

The Tale of Meleager in the *Iliad*

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I employ narratology and oral theory in a close reading of Phoenix's tale of the Kalydonian hero Meleager in Book 9 of the *Iliad* to clarify the function of this embedded narrative within the Homeric epic. Phoenix compares Achilles to Meleager, and the crux of the analogy—angry withdrawal from battle—has tempted some in the past to suppose that a pre-Homeric epic about an angry Meleager was the source for the *Iliad*'s angry Achilles. But since most ancient narratives about Meleager do not feature withdrawal from battle, today Homerists more commonly conclude that Phoenix invents Meleager's withdrawal in order to pursue this analogy. Though I essentially subscribe to this conclusion, analysis of the poetics of Phoenix's narrative have often been misguided. In this essay I explore the traditionality of Phoenix's story and its narratological construction in the Homeric epic. The main goal is to better calibrate the significance of the *Iliad*'s version of the story of Meleager. The issue is relevant to how the *Iliad* employs material from outside its narrative boundaries, including the Epic Cycle.

Though not as famous as the labors of Heracles, the Trojan War, or the return of Odysseus, the myth about Meleager was popular in antiquity. That is not surprising, since his story often featured the hunt of a monstrous animal and intra-family violence. Sometimes there was a love interest, the famous huntress Atalanta. The story could be variously narrated, and some versions of the myth are incompatible. Homerists have long explored how the version told by Phoenix in *Iliad* 9 corresponds to or deviates from alternative versions. Before we address that issue, it would be helpful to examine basic elements of the tale of Meleager in order to explore their causal connections and thematic significance.

Texts and Traditions

The bibliography on the Homeric story of Meleager is extensive.¹ Many have pursued a chronological analysis, speculating about the pre-Homeric development of the myth and its post-

¹Particularly instructive are Kakridis (1949:11-42), Willcock (1964:147-53), Lohmann (1970:254-65), Alden (2000:179-290), and Grossardt (2001, which is most thorough for primary material and bibliography, and includes a helpful graph of motifs in literature at 285-90). For commentary, see Hainsworth (1993:130-40).

Homeric literary history.² Homerists in the Analyst school of thought hypothesized a pre-Homeric epic about an angry, withdrawn Meleager, deemed the “Meleagris.”³ Most current Homerists have concluded that non-Homeric versions of the death of Meleager, whereby his mother Althaia burns a firebrand that represents his life, is the original form of the story.⁴ Since the firebrand version is an example of a widespread folktale type, this conclusion recognizes the possibility of pre-Homeric oral traditions.⁵ But Homerists have tended to celebrate the seeming Homeric suppression of the folktale motif as a victory of invention over tradition and epic realism over folkloric magic. Interpretative studies of the Homeric version accordingly propose complex effects that seem to depend, explicitly or implicitly, on literate composition and reception.

My approach assumes that a strong yet flexible oral tradition about Meleager is essential to the poetics of Phoenix’s story. Instead of creating a literary history by looking for clues of influence and derivation in the surviving evidence, I consider variation to indicate multiforms that were potential in both pre-Homeric and post-Homeric oral traditions about Meleager. The vast majority of ancient tellings of the tale of Meleager were never recorded, and only a minority of poems and images about Meleager have survived. It is therefore impossible to recreate a single, monolithic tradition about Meleager. But I do posit widespread knowledge of essential motifs in traditional narrative about Meleager. Audience knowledge of these would play a role in the potential significance of any manifestation of the myth.

In my view oral traditions were primarily responsible for widespread knowledge of the myth of Meleager, even after textual versions became known. It should not be supposed that once Homer included the tale in the *Iliad* this version became overwhelmingly dominant. In my work I have argued that the influence of Homer has been exaggerated for the Archaic Age.⁶ Though the centrality of Homeric texts for later literature is obvious, non-Homeric traditions

²See, for example, Bethe (1925:5-7), Kraus (1948), Kakridis (1949:13-19), March (1987:27-46), Bremmer (1988:38-51), Grossardt (2001, summary at 245-54 and 2002). For cultic and ritual foundations of the myth, see Rubin and Sale (1983), Bremmer (1988), Honea (1994), Barringer (1996), and Grossardt (2001:261-69).

³Notably, Howald (1924) and Sachs (1933). See Heubeck (1984 [1943]:129) for bibliography and discussion. It is not always noticed that Kakridis (1949:20-21, 25-26) largely follows the Meleagris theory. If in a separate discussion (about Meleager as a model for heroic withdrawal in the *Iliad*) he expresses uncertainty about the priority of wrathful Meleager and Achilles (60 n.22), his analysis of the Homeric tale of Meleager assumes a withdrawn, and so wrathful, Meleager in the pre-Homeric epic tradition.

⁴Pausanias (10.31.4) reports that the firebrand was used in a lost tragedy by Phrynichus, adding that the motif seems to have been well known before the tragedian’s time (see Grossardt 2001:76-79 for discussion). Bethe (1925:6-7), Bremmer (1988:43-46) consider the firebrand version to be post-Homeric; March (1987:43-46) attributes its invention to Stesichorus (see Garner 1994:38 and Grossardt 2001:3-4, 51-59 for the possibility of its presence in a fragment of Stesichorus; see now Davies and Finglass [2015 fr. 187-269, with commentary]).

⁵The tale type is actually entitled “Meleager” in Aarne and Thompson (1987 [1961]) the third edition. Uther (2004) provides recent bibliography in his expansion of the Aarne and Thompson system; see also Brednich (1999). For general methodological concerns about employing comparative folkloristics in Homeric studies, see now Edmunds (2016:10, 30-36). Kakridis (1949:127-48) concluded that modern Greek examples of the tale type (not about Meleager, though Kakridis tends to identify it with Meleager specifically) are survivals of a prehistoric Aitolian tradition (though he argues that a non-folktale epic tradition of Meleager influences the *Iliad*).

⁶See especially Burgess (2001).

modulated the reception of Homer down through antiquity. As it happens, Meleager is an excellent example of my argument: the Homeric suppression of the firebrand motif was rarely followed in subsequent narratives of the myth.⁷ The *Iliad*'s version could certainly be influential otherwise, as in our earliest surviving extended version of the Meleager tale, Bacchylides, *Ode* 5.⁸ And it may be that other poets like Stesichorus, Phrynichus, or Euripides changed the course of the myth's narrative, as some argue—though here the speculation rests on lost works. The extensive scholarship about which author first invented what motif is admirably rigorous, but of limited profit. Acceptance of oral multiforms of equal authenticity provides a different perspective, one that does not implausibly credit a handful of authors with the development of a traditional narrative.

For comprehension of the poetics of the Homeric tale of Meleager, narratological examination is indispensable.⁹ Scholars too often ascribe the tale of Meleager to Homer or conflate Phoenix with Homer, whereas it is the character Phoenix who narrates the story to the character Achilles in Book 9 of the *Iliad*. One needs to distinguish the significance of conversation between characters within the poem from the significance of performances to audiences of the poem. Narratological analysis of the Homeric tale of Meleager is incomplete, however, without consideration of the oral nature of the myth.¹⁰ The Homeric tale of Meleager sometimes displays concise and elliptical narrative that clearly assumes knowledge of tradition. It also seems to modify aspects of the Meleager myth, which characters listening to Phoenix and audiences listening to the *Iliad* would neither condemn nor disregard. I will assume that both tradition and its modulation are essential to the meaning of the Homeric narrative of Meleager.

Essential Elements of the Meleager Tale

Instead of thinking of Homeric manipulation of the story of Meleager as “invention,” as is commonly done,¹¹ we should consider it variation within tradition. This can be demonstrated by exploration of the myth's basic elements and their manifestations in multiforms of the traditional story.¹² For hermeneutic purposes, I use the narratological term *fabula*. Though this term most properly refers to the chronological reconstruction of events by narratees of a particular narrative, in my usage it refers to a sequence of essential actions that would commonly

⁷For a few minor literary versions that follow the Homeric version, and mythographical accounts that include it as an alternative, one can hunt through Grossardt (2001:43-232). Some consider a variant in which Apollo kills Meleager to be influenced by the *Iliad*, as noted below in the essay.

⁸See Maehler (2004:108-09, 121) and Cairns (2010:240).

⁹de Jong (2014) provides a useful explication of narratology for ancient literature.

¹⁰See de Jong (2014:98).

¹¹Willcock (1964) is seminal for this line of thought.

¹²For my use of multiform, see Lord (1960:100) and Nagy (1979:42-43).

be found, or understood, in oral tradition about Meleager.¹³ This *fabula* is a notional construct based on the surviving evidence, but it does not constitute evidence or hypothetical evidence. It is not a pre-Homeric ur-text, or a monolithic oral tradition, but rather a variable narrative pattern. Manifestations of the Meleager *fabula* would vary in detail and scope, and motifs in different versions would often be mutually incompatible, or trigger alternative consequences. The *fabula*'s variability can sometimes be attributed to changing temporal-spatial trends in ancient culture. Genre and media are also important factors in the shaping of a multiform. But since motifs may be vestigial or emergent, their presence in multiforms does not necessarily date them. While I do not discount the importance of local and historical contexts in the development of Meleager traditions, I am wary of employing them to establish a chronology of the myth's variability. It is enough to recognize that spatial and historical contexts would have allowed potential multiforms to arise.

What, then, are the essential elements of the *fabula* of Meleager? I find it possible to reduce them to a few: [A] Meleager leads a hunt against a boar ravaging his homeland Kalydon; [B] Meleager kills a brother (or two) of his mother Althaia in a dispute after the boar is slain; [C] Althaia in anger causes the death of Meleager. The three elements provide three basic actions, which are a series of deaths (boar, uncle[s], Meleager). A sequential causality is apparent—the boar's behavior motivates the hunt, which provides opportunity for Meleager to kill close relatives of his mother, which induces Althaia to take vengeance on Meleager.

My analysis of the essential elements of the myth obviously provides no insight into the aesthetics or ideology of any given multiform. It also has no implications about the prehistoric origins of the *fabula*, or its chronological development. One might guess that the myth of Meleager originated as an epichoric Kalydonian narrative. The story is fundamentally a family affair: his father Oineus is sometimes said to offend Artemis, who then sends the boar, and his mother Althaia is the cause of Meleager's death, in response to Meleager's slaying of his uncles. But for all we know this family drama developed from Aitolian or pan-Hellenic stories. The hunt of the boar requires a number of hunters, who potentially are gathered from Kalydon, from the region of Aitolia, or more widely from the Greek world. In its most expanded form, the Kalydonian boar hunt is a pan-Hellenic heroic enterprise, comparable to the group efforts of heroes in the Theban wars, the Trojan War, or the expedition of the Argo (the last shares many characters with expanded versions of the hunt).¹⁴ Also varying in scope is the nature of the quarrel arising from the hunt. In essence, this involves Meleager and his uncles. But in versions

¹³ See de Jong (2014:38-39, 47). See Edmunds (2016:3, 37-38) on hypothetical tale types in oral folktale as *langue* as opposed specific articulations as *parole* in Saussurian terms. I (2009:27-42) employ "*fabula*" to refer to the sequence of motifs in myth about Achilles.

¹⁴ For (contradictory) lists of the hunters, see Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.8.2, Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8.299-317, Hyginus 173, and Pausanias 8.445.6-7. Meleager is listed as an Argonaut at Apollonius *Argonautica* 1.191, Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.9.16. Stesichorus grouped the hunters into ethnic categories, including Locrians, Achaians, Boeotians, Dryopes, and Aeotilians (fr. 183 Davies and Winglass).

in which the uncles reside in Pleuron, another Aitolian town, violence can lead to war between Kalydon and Pleuron, and so the narrative becomes a regional one.¹⁵

Most multiforms will of course contain aspects that are functionally superfluous. The anger of Artemis is not essential, for example, however interesting in content. Members of the hunt are unimportant for narrative causality, except for the uncles who quarrel with Meleager afterwards. Some multiforms that we encounter, such as the pan-Hellenic version of the hunt, or the erotic intrigue featuring Atalanta that is its offshoot, have no structural value in the *fabula*. The regional Kalydon-Pleuron war that can follow the hunt is unnecessary as well. Such details may be portrayed as narratologically important—resentment of Atalanta sometimes spurs the quarrel between Meleager and his uncles, for example, and the regional war can provide a setting for Meleager to slay his uncles—but they are not essential for the causality of the *fabula*.

My *fabula* addresses the essential aspects of the surviving evidence, but multiforms readily expanded and contracted the *fabula*. The large-scale pan-Hellenic multiform was popular by the sixth century BCE, but focus continued to revert to epichoric content, or to Meleager as an icon of untimely death or tragic love. Roman art, for example, regularly represented Memnon alone, or as a corpse, or with Atalanta.¹⁶ Multiforms did not need to narrate the potential extent of the *fabula*, and some do not even contain an essential element. Still, I maintain that the traditional *fabula* in its totality is tacitly assumed in all its multiforms.

Three Multiforms

Let us consider how the surviving evidence makes use of the three essential elements.¹⁷ For now I will leave the Homeric version of the tale of Meleager to one side. Of other surviving texts that tell the story, the versions by Bacchylides and Ovid are most complete; in early iconography, the François Vase presents a magnificent and informative representation of the boar hunt. In *Ode 5*, Bacchylides portrays Heracles encountering the shade of Meleager in the underworld. Meleager proceeds to tell his story: his father Oineus was unable to appease Artemis, who was angry with him; she sends a destructive boar, which is killed after a long and difficult hunt by “the best of the Achaeans.”¹⁸ Meleager then states that Artemis caused more

¹⁵ In myth and literature the two towns seem closely associated, sometimes confusingly so. At *Iliad* 14.115-17, Diomedes reports that brothers of Oineus lived “in Pleuron and Kalydon.” Our sources often indicate that Althaia lived in Kalydon, presumably after marriage, and her brothers in Pleuron. Oineus, the father of Meleager, is surprisingly said to rule Pleuron, not Kalydon, at Sophocles *Trachiniae* 7. Note that Pleuron is referenced by the title of the lost play by Phrynichus, *Pleuronian Women* (Pausanias 10.31.4). It remains unclear why the Homeric tale of Meleager deems the Kalydonians Aitolians but (apparently) the Pleuronians Kouretes. For speculation about the role of Pleuron and the Kouretes in the development of the Meleager myth, see Kakridis (1949:35 n.45), March (1987:36-37), and Grossardt (2001:13-15).

¹⁶ For iconography of Meleager, see Woodford and Krauskopf (1992).

¹⁷ See Gantz (1993:328-35) for a survey of the evidence, and Grossardt (2001) for extensive discussion. For mythographical summaries, which typically conflate literary versions. See Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.8.2-3, Diodorus Siculus 4.34.2-7, Hyginus 171-74, and Antoninus *Liberalis* 2.

¹⁸ For discussion, see Grossardt (2001:67-72).

trouble: Kalydonians and the Kouretes fought over possession of the hide, and Meleager unintentionally killed two of his uncles in battle. His mother Althaia, described as “fiery-minded” (137) and “fearless” (139),¹⁹ as well as “ill-fated” (138), then burned a firebrand that represented his life span; Meleager immediately dies on the battlefield.

Here we have the three basic elements: the hunt of the boar (Element A), Meleager’s killing of his uncles (Element B), and Althaia causing her son’s death (Element C). Though concise, Meleager’s tale in Bacchylides offers further causalities and details. Artemis’ anger against Oineus (for unspecified reasons) leads her not only to inflict the boar on the Kalydonians but also to instigate a quarrel over the hide of the boar. The hunt would seem to be more than a local affair (the “best of the Achaeans” join it), and the dispute over the hide (apparently for the honor of its possession) somehow becomes a full-scale war between the Kalydonians and the Kouretes of Pleuron. It is on the battlefield that Meleager kills two of his uncles, though unintentionally, he insists. And the battlefield is where he dies when Althaia burns the firebrand that is magically linked to his life. It would seem that he only knows of her action after the fact, and he now angrily disparages her character.

Ovid, whose account in the *Metamorphoses* (8.270-546) is our longest and most dramatic of those surviving, provides more details and more characterization.²⁰ Diana (the Roman Artemis) becomes angry when Oineus slights her in his offerings, and she inflicts Kalydon with a ferocious boar. The hunt includes such illustrious figures as Castor and Pollux, Jason, Theseus, Nestor, Achilles’ father Peleus, and even Phoenix, the narrator of Meleager’s tale in the *Iliad*. Also joining the hunt is Atalanta, with a face “maidenly for a boy, or boyish for a girl” (8.322-23). Immediately Meleager desires her, and when Atalanta wounds the boar before Meleager finishes it off, Meleager awards Atalanta the hide and head of the beast. The uncles of Meleager take it from her, and Meleager in anger cuts them down with his sword. Althaia desires vengeance, and remembers how the three Fates had announced, upon her son’s birth, that his lifespan was equal to that of the burning brand. She retrieves the extinguished and hidden brand and, after much hesitation, throws it on the flames. Elsewhere Meleager is immediately seized with pain and soon dies. Althaia, feeling guilty, kills herself, and—this being the *Metamorphoses*—two of Meleager’s sisters metamorphose into birds.

Like Bacchylides, Ovid provides the pre-element of Artemis’ (Diana’s) anger, and also makes the hunt (Element A) a heroic expedition. The murder of the uncles (Element B), here intentionally committed by an angry Meleager, occurs in the immediate aftermath of the hunt, and so no battle erupts between Aitolian cities. Althaia is portrayed as torn between her loyalties to siblings and son before she causes Meleager’s death (Element C). There is much explanatory material, and occasion for speech-making is not wasted; Althaia expresses her indecision over her shocking deed at length, and Meleager’s fatal symptoms are slow-acting enough to allow for rhetorical speechification.

¹⁹ Artemis is also described as “fiery-minded” (122); on the epithet’s meaning, see Maehler (2004) *ad loc.*, and Cairns (2010:89, 122-23, 238). I follow the translation of Cairns that allows possible allusion to the firebrand, though the meaning can be more metaphorical.

²⁰ See Grossardt (2001:149-55) for discussion.

Extremely valuable as evidence for the hunt itself (Element A) is the François Vase from the early sixth century (Woodford and Krauskopf (1992, #7; Florence 4209). In multiple bands around the vase the painter Kleitias depicts a number of myths, with extensive inscriptions. One band displays the Kalydonian boar hunt—a relatively popular topic in sixth-century vase painting. The hunt on the François Vase is especially detailed, and even the dogs are named. The line of hunters surrounding the boar nicely fills out the band. To the left of the boar we find paired hunters: Meleager (or Meleagros, the ancient Greek form of his name) with Peleus, then Atalanta with Meilanion, along with several figures whose names mean nothing to us. To the right are Polydeukes and Kastor, followed by several other hunters of no heroic repute, excepting Akastus. The corpse is labeled Antaios, apparently equivalent to the Ankaios who elsewhere is said to be killed by the boar.²¹ The unknown hunters may be local Kalydonians, or perhaps the painter is inventing names to fill out the space. The presence of several famous heroes clearly marks this hunt as a pan-Hellenic venture, and exotic dress and/or names extend its geographical reach further (Barringer 2013:157-59).

Does the presence of Atalanta suggest the love story of Meleager and Atalanta, as in Ovid? Since the Meilanion with whom she is paired is known elsewhere as her lover, that may be doubted.²² Most scholars argue that an erotic relationship between Meleager and Atalanta originated in a lost tragedy by Euripides,²³ and iconography first links Atalanta with Meleager in the fourth century BCE.²⁴ Some images focus on the moment when Meleager bestows Atalanta with the head or hide, and this scene is relatively frequent in later art and in post-antiquity. But whatever the origins and popularity of the Atalanta/Meleager narrative, it can be understood as an example of variance in the *fabula*. The presence of Atalanta among the hunters represents one detail of the pan-Hellenic multiform of the hunt, itself non-essential for the killing of the boar (Element A). The multiform in which Meleager is attracted to Atalanta can provide motivation for the hero's murder of his uncles (Element B), though Atalanta is not needed for a dispute to arise over the spoils.²⁵ In some versions, as in the later vase paintings, the romantic intrigue between Meleager and Atalanta becomes the dominant aspect of the story, and for all we know Atalanta could have had a role in the Meleager myth previous to or contemporaneous with our

²¹ Besides other vases, Bacchylides *Ode* 5.117; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8.401; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.8.1; Pausanias 8.4.10, 45.2. See Gantz (1993:332-33).

²² For the iconography and myth of Atalanta and Meilanion, see Barringer (1996:54, 62-65, 71-73, 75) and Boardman and Arrigoni (1992).

²³ Fr. 515-39 *TrGF*; see Grossardt (2001:88-95, 270-75). Rubin and Sale (1983:154-57, 163 and 1984:214-18), in response to Most (1983:203-11), argue for a pre-Homeric Meleager-Atalanta relationship (also considered possible at Edmunds 1997:429). Potential early evidence of the Meleager-Atalanta story: a sixth-century vase that depicts Atalanta next to either Meleager or Meilanion (Boardman and Arrigoni 1984, #1; Athens Agora P334; only the first two letters survive), another sixth-century vase that shows Peleus wrestling Atalanta at the funeral of Pelias with a boar's head between and a hide behind (Boardman and Arrigoni 1984, #74; Munich 596), and the display of tusks and hide of the boar in the temple at Tegea (Pausanias 8.45.1, 46.2), in Arcadia, often but not exclusively the homeland of Atalanta (also Boeotia—see Gantz [1993:335-38]).

²⁴ See Boardman and Arrigoni (1984) and Woodford and Krauskopf (1992).

²⁵ Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.8.2-3, after rehearsing a version featuring Atalanta and the firebrand, gives a second and largely Homeric version in which a dispute over spoils not involving Atalanta leads to war.

first surviving evidence. In my analysis, however, variable choice of emphasis in multiforms does not challenge the prevalence of a relatively stable Meleager *fabula* in Greco-Roman antiquity.

Death of Meleager

The essential element of the death of Meleager (Element C) has excited much attention, especially because it is subject to variability. In our main sources, excepting Homer, Althaia effects her son's death by burning a firebrand that functions as his life-token. As mentioned above, folklorists associate this version of the hero's death with a folktale type. The key motif in the tale type is that of the external soul situated in a material object.²⁶ The general concept, in which objects such as candles, trees, animals, or birds can serve as an external soul, is worldwide. In narratives the motif has both positive and negative aspects. If the life-token is secreted safely away, then the person whose soul it represents is safe from all harm. But whoever obtains the life-token is able to kill the person by destroying the life-token. In the story of Meleager, Althaia is at first her son's protector, but then uses her power over his life destructively.²⁷ By causing the death of her son in anger over the murder of her brothers, Althaia values her family of birth over her family of marriage, a motif found elsewhere in Greek literature.²⁸

As I discuss below, the Homeric version distinctly has Althaia pray to Hades and Persephone for her son's death. By stating that the Furies heard the curses (9.569-72), Phoenix implies that the hero died as a result. Also apparently different from the life-token variant is the multiform in which Meleager is slain by Apollo on the battlefield. This occurs in early epic; Pausanias (10.31.4) provides testimony that this is how Meleager dies in the epic *Minyas* and in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*.²⁹ The motif of Apollo killing a warrior is certainly an epic one; in the *Iliad* Apollo helps the Trojans slay Patroclus (16.788ff.), and in the Cyclic *Aethiopis* Apollo helps Paris kill Achilles.³⁰ Epic versions of the myth that included the Aitolian war might well favor this version of the myth.

²⁶ Thompson (1955-1958), E761 ("Life-token"), E765 ("Life dependent on external object or event"). E765.1.2 ("Life bound up with burning brand [torch]") includes the Meleager myth. See also Frazer (1922, ch. 66, "The External Soul in Folk-tales").

²⁷ The protective possibilities of a hidden life token is perhaps indicated by the description of Meleager as *atrotos* in Apollodorus (1.8.2), which means "unwounded" or "invulnerable." Burgess (1995:219 n.6) mentions this passage in a discussion on the motif of invulnerability in Greek hero myth. Hesiodic *Catalogue* fr. 280.1-2 M-W may also suggest Meleager's invulnerability.

²⁸ For favor of birth family over matrimonial family, see Sophocles *Antigone* 905-06, and Herodotus *Histories* 3.119.

²⁹ Pausanias is the source for Hesiodic *Catalogue* fr. 25.12-13 M-W and *Minyas* fr. 5 Bernabé; see also Hesiodic *Catalogue* fr. 280.1-2.

³⁰ See Burgess (2009:38-39, 79-81). Apollo's role in the death is foreshadowed at *Iliad* 19.416-17, 21.275-78, 22.359-60.

Scholars have been most concerned with fitting the seeming variant of Apollo killing Meleager into a literary history of Meleager myth. Some argue that Apollo's slaying of Meleager was in pre-Homeric epic, others that it is an offshoot of the Homeric version, which stresses Meleager's role as a warrior.³¹ My achronic approach is more concerned with how the Apollo slaying fits into my narratological analysis. Apollo as slayer might seem to exclude Althaia as the cause of Meleager's death, and so would be incompatible with essential Element C of the *fabula*. In that case the Apollo variant is an outlier that falls outside the myth's usual structure as I have analyzed it. This may well be possible, and it does not invalidate the hermeneutic usefulness of my notional *fabula*. But it may be that this variant can include the agency of Althaia, as well as of Apollo. Though scholars such as Howald (1924:408) and Kraus (1948:11) have been hesitant to connect the curse of Althaia with the death of Meleager by Apollo, it is plausible that Apollo, the brother of Kalydonians' enemy Artemis, would serve as the instrument of the Furies (who are known to harass offenders but not kill them).³² If so, Althaia starts the process with her prayers to Hades and Persephone.

The location where the hero dies is also variable. As with other aspects of the story, much is consequential to the scale of the story. When the quarrel immediately arises over the head and hide, Meleager dies wherever he happens to be when Althaia hears about the murder of her brothers. When the conflict of the hunt extends to the battlefield, the death of the hero occurs there. In the Homeric version Meleager perhaps dies upon his return to the battlefield.

The Homeric Meleager

We are now ready to turn to the Homeric tale of Meleager. In Book 9 of the *Iliad* the Greeks are demoralized. Achilles in anger at Agamemnon for seizing his concubine Briseis has refused to fight, and the Trojans have gained the upper hand. So the Greeks decide to send an embassy consisting of Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax to supplicate Achilles. Odysseus offers lavish gifts promised by Agamemnon, but Achilles still refuses to return to battle. Then it is Phoenix's turn to give it a shot. He first emphasizes his personal relationship with Achilles by telling the story of his self-exile and arrival at the home of Peleus, Achilles' father. He then tells an allegory about listening to supplication that features "Delusion" being followed by "Prayers" (*Litai*), which in turn can inspire further "Delusion" on those who do not listen to the

³¹ Pre-Homeric: Howald (1925:408), Bethe (1925:6-7), Kraus (1948:11), March (1987:40-41), Bremmer (1988:43, 48-49), and Edmunds (1997:431-32). Post-Homeric: Sachs (1933:18), Kakridis (1949:13-14), and Grossardt (2001:45-46 and 2002:429).

³² Willcock (1964:152), Cairns (2010:84 n.18), and Voskos (1997:57-58) consider this possible. Gantz (1993:857 n.33), and Grossardt (2001:4, 15-16, 43-46) reject the agency of Apollo for the Furies. See *Il.* 9.453-57, where Phoenix's father prays to the Furies, and Hades and Persephone enact the curse. Pausanias 10.31.3 may distinguish death through the Furies and death by Apollo, but this simply follows the absence of the death in Phoenix's tale. Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.8.3, apparently paraphrasing the Homeric account as an alternative to the firebrand death, reports that Meleager dies on the battlefield (no slayer mentioned) after the curses of Althaia.

Prayers. Finally Phoenix turns to myth of the past to illustrate his argument, the story of Meleager (9.524-605).³³

Phoenix's version contains all three of the essential elements, sometimes elliptically. Achilles is told that the boar is sent by Artemis, angered at Oineus, Meleager's father (as in Bacchylides and Ovid). Phoenix passes over the actual death of the boar, but this first essential element (Element A) is assumed when he mentions its head and hide, over which Artemis inspires a quarrel (9.547-48, as in Bacchylides). Consequential to the dispute is war between the Kouretes and the Aitolians, during which a brother of Althaia is killed, as eventually noted by Patroclus to explain Althaia's curses (9.566-67).³⁴ With the death of Meleager's uncle we have Element B, for it is apparent from Althaia's curses that Meleager is the murderer. As noted above, the fact that the Furies hear Althaia's curses to Hades and Persephone implies that Meleager is sure to die. The third essential element (Element C) is thus included, if indirectly, in the Homeric version of the traditional story.

Phoenix knows and expects knowledge of the three essential motifs of the *fabula*, which apparently explains the allusive nature of his reference to them. A prologue to Element A (death of the boar) is provided, but details of the hunt are not. Element B, the killing of the uncle, is vaguely mentioned, and the connection between the quarrel over spoils and battle between Kalydon and Pleuron is not made explicit. The death of Althaia's brother motivates Althaia to bring about Element C, the death of Meleager, but Phoenix is rather more concerned with the battle between the Kouretes and Kalydon that leads to Meleager's withdrawal. Phoenix actually begins with this war (9.529ff.), as if this is fundamental to the story, and then quickly returns to the battle upon mention of the dispute over the spoils, practically fusing the dispute at the hunt with war between Kalydon and Pleuron. Meleager's withdrawal then becomes central to Phoenix's story; it is his anger over Althaia's curses, not Althaia's anger at the death of her brother, that is important in this telling.

The stories of Meleager and Achilles are independent, and the traditional myth of Meleager has little resemblance to that of Achilles. But Phoenix interjects into the *fabula* of Meleager the motif of heroic withdrawal in anger. Withdrawal is part of a larger typological pattern of withdrawal, devastation, and return. Albert Lord (1960:186-97) famously argued that this pattern underlies both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and his wife Mary Lord (1967:243, with reference to Meleager) explored its function in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.³⁵ John Miles Foley (1983) explored variations of this pattern in return tales of South Slavic oral poetry.³⁶

In the *Iliad* Achilles withdraws from battle, devastation results for the Greeks, and then he returns. At first it is a modified form of return, since Achilles allows Patroclus to borrow his armor and play his double in Books 16-17. It is the death of Patroclus that inspires Achilles to

³³ Meleager, whose death was already mentioned in the Catalog of Ships in *Iliad* 2 (639-42), belongs to the generation previous to that of the Greeks at Troy.

³⁴ That Meleager was Kalydon's primary champion in the battle for some time before he withdrew in anger at his mother (550-56) implies that the death of the uncle occurred on the battlefield.

³⁵ A. Lord Heroic withdrawal by itself is a typological motif; glimpses of it are seen in the *Iliad* at 6.21-368 (Paris) and 13.455-69 (Aeneas); see Grossardt (2001:24-36).

³⁶ See also Davies (2005) for the analogy of Coriolanus to Achilles.

return to battle in Book 20. By inserting the typological pattern of withdrawal/devastation/return into the Meleager tale, Phoenix can proceed to make an explicit analogy between the two heroes. As will become apparent, some of the details seem designed to assimilate the correlation more precisely. It will be necessary, however, to wonder whether apparent correspondences are actually significant. Much of the material is generic: divine wrath, heroic squabbles, intra-family violence, curses, and supplication. Typology not only allows analogies to be made explicitly, as Phoenix does with Meleager and Achilles, but it also makes discernment of implicit correlation difficult. Once the correlation is made, we must consider whether it is Phoenix who intends the correlation, or Homer.

Central to Phoenix's telling is the withdrawal of Meleager from battle in anger at his mother's curses. A series of delegates—first priests, sent by elders to offer gifts, then his father Oineus, then his mother and sisters, and then his friends—beg him to return to the battlefield, where the enemy in his absence is threatening Kalydon (9.574-86). He ignores all entreaties until his wife Kleopatra rouses him by listing the dreadful consequences of a city's sack (9.588-95). Meleager then joins the battle and saves the day. It looks like Phoenix has manipulated the traditional tale so that it better correlates to the current situation, the embassy's attempt to persuade Achilles to return to battle. A key part of the modulation is Althaia's curse, for an immediate death following the burning of the firebrand would allow no time for supplication of a sulky, withdrawn warrior. But arguments that stress the inventiveness of Phoenix's version of the tale of Meleager are exaggerated.³⁷ All three essential elements are part of Phoenix's tale; indeed, their importance is underscored by the narrator's very concision about them, as if there were so traditional that he could assume listeners' knowledge of the boar's death (Element A), Meleager's killing of brother(s) of Althaia (Element B), and Althaia's vengeful involvement in her son's eventual death (Element C).

By emphasizing Meleager's role as a warrior, instead of the hunt and the hero's subsequent death, Phoenix modifies a traditional tale in order to suit his immediate rhetorical needs. Homeric characters often employ mythological paradigms, whereby a traditional tale is modified so as to create a greater analogy with current circumstances.³⁸ Though Phoenix seems to begin by citing Meleager as a positive model of heroic flexibility ("Heroes received gifts and were receptive to words," 9.526), he ends by portraying Meleager as a negative model of unprofitable stubbornness. So much becomes explicit at the end of the speech, when Phoenix urges Achilles to return to battle while gifts are still offered. For Phoenix, the ultimate point to stress is that Meleager returned too late to receive the offered gifts ("So go for the gifts," 9.602-03).

To further explore the implications of Phoenix's speech, we will need to employ a narratological method. Homeric scholarship has usually been vague about whether Homer or Phoenix is responsible for the poetics of the Meleager tale in Book 9. In narratological terms,

³⁷ See Edmunds (1997:429-32).

³⁸ See Willcock (1964:147-53, with discussion of Phoenix's story at 147-153), Öhler (1925 [5-30, on Homer; 12-16, on Meleager]), and Greithlin (2006:334-40). On Homeric digressions in general, see Austin (1966), Gaisser (1969), and Alden (2000). Burgess (2001:48-49) cautions that scholarship on *ad hoc* invention sometimes obscures the traditionality of Homeric poetry.

there is a main or primary narrator (Homer, by convention) responsible for all of the *Iliad*, to be distinguished from Phoenix as a secondary or character narrator (de Jong 2014:9, 19-21). This distinction is essential for analysis of the significance of the Homeric Meleager story. Phoenix tells the story to the audience internal to the poem, Achilles. But the main narrator controls how Phoenix tells his tale so as to speak to audiences external to the poem.³⁹ The meaning Phoenix intends for Achilles may differ from the meaning the main narrator may provide for his audience. As Gregory Nagy (1979:102-11) claims, Phoenix delivers a “message” to Achilles, but the poet delivers a “code” to his audience.⁴⁰ And there is another participant in the narratology of the Homeric tale of Meleager. That is the oral traditional myth about Meleager, whose resonance is essential for establishing how any multiform is received, internally and externally.⁴¹ The main narrator and Phoenix as internal narrator would be aware of a longstanding if flexible narrative about Meleager, described here as a *fabula* with three essential motifs. So would the internal audience, Achilles, and the external audience of the *Iliad*.

Messages and Codes

What, then, are the message and the code in Phoenix’s tale of Meleager, and where to draw the line between them? Below I list in narrative chronology the correspondences commonly made between the Homeric story of Meleager and the Homeric depiction of Achilles and the Trojan War:

HOMERIC TALE OF MELEAGER	<i>ILLIAD</i>
war between the Kouretes and the Aitolians	war between Trojans and Greeks
Meleager as best warrior	Achilles as best warrior
Meleager’s anger, withdrawal	Achilles’ anger, withdrawal
supplication of Meleager, with gifts	supplication of Achilles, with gifts
rejection of supplication by Meleager	rejection of supplication by Achilles
walls of Kalydon on fire	ships of Greeks on fire
Meleager persuaded by Kleopatra	Achilles persuaded by Patroclus
Meleager returns to battle	Patroclus returns to battle, as Achilles

³⁹ I use “internal” and “external” in reference to the narrative boundaries of the *Iliad*; de Jong (2014:19) uses these terms differently, with a meaning similar to “homodiegetic” and “heterodiegetic” as employed by Genette (1980:243-59). See de Jong (2014:80) on “external” and “internal” (to the narrative boundary) prolepsis.

⁴⁰ “Argument” and “key” are terms sometimes employed for “message” and “code.” Similar distinctions between internal and external meanings are made at Andersen (1987), Brenk (1986), Nünlist (2009:261-63), and Gwara (2007). Relevant are studies that speculate about the thinking of the characters in the embassy scene, for example, Whitman (1958:191-94), Tarkow (1982), Scodel (1982 and 1989), and Jensen (2005). The insights here are often valuable, but I find the methodology problematic.

⁴¹ Andersen (1998) and Scodel (2002) are rather too skeptical about the role of tradition for audience reception of Homeric poetry, though they add welcome nuance to the issue.

Let us start with correlation that might be plausibly attributable to Phoenix. Most obviously, he explicitly correlates Achilles to Meleager. Phoenix has heard Achilles reject Odysseus' recitation of Agamemnon's offer of gifts, and he begins and ends his tale of Meleager by comparing the two heroes in terms of angry withdrawal and initial rejection of supplication. Are further details in the tale that seemingly correspond to aspects of the *Iliad* part of the internal narrator's rhetorical strategy? It is certainly essential to Phoenix's comparison of the heroes that Meleager be portrayed as the foremost warrior of the Kalydonians, as Achilles is for the Greeks. Phoenix has heard Achilles claim that before his withdrawal Hector would not stay far from the gate of Troy (9.352-54); Phoenix now reports that the Kouretes were unable to remain "outside the wall" (9.551-52) when Meleager fought. Some find the detail puzzling (outside Pleuron? Kalydon?), and so conclude that Phoenix is awkwardly extending his analogy between Meleager and Achilles.

Let us use this hypothesis as a test case of the issues involved with establishing correlation. First, note that the correspondence is not exact: Phoenix states that Meleager's opponents are shut within a city wall, while Achilles claims that his nemesis Hector did not venture far beyond a city gate. One might suppose that the material at hand is too intractable for precise correlation, or that precise correlation is unnecessary for making the point, or that Phoenix is rather clumsy in the construction of his argument. If the correlation is to be accepted and attributed to Phoenix, I would prefer the last of these analyses. But there are reasons to hesitate before attributing any implicit correlation at all to Phoenix. We hardly stand on firm ground when speculating about the undisclosed thoughts of Phoenix, who is a constructed character, not a flesh-and-blood person.⁴² One might also wonder whether we should be expected to attribute such minute correlations to a character portrayed as making a spontaneous argument in response to preceding speeches. Other possible but minor correlations, accordingly, I will reserve for discussion of the purposes of the main narrator, who might well be credited with greater control over the potential significance of the tale.

The possible correlation between the deaths of Meleager and Achilles is certainly not a minor one. Phoenix does not know the future, but he has heard Achilles talk of his two-fold fate, with death assured if he stayed at Troy (9.410-16). It might seem curious, then, that Phoenix's speech seems to ignore this claim (Held 1987:250).⁴³ How could Achilles profit from the gifts if his fate is to die at Troy and not return home? The immediate bestowal of goods and slave women (9.264-67) can serve as material indication of how much the army honors him—something that Phoenix stresses (9.603; as it happens, Achilles does receive the gifts, without enthusiasm, and after a delayed return, in Book 19). But marriage to one of Agamemnon's daughters and rule over multiple cities (9.283-99), not to mention further goods from the sack of Troy (9.277-82), are precluded by the terms of Achilles' destiny. Prophecies can be doubted, of course, and Phoenix cannot be said to have had much time to digest Achilles' claims about his fate. But it is just as illogical for him to state that Meleager blundered by returning too late to

⁴² The theory that Phoenix is a Homeric invention, not a traditional figure, further complicates matters. I (2009:85-86) doubt the hypothesis. See Mühlestein (1987:89-93) and Voskos (1997).

⁴³ Nestor and Patroclus (*Il.* 11.794-95, 16.36-37) later surmise that Thetis' prophecies might explain Achilles' withdrawal.

receive gifts. The value of gifts would be little for one cursed to die, and Phoenix himself intimates that Meleager will die (Kakridis (1949:13). In other words, Phoenix's pro-gifts argumentation fails to address the deaths of both Achilles and Meleager.

One could defend Phoenix, of course: tricky material, tough crowd. But on the basis of the text, and resisting psychological speculation, I would conclude that Phoenix's employment of the tale of Meleager is poorly executed.⁴⁴ His spontaneous remarks strain to make the myth of Meleager correspond to the situation of Achilles, especially if we attribute to him such small yet imprecise correlations as staying inside walls/near gate. The paradigm seems to begin by offering Meleager as a positive example (heroes receive gifts and change their mind; 9.526), but abruptly concludes with Meleager as a negative example (he waited too long and lost the gifts; 9.598-605). The resulting emphasis on the gifts is misplaced, especially when Phoenix acknowledges yet does not include the death of Meleager. Phoenix did not do much better in earlier parts of his speech. The sequence of thought in his allegory of Prayers is obscure, and his "autobiography" of self-exile, though explanatory of his eventual relationship with Achilles, is hardly apposite when addressed to someone who is threatening to leave the Greeks and return home.⁴⁵

But I do not mean to disparage Phoenix, for obscurity and twisted logic are typical of character speech in Homer, especially in mythological paradigms. The embassy scene in particular is a glorious display of intense and extemporaneous conversation. Odysseus' speech to Achilles (9.225-306) is a model of oratorical skill, but the argument noticeably veers from tactic to tactic, initially referencing the advice of his father Peleus, then listing Agamemnon's gifts at length, then asking for pity for the Greek troops, before provocatively referencing a boasting Hector. Achilles in his reply to Odysseus displays convoluted syntax, abstract philosophizing, and a passionate but incoherently expressed intransigence.⁴⁶ Notoriously, later in the epic Achilles even seems to speak as if he had never been approached by the embassy, prompting Analysts to conclude that various authors were responsible for different and inharmonious parts of the poem.⁴⁷ In my view, such inconsistencies are simply part of the Homeric depiction of the human. We are not presented with real humans with secret thoughts for us to explore, but rather with the uncanny Homeric representation of how people express their thoughts in words.

It is Achilles' reaction to Phoenix's tale of Meleager that should next concern us. As the internal audience to Phoenix's character speech, Achilles at first succinctly denies that he requires any honor from Agamemnon's gifts (9.607-10), then neatly flips appeals to friendship by demanding that Phoenix hate his enemy, Agamemnon (9.613-15). Then he invites Phoenix to

⁴⁴ See Brenk (1986:77-78).

⁴⁵ For other sections of Phoenix's speech besides the Meleager tale, see in particular Lohmann (1970:245-53), Rosner (1976), Bannert (1981), Scodel (1982), and Alden (2000:219-26). Various intricate correspondences have been suggested; I do not agree that these parts correlate to the tale of Meleager in more than a general manner.

⁴⁶ See Tarkow (1982).

⁴⁷ See 11.609-10, 16.72-73, 83-86. For an Analyst approach to the issue, see Page (1959:297-315), and for a Unitarian perspective, Tsagarakis (1971), Scodel (1989), and Alden (2000:182-84) (as part of extensive analysis of supplication).

stay with him, stating that they will consider whether to leave or remain in the morning (9.617-19). This is very different from his previous affirmation that he would sail off in his ships in the morning (9.356-63), and later in response to Ajax, Achilles will change his position once again, asking the embassy to report that he will fight when the ships of the Myrmidons are set on fire by Hector (9.649-55).

Some suppose that the detail in Phoenix's story of Meleager returning to battle when Kalydon is aflame (9.589) gives Achilles the idea of changing his mind when the Greek ships are aflame.⁴⁸ The correspondence between the firing of Kalydon in Phoenix's tale of Meleager and the firing of Greek ships by Trojans is imprecise, however. Meleager is not motivated to return by the firing of Kalydon; rather his wife's rehearsal of the consequences of the sack of a city changes his mind. Achilles in Book 9 in fact does not express concern over the potential firing of the Greek fleet. To Odysseus he states that Agamemnon will have to figure out how to ward off fire from the ships without him (9.346-47). To Ajax, he states that only an attack by Hector on the ships of his *Myrmidons* will impel him to action (9.650-53).

In Book 16 it is the battle success of the Trojans in general that inspires Patroclus, following the advice of Nestor, to approach Achilles. Achilles surmises that Patroclus is worried because the Greeks "are dying by the hollow ships" (16.17-19), but in his reply Patroclus does not specify this concern, though he expresses a desire to drive the Trojans "away from the ships and tents" (16.45). When Achilles allows Patroclus to go out in his stead, he recalls his previous promise to return "when the battle cry and war reaches my ships" (16.61-63; see 9.650-55). But the firing of the first Greek ship—not those of the Myrmidons—only happens subsequently to this conversation (16.122-24). When Achilles sees the flare, he does encourage Patroclus to arm swiftly (16.124-29). One might suppose that this reaction (finally) reveals some sense of obligation to his fellow Greeks, or at least recognition that danger to the Greeks cannot be easily separated from danger to the Myrmidons. But Achilles initially expresses concern only for his own ships and never clearly for the Greeks in general. The Greek ships are not set aflame before Achilles changes his mind, and even then he does not agree to return to battle, as Meleager does. On the whole, therefore, any suggestion that Achilles responds to Phoenix by correlating the firing of Kalydon to the firing of Greek ships, and then improvising new terms of his return on this basis, seems unpersuasive.

Codes

One major difference between the main narrator and a character narrator is knowledge of how the story proceeds. Phoenix does not know the future, but the main narrator knows that Achilles will reject the embassy and then lend his armor to Patroclus in Book 16. In Book 20 Achilles finally returns to battle, to avenge Patroclus, whose exploits while wearing Achilles' armor ended with his death in Book 17. The main poet also has control over what is included in character speech. Possible correlations of a minor nature that I was hesitant to attribute to

⁴⁸ See Whitman (1958:190-91), Scodel (1989:93, 96-97), and Rabel (1997:116, 133). See Rabel (1997) more generally for narratological exploration of how Achilles might model his behavior on the narratives of others.

Phoenix might more plausibly be credited to the main narrator. Especially intriguing is the potential correspondence of Kleopatra and Patroclus. Besides the inversion of the roots in their personal names, which reference “father” (*pater*) and “fame” (*kleos*), each is responsible for changing the mind of the withdrawn hero who is close to them.⁴⁹ If this is a significant correlation, it surely is not a message between characters, since it is hard to imagine Phoenix employing the name Kleopatra in the hope that her anagrammatic double Patroclus might later influence Achilles. But there is much potential here for a code between main narrator and external audience. The suggestive correspondence in name between Kleopatra and Patroclus might trigger later recognition of their correspondence in deed as the plot unfolds.

Though the correlation of Kleopatra and Patroclus seems attractive, there is reason for caution. Some are underwhelmed by the resemblance of their names. Greek proper names employ a limited number of roots (though *pater* [“father”] as an element is uncommon), so coincidence of names need not be significant.⁵⁰ It may be that the Kleopatra/Patroclus inversion is more striking to us than it was to ancient listeners. That a tangent in Phoenix’s tale indicates a second name for Kleopatra, Alkyone (9.562), raises the question of which one of her names might be traditional and which invented. The doubling of names does not necessarily signal invention, since Homeric characters can have dual names (for example, Alexander/Paris) or a nickname (Astyanax/Skamandrios, 6.402-03). We also do not know if Kleopatra/Alkyone is a traditional character.⁵¹ Though the story of her parents is also found in Pausanias (5.18.12), the spouse of Meleager never has a functional role outside of Homer.⁵² Nonetheless, it is striking that Patroclus as the closest friend of Achilles succeeds in changing Achilles’ mind in Book 16, just as Kleopatra in Phoenix’s story changes her husband’s mind.⁵³ The correlation is imprecise, it is true; Achilles is persuaded only to lend his armor, not to return.⁵⁴ But I am inclined to accept the Kleopatra/Patroclus correspondence as part of the “code” between the main narrator and the external audience, a detail that potentially triggers further recognition of correspondence between the Homeric Meleager tale and the plot of the *Iliad*.

⁴⁹ This was already noticed at Eustathius *ad Iliad* 9.556. The Homeric invention of Kleopatra (or her name) to correlate to Patroclus is widely accepted, notably by Öhler (1925:16), Schadewaldt (1938:140), Heubeck (1984 [1943]:133), Lohmann (1970:260), Ebel (1972:89-90, 93, 95), Nagy (1979:105), Andersen (1987:4-5), Alden (2000:239-40, 248-50, 252), and Grossardt (2001:36-39). Differently, Patroclus invented on the model of Kleopatra: Howald (1924:411). Others are skeptical of the correspondence, notably Kraus (1948:17), Kakridis (1949:28-32), and Willcock (1964:150 n.4). Edmunds (1997:431-32) denies the invention of Kleopatra but argues for the significance of the parallelism.

⁵⁰ See Mühlestein (1987:86-89) and Kavanou (2015:59-62).

⁵¹ On the issue, see Edmunds (1997:430-32).

⁵² At 4.2.7 Pausanias reports a daughter of Meleager and Kleopatra in the *Cypria* (fr. 26 Bernabé); for discussion, see Grossardt (2001:47-50). I have argued (Burgess 2001) that the Cycle poems are independent of Homer; if so, this testimony is evidence for the early presence of Kleopatra in Greek myth. Kleopatra commits suicide after Meleager’s death at Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.8.3 and Hyginus 174.7.

⁵³ I assume that a homoerotic relationship is not at play in the *Iliad*, though it certainly became one part of myth about Achilles. See Fantuzzi (2012:187-266).

⁵⁴ Schadewaldt (1938:140) claims inexactitude (“Ungenauigkeit”) is characteristic of Homeric mirroring.

If the narrator knows how the plot unfolds, so does the external audience, since Zeus has prophesized at the end of the previous book (8.470-77) that Achilles would return to battle after the death of Patroclus. And an informed external audience can also be expected to know the traditional story of the Trojan War. Is the *Iliad's* version of one episode of the war—the wrath of Achilles—traditional? In my view it largely is, but with an enlarged role for Patroclus, who serves as a sort of doublet of Achilles in Books 16-17 (Burgess 2001:63, 71-84 and 2009:75-97).⁵⁵ The basic narrative of Achilles withdrawing, only to return after the death of Patroclus, is probably traditional, though I would not hazard a guess about whether this involved Patroclus persuading Achilles to lend him his armor. In any event, informed by Zeus' prediction, and perhaps by tradition, the external audience does not expect Phoenix to succeed in persuading Achilles to return. It might notice a Kleopatra/Patroclus correlation when she takes a decisive role in persuading Meleager to return, and then follow closely the advice given by Nestor to Patroclus in Book 11. For there Nestor urges Patroclus to urge Achilles to fight, with "plan B" a request to borrow his armor (11.792-93). Patroclus' subsequently speaks of asking Achilles to fight, without mentioning a "plan B" (15.402-04), but eventually he employs only "plan B," without asking Achilles to fight (16.38ff.). Perhaps the correlation between Kleopatra and Patroclus only gains significance to the external audience in hindsight, when Patroclus persuades Achilles in Book 16 to let him return in his place (Lohmann 1970:261).

The *Iliad* does not narrate the death of Achilles, but it certainly alludes to it explicitly and implicitly.⁵⁶ It would not be surprising for the main narrator to take the opportunity to foreshadow the death of Achilles through the Meleager tale. As noted above, the topic is a delicate one for Phoenix, since he is asking Achilles to return to battle moments after the hero had announced that he is fated to die at Troy if he stays. I have characterized Phoenix's allusion to Meleager's death as inept, but it well serves the code between the main narrator and his external audience. If Phoenix's message to Achilles is "go for the gifts" (9.602-03), the main narrator's code to the external audience is that Achilles will die—something it knows from tradition, and something that is thematically developed throughout the *Iliad*.⁵⁷

That is as far as I would go for message and code in Phoenix's tale of Meleager, though Homeric scholarship has explored its correlations and significance much further.⁵⁸ Some have

⁵⁵ My approach rejects the theory that Patroclus is a Homeric invention.

⁵⁶ See Burgess (2009:43-55).

⁵⁷ Seminal on Phoenix's tale as foreshadowing the death of Achilles: Welcker (1835:v-vi); Schadewaldt (1939:139-43). Ebel (1972:89-90, 93, 95) is a particularly elegant discussion. On implicit prolepsis, see de Jong (2014:85-86).

⁵⁸ Survey of correlations: Reichel (1994:111), Voskos (1997:26-29), and Grossardt (2001:21-24). For various hypotheses, see Lohmann (1970:245-65), Ebel (1972:87-99), Rosner (1976), Brenk (1986), Held (1987), Alden (2000:219-26), and Gwara (2007).

correlated suppliants to Meleager to the members of the embassy to Achilles,⁵⁹ or shared patterns between Phoenix's autobiographical recollections and his story of Meleager, which in turn reflect elements earlier and later in the *Iliad*. Though there exists thematic repetition between parts of Phoenix's speech, and between his speech and the *Iliad* in general, the search for specific correlations is usually unhelpful. Typology and coincidence are here too easily promoted to intentional correspondence.

If we look closely, we can certainly find repeated motifs (for example, the curse of Phoenix by his father~the curse of Meleager by his mother), but repetition is not necessarily significant. The situation of Book 1 naturally leads to the embassy of Book 9, but its perceived correlation to the speech of Phoenix (for example, Khryseis supplicating Agamemnon~suppliants of Meleager), divine anger (Apollo~Artemis), contested women (Khryseis~concubine shared by Phoenix and his father), and change of heart (Agamemnon relinquishes Khryseis~Meleager returns to battle) need not be more than coincidence of typology. One especially hesitates about the assumptions made about the composer of the *Iliad* and his audience in these arguments. It is hard to imagine the historical listening audience finding these correspondences meaningful, and the intricate patterning hypothesized, as well as the search for Homeric invention, seem to take for granted a literate author and a reading public.

Of course, Phoenix's tale of Meleager is certainly connected to the *Iliad*. The situation of Book 1 naturally leads to the embassy of Book 9, but its perceived correlations to the speech of Phoenix (for example Khryseis-concubine of Phoenix's father, Khryses supplicating Agamemnon—suppliants of Meleager, anger of Apollo—anger of Artemis, Agamemnon relinquishing Khryseis-Meleager returning to battle) need not be more than coincidence of typology. Phoenix employs the mythological paradigm in order to persuade Achilles to return to battle, and the content seems to foreshadow aspects of Achilles' return beyond what Phoenix intends. For Phoenix, the tale of Meleager is a (somewhat) usable narrative for his argument. He does the best that he can, even if his attempt is a flawed one that fails to convince Achilles. For the external audience, though, including we who study the *Iliad* today, the Homeric tale of Meleager has potential significance beyond its immediate context.

Conclusion

I have indicated the basic structure and causality of the traditional tale of Meleager, surveyed variation between recorded examples of the tale, and explored the narratological poetics of the version found in *Iliad* 9. Phoenix has an explicit message for Achilles, though it is not clear that he suggests further, implicit correlations between the two heroes. What is certain is

⁵⁹ Much of this work is inspired by Kakridis' arguments about Homeric use of an "ascending scale of affection" in supplication (1949:19-34, 49-53, 159-64). The highest place is reserved for a spouse, but parents also have their place. Kakridis argued that this explains Althaia's supplication of Meleager (9.584), which some find surprising after her curse of him. Kakridis further supposes that Phoenix/Homer (the distinction is not clear) has promoted the companions of Meleager as far up the scale as possible to bolster the authority of the embassy to Achilles. I find the scale insufficiently documented and inconsistently fixed or flexible. As well, though scholars tend to view the scale as oral typology, in practice Kakridis strongly identifies it with a hypothetical "Meleagris." For critique of Kakridis' scale, see Lohmann (1970:258-61), Petzhold (1976:156-61), and Swain (1988:273-74).

that Phoenix pursues a correlation between Meleager and Achilles as principal champions in war who withdraw from battle and resist supplication. It is plausible that Phoenix also unwittingly delivers a code from the main narrator to the external audience. But given the oral context of the original performances of the *Iliad*, and also the typological nature of much of the correlation, I urge caution. As often in my previous work, I aim to take a moderate position between an oralist approach that stresses typology and literary criticism that is alert to the undoubted sophistication of Homeric poetics.

Phoenix's tale of Meleager did not exist in a vacuum; it assumes and employs traditional myth about the hero. Since it is impossible to recreate a uniform traditional tale of Meleager, whether before or after Homer, I have isolated three basic elements in the story. Phoenix imposes the typological sequence of withdrawal/devastation/return onto the tale, but Phoenix still adheres to the three basic elements. Both the internal audience and the historical audience would recognize that Phoenix tells a traditional story, with manipulation and suppression of some aspects of it. Phoenix's adjustment of the Meleager myth to refer to the circumstances of the *Iliad* is normal for mythological paradigms in Homer. And the Homeric tale of Meleager essentially constitutes a multiform that is perfectly acceptable within the variation possible for a traditional narrative. What should matter for us is not how Phoenix's tale gives clues about either pre-Homeric epic or Homeric invention, but how this multiform functions within the context of the *Iliad*.

The "Meleagris" theory would have us think that the tale by Phoenix represents a summary of a pre-Homeric epic from which the *Iliad* lifted a plot to apply to Achilles. This hypothesis severely limits the broad oral traditions that inform Homeric poetry and grossly underestimates Homeric poetics. The great Greek scholar Johannes Kakridis may have subscribed to aspects of the "Meleagris" theory, but he argued for some Homeric variation from pre-Homeric epic, notably in the Homeric version's partial modification of an "ascending scale of affection." Over the last half-century, scholarship has increasingly focused more on how the Homeric tale of Meleager transforms the traditional story of Meleager to reflect the circumstances of the *Iliad*.⁶⁰ This sounds like progress, but reading through the bibliography can be dispiriting. The Unitarian impulse, with which I have much sympathy, has tried to rehabilitate Homeric poetics by over-perceiving intricate patterning. Homeric epic does often invite us to react to suggestive elements—explicit yet incomplete correspondences in similes and mythological paradigms, for example, or implicit correlations in metaphor and embedded narratives. But there are methodological problems with current approaches to Phoenix's tale of Meleager: a neglect of narratology, a tendency to celebrate invention over tradition, an impulse to perceive textualist types of composition and reception, and recourse to speculation into the psychology of Homeric characters.

In my previous work, I have employed the school of thought known as neoanalysis in a more oral and intertextual manner to argue for the *Iliad*'s implicit reflection of the cyclic story of

⁶⁰ Bethe (1925), Schadewaldt (1938:137-43), and Heubeck (1984 [1943]) were early models for exploring Homeric manipulation of the Meleager tale. Willcock (1964) has been seminal, and Alden (2000) is the most thorough.

Memnon and Achilles.⁶¹ In particular, I have proposed “intertextuality without text”(2011) that amounts to a “metacyclic” use of mythological narrative by oral Homeric poetry (2009:4).⁶² In a previous publication in *Oral Tradition*, I compared Homeric employment of cyclic myth to mythological paradigms. Both have an essentially comparative nature that I attributed to oral practice, whether in poetic composition or in real life.⁶³ There are, of course, differences between Homeric employment of the Memnon story and the Meleager story. The Memnon story is part of Trojan War myth, whereas the Meleager story is unconnected to it. The *Iliad*’s narrative seems modified so as to reflect the external Memnon story (*this* is like *that*), whereas the embedded Meleager tale seems modified so as to reflect the *Iliad* (*that* is like *this*). The Memnon story seems to be mirrored by the *Iliad*, whereas the embedded Meleager story mirrors the *Iliad*.⁶⁴ The *Iliad*’s use of the Memnon story is implicit, whereas Phoenix/Homer employ the Meleager story in explicit and implicit ways. Yet traditional myth is central to the mechanics of Homeric employment of both the Memnon and Meleager stories. Phoenix respects the traditional story of Meleager as he molds it to his immediate needs, and with greater sophistication the Homeric narrator employs the myth to clarify his epic. The tale of Meleager is just one example of how Homeric epic constructs itself by engaging with traditional Greek myth.

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⁶¹ See Burgess (2009:58-71), where I distinguish my method from a “classic” form of neoanalysis that considers cyclic aspects of Homeric poetry as vestigial, not allusive.

⁶² See Finkelberg (2015:126-38) and Foley and Arft (2015:91-95).

⁶³ Burgess (2006 and 2009:56-71). Kakridis (1949) implicitly includes the *Iliad*’s use of Meleager and Memnon (Chapters 1 and 3, respectively) under neoanalysis, a term he invented (2-10); see now Schein (2016:127-36) on the work of Kakridis. Mühlstein (1987:89-93) discusses both the “Meleagris” and “Memnonis” theories with Analyst methodology; Kullmann (1991) associates the neoanalyst “Memnonis” argument with research on other possible pre-Homeric influences, including the story of Meleager at 9.443.

⁶⁴ On the concept of mirroring or reflection in Homer, see Schadewaldt (1965:190-96), Lohmann (1970:256-57, 262), Andersen (1987:8-10), Alden (2000 *passim*), and de Jong (2014:36). In my work, I have argued that Homeric “mirroring” is allusive. On the various relations of an embedded to to its frame narrative, see Genette (1980: 231-34), Barth (1984), and de Jong (2014:34-36) (with reference to the Homeric Meleager tale).

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