

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03519-5 - The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women and Archaic Greece

Kirk Ormand

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I Introduction: The Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*

Hesiod is well known as the author of two poems, the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*. In the Classical and post-Classical worlds of Greece and Rome, however, a number of other works were also ascribed to him, among them a work known as the *Catalogue of Women*. This work, though not now generally considered to have been written by Hesiod, was highly regarded in antiquity, probably committed to writing by the mid-sixth century BCE, and is fundamentally “Hesiodic” in form.¹ The *Catalogue* (as I will refer to it throughout this book) is structured in a manner familiar to readers of the *Theogony*: it provides a running list of women who gave birth to heroes, with brief narratives about those births. Most of these women conceive of their remarkable offspring by having intercourse (willingly or not) with a god, though some also marry mortal heroes and produce children with them. The work moves through a full set of genealogies arranged roughly within geographic areas but, like the *Theogony*, also contains a less clearly marked progressive plot. All the heroic genealogies culminate in the story of the marriage of Helen, which, as we will see, leads emphatically to the end of the age of heroes. In providing a comprehensive narrative of heroic genealogies, then, the *Catalogue* also tells the story of how the age that produced the birth of heroes came to its inevitable end, leaving humankind in its current, wretched state, divorced forever from direct social and sexual interaction with the gods.

With the publication of Merkelbach and West’s 1967 edition of the fragments of Hesiod and the small new finds that have occurred over the

¹ See Graziosi and Haubold 2005, 37–40, for a lucid discussion of the characteristics of Hesiod’s poetry and the ancient attribution of the *Catalogue* to Hesiod.

past forty-five years, significant passages of the *Catalogue of Women* are now readily available. What we must admit from the outset, however, is that we know very little about the conditions of production of this text. We do not know who wrote it or if it is appropriate to speak of a single “author.”² We do not know when it was committed to writing or how old the traditional material in it was when that happened. We do not know where its final redactor did his work. And finally, we do not fully understand the genre that it occupies (or, perhaps, defines *sui generis*) and what the confines of that genre are. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that literary interpretation of the *Catalogue* has taken some time to develop.

Each of the issues listed just above has received considerable scholarly attention, but none of them is the primary focus of this work.³ My goal, rather, is to produce a textured literary and historical reading of some of the major passages of the whole. In so doing, I also intend to place the *Catalogue* ideologically in the shifty historical context of the late Archaic period in Greece, specifically the mid-sixth century. To do so I have had to make assumptions and educated guesses about issues such as date, place, and genre. In this chapter, therefore, I lay out those assumptions.

At the outset I should make clear that I have chosen not to engage in the difficult technical work of textual reconstruction that has been so admirably undertaken by Merkelbach and West, Casanova, Hirschberger, Most,

² Graziosi and Haubold 2005, 19, point out that the name “Homer” is used by scholars to mean a range of different kinds of authors, from a single genius who composed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from traditional materials to the collection of oral bards who shaped those poems into their eventual fixed form. The name “Hesiod” is beset with similar difficulties: we are dealing with a set of traditional poetry, ascribed in antiquity to “Hesiod,” but clearly composed in parts over a period of centuries.

³ Indispensable to reading the fragments of the *Catalogue* is West 1985, with citations to earlier studies. See particularly 1–30. Clay 2003, 161–174, has significantly influenced my understanding of the work and its place in the Hesiodic tradition. Rutherford 2000 is an excellent discussion of the genre of the work, and Rutherford 2005 offers useful discussion of its possible origin(s). See also the essays of Osborne, Haubold, Cingano, and Martin in Hunter 2005. Cingano 2009, 111–118, provides an excellent summary of the problems and suggests a much shorter original text by Hesiod that grew over time through a series of later accretions (118). See further below.

Date, Genre, Performance

3

and many others. Though it may be dismissed as no more than a convenient fiction, I have chosen instead to try to squeeze what meaning we can out of the edition produced by Merkelbach and West (with occasional modifications) and to place those bits of text into a coherent literary and social history.⁴

DATE, GENRE, PERFORMANCE

As with so much about the *Catalogue*, there is general agreement, but no certainty, about where and when it was written. Nearly all modern scholars are willing to place it at some time in the sixth century, though some later than others.⁵ The primary internal evidence lies with two facts: first, the episode concerning Kyrênê (fr. 215), which, West argues, “presupposes the existence of the Greek colony in Libya

⁴ The major edition is Merkelbach and West 1967, updated and revised in Merkelbach and West 1990. On occasion information is included in the major edition that did not survive into the 1990 edition. When I cite from the 1967 version I make note of it; otherwise, quotations are from the 1990 edition. Most’s new edition in the Loeb series (2007) introduces a new numbering scheme for the fragments and, given Most’s skill in reconstruction, may become the new standard. For the sake of scholarly convenience, however, I have chosen to quote from and refer to Merkelbach and West unless otherwise noted. Numbering of fragments is that of Merkelbach and West.

⁵ West 1985, 130–137, arguing from internal evidence, puts it between 580 and 520. March 1987, 158–159, prefers the earlier part of this range, from 580 to 550. Koenen 1994, 26, suggests that it can be no later than the early sixth century. Rutherford 2000 argues that the “canonical version” may belong to the sixth century, but he is willing to believe that some material may be much older. Fowler 1998, 1 n. 4, argues for a date before the death of Kleisthenes in 575 and suggests a date near 580. The one significant outlier is Janko 1982 (87 and 247–248 nn. 37–38), who, based on stylistic evidence, believes that the *Catalogue* is closely contemporary to the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, which he puts at the end of the eighth or beginning of the seventh centuries. Solmsen 1981, 355–358, argues that the text was highly variable, and changed by local rhapsodes, until the Alexandrian period. If this is the case, it is impossible to fix either date or place of any fragment. Clay 2003, 165 n. 51, surveys previous opinions and discusses the difficulty of reaching a sure conclusion. Hirschberger 2004, 32–51, cautiously settles for a date between 630 and 590.

founded c. 631.”⁶ Next, the *Catalogue* seems to assume throughout the divinity of Herakles, which again points to a date after 600.⁷ As for place, West believes that the final redactor lives in Athens, in part because of the curiously Athenian flavor of fragment 43a. Fowler, however, sees the Athenian genealogy as significantly lacking in detail and suggests that the genealogy of the Hellenes suggests rather an Aeolid author from northern Greece, and he ties the redaction of the *Catalogue* to the expansion of Thessalian power after the First Sacred War. Hirschberger, citing numerous local versions of specific myths, suggests that some of the stories, particularly those from the Aeolid genealogies, seem to belong more securely in Asia Minor than in Thessaly.⁸

While it would doubtless be reassuring to place the production of our version of the *Catalogue* more securely, it is not critical for my project. I am interested in locating the *Catalogue* not in specific political disputes, but rather in the broad ideological changes that we see throughout Greece in the sixth century. Specific topics receive further treatment in the chapters that follow, but in this chapter I provide a thumbnail sketch of the issues.⁹ In so doing, I tip my hand: I also believe that the *Catalogue* belongs in the sixth century. I have come to this conclusion both because of the internal references used by other scholars and because such a date fits with the analyses that I have produced. Such reasoning is, of course, somewhat circular; on the other hand, many of the broad social concerns that I address are not, themselves, precisely datable. If we discover at some point that the *Catalogue* must have been written in the seventh century, then that means the ideological anxieties that are inherent in the

⁶ West 1985, 132.

⁷ West 1985, 130; cf. frs. 1.22, 25.26–33, 229.6–13.

⁸ West 1985, 169; Fowler 1998, 9, 11–15; Hirschberger 2004, 49–51.

⁹ Full discussion of the history of the sixth century is beyond the scope of this book. The period is fraught with difficulties, and most of our sources are written at least a century later. Good overviews can be found in Murray 1980, Snodgrass 1980, and Osborne 2009. For the role of Solon in the formation of the Athenian *polis*, I am particularly indebted to Manville 1990; see also Osborne 2009, 204–213. Patterson 1998 provides an excellent reassessment of the role of the *oikos* in the early *polis*. Hall 2007a makes clear just how uncertain our knowledge of the history of the period is and gives excellent discussions of various events and social changes.

Date, Genre, Performance

5

stories of the *Catalogue* must also have existed earlier. I see a greater preponderance of evidence for them in the sixth century.

As is often the case with fragmentary texts, the ancient Greeks were much more sure than we are about the authorship of the *Catalogue*. It was almost universally agreed in antiquity that the work was written by “Hesiod,” that is to say, the poet to whom they also ascribed both the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.¹⁰ Modern scholarly opinion is nearly unanimous in believing that the poet of the *Theogony* is not the same as that of the *Catalogue*; the issue is confounded by the fact that our text of the *Theogony* ends with a section that appears to have been written in order to form a bridge between the two works (*Theogony* 1019ff.). The style and diction of that last section, however, appear to be “post-Hesiodic.”¹¹

Nonetheless, the judgment of ancient scholars and authors is of some importance, not for the purpose of fixing the historical identity of a particular person who wrote a particular work, but because the ascription to Hesiod indicates that the scholars of previous ages considered the *Catalogue* to be a certain kind of poetry. The stories contained in the *Catalogue* are traditional heroic tales, and the entire text falls into the broad category of oral hexameter poetry that characterizes the works of Homer and Hesiod.¹² As such it contains a good deal of very old material, formed in large part by the formulaic rules of oral poetic composition. The “author” of any given line or fragment may well have lived some centuries before the text was written down. While

¹⁰ See discussion in West 1985, 127–130. A comprehensive analysis of the problem is provided in Schwartz 1960, 485–549.

¹¹ West 1985, 127–128. See also West 1966, 398–399; Clay 2003, 162–163, with references. Hirschberger 2004, 42–51, summarizes the arguments about authorship and date of composition. Dräger 1997, 1–26, argues for Hesiod as the author of the *Catalogue*; a useful summary is Haubold 2005, 87 n. 8.

¹² See Graziosi and Haubold 2005, 15–34, for a useful discussion of the meaning of the ancient ascription of “Homeric” authorship to a text. A useful summary of the poetic elements that characterize Homeric composition is on pp. 18–21, and the nature of oral formulae and the pioneering work of Milman Parry is discussed on pp. 48–56. It is sufficient here to indicate that the *Catalogue* is similarly derived from a long oral tradition, and eventually arrives in a relatively stable textual form. Rutherford 2000, 82–83 and 264 n. 10, provides a good brief discussion of some of the poem’s oral formulae.

there is some value, therefore, in trying to fix the final “redactor” of the text – and indeed, to tease out the ways that he has shaped the text – the question of author, I suggest, is better approached as a generic question.¹³

In an essay that has not been much remarked by Classicists, Michel Foucault teased out some of the functions of ascribing a work to a particular author:

[A]n author's name is not simply an element in a discourse . . . it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others.¹⁴

As Foucault goes on to argue, this classificatory function (the “author function”) is primarily an indicator of status. This discussion is particularly pertinent to the text of an Archaic author such as Hesiod, about whose life we know next to nothing with certainty. When Pausanias says that the *Catalogue* was written by Hesiod, in other words, that is first a statement of the type and status of the work: it is the kind of work that he associates with the author-function of Hesiod and is sufficiently similar in style to other works of the same author-function to deserve that label. We moderns, rather more obsessed with the identity of a genius behind a work, will find the *Catalogue* “not by Hesiod” on various grounds, but the poem is clearly “Hesiodic” in a larger sense.

¹³ See, e.g., Nagy 1990, 52–81, for a discussion of the way that “authors” in antiquity are primarily a function of the texts ascribed to them. Graziosi and Haubold 2005, 37–40, point out that the ancient Greeks saw the *Catalogue* as Hesiodic because they saw it as stylistically coherent with other works ascribed to Hesiod. West 1985, 30, sees the author of the *Catalogue* as a masterful “synthesizer” of traditional material. At 125 he boldly states, “The *Catalogue* is, just as much as the *Iliad*, the work of a single creative poet.” Clay 2003 makes the interesting argument that in dealing with poems of a traditional, oral nature, the presence of a creative poet is best discovered through the artful arrangement of material. In the case of the *Catalogue*, where the text is fragmentary and the arrangement necessarily provisional, this becomes a difficult task. Martin 2005 argues for a more fluid understanding of the text of the *Catalogue*, with the possibility of significant additions existing in some, but not all, versions.

¹⁴ Foucault 1984 [1979], 107. Graziosi 2002 makes good use of this work; see esp. 194 n. 81.

To start, the *Catalogue*, like the *Theogony*, provides us with an ambitiously comprehensive mythological genealogy, this time of heroes rather than of gods.¹⁵ From this similarity, no doubt, springs the attempt at some point in antiquity to link the two works as a single genealogical masterpiece. We can, however, go further than this: woven into the structure of the *Theogony* is also the story of Zeus' ascension as ruler of Olympus and, with it, the separation of humans from gods.¹⁶ The arrangement of material in the *Catalogue* appears to have a similarly Hesiodic bent: in addition to recounting, more or less systematically, most of the heroes of Greek myth, the *Catalogue* also recounts a specific time in the mythical history of humans, that brief period when (primarily male) gods were sleeping with (primarily female) humans and thus producing the half-divine heroes. Both the prologue of the poem (fr. 1) and its conclusion (fr. 204.97–110) allude to the eventual end of this bracketed time, to the moment when normal humans were finally and fully separated from the gods, so that the *hemitheoi*, the “half-gods” of myth, ceased to be produced.¹⁷ Like the *Theogony*, the *Catalogue* tells us why life today is the way it is.

Despite its thematic connection to the *Theogony*, however, this work clearly owes its pedigree in another way to the *Works and Days*. It is in that poem that Hesiod tells the story of the four declining metallic ages of humanity (gold, silver, bronze, and iron), and interjects an age of heroes in between the bronze age and the current, unhappy age of iron. How this age of heroes comes to an end, however, is not entirely consistent in the Hesiodic corpus. As Jenny Strauss Clay points out, the transition to the final age of iron is different from those that went before: “No catastrophe or sudden destruction precipitates the end of the heroic age. Instead, a gradual transition occurs as the gods withdraw from intercourse with mortals.”¹⁸ In the *Works and Days*, the narrative of the age of heroes ends with mention of their expedition to retrieve Helen (164–165), and then we hear that some of these heroes were settled

¹⁵ As Tsagalis 2009 notes: “In this respect the *CW* shows itself to be strongly Hesiodic, in that it abides by the built-in linearity characteristic of the genealogical Hesiodic epic par excellence, the *Theogony*” (p. 158). See also Graziosi and Haubold 2005, 40.

¹⁶ Recently discussed with great clarity by Clay 2003, 100–128.

¹⁷ See Clay 2003, 169, on the “distancing” function of the term *hemitheoi*.

¹⁸ Clay 2003, 93.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03519-5 - The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women and Archaic Greece

Kirk Ormand

Excerpt

[More information](#)

“apart from humans” (*dich’ anthrôpôn* 167) on the Isles of the Blessed. This general schema also seems to inform fragment 204 of the *Catalogue*, but there the transition is marked as more abrupt and more final. The story of the suitors of Helen shifts abruptly to a change in the character of life, in which someone – probably the gods, less likely their heroic offspring – must now live “as before/apart from humans” (fr. 204.103).¹⁹ Though the events correspond roughly to the narrative in the *Works and Days*, the result here is a sudden break and return to a mode of life that does not include direct congress with the gods.

The *Catalogue*, then, falls into the same broad contextual category as both the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. It serves as an explanation of why our lives are as they are now, and it does so by recalling an earlier time, a time when things were, in some ways, both better and less distinctly human.²⁰ More important, the *Catalogue* seems designed to fit just between these two texts, in that time after the general separation of gods from humans and up to the point when the gods are no longer sleeping with mortals and producing *hemitheoi*, “half-divine” heroes.²¹ Just as the authors of the Cyclic epics avoided retelling the stories that became monumentally known through the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, moreover, the redactor of the *Catalogue* seems to have taken some care to avoid myths already staked out by the *Theogony* and *Works and Days*.²² Though Prometheus and

¹⁹ Ludwig Koenen writes of this troubled ending to the fragment that “the *Catalogue*’s version is only understandable in light of Hesiod’s story about the removal of the heroes to the Islands of the Blest (the island is not even mentioned in the *Catalogue*).” Koenen 1994, 26–27 n. 62. See also Clay 2003, 169–174. Clay argues correctly (166 n. 56) that the setting of the *Catalogue* is after the separation of humans and gods narrated in the *Theogony*. González 2010 also argues that the poem presents a final separation between mortals and immortals; see esp. 416–417. See Hirschberger 2004, 55, for the importance of the Trojan War as the end of the age of heroes.

²⁰ I am here much influenced by Clay 2003, who argues that the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days* are complementary texts that view the problem of humanity from a divine and human perspective, respectively. See also West 1985, 167.

²¹ See Tsagalis 2009, 169. Haubold 2005, 96–98, argues that the story of Herakles in the *Catalogue* functions as intermediary between his role in the *Theogony* and in later epic (discussed at greater length in Chapter 5).

²² West 1985, 128–130, discusses several places where the *Catalogue* appears to consciously imitate either the *Theogony* or the *Works and Days*.

Date, Genre, Performance

9

Pandora are present in the *Catalogue*, for example, the fragments that we have spend no time on that story about the introduction of sex to the world or about the initial separation of gods and humans. Rather, the poem appears to focus on their offspring, Deukalion and Pyrrha, who restart the human race after the massive prehistoric flood (frs. 2, 4).²³ This emphasis makes sense, given the *Catalogue*'s focus on the age of heroes. As Clay points out, this narrative creates a necessary double-origin for humankind, "one half-divine, a hybrid of Olympian and Titanic, a heroic strand, sprung from Pyrrha and Deukalion and constantly reinforced through human-divine unions; and a second strand, sprung from the earth and rocks thrown by the first couple."²⁴ Unlike either Homeric epic, moreover, or the other works of Hesiod, the *Catalogue* gives us an extensive discussion of the suitors of Helen (frs. 195–204), using this episode, in fact, to frame the end of the heroic age.

Although we must resign ourselves, then, to the notion that this poem is "Hesiodic" rather than "by Hesiod," I would argue that the popular assignment in antiquity of the *Catalogue* to Hesiod carries a perceptive understanding of the function of the poem. Like other poems by the author-function designated as Hesiod, this poem melds a comprehensive narrative of traditional mythic stories with an overarching narrative about the end of an earlier, better time. It is "Hesiodic," then, in the sense that it also puts the reader – that is, us – in our relatively wretched human place.²⁵

If that understanding provides a general literary context for the *Catalogue*, it does little to tell us how and in what context the *Catalogue* was originally performed. Elizabeth Irwin has made the most specific case to date for a particular performance context, arguing that the *Catalogue* might belong to the relatively broad category of poetry performed at symposia, which is to say, drinking parties of aristocratic men. Through a careful and nuanced study, Irwin shows that much of the

²³ Tsagalis 2009, 159. These fragments are fraught with difficulty, particularly regarding the mother of Deukalion; see West 1985, 50–51. Fowler 1998 provides a historical reading of the *Catalogue*'s construction of the line of Hellenes.

²⁴ Clay 2003, 167–168.

²⁵ See Koenen 1994, 26 n. 62, 27.

language of the *Catalogue* is shared by the poets we traditionally associate with symposia.²⁶ The difficulty with this reading is that the overall structure of the poem, as well as its use of numerous formulae and compositional features of other hexameter poetry, fits better with Homeric and Hesiodic poems, which we generally do not think of as symposiastic. Irwin is correct to note that there is a high preponderance of language in this poem characterizing the erotic desirability of the women in it, and it is entirely likely that the poem as we have it draws from the themes and vocabulary of early lyric; but this, I believe, is a function of the poem's content, which consists of a series of erotic couplings of gods and men with aristocratic – and therefore beautiful – women. Irwin's study does, however, make strong points about the aristocratic ideological content of the poem.²⁷ This does not make it symposiastic per se, but does help make the case that the poem would appeal to those with an investment in elite status.

That still leaves us, however, with no clear understanding of how and where the *Catalogue*, or the poems that eventually became the *Catalogue*, was performed. I am inclined to believe that they were performed in the same sort of contexts as poems such as the *Theogony* or perhaps the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. We know from later testimonials that, at Athens, the rule for recitations at the Panathenaic festival was “only Homer,”²⁸ but this does not exclude the possibility that Hesiodic poetry was recited at other, similar festivals.²⁹ This tells us little enough: the poem would be considered one of many such poems performed for the public at large, which does not prevent it from glorifying a class structure that favors the aristocracy.

²⁶ See Irwin 2005a, 45–49.

²⁷ Irwin 2005a, 57–64.

²⁸ See Graziosi 2002, 198, with references. Burgess 2004, 8, points out that the Homeric poems are simply too long to be performed at the Panathenaic festival and suggests that rhapsodes must have performed short set-pieces from the poems, expecting the audience to be able to fill in the intervening plot points from their knowledge of the Epic Cycle.

²⁹ Rutherford, who favors a Thessalian origin for the core of the *Catalogue*, suggests that it might have been performed at the “Pylaia” at Anthela, the games at Delphi, or the festival of the Charitesia at Orchomenos (Rutherford 2005, 115 and nn. 62–63).