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HOMERIC CATALOGUES BETWEEN TRADITION AND INVENTION

Abstract

This contribution aims at showing how a traditional list of names could be varied by poets with the addition of new ones sharing the same features, with a special focus on the Nereids' names. A comparison between the catalogue of Nereids in the *Iliad* (XVIII 39–49) and the one in the *Theogony* (*Theog.* 243–264) shows that whilst some names are traditional and some others seem to be invented *ad hoc*, they all convey relaxing images (sea, nature, beauty, or gifts for sailors). This list of names did not become a fixed one in later times either: inscriptions on vase-paintings of the 5th century preserve names different than the epic ones. Even Apollodorus (I 2, 7) gives a catalogue of Nereids derived partly from the *Iliad* and partly from the *Theogony*, with the addition of some names belonging to another group of deities (the Oceanids) and other forms unattested elsewhere but with the same features of the epic ones. A further comparison between a catalogue of Nymphs in the *Georgics* (IV 333–356) and its reception in the work of Hyginus proves that adding new names to a traditional list is a feature not only of oral epic poetry, but also of catalogues composed in a literate culture.

Keywords: Homer, *Iliad*, Hesiod, *Theogony*, Apollodorus, Virgil, Hyginus, reception of Homer, vase-paintings, catalogues, Nereids, speaking-names, oral culture, orality

This paper will consider the ancient lists of the Nereids' names, making a comparison between catalogues in epic poetry, which were orally composed, and their reception in classical times. My focus will be on the way in which such catalogues of proper names were composed, partly relying on tradition and partly varying and innovating on it with the addition of names nowhere else attested that can be thus considered as the poet's own invention.¹

Even though the Nereids are recurrent characters in classical literature, only four texts preserve their names in the form of a catalogue, namely the *Iliad*, the *Theogony* and the works of two mythographers, Apollodorus and Hyginus. In narratives, these deities always act as a group and very few have a specific personality, the only exceptions being Thetis (wife of Peleus and mother of Achilles), Amphitrite (wife of Poseidon, but not mentioned in the Homeric catalogue) and – only in later sources – Psamathe (who begot Phokos from Aiakos, after turning herself into a seal).² Due to the lack of a precise background for each one of them, the freedom of poets when dealing with these characters is undeniable. Along with their names, which share the same features but, as it will be shown, are not repeated identically in the four catalogues, even their number fluctuates: Hesiod states that there are fifty Nereids (*Theog.* 264), a number not shared by the other catalogues and in open contrast with another tradition that calls for one hundred Nereids.³

1. The Catalogue of Nereids in the *Iliad*

When Thetis, from the depths of the sea, hears the cry of grief of her son Achilles, despaired for Patroclus' death, she

¹ For the sake of conciseness, this work will focus only on the catalogues of the Nereids, leaving aside the catalogues of the Oceanids, even if they share many features that will be observed in the following pages.

² Apoll. *Bibl.* III 12, 6; *Schol. vet ad Eur. Andr.* 687.

³ Plat. *Criti.* 116e. For ancient traditions about the Nereids see BARRINGER 1995, esp. 4–5.

starts wailing and is soon surrounded by her sisters named one by one (*Il.* XVIII 35–49):

σμερδαλέον δ' ὤμωξεν· ἄκουσε δὲ πότνια μήτηρ
 ἡμένη ἐν βένθεσσιν ἄλως παρὰ πατρὶ γέροντι,
 κώκυσέν τ' ἄρ' ἔπειτα· θεαὶ δὲ μιν ἀμφαγέροντο
 πᾶσαι ὅσαι κατὰ βένθος ἄλως Νηρηΐδες ἦσαν.
 ἐνθ' ἄρ' ἔην Γλαύκη τε Θάλεια τε Κυμοδόκη τε
 Νησαίη Σπειώ τε Θόη θ' Ἀλίη τε βοῶπις 40
 Κυμοθόη τε καὶ Ἀκταίη καὶ Λιμνώρεια
 καὶ Μελίτη καὶ Ἰαιρα καὶ Ἀμφιθόη καὶ Ἀγαυή
 Δωτώ τε Πρωτώ τε Φέρουσά τε Δυναμένη τε
 Δεξαμένη τε καὶ Ἀμφινόμη καὶ Καλλιάνειρα
 Δωρίς καὶ Πανόπη καὶ ἀγακλειτὴ Γαλάτεια 45
 Νημερτής τε καὶ Ἀψευδῆς καὶ Καλλιάνασσα·
 ἐνθα δ' ἔην Κλυμένη Ἰάνειρά τε καὶ Ἴανασσα
 Μαῖρα καὶ Ὠρεΐθυια ἐϋπλόκαμός τ' Ἀμάθεια
 ἄλλαι θ' αἰ κατὰ βένθος ἄλως Νηρηΐδες ἦσαν.

After the enumeration of the names, the narration continues with Thetis' lamentation over Achilles' misfortunes, while her companions beat their breasts in despair (XVIII 50–51). When Thetis reaches out to her son to comfort him, her sisters accompany her, and they attend the dialogue between them. Then, they are dismissed by Thetis and go back to the sea (XVIII 140–146).

The sudden disappearance of the Nereids and their lack of active participation posed some interpretive questions concerning this passage. Ancient commentators considered it to be an interpolation,⁴ whereas more recently the scene has been interpreted by the Neoanalysis as reminiscent of a funeral scene, probably the one contained in a lost *Achilleis* on the occasion of the death of Achilles himself.⁵ According to this view,

⁴ *Schol. vet. ad Il.* XVIII 39; the same view is shared by LEAF 1902 II, 273.

⁵ The mourning of Thetis surrounded by her sisters in occasion of her son's death is recalled also in the *Odyssey* (XXIV 47–59) and Proclus

the mournful procession of the Nereids was then adapted to the context of the *Iliad* and transferred to the death of Patroclus instead. Naming all the participants then would be a way to amplify Thetis' sorrow for the gloomy destiny awaiting her son and make it more visible to the listeners.⁶

However, the list of the Nereids' names could also serve a different purpose, namely to interrupt the mourning of Achilles at the news of Patroclus' death, both diverting the audience's attention and creating suspense about the outcome of such a sorrowful moment.⁷ Much attention has been dedicated by recent studies to the effects of Homeric catalogues on the ancient listeners (suspense, surprise, recollection of other stories, emotional engagement).⁸ In the case of a completely invented list,⁹ the audience would be enthralled by the novelty of the list itself and the beauty of its imagery. Even though a link between the catalogue of Nereids and the mythical tradition is undisputable, it seems nonetheless to have been harmoniously arranged in order to convey very evocative images. Some features of the text may support this view.

First of all, the line that opens the catalogue (παῖσαι ὅσαι κατὰ βένθος ἄλως Νηρηΐδες ἦσαν, XVIII 38) together with a very similar formulation at the end (ἄλλαι θ' αἰ κατὰ βένθος ἄλως Νηρηΐδες ἦσαν, XVIII 49), suggests that the poet did not name the totality of Nereids, but many others are known to him. Expressions of this kind, which appear very often at the

mentions this scene in his summary of the *Aethiopsis* (Procl. *Chrest.* 172 Seve.). KAKRIDIS 1949, 70–75; KULLMANN 1960, 36–37 and 331–332; RUTHERFORD 2019, 95.

⁶ GAERTNER 2001, 302–303; CORAY 2016, 32. According to MINCHIN 2001, 94 “the beauty of the list (...) serves to highlight its pathos”.

⁷ This thesis was first supported by SCHADEWALDT 1951², 248–250. Cp. OWEN 1989², 177. KELLY (2007, 123–124) insists on the function of catalogues as a preparation to major events (in this case the meeting between Thetis and Achilles).

⁸ Cp. MINCHIN 1996, 19–20 and 76–77; GAERTNER 2001, 298–305.

⁹ Such as the names of the Phaeacians (*Od.* VIII 111–119), on which see KANAVOU 2015, 120–123.

end of catalogues, suggest to the listener that such lists could never be completed because an oral poet would never be able to tell all the names he knows.¹⁰ At the same time, thus, such utterances emphasize the largeness of the Nereids' group, whose number could be expanded even further, as we will see.

Picking up only some entries from an indefinite range of possibilities, the poet of the *Iliad* inserted thirty-three names in ten lines, adding only three epithets (βοῶπις, ἀγακλειτή, ἐϋπλόκαμος), and obtaining, in this way, the simplest form of a catalogue.¹¹ These names are not just juxtaposed, but they share features, which make the whole list totally coherent. It is possible to detect a consistent use of phonetic assonance, especially evident in names that appear close to each other (Δωπώ τε Πρωτώ 43, Δυναμένη τε Δεξαμένη 43–44, Νημερτής τε καὶ Ἀψευδής 46, Ἰάνειρά τε καὶ Ἰάνασσα 47).

With regards to non-consecutive names, the repetition of the same root in different anthroponyms stresses the link from each figure to the others. Consider for instance θοός "swift", appearing in Θόη, Κυμοθόη, Ἀμφιθόη or κύμα "wave" used as first member of compound in Κυμοδόκη and Κυμοθόη. Again, Καλλιάνειρα and Καλλιάνασσα, similar both in meaning and in formation, appear in the same position of the verse and the latter is further echoed by Ἰάνασσα in the following line.

As a whole, they all are "speaking names", related to easily identifiable semantic areas. Maritime images are the most relevant, occurring close to each other and at the beginning of the catalogue (lines 39–41): apart from the two names built

¹⁰ A very similar structure recurs at *Hym. Hom. Ap.* 92–95. The inability of the poet to enumerate exhaustively all the names is sometimes explicitly stated, e.g. *Il.* XVII 260–261. Cp. KELLY 2007, 123–124.

¹¹ Cp. EDWARDS 1980, 99. Many scholars use the term 'list' in a specific sense, referring only to the simplest form of a catalogue, the one composed by bare names with no further elaboration, whereas a proper 'catalogue' would include some lines of explanation for each entry (MINCHIN 1996, 4–5; 2001, 74–76; SAMMONS 2010, 5–12). In this paper 'catalogue' and 'list' will be used as synonyms.

from the word κῦμα (Κυμοδόκη, “she who holds the wave” and Κυμοθόη, “swift wave”), the sea is evoked by many of its components. Γλαύκη is the “brightly gleaming”,¹² Νησαίη, Σπειώ, Ἀλίη, Ἀκταίη are readily derived respectively from νῆσος „island”, σπέος “cave”, ἄλς “sea” and ἀκτὴ “coast”. Λιμνώρεια, from λίμνη “marsh”, should be interpreted as “mistress of the marshes.”¹³ Further on, finally, there is Ἀμάθεια (49), clearly derived from ἄμαθος “sand”. Even though less evidently, other names of Nereids may carry an allusion to the sea. Θόη, “the swift”, may refer to the quick succession of the waves, and also Ἀμφιθόη, “the very swift”. Γαλάτεια, a common name for a nymph, should probably be interpreted as “milky sea foam”.¹⁴ Finally, Μαῖρα, from the root of the verb μαρμαίρω, has probably the meaning of “the glimmering” and Ὠρείθυια (“mountain-rushing”) may convey the idea of wind rushing down to the sea from a mountain.¹⁵

Even if names semantically related to the sea would be more expected for a group of sea Nymphs, the majority of them carry more general denominations, based on moral or physical features, which could belong to every minor goddess. A group of five names suggesting a helping attitude appear in a row (lines 43–44). Δωτώ, echoed further on by Δωρίς (45), is “the giver” and Πρωτώ is “the first (to help).”¹⁶ Immediately after, three participles of verbs appear after one another: Φέρουσα “the bringer”; Δυναμένη “the mighty”; Δεξαμένη “she who receives.”¹⁷

¹² As remarked by WEST 1966, 238, γλαυκή is an epithet of the sea in *Il.* XVI 34 and it is used as a *kenning* of the sea in Hes. *Theog.* 440.

¹³ Cp. CORAY 2016, 35.

¹⁴ It is mainly interpreted as a derivative of γάλα (“milk”).

¹⁵ Cp. EDWARDS 1991, 150.

¹⁶ VON KAMPTZ 1982, 126. For different (and more conjectural) interpretations cp. EDWARDS 1991, 149.

¹⁷ Proper names in a participial form must have been quite widespread for minor deities in catalogic poetry (see CASSIO 2005, 34–35 with more examples).

Although such names may still be related specifically to the Nereids and express their good will towards the seamen, all the other names refer to even more generic qualities. In fact, the second Nereid to be mentioned is Θάλεια, which is a very common name for a Nymph¹⁸ and thus may be reminiscent of other characters. In the same way, Αμφινόμη seems to be derived from the masculine Αμφινόμος, with a broad semantic reference to pastures and animals. A reference to moral virtues is implicit in names such as Μελίτη “the sweet (as honey)” and even more clearly in Νημερτής “the infallible” and Ἀψευδής “the one without deception”. Such attributes may have been influenced also by the popular belief in Greek culture that sea-divinities had a special knowledge concerning the future: Nereus himself in the *Theogony* is defined as ἀψευδής (233) and νημερτής (235) and Proteus in the *Odyssey* is introduced as γέρον ἄλιος νημερτής (*Od.* IV 384–385).

Names conveying the idea of beauty or power may be suitable for any high-ranking woman, such as Αγαυή “the admirable”, Καλλιάνειρα “the beautiful woman”, Πανόπη “all-seeing”, Καλλιάνασσα “beautiful mistress” and Κλυμένη “the famous”. As a formant of compounds names, the root of *ρίς (“strength”) is repeated: Ἰαιρα “the vigorous”, Ἰάνειρα “the forceful”,¹⁹ Ἰάνασσα “the mighty queen” (cp. Ἰφιάνασσα).

Echoes in sounds, repetitions of roots and “speaking names” in general were essential features of long lists of obscure characters. They served the twofold purpose of helping the poet recall or create all the names and holding the listeners’ attention during oral performance. The comparison with other catalogues of Nereids will show that even if the names are not always the same, their features are mostly constant, defining the sense in which a poet could “invent”, while still being attached to mythical tradition.

¹⁸ It is bestowed to a Muse (*Theog.* 77) and to a Grace (*Theog.* 909), see further on § 7.

¹⁹ VON KAMPTZ 1982, 102 and 121.

2. The Catalogue of Nereids in the *Theogony*

The relationship between the Homeric Catalogue and the mythological tradition has often been discussed. In particular, many scholars believed that Homer was drawing his list from a broader one²⁰ and this view was supported by the comparison with the other catalogue of Nereids belonging to an oral poem, the one included in the *Theogony* of Hesiod. After a recollection of the qualities of Nereus and the mention of his siblings, Hesiod gives a list of fifty Nereids (*Theog.* 243–264):²¹

Πρωτώ τ' Εὐκράντη τε Σαώ τ' Ἀμφιτρίτη τε Εὐδώρη τε Θέτις τε Γαλήνη τε Γλαύκη τε, Κυμοθόη Σπειώ τε Θόη θ' Ἀλίη τ' ἑρόεσσα	245
Πασιθέη τ' Ἐρατώ τε καὶ Εὐνίκη ῥοδόπηχυσ καὶ Μελίτη χαρίεσσα καὶ Εὐλιμένη καὶ Ἀγαυή Δωτώ τε Πρωτώ τε Φέρουσά τε Δυναμένη τε Νησαίη τε καὶ Ἀκταίη καὶ Πρωτομέδεια, Δωρίς καὶ Πανόπη καὶ εὐειδῆς Γαλάτεια	250
Ἴπποθόη τ' ἑρόεσσα καὶ Ἴππονόη ῥοδόπηχυσ Κυμοδόκη θ', ἥ κύματ' ἐν ἠεροειδέι πόντῳ πνοιάς τε ζαέων ἀνέμων σὺν Κυματολήγη ῥεῖα πρηῖνει καὶ ἐσφύρω Ἀμφιτρίτη, Κυμώ τ' Ἥιόνη τε ἐστέφανός θ' Ἀλιμήδη	255
Γλαυκονόμη τε φιλομμειδῆς καὶ Ποντοπόρεια Λειαγόρη τε καὶ Εὐαγόρη καὶ Λαομέδεια Πουλυνόη τε καὶ Αὐτονόη καὶ Λυσιάνασσα Εὐάρνη τε φυὴν ἑρατὴ καὶ εἶδος ἄμωμος καὶ Ψαμάθη χαρίεσσα δέμας δῖη τε Μενίππη	260
Νησώ τ' Εὐπόμπη τε Θεμιστώ τε Προνόη τε	

²⁰ The last line in the Homeric catalogue (XVIII 49) was interpreted by some scholars as a hint to the fact that the poet was shortening a longer list that circulated at that time, see KAKRIDIS 1949, 75. Cp. TSAGALIS 2010, 324–328.

²¹ The text is given according to the edition by RICCIARDELLI, 2018, who preserves the proper names in the form attested by the manuscripts, rejecting some modern emendations. See further on note 25.

Νημερτής θ', ἢ πατρὸς ἔχει νόον ἀθανάτοιο.
 αὐταὶ μὲν Νηρηῶς ἀμύμονος ἐξεγένοντο
 κοῦραι πεντήκοντα, ἀμύμονα ἔργ' εἰδυῖαι

In contrast to the Homeric list, Hesiod makes a larger use of epithets, all of which are semantically connected to the idea of beauty. Moreover, some names are further explained through a relative clause (at lines 252–254 and 262) and in one case the epithet itself does not consist of only one word, but it is expanded (line 259).

However, there are similarities between the two lists. One line is identical in both texts (*Il.* XVIII 43 = Hes. *Theog.* 248); two other lines differ only in one or two words (*Il.* XVIII 40 ≈ Hes. *Theog.* 245; *Il.* XVIII 45 ≈ Hes. *Theog.* 250). As a whole, there are eighteen names in common, fifteen names appear only in the Homeric catalogue and thirty-two names appear only in Hesiod's catalogue.

Scholars sought to explain these differences by trying to determine which catalogue was composed earlier, assuming that one catalogue is dependent upon the other²² or that they both derive from a common source.²³

However, given the difficulties in gaining certainty on such issues, it seems to be preferable not to deal with the mutual relationship of these catalogues and their connection with a specific source, but rather presume that they both derive

²² In particular, the most widespread opinion is that the author of Book XVIII drew from the *Theogony*, since all the names mentioned in the *Iliad* appear in the first half of Hesiod's catalogue, cp. WEST 2011, 344. Others (SOLMSEN 1949, 45–46; BUTTERWORTH 1986, 34–44) share the opposite view, arguing that the internal coherence of the Homeric Catalogue shows its earlier composition. For a complete recollection about the debate on this issue see CORAY 2016, 33–34. Interestingly, the number of Hesiod's new names (thirty-two) is almost equal to the totality of the Homeric names (thirty-three). This coincidence may point to a conscious *aemulatio* by Hesiod of the previous list or, more likely, it may be an indication of the average length of such catalogues of proper names in oral recitations.

²³ See KAKRIDIS (1949, 71–75 and 83–95), who postulates the existence of an epic *Achilleis* as a model for this part of the *Iliad*.

from the same epic tradition: similarities and differences between the two lists could suggest that the two poets combined some more popular names with less known or invented ones that still share the same features.

In fact, assonances due to the repetition of the same roots are easily noticeable also in Hesiod's list. Some of them are the same used in the Homeric catalogue, such as κῦμα, appearing in Κυμοθόη, Κυμοδόκη, Κυματολήγη, Κυμώ, while other formations stem out from different terms, like νόη (Πουλυνόη,²⁴ Αὐτονόη and Προνόη) or ἵππος (Ἴπποθόη, Ἴππονόη and Μενίππη). The prefix ἐν- is consistently reiterated through the entire catalogue, appearing both in proper names and in epithets (Εὐκράντη, Εὐδώρη, Εὐνίκη, εὐειδής, Εὐλιμένη, εὐσφυρος, εὐστέφανος, Εὐαγόρη, Εὐάρινη, Εὐτόμπη). Moreover, two names are repeated (Πρωτώ, line 243 and 248; Ἀμφιτρίτη, line 243 and 254)²⁵ and others are almost the same: Νησώ and Νησαίη, Ἴπποθόη and Ἴππονόη.

An analysis of the meaning of these forms shows that they belong to the same semantic areas as the Homeric ones. With regards to the names that did not appear in the Iliadic catalogue, some of them are related to the sea, such as Γαλήνη "calm sea", Εὐλιμένη "safe harbour", Κυματολήγη "who gathers the waves", Κυμώ "wave", Ἀλιμήδη "concerned with the sea", Ἠιόνη "from the coast", Ποντοπόρεια "who travels the sea", Ψαμάθη "sand", Νησώ "island", but also in this case the majority seem to be related to more general aspects of personality²⁶. Again, a group of names referring to

²⁴ Πουλυνόη is a correction for Πολυνόμη. See *infra*, note 43.

²⁵ If Πρωτώ and Ἀμφιτρίτη are counted only once, the total number of fifty is respected. Some editors instead write Πλωτώ (e.g. RZACH 1908) or Πρωθώ (WEST 1966) in line 243 in order to avoid the repetition, even though the form Πρωτώ is attested by all manuscripts. With this correction it is necessary to alter Θόη θ' Ἀλίη (line 245) in Θοή Θαλίη in order to maintain the total number as fifty; for a discussion on this issue see WEST 1966, 239; RICCIARDELLI 2018, 134.

²⁶ MC INERNEY (2004, 32–34), in his analysis of this catalogue, interprets such names as a recollection of political virtues useful to men in public life.

a helping attitude (towards the mariners) is easily recognisable: Εὐκράντη “good sovereign”; Σαώ “saver”; Εὐδώρη “generous”; Πρωτομέδεια “the first one to help”; Λυσιάνασσα “lady who releases”; Εὐπόμπη “who safely accompanies”. Also in this list there could be a reference to the power of sea-creatures to fairly interpret the future in names like Θεμιστώ “fair”, Προνόη “who knows in advance”, but the remainder seem to be generic appellations pointing to ordinary virtues (consider for instance Πασιθέη “all divine”, or Ἐρατώ “lovely”).²⁷

From the above comparison, it emerges that the two lists differ in the way they approach the same traditional material, renovating it and representing it in a new form. A restricted group of names was probably traditional and repeated each time a catalogue of Nereids was performed, but some others, with the same features, could be added by the poet. Moreover, in later times, the epic catalogues were not perceived as canonical sources preserving the names of the daughters of Nereus, but poets felt free to vary the list.

3. The Nereids in vase-painting

In the 5th century, the Nereids were a popular subject in vase-painting. Very often the figures are painted one next to the other and are labelled by inscriptions preserving their names, as if the painter was portraying a catalogue (or he was reminiscent of one).²⁸ As for the names, some of them are the same as those appearing in the *Iliad* or in the *Theogony*, but it is also possible to spot some names that did not appear in previous lists.²⁹

²⁷ As a whole, as Solmsen noted, the only names which “seem to disturb the pattern of the other names” (because they are not transparent in their meaning) are the ones fully linked to Greek mythology: Thetis and Amphitrite (SOLMSEN 1949, 46).

²⁸ In contrast to literary texts, in vase-inscriptions the collective form Νηρηίδες is never used.

²⁹ For a full list of the names of the Nereids in vase-paintings see LIMC VI/1, 820.

A quick survey will show that the “new names” are usually very similar to the epic ones, either from a phonetic point of view or because they are “speaking names” related to the same semantic areas.³⁰ Moreover, all of them are compatible with the hexameter for their metrical form. For instance, on an attic *epinetron*³¹ together with Μελίτη and Εὐλιμένη (the first appearing in both catalogues and the second only in Hesiod’s), there are ΑΛΤΙΣ, ΑΥΡΑ and ΝΑΩ, never attested elsewhere. These names may sound familiar and are easily understandable, because ΑΛΤΙΣ recalls Ἀλή (*Theog.* 245), αὐρα means “breeze” and νάω as a verb means “flow”³² (and it is also quite similar to Σαώ, *Theog.* 243).

The assonance with names belonging to the epic tradition had probably a considerable impact on the composition of such inscriptions (considering that the painter might have remembered poorly what he heard), but some forms appearing on vase-paintings are rather new creations. On an attic cup preserved in Munich,³³ for instance, Thetis is accompanied by ΓΛΑΥΚΟ and ΚΥΜΑΤΟΘΑΙ, easily comparable respectively to Γλαύκη (*Il.* XVIII 39, *Theog.* 244) and Κυμοθόη (*Il.* XVIII 41, *Theog.* 245). In addition, there are ΕΡΑΤΟ (already Ἐρατώ in *Theog.* 246), but also ΧΟΡΟ and ΙΡΙΣΙΑ. The first name, derived from χορός (“dance”), may be a hint to the image of dancing Nereids (recurring also in literary texts);³⁴ while the second one probably recalls ἶρις (“rainbow”).³⁵

Usually in these inscriptions there is no recognisable adherence to a specific literary list and, even when a reminiscence

³⁰ The text of the inscriptions is given according to AVI (<https://avi.unibas.ch>).

³¹ Attic *epinetron* (from Euboea), Athens Nat. Mus. 1629, 440 a.C., BA 216971, AVI 0804.

³² ΝΑΩ recurs also on a *dinos* from Vulci (Würzburg L540, 460 a.C., BA 213890).

³³ Attic Cup, Munich, Antikensamml. J331, 510 a. C, BA 201289, AVI 5321.

³⁴ For the dancing Nereids see BARRINGER 1995, 83–87.

³⁵ According to KRETSCHMER 1894, 202 the reference is to the goddess ἶρις.

of the Iliadic catalogue could be assumed, the resulting list turns out to be different. In fact, on a *pyxis* in the British Museum³⁶ there are three Nereids with Homeric names appearing in a row, namely ΓΛΑΥΚΕ, ΘΑΛΕΙΑ and ΚΥΜΟΔΟΚΕ. These are the first three names of the Homeric Catalogue of Nereids (Γλαύκη τε Θάλεια τε Κυμοδόκη τε, *Il.* XVIII 39), so it is possible that the painter remembered this verse. However, next to ΚΥΜΟΔΟΚΕ there are ΚΥΜΟΘΕΑ (formed on κύμα, but not part of a literary list) and ΓΑΛΕΝΕ, not in the catalogue by Homer but only in the one by Hesiod (*Theog.* 244). After them, the following character is ΠΟΝΤΟΜΕΛΕΑ, a name that is not part of a literary catalogue, but it is easily interpretable as a compound from πόντος and -*μεδ, “the one who rules the sea”. The remaining label is ΔΟΣΩ, which could be a mistake for Δωτώ (*Il.* XVIII 43) or a different form, maybe influenced by the epithet Δώς (or Δωσώ) given to Demeter.³⁷

These forms attested by vase-inscriptions could be variously interpreted. Names different from the literary ones could suggest either that in oral recitation the list was still varied, or that the painter had other sources or finally that he was himself adapting what he remembered from the traditional names he had previously heard because he was not concerned with the exact form of a name, but rather its meaning or its sound. The third option seems to be the most likely one, especially because names different from the epic ones usually appear only once. However, the form ΠΟΝΤΟΜΕΛΕΑ is a significant exception. In fact, a very similar name appears also on an attic amphora:³⁸ here there are only two figures, one is labelled ΘΕΤΙΣ and the other is ΠΟΝΤΜΕΛΑ, which could be a misspelling of Ποντ<ο>μεδ<ε>α, and, in any case, is a very similar form.

³⁶ *Pyxis*, London, British Museum E774, 430 a.C., BA 216969, AVI 4650.

³⁷ In *Hom. Hymn. Dem.* 122 the manuscripts have Δώς, the correction Δωσώ is accepted by most editors, cp. RICHARDSON 1979, 188.

³⁸ Attic Amphora, Munich Staatl. Antikensamml. 1415, 500 a.C., BA 4652, AVI 5151.

Another parallel may confirm the suggestion that these vases preserve a mythical tradition different from the literary one. In fact, on a fragment of Corinthian crater from the 6th century B.C.³⁹ it is possible to read ΠΟΝΤΟΜΕΛΟΙΣΑ,⁴⁰ another form deriving from πόντος and *-μεδ, but not attested in the literary versions of the catalogue. The ending of this form in -οισα suggests a lesbian origin, even if such aeolicisms entered Corinthian poetic language quite early.⁴¹ Anyway, the appearance of such a form on a Corinthian vase-painting may reveal a certain degree of familiarity of the poet with literary traditions.⁴²

Even though its origin remains uncertain, this name singularly survives in literary texts. In the catalogue of Nereids drawn by the mythographer Apollodorus (see §4) the form Ποντομέδουσα appears, which, from a phonetic point of view, corresponds to Ποντομέδοισα in the attic dialect. This coincidence may suggest that this list circulated broadly in ancient times and was varied adding new names or adjusting them to the local dialects⁴³.

³⁹ Geneva, priv. (WATCHER 2001, 98, no. 96B). For the inscription see CHAMAY 1990, 31–33.

⁴⁰ The spelling on the vase is ΠΙΝΟΤΟΜΕΛΟΙΣΑ, but it is highly probable that the first two letters have been inverted by mistake. A first member *πινουτο- from πινέω could be possible, but a noun such as *πινούτος is never attested as such or as the first member in compound names. Conversely, the similarity with proper names built on ποντο- strongly points at a mistake by the painter. Cp. WACHTER 1990, 45.

⁴¹ Cp. μοῖσα and ἔχιοισα in Eumelus' verses (Paus. IV 33, 2). In addition to ΠΟΝΤΟΜΕΛΟΙΣΑ, there are a few other Corinthian inscriptions from the VI century attesting an ending -οισα but the overall evidence is too scanty to assume that these forms belonged to the spoken dialect also and are not influenced by the literary language (see CASSIO 2005, 24). On forms ending in -οισα in doric dialect see SCHWYZER 1934 I, 110; CASSIO 2005, 22–38; ADRADOS 2005, 109–110.

⁴² On the literary tradition that may lay behind this lesbian form see WACHTER 2001, 300–302.

⁴³ WACHTER 1990, 42–44 links these forms with Hesiod's Πρωτομέδεια (*Theog.* 249), suggesting that they all could derive from the same antecedent.

4. The Catalogue of Nereids by Apollodorus

Apollodorus in his recollection of the daughters of Nereus enumerates a total of 45 names (Apoll. *Bibl.* I 2, 7):

Νηρέως δὲ καὶ Δωρίδος Νηρηίδες, ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα Κυμοθόη Σπειώ
Γλαυκονόμη Ναυσιθόη Ἄλιη, Ἐρατώ Σαώ Ἀμφιτρίτη Εὐνίκη
Θέτις, Εὐλιμένη Ἀγαύη Εὐδώρη Δατώ Φέρουσα, Γαλάτεια Ἀκταΐη
Ποντομέδουσα Ἴπποθόη Λυσιάνασσα, Κυμώ Ἰθίονη Ἀλμυῆδη
Πληξαύρη Εὐκράντη, Πρωτώ Καλυψώ Πανόπη Κραντώ Νεόμηρις,
Ἴππονόη Ἰάνειρα Πολυνόμη Αὐτονόη Μελίτη, Διώνη Νησαΐη Δηρώ
Εὐαγόρη Ψαμάθη, Εὐμόλπη Ἴονη Δυναμένη Κητώ Λιμνώρεια.

This catalogue is the result of a mixture of names from Homer and from Hesiod, with the addition of names given to another group of sea-nymphs, the Oceanids. Such names come from Hesiod's catalogue of Oceanids: Πληξαύρη (*Theog.* 353), Καλυψώ (*Theog.* 359), Διώνη (*Theog.* 353). Like the Nereids, the Oceanids are minor deities carrying speaking names mostly connected to water and nature for their meaning. Due to strong affinities between the two groups, their names were often confused in ancient times, which is probably the reason why in Apollodorus' list of Nereids we find also names that elsewhere are given to Oceanids.

In Apollodorus' list there are also names which do not appear in any other literary text: Ποντομέδουσα, Ναυσιθόη, Κραντώ, Νεόμηρις, Πολυνόμη, Δηρώ, Εὐμόλπη, Ἴονη, Κητώ. While for Ποντομέδουσα it is possible to trace back some evidence of its circulation before its appearance in the list drawn by Apollodorus, there is nothing similar for the others. However, since it is highly improbable that the mythographer himself invented them, it is likely that they were involved in an analogous process and that they were part of a poetic catalogue that is now lost. This can be firstly supported by the fact that all of them are compatible with the hexameter regarding their metrical structure (apart from Πολυνόμη, on which, however, see note 43). As for their meaning, then, some of them clearly

derive from marine imagery (Ναυσιθήη, “swift ship” and Κητώ “sea-monster”) others are generic but nonetheless very transparent (Κραντώ, “the one who accomplishes”, Πολυνόμη “of many names”⁴⁴, Εὐμόλπη “beautiful song”). Νεόμηρις and Ίονη are likely to be derived from names of plants: Ίονη from ἴον (“violet”) and Νεόμηρις from μηρίς (“sea-starwort” a plant which grows close to salt marshes⁴⁵). The only name which sounds hardly suitable for a Nereid, or a nymph, is Δηρώ (related to δῆρις “battle”?).

As a whole, the combination of names by Apollodorus suggests that the list of Nereids’ names was never a fixed one in ancient times and, above all, that the catalogues by Homer and Hesiod were not considered as normative in this respect. Centuries passed between the epic catalogues and the recollection of Apollodorus, but thanks to the hints given by vase inscriptions the overall tendency is clear: apart from a few names, which are constantly repeated, new ones sharing the same features (a clear meaning, the adaptability to the hexameter) could be inserted in the list and at that point they acquired the same level of “traditionality” as the others.

A comparison with the development of catalogues of Nymphs in Latin literature will help to conclude this picture.

5. A Catalogue of Nymphs in the *Georgics*

As Thetis heard the cry of Achilles from the depths of the sea, so Cyrene in Book IV of the *Georgics* hears the lament of grief of her son Aristaeus from under a river. In close

⁴⁴ Πολυνόμη is never found in Apollodorus’ manuscripts, where the form given is Πουλυνόη. Πολυνόμη, conversely, is attested uniformly in the text tradition of the *Theogony* (258). Since the form Πολυνόμη would not fit into the hexameter, modern editors assume that Apollodorus’ manuscripts preserve the original form belonging to Hesiod’s text and thus they restore Πουλυνόη in line 258. Presuming also that the two forms have been inverted, the form Πολυνόμη is currently printed in Apollodorus’ editions. For the textual problem see WEST 1966, 241.

⁴⁵ This form is attested only by Dioscorides, which quotes it as an alternative name of the better known *tripolium* (Diosc. IV132).

resemblance to the Homeric scene, Cyrene is surrounded by Nymphs and the poet lists their names (Verg. *Georg.* IV 333–356):

At mater sonitum thalamo sub fluminis alti sensit. Eam circum Milesia vellera Nymphae carpebant hyali saturo fucata colore,	335
Drymoque Xanthoque Ligeaque Phyllodoceque, caesariem effusae nitidam per candida colla, [Nesaeae Spioque Thaliaque Cymodoceque,] ⁴⁶	
Cydidippeque et flava Lycorias, altera virgo, altera tum primos Lucinae experta labores,	340
Clioque et Beroe soror, Oceanitides ambae, ambae auro, pictis incinctae pellibus ambae, atque Ephyre atque Opis et Asia Deiopea et tandem positis velox Arethusa sagittis.	
Inter quas curam Clymene narrabat inanem	345
Vulcani Martisque dolos et dulcia furta	

The names are mostly unattested elsewhere in Latin literature, and even the two nymphs defined as *Oceanitides* bear names that do not belong to any other catalogue of these deities (*Clio* is the name of a Muse according to Hes. *Theog.* 77 and *Beroe* is never attested elsewhere). As a whole, it seems that Virgil conceived the catalogue as a kind of intellectual game: the proper names are mostly invented, but they are derived from roots of Greek words transferred into Latin.

Considering the first names (line 336), the intellectual wordplay is clear: *Drymo* recalls *δρυμός* (“thicket”), *Xantho* means “blond”, *Ligea* (“with a light voice”) in the Greek form *Λίγεια* is the name of a Siren (*Lyc. Alex.* 726). *Phyllodoce* (“she who holds the leaves”) may be a variation of forms like

⁴⁶ Line 338 is considered interpolated by all modern editors because it seems to be imported from Verg. *Aen.* V 826 (where Virgil draws a short catalogue of Nereids recalling the names which appeared in *Il.* XVIII 39–40) and the earliest manuscripts do not include it, cp. THOMAS 1988, 208.

Κυματολήγη⁴⁷ (a Nereid in Hes. *Theog.* 253). As for the following ones, while *Cydippe* is a common name for a Nymph, *Lycorias* may recall refined Greek forms as Λυκωρεύς (an epithet of Apollo in Call. *H.* 2, 19 and Ap. Rhod. IV 1490)⁴⁸. Playing with different mythical traditions, after unexpectedly mentioning *Clio* and *Beroe* as Oceanids, Virgil lists *Ephyre*, who is one of the daughters of Oceanus according to Paus. II 1, 1. *Opis*, in the form Ὀπις or Οὐπις is an epithet of Artemis⁴⁹ and *Deiopea* is the name of a Nymph (used also in *Aen.* I 72). Finally, the last two names *Arethusa* and *Clymene* are the most familiar as names of minor deities, the latter appearing also in the Homeric catalogue of Nereids (*Il.* XVIII 47).

The intended effect of this list is still the entertainment of the listeners or readers, but at a very sophisticated level.⁵⁰ Contrary to the lists in Greek epic poetry, in this case there is no repetition of roots and sounds, but, on the other hand, it is possible to recognise a regular pattern in the disposition of the proper names over the lines. The order is as follows: four proper names (336) followed by one line of description (337); then two names (339) and one line of description (340); again two names (341) and one line of description (342); finally four names, one of which is an epithet (343). The last

⁴⁷ Cp. MYNORS 1990, 303.

⁴⁸ Cp. also the proper name *Lycoris*, used as a pseudonym for Gallus' mistress (e.g. Verg. *Ecl.* 2, 2 and 22).

⁴⁹ E.g. Her. IV 35, 1; Call. *H.* 3, 204; *Opis* is also the name of one of her Nymphs, cp. *Aen.* XI 352–353, or a different deity, cp. Plaut. *Bacch.* 892.

⁵⁰ With regards to Latin literature, poets' awareness of the entertaining aim of the catalogues can be proved also by a "negative" example. Describing the exceptional beauty of Arachne's tapestry, Ovid recounts that even nymphs abandoned their mountains and rivers in order to see the *opus mirabile* (*met.* IV 14–16). Although a catalogue of nymphs could have been easily inserted at this point, the poet decided not to do it and only mention them very briefly. A possible reason behind this can be found in the attractive power of the catalogue itself: Ovid wished not to divert the focus of his narration from the extraordinary weaving capabilities of the girl and, therefore, did not add elements that could distract his audience.

two names, which are the most famous, are on one line each (344 and 345).⁵¹

6. The Catalogue of Nereids by Hyginus

Even if this list by Virgil seems to have been composed as an intellectual game, it gained a considerable status in the mythical tradition: in fact Hyginus in his own catalogue of Nereids added the names he found in Virgil to the names that appeared in the *Iliad*. Leaving out the names from the *Theogony* of Hesiod, he added, instead, three names not belonging to any previous catalogue, for a total of forty-nine names (Hyg. *Praef.* VIII):

Ex Nereo et Doride Nereides quinquaginta, Glauce Thalia Cymodoce Nesaea Spio Thoe Cymothoe Actaea Limnoria Melite Iaera Amphithoe Agaue Doto Proto Pherusa Dynamene Dexamene Amphinome Callianassa Doris Panope Galatea Nemertes Apseudes Clymene Ianira [Panopaea] Ianassa Maera Orithyia Amathia Drymo Xantho Ligea Phyllodoce Cydippe Lycorias Cleio Beroe Ephyre Opis Asia Deiopea Arethusa [Clymene] Creneis Eurydice Leucothoe.

The names are given in the same order as they appear in the sources available to Hyginus: this is the reason why editors add *Panopaea* and *Clymene*, assuming that the mythographer skipped those names while copying the lists he had at his disposal. The integration of these two names has relevant consequences on the total number as well: at the beginning Hyginus states that there are fifty Nereids (*Nereides quinquaginta*), but then he enumerates forty-seven names, which can be raised to forty-nine with the addition of *Panopaea* and *Clymene*. With this correction the total may still be interpreted as 50,

⁵¹ Such techniques for the disposition of items in a catalogue are typical of Virgil, cp. KYRIAKIDIS 2007, 11–38 (who does not consider the passage from the *Georgics*).

considering that Hyginus also had Thetis in mind, though he did not mention her.

Despite the fact that Hyginus seems to be following his sources so closely, the last three names are never attested elsewhere as names of Nereids. Moreover, while *Eurydice* and *Leucothoe* are familiar names in classical mythology, *Creneis* is never attested elsewhere, even if, assuming it derives from κρήνη (“spring”) in Greek, it sounds very suited to a water-nymph.

In conclusion, Hyginus seems to be innovating on the mythical tradition in two respects. Firstly, he adds to a catalogue of Nereids the names he found in Virgil as companions of Cyrene: the introduction of those nymphs in a group of Nereids is probably due to the authority of Virgil as a point of reference in Latin literature and to the analogy of that excerpt of the *Georgics* with the Homeric passage in which the Nereids appear. Moreover, as already noted for Apollodorus, Hyginus too had access to sources different than the canonical ones and preserved “new names”, unknown to previous catalogues of Nereids.

7. Conclusion

The process outlined in the previous pages suggests that, as a whole, lists of proper names were never a fixed unity in mythical tradition, but they continued to evolve thanks to poets adding new names. A quotation from Seneca shows that also ancient writers were aware of such issues (Seneca *de beneficiis* I, 3):

Quemadmodum nomenclatori memoriae loco audacia est et, cuiuscumque nomen non potest reddere, imponit, ita poetae non putant ad rem pertinere verum dicere, sed aut necessitate coacti aut decore corrupti id quemque vocari iubent, quod belle facit ad versum. Nec illis fraudi est, si aliud in censum detulerunt; proximus enim poeta suum illas ferre nomen iubet. Hoc ut scias ita esse, ecce Thalia, de qua cum maxime agitur, apud Hesiodum Charis est, apud Homerum Musa.

While debating the qualities and names of the Graces, Seneca describes the role of poets in naming characters with the aid of two images related to Roman society.⁵² The first one is a comparison with the role of the *nomenclator* (a slave with the duty of remembering for his master the names of people they encountered): whenever he is unable to remember a name, he invents it, in the same way as poets invent for a character a name that suits the verse well (*belle facit ad versum*).⁵³ The second image is developed through legal terms. When a poet declares something that is not true (like a false name or a new one), he should not be charged with fraud, as if he asserted something false in front of a censor. In fact, the following poet will do the same and he will give his characters the names he likes. Then Seneca gives an example: Thalia is considered to be one of the Charites by Hesiod (Hes. *Theog.* 909) and, in his opinion, there is a Muse named in the same way by Homer.

Actually, in the Homeric poems there is no Muse named Thalia (Homer does not even mention the names of the Muses), but according to the classical tradition she is the Muse of comedy and this may be the reason why Seneca himself got confused. In any case, in the *Iliad* a character with this name existed, and she was, again, one of the Nereids (*Il.* XVIII 39).

Despite this lapse, Seneca's reasoning is altogether clear and it sheds light on the fluidity of catalogues in ancient times, confirming that even poets belonging to a writing culture felt free to add new names to a list of mythological characters, as it was the case for the Nereids. A catalogue of fifty daughters of Nereus probably never existed in a fixed form throughout antiquity, but it continued to evolve thanks to poets adding new names to it.

⁵² For a commentary to the passage in question see ZEYL 1974, 157–159; PICONE 2013, 74.

⁵³ The license of the *nomenclator* is evoked elsewhere by Seneca (e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 27, 5). For the importance of people in charge of reminding in ancient Greek and Latin cultures see Bettini 2000, 39–51.

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