

## An Aristeia of Agamemnon

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I here attempt to disentangle Parry's South Slavic data from his Homeric agenda, and to consider de novo the performance aspect of the early Iliad.

**Homer** has been thought to be singly responsible for our Iliad. But to (1) compose separate tales of Troy, (2) assemble them into a bardic corpus,<sup>1</sup> (3) draw on that corpus for a Wrath of Achilles poem,<sup>2</sup> (4) update it for a more pacific audience sensibility, (5) bring it into closer agreement with the Odyssey,<sup>3</sup> and (6) adjust it for performance at the Panathenaea,<sup>4</sup> is not fit work for one man. We must choose. Mid 07c allusions<sup>5</sup> put Homer in Stage 3; other evidence makes him contemporary with Hesiod (late 08c).<sup>6</sup> These point to roughly the same period for *the person with that name*; earlier stages must be otherwise explained. I here suggest how a Stage 1 tale might be recovered from its incorporation into the Wrath poem (the Menis; Stage 3).

**Lays.** How long were the Stage 1 tales of Troy? Parry (**Ćor Huso** 457-458) notes that a South Slavic epic performance is "a toil, and a good singer after a half hour of his song is drenched in sweat;" he reports a 58-minute long poem as delivered in segments of 20, 26, and 12 minutes. We may take 20 minutes (+ 6, -8) as a normal epic performance unit; a stint of two hours is very exceptional (Parry 458).<sup>7</sup> The comings and goings of wedding guests or tavern regulars may interrupt a singer who does not interrupt himself (Parry 455); a long song must thus be viable *as episodes*. It has been noted in opposition that a singer can *end* at any point.<sup>8</sup> But it is not equally true that he can *begin* at any point: beginnings tend to respect episode boundaries.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>It is this stage to which the concept of a reciters' guild (the "Homeridae") is relevant.

<sup>2</sup>I here evade the vexed "dictation" theory (Nagy **Responses** 64-66), and the assumption (central to Wolf's **Prolegomena**) that only writing can fix a text. Memorized texts exist at all stages of the transition from an exclusively oral culture to one also possessing writing

<sup>3</sup>For a beginning on clarifying this process, see for example Geddes **Problem**.

<sup>4</sup>Full performances on this occasion are associated (Pseudo-Plato **Hipparchus** [04c] 183) with Peisistratus's son Hipparchus (from c0528; d 0513; see Herodotus [c0430] 5:56).

<sup>5</sup>Bowra **Tradition** 256f cites Alcman, Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, Sappho, and Semonides.

<sup>6</sup>This agrees with the current consensus of a c0730 date for Homer's Iliad (OCD3).

<sup>7</sup>Notopoulos **Oral** 8: "Murko cites the fifty-year-old singer at a wedding in Herzegovina in 1911 who sang an hour-and-a-half without stopping." A more plausible length for the standard Wrath module will be the 58-minute performance mentioned in the above quote from Parry.

<sup>8</sup>Parry **Ćor Huso** 454, stressed by Lord **Homer**, but see Foley **Theory** 37.

<sup>9</sup>Foley **Theory** 120 n5. Note also that rival singers of the long song Bećiragić Meho performed two of its narrative segments *in different order* (Lord **Singer** 2ed 229).

**Iliad Rate.** We next need to know how much text can be sung in that much time. There exists no authentic Iliad performance tradition. Drerup (**Fünfte** 49f) conjectured 500 lines per hour (7.2 seconds per line), but (425 n1) revised this figure after hearing a 1 December 1912 reading at the Royal Opera House of Berlin, at which a 412-line abridgement of *Odyssey* 17 took 41 minutes (5.97 seconds per line). From a Tübingen experiment, Davison reported rates of 4.71, 4.96 (“too fast”), 5.1, and 5.6 seconds per line.<sup>10</sup> Notopoulos (**Oral** 4) reports rates of 6.47 and 6.39 seconds per 15-syllable line for modern Cretan and Cypriot singers.<sup>11</sup> Four contemporary Homerists, asked to recite *Iliad* 1:1-7 in a sonorous and public voice, reported times of 5 (“I may have been too fast”), 5.71 (twice), and 6.28 seconds per line; Daitz’s recorded tempo (5.71 seconds per line for *Id* 22:1-7) also seemed “too fast” to one listener.<sup>12</sup> It seems that the rate of *hearing* is the limiting factor here, and that anything much less than 6 seconds per line, though enunciable by the singer, is hard for the listener. We may adopt that figure, which is essentially the Berlin 1912 public performance rate, as our working estimate. It is equivalent to 1 hexameter foot per second, or 10 lines per minute.

Then a 20-minute Iliad performance module might contain 200 hexameter lines (Parry’s short 12-minute unit would have 120 lines and his 26-minute unit, 260 lines). Still shorter performance modules might be expected for non-heroic subjects.

**Homeric Data.** The oldest hints of Homeric performance are internal: the accounts of songs by bards Phêmos (in *Odyssey* 1) and Dêmodokus (in *Odyssey* 8).<sup>13</sup> Both bards have a wide repertoire;<sup>14</sup> they choose from it, or others may request from it.<sup>15</sup> These are not “concert” performances, but interludes accompanying something else: pastimes (Phêmos), or eating and dancing (Dêmodokus). Dêmodokus’ banquet song is lost, but “The Love of Ares and Aphrodite” is transcribed.<sup>16</sup> Its opening is abridged at *Odyssey* 8:266-270; the rest is at 8:270-366. Its length, a bit over 100 lines if the opening were restored, would be near the short performance module inferred above: a bit over 10 minutes. A banquet interlude that would not bring the banquet to a halt.

<sup>10</sup>Davison **Bebenaia I**. This was a 1963 attempt to simulate the Panathenaea: four Books in each of two sessions per day for three days, one reader per Book. The reader of *Iliad* 5 (909 lines; 91 minutes) “had nearly lost his voice by the end.” This supports the South Slavic data: anything much over an hour is too long for consecutive oral performance.

<sup>11</sup>Davison **Thucydides** 23f prefers a faster base rate, 5.45 seconds per line.

<sup>12</sup>I am grateful to Mark Edwards, Richard P Martin, Raphael Sealey, and Ruth Scodel for participating in this experiment.

<sup>13</sup>These passages are symmetrical: Penelope in Ithaca and Odysseus in Phaiakia are unbidden listeners to recitations of their own story; both are moved to tears.

<sup>14</sup>Penelope: “Phêmos, many other things thou knowest to charm mortals, deeds of men and gods which minstrels make famous. Sing them one of these . . . but cease from this woeful song which ever harrows the heart in my breast” (*Odyssey* 1:337-341, tr Murray).

<sup>15</sup>Telemachus: “My mother, why dost thou begrudge the good minstrel to give pleasure in whatever way his heart is moved?” (*Odyssey* 1:345f, tr Murray). Again, “the Muse moved the minstrel to sing of the glorious deeds of warriors” (*Odyssey* 8:73, tr Murray). See Aelian.

<sup>16</sup>This song is dismissed as irrelevant by Parry (**Cor Huso** 457). In view of the parallel if much expanded kinky sex scene between two gods in *Iliad* 14:154-360 and 15:4-80, which like Dêmodokus’ song ends with embarrassment and separation, I fail to see why.

## A Pre-Iliad Module: The Aristeia of Agamemnon

Can early performance modules still be discerned in our present Iliad?<sup>17</sup> The first bards were probably itinerant, earning their supper by their songs; their audiences may not even have known the same story of Troy.<sup>18</sup> Later on, when the Iliad had become a regularly performed textbook for Greece, its audiences will have known it by heart,<sup>19</sup> but this was not the first condition of things. In being reconfigured for a less strenuous, more settled age, the text may have been affected by the tastes of its new audiences, and any early modules may thus be overlaid by later adjustments.

The likeliest early modules will be scenes of combat.<sup>20</sup> One candidate would be the aristeia of Agamemnon (from 11:1 to Agamemnon's retirement from battle in 11:283). Of this, we may first ask what sort of interpolations were proposed by the Alexandrian critics? Bolling finds three extensions in this part of Iliad 11. The first is:<sup>21</sup>

- 013 Forthwith war became sweeter by far unto them than returning  
014 Home in the hollow ships to the well-loved land of their fathers.

This allusion, a passage in Iliad 1 which is itself readily shown to be interpolated, identifies this brief passage as later still. The second interpolation is:

- 078 All [the gods] were blaming the son of Kronos, Zeus of the dark mists  
079 Because his will was to give glory to the Trojans. To these gods  
080 The father gave no attention at all, but withdrawn from them  
081 And rejoicing in the pride of his strength sat apart from the others  
082 Looking out over the city of Troy and the ships of the Achaians,  
083 Watching the flash of the bronze, and men killing and men killed.

This shows the gods observing, and by implication directing, the human battles below. A god ethos is against the probable human ethos of the more warlike early period.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Let it be here noted that any Lachmannesque "lays" theory of the Iliad is now forbidden territory. "For a long time . . . I believed that a proper analysis of the poems would furnish a proper division of the Homeric poems into their chants. . . I looked for some unit in the poems that would correspond to the length of song suited to the regular length of time which a singer would sing" Later, "I saw how foolish my notions had been" (Parry **Cor Huso** 454f). The allusion is to Lachmann (**Betrachtungen**), who divided the Iliad into 18 lays, followed by Köchly **Carmina** (16 lays) and Drerup **Fünfte** 426f (18 lays). I agree that few of these lays would be viable as segments, and none would have been practicable as an integral performance. Any early lays (performance modules) must be shorter, not longer, than an average Iliad Book.

<sup>18</sup>Early vase painting shows scenes from Troy, not all of which are consistent in detail with our present Iliad; see Lowenstam **Talking**. One vase (Louvre CG1802; see Doloneia) portrays Dolon as he appears in the play Rhesus (attributed to Euripides), not as he appears in Iliad 10.

<sup>19</sup>"My father was anxious to see me develop into a good man," said Niceratus, "and as a means to this end he compelled me to memorize all of Homer; and so even now I can repeat the whole Iliad and Odyssey by heart" (Xenophon **Symposium** [early 04c] 3:5).

<sup>20</sup>Military exploits (aristeiai) in the Iliad are far more stylized (see Fenik **Typical**) than the more individual reconciliation scenes, and are thus more likely to have passed through a long formation process, and to be survivals of early material.

<sup>21</sup>Translations here and below are my adaptations from Smith.

<sup>22</sup>The hero wants to think he has killed his man, and not merely stripped of its armor a heap of carrion left on the battlefield by some god's cowardly blow from behind.

The third of Bolling's late interpolations<sup>23</sup> is:

- 179 Headlong fell from their chariots many, prone or supinely,  
180 Under Atrides' hands, for his spear raged round and about him.

This is an extension of the preceding narrative, in which Agamemnon slays the fleeing Trojans. It adds nothing except elapsed time; all it tells us is that the 06c Athenians liked to linger over the story of Troy, even in its violent moments. We are thus put on notice that mere prolongation, without any advance in the plot, may be suspect as such.

The first two of these interpolations are actually the ends – the prolongations – of longer passages of similar character. Thus 11:13-14 is merely the conclusion of a passage beginning at 11:3, in which the goddess Eris (“Strife”) figures among the more familiar Olympian gods as an instigator of war:

- 003 Zeus meanwhile sent forth to the swift-faring Achaean galleys  
004 Wearisome Eris, who held in her hands the signal for battle.  
005 Coming, she stood on the black and deep-hulled ship of Odysseus,  
006 There in the midst, that her call might carry in either direction,  
007 This way, e'en to the barracks of great Telemonian Aias;  
008 That, unto those of Achilles; these had drawn up their trim ships  
009 Thus at the ends; they relied on their own strong hands and their valor.  
010 There then standing, the goddess with loud voice, shrill and terrific,  
011 Shouted and set in his heart – each one, those sons of Achaia –  
012 Measureless might unto battle and warfare unintermittent . . .

And the god scene in 11:78-82 was added to this earlier god scene, which itself is probably interpolated:

- 073 like unto wolves. And beholding it, Eris, the woeful, was gladdened,  
074 She that alone of the gods still chanced to be by in the battle  
075 None of the other Immortals were present among them, but seated  
076 far in their halls and at peace, where'er unto each was appointed,  
077 Palace surpassingly fair in the dells of Olympus erected . . .

Here again is the non-Olympian Eris, suggesting that these passages are thematically connected. Both of them should be excised as late. This earlier part identifies the instigation of conflict only with Eris; the later part (078-082), whether or not consistently, shifts the focus, and the blame for the battle, back on Zeus.

So far the Alexandrian proposals take us, and with those hints, we are on our own. In the description of Agamemnon's shield, we might suspect these lines:

- 036 Thereon was also the Gorgon embossed, ferocious of visage,<sup>24</sup>  
037 Glow'ring terrific; about her on both sides were Panic and Terror.

Again the concept that war is an evil thing, especially in its effects on the civil populace (though the early sackers of cities may well have gloried in just that aspect), and the representation of those effects by hypostatized figures, Panic and Terror.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Not in the text of Zenodotus; marked as doubtful by Aristarchus.

<sup>24</sup>The Gorgon is known as an art motif only from the 07c (Leaf **Companion** 205).

<sup>25</sup>Agamemnon's shield, with its symbols of dread, has here become a symbolic counterpart to the shield of his rival Achilles, which instead depicts scenes of peace (Iliad 18:483-607).

Another note of sympathy for those who die in war is encountered in this detail of the description of the decorations on Agamemnon's breastplate:

- 026 Dark blue also the dragons that writhed up there on the collar,
- 027 Three on a side; they were like unto rainbows set of Cronion
- 028 High on a cloud, for a sign unto earth-born, perishing mortals.

Moving further back in the text, we find a historical as well as thematic problem: Leaf has suggested<sup>26</sup> that the following, from this same description . . .

- 020 Corselet that once in the past as a guest-gift Cinyras gave him,
- 021 Even as far as Cyprus had reached him the wonderful rumor,
- 022 How that Achaeans were going to sail in their galleys to Troyland,
- 023 Wherefore Cinyras gave him the corselet to pleasure the monarch.

. . . was later added to claim Cyprus as a Greek-ruled territory. Following the usual test for interpolations, we note (as with the passages discussed above) that removing the suspect pieces leaves a perfectly satisfactory text. Here is the Arming of Agamemnon, minus the passages identified above as suspect:

- 015 Then Atrides shouted and ordered the Argives to arm them,
- 016 While he himself put on him his armor of bronze all refulgent:
- 017 First on his legs he fastened his greaves all round about deftly,
- 018 Beautiful: fitted with buckles of silver and firm at the ankles.
- 019 Next then donned him a corselet, engirdling his breast all about him.
- 024 Ten were the stripes of cyanus dark, well-wrought on the breastplate,
- 025 Twice six also of gold thereon, and of tin there were twenty.
- 029 Next, then, over his shoulders he slung his sword, and refulgent
- 030 Glittered its golden rivets, while of silver itself was the scabbard
- 031 Round and about it, with hangers well fitted, all of them golden.
- 032 Then he took up his shield, rich-wrought, for defense or for onset.
- 033 Beautiful: ten were the circles that ran all bronzen about it.
- 034 Bosses there were, all fashioned of tin, full twenty in number,
- 035 White, though the one in the middle was molded of cyanus, dark blue.
- 038 Down from the shield hing hastened a baldric of silver, and on it
- 039 Coiled up in dark blue metal a dragon; upon him were triple
- 040 Heads turned different ways, and all from the same neck sprouting.
- 041 Next on his head he set his two-ridged helmet, with bosses
- 042 Fourfold, horsehair-plumed, and the crest waved dreadful above it.
- 043 Two long lances he grasped, well shodden with bronze, keen-sharpened.
- 044 Out from the lances the bronze shot upward afar off a splendor
- 045 High unto Heaven. Queen Hera and Pallas Athena, the goddess,
- 046 Thundered thereat, to honor the King of Golden Mycenae.

Thus does the monarch deck himself out with the tools of his war-trade. Here is no wringing of hands at the the horrors of war; it is rather the voice of one who would stop, in the thick of the battle, to strip armor and weapons off their former possessor. The mention of gods at the end is not divine interference (a regular feature of the later Menis), but simply a recognition from on high – gold greeting gold – of the might and splendid array of the battle-clad king, Agamemnon.

<sup>26</sup>Leaf *Companion* 202f

There are a few other passages in the Agamemnon segment that have the same traits as some of the above, or present other evidence of interpolation:

- 11:51-55. Cronion (cf 11:27) rains down ominous blood.<sup>27</sup>
- 11: 163-164. Zeus draws Hector out of danger: Inteferece.
- 11:181-210. Zeus sends Iris with a message to Hector: Interference.

It would seem that these belong to the same sensibility, and thus to the same textual layer, as the above. Removing them produces no difficulties of narrative consistency. Removing all the interpolations here proposed produces a text of 212 lines, which would require about 21 minutes to recite for an audience. This is within the range that the Odyssean specimens, and the South Slavic parallels, have led us to expect.

**The Formation of a Repertoire.** The formulaic language of the Iliad makes best sense as an aid to improvisation in real time, not an aid to memory per se. But control of that resource is itself a feat of memory: the resource is gained, not by memorizing *formulas*, but by memorizing *songs in which they occur*.<sup>28</sup> It was probably within the capacity of an epic improviser to recall a given performance in detail, if there had been reason to do so. The notes to the translation, below, suggest why this particular version might have remained in the singer's memory, to be called forth on later occasions when this exploit was wanted. Given the memory skills which both options require, repetition, in the end, is easier than re-improvisation.<sup>29</sup>

Mere transcription will not necessarily fix a text within a performing tradition.<sup>30</sup> But there may be another dynamic: the singer's response to the *audience's* response. An early song of Troy was presumably an improvisation, not a text. But if a given improvisation went well, it might well be repeated, and in that way become fixed *within the tradition*, without the need for any transition to a written medium.<sup>31</sup>

How might this fixity spread beyond one bard? Probably in contact with others, such as on market days.<sup>32</sup> Such contacts are found in the South Slavic tradition.<sup>33</sup> Market meetings are a likely precursor of the festival competitions of a later time, such as were regularized in the Greater Panathenaea, where the entire Iliad, as it had then become, was performed at four-year intervals. The appearance of a guild of "Homeric" reciters is a not unreasonable previous stage in that probable evolution.

<sup>27</sup>West has noted narrative inconcinnities in 11:51-52; such inconcinnities are often found at the borders of interpolated passages (see for example Walker **Interpolations** 75).

<sup>28</sup>See above. There is no hint in the Parry material of anyone learning *formulas*.

<sup>29</sup>Bach, the greatest improviser of his day, nevertheless sometimes drew on his earlier works in writing his later cantatas, eg *Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen* (1724) < *Der Himmel dacht* (1718).

<sup>30</sup>Sealey **Pemios** 329f.

<sup>31</sup>Bach did not write down his improvisations, but he did remember them, and could recall them verbatim. The ricercars of the Musical Offering, which bear the marks of improvisation, were improvised for Frederick the Great at a command performance (Potsdam, 7 May 1747), and could not without disrespect be published otherwise than as rendered on that occasion.

<sup>32</sup>One bard: "I loved your Diomedes. But you should hear Xenos' Agamemnon. Terrific. That's him over there." The other bard: "Call him over. I'll pay for drinks."

<sup>33</sup>Parry **Ćor Huso** 460: Hajdar Đozo of Bare had learned his songs in the *han* which his father kept for the caravan drivers on the caravan route from Sarajevo to Foča."

**Conclusion.** The lays behind our Iliad were first shaped by bards like the one I here call Xenos, who had his language hexametrically organized at his fingers' ends, and was ready at the drop of a dinner plate to improvise episodes in the tale of Troy. An episode which succeeded especially well tended to become fixed in his repertoire.

It remains to test the literary plausibility of the proposed reconstruction; see below. Readers are invited to verify that the text, freed of gods and limited to men and gore, gives us not the inept Agamemnon of the later Iliad chapters, but an Agamemnon worthy to be a king, invulnerable except by a thrust from an unseen foe, and presented in language that possesses the rapidity and directness that Matthew Arnold saw as among the basic qualities of the Iliad.

### A Reconstructed Aristeia of Agamemnon

*Translation adapted from Smith and Miller (1944); modern line numbers are preserved.*

*Xenos adjusts his lyre, and strums a few chords, to settle the audience.*

001 Dawn, from her couch by the side of lordly Tithonos,  
002 Now did arise, bringing light alike to gods and to mortals.

*A few more soft mood-setting twangs, and the singer starts out with his story. He starts slow, and with some gorgeous, militarily ravishing, detail.*

015 Then Atrides shouted and ordered the Argives to arm them,  
016 While he himself put on him his armor of bronze all refulgent:  
017 First on his legs he fastened his greaves all round about deftly,  
018 Beautiful: fitted with buckles of silver and firm at the ankles.  
019 Next then donned him a corselet, engirdling his breast all about him.  
024 Ten were the stripes of cyanus dark, well-wrought on the breastplate,  
025 Twice six also of gold thereon, and of tin there were twenty.  
029 Next, then, over his shoulders he slung his sword, and refulgent  
030 Glimmered its golden rivets; while of silver itself was the scabbard  
031 Round and about it, with hangers well fitted, all of them golden.  
032 Then he took up his shield, rich-wrought, for defense or for onset,  
033 Beautiful: ten were the circles that ran all bronzen around it.

*Beautiful indeed, sigh the robbers softly; they are connoisseurs as well as practitioners.*

034 Bosses there were, all fashioned of tin, full twenty in number,  
035 White, though the one in the middle was molded of cyanus, dark blue.  
038 Down from the shield hung fastened a baldric of silver, and on it  
039 Coiled up in dark blue metal, a dragon; upon him were triple  
040 Heads turned different ways, and all from the same neck sprouting.  
041 Next, on his head he set his two-ridged helmet, with bosses  
042 Fourfold, horsehair-plumed, and the crest waved dreadful above it.  
043 Two long lances he grasped, well-shodden with bronze, keen-sharpened,  
044 Out from the lances the bronze shot upward afar off a splendor  
045 High unto Heaven. Queen Hera and Pallas Athena, the goddess,  
046 Thundered thereat, to honor the King of Golden Mycenae.

*Sigh, sigh. What wonderful weapons. Or, should fortune but favor, what wonderful plunder. The robbers are engrossed. Xenos now picks up the tempo a little, to normal level.*

047 Therewith each of the leaders committed his steeds to a driver,  
 048 With instructions to hold them far back, by the trench, in good order,  
 049 While they, meanwhile, dismounted and armed in their war gear,  
 050 Marched on ahead, and their cry unquenchable rose toward the dawning.

*The singer hasn't a clue how chariot warfare worked, in the ancient times when they had chariot warfare, but neither does anybody else in his century, so nobody is going to call him on this taxi concept. He gets away with it. Now a few chords, to indicate a wider field of view.*

056 Over against them, the Trojans, on their side, stood on the rising  
 057 Ground of the plain, around tall Hector and grand Polydamas,  
 058 With them, Aineias, esteemed in the land as a god by the Trojans,  
 059 Antenor's three sons: Polybus first, then godlike Agenor,  
 060 And third, young Akamas, like an immortal; these were the leaders.  
 061 And Hector was there in the front, with his shield all evenly rounded.  
 062 As out of the clouds, there gleams of a sudden the Evening Star<sup>34</sup>  
 063 Glittering bright, then it sinks once more in the clouds and the darkness,  
 064 So, at one time, Hector would show himself in the front line,  
 065 Then in the rear giving orders, while he in his armor of bronze  
 066 Gleamed like the lightning of Father Zeus, who wieldeth the aegis.

*The last time Xenos had done Agamemnon was in town on a market day, and he here continues with the same simile he had improvised then, for the farmers:*

067 And then, like two lines of reapers, that over against one another  
 068 Drive, on opposite swaths, through the fields of a well-to-do owner,  
 069 Whether of barley or wheat, and the handfuls of grain fall frequent,  
 070 Even so, leaping against one another, Achaians and Trojans  
 071 Slew, and of ruinous flight nor the one nor the other was minded;  
 072 Rather, the fight kept even their heads, as they kept on charging.

*A few chords to punctuate. Xenos notices that the reaper image made no special effect. He will vary his approach in the rest of this performance, starting with forest scenes.*

084 While it was still early morning, and daylight divine was advancing,  
 085 Missiles from both sides kept striking amain, and felling the people.  
 086 But just at the hour when a woodman gets ready to pause for his dinner,  
 087 Deep in a mountainous glen, when the strength of his arms is expended  
 088 In felling the high-grown trees, and weariness comes on his spirit,  
 089 Ay, and a longing for savory food lays hold on his feelings . . .

*The hearers all chuckle at this sly reference to dinner, and one of them passes Xenos the wine. He takes a swallow, and then resumes, picking up the tempo to battle level:*

090 Then the Danaians broke with their might the opposing battalions,  
 091 Calling aloud on their comrades, rank unto rank. Agamemnon  
 092 Rushed in first. And a hero, Bienor, shepherd of peoples,  
 093 He slew; both him and his comrade Oileus, lasher of horses,  
 094 Who springing down from his chariot, stood forth to face him,  
 095 But him, in his furious onset, the keen lance full in the forehead

<sup>34</sup>Following West **Studies** 211.



096 Pierced, and his vizor, though heavy with bronze, availed to repel it  
097 Nowise; onward it drove through vizor and bone; it bespattered  
098 All of his brain within, and quelled him, for all of his fury.  
099 There he left both men lying, the monarch of men, Agamemnon,  
100 Shining with chests left bare, for he stripped off even their tunics,  
101 And hastened away, bent on despoiling the children of Priam,  
102 Isus and Antiphus, this one legitimate, that one a bastard,  
103 Riding one chariot, and the bastard son was the driver,  
104 And far-famed Antiphus fought at his side. Before this, Achilles  
105 Had bound them on Ida's slope, with pliant withies of willow,  
106 Minding their sheep he had caught them, but set both free for a ransom.

*Xenos takes no chances that the audience don't know these relevant background details.*

107 But this time, Atreus' son, wide-ruling King Agamemnon,  
108 Smote with his spear the breast of Isus, right over the nipple,  
109 Antiphus close by the ear he struck with the sword, and threw him  
110 Down to the ground. In haste he stripped off their beautiful armor,  
111 Which he knew well, for before at the swift-sailing ships he had watched  
112 That time when Achilles, the fleet of foot, had brought them from Ida

*Time for another simile, and Xenos tries something new and violent.*

113 Even as when, on the lair of a swift-footed deer, a lion  
114 Alights, and seizing her fawns unguarded, he readily crushes  
115 Them with his powerful teeth, and of life-breath robbeth the weaklings,  
116 She, however, though she might chance to be near, is unable  
117 To give them help, for trembling and terror have fallen upon her,  
118 Swiftly she bounds away, through thick-grown coppice and woodland,  
119 Sweating and hastening far from the powerful wild beast's onset,  
120 Likewise, then, not one of the Trojans availed to deliver  
121 These two from death; they were fleeing themselves, in fear of the Argives.

*Frisson. Xenos notices that the lion bit has gone over well. The rest of his song will be peppered accordingly with lions.*

122 Next on Pisander he fell, and Hippolochus, sturdy in battle,  
123 Wise-heart Antimachus' sons, the same that was first in refusing  
124 (For glorious gifts he expected; rich gold from the Prince Alexander)  
125 Ever to give Helen back to her fair-haired lord, Menelaos.  
126 His were the sons now taken, the twain, by Lord Agamemnon  
127 Both in one chariot, trying to drive the fleet-footed horses  
128 Since the glittering reins had slipped from their hands, and escaped  
129 Also, the horses were stricken with panic. Then, like to a lion

*Another lion, in passing. Good shot.*

130 Darted Atrides against them, and up from above they implored him,  
131 "Take us prisoners, Atreus' son, and receive a rich ransom  
132 Many the treasures rich in the halls of Antimachus lying,  
133 Many of gold, and of bronze, and of iron cunningly wrought,  
134 Whereof our father would give thee a ransom beyond all telling,  
135 Doubtless, if only he heard we were safe by the galleys Achaian."

136 Thus did the twain with tears address themselves to the monarch  
 137 Pleading with piteous words, but the answer they heard held no pity:  
 138 “If ye are truly the sons of the wise Antimachus, ye twain,  
 139 He who one time in the Trojan assembly bade slay Menelaos,  
 140 When as an envoy he came with Odysseus the godlike,  
 141 Nor would allow him return once more to the men of Achaia,

*Again Xenos takes no chance that the connection may be unknown to his hearers.*

142 Verily, now you shall pay for the outrage foul of your father.”  
 143 So saying, Pisander he thrust, from the chariot onto the ground  
 144 Smiting him full in the breast with his spear, and hurling him backward.  
 145 Down leaped Hippolochos; him he felled to the earth and despoiled him,  
 146 Lopped with his sword his two arms, hewed off his head at the shoulders,  
 147 And kicked it away, to go rolling off through the throng like a mortar.  
 148 These he left lying. Then, where the squadrons were clashing the thickest,  
 149 Thither he rushed, and with him the rest of the well-greaved Achaians.  
 150 Footmen were slaying footmen, necessity-driven before them,  
 151 Horsemen were slaying horsemen (a cloud uprose from beneath them  
 152 Dust from the plain, stirred up by the thunderous hoofs of the horses),  
 153 Dealing them death with the bronze, and meantime Lord Agamemnon  
 154 Went on, ever slaying, giving commands to the Argives,  
 155 Even as falleth, devouring, a fire in the midst of a dense-grown  
 156 Woodland, spread all around by the wind meanwhile, and the thickets  
 157 Crumble away at the roots, assailed by the blast of the burning,

*Another woodland image, and we note that even the woodland images are violent.*

158 So then, before Agamemnon Atrides the heads of the Trojans  
 159 Fell, as they fled, while many a one of the strong-necked horses  
 160 Rattled along on the bridges of war, their chariots empty,  
 161 Yearning in vain for their faultless drivers – but they on the earth lay,  
 162 Lovelier far to the vultures, then, than to their own consorts.  
 165 Still Atrides followed in fury, and called on the Argives,  
 166 Well past the barrow of Dardanus’ scion, Ilus the ancient,  
 167 Through the midst of the plain, some were speeding past the wild fig-tree  
 168 On, as they made for the city, and shrill-voiced, ever Atrides  
 169 Followed and ever with gore his hands unapproachable spattered.  
 170 But now when they had come to the Scaean gates and the oak-tree,  
 171 There they came to a stand, and one another awaited.

*The watchman comes in and sits down by the chief. “What’s this about?” The chief answers, “Agamemnon. You should have heard the part about the head.” Xenos will presently oblige.*

172 Some through the midst of the plain were struggling in panic, as cattle,  
 173 Which in the dead of night a lion’s coming hath scattered  
 174 All, but to one cow cometh an instant, an utter, destruction:  
 175 First, he seizes her neck with his powerful teeth, and he breaks it;  
 176 Next, he greedily gulps down the vitals and blood of his victim.  
 177 So Agamemnon, the Lord Atrides, was pressing upon them,  
 178 Always slaying the rearmost – and they kept fleeing before them.

*Enough of these pastoral images; back now to human killing.*

211 Hector then leaped from his chariot, down to the earth in his armor  
212 Brandishing two sharp spears, and ranged everywhere through the army  
213 Rousing them up to the fight, and a battle-din dreadful awakened.  
214 So they were rallied, and stood and resisted again the Achaians,  
215 While upon their side also, the Argives made strong their battalions,  
216 Setting their lines, they faced the foe. Then rushed Agamemnon  
217 Forward the first, ahead of the vanguard, resolved to do battle.

*A hush in the audience. The rout has become a faceoff. All is set for the final encounter. Xenos takes a pull of the wine, and pretends to search his memory for the next details:*

218 Tell me now, ye Muses, who dwell in the halls of Olympus,  
219 Who came forward the first, to oppose the King, Agamemnon?  
220 Whether of Troy's own folk, or their allies of wide renown?  
221 He was Antenor's son, Iphidamas, goodly, majestic,  
222 Who had been nurtured in Thracia, mother of flocks, and the fertile  
223 Kisseus nurtured him there in his home, when he was an infant,  
224 Even Kisseus, the sire of his mother, the fair-faced Theano.  
225 Now, as the lad had attained to the measure of glorious manhood,  
226 There he thought to detain him and offered his daughter in wedlock.  
227 Yet when the tidings came, of the Argives, forth from his chamber  
228 Issued the bridegroom, leader of twelve beaked galleys that followed.  
229 These gallant ships he had left behind, at this time, in Percote,  
230 Whence he had journeyed on foot, overland, to Ilium City.  
231 He it was, then, that encountered Atreus' son, Agamemnon.  
232 Now, as they came close up in the onrush, against one another,  
233 Atreus' son made a miss, and aside went glancing his spear,  
234 Whereas Iphidamas smote on his waist, down under his corselet,  
235 Putting behind his heavy hand all the weight of his body,  
236 Nevertheless, he pierced not the war-belt, but long before  
237 That, upon reaching the silver, the point turned as if leaden.  
238 Grasping the spear in his hand, wide-sceptered King Agamemnon  
239 Pulled it in rage toward himself, then wrenching it, like as a lion,  
240 Out of his hand, he smote his neck with his sword, and unstrung him,  
241 Thus Iphidamas fell, and a slumber of bronze overcame him,  
242 Piteous man, as he aided his countrymen, far from the wedded  
243 Maiden, his bride, no pleasure of her yet known, though he'd given  
244 Gifts in abundance, a hundred of oxen, and promised a thousand  
245 Goats too, and also sheep, for he herded uncountable numbers.  
245 Then Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, stripped off his armor,  
247 And bearing the beautiful gear, went back through the throng of Achaians.

*The tale might end here if it had to, but nobody is moving, so best to bring it to a climax. Dark chords on the lyre, to indicate grim doings afoot.*

248 When now Koön beheld it – conspicuous peer among heroes,  
249 First-born son among all of Antenor's children – a grievous  
250 Sorrow enveloped him, clouding his eyes, at the fall of his brother.

251 Standing off to one side, he, unmarked of divine Agamemnon,  
 252 Smote him upon the arm with his spear, under the elbow,  
 253 Clean through the forearm went the point of the glittering spear.

*The hearers gasp in sympathetic shock; is this the end for the hero? They are reassured:*

254 Then did a shuddering seize on the monarch of men, Agamemnon,  
 255 Yet even so, he ceased not a whit from the battle and warfare,  
 256 But rushed on Koön instead, with a spear that the tempests had toughened  
 257 Koön was eagerly dragging away by the foot his dead brother,  
 258 Son of his sire, while calling aloud on all of the bravest.  
 259 Him, while dragging his dead through the tumult, under his bossy  
 260 Buckler he wounded with bronze-shod spear, and loosened his sinews.  
 261 Over Iphidamas he stood, and hewed off the head of his brother.  
 262 Thus did these sons of Antenor, subdued by the monarch Atrides,  
 263 Fill up their measure of Fate, and enter the mansion of Hades.

*Another sensation, as the head trick works again. Now the bandit chief's wife joins the group to announce dinner; but seeing them intent, she silently sits down. A gesture is due to her, as the hostess on this occasion, and Xenos smoothly works one in:*

264 Still Agamemnon kept ranging the ranks of the rest of the heroes,  
 265 Wielding a sword or a spear, or a ponderous boulder for hurling,  
 266 Long as the blood welled warm, as it flowed from the wound in his arm,  
 267 But as the wound waxed dry, and the blood no longer was flowing,  
 268 Sharp, penetrating pangs then assailed the mighty Atrides.  
 269 Even as keen as the shaft that smiteth a woman in travail,  
 270 Piercing; the Ilthyiae, the birth-pang goddesses, send it,  
 271 Daughters of Hera, that ever hold poignant pangs in their keeping,  
 272 Even so sharp was the pang that entered the soul of Atrides.

*Time to be done with this; dinner is smelling good. Tempo picks up; last effort.*

273 Then he sprang into his chariot, giving command to the driver,  
 274 Straightway to head for the hollow ships, for his heart was in anguish.  
 275 Then with a ringing shout he called to the Danaan warriors,  
 276 "Friends of mine, commanders, and counseling chiefs of the Argives,  
 277 Ye yourselves now must ward off, from the sea-faring galleys,  
 278 The din of the desparate battle, for Zeus, the counselor, hath not  
 279 Suffered me here to make war the whole day long with the Trojans."  
 280 Thus spake Atrides, and then the fair-maned horses the driver  
 281 Lashed toward the hollow ships, and they flew not unwillingly forward,  
 282 Both their breasts foam-flecked, besprinkled with dust from beneath them,  
 283 Stirred up as they bore the King sore-smitten, away from the fighting.

*A final chord, as a signal. Applause, and commendatory slaps on the back for the singer. These are rough men, who know what it is to end the day's work with a wound. Time now for dinner. It is served, and Xenos has fended off hunger for one more day. On the whole, the evening has been a great success. This version of Agamemnon, unlike a dozen others which he has sung and forgotten, he will keep in mind for the future, with all its stock features, and all its spontaneous adjustments to the mood of this moment, alike intact forever.*

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