



## MATRILINEAL SUCCESSION IN GREEK MYTH\*

### ABSTRACT

*This article presents a systematic examination of matrilineal succession in Greek myth. It uses MANTO, a digital database of Greek myth, to identify kings who succeed their fathers-in-law, maternal grandfathers, step-fathers, or wives' previous husbands. Analysis of the fifty-four instances identified shows that the prominence of the 'succession via widow' motif in archaic epic is not typical of the broader tradition. Rather, civic mythmaking more commonly relies on succession by sons-in-law and maternal grandsons to craft connections between cities and lineages, and to claim panhellenic prestige. We show that matrilineal successors are not treated as necessarily illegitimate or inferior within the overwhelmingly patrilineal conventions of Greek myth. In fact, matrilineal calculations afford certain advantages, like the ability to integrate heroes from elsewhere, or to champion local kings with divine fathers. Matrilineal succession reveals the gendered dynamics inherent to Greek myth; we argue that, although in these instances regnal power is transferred through female relatives, the heroines involved are typically treated simply as nodes for this power and their roles in these stories do not necessarily correlate to a greater visibility or autonomy.*

**Keywords:** Greek myth; matriliney; succession; civic myth-making; genealogy; rulership; women; gender

### INTRODUCTION

Matrilineal succession occurs when a ruler inherits a kingdom because he is related to a former ruler via a female relative. In such instances, women do not wield power; matriliney must be distinguished from matriarchy. Rather, matriliney makes women nodes through which power is transferred. Patriliney would usually see power passing to a son or paternal grandson; matriliney has a son-in-law, a step-son, a maternal grandson or the new husband of the former king's widow taking control of the kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

Prominent examples of matrilineal succession appear in Homer. Menelaos both wins Helen and succeeds her father Tyndareos at Sparta. In Lycia Iobates rewards Bellerophon with a royal bride and his kingdom (Hom. *Il.* 6.155–95); and leading the Lycian contingent at Troy is Sarpedon, son of Bellerophon's daughter Laodameia

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<sup>1</sup> This definition (see *OED* s.v. matrilineal: 'of, relating to, or based on (kinship with) the mother or the female line') expands beyond just succession via the mother (e.g. K. Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology* [London and New York, 1992], 108). We do not distinguish between immediate succession and succession after intervening ruler(s) since our sources are often imprecise on this point.

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(6.191–9). Oedipus comes to rule Thebes when he defeats the Sphinx and marries Iokaste (*Od.* 11.271–80). Two other Homeric ‘widows’ have suggestive matrilineal potential: Aigisthos rules at Mycenae as husband of Klytāimnestra, the absent ruler’s wife; and Ithaka’s future seemingly rests on Penelope’s selection of a new husband.

How representative are these episodes as examples of mythic matriliney *tout court*? Can we indeed conclude that ‘Contrary to appearances, Greek [heroic] tradition does not make provision for royal succession from father to son’?<sup>2</sup> This is the view of Finkelberg in the most comprehensive study yet of matrilineal succession in Greek myth. She argues that the prevalence of matrilineal inheritance in these stories indicated a Bronze Age norm in which ‘kingship by marriage represent[ed] the general rule’.<sup>3</sup> In this article, we re-examine the significance of matrilineal succession in Greek myth. Leaving aside the question of the origins of matriliney, we instead focus on its use. Thus we treat myths not as evidence that unwittingly preserves memories of earlier practices, but as a flexible repertoire of cultural artefacts activated and improvised on by autonomous storytellers to diverse ends. Through this lens, matriliney can be seen to be an extraordinarily flexible motif. We show that matrilineal calculations bring with them a range of associations. In narrative terms, they offer high-stakes drama since the transfer of power can be placed within a breakdown of ‘normal’ familial cohesion. As an instrument of civic myth-making, matriliney legitimizes outsiders and projects wider geo-genealogical associations. In local myth, where certain ‘facts’ might be fixed by panhellenic tradition, matrilineal calculations can explain disjunctions apparent on the ground. We show, in short, that matriliney is not a single phenomenon but a series of tropes and a set of potentialities drawn on for different purposes in different contexts. This article, then, challenges two prevailing ideas about matriliney, namely that it is an inherent, invariable aspect of the myths in which it appears, and that it correlates to unusual female visibility and significance.

### *The dataset of matrilineal succession*

To establish the prevalence of matrilineal succession, we used MANTO, a Linked Open Data (LOD) resource for Greek myth. MANTO currently includes all of archaic epic, plus Apollodoros and Pausanias among other authors, and so provides good chronological and thematic range.<sup>4</sup> Because MANTO captures assertions about heroic lineages and kingdoms, we could query it to identify instances of four matrilineal modalities:

<sup>2</sup> M. Finkelberg, *Greeks and Pre-Greeks: Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge and New York, 2005), 65. This appears in an earlier form in M. Finkelberg, ‘Royal succession in heroic Greece’, *CQ* 41 (1991), 303–16, at 303 (‘Greek heroic tradition does not supply sufficient evidence for seeing the kingship as transmitted from father to son’).

<sup>3</sup> Finkelberg (n. 2 [1991]), 306. Similar arguments appear in J.G. Frazer, *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (London and New York, 1905), 238–46; J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York, 1922), 154–8; K. Atchity and E.J.W. Barber, ‘Greek princes and Aegean princesses: the role of women in the Homeric poems’, in K. Atchity (ed.), *Critical Essays on Homer* (Boston, 1987), 15–36. Pomeroy also used examples of uxori-local marriages and matrilineal succession in archaic epic to reconstruct historical social norms: S.B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York, 1975), 19–20, 23. Finkelberg’s argument for Bronze Age matriliney remains influential: e.g. B.A. Olsen, ‘The worlds of Penelope: women in the Mycenaean and Homeric economies’, *Arethusa* 48 (2015), 107–38, at 125–9; R. Janko, ‘Helen of Troy—or of Lacedaemon? The Trojan War and royal succession in the Aegean Bronze Age’, in J.J. Price and R. Zelnick-Abramovitz (edd.), *Text and Intertext in Greek Epic and Drama* (Abingdon and New York, 2020), 118–31.

<sup>4</sup> MANTO is available at <https://manto.unh.edu/>. This article uses MANTO’s dataset as of 1 June 2022, but excludes [Plutarch]’s *On Rivers*, and rationalizing material from the three *Peri Apistōn* treatises.

- (1) the new king marries the former king's daughter (succession by son-in-law);
- (2) the new king is the son of the former king's daughter (succession by maternal grandson);
- (3) the new king marries the former king's widow (succession via widow);
- (4) the new king's mother marries the former king after having conceived him to someone else (succession by step-son).<sup>5</sup>

Our list (given in the appendix) identifies 54 stories featuring 57 matrilineal successors (this higher number reflects the presence of co-rulers).<sup>6</sup> These kings exist within a dataset containing 541 male rulers or founders; in other words, almost 90% of mythic kings owe their kingdoms to something other than matrilineal descent.<sup>7</sup>

MANTO allows us to surface examples of mythic phenomena, but it is not an end in itself. Such digital methods 'flag up potential patterns of interest'; they offer suggestive heuristics and substantial datasets, but not analytical conclusions.<sup>8</sup> For this we go back to the source material with new questions in mind. In this article we examine different facets of matrilineal succession in turn. We begin by showing how widows who transfer regnal power raise the dramatic stakes of a story. We then describe the conceptual advantages of matrilineal to genealogical thinking. Our third section demonstrates how specific communities traced—or avoided tracing—matrilineal connections. The fourth

<sup>5</sup> 'Succession by step-son' excludes heroes sometimes identified as sons of gods and so technically sometimes inherit the kingdom of their mortal 'step-fathers'. For a fifth possible modality, succession via marriage to a queen, see note below.

<sup>6</sup> Our list is supplemented with instances from sources not yet in MANTO. We excluded false positives and marginal examples: e.g. Polydoros (son-in-law of Nykteus but succeeds at Thebes as son of Kadmos); Skeiron (son-in-law of Pandion but succeeds at Megara as son of Pylas; see Fig. 1); and Molossos (step-son of Helenos but succeeds in Epeiros as son of Neoptolemos). Intertwined matrilineal and patrilineal claims at Argos are discussed below.

<sup>7</sup> Of the 450 heroes identified as rulers (not founders) in MANTO, 170 rule the kingdom (or part of the kingdom) ruled or founded by his father. This reveals the prevalence of one patrilineal modality, succession by the son of a former ruler. (We did not search for other patrilineal modalities, such as heroes founding cities within their fathers' kingdoms, or succeeding paternal grandfathers). Female rulers in MANTO are rare, and represent atypical circumstances. Hippolyte and Hypsipyle rule female-dominated kingdoms; Calypso and Circe are divinities ruling functionally empty lands. Medousa (Paus. 2.21.5–6) and Ariadne (Plut. *Thes.* 19.4–7) are made queens in rationalized accounts. Omphale in Lydia and the Thesprotian queen Kallidike with whom Odysseus has a son (*Telegony* arg. 2, Lysimachos of Alexandria *FGH Hist* 382 F 15) exist to provide suitably elite—and apparently single—mates for a wandering hero. Beyond these, Hesiod describes Laothoe ruling Hyperesia (*Ehoiai* fr. 23 Most = fr. 26 M–W); and Eumelos has Medeia ruling Corinth (fr. 20, 23 West = Paus. 2.3.10–11). Three women rule alongside their husbands: Hymnetho (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.8.5); Messene (Paus. 4.1.1–2); Polyxo (perhaps as regent, Paus. 3.19.9–10). (Two matriarchs sometimes identified in Homer are not included in MANTO: Arete on Scheria, and Andromache's mother at Thebe; Pomeroy [n. 3], 22–3; S.B. Pomeroy, 'Andromaque: un exemple méconnu de matriarcat', *REG* 88 (1975), 16–19). Children of female rulers or founders are also rare, except where the queen rules alongside her husband (and thus the succession is both patrilineal and matrilineal). Polypoites, son of Kallidike and Odysseus, seems a partial exception in *Telegony* arg. 2; however, Apollodoros says that Odysseus was made king too (*Epit.* 7.35, probably following the epic plot closely; L. Lulli, 'The case of *Telegony/Thesprotis*. Some notes about the epichoric aspects of a cyclic epic poem', *Sem Rom* 7 [2018], 21–46, at 29–34). There is one further example in MANTO of a succession via marriage to a queen: Eumelos' statement that when Medeia ruled Corinth, 'Jason ruled through her' (δὲ ἀὐτήν, Paus. 2.3.10–11 = Eumelos fr. 20, 23 West). We excluded this matriarchal modality from our study since in it women hold power autonomously. In general, MANTO bears out the observation of T.S. Scheer, 'Women and *nostoi*', in S. Hornblower and G. Biffis (edd.) *The Returning Hero: Nostoi and Traditions of Mediterranean Settlement* (Oxford, 2018) that gendered stereotypes operant in storytelling communities meant heroines had different and less prominent roles in Greek myth.

<sup>8</sup> Quotation: E. Barker, L. Isaksen and J. Ogden, 'Telling stories with maps: digital experiments with Herodotean geography', in E. Barker, S. Bouzarovski, C. Pelling and L. Isaksen (edd.), *New Worlds from Old Texts: Revisiting Ancient Space and Place* (Oxford, 2016), 181–244, at 199.

reveals how patrilineal assumptions are upheld even in narrative systems where power ostensibly flows through women.

### NARRATIVE EXPEDIENCIES

The 'rules' of the Greek mythic storyworld owe as much to immediate narrative contingencies as to any cast-iron social laws operant within it. So in the key example of Ithaka, Homer skilfully exploits the tension intrinsic to having both regnal and familial security hang on Penelope's potential remarriage. Key to this tension is the storyworld's lack of constitutional precision. The *Odyssey* obfuscates the issue of who holds power on Ithaka, and how that power might be conveyed to another.<sup>9</sup> We can put together hints: Odysseus had instructed Penelope to remarry and leave Ithaka once Telemachos had grown up, suggesting an expectation of patrilineal inheritance (18.269–70); Antikleia says Telemachos took charge when Laertes withdrew from public life (11.180–7). But it is precisely the unsettled scenario that makes the story: Telemachos is inexperienced, vulnerable, and stands in the way of the suitors' ambitions (1.358–9; 1.383–7; 2.335–6). Homer brings Odysseus to Ithaka at a crucial moment. In her struggles to put off the suitors, Penelope makes a contrastive pair with Klytaimnestra, whose adultery is part and parcel of Agamemnon's deposition. Critical to the *Odyssey* is precisely that threat of violent usurpation. The possibility of matrilineal transfer in a moment in which Laertes is weak, Penelope is beset, the palace's resources are depleted, and the rightful heir targeted by assassins: these are the dramatic stakes which fuel the *Odyssey*.

The Homeric epics are notable in their inclusion of two specific matrilineal tropes: namely, the 'succession via widow' modality, and the bride competition. Homer gives us three 'widows' seemingly capable of conferring regnal power on their new husbands (Penelope, Klytaimnestra and Iokaste) and two formal bride-contests in which the successful suitor also wins the throne (Helen and Penelope). These memorable heroines create, however, an availability bias; their prominence in the Homeric epics is not indicative of the frequency of the motif elsewhere in Greek myth. A third prominent bride-competition is easily found: Pelops wins Hippodameia, defeats—or kills—her father in the process, and takes his kingdom. But other instances of the motif in MANTO are not clearly connected to succession. Herakles wins Iole but sacks her father's city of Oichalia after he prohibits the marriage (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.6.1); Danaos holds athletic competitions to find second husbands for forty-nine of his daughters, yet it is Lynkeus, husband of his fiftieth daughter, who succeeds at Argos (Pind. *Pyth.* 9.120–6; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.1.5; Paus. 3.12.1–2, although see below); Odysseus wins Penelope (Paus. 3.12.1–2) and Idas wins Marpessa (Bacchyl. fr. 20a Snell–Maehler) but both are patrilocal marriages; when Alexidamos wins Alkeis in Libya no succession is mentioned (Pind. *Pyth.* 9.103–25).

To Homer's three 'widows' capable of transferring regnal power, MANTO adds just one: Merope, in Euripides' *Kresphontes*.<sup>10</sup> Polyphontes had installed himself as king of Messenia after killing his brother Kresphontes and marrying Kresphontes' widow

<sup>9</sup> For the opaque potential power of Penelope's new husband see e.g. J. Halverson, 'The succession issue in the *Odyssey*', *G&R* 33 (1986), 119–28; C.G. Thomas, 'Penelope's worth: looming large in early Greece', *Hermes* 116 (1988), 257–64; R. Scodel, 'The suitors' games', *AJPh* 122 (2001), 307–27.

<sup>10</sup> This mythic modality is often illustrated by non-mythic analogies from Herodotus' descriptions of Lydia and Persia: e.g. Frazer (n. 3 [1905]), 242–3; J.N. Bremmer, 'Oedipus and the Greek Oedipus complex', in J.N. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1988), 41–59, at 47.

Merope. The fragmentary prologue suggests the still-mourning Merope was married by force;<sup>11</sup> she may later have lamented with the chorus her plight as wife of her husband's murderer in a city ruled by a usurper.<sup>12</sup> Her surviving son returns and kills Polyphontes with Merope's help. The play sets up an implicit comparison with Orestes; but Merope is no Klytaimnestra. In short, the 'succession via widow' motif is integral to *Kresphontes'* intertwined 'themes of kingship and kinship',<sup>13</sup> so that the stakes for Merope's son are simultaneously political (recovering of his kingdom), familial (avenging his father's death) and personal (rescuing his mother from her misery).

Dramatic expediency, then, drives this motif. Greek myths are not a stable repertoire: Euripides probably invented Merope's forced marriage to her husband's killer just as he made Kresphontes and Polyphontes brothers to intensify the emotional effect.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the trope of matrilineal succession need not be an invariable element of a hero's story: Isocrates and Pausanias both narrate the death and deposition of Kresphontes without mentioning his widow.<sup>15</sup> No instance of 'succession via widow' makes marriage the principal mechanism underpinning the new king's authority. Polyphontes has already defeated Kresphontes. Oidipous is unknowingly restored to his patrilineal birthright by defeating the Sphinx. And Aigisthos' usurpation of Agamemnon continues the feud of their fathers, Thyestes and Atreus, likewise riven by violence and sexual jealousy.<sup>16</sup> In each case, the widow's presence crystallizes competition for control of a city as inter-personal conflict, replete with very human emotions. For Merope, it is the trauma of murder and defeat that must be avenged; for Iokaste, the horror of incest; and for Klytaimnestra, the 'unfeminine' pairing of ambition and infidelity. These examples should remind us that the 'rules' of the Homeric epics are not necessarily indicative of mythic norms writ broad.

### GENEALOGICAL CONTINGENCIES

The examples above, in which a widow's capacity to convey kingship along with kinship tests already strained familial relationships, illustrates a common feature of matrilineal calculations. Tracing matriliney enhances connectivity within the Greek mythic storyworld. Matrilineal bonds work alongside patrilineal lineages to draw mythic

<sup>11</sup> Eur. fr. 448a *TrGF*, supplemented by P.Mich. 6973; the most up to date text is found in K. Lu Hsu, 'P. Mich. 6973: The text of a Ptolemaic fragment of Euripides' *Cresphontes*', *ZPE* 190 (2014), 13–29.

<sup>12</sup> Eur. fr. 448a *TrGF*, supplemented by P.Mich. 6973 lines 117b–28, as reconstructed and interpreted by K. Lu Hsu, 'P. Mich. 6973: An interpretation of a Ptolemaic fragment of Euripides' *Cresphontes*', *ZPE* 190 (2014), 31–48, at 41–5. Euripides' plot is probably the source for Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.8.4–6 and Hyg. *Fab.* 137, but see A. Harder, 'Euripides' Temenos and Temenidai', in H. Hoffman and A. Harder (edd.), *Fragmenta dramatica* (Göttingen, 1991), 117–35.

<sup>13</sup> Lu Hsu (n. 11), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Eur. fr. 448a *TrGF*, supplemented by P.Mich. 6973 lines 22–3.

<sup>15</sup> Isoc. *Archidamas* 22–3 and Paus. 4.3.7–8 have Kresphontes killed by Messenian elites. Elsewhere, Pausanias describes Merope's marriage to Kresphontes as a diplomatic alliance engineered to protect her father's kingdom from Heraclid attack (8.5.6). This illustrates the expected amity between in-laws in stories of matrilineal succession (see below).

<sup>16</sup> Homer admittedly downplays Thyestes and Atreus' antagonism (e.g. *Il.* 2.100–8). However, it probably did feature in archaic epic (e.g. *Alcmaionis* fr. 5 West) and allusions in Aeschylus (e.g. *Ag.* 1191–3, 1219–22) suggest that Thyestes' affair with Atreus' wife and Atreus' revenge were standard explanations for animosity in the next generation (T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* [Baltimore, 1993], 545–6).

families into a tighter web of relationships. This is the organizing principle of the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* in which the heroic world is shown to be a network of mothers, wives and daughters.<sup>17</sup> But female visibility should not be conflated with matrilineal significance. In the poem, matrilineal inheritances principally explain ethnic affiliations; much less is made of women's roles in transferring power within specific *poleis*.<sup>18</sup>

By comparison with their husbands and fathers, women in Greek myth typically have less fully-formed biographical identities. Many exist only as names fleshing out the family relationships of heroes. The general expectation that their traditions would be obscure and malleable made them useful. Little-known female relatives could be drafted in—we might better say 'invented'—to establish connections previously 'overlooked'. Ever more sisters, daughters, and even wives might be added to a hero's family tree. By these means ancient storytellers could paper over the clumsy grafting of lineages, glaring inconsistencies or incompatible traditions. One instance, often taken as illustrative of the power of the matriline, results from just such a remediation.<sup>19</sup> Homer says that Sarpedon, son of Bellerophon's daughter Laodameia, inherited Lycia from his grandfather despite Bellerophon having two sons (*Il.* 6.196–9). Yet almost everywhere else he is born to Europe on Crete and is a foreigner in Lycia.<sup>20</sup> Homer uniquely insists on an alternative genealogy—and narrates a matrilineal succession—to make the chronology work: any son of Europe would be several generations too early to join Priam's allies.<sup>21</sup>

### *Pharai*

In Messenia, post-liberation myth-making also exploited the connective capacity of matriline. Pausanias' fourth book, our best evidence for this tradition, shows how

<sup>17</sup> R.L. Fowler, 'Genealogical thinking: Hesiod's *Catalogue*, and the creation of the Hellenes', *PCPS* 44 (1998), 1–19, at 6 describes the *Catalogue's* structures as inherently patriarchal: 'the women are the glue, and the men are the building blocks.' Similar in approach is K. Ormand, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women and Archaic Greece* (New York, 2014). For objections to Fowler's categorization, and arguments for female significance in the *Catalogue*, see L.E. Doherty, 'Putting the women back into the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*', in V. Zajko and M. Leonard (edd.), *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (Oxford, 2006), 297–326; I. Kyriakou, 'Female ancestors in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*', in C. Tsagalis (ed.), *Poetry in Fragments: Studies on the Hesiodic Corpus and its Afterlife* (Berlin and Boston, 2017), 135–61; I. Kyriakou, *Généalogies épiques: Les fonctions de la parenté et les femmes ancêtres dans la poésie épique grecque archaïque* (Berlin and Boston, 2020), especially 170–203.

<sup>18</sup> Few women in the *Catalogue* confer regnal power. Of the 165 women that MANTO captures in *Catalogue* fragments, eighteen feature also in our matriline dataset. Judging by the surviving fragments, seven played roles in successions: Philonoe (fr. 69 Most = fr. 43a M–W), Tyro (fr. 27 = 30, fr. 35 = 37), Europe (fr. 89 = 140), Helen (fr. 154 = 196–200), Auge (fr. 117 = 165), Lysippe and Iphianassa (fr. 35 = 37). Hippodameia, Klytaimnestra, Danae, Io and Hypermnestra may also have played matrilineal roles. With Alcmene, Kreousa, Gorge and Hermione we cannot be sure either way. Kallisto could not have secured an Arcadian kingdom for her son since in fr. 115 (not securely attributable to the *Catalogue*) her father is explicitly not Lykaon; similarly, Antiope was probably not a daughter of Nykteus (see M.L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women: Its Nature, Structure, and Origins* [Oxford, 1985], 101–2).

<sup>19</sup> e.g. Dowden (n. 1), 152–3 opens his discussion of matriline with Sarpedon and notes ancient puzzlement over his succession.

<sup>20</sup> e.g. Hes. fr. 89–91 Most = 140–2 M–W; Bacchyl. fr. 10 Snell–Maehler; Aesch. fr. 99 *TrGF*; Hellanikos fr. 94 Fowler; [Eur.] *Rhes.* 29; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.1.1.

<sup>21</sup> Other solutions were possible: Hesiod has an extra-ordinarily long-lived Sarpedon (fr. 90 Most = fr. 141 M–W); Diodoros has two homonyms, a Cretan and his descendant (5.79.3).

transformative the minimal invention or manipulation of heroines could be in projecting a past that maximized the region's claims to panhellenic prestige. So at Pharai, Pausanias' reported lineage suggests that a patriline described at *Il.* 5.541–60, Alpheios—Ortilochos—Diokles—Ortilochos and Krethon, has been expanded through the addition of two otherwise-unrecorded women, Telegone and Antikleia (4.30.2–3, Fig. 1):

They say that the founder Pharis was the son of Hermes and Phylodameia, daughter of Danaos. They say that he had no sons, just a daughter, Telegone. Homer gives the descendants of Telegone in the *Iliad*: Krethon and Ortilochos were the twin sons of Diokles; Diokles himself was son of Ortilochos, son of Alpheios. But he does not actually mention Telegone, who, in the Messenian account, bore Ortilochos to Alpheios.

At Pharai I heard some further information: as well as his twin sons, Diokles had a daughter, Antikleia, and her sons were Nicomachos and Gorgasos. Their father was Machaon, son of Asclepios.

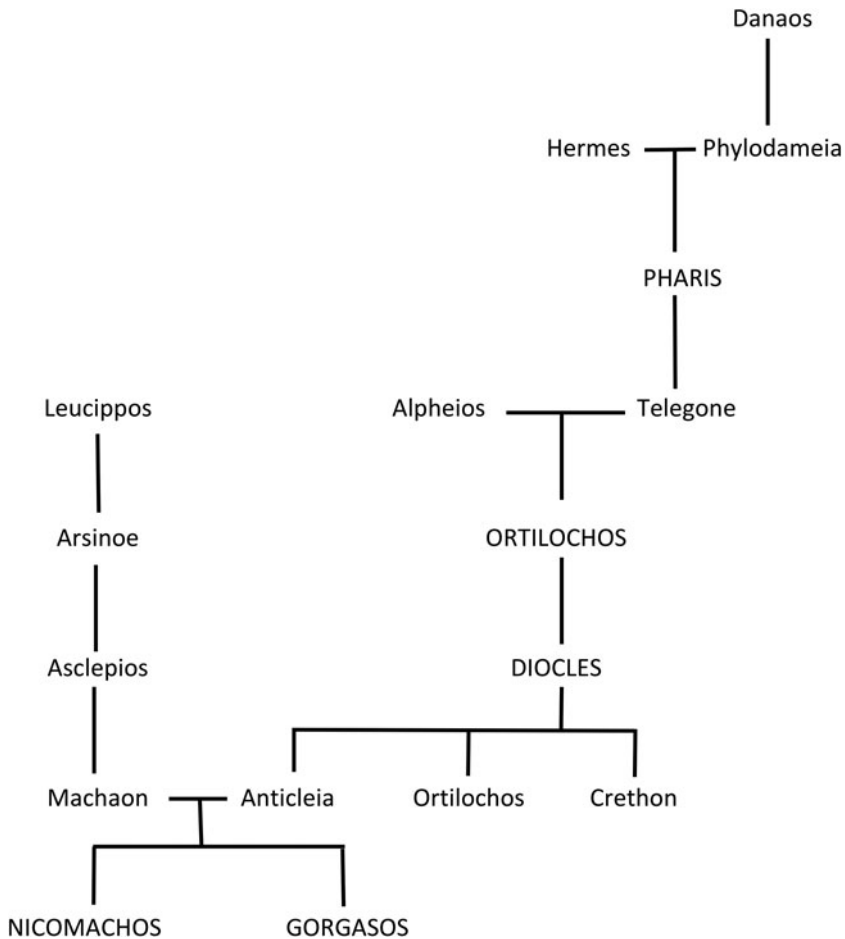


FIG. 1: Genealogy associated with Pharai according to Pausanias 4.30.2–3, 4.31.12. Not all relationships shown. Names in upper case are rulers at Pharai.

Telgone serves to connect the eponymous founder (an Argive on his mother's side) to Homer's genealogy. Antikleia keeps that lineage going after her brothers die at Troy by giving birth to the next generation of rulers.<sup>22</sup> As Machaon's wife, Antikleia is also the link by which the Homeric nexus might be made to intersect with the Hesiodic tradition of a Messenian Asklepios. That tradition also turned on an obscure woman. Hesiod had identified Asklepios' mother not as the Thessalian Koronis, but as Arsinoe, a third daughter of the Messenian Leukippos (fr. 53 Most = fr. 50 M–W).<sup>23</sup>

### *Salamis*

At Salamis matrilineal nodes smooth out a different kind of disjunction. Telamon was poorly integrated into the myth-history of the island. Panhellenic tradition offered two fixed geo-genealogical data-points: Telamon was son of the Aiginetan Aiakos, and he was father of the Salaminian Aias. He was thus usually said to have been exiled from Aigina and to have migrated to Salamis. Explanations for how he became king there avoid any suggestion of conflict. Apollodoros has king Kychreus, dying without sons of his own, choose Telamon as his successor (3.12.7). Diodoros uses the 'succession by son-in-law' motif: Telamon comes to Salamis, marries Kychreus' daughter Glauke, and succeeds her father (4.72.7). Pherekydes, by contrast, made Telamon the son of Glauke and Aktaios, and thus successor to his grandfather (fr. 60 Fowler). All three stories insist on the legitimacy of Telamon's rule by placing its origins within an established patriline. What distinguishes Diodoros' matrilineal mechanism from Pherekydes' is not primarily the genealogical adjustment. After all, 'Glauke' is merely a name; she is no more fully realized as mother of Telamon than she was as his wife. Rather, the new genealogy revises Telamon's geographical affiliations. Sons-in-law can be outsiders through and through. Grandsons, by contrast, share a connection with the former king from birth. (They may, then, be conceived of as successors from within the community). Pherekydes' naming of the otherwise-unknown 'Aktaios' as Telemon's father makes him an Athenian, or at least from Attica. He is shifting Salamis' conceptual networks and suggesting through these two mythical migrations (Glauke's marriage into Athens; Telamon's return to Salamis) a surprisingly harmonious kinship between the city and island.<sup>24</sup>

### *Megara*

The Messenians and Salaminians are both exploiting the potential of characterless matrilineal lines to fashion advantageous connections with mechanical efficiency. The Megarians likewise used such techniques to manufacture a harmonious past for their city. As with the Messenian material, our best evidence for this comes from Pausanias. But by contrast with his acceptance of Messenian claims in book four, at Megara Pausanias calls out the artificiality of the construct. The line of succession in question begins when Pandion, exiled from Athens, comes to rule Megara after marrying

<sup>22</sup> In 4.30.2–3 Nicomachos and Gorgasos succeed their grandfather; there is no role there for Machaon. Elsewhere Pausanias suggests Machaon ruled somewhere in Messenia (4.3.2); he was particularly associated with Gerenia (e.g. 3.26.9).

<sup>23</sup> See G. Hawes, *Pausanias in the World of Greek Myth* (Oxford, 2021), 92–8, 109–14, 188–201.

<sup>24</sup> G.L. Huxley, 'The date of Pherekydes of Athens', *GRBS* 14 (1973), 137–43, at 138–9, dates fr. 60 to 481–c. 460, a period of improved relations between Salamis and Athens.



the daughter of the king there and is succeeded by his son, Nisos.<sup>25</sup> Pausanias reports that the Megarians say that Nisos, dying without heirs, was succeeded by Megareus, his son-in-law from Onchestos, and that after both of Megareus' sons were killed, Alkathoos, a son of Pelops, succeeded in turn, having defeated the Kithaironian lion and married Megareus' daughter (1.39.6, 1.41.3–5, see Fig. 2). These latter two successions display conventional tropes: a wandering hero, a king without heirs, and a bride given as reward. Their tidiness rouses Pausanias' suspicions. In fact, as he points out, Megara was destroyed by Minos at this time and so, Pausanias declares, Megareus was not (merely?) a son-in-law, but Nisos' Boiotian ally; and Alkathoos came from Elis to rebuild the city after Minos had left:

The Megarians know the truth but conceal it, not wanting to believe that they had been conquered in the time of Nisos, saying instead that Megareus succeeded Nisos as a son-in-law, and that Alkathoos succeeded Megareus in the same way (1.41.5).

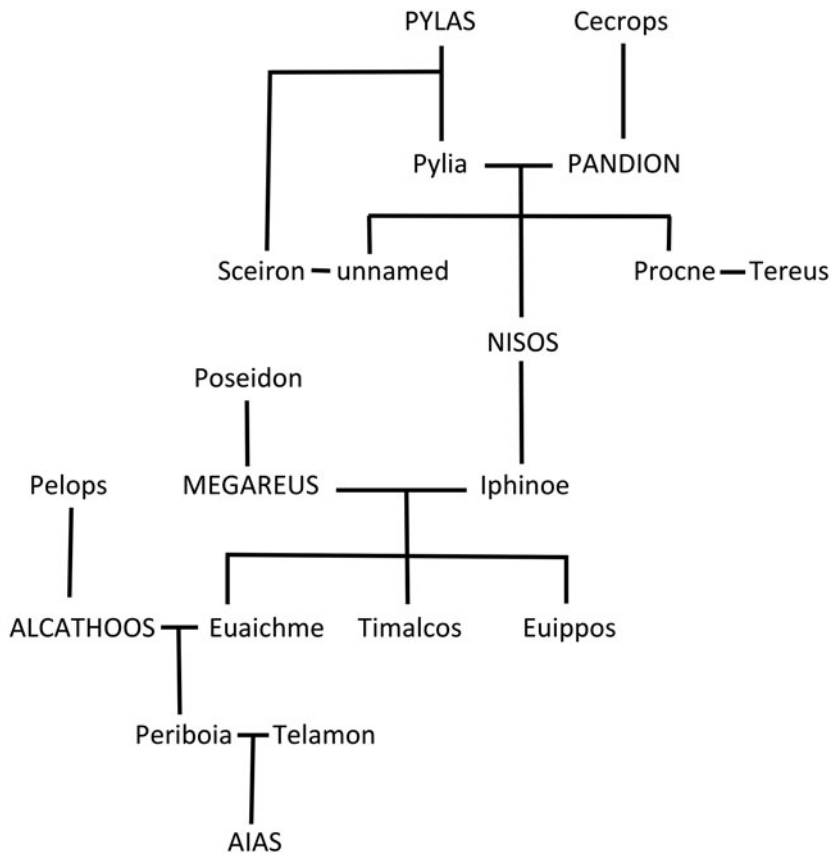


FIG. 2: Genealogy associated with Megara according to Pausanias 1.39.4–6, 1.41.3–4, 1.41.8–9, 1.42.4. Not all relationships shown. Names in upper case are rulers at Megara.

<sup>25</sup> Pausanias uniquely records two further matrilineal claimants in Megara: Tereus, son-in-law of Pandion, whose kingdom within Megara probably explained his tomb there (1.41.8–9); and Aias, who Pausanias hypothesizes succeeded his maternal grandfather Alkathoos since there is a temple to Athena Aiantes at Megara (1.42.4).

In this context, then, matriliney conveniently motivates legitimate lines of succession while obscuring the civic humiliations of a disconnected king list. It integrates outsiders into the *polis*' history so that their primary roles are as sons-in-law and rulers. The two women who in effect transform their husbands into Megarian kings—Iphinoe, daughter of Nisos, and Euaichme, daughter of Megareus—are named (uniquely) by Pausanias, but remain, as so many other women in these traditions, nothing more than names.

### LOCAL PREFERENCES

Pausanias' criticism of Megarian myth-making reveals the civic advantages of a thoughtfully-crafted narrative of regnal descent. Matriliney allowed the Megarians to emphasize continuity through two generations of external disturbance. It allowed the Messenians to shore up trans-regional esteem by fully exploiting the prestige of archaic epic. Matriliney can bolster social cohesion, by allowing genealogies to expand 'horizontally' as in Messenia. It can also create temporal cohesion, by linking generations together 'vertically' as at Megara. We turn now to two further—contrastive—examples of matrilineal succession and its avoidance in civic myth-making. Argos embraced the 'horizontal' affordances of matriliney in its metanarrative of heroic collaboration. Yet in Athens' traditions of its early kings' 'vertical' matrilineal calculations are so rare as to constitute a 'road not taken'. There, the civic sense of self rested not on tying together comprehensive narratives or strong dynastic families, but on tying the *polis* to its territory, and for this matriliney had little to offer.

#### *Argos*

Argive myth-making is remarkable in that it imagines that, in the generations of the Seven and their sons, the city was full of heroes co-existing without rivalry or hostility. Royal women served as marriageable nodes, connecting Argive heroes ever more tightly to one another, and quickly integrating non-Argives. We will see below that an exceptional commitment to matrilineal calculations effectively blurred distinctions between insiders and outsiders in these generations. Such connectivity was possible because Argive genealogies were remarkably segmented: whereas many Greek cities narrated their pasts through linear family trees with few 'branches', the genealogical traditions of Argos feature three intertwined families with several potential successors in each generation.<sup>26</sup>

Argos' segmentation has its origins in Proitos' tripartite devolution of his kingdom on his son Megapenthes, and Melampous and Bias, at least one of whom is his son-in-law.<sup>27</sup> This pair are clearly outsiders: they are Thessalian Aiolidai born at Pylos to Amythaon, Neleus' half-brother; in the earliest traditions Bias's wife is Pero, daughter of Neleus (e.g. *Od.* 15.222–64; Hes. fr. 35 Most = fr. 37 M–W). They win

<sup>26</sup> For genealogical segmentation, see Fowler (n. 17), 3–4.

<sup>27</sup> The boundaries of Argive territories in myth are notably inexact and inconsistent: P. Wathelet, 'Argos et l'Argolide dans l'épopée; spécialement dans le Catalogue des Vaisseaux', in M. Piérart (ed.), *Polydipsion Argos: Argos de la fin des palais mycéniens à la constitution de l'état classique* (Paris, 1992), 99–116. Further matrilineal claimants at Argos appear amongst Danaos' heirs. He is always succeeded by Lynkeus, the only surviving Aigyptid, but Pausanias, explaining the Achaian–Danaan fusion, says two other sons-in-law, Achaios' sons Architeles and Archandros, also ruled (7.1.6–7). See J.M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1997), 72–3, who describes Pausanias' assemblage as a 'clumsy attempt at reconciling the two genealogies' (p. 83).

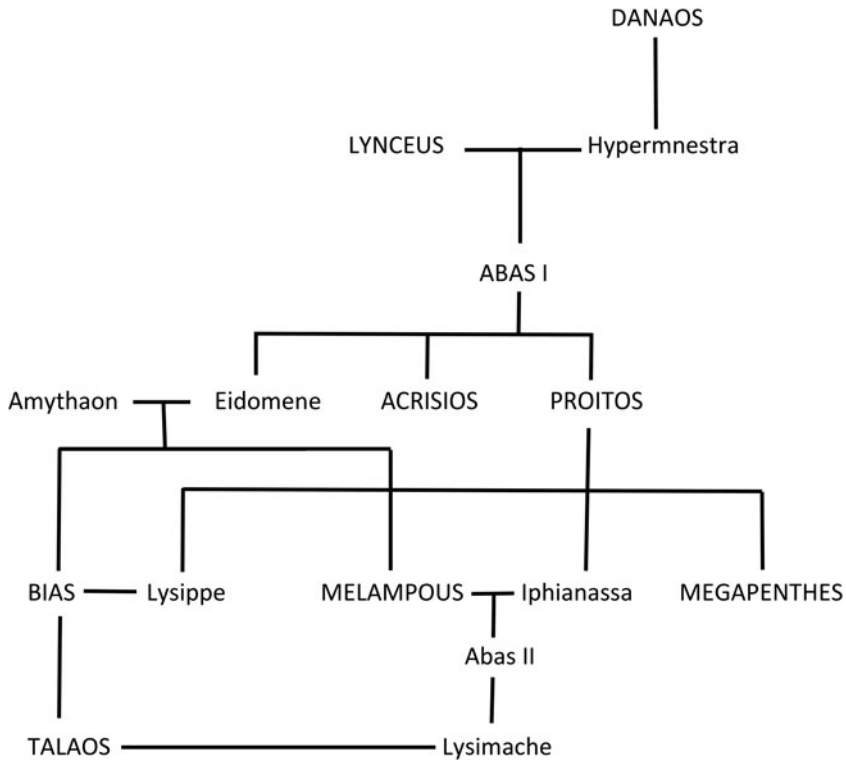


FIG. 3: Genealogy associated with Argos according to Apollodoros *Bibl.* 1.9.11–13, 2.2.1–2. Apollodoros does not specify which of the Proitids Bias and Melampous married; this arrangement follows Pherek. fr. 114 Fowler. Not all relationships shown. Names in upper case are rulers at Argos.

parts of Proitos' kingdom for themselves after Melampous heals his daughters.<sup>28</sup> But a set of traditions in Apollodoros tempers this pattern by identifying three matrilineal lines that tie them into the Argive ambit from the beginning (see Fig. 3). He alone names their mother as Eidomene, daughter of Abas I, so making them nephews to Proitos. He says that Bias too married a daughter of Proitos (and so implicitly jettisons Pero). And he has Bias' son Talaos marry a daughter of Abas II, and so makes the lineages converge even at the first (or second) generation.<sup>29</sup> Although these genealogies are unique—and contradicted elsewhere in the *Bibliotheca*<sup>30</sup>—the very fact that they do

<sup>28</sup> Parts of the story of the brothers' succession are told at Hom. *Od.* 15.225–40; Hes. fr. 35 Most = fr. 37 M–W; Hdt. 9.34; Diod. Sic. 4.68.4; Paus. 2.18.4.

<sup>29</sup> Apollodoros alone identifies Talaos' wife as a Melampodid; elsewhere she is daughter of Kerkyon, and so perhaps Eleusinian (Σ Eur. *Phoen.* 150, citing Antimachos of Colophon); or daughter of Polybos, and so Sikyonian (Paus. 2.6.6). Abas II appears only in Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.13 and Paus. 1.43.5 and serves principally genealogical ends: he is also grandfather of the Polyidos who purifies Alkathoos at Megara.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Apollodoros mentions Amythaon's wife (i.e. the mother of Melampous and Bias) twice: first as daughter of Pheres (and thus niece of Amythaon, i.e. a Pylian, 1.9.11) and later as daughter of Abas I (and thus sister to Proitos, i.e. an Argive, 2.2.2). At 1.9.12–13, Pero is (as conventionally) wife of Bias and mother of Talaos.

exist is striking in that they parallel the great care taken in the generations of the Seven and the Epigonoï to deploy matrilineal as connective nodes.

The story of the Seven imagines an extraordinarily full heroic community at Argos (see Fig. 4). The leaders share a joint commitment to Argive success without losing their individual qualities. This unique balance is achievable in genealogical terms through the radical deployment of uxori-locality and endogamy possible in a storyworld where several generations of segmentation can create a network of civic elites with close—yet largely non-hierarchical—relationships. Of the nine heroes commonly counted amongst the ‘Seven’, five are always Argive by birth.<sup>31</sup> Adrastos, Hippomedon and Mekisteus are patrilineal descendants of Bias; Amphiaraios and Eteoklos are patrilineal descendants of Melampous and Megapenthes respectively.<sup>32</sup> Two of the Seven are sometimes said to be Argive. Parthenopaios is sometimes the Arcadian son of Atalanta; and sometimes another son of Talaos.<sup>33</sup> Capaneus is usually the Olenian son of Hipponoos. Yet Pausanias says he is paired with Eteoklos in a statue group dedicated by the Argives at Delphi because they were both Proitids (i.e. descendants of Megapenthes, 10.10.3).<sup>34</sup> The final pair, Polyneikes and Tydeus, are always non-Argives, but efficiently incorporated into the nexus when Adrastos marries two of his daughters to them on their arrival in the city. This would appear to set up a ‘succession by son(s)-in-law’ trope, and yet neither goes on to rule at Argos. Marriage, rather, is the mechanism for a collaborative expedition. All women identified as wives of the Seven belong to one of the three Argive lineages. Thus if we conflate the various traditions, Adrastos could be said to be brother of three attackers (Hippomedon, Parthopaios, Mekisteus), brother-in-law to one (Amphiaraios), father-in-law to two (Polyneikes, Tydeus) and maternal uncle to two (Capaneus, Hippomedon). In addition, Capaneus is uncle to Tydeus via his sister Periboia (Hes. fr. 84 Most = fr. 12 M–W) and brother-in-law to Eteoklos via his wife Euadne (e.g. Eur. *Supp.* 980–1008).

The segmentation of Argos’ genealogical past brings with it a distinctive vision of heroic leadership. Despite the glut of potential claimants for power, and the lack of clarity over how the three ruling families divided power, few stories narrate conflict over succession. The most notable rift, between Adrastos and Amphiaraios, is resolved by Amphiaraios’ marriage to Adrastos’ sister Eriphyle, that is, by the fashioning of a matrilineal tie (Pind. *Nem.* 9.13–17). Rule over Argos itself is not the prize; at least in the generations of the Seven and the Epigonoï, the rivalry is focussed outwards, towards Thebes. This metanarrative of intra-civic co-operation was not entirely Argos’ to control. The Seven seem originally a Theban creation, and Argive kings feature prominently in Homer. So myth-making at Argos wove ‘facts’ inherited from the

<sup>31</sup> For various ancient lists of the Seven, see E. Cingano, ‘I nomi dei Sette a Tebe e degli epigoni nella tradizione epica, tragica e iconografica’, in A. Aloni, E. Berardi, G. Besso and S. Cecchin (edd.), *I Sette a Tebe. Dal mito alla letteratura* (Bologna, 2002), 27–62; D.W. Berman, *Myth and Culture in Aeschylus’ Seven against Thebes* (Rome, 2007); G. Hawes, ‘Stones, names, stories, and bodies: Pausanias before the gates of seven-gated Thebes’, in J. McInerney and I. Sluiter (edd.), *Valuing Landscape in Classical Antiquity: Natural Environment and Cultural Imagination* (Leiden, 2016), 431–57. We will not discuss here minor figures like Alitherses (Paus. 10.10.3).

<sup>32</sup> The only uncertainty lies in Hippomedon’s parentage. Always a Biantid, he is variously Talaos’ son, paternal grandson (Apollod. 3.6.3) or maternal grandson (Paus. 10.10.3; Hyg. *Fab.* 70).

<sup>33</sup> This ‘alternative’ tradition appears surprisingly early: Gantz (n. 16), 336–7.

<sup>34</sup> The referent is presumably traditions that made Hipponoos son of Megapenthes’ grandson Anaxagoras (ΣBt Hom. *Il.* 2.564; Σ Eur. *Phoen.* 180) and/or Iphis’ daughter Laodice (Σ Eur. *Phoen.* 189). It is perhaps these close ties of birth and marriage that cause Pausanias to call Capaneus the *adelphos* of Iphis (2.18.5); no surviving tradition makes Capaneus another son of Alector.

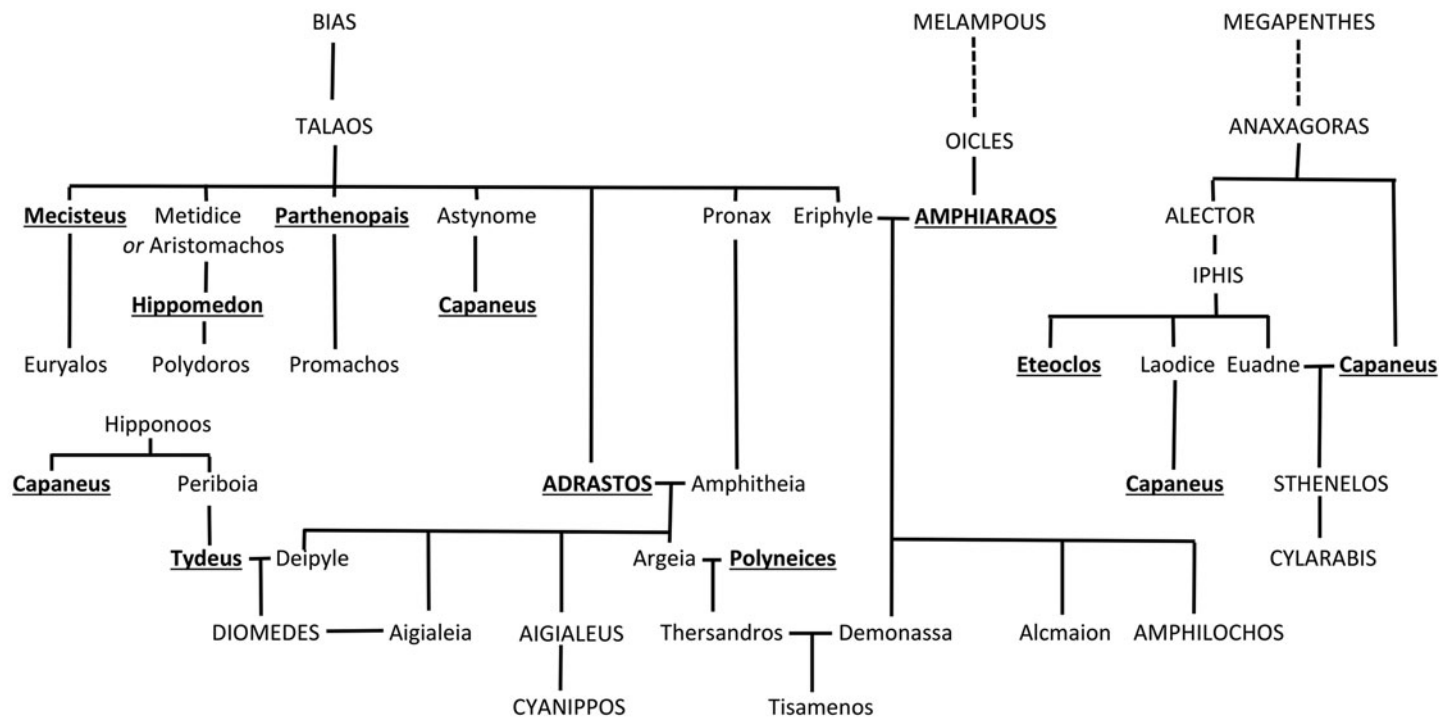


FIG. 4: Genealogical connections of the Seven at Argos. A synthetic rendering of the traditions discussed in the article. Not all alternatives for parentage of Aigialeia, Cyanippos and Hippomedon shown. Capaneus appears four times to capture alternative genealogies. Not all relationships shown. Names in upper case are rulers at Argos; underlined names are members of the Seven. Dotted lines represent patrilineal lines greater than one generation.

Theban and Trojan cycles into their own Proitid inheritance.<sup>35</sup> Amongst the resulting idiosyncrasies was the Homeric tradition of Diomedes being king at Argos (*Il.* 23.470–2).<sup>36</sup> His over-engineered claim (he is both maternal grandson and son-in-law to Adrastos since his mother and wife are sisters) show indeed his ill fit in this role. When he too returns from Troy to discover his wife's adultery, the consequences are personal, not political: he migrates to Italy leaving no descendants and no hint of a succession crisis in a city with three patrilineal rulers besides him. The extreme endogamy in the generation of the Seven meant that all who rule at Argos in Diomedes' generation have matrilineal ties to a former king alongside (in most cases) their patrilineal affiliations. Diomedes has a matrilineal claim twice over. Sthenelos is both paternal nephew and maternal grandson to Iphis; Amphilochos is paternal grandson of Oikles and maternal grandson of Talaos; Aigialeus is paternal grandson and maternal great-grandson of Talaos. The pattern transfers to newly-conquered Thebes. Installed as king there is Polyneikes' son Thersandros, inheritor of both a Kadmeian patriline and a Biantid matriline and married to Demonassa, daughter of Eriphyle and Amphiaros (Paus. 9.5.15). This Argive generation illustrates Fowler's observation that maternal and paternal filiations inevitably become conflated without strict exogamy.<sup>37</sup>

### *Athens*

Athenian stories of the earliest generations of kings sit at the other end of this spectrum in that opportunities to link together successive generations are repeatedly eschewed. Following Erichthonios, the Attic kings cleave principally to a single patriline; but he himself came at the end of a series of rulers—Aktaios, Kekrops, Kranaos, and Amphiktyon—unrelated to one another.<sup>38</sup> Aktaios is a shadowy figure; Philochoros of Athens denied he existed (*FGrHist* 328 F 92). The other four have such similar narrative traditions that they seem almost calques of each other, not least in their shared stories of autochthonous origins.<sup>39</sup> Autochthonous kings cannot succeed their fathers, but dynastic cohesion might none the less be achieved by having them marry the daughters of former kings. Yet rarely do our sources employ such matrilineal connections to motivate regnal succession in early Athens (see Fig. 5). Of the few exceptions, Pausanias says that Kekrops became king because he married Aktaios' daughter (1.2.6) and that Amphiktyon violently deposed Kranaos, even though he was his son-in-law (*ibid.*);<sup>40</sup> and Apollodoros suggests a tenuous matriline between Amphiktyon and Erichthonios, who likewise deposes him in a coup, when he reports the alternative tradition that Erichthonios was born to Kranaos' daughter Atthis

<sup>35</sup> For this grafting of traditions, see E. Cingano, 'Tracing Mantic genealogies in Homer and in the Hesiodic corpus (fr. 25, 37, 136 M–W): Polyidus and his family', in M. Alexandrou, C. Carey, and G.B. D'Alessio (edd.), *Song Regained* (Berlin and Boston, 2022), 271–304, especially 275–9.

<sup>36</sup> Pausanias explains this by saying that he was steward for the Biantid Kyanippos at the time when the co-rulers were the Melampodid Amphilochos and the Proitid Sthenelos (2.30.10).

<sup>37</sup> Fowler (n. 17), 4. Matrilineal disappear in the following generation: no mothers are identified for the Argive kings Kylarabis and Kyanippos.

<sup>38</sup> In early accounts Erichthonios succeeds Kekrops. Kranaos and Amphiktyon are inserted later. Full lists: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.1, 3.14.6; Kastor of Rhodes, *FGrHist* 250 F 4; Paus. 1.2.6; *Marmor Parium*, *FGrHist* 239 F a1–9. See R.L. Fowler, *Early Greek Mythography* (Oxford, 2013), 2.449–51.

<sup>39</sup> Traditions of autochthony: Kekrops (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.1, Hyg. *Fab.* 48), Kranaos (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.5; Kastor of Rhodes, *FGrHist* 250 F4), Amphiktyon (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.6), Erichthonios (*Il.* 2.546–549; *Danais* fr. 2 West; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.6). See also L. Edmonds, 'Athenian autochthonous kings and their families: the shared patterns of their myths', *Arethusa* 56 (2023), 1–25.

<sup>40</sup> Kastor of Rhodes (*FGrHist* 250 F4) also describes Amphiktyon as son-in-law of Kranaos, but does not connect this to the succession.

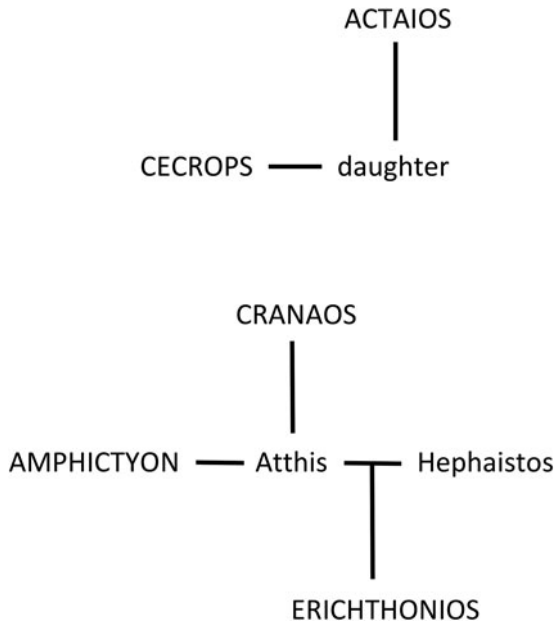


FIG. 5: Matrilineal connections in early Athenian myth, according to Pausanias 1.2.6 and Apollodoros *Bibl.* 3.14.6. Not all relationships shown. Names in upper case are rulers at Athens.

(3.14.6). These links awkwardly insert relationships usually suggestive of familial loyalty into a narrative tradition notably tolerant of disjunction and discord. Hostility between kings and their matrilineal successors is vanishingly rare in our dataset. It is inherent to the drama of the ‘succession via widow’ modality, but elsewhere the best examples appear in narratives which highlight antagonism between a king and his potential son-in-law from the beginning. So Pelops’ defeat of Oinomaos usually results also in Oinomaos’ death, a threat that had hung over unsuccessful suitors for Hippodameia.<sup>41</sup> And Lynkeus sometimes kills Danaos, who was not merely his father-in-law but the architect of his brothers’ deaths.<sup>42</sup> In both narratives conflict (rather than succession) is the dominant theme and the final fate of the former king is subsidiary to his defeat. All other kings who kill their predecessors in our dataset do so accidentally.<sup>43</sup> But more commonly, sons-in-law succeed without obstacles; only one succeeding son-in-law in our dataset, Deiphontes, faces opposition from patrilineal claimants.

<sup>41</sup> Oinomaos’s killer is either Myrtilos following instructions from Hippodameia (Pherek. fr. 37a Fowler) or Pelops (Hyg. *Fab.* 84), or Pelops himself (Apollod. *Epit.* 2.7). Oinomaos dies by suicide in Diod. 4.73.5–6 and is deposed by Pelops in Paus. 5.1.6, 8.14.1.

<sup>42</sup> Lynkeus’ killing of Danaos is implied in ΣD Hom. *Il.* 1.42; in Σ Eur. *Hec.* 886 he kills both Danaos and forty-nine of his daughters. Revenge is suggested in Hes. fr. 77 Most = fr. 129 M–W, and mutual animosity in Archilochos fr. 305 W<sup>2</sup>. Of another possible instance, Amphitryon kills his father-in-law Elektryon in [Hes.] *Sc.* 82, but no succession is mentioned (cf. e.g. Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.6, where Amphitryon is only indirectly responsible for Elektryon’s death). For the downplaying of hostility in post-Hesiodic accounts, see Ormand (n. 17), 158–62.

<sup>43</sup> e.g. Perseus kills Akrisios with a discus; Amphitryon kills Elektryon with his club; Peleus kills Eurytion while hunting; Oidipous kills Laios unaware of his identity.

So the 'Athenian' examples outlined above are outliers both because they narrate a hostile coup by a matrilineal heir, and because they contain no narrative mechanism to explain the antagonism.

Athens' myth-history did not lack royal daughters, and matrilineal ties were exploited elsewhere in Athenian traditions.<sup>44</sup> That they were not used to connect the earliest kings points to the ideological focus of these traditions. Aktaios, Kekrops, Kranaos and Amphiktyon are independent emblems of Athens; all born from Attic soil, they were namesakes of both the people as a collective and of the city itself.<sup>45</sup> Mythographers could join them together into a king list and suggest certain points of social interconnectivity, but they never lost their principal function as aetiological ciphers, eponyms of places, festivals, and tribes; in short, they were 'mythical representations of the whole Athenian people in their claim to autochthony'.<sup>46</sup> Matrilineal connectivity has little to offer in this context.

### IDEOLOGICAL ADVANTAGES

Narrative tropes are the recognizable building-blocks of myth. At once familiar and malleable, they carry with them conceptual potentialities which allow certain ideological projections, while stifling others. So the distinct preference for autochthones in early Athenian myth fosters an ideal of civic cohesion rooted in citizens' connections to the land while stifling the celebration of dominant elite patrilineal lines.<sup>47</sup> We have already encountered some of the strategic advantages of matrilineal descent. Calculating descent through wives as well as fathers means outsiders can be efficiently integrated, established traditions can be retroactively knitted together, and civic metanarratives of stability and co-operation can be promoted. A matrilineal successor lacks, *prima facie*, the normal legitimacy of a patrilineal heir. And yet, a matrilineal claimant need not be thought of as a necessarily inferior choice. Matrilineal claims have their own ideological advantages.

Pausanias clearly expresses this logic when calculating why Argos, Phoroneus' maternal grandson, took precedence over Phoroneus' son Europs (2.34.4–5):

Europs was certainly the son of Phoroneus, although Herophanes of Troizen said he was an illegitimate one; for surely rule over the Argives would not have fallen to Argos, the son of Niobe and maternal grandson of Phoroneus, had a legitimate son of Phoroneus been available at the time. But I think that even if there were a legitimate son—Europs—around when Phoroneus died, he would have been no match for Niobe's child. For he—Argos—was thought to be a son of Zeus.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. Athens claimed Megara via Pandion's succession as son-in-law there (Strabo 9.1.6; Paus. 1.39.4). The Thracian Eumolpos who attacks Eleusis is maternal grandson of Oreithyia. The Thessalian Xouthos who adjudicates the succession after Erechtheus' death (Paus. 7.1.2) and founds the Attic Tetrapolis (Strabo 8.7.1) marries a daughter of Erechtheus; his son Ion goes on to rule Attica (8.7.1). The founders of the twelve Ionian cities are Neleids by patrilineal descent, but have an Athenian mother (Paus. 7.2.1–4).

<sup>45</sup> Kekropidai: Thuk. 2.15.1; Kranai: Thuk. 2.15.1, Aesch. *Eum.* 1011; Amphiktyones: *Marmor Parium*, *FGrHist* 239 F a5; Erechtheidai: Pind. *Isthm.* 2.19, Eur. *Suppl.* 681, Eur. *Hipp.* 151.

<sup>46</sup> R. Parker, 'Myths of early Athens', in J.N. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1987), 187–214, at 194–5.

<sup>47</sup> For autochthony in fifth-century Athenian rhetoric promoting an egalitarian identity, see Hall (n. 27), 51–6.



Pausanias' reckoning exploits the bilateral pragmatism inherent to mythic genealogy. In a context where the son of a god will win out over the son of a king, matriline allows for theogeniture while producing claimants who also inherit unimpeachable local legitimacy from their maternal grandfathers. In Pausanias' calculations, the matriline itself is quite insignificant. Argos' superiority derives from his father and grandfather; his mother Niobe is merely a necessary node. By giving birth to a son who rules his ancestral kingdom as child of a god, she is the means by which two cherished claims to power, mutually exclusionary in a strictly patrilineal system, can be combined in a single individual. These calculations lay bare the centrality of patrilineal inheritances even if descent is ostensibly being traced through matrilines. Heroes who succeed maternal grandfathers typically have fathers who are more impressive than the former king. For instance, fifteen of the twenty-seven examples in our dataset are sons of Olympian gods.<sup>48</sup> The extraordinarily long Sikyonian king list is a neatly-compiled patriline, broken only by the inclusion of matrilineal successors who are sons of Poseidon, Apollo, and Hermes (see Fig. 6).<sup>49</sup> The conceptual inheritances bestowed by such kings could be complemented by other kinds of geo-genealogical connections. The eponym Sikyon became the first true outsider to the royal line when he succeeded his father-in-law. Multiple traditions regarding his parentage gave Sikyon several different options for crafting its place in the Argolid. He tied the city either eastwards to Attica as a son or grandson of the Athenian king Erechtheus or as a son of the eponym Marathon; or westwards into the Peloponnese as yet another son of Pelops.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Succession by step-son*

Where succeeding grandsons afford divine honours to the city and succeeding sons-in-law offer prestigious geo-genealogical connections, our final matrilineal modality, 'succession

<sup>48</sup> Of the other twelve, Ortilochos' father is a river god, and Pentheus' an autochthon. The final ten are idiosyncratic. Telemon, and Bias and Melampous usually succeed as sons-in-law, not grandsons (see above). Nicomachos and Gorgasos were probably sons of a ruler elsewhere in the region (see above), as is Ion, whose father Xouthos founds the Attic Tetrapolis. Aias' rule at Megara rests on extremely tenuous evidence (see above). Adrastos' matrilineal claim to Sikyon exists to explain Homer's assertion that he ruled there (*Il.* 2.572). Sthenelos and Diomedes technically succeed their maternal grandfather Adrastos, yet both are also sons of non-Argive sons-in-law of Adrastos, so we might think of them as illustrating the 'succession by son-in-law' modality delayed by a generation (see above).

<sup>49</sup> These are: Peratos (Paus. 2.5.7); Koronos (2.5.8); and Polybos (2.6.6). Kastor of Rhodes' Sikyonian king list (*FGrHist* 250 F2) largely parallels Pausanias', but typically inserts intervening generations where Pausanias has grandsons succeed (see N. Nenci, 'The oldest on record: A study on the Sikyonian kings lists', *Hormos* 13 [2021], 173–250, especially 184–7).

<sup>50</sup> Paus. 2.6.5 gives all alternatives. Son of Erechtheus: Hesiod, fr. 170 Most = fr. 224 M–W. Grandson of Erechtheus: Asios fr. 11 West. Son of Marathon: Eumelos fr. 19 West. Son of Pelops: Ibykos fr. 308 Campbell. West (n. 18), 10: 'assertions about the mythical past expressed the political perceptions or aspirations of the present. For example, when the poet of the *Catalogue* makes Sikyon a son of Erechtheus (fr. 224), whereas Ibycus makes him a son of Pelops, it is not merely a difference over a detail of mythology: it is a question of whether the Sikyonians' closest ties are with Athens or with the Argolid'. Pelops was particularly valued as an ancestor. Despite Plutarch's general statement (*Thebes* 3.1), rulers are uncommon in the first generation of the Pelopids: our dataset includes only Sikyon and Alkathoos (at Megara). (Pelops' daughter Nikippe is however the mechanism by which Mycenae passes from the Perseid Eurysthenes to Atreus: see Hall [n. 27], 90). More common are Pelopid eponyms: A. Patay-Horváth, 'Descendants of Pelops in the fifth century BC', *Hermes* 149 (2021), 260–79, at 265 lists (for the mainland) Korinthos, Sikyon, Eleios, Epidauros, Letreus, Dysponteus, Kleonos, Kynosauros, and Troizen. The precarious fit of these heroes into local traditions has been noted by West (n. 18), 110 and Fowler (n. 38), 438; Patay-Horváth connects their invention to political alliances in the second half of the fifth century.

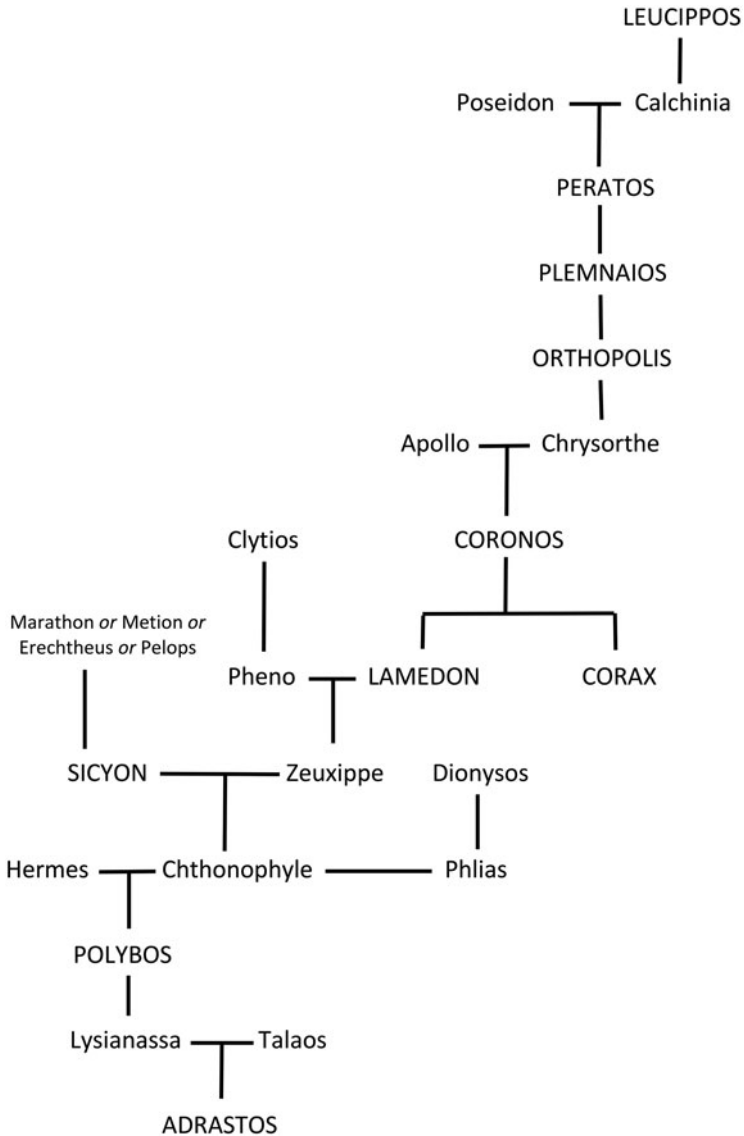


FIG. 6: Genealogy associated with Sicyon according to Pausanias 2.5.6–2.6.6. Not all relationships shown. Names in upper case are rulers at Sicyon.

by step-son' fuses these two kinds of affiliation in a single individual. The most prominent instance of a Greek hero who inherits his step-father's kingdom is Telephos, successor to Teuthras in Mysia. The *Catalogue* poet identifies him in three ways (fr. 117.8–9 Most = 165 M–W):

She [Auge] gave birth to him, descendant of Arkas, king of the Mysians,  
After she mingled in desire with Herakles' force.

Because she migrates from Arcadia to Mysia, Auge transfers to her son three distinct legacies from three separate ‘father figures’.<sup>51</sup> He is Arcadian because his mother was Arkas’ great-granddaughter; he is king of Mysia on account of Auge’s marriage to Teuthras, and he has the lustre of being counted among the sons of Herakles because Auge caught the hero’s eye.<sup>52</sup>

This trilateral inheritance operates in two further instances of the ‘succession by stepson’ modality even though the actual succession is marginal to the tradition.<sup>53</sup> That Epaphos and Minos ruled Egypt and Crete respectively was established mythological fact; how each came to rule was less clear. Both are sons of Zeus and a far-travelling woman: Io gives birth to Epaphos in Egypt at the end of her travails; Europe bears Minos in Crete after being taken there by the god. Apollodoros provides post-facto explanations of how each came to power by analogizing from Telephos’ example. He introduces an Egyptian king ‘Telegonos’, whom Io marries and Epaphos succeeds (*Bibl.* 2.1.4) and says Minos ruled in Crete on the death of Europe’s husband, Asterios (3.1.3; also *Diod. Sic.* 4.60.3).<sup>54</sup>

Apollodoros’ re-deployment of this trope is effective because Io and Europe are functionally identical to Auge. Each bears a son to a god, migrates to a new land, and then disappears from the tradition.<sup>55</sup> The voyaging and extraordinarily exogenous marriages are not marks of autonomy. Rather, these heroines exist within the patrilineal norms of geo-genealogical kinship: each affords her son a natal affiliation, a divine father and a new land to rule. These divine fathers lend authority and prestige—so particularly in the case of Minos (e.g. *Bacchyl. Dith.* 17)—and suggest a special relationship between the king’s city and that god. Natal affiliations point to the prominence of certain trans-local heroes in expressing civic kinship. These patronymics can again overshadow the heroes that bear them, producing kings like Sikyon who resemble their female relatives in being little more than nominal markers in a web of lineages.

## CONCLUSION

We have treated matrilineal calculations as a highly functional aspect of myhtelling. Matrilineal lines have narrative power: their capacity for civic disruption creates situations of extraordinary emotional intensity. Yet they also have strategic utility: they can resolve apparent disjunctures and craft advantageous histories. In short, matrilineality is not a single mythic phenomenon, but an overlapping series of storytelling motifs used to different effect in different contexts.

<sup>51</sup> For the conceptual advantages of heroes with both mortal and divine fathers, see C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Hylas, the Nymphs, Dionysos and Others* (Stockholm, 2005), 294.

<sup>52</sup> *Diod. Sic.* 4.33.12 also says that Telephos became Teuthras’ son-in-law, so crafting a second matrilineal connection. Strabo recounts the Euripidean mythos with some scepticism: ἄλλην δὲ τινα δεῖ γερονένοι συντυχίαν, δι’ ἣν ἡ τοῦ Ἀρκάδος θυγάτηρ τῷ Μυσῶν βασιλεῖ συνήλθε καὶ ὁ ἐξ αὐτῆς διεδέξατο τὴν ἐκείνου βασιλείαν (13.1.69).

<sup>53</sup> The fourth instance in our dataset concerns a variant for Pelias’ succession. Apollodoros says he succeeded his step-father Kretheus; elsewhere Pelias usurps the patrilineal heir (*Bibl.* 1.9.16; cf. e.g. *Pind. Pyth.* 4.109–10). The fifth instance, an alternative tradition related to Erichthonios, is far from clear-cut. Superficially similar is *Diod. Sic.* 4.67.4–6 and *Hyg. Fab.* 186e: Boiotos and Aiolos momentarily take by force their adoptive father’s kingdom of Metapontos, but their mother is not his wife.

<sup>54</sup> Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.1.2 gives Minos a second matrilineal claim as husband of Asterios’ daughter.

<sup>55</sup> See Ormand (n. 17), 41, on the *Catalogue*: ‘We should also note here the brutal force of this overriding and repetitive structure: once the woman in question has produced the hero in question, she is done; subsequent actions, and even subsequent births, are of no interest.’

Sensitivity to storytelling context here is critical; the basic data of myth is never fixed. To take up the example so often used to illustrate mythic matriliney, Menelaos' succession at Sparta on marrying Helen would in positivistic terms suggest that Tyndareos gives preference to his son-in-law over his sons Kastor and Polydeukes, who possess the added advantage of theogeniture. But this is to treat the Greek mythic storyworld as if it were the real world. In this storyworld, Tyndareos' sons are not victims of an apparent usurpation, and Menelaos is no usurper: that is not part of their stories. The Trojan cycle requires that Menelaos be a powerful king with an equally powerful brother, and tradition requires that Helen have the Dioskouroi for brothers. These 'facts' could in any case be flexible: on the one hand, Pausanias says Kastor and Polydeukes did rule Sparta for a time before Menelaos (3.1.5); and on the other, Agamemnon has stronger associations in Laconia than one would expect for a king of Mycenae, even one with a Spartan wife, and it is his son Orestes who succeeds Menelaos. The Greek mythic storyworld does include king lists—we have seen several in the course of this article—but not all traditions within it presuppose their linear logic.

We began by identifying specific genealogical relationships between kings and their successors, a necessary precondition for retrieving data from MANTO. What our analysis has shown is that these modalities have significance beyond providing machine-readable templates. They illustrate distinctive patterns within Greek myth as well. We have shown that, for all the eye-catching prominence of Telephos' succession at Mysia or Oidipous' at Thebes, instances of succession by step-son or via widow are in fact quite rare, yet rich in dramatic potential. Much more frequent are stories in which grandsons and sons-in-law inherit the kingdom; it is these modalities that are a basic component of civic traditions. So we saw at Pharai, Sikyon and Megara these modes of succession deployed such that their strategic implications could go unremarked: the reader, necessarily literate in Greek ideas of mythic kinship, would easily grasp the connections that they forged between cities, between lineages, and between seemingly unrelated traditions.

#### APPENDIX: INSTANCES OF MATRILINEAL SUCCESSION IN GREEK MYTH

Succession	Kingdom	Matrilineal connection	Modality <sup>56</sup>
Adrastos succeeds Polybos	Sikyon	Lysianassa, daughter of Polybos, mother of Adrastos	2
Aias succeeds Alkathoos	Megara	Periboia, daughter of Alkathoos, mother of Aias	2
Aigisthos succeeds Agamemnon	Mycenae	Klytaimnestra, 'widow' of Agamemnon, wife of Aigisthos	3
Alkathoos succeeds Megareus	Megara	Euaichme, daughter of Megareus, wife of Alkathoos	1

<sup>56</sup> Key: (1) succession by son-in-law; (2) succession by maternal grandson; (3) succession via widow; (4) succession by step-son.

Althepos succeeds Oros	Troizen	Leis, daughter of Oros, mother of Althepos	2
Amphiktyon succeeds Kranaos	Athens	Atthis, daughter of Kranaos, wife of Amphiktyon	1
Amphion & Zethos succeed Nykteus	Thebes	Antiope, daughter of Nykteus, mother of Amphion & Zethos	2
Amphitryon succeeds Elektryon	Mycenae	Alkmene, daughter of Elektryon, wife of Amphitryon	1
Andraimon succeeds Oineus	Kalydon	Gorge, daughter of Oineus, wife of Andraimon	1
Arkas succeeds Lykaon	Arcadia	Kallisto, daughter of Lykaon, mother of Arkas	2
Archandros succeeds Danaos	Argos	Skaia, daughter of Danaos, wife of Archandros	1
Architeles succeeds Danaos	Argos	Automate, daughter of Danaos, wife of Architeles	1
Argos succeeds Phoroneus	Argolid	Niobe, daughter of Phoroneus, mother of Argos	2
Bellerophon succeeds Iobates	Lycia	Philonoe, daughter of Iobates, wife of Bellerophon	1
Belos succeeds Epaphos	Egypt	Libya, daughter of Epaphos, mother of Belos	2
Bias & Melampous succeed Proitos <i>and</i> Abas I	Argos	Lysippe & Iphianassa, daughters of Proitos, wives of Bias & Melampous <i>and</i> Eidomene, daughter of Abas I, mother of Bias & Melampous	1 <i>and</i> 2
Boiotos succeeds Aiolos	Aiolia	Arne, daughter of Aiolos, mother of Boiotos	2
Bousiris succeeds Epaphos	Egypt	Lysianassa, daughter of Epaphos, mother of Bousiris	2
Dardanos succeeds Teukros	Troy	Bateia, daughter of Teukros, wife of Dardanos	1
Deiphontes succeeds Temenos	Argos or Epidaurus	Hymetho, daughter of Temenos, wife of Diphontes	1
Demophon succeeds unnamed king	Bisaltia	Phyllis, daughter of unnamed king, wife of Demophon	1
Diomedes succeeds Adrastos	Argos	Aigialeia, daughter of Adrastos, wife of Diomedes <i>and</i> Deipyle, daughter of Adrastos and mother of Diomedes	1 <i>and</i> 2

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*Continued*

Continued			
Succession	Kingdom	Matrilineal connection	Modality <sup>56</sup>
Eleios succeeds Endymion	Elis	Eurykyda, daughter of Endymion, mother of Eleios	2
Epaphos succeeds Telegonos	Egypt	Io, wife of Telegonos, mother of Epaphos	4
Erichthonios succeeds Kranaos <i>and</i> Amphiktyon	Athens	Atthis, daughter of Kranaos <i>and</i> wife of Amphiktyon, mother of Erichthonios	2 <i>and</i> 4
Gorgasos & Nicomachos succeed Diokles	Pharai	Antikleia, daughter of Diokles, mother of Gorgasos & Nicomachos	2
Ion succeeds Erechtheus	Athens	Kreousa I, daughter of Erechtheus, mother of Ion	2
Kekrops succeeds Aktaios	Athens	Agraulis, daughter of Aktaios, wife of Kekrops	1
Koronos succeeds Orthopolis	Sikyon	Chrysorthe, daughter of Orthopolis, mother of Koronos	2
Lakedaimon succeeds Eurotas	Sparta	Sparte, daughter of Eurotas, wife of Lakedaimon	1
Lynkeus succeeds Danaos	Argos	Hypermnestra, daughter of Danaos, wife of Lynkeus	1
Megareus succeeds Nisos	Megara	Iphinoe, daughter of Nisos, wife of Megareus	1
Menelaos succeeds Tyndareus	Sparta	Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, wife of Menelaos	1
Minos succeeds Asterios	Crete	Krete, daughter of Asterios, wife of Minos <i>and</i> Europe, wife of Asterios, mother of Minos	1 <i>and</i> 4
Oidipous succeeds Laios	Thebes	Iokaste, widow of Laios, wife of Oidipous	3
Orestes succeeds Menelaos	Sparta	Hermione, daughter of Menelaos, wife of Orestes	1
Ortilochos succeeds Pharis	Pharai	Telegone, daughter of Pharis, mother of Ortilochos	2
Pandion II succeeds Pylas	Megara	Pylia, daughter of Pylas, wife of Pandion II	1
Peleus succeeds Eurytion	Phthia	Antigone, daughter of Eurytion, wife of Peleus	1
Pelias succeeds Kretheus	Iolkos	Tyro, wife of Kretheus, mother of Pelias	4
Pelops succeeds Oinomaos	Pisa	Hippodameia, daughter of Oinomaos, wife of Pelops	1

Pentheus succeeds Kadmos	Thebes	Agaue, daughter of Kadmos, mother of Pentheus	2
Peratos succeeds Leukippos	Sikyon	Kalchinia, daughter of Leukippos, mother of Peratos	2
Perseus succeeds Akrisios	Argos	Danae, daughter of Akrisios, mother of Perseus	2
Polybos succeeds Sikyon	Sikyon	Chthonophyle, daughter of Sikyon, mother of Polybos	2
Polyphontes succeeds Kresphontes I	Messenia	Merope, widow of Kresphontes I, wife of Polyphontes	3
Sarpedon succeeds Bellerophon	Lycia	Laodameia, daughter of Bellerophon, mother of Sarpedon	2
Sikyon succeeds Lamedon	Sikyon	Zeuxippe, daughter of Lamedon, wife of Sikyon	1
Sthenelos succeeds Iphis	Argos	Euadne, daughter of Iphis, mother of Sthenelos	2
Telamon succeeds Kychreus	Salamis	Glauke, daughter of Kychreus, wife or mother of Telamon	1 <i>and</i> 2
Telephos succeeds Teuthras	Mysia	Auge, wife of Teuthras, mother of Telephos <i>and</i> Argiope, daughter of Teuthras, wife of Telephos	1 <i>and</i> 4
Tereus succeeds Pandion II	Pagai	Prokne, daughter of Pandion II, wife of Tereus	1
Teukros succeeds Kinyras	Cyprus	Eune, daughter of Kinyras, wife of Teukros	1
Tmolos succeeds Iardanes	Lydia	Omphale, daughter of Iardanes, wife of Tmolos	1

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