

1. THE CONTEST

meeting up at Aulis in Boeotia. For after composing the *Margites*, they say, Homer went round from town to town reciting, and on coming to Delphi he enquired what his native land was; and the Pythia said:

There is an island Ios, your mother's home, which on
your death
will receive you. Only beware the young boys' riddle.

After hearing this, they say, he avoided going on to Ios, and remained in those parts. Around the same time Ganymctor was organizing the funeral of his father Amphidamas, a king in Euboea, and he invited to the contest all the men who were noted not only for strength and speed at running, but also for intellectual accomplishments, honoring them with sizeable gifts. So these two also, having met up by chance, as they say, went to Chalcis. At the contest, among other Chalcidian notables who were sitting as judges, there was Panedes, a brother of the deceased. And after both poets had put up wonderful performances, they say that Hesiod was the winner, in the following manner. He came forward onto the floor and set Homer a series of questions, to which Homer responded. So Hesiod said:

Son of Meles, Homer, with your wisdom from the
gods,
come, tell me first of all, what is the best thing for
mortals?

Homer:

1. THE CONTEST OF HOMER AND HESIOD

Homer and Hesiod are the most inspired of poets, and all mankind would like to have them reckoned as their own fellow-citizens. Hesiod at least, by naming his own homeland, precluded any rivalry: he said that his father

settled near Helicon in a miserable village,
Ascra, bad in winter, foul in summer, good at no time.

With Homer, on the other hand, practically all cities and their inhabitants claim that he was born among them.

[Summary of the variant stories surrounding Homer's origins.]

Some, however, say that they flourished at the same time, so as actually to compete with each other after

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Not to be born in the first place is best for men on earth,
or if born, to pass through Hades' gates as fast as possible.

Hesiod again:

Come, tell me this too, godlike Homer:
what do you consider to be the finest thing for mortals?

He replied:

When good cheer prevails throughout the people,
and banqueters in the hall are listening to a bard,
sitting in line, and beside them the tables are laden
with bread and meat; and drawing wine from the bowl
the wine waiter brings it round and pours it in the cups—
this sort of thing is what seems to me the finest.

When these verses were spoken, they say the lines were so intensely admired by the Greeks that they were dubbed "golden," and even today everyone invokes them at public sacrifices before the feasting and libations.

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[The poets' contest continues, with Homer besting Hesiod at every turn, much to Hesiod's chagrin.]

When these dicta too had been spoken, the Greeks all called for Homer to be garlanded as victor. But King Panedes told each poet to recite the finest passage from his own compositions. So Hesiod said first:

When the Pleiades born of Atlas rise before the sun,
begin the reaping; the plowing, when they set.
They for forty nights and days
are hidden, and again as the year goes round

²⁰ ἔχειν σ' cod.: corr. Hutchinson.

²¹ στήθισιν West: σώμασιν cod. (cf. Stob. 3.3.45).

²² ἐπὶ Stephanus: ἔτι cod.

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they first appear at the time of iron-sharpening.
This is the rule of the land, both for those who live
near the sea, and for those who live in the winding
glens
far from the swelling sea, a rich terrain:
naked sow and naked drive the oxen,
and naked reap, when all is in good season.

Then came Homer:

About the two Ajaxes the battle lines stood strong
that neither would Ares have faulted had he come
there
nor Athena driver of armies; for the finest
picked men were awaiting the Trojans and lordly
Hector,
hedging lance with lance, shield with shield
overlapping;
targe pressed on targe, helm on helm, man on man,
and the horsehair plumes touched on the bright
crests
as they nodded, so close they stood to one another.
The murderous battle bristled with long spears
that they held to slice the skin; eyes were dazzled
with the glint of the bronze from the shining helmets,
the fresh-polished corslets, and the bright shields
as the armies clashed. It would have been a bold-
hearted man
who felt joy at sight of that toil and not dismay.

Once again the Greeks were struck with admiration
for Homer, praising the way the verses transcended the

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merely fitting, and they called for him to be awarded the
victory. The king, however, garlanded Hesiod, saying that
it was right for the poet who encouraged people towards
agriculture and peace to win, not the one who rehearsed
battle and carnage. So that is how they say Hesiod got his
victory, and that he received a bronze tripod and dedicated
it the Muses with this inscription:

Hesiod dedicated this to the Muses of Helicon,
having defeated in song at Chalcis the godly Homer.

HOMERIC HYMNS HOMERIC APOCRYPHA LIVES OF HOMER

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
MARTIN L. WEST



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