~ Appendix III ~

Homeric Question Overview

The unitarian-analyst debate embodied the Homeric Question, centering on the unity and authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Broadly stated, the Unitarians believed in the unified or single authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The Analysts posited works variously composed over time as a series on interconnected "lays," the parts somehow overseen or supervised by a guiding genius or principle, the parts eventually assembled, supposed imperfections and all. In either case, the works were finally set to writing—likely by dictation—and later edited and finalized as the poems we have essentially come to know. For the theory and dating of dictation see Albert A. Lord, "Homer's Originality: Oral Dictated Texts," *Transactions of the American Philological Society*, 84 (1953), 124–134; Richard Janko, "The *Iliad* and Its Editors: Dictation and Redaction," *Classical Antiquity*, 9.2 (1990), 326–334; Janko, "The Homeric Poems as Oral Dictated Texts," *Classical Quarterly*, 48.1 (1998), 1–13.

Gregory Nagy has variously enunciated a five-period "evolutionary model" for the fixing of Homeric texts, a process generally opposed to the "dictation model." The controversy is discussed to over-length by Jonathan L. Ready, "The Textualization of Homeric Epic by Means of Dictation," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 45.1 (2015), 1–75 (with citations to Nagy and other controversy participants, starting with Albert Lord). See further Nagy, review: *Writing Homer* by Minna Skafte Jensen, *Gnomon*, 86.2 (2014), 97–101. The often contrarian Martin West claims the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were actually written texts and criticizes as "simplistic" the oralist assumption that "oral dictated texts [retain] the pure properties of true oral poems while being happily captured in writing for the benefit of all subsequent ages." See M. L. West, *The Making of the Iliad: Disquisition and Analytical Commentary* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 4 (not mentioned by Ready).

For an early, detailed and authoritative discussion of the Homeric Question, see R. C. Jebb, Chapter IV: "The Homeric Question" in *An Introduction to the Iliad and the Odyssey* (Gina, 1887, 7th ed.); cf. C. T. Lewis, 328–347, and see also J. A. Davison, Chapter 7: "The Homeric Question" in Wace and Stubbings, eds.; Robert Fowler, Chapter 14: "The Homeric Question" in Fowler, ed.; and the smart discussion by Howard Clark, Chapter IV: "Homer Analyzed" in *Homer's Readers: A Historical Introduction to the Iliad and the Odyssey* (Univ. of Delaware Press, 1981). See also Tania Demetriou, "The Homeric Question in the Sixteenth Century: Early Modern Scholarship and the text of Homer," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 68 (2015), 496–557.

More recently, "Today there is no agreement about what the Homeric Question might be. Perhaps the most succinct of many possible formulations is this: "'The Homeric Question is primarily concerned with the composition, authorship, and date of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.' Not that any one way of formulating the question in the past was ever really sufficient." Gregory Nagy, *Homeric Questions* (Univ. of Texas Press, 1996), 1 (citing sources). Also, the term [Homeric Question] stands (or stood for well over a century) for the question of the Homeric epics' origins, with special reference to their unity of authorship, the personal contribution of 'Homer,' and his location in space and time." M. L. West, "Homeric Question" in *The Homer Encyclopedia, Vol. II*, Margalit Finkelberg, ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 362. "The debate," continues West (364), "was seen as polarized between Analysts and Unitarians, or as they were sometimes ironically designated in German, *Liederjäger* and *Einheitshirten* (lay-hunters and unity herdsmen).

The humor in such designations recalls the assessment of Harvard-educated, Harvard Law School-trained lawyer and foremost essayist of his day, John Jay Chapman (1862–1933):

> In the *Rise of the Greek Epic* [Gilbert Murray] enters the field of Homeric criticism. Now the Homeric Question during the last one hundred and fifty years became a great bazaar: it is like a covered market a hundred yards long . . . with furiously active tailors and sewers of patchwork. They sit upon piles of bagging, each in his booth heaped with bales of work. Slaves stagger to and from under new and miscellaneous plunder which archaeologists

> are momentarily consigning to the bazaar from the quarried ruins of every Mediterranean shop. Beaded men wrangle, and dim-eyed enthusiasts attack their theses. They rip and sew, sift and assay, they heap and scatter like madmen. The general reader looks upon the scene in smiles and in despair. Then Murray enters and begins talking in a casual way about Homer. Anyone can understand what he says. He is explaining what some of the fury is about. He comes from the open air and brings the daylight with him. He is as likely to illustrate the point with something that he saw in the street five minutes before as with a line from the Pentateuch.

See John Jay Chapman, "Professor Gilbert Murray—Oxford" in *Greek Genius and Other Essays* (Moffat Yard, 1915), 99–100, referencing Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1907; 2d ed., 1911). The Homeric "rippers" and "sewers" of patchwork, each busily working "in his own booth," recalls Shakespeare's "crew of patches, rude mechanicals / That work for bread upon Athenian stalls." The *Liederjäger*, or Analysts, thus make of Homer's perfect fabric a mere patchwork of passages—excising one, sewing in another, inserting and rearranging at will, the onlookers perplexed and agog.

The mid-twentieth-century aftermath of Parry-Lord witnessed the rise of "Neoanalysis," which sought to bridge the gap between Analysts and Unitarians. Neoanalysts believed that many of the irregularities observed by the Analysts could be explained by assuming that motifs, plots, and persons of other, earlier epics had been adopted to the plot of the *Iliad*—this, with the help of writing, toward the end of the period of oral composition. See Mark W. Edward, *The Homer Encyclopedia*, Finkelberg, ed., "Neoanalysis," Vol. II, 566–567. However, and as set forth above, the impact of earlier epic on the *Iliad* need not have depended on writing.

See further Martin West, "The Homeric Question Today," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 155.4 (2011), 383–393 (now distinguishing between unitarians, oralists, and neoanalysts [386] and noting that "scholars who discuss the poems' origins no longer speak of . . . the Homeric Question. But the problems that traditionally made up the Homeric Question are by no means settled" [388]). Similarly, "'It was not the smallest of accomplishments of Parry's Homeric theory [of oral composition] that it

made the whole Unitarian-Analyst controversy; at least in its older and best-known form, obsolete'" (West, 386, quoting Adam Parry in *Milman Parry, The Making of Homeric Verse* [Oxford, 1971], xliii, li).

The present author has noted, apropos of the idea that literary traditions tend to "invent their originators," that

> similar invention is attributed to the name Homer, despite antiquity's committedness to his life and authorship. Modern scholars note the etymological meaning of Homer as a "harmonizing" or "fitting together" of song, or of the stages or layerings of epic recitation over time. viewed as such, "Homer" is not so much the author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as the summation of the process by which they were created: "a collective and not a personal name." The idea convincingly reflects what is now known of the lengthy oral development of Homeric epic (*TLL*, 62).

See also *TLL*, 586, on the etymologies, in this connection, of the names "Homer" and "Hesiod" (citing Nagy, West, and others). The emphasis here changes from separate Homeric "lays" to "the stages or layerings of epic recitation over time."

For the most recent entrant to the Homeric Question, See Robin Lane Fox, *Homer and His Iliad* (Basic Books, 2023).