Introduction

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Early Greek epos is represented for us by several thousands of hexameter verses in essentially uniform dialect, idiom and style. In addition to what has come down to us more or less intact – the two Homeric poems, Hesiod's works, a number of hymns (not all of them that early), the *Aspis* – we have chunks of catalogue poetry and fragments and reports of a number of different works, and we are aware of the existence of a whole oral epic tradition in which essentially traditional material was transmitted in conventional forms. How are we to establish a literary history of early Greek epos, to sort out the elements of the medium and the message chronologically and even genealogically in relation to each other? In the case of most modern *oeuvres*, there is no need to ponder the internal sequence, as dates of composition and publication are known. Indeed, in European literature back until the time of the Greek tragedians, independent information and external evidence often yield absolute dates so that the working out of an internal chronology is not an issue. In the case of early Greek epos, however, the near total lack of absolute chronological pegs and the scarcity of relevant facts and contexts compel us to rely mainly on internal criteria. That holds true especially for the earlier part of the Archaic Age (the eighth and seventh centuries BC); with time we do get testimonies that may serve as clues to *termini post* (or even *ante*) *quem* and thus help us establish a relative chronology based on (approximate) absolute dates. For the charting out and pinning down of poets and poems, we are not much helped by authorial self-reference, except, perhaps, in the case of Hesiod, which does not yield much in the way of chronology, and of the Hymn to Apollo, which may already build on the fiction of a Homer from Chios.

Homer and Hesiod obviously could lay claim to pride of place even at a time when much more epic poetry by many more poets was available than is the case today. We are not, however, much helped by the ancient biographical lore about Homer and Hesiod – the *vitae*, the *Certamen* and

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scattered evidence – or by what the ancients generally imagined about
the age and succession and relationship of those two and of other poets.
The tendency of ancient literary biographers to construct neat successions
between prominent literary figures and to fashion biographical accounts
from what is in the poetry is well known. Graziosi (2002) has shown how
the characters and circumstances and dates of Homer, and of Hesiod as
well, have been constructed by posterity and in essence must be understood
in the light of social and political circumstances and within the context of
literary and ideological axe grinding.[1] Interest in the age and chronological
relationship of Homer and Hesiod is not driven by historical curiosity. The
Homeridai, the rhapsodes in general, the Chians, the Athenians, Herodotus
and Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle – all conjure up a different Homer.
Therefore, although the story of the invention and individualization of
Homer is fascinating and utterly instructive in its own right, the ancient
biographical lore tells us preciously little about the persons it claims to be
about, and is of very little assistance in the quest for absolute and relative
dates. The same questions were rehearsed again and again throughout
the centuries. Thus, for example, while the prominent fourth-century BC
historian Ephorus from Cyme proposed a genealogy according to which
Homer was a younger cousin of Hesiod's, the somewhat later scholar-
historian Philochorus held – with others – that Homer was the older one.[2]
The topic was the theme of a treatise in two books by the fourth-century
BC Platonic philosopher-scholar Heraclides Ponticus, of which nothing is
known other than its title, and the Peripatitic Chamaeleon's (also from
Pontus) allegation that the material in it had been derived from his work.[3]
For the most part, we have only opinions to go by, and very little in
the way of argument. Aristarchus' collective labelling of the cyclic poets as
νεώτεροι ('more recent') in relation to Homer probably does not rely on any
method of assessing literary development, or any historical investigation; it
cannot be separated from Aristarchus' attitude to the non-Homeric Trojan
war tradition as a threat to Homer's originality,[4] even as he championed
Homer's unity against the *chōrizontes* who would ascribe the *Iliad* and
the *Odyssey* to two different authors. As for the relative chronology of
Iliad and *Odyssey*, ps.-Longinus seems to contribute to an ongoing debate

[1] Graziosi's comprehensive account also generously refers to other contributions in a similar vein, such
as West (1999), Burkert (1987).
[2] *FGrH* 70 F1 ad Plut. *Vita Hom.* 1.2; 328 F210.
[3] Heraclid. Pont. F 22.13–14 ap. Diog. Laert. V 86; F 176 ap. Diog. Laert. V 92.
[4] Schol. D ad *Il.* 1.5; schol. A ad *Il.* 1.5–6. On Aristarchus' attitude, see Severyns (1928), Ballabriga
(1998), Burgess (2001).

as he advances the view that the *Iliad* is the work of a young, vigorous poet, and the *Odyssey* that of an aged one.[5] The second-century AD satirist Lucian during his sojourn amongst the dead asks Homer whether he wrote the *Odyssey* before the *Iliad*, 'as most people say' (Homer answers 'no').[6] Another writer of the same period, the geographer Pausanias – who himself was unsure whether the *Theogony* was a work of Hesiod and believed that Homer had written the *Thebaid* – declares that he has undertaken careful research into the question of the age of Hesiod and Homer, 'but I do not like to write on this matter, as I know the quarrelsome nature of those especially who constitute the modern school of epic criticism'.[7] Sometimes, fortunately, relevant evidence is reported. Thus, in view of the fact that verses 1–56 of the *Aspis* were transmitted in Book 4 of the *Catalogue*, Aristophanes of Byzantium, as reported in the hypothesis to the *Aspis*, suspected that the *Aspis* was not by Hesiod but by someone else who had chosen to imitate the Homeric 'Shield'; this is not only testimony to the way an Alexandrian scholar would reason, it also contains, if reliable, relevant information on the relationship between two works within the Greek epos.

Both Eratosthenes, Aristophanes' predecessor as head of the Alexandrian Library, and Aristarchus of Samothrace, who succeeded him, attempted to buttress Homer's priority over Hesiod by showing that the geographical, ethnographical and socio-cultural information incorporated in the Homeric epics represents a less advanced and thus earlier stage in relation to comparable information in Hesiod's works. According to Strabo, Eratosthenes pointed out that Hesiod knew many more localities associated with Odysseus' wanderings than did Homer.[8] The same scholar observed that Homer was ignorant of the fact that the river Nile had several mouths – something that the younger Hesiod was aware of.[9] Indication of Homer's priority is his use of early ethnic names, e.g. of 'Meones' for the Lydians;[10] on the other hand, Hesiod, being younger, introduced Hippomenes running naked against Atalante;[11] the *terminus ante quem* for the innovation is pinned to the 14th Olympiad, i.e. 714–711 BC. Much unsure ground has to be traversed before the presence of putative items of relevant geographical and ethnographic knowledge can be securely transformed into evidence for

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[5] Ps.-Longinus, *Subl.* 9.13. [6] Lucian, *Ver. hist.* 2.20. [7] Paus. 9.30.9.
[8] Eratosth. *FGrH* I B3 and Hes. F 150 M–W ad Strabo 1.2.14.
[9] Eratosth. *FGrH* I B1,6–9 and Hes. F 338 ad Strabo 1.2.22. Hesiod's more advanced geographical knowledge is also evidenced by the fact that Homer refers to the Nile as 'Aigyptos' while Hesiod knows the river by its later name, cf. schol. HMPQT ad Hom. *Od.* 4.447.
[10] Schol. A ad *Il.* 10.431a. [11] Schol. A and T ad *Il.* 23.683b.

absolute and relative chronology – and then only for that verse or passage
of a poem in which it occurs.

In a sense, the Alexandrian philologists' work on the text of the Homeric
poems is all about relative chronology, in so far as they seek to identify accre-
tions to what Homer originally wrote. Some statements question whole
sections of the text. Most important has been the view of Aristophanes and
Aristarchus, that the *Odyssey* reached its πέρας ('limit') or τέλος ('end')
at 23.296,[12] which has often been taken to mean that the poem originally
ended at that point and that the end of book 23 and all of book 24 are
additions by a later hand. The Alexandrians' statement is not supported
by argument; we do not even know for sure what they claim; many have
taken their pronouncement as an aesthetic judgement, referring to the
reunification of husband and wife as the 'goal' of the hero's journey home.
The remark in the scholia that the Doloneia (book 10 of the *Iliad*)[13] had
been drawn up by Homer separately and was included into the poem
by Pisistratus can scarcely be relied upon and is not argued for. A feel-
ing for the special linguistic and compositional features of the Doloneia,
and/or of its untypical content and setting, may have led to this whole
song coming under suspicion at some stage in some circles, prefiguring the
modern unease with Book 10 of the *Iliad*, which was bound to have arisen
anyway, but no doubt has been spurred on also by the ancient scholiast's
remark.[14] The fact that the Doloneia's alleged inclusion in the *Iliad* under
Pisistratus would hardly have been politically motivated may point either
way – the allegation appears the more credible as it is not linked to a polit-
ical motive, or less so, because it has no 'Pisistratean' motive. Most other
putative Pisistratid additions to the text seem to serve Athenian political
aspirations, especially in relation to Aegina and Megara. In a number of
ancient sources from the fourth-century BC Pseudo-Platonic *Hipparchus*
onwards, and the (lost) Megarian historian Dieuchidas of the same period,
the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus or his son Hipparchus are credited (or dis-
credited) not only with the odd addition to the Homeric corpus, but with
a far-reaching initiative which consisted in bringing 'Homer' to Athens
and seeing to it that the Homeric epics were recited every year at the Pana-
thenaic festival in a fixed order by a series of rhapsodes. While the so-called
'Pisistratean Redaction' seems to some to be a chimaera, the tradition seems
to us to rely on some real historical initiative during the tyrants' regime,
privileging and canonizing the Homeric epics by means of the 'Pisistratean

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[12] Their collective opinion is somewhat differently reported in schol. MV, Vind. 133 and in HMQ.
[13] Schol B to *Il.* 10.1.   [14] On the Doloneia, see Danek (1988, and in this volume).

Rule'. That the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* came into being only at this time, as some have held, is a hypothesis that is not supported by the testimonies to this process, and flies in the face of the linguistic and literary evidence for the existence of those poems in a relatively fixed form some 100 to 150 years earlier.

Pictorial representations are another type of ancient evidence that could help us pin down the emergence and existence of epic poems chronologically. If a pictorial representation can be reasonably securely dated, and it can be convincingly shown to represent a scene from a specific poem, then we have at least a *terminus ante quem* for the existence of that poem. And if we can observe a sudden surge in pictorial representations from some part of heroic myth – say, from the subject matter of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* – this would consititue a strong indication of the existence and coming into circulation of a poem. Snodgrass (1997, 1998), reviewing relevant evidence down to late archaic times and refining the methodology of his predecessors,[15] has shown how tenuous are the links between poetry and pottery in the Geometric and Early Archaic ages. Down until *c.* 600 BC only two out of *c.* sixty pictorial representations of myth may be confidently judged to have been influenced specifically by 'Homer', i.e. the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* as we know them, and during the first half of the sixth century there is only a slight increase. This warrants the postulation of a *terminus ante quem* for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey c.* 650 – if the poems were not circulated in a truncated form, an idea that will not appeal to many today. The very parts of the saga that were developed in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* appear to have been quite slow to occupy centre stage in the visual arts. No surge in the popularity of 'Homeric' motives indicates that new, great poems had suddenly become available and rapidly attained popularity. Indeed, 'Homer' seems not to have been a source of inspiration and authority for painters even when they depict scenes taken from the subject matter of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. And what is more, the subject matter of those two poems is not privileged in comparison with episodes from other parts of the Trojan saga (eventually contained in the epic poems of the *kyklos*), and even less so in comparison to other heroic myths. One might prefer to stress that Snodgrass's cautious considerations would after all give us a *terminus ante quem* for 'Homer'; we would like to point to the challenges of charting out the relative chronology that arise from the fact that the existence of our two monumental epics apparently did not have

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[15] Notably Friis Johansen (1967) and Fittschen (1969). The pictorial evidence is put to good use by Burgess (2001).

momentous consequences and did not monopolize the market. Snodgrass's
work constantly reminds us of the plethora of local oral traditions, vernac-
ular oral accounts, and of lost poems that were around for painters, but
also for poets, and for the public at large to refer and relate to.

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While pictorial representations and the textual testimonia from historians,
philologists, etc. must be used for what it is worth, we mainly depend on
the evidence of the corpus itself when we try to work out the chronological
relations within the corpus of Greek epic poetry. About the corpus as a
whole, we should like to stress the following points, some more pertinent to
linguistic issues, others to literary. First, although the corpus is voluminous,
what has been preserved is only a fraction of what was available by, say,
500 BC. In addition, the whole mass of oral popular and local traditions
has vanished, except for scattered remarks. Second, the loss also of all
other poetry of the period before *c.* 650 BC has deprived us of invaluable
comparative material and makes epic poetry stand out in splendid isolation.
Third, in Greek epic, tradition and convention possess the poet to such a
degree that it is especially difficult to disentangle what is older from what
is not so old. Fourth, and on the other hand, early Greek hexameter poetry
is represented for us by several subclasses (heroic, theogonic, didactic,
hymnic) and it has various provenances; they are not all grafted similarly
onto the general tradition. Fifth, some of what actually remains of the
corpus is anything but typical in the sense that it must rely on extraordinary
poetic genius; at least the special status of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has
been *communis opinio* since the time of Aristotle: how to provide for the
individual talent?

   Then there is the question of the nature of those 'texts' that we have. Epos
of every kind had been written down before the end of the Archaic Age;
whether we should think of specimina as 'oral dictated texts', or according
to some other method of textualization, is not our concern here. Once
written down, the individual works would to a varying degree be subject to
changes in performance and even in writing, depending, probably, on the
individuality the works exhibited and the status they achieved. Finkelberg
(2000) has shown how the 'multiformity' that is the hallmark of oral
tradition can be plausibly postulated in the case of the *Cypria*, which seems
hardly to have reached a standard, canonical version, while the kinds of
variations that we find in the case of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are not
sufficient to meet the definition of multiformity: they remained, both in
essence and in detail, the works that had once been written down. That is
why the Homeric poems, as well as Hesiod's works and the major hymns,

can form the basis for the study of relative chronology. Another approach
to Greek epic that has been influential for some time holds that this idea
of the fixed text is misguided: Gregory Nagy's 'evolutionary model of the
genesis of epic' holds that after a fluid period down to *c.* 800 BC, there
followed a 'pan-Hellenic' period with still no written text down to the
middle of the sixth century, and then a third period with 'potential texts
in the form of transcripts' down into the fourth century, followed by a
standardizing period under Demetrius of Phalerum at the very end of
the century and further standardizing by the Alexandrian scholars. This
'evolutionary theory of text-fixation through crystallization' makes away
with 'the elusive certainty of finding the original composition of Homer'
as it implies that even after the Homeric poems were first fixed in writing,
they were characterized by 'multiformity', as oral performances continued
to influence the written texts.[16] This approach for all practical purposes
ignores the difference between *aoidoi* and rhapsodes. Nagy's hypothesis is
hardly called for in order to explain the kind of differences that we find
in Homeric manuscripts. Above all it seems to us not to tally with the
linguistic evidence, which shows that the works of Greek epos are not all
of the same fabric, but have 'crystallized', if that is the correct word, at
different times.

As for the texts that were actually written down, one may ask how
far they represent oral tradition and conform to what is often called oral
poetics, and what, if anything, they owe to the new medium of alphabetic
script being exploited for epic song. Are we dealing with oral poetry, in
the sense that the poems bear witness of composition-in-performance, or
has writing enabled the poet to make things that he otherwise could not
have done? Is Homer the traditional bard, or is he the pan-Hellenic poet?
Closely connected with this is the question of what kind of audiences the
poems and texts are meant for, and how high we shall rate the familiarity of
the audiences with the corpus as a whole, and with the mythical tradition,
and to what works or traditions they relate what they actually listen to. Is
the audience the local population and big men of various Aegean localities,
as they are occasionally visited by travelling bards or rhapsodes, or perhaps
the multitude of Ionians assembled to celebrate a religious festival? Or
must we think of a generalized, pan-Hellenic audience? Finally, there is the
problem of the authority of the manuscripts that we possess and of other
textual evidence owed to papyri and literary quotations in relation to what
was once written down. The manuscripts are what we have got. 'Objects

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[16] Nagy (1996a); cf. Nagy (2004).

which we can see and touch and smell are the data of history: all else is construction.' (Dover 1968: 1)

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In modern times, one may say that the topic of relative chronology in early Greek epic has been broached mainly from three angles: (*a*) on the basis of linguistic criteria, one has aimed to understand the mechanisms and phases through which the epic idiom was formed and to discern the genuinely older from the younger and archaizing elements, thus making possible a diachronic analysis of the linguistic conglomerate of Greek epic; this approach is based on a kind of knowledge of the Greek language and the relationship between Greek dialects that the ancients simply did not possess; (*b*) on the basis of on literary criteria, one has explored relations of literary dependence and thus chronological posteriority with the aid, if possible, of external information, but above all on the basis of internal considerations involving aesthetic appreciation. Familiar problems in this area are how qualitative evaluations may be transposed into temporal relations ('better is older'?) and how the typical and traditional can also be something pregnant and individual; this approach also remained largely unexplored in antiquity; (*c*) on the basis of criteria of material culture and historical criteria in general. This last approach is typically oriented towards the absolute dating of phenomena that occur in the text but belong in the world. By dating these, one can also establish a relative chronology between different parts of the corpus. Intimations of the period to which a verse or a passage or a poem belongs can be had, typically, from references to historical circumstances (e.g. the reign of King Amphidamas, the destruction of Babylon, the heyday of Egyptian Thebes, Phoenician seafaring, the political geography of Asia Minor, military tactics, etc.).[17] Apart from the difficulties inherent in identifying reliable clues in the text as opposed to reading them into it, such external matter can merely serve as the basis for arguments for *termini post quem.* Arguments in favour of *termini ante quem* based on the absence of elements from the text are even more problematic. The case is similar in regard to material objects described or mentioned in the text, on the basis of which Carl Robert (1901) made his ambitious attempt at an archaeological analysis of the *Iliad*.[18] When securely dated, specific objects or types of objects may give us relatively objective dating criteria. Objects such as the towering shield of Ajax, the Shield of Achilles, Heracles' shield (the *Aspis*), the silver-studded sword, Athena's lamp and many more

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[17] See especially Burkert (1976), Dickie (1995) and West (1995).
[18] Lorimer's (1950) was another useful survey; the field is now exhaustively treated in the series *Archaeologia Homerica* (Buchholz and Matz 1967–).

objects, make their entry into the world at some specific time. But again, each gives us only a *terminus post quem*, and only for the introduction of that item into the tradition: the boar-tusk helmet, which doubtless belongs in Mycenaean times, only makes its appearance in the Doloneia, which is by common consent a recent part of the *Iliad*. The corpus of Greek epos is not only a linguistic but also a material and socio-political conglomerate. There is no *one* 'world of Odysseus' out there, or an historical 'Homeric society', whose realities are reflected in the Homeric poems. Which is not to say that the poems do not imaginatively conjure up a fairly unitary and consistent fictitious world that makes sense in its own right.[19]

In this volume, archaeological and historical considerations do not loom large, although they play an important role in some of the contributions, e.g. those by Martin West and Wolfgang Kullmann. The contributions to this volume broadly fall under two headings, linguistic and literary. Martin West's contribution is a qualified wholesale attempt at pinning early Greek epic poems down in time, both relative to each other and in absolute terms. It is fitting, we think, to put it at the end, although it is anything but a conclusion to the volume, which opens with Richard Janko's restatement and refinement of the argument of his path-breaking *Homer, Hesiod, and the Hymns* (1982). Needless to say, no broad scholarly consensus on the issue has yet been reached, and the contributions in this volume point in different directions.

i linguistic perspectives on relative chronology

Linguistic analysis of the corpus of early Greek epic poetry throws light upon the historical development of the Greek language, of the epic idiom as such and of the oral epic tradition; it may also contribute importantly to determining the relative chronology between segments and works within the epic corpus.

Serious research on the linguistic stratification of the epic language started with Gustav Hinrichs's 1875 dissertation. Like so many other strands of nineteenth-century Homeric philology, this line of research built upon the new premises established by F. A. Wolf's *Prolegomena*,[20] that Homer belonged to an oral tradition where everything, including language and diction, was in a state of flux. With the rapid advancement of Greek dialectology and comparative, historical linguistics, it soon became clear

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[19] See Morris (1986, 1997); good remarks in Cairns (2001a: 4–5).
[20] Wolf's work in Latin (1795) is conveniently available in English translation in Wolf (1985).

that Homer's Greek was not the kind of 'original Greek dialect' that scholars had thought. Indeed it was not one homogeneous dialect at all, but rather a mixture incorporating elements from various dialects and chronological layers. Untangling this mixture is still the task that faces modern linguistic studies of Homer, including those of Janko, Wachter, Finkelberg, Haug and Jones in this volume. There are two dimensions to the question, the geographical and the diachronic. Although they are interrelated, we will look at them one at a time, starting with the geography.

Homer's basic dialect is Ionic Greek, the dialect spoken in Euboea and Asia Minor. More specifically it has been argued to be Euboean Ionic, since he uses forms like πως instead of κως which we find in Herodotus, but the significance of this has been doubted, since such forms could easily be changed during the transmission. Moreover, κ-forms hardly appear in epigraphic attestations of Eastern Ionic.[21]

Importantly, the epic language also contains a number of Aeolic forms. Hinrichs (1875) was able to pinpoint a number of these and developed a *phase model* to explain them: the Aeolic forms, he argued, reflect the prehistory of the epic diction. At one point, the dialect of epic poetry was pure Aeolic, but as Ionians came to practise it, they gradually replaced Aeolic forms with their native Ionic – which is why Aeolic forms are only found when they differ in metrical value from the corresponding Ionic ones.[22] Milman Parry further developed this hypothesis by embedding it within a general theory of oral composition and formulaic language. The demands of composition in performance make the tradition conservative, since useful formulae are preserved even when they contain obsolete linguistic material, but gradually poets create new expressions which oust the old ones. This view remains strong today.[23]

But a competing model has been developed, which claims that the Aeolic forms are not archaisms of the tradition, but rather borrowings by Ionic epic of neighbouring dialectal forms (the diffusionist hypothesis).[24] This model is defended with extensive argumentation by Jones (this vol.). As these scholars point out, the existence of Aeolic forms is not enough to prove an Aeolic phase – it is necessary to show that there is a break in the Ionic tradition, i.e. that there are no Ionic archaisms in the epic language. Since Meister (1921), the absence of genitives in *-ηο/*-ηων (which would be the archaic Ionic form instead of Aeolic -αο/-αων) has

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[21] See Stüber (1996: 73–4).   [22] As shown first by Witte (1913a).
[23] See for instance Janko (1982), West (1988), Haug (2002).
[24] Notable supporters of this hypothesis include Strunk (1957) (who in fact denied the very existence of specifically Aeolic material in the epics), Wyatt (1992) and Horrocks (1997).