THE ORDEALS OF HOMERIC SONG

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In a recently published work,[1] Richard Seaford has offered one of the most ambitious efforts yet to address the social and ritual contexts of the Homeric epics and to interpret the cultural significance of the epics as they assumed the approximate form in which we know them. The basic point of Seaford's complex argument is that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* should be seen as parallel developments to the public funeral and the cults of the heroes.[2] These public death rituals were encouraged by the developing polis in correlation with its legislative discouragement of elaborate private funerals;[3] the city's twofold project to regulate mourning had as its object the replacement of the socially divisive emotions aroused by private funerals with the socially unifying emotions aroused when the dead were conceived of as equally related to all of the city's constituents. The songs of Homer were part of this selfsame civic project: "In the individuals they celebrate (ancient, Panhellenic heroes), in the context of their performance (the public festivals), as well as in being a (rhapsodic) *contest*, the Homeric recitations at Athens can be said to cater for (*sic*) the kind of cohesive public emotion that also accompanied the development of hero-cult and the public funeral at the expense of the once magnificent private funeral."[4]

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1 Seaford 1994. This book actually appeared at just about the time the Ohio State Colloquium took place, and thus could not be fully taken into account in the papers in this volume.

2 Seaford 1994.180–90.

3 Seaford 1994.78–86, 106–23.

4 Seaford 1994.183; emphasis in original. Seaford refers to "recitations at Athens" because he accepts the view that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* acquired their permanent form only as part of the Peisistratean reform of the Panathenaia.

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Seaford's book represents a brilliant synthesis that will deservedly occupy a focal position in the ongoing discussion of Homer and the ancient city. Nevertheless, two of the papers in the present volume, which were conceived before the appearance of Seaford's book, indicate directions from which attempts to criticize or at least modify Seaford's position can be expected. Peter Rose's account of the developing city as a scene of domination of the countryside by an urban elite finds social division along lines of class rather than kinship, and reads in the *Iliad* an opposition of voices rather than a harmonious cohesion. The present paper, like Seaford's book, regards the *Iliad* as a ritual performance conducive to civic unity, but it emphasizes the role of the gods in both Homeric song and civic cult, where Seaford emphasizes the heroes. In doing so it also investigates the spiritual dimension of the ritual in its own right, where Seaford focuses upon its civic utility.[5]

THE GODS IN THE *ILIAD*

Nobody knows how much Homer's audiences believed of what he told them about the gods. The possibility that the Muses might lie was acknowledged as early as Hesiod (*Th*. 27) and no doubt earlier. Skepticism about Homer's gods prompted the first literary criticism known to us, the allegorizations of Theagenes. But the strict believability of mythic song has little to do with its spiritual impact. The words of the Muses have a power of enchantment. Audiences respond to them not merely as if they believed in the events described, but as if they were actually present to behold them.[6] The significance of Homer's gods, therefore, lies as much in the experience of succumbing to their charms as in their credibility. Accordingly, an account of them must ask how Homer positions his audience toward the gods, what sort of spirituality he fosters. We can approach this question through examination of their role in Homer's narratives; this paper will concentrate upon the *Iliad*.

Most of the critical facts concerning the gods in the *Iliad* are

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5 Needless to say, Nagy 1996 appeared to late to be taken into account in this paper. I was pleased to see that Nagy's view of the affect of ancient Greek performance (Nagy 1996.95–6) generally agrees with that proposed in this paper. Still, despite his almost mystical conception of performance as "reenactment," Nagy says little about the gods.

6 Pl. *Ion* 535b1–c3. On vividness rather than historical truth as the purpose of epic song, see Ford 1992.49–56.

already well known.[7] Yet in much recent writing about Homer these facts, and the gods as a whole, are neglected. In *Pindar's Homer*, for example, Gregory Nagy states that "the praise of Homeric poetry is restricted to the heroes of the distant past."[8] Since, according to Nagy, κλέος is the very essence of epic song,[9] it is not clear where the gods would come into the picture. Of course Nagy does accord a role to the gods in his highly original interpretation of early Greek epic,[10] but it is hardly the central role that their position in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* would suggest.[11]

According to Penelope (*Od*. 1.338), singers make famous the deeds of men *and gods*: ἔργ' ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, τά τε κλείουσιν ἀοιδοί.[12] The Homeric Olympians desire κλέος and they expect their κλέος to exceed that of mortals. When the Achaeans build their fortifications without making sacrifices to the gods, Poseidon complains to Zeus that the κλέος of their wall will be spread as far as the dawn, while the wall that Poseidon and Apollo built around Troy will be forgotten (*Il*. 7.451–53):

> τοῦ δ' ἦ τοι κλέος ἔσται, ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδναται ἠώς.
> τοῦ δ' ἐπιλήσονται, τὸ ἐγὼ καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
> ἤρῳ Λαομέδοντι πολίσσαμεν ἀθλήσαντε.

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7 See especially Griffin 1980.144–204, Fränkel 1975.64–75, Lesky 1966.65–73; also Erbse 1986, Edwards 1987.124–42, Janko 1992.1–7. Thalmann 1984.78–112 is especially valuable on the relations between the gods of epic and mortals. Tsagarakis 1977 discusses the conceptions of divinity expressed by Homer's characters. Kirk 1990.1–14 discusses the historical background of the Homeric gods.

8 Nagy 1990.150.

9 Nagy 1979.15–18. Nagy's subtitle indicates very explicitly the emphasis on the heroes which his work shares with many other recent Anglo-American writings on Homer. Three interpretations that stress the gods to an exceptional degree are Clay 1983, Slatkin 1991, and Cook 1995.

10 Especially in his analysis of the antagonism between god and hero; see Nagy 1979.118–50.

11 But note that in his introductory remarks on Panhellenism in cult and epic (Nagy 1979.7) Nagy writes as follows: "Such institutions as the Olympic Games and the Delphic Oracle, both stemming from the eighth century, are of course monumental feats of intersocial organization and also of intercultural synthesis. Significantly, the same can be said of Homeric Epos itself. From the internal evidence of its contents, we see that this poetic tradition synthesizes the diverse local traditions of each major city-state into a unified Panhellenic model that suits most city-states but corresponds exactly to none; *the best example is the Homeric concept of the Olympian gods, which incorporates, yet goes beyond, the localized religious traditions of each city-state.*" (Emphasis mine)

12 Fränkel 1975.53.

Zeus assures his brother that Poseidon's is the κλέος that will be spread as far as the dawn: σὸν δ᾽ ἦ τοι κλέος ἔσται, ὅσον τ᾽ ἐπικίδναται ἠώς (*Il*. 7.458). When the Achaeans leave the plain of Troy Poseidon will level their wall without trace. Evidently not only heroes but also gods and indeed even walls can win κλέος. Poseidon's κλέος obviously cannot come in compensation for his death, but it does seem to compensate him for effort expended in the construction of the Trojan Wall (πολίσσαμεν **ἀθλήσαντε**, 7.453). Poseidon's κλέος is not explicitly transmitted by song, however, and appears to be a pure outgrowth of his power, without any dependence upon a medium (note Zeus' reassurance: 7.456–57). A divinity as powerful as Poseidon *will* be famous among mortals. But no audience of the *Iliad* could ever have doubted that this song magnifies the κλέος of Poseidon as well as the other Olympians. The Homeric narrator projects a powerful image of Olympus as the point from which the events of his songs emanate.[13] Within the first five lines of the *Iliad* he states that the wrath of Achilles and its consequences coincided with the fulfillment of the Plan of Zeus (*Il*. 1.5).[14] Then he adds that the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon was set in motion when Apollo heeded the prayer of Chryses and sent the plague (*Il*. 1.6–7), and Hera put it into the mind of Achilles to call the assembly (*Il*. 1.55). Achilles had already begun to draw his sword to slay Agamemnon when Athena arrived to stop him (*Il*. 1.194–95);[15] had she not done so, Achilles' prayer to Thetis would have been obviated and the epic along with it. The wrath plot begins only when Zeus nods in assent to Thetis' request that the Achaeans be worsted until they honor her son: if Zeus does not nod, we have an angry Achilles, but we have no *Iliad*. Even without Achilles, the Greeks dominate the Trojans when Athena gives

13 "Wollte man [Zeus'] wirken in den beiden erhaltenen Gedichten beschreiben, dann müsste man deren ganzen Inhalt wiedergeben," Erbse 1986.209.

14 According to Pi. *N*. 2.1–3, Homeric rhapsodes often began with Zeus as a prooimion (Διὸς ἐκ προοιμίου). *Performances* of Homer therefore did not necessarily begin with the μῆνιν and ἄνδρα that begin our texts and are taken to summarize their subject matter. The rhapsodic practice of beginning with Zeus could only have reinforced the impression of Olympian centrality that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* already convey. On the proem as part of the epic performance see Ford 1992.23–31.

15 Cf. Fränkel 1975.69. Because the narrator specifies that after pausing to think Achilles had begun to draw his sword (ἕλκετο . . . ξίφος, 1.194), and that, after the arrival of Athena, Achilles announced to her his intention to kill Agamemnon (τάχ᾽ ἄν ποτε θυμὸν ὀλέσσῃ, 1.205), he denies the audience any basis for imagining that "Athena may be said to represent, or embody, his ultimate decision to go no further" (Kirk 1985 *ad* 1.193–94). The divine intervention is indispensable to the course of events as the narrator presents it.

strength to Diomedes (Book 5) and when Poseidon lends assistance (Books 13 and 14): these events show that the descent of the Greek fortunes is not the inevitable outcome of Achilles' withdrawal,[16] but the result of decisions made on Olympus. The same applies to every significant event of the epic. If Hera and Athena do not stop the flight of the Achaeans to their ships in Book 2, the Trojan War would end and with it the *Iliad*. Such an occurrence would be untraditional, but it is neither impossible nor unthinkable according to the narrator of the *Iliad*. He states, "Then the Argives would have enjoyed a return home beyond their allotment, if Hera had not spoken to Athena . . ." (ἔνθα κεν Ἀργείοισιν ὑπέρμορα νόστος ἐτύχθη / εἰ μὴ Ἀθηναίην Ἥρη πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπεν, *Il*. 2.155–56). Contrafactual expressions like this one dislodge the war from the tradition in which the audience knows it and return it to the gods to create as they wish.[17] The narrator is saying: the gods of this epic do not *serve* the plot; they *created* the plot.[18]

Whenever the narrator approaches a critical juncture of the story he reveals the activity of the gods. As the first day of fighting begins, Zeus meditates upon its outcome and how he will achieve it (2.1–15). After the combat between Paris and Menelaus, Zeus broaches the possibility that Paris' defeat might make a good point to stop the war altogether (4.1–18). The debate on Olympus and Athena's persuasion of Pandarus to break the oaths cause the renewal of fighting. As the first day of battle concludes, the Achaeans build their fortifications, and Zeus and Poseidon agree upon their destruction (7.442–63). When dawn rises on the second day of fighting Zeus calls the gods to assembly and warns them in a vivid speech not to interfere in the battle *and thus delay the fulfillment of his plans for it* (ὄφρα τάχιστα τελευτήσω τάδε ἔργα, 8.9). A period of indecisive conflict ends when Zeus allots the Achaeans a heavier portion of κῆρες on his scales than

16 As claimed by, among others, Whitman 1958.227.

17 Morrison 1992 interprets such passages as expressions of the poet's capacity to deviate from tradition. But since no explicit deviation ever occurs, they could just as well illustrate the poet's impotence before the tradition. de Jong 1987.81 argues that, because the narrator presents the events as historical facts rather than as his inventions, contrafactual events present only imaginary alternatives. In reply, I would say that while Homer does not present himself as the creator of the events narrated in the *Iliad*, he does present the gods as their creators, most of all in the passages in question. For them the unfulfilled alternatives are not merely imaginary, but real possibilities which they must take action to avoid. See also Lang 1989 and Loudon 1993.

18 Cf. the remarks of Ford 1992.38–39: "Epic . . . seems to have chosen to divert ideas of verbal artistry from its singers and to have transferred them onto gods as the ultimate shapers of events."

he allots the Trojans and the Achaeans' day descends (8.69–72). As the second day of fighting draws to a close, Hera and Athena make elaborate preparations to assist the Greeks, but Zeus orders them back to Olympus, where he warns Hera from his golden throne (8.442) that whether she likes it or not, Hector will prevail until Patroclus is killed and Achilles rises up (8.473–76). Thus the narrator reveals that Zeus has determined the critical events of the third day of battle before the second has even ended (and before the Embassy has visited Achilles). When dawn breaks on the third day, Zeus sends Eris to the ships of the Achaeans, where she raises a terrible shout (11.1–14). At the beginning of fighting he sheds bloody drops on the earth, because of the mighty heads he is about to send to Hades (ἔμελλεν . . . κεφαλὰς Ἄιδι προιάψειν, 11.54–55). In one of the poem's most impressive passages, the narrator marks the beginning of the battle for the Achaean Wall by describing its eventual destruction by Apollo, Poseidon, and Zeus (12.9–35). Hector finally breaches the wall when Zeus enables him to lift a huge rock and bash in the gate (12.450). When Zeus turns his attention from the Trojan plain toward other peoples (13.1–9), the course of battle immediately shifts as Poseidon seizes the chance to encourage the Greeks (13.10ff.). The moment when Hector will set the ships afire and prompt Patroclus' fatal entry into battle is prepared when Zeus awakens from his slumber, proclaims his authority to Hera, and once again pronounces the script that events will follow (15.4–77). As Patroclus goes forth, the narrator reveals that Zeus will not grant Achilles' prayer for his safe return (16.249–56). He focalizes the Patrocleia through the eyes of Zeus, as the father of gods and men deliberates the exact moment at which the hero should meet his doom (16.644–55). From the narrator's standpoint, the corpses of the Trojans that Patroclus kills are virtually a path along which the gods lead him to death (16.692–93):

> ἔνθα τίνα πρῶτον, τίνα δ' ὕστατον ἐξενάριξας,
> Πατρόκλεις, ὅτε δή σε θεοὶ θανατόνδε κάλεσσαν;
>
> Whom then first, whom last did you slay, Patroclus, when
> the gods called you toward death?

Apollo, unseen by Patroclus and Hector but vividly described by the narrator, prepares his doom (16.787–89 *et seqq.*). The third day of battle concludes with Hephaestus' construction of the marvelously synoptic shield that Thetis has requested for Achilles. Fighting begins on the fourth

day with another assembly of Olympians, in which Zeus permits the gods to interfere in order to prevent an undesirably premature outcome (20.4–30). Apollo's assistance enables Hector to flee Achilles, until Zeus decrees the moment of his death (22.203–04, 208–13). The final event of the epic, like each of the days of fighting that has preceded, begins with a council on Olympus, as Apollo reproaches the gods for permitting Achilles to desecrate Hector's corpse, and Zeus sets in motion its redemption (24.33–119).

These divine deliberations do not, it is true, deprive the mortal characters of the *Iliad* of the psychological autonomy which is one of the epic's most urgent themes.[19] But it is the gods alone, and Zeus above all, who determine the consequences that will flow from mortal inclinations and decisions. Thus the fact that Pandarus is foolish to heed the words of the disguised Athena in *Iliad* 4 in no way implies that his foolishness would have led him to break the oaths even without Athena's intervention; the prominence given the Olympian council indicates the opposite. The same applies to Achilles' decisions to reject the Embassy in *Iliad* 9 and send Patroclus into battle in *Iliad* 16. It is not Zeus who makes the decisions, but it is he who has the power to make them bad. The narrator's emphatic disclosure of Zeus' plans shows exactly what Achilles has overlooked. The Muse of Homer accords mortals psychological autonomy precisely in order to caution them as to its use. Any mortal decision not taken in careful dialogue with Olympus is subject to disaster.

The gods of the *Iliad* are much more powerful than the heroes,[20] so much so that the greatest of mortals are as humbled by the divine assistance they require as by the divine blows they suffer: when Aphrodite rescues Aeneas, he is once again her baby. More important than the fact of Olympian power in the *Iliad*, however, is the narrator's emphatic, repeated revelation that this power specifically produced the events of the epic narrative, that without the gods it just would not have happened as the song says it did. If Zeus had not decided that Patroclus was to die, then Achilles would have had no grief at his loss and no rage at Hector. If Zeus had not decreed that Achilles had to return the body of Hector, then Achilles and Priam would have had no reconciliation, made no speeches, and shed no tears together. The poet of the *Iliad* invests all of his rhetorical skill in

19 As shown by Lesky 1961.

20 On the difference in power between the Homeric gods and heroes, see Griffin 1980.157–58, 167–72, 185–201.

impressing upon his audience that the heroes, their deeds, their sorrows, and their song, are all the work of the gods who live on Olympus.

The Olympians of Homer do not only embody all the forces of nature, from mortal emotions to catastrophes of weather: they exceed nature. They pour blood from the sky (11.53–55, 16.459), endow lifeless metals with motion, voice, and even intelligence (the automata of Hephaestus, 18.417–20), they supply a horse with the power to speak prophecy (19.403–17), spare a fasting Achilles from hunger by instilling nectar and ambrosia into his breast (19.340–56), and preserve the corpses of Patroclus and Hector from mutilation and even decay (19.30–39, 23.184–91, 24.19–21). The divine miracles of the *Iliad* occur with accelerating frequency in the second half of the poem, eliciting, it may be conjectured, a greater sense of surprise and wonder in audiences than a less discriminating display might have achieved.[21]

Several of these miracles suggest that for the Olympians the boundary between living and lifeless matter is not absolute. They can put νόος into gold and protect corpses from decay.[22] In the *Odyssey* it is clear that the gods can actually furnish the dead with a blessed afterlife: Heracles exists among the Olympians, Ino has been transformed into the immortal Leucothea, Menelaus is told that he will be sent to the Elysian Fields. The absence of such afterlives in the *Iliad* has been taken to mean that they are permanently beyond the power of its gods and that the poet of the *Iliad* defines the human condition as one to which death is an absolute and inevitable terminus.[23] These conclusions may be based on too literalistic a reading of the text. Or perhaps one not literalistic enough. Since the *Iliad* never explicitly broaches the possibility of life after death it never explicitly denies it either. (The passages in which Zeus is persuaded not to save Sarpedon and Hector from death acknowledge that he *could* save them; moreover, these passages do not address at all the question of whether Zeus

21 Fränkel 1975.71–72 and Griffin 1980.165–67 have emphasized the Homeric gods' relative abstention from miracles. I feel it is a moot point whether the cup of Homeric miracles is half full or half empty: the gods of Homer do perform miracles, and hence must be regarded as truly miraculous gods. But it may be significant if the gods of Homer ration their wonders. Audiences not accustomed to seeing miracles in their own time might retain the impression that they were still possible: infrequency would not imply impossibility.

22 Nagy 1979.179 argues that in the diction of early Greek epic, gold symbolizes "the artificial continuum of immortality." If so, then Hephaestus' manufacture of lifelike golden *therapontes* implies the divine capacity to confer immortality.

23 Perhaps most eloquently by Griffin 1980; see also Edwards 1985.

might provide something wondrous for mortals even *after* death.) But the *Iliad* does recognize that the conditions of divine and mortal existence have not always been the same: the men of those days could perform feats impossible for the men of Homer's time, Zeus did not always rule the gods. Since some change is built into Greek mythology's presentation of the cosmos (a feature more explicit in Hesiod than in Homer), one cannot speak of a "mortal condition" without chronological qualification.[24] If the gods did not provide life after death at the time of the events narrated in the *Iliad*, they might have done so later; since the events narrated in the *Odyssey* occur mythically later than those in the *Iliad*, this, and not a deep eschatological disagreement between the poems, might explain why afterlives are mentioned in one and not the other.[25] Within the *Iliad* the gods' performance of wonders as the epic approaches its climax would seem to indicate that one cannot tell what the gods may do, rather than that their powers are subject to specific limitations. The fact that the most emphatic of these wonders concern the preservation of corpses might be taken as a hint that it is in their care for the dead that the gods' greatest wonders yet are to be expected or hoped for.[26] Keith Stanley has suggested that Achilles' reaction to the ψυχή of Patroclus indicates that "the seed at least of a larger

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24 Cf. the view of Clay 1989 that the major Homeric Hymns narrate stages in the consolidation of Zeus' rule on Olympus. Cf. also Thalmann 1984.102–06.

25 The magisterial discussion of Kullmann 1985 never considers the factor of mythical chronology in weighing the apparent theological contradictions between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The case of Heracles does present a problem for my interpretation, since Heracles' afterlife on Olympus is never mentioned in the *Iliad*, but in mythological time it would have occurred before the Trojan War. But the *Iliad*'s silence about the translation of Heracles does not amount to denial. Achilles' statement that Heracles was unable to escape death (18.117–19) says nothing about what happened to the hero after his death, and need only mean that Achilles himself was ignorant of Heracles' blessed fate. Perhaps reference to Heracles' afterlife would have diminished the poignancy of the limited but promising *post mortem* benefactions conferred on Patroclus and Hector in the poem.

26 Contrast with this interpretation of Homeric eschatology as representing *mythical* development that of Sourvinou-Inwood 1981, who sees in Homer inconsistencies that reflect *historical* development. Thus for her the afterlives of the *Odyssey* are "the first signs of a challenge to the inescapable fate of death which in the following (archaic) period will grow and develop into an important new eschatological strand that will provide the common man with a model of hope for a better life after death" (p. 20). The incipience of this belief is indicated in epic by its exceptional character. But, as I have suggested, the rarity of afterlives in Homer may serve instead as a mode of poetic emphasis that relates their importance precisely to their infrequency in the text. Morris 1989.310 argues against Sourvinou-Inwood that Homer's immortalizations do not reflect historical development, but he also denies that they have anything to do with beliefs in personal salvation.

eschatological perspective has been planted in Achilleus."[27] The same seed may have been planted in the audience as well.[28] If so, it can only have developed further when the audience heard the account of the redemption of Hector's corpse, which, as Stanley and others have shown, brims with suggestions of a divinely guided *katabasis* to an Underworld where the souls of the dead meet justice.[29]

There is nothing in the *Iliad* upon which either Homer's narrator or his gods concentrate their attention more intensely than the dead body of Hector. Now that he is no longer capable of exhibiting any sort of heroism, of performing any great deeds or winning any *kleos*, one might have expected Hector to become irrelevant to the epic, but precisely the opposite occurs: he becomes more important than ever. Similarly, Odysseus becomes the focus of divine concern, and the hero of his own epic, not when he is performing glory-winning deeds at Troy, but when he has languished in complete obscurity and inactivity, in a state of virtual death, on the island of Calypso. The Olympians explain the reasons for their concern. Zeus rejects Hera's spiteful argument that the abuse of Hector's corpse should be tolerated because the Trojan was of purely mortal birth, while Achilles had a divine mother. Instead, he and Apollo declare that Hector deserves their consideration neither because of his erstwhile courage nor because of his lineage, but because of his piety (24.33–34, 65–70).[30] That is also why Zeus is willing to bring Odysseus back from Calypso (*Od*. 1.60–67). These speeches implicitly bring the gods' care and power within the scope of Homer's own audiences, because while only a few can enjoy distinguished

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27 Stanley 1993.224.

28 Compare Richard Seaford's statement, "The *Iliad* is about the ancient world of heroes, in which there was no hero-cult. In this respect it resembles those aetiological myths . . . about the (one-off) funeral of a hero which gives rise to a (repeated) cult" (Seaford 1994.187). Another example of such an aetiological prefiguration might be the shower of blood that Zeus sheds on the earth to honor Sarpedon before his death (παῖδα φίλον τιμῶν, 16.458–60; cf. 11.53–55), which suggests *avant la lettre* the blood sacrifice of hero-cult. Just as the *Iliad* may prepare for cults known to its audiences but not to its heroes, so may it do for the afterlife. On ritual pouring of blood into the earth to honor the dead, see Burkert 1985.60.

29 See Whitman 1958.217, Nagler 1974.184, Nethercut 1976, and especially Stanley 1993.237–40.

30 MacLeod 1982 *ad* 33–76 notes the momentous implications of the disagreement between Apollo and Hera. Cf. also Richardson 1993 *ad* 22.170–72. Taplin 1992.262 astutely remarks, "The poetry of Apollo's speech . . . makes powerful connection with the ethics of the whole poem, *and speaks to the human audience*" (emphasis mine). But all neglect the fact that Hector receives the reward for his piety only after death.

birth or win glory on the battlefield, anyone can be pious. Homer's display of divine power might have offered his audiences an immediate promise as well as a picture of the distant past. It could have aroused the expectation that even the most unimportant and powerless among them might receive the gods' consideration when they stood most in need of it, after death. Although the *Iliad* does not specify what form this consideration might take, it does suggest that the gods have both the power and the motivation to bend the laws of nature in a way that might make a difference.

The distance is not great from here to the vague promise of a blessed existence after death that was offered by cults such as the Eleusinian Mysteries, perhaps as early as the eighth century, if not even earlier.[31] For audiences who already believed in the promise of a blessed afterlife for themselves, the performances of the *Iliad* must have inspired a profound sense of reverence. This would have been all the more true because the epics were often sung at sacred festivals where the act of attendance, at the performance and hence at the festival, was itself an expression of piety. Such festivals may well have served as the original venue of Homeric performance.

THE GODS IN CULT

In a passage quoted above, Richard Seaford identified three features of Homeric song that link it to hero cult: panhellenic heroes, public festival performance, and rhapsodic competition.[32] But, in general, cults of the heroes and those of the gods existed side by side, often in close alignment; Walter Burkert's researches on the Arcadian Lykaia, the sanctuaries of Olympia and Delphi, and other cult sites have shown that in cult, as well as myth, heroes and gods can be differentiated but not easily

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31 Janko 1982.181–83, on linguistic grounds, dates the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as early as the latter half of the seventh century. The cult of Demeter at Eleusis and the beliefs surrounding it must be older, although how much older is unclear. Richardson 1974.18 cites the tradition that the Ionians took the cult and priesthood of Eleusinian Demeter with them to Asia Minor as evidence that the cult was widespread in Greece during the Mycenaean period. But there is no certainty that the Mysteries were of equal antiquity. In general, it seems plausible that mysteries in some form are as old as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Of course, if the ending of the *Iliad* dates to the late sixth century, as Seaford and others suggest, then there can be no doubt that its audience knew of mystery cults and the promises they offered. On dating the cult of Demeter see also Allen-Halliday-Sikes 1936.123–26.

32 See above p. 221.

separated.[33] The code of Drakon commanded the Athenians to pay honor both to the gods and the local heroes (θεοὺς τιμᾶν καὶ ἥρωας ἐγχωρίους).[34] The growth of local hero cults often enjoyed the sponsorship of Apollo's oracle at Delphi.[35] Therefore cultic developments in archaic Greece that focused loyalties on the city and beyond involved devotion to gods as well as heroes; this is well illustrated by the Panathenaia, whose reorganization by Peisistratus Seaford links to the creation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as we know them. In this symbiosis, however, the gods held a position of superiority, for their power was unlimited in space, while that of the heroes extended only a short distance from their graves.[36] Rohde quotes Pausanias to the effect that "the ancients considered the Eleusinian mysteries as τοσοῦτον ἐντιμότερον than all other religious ceremonies ὅσῳ καὶ θεοὺς ἐπίπροσθεν ἡρώων."[37]

Panhellenism, public festivals, and contests were all features of Olympian/heroic cult, and it is this complex, rather than hero cult alone, that forms the ritual context in which the earliest performances of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* should be viewed. Major multi-day festivals seem to offer the only occasion on which poems of such length could have been performed.[38] At these festivals the overarching event was devotion to one or several Olympian deities: Wade-Gery suggested that the pan-Ionian *panegyreis* of Poseidon Helikonios at Mykale, of Apollo at Delos, and of Artemis at Ephesus, could have been the sites of the original performances of the *Iliad*.[39] In all probability, therefore, the paradigmatic performances of Homer were conceived of by their singers, audiences, and sponsors as acts of devotion, dedications of song to more than human powers. The words of Plato at *Ion* 530a5–6 clearly indicate that the contest of rhapsodes at the festival of Asclepius was considered a dedication to the god: ῥαψῳδῶν

33 Burkert 1983.96–103, 116–30, 156–58; Burkert 1985.202–03.
34 Porph. *De Abst.* 4.22.
35 Rohde 1925.128–31.
36 Rohde 1925.132.
37 Pausanias 10.31.11, *ap*. Rohde 1925.150 n. 91.
38 Bréal n.d. 43–45, Murray 1934.187–92, Wade-Gery 1952.14, Schadewaldt 1975.24, Taplin 1992.39–41. Page 1955.76 forcefully argued for agnosticism regarding the circumstances of Homeric performance before the sixth century. Alternatives to the festival performance have been suggested by Lord 1960.149–57 and Powell 1991.229–30, who argue that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not composed for performance at all; and by Notopoulos 1964.1–18. Thalmann 1984.119 suggests a range of settings, including festivals, for Homeric performances.
39 Wade-Gery 1952.2–6, 14–18.

ἀγῶνα τιθέασιν τῷ θεῷ οἱ Ἐπιδαύριοι.[40] Jesper Svenbro has shown that it was not unusual for the Greeks to speak of a song as a sacrificial victim or libation offered to gods or ancestors;[41] most striking is the anecdote related of Pindar, that when asked at Delphi what he had brought to sacrifice, the poet replied, "a paian."[42] Other examples of song as dedication are the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 494, where the singer asks the goddesses to provide sustenance (βίοτον) *in return for* his song (ἀντ᾽ ᾠδῆς), and *Il*. 1.472, where the Achaeans propitiate Apollo by singing all day (πανημέριοι μολπῇ θεὸν ἱλάσκοντο); elsewhere in epic diction when ἱλάσκομαι indicates propitiation of a divinity as direct object the means of propitiation is always explicitly an offering of sacrifice or libation.[43] Thucydides' statement that the Athenians and the islanders sent choruses *along with sacrifices* to the festival of Apollo at Delos suggests that the choruses as well as the sacrifices were dedications to the god.[44] In Plato's *Symposium*, Agathon dedicates his discourse to the god Eros: οὗτος . . . ὁ παρ᾽ ἐμοῦ λόγος . . . τῷ θεῷ ἀνακείσθω (Pl. *Smp*. 197e6). Finally, we know that in a later period novels describing miraculous divine services were dedicated as offerings.[45]

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40 Cf. Eur. *Ph*. 576: τάσδε . . . θεοῖς ἀσπίδας ἔθηκε. In dedicatory inscriptions denoting physical objects ἀνατίθημι would be the usual but by no means indispensable verb; often a divinity in the dative case is enough to indicate a dedication. See Woodhead 1959.41–42, 49–50.

41 Svenbro 1984. Note especially the sayings attributed to Pindar in the scholia (Svenbro 1984.228 n. 1) and Philodemus (Svenbro 1984.218). I have not yet been able to see P. Sfyroeras, *The Feast of Comedy* (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton, 1993).

42 ἐρωτώμενος τί πάρεστι θύσων, εἶπε παιᾶνα: Schol. Pi. *I*. 3.18–19 Drachmann, *ap*. Svenbro 1984.228 n. 1. See also the statement of Philodemus cited at Svenbro 1984.218 and 229 n. 41.

43 *Il*. 1.99–100: ἄγειν θ᾽ **ἱερὴν ἑκατόμβην** / ἐς Χρύσην· τότε κέν **ἱλασάμενοι** πεπίθοιμεν; *Il*. 1.147: ὄφρ᾽ ἡμῖν ἐκάεργον **ἱλάσσεαι ἱερὰ ῥέξας**; cf. *Il*. 1.386: θεὸν ἱλάσκεσθαι; *Il*. 1.443–44: Φοίβῳ θ᾽ **ἱερὴν ἑκατόμβην** / **ῥέξαι** ὑπὲρ Δαναῶν, ὄφρ᾽ **ἱλασόμεσθα** ἄνακτα; *Il*. 6.380=6.385: θεὸν ἱλάσκονται (refers to the peplos dedicated to Athena); *Od*. 3.419: ὄφρ᾽ . . . ἱλάσσομ᾽ Ἀθήνην (description of the sacrifice of a cow in the lines that follow); Hes. *Th*. 417: **ἕρδων ἱερὰ καλὰ** κατὰ νόμον **ἱλάσκηται**; Hes. *Op*. 338: **σπονδῇσι θύεσσί τε ἱλάσκεσθαι**; *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 368–69: οἵ κεν μὴ **θυσίαισι** τεὸν μένος **ἱλάσκωνται** / εὐαγέως ἕρδοντες ἐναίσιμα **δῶρα τελοῦντες**. Since in ritual contexts ἕρδω normally denotes sacrifice (LSJ *s.v.* 2), *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 274: **εὐαγέως ἕρδοντες** ἐμὸν νόον **ἱλάσκοισθε** probably also indicates that sacrifice was the means of propitation. It is not clear how Demeter is propitiated at *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 292. The sole instance in epic where ἱλασκόμαι clearly does not indicate a dedication is Hes. *Th*. 90–91. But in this passage the propitiatee is a human being.

44 τοὺς μὲν χοροὺς οἱ νησιῶται καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι μεθ᾽ ἱερῶν ἔπεμπον (Thuc. 3.104.6).

45 Xenophon of Ephesus, Antonius Diogenes, and Apollonius of Tyre; see Winkler 1985.240.

The conception of epic performance as an offering helps us to see the links between this and other dedicatory performances. Implicit in dedication is a measure of identification of the giver with the object given up: it is this that facilitates the relationship between the giver and the superhuman recipient.[46] When making a dedication to gods or heroes, one gives oneself. Sometimes self-devotion may take the form of a precious object, part of oneself; another form of self-devotion is to put oneself at the disposal of the recipient for special uses and special times. When a community celebrates a festival by suspending profane business, purifying itself for the performance of sacred rites, and entering the sanctuaries for those performances, it is in essence giving itself over to the divine. An obvious case is that of young people who as part of initiation rites were dedicated to the service of a divinity: at Brauron girls took the role of bears to compensate Artemis for a bear sacred to her that once had been killed.[47] Participation in ritual athletics has recently been interpreted in this manner, as a symbolic experience of death that compensates a hero for his death.[48] Their performance is a contest (ἀγών) that calls for expenditure of effort (μόχθος, πόνος, κάματος). The victor in the contest is adorned with ribbons and wreaths that resemble those worn by the victims of animal sacrifice, suggesting that the victor himself has been dedicated to the recipient of the cult.[49]

The competitive boasting of the singer of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (166–73), as well as Hesiod's reference to performance in a contest at the funeral of Amphidamas of Chalcis (*WD* 654–57), suggest that the agonistic feature of epic performance goes back to the time of the composers.[50] Significant exertion was required of the epic performers and their audiences since the performances were long, lasting probably most of three days,[51] the performers' voices had to be audible to a large group, and

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46 Hubert and Mauss 1964.31–32, Bloch 1992.30, Sansone 1988.66–68.

47 Burkert 1985.151; on initiatory performances in general see Calame 1977.

48 Burkert 1985.105–07, Sansone 1988.48–72, Nagy 1990.118–19.

49 Sansone 1988.figs. 1–10.

50 Thucydides quotes the cited passage from the *Hymn to Apollo* and adds the following: ὅτι δὲ καὶ μουσικῆς ἀγὼν ἦν καὶ ἀγωνιούμενοι ἐφοίτων ἐν τοῖσδε αὖ δηλοῖ ("he makes clear in the following verses that there was also a contest in song and that men went there to compete"; Thuc. 3.104.5). On *agones musikoi* in the eighth century if not earlier, see Herington 1986.7–10.

51 Wade-Gery 1952.14–16 proposed a three-part division of the *Iliad* calling for three-day performance; Taplin 1992.14–31 offers a three night scheme. Cf. the "all day" (πανημέριοι)

both performers and audiences experienced emotional and physical pathos in sympathy with the characters of the epics.[52] Homer's narratives repeatedly describe death, whether undergone violently (as usually in the *Iliad*) or symbolically (as usually in the *Odyssey*, for example in Odysseus' *katabasis*, and also in the *Iliad* through the funereal abstentions of Achilles and Priam); this participation in death through the performance renders the recitation of Homeric song a symbolic death for both singer and audience.[53] The particular word used by Plato (*Ion* 535b2) to denote the means by which the rhapsode's performance achieves its emotional effect is ἐκπλήσσειν, a compound form of the verb πλήσσειν, which means simply "to strike a blow." The performers of the *Iliad* feel as if they were being struck violently through the medium of the song, and this too suggests that they experienced the act of performance as a kind of sacrifice. The singer's adornment in a gold wreath (Plato *Ion* 535d3), like the wreaths and ribbons worn by athletic victors, recalls the gold foil applied to the horns of sacrificial victims and suggests that the singer too has been dedicated to some daimon.

A dedication to the gods might be expected to elicit their presence to receive it. Indeed, the act of sacrifice (and symbolic death in general) has been interpreted as a means of partaking in an immortal dimension.[54] Concerning the specific case of ritual performance, Burkert has written, ". . . the experience of the dance merges with the experience of the deity."[55] It so happens that our only ancient description of Homer in performance

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propitiation of Apollo at *Il*. 1.472 and the "all night" (παννύχιαι) propitiation of Demeter at *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 292.

52 See the vivid description in Plato *Ion* 535b1–c8.

53 Nagy 1990.143 n. 40 suggests that "Homeric poetry compensates for its avoidance of details concerning the sacrifices of animals by dwelling on details concerning the martial deaths of the heroes. In this way, the epic poetry of the Greeks, in describing the deaths of the heroes, seems to serve as a compensation for sacrifice." If I understand Nagy correctly, he means that the non-ritual event of the performance serves as an alternative to the ritual of sacrifice, much as the panhellenic κλέος of song represents an alternative to the τιμή offered to heroes at local cults. What I am suggesting is that the performer's and audience's experience of heroic death through the song actually renders a form of sacrificial τιμή to the gods. Note the explicit comparison of a heroic death to an animal sacrifice at *Il*. 20.403–05. Wade-Gery 1952.3 proposes that these lines allude to sacrifice at the panegyris of Poseidon Helikonios at Mykale, which could also have been the site of Homeric recitations. If this line of speculation were correct then the link between death at Troy and sacrifice to the Olympians might have been very vivid to Homer's audiences.

54 Bloch 1992.8–23, 28, 35–36, *et passim*.

55 Burkert 1985.103.

attributes the display of intense emotion to divine possession. In Plato's *Ion* Socrates presents the poet, rhapsode, and audience alike as passive links, like magnetized iron rings, connected by an active element of divinity that runs through them, in which they participate through the performance. Like those who chant oracles, the poet is a servant of god (ὑπηρέτης). He acts as a medium that transmits to mortals the poem whose actual speaker is the god himself (ὁ θεὸς αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ λέγων).[56] It is moot how much of this is truly idiosyncratic and how much a novel articulation of a familiar experience. Most of the elements of Socrates' description of poetic creation are conventional; only in the claim that νοῦς and τέχνη are inconsistent with poetic creativity is there anything completely new.[57] The rhapsode Ion, a literary persona but, one assumes, a plausible one, registers a shock of recognition.[58] When Homer's audiences paid service to the gods by turning their attention, for days on end, to the beautiful songs that displayed Zeus' power and wisdom, songs made possible by Zeus' daughters the Muses, they must have felt like they were indeed possessed.[59] Socrates' image furnishes a metaphysical explanation for the sensation of unity that Seaford has proposed as the goal of the *Iliad*. The stability of the polis depended

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56 Pl. *Ion* 533c8–535a2, 535e7–536d3.

57 Cf. Thalmann 1984.114. Any audience of Homer would recognize the claim that a powerfully experienced emotion bespoke the activity of a god. Socrates' description of the poet as the ὑπηρέτης or servant of the god is perfectly consistent with archaic descriptions of the poet as the Μουσῶν θεράπων or Μουσῶν ἄγγελος (assistant or messenger of the Muses). The Homeric narrator's occasional second person addresses ("You, Menelaus," "You, Patroclus," "You Eumaeus, O swineherd") indicate that the singer feels himself to be in the presence of the heroes, refuting the argument of Murray 1981.90–92 that the Muse of Homer conferred only knowledge of the past and not an experience of it; on the vivid presentation of the past offered by the Muses see Dodds 1951.100 n. 116 and especially Ford 1992.49–62. The sense of the presence of the heroes is exactly the phenomenon described by Ion which Socrates explains as possession by the divine. Hesiod spoke of the Muses breathing a divine voice into him (ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν / θέσπιν, *Th.* 31–32), which suggests invasion of the poet's body by a divine substance and not simply the transmission of information. Socrates' extension of divine possession to the rhapsode's audience only slightly modifies traditional descriptions of song as exercising a magical spell upon audiences. On early ideas of poetic inspiration see, besides Murray 1981, Schadewaldt 1944.54–86, Sperduti 1950, Dodds 1951.80–82, Tigerstedt 1970, Walsh 1984, Ritook 1989, and Ford 1992.31–89.

58 Pl. *Ion* 535a3–5. Ion only objects that he does not feel possessed when he speaks praise *about* Homer (535d4–7).

59 Ford 1992.6 compares the poetic experience furnished by the Muses to a divine epiphany.

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upon a feeling of cohesiveness not only within the body of active citizens, but between the living and the dead, between one city and others, and between the cities and their gods. According to Socrates, this is what the divine inspiration of Homer seemed to provide, flowing as it did through Homer's songs into the hearts of his singers for generations afterward and through them into the hearts of audiences throughout Greece.

As the recipients of cult at the performance itself, the gods are the ultimate audience of the song that honors them. The gods delight in the offerings of men, and they delight in the songs of the Muses; in the performances of Homer they do both at once. For the mortals who may be said to perform the dedication of song through sponsorship and attendance as well as singing, the performance may ultimately compensate the gods for the gift of the song itself, which allows mortals to acknowledge their relationship to the divine by re-enacting rather than reliving heroic death. In this way too, epic song avoids the grief and anger that real death might bring in its wake.

There is abundant reason to conclude that for ancient Greek audiences of Homeric poetry it was the gods who were central, narratively, cultically, and spiritually. This statement would have little novelty were it not for the widespread tendency of Homeric scholarship to downplay the gods whenever possible. Homer's reputation as a mortal speaking to mortals about mortality should not be diminished by the recognition that his poetry concerns the relation between mortals and immortals, and conceives of itself as participating in that relationship. But this Homer, who stands plainly before us in almost every line of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, is even more foreign to us than most of the Homers that scholarship has unearthed in his place.

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