

### Stentor's Hyperbolic Voice (*Il.* 5.784–91)

In *Iliad* 5 Hera, to stir up the Achaeans, assumes the form of a man named Stentor, said to have the voice of “fifty other men” (*Il.* 5.786). This hyperbole drew the ire of some early textual critics; a scholiast remarks that some editions omitted or athetized the passage due to its hyperbolic nature (Leaf 1900: 247). Some ancient rationalists even interpreted it to mean that Stentor was the creator of a certain kind of war-trumpet (Kirk 1990: 140).

My paper will examine this alleged hyperbole and argue that it is meant to be credible, not fantastic. I will examine *Il.* 5.859–63 and 14.147–52, where Ares and Poseidon respectively are said to have the voices of nine- or ten-thousand men. The enormous difference between the voices of 50 and 9,000 or 10,000 men presupposes the Iliadic theme of the insuperable gulf separating god and man. I will also argue that the army's fearful reaction to the voice of Ares at *Il.* 5.862–63, missing from the passage about Stentor (*Il.* 5.784–91), suggests that these two voices are significantly different. My paper will show that Stentor's “voice of fifty men” correlates nicely with that of a *keleustes* on board a penteconter, shouting his orders over the voices of fifty rowers. Since the penteconter was a common ship in archaic Greece and Homer's poems feature penteconters (*Il.* 2.718–20, 16.169–70, *Od.* 8.34–36, 8.48, 10.203–9) (Casson 1986: 44n8), ancient audiences likely would have had this as a frame of reference and realized that a “voice of fifty men” was both a possibility and a reality.

Martin West (2007: 457; 2011: 348) has recently argued that *Iliad* 18. 217 presents a war-cry which has been “rationalized” from the more outlandish Indo-European tradition of war-cries. Although he does not in any way suggest that Stentor's voice is a rationalization, I will support this view by drawing on additional comparative material from a variety of epic traditions, including Irish (O'Rahilly 1976), Persian (Warner and Warner 1905–25), Russian

(Howes 1973; Bailey and Ivanova 1998), and Armenian (Shalian 1964). I will show that Stentor's voice is modest in comparison with those of a number of figures in similar traditions, confirming the common view that Homer downplays the fantastic. Finally, I will show that Homer skillfully varies his hyperbole by comparing the *Iliad* passage to a similar one in the Irish epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* where a hero has the voice of 100 men.

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