



Isocrates' *Encomium of Helen* and the Cult of Helen and Menelaus at Therapnē

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The main sources in Greek literature for the cult of Helen and/or Menelaus at Therapnē are Herodotus (6.61.3), Isocrates 10 (*Encomium of Helen*), and Pausanias (3.19.9-10). Isocrates is the one who speaks of joint-worship of Helen and Menelaus (10.63). He suggests, furthermore, that Helen was a goddess at Therapnē, and his *Encomium* is routinely cited for her divine status in this cult, and not only by scholars of myth and literature. Archaeologists, too, have appealed to the *Encomium* as a documentary source for their interpretation of the site, the so-called Menelaion (first by Polybius 5.18.4). Much disagreement prevails, within the two fields of classical studies just mentioned, and also between them.¹ The present article does not attempt to adjudicate. It

¹ Accounts of Helen in the history of Greek religion differ in the weight assigned Isoc. 10. Harder 2006, in the *New Pauly*, s.v. "Helena," begins: "Goddess who was worshipped at various cult sites in and around Sparta, especially in the Menelaion in Therapnē," citing Hdt., Paus., and Hsch. but not Isoc. Similarly, for the Therapnē cult Calame 1997 196-99 (also 194, 200-201, 232) builds his interpretation on Hdt., citing Isoc. 10 only in a n., for the joint worship of Helen and Menelaus (196 n. 331). Others, like Nilsson (cf. Edmunds 2007: 16, 20-24, which the present article amplifies), who see in Helen the avatar of a Minoan or "Old European" vegetation goddess, routinely cite Isoc. 10. For scholars of

focuses on a single source, returning to the text, reading the passages customarily cited for the divinity of Helen, and asking: what, according to Isocrates, is the cult status of Helen at Therapnē? The answer to this question will not, of course, immediately affect other kinds of evidence and other arguments for the divinity of Helen.

The title of the work to be discussed is somewhat misleading. Helen is almost incidental to Isocrates' program, which includes his dispute with Plato and the Academy (1-13) and a long passage on Theseus (18-37).² He also desires to go Gorgias one better (14-15).³ He expatiates on Paris' decision to abduct Helen (39-51) and on the power of beauty (54-60).⁴ The relatively short passage on the cult at Therapnē comes toward the end of the oration and displays a device that Isocrates has already used in this oration. A new motive or cause, flattering to his object of praise, is attached to an old datum concerning this object. Isocrates has thus explained Paris' abduction of Helen by his desire to become the son-in-law of Zeus and in this way to see to it that his descendants will be the descendants of Zeus on their mother's as well as their father's side (43).⁵ Isocrates has also explained, to take another example of the device, that the Trojans did not fight to support Paris nor did the Greeks to support Menelaus. The former fought on behalf of Asia, the latter on behalf of

Helen in Greek myth her divinity is a given (often with reference to Nilsson) and Isoc. 10 is assumed to have documentary value. Archaeologists, reasoning from what they find on and in the ground at Therapnē, have reached opposing conclusions. Cf. Antonaccio 1995 and Deoudi 1999 (taking Isoc. to support her position), cited below (n. 30). For a photograph of the site: www.greeceathensaegeainfo.com/p_laconia_city_sparta.htm.

² Cf. *Panath.* 126-30. On Theseus in *Hel.* and *Panath.* see Gotteland 2001: 109-15; on the comparison of Theseus and Heracles in *Hel.* 23-29: 253-59; on Theseus and democracy in *Hel.* 32-37: 277-84.

³ It is reasonably assumed that in 14 Isoc. is referring to Gorgias. For a comparison of Gorg. *Hel.* and Isoc. *Hel.* see Zagagi. 1985: 77-82. On Isocrates' criticism of Gorgias' *Helen* on the basis of genre (viz., Gorgias wrote an *apologia*, not an encomium), see Ford 2002: 252-54.

⁴ Mirhady and Too 2000: "One could almost say there are three speeches within this speech" (i.e., 1-15, 16-38, and 39-69). On the question of the unity of the oration, see the conclusion of this article.

⁵ The genealogy of Paris that Isocrates probably has in mind is: Zeus – Dardanus – Erichthonius – Tros – Ilus – Laomedon – Priam – Paris; Zajonz 2002: 225. Papillon 1996: 13-14 discusses Isoc.' use of the myth of Paris. As with other myths in Isoc., "the treatment is limited and specifically linked to Isocratean themes."

Europe, “believing that in whichever the person of Helen resided this land would be more prosperous” (51).

The passage relevant to the Therapnē cult begins as follows:

Οὐ γὰρ μόνον ἀθανασίας ἔτυχεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν δύναμιν
 ἰσόθεον λαβοῦσα πρῶτον μὲν τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ἤδη
 κατεχομένους ὑπὸ τῆς πεπρωμένης εἰς θεοὺς ἀνήγαγεν,
 βουλομένη δὲ πιστὴν ποιῆσαι τὴν μεταβολὴν οὕτως
 αὐτοῖς τὰς τιμὰς ἐναργεῖς ἔδωκεν ὥσθ' ὀρωμένους ὑπὸ
 τῶν ἐν τῇ θαλάττῃ κινδυνευόντων σώζειν, οἵτινες ἂν
 αὐτοὺς εὐσεβῶς κατακαλέσωνται (61).⁶

Not only did she get immortality (noun ἀθανασία) but she also, having acquired god-like (adj. ἰσόθεος) power, she first raised her brothers, now held down by death, to the gods. Wanting to give credibility to their transformation she gave them such conspicuous honors that they are seen by and save those in peril on the sea, whoever calls upon them piously.

For her immortality, there were already three accounts, none of them easily reconcilable, however, with Isocrates' picture of the cult at Therapnē.

In Euripides' *Orestes* Apollo proclaims that Helen, as Zeus' daughter, is immortal (1635). In other words, she did not acquire immortality; it was her birthright. (Apollo also proclaims that she will become, along with her brothers, a savior for sailors—an “ad hoc invention” [1636-37].⁷ Her apotheosis even entails catasterism—although “the carefully phrased new mythographic formulation is appropriately imprecise” [1682-90].⁸ In Euripides' *Helen*, the Dioscuri predict their sister's sharing in a joint cult with them [1666-69], probably a matter of her joining them in the *theoxenia* [cf. Pind. *O.* 3.1-2].) Pausanias is the source for another kind of immortality of Helen. He heard a story in Croton and in Himera about a certain Crotoniate man, Leonymus. This person, wounded in battle, was sent by the priestess at Delphi to Leukē, an island in the Euxine at the mouth of the Ister, to be

⁶ The Greek text here and in the other quotations from *Hel.* is that of Mandilaras 2003.2.

⁷ Willink 1986: 352 on vv. 1635-7. West 1987: 291 on v. 1637 takes the same view, with some qualification.

⁸ Willink 1986: 360 on vv. 1689-90

cured by Ajax. Upon his return to Croton, cured, he reported that he had seen, amongst other heroes, Helen, who was married to Achilles (3.19.13). Achilles had been snatched from his pyre and carried there by his mother.⁹ Pausanias' story does not give an explanation for Helen's immortality. Like the joint cult with her brothers, however, this story rules out Menelaus and, for this reason, cannot be squared with the description of the cult at Therapnē. Finally, there is the tradition that Helen and Menelaus go to the Elysian Field, he simply because he was married to her.¹⁰ Life in the Elysian Field is everlasting but it is a life "for mortals" (ἀνθρώποισι, *Od.* 4.565), not gods. This tradition does not elevate Helen and Menelaus to the status that they ostensibly attain in Isocrates.

Isocrates is in fact offering a new cause of Helen's immortality, which he finds in her beauty. In his excursus on beauty (54-60) preceding the passage quoted above, one of the themes is that beauty (κάλλος) is the most divine of human characteristics (54). Of superior human qualities it is the most immediately compelling. At first sight we are well-disposed to beautiful persons and those alone, "like the gods," we do not refuse to serve (56). Piety (εὐσέβεια) is one of the things that we feel toward beauty (58). Even Zeus thought it appropriate to approach beauty in lowly guise—as Amphitryon to Alcmene, as a shower of gold to Danaë, as a swan to Nemesis, and again in this form to Leda (59).¹¹ "Here is the greatest proof of my words: we would find more persons who have been made immortal (adj. ἀθάνατος) because of beauty than because of all other virtues." "Helen surpassed (lit., "got more than," πλέον ἔσχευ) these persons to the extent that she excelled

⁹ *Aithiopsis* arg. B, p. 69.19-24 Bernabé = *Procli Aethiopidos Enarratio*, p. 47.26-28 Davies; Pind. *O.* 2.79-80. Cf. the next n.

¹⁰ *Od.* 4.561-69 (Proteus to Menelaus). Or Menelaus will go to the Island of the Blest (Eur. *Hel.* 1676-77); cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 6.29. (In Pind.'s short list of those on the Island of the Blest at *O.* 2.78-80 Menelaus is not included.) The Elysian Field and the Island of the Blest are for all intents and purposes the same place. See Stephanie West in Heubeck, West and Hainsworth 1988: 227; Nisetich 1988: 13 and n. 48; Nagy 1999[1979]: 167-68; M. L. West 2007: 349.

¹¹ Isoc. does not trouble to choose between the two conflicting accounts of Helen's birth. (1) From an egg from Nemesis. In his union with her, Zeus took the form of a gander (*Cypria* fr. 10 B = fr. 8 Davies), not Isoc.' swan. In Cratinus *Nemesis*, however, he took the form of a swan (*Epit.* ii K-A [*PMG* 4.179]). (2) From an egg from Leda. Only *Hel.* 257-59. These lines are bracketed, however, in most eds.

them in appearance” (61). Now comes the passage on Helen’s immortality quoted above. Her immortality is, then, implicitly the result of her beauty.¹² As for her “god-like power,” its source is not clear. Earlier Isocrates said Zeus wished to raise the persons (σώματα) of Heracles and Helen to the gods (17), putting the matter in terms of Zeus’ intention (βουλόμενος, without further specification), an intention that we know was fulfilled in the case of Heracles. As for Helen, of the sources that we have, only the plays of Euripides cited in the preceding paragraph would have given Isocrates any authority for her divinity and this authority was hardly established.

To say, as Isocrates does in the passage under discussion (61), that Helen is immortal is not by itself to say that she is a goddess. If immortality were the sufficient condition of divinity, even Tithonus would be a god. Isocrates refers, however, to the power that Helen has acquired as “god-like,” using the definite article, “*the* god-like power” and thus apparently pointing to the immortality he has just mentioned as its source. Of gods one does not say that their power is “god-like,” and, at least for the moment, Helen is not a goddess. What she does with this power, however, presupposes that she is indeed divine. She raises her brothers from the dead “to the gods” (verb ἀνάγειν, which is *vox propria* for resurrection¹³) and, as a confirmation of their new status, makes them rescuers of mortals. This piece of Greek myth is unparalleled, and indeed it contradicts everything else reported about the Dioscuri.¹⁴ It is a matter of Isocrates’ piecing together a unique Iliadic datum concerning mortal Dioscuri, i.e., both of them dead and buried in Lacedaemon (*Il.* 3.243-44; n.b. verb κατέχειν, the same verb used by Isocrates) with another datum, the known fact of their efficacy as rescuers (*Hymn. Hom.* 33; *Alc.* 34 V, etc.).¹⁵ In Isocrates’ logic, the Dioscuri could not be rescuers in this world if they were buried in Lacedaemon. They had to have been resurrected. Further, their powers had to have been conferred

¹² The reading of Isoc. *Hel.* by Worman 2002: 165-69 emphasizes the reciprocity between encomiastic style and the beauty of Helen.

¹³ Edmunds 1981: 231.

¹⁴ Zajonz 2002: 275.

¹⁵ Elsewhere, either they are both beneath the earth, exchanging death and life on alternate days (*Od.* 11. 301-4; with τοὺς ... κατέχει ... αἴα cf. Isocrates’ κατεχομένους), or Castor is mortal and Polydeices immortal (*Cypria* fr. 8 B = fr. 6 Davies), or on alternate days one lives on Olympus and the other beneath Therapnē (*Pind. Nem.* 10. 55-60; *Pyth.* 11.63-64). For a survey of the Dioscuri in Pindar see Robbins 1994: 41-45.

on them by someone. Isocrates supplies a new cause for this new mythical construct, namely Helen. It is a matter of the encomiastic device already described. In short, this divinity of the Dioscuri is an encomiastic invention or reinvention.

Next come Helen's deification of Menelaus and their joint-cult at Therapnē.

Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τοσαύτην Μενελάῳ χάριν ἀπέδωκεν ὑπὲρ τῶν πόνων καὶ τῶν κινδύνων, οὓς δι' ἐκείνην ὑπέμεινε, ὥστε τοῦ γένους ἅπαντος τοῦ Πελοπιδῶν διαφθαρέντος καὶ κακοῖς ἀνηκέστοις περιπεσόντος, οὐ μόνον αὐτὸν τῶν συμφορῶν τούτων ἀπήλλαξε ἀλλὰ καὶ θεὸν ἀντὶ θνητοῦ ποιήσασα σύνοικον αὐτῇ καὶ πάρεδρον εἰς ἅπαντα τὸν αἰῶνα κατεστήσατο. (62) Καὶ τούτοις ἔχω τὴν πόλιν τὴν Σπαρτιατῶν τὴν μάλιστα τὰ παλαιὰ διασώζουσιν ἔργῳ παρασχέσθαι μαρτυροῦσαν· ἔτι γὰρ καὶ νῦν ἐν Θεράπναις τῆς Λακωνικῆς θυσίας αὐτοῖς ἁγίας καὶ πατρίας ἀποτελοῦσιν οὐχ ὡς ἥρωσιν, ἀλλ' ὡς θεοῖς ἀμφοτέροις οὔσιν (63).

Thereafter she rendered such favor to Menelaus for the toils and dangers he had endured for her that, when the whole race of the Pelopids was destroyed and fallen into fatal misfortunes, not only did she free him from these disasters but even made him a god instead of a mortal and established him as the one who sits beside her for all time. And as witnesses to these facts I can offer the city of the Spartiates, the one that especially preserves ancient traditions (lit., “the old things”). For still today in Therapnē, in Laconia, they render holy ancestral sacrifices to them, not as to heroes but as to gods, both of them.

As the immortality of Helen, mentioned as the outset (61 init.), soon became god-like power and she elevated her brothers “to the gods,” so, too, she now elevates Menelaus to this status. The afterlife of Helen and Menelaus in the Elysian Field (cf. above) is forgotten. Isocrates offers another new mythical construct in the manner already noticed. Here he has a particular datum from the joint-cult on which to elaborate, i.e., the form of sacrifice offered in this cult—“not as to heroes but as to gods,” he says. Scholars have usually assumed that Isocrates means the complete agenda of sacrifice to gods. But his “holy ancestral sacrifices”

is vague. He would have been seizing on one or more of the several differentiae as between the cults of heroes and of gods.¹⁶ For Isocrates' purposes, even a single detail in the worship of Helen and Menelaus at Therapnē, perhaps introduced by priests desiring to upgrade the cult, would have sufficed as the basis of his large claim. Isocrates' description of the form of sacrifice does not in itself have to be taken as false; his large claim is another matter, a properly encomiastic one.

For the understanding of Isocrates' "not as to heroes but as to gods" in relation to sacrifice a phrase in Pindar *Olympian* 7 (to Diagoras of Rhodes, 464 B.C.E.) is helpful.¹⁷ One of the three myths in this ode concerns Tleptolemus' murder of Likymnius and his settlement of Rhodes (20-33). Pindar returns briefly to the myth later in the ode and refers to a cult:

τόθι λύτρον συμφορᾶς οἰκτρᾶς γλυκὺ Γλαπολέμῳ
 ἴσταται Τιρυνθίων ἀρχαγέτα,
 ὥσπερ θεῶ,
 μῆλων τε κνισάεσσα πομπὰ
 καὶ κρίσις ἀμφ' ἀέθλοισι. 77-80

There for Tleptolemus, leader of those from Tiyrns (his hometown)—sweet requital for lamentable misfortune—are established as if to a god a procession of sheep for steaming sacrifice and decision-bringing games.¹⁸

The misfortune is his slaying of Licymnius (27-32).¹⁹ Pindar gives a lapidary notice of games (the Tleptolemeia) and the sacrifice to Tleptolemus.²⁰ The kind of cult is recognizable: honors to a founder or colonizer (*oikistēs*) as hero.²¹ Tleptolemus was the *oikistēs* of Rhodes. Thucydides tells how the people of Amphipolis, in gratitude to Brasidas

¹⁶ For the differentiae: von Geisau 1967: 1104-5.

¹⁷ For those "honored as a god" in Homer see Webster 1958: 105-107.

¹⁸ Slater 1969 s.v. ἀμφί A.III.3: "in respect of, in the field of, esp. of what is at stake."

¹⁹ The passage that I have quoted raises two larger issues that happen not be directly related to the small point that I am making. One is the religious ideology of "compensation," on which see Nagy 1990: 140-42. The other is the tradition concerning the settlement of Rhodes: see Kirk 1985 on *Il.* 2.668-70.

²⁰ The Tleptolemeia are referred to also in Dittenberg. *Syll.*³ no. 1067.7 (Rhodes, second c. B.C.E.).

²¹ Hornblower 1991: 20-21 (on 1.4) for the institution.

for his liberation of their city from the Athenians, made him their *oikistēs*.²² They buried him in the city; sacrificed to him as to a hero; paid him the honor of games and yearly sacrifices (5.11.1). As this example shows, the hero's grave is focal. The cult of Tleptolemus on Rhodes presupposes that his companions brought his remains from Troy, where he was killed by Sarpedon (*Il.* 5.628-662).²³ His bones would have been collected and saved in a jar after his pyre burned down (cf. *Il.* 23.238-44 [Patroclus]; 24.792-94 [Hector]; *Od.* 24.71-75 [Achilles]).

No one has ever doubted that the cult of Tleptolemus was a hero cult.²⁴ Why, then, Pindar's "as if to a god"? The explanation is not far to seek. As the scholiast explained, "the compensation is set up for him as for the gods, for he gets distinguished sacrifices and games are dedicated to him."²⁵ The scholiast takes the form of sacrifice as part of the explanation of "as if to a god," which, it should be noted, he paraphrases "as for the gods," i.e., he uses ὡς, not ὡσπερ. Isocrates says similarly and more fully "not as (ὡς) to heroes but as (ὡς) to gods." Isocrates' ὡς κτλ. and Pindar's ὡσπερ κτλ. are different ways of saying the same thing. As was suggested earlier, it was the form of sacrifice in the cult at Therapnē that was the datum on which Isocrates was building. The clearer case of the sacrifice to Tleptolemus corroborates this suggestion.

²² Willcock 1995: 130 on lines 77-80 cites the cult of Brasidas among others.

²³ Fernández-Gallano 1956: 228 on line 78.

²⁴ Farnell 1932: 56: "The hero-founder was naturally worshipped as ἀρχηγέτης; Pindar's words ὡσπερ θεῶ by no means prove that the Rhodians were worshipping Tleptolemos as a god" Fernández-Gallano 1956: 228: "seguramente quiere decir 'como a un semiodios'." Lehnus 1981: 117 translates: "destino eroico"; he comments (123) on lines 77-80: "eroicizzazione di Tlapolemos." (On ὡσπερ θεῶ Gildersleeve 1885 has nothing relevant to the present discussion; Kirkwood 1982 has nothing.) Verdenius 1987: 81 on line 80, referring to von Geisau 1967 (list of differentiae between hero cult and divine cult) states: "The use of θεός does not necessarily imply that the offerings to Tleptolemus were not completely burnt ..., for θεός means 'divine being', which comprises both gods and heroes" I.e., Tleptolemus was a hero (offerings to heroes were completely burnt). Verdenius' comment on the semantics of θεός is odd and seems to miss Pindar's point, viz., that Tleptolemus receives distinctive honor. Even if Verdenius' general observation on the semantics is correct, it is here irrelevant.

²⁵ Schol. *O.* 7.141c.1 (BCDEQ) Drachmann 1.229: ἴσταται δὲ αὐτῷ τὸ λυτήριον ὡς τοῖς θεοῖς· θυσία γὰρ αὐτῷ διάφοροι γίνονται καὶ ἀγῶνες τελοῦνται.

The divinity of Helen at Therapnē depends, then, on the encomiastic device defined and illustrated above. Isocrates' concluding remarks on the power (δύναμις) of Helen as a goddess as shown in her blinding of Stesichorus could as well argue for her power as a heroine (64).²⁶ There is no reason, finally, to believe in Helen's divinity in the cult at Therapnē any more than in Isocrates' obvious inventions, the divinity of Menelaus and Helen's elevation of her brothers to the gods.²⁷ Isocrates nowhere in his encomium of Helen goes so far as to call Helen a goddess, for the simple reason that he knew she was not a goddess. It is Menelaus whom, with paradoxical bravado, he calls a god (θεός) and her *parhedros*. The cult on which he lavishes this encomiastic wit was a hero cult, like the cult of Alessandra-Cassandra at Amyclae and like many another archaic hero cult.²⁸ To explain such cults all that is necessary is Greek myth and epic.²⁹ Hector Catling, to quote an archaeologist on the matter, said of the Menelaion: "The shrine is ... a classic instance of cult created deliberately out of nostalgia for the Heroic past"³⁰ In short, the cult of Helen and Menelaus at Therapnē, although somewhat unusual as the cult of a couple, fits into a well-known pattern of archaic hero cult.³¹

²⁶ Salapata 2002: 145-46 on the dangers of angry heroines.

²⁷ The deification of Menelaus, unattested anywhere else, is Isocrates's invention. Zajonz 2002: 279.

²⁸ For the cult of Alessandra-Cassandra cf. Salapata 2002.

²⁹ Nagy 1999[1979] 114-17 asserts the evolution of hero cult from earlier ancestor worship. As Coldstream 1976 shows, regional distinctions are necessary: "some local heroes may have been venerated all through the Dark Age, long before the circulation of Homeric epic; when the epic cycle became widely known, more cults for named heroes might grow up in regions where there had been no such continuity—for example, in the Dorian Peloponnese" (17).

³⁰ Catling 1976-1977: 34. Quoted by Antonaccio 1995: 166. The critique of Antonaccio 1995 by Deoudi 1999: 125 n. 619 takes the form of an argument from authority, i.e., a list of earlier scholars who asserted the divinity of Helen at Therapnē.

³¹ The only other famous couple who have a cult is Pelops and Hippodameia, at Olympia. Kearns 1998, surveying the "couple acting together," refers to Metaneira and Keleos at Eleusis; Pelarge and Isthmiades at the Theban Kabeirion; and Klymene and Dictys. Alcman fr. 7 Page, Davies = 19 Calame, from a fragmentary commentary on Alcman, seems to be referring to Menelaus, Helen, and the Dioscuri as worshipped at Therapnē. The various references to the Dioscuri at Therapnē do not include mention of a shrine. Parker Forthcoming suggests that "Therapnē in general usage could stretch as far as the

The archaeological evidence has, of course, been used to argue that Helen and Menelaus really were gods and not heroes at Therapnē. The goal of the present discussion was not, however, to settle the archaeological question, nor was it to combine literary and archaeological evidence or to confront one kind of evidence with the other. The much more limited goal was to reconsider Isocrates' *Encomium of Helen* as a source for the nature of the cult of Helen and Menelaus at Therapnē. It has been possible to show that nothing in this work requires that they be understood as gods. On the contrary, their divinity is merely (and abundantly!) encomiastic. Isocrates did not expect anyone to take his great hyperboles (τηλικαύταις ὑπερβολαῖς, 54) literally.³²

Scholars whose research lies outside myth, i.e., Greek myth in Greek literature, may find words like "invention" jarring. Is not Greek myth something relatively fixed and does it not have an exemplary value that is relatively stable? Could Isocrates have taken the liberties imputed to him in this article? The answer is that Greek myth is relatively mutable and its exemplary value is ad hoc. As a coda to this article, some brief comments on the tradition of Isocrates' practice are offered.

When a Homeric hero retells a myth, it is an exemplum that seeks to address present circumstances.³³ The following pattern is typical in Homer. (1) The narrator finds a particular point of contact between the myth and the situation to which he or she applies it. (2) He or she uses the myth to argue for a course of action or to illustrate a relevant gnome. (3) Because of (1) and (2), he or she adapts the story, producing a version in some way new. (4) He or she concludes by reasserting the myth's relevance to the present situation. Sometimes the adaptation is so novel that it seems as if a new myth is being invented.³⁴ Phoenix' retelling of

Phoibaion," where Paus. 3.20.2 says that the Dioscuri had a shrine. Cf. Calame 1997: 200 for the presumed removal of the Dioscuri to another place in Sparta.

³² As Zajonz 2002: 254 points out, Isoc. seems here to contradict his introduction (13), where he says that hyperbole is easy in trivial matters, whereas it is difficult to attain the measure of the noble and beautiful, i.e., hyperbole is beyond reach (as he says at 4.88 concerning Xerxes). On τηλικαύταις see Zajonz 2002: 240.

³³ Slater 1977: 195.

³⁴ The typology is based on the one in Edmunds 1997: 419-20. Myths that are told in Homer are conventionally and appropriately called paradeigmata, as by Willcock 1964. In this article, I argue (429-32), with particular reference to Phoenix' version of the myth of Meleager (and citing March 1987 and Nagy

the myth of Meleager is a well-known example. The scanty evidence for the narrated mythical exemplum in archaic solo lyric and elegy does not permit firm conclusions, but it seems as if the poet's practice is the same as the one just outlined. The myths in Pindar and in the choruses of tragedy, although often more complexly related to the circumstances to which they refer, have the same exemplary purpose.³⁵ As for mythical novelty in choral lyric, the most famous example is perhaps Pindar's retelling of the story of Pelops in *Olympian* 1 (37-52).³⁶ Athenian orators' abundant use of mythical exempla has been seen as continuous with the practice of the Homeric heroes.³⁷

In Isocrates the exemplarity of Helen, who surpasses all other women in birth, beauty, and fame, is a given, and the challenge to the composer of an encomium about her is to say something that others have not already said (13, 15). Isocrates intends his own oration to be itself exemplary, both as against contemporary practice (and against Gorgias' earlier effort) and an inspiration for future orators, to whom it still lies open to say new things about Helen (καινοὶ λόγοι, 69). Innovation is, then, programmatic, and it leads to the paradoxical results already noticed, as well as to suppression of any indication of culpability on Helen's part.³⁸

"Paradoxical" happens to occur in Isocrates' opening sentence, where he refers with scorn to contemporary philosophical disputation. Has he, then, excluded the application of the word to himself? The answer is no, if one follows an interpretation of the prooemium (1-15) that goes back to Aristotle. He took it as an example of the epideictic prooemium that is in itself unrelated to the subject of the oration that it

1991), that "it is the speaker who creates the 'innovation' in a myth, in response to the demands of the situation in which he or she is speaking. Thus it would be more accurate to say that *Homer represents his characters as innovating* than it is to say that Homer innovates" (emphasis as in the original). For a critique of Willcock 1977, see Nagy 1991.

³⁵ For the narrated mythical exemplum in archaic solo lyric and elegy, with some comments on Pindar and tragedy, see Edmunds 2009.

³⁶ Seidensticker 2008 defines a category of "correction of myth" (*Mythenkorrektur*), of which Pindar's Pelops is an example. Seidensticker's article is a useful reminder that a practice that we think of as characteristic of modern reception of Greek myth was going on from an early time in ancient Greece.

³⁷ Gotteland 2001: 11.

³⁸ Zajonz 2002: 21-22.

introduces (*Rhet.* 1414b19-28; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 3.8.9).³⁹ On this interpretation, Isocrates would not be contradicting himself if he went in for paradoxology in the encomium itself, and one would be free to speak, with the French, of an “éloge paradoxal.”⁴⁰ One would also have removed the apparent contradiction between the prooemium and Isocrates’ reference to the “hyperboles” of his own work. To conclude, it is tempting to speak of Isocrates’ cult of Helen and Menelaus at Therapnē, although not in the same unfriendly spirit, in a phrase that Polybius used of Timaeus, ὑπερβολὴ τῆς παραδοξολογίας (Timaeus *FGrH* 566 T 19 [26c] = Polyb. 12.26c.1).⁴¹

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³⁹ At the same time, the prooemium coheres with the rest of the speech in various ways, as Zajonz 2002: 37-57 argues, taking into account the whole history of scholarship on the structure and import of Isoc. *Hel*. These larger questions lie outside the scope of the present article, which has not attempted to repeat Zajonz’ copious references.

⁴⁰ Saïd, Trédé, and Le Boulleuc 1997: 253. Cf. Gotteland 2001: 115.

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