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GREEK EPIC FRAGMENTS

Edited and Translated by

MARTIN L. WEST

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FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE FIFTH CENTURIES BC

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PREFACE

In the old Loeb Classical Library edition by H. G. Evelyn-White, which originally appeared in 1914, the poems and fragments of Hesiod were coupled with the Homeric Hymns and Epigrams, the remains of the Epic Cycle and other poems associated with Homer's name (including the *Battle of Frogs and Mice*), and the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*. This material is now being distributed across three new volumes, each of which will contain a considerable amount of additional matter. In the present one the section dealing with the Epic Cycle has been expanded to take in more or less all the remains of early epic down to and including Panyassis.

Dealing with fragmentary works is never as satisfactory as having complete ones. The fragments of the early epics, however, are in one way more rewarding than (say) those of the lyric poets. This is because most of them are cited for their mythological content rather than to illustrate some lexical usage, and often this helps us to build up an idea of the larger whole. For most of the poems of the Epic Cycle, at least, we are able to get a fair notion of their structure and contents.

I have edited and arranged the texts according to my own judgment, but relied on existing editions for information about manuscript readings. The nature of the Loeb

series precludes the provision of the fullest philological detail about the sources of fragments, variant readings, or scholars' conjectures. I have nevertheless tried to ensure that the reader is alerted to the significant textual uncertainties, and, in the case of fragments quoted by ancient authors, supplied with sufficient context to appreciate the purpose for which each one is adduced.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Dr. Dirk Obbink for allowing me to see and cite the forthcoming second volume of his monumental edition of Philodemus, *On Piety*, a work well known as an important source of poetic fragments.

Martin L. West
Oxford, May 2002

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

CAG	M. Hayduck and others, Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca (Berlin, 1882–1909)
CEG	P. A. Hansen, *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca* (Berlin and New York, 1983–1989)
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
FGrHist	Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin and Leiden, 1923–1958)
FHG	Carolus et Theodorus Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* (Paris, 1841–1873)
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zurich and Munich, 1981–1999)
Mus. Helv.	*Museum Helveticum*
NGG	*Nachrichten der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*
OCD[3]	*The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, third edition (Oxford, 1996)
PMG	*Poetae Melici Graeci*, ed. D. L. Page (Oxford, 1962)

PMGF	*Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. M. Davies (Oxford, 1991)
RE	*Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1894–1980)
Rh. Mus.	*Rheinisches Museum*
SVF	H. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1903–1905)
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

[ ]	words restored where the manuscript is damaged
⟦ ⟧	letters deleted by scribe
< >	editorial insertion
{ }	editorial deletion
† †	corruption in text
*	(attached to a fragment number) uncertain attribution

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GREEK EPIC FRAGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The term "epic" has sometimes been applied to all early hexameter poetry, including, for example, the works of Hesiod and Empedocles. It is now usual to restrict it to narrative poetry about events some distance in the past. Within this category there is a distinction to be made between poetry that is primarily concerned with the narration of a particular heroic episode or series of episodes and poetry concerned with the long-term history of families or peoples, their affiliations and relationships. In the first type, which we may call heroic poetry, the action extends over a few days, a few weeks, or at most a period of years. In the second, which we may call genealogical and antiquarian poetry, it extends over many generations.

The distinction is one of convenience, and it is not absolute, as poems of either sort may contain elements of the other. In Homer we find here and there genealogies going back for six or eight generations, and in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalog of Women*, the prime example of genealogical–antiquarian poetry, we find summary heroic narratives attached to individuals as they appear in the genealogies.

Because the archaic epics were redactions of traditional material, there was not always such a clear-cut sense of authorship as there was with lyric, elegy, or iambus. A

few of the later epics, such as Eugammon's *Telegony* and Panyassis' *Heraclea*, were firmly associated with a specific author, but most tended to be cited anonymously by title, and there was often real uncertainty about the author's identity. Many writers throughout antiquity preferred not to opt for a name but to use expressions such as "the poet of the *Cypria*."

HEROIC POEMS. THE EPIC CYCLE

The identifiable poems of the heroic category either belonged to one of the two great cycles, the Theban and the Trojan, or were concerned with the exploits of one of the two great independent heroes, Heracles and Theseus. Other epics—for example a self-contained *Argonautica*—must once have existed at least in oral tradition, but if they were ever written down they seem to have disappeared at an early date.

Sometime in the fourth century BC an "epic cycle" (ἐπικὸς κύκλος) was drawn up, probably in Peripatetic circles. It was in effect a reading list, comprising at least the Trojan epics, and perhaps a wider collection. The poems were to be treated as a corpus which could be read in sequence to yield a more or less continuous story (though in fact some of them overlapped in subject matter). The Epic Cycle that Proclus described in his *Chrestomathy* began with a theogony, so that its narrative extended from the beginning of the world to the end of the heroic age.[1]

The epics were well known in the classical period, and poets such as Stesichorus, Pindar, and the tragedians drew

[1] Photius, *Bibl.* 319a21–30.

on them extensively. Later they fell out of favor. The Hellenistic artists who depicted scenes from Troy and who named Cyclic poems and poets on their works were probably already using prose summaries, not the originals.[2] Yet some of the poems appear to have been still available in the second century AD to certain bookish writers such as Pausanias and Athenaeus.

The Theban Cycle

The Theban and Trojan Wars were the two great military enterprises of the mythical age, the wars which according to Hesiod (*Works and Days* 161–165) brought to an end the race of the heroes who are called demigods. The poet of the *Iliad* knows of the earlier war and refers to it in several places.

The legend tells in fact of two separate Theban wars: the failed assault on Thebes by the Seven, and the successful assault by their sons, the so-called Epigoni. The first, which resulted from the quarrel between the sons of Oedipus, was the more famous and the deeper rooted in tradition. It was the subject of the *Thebaid*. The second, the subject of the *Epigoni*, was a later invention, a pallid re-

[2] The works in question are the mass-produced Macedonian "Homeric cups," dating from the third to second centuries BC, and the miniature relief plaques from the Roman area, such as the Borgia and Capitoline tablets, which are from the time of Augustus or Tiberius. On the cups see U. Sinn, *Die homerischen Becher* (Berlin, 1979); on the plaques A. Sadurska, *Les tables Iliaques* (Warsaw, 1964); Nicholas Horsfall, "Stesichorus at Bovillae?" *JHS* 99 (1979), 26–49.

flection of the first war, on which some of its details were clearly modelled. If we can trust the information given in the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, each of these epics was about 7,000 lines in length, something under half the size of the *Iliad*.

There were two others on associated subjects. The *Oedipodea*, said to have been of 6,600 lines, told the story of Oedipus; the *Alcmeonis*, of unknown length, told of Alcmaon, son of the seer Amphiaraus.[3] Alcmaon became notorious (like Orestes) for killing his mother, which he did because of her role in the first Theban war.

To judge by what we know of their contents, the poems of the Theban cycle breathed a different spirit from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. With their emphasis on family quarrels and killings, vengeful exiles, and grimly ruthless women and warriors, they have reminded more than one scholar of the world of Germanic saga.

Oedipodea

The Borgia plaque attributes this poem to Cinaethon. Of its contents we know only two details: that the Sphinx was represented as a devouring monster, to whom even the regent Creon's son fell victim, and that Oedipus' children, Polynices, Eteocles, and their two sisters, were not the product of his incestuous union with his mother (as in the tragedians) but of a previous marriage to one Euryganea. We do not even know what his mother was called in the poem, whether Epicaste as in the earliest reference to the

[3] Alcmaon is the epic form of the name, Alcmeon the Attic, Alcman the Doric; Alcmaeon is a false spelling. The poem was anciently cited as the *Alcmeonis* (Ἀλκμεωνίς), though later manuscripts generally give Ἀλκμαιωνίς.

story (*Odyssey* 11.271), Iocaste (Jocasta) as in tragedy, or something else again.

Thebaid

The opening line is preserved (fr. 1), and it indicates that the war was seen from the Argive viewpoint rather than (as in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*) from the Theban. It was thus a story of disastrous failure, not of salvation from peril.

Polynices and Eteocles were doomed to their fatal dispute by curses which their father laid on them. The fragments of the poem describe two occasions of his wrath and two versions of the curse (frs. 2 and 3): the first, that the brothers should be forever quarrelling, the second, more specific, that they should die at one another's hand. According to later authors they initially made an amicable arrangement that each would rule Thebes in alternate years while the other went away. But then Eteocles refused to relinquish power or allow Polynices back into the city.

Polynices made his way to Argos, where Adrastus was king. He arrived at the same time as Tydeus, a fierce Aetolian who was in exile after a domestic killing. The two got into a dispute, whereupon Adrastus recognized them as the boar and the lion that a seer had advised him to make his sons-in-law. He accordingly gave them his two daughters. He agreed to help Polynices recover his rightful throne at Thebes, and the military expedition was prepared.

It is not quite certain, but it is likely, that there were already in the epic seven commanders to correspond to the fabled seven gates of Thebes. The probable list is: Adrastus, Polynices, Tydeus, Capaneus, Parthenopaeus,

Mecisteus, and Amphiaraus. This last hero, who was a wise seer as well as a doughty warrior (fr. 6), knew from the omens that the enterprise was destined to fail, and he tried to avoid enlistment. But he was married to Adrastus' sister Eriphyle; Adrastus had given her to him in settlement of a quarrel, and it had been agreed that in the event of any disagreement between the two of them her arbitration would be final (fr. 7*). On this occasion, bribed by Polynices with a priceless heirloom, the necklace given by Cadmus to Harmonia, she decreed that Amphiaraus must go to the war. As he prepared to set out, knowing that he would not return alive, he gave advice to his sons, Alcmaon and Amphilochus, on how they should conduct themselves when he was no longer there (fr. 8*). He may have charged Alcmaon with the duty of taking revenge on Eriphyle.

For most details of the campaign we have to turn to other authors, who may or may not give an accurate reflection of the narrative of the *Thebaid*.[4] On reaching Nemea the expedition paused to honor with funeral games the boy Opheltes, also called Archemoros, who had been fatally bitten by a snake: this was the mythical origin of the Nemean Games.[5] If the episode occurred in the *Thebaid*, the poem must date from after 573, when the Nemean Games in fact began.

[4] See especially *Iliad* 4.372–398, 5.801–808, 10.285–290; Pindar, *Ol.* 6.13–17, *Nem.* 9.13–27; Bacchylides 9.10–20; Diodorus 4.65.5–9; Apollodorus 3.6.3–8; Pausanias 9.5.12, 8.7–9.3; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 68; Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 510–519.

[5] Bacchylides 9.10–24; Euripides, *Hypsipyle*; Hypotheses to Pindar's *Nemeans*; Apollodorus 3.6.4; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 74, 273.6. For a parallel myth about a heroic origin for the Isthmian Games see below on Eumelus' *Corinthiaca*.

At the river Asopus, a few miles from Thebes, the army halted, and Tydeus was sent ahead to deliver an ultimatum. In the version known to the poet of the *Iliad* he was entertained at a banquet in Eteocles' house, after which he challenged the Cadmeans to athletic trials and easily beat them all. When he departed they set fifty men to ambush him, but he overcame them all, leaving only one alive to tell the tale.

The Argive attack then went forward. After fierce fighting outside the walls the Thebans were driven back into the city. Capaneus mounted the wall on a ladder, and it seemed that nothing could stop him, until Zeus struck him down with a thunderbolt. This gave the defenders new courage, and the issue was again in the balance. It was agreed that Eteocles and Polynices should fight a duel to settle which was to be king, but it resulted in their both being killed. The battle resumed. One by one the Argive champions were killed, Tydeus showing his savage nature to the last (fr. 9*). The good Amphiaraus was saved from this ignominy: as he fled in his chariot, the earth opened up and swallowed him. He remains alive underground to issue prophecies at his oracular site. Only Adrastus escaped with his life, thanks to the marvellous horse Arion (fr. 11).

The elegiac poet Callinus in the mid seventh century associated this subject matter with "Homer," and no alternative author is ever named. Herodotus surely has the *Thebaid* in mind when he speaks of "Homeric" poetry that Cleisthenes of Sicyon banned because of its celebration of Argos and Argives (5.67.1). He goes on to tell that Cleisthenes reduced the honor in which Adrastus was held at Sicyon and introduced the cult of Melanippus, who had killed Mecisteus and Tydeus in the Theban war.