

Hector's Snowy Mountain Simile (*Iliad* 13.754–55)

The Homeric simile is normally thought to serve a number of functions, such as breaking up potentially monotonous battle narrative and lending vividness and clarity to passages. One simile that has decidedly not successfully served this latter function among critics is the simile at *Iliad* 13.754–55, in which an onrushing Hector is compared to a snowy mountain. It is normally held that the simile compares Hector to a mountain because of his great size. This reading has troubled commentators for two main reasons: 1) Hector is not as big as a mountain and 2) mountains do not move.

Scholars have recently come up with a few alternate interpretations of this simile to make it more acceptable. Bradley (1967) argues that the comparison is not to the mountain of the simile, but the snow. Clarke (1997) believes the simile is a relic of earlier descriptions of mountainous gods, not men. Lane (2005) emends the text so that the simile compares Hector not to a mountain (*oros*), but rather the wind Boreas.

This paper argues that the simile is perfectly understandable as it is since comparisons of heroes to mountains are very common across Indo-European epic. I adduce *comparanda* from a number of central Indo-European epics including Sanskrit (*Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*), Persian (*Šāh-nāme*), Irish (*Táin Bó Cúailnge*), Old Norse (*Ragnars saga loðbrókar*), and Armenian (*David of Sassoun*) as well as folk epics from Russia and the former Yugoslavia. This abundance of analogues makes it highly likely that the motif is itself Indo-European, and therefore its appearance in the *Iliad* should occasion no surprise.

The paper then argues that Hector's similarity to a mountain, even a moving one, is not out of place in Homer. I argue that the Homeric passage downplays inherited Indo-European hyperbole by keeping implicit two of the elements of the simile that have caused scholars the

most distress—that the comparison is between the size of Hector and the mountain and that the mountain would have to be moving since Hector is as well. I show that other Indo-European epics are often much more explicitly fantastic, highlighting the point of comparison (size) and the “moving mountain” aspect of the comparison far more than Homer does. The simile thus arguably rationalizes an Indo-European motif of epic hyperbole, fitting well with the scholarly (near-)consensus that Homer downplays the fantastic (Griffin 1977; Hansen 2002; Davies 2003; West 2007).

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