

An Aristeia of Agamemnon

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Abstract. I here attempt to disentangle Parry's South Slavic data from his Homeric agenda, and to ask how the transition from a free to a fixed oral text might occur.

Focus. "Homer" is thought to be singly responsible for our Iliad. But to (1) invent a formulaic language, (2) improvise tales of Troy in that language, (3) crystallize the tales into a repertoire,¹ (4) work parts of that repertoire into a Wrath of Achilles poem, and (5) script it for the 06c Panathenaea,² is not fit work for one man. We must choose. Mid 07c allusions³ put Homer in Stage 4; anecdotal evidence makes him contemporary with Hesiod (late 08c).⁴ I here suggest how a (late 09c?) Stage 2 improvisation might have entered the (early 08c?) fixed Stage 3 repertoire.

Limits. 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 exceptional (Parry 458).⁵ 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*. The existence of performance modules has been denied, in this tradition, because a singer can *end* at any point.⁶ But he cannot *begin* at any point: beginnings tend to respect episode boundaries.⁷

Iliad Rate. There is no Iliad performance tradition. Drerup (**Fünfte** 49f) conjectured 500 lines per hour (7.2 seconds per line), and (425 n1) revised his estimate from a 1 Dec 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).

¹In this way I propose to evade the vexed "dictation" theory (Nagy **Responses** 64-66).

²Full Iliad performances on this occasion are associated (Pseudo-Plato **Hipparchus** [04c] 183) with Pisistratus's son Hipparchus, who was killed in 0513 while leading the Panathenaea procession (Herodotus [c0430] 5:56).

³Bowra **Tradition** 256f cites Alcman, Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, Sappho, and Semonides.

⁴This agrees with the current consensus of a c0730 date for Homer's Iliad (OCD3).

⁵Notopoulos **Oral** 8: "Murko cites an exceptional feat of a fifty-year-old singer at a wedding in Herzegovina in 1911 who sang an hour-and-a-half without stopping." I reject all such admittedly exceptional feats as a basis for inferences about normal practice.

⁶Parry **Ćor Huso** 454, stressed by Lord **Homer**, but see Foley **Theory** 37. Devices for ending a flow of improvised music quickly are familiar to any church organist.

⁷Foley **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).

From a Tübingen experiment, Davison reported rates of 4·71, 4·96 (“too fast”), 5·1, and 5·6 seconds per line.⁸ Notopoulos (**Oral** 4) reported an average rate of 6·47 and 6·39 seconds per 15-syllable line for modern Cretan and Cypriot singers.⁹ Four modern Homerists, asked to recite Id 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) seemed “too fast” to one respondent.¹⁰ It seems that rate of *hearing* is the limiting factor here, and that anything much less than 6 seconds per line, though enunciable by the *singer*, is too fast for the *listener*. Averaging the qualifying figures from the sample (5·97, 6·28, 6·39, 6·47), we may project an Iliad base rate of 6·28 (+ 0·19, - 0·31) seconds per line.

This suggests that an early 20-minute Iliad performance module might contain 191 hexameter lines. Extremes would be 275 lines (for the 26-minute module at the faster rate) and 111 lines (for the 12-minute module at the slower rate). Still shorter modules are to be expected for non-heroic subjects.¹¹

Corroboration. The oldest hints of Homeric performance are internal: the accounts of songs by bards Phêmios (in *Odyssey* 1) and Dêmodokus (in *Od* 8).¹² Both bards have a wide repertoire¹³ and choose from it, or others request from it, according to their mood.¹⁴ These are not “concert” performances, but interludes in something else: pastimes (Phêmios), or eating or dancing (Dêmodokus). Dêmodokus’ banquet song is lost, but “The Love of Ares and Aphrodite” is transcribed.¹⁵ Its opening is abridged (*Od* 8:266-270); the rest is at 8:270-366. Its length, a bit over 100 lines if the opening were restored, is the same as was surmised above for the short Iliad module at the slow (as it might be, lyrical) delivery rate. It is thus consistent with the tendency of present conjectures.

⁸Davison **Bebenaia I**. This was a 1963 student attempt to simulate the quadrennial Greater Panathenaea marathon Iliad performance: four Books in each of two sessions per day for three days, with one reader per Book. The reader of Id 5 (909 lines; 75 minutes) “had nearly lost his voice by the end.” As far as it goes, this supports the implications of the South Slavic data: anything much over an hour is too long for an uninterrupted presentation.

⁹Davison **Thucydides** 23f prefers a slightly faster base rate, 5·45 seconds per line.

¹⁰I am grateful to Mark Edwards, Richard P Martin, Raphael Sealey, and Ruth Scodel for participating in this experiment.

¹¹See the many women’s songs transcribed in Bartók **Yugoslav**, and note the critique of the “one-sidedness” of the parry collection, in Bartók **Parry**.

¹²These passages are symmetrical: Penelope in Ithaca and Odysseus in Phaiakia are unbidden listeners to recitations of their own story; both are moved to tears.

¹³Penelope: “Phêmios, 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” (*Od* 1:337-341, tr Murray).

¹⁴Telemachus: “My mother, why dost thou begrudge the good minstrel to give pleasure in whatever way his heart is moved?” (*Od* 1:345f, tr Murray). Again, “the Muse moved the minstrel to sing of the glorious deeds of warriors” (*Od* 8:73, tr Murray).

¹⁵This 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 *Id* 14:154-360 and 15:4-80, which like Dêmodokos’ song ends with embarrassment and separation, I fail to see why.

A Pre-Iliadic Module: The Aristeia of Agamemnon

With that confirmation from early tradition, I here identify a module that may survive, embedded in our text, from an earlier stage.¹⁶ I make these assumptions: (1) those audiences were less expert than later Athenian ones;¹⁷ (2) they knew the story of Troy, but not any particular *recounting* of that story,¹⁸ so that any bard's realization would have been novel; (3) it was for them a story of human effort, not godly contrivance;¹⁹ and (4) They relished tales of war and wounding, however distasteful these subjects may have become to later Iliad readers.²⁰

Early bards were probably itinerant, earning their supper by their powers of presentation. For reasons that will be evident in the notes attached to the appended translation, I assume an audience of brigands, encamped in the forested Ionian hills.

Text. If we look in our present Iliad for an early module preserved more or less intact the stage of formulaic improvisation, we should focus on its highly stylized exploit narratives (*aristeia*). Such a module should display prowess, but must end short of final victory. The usual device of to bring such a narrative to an end is an interruption by a wound or divine interference. The latter violates the heroic ethos that probably obtained for early listeners.²¹ From examples ending in a wound, I here consider that of Agamemnon in Id 11. It contains few disputed lines, and most of those are in the introduction, not the *aristeia* proper (from line 91 on).²²

¹⁶This is 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; cf Köchly **Carmina** (16 lays) and Drerup **Fünfte** 426f (18 lays). I agree that few of these lays would be viable in segments, and none would have been practicable as an integral performance. Any genuinely early lays must be shorter, not longer, than an average Iliadic Book.

¹⁷"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).

¹⁸Early vase painting shows scenes from Troy, not all of which are consistent in detail with our present Iliad; see Lowenstam **Talking**. Thus the X vase at Y portrays Dolon as he appears in the play Rhesus (attributed to Euripides), not as he appears in Id 10.

¹⁹The defining conflicts of what was probably the original Troy saga (between Menelaos and Alexandros/Priam), and equally of its later Achilleid reshaping (Achilles vs Agamemnon), are human, not divine.

²⁰It follows from the "oral" character of the early tradition that elements surviving from it will be stylized and recurrent. Military exploits or *aristeia* are far more stylized and recurrent (see Fenik **Typical**) than the more individual reconciliation scenes. War will thus have been typical of the early tradition. As for the more pacific tastes of later ages, I note that the gory Agamemnon module I here propose is omitted, except for its god-ornamented prologue, from I A Richards' abridged classroom version of the Iliad.

²¹The 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 Apollo's cowardly blow from behind.

²²Robert's 2,146-line Ur-Ilias begins a 70-line selection from this material at line 84.

The following lines require decision:

- 1-2. A harmless nature image, setting the scene in the morning. Retain
- 13-14 (Erexis). Symbols of the direness of war reflect later sensibility. Omit
- 13-14. Om Zenodotus; ath Aristarchus (as from 2:453-454). Confirm omission
- 20-23. Later added to explain absence of Cypriots from Troy (Leaf). Omit
- 36-37. Gorgons known as dread art motifs only from 08c (Leaf). Omit
- 51-52. Narrative inconcinnities (West). Omit
- 52-55. God symbols of dread. Omit
- 72-77 (Erexis). See at 13-14. Omit
- 78-83. Gods. Omit
- 163-165. Gods. Omit
- 179-180. Om Zenodotus; ath Aristarchus. Omit
- 182-210 (Mission of Iris). Ethos violation. Omit

The above omissions leave a perfectly consecutive text of 198 lines, which would have taken about 20 minutes 43 seconds to perform; almost exactly the normal module which was projected above on general performance grounds. It may be inspected in the complete translation which is given in the Appendix. Factors affecting the improvisation are suggested in notes to the translation.

Formation of a Repertoire. The formulaic language in which the Iliad is cast makes sense only as an aid to improvisation in real time, not to memory per se. But control of that resource is itself a feat of memory, and the resource itself is gained not by memorizing formulas, but by memorizing songs in which they occur.²³ It would thus have been within the capacity of an Iliad improviser to recall in detail a given performance, if there had been reason to do so. The notes above mentioned suggest why this particular version, more than others, might have remained in the singer's memory, to be called forth on later occasions when the lay of Agamemnon happened to be wanted. Repetition, in the end, is easier than re-improvisation.²⁴ Thus might the Trojan songs of one bard have gradually become textually fixed.

How might this fixity generalize itself beyond the practice of one bard? Most obviously, in occasional contact with other bards. Such contacts, on market or festival days, with friendly or competitive comparison of personal versions, are also found in the South Slavic epic tradition.²⁵ They are the natural ancestor of the formalized festival competitions which we dimly know of in pre-Pisistratean Greece, and which were further regularized in the eventual Greater Panathenaea, where the entire repertoire was performed consecutively at four-year intervals. Both before and after those occasions, the Iliad as a performance text lived in briefer units, on brisker occasions.

²³See above. There is no hint in the Parry material of learning formulas.

²⁴Bach, the greatest improviser of his day, often stole from himself for his weekly cantatas. Even for him, reuse was easier than new composition.

²⁵Parry **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."

Early and Late in the Iliad. In seeking an early Iliad *module*, we may first ask, what is early Iliad *material*? The trend of Iliad subject matter over time is apparently from war to peace. (1) Old material should be stylized. Recurring *aristeia* or “warrior exploit” narratives are made of stock elements;²⁶ whereas reconciliation narratives are unique and *durchkomponiert*. (2) The shield of Agamemnon (briefly described at 11:32-40; present in all texts) bears a fearful Gorgon image; the shield of Achilles (lengthily described at 18:478-608; *athetized* by Zenodotus) includes scenes of peace. (3) The logical beginning of a Trojan war story would be the assembling of the hosts; that beginning is still found at Id 2:484, with its own invocation. The invocation of the Achilles wrath story (Id 1:1-7) and the concluding funeral descriptions (Id 23-24) now frame the Iliad, and like any framing elements, are probably later than what they frame.²⁷ We should thus seek for traces of early modules in war narratives, not reconciliation narratives, however grateful the latter may be to modern taste.

Gods. To that more warlike ethos, we may further suspect, the interference of the gods, so characteristic of our present Iliad, might be offensive. The warrior’s code is made of different materials altogether. A Hektor likes to think he has killed his man face to face, not just stripped of its armor a pile of carrion left by Apollo’s cowardly blow from behind. Even if Iliad war narratives now contain them, we may thus validly look askance at god intrusions.

Audience. The Athenians at some 05c Greater Panathenaea were educated; they had memorized the Iliad and could judge its performance as experts.²⁸ It is however generally conceded that the Iliad arose not there, but in the Ionian cities. The Ionians were a tough, enterprising people, who made their name known in far places as the “Greeks” of record.²⁹ Such an audience would tolerate, even relish, songs featuring weapons, war, bloodshed, the cutting of throats, the spattering of brains, the plundering of the dead and dying, and gore on the hands. For reasons that are detailed in the Appendix, I envision our test audience as a band of robbers³⁰ camped somewhere in the densely wooded Ionian hills.

²⁶See for example Fenik **Scenes**.

²⁷Layer theories, such as that of Leaf **Companion** 29f, invariably posit the Wrath (or *Ménis*) of Achilles as the earliest layer. This assumes that the best parts of a layered work or an evolving tradition are also the earliest. But we do not so treat traditions we know directly (the symphony from Haydn through Beethoven), nor ancient works whose layers are firmly dated (for the excellence of Horace *Carmina* IV see Putnam **Artifices**). As to framing elements, it is axiomatic that they postdate the things which they frame.

²⁸“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** 3:5, tr Marchant).

²⁹Among the “coastland peoples” mentioned in Genesis 10:2, the Ionians or Yavna are given an eponymous ancestor Yavan, son of Yapheth. See further Witzel **Yavana**.

³⁰κλέπτη, Id 3:11 “a mist that the shepherd loveth not, but that *to the robber* is better than night” (tr Murray).

Audience Knowledge. From vase painting, we may infer that the story of Troy was known generally in the early Greek world, if not always in versions that agree with our Iliad.³¹ Our robbers will probably have known it, not in precise form, but as a lore tradition.³² The function of our singer (call him Xenos) is to make a part of that tradition momentarily vivid for his hearers.

Experiment. I have mentioned the shield of Agamemnon as typologically older than that of Achilles. I now suggest that the Aristeia of Agamemnon (Id 11) contains old material generally, and that with minimal care, an early performance module may be extracted from the text. It will lie between the beginning of our Id 11³³ and Agamemnon's exit from battle at line 283. From this, on previous assumptions, we should subtract the god passages 3-14, 45-46, 51-55, 72-83, and 179-210;³⁴ also the "Cyprus" passage 20-23, noted by Leaf as a late political apologia. The deletions total 66 lines. Does the result fall within the limits derived above, from performance considerations, for a single consecutive song? It does. It comes to 217 lines, or, at our standard rate, 22 minutes 9 seconds, a good stretch for a singer, but not one requiring a break.

It remains to test the literary plausibility of the result. See the annotated translation in the Appendix for a detailed argument. Readers are invited to verify that the text, freed of gods and limited to men, has the rapidity and directness that Matthew Arnold once discerned as among the basic Iliadic qualities.

The Fixing of the Text. As Sealey (**Phemios** 329f) notes, mere transcription will not necessarily fix a text within a performing tradition. But there may be another dynamic. It consists in the singer's response to the audience's response. An early song of Troy was an improvisation, not a text. But if a given improvisation went well, it would be likely to be repeated, and could eventually become fixed *within the tradition*, without any transition to a different medium.³⁵

Conclusion. The lays underlying our Iliad were first shaped by bards like 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 story of Troy. But as one such episode succeeded, it tended to become fixed in his repertoire,³⁶ thus leading eventually (after many transmissions, and many further evolutions) to urban audiences, civilian sensibilities, and the leisurely Iliad we know.

³¹See Lowenstam **Talking**.

³²See Brooks **Lore**.

³³I here diverge from Clark **Study** 334, who begins at 11:91b; cf Fenik **Typical** 82.

³⁴And Bolling's filler lines, but in fact these turn out to lie within the god passages.

³⁵Bach, the greatest improviser of his time, did not write down his improvisations. The ricercars of the published Musical Offering were an exception: they were improvised for Frederick the Great at a command performance at Potsdam on 7 May 1747.

³⁶I am here suggesting that the "writing" issue, introduced into Iliadic discussion by Wolf in 1795, may be, at least in part, a red herring.

Appendix: The Aristeia of Agamemnon

Translation adapted from Smith and Miller (1944)

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 And the son of Atreus cried aloud, and called the Achaians
016 To arm, while he himself put shining bronze upon him:
017 First on his legs he fastened his greaves, fitted all round,
018 And beautiful, buckled with silver to hold them firm at the ankles.
019 Then he put on a corselet, encircling his chest on all sides.
024 Ten were the stripes of deep blue, well-wrought on the breastplate,
025 Twice six also the stripes of gold, and of tin there were twenty.
026 Deep blue as well were the dragons that writhed in coils at the collar,
027 Three on each side, like rainbows set by the son of Chronos
028 High on the clouds, as a sign and portent to earthbound mortals.
029 Next, then, over his shoulders he slung his sword, and gleaming
030 Glittered its golden rivets; of silver itself was the scabbard
031 Which held it around, with hangers well fitted, all of them golden.
032 Then he took up his shield, rich-wrought, for defense or assault,
033 Beautiful: ten were the circles that ran, in bronze, all around it.

Beautiful indeed, sigh the robbers; they are connoisseurs as well as users.

034 Bosses there were, all fashioned of tin, full twenty in number,
035 And white, though the one in the middle was molded of deepest blue.
036 Thereon was the Gorgon embossed, ferocious of visage,
037 Glowering, terrible, flanked on the sides by Panic and Terror.
038 Down from the shield hung fastened a baldric of silver, and on it
039 Coiled up in deep blue metal, a dragon; upon him were triple
040 Heads turned in different ways, from a single 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 spears he grasped, their points of bronze well sharpened,
044 And out from the spear-tips the bronze flashed far into Heaven.

What wonderful weapons. Or, should fortune 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 widening of the field of view.

056 Over against them, the Trojans, on their side, stood on the rising
 057 Ground of the plain, around tall Hektor 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 Star³⁷
 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.

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 chuckle at this 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 Danains 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
 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,

³⁷Following West **Studies** 211.

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 details of the story.

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,³⁸
 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,³⁹
 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

³⁸This is the second forest image in the improvisation, lending color to the idea that the singer is performing far from town, and letting the landscape inspire him.

³⁹And this is the second pair of foes Agamemnon personally kills. There will soon be a third. Single enemies are not enough for a true hero; he needs twos.

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, and giving out his 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.

Now 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 marks this comment, and will presently oblige.

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, out ahead of the vanguard, resolved to do battle.

A hush in the audience. The rout has become a face-off. 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, the 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, like 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 mid-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 standing, he 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. It is getting time to bring the song to its end, and in any case, Xenos' strength, like his hero's, is waning. Meanwhile, a gesture of acknowledgement is due to the chief's wife, as hostess.

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 desperate 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 many others he has sung, he will keep in mind for the future, with all its stock features and its spontaneous adjustments to the mood of the moment, both intact forever.

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