

SCIENTIA DANICA · SERIES H · HUMANISTICA · 8 · VOL. 4

Writing Homer

A study based on results from
modern fieldwork

Minna Skafte Jensen

1742

Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab
The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters

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Writing Homer

Abstract

The oral-formulaic theory formed by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord not only revolutionised Homeric studies but also had an impact on anthropology and folklore. It led to increased interest in oral epic traditions, and fieldworkers changed their methods towards a focus on composition in performance. The individual singer and his handling of the tradition gained importance. When possible, more than one performance of the “same” song was recorded, by the same singer on different occasions or by different singers, and interaction with the audience was documented. By now, a wealth of editions and studies of oral epics from various parts of the world is accessible and is used in the present study as an inspiration for achieving a deeper understanding of the methods at work in oral epic, for building a social framework for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and especially for speculating on the circumstances of the writing of the two great poems. Long oral narratives are flexible, and accordingly, the dictation to scribes that must be at the origin of the texts that have been preserved in writing to this day, was a process of the utmost importance as the composition in performance of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

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Scientia Danica. Series H, Humanistica, 8 vol. 4

DET KONGELIGE DANSKE VIDENSKABERNES SELSKAB

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Printed in Denmark by Special-Trykkeriet Viborg a-s
ISSN 1904-5492 · ISBN 978-87-7304-361-5

Published with kind support from the Velux Foundation

Cover: Athenian scribe, c. 510 B.C.
(Acropolis Museum inv. no. 629. Photographer: Evangelos Tsiamis)

Submitted to the Academy July 2010
Published August 2011

Contents

Preface	9
Introduction	9
A note on terminology	12
Acknowledgements	15
CHAPTER 1: Epic fieldwork	17
The purpose of the present study	17
The oral-formulaic theory in fieldwork	21
A working definition of 'epic'	23
Methodical problems	27
Selected examples of fieldwork	31
The Nyanga <i>Mwindo Epic</i>	32
The Tamilnadu <i>Brothers' Epic</i>	34
The Telugu <i>Epic of Palnadu</i>	36
The Arabic <i>Sirat Bani Hilal</i>	38
The Tulu <i>Siri Epic</i>	42
The Karakalpak <i>Epic of Edige</i>	44
Summary	47
CHAPTER 2: The oral-formulaic theory revisited	48
Parry's project	48
Formula	50
Theme	63
Adding style	70
Basic concepts	72
Summary	73
CHAPTER 3: Oral epic in performance	74
Epic repertoires	74
Singer and audience	78
The singer's education	91
Narrative strategies	99
Summary	107

CHAPTER 4: The flexible oral epic	108
Stability and change	108
Genre-dependence and tradition-dependence	110
The same song	115
Typical changes	125
Some versions compared	131
Two scholarly approaches	137
The critical phase	142
Summary	144
CHAPTER 5: Homeric performance	145
Rhapsodes and singers	145
Homer as a rhapsode	153
Rhapsode and audience	156
Plato's <i>Ion</i>	161
Panathenaic competitions	167
The <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i> in performance	174
Summary	177
CHAPTER 6: Transitional texts	179
Lord and his critics	179
Two models	182
Interaction of literacy and orality	187
Literacy and orality in archaic Greece	194
The <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i> as transitional texts	197
A question of ideology?	203
Individual vs. traditional composition	209
Summary	213
CHAPTER 7: Gradual fixation	214
An evolutionary model	214
A medieval parallel	220
A Babylonian parallel	225
The single recording in writing	227
Evolution, devolution, or flux	230
The Trojan War in vase paintings	237
The original	244
Summary	247

CHAPTER 8: The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in context 248

Epic as part of Greek song-culture 248

Pools of tradition 251

Mental text and expansion 256

Iliad, *Odyssey*, and *Epic Cycle* 261

Reception of the written epics 268

Homer in schools 272

A matter of education 275

Summary 280

CHAPTER 9: The dictation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* 281

Forms of recording 281

From performance to book 285

Recording the *Siri Epic* 292Recording the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* 295

Cynaethus and Onomacritus 302

Interpolation 313

Vestiges of dictation 317

Summary 327

CHAPTER 10: Twice twenty-four books 329

The problem 329

Scholarly opinions 332

The singer's breaks 341

The books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* 346

Transitions between books 350

Endings 353

Beginnings 355

Iliad vs. *Odyssey* 358

Conclusion 360

Summary 362

CHAPTER 11: Three Athenian scribes 363

An unusual motif 363

History 365

Date and context 371

The scribes' postures 377

Two Boeotian terracotta figurines 388

Summary 393

CHAPTER 12: Conclusion 394

Works cited 399

Index of Passages 429

General Index 430

Preface

Introduction

The Homeric Question marks the beginning of humanistic scholarship in the western world. Its first occurrence is in the *Histories* of Herodotus (c. 430 B.C.), where at a certain point it is stated as a problem that two Homeric epics, the *Iliad* and the *Cypria*, disagree with regard to the journey made by Paris and Helen from Sparta to Troy, and Herodotus concludes that Homer cannot be the author of both poems. The problem raised as well as the solution proposed inaugurate what has become known as the Homeric Question: are inconsistencies to be explained as the result of multiple authorship?

At the Museum in Alexandria, where the early Ptolemies invested fabulous amounts of money in collecting a comprehensive Greek library (3rd – 2nd centuries B.C.), study of the Homeric Question was professionalised and developed into a sophisticated compound of literary interpretation, linguistic research, and textual criticism. The scholars had access to several manuscripts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and tried to establish a text that came as close as possible to the poet's original. Their methods have, of course, been criticised and refined during the millennia, but their approach established itself as the basic model for humanistic scholarship.

Only in the 20th century was a fundamentally different method applied to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. By means of statistical analysis Milman Parry demonstrated that the style of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* bears the characteristics of oral composition, and that this fact changes the nature of the Homeric Question. Oral traditions work in other ways than literary composition, and instead of arguing for and against multiple authorship research into the nature of oral composition in general and epic traditions in particular might lead to a new understanding of the origin and status of the two ancient Greek epics.

Parry and his assistant Albert B. Lord initiated a new kind of

fieldwork that aimed at investigating the general rules of oral composition. Their approach became a stimulus for generations of fieldworkers, and by today oral epic traditions from many parts of the world have been recorded, published, and analysed, thereby offering opportunities for adding light and shade to a comparative framework for all kinds of Homeric questions. In the present book I accept this offer and am particularly concerned with the old problem of the origin of the two epics.

If the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were orally composed but are nevertheless known to us as written texts, this paradox calls for an explanation. The simplest model is to imagine that the two poems were composed by an oral poet dictating to a scribe. Such an idea is supported by the fact that in historical times dictation to a scribe was the normal practice in ancient Greece and Rome whenever anything complicated had to be written.

Nevertheless, dictation to a scribe is by no means the dominating hypothesis about the composition of the two epics. Most Homeric scholars either do not discuss the question or imagine that the poet composed in writing on the basis of an oral tradition. Richard Janko, who has argued forcefully for the dictation hypothesis, has found few adherents.¹ Too few, according to the views here set forward.

Over the years the problem has been central in my Homeric studies, sometimes only touched upon in passing, sometimes as the main question of a paper. I have had the good fortune to receive comments and criticism, mainly in respect of my monograph *The Homeric Question and the Oral-Formulaic Theory* (1980) and the paper "Dividing Homer" (1999). The editors of the periodical *Symbolae Osloenses*, in which the latter work was published, even invited an impressive series of learned scholars to offer their comments, and these were printed in connection with the paper. Accordingly, I feel well informed of what readers have found to be weaknesses and strengths in my hypothesis, and I have tried to learn from their criticism. In some cases I have changed my views; more often, I am afraid, I have felt provoked to argue for them in more detail.

1. Janko 1998a & b.

What follows is built around the above-mentioned paper in *Symbolae Osloenses*, reappearing here in modified form as Chapter 10. New investigations of relevance to my work have been published since 1999, most importantly Lauri Honko's mammoth edition and discussion of the *Siri Epic as performed by Gopala Naika* (1998, not yet accessible to me while preparing my paper). Other passages of the present book have been published elsewhere but they have been modified or changed as a consequence of new scholarship or in order to fit into their new context. Their relationship to earlier papers is mentioned in notes at the end of chapters.

The argumentation begins with a statement of my purpose and a discussion of method. The fact that many kinds of fieldwork from various parts of the world are brought in to establish a framework for Homeric studies occasions a set of problems connected with the fact that the oral epics presented have been passed through quite a few filters, as it were: somebody has recorded, published, translated, and commented upon them, to mention only the most obvious difficulties for a proper use of fieldwork experience in relation to Homer. But the problems must somehow be surmounted. For a comparative framework to be trustworthy it must necessarily build on such fieldwork experience as is accessible. (Chapter 1.)

Chapters 2-4 first reconsider Parry and Lord's oral-formulaic theory on the basis of fieldwork pursued by their followers, and next dwell upon singers, audiences, and poems in their performance context. The ambition is not to offer an updated version of the great comparative studies of oral epic published by C.M. Bowra (1952) and Arthur Hatto (1980-89). Unlike these works the present study is selective, guided by the overall purpose of understanding the origin of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The focus is on the general lines, but such detail as seems relevant to Homeric studies is also included.

Chapter 5 interprets the sources for performance of Homeric epic in this framework, in particular information concerning the professional epic singers, the rhapsodes, and public performance at religious festivals.

In Chapter 6 an old bone of contention is taken up again: Lord's assertion that any literary text has to be either oral or written, and

that transitional texts do not exist. Chapters 7-8 discuss the place of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the general history of archaic Greek literature.

On this background Chapters 9-11 deal thoroughly with how a recording in writing can have been accomplished. Anthropologist and folklorist experience of what takes place during a registration is the fundament, and Honko's studies in particular are referred to. It is argued that the transmitted division of the two epics into 24 books each goes right back to this original recording, and that a group of statuettes in the Acropolis Museum are votive offerings dedicated to Athena to celebrate the completion of this monumental scribal work.

Chapter 12 briefly sketches the fundamental change in understanding the history of archaic literature that follows from my hypothesis.

My model reader is a Homeric scholar; but since hopefully the book will find a broader public, too, Greek words and phrases are translated, and in general the style tries to address other readers than just the initiated. Philological technicalities are kept at a minimum; where they are judged indispensable, the non-classicist reader will have to skip the passage in question.

A note on terminology

I speak of the oral 'theory', just as Lord did in *The Singer of Tales*. Later he discarded the term under the influence of scholarly discussion, and was followed by Gregory Nagy and Richard Janko.² I use it, however, not as a term for what is not documented fact, but to designate an overall view in opposition to hypotheses about details, similar to how relativity in Einstein's sense is called a theory. By 'oral theory' I mean the demonstration that oral composition is basically different from the written composition with which modern western culture is most familiar; the theory posits two kinds of literature, the oral and

2. Lord (1960) 2000, 1 and passim as against Lord 1995, 191; Nagy 1992, 28; 1996b, 19-20; Janko 1998b, 4. – I am happy to find that Friedrich 2007, 9 also insists on the term 'theory'.

the written, each with an infinite variety of forms and potentialities. In relation to this theory individual texts may be placed with more or less certainty as oral or written or something in between, and hypotheses may be constructed, such as for example the hypothesis that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were orally composed.

When speaking of ‘Homer’ or ‘the Homeric poems’, I mean the whole transmitted corpus of Homeric poetry: the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Hymns*, and the fragments of the *Epic Cycle* (with the exception of the *Batrachomyomachia* and *h.Hom.* viii, to Ares, which both differ from the otherwise common style). Sometimes I even use ‘Homer’ in the sense of all Homeric poetry, transmitted or lost; in each single case the context will make clear what is meant. In short, ‘Homer’ means the Homeric *langue*, of which individual manifestations such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are considered *paroles*. When discussing only the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, I mention them by name or speak of ‘the two epics’ or ‘the two poems’. Here, then, ‘*Iliad*’ means ‘the *Iliad* as we know it, the version of the poem that has been transmitted to us’. Accordingly, the terms ‘prehomeric’ and ‘posthomeric’ that scholars use for matters that precede or follow the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, do not make sense here and are not used.

I follow Gérard Genette in distinguishing between ‘story’ = the signified content, ‘narrative’ = the signifier, and ‘narrating’ = the producing narrative action.³

I use ‘text’ for both written and oral versions and therefore dismiss the term ‘textualisation’ that is often met with in the sense of recording in writing.

Sometimes scholars distinguish between ‘variant’ and ‘version’, with ‘variant’ being the individual performance and ‘version’ a group of variants sharing such similarities as to distinguish them from other versions.⁴ Since I have not aimed at this level of stringency, I have chosen to use the term ‘version’ more loosely to denote ‘the text in case’.

In general use, ‘tradition’ is a broad term, more or less synonymous with ‘transmission’. Even when narrowed down to mean ‘oral

3. Genette (1972) 1980, 27. In French the three terms are *histoire*, *récit*, and *narration*.

4. Reichl 1992, 6; 2001a, 78-9.

tradition', the term is still too comprehensive for my purpose, since the world is full of oral traditions of many kinds that are not my topic here. The humbler ones, such as lullabies or work songs, were seldom registered before the Romantic Movement in Europe made scholars interested in the 'folk'. In the present book, unless otherwise stated, I use the term 'tradition' in the sense of 'oral epic tradition'. As such it may mean the process of composing, performing, and transmitting oral epics as well as the result of the process. For instance, I speak of 'the Palnadu tradition' or 'the Homeric tradition'.⁵

'The singing community', a folklorist term, is used for the social group – singers, patrons, and audiences – for whom the epic serves as a means of communication.

A difference in understanding between insiders and outsiders will be described with the terms 'emic' vs. 'etic'. As a relatively new terminological pair they require a few extra words. When the terms were first coined by the linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike, they were part of an ambitious project of describing human behaviour in general. Both terms designate analytic approaches, but while an emic analysis studies cultural units in relation to an overall pattern of that same culture, the etic analysis compares and classifies units from various emic systems with the purpose of building generalised descriptions. However, the terms are also used in a more simplistic way, for instance by the historian Bruce Trigger, who states that "*etic* refers to analysis in terms of cross-culturally applicable scientific terms and *emic* to the study of the terminology and underlying concepts that have meaning for the people who belong to a particular society", and that is how they will be used here.⁶

Anthropologists discuss whether it is ethically permissible at all to posit a difference between inside and outside in cultural studies. For instance, Stuart Blackburn feels uneasy about the concept but

5. Scodel 2002, 1-41 gives a detailed and thought-provoking discussion of the concept.

6. Pike 1954, 8-10; the words are modelled over the linguistic pair 'phonemic' vs. 'phonetic'. Trigger 2003, 63. Cf. Fine 1984, 73; Reichl 2000a, 118; Okpewho 2004, 87; Reichl 2007, 100.

ends up defending the differentiation and proceeds to underline the usefulness of the study of oral literatures as a means for the outsider to attempt at understanding local concepts. William Collins describes the same experience when he states that whereas he had been well able to document Dutch views on the Besemah in South Sumatra, he had lacked “a sustained ... voice speaking from within the culture” until he found and recorded the *Radin Suane Epic*.⁷

Since singers of epic are almost always male I use the pronoun ‘he’ when referring to an anonymous representative of the craft.

Well-known proper names that first reached Western Europe via the Romans are latinised whereas I have retained the Greek form of less famous names: for instance, I write Pisistratus, not Peisistratos, but Kleitias and Maiandrios.

I follow the general custom of dividing the history of ancient Greece into the ‘archaic’ (c. 800-490 B.C.), the ‘classical’ (490-323 B.C.), the ‘Hellenistic’ (323-31 B.C.), and the ‘Roman’ (after 31 B.C.) periods, 490 B.C. being the date of the Persian invasion, 323 the death of Alexander the Great, and 31 the Battle of Actium.

Acknowledgements

Over the years, students, colleagues and friends have discussed my views with me, and I am deeply grateful to them all. Decades ago, the music ethnologist Birthe Trærup gave me an invaluable methodological introduction to the duties of a fieldworker. More recently, Karen Skovgaard-Petersen read the manuscript at a crucial stage and gave helpful comments. For Chapter II, in which I venture into the domain of archaeology, I received expert help from Poul Pedersen and Annette Rathje, all the more generous considering that they did not necessarily agree with the interpretation of the monuments there given. Nora Petersen collected a basic bibliography for the same chapter, and Hanna Lassen was helpful in acquiring photos.

7. Blackburn 2008, 4-7; W.A. Collins 1998, 5-6. – Cf. Flueckiger 1989, 33 of the difference between insiders and outsiders in understanding the north Indian *Lorik-Canda Epic*. – Malik 2005, xii describes an Indian scholar’s problems in establishing his role as inside or outside.

In a final stage Signe Isager read the manuscript and to my great relief gave it her approval. John D. Kendal revised my English, and Jonas Skafte Jensen helped me through the intricacies of computer composition. What remains of errors or wilful thinking is entirely my own responsibility.

Thanks are due also to the staffs of the University Library of Southern Denmark, the Royal Library of Copenhagen, Accademia di Danimarca in Rome, the Danish Institute at Athens, and the Blegen Library in Athens. I thank Museum Tusculanum Press, Nordic Academic Press, Forum of Renaissance Studies, the Central Institute of Indian Languages, the Norwegian Institute at Athens, Taylor & Francis, and Vita e Pensiero for permission to republish updated versions of papers originally published by them. Finally I thank the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, especially its editor Marita Akhøj Nielsen and two anonymous readers, for accepting my book in its humanistic series.

CHAPTER I

Epic fieldwork

The purpose of the present study

Almost a century has passed since Parry published his doctoral thesis. What began as an analysis of Homeric formulaic diction developed into an ambitious theory about oral poetry in general and oral epic in particular. The publication in 1960 of Lord's *The Singer of Tales* was followed by a period of euphoria in which it seemed that all the old Homeric questions had found their answers, and the theory spread into the other philologies. Next came a period of frustration: scholars tired of what was felt to be oversimplification and the theory was widely rejected. In the field of medieval studies influential papers by Larry D. Benson and Michael Curschmann contested the relevance of the Parry-Lord theory to studies in medieval English literature. From a background of fieldwork in Sierra Leone and a general knowledge of African oral traditions, Ruth Finnegan criticised the theory for being too rigid. Instead, she stressed the coexistence of written and oral literature in the modern world, and the constant interaction between the two.¹

As for Homer, David Shive stated in 1987 that the idea of Homeric oral poetry was in a crisis. By presenting full tables of the ways Achilles is mentioned in the poems, grammatical case for grammatical case, he challenged Parry's notion of the thrifty Homeric formulas. Pointing to the fact that Parry had left unnoticed the role of grammatical and metrical details such as movable *ny* or elision, and had not systematically included variant phrases such as those containing personal pronouns or patronymics, he declared

1. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 1-239; Lord (1960) 2000; Benson 1966; Curschmann (1967) 1979; Finnegan 1977. For a discussion of Finnegan, cf. Jensen 1980, 22-6. – Fine 1984, 34, 65-6, comments upon the impact of the theory in folklore studies, Foley 1988 gives a more general survey of its history, Thomas 1992, 29-51 surveys and discusses the status of the theory at that time, so do Mitchell & Nagy 2000, and de Vet 2005 describes the scholarly background of the theory.

that he had “tried to help cure Homer of blindness and put a pen in his hand”.² The same year an anthology of Homeric studies carried the revealing subtitle *Oral Poetry and Beyond*,³ and when in 1991 James Holoka surveyed the history of the theory and its impact, all that was said of comparative studies based on the oral-formulaic theory was some references to Lord and James A. Notopoulos and then the following phrase: “...Yougoslav or Old English or Bantu or what have you...”, with no notes added.⁴ Holoka concluded that, what was interesting was not so much to try to understand the poems on their own premises as to read them with modern eyes. With respect to the field of Serbo-Croatian epic, both Parry and Lord have been criticised for insufficient knowledge of existing scholarship.⁵

However, scholars such as John Miles Foley, Gregory Nagy, Carlo Odo Pavese, Antonio Aloni, and Georg Danek kept the discussion going, and in recent years the tide has turned. Currently the theory is again central in Homeric scholarship, and sometimes it is even taken for granted that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are oral poems.⁶ Many would agree with Janko when he states: “I would compare the theory to an axiom in mathematics: it cannot itself be proved, but without it little else can be explained.”⁷ This is not to say that

2. Shive 1987, 139.

3. Bremer et al. 1987.

4. Holoka 1991, 476; Sigurdsson 2004, xvii quotes a similar statement concerning the oral theory in saga research, from a 1995 context: “Unsere Germanen sind nicht mit den wilden Hottentotten zu vergleichen”. – Nagy 1996a, 19-27 lists “ten examples of usage ... applied in misleading ways” (19).

5. Bynum 1998; Colakovic 2007b, 571.

6. Theoretical discussions: M.L. West 2000b; Whallon 2000; Burgess 2001; Pelliccia 2003; Burgess 2004-5; Blössner 2006; Friedrich 2007. – Interpretational studies: Danek 1998; Cairns 2001a; Dué 2002; Graziosi 2002; Scodel 2002; Graziosi & Haubold 2005; Bakker 2006; Danek 2006; Radke 2007; Marks 2008; Tsagalis 2008; Camerotto 2009. – Oral composition taken for granted: Dimock 1995, 2-3; Wyatt 1999, 2-3; Dalby (2006) 2007; Tsagalis 2006; Ready 2007; Brillante 2005 (published 2009); Reece 2009. – Oral composition is central for many of the contributions to Fowler 2004. – The series *Orality and Literacy in Ancient Greece*, published as *Mnemosyne Supplementa* by Brill in Leiden, was initiated in 1996 and reached its 7th volume with Mackay 2008.

7. Janko 2000.

leading scholars embrace the theory unanimously; Martin West, for one, some years ago emphatically shook oralism off his back.⁸ Where the other philologies are concerned, interest in the theory differs from one field to another, but the once popular type of investigation in which it was decided on the basis of formulary statistics whether a given poem was orally composed or not seems to have been generally discarded.⁹

In the present book no attempt will be made to prove that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were orally composed. I certainly share Janko's opinion that the whole complex of questions surrounding the two epics are best understood if they were, but the matter is hardly one that can be proved or disproved. Instead, my argument will be: if as our point of departure we take the two poems to be oral, what can we then learn from oral traditions in our own world as to how they can have been recorded in writing? I gave a first answer to this question in 1980, pointing to the Pisistratid court in Athens as the when and where. Briefly, the argument ran as follows: since oral epic is continuously changing what we can attempt to date is the written text. In archaic Greece, the tyrants were the persons who most probably could afford the cost of such an undertaking, and whereas it is difficult to see why the singers themselves should wish to have the poems written, the political advantages of owning a written Homer might have been a reason for tyrants to invest in the project. Various considerations point towards Athens as the location, first and foremost the fact that the manuscripts seem to go back to an Athenian archetypus. Besides, the well-known anecdote of Pisistratus or his son Hipparchus having created order out of a chaotic tradition might be a distorted reminiscence of the recording in writing.¹⁰

I shall not here return to the question of dating. Instead, my purpose is to greatly enlarge the comparative material adduced and on this background discuss in detail the circumstances of the writ-

8. M.L. West 2003a, 14.

9. Lord inspired this approach, Lord (1960) 2000, 130, and there was a period when such tests were widespread. Later on they went out of use, and scholars such as Janko 1982, 19 and Foley 1990, 4-5 took leave of them explicitly.

10. Jensen 1980.

ing of the two epics. The question is of paramount importance for, again, since the tradition is in perpetual change, the writing is also the composition of the poems we know.

Parry was careful to state: “We are merely saying that the traditional style which Homer used was oral, and not that Homer’s style was so.”¹¹ Nevertheless he invested much time and energy in studying a living oral tradition as a way towards a better understanding of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Lord took the theory a step further and stated: “There is now no doubt that the composer of the Homeric poems was an oral poet.”¹² Even for those who feel that such things are beyond proving or disproving the oral theory remains central for understanding archaic Greek literature and Homer’s place in it.

In Homeric studies comparison with oral epics in the modern world has been used mainly with two purposes: to facilitate readings that attempt to understand the poems in a way that resembles how a contemporary audience must have understood them, and to build up a probable framework for the composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The present work belongs to the second category and is meant as a contribution to the history of archaic Greek literature.

Accordingly, I shall not here attempt interpretations of the two epics; only now and then, when the argumentation calls for it, will readings of special passages be proposed. One overall point to do with interpretation will, however, be implicitly argued all the way through: my hypothesis of the composition in dictation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* does not mean to suggest that the process was “casual”.¹³ To compare, great oral epic traditions as documented in recent times are performed by highly trained artists and manifested in sophisticated texts. Similarly, I think that the two rhapsodes who – as I shall argue – composed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, had spent their lives training for ever increasing virtuosity in meeting the demands of different audiences, and that they were therefore experts

11. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 321; ‘Homer’ used in the sense of the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

12. Lord (1960) 2000, 141.

13. Such was the most serious criticism I received of my hypothesis as put forward in Jensen 1999, raised by Irene de Jong (1999, 62).

in handling the various challenges inherent in adapting fluent texts to given performance conditions. They were able to abbreviate and expand, control a coherent action from beginning to end, manipulate their listeners' sympathies and antipathies, and give verbal form to a treasure of human wisdom acquired during centuries of rhapsodic tradition.

Besides the purpose of building up a hypothesis of how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* can have come into being, I want to draw the attention of Homeric scholars to the fact that fieldwork studies of oral epic have increased during recent decades, and that all the time new texts of relevance for our understanding of the two archaic Greek epics in context are being published.

The oral-formulaic theory in fieldwork

Criticism notwithstanding, the theory has certainly been a stimulus for research, both in Homeric scholarship, where it began, and in modern folkloristics and anthropology.¹⁴ The way fieldwork is conducted changed radically as a result of this theory, the methods of both recording and publishing were fundamentally altered, and the volume of living epic traditions documented in such a way as to make them accessible to scholars from other disciplines is by now considerable.¹⁵

Besides the fact that the theory has been so obviously productive, it has another very attractive side inasmuch as it offers an alternative to the evolutionary model for understanding history. Why is it relevant at all to study one phenomenon – say, ancient Greece – by comparing it with another, such as, for instance, Yugoslavia in the 1930s? Because there is an evolution that all human societies go through, but at a different pace? That was the generally accepted western worldview in the 19th century when comparative studies were first introduced. But it has grown increasingly problematic,

14. Reichl 1992, ix tells how this scholar was inspired by Lord (1960) 2000.

15. The periodical *Oral Tradition* is an important source of information. For a survey with bibliography, see Jensen 1994-5. A detailed discussion of eleven select examples of edited oral epics are to be found in Honko 1998 a, 169-217.

especially because it involves ideas of lower and higher steps on a ladder of progress, with our own societies occupying the top rung. What a coincidence! Parry and Lord's focus on the technical, material, and social circumstances of composition provides an ideologically more neutral basis for comparison.¹⁶

For a sociologically oriented question such as the topic treated here, comparison with oral poetry in our own times is important as a help towards establishing a convincing setting for the poems. We have the texts, but few or no reliable external sources to inform us about the details of how they came into being. For this use, documented oral epic serves as a kind of laboratory, and much of Parry and Lord's influence has had to do with this aspect.¹⁷

When modern fieldwork is used as a means to reconstruct the lost social framework of ancient epic, as in the present work, the normal is what is interesting. Much attention has been focused on Avdo Mededovic because he was the most accomplished singer Parry met in Yugoslavia, and Homeric scholars have been looking for somebody to match the poet of the *Iliad*, to some degree. That is reasonable enough when the question is whether it is conceivable at all that the *Iliad* can have been composed orally, and also when various questions of narrative technique are concerned. But in order to establish an impression of the context in which the two great epics belong, as is my aim here, volumes 1, 2 and 14 of *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, in which works of average singers are published, are more relevant than volumes 3, 4 and 6, which are focused on Mededovic. For the same reason I have tried to collect a broad documentation of fieldwork experience from many parts of the world. My aim is to achieve as detailed and reliable a picture as possible of the general characteristics of oral epic traditions. In this way I hope to replace the implicit frame of reference for Homeric epic, obtained from the history of literature as western readers know it, with an explicit framework built upon epic traditions that are demonstrably oral.

The theory emphasised the flexibility of epic traditions, and

16. For a brief discussion of evolutionary models, see Trigger 2003, 40-42.

17. Similarly, Sigurdsson 2004, 41-2 speaks of using the comparative approach as a way to "plug gaps in our fragmentary knowledge of the past" in connection with saga studies.

scholars have become careful to clarify what specific performance they are studying. It is no longer accepted to edit texts conflated from more than one performance or even based on recordings from a multitude of singers.¹⁸ Furthermore, it has become normal to publish more than one version of a song.

In spite of the interest in social context and listeners' reactions it is not unusual for scholars to ask for special performances carried out for the purpose of registration; such texts are called 'induced' or 'elicited' oral epics. The advantages and drawbacks of this will be discussed in Chapter 9.

In step with the interest that has gathered around the specific performance, singers have gained individuality in the scholars' eyes. Modern studies and editions regularly inform the reader about the singers involved, their background, education, and role in society. It is also typical for this branch of scholarship that singers are interviewed about their views on their art, and that such dialogues between artist and scholar are published, at least in selection. This was an important innovation in Parry's fieldwork, and it has had a great impact on later publications. Questions concerned with formulas, themes, and orality vs. literacy have become central, both for such dialogues and for the analyses scholars present of the recorded texts.

A working definition of 'epic'

Spontaneity and tradition do not interact in the same way in all genres of oral poetry. Therefore, when we want to draw comparisons between oral epic in the modern world and in ancient or medieval times, it is necessary to establish some kind of formal definition. Scholars differ on the issue. After a discussion of various possibilities, Honko settles for the following:

Epics are great narratives about exemplars, originally performed by specialised singers as superstories which excel in length, power of

18. According to McLaren 2010, 161, an anthology of ten folk epics from the lower Yangzi Delta region in China published in 1989 was still made by means of conflation.

expression and significance of content over other narratives and function as a source of identity representations in the traditional community or group receiving the epic.¹⁹

This definition seems too circumstantial to be useful in our present context. Especially, it is inconvenient to make a hypothetical earlier form part of the definition and to exclude traditions not handled by specialists. But it also seems uncertain whether epic always ranges higher than other forms of narrative.

Epic is often understood as the genre celebrating heroic deeds, for example by C.M. Bowra and Arthur Hatto, and also by Stuart Blackburn and Joyce Flueckiger when they define Indian epic as narrative, poetic, and heroic.²⁰ A classic definition was given by the folklorist Axel Olrik:

Heroic poetry or heroic narratives ... are epic presentations with human beings as their main characters. These characters are presented as surpassing present-day human dimensions. They belong to a vanished time, usually a heroic time, during which most of the heroic figures known to the people lived. They belong to a certain tribe, normally the tribe in which the tradition is found, or a closely connected one. The present-day leading families are frequently regarded as being descendants of these heroic figures.²¹

Like Olrik and Honko, Hatto aims at finding a world-wide definition that can cover the genre in all its varying forms, but considers this impossible as yet. As a working definition he speaks of “two axes which intersect, ‘the heroic’ and the ‘epic’”, and ends up with a list of some important factors that taken together form the genre: the epic occasion, involving singer, patron, and audience; composition in performance; epic moments (great, symbolic, and visually

19. Honko 1998a, 24-9, quote 28. Honko's definition is accepted by Foley 2005b, 199. Reichl discusses genre definitions at some length in his survey of Turkic epic, Reichl 1992, 119-41.

20. Bowra 1952; Hatto 1980; 1991; Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989, 2-3; Flueckiger 1989, 76 adds length and song to the definition.

21. Olrik (1921) 1992, 110.

impressive scenes); and finally the poem's capacity of making listeners identify with the heroes and believe in what is being told.²² Such a description fits the present study well enough and many of the aspects mentioned will be taken up in what follows, but also this definition is too vague for my purpose. At the same time, since the term 'heroic epic' might be felt to exclude the *Odyssey*, it is not workable in the present context.

Stephen Belcher's definition is concerned only with the genre as cultivated in Africa, still a very broad topic. It says: "an extended narrative on a historical topic, delivered in public performance, most often with musical accompaniment, by a specialized performer".²³ The focus on performance makes this definition awkward for my purpose but it is interesting as a reminder to the classicist of how much is lost when we can only read an epic.

In a thought-provoking discussion, Richard P. Martin characterises the epic as the overall, 'unmarked' form, able to incorporate all kinds of smaller genres such as proverbs, praise poetry, didactic forms, etc., and suited for performance on all occasions.²⁴ However, such a deconstruction of the very term creates problems when empirically weighed. For one thing, epic is not a genre that is cultivated in all oral societies such as the humbler genres – children's songs or laments for example – and there are other genres, too, that incorporate subgenres, such as drama. Next, epic tends to be a male speciality. Any idea of an overall genre to include all other forms must be open to women's genres, too, in order to make sense. Furthermore, some forms of epic are not suited for all occasions since they are closely tied to religious events; this is, for instance, the case for the *Epic of Palnadu* in Andhra Pradesh in eastern India, performed by specialised singers. They may sing at secular gatherings, but their

22. Hatto 1980, 2 (quote); 1991, 11, 19.

23. Belcher 1999, xiv. – Cf. Mulokozi 2002, 1-11, whose definition is based on Haya poetic narrative in Tanzania and mainly aimed at demonstrating that epic certainly exists in Africa, as against Ruth Finnegan; and Barber 2007, 45-58, who discusses the African epic traditions in the context of the whole spectrum of African genres.

24. Martin 2005; cf. Nagy 1999a, whom Martin refers to. Biebuyck 1972, 266 similarly calls Bantu epic "a supergenre that encompasses and harmoniously fuses together practically all genres".

songs are always considered religious and therefore different from other kinds of entertainment.²⁵

My purpose is less ambitious than Honko's or Hatto's. I am not trying to establish a definition that functions world-wide, but to make sure that I do not apply parallels that are not viable. My concern is Homer, not oral epic as such, and for that I need a brief and simple definition. For this purpose I have settled on the "working definition" put forward by Margaret Beissinger, Jane Tylus, and Susanne Wofford: "A poetic narrative of length and complexity that centers around deeds of significance to the community".²⁶ I interpret the definition as follows: by 'poetic' I understand whatever is performed in a style distinct from daily speech, since my definition must not exclude prosimetric narratives such as they frequently occur in many parts of the world; by 'narrative': concerned with action (but description and reflection may occur); by 'length and complexity': longer and more complex than other literary forms in a community's spectrum of genres, and by 'deeds of significance to the community': incidents that singer and audience consider to be true in the sense of having actually taken place at some time.²⁷

The question of truth as a generic quality of epic will be further discussed in Chapter 4. The idea that the distinction between texts considered fictive and those considered truthful is basic in oral literature has been criticised as too narrowly based on European experience; but in a recent discussion Blackburn states that it actually works remarkably well not only in Europe, but also in south India and much of sub-Saharan Africa.²⁸ According to my working defini-

25. Roghair 1982, 36, 61-2.

26. Beissinger & al. 1999b, 2.

27. Olrik (1921) 1992, 3 also mentions that epic is regarded by its narrators as historical.

28. Blackburn 2008, 19-20. – Priso 1993, 27 mentions such a fundamental distinction between *myangó* (history) and *miná* (fiction) in Dwala oral literature in Cameroun, and to Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 56, whose fieldwork has taken place in Ghana, the question whether a given genre is considered to be truthful constitutes the basic dividing line between myth and legend on one side, and folktales and fables on the other; cf. Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 120-21, 129.

tion, the poetic narratives among the Haya in Tanzania which are considered to be by the singing community to preserve historical truth are epics, although Peter Seitel prefers to call them “epic ballads” because he finds them too short to qualify as epics.²⁹ When Micheline Galley underlines that by singers of the Arabic *Sirat Bani Hilal* and their audiences these songs are considered to narrate their own history, her experience confirms the relevance of this criterion for the definition of the epic genre.³⁰

It might be argued that with the last element of the definition it becomes uncertain whether the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are epics since we know so little about their social context. However, there are crucial passages in the poems in which it actually comes out that in the two epics truth is the most highly appreciated quality.³¹

In a few cases other genres are drawn into the discussion, and they are then explicitly characterised as such. North Indian *dhola* and Korean *p’ansori*, which are long narratives sung for entertainment without any pretence to truth, are kept out of the discussion of stability and change, but referred to in some other contexts, for instance in the description of how professional singers are trained. Similarly, the tradition of Yangzhou storytelling, with its daily performances in sessions of a couple of hours over a period of several weeks, is brought into the discussion where relevant, even though the stories are mainly in prose with only a few sung passages. Furthermore, a passage from a Bedouin lyric poem from Saudi Arabia is quoted to demonstrate the workings of adding style.

Methodical problems

With the oral-formulaic theory Homeric studies became closely related to folkloristics and anthropology, and in the present study I draw heavily on scholarship from these disciplines. When moving from your own field (in my case classical philology) to neighbouring areas you run the risk of misusing methods and results of your

29. Seitel 1999; to Mulokozi 2002, 1-11 they are epics.

30. Galley 1998, 112-13.

31. Jensen 1980, 62-80.

neighbours. Being aware of the problem I have attempted as best I could to acquaint myself with the basic methods of these related disciplines, and in 1974 an agreement on cultural cooperation between Albania and Denmark enabled me to attend performances by epic singers from the area of Shkodra in northern Albania.

It is a disquieting fact that Homeric scholars who implement the oral-formulaic theory sometimes read in very different ways when referring to the same fieldwork results. For instance, the volume on Indian epic edited by Blackburn and others in 1989 was a main inspiration for Nagy when writing his *Homeric Questions*, but some of the uses he put it to seem unacceptable to me, an issue that will be treated in Chapter 7.³² A degree of subjectivity is, of course, inescapable in humanistic studies, but even so the risk is that critics of the Oralist approach may feel that such disagreement makes this whole branch of scholarship unreliable.

I have tried to restrict the subjectivity of my own approach in various ways. First, I stick to matters of composition and social context and do not include the – fascinating – parallels that in some cases exist between the content of oral epics widely distant in time and space. This is not to suggest that comparison of content is unmethodical, just that it is a different subject demanding other tools than those introduced by Parry and Lord. Next, the orality of the traditions here adduced for comparison is documented fact, and, with one exception, I do not refer to ancient or medieval traditions since their way of composition is as hypothetical as that of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The exception occurs in Chapter 7 in connection with a discussion of the manuscript transmission of the two epics. Third, I refer to a broad variety of fieldwork, carefully also mentioning results that seem to contradict the patterns identified in the present study, and combine this approach with a closer reading of a few selected studies. In this way I hope to build up as detailed and reliable a picture as possible of what is normal and what not in oral epic traditions.

Special problems attach to the fact that I am dependent on translations when referring to oral epics as they are known from field-

32. Blackburn & al. 1989; Nagy 1996a.

work. Scholars' choices of how to navigate between source and target language differ widely – a question I shall return to in Chapter 9 – and the reader is at their mercy. It is a great help, however, when a translation is accompanied by a transcript of the original recording so that various questions of detail can be checked. For instance, even without knowledge of the language in question it is possible to ascertain whether repeated phrases in the original are represented by repeated phrases in the translation. A superficial impression of rhythm and verse structure can also be obtained, and when some modern editions by means of cd's or references to the internet enable the reader to actually hear the performance, the reader can have the feeling of almost being part of the audience. On the other hand, such a feeling may be misleading, and in general I have restrained myself from commenting on aesthetic qualities.

The question of how the fieldworker influences the performance is of paramount importance when the aim is to understand oral art in its most authentic forms. It is, however, still unusual for scholars to be as explicit as Susan Slyomovics about their own role when recording and editing oral poetry.³³ Sometimes they even neglect to state what they asked for at the beginning of their fieldwork. When participating in interdisciplinary seminars I have regularly tried to make fieldworkers more aware of such problems, and I was proud to find that as a response Lauri Honko added a full chapter to his monograph on the *Siri Epic*.³⁴

Another factor that complicates the comparative approach is the difference in scholarly traditions. Already Lord regretted the lack of an index to Parry's collection of Serbo-Croatian epics.³⁵ Homeric scholarship has a long history, and scholars who engage in formulaic analysis of Homeric diction begin at a level at which the language has already been described in great detail, and sophisticated hypotheses about its nature abound. Homerists are endowed with a

33. Slyomovics 1987, cf. below. Reynolds 2000 is a detailed discussion of how theoretical preconceptions and personal interests influence the results of fieldwork, published texts included.

34. Honko 1998a, 276-321, with note 196 on p. 321.

35. Lord (1960) 2000, 50; cf. Biebuyck 1978, 23.

wealth of handbooks and databases, and they have colleagues with whom they can cooperate and discuss their work.

In all this they are in a different situation from that of fieldworkers who collect oral epic in some distant corner of the modern world. Just to approach a more detailed investigation calls for professional competence from numerous fields. The linguistic demands are particularly evident. In the modern world, epic traditions tend to belong to marginal groups, socially, ethnically or geographically, and the dialects used are often such that have no established orthography, not to speak of grammars or dictionaries. If such traditions resemble Homer in combining more than one historical level into a special poetic dialect – as may well be the case – a proper study has to be both synchronic and diachronic. In addition to the demands inherent in the musical and dramatic sides of the performance cultural, sociological and historical aspects play a considerable role. Few scholars can hope to meet such requirements. As Daniel P. Biebuyck exclaimed in relation to the question of a formulaic system of Nyanga epic in eastern Congo: “Its exhaustive study would require a Parry or a Lord.”³⁶ Add to this that formulaic analysis of living oral epic demands a kind of study that contains little attraction for the fieldworker, time-consuming as it is and of limited promise in terms of fame and career.

On the other hand, Biebuyck’s situation on discovering an epic tradition that had not yet been known to exist is unusual; more often than not a fieldworker can build upon more or less well-developed existing scholarship. When Parry decided to add fieldwork to his Homeric studies, he chose a tradition that already had a long history as the object of study and was well known from printed editions, and even though his approach was new, he had a solid fundament to start from. Similarly, some of the great Turkic traditions have been intensely studied, not least by Russian scholars. Still, there is a long way from even such relatively well-analysed traditions to Homeric scholarship. The problem is most acute on the level of formulaic analysis, a question I shall return to in Chapter 2.

36. Biebuyck 1978, 75. Cf. Biebuyck 1976, 5 and Johnson (1986) 2003, 30 about the problems African epic causes the researcher.

Experts on Sanskrit epic settle the account as follows: “Mahabharata is almost eight times the size of the Iliad and Odyssey together, yet it has received less than .08 % of the critical attention that Homer has had.”³⁷ This provocative statement concerns a venerable ancient tradition. When it comes to living oral epic, a comparison would show an even greater inequality. Homer is definitely the spoiled child of the epic family.³⁸ In short, the mere fact that the study of Homeric language and meter has such an impressive history is a problem for intercultural comparison.

Selected examples of fieldwork

A multitude of studies and editions of oral poetry is by now accessible and in the following, six living traditions will be presented that seem especially relevant to Homeric studies. Two are from Africa, three from India, and one from Central Asia. The fact that oral epics edited or described in books are seen through the eyes of the describing scholars raises a whole range of not easily answered questions. Therefore it may be useful to give a brief introduction to a few representative works in order to give an impression of the differing approaches.

The six have been chosen both because they are in one way or another closer to Homer than other accessible epic traditions, and – mainly – because the way they have been described makes them especially interesting in connection with the oral-formulaic theory. Seven scholars are involved, three of whom, Slyomovics, Reynolds and Reichl, studied traditions they considered close to extinction, while the Indian traditions represented were still flourishing. Biebuyck does not comment on the prospects of the Nyanga tradition, but nevertheless conveys the impression that the conditions for epic performance were disappearing when he was doing his fieldwork.

The seven projects presented are also intended to give an impression of the scale of the differences that exist among the methodologies of fieldwork as it has been conducted during the decades after

37. Smith 1980, 75, referring to Mary Carroll Smith.

38. Cf. Biebuyck 1978, 23, 75; Hatto 1980, 17-18.

The Singer of Tales. The works are presented in the order in which they were first published. However, between them, these seven scholars represent most of the approaches typically guiding modern fieldwork in oral epic traditions. There is substantial difference in the scope of the studies presented, but each of them conveys an infectious fascination with the wonders of great oral narrative and the importance such traditions have or until recently had in their communities.

The Nyanga *Mwindo Epic*

The first example is from eastern Congo, where Daniel P. Biebuyck did fieldwork in 1954-6. At the time, the best known African epics were the great traditions cultivated by Mande speakers in west Africa (Mali, Mauretania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Conakry, and The Ivory Coast). They celebrate Sunjata (who also appears as Sundiata or Son-Jara in scholarly literature), the founder of the Mali empire c. 1250, or Da Monzon, ruler of the Bambara state in the upper Niger region in the early 19th century. It was not known at the time that the Nyanga and neighbouring peoples had an epic tradition, too.

At a certain point, while engaged in a general collection of oral literature in the area, Biebuyck met with bards who knew songs about a hero called Mwindo from a remote but undetermined past. The singers were semiprofessional, making their living in other jobs. They performed for broad audiences whenever a suitable occasion turned up, and Biebuyck emphasises that there was nothing secret about it. For instance, a chief would invite a bard to perform a few episodes from the epic in the evening, around the men's hut in the middle of the village, and large crowds of people, male and female, young and old, would come to listen. If the performance was a success, the singer might be invited to continue on the following evening. In any case it was always a matter of episodes, never the entire story. The singers were accompanied by musicians playing a two-stringed zither and drums, and in performance they first sang, then narrated episode by episode. The epic was not known in books or other forms of writing.

Singers were called *Shé-kárisi*, a teknonym meaning father of epic; *kárisi* is both the name of the genre and of a male spirit, the guardian of the tradition. In performance they identify both with *Kárisi*, whose paraphernalia – an iron bell and a special spear – they carry, and with the hero *Mwindo*.³⁹

The bard *Biebuyck* came to know best was *Sherungu Muriro*, who acted both as an informant and a general assistant to him during his fieldwork. He had been employed as a road worker by the local administration, but *Biebuyck* discovered that his intellectual and other qualities were impressive:

He is an outstanding and versatile drummer, an experienced hunter, a friend of the Pygmies, a renowned medicine man, and an excellent storyteller. Furthermore, ... he occupies an influential position in the college of ritual experts surrounding the chief.⁴⁰

Biebuyck registered four induced versions of the epic from four different singers, all of whom were illiterate. Three versions were dictated to the scholar and two local assistants on his team who worked as his scribes, while the fourth was sung and registered on tape. The longest version, dictated by a certain *Candi Rureke*, was published in 1969 in both the original language and in English translation, and this is the case described in most detail by *Biebuyck*. The dictation process was arranged by the scholar as a special session made for the purpose but was more similar to a natural documentation than most induced cases, since the event gathered a lively local audience, participating more or less as they would normally have done. The dictation lasted twelve days and as published the text occupies 102 pages. The three other versions were published in 1978, in translation only. They are each 40-50 pages long.

39. *Biebuyck & Mateene* 1969, 12-14.

40. *Biebuyck* 1978, 12.

The Tamilnadu *Brothers' Epic*

Next comes Brenda Beck's study of an epic tradition in the state of Tamilnadu in south eastern India.⁴¹ During a period of some years in the mid-1960s she lived as a social anthropologist in a village in the Coimbatore district, where one of the sources of popular entertainment was epic performance. There were local singers, but now and then the village was visited by professional performers of the same tradition. The subject of the epic consists of the heroic deeds of two brothers and their sister, who, after their death, are given semi-divine status by the gods. As in the case of Mwindo, the events take place in an indefinable distant past, but in the area in which the singing community lives.

The professional epic singers are itinerant and work in groups. The singing is accompanied by drums. The audiences are mixed: men and women, adults and children from various castes. The number of nights spent on one performance depends on the interest of the audiences. Singers maintain that they can take three months to tell the *Brothers' Epic*; the usual event is a performance over three to four evenings but it is not uncommon for performance periods to be longer, up to two or three weeks.⁴² Beck registered a performance sung by E.A. Ramacami that was spread over nineteen evenings between June 23 and September 1, 1965. The total recording time was 44 hours. The anthropologist was present with her tape recorder but did not try to elicit a special performance; this long, continued presentation was of a normal length.

In order to facilitate her understanding of the text, Beck asked Mr. Ramacami to dictate the epic to a scribe, and this was done from June 25 to September 3, 1965. Beck does not describe the process in detail, but the dates suggest that whenever the singer sang a passage to an audience, he dictated the same passage to the scribe afterwards. The written version is 622 pages long, some 11,500 verse lines. Even though the singer considered the two versions to be the same, there were considerable differences between the written and

41. Beck 1982.

42. Beck 1982, 85.

the performed versions.⁴³ In some cases the order of events was changed, and most notably the written version was much the shorter of the two. Descriptions were left out or abbreviated, and humorous passages also tended to disappear. In the sung performance there were passages in which audience and singer discussed the events, but these were also omitted from the written version. In Beck's words: "[the dictated version] tells one just as much or more about what happened, but less about how things looked and felt".⁴⁴

In addition to these two versions by the same singer Beck refers to six other texts. Two of them contain just a single passage, the sister's lament at her brothers' death, one of which is a performance by another singer, whom Beck registered at a religious festival; the performance lasted twenty minutes. The other is a manuscript of 27 pages, written in 1930. Next she refers to the epic as she found it in three different paperback editions, printed between 1965 and 1977, and without precise indication of its origin; the texts vary from 130 pages, about 4,500 verses, to 298 pages, about 9,500 verses. Finally, she refers to a radio version from 1966 which gives only a brief outline of the story.⁴⁵

Except for the two above-mentioned versions performed by the same singer, Beck does not state precisely how the various texts are interrelated, presumably because this would be impossible to ascertain. But the general picture is clear enough: the story can be narrated in many ways, in various media to various audiences, and in greater or less detail. Furthermore, it is clear from the publishing dates that these specific printed books cannot have been the source of the sung versions; it seems that Beck only began hunting for other versions of the story after attending the performances she recorded in her village. Even so, other printed versions would have been accessible to readers before this. Similarly the famous ancient Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, were present in one form or another. The *Mahabharata* was already translated into Tamil about 1400 A.D., and it is recited in various ways at religious festivals or on

43. Beck 1982, 58-88.

44. Beck 1982, 67.

45. Beck 1982, 3-4 offers a survey of the versions in schematic form.

the radio; it is to be found in drama and dance, and as the basis of films. In her analysis of the *Brothers' Epic* Beck often points to various influences from the old epics. But the *Brothers' Epic* forms a distinct tradition that does not fit into or relate to the events narrated in these epics.

The Telugu *Epic of Palnadu*

Gene H. Roghair first became aware of the wealth of oral traditions in the region of Palnadu in Andhra Pradesh during his fieldwork there in 1967-9. Back in the USA, he began studying the *Palnativiracaritra*, a printed edition of the *Epic of Palnadu*, and planned a double approach: to find the best available written version for translation, and to record some oral versions. In 1974 he returned to Palnadu, where, among other things, he registered two oral versions and gradually realised that he found them much more interesting than the poem he knew from the book. Accordingly, the study he published in 1982 is concerned with a version sung for registration over two weeks in October 1974 by Alisetti Galeyya. The performance lasted somewhat more than 30 hours. As presented in Roghair's translation the text is structured in twenty-four episodes. Of these, Roghair offers ten in full, whereas the rest are retold in "detailed summaries". In his translation he leaves out word doubling and filler words.⁴⁶

The epic shifts back and forth between poetry and prose. In the published version the poem tells how the ancestors of the people of Palnadu first arrived in their land, and how they were gradually separated into two mutually hostile groups, leading up to a fatal battle on Karyamapudi Plain. That a battle took place there in 1182 A.D. is considered to be a historical fact by scholars, and other elements of the story may go back to that period, too. But as the epic is told by the singer, the general impression is much more that of an undefined distant past, similar to that described by Beck and Biebuyck in the traditions they studied. "The epic generates the impression that there is an epic past, a visible present, and nothing

46. Roghair 1982, xvii-xix.

noteworthy intervening.”⁴⁷ The protagonist Brahma Nayudu is Vishnu incarnate and possesses divine powers, and the founding of local cults is an important theme. The poem is closely related to an annual festival in Karempudi. The heroes of the epic who died in the battle are believed to have a continued existence in the Gut-tikonda cave close by, and every year they are believed to leave their cave to take part in the festival.⁴⁸

There is documentation of the existence of the epic ever since the 15th century, but in such ways that it is hard to tell exactly how similar or different various versions have been.⁴⁹ Roghair himself is not very clear about it; his concern is mainly with convincing his readers that what is really worth studying is not, as his Palnadu friends told him, the written literature belonging to the Brahmin caste, but the lively oral performances he encountered among the low-caste inhabitants of the villages.

Roghair registered two performances, the one eventually published and another, sung by Medukonduru Cennayya. The latter sang in his village, in front of his own house, with an audience that consisted of men and women, young and old. Roghair was present as a relatively unobserved part of the audience. But the singer’s dialect was unfamiliar to the scholar, and the accompanying music, drums and bagpipe, as well as the noise from the audience, made transcribing difficult. In order to obtain an audible text, he settled instead for an induced version. The event caused a small audience to gather, and Roghair himself made what efforts he could to stimulate the singer. Galeyya managed to complete his performance under these unusual conditions and without accompaniment. Normally, a performance consists of one or a few episodes, not necessarily in the order followed by the story. Since Roghair wanted “the full story”,⁵⁰ Galeyya arranged the episodes into a roughly chronological sequence when singing for the recorder.

47. Roghair 1982, 113.

48. The tradition seems in many ways similar to the Rajasthani *Epic of Pabuji*, that celebrates a medieval warrior who is considered to be Lakshmana incarnate, Smith 1989.

49. Roghair 1982, 70-85.

50. Roghair 1982, vii.

At the festival, certain episodes from the epic are prescribed for performance at different stages of the cult and at previously designated places, and the story is also the basis for processions and dramatic scenes in which participants have their inherited roles to play.

Singers such as Galeyya and Cennayya were special performers for the sanctuary in Karempudi and received a salary in that capacity; Galeyya also had a small piece of land allotted from the temple. They needed to have other sources of income in order to survive. The profession of singer runs in families. Promising young males are trained by serving as musical accompanists to their fathers. They are low-caste, from the Mala, Telaga and Kansali castes. The region also boasts other types of singers, and they are generally illiterate or semi-literate.

The *Palnadu Epic* exists in printed books, but is not easily accessible to poor people. *Mahabharata* was translated into Telugu already in the 11th century, and here and there material from the famous ancient poems has worked its way into the oral epics, more or less as described by Beck in the case of Tamil tradition.

The Arabic *Sirat Bani Hilal*

Susan Slyomovics and Dwight F. Reynolds both describe the *Sirat Bani Hilal*, an epic tradition concerned with the migration of the Bani Hilal tribe from the Arabian peninsula to northern Africa.⁵¹ This took place during the ninth through twelfth centuries, and ended in two major battles in Tunisia (1153 and 1160), in which the tribe received crushing defeats. The events are known from written documents, among which is a description by the historian Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406). The protagonists are historical persons documented in other sources, but according to the scholars their lives in the epic tradition have little in common with those of the historical figures.⁵² The epic tradition is known all over the Arab parts of northern Africa. The first written manuscripts stem from the end of the 18th century, and printed versions are accessible in books. The

51. Slyomovics 1987; Reynolds 1995.

52. Reynolds 1995, 8-10.

oral tradition exists, as it seems, on its own premises, performed by professional singers. Their social status is low, and even though peasants and workers are interested in the stories as the history of their own ancestors, they look down upon the singers and consider them gypsies. Slyomovics conducted her fieldwork in Upper Egypt, Reynolds in a village in the Nile Delta. In both areas the audiences are male; performance occasions are festive events such as weddings or gatherings of factory workers, but singers also entertained in cafes and marketplaces.

Slyomovics takes pains to describe her own background as an ethnographer, folklorist, and philologist, the way in which she spent a long period working on a lexicon, seated in front of a friend's cigarette shop in order to gradually become a known figure in the neighbourhood, how she attended the performances of various singers, and how she finally agreed with the singer 'Awadallah 'Abd aj-Jalil 'Ali to accompany him on his travels for a longer period.⁵³ He was an illiterate professional singer, the son and grandson of singers; he found his audiences among harvest workers, in connection with pilgrimages or celebrations such as weddings, parties at the local sugar factory, or the end of Ramadan, when he was paid by a patron to recite to the guests; when during a period of his life he worked as a stonemason at a phosphate company, he sang for his fellow workers to distract them from their arduous tasks.⁵⁴ When performing he accompanied himself on a drum. There were also singers who played a one-stringed violin, the *rabab*, but 'Awadallah looked down upon them and considered the instrument frivolous. Slyomovics tape-recorded an elicited performance of the entire epic in sessions over six weeks,⁵⁵ but her purpose was to finally record and publish a specific performance of his, which took place on March 10, 1983. On that evening he sang the story of how Abu Zayd and his three nephews visited the king of Iraq, 'Amir Khafaji, and helped him defeat his Jewish enemy. As a result, Slyomovics is able to present a text with a high degree of precision: she knows when

53. Slyomovics 1987, 21-30.

54. Slyomovics 1987, 7-8, 11.

55. Slyomovics 1987, 30.

and where it was performed, by whom and for whom, and in her work on the recorded text – transcribing, translating and interpreting – she had the poet-singer at hand and was also able to ask questions of some of those who had been present at the performance. As edited and translated the poem runs to 1,347 verses.

In her introduction to the edition Slyomovics compares ‘Awadallah’s version of this episode with seven other versions, of which four were recorded by herself during her fieldwork in 1983. Of the others, two are from Tunisia and one from Libya. Besides, the episode is also known from printed publications, some of them accessible in cheap editions, where, however, it is only briefly narrated. The singers she worked with were all illiterate, and none of them had used books to learn their songs.⁵⁶

Reynolds, too, had a background in folkloristics as well as in Arabic language and literature studies when he came to oral epic fieldwork. Like Slyomovics, but unlike Beck and Biebuyck, he searched for some time in order to find the best performance setting for his purpose and ended up in a place called “The Poets’ Village”, Al-Bakatush. Here a few families had specialised in the Bani Hilal-tradition and were called upon as entertainers at weddings and other festivities. They accompanied their performances on the *rabab*. Reynolds first visited the village in 1983 and stayed there for longer periods in 1986-8.⁵⁷ At the time of his stay there were fourteen active singers in the village. Reynolds was eventually accepted as an apprentice by one of the old singers, taught to play the *rabab*, and also trained in singing the stories. His main intention, he explains, was to find himself a role that was familiar and well-defined in the community, and that gave him a vantage point from which to attend both performances and discussions between singer and audience, as well as conversations among the singers themselves.⁵⁸ As indicated in the title of his book, *Heroic Poets, Poetic Heroes*, Reynolds was especially interested in the identification he saw between singers and the heroes of which they sing.

56. Slyomovics 1987, 55-69; books: 66-7.

57. Reynolds 1995, 35-44; 2000.

58. Reynolds 1995, 42-45.

The epic consists of some thirty episodes, each of which is a rounded tale meant to be performed in the course of one or a few evenings. The episodes are known under titles, and the singers generally agree on a proper order in which the events follow one another.⁵⁹ Reynolds asked the singer Shaykh Biyali Abu Fahmi to do a full performance for him of all the episodes in sequential order, a feat the singer said was new to him. The performance lasted eleven nights and added up to 32 hours of singing time. However, throughout the following weeks the poet would now and then realise that he had forgotten something, which he then sang to the tape-recorder. With these additions the poem grew to 37 hours. Afterwards, when the scholar was studying his tapes, he found that this induced version tended to render the various episodes in a briefer format than when the singer performed in his usual way; it seems that the fact that the singer knew that he was supposed to give the narrative in its entirety made him choose not to over-embellish individual details.⁶⁰ In this case, then, we have an induced epic narrated in chronological fashion, whereas normally the epic is a cycle of episodes.

Reynolds did not publish a text initially. His monograph is a description of the epic as it is performed in the poets' village, and a discussion of its social context. His special approach offers the reader an exciting perception of oral epic from within, and is an important complement to more usual forms of study. Recently, however, Reynolds has opened a website, www.siratbanihilal.ucsb.edu, where visitors can choose between various ways of experiencing his recordings. The epics may be read in Arabic or in English translation, or the sung performance may be listened to, accompanied by a synchronised line-by-line text. In this way the epic will be not only published for scholars but given back, as it were, to its original illiterate owners.

59. Reynolds 1995, 16-19.

60. Reynolds 1995, 41-42.

The Tulu *Siri Epic*

The next example is the result of fieldwork in the 1980s and early '90s directed by the Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko and involving a team of Indian and Finnish scholars.⁶¹ The epic tradition studied belongs in Karnataka in the south-western part of India, where a minority of about two million people speaks the language Tulu. Honko concentrated his efforts on the singer Gopala Naika, who is also a farmer and the head of a religious community that worships a certain heroine called Siri. The epic in question narrates the story of this heroine and that of her daughter and granddaughters.⁶² The dramatic time is the distant past, the places are well-known localities in the area, and the poem relates, among other things, how certain sanctuaries were founded. The epic is mainly performed in two social settings, as entertainment during work in the paddy field and as a main part of religious festivals, most importantly at the harvest festival.⁶³ The audience in the field consists of women workers planting rice plants. At the harvest festival, these same women make up the main audience, while a broader public is also present. These so-called Siri women participate actively in the performance: Naika first sings for a couple of hours, after which he begins asking questions of the women who then impersonate Siri and the other female protagonists of the tale, each relating the specific heroine's story in first-person format. Some of them go into a trance.

In 1985-6 the singer had dictated a version of the same poem that Honko later recorded, to a student, Miss Sudha, who was living in his house at the time. The initiative was the singer's; he wished children in school to have the possibility of reading an epic in their own language. He was also motivated by pride in the Tulu language and the local heroine. In India, excerpts and tales from the classical epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are normal parts of school curricula

61. Honko 1998a & b

62. Thus it conforms to Hatto's category of the epic trilogy, like the *Manas Epic*, Hatto 1991, 13-14.

63. In China, too, work in the paddy field may be relieved by singers hired to perform long narratives, as described by McLaren 2010, 164-5. - For the African *Sunjata Epic* performed to a male audience of fieldworkers, see Johnson (1986) 2003, 89.

in book form, and presumably Naika felt that for Tulu children the *Siri Epic* would be more appropriate. The dictation was carried out with intervals over a period of six months, and the written poem runs to 8,538 verses.⁶⁴

Honko visited Naika on several occasions before in December 1990 arranging for a performance to be given for a small team consisting of his wife, himself, an interpreter and sometimes a few others. He asked the singer to present “the full story”, a kind of performance Naika said he had not attempted before. His performance was recorded on audio- and video-tape and copied so that versions could be archived in both Helsinki and Mysore. The recording process took six days, and the total singing time, not counting breaks, was 26 hours.⁶⁵ When written down, the elicited poem ran to 15,683 verses, preceded by an invocation of 563 verses. In printed form, with a parallel translation into English, the recorded poem takes up two solid volumes. The dictated and the sung version tell the same story in the sense that they follow the same course of events, but with all kinds of variation. The longer version gives more details and engages in more embellishment than the shorter one, but there are also episodes told in the shorter, dictated, version that are left out of the longer, sung, performance.⁶⁶

In the monograph introducing the edition, Honko discusses a wealth of theoretical questions in connection with his fieldwork. Of special importance in the present context are his considerations concerning stability and change in Naika’s texts. He maintains that there is a common denominator throughout the many different performances, a kind of matrix that the singer varies according to the specific requirements of a given performance.⁶⁷ In addition, Honko was eager to interview the singer about his art, and Naika’s views are prominently represented in the book.

Naika regularly performed to female audiences, and during cult performance the women identified with the heroines in a very di-

64. Honko 1998a, 13-15, 228, 276-277.

65. Honko 1998a, 270-321; Honko 2000a, 13.

66. Honko 1998a, 258-60.

67. Honko 1998a, 92-99.

rect way. But also in a more general fashion, the epic seems to invite a female audience's identification: not only are the protagonists female, but the poem is very much concerned with women's problems such as menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. This is, however, an aspect Honko only touches upon very briefly; he is much more interested in the relationship between the poem and the cult.

It is obvious that the three Indian traditions briefly described here resemble each others in various ways. Not least, they all seem to be closely related to the landscapes in which they are sung. The heroes and heroines who act in the epics are ancestors of the singing community, they have founded the cults to which the performances are attached, and on festive occasions they are present to participate together with the worshippers. Roghair concentrates on the *Palnadu Epic*, but he mentions that Telugu oral epic also contains poems that celebrate heroines.⁶⁸

The Karakalpak *Epic of Edige*

The German medievalist Karl Reichl has performed fieldwork in Uzbekistan and neighbouring regions since the early 1980s and has published widely on various oral epic traditions from that area.⁶⁹ His *Edige: A Karakalpak Heroic Epic as Performed by Jumabay Bazarov*, is an edition of a performance video-recorded on September 17-18, 1993. The monograph offers the original both as a written transcript and a cd, accompanied by an English translation, an introduction, and a commentary (including an analysis of the musical aspects). The version is an induced text, sung for the scholar and a few others: an assistant, a student from Nukus University, the director of the cultural centre of Shomanay, where the registration took place, and the occasional extra listener.⁷⁰ The text occupies 104 pages of the book.

68. Roghair 1982, 132-3.

69. He describes his approach in Reichl 2000b, 8-9.

70. Reichl 2007, 56-7; copies of the tapes are deposited in Düsseldorf and Nukus, Reichl 2007, 160.

The epic unfolds in a mixture of poetry and prose, and the singer accompanies himself on a *qobiz*, a two-stringed instrument played with a bow.

The story tells of the hero Edige, who was an officer at the court of Khan Tokhtamysh. After attempts on his life he fled to the khan's enemy Sätemir, with whom he waged war on Tokhtamysh. These three protagonists are all historical figures: Tokhtamysh was khan of the Golden Horde and was defeated in 1395 by Sätemir = Shah Timur = Tamerlan, who reigned over a large central Asian empire (1370-1405). Edige's place between the two rulers is historical, too. He led the Golden Horde after Tokhtamysh's fall, and his most famous exploit was an assault on Moscow in 1408, an event that does not, however, play any role in the epic. Here the narrative has many fairy tale traits; for instance, the hero is the son of a swan maiden (or rather, dove maiden), and at a certain point in his adventures he rescues a princess from a monster and is rewarded with her hand and the kingdom.

The tradition is known in a variety of more or less closely related Turkic languages, Noghay, Kazakh, Tatar, Bashkir, and Karakalpak, and versions were recorded in writing already in the 19th century.⁷¹ Especially, scores of Kazakh versions, written between c. 1820 and 1950, are preserved in archives. The last Kazakh singer to know the epic was Murin-jiraw Senirbek-uli, who died in 1954. In his repertoire the epic of Edige formed part of a cycle about the forty Noghay heroes.⁷² The tradition has been the object of study, especially by Russian scholars, for many years.

Reichl's study is very much oriented towards the question of stability and change, as is appropriate in the case of this unusually well documented tradition. His approach is a combination of fieldwork and archival studies, and he seems to have a command of all the languages involved. He demonstrates how the same song comes in a multitude of versions and suggests a multi-level system: each singer has his version (which may be varied endlessly), he is part of a group of singers who are connected with each other, for instance by

71. Reichl 2007, 32-50.

72. Reichl 2007, 42-4.

common training, and have versions that resemble each others'; this group may again be part of a larger group of singers who for instance share the same language, etc.⁷³ Thus his Karakalpak informant, Jumabay Bazarov (1927-2006), had learned his epics as a young man during a three-years stay with a master, and Reichl is so well informed about masters and pupils that he is able to establish a genealogy for them.⁷⁴ In this teaching continuity he sees the main reason why the tradition is actually very stable. He lists eleven Karakalpak versions besides Bazarov's, and the text he recorded in 1993 bears a relatively close resemblance to the oldest of them, a manuscript written in 1903.⁷⁵

There is less information about the singers than in most of the studies mentioned above. Bazarov's brief autobiography is given,⁷⁶ and here it is implied that the profession was not hereditary, that singers were itinerant, that they performed as entertainment on festive occasions, and that they had some status in the community. Except for that, next to nothing is said about the normal performance context of the epic. One reason may be that the tradition is dying out; according to Reichl, Bazarov was the last person alive who was able to sing the entire epic. Besides, in a monograph from 1992 on Turkic oral epic Reichl had already discussed the social contexts of these traditions in some detail.

Various versions of the epic have been published, but mostly in scholarly editions, not easily accessible to the singing community. Before the literacy campaigns initiated in the Soviet Union, most Karakalpaks were illiterate anyway. The tradition was not supported by the Soviet authorities, since it was considered ideologically problematic, and in periods it was even prohibited. After 1989 an upsurge of interest resulted in quite a few publications.⁷⁷

73. Reichl 2007, 100-101.

74. Reichl 2007, 83.

75. Reichl 2007, 51-72.

76. Reichl 2007, 54-5.

77. Reichl 2007, 20-21, 82.

Summary

My purpose is to build on experience from fieldwork studies in oral epic in order to establish a probable framework for the origin of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in particular the circumstances of their recording in writing. Epic is here defined as a poetic narrative of length and complexity that centers around deeds of significance to the community. The project involves many methodical problems, but for readers who want to apply the oral-formulaic theory to their study of Homer the results of fieldwork cannot be neglected. In order to give an impression of the scope of living epic traditions and the approaches applied by fieldworkers, seven scholars and six traditions are briefly introduced.⁷⁸

78. Pp. 17, 23, 34-6, 38-44 are a revised version of Jensen 2008.

CHAPTER 2

The oral-formulaic theory revisited

Parry's project

Parry based his theory on two traditions, Homer and Serbo-Croatian heroic poetry, but his ambition was to reveal the general rules that govern oral composition. In this he was influenced by the scholarly milieu in Paris in the 1920s, where he aligned himself with the linguists rather than the philologists. Just as linguists establish laws for phonetic and semantic developments, Parry studied Homeric diction in order to distinguish the regular from the arbitrary, define the elements, and describe the principles at work. Similarly, in his fieldwork he collected material for establishing as clearly as possible how an oral epic tradition works, and in the foreword to the edition he prepared he stated: "Those who consult these volumes should fully understand with what end in mind I gathered my material. It was least of all for the material itself that I planned the study. What I wished to learn was in general what an oral poetry was, and in particular what the South Slavic poetry was."¹

It is a paradox that Parry was led to this project by means of the analysis of a written text. The oral-formulaic theory was first and foremost established as a way to understand the peculiar style of the Homeric poems, and the Yugoslav fieldwork was added as a test of the construction Parry had built on Homer. Similarly, the rich variety of oral epic that has been studied around the world in continuation of his work has both served as research in its own right, illuminating the traditions in question, and been adduced as further tests of his theory.

The new technology Parry had at his disposal contributed in important ways to the establishment of his theory, mainly because the electronic recording enabled him to compare different versions of a song and enhanced his sensitivity to the flexibility of the tradition.²

1. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 439.

2. Cf. Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 58-63 on his own experiences in Ghana.

While Parry's works found few readers outside the field of classical scholarship Lord's *Singer of Tales* made a tremendous impact on anthropological and folkloristic fieldwork. From its publication in 1960 onwards Parry and Lord's research set the scene and defined the questions. Not only were methods of collecting and editing changed, but it became important to collect more than one version of a song and to analyse collected poetry in accordance with the theoretical framework of the oral-formulaic theory. Early examples are from Africa, published in the 1970s: Charles Bird's study of Mande hunters' songs in Mali as well as Biebuyck's survey of African heroic epic treated composition by formula and theme as central issues, and in his discussion of different versions of a LoDagaba ritual poem (from the border area between Ghana, Burkina Faso, and the Ivory Coast), Jack Goody underlined the usefulness of the Parry-Lord approach. In 1988 Blackburn acknowledged the importance of Lord's monograph for performance studies, and in 1994 another fieldworker paid homage to Lord by giving the title *The Korean Singer of Tales* to a book. In 1996, Vibeke Børdahl opened her book of Yangzhou storytelling by stating her debt to him.³ In her important study of African oral and written literature Karin Barber acknowledges the Parry-Lord-theory as the point of departure for the modern approach to textual anthropology, and she describes the upsurge of performance studies in folklore and anthropology from the 1960s onwards as "the exhilarating discovery of the importance of "composition *in* performance," of improvisation, of interaction with the audience, of gesture, tempo, rhythm, and bodily expression, of the emergent and the processual."⁴

In the present chapter a survey will be given that is first organised in accordance with the three basic concepts in Parry and Lord's description of an oral epic diction, formula, theme, and adding style, while the more general aspects are reserved for the end.

3. Bird 1972; Biebuyck 1976; Goody & Gandah 1980, 44; Blackburn 1988, xviii; Pihl 1994; Børdahl 1996, xxiii-iv, xxvi-vii, 137; cf. de Vet 2008, 176. – Ruth Finnegan, who is one of the most interesting critics of the oral-formulaic theory, acknowledges its positive effects on fieldwork, Finnegan 2007, 96-113.

4. Barber 2007, 69-70; quote 2005, 266.

Formula

Parry defined the Homeric formula as follows: “A group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea”.⁵ Transferred to other traditions, this definition has in some cases been found useful while in others it has proved problematic. A basic problem lies in establishing a fitting parallel to “the same metrical conditions”. Till now, all oral epic that has been documented in fieldwork evolves in verse forms that are less strict than the Homeric hexameter. There may, on the other hand, be other formal demands for the singer to meet such as alliteration, assonance, or rhyme, not to speak of the exigencies raised by the music. Scholars who study little known traditions and perhaps have to rely on interpreters are not necessarily able to catch the more delicate aesthetic aspects of a text. For the formulaic analysis this raises the problem of understanding the specific needs that the recurring units must meet.

The only comparative study of Homeric and Serbo-Croatian formulas Parry published was written after his first visit to Yugoslavia but based on texts published in Vuk Karadzic’s collection.⁶ Here Parry compares whole formulaic verses in the two traditions: verses beginning and ending discourse, telling of the movement of time, telling of the movement of the characters, and various other like verses and groups of verses. He emphasises that when in both traditions these ideas are expressed so that they exactly fill a verse and often even resemble each other from one tradition to the other, this fact counteracts differences in idiom, verse form, and content; the two epic traditions have different aesthetic demands and belong to cultures that differ profoundly in customs, warfare, religion, etc. But in both traditions the singers need fixed ways of expressing frequently recurring ideas, and the easiest formula for the oral poet to handle is that which is both a whole sentence and a whole verse.

5. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 272; Adam Parry gave a slightly different translation of his father’s original French wording, Parry (1928-35) 1971, 13.

6. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 376-90.

It was left to Lord to make the first analysis of the formulaic diction of a living tradition. In *The Singer of Tales*, he transferred Parry's method from Homer to his and Parry's collection of Serbo-Croatian epics.⁷ He chose eleven songs totalling about 12,000 verses collected from the bard Salih Ugljanin, and on the basis of this corpus he analysed a passage of fifteen verses for formulas and formulaic expressions (phrases repeated verbatim more than once, and phrases following the same patterns of rhythm and syntax as others) and calculated the percentages. He sought for other ways of expressing the same ideas in order to establish whether Ugljanin's formulaic language resembled Homer's in "thrift". He built paradigms of formulaic systems, for instance for "x mounted his/her horse" with the verb and the object both being three-syllable words so that the phrase fits into the second part of the ten-syllable verse, from the fixed break after the fourth syllable to the end. Furthermore, he widened the analysis in ways impossible for Homer, considering the texts in relation to the music and comparing Ugljanin's formulaic style with that of other singers from the same district. The overall purpose was to elucidate how the singer's formulaic style facilitated the demand of keeping up rapid composition in performance.

In many ways Lord's results show a remarkable similarity between Homeric and Serbo-Croatian epic styles, and basically the two must both be characterised as formulaic. In both, the most stable formulas are those for the most common ideas of the poetry, the names of the actors, the main actions, time, and place. They also differ considerably. Epithets are not as common in Serbo-Croatian epic as in Homeric, since in the much shorter verse a title or a patronymic added to a name is normally enough to fill a half-verse. The looser rhythm puts less strain on the singer, while other aesthetic demands such as alliteration or assonance are in play.

Already in 1963 Patricia Arant tried out Parry and Lord's method in a study of Russian *byliny*. Using texts from printed collections she followed Lord in analysing the formulas of one singer while now and then drawing upon a broader selection of poems. In this epic tradition the rhythmical verse pattern is a fluctuating number of syl-

7. Lord (1960) 2000, 30-67.

lables, three primary accents, and a moveable break, and half-line units are more useful for the singer than those that fill the whole line. The singer's 'formulas' are not as fixed as Homer's but may readily be expanded or contracted, for instance through the use or omission of meaningless particles.⁸ Accordingly, Parry's definition can be applied only with modifications; what Arant underlines is, however, that just like Homer's, the Russian singer's style is best explained by reference to the demands of composition in performance. She asserts that

if Parry and Lord had used Russian *byliny* in place of Serbo-Croatian heroic songs in their early research on the oral theory of composition, they might have arrived at similar conclusions regarding the nature of oral literature and the role that orality plays in its composition and interpretation.⁹

Another early study of this kind applied the method to a living and very different tradition, the analysis the above-mentioned linguist Bird made of formulaic diction in the heroic songs of Mande hunters. These songs evolve in a highly variable verse-structure, and Bird explains that "the essential metrical requirement is that the singer keep in rhythm with his instrumental accompaniment. He may ... form lines of one syllable or fifty syllables, depending very much on his virtuosity in rapid speech, and his subtlety in weaving the rhythms of his language around those of his instruments". Obviously, a formula of the Homeric kind would be of little use to a singer in this tradition, and Bird proposed a reformulation of the definition into "a kind of abstract-pattern sentence into which the singer can substitute a great number of words, creating a line that will meet the metrical requirements of the poem".¹⁰

In other cases Parry's concept is less foreign. A detailed and informative study of the formulaic structure of a living epic tradition is to be found in Reichl's monograph on Turkic epic poetry, in

8. Arant (1963) 1990, ix, 15.

9. Arant (1963) 1990, x.

10. Bird 1972, 283.

which he gives both an overall description of Turkic traditions and a closer analysis of Kazakh epic.¹¹ The book takes into account a whole series of related traditions as they exist in various Turkic languages, mainly Uzbek, Kazakh, Karakalpak, and Kirghiz. Reichl's work is explicitly based on Parry's Homeric model, but adjusted to the different formal demands of Turkic metrics and language structure. Here syntactic patterning and parallelism are significant features, and the workings of alliteration are not only 'horizontal' (within the verse), but also 'vertical' (between the verses). The latter type of alliteration is an important verse-binding principle in Altaian, Yakut, and Kirghiz traditions. Assonance and end-rhyme are important, too, and fixed epithets abound.

For his closer study of the formulaic character of Kazakh epic Reichl established a concordance of somewhat more than 8,000 verses. In an example analysis of the adjective *aq* (white), he identifies four types of verse structure: 1) lines which share only the same epithet-noun combination but are otherwise different; 2) lines which share besides the same epithet-noun combination a common syntactic structure; 3) pairs of lines of which the second is an echo of the first in the course of a dialogue; and 4) lines which are formulas in the strict sense. Reichl also describes formulaic systems of lines in which a fixed element, for instance a verb of movement with a preceding ablative, leaves a slot of three or more syllables to be filled under various metrical or grammatical constraints.¹² Here, then, Reichl transfers Parry's definition of the formula to Turkic epic, with suitable modifications to fit the special demands of Turkic prosody and other aesthetic rules.

Modifying the definition in various ways, Nigel Phillips analyses the west Sumatran *Sijobang Epic* in accordance with the Parry-Lord model, and so does Marshall Pihl in his study of the Korean tradition of *p'ansori* song. Pihl concludes that "there is no dividing line between formula and non-formula: everything in orally composed literature is potentially formulaic".¹³

11. Reichl 1992, 171-200; cf. Reichl 1989b (Uzbek).

12. Reichl 1989a; 1992, 184-91.

13. Phillips 1981, 102-23; Pihl 1994, 78-82, quote 79.

Also William Collins, who collected and edited an epic from south Sumatra, was inspired by this model for his method of analysis. The poem is in an archaic form of Besemah, a little known Sumatran-Malay language. The text is difficult to understand even for native speakers. Whereas Collins received help from linguist experts in coping with the language, his analysis of poetic structures is based purely on his own listening to the recorded text. The verse consists of nine syllables, usually with four stresses. The formulas that Collins describes are all of verse-length and fall into subgroups: dramatic devices, transition devices, and narrative formulas. Collins' analysis is especially close to Parry's discussion of whole formulaic verses in Homeric and Serbo-Croatian epic.¹⁴

John D. Smith, on the other hand, who had been inspired by Lord and Hatto to engage in fieldwork in Rajasthan in north western India, did not find an analysis in accordance with the oral-formulaic model fruitful. He states of the *Epic of Pabuji* that it "consists of stock scenes described in stock phrases" and does not want to consider in more detail how these patterns work.¹⁵

Often scholars confine themselves to sweeping statements about oral epic style, typically mentioning features such as archaic language and fixed epithets. This is the case, for instance, in many of the chapters in Hatto's great volumes of comparative epic research.¹⁶ Brief descriptions of the poetical language of a given tradition are in some cases more liable to stimulate the Homerist's curiosity than to satisfy it. A case in point is what John William Johnson writes of mutually related Mande genres:

Although the overwhelming majority of any text will follow the dialect of the bard, forms from other dialects are sometimes mixed into a text. This is particularly common in praise-poems and praise-names, many of which are from Soninke and Khasonke. Bards learning texts, especially when they travel to areas where different dialects are spo-

14. W.A. Collins 1998, 26-38; Parry (1928-35) 1971, 376-90.

15. Smith 1991, 20-23; quote 21.

16. Innes 1974, 11-12; Bailey 1980, 236, 246, 263 (Ossetic); Cushing 1980, 224-5 (Ob Ugrian).

ken, sometimes maintain the original form of a praise-name they happen to hear.¹⁷

The usefulness of the formula cooperates with the wish to retain the old songs as accurately as possible to make epic language archaic. Gordon Innes mentions that Gambian epic diction contains quite a few words and phrases that neither singer nor listeners understand, and Dan Ben-Amos reports the same thing from Benin in Nigeria, where in 1966 he recorded an epic in the Edo language from the master narrator Iditua of Urhokosa village. When in this poem expressions occurred that the singing community did not understand, the listeners resigned to the fact. “They accept, and sometimes are fascinated by the mysterious aspect of language. Obscurity has ... aesthetic value.”¹⁸

Roghair, who studied a prosimetric tradition, uses the term ‘formula’ for repetitions in both the prosaic and the poetic parts if they seem to be employed because of their usefulness during composition in performance. He states that “even without the need to fill a particular metre, and even without the need to improvise wholly new subject-matter, a *Vira Vidyavantulu* utilizes formulas to give a satisfactory performance of an epic out of inherited material without memorizing.”¹⁹ In the translated text, the repetitions are mostly felt when they contain remarkable wording, such as the following description of a hero growing angry: “he preened his great sharp moustache; he combed his tiger moustache, his eyes reddened; they glowed like the eyes of a spirit.” This whole chain of phrases is repeated several times.²⁰ A trait recognisable from many other traditions is that direct speech is regularly introduced by a formulaic verse. Proper names are often connected with epithets, more or less as in Homer; for instance, to Brahma Nayudu’s name it is regularly added that he is Vishnu incarnate. Smith, who describes another

17. Johnson (1986) 2003, 90.

18. Innes 1974, 12-13; 1976, 26; Ben-Amos 2000, 283-4, quote 284.

19. Roghair 1982, 59-60, quotation p. 60; a similar statement in Johnson (1986) 2003, 40.

20. Roghair 1982, 261, 270, 347.

prosimetric Indian tradition that in many ways seems to be similar to the *Palnadu Epic*, the Rajasthani *Epic of Pabuji*, states of the verse parts that they are strongly formulaic and “repetitive to the point of predictability”.²¹

Sirat Bani Hilal performances are often prosimetric, too, but most of the singers studied by Slyomovics and Reynolds preferred verse. Slyomovics conveys a list of “oral-formulaic phrases and epithets” in ‘Awadallah’s repertoire but does not attempt a study of possible systems, and avoids the term ‘formula’.²²

In his analysis of the diction of the *Siri Epic*, Honko discards the term ‘formula’ altogether. In explicit criticism of Parry he lists a long series of variations of a single idea, an expression of despair and bewilderment: “alas what a shame”. From this one poem he has collected 23 different versions of this sigh and concludes that “the life of a formula is variation, not fixity”.²³ Instead, Honko prefers the term ‘multiform’ for this element of epic diction and asserts that the very dynamism of the style lies in this ever-continued variation.

A typical kind of repetition in the *Siri Epic* consists in building up a narrative over a few brief patterns that are then steadily varied. A description of how the god Naagaberramma shifts into the form of a poor Brahmin may serve as an example (vv. 447-69):

A thread from a banana tree the Brahmin took.
 A sacred thread, a sacred thread the Brahmin put on,
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina oo, the Brahmin man, oo Naaraayina.
 The Brahmin cut a sugarcane. 450
 The Brahmin made a staff,
 Naraayina oo, the Brahmin.
 The Brahmin cut a watergourd.
 The Brahmin made a tamburi, a tamburi,
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina oo, the Brahmin, 455
 Naaraayina oo, the Brahmin.
 The Brahmin tore a shawl.
 The Brahmin stitched a bag for alms,

21. Smith 1989, 35-6, quote 36.

22. Slyomovics 1987, 275-86.

23. Honko 1998a, 100-116, quote 113.

Naraayina oo, the Brahmin,
 Naraayina oo, the Brahmin. 460
 The Brahmin cut a reed.
 A flute, a nose flute the Brahmin made,
 a flute, a mouth flute the Brahmin made,
 Naraayina oo, the Brahmin man,
 Narayina oo, the Brahmin. 465
 To his leg a jingle-bell the Brahmin tied.
 In his hand a small plate the man took, the Brahmin man.
 On his back a back bundle the Brahmin placed,
 Naraayina oo Naaraayina oo, the Brahmin.²⁴

Such multiforms combined with filler words result in a rhythm that makes itself felt even through the translation. At the same time, considered from the point of view of composition in performance it is clear that such a style is helpful for a singer working under the strain of rapid performance, and Naika actually stated as much himself.²⁵ He performed without the accompaniment of musical instruments, and it seems likely that the function of the filler words should be seen as a parallel to how narratives may be punctuated by short musical interludes in other traditions.

The patterning of this Tulu epic is not unlike the syntactic parallelisms in Turkic epic described by Reichl,²⁶ and in this scholar's translation the Karakalpak *Edige Epic* develops in a way that bears close comparison. Consider the following description of the hero, who after a strenuous ride is finally approaching his goal (vv. VII.44-61):

The khan-like noble Edige
 Ascended a hill. 45
 It was a high hill he had climbed up.
 He remained on this hill.
 By turning around on the horse
 He looked in all directions.

24. Honko 1998b, 63. Similar forms of varied repetition are mentioned by Cushing 1980, 225 (Ob Ugrian) and Reichl 2001a, 51 (Turkic).

25. Honko 1998a, 301.

26. Reichl 1992, 177.

As he looked in all directions, 50
 A fortress loomed up
 Large on the horizon.
 On a nearby place there were people,
 On a place slightly farther away there was a lake:
 A day was in sight when one would find rest. 55
 After he had seen the fortress,
 His heart came to rest.
 This fortress was not empty.
 After Edige had seen
 The looming fortress, 60
 He greatly calmed down.²⁷

Here there are no filler words, but after 55, 57 and 61 the singer makes a brief bow stroke on his *qobiz*. Just as in the Siri passage the action takes place by means of gradual variation. 45-7 are dominated by the hill: first Edige ascends it, next it is underlined that it was high, and finally that he paused there. 49-50 are identical, except for the shift from sentence to clause. The following passage is seen through the hero's eyes and dominated by the fortress, which occurs four times. In the original, the fortress comes at the end of the verse in three of these occurrences, and two of the verses, 51 and 59, are almost identical. The singer proceeds step by step while gradually adding new pieces of information to what has already been told. At the same time the singer lets his audience feel how excited the hero was: step by step he first sees the dominating fortress, next notices the details of the landscape and the fact that it is peopled, and then relaxes. Here the style facilitates both verse-making and the building up of suspense. It is my impression that 'formula' in this sense, a phrase repeated with a minor detail changed at each recurrence, is very widespread, but I have not taken notes to document the phenomenon.

To sum up: as defined by Parry the formula has turned out to be of limited validity. With suitable modifications it is very widespread. Loosely defined as lexical and syntactical patterning it is characteristic of all oral epic.

27. Reichl 2007, 302-3.

A particular aspect of Parry's definition remains to be commented upon, the regular employment of the word group. In Parry's study of noun-epithet formulas the regularity takes the form of the famous "economy" or "thrift": the Homeric singer normally has one and only one such formula for a given noun in a given case to fill out a given part of the hexameter. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Shive pointed to the fact that in his statistics for the occurrence of noun-epithet formulas Parry had not taken into account that in some cases there are alternative ways of expressing the name of a given hero. Accordingly, the economy of the system is not quite as strict as Parry maintained. Far from overturning the formulaic theory, however, Shive's analysis only shows that even Parry could overlook data that should have been included. A new study has recently pointed out further breaches of Homeric economy, to be discussed below in Chapter 6.²⁸ Still, with or without these exceptions, Homer's (and Hesiod's) style differs from other forms of ancient poetry, and the regularity with which the Homeric noun-epithet formula works is remarkable and calls for explanation. Till now, no better way of explaining this characteristic has been found than that offered by the oral-formulaic theory.

It is strange, though, that precisely the economy of the Homeric formula has not found parallels in fieldwork. For some, the conclusion would be to discard the theory altogether,²⁹ for others to consider the reasons for the problem and modify the theory accordingly. In his analysis of Serbo-Croatian formulas Lord found that restricted to one singer's works the patterning came closer to Homeric thrift than when a broader selection was studied. Furthermore, in cases where even a single individual had more than one phrase to express the same idea, it turned out that aesthetic factors such as alliteration or assonance played a role for his choice of phrases.³⁰ Even so, Lord is not quite convincing when he states that formulas function in Serbo-Croatian songs more or less as they do in the Homeric epics. After all, what was shocking in Parry's thesis

28. Friedrich 2007.

29. This is the choice of Berg & Haug 2000.

30. Lord (1960) 2000, 30-67; the question of thrift 53-63.

was the fact that the formula seemed to work without reference to its context.

A new path was opened by John Miles Foley in his *Traditional Oral Epic*.³¹ Here he bases his argument upon three epic corpora: the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, and the Serbo-Croatian return song, but argues in a way that concerns the oral-formulaic theory as such. In a reappraisal of the theory he emphasises that even though the noun-epithet formula was the point of departure for Parry's understanding of Homeric diction it was just one kind of phrase structure in a spectrum of a rich variety of formulas of different types and structures. Furthermore, the various formula systems Parry analysed were meant as examples only, while he considered it impossible to give a full description of the technique of formulaic composition because its complexity was altogether too great. In the diagrams Parry established, for instance of phrases introduced by *autarepei* (but when) + a verb, each phrase has a clear essential idea, but the group as a whole is too wide-ranging semantically to have one core idea behind it.³²

Comparing the three corpora he is analysing, Foley argues that any analysis must respect the traditional rules that guide the composition, because prosody and formulaic structure are interrelated.³³ He underlines that formulas and systems are only part of the patterned Homeric composition and prefers to speak of 'phraseology' as a more comprehensive term than formulaic diction. In his discussion of the phraseology of the *Odyssey* he warns against the feeling of a closed structure and dwells instead upon its flexibility and dynamics.³⁴ If the formulaic systems of Homer and Serbo-Croatian epic resemble each other more than they resemble that of *Beowulf*, this does not show a difference in traditionality or orality that would unite Homer and Serbo-Croatian epic as against *Beowulf*, but rather that the traditional rules governing the two former kinds of epic happen to be closer to each other than they are to

31. Foley 1990.

32. Foley 1990, 122-7, quoting Parry (1930) 1971, 276, 307.

33. Foley 1990, 65-84.

34. Foley 1990, 121-57.

those of Beowulf, and different traditional rules generate different forms of phraseology.³⁵

As matters stand now, it seems that the thrift of the Homeric noun-epithet formula is a special feature of Homeric phraseology rather than a typical characteristic of oral poetry in general. Even in Parry's analysis of Homeric diction the thrifty noun-epithet formula is a detail as compared to the complex and unlimited network of formulaic systems he demonstrated. In 1930 Parry wrote:

It is important at this point to remember that the formula in Homer is not necessarily a repetition, just as the repetitions of tragedy are not necessarily formulas. It is the nature of an expression which makes of it a formula, whereas its use a second time in Homer depends largely upon the hazard which led a poet, or a group of poets, to use it more than once in two given poems of a limited length. We are taking up the problem of the Homeric formulas from the side of the repetitions, but only because it is easier to recognize a formula if we find it used a second or third time, since we can then show more easily that it is used regularly, and that it helps the poet in his verse-making.³⁶

Parry proceeds to analyse a broad selection of Homeric phrases to judge whether their context indicates that they are used in a special way or just because of their usefulness.

A further step towards describing the patterning of Homeric style as a much deeper and more pervading feature than what can be demonstrated by statistics was taken by Michael Nagler in his study of spontaneity and tradition in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.³⁷ His approach, which has not been as prominent in comparative studies as might have been expected, has recently been revived by Mugyabuso Mulokozi in his description of the oral-formulaic character of *enanga* epic as it exists among the Haya in northwestern Tanzania (*enanga* is the name of the instrument accompanying the song):

35. Foley 1990, 354-6.

36. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 304.

37. Nagler 1974.

Enanga formula and theme ... is generative rather than structural. ... Formula as it applies to enanga poetry is an abstract, traditional recurrent core-idea, serving primarily as a semantic and structural aid in oral composition-in-performance, and realized concretely, as a phrase or clause, only in oral performance, and largely through the devices of verbal repetition, derivation, transformation, and linguistic-contextual association.³⁸

Epic traditions with relatively strict prosodic rules generate more thrifty phraseology than do those with looser structures. When Foley speaks of “the tradition-dependent character of the multiform unit”³⁹ he is close to Bird’s idea of the abstract-pattern sentence that allows for substitutions, and the similarity to descriptions of natural languages is obvious. Lord actually spoke of the rules of oral-formulaic composition as a grammar within the grammar:

The method of language is like that of oral poetry, substitution in the framework of the grammar. Without the metrical restrictions of the verse, language substitutes one subject for another in the nominative case, keeping the same verb; or keeping the same noun, it substitutes one verb for another. In studying the patterns and systems of oral narrative verse we are in reality observing the “grammar” of the poetry, a grammar superimposed, as it were, on the grammar of the language concerned. Or, to alter the image, we find a special grammar within the grammar of the language, necessitated by the versification. The formulas are the phrases and clauses and sentences of this specialized poetic grammar. The speaker of this language, once he has mastered it, does not move any more mechanically within it than we do in ordinary speech.⁴⁰

Furthermore, a description like that offered by Honko of the oral poet’s working method is similar to how linguists describe the speaker’s use of his/her first language: “a life-long series of adop-

38. Mulokozi 2002, 127-70, quotes 127, 132.

39. Foley 1990, 354.

40. Lord (1960) 2000, 35-6; Bird 1972, 282-3.

tion and rejection of available traditions in accordance with the individual's interests and worldview".⁴¹ Or, to quote Foley: "Oral tradition works like language, only more so".⁴²

Theme

According to the theory, not only formulas but also larger units, 'themes', belong to the necessary tools of oral epic. In Lord's wording: "Following Parry, I have called the groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style of traditional song the "themes" of the poetry".⁴³ When performing, the singer builds up his song theme by theme, and when a theme is well established in his repertoire he tends to use it in the same way whenever the need occurs. An assembly, an arriving horseman, the writing of a letter, a list of guests, or a hero arming himself are examples of such themes that the singer has ready-made in his repertoire.⁴⁴ Composition by theme is an essential aspect of oral traditional narrating, and Lord describes how the themes are not only seen in the recurrent scenes and patterns but also in more indirect ways. For instance, themes tend to occur in clusters, and they are easily intermixed so that elements from one theme steal into another. The result is inconsistencies that may be bewildering to readers used to written literature. The singer is under a constant pull in two directions, towards the song he is performing and towards other songs he has performed or heard performed.⁴⁵

Scholars have felt slightly uneasy about this more loosely defined concept, since a great deal of the attraction of Parry's work was found in the precision of his terminology. The criticism has been mainly concerned with two aspects: firstly, that it remains unclear how this relates to the terms of related scholarly fields; in structuralism, 'theme' is used for another concept, while folklorists' 'mo-

41. Honko 2000a, 20.

42. Foley 2000, 76, 82; 2005b, 203.

43. Lord (1960) 2000, 68.

44. Lord (1960) 2000, 78-98, 103-5.

45. Lord (1960) 2000, 94-8, 112, 120. Cf. Pihl 1994, 82-5, where the concept is transferred to Korean *p'ansori* without causing problems.

tif' covers more or less the same as Parry and Lord's 'theme'. Next, that the term is used for two basically different ideas, typical scenes and narrative patterns. Accordingly, quite a few other terms have been tried out by various scholars.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Lord's chapters on "The theme" and "Songs and the song"⁴⁷ opened up a fruitful new way of interpreting oral epic, and they are the part of his monograph that more than anything else became the overwhelming inspiration for the change in recording practice described above. Patricia Arant defines 'theme' as "any repeated incident or descriptive passage", and arranges the various formulaic units into a question of size, positing the scale formula – theme – story pattern – song.⁴⁸ Such a model, with its distinction between 'theme' in the sense of either 'typical scene' or 'pattern', is an important improvement of Lord's simpler terminology. Furthermore, Arant's conclusions about the characteristics of thematic composition in *byliny* are valid not only for Russian epic but may well serve as a general list of typical traits:

- (a) That some themes are more stable than others from performance to performance, but that exact verbal correspondence is not to be expected.
- (b) That within thematic variants, the most frequent forms of variety are due to the omission or addition of episodes, a difference in their sequence, or to more or less elaboration of a theme.
- (c) That inconsistency frequently occurs with small details in a theme.
- (d) That there are certain weak points where episodes of one thematic pattern can come together with those of another thematic pattern and lead a singer logically on to another story pattern or to confusion, points at which a singer is faced with a choice.⁴⁹

Reichl, too, uses Lord's terminology in his survey of thematic patterning in Turkic epic. He concentrates on three typical scenes, the council scene, the scene of the hero putting on his armour and sad-

46. See Foley 1990, 240-45 for a survey of opinions.

47. Lord (1960) 2000, 68-123.

48. Arant (1963) 1990, 10, 65, 118.

49. Arant (1963) 1990, 118-19; 160-61.

dling his horse, and finally the hero's ride, and shows how they represent three different types characterised by various forms of patterning. A typical scene may also take the form of one and the same passage used in different contexts. For instance, in the published version of the *Alpomysh Epic* two unpleasant old women occur at different points in the story, and even though they are in no way related, they are described in the same words. In more than one place, Reichl emphasises that his experience confirms Lord's theory.⁵⁰

Honko once again prefers the term *multiform*, and in his analysis this word covers both formula and theme in Parry and Lord's terminology. But in his understanding of these units he is actually close to Lord's description of thematic composition.

With a reference to Ruth Finnegan Honko speaks of a 'pool of tradition', defined as "a pool in which the elements reside to be used in different combinations by different performers". As part of such a collective base he speaks of the individual singer's 'idiolect', "the singer's personally adjusted share of the epic register and ... the pool of tradition of the individual".⁵¹ His and other scholars' analysis of the single performance in relation to the tradition is synchronic; a historical analysis of how such pools have developed over time would be exciting but is hardly a possibility.

Reichl's edition of the *Edige Epic* combined with his edition of an Uzbek version of the *Alpomysh Epic*⁵² may furnish us with some examples. The two traditions seem to a high degree to share a common pool of tradition, as well as containing, of course, links to a global pool of oral traditions as documented in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson's *Motif Index*.⁵³

Themes in the sense of typical scenes abound, such as descriptions of arming, departure, combat or riding over the steppe.⁵⁴

50. Reichl 1992, 201-17 (typical scenes); Reichl 2001a, 230, 278 (repeated passage); Reichl 1992, 263, 264 (confirmation of Lord).

51. Honko 1998a, 70-71, 167; for a concise survey of the terminology, see Honko 2000a, 18-24. Foley 2000, 79 prefers to speak of 'idiolect', 'dialect', and 'language' for three levels of a traditional idiom.

52. Reichl 2001a.

53. Uther & al. 2004.

54. Discussed in relation to Parry and Lord in Reichl 2001a, 49-56; 2007, 98-103. Not

There are also more specific elements of the story that occur in both texts, for instance a scene in which the ruler issues a ban on childless couples.⁵⁵

Small narrative inconsistencies may be found. In the published version of the *Alpomysh Epic*, the hero is recognised by his old, blind father by means of a characteristic birthmark that has the form of five fingers; however, while it is known from other versions of the epic that as a small child Alpomysh received such a mark when a saint touched his shoulder, this has not actually been mentioned in the published version.⁵⁶ Probably the singer simply forgot, and his audience would hardly have been bewildered since they would have known in advance that the hero carried this mark.

Some of the narrative patterns we meet in the *Epic of Edige* are of the kind folklorists call motifs, such as the swan maiden who marries a mortal lover, the three orders she gives him that he disobeys in due course, and in general the unusual conditions related to the hero's birth.⁵⁷ Another such motif is the story of the wise judge, best known from the Bible, who in a conflict between two mothers reveals the real one by proposing to have the baby cut in two; here it is applied, even in a double version, as one of the ways in which the young Edige gains distinction as a wise judge.⁵⁸

Another well-known motif in this epic is the story of how the hero wins the princess and half the kingdom by saving the girl from the monster who keeps her captive in his palace.⁵⁹ In Jumabay Bazarov's version the pattern is handled so as to allow an intense tragic effect when the dying monster consoles himself with the thought that his death will be revenged by his maternal cousin. This cousin is the selfsame Edige who has just given him the fatal wound.

The same passage offers some examples of the narrative inconsistencies typical of composition by theme. Long ago the monster

least arming scenes seem to be a world-wide theme, cf. Foley 2004, 198-9, with references.

55. Reichl 2001a, 201; 2007, 286-7.

56. Reichl 2001a, 24, 261.

57. Reichl 2007, 284-5.

58. Uther & al. 2004 no. 926; 1. *Book of Kings* 3, 16-27; Reichl 2007, 292-4.

59. Reichl 2007, 306-36.

had been given the prophecy that he would one day be killed by Edige, and already when Edige distinguished himself at a shooting contest, the giant guessed his identity, but was convinced by the hero when he denied it. When later Edige attacks him, he immediately understands that the stranger was, after all, this cousin; nevertheless he can die tragically with the unrealisable wish. Moreover, even though he has told Edige about the prophecy, and the hero therefore knows well enough that he is closely related to his victim, Edige breaks down after his deed and is inconsolable when he understands that he has killed his own cousin. In short, the activation of various patterns in the narrative has caused some confusion: the overall pattern of the rescue of the girl has been linked with two subordinate patterns, one of a prophecy and its fulfilment, and another of a conflict between related parties. That the passage is nevertheless one of the most moving in the epic only demonstrates the singer's mastery irrespective of the lack of narrative stringency.

Other themes that connect these epics with global traditions are, for instance, the handling of relations between parents and children, between brothers, or between warrior friends. In the *Alpomysh Epic*, scholars have been especially interested in the friendship between Alpomysh and Qorajon, which Bowra compared to "Achilles and Patroclus, Roland and Oliver, Gilgamish and Enkidu ... the Armenian brothers Sanasar and Bagdasar".⁶⁰ The Fulani friends Silamaka and Poullori from Mali might be added; they are so admirable that they are even celebrated as heroes among their Bambara enemies.⁶¹

Intriguingly, the final half of the *Alpomysh Epic* not only belongs to the general genre of return stories, but contains close similarities to the end of the *Odyssey*, even down to details; for instance, just as Odysseus is recognised by his old dog Argus, Alpomysh in disguise is first welcomed by an old camel.⁶²

Sometimes a passage belongs in a specific setting. Reichl has an interesting example of that. In Jumabay Bazarov's version of the

60. Bowra 1952, 65, cf. Reichl 2001a, 34.

61. Seydou 1972; Dumestre & Kesteloot 1975.

62. *Od.* 17.291-304; Reichl 2001a, 29, 256.

Edige Epic a climax is reached when the hero's son, who was born after his father had left, as a young man finds Edige and is recognised by him. The recognition is triggered by a metaphorical speech in which the son describes the loss of his father as follows (vv. XXXI.12-65) :

I have lost a black bull, Who treads the ground majestically, Who sets down his legs evenly, Who flings sand up to his own head.	15
...	
I have lost my black camel bull Who treads the ground majestically, Who sets down his four legs evenly Whose hair is covered in dust, Whose humps are filled with fat, Whose ribs are long, whose belly is broad.	30
...	
I have lost a bay stallion From my many herds of horses That graze on the shores of the lake; A bay stallion with a thick mane, Who snorts loudly, Who runs after the other horses and bites their manes.	45 50
...	
I have lost a white ram, An old ram with a broad tail, Who only nibbles the heads of cornflowers, Who has a curled tail, Who has twisted horns, Who bleats so loudly That the enemy is seized with fear in his heart, That no roaming wolf comes near my herd of sheep. ⁶³	60 65

This passage is in itself thematic in the sense that you might call it four versions of one and the same pattern, and as such it fits Honko's

63. Reichl 2007, 87-8.

description of the multiform. It is not, however, a theme in the sense that it may be used whenever somebody has lost something important; it occurs only in the recognition scene between Edige and his son. Reichl quotes the same scene from four other Karakalpak singers' versions of the *Edige Epic*, and they all have the son express himself in very much the same metaphors.⁶⁴

However, the Edige tradition also contains themes in Parry and Lord's sense, and sometimes such themes are special to one branch of it. Reichl relates how a detail about the hero as a baby being found by a childless couple occurs regularly in Karakalpak versions of the poem, but not in those sung in Noghay, Kazakh, Tatar or Bashkir. Among the Karakalpaks the theme is also known from other epics.⁶⁵

So the Karakalpak pool of tradition for the *Epic of Edige* shares multiforms for all the regularly recurring ideas such as arming, departure, or arrival, with a greater pool, common to all the languages in which this epic is sung, while at the same time offering characteristic multiforms that occur only in the Karakalpak branch of the tradition. Both themes and passages reserved for specific situations may exist inside a single pool. The recognition scene is a climax in the story, and it is easy to imagine that singers are eager to stick to a remarkable wording for such a notable event. It must be surmised that both singers and audiences would immediately think of Edige and his son if the metaphor of the lost animal was quoted out of context.

Such a system of pools seems to describe the general situation more precisely than Honko's simpler idea of the singer's individual pool of tradition as part of a common pool. Bird, Biebuyck, Innes, and Johnson all stress that singers develop their art in the course of their careers, and that if they are itinerant, they regularly learn by attending other singers' performances, also such that do not belong to their own tradition. But then, Honko's Gopala Naika was not only stationary, but also considered the local authority from whom others learned, so in his case the simpler model may well have been sufficient.

64. Reichl 2007, 87-93; cf. Reichl 2001b, 241 for another example of a recurring passage that cannot be considered a theme.

65. Reichl 2007, 80.

Adding style

Besides 'formula' and 'theme', Parry's third characteristic of oral epic was the 'adding style'. He drew attention to the fact that in Homer verse and phrase structure cooperate so that each verse brings the narrative to a meaningful stop, and underlined that in this respect the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are markedly different from Hellenistic and Roman epic.⁶⁶ The same is the case in the Serbo-Croatian tradition he studied, and the fact that one-verse formulas work so well in both traditions is, again, connected with the importance of the verse as a basic unit. Many statements by the singers Parry and his assistants interviewed show that also emically the verse functions in this way. For instance, in an interesting dialogue about the word *rec* between Parry's interpreter-scribe, Nikola Vujnovic, and the singer Mujo Kukuruzovic, quoted by Foley, the scribe uses it to mean 'word' while for the singer it means 'verse'.⁶⁷

This is the element of the theory that is perhaps most easily adapted to oral epic traditions studied elsewhere, as long as they are in verse at all. Theellenisti three excerpts given above testify to it in three slightly different ways. In the *Siri* example each verse is a period, and each of them might have ended with a full stop. The first *Edige* example contains some periods that run over more than one verse (vv. 44-5, 48-9, 50-52, 56-7, 59-61), but in such a way that each verse still consists of either a period, a clause, or another meaningful syntactic unit. In this it conforms to what Parry called 'unperiodic enjambement' in Homeric style: "the verse can end with a word group in such a way that the sentence, at the verse end, already gives a complete thought, although it goes on in the next verse, adding free ideas by new word groups".⁶⁸ The second excerpt from the *Epic of Edige* abounds in examples of unperiodic enjambement, mainly in the form of adjectival additions. In all the given examples the verse is the all-important measure.

66. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 251-65, 388-9; Lord (1960) 2000, 54, 131.

67. Foley 1990, 49.

68. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 253.

A further example is taken from another genre, the beginning of a poem from Saudi Arabia in which the Bedouin poet Abdallah ad-Dindan describes how inspiration comes to him, in Marcel Kurpershoek's translation (vv. 1-8):

After sunrise the bard climbed the high crest of a mountain,
 Downhearted he vented his spleen in verse after verse.
 Grief welled up and he moaned as if roasted
 By a fire that had been lit in his breast.
 I wanted to bear my suffering in silence, but found I could not, 5
 For I felt as if pincers began plucking out my heart.
 No sooner did I chant one verse, than others came like camels
 rushing to a well,
 Pressing around me and lowering their big heads to the water.⁶⁹

Here, again, either the period is concluded at the end of the verse, or it turns out only with the following verse that it was not (vv. 3-4, 5-6, 7-8), featuring the characteristic unperiodic enjambement.

Not all kinds of oral poetry are characterised by adding style, but for the genres that contain a high degree of flexibility it seems to be a general feat. Again, considered from the point of view of oral verse-making, the brief pause at each verse end offers the singer a rest during which the mind lingers on the already finished idea of the foregoing verse before proceeding to the next.⁷⁰ This general characteristic of long oral poetic narratives is an important element in establishing the feeling of a well-ordered, harmonious whole. The story may be complicated and the poem take us through far-reaching problems and intense emotions, but the verse remains stable.

69. Kurpershoek 1994, 114. – I admit that I chose this example because I love the comparison between the singer's inspiration and thirsty camels jostling for water.

70. Cf. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 258. – Cf. Phillips 1981, 105-6 (West Sumatra).

Basic concepts

The aesthetic and social features common to oral epic do not, of course, compare in fixity to the laws of nature, nor are they as regular as linguistic laws, but they are still stable enough to allow for generalisation. Whenever one begins reading a new report of field-work or a new edition of an oral epic, it is possible to anticipate quite a few of the characteristics that will be mentioned.

In Parry and Lord's oral-formulaic theory the flexibility of the epic traditions and the connected fact of composition in performance constitute the basic difference from written literature. I have found no exceptions to this rule of flexibility. The strain on the bard composing at full speed face to face with his audience is what makes him dependent on ready-made phraseology. Exactly what form this phraseology takes is caused by the particular prosody and other formal characteristics of the tradition in question.

The fact that epic is concerned with events that took place long ago which both singer and audience wish to be correctly transmitted no doubt reinforces the singer's attempt at learning not only the story but also how it is told, and it contributes to the way epic traditions are understood in the singing communities, as conservative in both content and expression. The memorised formulas, themes, and patterns are the necessary tools of the singer's art, but they are also well suited to the content of the poems, and if they contain a certain amount of cryptic phrases – such as old or foreign words, or expressions that are misunderstood – that is only felt to enhance the venerability of the songs. On the level of theme, the same mechanism sometimes leads to inconsistencies in detail or breaches of narrative logic. For the reader such inconsistencies are recognisable as the result of two or more mutually similar themes having been mixed up.

Composition in performance is the constant and exhausting demand the singer must cope with. But it also gives him fabulous potentialities. The fully-fledged bard can adapt his performance to actual situations, expand or contract, allude to current events, flatter a patron, please his listeners by dwelling upon topics of particular interest for them and omitting what would displease them, and

so forth. Besides the mere fact of the singer's capacity of performing for hours on end there is nothing scholars admire more than this versatility.

Lord's *Singer of Tales* still offers the basic description of such general features as stability and change in an oral epic tradition, the workings of composition in performance, the singers' understanding of their art and their notions of aesthetic qualities, as well as the various ways in which collecting procedures influence the poems edited. Observed over the distance of three quarters of a century and on the basis of an ever growing corpus of fieldwork, the most remarkable aspect of Parry's oral-formulaic theory was the understanding of the patterned style as a necessity for the singer composing in performance.

Summary

All oral traditions have something that may be called 'formula', but as defined by Parry the term is not easily transferred from Homer to other epic traditions. In some cases the definition works with minor modifications, whereas in others the term must be fundamentally redefined in order to be workable. Of the two other basic concepts, 'theme' has been divided into typical scene and story pattern, and as such it seems to be valid everywhere. Finally, 'adding style' is a general characteristic of long oral narrative. The common denominator for oral epic is composition in performance. Without a comprehensive pool of traditional units to facilitate verse-making – to be defined with respect to the basic aesthetic mechanisms of the tradition concerned – oral epic would not be possible.

CHAPTER 3

Oral epic in performance

Epic repertoires

Parry and Lord collected more than a thousand Serbo-Croatian songs during their campaigns in 1933-5 and 1950-51, and most of them run to a length of 500-1,000 verses.¹ Salih Ugljanin of Novi Pazar sang or dictated twenty-seven epics to them, of which the longest contained 2,053 verses. Like other of Parry's informants he came from an Albanian family and had repertoires in both languages, but the edition is concerned only with his Serbian songs.² Parry's star singer, Avdo Mededovic of Bijelo Polje, had a repertoire of fifty-eight epic songs, of which nine were recorded on phonograph discs and four others written from dictation. That made 44,902 verses sung and 33,653 verses dictated. Mededovic's longest registered song runs to 13,331 verses or 16 hours of performance time net.³

This bulk of poetry is very impressive both as a singing and a recording achievement, and it conveys an image of a landscape in which every village had at least two or three accomplished singers. Even so, neither the number of singers nor the length and amount of individual songs they performed is outstanding compared to what is found in various other traditions. Roghair and Beck both recorded

1. For a full list, see *SCHS* 1, 1954, 21-45. - Of the planned publication only six volumes have appeared. Vols. 1-2 are concerned with songs from Novi Pazar and offer an extraordinary picture of a local singing community, featuring 5 singers and 32 songs containing between 51 and 1,811 verses. Vols. 3-4 and 6 focus on Avdo Mededovic, whereas vol. 14 publishes a selection of songs from four singers of Bihac. The full texts are published in Serbo-Croatian, whereas the English volumes print selected versions and represent the others as summaries. For surveys of Parry and Lord's fieldwork, see Foley 2000, 79-82; Mitchell & Nagy 2000. - The collection is now being digitised, cf. <http://chs119.chs.harvard.edu/mpc/>

2. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 59-223; 2, 1953, 1-184. - Albanian repertoire: *SCHS* 1, 1954, 56-7; longest song: *SCHS* 1, 1954, 398-9 (English synopsis).

3. *SCHS* 3, 1974, 6-7; Avdo's own list 53-7. - Colakovic 2007a is a critical edition of a broader selection of this singer's works.

uninduced poems performed as continued narratives over a series of nights; the Tamilnadu *Brothers' Epic* even lasted nineteen such sessions.⁴ In Africa, the most famous epic singers among the Mande, Bambara *jelilu/griots*, are known to perform songs of 10,000 verses each.⁵ Of performances among the Nyanga and Lega in Congo, Biebuyck stated that they might be “unrolled episode after episode for several hours a day, and for several days”.⁶ From the Uzbek singer Fozil Yo'ldosh-o'g'li (1872-1955) almost forty epics were registered. Alone the verse passages of his version of the *Alpomyshe Epic*, which like other Uzbek epics is prosimetric, run to 13,715 verses. Another Uzbek *baxshi*, Muhammad Jonmurod-o'g'li Po'lkan (1874-1941) knew more than seventy epics of which almost thirty were taken down in writing.⁷ The Kirghiz bards Sagimbay Orozbaqov (1867-1930) and Sayaqbay Qaralacv (1894-1971) knew the *Manas Epic* in versions of c. 180,000 verses and 500,553 verses respectively, and in Chinese Xinjiang the Kirghiz Dzüsüp Mamay knew eight episodes of this epic totalling c. 200,000 verses when Reichl met him in 1985; his version of the epic was published in 1984-95 and fills eighteen volumes. It is claimed that besides the *Manas Epic* he knows eleven other epics.⁸ The Gesar Research Institute of Tibet University houses the recordings from “Old Man Thrapa”, amounting to 600,000 verses of epic poetry, and the Chinese scholar Rinchindorji asserts that 200 volumes of relatively independent Mongolian poems, c.200,000 lines in all, have been collected and 396 Siberian Turkic epics registered by Russian scholars. Furthermore, a ten-volume series of 73 Altaic epics was published in 1958-80.⁹

Such reports are nothing new; already Bowra referred to traditions for mammoth performance in many parts of the world. But

4. Beck 1982; Roghair 1982.

5. Biebuyck 1976, 21

6. Biebuyck 1976, 24. Further examples of very long poems: Saada 1985, 24 (Arabic, Tunisia); Smith 1991, 17 (Rajasthani); Gyaltshe 2001, 281 (Tibetan); Ying 2001 (Kirghiz).

7. Reichl 2001a, 23-4, 80-81, cf. Reichl 1992, 72.

8. Reichl 1992, 82; cf. Zhirmunsky 1969, 279 (who, however, gives other figures); the eleven remaining epics: Ying 2001, 236.

9. Gyaltshe 2001, 281; Rinchindorji 2001, 381-2.

this kind of information has seemed unreliable to some readers, and the mere fact that in recent years very long texts have been registered and some of them also published has certainly added weight to such reports. During two months in 1974 Nigel Phillips recorded the *Epic of Anggun Nan Tungga* from the west Sumatran singer Munin, lasting 23 hours in all. Slyomovics states that the elicited full recording of *Sirat Bani Hilal* she got 'Awadallah 'Abd aj-Jalil 'Ali to sing lasts c. 35 hours. The version of the same epic Reynolds recorded from Shaykh Biyali Abu Fahmi in al-Bakatush took 37 hours, and he asserts that performances in this tradition may be over one hundred hours in length. Honko's Gopala Naika not only performed the *Siri Epic* with its 15,683 verses of narrative, introduced by a prologue of 563 verses, but in his repertoire he also had five other epics, four of which were relatively short (between c. 1,000 and c. 3,000 verses), while the *Kooti Cennaya* occupied almost 15 hours of singing time (c. 7,000 verses) when Honko registered it. Aditya Malik recorded a 24-hour version of the *Devnarayan Epic* from Hukamaram Bhopa in Rajasthan, and the singer afterwards added further songs so that eventually Malik ended up with 46 hours of taped performance.¹⁰ Reichl relates that a series of twenty volumes of Karakalpak folklore was published during the period 1977-90, of which thirteen volumes contain epic. The *Epic of Edige* is not included among their more than thirty epic songs, and Reichl mentions six further titles that are not there either.¹¹ Nevertheless, as late as in 2003 a respected classicist could make a categorical statement asserting that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* surpass all known oral epic in scale.¹²

In the modern world, epic traditions survive for the most part in marginal areas, relatively unaffected by a modern western lifestyle.

10. Bowra 1952, 330-67; Phillips 1981, 21; Slyomovics 1987, 23, 49; Reynolds 1995, 7, 42; Honko 1998a, 13, 563-9; Malik 2005, xx.

11. Reichl 2007, 18-19.

12. Ulf 2003, 269: "Es ist eine von niemandem bestrittene Tatsache, dass sich bis heute kein in einem oralen Umfeld entstandener und mündlich tradiert Text hat finden lassen, der in Umfang und Qualität den homerischen Texten gleichzusetzen wäre". - The argument from quality is worthless. It works just as well the other way around: Since no written poem equals it, the *Iliad* cannot have been composed in writing.

In general the traditions as such are often looked down upon as an unwanted sign of underdevelopment; but in areas where the independence of an ethnic group and its language is threatened or non-existent, epic may on the contrary be considered very important.

On a global scale oral epic seems to be disappearing; at least this is what is often surmised. Of his fieldwork among the Nyanga Biebuyck stated that whereas he collected a wealth of prose tales, he met with only four epic singers who knew the whole *Mwindo Epic*, the four whose texts he published.¹³ Reynolds relates that at Egyptian weddings hosts now tend to invite modern bands to entertain their guests rather than the old-fashioned bards, and Phillips reports that at celebrations in west Sumatra guests pay little attention when the bard performs. According to Reichl, Jumabay Bazarov was the last Karakalpak bard able to perform a full version of the *Epic of Edige*, while Joyce Blau writes that the Kurds once had a tradition for oral epic, performed by *dangbêj* singers supported by feudal landlords, but that such singers are dying out.¹⁴

As against all this, however, Blackburn and Flueckiger report of flourishing traditions in many parts of India. The mere existence of these overwhelmingly rich traditions was virtually unknown among scholars until c. 1960, whereas the two scholars describe the situation in the 1980s as follows: “for researchers in South Asia today, the problem is not where to find oral epics, but which ones to study.” They conclude their survey of Indian traditions with an appendix in which they line up performance features of twelve individual epics, not counting *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and in the various contributions to the volume quite a few more are mentioned.¹⁵ From Rajasthan in north west India in the seventies Smith reports that even though two great old epic traditions, *Pabuji* and *Devnarayan*, dominated, new traditions were also beginning to establish themselves.¹⁶ Rinchindorji asserts that hundreds of Turkic epics from Siberia and

13. Biebuyck 1978, 23. – Cf. Blackburn 1988, xix, xxiii about bow songs in Tamil Nadu in Southern India that average 3-5,000 verses and take five or six hours to perform.

14. Blau 1984, 74.

15. Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989, 1; appendix 254-62.

16. Smith 1991, 9.

Central Asia await further study. From China, Lang Ying reports that during fieldwork in 1998 he attended nine Kirghiz Manas singers between 20 and 78 years of age.¹⁷ As for Africa, scholars convey the impression that epic is on the retreat; even so an anthology from 1997 is able to present passages of twenty-four different epics.¹⁸ Furthermore, it is not out of the question that hitherto unknown epic traditions may still turn up; Biebuyck had no knowledge of the Nyanga epic tradition before undertaking his fieldwork, and Dan Ben-Amos reports how in 1966 he met an Edo bard in Nigeria who recited two epics to him of which one was until then unknown and the other considered extinct. Collins was similarly unprepared when he encountered the *Epic of Radin Suane* among the Besemah in south Sumatra.¹⁹

Singer and audience

Considering the importance Parry and Lord attached to the concept of performance, there is relatively little to be found in their works to illuminate the relationship between singer and audience in detail. Parry's interests were focused on the singers and the way formulas and themes work in their art, and he normally made his registrations by means of induced sessions, inviting singers to the hotels where he stayed. There were practical reasons for that, too. His approach was based on the most modern technical aids of the time, and compared to writing from dictation the mechanical recording offered hitherto unknown chances of obtaining authentic texts for study. Even so, Parry's recording apparatus was heavy and not easily moved, and also for reasons of sound quality it would hardly have been possible for him to base his collection on the mechanical registration of epic in natural surroundings. The part of Parry's collection that is most informative about the interaction of singer and audience in performance is the interviews he or his assistant Vuj-

17. Rinchindorji 2001, 382; Ying 2001, 222.

18. Johnson & al. 1997. For a discussion of all known oral epics in Africa, see Belcher 1999. Here is also given a catalogue of published epics, Belcher 1999, 193-212.

19. Biebuyck 1978, 23; Ben-Amos 2000, 282-3; W.A. Collins 1998, 8.

novic conducted with their informants, at which the singers were often asked to comment upon their art. In his *Singer of Tales*, moreover, Lord is more liberal with information about his and Parry's experience.

The question has been all the more central among Parry and Lord's followers, and both the social context of oral epic in general and performance situations in particular have by now been well analysed. For instance, by means of a remarkable cooperation among nine scholars it was possible for Blackburn and Flueckiger to survey the performance features (languages, styles, patrons and audiences, performers, context, time, place, instruments, costumes, and props) of twelve oral epic traditions in India.²⁰

Occasions for performance can be of many kinds, but in general epic may be called for wherever a suitable audience is gathered. Singers may perform of their own accord, for instance in market places, they may be engaged by a patron or a host who wishes to entertain his guests, or they may play a regular part in religious festivals.

Foley's studies are again of special importance in this field. He describes the relation between singer and audience as an arena in which the parties' shared knowledge of the tradition conveys a metonymic character to the text being performed. Each individual song is a *pars pro toto* of the tradition concerned appealing to the listeners' experience of similar performances in similar arenas. The single event calls to life the entire myth, a fact that adds considerably to the power of the text being performed. The spoken words "no longer defer simply to the literal meanings of the everyday language extrinsic to performance but ... are charged with associative values particular to the event taking place".²¹ Foley explains:

The key difference [between oral and literary poems] lies in the nature of tradition itself: structural elements are not simply compositionally useful, nor are they doomed to a "limited" area of designation; rather they command a field of reference much larger than the

20. Blackburn & al. 1989, 254-62; cf. Wadley 1989, 77.

21. Foley 1995, 8; cf. Graziosi & Haubold 2005, who speak of 'resonance' in a similar way.

single line, passage, or even text in which they occur. Traditional elements reach out of the immediate instance in which they appear to the fecund totality of the entire tradition, defined synchronically and diachronically, and they bear meanings as wide and deep as the tradition they encode.²²

The performance arena not only adds to the power of the words, but also of the singer. Even if he is not personally considered an important figure in the community, his mastery of the inherited texts makes him an authority during the act of performing. Slyomovics describes an intermezzo during 'Awadallah's performance that may illustrate this. When a listener had lost the thread and asked "Who says this?" he got his answer but was also rebuked by the singer for not having been attentive. 'Awadallah performed for men who were socially his superiors, and under other circumstances he would not have addressed the man like that.²³

The *Pabuji Epic* in Rajasthan is performed in front of a *par*, a painted cloth illustrating various events in the story. When performing, the singer points out the relevant illustrations with the bow of his fiddle, while his wife lifts up an oil lamp so the audience can see the pictures. The *par* is the equivalent of a portable temple and may only be unrolled at night. The performance lasts from nightfall to daybreak.²⁴ Komal Kothari gives a detailed description of such a performance as it takes place at festivals and fairs as well as at private parties in villages when a patron may sponsor a performance for one night or a series of nights. A common reason is to fulfil a vow taken to gain the deity's help in alleviating some problem, or a wake ceremony with epic performance may be necessary for the establishment of a new shrine.

Once the decision to hold a wake is taken, the performers are invited to the home, shrine, well site, or field where it is to occur. Members of the sponsoring family and their friends and neighbors gather and

22. Foley 1991, 7.

23. Slyomovics 1987, 75, 99-100, 264. - The ambiguities of 'Awadallah's status are discussed in more detail in Slyomovics 1999.

24. Smith 1991, 8, 14-53.

form an audience of about forty to fifty people. During the all-night performance, the host provides tea to everyone and serves *lapsi*, a sweet preparation of wheat and sugar, in the early morning. The singers can earn some extra money (beyond the fee paid by the sponsor) during these performances by means of individual donations by audience members.²⁵

Similar night-time performances are well known from other parts of the world. From Africa, Biebuyck mentions a night-time performance among the Fang in Gabon that lasted ten hours without a break, and Pascal Boyer has a vivid description of all-night *mvét* performances, also among the Fang (*mvét* is the name of both the epic genre and the instrument accompanying its performance). The bard makes brief pauses now and then and is frequently interrupted by the audience, especially in the beginning; gradually the atmosphere grows more and more intense, and the shouts from the audience concentrate on stimulating the heroes to action. In this way they continue until daybreak.²⁶ Reichl states that Turkic epic performance may last the whole night or be continued over several nights, and he quotes the Russian scholars Victor Zhirmunsky and Hadi Zarifov for a detailed description of a full night's performance, just as intense as the performances reported by Biebuyck and Boyer from Africa. Around midnight the Turkic singer makes a break at an especially tense point in the story and "puts down the *dombira*" as a signal to the audience that gifts will be welcome. Only afterwards does he complete his performance.²⁷ – To the reader of Homer, the parallel to *Odyssey* II.328-84 is striking.

25. Kothari 1989, 104-8, quote 104. – Cf. W.A. Collins 1998, 10-11 and Malik 2005, xx, 11-17 for vivid descriptions of performances of the *Radin Suane Epic* in South Sumatra and the *Devnarayan Epic* in Rajasthan.

26. Biebuyck 1976, 24; Boyer 1988, 36-8, cf. Bird 1972, 280. Parry's Mededovic reported something similar about one of his fellow singers, *SCHS* 3, 1974, 68.

27. Reichl 1992, 91; quote 97-9. – Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989, 203 state that the *Annamar Epic* in Tamil Nadu takes up to eighteen nights to perform. Further examples: Bailey 1980, 248 (Ossetic); Phillips 1981, 9 (Minangkabau, west Sumatra); Claus 1989, 57-8 (Tulu, Karnataka); Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989, 217: (Hindi, Rajasthan); Pihl 1994, 4 (Korean).

Shorter performances such as those Parry and Lord experienced in Yugoslavia are, of course, also widespread. Among various factors that are decisive for the duration of performances two seem most important: the time-span available and the competence of singer and audience. For a tradition to develop very long performances there must be many or at least regularly recurring occasions when people are gathered for many hours and epic performance is called for. Next, for a singer to cope with the physical strain on his voice and the intellectual demands of the long, detailed story told in verse requires a high degree of professionalism, and audiences able to follow such a performance must be well versed in the stories and also able to appreciate good performers.

Not all audiences are as attentive as those described by Boyer, nor are all occasions as stimulating. When a singer performs in a market place or in a coffee house, for instance, members of the audience may arrive in the middle of a poem or leave before its end, but, again, for the song to be engaging the listener must be able to recognise protagonists and events. Ruth Scodel emphasises that some members of an audience are better equipped to understand a given performance than others, just as some modern readers profit more than others from reading the same book. But notwithstanding such problems, those involved share an experience:

When the singer of tales performs, singer and audience consciously participate in a traditional form. They are fully aware that by listening and performing, they are doing as people have done before them, re-enacting the mode of performance, the formulaic technique, some of the formulae themselves, and (at least in large part) the content of the tales. This consciousness of participation in a chain of transmission is crucial to the authority of the song.²⁸

Reynolds systematises his experience of audience interaction in al-Bakatush in three main types: the listeners may encourage or criticise the poet by requesting particular scenes or by pointing out that a particular detail has been overlooked, they may become part of

28. Scodel 2002, 7-33, quote 31.

the actual stuff of the performance when the poet manipulates plot or characters so as to point directly to members of the audience, or when they have engaged in discussions during breaks, the poet may take his cue from his listeners' remarks and weave references to their stories into the narrative.²⁹

Epic singers are male. This is a rule with quite a few exceptions, but not enough to alter the picture. When women perform epic, this is mostly felt as something unusual in the singing communities.³⁰ Slyomovics, however, has a brief passage in which she considers whether female epic with women performing to women actually exists in Egypt and suggests that the reason why it is not found may be that scholars have not looked for it.³¹

Normally, epic is performed by one singer; but he is often assisted by musicians or apprentices, and in some cases these may take over and recite parts of the narrative.³² Sometimes two singers regularly cooperate as in Finnish *runor*, performed by two men holding each other's right hand,³³ or when in some areas Albanian singers perform two together so that singer A recites a verse that is then repeated by singer B, and so forth all the way through the performance. Some Indian epics are also performed by two singers, one taking the lead and the other responding in various ways.³⁴ Still, the general rule is that one singer is responsible for the poem.

In most traditions epic is sung to musical accompaniment. The singer may be his own musician, as was the rule among Parry and Lord's Serbo-Croatian bards as well as in the Egyptian tradition

29. Reynolds 1999, 164-6.

30. Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989, 9 (India); Honko 1998a, 298-300 reports of a female singer of the *Siri Epic*; Seitel 1999, 87 states that both men and women sing "epic ballads" among the Haya in northwestern Tanzania; Flueckiger 1999, 140 states that in recent years female singers have begun performing the *Candaini Epic* in Chattisgarh in central India, and that they are enormously popular; Reichl 2001b, 219 mentions female singers of Turkic epics. Cf. Bawden 1980, 293 (Mongolia).

31. Slyomovics 1987, 56.

32. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 12-13; Innes 1976, 182.

33. Hatto 1991, 9.

34. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 60, 329. Cf. Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989, 213 (Chattisgarh, central India); Claus 1989, 68 (Karnataka); Smith 1989, 30 (Rajasthan); Malik 2005, 173 (Rajasthan).

studied by Slyomovics and Reynolds and the Turkic traditions studied by Reichl.³⁵ In many African and Indian traditions he is assisted by a whole retinue of musicians.³⁶ There are, however, traditions in which the singer's voice is alone: Naika sang to the scholars without an instrument, and so did some of Parry and Lord's Macedonian informants.³⁷ Although Turkic epic is normally performed together with a musical instrument, Kirghiz epic is not. Besides, Reichl tells of a Kazakh singer who at a certain point decided to no longer accompany himself on the *dombira* in order to facilitate the listeners' understanding of his words.³⁸ In Korea the *kwangdae* was accompanied by a drummer.³⁹ From Africa Christiane Seydou edited five Fulani bards, three of whom were accompanied on a *hoddu* by an assistant, one accompanied himself, and one performed without an instrument. But Seydou emphasises that ideally the singer accompanies himself, and that the music is a very important part of the performance, sometimes even taking over the narrative as when after a brief description in words of a struggle between the hero and a monstrous snake, "the griot lets the strings speak under his fingers, stringing the notes out into long coils and striking the body of the hide of the lute in furious slapping".⁴⁰ Parts of the story may be told

35. Slyomovics 1987, 13; Reichl 2001a, 21-2, 61; 2007, especially 163-78. – Kesteloot's Sissoko Kabinè performed alone, playing a *ngoni*, Dumestre & Kesteloot 1975, 27; Biebuyck's Muriro Sherungu accompanied himself on a two-stringed zither, Biebuyck 1978, 12. Cf. Bailey 1980, 248 (Ossetic); Cushing 1980, 215 (Ob Ugrian); Smith 1991, 8 (Rajasthani).

36. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 13; Blackburn & al. 1989, 254-62. – Even though Turkic singers are generally their own musicians, Choresmian singers may be accompanied by more musicians, Reichl 2001a, 21, 61-2. Mongol epic performance may be spoken or chanted without music, or the singer may accompany himself on either a plucked or a bowed instrument, Bawden 1980, 293. Ram Swarup Dhimar of Karimpur in north India accompanied himself on a stringed instrument, *cikara*, but was also assisted by a drummer and a steel tong player, Wadley 2004, 66.

37. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 17.

38. Kirghiz epic without instrument: Reichl 1992, 103; cf. Reichl 2001a, 90 of a singer who performs the *Alpomysh Epic* without an instrument. The Kazakh who stopped playing: Reichl 1992, 107.

39. Pihl 1994, 3.

40. Seydou 1976, 43, 135, 267, 319, 357; Seydou 2000, quote 215.

in prose, as in the case of the traditions studied by Roghair and Reichl, and in Africa epic singers regularly switch between poetry, prose, and dramatic action.⁴¹ In India dance-drama is often included, and in west Sumatra sung heroic narrative may be dramatised by 15-20 male dancers.⁴²

Singers may be itinerant or stationary, and it is normal for them to shift between these ways of living depending on the possibilities.⁴³ Many bards have to add to their income by means of another profession, for instance as peasants or industrial workers. Some bards are able to maintain a reasonable economic level by staying at home and accepting such invitations as come, while others travel to find engagements. When they arrive at a new village they begin by gathering information about local power structures so as to be able to adapt their performance to their prospective audiences.⁴⁴

A well-to-do patron may employ one or more singers to stay with him at home and accompany him on journeys or in war, and such bards are expected to specialise in the patron's family history and be able to perform suitable poems whenever an occasion offers itself. More often the patronage is short-term: somebody plans a festive arrangement – a wedding, a harvest celebration, a festival of workers at an industrial plant – and hires a singer to entertain the guests. It is normal, then, that the host pays the singer a fee, but also that individual listeners add to the fee with their own contributions to show their appreciation of passages that have pleased them.

The social status of singers varies considerably from place to place. In Egypt, the *Sirat Bani Hilal*-singers have low status, even among their audiences. The Mande and Fulani singers in central Africa studied by Biebuyck, Johnson, Innes, and Seydou in the 1960s and '70s were of relatively humble status, dependent on the generosity of patrons and casual audiences, but certainly respected as pro-

41. Biebuyck 1972, 264; 1976, 23; the Korean *p'ansori* and north Indian *dhola* are prosimetric, too, and characterised by a similar combination of narrating with dramatic acting, Pihl 1994, 3-4; Wadley 2004, xi.

42. India: Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989, 9; west Sumatra: Phillips 1981, 5.

43. Slyomovics 1987, 10.

44. Finnegan 1977, 55. She refers to Hausa praise singers in northern Nigeria as her example, but considers the practice normal for epic singers, too.

fessional authorities on matters of history, and as welcome entertainers. The same holds good of most Indian bards, for instance those studied by Roghair in Andhra Pradesh and by Smith in Rajasthan. In pre-colonial Africa, the stationary singer employed at the court of a chief was an important figure with both moral and political authority.⁴⁵ In Karnataka in India Honko's Naika is a person of some status in his community, both economically and religiously. In pre-Soviet Siberia singers were also shamans and very important figures in their communities.⁴⁶ Often the profession runs in families.⁴⁷

The singer of epic does not claim authorship of his songs. On the contrary, his professional pride is in his memory, his capacity for presenting correct and reliable information to his audience about events in former times.⁴⁸ Another, related, reason for pride may be found in the ability to repeat a performance you have attended only once. This is an ultimate feat of memorising and admired as such, as a reproductive, not a creative act.⁴⁹ Singer and audience agree on the opinion that the poems were composed at the time when the events described took place, and that they have been reliably transmitted from generation to generation. Careless singers may exist and should be rejected; but precise transmission is not only possible but normal, and the reason why both parties are so moved by the songs is that what is being performed is true.⁵⁰

In some traditions epics are referred to a named poet who lived long ago, but normally they are simply anonymous.

Singers rarely mention themselves in their songs. There may be various reasons for this. The first one is simple: everyone present already knows the bard's identity, and there is no need for further presentation. Another possibility is that a bard actually presented himself when performing for the scholar but that the latter did not

45. Seydou 1972, 12-13, 18-30; Innes 1974, 8-9.

46. Cushing 1980, 214 (Ob Ugrian).

47. Bailey 1980, 249 (Ossetic); Bawden 1980, 296 (Mongol); Saada 1985, 29 (Arabic); Ying 2001, 225-6 (Kirghiz).

48. Lord (1960) 2000, 27-9, 101.

49. Lord (1960) 2000, 19, 26-7.

50. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 239, 244-5; Cushing 1980, 223 (Ob Ugrian); Phillips 1981, 5-6 (Minangkabau).

consider the presentation part of the performance and therefore did not include it in his edition. A third possible reason is that the singer does not see himself as responsible for the song, which he considers composed long ago. Here the reader of published oral epics is clearly at the mercy of the editor.

Innes' edition of three Mandinka performances from The Gambia is of special interest in this respect. The bard Bamba Suso devotes his first 23 verses to presenting himself and his musician and stating how they are related by family. In this he seems to be aware of the fact that his performance is being recorded and will reach other listeners than those present; Innes actually reports that the bard was accustomed to performing on the radio. On the other hand, when in the same passage the singer states how he learned his art from his father and grandfather, this seems perfectly traditional. Another singer, Dembo Kanute, does not present himself. His poem was performed at the celebration of the naming of the bard's small niece, and recorded by one of the other guests. Presumably everyone in the audience knew the singer, and there would be no need of a self-presentation. However, his text has both an 'I' and a 'you', being addressed directly to a local agricultural officer who was present at the recording. Kanute, who was excited by his brother's friendship with such an important person, offered his performance as a gift to this special guest and the text is full of apostrophes to him. This poem has a special aura of authenticity for the reader and reminds us that induced recording establishes a certain distance to natural performances.⁵¹ – In one of the Haya epics from Tanzania, published in translation by Peter Seitel, the singer Justinian Mugasha briefly presents himself at the beginning, but Seitel gives no information of the performance context.⁵²

Audiences of epic are generally broad, including both men and women of all ages and social groups.⁵³ In some cases audiences are

51. Innes 1974, 41 (Bamba Suso), 267 (Dembo Kanute).

52. Seitel 1999, 127. – Of the four Haya epics edited by Mulokozi, two (both of them performed by the singer Habibu Selemani and recorded by Mulokozi) begin with a brief address to the scholar and the rest of the audience, Mulokozi 2002, 322-3, 494-5.

53. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 13; Biebuyck 1976, 23; 1978, 5; Bailey 1980, 248; Philips 1981, 9; Smith 1991, 6.

purely male, as is the case at performances of *sampo* in Finland, or of Ob Ugrian epic; G.F. Cushing states that even when a shaman singer was female, only men were allowed to attend.⁵⁴ The performances studied by Slyomovics in Upper Egypt were only for men as well.⁵⁵ However, such restrictions are normally caused not by the genre, but by external factors. Parry and Lord mainly listened to singers who performed to male audiences in coffee-houses, but according to David E. Bynum the normal occasion for epic performance in Parry's Yugoslavia was a gathering in a private home with both men and women present.⁵⁶ In pre-socialist Albania the proper audience was to be found in the *kulla*, the home of the extended family in the mountainous villages in the North, which were regularly isolated by snow during the winter months. Here the men of the family constituted the immediate audience, but the women listened from the back, more or less like Penelope in the first book of the *Odyssey*.⁵⁷ However, audiences might be purely male under special conditions like those described to me in 1974 by the Albanian singer Mirash Ndou, who had had his best audiences when performing to fellow partisans during World War II. Most of the time, he told, they had been just waiting, for instance watching a road on which German soldiers were expected to pass; there his comrades had been attentive listeners to the songs of Mujo and Halil. There are also cases in which audiences as a rule are female, such as when Naika performs to women workers.

When a host hires a singer to entertain his guests, for instance at a wedding, the host may in advance have requested specific songs that he finds suitable for the occasion, but the singer is also attentive to wishes from the general audience. Any singer is ready to perform what his audience wants to hear. Normally there is lively inter-

54. Cushing 1980, 227; Hatto 1991, 8-9.

55. Slyomovics 1987, 7, 56.

56. Bynum in *SCHS* 4, 1974, xix. Similarly, Phillips relates that in west Sumatra *sijobang* is performed both to broad audiences, for instance at weddings, and to purely male listeners in coffee-houses, Phillips 1981, 9-10.

57. Described to me in 1974 by Mirash Ndou; cf. Lambertz 1958, 95. - Similarly, Indian outdoor performances are attended primarily by men, but women may be present on the fringes, for instance on rooftops: Wadley 2004, 66.

action between audience and performer, and fieldworkers underscore the importance of the audience. Mulokozi praises the Haya bard Habibu Selemani (1928-93) for his “sensitivity to context”:

He always strove to contextualize the performance, to interest his audience in the performance, to retain the audience’s attention. He did this through various techniques, such as facial expression, humour, instrumental music flourishes, and audience involvement (by directly addressing a member or members of the audience, involving the audience in singing, asking questions, making jokes, etc).⁵⁸

That the listeners are important for the song also applies for cases when audiences are silent, as for instance in The Gambia, where epic audiences are reported to listen in silence, whereas listeners to other genres may interfere in many ways. “A good singer transports his audience, and a good audience influences and furthers the singer’s performance”, states Reichl.⁵⁹

The nature of the audience is a decisive factor in shaping the content of the poems. Again, Lord offered the archetypical example with the Serb singer Stjepan Majstorovic in Bihac, who when he was with Serbs sang Christian songs, but to Moslems sang Moslem songs, or Christian songs in a form in which the Moslems won the battles.⁶⁰ Innes has taken a special interest in this mechanism in his fieldwork in The Gambia. He mentions that the singer Banna Kanute, whose performance of the *Sunjata Epic* he recorded at a school in Brikama in 1969 with the headmaster among the audience, took care to praise the teacher in his song. His brother Dembo Kanute took the opportunity to praise a patron by giving one of the patron’s ancestors a prominent role in defeating Sunjata’s arch-enemy Sumanguru.⁶¹ A Gambian singer whom Innes had not met personally, but whose performance for Radio Gambia he publishes, took

58. Mulokozi 2002, 307-8.

59. Host and guests decide upon the song: Phillips 1981, 8-9 (west Sumatra). Silent audience: Innes 1974, 10, 142. Quote: Reichl 1992, 114.

60. Lord (1960) 2000, 18-19.

61. Innes 1974, 31; 1976, 127, 182, 238-41.

pains in this broadcast version to mention the prime minister's family, no doubt hoping that the politician would listen to the programme.⁶² In Ossetic epic, which is performed for broad audiences including women and children, heroines may dedicate themselves to humble female duties such as carding, spinning, and doing the laundry,⁶³ very much as both heroines and goddesses sometimes do in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Similarly, it can be no coincidence that the *Siri Epic* not only features female protagonists, but gives women's experiences a prominent place in the narrative.

Slyomovics' edition of 'Awadallah's performance has the special advantage of including audience reactions. At a certain point there was some laughing and the scholar did not catch the point. When she asked afterwards, it turned out that the singer had related an amorous event in the heroic sphere in such a way that everyone immediately saw a parallel to a scandal in the village connected to the widow of a recently deceased blacksmith.⁶⁴ It is to be surmised that written versions of oral poems are full of such allusions that appealed to the original listeners but are not accessible to readers. Besides, some genres excel in cryptic references to be understood only by the initiated, as is often the case in sub-Saharan praise poetry, according to Barber. In connection with a very different genre, brief epigrammatic songs functioning as coded messages on Bellona, a small island in the Solomon group, Torben Monberg wrote: "As an anthropologist, one cannot help feeling some compassion for scholars who struggle with the understanding of content and meaning of written texts sometimes more than a millennium old and from cultures long extinct."⁶⁵

Scholars often emphasise the close connection between singers and audiences on one side and the heroic world on the other.⁶⁶ In Congo, Lega bards identify with their main hero, Kyanga, and may

62. Innes 1976, 182.

63. Bailey 1980, 258.

64. Slyomovicz 1987, 110-111, 137-8.

65. Barber 2005, 269-75; Monberg 1974, 427.

66. Biebuyck 1972, 267-9, 272-3; Bird 1972, 290; Slyomovics 1987, 3; Reynolds 1995, 72-88.

even be named after him.⁶⁷ About the above-mentioned Kirghiz bard Dzüzüp Mamay (b. 1918) a fabulous birth story is current, closely similar to the story of the hero Manas' legendary birth.⁶⁸ Parry's singers often understood their own lives in epic terms.⁶⁹ I had the same experience when Mirash Ndou told me incidents from his life. Sometimes a singer cries when his hero is in trouble.⁷⁰ There are traditions in which the heroes are thought to be called to life by the performance, and the singer identifies with the protagonist and speaks in the first person. Also without such supernatural overtones a narrative that is presented in the third person may shift to the first in moments of suspense.⁷¹ In some Indian and Siberian traditions epic performance is linked to religious possession rites. For instance Honko's Naika identifies with Siri's son Kumara during the harvest festival, and the women worshippers may be possessed by Siri and her daughter and granddaughters.⁷²

Even when the identification remains more general, it is not less important for that reason. That Ndou remembered his partisan audiences with such pleasure is probably due to the fact that both he and his listeners were inspired by the similarities connecting their own situations with those described in the songs. In this way, epic with its broad audience and historical content is an important means of ascertaining common values and establishing ideological identities.

The singer's education

Lord linked his discussion of formulas and themes to a description of how the young singer learned his art, and in spite of great variation in how systematically singers are trained in various epic tradi-

67. Biebuyck 1972, 262.

68. Ying 2001, 225.

69. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 389-90; Foley 1990, 45-8.

70. Reichl 1992, 116.

71. Cushing 1980, 226. - Bailey 1980, 249, asserts that the Ossetic singer experiences the events while telling of them. - Shift from third to first person: Slyomovics 1987, 242.

72. Honko 1998a, 454-98.

tions of the world, the concept is fundamentally the same everywhere: the trainee begins at an early age and learns by memorising. In Parry and Lord's Yugoslavia singers picked up their art more or less randomly, learning from such experienced singers as they happened to hear performing. The way Honko's Naika learned his art was also through a chain of non-formalised, but frequent and continued performances by experienced singers.⁷³ Roghair's Telugu singers were specialised in the *Palmadu Epic*, and sons learned the art from their fathers by attending their performances, but Roghair does not give details about their training.⁷⁴

In most societies where epic is cultivated by professional singers the training is more formalised and full of hardships. Still, the basic traits are the same. Learning normally begins early in life with the child attending his father or such guests as visit the family. Seydou tells of the Fulani singer Boûbacar Tinguidji in Mali that his mother came from a family of musicians, and that one of his maternal uncles gave him his first *hoddu* (the epic singer's instrument) on his seventh birthday.⁷⁵ 'Awadallah, too, told Slyomovics how his father had begun training him when he was seven. The father said a line of the poem and beat the boy with a stick until he repeated it correctly.⁷⁶ Similarly, the Kirghiz singer Mamay described to Reichl that his father and his elder brother had begun teaching him when he was eight years old. Every day the small Dzüzüp had to memorise an extract from an epic and repeat it until he was able to reproduce it without mistakes. Ever since, he stated, apart from eating and sleeping he had done nothing but learn and memorise.⁷⁷

Vibeke Børdahl describes the first steps of the young Yangzhou storyteller's training as follows:

At first the child was supposed to attend the performances of his father/master, waiting upon him and absorbing the whole atmosphere

73. Honko 1998a, 519-4. Cf. Bawden 1980, 296 (Mongol); Slyomovics 1987, 7 ('Awadallah).

74. Roghair 1982, 34, 39, 61-2.

75. Seydou 1972, 12.

76. Slyomovics 1987, 7.

77. Reichl 1992, 223. - Ying 2001 is a biography of Mamay.

of the art. Later he would not only attend the performances, but actively try to learn by heart his first story. In the beginning he would only learn a few sentences to retell, but little by little he would have to remember longer and longer passages. Together with the words he would also imitate the gestures and mime of his master. Every day the disciple would go with his master to the storytellers' house and listen to the public performance. Upon returning the master would teach him a passage, which he had to learn for the next day. When left alone he would try to reactivate the master's words in his mind, memorize and rehearse the words and gestures, called 'stage work' ... The next day he would have to 'return the text' ..., i.e. retell the passage for his master to correct and not infrequently give him a spank, if unsatisfactory.⁷⁸

Børdahl also publishes the autobiographies of seven storytellers, texts that are unusually informative about how they were taught their art. Just like epic singers, they began early, normally taught by their fathers; the training was very strict and often included beating. The training developed into apprenticeship with a master (sometimes still the father) and lasted several years until the master decided that the apprentice could be allowed to "cross the sea" = perform on his own. Besides careful memorising the training was focused on the various dialects to be used for various characters, and on how to engage the audience by means of gesture and eye contact.⁷⁹

Reynolds describes his own experience as a singer's trainee in Egypt, and the teaching method was the same, only more polite. The master showed him how to handle the *rabab*, and he soon picked up the technique. As for the text, the teacher sang a few lines to him and asked him to repeat them. The scholar admits that he was not very adept at learning them, so the master repeated them again and again. Reynolds tells that as a pupil he eventually acquired some skill in performing, but only texts he had memorised.⁸⁰

In traditions in which the singer accompanies himself while performing, an early step is to learn how to play the instrument. This is

78. Børdahl 1996, 21-2.

79. Børdahl & Ross 2002, 101-65.

80. Reynolds 1995, 42-4; 2000, 268.

how Lord described the young Serbo-Croatian singer's elementary training, what Sherungu told Biebuyck in Congo, and what Tinguidji said to Seydou in Mali.⁸¹

If the profession runs in a family, the grown-ups keep an eye on the small boys, considering whether some of them show a disposition for the art.⁸² Marshall Pihl's description of how a Korean *p'ansori* singer, a *kwangdae*, emerged from a hereditary shaman household gives an impression of the limited spectrum of possible future professions for those born into a tradition. The shamans were women and learned their craft from their mothers-in-law, and their husbands and sons were potential *p'ansori* singers:

The highest aspiration for a male born into such circumstances was to become a *kwangdae*. Lacking that potential, he would become a musician and accompany a shaman. Failing that, he would turn to tumbling or rope-walking or become a blacksmith. As a last resort, he could serve as a helper at shaman ceremonies.⁸³

Also without such a caste-like system, epic is often restricted to special families. Presumably such a system both furthers the art because the bard-to-be can begin his education at an early age and more or less grow into his profession, and hampers it because children of other families who could have become brilliant singers never enter the relevant social sphere. The system is not as closed as it might seem, however, since a gifted child may be adopted into a professional family.⁸⁴

Some kind of apprenticeship with a master is very widespread.⁸⁵

81. Lord (1960) 2000, 21; Seydou 1972, 12; Biebuyck 1978, 18-19. For Avdo Mededovic, however, the *gusle* was secondary. *SCHS* 3, 1974, 51.

82. Slyomovics 1987, 7: Because of his intelligence 'Awadallah, who was a younger brother, was selected to continue the family tradition, even though the profession normally passed from father to eldest son. - Kothari 1989, 103-4 (*Pabuji* performers in Rajasthan).

83. Pihl 1994, 8.

84. Børdahl & Ross 2002, 117 (a Yangzhou storyteller).

85. Niane 1960, 153-4 (Mande); Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 12-13 (Nyanga); Dumestre & Kesteloot 1975, 22 (Bambara); Nekljudov & Tömörörceren 1985, 6 (eastern

Respected singers are attended by a retinue of apprentices, and their teaching establishes a chain of transmission from master to pupils that scholars often refer to as schools.⁸⁶ Where singers are itinerant, this simple picture is, however, blurred by influences from other sources such as attending performances by bards trained in other schools.⁸⁷ In Korea, after attending the master the future singer of *p'ansori* often adds some years of solitary training in the wilderness. A main purpose is to train the voice to contend with the tremendous sounds heard in nature, such as the din of a waterfall.⁸⁸

There are masters who modernise their teaching. Kirghiz singers in socialist China are literate, and Dzüsüp Mamay's elder brother was an eager collector of epic and possessed many texts in written form. Therefore the texts that the future singer was memorising were written as well as oral. This in itself does not necessarily involve a change in method, and actually, as described by Reichl Mamay's way of learning was not unlike that experienced by 'Awadallah and Reynolds in Egypt. But a further step towards change has been taken by another Kirghiz teacher in Xinjiang, Mämbet Sart (born 1942), who teaches his apprentices by having them write the texts down or recording them on tape, and for Yangzhou storytellers the education has since the 1980s been taken over by drama schools, where pupils learn by heart from books.⁸⁹

Børdahl's storytellers are literate, too, and two of the seven say that written texts formed part of their training, but what they describe is far from the systematic way writing was used in Mamay's case. Some of them warn against using books and think it may damage the art.⁹⁰

Mongolian); Kothari 1989, 106-7 (Rajasthani); Reichl 1992, 71; 2001a, 18, 23 (Uzbek); Pihl 1994, 104-9 (Korean); Børdahl 1996, xxvi, 17-22 (Yangzhou); Revel 2000, 192-3 (Philippine); Mulokozi 2002, 305-6 (Haya in Tanzania); Wadley 2004, 65-7 (Rajasthani); Reichl 2007, 82-3, 95-7 (Karakalpak).

86. E.g. Zhirmunsky 1969, 331-2 (Uzbek, Kazakh, and Karakalpak).

87. Innes 1974, 6; Reichl 1992, 69-72, 90.

88. Pihl 1994, 104-5.

89. Reichl 1992, 87; Børdahl & Ross 2002, 79.

90. Børdahl & Ross 2002, 129-31, 149 (writing as part of education); 138, 152, 161-2 (warnings).

In his description of how Karakalpak singers are trained, Reichl emphasises that “the singer learned epics, individual poems with a specific plot and a specific lexical and poetic patterning. ... Naturally, the apprentice singer would by imitating and learning arrive at a verbal and musical competence in epic diction that gives him a certain freedom in modelling a particular scene or episode.”⁹¹ Also in his study of Turkic epic in general Reichl stresses that what future singers learn from their masters are specific epic poems, and he compares the system with the Suzuki method in musical teaching.⁹² It is by means of memorisation that the singer achieves a level at which he moves freely when (re)composing in performance; Reichl describes the learning process as an internalising of songs that enables the singer to be creative.⁹³ This understanding of the pedagogical system is confirmed by Reynolds’ experience: to memorise texts is a first step towards the fuller mastery of the craft that consists in being also able to handle the traditional poems more freely. Furthermore, when one of the Yangzhou storytellers described his learning process as listening to his stepfather’s performances and “eating them down in his stomach”, that must be a description of the same process.⁹⁴

Whatever the variations among traditions, this description of a teaching practice that aims at training the memory and by means of this actually enables the singer to improvise by building up a great stock of more or less ready-made formulas and themes in both music and words, appears to cover the general experience. Whether the apprenticeship consists in conscious learning by heart, as described by Reynolds and Reichl, or a more gradual growing used to how songs are performed, as maintained by Lord, memorising plays a dominant part in the training of an epic singer.

A carefully structured education system is reported from west Africa, south of the Sahara. Singers of Mande epic are recruited

91. Reichl 2007, 95; Biebuyck 1972, 266 asserts the same for Nyanga and Lega singers.

92. Reichl 1992, 263-4.

93. Reichl 1992, 265; 2001b, 233-42.

94. Børdahl 1996, 227.

from a special family. Their training begins at home at an early age when the child listens to his parents or guest singers. In early adolescence the aspiring bard is taught to play the relevant instruments, and later the formal apprenticeship begins. This may last several years, at the master's discretion; a time span of five to ten years is normal. The apprentice acts as assistant singer and musician and may travel far and wide with his master, learning not only from him, but becoming acquainted with traditions from other regions as well. The training culminates at the 're-roofing ceremony', a great festival in the village of Kaaba in southern Mali that is held every seven years and attracts participants from all Mande areas. Here the reciting of the *Sunjata Epic* has a prominent place, and singers who have attended can afterwards claim this as a guarantee of the authenticity of their text.⁹⁵

Mvet performers in Gabon and Cameroun end their training with an initiation ceremony that lasts several days, during which the aspiring bard receives the magic symbols of his trade and gives a night performance.⁹⁶

A similar final test is reported for Uzbek singers: the pupil has to recite a whole epic before a selected audience of other singers, after which he receives the title of *bakshy* with the right to perform independently.⁹⁷

Sometimes fully fledged singers meet in public competitions. Zhirmunsky describes such customs from Kazakh and Kirghiz traditions. Here they occur in many variations and various genres. Male singers compete with female rivals, and families or tribes challenge each other. They praise their own side and mock or abuse their opponents, and the contests demand wisdom and knowledge, the ability to solve riddles, and promptness in improvisation.⁹⁸ Kirghiz contests in epic performance are described by Lang Ying. He relates that the above-mentioned bard Sagimbay Orozbaqov

95. Biebuyck 1976, 20; Johnson (1986) 2003, 24-5, 89-90; Bird 1972, 279 describes a similar training for Mande hunters' bards.

96. Biebuyck 1976, 20.

97. Zhirmunsky 1969, 330.

98. Zhirmunsky 1969, 329-30.

competed with another Manas bard, but simply states that the listeners were unanimous about the latter having won. The story continues, however. In the audience there was another bard, Ebrayin Akunbe, who was not impressed since the two star singers had performed only the three first sections of the epic. He then added five more sections, partly story-telling, partly singing.⁹⁹ Here, then, is a clear criterion for quality, that of knowing most and being able to perform the fullest version. This event must have taken place before 1930, when Orozbaqov died. Later on, in the former socialist countries, the state often arranged public festivals and competitions.

Even though accomplished singers have learned their art by means of hard training, the result, their marvellous epics, is often felt to be supernatural and to go back to a divine origin. The same Kirghiz bard Mamay, who had been trained by his brother, maintained that he had been instructed by the heroes of the epic who had met him in a dream,¹⁰⁰ and Slyomovics' 'Awadallah told the following story of how his grandfather had been initiated:

While wandering in the mountains, ['Ali] came upon a book in the desert. That night, sleeping in a cave, a certain al-Khidr came to 'Ali in a dream, saying: *Igra?*, 'read' or 'recite', because he was illiterate. 'Ali answered, "I cannot." Again, al-Khidr commanded him, *Igra?* and again 'Ali replied, "I cannot." Yet a third time, al-Khidr said, *Igra?* and this time to his surprise 'Ali could read what was written in the book, and he began to recite. This book was called *sirat il 'arab*, the epic or saga of the Arabs. 'Ali memorized this book and taught his son 'Abd aj-Jalil, who taught his son, 'Awadallah. After memorizing the book 'Ali lost the ability to read and also the book.¹⁰¹

99. Ying 2001, 223-4, 231.

100. Ying 2001, 226-8. For similar dream-initiations cf. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 12 (Nyanga); Zhirmunsky 1969, 332-4 (Kirghiz, Uzbek, and Kazakh); Opland 1983, 64, 96-7 (Xhosa); Gyaltscho 2001, 280-86 (Tibetan).

101. Slyomovics 1987, 11-12.

Narrative strategies

In his ambitious attempt at describing the differences between orality and literacy, Walter J. Ong stated that oral poets were unable to build up a plot so that the tension rises to a climactic knot, which is then untied. According to Ong, if the poet of the *Iliad* sets off his narrative *in medias res*, he does so because he has no other choice.¹⁰² This categorical statement is not borne out by fieldwork experience, from which a much more varied picture emerges.

Charles Bird describes the sophistication of storytelling devices in both epics and hunters' songs of the Mande, in which flashbacks and subplots are frequent and usually well integrated into the main plot.¹⁰³ In contrast, Reichl states that Turkic narratives normally proceed in a linear progression without flashbacks and anticipations, except for dreams and visions.¹⁰⁴

Biebuyck emphasises that Lega and Nyanga epics are admired for their completeness and logical coherence: "There is a complete text in the mind of every knowledgeable individual narrator – a text that has a beginning and an end – which follows a basic structure and constitutes a coherent and well-rounded whole." Singers who do not have sufficient control over plot and themes may be rejected by audiences. Similarly, Georg Danek's experience from studying both Parry and Lord's publications and classical collections of Serbo-Croatian oral epics is that a coherent plot is a normal characteristic, and Innes points out that singers cannot afford to be boring since they depend on their audiences for their living and consequently seek performances that can hold the interest of their listeners.¹⁰⁵

Boyer relates how *mvét* singers among the Fang in Cameroun and Gabon during night-time performances build up suspense, but instead of reaching a solution break off abruptly, either at cock-crow

102. Ong (1982) 2002, 138-44.

103. Bird 1972, 282; Johnson (1986) 2003, 40.

104. Reichl 1992, 311-12.

105. Biebuyck 1972, 265-6, quote 266; 1978, 4; Danek 1998, 511-12. Similar statements in Dumestre & Kesteloot 1975, 28 (Bambara); Innes 1976, 27 (Gambian); Malik 2005, 67 (Rajasthani).

or with some self-imposed cause; for instance, they may scold the audience for not being sufficiently attentive.¹⁰⁶ Such a report should not be taken as evidence against the importance of a coherent plot; on the contrary, it confirms that both singer and audience expect the narrative to be brought to a satisfactory end, since it is this expectation the singer exploits.

In his edition of the *Radin Suane Epic*, which was performed over two night-time sessions, Collins mentions that he had the impression that the bard was used to performing the poem in the course of one night, and that on this occasion he drew out the story to increase his pay.¹⁰⁷ On this background it is especially impressive how well structured the poem is. Its two halves proceed as parallels, each of them with a clear, rounded structure. With the increase in epics recorded as versions by individual singers and accessible in print, readers now have rich possibilities of assessing how various traditional artists handle the plot of their story.

Børdahl compares the way the *Shuihu* story is handled in Chinese written fiction and in oral storytelling. Vernacular novels begin with prologues and make sure that readers are informed of the events that precede the action, whereas when the storyteller opens his long session of daily storytelling he does so without a prologue and instead heads directly for the most popular story, the one in which Wu Sung fights a tiger. It is assumed that the audience already has some idea about how the hero arrived at the inn where that story takes its departure, and the storyteller concentrates on catching his audience's interest so as to make them return for the next day's entertainment. In this case, then, Ong's opinion is confirmed. But in the very orderly arrangement of continued storytelling that follows, the daily performance lasts two hours with each day's portion having its own coherent structure. Parallel to Boyer's report, Børdahl describes how the storyteller takes care regularly to end the narrative on a point of suspense and an exhortation to the audience to return next day if they want to know what happened next.¹⁰⁸

106. Boyer 1988, 37; cf. *SCHS* 3, 1974, 68, for a similar case in Yugoslavia.

107. W.A. Collins 1998, 11.

108. Børdahl 1996, 184-7.

The common denominator seems to be the relationship between performer and audience. Oral artists cannot afford to bore their audiences but are bound to open their narratives in a way that engages their listeners. That may differ from one singing (or storytelling) community to another, and accordingly, a narrative may begin with some particularly exciting episode or with the dramatic circumstances of a hero's birth, or with whatever else may attract the listeners' attention. If the narrative is continued from one session to another, a device to convince the audience to return for the next session is called for.

Very comprehensive traditions may evolve as continued performance of unified epics over several days or nights, they may exist as cycles of separate episodes, or they may place themselves in between by having a more or less fixed order in which otherwise independent events are considered to have taken place.

In his description of epic traditions of the Mande, John William Johnson distinguishes between cyclic and unified traditions: the unified is "one whose core and augmenting episodes produce a single narrative ... the core episodes must not be omitted when the epic is recited *in toto*", whereas the cyclic consists of "several epics, each with its own set of core and augmenting episodes, together making up an extended narrative". He draws attention to the peculiar fact that the two most important epic traditions in the area, those concerned with Sunjata and Da Monzon, exist as unified and cyclic respectively.¹⁰⁹ In between these poles there is a gradation of possible strategies. It seems to be the same experience that in a Chinese scholar's terminology is called 'single-plot epics', 'tandem-compound epics', and 'juxtaposition-compound epics'.¹¹⁰

An example of unified narrative is the Turkic *Alpomysh Epic*. Versions may be performed during one session; but the best known

109. Johnson (1986) 2003, 27-8; cf. Barber 2007, 50. – Cf. Dumestre 1979, 27-31, who describes in some detail "la geste de Ségou", the cycle consisting of individual "épopées" telling of events during the reign of Da Monzon. The poems published in Dumestre & Kesteloot 1975 and Dumestre 1979 are Bambara epics belonging to this cycle, while Seydou 1972 and 1976 published Fulani epics concerned with heroes fighting against Da Monzon.

110. Rinchindorji 2001, 384-9.

one, by the singer Fozil Yo'ldosh-o'g'li, is said to have been performed over two nights, and other singers prided themselves in being able to give a continued performance that would last all the nights of the Ramadan.¹¹¹ A famous anecdote tells of the Uzbek bard Ernazar-shoir that he performed the *Alpomysh Epic* to the emir of Bukhara over six months by steadily inventing new obstacles for the hero's horse when it was on its way to save Alpomysh from the dungeon.¹¹² The *Edige Epic* is also unified. In India Honko's *Siri Epic* is unified, and to judge from Beck's description the same holds good for the *Brothers' Epic*.¹¹³ In Africa the *Sunjata Epic*, as already mentioned, is said to be unified, as is the *Ozidi Epic* from Nigeria according to J.P. Clark.¹¹⁴ The Tibetan *Gesar Epic* also seems to be unified, following the hero from his birth until he ascends to heaven; the middle part, in which his various fabulous deeds are told, allows for few or many episodes, and it seems that this part may function as a cycle of poems within the overall unified structure.¹¹⁵

A cyclic tradition consists of episodes that are self-contained narratives centred on the same protagonists or evolving within a general framework of events. The narrator or his audience are free to select the story they find most suited for a given situation.¹¹⁶ Such was Parry and Lord's Serbo-Croatian tradition, and the neighbouring Albanian tradition likewise. The same is true of the Fulani tradition in Mali that celebrates heroes who fought Da Monzon.¹¹⁷ According to Blackburn and Flueckiger, this is the case for most Indian traditions, too. Peter J. Claus makes the point in some detail as regards the Tulu *Kordabbu Epic* in Karnataka, and Susan Wadley states

111. Reichl 2001a, 22. Parry had the same experience in Yugoslavia, Lord (1960) 2000, 15.

112. Reichl 2001a, 79.

113. Beck 1982; Honko 1998a & b.

114. Johnson (1986) 2003, 27-9; Clark 1977.

115. Enhong 2001, 298.

116. Biebuyck 1972, 260.

117. Roghair 1982; Slyomovics 1987; Seydou 1972; Reynolds 1995; Seydou 1976, 39. Cf. Cushing 1980, 227 (Ob Ugrian); Phillips 1981, 9 (Minangkabau); Pihl 1994, 6 (Korean).

that the Hindi *dhola* in north India is never performed as a continuous story.¹¹⁸

The traditions studied by Roghair, Slyomovics and Reynolds are also cyclic, but singers are in relative accord about a proper order in which to perform the episodes if more than one is called for.¹¹⁹ Reynolds even reports that his informants, who did not usually perform more than one episode at a time, had in their memories ready-made passages to serve as a kind of glue between episodes in such cases.¹²⁰ Nigel Phillips says of the *Sijobang* tradition in west Sumatra that it is performed in one or a few episodes at a time, but that singers asserted that there was a proper order of the episodes, and that the full narrative would take seven nights to perform. However, the number of episodes they mentioned differed considerably, from two to twenty-six. When at a certain point Phillips asked the singer Munin to recite a fairly full summary for the tape recorder, the singer agreed, but nevertheless the scholar was given a coherent narrative that was perhaps just as detailed as it would have been in a sung performance. As published, it consists of seventeen episodes. Wadley reports that performers of *dhola* in North India asserted that this cycle consists of fifty-two episodes but could name no more than twenty. The *Pabuji Epic* in Rajasthan is always performed as episodes, but singers and audiences agree on an order of events that takes the story from the hero's birth to his death and the vengeance taken for it. Not all singers know all episodes.¹²¹ The Kirghiz *Manas Epic* seems to be of the same type.¹²² So the *Sijobang Epic of Anggun Nan Tungga*, the *Palnadu Epic*, the *Pabuji Epic*, the *Sirat Bani Hilal*, and the *Manas Epic* range somewhere in between traditions for cyclic or unified performance.

In his study of the Turkic epic tradition of Alpomysh, Reichl describes how the popularity of this hero led to a 'cyclisation': songs

118. Blackburn & al. 1989, 11 (general); 198 (the *Alha Epic*, Hindi, north India); 203 (the *Annammar Epic*, Tamil, Kongu area); 219 (*dhola*, Hindi, north India); 231-2 (the *Kordabbu Epic*, Tulu, Karnataka); Claus 1989 (the *Kordabbu Epic*, Tulu, Karnataka); Wadley 2004, xii (*dhola*, Hindi, north India).

119. Roghair 1982, vii, 66-7; Slyomovics 1987, 23; Reynolds 1995, 18-20.

120. Reynolds 1995, 19-20.

121. Phillips 1981, 18-29; Wadley 1989, 79-80; Smith 1989, 30-32; 1991, 18.

122. Ying 2001, 233.

were developed to celebrate Alpomysh's sons and even the father-in-law of one of these sons.¹²³ Here, then, we have a unified epic giving rise to a cycle of related episodes.

Aditya Malik, who recorded a version of the *Devnarayan Epic* from the singer Hukamaram Bhopa in Rajasthan, relates how afterwards when he asked for comments on various details, the singer's explanations were often in terms of another story that had taken place prior to the given event in the narrative, so that Malik got the impression that the entire narrative was an intersecting web of different narratives.¹²⁴ Biebuyck reports something similar about the Mwindo tradition: besides the great epic cycle a lot of prose tales circulate featuring both the main hero and many of the other figures involved.¹²⁵

When attempting to classify various epic traditions according to narrative strategies it is not always easy for a reader to reach a clear concept of their character. For instance, whereas for Clark the *Ozidi Epic* is unified, Isidore Okpewho says that it is never told in full but that selected episodes are recited over a period of seven evenings.¹²⁶ Similarly, the *Siri Epic*, which was so magnificently documented as a unified epic by Honko, belongs to the Tulu *paddana* tradition in Karnataka that is described by Claus as a story framework from which particular versions are drawn, but which never exists in full as a performance event.¹²⁷

Part of the problem is to be found in the cooperation between scholar and singer, and therefore it is of paramount importance that editions of oral epic state precisely what the scholar asked for when he/she agreed with a bard to record a version of the epic. Phillips, Roghair, Smith, Reynolds, Honko, and Malik are all explicit about having asked for long performances. In all cases their informants asserted that this way of telling the story was unusual for them; normally they offered selected episodes.¹²⁸ When Biebuyck says the

123. "Zyklisierung", Reichl 2001a, 32.

124. Malik 2005, xx.

125. Biebuyck 1978, 114-24.

126. Okpewho 2004, 63.

127. Claus 1989, 56-7.

128. Phillips 1981, 18, 29; Roghair 1982, 37, 129; Smith 1991, 17; Reynolds 1995, 19;

same of the bard Candi Rureke¹²⁹, we may surmise that this scholar, too, had requested a performance of the whole story. The same is implied when he says that he had at first received only “fragments” of epic stories before he met with Rureke, and also that during his years of fieldwork he found only four singers who knew the whole *Mwindo Epic*.¹³⁰

Scholars studying epic traditions often go for long performances, both when deciding on which singer to concentrate on and when planning a registration. There is more than one reason for this: long performances are admired by both scholars and singing communities, and part of the attraction oral epic works, also for outsiders, is the wonder at the feats of memory and performance involved in large-scale traditions. Besides, somewhere in the background the *Iliad* lurks as the archetype of the genre, even for scholars who do not have as their purpose to study living traditions in order to understand Homer. Stephen Belcher and Karin Barber, both of whom write about African oral epic, point to the importance of Homer for achieving an understanding of the genre, and Honko states: “We can hardly overestimate the dominance of Homer in everything we think and say about epics.”¹³¹ If not for other reasons, the *Iliad* is there because the Greek epic has set the standard for handbook descriptions of the genre. Beck and Slyomovics are unusual in having selected normal performances and recorded them live.

If asked for a full version, a singer may choose expansion or concatenation. When Parry’s Mededovic was asked to sing a song that he had heard only once, he kept the course of events, but expanded the narrative to three times its length. Also in other cases he prided himself on his ability to “ornament” songs and in that way perform the same texts, only in much longer versions than his models.¹³² But when singers are asked to perform the entire epic, they rather choose to begin with the beginning, say, the birth of the hero, and link epi-

Honko 1998a, 267, 276; Malik 2005, xvii.

129. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 14.

130. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, vi; Biebuyck 1978, 23.

131. Belcher 1999, xiii; Barber 2007, 47; Honko 1998c, 12.

132. Lord (1960) 2000, 78-81, 102-5, 223-34; *SCHS* 3, 1974, 9-11, 67, 74.

sodes together in a roughly chronological order. For instance, the four versions of the *Mwindo Epic* published by Biebuyck all begin with the hero's father, who declares to his pregnant wife/wives that he does not want a son; in all four versions the child nevertheless turns out to be male. However, soon this leads to rather differing consequences, and gradually the four versions proceed to tell each its own story, with little in common except the chronological strategy and the fact that the events lead to a rounded, harmonious ending.¹³³ It is remarkable that singers around the world all seem to be able without further ado to conform to the scholars' wishes and structure their performances in ways they have not attempted before.

These considerations point to the following conclusion: when a fuller version of an epic is requested than what is normally performed, the singer feels obliged to respect the given course of events and attempts to do so. Passages may change place, and, especially, there is nothing to prevent the bard from introducing expansions that are not felt to interfere with the facts, but a song about how Meho won his bride must remain a song on this topic. On the other side, a demand for the entire epic opens up for a concatenation of otherwise independent episodes in some kind of chronological order. In their eagerness to document a given tradition in the most comprehensive form possible, scholars tend to ask for the entire story, and accordingly the bard seeks a reasonable beginning, for instance the birth of the hero, and continues from there by means of concatenation. Therefore the impression given in printed editions, that concatenation is more frequent than expansion, is probably misleading.

133. I analysed the first version of the *Mwindo Epic* in Jensen 1980, 38-9, and was criticised by Campagnet 1981, 558 for calling it episodic. This criticism was based on a misreading of my argument; what I did was to point out the parallels between beginning and end as a way in which this version establishes a harmonious balance.

Summary

The scope of epic singers' repertoires is overwhelming. Singer and audience meet in the performance arena, to which both parties bring their knowledge and expectations so as to give a metonymic quality to the performance. Singers of large-scale epic are professional and depend on their art for their living. Most are itinerant, but sometimes a patron engages a singer to stay at his court and specialise in his family's history. Singers' education begins at home and continues into apprenticeships that may last many years. Their epics are either unified, in that they tell a linear story of events, or cyclic, consisting of independent episodes. If a bard is requested to perform a song as fully as possible, he may choose between expansion and concatenation.

CHAPTER 4

The flexible oral epic

Stability and change

Lord was emphatic about the constant flux of the Serbo-Croatian epics and maintained that singers did not memorise texts, but recreated them in each performance; no two performances of the “same” epic were ever alike. This constant variation has been confirmed again and again in fieldwork and I have found no exceptions.¹ Where reports differ is in the description of how much performances vary, in what ways, and why.

Memorisation plays an important role in the training of a singer-to-be, and also when the fully fledged bard learns a new song. But afterwards he works the song over until it finds a form that suits him, and once it is well established in his memory, he handles it with perfect freedom. Honko is clear in his statement: “The variation in oral epic is far more extensive and radical than is generally assumed by scholars versed in the theories of literary culture.”² On the other hand, Lord was also impressed by the conservativeness of the tradition, underlining that the basic stories were carefully preserved.³

To further complicate the matter Reynolds relates from his time as an apprentice in al-Bakatush that his master could repeat even longish passages almost verbatim for several hours and even over several days. But when Reynolds compared these passages with poems he had recorded in performance, the passages they had rehearsed during the lessons were substantially different from what the teacher actually sang to his audiences.⁴ So here we have a sing-

1. Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 3, 62-5, 95-116 is particularly insistent on the general variability of oral poetry.

2. Honko 1998a, 66; cf. Claus 1989, 71; Johnson (1986) 2003, 33, 40.

3. Lord (1960) 2000, 120.

4. Reynolds 2000, 268.

er who was perfectly able to perform the same song in the same way on different occasions, but did not.

With explicit reference to Lord, Biebuyck described the art of the African epic singer as follows:

He creates while he performs. He selects, adjusts, and modifies episodes, sometimes in response to the actual composition of his audience or in response to the social position of his hosts and sponsors. On the other hand, he acts and performs in an ethnic world where principles of conformity and tradition are very strong. Moreover, he consciously represents and follows certain “schools” of tradition, since he is a member of a certain family of bards or a certain lineage, and since he learned his art from particular masters.⁵

Similar descriptions of the creative singer who moves in a conservative framework recur in fieldwork reports. When scholars sum up their views concerning stability and change, they regularly express themselves in paradoxes. Lord wrote: “In a variety of ways a song in tradition is separate, yet inseparable from other songs”, and Roghair stated that conservatism and innovation were integral parts of the Palnadu tradition.⁶ It is not easy to get a clear impression of just how tradition and creativity blend.

One of the problems is that scholars do not share a single, clear terminology, and that it is therefore often difficult to ascertain what is meant by their various descriptions of stability and change. For instance, Smith states of the performance of the *Pabuji Epic* in western India: “The epic text (which is fixed and memorized), and its deeper meaning, are not static: singers learn story-episodes and story-interpretations from one another.”⁷ So here it seems that “a

5. Biebuyck 1976, 21; cf. Zhirmunsky 1969, 325-9 (central Asian); Johnson (1986) 2003, 22-9 (Mande).

6. Lord (1960) 2000, 123; Roghair 1982, viii.

7. Smith 1980, 54-5; cf. his discussion with Lord, Smith 1989, 36-7. – Similarly, when Stuart Blackburn describes the “prior preparation” of Tamil bow songs as a method in between “prior composition” and “simultaneous composition” mainly because bow singers do not compose their songs (Blackburn 1988, xx-xxi), I doubt whether the method actually differs from what Lord called composition in performance. Epic singers do not compose their songs either.

fixed and memorized text” means the same as what others call a text that is infinitely varied. The ambiguity is intensified when Smith’s statement is compared with how another scholar describes the same tradition; from Komal Kothari’s analysis of *Pabuji* performers it appears that they differ importantly from each other in their ability to add nuances and elaborate emotional situations as well as in the mere fullness of the versions they perform.⁸

An important step towards clarity is found in Honko’s distinction between the tradition and the individual singer. Of the tradition he states:

The assumption of a collectively shared basic folklore text becomes, in spite of its prima facie plausibility, impossible to maintain in the comparison of all the available tellings, not to speak of all the possible tellings which were once produced but never reached the scholar’s desk or are just emerging.⁹

As for the singer, Honko introduces the term ‘mental text’, a variable template existing in the singer’s mind, to be abbreviated or expanded according to circumstances and adapted to various modes of performance. Even this mental text does not retain a fixed form but is altered and developed during the career of a bard. Honko also speaks of mental editing: if a singer performs his text frequently, he will be continually revising his mental text on the basis of his experience of audience reactions.¹⁰

Genre-dependence and tradition-dependence

Notwithstanding the almost chaotic variety among descriptions of stability and change, some general features can be discerned. To begin with, two facts must be noted: the rules governing epic are not common to all oral poetry, and among different epic traditions

8. Kothari 1989, especially 106.

9. Honko 1998a, 92.

10. Honko 1998a, 92-9.

some are more stable than others. Foley speaks of genre-dependence and tradition-dependence.¹¹

To begin with the latter point, it is complicated to ascertain with any precision how much epic traditions differ from each other in this respect because they are normally described by different scholars whose terminologies are not immediately comparable. But the volume on Indian epic edited by Blackburn and others is the result of detailed discussions among the contributing scholars, and their descriptions of the various traditions presented were adjusted to conform with common concepts. On this basis it seems that in India there is a difference in flexibility in that traditions closely linked with ritual are more stable than those performed on secular occasions.¹² Furthermore, the epics performed before a *par* (*Pabuji* and *Devnarayan* in north western India) must be less flexible than purely verbal traditions because the illustrations are fixed and work as an aide-mémoire.¹³

For the main part scholars dwell on the infinite variation of traditions. For instance, when Seydou considers the historicity of the epic tradition among the Fulani, which takes its content from their wars against their Bambara neighbours c. 1800, she concludes that historical events only serve as a background to the fictitious moral portraits drawn of the main characters. In their discussions of the parallel Bambara tradition, Lilyan Kesteloot states that the *griots* mix up the various events, and Gérard Dumestre points out how the epics attach the heroic deeds to Da Monzon even though in actual fact his father was the great ruler of Ségou. Compared to that, the Turkic traditions studied by Reichl seem remarkably stable.¹⁴ In general it is often emphasised, also in connection with stable traditions, that however much epics may celebrate heroes and events known from other sources to have a place in history, they are of little value as sources for the historian.¹⁵

11. Foley 1990, 1-5.

12. Blackburn 1989, 31.

13. Smith 1991, 8-9.

14. Seydou 1972, 44; similar statements in Innes 1974, 26; 1976, 18. - Dumestre & Kesteloot 1975, 12-22; Dumestre 1979, 26-7.

15. Innes 1974, 26; Johnson (1986) 2003, 6-7; Reichl 2007, 116-24.

That various oral genres are characterised each by their own rules of stability or change is, on the other hand, clear. Like their written counterparts, oral literatures consist of a great variety of genres, depending on the various occasions that call for performance. There is prose and poetry, each field containing a broad spectrum of different forms. Of poetic genres some are meant for solo performance and others to be sung or chanted in unison, or a lead singer may be accompanied by group refrains. Some poetry is performed by amateurs, some by professionals. There are songs to relieve the burden of hard work and songs that serve to heighten the atmosphere of festive occasions. Some songs are there for their own sake, to give words to feelings or just to please and prevent boredom. The hunter may praise his game, the nomad his cattle, the Bedouin his camels.¹⁶ Rulers may support professional singers at their courts, and also humbler patrons may engage performers to entertain at weddings or funerals, etc. The performance arenas of different genres involve different expectations. In connection with African “orature” Karin Barber states that “literary criticism without genre ... [is] without history and without culture”.¹⁷

Genres meant primarily for entertainment may be freely varied, and the singer is allowed to adapt the performance to the given situation as he or she feels like. Wadley writes that when she discussed aesthetics with the Hindi *dhola*-singer Ram Swarup, he stated that good performances depended on telling the story in a clear fashion and providing variety. Marshall Pihl even refers to a master singer of Korean *p’ansori* who is reported to have said: “A singer is like a fabric seller. To the customer who asks for silk, he gives silk, and to the customer asking for cotton, he gives cotton”.¹⁸

There are even genres in which improvisation is aimed at as a primary goal, normally in combination with other formal demands. An odd example is the *dudak degmez*, a form of competition in Turkish Anatolia in which competitors improvise on given topics, but

16. Bird 1972; Morris 1964; 1980; Kurpershoek 1994.

17. Barber 2007, 45.

18. Wadley 1989, 97; Pihl 1994, 9.

their poems are not allowed to contain any labials.¹⁹ In a more widespread form of competition two singers have a dialogue so that one of them performs a song on a certain topic, and the other then has to immediately compose another song on the same topic while conforming to the same formal demands in music and wording, at the same time varying, punning on, or creating riddles in connection with the first performance. Derek Collins has demonstrated that this kind of ‘capping’ was widespread in Greece from the late archaic to the classical period.²⁰

While the genres in which creativity is an asset belong to the category of ‘lies’, ‘true stories’ aim at transmitting inherited knowledge as precisely as possible.²¹ In the latter category, the singer’s professional pride first and foremost concerns his memory, and respect for what is considered truth is a regulating factor of the utmost importance.²² As defined in the present study, this is where epic belongs. In his self-presentation the Mande bard Mamadou Kouyaté puts it as follows:

Je tiens ma science de mon père Djeli Kedian qui la tient aussi de son père; l’Histoire n’a pas de mystère pour nous; nous enseignons au vulgaire ce que nous voulons bien lui enseigner, c’est nous qui détenons les clefs des douze portes du Manding.

Je connais la liste de tous les souverains qui se sont succédés au trône du Manding ...

J’ai enseigné à des rois l’Histoire de leurs ancêtres afin que la vie des Anciens leur serve d’exemple, car le monde est vieux, mais l’avenir sort du passé.

Ma parole est pure et dépeignée de tout mensonge; c’est la parole de

19. Gürsoy-Naskali 2000. – Some of the competitions mentioned by Zhirmunsky 1969, 329-30 (Central Asian) are also concerned with improvisation.

20. D. Collins 2004. – Also in this form such competitions are popular in Turkic traditions. Towards the end of the *Alpomysk Epic* they play an important role, embedded in the epic, Reichl 2001a, 63, 278-92. In ancient literature the form is known from Theocritus 5, 6, and 8 and Virgil *Ed.* 3 and 7.

21. Olrik (1921) 1992, 3; Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 10; Reichl 1992, 125; Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 56. – I agree with Finkelberg 2005, 9-15 when she stresses that the mythical past cannot just be reconstructed at will to suit the present.

22. Slyomovics 1987, 13.

mon père; c'est la parole du père de mon père. Je vous dirai la parole de mon père telle que je l'ai recue; les griots de roi ignorent le mensonge.²³

Similarly, in Turkic epic the introductory formulas often stress the authenticity of the stories by referring to their transmission from singer to singer, or the performance ends with a poetic genealogy of this kind. We find the same approach when the bard Bamba Suso in The Gambia opened his performance by asserting that he had been taught by his father, who had, in his turn, been taught by his father, and this grandfather of Bamba Suso had learned his songs directly from the jinns, who had also given him his instrument, the *kora*.²⁴ Such passages correspond to how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* appeal to the Muse as their authority. When it is also sometimes mentioned that some element of fiction might occur,²⁵ this resembles how Hesiod's Muses stated that they knew both how to tell truths and how to tell lies (*Th.* 27-8), and it actually underlines the importance of this criterion for the genre.

This comes out, again, when closely related genres are compared. Bird describes two such genres among the Mande, national epic and hunters' songs. They share a series of stylistic, structural, and thematic traits, they are performed to similar kinds of music, and the bards are trained in similar ways. But they differ in prestige and social function. The epics are recognised as the symbol of the origin, growth, and development of the state, whereas the hunters' songs serve to cement relations within a particular group. The epic contains passages of factual importance, such as genealogies. It is the property of bards from one specific caste, and these are formal institutional figures in the community, whereas any talented person is allowed to train as a hunters' singer. The epics are products of a long tradition, while it is not unusual to find an artist who creates new heroic songs dealing with the fairly recent deeds of a local hunter.²⁶ In this case, then, the singers' backgrounds, the content of

23. Niane 1960, 11-12.

24. Reichl 1992, 306; Zhirmunsky 1969, 332; Innes 1974, 41.

25. Reichl 1992, 125-6, 307.

26. Bird 1972, 278-9, 290-91.

their poems, and their social status contribute to distinguishing between two related poetic forms, and both singers and audiences have different expectations of their stability, accepting innovations in hunters' songs that they would not like to encounter in epics.²⁷

In his study of a ritual narrative, the *Bagre*, belonging to the LoDagaba in northern Ghana, Jack Goody considers various factors that may serve to fix an otherwise flexible text. Among these, writing is the most important. In purely oral traditions, he points to the control exercised by the audience, and especially its elder members, as decisive, but also states that audience control does not prevent the constant change of a text. Finally, he asserts that a text linked with a ritual is more stable than other texts because ritual acts remain more unchanged than myth.²⁸

The same song

The expectation of epic singers and their audiences is that what is being performed is a careful transmission of inherited songs. Lord stated as much when he wrote that originality was a concept foreign to the singer, and one that he would avoid, if he understood it.²⁹

In the conversations Parry and Lord had with their informants, respect for the precise transmission dominated all discussions of the singer's art. A good voice, a clear presentation, a comprehensive repertoire, and skill at ornamenting were admired qualities, too, but when the scholars insisted on being told what was most important, singers always chose the unaltered reproduction of the epic. The ambition was not only to sing what one had learned, but to tell of the events exactly as they had taken place once upon a time.³⁰ When being asked which of two different versions of a song he preferred, the bard Mujo Kukuruzovic answered: "The one [I sang] this morning, because, you know, I've heard it done that way more times."³¹

27. Reichl 1992, 125 mentions a very similar distinction between epic and romance in Turkic traditions.

28. Goody & Gandah 1980, 33, 48-9.

29. Lord (1960) 2000, 44-5.

30. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 236-45; 3, 1974, 72. Cf. Honko 1998a, 546.

31. Foley 1990, 360; cf. 50.

The criterion was not a better performance or a more coherent story, nor anything the singer had himself added to the song, but the reliability of the model and the singer's proficiency in reproducing it. Avdo Mededovic, who was very proud of his virtuosity in embellishing songs, saw no conflict between lengthening and transmitting truthfully, and he told the scholars of the following incident with special pride: At a certain occasion he had performed a song that he had learned from a book, and in the audience there happened to be a man who owned that very book. Afterwards, this man asserted that Mededovic had sung the text exactly as it was on the printed page.³² The anecdote is less informative about actual fact than about the bard's professional aspiration.

The belief that epic songs recount what actually happened in the distant past may well cause speculation. Singers and audiences may marvel at the fact that a poem can tell of events that happened long ago and far away, and in many cases the tradition is considered a divine gift. Individual bards may make mistakes or change songs on purpose, but that precise transmission is both possible and normal is not doubted. When in the beginning of his performance the Gambian bard Banna Kanute states that different singers have different versions of the song in question, he exhibits a relaxed approach to multiformity that is very unusual. But then, this bard had spent a considerable period in London performing for scholars at the School of Oriental and African Studies.³³

Sometimes the respect for precise transmission has slightly odd consequences. Reichl tells of an Uzbek singer who insisted on using a special dialect form in a performance that otherwise mostly took place in his local language. When the scholar asked why, the bard answered: "That is how it should be."³⁴ Something similar seems to be the reason why singers performed some passages of the *Mwindo*

32. *SCHS* 3, 1974, 65-6. The situation resembles the scene when Odysseus attends the Phaeacian bard (*Odyssey* 8.469-531, cf. Jensen 1980, 70-72). – For Mededovic's respect for both embellishment and correct transmission, see Lord (1960) 2000, 78-80; *SCHS* 3, 1974, 59-60, 72; *SCHS* 4, 1974, xix-xx.

33. Innes 1974, 136, 145.

34. "Es gehört sich so": Reichl 2001a, 74.

Epic, otherwise in Nyanga, in a neighbouring language, Hunde.³⁵ Furthermore, special scenes or remarkable formulations may establish themselves as fixed elements in a song.³⁶

Field experience shows that one thing is what singers say, another, what they do. At the same time as they confess to their total respect for unaltered transmission, they change their song from performance to performance and adapt it to the interests of each new audience. Even though it is difficult to judge from scholarly descriptions just how variable various traditions are, the reports are unanimous about variability as a general characteristic of oral epic. No two performances are alike, not even if they are by the same singer to the same audience.³⁷ Goody reports of his own astonishment when he found that a text he had collected in dictation in 1951 was radically different when in 1969-70 he made an electronic registration. The singers and their audiences considered these performances, which for the anthropologist were so different, to be the same text.³⁸

It seems that the idea of truth in oral epic traditions is in itself flexible. In her description of *Sirat Bani Hilal* as she witnessed it, Slyomovics states that both patrons and listeners actually appreciated variation and elaboration, and the performance she edited contains many examples of the singer's elegant handling of unforeseen situations and his proficiency in immediately improvising suitable verses when called for.³⁹ She describes the balance between memorisation and improvisation as follows:

Since the epic and its plot lines are known to all, the poet, as he is seen by his listeners, is thought only to hand on a familiar, monolithic history, perhaps embellishing it as it momentarily rests within his pos-

35. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 41; Biebuyck 1978, 6, 41.

36. Reichl 1992, 216-17; 2001b, 241-2.

37. Wadley 2004, 65 (north Indian *dhola*).

38. Goody & Ganda 1980, 33-8; Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 58-63. – Goody classifies the genre as myth, not epic, but according to the definition used in the present study, Goody's *Bagre* qualifies as epic.

39. E.g. Slyomovics 1987, 99, 156, 238. – Wadley states the same about her *dhola* singers, Wadley 2004, 66, 72.

session. The audience believes that the corpus is memorized ... because its content is familiar ... The poet himself believes that he sings a revealed memorized cycle ... To an outsider, however, witnessing many performances, which often relate the same episode, each recitation is a unique, improvised oral composition upon an inherited tradition. Though the general frame-story is more or less constant, the narrative is by no means stable. Both the audience and the poet see the poet as the bearer of tradition, not as an individual creative artist.⁴⁰

When scholars describe what is stable in this constant flux, they speak, like Slyomovics, of the general frame-story, or they single out a core of events as specific for a song. Flueckiger's identification of several traditions in various Hindi dialects as different manifestations of a single epic is based on "several constant motifs, plot elements, and major characters". Johnson attempts a definition in relation to the epic he is concerned with: "The core episodes are those without which the story of Son-Jara could not be told".⁴¹ The existence of such a core does not, however, guarantee anything like historical truth in an etic sense, for when Johnson has peeled off all the augmenting episodes he is left with a hero whose life-story is strikingly similar to the world-wide general portrait of the hero.⁴² Goody states that there is not even a stable core: "These forms [long oral recitations] vary ... greatly, and not, I submit, around a determinative core but rather as a syntagmatic chain."⁴³

Seydou discusses what is stable in the Fulani epics of her experience, and like Goody she does not refer to a core, but points to the characters rather than to the plot. Except for a few historical incidents linked to various persons the bards may relate almost anything in order to describe the heroes' characteristic virtues, such as the courage of Silamaka and the passion of Ham-Bodedio.⁴⁴ A sim-

40. Slyomovics 1987, 19, cf. 30.

41. Flueckiger 1989, 33; Johnson (1986) 2003, 39. – Mulokozi 2002, 205-6, 308-9, 378-9, and 476-7 knows more than one version of the Haya epics he publishes and asserts that in most cases they differ in detail but agree on the plot.

42. Johnson (1986) 2003, 6-7.

43. Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 98, cf. Goody & Gandah 2002, xiv-xv.

44. Seydou 1972, 44; 1976, 10.

ilar tension between stability and change is described for the notion of ‘paired’ heroes in Serbo-Croatian epic. Osman and Mehmed belong together and are involved in the same stories, and Osman is regularly Mehmed’s senior. Otherwise their relationship varies, sometimes they are brothers, in other cases father and son, or they may be uncle and nephew.⁴⁵

In actual practice it seems difficult to reach a viable definition of the stable core of an oral epic, because it consists of elements of different type – named protagonists with specific characteristics, a basic course of events, or recurring narrative patterns along with specific words and phrases – and because even these minimal common features are not always present.

Fieldworkers nevertheless convey the impression that something remains stable enough for an epic to be recognised through the ever-changing vicissitudes of transmission.⁴⁶ Thus Honko’s Gopala Naika knew other epics besides the *Siri Epic*, for instance a certain *Kooti Cennaya*, and Honko speaks of them as two clearly different songs. To judge from his description the latter is definitely a men’s poem, featuring two brothers who distinguish themselves in battle, as against the *Siri Epic*, which is concerned with women’s affairs. He even states that as soon as the singer begins his performance you recognise the identity of the epic because the two have different melodies.⁴⁷

On the basis of her experience with African oral literature Barber describes the identity of traditions as follows:

There is a performance—but it is a performance *of* something. Something identifiable is understood to have preexisted the moment of utterance. Or, alternatively, something is understood to be constituted in utterance that can be abstracted or detached from the immediate context and re-embodied in a future performance. Even if the only place this “something” can be held to exist is in people’s minds

45. *SCHS* 14, 1979, 51-2.

46. Lord (1960) 2000, 123; Biebuyck 1976, 25; Roghair 1982, viii; Johnson (1986) 2003, 39.

47. Honko 2000a, 22, 25. Similarly, Reichl 1992, 102-3 states that the Turkic *Manas Epic* has a special melody.

or memories, still it is surely distinguishable from immediate, and immediately disappearing, actual utterance. It can be referred to. People may speak of “the story of Sunjata” or “the praises of Dingaan” rather than speaking of a particular narrator’s or praise-singer’s performance on a particular occasion. And this capacity to be abstracted, to transcend the moment, and to be identified independently of particular instantiations, is the whole point of oral traditions.⁴⁸

It is well documented by Parry and Lord that in one and the same singer’s repertoire a song may be very stable. In *The Singer of Tales* Lord discusses the same song recorded four times from the same singer and concludes: “Once a singer learns a song it attains a kind of thematic stability as long as he keeps singing it; but when he sings it infrequently, it begins to suffer from reduced ornamentation, and lapses of memory of the story.”⁴⁹ This experience confirms Honko’s concept of the singer’s mental text.

Bynum describes how Parry wanted to test the distinctions among individual epics in a singer’s repertoire during his recording sessions with Mededovic in July-August 1935. The singer began dictating *The Wedding of Ali Vlahinjac*, but after two days and the first c. 3,000 verses Parry asked him to sing it instead. So he made a new beginning and performed his song in two days. The following day he was asked to continue his dictation, and he added some 300 verses. Then Parry asked for a different epic, and Mededovic sang *Osmanbeg Delibegovic and Pavicevic Luka* in four days. At this point they made a break of some days, and finally Mededovic dictated the last 2,500 verses of his *Ali Vlahinjac* in two days. In spite of the interruptions, Mededovic also managed to make a coherent narrative of the dictated version of *Ali Vlahinjac*.⁵⁰ The experiment demonstrates that the various songs were distinct entities in Mededovic’s repertoire, and that he was remarkably competent at keeping them apart even under rather absurd conditions.

48. Barber 2005, 266-7.

49. Lord (1960) 2000, 113-15, quote 115.

50. *SCHS* 6, 1980, x-xi.

The volumes published from the Parry Collection contain various examples that illustrate the problem of sameness. When Mededovic performed his tour de force by expanding a song that had been read to him from a songbook to almost three times its length, the course of events in this new version was roughly the same as that in his model, and in that sense it was unproblematic to speak of the same song. Lord visited Mededovic again in 1950 and recorded the song again, and the bard's new version was remarkably similar to the one he had dictated in 1935. Besides being known from songbooks this song also existed in an independent written version. It was recorded twice by Parry performed by other singers, in further versions by Lord in 1950, and again by Lord and Bynum in 1962-5. Somewhere in the background of all these recorded poems is the songbook version, and even though other story elements have been incorporated and the songs vary between them, it does not seem to be difficult to recognise them as versions of the same song.⁵¹

However, the borders are blurred in the case of *The Song of Bagdad*, which is represented in six versions in volumes 1-2, recorded from three singers.⁵² In the Parry Collection they form two distinct branches; furthermore, it is mentioned that songs on the same topic are known from books printed in 1833 and 1878, but that these have little in common with the Parry-Lord recordings. The songs about Bagdad constitute a sub-group of songs about the taking of cities, represented also by a song on the taking of Chania in Crete and two versions of a song on the taking of Budapest.⁵³ Such songs are documented as early as in a printed version from 1584, and are also

51. The experiment: Lord (1960) 2000, 78-81, 223-34; *SCHS* 3, 1974, 11; the recording in 1950: Lord (1960) 2000, 115-18; *SCHS* 3, 1974, 8; the non-Mededovic versions of *Smailagic Meho*: *SCHS* 3, 1974, 279-323.

52. *SCHS* 1-2, 1953-4, nos. 1, 2, 3 (Salih Ugljanin), 22, 23 (Sulejman Fortic) and 26 (Sulejman Makic). Nos. 1 and 26 are translated in full. Cf. Lord (1960) 2000, 76-7, where the beginnings of three of the versions are compared. - Murat Zunic's song of the battle of Temisvar, published in *SCHS* 14, 1979, 46-9, 235-61, belongs to the same class of songs.

53. Nos. 15 (Salih Ugljanin), 20, and 21 (Sulejman Fortic). Cf. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 380-81, where the same group of songs is called the "Sultan" cycle. Nos. 15 and 20 are translated.

known in versions from Anatolian Turkey.⁵⁴ Here, then, the common core that justifies speaking of the same song is difficult to grasp: neither the course of events nor the city around which the action takes place remain unchanged.

In the case of a widely known and much studied tradition such as that of the *Alpomysh Epic*, Reichl is able to give a survey of four distinct branches, three named after the language in which it is performed (Kiptchak, Altaic and Oghuzic) and the fourth after the place to which this branch locates the story (Qo'ng'iro't). So the various versions of this epic are sufficiently alike to be recognised as such, and also sufficiently different to be categorised in four groups. Furthermore, in relation to one of three subgroups of the Qo'ng'iro't branch, the Uzbek, it is again possible to distinguish between two branches, of which the best represented is known in more than twenty registered versions.⁵⁵

Similarly, Flueckiger describes the north Indian *Lorik-Canda Epic* that is known in five different Hindi dialects spread over a wide area of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. By the singing community it is perceived as constituting five different traditions, but for the folklorist it is one tradition with two special branches, which ramify into local versions. She states:

A supra-regional epic tradition such as Lorik-Canda does not remain constant over the wide area in which it is performed; rather, it is reworked in each unique setting. The epic responds to and reflects different sets of contextual factors and the folklore communities in which it is performed, gives identity to those communities, and continues to inform their values.⁵⁶

Such experience may be compared to a tree in which the trunk is a song that becomes successful for some reason and branches out into

54. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 330-32; *SCHS* 2, 1953, 329.

55. Survey: Reichl 2001a, 41-9; abstracts of Uzbek versions: Reichl 2001a, 80-105. – Slyomovics 1987, 67, mentions that Tunisian oral versions of the episode she analyses differ markedly from the Egyptian ones.

56. Flueckiger 1989, quote 54.

other regions and languages, changing more or less imperceptibly in the process.

For the main part written versions of oral epic are first known from the decades just before 1900 when Romantic interests in “the folk” sent scholars out to collect traditional literature. Earlier sources usually consist in more or less casual remarks. A not unusual pattern is that a source documents the existence of an epic tradition relatively soon after its dramatic time, but that recordings proper are known only from much later periods. This is the case for *Sirat Bani Hilal*: the Arab tribe’s immigration to northern Africa and its march towards the west took place in the 11th century. In the 14th century the historian Ibn Khaldoun mentions with some condescension that Hilali people celebrate the event in song and are so convinced of the authenticity of their tradition that it is unwise to criticise it. In 1836 the British lexicographer Edward Lane mentions that there were at least fifty Hilali bards in Cairo. The first written texts are from the last decades of the 19th century.⁵⁷ Similarly, the battle of Karemputi celebrated in the Palnadu tradition is supposed to have taken place in 1182. In a text from the 15th century there is a scene in which a woman sings a song of the fearless Palnadu heroes in such a way that it seems to reveal knowledge of the epic but in a considerably different form. A summary written by the historian Robert Sewell in 1862 resembles modern versions but leaves out some of the episodes. The first printed edition is from 1911.⁵⁸ The early sources are important as testimony to the age of the tradition but of no value in relation to its stability or lack of stability. A time-span of about a century is normal for the documented history of a tradition.

The *Pabuji Epic* constitutes a special case, both because it is supported by the illustrations on the *par*, and because it can be compared to a 17th century prose chronicle by a certain Nainasi that tells Pabuji’s history in a form similar to that found in the epic. According to Smith, a general difference is that the oral versions exaggerate the events of the epic, as compared to Nainasi’s version.⁵⁹

57. Galley in Galley & Ayoub 1983, 22-7.

58. Roghair 1982, 8, 80-83.

59. Smith 1991, 71-3.

Systematisations such as that Reichl applied to the *Alpomysh Epic* are rare for the simple reason that it is not easy to record and form an overview of long epic texts. But in the case of a somewhat similar, but more manageable genre, the Scandinavian ballad, scholars agreed upon an authorised classification in 1978. They settled on 838 ‘ballad-types’, known in 15-20,000 registered manifestations. It should be taken into account that this tradition has developed in an interaction with printed songbooks, a circumstance that has no doubt contributed to the fixity of the types, and moreover that the fact that the texts are much shorter than epics makes for a more stable transmission. Even so, there are cases in which the identity of a type remains uncertain. “The same story may be treated in many different ballads, and, in addition, the dividing line between types dealing with the same subject matter is often rather vague”, it is stated.⁶⁰

Another approach, also to the question of stability and change in ballad tradition, comes from Tom Pettitt. He draws attention to the fact that in some cases English ballads begin as broadsides. He is especially interested in crime stories that tell of real events since in such cases the offence constitutes a *terminus post quem*. Comparing a 20th century oral version with the original broadside he demonstrates how the song has been passed through a “ballad machine”, adapting the text to the demands of the genre and the tastes of the singing community and in the process removing it considerably from its point of departure; still the modern version retains quite a few phrases from the broadside and is easily recognisable as the same song.⁶¹

The relevance of such results for epic studies may, of course, be contested. On one hand, ballads are not bound by a generic demand for truth and may therefore be more freely changed; on the other, the much shorter texts are easier to memorise. For information on the life of an oral epic tradition the Parry collection is still unsurpassed. On the basis of his familiarity with the collection supplemented by archival studies, Bynum distinguishes between ‘multiforms’ and ‘modulations’. Multiforms designate the endless vari-

60. *T&B* 1978, 13-21, quote 15.

61. Pettitt 2009.

ety of versions of a basically stable song whereas modulations are new songs or passages made by adapting a story pattern or a motif to a new setting. As an example he mentions that the heroes Osman and Mehmed as a pair are the successful protagonists of a song known in many multiforms, but that the pair may also occur in modulated form as when in a different song two brothers of the same names but otherwise unrelated to the famous brothers are murdered. In the latter case he speaks of hybridisation.⁶²

To conclude, orally transmitted epics may retain enough characteristics to be recognisable over great spans of time and widely distant geographical areas. Nevertheless, no two performances are alike, and it is difficult to define criteria for when a text has changed so much that it no longer makes sense to speak of the same song. There is nothing that may not change, but what is most changeable are the immaterial components, such as focalisation of narrative, motivation of events, or building of suspense, in short the factors that first and foremost make for the poetic qualities of a narrative.

Typical changes

One kind of change is the result of errors: names are mistaken, passages misunderstood or forgotten. The way in which some singers use a standard form of, say, a catalogue in different poems belongs in this category, too.⁶³ In general, poetry remains more unchanged than prose, and passages subject to special formal demands are more stable than others. For example, in rhymed poetry the beginnings of lines are more flexible than the rhyming ends. Strict formal demands make for more stability than less stringent demands, and long texts are more fluid than shorter texts.⁶⁴ Furthermore there is reason to believe that different training systems result in greater or lesser stability.

Other types of change are introduced on purpose. Lord gave a list of six categories of typical changes in the transmission:

62. *SCHS* 14, 1979, 51, 65-6.

63. Lord (1960) 2000, 86; Johnson (1986) 2003, 4.

64. Rubin 1995.

(1) saying the same thing in fewer or more lines, because of singers' methods of line composition and of linking lines together, (2) expansion of ornamentation, adding of details of description (that may not be without significance), (3) changes of order in a sequence (this may arise from a different sense of balance on the part of the learner, or even from what might be called a chiasmic arrangement where one singer reverses the order given by the other), (4) addition of material not in a given text of the teacher, but found in texts of other singers in the district, (5) omission of material, and (6) substitution of one theme for another, in a story configuration held together by inner tensions.⁶⁵

These are all to do with relatively superficial aspects, most of them with quantity. They should not be underestimated, though, since a normal way of adding to the importance of an element in oral narrative is to expand. Still, changes of content caused by the singer's interpretation of the story, his own feelings about right and wrong, or his wish to please an audience should be added to Lord's list. The strange fact that he did not include them can hardly be an expression of a lack of interest in such questions on his part, considering that they are repeatedly discussed in *The Singer of Tales*. For instance, one of the qualities that Lord admired in Avdo Mededovic's art was his ability to make the heroes psychologically consistent and add human motivation to the events. Changes of this kind are only suggested under points (2) and (6), and the influence of audiences not at all. Presumably Lord's problem was one of documentation: almost all Parry's registrations were made from induced performances and did not offer much material for such studies.

There are also relatively few examples in more recent works of change of content or ideology, and of course such changes are trickier to identify than variety in length. Manifest examples of manipulating stories to please a given audience are found when singers praise influential persons who happen to be present, or give priority to their ancestors.⁶⁶ More important from a literary point of view are

65. Lord (1960) 2000, 123. – For a full list of typical changes in oral narrative transmission, see Olrik (1921) 1992, 65-75.

66. Innes 1974, 31; cf. Chapter 3 above.

the ways in which the narrator handles the means of evoking sympathy or not for the characters, such as when Johnson mentions that their motivation for action may change. This author also makes the more general statement that the individual singer regularly adds his own personal views to the text.⁶⁷ An example of this is to be found in Slyomovics' analysis of how 'Awadallah exploits his poet-hero Abu Zayd to confirm his own status in relation to his audience.⁶⁸ A particularly interesting example of variation in content is to be found in Goody's discussion of the various versions of the *Bagre* he recorded: "These [the variations] are not simply verbal variants circulating around a permanent core, but include radical changes of philosophical attitude, for example, as between creationist and evolutionary perspectives on the origin of the world, or between theological and more materialist views of the creation of culture."⁶⁹

Without changing the facts of the story a singer may handle its logic in very different ways. He may build up sympathies and antipathies for its characters by means of the way in which he relates the causes for action, by shifting focalisation, or by having the persons involved or the general narrator comment upon the story. One and the same outcome of a chain of events may be related as a failure or a triumph, and the mere choice of where to end the tale may render it tragic or optimistic.

Still another kind of change is caused by the singer's wish to please his audience. Being face to face with his listeners in the arena, he is all the time aware of their reactions and eager to keep their attention. He may humour them in all kinds of ways, and he may, directly or indirectly, flatter important persons in their midst. Reynolds has an instructive (and entertaining) example of how a passage describing a beautiful young girl was significantly different when sung to a mixed audience of men, women, and children, to a group of young men, or to elderly male listeners.⁷⁰

67. Johnson (1986) 2003, 40, 59; Seydou 1972, 9 states something similar about Fulari bards.

68. Slyomovics 1987, 75-6, 264.

69. Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 103.

70. Reynolds 1995, 127. A similar example in Reichl 2001a, 66.

In his study of the Turkic *Alpomys̄h Epic*, Reichl mentions that a main difference between Oghuzic and Uzbek versions is that in the former, the pagan enemies are Christian, while in the latter they are Lamaic-Buddhist Kalmucks. It appears that both versions have been adapted to new conditions brought about by conflicts Muslims were having with Christians in Anatolia and with Kalmucks in Central Asia respectively.⁷¹ One of the individual versions of the Uzbek tradition is special in stressing the religious aspect, so that when the hero is born, his father celebrates the event by building mosques and Koran schools all over his land, and further on the hero's achievements are invariably performed with God's direct help. Another version increases the comic potentialities of the song by adding humoristic scenes.⁷²

New songs may emerge on the pattern of older songs. Smith reports that he heard a local song performed by professional *Pabuji* singers, a lay about the heroic deeds and tragic death of a certain Ompuri. However, Smith met a retired civil servant from the same area who could inform him that he had personally known the man, who had been a notorious brigand. "Within a mere two decades, then, the story had shed all disagreeable historical features, and had embellished itself with suitably heroic motifs".⁷³

Expanding and abbreviating are accepted as long as the truth of the narrative is not felt to be affected. Parry and Lord's singers were proud if they were good at ornamenting the song, and this attitude seems to be general. It is cognate with the respect for long performances and comprehensive repertoires.⁷⁴ Slyomovics reports that 'Awadallah distinguished between authentic passages and embellishments and had different terms for them.⁷⁵ Johnson speaks of an

71. Reichl 2001a, 46.

72. Islam: Reichl 2001a, 83, cf. 86, 94 for other examples; humour: Reichl 2001a, 89. - Claus 1989 discusses ideological change in Tulu epic in Karnataka.

73. Smith 1980, 54. Of course, whether this Ompuri was a hero or a villain may also have depended on the background and sympathies of those who uttered their opinions.

74. *SCHS* 3, 1974, 63, 67; *SCHS* 4, 1974, xix. Reichl 1992, 223 (Turkic).

75. Slyomovics 1987, 71. - Cf. Børdahl & Ross 2002, 88-9, of Chinese storytellers distinguishing between the "real story" and various digressions.

“accordion effect”, the apparently unproblematic swelling and shrinking of mental texts.⁷⁶

While all good singers are capable of lengthening and shortening, few are able to change prose into verse. Reichl’s Mamay was one of these few, and when so doing he was conservative and did not innovate in a modernising way.⁷⁷ It stands to reason that such newly composed texts were accepted by his audiences as old and truthful as long as they contained stories that were recognisable and were expressed in the traditional formulaic patterning.

Epic tells of events that are considered historical fact of general importance for the community and is therefore a more or less official genre subject to lively social control.⁷⁸ Singers do not just make up new songs about former times. Roghair mentions that his two informants both knew of an episode belonging to the *Palnadu Epic* that they were, however, unable to perform even though they told it to him in summary form. For this reason it was not included in the full version he recorded – the singers could or would not simply compose a new version of the passage in question.⁷⁹ Another example, also from Roghair’s Telugu experience, is that even though Islam was introduced in the area in the 16th century and Christianity in the 19th, these two religions have left no trace in the epic. They are regarded as new and alien and therefore not relevant to the events related.⁸⁰ Similarly, Reichl states: “Even in those cases where a singer is creative, he is creative within the context of his tradition and does not compose a work which is his alone.”⁸¹ Biebuyck states that singers of the *Mwindo Epic* never admit reference to recent wars or other historical events from the 19th and 20th centuries into their songs.⁸²

This does not mean that epic is not highly relevant to the singing community’s own time. First and foremost, the heroes of old are the

76. Johnson (1986) 2003, 48.

77. Reichl 1992, 223-32.

78. For the distinction official / private, see Vansina (1961) 1973; social control: Bogatyrev & Jakobson (1929) 1966.

79. Roghair 1982, 193.

80. Roghair 1982, 126-8.

81. Reichl 1992, 310.

82. Biebuyck 1978, 41-2.

ancestors of the living, and the institutions they founded are those that still frame the existing community. "Narratives are not simply about the past ... they constitute ways for people to think with 'the past'."⁸³ Such experience is part of the rules that govern the performance arena and also remain valid in the outer world. For instance, Slyomovics relates that 'Awadallah considered Nasser to be a heroic leader of the Arab people. Furthermore, as described with especial care in Reynolds' monograph, a general identification often takes place between poets and heroes.⁸⁴

When epic nevertheless changes, it does so imperceptibly and against the declared wish of both singers and audiences.⁸⁵ A community's feeling for truth is not stable, ideology and values change, social groups ascend or decline, families expand or die out, and views on the past change. This holds good for all kinds of society, literate or illiterate. Events of former times are seen with the eyes of the living, and a continuous negotiation is in process between past and present. However, oral epic can adapt itself to changing ideologies in a way historiography cannot, or is only able to do if written records are disregarded. In a literate society, the past may be reinterpreted when historians dig out new sources or read those that are well known in a new way, a possibility that is not available in an illiterate society. Both kinds of history are subject to control, but while the control of written history, at least ideally, depends on methodical evaluation of written sources from the past, the control of oral history is based on the audience's experience of how things function in their own time. A Fulani bard would meet with protests if he represented the heroes in a way that was not in character. The emic truth allows for variation as long as it does not conflict with what is considered fact, and it is normal for bards to have a vocabulary for embellishment just as Parry and Lord's informants had. The better an epic singer knows his listeners, the more will he be able to meet their understanding of the world. In order for his song to be accepted as true, the singer must be keenly aware of such matters

83. Kuschel in Tuhanuku 2002, 17, with reference to Robert Borofsky.

84. Innes 1974, 32-3; Slyomovics 1987, 46; Reynolds 1995.

85. Slyomovics 1987, 13; Reichl 1992, 265.

and adapt his story to what is at the moment felt to be true by a specific audience. Slyomovics describes the relationship as follows:

A genuine and good performance of the Hilali epic demands that poet and audience know each other well, that they have rich, textured lives in common. The poet must know his audience not just to please them in the obvious sense of entertainment, but also to strike fear and anger in the listener's heart. Epic poetry may be pleasing, but above all, it is truthful because it not only pleases and entertains, it also commemorates famous deeds of Arab history. 'Awadallah's performance of oral epic poetry delights because it commemorates the truth, a truth that is both entertaining in itself and pleasurablely communicated.⁸⁶

Some versions compared

In order to reach a personal impression of the scale of change and stability in oral epic traditions it may be useful to study multiforms of the same story, and a considerable number of such texts are by now accessible as full texts or in summaries.

In five appendices to *The Singer of Tales* Lord exemplified various types of transmission by comparing different versions of songs, theme by theme, on the basis of English summaries.⁸⁷ In this way he treated two versions by two different singers, four versions by one and the same singer, ten versions by nine different singers, five versions by five different singers, and three versions by three singers, two of whom were father and son, the son asserting that he had learnt the song from his father. The two versions summarised in Lord's Appendix I are special, being the result of the experiment Parry carried out with Avdo Mededovic, when he asked him to repeat a song he had not heard before immediately after having attended its performance by another singer.⁸⁸

Furthermore, the published volumes of *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs* offer several examples of songs recorded in more than one version.

86. Slyomovics 1987, 265.

87. Lord (1960) 2000, 223-71.

88. Lord (1960) 2000, 78-9, 102-5, 223-34, described above.

Volume 6, for instance, contains two versions of *The Wedding of Ali Vlahinjac* both recorded in July 1935 from Mededovic, one dictated and one sung. His two versions are close to each other, as is to be expected considering that the same bard performed them within a few days, and they are of almost the same length, 5,883 verses as against 5,942 verses. Nevertheless, even though the plot is the same, there are quite a few differences in detail such as passages present in one version, but not in the other, or being told much more fully in one version than in the other. According to Bynum, who edited the volume, the overall impression differs in that the version dictated to Nikola Vujnovic dwells more on the hero's relations to women than to men, whereas the opposite is the case for the version sung to Milman Parry. Bynum ventures no explanation of this, but the difference is perceptible enough for him to characterise the sung version as heroic-epic and the dictated one as romantic-balladic.⁸⁹ A qualified guess might be, first that the singer felt bored by being asked to perform the same song twice and therefore chose to vary more than he would have otherwise done, and next that the difference reveals the singer's feeling for the persons in charge of the registration, Vujnovic and Parry respectively, so that we here actually have a rare example in Parry's collection of the influence of different audiences on the narrative.

Three other versions of this *Wedding of Ali Vlahinjac*, two by other singers from the Parry collection and a third recorded in the 19th century, are summarised, and they are so different from Mededovic's song that they have little in common with it, or with each others, except for the hero's name and the fact that he wins a bride. In one of them Ali is not even the protagonist. Vlahinjac means "the Vlah woman's son". Ali is of very low social standard not only not having a father, but belonging ethnically to a despised social group. Even this aspect is handled in very different ways by the four singers. Mededovic and two of the others use the inherent possibility of highlighting the hero's success in spite of the negative odds facing him to begin with, whereas in the fourth version this aspect is not

89. *SCHS 6*, 1980, xxiii.

used at all, and Ali is a wealthy person, even the owner of a castle, right from the start of the song.⁹⁰

Among the eight songs from Bihac published in volume 14 of *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs* some are versions of songs published in other volumes of the collection. Of special interest are two of Murat Zunic's songs, one of which is also known in a version sung by Suleiman Makic and published in volumes 1-2,⁹¹ and the other is a version of *Osmanbeg and Pavisic Luka*, sung by Avdo Mededovic and published in volume 6. Besides *The Wedding of Smailagic Meho* this song is the most famous of Mededovic's extremely long performances, containing 12,375 verses whereas Zunic's has 1,761. Bynum compares Mededovic's and Zunic's versions against each other as well as against four other recorded versions. Of these, two are in the Parry collection while the other two were collected by earlier scholars.⁹² In his discussion Bynum distinguishes between a stable song, documented already in Marjanovic's collection from the end of the 19th century and known in various multiforms, and hybrids that create a fusion of this song and others.⁹³

Biebuyck published four induced versions of the *Mwindo Epic*, numbering them I, II, III and IV. In addition, he also included two texts as synopses only, one that the informant related as the retelling of another singer's performance, and one that was fragmentary.⁹⁴ Epic I is given both in the original Nyanga and in English translation, II - IV only in English; the texts are printed in full and accompanied by introductions and commentaries. The four versions agree in telling Mwindo's story from before he was born, and they unfold it either until he has become enthroned as chief (I and II), to his death and his enemy's son taking over the reign (IV), or until after his death his ten sons share the reign peacefully among them (III). The versions agree that relations between the hero and his father are hostile, that the hero is put to a series of tests, and that besides living normally on the earth he moves through air and water and even

90. *SCHS* 6, 1980, xxiii-xxxi.

91. *SCHS* 14, 1979, 46-9, 235-61; *SCHS* 1, 1954, 277-84; *SCHS* 2, 1953, 268-74.

92. *SCHS* 6, 1980, xxxi-ii, 153-333; *SCHS* 14, 1979, 51-66, 311-82.

93. *SCHS* 14, 1979, 63-6.

94. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969; Biebuyck 1978.

down into the underworld. In three of the versions his paternal aunt is his powerful helper. But whereas in versions III and IV she comes to his rescue only in a few critical situations, version I is centred on her close relationship with Mwindo, who performs all his deeds tied to her with a rope.

In view of the fact that this tradition is cyclic and normally performed only in the form of select episodes, it is intriguing that the four versions agree most in the beginning, all starting out with the events around the hero's birth. This must be attributed not to a specially fixed text for this part of the epic, but rather to the way the singers reacted to the scholar's demand for the entire story. What would that be except his life story, naturally told as beginning with his birth? As a matter of fact, even in this episode the differences are evident. In I and II the newborn Mwindo can walk right from his birth and is given the epithet *kabutwakenda*, which means "little-one-just-born-he-walked"; but in III and IV Kabutwakenda is a separate person, and in IV he is even the hero while Mwindo is the villain. In one of the versions presented only as a summary, the plot is completely different; here Mwindo is going to marry a woman who is made of iron, and who insists on the bridegroom's being forged. Accordingly, Mwindo has to put his legs into glowing coal for the blacksmith to hammer out. As Biebuyck states, "the differences far outweigh the similarities".⁹⁵

Christiane Seydou published seven versions of a Fulani epic celebrating two friends, Silamaka and Poullori.⁹⁶ They are heroes from the wars between Fulani and Bambara around 1800 that also form the background for the *Epic of Da Monzon* among the Bambara. Of the versions, three were recorded from the singer Boûbacar Tinguidji by different scholars in 1964, 1967, and 1968 respectively, while the four others were sung by four different bards and collected by three different scholars in 1927, 1928, and 1967. One version is not about friends at all, but features only Silamaka; this song has nothing in common with the others except the hero's name. In the rest, friendship is the common overall topic. Tinguidji's three per-

95. For a more detailed comparison, see Biebuyck 1978, 80-92; quote 86.

96. Seydou 1972.

formances of the song are sufficiently similar to each other for the editor to publish only one of them and let the other two be represented in the form of notes. All six versions agree that Silamaka is a prince and Poullori his slave. Most of the versions begin with the birth of the hero, but one is the story of his death. In Tinguidji's versions Poullôri is older than Silamaka (three years or seven days), while in the others the two were born on the same day. Except for that, the versions differ considerably. For Tinguidji Silamaka's father is called Avdo Massina, while in one of the other versions that is the name of his main enemy. Seydou concludes that the only constant feature of the songs is the character of the heroes.⁹⁷

As part of her introduction to 'Awadallah's performance of "The Story of 'Amir Khafaji" Slyomovics compares his version with eight others, four of which were recorded by herself during the same stay in Egypt in 1983. The others are three versions from Tunisia recorded by others, also from oral performance, and a book version printed in Cairo sometime between 1860 and 1880 and still available at a low cost. She also mentions the existence of printed texts of the epic in German and British libraries. The various versions are represented in summaries.

Her own recordings vary in length from ten minutes to one hour, plus 'Awadallah's version lasting three and a half hours. Even though the plot is part of the overall story of the Hilali journey westwards and might therefore be expected to be relatively fixed, little is common to the five versions except the names of the protagonists, Abu Zayd and his three nephews Yahya, Mar'i, and Yunis. The two briefest versions focus on an episode within the episode and relate how Abu Zayd rescued a fettered girl, whereas for 'Awadallah and the two other informants "The Story of 'Amir Khafaji" is concerned with how Abu Zayd came to the king of Iraq and achieved his assistance for the Hilali project.⁹⁸

Nevertheless there seems no doubt that Slyomovics' five narratives are multiforms of the same story since they are linked together criss-cross by details occurring in some versions, not in others. To

97. Seydou 1972, 44, 243.

98. Slyomovics 1987, 55-69.

mention just a few: sometimes the king is wounded but cured by Abu Zayd in various more or less supernatural ways: he conjures up a magic helper, or somebody is sent to Arabia to fetch his magic kit; in one case his daughter is involved. The captive girl occurs in three of the versions, either hanging by her hair or bound hand and foot. In two of the cases Abu Zayd asks her to give him water, but in only one of them does she answer: "Cannot you see that I am shackled? Are you blind?" Another detail that occurs in some of the versions is concerned with a monstrous horse that Abu Zayd tames; when he mounts it afterwards, he sometimes seats himself facing backwards without any of the versions offering a reason for this. The motif would normally be part of a scheme to make somebody believe that the rider was mad, and it is tempting to guess that this could be the way such a detail occurred in other versions. It would fit into another motif present in most of the versions, that Abu Zayd acts in disguise as a poet. According to other versions again, including 'Awadallah's, Abu Zayd is in reality a poet besides being a warrior-hero. For 'Awadallah this is actually an important aspect of the narrative.

Some of these – and other – details link the Egyptian versions with the three Tunisian versions, and again there is no problem in considering all nine versions as multiforms of the same episode. But as a group the Tunisian versions distinguish themselves markedly from the Egyptian ones (the printed version included). In the Tunisian texts the king rules Libya and has a different name, and the events lead to his death. In one of the versions he is Abu Zayd's enemy. Here, too, the king is wounded. Abu Zayd gains access to him disguised as a doctor and takes the opportunity to kill him.

Reynolds and Slyomovics both contributed to an anthology of African epic giving translations of a passage from the beginning of *Sirat Bani Hilal*, describing the birth of the protagonist Abu Zayd. Reynolds offers the passage as sung by Shaykh Taha Abu Zayd in

June 1987, while Slyomovics' excerpt was recorded from 'Awadallah 'Abd Al-Jalil in January 1983. Only the barest outline of the story, the problems the hero's father had before he finally got a son, form a link between the two renderings.⁹⁹

Two scholarly approaches

Honko was very interested in the flexibility of tradition, and this subject is treated in many passages in his monograph. There is not necessarily a recognisable reason for variation, he finds; different recordings of the same passage are just simply never alike. This leads him to speak of the text of the oral epic as being "evasive".¹⁰⁰ One of his most striking examples is an experience he had with Gopala Naika in January 1995:

During one of the concluding interviews he told us about his recent appearance on the All India Radio. He had performed the Kooti Cennaya epic in twenty minutes. I was appalled, because Kooti Cennaya is the best known long epic in Tulu tradition and the second largest in his repertoire after Siri. Exactly three years earlier we had video- and audiotaped Kooti Cennaya: it took three days, close on 15 net hours of singing in 19 portions varying between 18 and 120 minutes in length and resulting in approximately 7,000 lines. To be able to believe him, I had to ask Gopala Naika to sing Kooti Cennaya once more in twenty minutes, just as he had performed it on the radio. Without hesitation he complied and sang for about 27 minutes.¹⁰¹

99. Reynolds 1997; Slyomovics 1997. - Other examples of the "same" song in more than one version are Innes 1974 (Mandinka), discussed in Innes 1973 and Finnegan 1977, 75-8; Phillips 1981, 38-102, 124-70 (Minangkabau); Smith 1991, 44-5 (Rajasthani); Wadley 2005, 175-86 (Hindi *dhola*). - Goody 1972 and Goody & Ganda 1980 offer different versions of ritual songs from LoDagaba and Wiili, living where the Republics of Ghana, Upper Volta and the Ivory Coast meet. Børdahl 2010, 114-23, offers three versions of a passage of Chinese storytelling, told by three different storytellers in 1961, 1989, and 1992. They are remarkably alike, a fact that is probably caused by its belonging to the very first story of "The Water Margin", which is also the first text a young disciple is taught (Børdahl & Ross 2002, 87).

100. Honko 1998a, 44-51.

101. Honko 1998a, 30.

Honko has many other examples of how Naika's songs changed from one performance to the next. Details were added or left out, the order of events varied, and the wording differed. According to Honko,

any performance is a compromise, an intelligent adaptation of tradition within unique situations structured by a confluence of several factors. It can be understood only against a broader spectrum of performances of the same integer in similar and different contexts. A single performance cannot witness for other performances, just as one singer can not represent other singers.¹⁰²

When a bard has 'internalised' a song, a process of 'mental editing' begins. In every new performance he studies the reactions of his audience and adapts his mental text to the experiences he has had. So even though the mental text remains basically stable, it is also the object of lifelong remodelling. The same experience was described by the Tunisian singer Mohammed Hsini, who told Lucienne Saada how he had worked twenty years on his version of *Sirat Bani Hilal*, repeating it in his mind, correcting, thinking it over, expanding and polishing it.¹⁰³

The Karakalpak tradition studied by Reichl seems remarkably stable. The oldest recorded version is a manuscript from 1903, and as sung by Jumabay Bazarov in 1993 the epic still recognizably tells the same story. Reichl presents this old version as a summary and compares it to Bazarov's version. The two texts differ most in the beginnings and the ends: Bazarov invests much of the opening of his narrative in relating how the hero's father won a fairy as his wife but lost her again, how the fairy left baby Edige under a tree, where he was found by a maidservant of one of Khan Tokhtamysh's subjects, and how the boy finally ended up as an adopted child at the khan's court. All this has no parallel in the 1903 version. Towards the end, Bazarov describes how Edige and his son became enemies but were at last reconciled, and how Edige's son succeeded his fa-

102. Honko 2000a, 13.

103. Honko 2000a, 20, 24; Saada 1985, 30.

ther on the khan's throne. In the 1903 version father and son cooperate all the way through, and the poem ends with their victory over Tokhtamysh and Edige's becoming khan.¹⁰⁴

It is known that printed versions have existed in the area, and Reichl considers whether this fact may have caused the tradition to remain more stable than it would otherwise have been. However, since illiteracy was still widespread among the Karakalpak until the Soviet era, Reichl is more inclined to see the system of apprenticeship as the conservative factor. He stresses that what singers learn are specific songs, not an abstract technique.¹⁰⁵ He has collected what various Karakalpak singers have said about their masters and is able to establish a kind of pedigree of masters and their apprentices. According to him, the schools that have taken form around such masters may well have been able to minimise individual variation.¹⁰⁶

Bazarov had dictated the *Epic of Edige* to another scholar in 1986, and Reichl describes this version briefly; among other things it is longer than the version Bazarov performed for Reichl in 1993 (c. 39,400 words as compared to c. 27,600 words). Some of the verse passages from the 1986 version had become prose in 1993, and even though the later version was shorter, some passages were told in more detail there than in the earlier version.¹⁰⁷ The most striking difference between the two is that the dictated version takes the story a little further than the sung version, and Reichl adds this final passage as an appendix at the end of his edition. He is explicit about this fact, and he does not conflate the two versions; nevertheless the underlying assumption is that the singer would have taken the story thus far had he had time enough, or just felt like it.

But is that so certain? to the present reader it makes quite a difference whether this final passage is added or not. As performed in 1993, the epic ends on a tragic note, leaving the protagonists, Edige

104. Reichl 2007, 51-2, 57-72.

105. Reichl 2007, 95.

106. Reichl 2007, 82-3; for similar 'schools' in Uzbek tradition, see Reichl 1992, 69; 2001a, 22-3. Børdahl gives similar pedigrees for 'schools' in Yangzhou storytelling, Børdahl & Ross 2002, 64-70.

107. Reichl 2007, 57-72.

and his son, in open conflict, whereas the longer version brings their relationship to a harmonious solution. The poem as we read it in Reichl's edition is very much concerned with relations between parents and offspring; it is not clear from what we are told of the other versions whether this is a general feature or special for Bazarov's text, but at least the summary of the 1903 version suggests that this issue was not very important there. In Bazarov's version it is most notably represented by Edige and his son, but treated also in many other passages featuring minor as well as major characters. Edige himself has filial relations to Khan Toktamys, to Toktamys's queen, and later on to Satëmir, as well as to his legendary biological parents, and these relationships are all of importance for the plot. Perhaps Bazarov had become more pessimistic about such relations during the interval between 1986 and 1993?

That Reichl is impressed by the stability of the poem across the span of almost a hundred years is, of course, well-founded, and if the singers are proud of their memory, they have all good reason to be so. Nevertheless it is also clear from Reichl's work that the Karakalpak singers vary their tales from one performance to another, just as maintained by Parry and Lord, and in general also Reichl emphasises that no two performances are absolutely identical.¹⁰⁸ He reports that on a certain occasion he had begun recording an epic from Bazarov, and the singer had understood that he was expected to give a brief version of his song. When on the contrary it became clear to him that he and Reichl had several days at their disposal, he insisted on singing the first part again in order to give it a form that would suit the fuller version of what was to come.¹⁰⁹ Lord's description, "we usually find ... no small divergences in text, yet a conservativeness in regard to story"¹¹⁰, would actually fit Reichl's material well enough, it seems.

On a first observation, then, the two most impressive modern editions of oral epic, Honko's *Siri* and Reichl's *Edige*, present two traditions that seem to differ markedly in the degree of stability with

108. Reichl 1992, 235, 265.

109. Reichl 1992, 264.

110. Lord (1960) 2000, 113.

which songs are transmitted. However, the difference may derive just as much from the different approaches of the two scholars, who have backgrounds in folklore and medieval English literary studies respectively. As a folklorist, Honko took the variability of orally transmitted texts more or less for granted and concentrated on one epic performed by one singer with the purpose of documenting the status this poem had in this singer's repertoire. Accordingly, he recorded Naika on many occasions and under different circumstances. His study was necessarily centred on the overwhelming task of bringing the text as performed on one occasion to the press in a satisfactory form. The result is a mammoth text and translation with a relatively meagre commentary. All along the scholar underlines the endless variation between the singer's versions. Reichl, on the contrary, is less interested in the individual versions than in the tradition as such, and he goes to some length to argue that the poem he recorded from Bazarov may serve as a proper representative of the tradition as it exists among the Karakalpak. He has followed the Edige tradition through various geographic and linguistic conditions and over a period of almost a century, studying both written and oral sources. Like Honko, he has published one performance by one singer, in original and translation, but the text is much shorter than that edited by Honko, and Reichl's goal was in this way to present the public with a representative version of this epic tradition. Where Honko is very intent on Gopala Naika and his views upon his profession, Reichl conveys only a rather summary impression of Jumabay Bazarov.

Roughly speaking, the two scholars have offered their readers a synchronic (Honko) and a diachronic (Reichl) analysis of the two traditions in question. From the examples given it certainly seems that Naika varies his mental text from one performance to another much more than Bazarov his. But the difference may be less striking than it seems. It is at least a possibility that part of the difference lies not in the two epic traditions but in the different scholarly approaches of a folklorist and a literary scholar respectively. As a parallel one might refer to the way the *Pabuji Epic* appears when de-

scribed by John D. Smith and Komal Kothari, as either very stable or in constant variation.¹¹¹

The critical phase

Innes describes how a song develops in a singer's repertoire as follows:

[The evidence] suggests to me a pattern of life in which a griot in his younger days travels extensively, listens to other griots and borrows selectively from them, repeatedly modifying his own version until eventually he arrives at a version which seems to him the most satisfying. With repetition, this version will become more or less fixed, and even the words will tend to become fixed to some extent.¹¹²

When Parry's informants were asked whether they were able to repeat a song immediately after they had heard it for the first time, most of them answered that they would need a couple of days before performing. The answer is revealing of the fact that the singer has to decide on his own way of handling the song, and it may actually take some time before he has reached a version with which he is satisfied.¹¹³ This is part of the activity Honko describes as 'mental editing'.

That a song when it has established itself as a mental text in the bard's repertoire may be retained even over long gaps of time is well documented. When Lord returned to Yugoslavia after the war and sought out his and Parry's informants from the 1930s, he often found that they were able to perform songs more or less in the form in which they had performed them before the war. The most famous example was Mededovic's *Wedding of Smailagic Meho*, but Lord also relates how Demail Zogic performed a song with few changes after a gap of seventeen years.¹¹⁴ In 1969, Innes' Bamba Suso sang a song twice in such a way that some passages occurred in almost the same

111. Smith 1980, 54-5; Kothari 1989.

112. Innes 1973, 118; cf. Innes 1974, 6.

113. Lord (1960) 2000, 26.

114. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 408-10.

wording in the second performance as in the first. In her edition of the various versions of *Silâmaka et Poullôri*, Seydou prints only one of Tinguidji's three versions, presenting the other two by means of notes that mention when they diverge from the version she chose. That this is possible at all shows that the bard's three performances came close to each others. Similarly, in his discussion of various versions of the *Epic of Edige* Reichl treats Bazarov's two versions as if they were one and the same.

The critical link in a chain of transmission seems to be the passage of the song from one singer to another. For instance, when Phillips compares four *Sijobang* singers' versions of the same story, he finds that they differ considerably, whereas two performances of the same passage by the same singer are closely alike. Even Smith reports that the unusually fixed *Pabuji* tradition manifests itself so that versions by the same singer resemble each other strongly, those performed by closely related singers are less similar, and performances by unrelated singers differ most.¹¹⁵ Again there are important nuances. When a master teaches a song to his pupil, the young man is involved in a solid process of memorising, and songs that the singer has learned in this way as a boy will probably stay with him the rest of his life. Furthermore, an apprentice has little chance of reshaping a song according to his own liking before he leaves his master and begins performing on his own. But songs that adult singers learn from each other seem to change considerably, both in singer B's first performance of the song he learned from singer A and during the first weeks, months, or years of its life in singer B's repertoire – the time span depending on how often singer B finds an opportunity to perform it, as well as on his and his tradition's customs when it comes to memorising. When singer B has settled for a mental text that suits him, this text may remain remarkably unchanged. However, the mental text is never safe from what Honko calls 'mental editing': whenever singer B hears passages in other singers' performances that appeal to him, he may incorporate them into his own mental text. The most drastic mental editing undoubt-

115. Phillips 1981, 29-32 versus 38-102; Smith 1991, 25-6. – Cf. Seitel 1999, 221-2 of four Haya bards' individual styles.

edly takes place, however, during the first period after he learned his new song.¹¹⁶

Summary

Oral traditions are in constant change but at the same time stable, and the balance between stability and change is not easily definable. Two parameters are to be considered: the demands of the genre and of the tradition in question. Oral epic is expected to be truthful, and the change must not deviate from what audiences consider to be fact. Some epic traditions are more flexible than others. Still, however much an epic tradition changes, individual songs are normally recognisable, and not even very fixed traditions preserve what would be considered by a modern mind to be historical truth. For each song the epic singer has his mental text, which he adapts to the performance arena in case. The critical phase in transmission is the passing of a song from one singer to the next.

116. Cf. Jensen 1980, 24, 42; Holbek 1987, 173-6 confirms this impression on the basis of a broad material of Danish fairy tales, collected c. 1870-1910.

CHAPTER 5

Homeric performance

Rhapsodes and singers

In ancient Greece Homer was performed by specialised singers called rhapsodes. The term *rhapsoidos* was given two etymologies, as meaning either a singer who stitches or one who has a staff. Both ideas are exemplified in Pindar (*N.* 2.1-3 and *I.* 4.65-6), and when in the initiation scene of Hesiod's *Theogony* the narrator receives a laurel staff from the Muses as the sign of his new profession (*Th.* 30), it is suggested that the singer of this poem considered himself a rhapsode in the sense of carrying a staff (even though he actually calls it a *skeptron*).¹ The staff was useful for the singer both when travelling and during performance; when in the *Iliad* Antenor describes the expert speaker Odysseus, he notes with astonishment that he did not gesticulate with his staff (*Il.* iii.218). In a famous vase painting the rhapsode is demonstratively characterised by his staff.²

Modern linguists reject the idea of the staff, accepting the stitching as the correct etymology.³ So what, then, did the rhapsodes stitch? According to Pindar (*N.* 2.2) they stitched *epe*, which may be translated as words, hexameter verses, or epic. Nagy opts for epic songs and builds up an interesting interpretation, involving also the Homeric weaving and spinning metaphors. Recently Jonathan Burgess has argued that *epe* refers to a performance technique of adding episodes to each others. Barbara Graziosi thinks that they stitch words. I agree with Harald Patzer, Andrew Ford, and Derek Collins in translating *epe* with verses and understand the stitching as referring to the characteristic adding style of oral

1. This is how Pausanias understood the phrase, Paus. 9.30.3.

2. British Museum E 270, by the Cleophrades painter, c. 490 B.C.

3. Patzer 1952. – Sauge 2007, 90-96, however, endorses the staff-etymology but with the interpretation of the staff as the rule a rhapsode has to follow.

poetic narrative: the rhapsode is a singer who stitches verse after verse to each other.⁴

In Homeric and Hesiodic poems singers are called *aoidoi*, and the much discussed question whether this term is synonymous with *rhapsoidoi* will be treated below. As they are represented in the texts, they are strikingly similar to the epic singers encountered in field-work in our time.

They are invariably male, and they may be itinerant or stationary according to circumstances. The *Iliad* mentions the Thracian singer Thamyris, who met the Muses when travelling from Oichalia towards Pylos (*Il.* ii.594-600), and in the *Hymn to Apollo* the narrator describes himself as itinerant. In the *Odyssey* two stationary bards are described, Phemius in Ithaca and Demodocus in Scheria, and itinerant singers are mentioned in one passage. Their social status is sometimes high, sometimes not. When Eumaeus speaks of wandering professionals that you might be inclined to welcome, unlike beggars, singers occur together with craftsmen such as prophets, doctors, and carpenters (*Od.* 17.382-6). That is, they are useful, but not of especially exalted status. Furthermore, when towards the end of the *Odyssey* the hero has killed all the suitors, Phemius the singer is represented as a parallel to Medon the herald when they appear in slightly ridiculous roles, Phemius on the point of fleeing and Medon hiding behind a chair; when they assert that they have worked for the suitors out of sheer need, not willingly, Odysseus smiles and lets them live (*Od.* 22.330-80). Again, they are useful servants and protected by the gods, but their place in society is relatively humble.

As against such figures stands Demodocus, the Muse's favourite and highly respected by the Phaeacian court, who, being blind, is led by a herald wherever he goes (*Od.* 8.62-70). Odysseus praises him for his performance, and the text is explicit about his excellent qualities. He is, however, dependent on gifts such as the piece of meat Odysseus takes care to have served to him; he may be a great singer, but he is not among those who are invited as guests to the king's dinner, and even if he had been young and had had his eye-

4. Nagy 1996b, 61-9; 1996a, 89; 2001; Graziosi 2002, 32, 208; Burgess 2004-5. - Patzer 1952; Ford 1988; D. Collins 2001.

sight, it is inconceivable that he could have participated in the sports competitions arranged to entertain the stranger. For all its honour his status is that of a dependent person. Another rather highly placed singer belongs to Agamemnon's household (*Od.* 3.267-72). He was entrusted with looking after Clytemnestra during the absence of her husband and making sure that she did not stray from the way of virtue. Aegisthus had to send him off to an isolated island before proceeding to corrupt the queen. His role must have resembled that of Boûbacar Tinguidji, the Fulani singer described by Seydou, who had for many years been attached to the chief Môssi Gaïdou in Mali. He followed him everywhere, also in war, and it was his task to remind the chief of the deeds of his ancestors and in that way exhort him to be as valorous as they.⁵ Such singers' expert knowledge of the family's history not only enables them to entertain and praise their patrons, but also renders them authoritative in matters of honour and correct behaviour.

When Odysseus tells his masterly story to the Phaeacian court, he is praised for resembling a singer and rewarded with rich gifts (*Od.* 11.333-69). It seems reasonable to regard this detail as a hint from the poet to his audience about the proper way of reacting to a good performance, just as Innes reports from The Gambia how an epic singer may use the identification between performance in the poems and the singing actually taking place to invite his listeners to remunerate him for his song.⁶

Audiences are predominantly male, but in Scheria Queen Arete is an important member of the audience, and in Ithaca Penelope attends from her chamber. Considering that the hall where the entertainment takes place is filled up with her suitors, it is obvious that it would not be proper for her to be present. The situation is therefore too abnormal to serve as a source of information about the regular circumstances of such performances. In the *Hymn to Apollo* the narrator addresses a chorus of young girls that seems to constitute his main audience.⁷

5. Seydou 1972, 31-2.

6. Innes 1973, 110-11; cf. Slyomovics 1987, 238.

7. For a careful study of text-internal audiences, see Doherty (1992) 2009a.

The singer may choose his own topic, but when somebody in the audience asks for a specific song, he is also able to satisfy the request on the spur of the moment. In two cases an Odyssean performance is cut short: when in *Od.* 1.328-44 Penelope requires Phemius to end a song that displeases her, and when in *Od.* 8.533-43 Alcinous orders Demodocus to interrupt a performance that makes his guest cry. Apparently it is the patron who is entitled to intervene, and the dispute between Penelope and Telemachus over the matter is at the same time a dispute about which of them is master of the household. Audiences depicted in the *Odyssey* mostly listen in silence, just like Mandinka audiences at epic performances in The Gambia.⁸ There are no examples of interaction between singer and listeners as is most often the case in our time.

To what degree singers in the poems depict singers in real life has been much discussed, the debate being centered round the question of the relationship between the terms *aoidos* and *rhapsoidos* and the question of performance. Whereas the singers in the *Odyssey* accompany themselves on a lyre or a phorminx, rhapsodes as they occur in other sources do not carry an instrument, nor are they accompanied by musicians. This fact is normally understood to mean that rhapsodes spoke rather than sang, and their activity is described with the English verbs to recite or to chant. However, in a detailed portrait of the rhapsode Ion (to be further discussed below), Plato actually uses the verb *aidein* (to sing) of his performance and even speaks of a *melos* (song) of Homer's, a noun that is normally reserved for lyrics.⁹ So perhaps the rhapsodes actually sang, but without instrumental accompaniment, as was the case with Honko's Gopala Naika.

Be that as it may, in the lack of instrumental music the rhapsodes in non-Homeric sources differ markedly from singers as they occur in Homeric poetry, and scholars have mostly understood the relationship between the singers in the poems and the rhapsodes of reality in terms of a development in time. For those who consider the

8. Innes 1974, 10.

9. Pl. *Ion*. *Aidein*: 532b, 535b; *melos*: 536b. – Notopoulos 1964, 1-18. – M.L. West 1981 attempts a reconstruction of the melody of the first verses of the *Iliad*.

Iliad and the *Odyssey* to have been composed c. 700 B.C. a span of c. 250 years divides the *aidoi* from the first attestations of the term *rhapsoidos*, and it is often thought that the shift in terms indicates an important change in performance that had taken place during this interval. By Hans van Wees, for instance, the change from the singing bard to the reciting rhapsode is felt to be a major problem, and the need for a considerable distance in time between the singers of the *Odyssey* and the rhapsodes as they are known in later sources is one of the reasons why he cannot accept a sixth century date for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.¹⁰

However, to establish such a direct line from poetry to some kind of historical reality is problematic, even though it is often done. The use of the Homeric poems as a historical source is a vexed problem that can only be touched upon here, but before supposing that figures and events in the poems depict real figures and events it is important to remember that the poems in general describe the Homeric world as richer and more impressive than that of narrator and audience: heroes were bigger and stronger, food available in abundance, singers always successful and audiences regularly spell-bound.¹¹ Perhaps singing was considered more impressive than reciting and therefore better suited for heroic surroundings?

A parallel from our times which shows that bards in real life do not necessarily represent bards in their poems as true copies of themselves may be found in Slyomovics' study. She stresses that a main tendency in 'Awadallah's performance was to teach his audience a lesson about the respect that should be paid to his profession, also by persons who occupied higher positions than he on the social ladder, and 'Awadallah clearly identified himself with the hero-poet of his epic, Abu Zayd. Nevertheless, in the poem Abu Zayd accompanies himself on a *rabab*, whereas 'Awadallah used a drum and explicitly dissociated himself from *rabab*-playing colleagues.¹² This important difference in performance style between the singer himself and portraits he gives of singers in his song does not appar-

10. van Wees 2002, 103.

11. For an analysis of text-internal performances, see Hainsworth 1970.

12. Slyomovics 1987, 19.

ently hamper the process of identification between singer and audience on one hand and what takes place in the song on the other.

Another way of solving the problem of the relationship between *aidos* and *rhapsoidos* is to question whether Demodocus and Phemius are meant to be understood as epic singers at all. They may be singing lyrics, or they may be citharodes. Just as prose speeches are transformed into hexameters when quoted in the poems, non-epic poetic forms would necessarily end up as hexameters, too.¹³

In particular it has been maintained that the *aidoi* of the poem belonged to a stage of the epic tradition in which singers were still creative, whereas in a later, less accomplished phase *rhapsoidoi* were performing what they had learned by rote.¹⁴ The way Plato and Xenophon speak of rhapsodes is rather condescending, and the distance from the venerable singer at the Phaeacian court to the insignificant rhapsode in real life has been taken to be expressive of a decline in the art. But such a distinction between creative and memorising singers is a confusion of emic and etic views, linked as it is with the focus on originality that western societies have inherited from Romanticism. As has been emphasised in preceding chapters, traditional epic singers, whether singing or reciting, with or without instruments, regularly maintain that they repeat meticulously what they have been taught and are proud to do so. When they embellish their songs they do not feel that they are interfering with a precise transmission. What from an etic point of view is a mixture of memorising and creation is not so for the singing communities, and even if a shift of the kind suggested had actually taken place, it would hardly have been felt clearly enough to cause the introduction of a new term.

In a Greek context it is worth noticing that when we find an explicit criticism of rhapsodes, they are accused of being creative: I am referring to a scholium on the passage of Pindar mentioned

13. This is Pavese's solution (1993) 2007, 54.

14. Aly 1914, 245; Sealey 1957; Burkert 1987, 47-9; Nagy 1990, 54; 1996b, 59-74; Janko 2000; Danek 2006, 65-6; Quaglia 2007, 262. Nagy stresses that the passage from creative to reproductive took place gradually, and that the two kinds of rhapsode must not be contrasted with each others, Nagy 1996b, 60; 1996a, 82-7. – M.L. West 1981, 114-15 and D. Collins 2004, 176 argue against the distinction.

above (a passage I shall return to in Chapter 9).¹⁵ The commentator is concerned with a certain Cynaethus and his followers, who are said to have made up verses and entered them into the *Iliad*, and Cynaethus himself is asserted to have composed the *Hymn to Apollo* and pretended that it was by Homer. Clearly, creativity was not considered an asset in a rhapsode.

In general the supposed relation between instrument and creativity as against non-instrumental performance and reciting by rote does not find confirmation in fieldwork. There are creative traditions with or without musical accompaniment, and even traditions in which instrumental music is of great importance may include individual singers performing without accompaniment or preferring to recite rather than to sing.

Reichl does, however, point to a distinction that exists in Kirghiz and Kazakh traditions and may look similar to the proposed distinction between *aidos* and *rhapsoidos*. It actually reveals itself in the fact that there are different terms for two kinds of bard. But in his description of how the two types manifest themselves Reichl draws a picture rather different from that held by Homeric scholars: what characterises Reichl's creative singer is his extensive repertoire and his ability not only to expand or abbreviate songs, but also to turn texts he has learned in prose into verse, whereas the reproductive singer knows only a few songs or extracts from songs. The great Dzüsüp Mamay belonged to the former category, and, as mentioned above, he had undergone intensive memory training. It is also worth noting that Reichl does not speak of a development from one type to the other. The two kinds of singer are contemporary and exist side by side in the same community, and the distinction between them is often blurred. Furthermore, Reichl stresses that the existence of accessible books or manuscripts does not in itself bring about a development from creativity to memorising.¹⁶

In her analysis of the ancient sources for Homer's life Graziosi

15. Sch. N. 2.1. – *Scholia* are commentaries that accompany classical texts in some of the medieval manuscripts, and they are often difficult to date. The one referred to here is likely to be ancient.

16. Reichl 1992, 90, 223-35, 261; 2001b, 224-6. Cf. Ying 2001 about Mamay.

subjects the question to renewed investigation. In a discussion of three related terms, *aidos*, *rhapsoidos*, and *poietes*, she analyses all the early occurrences of the word *rhapsoidos* and its derivations.¹⁷ She shows that the term as such is not derogatory; it connotes authority, not foolishness, and if modern readers feel otherwise they owe their impression to the individual standpoints expressed by Plato and Xenophon. In her view, what is typical of a rhapsode is that he performs poems he does not claim to have composed himself. The distinction between rhapsode and poet is clear: the poet composes, the rhapsode performs.

So far, so good. When it comes to the relationship between singer and rhapsode, Graziosi is less clear, and also less convincing. She argues that even though many passages treat the two concepts as synonymous, there are cogent reasons for maintaining a distinction: while the rhapsode is a performer, the term for singer, *aidos*, covers both composing and performing.

Here her reading of the adduced passages is not always convincing, and especially there is an important weakness in her interpretation of one of the two first occurrences of the word *rhapsoidos*. Besides its use in a dedicatory inscription from c. 450 B.C. (to be quoted below), where it designates a normal, human rhapsode, the word occurs in verse 391 of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as an attributive to the sphinx: the monster is called *he rhapsoidos kyon*, the rhapsodic bitch. Graziosi offers a clear and interesting interpretation of why the monster could be thus designated, referring also to verse 1200, where she is called *chresmoidos*, singer of oracles, and lists a series of similarities between the sphinx and the rhapsodes, among other things that both parties were experts in competition.¹⁸ What Graziosi does not mention, however, is that the same sphinx is actually called *aidos* when she is first referred to, at the opening of the tragedy (36). So in this crucial context at the very beginning of the documented history of the term *rhapsoidos* it is synonymous with *aidos*. The sphinx was a performer, whether of a riddle she had herself invented or not.

17. Graziosi 2002, 18-47.

18. Graziosi 2002, 27-9.

My conclusion is that except for the proviso that *aidos* may be a more comprehensive term than *rhapsoidos*, covering both rhaps- and citharodes, the two terms are synonymous, and that the distinction between them is one of style, the former being suitable for poetry, the latter for prose. Whatever the differences between the heroic world and his own, a rhapsode present in the audience at a performance of the *Odyssey* would have had no difficulties in recognising himself in Phemius and Demodocus.

Homer as a rhapsode

Rhapsodes in real life are relatively well known from literature, inscriptions and vase paintings, and the picture is clear enough: they are professional, male, and itinerant, and they entertain broad audiences. There were many of them. Plutarch (1st century A.D.) has an anecdote about the Sicilian tyrant Hieron and the poet Xenophanes. When the latter deplored that he could hardly afford two slaves, Hieron mocked him, pointing to the fact that even after his death Homer was able to provide nourishment for more than 10,000 men.¹⁹ As a source for Hieron and Xenophanes the story is worthless, but for the anecdote to be meaningful the number cannot have been wildly exaggerated.

Plato seems to take for granted that Homer and Hesiod led rhapsodes' lives, and this is also how both the *Biographies of Homer* and the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* describe them.²⁰ Again, as sources for a historical Homer these texts are of little interest, but as descriptions of how the rhapsodic profession was perceived in later periods they are well worth reading. The most detailed and proba-

19. Plu. *Moralia* 175B-C. Cf. Aloni 1998, 46; Graziosi 2002, 60. – Herington 1985, 167-76 presents a collection of sources for rhapsodes in English translation.

20. Plato on Homer and Hesiod: Pl. *R.* 10.600d. – Both the *Biographies* and the *Contest* are difficult to date. In the form in which they are transmitted, the oldest biography, *Vita Herodotea*, has been dated to between 50 and 150 A.D., and *Certamen*, in which the emperor Hadrian is mentioned as dead, must be later than 138 A.D. But stories of Homer's life seem to have been around already in the 5th century B.C., and *Certamen* makes use of a work by the sophist Alcidas (early 4th century B.C.), M.L. West 2003b, 297-305.

bly oldest of the biographies, the one that claims to have been composed by Herodotus, offers the following story. As a young man Melesigenes – later to be called Homer – was educated as a school teacher. However, when a rich patron invited him to see the world, he accompanied him on a voyage to the western Mediterranean, and since he was already attracted by the idea of becoming a poet he took notes of what he saw.²¹ He began his career as a poet when he lost his eyesight, and in later periods he toured the Greek lands, particularly the towns in Asia Minor and the islands along the coast, performing wherever occasion arose. For brief periods he returned to teaching, both in a private household and as the master of his own school, but first and foremost he was an itinerant poet and rhapsode. The impression given is that he composed his poems in private and performed them afterwards, but he also impressed his audiences with his capacity for extemporaneous composition whenever a situation called for a comment. He was poor and dependent on patrons and audiences for his living, now and then falling back on his first profession as a teacher.

Some elements of this life are evidently to do with the fact that the protagonist is Homer. For one thing, he does not undergo a professional training as a singer. How could he? Considering that he is the founder of the epic genre there were no masters to learn from. For the same reason the poems he performs are composed by himself. Besides, his profession as a teacher obviously mirrors the fact that in real life the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were important school texts.

In the present context the role literacy plays in his life is of particular interest. First of all, the narrator has no speculations about whether writing existed in Homer's time. He links the poet's life story to the foundation of Greek cities in Asia Minor, especially the foundations of Cyme and Smyrna, a fact that for modern readers makes 1102 B.C. the date of Homer's birth.²² Nevertheless, writing, schools, written notes, and inscriptions are taken for granted. There is no mention of books being around, however, and since Homer

21. *Vit. Hom. Hdt.* 6.

22. M.L. West 2003b, 403.

only begins to compose after he has gone blind, he obviously composes orally. The narrator does not comment on how Homer used the notes he made during his journey; probably we are meant to think that somebody read them aloud to him. Nor are we told how he managed to teach without being able to see; but when he set up his own school it is stated that he taught children the epics, and that the citizens admired him for his intelligence.²³ It seems we are to imagine that he recited his epics to the pupils and that adults, too, sat in on the teaching, a scenario perfectly possible for a blind teacher and rhapsode.

At a certain point while Homer was living in Phocaea and used to perform his epics in the *leschae* (humble premises where men met for talking and having fun; Martin West translates the word as ‘saloons’) a bad guy enters the story. His name is Thestorides, and he makes his living by teaching boys to read and write:

When he became aware of Homer’s poetry, he made an approach to him, offering to take him in and look after him and feed him, if he was willing to set down in writing the poems he had composed, and when he composed more, always to bring them to him. When Homer heard this he decided he should do it, as he was short of the necessities of life and in need of care.²⁴

Thestorides writes down Homer’s poems at the poet’s dictation, and as soon as he has them in his possession he ends his care for the poet and leaves for Chios, where he sets up a school and performs the poems as if they were his own. So much for the interaction of orality and literacy! What the written text achieves is to enable an unscrupulous person to steal the poet’s works. As for Homer himself, the narrator presents him as both composing and performing orally even though he is perfectly literate. In this he resembles many oral epic poets in the modern world who are literate but do not use writing in their craft as singers. Furthermore, the fact that the idea of having the poems written did not originate with the poet but

23. *Vit. Hom. Hdt.* 25.

24. *Vit. Hom. Hdt.* 15, trl. M.L. West 2003b, 371.

with another person who had his own agenda, is, again, in accord with fieldwork experience.

The other biographies are much less detailed than Pseudo-Herodotus, and they differ from him especially on matters of parentage, date, and geography. Many Greek cities claimed Homer as their citizen, a fact that is prominently discussed in the biographies, and in general it is evident that nothing solid was known of the great poet's history. But the picture of the humble itinerant oral poet is stable throughout these texts.

As described in the biographies, Homer is semi-professional just as it is the case for many epic singers in the modern world, but in other sources rhapsodes are represented as living exclusively from their art as singers. Whether this difference is important or just a question of how many details are included, is impossible to determine. Furthermore, Homer the rhapsode is sometimes stationary, sometimes itinerant, whereas other sources presuppose that rhapsodes are itinerant. My guess is that most of the historical rhapsodes would at times have been stationary and at others itinerant during a lifetime. If they found a good patron, they would have stayed with him as long as it suited both parties, otherwise they would have travelled.²⁵ There is nothing to suggest that there was a difference in status between influential stationary court singers and less respected itinerant bards as the situation is described for Fulani and Manding bards in pre-colonial Africa.²⁶

Rhapsode and audience

The rhapsode's occupation may have run in families; at least that is what is suggested by the term 'Homerids', the sons of Homer, and sometimes also a certain Creophylus is mentioned as the head of a family of professional rhapsodes. The Homerids had their main seat on Chios, the Creophylei on Samos. A further possibility is that 'Homerids' and 'Creophylei' designate various schools, such as we

25. For the relationship between itinerant poets and their patrons in archaic Greece, see Martin 2009.

26. Seydou 1972, 18-30; Innes 1974, 1-11.

must in any case imagine to have existed. Authoritative singers will have been attracting apprentices in a more or less formalised way. The itinerant singer Thamyris, of whom a dramatic story is briefly told in *Iliad* ii.595-600, may have given name to still another school.²⁷

A good reason for travelling was to be found in the competitions arranged by both city-states and private patrons. The overall importance of contests is the element of the Greek rhapsodes' lives that differs most from what is typical in modern times. Singers' competitions are mentioned from various places in the modern world, but they are not a dominant feature as in Greece. This difference does not, however, single out Greek rhapsodes from singers elsewhere since competitiveness is a conspicuous characteristic of Greek culture in general, not of rhapsodes in particular.

In the Hesiodic *Works and Days* the narrator mentions that he won a tripod at a nobleman's funeral in Chalcis and dedicated the prize to the Muses on Helicon (*Op.* 654-9). There is thought to have been epic contests at the various festivals that were instituted during the sixth century B.C., such as the Pythian Games (from 582) and the Greater Panathenaea (from 566), and in later times such contests were a regular part of the cultural life of a city-state.²⁸ From Herodotus it is clear that there were rhapsodic performances in Sicyon until the tyrant Clisthenes closed them down (sixth century B.C.).²⁹ An inscription c. 450 B.C. from Dodone, now in the National Museum in Athens, runs: "The rhapsode Terpsikles dedicated [me] to Zeus Naios (*Terpsikles toi Di Naioi rhapsoidos anetheke*)".³⁰ The text is written on a small bronze tripod base that once carried a vase. Terpsikles must have won a competition and, just like the rhapsode in *Works and Days*, dedicated the prize as a votive gift to the god. Grazi-

27. Burkert 1972; Graziosi 2002, 201-28. – Thamyris: Wilson 2009, 46-59.

28. Delphi: Burkert 1987, 52; Athens: Neils 2007, 42-3. Neils presumes that *Iliad* xxiii inspired both Clisthenes and the organisers of the Panathenaea, whereas in my view the causal relation was the other way round, the poem alluding to the Athenian games.

29. Hdt. 5.67.1.

30. Karapanos collection 450. Cf. Kotsidu 1991, 74-5, who also mentions a similar inscription by a rhapsode Clearchus, from the same period, but of unknown provenance.

osi argues that the speaking name Terpsikles, famous for pleasure, suggests that this rhapsode, too, came from a family of performers.³¹

Plato's *Ion* (4th century B.C.) has just won the competition at the Asclepius games in Epidaurus and also hopes to win at Athena's games in Athens.³² For later centuries the epigraphic documentation of competitions for both citharodes and rhapsodes is considerable.³³ Sadly, the most interesting inscription in our context, *IG II² 2311*, a list of victors at the Panathenaea from c. 375 B.C., is fragmentary at the beginning where the results of the musical contests would have been.

Rhapsodes had abundant possibilities of listening to each other and adapting their performances to varying circumstances. In this way, both because they learned from each other and because they had to perform to audiences in many parts of the Greek-speaking world, their repertoires would take on characteristics from many sources. The Panhellenic aspect of the two great epics has been in focus during the last decades, mainly because of Nagy's studies, and I shall return to the topic in Chapter 7.³⁴ Its importance is obvious, and there is no doubt that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have incorporated in their texture much that came from local traditions, just as other rhapsodic traditions have. Not least the great catalogues, for instance the family genealogies, drew upon local traditions.³⁵

Nagy imagines that rhapsodic competitions at festivals made performances at private parties fall into disuse,³⁶ but that is unlikely. Public festivals may have been the normal performance arena for the most successful rhapsodes, such as Plato's *Ion*, but in order to make a living from his art the average rhapsode must always have been ready to perform whenever a patron was interested in engag-

31. Graziosi 2002, 26.

32. Pl. *Ion* 530a. For a survey of early competitions, see Kotsidu 1991, 8-14.

33. Aly 1914, 248-9; M.L. West 1981, 114.

34. Cf. Chapter 6 below.

35. M.L. West 1985, 165.

36. Nagy 1990, 23-4.

ing him. In Athenaeus (620b, 2nd century A.D.), well-to-do citizens invite rhapsodes to entertain at their symposia.³⁷

The prosodic demands of the Greek hexameter tradition are considerable. In general, ancient metres leave less freedom of choice than most modern poetic forms, but the hexameter is particularly demanding. Milman Parry's teacher, the linguist Antoine Meillet, pointed out that this metre was so ill suited for the Greek language, calling for all kinds of artificial tampering with morphological rules and syllabic quantities, that it might go back to the non-Indo-European forerunners of the Greeks as inhabitants of the Balkan peninsula.³⁸ For a rhapsode to reach a stage at which he could move with ease in his tradition must have called for many years of training. To begin with, his way of learning may have resembled the process described by Lord, and Mario Cantilena has drawn attention to the analogy between this process and a child's learning his/her mother tongue.³⁹ However, keeping in mind Foley's statement about oral poetry working like language, only more so, we can hardly imagine that the more professional education developed just by itself; the learning of the special grammar of formulas and themes must have been a more complicated matter. My guess is that a fledgling rhapsode underwent harsh training, just like young 'Awadallah in Egypt and young Mamay in Xinjiang, and that his elementary training was afterwards followed up by many years of apprenticeship.

Epic audiences were either male, for instance in the *leschae* and at private parties, or included both genders, as they seem to have done at most public festivals; purely female audiences are not attested. Graziosi emphasises that in early sources Homer is always mentioned in connection with an audience, and that the most striking characteristic of these audiences is their universality.⁴⁰ There have been different ideas about the kind of audience to whom the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are addressed; on text-internal evidence it seems to me that the audiences included both sexes, young and old, high and

37. The passage is discussed in Nagy 1996b, 158-60.

38. Meillet 1923, 58-63.

39. Cantilena 1997, 154-5.

40. Graziosi 2002, 57-8.

low,⁴¹ whereas the misogynist mood of the *Works and Days* suggests that this poem was directed at a purely male group of listeners.

Even though the distinction between *rhapsoidos* and *poietes* seems clear-cut, ancient sources regularly represent Homer as a rhapsode, and Graziosi argues convincingly for the view that this concept originated in rhapsodic circles.⁴² She also points out that the concept of Homer as the revered poet entertaining aristocratic audiences that has been widespread in modern times, has no support in ancient sources and is based on scholars' wilful neglect of them. When in later periods Greeks imagined what the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was like, they drew their portrait of the great poet in the likeness of the rhapsodes they knew from their own surroundings, as a person of humble means singing to powerless people, fishermen, shoemakers, and old men in the gathering places of harbour towns.⁴³

In my opinion, if by 'Homer' is meant the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, there is every reason to accept the idea that he was a rhapsode, or rather, that two rhapsodes composed the two epics in the way traditional singers of oral epic do. In their own view they were not poets but performers of songs that had been composed many generations previously by somebody called Homer. No wonder, therefore, that Herodotus tells us nothing about the composition of these poems at the Pisistratid court – neither the rhapsodes in question nor their audiences would have considered them to be new compositions but on the contrary they would have maintained that the two epics were precise repetitions, word for word and line for line, of what Homer had once sung.

Where does this leave the *oidoi* of the *Odyssey*? Graziosi takes for granted that they are understood to have composed their songs themselves, especially because Telemachus speaks of Phemius' song as new (*Od.* 1.352, cf. 22.347-8).⁴⁴ In my interpretation, instead, they, too, should be understood as performers of readymade poems.

41. Cauer 1921, 459-81; Jensen 1992, 65-84; Dalby 1995.

42. Graziosi 2002, 18-50.

43. Graziosi 2002, 51-89, 252.

44. Graziosi 2002, 19-20.

When Demodocus can entertain his audience with songs about incidents from the Trojan War and Phemius sing of the homecoming of the Greek heroes, a game with past and present is unfolding. Just as one might wonder how a rhapsode could know what took place in a war many generations ago or what the gods were doing on Olympus, the question of when the songs about Troy were first sung must also have been intriguing, and an especially interesting question must have been how bards living in far away Ithaca or in even more distant Scheria could know the stories. For all such questions the answer is: by divine help. The narrator of the *Iliad* is explicit about it in the invocation with which he introduces the Catalogue of Ships: the Muses are his eye-witnesses (*Il.* ii.485-92). When Odysseus praises Demodocus for having performed a song as correctly as if he had himself been present at Troy (*Od.* 8.487-91), I take this as an expression of such speculations, too. It is worth stressing that Odysseus does not say “What a great poem you have composed”, but considers who can have taught Demodocus this superb song, and his answer is that either the Muse or Apollo himself must have done so. Songs are not composed, they are learned from others. For a normal rhapsode this divine help consisted in what we would call the tradition, but since at the time of the war the chain of masters and apprentices had not yet developed, the gods must have offered their help directly. To have singers entertain contemporaries of the war, and even to have Demodocus perform a song about Odysseus to the hero himself, is a kind of poetic irony comparable to how Athena in human disguise can say a prayer to Poseidon and immediately afterwards fulfil it herself (*Od.* 3.62).⁴⁵

Plato's *Ion*

Among non-Homeric sources Plato's dialogue *Ion* is special in featuring a rhapsode as the protagonist and presenting him in a way that is informative of the context for his art. Compared to how oral bards appear in fieldwork reports, parts of the description are very close to how singers and audiences are represented in modern

45. Cf. Jensen 1980, 69-79.

scholarly literature, while other parts are difficult to fit into this picture.

First and foremost, the famous simile of the Muse as a magnet that irresistibly attracts the poet, the rhapsode, and the audience so that each and every link of the chain, even the remotest,⁴⁶ becomes magnetic itself, is easily acceptable as a description of a performance as experienced in fieldwork; also, when the verb *ekplettein* (as-tound) is used of the effect the singer works on his listeners, when it is described how they are moved to tears at points of emotional climax, and when it is said that the Muse draws their souls towards her, this all matches similar descriptions of spellbound audiences in folkloristic and anthropological literature.⁴⁷

As for the rhapsode, both he himself and his interviewer, Socrates, take for granted that he is an expert in the art of memory, and when Socrates asks him to recite a given passage of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, he does so immediately without the slightest hesitation.⁴⁸ At the same time, he prides himself on his skill in embellishing Homer, saying *eu kekosmekā* (I ornamented well). Timothy Boyd has drawn attention to how closely this expression resembles the way in which Parry's Mededovic prided himself on his skill in ornamentation.⁴⁹ On this interpretation Ion is characterised in a way similar to how singers in living traditions describe the interaction of memorisation and creativity in their practice: they reproduce and embellish, and there is no contradiction involved. Again, that he is specialised in performing Homer as against other poets such as Hesiod or Archilochus resembles the situation of many bards in more recent times, such as Roghair's *Palnadu*-singers. Ion may himself be so moved by his story that he breaks into tears; this does not, however, prevent him from keeping an eye on his listeners and observing their reactions – another characteristic he shares with singers in our day. Socrates even calls him possessed by Homer. There is nothing in gen-

46. Here I disagree with Nagy 1990, 55.

47. Pl. *Ion*. The magnet: 533d-5a, 535e, 536a; *ekplettein*: 535b; tears: 535e; drawing the souls: 536a.

48. Pl. *Ion* 537a-b.

49. Pl. *Ion*. Memory: 537a, 539e; immediate recitation: 537a; ornamentation: 530d, cf. Boyd 1994, 114-21.

eral to suggest that he might be possessed in the way in which shamanistic epic bards in Siberian traditions are possessed, or as Naika's Siri women fall into a trance, but the expression could well describe a degree of identification between rhapsode and heroes such as was the case of Biebuyck's Rureke, who identified himself with his hero Mwindo, or of Kazakh singers' relationship with the protagonist of their epic, *Manas*.⁵⁰ In all these respects the description of Ion closely matches how oral epic singers are described in modern fieldwork.

What is strange, however, is the emphasis on the rhapsode's skill in interpreting his texts. Such activity is not unusual in itself, as attested by, for instance, Beck, Slyomovics, and Reynolds; it is normal enough for singers to discuss the content of their songs with their audiences. But as described in Plato's dialogue the interpretation appears to be the main part of Ion's art, a fact that is hard to accept. At any rate, it makes little sense as part of the performances for the 20,000 listeners mentioned by Socrates, and when Ion describes how he becomes sleepy when other poets are discussed, but wide awake when Homer comes up, this rather suggests informal conversations, more or less as they take place in Socratic dialogues in general, and as they are described by Reynolds when a singer performs to a local audience in al-Bakatush.⁵¹

To my mind, the insistence on Ion's skill or lack of it in talking about Homer rather than on his success as a performer of epic must be understood as a distortion of how rhapsodes worked in real life, brought about by Socrates' statement, at the very start, that in order to perform Homer well the rhapsode has to have thoroughly understood the poet's thinking, not only his verses (*dianoia* as against *epe*). Here Socrates sets a trap for the rhapsode, and Ion falls right into it, misunderstanding the word *hermeneus* (interpreter), which in Socrates' mouth presumably referred to his activity as a performer. In-

50. Pl. *Ion*. Specialisation: 531a; tears: 535e; possession: 542a. Possession proper: Honko 1998a, 454-8 (Gopala Naika and the Siri women); Wadley 2005, 1-35 (Hindi, North India). Cf. Reichl 1992, 116 of Turkic singers breaking into tears.

51. Pl. *Ion*. Interpretation: 533c; 20,000 listeners 535d. - Reynolds 1995, 185-9. Ford 1999, 33-4 points to the similarity between Ion and the singers of al-Bakatush in this respect.

stead, Ion begins describing how good he is at speaking about Homer and brings up the critics Metrodorus, Stesimbrotus, and Glaucon, claiming that he surpasses them all in being able to express so many beautiful thoughts about Homer.⁵² In this way most of the dialogue is devoted to demonstrating the rhapsode's lack of professional skill in a field that is not his. On this reading Ion's reference to the critics is a case of nervous name-dropping on his part, and the fact that he is on thin ice is revealed when one of the names – the mysterious Glaucon – is erroneous.⁵³

What this discussion actually does resemble is the conversations Parry and his interpreter had with the Serbo-Croatian singers. The interviewers did not set traps, but often had to put their questions in intricate ways in order to elicit reasoned comments from the singers on matters such as the qualities of a successful song, or the question of reproduction as against variation. Socrates' dialogue with Ion leaves a similar impression of two parties not sharing the same code, as do many of Parry's dialogues with his informants. It might even be taken as an early example of the difficulties that arise when emic and etic approaches meet without the parties acknowledging the problem.

We are left with the question of what Ion performed. There is no doubt that in Plato's text 'Homer' is the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; the five verse passages that occur are all quoted from the two epics, and their titles are explicitly mentioned. But does that make sense? If Ion were reproducing fixed texts, it would be a remarkable deviation from the otherwise recognisable picture of an oral epic singer composing in performance. Ion's mention of ornamentation points in the opposite direction, and there is still another detail to raise the suspicion that the rhapsode's text was a normal composition in performance, not a recitation of a memorised *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. When towards the end of the dialogue Ion is provoked to define the craft of the rhapsode he at first asserts that it is everything; when Socrates does not accept this, Ion ends up maintaining that he is an

52. Pl. *Ion* 530b-d.

53. Glaucon may, of course, be the critic Aristotle mentions in his *Poetics*, Arist. *Po.* 1461b1.

expert in knowing the proper way people express themselves – a man, a woman, a slave, a freeborn, a leader, and a subject. As the peak of expertise for a singer performing a memorised text, this is rather awkward, whereas it makes perfect sense applied to a traditional oral bard composing in performance.

What I am arguing is, then, that Plato paints a precise and recognisable portrait of an oral epic singer and his audience as they are met with in our own time, with only one exception: the examples he has the rhapsode and Socrates give of Homeric poetry are quoted from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. If Ion had been a normal bard, he would not have limited himself to one fixed text, and I think that the impression Plato conveys, that Ion recited the two epics, is misleading. In general Plato often quotes the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in his dialogues, and he seems to know them almost by heart. Would he not have noticed if Ion's performances differed? Perhaps he would not. Lord has a story of how he invited two Bulgarian scholars to attend a performance because they would not believe him when he described how the epic texts changed, and only when attending a singer and controlling his performance against a written version did they accept that the singer was not reciting a memorised poem. Still, I find it difficult to imagine that Plato did not notice. My hypothesis is rather that he recognised the differences but did not care – after all, he had not heard of composition in performance as an interesting phenomenon. But when he was composing his dialogue, the examples that occurred to him were such that he knew by heart.⁵⁴

It is remarkable that not only Plato, but also Xenophon lets his Socrates have rather negative feelings towards rhapsodes. Whereas Homer is unanimously revered by both first-level narrators and speakers in the dialogues, Socrates treats Ion in a rather sarcastic way even though he is considered the best rhapsode of his time⁵⁵,

54. Lord (1960) 2000, 118-19. – Cf. Jensen 1980, 124.

55. Pl. *Ion* 541b. – It is sometimes stated (for instance by Rijksbaron 2007, 11, 109, 118-19) that Plato holds both poetry in general and Homer in particular in contempt. But before expelling Homer from his ideal state for moral reasons Socrates declares how he has loved him right from childhood and even describes this love almost as an erotic passion (Pl. *R.* 595b9-10, 607e4-8a5). Plato's own feelings for the *Iliad* and the

and according to Xenophon the great philosopher concurred when his friends called rhapsodes naive, *elithioi*.⁵⁶ This suggests that their status in fourth century society was relatively humble, just as Homer's status is described in the *Biographies of Homer*, and the situation resembles what is found in more recent times in many places where oral traditions are maintained by low-status artists. Such was, for instance, the standpoint Roghair met with among his intellectual colleagues in Andhra Pradesh, who did not even know that the *Palnadu epic* was alive and well in oral tradition just outside their door, and in any case advised the scholar to study the old written text rather than the versions performed by persons they looked down upon. Slyomovics reports the same attitude towards oral epic among educated persons in Egypt.⁵⁷ To admire an age-old text but despise the humble persons who perform it, is a well-known pattern in our day.

When Plato draws attention to Ion's rich attire,⁵⁸ this cannot be taken as an indication that rhapsodes were wealthy in general. As a winner, Ion had access to rich awards; besides, Socrates' description of the rhapsode's splendid garments contributes to the ironic picture of the man by stressing the distance between his inner and outer qualities.

Rhapsodes may, of course, have suffered a loss of status during the centuries preceding Plato and Xenophon, but the difference between the authoritative rhapsode of the fifth century B.C. and Ion and his colleagues as we meet them in Plato and Xenophon in the fourth, is in all probability a question of social class and individual opinion rather than historical development. Derek Collins has argued that there was a general hostility during the same period from the symposiastic milieu towards rhapsodic performing. In contrast to the portraits painted by Plato and Xenophon, inscriptions testify to the popularity among broad audiences of rhapsodic perform-

Odyssey are demonstrated by the numerous quotations from the two epics in his works, cf. Labarbe 1949.

56. X. *Mem.* 4.2.10; *Smp.* 3.5.

57. Roghair 1982; Slyomovics 1987, 17. – Blackburn 1988, xxii tells a similar story of bow songs in Tamil Nadu in Southern India.

58. Pl. *Ion* 530b; 541b.

ance well into the Roman era, a fact that serves only to sharpen the contrast to the élite gatherings of the symposia. Collins takes the negative view on rhapsodes in Socratic dialogues as an expression of this general antipathy and considers it a signal of prejudice against rhapsodes; he even speaks of “the stigma attached to rhapsodes by the likes of Plato and Xenophon”.⁵⁹

Recently Oswyn Murray has proposed a hypothesis of direct development from performance in the *Odyssey* via performance of the *Odyssey* to sympotic performance, and argues that “there was a substantive continuity between Homeric feast and archaic *symposion*”.⁶⁰ His notion is unconvincing since it neglects the important social difference between professional and amateur performers.

The antipathy described by Collins seems not so much a conflict between different poetic genres as between different social strata. It is obvious that there is a gap between professional performers, who earned their living by their art, and poets of the nobility such as Alcæus, Sappho, or Solon, who were free to use their poetic gifts as they pleased. Symposiasts belonged to the higher layers of society whereas rhapsodes were humble figures who depended on patrons whether tyrants, democratic organisers of festivals, or hosts at private festivities such as weddings or funerals.

Panathenaic competitions

Every year Athena’s birthday was celebrated in Athens on *Hekatombaion* 28, in late summer. From 566 B.C. onwards the festival was arranged with special lavishness every fourth year. The goddess was given a new peplos, brought to her in a solemn procession, musical and athletic competitions with luxurious prizes were held in her honour, and a sumptuous sacrifice of cows was offered on the Acropolis. Among the musical contests were rhapsodic recitals of Homer.

59. D. Collins 2004, 135-61, quote 160. – Graziosi comments: “In some circles, ‘Hollywood’ is synonymous with commercial superficiality, but to most people it speaks of prestige and high artistic standards”, Graziosi 2002, 31.

60. Murray 2008, 169; Murray does not mention Collins.

The various sources for rhapsodic competition at the Great Panathenaic festivals have been intensively discussed over many years. Scholars agree that they are of central importance for this phase of the history of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and do so for two rather different reasons: the musical *agones* at this festival constitute the best documented early occasion for Homeric performance, and the manuscript tradition of the two epics is considered to go back, in one way or another, to archaic Athens.

We have both literary and archaeological sources for the Panathenaic festivals, and it is certain that rhapsodes performed Homer as one of the musical competitions, but the details are unknown.⁶¹ That the musical competitions were considered important is clear from the fact that they were first on the programme and the prizes for winning considerable. However, to judge from the wealth of other activities taking place at the festival the Homeric competition cannot have been a dominant event. The general impression given of the role it played at the Panathenaea is very different from that of the role played by the dramatic performances at the Dionysus festivals in classical Athens. For instance, in his detailed discussion of the festival Aristotle mentions the musical competitions only briefly and does not single out the Homeric recitals.⁶² We do not know, for instance, how the recitals were organised, how many rhapsodes took part, how much time was reserved for this part of the festivities, or what the criteria were for winning.

Three literary sources mention the so-called Panathenaic rule about the recital of Homer.⁶³ The orator Lycurgus (c. 390-325 B.C.) speaks of a *nomos* (a law, a custom) instituted by the Athenian forefathers demanding that of all the poets only Homer's verses should be recited at the Greater Panathenaea, whereas Plato (c. 429-347 B.C.) and Diogenes Laertius (3rd century A.D.) specify that the

61. Neils 1992; 1996. – Exactly when the various points on the programme were initiated cannot be ascertained.

62. Arist. *Ath.* 60.

63. Pl. *Hipparch.* 228b-229b; Lycurg. 102; D.L. I.57, cf. Jensen 1980, 128-58, with bibliography. Further discussions: Nagy 1990, 21-2; Shapiro 1992; Nagy 1996a, 80-82, 102; M.L. West 1999, 382, who argues that the rule was introduced in 522; Nagy 2002, 9-35; D. Collins 2004, 143.

rhapsodes had to compete *ex hypolepseos* (by relay) or *ex hypoboles* (by relay/by prompt). Ever since J.A. Davison's basic study the similarity of these expressions has been thought to mirror the very wording of the rule.⁶⁴

Most scholars imagine that what was recited were the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.⁶⁵ But this is problematic, mainly because of the length of the two epics. According to J.A. Notopoulos, who has made the most reliable estimation accessible, a full recital of the *Iliad* would take up 27 hours, of the *Odyssey* 21,⁶⁶ and it is difficult to see how such a performance could be squeezed in among the other events at the festival. Add to this the time needed for selecting a winner and rewarding him with the prize. Nevertheless, Martin and Stephanie West, who consider the festival to have lasted four days, imagine a recital going on during the whole arrangement with the two poems either being performed in parallel sessions, six books per day, or all forty-eight books in a continued performance with twelve books per day.⁶⁷ It is difficult to see what the point would be of such a marathon recital, and if it really did take place, would it not then have been considered a major event in the festival, on a par with the procession and the gift to the goddess of the new peplos?

Besides the problems caused by the length of the two poems, it is hard to make sense of the competitive element if the rhapsodes' task was to recite them by rote. What would be the criterion for winning? According to Plato's *Ion*, the rhapsode had most chance of winning if he made his audience cry.⁶⁸ At a recital of the *Iliad* you might think that the odds would be against the rhapsode assigned, say, Book xx, rather than, for instance, Book xxii. Would rhapsodes have accepted such uneven conditions?

64. Davison 1955; Foley 1990, 22. Even though he considers the anecdote of Pisistratid influence on the written text a myth, Nagy attaches great importance to the Panathenaic rule and discusses the sources several times, e.g. Nagy 1996b, 69-80; 1996a, 70-93.

65. E.g. Herington 1985, 14; Nagy 1990, 21; 1996b, 77-9; 1996a, 80-82, 102; 2002, 9-15; Calame 1999, 45; Heiden 2008, 233.

66. Notopoulos 1964, 12.

67. M.L. & S. West 1999, 69-70.

68. Pl. *Ion* 535e.

Various attempts have been made to solve these problems. Boyd broke fresh ground when in 1994 he stated that a full recitation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was out of the question. Since there are good reasons for assuming that the musical contests were settled during the first day of the festival,⁶⁹ only selected parts of the poems can have been performed. Diogenes Laertius' phrase *ex hypoboles* may be understood as 'by prompt' and suggests that a prompter was at hand, an attendant or judge who was in charge of the competition and cued one rhapsode after another to give his performance. The rhapsode's skill in embellishing would be one of the criteria for winning.⁷⁰ Collins has taken the argument a step further. Like Boyd, he discards altogether the idea that rhapsodes recited the whole *Iliad* and *Odyssey* at the Panathenaea. Instead, he draws attention to the way the fictitious Homer and Hesiod compete in the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* and discusses three ways in which rhapsodes may have introduced innovations into a known text: "The first involves the "stitching" or "weaving" of song, the second involves the insertion of newly composed "Homeric" verses into a preexisting text, and the third involves capping with hexameter verses." It is the capping type he imagines for the Panathenaea: a game in which one rhapsode breaks off in a way that leaves the sense enigmatic or inconsistent, while the next one has to continue, often by means of a runover word, in such a way that a meaning is established.⁷¹ Burgess disagrees and argues for yet another solution, that the rhapsodes did not attempt to perform a full text, but recited selected episodes and just briefly recalled the context.⁷²

These scholars still maintain the premise that what was performed were the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, even though they no longer accept that the two poems were recited in full. However, there is no reason to take this for granted considering that none of our three

69. Boyd 1994, 110, with a reference to Neils 1992, 115.

70. Boyd 1994, 114-21.

71. D. Collins 2001, quote 132; in 2004, 194 he modifies this view, stating that the *Contest* model cannot be used as direct evidence for the Panathenaic competition. He does not, however, explicate how in that case he imagines the conditions of this competition.

72. Burgess 2004-5; 2009, 96.

sources mention the two epics; they all speak of performing *ta Homerou epe* (Homer's verses). Both West and Graziosi have recently reminded us of Wilamowitz' statement "Um 500 sind alle gedichte von Homer, um 350 sind von Homer im wesentlichen nur noch Ilias und Odyssee".⁷³ If the wording in Plato, Lycurgus, and Diogenes Laertius actually goes back to the sixth century B.C., the Panathenaic rule would not mean that these two poems were to be recited, but any poem of the Homeric tradition. (The three authors themselves probably considered 'Homer' to be synonymous with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but that is not relevant for our problem.)

Add to this that the hexameter that comes out of the mouth of the famous rhapsode on the Cleophrades vase is not part of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. For John Herington this excludes the interpretation that this rhapsode was performing at the Panathenaea;⁷⁴ but the argument should rather be reversed: what the painting actually demonstrates is that rhapsodes were not required to recite these two poems at the competition, but any Homeric epic.

As soon as we give up the idea that the poems performed at the Panathenaea were the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the arrangement of the competition becomes understandable.⁷⁵ The sources all suggest that something new was introduced by the rule mentioned by Lycurgus. In his version it gave priority to Homer as against all other poets – not the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as against the *Epic Cycle*, as it is sometimes understood, but Homer as against, say, Hesiod or Archilochus.⁷⁶ In Plato and Diogenes Laertius the emphasis is instead on the special kind of performance, by relay. Nagy has drawn attention to the fact that Socratic dialogues may be understood as a similar kind of competition by sequencing,⁷⁷ and Collins draws a comparison with the way symposiasts competed. We may imagine

73. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1884, 353; M.L. West 1999, 372; Graziosi 2002, 166.

74. Herington 1985, 14.

75. Bethe 1914, 13; Jensen 1980, 147-9. – de Vet 2008, 173, 175-6 also considers the Panathenaic performances to have been improvised, but does not mention the problems involved.

76. Cf. Pl. *Ion* 531a.

77. Nagy 1999b; 1999 c, 64-5; 2000.

that at earlier occasions in Athens or at performances in other city-states competing rhapsodes were free to choose what to recite, perhaps at the instigation of their audiences, and that the chance of winning lay in both the choice of a suitable episode, the skill in adapting it to the given audience's interests, and the virtuosity of the performance, such as the use of voice, mimicry, and gesture.

What was introduced by the Panathenaic rule was, then, a restriction of the choice of song from any poem in the rhapsode's repertoire to one belonging to the Homeric tradition, and the requirement that the rhapsodes should between them tell a continued story. Accordingly they were ordered to cover a common storyline, each performing a known episode in chronological order. This would involve capping in the sense that where one rhapsode stopped, the next would have to begin, something both Demodocus of the *Odyssey* and Ion of the Platonic dialogue would clearly have been able to do. The textual variants at the beginning and end of our *Iliad* may be traces left of such a procedure. Susan Wadley mentions that similar competitions take place in Uttar Pradesh in north India, where competitors must be able to start an episode from the point at which the previous singer has stopped, but do so in a different style.⁷⁸

Diogenes Laertius' phrase, *ex hypoboles*, may of course mean 'prompted' or 'cued', as interpreted by Boyd. As he describes it, there must have been officials in charge of the formalities of the competition, prompting each competing rhapsode to ascend the tribune and perform, one after another. But it is worth noting that both Diogenes and Plato add as an explanation that the words should be understood as 'by relay, in succession'; Plato says *ephexes* (one after another) and Diogenes *hoion hopou ho protos elexen, ekeithen archesthai ton echomenon* (so that where the first stopped, from there the next should start). These expressions exactly cover a procedure of the kind just described.

In this form the competition was not unlike the tragedy competitions in classical Athens in the sense that poets competed using in-

78. Wadley 1989, 98. Her example is from the 1960s, and I do not know whether such competitions are still being held.

dividual versions of well-known myths; only at the dramatic festivals was there neither a demand to have a full story told, nor to recite only Homeric stories.

Mark Griffith has discussed criteria for winning intellectual competitions in early Greece. He states that under the general heading of *sophia* (“wisdom/skill/artistry/cleverness/taste”), three main forms may be discerned: (a) knowledge and factual accuracy, (b) moral and educational integrity, and (c) technical skill and aesthetic/emotional impact. He is hesitant about the use of criterion (a) in actual practice because judges would seldom be able to evaluate the factual content of a performance. Besides, he points to the somewhat surprising fact that both in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* and in the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* the judge goes against the expectations built up during the competition and awards the victory on the basis of criterion (b): in Aristophanes’ comedy Dionysus gives the prize to Aeschylus in order to recreate the good old days of Marathon, and in the *Contest* the king chooses Hesiod instead of Homer because he is the poet of peace and Homer the poet of war.⁷⁹ When Gopala Naika said that he preferred the *Siri Epic* to the *Kooti Cennaya* his criterion was the same: peace as against war.

Considering the importance of truth for the epic genre, it is likely that among Griffith’s three criteria, (a) would be the most important for judges of an epic contest. Griffith’s hesitation would hardly have been prohibitive, since what was important would not have been factual truth in an etic sense, but the singer’s capability of presenting his audience with a version that confirmed the world they knew, in which power structures of their own community were recognisable in the portrait given of the heroic world. Besides, a mixture of the three would probably have been at work, and the judges would – just like the bard Ion – have been keeping an eye on the audience and observed how well the performance succeeded in magnetising the listeners and drawing their souls towards the Muse.

In any case, the idea of a Panathenaic contest consisting in performing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* not only does not make sense because of the length of the two epics, but also because it would be

79. Griffith 1990, 188-91; quote 188.

impossible for judges to settle the contest on any of the three criteria. An epic competition must have been one of both form and content, involving all factors at work in a performance arena.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in performance

Nevertheless studies in Homeric performance, at the Panathenaea and elsewhere, usually take for granted that rhapsodes performed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Such is, for instance, the implicit background of the ideas of an *Iliad* in three parts and an *Odyssey* in two.⁸⁰ It must be emphasised that from a comparative point of view such performances of written texts would be abnormal. In the framework of the present study there is no reason to imagine that rhapsodes ever attempted to perform these two specific texts, and the hypothesis should be discarded altogether. When the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written, it was not with the purpose of producing texts for performance, and when rhapsodes performed Homer, it was not the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Finnegan introduced the distinction between three kinds of orality, in relation to composition, transmission, and performance,⁸¹ and when scholars speculate how the *Iliad* can have been performed and for instance look for suitable incisions in the poem's text in order to achieve portions that would seem to be manageable in a performance context, they implicitly reduce the question of orality to being one of performance. But for oral epic as attested in fieldwork full orality in all three respects of the term is the norm. Books or other kinds of written texts may play a certain role in the transmission, as was the case in Parry and Lord's Yugoslavia, but even so the bards handle epics learned from books in the same way as other poems in their repertoire, remodelling them until they achieve a suitable mental text and afterwards exposing them to mental editing in accordance with their experience from performance. A written text is not only not needed in this process, it would be an encumbrance for the singer.

80. Taplin 1992, Stanley 1993.

81. Finnegan 1977, 17.

Considering that most modern fieldwork takes place in societies where books and other media are accessible, what is most striking is how unusual it is to find a report as the one about Dzüzüp Mamay's elder brother who collected epics in writing and implemented them in the teaching of his younger brother, and even in his case the aim was to enable the fully-fledged singer to perform flexible texts that he could adapt to the interests of his audiences. In the modern world, with all the written texts being around, in print and otherwise, and with the enormous prestige attached to the written word, the normal teaching method is still the one Reynolds met with in his poets' village.

Some scholars imagine that early written texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were particularly to be found among rhapsodes.⁸² Seen from a comparative angle this hypothesis is unlikely; Lord's experience that when oral epic is recorded in writing, the initiative does not come from the singer is a rule almost without exceptions. However, there are a few examples from modern times of performers' books. In his description of Korean *p'ansori* singers Pihl mentions that the text he is publishing already exists in more than 100 written versions, as manuscripts or in print, and he actually asserts that the most valuable manuscripts are preserved in singers' families. On the other hand, he does not specify how such texts are used by the singers, and in any case this tradition is not epic proper but narrative intended for entertainment. Besides, it is evident from his study that *p'ansori* performance is at least as flexible as oral epic traditions are.⁸³

The most interesting examples are described by Vibeke Børdahl. Among the many Yangzhou storytellers she studied, two owned manuscripts they had inherited, and she was allowed to read them. One of these texts was written between 1880 and 1910, and the other is dated 1923. She describes and analyses both texts, and compares them with the owners' mode of performance. The written versions are considerably shorter than the performed versions, but they are

82. E.g. Burkert 1987, 56-7; Ballabriga 1990, 28-9; M.L. West 2000c, 28, 31-2; Cassio 2002, 119, 123-4.

83. Pihl 1994, 113-21.

still narrative, not mere lists of topics. Who wrote the earlier text and with what purpose remains unknown, but the present-day owner was convinced that it had been written by one of the former masters. The more recent manuscript was written by the storyteller Fei Junliang (1891-1952). His background was unusual: he was a school teacher and had taken up training as a storyteller only when he was thirty-two years old. Every evening after attending his master's performance he had written out the day's episode in a kind of shorthand, and the purpose of his project was autodidactic, an aid to learning the story. In both cases the present-day owners kept these scripts as ritual objects, as it were, conceived of as family property that needed protection against stealing, i.e. copying. In actual practice neither the two owners of these manuscripts nor other storytellers used scripts when preparing their performances.⁸⁴

Here, then, we actually have two well-documented examples of manuscripts written by oral performers and kept in their families. But it should be stressed how rare they are, both in the tradition studied by Børdahl and in oral narrative traditions as such. Moreover, Børdahl's examples stem from a culture in which writing and print have an immensely long history and strong penetration. The oldest examples of printed novels taking their stories from the same pools of tradition as the oral Yangzhou stories stem from c. 1300 A.D. Furthermore, the fact that in the storytelling community the written texts were considered to imply a risk of theft offers a striking parallel to the story of the rhapsode Homer and the mischievous Thestorides referred to above: the ancient biography of Homer does not envisage the great poet as the happy owner of written epics, a groundbreaker for the art of writing, but as a victim of the nefarious possibilities accompanying this same art.

The experience of Phillips, Beck, and Slyomovics was that singers were uninterested in such books as were available, and that the book versions the scholars found differed considerably from the oral versions that were around.⁸⁵ In general it is not unusual for

84. Børdahl 2005.

85. Phillips 1981, 5; Beck 1982, 3-4; Slyomovics 1987, 66-7.

singers to learn from written texts if they are accessible, such as was the case in Parry and Lord's Yugoslavia. But such texts are treated just like oral texts, as sources to be learnt from, not as a means of preserving a particularly successful version or because written songs are considered more durable than songs preserved in the singer's memory. There is nothing to suggest that epic singers are eagerly reaching out for the book as a phenomenon, that they are having their own performances registered, or that they are preserving written books as a kind of treasure store of their craft, consulting them to make sure that they memorise the poems correctly.

If that is so in the modern world, how much more unlikely would it not have been for rhapsodes in archaic Greece to be pioneers in promoting the book?⁸⁶ Not only is it difficult to imagine what advantage it would be for them, but referring to books would be in conflict with their professional pride, which rested in their huge and supple memories. Nagy's assertion that the rhapsodes' mnemonic techniques were independent of writing, and that the written medium had nothing to do with their traditions, is unambiguously confirmed by fieldwork experience.⁸⁷ It is worth noting that Plato's self-important Ion nowhere makes the slightest hint at having access to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as books. Nor does the image of Homer as an itinerant rhapsode anywhere picture him as owning a book, reading one, or even consulting one, and the only outcome of his poems being written down is that they are stolen, as in the story told above, or that the poet can present them as gifts to other poets.⁸⁸ The singer's attribute is his lyre, the rhapsode has his staff, but neither of them is ever assigned a book to mark his identity.

Summary

Homeric epic was recited by professional singers, rhapsodes, who in all essentials resemble epic singers as they are known in modern times. In the *Iliad* and especially the *Odyssey* singers sometimes per-

86. Adam Parry underlined this point, A. Parry 1966, 214-16.

87. Nagy 1990, 29.

88. Graziosi 2002, 49, 233, 244.

form, and these singers mirror real life rhapsodes but with suitable idyllisation. In historical times the Greeks thought of Homer as a rhapsode. When at the Greater Panathenaic festivals rhapsodes competed at Homeric recital, we should understand ‘Homer’ as any Homeric poem, not the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. The “Panathenaic rule” demanded of the competing singers that they were able to cover a common storyline of the Trojan War. It is unlikely that rhapsodes were first to promote written texts of the two epics.

CHAPTER 6

Transitional texts

Lord and his critics

In Chapter VI of *The Singer of Tales* Lord discussed the relationship between writing and oral tradition. Here he stated, among other things, that any given literary text is either oral or written and cannot be transitional between the two media. Phases of transition exist, but transitional texts do not, “because the two techniques are, I submit, contradictory and mutually exclusive”.¹ This was met with strong criticism from many sides. Medievalists asserted that on the contrary transmitted European literature teemed with transitional texts,² and anthropologists emphasised the lively interaction between oral and written in many modern communities. With an open-minded attitude rare among scholars Lord accepted much of the criticism and changed his views, as demonstrated in quite a few of his later works.³ Perhaps, however, he was more correct in his initial stand than in his later retraction.

Of particular interest in the present connection is Ruth Finnegan’s criticism. Her argument was based on her own field-work in Sierra Leone as well as on a broad knowledge of oral poetry in the modern world, and she criticised the oral-formulaic theory for being too rigid in its definitions and thereby separating elements that in reality belong together. Her paper, “What is oral literature anyway? Comments in the light of some African and other comparative material”,⁴ acknowledged the general importance of the oral-formulaic theory but rejected Lord’s opinion on transitional texts. Finnegan demonstrated that written and oral literature coexists in many cultures, often with a lively interchange between the

1. Lord (1960) 2000, 124-38; quote 129.

2. Benson 1966; Curschmann (1967) 1979.

3. Lord 1976; 1986; 1995, 212-37.

4. Finnegan 1976, especially 137-8, 140-41.

two. She mentioned oral poets who rely on brief written notes for their performance, and from her own experience she adduced as an example that of the two most brilliant storytellers whose performances she attended in Sierra Leone; one was illiterate while the other had one of the best educations attainable in his community.

In her book, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, she refrained from defining the term 'oral', since she felt that it covers too many fields to be definable; texts can be oral in at least three important ways, in composition, transmission and performance, and there is a wealth of mixed forms in between.⁵

The basic point, then, is the continuity of 'oral' and 'written' literature. There is no deep gulf between the two: they shade into each other both in the present and over many centuries of historical development, and there are innumerable cases of poetry which has both 'oral' and 'written' elements. The idea of pure and uncontaminated 'oral culture' as the primary reference point for the discussion of oral poetry is a myth.

Both in this book and in her Penguin anthology of oral poetry⁶ she included a rich and varied selection from many times and parts of the world. One of the important aspects is that she makes it abundantly clear that oral poetry consists of an infinite range of genres – Lord sometimes gave his reader the feeling that it was necessarily epic.

But was Finnegan really refuting what Lord had claimed in the first place? He was not saying that no oral poet could read and write, nor that there was no coexistence and mutual inspiration between oral and written literature. On the contrary, he discussed many aspects of this, such as what happens when oral poets write their own texts, or when singers learn their texts from books; he also described how school teaching, diffusion of song books, or campaigns against illiteracy influence traditions. After all, his own field-

5. Finnegan 1977, 24; still in 2007 she insists that we need a looser definition of 'oral' (2007, 113).

6. Finnegan 1978.

work was carried out in an area where written and oral literature manifestly coexisted. One of Finnegan's assertions, that Lord claimed that literacy inevitably destroys the capacity of the oral composer,⁷ was actually quoted from G.S. Kirk, not from Lord. In a conference where she and Lord met, he said little besides briefly defending himself against misrepresentation.⁸

Lord was not, of course, uninfluenced by a certain romantic admiration for anything oral, almost to the point of regretting the success of campaigns for literacy, and he often overstated his points. Finnegan had some pertinent remarks about misdirected ideas concerning an "oral mentality" and even about a return to an old-fashioned anthropology that professional anthropologists no longer embraced. Her persistent emphasis that oral literature is just as multifarious as its written counterpart is still of great importance.⁹ Her stand is not, however, without paradoxes; especially it seems strange that an authority on oral literature should reject any attempt at defining the concept.

Lord's somewhat fundamentalist statements are both understandable and excusable considering that he was introducing a new kind of scholarship and wanted to argue his points as forcefully as possible. In general, his discussion was expressive of a clear eye for what was characteristic of the oral poetry he had been studying. The mere fact that the distinction between oral and written is still felt to make sense is a sign that even though each of these terms covers a broad field and must be further defined for many practical purposes, they are still basic.

What makes Lord's original standpoint worthy of serious consideration is precisely that it is so surprising. If he was well acquainted with examples of the kind that his critics mentioned, and if such texts are not transitional, what then did he mean by the term? His opinion is what philologists when studying medieval manuscripts would call the *lectio difficilior*, a reading that merits attention by virtue of its very strangeness, since it is not easily explained as a slip of the

7. Finnegan 1976, 138.

8. Lord 1976.

9. Finnegan 2005.

tongue, or of the writing hand. Thus, the mere fact of its incongruity suggests that Lord's statement was based on some kind of genuine experience, even though he later retracted his stand.

Two rather different components seem to merge in Lord's view. Besides the above-mentioned consideration of the mutually exclusive techniques of composition, his standpoint reveals that he was astonished at certain features he and Parry encountered during their fieldwork in Yugoslavia. If they went there with the usual idea of development in their minds, according to which writing is a self-evident progress from orality, they must have been surprised when they found that their informants did not eagerly grasp the art of writing. Illiterate epic singers often expressed admiration for books and those who could read them, and believed that if they had known how to read and write they would have been better at their profession. But those who were actually literate did not sit down to write their poems. On the contrary, they continued as they had been taught, not even writing down the main points of their story as a mnemonic aid or using the art of writing in other ways to stimulate their craft. They preferred their traditional procedures. When Lord denied the existence of transitional texts, he may have been still affected by his surprise at the fact that even though the Slavic oral tradition had coexisted with literacy for so many centuries, writing seemed not to be a stimulus for the oral epic singer.

Two models

The term 'transitional' suggests an evolution from oral to written, and that has, of course, been a typical feature in history. However, it may also convey the idea that this evolution is necessarily from inferior to superior. In the modern world criticism of civilisation and nostalgia for more primitive stages are common phenomena; nevertheless it almost always goes without saying that writing, and especially alphabetic writing, is an advance. The advantages of literacy have often been described, whereas it is much rarer to read about the advantages of oral performance.

A transitional text can be imagined in two main forms: a text composed in writing and performed orally, and one orally com-

posed and “performed” in writing. The former type is well known in modern societies, where public speeches, theatrical performances and many other oral art forms are normally composed and often also transmitted in writing. In the context of oral tradition, this former imagined type would involve a text composed by an oral poet who knew how to write and used this competence when preparing his performance, for instance by writing notes. Considering how often oral poets in our days are literate, it is actually astonishing that performance of this type does not seem to be attested in modern fieldwork.

On the contrary, Lord’s experience that oral epic singers in Yugoslavia who knew how to write did not use writing as an aid in composition has been overwhelmingly confirmed. Singers may be trained on written texts, they may learn new songs from books, and they may write their own songs and, for instance, have them published in literary magazines. But all this is different from the basic idea of the transitional, that the bard should incorporate the use of writing in his working process. That Finnegan had to refer to a medieval Chinese example of the use of written summaries as a mnemonic aid seems to reveal that she had been unable to find demonstrably oral cases.¹⁰ We may assume that if her Limba storytellers had found such a procedure useful, she would have mentioned them instead.

When in his evolutionary model for how the written text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* came into being (to be discussed in Chapter 6) Nagy has as an imagined first stage a text that “can be a record of performance, even an aid for performance, but not the equivalent of performance”,¹¹ he ignores this basic experience of Lord’s. A text like the one Brenda Beck had her singer dictate after his performances has nothing in common with Nagy’s aid for performance except for pen and ink. Whereas a record of performance is a well-

10. Finnegan 1976, 140; 1977, 84, 168. – They are probably the same as the printed “prompt books” Børdahl mentions; she cautiously says of these medieval books that “the relation between the written texts and the oral tradition is a much disputed theme”, Børdahl 1996, 12. The topic is discussed extensively in Børdahl 2005.

11. Nagy 1996b, 112.

known phenomenon in oral cultures, documented wherever literate people take an interest in oral art, a written aid for performance is conspicuously absent. By assigning these two kinds of text to the same category Nagy mixes up categories that differ importantly from each other.

So let us consider the other main form of the imagined transitional text, a written composition by an oral poet who writes poetry instead of performing orally. First, the most famous of Lord's own examples. In one of his last papers, "The merging of two worlds: Oral and written poetry as carriers of ancient values", he describes the Montenegrin poet Petar Petrovic Njegos, *vladika* (prince and bishop) of Montenegro in the middle of the nineteenth century. Born in 1813, Njegos grew up in an oral environment, and as a child he probably learned to compose traditional oral epic. At the age of twelve he entered the monastery of Cetinje where he was taught to read and write, and here he also started his career as a written poet, composing in the traditional ten-syllable verse of the Serbian oral epic. Five of his poems were published in 1835, and Lord finds that one of these is of special interest as a "merger", since it uses formulas and themes side by side with "non-traditional elements". Lord concludes that this poem is "truly transitional in the development of Njegos' own writing as in the Montenegrin tradition itself".¹² Earlier in his life, however, Lord would probably have characterised such a poem as a written composition influenced by oral tradition, and considered the poet to have passed from one "world" into another.

Another possible candidate from the same period is the Finnish scholar and poet Elias Lönnrot. In his composition of the *Kalevala* on the basis of folk poetry that he had collected from oral tradition, he was influenced by Homeric scholarship of his day and tried to do for Finnish oral traditions what he thought Homer had done for ancient Greek epic.¹³ But already for this reason his great poem is manifestly a work of written erudition: it not only presupposes acquaintance with Greek scholarship, but would be unthinkable without the general impact of the Romantic movement, the rise of na-

12. Lord 1986, quotes 32-3.

13. Honko 1990; 1998a: 169-76; 1998c, 10-11.

tional awareness, the interest in preserving old traditions perhaps threatened by extinction, etc. As candidates for being transitional poets Njegos and Lönnrot differ from each other along the lines of the emic-etic distinction.

A case closer to the emic approach is to be found in Kirsten Thisted's study of Inuit stories from Greenland. (Here, then, a non-epic genre is drawn into the argumentation.) Christian missionaries of the eighteenth century were very effective at teaching the Greenlanders to read and write, and the early collections of Inuit stories consist mainly of texts that the storytellers themselves wrote down and handed over to the collectors. The narrators seem to have written the stories that they used to tell while at the same time having a reader rather than an audience in mind. However, the texts must in many ways be different from the texts presented in oral performance. The narrators no doubt purged their stories of such elements as might be frowned upon by the collector – the local (Danish) minister, schoolmaster, or colonial administrator. This will typically have been the case regarding heathen aspects of the stories or elements that might be expected to offend the collectors' sexual norms. Paradoxically, Thisted even finds that whereas the earliest texts exhibit influences from European literature, such elements disappear in later texts, and she interprets this as an expression of the collectors' wish to have only genuine old Greenlandic stories. We cannot know if the storytellers also felt inspired by the art of writing to develop their texts into something more like written literature. It seems more probable that they shortened their stories because of the slow process of writing, but the sources do not allow for a decision on this matter. Instead, it appears that as the great Danish collector H.J. Rink (1819-93) gradually improved his familiarity with the Greenlandic language and also developed a kind of shorthand, the recorded stories grew longer and more interesting. What is evident is that none of the storytellers would have thought of recording their stories in writing for their own use.¹⁴

An especially convincing candidate for the potential category of transitional texts is again a prose example, presented by Rolf

14. Thisted 1998; 2001.

Kuschel: The well-educated teacher, pastor and storyteller Daniel Tuhanuku (1921-98) of the Bellona Island in the South Pacific, who filled five large notebooks containing more than 600 hand-written pages detailing his clan's traditional knowledge. The initiative for the project was his own; he had felt provoked by a scholarly edition of the island's history as related by representatives of other clans.¹⁵ In this respect there are similarities between him and Honko's Naika who was at pains to have his *Siri Epic* written down; only Tuhanuku was literate and did the writing himself. In these cases a traditional oral artist judged that writing offered a possibility of reaching an audience otherwise inaccessible to him, and both felt directly provoked by existing written works, Tuhanuku by the published history that he felt to be untrue, Naika by school textbooks that he thought ought to be concerned with the local children's own language and lore.

These examples, the works of Njegos, Lönnrot, Tuhanuku, and the writing Inuit, all belong to the second type described above. Tuhanuku's history and the Greenlandic stories obviously come closest to what scholars have in mind when thinking of transitional texts: they are composed by traditional artists who appear to have tried to record their oral performance in writing. In this process, there is nothing to suggest that they felt writing as a great gift that enabled them to refine their art in new and exciting ways; on the contrary, the new medium presented them with problems of a hitherto unknown kind, and their skill at overcoming them calls for admiration.

There is another sense in which it might be argued that particularly the Inuit stories are transitional, inasmuch as they form an interim stage in the history of Greenlandic literature. For the first written Greenlandic authors seeking coherence in their national literature, such stories represented the oldest known stage and marked the bridge to an otherwise lost oral tradition. However, so many other influences played a role in this process that there is no simple linear development from oral narrative to written novel or short story.

15. Tuhanuku 2002.

Thus, even if Lord's opinion, that the two techniques are contradictory and mutually exclusive, is perhaps an overstatement, it still describes a difference between the two that was sufficiently felt to make people react to it long before an oral theory had been formulated. It is a well-known fact that older editions of so-called folk poetry are not very careful to offer authentic texts; repetitions and other characteristics of the oral style are reduced, and morally offensive passages pruned away.

At all events, such candidates for the status of being transitional texts are very far from what Homeric scholars have in mind when they imagine that Homer combined the traditional oral epic singer's professional art with the literate intellectual's sophistication and taste for impressive compositional effects.

Interaction of literacy and orality

Most of the oral epic traditions referred to in this study are found in communities in which books are accessible and oral epics have been recorded in writing. That was also the case in Parry and Lord's Yugoslavia, where a four-volume printed collection of epics had been published a century before their research, and other collections were around, too, among them songbooks that were affordable for the singers. Nor was it unusual to find examples of songs that bards had learnt from books, whether they were themselves literate or had had others read aloud to them.¹⁶ Literate oral poets are also reported from many other parts of the world.¹⁷

Writing is often mentioned in recorded oral epics, and generally with respect. In Parry and Lord's material, for instance, it is taken for granted that the heroes are literate, and letter writing is a well-established theme. Sometimes it is one of the epic hero's accomplishments to be literate: for instance, the young Abu Zayd excels in

16. For Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 122 this fact minimises the importance of their fieldwork.

17. Nekljudov & Tömörçeren 1985, 1-2, 7 (Mongolian); Saada 1985, 23-30 (Arabic); Børdahl 1996, 17 (Chinese storytelling); Gyaltsho 2001, 284-5 (Tibetan); Ying 2001 (Kirghiz).

Koran studies, reading, and writing, so that he becomes a teacher while still a child, and later on he astonishes the king of Iraq by being able to read a letter for him. Brahma Nayudu, whose mother was pregnant with him for nine years, became an expert in both reading and martial arts while still in her womb.¹⁸

The respect for writing in oral epic also manifests itself in the fact that some bards think that their tradition goes back to an original book. Such was 'Awadallah's story of his grandfather's dream, and Smith reports that his Pabuji singer in Rajasthan, Parbu Bhopo, was of the opinion that the epic he performed had originally been composed in writing by a high-caste poet, and that the book was kept in a temple of Pabuji; afterwards low-caste oral bards like himself had learned it from the book and transmitted it orally.¹⁹

Scholarly registrations of oral epic mostly end up in archives, or, if they are published, they reach a reading public socially distinct from the singing communities. David Bynum comments critically on the early collectors of South Slavic epic, who visited the singers, wrote down a few random epic performances, had them published, and believed that in this way they had saved the tradition. That was totally beyond their power, he states; instead, what they did was to introduce peasant traditions as an exotic kind of poetry to urban readers.²⁰ Registration of oral poems does not as such influence oral tradition. After the event, both the singer whose performance has been recorded and his colleagues continue as they did before.

For oral epics to make their way to the book industry somebody has to judge them of interest for potential buyers and readers. Collins presents an emic example from South Sumatra of an oral epic entering into written circulation: while he was working assiduously to achieve a sufficient understanding of the Besemah text to allow for a scholarly edition, his local assistant, who had worked with him for weeks to transcribe the cassette tapes, put together his own ab-

18. Slyomovics 1987, 49, 129; Roghair 1982, 154, 205. For similar ideas, see Seydou 1972, 99 (Fulani); Innes 1976, 60-61 (Gambian); Reichl 2007, 291 (Karakalpak).

19. Slyomovics 1987, 11-12; cf. Chapter 3. Smith 1991, 18.

20. *SCHS* 14, 1979, 4.

breviated version of the poem, translated it into modern Indonesian, and sold it in Pagaram and Lakat.²¹

From north eastern Sumatra Susan Rodgers reports of an epic genre called *turi-turian*, performed by male singers in the language called Batak. In this area there was a long history of writing in a Sanskrit-derived old script called *Aksara*, which had only gradually given way to the Latin alphabet under the influence of Netherlandic colonisation. However, the local alphabet had not been used for recording oral epic in writing. Not until the early decades of the 20th century had a folkloristic interest led to an output of prose retellings of the epic stories in the Latin alphabet. A driving force behind this activity had been a patriotic wish to make old rural traditions accessible to a broad reading public.²²

In contrast *Sirat Bani Hilal* have a long history as written texts. The earliest surviving manuscripts are from c. 1600, and they are well represented in European libraries; Micheline Galley states that in Berlin alone 189 such texts are included in the inventory. They have regularly been written down from oral dictation without mention of either singer or scribe.²³ Such recordings are of no importance for the tradition in question. For written texts to influence oral tradition they have to be accessible to the singing communities, and that is actually the case for many epic traditions in the modern world. Beck, Slyomovics, and Wadley all report inexpensive printed versions of traditional epics that could be found in marketplaces in the areas where they were working.²⁴ In some cases reading traditional texts aloud from books is equivalent to a kind of oral performance; such readings are, for instance, said to have been common in cafés in Syria.²⁵

Stephen P.D. Bulman has given a detailed survey of the history of the *Sunjata Epic* in written form from its first appearance in 1904 and distinguishes between three phases and social groups: literate

21. W.A. Collins 1998, 15-16.

22. Rodgers 2005, 1-4.

23. Galley & Ayoub 1983, 24. - The written tradition of the Tibetan *Gesar Epic* goes back to the 18th century, according to Enhong 2001, 294, 303.

24. Beck 1982, 3-4; Slyomovics 1987, 66; Wadley 2004, 4; cf. Galley 2005, 10.

25. Galley & Ayoub 1983, 24; Galley 2005, 12.

Muslim notables, early French colonial administrators, and western-educated west Africans; this last phase begins around 1930. What is striking in the present context is that the movement is one-way, from oral performance to written texts, whereas it seems that the published poems have had little or no influence on the oral tradition of the epic.²⁶ But in her chapter on the epic genre in Africa, Barber gives a much more complex picture, speaking of “manuscripts and print genres as well as oral ones, and also all the intermediate, semi-oral, semi-written, mediated and popular forms that are so prominent in contemporary societies”.²⁷

Today a wealth of other media than writing is accessible in many parts of the world. Radio and television play their parts, and cassette tapes are present in many singing communities. Since they are a cheap alternative to singers’ performances they may actually be a threat to the tradition in the way writing has often been thought to be. At the same time they offer the bards the chance of an income by producing commercial cassettes, and this is probably the closest one comes in the modern world to the potentialities many scholars believe writing offered singers in ancient times. Mainly, however, cassette recordings influence the bards just like printed versions of songs, as a source for learning new songs or revising those a singer already has in his repertoire.²⁸

Roghair gives a particularly vivid description of the many media in which the *Palnadu Epic* appears: “modern verse; unedited palm-leaf manuscripts in both classical and folk metres; edited scholarly publications based on palm-leaf manuscripts; references in scholarly and non-scholarly histories; motion pictures; elementary school reading texts; novels; stage plays; radio plays; dramatic monologues; rice-transplanting songs; *burra katha* (popular entertainments derived from a folk model); books of stories for adults; children’s stories; narrative songs sung by *Piccaguntlu* (a caste of itinerant narrative singers); articles in weekly magazines; paintings; sculpture; satirical essays; local common knowledge; and extended oral

26. Bulman 1999.

27. Barber 2007, 46.

28. Phillips 1981, 8; Wadley 2004, 4.

narratives.”²⁹ Nevertheless, in the midst of all this the singers whose performances Roghair attended were pursuing their traditional craft.

Innes states that even though the bards he recorded were themselves illiterate, they might well have been influenced by literacy. Reichl often reminds his reader that if a tradition is stable this may reveal that it is influenced by written versions. Børdahl describes the oral literature of China as existing in a society deeply imbued with writing and written literature. Although Yangzhou storytellers both perform and transmit their long stories without using written texts, a stylistic influence from literature makes itself felt in some passages.³⁰

A special case for interaction is made by Jeff Opland in his study of Xhosa praise singers in South Africa. He describes four such *iimbongi* who are all literate and express themselves both orally and in writing. In their printed works they adopt well-known literary forms such as the novel and the essay, but they also now and then publish poems in the traditional style – in short, they act in a way similar to what Lord described in the case of Petar Njegos. However, that written and oral poetry are, nevertheless, distinct comes out in an illuminating anecdote Opland tells about the singer Chief S.M. Burns-Ncamashe. He had been engaged to perform a praise poem at the inauguration of a new chancellor of Rhodes University in March 1977. Well before the event Ncamashe handed in his poem in written form. On the morning of the celebration Opland asked him to perform the poem, which he did without hesitation in a form that bore only slight verbal resemblance to his written poem. Opland next gave him back his written text, and when later the official performance took place, the singer held his manuscript in his hands and to begin with followed the written text with only minor departures. But in the middle of the performance he broke off reading and shifted into spontaneous praise of the new chancellor.³¹ The written fixation of his poem was clearly a burden rather than a help to him when performing.

29. Roghair 1982, 7; cf. Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989, 10-11.

30. Innes 1974, 6; Reichl for instance 1989b, 111; Børdahl 1996, xxiv, 217-43.

31. Opland 1983, 90-116, 175-80. – de Vet 2008 describes literate oral artists in Bali.

Stuart Blackburn describes a different case of interaction between written text and oral performance from Tamil Nadu in south eastern India in order to “remind us of a basic truth in the study of oral tradition: fixed, written texts are not necessarily inconsistent with oral performance”. There are temples in which bow songs (ritual biographies of deified dead persons) are performed so that a man reads line-by-line from a palm-leaf manuscript to the lead singer, who then immediately turns each line into song.³² Contrary to Blackburn’s purpose this example might actually be taken to confirm Lord’s first wonder at the gap between orality and literacy. For one thing, the case is obviously unusual even though in Tamil culture oral and written forms of literature have coexisted for two millennia. Next, it is obvious that each of the two media has its representative in the performance, the reader and the singer, and that each form retains its characteristic features of being either fixed or spontaneously varied.

In their survey of oral epic in India Blackburn and his colleagues give no examples of interaction between fixed media and oral tradition. This fact is all the more remarkable considering that the contributing scholars agree on dismissing the idea of a gap between orality and literacy, and it is difficult not to suspect that their fieldwork experience did not really support this general view. Even the *Annamar Epic* of Tamil Nadu, which has oral versions, versions written on palm leaves, chapbook variants, and scholarly, book-length texts, is still very popular in oral performance. Again, a special case is briefly mentioned, the *Kanyaka Epic* in Andhra Pradesh, which is sung from a written text. But this is presented as the result of the fact that singers from the Mailaru caste, who used to perform this epic, have lost their skill in performing.³³ The two ancient Sanskrit epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which are omnipresent in India in a great variety of media, reveal their influence on the oral epics in many ways; for instance some of the heroes of present-day traditions are considered reincarnations of famous heroes from the writ-

32. Blackburn 1988, xxi.

33. Blackburn & al. 1989, 10-11 (oral and written); 203-5 (*Annamar Epic*); 228-9 (*Kanyaka Epic*).

ten poems, and in this sense there is an evident connection between media such as books, tapes, or television on one hand, and oral tradition on the other. However, in the midst of all this epic singers tend to stick to their traditional craft in actual practice.³⁴

Thérèse de Vet has drawn Balinese dramatic performers into the discussion. In Bali, written and oral forms have coexisted for centuries, and oral performance with its characteristic flexibility is preferred because it offers possibilities that fixed texts do not:

The main reason for improvisation, the performers explain, is that it makes the stories more interesting, both for the audience and the performer. Improvisation allows for adjustment and adaptation to the current social situation in the village or town where the performance is given, a fact of which the audiences are well aware.³⁵

In short, many media may coexist in a community and interaction take place between oral and written, flexible and fixed. Songbooks and cassette tapes more or less closely based on oral traditions may be accessible, and traditional singers may learn from them. Broad-sides may give rise to ballads that then develop their own life in oral tradition.³⁶ Books and other media that present fixed texts may work as a stabilising factor in a tradition because singers may adjust their mental texts to the fixed versions. In principle, furthermore, it takes only one literate person in a community for a written song to become integrated in singers' repertoires.

Traditional interaction between an oral text and a fixed medium is a regular occurrence in north western India, where some epics are performed in front of a *par*, and the performance is actually called "reading of the *par*".³⁷ In some respects the painted cloth works as a written text, helping the bard to remember the episodes of the

34. I remain unconvinced by Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 117-52, who argues that long narratives develop only with the introduction of writing. The theory is based on a single example from his own fieldwork and a more speculative consideration of various societies, mainly in Africa.

35. de Vet 2008, 162-3. (de Vet's conclusions are different from mine, though.)

36. Pettitt 2009.

37. Smith 1991, 8.

story and thus exerting a stabilising influence on the tradition; its purpose, however, is first and foremost to be the material representation of the divine hero and to assist the audience's understanding of the narrative.

Precisely how often written literature enters oral tradition is difficult to ascertain. With regard to folk genres in general, folklorists have disagreed over the question for generations. Olrik's view was that "it is mostly scholars of a general cultural-historical or literary orientation who ascribe great importance to the literary origin", and one of the examples he referred to was *Odyssey* Book 9: Out of 221 variants of the Polyphemus story registered by folklorists none followed the Homeric chain of events. In the *Arabian Nights*, by way of comparison, the story is told in a way that makes descent from the *Odyssey* probable.³⁸

In epic traditions, interaction in the sense that literate singers use their ability to write as an aid in their traditional craft, or even that singers who learn to write eagerly embrace this new skill as a means to compose more sophisticated poetry than before seems to be very unusual, if it exists at all. On the other hand, examples abound of literate singers who stick to traditional ways of composing, transmitting, and performing, and in general flourishing oral traditions often coexist with a literate culture.

Literacy and orality in archaic Greece

When interaction of oral and written is discussed in Homeric scholarship, it has mostly been thought that Homer had the best of two worlds and based his art on an ancient oral tradition while at the same time exploiting the advantages offered by the technique of writing.³⁹ As we have seen, this seemingly probable model is not borne out by actual fieldwork findings.

The reason may be, of course, that the difference between archaic Greece and illiterate societies in the modern world is too big

38. Olrik (1921) 1992, 33-5, with a reference to Hackman 1904; quote Olrik (1921) 1992, 33.

39. E.g. Kleinlogel 1981; Kullmann 1991, 427-8.

for the two to be compared in a meaningful way. As it has often been pointed out, it is not easy to find modern parallels to how the introduction of writing influenced oral literature in archaic Greece.⁴⁰ In our world, such a procedure is not simply a question of learning how to read and write, or of handling books and other written media. The alphabet also carries with it ideology and priorities, from everyday ways of communicating with one's family and neighbours to the understanding of one's place in the world. None of this holds good for ancient Greece, where the alphabet was introduced simply as a new technology and literacy spread gradually without any connotations of development and education. On the contrary, when ideological aspects occur, writing tends to be linked with political suppression. For instance, in Herodotus barbarian despots are those most given to the use of writing, whether for registration or for sending messages. In Deborah Tarn Steiner's words: "...writing is a negatively charged device in Herodotus and several other fifth-century sources, and ... belongs within the larger set of symbolic activities that distinguish the barbarian from the Hellene".⁴¹

The Greek alphabet seems to have been first developed in scribal milieus in Cyprus some time after 850 B.C.,⁴² from where it spread relatively quickly to most of the Greek-speaking world. But it seems to have taken some centuries before books made their entry among the upper strata of the populations, and still another century and a half before they were accessible as commodities to be bought. The tyrants Polycrates on Samos and Pisistratus in Athens are said to have been the first to own libraries (c. 550 B.C.). In Athens, books begin to appear in vase paintings c. 490 B.C. Often the depicted books bear some kind of writing. Sometimes they are inscribed with fake letters, but when the texts are readable, they are always poetry, almost always hexameters, and never lines known from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*.⁴³ During the period c. 450-400 B.C. people such as

40. E.g. A. Parry 1966, 213.

41. Steiner 1994, 127-85, quote 166.

42. The question is still unsettled, but I have been convinced by Woodard 1997.

43. Immerwahr 1964, 1973. – Powell 1991 argues that the alphabet was introduced with the purpose of writing hexameter poetry. He is criticised but also cautiously supported by Malkin 1998, 262.8.

Euripides may be ridiculed in comedies for their interest in books. Trading in books is first attested in Athens, from c. 400 B.C.; from c. 350 B.C. books are mentioned with some frequency in literary texts, and from c. 300 B.C. onwards books and writing seem to be omnipresent in the Greek cities.⁴⁴

In her two books about the interaction between literacy and orality in ancient Greece, Rosalind Thomas emphasises that for centuries after the introduction and spread of the alphabet oral communication still carried more weight and was considered more prestigious than communication by writing. Only gradually did the use of written records make its way into people's minds, and the Greeks were by no means eager to grasp the possibilities writing offered them. In legal affairs, for instance, even if written contracts had been agreed upon, living witnesses were still considered important well into the fourth century B.C., and only around 350 had written documentation achieved a status comparable to that of oral sources. For example, Aeschines (c. 390-30 B.C.) is the first orator to build his arguments on detailed references to past decrees.⁴⁵

In a critical discussion with Lord, Thomas sees the epic tradition in this framework and asserts that the way writing gradually made its way into Greek culture would not as such have made it a threat to oral composition or even have stifled it (as Lord thought) but that writing "probably duplicated the activity of the oral bards rather than suppressing it".⁴⁶ Her views have been contested by Hayden Pelliccia, who refers to choral practice in order to affirm that at least in fifth century Athens with its many occasions for choral performance involving hundreds of citizens as choristers the notion of a fixed text must have been familiar.⁴⁷

Now Thomas did not actually state that ancient Greeks had no notion of a fixed text, but instead that "even as late as the fifth and fourth centuries, the concept of fixed, absolutely verbatim accuracy

44. Robb 1994.; Pébarthe 2006.

45. Thomas 1989 & 1992; slowness 1989, 38-45; witnesses 1989, 34; Aeschines 1989, 90; cf. 1992, 123-7 & 150-57 on epic performance.

46. Thomas 1992, 44-50, quote 50.

47. Pelliccia 2003.

is surprisingly hard to find". The most important flaw in Pelliccia's argument is, however, that he discards the difference between genres as unimportant. He states that "we have absolutely no reason to think that the practices for Homer were any different [from those of choristers], except in as much as the great length of the Homeric poems had required that their reproduction be entrusted to full-time professionals".⁴⁸ But precisely these two features, the length of epic performances and the fact that they were handled by professionals, make it impossible to compare drama and epic with regard to the question of flexibility.

In short, the difference between the present day and antiquity makes it difficult to compare the introduction of literacy to previously oral societies in the modern world with the corresponding process in ancient Greece. But it should be noted that that difference clearly tips the scales towards the importance of orality rather than of literacy in most aspects of life in archaic Greece, and against the idea of an easy and quick passage from oral to written whether in the composition of Greek epic or in its reception. The fact that the transmitted Homeric poems unlike their modern counterparts never mention writing may mirror a social context in which writing did not play a part in the everyday lives of poets and audiences.⁴⁹ The difference between now and then speaks unambiguously against a lively interaction between the two media in the Homeric tradition, and makes the idea that the poet(s) of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* should have eagerly embraced the new technique in order to achieve a hitherto unknown level of sophistication even more unlikely.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as transitional texts

Two recent studies of Homeric diction end up more or less explicitly as arguments in favour of the two epics as being transitional texts: Norbert Blössner's "Relative Chronologie im frühgriech-

48. Thomas 1992, 48; Pelliccia 2003, 115.

49. The passage that comes closest to showing knowledge of the art of writing is *Iliad* vi.168-9, which mentions *semata lygra* (baneful tokens) written on a folded tablet.

chischen Epos: Eine empirische Methode und erste Ergebnisse”, and Rainer Friedrich’s *Formular Economy in Homer: The Poetics of the Breaches*.⁵⁰

Blössner’s paper is a summary of a great project that was inaugurated by Ernst Heitsch at the University of Regensburg in the early 1970s. Here a database was established in which all word-by-word repetitions in the transmitted epic corpus were collected.⁵¹ The study was concentrated on phrases that occur only once in the *Iliad*, but are also found elsewhere, and the aim was to decide whether such cases might be used as tools for establishing a relative chronology between the poems or passages from them. In the great majority of cases the repeated phrases fit smoothly into their contexts and do not reveal anything about the priority of one or another, but if a phrase is in some way ill-fitted in one context but unproblematic in another, the simplest explanation would be that the former is an unfortunate imitation of the latter. The resulting picture is complex, with quite a few examples of Iliadic passages being based on phrases from other poems usually considered younger than the *Iliad*.⁵²

What is interesting in connection with the oral-formulaic theory is mainly the fact that the great majority of *iterata* occur only twice. Blössner underscores that they are therefore not formulas according to Parry’s definition and do not confirm the impression that the poets composed their works on the basis of a common stock of formulas. Furthermore, more than two-thirds of the repeated phrases occur within one text, and even within relatively brief passages from it. On the other hand, the often repeated phrases (those with more than six occurrences) are in fact rare, and contrary to what the oral theory maintains, they constitute a highly atypical stylistic element.⁵³

Blössner and his colleagues are extremely careful not to jump to conclusions, and they are well aware that in many cases the assess-

50. Blössner 2006; Friedrich 2007.

51. Strasser 1984 describes the process of building the base.

52. Four scholars divided up the *Iliad* among them: Books 1-10: Ramersdorfer 1981; Books 11-15: Csajkas 2002; Books 16-20: Blössner 1991; Books 21-4: Roth 1989.

53. Blössner 2006, especially 25-6.

ment of a passage is necessarily subjective. They reach the conclusion that the written *Iliad* as we know it contains many allusions to or quotes from both the *Odyssey* and some of the *Homeric Hymns*. They do not actually characterise the *Iliad* as a transitional text, but since they maintain that oral formulas and written quotations may well exist side by side, that seems to be what they are saying. And despite all their openness towards other theories, their investigation leads miraculously towards confirmation of their point of departure, that it is in many cases relatively safe to identify a direct dependence of one epic passage on one or more similar passages. Blössner actually admits that a reason for concentrating on “singuläre Iterata” in the first place was that it seemed improbable that they were formulas.⁵⁴

Some of their examples are more convincing than others. One of the first phrases discussed in their list is *Iliad* i.115. Here the words *ou demas oude phyen* constitute a *hapax* in the *Iliad*, but are known from three verses in the *Odyssey* and from one in the *Hymn to Apollo*. The passage from *Iliad* i is placed in the group of cases that are problematic in their context, and the reason is that Agamemnon says of Briseis in public that she is no less beautiful than his wedded wife. Where the phrase occurs in the other poems, the comparison is between a human and a goddess, and the contexts are smooth. Therefore it is probable, it is asserted, that the occurrence in the *Iliad* is modelled over the passages in the *Odyssey* and the hymn, not the other way round.⁵⁵ Another reading of the passage might, however, argue that Agamemnon’s shocking words are an important part of the way this hero is portrayed in the *Iliad*, and that the poet is even signalling that his wife might have had her reasons for killing him in due course. Actually, in this case the oral theory makes excellent sense: the phrase seems to have its traditional function in a comparison between mortals and gods, and all the more horrendous is the fact that Agamemnon can use it in connection with a slave girl and his queen.

Even allowing for skepticism in some cases the fact remains that there are a considerable number of passages in the *Iliad* that from

54. Blössner 1991, 12.

55. Ramersdorfer 1981, 10-11, 43-4.

the point of view of these investigations look as if they are imitations of similar passages in the *Odyssey* or elsewhere. Furthermore, to the cases studied, which are on principle restricted to repetitions of phrases, one might add elements of content, such as the detail in the first book of the *Iliad* of the gods having left for Ethiopia (*Il.* i.423-4). This is unimportant for the plot of that poem, whereas a similar element in the first book of the *Odyssey*, that Poseidon is making a visit to the same place (*Od.* i.22-5), is essential for Athena to launch her project of helping Odysseus home, and accordingly for the *Odyssey* to get started. So here, again, it might be thought that the *Iliad* imitates the *Odyssey*.

Friedrich's monograph offers an analysis of all the examples he has found in the two epics of metrically equivalent phrases covering the same 'essential idea', and in this he continues Shive's demonstration that Homer's use of formulas was not quite as thrifty as Parry stated. His study is not restricted to name-epithet formulas, but includes any kind of patterned expression. His list is very impressive. It cannot of course be considered complete the way the Regensburg registration is, since Friedrich's list is not a computerised count but consists of observations of content made during the scholar's own careful study of the texts. In the second half of his book he considers the variants one by one and regularly demonstrates how the poet has departed from formulaic economy and chosen a variant that for stylistic or other reasons he found preferable. He concludes that rather than the *mot juste*, the poet is all the time searching for the *phrase juste*.⁵⁶

The first half of Friedrich's book is an argumentation for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* being transitional texts. The author maintains that inasmuch as the formulaic system of the two epics is not nearly as thrifty as Parry thought, this means that the poems we have represent a stage of development when proper oral composition was no longer current. This conclusion is logically coherent given a gradual evolution from oral to written, but that is exactly what is at stake. Parry maintained that the oral poet's thrifty formulas were neces-

56. Friedrich 2007, 84. - Finkelberg 1986 reaches a similar conclusion in her analysis of the phrase *kleos aphthiton*.

sary for composition in performance, but the poet who composes in writing may in principle choose any degree of patterning of his diction, and the theory does not posit such a development as an equal curve.

The meticulous care of both approaches makes them valuable as further steps towards precision in describing Homeric style. In my opinion, however, the conclusions are unacceptable because neither Friedrich nor the Regensburg scholars take into sufficient consideration that the Homeric poetry we know is not all that once existed. Actually, the analysis of the single *iterata* of the *Iliad* is from my point of view a forceful argument for the shared pool of archaic Greek epic being much richer than what appears from a registration of repeated phrases in the preserved works. Seen in the comparative framework, the oral epic tradition in Greece consisted of infinitely more poems than those we know. It lasted several centuries and was cultivated by a great amount of rhapsodes, of whom each performed his epics hundreds of times at private or public occasions. The access to their shared pool of formulas that the preserved poems allow amounts to no more than a glimpse of its richness.

Another recent attempt at removing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* from a common oral epic tradition in archaic Greece is made by Zlatan Colakovic, who argues that the two epics are 'post-traditional'. The term is introduced on the basis of a critical reassessment of how Parry and Lord interpreted their most famous informant, Avdo Mededovic. The term as such is awkward, considering that Mededovic was actually illiterate and would not have been able to perform long oral poems without relying on the traditional craft of Serbo-Croatian oral verse-making. However, what Colakovic argues is not, of course, that Mededovic composed his songs without formulas or themes; his thesis is that this singer consciously distanced himself from his tradition, even to the point of being ironic towards it, and that Mededovic's relationship with his tradition has a parallel in how Homer (in the sense of the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*) used his.

To illustrate the point, Colakovic offers a renewed analysis of the case when Mededovic was provoked to repeat a performance he had

just attended for the first time and did so in a way that made the song almost three times as long as the model. The first singer, Mumin Vlahovljak, was afterwards interviewed by Parry's assistant, Nikola Vujnovic, about his opinion of Mededovic's performance, a conversation that has not previously been published in English translation. It turns out that Vlahovljak is full of criticism of Mededovic, whom he charges with lying. "Vlahovljak continued explaining that "embellishing" a poem means not only "to lengthen it" but also "to bring lies in it." He exclaimed, "I don't want to lie; I will never lie, for anything!"⁵⁷ In the same conversation moreover Vlahovljak maintained that the famous singer of former times, Cor Huso, did not embellish his songs, that he himself and his father had learned their songs from Huso, and that in rejecting ornamentation they were following Huso's lead.

Colakovic argues that in this dispute Vlahovljak represents the traditional opinion among Serbo-Croatian epic singers, and that his words reveal that with his way of singing Mededovic had distanced himself from their common tradition. From the point of view of the international experience collected in the present book, Vlahovljak is certainly traditional in his emphasis on the importance of truth. His view on embellishment, however, is unusual. Normally, oral epic singers do not reject ornamentation as long as it does not interfere with what is considered the true story. On the contrary, virtuosity in embellishment is admired, and so is the ability to lengthen songs. Mededovic actually said as much, and it is clear that he found no contradiction between ornamenting a song and repeating it correctly. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, Mededovic also stressed the importance of the truthful song, and when he commented upon other singers, he was just as emphatic as Vlahovljak about not accepting lies or mixing up songs.⁵⁸ I find it hard to accept Colakovic's idea of post-traditionality on the basis of Vlahovljak's criticism

57. Colakovic 2007b, quote 570-71. - The songs involved are texts nos. 12468 and 12471 + conversation no. 12472. Cf. Lord (1960) 2000, 78-9, 102-5, 223-34; *SCHS* 3, 1974, 11. - Colakovic's thesis that both Avdo Mededovic and Homer were 'post-traditional' singers is embraced by Fowler 2007 and Danek 2007.

58. *SCHS* 3, 1974, 59-60, 72; *SCHS* 4, 1974, xix-xx.

of Mededovic; the accusation of lying looks all too much like an expression of jealousy at the success his rival's immense lengthening of Vlahovljak's song had with the American scholars.

A question of ideology?

Does it matter at all whether texts can be transitional or not? Or is it merely an empty dispute about words whether Petar Njegos' poems should be described as transitional or composed in writing on the basis of oral tradition?

It can certainly be argued that it is of little consequence for the study of oral epics of modern times. The interaction of oral and written, or of folk traditions and the literature of the educated classes has been studied anyway and was brilliantly described by Pjotr Bogatyrev and Roman Jakobson as early as in 1929.⁵⁹ When they described folklore as "a special kind of creativity", this did not mean that they rejected any kind of mutual influence between written and oral literature, but that they emphasised the difference between the two, not only in the way poets worked but also in the status of their audiences.

When Lord insisted on excluding the possibility of regarding the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as transitional texts, what was on the face of it a discussion of literary techniques was perhaps in a deeper sense a discussion of ideology. Lord wrote: "Diplomatic Homerists would like to find refuge in a transitional poet who is both an oral poet – they cannot disprove the evidence of his style – and a written poet – they cannot, on the other hand, tolerate the unwashed illiterate".⁶⁰ It is seldom expressed so directly, but the reluctance to accept a comparison between Homer and oral singers from the backward parts of western culture or from the so-called third world runs like an undercurrent through much Homeric scholarship.

Often ideological connotations become more apparent when looked at from a distance. When we now read what was written about Homer during the first half of the twentieth century, it may

59. Bogatyrev & Jakobson (1929) 1966.

60. Lord (1960) 2000, 128-9.

be shocking to see how the British-German conflict of the modern world made itself felt in the study of antiquity; the discussions sometimes feel more like political propaganda rather than scholarly exchange of views. Thus, T.W. Allen, the distinguished editor of the Oxford text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, found that he could discard the German analytical theory altogether by maintaining that Germans did not even understand their own contemporaries, and he stated in his *Homer; the Origins and the Transmission* that German scholarship would offer future psychiatrists interesting data for study.⁶¹ If today there is controversy over the comparability of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* on one hand and Indian or African epic on the other, this may be in some way related to the dismantling of open colonialism during the decades following the Second World War. When discussing Homer, some people feel that to compare him with illiterate singers of our time comes close to blasphemy – after all, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the crowning glory of ancient Greek poetry and as such almost the highest achievement of European culture.⁶²

It seems likely that Lord's target in this matter was mainly Homeric scholarship. At least, in the passage just referred to he was explicit that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are not only not transitional, but that they cannot even belong to a transitional period of written style. And he briefly referred to one of the leading Homeric scholars of the day: "Bowra's phrase that the richness of these poems 'suggests reliance on writing' is ambiguous". When in his very last work Lord returned to Petar Njegos, he concluded his article with a statement that the Homeric poems were not transitional texts.⁶³

Some early critics of the oral theory argued that not only were the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* composed in writing, but actually the art of writing was in some mysterious way the key to the understanding of the Homeric miracle. "What the poet needed (and what the Muse gave him) was an alphabet" was Wade-Gery's proposal in 1952.⁶⁴ And Adam Parry found an especially elegant expression of the idea,

61. Allen 1924, 6.

62. See, for instance, Doherty 2009b, 17.

63. Lord (1960) 2000, 134; 1995, 236.

64. Wade-Gery 1952, 14.

when he spoke of “the epoch-making (epic-making?) act of putting such long poems into writing”.⁶⁵ Even the great authority on early Greek inscriptions, Lillian Jeffery, was of the opinion that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had been written very soon after the introduction of the alphabet, and that their greatness was in some way directly dependent on this.⁶⁶

The idea that the greatness of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is in one way or another due to the art of writing proved long-lived in Homeric scholarship and has had many adherents. A typical argument in discussions of the Homeric question is (heavily simplified): the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are sophisticated poems and consequently they cannot have been orally composed. An example of this approach is Rismag Gordesiani’s study, *Kriterien der Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit im homerischen Epos*, which is much more a book about the wonders of composition in the two poems than about orality and literacy.⁶⁷ Pietro Pucci’s Homer is almost postmodernist in his self-referentiality, whereas Scott Richardson returns to classical unitarianism. For Ken Dowden, what makes the hypothesis of oral composition unacceptable is the intertextual elegance with which especially the *Iliad* incorporates material from the Trojan *Faktenkanon* (with a term from Wolfgang Kullmann) so as to make the poem of Achilles’ wrath into one of the entire war. An oral *Iliad* would be “pernicious” for a satisfactory interpretation.⁶⁸ The common basis for these authors is the failure to recognise the potentialities of oral art.

The feeling that the poet must somehow have had at his disposition working tools similar to ours has also been prominent when scholars consider the amount of detail contained in the huge epics. In an otherwise impressive analysis of Iliadic composition Dieter Lohmann imagined that the poet had before him some kind of card index in order to check up on his many cross-references.⁶⁹ Even though this does not fit into anything known about ancient Greek

65. Parry 1966, 185.

66. Jeffery 1961.

67. Gordesiani 1986; a similar view in Herington 1985, 41-2.

68. Pucci 1987; S. Richardson 1990; Dowden 1996, quote 60.

69. Lohmann 1970.

working habits, the suggestion is important since it is at least a serious attempt at considering how the poet managed to keep a grip on his complicated material. G.P. Goold presented a strange picture of a poet who had before him a “wall of unlimited length”, on which he inscribed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, changing his mind in the process, scratching out errors and squeezing in extra lines.⁷⁰ Alexander Kleinlogel argued that Homer was really a philologist rather than a poet – here it is tempting to quote Lord, who wrote in connection with similar opinions: “There is even the possibility that Homer would not feel complimented!”⁷¹

Similar views are current in the case of Hesiod. In her discussion of how the *Catalogue of Women* with its five huge genealogies can have come into being, Martina Hirschberger asserts that each tribe would normally know only its own genealogy, and concludes that such a synopsis of genealogical traditions presupposes the use of writing in both inventing the concept and realising it.⁷²

In a comparative framework, on the contrary, the natural explanation lies in the fact that handling great amounts of factual knowledge in verse form is what the rhapsode’s training was all about. What the fantastic ancient epics presuppose is not an alphabet, but life-long training. Beginning when still a kid the rhapsode must have received his elementary training from being compelled to learn songs by heart, must then have become professionalised in the course of many years of apprenticeship, and have continued his training as long as he was active as a performing bard. As for the concept of compiling a common genealogy, what is needed is an audience that calls for such a work, rather than an alphabet. The parallels from living traditions suggest that the rhapsodes were sim-

70. Goold 1977, 17, quoted with approval by M.L. West 2003a, 11-12.

71. Kleinlogel 1981; Lord (1960) 2000, 128.

72. Hirschberger 2004, 67-8, quote 68; cf. Aloni 2010, 120 for a similar argument. – There has been a discussion of the oral or literate status of genealogies as a genre, well summarised by Thomas 1989, 173-95: whereas oral genealogical poems concentrate on the legendary ancestors, written genealogies attempt at bridging the gap between past and present, and while people seem to be unaffected by inconsistencies in oral genealogies, the use of writing may stimulate poets to compare genealogies and construct plausible lineages.

ply able to keep hold of their immense and varied material, storyline as well as details, in their well-trained memories – and that of course a host of inconsistencies and oddities were included as well.

In an influential discussion of the early sources for the writing of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, A.C. Cassio states that “there is no indication that the Greeks ever seriously objected to putting down in writing their traditional poetry”.⁷³ This strangely guarded phrase with its double negation actually misses the point made by Oralists. The question is not whether people in a given culture object to having their poetry written. What was central in Lord’s theory was the observation that singers do not feel a need to have their epics written, neither in order to preserve them, nor as an aid for memorising or performing, or as a means to develop their art into something more sophisticated. Both singers and audiences seem perfectly satisfied with the oral medium, and this attitude remains unaffected even if people are surrounded by books and all the other paraphernalia of a written culture.

This is not to argue that the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, or the *Catalogue of Women* were orally composed, but to point to the special kind of prejudice underlying much of the argumentation for the necessity of writing. Oral poets have advantages and disadvantages as compared to their written colleagues; but the tendency to think that only poets who write their poems are capable of achieving the highest levels of sophistication or handling the greatest mass of detail is unfounded.⁷⁴

Accordingly, what is at stake in the dispute over transitional texts is not so much whether they exist or not, but whether the oral theory is relevant for understanding the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Various terms have been found for written epics based on an oral tradition, such as Foley’s ‘oral-derived’ or Honko’s ‘semiliterary’ epics. Honko organises the genre in three categories, literary, semiliterary,

73. Cassio 2002 105.

74. Cf. Nagy 1990, 1-2, who also criticises this kind of prejudice. – A refreshingly different standpoint is found when Douglas Frame states that the level of refinement of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is a great argument that these poems were created orally, Frame 2009, 602.

and oral, and in the semiliterary group he places Lönnrot's *Kalevala*. For Foley, the term is one of caution, and the point is to emphasise that however much old texts transmitted in writing may look as if they were orally composed, we shall never know their status for sure. He writes: "prudence demands that we speak of oral-derived rather than ascertainably oral works", and that may prove useful.⁷⁵ What is important is to avoid the implicit conviction that to call the two epics orally composed is to deny their sophistication.

The two Homeric epics that have survived are cultural monuments, and the fact that, unlike the Bible, they do not express the views of any still existing religion makes them even more important as a broadly inclusive common denominator. By means of their translations, first into Latin during the 15th-16th centuries and later into the vernaculars, their readership grew, and via many paths, from humble retellings for children or movies for a broad public to sophisticated reuse in élite literature they influenced western thinking profoundly. During the same centuries scholarship, and not least the great German masters of the 19th-20th centuries, constructed huge edifices of learning around the texts, illuminating them but at the same time also appropriating them for their own social class and regional background.

The oral theory may be felt to have stripped the poems of the very characteristics that made them European. It offered a largely technical solution to problems that in the minds of many readers rather called for spiritual explanations. Furthermore, by positing that poor, unlettered poets from areas widely remote from high western centres of poetry and learning, geographically as well as culturally, bear comparison with the greatest poet in western literature, the theory has caused offence in many circles. Most of all, the assumption that such comparisons might even offer an important key to the interpretation of the two epics is unacceptable to such critics. The oral-formulaic approach to Homer may be seen as a part of the process of "provincializing Europe",⁷⁶ a fact that has probably contributed to the strong criticism the theory has aroused in some quarters.

75. Honko 1998c, 10; Foley 1991, xv.

76. Chakrabarty 2000.

However, when the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were first composed there was as yet no Europe nor any western world to monopolise the poems. Just as Oralist studies of the Homeric epics learn from anthropological and folkloristic fieldwork, the oral-formulaic theory has intensified the study of living epic traditions. In this cross-cultural scholarly activity it is exciting to see the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* realising their potential for becoming a common denominator and a fundamental poetry for mankind and not just for the western world.

Individual vs. traditional composition

The quality of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* most often used as an argument for the role of writing in their process of genesis is their overall composition, already admired by Aristotle. Since most early inscriptions are too short to offer comparison in this respect, let us briefly consider the transmitted work that comes closest to them in time, aim, literary form, and volume, namely Herodotus' prose history. Ancient readers also found similarities between Homer and Herodotus: in a recently discovered Hellenistic elegy from Halicarnassus Herodotus is called "the prose Homer", and the literary critic Longinus (1st century A.D.) characterised him as "the most Homeric".⁷⁷ What Aristotle said of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* might be transferred to Herodotus, that his work contains the storyline of one tragedy, that of the rise and fall of the Persian Empire. His narrative technique has recently been compared to that of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in some detail. Just as the *Iliad* concentrates on a single episode of the war, but nevertheless encompasses the whole story by means of various kinds of analepsis and prolepsis, Herodotus takes his audience back and forth in time and far into foreign lands so as to make his *History* into a cosmology. Furthermore, through the first half of his work he spins two different threads, one Persian and one Greek, to let them finally intertwine in a way not unlike that in which the *Odyssey* handles the stories of Telemachus and Odysseus.⁷⁸ At an-

77. Isager (1998) 2004, verse 43; Longin. 13.3.

78. Rengakos 2006.

other level, it has been pointed out that the narrator in Herodotus in many ways resembles Odysseus as narrator and protagonist of the *apologoi*.⁷⁹

Whether these similarities are the result of influence from the two epics may be a matter of dispute. What is interesting in the present context is, however, that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are so much more elegant than Herodotus in their use of such narrative techniques. Where Herodotus simply brings in his 'extra' material in the form of digressions told by the overall narrator, the two poems excel in their use of second-level narrators such as Nestor, Menelaus or Odysseus, and their narratives move on two levels, the Olympian and the human world. They work by means of what has been called a technique of resonance, as when Patroclus' death is narrated so as to mirror Achilles', or Andromache's loss of her *kredemnon* becomes a foreshadowing of the fall of Troy, to mention only two important and very different examples.⁸⁰ Then there is their use of ring composition to balance and convey harmony to the long narratives – the list may be continued almost endlessly.

There is no doubt that Herodotus composed his *History* in writing: he probably worked in a way that we know was normal later in the Greco-Roman world, i.e., he had one or more slaves to do the actual writing, while he dictated. He could ask the slave to go back to earlier parts of the work; he could change his mind, revise what the slave had written, etc. Thus, even if his work might be called an 'oral dictated text' it is far from what Lord was thinking of when he coined that term. It is not a manifestation of an oral tradition, but an individual and individualistic work. Herodotus drew widely on oral sources, but was explicitly individualistic in his approach to what he was transmitting. He may say: "This is the opinion of one side, but the other side says something different, and my own judgment is..." When he discusses his sources and offers his reasons for why he thinks the events happened in one way

79. Marincola 2007, 35-7, 51-67.

80. Resonance: Graziosi & Haubold 2005. Patroclus and Achilles: Kakridis (1944) 1949; Schadewaldt (1943) 1959, 155-202. Andromache's *kredemnon*: Nagler 1974, 47-54. Overall surveys: Dowden 1996; Cairns 2001a, 35-44, Finkelberg 2003, 76-9.

rather than in another, he lets his audience participate in his critical reflections.⁸¹

It would be inconceivable to have such passages in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. The poet does not invite his audience to speculate over the fact that there may be more than one view on an event. His authority is of a different kind: he knows what is true, he has his information straight from the Muse, and the audience is at his mercy. If he chooses to lie to them, they will be unable to check up on him. Historical truth is as important to the poet as it is to the historian, but he handles the matter in a way completely different from his. The difference is one of genre, of course, but mainly it is one between an oral, traditional singer and a written, individualistic author.

Audiences may interact with or even protest against a given version, but normally the epic singer will insist on the truthfulness of his performance. Other singers may lie or make mistakes, but he does not. He might admit to weaknesses in his own work, but he would never accept that there might be doubt as to the truthfulness of his tradition, or that it might even be impossible ever to ascertain the facts of a historical event. The Homeric poet's guarantee is the Muse, and accordingly his authority accepts no criticism. The Muse may choose to lie, and in that case human singers and audiences are helpless. But as long as the goddess is gracious, the professional singer is capable of narrating events from far away and long ago as if he had himself been present.⁸² In a central passage commenting on his own duties as an author Herodotus is explicit about his authority as being of another kind: "I have to report what is said but not necessarily believe it, and such is my form of authoritative speech (*epos*) in my whole work." The translation of *epos* as "authoritative speech" is proposed by Alexander Hollmann,⁸³ and I think he is right. Herodotus' choice of this term seems to indicate that he

81. The narrator's voice in Herodotus: Dewald 2002.

82. Weimann 1988 is the basic study of literary authority. - Herodotus and Homer: Boedeker 2002. Homeric and Herodotean authority: Marincola 1997, 3-12; 2006, 14-16. Herodotus and the Homeric Muse: Bakker 2002, 28. Cf. Jensen 1980, 69-80.

83. Hdt. 7.152.3; Hollmann 2000, especially 230.

wants his readers to compare his kind of speech with rhapsodic authority and understand the distinction.

At the same time, epic audiences are better informed about the stories narrated than readers/listeners to a work of history. Part of the elegance of composition so characteristic of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is rooted in this fact. For instance, the way the *Iliad* opens its narrative at a great pace and with a supreme indifference to chronological order is only possible because the audience is already acquainted with the storyline and actors. So again, the effortless elegance with which the narrators of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* handle their stories is understandable precisely on the basis of composition in performance: The poets have perfect command of their stories in the form of mental texts, passages of which may be activated or deactivated as they see fit, and their audiences are well prepared to both enjoy the narrative presented and catch allusions to other stories that may reverberate during the performance.

The rhapsodes who dictated the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* worked in a tradition, and they composed/recomposed in a tension between their wish to preserve historical truth correctly, as they had been taught, and to please any given audience with the version of truth they would find most convincing. The prose historian had to do without the help the tradition gives the epic singer, and also without its restraints. Being in a private setting during the composition of his work, he may or may not have had special readers in mind, and he used his own critical judgement in deciding on the reliability of his sources. The rhapsodes had a profession with a certain status but depended on their patrons for their livelihood, whereas probably the historian was economically independent. Rhapsodic performance arenas were per definition part of a social context at private or public religious events, while the literary composition of the historian was his own private concern. It is told that Herodotus gave a public reading of his work at the Olympic games;⁸⁴ still, such a privately offered performance was on principle different from the way in which epic poetry and other oral traditions were recurrent elements in the festivals of early Greece.

84. Lucianus: *Herod.* 1.

Herodotus spent his life composing his work, and yet it remained unfinished. If the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had been composed in the same way, how many years would their composition have demanded? And would the poets have been able to keep a grip on of their storylines? If the poems were, instead, dictated by rhapsodes to scribes, approximately in the same way as singers have dictated to scholars in more recent times, the process would probably have lasted a couple of months. Still a considerable job, but one that is more easily reconcilable with the fact that the rhapsodes did not lose control of their plots. The mastery with which the rhapsodes behind the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* handle their huge poems is based not on card indexes or anything of that nature, but on their professionally trained memories and creative powers. To put it in a more provocative form: the poems are so sophisticated because they were orally composed.

Summary

When Lord stated that transitional texts could not exist he provoked intense criticism and finally retracted his claim. However, his original statement was based on a genuine and interesting observation, that oral poets stick to their traditional craft even if they are literate, and that writing does not seem to be attractive to them as an aid in their profession. In the modern world oral epic coexists with a multitude of media, both written and of other types, but the traditional way of composing in performance seems remarkably un-influenced. The introduction of writing in archaic Greece was in important ways different from the corresponding process in our time, and this difference speaks unambiguously against hypotheses that writing contributed to Homeric composition. A comparison between the two Greek epics and Herodotus' *History* highlights the advantages of oral composition.⁸⁵

85. Pp. 179-87, 203-6, 209-13 are a revised version of Jensen 1998.

CHAPTER 7

Gradual fixation

An evolutionary model

In one work after another Gregory Nagy has argued for an evolutionary model of how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became the written texts we know.¹ Over the centuries rhapsodic practice became progressively intent on verbatim transmission, he asserts, and the evolution “may be envisaged as a cumulative process, entailing countless instances of composition/performance in a tradition that is becoming streamlined into an increasingly rigid form as a result of ever-increasing proliferation”.² He emphasises that the two epics developed on the basis of an oral-formulaic system, and that what is stable is the system whereas the texts are variable. When this is understood we may break free from “rigidly confining ideas of a single “Homeric genius” as the ultimate source of a once-and-for-all fixation of the Homeric text”.³

According to Nagy, five stages of the development may be observed, with each period showing progressively less fluidity and more rigidity: a relatively most fluid period (c. 2000-750 B.C.), a formative period under the influence of a general Panhellenistic trend (c. 750-550), a definitive period (c. 550-320), beginning with the Pisistratid tyranny in Athens (560-510), a standardising period (c. 320-150), beginning with the régime of Demetrius of Phalerum in Athens (317-307), and finally a relatively most rigid period from c. 150 B.C. onward, beginning with the completion of Aristarchus’ editorial work at the Alexandrian Museum. The two first stages were exclusively oral, whereas various forms of written texts began to be produced during the third stage, when the two epics reached

1. Nagy (1979) 1999, xiv-xv, 7-8, 41; 1989; 1990, 52-81; 1996b, 77, 108-52; 1996a, 29-112; 2004, xi-xiii, 112-13; 2009, 4-6.

2. Nagy (1979) 1999, 8.

3. Nagy (1979) 1999, xi; quote 2004, xiii.

“a near-textual status”.⁴ Stage three and the beginning of stage four were dominated by Athens, where the authorities exercised a growing control of both performance and text. With the fall of Demetrius in 307 came a period of instability in performance traditions leading to a burst of textual variation that only petered out towards 150 B.C. From c. 300 onwards the Alexandrian Museum, founded by Ptolemy I with Demetrius as his adviser, became the centre.⁵

This evolution of a fixed text for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was connected with a development in archaic Greece from epicchoric to Panhellenic epic. According to Nagy this developing poetic tradition synthesised the diverse local traditions of each major city-state into a common Panhellenic model that suited most city-states but corresponded exactly to none. The more the epics were proliferated, the more rigid the tradition grew.⁶ Homeric recitals at the Greater Panathenaea functioned as a centre of diffusion bringing into play both centripetal and centrifugal forces. That the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* eventually gained supremacy over all other epics was mainly due to their Panhellenic character.⁷

Nagy’s model has won approval in many circles, and at the moment it seems to be the dominant hypothesis regarding the origin of the two epics.⁸ Something similar is asserted for the *Epic Cycle* (a fragmentary group of epics about the Trojan War, to be further discussed in Chapter 8); Jonathan Burgess imagines that also these poems gradually developed out of an amorphous wealth of Trojan performance into a specific “performance tradition” for each epic.⁹

4. Nagy 1996b, 109-13; 1996a, 41-2, quote 110.

5. Nagy 1996b, 153-206.

6. Nagy 1990, 54; (1979) 1999, 7.

7. Nagy 1990, 57-81; 1996a, 4; 1999c; Tsagalis 2008, xiii.

8. E.g. it is embraced by Foley 1990, 21-31; Cantilena 1999, 49; Scodel 2002, 44-52 (with some hesitation); Aloni 2006, 24-5; Larson 2007, 31-40; Marks 2008, 3-13; Burgess 2009, 2; Dué 2009a. Critical voices are, of course, also heard: Rutherford 1996, 29-31; Cairns 2001a, 3. – Aloni 2006 is a detailed study of how epicchoric Pylian traditions of the Neleid family are represented in the two epics and *h.Ap.*

9. Burgess 2004-5, 1; Tsagalis 2008, xiii.

As will have become clear in the previous chapters, I share Nagy's point of departure and appreciate the attention he pays to comparative studies of oral tradition. When he underlines the stability of the system and the variability of its manifestations, or describes the "multitude of ... performances of a multitude of performers in a multitude of places",¹⁰ his ideas seem to me important and convincing. However, when it comes to his implementation of the principles, I feel he goes astray in some central parts of the argumentation.

First, it is not easy to imagine how the interaction between oral performance and written text can have taken place in actual practice. As described in Chapter 6, in order for an interaction to work, written texts must be accessible to the bards and their helpers, a situation for technical reasons barely conceivable at the time of Nagy's fourth and fifth stages, and then still not very probable for social reasons. If we hypothesise that written texts were accessible to the rhapsodes and gave rise to new versions when they integrated them into their oral repertoires, this situation leads to the next question: How could these new versions make their way back into written texts as they must have done if their influence is found in the transmitted text of the two epics? Did the rhapsodes own manuscripts that they revised whenever they had a new good idea? That would have been a cumbersome and expensive process demanding frequent erasure and rewriting. In the case of a papyrus manuscript the relatively fragile material would allow for only a limited amount of changes. If, instead, the rhapsodes preferred waxed tablets, any number of changes would have been physically possible; but in that case the piles of tablets necessary for containing the two poems would pose other problems. Add to this the problem of geography: how would performances from all over the Greek-speaking area be able to influence a common text?

In view of the importance Nagy attributes to the Athenian authorities we are, perhaps, rather supposed to imagine that state

10. Nagy 1990, 58. – I regret the fact that precisely because my own understanding of the Homeric Question comes so close to Nagy's and has in so many ways been influenced by his work, my criticism of certain aspects of his model has to be set forth in particular detail.

scribes were on an ongoing basis engaged in modifying official manuscripts of the two epics in connection with each new Panathenaic competition. This seems slightly more probable but still an expensive and awkward undertaking that would hardly have contributed to the authority of the text. In short, the puzzling fact is that Nagy's hypothesis attributes to the written transmission features that are characteristic of oral composition and transmission. In any case, for the imagined fertile interaction of performance and written text to make an impact on the texts eventually transmitted to us, the various transactions between orality and literacy must in some way have entered the ancestors of our written *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Furthermore, the idea of the Panathenaea as a centre of diffusion for a Panhellenic corpus of rhapsodes is an overestimation of the influence of epic recitals at this festival. Below, I shall argue for the festival's paramount importance for the writing of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But that it was central in the oral epic tradition is unlikely. There were many festivals with musical competitions in ancient Greece, and it should be noted that in Plato's *Ion* the rhapsode has just won a competition in Epidaurus before proceeding to Athens. Plato does not suggest that a victory at the Panathenaea would be more important than one in Epidaurus.

Such practical problems are, of course, trivialities, but they need an answer for the dogma concerning the interaction between the two media to carry conviction. A more subtle problem is posed by the variants in the written transmission of the two epics, and that calls for a more detailed discussion.

A fundamental element in Nagy's hypothesis is the fact that the Homeric manuscripts are characterised by a special form of variants. The texts we read today in printed editions have come to us via medieval manuscripts, the very earliest of which date from the 10th century A.D.; they are often referred to in general as the vulgate.¹¹

11. There is a certain confusion in the use of this term. For Arthur Ludwich it designated the text as we know it in medieval manuscripts, Ludwich 1884, 11-12; 1898, 69. For T.W. Allen it served both as a translation of the Greek *he koine* or *hai koinai*, sometimes mentioned in the *scholia* (Allen 1924, 271-82), and as the name of the medieval text (Allen 1924, 302). Haslam 1997, 71 reserves the term for the medieval text. So did I in my discussion in Jensen 1980, 106-11, where I argued for van Groningen's hy-

The huge gap between the supposed origin of the poems and the earliest full representatives of them, more than a millennium even on the extremely late dating that Nagy proposes, is to some degree filled in by fragments preserved in Egyptian papyri (3rd century B.C. – 7th century A.D.) and quotations by other ancient authors. Thus, the earliest papyri of the two Homeric epics stem from the fourth stage of Nagy’s evolutionary model. By now about forty fragments older than c. 150 B.C. are known, most of them tiny scraps. They differ in some respects from the medieval transmission, mainly in terms of length, most of them having extra lines as compared to the vulgate.¹² The reason why Nagy makes c.150 B.C. his borderline between the fourth and the fifth stages is that from then onwards the fragments contain the same number of verses as the vulgate and clearly represent this same text. It has been much discussed how this standardisation in length of the two epics came about, and it is a widespread hypothesis that it somehow had to do with the philological work pursued at the Museum in Alexandria.

The variants occur in papyri as well as in medieval texts. For instance, some of them may have one adjective where others have another, more or less synonymous phrases may replace each other, or small variations in syntax may occur. The variants rarely exceed half a hexameter in length. What makes them special as compared to the usual variants that are well known in the transmission of ancient texts is the fact that they are not visually alike and therefore hardly caused by scribes misreading what was in the manuscripts they were copying. In Michael Haslam’s words: “What the manuscripts reflect is a host of concurrent variants jostling for preference, and there was no point in time at which this was not the case.”¹³

pothesis that the absence of any mention of an Athenian text in our *scholia* suggests that this was the ancestor of the vulgate, cf. van Groningen 1963a; 1963b, 36-7. Frustratingly, Haslam misunderstood my use of the term and rejected my argument. – Nagy 2009, 9-14, 66-72 sorts out the relationship between ‘*he koine*’ and ‘the vulgate’ and points out that *koine* does not necessarily have a derogative meaning.

12. S. West 1967; Haslam 1997. – Finkelberg 2006, 234-6 argues that the standardisation was effected by the central authorities on the order of Ptolemy VIII.

13. Haslam 1997, 63.

In Nagy's model these variants bear witness to a continuous performance tradition: "I argue for an evolutionary model, accounting for a plethora of different authentic variants at different stages (or even at any one stage) in the evolution of Homeric poetry *as an oral tradition*; variations in the textual tradition would reflect different stages in the transcribing of this oral tradition."¹⁴ In this opinion Nagy is following Parry, who ended his authoritative double paper on the epic technique of oral verse-making by stating that the variants stem from oral tradition and show that the manuscripts that were at the Alexandrians' disposal came from different oral traditions. However, these articles were written at a stage when Parry still knew oral tradition only from other scholars' studies. Later on, when he had acquired personal experience of oral variation he seems to have become less certain. At least, among his published field notes there is a passage to suggest as much: Parry is there planning a closer study of the transmission of the Homeric poems and notes that a comparison with alterations made to the South Slavic texts by unscholarly collectors might be useful for understanding the Homeric variants.¹⁵

Anyway, compared to different recordings of one and the same epic in our days, the variation among Homeric manuscripts is strikingly small. There is no example of alternative narratives, or even of the same story narrated in different ways.¹⁶ Only in one single case, a papyrus of the 2nd century B.C. containing remnants of Books 4-5 of the *Odyssey*, does Calypso don her cloak in a slightly different way than she does in the vulgate (*Od.* 5.230-32).¹⁷ I cannot see why this circumstance should be taken as an example of typical oral multi-formity, as asserted by Nagy. On the contrary, compared to field-work experience the Homeric vulgate is remarkably uniform.

14. Nagy 2004, 13; Nagy's italics.

15. Parry (1928-35) 1971, 361, 452.

16. Finkelberg 2000 raises the same criticism.

17. Discussed in some detail by Haslam 1997, 66-8. - The variation between *Iliad* xxiii.77-92 as found in the vulgate and Aeschines, discussed by Dué 2001, is not between two different stories; burial in the golden amphora would not prevent the soul of Achilles in ending up in Hades.

A medieval parallel

In his discussion of Homeric multiformity Nagy takes his point of departure in a passage in the *Odyssey* where Penelope compares herself with the nightingale, which “pours out its resonant voice while changing it” when lamenting her dead son (*troposa cheei polychea fonen*, *Od.* 19.521). He reads this as an expression of the nightingale constantly varying its dirge and draws a comparison with selected examples of French medieval lyrics, in which explicit reference to variation of performance and transmission may occur, often even with a similar use of the nightingale as a symbol of the human bard. Among Romance scholars this phenomenon is called ‘*mouvance*’. Nagy argues that Penelope’s words reveal a similar consciousness of variation in the *Odyssey*, and from there he continues to the interpretation of textual history and the significance of the variants referred to above. Nagy discusses the contradiction between what epic singers say and what they do, but also maintains that both bards and audiences actually appreciate *mouvance*.¹⁸

Nagy’s reading of *Od.* 19.521 is, of course, ingenious but for more than one reason not convincing. First of all, in such a question it is not legitimate to argue from lyrics to epic. Whenever the narrator of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* implicitly or explicitly reveals his ambitions – mainly in the invocation of the Muses at the beginning of the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* ii.484-93) and in connection with Demodocus’ performance at the Phaeacian court (*Od.* 8.487-98) – the emphasis is on precise memory and correct presentation, and there is not a single hint that variation might be laudable or even acceptable. In this respect the poetics of the two epics is in complete agreement with the opinions voiced by oral epic bards in present times.¹⁹ Penelope’s words should most probably be understood as referring to lyric song. This is in fact how they are read by Nagy, and accordingly, even if we accept that what she is referring to is *mouvance*, the phrase is without relevance for epic. Another possibility is to stick

18. Nagy 1996b, 7-38.

19. Cf. Jensen 1980, 62-80.

to the usual interpretation and take ‘to pour out and change the voice’ as an emotional way of saying ‘to sing’.

The term *mouvance* was introduced by Paul Zumthor in 1972 in a discussion of textual variants in the transmission of medieval French poetry. He argued that variation should not be considered a problem but be recognised as a general characteristic of the literature of that period. Each version of a poem must on principle be read as a recreation of it, and in the manuscripts it is possible to follow how the texts are still in the process of finding their form. Zumthor even speaks of a fundamental lack of identity of these poems. He emphasises the connection between *mouvance* and another typical phenomenon, that the works have often been transmitted without an author’s name: the scribes had a feeling of ownership towards the texts and allowed themselves to vary them according to their own tastes and wishes.²⁰ Later, in his general poetics of oral poetry from 1983, Zumthor used the term also for the variation typical of oral composition and transmission.²¹

The discussion took a new direction among Romance scholars with the so-called new philology, the main purpose of which was to find editorial methods that respect the variation found in the manuscripts. This was especially clear in the case of Bernard Cerquiglini. His *Éloge de la variante* carries the subtitle “Histoire critique de la philologie”, and is a polemic against Romance scholarly practice, which in his view constrains the poems into a form that is not represented by any of the manuscripts. The typical philologist is a Mr. Procrustes, who with his cruel methods kills the multiplicity that characterises the transmission:

Cette variance est si générale et constitutive que, confondant ce que la philologie distingue soigneusement, on pourrait dire que chaque manuscrit est un remaniement, une version ... les sept manuscrits complets de la *Chanson de Roland* représentent autant de versions, de réalisations de cette épique, et les arborescences génétiques, issues

20. Zumthor 1972, 65-75.

21. Zumthor 1972, 65-75; 1983, 245-61.

d'un archétype originel, dont s'ornent les éditions de la philologie, sont de touchantes fictions.²²

To readers of Homer such a passage makes it evident, both that the variation in the French transmission is much more radical than that found in the manuscripts of Homer, and that Cerquiglini's description comes very close to the portrait Lord gave of the oral transmission of South Slavic epic.²³

Now and then Cerquiglini refers briefly to the question of oral composition, but in his interpretation the place where creativity flourished was the scriptoria; he speaks of the constant rewriting of poems that took place there, and of how each single scribe felt entitled to change the texts as he felt like doing.²⁴ This attitude is linked with his opinion that written poetry is more valuable than oral composition. He asserts that oral traditions are per definition conservative, while progress is impelled by writing, and he explicitly distances himself from Zumthor.²⁵

When transferring this discussion to the question of Homeric transmission it may be useful to borrow a typology from the Romance philologist Lene Schøsler. She offers the following graduated list of typical variation as it occurs in manuscripts of French medieval narrative poetry:²⁶

- 1 differences in spelling and phonology
- 2 differences in morphology and syntax
- 3 content differences in related passages
- 4 content differences resulting in unrelated passages

Applied to the manuscripts of Homer it first leads to the observation that variants of types 1 and 2 are frequent. They are more easily seen in Helmut van Thiel's edition of the two epics than in Martin

22. Cerquiglini 1989, 62.

23. Lord (1960) 2000, 99-123, særlig 101-2.

24. Cerquiglini 1989, 57.

25. Cerquiglini 1989, 37; 54 + n. 19.

26. Schøsler 2004, 207.

West's of the *Iliad* because the latter not only standardises (for instance by regularly introducing movable *ny* at the end of verses, whether it is there in the manuscripts or not), but also archaïses. Only major encroachments on the text are mentioned in his apparatus. Variants of type 3 also occur in great number, whereas variants of type 4 are not encountered.

The variants of type 1 (differences in spelling and phonology) are small compared to what is found in manuscripts of *Chansons de Geste*. There is nothing in Homeric manuscripts to be compared with the wealth of different spellings in the French manuscripts, nor are there examples of versions of the poems in other dialects than the standard form. Right from the earliest papyrus fragments it is clear that the scribes attempt to follow a common orthography that comprises not only Homer, but all archaic poetry in hexameters or elegiacs. The variation concerns small matters such as doubling or not of consonants, elision of final vowel versus omission of augment where two vowels meet, or the handling of movable *ny*. Such variants do not characterise some manuscripts as against others but occur randomly in the manuscripts.²⁷

On the contrary, the variants of type 2 (differences in morphology and syntax) are very similar in the two transmissions, and in both cases they are less frequent than type 1.

The variants of type 3 (content differences in related passages) also resemble each other in the two transmissions. Romance scholars, however, know their scribes better than do Homerists, and in many cases they can point to individual characteristics in scribal behaviour. The most famous scribe is a certain Guiot who signed a manuscript from the 13th century. Here he wrote a version of Chrétien de Troyes, which is a general revision of the poet's style in that he limits the use of anaphora, softens violent feelings, omits what he does not like, and substitutes courtly expressions for more vulgar ones. Keith Busby calls him "the wilful scribe".²⁸ In the manuscripts of Homer there is nothing to suggest that any scribe pursued his own agenda in a similar way.

27. M.L. West 1998-2000, 1, XXV-XXVIII.

28. Busby 2002, 93-108.

When it comes to the question whether the variants are typical of oral or written transmission, it seems attractive to look for different explanations of different types of variation, and that is how Schøsler implements the distinctions between her four types. Variants of type 4 (content differences resulting in unrelated passages) are taken as a sign that the manuscripts in question go back to more than one recording from oral tradition of the poem concerned, whereas she attributes variants of types 1-3 to scribes and considers a small range of possible explanations why they undertook such changes. Especially, in cases when one and the same scribe copied both Latin and vernacular texts, he would evidently attempt to copy as precisely as possible when writing Latin classics, but might well handle a vernacular model more freely. She considers this to be revealing of the fact that scribes felt a respect for Latin texts that they did not feel for those written in their own language. Another important explanation she finds in the fact that the scribes had been taught a uniform orthography only for writing Latin.²⁹ The variants of type 3 she refers to Zumthor's *mouvance*.³⁰

In order to understand the variants of types 1-3 in the transmission of French medieval epic, scholars point to factors such as the lack of a standardised orthography, differences in dialect (of the scribe or of the patron), and the scribes' attitudes towards their work – a feeling of ownership towards the text, a lack of respect for the model to be copied, and even individual preferences. None of these explanations is immediately transferable to the Homeric scribes. There is no reason to believe that Greek scribes did not respect Homer just as much as they did Plato or other classics, and there is nothing to compare with the different attitudes French scribes displayed towards Latin or vernacular texts. All variation notwithstanding it is obvious that Homeric scribes respected their text and copied their models with the utmost care.

Variants of type 4 (content differences resulting in unrelated passages) do not occur in the transmission of Homer, and that is the decisive fact that undermines Nagy's hypothesis.

29. van Reenen & Schøsler 1996, 268-9; Schøsler 2001, 54-55; 2004, 208.

30. Schøsler 2004, 217.

A Babylonian parallel

Another parallel has been drawn into the discussion by Martin West, the transmission of Babylonian poetry from the end of the second century B.C. to the middle of the first, and the similarities between the kind of variation found in this transmission and that of the Greek epic are indeed striking.³¹ However, the comparison becomes much more interesting if it also takes into consideration the earlier phases, especially of the textual history of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

The written history of this poem is fabulous. It is documented in more or less fragmentary form in various languages over a huge geographical area and over a period of almost two thousand years, and new fragments are still being found. The earliest are in Sumerian and have been dated to c. 1800 B.C.; they are copies of texts composed before the spoken form of this language gradually disappeared in about 2000 B.C. During the period c. 2000-1600 B.C. Akkadian writers established a corpus of classical Sumerian texts, among them poems about the legendary King Gilgamesh. The oldest examples of such poems in Akkadian are from c. 1700 B.C. Materially they originate in different cuneiform tablets, and there are both Sumerian and Akkadian fragments that offer examples of different versions of one and the same episode. The differences are considerable, consisting among other things in the way the heroes are characterised and in the moral judgements on their deeds. From the period c. 1600-800 B.C. only few and small fragments are known from Mesopotamia, but from c. 1500-1200 a considerable number of fragments of the epic translated into the Hittite, Hurrian, and Elamite languages survive from Anatolia and Syria. Most important are the tablets from the Hittite archives in Hattusas (c. 1400-1250). The centuries c. 800-100 B.C. again offer many Akkadian fragments from Mesopotamia, now all representing the same text with only minor variants. A certain Sin-leqi-unnini, who seems to have lived around 1100 B.C., is named as the author of the Akkadian standard version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. An almost complete exemplar of this

31. M.L. West 2001, 15.

standard text in twelve tablets was found in Niniveh in the library of King Assurbanipal (c. 669-27 B.C.). The latest surviving dated fragment of the epic is from c. 130 B.C.³²

In a detailed discussion of this history Jeffrey H. Tigay described the course of events exclusively as a matter of written transmission and considered the variants to be manifestations of the authors' or scribes' attitudes, showing that they felt free to include or leave out parts of the poem as they pleased.³³ But in their introduction to their Danish translation of the poem Ulla and Aage Westenholz interpret the development in another way. They think that the tablets written during the first thousand years represent an oral tradition that originated in Sumerian and later spread to neighbouring languages; the fragments go back to recordings in writing in different places and on different occasions. They also think that a continuous Sumerian text must have existed, telling the full story of Gilgamesh either orally or in writing, but the two authors consider that to be less certain. With the introduction of the Akkadian standard version the situation changed, and the variants that occur between various quotations and other fragments of this version are small and belong to scribal milieus.³⁴

Accordingly, in these two scholars' description transmission took place in two essentially different phases: the first millennium (c. 1800 – 800 B.C.) represented by texts that differ considerably from each other, and the following centuries during which a standard version with only minor variants was transmitted. They describe these small variants as follows: orthographic variation of no importance for the question of transmission, since it was up to the single scribe how to spell the words; words exchanged with a synonym; cases of variation in the order of verses, of the omission of several words or whole verses, or of adaptation of the wording of a passage to a similar passage elsewhere in the epic. Few of these variants change the content of the story. The scribes were well educated, and the minor deviations they allowed themselves did not change the

32. Tigay 1982; Westenholz 1997, 19-60; Noegel 2005; Sallaberger 2008, 83-111.

33. Tigay 1982, 139.

34. Westenholz 1997, 52; cf. M.L. West 1997, 593-602.

fact that they considered the production of a reliable copy an act of divine worship.³⁵

It seems clear that the variants of the first phase belong to Schøsler's type 4, while those of the second belong to Schøsler's types 1-3, and it is this second phase that resembles the manuscript transmission of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Again, it is remarkable that type 4 is lacking in Homer, a fact that confirms Arthur Ludwich's description of the medieval text as "*der wunderbar fest gefügte Bau unserer Homerischen Vulgata*".³⁶ We have no preserved examples of other archaic epic versions of the stories told in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

The single recording in writing

These three transmissions – of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, *Chansons de Geste*, and *Gilgamesh* – resemble each other, and at the same time they differ interestingly from each other. The general similarity consists in the fact that they are all characterised by much greater variation than what is normal in a written transmission. As opposed to their Homeric colleagues the French and Mesopotamian scribes were working without an established orthography, but even so the three transmissions are basically similar with respect to variants of types 1-3. What is decisive in the present discussion is the fact that the French manuscripts and the early phase of the Mesopotamian manuscripts both exhibit the full spectrum of variants (Schøsler's types 1-4), whereas the manuscripts of the two Homeric epics and the tablets of the Akkadian standard version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* contain only minor variants (Schøsler's types 1-3).

The most obvious explanation of this similarity would seem to be that even though we know the poems as written texts, these epics are all somehow connected with oral tradition. The important distinction is between the transmissions that contain type 4 variants and those that do not. Both Schøsler and U. & Aa. Westenholz consider the texts with the more pronounced variants to go back to different recordings in writing from oral tradition while the varia-

35. Westenholz 1997, 43.

36. Ludwich 1898, *Vorwort* without page counting.

tion in those with the smaller variants derives from scribal milieu, and this seems convincing.

Even if we accept that the Homeric variants originate with the scribes it is reasonable to bear a relation to oral tradition in mind because this is the fact that explains the similarity of the three transmissions. Part of the reason why such variants come up in the written transmission of oral epics may be found in the redundancy typical of long oral narratives. Presumably the scribe whose mind is full of verses and passages that are repeated unchanged or with minor variation may easily make mistakes and introduce a well-known and memorised phrase where something similar is actually in his model. It is also conceivable that a scribe would purposely change a phrase he considers erroneous as compared to one he has in his mind; such variants would then have the status of conjectures. There is nothing to suggest that the Greeks ever had a special education for scribes of the kind we know from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, and it seems most likely that in a household which invested in scribal expertise new apprentices would be regularly initiated by more experienced practitioners, and that such teaching took place at home. But just as in the schools for the élite the copying of Homeric verses must have taken up a central place in their training. It might still be maintained that the variants offer a glimpse into performance practice, but only at one remove, as it were: the scribe had attended Homeric performances, and during his training he had read and no doubt been made to memorise long passages of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Whereas the meticulous copying that is in general typical of Homeric manuscripts makes it hard to imagine a wilful Homeric scribe, a pedantic one would not be unthinkable.³⁷

Be that as it may, notwithstanding the host of variants jostling for place, it is clear that the Homeric manuscripts, papyri and testimonia included, transmit a uniform text of the two epics, and that therefore they must go back to one recording in writing of each poem. At least, that seems just as clear to me as it did to Ludwich, and in general editors of the texts have been of the same opinion. They have also agreed on this first common ancestor of the medie-

37. Similar conclusions in Haslam 1997, 77 and M.L. West 2001, 15.

val transmission as having been written in Athens. What used to be the bone of contention was the question of potential forerunners of this Attic text. In my view, it had no written predecessors. In principle there is nothing to rule out that other recordings were made, but if so they were of no consequence for the manuscript transmission and therefore of no importance to us. Nagy's model challenges the idea of the Athenian ancestor; for instance, Casey Dué, together with Mary Ebbott editor of the Homer Multitext Project³⁸ and one of the adherents of Nagy's model, puts it very clearly: "Our evidence suggests strongly that there was no single exemplar that has reached us from Classical Athens," and even though she admits that the medieval manuscripts do not vary in remarkable ways from one another, she insists that there is not even a medieval vulgate for the two epics.³⁹

To these considerations of how to interpret manuscript variants may be added another, aesthetic, argument for the single ancestors of the transmitted Homeric texts. This argument is much more subjective but also much more important: it is unconvincing that a gradual writing would lead to poems having a coherent plot as is a characteristic feature of the surviving Homeric poems, not only the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* but the *Homeric Hymns* as well. They are harmonious narratives with beginning, middle, and end, and even the composite *Hymn to Apollo* with its two differing halves bears the mark of an organising mind. (I am, of course, aware that not all scholars agree on this matter, but to me it seems evident.)

Considerations of this kind deprive me of any wish to be liberated from the idea of the single Homeric genius and the once-and-for-all fixation. I modify the single genius in the sense that I posit one rhapsode as the recomposer of each poem, and the once-and-for-all fixation in the sense that I acknowledge more than average variation of content in the transmission, but I insist on one original for each text and scribal milieu as the home of the variants found in manuscripts.⁴⁰

38. www.chs.harvard.edu/

39. Dué 2009a, 22-7, quote 23.

40. Cf. Saugé 2007, 10, 253. – For a fuller discussion of the origin of the written *Iliad*

The terminus ante quem for the fixation of this text, the ancestor of the medieval vulgate, is Plato's oeuvre (c. 400-350 B.C.). Plato often refers to Homer, and as shown by J. Labarbe his 'Homer' is the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, for all practical purposes in the same form as known today, including passages suspected to be interpolations such as the Athenian entry of the Catalogue of Ships (cf. Chapter 9 below).⁴¹

Perhaps there is another terminus, almost a century earlier. It has often been admired that in the *Iliad* the enemy is not depicted as barbarian; on the contrary, the Trojans live just like Greeks, in a city-state with an acropolis and a temple to their patron goddess Athena. Furthermore, most readers feel that figures such as Hector and Andromache are more heroic than their Greek assailants. I doubt whether that would have been so if the poem had been composed after the Persian invasion in 490 B.C. The question of how the Greeks handled their mythic past during various historical vicissitudes such as the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars in the fifth century B.C. is too complex to be treated here in any detail. But it seems to me that the *Iliad's* depiction of the Trojan War is more likely to have been modelled on such wars as the Greek city-states were constantly waging against each other than on a campaign against a foreign enemy. A sixth-century Panathenaic audience as well as other archaic audiences would comprise persons who had experienced such wars, both as aggressors and as defenders of cities.

Evolution, devolution, or flux

According to Nagy's overall model the two epics crystallised out of a common tradition and eventually outgrew the others like a cuckoo in the nest. Nagy speaks of the Homeric tradition as synthetic, which makes sense as long as it describes the way Panhellenic oral epics seem to have incorporated elements from epichoric traditions. As Margalit Finkelstein has shown, there seems to have been an ef-

and *Odyssey*, see Jensen 1980, 106-11.

41. Labarbe 1949, 409-25; cf. Jensen 1980, 107.

fort to build up a common Hellenic identity, disseminated by the poets and accepted by their audiences. It involved a collective amnesia of the painful historical events that led to the destruction of the Mycenaean culture and substituted in their stead a decision by Zeus to put an end to the practice of the gods having children with mortal women. That meant the end of the heroic age, and an agent for its destruction was the Trojan War. The construction of a genealogy according to which Aiolos, Doros, Ion, and Achaios were the sons and grandsons of Hellen consolidated the common identity.⁴² It should be emphasised that this synthetic movement is not prominent in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but rather in the epic traditions in general, and that most of the great mythical stories are Panhellenic by nature since they involve heroes from many parts of the Greek world. That may have been a result of the fact that most rhapsodes were itinerant. They must have been continually drawing on local legends in order to expand their repertoires and improve their chances of pleasing individual local audiences.

Among folklorists there is an old dispute between adherents of evolution and of devolution, resulting in models that presuppose either that oral texts have humble beginnings and only gradually develop into full flower, or that they begin with great original creations that are then more or less well preserved in transmission until they gradually peter out.⁴³ In view of the fact that the beginning of an epic tradition is as a rule unattested, these models are abstract ideas that are more expressive of the scholar's aesthetic and social worldview than of fieldwork experience.

Examples of traditions outrivalling each other are not unknown in modern times. At least, this seems to have been the case of the Arabic *Sirat Bani Hilal*, which is still widespread on the Arabian Peninsula and in northern Africa, whereas most of the other epic traditions have disappeared.⁴⁴ Similarly, Phillips reports from west Sumatra that previously there had been many epic traditions, but that only *Sijobang*

42. Finkelberg 2005.

43. Holbek 1992, xvii-xviii.

44. Reynolds 1995, 1-8. Cf. Saada 1985, 28; Lyons 1995 (a retelling and analysis of ten different Arabic traditions, based on printed editions); Galley 1998, 112-13, 118.

was left when he was carrying out his fieldwork.⁴⁵ But such developments concern whole traditions, not particular versions.

However, when Nagy speaks of “the synthetic tradition that produced the Homeric poems”,⁴⁶ he reserves this characteristic for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and takes it as an explanation of how these two epics ousted the poems of the *Epic Cycle*. That is another story than that of one tradition growing more popular than others. The idea that one (or two) oral version(s) of a tradition should be so brilliant as to outshine all others does not make sense in a transmission that is subject to constant change. To the best of my knowledge it is unparalleled in fieldwork studies.

As it appears from the kind of scholarly work this book is based on, the general picture may be described as follows: Traditions consist of an infinite amount of multiforms, performances of singers’ mental texts that are at the same time multiforms of the songs that exist as potentials in the common pool of tradition. Stories are continually taking on new forms, branching out into new narratives, not the other way round. Even relatively stable songs are constantly being modified according to the singers’ wishes and the accessible performance arenas, and the tradition does not aim at achieving a final form any more than a natural language aims at producing one final, perfect statement. For this same reason I also decline the evolutionary model recently proposed by Douglas Frame.⁴⁷

Events in the singing community further or weaken interest in a given song. A song may grow popular and spread to many singers but it never reaches its decisive form. Similarly, songs may disappear from repertoires if audiences lose interest in them. Various ‘schools’ may develop special ways of performing a song so that singers belonging to that group have their special pool of tradition, travelling singers may carry their individual versions of songs from one singing community to another, local singers may adopt foreign elements into their songs, and local elements may enter the common pool of tradition.

45. Phillips 1981, 15.

46. Nagy 1990, 79.

47. Frame 2009, 551-620.

In his survey of oral epic in Central Asia, Victor Zhirmunsky described the history of four particularly widespread traditions, the tales of Alpomysh, Edige, Kōroglu, and Manas, which are all known to have existed for centuries. Kōroglu, who is the subject of song among many peoples and in many languages, seems to have lived at the end of the sixteenth century; a person of that name is mentioned in *firmans* between 1580 and 1582. According to Zhirmunsky, the Azerbaijan version is the oldest, and the model for all other versions in the Caucasus and the Middle East. In these songs the hero is a noble bandit of the Robin Hood type. In Uzbek tradition, instead, he is the good ruler of noble birth and reigns over all Turkmens and Uzbeks. In addition there is a Turkmen tradition that is an intermediate link between the other two. Here, then, we see a tradition that is recognisably one tale and seems to have had its origin in one particular region. As it spread from there over a huge area it gradually ramified into new groups of versions. Zhirmunsky describes the result as “greatly differing versions of the same epic theme from different geographical areas and different schools of tale-singing”.⁴⁸ In a similar way, Micheline Galley describes how in the course of the centuries the *Bani Hilal* tradition spread from the Arabian Peninsula and Syria through northern Africa to the Atlantic coast and even to areas south of the Sahara, diversifying itself in the process, in content as well as in ways of performance.⁴⁹

Parry’s attempt at a registration of an entire epic tradition as it existed in 1934-5 is still unrivalled in scope and precision, and the very comprehensiveness of his collection allows for some conclusions as regards both synchrony and diachrony. On the basis of his familiarity with the Milman Parry Collection supplemented by archival studies in earlier collections and his own fieldwork, David Bynum distinguishes between multiforms and hybrids. A multiform is a performance of a text that sticks to the elements which have achieved common acceptance as the proper way of telling the story in question, whereas a hybrid has incorporated elements that are normally part of other, similar, oral texts. Usually such a hybrid

48. Zhirmunsky 1969, 292-307; quote 327.

49. Galley 1998, 118-19.

is a one-off performance, or it may become integrated into the singer's mental text as his normal way of telling the story. But sometimes it is taken over by other singers, and if it becomes generally accepted by the singing community it has made its way from hybrid to multiform. Bynum states:

Whereas there were at any given time in the life of the tradition certain distinct tales and types of tales ... that recurred in multiforms time and again in the composition of many, most, or all of the singers, there were also processes of hybridization or cross-breeding at work upon narrative patterns. Singers in numerous different places shared and – without knowing it – agreed upon certain patterns of story, to which their separate, personal story-telling habits thus imparted a conspicuous stability. But hybridization was also no less an established, regular part of the tradition than was composition in the common way ... Certain of the formerly stable tales might wane in their frequency of use, and so pass into obscurity. Such hypothetical changes are presently the only acceptable explanations for certain long-term relationships between the Serbocroatian tradition and others. The availability of multiforms of a given epic from a variety of singers nevertheless made the distinction between frequent, stable narratives and hybrid modifications perfectly ascertainable at any given moment in the attestation of the tradition. ... *One must know the whole tradition as it was at many places in its geographic and historical extent* if one is to distinguish between stable epic tales and hybrids, and to say whether any one particular narration was the one or the other. For one absolutely essential element in the definition of any epic was the sum of the ways in which it diverged from the others surrounding it (and alternative to it) in the tradition. No singer who dared to call himself such and who merited the dignity of being called such among his compatriots ever professed to sing only one single epic.⁵⁰

In other contexts Bynum speaks of different classes of epic such as songs about the taking of cities, bride-winning, or the hero's return – what others would call distinct pools of tradition. Individual songs belong to such classes but may also combine elements from more than one of them. A wealth of songs coexists in a singer's rep-

50. *SCHS* 14, 1979, 65-6. Bynum's italics..

ertoire and affords a wide, continuous spectrum of cognate ideas and formulations that spill over from one song to another. This “cross-breeding” is going on all the time and is active in rejuvenating a given tradition. Summing up, Bynum writes:

Every epic in the tradition was an alternative to others that were either multiforms or modifications of the narrative in it. Those others were in turn implicated in, and alternative to, still others; and so forth. The web of such relationships from one tale to another was in fact unlimited in its compass, and held every tale suspended upon intricate lines of analogy with infinitely receding orders of other, alternative stories all around it in the tradition. No epic could ever stand alone. ... For in truth it is not a ‘thing in itself’ at all, but only a transient manifestation of the larger reality that has produced it – the whole polymorphic tradition of epos that has in its entirety informed the minds of all the singers.⁵¹

What Bynum here describes seems to hold good for oral epic everywhere as studied in fieldwork, and it makes no difference if the singers specialise in one epic cycle as in the case of *Sirat Bani Hilal* and the *Epic of Palnadu*. Consider the variation Slyomovics found among the ways one and the same episode could be narrated.⁵² In that case the scholarly world has no detailed knowledge of the whole tradition, as required by Bynum, and it is impossible to distinguish between hybrid and multiform, but that cross-breeding has been taking place is evident. Even though singers agree on an overall storyline, there is still no end to the variation going on. Slyomovics states, moreover, that ‘Awadallah also had in his repertoire songs of Abu Zayd’s love affairs that were not part of the *Sirat Bani Hilal* proper, just as Biebuyck mentions that there are other stories of Mwindo than those represented in the four versions of the epic he recorded.⁵³ It is impossible to say whether such extra material is spill-off from the epics or new elements waiting to be incorporated in them;

51. *SCHS* 14, 1979, 51.

52. Slyomovics 1987, 55-69. Cf. Chapter 3 above.

53. Slyomovics 1987, 42; cf. Reynolds 1999, 157 on the many forms *Sirat Bani Hilal* performance may take. – Biebuyck 1978, 23, 114-24.

what is important to note is that however stable a song is, it is never past the phase of being modified.

In Nagy's model a basic argument is that the increasing proliferation of the two epics led to a gradually more and more rigid transmission, but there is nothing to indicate that proliferation works that way. Nagy refers to experience from India, but while his main authorities, Stuart Blackburn and Joyce Flueckiger, actually describe a development toward Pan-Indian traditions comparable to the evolution towards Panhellenism Nagy argues for, they offer nothing to compare with the process of gradually increasing rigidity he posits. On the contrary, Blackburn points out that textual fixity impedes diffusion because it does not allow for the kind of changes that make the story more relevant and acceptable to a diversity of groups, and thus encourage geographical diffusion of a tradition.⁵⁴ Another of the contributors, Peter J. Claus, says of the Tulu *Kordabbu Epic* in Karnataka that "different versions serve to distinguish social groups and establish relations between them ... They provide an arena in which the local caste group organizes its efforts to raise itself in the eyes of the larger community."⁵⁵ Furthermore, Nagy's opinion that the Panathenaic competitions were an important element in the establishment of the two epics as fixed texts is both contradicted by common sense and by fieldwork experience. Competing singers would try to emphasise aspects characteristic of their specific performance as distinct from those of their rivals, it seems to me, and Phillips actually mentions that "the competitive desire for distinctiveness" of the bards has led to a process of diversification of the *Sijobang* epic in west Sumatra.⁵⁶ This seems to indicate that competition and proliferation would lead to differentiation rather than to fixation of a common version.

Herodotus tells of the tyrant Clisthenes (c. 600 B.C.) that he forbade the rhapsodes to perform in Sicyon because they were praising Argos all the time. When this story is referred to as proof

54. Nagy 1996a, 43-63; Blackburn & Flueckiger 1989; Blackburn 1989, 31. Nagy actually admits that these scholars describe a tradition that is changing, Nagy 1996a, 54.

55. Claus 1989, 72.

56. Phillips 1981, 33.

that the public did not accept tampering with the text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*,⁵⁷ this is based on a twofold misunderstanding of the rhapsodes' craft, one modern and one ancient. Rhapsodes would certainly be able to change any performance so that the story became pleasing to a local audience, and such adaptations would not be felt as "tampering". But if the tyrant misunderstood Homeric diction, as I think he did, and took *Argeioi* as the name of the local citizens of Argos and not as one of three names the epic tradition has for the Greek heroes, synonymous with *Danaoi* and *Achaiói*, the rhapsodes would be left helpless. Stories may be changed in infinitesimal ways, but a wholesale revision of the formulaic language in order to remove a well-established name for the warriors on one side of the battles would hardly be possible.

The Trojan War in vase paintings

Visual representations of mythical motifs have often been brought into the discussion, but in this field, too, scholars have differed widely in their interpretations of the same sources. Knud Friis Johansen's pioneering studies in how Iliadic motifs were represented in early Greek art⁵⁸ are still being referred to, and many further pictures have been added to the illustrations he discussed. What is striking is, however, how different conclusions scholars have drawn from the study of this source. The famous Francois vase in Florence (Museo Archeologico 4209), made in Athens c. 570 B.C. and richly decorated by the painter Kleitias with mythical scenes, has had a central place in the discussion. To Karl Schefold, who was of the opinion that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had found their final form in 6th century Athens, the Francois *krater* expressed an engagement in large-scale, detailed narration that vase painters of the time shared with epic poets. In his interpretation, the overall programme of the decoration counterposes Achilles and the Athenian hero Theseus, but with Achilles as the protagonist. This hero's life story fills most of the narrative space and is told all the way from the wedding of his

57. Hdt. 5.67.1; Nagy 1989, 16; Graziosi 2002, 221. – Cf. Jensen 1980, 121.

58. Johansen 1934; 1967.

parents, Peleus and Thetis, till his death, with Ajax carrying his dead body from the battlefield. Nagy, too, refers to this vase, but quite briefly, and finds that its decoration confirms the relative stability of narrative traditions that he asserts, and for Martin West it even serves as proof that the *Iliad* existed when the vase was decorated. As opposed to this Anthony Snodgrass points out that the Trojan scenes represented on the vase are with one exception not among those that occur in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, and that the exception, the horse race at Patroclus' funeral, differs in many details from the corresponding passage in the *Iliad* (*Il.* xxiii.262-650).⁵⁹

In the meantime an important article by Rudolf Wachter has received little attention. He concentrates his study on the fact that the painter has added names, 130 in all, to figures and objects represented. Especially along the rim there is a throng of persons, participating in the Calydonian boar hunt on the obverse and in a chain of young Athenians led by Theseus on the reverse. Some of the names are known to us from other sources, but the majority of them are not. The fact that the painter has named all the figures suggests that he had in mind a catalogue of participants, and that it was important for him to make clear to the viewer that these figures are not just typical hunters or dancers, but specific, individual persons.⁶⁰ To me it seems evident that the decoration on this vase illustrates other stories and other versions of stories than those we happen to know, related in poetry or prose that has simply not survived.

With his 1998 study, *Homer and the Artists*, Snodgrass provoked renewed interest in the question of how paintings relate to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He draws attention to the fact that these two epics are conspicuously absent from the Trojan motifs represented in pictures. Painters and other visual artists prefer instead to focus on events, such as the judgement of Paris or the sack of Troy, that either

59. Museo Archeologico no. 4209. - Scheffold 1964, 54-9; Nagy 1996a, 107-8; M.L. West 2003a, 11; both Nagy and M.L. West refer to Johansen 1967. - Snodgrass 1998, 119-20. - M.L. West 1995, 207 offers a brief discussion of vases that have been brought into the discussion as possible early illustrations of scenes from the *Iliad*.

60. Wachter 1991.

do not occur in the two epics at all or are mentioned only briefly. He states:

The innumerable surviving portrayals of legendary scenes in the art of early Greece, thousands of which undoubtedly relate to the saga of the Trojan War and its aftermath, and some hundreds apparently to the very action of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, were in fact seldom if ever inspired by the Homeric poems.⁶¹

Snodgrass does not, however, draw the conclusion that to me seems unavoidable,⁶² that the painters did not know the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* but that the Homer they illustrated was the general tradition of the Trojan War. Instead he argues for another explanation, that the painters did not want to illustrate epics or other narratives but to stimulate the viewers to read their own stories into them. He asserts that this is also how the poet of the *Iliad* describes the artist's approach when Hephaestus made new armour for Achilles and especially decorated the new shield with a wealth of lively scenes (*Il.* xviii.478-608). For Snodgrass, the fact that many of the figures that Hephaestus made come alive with a great deal of movement and sound is expressive of how the god invited his viewers to make up their own stories about the scenes in the decoration.⁶³

As a parallel this scene is not very effective, though, since the god did not choose mythical motifs for his decoration. Furthermore, interesting as it is, this reading of the god's working process is not convincing. The description is given by the overall narrator, and there is nothing to indicate that the proceedings are focalised by somebody else, for instance Thetis, who might have been brought in to marvel at the pictures taking form under Hephaestus' hands. When at a certain point the narrator does draw attention to the appearance of the decoration, this is in connection with the god's expertise in imitating nature in metalwork: a ploughed field

61. Snodgrass 1998, ix. – By “the Homeric poems” Snodgrass means the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

62. Jensen 1980, 103-6.

63. Snodgrass 1998, 159-62. Cf. Snodgrass 2006, 365-442.

on the shield looked exactly like a ploughed field even though it was rendered in gold (548-9). Also, the narrator states that Ares and Athena, being gods, were depicted in somewhat bigger proportions than the human figures (518-19). Especially this latter detail speaks against Snodgrass's interpretation since it suggests that Hephaestus wanted viewers of the shield to understand who these figures were. The description is introduced with a formula regularly attached to Hephaestus, that he made the armour with *idoieisi prapidessin* (expert knowledge), which suggests that we should understand the procedure from the god's point of view, as a description of the thoughts that thronged through his mind while he fabricated the wondrous weapons.

No part of the story of Troy was more popular with vase painters than scenes from the fall of the city. In Athens they were illustrated again and again during the period c. 550-400 B.C., and among the many motifs five are most frequent: the deaths of Priam and Astyanax, Ajax' rape of Cassandra, Aeneas carrying Anchises on his shoulders, the reconciliation of Helen and Menelaus, and the rescue of Aethra.⁶⁴ None of these elements of the story are mentioned in the *Iliad*, even though the fall of Troy is constantly present, sometimes in the form of an explicit analepsis and in general as an undertone in the narrative.

Hopefully a recent monograph by Steven Lowenstam will bring a change.⁶⁵ He looks at the Trojan myth as depicted in various art forms all over the Greek world as well as in Etruria during the period c. 650-300 B.C., and his book offers both surveys and detailed discussions of individual works. The general pictures that emerge are rather uniform, following similar trajectories as regards the popularity of various scenes; but whereas Trojan motifs begin roughly at the same point of time in mainland Greece and Etruria, southern Italy follows only after a couple of centuries and continues when this kind of decoration goes out of fashion in Athens around 400 B.C. Besides, even though the same motifs are depicted in the Greek city-states in Italy as on the mainland, the fact that in Italy they are

64. Mangold 2000, 9.

65. Lowenstam 2008.

mostly deployed in a funerary context distinguishes the two branches of the tradition.

Lowenstam's study shows that scenes from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are not given priority over other Trojan motifs. The artists are responding to the general heroic tradition in the form of images they have seen and songs they have heard, epic as well as lyric, and not to the two epics in particular. "The poet of the *Iliad* ... is a cousin, so to speak, not a parent of the painter", and images and poems are "multiforms that we should not subordinate to each other but which we should read and visualize as individual reflexes of the vibrant creativity that was Greek heroic myth".⁶⁶ Add to this that with all the metrical inscriptions and all the scraps of poetry found on vases, no quotation from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* ever appears.⁶⁷

Lowenstam even takes up the question of how Etruscan artists knew the stories, an obviously important issue but rarely mentioned in connection with Homeric studies. He suggests that they did not know our *Iliad* or *Odyssey* but were familiar with the Trojan myth and employed it to serve their own purposes.⁶⁸ In antiquity just as in modern times stories travelled across linguistic borders wherever there were interested audiences and singers or storytellers to meet their demands; an immediate parallel is to be found in Parry's bilingual informants, who were able to perform in both Serbo-Croatian and Albanian depending on the circumstances in which they found themselves.

In some respects, however, even Lowenstam does not draw the conclusions his material points to, and this leads to some inconsistency in his argumentation. At the beginning of his book he writes that vase paintings indicate that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* did not find the form in which we know them before the second half of the 6th century B.C.⁶⁹ But when he expects to find the effects of the Panathenaic rule manifesting themselves in Athenian art from that time onwards, he runs into trouble. A scene that becomes popular in

66. Lowenstam 2008, 35.

67. Lowenstam 2008, 6-7.

68. Lowenstam 2008, 173.

69. Lowenstam 2008, 4-5.

Athens in the same period as the introduction of the rule shows Ajax and Achilles playing a board game. This motif happens to be unknown not only in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but in the transmitted texts in general, and Lowenstam does not interpret it as a retelling of some story from a lost narrative as would have been natural, given his general approach. Instead he thinks that the painter Exekias thought out this motif because he wished to compare the two heroes.⁷⁰ But the fact remains that representations of this popular scene appear as a normal part of the representation of Trojan motifs in Athenian art. It should not be treated differently just because it comes up at a date when Lowenstam expects to find traces of the two epics.

There are other examples to show that after c. 520 the general pattern remains the same as before. Most striking is a famous cup in Chiusi made in Athens in c. 440 B.C., almost a century after the introduction of Panathenaic rule. On one side it shows Telemachus together with Penelope at her loom, on the other Odysseus with Eurykleia, only the old woman's name is given as Antiphata. In his discussion of this vase Lowenstam reveals several ways in which its decoration diverges from the *Odyssey*, but nevertheless retains his opinion that a version of the *Odyssey* close to ours was familiar to the Athenians at this point in time. He concludes his interpretation of this vase in a way that is representative of his approach in general:

The Chiusi skyphos demonstrates that the heroic tradition continued unabated for century after century. Whether the teller of tales was a singer, painter, rhapsode, dramatist, sculptor, or lyric poet matters less than that all these artisans shared a common inheritance which they preserved and replenished each time they undertook the act of creation.⁷¹

In his analysis Lowenstam begins at c. 650 B.C. because this is when all of a sudden illustrations of Odysseus and Polyphemus pop up in Athens, Argos and Etruria, inaugurating the flow of mythological motifs in pictorial art that characterises the following centuries. However, the first indisputable Homeric decoration of a vase

70. Lowenstam 2008, 39-41.

71. Lowenstam 2008, 66-71, quotes 66 and 71.

occurs as early as in c. 730 B.C. when the Trojan horse is depicted on a huge relief *pithos* from Myconus (Myconus Museum 2240). The big vessel is ornamented with many other war scenes, a couple of which are considered to represent other scenes from the same war such as Menelaus' reconciliation with Helen and the killing of Astyanax. Accordingly, the decoration of this vase is parallel to what we find in later paintings: it shows well-known scenes from the war that are not, however, part of the storylines of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. Furthermore, the vase is decorated with many other scenes that are not immediately recognisable, and, what is more, in the museum on Tinos there are other similar *pithoi* decorated with figures that cannot be identified as illustrating transmitted stories. Of course, we cannot know if they are meant to visualise events from epic and not from other types of narrative, but that they are mythical topics seems obvious.

On the basis of his material, Lowenstam concludes that “no one part of the tradition (Homeric, for instance) dominated over the others. ... Depending on the date of their work, [painters] may or may not have known a poem similar to our *Iliad*, but they were certainly acquainted with many other poems and visual depictions and found no one version authoritative.”⁷²

It seems, then, that what can be concluded from the comprehensive material offered by paintings is that the story of the Trojan War was well known throughout the whole period in which artists let themselves be inspired by mythic tales, in the Greek-speaking regions as well as in Etruria. Motifs from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were never privileged over other scenes from the Trojan War but occurred with more or less the same frequency as other Trojan events, except that scenes from the fall of Troy outrivalled all others.

When scholars state that painters followed their own rules and did not necessarily illustrate a literary narrative when painting, they may be suspected of doing so under the pressure of a refractory source material. If the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were as well known to all ancient Greeks as is often asserted, why then have these poems left

72. Lowenstam 2008, 174. – With “Homeric” Lowenstam refers to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

so few traces in pictorial art? We cannot, of course, take for granted that the painters of mythical scenes knew the stories from epic; they may just as well have drawn upon other genres such as lyrics or storytelling. But that the artists had in mind some kind of story told in words, and that such stories were prior to stories told in pictures, seems obvious to me. As an argument in the discussion of the origin and diffusion of the two epics vase decoration supports the history to be constructed in the following on the basis of the oral-formulaic theory.

The original

Lord emphasised that the idea of an original does not make sense in an oral epic tradition, but also that the recordings that are made of oral epics become originals in the sense of archetypes of the written manuscripts, and that therefore the recording in writing of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was their original.⁷³

In my opinion there were no *Iliad* or *Odyssey* prior to those we know. The singers who composed them in performance must have had relatively stable mental texts for how to narrate the episodes of Achilles' wrath and Odysseus' homecoming respectively, so that they would always be able to perform them on demand, but these mental texts were in all probability much shorter.

How the once-and-for-all fixation can be imagined to have taken place will be discussed in some detail in Chapters 9-10. As argued thirty years ago, I think the two epics were dictated to the tyrants' scribes in Athens, and the year 522 B.C., which for West is the date of Hipparchus' introduction of the Panathenaic rule, is for me the date of the composition in dictation of the two epics.⁷⁴ When the dictation had been completed, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* existed as written texts in Athens and as mental texts in the two poets' minds, never again to be performed in exactly the same way, and to be finally extinguished at their deaths. The rhapsodes who had dictated

73. Lord (1960) 2000, 124.

74. M.L. West 1999, 382; Jensen 1980. – Aloni 2006; 2010 supports the hypothesis of dictation at the Pisistratid court.

them continued their professional lives, performing wherever a performance arena was at hand any song they had as a mental text in their repertoires, whether they were about an episode from the Trojan War or otherwise. Songs about Achilles' anger or Odysseus' homecoming would have had the same status for them as other songs they knew, as potential narratives to be adapted to the interests of their audiences.

Other singers may have had songs that told the same stories, and such songs may have been parts of the normal repertoires of rhapsodes. If songs had titles, other rhapsodes may have been ready to perform songs called *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, but they were not the two poems we know. There is nothing to suggest an interaction between the written epics and oral performance; the two were divided not so much by different media as by differences in the social milieus to which they belonged.

In a memorable paper Adam Parry long ago demonstrated that precisely because of the flexibility of the tradition we may feel certain that the two poems we know are the original works of their authors. He did so by asking the question whether we have Homer's *Iliad*, and elaborating on it with further questions:

What is the essence of the *Iliad*? How much would our vulgate text have to be changed before a reasonable student would have to say: "This is no longer the *Iliad*, it is a song sung in much the same style, treating of similar themes"?

By means of a lucid analysis of the *Teichoskopia*, the scene in *Iliad* iii.121-244 in which Helen points out the most famous Greek warriors to the old men of Troy, he demonstrates that

its particular qualities depend on an exact economy of the formulae within it. Change the order of statements, add a bit here, subtract a bit there, develop the thoughts in some other manner, and we no longer have the great scene we know. But the *Iliad* is made up of a succession of such scenes, arranged in a fairly exact order. Some of course are more moving, or more highly charged, than others. But they must all be such as to create the impressions they now create, or we shall

not have our *Iliad*. We should at best have a poem with discernible similarities to our own. And to be such as to create the impressions we receive now, they can endure very little change.⁷⁵

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had no further life in oral tradition, I submit. They were not memorised by their two poets or by others and not reperformed in full or in part. They were only brought back to life when someone consulted them, as it is reported that Athenian state authorities did on a few occasions. When Nagy tries to establish what it was that caused their success at the cost of other oral epics he asks the wrong question. There is nothing to suggest that they had this success. Panhellenism neither stimulated the composition of the two epics nor contributed to their diffusion. What we find documented all over the Greek-speaking areas right from the oldest preserved inscriptions from the second half of the 8th century B.C. is not the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* but the general Homeric tradition of telling stories in hexameters.

Nagy asserts that the performance tradition stayed alive well into Roman times.⁷⁶ He offers an exciting survey of sources for rhapsodic activity during his fourth and fifth stages, and for various shifts in the modes of performance. Among other things he discusses the use of the term *homeristai* (Homeric performers), which seems to be a technical term for rhapsodes performing in theatres. In Athenaeus (2nd century A.D.), who first uses the term, it is connected with a reform introduced by Demetrius of Phalerum to have rhapsodic performance transferred into the theatre.⁷⁷ In all this I agree, but not with Nagy's concept of the content of their performances. He takes for granted that their duty was to perform suitable passages of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In my opinion, instead, the two written epics belonged to the educated élite, while rhapsodes handled Homeric poems in the age-old fashion, adhering to the rules for stability and change common to oral epic traditions.

75. A. Parry 1966, 189-201, quotes 189, 200-201.

76. Nagy 1996b, 205-6.

77. Ath. 620b-c; Nagy 1996b, 156-82. The same sources are discussed and related to the question of variants by D. Collins 2004, 207-16.

The Roman author Petronius (1st century A.D.) has a delicious figure by the name of Eumolpus (sweet singer); he is called *poeta*, but from the way he is described, as an itinerant performer, he very much looks like a rhapsode. His Greek name and the fact that he is touring the Greek towns of southern Italy reinforce this impression. Mostly he is not very successful, being met with stone-throwing rather than applause, but he is unstoppable in his continued output of verses. Even when at a certain point somebody tries to save him after a shipwreck he insists that they have to wait just one little moment for him to finish the line he is engaged in composing.⁷⁸

According to Carlo Odo Pavese, the tradition of Homeric performance continued in Greece right through antiquity and into the Middle Ages. It lost ground only when the Greek language underwent its change from a quantitative to an accentuating prosody, and the fifteen-syllable ‘politic’ verse took over. Such a hypothesis fits well into the history constructed here on the basis of fieldwork.

Summary

An influential model for a gradual “crystallisation” of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is not supported by fieldwork experience of how oral epic traditions work. A central part of the argumentation for the model lies in the special kind of variants that characterise the manuscript transmission of the Homeric epics. These variants, however, are too small to be explained as results of oral transmission and must go back to scribal milieus. The transmitted text of the two epics is actually remarkably uniform and must be based on one single recording. Paintings and other illustrations of scenes from the Trojan War suggest that after having been written the two poems remained unknown to the broader public, and that the source for common knowledge of the war was the general mythic tradition, not the two poems.⁷⁹

78. Petr. 90-132; the shipwreck 115.1-5.

79. Pp. 220-27 are a revised version of a Danish paper, Jensen 2007.

CHAPTER 8

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in context

Epic as part of Greek song-culture

Looked at in this framework, the two long epics that have been preserved are part of the archaic and classical “song-culture” so convincingly described by John Herington and Barbara Kowalzig.¹ But their place in the landscape is not without ambiguities. In this as in so many other aspects of early Greek literature readers tend to be subject to the optical illusion that what is left is what there was,² an illusion that has left its traces already with readers of the late classical period, most notably Aristotle. He saw the early history of Greek poetry as a succession of genres taking over one from another,³ and this view still dominates the handbooks. In some cases, such as drama and philosophical dialogue, the origin of a genre can be established with relative certainty, but in general the idea of the succession of genres must be wrong. Instead, a broad spectrum of genres must always have coexisted, since social events that called for performance of genres such as epic, cithara-singing, choral lyric, dirges, or storytelling were a constant fact. I am not arguing that no evolution took place. In other fields, such as warfare and state building, we know the archaic period as a dynamic phase of ancient Greek history, and intellectual innovations such as the spread of writing and coinage tell the same story. Societies change and did so in ancient Greece as they do today. But with the scant and unrepresentative sources we have it is impossible to follow such literary developments as there may have been.

Among the various hypotheses about archaic Greek literature put forward by Homeric scholars, Carlo Odo Pavese’s model seems the one most in harmony with the oral-formulaic theory. According

1. Herington 1985, 1-76; Kowalzig 2007.

2. Alpers 2003, 10, is a particularly clear reminder of this.

3. Arist. *Po.* 1448b-1449b.

to Pavese three traditional genres dominated: rhapsody, citharody and lyric. Rhapsody was performed without instrumental accompaniment, citharody and lyric to the cithara.

In the genre of rhapsody he assigns all the early hexameter poetry: the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the fragments of the *Epic Cycle*, the *Homeric Hymns*, the *Theogony*, the *Works and Days*, the *Catalogue of Women*, the *Shield*, the fragments interspersed in the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* and in the Pseudo-Herodotean *Biography of Homer* as well as the early mantic responses. The tradition may be very old; at least the characteristic diction was already practised all over the Greek-speaking world when the oldest known inscriptions were written. Three cycles of stories were prevalent: on the Trojan War, the Theban War, and the deeds of Hercules. The tradition may have continued right up into Byzantine times, to lose foothold only when the Greek language changed its intonation. The written texts that have survived constitute a minimal part of what once existed.⁴ The rhapsodic tradition may be analysed on three levels, the interregional, the regional, and the individual.⁵

In a convincing interpretation of the 'Nestor Cup' from Ischia (c. 720-10 B.C.), Pavese reads the graffito on the vase as an owner's inscription of the type well known from the archaic period, and points to some particularly close parallels from Ischia and Euboea. He concludes that the inscription bears witness to familiarity with the Homeric tradition, but not necessarily with the *Iliad*.⁶

Pavese's model seems too stylised, however. Early Greece must have been teeming with oral literature of all kinds, songs and stories to meet any requirement, performed by amateurs and professionals, just as in illiterate societies in the modern world. There must have been all the typical work songs necessary for people to work rhythmically, such as sea shanties, or simply to kill the boredom of work, such as pastorals or women's songs at the loom; mothers must have sung lullabies to babies and told stories to older children, and the

4. Pavese (1998) 2007. A more detailed survey of the cycles and their local connections is given in Pavese 1972, 219-26. Cf. also Alpers 2003.

5. Pavese (1993) 2007, 53.

6. Pavese (1996) 2007.

various rites of passage must have involved all the proper genres for such occasions. The preserved written literature often mentions such songs and stories, but they are rarely or not at all represented in the transmitted corpus of texts. Just as the epic poems we know must be an infinitesimal part of what once existed, other kinds of poetry are only represented in the medieval transmission if special circumstances made that possible, the first condition being that they were written at all. An interesting case is that of the lament. Ancient theorists considered elegy to be first and foremost the genre of dirges, but not a single such example has been transmitted.⁷

The distinctions between genres were based not only on poetic and musical form but also on social class. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the idea that, as sometimes suggested, sympotic song developed from epic is unconvincing for social reasons. Symposiasts belonged to the social élite. They may have invited rhapsodes for entertainment just as the host of Xenophon's symposium arranged for musicians and dancers to perform for his guests,⁸ and they may have alluded to the epic poems they had studied at school, or they may even have recited memorised passages of epic. But they would not themselves have engaged in epic performance proper. That was the business of professionals and way below their own social status.

Whereas epic and citharody were sung by professionals, most lyric poetry was handled by amateurs, among them poets who belonged to the highest strata of society such as Sappho, Alcaeus, and Solon. Elegy, too, as it meets us in the *Corpus Theognideum*, is clearly a genre cultivated by the élite, and to male poets the symposium offered the typical performance arena. Plato gives us a vivid glimpse of an aristocrat in love, Hippothales, who bores the wits out of his fellow symposiasts by constantly singing poems to celebrate the beautiful young Lysis.⁹ He produces both poems and written texts, *poiemata* and *syngammata*, and the impression given is that the lover first composes his poems, then writes them, and finally sings them to his companions. Both lover and beloved are of good family,

7. For a diachronic study of the Greek lament, see Alexiou (1974) 2002.

8. X. *Smp.* 2.1-2.

9. Pl. *Ly.* 204b-205d.

and among other things Hippothales tells how one of the youth's forefathers once hosted Hercules, a theme that most likely would be expressed in phrases inspired by epic. Sadly, Plato does not give us examples.

Epic looms large behind most of the other genres, both in form and content. Mythic themes and Homeric wording are normal features and bear witness to how widespread the epic tradition was, both socially and geographically.

Pools of tradition

The epic tradition of which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are manifestations must have been immensely rich and have been the basis of countless performances. It is also likely to have been immensely old, as argued by Meillet.¹⁰

The general evidence provided by both literature and paintings from the archaic period onwards suggests a situation in which epic poetry was ubiquitous and in constant flux, but also fixed in the sense that songs had their established forms that singers tried to maintain respecting the demand for truth inherent in the genre. Social control as maintained by patrons and audiences ensured that only such changes were accepted that were felt not to betray the truth of a given story. The pool of tradition must have contained a limitless number of potential songs centred round events, such as for instance the wars of Troy or Thebes, round heroes, such as Hercules or Odysseus, or round families, such as the descendants of Atreus or Labdacus. As Malik says of the *Devnarayan Epic*, the archaic Greek epic tradition consisted of an intersecting web of different narratives.¹¹ Attic tragedy also draws freely from the pool.

A rhapsode's repertoire would consist of songs of many kinds. Some stories were epichoric and others Panhellenic, there were local versions of the Panhellenic ones, and Panhellenic traditions might adopt local elements when itinerant rhapsodes brought them from one community to another. Individual rhapsodes would have

10. Meillet 1923, 62-3.

11. Malik 2005, xx.

their mental texts ready for performance, they would abbreviate or expand their narratives to suit a given performance arena, and they would all the time be engaged in oral editing of their texts on the basis of audience reactions. Such editing would take the form of infinite modulation and hybridisation as described by Bynum, new multiforms would arise, and if they were accepted by the singing communities, they would enter the common pool of tradition. At any given point of time a certain amount of relatively stable songs would exist, but they would never be safeguarded against further change, and an individual way of performing a song would disappear with the death of the rhapsode who practised it.

Homeric and Hesiodic rhapsodes shared the pool of tradition, and the distinction between them was not so much in the stories they performed as in the way they organised their stories, Homer's songs being mainly narrative with an overall plot while Hesiod's were told as catalogues with plots structuring single passages. They shared formulas, themes, and memorised passages, as witnessed to by examples such as the catalogue of Nereids in *Theogony* 243-62 and *Iliad* xviii.39-49, or the description of divine gifts to the intelligent in *Theogony* 81-93 and *Odyssey* 8.169-73. Inside the Homeric branch, there are similar examples of links among the two epics and the hymns. Not only is there the almost verbatim agreement between the prophecy regarding Aeneas' descendants as spoken in *Iliad* xx.307-8 and the *Hymn to Aphrodite* 196-7, but also the list of localities that the Cretan sailors pass when Apollo leads them towards his shrine in Delphi (*H.Ap.* 422-9), the relevant entries of the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* ii.591-2 + 615-19), and Telemachus' route when returning from Nestor's Pylos (*Od.* 15.297-8 + 9.24, cf. 1.246, 16.123, 19.131) are manifestations of one and the same mental catalogue. It appears that rhapsodes had in their common pool of tradition memorised catalogues and other useful passages to be activated when needed, with such variations as were called for by changing audiences or caused by failures of memory.¹²

12. Peabody 1975, 216-72, is a treasure trove of observations of such links between the poems accessible to us.

How was this huge body of epic narrative organised? Were the various epics unified narratives such as the *Sunjata Epic* and the *Alpomysh Epic*? Or did they exist as independent episodes in the way epic songs did in Parry and Lord's Yugoslavia?

The latter alternative seems most likely. Demodocus' songs are episodes, both those he sings of the Trojan War and the one about Ares and Aphrodite's love affair (*Od.* 8.73-82, 261-366, and 484-520). The fact that also the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* for all their length are episodic is an argument that in this respect Demodocus mirrors real life rhapsodes. Being a return story the *Odyssey* resembles the category of unified epic more than does the *Iliad*; still the fact that the poem neither includes the stories of the hero's youth or how he was involved in the war, nor most of those describing his deeds during the war makes it episodic. A comparison with the *Alpomysh Epic* which is also a return story makes that clear: this epic begins with the circumstances of the births of the two protagonists and their early betrothal, and the bulk of the narrative consists of their deeds while roughly the final third is focused on Alpomysh's return to his home. The episodes of Achilles' wrath and Odysseus' homecoming must have been parts of the Trojan cycle on the same level as other episodes such as the judgement of Paris, Achilles' death, the fall of Troy, Agamemnon's homecoming, etc.¹³

Did the rhapsodes share a mental storyline such as singers of *Sirat Bani Hilal* or the *Palnadu epic*, so that episodes normally performed one at a time or linked together two or three to suit a given performance arena, did nevertheless have each its place in a chronologic order on which the rhapsodes were in relative agreement? Perhaps they did. Hercules is famous for his twelve labours but also for many other stories, a situation which resembles the reports of how singers of Sumatran *Sijobang* or Indian *dhola* assert that there is a fixed number of episodes in these narratives but do not quite agree when

13. Aelian *VH.* 13.14 seems to cherish an idea of Homeric epic as a cycle of episodes; but the sequence of titles he mentions refers explicitly to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, not to the whole Homeric tradition. Aelian lived in the 2nd century A.D., long after 'Homer' had acquired the sense of 'the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*'. The passage is discussed by Nagy 1996a, 78-9.

it comes to more specific knowledge of their content. As for the Trojan cycle, when the Athenian tyrants demanded that at the Greater Panathenaic festivals rhapsodes should perform by relay, one taking over where another had finished, this seems to have been an attempt at bringing order into an otherwise chaotic wealth of episodes. If so, it means that songs of the Trojan War were not usually performed in that way, but it does not exclude that rhapsodes already before had a shared idea of a proper order of the episodic songs.

When performing an epic of the Trojan War the rhapsode would have at his disposal mental texts for a great number of episodes and be immediately ready whenever an occasion occurred to entertain an audience with the performance of a suitable episode, whether by his own choice or to meet the listeners' requests. Both potentialities are exemplified by Demodocus' various performances in *Odyssey* 8.

A demand of paramount importance for a rhapsode must have been to find his way through the mass of episodes and to decide on where to begin and end his song. This is actually what is said of Demodocus. When Odysseus has expressed his special wish for hearing the song of the Wooden Horse, the singer begins his performance "taking it from the point where ... (*enthen helon, Od.* 8.500)". The phrasing suggests that he had to decide just where in his mental storyline it would be most fitting to start. That a similar mechanism is at work at the beginning of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is clear from the fact that in both cases the poet is specific about the point from where he asks the Muse to begin the narrative (*Il.* i.6 and *Od.* i.10).¹⁴ Next, when the metaphor *oime* (path) is sometimes used for a song (*Od.* 8.74, 481, 22.347, cf. *h.Merc.* 451), this again points to the cognate notion that the rhapsode's (and the Muse's) task is to find the proper way through the wilderness of stories. According to Susan Wadley, north Indian *dhola* singers use the same metaphor for their strategies when choosing how to perform a suitable part of the "series of songs and chants tied together by a narrative thread", and Reynolds mentions that *Sira* in *Sirat Bani Hilal* means path.¹⁵

14. For a more detailed discussion of these passages, see Burgess 2004-5, 18-19. - Cf. Jensen 1980, 74-7; Rossi 2001, 109-10.

15. Wadley 1989, quote 79; Reynolds 1995, 5.

When Demodocus opens his song, the verb used is *phainein* (show, reveal, 8.499), a fact that suggests a conception of the song almost as something material that is already there, just waiting to be shown by means of the performance. An interesting parallel occurs in the edition of an epic from Cameroun when the anthropologist says of the singer that he consented to “*montrer ce qu’il savait encore faire dans ce genre de manifestation*”.¹⁶

Another glimpse into the rhapsode’s performance technique is offered by Adrian Kelly, who in a recent paper compares the hero’s various lying tales in the second half of the *Odyssey* and argues that they may be read as examples of how a singer manipulates a given tale so as to fit various situations and audiences.¹⁷ Kelly does not use the term ‘mental text’, but his analysis lends itself easily to Honko’s terminology when he points out how these stories contain three basic elements, the Cretan identity, the presence of Idomeneus, and an involvement in the Trojan War, which are then manipulated mainly by four means: progression, mirroring, doubling, and omission. Kelly states that “Homer’s Odysseus is constructed in bardic terms”, and that these tales work “almost as though we get a picture of him practising elements within his repertoire”.¹⁸ Still another example might be added to Kelly’s analysis, the story Demeter in disguise tells to Keleus’ daughters when they meet her at the well in the Homeric hymn in her honour (*h. Cer.* 119-144). This narrative has nothing to do with the Trojan War but takes place at an indefinite point of time probably understood to be long before the war, and Demeter’s tale shares with that told by Odysseus only one of the basic elements, the Cretan identity. Nevertheless it is remarkably similar in tone to his lying tales. When the goddess relates how she escaped her robbers while they were having their meal, her narrative comes very close to one of Odysseus’ tales, his life story as recounted to Eumaeus (*Od.* 14.192-359). Thus it seems that when the *Odyssey* describes its protagonist as acting like a bard, both hero and narrator have access to useful patterns in the pool of tradition that

16. Priso 1993, 32. My italics.

17. Kelly 2008, 182-93.

18. Kelly 2008, 198, 186.

the poet shares with other rhapsodes. It is noteworthy that both the Cretan identity and the detail of the robbers' meal are arbitrary elements in the sense that they have no immediate connection with characteristic qualities pertaining to either Odysseus or Demeter.

Mental text and expansion

With the limited corpus of poetry left to exemplify the Homeric tradition we are far from being able to meet Bynum's requirement that we should know an entire tradition as it was at many places in its geographical and historical extent in order to distinguish between the status of individual epic songs. But internal analysis of the two epics makes it fairly certain that they are expanded versions of the respective singers' mental texts, that they are the works of two different singers, and that the poet who composed the *Odyssey* knew the *Iliad*. I have argued elsewhere that both of the two epics were aimed at Athenian audiences, and especially for the *Odyssey* other scholars have developed my arguments further by pointing to vestiges of Attic influence I had not been aware of.¹⁹ If this is so, the two epics were adaptations made to fit this special arena. Composers of tragedy in 5th century Athens handled the pool of tradition in a similar way, but with the important difference that tragedians were freer than epic poets to manipulate their stories. An epic singer under the obligation imposed by the generic demand for truth could hardly have allowed himself to place Athena's acquittal of Orestes in the Athenian council of Areopagus, as Aeschylus does at the end of the *Eumenides*.

Whereas the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in itself presents no problem to the hypothesis of their having been orally composed, there are cogent text-internal reasons for believing that the rhapsodes who dictated them in both cases made maximum use of what Johnson called "the accordion effect", the elasticity available to them. Per definition only the singer himself has access to his mental text, but an idea of how the two rhapsodes normally performed the songs of Achilles' wrath and Odysseus' homecoming may be ob-

19. Jensen 1980; Catenacci 1993.

tained by considering classical Homeric analysis such as Wilamowitz's reconstruction of the *Uriliad* or Schwartz's of the poem composed by his *Odyssey* poet O.²⁰ Their idea was that the various breaches in logic or quality were brought about during a process in which one or more poets expanded an original poem with more or less success. On the present hypothesis each of the two rhapsodes was for some reason presented with a demand for a very long version and answered this demand by various devices such as, for instance, mirroring and doubling, as described by Kelly. When in the *Iliad* the duel between the two rivals Menelaus and Paris had been fought, another, between Ajax and Hector, was added, and the *Odyssey* had not only one but three alluring women delay the hero's homecoming. The dictating rhapsodes expanded their mental texts with extra themes or they even incorporated what may have been full songs they had in their repertoires such as the Catalogue of Ships or the adventures of Menelaus during his voyage back from Troy. What in the view of classical analysis was a process that took place in the course of generations, is according to my hypothesis the work of two single rhapsodes in performance. A necessary precondition for their achievements is that such a process was normal and had been regularly taking place whenever for some reason a rhapsode expanded his mental text.

This hypothesis actually comes very close to West's ideas of how the two epics were composed, during a process of gradual expansion that, at least in the case of the *Iliad*, may have lasted many years. According to West, while travelling from place to place the poet carried with him a collection of papyrus rolls and added to them over the years. West imagines that the poet currently made sporadic interventions in his text to incorporate new ideas, and here he is explicitly speaking of "operations performed on a written text, as it were with scissors and paste".²¹ What in West's model is the result of decades of working over a text in writing, is in mine a case of composition in performance at a special occasion on the basis of a lifetime of experience in mental editing. West's poet works in a way

20. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1916; Schwartz 1924.

21. M.L. West 2000b (*Odyssey*); 2000c, 27-8 (*Iliad*); quote 2000b, 487.

unparalleled in archaic Greece, whereas in his way of composing my rhapsode follows the usual procedure of oral poets as observed in our time, and in dictating to a scribe the normal way of writing all through antiquity.

We do not know the usual length of an epic performance in archaic Greece.²² But if we accept that the Homeric hymns functioned as preludes to epic performance, it is reasonable to imagine that such performances were at least substantially longer than the hymns. For instance, the 546 hexameters of the *Hymn to Apollo* could hardly have introduced an epic of less than, say, 3,000 verses.

When itinerant rhapsodes came to a city or village they had not visited before they probably began by gathering local information so as to be able to satisfy the specific demands they might expect to be met with in that performance arena. Afterwards successful passages made for epichoric use might stay on in their mental texts and pop up in other performances so long as they did not give offence. For instance, even though I consider the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to be multiforms to please Athenian audiences, the prophecy concerning Aeneas' descendants in *Iliad* xx.307-8 must have originated at a performance in Skepsis, the reference to a common meal in Menelaus' palace in *Odyssey* 4.621-3, which has been thought to be an allusion to the Spartan custom of *sysitia*, may have been originally made for a performance in Sparta, and the strange mention of Cape Malea in the passage on Agamemnon's homecoming in the same book (4.514) may be a slip of the tongue revealing how the poet used to sing this story when performing in Sparta.²³ Furthermore, problematic passages might be inconspicuously omitted from a performance, ready to come back into use in arenas where they would cause no offence. That the Catalogue of Ships does not mention Megara may be a case in point.

The pools of tradition accessible to the two rhapsodes contained both Troy songs and what appears to have been an infinite number

22. I am sad to find myself referred to for the opinion that a usual performance would be roughly of the length of a book of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, Frame 2009, 562.

23. *Iliad* xx.306-8, cf. Reinhardt 1961, 507; *Odyssey* 4.621-3, cf. S. West 1988, 231; *Odyssey* 4.514, cf. Brillante 2005, 6; Jensen 2005, cf. Chapter 9 below.

of other songs. Considering the ease with which the *Iliad* refers to or includes other stories, it seems certain that the poet had in his repertoire many such songs, for instance about the deeds of Bellerophon, about the Calydonian boar, or about the conquest of Thebes, just as the composer of the *Odyssey* must have been able to sing of the adventures of the Argonauts or perform catalogues of women in the Hesiodic style, depending on the demands of a given performance arena. The rhapsodes who composed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would not only have been capable of singing these two epics in much shorter versions, or versions adapted to other audiences, they must have had in their minds a broad selection of other songs, too. Great oral poets have great repertoires. As Lord stated: “The singer who performed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* ... was not a two-song man.”²⁴ To compare, Sophocles composed c. 120 tragedies, not just the seven that have been transmitted.

Scodel makes the following list of epic stories in archaic Greece: the Trojan War, the voyage of the Argonauts, Hercules’ deeds, the Theban War, local Pylia traditions, the adventures of Peleus, Melampus, Theseus, Meleager, Bellerophon, Orion, Lycurgus, Otus and Ephialtes, Amphion and Zethus, the Dioscuri, and Arithous.²⁵ According to West, the Troy cycle in particular “grew fat” on the others.²⁶ In my opinion, any rhapsode who for some reason wished to expand his mental text would do so by incorporating stories from anywhere else, so that it is not the Troy cycle as such, but the two individual epics we know that have drawn extensively from the pool. Lost performances of Hesiodic catalogues or the voyage of the Argo may in the same way have been “fattened” on Troy stories when that was called for.

Are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* close to each other? Or, the same question put in another way, are the differences between them important or unimportant? Many scholars feel that they are too differ-

24. Lord (1960) 2000, 151.

25. Scodel 2002, 37; cf. Dowden 2004, 196-7. M.L. West 2003a is an edition with English translation of the fragments and testimonia of lost epics. – For a detailed investigation of the relationship between the *Odyssey* and the *Argonautica*, see M.L. West 2005.

26. M.L. West 1985, 137.

ent to have been composed by one and the same person. Had many Homeric epics been passed down to us, or had we known more than one version of the same story, we might have answered with more confidence. There is, however, an argument to be found in comparing the two epics with the hymns; they, too, are transmitted to us as works by Homer, and they are close to the two epics, both in style and content. The two epics are not closer to each other than they are to the hymns, or than the hymns are to each other. On principle, each surviving poem must be considered an independent manifestation of the tradition unless there are special reasons for arguing otherwise.²⁷ This holds good for Hesiodic poems just as much as for Homeric ones.

We cannot know whether the Homeric tradition often fostered poems that compared to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in quality. Arguably, however, since great oral poems regularly stem from great traditions, the qualities of the two epics in themselves make it probable that there were poets around of a similar stature. You might even argue that the artistic level of, for instance, the *Hymn to Aphrodite* bears comparison to the *Iliad*. In my opinion the bulk of surviving Homeric poems as such bear witness to a tradition that is as a whole of incomparable wisdom, charm and elegance. This is not to say that all the surviving texts are on the same level, just as not all passages in the two great epics have won the same appreciation from readers. Attic tragedy is exemplified in the transmission available to us by the works of three masters. Had the works of only one of them survived, readers might easily have surmised that this poet was the one and only genius to outshine all drama in his own time as well as in posterity.

That the poems have come down to us without individual authors' names is not strange, for neither rhapsodes, nor audiences or scribes would consider them to be new compositions. A Homeric or Hesiodic rhapsode would never claim to be performing poems he had composed himself. His professional pride would be first of all

27. Aloni 1989, 107 argues for the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn to Apollo* having been composed by the same rhapsode, and Pavese (1993) 2007, 53-4 for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* likewise.

in his memory, and both he and his listeners would believe that the more he was able to move them, the more truthful was his song.²⁸

They would also believe that once upon a time there had been a poet – a Homer, a Hesiod – who had composed the song that the rhapsode had learned from his master, and he in turn from his master, etc. Both the first composition and the marvellous fact that the rhapsode was still able to perform the song many generations later were due to the support of the Muse, and she guaranteed the truth of the song. As for Homer, he was considered the author of a great variety of epics and only as late as the time of Plato and Xenophon did his name begin to be linked with in particular the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.²⁹ The names that for the singing community signified persons, are for us the names of genres.

Iliad, Odyssey, and Epic Cycle

The first mention of the titles *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was made by Herodotus in c. 430 B.C. He also knew two other epics by name, a *Cypria* (a poem about or from Cyprus) and an *Epigoni* (the descendants, referring to the second of two mythical sieges of Thebes). He clearly knew them all as works by Homer but was doubtful as to the authenticity of *Cypria* and *Epigoni*. With respect to the former he noticed a difference between the *Iliad* and the *Cypria*: according to the *Iliad*, Paris and Helen visited Sidon on their journey from Sparta to Troy, whereas in the *Cypria* they sailed directly across the Aegean. In relation to the Theban epic Herodotus was concerned with sources for an ethnic group, the Hyperboreans, and wrote that they are mentioned in Homer's *Epigoni*, "if this poem is actually by Homer".³⁰

How did Herodotus know all these epics? From reading or from attending performances? The discussion of Paris and Helen's journey, concerned as it is with a matter that in the *Iliad* is mentioned only in passing (*Il.* vi.289-92), rather suggests that Herodotus was referring to written texts, and the fact that all four poems were

28. Nagy 1990, 61-70 discusses the concept of truth as a criterion of Panhellenism.

29. M.L. West 1999, 372; Graziosi 2002.

30. Hdt. 2.116-17, 4.29, 4.32.

known to him by titles points in the same direction, but the evidence can hardly be called conclusive. What is evident, however, is that Herodotus was arguing against a common opinion that regarded all four poems as composed by Homer, also the one that is not concerned with the Trojan War.³¹

The *Cypria* turns up again a century later when Aristotle compares the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to other epic poems, and this time the comparison concerns poetic excellence. The passage treats of unity of plot, and now 'Homer' has become the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as against the unknown poets of the other titles he lists:

That is why ... Homer's inspired superiority of the rest can be seen here too: though the war had beginning and end, he did not try to treat its entirety, for the plot was bound to be too large and incoherent, or else, if kept within moderate scope, too complex in its variety. Instead, he has selected one section, but has used many others as episodes, such as the catalogue of ships and other episodes by which he diversifies the composition. But the others build their works round a single figure or single period, hence an action of many parts, as with the author of the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad*. Accordingly, with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* a single tragedy, or at most two, can be made from each; but many can be made from the *Cypria*, and more than eight from the *Little Iliad* - namely, *Judgement of Arms*, *Philoctetes*, *Neoptolemus*, *Eurypylus*, *Begging Episode*, *Spartan Women*, *Sack of Troy*, and *The Fleet's Departure*, as well as *Simon* and *Trojan Women*.³²

The epics Herodotus and Aristotle mention have all been lost except for a few fragments and a series of summaries made by a certain Proclus and transmitted by the Byzantine patriarch and scholar Photius (9th century A.D.).³³ They are arranged so as to serve as an aid for readers of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, each poem is given an author's name (sometimes more than one) and it is stated how many books it contains - in short, here we are clearly concerned with written poems. The summaries list the various incidents of the Trojan

31. For a careful study of Herodotus' relations to Homer, see Boedeker 2002.

32. Arist. Po. 1459a-b, trl. Halliwell 1995, 117-19.

33. For an English translation of the summary, see Burgess 2001, 177-80.

War and its aftermath, compensating for the problem that so many of the most famous events are mentioned only briefly or not at all in the two poems. Jonathan Burgess has shown that the poems summarised were not originally meant for constituting a coherent description of the Trojan War but that they seem to have had their own structures and ambitions as individual poems. He argues convincingly for the opinion that the arranging of them so as to tell a coherent story was carried out in the Hellenistic period, later than Aristotle.³⁴

In the philosopher's view the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* on one hand and the poems of the *Epic Cycle* on the other differed basically from each other, and over the last decades this difference has been discussed over and over again.³⁵ Aristotle's statement is, of course, of paramount importance, both because it is made by him and because the difference he points to is one that also seems important to modern critics. The unity of plot in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* belongs to the qualities that have been most admired by modern readers, and in this way Aristotle's verdict also serves as a welcome reason for scholars to believe that what has survived to our times is the best of what ever existed.

However, the poems Aristotle was comparing were likely to be written books he had in his library. Like everybody else he must have occasionally attended epic performances, but it is reasonable to imagine that for him the real thing was what was in his books. How much they resembled such poems as were performed by rhapsodes is unknown, both in the case of the *Epic Cycle* and of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Herodotus had his doubts as to the authorship of some of the Homeric poems he knew, but Aristotle is the first to establish a qualitative gap between the two epics and the rest.

Even though the poems of the *Epic Cycle* are lost, they have played an enormous role in Homeric studies. Enough is known of them to

34. Burgess 2001, 14-16.

35. Especially by the so-called Neoanalysis; for a survey including the analytical forerunners of this theory, see M.L. West 2003c, 2-5. - Even Burgess, who admits that the ancients did not seem to distinguish between the two great epics and the *Cycle* until well into the classical period, maintains that the distinction in narrative strategies was there all the time, Burgess 2004-5, 3-4.

make them an important source for what Greek epic was apart from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Depending on the overall picture constructed, scholars have hypothesised that they were further developments of the genre, building on the two epics, that they were models for them, or that they were other examples of the same tradition. For Oralists the last option is the one that seems likely. Burgess has expressed the relationship as follows: “If the tradition of the Trojan War were a tree, initially the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* would have been a couple of small branches, whereas the *Cycle* poems would be somewhere in the trunk”,³⁶ a statement I find precise and illuminating. Where I part company with Burgess is in the adverb “initially”, since in my perspective the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had no further life in oral tradition. They were as they were and remained unchanged, as well as for a considerable time unread.

The picture I am constructing is in many respects the same as Burgess'. Together with visual representations of mythical topics I take the *Epic Cycle* as the main source for the pool of tradition the surviving epics drew from. It offers a glimpse into the common Homeric tradition out of which the two epics were born, and they represent the mainstream – the trunk – with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* focusing on relatively marginal topics.

In all probability the scrolls of the written texts were deposited in the Acropolis, just as according to Herodotus the tyrants kept their collection of oracles there.³⁷ While the two epics were lying safely in their temple, to be consulted only on formal occasions, the Homeric tradition continued as before. The tradition existed both before and after the writing of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and was unaffected by them. The written versions of the *Epic Cycle* that Proclus knew must be considered manifestations of the tradition on the same level as the two epics we know, and accordingly they raise the same questions as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: what was their relationship to oral tradition? were they oral poems that somebody ensured was recorded in writing? or were they composed in writing by a literate poet who drew from oral tradition? The fact that Proclus knew

36. Burgess 2001, 1.

37. Hdt. 5.90.2. – For temples as early archives, see Perilli 2007, 50-52.

authors' names for them suggests the latter option. But if they were written from dictation, the odds are that the scribes of these poems put other questions to their informants than did the scribes who recorded the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. They may have resembled modern fieldworkers who tend to ask for the full story, or at least for a narrative that proceeds properly, telling first things first. This characteristic, which by some readers has been taken to be typically oral, is instead in my view typical of people like scribes and scholars, who take an interest in oral traditions but are bewildered by the multiplicity of the stories and try to create some kind of order in them. To compare, in Apollodorus' mythology (2nd century A.D.?) the stories of the Trojan War, those told in the *Epic Cycle* as well as those told in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are related chronographically.³⁸

Obviously the *Epic Cycle* is important for our understanding of the two epics we have, and scholars have been eager to explore how intertextuality works in Homeric tradition. For non-Oralists it is important to reach a probable arrangement of when the various poems were composed in order to sort out which poem alludes to which. For those who think in oral traditions things are both much simpler and much more complicated.

In a way, intertextuality is a basic feature of oral epic since every single performance echoes preceding performances, and since all songs share the common pool of tradition. Foley speaks of metonymy: In the performance arena the poem being performed evokes other phrases, themes, and songs in the minds of both singer and audience. Barber coins the term 'quotedness': "There is a pervasive intertextuality in which incorporated elements are partially, but not fully, subordinated to the project of the incorporating genre, casting a haze of "quotedness" over the whole field of Yorùbá orature".³⁹ She is concerned with African praise poetry, but her description fits oral epic just as well. When Christos Tsagalis draws all kinds of stories from the *Epic Cycle* into his readings of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, regardless of dates,⁴⁰ he is proceeding in a way that transfers in-

38. Apollod. *Epi.* III-VII, cf. Jensen (1994-5) 2009.

39. Barber 2005, 275; cf. Barber 2007, 78-9.

40. Tsagalis 2008.

sights such as Foley's and Barber's into actual interpretative practice.

However, if by intertextuality we mean the reference from one text to another in a way that well-informed readers or audiences will experience as an allusion to or even a quotation from a specific text, the question is whether that is possible at all in oral epic traditions. Intertextuality in this sense seems to presuppose texts that are stable enough to be recognised as individual poems.

The question has been central in Homeric studies ever since Neoanalysts and Oralists began to notice that their different approaches had run parallel and might fruitfully inspire each other.⁴¹ In particular it has been discussed whether the Neoanalytic interpretations of the second half of the *Iliad* as alluding to epics that described Achilles' death would make sense in oral tradition. If poems share formulas and themes, can the reuse of a phrase be understood as pointing from one poem being performed to other poems known to singer and audience?

On the basis of Neoanalytic results and in constant dialogue with them, Burgess in a recent book studies the way Achilles' death and afterlife are handled in the *Iliad* as compared to other versions of the story and argues that "an allusive type of intertextuality is characteristic of the poetics of the *Iliad*". He finds it probable that a coherent life story of Achilles, at least as "a notional mythological construct" existed in the singing community, and reconstructs its course of events in the form of an abstract *fabula*.⁴² Element for element he discusses how these events are treated in the *Iliad*, underlining the sophistication with which the poet uses them both in his characterisation of the hero and in the way the tragic aspect of his imminent death is included in the poem. Burgess accepts the Neoanalytic interpretation of Patroclus as an *altera persona* of Achilles from the point when in *Iliad* xvi he dons his friend's armour till he has been killed and buried, but unlike the Neoanalysts Burgess finds it unlikely that the references are to written texts. On the contrary, he asserts that even if some epics were registered in writing

41. Schoeck 1961, 116; Dihle 1970; Jensen 1980, 30-36; Kullmann 1984.

42. Burgess 2009, quotes 6, 8, *fabula* 135.

such manuscripts would hardly be accessible to readers. Instead he speaks of an “intertextual web of traditional narrative of which different epics were cognate yet independent manifestations”. He distinguishes between typology and allusive motif transference. To the first category belong Lord’s themes, the multiforms out of which oral epic is built, whereas the other category contains the intertextuality between the end of the *Iliad* and the story of Achilles. He conceives of this story not as a specific narrative but as a myth with relatively stable contours in innumerable manifestations.⁴³ What Burgess describes is a thoroughly oral and highly sophisticated process of intertextuality between a particular narrative and collective mythological knowledge. “Performer and audience would need to negotiate the process of communication, and much would depend on the knowledge, alertness, and cooperation of an audience at any given performance”.⁴⁴

I have found nothing exactly parallel in any of the fieldwork reports I have used, but that may well be because nobody has looked for it. Since it is a well-known fact that characters in epic can be taken by audiences as alluding to living persons, or even as a kind of *personae* for them, it seems logical that such allusions from one traditional character to another would also be understood, particularly if this other was a protagonist in the tradition. Consider the series of metaphors that the Karakalpak hero Edige uses when he is finally reunited with his father. Reichl emphasises that this passage is no theme in Lord’s sense because it occurs only in that specific situation.⁴⁵ Let us imagine that a singer nevertheless had another character use it. In that case would not any audience well-versed in the Edige Epic immediately catch an allusion to the recognition scene between Edige and his father?

In comparison it makes excellent sense to imagine that precisely Achilles’ death would be so important a part of the pool of tradition that it contained its own, recognisable, elements, including phrases that were especially linked to this event. Neoanalysts pointed to the

43. Burgess 2009, especially 56-71; quote 100.

44. Burgess 2009, 70.

45. Reichl 2007, 87-93; cf. chapter 2.

remarkable phrase, *keiso megas megalosti* (you were lying huge over a huge space) that the dead Agamemnon uses in *Odyssey* 24.40 of the dead Achilles, when the two heroes are discussing Achilles' death and burial in Hades. The same phrase is used twice in the *Iliad* (xvi.776 and xviii.26), about another hero in connection with Patroclus' last battle, and about Achilles himself grieving over Patroclus' death. If the proper use of this unusual phrase was to describe the slain Achilles, it might well be felt as an allusion to Achilles' own death.⁴⁶

Reception of the written epics

Discussions of Homer are reported as early as from the last decades of the sixth century B.C., when the poet Xenophanes of Rhegium as well as the prose authors Theagenes and Heraclitus criticise him from a moral point of view. His scandalous representation of the gods is their main target. Xenophanes points out that Homer ascribes to the gods all kinds of behaviour that are forbidden among mortals, and Heraclitus recommends that both Homer and Archilochus be expelled from public competitions. Theagenes, who is said to have been the first to write about Homer's life and work, wanted instead to solve the problem of the immoral gods by means of allegory.⁴⁷

That the criticism comes up at this particular time has been taken as a sign that these authors had access to a written *Iliad* and *Odyssey*,⁴⁸ and that is of course possible even if the texts had at that time only recently been (composed and) written, as I believe. One of Theagenes' comments actually gives an indication that he may have known the beginning of the *Iliad* in written form: He proposed to replace the adverb *mala* (very) in *Iliad* i.381 with two rather insignificant small particles, so that Achilles no longer said that Apollo was a very good friend of his priest Chryses, a relationship between a god and a man that Theagenes seems to have felt to be impro-

46. Cf. Burgess 2009, 84-5.

47. Xenoph. fr. 11-12 D-K; Theagen. 1, 2, 4 D-K; Heraclit. fr. 42 D-K.

48. Cassio 2002, 118-19.

er.⁴⁹ With this single exception there is nothing in the criticism raised by Theagenes and his contemporaries that would not also make sense if it was directed at the Homeric tradition as such.

As a matter of fact, when Xenophanes' indignation concerns the fact that Homer represents the gods as "stealing, committing adultery, and cheating each other",⁵⁰ the first point, the stealing, cannot be directed at the two epics. The god who famously steals from another god is the new-born Hermes in the hymn addressed to him, and in general Xenophanes' criticism makes just as much sense in relation to the greater *Homeric Hymns* as to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This is not to say that Xenophanes was criticising the hymns, but that the gods' scandalous moral behaviour seems to have been a common part of Homeric epic as such, and that Xenophanes' target was the Homeric performance tradition in general, not the two epics in particular. Heraclitus' reference to competitions is explicitly concerned with public performance, not reading. Nagy points out that Heraclitus' use of the verb *rhapizesthai* (to be beaten) in his demand for the expulsion of Homer and Archilochus is likely to be a pun on the word rhapsode, and that it is directed at the rhapsodic performances of these two poets rather than at the poets themselves.⁵¹ This intimate linking of poets and rhapsodes underlines that Heraclitus was thinking in terms of performance.

A further point is that anyway we have very few literary sources older than this period. The sudden upsurge of Homeric criticism around 520 B.C. should perhaps be taken as a sign that the Greeks were beginning to make use of writing for such topics rather than that reading of Homer originated at this point of time.

A century later a new wave of Homeric scholarship set in, and now another kind of comment was added to the discussions of content, such as questions of accentuation and word division, topics

49. Theagen. 3 D-K. – 2 D-K, a scholium to *Iliad* xx.67, does not assert that Theagenes commented on this specific passage but that he was the originator of allegorical interpretation, as emphasised by Ford 1999, 35-6; Ford also points to the fact that it remains uncertain whether the Theagenes who proposed another reading in *Iliad* i.381 was actually the scholar from Rhegium, Ford 1999, 37.

50. Xenoph. fr. 11-12 D-K.

51. Nagy 1989, 38; Graziosi 2002, 29-30.

that obviously presuppose a written text. Cassio lists Hippias from Thasos, Stesimbrotos from Thasos, Metrodoros from Lampsacus, as well as philosophers and rhetoricians such as Democritus, Alcidas, Antisthenes, Zoilus, Plato, and Aristotle as participants in this discussion.⁵²

Starting in the same period, c. 430-20 B.C., the amount of written copies of the two epics seems to have increased steadily. As we have seen, Herodotus is likely to have known them as well as various other epic poems in written form. Thucydides (c. 460-400 B.C.) is an ambiguous case with regard to the question of the two senses of 'Homer'. He knows the Catalogue of Ships, and when he gives his account of how many Greek troops participated in the war, the figures tally with what we have in the *Iliad*. But on an important issue he disagrees with the transmitted text. Thucydides argues that when disembarking on the Trojan shore the Greeks must have won their very first battle, since otherwise they would not have been able to build a fortified camp. In our *Iliad*, on the contrary, the fortification of the camp is realised only when Nestor in Book vii has proposed the construction of a wall. It is an old and well-established result of Analytical research that the wall was a late addition to the poem, as it is revealed both in a problematic passage (*Il.* vii.333-42, to be further commented upon in Chapter 9) and by the fact that during the fighting scenes in the middle of the poem the wall sometimes plays an important role, sometimes seems not to be there at all. My hypothesis is that the rhapsode decided during the dictation to introduce this element, presumably to honour the ancestor of the Pisistratids, and that he had problems in fully integrating it in his mental text.

Whatever the case, Thucydides knows the Catalogue of Ships and he also refers to another passage of *Iliad* ii, but on an important issue concerning the overall structure of the *Iliad* he disagrees with the poem we know. The argument he derives from the fortification

52. Cassio 2002, 120-23. Cassio starts his list with Theagenes and dates the beginning of this kind of criticism a hundred years earlier. - Among his examples of sophistical argumentation Aristotle actually makes the point that to emend Homeric passages by change of accentuation presupposes a written text, *Arist. SE* r66b.

of the camp even takes for granted that everybody knew that the Greeks built a wall round their camp from the very beginning of the war. How can that be explained? I think that as yet the *Iliad* had very few readers, but that a written text was known to exist. Thucydides took care to get a copy of Book ii in order to be sure to have the precise number of the ships that sailed to Troy, since they were important in his argumentation about the relative sizes of the armies that took part in the Trojan War and for his own topic, the Peloponnesian War. The Catalogue consists of 29 entries and it is not easy to get an overview of it. Otherwise the historian felt satisfied with oral performance and was unaware that the written *Iliad* actually differed from mainstream versions in its handling of the fortification.⁵³

During the following centuries more and more copies of the written poems were produced, and simultaneously the first attempts at textual criticism seem to have been made. At least, Plutarch (c. 40-120 A.D.) writes that Aristotle made an emended version of the *Iliad*, and that the philosopher's pupil Alexander the Great (356-23 B.C.) carried this text with him on his campaigns and used to have it together with a dagger under his pillow when he slept.⁵⁴ This activity on Aristotle's part is all the more interesting since it can be seen as the seed from which germinated the refined criticism later pursued at the Alexandrian Museum. The politician Demetrius of Phalerum was an adherent of Aristotle's school, "the peripatetics", and he seems to have brought the philosopher's interests with him to Alexandria when as an advisor to Ptolemy I he contributed to the establishment of the Museum. During its heyday, c. 250-150 B.C., the scholars there had access to many versions of the two epics, all of them going back to the first Athenian original, as argued in Chapter 7.⁵⁵ The Homeric scholia often refer to readings from such other manuscripts, and the variants mentioned resemble those we find in early quotations from the two epics, and in papyri.

53. *Iliad* ii.100-109, 484-759; Th. 1.9.4-11.1.

54. Plu. *Alex.* 8.2.

55. van Groningen 1963a; 1963b, 36-7; Jensen 1980, 109-10; Cassio 2002, 117.

Homer in schools

Where the two epics outrivalled all other Homeric poems was in the schools, I submit, and I think they did so simply because they had been written down before any other epic.

Schools seem to have been first established in Ionia in about 500 B.C. and to have made their way into Athenian society during the fifth century B.C.⁵⁶ I imagine that the entry of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* into the Athenian school curriculum took place more or less as follows: both parents and children were used to thinking of Homer (= the Homeric tradition) as the quintessence of Greek culture, as had been asserted already by Xenophanes.⁵⁷ As formalised school teaching was gradually introduced, it seemed natural to accept Homeric poetry as part of the teaching programme. Even though athletics was a main priority of school teaching, presumably from the very first day, elementary education also comprised reading and writing. It continued to *mousike*, a combination of reading, singing, and playing various instruments. These were the competences an ambitious citizen had to have in order to participate in festivals, for instance as a chorister, to make a career in political affairs, and to excel at symposia. The Homer who entered this programme was neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* but the Homer known from performances on all kinds of occasion, from humble gatherings as they are described in the *Biographies of Homer* to the formal competitions at state festivals. A famous cup painted by Douris in c. 490 B.C (Berlin 2285) and thus one of the very earliest sources for Athenian schools shows in the tondo a young athlete getting himself ready for exercise and on the outside four teaching scenes, in which young men are trained in reading and writing, singing to the flute, and playing the cithara. In the reading scene the teacher is holding the book out so that we can see a (not quite correct) hexameter verse written on it. It seems to be the beginning of a poem, but it is not one that is otherwise known.

Thus, in school surroundings we actually see a lively interaction of oral and written, instruments and books. I imagine that teachers

56. Robb 1994, 183-8; Pébarthe 2006, 69-76.

57. Xenoph. fr. 10 D-K.

who wanted to have suitable texts for their pupils to read sent out their scribal slaves to record selections of oral epic, and that it is the beginning of such a poem we see on the vase. The written texts were then used for the young men to copy, analyse, and memorise. At a certain point somebody grew more ambitious, and knowing that an old and comprehensive text existed in the archives he obtained permission to have a copy made, of excerpts or of the whole. That would have been the first step of the development that changed Homer from being the author of all epic poetry to becoming the poet of only the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This first step must have been taken around 450 B.C. During the next century, while gradually other individuals and city-states had copies made, the experience of those who frequented schools made them equate ‘Homer’ with the texts they had studied there.

Plutarch writes of the Athenian politician Alcibiades (c. 450-404 B.C.):

On the point of surpassing childhood he approached a schoolmaster and asked for a book of Homer. When the teacher answered that he did not have anything of Homer, he hit him with his fist and passed him by. But when another said that he had a Homer he had himself emended, he said to him: “So you teach to read and write even though you are qualified to revise Homer? Why do you not teach the young men?”⁵⁸

Besides showing that the youthful Alcibiades was not easily pleased, Plutarch’s anecdote implies that towards 430 B.C. an Athenian schoolmaster might be expected to possess some part of Homer in book form, that Homeric criticism of some kind was being practised, and that it was considered a task that demanded expertise. Furthermore, the story unambiguously links the written Homer to the schools. It accords well with this picture that Aristotle’s emendation of the *Iliad* seems to have been made in connection with his teaching of the young Alexander.

58. Plu. *Alc.* 7.1.

Gradually also the sources for Greek schools grow more informative. In the more developed school system of Hellenistic and Roman times the boys began attending the *grammatistes*, next the *grammatikos*, and finally the *sophistes* or *rhetor*. On all levels the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were considered the basic text for study, even though on the highest level the two epics were gradually outrivalled by the rhetorical treatises and studies of Demosthenes.⁵⁹ However, even in these schools pupils in no way worked through all 48 books. It has been pointed out that a study of papyri that seem to stem from school teaching reveals a very unequal focus on the two epics. The *Iliad* was always more popular than the *Odyssey*, and of both poems some books were much more studied than others. Quite a few are not found in school papyri at all, for instance Book xvii of the *Iliad*, and the entire second half of the *Odyssey* is represented only twice. The absolute favourites were Books i-ii of the *Iliad*, found in 29 and 22 school papyri respectively.⁶⁰

In general it cannot have been easy for readers in antiquity to appreciate the impressive coherent plots of the two epics. Books were scrolls, and the maximum length of a volume of poetry seems to have been about 1700 verses, well suited for a drama, for instance. As for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, surviving papyrus fragments suggest that a scroll normally contained two books. At the end of the second of such books, the first one or two hexameters of the following book were written as '*versus reclamantes*' to facilitate the search for the correct next volume. Only with the introduction of the codex book form did it become possible to write the whole of one of the two epics coherently. The oldest papyrus considered to have contained the entire *Odyssey* is *Papyrus Rylands 1.53* from the third or fourth century A.D.⁶¹

The impression the modern reader gets of the predominance of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Greek epic tradition is based on literature and is therefore flawed: it is concerned with the well educated and

59. Hock 2001.

60. Davison 1956, 52; Morgan 1998, 105-15, 308-9; Criboire 2001, 194-7 softens the picture slightly.

61. Schironi 2010, especially 12-14, 50-51. *PRyl. 1.53* is item 47 in Schironi's list.

does not necessarily take into account what happened outside their circles. Plato seems to know the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* more or less by heart. Whether Xenophon's Nikeratos⁶² actually did, may be a matter of some doubt. But later on, in imperial times, educated men seem to have been so familiar with the two epics that they were able to produce quotations from them on the spur of the moment. That is, for instance, how Athenaeus (2nd century A.D.) represents the scholars who are participating in the learned dinner conversation he describes.⁶³

A matter of education

While Homer was gradually being equated with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in schools, Homeric performance tradition continued with undiminished force, I argue, also in Athens. For the general public the sense of the term 'Homer' was still a whole spectrum of epics, at least all those concerned with the Trojan War. Just as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* do not suddenly manifest themselves in vase paintings after about 520, they continue not to dominate in painting and sculpture. This is apparent from some public monuments that were erected or decorated during the fifth century B.C. in Athens.

When *Stoa Poikile*, a famous portico at the Athenian agora, was decorated with scenes from the Trojan War in c. 460-50 B.C., the authorities chose not to follow the *Iliad* but preferred the much more popular part of the story, the fall of Troy. The same holds good for the most prestigious project of all, the Parthenon, completed in 432 B.C. There the metopes illustrated four examples of civilisation conquering barbarism: Athena's victory over the giants, the slaying of the Amazons, presumably by the Athenians, the victory over the centaurs featuring the Athenian heroes Theseus and Pirithous, and the conquest of Troy.⁶⁴ Here, overlooking the sacred

62. X. *Smp.* 3.5-6.

63. Lucianus *Symp.* 12; Ath. 1.2c, 4.160c, 6.273a-274c, 10.457e-458f; cf. Hock 2001, 67.

64. Ferrari 2000 argues that the Trojans are not represented as barbarians; but even though cruelty and sacrilege on the part of the Greeks are aspects often emphasised in Athenian literature and vase painting, her interpretation seems unconvincing considering the context of the decoration.

precinct of Athena, the goddess in whose honour the Great Panathenaea were celebrated with Homeric recitals, the *Iliad* was passed by. If the public recitals had really consisted in memorised performance of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, would not the state authorities have chosen scenes from these epics for illustration?

One brief passage of the *Iliad* was, however, very well known in fifth century Athens: the Athenian entry of the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* ii.546-56). Here it says of the Athenian hero Menestheus, who otherwise plays a minimal role in the poem:

Of these men the leader was Peteos' son Menestheus.
Never on earth before had there been a man born like him
for the arrangement in order of horses and shielded fighters.⁶⁵

The passage meets us in a story told by Herodotus: while Xerxes was preparing his invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. the Spartans and Athenians sent envoys to Sicily, where Gelon had established himself as tyrant in Syracuse with immense power. Their aim was to enlist him as an ally against the Persians, but the plan broke down when the tyrant insisted on being commander himself, at least of either the army or the navy. The Spartan envoy, Syagros, and his Athenian colleague both referred to Homer in their rejection of the demand. Syagros said: Pelops' descendant Agamemnon would swear a great oath if he heard that Spartians had been deprived of the leadership by Gelon and Syracusans. The Athenian said: According to the epic poet Homer an Athenian man was best of those who went to Ilios to draw up and arrange an army.⁶⁶ While Syagros referred to the mythic past in general, the Athenian took his argument from a particular passage in the *Iliad*. The two approaches represent oral performance and written text respectively.

In 475 B.C., towards the end of the wars, a Persian stronghold at Eion in Thrace was successfully besieged by an Athenian army under the leadership of Cimon, a story also related by Herodotus. Afterwards the victory was celebrated with the erection in Athens of

65. *Il.* ii.552-4, trl. Lattimore 1951, 90.

66. Hdt. 7.153-62.

three inscribed Herms, and the text of the inscriptions is transmitted in slightly varying forms by three other authors.⁶⁷ In the two first couplets of this epigram the incident is explicitly compared to the Trojan War, and the phrasing refers to the above-mentioned passage in the Catalogue:

From this polis did Menestheus once upon a time together with the
Atreïds lead a contingent to the sacred Trojan plain,
Menestheus of whom Homer said that he went there as the foremost
among the heavily armoured Danaoi to arrange an army for battle.⁶⁸

Half a century later, in c. 420-15 B.C. during the Peloponnesian war, a public monument was erected that referred to Athenian participation in the Trojan War. Pausanias, who visited Athens some time in the 2nd century A.D., was still able to see a huge bronze sculpture of the Wooden Horse in the Acropolis, and states that Menestheus was shown crawling out of it, together with Teucer and the two sons of Theseus.⁶⁹ Archaeologists have found what is considered to have been the base of this statue in the precinct of Artemis Brauronia, with the inscription *Chairedemos Euangelou ek Koiles anetheken; Stronggylion epoiesen* (Chairedemos, son of Euangelos, from Koile, dedicated the statue; Stronggylion made it).⁷⁰

It seems, then, that this passage of the Catalogue of Ships was well-known and popular in Athens as composed by ‘Homer’, but the sources say nothing of the rest of the two epics being known. On the contrary, the sculpture of the Wooden Horse contradicts the poems we know. The warriors coming out of the bronze horse are not those mentioned by Menelaus when in a brief passage of the *Odyssey* (4.280-86) he tells of this ruse: Menelaus himself, Diomedes, Odysseus, and Anticlus (an otherwise obscure warrior whose role here is to almost give away the hidden Greeks). Instead, the Athe-

67. Hdt. 7.107; Aeschin. 3.183; D. 20.112; Plu. *Cim.* 7; the epigram is edited with introduction and commentary by Page 1981, 255-9.

68. Page 1981, 257 vv. 1-4.

69. Paus. 1.23.8.

70. *IG I³*, 1994, 638, no. 895. Both the Herms and the bronze horse are briefly discussed by Ferrari 2000, 119-20.

nian monument asserted that Menestheus was there together with Teucer (who after his brother Ajax's death was the main hero from Salamis). As for Theseus, neither he nor his sons have anything to do with the Trojan War in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. So this huge monument addressed onlookers who were wont to think that Salamis and Athens fought side by side in the siege of Troy, that their leader was Menestheus, and that the favourite mythic hero of democratic Athens, Theseus, was represented in the war by his sons. While boys in school gradually became accustomed to reading the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in books, the general public continued as before, and it even seems that in oral versions known in Athens Menestheus and his role in the Trojan War were expanded upon.

Further on in antiquity the picture remains the same: 'Homer' meant one thing to those who had had a literary education and another to those who had not. In literature, Homer was the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and the great Roman poets of the Augustan age and afterwards seem to have known the two poems by heart. But to persons less versed in Greek literature – such as for instance Plautus and his low-class audiences – the Trojan War was a complex of myths known from a great variety of sources, many of them presumably oral.

Consider the famous Sperlonga sculptures, made by Rhodian artists for Tiberius some time between 4 and 26 A.D. The programme for the decoration of the emperor's cavern contained four scenes from Odysseus' adventures: the obtainment of Achilles' weapons, the abduction of the Palladium, the blinding of Polyphemus, and the escape from Scylla.⁷¹ The two first mentioned are not part of the *Odyssey* at all, and the two others are illustrated in ways very different from how they are described in the poem. In the *Odyssey* (12.89-92) the monster Scylla has twelve legs and six necks, each of which bears a scary head with three rows of teeth. She sits in a cavern from which only the upper part of her body protrudes. In the sculptural group, however, her upper body is that of a beautiful young woman, whereas her lower part consists of aggressive dogs

71. Date and programme: Conticello 1996, 283-5; Scylla: Conticello 1996, 280-83; Polyphemus: Andrae & Presicce 1996, 358-61.

that bite and kill Odysseus' companions. The artist evidently followed the tradition of his art, not the poem we know. Similarly, the Sperlonga representation of the blinding of Polyphemus does not reveal any knowledge of the *Odyssey*. Right from their beginning in the seventh century B.C. paintings show the scene in such a way that Odysseus and his comrades drive the pole or the spit horizontally into the eye of the Cyclops, who is halfway sitting, and this same pose is used in the Sperlonga group. In the *Odyssey* (9.371-95), however, the Cyclops is lying on his back, and the pole is driven into his eye vertically, a fact that is not just a detail. The narrative dwells upon it in a simile comparing the blinding with a drill bored into a ship's timber by means of a strap that makes it whirl around. Commentators have pointed out how this simile (as well as a following one, describing the hardening of an iron axe) carries connotations to the basic nature-culture conflict of the story as told in the *Odyssey*. In short, the decoration chosen by this Roman emperor in the beginning of the first century A.D. for his mythical grotto bears witness to a lack of interest in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* corresponding to what we found in early Greek vase painting.

The distinction between a high-status and a low-status reception of Homer is employed in the portrait painted by the above mentioned Petronius (first century A.D.) of the character Trimalchio, the nouveau riche who hosts a sumptuous dinner and at a certain point wants to impress his guests with his learning. He asks one of them whether he remembers Hercules' twelve labours or the story of how the Cyclops wrenched Ulysses' thumb out of the ring, and says: "As a child I used to read of this in Homer."⁷² Now, the twelve labours are not mentioned in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, and the version the *Odyssey* poet chose to give of the Polyphemus story was not the one in which the ogre gives the hero a ring. So in this as in so many other details the highbrow narrator exposes Trimalchio's pathetic lack of education.

With the gradual growth in the prestige of literary education, knowledge of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* became a mark of the educated élite, while the name 'Homer' preserved its original sense in

72. Petr. 48.7. - I owe this reference to Patrick Kragelund.

oral performance. Ordinary people in both the Greek- and the Latin-speaking parts of the world would know the stories of the Trojan War from rhapsodes, storytellers, and other oral performers, not from reading the two epics.

Summary

A growing awareness of the importance of song and music in early Greek culture has been making itself felt in recent decades, and the interest in the performance of Homeric epic fits well into that approach. The pools of mythic tradition, Trojan and otherwise, were shared by many genres, and rhapsodes were ready to perform wherever a suitable performance arena offered itself. In the context of the fragments of the *Epic Cycle* the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* rank as usual oral episodes of the Trojan War, only unusually expanded. The writing of the two epics did not affect oral tradition. Only gradually, with the development of schools and advanced studies, the two written epics outrivalled oral tradition among the educated, and for them 'Homer' became the poet of these two poems, whereas for the broad public 'Homer' retained the sense of oral epic performance tradition right through antiquity.

CHAPTER 9

The dictation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

Forms of recording

The great argument for retaining the idea of an oral poet dictating to a scribe is, of course, that it actually provides answers to the old Homeric puzzles. The breaches in logic, the coexistence of different linguistic and historical layers, as well as the remarkable overriding unity in composition, are all understandable on the hypothesis of one singer in a tradition.¹ Without this hypothesis, we lose the most important contribution that the oral theory made to Homeric scholarship, that it united Analysis and Unitarianism.

When an oral epic is recorded, the initiative is regularly taken neither by the singer nor by his audience. This was Parry and Lord's experience, and they also offered an explanation: the involved parties feel no need of recording since they are in general satisfied with the means of preservation and publishing inherent in oral transmission. Of course, there may be bad singers who make a mess of stories or even tell lies on purpose, but good singers relate what happened, and the singing community is in no need of writing or other artificial media to guarantee that songs are preserved.

In modern times, the registration is mostly undertaken by a scholar, and his/her purpose may be to preserve a tradition that is on the point of disappearing, to establish material for linguistic or cultural research, or to further comparative studies, as has often been the case under inspiration from the oral-formulaic theory. Furthermore, local or national authorities may be at work, since epic has in some contexts been considered a prestigious genre that can bear witness to the intelligence and creative force of a community. Great collections such as Vuk Karadzic's collection of Serbian Folk

1. I do find the unity evident, although it is still sometimes questioned, for instance by Cantilena 1997, 151. – Cf. Jensen 1980, 149-58; Janko 1998b, 12; Aloni 2006; 2010.

Songs (1841-62)² or the twenty volumes of Karakalpak folklore (1977-90) mentioned by Reichl³ have normally been motivated by considerations of this kind.

Before mechanical registration became a possibility, recording of oral epic was by necessity induced. In recent decades, when recording by means of audio- or videotapes has become almost universal, a natural setting has become a possibility, and it is obvious that a text mechanically recorded in a normal performance arena is the singer's authentic work in a way a text obtained by induced recording cannot be.

However, even if the wish is to preserve the original as close to its genuine oral form as possible, collectors normally prefer an induced setting to a natural one, for the simple reason that a text recorded during live performance may be difficult to understand. Perhaps the singer's voice does not come through clearly, or the recording may be disturbed by interference from the audience or by general noise. Induced recording – whether in writing or by electronic means – increases the chance of producing a clear and understandable text. But there are also many drawbacks. Registration in itself implies a step taken away from normal performance, and an induced setting removes the text thus established still further. The former Soviet Union presented a special problem: here foreign scholars were normally not allowed to register a live performance and so had no other choice than to record induced performances in hotel rooms or academies of sciences.⁴

Parry was the first in the world to use technical equipment for recording on a large scale, and the fact that he used it for recording both sung performance and dictation is remarkable. The experience he and Lord had in Yugoslavia was clear: as compared to singing for the tapes, dictation and writing bring about a tedious process that tends to make the singer lose inspiration and opt for brief solutions. On the other hand, in a few cases singers found dictation

2. Foley 2000, 72-6, discusses the purpose and historical background of this collection.

3. Reichl 2007, 18-19.

4. Reichl 1992, 114. – For a criticism of induced recording, see Opland 1983, 162.

stimulating, both because of the close collaboration with the scribe and because the regular pauses for writing after each dictated verse gave him a better chance to prepare the next verse than he had in the heat of performance.⁵ In former days when dictation was the normal means of recording, acknowledged singers sometimes developed an expertise in this special kind of performance so as to create more interesting songs in this way than in singing. For the scholar dictation has its attractions, too, mainly that he/she may ask questions during the process, require a passage to be repeated when the content is unclear, protest if a verse does not scan, etc.

During his fieldwork in the 1950s, Biebuyck mostly made his collections by dictation. He describes his problems as follows:

On a couple of occasions I had received fragments of such stories [epic tales] from select informants, but I had never been successful in getting a complete and coherent text, either because the narrator was too old and too confused or because he did not remember the complete text (or had never known it), or because the narrator was simply uncooperative and apprehensive of the necessity to sit day after day with me and my collaborators to painstakingly narrate – indeed narrate over and over again – the various passages of his *kárisi*-story.⁶

Then Biebuyck met Rureke in the village of Bese. He was both capable and willing, and his dictation took the form of singing, narrating, dancing and miming, thus approaching a normal performance. Such a situation is sometimes called an ‘induced natural context’.⁷

Biebuyck writes:

We would begin to work early in the morning and, with a few short breaks, continue well into the night. Large crowds of people from Bese and from surrounding villages and hamlets would come to listen

5. Parry (1933-35) 1971, 450-51; *SCHS* 1, 1954, 8; Lord (1960) 2000, 124-8. – Cf. Goody’s discussion of two versions of *The Myth of the Bagre*, registered by dictation and tape respectively, Goody & Gandah 1980, 50-54; Goody (1961-2007) 2010, 58-63.

6. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, vi.

7. Johnson 2000, 240.

to the narration, to participate in the refrains of the songs, to dance. There was an atmosphere of joy and relaxation in this village where, as in the other Nyanga villages, life had become increasingly dull and joyless as a result of the various pressures introduced from the outside.

Rureke himself was inexhaustible in words, in movements, in rhythm, even though he became very tired physically (during the last days, his voice became increasingly hoarse and I was compelled to treat him regularly with some European ointments and mouthwashes). Very excited by the stimulus he received from his audience, very self-confident about his knowledge, and very proud about his achievements, Rureke was able to maintain from beginning to end the coherence of his story and the unusual richness and precision of language, as well as to capture the essence of Nyanga values.⁸

Two of Biebuyck's Mwindo texts were registered in a more unusual way. The scholar had asked his assistant Sherungu to dictate his autobiography to one of the scribes and include such songs and stories as he knew. The work ended up as 3,456 closely written pages, containing a wealth of songs and other texts, among them two epics. One of them was embedded in a tale of how Sherungu had once listened to another bard entertaining a group of hunters during a night's rest, so in this case Sherungu's version was the retelling of another singer's performance.⁹

Such descriptions, whether of technical recording or writing from dictation, are not often found, but in his monograph on the *Siri Epic* Honko reserves a whole chapter to a precise account of the registration process, and he returns to the topic in a solid paper a couple of years afterwards. Here he formalises his experience of the recording in a detailed list of the various phases an oral epic passes through on its way from pool of tradition to printed book.¹⁰ I shall return to his work shortly.

8. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, vi.

9. Biebuyck 1978, 12; Sherungu's own version is published in translation as epic IV, the retold version only as a summary.

10. Honko 1998a, 276-321; 2000a, 17-35.

From performance to book

In a paper entitled “Authenticity and oral performance: textualizing the epics of Africa for Western audiences”, John William Johnson discusses fieldwork methodology. The title of the paper is a useful indication of the ideal of this kind of research: to present an oral poem in print in a way so as to make it understandable for readers without losing its authenticity. No easy task! He systematises the fieldworker’s duties under four headings: collection, transcription, translation, and description of contexts.¹¹ In the following considerations I follow his lead but take as my starting-point already the situation when a singer and a collector have met and agreed to make a registration. Since in my material the collector is invariably a scholar, this is how he/she will be called. Elizabeth Fine uses the term ‘textmaker’, but only after explaining why she does not consider the performance a text.¹²

Three parties are involved in a normal performance: singer, patron, and audience.¹³ At a registration, only two are necessarily present, singer and scholar, and their interests in the project are different except for the fact that they share a respect for the epic tradition in case.

Singers are interested in promoting their traditional art and themselves as outstanding representatives of it. They may hope that the event will further their chances of access to other media, such as radio performance or a production of tapes or cd’s for sale, and they expect a reasonable salary for their efforts. If they live in a society where there are books, they may also be impressed by the prospect of their performance ending up as a book.

Scholars want to establish a written text as material for further study, which may open the way for new insights in their field. Moreover, not unlike the singers they are normally interested in promoting the art in question and themselves as researchers of it. Often they are also impelled by a wish to preserve examples of a tradition

11. Johnson 2000.

12. Fine 1984, 87 etc.

13. Cf. Hatto’s “epic occasion”, Hatto 1991, 8.

that is thought to be disappearing. The balance among their various purposes is decisive for many of the choices that have to be made already in the registration phase. An important example of this is Parry's decision to record more than one version of a song from the same singer or from different singers, and both by means of technical registration and by dictation. In this way he established material for an overall study of epic composition in performance. But also matters of detail depend on the long-term purpose; in his work on the *Siri Epic* Honko's wish to establish a text that was as authentic as possible led to decisions such as letting the singer choose when to make breaks, allowing him all the time he wished during the recording sessions, as well as postponing discussions of the poem until after the registration proper was concluded in order not to influence his performance unduly.¹⁴

During the registration the scholar takes the place of both patron and audience. If the scholar is explicit about his/her wishes, the singer will meet them as best he can. If not, the singer will guess at what is required and try to develop his performance accordingly. This mechanism may work unconsciously as has presumably often been the case when Christian scholars collected indigenous texts, or when educated middle-class folklorists have collected lower-class traditions.¹⁵ A knowledgeable scholar is stimulating for the singer; furthermore, if other people attend the session, for instance as described by Biebuyck, their reactions will be of importance for the resulting text. Roghair states with some astonishment that Galeyya grew very tired during the recording process; but there is no doubt that an induced registration puts a heavier strain on the singer than a normal performance, since he will miss the encouragement to be found in the natural setting, the intense atmosphere that builds up, and the feeling that the heroes or perhaps even the gods are drawing near. Compared to that, even an ideal collector is a poor substi-

14. Honko 2000a, 29.

15. Wadley 2005, 192, 217 (Karimpur, Uttar Pradesh), on an illiterate woman's story collected by her brother-in-law for a European missionary and purged of the more offensive details. – As described by Thisted 2001, collected autograph Inuit stories were morally and sexually purged both consciously and unconsciously.

tute. Innes emphasises how impressive it is that singers used to entertaining a live audience are often able without further ado to perform in a recording studio.¹⁶

If the process is a dictation, singer and scribe may be alone, as was often the case when Parry's assistant Nikola Vujnovic was writing from the Serbian singers' dictation. A mechanical registration may also be carried out by the collector alone, as when Slyomovics and Reynolds were recording versions of *Sirat Bani Hilal*, but more often it is felt that a team is required to handle the various machines. In any case an invisible audience is also present in the form of the reactions the singer has had over the years when performing in normal contexts. If nothing different is called for, he will stick to his mental text as he has gradually developed it under the influence of competent listeners. For instance, the fact that Naika's *Siri Epic* is so manifestly feminist in its ideology hardly reflects the interests of Honko and his team, but must be the result of the singer's continued wish to humour his usual audience, the Siri women.

In *The Singer of Tales* Lord discussed how the singer handles his narrative when performing for the phonograph or when dictating to a scribe. Whereas he may ask the scribe to correct minor errors during the dictation process, he prefers not to interrupt his singing if something has gone wrong, and corrects himself tacitly in what follows. An example of this is found in Demail Zogic's epic *Bojicic Alija Rescues Alibey's Children*. In v. 1184 Zogic by mistake mentions Halil instead of Alija. He simply moves on, repeating his verse but with the correct subject.¹⁷ Similarly, when Mujo Velic makes an occasional slip of the tongue, he leaves the verse unfinished and continues with the line in the correct form.¹⁸

When the registration is completed, the next phase consists in transcribing the text collected, whether on a tape or in the form of a raw manuscript. This is a task full of difficulties, and most scholars need help from local assistants. Lord mentions that he received help from Milos Velimirovic and Milenko S. Filipovic in transcribing

16. Innes 1974, 7-8.

17. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 261 + note p. 409; 2, 1953, 242 + note p. 144.

18. *SCHS* 14, 1979, 162.

from the tapes as well as in translation and interpretation of the texts.¹⁹ Phillips thanks a certain Syamsuhir Burhan for help, and he also had the possibility of asking his singer for assistance.²⁰ Slyomovics, who made the rare choice of a natural setting for her registration, solved these problems by afterwards discussing the performance with both singer and members of the audience. In this way she was able not only to transcribe her text, but also to comment on the audience's reactions. Even with the singer's cooperation it is not certain, however, that all details of the collected text will have been satisfactorily elucidated. Innes describes how his Gambian singers were sometimes themselves unable to explain the exact meaning of a phrase.²¹

Most collected texts are full of inconsistencies such as verses that do not scan, breaches of syntax, errors in the names of persons or localities.²² Before Parry and Lord, editors did not hesitate to introduce emendations tacitly, and anyone who has tried to compare published texts from earlier periods of collection with the raw manuscripts in archives will have noticed such emendations.²³ Even modern editions introduce a certain degree of standardisation, but mention the fact in the notes.²⁴

Whatever the case, from this phase onwards the text is in the scholar's hands as the task changes from collecting to editing. Again the overall purpose of the publication is decisive for how a whole series of questions is treated: whether to publish both original and translation, how to weigh source against target in the translation, what kind of paratexts to include, such as introduction and com-

19. *SCHS* 3, 1974, vii-viii. Cf. Seydou 1972, 51-5; 1976, 41, 133, 317; Wadley 2004, xiii. – Foley 2004, 145-91, describes Vujnovic's method when transcribing from a tape.

20. Phillips 1981, viii, 21.

21. Innes 1974, 12-13.

22. Lord (1960) 2000, 38.

23. Cf. Janko 1998b, 9. I had similar experiences in the archives of the folklore institute in Tirana in 1974.

24. In his notes to *SCHS* 4, 1974, Bynum mentions *lapsus linguae*, *calami*, and *mentis*, for instance 397, and Foley 2004, 146, adds *lapsus auris* on the part of the scribe. But not all verses that do not scan when read on paper, are equally defective as part of the oral rhythm, Foley 2004, 153.

mentary, how to handle incomprehensible passages, and whether to retain repetitions and filler words. If the purpose is to establish a readable text that may appeal to a non-professional public, the editor may encroach rather drastically on the text. Again, an obvious example is to be found in the translations of Greenlandic texts for Danish readers in the beginning of the 20th century, when an overall purpose was to convince Danes that Greenlanders were human beings and had a literature worth reading.²⁵ In contrast, a text produced for scholarly use must be as close to the original transcript as possible.²⁶ In all circumstances, the process involves translation, not only from language to language, but from culture to culture and from one medium to another.²⁷

When the language of the collected text is a dialect of an acknowledged standard, it has to be settled how closely the dialectal traits should be represented; Reichl gives careful accounts of such problems in his editions.²⁸ Furthermore, in the case of epic traditions that have been only superficially studied before, or not at all, the mere question of how to scan the metre or divide the text into lines may cause problems.²⁹ Mostly this phase calls for team work: The Nyanga scholar Kahombo C. Mateene assisted Biebuyck in establishing a system of transcription for Rureke's text, and during the years 1991-8 Honko spent lengthy periods with his Indian colleagues, Viveka Rai and Chinnapa Gowda, working on the transcription and translation of the *Siri Epic*.³⁰

William Collins describes the process in more detail than most. He recorded the *Guritan of Radin Suane* in 1971, it seems. At the time he was preparing his dissertation on another topic and had to wait some years before returning to his epic; in the meantime the old singer had died. Collins was first assisted by a local friend, Pak Saman, and they spent several weeks transcribing the nine hours of tape. Next, in 1980-81 a Malay linguist, Rosenah binti Ahmad,

25. Thisted 1998, 210-12; 2001, 180-81.

26. Fine 1984, 100-110 discusses such problems in editing folklore texts in general.

27. Innes 1976, 25; Foley 1995, 61.

28. Reichl 2001a, 11-12, 63-76; 2007, 11-13, 142-62.

29. Seydou 1972, 53-5.

30. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 35-7; Honko 1998a, 581-94.

helped him to make a new and better transcript, and in 1988-9 a Javanese linguist at the University of Yogyakarta studied the text and identified several Javanese elements in the dialect. Afterward, Collins returned to Pak Saman for a renewed revision, and finally the scholar spent three years at Berkeley, 1991-4, preparing his edition. The book appeared with introduction, original text, translation, and notes in 1998.³¹

The musical aspect of the performance often receives little attention or even none at all. But in *SCHS* 1 Bela Bartok transcribed one of Salih Ugljanin's performances in musical notation, and in *SCHS* 14 David Bynum analysed the rhythmic effects that occurred in the sung performance of the texts edited in that volume. In his edition of Gambian texts Gordon Innes had Anthony King comment on the music; Nigel Phillips describes the melodies of his Sijobang singer; Susan Slyomovics had Peter Maund analyse the drum beat pattern of 'Awadallah's performance; John Smith offers examples in musical notation of Parbu Bhopo's performance of the *Pabuji Epic*; William J. Raoul Brody made a musical notation for the beginning of the *Epic of Radin Suane* for William Collins; Foley includes a chapter by H. Wakefield Foster on the role of music in his edition of a performance from the Parry collection; and one of Reichl's introductory chapters to the *Epic of Edige* is dedicated to the music. In his survey of Turkic oral epic Reichl, again, has a chapter on the music, and he is the editor of a volume of papers on the music of oral epic performance.³²

For those who are used to reading stories in printed books, it is easy to forget how much is lost in the passage from oral performance to published edition: not only the music, but also intonation, accentuation, mimicry, and gesticulation, as well as interaction with the audience and the overall atmosphere of the event.³³ It is, how-

31. W.A. Collins 1998, 15-16. - Cf. Ben-Amos 2000, 285 and Johnson 2000, 241-3 of their experience from African fieldwork.

32. *SCHS* 1, 1954, 435-67; *SCHS* 14, 1979, 14-43; Innes 1974, 17-20; Phillips 1981, 102-4; Slyomovics 1987, 74-5; Smith 1991, 46-53; W.A. Collins 1998, 515-16; Foley 2004, 223-60; Reichl 1992, 100-113; 2000c; 2007, 163-78.

33. Fine 1984, 114-33 offers a survey of what is lost when a folklore text passes from the multi-channelled medium of performance to the simple print.

ever, becoming more and more usual to have printed editions accompanied by cd-rom samples of the recording, and even though he had settled for the book form, Honko considered the possibility of a future multimedia presentation of his recording of the *Siri Epic* for Tulu speakers and, with translation and commentary, for classroom use at universities.³⁴ The second edition of Lord's *Singer of Tales* is accompanied by a cd containing the recorded passages of the songs which Lord quotes.³⁵

A new approach is made by Foley's edition of one of the performances in the Parry collection, Halil Bajgoric's song of *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Becirbey* on June 13, 1935.³⁶ Here not only are the usual chapters containing introduction, transcript and translation supplemented by such information as a performance-based commentary and an *apparatus fabulosus*, as well as a study in the role of music containing also a transcription in musical notation of the first hundred verses, and an analysis of a special linguistic trait, the use of so-called performatives, but the book cooperates with a multimedia, hyperlinked E-edition in which the reader can listen to Bajgoric's performance.³⁷

Reynolds' edition of *Sirat Bani Hilal* plans to do without the book form altogether. Instead, the website www.siratbanihilal.ucsb.edu will work as an archive that will

house 53 hours of English translations, over 150 hours of Arabic transcription (53 hours of which will appear typed and about 100 hours of which will appear as handwritten transcriptions), and over 250 hours of audio recordings. ... In the "Virtual Performance" section, viewers can listen to an audio-recording while reading a synchronized line-by-line translation of the performance in both Arabic and English. This allows viewers to get a real sense of the pacing and the sound of northern Egyptian epic singing and to enjoy the story itself, whether or not they speak Arabic.

34. Honko 2000a, 35.

35. Lord (1960) 2000.

36. Foley 2004; Parry Collection no. 6699.

37. www.oraltradition.org.

Recording the *Siri Epic*

A special achievement in this field is Lauri Honko's registration of Gopala Naika's performance of the *Siri Epic*, first of all because of the singer's ability to perform a long, beautiful and moving poem under unusual circumstances, and next because of the scholar's careful description of the process and thoughtful comments on its various aspects.

From December 20th to December 28th, 1990, Naika sang his poem to Honko and his team, who were equipped with a video camera and two tape recorders.³⁸ The singer does not accompany himself on an instrument, so he just sat there on a bench under a tree, singing and singing. Towards the end of the project, he now and then asked Honko if it would perhaps be a good idea to abbreviate a bit – a request that to the present reader seems quite touching, but which, fortunately for scholarship, was firmly rejected by Honko.³⁹ Of course, we are unable to check whether Naika did in fact abbreviate the epic as compared to how he could have presented his story.

The fact that the recorded narrative is almost double the length of the dictated version confirms Parry and Lord's general experience. On the other hand, when Naika himself had formerly taken the initiative of having a written version produced, this was a departure from another of their experiences that the singing community has no need of registration in writing. But it is worth noting why Naika wished to have his song made into a book. It was not in order to have it preserved, but to reach an otherwise inaccessible audience, children at school. His wish can hardly be said to have been fulfilled, or rather, it has been fulfilled in a way he could not have imagined. The version that he dictated ended up on a scholar's shelf without being printed,⁴⁰ and the huge sung version that now exists as an impressive two-volume printed book is hardly suitable for use in the local classrooms. But at its release in Udupi in Karnataka, in March 1999, it was handed over to Gopala Naika under great fes-

38. Honko 1998a, 276-321.

39. Honko 1998a, 310.

40. Honko 1998a, 257.

tivities with many dignitaries present. The event was accompanied by a scholarly seminar, and newspapers both in south India and New Delhi brought articles on the subject.⁴¹ So his efforts did achieve an increase of interest in Tulu culture.

Honko takes pains to inform his readers about Naika's audiences, both those that are made up of the typical addressees of his normal performances and those that were present at the registration. The latter regularly consisted of three people: Honko himself, directing the process and looking after the video recorder, his wife Anneli Honko, who handled the tape-recorders, and Chinnapa Gowda, the scholar who had had Naika's epic written down from dictation, and who on this occasion was taking notes and acting as interpreter. Honko had asked for a version that was as full as possible. He made it clear to Naika that he as the singer was free to decide how he would organise his narrative, and that he could take as much time as he needed. Naika chose to proceed chronographically through three generations of heroines, beginning with the birth of Siri, taking us through her story and those of her daughter and twin granddaughters, and ending with the deaths of the twins.

On some occasions guests were present at the recording. A professor from Mangalore University, the above-mentioned Viveka Rai, attended on December 23rd. At the end of the morning's performance he pointed out that a detail had been left out, and Naika agreed to sing the missing piece of narrative and let the scholars insert the passage into the printed text in due course.⁴² However, in another connection Honko had protested against what seemed to him an inconsistency: Siri was furious with her husband because he had visited a harlot, but it had not been told how she came to know. Here Naika defended his narrative, claiming that Siri had supernatural powers and knew what had taken place without being informed.⁴³ It is a tempting suspicion that Naika's reactions reflect his assessment of the expertise of these two listeners. At any rate, while Naika often corrected himself on minor points, the name of a local-

41. Honko 1999.

42. Honko 1998a, 296-8.

43. Honko 1998a, 291.

ity for instance, the correction of the error noted by Rai was the only case in which Naika made use of the possibility offered him by the recording process of revising the contents of his performance.

One day a woman singer was invited, a certain Ramakka, one of Naika's Siri women who had learned her art from him and had been a member of his group for more than 30 years.⁴⁴ Naika initially proposed that she should continue the performance from the point he had reached, but Honko wanted the whole recorded version to be the work of a single singer. Therefore it was decided that she should give a passage that Naika had already sung, without her being present. Naika told her what part of the story she was to perform, sang a few verses and asked her to take over, which she did. Honko's and Naika's respective attitudes to the matter reveal their different opinions on stability and change of a song. Ramakka's version of the passage actually differed rather much from Naika's and was considerably shorter.⁴⁵ Even though Ramakka maintained that she had had no other teacher than Naika, her mental text seemed to be far from identical with his.

While taking pains to meet Honko's requirements, Naika obviously chose to treat his unusual audience, among whom the two scholars did not even understand his language, as if this was one of his typical audiences consisting of women. And what is perhaps most remarkable, he performed the introductory invocation of the gods as if he were launching into a ritual performance, even though from his point of view the occasion must have been a fake ritual. To invite the gods' participation in a performance of this kind reveals an extraordinary degree of abstraction on the part of the singer.

On several occasions when Honko discussed the structure of the narrative with Naika, the latter's comments were invariably concerned with content. For instance, there are passages that must be performed without breaks such as the description of Siri's pregnancy; if this was not the case, the divine heroine would feel offended and avenge herself on the singer.⁴⁶ This sheds an interesting light

44. Honko 1998a, 300.

45. Honko 1998a, 298-300.

46. Honko 1998a, 289.

on Naika's relationship with his poem, showing how he feels that the narrative brings the protagonists and their time as human beings back to life. The performance is a re-enactment and, as such, dangerous, calling forth divine powers that are beyond the singer's control. Naika did not mention any concerns for his human audience.

Recording the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

I have argued elsewhere that the various testimonies we have about a so-called Pisistratean redaction of Homer should be seen as the distorted memory of a process in which two oral epics were recorded in writing in sixth century Athens. There was no oral theory before Milman Parry,⁴⁷ and the ancient Greeks who commented on the Homeric problem had no tools for analysing oral traditions, whether because they were themselves part of them and accepted that transmission by memory was reliable, or because they lived in a literate culture and shared modern prejudice, or because they were in some intermediate position.

My hypothesis is that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were recorded in writing in connection with one of the Greater Panathenaea during the rule of the Pisistratids, that the singer who had won first prize in the competition was afterwards engaged to dictate his successful song to the tyrants' scribe, and that this was when the *Iliad* was born. For the singer this would have been a new experience, whereas the scribe would have written from dictation often before, since that must have been normal practice whenever the tyrant or anybody else wanted something written. Perhaps the scribe was even experienced in writing hexameter poetry from dictation, since the sources of Pisistratid writing mention not only Homer, but Hesiod, Orpheus and Musaeus as well.⁴⁸

47. Martin and Stephanie West protest against this statement, M.L. & S. West 1999, 72; but to point out that Homer was thought of as an oral poet in the eighteenth century and that Parry had forerunners, does not alter the fact that it was he who established the theory.

48. Jensen 1980, 82-9, with bibliography. - Most scholars still date the *Iliad* to just before 700, the *Odyssey* just after - Morris and Powell 1997 is a monumental example.

The patron was Hipparchus, the younger son of Pisistratus. His interest in the project must have been of the same kind as his interest in supporting other forms of public events such as the festivals of Dionysus and the Panathenaic games in order to further the power and glory of Athens and its ruling house. He may have also foreseen the advantages of having a written Homer in his archives: It could be controlled in a way oral performance by itinerant rhapsodes could not. A written book could be referred to; at least that was the use the *Iliad* was put to in the discussions of the leadership of the Panhellenic army against the Persians related by Herodotus (cf. Chapter 8 above). There is no reason to believe that he feared that the tradition was dying out and therefore wanted to preserve these poems, or that he wanted to make them accessible to a reading public.⁴⁹ Whatever his interests in the registration, the project would have been propagated as a task undertaken to promote the greater glory of Athena, and the written scrolls would probably have been offered to the goddess as an *ex voto*. I imagine that the recording took place on the Acropolis, where both goddess and rulers had their homes.⁵⁰

It is out of the question, of course, that the written text was a recorded live performance. Instead it must be the result of dictation in an induced setting. When we speculate what such a dictation would be like, the best comparative material accessible is Honko's description, even though the process that he and Naika went

Before 800: Ruijgh 1995, 21-5, followed by Janko 1998b, who opts for just after 800. Burkert 1987 dates the first writing of the *Iliad* to 700-650, while the poem only found its final form in 580-70. Dickie 1995 says: later than 700. M.L. West 1995: 675-25. But the 6th century date has been gaining proselytes: Aloni 1984; Shapiro 1989; Ballabriga 1990; Catenacci 1993; Stanley 1993; Seaford 1994; Cook 1995; Dowden 1996; Angiolillo 1997; Sauge 2000; Shear 2000; Larson 2007; Lowenstam 2008.

49. Aloni 1984, 25-38, 116-19 sees the tyrant's wish for a *condemnatio memoriae* of the ancestors of his aristocratic rivals as his main interest in the project, an exciting reading that is, of course, absolutely possible. But I am not convinced that the sons of Theseus were age-old participants of the Trojan War (Aloni 1984, 31); there is no clear link between the two heroes and the Troy story in figurative art before c. 460 B.C., according to *LIMC* (I.1.436-7, 441; I.2.336-7 (Uta Kron)).

50. It is uncertain where the tyrants' palace was situated, but I agree with Angiolillo 1997, 29-30 that probably it was on the Acropolis.

through was in many ways different from what a process of dictation must have been like in ancient times. Performing is different from dictating, the technical equipment of Honko's team made the undertaking radically different from any kind of recording in antiquity, and – what is perhaps most important – the balance of status and power between singer and scribe was not of the same kind as it typically is nowadays. But the fact that a singer was being asked to change his performance from the demanding, but also inspiring, task of entertaining a live audience to the tiresome process of recording for scribes or scholars is actually similar.

Still, dictation is a kind of performance, but a very special one that lacks many of the important features of a normal performance. On this occasion the rhapsode had to do without the general atmosphere of merriment at the festival, the excitement of the competition, the stimulus of the big audiences, and the formal presence of the goddess. Like Naika the rhapsode probably did not normally play an instrument, so in that respect the dictated performance may not have been so very different from his usual practice,⁵¹ but he had to proceed at a much slower pace than he was used to. All things considered he must have found the process tedious compared to a normal performance.

His audience will have been the scribe and perhaps other persons; my guess is that the patron was sometimes present, but not regularly. Since *Iliad* ii is so eager to emphasise the positive aspects of monarchy, I like to imagine that that book was dictated on one of the days when Hipparchus deigned to attend. Other chance listeners may have come by, perhaps even such famous poets as Anacreon, Simonides, or Lasus of Hermione, all of whom are said to have been guests at Hipparchus' court. Whatever the case, the most important and fixed element in the audience must have been the scribe. Actually, I think the tyrants kept a scriptorium, and that a whole team of scribes was at work, writing their raw manuscripts on waxed tablets. Even so, the leader of the scribes must have been there more or less continually, and the risk of his getting bored must have been considerable. On this background it is all the more re-

51. M.L. West 1981, 113-15.

markable that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are in general so fresh, and that many passages are so intensely engaging. The scribe must have been very good at stimulating the singer, putting interesting questions and through comments showing his knowledge of the tradition. On the whole, the rhapsode must have felt inspired to do his best by the enormous prestige of the project and presumably also by a handsome fee. Furthermore, both singer and scribe may have felt that the goddess of the festival was still present.⁵²

Like Naika, during the long, strenuous process the rhapsode would have kept in mind the audience of his regular performance; but being itinerant, he was used to adapting his story to differing audiences. The imaginary listeners he had in mind on this occasion must have been those who had been present at the Panathenaic competition and witnessed his victory.

The singer's normal practice would have been to sing one episode, perhaps one proposed by the audience as when Odysseus asks Demodocus to sing of the Trojan Horse. We can imagine that it happened like this: when at the festival the whole story of the Trojan War was performed by rhapsodes who had enrolled for the competition, this man had been assigned the incident in which Achilles withdraws from battle because of his anger at Agamemnon, and with his song he had won the prize. Now he was asked to repeat his performance to the scribe, but also to demonstrate his competence by telling his story as fully as possible. He did so by expanding his mental text of this episode with other Trojan texts he had in his repertoire, such as the Catalogue of Ships and Diomedes' *aristeia*, or he multiplied familiar incidents so as to have not only a duel between the two protagonists of the war, Menelaus and Paris, but also between two main warriors, Ajax and Hector, and between two sons of goddesses, Achilles and Aeneas, or he let Patroclus take over Achilles' role in his final battle; he also included texts from other cycles, such as the story of Meleager and the Calydonian boar. In this way he drastically expanded his mental text of Achilles' wrath.⁵³

52. Saugé 2000, 403 emphasises that dictation to a scribe enables the singer to compose with much more freshness than if he has to write himself.

53. The retardations discussed, for instance, by Reichel 1990 were brought into the

So far, what has been described here has been concerned with the dictation of the *Iliad*. However, it is a problem for the hypothesis I have proposed why one great epic was not enough. It is easier to understand that a single winner has his performance registered than that two winners do. Were patron and/or scribe dissatisfied that so many of the best known incidents from the war were not included, such as the famous story of the Wooden Horse? Did they want a poem that more clearly celebrated the tyrants' forefathers as important heroes in the Trojan War? Or did they perhaps have a permanent court rhapsode who was provoked into competing with the original winner?

However that may be, I agree with those who consider the two poems to have been created by two different poets. Furthermore, I am convinced by the hypothesis that the *Odyssey* is careful not to repeat the *Iliad* and at the same time to fill in some of the holes in the story left by that poem.⁵⁴ Also, I am attracted by Jenny Strauss Clay's hypothesis that the discussion of divine justice in Book 1 of the *Odyssey* is an answer to the passage on Zeus' two jars in *Iliad* xxiv (527-33).⁵⁵ In short, I imagine that the *Odyssey* poet was present all the way through the dictating of the *Iliad* as an attentive listener who was subsequently to imitate and compete with his great colleague.

If he, too, had participated in the continuous Panathenaic performance his assigned job must have been to sing the tale of Odysseus' return. His means of expansion would have been similar to those used by the *Iliad* poet, multiplication and incorporation, so as to describe not only the hero's adventures but also his son's, and to have other famous return stories included as narratives within the narrative of Odysseus' homecoming.⁵⁶ But the *Odyssey* singer was in an especially difficult situation, for singing *nostoi* in Athens meant to sing of Athena's wrath in this very goddess's honour. Among the various ways in which that problem might be solved, the rhapsode chose to veil this aspect of his tale by introducing Odysseus' son as

Iliad in this phase, according to the present hypothesis.

54. Scodel 2002, 57; Burgess 2009, 146 with bibliography.

55. Clay 1983, 215-16.

56. Ballabriga 1998 has many examples of expansions.

a listener to Menelaus' tale of the angry goddess, and letting the *nostos* proper be told by the hero himself. Unlike the primary narrator the heroes of the poem had no direct information about the decisions of the gods and therefore were not in a position to describe their actions.⁵⁷ In addition, the rhapsode stressed the family links between Nestor and the Athenian tyrants, as well as the almost motherly care that Athena bestows on Odysseus.

This whole scenario is, of course, speculative and has even been considered too "romantically attractive" to be convincing.⁵⁸ But it has the advantage of being based upon a documented comparative framework unlike most of the hypotheses set forth concerning the origins of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Already in writing the raw manuscript the scribes probably emended minor irregularities in metrics and wording in the oral text, just as revealed by Foley in the case of Parry's Nikola Vujnovic.⁵⁹ Next, when this huge amount of more or less unreadable cursive hexameters had to be copied from the tablets onto neatly written papyrus rolls, another careful process of standardisation must have taken place; otherwise we would not have had such astonishingly well-organised and regular texts written in a consistent orthography and with the hexameters sorted out in lines, facts that bear witness to the scribes' proficiency.⁶⁰ Of course, the texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were also, later on, edited in Alexandria, but there the activities were concerned with more elevated problems, and elementary matters such as questions of orthography had already been settled.⁶¹ The oldest Homeric papyri already follow the orthography of later sources.

57. Jørgensen 1904.

58. Janko 2000.

59. Foley 2004, 145-91. Foley 1990, 7 reflects on the Homeric scribe's control over the written text.

60. For the non-obviousness of verse = line, see M.L. West 1997, 26; Seitel 1999, vii.

61. The question whether the texts were taken through a transliteration from the old to the new Attic alphabet has been settled in the negative: Goold 1960; M.L. West 1967, 135-8; 1978, 61-2; Heubeck 1979, 165-9; Janko 1992, 34-7; Erbse 1994; Janko 1998b, 13. - Immerwahr 1990 has shown that the Ionic alphabet was in use in Athens well before the official introduction in 403/2 B.C.

Beyond such standardisations of detail the scribes seem to have interfered very little. This is actually strange when we compare with how freely pre-Parry editors used to tamper with oral epic on its way from performance to printed text. Janko pointed to textual problems in the Homeric poems that “a poet using writing or an editor altering his work” would have done something about and stated that such vestiges of dictation can be found everywhere.⁶² He does not, however, speculate why the editor did not correct what to Janko seems so obviously erroneous.

I think the answer is to be found in the balance of power between the parties involved. In modern times, when a scholar collects an oral epic he/she not only represents both patron and scribe in one person, but is backed by the overwhelming wealth and authority of the western world as against a third-world singer, who even if he is well off in his own community, as was Gopala Naika, is nevertheless so obviously the weaker part. A similar, if less drastic, power gap tends to emerge both now and in earlier periods when intellectuals collect oral literature among their own compatriots. A well-analysed case is that of the famous eighteenth century Finnish collector and poet Elias Lönnrot. He had himself been born in a poor family, but had ascended the social ladder as a doctor and an academic, and when he visited the singers’ homes, he represented the social élite however much he tried not to.⁶³

Things must have been different in the scenario I am painting. Among the three parties involved, patron, rhapsode, and scribe, power resided with the patron. In general, the social status of rhapsodes seems to have been rather humble, but if the *Iliad* singer had just won the prize, he would have been a more important figure than an average rhapsode. At least he was more powerful than a scribe, even if this person was the head of a tyrant’s scriptorium. In ancient Greece, writing was a low-status activity, mostly carried out by slaves. Compared with modern editors, and especially with those who were active before the oral-formulaic theory changed the routines, the editor of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* must have felt more re-

62. Janko 1998b, 7-8, quote 7.

63. Honko 1987, 13.

spectful towards the singers and less tempted to tamper with their texts.

In any case, we must be infinitely grateful to the Homeric scribe. The fact that the poetry comes through in a form so remarkably enjoyable is, at least in part, his achievement.

Cynaethus and Onomacritus

Perhaps not only the patron but all three parties of the process can be identified with persons known from other sources. I have argued before that the rhapsode who dictated the *Iliad* was the Homeric Cynaethus known from the scholium on Pindar mentioned in Chapter 5, and that the scribe was a certain Onomacritus from Athens whom Herodotus calls an expert on oracles and the editor of Musaeus' oracles (*chresmologos te kai diathetes chresmon ton Mousaiou*).⁶⁴

The picture given of Cynaethus in the scholium is negative: he was successful, but a forger and an interpolator, who among other things wrote the *Hymn to Apollo* and passed it off as Homer's. Herodotus, the main source for Onomacritus, paints this latter person in similarly dubious colours. He relates how the exiled Pisistratids during the years after the Persian Great King Darius' death (486 B.C.) participated in various efforts to convince his successor Xerxes to undertake a new campaign against Greece. Their trump card was this Onomacritus. He had been on friendly terms with Hipparchus, but when at a certain point he was caught red-handed in interpolating an oracle into Musaeus, his patron had exiled him. Now the surviving Pisistratids had settled their conflict with him, and when visiting the Persian court at Sousa, they had brought him with them and had praised him to Xerxes, so that the king had consented to listen to him. Onomacritus then recited oracles to Xerxes but was careful to select only such as would stimulate the king to undertake the campaign, omitting those that would have spoken against the project.⁶⁵

64. Jensen 1980, 153-4. Hdt. 7.6.3. - The various terms used for the activities of Cynaethus and Onomacritus - *chresmologos*, *diathetes*, *emballein*, *empoiein* - have been discussed by many scholars; the translations here given are my interpretations.

65. Hdt. 7.6.2-5. - Cf. the comments in Eichhoff 1840, 4-11; D'Agostino 2007, 33-40.

Among scholars views on the two men have varied. For Gilbert Murray – whom I followed in my 1980 monograph – Cynaethus was the great poet not only of the *Hymn to Apollo* but also of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and in more recent times Antonio Aloni has further developed this standpoint. Martin West, on the contrary, accepts the accusation of forgery contained in the scholium and thinks that Cynaethus and his fellow Homerids were unscrupulous forgers, who even invented their ancestor Homer.⁶⁶ As for Onomacritus, he was for C. Eichhoff a main agent of the great cultural projects of the Pisistratids, whereas for Giorgio Colli he is the first archaic sage to allow himself to be misused by political forces. For Ettore D’Agostino he is a multi-faceted person, a poet, rhapsode, and diviner of some status in Athenian society.⁶⁷ D’Agostino argues convincingly that the Onomacritus to whom a poem in the Theognidean collection⁶⁸ is addressed is in fact the selfsame person. The ‘I’ of the poem complains that he has drunk too much and fears to make a fool of himself. The person addressed is not described, but the mere fact of his occurring in a symposiastic context warrants that he was a respected citizen.

In the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* the *Hymn to Apollo* is mentioned as Homer’s last great composition. We are told how the aged poet participated in a festival at Delos, and that when he had performed the hymn, “the assembled Ionians conferred joint citizenship on him, while the Delians wrote out the verses on a placard and dedicated it in the temple of Artemis”.⁶⁹ Scholars have found that the fact that the story says Artemis’ temple, not Apollo’s, gives it a degree of credibility.

In 1979 Walter Burkert pointed out a striking relationship between the *Hymn to Apollo* and a special festival arranged on Delos in 523 or 522 B.C. by the tyrant of Samos, Polycrates. The festival celebrated Apollo with Delian and Pythian games combined, just as the poem is a concatenation of two hymns to the god, as the lord of

66. Murray (1907) 1934, 308-16; Aloni 1989; M.L. West 1999.

67. Eichhoff 1840; Colli 1978, 35-7; D’Agostino 2007.

68. Thgn. 503-8; D’Agostino 2007, XIV.

69. *Certamen* 18, M.L. West 2003b, 350-51; West’s translation.

Delos and of Delphi, and accordingly it makes excellent sense to consider Polycrates' festival the occasion for the composition of the hymn. On this background Aloni reconsiders the hymn in its cultic and cultural context and shows how well the hypothesis of Cynaethus' authorship fits into the general picture of the tyrants' policy. The rhapsode first sought Polycrates' patronage, next the Pisistratids', and after their fall went to Sicily, where the most powerful tyrants were then to be found. During his stay at Polycrates' court his hymn was recorded in writing, and in Athens he not only dictated the two epics but also another version of the hymn.⁷⁰

West, who is of the opinion that the *Iliad* had been in existence for a century at this time, also thinks that Cynaethus went to Athens when after Polycrates' death, probably in 523, Athens under Hipparchus' leadership succeeded Samos as the cultural center. He asserts:

We may find it a plausible hypothesis that that was the moment when Hipparchus (besides sending a ship for Anacreon) invited the Homeridai to Athens and arranged for the complete performance of the poems of Homer at the next Athenian panegyris: the Great Panathenaea that began (if the calendar was properly calibrated) on 19 August 522.⁷¹

What for West is the memorable date of the first full recitation of the two epics is for me the even more memorable date of the contest at which the great rhapsode Cynaethus won the prize with his version of the story of Achilles' wrath, a victory that led to the process of dictation organised by Onomacritus and his team of scribes during which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed.

Herodotus does not mention any such event, which does not mean that he did not know of it. For one thing, neither he nor the rhapsodes would have understood the recording to have been the original composition of two masterpieces of world literature, but a recording in writing of Homer. A great and strange undertaking, no

70. Burkert 1979, 58-62; Aloni 1989, 65-8 (patronage), 121-5 (writing)..

71. M.L. West 1999, 382.

doubt, well worth mentioning if relevant. However, Herodotus is not engaged in drawing a general portrait of Onomacritus but in telling who convinced Xerxes to undertake the campaign against Greece and by what means. Accordingly, he relates what is important for this topic: Onomacritus' relationship with the Pisistratids and his way of handling oracles. Furthermore, Herodotus is markedly negative in his description of the diviner. Colli points to Herodotus' rationalism as a cause for this antipathy,⁷² and as a perhaps more weighty reason might be added that Onomacritus was an important agent for Xerxes' decision to invade Greece. Since a recording of Homer would in the historian's view probably be a laudable act, he would hardly have been interested in mentioning it.

Other sources suggest that Onomacritus not only edited Musaeus, as he did according to Herodotus, but also Orpheus, Hesiod, and Homer. Again, some of this information occurs in the form of charges of tampering with the texts. For instance, Onomacritus is accused of having entered some verses in Book II of the *Odyssey* for the benefit of Hercules, Theseus, and Pirithous, a charge I shall return to below. Here I shall just note the way the scholium on *Odyssey* II.604 simply states that this verse is said to have been inserted by Onomacritus, as if everybody knew that he had been involved with the text and here and there had added some verses of his own making.

In the present context it is especially interesting that both men are accused of interpolation; the verbs used are *emballein* and *empoiēin* (both mean insert, the latter with a connotation of also composing). Moreover the scholiast states of Cynaethus that he wrote his *Hymn to Apollo* and dedicated it to the god, and of Onomacritus Herodotus says that he was the editor of Musaeus. So both accusations are linked to the medium of writing and bear witness to the fact that this art was looked upon with suspicion rather than with admiration.

As for Polycrates' Samos it is recorded that this tyrant kept a scribe of some sort, a *grammatistes* by the name of "Maiandrios, son of Maiandrios, one of the citizens", as Herodotus puts it, and that

72. Colli 1978, 323.

this man was particularly trusted by the tyrant. He enters the story in connection with the developments that eventually led to Polykrates' fall, and his role was to control whether a certain Oroites was as rich as he asserted. When eight chests filled with stones but with a layer of gold on top were shown to Maiandrios, he was deceived. For Deborah Steiner, the story reveals that precisely a scribe is regarded as a superficial observer incapable of penetrating beneath the surface of things, and she underlines the link between the art of writing and tyranny.⁷³

In Athens, if the great writing projects took place, as I imagine they did, on the Acropolis, the Athenian public must have been well aware that something out of the ordinary was in progress, and if not before, then after the fall of the tyrants the recordings in writing may well have been frowned upon.

It is an intriguing fact that precisely the *Hymn to Apollo*, which is said to have been written and dedicated to the god, is also the only transmitted Homeric poem in which the rhapsode speaks of himself in any detail. In vv. 165-78 the narrator addresses Apollo and Artemis, and in the same breath a chorus of young Delian maidens who have been described in the immediately preceding verses. Their profession is to sing hymns about gods and to celebrate men and women from former times, and it is clear that even though their genre is different from the rhapsode's, the topics of their performances are the same. In West's translation the passage runs:

But now, may Apollo be favorable, together with Artemis, and hail, all you Maidens! Think of me in future, if ever some long-suffering stranger comes here and asks, "O Maidens, which is your favorite singer who visits here, and who do you enjoy most?" Then you must all answer with one voice (?), "It is a blind man, and he lives in rocky Chios; all of his songs remain supreme afterwards." And we will carry your reputation wherever we go as we roam the well-ordered cities of men, and they will believe it, because it is true. And myself, I shall not cease from hymning the farshooter Apollo of the silver bow, whom lovely-haired Leto bore.⁷⁴

73. Hdt. 3.123.1. Steiner 1994, 173-4.

74. *h. Ap.* 165-78, trl. M.L. West 2003b, 83-5.

The passage is built up in accordance with the normal conclusion of a hymn, ‘*dimissio*’ in Pavese’s schematisation: the singer takes leave of the god, asks for his/her help, and promises to sing of the god again.⁷⁵ However, it does not conclude the hymn but only the first part of it, the part concerned with Apollo’s relations with Delos, and as such it is unparalleled among the hymns transmitted to us. Even stranger is the fact that an address to a human chorus is squeezed into the middle of the *dimissio*, taking over some of the core concepts and transferring them to other actors than usual. The verb *chairete*, which West translates with “hail”, begins v. 166 and would at first be understood by an audience used to attending Homeric hymns as a farewell to the two gods, until the following words have made clear that it is, instead, addressed to the chorus of maidens. “Think of me” is a translation of *emeio ... mnesasthe* (remember/mention me); but in the regular *dimissio* the person who remembers/speaks is the narrator of the hymn, whereas here the remembering is to be undertaken by the addressee, the Delian maidens.

The narrator proposes a kind of contract to them: whenever some travelling stranger asks them what singer has pleased them most, they are to answer that it is a blind man who lives on rocky Chios whose songs are always the best. In return the singer will carry their fame to the cities of men all over the world. The two protagonists, the chorus and the rhapsode, are parallel, and an audience is introduced for each party to the contract, an imaginary single traveller for the chorus, and the populations of cities all over the world for the solo performer. Thus there is an elegant balance between the chorus informing the single visitor and the solo performer entertaining group audiences. Furthermore, being female, the maidens are stationary, but they live in a place to which any travelling stranger may come, whereas the rhapsode is itinerant and may visit all cities. Each party has in its own way in its power to promote or suppress the fame of the other.

Thucydides, who quotes the passage, takes the narrator to be Homer, and he argues from the hymn that great festivals including athletic and musical contests had been held in Delos in old times (*to*

75. Pavese (1991) 2007, 66-7.

palai). It is unknown when the historian thought Homer to have lived, but since in the immediately preceding lines he has commented upon both Pisistratus and Polycrates, he clearly reckoned the poet to be considerably older than the two tyrants. If Thucydides had heard the story of Cynaethus having forged the poem, he obviously did not believe it. Also the orator Aelius Aristides (2nd century A.D.) refers to the passage, perhaps drawing on Thucydides, and takes for granted that Homer is the speaker.⁷⁶

West, however, believes in the forgery story and argues that Cynaethus the rhapsode could without problems speak in the first person in the name of Homer and be understood as such by his audience.⁷⁷ To me this seems very unlikely. An audience listening to a singer who says 'I' or "we" when commenting on the current performance arena must believe that he is speaking in his own person. This is not to maintain that the 'I' of the epic narrator is a simple and unambiguous entity. As mentioned in Chapter 3, it is not unusual for a performing singer to identify with the hero of the narrative to such a degree that he shifts into the first person. It is also conceivable that a singer retains a narrating 'I' when performing a song that a famous predecessor composed on some well-known occasion, even though I cannot adduce a parallel from epic fieldwork. But that he should speak in the first person of his professional activity during the specific performance in which he is engaged, and expect those present to understand that saying 'I' he means the ancestor of his craft seems very odd. The fact that the situation he describes is so obviously the one he is participating in – this unique festival with its contests, and the brilliant performance of this spe-

76. Th. 3.104; Aristid. 34.35.

77. M.L. West 1999, 369-71. Also Burkert 1979, 61 and Aloni 1989, 83-4 consider the blind man from Chios to be Homer. West refers to the Hesiodic poems and argues that when they were performed audiences understood the first-person passages there to concern Hesiod, not the performing rhapsode. But just as I do not believe that rhapsodes memorised the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and performed them, I cannot imagine the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days* as the objects of memorised reperformance, and I consider the first-person passages in those poems as pointing to the rhapsodes whose versions happen to have survived. For the 'I' and 'you' of the *Works and Days*, cf. Jensen 1966.

cific chorus of maidens – makes it even more improbable that with an ‘I’ he would be speaking of anybody but himself.

The plural in “we will carry...” may be understood as “we, the rhapsodes” or even “we, the Homerids”, or it may be taken as an instance of *pluralis maiestatis* and equal an “I”.

When the singer/narrator transfers the verb *chairete* from the god to the girls, he establishes a degree of identification between them and the gods. The whole passage is sophisticated: instead of simply claiming to be the best, the rhapsode attributes to the girls both divine power and poetical expertise so that later on they can tell some imaginary visitor that this very rhapsode is the one they found most pleasant.

The hymnic *dimissio* contains the possibility of a prayer for the god’s grace, and in one case (*h. Hom.* VI.19-20) such a prayer concerns victory “in this contest”. Accordingly, that hymn (to Aphrodite) must have been composed by a singer engaged in a rhapsodic contest, who began his performance with this proemium in praise of the goddess and then proceeded to his epic performance proper. Similarly, when the ‘I’ of the *Hymn to Apollo* wants the girls to assert that all his songs *metopisthen aristeuousin* (are the best afterwards), I interpret that to be this singer’s confident statement that he will be victorious in rhapsodic contests, the one he is engaged in as well as others he may enter. In Pindar the verb *aristeuein* means to win athletic games.⁷⁸ For me, then, the blind man who lives on rocky Chios is the rhapsode Cynaethus.

As narrated in the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, the hymn was first performed and then written, and I assume this to be based on that author’s experience of how Homeric poetry was normally recorded in writing: first a successful oral performance and next the decision by somebody else to have it written down, just as I imagine the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were recorded. That the written text of the hymn includes a passage so directly connected with the oral performance suggests that neither singer nor scribe thought of the recording as a means for the poem to be enjoyed by a reading public. The reason for writing the text would rather have been that once it was in mate-

78. E.g. *Pi. N.* 11.14.

rial form, the poem could be offered to the god. Furthermore, I do not believe that the hymn was recorded in writing a second time in Athens; I cannot imagine that such a recording would have retained the address to the Delian maidens, and I think that Aloni overestimates the differences between the text transmitted in the collection of Homeric hymns and Thucydides' quotation.⁷⁹

Since this is the only Homeric passage that Thucydides actually quotes at some length, my guess is that in his time the placard, the *leukoma*, was still to be seen in Artemis's temple in Delos, and that that was where Thucydides read it. The small differences in phrasing between the passage as part of the manuscript-transmitted hymn and Thucydides' quotation I reckon to have been due to the historian's memory. The same placard probably gave rise to the suspicion of forgery. Some educated person may well have read the poem and not only recognised Homer's style and mastery but also thought that he was referred to as the blind poet from Chios. If he happened to know that the rhapsode who had won the prize with this performance was called Cynaethus, the problem of how to understand the first-person passage led to the solution that the rhapsode was attempting to pass off a work of his own as Homer's. Just as in the case of Plato and Ion I see here a gap between emic and etic.

The rhapsode himself and his audiences would know that his profession was to perform Homer's poetry, and the quality of his performances would be estimated first and foremost as a question of their accuracy, of his proficiency in narrating the events of long-gone days just as they had happened. However, in matters concerned with the here and now, such as everything referring to the performance arena in which they were present, the 'I' was the rhapsode in question. In a contest, whether in Delos or in Athens, the victor would be the performing rhapsode, not the legendary Homer.

As for Onomacritus, D'Agostino rejects the idea of his forgery and asserts that in several cases an archaic poem is considered to be composed by both a famous old poet and somebody else, for in-

79. Aloni 1989, 109-18.

stance *The Conquest of Oechalia* by Homer and Creophylus.⁸⁰ But this is not really convincing. For one thing, there is an important difference in genre between epic and oracles. With all its demand for truth epic is still not a sacred text on the level of a collection of oracles. Epic is important as a historical source and useful in political claims, as we have seen, but there is a considerable distance from that to a text that has as its main purpose to reveal the intentions of the gods. Accordingly, Cynaethus' crime, if he did commit one, is of a less dangerous type than that of Onomacritus. That the accusation against Onomacritus was a serious matter is made abundantly clear by Herodotus when he emphasises that even though Hipparchus had until then been on friendly terms with him, he exiled him for his forgery. It is also worth noting that when Onomacritus performed at the Persian court, he did not just make up suitable oracles. His fraud consisted in selection and omission of passages that were already there.

Furthermore, when D'Agostino argues that the activity of inserting verses of one's own making was a normal part of the rhapsodic technique by which the still fluid oral texts were gradually adapted to changing circumstances, and that therefore *empelein* (insert) should not be understood as interpolating, he confuses two different processes. The constant change typical of oral epic is not a question of adding or subtracting a verse here and there but a much more subtle process. So even though I agree with D'Agostino in not accepting the picture of Onomacritus as a forger I think it should be stressed that that is precisely how Herodotus describes him, and a dangerous one at that.

The difference is not so much a question of fixed or fluid, as of control. When the singer adapts his mental text to a given performance arena, neither he nor his audience normally feel that he is changing anything, only that he is embellishing or perhaps making his narrative more true by ensuring that it is confirmed by the experience his listeners have. A well-informed audience controls what is being performed, and listeners protest if they feel that the singer does not tell them the true story. If the patron is present, his accept-

80. D'Agostino 2007, XVIII-XXII.

ance of the performance is particularly important for whether the singer is felt to be reliable. When the bard travels to another place and a new performance arena he adapts his mental text to this new situation, and its reliability depends on his authority and the implicit contract he enters into with his new patron and audience.

When a text has been written down and is met by a reader instead of an audience, its authority no longer depends on the implicit contract of the performance arena. Detached from its normal setting the naked text, as it were, must convince the reader of its reliability. In the case of the hymn published on the placard, the readers must have made their own interpretation, and depending on their understanding of Homeric tradition they must have read the self-referential passage as Homer's words, or as the result of Cynaethus' attempt at acting Homer.

The suspicions of interpolation only make sense as an assertion of the rhapsodes' having made wrong use of their texts while out of their audience's control. In my view, neither Cynaethus nor Onomacritus forged anything. With the *Hymn to Apollo* as well as the *Iliad*, Cynaethus did his best to please patrons and audiences, and when Onomacritus had his scribes register the rhapsodes' words they meticulously recorded what was dictated. But the recording in writing was a first step towards detaching the texts from the control of audiences by the mere fact of the unusual performance arena. Passers-by as well as people who just heard of the undertaking might well be suspicious of what tyrants, singers, and scribes were making of the poems.

The fact that the suspect passages are still to be found in our texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is not to be explained by oral performance. The passages could only have made their way into the transmitted text if they were introduced into the ancestor of the manuscripts, and the only way they could do that was by either being interpolated into an already written text or, as I suppose, during the recording in writing of the text.

Interpolation

If by 'interpolation' we mean a passage that somebody other than the author added to a text, for whatever reason, the problem is that an orally composed epic is not uniform, neither in style nor in content. The poet himself may switch among different styles when following now one, now another model.

It is, of course, by no means impossible that interpolations were made in the texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the course of their manuscript transmission just as interpolations occur in other transmitted ancient texts. When here and there verses are missing from good manuscripts, this may be an indication of their having been interpolated in other manuscripts at some point in the history of the text.⁸¹ But identification of interpolations for reasons of style or content cannot be pursued because the dictation hypothesis invalidates normal criteria for distinguishing between original text and interpolations. The oral-formulaic diction is in itself a harmonisation of older and younger linguistic levels and of different dialects. If the written text mirrors what the rhapsodes dictated as closely as maintained here, it also retains such shifts in style as typically occur in oral epics when the bard incorporates passages from one song into another, changing as little as possible in the process. He may even retain a foreign dialect of an incorporated passage.

As just described, in antiquity a few passages in the two epics were under suspicion of having been interpolated. Two such accusations have been mentioned above, the scholium on *Odyssey* 11.604, which laconically states that this verse was inserted by Onomacritus and is athetised, and Plutarch's story of Hereas and his accusation that Pisistratus had interpolated *Odyssey* 11.631. So here perhaps we have interpolations proper, added by the scribe; but considering that in general he appears to have respected the singer's dictated text without interfering, it seems more probable that the corrections were introduced by the singer as self-corrections. Who knows? Perhaps the scribe's facial expression suggested criticism? In any case,

81. For instance, *Il.* 1.265 may well have been interpolated by a reader who missed Theseus after the mention of his friend Pirithous, *pace* Aloni 1986, 28-9.

in the process of recording from dictation the distinction between the singer's and the scribe's contributions is not always clear-cut.

Iliad ii.558, in particular, was suspected of being an Athenian interpolation, made for political purposes. The verse concerns the Salaminian hero Ajax and is part of the Catalogue of Ships. The geographer Strabo (c. 64 B.C.-21 A.D.) says of the island of Salamis that in his time it belonged to Athens but that it had previously been Megarian. In order to legitimate the Athenian claim to the island, either Solon or Pisistratus had appealed to a verse he had interpolated, saying that Ajax made his troops take their stand next to the Athenian contingent, ousting the original passage, which mentioned three localities in the Megarian region. Strabo also asserts that the accusation seemed convincing because in other passages of the poem Ajax is not represented as being close to the Athenians, neither in battle array nor with respect to his place in the camp. Plutarch (c. 40-120 A.D.) and Diogenes Laertius (3rd century A.D.) have the same story of political appeal to the interpolated verse, but with Solon as the politician involved, and it is repeated in many later sources.⁸²

As such, the story is convincing enough: a passage is changed with a clear political purpose. We saw in Chapter 8 how the immediately preceding passage, the Athenian entry, was referred to in a context of foreign policy, and that it was well known and popular in Athenian self-reference in classical times. Furthermore, also for a modern reader both entries look as if they have been tampered with since they differ from the otherwise clear patterning of the catalogue entries in a number of ways. The problem is that it also makes perfect sense to imagine that the tampering was done by the dictating rhapsode himself in a way not unlike the procedure in the passages just discussed. The neighbouring city-states Athens and Megara were at war over Salamis in the beginning of the sixth century, and

82. Str. 9.1.10; Plu. *Sol.* 10; D.L. 1.48. – The sources are collected in Jensen 1980, 207-26. Finkelberg 2005, 170-72 points out that also the way Argos and Messenia are treated in the Catalogue seems to be the result of adaptation to political aims. Frame 2009, 483-5 suggests that Solon actually composed the Athenian entry. This seems unconvincing to me for social reasons, cf. Chapter 5 above.

their rivalry and enmity continued right down into classical times. A rhapsode engaged by the Athenian tyrants to dictate an epic would in all likelihood deviate from his normal version of a politically loaded passage such as the Catalogue and substitute new passages for those he knew by heart in order to please his patrons and the local audience. Whereas the rest of the Catalogue had been ground and polished in regular use, perhaps for generations, the new verses are revealed as such by not having had time to adapt themselves to the pattern. Also the fact that Megara does not even feature in the Catalogue can be understood along the same lines, as a result of the rhapsode's decisions in this particular performance arena. If, instead, it was the scribe who composed the new verses, they are an interpolation, as they also are if some later person with access to the original deleted the passage as it was first recorded, and substituted another. If so, it must have been done before 490 B.C. when, as described in Chapter 8 above, the Athenians claimed to be entitled to the leadership with reference to these verses. But, to repeat, we do not have the tools for deciding the matter.

The Athenian and Salaminian entries can without problems be understood as a modification that the rhapsode made of his mental text in order to please his Athenian audience. That is actually what one of the *Biographies of Homer* says about them and also about a couple of verses in the *Odyssey* (7.80-81) where the goddess Athena returns from Scheria via Marathon to Erechtheus' house in Athens. The biographer asserts that the poet took pity on the Athenians because they played such a small role in the poems and therefore inserted these verses.⁸³

Ancient accusations of interpolation are notably focused on Athens: Athenian politicians or their officers are the agents, or the interpolations are made in the interests of Athens. Seen from that angle it is actually surprising that so few passages were contested. For instance, many features of the *Odyssey* that according to the present hypothesis were introduced by the rhapsode in this special performance to please his audience, such as the invention of a young son of Nestor by the name of Pisistratus in *Odyssey* 3-4, might have been

83. *Vit. Hom.* 1,28 (M.L. West 2003b, 386-8).

candidates, but they seem not to have been the object of suspicion in antiquity. The reason may be that those passages were better integrated in the context of the poem than the distrusted passages and therefore perhaps less conspicuous.

Iliad x constitutes a special case. The scholiast on x.1 states that this book was composed separately by Homer and introduced into the *Iliad* by Pisistratus, and even Unitarian scholars often consider the book interpolated. It differs manifestly from the rest of the poem both in moral values and in many details. Special features of the narrative, such as the strange armour and clothing of the protagonists, have no parallel in the rest of the poem, and the behaviour of Odysseus and Diomedes is in breach of the heroic ethic that rules elsewhere. The question was discussed with considerable care in 1988 by Georg Danek, who drew special attention to stylistic characteristics, such as the way speeches and dialogues function; he did not, however, reach a clear-cut conclusion as regards authorship. One of the models he found possible (but not the one he preferred) was that the singer had added Book x late in his career, at a point in which he had already a fully-fledged *Iliad* in his repertoire.⁸⁴ Such a stand is relatively close to my model of the mental text that is expanded. In my view it would not be beyond the singer to include with only minimal change an episode he had in his repertoire and was used to performing in other contexts. The difference between Book x and the other Iliadic books is not such as to cause open contradiction in the storyline and can be compared with the way in which Karakalpak bards have taken over a song from their Turkmen neighbours without fundamental linguistic adaptation.⁸⁵ Or consider the Uzbek singer (mentioned in Chapter 4) who used Kiptschak forms in his songs and explained to Reichl that that was how they should properly be sung.⁸⁶ Anyway, the scholiast considered the book to have been composed by Homer, only not as part of the *Iliad*.

84. Danek 1988, 235.

85. Reichl 1992, 259-60. – Cf. Biebuyck & Mateene 1969, 41; Biebuyck 1978, 6, 41 (Nyanga).

86. Cf. Reichl 2001a, 74.

Accordingly, despite all my respect for the great Analytic scholars I end up as a hyper-Unitarian, not because I exclude the possibility of tampering with the texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* having taken place, but because the oral-formulaic theory leaves us without the means to identify interpolations.

Vestiges of dictation

In the above-mentioned argumentation for understanding the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to be what Lord called ‘oral dictated texts’, Janko pointed to various examples of problems in phrasing or metre that he thought a poet or an editor would have emended had he had the time and opportunity to do so. In particular he stressed that without a faithfully transcribed text the famous passage in *Iliad* ix (182-98) where dual forms are used for three persons would be impossible to explain.⁸⁷ In the following I shall discuss in some detail three other examples, also old bones of contention among commentators.

In the first example, from *Iliad* vii, the singer to begin with muddles up some details of the passage but afterwards gets them sorted out (*Il.* vii.333-42). It has become evening after a long day of fighting. Zeus’ promise to Thetis has not yet had any effect, and the Greeks have won the day. Nevertheless Nestor proposes in a speech to the leaders that they ought to fortify their camp. His plan is two-fold, to arrange for burial of the fallen warriors and for the building

87. Janko 1998b, 7-9; Lord (1960) 2000, 149. – Already Nagler 1974, 95 suggested that the poet sometimes changed his mind during performance. Another example may perhaps be found in *Od.* 7.103-31. M.L. West 2000b emphasises that the use of the present tense in a description of past affairs is without parallel in Homeric poetry and argues that the passage has been transposed from an original setting in a speech by Nausikaa. West’s assertion that his argumentation is sufficient to disprove the dictation hypothesis is unconvincing. On the contrary, the passage may be read as another vestige of dictation: the rhapsode usually had Nausikaa describe her father’s palace but this time chose to leave out the description; afterwards he changed his mind and decided to keep it nevertheless and instead let it be part of Odysseus’ experience on his arrival at the palace. The singer here kept it in its usual form, but we may guess that if he stuck to this decision in later performances the present tense verbs would be changed.

of a wall, and Nestor mentions the following tasks awaiting the Greeks: they should bring together the corpses from the battlefield, burn them, collect the bones of each man in order for them to be brought home to their relatives, construct a common tomb, fortify it with ramparts, make a gate in them, and surround it all with a moat. His proposal is unanimously accepted.

The knotty part of the speech says, in Richmond Lattimore's translation:

... then must we burn them [the bodies] a little apart from
 the ships, so that each whose duty it is may carry the bones back
 to a man's children, when we go home to the land of our fathers. 335
 And let us gather and pile one single mound on the corpse-pyre
 indiscriminately from the plain, and build fast upon it
 towered ramparts, to be a defence of ourselves and our vessels.
 And let us build into these walls gates strongly fitted
 that there may be a way through them for the driving of horses; 340
 and on the outer side, and close, we must dig a deep ditch
 circling it, so as to keep off their people and horses.⁸⁸

The very idea of fortifying the camp in this phase of the war is strange, and during the fighting described in the middle of the poem, the narrative famously shifts between scenes in which the wall is essential and others in which there does not appear to be a fortification at all. The building of a wall seems to have been normally described among the episodes belonging to the early stages of the war, as it is taken for granted by Thucydides in the passage discussed in Chapter 8 above, and as it would seem natural anyway. The introduction of the fortification at this stage can be seen as a parallel to how our poet included passages such as the Catalogue of Ships or the *Teichoskopia*, as a way to expand his mental text with passages from other parts of his repertoire and let his version of the story of Achilles' wrath embrace the whole war. However, the decision to have Nestor make this proposal and the idea of collecting the bones of the dead may have occurred to the singer while he was

88. Lattimore 1951, 177.

dictating, as is suggested by a series of problems raised by the passage:⁸⁹

- 1 Thucydides (2.34) mentions the practice of bringing home each dead warrior's bones as a special Athenian way of honouring those who have fallen in the first battle of a war. It can be no coincidence that in the *Iliad* the proposal is set forth by Nestor, ancestor of the Pisistratids, and the detail must be seen as one of the poem's Atticisms, intended to please the singer's current audience.
- 2 According to Thucydides, those who were honoured in this way were the warriors who had been killed in the first battle of a war. In the *Iliad*, Troy has been besieged for nine years when the proposal is made. The battle is, however, the first one in the poem, a fact that may lie behind the singer's idea of introducing this proposal.
- 3 To collect the bones of the dead from the pyre and bring them home is an alternative to burying them indiscriminately in a common mound. To begin with, the singer chose the first alternative, then changed his mind and chose the second.
- 4 The wording of the proposal comes close to being nonsense. To quote Walter Leaf: "the natural meaning [of 334-5] would be, 'that every man may carry his own bones back'. As it stands, we must take it to mean 'that every man may take (somebody's) bones back to the children (of their owner)'"⁹⁰ 334-5 were athe-tised by Aristarchus, probably because of their obscurity.
- 5 The passage on gathering something indiscriminately from the plain is unclear. The verb is *exagagontes* (having brought out/having gathered), and the implied object seems to be the corpses.

89. Leaf 1900, 297-8 and 320-21, is still admirably clear. Further argumentation in Page 1959, 315-29; M.L. West 1969.

90. Leaf 1900, 321.

The conflict between the alternatives and the change from individuality to collectivity are striking.

- 6 That the tomb is planned as part of a fortification of the Greek camp is odd and suggests that not only are two versions of how to treat the corpses mixed up here, but also two basically different tasks: to have the dead warriors buried and to have the camp fortified.

The next day both Trojans and Greeks gather the corpses of their fallen comrades and burn them, and it is explicitly stated that it was difficult for the survivors to identify the dead bodies. When after a hundred lines or so the point is reached for building mound and fortification, the description runs as follows (*Il.* vii.433-41):

But when the dawn was not yet, but still the pallor of night's
edge, a chosen body of the Achaians formed by the pyre;
and they gathered together and piled one single mound
all above it 435
indiscriminately from the plain, and built a fort on it
with towered ramparts, to be a defence for themselves and
their vessels;
and they built within these walls gates strongly fitted
that there might be a way through them for the driving of horses;
and on the outer side and against it they dug a deep ditch, 440
making it great and wide, and fixed the sharp stakes inside it.⁹¹

As usual when describing a proposal and its realisation the singer makes the two passages as closely similar as possible, the changes being mainly restricted to verbal forms. But he has wisely omitted the detail of singling out the bones of individual warriors, thus correcting the most obviously problematic part of Nestor's proposal. Without the verses mentioning the dead bodies the mound becomes the object of the participle *exagagontes*, so that it is now material for that which is being brought indiscriminately together.

91. Lattimore 1951, 179-80.

I imagine that the idea of introducing the Athenian custom of bringing home the bones of the dead warriors occurred to the singer on the spur of the moment, during dictation. To have Nestor propose it, however, was part of a general decision he had probably made already when preparing his performance for the Panathenaic competition, to give Nestor as powerful a part as possible. Now the idea occurred to him of letting an Athenian burial practice have roots in mythic times, but no sooner had he mentioned the bone-collecting than he changed his mind because it gave him problems in relation to his normal way of describing the procedures when dead bodies had to be disposed of after a battle. That he had a standard description of the burial of many corpses in the brief time-span of a one day's pause in the fighting, and that it would be part of the pattern to underline the fact that no individual measures could be taken, is a reasonable hypothesis. So he returned to his usual way of singing such a passage, stating that the corpses had to be brought together indiscriminately, a fact that muddled up his narrative. Instead of interrupting his dictation he continued, but took care to emend the passage when the proposal was realised.

Honko's experience when Gopala Naika recited his *Siri Epic* to him included similar instances of confusion when one error led to others:

The singer could proceed for hundreds of lines without a single mishap. When errors occurred, they could accumulate in nearby lines. Tiredness and lapses of concentration brought about minor crises which occasionally may not even have surfaced and could be accommodated by adjusting the path of composition accordingly.⁹²

Another example of confusion and self-correction is to be found in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, when it is described how Agamemnon reached his home. The events are told to Telemachus by Menelaus, who in his turn relates what "the old man of the sea", Proteus, told him, when he had succeeded in getting hold of him. But parts of this narrative are so puzzling that they hardly make sense. *Od.* 4.512-23 are

92. Honko 1998a, 320.

as follows in Robert Fagles's translation (which in this passage is quite close to the original, except for a looser verse structure); the quotation begins just after we have learnt how the Locrian Ajax died at sea:

... Your brother?

He somehow escaped that fate; Agamemnon got away
 in his beaked ships. Queen Hera pulled him through.
 But just as he came abreast of Malea's beetling cape
 a hurricane snatched him up and swept him way off course -
 groaning, desperate - driving him over the fish-infested sea
 to the wild borderland where Thyestes made his home
 in the days of old and his son Aegisthus lived now.
 But even from there a safe return seemed likely,
 yes, the immortals swung the wind around to fair
 and the victors sailed home. How he rejoiced,
 Atrides setting foot on his fatherland once more -
 he took that native earth in his hands and kissed it,
 hot tears flooding his eyes, so thrilled to see his land!⁹³

The brief passage raises many questions. What was Agamemnon doing near Cape Malea, the south eastern promontory of the Peloponnese, when he was heading for Mycenae from Troy? Why is Thyestes brought into the narrative? Where are we supposed to imagine that Agamemnon was driven when he came "to the wild borderland" (*agrou ep' eschatien*)? Why must he make another voyage in order to finally reach his home?

Commentators have made many efforts to repair the transition, one of them being to move the verses about Thyestes and Aegisthus until after Agamemnon's landing so that the king reaches land only once, namely in his home country close to Aegisthus' house, and another to consider the whole passage an interpolation. Such solutions are, of course, rather desperate and the former only solves the problem of why Agamemnon has to make two landings. Both beg the question of who could have been at work and with what purpose.⁹⁴

93. Fagles 1996, 140-41.

94. The transposition would give the following order of verses: 4.516-519-520-517-

In my view we are here instead allowed a glimpse into the process of composition in dictation. Just for a brief moment the singer has lost his concentration and made a mistake, confusing various versions of the story of Agamemnon's homecoming and death.⁹⁵ It appears from other passages that some versions had the murder committed in Aegisthus' house, others in Agamemnon's. The latter alternative is known to us from Athenian drama, but in the *Odyssey* it is mentioned only once (*Od.* 3.234-5). Next, if Agamemnon was to be murdered in Aegisthus' home he might come there either because he was blown off course by a storm and landed in Aegisthus' neighbourhood, where his rival could get at him, or because having landed as planned in his home country, he was seen by a watchman Aegisthus had engaged to look out for him and was then invited to his rival's home. The idea of his being spotted by the watchman makes sense only if Agamemnon approached his home the way he was expected to.

Furthermore, Carlo Brillante has recently reminded scholars of a hypothesis offered by Eduard Schwarz in 1924. In addition to the common opinion in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* according to which Menelaus and Agamemnon ruled Sparta and Mycenae respectively, there seems to have been a special Spartan version that had the two brothers reign over Laconia and Argos in unison with their royal seat located in Sparta. This joint rule was in historical times considered the mythic source of the double kingship in Sparta. If Agamemnon was heading for Sparta, it would make excellent sense for him to pass Cape Malea.⁹⁶

The way the locality is mentioned in no way signals there might be anything odd about this part of Agamemnon's route. We may imagine that when our singer was performing for a Spartan audience, this was the version of Agamemnon's homecoming he would choose. Now, however, he was in Athens, and as soon as he had said

518-521, *Ameis-Henze-Cauer* 1920, 128. – Interpolation: Kunst 1924-5, 23. – Brillante 2005 offers his solutions to the problems with a comprehensive bibliography.

95. Agamemnon's homecoming and death are mentioned many times in the *Odyssey*: 1.28-43, 298-300, 3.130-64, 193-8, 234-5, 247-312, 4.512-47, 11.387-464, 13.383-5, 24.19-22, 96-7, 199-202.

96. Brillante 2005, 6-9; cf. Schwartz 1924, 75-8; Kunst 1924-5, 22-6.

Cape Malea he realised that he had committed an error. This made him lose control of the narrative. The promontory triggered a storm more or less automatically. On the three other occasions on which it is mentioned in the *Odyssey* it is connected with fateful storms each time: Menelaus was blown to Egypt, Odysseus to the land of the Lotus-eaters, and in the fake story of how Odysseus visited a guest friend in Crete on his way to Troy, he came to that island because of a storm that hit him when he had travelled as far as Cape Malea (*Od.* 3.287, 9.80, and 19.187). The rhapsode continued his dictation while desperately trying to get his narrative back on course. But one mistake led to another, and he said Thyestes instead of Aegisthus, conspiring father for conspiring son. This new mistake was immediately made up for in the following verse: Thyestes belonged to the past, now his son Aegisthus had taken over. At this point the poet simply invented a change of wind without any clear notion of from where, wind as an agent of the gods to finally bring Agamemnon to his home country. From then on the narrative was back on course: Aegisthus' watchman could enter, and Aegisthus himself could make his preparations and treacherously invite Agamemnon to his home to be murdered.⁹⁷ In this way the singer acted as singers do in our times, especially if they are performing in front of some kind of recording apparatus. It seems that he regarded the dictation process as a performance, however unusual it must have been felt.

Still another passage may bear witness to how the singer sometimes changed his narrative during the very process of dictation. Towards the end of Book 11 of the *Odyssey* Odysseus tells of his adventures in Hades (*Od.* 11.601-5). He reports that he met Hercules there and heard him relate the sensational story of how as one of his labours he had fetched the watchdog from the realm of the dead. Afterwards Hercules left in order to return to Hades' house, but Odysseus stayed on a while in the hope of also meeting Theseus and his comrade Pirithous. However, when instead a swarm of dead souls came rushing in on him, he was overwhelmed by fear, hurried back to his ship and sailed off.

97. I agree with most of Foley 2005c, but find that he underestimates the problems, especially those of geography.

However, in Athens Hercules was not thought to be in Hades but to have been received on Olympus and given divine status. First Odysseus introduces Hercules but then he corrects himself, simply adding *eidolon* (image) in enjambement as an apposition to Hercules and explaining that the hero he met was not truly Hercules, but just his image, since he himself lives among the gods of Olympus with the goddess Hebe as his wife. Unconcerned, Odysseus then continues his story of the meeting in Hades. Fagles slightly overdoes the self-correction, but as such his interpretation is convincing enough:

And next I caught a glimpse of powerful Heracles –
 his ghost, I mean: the man himself delights
 in the grand feasts of the deathless gods on high,
 wed to Hebe, famed for her lithe, alluring ankles,
 the daughter of mighty Zeus and Hera shod in gold.
 Around him cries of the dead rang out like cries of birds.⁹⁸

A scholium on the verse about Hebe's descent says: "It is said that this verse was interpolated by Onomacritus, and it is athetised." The comment is most naturally taken as concerned with the whole brief passage about Hercules' divine status. The singer's mental text seems to have had Odysseus meet Hercules; but no sooner had he introduced him than he realised that this was problematic, and corrected himself.⁹⁹

When a few lines further on Odysseus asserts that he had hoped also to meet the Athenian heroes Theseus and Pirithous (*Od.* 11.630-31), this is not, of course, a self-correction but seems to be simply an addition to the rhapsode's usual way of performing this story, made again to please his local audience. Here the corpus of scholia adds no comment, but Plutarch says that according to the historian Hereas from Megara v. 631 was interpolated by Pisistratus *chari-*

98. Fagles 1996, 269.

99. Aloni 2006, 20-22 offers a similar interpretation, but unlike me he does not consider a written text necessary for the transmission of such self-corrections.

zomenos Athenaios (to please the Athenians).¹⁰⁰ Again, in my opinion the passage was not necessarily interpolated by Pisistratus; it is certainly possible that the singer himself felt the lack of these local heroes in his mental text. Out of respect for the truth of the story he did not make up for their absence by composing a short passage relating how Odysseus met these heroes; if they did not regularly belong to the list of heroes Odysseus met, such a procedure would have been a lie, but to give a reason why they were not there would have offended nobody.

The fact that these passages are all in some way related to Athenian interests links the textual problems to the situation the rhapsodes were in when adapting their mental, Panhellenic, texts to their Athenian performance arena. The rhapsodes, I suppose, were from the start intent on pleasing their audience by giving Athens a more prominent role in the Trojan War than the city traditionally had. They were moving inside the strict framework of the genre's demand for truth, and a fundamental change of the events would not be accepted. But they gave their mental texts an Athenian twist, and most of the time they did so without running into problems. In the passages discussed here, however, they did get into trouble but managed to come back on course.

How closely the *Iliad* rhapsode stuck to his mental text, especially in passages deeply embedded in tradition, can be seen from how he transposed the Catalogue of Ships from its proper place at the departure from Aulis to its position in the tenth year of the war. Two heroes gave rise to problems: Protesilaus, who was the first Greek hero to be slain, already on arrival, and Achilles, who had at the beginning of the poem withdrawn in anger. As the passages figure in our text, the singer has evidently retained them in their usual form and solved the problem by adding corrections at the end of each entry. In *Iliad* ii.681-5 he registers the contingent from Pelagic

100. Plu. *Thes.* 20,1-2. – Aloni 1984, 1986 argues that traditionally the two sons of Theseus took part in the Trojan War but that they were left out of the two poems in accordance with Hipparchus' wishes. In view of the fact that ancient suspicions of tampering with the text always work the other way round, accusing the Pisistratids or their helpers of introducing Athenian elements into the poems, I find this hypothesis difficult to accept.

Argos, stating that they brought fifty ships led by Achilles, and then adds (686-94) that they did not now take part because of Achilles' anger. In ii.695-8 he then registers the men from Phylace and its surroundings and states that they were led by Protesilaus, only to add at the beginning of v. 699: "while he was still alive" – the same use of enjambement as in the self-correction of the mention of Hercules. Then follows (699-709) the story of how this hero was killed but substituted by his younger brother, and the entry is closed in the usual way: "Forty black ships followed them" (ii.710). At the end of the Catalogue, the narrator asks the Muse to state who was best of the men and which was the best of the horses that took part (ii.761-2). Here the model is turned upside down: first it is stated that the best horses belonged to Eumelus and the best hero was Ajax, and then v. 769 adds: "while Achilles was angry", followed by the assertion that otherwise he was the best hero and had the best horses, and by a brief description of how they were now idling away their time in the camp (*Il.* ii.769-79).

These readings have been based on the hypothesis that the written text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* originated in a process of dictation, as a cooperation between singer and scribe not unlike what takes place when in modern times an oral epic is recorded. They confirm what Janko asserted, that the hypothesis of a singer dictating to a scribe who carefully wrote what was dictated without tampering with the text, actually enables us to understand narrative inconsistencies of this type.

Summary

Even though quite a few oral epics have been published for an international readership in recent times, information about the details of the recording process is still relatively scarce. But Honko's monograph on the *Siri Epic* is a treasure trove of such matters and serves here as the basis of a reconstruction of how the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* may have been recorded in writing. Such sources as there are point at a certain Cynaethus as the rhapsode who dictated the *Iliad*, whereas no name can be given the poet of the *Odyssey*. The scribe in charge of the undertaking may perhaps be identified as Onomacri-

tus, known from Herodotus. A few passages of the poems exhibit problems that may be traces of the singers' momentary confusion in the course of dictation.¹⁰¹

101. Pp. 292-5 are a revised version of Jensen 2004, pp. 295-300 of Jensen 1999, 29-32, and pp. 321-4 of Jensen 2003 and 2005.

Twice twenty-four books

The problem

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were transmitted to us via the Middle Ages carefully divided into twenty-four books.¹ Each book is named after a letter of the alphabet, and each has one or more titles to introduce the reader to its content. This arrangement of the poems goes right back to antiquity, as witnessed by papyrus fragments, but in works of reference there is a consensus that it was introduced at the Museum in Alexandria and has nothing to do with the poet(s).

This opinion is based on a passage in Pseudo-Plutarch's *On the Literature and Poetry of Homer*, where it says that the division according to the letters of the alphabet was introduced by Aristarchus and his colleagues.² Besides, a scholium on *Iliad* ii.877 states that "*he ... kata stoicheia dihairesis*" (the division by letters) is the work of grammarians, whereas the poet himself composed the *Iliad* as a coherent whole, not divided into books. René Nünlist, who drew attention to this witness, argues convincingly that the scholiast builds on Nicanor, a scholar of the first half of the 2nd century A.D.³ Furthermore, the explicit assertion of these two passages fits well into our general impression of the kind of activities that are known to have taken place at the Museum.

Feelings about the arrangement have varied: to Karl Lachmann the division, and especially the naming of the books according to the letters of the Ionic alphabet, seemed childish; to Victor Bérard it was even a vivisection of the living organism of Homeric poetry, while

1. In 1999 I was criticised for using the term 'songs' (M.L. & S. West 1999, 68). My choice of term was not an attempt at manipulating the reader, but simply bad English; in Denmark, under influence from Germany, readers of the two epics are accustomed to referring to these subsections as *sange*. After all, as a translation of Greek *rhapsoidia*, 'song' is closer to the source expression than 'book'.

2. Ps.-Plu. *Vita Hom.* 2.4. West 2003b, 416.

3. Nünlist 2006.

most scholars have agreed with Giorgio Pasquali that the system is arbitrary, but helpful.⁴ The opposite view, that the division into books is an integral part of the two poems, has also had its adherents. Especially, Cedric Whitman argued that the poet of the *Iliad* had arranged his poem in a system of concentric circles with Book ix as its centre, and in this system the books worked as independent entities.⁵ In general, however, the secondary character of the division into books seemed corroborated by some of the oldest papyrus fragments of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, until Stephanie West in 1967 raised questions about the way in which these fragments were interpreted.

This did not lead to a change in the actual practice for how editions of the poems or parts of them were organised, for, remarkably enough, the great majority of textbooks containing the two epics had maintained the division even though it was thought to have been superimposed upon the text long after its origin, leaving well-informed readers with a vague sense of guilt for continuing to think of the epics in terms of these books.⁶ In his new edition of the *Iliad*, however, Martin West no longer marks the transitions from one book to the next typographically, while for practical reasons he retains the traditional system of verse-counting.⁷ It is my guess that many readers will miss the division, which in practice has a similar effect as chapters in a modern book.

The facts of the matter have been summarised by Stephanie West and Nicholas Richardson.⁸ The oldest references to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in other authors use episode titles, not book num-

4. Lachmann (1847) 1865, 93: "die kindische eintheilung beider werke nach den buchstaben des alphabets"; Bérard (1924) 1933, xvi: "cette vivisection des drames homériques"; Pasquali (1934) 1951, 218: "la divisione, arbitraria ma comoda".

5. Whitman 1958

6. Until M.L. West's new *Iliad*, the great exception was Bérard's edition of the *Odyssey* for the Collection Budé; the Budé *Iliad*, on the other hand, contains unusually direct praise of the beauty of the book division, Mazon 1943, 138. – Mark Edwards, who does not consider the book division original, nevertheless describes it as almost indispensable in actual practice, Edwards 2002, 38-9.

7. M.L. West 1998-2000.

8. S. West 1967, 18-25; 1988, 39-40; N.J. Richardson 1993, 20-21.

bers, to refer to specific passages,⁹ and in two cases the titles used are not in agreement with those used in medieval manuscripts of the two poems: when Herodotus mentions *Diomedous aristeia* (Diomedes' prowess), he is referring to *Iliad* vi.289-92, not book v, and Aristotle says of *Odyssey* 8.521ff. that it is part of *Alkinoou apologos* (the tale to Alcinous) which for us begins with Book 9. The first reference to a passage by book number is in the title of a commentary on *Iliad* xiv (the letter *xi*) by the grammarian Apollodorus of Athens (2nd century B.C.) – To Richardson's list some scholars add the inscription from an Athenian vase (c. 540 B.C.) decorated with a horse race, saying: *Patroklous athla* (games for Patroclus).¹⁰

Two Ptolemaic papyri of the *Odyssey* suggest that the division into books was respected: Pap. 31 (*Od.* 9.211-10.96) has a verse count saying '400' at verse 396 of the vulgate; this seems to indicate that the count actually began with verse 1 of that book. Pap. 146 (*Od.* 21.1-22.1) has Book 21 begin at the top of a column, presumably the beginning of the roll. In general, few early literary papyri contain fragments showing the end of one work and the beginning of another, but such as there are show that shifts were not very clearly indicated. From the 1st century B.C. onwards an ending was marked by a *coronis*, a small flourish, and during the 1st century A.D. the practice was introduced of marking with both *coronis* and title, with the rest of the column left empty. So the counting of the books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by letters of the Ionic alphabet would hardly have appeared in the texts, but on the *sillyboi*, the tags added to the stick around which the papyrus was wound. Nowhere is there any trace of other forms of division.

West and Richardson agree that the division cannot be original, and that the use of the twenty-four letters of the Ionic alphabet is odd; West, however, refers to the works of Theophrastus as an only parallel. Richardson concludes that the division must have been made in Alexandria.¹¹ But West finds this improbable, because the

9. Hdt. 2.116, Thuk. 1.9.4 and 1.10.4, Plato *Crat.* 428C, *Ion* 539B, *Rep.* 614B, Arist. *Poet.* 1454b30, 1455a2, *Rhet.* 1417a13.

10. Shapiro 1989, 44 (the Sophilus sherd).

11. Calame 1999, 43-4 underlines that a division into books of the two epics fits well into the general picture of scholarly activities at Alexandria.

scholars there would have proceeded more rationally and, in particular, produced books that were more equal in length. Furthermore, Aristarchus, who considered *Od.* 23.296 to be the end of the *Odyssey*, would at least have let the book end there, to which Richardson's reply is that that would have made Book 23 unacceptably short. For West, instead, the logical conclusion is that the system must be older than the Alexandrians and venerable enough for them to have respected it, and she thinks that it might in some way go back to rhapsodic practice.

Recently Francesca Schironi published a collection of all known papyrus fragments that contain ends of hexameter books, 55 items in all, of which 51 are books of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. They span the period c. 250 B.C. – 550 A.D. Her study confirms West's analysis of the earliest examples: "The common claim that Ptolemaic papyri did not mark the transition from one book to the other is false."¹²

Thus the external evidence for dismissing the division into books as unoriginal is weak.¹³ If the episode names do not always match the distribution of the same or similar names in the manuscripts, the reason may be that the author's memory failed him, or that the text referred to is not the same as the one we have. At least we cannot conclude from the use of episode titles that the counting by letters had not yet been introduced, since then it would still not have been introduced at the time of Lucian, who also refers to episodes by titles.¹⁴ And the famous passage in Pseudo-Plutarch may be the author's own invention.

Scholarly opinions

Parry mentioned the question of the division into books in various passages of his work, but he left no fully considered discussion of the problem. It seems that towards the end of his life he was prepar-

12. Schironi 2010, quote 36. Her study contains clear pictures of all the papyri concerned.

13. Heiden 2008, 61-5 considers the "evidence" unreliable altogether.

14. E.g. Lucianus *Salt.* 13: "*Homeros ... en tei aspidi*", referring to *Il.* xviii.593 and 605-6. Heiden 1998, 80-81, similarly points to Ps.-Longinus using titles, not book and verse, when referring to passages from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*.

ing a study of how his experience of the singer's rest in South Slavic tradition influenced his ideas regarding the two epics. He writes that originally he was looking for what might have been the poet's own breaks in the transmitted poems, until he realised that this problem did not make sense: an oral poem has no fixed length and can have none, because the singer is dependent on the circumstances of the performance. He must prepare his books in such a way that he is always able to break off at short notice if the necessity comes up, and the poems we have are composed so as to be open for incisions in many places. In the few passages where Parry mentions the writing of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, he imagines a process of dictation similar to those in which he and his assistants were involved. He describes his experiences with dictation, situations that were afterwards more fully described by Lord.¹⁵

Sadly we cannot know how Parry would have developed his views on this question; but my guess is that he somehow imagined that the poems we have were meant for performance. As I have argued, I think that they are, instead, the result of performance, and that therefore it makes excellent sense to look for places where the singer made his breaks.

Later on Notopoulos followed Parry's lead with a thorough investigation of epic singing in Crete. He registered various singers in various performances and measured their tempo in singing; the 'politic' verse of Byzantine and modern Greek epic is not unlike Homeric hexameters in length, and he felt able to draw some very direct comparisons between his modern material and the two epics. He concluded that each book of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would make a feasible performance, roughly comparable to what in his fieldwork he found that singers and audiences could manage without a break.¹⁶

The question was taken up again in connection with the great twentieth century commentaries on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, prepared by two teams of scholars. A commentary on the *Odyssey* by Alfred Heubeck, Stephanie West, J. B. Hainsworth, Arie Hoekstra,

15. Parry (1928-35) 1971, xxxix, 420, 450-51, 454-62; Lord (1960) 2000, 124-28, 148-54.

16. Notopoulos 1964; cf. Mazon 1943, 138.

Joseph Russo and Manuel Fernández Galiano, first published in Italian in 1981-1986, was revised for English publication in 1988; while a commentary on the *Iliad* by G.S. Kirk (ed.), J.B. Hainsworth, Richard Janko, Mark W. Edwards and Nicholas Richardson appeared in 1985-1993. In his introduction to the latter Kirk declares that the division “is probably itself, to some extent at least, a product of post-Homeric activity”, and, a little later, that it “may nevertheless sometimes reflect more ancient points of pause or transition”, while anyway the break in the middle of the *Iliad* “has strong organic authority”, but despite this “the most natural division ... might be into three ‘movements’”.¹⁷ If this seems somewhat confusing, the reason is easily found: it is the dictum of an editor whose team actually disagrees on the matter. Hainsworth seems to accept the division into books; Janko argues for a six times four system, which implies a certain unity in the individual books, although he thinks that the division was invented by Aristarchus and certainly later than Apollonius Rhodius; Edwards considers the division secondary, imposed upon the text by means of interpolated passages to mark the shifts, and Richardson is convinced that the division is Alexandrian, but nevertheless declares that three of the books he is commenting on constitute harmonious unities.¹⁸

The *Odyssey* commentary was also written by scholars with different attitudes to the question of the books.¹⁹ West considers the division pre-Alexandrian, possibly introduced when the archetype of our manuscripts was established in 6th century Athens and perhaps based on rhapsodic practice. In her view the division works reasonably well for the *Iliad*, but seems to have been imposed upon the *Odyssey* in order to make it similar to the *Iliad*. Hainsworth argues for the fundamental integrity of ‘his’ books, although he considers it improbable that the division into books is original; Heubeck and

17. Kirk 1985, 44-47, quotes 45.

18. Edwards 1991, 235, 287 and 345; Janko 1992, 22, 31, 39, 149, 225-6 and 311; Hainsworth 1993, 57, 150, 155, 210, 212, 311, 313 and 366; N.J. Richardson 1993, 20-21, 105, 164 and 272.

19. Heubeck et al. 1992, 313.

Russo seem to accept the books as the poet's work, while Hoekstra declares as his conviction that the division is Alexandrian, and Fernández Galiano (who is less unitarian than the team in general) is nevertheless relatively satisfied with the internal unity of Books 21 and 22.²⁰

In fact, few incisions are felt by the commentators to give serious offence. Edwards criticises the break between *Iliad* xviii and xix for cutting right through a type-scene. However, he himself offers a subtle explanation for this: before the final battle between Achilles and Memnon, as described in the lost *Aethiopsis*, Eos brought divine armour to her son, and it is therefore reasonable to imagine that at this point in the *Iliad* Thetis is acting in a role so similar to that of Eos that she becomes identified with the goddess of dawn and is thus a natural choice for the beginning of a new book. Regarding the incision between *Iliad* xx and xxi, Edwards comments that it interrupts a passage which we recognise from xi.169-70, where it runs on unbroken. West finds that the particle *men* at the end of *Odyssey* 2 suggests that 2 and 3 ought to be one unit, and *Odyssey* 6, 7, 20, and 21 are so short that they might well have been united to form two longer books. As regards *Odyssey* 12-13, both Kirk and Hoekstra find that the division is awkward and should instead have been placed after 13.92.²¹ And then, of course, *Odyssey* 23.296 is discussed because of the scholium saying that Aristophanes and Aristarchus considered this to be the end of the poem; West emphasises that if the division had originated with the Alexandrians, 23.297ff. and Book 24 would have been united in one book.²² In actual practice both the great *Iliad* and *Odyssey* commentaries retain the traditional division; the task was distributed among the contributors in groups of four books for each, and the varying opinions do not seem to have hampered the work as it proceeded.

20. S. West 1988, 39-40; Hainsworth 1988, 250-51, 290, 315 and 344; Heubeck 1989, 11 and 77; Hoekstra 1989, 147; Russo 1992, 17, 46, 74 and 107; Fernández-Galiano 1992, 131, 207 and 210; Heubeck 1992, 353, 355 and 418.

21. Heiden 2000a, 256-8 points out that *Odyssey* 13.93 ff. would have been awkward as the introduction of a new segment of the poem.

22. Edwards 1991, 235 and 345, cf. Edwards 1994, 450-51; S. West 1988, 40 and 157; Kirk 1985, 45; Hoekstra 1989, 147. The sense of the words *peras* and *telos* is disputed.

While these two commentaries may be seen as representatives of classical Oralism and Unitarianism respectively²³ – ‘classical’ in the sense of old, authoritative, and vital enough to accept recurrent re-definition – classical Analysis may be represented by Helmut van Thiel, who during the same period composed his interpretations of the two epics, built up as commentaries. He distinguishes between an early and a late version of the poems, finding the early form to be much the better. The division into books was made by the redactor who was responsible for the late versions, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as we have them today, and its secondary character is apparent, among other things, in many brief interpolations where the incisions are placed. At the ends of books these passages are normally appositely connected with what precedes them, whereas they often contradict what follows, a fact that van Thiel calls a blinker effect. In his *Iliad* commentary he begins with Books xii-xv, but apart from that he proceeds in accord with the traditional order of the transmitted texts.²⁴

With *Homeric Soundings* (1992) Oliver Taplin attacked the transmitted system and argued instead for an “*Iliad* in three movements” on the basis of narrative time, in which the central day of fighting (xi.1-xviii.353) with its massive structural unity constitutes the middle part. In terms of performance time he stresses that the result is two almost equal parts and a third somewhat shorter part. However, he divides the *Odyssey* into two halves at 13.92. This leads him to label both the great English commentaries as “misguided and misleading”. On the other hand, in his concise discussion of all the dividing points, few come out as really offensive, and he admits that “on the whole the book-divisions are well placed”.²⁵ He was in turn criticised by Edwards for not paying attention to an element which to Edwards seems important: that the books of the *Iliad* are regularly

23. Heubeck calls the *Odyssey* commentary “Unitarian”, Heubeck 1992, 313. – I admit that this categorisation is somewhat rough, as pointed out by Rossi 2001, 104-5; but it is hard to do without it in a brief survey.

24. van Thiel 1982, 26-9, 142 and 529; 1988, 65, 75, 92, 96-7, 144, 196 and 244; *Scheuklappeneffekt* 1988, 96.

25. Taplin 1992, 11-22 and 285-93; quotes 11 and 286. Cf. Olson 1995, 228-39; Nagy 1999c, 64 for a similar opinion.

introduced by a summary, beginning with *hos*, or are preceded by books which end with a similar summary.²⁶

Taplin's attack was immediately after followed by an elaborate and learned defence of the division into books, Keith Stanley's *The Shield of Homer*. Stanley, too, advocates a tripartite structure of the *Iliad*, but explicitly takes the transmitted twenty-four books as the narrative units from which the greater structure is built: i-vii, viii-xvii and xviii-xxiv. He demonstrates all kinds of subtle cross-references in the three parts as well as within single books and between books, and he carefully considers the transitions between books. He concludes that there are four major types of transition: a summary involving a *hos* statement, a shift from a general scene to a 'close-up', temporal discontinuity and change of scene, and finally, where divisions bisect a continuous narrative, an introduction marking the new beginning.²⁷ However, for all its learning the analysis may provoke doubts in its reader as to whether poet and contemporary audience would have had a chance to observe all the delicate internal references. In antiquity both audiences and readers mainly used their ears when enjoying literature, since those who had books also had slaves to read aloud from the books. Stanley's hypothesis might seem to presuppose not just a written text to be read with the eyes, but one presented on pages of clearly printed typography that would permit the reader to experience the patterns.

In 1996 Irene J.F. de Jong published an analysis of the Homeric 'para-text' (with a reference to Genette) and pointed out how the very first words of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* function as titles, and that similar 'titles' introduce the songs performed by Phemius and Demodocus. The proems take the place of prefaces, and events to come are outlined in speeches that function as tables of content. In this system the books take the place of chapters, with sunsets and sunrises as the most evident punctuating devices. de Jong considers the book division secondary and attributes it to the Alexandrian scholar Zenodotus; she argues that Apollonius Rhodius alludes to

26. Edwards 1994, 451.

27. Stanley 1993, especially 249-68.

it in his epic, and takes the *Argonautica* as her *terminus ante quem* for the system (contrary to Janko, as we have seen). Bruce Heiden, however, stresses that the Alexandrian critics, who so often disagreed, seem to have been unanimous as regards the placing of the divisions between books, and takes this as an argument that it already had strong manuscript authority before their studies.²⁸

The features de Jong points out actually confirm the hypothesis that the written form in which we have the two epics closely represents their oral original. Narrator and narratee of a long text, whether written or oral, need such markers. Oral performers have the possibility of introducing their texts to their audiences in spoken prose, and such introductions are normally not included in a written version; but to make the ‘titles’ part of the performed text adds to their authority. Written books can instead proceed in the way we have become used to, and the very first example of such a procedure might be the naming by letters of the books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. An attractive detail is de Jong’s observation of the ‘titles’ of the books performed by Demodocus and Phemius, since they are so obviously similar to the episode titles that are part of the transmitted Homeric para-text, and some of which are used when other ancient authors refer to the two epics.

In 1999 the paper that forms the basis of the present book was published in *Symbolae Osloenses* together with an impressive amount of comments from learned colleagues, followed up in the next couple of years by still three further reactions.²⁹

As part of a broader study of narrative rhythm in ancient Greek and Latin poetry, Edwards devoted a chapter to “scenes and summaries” in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Here he draws attention to the similarity between the book divisions and other breaks in the poems and argues that rather than establishing incisions they serve to link the scenes together. He argues that the two poems are continuous narratives and should preferably be printed without any visible markers of division.³⁰ To me, this interpretation is especially inter-

28. Heiden 2000a, 249.

29. Jensen et al. 1999; Berg & Haug 2000; Janko 2000; Rossi 2001.

30. Edwards 2002, 38-61; referred to already in Edwards 1999, 52.

esting when linked with Parry's views (as summarised above): among the tricks of their trade Homeric rhapsodes had ways of rounding off a narration if outward circumstances demanded a break, just as they were able to begin a narration in a suitable way at any point in the story; in the unusual situation in which the two bards found themselves while slowly and patiently dictating their long poems, they returned as much as possible to their normal methods of structuring the stories, among them ways of introducing breaks.

In 2009, Douglas Frame published a mammoth study of the character Nestor in myth and history, and here he dedicated a chapter to the composition in performance of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Frame sees a link between the *Dodekapolis*, the league of the twelve most important Ionian cities in Asia Minor established in the 8th century B.C., and the fact that the two epics consist of a number of books which is a multiple of twelve. He imagines that the poems were developed gradually by rhapsodes meeting at recurring festivals, Panionia, and that when the league had reached its final number of twelve cities each of these was regularly presented in a collaborating team of rhapsodes. The forty-eight books were performed four at each sitting, perhaps by four different rhapsodes.³¹ Of special interest in the present connection is Frame's argumentation that the books are an integral element of the two epics.

In the meantime Heiden continued his studies of both the division into books and the overall structure of the two epics in a series of papers leading up to an ambitious monograph dedicated to the *Iliad*. Here he argues for a narrative system in which the twenty-four books constitute three parts, Books i-viii, ix-xv, and xvi-xxiv, distinguished and linked together by a subtle network of references in action and themes. This might seem close to Stanley's work, but where Stanley's focus is on the poet, Heiden is more concerned with showing how the system he describes helps to guide the reader through the poem.³²

Heiden's point of departure is the fact that the poem has one undisputed beginning and end, Books i and xxiv respectively, and

31. Frame 2009, 551-620.

32. Heiden 1996; 1998; 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2008.

that these are characterised by a dramatic assertion of Achilles' will and a counter-assertion of Zeus' will. Whereas Achilles' decision in Book i to withdraw from the fighting is of high consequence for the plot, Zeus' decision in Book xxiv to have Hector's body given back to the Trojans for burial is of little consequence for any further development. Similarly, he asserts, the intermissions between books occur at junctions of low-consequence scenes at the end of books and high-consequence scenes at the beginning of the following scenes. Furthermore, each book has an internal unity of plot that follows a general pattern: the book opens with a problem that leads to a decision, followed by action and ending with an aftermath. He concludes that the division into books is "neither more intrusive nor more speculative than the well-accepted practices of inscribing each hexameter verse on a separate line".³³

In Heiden's view the intermissions between the books of the *Odyssey* are less important because the plot of that poem is simpler; they might even have been omitted without making it less comprehensible. The plot of this poem proceeds by stages. Endings are typically low-consequence scenes that arouse anticipation of what is to come, while beginnings invariably initiate a new stage.³⁴

Heiden identifies six cases of transition from one book to the next in the two epics in which the narrative would become very awkward without the feeling of a pause conveyed by the transition, *Iliad* iii-iv, vii-viii, x-xi and *Odyssey* 4-5, 17-18 and 23-24. For instance, without the shift from one book to the next, the dawn in *Iliad* viii.1 would follow immediately after the statement that the warriors fell asleep in *Iliad* vii.482. Such a procedure would be unparalleled in the poem, and Heiden refers to *Iliad* i.475-8 as an example of how such a passage from evening to morning is narrated when it occurs as a part of the continuous narrative. Interestingly, in his edition of the *Iliad* Martin West suggests that there might be textual problems at this point and suggests a transposition of verses in order to repair the passage. As for the other Iliadic transitions discussed by Hei-

33. Heiden 2008, 15-17, 56-65; quote 17.

34. Heiden 2000a.

den, x-xi is unproblematic for West since he considers Book x to be an interpolation anyway, while he leaves the passage *Iliad* iii.461-iv.1 uncommented.³⁵

The singer's breaks

Let us consider some reports of how oral epic singers actually divide their performance into sections.

There are a few cases in which one of Parry and Lord's singers is reported to have made a short repetition after a break. In general, however, *SCHS* is not very helpful in this respect. As a rule breaks are not indicated, and in some cases it is explicitly stated that it was Parry, not the singer, who decided when to take a break.³⁶ But Foley describes how Ibro Basic's practise was to do so whenever he felt like it and then revert after the pause to a suitable incision in the story, present a brief proem, and begin anew from there.³⁷

Slyomovics' edition of 'Awadallah's *Story of Amir* keeps closely to the tapes of the registration, both in the sense that the transcript follows the singer's oral text with a minimum of standardisation,³⁸ and that it is supplemented by information about the activities of the various other persons present, such as when a brief interruption is caused by Slyomovics' turning the tape over. Reactions from the audience are included, as well as the singer's responses to them, and pauses in the performance are mentioned.

At a certain point the host came in bringing refreshments; the audience protested at this, but the break was accepted by the singer. 'Awadallah had just finished a conversation between the hero's main enemy and his sister and had moved a couple of verses into a description of their army setting out. As a reaction to the host's interruption the singer abruptly inserted a prayer to Mohammed, and a long break followed (553-4). After the meal 'Awadallah reopened

35. Murray 2008 wants to understand the *Odyssey* as a sequence of 39 'cantos', without reference to Stanley, Heiden, or me.

36. Repetition after a break: *SCHS* 1, 409; 6, 151. – Parry's interruptions of Mededovic's singing: *SCHS* 6, x-xi.

37. Foley 1990, 284-8

38. Slyomovics 1987, 269-73.

the narrative by briefly recapitulating the conversation and then continuing to the outset of the war. Later, at verse 1,286, Slyomovics had to see to the tape and 'Awadallah made a pause; when continuing the performance he repeated the last verse he had sung.

Of his own accord he made two pauses that structured the performance as a long middle section, introduced and concluded by shorter sections:

Vv. 1-218, 219-1151, and 1,152-1,347.

The first section opens with a prayer to Mohammed (1-9), followed by an introduction in the first person, announcing that the singer will celebrate the Arab Hilali heroes (10-15). The section is rounded off with the heroes having dinner and saying their evening prayer (210-13), shifting in mid-sentence to a first person address: "Forgive me, then, O my brothers ... let me drink and see to my coffee" (214-18). The audience reacts with laughter.

The main section is introduced by a praise of the prophet that to begin with seems to be the singer's words, but elegantly turns out to be sung by the protagonist, Abu Zayd (219-24). The section ends just before the climax of the story, the final battle between Abu Zayd and his Jewish enemy. The hero has just announced to his enemy that he has come to him as an angel of death, when the singer breaks off with four verses declaring his wish to smoke a cigarette (1,148-51), this time without any reaction from the listeners.

The final section begins with a prayer to Allah (1,152-7) and ends with a brief formal conclusion: "Muhammad let us pray to Him. Conclusion of the story of 'Amir" (1346-7).

The edition demonstrates not only that the performance as a whole is a clear and rounded narrative, but also that the singer's insertion of breaks in the performance is elegantly done so as to divide the long poem into three harmoniously structured parts. Each of the three sections has a proper beginning and end. The conclusion of the main part just before the duel brings about a strong tension, the pause working as a chance for both singer and audience to muster all their strength before the final, violent outcome of the song. Even the two breaks caused by others have been provided

with brief closing and beginning effects, extemporaneously composed.

A specially detailed fieldwork example of how a singer handles his breaks is contained in the description of how the *Siri Epic* was registered. As structured by Naika's breaks, the poem falls into 36 segments of unequal lengths, varying from 88 to 795 verses. Honko analyses the way the singer ends a segment and begins the next, finding two main types: either he repeats the last few lines of the preceding segment on beginning a new one, or he simply continues. In both cases he ends and begins with *Naraayina* (an appellation for Vishnu, used as a kind of exclamation: Oh God!). A special problem for the singer was to remember after a break exactly at what point of the story the narrating had been interrupted. Naika sometimes asked Gowda for help, but as a rule he was in full command of the storyline. When in some cases Naika ended a segment with an almost graphic representation of a scene, Honko understands this as a mnemotechnic aid, the scene remaining in the singer's mind with almost visual clarity. Since Naika was not used to performing in this way, he must have developed such techniques on the spot, and the scholar even notices a development of them during the days of performance.³⁹

Honko states that he decided upon writing this chapter in a late phase of the editorial work when the poem had already been analysed and organised as it is in the edition, divided into 5 'sub-epics', which are again subdivided into 56 'cantos' in all. Comparing the two systems, the singer's and the editors', he notes that even though they differ in matters of detail, they are not absolutely at variance with each other. Furthermore, studying the segments brought about by the singer's breaks he finds cohesion of content in them.⁴⁰ That Naika was actually trying to organise his narrative in coherent parts is clear from some of the remarks he made, for instance when he states of a passage he is just going to perform: "It is like becoming one chapter".⁴¹

39. Honko 1998a, 278, 316-18.

40. Honko 1998a, 318-19.

41. Honko 1998a, 284.

However, Naika's breaks differ in length from three minutes to a whole night and can hardly all have been felt to be equally significant. A couple of details confirm this assumption: first, even though Naika had said that Siri would not accept any interruption in the representation of her pregnancy (vv. 2,448-3,110), he made a pause of fourteen minutes after v. 3,015, and Honko finds an irony in this breaking of a taboo;⁴² similarly, Honko wonders at a strange intersection between segments 24 and 25 that falls in the middle of a speech. At this point the singer was exhausted, drank water, coughed, and only continued singing after a break of twenty-five minutes.⁴³ I think that these awkward breaks might reveal that a relatively short pause was not felt by the singer to interrupt the narrative.

The most important factor for the overall structure of the performance must have been the intermissions at noon and in the evening. The length of the sessions was dependent on the temperature for singer and audience and daylight for the video recorder, and morning sessions were always longer than those in the afternoon. To a singer accustomed to regulating his performance according to circumstances, this must have offered a rhythm that was reasonably simple to operate.

Figure 1 shows how Naika distributed his narrating over the eleven sessions. His capacity for performing long passages in each session is remarkable, and at a certain point it became necessary to make a break of some days because his voice had become strained. His singing tempo varied; it seems that he speeded up the further he got into his performance; the two 'beginnings', on December 21 and 27, are below average.

If we look at how Naika arranged his long narrative, we find that it actually falls into harmoniously rounded narrative elements to which titles may be easily attached, as shown in Figure 2. Only in one case, no. 6, did I feel uncertain about how to characterise the content. In a written novel, such narrative elements would be called chapters.

42. Honko 1998a, 290.

43. Honko 1998a, 305-6.

Figure 1: -Survey of the sessions of Naika's performance of the *Siri Epic*

Session	Date	Time of day	Verses	Duration hours/ minutes	Number of verses sung	Verses per minute
1	Dec. 21.	morning	1-1350	2/16	1350 vv.	9.9 vv.
2		afternoon	1351-2447	1/53	1097	9.7
3	Dec. 22.	morning	2448-4783	3/41	2336	10.6
4	Dec. 23.	morning	4784-6657	2/59	1874	10.5
5		afternoon	6658-7511	1/17	854	11.1
6	Dec. 24.	morning	7512-9356	2/59	1845	10.3
7		afternoon	9357-10623	1/52	1267	11.3
8	Dec. 27.	morning	10624-11994	3/07	1371	7.3
9		afternoon	11995-12979	1/40	985	9.9
10	Dec. 28.	morning	12980-14674	2/46	1695	10.2
11		afternoon	14675-15683	1/39	1009	10.2

Net singing time: 26 hours, 9 minutes.

Figure 2: Naika's performance of the *Siri Epic* divided into chapters

1	The prehistory
2	Siri's birth, youth, and wedding
3	Siri's wedded life and divorce; the birth of her son Kumara
4	Siri's period of wandering
5	Siri's second wedding
6	Siri's last years; the birth of her daughter Sonne
7	Sonne's childhood and wedding
8	Sonne's wedded life
9	Sonne's two daughters, Abbaya and Daaraya
10	Abbaya and Daaraya's weddings
11	Institution of the cult

The books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

With the attention to the concept of performance raised by the oral-formulaic theory the division into books became the object of renewed interest since the two long poems called for some kind of subdivision when scholars tried to imagine how they might have been performed. Since the ancient term for the Homeric book was *rhapsoidia* (rhapsodic performance) it is generally thought that the division into books somehow mirrors performance practice. Each book is thought of as a performance as in Notopoulos' study, or books are grouped into larger units so as to make for performance of the two poems over some days. The tendency is to imagine that the *Iliad* was performed over three days (or nights), the *Odyssey* in two.⁴⁴

What scholars imagine is that the text was written to be memorised for performance, perhaps for the Panathenaic festival, perhaps for the patron to be able to control the text. But this raises considerable problems, as shown in Chapter 5 above. Instead, if, as I have argued, the original of the written transmission is a text taken down from dictation, singer and scribe must have divided up their work into suitable portions, just as Naika and Honko did when the *Siri Epic* was recorded. My hypothesis, then, is that the division into books mirrors the special performance that took place when the poems were dictated, and that each book is the part of the poem dictated and written in one day.⁴⁵ That the singers evidently expanded their mental texts considerably may have been caused by the patron's wish to have as long and impressive texts as possible, and perhaps the rhapsodes were paid per day.⁴⁶ That such extensive

44. Pasquali (1934) 1951, 202; Mazon 1943, 138; Wade-Gery 1952, 13-16; Kirk 1962; Notopoulos 1964; S. West 1967, 20; Marzullo (1952) 1970, 408; Goold 1977; Thornton 1984, 46-63; Kirk 1985, 45; S. West 1988, 40; Janko 1992, 31; Taplin 1992, 12-22; Stanley 1993; Willcock 1995; Davies 1995; Foley 1995; Nannini 1995, 19; Heiden 1996; Aloini 1997; Ford 1997.

45. Briefly sketched in Jensen 1980, 87-9.

46. Cf. Phillips 1981, 22: the scholar suspected that his singer gave him an extra long version because he was paid per hour. W.A. Collins 1998, 11 has a similar suspicion of his bard. (West and south Sumatra respectively.)

expansions of a mental text would really be possible in twenty-four days, has been argued in the preceding pages.

The above hypothesis would solve the problem of the different lengths of the books, since the day's task would among other things depend on the inspiration singer and scribe felt – on some days they were more in the mood than on others.⁴⁷ (Jazz music is often referred to as a modern example of an art form in which improvisation is an important element, with one and the same band giving performances of varying length and intensity depending on the feel of the situation.) As a matter of fact, the long books are also those that give the reader the most immediate sense of a spontaneous joy in narrating, so clearly to be felt in, for instance, the long *Iliad* v. The hypothesis also solves the problem that even though the term *rhapsodia* seems to refer to rhapsodic practice, the incisions now and then cut up episodes that it would be sensible to perform as coherent wholes.⁴⁸

On the other hand, I agree with van Thiel that in the second half of the *Odyssey* there are passages that give the impression that the poet/singer was running out of material, and here, then, the problem manifests itself in short books.⁴⁹ Perhaps the rhapsode had planned the *apologoi* to fill the middle of the continued performance and was disappointed when the scribe informed him that they were only half way through? Anyway, when the end had come so close that the singer could survey the number of books he still had to dictate in order to fulfil his contract, he was back in form again, and from Book 19 onwards the action moves ahead clearly and energetically with each book bringing its specific contribution to the storyline.

That there are precisely twenty-four books is certainly odd, as has been emphasised by many scholars. I see no other explanation than that this must have been connected with the alphabet right from the beginning and have been the scribe's idea. The alphabet was a kind of sign for his profession, and to demand a book for each

47. Sadly, Clay 1999, 51 was not convinced.

48. M. & S. West 1999, 69 underline this problem.

49. van Thiel 1988, 235.

letter, although I know of no exact parallel, is not unrelated in kind to composing psalms with each stanza beginning with a letter of the alphabet, as they are found in the Old Testament, or to have the alphabet decorating one's cup or one's writing tablet.⁵⁰ Haslam's idea that the twenty-four letters convey the notion of fullness, similar to when Jesus calls himself the *alpha* and the *omega*, is attractive and not contrary to the idea of the letters as an effect of professional pride.⁵¹ Since the letters are those of the Ionic alphabet, that must have been what the scribe used. This is not incompatible with the idea that the writing took place in Athens. In the 6th century Ionia seems to have been the foremost in mastering the art of writing, and the Pisistratids presumably spent the money necessary to have the most competent scribes available in their household. This part of the hypothesis is confirmed by a study of vase inscriptions carried out by Henry Immerwahr, who concludes that "the pressures leading to Ionian influence [on the Attic alphabet] in the late sixth century clearly came from the Ionians brought to Athens by the Peisistratids".⁵² So probably the text was written in Ionic letters right from the start, and there was no transliteration from old Attic.

I imagine that dictation started in the mornings and finished in the evenings, with suitable breaks. It would have been natural for the singer to let the day's narrative portion do likewise, as the *Odyssey* singer regularly does. In these cases narrating time coincided with narrative time, and both singer and scribe must have felt that to be harmonious. Similarly Collins, who recorded the *Epic of Radin Suane* in the course of two night sessions, thinks that "formulas that describe dawn ... probably get some of their effectiveness from the fact that the night-long performance is moving inexorably towards a dawn conclusion".⁵³

The amount of text composed per day must have been decided mainly by the scribe's capacity. How far the story was brought per day must have depended on such varied factors as are also at work

50. Bundgaard 1965.

51. Haslam 1997, 58.

52. Immerwahr 1990, 181.

53. W.A. Collins 1998, 29.

in normal performance. The singer had his mental text that he was used to performing to various audiences whenever occasions arose. When for some reason a break was called for – because he needed a pause, because his audience was growing tired and inattentive, or because some external factor made it necessary – he followed his normal ways of bringing the story to an intermediate ending. In some respects, though, the unusual dictation performance may have influenced his general routine in this matter. He was certain that his main audience, the scribe, would be there next morning and did not have to use special means to convince him to return for the next session. If his normal practice included continued performance, for instance over two or three nights, he may have usually exhorted his listeners to come back just as Børdahl's Chinese storytellers regularly do. Each session in a Yangzhou tea-house not only ends with such an exhortation, it also very often ends at a point of suspense. Similarly, in his normal continued performances our rhapsode would probably have been intent on ensuring that interruptions in the session were made at a point of high tension, a practice that would not be called for during the dictation process. Furthermore, a normal performance, whether full or partial, would not begin with the phrase: "Thus he spoke", as do *Iliad* vii and *Odyssey* 13. At a dictation session, on the contrary, it is easy enough to imagine that singer and scribe began the morning's job with a brief dialogue about how far they had got the day before, and if that session had ended with direct speech, the new one would naturally begin as passages summing up direct speech normally do.

Overnight the singer would have prepared the next day's performance, but the actual process cannot always have developed exactly as he expected – a fact reflected in van Thiel's "blinker effect". Sometimes new incisions would have been introduced. For instance, *Odyssey* 13.88-92 of course looks very much like an epilogue to mark the end of the hero's wanderings. I imagine that that was where the singer usually made his break when performing his tale of Odysseus' return. Similarly, the tripartite structure of the *Iliad* may be the trace of a much shorter normal performance with two breaks.⁵⁴ In

54. Compare Lord's famous experience with the singer who made his break at the

this as in all other matters the rhapsode would have kept as closely to his mental texts as possible and only improvised when he had to, for example in connection with his new incisions; in some cases this led to “*grausames Griechisch*”.⁵⁵

Transitions between books

Whereas Stanley recognises various markers that indicate the beginning of a new book in the *Iliad*, such as for instance a *hos*-statement, Heiden concentrates exclusively on the junctions of low- and high-consequence scenes in his argumentation for the book divisions and considers other kinds of argumentation unmethodical. Heiden is, of course, justified in emphasising that his approach is both more sophisticated and more methodical than such observations of surface techniques as the ones that follow here. The system he describes has, however, been unnoticed for two and a half millennia, a fact that may raise doubt as to whether it was actually such a great help for listeners and readers as he asserts. In contrast, techniques such as having books begin at dawn and end at sunset have often been noticed by readers. None of the markers I mention is used exclusively in connection with transitions between books, but together they form an observable technique used in passing from one book to the next, as will be shown in the following.

There are 46 such transitions in all, and to facilitate an overview I have arranged them in a table, counting the various techniques used.⁵⁶

same point of the story where he had made it 17 years earlier: *SCHS* 1, 1954, 410 (cf. Chapter 4 above).

55. van Thiel 1988, 65.

56. The categorisation of the techniques is not exactly the same as Edwards's and Stanley's, but may be considered a further development and expansion of their observations. The table has been revised as compared to Jensen 1999, mainly because of de Jong's criticism (de Jong 1999, 58-61). On some points, however, I have retained my first interpretations.

Figure 3: Survey of transitions between books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

A	arrival	N	night falling, sunset	S	summary, survey
B	going to bed	N ₁ /N ₂	narrator ₁ /narrator ₂	W	somebody is awake
D	dawn	P	change of place		
E	special effect	R	rounding off		

Ends of books						Beginnings of books							
i	N ₁	R		N	B	ii	N ₁		S	W			
ii	N ₁					E	iii	N ₁		S			
iii	N ₁	R	S			iv	N ₁	P					
iv	N ₁		S			v	N ₁						
v	N ₁	R	S			vi	N ₁		S				
vi	N ₂	R				vii	N ₁	P	S			A	
vii	N ₁	R	S	N	B	viii	N ₁	P			D		
viii	N ₁	R	S	N	B	ix	N ₁	P	S				
ix	N ₁	R			B	x	N ₁		S	W			
x	N ₁	R				xi	N ₁				D	A	
xi	N ₁	R				xii	N ₁	P	S				
xii	N ₁					E	xiii	N ₁	P	S			
xiii	N ₁		S			xiv	N ₁	P					
xiv	N ₁					E	xv	N ₁	P	S			
xv	N ₁		S			xvi	N ₁	P	S			A	
xvi	N ₁	R				xvii	N ₁		S				
xvii	N ₁		S			xviii	N ₁	P	S			A	
xviii	N ₁	R				xix	N ₁	P			D	A	
xix	N ₁					E	xx	N ₁	P	S			
xx	N ₁		S			xxi	N ₁	P	S				
xxi	N ₁	R	S			xxii	N ₁		S				
xxii	N ₁	R	S			xxiii	N ₁	P	S				
xxiii	N ₁	R				xxiv	N ₁		S	W			
	22/1	14	11	3	4	4		23	14	17	3	3	5

1	N ₁	R	S	N	B	2	N ₁				D	A
2	N ₁	R	S	N		3	N ₁	P			D	A

Ends of books							Beginnings of books						
3	N ₁	R		N			4	N ₁	P			A	
4	N ₁	R		N			5	N ₁	P		D	A	
5	N ₁	R		N	B		6	N ₁	P	S	D	A	
6	N ₁	R	S	N			7	N ₁	P	S		A	
7	N ₁	R	S		B		8	N ₁			D	A	
8	N ₂						9	N ₁					
9	N ₂	R	S				10	N ₂	P			A	
10	N ₂	R					11	N ₂	P			A	
11	N ₂	R					12	N ₂	P		D	A	
12	N ₂	R					13	N ₁		S			
13	N ₁	R	S				14	N ₁	P			A	
14	N ₁	R	S		B		15	N ₁	P		W	D	A
15	N ₁	R	S				16	N ₁	P		D	A	
16	N ₁	R	S	N	B		17	N ₁			D	A	
17	N ₁	R	S				18	N ₁				A	
18	N ₁	R			B		19	N ₁		S			
19	N ₁	R			B		20	N ₁			W		
20	N ₁	R	S				21	N ₁	P			A	
21	N ₁				E		22	N ₁					
22	N ₁	R					23	N ₁	P			A	
23	N ₁	R					24	N ₁	P			A	
	18/5	21	11	7	7	1		20/3	14	4	2	9	18

First of all, we notice that transitions are in the hands of the primary narrator, N₁. Considering how widespread direct speech is in both poems, this fact is in itself remarkable. The important exception is formed by the *apologoi*, *Odyssey* 9-12, and Alcinous' question that ends *Odyssey* 8 and triggers Odysseus' narrative. Except for that only a single book (*Iliad* vi) is ended by a secondary narrator (Hector). I accept de Jong's interpretation, that in this way Hector's words are given maximum weight.⁵⁷

57. de Jong 1999, 59.

Odyssey 9-12 constitutes a special case. Odysseus relates his adventures to Alcinous and his court, and the four books are separated from the rest as an epic within the epic. They are arranged in accordance with what Van Otterlo called *Ritournellkomposition*, in which each new adventure is added to the preceding one with a recurring phrase.⁵⁸ However, this is not the only compositional device characterising the *apologoi*: three of the four books are structured in one and the same way, consisting of three adventures, two briefly told and the third recounted in detail.⁵⁹ Book 11, the descent into Hades, is differently arranged, but stands out as a unity simply by virtue of its extraordinary content.

If we look at the two books that surround 9-12, we find that they are marked by being just that, surroundings: Book 8 ends abruptly with Alcinous' question to his guest, and 13 begins just as abruptly: "Thus he spoke..." This suggests that Odysseus' tale is felt to constitute a single, heavy block, best left as a unity in its own right, and that this feeling of its special unity has outweighed other considerations.

Endings

Books are closed with some kind of rounding off. Those which describe a single course of action (like *Odyssey* 5) bring this to its completion, or else the action of the last part of the book reaches a satisfactory ending, as in *Iliad* i, where the conflict between Zeus and Hera is resolved in laughter, and the divine couple goes to bed. In other books the feeling of completion of a whole is achieved by means of a final episode which is harmoniously rounded off, although the long-term action continues in the next book; such is the end of *Iliad* book xi, where Patroclus takes care of Eurypylos and dresses his wound, so that the last words of the book inform us that the wound dried and the blood was staunched. Book xii then begins with two and a half verses that sum up the situation: thus Patroclus was trying to heal the wounded Eurypylos in his tent, but

58. Gaiser 1969.

59. Cf. Heiden 1996, 15.

Greeks and Trojans were still fighting. Often this rounding off is achieved through N_1 summing up the situation at the end of the book, not unlike what is regularly done whenever somebody has been speaking. This is typical of both poems, but is implemented in different ways:

In the *Iliad*, the summing up at the end of books varies from one verse (v, xxii) to forty verses (xvii). There is also great variation in content. The summaries do not merely repeat what has been related but, rather, present an overview of the way things stand at that point of the story, mostly seen from above and at a distance. Sometimes one or more similes are included (such as in xvii and xx). In one case, xxii.515, the summing up is a normal verse of closing direct speech.

In the *Odyssey*, too, books are often ended with such passages. In this poem, however, they are short, one to five verses, except for one of eleven verses at the end of Book 14. They regularly sum up what has taken place in the preceding narrative; in two cases, at the end of Books 17 and 20, they also contain prophetic views of impending doom for the suitors. There is nothing in this poem to compare with the bird's eye surveys typical of such passages in the *Iliad*.

In both poems books often end with the end of a day, the sun setting and people going to bed.

In five cases books end without any of these devices. *Iliad* ii simply ends when the catalogues are finished; the last verse of the Trojan catalogue is the last verse of the book. Similarly, there is an invocation and a catalogue of Greek warriors who are killing Trojans at the end of xiv. In the remaining cases, a spectacular event ends the book. In *Iliad* xii Hector breaks down the gates of the Achaean wall; in xix Achilles' horse predicts his master's imminent death; and in *Odyssey* 21 the hero succeeds in sending his arrow right through the axe-holes. I have argued elsewhere that catalogues with their compact mass of information must be considered *tours de force* on the part of the singer, and accordingly they can be seen as special effects in their own right.⁶⁰ Thus, precisely because books regularly end so as to give the audience a feeling of intermediate closure, the five exceptions stand out as all the more remarkable.

60. Jensen 1980, 75-7.

In only two cases, both in the *Odyssey*, does a book have a *men* towards its end, corresponding with a particle at the beginning of the following book. They convey a feeling of something unfinished and are rare. At the end of *Odyssey* 2, the night voyage is related to the sun rising at the beginning of Book 3, and when in the last verses of *Odyssey* 13 Athena and Odysseus take leave of one another, the *men* connected with Athena prepares us for the fact that the next book will follow Odysseus. Thus, although these particles are unusual at the end of a book, they make sense in their contexts. On the other hand, considering how often Greek texts are structured by means of the corresponding particles *men-de*, we should certainly have expected more than two cases out of forty-six possibilities if the division into books had not been original.⁶¹

Beginnings

Books often begin with a brief summary, one to eight verses in the *Iliad*, one to two verses in the *Odyssey*. *Iliad* xxi, however, opens with a sixteen verse survey. In the *Iliad* these passages sum up the events of the previous book, or the general situation, or both. In the *Odyssey* there are only four such summaries, at the beginning of Books 6, 7, 13, and 19; they contain no new information and do not exceed two verses but merely give a relatively simple account of the situation. The beginning of *Iliad* xii is ambiguous: either the summary is in two and a half verses and similar to the rest, or else it has fifty-nine verses and contains a summary of coming events reaching well beyond the end of the poem till after the fall of Troy. If we include this as an opening feature of the book, it is the only Iliadic case of foreshadowing at the transition from one book to the next. The *Odyssey* has two such examples, but they come at the end of books. The in-

61. Rossi 2001, 105 questions the meaning of ‘original’ in this context since he maintains that the book division can only have been introduced “when original, genuine epic practice was over”. However, in my 1999 article I explicitly argued against such an opinion and tried to demonstrate that the division had been made by the rhapsodes during the process of composing the two epics in dictation. ‘Original’ therefore meant ‘invented by the poet’ – a normal sense of the adjective in a context of literary history.

vocations at the beginning of the two poems may in this connection be considered to be introductory summaries: They both survey the situation and foreshadow what is to come.

In addition, beginnings of books convey the impression of a new start by means of a change in place, actors, or time. Passing from one book to the next, we regularly encounter a change of place. These shifts are differently handled in the two poems:

In the *Iliad* the changes occur so that one book ends in one place and the next one begins somewhere else, the leap sometimes being rendered less abrupt by a summary of some kind. The change is often from earth to heaven. It does not work the other way round: action in the two poems so often has its roots in some divine decision that Olympus is a natural place to begin a book, but an unusual location for an ending. Only in two cases does a book end on Olympus and the following begin in the human world, and in both of these the transition is mitigated in some way: *Iliad* v ends with Paieon and Hebe curing Ares' wound, but the very last verses take us back to the human world, saying that now Hera and Athena had left the battlefield, and Book vi begins by stressing that from now on the fighting warriors were left to get on by themselves. *Iliad* xviii has Thetis leave Olympus carrying Achilles' new armour to go to the human world, where she arrives at the beginning of xix. We might wonder why her promise is not fulfilled within Book xviii, so that xix could concentrate on the reconciliation between Achilles and Agamemnon. Two effects are achieved by the decision: first, the new book can begin a new day, as books often do (cf. Thetis' association with Eos as mentioned above), and secondly, this opening lets the reconciliation be a direct outcome of Achilles' new wrath. At the sight of the wonderful divine armour he is filled with lust for battle, and his ensuing actions all spring from his wish to avenge the death of his friend. Without a divide after the receipt of the weapons, the story can be told as one great emotional sweep from the sight of the armour to the meeting with Agamemnon and the convening of the assembly.

Most changes of locality are unambiguous. In two of them, however, it might be disputed whether the place is actually changed: *Iliad* x ends in the Greek camp with Odysseus and Diomedes drink-

ing after their adventurous night, so when xi begins with Eos rising and Zeus sending off a servant, Eris, there is of course a change of place; but Eris is sent to the Greek ships and heads directly for that of Odysseus, so that after just four verses we are back where we came from. Similarly, *Iliad* xxi closes on the battlefield outside Troy, where Apollo has led Achilles astray while the Trojans manage to get safely inside the walls; xxii starts in the city with a description of the warriors who entered, but after only two and a half verses we are back on the battlefield.

In the *Odyssey*, however, we follow somebody moving. At the end of *Odyssey* 1, for example, Telemachus goes to bed in his room, and at the beginning of *Odyssey* 2 he goes out from there to convene an assembly, and we follow him to the new scene of action. This is a normal change of location between books in the *Odyssey*, whereas the same pattern is used only twice in the *Iliad*, from vi to vii and from xviii to xix. The *Odyssey* has four *Iliad*-like unmitigated changes, all taking us from the human world to that of the gods: 4-5, 5-6, 14-15 and 23-24.

A very common feature, especially of the *Odyssey*, is that books begin with morning and sunrise, just as books end with nightfall and sleep. In three cases it is still night at the start of a book, and then it becomes morning (*Odyssey* 6, 12 and 15).

Some books open with somebody staying awake. In the *Iliad*, this person is explicitly described as a contrast to the community as a whole; now everybody was asleep, only one person was unable to find rest. In the *Odyssey* this element is handled differently: we have Telemachus staying awake at the beginning of Book 15 as a contrast to the sleeping Pisistratus, and Odysseus remains awake right through the whole of Book 20.

In both poems sunrise and summary are alternatives. A new day is a new start and is in no need of further marking. The only exception is *Odyssey* 6, in which a summary states the change in place and protagonist.

The transition from *Odyssey* 23 to 24 is unique. Here morning comes at the end of 23, while 24 begins with Hermes leading the souls of the killed suitors down into Hades – and out of time, as it exists among the living. Of course the descent into the underworld

could have ended Book 23, and 24 could then have opened with sunrise; but as the text stands, it has the advantage that the action involving Penelope is completed in 23, and 24 is thus reserved for settling the other affairs, Odysseus' relations to his father and to the families of the suitors.

Often somebody arrives at the beginning of a book, a much more common device in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*.

A new book is regularly connected with the preceding one by means of a particle.

Figure 4: Survey of particles used at the beginning of books

Iliad:

<i>hos</i> eight times	vii, ix, xii, xvi, xviii, xx, xxii, xxiii
<i>de</i> six times	iv, vi, xi, xiii, xiv, xxiv
<i>men</i> three times	viii, x, xix
<i>autar epei</i> twice	iii, xv
<i>ra</i> once	ii
<i>enth' au</i> once	v
<i>oude</i> once	xvii
<i>alla</i> once	xxi

Odyssey:

<i>de</i> fourteen times	2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 24
<i>autar</i> four times	14, 19, 20, 22
<i>hos</i> three times	6, 7, 13
<i>autar epei</i> twice	11, 12

Iliad vs. *Odyssey*

The dominant element in the technique of the *Iliad* is the survey, either at the end of a book, or at the beginning, or both. These surveys are often relatively detailed, especially those at the end of books, and they are always presented by N₁. At the end of Book iv the narrator says that if some imagined person were guided through

the battlefield by Athena, he would be unable to criticise the efforts of the warriors. Here we have a survey, an evaluation, and a summing up of the situation, all from the point of view of this imaginary onlooker. The summarising endings and beginnings in the *Odyssey* are much briefer.

The use of particles is much more varied in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey*.

In the *Odyssey* the *apologoi* form a special part, clearly distinguished from the rest of the poem; their character as a single, heavy unit is decisive for the ending of *Odyssey* 8 and the beginning of 13. The remaining 18 shifts from one book to the next in this poem are markedly regular, and much more so than in the *Iliad*.

The *Odyssey* uses the technique of ending a book with nightfall and beginning the next with dawn more often than the *Iliad*. Towards the end of the poem, where the events from the beginning of 17 until the end of 20 take place during a single day, the poet nevertheless succeeds in using this habit of ending his books twice before the day is actually over, by having the suitors withdraw at the end of 18 and Penelope withdraw at the end of 19. If we add up the shifts where night is falling, somebody is going to bed, or dawn opens the following book, we find that twelve out of eighteen transitions use this device, as compared to the *Iliad* with six out of twenty-three. Against this background the beginning of Book 20 is strongly marked: here we have a book beginning with Odysseus going to bed.

Add to this the fact that fifteen of the eighteen new books are introduced by the arrival of a protagonist: Telemachus arrives in Pylos, Telemachus arrives in Lacedaemon, the gods arrive in their assembly, etc. In two cases the arrival includes preparations: in Book 2 Telemachus dresses before arriving in the Ithacan assembly, and in Book 17 he takes leave of his father in Eumaeus' hut before setting out for the town. The three exceptions are Books 19, 20, and 22. In 19 the expected protagonist, Penelope, actually comes, but only at verse 53. I have argued elsewhere that one of the ways she is portrayed is through her delayed arrivals; for most of the poem she is a person who stays within, only to appear when the action is already developing. All the more forceful is her entrance at the open-

ing of 21 when she introduces the final struggle by fetching her husband's bow.⁶² In 22 it might be maintained that when at the beginning of the book the stranger throws off his rags, jumps up and begins shooting, we have the lord of the house finally arriving. That would leave us with the beginning of Book 20 as the only exception. This book describes the night before the killing of the suitors, and begins with Odysseus going to bed and lying sleepless. Part of its special atmosphere is that it departs from the pattern; this is not a book of action, but of breathless suspense, the quiet before the storm. However, our expectation that a book ought to begin with an arrival is met by the passing of the giggling slave girls on their way to the suitors' beds. The *Iliad* uses this method in only five (vii, xi, xvi, xviii and xix) of the twenty-three possible beginnings of books.⁶³

Conclusion

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are divided into books in roughly the same way: each book is given a certain unity inside the poetic whole by means of recurring forms that structure the content and mediate the transition from one book to the next. This narrative patterning is analogous to Parry and Lord's well-known formulas and themes and may be described in the terms of Egbert J. Bakker's "suprasyntax".⁶⁴

Inside this common patterning the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* differ markedly from each other, and although the *Odyssey* may have been divided into 24 books in imitation of the *Iliad*, the division was certainly made in its own way. Thus my conclusion is again analogous to those of other analyses of style and content that point out distinguishing features in the two epics within a framework of overall similarity.⁶⁵

62. Jensen 1992, 122.

63. Olson's dissatisfaction with divisions like 3-4, that separate Telemachus' journey from his arrival in Sparta, reveals a lack of sensitivity to a dominant pattern in the poem, Olson 1995, 230.

64. Bakker 1997, 121-2.

65. *E.g.* Gaisser 1969.

The singer, who had been engaged to dictate his victorious song in as full as possible a form and to arrange his story so as to take up twenty-four days, expanded his mental text in all kinds of way. At the same time he handled each day's portion more or less as he usually did in a normal performance arena. If at the end of a day important parts of the story were left untold, then either the audience would have to accept it anyway, in the case of single performances, or, in the case of continued entertainment, the *Iliad* poet would have no problem in opening a new book with a brief survey and adding what was missing, as he did in the case of Glaucus and Diomedes meeting on the battlefield. Or the *Odyssey* poet could add another day or two to Telemachus' visit in Sparta with no harm done.

Most important of all: The division into books is an integral part of the two poems and must be the poet's work, to be taken just as seriously as any other unit of epic style. This is obvious, since the techniques described are not restricted to brief transitional passages, easily interpolated by a redactor. Furthermore, the difference in the way the two poems handle their books makes it improbable that the system was created by anyone but the rhapsodes themselves. If the two epics had crystallised gradually out of an amorphous tradition, why did each do so in its own way? Or, if the division was made by a redactor not involved in the compositional process, why did this redactor proceed differently in the two poems?

The poet handles his books in a way very similar to how he handles his hexameters. As a rule he brings verse or book to an end in such a way that it is felt to be a rounded harmonious part of the narrative, either because the content is actually an organic unit or because it is made to feel like one, even if it turns out at the beginning of the next hexameter or book that the incision in the narrative was less important than it had at first seemed to be. This last feature is what Parry, with reference to verse, called "unperiodic enjambement";⁶⁶ I suggest that we expand the sense of this term and also use it to describe a distinction between books of the kind found, for instance, between *Iliad* xi and xii.

66. Parry (1928-35) 1971.

Just as this ‘adding style’ is a distinctive factor in the verse rhythm of the poems, so it is in the rhythm of books. The long tale is cut up into appropriate smaller units, each adding itself to the previous one in a quiet, dignified fashion, and each bringing the narrative to a new pause.⁶⁷

Summary

In the medieval manuscripts both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are divided into twenty-four books, named after the twenty-four letters of the Ionic alphabet. This division has been considered imposed upon the poems by some ancient editor, perhaps at the Museum in Alexandria. In recent decades various scholars have thought that the books were somehow connected with rhapsodic practice, and some have argued that the division into books goes back to the poet(s). I side with these last scholars and argue that the division mirrors the rhythm of the dictation process, each book being the portion dictated in one day.⁶⁸

67. Cf. de Jong 1996, 25.

68. Pp. 329-38, 346-62 are a revised version of Jensen 1999, and pp. 343-5 reuse a passage from Jensen 2004.

Three Athenian scribes

An unusual motif

In the Acropolis Museum in Athens three small statues of scribes are exhibited, one somewhat bigger than the other two (Acr. 144 (44.5 cm.), 146 (29.3 cm.), and 629 (61.5 cm.)¹), found at various times during the excavation of the Acropolis between 1836 and 1882. They are of Hymettian marble and more or less fragmentary, and there seems to have been at least one more of them.² In 1994 Ismini Trianti identified a fragment in the Louvre (2718) as part of 629's head, so this piece is now added as a plaster cast, which made it possible to add also the man's skull, that had been in the Acropolis Museum all the time (Acr. 306).³ The statuettes were originally vividly painted, and there are still traces of colour on them. They are thought to have been dedicated to the goddess as votive offerings, but by whom and in what connection?

To begin with, it is worth noticing that while scribes are a popular theme in ancient Egyptian sculpture, the same is not true for Greece. To my knowledge there is only one other example, a terracotta figurine from Boeotia, now in the Louvre (CA 684), of roughly the same age as the Acropolis scribes. I shall return to this small scribe in some detail below.

The statuettes are also unusual in the context of their dedication, as representing seated males that are not gods. As such they have few parallels in the Acropolis. But there is a vase on which Athena, herself seated, is painted between two potters, one of whom is crouching while the other is seated; its date is c. 515-500 B.C. Furthermore, a relief (Acr. 1332), dated c. 520-10 B.C., depicts a potter

1. Measurements according to Schuchhardt 1939; I do not know the height of 629 after the head was added.

2. Raubitschek 1939-40, 18.

3. Trianti 1994.



Figure 5: Three scribes, Acropolis Museum inv. nos. 629, 144, and 146. Photographer: Evangelos Tsiamis.

holding two cups in his left hand and sitting on a stool remarkably similar to the one 629 is sitting on; also his hand is represented in a way close to 629's preserved hand. Still another relief (Acr. 577) shows Athena receiving an offering from a potter; the goddess is standing and somewhat bigger in scale than the craftsman; it is dated c. 480-70 B.C.⁴ So these seated figures are all potters, and a reason for their sitting may perhaps be found in the fact that this was the best way in which the artists could make their profession clear.

4. Hurwit 1999, 15-18 and 60-61 with figg. 13 and 46.

This very fact, the singularity of both motif and context, makes it reasonable to consider whether anything unusual in the field of writing took place in Athens at about this time. And as argued in the previous chapters this is certainly the case! In a preliminary note at the end of my 1999 paper I suggested that the Acropolis scribes might have been dedicated to Athena to celebrate the remarkable feat that scribes and singers had achieved with their recording in writing of epic poetry.⁵ In the present chapter I shall argue more fully that this could indeed be the case. Anyway, considering with how much vigour questions of orality and literacy in archaic Greece have been discussed during recent decades, it seems astonishing that these few representations of scribes have not been drawn into the discussion.⁶

History

No. 146 was found first, and the figure, of which only the lower part is preserved, was thought to be a woman with a box of jewellery. But when in 1881 Adolf Furtwängler recognised the thing she was holding as a writing tablet, he guessed that the figure represented a man, since he considered it impossible that an Athenian woman of the 6th century B.C. could write. He interpreted the two figures then known, 146 and 629, as private votive offerings, and that is how they have been understood ever since. As to their relative dates, he was somewhat indecisive: even though 146 was more archaic in type than 629, he thought that this might simply be a result of the difference in size, since he found their stylistic characteristics so similar that they were probably of the same age.⁷ He did not define this more precisely than the 6th century; but since in 1887 he described one of them, probably 146, as “eine hochaltertümliche Statuette”, it seems that he was thinking of the middle rather than the end of the

5. Jensen 1999, 83.

6. For an overview of the last two decades of literacy studies in the classics, see Werner 2009. – Among philologists, the only reference I have found to these scribes is Pöhlmann (1994) 2003, 4.

7. Furtwängler 1881, 176 and 179.

century.⁸ With the finds soon after of 144 and more fragments of 629, it became clear that he had been right about the gender of the figures. But Franz Studniczka, the scholar who pieced together the fragments, felt convinced that the two smaller scribes were earlier than the big one, and this opinion remained unchallenged for some decades.⁹

Furtwängler had suggested that the statuettes had been dedicated by some *grammateis* (scribes, perhaps religious or political officials), and when in 1904 Henri Lechat published a general discussion of early Athenian sculpture, he drew attention to an inscription from the Acropolis in which a *grammateus* dedicates a gift to the goddess. He thought that this dedicant would have been one of those represented by the statuettes.¹⁰ He dated them to the period 540-500, with unequal lengths of time between the three.¹¹

Furthermore, when the statuettes were first discussed, they were considered to be influenced by Egyptian sculpture because both the motif and the garments the scribes are wearing seemed related to Egyptian art. This was rejected by Emanuel Löwy in 1909 and Hans Möbius in 1916, who asserted that their dress was a perfectly normal Greek *himation*, and that the motif could have come up independently of any influence.¹² Their argumentation has been widely accepted.

But for these questions, the scribes had a marginal place in scholarly discussions in the early 20th century, and as late as in 1936 in his influential study of marble sculpture from the Acropolis, Humfry Payne devoted only a few lines to them.¹³ But they were meticulously described by Walter-Herwig Schuchhardt as part of a thor-

8. Furtwängler 1887, introduction to pl. LXXXVI.

9. Studniczka 1886; Lechat 1904, 268-73; Dickins 1912, 165-67; Möbius 1916.

10. Furtwängler 1881, 177-8; Lechat 1904, 267; cf. Dickins 1912, 166; the inscription is no. 383 in Raubitschek 1949, now dated c. 480-60 B.C., and no longer considered related to the scribes.

11. Lechat 1904, 272-3; Floren 1987, 261, assigns a similar date to the scribes, but narrows it down to 530-20.

12. Löwy 1909, 288-91; Möbius 1916, 169.

13. Payne & Young 1936, 47.

ough general study of marble sculptures from the Acropolis. He dated the statuettes to 520-10 and argued that the three of them were of equal date and produced in the same workshop. That 144 and 146 look more archaic than 629 he took as an indication that they had been made by apprentices, 629 by the master.¹⁴

New interest was aroused when soon afterwards Anton E. Raubitschek proposed a connection between the biggest statuette and an inscribed column, also found in the Acropolis. Raubitschek argued that the statue was erected by a certain Alcimachus and represented his father Chaerion, whom Raubitschek identified as a treasurer of the goddess known from another Acropolis inscription from c. 550 B.C. This same Chaerion's tombstone was known from Eretria. So Raubitschek combined these three inscriptions into a hypothesis that Chaerion had followed Pisistratus into exile in Eretria and had died there, and that his son had erected the statue to commemorate him some time during the second Pisistratid reign in 527-510 B.C.; on stylistic grounds Raubitschek dated both column and statuette to c. 520-10 B.C. This interpretation became very influential and dominated scholarly discussions of the scribes during the following decades. It has recently been defended against modern criticism by Catherine M. Keesling.¹⁵

In 1973 another hypothesis was vented. Herbert A. Cahn published a study of a fragmentary red-figure cup (Coll. H.Cahn, Basel, 133) from c. 510-500 B.C. decorated on the outside with young men leading horses towards a standing figure with a writing tablet. Cahn argued that this scene as well as a whole series of similar decorations showed the process of *dokimasia*, by which young aristocrats were accepted into the class of *hippeis*. In this connection he referred to the Acropolis scribes and suggested that they, too, might be interpreted as *katalogeis*, scribes engaged in *dokimasia*, and even that they

14. Schuchhardt 1939, 1, 207-12 + 2, Tafel 132-3.

15. Raubitschek 1939-40, 17-18, 37 with pl. 7; cf. Raubitschek 1949, 10-12 (no. 6). Raubitschek's interpretation is accepted by Brouskari 1974, 64; Ridgway 1977, 137; Alford 1978, 396; Floren 1987, 261; Hurwit 1999, 58; Kissas 2000, 194-5; Keesling 2003, 182-5, 210-12. - Karouzos 1961, 49 and Krumeich 1997, 22 also favour the decade 520-10, but independently of Raubitschek. - In the new Acropolis Museum the potter's relief and the inscribed column are placed next to the scribes.



Figure 6: Scribe, Acropolis Museum inv. no. 629. Photographer: Evangelos Tsiamis.

were perhaps connected with the statues of horsemen from the Acropolis dedicated during the same period.¹⁶

In her discussion of art and culture in Athens under the tyrants, Simonetta Angiolillo did not endorse any particular one of the suggested interpretations, but assumed that the scribes belong to the period before the introduction of democracy.¹⁷

In 1994 research on the statuettes took a remarkable step forward with Ismini Trianti's ingenious find of the biggest scribe's head. A couple of years later Trianti published a comprehensive all-round study of the statuettes in order to establish their precise relations to a number of other works of Athenian art from that period. By concentrating especially on the way ears, eyes and fingers are represented, as well as the cloak and its folds and decorations, she concluded that the scribes, a *stèle* from Anavyssos (Nat. Mus. 4472), two bases with young men playing ball and engaged in other kinds of sport (Kerameikos Museum P 1002 and Nat. Mus. 3476), a relief representing Athena killing a giant (Acr. 120), the head of a *kore* (Acr. 645), and a rather battered full statue of a *kore* (Acr. 612) might all be works produced by one and the same artist. She characterised him as an innovator, who without rebelling against traditions added a new focus on human relations to the art of his day and who excelled in representing persons in action, caught in some instantaneous movement, as it were. As for the purpose of the dedication, she rejected earlier suggestions, including Raubitschek's; against his hypothesis she pointed out that the traces left in the column by the monument once placed on top of it are too big for scribe 629's plinth and, especially, that the column is made of Parian marble and thus of a more expensive material than the statue, which seems odd if they were made as one monument.¹⁸ Instead, Trianti argued that the scribes were officers of the new Athenian democracy and referred to Aristotle's description of three kinds of secretaries to the people's assembly. She also found it probable that

16. Cahn 1973, 8.

17. Angiolillo 1997, 204-6.

18. Trianti 1998, 29-31; cf. Trianti 1994, 85-6. Keesling 2003, 210-12, does not answer the problem of the qualities of the marble.

they were dedicated together as a group, and dated them to after 510 B.C.¹⁹

Nevertheless, already in 2001 H.Alan Shapiro put forward another idea: He identified in the biggest figure the intriguing Onomacritus, mentioned by Herodotus as an expert of oracles at the court of the Pisistratids (cf. Chapter 9 above). Shapiro was especially impressed by how old and thin the three men looked, and he argued that old age and asceticism were the typical marks of the sage, both in later periods of Greek art and in oriental traditions. The fact that the recently found head of 629 is definitely not an old man's head, was somewhat inconvenient to his hypothesis, but he solved this problem by asserting that anyway in early Greek art the body was more important than the face to characterise a person.²⁰

To sum up: In recent decades the date of the scribes has moved gradually downwards, from shortly after the middle of the 6th century towards the end of it. Basically, the dating has been founded on stylistic criteria, but when it comes to the finer nuances, scholars have of course also been influenced by the socio-religious contexts they have found for the statuettes. Raubitschek's identification of the person represented by 629 made the fall of the Pisistratids the necessary *terminus ante quem*, Shapiro's long fascination with the tyrants' cultural policy and his wish to connect 629 with a passage from Herodotus resulted in the same date, whereas Trianti used Aristotle's three types of secretaries as a key to her interpretation. And when Keesling in her study of votive offerings on the Acropolis stuck to Raubitschek's interpretation, she may have wanted not to lose one of the few cases in which a statue was paired with an inscription. I am of course not blind to the fact that my view that the dedication of the scribes is a celebration of the Pisistratid recording in writing of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is guided by my overall hypothesis concerning the genesis of the two epics.²¹

19. Arist. *Ath.* 54, 3-5; Trianti 1998a, 32-3. Her dating is accepted by Rolley 1994, 175 with fig. 154; Sturgeon 2006, 46; whereas Keesling 2003, 182, 210-12, sticks to Raubitschek's interpretation, but is ready to accept a later date, perhaps even as late as 480. Perilli 2007, 52 simply says 6th century.

20. Shapiro 2001a, 6-8 & 2001b, 94-6.

21. Such mechanisms are discussed in Holbek 1981; cf. Trigger 2003, 66.

At least, scholars agree that the three statuettes are of Hymettian marble,²² that they have been made in one and the same Athenian workshop, and that they have been dedicated to the goddess as votive gifts.

Date and context

Of the various recent studies Trianti 1998 is both the most detailed and the most authoritative, and the details she points to are impressive. I feel convinced that she is right when she establishes her list of works made by one and the same sculptor and find it disappointing that Shapiro, who rejects her dating, does not engage in a discussion of these criteria. Among the arguments for his own dating he claims that Hymettian marble went out of use in c. 510 B.C., to be replaced by marble from Pentelicon.²³ But in a study concerned especially with the various kinds of stone used by Athenian sculptors of this period, Mary Sturgeon accepts Trianti's date for the scribes and is ready to move the chronological limit for Hymettian marble accordingly.²⁴

What I do not understand, however, is why the artist and his workshop could not have been active more than the roughly ten years Trianti assigns to him. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of her paper she points out some male heads that are similar to 629 in their hairstyle, among them both a *kouros* in Boston (Museum of Fine Arts 34.169), dated c. 530 B.C., and the so-called Sabouroff head in Berlin, c. 540 B.C., implicitly accepting that other scholars have had their reasons for deciding upon an earlier date.²⁵ And when we compare 629 – not to speak of 144 and 146 – with our sculptor's other works, the scribes could easily belong to an earlier phase of his career than some of the others. I am thinking especially of the

22. This has not always been the common opinion; earlier scholars considered the marble to be Pentelic, and this is still the information given in Brouskari's Catalogue from 1974. But Trianti 1994, 83 with note 3 feels certain that it is Hymettian, and so do Shapiro 2001a, 7, and Sturgeon 2006, 46.

23. Shapiro 2001a, 7, referring to Olga Palagia.

24. Sturgeon 2006, 46.

25. Trianti 1998b, 6-7; cf. Furtwängler 1883, pll. III-IV.

right side of a base decorated with athletes in the National Museum (Nat. Mus. 3476), the scene in which two seated men are setting a dog and a cat against each other. Eyes, ears and fingers are certainly made in the same way as the bigger scribe's, as Trianti states, but the muscles are more clearly and naturalistically formed, and the rich and varied activity of the figures resulting in complicated turns of their limbs seems much more advanced. The seated figure to the left who is holding a dog has a posture not very different from 629's, and he is sitting on a stool very similar to his. But the way the bodies of the two protagonists are represented, twisted and tense, seems almost mannered in comparison. The base is dated c. 510 B.C. according to the legend in the Museum. In short, even if Trianti may be right in dating this artist to the end of the 6th century, I find it reasonable to allow him a creative period of some decades, and stylistically I think the scribes must belong to an earlier phase of his career than most of his other works. So I imagine that his workshop was active both under the tyrants and after Clisthenes' reforms.

That it has been so complicated to interpret the three figures is mainly due to the fact that they are from many points of view an alien element, both in the Acropolis and in the history of archaic art and religion more generally. In the Acropolis, the *korai* predominate absolutely among archaic votive offerings. According to Shapiro, fragments of about seventy-five such young girls are known.²⁶ Compared to that, male figures are rare, seated figures are normally representations of gods, and scribes as a motif for sculpture are without parallel both in the Acropolis and elsewhere.²⁷

Another question is whether a sculpture or picture can be said to represent an individual person. Once upon a time it was thought that the Sabouroff head might be a portrait of Pisistratus because the face seemed so individualistic. But such hypotheses have long since been discarded, and these days nobody would argue for individual likeness in a work of art before the 5th century. On the other hand, it is not unusual to think that sculptures of a non-personal, typified character were meant to represent individuals. For instance,

26. Shapiro 2001a, 3-4.

27. Payne & Young 1936, 43 and 47.



Figure 7: Decorated base, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, inv. no. 3476. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Tourism / Archaeological Receipts Fund

the *korai* may have been dedicated by aristocratic parents of young girls who had functioned as *arrephoroi* to the goddess at the end of their year of office.²⁸ Poul Pedersen mentions the archaic seated statues erected along the sacred road to Didyma in Asia Minor, which are often thought to represent persons who had officiated as priests in the sanctuary.²⁹ In the introduction to his study of official portraits of the 5th century, Ralf Krumeich submits that quite a few of the archaic male statues in the Acropolis were meant to embody individual politicians. He discusses the statuettes of the scribes and considers them to be images of individual officials in this sense, dedicated by themselves or their relatives at the end of their term of office. He insists that they must be of high social status.³⁰ Jeffrey M. Hurwit mentions 629 and interprets it with Raubitschek as a representation of Athena's treasurer Chaerion, erected by his son.³¹

This leads to the social aspects of the dedication. Opinions differ as to who was in a position to dedicate votive gifts in the Acropolis, and in general scholars used to be comfortable with Raubitschek's

28. Krumeich 1997, 23; Hurwit 1999, 58; Shapiro 2001b, 93-4.

29. Private communication.

30. Krumeich 1997, 22-3; he does not decide whether to follow Trianti or Raubitschek.

31. Hurwit 1999, 58 with Fig. 43.

hypothesis because the goddess's treasurers came from the upper stratum of the Athenian population. But in connection with his argumentation for 629 as a representation of Onomacritus Shapiro asserts that in the archaic period everybody was free to offer gifts to the goddess, and that it was only after the fall of the tyrants in 510 B.C. that regulations were introduced. He considers both the tyrants and the sages themselves to be possible dedicants of the statuettes.³² Furthermore, Hurwit goes out of his way to emphasise that Athena met her worshippers on a more equal footing than other gods, and points out that there is a high percentage of relatively humble persons among the dedicants in the Acropolis. He lists many of their gifts, and they are mostly standard objects such as basins, vases or small shields. But contrary to Shapiro's approach, Hurwit treats the last decades of the 6th century B.C. and the first of the 5th as one continuous period, while nevertheless asserting a growth in members of the Athenian business or middle class as dedicants after the introduction of democracy, "encouraged by the new atmosphere of *isonomia*", political equality. In this context he discusses the above-mentioned "potter's relief" (Acr. 1332), taking for granted that it represents the potter himself.³³ This relief actually seems a very interesting parallel, close in date to the scribes and dedicated by a person from a similar social level as theirs, as I believe.

As for the general appearance of the three Acropolis scribes, they are relatively modest gifts in comparison with other sculptures dedicated to the goddess during the same period, which are bigger and often made of more expensive types of marble – the *moschophoros*, the *korai*, and not least the horsemen, notably the Rampin rider. In the densely packed areas of the sanctuary where they were originally erected they cannot have attracted much attention.³⁴ Even 629, the biggest and most impressive among them, was made of a

32. Shapiro 2001b, 97-9; Krumeich 1997, 23, is of the same opinion.

33. Hurwit 1999, 15-18 and 60-61 with fig. 46; quotation 129. The relief is among the parallels pointed to by Trianti 1998a, 12.

34. Shapiro 2001b, 91 has a vivid description of how this must have looked and compares it to "ein dichtbesiedeltes Stadtzentrum aus Marmor".

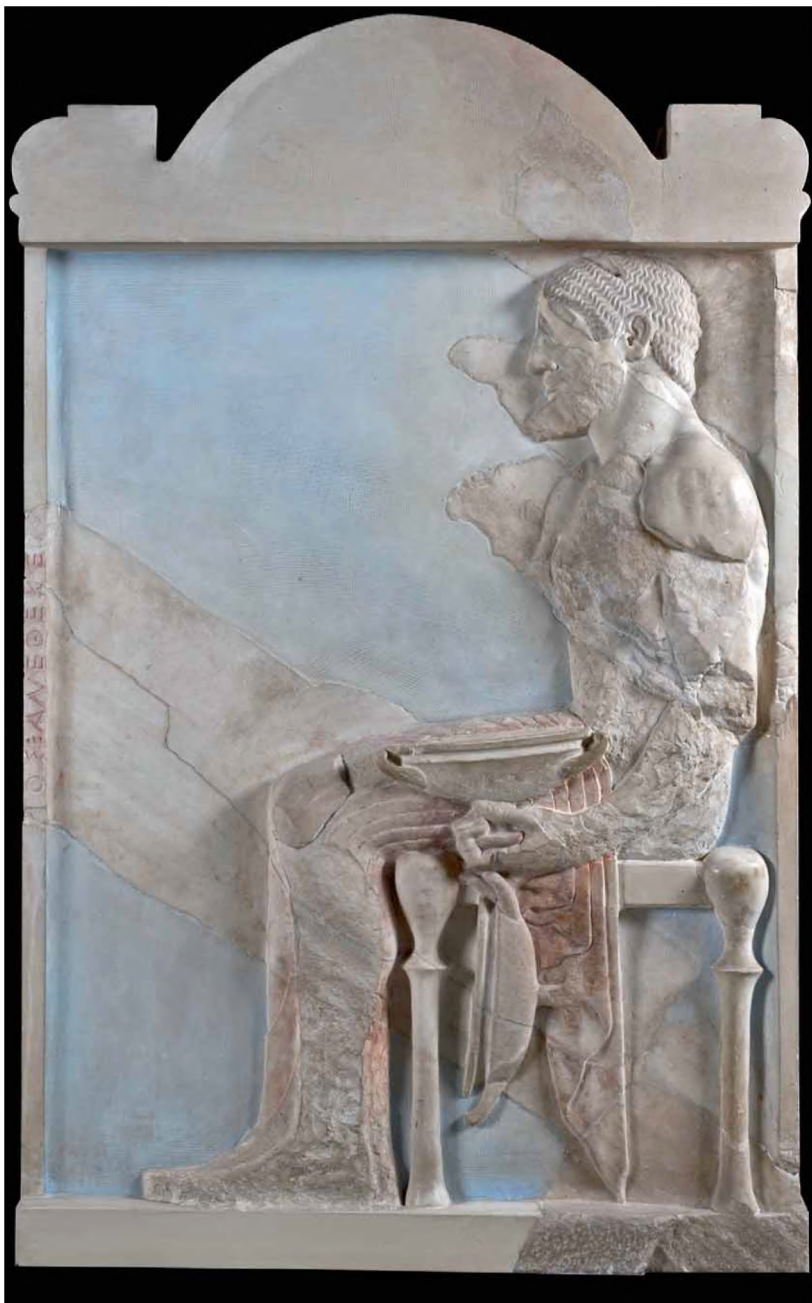


Figure 8: The potter's relief, Acropolis Museum inv. no.1332. Photographer: Evangelos Tsiamis.

slightly too small marble block, so that a part of his left upper arm as well as his scull had to be added. Scholars who have discussed the phenomenon of piecing have had no good explanation for this practice. The most authoritative recent study is by Sturgeon, who emphasises that piecing was relatively frequent and did not necessarily detract from the value of a work. Often it was the most demanding parts that were carved separately.³⁵ But 629 is a special case, also in this respect: there can have been nothing extraordinarily demanding about the added part of his arm, and whereas the head is carved with absolutely special care, the cutting edge runs awkwardly askew through the figure's head, separating one eye from the other. I find it hard to see any other reason for the piecing than that the dedicant was of modest means and had to accept that the figure was carved from a block that was not quite big enough. All in all the statuettes are pleasant, but not luxurious gifts to the goddess, a fact that fits the social position I think a leader of the tyrants' scriptorium would have occupied.

When seeking to understand these figures in the context of the tyrants' great writing projects, I imagine that they were dedicated at the end of the respective officials' periods in office, either by themselves or by the tyrants on their behalf. As stated in Chapter 9, the passage from original draft to final copy must have been time-consuming, even for an expert team of scribes. Years may easily have passed so that it is not certain that the team remained the same all way through. The actual writing must have been done by slaves, and it is certainly not them who are represented in the statuettes.³⁶ But over the years the leaders of the team must have acquired some status, and depending on whether the three statuettes were dedicated as a group or one by one, they may be thought to represent either changing heads of the scriptorium or persons in charge of various levels of the process. For this hypothesis, however, 510 B.C. is the *terminus ante quem*. I cannot imagine that scribes responsible for the tyrants' great recording projects could have been honoured

35. Sturgeon 2006, 52, cf. Kessling 2003, 212.

36. Winsbury 2009, 79-85 is a detailed description of "slavery as the enabling infrastructure" of book-production in ancient Rome.

with statues on the Acropolis after the fall of the tyranny. I disagree with Keesling when she asserts that "there is no reason why Alkima-chos could not have made his dedication between ca. 510 and 480";³⁷ it cannot have been easy after the introduction of democracy to commemorate an officer who had had an important post under the tyrants, whether as treasurer or as secretary.

Whether the three statuettes were dedicated at different points of time, for instance at the end of their terms of office, or they were all erected together, it is worth noting that this new habit of dedicating scribal statuettes to the goddess was discontinued. That is strange, actually, considering that secretarial offices were introduced during the democracy, as mentioned by Aristotle, and such scribes might well have wanted to honour the goddess and themselves with similar *ex voto* sculptures. Whereas the habit of dedicating statues of young girls continued well into the democratic period, the little group of scribes became an isolated phenomenon among the votive offerings to Athena. This break is understandable if writing as such was frowned upon by commoners and the three statuettes commemorated an important venture organised by the tyrants.

The scribes' postures

Trianti finds it characteristic for this artist that he depicts persons engaged in action. So what are the men actually doing? This question is most easily answered in the case of figure 146, the one first found and most damaged. His left hand is preserved, holding the tablet in a firm grip, and a trace of his right hand is visible on the innermost right corner of the tablet, as well as a drill hole close to the middle of the tablet, where a metal stylus must have once been fixed. Also, the way the tablet slants to the right suggests that it was weighed down by the man's writing hand. In short, this man does certainly seem to be writing.

144, however, is more tricky. He sits frontally, just like 146, and his left hand grips the object he is holding in a way similar to how

37. Keesling 2003, 211.



Figure 9: Scribe, Acropolis Museum inv. no. 146. Photographer: Evangelos Tsiamis.

146's left hand is shown. But his tablet is much thicker than his colleague's, and both the surface of this box-like object and its turned back flap are carefully painted along the edges so as to leave a rectangular space in the middle. This might indicate a box with an open lid,³⁸ but the man's left thumb and the trace his right hand has left both suggest that the surface is meant to be seen as solid. So the object is presumably a *polyptychon*, a set of more than two writing tablets, and the painted line represents the wooden frame encompassing the wax-clad writing surface. This is also suggested by faint traces of painted stripes on the box's right side, presumably representing the pile of tablets on top of each others. Trianti states that 146 has a triptychon, 144 a hexaptychon,³⁹ and she may be right, even though my eyes cannot really see that. 144 keeps his writing

38. Schuchhardt 1939, 210: "ein kastenartiges Schreibgerät ... das im strengen Sinne nicht Diptychon genannt werden kann."

39. Trianti 1994, 85.

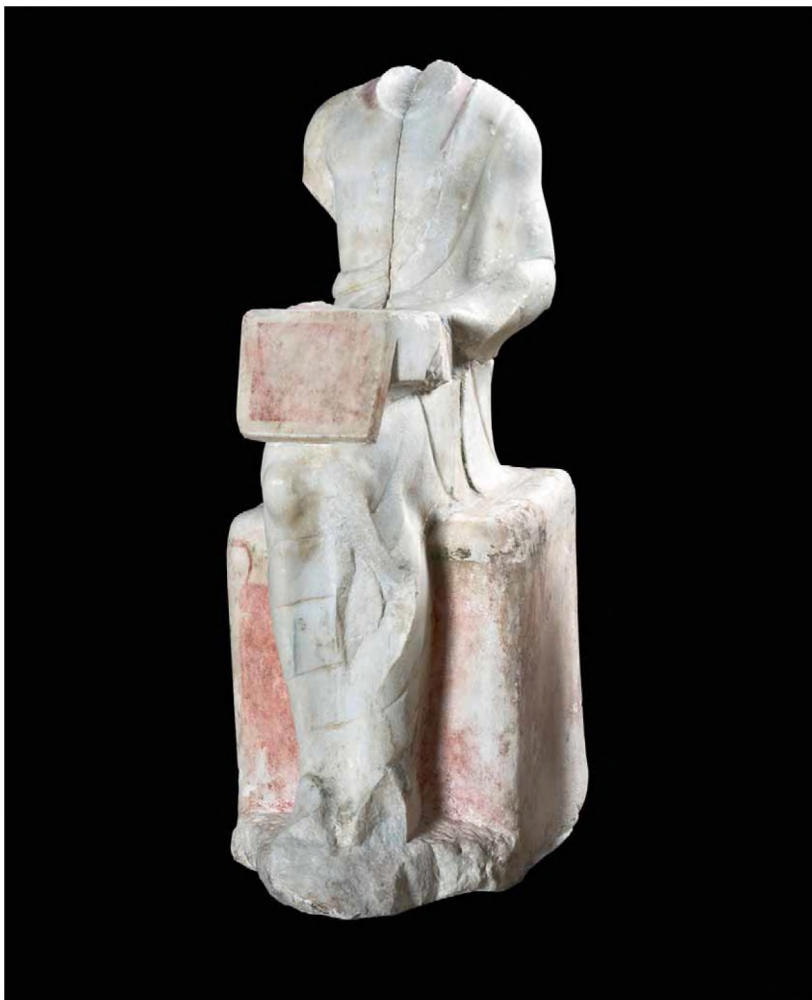


Figure 10: Scribe, Acropolis Museum inv. no. 144. Photographer: Evangelos Tsiamis.

tablet strictly horizontal, and if the man is writing, the process is less naturalistically represented than is the case of 146.

The heads of both these figures are missing, but from their upright, forward turned bodies it may be surmised that they were originally looking straight at their public (or, rather, at the goddess), whereas figure 629 is turned inwards towards himself. His posture

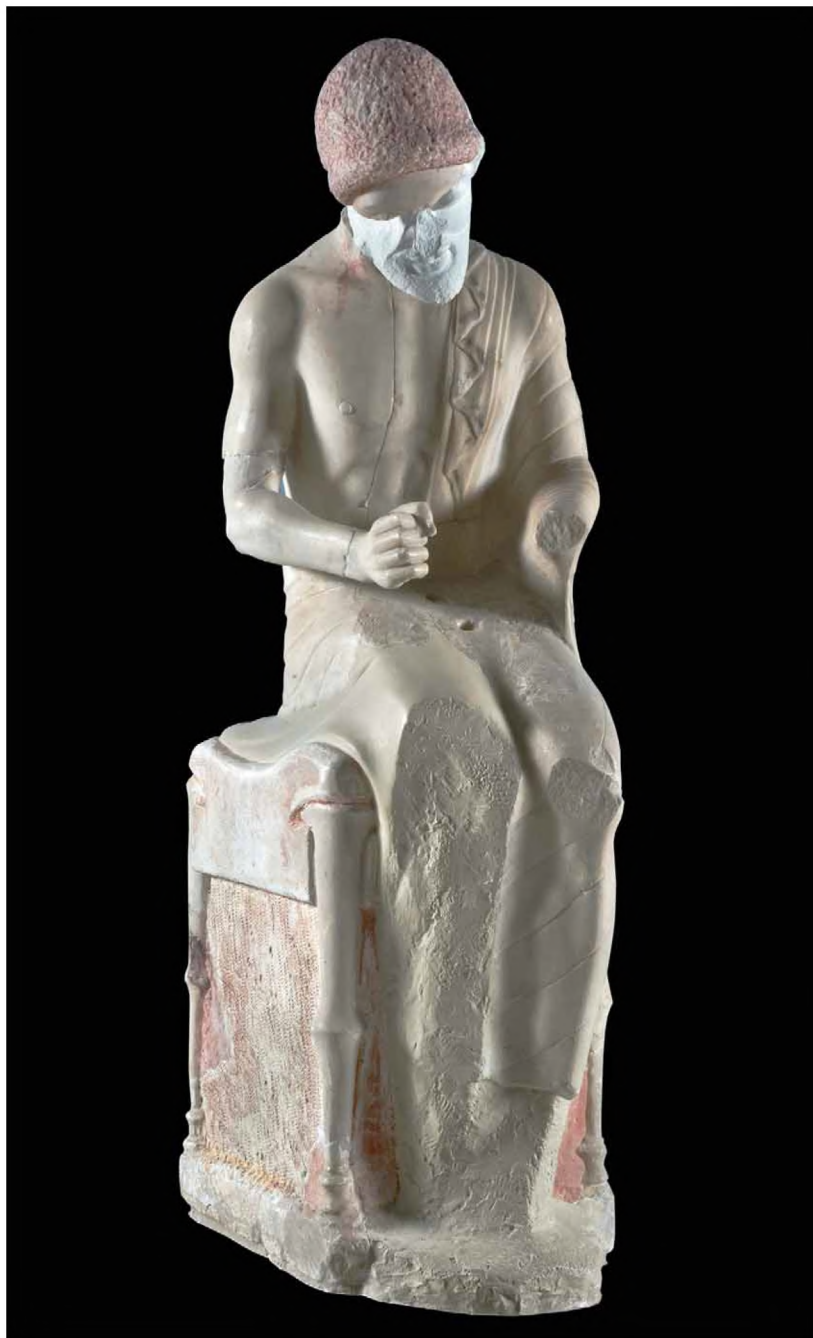


Figure 11

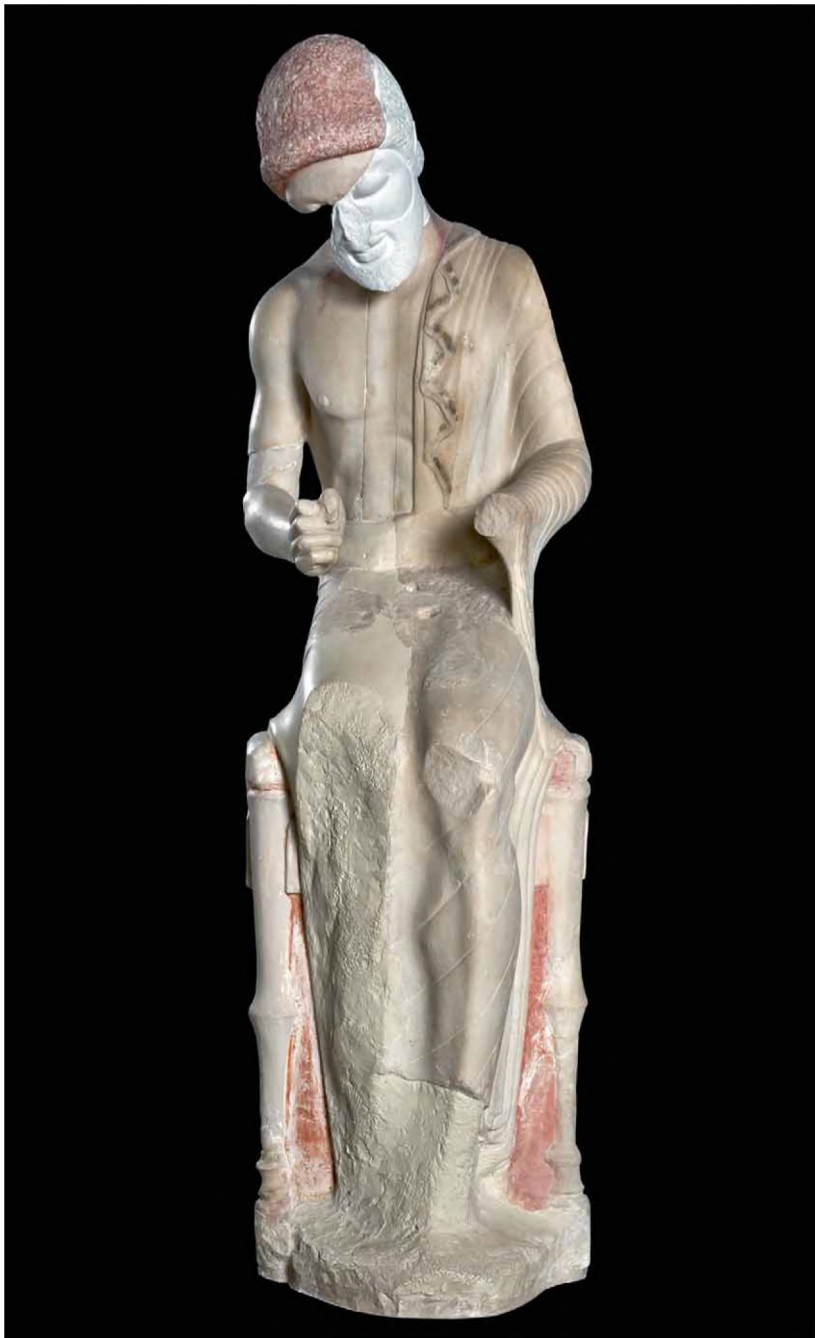


Figure 12



Figure 13

Figures 11-13: Scribe, Acropolis Museum inv. no. 629. Photographer: Evangelos Tsiamis.

is fundamentally different from theirs; he is bending slightly towards the right with his left leg stretched a little bit forward. His well-preserved right hand is clutched round some object that was added, presumably in metal, as revealed by a hole on either side of the hand; the object is usually thought to have been a stylus.

His eyes are looking at his hands and something he once had in his lap, while his facial expression is of the utmost concentration. It is evident both from two drill holes in his stomach and from traces on his thighs and the innermost side of the cloak that is falling from his left arm, that an object was originally added in some other material than marble⁴⁰. It is regularly thought to have been a writing tablet, and it is, of course, natural to imagine that he was engaged in the same activity as his two companions. However, it is difficult to understand why the artist would have added such an object in another material than the rest of the statuette. When marble figures have drill holes, what has been added is normally something that it was difficult to make in stone, or something glamorous, a metal wreath or a helmet for instance. A wooden writing tablet does not fit into either of these categories. Besides, the traces left on the sculpture do not look as if the object the man was carrying was rectangular. The cavity formed under his left arm by the stomach and the cloak does not easily fit a *polyptychon* similar to 144's, and a beginning curve in the middle of his waistline, just where the original piece was broken off, complicates the matter. So do the traces the inserted object left on his thighs; they suggest that it was a rather big thing, leaving traces on about two-thirds of them. Furthermore, it seems to have been somewhat higher where it leaned against his stomach than at the outside where it met his right hand. The hand may have rested upon the object, but there are no traces on its underside to support this hypothesis.

40. Generally thought to have been metal, but Trianti 1994, 85, thinks it was wood, and Vlassopoulou 2007, 35 a separate piece of stone.

What is clear is that 629 was holding this object in a different way from that in which his two companions are holding their writing tablets. The object was located close to his body so that its outermost edge was in line with his hands, whereas the two other scribes have their tablets on the middle of their thighs, closer to their knees. His left hand is missing, but the preserved part of his left forearm is held rather high and cannot have been gripping the object the way the other figures are gripping their tablets. Forearm and hand were either resting on the object or running parallel to its edge. Furthermore, the arm is turned so that the palm of his hand would have been turned upwards.⁴¹

Another problem is a small, slightly curving furrow on the inside of his right hand, suggesting that he may have been supporting the inserted object with it; however, the furrow may be simply caused by the fact that it would have been difficult for the sculptor to continue the naturalistic representation of the closed fist into the narrow passage between fingers and thigh.⁴²

What his missing, but upward turned left hand was doing is just as difficult to interpret. It may have been holding a writing tablet. In vase paintings people are often holding tablets that way, with an outstretched left forearm, supporting the tablet on the upwards turned palm, even though to a modern mind that would seem an extremely tiring position. The scribe on the above-mentioned *dokimasia* representation is doing that, and so is one of the persons in the famous teaching scene by Douris, mentioned in Chapter 8 (Berlin 2285, c. 490 B.C.). Or the scribe may have been holding out a gift to the goddess; the position of the forearm resembles that of many of the *korai*. This would, on the other hand, be strange considering that his face is not turned forward to look at the goddess as is the case with the girls.

Whatever the man is doing, he is not writing with a stylus. His right hand, firmly closed around the two small holes, is not held in a writing position. Early commentators were aware of this problem:

41. Schuchhardt 1939, 208, emphasised that 629's activity was fundamentally different from that of 144, but his observation has not been commented upon by later scholars.

42. Poul Pedersen's suggestion.

Studniczka stated that he was holding his stylus as if it were a paint brush, and Guy Dickins quoted Rudolf Heberdey as stating that a stylus could not have been held in the manner shown.⁴³ The question does not, however, seem to have troubled modern scholars. The figure might be hypothesised to be making a pause from writing, but even in that case the way he is holding the stylus seems awkward, and the intent way in which he is looking at his hands makes it more reasonable to imagine that that he is engaged in doing something than that he is resting.

Nor is he writing with pen and ink. Theodor Birt long ago discussed in some detail the physical process of book-writing and drew attention to the fact that unlike writing on tablets it is hardly ever shown in pictures or described in literature. He explains this with reference to the low social status attached to this kind of work. People of higher standing used tablets for things such as taking notes or writing letters, but they kept slaves for the more laborious writing of longer texts and of fair copies. From the few sources we have, Birt felt certain that a scribe never used a table, but supported the sheet or unfinished scroll either on his knees or on his left hand while writing on it with his right.⁴⁴ Again, to a modern mind that seems next to impossible, both because of the strain on the arm and because papyrus is relatively fragile, and Eric G. Turner thought that scribes may have supported the papyrus with a kind of board. However that may have been, such a support does not fit easily into the traces left of the object the man once had in his lap. In a recent discussion Rex Winsbury imagines that when writing on papyrus a scribe was "sitting on the floor cross-legged, with his tunic stretched between his legs as a sort of substitute for a writing surface, while the left hand held the unwritten scroll and the right hand the sloping surface on which to rest the portion of the scroll to be written on",⁴⁵ a description that is even further away from what our 629 is doing. Also for social reasons it is very unlikely that the statuette depicts a person writing a book.

43. Studniczka 1886, 360; Dickins 1912, 166-7.

44. Birt 1907, 197-9; the Acropolis scribes are briefly mentioned on p. 200.

45. Turner 1971, 7-8; Winsbury 2009, 37.

Nor is he reading a book. Reading is often represented in art and it is well known how that was done, the reader holding the scroll in both hands and gradually rolling it from one hand to the other as he proceeded through the columns.

In 1980, when I first argued for the Pisistratid court as the milieu where the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed and recorded in writing, I suggested that the head of the scriptorium might have been the man called Onomacritus. So it was of course exciting for me to find that Shapiro identified 629 with Onomacritus, a hypothesis I can only support. Not because the scribes look old and emaciated, however. I have already mentioned that the newly found head does not concur with the idea that 629 depicts an old man (and as a matter of fact, also before the finding of his head traces of reddish colour from the hair were to be seen on the necks of both 629 and 144, suggesting that the figures were meant to be seen as still young). Besides, even though the three figures are slim, I cannot really see that they are extraordinarily so. For instance, 629's naked right shoulder seems to my eyes to belong to a normally nourished person. Accordingly, the person I see in 629 is Onomacritus the head of the tyrants' scriptorium, not Onomacritus the emaciated sage.

According to Shapiro, he is carrying scrolls in a cylindrical container.⁴⁶ As an answer to the question why this object was added in another material than marble this seems a much better idea than the writing tablets, since unlike them both scrolls and container would make an impressive effect when naturalistically represented in some precious metal. However, neither in this case do the traces left on the sculpture really fit the hypothesis, and Shapiro gives no details, not stating how he imagines that the container was placed, upright on the man's lap or lying on it, nor does he specify what he thinks the man was doing with them.

In view of his connection with the two smaller scribes it is likely that he is actually concerned with books and writing and not something completely different. But exactly what remains a riddle. He may be Onomacritus the diviner, pointing out with his stylus some ominous passage in a holy book, represented in metal and lying in

46. Shapiro 2001a, 7; cf. Shapiro 2001b, 94.

his lap. Or he may be Onomacritus the head scribe controlling the fair copy of a recorded oral poem, holding the draft as a tablet in his left hand and a metal scroll on his knees, with a pen in his right hand ready to enter corrections. This interpretation is not all that convincing however, since it seems more likely that this phase of the editing would be pursued so that one person read aloud from the draft while the other checked the fair copy. Still another possibility is that the figure had a metal string in his hands, being in the act of tying up a pile of metal scrolls lying in his lap before handing them over to the priestess. That would make his activity a humble forerunner of the solemn handing over of the peplos on the Parthenon frieze.⁴⁷

Of Cynaethus it was said that his *Hymn to Apollo* was written on a placard and dedicated in the temple of Artemis. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* would have filled quite a few placards should they have been published for reading in the same way. But I imagine that the process of recording the two epics was basically similar to the writing of the hymn: Cynaethus won the prize at the Panathenaea, and afterwards his poem was dictated and written. In competition with him another rhapsode dictated the *Odyssey* in similar fashion. When the poems had been materialised in this way, they were dedicated as votive offerings to Athena and preserved in her temple. Onomacritus, the person who had been directing this huge project and who had also been in charge of the writing of Orpheus, Musaeus, and Hesiod, dedicated a statue of himself and his assistants to the goddess. It may also have been the patron, Hipparchus, who honoured his scriptorium in this way. Onomacritus' status as an Athenian citizen and important enough to be accepted at symposia but not belonging to the highest élite, fits well enough into the impression given by the material of the biggest statuette: of modest size, made of local marble and of a block not quite big enough.

In any case, we have these three statuettes as the only representations of scribes in Greek marble sculpture, dedicated in Athens during the period when there are reasons to believe that the originals of the two great epics were composed in performance and recorded in

47. Saugé 2007, 30 compares the *Iliad* with the peplos as a gift to the goddess.

writing. If the beautiful statuette Acropolis 629 really represents the person responsible for the writing of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, it deserves the status of a holy icon to be worshipped by readers from all over the world. Of course the rhapsodes who composed the two epics are the great beneficiaries of mankind; but next to them the scribe who ensured that the texts were preserved in a form so fresh and readable deserves our endless gratitude for his contribution to the miracle.

Two Boeotian terracotta figurines

While it was something new in Athenian sculpture of this period to depict persons in a moment of action, in Boeotia at the same time coroplasts were creating a rich variety of people engaged in all kinds of everyday tasks: butchers, cooks, bakers, carpenters and barbers, just to mention a few. These are small figures normally found in graves, and they come both as single persons and as groups. For instance, there is a scene in which women are kneading dough while a flutist entertains them, all arranged on the same plinth.

Terracotta figurines were made during all periods of antiquity all over Greece, and most of them are thought to represent divinities. This series of lowly people is special to archaic Boeotia and belongs to a relatively short period, the last decades of the 6th century B.C. and the beginning of the 5th. In Hellenistic times human motifs return, but then the figurines no longer illustrate work situations, but depict what seems to be persons of a somewhat higher social status, notably elegant ladies wearing large hats and draped cloaks.⁴⁸

It has been eagerly discussed what the purpose can have been of accompanying the deceased with such realistic representations of artisans, servants and other professionals. Some of them, such as mourners and musicians, seem to be continuing the funeral rites, but they constitute a minor group. Others may have been children's toys, but again only a few fit that hypothesis. It has been thought that the figurines were more generally conceived as servants in the afterlife, and just as for the Acropolis scribes, there was a period

48. For surveys, see Knoblauch 1937; Mollard-Besques 1963; Higgins 1967; 1986.

when an Egyptian influence was suggested. In recent decades the tendency has been to consider their function to be merely decorative, mainly because the figurines are not found exclusively in graves, but also in temples and private houses.⁴⁹ Anyway, whether they are given a profane or a religious meaning, they surround the deceased with normal members of an affluent household and as such allow us a precious glimpse into everyday life in archaic Boeotia. J. Schneider-Lengyel appropriately compared them to Homeric similes, which often take their motifs from everyday life.⁵⁰

Of interest in the present context is the fact that among the many figurines there is a scribe, and that he is paired with a man playing the cithara.⁵¹ They are in the Louvre, nos. CA 684 and 685, having been acquired in 1896. Their heights are 11 and 10.1 cm respectively. Simone Mollard-Besques states in the catalogue that they are from Thebes and were found in the same grave, but she does not mention her source for this. The provenance of terracotta figurines bought on the market in the late 19th century is normally unknown because many of the graves had been robbed and the goods sold before the archaeologists had arrived to excavate them. On the other hand, some of the French buyers established good relations with the robbers and may have received reliable information from them.

Whether the two figurines belong even closer together is uncertain, but probable. Their heads come from one and the same mould, while their bodies are modelled by hand.⁵² To join moulded heads with modelled bodies was a normal procedure for these figurines.

49. Funeral rites: Charbonneaux 1936, 5; Higgins 1986, 65. Egyptian influence? Pottier 1900, 520-22; Pottier 1909, 51; Higgins 1967, 77. Servants in the afterlife: Furtwängler 1887, 12; Pottier 1900, 520-22; 1909, 51; Charbonneaux 1936, 5; Schneider-Lengyel 1936, 17; Higgins 1967, 77. Decorative function: Higgins 1986, 65; Szabó 1994, 123. Pasquier & Aravantinos 2003, 98, mention both possibilities without taking a stand.
50. Schneider-Lengyel 1936, 17.

51. I am grateful to Margalit Finkelberg for drawing my attention to these figurines.

52. Mollard-Besques 1954, 20. Buyers and robbers: Higgins 1986, 39. Mentions of scribe and/or musician: Pottier 1900, 512-13 + pl. 11.1; Pottier 1909, pl. VI; Charbonneaux 1936, 15 + pll. 15-16; Schneider-Lengyel 1936, pll. 18 a-b; Knoblauch 1937, 203; Higgins 1967, pl. 32 A; Turner 1971, 125; Pasquier & Aravantinos 2003, 98.



Figure 14: Boeotian scribe, Musée du Louvre inv. no. CA 684. Réunion des Musées Nationaux 02-014783.

But their posture is the same, they are seated in the same way, upright with their legs close together, on identical stools with four legs, and dressed in the same white *himations* leaving the right shoulder free, facts that make it reasonable to interpret them as a pair. Their activities are clearly represented. The scribe has a diptychon on his knees with one tablet falling slightly downwards, and he is writing on it with a stylus with its characteristic upwards turned broad end, used for smoothing out the wax when he wants to correct something. A few letters are still to be seen on the tablet. The musician is holding a lyre with five strings, supporting it with his left thigh, while at the same time pressing it against the thigh with his left forearm. He is playing with a *plektron* in his right hand, and the fingers of his left are touching the strings. Even though they do not share a plinth as is the case with other figurines that represent persons working together, their parallel forms make it tempting to see them as cooperating, a poet singing and a scribe writing his poetry down.



Figure 15: Boeotian singer, Musée du Louvre inv. no. CA 685. Réunion des Musées Nationaux 93-000985-01.

Edmond Pottier and Alain Pasquier both accompany these figurines with a brief reference to the Acropolis scribes,⁵³ and the similarity is, of course, striking: just like them, they are dressed only in a *himation*, worn in the same way; they are sitting frontally on four-legged stools, and the scribe is holding his writing tablet just as Acr. 144 and 146 do. This parallel suggests that the mysterious Acr. 629 might be a singer – a rhapsode dictating Homer or Musaeus – with a metal lyre in his lap and a *plektron* in his right hand (ancient *plektra* were similar to modern teaspoons and tied to the instrument with a string). As a matter of fact, his posture is not unlike that of the small clay citharode. However, this interpretation seems excluded by the position of 629's left forearm, which is turned outwards.

Pasquier reflects on the possibility that the figurine of the scribe, CA 684, may depict an official secretary as the Acropolis statuettes

53. Pottier 1900, 521; Pasquier & Aravantinos 2003, 98.



Figure 16: Here the museum has let the two figurines of singer and scribe be accompanied by a woman kneading dough. Musée du Louvre - Réunion des Musées Nationaux 93-001018.

perhaps do, but feels that his modest size makes it more likely that he represents a teacher of writing or a public scribe. What the deceased had used such workers for, or how his relatives thought they might be of use to him in his afterlife is impossible to say. They may have come from a poet's grave, or the deceased may have been a reader of poetry or a book collector; in any of these cases he will have been an innovator in the field of literature.

Despite all the similarities, the religious contexts of the two sets of figures are of course different. A votive offering is linked with a prayer to a god, most often as an act of thanksgiving after the fulfillment of the wish involved, and a statue erected in an important sanctuary is both a celebration of the dedicant and a gift to the god who supported his/her project.⁵⁴ Whereas it has here been argued that the Acropolis scribes mark the tremendous achievement of recording into writing of huge quantities of hexameter poetry, there is

54. Cf. Hurwit 1999, 57-62; Baumbach 2004, 1-4.

no reason to imagine that the small Boeotian clay figurines were made to celebrate anything out of the usual. They are there rather as the representation of a scene that was gradually becoming well known in both the public and the private sphere, a normal part of everyday life just like other forms of handicraft. Scribe and singer are represented as two persons of equal importance, and as figures of similar social status as cooks and carpenters. In this case it is not strange that they were not followed by a series of similar figurines over the next decades, since the general habit of illustrating everyday motifs was discontinued.

However, the fact that the only known representation, apart from the Acropolis scribes, of that profession in plastic art may be concerned with the recording in writing of poetry, does reinforce the hypothesis of a similar act behind the much more prestigious statuettes in the Acropolis. Such situations must have gradually become familiar during the the decades around 500 B.C.

Summary

Three marble statuettes dedicated in the Acropolis of Athens as votive offerings to Athena towards the end of the sixth century B.C. are here interpreted as gifts celebrating the great writing projects of the Pisistratids, among which the recording of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Conclusion

To ask questions has always been more interesting than to give answers. In this study I have nevertheless attempted to answer one of the most famous age-old questions of the world, but, fortunately, the answers I propose give rise to a host of new questions. In all modesty, I suggest that the entire history of archaic and classical Greek literature be rewritten with the purpose of reaching a fundamental reappraisal of the early reception of the Homeric poems that distinguishes between the two senses of 'Homer' as either the poet(s) of the two transmitted epics on one hand, or of a comprehensive epic performance tradition of mythic hexameter poetry on the other. Because of the omnipresence of Homeric epic in early Greek thought, to let go of the idea that 'Homer' designates only the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* means no small change in our understanding. Not only the mythic narratives that have survived, whether in words or pictures, but also most other early Greek texts change their relationship to each other and their individual meanings in the process.

Writing was introduced in Greece at the beginning of the archaic period but made its way into everyday life only gradually, and for all practical purposes archaic Greece was an oral society. Like other predominantly oral societies it must have been characterised by a broad spectrum of literary genres, verse and prose, to cover any situation in which some form of literature was called for. All literary forms served a purpose in the community. Most ritual gatherings contained some kind of performance, and everyday life offered a rich variety of situations in which people needed singing or storytelling. An important social dividing-line runs between genres handled by professionals depending on their art for their livelihood, such as epic, and genres cultivated by amateurs of high society; the latter forms often had the symposium as their social context and were restricted to male poets and audiences. Sappho is the only known female upper-class amateur poet. Various forms of lyric po-

etry were composed by professionals but performed by upper-class choristers, female as well as male.

The question why a text was written down is not only relevant in connection with the Homeric epics but with early Greek literature in general. Neither singers, lyric poets, philosophers, and storytellers, nor their audiences will normally have felt any need to have their works written, and in that sense the process studied in this book was not unique. For all archaic and early classical literature preserved to this day the question why it was recorded in writing is central and should regularly be asked.

Poetry found its way into writing before prose, presumably as the more complicated and in that respect more prestigious form. Most of the extant examples of archaic Greek literature must be considered as individual cross-sections of traditions produced when for some purpose the text was written, and not necessarily representative. Traditions are general and manifestations of them particular, or, in other words, traditions are *langue*, the surviving texts *parole*. If a poem was recorded in writing, this had no influence on the tradition.

Some texts refer to the performance situation. This is regularly the case in choral lyrics, composed for individual festivals. Similarly in Homer and Hesiod, when the poetic 'I' addresses the gods in the invocations opening epic poems or at the beginning and end of hymns, the performance situation is called into presence. But in this tradition such passages are suitable for any performance arena, whereas reference to a specific performance is very rare.¹

Since the registration in writing must always have taken place at special sessions the *hic et nunc* of a written text is at least twofold: the performance and the writing that mirrors the performance. There are no examples from archaic Greece of reference in a text to the composition in dictation that must have taken place, or to the persons involved. Colophons such as those the scribe Ilimilku added to his registrations of Ugaritic epics (14th century B.C.)² have no

1. Earlier than c. 500 B.C. there may be only two, *h.Ap.* 146-76, discussed in Chapter 9 above, and Hes. *Op.*, cf. Jensen 1966.

2. Parker 1997, 42, 141, 164.

Greek parallel. How closely the written text mirrored the performance must have depended on both singer and scribe: the singer may have had a special performance in mind while dictating, or may have preferred to dictate a more generalised version of his mental text, and the scribe may have copied carefully what the singer dictated or may have chosen to leave out passages that he felt to be irrelevant for the written copy.

In the preceding chapters I have drawn on modern fieldwork studies of oral epic in order to reconstruct a probable framework for the origin and early reception of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The two poems have reached us simply as texts, without reliable information as to when and how they were composed. The oldest layer of the corpus of scholia that accompany the poems in some of the medieval manuscripts is from c. 200-150 B.C. and thus several centuries younger than the poems, even taking into account the relatively late date of their composition I favour. The mostly fragmentary and scattered sources for their early reception are distorted because the well-educated authors of the surviving ancient Greek literature did not understand the mechanisms of oral tradition and were not aware that the concept of 'Homer' gradually changed from meaning the author of a broad spectrum of oral epics to the poet of only the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. As the once ubiquitous oral Homeric tradition began to make way for the two written poems as school texts, it gradually disappeared from view for the educated class. This does not mean that it disappeared from the Greek world.

Also in more recent times a distortion has taken place. Modern readers have accepted the interpretation of 'Homer' as the poet of the two epics even though this meaning of the name does not go further back than to late classical times, c. 350 B.C. This acceptance has been all the more natural since most of the epic tradition other than the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and a few other early hexameter poems has not survived. But the view that what we have is what there was is fundamentally wrong. Scholars know that well enough but tend to forget their knowledge when trying to establish a likely history of the place of 'Homer' in archaic and classical life and letters.

The two epics we know are conspicuously absent in Greek art and letters until the time of Plato. The various sources that have

usually been pointed out as *termini ante quem* for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* demonstrate the presence of the tradition, not of the two epics. The “Nestor cup” shows familiarity with Homeric style. Xenophanes’s criticism addresses the tradition in general. What looks like quotations from the *Iliad* in Tyrtaeus and Simonides,³ are passages that express opinions that would be shared by most archaic Greeks and could easily have been part of other epic poems than those we happen to know. Furthermore, ‘Homer’ is praised for treating mythic events that are not part of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the new Simonides, “he who received all truth from the Pierids”, i.e. Homer, is said to have described Achilles’ death. Pindar’s Homer defends Ajax’ honour after the latter’s suicide. The rhapsodes Pindar knows are wont to begin their performances with hymns to Zeus, a usage without a parallel in the surviving Homeric corpus.⁴ Such sources bear witness to these authors’ familiarity with a broad Homeric performance tradition evidently being cultivated all over the Greek-speaking world. Meanwhile the two written poems were lying safely and unread in their archives.

Even in Athens, where I have argued that the written poems were kept, there is nothing to suggest that they were read during the first many decades of their existence except for one crucial passage, the Athenian and Salaminian entries of the Catalogue of Ships. The great dramas relate to versions of the mythic past that differ from those found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. When they are taken as witnesses not only to their authors’ but also their audiences’ familiarity with Homer, that is correct only if this ‘Homer’ means the Homeric performance tradition.

The famous anecdote of Aeschylus asserting that in his poetry he thrived on the crumbs from Homer’s rich table has been understood in two different ways. Either the dramatist stated that he studiously avoided the mythical stories that Homer had told in his two epics, or that he drew without reservation whatever he wanted from

3. Tyrtaeus fr. 10.21-30 West, cf. *Iliad* xxii.71-6; Simonides fr. eleg. 19.1-2 West², cf. *Iliad* vi.146-9.

4. Simonides fr. eleg. 11.1-18 West²; Pindar *N.* 2.1-3; *I.* 4.35-9.

the inexhaustible treasure of Homeric performance tradition.⁵ The latter interpretation must be correct, and actually there are quite a few overlaps between the preserved Aeschylean tragedies and the two epics. I doubt whether Aeschylus knew the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* at all. The way he diverges from the two epics in insignificant details, for instance in calling Agamemnon's queen Clytemnestra, not -mnestra, would be strange if it were a conscious deviation from a dominant model.

In a careful study of the preserved fragments of Athenian comedy of the fifth century B.C. Riccardo Quaglia concludes that the spectators in the Athenian theatre were deeply familiar with Homer, down to details of language and wording.⁶ But unlike Quaglia I find it striking that this 'Homer' is, again, the broad performance tradition, not the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It is interesting that Homeric and Hesiodic poetry seem to work in unison as the epic model for Attic comedy, and it is remarkable that some of the most popular stories in comedy are also popular motifs in vase painting, such as Odysseus' adventures with the Cyclops and the Sirens.

My focus has been the circumstances of the creation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and I have attempted a reconstruction of the process of dictation in which the originals of the two epics must have been composed. But it is my hope that the results of my investigation may be felt as a confirmation of the dynamics of the oral model, also for interpretational research, and as a support for the scholars who contribute to an ever-growing awareness of the oral-traditional character of the two great epics.

Basically my obsession with the Homeric Question is a matter of old-fashioned, traditional philology: in order to conduct a serious study of the two epics we must establish what kind of texts they are.

5. Ath. 347e. - M.L. West 2000a, 338, emphasises that the dramatist uses 'Homer' including the *Epic Cycle*.

6. Quaglia 2007.

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Index of Passages

- Diogenes Laertius
I.57 168-73
- Herodotus
3.123.1 305-6
7.6.2-5 302-5, 310-12
7.107 276-7
7.153-62 276
- Hesiod
Theogony
30 145
- Homer
Hymn to Apollo
146-76 306-10
Hymn to Demeter
119-44 255-6
Iliad
i.1 172
i.115 119
i.423-4 200
ii.546-58 276-8, 314-15
vii.333-42 317-21
x 316
xxiv.804 172
Odyssey
1.22-5 200
1.352 160-61
3.267-72 147
4.512-23 321-4
8.499-500 254
9.371-95 279
11.333-69 147
11.601-5 324-6
11.630-31 325-6
14.192-359 255
22.330-80 146
22.347-8 160-61
- Lycurgus
102 168-73
- Plato
Hipparchus
228b-229b 163-73
Ion 161-6
Lysis
204b-205d 250-51
- Pseudo-Herodotus
Life of Homer 153-6
- Scholium on Pindar
Nemean
2.1 150, 302
- Sophocles
Oedipus Rex
36, 391, 1200 152
- Thucydides
2.34 319
3.104 307-10

General Index

A

- abbreviation 21, 35, 110, 128, 151, 189,
 252, 292
 Abdallah ad-Dindan 71
 Abu Zayd 39, 127, 135, 136, 149, 187,
 235, 342
 accordion effect 129, 256
 Achilles 17, 67, 205, 210, 219, 237,
 239, 242, 244, 245, 253, 256,
 266, 267, 268, 278, 298, 304,
 318, 326, 335, 340, 354, 356, 357,
 397
 Acropolis 12, 167, 264, 277, 296, 306,
 363, 365, 366, 367, 370, 372, 373,
 374, 377, 388, 389, 393, 394
 Aelius Aristides 308
 Aeschines 196, 219
 Aeschylus 173, 256, 397, 398
Aethiopsis 335
 aide-mémoire 111
 Ajax 238, 240, 242, 257, 278, 298,
 314, 322, 327, 397
 Akunbe 98
 Alcaeus 167, 250
 Alcibiades 273
 Alcidamas 153, 270
 Alcinous 148, 331, 352, 353
 Alexander 15, 271, 273
 Alexandria 9, 214, 215, 218, 219, 271,
 300, 329, 331, 332, 334, 335, 337,
 338, 362
 Allen 204, 217
 Aloni 18, 153, 206, 215, 244, 260, 281,
 296, 303, 304, 308, 310, 313, 325,
 326, 346
Alpomysh Epic 65, 66, 67, 75, 84, 101,
 102, 103, 104, 113, 122, 124, 128,
 233, 253
 Anacreon 297, 304
 Andromache 210, 230
 Angiolillo 296, 369
Annanmar Epic 81, 103, 192
 Antisthenes 270
aoidoi 146, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153,
 160
 Apollodorus 265, 331
 Arant 51, 52, 64
 Archilochus 162, 171, 268, 269
 Arete 147
 Aristarchus 214, 319, 329, 332, 334,
 335
 Aristophanes 173, 335
 Aristotle 164, 168, 209, 248, 262,
 263, 270, 271, 273, 331, 369, 370,
 377
 Artemis Brauronia 277
 Assurbanipal 226
 Athenaeus 159, 246, 275
 Athens 16, 19, 157, 158, 167, 168, 172,
 195, 196, 214, 216, 217, 218, 229,
 230, 237, 238, 240, 241, 242, 244,
 246, 254, 256, 258, 271, 272, 273,
 275, 276, 277, 278, 295, 296, 299,
 300, 302, 303, 304, 306, 310, 314,
 315, 319, 321, 323, 325, 326, 331,
 334, 348, 363, 365, 366, 369, 371,
 374, 387, 388, 394, 397, 399
 authority 212
 'Awadallah 'Abd aj-Jalil 'Ali 39, 40,
 56, 76, 80, 90, 92, 94, 98, 127, 128,
 130, 131, 135, 136, 149, 159, 188,
 235, 290, 341, 342

B

Bagre 115, 117, 127, 283
 Bajgoric 291
bakshy 97
 ballads 124
 Barber 25, 49, 90, 101, 105, 119, 120,
 190, 265
 Bartok 290
 Beck 34, 35, 36, 38, 40, 74, 75, 102,
 105, 163, 176, 183, 189
 Beissinger 26
 Belcher 25, 78, 105
 Ben-Amos 55, 78, 290
 Bérard 329, 330
 Bhopa 76, 104
 Bhopo 188, 290
 Biebuyck 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 40,
 49, 69, 75, 77, 78, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87,
 90, 91, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 102, 104,
 105, 106, 109, 113, 117, 119, 129, 133,
 134, 163, 235, 283, 284, 286, 289,
 316
Biographies of Homer 153, 166, 272, 315
 Bird 49, 52, 62, 69, 81, 90, 97, 99, 112,
 114
 Birt 385
 Biyali Abu Fahmi 41, 76
 Blackburn 14, 15, 24, 26, 28, 49, 77,
 79, 81, 83, 84, 85, 102, 103, 109, 111,
 166, 191, 192, 236
 Blau 77
 Blössner 18, 197, 198, 199
Bojicic Alija Rescues Alibey's Children 287
 books 35, 38, 40, 46, 95, 98, 116, 121,
 124, 139, 154, 177, 194, 217, 272,
 285, 338
 Børdahl 49, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 100,
 128, 137, 139, 175, 176, 183, 187, 191,
 349
 Bowra 11, 24, 67, 75, 76, 204
 Boyd 162, 170, 172

Boyer 81, 82, 99, 100
 Brahma Nayudu 37, 55, 188
 Brillante 18, 258, 323
 Brody 290
Brothers' Epic 34, 36, 75, 102
 Bulman 189, 190
 Burgess 18, 145, 146, 170, 215, 254,
 262, 263, 264, 266, 267, 268, 299
 Burhan 288
 Burkert 150, 157, 175, 296, 303, 304,
 308
 Burns-Ncamashe 191
 Busby 223
byliny 51, 52, 64
 Bynum 18, 88, 120, 121, 124, 132, 133,
 188, 233, 234, 235, 252, 256, 288,
 290

C

Cahn 367, 369
 Cantilena 159, 215, 281
 Cassio 175, 207, 268, 270, 271
 Cennayya 37, 38
 Cerquiglini 221, 222
 Chairedemos 277
Chansons de Geste 223, 227
 Chrétien de Troyes 223
 Cimon 276
 citharodes 150, 153, 158
 Clark 102, 104
 Claus 81, 83, 102, 103, 104, 108, 128,
 236
 Clay 299, 347
 Cleophrades vase 171
 Clisthenes 157, 236, 372
 Colakovic 18, 74, 201, 202
 Colli 303, 305
 Collins, D. 113, 145, 146, 150, 166, 167,
 168, 170, 171, 246
 Collins, W. 15, 54, 78, 81, 100, 188,
 189, 289, 290, 346, 348

- competitions 98, 304, 309
 composition in performance 24, 49,
 51, 52, 55, 57, 72, 73, 109, 164, 165,
 201, 212, 257, 286
Contest of Homer and Hesiod 153, 170,
 249, 303, 309
Corpus Theognideum 250, 303
 Creophylus 156, 311
 Cushing 54, 57, 84, 86, 88, 91, 102
 Cynaethus 151, 302, 303, 304, 305,
 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 327, 387
Cypria 9, 261, 262
- D**
 D'Agostino 302, 303, 310, 311
 Da Monzon 32, 101, 102, III, 134
 Danek 18, 99, 150, 202, 316
dangbéj 77
 definition of epic 26
 de Jong 20, 337, 338, 350, 352, 362
 Demetrius of Phalerum 214, 246, 271
 Democritus 270
 Demodocus 146, 148, 150, 153, 161,
 172, 220, 253, 254, 255, 298, 337,
 338
 Demosthenes 274
Devanarayan Epic 76, 77, 81, 104, III, 251
dhola 27, 85, 103, 112, 117, 137, 253, 254
 Dickins 366, 385
 dictation 10, 21, 33, 35, 43, 139, 156,
 284, 302, 312, 314, 328, 393
 Dingaan 120
 Diomedes 277, 298, 316, 331, 356, 361
 Douris 272, 384
 Dowden 205, 210, 259, 296
dudak degmez 112
 Dué 18, 215, 219, 229
 Dumestre 67, 84, 94, 99, 101, III
 Dzüsüp Mamay 75, 91, 92, 95, 98,
 129, 151, 159, 175
- E**
 Ebbott 229
Edige Epic 44, 45, 57, 58, 65, 66, 67,
 68, 69, 70, 76, 77, 102, 138, 139,
 140, 141, 143, 233, 267, 290
 Edwards 330, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338,
 350
 Eichhoff 302, 303
 emic / etic 15, 150, 164, 310
Epic Cycle 13, 104, 171, 215, 232,
 235, 249, 261, 263, 264, 265,
 280, 399
Epic of Anggun Nan Tungga 76, 103
Epic of Gilgamesh 67, 225, 226, 227
Epic of Palnadu 14, 25, 36, 37, 38, 44,
 56, 92, 103, 109, 123, 129, 162, 166,
 190, 235, 253
Epigoni 261
 episodes 32, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 64,
 75, 96, 101, 102, 103, 104, 106, 107,
 109, 118, 122, 123, 129, 134, 135,
 136, 145, 170, 172, 176, 193, 209,
 225, 235, 244, 245, 253, 254, 262,
 280, 298, 316, 318, 330, 332, 338,
 347, 353
 Ernazar-shoir 102
 Eumaeus 146, 255, 359
Eumenides 256
 Eumolpus 247
 Euripides 196
 Eurykleia 242
 Exekias 242
 expansion 21, 52, 72, 105, 106, 107,
 110, 121, 126, 128, 130, 138, 151, 231,
 252, 256, 257, 259, 278, 280, 298,
 299, 316, 318, 346, 347, 350, 361
 expansion / concatenation 106
- F**
 Fagles 322, 325
 Fei Junliang 176

Fernández Galiano 334, 335
 Filipovic 287
 Fine 14, 17, 285, 289, 290
 Finkelstein 230
 Finnegan 17, 49, 65, 85, 137, 174, 179,
 180, 181, 183
 Flueckiger 15, 24, 77, 79, 81, 83, 85,
 102, 118, 122, 191, 236
 Foley 17, 18, 19, 24, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64,
 65, 66, 70, 74, 79, 80, 91, 111, 115,
 159, 169, 207, 208, 215, 265, 282,
 288, 289, 290, 291, 300, 324, 341,
 346
 Foster 290
 Fozil Yo'ldosh-o'g'li 75, 102
 Frame 207, 232, 258, 314, 339
 Francois vase 237
 Friedrich 12, 18, 59, 198, 200, 201
 Furtwängler 365, 366, 371, 389

G

Galeyya 36, 37, 38, 286
 Galley 27, 123, 189, 231, 233
 Gelon 276
 Genette 13, 337
 genre-dependence 110, 115
Gesar Epic 75, 102, 189
 Glaucón 164
 Goody 26, 48, 49, 108, 113, 115, 117,
 118, 127, 137, 187, 193, 283
 Goold 206, 300, 346
 Gordesiani 205
 Gowda 289, 293, 343
 Graziosi 18, 79, 145, 146, 151, 152, 153,
 157, 158, 159, 160, 167, 171, 177, 210,
 237, 261, 269
 Griffith 173
griots 75, 111, 114, 142
 Guiot 223

H

Hainsworth 149, 333, 334, 335
 Halil 88, 287, 291
 Ham-Bodedio 118
 Haslam 217, 218, 219, 228, 348
 Hatto 11, 24, 25, 26, 31, 42, 54, 83, 88,
 285
 Heberdey 385
 Hector 230, 257, 298, 340, 352, 354
 Heiden 169, 332, 335, 338, 339, 340,
 341, 346, 350, 353
 Heitsch 198
 Helen 9, 240, 243, 245, 261
 Hephaestus 239
 Heraclitus 268, 269
 Hercules 249, 251, 253, 259, 279, 305,
 324, 325, 327
 Herington 153, 169, 171, 205, 248
 Herodotus 9, 154, 156, 157, 160, 195,
 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 236, 261,
 262, 263, 264, 270, 276, 296, 302,
 304, 305, 311, 328, 331, 370
 Hesiod 59, 114, 145, 153, 157, 160, 162,
 170, 171, 173, 206, 207, 249, 252,
 261, 295, 303, 305, 308, 309, 337,
 387, 395
 Heubeck 300, 333, 334, 335, 336
 Hieron 153
 Hipparchus 19, 244, 296, 297, 302,
 304, 311, 326, 387
 Hippias 270
 Hippothales 250
 Hirschberger 206
 Hoekstra 333, 335
 Hollmann 211
 Homerids 156, 302, 303, 304, 309
homeristai 246
 Honko, L. 11, 12, 21, 23, 24, 26, 29,
 42, 43, 44, 56, 57, 62, 63, 65, 68,
 69, 76, 83, 86, 91, 92, 102, 104,
 105, 108, 110, 115, 119, 120, 137, 138,

- 140, 141, 142, 143, 148, 163, 184,
186, 207, 208, 255, 284, 286, 287,
289, 291, 292, 293, 294, 296, 301,
321, 327, 343, 344, 346
- Honko, A. 293
- Hsini 138
- Hurwit 364, 367, 373, 374, 394
- Huso 202
- hybridisation 125, 133, 233, 234, 235,
252
- hymns 13, 199, 229, 249, 252, 258,
260, 269, 303, 306, 307, 310, 396,
398
- Hymn to Aphrodite* 252, 260
- Hymn to Apollo* 146, 147, 151, 199, 229,
258, 260, 302, 303, 305, 306, 309,
312, 387
- I
- Iditua 55
- Ilmilku 395
- induced / natural 23, 284
- Innes 54, 55, 69, 83, 85, 86, 87, 89,
90, 95, 99, III, 114, 116, 126, 130,
137, 142, 147, 148, 156, 188, 191,
287, 288, 289, 290
- interpolation 230, 305, 312, 313, 314,
315, 317, 322, 323, 336, 341
- intertextuality 205, 265, 266, 267
- Ion* 148, 158, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165,
166, 169, 171, 172, 173, 177, 217, 231,
310, 331
- J
- Jakobson 129, 203
- Janko 10, 12, 18, 19, 150, 281, 288,
296, 300, 301, 317, 327, 334, 338,
346
- Jeffery 205
- jelilu* 75
- Johansen 237, 238
- Johnson 30, 42, 54, 55, 69, 78, 85, 97,
99, 101, 102, 108, 109, III, 118, 119,
125, 127, 128, 129, 256, 283, 285,
290
- Jumabay Bazarov 44, 46, 66, 67, 77,
138, 139, 140, 141, 143
- K
- Kanute, B. 89, 116
- Kanute, D. 87, 89
- Kanyaka Epic* 192
- Karadzic 50, 281
- Keesling 367, 369, 370, 377
- Kelly 255, 257
- Kesteloot 67, 84, 94, 99, 101, III
- Khaldoun 38, 123
- King 290
- Kirk 181, 334, 335, 346
- Kleinlogel 194, 206
- Kleitias 15, 237
- Kooti Cennaya* 76, 119, 137, 173
- Kordabbu Epic* 102, 103, 236
- Köroglu 233
- Kothari 80, 81, 94, 95, 110, 141
- Kouyaté 113
- Kowalzig 248
- Krumeich 367, 373, 374
- Kukuruzovic 70, 115
- Kullmann 194, 205, 266
- Kumara 91
- Kurpershoek 71, 112
- Kuschel 130, 186
- kwangdae* 84, 94
- L
- Labarbe 166, 230
- Lachmann 329, 330
- Laertius 168, 170, 171, 172, 314
- Lane 123
- Lasus of Hermione 297
- Lattimore 276, 318, 320

- Lechat 366
Little Iliad 262
 Lohmann 205
 Longinus 209, 332
 Lönnrot 184, 186, 208, 301
 Lord 9, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 28, 29, 30, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 59, 62, 63, 64, 65, 69, 70, 72, 73, 74, 78, 79, 82, 83, 86, 88, 89, 91, 94, 96, 99, 102, 105, 108, 109, 115, 116, 119, 120, 121, 125, 126, 128, 130, 131, 140, 142, 159, 165, 174, 175, 177, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 187, 191, 192, 196, 201, 202, 203, 204, 206, 207, 210, 213, 222, 244, 253, 259, 267, 281, 282, 283, 287, 288, 291, 292, 317, 333, 341, 349, 360
Lorik-Canda Epic 15, 122
 Lowenstam 240, 241, 242, 243, 296
 Löwy 366
 Ludwich 217, 227, 228
 Lycurgus 168, 171, 259
- M**
Mahabharata 31, 35, 38, 42, 77, 192
 Maiandrios 15, 305
 Majstorovic 89
 Makic 121, 133
 Malik 15, 76, 81, 83, 99, 104, 105, 251
Manas Epic 42, 75, 78, 91, 98, 103, 119, 163, 233
 Matjanovic 133
 Martin 25, 156
 Mateene 33, 83, 84, 87, 94, 98, 105, 113, 117, 133, 283, 284, 289, 316
 Maund 290
 Mededovic 22, 74, 81, 94, 105, 116, 120, 121, 126, 131, 132, 133, 142, 162, 201, 202, 341
 Mehmed 119, 125
 Meillet 159, 251
- Meleager 259, 298
 Melesigenes 154
 Memnon 335
 Menelaus 210, 240, 243, 257, 258, 277, 298, 300, 321, 323, 324
 Menestheus 276, 277, 278
 mental editing 138, 142, 143
 mental text 110, 120, 129, 138, 142, 143, 256, 294
 Metrodorus 164, 270
 Möbius 366
 Mollard-Besques 388, 389
 Monberg 90
 Muhammad Jonmurod-o'g'li Po'lkan 75
 Mujo 70, 88, 115, 287
 Mulokozi 25, 27, 61, 62, 87, 89, 95, 118
 multiform 56, 57, 62, 65, 69, 116, 124, 125, 131, 133, 135, 136, 219, 220, 232, 233, 234, 235, 241, 252, 258, 267
 Munin 76, 103
 Murin-jiraw Senirbek-uli 45
 Muriro 33, 84
 Murray 167, 303, 341
 Musaeus 295, 302, 305, 387, 393
mvēt 81, 97, 99
Mwinda Epic 32, 33, 34, 77, 104, 105, 106, 116, 129, 133, 134, 163, 235, 284
- N**
 Nagler 61, 210, 317
 Nagy 12, 17, 18, 25, 28, 74, 145, 146, 150, 158, 159, 162, 168, 169, 171, 177, 183, 207, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 224, 229, 230, 232, 236, 237, 238, 246, 253, 261, 269, 336
 Naika 11, 42, 43, 57, 69, 76, 84, 86, 88, 91, 92, 119, 137, 141, 148, 163, 173, 186, 287, 292, 293, 294, 296,

297, 298, 301, 321, 343, 344, 345,
346, 470
Nainasi 123
Nasser 130
Ndou 88, 91
Nestor 210, 249, 252, 270, 300, 315,
317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 398
Nestor Cup 249
Nicanor 329
Nikeratos 275
Njegos 184, 185, 186, 191, 203, 204
nostoi 299, 300
Notopoulos 18, 148, 169, 333, 346
Nünlist 329

O

Odysseus 67, 116, 145, 146, 147, 161,
200, 209, 210, 242, 244, 245, 251,
253, 254, 255, 256, 277, 278, 298,
299, 316, 317, 324, 325, 349, 352,
353, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360,
399
oime 254
Okpewho 14, 104
Olrik 24, 26, 113, 126, 194
Ompuri 128
Ong 99, 100
Onomacritus 302, 303, 304, 305, 310,
311, 312, 313, 325, 328, 370, 374,
386, 387
Opland 98, 191, 282
Orpheus 295, 305, 387
Osman 119, 125
Osmanbeg Delibegovic and Pavicevic Luka
120, 133
Ozidi Epic 102, 104

P

Pabuji Epic 37, 54, 56, 77, 80, 94, 103,
109, 110, 111, 123, 128, 141, 143, 188,
290

paddana 104
Palladium 278
Palnativiracaritra 36
Panathenaea 157, 158, 167, 168, 169,
170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 178, 215, 217,
230, 236, 241, 242, 244, 254, 276,
295, 296, 298, 299, 304, 321, 346,
387
Panhellenic 158, 215, 217, 230, 251,
296, 326
p'ansori 27, 53, 63, 85, 94, 95, 112, 175
papyri 216, 218, 219, 223, 228, 257,
271, 274, 300, 329, 330, 331, 332,
385
par 80, 111, 123, 193
Paris 9, 238, 253, 257, 261, 298
Parry 9, 11, 17, 20, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30,
48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 58, 59,
60, 61, 63, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74,
78, 79, 81, 82, 83, 88, 91, 92, 99,
102, 105, 115, 120, 121, 124, 126, 128,
130, 131, 132, 133, 140, 142, 159, 162,
164, 174, 177, 182, 187, 195, 198,
200, 201, 202, 205, 219, 233, 241,
246, 253, 281, 282, 283, 286, 287,
288, 290, 291, 292, 295, 300, 301,
332, 333, 339, 341, 360, 361
Parry, A. 204, 245
Pasquali 330, 346
Pasquier 389, 391
Patroclus 67, 210, 238, 266, 268, 298,
331, 353
Pavese 18, 150, 247, 248, 249, 260,
307
Payne 366, 372
Pedersen 15, 373, 384
Pelliccia 18, 196, 197
Penelope 88, 147, 148, 220, 242, 358,
359
performance arena 80, 107, 112, 130,
144, 158, 174, 212, 232, 245, 250,

252, 253, 258, 259, 265, 280, 282,
308, 310, 311, 312, 315, 326, 361,
396
Petronius 247, 279
Pettitt 124, 193
Phemius 146, 148, 150, 153, 160, 337,
338
Phillips 53, 71, 76, 77, 81, 85, 86, 87,
88, 89, 102, 103, 104, 137, 143, 176,
190, 231, 232, 236, 288, 290, 346
Photius 262
Pihl 49, 53, 63, 81, 84, 85, 94, 95, 102,
112, 175
Pike 14
Pindar 145, 150, 302, 309, 397
Pisistratus 15, 19, 160, 169, 195, 214,
244, 270, 295, 296, 302, 303, 304,
305, 308, 313, 314, 315, 316, 319,
325, 326, 348, 357, 367, 370, 372,
386, 393
Plato 148, 150, 152, 153, 158, 161, 163,
164, 165, 166, 168, 169, 171, 172,
177, 217, 224, 230, 250, 261, 270,
275, 310, 331, 396
Plautus 278
Plutarch 153, 271, 273, 313, 314, 325,
332
Polycrates 195, 303, 304, 305, 308
Polyphemus 194, 242, 278, 279
pool of tradition 65, 69, 73, 232, 251,
252, 255, 256, 264, 265, 267, 284
Pottier 389, 391
Priam 240
Proclus 262, 264
Proteus 321
Pseudo-Plutarch 329
Ptolemy I 215, 271
Pucci 205

Q

Quaglia 150, 398

R

Radin Suane Epic 15, 78, 81, 100, 289,
290, 348
Rai 289, 293
Ramacami 34
Ramakka 294
Ramayana 35, 42, 77, 192
Raubitschek 363, 366, 367, 369, 370,
373
Reichl 13, 14, 21, 24, 31, 44, 45, 46, 52,
53, 57, 58, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69,
75, 76, 77, 81, 83, 84, 89, 91, 92,
95, 96, 99, 102, 103, 104, 111, 113,
114, 115, 116, 117, 119, 122, 124, 127,
128, 129, 130, 138, 139, 140, 141,
143, 151, 163, 188, 191, 267, 282,
289, 290, 316
re-roofing ceremony 97
resonance 210
Reynolds 29, 31, 38, 40, 41, 56, 76, 77,
82, 83, 84, 90, 93, 95, 96, 102, 103,
104, 108, 127, 130, 136, 163, 175,
231, 235, 254, 287, 291
rhapsode 11, 20, 21, 145, 146, 148, 149,
150, 151, 152, 153, 155, 156, 157, 158,
159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165,
166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172,
174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 201, 206,
212, 213, 214, 216, 217, 229, 231,
236, 237, 242, 244, 245, 246, 247,
249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 256,
257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 263, 269,
270, 280, 296, 297, 298, 299, 301,
302, 303, 304, 306, 307, 308, 309,
310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 317, 324,
325, 326, 327, 332, 334, 339, 346,
347, 349, 350, 355, 361, 362, 387,
388, 393, 398
Richardson, N. 330, 331, 332, 334
Richardson, S. 205
Rinchindorji 75, 77, 78, 101

- Rink 185
 Rodgers 189
 Roghair 26, 36, 37, 44, 55, 74, 75, 85,
 86, 92, 102, 103, 104, 109, 119, 123,
 129, 162, 166, 188, 190, 191, 286
 Roland 67, 221
 Rosenah binti Ahmad 289
runor 83
 Rureke 33, 105, 163, 283, 284, 289
 Russo 334, 335
- S
- Saada 75, 86, 138, 187, 231
 Sagimbay Orozbaqov 75, 97, 98
 Saman 289
sampo 88
 Sanasar 67
 Sappho 167, 250, 394
 Sart 95
 Sayaqbay QaralaeV 75
 Schefold 237, 238
 Schironi 274, 332
 Schneider-Lengyel 389
 Schøsler 222, 224, 227
 Schuchhardt 363, 366, 378, 384
 Schwartz 257, 323
 Scodel 14, 18, 82, 215, 259, 299
 Scylla 278
 Seitel 27, 83, 87, 143, 300
 Sewell 123
 Seydou 67, 84, 85, 86, 92, 94, 101,
 102, 111, 118, 127, 134, 135, 142, 147,
 156, 188, 288, 289
 Shapiro 168, 296, 331, 370, 371, 372,
 373, 374, 386
 Sherungu 33, 84, 94, 284
 Shive 17, 18, 59, 200
Shuihu 100
Sijobang Epic 53, 103, 143, 231, 236,
 253, 290
- Silamaka 67, 118, 134
 Simonides 297, 397
 Sin-leqi-unnini 225
Sirat Bani Hilal 27, 38, 56, 76, 85, 103,
 117, 123, 136, 138, 189, 231, 235,
 253, 254, 287, 291
Siri Epic 11, 29, 42, 43, 56, 58, 70, 76,
 83, 90, 91, 102, 104, 119, 137, 140,
 163, 173, 186, 284, 286, 287, 289,
 291, 292, 293, 294, 321, 327, 343,
 344, 345, 346, 470
 Slyomovics 29, 31, 38, 39, 40, 56, 76,
 80, 83, 84, 85, 88, 90, 91, 92, 94,
 98, 102, 103, 105, 113, 117, 118, 122,
 127, 128, 130, 131, 135, 136, 147, 149,
 163, 166, 176, 188, 189, 235, 287,
 288, 290, 341, 342
 Smith 31, 37, 54, 55, 56, 75, 77, 80, 83,
 84, 86, 87, 103, 104, 109, 111, 123,
 128, 137, 141, 143, 188, 193, 290
 Snodgrass 238, 239, 240
 Socrates 162, 163, 164, 165, 166
 Solon 167, 250, 314
 Son-Jara. *See* Sunjata
 Sophocles 152, 259
 Sperlonga 278
 Stanley 174, 296, 337, 339, 341, 346,
 350
 Steiner 195, 306
 Stesimbrotus 164, 270
 Strabo 314
 Studniczka 366, 385
 Sturgeon 370, 371, 376
 Sundiata. *See* Sunjata
 Sunjata 32, 42, 89, 97, 101, 102, 118,
 120, 189, 253
 Suso 87, 114, 142
 Swarup 84, 112
 Syagros 276

T

Taha Abu Zayd 136
 Tamerlan 45
 Taplin 174, 336, 337, 346
Teichoskopia 245, 318
 Telemachus 148, 160, 209, 242, 252,
 321, 357, 359, 360, 361
 Terpsikles 157
 Teucer 277, 278
 Thamyris 146, 157
 Theagenes 268, 269, 270
The Conquest of Oechalia 311
Theogony 145, 249, 252, 308
 Theophrastus 331
 theory / hypothesis 13
 Theseus 237, 238, 259, 275, 277, 278,
 296, 305, 313, 324, 325, 326
The Song of Bagdad 121
 Thestorides 155, 176
 Thetis 238, 239, 317, 335, 356
The Wedding of Ali Vlahinjic 120, 132
The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Becirbey
 291
The Wedding of Smailagic Meho 121, 133,
 142
 Thisted 185, 286, 289
 Thomas 17, 196, 197, 206
 Thrapa 75
 Thucydides 270, 307, 310, 319
 Tiberius 278
 Tigay 226
 Tinguidji 92, 94, 134, 142, 147
 Tokhtamysh 45, 138
 tradition 14
 tradition-dependence 110, 111
 translation 29, 289
 Trianti 363, 369, 370, 371, 373, 374,
 377, 378, 383
 Trimalchio 279

truth 25, 27, 86, 114, 117, 128, 129, 131,
 173, 202, 212, 261, 312, 317
 Tsagalis 18, 215, 265
 Tuhanuku 130, 186
turi-turian 189
 Tylus 26
 Tyrtaeus 397

U

Ugljanin 51, 74, 121, 290
 unified / cyclic 104, 254

V

Van Otterlo 353
 van Thiel 222, 336, 347, 349, 350
 van Wees 149
 Velic 287
 Velimirovic 287
 Vlahovljak 202
 von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 171,
 257
 Vujnovic 70, 79, 132, 202, 287, 288,
 300

W

Wachter 238
 Wade-Gery 204, 346
 Westenholz 226, 227
 West, M. 18, 19, 148, 150, 153, 154,
 155, 158, 168, 169, 171, 175, 206,
 223, 225, 226, 228, 238, 244, 257,
 259, 261, 263, 295, 296, 297, 300,
 303, 304, 306, 307, 308, 315, 317,
 319, 329, 330, 340, 341, 347, 399
 West, S. 169, 218, 258, 295, 329, 330,
 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 346, 347
 Whitman 330
 Wofford 26
 Wu Sung 100

X

Xenophanes 153, 268, 269, 272, 397

Xenophon 150, 152, 165, 166, 250,
261, 275

Y

Yangzhou storytelling 27, 49, 92, 94,
95, 96, 139, 175, 176, 191, 349

Ying 75, 78, 86, 91, 92, 97, 98, 103,
151, 187

Z

Zarifov 81

Zenodotus 337

Zhirmunsky 75, 81, 95, 97, 98, 109,
113, 114, 233

Zogic 287

Zoilus 270

Zumthor 221, 222, 224

Zunic 121, 133

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Printed in Denmark by Special-Trykkeriet Viborg a-s
ISSN 1904-5492 · ISBN 978-87-7304-361-5

ISBN 978-87-7304-361-5



9 788773 043615