

CLCS4009

READING ANTIQUITY: A SURVEY
OF ANCIENT LITERATURE



Lecture 2: Epics,
Songs and
Hierarchies:
Homer's *Iliad*
and Hesiod's
Theogony

What is Epic?

- “hexameter narrative poems on the deeds of gods, heroes, and men” *Oxford Classical Dictionary* 3rd edition, s.v. epic
- Inscribing the past for the present
- Religious, ethical, political and military values
- Panhellenic?





Mt. Olympus

Lamnos

Troy

Iolcus

AEGEAN SEA

ASIA MINOR

THESSALY

Lesbos

Scyros

Delphi

Thebes

Athens

BOEOTIA

Corinth

ATTICA

LYCIA

Mycenae

Argos

Piryns

Troezen

PELOPONNESE

ARCADIA

Pylos

Sparta

Delos

Naxos

Cythera

Rhodes

Cyprus

Knossos

Crete

Orality and Interpolations

- Different bards/audiences
- The written tradition
- Politics and literature
- And they that held Athens, the well-built citadel, the land of great-hearted Erechtheus, whom of old Athene, daughter of Zeus, fostered, when the earth, the giver of grain, had borne him; and she made him to dwell in Athens, in her own rich sanctuary, [550] and there the youths of the Athenians, as the years roll on in their courses, seek to win his favour with sacrifices of bulls and rams;—these again had as leader Menestheus, son of Peteos. Like unto him was none other man upon the face of the earth for the marshalling of chariots and of warriors that bear the shield. [555] Only Nestor could vie with him, for he was the elder. Homer, *Iliad*, 2. 546-56.

Indicators of Orality

- Inconsistencies
 - Nestor's strength
- Type scenes
 - Formulaic scenes (arming; readying ships; hospitality)
- Formulas = expressions regularly used to explain an essential idea
 - much-suffering divine Odysseus
 - swift-footed Achilles
 - cow-eyed Athena
 - Rosy-fingered dawn

Authorship: The Homeric Question



Authorship: Hesiod

And one day they taught Hesiod
glorious song while he was
shepherding his lambs under
holy Helicon, and this word first
the goddesses said to me—[25]
the Muses of Olympus,
daughters of Zeus who holds
the aegis: “Shepherds of the
wilderness, wretched things of
shame, mere bellies, we know
how to speak many false things
as though they were true; but we
know, when we will, to utter
true things.” Hesiod, *Theogony*
22-8.



Performances, Singers and Heroes

For them Alcinous slaughtered twelve sheep, [60] and eight white-tusked boars, and two oxen of shambling gait. These they flayed and dressed, and made ready a goodly feast. Then the herald drew near, leading the good minstrel, whom the Muse loved above all other men, and gave him both good and evil; of his sight she deprived him, but gave him the gift of sweet song. [65] For him Pontonous, the herald, set a silver-studded chair in the midst of the banqueters, leaning it against a tall pillar, and he hung the clear-toned lyre from a peg close above his head, and showed him how to reach it with his hands. And beside him he placed a basket and a beautiful table, [70] and a cup of wine, to drink when his heart should bid him. So they put forth their hands to the good cheer lying ready before them. But when they had put from them the desire of food and drink, the Muse moved the minstrel to sing...

Homer, *Odyssey*, 8. 59-73

The Muses

Theogony: From the
Heliconian Muses let us
begin to sing,



Odyssey: Tell me, O Muse,
of the man of many
devices, who wandered full
many ways after he had
sacked the sacred citadel of
Troy.

Iliad: Sing goddess, of the
wrath of Peleus' son,
Achilles, that destructive
wrath which brought
countless woes upon the
Achaeans, and sent forth to
Hades many valiant souls
of heroes,

Homer's *Iliad*: Summary

- Nine years in: Chryseis and Briseis
- Retreat of Achilles & desire to see Achaeans destroyed
- Fighting: Trojans with Zeus on side
- The embassy to Achilles
- Patroclus fights: slain by Hector
- Achilles vs. Hector
- Priam supplicates Achilles
- Where's the rest?

Power Crisis

- Political Power vs. Strength
- “...but I will myself come to your tent and take the fair-cheeked Briseis, your prize, so that you will understand [185] how much mightier I am than you, and another may shrink from declaring himself my equal and likening himself to me to my face.” So he spoke. Grief came upon the son of Peleus, and within his shaggy breast his heart was divided, whether he should draw his sharp sword from beside his thigh, [190] and break up the assembly, and slay the son of Atreus, or stay his anger and curb his spirit. Homer, *Iliad* 1.184-93

Might is right?



Aristocracy v. Community

- *Iliadic* fighting vs. counsels
- Aristeia of Diomedes
- Shame and Glory
- Vs. Assembly of book 2
- The Body Beautiful
- Now the others sate them down and were stayed in their places, only there still kept chattering on Thersites of measureless speech, whose mind was full of great store of disorderly words, wherewith to utter revilings against the kings, idly, and in no orderly wise, [215] but whatsoever he deemed would raise a laugh among the Argives. Evil-favoured was he beyond all men that came to Ilios: he was bandy-legged and lame in the one foot, and his two shoulders were rounded, stooping together over his chest, and above them his head was warped, and a scant stubble grew thereon. [220] Hateful was he to Achilles (et al). Homer, *Iliad* 2.211-23

Hesiod's *Theogony*: Summary

- Hymn to Muses
- Chaos, first gods and the Titans et al
- Line of Pontos(alternative cosmogony)
- Challenges to Zeus (Prometheus, Titanomachy, Typhoeus)
- Children of Olympians
- Catalogue of Women
- Cosmogony (*kosmos + gignesthai*) =
theogony(*theos + gignesthai*)

Cosmic Order: Intergenerational strife



- 8th–7thc. BC: religious and historical context.
- Muses
- “they gave me a staff ... and they breathed into me a voice divine, so I might celebrate past and future.”(31-3)
- “Sing for Zeus father”(37)
- “He is king in the sky, he holds the thunder and flashing lightning. He defeated his father Cronos by force, and he ordained laws for the gods and assigned them their rights” (72-5)
- Titans

Cosmic Order: Alternative Orders

- 211-412: “Other Early Gods”
- Progeny of Night: the dark side (Fate, Nemesis, Deception, Old Age, Toil, Lawlessness ...)
- Progeny of Ceto and Phorcys: Hesiod’s monsters (Geryon, Cerberus, Chimera, Nemean Lion ...)
- Tartarus or death (difference?)
- Typhoeus



Hesiod's Cycle

- Ouranos and Cronos
- Cronos and Zeus
- Zeus and ...

Metis/ Athena

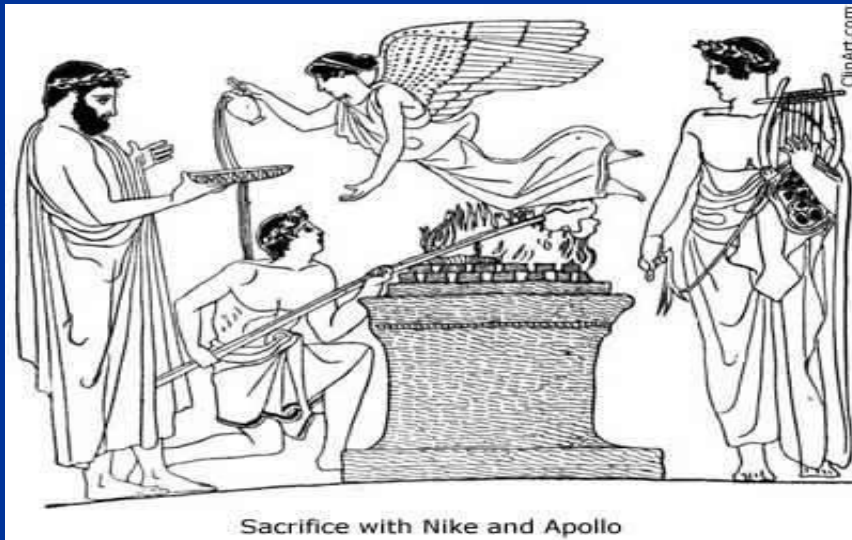
- Doubling
- Hieros gamos
- Functions (Sun, Sex, Stars ...)



Political Order: Gods and Men

Iliad:

- difference between gods and men (book 1)
- Psychostasia (book 22)



Theogony:

- Prometheus, Sacrifice and Pandora (507-616)

Questions?

Follow-up Reading

- Allan, W. 'Divine justice and cosmic order in early Greek epic', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 126, 2006, pp. 1-35.
[<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30033397>]
- Minchin, E. 'The Poet Appeals to His Muse: Homeric Invocations in the Context of Epic Performance', *Classical Journal* 91, 1995, pp. 25-33. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3297771>]

Preliminary Reading for Next Lecture

- Homer, *Odyssey*, book 8
- Homer, *Odyssey*, book 11
- Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 1-247
- Use the websites given in lecture 1 (for primary sources/ancient texts) or use the library!