

The Schedius-Sequence and the Alternating Rhythm of the Iliadic Battle Narrative

This paper analyzes the battle narrative of the *Iliad* by focusing on the basic alternation of individualized victories won by warriors on one side or the other as the action progresses (disregarding potential boundaries between distinct episodes). I demonstrate that the poem's larger battle rhythm (so defined) tends to follow favored patterns or formulaically repeated sequences. Other scholars have recognized that the *impression* of haphazard mayhem on the Homeric battlefield—where hundreds of named warriors fall in a dazzling variety of discrete incidents—is actually a highly stylized poetic creation achieved by artful manipulation of typical elements (e.g., Mueller 1984: 80–82; Edwards 1987: 78–79). In fact, the poet likes to repeat certain abstract patterns, such as Greek A misses Trojan B; then B strikes A ineffectively; then A slays B (Fenik 1968: *passim*; cf. Kirk 1962: 72–80; 1990: 15–27). Analogously, I argue, as the fighting is extended to monumental proportions, and victories are assigned in alternation to Greeks or Trojans (G or T), certain patterns are strongly preferred. Bernard Fenik, an expert on Homeric battle scenes, astutely singled out and recognized as typical two contrasting occasions: when both sides win alternating victories, and when one side slays the other without interruption (Fenik 1968: 10)—but he did not pursue the matter in systematic detail.

In particular, I have found that individualized battlefield conquests are typically allocated in modules of two kinds: in what might be called alternating trios (1G+1T+1G or 2G+2T+2G); and in continuous blocks extending to a multiple of three (3G, 3T, 9G, 9T, 12G, 15G, 18G, 24G). Such arrangements account for two-thirds of the poem's single or double victories; and nearly two-thirds of the remaining victories. (These findings can

be checked against the reliable, independent list of Iliadic casualties in Stoevesandt 2004: 388–412.) Moreover, such trios are nearly always followed by another trio or by a block that is a multiple of three. And a favored sequence (1T+1G+1T, 3G) may be augmented by a prefixed trio (1G+1T+1G, 1T+1G+1T, 3G). Much as formulaic epithets occur in shorter or longer versions to complete different segments of the verse ("... [swift-footed] divine Achilles/"), so too can a sequence of victories be expanded or contracted in accordance with the typical battle rhythm.

Thus fighting in the *Iliad* commences with six alternating single victories (or two successive trios), followed by eighteen Greek conquests in a row, followed by three alternating double victories (another kind of trio): 1G+1T+1G, 1T+1G+1T, 18G, 2T+2G+2T, ... (*Il.* 4.458–5.609). Such is the formulaic nature of the Homeric battle rhythm, established as paradigmatic from the beginning. While similar patterns recur throughout the *Iliad*, this paper will concentrate on the poem's longest and most elaborate formulaic sequence, which is meaningfully repeated as the fighting concludes: 1T+1G+1T, 3G, 1T, [12G], 24G (at *Il.* 15.515–16.477 and again at 17.306–22.355).

Each occurrence of this sequence tellingly begins with Hector's victory over a Phocian leader named Schedius. Significantly, Schedius is the only Iliadic "homonym" slain by the same man—the kind of slip indicative of formulaic oral composition, comparable to the habitual recurrence of a Melanippus as the last of multiple victims named in one verse (*Il.* 8.276, 15.576, 16.695, cf. 19.240), or of an Autonus as the second victim in a catalog of nine (*Il.* 11.301, 16.694). The two instances of the Schedius-sequence show other interesting correspondences. For example, at the same point in both (after Hector slays his next victim, the last Greek to die in the sequence), an otherwise

unusual event occurs: twelve *anonymous* Trojans perish (*Il.* 15.746, 18.230). Next, the long-anticipated entry of the Myrmidons' leader results each time in twenty-four consecutive conquests over named Trojans, with the first block culminating in Patroclus' slaying of Sarpedon, and the second in Achilles' slaying of Hector—the poem's two most important Trojan casualties. Patroclus, wearing Achilles' armor, and other Greeks manage together to slay an impressive two-dozen Trojans in succession; mighty Achilles later accomplishes the same feat by himself. In summary, within the recurrent Schedius-sequence, Trojans kill only three named men, while Greeks kill twenty-seven, plus one major hero at the end as a kind of exclamatory punctuation. The pattern's extensive length and its detailed uniqueness, dynamic development, and strategic placement provide strong evidence that the poet of the *Iliad* habitually apportions victories to each side in controlled, formulaic modules.

Works Cited

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