

Zeitschrift: Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

Band: 79 (2022)

Heft: 1

Artikel: Paus. 2.16.4 : Acusilaus of Argos?

Autor: Pàmias, Jordi

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-981204>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 23.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Paus. 2.16.4: Acusilaos of Argos?

Jordi Pàmias, Barcelona

Abstract: Pausanias (2.16.4) attribue un logos sur les origines généalogiques de Mycènes à Acousilaos d'Argos. Or, le mot Ἀκουσιλάω, admis par les éditeurs modernes de façon unanime, n'est pas la variante transmise par les manuscrits de Pausanias (ἀκοῦσι λόγον), mais une conjecture de Porson. La leçon ἀκοῦσαι, acceptée par les premiers éditeurs de Pausanias, doit être retenue comme originale. Par conséquent, un fragment substantiel d'Acousilaos devrait disparaître des éditions de ce mythographe.

Keywords: Pausanias, Acousilaos d'Argos, Mycènes, critique textuelle.

In giving his report on the mythical past of the city of Mycenae, Pausanias provides a number of conflicting accounts dealing with the origins of this toponym. Among other theories, two hero names are put forward as eponyms: Mycene and Myceneus. For the first one, the Periegete calls upon the Panhellenic epic authorities as a testimony – Homer and 'Hesiod' (2.16.4):

Ὅμηρος δὲ ἐν Ὀδυσσεΐᾳ γυναικὸς Μυκῆνης ἐν ἔπει τῷδε ἐμνήσθη· Τυρώ τ' Ἀλκμήνῃ τε εὐστέφανός τε Μυκῆνῃ (Hom. *Od.* 2.120). ταύτην εἶναι θυγατέρα Ἰνάχου γυναικᾶ δὲ Ἀρέστορος τὰ ἔπη λέγει, ἃ δὴ Ἕλληνες καλοῦσιν Ἡοίας μεγάλας (Hes. fr. 246 Merkelbach/West)· ἀπὸ ταύτης οὖν γεγονέναι καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῇ πόλει φασίν.

Homer in the *Odyssey* mentions a woman named Mycene in the following verse: "Tyro and Alcmene and the fair-garlanded Mycene." She is said to have been the daughter of Inachus and the wife of Arestor in the poetry that the Greeks call the *Great Ehoëae*. So they say that the name of the citadel originated from her.¹

As for the second genealogy, it goes back to a certain Myceneus, son of an unknown Sparton, who was the son of Phoroneus. This arrangement is objected to by Pausanias, as the Spartans did not know of any hero named Sparton. Their eponymous heroine is Sparte, a woman, represented by a statue in Amyclae:

ὃν δὲ προσποιοῦσιν Ἀκουσιλάω λόγον, Μυκηνέα υἱὸν εἶναι Σπάρτωνος, Σπάρτωνα δὲ Φορωνέως, οὐκ ἂν ἔγωγε ἀποδεξαίμην, διότι μηδὲ αὐτοὶ Λακεδαιμόνιοι. Λακεδαιμόνιοις γὰρ Σπάρτης μὲν γυναικὸς εἰκὼν ἐστὶν ἐν Ἀμύκλαις, Σπάρτωνα δὲ Φορωνέως παῖδα θαυμάζοιεν ἂν καὶ ἀρχὴν ἀκούσαντες.

* My current research on Acusilaos of Argos is conducted as part of the project "Estudio diacrónico de las instituciones socio-políticas de la Grecia antigua y de sus manifestaciones míticas" (FFI2016-79906-P) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO) and directed by Carlos Varias García. I am grateful to my colleague Ariadna Arriaza and to Prof. Lowell Edmunds for their corrections and suggestions.

¹ The translations of Pausanias are those from Loeb's Jones, as edited, with revisions, by Gregory Nagy (under <https://chs.harvard.edu/>, consulted in Nov. 27th, 2019). I adapted the translations at some points.

But the tradition that is attributed to Acusilaus, that Myceneus was the son of Sparton, and Sparton of Phoroneus, I cannot accept, because the Lacedaemonians themselves do not accept it either. I say this because, although the Lacedaemonians have at Amyclae an image of a woman named Sparte, even they would be amazed at the mere mention of a Sparton, son of Phoroneus.

In the text just quoted, this λόγος ('account') is to be ascribed to the mythographer Acusilaus of Argos. Nevertheless, Ἀκουσιλάω is not the reading found in the manuscripts of Pausanias (ἀκοῦσι λόγον) – and it may be worth adding that Acusilaus of Argos is not cited elsewhere in the *Description of Greece*. As it happens, all the modern editors of Pausanias have accepted unanimously and uncritically Porson's *ope ingenii* conjecture as recorded by John Kaye back in 1814.² Accordingly, a new piece of evidence of Acusilaus' *Genealogies* was regained and conveniently included in the collections of fragments of this mythographer. Myceneus' genealogy was numbered and printed among the fragments of Acusilaus dealing with the mythical origins of Argos and the Argolid.³ It is by a philological procedure such as this *coniectura* that a new fragment was 'produced'.

It is my aim to call into question this attribution. In my opinion, the name Acusilaus (and consequently a substantive fragment of this mythographer) should be expunged from the editions of Pausanias' *Description of Greece* and hence of Acusilaus' *Genealogies*. This proposal assumes that, if the manuscripts yield a reading that makes sense, there is no use in making any attempt to 'ameliorate' it. The days of hypercriticism in the editing of Greek and Latin authors are long past. A simple correction that is paleographically plausible should prevail over a more complicated and elaborate one. A misspelling ἀκοῦσι for ἀκοῦσ·αι after προσποιούσιν can be easily explained as a *Perseverationsfehler*. In conformity with the earlier editors of Pausanias, this passage should read as follows: ὃν δὲ

2 "For the discovery of this reference we are indebted to the acuteness of the late Professor Porson [...] the Professor with his accustomed ingenuity deduced the true reading" (Kaye 1814: 220, n. 5). The only editor that has expressed suspicions about Porson's correction is Musti in his Lorenzo Valla edition: "*fortasse ἀκοῦσ·αι non excludendum, etsi forma activa προσποιεῖν minus frequenter cum hac significatione adhibetur*" (Musti/Torelli 1986: 86). However, see *LSJ*⁹, s. u. προσποιέω (I.3. = προσποιέομαι).

3 The fragment is number 16 in Müller's edition (*FHG*) and number 24 in the editions of Jacoby (*FGH*), Diels/Kranz (*FVS*), Fowler (2000), Toye (*BNJ*) and Andolfi (2019). Myceneus' genealogical arrangement is attributed uncritically and straightforwardly to Acusilaus by Tozzi (1967: 597–598), Pellegrini (1973–1974: 161–162), Brillante (1990: 98), Fontana (2012: 385), Kaplan (2014: 301), among many other scholars. Far-reaching conclusions have been drawn from this (philologically constructed) passage. An example: "A long-standing scholarly prejudice posits Acusilaus as a prominent celebrator of his native city, a view supported in antiquity by Pausanias"; "Responsibility for this long-standing opinion lies principally with Pausanias, who dealt in the second book of his *Periegesis* with the Argolid and its traditions" (Andolfi 2019: 19 and 21). See also Frateantonio (2009: 184–185), who takes for granted that Pausanias used Acusilaus' Argive traditions through Apollodorus' *Library*.

προσποιοῦσιν ἀκοῦσ' αὖ λόγον.⁴ As Facius, an eighteenth century editor of Pausanias translates it, “quam autem audisse contendunt famam etc.”.⁵ The reading ἀκοῦσαι (instead of Ἀκουσιλάω) should be retained for the following reasons:

a. The *logos* under consideration, which is mentioned after the epic authorities (Homer and ‘Hesiod’), is in keeping with Pausanias’ tendency to write down accounts that contradicted what was known from literary sources (like in this passage) or that were not widely known.⁶ In fact, prior to Homer’s quotation, a story dealing with the foundation of Mycenae is attributed to a certain local oral tradition (2.16.3: ἤκουσα δὲ καὶ ...). To these, or similar, local informants Myceneus’ genealogy can be traced. Worthy of attention is the fact that, after sketching Myceneus’ lineage, Pausanias claims that the Spartans would not accept it. And he goes into detail saying that they would be astonished upon merely hearing this *logos* (θαυμάζοιεν ἂν καὶ ἀρχὴν ἀκούσαντες), a wording that hints at the oral nature of this account.

b. Narratives in Pausanias referring to ‘toponymic heroes’ (for this notion, see section c) bear the trace of oral transmission and are specifically attributed to local informants.⁷ Although it is true that phrases like ‘they say’ can be used by Pausanias as an introduction to any kind of quotation,⁸ including literary works, epic choric accounts on heroic eponyms are not credited to literary sources in the *Description of Greece* (as would be the case with the emended Ἀκουσιλάω). Besides the text studied below (section d), a good example thereof is the account of the city of Epidaurus and its eponymous hero, the homonymous Epidaurus. Pausanias sketches the local genealogy after giving the version of the Argives and of ‘Hesiod’ (2.26.2). Take note that the verbal form used by the Periegete to refer to the local claims (προσποιοῦσιν) is the same one as in the passage in question:

κατὰ δὲ Ἀργείων δόξαν καὶ τὰ ἔπη τὰς μεγάλας Ἥοίας ἦν Ἐπιδαύρω πατὴρ Ἄργος ὁ Διός· Ἐπιδαύριοι δὲ Ἀπόλλωνι Ἐπίδauρον παῖδα προσποιοῦσιν.

4 See also n. 2.

5 Facius 1794: 236.

6 Pretzler 2005: 239. Cf. Pretzler 2018: 272: “The text therefore becomes a constant multiple discourse between different local, probably mostly oral, traditions and the literary tradition, moderated by the ostensibly elusive, but also actively interventionist narrator”.

7 See, for instance, the foundation account of Abae in Phocis (10.35.1): “The people of Abae say that they came to Phocis from Argos, and that the city got its name from Abas, the founder”. In some cases, the oral origin of the local account is implicit: καὶ τὸ ὄνομα ἀπὸ τοῦ Πατρέως ἐτέθη τῇ πόλει (for Patras: 7.6.2); Τίρυνθα δὲ ἦρωα, ἀφ’ οὗ τῇ πόλει τὸ ὄνομα ἐγένετο, παῖδα Ἄργου τοῦ Διὸς εἶναι λέγουσι (for Tiryns: 2.25.8); Τημενίου δὲ ἀπέχει Ναυπλία πεντήκοντα ἔμοι δοκεῖν σταδίου, τὰ μὲν ἐφ’ ἡμῶν ἔρημος, οἰκιστὴς δὲ ἐγένετο αὐτῆς Ναύπλιος Ποσειδῶνος λεγόμενος καὶ Ἀμυμώνης εἶναι (for Nauplia: 2.38.2). At 8.3 Pausanias gives the names of Lycaon’s sons as city founders. No literary source is claimed (cf. also Zoeteus and Paroreus at 8.35.6).

8 Pretzler 2005: 245.

According to Argive opinion and the poem the *Great Ehoëae*, the father of Epidaurus was Argos, son of Zeus, while the Epidaurians maintain that Epidaurus was the child of Apollo.

A number of passages in the *Description of Greece* show traces of conflicting reports between local experts as well as Pausanias' discussions with them.⁹ Indeed, at some points the author refers to contradictory versions of local eponymous traditions.¹⁰ In my opinion, it is precisely to this sort of conflicting epichoric accounts that the passage under discussion refers to. Those who pretend to have heard the *logos* on Myceneus (προσποιοῦσιν ἀκοῦσαι λόγον) are in disagreement with those who say (φασίν) that the name of the *polis* originated from Mycene (ἀπὸ ταύτης οὖν γεγενέσθαι καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῇ πόλει). (Note that the verb φασίν does not have Homer and 'Hesiod' as subject, as these authors are merely mentioning Mycene as a character and not as a city place; its subject are some local experts). Pausanias is actively intervening to this dispute (οὐκ ἂν ἔγωγε ἀποδεξαίμην).

c. Eponymous heroes like Myceneus, characteristically a 'toponymic hero', have the function, as Hall has explained, "to act as linchpins, pegging the genealogies to their consumer cities".¹¹ Myceneus should be seen therefore as a local (that is, Mycenaean) elaboration and as such there is no clear reason for what purpose Acusilaus, writing from Argos, should have produced it. Rather than a "chauvinistic subordination of Mykenai to Argos", as Fowler assumes,¹² this genealogy points to an independent and local Mycenaean account willing to guarantee a connection to Sparta – and dependence thereon. A coalition between both cities, as was the case in some moments of the sixth and beginnings of fifth centuries BCE, looms in the background.¹³ At the same time, this arrangement provides a seal of reputable antiquity as long as the eponymous hero is grafted on the 'antediluvian' *Urmensch* Phoroneus. As Phoroneus is the father of Niobe and grandfather of Argos in the regular Argive *Stammbaum*, again one may wonder what would have prompted Acusilaus to include a competing lineage when he charted his Argive genealogies (on this argument see further below, section d).

⁹ See, for instance, 6.24.9 and 8.42.12–13 (old men in Elis and Phigalia who are in possession of variant traditions of reputable antiquity). Cf. Pretzler 2005: 241–243; Pretzler 2007: 40. For the diverse kind of informants (expounders, guides, local antiquarians, etc.), see Jones 2001.

¹⁰ For instance in 5.5.4–5: "The city got its name, they say, from its founder Lepreus, the son of Pyrgeus [...] I have heard some who maintained that Lepreus was founded by Leprea, the daughter of Pyrgeus. Others say that the first dwellers in the land were afflicted with the disease leprosy and that the city received its name from the misfortune of the inhabitants".

¹¹ Hall 1997: 88.

¹² Fowler 2013: 237.

¹³ Mazzarino 1973: 61–62; Brillante 1990: 98 and 127.

d. A competing genealogy to the one being analysed (2.16.4) is provided by Pausanias himself some paragraphs below (2.34.4–5), when he turns to the foundation of the city of Hermione. And again a ‘toponymic hero’ is put forward – namely Hermion, the son of Europs. Noteworthy is the fact that this eponymous combination is once again attributed to a local oral tradition (Ερμιονεῖς φασίν: see above, section b). But there is more at stake: according to the Hermioneans, Hermion is interestingly a grandson of Phoroneus – just as in the case of Myceneus above:

οἰκιστὴν δὲ τῆς ἀρχαίας πόλεως Ἑρμιονεῖς γενέσθαι φασὶν Ἑρμίονα Εὐρώπος. τὸν δὲ Εὐρώπα – ἣν γὰρ δὴ Φορωνέως – Ἡροφάνης ὁ Τροιζήνιος ἔφασκεν εἶναι νόθον· οὐ γὰρ δὴ ποτε ἐς Ἄργον τὸν Νιόβης θυγατρίδοῦν ὄντα Φορωνέως τὴν ἐν Ἀργεὶ περιελθεῖν «ἄν» ἀρχὴν παρόντος Φορωνεῖ γνησίου παιδός. ἐγὼ δέ, εἰ καὶ γνήσιον ὄντα Εὐρώπα πρότερον τὸ χρεὼν ἢ Φορωνέα ἐπέλαβεν, εὖ οἶδα ὡς οὐκ ἔμελλεν ὁ παῖς αὐτῷ Νιόβης παιδί ἴσα οἶσεσθαι Διός γε εἶναι δοκοῦντι.

The founder of the old city, the Hermioneans say, was Hermion, the son of Europs. Now Europs, whose father was certainly Phoroneus, Herophanes of Troezen said was an illegitimate child. For surely the kingdom of Argos would never have devolved upon Argos, Niobe’s son, the grandchild of Phoroneus, in the presence of a legitimate son. But even supposing that Europs was a legitimate child who died before Phoroneus, I am quite sure that his son was not likely to stand a fair chance against Niobe’s child, whose father was supposed to be Zeus.

Both passages show that accounts of the mythical origins of Argos and the Argolid were alive and burgeoning down to Pausanias’ time. A number of lineages hover over the most ancient and reputable Argive figure, the ‘cataclysmic’ Phoroneus. At the same time, however, the authority and legitimacy of Argos as the acknowledged descendant of Phoroneus is constantly preserved – in this case, through the purported illegitimacy of Europs; or above (2.16.4) through the Lacedaemonian claim of an eponymous Sparte (instead of Sparton). In fact, other testimonies point to the same direction. From a scholium to Euripides (*Or.* 1246) and from the entry devoted to ‘Mycenae’ in Stephanus’ *Ethnica* we are able to obtain new valuable pieces of evidence. Both texts provide genealogical arrangements showing striking resemblances to – but also differences from – the genealogy at issue. In the first one, Myceneus is the son of Sparton – who is however not the son of Phoroneus, but of Phoroneus’ brother Phegeus. According to this genealogy, Phoroneus begot three sons besides Niobe: Aegialeus, Apis, and Europs (ἴσχει δὲ παῖδας ἐκ Πειθοῦς Αἰγιαλέα, Ἄπιν, Εὐρώπα, Νιόβην). But Argos keeps the power thanks to the fact that, upon Phoroneus’ death, their sons spread out – except for Niobe.¹⁴

¹⁴ Sch. Eur. *Or.* 1246: Φορωνέως δὲ ἀπολωλότος καὶ τῶν παίδων διασκεδασθέντων Ἄργος ὁ Νιόβης βασιλεύσας ὅλην τὴν ἐντὸς τοῦ Ἰσθμοῦ Ἀργεῖαν καὶ τὸ Φορωνικὸν ἄστυ Ἄργος ὠνόμασεν.

As for the genealogy recorded by Stephanus Byzantius, Myceneus is the son of Sparton, too, but in this case Sparton is Phoroneus' brother (ἀπὸ Μυκηνέως τοῦ Σπάρτωνος τοῦ Φορωνέως ἀδελφοῦ). In any case, Argos' direct connection to Phoroneus is again guaranteed.¹⁵ As Fowler has established, "genealogies in oral cultures are fluid. They change constantly to fit new circumstances".¹⁶ And yet the prestige and the status of the eponymous Argos as the primordial ruler of his homonymous city is never challenged. To sum up, it would be hardly comprehensible that Acusilaus, who took Argos and the Argolid as the focal point of his *Genealogies*, could have posited an eponymous hero (Sparton), concurrent to Argos, as a descendant of Phoroneus.

Correspondence:

Jordi Pàmias

Departament de Ciències de l'Antiguitat i de l'Edat Mitjana

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Edifici B, Campus de Bellaterra

E-08193 Cerdanyola del Vallès (Barcelona)

jordi.pamias@uab.cat

Bibliography

- Andolfi, Ilaria (ed.) (2019). *Acusilaus of Argos' Rhapsody in Prose. Introduction, Text, and Commentary*. Berlin/Boston.
- Brillante, Carlo (1990). "History and the Historical Interpretation of Myth", in Lowell Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth*. Baltimore/London, 93–138.
- Facius, Johann Friedrich (1794). *Pausaniae Graeciae descriptio Graece. Recensuit ex codd. et aliunde emendavit, explanavit Jo. Frider. Facius*. Tomus I. Leipzig.
- Fontana, Federica (2012). "Sul metodo storiografico di Acusilao di Argo", *Historia* 61, 383–413.
- Fowler, Robert L. (1998). "Genealogical Thinking, Hesiod's *Catalogue*, and the Creation of the Hellenes", *PCPhS* 44, 1–19.
- Fowler, Robert L. (2000). *Early Greek Mythography. I. Texts*. Oxford.
- Fowler, Robert L. (2013). *Early Greek Mythography. II. Commentary*. Oxford.
- Frateantonio, Christa (2009). *Religion und Städtekonkurrenz. Zum politischen und kulturellen Kontext von Pausanias' Periegesis*. Berlin/New York.
- Hall, Jonathan M. (1997). *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. Cambridge.
- Jones, Christopher P. (2001). "Pausanias and His Guides", in S.E. Alcock/J.F. Cherry/J. Elsner (ed.), *Pausanias. Travel and Memory in Roman Greece*. Oxford, 33–39.
- Kaplan, Philip (2014). "Ethnicity and Geography", in Jeremy McInerney (ed.), *A Companion to Ethnicity in Ancient Mediterranean*. Chichester, 298–311.
- Kaye, John (1814). "On Certain Early Greek Historians Mentioned by Dionysius of Halicarnassus", *Museum Criticum; or, Cambridge Classical Researches* 2, 216–225.

¹⁵ See also Eust. *Il.* 2.569 (1.446 van der Valk).

¹⁶ Fowler 1998: 3.

- Mazzarino, Santo (1973). *Il pensiero storico classico. 1.* Roma/Bari.
- Musti, Domenico/Torelli, Mario (1986). *Pausania. Guida della Grecia. Libro II. La Corinzia e l'Argolide.* Milano.
- Pellegrini, Daniela (1973–1974). “Sulle “Genealogie argive” di Acusilao”, *AAPat* 86/3, 155–171.
- Pretzler, Maria (2005). “Pausanias and Oral Tradition”, *CQ* 55, 235–249.
- Pretzler, Maria (2007). *Pausanias. Travel Writing in Ancient Greece.* Bristol.
- Pretzler, Maria (2018). “Pausanias”, in K. De Temmerman/E. van Emde Boas (ed.), *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature.* Leiden/Boston, 271–289.
- Tozzi, Pierluigi (1967). “Acusilao di Argo”, *RIL* 101, 581–624.