CHAPTER TWO

Homer

Nothing specific is said either in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* about the name and background of the poet who composed them. Yet what is said about poetry in the two epics led to a tradition that they are the work of the same man. He emerges in the biographical tradition as a humble itinerant, like the bards Phemius and Demodocus in the *Odyssey*, dependent on others for support. Although his poetry is acclaimed by ordinary people, he wins no contests. Hesiod said in the *Works and Days* that he could speak of seafaring although he had never been on a boat because the Muses had taught him (661–2). But the poet of the *Iliad* sets his ignorance and weakness against the goddesses' knowledge: 'we hear only report and do not know anything; I couldn't tell or name the multitude, not if I had ten voices, or ten mouths, or had an unbreakable voice, or a bronze heart within me' (487–90). The story he then tells about Thamyris reinforces the value of humility: Thamyris boasted that he could beat the Muses in a singing contest, but they made him lame and took away his song and made him forget how to play the lyre (*Il.* 2.599).[1]

Other biographical data about Homer also derived from his poetry. As in Hesiod's case, some 'facts' were produced by inference: Demodocus was taught either by a Muse or by Apollo himself; Homer is the son of a Muse and of Apollo (Suda, p. 33 Wil) or a direct descendant of Apollo through Orpheus (*Cert.* 4) or Musaeus (Gorgias 82B25 DK) in geneaologies known to writers like Hellanicus (*FGrHist* 4F5) and Pherecydes (3F161) in the fifth century.[2] Other attempts to

[1] According to other traditions, Thamyris was blind, perhaps on the analogy of Demodocus and Homer; Lesky 1966, 169–75.

[2] More poets are added as time goes on; Jacoby on Hellanicus *FGrHist* 5F11.

show that the poet's work in direct ways reflected his life experience give Thamyris or Telemachus as Homer's father (*Cert.* 3); Penelope as his beloved (Hermesianax fr. 7.29–30 Powell).[3] According to Ephorus in the fourth century (*FGrHist* 70F1), Homer studied poetry with a school-teacher called Phemius (the bard in *Od.* 1.153–5). Other characters from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* make their way into his life (*Vit. Hdt.* 6, 7) Mentes (*Od.* 1.105), who takes him to his homeland Ithaca, where Homer stays with Mentor (*Od.* 1.180–1); Homer sings for Tychius the shield-maker (*Il.* 7.218–21).

Having Telemachus as father or Mentes as friend helps account for Homer's detailed knowledge of the remote island Ithaca. In the biographies the site of Homer's birthplace also provides some explanation of geographical and linguistic diversity in the poems. Writers who believed the prominent dialect of the poem to be Aeolic set his birthplace in Smyrna (e.g. *Vit. Hdt.* 37); the singer of the *Hymn to Delian Apollo* claims that he comes from rocky Chios (*HHom* 3.172). These are the birthplaces mentioned by writers in the fifth century (Stesimbrotus *FGrHist* 107F22, Pindar fr. 264, Simonides fr. 652 P = fr. 8 W). That Pindar is alleged to have said that Homer came from both Chios and Smyrna (Ps. Plu., *Vit. Hom.* p. 23 Wil) suggests that attribution of homeland was meant as aetiology rather than as literal fact. Philochorus in the fourth century suggested Argos, because of the importance of Mycenae in the *Iliad* (*FGrHist* 328F209); later Pylos and Athens were suggested, to account for complimentary references in the poems (e.g. *Vit. Hdt.* 28).

But other aspects of the poet's life have only an indirect relation to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Accounts of Homer's parentage acknowledged the importance of the poems by giving him the uncertain origins of a mythological hero. According to Aristotle (fr. 76 Rose), his mother Critheis, a girl from Ios, was made pregnant by 'some divinity' among the dancers in a festival of the Muses. She went and hid in a place called Aegina, but was stolen from there by pirates and brought to Smyrna, which was under Lydian rule. There the king

[3] Cf. Hesiod's Eoie, p. 6 n.17 above.

Maion fell in love with her because of her beauty. She gave birth to Homer near the Meles river but died in childbirth. Her son, called Melesigenes after the river, was raised by Maion as his own. Later when the Aeolians captured Smyrna he offered himself as a hostage (*homēros*) and afterwards was addressed by that name. The story, with its Euripidean pace, reversals and ultimate success of its hero, could serve as the outline for the opening book of a Hellenistic romance. But in the course of the action, scholarly questions are addressed: although his mother comes from Ios, his birthplace is Smyrna, and an explanation is offered for his two names.

However, where Aristotle enhances the poet's stature by making him the son of a god in disguise, in Ephorus (*FGrHist* 70F1) his father is his mother's uncle, who raped her in Cyme while she was entrusted to his care and then married her off to a school-teacher Phemius in the neighbouring town of Smyrna. The child was born while she was doing her laundry by the river Meles. Her son, Melesigenes, was called Homer, not because he courageously offered himself as a hostage, but because the Cymaeans and Ionians called blind people *homēroi*. Ephorus' story, like Aristotle's, gives Homer's birthplace as Smyrna and accounts for Homer's names. But Ephorus' Homer is blind from the start, and by background is in no way superior to other people. Where Aristotle's geneaology suggests that Homer is extraordinary, like his poetry, Ephorus' account makes him no better (if not worse) than an ordinary member of his audience.

Places not mentioned in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* assume a prominent place in these biographies: the home of Homer's mother is Ios or Cyme. Patriotic motives may have led Ephorus to pick his hometown; Antimachus, a contemporary of Plato, had claimed that Homer came from his hometown Colophon (fr. 130a Wyss).[4] Ios figures in the oracle about Homer's parents and origin: 'there is an island Ios, your mother's fatherland, which will receive you when you are dead' (*AP* 14.65); there is no disagreement in the *Lives* that Ios is the site of the poet's grave. To some extent the story of Homer's travels

[4] Also Wyss 1936, xxx–xxxi.

to these places accommodates strong local tradition: a group of rhapsodes recited the Homeric poems on Chios (schol. *Nem.* 2.1); in Smyrna Pausanias saw at the source of the river Meles the cave where Homer wrote his poetry (7.5.1). According to one tradition the river Meles himself was Homer's father (*EG* 3305/146 GP).

By the fifth century, a reference to 'the man from Chios' could be understood to mean Homer (Simonides fr. 8 W/*PMG* 652), just as 'the man from Boeotia' meant Hesiod (Bacchyl. 5.191ff., cf. Hesiod fr. 359 MW).[5] Thucydides took the end of the *Hymn to Delian Apollo* as a reference to Homer (*HHom.* 3.165ff). There the singer does not give his name, but provides obvious clues to his identity: he is the sweetest singer, in whose songs men most delight; he is a blind man who lives in rocky Chios (3.104.5). By implication, he is a travelling singer, who is competing at Delos (*HHom.* 3.150). A fragment of a poem attributed to Hesiod says that Homer and Hesiod first sang as bards in Delos, and composed new hymns for Apollo (fr. 357 MW). Retrospect provided the epic poets with the characteristics of their successors: like the rhapsodes, Homer and Hesiod travelled and sang in contests at religious festivals.

In other cases Homer's presence in a place explains why he should have written particular poems or verses. Visits to Athens and Argos (like being born in either city) explain the presence in the poems of complimentary lines (*Cert.* 16, 17); a trip to Delos verifies that he wrote the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (*Cert.* 18/fr. 357 MW), which was also attributed to 'one of the Homeridae' (Ath. i.22). By being on Samos he can have reason to compose several poems associated with that island: the *Sack of Oechalia*, also attributed to Creophylus (Allen p. 145, Strabo 14.638): the *Eiresione*; and the *Kiln Song*, also attributed to Hesiod (fr. 302 MW)—'Samian' in Roman times was a synonym for 'clay'.[6] In the third century Salamis in Cyprus was suggested as Homer's birthplace (Callicles 758F13/*EG* 3305), perhaps in order to address the question of whether or

[5] Burkert 1979, 57; West 1974, 180; cf. Lefkowitz 1976, 73.

[6] Burkert 1972b, 79. On the Kiln song, Noble 1965, 103; Detienne and Vernant 1978, 194–5; Herter 1975, 45–7.

not Homer wrote the Cypria, an issue that had been disputed since the fifth century (cf. Hdt. 2.116).[7]

'Family' became another means of accounting for problems of transmission and authorship. Pindar in the fifth century wrote of 'bards . . . sons of Homer (Homeridae)' (*Nem.* 2.1–2); he also told the story of how Homer, at a loss for what to give his daughter as a dowry, gave her the Cypria (Ael. *VH* ix. 15/ Pind. fr. 265, also attributed to Stasinos). Creophylus, according to some the author of Homer's *Sack of Oechalia*, was said to be either Homer's friend (Pl., *Resp.* 600b) or his son-in-law (Suda, s.v.). Such a relationship was an efficient way of begging the question of authenticity that was still unresolved in Callimachus' day (Ep. 6 Pf/ 55 GP). In the third century the Sicilian historian Hippostratus (*FGrHist* 568F5/ schol. *Nem.* 2.1) spoke of Homeridae descended from Homer who sang his poetry by right of succession (*ek diadochēs*) and rhapsodes called Homeridae who no longer claimed descent, among them a Cynaethus of Chios who both interpolated lines into Homer's poetry and wrote the *Hymn to Apollo* (p. 15 above) and attributed it to Homer. An inscription seems to confirm that Cynaethus, as Hippostratus says, recited the Homeric poems in Sicily at the end of the sixth century; stating that he was not descended from Homer is a biographer's means of indicating that his work was not genuine.[8]

Many stories about Homer tell of inhospitality or rejection in the course of his travels. In epigrams quoted in the biographies the poet asks for support in Cyme (*Epigr.* 1,2), but his request is turned down and he travels elsewhere (4). He complains to a Thestorides of the unpredictability of human behaviour (5); he asks for revenge on a man who has deceived him and angered Zeus, god of strangers (8); he curses a pine tree (9), an old woman (12), and low-born boys (12). The world he describes is hostile: the earth is angry at some cities (7); dogs bark and must be fed because they protect the house (11); a

[7] Since Homer's father could not very well be the river Meles (p. 15 above) if his birthplace were Salamis, the name Dmesagoras was substituted (Callicles *FGrHist.* 758H13/ *Cert.* 3/ Alcaeus *EG* 3306/ 147 GP); cf. the names invented for Hesiod's son (p. 6 n.17 above).

[8] Burkert 1979, 56; Fehling 1979, 193–4.

home wins praise for having a fire in it (13). With prose glosses that attach them to specific situations and cities, the epigrams tell of the life of a lonely wanderer, compelled to struggle against the world. A third-century inscription preserves Demeas' biography of the poet Archilochus, written in prose with long quotations in verse from Archilochus' poetry, including a description of a battle in which the poet participated (5 Tarditi). Homer's conflicts are of a different nature, in keeping with the humble character of his first-person statements and the portraits of the bards in the *Odyssey*; in Cyme his request for public support is rejected, like the poet Xenophanes' (21B2.11–12 DK) or the philosopher Socrates'. Plato contrasts his bad treatment by Creophylus to the heroisation of Pythagoras by his followers (*Resp.* 600b).

The notion of rejection is inherent in the professional stance adopted by archaic poets; it is the natural response to the poet's statement of his superiority to 'shepherds of the wilderness, mere bellies' (Hes. *Th.* 26; p. 2 above). So it is possible that the epigrams about Homer's life that complain of hostile treatment date back at least to the fifth century B.C. Heraclitus, at the beginning of the century, gives a version of one of the epigrams, the riddle asked of Homer by fisher boys. Heraclitus cites the riddle to show how Homer knew less than people think he did: 'men are deceived in respect to knowledge of the apparent, like Homer, who was the wisest of all the Greeks': Boys killing lice deceived him when they said 'what we saw and caught we left behind, what we didn't see and didn't catch we bring'. Heraclitus' version of the riddle is in prose, because of the special emphasis he wants to put on 'seeing'. Alcidamas, a century later, apparently linked the riddle to the oracle about Homer's origins (cf. *Cert.* 18) itself another epigram (16), that the poet would die on Ios where his mother was born (*PMich*, 2754.9).[9]

In Alcidamas' account prose explanations precede and follow citations of poetry, as if to place them in appropriate settings: 'seeing him the boys improvised this verse (1–2): what we caught we left behind, what we caught we didn't

[9] On Alcidamas, pp. 4–5 above; text in Renehan 1975, 85–6; cf. Fontenrose 1978, L 80.

bring (17). When Homer couldn't find the solution he asked them what they meant and they said that they had gone off to fish but didn't catch anything so they sat down to pick lice. Of the lice the ones they caught they left behind, but the ones they didn't catch they brought with them in their clothing' (3–9); 'after he recalled the oracle that the end of his life had come, Homer composed the following epigram for himself: "here the earth covers the sacred head of the poet who gave heroes glory, divine Homer."' In Alcidamas the pattern of Homer's death resembles Hesiod's, an oracle not followed, a degrading death away from his homeland: 'and when he went away from there, since there was mud, he slipped and fell on his side, and thus they say, he died' (13–14). 'They say' shows that Alcidamas is following an older tradition, which he does not necessarily regard as accurate. But the form of Alcidamas' 'On Homer' suggests that the biographical tradition about Homer in its earliest form contained explanations and quotations from his poetry.

In the Hellenistic age and after, conscious attempts were made to bring order to the chaos of the variant traditions, and to restore some of the honour the great poet seemed to deserve. Epigrams listed the names of all the cities that claimed Homer as their son, and concluded that he belonged to no one city but to all of Greece.[10] Instead of making Homer an illegitimate child, an epigram (*AP* 14.102) from the Roman period suggested that Telemachus and Polycaste, Nestor's daughter, were his parents; the same genealogy was sent by the Delphic oracle in reply to an inquiry by the emperor Hadrian (*Cert.* 3).[11] Other Hellenistic epigrams concerned the contest at Aulis, and the occasion of his death; but none related the stories of inhospitality recorded in the older epigrams attributed to Homer himself. The treatise *The Contest between Homer and Hesiod* prefers Telemachus as Homer's father, and records the honours paid to Homer by various cities he visited after the contest, before he came to Ios, where he died.

The author of the treatise *The Contest between Homer and Hesiod* reports events without editorial comment, and without

[10] Skiadas 1965, 17–32. [11] Ibid., 32–7.

seeming to distinguish among the relative historical merits of his sources. But to regard his work as naïve is to misunderstand his purpose.[12] He did not see himself as a historian in the modern sense of the word, but as a recorder of myth, at liberty to present his material in ways that would impart a general truth about his subject. His narrative emphasises divine recognition in the form of oracles about Homer's parents and his death, and mentions the sacrifices offered to him in Argos (17). His narrative accounts (in that order) for the composition of several minor epics (15), the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad* (16) and a few epigrams. But at the same time he makes it clear that although Homer is undoubtedly a more facile and popular artist, he loses the contest because the ethical quality of his poetry is inferior to Hesiod's, and like the sophist Alcidamas, he has Homer die after failing to answer a riddle, by slipping in the mud. The ambivalence of his narrative, with its alternating successes and failures, balances fourth-century concern about the content of poetry against the poems' continued popularity and cultural importance; in that sense (though certainly not in ours) the *Contest* offers a valid impression of the significance of Homer's poetry in the second century A.D.

The author of the *Contest* indicates clearly to his readers that he is writing for them as their contemporary; he cites many of his sources by name; he mentions the oracle that 'we have heard to have been spoken to the most sacred Emperor Hadrian' (3). But the author of the longest surviving biography of Homer[13] pretends that he is the famous fifth-century historian: 'Herodotus of Halicarnassus wrote the following history of Homer's background, upbringing, and life, and sought to make his account complete and absolutely reliable.' This opening, with its claim of accuracy, bears some resemblance to the forged history of Dictys of Crete: 'when by chance some books had come into our hands, the desire for true history came over us to put them into Latin' (*Ep.* 1.14 Eisenhut).[14] Unlike the author of the *Contest*, 'Herodotus' cites no sources or conflicting opin-

[12] P. 8 n.27 above. [13] See Appendix 1.

[14] On fraudulent history, Syme 1968, 118–25. Cf. Lucian, who writes his preposterous *True History* 'honestly'; or Dares, who according to Cornelius Nepos wrote *vere et simpliciter*, Syme 1971, 266.

ions about Homer's ancestry or adventures but offers instead a straight narrative account of Homer's life. 'Herodotus' ' or Dictys' audiences may not have been deceived by these protestations of veracity; fanciful 'correspondence' between persons long dead, like Stesichorus and Phalaris, had appeal in late antiquity. Alciphron in the fourth century A.D. composed a book of letters between the third-century B.C. comic poet Menander and his *hetaira* Glycera, who bore the name of the heroines of several of his plays.[15] But the existence and apparent success of the *Historia Augusta* indicates that an audience for learned fraud existed and might be exploited.[16]

'Herodotus' does even more than the author of the treatise on the *Contest* to improve the poet's stature. In the *Contest*, Homer dies when he cannot answer the fisherboys' riddle about the lice (*Cert.* 18); in 'Herodotus' ' life the poet dies of weakness, not after being found ignorant (36). In fact the boys' taunt gives Homer an opportunity to compose an insulting epigram about their low descent (35; *Epigr.* 18). 'Herodotus' explains the epigram that complains to a Thestorides of the incomprehensibility of the human mind (*Epigr.* 5), by telling how Thestorides mistreated Homer and stole his poetry (16). Later it was discovered that Homer is the true author of the lines, and Thestorides goes into exile (24). From the beginning of his life Homer's talent wins recognition. Where Ephorus said (*FGrHist* 70F1) that Homer was the product of an incestuous union, and that his uncle married off his mother to the local school-teacher, 'Herodotus' leaves the identity of Homer's father a mystery, and has the school-master marry her because he likes her work and admires her son. Homer takes over the school, is taken by a merchant friend to Ithaca, and later made tutor to the children of a wealthy Chian, who gives him a new start in life.

In 'Herodotus' ' account, Homer's difficulties derive not from defects of character but from his physical dependence on others. 'Herodotus' constantly reminds his audience of the problems caused by blindness: Homer must be led from place to place, addressed slowly and with consideration (13), not

[15] Cf. p. 114 below. [16] Syme 1972, 13–17.

only greeted, but embraced (18, 19), and reassured (24). But even so, blindness gives Homer a seer's status and divine protection: fishermen who refuse to take him on board are driven back by adverse winds (19); he arrives without a guide at Pityos in the centre of the island of Chios (21). A crowd of people gather round him as he lies dying on the beach at Ios, and bury him (36).

'Herodotus' also tries to show how and where Homer could have written most of the poetry attributed to him. He gains some credibility by not trying to claim everything: Alcidamas has Homer write his own epitaph,[17] but 'Herodotus' says explicitly that the verses are not Homer's, but composed, long after his death, by the people of Ios. 'Herodotus' never states explicitly that he is dealing with questions of authenticity throughout his history, but anyone familiar with the Hellenistic commentaries on Homer would have understood why he takes proportionately so much space to explain why the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain special verses in praise of Athens (28). Three of the passages he cites were questioned by the Alexandrian scholars Zenodotus, Aristophanes, and Chaeris.[18] 'Herodotus' has Homer compose these verses on Chios, in anticipation of a trip to mainland Greece. He prefaces his story by citing two lines about Athens whose authenticity was never questioned; after this the three questionable passages, cited out of context, appear as appropriate as the first.

Since the authorship of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was not disputed in antiquity, 'Herodotus' notes only in passing that Homer wrote them while he was on Chios; he ignores the tradition recorded in the *Contest* that Homer wrote them in mainland Greece after a visit to the Delphic oracle (*Cert.* 16) But he makes his narrative take account of Homer's minor works.[19] He says that Homer wrote the *Cercopes*, *Battle of the*

[17] P. 17 above.

[18] Schol. *Il.* 2.452–4, 557–8; *Od.* 7.80–1; cf. *Il.* 2.547. Callimachus in his poetry frequently alludes to controversial readings in the Homeric text; Williams 1978, 5.

[19] On the development of fictional narrative to 'satisfy interest in juvenilia', Syme 1972, 9. The discrepancy in style between major and minor works was noted in antiquity, e.g. Stat., *Silv.* 1 prooem./ T5 Allen p. 163. The

Frogs and Mice, and other minor poems for the Chian's children, thus explaining their comic subject matter and low quality (24); Vergil's biographers explained the *Culex* and *Ciris* by making them creations of the poet's early manhood (*Vit. Donat.* 17). 'Herodotus' painstakingly accounts for all the epigrams attributed to Homer. Homer spends the winter on Samos, composing two short epigrams (12, 13), the *Kiln Song*, and the *Eiresione* song; 'Herodotus' makes no reference to the Samian Creophylus, credited elsewhere with the authorship of the *Sack of Oechalia*, but Homer's presence on the island gives him opportunity to have written this work as well.[20] 'Herodotus' has Thestorides steal Homer's poetry; other authorities credit him with the authorship of the *Little Iliad*.

'Herodotus' further enhances Homer's stature by making no reference to the famous contest at Chalcis that Hesiod won. In his biography Homer is never defeated, and no one is given opportunity to criticise the content of his poetry. His international reputation and connection with mainland cities are explained in other ways. In part his associations with mainland Greece can be accounted for by his ancestry: his grandparents come from Magnesia, his mother's first guardian from Argos, her second from Boeotia; he travelled to Ithaca as a young man, before his sight failed. Wilamowitz suggested that 'Herodotus'' account of Homer's genealogy preserved traces of folk epic;[21] but since local historians tended to account for the past in terms of their understanding of the present,[22] 'Herodotus'' version of Homer's background may simply help represent in narrative form how a man who was primarily associated with Ionia and the eastern islands came to know so much about the rest of Greece. 'Herodotus' has Homer write an epigram for Midas' tomb (3) early in his career (11), not after the contest (cf. *Cert.* 15), because Homer's talent, in his account, was recognised from the start.

Batrachomyomachia and *Margites* were also attributed to Pigres (Suda, s.v./ T4 Allen); Aristotle explains the *Margites* (to which 'Herodotus' does not refer) as a model of comedy (*Poet.* 1448b38ff.).

[20] Cf. p. 15 above. Allen 1924, 145; Burkert 1972b, 79.

[21] Wilamowitz 1916, 413; nor does it depict for an illiterate audience 'the lowest sphere of life', as Parnell 1715, 25 thought.

But 'Herodotus' does not try to explain in any serious way how the blind poet was able to compose so great an oeuvre, given the deprivations of his life. Neither he nor his sources seem to have been interested in trying to understand the mechanics of Homer's art or to suggest how an itinerant poet could commit so much to memory and easily revise it, or how he was able to learn so much without the guidance of another poet or tradition. 'Herodotus' accepts Homer's achievement as anomalous. He is concerned rather with showing how Homer's talent was immediately apparent to everyone he encountered in his lifetime, by educated men like the school-teacher Phemius and the rich Chian, and by ordinary townspeople and working men throughout Ionia. It is in this respect that his biography is in fact 'complete and absolutely reliable'. Surviving papyri testify that even in late antiquity Homer remained the most popular author in the Greek-speaking world.[23] Quintus of Smyrna's epic tells 'What happened after Homer'. 'Herodotus'' short history documents in narrative form the continuing appeal of Homer's poetry.[24]

Yet for all his efforts, 'Herodotus'' Homer seems inadequately equipped for the magnitude of his achievement. In this respect he is no different from the Hesiod of the biographies, though the contrast between expectation and portrait is greater because of the relative importance of Homer's work. One may well compare the ambivalent characterisation of Heracles:[25] for all his accomplishments, including victories over death in three different forms, Heracles is portrayed as a glutton and a buffoon; he spends longer in slavery than any other god or hero. Because the greatest hero was capable also of such extraordinary failings, ordinary men are able more readily to tolerate his success. Instead of dying in battle, Heracles is poisoned by a woman; Homer too dies as a consequence of being unable to exercise the powers that had served him well previously in his life.[26]

[22] Jacoby 1949, 133.

[23] Winter 1933, 194.

[24] On the date of the Herodotean Life, Wilamowitz 1916, 416.

[25] Kirk 1973, 289–90.

[26] Wehrli 1973, 194; cf. p. 10 n.37 above.

Perhaps the best illustration of how Homer's achievement is reduced to the comprehensible may be found in his portrayal in works of art. In the Homereion created by Ptolemy IV in the late third century, a seated statue of Homer was surrounded by statues of the cities that claimed him; a painting by Galaton showed poets collecting water that spewed from the poet's mouth (Ael., *VH* 3.22). The painting offered a visual representation of the Hellenistic notion that Homer was like Oceanus the source of all rivers and springs (Callim., *H.* 2.105–13; *Lyr. Adesp.* 10.14–16 Powell).[27] A second-century relief shows him seated with symbolic representations of his works around him, Ptolemy and Arsinoe and personifications of the types of poetry and learning are in attendance.[28] A sixth-century A.D. poet describes a late Hellenistic statue that shows a bee bringing a honeycomb out of Homer's mouth (*AP* 2.342–3).[29] In their final tangible form the traditional attributes of poetic achievement become trivial and ludicrous.

[27] Webster 1964, 114–15; Williams 1978, 88–9.
[28] Webster 1964, Pl. iv.
[29] Cf. p. 59 below.

CHAPTER THREE

Archaic Lyric Poets

What Homer can say about himself in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is determined by the nature of epic poetry; only the most functional and modest statements are appropriate. Even Hesiod, in an instructional epic addressed to his brother, says only as much as he needs to establish his credentials. Their biographies accordingly concentrate on events in their professional lives, and give them the place in society that they give to themselves or to other poets in their poems. But the lives of writers of elegiac and lyric poetry involve a greater variety of experience, because the first-person statements in the poems express opinions about subjects other than poetry.

Archilochus appears to be the first real person among Greek poets because he wrote about ordinary events of life, love affairs, campaigns, civil strife. The characteristic passion with which he describes feelings, with emphatic repetition and vivid metaphors, gives the impression that he is personally involved in the events he describes in his poem.[1] Archaeological evidence confirms that Thasos was settled around the time he is said to have gone there;[2] an epitaph of the seventh century (T1 T) commemorates his friend Glaucus. But significantly only the most destructive aspects of his poetry survive in his biographies; there is no trace in the Lives or anecdotes of the Archilochus who consoles his friend Pericles (fr. 13 W = 10 T), disdains riches (fr. 19 W = 22 T), or reveres the gods (fr. 26, 30 W = 30, 94 T).

In the fifth century Socrates' pupil Critias claimed that

[1] On historical elements in the poems, cf. esp. Rankin 1978, 9ff.; Rankin 1977, 129–32.
[2] Graham 1978, 84–93.

THE LIVES OF THE GREEK POETS

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