* 2 suggests that the later association of two other heroes with sequential contingents, Menestheus of Athens and Ajax of Salamis, “in books 12 and 13 is apparently organic.”¹⁰ And while Elizabeth Minchin sees the Cata-

6 Marks 2003.

7 Gaertner 2001, 303.

8 Edwards 1980, 101–102.

9 Reinhardt 1960b, 296.

10 Kirk 1985, 206 ad *Iliad* 2.522.

logue as a “cognitive map,” her focus is on the ability of oral poets to create and retrieve lists based on these cognitive maps, rather than on the potential significance of the lists for the structure of the narratives in which they are embedded.¹¹

Building on Reinhardt’s observation, I noted that Odysseus and Thoas in turn tend to associate with others named around them in the Catalogue. Thus the Cretans Idomeneus and Meriones, whose Catalogue entry follows immediately after Thoas’ Aetolians’, form part of what I identify as a cluster of characters that begins at verse 631 with Odysseus and extends through Thoas at 638 and the Cretans at 645. The associations that are thus established among the characters within this cluster play out in a variety of ways as the narrative proceeds beyond the Catalogue. Odysseus and Idomeneus are of course linked repeatedly throughout the *Iliad* owing to their high status in the Greek army, as well as in the *Odyssey*.¹² However, a special affinity seems to exist between these two among the Greek leadership: Agamemnon lists them one after the other among possible commanders of the mission to return Chryseis to her father (1.145); they receive sequential extended descriptions by Helen in the *Teichoskopeia* scene (3.224–240, interrupted only by a brief reference to Telamonian Ajax at 225–229);¹³ and they are listed close together among one group of chiefs that casts lots to face Hektor (7.165, 168), and another that comforts Achilles after the death of Patroclus (19.310–311). Idomeneus in turn usually appears in the company of his fellow Cretan and charioteer Meriones, but the latter also interacts with Odysseus on his own when he presents him with an heirloom helmet during the *Doloneia* sequence (10.262–272). Similarly, Thoas also appears on his own apart from Odysseus with Idomeneus and Meriones, who are the first among a group of Greeks exhorted by Poseidon after the god assumes Thoas’ appearance (13.210–250), and another group later exhorted by Thoas *in propria persona* (15.301–302).

Since there also appear in the scenes I have been discussing other characters that do not form part of the cluster of heroes around Odysseus in the Catalogue of Ships, it could be objected *prima facie* that the

11 Minchin 1996, 12; see also Sammons 2010, 24.

12 *Odyssey* 13.295–266; 14.235–241; 19.178–184; for Idomeneus and Odysseus see the contribution to this volume by Tsagalis.

13 Note that the *Teichoskopeia* emphasizes the physical proximity of Idomeneus to Odysseus, as Kirk (1985, 298 ad *Iliad* 3.230–233) observes.

cluster is based on a selective treatment of the evidence. The phenomenon of clustering can therefore as suggested above better be illustrated through the examples of lesser characters, whose fewer interactions can be mapped more neatly. Thus, returning again for a moment to Thoas, while he is on occasion accompanied by characters other than those whose contingents border his own in the Catalogue of Ships, I draw attention to the fact that he never appears apart from at least some members of this cluster in the *Iliad*, nor does he interact with any other Iliadic characters as closely.

The same can be said of the lesser figure Meges of Elis, whose entry in the Catalogue immediately precedes that of Odysseus' Cephallenians (2.615–630). As the narrative proceeds, Meges first appears as the third in a series of Greeks to make a kill in battle, the first two being Idomeneus and Meriones (5.43–69), and he is later among the group of Greeks who are rallied by (the real) Thoas (15.301–302), and the aforementioned group, which includes Meriones and Thoas, that helps Odysseus present Agamemnon's gifts to Achilles in Book 19 (239). Of the four other members of the Elean contingent named together with Meges in the Catalogue, two do not appear again, and the other two die in the next scenes in which they appear, one near Odysseus (4.517), the other in a manner that prompts Poseidon to take the form of Thoas to rally Idomeneus and Meriones in the scene mentioned above (13.202–220). Similarly, the fact that Meges is referred to as one of the Epeioi elsewhere in the *Iliad* (13.691, 15.529), while he is more properly associated with Elis and Doulichion in the Catalogue of Ships, suggests that the context of the Catalogue remains associated with this hero even in situations where no character from a neighboring homeland is present.¹⁴

It therefore appears that one of the organizing principles that underlies the *Iliad* is a cluster of heroes whose homelands are introduced sequentially in the Catalogue of Ships, running from Meges in Elis through Odysseus' Cephallenians and Thoas' Aetolians to Idomeneus' and Meriones' Cretans, and who tend to track together as the narrative proceeds. I draw attention to the fact that it is not the 'real' geography of ancient Greece that informs this cluster, but rather the specific geography of the Catalogue, which skips from the west Greek contingents of

14 Meges' "dual citizenship" is also explicable in mythological terms; see Kirk 1985, 182–183, 219 *ad Iliad* 2.618–619.

Odysseus, Thoas and Meges to the Cretan contingent.¹⁵ The cluster, then, though being grounded in the geography of ancient Greece, is specific to the *Iliad's* presentation of its heroes in the Catalogue and in the narrative.

Again, proximity in the Catalogue is only one among several tendencies that underlie the relationships among Iliadic characters. Thus as mentioned the association by status that finds Odysseus together with Agamemnon, Nestor and the other main leaders of the Greek expedition obtains alongside, and when necessary overrides, the geographical tendency, which naturally remains subordinate to the demands of the plot. It is for this reason that the lesser figures present the clearest evidence of the Catalogue's programmatic force, which is unsurprising, since minor characters are the most difficult to keep track of, while they at the same time represent a store of bit players that can be deployed to flesh out the scenes in which the major players further the story.¹⁶

Once seen from this perspective, other clusters of characters become apparent in the Catalogue of Ships. The core of one of these forms around the two characters named Ajax, who are associated by their shared name, the *Aiante(s)*, a formula that occurs over two dozen times in over a dozen separate scenes in the *Iliad*.¹⁷ This onomastic association is reflected in the proximity of the Ajaxes in the Catalogue, where their Locrian and Salaminian contingents occupy, not consecutive positions, but rather either end of a sequence that runs, in order, from the Lokrians, through Elephenor's Euboeans and Menestheus' Athenians, to the Salaminians (2.527–558), to form a cluster with properties similar to those we have seen in the case of the heroes around Odysseus. To begin with, one or both of the Ajaxes are present or nearby in each of the scenes in which Menestheus appears: all three are among the Greeks exhorted by Agamemnon in the *Epipolēsis* scene before the first Iliadic battle (4.273–367), and all three together occupy the same part of the battlefield in a series of scenes in which the Greeks face the Trojan onslaught on the ships (12.331–399; 13.170–195,

15 For the Catalogue's geographical leap from west Greece to Crete see Kirk (1985), 184–185; Visser 1997, 609; Kullmann 1999, 102; Sammons 2010, 136–137.

16 Beye 1964, 363.

17 If the theory, for which see Merkelbach 1960, that the word *Aiantes* in the *Iliad* derives from a pre-existing formula describing Salaminian Ajax and his brother Teucer has merit, this derivation would thus seem to have occurred as the narrative of the *Iliad* was taking shape.

685–722). As for the commander of the Euboean contingent, Elephenor, his death in the first Iliadic battle, the only scene in which he appears, is reciprocated by the death of a Trojan warrior at the hands of Telamonian Ajax (4.463–473). The cluster may also potentially be extended to include Schedius of Phocis, whose entry precedes that of the Locrians (2.517–526), and who is also killed in the proximity of the Ajaxes (17.306; cf. 15.515).¹⁸

I identify further a third cluster of Catalogue entries that proceeds from Diomedes' Argives to Agamemnon's Mycenaeans and Menelaus' Spartans through to Nestor's Pylians.¹⁹ Once again, the very centrality of these figures means that their appearances are dictated by such higher-order factors as social and military ranking and of course the demands of the story. Nevertheless, it may be possible to observe even here a tendency to cluster according to the geography of the Catalogue. Naturally enough, the contiguity of the Mycenaean and Spartan contingents (2.569–90) is reflected in the kinship of their commanders, the brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus, who regularly appear together in the *Iliad*. Diomedes acts as a member of this cluster at such crucial moments as his rescue of Nestor in Book 8 (99–169), and his opposition in Book 9 to Agamemnon's second call to abandon the siege of Troy (9–49).²⁰ Thus, while the geographical tendency is largely obscured by other factors in presenting these major characters, the clustering of their Catalogue entries nevertheless reflects the particularly close association of Agamemnon, Menelaus, Nestor and Diomedes throughout the *Iliad*.

The integrity of the clusters discussed thus far seems to be reflected in the fact that each represents a center of power within the Greek army in the *Iliad*. Most responsible for the actual conduct of the war is the cluster that includes Agamemnon, Menelaus, Nestor and Diomedes. Odysseus and the Ajaxes, the major figures in their respective clusters, are to be sure full participants in war councils and battlefield engage-

18 On Schedius see Janko 1992, 284–285 ad *Iliad* 15.515–517.

19 Sammons (2010, 173–174) describes this as “the portion of the catalogue that presents many of the narrative’s core figures”, that includes Diomedes, Agamemnon, Menelaus, Nestor, and also, in contrast with the analysis offered here, Telamonian Ajax.

20 Note in this context the notorious crux regarding the overlap of Agamemnon's and Diomedes' realms, on which see Kirk 1985, 180–181. Following the arguments presented here, it might be said that the associative tendency of the narrative has in effect been reflected back into Iliadic geography, at the cost of some distortion.

ments, but they can be seen each to pursue a distinct agenda. Odysseus' agenda manifests itself in a consistent championing of the commonweal, as for instance in his support of Agamemnon in the face of Thersites' seditious rantings (2.211–277) and his opposition to Achilles' call to battle when the troops are exhausted (19.154–237).²¹ The Ajaxes, by contrast, are distinguished by their shared characteristic of disagreeableness. Lokrian Ajax is perhaps the most savage combatant on the battlefield at Troy, and his unsportsmanlike conduct during Patroclus' funeral games issues in an Athene-inspired sprawl in manure (23.770–92; cf. 448–98). Similarly Salaminian Ajax' obstinacy and pride will lead to his suicide after the *Iliad* ends, and are reflected in the way in which the Greek ships are drawn up on the Trojan shore, where his contingent occupies one of the two positions furthest from the center (8.224–226).²²

As for the other major Iliadic character not yet discussed, Achilles of course follows his own counsel in allowing his Myrmidons (2.681–694) to take no part in the fighting until Patroclus is sent to drive the Trojans from the Greek ships in Book 16. It is therefore at least symbolically fitting that the Myrmidons are isolated within the Catalogue of Ships, for their entry²³ is bordered by contingents—from Syme and Kos (671–680), Phylace and Pherae (695–715)—whose soldiers play little or no role in the rest of the narrative. This isolation is likewise consistent with the fact that Achilles fights alone in the *Iliad*, and that his ship like that of Salaminian Ajax occupies one of the positions furthest from the center of the Greek camp. In other words, the lack of major characters in the contingents that border Achilles' contingent in the Catalogue can be seen as an inverted case of the geographical tendency: the location of the Myrmidons' entry corresponds to their isolated position on the *Iliad*'s overall 'cognitive map' of the Greek army.²⁴

21 In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' tendencies in this regard can be seen in his desire to save his crew and his attempt to reconcile the quarreling Agamemnon and Menelaus when the Greeks begin their return from Troy (*Odyssey* 3.162–164).

22 Odysseus' ships are fittingly in the middle, as Martin (1989, 120) observes.

23 The Myrmidons receive a supplementary catalogue when they muster at 16.168–197, though 3 of the 5 leaders named there are *hapaxes* not mentioned in the Catalogue of Ships (the other 2 being the Achilles' guardian Phoenix and lastly Alcimedon, who saves Achilles' horses after Patroclus dies, 17.467–501); on the relationship between the two passages, see Sammons 2010, 138.

24 The Myrmidons' position also seems to be informed by a desire to impart a measure of drama to the Catalogue by placing Achilles near the end; discussion

This, then, is my argument that the Catalogue of Ships functions as one among a number of devices for keeping track of the *Iliad's* large cast of characters, in particular subsidiary ones. Amid the 29 entries for the Greek forces, four main clusters of characters can be discerned.²⁵ The clustering of the characters in the Catalogue corresponds to their association later in the narrative, a phenomenon I have termed the 'geographical tendency.' This tendency is barely perceptible in the case of the major heroes around Agamemnon, whose associations are primarily dictated by the higher-order considerations of status and the demands of the plot. The cluster around the Ajaxes can be discerned more clearly owing to its inclusion of the lesser figures Menestheus and Elephenor, whose fewer appearances are easier to track. The case for the geographical tendency appears strongest for the cluster around Odysseus owing to its inclusion of several lesser figures that can be mapped over multiple scenes. Lastly, the isolation of Achilles and his Myrmidons in the Catalogue corresponds to their overall relationship to the Greek army.

I have repeatedly stressed that the geographical tendency I posit is not meant to offer a comprehensive explanation for the deployment of Iliadic characters. It is clear that numerous factors contribute to motivate a given character's appearance in a given scene, including such obvious organizing principles as those to which I have just referred, status and narrative exigency. It is therefore entirely consistent with my argument that the geographical tendency does not appear operative in the *Iliad's* other catalogues and lists, which are informed by more local factors such as recent appearances, euphony and meter.²⁶

Conversely, the geographical tendency cannot itself be accounted for by any single factor. On the one hand, some of the associations within the clusters of characters likely carry over from myths upon which the *Iliad* drew, or from historical relationships among the peoples identified with the various contingents. Thus, in the case of Odysseus and Thoas

and bibliography in Sammons 2010, 136–137, 184–194, who also observes (184) that “the whole latter portion of the catalogue, and not just Achilles' entry, seems to be specially marked off and separated from the rest”.

25 These clusters can be mapped onto the scheme proposed by Stanley (1993, 16) by including the Aetolians and Cretans with what he calls the “Western Islands,” and associating northern Greece with Thessaly.

26 Beye 1964; cf. Janko 1992, 108 *ad Iliad* 13.478–80. On the other hand, a geographical tendency obtains in other cataloguing traditions, for instance the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, which proceeds in a roughly regional manner; discussion in Osborne 2005, 21–22.

the Aetolian, their consecutive entries in the Catalogue of Ships and close relationship elsewhere in the *Iliad* is consistent with their appearances together in the *Odyssey* (14.469–502), in the non-Homeric *Ilias Mikra* (7 Bernabé), the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (5–10 M.-W.), and in a set of related myths concerning Odysseus' 'post-*Odyssey*' story, all of which suggests that the *Iliad* activates pairings of these two heroes already established in west Greek myths.²⁷ Put another way, links among regional traditions involving Odysseus and Thoas may have formed the basis for a mnemonic association that is reflected in the Catalogue of Ships and in the *Iliad* generally. As a parallel, I note the appearance of Odysseus with another member of this cluster, Polyxenus the Elean, whose only mention in the *Iliad* occurs in the Catalogue near Odysseus (2.623–624), and who also entertains Odysseus in the Cyclic *Telegonia* (Proklos p.102.4–6 Bernabé). Larger-scale associations may also operate alongside and interact with the geographical tendency; thus for instance the proposal that the overall organization of the Catalogue of Ships traces back to the itineraries of *theorodokoi* sent out from Delphi suggests another preexisting reservoir of relationships by geographical proximity that could contribute to the deployment of Iliadic characters in an analogous way.²⁸

The frequent grouping of Odysseus and/or Thoas with the Cretans Idomeneus and/or Meriones, on the other hand, seems more a product of the *Iliad*'s own inner logic, since, as observed earlier, this cluster embraces the Catalogue's necessary but artificial leap from west Greece to Crete. Likewise in the case of the two Ajaxes, the simple fact of a shared name, rather than any mythical-historical link, seems to underlie their association throughout the *Iliad*, and to offer a partial explanation for the somewhat strained geography of the 'Aiantid cluster', which presents sequentially the somewhat outlying Locris with geographically proximate Euboea, Attica and Salamis. In other words, the convenience of formulae built around 'Ajaxes' helps to motivate the pairing of these two major heroes, which pairing is in turn reflected in the inclusion of Locris and Salamis in the same cluster of contingents that is mapped out in the Catalogue of Ships and that maintains its coherence as the narrative proceeds.

27 Marks 2008, 93–109.

28 Giovannini 1969, 51–71; see discussion in Visser 1997, 46–47; Kullmann 2009, 12–13.

Similarly, while the relationships among what I have referred to as the cluster of major heroes can be traced to myths associated with the Argolid and the central and southern Peloponnese, the confusion that attends the depiction of Diomedes' realm in relation to that of Agamemnon in the *Iliad* suggests that this cluster could be informed at a fundamental level by a specifically Iliadic conception of the core of the Greek leadership, including as it does the party for whom the war is being waged (Menelaus), the main commander (his brother Agamemnon), the up-and-coming leader (Diomedes), and the aged counselor (Nestor). The resulting geographical separation of these leaders from the Ajaxes and Odysseus I have attempted to explain in terms of personal agendas that distance the latter heroes from the core leadership cluster. A more extreme personal agenda informs the isolated position of Achilles.

In any case, in the act of performing a poem like the *Iliad*, a traditional Greek singer would necessarily distance any associations among characters from any pre-existing contexts in order to place them in the service of the narrative at hand. The geographical tendency may in some instances reflect the arrangement of material on which the *Iliad* draws, but the salient issue for those who composed ancient Greek epics will not have been such literary-historical concerns, but rather the extent to which this tendency could contribute to the verisimilitude of the story by helping to supply a plausible cast with which to populate the *Iliad's* many scenes. Thus the narrator's request at the beginning of the Catalogue that the Muses inspire the power to "tell the captains of the ships and the ships in order" (2.491–493), can perhaps be understood on one level as a metatheatrical moment, in which the ability to sing the *Iliad* is linked self-consciously to the arrangement of the Catalogue of Ships.²⁹

29 The author would like to thank Christos Tsagalis and Antonios Rengakos for the invitation to present the talk on which this paper is based.