

I THE POEMS

The early Greek hexameter poems that survive intact are the two Homeric epics; the Hesiodic *Theogony*, *Works and Days*, and *Shield*; thirty-one Homeric *Hymns*; and about two hundred short inscriptions. Homer comprises 27,803 lines of verse; the other poems comprise another 5,000 lines or so. But we can safely infer that there was once much more. For one thing, we are lucky to have what we do: as a general principle, the texts we have inherited through mediaeval manuscripts represent only a sample of what was available in ancient libraries. For another, in ancient authors who *do* survive we find references to over a hundred other poems or poets that were available to them but are now lost. In several cases we have indications of considerable length.

Here we shall look at each of the intact poems (other than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and some of the most important fragmentary poems. There are too many fragmentary poems to discuss every one in detail. The Appendix gives a list of editions where all the fragments may be found. On fragmentary heroic epics not discussed in detail here, see Huxley 1969; specifically on the Theban epics, Davies 2014 and the relevant chapters in Fantuzzi and Tsagalis (eds.) 2015; on the Orphic fragments, Edmonds 2011; on the Derveni *Theogony*, Bernabé 2007; and for literary criticism of Xenophanes and Parmenides, Fränkel 1975: 325–37, 349–70.

In dating the poems it is best to err on the side of caution. Frankly we are lucky if we can pin a poem down to the correct century, let alone the correct part of a century. Ancient testimony on early poets' dates is usually untrustworthy. Averaging out the dates suggested by experts is no solution; nor is repeating a traditionally accepted date, as though consensus constituted proof. We have three types of evidence, and there are serious problems with all of them.

1. Intertextual references. When two poems display a shared motif, a common procedure is to treat one poem as the original source of the motif. This sets a bound on the date of both poems. For example: a reference to different kinds of Strife in *Works and Days* 11–12 might be a retraction of the genealogy given for Strife in *Theogony* 225; a distinctive choice of words in *Hymn to Demeter* 268 (τιμῶχος...τέτυκται, 'the honoured one...is') might be an echo of the same phrasing in

Hymn to Aphrodite 31–2.¹ But it is nearly always more parsimonious to interpret similarities like these as motifs belonging to a shared tradition, not allusions to a specific text.² Motifs require only that a tradition of stock elements and characters existed – something we know to be true. Strife is a traditional character; ‘the honoured one’ may be a traditional trope. By contrast, specific allusions involve a strong assertion that no earlier poem, legend, or story ever used the motif; or, even more strongly, that *only* the two texts in question ever used the motif. Since we have lost vastly more hexameter poetry than we possess, and since there is no guarantee that a given motif even has its origin in hexameter, this type of evidence always involves an argument from silence.

2. Stylometry. There is only one stylometric study of Archaic hexameter poetry that is both broad-reaching and statistically competent. Janko’s *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns* (1982) reconstructs a chronology of early hexameter poems based on the relative density of ten medium-to-low-frequency, context-sensitive, linguistic features. His research suggests some striking trends, vividly depicted by two graphs in a 2011 essay, but has also been criticized from a variety of angles.³ Modern automated stylometric analysis looks a bit different: best practice is to treat the results as compelling only if multiple kinds of analysis point the same way, and some standard tests use forty high-frequency, context-insensitive words in a single analysis.⁴ This category of evidence is certainly suggestive, but so far only the surface has been scratched.

3. References to dateable events and material culture. If a passage within a poem presupposes a specific and dateable historical event, or refers to a custom or aspect of material culture where external evidence shows a clear transition at a well-defined date, then that external evidence puts a constraint on the date of the poetic passage. This tactic has been especially heavily applied to the *Iliad*, where many different references of this kind consistently point to a date of about 670–650 BCE: the use of single-grip round shields; bronze greaves; soldiers

¹ On *WD* 11–12 see Zarecki 2007; on *Hymn. Hom. Aphr.* 31–2 see Olson 2012: 23.

² See pp. 57–63 on ‘unrecorded traditions’; pp. 104–12 on the pitfalls involved in identifying Homeric echoes of earlier poems.

³ Janko 1982; 2011: 26, 28. For criticism see Jones 2011; Olson 2012: 10–15; Vergados 2012: 142–5.

⁴ Grieve 2007, esp. 266–7; Juola 2006 provides a useful survey (Grieve and Juola both focus on authorship attribution, not relative chronology).

armed with a single spear; the overwhelming dominance of spears as the instrument of death in battle scenes; the Gorgoneion as a shield device.⁵ In a similar vein, the *Theogony*'s description of Pandora's headband (*Theog.* 578–84) may suggest a date after animal decorations began to appear in the Late Geometric style of Greek art.⁶ This form of dating is compelling when it is practical, but that is rarely the case. Textual critics are familiar with the problem of interpolations in ancient texts; with literature earlier than 500 BCE, we must also worry about adaptations in the course of oral transmission and transcription. Any constraint based on a single passage is severely weakened by the significant, and unquantifiable, likelihood of late alterations. This method carries little weight unless it is based on aggregate data, as is the case with the military equipment in the *Iliad*.

1. The Hesiodic *Works and Days*

The most popular Hesiodic poem nowadays is the *Theogony*, thanks to its prestige as a source text on Greek mythology. But in antiquity the *Works and Days* was the centrepiece of the Hesiodic corpus. According to Pausanias, there was a tradition at Mount Helicon in Boeotia that it was the *only* authentically Hesiodic poem. He reports that the locals even rejected the opening hymn to Zeus (lines 1–10) as an interpolation.⁷ The poem's popularity is easy to see from a set of 'commemograms' drawn up by Koning, which tabulate references to Hesiodic passages in later Greco-Roman authors.⁸ Koning's results are telling: ancient writers quoted the *Works and Days* more than twice as often as the *Theogony*, and the least-quoted sections of the poem were quoted as much as the most-quoted parts of the *Theogony*.

The speaker assumes the persona of Hesiod and addresses the poem to his brother Perses. After their father's death, the backstory goes, Perses brought a case before the leading figures of the community, the big men or *basilēēs* (usually translated as 'kings');⁹ Perses bribed

⁵ Van Wees 1994: 138–46 (round shields, greaves, spears); M. L. West 2011a: 15–19 (Gorgoneion).

⁶ M. L. West 1966: 328, commenting on *Th.* 584 ζωοῖσιν ἐοικότα.

⁷ Paus. 9.31.4 (=Hesiod test. 42).

⁸ Koning 2010: 18–22.

⁹ See Hall 2014: 127–34 on the meaning of βασιλεύς in Iron Age Greece. In classical Greek the word means 'king'; in Homer its meaning is closer to the term 'big man' popularized by the

them in an effort to get more than his fair share of the patrimony. Perses himself slips out of view after the first 300 lines or so. The poem as a whole is an ethical discourse on virtue and the relationship between virtue and work, interspersed with mythological narratives and aphorisms about managing an estate. It fits into a long-standing tradition of wisdom literature, with many parallels in ancient Near Eastern and Greek literature.¹⁰

The present book follows Most's (2006) text and translation; for commentaries, see M. L. West (1978) and Ercolani (2010). The poem's structure is as follows:

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|---------|---|
| 1–10 | Hymnic prelude to Zeus |
| 11–46 | Introductory ethical discourse addressed to Perses |
| 47–212 | Mythical interlude (Prometheus and Pandora; Myth of the Races; fable of the hawk and nightingale) |
| 213–380 | Aphorisms on political (213–85) and personal (286–380) ethics |
| 381–764 | The 'works': advice on |
| | 383–492 Ploughing and sowing |
| | 493–617 The nature of the seasons |
| | 618–93 Sailing |
| | 694–764 Household management and ethics |
| 765–828 | The 'days': advice for specific days of the month |

Works and Days 654–7 often plays a key role in scholarship on the dating of early hexameter poetry:

ἔνθα δ' ἐγὼν ἐπ' ἄεθλα δαΐφρονος Ἀμφιδάμαντος
 Χαλκίδα τ' εἰς ἐπέρησα· τὰ δὲ προπεφραδμένα πολλὰ
 ἄθλ' ἔθεσαν παῖδες μεγαλήτορες· ἔνθα μέ φημι
 ὕμῳ νικήσαντα φέρειν τρίποδ' ὠτώεντα.

There I myself crossed over into Chalcis for the games of valorous Amphidamas – that great-hearted man's sons had announced and established many prizes – and there, I declare, I gained victory with a hymn, and carried off a tripod with handles.

Plutarch and the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* tell us that this event at Chalcis was considered to be *the* Contest of Homer and Hesiod, and

anthropologist Marshall Sahlins. Homeric βασιλεύς-ship is not an inherited constitutional position but a prestigious social role linked to personal qualities and wealth. The word's meaning in Hesiod is a moot question.

¹⁰ See pp. 37–8.

that Amphidamas was a hero of the Lelantine War.¹¹ The story is very doubtful, but a very old one nonetheless. The tradition of the *Contest* goes back to Alcidas in the fourth century BCE, and before that was probably known to Aristophanes;¹² the Lelantine War is attested in Herodotus and Thucydides.¹³ But the events themselves are so early that it is impossible to tell where tradition ends and history begins.¹⁴ The reports we have of both contest and war are shaped more by tradition and legend than by accurate reporting. If the Lelantine War was a real historical event, one candidate for its date is c.700 BCE, based on archaeological indications that the site of Lefkandi was abandoned or destroyed near that date. Now, it would be too credulous to suppose that the composer of the *Works and Days* genuinely participated in a real-life Contest of Homer and Hesiod. But it may well be that the above passage was designed to evoke the Lelantine War in the minds of its initial audience. If so, the war would probably have been within living memory: this extremely conjectural argument would put the *Works and Days* in the first half of the seventh century. It is unlikely that we can get any closer to a secure dating.¹⁵

The poem's image of domestic economics, and intimations of a class struggle between working landowners and *basilēēs*, cannot be taken as a faithful, impartial account of a real society. But it can be expected to possess verisimilitude. For this reason, ancient historians sometimes give it a prominent role in the study of Iron Age Greek society. That position is not really secure: the picture that the poem paints has various inconsistencies. For example, we can easily imagine the *Works and Days* being performed in the sympotic context that we routinely suppose to be a normal forum for Archaic poetry, but it is harder to imagine the severe narrator himself tolerating such a leisured environment. He has no time for handouts, yet he is happy to accept a valuable tripod as a prize for his poetry (654–7, quoted above) – even though

¹¹ Plut. *Conv. sept. sap.* 153f–54a; *Contest* 6.

¹² See Introduction, pp. vi–vii with n. 2.

¹³ Hdt. 5.99; Thuc. 1.15. Archil. fr. 3 distances 'the masters of Euboea, spear-famed' from the use of bows and slings, and this is sometimes linked to the Lelantine War by a legend that a treaty forbade the war from being fought with missile weapons (Strabo 10.1.12); but that legend cannot realistically be dated earlier than Ephorus, in the fourth century (see E. Wheeler 1987).

¹⁴ For a sceptical view see Hall 2014: 1–8; more sympathetically, Janko 1982: 94–8, with further bibliography.

¹⁵ Cf. Janko 1982: 228–31, dating *WD* to 690–650; Köiv 2011 makes 'Hesiod' contemporary with Archilochus (both give extensive bibliographies).

poetry is not a type of economic activity that fits easily into the conception of ‘work’ presented elsewhere in the poem.¹⁶

As a literary work, the *Works and Days* is far more than just a string of aphorisms.¹⁷ It depicts an intimate interdependence between ethics and work. The narrator weaves back and forth between advice on household and farm management, on the one hand, and politics, justice, and obligations, on the other. As Stephanie Nelson has suggested, the poem is not a technical manual about *how to do* farming but more a self-help manual on how to *experience* farming.¹⁸ The work ethic that emerges is not a rule imposed by an external authority but an integral part of the human experience: only a working person is a fully realized person.

Work is central to the relationship between gods and mortals. It is the gods who provide mortals with this opportunity to become fully human: the gods conceal livelihood from mortals so that they must work (*WD* 42–6), and they share out work to mortals (397–8). Work is tough and requires sweat, but it is also the only way to avoid misery (287–92):

τὴν μὲν τοι Κακότητα καὶ ἰλαδὸν ἔστιν ἐλέσθαι
 ῥηϊδίως· λείη μὲν ὁδός, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθι ναίει·
 τῆς δ' Ἀρετῆς ἰδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροισεν ἔθηκον
 ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτὴν
 καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπὶ δ' εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται,
 ῥηϊδίη δῆπειτα πέλει, χαλεπή περ ἐούσα.

Misery is there to be grabbed in abundance, easily, for smooth is the road, and she lives very nearby; but in front of Excellence the immortal gods have set sweat, and the path to her is long and steep, and rough at first – yet when one arrives at the top, then it becomes easy, difficult though it still is.

The sweat of the brow is everything. This Hesiod looks a bit like a proto-libertarian. But he is no amoral egoist: he is also adamant

¹⁶ See also Hall 2014: 25–6 on mismatches between the narrator’s stated philosophy on work and his vocation as a poet.

¹⁷ A sample of recent literary approaches to *Works and Days*: Clay 2003: 31–48; 2009 (the *Works* represents a mortal outlook on the cosmos, complementing the *Theogony*); Lardinois 2003 (the *Works* is structurally similar to a Homeric angry speech); Beall 2004 (the *Works* is closer to Greek epic than to Near Eastern wisdom poetry); Canevaro 2013 (misogyny in the *Works* is an expression of anxiety about the efficacy of work); Hunter 2014 (ancient reception of the *Works*); Canevaro 2015 (self-sufficiency as an interpretive strategy for approaching the poem).

¹⁸ Nelson 1998: 57.

about the importance of honesty, loyalty, and fair dealings with neighbours and outsiders (346–50, 707–23); this way, neighbours can be relied on for aid in the event of future disaster (351, 397–403).

And his philosophy is not blindly laissez-faire either. As mentioned above, he has no problem with handouts when it comes to poetry prizes. Even aside from that, he recognizes that ethical people need an ethical society to live in. It is the responsibility of the *basilēēs* to prevent envious men from taking advantage of the labour of others (248–85), and to ensure that each man has the autonomy to work. The worst dregs of humanity are ‘gift-eaters’ (38–41, 220–1, 263–4), people who live off the labour of others. ‘Gift-eating’ in a *basileus* is worse still, and stands for corruption. A thing is noble if it encourages labour and enables self-sufficiency. If envy of another man’s wealth provokes a lazy man to work and gain wealth for himself (20–6), that is competition, a form of Strife that is good for mortals. It is quite different from the resentment that just men feel against a lazy man who lives without working (303–6).

Within this broad ethical framework – the divine nature of work and the imperative of justice – the poem is full of grey areas, and various interpretations compete with each other with no clear winners. This is especially true for the mythical interludes, the Myth of the Races and the story of Prometheus and Pandora. When Prometheus gives fire to mortals, is that an endorsement of fire as a moral good, on the basis that it enables people to work? Or is it an evil, since it turns mortals into a race of gift-eaters? Pandora is another paradox.¹⁹ On the one hand she is *all gift*, the literal meaning of her name, ‘since all those who live on Olympus had given her a gift’ (80–2); on the other, she counterbalances the gift of fire, since her presence increases the resources and work that a man needs to sustain life. For the narrator, all women are lazy consumers (373–5):

μηδὲ γυνή σε νόον πυγιστόλος ἐξαπατάω
 αἰμίυλα κοτύλλουσα, τεινὴν διφῶσα καλίην·
 ὅς δὲ γυναικὶ πέποιθε, πέποιθ’ ὃ γε φιλήτησιν.

Do not let an an arse-fancy woman deceive your mind by guilefully cajoling you while she pokes into your granary: whoever trusts a woman, trusts swindlers.

¹⁹ Fraser 2011 gives a recent survey and discussion of questions surrounding Pandora.

The narrator is deeply and viciously misogynistic. But he is not entirely irrational: he never resorts to fantasizing that women had never been created, and he readily acknowledges the importance of the wife in a working household. The ambiguity extends to Pandora's jar, which infamously retains Anticipation after all its evil contents have escaped (94–104): Anticipation is Most's translation of *elpis*, more traditionally rendered as 'Hope', but the word also means 'expectation'. Is Pandora's Anticipation a gift or a curse? And does it stay in the jar for mortals to keep and treasure, or to keep it hidden and inaccessible? These questions are left open.

2. The Hesiodic *Theogony*

The *Theogony* is an account of the establishment of the divine world. It begins with the primordial entities Chasm (or 'Chaos'), Earth, and Eros ('desire' or 'love'); moves on to the succession of Cronus at the head of the Titans, born from Earth and Sky; then considers Zeus and the Olympians; and finally arrives at the organization of the divine world in the 'now'. Many other miscellaneous divinities, monsters, and other figures appear along the way.

Again, the text and translation used here follows Most (2006); for a critical edition and commentary, see M. L. West (1966). The poem's structure is as follows:

1–103	Hymnic prelude to Muses
104–15	Proem (introductory paragraph) ²⁰
116–53	The earliest divinities: Chasm to Earth, Sky, and the Titans; various monsters born from Earth
154–210	The Titans; succession of Cronus and castration of Sky; Aphrodite born from Sky's severed genitals
211–452	Various other monsters and divinities born
453–506	The Olympians; succession of Zeus
507–900	Challenges to Zeus:
521–616	Prometheus; separation at Mecone; Pandora
617–819	Titanomachy; description of Tartarus
820–80	Battle with Typhoeus
881–900	Zeus devours Metis; birth of Athena

²⁰ 'Proem' is used here to refer to the brief, semi-formulaic preface that follows a hymnic prelude and precedes the main body of a poem. See pp. 45–8.

- 901–1020 The ‘Continuation’ (see also below): little catalogues
 901–62 Offspring of male gods and mortal women
 963–4 Farewell to Muses
 965–1020 Offspring of female gods and mortal men
 {1021–2 First two lines of the Catalogue of Women}

The poet explicitly assumes the persona of Hesiod (*Theog.* 22–34), so readers who take Hesiodic authorship literally will date the poem close to the *Works and Days*. And, in fact, stylometric evidence does put the poems close together, so far as that kind of evidence can be trusted.²¹ On this literalist interpretation, the conventional date is *c.*700, around the time of the Lelantine War (see under *Works and Days*, above), with the *Theogony* normally supposed to be the earlier of the two poems.²² If a later date is accepted for *Works and Days*, the *Theogony*’s date will also change. But the nature of that change will depend on other assumptions: about the validity of linguistic evidence, and whether the two poems are to be assigned to the same ‘author’ or not.²³

More than any other poem discussed in this book, the Hesiodic *Theogony* needs to be understood in the context of other cosmogonic texts. Current treatments rightly emphasize the importance of older Near Eastern parallels for the succession myth.²⁴ But we should also think of later fragmentary Greek theogonies. We have fragments of theogonies attributed to Epimenides and Musaeus; the Derveni *Theogony*, probably dating to the sixth century; the ‘Eudemian’ *Theogony*, perhaps *c.*400 BCE; maybe further Orphic and/or Cyclic theogonies; and Titanomachies by Eumelus and Musaeus. And there are other, later, theogonic poems with links to the earlier ones, especially the Hieronyman *Theogony* and Orphic *Rhapsodies*, written in the Hellenistic era.²⁵ No reliable comprehensive translation of all these fragments is available.

²¹ Janko 1982: 220–1.

²² This supposition is based on treating *WD* 11–12 as a retraction of *Theog.* 225. Identifying cross-references between early Greek poems is hazardous to say the least: see pp. 1–2 above, also pp. 57–63 and 104–12 below.

²³ Janko 1982: 228–31 dates the *Theogony* to 700–665 BCE based on stylometric evidence; Köiv 2011 makes both the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* contemporary with Archilochus (i.e. *c.*650), based on a survey of the biographical tradition and ancient chronographies; M. L. West 2011b: 236–7 assigns the poems to 680–660 based partly on the biographical tradition, partly on the catalogue of rivers in *Theog.* 337–45. See also pp. 4–5 above.

²⁴ See below, pp. 38–40.

²⁵ All of these poems appear in Bernabé 2004–7. For the Derveni *Theogony*, see also Bernabé 2007; and (full Derveni papyrus) Kouremenos et al. 2006.

The age and intact state of the Hesiodic *Theogony* have made its version of the Greek succession myth the most prestigious one for modern readers. The cosmos begins with the primal powers Chasm and Earth, followed by Eros, Erebus, Night, and others; Cronus castrates and overthrows his father Sky; in turn his son, Zeus, overthrows Cronus in the Titanomachy. In many ways the Orphic theogonies follow the same pattern. The Derveni and Eudemian theogonies begin with symbolic entities too (though they place Night first), and proceed through the succession of Cronus and then Zeus. Aristotle, who knew the Eudemian *Theogony* well, lumps it together with Hesiod in places, on the basis that the two poems' cosmogonies followed a common pattern.²⁶

But the Orphic poems are different in some significant ways. The Derveni *Theogony* avoids relating Zeus's rise to power directly: instead, it casts it as a flashback. As the poem opens, Zeus – already ruler of the universe – is visiting Night in her cave to consult her as an oracle. The setting makes the poem a piece of wisdom literature, where Night instructs Zeus in the history and nature of the cosmos. One thinks also of Parmenides' poem, where the narrator passes through the gates of Night and Day to receive instruction from an unnamed goddess. In Hesiod, after Cronus castrates Sky, the severed genitals engender the goddess Aphrodite, a personification of playful sexual desire; in the Derveni *Theogony*, Zeus eats Sky's genitals (apparently represented by the Sun) so that he may absorb the identity of all-ancestor and firstborn, establishing himself at once as primal origin, ancestor, and ruler of the cosmos.²⁷ Zeus has a habit of eating important symbolic entities in these poems. In Hesiod, he devours Metis ('cunning'), in accordance with prophecies from Earth and Sky 'so that the goddess would advise him about good and evil' (*Theog.* 899–900). In the much later Hellenistic poems, Zeus takes the identity of *prōtogenos* ('first ancestor') by eating Phanes, a primordial dragon who hatched from a cosmic egg.²⁸

The unique poetic achievement of the Hesiodic *Theogony*, as opposed to its successors, lies in the extraordinary originality of its

²⁶ Orphica frs. 20.ii, iii, iv Bernabé.

²⁷ Orphica frs. 8, 9, 12 Bernabé.

²⁸ Orphica frs. 80.iii, 85, 241 Bernabé. See M. L. West 1983: 198–202 on Phanes' egg. The *Rhapsodies* rationalize the variants by making Phanes and Metis one and the same (frs. 140, 243.9; in frs. 96 and 139 they are two persons of a trinity).