

The Counselor: The Extent of Zeus' μῆτις in Greek Epic

After being immersed in the world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, some knowledge becomes almost inherent to the reader, such as how Achilles is always associated with his might (βία) and his anger in contrast to wily Odysseus and his cunning (μῆτις). As my title would suggest, I will pay close attention to how μῆτις functions in relation to Zeus and a few other characters along with any other verb and noun variations that share similar roots. I would posit that Zeus' connections to μῆτις are much more intricate than most would believe. His influence over the characters in the epics is demonstrated through his power as the counselor and is reflected in the specific of the usage of the word throughout.

First, I will detail my findings on μῆτις throughout the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, chiefly, but I will also spend some time looking into examples from the *Argonautica*. Although Zeus and the reaches of his power as the counselor will be my primary focus, I also want to focus on pivotal epic characters that display similar qualities in respect to cunning, specifically in regard to Odysseus and Jason. I will then discuss Jason and Odysseus' backgrounds in respect to their familial connections—how they are related to the divinities and how this influences their attributes. I will juxtapose the two heroes, but also highlight how Apollonius' model for Jason is purely Hellenistic in contrast to the timeless Homeric variety that is Odysseus (Fantuzzi and Hunter 2011).

Throughout the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the set trend with most variations with μῆτις is that it is either referring to a god or a particular hero, specifically Nestor, Hector, or Odysseus. The first example that we are introduced to in the *Iliad* that is repeated frequently throughout the epic is the epithet of Zeus as μῆτιετα or “the counselor.” This appears in almost every book of the

Iliad but is seen much less frequently in the *Odyssey* (Hom. *Il.* 1. 175, 1.508, 2. 197, 2.324, 6. 198, 7. 478, 8. 170, 9. 377, 10. 104, 11.278, 12. 279, 12. 292, 15. 377, 15.599, 16. 249, and 24. 314. Hom. *Od.* 14. 243, 16. 297, and 20. 102). This connection that the term has with the divine, especially to Zeus, is something that becomes more obvious with each use that arises. There are also many essential episodes in which Athena names Odysseus as an equal to Zeus in counsel. Although Athena herself is tied strongly to μητις, for obvious reasons, and she is known for her strategic military tact, she seeks out the mortal hero, Odysseus, and dubs him and equal in counsel to her father, the king of the gods.

What marks Jason and Odysseus as unique is that they are distinguished in the company of gods and demi-gods, but the divine origins of both are very obscure. In respect to Odysseus, one line that has caused many questions to be raised is the formulaic phrase repeated in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, respectively, numerous times, which is his reference as son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus or Zeus-born Laertiades, resourceful Odysseus. It is important to note that there is a clear connection between whatever ties Odysseus may have to Zeus and his famous descriptive πολυμήχανος, which becomes more evident later in my analysis.

Bibliography

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