

THE CATALOGUE OF SHIPS: A KEY TO HOMERIC POETRY

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Summary: The Catalogue of Ships in *Iliad* 2 is a special passage. It was clearly not composed for the context in which it has been transmitted, and a series of other peculiarities has made it a key to most of the basic Homeric questions. Over the years its aesthetic value has been very differently estimated by scholars. This paper offers a survey of the various opinions, a description and analysis of the text as a testimony to Homeric poetics, a report of its earliest reception, and a discussion of how it can be understood and read with pleasure.

Introduction

The Catalogue of Ships (*Iliad* 2.494–779) enumerates the leaders of the Achaean army which set out to conquer Troy, and the ships they brought. It is a special part of the poem for many reasons: it is by far the longest catalogue in Homer; it was clearly composed for the beginning of the war, not for the *Iliad* that takes place in its tenth year; in many details it differs from the rest of the poem; it gives a survey of Greece which does not easily fit into historical-topographical realities; and it has its own place in the history of the earliest reception of Homer. Added to this it has had a stormy history. Some manuscripts of the *Iliad* leave it out, and in modern Homeric scholarship it has been variously estimated. During the many decades when a conflict reigned between ‘analysts’ (scholars who argued that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed by many poets) and ‘unitarians’ (those who insisted on a single poet, or perhaps two single poets, one for each of the two poems) the tendency was that analysts condemned it, while the unitarians defended it. In 1958 Günther Jachmann considered it an ugly representative of the latest, most degenerate period of ancient Greek epic, while in 1959 Denys L. Page argued vigorously for it being a venerable document preserved from Mycenaean

times.¹ In 1960 A.B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales* appeared, which became a game changer in Homeric studies as well as far beyond Homeric scholarship.² In that way the Catalogue is also a thought-provoking example of the changes brought about by varying scholarly approaches to an unchanged object. In addition, the invocation to the Muses introducing the Catalogue is unusually explicit about questions of Homeric performance, a topic which has been much discussed in recent years.

In the present paper I shall offer a general analysis of the Catalogue and its surroundings with a special emphasis on the information it gives of the rhapsode's concept of his art and of his working methods. (I use the name 'Homer' for the corpus of Homeric poetry, lost or surviving, and 'the rhapsode' for the composer/performer of a given Homeric text, in this case the *Iliad*.³)

Description

The Catalogue of Ships is mentioned by this name by Thucydides (νεῶν κατάλογος, 1.10.4). It contains 29 entries, and each gives as a minimum the names of the region, its leaders, and the number of their ships. With two exceptions they also mention the men and the localities from where they came, and the description of each contingent is built with the same template. This strict monotony is softened by additions such as epithets or appositions to names of persons or places, small anecdotes about the origin of a leader or a happening that occurred in the region in question, descriptions of localities and characterisations of the men from there, and in some cases mentions of events from earlier in the Trojan war.

There are quite a few ways in which the Catalogue differs from the rest of the poem. The first entry and the one giving the most detailed list of localities concerns Boeotia, which plays a minor role in the *Iliad*. Similar problems exist concerning heroes such as Ialmenos (512) or Elephenor (540), who each appear only once outside the Catalogue, and

1 Jachmann 1958: 241; Page 1959: 118-77.

2 Jensen 2017.

3 I have discussed the Catalogue before (Jensen 1980; 2011) and am grateful to Museum Tusculanum and the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters for allowing me to draw on passages from there.

Thalpios (620) or Polyxeinos (623), who do not reappear at all, whereas Ajax, in the poem the most important warrior after Achilles, is mentioned in a single verse (557) in the briefest entry of them all, 2 verses in all.

Another problem is found in the comparison between the towns which Agamemnon rules over in the Catalogue (569-75) and those that he offers to Achilles when he tries to reconcile him; these are mentioned twice, first when Agamemnon gives his instructions to the envoys and next when Odysseus enumerates the gifts for Achilles (9.149-53, 291-95). The towns Agamemnon offers are not among those he has in the Catalogue, and of course, such problems made the analysts maintain that the same poet could not have composed the Catalogue and Book 9, a standpoint not easily answered by unitarians.

Across the differences towards the basic Homeric questions, almost all scholars agreed that the Catalogue of Ships was not originally made for the context in which it has survived.⁴ The order in which the localities are mentioned, with Boeotia in the first place, suggests that it lists the participants of the Trojan war gathering in Aulis. The care with which the number of ships is registered makes more sense as a description of a navy preparing itself for an expedition than of an army making itself ready for battle. The fact that the verbs used for the leaders bringing the ships are in the imperfect tense as if they were just then arriving, is another sign that what is listed are the participants of a fleet. Add to this that in his tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Euripides made the chorus spend their first song on a catalogue-like description of the warriors and their fleet coming together in Aulis (Eur. *IA* 163-302). Such a survey is natural at the beginning of the war rather than in its tenth year.

The Catalogue of Ships is not the only passage of the *Iliad* made for another context. It is old wisdom that the poem has a kernel, the narrative of Achilles's wrath, which has been immensely expanded by various means.⁵ Passages from other phases of the war have been inserted, such as most obviously the Catalogue, but also the *Teichoskopia* (3.146-244) in which Helen points out to the old King Priam the identities of the leading Achaean warriors as if they were new to him. Digressions may occur such

4 Sammons 2010 is a relatively recent exception.

5 E.g. Leaf 1900: xvii, a "kernel ... surrounded by a great deal of later additions".

as when Nestor relates a long, dramatic chain of events from his youth (11.655-803). Scenes may be doubled as is the case when first Paris and Menelaos fight a duel (3.76-120 + 245-382) and later Hector and Ajax do (7.37-310). Later on, when Achilles lets his friend Patroclus take his place on the battlefield, wearing his armour (16.1-100), scholars have shown that many details of Patroclus' fight, death, and burial have been taken from the story of Achilles's fight, death and burial.⁶ This just to mention the most famous expansions. There is relative agreement on this; where opinions differ is over how, why, and by whom these expansions were made.

Geography

The many localities mentioned in the Catalogue have not all been easily found in the real world. Scholars have of course built on information from later authors, mainly Strabo; sometimes inscriptions have offered an identification, and sometimes archaeology. In 1873 Benedictus Niese published a study in which he marked the locations of the towns on the map and discussed the order in which they are mentioned. His idea was that somebody had made a geographical survey of Greece, probably in the late 8th century BC, into which the poet of the Catalogue had fitted the various heroes at some time in the eighth century. Niese also pointed out the strange fact that some of the best-known towns are not mentioned, such as Larisa, Krannon, Pharsalus and Thebes.⁷ To those who held that the Catalogue describes Mycenaean Greece, this was a main argument, since Greece of the Catalogue appears to be pre-Dorian. In 1969 Adalberto Giovannini argued against both Page and Niese, maintaining that the Catalogue is a description of Greece in the archaic period; that some towns are missing is due to conscious archaism.⁸ He underlined how complicated the historical topography is since many towns must have disappeared before the time of Strabo because of catastrophes, such

6 As shown by Neo-analysts, with Kullmann 1960 as their main representative.

7 Niese 1873: 30, 44.

8 Giovannini 1969: 42.

as wars, floods and earthquakes as well as general poverty between classical times and the 2nd century BC.⁹ Still, out of the 146 localities mentioned in the Catalogue, 90 were city-states in the archaic period.¹⁰

Scholars have continued studying the detailed information of Greek localities found in the Catalogue; for instance, G.S. Kirk is careful with comments on the geography of both catalogues,¹¹ and the interest in its geographical reality is still remarkable. An inspiring paper from 2018 draws attention to the impressive knowledge shown in the Catalogue. The authors ask: “How does a poet working in an oral tradition, long before the development of maps, compose and organize such a detailed geographical tour of the Greek world?”¹² Jenny Strauss Clay has been identifying the places mentioned in the Catalogue, and via the link <https://ships.lib.virginia.edu/> her results can be followed.

Changing scholarly approach

The great analysts based their interpretations on careful philological studies and felt certain that they knew what a genuine Homeric epic was; accordingly, they could decide what suited the genre, and what not. Especially, an epic was a narrative, and since catalogues break the narrative progress they considered them foreign to the genre. In retrospect, after so many decades, it is strange that such immense learning could lead to results that now seem misguided.

What really changed the opinion on catalogues was the oral-formulaic theory, made widely influential by Lord's *Singer of Tales*, published in 1960. Parry and Lord were focused on poetry as was natural considering that their point of departure was Parry's demonstration of the formulaic system in Homer. Their research was supplemented by the historian Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition* from 1961, concerned with a broad selection of historical genres in prose as well as in verse. Vansina's work is built on experience from Africa, centered on the Kuba in Congo. Lists, that to

9 Giovannini 1969: 13-14.

10 Giovannini 1969: 33.

11 Kirk 1985: 178-237, 250-62.

12 Jasnow et al. 2018: 2.

Jachmann had been intruders in the narrative, “inconceivable in the hey-day of the epic”,¹³ were realised as integral elements in oral traditions, well known from many times and places in the world. Catalogues, such as genealogies, lists of rulers, or enumerations of lands a tribe has passed through on its travel to its final location, are considered especially important parts of epics and other historical performances. A long, detailed, magisterial list as the Catalogue of Ships will have been the rhapsode’s virtuoso showpiece; it has recently been called “Homer’s masterpiece of memory”.¹⁴ In recent years lists and catalogues have been the object of intense research, with a mammoth discussion of the “poetics of enumeration”¹⁵ as a climax for the time being.

Folklorists are familiar with the fact that epic singers can shorten or expand a song as circumstances demand. Lauri Honko described how singers who learn a new song work on it until it finds the form that they like and then keep this as a basic version of the song, a ‘mental text’. Singers who belong to the same tradition build up a common ‘pool of tradition’, and the more experienced and talented they are, the richer their individual mental archives are. When singers want to expand a mental text they fetch what they need in their mental archive and either prolong the basic text, e.g. with adding further events or new generations of heroes, or they squeeze further details, dialogues, scenes etc. into the mental text.¹⁶ The rhapsode of the *Iliad* chose the latter model.¹⁷

A further development found place when Homeric scholars realised the relevance of cognition science. In this approach Elizabeth Minchin was a pioneer. In her readings of Homer she applies cognitive psychology and linguistics, especially to understand the workings of memory. She points out that there are many forms of memory, and that it takes one form to remember a story, another to remember a list. She studies how epic singers learn their trade and comes close to understanding the epic art from inside. For instance, imagining how the poet decided to fit the Catalogue into his poem she can write: “In its celebration of the wider

13 Jachmann 1958: 167: “[ein Fehler] wie er in der Blütezeit des Epos undenkbar wäre.”

14 Jasnow et al. 2018: 41.

15 Laemmle et al. 2021.

16 Honko 1998: 66-74, 92-99.

17 Jensen 2017: 8-11.

region and its resources, the Catalogue of Ships is to be a splendid creation in its own right", using the future tense.¹⁸

She has the following description of how singers and audiences feel about lists:

As a list-song is performed, the audience's response is one of quiet attention and even, for sustained lists and catalogues, a subdued excitement. This excitement relates in part to the content of the list but also to its delivery. Both the singer and his listeners are anxious that the performance will be a success. Should the singer reach his list's end triumphantly – without faltering and without confusion – the audience's suspense is resolved. The longer the list, the greater will be the relief and delight of the audience once the end is reached.¹⁹

Opening

The rhapsode is explicit about the purpose of the catalogue, to describe how monumental the Achaean army was. It is introduced by an impressive list of six similes (455-83), describing the radiance and roar of the army, the large number of soldiers, and the competence of their leaders. Nowhere else in the poem is such a wealth of similes accumulated. At the end of the Achaean catalogue follows a final simile, again underlining the tremendous size of the army, its noise and weight, so enormous that it made the earth sigh (781-85). Later on, when the Trojan guard notices the deployment of the Achaean army, he reports to King Priam (in fact, 'he' is the goddess Iris) that he has never before seen such a huge army (799-801).

The introductory list of similes describes the movement of the army: the fire and the birds illustrate the men coming from ships and huts to the Skamandrian plain, the spring flowers and flies visualise how they came to a standstill there, the shepherds show how well the leaders functioned, among them Agamemnon, and the final simile concentrates on him, comparing him to a bull shining in the herd of cows. Thus, what

18 Minchin 2001: 85.

19 Minchin 1996: 16.

began as a movement of the men from camp to battle develops into a movement of the onlooker's sight from the soldiers via the leaders to the overlord, ending in two verses stating that on that day Zeus himself made Agamemnon excel among all others.

Invocation

The catalogue as such is introduced by an invocation to the Muses. Nowhere else in the surviving parts of the Homeric corpus are the Muses invoked in so much detail and over so many verses. Together with the similes the impressive invocation signals not only that the army was enormous, but also that the rhapsode's task in describing it was exceptional:

ἔσπετε νῦν μοι, Μοῦσαι, Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι -
 ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαὶ ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα,
 ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἷον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν -
 οἳ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν.
 πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,
 οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν,
 φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη,
 εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι, Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
 θυγατέρες, μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον,
 ἀρχοὺς αὖ νηῶν ἐρέω νῆας τε προπάσας (484-93).

Tell me now, Muses, who have your homes on the Olympus –
 For you are goddesses, you are present and know everything,
 We only hear the fame and know nothing –
 Who were the leaders and commanders of the Danaans.
 The mass I could not mention nor enumerate,
 Not even if I had ten tongues and ten mouths,
 An unbreakable voice and a heart of bronze,
 Unless the Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus
 The aegis-holder, mentioned all who went to Ilion.

But the captains of the ships and all the ships I will mention.²⁰

The invocation is not absolutely clear, and it has been read in different ways. Felix Jacoby, for instance, emphasised the shift from plural to singular and understood the ἐγώ (488) as a sign of the poet making his distance from the Muses. Giovannini read οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν (486) as a statement that the poet could only mention all those that he *thought* had participated.²¹

I see mainly two problems: who are the ‘we’ of v. 486 – the rhapsodes? rhapsodes and their audiences? or all mortals? – and is the rhapsode able to tell all the names or is he not? These questions lead to the overall problem: what is the relationship between the Muses and the singer? Why does he declare the ‘we’ ignorant?

To begin with, the parallelism between verses 485 and 486 contrasts ‘you’ and ‘we’, ὑμεῖς and ἡμεῖς, and emphasises divine vs. mortal. Rhapsodes are a subset of the mortals, just as Muses are of the gods. Considering that the second halves of the two hexameters focus on the knowledge of the two parties, the ‘we’ must mean ‘we, the rhapsodes’. What is at stake is the art of epic poetry, more specifically the truth of the tale. The overall goal of the epic genre is to preserve the memory of the community, and that is possible only when the Muses are gracious.

The immortal Muses were alive and present when the events rhapsodes sing of took place; being distant in both time and space, the rhapsodes have to rely on hearing with the uncertainties that implies. Compared to the Muses they are ignorant; still, they can listen to fame, and if it pleases the goddesses, they may teach the rhapsodes the truth.

The Muses invoked here are the same as those appearing in the Hesiodic *Theogony*, who said to that rhapsode:

ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι (Hes. *Th.* 27-28).

We know how to tell many lies that resemble truths,
And we know, when we choose, how to sing reality.

20 Translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

21 Jacoby 1932: 583; Giovannini 1969: 42-43, note 4.

Like all other gods in the Homeric-Hesiodic universe the Muses are arrogant, and the highest a mortal worshipper can hope for is to attract their goodwill. With their words these rhapsodes do not issue a warning that they themselves should not be believed, but remind their listeners that the genre as such is dependent on divine help.

The way to receive the Muses' help is by listening to fame, κλέος ἀκούειν (486), and that is what rhapsodes do during their education and continue to do all their active life. It is not as efficient as to relate what you have experienced yourself, but it is as much as a human rhapsode can achieve. No singer of epic would call the truth of his own performance into question; but asked whether epic singing is always to be believed, he would admit that some singers make errors.²² The invocation which opens the Achaean catalogue is not a warning, but rather a call for the listeners' admiration for the close relationship the rhapsode has with his gods. It manifests itself in the huge and brilliant catalogue which follows.

Even though the problem the rhapsode envisages is physical, the help he imagines he could have from the Muses concerns the content rather than bodily strength: they might give him all the names. This fact reveals that the power these goddesses have is to know the facts of the tales, just as the rhapsode described it in v. 485: they were eyewitnesses, therefore they know. Exactly the same opinion of poetic competence is found in Odysseus's praise of the Phaeacian bard Demodocus: you sang correctly

ὥς τέ που ἢ αὐτὸς παρεὼν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας (Od. 8.491).

As if you had been present yourself or heard from somebody else.

This understanding of the Muses' sphere of operation is supported by the fact that in Homer the Muses are invoked especially when the rhapsode needs help for a catalogue.²³ Poetry, it appears, is a question of knowledge, and the ways to achieve it are either by presence or by listening to somebody else. The invocation is a prayer to the goddesses and

22 E.g. Parry & Lord 1954: 239-45.

23 Minton 1960; 1962.

also a statement of the purpose of the epic genre. In such an opinion of poetry it is easily understood why catalogues are treated with the greatest respect. They are concise lists of information of importance for the singing community, and a successful performance of a catalogue is the ultimate proof of a singer's capacity.

Is the rhapsode able to tell all the names? Homeric invocations contain a precise request; in the present case the rhapsode asks to be told who were the leaders of the Danaans. But then his mind wanders: was this prayer too modest? should I have asked for all the common soldiers, too? No, that would have been too demanding of my physical powers, only a monster could have had the strength to carry out such a performance. A further mental wandering gives him pause: of course, if it pleases the Muses, it would be possible. I must take care not to offend the goddesses, who are certainly able to mention all those involved if they feel like it; but problems of bodily strength do not belong to their province. Anyway, a full list of warriors is not what I ask for now. I shall mention only the leaders of the ships and all the ships. As a matter of fact, the rhapsode does end up mentioning not only the leaders, but also the men. Not individually, though, but as groups coming from named localities and now and then also having special characteristics.

The very flaw in logic reveals how overwhelmed the rhapsode is at the thought of the performance he is venturing into. Will my breath be strong enough? Will my voice be clear and will it manage performing the huge amount of names without breaking? The two hexameters of worries (489-90) bring us close to the rhapsode's feeling of his art in a way unparalleled in Homer, and they also bring him close to all singers of tales, before and after. In modern times, when sometimes a fieldworker asks an epic singer which qualities are the most important for his art, he answers: A big repertoire and a clear and unbreakable voice. The repertoire is what Homer's Muses are responsible for, and our rhapsode hopes that they will be gracious. The voice is what worries him. When I attended an epic singer's performances in Albania in 1974, Mirash Ndou, he was disappointed to hear his voice on the tape recorder. "You should have come when I was younger", he lamented.

When in the modern world singers tell how they were educated, the emphasis is mostly on training the memory. The same was the experience the Arabist Dwight D. Reynolds had when he made his fabulous emic fieldwork in Egypt in the 1980s and was accepted as a pupil with an old master, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhab.²⁴ First he was taught to play the *rabab*; but next the teaching consisted in learning how to memorise songs in order to build up a repertoire. Performance was learned by attending gatherings when the master was singing to audiences.

The invocation to the Muses and, more generally, the relationship between Muses and singers have been eagerly discussed over the years.²⁵ The wealth of subtle interpretations suffers, however, from underestimating how pointedly the focus is on information of data when it is mentioned what the Homeric singer expects from his Muses. Nowhere are they asked to give inspiration. The closest we come to a verb that might mean ‘inspire’ is ἀνῆκεν in *Odyssey* 8.73, when Demodocus began his song and the Muse started him. However, that the Muse’s task also here was to give the singer eyewitness information, is clear from the content of his song, heroic epic, κλέα ἀνδρῶν, as well as from Odysseus’s just quoted praise of him specifying presence or listening to somebody else. Accordingly, ἀνῆκεν must be translated ‘set him going’, not ‘inspired him’. It is a divine miracle that rhapsodes can sing of what happened many generations ago, and this distance in time is comparable to the spatial distance that makes Odysseus wonder how a Phaeacian bard, living far away in fairyland, can be well informed of what happened in Troy. Modern readers, who have some millennia and not least Plato between themselves and Homer, take for granted that Muses are there to inspire, a much more abstract and spiritual help than what the down-to-earth daughters of Mnemosyne offered.

Underlining Homer’s fact-oriented approach to the Muses is not an attempt at maintaining that he saw them “just as a useful mnemonic device”,²⁶ but that what rhapsodes felt most demanding was actually the

24 Reynolds 2000: 267–69.

25 Friedman 2024: 34 offers a survey.

26 Haubold 2021: 214.

handling of big amounts of story.²⁷ Perhaps they felt that the poetic wonders which their audiences, then and now, have admired, came naturally? At least, it is worth noticing what they say of them, including what they do not say. The greatest of all wonders was that it was possible to know so much of events that happened long ago, and there was no contrast between memory and poetic resources in the mental archive.

When we look at the introductions to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the two are made over the same pattern: a quest for information and an instruction of where to begin. This reveals that the story of the Trojan war – or whatever the story being called for – exists as a chain of events among which the rhapsode can choose a specific episode. Such an organisation of an epic story is what folklorists call a cyclic tradition.²⁸ In the *Iliad* the chosen episode is Achilles's wrath, and the Muse is asked to begin from the point when Apollo caused the conflict between the two heroes, a proper starting place when the subject is this conflict. In the *Odyssey* it is the hero's homecoming, and when the Muse is asked to begin from an arbitrary point, ἀπόθεν, the audience is warned that the narrative will develop in an unusual way, and not take them from the departure in Troy to the arrival in Ithaca.²⁹

Scholars have wondered why there is only this one invocation to the Muses in the *Odyssey*. Considering that much of the action is narrated by Menelaus and Odysseus respectively, both of them eyewitness narrators, that makes perfect sense: they need no Muse to supply them with data.

Minchin underlines that the invocation introducing the Catalogue is directed at the audience just as much as at the Muses; the rhapsode prepares his listeners for a huge, special event.³⁰ I think she is absolutely right and want to add that with bringing up the possibility that he could have set about rattling off the names of all the commoners he is provoking the audience: If I had had the stamina for such a performance, would you have endured attending it? The suggestion makes the catalogue which follows even more overwhelming.

27 I follow Gérard Genette in distinguishing between story, the signified, and narrative, the signifier, Genette [1972] 1980:27.

28 Johnson 2000; Reynolds 2000: 265–66; Jensen 2011: 101–6; 2017: 8–11.

29 Jensen 2011: 256–57.

30 Minchin 2001: 85.

Catalogue

Of the 29 entries three are broken by a correction. The original Catalogue described the army as it was at the beginning of the war, but in the meantime the situation has changed in some respects, and in these three cases an updating was needed: the men from Pelasgian Argos (681-94) had been led by Achilles who brought 50 ships, but they were not part of the army deployed here because of Achilles's wrath; the contingent from Phylake with 40 ships (695-710) had been led by Protesilaos, but he was dead and buried now, and the men had his brother as their commander; those from Methone had been led by Philoctetes who brought 7 ships (716-28), but he had been left on the island of Lemnos, and they had got another commander.

These passages offer us a glimpse into the rhapsode's way of handling his poem: He has in his mental archive this enormous catalogue, ready for being performed as a solo piece or inserted in another poem. In her studies of the way singers train their memory, Minchin shows that remembering a narrative is different from remembering a list, and that the effort to fix the two kinds of mental text differs (she prefers the term 'script'). Events following each other in a meaningful sequence can relatively easily be modified, whereas a list of data simply has to be correct. It finds its fixed form through training and repeated performance, by the singer and his forerunners, and exists as an established text in his memory.

That is exactly what we see in the Catalogue of Ships: the rhapsode performs the list of contingents coming together in Aulis in the form he has in his mind, only adding what is necessary for bringing it up to date. The result is especially harsh in Protesilaos's case, where the rhapsode introduces the new verses by means of an unperiodic enjambement without any effort of adapting his text to the narrative 'present':

τῶν αὖ Πρωτεσίλαος ἀρήιος ἡγεμόνευε
ζωὸς ἐὼν· τότε δ' ἤδη ἔχεν κᾶτα γαῖα μέλαινα (698-99).

They were led by warlike Protesilaos
While he was alive; now black earth already covered him.

In all three cases the updating sums up well-known events from the war: Achilles's wrath and withdrawal, Protesilaos's having been killed on arrival, and the importance of the archer Philoctetes for the capture of Troy. Such use of ana- and prolepsis within the Troy-myth gives hints to the audience that there are still many tales to be told, and that the rhapsode is able to deliver them should they be called for.

Another sign that a catalogue is not easily adapted to a new context is the entry of Athens (546-56). It contains the demanded minimum in three single verses, two framing the content, v. 546 mentioning the name of the city and v. 556 the number of ships, and one, v. 552, giving the name of the leader, Menestheus, of whom it is said that he was the best in the world to arrange horses and shield-bearing men. However, the narrative which fills in the remaining verses is unusual. Instead of a long list of localities sweetened by some little anecdote we are told an event from the founding of the city: Athena herself brought up the mythic King Erechtheus and established him in her own shrine, where young Athenians every year bring him sacrifices. Within five verses, 547-51, the rhapsode succeeds in both underlining the city's religious importance, its close connection with the goddess Athena, and a contemporary cultic practice, linking myth with the time and space of the rhapsode and his audience. Nowhere else in the *Iliad* is a cultic practice from the real world of the rhapsode and his audience brought into the poem. Next follows a praise of Menestheus, who in warlike qualities is only surpassed by Nestor. What has Nestor to do here? He is mentioned in his own entry just like other leaders. Why would not that be sufficient? Because the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus and his sons led back their family to Nestor. It would have been complicated for the rhapsode to mention that in the Pylos entry; instead, he brings in Nestor here, quietly reminding his audience of his importance for Athens.

I have argued elsewhere that the dictation process to which our texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* go back took place in Athens in August 522 BC.³¹ Mogens Herman Hansen supported my dating of the poems to the 6th century and used to compare the date of a traditional epic with that of a hoard of coins: the youngest coin fixes the date.

31 Jensen 1980; 2011.

At that time Athens was at war with Megara over the ownership of Salamis, and that, of course, presented a special problem to the rhapsode. The fact that the Catalogue was the most authoritative passage of the poem made the question of how to handle Athens and her neighbours sensitive. Vansina long ago stated that catalogues such as e.g. genealogies were both the most carefully preserved genres and those most exposed to purposeful change, exactly because of their importance as authoritative concentration of data.³² The truth of a catalogue was evaluated by how well it was confirmed by the reality in which people lived.

The rhapsode solved the problem by simply skipping Megara and in the case of Athens and Salamis keeping the minimum data and besides that substituting the entries in his mental archive with new ones. This procedure left the great Ajax with an absurdly short mention, two verses in all, while Athens was honoured by a description that was completely different from the strict template with which all the other entries were formed.

The solution is characteristic for the way the demand for truth is handled in an epic tradition. To give wrong information is unacceptable, but a singer is not obliged to repeat what will not please his audience, and he can freely substitute a passage with something new as long as the new passage is felt to be true by the audience.

Closing

At the end of the Catalogue a renewed invocation appears, this time to just one Muse. The question is: Which man and which horse were the best? During the dictation, the audience will have been the scribes and perhaps the patron and other listeners, and whether the slower, less exciting 'performance' gave them the euphoric experience Minchin describes we cannot know. But when our rhapsode performed the Catalogue to a normal audience these people will have listened with quiet attention and subdued excitement as described by her, and the suspense will have been resolved after the last entry, the one of the Magnetes. At that point the audience will have exploded in enthusiastic applause.

32 Vansina [1961] 1973: 151-52.

In the passage that follows (760-85) the rhapsode carefully cools down the feelings to a more relaxed and thoughtful state. The question the rhapsode here puts to his Muse is brief and simple compared to the elaborate invocation at the beginning of the Catalogue, but it will certainly have affected the listeners. It is well known how much both competition and horses meant to the ancient Greeks in general, and the funeral games for Patroclus in Book 23 document that these interests were central to the singing community of the *Iliad*. The horses mentioned have their place in myth: Eumelos' father, Pheres's son Admetos, received his horses as a gift from Apollo, and Achilles's horses were immortal, with both individual names and parents' names. They play an important role towards the end of the poem (16.148-51, 19.392-424). It will have pleased the audience to be reminded of these famous horses.

The passage brings us back to the present time of the *Iliad*: The Achaean army is on the point of marching out to battle, but the greatest warrior is not there. We are reminded of the situation and there is no need of updating; the narrative follows the story. The statement of the quality of men and horses adds a pleasant, peaceful touch to the war-theme, as if the impending battle were a sports competition, and the playful Myrmidons passing the time on the beach reinforce this impression. Just for a moment, though, for the situation is, of course, terribly wrong and the idyll misleading. The wonderful horses are idle, emphasised by the verb ἑστασαν in enjambement (777), they just stood there, marking the end of the peaceful scene. The following lines describe how the chariots were ready, but the soldiers lacked a leader; οὐδ' ἐμάχοντο, so they did not fight, are the closing words (779).

Was the Muse really necessary here? Yes, the special details about the horses belong to the kind of knowledge the rhapsode has from the Muse. Besides, she is there to signal to the audience that the virtuoso event is brought to a dignified end and that the Muses have been present all the time. The scene is rounded off with a simile: the army marching out was like a violent fire and made the earth sigh under the soldiers' feet. In connection with the brief invocation it makes a chiasitic ring composition: At the beginning the long chain of similes and the invocation, at the end another invocation and a simile.

The Trojans

The final part of Book 2 is concerned with the Trojan side. Zeus sends Iris to deliver a message to Priam about the Achaean army in the form of Priam's son Polites. The Trojans were gathered for an assembly, but make themselves ready for fight immediately; the gates are opened, and the army rushes out. The Trojan forces are enumerated in a catalogue resembling the Achaean one, but much shorter, vv. 816-77, 62 verses in all, compared to the 266 verses of the Catalogue of Ships.

When Zeus sends Iris it is a reminder to the audience of his promise to Thetis: all that happened in Book 2 was arranged by him in order to make the two parties join battle. The *Iliad* begins at a point when the Achaean army was tired of fighting; so much is clear from the fact that the soldiers immediately embraced the idea when Agamemnon proposed to give up the whole project, and also here from the detail (794) that the Trojan watcher was looking out in the hope of the enemy's withdrawal.

The Trojan catalogue contains 16 entries, built up much like the Achaean ones. Each has as a minimum two bits of information, the names of the region and its leaders. No ships, of course, and no updating; the narrative follows the story, and what we are being informed of is the army hurrying out into battle. Nine of the entries have just the minimum. The others have similar additions as the Achaean ones such as small anecdotes about the origin of a leader or descriptions of localities and characterisations of the men from there, and in some cases prolepses to what would happen to the warriors during the fighting.

Agamemnon and Hector lead the biggest contingents (577-78 and 817-18). That singles them out as leaders of the two armies.

This catalogue is clearly modelled over the Achaean one, but it is meagre. The rhapsode could have had good use for the Muses, we might feel, but he did not call for them. A catalogue of Trojans and their allies is not their field of expertise. The Muses are representative of Greek tradition of which the Trojan royal household is a part. But the allies of Troy and especially all the soldiers who occur just to be killed seem not to have had the Muses' interest. The rhapsode uses the well-known story of Aeneas being the son of Anchises and Aphrodite, and later in the poem he has much to tell about Troy and its earlier history; but except for Glaukos and Sarpedon he has little to find in his mental archive for this catalogue,

and even they, who have important roles later on, are just briefly mentioned.

Of the big cities along the coast, he includes only Miletus and states that it was inhabited by Carians and that they were βαρβαρόφωνοι, not Greek-speaking (867). In this case as in the question of the unmentioned cities in the Achaean Catalogue the reason must be that the rhapsode takes care to represent the geography as he imagines it was long ago, during the War of Troy;³³ in his own time these cities were Greek. It has been stated in vv. 803-4 that Priam's allies were speaking various languages even though normally the communication in the poem does not suffer from linguistic problems.

The fact that the Trojan catalogue is so short and has so little to say is actually astonishing when we remember that the rhapsode probably was an Ionian from this area.³⁴ It underlines that catalogues as a genre are not just created out of nothing; the rhapsode needs a tradition, or, you might say, he needs the Muses.

Another reason why the Trojan catalogue is so short may be found in the very virtuosity of the Catalogue of Ships. After his master performance, the rhapsode simply was exhausted. A similar sequence is to be seen in the rhythm of his other special achievement, Hephaestus's forging of new arms for Achilles (18.478-613). The god uses 131 hexameters to create the shield, after which he spends 4 verses on making cuirass, helmet, and greaves. The making of the wonderful shield, which is not unlike a catalogue with its reiterated ἐν δ' ἐτίθει, "and he put in", must have been a performance that demanded just as intense concentration as the Catalogue.

Reception in the 5th century BC

Among the writers preserved to us Herodotus is the first to mention the titles *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. He also mentions *Cypria* and *Epigoni*, and he doubts

33 Kirk 1985: 263 also calls this a result of archaising.

34 West 2011: 15-27.

whether these poems can have been composed by Homer. His way of arguing shows that it builds on reading.³⁵ In Herodotus the first steps are taken towards making Homer the poet of only the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Herodotus has a story in which the Catalogue plays an important role. He tells of an event taking place in 480 BC, when the Persians were invading Greece. Athens and Sparta sent a legation to the tyrant Gelon of Syracuse in the hope that he would join them in the war. Gelon held out the prospect of a very considerable force consisting in both navy and infantry of various kinds, on the condition that he himself would be the leader of the total army. The Spartan envoy was furious: Should the descendants of Agamemnon be subordinate to a Syracusan? The Athenian insisted that since his people was alone in Hellas to have always lived in the same place, and since the epic poet Homer maintained that an Athenian had come to Troy as the best to arrange and organise an army, the Athenians were obvious for the leadership. Gelon was not impressed, and the envoys returned without his support.³⁶ The story shows how Herodotus has both envoys basing their arguments on the Trojan War. The Spartan Syagros refers to Agamemnon and the Trojan war in general, whereas the Athenian refers to a specific passage, the Athenian entry of the Catalogue. The incident is described as if only in Athens a written text was known. When Syagros does not question the Athenian's speech he seems to accept that Athens was somehow the authority as to what Homer said. Syagros does not suggest that alternative versions of the Catalogue were around.

Various other sources confirm that Menestheus was famous in Athens. He was celebrated in the public space: A *herm* erected after a victory in Thrace in 475 BC had an inscription maintaining that Homer called him the best in the Trojan War to arrange an army for battle.³⁷ Besides, it is told that a huge bronze statue of the Wooden Horse in which this same hero was shown crawling out of the horse was put up in the Acropolis.³⁸ So here we have on one side an inscription clearly referring to the Athenian entry of the Catalogue, and on the other a statue just as clearly

35 Hdt. 2.116, 4.29, 4.32.

36 Hdt. 7.157-62.

37 Aeschin. 3.183; Dem. 20.112; Plut. *Cim.* 7.

38 Paus. 1.23.8.

referring to a story different from what is found in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. In these two poems the story of the Wooden Horse is told only in *Odyssey* 4.266-89 and 8.492-520, and there Menestheus is not participating. As mentioned, except for the Catalogue the Athenian hero is no important warrior in the *Iliad*, but he may have played a role in other Homeric poems, or he may owe his fame to the Catalogue and from there have made his way into performances of episodes from the Trojan War.

Thucydides opens his work with the statement that right from the beginning of the war (the so-called Peloponnesian War) he realised that it would be the largest and most important of the Greek wars, involving almost all Greeks and even some of the barbarians. His opening chapter (1.1-22) discusses the difficulties he had in finding reliable information because human memory is faulty and because Homer, being a poet, probably tended to exaggerate in order to embellish his poems. Thucydides's only named source is Homer. Otherwise, he mentions e.g. οἱ τὰ σαφέστατα Πελοποννησίων μνήμη παρὰ τῶν πρότερον δεδεγμένοι, "those of the Peloponnesians who have taken over by memory from their predecessors the clearest information", and he speaks of "the poets" or "the old poets" and once of οἱ λογογράφοι, "those who write stories". He may write Κορίνθιοι λέγονται, "it is said of the Corinthians", keeping the statement anonymous, or ὅσον οἱ τε ποιηταὶ εἰρήκασι καὶ ὁ λόγος κατέχει, "as the poets have said and the oral account has it", making a difference between poems and people's talk. He underlines the uncertainty of it all by using verbs like φαίνεται, it appears, and δοκεῖ, it seems.

Thucydides knew the Catalogue in its entirety, and evidently in the form we have in our *Iliad*. He was arguing that the war he was describing was the largest ever, and with this purpose he carefully evaluated the data given in the Catalogue. When he mentions Homer, it is as the poet of the Catalogue and of another passage in *Iliad* 2 (100-8) which he calls τοῦ σκῆπτρου ἡ παράδοσις, the transmission of the sceptre. He knows other events from the Trojan War such as the oaths given to Tyndareos and the heroes' returns from Troy, but gives no poets' names to them. He does not use the titles *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or any other titles of Homeric epics.

Except for *Iliad* 2, Thucydides's sources for the early history are φήμη and λόγος, fame and talk; books or reading do not occur. He is himself

pointedly a writing author. The first words of his monumental work are Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ξυνέγραψε, “Thucydides from Athens wrote”. At the end of his methodical introduction he concludes of his work: κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ζύγκειται, “and it exists as a possession for eternity rather than a competition for momentary listening” (22.4). The competition for momentary listening must mean an oral performance. What makes his history of the Peloponnesian War a possession for eternity is the fact that it is written, as already Eric A. Havelock stated.³⁹

Since Thucydides does so evidently know the Catalogue of Ships in all details, and since he is so focused on the difference between writing and speaking from memory it is an intriguing fact that it is just as evident that he did not know the whole of our *Iliad*. This is clear from the way in which he describes the beginning of the war: ἀφικόμενοι μάχη ἐκράτησαν (δῆλον δὲ τὸ γὰρ ἔρυμα τῷ στρατοπέδῳ οὐκ ἂν ἐτειχίσαντο), “when they [the Greeks] arrived they were victorious in the battle (and that is clear, for otherwise they would not have built a defence for their camp)” (11.1). However, in Book 7.327-43 of the *Iliad* Nestor is originator of a plan of fortifying the until then unfenced camp with a wall, a plan which is immediately realised. Nestor’s proposal is not just an insignificant detail but plays a major role in the action that follows. Nevertheless, Thucydides takes for granted that it is common knowledge that the Greeks fortified their camp immediately after arrival, so well-known that it can be an argument for stating that they must have won the first battle.⁴⁰

In short, as far as the sources for the 5th century BC go, the written *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were first known in Athens, the written Catalogue was known before the rest of the texts, and of the Catalogue only the Athenian entry was widely known. The public at large knew the war from flexible oral performance, a situation which is confirmed by visual representations.⁴¹

Between them, Herodotus and Thucydides offer a glimpse into the reception of Homer in the last decades of the 5th century BC in Athens.

39 Havelock 1963: 54, n. 8.

40 Jensen 2011: 270-78.

41 Cf. Jensen 2011: 237-44.

Homer was considered author of the stories of the Theban and Trojan wars in general, and they were known from oral performance, while at least the Athenian entry in the Catalogue and perhaps the entire Catalogue had become accessible in written form. Herodotus had begun doubting Homer's authorship of some of the epics ascribed to him, but his few remarks do not reveal exactly how much of the poems he knew. Thucydides read the Catalogue, and perhaps the whole of Book 2, but not the full *Iliad*. Since he was arguing about the scale of the Trojan war it was essential to him to have the precise numbers. He must have known that a written text existed and that it contained a detailed statement of the size of the army, and he made sure to get access to it. As for the rest, he had a layman's interest in Homer, enjoyed attending epic contests, felt that he knew the story of the Trojan War, but considered it probable that the poets had exaggerated its grandeur.

During the following decades the picture changed rapidly, with references to Homeric passages turning up here and there and in forms more or less as they are in the transmitted texts. Again, the Catalogue was in focus: two Megarian historians, Hereas and Dieuchidas, protested against the way Salamis appeared. Only with Plato it is clear that he knows the whole of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in detail,⁴² and to him Homer is the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Aristotle is the first to call attention to a difference between *Iliad* and *Odyssey* on one side and other epics on the other.⁴³

Conclusion

The folkloristic-cognitive approach may enable a reader to envisage how the rhapsode and his audience felt about the Catalogue of Ships. He/she may accept that what may seem boring on the printed page will have been exciting to a listening audience. In a context of oral epic with its respect for potent memory, precise transmission, and competent performance, it is easily understandable that audiences may react as described above.

42 Lohse 1964-67.

43 For a more detailed argumentation, see Jensen 1980: 96-111; 2011: 268-80.

In antiquity, not only listeners, but also readers will have been impressed. There is, of course, a national aspect. Greek audiences must have felt a pleasure at imagining such a huge gathering of contingents from so many parts of Greece; it must have had an effect comparable to the many festivals where representatives of city-states from all over the place came together. Edzard Visser emphasises that the plot of the *Iliad* was considered history, of importance for national identity.⁴⁴ The stories of Menestheus and how he was used in Athens show that not only the Catalogue as such was nationally important, but that individual city-states were careful to keep the connection with former generations alive. Attending performances of the Trojan War and not least of the Catalogue, listeners might feel that they were descendants of the epic heroes and enjoy hearing their state or home region mentioned, even if it was small. An inhabitant of Boeotia will have been waiting with long ears to hear if his village would come up.

Millennia later we find a similar feeling in a poem by Giorgos Seferis, saying how he and a friend looked around for those who once lived where they are now and finding, with some frustration, just a single name:

Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΣΙΝΗΣ

Ἀσίνην τε...

ΙΛΙΑΔΑ

...Ὁ βασιλιάς τῆς Ἀσίνης πού τὸν γυρεύουμε δυὸ χρόνια τώρα
 ἄγνωστος λησμονημένος ἀπ' ὅλους κι' ἀπὸ τὸν Ὅμηρο
 μόνο μιὰ λέξη στὴν Ἰλιάδα κι' ἐκείνη ἀβέβαιη
 ριγμένη σὰν τὴν ἐντάφια χρυσὴ προσωπίδα.
 Τὴν ἄγγιξες, θυμᾶσαι τὸν ἦχο της; κούφιο μέσα στὸ φῶς
 σὰν τὸ στεγνὸ πιθάρι στὸ σκαμμένο χῶμα
 κι' ὁ ἴδιος ἦχος μὲς στὴ θάλασσα μὲ τὰ κουπιά μας.
 Ὁ βασιλιάς τῆς Ἀσίνης ἓνα κενὸ κάτω ἀπ' τὴν προσωπίδα
 παντοῦ μαζί μας παντοῦ μαζί μας, κάτω ἀπὸ ἓνα ὄνομα·
 “Ἀσίνην τε ... Ἀσίνην τε ...”

THE KING OF ASINE

Ἀσίνην τε

...

ILIAD

...The king of Asine, whom we've been trying to find for two years now,
 unknown, forgotten by all, even by Homer,
 only one word in the *Iliad* and that uncertain,
 thrown here like the gold burial mask.
 You touched it, remember its sound? Hollow in the light
 like a dry jar in dug earth:
 the same sound that our oars make in the sea.
 The king of Asine a void under the mask
 everywhere with us everywhere with us, under a name:
 "Ἀσίνην τε ... Ἀσίνην τε ..."

(Translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard.)

Ἀσίνην τε, "and Asine," is fetched from *Iliad* 2.560, in the Catalogue's entry of Argos.

So far, so good. Still, it can be frustrating to have to content oneself with a historical appreciation of a passage of the *Iliad*, which is otherwise so immediately enjoyable across the distance in time and culture. Johannes Haubold expresses that feeling beautifully: "We do not on the whole enjoy catalogues as much as ancient readers seem to think we should"⁴⁵ – as if hit by a kind of bad conscience for not appreciating the virtuoso pieces.

Again, Minchin offers help. She makes her own rather long list of what it is that can make catalogues in an epic context so engaging to audiences, and some of her points are relevant for both listeners and readers. Two are especially useful for a modern reader: "A traditional list ... may appeal to an audience because of its integrity and relevance", and "it may in some way contribute to or evaluate the ongoing narrative".⁴⁶

45 Haubold 2021: 224-25.

46 Minchin 2001: 97-98.

The scholars who study the way the Catalogue succeeds in mapping Greece are good at communicating their excitement of reading it with the real landscapes in mind; in this case the millennia-long history is, of course, part of the excitement, but a feeling of integrity and relevance may still move a modern time-reader.

Minchin's other suggestion of studying how the Catalogue contributes to the ongoing narrative is especially fruitful, because it brings us back to normal literary close-reading. Actually, the rhapsode himself offers the key: the overwhelming amount of names of heroes and localities make the reader understand how great and important and terrible this whole enterprise was. Thucydides may be sceptic as to the numbers, but his very reaction reveals that the rhapsode was successful in overwhelming him. To bring in the Catalogue as part of the intricate opening of the expanded epic is one of the ways in which the rhapsode made his poem live on two levels, as performance of the song of Achilles's wrath and of the whole Trojan War.⁴⁷

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