

Poetic Counting Techniques and Compositional Strands in the Catalogue of Ships

The Catalogue of Ships shows an aesthetic preference for two types of conventionally round numbers, multiples of ten and multiples of three. Close analysis of the Catalogue's use of such numbers allows us to detect different strands from which it has been woven together and stitched into the *Iliad*. Multiples of ten and three may of course be combined in complementary ways (which can be illustrated by examples from Homer and Hesiod). But their actual distribution in the Catalogue and the *Iliad* as a whole suggests that, while the Catalogue is a relatively unique piece—a conclusion scholars have already drawn for a variety of reasons—those portions associated with Heraclids and Dorians treat numbers in a way which can also be found in surrounding episodes in Book 2 and the larger poem.

By far the longest discrete list in the *Iliad* is the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* 2.484–760). (The total number of contingents [29], ships [1186], named leaders [460], and places of origin are reliably documented by Latacz 2003: 146, 238.) Since the Catalogue lists contingents that had set sail more than nine years earlier, naming leaders who have already died or did not make it to Troy, it appears to have been originally composed for a setting somewhat different than that of the *Iliad*. As its most obvious numerical pattern, the quantity of ships of individual contingents is expressed as a multiple of ten in three-fourths of the Catalogue's entries (22/29=76%). By far the most common number of ships is *forty* (10/29=35%). But that number is not mentioned elsewhere in the poem, marking the Catalogue as unusual. Moreover, in contrast with the Homeric texts in general, which show a distinct preference for three, the most commonly mentioned number, and for multiples of three, occurring twice as often as expected in a random distribution (Waltz 1933: 21, 24–38; Germain 1954: 8–10, 99–103), the Catalogue does not mention multiples of three with special frequency (35%). Thus, while the Catalogue

characteristically indicates that Crete has *one hundred* cities (*Il.* 2.649), the *Odyssey* refers instead to *ninety* (*Od.* 19.174).

Nevertheless, certain sections of the Catalogue of Ships treat multiples of three with particular interest. Smaller islands naturally have fewer ships, usually multiples of three: *twelve* (Salamis, Ithaca), *nine* (Rhodes), *three* (Syme), *thirty* (Cos) (Latacz 2003: ad *Il.* 2.654).

Moreover, multiples of three tend to appear in clusters, whether by subconscious suggestion or deliberate design. Rhodes, Syme, and Cos are naturally listed one after another, reflecting their geographical proximity. Led by Heracles' son Tlepolemus, the Rhodians have *nine* ships; they dwell on Rhodes arranged in *three* divisions (*kataphyladon*, 668), possibly the three Dorian tribes (Kirk 1985: ad *Il.* 2.668–70; cf. *Od.* 19.177); and they live in an implicit tally of three cities, all listed in one verse: Lindus and Ialysus and chalky Cameirus (656). Neighboring Syme has *three* ships, the smallest fleet. For emphasis, the handsome leader's name, Nireus, is repeated in epanaphora at the beginning of three successive verses (671, 672, 673). The following contingent, including the island of Cos, is led by Eurypylus and Antiphus, two sons of Thessalus, son of Heracles, and happens to have *thirty* ships (680). Thus a kind of frame is provided for these three entries by the three Heraclids, the only ones named in the poem.

Also at one other point the Catalogue assigns ships as multiples of three to three successive fleets: the Peloponnesian ships from Lacedaemon, Pylos, and Arcadia number, respectively, *sixty*, *ninety*, and *sixty* (587, 602, 610). Significantly, each of these three consecutive regions also happens to have an unstated total of nine named towns. The *ninety* ships and nine towns attributed to Nestor's contingent by the Catalogue finds a kind of echo in the *Odyssey*, where the Pylians are arranged in *nine* companies of men, each of which sacrifices *nine* bulls (*Od.* 3.7–8). Moreover, in the case of the Pylians, the last town, interestingly called

Dorium, is singled out as the place where Thamyras was defeated by the Muses. While the ninth town's name conceivably evokes an association with the Dorians, it is explicitly associated with the Muses, who most likely number nine (as at Hes. *Th.* 76). Thus, in rather subtle fashion, the Catalogue of Ships implicitly associates the poet's art with special multiples of three.

Bibliography

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