

§7. Aeneas

Nathless Apollo, the urger of war-hosts, roused up Aeneas
straightly against the Pelides, and filled him with valorous courage . . .

– *Iliad* 20:79-80

The Catalogue of Ships, that much worked-over relic of early times, was the central identity text for the Greeks after the Dorian incursion. It was all they had left of their glorious past; their oldest cultural possession. Greek settlers brought it with them to the islands and cities of Ionia. There, a large body of celebratory recitations grew up around it, the Trojan War songs. And in time, the reworking and streamlining of that tradition by Homer.¹

But these Greeks were now on the same side of the sea as Troy itself. Around them were clans which may have taken the Trojan side in times past. Did someone, after a session, approach the singer, slip him a twenty, and say, “That was fine. But tomorrow, how about one on our great ancestor, Aeneas?”

Some have seen such a connection in the encounter between Achilles and Aeneas which takes up *Id* 20:75-352.² Leaf waxes disdainful about the inconclusiveness of this piece.³ But it is not quite as terrible as he makes out. For one thing, Homer himself criticises Achilles’ fears (261-266):

Off from his body Pelides held, with his stout hand the buckler –
held it away in dread, for he deemed the far-shadowing javelin
hurled by Aeneas, the great of heart, would easily pierce it.
Fond man! he realized not in the depth of his heart and his spirit
how that the glorious gifts of the gods not lightly are wanted
either to yield or be vanquished by prowess of men that are mortal.

There is musical support for its retention. The Aeneas episode clocks in at 278 lines, or 28 minutes. Eliminating it would reduce *Id* 20 (503 lines, the normal *Iliadic* 50 minutes) to a mere 225 lines (23 minutes), a piece on the scale of the old *aristeia* of Agamemnon (see §3). Those who note a parallel with the inconclusive duel between Diomedes and Glaucos in *Id* 5 are probably in the right of it. The two are both functional in the larger context.⁴

¹What happened in the time of Pisistratus was the return of that body of song, back to its old home in Greece, specifically to Athens, in c525; see §17.

²The existence of a royal line of Aeneas, surviving to succeed that of Priam, was noted already in antiquity. The possibility of a literary commission has been raised in recent times by Reinhard *Ilias* 450-43 and 506-521 (cited from Edwards *Iliad* 5/300).

³Leaf **Companion** 24f, “instead of being furious [Achilles] is only sarcastic; instead of blows, he uses nothing harder than taunts, “like a child” as Aeneas not unnaturally says. . . the attack is left to Aeneas, and awaited in fear by Achilles . . . it reads almost like a deliberate attempt to belittle the hero.” Maybe that last is not far off; see below.

⁴For such devices not as blemishes, but as part of Homer’s artistry, see §30.

Moderns may be bored by the Iliadic genealogies, but their boredom merely shows their lack of antique sensibility. Those pedigrees convey the weight and importance of a person, and the weight and importance of their encounter wholly depends on it. If the Iliad contained only such rosters of the trivial slain as we find in 5:676-678 (the inconsequential Aristeia of Odysseus) . . .

So on the Lycian masses Athena directed his fury.
Coeranus quickly he slew, and Alastor; Chromios also,
Halius too, Alcandrus, Noëmon, and Prytanis likewise;
others, and more had the godlike Odysseus slain of the Lycians . . .

. . . then the great dynastic panorama would become a mere newspaper squib. So much the more when a genealogy goes back to a divinity. Such connections gave to humans the right to rule, and rulership is the name of the Iliadic game.⁵ If the Trojan dynasties of Priam and Aeneas were both to perish, we would have only destruction. But tradition held otherwise, and that larger dimension is introduced by this Aeneas episode. It is this prediction of future importance (20:300-305, Poseidon is speaking, and is about to rescue Aeneas) . . .

Come now, let us deliver and lead him from death and disaster,
so that the son of Cronus may not be wroth, if Achilles
slay this man, for to him escape by fate is appointed,
lest the whole line of Dardanus traceless haply should perish
leaving no seed, for him did Cronion love more than all other
children besides, that were born unto him of the daughters of mortals.

. . . that marks the Aeneas episode as something special. The death of Hector in Id 22 is allowed to imply the end of Troy. The Aeneas bit puts it on record that there will remain something *beyond* Troy.

All told, one may fairly judge that it is not a blemish, but an enhancement.

But did Homer think of it all by himself? Not likely. For him, the story of Troy did indeed end with the fall of Troy. The final Greek victory, even if only implied, probably sufficed him. The Aeneas piece is more likely to be what some have suggested: an early Ionian commission, worked into the Menis, indeed as a parallel to Diomedes and Glaucos, but having its own origin.

It might then be a relic of the early days of the Greeks on Ionia, a parallel to the oldest thing the mainland Greeks possessed, garbled and enhanced, but demonstrably ancient: the Catalogue of Ships. A native Ionian equivalent.

Never underestimate the power of a twenty.

⁵Here is another point of contrast with the Odyssey, where the mythic monsters and the human helpers alike are of anything but royal origin. The gods in Homer are there to illustrate, to enhance, and to enforce what they themselves refer to as fate, moira – that which, somehow or other, despite any human exertions, is to be.