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## ANCIENT HISTORY

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### DELINEATION OF THE EARTH'S BEST SON

**Abstract:** The genealogical tree of Achilles holds significant research interest, as each individual within it, is distinct and possesses considerable influence since antiquity. Unfortunately, the dazzling radiance of the demigod hero prevents figures such as his father, for instance, from demonstrating their own legacy. Indeed, in the mind of most individuals, and as evidenced by the limited sources in the context of international literature, Peleus appears to be a figure of secondary importance within Greek mythology. This research paper aims to dismantle this enduring stereotype, grounded in the assertion of Apollonius of Rhodes, which posits that Peleus is not merely an ordinary mortal but rather the finest among all mortals who tread upon the earth. The abundance of heroes who lived in the same generation, along with their psychological and spiritual traits, reinforces the perspective of this particular ancient author. Considering his achievements on physical, mental and spiritual level, the reality appears to be uncharted and significantly different. A comprehensive examination of ancient sources and the interconnection of various aspects reveal, in the most tangible manner, the legacy of Peleus, the attainment of his own literary immortality and the respect that international research owes to the father of the greatest of the Greek heroes.

**Keywords:** *Aeacus, Peleus, Argonauts, Iliad, Thetis, immortality.*

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#### FAMILY ENVIRONMENT & UPBRINGING

The entire life of Peleus is complex and tumultuous, with numerous dimensions that have only been superficially examined.<sup>1</sup> The designation of a mortal hero – in this case, Peleus – as the best son of the earth<sup>2</sup> in ancient Greek literature cannot be deemed coincidental. Moreover, numerous factors play a significant role in this characterization. The family environment must be underlined, as the stimuli experienced during childhood cannot be overlooked or disregarded. This fact is recorded in various ways within ancient literature and at this point, the island of Aegina holds the leading position.

One of Asopus' daughters, Aegina, caught the affection of Zeus. Her father, unable to accept this situation, took the extraordinary step of pursuing the father of the gods. However, Zeus, seeking refuge on Olympus, unleashed his lightning bolts and struck him down. Subsequently, she relocated Aegina to an island that was then known as Oenone, which is still referred to as Aegina today, thanks to this woman. Their union resulted in the birth of Aeacus.<sup>3</sup> Another name of this island, during the ancient era, was Oenopia.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ROSE/MARCH, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 347.

<sup>3</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 85; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1997, 223; PAPATHOMOPOULOS/TSAVARI, 2002, 198; ROUSSOS, 2001, 93, 129, 147, 281, 327; SKARTSIS, 1993, 227.

<sup>4</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 327.

Aegina was considered the most inaccessible island in Greece due to the numerous reefs and rocks surrounding it. It is said that Aeacus deliberately devised a plan to utilize the island, motivated by the fear of pirate raids by sea and to make it generally perilous for enemies.<sup>5</sup> The island was regarded as warlike and a society which adored music,<sup>6</sup> a welcoming land for foreigners, a birthplace of strong men and possessing a formidable fleet,<sup>7</sup> rich in culture, renowned for its many virtues and was likened, both literally and metaphorically, to a tower that rises high.<sup>8</sup>

For the sake of his son, whom he loved unconditionally and because he was alone on the island due to Hera's vengeful wrath, Zeus transformed the ants into humans.<sup>9</sup> He was the most pious man in the world and for this reason, when Greece faced a barren period due to Pelops, oracles from the gods proclaimed that the country would be freed from the calamities it suffered only if Aeacus prayed to Zeus, on behalf of all humanity. Indeed, Zeus answered the prayer and Greece was relieved from the drought.<sup>10</sup> It appears that this incident was deeply ingrained in the memories of subsequent generations, where it was commemorated alongside a monument. At the most prominent location in the city stood the "Aeakeion", a square enclosure made of white marble. The entrance featured carvings depicting those sent by all the Greeks to Aeacus. The Greeks sent a delegation to the Oracle of Delphi to seek guidance on how to address the drought affecting them. The response indicated that they needed to appease Zeus and that only Aeacus should pray in order for them to be heard.<sup>11</sup>

The king of Aegina enjoyed the company of the gods, who held him in high regard overall. A notable example is the construction of the walls of Troy by Poseidon and Apollo, who invited Aeacus to accompany them and contribute to their endeavor. However, upon the completion of the wall construction, an unusual event occurred. Specifically, three snakes emerged from the sea, with two of them attempting to ascend the sides built by the two gods, but ultimately, they were unsuccessful. The third serpent, successfully entered Troy through the side constructed by Aeacus. Consequently, Apollo prophesied that Troy would be conquered twice by the descendants of his half-brother.<sup>12</sup> The favor that Aeacus received from the gods is further illustrated by another example, in which Poseidon directed his chariot towards the maritime isthmus, bringing the demigod mortal king to Aegina on golden horses.<sup>13</sup>

The virtues of this individual extended beyond this point. He was regarded as the foremost in physical strength, as well as in wisdom. Many sought the opportunity to meet him and willingly, without objection, sought his insights and advice, even in cities such as Sparta and Athens.<sup>14</sup> The sense of justice that consumed him was so profound that he was

said to be the most revered among mortals and served as a judge in the disputes among the gods whenever conflicts arose among them.<sup>15</sup> The gods honored him appropriately after his death and Aeacus was regarded as a judge of the Underworld,<sup>16</sup> holding the keys of Hades,<sup>17</sup> alongside his half-brothers Minos and Rhadamanthys, responsible for the souls originating from Europe,<sup>18</sup> though it has been reported that in addition to these three judges, there was also a fourth, named Triptolemus.<sup>19</sup> It is evident from the aforementioned points that Aeacus was not an arbitrary figure but rather an individual endowed with numerous virtues. He could easily be regarded as an archetypal figure of a father, the embodiment of justice, a notion further supported by a fact that is otherwise considered controversial and it will be analyzed shortly below.

## AN AMBIGUOUS MURDER

Aeacus married Endeis and together they had two sons, Peleus and Telamon. Unfortunately, Endeis passed away, leading the king of Aegina to be united this time with a goddess, the Nereid Psamathe. Despite her transformation into a seal, she was unable to escape him. From this union, Phocus was born, making him the half-brother of the two earlier sons.<sup>20</sup> The name of the current Phocis Prefecture in Greece, is derived from this mythological person.<sup>21</sup> It appears that Phocus excelled over his brothers in competitions which led them to conspire against him, ultimately resulting in his death. At this point, various versions about this fact must be presented. Firstly, the lot fell upon Telamon and once, while they were training together and envying their half-brother for his athletic capabilities, he struck him on the head with a discus, resulting in his death, hiding the dead body somewhere in a forest.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, it is noted that near the "Aeakeion", there was the tomb of Phocus. When Telamon and Peleus challenged Phocus to a contest, it was Peleus' turn to throw the stone they used in place of a discus and he intentionally struck Phocus. They did this to please their mother, as Phocus was born of a mother who was a goddess.<sup>23</sup> Thirdly, it is stated that Peleus was the one who killed him after having first orchestrated the assassination plan.<sup>24</sup> Fourthly, it is noted that Peleus accidentally killed his brother while throwing a discus.<sup>25</sup> Fifthly, it is emphasized that Peleus and Telamon unintentionally killed Phocus.<sup>26</sup>

A sixth version depicts the three sons of Aeacus praying to Zeus for Aegina to gain worthy men and fame for its fleet. This peaceful and harmonious scene contrasts sharply with

<sup>5</sup> TATARAKI, 1992A, 175.

<sup>6</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 125.

<sup>7</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 445–447.

<sup>8</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 283.

<sup>9</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 85; SKARTSIS, 1993, 227.

<sup>10</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 85.

<sup>11</sup> TATARAKI, 1992A, 175.

<sup>12</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001B, 177–179.

<sup>13</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001B, 179.

<sup>14</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 147.

<sup>15</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 327.

<sup>16</sup> ROUSSOS, 1993A, 91–93, 105.

<sup>17</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 85.

<sup>18</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1993A, 301; PAPATHOMOPOULOS/TSAVARI, 2002, 464.

<sup>19</sup> ANDREADI, 1991, 89.

<sup>20</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 85; PAPATHOMOPOULOS/TSAVARI, 2002, 251; ROUSSOS, 2001A, 93; LEKATSAS, 1941, 193.

<sup>21</sup> TATARAKI, 1992B, 177–179.

<sup>22</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 87; ROUSSOS, 1993B, 95; GANTZ, 1993, 223.

<sup>23</sup> TATARAKI, 1992A, 177.

<sup>24</sup> TATARAKI, 1992B, 177–179.

<sup>25</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1997, 223.

<sup>26</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 35.

what is known about the subsequent events from tradition, specifically the murder of Phocus by his brothers, an occurrence that is alluded to but remains unspoken. The motives of Peleus and Telamon for the murder are not mentioned here, although the perpetrators and the victim appear to be quite distinct from one another. They have different origins as they are half-siblings on their mother's side and their phenotypes are dissimilar. Peleus and Telamon are well-known as the famous sons of Aeacus while Phocus is depicted as a powerful lord.<sup>27</sup> It is noted that he is the son of a goddess which places him above his brothers in status; however, he also possesses a somewhat animalistic nature. The name itself in the Greek language alludes to a seal while the reference to its birth at the edge of the sea is both dark and unusual.<sup>28</sup> Although the death of Phocus appears premature and elicits sympathy and sorrow, it does not negate the somewhat dark portrayal of him prior to his assassination.<sup>29</sup> In this version,<sup>30</sup> it is likely that the mother goddess of Phocus plays a significant role, as the celebrated victor in this instance comes from an athletic family on his mother's side while his father did not have any athletic achievements.<sup>31</sup> Still, the murder is not mentioned and the outcome is promptly communicated which results in the exile of the two siblings. This exile, however, is driven both by their own initiative and by the influence of a divine existence that appears to be guiding the developments. The responsibility of the two brothers is thus mitigated in two ways; their names are not mentioned which means that the murder is only implied and the ultimate accountability is attributed to a divine power.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, this approach may preserve the pious perspective of attributing all events in human life to the will of the gods while also ensuring that individuals do not completely escape the burden of guilt. On the other hand, it can be stated with considerable certainty that references to exile substitute and align with references to murder. The desire to keep the truth concealed frames the mention of exile and underscores the significance of the suppressed fact.<sup>33</sup>

In any case, there is a consensus regarding the exile of Peleus and Telamon, despite the latter having requested a hearing on two occasions. The fact that Aeacus, likely in response to widespread public outcry, prioritized the community of Aegina over his own family must have elevated his caliber in the eyes of the contemporary world, concerning the concept of justice. Indeed, the entire scenario can be aptly described as an unjustifiably incongruous and dark aspect of Peleus' history which cannot be justified in any way considering his future. Although the dilemma may never become clear, the author supports the versions which do not include deceit, taking into account three main facts; a) the accomplishments of the descendants of Aeacus cannot be fully recounted,<sup>34</sup> b) Aeacus' children are characterized as godlike,<sup>35</sup> c) the features of Peleus (will be analyzed

below), based on his character and quality, do not support an opposing action.

## FEATS & FAME OF PELEUS

After his exile, Peleus sought refuge in Thessaly, specifically in Phthia, where he was purified by the king Actor, whom he later succeeded in the throne due to the king's lack of heirs.<sup>36</sup> However, another version depicts him ending up in Phthia, near king Eurytion, the son of Actor. The king, recognizing the virtue of Peleus, not only purified him but also bestowed upon him his daughter, Antigone (distinct person from the one associated with Boeotian Thebes), along with the one-third of his kingdom. Together, they had a daughter whom they named Polydora. He participated, like many renowned heroes of his time, in the hunt for the Caledonian Boar. Unfortunately, he inadvertently killed his father-in-law by throwing a spear behind a bush, mistakenly believing that the wild beast was there. After this second strike from the Three Fates in a very short period, he left Phthia and arrived in Iolcus, where Acastus reigned. He, in turn, purified him once more and Peleus participated in competitions held in honor of his father, Pelias.<sup>37</sup>

Peleus' residency in Iolcus was far from peaceful, as Astydameia (in another version, Hippolyte<sup>38</sup> but not the well-known queen of the Amazons), the wife of Acastus, fell in love with him and sent him a message, proposing a union. However, the hero promptly rejected her, leading her to seek revenge in a twofold way. First, she sent a false message to Antigone, the wife of Peleus, stating that he was preparing to marry Sterope, the daughter of Acastus and Astydameia. As soon as Antigone received the news, she hanged herself and died. Second, she lied to Acastus, claiming that Peleus had made immoral propositions to her. In a notably concise and selective narrative, where every word appears essential, Astydameia is depicted as a woman intent on ensnaring Peleus through deceit. The outcome of her desire was the construction and delivery of a deliberately false and artificial speech. Even to attract Peleus, she employed flattering rhetoric that deviated from truth and morality, showcasing her as a highly skilled manipulator of deceitful discourse. The subversive nature of Astydameia regarding language lies in her rejection of gender stereotypes, as she is the first to openly express her desires, thereby reversing the traditional roles of male and female.<sup>39</sup>

Peleus appears to engage in a cognitive process that leads him to reject infidelity and the violation of hospitality, driven by an instinctive sense of fear and logic. If it can be assumed (and there is no reason for doubt) that piety is so deeply ingrained within him that he does not even require cognitive processing to resist temptation, then he embodies a worthy representation of the archetypal traits of the Aegina aristocracy.<sup>40</sup> Adapting a holistic view, the phrase "*τοῖο δ' ὄργαν κνίζον ἀπεινοὶ λόγοι*"<sup>41</sup> will be put to the test since it

<sup>27</sup> PFEIJFFER, 1999, 16.

<sup>28</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 447; BURNETT, 2005, 66.

<sup>29</sup> SEGAL, 1974, 400–401.

<sup>30</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 447.

<sup>31</sup> BURNETT, 2005, 66; FENNO, 2005, 296–297; ROBBINS, 1987, 31.

<sup>32</sup> STERN, 1971, 170.

<sup>33</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 447.

<sup>34</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 79.

<sup>35</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 327.

<sup>36</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1997, 223.

<sup>37</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 87.

<sup>38</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 93–95.

<sup>39</sup> CARNES, 1996, 44.

<sup>40</sup> PFEIJFFER, 199, 85.

<sup>41</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 449.

can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, her words ignited his indignation and from the very beginning, he did not waver. On the other hand, her words stirred his romantic desire, causing him to waver, albeit briefly, as the adverb “immediately” soon follows. The initial interpretation is significantly stronger but even if the second interpretation was valid, it still renders Peleus admirable. The temptation he faced appears considerable and thus, the restraint he needed to exhibit out of respect for his wife and the hospitality in a foreign kingdom, demanded remarkable self-control.

Upon hearing his wife, Acastus was filled with a desire to kill him;<sup>42</sup> however, doing so would constitute an act of hubris, as it would violate the sacred principle of Zeus Xenios. For this reason, he invited him to a hunting expedition on Mount Pelion, where a hunting competition took place. Being a prudent individual, Peleus would cut off the tongues of the animals he killed and place them in a bag. The men of Acastus however, would take the slain beasts and mock Peleus for not having caught anything. In response, he silenced them by showing them the tongues of the beasts. The fury of Acastus was so intense that while Peleus was sleeping exhausted on the mountain, he abandoned him after first concealing his divine sword in a pile of ox dung. Peleus awoke to the sound of thundering hooves and realized he was surrounded by Centaurs, poised to kill him. As he searched for his divine knife, he was fortunate enough to see the Centaur Chiron, who pointed out the location where the divine weapon was hidden. The combination of Peleus’ physical abilities and the divine sword, led to the retreat of the Centaurs without any battle.<sup>43</sup>

This divine gift was crafted by the god Hephaestus<sup>44</sup> and stemmed from Peleus’ integrity regarding his attitude towards the sacred notion of hospitality mentioned earlier.<sup>45</sup> Specifically, the stance of Peleus was endorsed by Zeus himself, who promised him a Nereid goddess as a wife.<sup>46</sup> Thus, it is clear that the gods recognized his virtue and favored Peleus, on an initial level, at least. It appears that Peleus never forgot the insult from Astydameia and even more so, the death of Antigone. Consequently and at a later time, he, along with Jason and the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux), seized Iolcus, killed Astydameia and after dismembering her, led his army through her remains into the city,<sup>47</sup> delivering the land to the Haemonians.<sup>48</sup> At this point, it is important to highlight the connection between the name of Peleus and Mount Pelion which is quite evident, taking into consideration that the hero was very active in that region. An alternative interpretation links the name to the quivering spear, a weapon that was a gift from Chiron to Peleus and is primarily associated with Achilles, as an inheritance from his father. Last but not least, Peleus is etymologically correlated with clay and earth.<sup>49</sup>

Peleus proved to be a king who ruled Phthia with justice, much like his father, embodying temperance, wisdom,

courage, morality and virtue. This perception is reinforced by the ancient Greeks’ view of Peleus and his caliber which transcended the limited geographical boundaries of that era. His story was already known to the hearers of Homer in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. There was no barbaric city or place so strange in its speech that was unaware of the glory and fame of the hero Peleus, who was chosen to become the son-in-law of the gods.<sup>50</sup> Among all the examples of excellence, the foremost was that of Peleus, who single-handedly captured Iolcus without an army<sup>51</sup> (a different version of his previously mentioned campaign). When Peleus entrusted his son Achilles to Chiron for his upbringing, aiming to shield the young demigod from any negative influences on his character, the son of Aeacus was regarded as the epitome of wisdom for recognizing that the centaur provided a superior educational environment than himself.<sup>52</sup>

If Peleus is to be considered as the earth’s best son<sup>53</sup> and the finest human among mortals, the aforementioned arguments are insufficient. As a member of the Argonauts himself,<sup>54</sup> the overall quality of his existence must have been exceptional to stand out among the prominent heroes of his generation, including the other Argonauts (Jason,<sup>55</sup> Orpheus,<sup>56</sup> Admetus,<sup>57</sup> Actor,<sup>58</sup> Telamon,<sup>59</sup> Theseus,<sup>60</sup> Pirithous,<sup>61</sup> Heracles,<sup>62</sup> Lynceus,<sup>63</sup> Idas,<sup>64</sup> Ancaeus,<sup>65</sup> Meleager,<sup>66</sup> Castor and Pollux,<sup>67</sup> Zetes and Calais,<sup>68</sup> Amphiarus,<sup>69</sup> Autolycus,<sup>70</sup> Caeneus,<sup>71</sup> Acastus,<sup>72</sup> Actor<sup>73</sup> etc.). To begin with, during the Argonautic expedition, Peleus was honored with a commendation that is still preserved to the present. Physical exercise

<sup>50</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 297.

<sup>51</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 57.

<sup>52</sup> GEORGIOPOULOS, 1992, 83.

<sup>53</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 347.

<sup>54</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 35; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 95.

<sup>55</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 31; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 95.

<sup>56</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 31; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 169–171; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 95.

<sup>57</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 33; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 99.

<sup>58</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 33.

<sup>59</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 35; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77.

<sup>60</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 35; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77.

<sup>61</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 37.

<sup>62</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 37; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 169–171; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 95.

<sup>63</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 39; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 99.

<sup>64</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 39; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 99.

<sup>65</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 41.

<sup>66</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 41; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 97.

<sup>67</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 169–171; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 95

<sup>68</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77; MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 169–171; MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 101.

<sup>69</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77.

<sup>70</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77.

<sup>71</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77.

<sup>72</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 43; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77.

<sup>73</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 77.

<sup>42</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 87; ROUSSOS, 2001A, 77.

<sup>43</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 87–89.

<sup>44</sup> SKARTSIS, 1993, 227; NIKOLITSIS, 2005, 119.

<sup>45</sup> NIKOLITSIS, 2005, 119.

<sup>46</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 93–95.

<sup>47</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 91.

<sup>48</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 77.

<sup>49</sup> SHEWAN, 1916, 184; BURY, 1899, 307; JANKO, 2003, 594–595.

was regarded as a science from ancient times, holding equal importance to any form of art. The athletic practices of antiquity produced remarkable athletes such as Peleus and Heracles. In later periods while athletes continued to be admirable and noteworthy, they were considered to be of lesser range.<sup>74</sup>

Among the various events,<sup>75</sup> the lighter competitions included the one (200m)<sup>76</sup> and two-stage (400m)<sup>77</sup> races, long-distance running (1.400m–4.500m),<sup>78</sup> the hoplitodromos,<sup>79</sup> the long jump and the javelin throw. In contrast, the heavier events included pankration, wrestling, boxing and discus throw. The pentathlon originated from the combination of sports from both categories on Lemnos Island.<sup>80</sup> Initially, the events of long jump, discus throw and javelin were individual competitions, each with its own prize. However, over time, they lost their independence and became part of the pentathlon events. Telamon was an exceptional discus thrower, Lynceus was a javelin thrower and in the sprinting and long jump events, Zetes and Calais excelled, respectively. In these competitions, Peleus secured second place in the previous competitions except for wrestling where he was unbeatable among mortals. During these contests on the island of Lemnos, the leader of the Argonauts, Jason, combined these five events and due to his superior average score, Peleus was declared the first winner of pentathlon in the history of the world.<sup>81</sup> His contemporaries regarded him as an exceptional warrior in a broader sense, both for his bravery displayed in battles and for his achievements in the pentathlon as well<sup>82</sup> while within the whole Greek antiquity, such athletes enjoyed the boundless appreciation of everyone and were considered examples of excellence among everyone.<sup>83</sup> It should be noted that even nowadays, the Municipality of Lemnos Island organizes the ancient pentathlon every year to honor the hero Peleus within an international and global context.

Considering all the aforementioned points, it is certainly not coincidental that Peleus has also been recorded as a victor at the Isthmian Games.<sup>84</sup> The ancient Greeks regarded the pentathlon as an unparalleled competition, as athletes were required to harmoniously blend strength, agility and skill, along with endurance and perseverance, fully embodying the athletic ideal.<sup>85</sup> The distinction between light and heavy events which persists to this day,<sup>86</sup> has its roots in the time of Plato<sup>87</sup> and Aristotle.<sup>88</sup> Besides, Aristotle used to claim that the athletes of pentathlon are the best Greeks<sup>89</sup> and of

course, this was not the only one incident that Peleus played an active role. He was the one who transformed the mindset of Jason and all the Argonauts when the feat involving the bulls with bronze legs and fire-breathing mouths appeared insurmountable for the leader, in the plains of the god Ares in Colchis, proving that he was a source of inspiration and distinguished himself for his leadership abilities in challenging situations. This was a moment that deeply moved heroes such as Telamon, Idas and the Dioscuri; however, the others hesitated,<sup>90</sup> clearly illustrating the distinction between Peleus and the rest of Greece's elite during that era, who were undoubtedly the Argonauts.

His accomplishments and achievements certainly do not end here since he took part in the hunt of the Caledonian Boar with the heroes of his era,<sup>91</sup> in the campaign against the Amazons along with Heracles, Theseus and of course his brother, Telamon.<sup>92</sup> His most significant achievement appears to have been the capture of Troy, alongside Heracles and Telamon.<sup>93</sup> Troy undoubtedly lacked the power and glory it would possess a generation later, during the time of Achilles and Ajax the Great. However, this does not diminish the significance of the particular feat, especially as its conquest was marked by a unique event. Heracles set sail against Troy with 18 ships, each manned by fifty oarsmen, after gathering an army composed of the finest warriors who willingly followed him. The trio of Heracles, Peleus and Telamon instilled fear in their enemies. During the siege, Telamon breached the wall and was the first to enter the city, followed closely by Heracles and Peleus. Upon seeing Telamon enter first, Heracles, driven by his ego, drew his sword and advanced towards him, unwilling to allow anyone to be perceived as superior. Noticing this, Telamon began to gather stones and when Heracles inquired about his actions, he replied that he was constructing an altar for him and this response calmed down the son of Zeus.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the prophecy of Apollo was confirmed (when he, along with Poseidon and Aeacus, was constructing the walls of Troy), which stated that Troy would fall due to the first generation of Aeacus and the fourth generation (Neoptolemus, son of Achilles).<sup>95</sup>

Even in his advanced age, he did not hesitate to travel with the troops to Epirus in order to rescue both his grandson, Neoptolemus and Andromache.<sup>96</sup> Peleus' motivations for his actions reflect a perspective of wide range. He challenges the binary distinction between providing sound advice and engaging in physical combat by disregarding his age. This denial enables him to utilize the eloquence acquired through his years as a compelling alternative to direct confrontation, allowing him to assume the social role typically associated with a younger individual within the Greek household.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>74</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 29–31.

<sup>75</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 33.

<sup>76</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 197.

<sup>77</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 198.

<sup>78</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 197–198.

<sup>79</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 198.

<sup>80</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 79; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 33.

<sup>81</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 33; KAKRIDIS, 1986A, 139.

<sup>82</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 33.

<sup>83</sup> ILIOU, 1999, 54.

<sup>84</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 209.

<sup>85</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 199.

<sup>86</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1995, 197.

<sup>87</sup> KOUSOUNELOS, 1992B, 141–143.

<sup>88</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1993B, 163–167.

<sup>89</sup> ILIOU, 1999, 54.

<sup>90</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 233.

<sup>91</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 55.

<sup>92</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1999C, 121; ROUSSOS, 2001A, 57.

<sup>93</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 57, 75, 281, 297; KAKRIDIS, 1986B, 92.

<sup>94</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1999B, 163–165.

<sup>95</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001B, 179.

<sup>96</sup> ROUSSOS, 1993B, 113–128.

<sup>97</sup> RIMERMAN, 2022, 109.

## PELEUS &amp; THETIS

Upon his return from Iolcus, Peleus brings a wealth of treasures and is hailed as the favorite of the immortal gods while all mortals envy him for conquering the ancient city and for marrying a goddess. For this reason, he was described as “μακάριος” and “ὄλβιος” three and four times respectively, as well as being distinguished among all heroes and above all mortals, receiving the highest honors.<sup>98</sup> The semantics of the two preceding ancient Greek terms align with divine tranquility and differ from the mere concept of “εὐτυχής” (=happiness by luck) and “εὐδαίμων” where the state of mental flourishing corresponds to the level between the divine and humanity. It is thus demonstrated that such honors have not been bestowed upon any mortal, at least not for the other heroes of his generation, with the exception of his son in total, of course.

His marriage to a sea goddess, the Nereid Thetis was perhaps the most significant event of his life, characterized by complexity and fluctuations. Simultaneously, they are regarded as the most celebrated marriages in Greek mythology,<sup>99</sup> with all the gods invited in only two, throughout the entire literature. These unions were those of Peleus and Thetis (apart from the goddess Eris) and on the other hand, Cadmus and Harmonia.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately though, the winds of change often blow and mortal happiness tends to be fleeting, particularly when it is intense and this is something which is going to be explained in a while.

In the past, a conflict arose between the two most powerful gods, Zeus and Poseidon, over Thetis.<sup>101</sup> However, the Titaness Themis delivered a prophecy stating that Thetis’ son would surpass his father in strength.<sup>102</sup> Another version of the story suggests that Prometheus revealed this prophecy while he was chained on Mount Caucasus.<sup>103</sup> The immense indirect power of Thetis was, in fact, direct on a cosmic and universal scale, within the context of Greek Cosmogony and Theogony regarding the universe and spacetime, many centuries prior to Homer and Alcman.<sup>104</sup> This explains both the prophecy itself and the boundless influence of Achilles in relation to ancient Greek thought. Following this revelation, both gods withdrew from their pursuit of her. Thetis was unwilling to sleep with Zeus out of respect for Hera<sup>105</sup> who had raised her and in response, Zeus became enraged and expressed his desire that Thetis should marry a mortal. Hera, in an effort to alleviate the situation, informed the sea goddess that she was proposing marriage not just to a common mortal but to the finest man on earth<sup>106</sup> who was the most pious among those nurtured by the fertile plains of Iolcus.<sup>107</sup> His virtue was immense, as the ancient Greek literature does not clarify whether there were equally or more virtuous suitors elsewhere. The hero demonstrated once more his

nobility and the value he placed on the institution of family by requesting the hand of Thetis from her divine father, Nereus. Peleus can be easily compared to Paris, as he adhered to established norms and treated Nereus and his household with the respect they deserved. In contrast, the Trojan prince displayed inappropriate behavior by failing to honor Menelaus’ hospitality.<sup>108</sup> When considering Peleus’ reaction at the royal court of Acastus, the notion of hospitality and the significance of the household become highly important, as does Peleus’ response.<sup>109</sup> Thus, Paris represents the violation of family law, whereas Peleus embodies its adherence.

Either Proteus<sup>110</sup> or Chiron<sup>111</sup> advised him to wait for her at Cape Sepias during a full moon, to capture her and hold her while she transformed, a skill she had inherited from her father, Nereus. The name of this cape still exists nowadays in the southeast of Mount Pelion and derives from the latest transformation of Thetis which was that of cuttlefish and in ancient Greek language is called “*sepias*”. The battle between the greatest wrestler of all time and a goddess was formidable. Despite the goddess transforming into fire, water, a lioness and other forms, Peleus did not take a step back, regardless of how insurmountable the challenges appeared, until he witnessed the goddess return to her original female form.<sup>112</sup> In this manner, Thetis acknowledged Peleus in his entirety and ultimately accepted him, indicating and admitting that he is worthy, despite his mortal nature.

The battle between Peleus and the Nereid goddess exhibits certain peculiarities, with the most notable being reflected in the participle “*σχάσαις*” that conveys his victorious action. The verb from which this participle is derived primarily means “to relax”.<sup>113</sup> Peleus does not appear to engage in combat, strike, pressure, or exert force upon Thetis; in fact, he does not seem to harm her in any way, especially considering her supernatural abilities. What he does is relax her resistance, preventing her from defending herself, ultimately leading to her submission. There is no place for violence in this process; rather, it involves limiting her reactions and the eventual collapse of her defenses. The conflict between Peleus and Thetis has been assessed over time, evolving from the hero’s battle against the forces of nature to the efforts of subduing and appeasing the goddess who gave her husband immortality.<sup>114</sup> Nereids possessed a unique power to grant immortality to their lovers, a concept illustrated in the “Monument of the Nereids” located in Lycia, where the architectural embellishments conveyed the notion of eternal life.<sup>115</sup> This myth in total, serves as a model for marriage. The imagery of the “fleeing woman” represents the unmarried girl while the act of abduction holds an “initial” significance, symbolizing the domestication of the girl’s untamed nature. This myth is particularly unique as it depicts a mortal pursuing a divine entity, rather than the other way around.

<sup>98</sup> SKARTSIS, 1993, 227–229.

<sup>99</sup> SPANOS/TSIOTAS/SDROLLAS, 2018, 939.

<sup>100</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 77; ROUSSOS, 2001B, 337.

<sup>101</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 89; ROUSSOS, 2001A, 329.

<sup>102</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2008B, 501.

<sup>103</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2007, 251–252.

<sup>104</sup> SPANOS, 2024A, 527.

<sup>105</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 345–347; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 89; MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 772.

<sup>106</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 347.

<sup>107</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001A, 329.

<sup>108</sup> MEYERHOFF, 1984, 107–108.

<sup>109</sup> MEYERHOFF, 1984, 107–108; ROSLER, 1980, 230; BURNETT, 1983, 196–197.

<sup>110</sup> PAPATHOMOPOULOS/TSAVARI, 2002, 403–404.

<sup>111</sup> PAPATHOMOPOULOS/TSAVARI, 2002, 405; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 89–91.

<sup>112</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 89–91.

<sup>113</sup> HENRY, 2005, 42; WILLCOCK, 1995, 105.

<sup>114</sup> PICARD, 1935, 71.

<sup>115</sup> PICARD, 1938, 136–140.

Nevertheless, Peleus embodied the will of the gods and was granted the status of a temporary and “honorary” god which aligns with the concept of achieving immortality.<sup>116</sup> It is true that his vitality reaches its peak, as Chiron ensured his survival; however, he did not secure Thetis for him, a prize that Peleus had to win entirely on his own.<sup>117</sup> He married her for his self-restraint as well as for the fact that he himself was not libertine.<sup>118</sup> It is important to note that, unlike the 5<sup>th</sup> Nemean and 8<sup>th</sup> Isthmian Odes of Pindar, where Thetis is presented as a reward for Peleus’ virtue and piety and his relationship with the gods is framed within a context of reciprocity, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Nemean Ode, the goddess is not explicitly depicted as a reward.

This battle is frequently depicted in Greek art from the Archaic and Early Classical periods, with Peleus himself appearing in approximately 600 scenes.<sup>119</sup> This incident from Greek mythology was widely recognized throughout the ancient world, even in Apollonia Pontica to the north of Euxinus Pontus, where a silver medallion depicting the battle was discovered. The detail is such that Thetis is depicted as a larger entity, indicating her status as an immortal goddess, in contrast to the mortal Peleus. This particular finding is exceptionally rare, as this battle is primarily represented on painted vases.<sup>120</sup> Until this day, this incident has been recorded in only two other jewellery items.<sup>121</sup> The first is a pair of rings discovered in Eretria and the second is a golden amulet from the burial mound of Kul-Oba on the Taman Peninsula, in the northern Black Sea area.<sup>122</sup>

Returning to the wedding ceremony, Mount Pelion, which was considered as the summer residence of the gods, welcomed the couple. All the deities were invited, with the Muses singing in celebration. Chiron presented Peleus with a spear crafted from the melia tree while Poseidon bestowed him two immortal horses, Balius and Xanthus. Additionally, the divine weapons forged by the god Hephaestus were also part of the gifts.<sup>123</sup> From this union, Achilles was born, the dazzling light of Thessaly<sup>124</sup> and Hellas.<sup>125</sup> Thus, through this marriage, the son of Aeacus provided the catalyst for the Trojan War as well as the central hero of the one of the Homeric epic poems, the Iliad. Consequently, it can be easily stated that his marriage to the Nereid goddess can be regarded as the pinnacle of mortal and human happiness, a joy infused with divine elements.<sup>126</sup>

However, upon thoroughly examining the life of the hero, one can easily understand that this divine happiness is short-lived. Furthermore, Peleus receives treatment from his divine wife that is entirely unbecoming, especially considering his whole background. The foundation for this statement is based on the words of Achilles, who describes

his father as a quintessential example of a person who was granted both good and bad fortune by the gods.<sup>127</sup> From the moment of his birth, he experienced unique happiness and wealth in Aegina, along with the privilege of ruling over the Myrmidons. In addition to these advantages, he was favored exceptionally, as the gods bestowed upon him the goddess Thetis as his wife and granted him divine gifts in this union.<sup>128</sup> The first example pertains to the notion that Thetis indirectly rejects the victory of Peleus, believing that it was achieved through divine intervention.<sup>129</sup> The second example is that Thetis maintains an ambiguous stance regarding her residence, as she lives on the one hand, in the sea. She emerges from it following Achilles’ call<sup>130</sup>, returns after her visit to Olympus,<sup>131</sup> hears her son’s lament alongside her Nereid sisters<sup>132</sup> and converses with the goddess Iris in her father’s cave, that of the god Nereus.<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, Achilles recalls his mother’s tales about the Titanomachy, an event that took place in Phthia.<sup>134</sup> He opens the box that his mother gave him as a farewell gift before his journey to Troy which also occurred in Phthia.<sup>135</sup> Thetis, along with Peleus, welcomes supplicants,<sup>136</sup> yet she acknowledges that she will not receive her son alive in Phthia when he dies.<sup>137</sup> However, an objective interpretation of this final reality suggests that the reception of the deceased Achilles in her watery realm, at the bottom of the sea, would not be feasible.<sup>138</sup> The third example pertains to Thetis’ actions concerning the newborn Achilles. In her desire to make him immortal, she secretly placed him in the sacred fire of Hestia, aiming to burn away his mortal parts inherited from his father.<sup>139</sup> Afterward, she anointed the charred areas with ambrosia. At one point, Peleus caught her in the act and upon hearing his son’s cries, he intervened. Consequently, Thetis, after her intentions were thwarted, abandoned her infant child and returned to her Nereid sisters. It could be argued that fate played cruel tricks on Thetis, who was compelled to mourn both her husband and her son (as even demigods face death) and this is the reason behind her actions. Besides, the Iliad clearly articulates that maternal love surpasses marital love,<sup>140</sup> emphasizing the immortality of the goddess and the vulnerability of Peleus due to his mortality. The fact that she describes herself as an unpleasant mother who gave birth to an excellent child reinforces the aforementioned statement.<sup>141</sup> However, it is striking that she returned to her marine realm without even discussing it with Peleus. The negative aura surrounding this incident is closely linked to the fourth event, in which Thetis, at Hera’s request, assisted the Argonauts when they

<sup>116</sup> SOURVINOU-INWOOD, 1991, 65–67.

<sup>117</sup> KOHNKEN, 1971, 204.

<sup>118</sup> NIKOLITSIS, 2005, 119.

<sup>119</sup> VOLLKOMMER, 1994, 251–268.

<sup>120</sup> DAMYANOV, 2007, 241–242.

<sup>121</sup> DAMYANOV, 2007, 243.

<sup>122</sup> DAMYANOV, 2007, 243; WILLIAMS/OGDEN, 1994, 82.

<sup>123</sup> ROUSSOS, 2001B, 337; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 89–91.

<sup>124</sup> GEORGUSOPOULOS, 1992, 111.

<sup>125</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 2002, 215.

<sup>126</sup> WILSON, 1974, 385.

<sup>127</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 786.

<sup>128</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 528, 564, 772.

<sup>129</sup> PAPATHOMOPOULOS/TSAVARI, 2002, 405.

<sup>130</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 73.

<sup>131</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 78.

<sup>132</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 592.

<sup>133</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 773.

<sup>134</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 74.

<sup>135</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 523.

<sup>136</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 533.

<sup>137</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 592, 593, 600, 603.

<sup>138</sup> KAKRIDIS, 1984, 95.

<sup>139</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 351; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 91.

<sup>140</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 603.

<sup>141</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 592.

were in peril between the straits of Scylla and Charybdis.<sup>142</sup> He found the Argonauts near their ship, enjoying themselves by throwing the discus and practicing archery. Approaching them, he touched the edge of Peleus' hand, appearing solely to him. This romantic moment was swiftly replaced by one filled with tension from the goddess, as she informed him of her intention to assist them. She instructed Peleus that when he saw her coming to act, he should not reveal her presence to anyone and should avoid provoking her further, especially regarding the incident with the infant Achilles.<sup>143</sup> Still, it appears that deep down, Thetis genuinely cared for Peleus' salvation; still, her ego, stemming from her immortality, prevented her from acknowledging it.<sup>144</sup>

The unfortunate yet cynical aspect of the entire matter is that the excellence of mortality does not appear to play any significant role in the concept of immortality itself. Marginalizing or disregarding the chasm that separates mortals from immortals reflects a form of metaphysical violence, the outcome of which is solely destruction. For instance, Achilles mourns his mortal fate and wishes that his divine mother had remained among beings like herself while his father had married an ordinary mortal woman.<sup>145</sup> This blend of divine and mortal essence is the root cause of all destruction. A similar sentiment is observed in Zeus' dialogue with the immortal horses, Balius and Xanthus,<sup>146</sup> where he questions why they were gifted to the mortal Peleus, who was surrounded by suffering.<sup>147</sup> The consequence of the absolute-ness' entry into spacetime is the ongoing conflicts, as the attempt to coexist the divine and mortal natures reflects an increasingly clearer picture of the chaotic distinction between the two.<sup>148</sup> This kind of symbolism has to do with the aspect of immortality and it is not necessarily bad for the mortal one, considering the proportions, something that will be clarified in the end of the paper, referring to Peleus, of course.

## PELEUS IN THE ILIAD

Concerning Troy, it appears that Homer was familiar with numerous stories from earlier epics, such as those about Heracles,<sup>149</sup> the Epigoni,<sup>150</sup> the Thebaid,<sup>151</sup> the Titanomachy<sup>152</sup> and the Argonauts.<sup>153</sup> Additionally, the Homeric works contain veiled references to heroes whom he seems to regard as already known from other poems, as evidenced by Phoenix's mention of Meleager.<sup>154</sup> Epic poems composed shortly after Homer have not survived and the understanding of them is primarily based on Proclus, excerpts, imitations and commentaries. Most of these epics, contained legends related

to Troy that were not included in the Homeric works.<sup>155</sup> According to prevailing opinion, these epics were originally composed to fill in the gaps in the history surrounding Homer, with each one addressing a distinct aspect of that narrative. This impression is conveyed by the epic cycle.<sup>156</sup> Regarding Peleus, the epic cycle preserves certain fragmentary elements that, when compared to Homer's epic, can lead to valuable conclusions. It is evident that Homer transforms the mythological material at his disposal to present a rigorous and consistent heroic perspective of the world, isolating monsters, various wonders and ultimately, adopting a non-tragic stance towards mortality.<sup>157</sup> Peleus is not physically present in the Iliad and does not take part in the events, as he resides in Phthia. This is due to his advanced age which keeps him away from the land of Troy, where he remains in his palace.<sup>158</sup> However, his indirect presence is pervasive and manifests in various ways.

The initial recommendation for the hero comes from Nestor, with the phrase "*γέρον ἱππηλάτα Πηλεὺς*".<sup>159</sup> This is a standard phrase that is also applied to Nestor,<sup>160</sup> Phoenix,<sup>161</sup> Oeneus<sup>162</sup> and Tydeus.<sup>163</sup> It is attributed to elderly heroes from a previous generation who had demonstrated their worth prior to the events of the Iliad. For this reason, the old age of Peleus is emphasized, as he represents a venerable and respected hero from the preceding generation. Adjectives containing the word "*ἵππος*" (=horse) which indicate chariot driving, are commonly found in the Iliad. However, this particular adjective is exclusively associated with heroes from the previous generation, possibly suggesting an older method of waging war.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, he is "*ἔσθλός Μυρμιδόνων βουλευφόρος ἠδ' ἀγορητής*".<sup>165</sup> The brave leader of the Myrmidons remains steadfast, even while in Phthia, as he continues to be the head of the entire household. In addition to his distinguished martial prowess, he possesses a well-rounded character, being an eloquent speaker and capable of executing whatever he resolves to undertake. It is not coincidental that all of the above align with his divine origin via Zeus himself.<sup>166</sup>

The transition into old age does not signify a release from an active and productive role within the community; rather, it represents a gradual shift towards a new and significant social responsibility. The transition into old age signifies a shift from beneficial and competitive activities to prioritizing the community over individual gain.<sup>167</sup> While aging may be viewed unfavorably in a culture that values strength and beauty, it does offer compensatory advantages. A young person often exhibits impulsive and superficial thinking,<sup>168</sup>

<sup>142</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 351; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999B, 89–91.

<sup>143</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999A, 351.

<sup>144</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2011, 175.

<sup>145</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 593.

<sup>146</sup> ARVANITAKIS, 2008, 210.

<sup>147</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 571.

<sup>148</sup> ARVANITAKIS, 2008, 211.

<sup>149</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 203, 466.

<sup>150</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 172.

<sup>151</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 233, 460.

<sup>152</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 74.

<sup>153</sup> DOUKAS, 1999, 335.

<sup>154</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 320–322; FOWLER, 2013, 252–253.

<sup>155</sup> ROMILLY, 1985, 13–14.

<sup>156</sup> FOWLER, 2013, 253.

<sup>157</sup> GRIFFIN, 1977, 53.

<sup>158</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 603.

<sup>159</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 258, 317, 385.

<sup>160</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 106, 109, 114, 170, 260, 280, 281, 306, 309, 310, 338, 339, 340, 350, 377, 381, 458.

<sup>161</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 317.

<sup>162</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 321.

<sup>163</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 172.

<sup>164</sup> HAINSWORTH, 2004, 238; JANKO, 2003, 634.

<sup>165</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 258.

<sup>166</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 680.

<sup>167</sup> HANIGAN, 2016, 14.

<sup>168</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 746.

whereas an older individual possesses greater knowledge and experience.<sup>169</sup> As previously noted, Nestor holds a prominent position among the Achaean advisors. However, offering right counsel is not the sole requirement for being heard as a speaker in an assembly of that era. Therefore, he also references his past military achievements.<sup>170</sup> Despite the persuasive and wise nature of his words,<sup>171</sup> he fails to prevent the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon. The questionable influence of Nestor within the community and his lack of effectiveness<sup>172</sup> elevate Peleus to a significant role, even in his absence, as the heroes try to gather the courage to confront Hector. The image of the elder Peleus raising his hands to the heavens, praying for a better death than witnessing the Achaeans' fear of Hector,<sup>173</sup> profoundly illustrates the reverence and heroic stature he possessed. His connection with the Achaeans is employed to inspire the entire army. It should not be forgotten that the appeal to emotion which prompts Achilles to return to battle, is made through the mention of Peleus.<sup>174</sup>

The gentle and benevolent nature of this aged hero, who in his youth interacted with earlier fierce warriors, manifests in various parts of the epic, as if he was present. This presence is conveyed either through advisory words directed at Achilles, relayed by other characters or through the involvement of other figures who fulfill his paternal role. The prestige of this esteemed heroic figure serves, either directly or indirectly, as the guiding principle for Achilles, as he forges his own path. For instance, Peleus "intervenes" by speaking to his son using phrases such as "*σὺ δὲ μεγάλητορα θυμὸν ἴσχειν ἐν στήθεσσι*",<sup>175</sup> "*μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων*"<sup>176</sup> and "*αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων*".<sup>177</sup> Achieving excellence, controlling his emotions and earning the respect, admiration and honor of all, are the key pieces of advice given by Peleus which ultimately his son, Achilles, successfully attains.

He is a distinguished and well-rounded hero of the previous generation and as such, he agrees to the proposal put forth by the Achaean envoys for Achilles' participation in the Trojan War. At his own discretion, he entrusted his son to them when they visited him at his palace,<sup>178</sup> seeking information about the noble lineage of the warriors.<sup>179</sup> This significant criterion which holds great importance, allows him to obtain the assurances he desires, demonstrating his foresight. At the same time, he ensures that individuals whom he trusts as a father accompany Achilles. Their purpose is to provide proper guidance and comprehensive education to his son,<sup>180</sup> so that he may emerge as a worthy successor to the house of Peleus, whose influence and power was undeniable.<sup>181</sup>

Another notable aspect of Peleus was his gentle and benevolent nature, as evidenced by three instances of supplicants who sought refuge at his royal court. Among these, two had committed murder (Epigeus<sup>182</sup> and Patroclus<sup>183</sup>) while the third (Phoenix) was an outcast, cursed by his own father.<sup>184</sup> Peleus purified them and restored them both materially and morally, granting them a place in his kingdom and sharing his wealth with them. Besides, the distinction between the materialistic views of characters such as Odysseus and Agamemnon, on the one hand and the humanity and hospitality of Peleus on the other hand, is quite evident.<sup>185</sup> Another aspect that demonstrates Peleus' piety is his vow to the river god of his domain, Spercheios. Despite the formidable prowess of his son, he offers the hair of Achilles hoping that he will return safely from Troy.<sup>186</sup> Another illustration of piety and mortality is when the father bestows the immortal weapons of the gods upon his son, allowing him to wear them,<sup>187</sup> along with the eternal horses.<sup>188</sup> Despite the distinction between father and son, as the latter is a demigod born of a goddess, he remains marked by his mortal nature. Consequently, while the divine gifts emphasize his mortality,<sup>189</sup> his immortal lineage grants him the privilege to wield them (such as the second armor crafted by Hephaestus since he did not appear to wear the first divine armor).<sup>190</sup> This sets him apart from mortals like Patroclus or Hector, who perished because they were not worthy as entirely mortal beings and died at once when they put on the armor. The immortal armor<sup>191</sup> symbolizes the divide between mortals and immortals. Due to its invincibility, Apollo was compelled to remove it from Patroclus in order to kill him. The helmet became intertwined with the earth, mingling with dust and blood,<sup>192</sup> as it was worn by someone who was not the rightful recipient of the divine gift, a situation that also applies to Hector.<sup>193</sup> Both Patroclus and Hector lack a share in divine nature. In contrast, Peleus is the legitimate owner of the gifts; however, he recognizes his mortal essence and after safeguarding them, possesses the courage and self-awareness to pass them on to his son, who, through his mother, carried divine lineage.

Another aspect of Peleus that should be mentioned is the strong relationship that Achilles had with him, in various ways. The Homeric kingdoms were characterized by a complex structure that encompasses aspects related to kinship, settlements and the economy. Among these, kinship, regardless of its degree and extent, played a crucial role in the succession of the throne,<sup>194</sup> in contrast to genealogy which remains uninterrupted regardless of an individual's

<sup>169</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 431, 687.

<sup>170</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 70; ADKINS, 1982, 298.

<sup>171</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 70–71.

<sup>172</sup> HANIGAN, 2016, 15.

<sup>173</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 258.

<sup>174</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 312; JONG de, 2024, 7.

<sup>175</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 312.

<sup>176</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 317.

<sup>177</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 385.

<sup>178</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 385.

<sup>179</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 258.

<sup>180</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 317.

<sup>181</sup> SIMPSON/LAZENBY, 1959, 102–105.

<sup>182</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 533.

<sup>183</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 731; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C 93.

<sup>184</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 318.

<sup>185</sup> ROSNER, 1976, 315–325.

<sup>186</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 733.

<sup>187</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 520–521.

<sup>188</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 521, 737.

<sup>189</sup> HEATH, 1992, 387–400.

<sup>190</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 604.

<sup>191</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 564.

<sup>192</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 539.

<sup>193</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 539–540.

<sup>194</sup> DONLAN, 1985, 299–301.

location.<sup>195</sup> Achilles would never be able to care for his father in the same way that his father cared for him during his childhood,<sup>196</sup> as he had a limited lifespan and could not fulfill this obligation. The initial fortune of Peleus was counterbalanced by the misfortune of having only one heir, who would live his life far from Phthia. This type of responsibility extends beyond merely meeting basic survival needs; it also encompasses the emotional well-being of the parent, protection from adversaries and safeguarding the honor of the kingdom.<sup>197</sup> Peleus, as a wealthy king, does not require sustenance but rather seeks an heir to inherit his kingdom and wealth, to safeguard him from potential adversaries and to ensure proper arrangements for his burial rites. His concern and paternal sorrow upon learning of his son's death may define the epic as a profound poem about fatherhood.<sup>198</sup>

Achilles vividly recalls his father<sup>199</sup> while simultaneously rejects Agamemnon's offers of adoption.<sup>200</sup> He remains deeply concerned for his father, even after his death.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, when Odysseus has nothing further to add to Achilles, the latter encourages Phoenix to stay in his tent, so they can depart together for Phthia in the morning.<sup>202</sup> It is clear that through his foster father, Achilles is in search of his true one. The feelings of responsibility and anxiety are so profound that the barrier between life and death does not hinder him, thereby demonstrating a strong familial bond between father and son. Two additional arguments that strengthen this connection are that Achilles does not blame the mortal nature inherited from his father, just as Zeus did not intervene to prevent Heracles' death<sup>203</sup> and he proudly boasts of his lineage from his father<sup>204</sup> rather than from his divine mother, a distinction that holds significant meaning for his worldview.

Another scene that simultaneously highlights the greatness of Peleus and the unfortunate treatment he receives from fate is the most poignant moment in the Iliad, where Priam encounters Achilles. The figure of the grieving father is prominent in the Iliad, spanning from Chryses to Priam, culminating in the plea of an absent father, Peleus. As a mortal, he was unaware of Achilles' impending death, lacking the ability to mourn him. Unlike Thetis, he did not even have the opportunity to bid him farewell.<sup>205</sup> The profound irony of the parallel between Priam and Peleus lies in the fact that the latter is repeatedly known that he will never see his son again, leaving him entirely abandoned in darkness.<sup>206</sup> The tragedy of Peleus is heightened by Priam's mention of his name, as the king of the Myrmidons is ensnared in Phthia which, in the epic's evolution, serves as the "anti-Troy," symbolizing the Iliadic equivalent of the past and the perpetually

deferred future.<sup>207</sup> Even the dead sons of Priam<sup>208</sup> symbolize Peleus' inability to father sons who could succeed him, as well as the dark fate of his only son.

The plea of Priam is founded on the comparison between the king of Troy and Peleus, aiming ultimately to evoke an emotional response from Achilles.<sup>209</sup> In this context, the hero emerges as an exceptional orator,<sup>210</sup> offering profound and reflective insights,<sup>211</sup> honoring thus his father, not only in the battlefield but within a total framework. The primary reasons that make the speech between Priam and Achilles in the final rhapsody so moving are the obvious humanitarian values it conveys, such as compassion, mutual respect and kindness.<sup>212</sup> These values stand in stark contrast to the relentless hatred and vengeful fury depicted in other parts of the epic. Furthermore, this dialogue poignantly highlights the theme of paternal love, as it unfolds between the perpetrator and the victim.<sup>213</sup> Consequently, the bond between father and son in the relationship of Achilles and Peleus, holds significant importance, as it plays a crucial role in the hero's ultimate decision to return Hector's body, surpassing even his sympathy for Patroclus.<sup>214</sup> But even Patroclus does not serve as Achilles' alter ego or his reflection, as is often mistakenly portrayed. On the contrary, Patroclus embodies the communal values of his time, acting in a paternal role and thus, he reflects the essence of Peleus, despite his absence.<sup>215</sup> In any case, the comparison of Priam to Peleus deeply affects Achilles, evoking painful memories of his own father and ultimately softening him.<sup>216</sup> The two lethal enemies are connected through the invisible presence of Peleus and the aura he emanates while the subsequent shared meal symbolizes the ultimate and complete peace, not only within the Iliad but also in general.

## THE END OF PELEUS

Peleus was expelled from Phthia either by Acastus<sup>217</sup> or by his sons, Archandrus and Archeteles. The exiled king, in search of his grandson Neoptolemus, was caught in a storm on the island of Kos, where he was taken in by a man named Molon and ultimately passed away there.<sup>218</sup> A second version states that Peleus was exiled from Phthia by the sons of Acastus and subsequently died; however, his grandson, Neoptolemus, succeeded him in inheriting his grandfather's kingdom.<sup>219</sup> A third version affirms that in ancient times, as noted in a fragment from Callimachus' lost work "Aitia", there existed a tomb dedicated to Peleus in Ikos which is modern Alonnisos,<sup>220</sup> an island in the northern Sporades Islands (Prefecture of Magnesia). In this location, Peleus was

<sup>195</sup> FINKELBERG, 1991, 304.

<sup>196</sup> FELSON, 2002, 36–38.

<sup>197</sup> KOUSOUNELOS, 1992A, 145; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1993C, 89.

<sup>198</sup> FINLAY, 1980, 268.

<sup>199</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 632.

<sup>200</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 313.

<sup>201</sup> DOUKAS, 1999, 323.

<sup>202</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 317.

<sup>203</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 594.

<sup>204</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 680.

<sup>205</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 775.

<sup>206</sup> JOHANSEN, 1967, 45.

<sup>207</sup> TSAGALIS, 2012, 190.

<sup>208</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 785.

<sup>209</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 785.

<sup>210</sup> HELD, 1987, 252–253.

<sup>211</sup> HAINSWORTH, 1976, 115.

<sup>212</sup> MACLEOD, 1982, 16.

<sup>213</sup> MARONITIS/POLKAS, 2007, 147.

<sup>214</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 788.

<sup>215</sup> FINLAY, 1980, 267.

<sup>216</sup> SEAFORD, 2003, 133–180.

<sup>217</sup> ROUSSOS, 1991, 123.

<sup>218</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 221.

<sup>219</sup> CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 167.

<sup>220</sup> DUBNER, 1864, 417.

honored as the “*King of the Myrmidons*” and an annual celebration commemorating the “*Return of the hero*” was taking place.<sup>221</sup> A fourth version indicates that due to his virtues as a human entity, he was honored to live after his death not in Hades but in the Islands of the Blessed.<sup>222</sup> Still, the latest version seems to be more attractive as well as fair enough and it is going to be explained at once.

In the twilight of his life, Peleus laments the loss of his lineage, expressing sorrow over the absence of descendants in his home. The psychological burden he must bear is immense, as he mourns both his son, Achilles, and his grandson, Neoptolemus.<sup>223</sup> He feels profound misery due to the calamities that have befallen him. His marriage to the goddess Thetis ultimately led to the ruin of his household and city,<sup>224</sup> subjecting him to relentless misfortunes until he reaches the Underworld, where his suffering ceases. His grief is so overwhelming that he renounces his royal scepter, declaring to the Nereid goddess that he will fade into the earth.<sup>225</sup> Thetis, however, rises from the sea and advises Peleus not to dwell on his misfortunes. Instead, she instructs him first to bury his grandson, Neoptolemus, in Delphi. Following this, she urges him to cease mourning the dead, as death is an inevitable fate for all humans. Rather, she encourages him to go to the cape of Sepias, where she had once submitted, and await the Nereids who would accompany him. Her purpose, as an immortal goddess, was to free him from human passions and elevate him to divinity, allowing him to reside henceforth in her watery palace. This particular fate for Peleus was, in fact, the will of Zeus, who had not forgotten his grandson.<sup>226</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The promotion of Thessaly can definitely be supported, among other means,<sup>227</sup> through mythology. This is due to the inexhaustible nature of the material and the emblematic figures<sup>228</sup> it encloses which carry profound and significant meanings. The numerous and diverse traits of Peleus make him a remarkable, distinctive and unique figure throughout the history of Greek mythology. His family background, his dignified stance in the face of life’s adversities for many years, his accomplishments and achievements, along with the revered archetypal figure of a father and his complete personality, something rare and quite difficult in that era, establishes him as a hero of paramount importance, undeniably placing him among the pantheon of the greatest ancient Greek heroes. He is not only a distinguished representative of the Aegina’s aristocracy but also of Greece as a whole, having made significant contributions to the development of the par excellence noble lineage of the Greeks. The concept

of virtue, as reflected in ancient Greek literature, has never been explored with such depth, extending across four generations when considering his genealogy (Aeacus, Peleus and Telamon, Achilles and Ajax the Great, Neoptolemus). This is strengthened by the fact that in the face of the imminent threat posed by the Persians during the naval battle of Salamis and the possible extinction of the whole Hellenism, the Greeks prayed to Aeacus and his descendants for assistance.<sup>229</sup>

From all the above, special mention must be made of the symbolism of Peleus’ attempt to conquer the Nereid goddess Thetis. This woman constantly underwent transformations, with Peleus understanding no fear, never releasing his grip. She became a serpent, a lioness, a wolf, fire and ice; elements that are difficult to hold without causing pain, burns or frostbite to the hands. Yet, he managed to withstand because love provided him with the strength to endure what all the other people could not handle; horror, suffering and revulsion. He never loosened his embrace to these dark aspects, for he understood that behind all these facades, lied the essence of his beloved and her soul was concealed within him. The immortality of Peleus through Thetis symbolizes the virtue that is rewarded throughout life, even in the face of significant challenges and seemingly insurmountable difficulties.<sup>230</sup> This, in turn, illuminates an important aspect of human evolution towards enlightenment and metaphorically speaking, at that era, depicts the harmony of the two elements of nature that they represent (land and sea), with the ultimate result of the creation of light (blonde Achilles),<sup>231</sup> therefore the creation and essence of – Greek – civilization. It is not a coincidence that the son of Peleus was the most esteemed hero and an exemplary figure for all men in ancient Greece whose universal geophilosophical core continues to resonate in contemporary times.<sup>232</sup> Peleus contributed evidently to this as a father (just like Aeacus did for Peleus) and thus, he emerges from oblivion and takes the place he deserves within Greek mythology and its heroes.

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<sup>230</sup> ALLAN, 2000, 81.  
<sup>231</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2004, 68, 733.  
<sup>232</sup> SPANOS, 2024A, 524; STAMKOS, 2002.

<sup>221</sup> FARNELL, 1921, 310–311.

<sup>222</sup> MAVROPOULOS, 2008B, 89.

<sup>223</sup> SCHMIDT, 1872, 105; PAPACHATZIS, 1979, 69; ROUSSOS, 1992, 175; TATARAKI, 1992B, 149; TATARAKI, 1992C, 85–87; ROUSSOS, 1993B, 113–133; THEODORIDIS, 1994, 133; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 1999C, 167–169; CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM, 2002, 203; MAVROPOULOS, 2008A, 485–487.

<sup>224</sup> ROUSSOS, 1993B, 133.

<sup>225</sup> ROUSSOS, 1993B, 135.

<sup>226</sup> ROUSSOS, 1993B, 139.

<sup>227</sup> SPANOS, 2024B, 8; SPANOS, 2019A, 1837.

<sup>228</sup> SPANOS, 2019B, 237; SPANOS, 2015, 1817

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