

## ON THE ORIGIN OF GREEK STORIES

The Alpha-tradition

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## on the origin of Greek stories

Ward Blondé

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All passages from the Iliad and the Odyssey in this book make use of the translations of Richmond Lattimore.

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#### **Quotes:**

William F. Hansen, Professor Emeritus of Classical Studies and Folklore: I read your argument with interest. The "king story" that you reconstruct is not, to my knowledge, attested anywhere in oral tradition.

Haris Koutelakis, PhD in Archaeology and History:

I just finished my book about "Odyssey" after many-many years. Of course in that I have made some citations to your book. But now I must read your new one!

Pantos Emmanuel, Homeric friend:

It's an excellently organised text. Well done. Looking forward to your Gamma, Delta and Epsilon efforts.

#### About the author:

Ward Blondé studied Latin and Greek during secondary school. Because of his predisposition toward mathematics and logic, he became a civil engineer (specialization physics) and a PhD in applied biological sciences. He worked as a postdoc in Austria, Norway, and the Netherlands, and currently works as a bio-informatician in Belgium. Since 2000, he has studied ancient Greek texts in his spare time. Since 2015, he has also published in philosophical journals like Symposion and Philosophy & Cosmology on the topics of theology and metaphysics.

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## Introduction

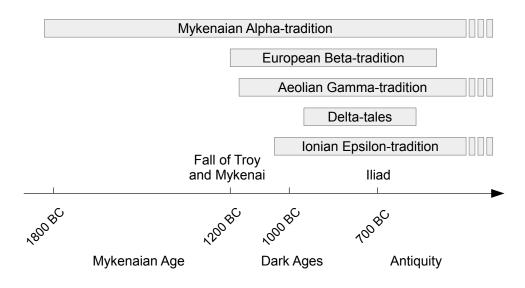
This book about the Mykenaian<sup>1</sup> Alpha-tradition deals with the first of a series of five oral traditions, which I discovered during a thorough examination of the Iliad. The entire series fits into a single overarching theory about the origin of the Iliad. Each of the five oral traditions reaches into Greek prehistory and has been used in the composition of the Iliad. Some, but not all, of the five were also used in the composition of the Odyssey. As far as the oral traditions can be dated, they are ordered from old to young, and named as follows: the Mykenaian Alpha-tradition, the European Betatradition, the Aeolian Gamma-tradition, the narrative Delta-tradition, and the Ionian Epsilon-tradition.<sup>2</sup> None of these oral traditions has been described by other authors. Despite the many analyses of the Iliad, literary science has never distinguished separate Greek oral traditions.

This book is not about the final stages of the development of the Iliad: the necessary evidence for that is too large. This book addresses only the oldest of the five oral traditions as they appeared on Mediterranean soil, the discovery of which provides new insights and understandings about Greek prehistory, literature, and mythology. These include the king story and the hero story, the distinction between Eastern and older, Greek oral characteristics, and the oral characteristics of the Mykenaian Alpha-tradition.

However, it is useful to understand the basic assumptions of the entire theory from the outset. Although I have ordered the oral traditions more or less in time, it is still very likely that they largely overlapped. They may have existed in different parts of Greece at the same time, and there may also have been space for multiple oral traditions to coexist within the same area. Just as newspapers and television report the same story in a different way, two oral

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>The Mykenaian Empire was a palace civilization that was in power on the Greek mainland for most of the second millennium BC. More about this in chapter 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>The double names serve as memory support, without suggesting that no other Mykenaian or Ionian oral traditions can exist.



**Figure 1:** A speculative timeline of the five discovered oral traditions as they appeared on Mediterranean soil.

traditions may have coexisted as different media. A speculative timeline can be found in Figure 1.

The five oral traditions potentially existed in different dialects and verse forms, or may have been recited with different musical accompaniments or on various occasions. Nevertheless, I hypothesize that all were eventually translated into the dactylic hexameter verses<sup>3</sup> of the Ionian Epsilon-tradition in the Ionic dialect.<sup>4</sup> In that oral tradition, which I will expand on in a subsequent book, the Iliad and the Odyssey were solidified.

To understand how the Mykenaian Alpha-tradition appears in the Iliad, it is also important to understand how the Iliad came to be solidified according to my theory. At that point, I assume that Ionian bards existed who were performing as part of the Ionian Epsilon-tradition, but who simultaneously specialized in a specific older oral tradition. The specialists of the Mykenaian Alpha-tradition will be called here the Alpha-bards. Such bards could take turns to retell an old story like the Iliad. The Iliad would subsequently

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>The dactylic hexameter was a verse with six feet that worked according to a strict system of short and long syllables.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>The Ionic dialect spread from mainland Greece into the Aegean around the eleventh century BC. A detailed overview of the Greek dialects can be found in Figure 3.

have been memorized during an orchestrated event, in which many specialist bards alternated their performances. The traditional character of a collaboration between bards with different specialties reveals both the fragmented and traditional oral nature of the Iliad. The unity of the Iliad may be explained by the preparation for and direction of the memorization event. It is possible that the memorized text was only later written down.

## **Reading guide**

With that, enough has now been said about the other oral traditions. We can begin investigating the Mykenaian Alpha-tradition, which I will henceforth simply call the Alpha-tradition. In Part I, we will examine a common core of some very famous Greek story cycles. This will allow us to discover the king story – an ancient tale of a king who is driven from power and who takes revenge upon his return. A similar approach to a series of well-known stories about Greek heroes brings us to the ancient hero story. In this manner, we will gradually come to discover the core of the Alpha-tradition.

In part II, we will search for the Alpha-tradition in the details of the Iliad. The Iliad yields 49 oral characteristics, or so-called Alpha-characteristics, that delineate the Alpha-tradition. On the basis of these Alpha-characteristics, I will show that a series of 46 passages in the Iliad and the Odyssey – the Alpha passages – have their precursors in a separate oral tradition – the Alphatradition.

We then search for the social background of the Alpha-tradition. The many local centers of power in a society that only shares a language and a common culture justify its comparison with the Sicilian Mafia. This provides more insight into the command structure of the centers of power and the relationships between the characters.

The book ends with a bold reconstruction of the developmental history of the Alpha-tradition through time. This begins in the early Mykenaian period and continues to develop until the eighth century BC.

The main place names to be covered in this book are shown in Figure 2. However, before we actually begin our trip, some concepts and the necessary background knowledge also need to be discussed. This is done in the next chapter.



Figure 2: The main locations in the oldest Greek stories.

## Part I

# **Prehistoric stories**

## Chapter 1

## **Background knowledge**

## Greek mythology and Homer

Who has not heard of the constellations of the night sky, the eternally rotating light show that has not changed in some thousands of years? Virgo, Gemini, Libra, and Taurus are just a few examples. While the signs of the zodiac are well known, thanks to the horoscopes, these constellations, along with others like the Great Bear and the Little Bear, Kassiopeia, and Herakles, reveal stories that often go back to Greek myths and sagas surpassing in age even the Iliad, the oldest Greek poem.

The constellation Gemini, or the Twins, in fact consists of two bright stars: Kastor and Polydeukes. Of these legendary twins, only Kastor was mortal, while Polydeukes was godly and therefore immortal. When Kastor died, Polydeukes begged Zeus, the first among the gods of the Greek pantheon, to make his brother immortal as well, so that they could remain together. As a compromise, Zeus allowed them to alternate their days between the dead in the underworld and the gods on Olympos. These twins also show up in other Greek stories. They participated in the journey of the Argonauts, embarking with Herakles (the muscleman), Orpheus (the mythical singer), and Peleus (Achilleus' father). In the hunt for the Kalydonian boar, they were present alongside heroes like Theseus and Idas. Helen of Sparta, the most beautiful woman on earth, was their sister. When Theseus carried her off to Athens, Kastor led an expedition to bring her back.

A central story in Greek mythology is that of the seven against Thebes, in which another set of twins played the lead role: Eteokles and Polyneikes. This story is presumably older than that of Kastor's expedition to Athens. Seven men besieged Thebes under the leadership of Polyneikes in a bid to end the reign of Eteokles there. Eteokles and Polyneikes had agreed that they would each rule Thebes in alternate years, but Eteokles broke his promise. It was not to be these seven, however, but their sons who would ultimately conquer Thebes. Associated with Thebes, we also find the legendary Oidipous, the man who killed his father and married his mother, and the Sphinx, the fairytale monster that persecuted passengers with a riddle.

Some of the sons who conquered Thebes later also fought in the Trojan war. The stories of Troy have as a background the more well-known abduction of Helen by Paris. Paris was a favorite of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, since he had elected her the winner in a beauty contest. The war between the Greeks and Trojans that followed Helen's abduction was ultimately decided by the wiliness of Odysseus and the famous Trojan horse. After 10 years of war, the Greeks withdrew, leaving a horse behind on the beach with 10 Greeks inside. The Trojans, feasting outrageously, brought the horse within the city walls, enabling the Greeks to leap out under cover of night and surprise the drunken Trojans in their sleep. Troy was devastated, and the Greeks returned with Helen to their homelands. The returns of the Greeks were in themselves dramatic, and there are many well-known stories about their respective returns. The most famous of these is The Odyssey, which describes the wanderings of Odysseus on his journey to Ithaka.

The Iliad sheds light on a rather brief episode that took place in the 10th and final year of the Trojan War. Achilleus, the greatest of the Greek heroes, began a quarrel with Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek kings. He refused to fight any longer, causing the Greek ships to be driven back during an attack by the Trojans. Achilleus was finally persuaded by Patroklos, his bosom friend, to lend him his armor. Disguised as Achilleus, Patroklos went to battle, but was killed by Hektor, the hero of the Trojans. Achilleus then gave up his anger toward Agamemnon, so that he could kill Hektor.

Although the core of this episode spans just a few days, the Iliad is one of the largest works in Greek literary history. It contains almost 16,000 verses and, along with the Odyssey (about 14,000 verses), was later ascribed by the Greeks to the legendary Homer. The uncertainty regarding the history and origin of the Iliad and the Odyssey is an important part of what is called the Homeric Question.

With regard to evidence that proves the existence of the Alpha-tradition, it is necessary to distinguish between these two sources: the Homeric texts and Greek mythology. The Iliad and the Odyssey are the most important of the two, because in them we can restore a detailed image of the Alphatradition by clustering characteristics that occur together (the result of which can be found in Appendix "Overview of the Alpha-characteristics" and from p. 117 to p. 131). In Greek mythology, on the other hand, the Alpha-characteristics are present on the surface. They can be found by examining the summaries of many well-known stories, though with less precision than through the study of the Homeric texts. Therefore, the analysis of Greek mythology only serves to corroborate the discovery of the Alpha-tradition in Homer. Even though Greek mythology is not my primary field of expertise, it cannot be left unexplored in proving the existence of the Alpha-tradition.

Greek mythology can be found in nearly every genre of Greek literature. A systematic collection of Greek myths can be found in the pseudo-Apollodorus. Archeological findings often correspond to what is found in the literature, though occasionally, they do not (Junker 2012). Many approaches have been offered to analyze Greek mythology (Edmunds 2014), including comparisons to literature from the Near East.

## Oralism

Every modern scientist who studies the Homeric Question today acknowledges that the Iliad and the Odyssey stem from an oral tradition: an age-old tradition of oral transmission. The domain of science that studies such transmissions is called Oralism and it studies Oral Theory. Thanks to this science, we know that oral texts can be passed on from generation to generation over centuries. This happens through bards who sing or recite texts, often in a fixed verse meter and with the aid of musical instruments. The transmission does not occur literally and therefore the stories can start to vary considerably over the course of time. Indeed, the bards do not memorize entire texts by heart, but largely improvise the stories.

## **Epithets and typical scenes**

In the thirties of the last century, a young scientist named Milman Parry revolutionized the way in which science thinks about Oralism and the Homeric Question. He conducted fieldwork on an ancient oral tradition in the former Yugoslavia and identified many similarities between the texts that he recorded on tape, and the Iliad and the Odyssey. One of the most striking similarities was the many repetitions and fixed formulas. The Homeric texts, which are composed in dactylic hexameter, contain many adjectives, called *epithets*, which form a pleasant sounding unity when coupled with a noun, fitting precisely into the demanding verse scheme. Another similarity is the presence of *typical scenes*, which consist of a fixed oral pattern for a small section of the story. Examples of such typical scenes are the preparation of a meal, the start of a new day, or the gathering of troops for battle. Thanks to such acquired patterns, the bards can easily improvise a new story that they have never recited in that particular way before.

### From performance to writing

Parry's (1971) research was continued by Albert Lord (1991), and, more recently, by Minna Skafte Jensen (2011). The main conclusion drawn from this line of research is that the Iliad and the Odyssey were not written down by a poet, but were instead composed through repeated improvised performances and memorization. Lord believes that Homer was a bard who dictated his text to a writer, whereas Gregory Nagy (1996) proposes an evolutionary model in which the Iliad and the Odyssey became gradually less fluid over several centuries of transmission. From her research to six modern oral traditions, Jensen concluded that there cannot have been a real difference between aidoi, performing bards who are believed to have improvised their texts, and rhapsodes, reciting bards who are believed to have memorized written texts. According to Jensen, both types of bards would have used improvisation and memorization.

In my opinion, there are two aspects in which modern oral traditions differ from the circumstances in which the earliest oral literature emerged. First, in illiterate or barely literate societies, oral traditions must have had a much more important societal role compared to modern oral traditions. In a modern society, the most intelligent and internationally oriented people invariably study at universities and collaborate with other people who study or have studied at universities. They are not required to possess any bard skills in order to contribute to science, history, or culture. This must have been very different in illiterate societies.

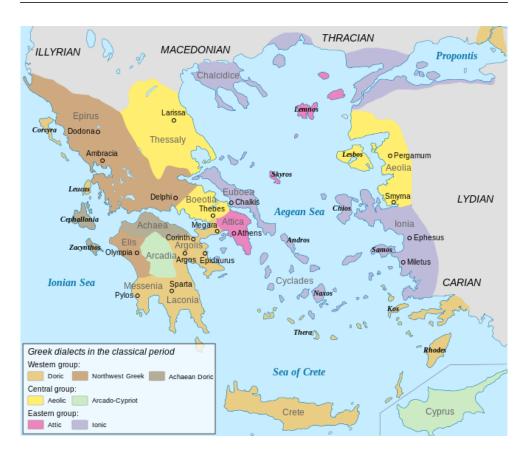
Second, the endeavor to create the first written text in an oral tradition was probably a unique event that cannot be reproduced through modern fieldwork. Just like the Egyptian pyramids and the USA's Apollo moon landing missions, the first recording of an oral tradition must have been barely achievable, while still being enabled by the great admiration of the people of the nation or region that achieved it. After the transcription of two lengthy masterpieces by one region, other regions or subsequent generations must have been considerably less enthused to repeat the endeavor.

For these two reasons, I assume that the Iliad and the Odyssey are the result of a natural, nationwide competition between highly professional bard school centers to be the first to use the recently introduced writing system to preserve their poems. After the Ionian center had won this competition, no other Greek region was sufficiently interested to create any competing written texts. The enormous task to teach people to read, write, memorize, and copy written texts of such lengths as early as the eighth century BC cannot be underestimated. Most probably, no more than one set of texts could survive through the ages. After all, the written texts of the Trojan cycle that were created to complement the Iliad and the Odyssey were effectively lost. Moreover, recitation and memorization may have been the main method through which the rhapsodes learned the Homeric texts by heart, even though they were aware that a literally exact reference copy existed somewhere. There are good reasons to believe that a new written copy of the Homeric texts was created on the basis of recitations by rhapsodes as a reference for the recitation competition during the Panathenaic Festivals instituted at 566 BC under the rule of Peisistratos.

## **Oral characteristics**

In order to begin the investigation into the Alpha-tradition, we need to distinguish some terms. An oral tradition transmitted through writing can be distinguished from others on the basis of *oral characteristics*. Each traditional story can in fact be characterized on the basis of three criteria: the *story elements*, the *narrative techniques*, and the *language* (or dialect) that are used by the bard in his stories. All are oral characteristics that allow us to recognize an oral tradition and distinguish it from other traditions.

We will discover the Alpha-tradition mostly through the many story elements and largely use the concept of "oral characteristic" in that narrower meaning. The story elements comprise the actual building blocks of the content: the many common story facts, motifs, typical scenes, and themes, but also the entire stories themselves, many of which we will discuss in detail. Examples of story elements are "the revenge on the return," "king," or "the Kalydonian boar." The revenge on the return is a theme in the Odyssey, found as a motif in the hero story of Herakles, and a story fact in the heroic deeds of Bellerophontes in the Iliad.



Chapter 1. Background knowledge

**Figure 3:** The spread of Greek dialects in the centuries after the composition of the Homeric works. (Roger D. Woodard (2008b), "Greek dialects," in: The Ancient Languages of Europe, Cambridge University Press, p. 51)

Narrative techniques are also useful for recognizing an oral tradition. Examples of these are the type of verse meter, digressions, similes, cyclic compositions, direct or indirect speech, enumerations (which are often very long), repetitions, and so on. In the Iliad, the Alpha-tradition is evident in the many digressions, and sometimes even in digressions within digressions.

### The Homeric language

At first sight, the language used by the bard seems to be of primary importance. For example, in referring to the set of oral characteristics, Foley (1999) stresses that the poetic tradition "is first and foremost a language." In

my opinion, this is where the analysis goes wrong. The language of the Iliad and the Odyssey appear to be almost uniform throughout the length of both epics (Janko 1982). They are composed in the Ionic dialect of Greek, complemented with all kinds of substitute words from the Aeolic dialect wherever the Ionic vocabulary does not fit in the dactylic hexameter (Hackstein 2002). The presence of Aeolic words in the verses of the Iliad and the Odyssey will therefore not correlate much with literary analyses of the texts. They are distributed homogeneously throughout the text and, in a few cases, we can even glimpse the much older Mykenaian dialect, which is best preserved in the Arcado-Cypriot dialect. The Attic dialect, which is even younger than the Homeric Ionic dialect, can also be found from time to time in the texts. These Attic cases are often found to be later additions or modifications to the originals. The geographical distribution of the Greek dialects in historical times can be found in Figure 3.

Thus, analysis of the language, as the most promising oral characteristic, has not helped in distinguishing different Greek oral traditions. Instead, it seems to point to a single, uniform tradition. This finding fits well with the analysis that the Ionian Epsilon-tradition is present merely as a finishing layer in the Iliad and has exerted only a slight influence on the course of the story. The Ionian Epsilon-tradition is situated in a place and time in which a greater professionalization of the bard vocation had occurred. Old stories from other oral traditions were gradually translated into the Ionian Epsilontradition, solidified, and set down in writing. Old, foreign, and innovative linguistic variants often fit better in the demanding hexameter that is used for the poems; therefore, the Homeric language is artificial to a certain degree. If there is any lesson to be learned from Hackstein (2002), it is that linguistic Homeric characteristics cannot be used to conduct literary analysis. Although it is opposed by Nagy's evolutionary model, I will stick to Hackstein's mainstream analysis.

According to Hackstein, the consensus is that the Homeric language can be dated to the eighth century BC, with the Iliad being a few decades older than the Odyssey. The situation in which rhapsodes memorized texts of which the language was some centuries older than the language spoken by their audiences is exceptional. This can only be declared by the existence of a literally exact reference copy and by the great importance of this reference copy. We can assume that in the normal situation, bards would translate the content they learned at a young age into the evolving language of their improvised performances during their lifetimes, to the extent permitted by the meter used in their songs. In this way, the Alpha-tradition must have passed along many dialects throughout the ages. This means that the language is not really a useful characteristic with which to distinguish an oral tradition. Translation into a new dialect happens much more often than changing the content of oral traditions.

This analysis of the language as an oral characteristic can be corroborated with a modern example. Traditional songs about Santa Claus, for example, have a language that is typically some decades old. The story elements of these songs, however, easily go back a thousand years.

## Variation in the transmission of the Homeric manuscripts

Within the evidence in which the Alpha-tradition can be found, the Homeric texts seem to be the most important. Many Alpha-characteristics that can be found in the Iliad and the Odyssey can rarely or not be found elsewhere. In addition to being the most important sources, the Homeric texts also have the most complex transmission history. We can distinguish four types of evidence of this transmission history: manuscripts (mostly fragments), scholia (editions and commentaries on manuscript versions), literature references (citations, parodies, and mentions), and archeological evidence (e.g., vase paintings). In particular, the fact that many variations have crept into the transmitted texts makes the matter this complex. These variations are often just a single word or some words that fit equally well in the hexameter verse, as compared to what is found in other manuscripts. Other times, a couple of verses have been added.

Since the Greeks lost track of the true original texts, scholia were made by experts in the Homeric transmission history. In these scholia, the experts commented on every verse in an attempt to elucidate the transmission history. The most famous of these experts was Aristarchus of Samothrace (second century BC), who made the first attempt to reconstruct the original Iliad and Odyssey of what he believed to be the historical poet Homer. Modern experts, such as van Thiel (Odyssey 1991, Iliad 1996) and West (1998), make similar reconstructions in editions of the Homeric texts, based on modern evidence and insights. Fortunately, these editions do not vary greatly. We have a fairly good view on an original version that probably stems from around the eighth century BC.

My view on the nature of the variants in the Homeric manuscript transmission can best be expressed in the form of five hypotheses:

- 1. Rhapsodes memorized the Homeric texts literally by heart on the basis of teaching recitations of other rhapsodes.
- 2. Aidoi performed through the classical combination of memorization and improvisation, which can still be found in modern fieldwork on oral traditions.
- 3. The rhapsodes primarily used a written reference copy as reinforcement, or took the help of people who could read such a reference copy.
- 4. Sometimes, the rhapsodes used the oral tradition of the aidoi as reinforcement or they invented new content on the basis of what they had memorized, which introduced small variants.
- 5. New written copies were sometimes created on the basis of slow-paced recitations of rhapsodes.

This clashes with the hypotheses of the so-called hard Parryists, such as Nagy (1996a) and Jensen (2011), who assume that aidoi and at least the earliest rhapsodes operated within an oral tradition in which no literally precise reference copy has a role. In my opinion, the hard Parryists are begging the question by studying oral traditions in which no written copy has the status of a bible and in which rhapsodes whose only profession it is to memorize a single text that they recite at competitions do not exist. Further evidence could probably be found by investigating the extent to which Muslims can recite the Quran without introducing variants. However, the true conditions in which the Greek rhapsodes operated can never really be reconstructed because both the status of the art of reading and writing and the status of the Homeric texts as a bible are unique to ancient Greece. Simply put, knowledge of modern oral traditions is necessary and may be sufficient to understand Greek oral traditions before the eighth century BC. After the eighth century BC, this knowledge is necessary but is certainly not sufficient. Additional hypotheses are required beyond what can be studied in modern oral traditions.

The five oral traditions I discovered cannot be found by studying the variants in the manuscripts. They must have been unknown to Aristarchus, and they were either unknown to earlier authors or never mentioned by them. They can only be found by clustering oral characteristics that occur often and closely together in any of the available editions of the Homeric texts. Consequently, they must be older than the eighth century BC.

## Analysis and Unitarianism

The Homeric Question has a history that goes further back than Parry's discovery of oral traditions. The scientific study of the Homeric texts began, in fact, with Friedrich August Wolf's influential Prolegomena ad Homerum (1795). Through his analysis, Wolf found that the texts could not have been the work of a single author and were instead a unified redaction of many ballads that were composed around 950 BC. Wolf's ideas were further developed by the Analysts; Hermann, Kirchhoff, Cauer, Schwartz, Von der Mühll, Merkelbach, Murray, Page, Croiset, Mazon, Leaf (1900), Wilamowitz (1916), and West (2011) are only a few of the many scholars that could be mentioned here. They separated the Homeric texts into many passages or strands that were somehow different in style, language, and poetic preferences. The most popular interpretation of such passages is that they can be removed from the texts so as to reveal a much shorter core. Alternatively, the many passages can be seen as evidence that several or many predecessors of the Homeric texts known to us have existed from whom the passages have been borrowed. The latter approach is called Neoanalysis (Kakridis 1987, Montanari 2012), and tries to blend with Oral Theory.

The Unitarians, such as Nitzsch, Bowra (1930), and Schadewaldt (1975), have always believed that the great unity that can be found in the Homeric texts can only be explained if the texts had a single author. Some even go as far as to claim that the legendary Homer was indeed a historical person, as believed by the ancient Greeks themselves. In this respect, I would like to mention that the legendary Homer was believed to have seven different places of birth and that the Homeric hymns, which are about two hundred years younger than the Iliad and the Odyssey, were also ascribed to Homer. However, the arguments of the Unitarians cannot be denied. The Iliad and the Odyssey are not created by combining unrelated passages in an awkward manner. The many similarities and poetic preferences between the texts are best explained by assuming that the Iliad had been performed as a whole by a single author, at least during some stages of its development history.

In my opinion, only a theory that takes Oral Theory, Analysis, and Unitarianism into account can provide a satisfactory answer to the Homeric Question. Separating the Iliad into many passages can only be the starting point for a good theory. This work must be followed by an assessment of the degree to which the passages adhere to a certain preference based on lists of oral characteristics. The process of separation into passages and lists must be refined through iteration, which will inevitably reveal that any analytic patchwork theory is too simple to be a declaration mechanism. The many passages show the imprints of the lists of oral characteristics to various degrees, but they can almost never be assigned to a single list. For example, the Doloneia (chapter X of the Iliad) and the funeral games for Patroklos (Iliad XXIII 257–897) clearly have a strong imprint of the list that I identified as the Ionian Epsilon-tradition, though they also have the imprints of several other oral traditions. I must conjecture that the bards were very well-aware of the multi-traditional patchwork nature of the orally transmitted Iliad and that they creatively expanded on this wealth in a manner that had become traditional within an Iliad-tradition in the Ionian Epsilon-tradition. A cooperation between bards with different roles and specialties seems inevitable in this theory.

In order to begin a serious investigation of the Homeric Question and the origins of Greek mythology, we can of course not be limited to the study of the literary interpretations of the Iliad and the Odyssey. The historical knowledge about periods prior to the Iliad also provides answers to our questions.

## Greek prehistory: not three but four epochs

## The Homeric epoch

Might there be a kernel of truth in the Greek stories? Did the Trojan War really take place? And for how long were all these myths transferred before they were written down in the Iliad? All these questions are particularly difficult, but in any case, we must search for the answers in the archaeological facts about Greek history and prehistory. Three time periods have been identified by historians as candidates for providing such answers. The first is the Homeric epoch itself, around the eighth century BC, in which the Iliad and the Odyssey came into a fixed form. The first Olympic Games to be preserved in the statistics, held in 776 BC, were later remembered by the Greeks as the beginning of documented time measurement. This historical epoch, the starting point of Greek antiquity, coincided with demographic growth and the revival of trade, politics, art, and above all writing. Knowledge of writing was imported from the East, in particular from the Phoenicians, with whom the Greeks had commenced extensive trade relations. This link might also explain why so many stories from the East are mixed with Greek mythology.

## The Greek Dark Ages

The epoch that immediately precedes the Homeric epoch consists of the Greek Dark Ages, which extend from approximately 1200 BC to 800 BC. For those who are skeptical about the idea that oral transmissions go way back in time, the Dark Ages evidently form the ur-epoch of Greek mythology. This was, however, the period of a severe demographic collapse and displaced peoples. The mighty palaces were reduced to ruins, the knowledge of writing got lost, and art and trade receded to secondary importance. There is no equivocal conclusion about the causes of this cultural disaster, but it is at least difficult to imagine that the Greek people retained the proudest of their memories from this period. Neither the brave warrior who sacks many cities, nor the powerful, good-hearted king that rules his subjects steadfastly, are likely to have stemmed from this epoch.

## The late Mykenaian epoch

A third epoch is that of the Mykenaian civilization. This is undoubtedly the favorite period for the many books and documentaries that revitalize the Greek myths and sagas in colorful ways. Here, we find the mighty walled fortresses in which rich kings ruled over Greek valleys. Treasures from all over the world filled the galleries of their splendid palaces and the graves of their honored ancestors. Wall paintings that have been preserved until the present reveal scenes of well-organized armies that show little mercy for barbarian intruders. However, the creators of these documentaries have at least one good excuse: the Ancient Greeks also believed that these palaces had once been inhabited by their heroes. As far as they had any overview on their own history, they situated the Trojan War, and therefore also all the important stories with which it was associated, immediately before the invasion of the Dorians and the collapse of the Mykenaian civilization. Modern science dates this key moment to approximately 1200 BC. Those who believe that the Trojan War really took place adhere to the same date.

## The early Mykenaian epoch

That being the case, can the Mykenaian civilization be considered the primeval age of Greek mythology? What appears so obvious is not however unproblematic. The strictly organized, bureaucratic society of the Mykenaians does not reflect the untamed character of the Greek hero stories. Thanks to the decipherment of Linear B, the writing used by palace secretaries, we know how deadly boring were the regulation of trade relations and the division of land. The abduction of each other's herds of cattle was not a daily business at that time. The connection of the Greek stories with the fall of the Mykenaian civilization merely witnesses an overwhelming historical reality. Although only a snapshot in time, an event such as a major revolution will inevitably leave its mark on oral tradition. In order to declare the Alphatradition, as we will see, we need an extended period in time, a primeval age in which the bards sang to the great-grandson about the successes of his great-grandfather. For this reason, we need to consider a fourth epoch: the early days of the Mykenaian civilization.

In order to gain an overview of this epoch, which was situated at the beginning of the second millennium BC, we must take one more step into the past. Since thousands of years before the beginning of the Mykenaian civilization, Greece had been inhabited by native Stone Age and Copper Age tribes that did not speak Greek. Around 3000 BC, these tribes came to know about bronze thanks to Indo-European migrants.

The ancestors of the Mykenaians entered Greece from the North and East between 1900 and 1600 BC. They were an Indo-European people that distinguished themselves from the natives on the basis of their language and culture. The variant of Indo-European that they spoke later evolved into Greek, just as it evolved into Latin, Celtic, and Germanic further to the West. The coming of the Indo-Europeans appears to have happened gradually and indeed the different peoples may not have been aware that one culture was slowly replacing the other. Nevertheless, some centuries later, the Greek fortresses were ruled by an aristocracy of Greek speaking warriors. The decipherment of Linear B writing by Ventris in 1952 has confirmed this. At the peak of their power, in approximately 1400 BC, the Mykenaian warriors launched a joint military attack on their southern neighbors on Krete. They thus brought Minoan domination, probably already weakened by a volcanic eruption and tsunami, to its final demise.

The start of this epoch in the Greek Bronze Age, roughly the first half of the second millennium BC, offers the best hypothesis as to the primeval society of the Alpha-tradition, which will be delineated in this book. In those times, the ancestors of the Mykenaians must have worked their way up to be permanent inhabitants of the impregnable fortresses in the Greek mountain landscapes, through cunning, aggressive decisiveness, and intelligent favoritism. The noble dynasties and their diplomatic relations must then have evolved into the Mykenaian civilization, to which the dauntless hero was no longer well suited. At least not in reality, since such heroes flourished in the nightly stories told around the fireplaces of Mykenaian palaces.

## Mafiosi and their stories

The assumption of power in Greek fortresses by Indo-European Mykenaians leads us to ask: what type of society was found in the early second millennium BC? We know that Greece was not dominated by its neighboring superpowers, like the Hittites in Turkey or the pharaohs in Egypt. The rulers of the Greek fortresses each ruled separately over their surroundings, without any form of involvement by a central government. A peaceful transition of power from father to son in age-old dynasties was apparently not the custom in the earliest time of the Mykenaians. Otherwise, it is hard to declare that the language of foreigners systematically overtook the throne rooms of the mighty fortresses. Moreover, the Mykenaians were very warlike and very keen on their costly military arsenal. This automatically leads us to posit a Mafia-like society, in which the struggle for power was decided by a fight without any clear rules.

The emergence of all kinds of heroic stories in such societies is not unusual. When the FBI began to lead investigations into the already widespread networks of the Sicilian Mafia in the United States in the 1960s, they discovered archaic stories and mythological symbolism. The bosses of Mexican drug cartels also understand the value of their glorification in popular culture, and pay singers and musicians to compose songs about them. The intense struggle for power is undoubtedly fruitful ground for the development of an oral tradition.

The struggle for power is, of course, a universal phenomenon found in every society. In order to better understand the functioning of a Mafia society, we must compare it with a more recent example. The Sicilian Mafia, whose history is fairly well known, is perfectly suited for that. We can investigate its origin, the principles on which it is based, and how it has spread internationally. We also know that its clans have clearly organized hierarchies in which the most important roles have Italian names, like the Don and consigliere.

We will also find other aspects of Sicilian Mafia life, like family honor, blood revenge, and deadly feuds, in the stories of the Alpha-tradition. Therefore, we may conclude that once, long before the genesis of the Iliad, a society must have existed with the same social ingredients.

## Chapter 2

## The king story

It is not easy to uncover and delineate the Alpha-tradition. The introduction of this new concept in science is no small task. The contours of an oral tradition can scarcely be proven. They can at most be sensed.

In order to at least achieve such a sense, a scientific discovery is first presented in this chapter that rests on a much firmer base. An ancient story is here introduced, which will later be called the *king story*. This story appears to be a precursor to four of the largest Greek story cycles that have developed around as many cities: Mykenai, Ithaka, Thebes, and Troy. Thanks to the discovery of the king story, a wealth of information comes to light about how these four story cycles developed in their earliest stages.

## The description of the core

#### The plot

The core of the king story can be described briefly:

A mighty king must leave his city for a long period because of a war or a long journey. However, during his absence, things go terribly wrong at home. A wicked man, assisted by a group of traitors, seduces the wife of the king and seizes power in the city. He banishes the king's son and mobilizes his troops to kill the king on his return.

When the king returns, he is informed of the situation by his faithful friends. He gathers forces in other cities to regain his power. This leads to an intense battle that proceeds with great difficulties. The city appears to be impregnable and eventually the king dies in battle.

Nevertheless, the faithful attackers do not give up the fight. A wise, loyal friend has given the king's son a good education and prepared him for the kingship. When he finally reaches adulthood, he joins the fight. In this way, the king's son gives a second wind to the fighters who never ceased to believe in victory. Eventually, the city is taken by a cunning ruse. The traitors are killed mercilessly, and the king's son comes to sit on the throne.

The survivors are then punished for their ruthlessness and are persecuted by the gods.

This story has several variants that can differ quite significantly, as we will see later in this chapter, when the synopses of the four king stories are analyzed in more detail. The synopsis above is therefore only a rough sketch. It fits in its entirety for none of the stories about Mykenai, Ithaka, Thebes, or Troy.

Although the different king stories differ greatly, we still find many similarities. These occur in plot twists, action scenes, themes, roles of characters, and motifs. On this basis, we can easily recognize the king story as an overarching predecessor.

## Plot twists

A plot twist that is central to the synopsis above is *the failure of the first attempt* to conquer the city, followed by the establishment of a second attempt. The death of the king followed by the arrival of the king's son is the most notable example of this plot twist. Yet, it also occurs in other phases of the story. For example, a god may give a bad omen, so that the attacking army is disbanded even before going to battle.

### Action scenes

An important action scene is that of *the dangerous negotiation*. When the king on his return discovers that the conquest of the city will not succeed without a fight, he decides to send a negotiator ahead to venture among the enemy. What is typical about this scene is that the negotiator is threatened when he is all alone among the enemy; nevertheless, he escapes death. The role of the negotiator can be taken either by the king himself or by a fighter from his entourage.

The traitors in the city also set up a campaign. They devise a *plan to kill the king* in an ambush upon his arrival. To this end, they position a *sentry* who is constantly on the lookout.

### Themes

The central theme of the king story is *the faithfulness versus the unfaithfulness* of the traitors. This theme is developed for both the men and women left behind in the royal palace. Despite the general atmosphere of betrayal, some palace residents remain loyal to the king. They are under pressure from the real traitors; however, they try to avoid choosing a side. Thus, everyone chooses a position. The real stalwarts of the king go into exile and live outside the city.

Closely related to this theme is *the fear for the return of the king*. The traitors are extremely concerned about the consequences of their crimes. This ultimately causes disagreement about what strategy to follow. Some advise against the wicked plans and predict doom, but their voices are weak.

A third theme is *the education of the king's son*. In the eyes of the traitors, the king's son is a threat to their power. Therefore, he must flee or come under the protection of a faithful friend of the king. During the absence of his father, the king's son learns everything and grows into a wise king.

## Roles

A series of roles are connected to all these actions and themes: the king, the king's son, the traitor, the faithful friend, the educator, the negotiator, and so on. However, there are some roles that are less obvious. To begin with, there is the role of *the seer* who predicts the end of the drama. This role is closely related to that of the traitor who discourages – in vain – the boldest plans. However, the attackers can also count on the help of seers.

This role is also akin to that of *the exile who joins the fight*. The arrival of such an exile predicts that the city will soon fall. Obviously, this role is also akin to that of the exiled king's son who leads the second attempt. A third role is that of *the man who provides shelter*. This can be a traitor or a loyal friend. When he lives inside of the walls of the city or palace, he can provide shelter for the king's son or the negotiator. Outside, he can provide support for the king's son.

An interesting role is that of the *spy or smuggler*. This hero or heroine will eventually betray the traitors and be paramount in the recapturing of the city. Finally, there is the unfortunate role of *the one who dies first*.

Many of these roles are related to the central theme of faithfulness: the spy, the loyal friend, the educator of the king's son, the man who provides shelter, the traitor who advises against the wicked plans, and so on. An action is attached to this theme as well, namely *the flight of some of the traitors*. Those traitors who were not too bad are not killed after the capture of the city, but are allowed to flee.

## Motifs

Apart from these themes and roles, the king story also has a number of motifs that appear in different versions. For example, there are *the solemn games*. One of the heroes, like the king or the negotiator, meets the traitors during a match and defeats them. Another motif is that the attackers *assemble or arrive at a place at some distance from the city* before they launch their attack. This motif is related to the task of the sentry of the traitors who is on the lookout. Other motifs are *the transport of corpses*, in the middle or at the end of the story, *the sacrificing of women* and *the massacre at feast tables*.

With all these oral characteristics, from the plot to the motifs, we already have a picture of the king story that is about loyalty and betrayal, deceit and deception, and chivalrous heroism. It goes back on the many intrigues that have ever occurred within the walls of mighty castles.

From here, we will discuss in detail the four remaining king stories of Mykenai, Ithaka, Troy, and Thebes. The synopsis of these stories is shown separately, along with tables that clarify the roles of the characters. A more detailed description of the king story then follows in the form of 27 individual parts of the storyline. This allows us to demonstrate that the king story is much older than the Iliad and the Odyssey, and that it connects a series of oral characteristics. These oral characteristics are discussed further in Part II.

## King story 1: Treachery in Mykenai

The story of the return of Agamemnon is largely known thanks to the three famous playwrights of the fifth century BC. We can find it in Aeschylus' "Oresteia" trilogy, in Sophokles' "Elektra," and in Euripides' "Elektra," "Iphi-

geneia in Tauris," "Iphigeneia in Aulis," and "Orestes." The Odyssey also mentions Agamemnon's return in chapters IV and XI, in which both Menelaos and the ghost of Agamemnon tell a little part of the story. A summary of the many variants that can be found in these works follows here, with the emphasis on some important oral characteristics that consistently reappear:

When Agamemnon departed to Troy as leader of the Greek army, he left his whole family in his palace in Mykenai. He had four children from his wife Klytaimestra: Elektra, Iphigeneia, Orestes, and Chrysothemis. Orestes, his only son, was predestined to become king of Mykenai one day. However, Agamemnon's departure to Troy was prevented by the gods. The ships could not set sail from Aulis because the winds died down. A seer predicted that Agamemnon would have to sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia on an altar to please the gods. Agamemnon committed the murder and thereby sealed his own fate.

During his absence, Klytaimestra fell in love with Aigisthos, the cousin of Agamemnon. She let him enter the palace and made him the new ruler of Mykenai. Together, they made plans to kill Agamemnon on his return. They paid a watchman to observe the coast constantly to report the return of Agamemnon.

Elektra helped her younger brother Orestes to escape abroad. He was welcomed hospitably by a friend of Agamemnon, King Strophios, who gave him a decent education. Elektra and Chrysothemis remained in the palace in Mykenai. The sisters behaved, however, very differently. Elektra rejected the reign of Aigisthos and secluded herself entirely. Chrysothemis, on the other hand, consorted with her mother. She was permitted to stay in the most comfortable living rooms of the palace and to wear the nicest dresses. Elektra considered her sister a traitor.

Meanwhile, the Trojan War had come to an end and Agamemnon returned to Mykenai to resume his reign. Following his departure, however, he was caught by a storm. Drifting off course, he sailed past the coast of the Mykenaian land. After his second attempt, he managed to arrive and came ashore in his homeland together with his entourage.

The watchman who had been positioned by Aigisthos, immediately went to the palace to announce the arrival of Agamemnon. Aigisthos concocted a cunning plan. He gathered 20 men and set them up in an ambush at the palace. He himself went by horse and wagon to meet Agamemnon and invited him and his entourage to attend a feast. Unsuspectingly, Agamemnon and his men accepted the offer. But when they had enjoyed the meat and wine, they were surprised by the men of Aigisthos. Agamemnon and his entourage were killed while still sitting at the dining tables.

Menelaos, the brother of Agamemnon, also hit a storm during his return journey from Troy. He wandered for a long time along distant coasts and gathered many treasures. After many years, he arrived at an island some distance from the coast of Egypt where he got stuck due to the lack of a favorable wind. He stayed there in long, grievous captivity until he was finally helped by the god Proteus. This god told him of the murder of his brother and which course to choose to sail back to Mykenai as fast as possible.

Menelaos arrived only just in time to attend the funeral of Aigisthos, for Elektra had earlier persuaded Orestes to avenge the death of their father. Together with Pylades, the son of King Strophios, they invented a ruse. Pylades was sent as a messenger to the palace of Mykenai to announce that Orestes had died during the solemn Pythian Games. This reassured Klytaimestra and Aigisthos. They had already made plans to make Alete, the son of Aigisthos, the successor to the throne. But Orestes and Pylades then ventured into the palace together, ostensibly to deliver the corpse of Orestes but in fact it was Elektra who was hidden beneath the winding sheet. Once inside, Orestes killed Klytaimestra and Aigisthos and recaptured the kingship of Mykenai.

Because of his murder of his own mother, Orestes was pursued by the Erinyes and had to move abroad to escape them.

So far for the story about the fight for Mykenai. Let us now gather together the roles discussed in the introduction to the king story. The summary in Table 2.1 is a *role schema* that represents the role of each person in the story. Making a role schema of each king story will allow us to compare them much more easily later on. This will be done in the section "Discussion of the king story."

The story of Agamemnon in Mykenai has several variants. Among other things, the complicity of Agamemnon's daughters is a variable fact, as is the ruse with the transport of the dead body. However, it is precisely such variations that prove the great antiquity of this story. Furthermore, the themes of the quarrel following a funeral and the transportation of a dead body are processed in this story in a unique way.

Agamemnon	The king
Orestes	The king's son
Klytaimestra	The queen and traitor
Aigisthos	The traitor who takes power
Elektra	The spy and smuggler inside the palace who
	remains loyal to the king
Strophios	The loyal friend and educator
Pylades	The negotiator and smuggler
Chrysothemis	A traitor
Iphigeneia	A woman who is sacrificed
Proteus	The seer who predicts the outcome

**Table 2.1:** Role schema of the fight for Mykenai.

# King story 2: Odysseus in Ithaka

The Odyssey is rightly one of the most famous stories from European literary history. It appeals greatly to modern readers thanks to its imaginative content and its sympathetic, cunning hero who can surprise friend and foe over and again. However, I suspect it is largely coincidence that this story was, together with the Iliad, the only one among the many old stories to have become a major narrative. Even long before the emergence of the Homeric Odyssey (the final version ascribed to Homer), this story must have known great popularity. What follows is a summary of the Odyssey and the stories that precede it:

Odysseus and Penelope were king and queen of Ithaka and together they had a baby, Telemachos. Not long after Telemachos' birth, however, Odysseus had to live up to an oath that he had once sworn to Menelaos. Menelaos' wife, Helen, had been unfaithful and had accompanied the handsome Paris to Troy. A coalition of fighters was gathered to retrieve Helen from Troy and Odysseus was one of these.

The war that broke out with Troy lasted nine years and was decided only in the 10th year. Troy was captured, Paris slain, and Helen brought back to Sparta. During all this time, however, many suitors had gathered in Odysseus' palace in Ithaka. Instead of waiting for Odysseus to return, they tried to seduce Penelope to remarry with one of them. Penelope, however, remained faithful to her marriage and refused all proposals from the suitors. She wove a shroud for Laertes, the father of Odysseus, in which he could be dressed when he died and declared that only upon finishing it, would she remarry.

However, the gods were not favorable to Odysseus. On his return to Ithaka, Poseidon drew the ship of Odysseus off course with fierce storms. Odysseus wandered on the sea for another nine years and had to endure 10 trials. He fought against the Kikonians, he escaped the Lotus eaters, he blinded the Cyclops Polyphemos, he controlled the winds of Aiolos, he escaped the murderous Laistrygones, he ended the spell of Circe, he spoke to the spirits in the underworld, he sailed past the deadly lure of the Sirens, he guided his ship past Skylla and Charybdis, and he resisted stealing the cattle of Helios during a long famine. The shipmates whom he led, however, all died during these trials. Their bodies remained unburied on distant beaches. Only Odysseus survived, assisted by the goddess Athene. After a heavy storm, he landed on a deserted island, home of the goddess Kalypso, daughter of Atlas. Odysseus stayed there for many years in painful captivity.

During all this time, the suitors of Penelope remained in Ithaka. They indulged in the riches, herds of cattle, and women at the palace of Odysseus. They tried to acquire for themselves the kingship that Telemachos would inherit on his adulthood, through a marriage with Penelope, but Penelope continued to refuse. The shroud that she wove during the daytime, she unraveled at night, to ensure she would not have to remarry. However, some individuals in and around the palace remained faithful to Odysseus, such as the bard Phemios, the housekeeper Eurykleia, the herald Medon, the swineherd Eumaios, and the cowherd Philoitios.

Penelope was assisted by Mentor in the education of Telemachos. When Telemachos finally reached adulthood, Mentor advised him to collect more news about his father and to gather those people around him who were still on his side. Telemachos then collected all the nobles of Ithaka in the palace for a meeting. He found the wise Mentor and the seer Halitherses willing to assist him in word and deed. They predicted that Odysseus would soon return and take revenge, but Leokritos made them look like fools. The suitors Antinoös and Eurymachos did everything to ensure that Odysseus was forgotten and to increase their chances of marrying Penelope.

After the meeting, Telemachos departed by ship on a tour of the other Greek cities to find out more news about his father. On hearing this, the suitors suggested mockingly that Telemachos would call up support to kill them with an army or through a ruse. In Sparta and Pylos, Menelaos and

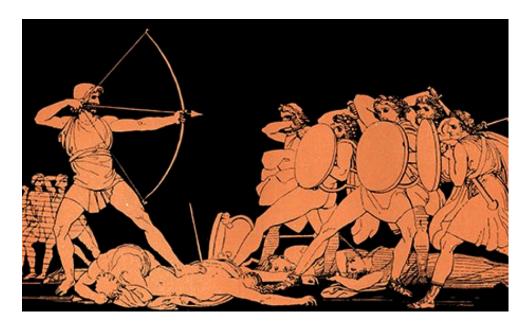


Figure 4: Odysseus kills Penelope's suitors in the palace of Ithaka.

Nestor supported Telemachos and Nestor commanded his son Peisistratos to accompany him. Theoklymenos, the son of the seer Polypheides, also sailed back with Telemachos and he predicted that Telemachos would soon be victorious. In Ithaka, the suitors positioned guards and hid in order to ambush and kill Telemachos on his return. However, Telemachos outwitted them and landed slightly further back along the shore.

When Telemachos returned, in the 10th year after the fall of Troy, Odysseus also arrived in Ithaka. Odysseus had been assisted by the Phaiakians, a race of skilled seafarers. Father and son met in the hut of Eumaios, a swineherd who had ever remained loyal to Odysseus. However, Telemachos was the only one to recognize his father as Odysseus had been given the figure of a beggar with the help of Athene.

In this disguise, Odysseus ventured into his own palace. There, he won first place in the contest amidst all the suitors. His task was to wrestle Iros, a beggar who had denied him access to the palace. He was then able to speak with his own wife, but she did not recognize him. He foretold to her that Odysseus would soon return. He was almost betrayed by Eurykleia, the old housekeeper, when she recognized him by a scar while washing his feet but Odysseus managed to return silently to the hut of Eumaios. The day then arrived on which Penelope had organized a contest for the suitors. Whoever could bend the bow of Odysseus and shoot an arrow through 12 axes would marry her. Odysseus mingled with the suitors, once more disguised as a beggar, while his allies made preparations in the palace. The suitors filled themselves with meat and wine but failed miserably in the contest. None could bend the bow of Odysseus. When Telemachos gave the bow to Odysseus, he succeeded with flying colors.

Odysseus then wreaked terrible revenge on the suitors. From a close distance, he shot down the suitors who had gathered unsuspectingly in the dining room, starting with the noble Antinoös. Telemachos and his other supporters immediately came to his aid and together they slaughtered the drunken suitors. Nor were the unfaithful maids and mistresses who had stayed in the palace spared. Mentor, Medon, and Phemios were, however, spared, because they had always been of fatherly help to Telemachos.

The god Hermes guided the dead suitors to the underworld. Their relatives flocked together in the palace of Odysseus and brought the corpses home to bury them there. They then assembled in Ithaka with a plan to take revenge. Eupeithes led them, although a seer advised against the action. Odysseus and his relatives killed Eupeithes and won the battle with the help of the gods.

But Odysseus' misery did not end there. He left his homeland once more to recoup his lost riches. This fate had been predicted by the ghost of the seer Teiresias.

Odysseus' famous sea voyage with its impressive adventures is undoubtedly the most well-known part of the Odyssey; however, this is only a minor part of the king story. The long voyage is just one of the major difficulties that the coalition of supporters undergo in breaking the power of the traitors. All the while, the abuse in Ithaka persists. In the story of Agamemnon, we had already observed that his brother Menelaos had also failed to arrive in Mykenai in time, while the king's son Orestes was still too young to take revenge immediately. The wanderings of Odysseus and Telemachos exemplify the same theme.

We can find the core of the king story in the second half of the Odyssey, in which Ithaka is cunningly besieged. Oral characteristics like the cunning takeover of the city, the contests, the killing of women, and the transport of corpses, all appear towards the end of the story. Unlike Agamemnon, Odysseus does not himself die, and he is the great hero who oversees the trickiest parts of the recapture. Like Menelaos, he makes arduous wanderings. Like

Odysseus	The king and negotiator		
Telemachos	The king's son, spy, and smuggler		
Penelope	The loyal queen		
Antinoös	The main traitor and the first to die		
The suitors	The traitors who are slaughtered at the feast		
	tables		
Halitherses and	The seers who p	predict the fatal end	
Mentor			
Eurymachos and	The traitors who laugh at the predictions of the		
Leokritos	seers		
Eumaios	The loyal friend who gives shelter		
Eurykleia	A traitor who timely chooses the good side		
Mentor, Mentes and	Educators and counselors of the king's son		
Medon			
Medon and Phemios	Traitors who are spared after all		
Theoklymenos	The exile whose arrival forecasts the end		
Hermes and the	Those who transport the dead bodies at the end		
citizens of Ithaka			
Telemachos, Menelaos, Nestor,		Heroes who choose the side of	
Peisistratos, Theoklymenos, Eumaios,		the king	
Philoitios, Mentor, and Mentes		-	

Table 2.2: Role schema of the fight for Ithaka.

Pylades, all alone he mingles with the enemy. He also follows the example of Orestes by personally wreaking a bloody revenge. Table 2.2 provides an overview of the various roles.

As will be discussed in the section "The Odyssey as the classic example," the Odyssey is the most complete version of the king story. Several of its oral characteristics are developed into major themes, which cannot possibly be displayed in a short summary. First, however, more material follows for comparison via the stories of Troy and Thebes.

# King story 3: The fall of Troy

With the Trojan cycle, the collection of stories about the abduction of Helen to Troy, we arrive at the most famous and most extensive version of the king story. The structure of the whole Trojan cycle is covered by this story, the core of which is the siege of a city. The king story, however, has specific emphases. Let us also examine these based on the part of the Trojan cycle that precedes the Odyssey:

Menelaos, the brother of Agamemnon, was the wealthy king of Sparta. One day, when he went to Krete for the funeral of his grandfather, he left his wife Helen alone in his palace. During his absence, Paris, a prince of Troy, visited Sparta. Paris and Helen fell in love and sailed away together, taking with them the treasures of the palace of Menelaos. After some wanderings, they arrived in Troy. The visionary Kassandra predicted that Troy would be destroyed if Helen was not returned to Menelaos, but Paris refused to give her up.

Menelaos then called upon the help of Agamemnon to gather troops and to retrieve his wife. They went to the palaces of Nestor, Odysseus, Achilleus, and many other Greeks. With an overwhelming coalition, they assembled in Aulis to sail to Troy with Agamemnon as commander. The Greek seer Kalchas predicted that the Greeks would be victorious after nine long years of war.

After crossing the sea, the Greeks went ashore in the wrong place and destroyed Teuthrania, holding it for Troy. When they tried to sail on to the real Troy, they were scattered by a storm. They assembled once more in Aulis to launch a second expedition. This time they could count on the support of Telephos, a guide who lived in the neighborhood of Troy.

However, the goddess Artemis sent unfavorable winds and Kalchas predicted that Agamemnon would have to sacrifice his own daughter to appease her. Agamemnon asked Iphigeneia to come to Aulis under the pretext that she would be married to Achilleus. There, he sacrificed his own daughter, bringing great misfortune upon himself.

Via Tenedos, an island en route to Troy, the Greeks reached the shores of the Trojan land. The Trojans had installed watchmen to prevent the Greeks from coming ashore. Thus, Protesilaos, the first to jump from the ship, was slain by Hektor. Eventually, the Trojans were driven back within the walls of Troy thanks to the heroic deeds of Achilleus.

Menelaos and Odysseus undertook a brave expedition. They ventured amidst the Trojans as negotiators to reclaim Helen. Paris refused to hand Helen over and he tried to persuade the other Trojans to kill Menelaos. The pair were able to return alive thanks to the intervention of Antenor, but they could not take Helen with them.

The Greeks surrounded Troy and travelled around the area, looting neighboring cities and villages. The Trojans could no longer persist in the battle outside the walls of their city. During one clash between the two armies in the plain, Hektor suggested organizing a duel between Paris and Menelaos. The winner would receive Helen as wife. Both agreed with this proposal, but when Paris was beaten, he escaped secretly and once more refused to hand Helen over. Subsequent negotiations also took place without effect. The only agreement that both parties could reach was to exchange the corpses of the dead that had fallen on both sides. This allowed the Greeks to carry the corpses of their fallen warriors back home to be buried by their children.

After the Trojans had been surrounded and trapped in their city for years, Zeus decided to relieve them. He stirred up a blazing quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilleus, the leader and bravest of the Greek heroes. Achilleus refused to continue fighting and the Trojans were thus able to persist once more in the battle outside the walls and even tried to set the ships of the Greeks on fire. Patroklos, a good friend of Achilleus, drove the Trojans back temporarily, but he was eventually slain by Hektor. This enraged Achilleus to such an extent that he gave up his rancor and killed Hektor before the walls of Troy. This caused Kassandra to predict that the fall of Troy was nigh.

In the next phase of the war, there were casualties on both sides. Achilleus killed Penthesileia, the Amazon, and Memnon, but he was killed himself by an arrow in his heel, shot by Paris. After a long fight over the body of Achilleus, the Greeks finally won it back. They organized a grand funeral with solemn funeral games. During these games, a violent quarrel broke out between Odysseus and Aias. Unable to bear his defeat, Aias committed suicide.

According to the seer Helenos, Troy would fall if Philoktetes joined the fight. Philoktetes had had to stay behind on an island halfway through the outward journey to Troy, because he was bitten by a snake. After he was brought to Troy by Diomedes, he killed Paris with his arrows. Yet, the Trojans were still not willing to give Helen back and Helen remarried, this time to Deïphobos.

Even before his death, Achilleus had expressed his concern about his father Peleus and his son Neoptolemos. Achilleus already knew that he would die thanks to the predictions of his clairvoyant mother, Thetis. His father and son would wait in vain for his return. He had asked the other Greeks to return to his homeland and prepare Neoptolemos for the kingship. He asked them to show Neoptolemos all his rich possessions, his people, and his palace. Moreover, they should bring him to Troy to help the Greeks in battle. Odysseus carried out this task.

Neoptolemos committed brave deeds on the battlefield before the walls of Troy; however, the Greeks could not take the city. It was finally Odysseus who devised a cunning plan to overthrow Troy. He ordered the construction of a large wooden horse in which the bravest of the Greeks could hide. The other Greeks he encouraged to depart and to return only when they saw fire signals above Troy. They would leave only Sion behind as an outcast to mislead the Trojans. Thus, they carried out all these plans to the great delight of the Trojans who thought the war had ended and regarded the horse as a sacrifice to the gods from the Greeks.

Laokoön, a clairvoyant priest, warned the Trojans in vain. A frenzied crowd even broke a part of the city wall to bring the giant horse through the gate inside the city. They feasted the whole day, until, drunk, they fell asleep on the dining tables at night. The Greeks then jumped through a hatch in the belly of the horse and slaughtered the drunken Trojans. With torches, they committed arson and opened the city gates, allowing the other Greeks to come to their aid. All the Trojans were slaughtered mercilessly. Menelaos planned to kill Helen as well, but when he found her, he was overwhelmed by her beauty. He took her to his ship to bring her back to Sparta.

The Greeks committed terrible deeds, even killing the old men and children. The families of Aineias and Antenor were the only ones to be spared. Polyxena, the daughter of King Priam, was sacrificed on the grave of Achilleus. The altars of the gods were desecrated, to the anger of Zeus and Athene. This also left the Greeks with misfortune. They became embroiled in violent quarrels on life and death. Many died at sea during their return to their homelands, while others were haunted by the gods for many years.

In the Trojan cycle, we also recognize the basic components of the king story. Menelaos, the king who was betrayed in his absence, looks for allies and launches a revenge expedition. This passes with the greatest of difficulties. Only after many years and several failed attempts is Troy overtaken by a ruse.

The Trojan cycle does not appear to be the oldest and most authentic variant of the king story. We recognize no less than four kings in the

Menelaos	The king who is betrayed	
Agamemnon	The king who collects many soldiers	
Achilleus	The king who desideds many services	
Odysseus	The king who cunningly overthrows the city	
Helen	The queen who betrays her husband	
Paris	The traitor who marries the wife of the king	
Priam	The traitor who has the power	
Menelaos and	The negotiators	
Odysseus		
Neoptolemos	The king's son who substitutes the king who has	
	been slain	
Odysseus	The herald who accompanies the king's son	
Kassandra, Helenos,	Seers who predict the outcome	
Laokoön, Kalchas	Seels who predict the outcome	
and Thetis		
Telephos	A hero in the neighborhood of the city who gives	
Telephos	support to the attackers	
Protesilaos	The one who dies first	
Iphigeneia and	Women who are sacrificed	
Polyxena		
Philoktetes	A prisoner whose arrival predicts the end	
Sion	The hero who cunningly smuggles the Greeks	
	inside	
Antenor and Aineias	The traitors who are not that bad and are allowed	
	to flee	

 Table 2.3: Role schema of the fight for Troy.

storyline. Menelaos, the king who is betrayed, Agamemnon, who leads the expedition, Achilleus, who dies and whose son replaces him, and Odysseus, who ventures among the traitors and brings the city to its fall through cunning. The king story is not entirely suited for use in relation to a siege in which the leader of the attackers is not the betrayed king of the besieged city. It is, therefore, difficult to subdivide the traitors in the city, in this case the Trojans, into those who stayed loyal to the true king and those who betrayed him shamelessly. Even the location of the treason, Sparta or Troy, is not entirely clear. This leads us to suspect that the characteristics of the king story have been applied ex post facto to an existing story about Troy.

For this reason, the story characteristics appear much less as wellchosen themes and motifs. Antenor is almost the only one of the Trojans to take up the role of a traitor who is not guilty. He hosts Menelaos and Odysseus in his palace during the negotiations and opposes the cowardly plans to assassinate Menelaos. At the fall of Troy, the Greeks let him flee. Aineias is allowed to flee, despite the lack of stories or motifs showing that Aineias can claim this role. Telephos, a mythical leader of colonizing Greeks near Troy, can fit this role. He was first among the enemy, but ultimately guides the Greeks to Troy. If there is any parallel that can be drawn between Antenor, Aineias, and Telephos, it is the fact that they are all involved in colonization stories, an oral characteristic that seems to fall entirely outside the scope of the king story.

The king's son, Neoptolemos in this case, hardly plays any role in the whole of the Trojan cycle. The sons of Odysseus and Agamemnon have no connection with Troy, and Menelaos and Helen only had a daughter. This contrasts sharply to the central roles played by Orestes and Telemachos in the stories of Ithaka and Mykenai. Table 2.3 provides an overview of the roles of the characters in the Trojan cycle.

Nevertheless, the foundations of the Trojan cycle are largely shaped by the king story. The beginning (the laborious journey to Troy), the climax (the fall of Troy), and the end (the miserable returns) are simply its components. The Trojan cycle subsequently grew to become the national story cycle of the Greeks to such a degree that all other stories adapted to this framework. This applies equally to the older stories that lent out their characters, like those of Odysseus and Agamemnon.

The Odyssey not only lent its main character to the Trojan cycle, but also some components of the story. In particular, the stories about the fall of Troy contain some explicit similarities. Odysseus is the main character who triumphs through guile. As in Ithaka, the Trojans are attacked unexpectedly after indulging in booze and a feast. However, there are also some episodes in which Odysseus ventures among the Trojans, either alone or in company. For instance, there is the story of Odysseus succeeding in getting within the walls of Troy, disguised as a beggar. There, he meets Helen, who recognizes him and almost betrays him prematurely. Helen interrogates Odysseus thoroughly and expresses her desire for her former husband. Finally, she washes and dresses Odysseus. This vignette echoes the meeting between Odysseus, Penelope, and Eurykleia within the walls of the palace in Ithaka. At this point, we can make the clear conclusion that the foundations of the Trojan cycle are younger than the stories about Odysseus in Ithaka and Agamemnon in Mykenai. An important argument for this is the biography of these two kings and their sons. Not a single constituent of their biography is essentially altered by the war at Troy. Not their birth, their marriage, their descendants, nor their death. Within the oldest stories, we find enough wars around cities to declare the absence of the fathers at an earlier stage: Pylos, Kalydon, Thesprotia, Thebes, and so on. Odysseus besieges many peoples during his adventures at sea. Each of these adventures can be considered a possible interpretation of the first story characteristic, the absence of the king, in the king story of Ithaka. Apparently, the story of the Trojan War became very popular at a certain point in history, to the extent that it took a prominent place in the stories about Ithaka and Mykenai.

We find the oldest stories on the Peloponnese and on the nearby mainland of Greece. They unite the siege of a city with an internal power struggle. On the Greek mainland, we also find many other ancient stories, like the war at Pylos, the catching of the Kalydonian boar, and stories of heroes like Pelops, Idas, Kastor and Polydeukes, Meleagros, and so on. Other heroes have important connections with the Peloponnese that concern their origins, like Theseus, Herakles, and Bellerophontes.

# King story 4: The seven against Thebes

The city of Thebes is legendary in the Greek stories, which can potentially be declared by the fact that it was definitely destroyed during the Mykenaian period, well before the fall of the Mykenaian empire. Centrally located in Greece, not far north of the Peloponnesian peninsula, it was reduced to ruins during the period when the Mykenaian civilization was still flourishing. It remained uninhabited after its destruction, which corresponds surprisingly well with the stories about "the seven against Thebes." Mykenai, Ithaka, and Troy were in any case still inhabited until the fall of the Mykenaian civilization. According to the chronology of the stories, Thebes would have been destroyed one generation before Troy. Archaeologists, however, estimate its destruction to approximately two centuries earlier, namely somewhere in the 14th century BC, or 600 years before the Iliad was finalized. According to my theory, the Alpha-tradition would have been in use for a long time by that point. The king story would then have been applied to the remaining ruins of Thebes after its historical destruction.

A similar reasoning also applies therefore to Troy, even though it does not seem likely from an archaeological perspective that Troy was destroyed by the Mykenaians. The narrative material that bards needed to compose king stories was not so much a real war, but an abandoned ruin that would appeal to everybody's imagination and that left sufficient room for new stories to develop. Let us determine here what this meant for the ancient Greeks, who handed the story of the seven against Thebes down to us:

One of the kings of Thebes was Oidipous, the man who, by a twist of fate, had killed his own father and married his mother. One day, when Oidipous was angry with his sons, the twins Polyneikes and Eteokles, he cursed them; they would kill each other in a dispute over the reign of Thebes.

Later, Oidipous had to flee from Thebes as punishment for his terrible deeds. His sons agreed not to fight, but to reign Thebes for alternate periods of one year. Eteokles governed Thebes first, while Polyneikes was exiled and went to Argos. There, Polyneikes was warmly received by King Adrastos, who had once been informed by a prophet about the arrival of an exile. Adrastos gave him his daughter Argeia in marriage. When one year had passed and Polyneikes returned to Thebes, Eteokles refused to keep the appointment and give up the throne.

Polyneikes returned to Argos and together with King Adrastos they collected seven brave men, including themselves, to undertake a violent expedition against Thebes. The five others were Tydeus, another exile, Kapaneus, Hippomedon, Parthenopaos, and Amphiaraos, a seer who saw both his own demise and the failure of the expedition in advance.

Tydeus was sent to Thebes to negotiate, where he encountered the Thebans during a banquet and solemn games. He challenged them there and won in each contest, which infuriated the Thebans. When he turned back, an army of 50 Thebans was sent after him to kill him. Tydeus, however, slew them all except one man, whom he sent back to retell the story.

Terrified by the force of Tydeus, the Thebans consulted the seer Teiresias. He said that a Theban had to be sacrificed, specifically one from the noble families whose pedigree dated back to the Spartoi, the first Thebans. This sacrifice would bring the Thebans victory in the war. Menoikeus, a son of Kreon, stabbed himself on the walls of Thebes and thus sealed the outcome of the expedition of the seven against Thebes.

When the seven arrived in Thebes, each of them besieged one of its gates and all died, except Adrastos. However, the Thebans also had casu-

alties. Eteokles did not escape his fate, for he and his brother pierced each other by the sword in combat. By this deed, the curse of Oidipous was accomplished.

Despite their victory the Thebans' fate was tragic. Kreon, who was appointed regent, declared a ban on burying the bodies of the seven. Antigone, the daughter of Oidipous and a sister of Polyneikes and Eteokles, had pity on her brother Polyneikes and buried him secretly. Infuriated, Kreon had her buried alive in a tomb. Haimon, the son of Kreon, was betrothed to Antigone and came to rescue her from the tomb. However, by the time he opened the tomb, Antigone had already hanged herself and Haimon then also committed suicide. When Eurydike, mother of Haimon and wife of Kreon, heard this news, she also committed suicide.

When Laodamas, the son of Eteokles, reached adulthood, he took the kingship in Thebes. However, he was not destined to reign until old age. Thersander, the son of Polyneikes, was determined to sit on the throne his father had tried to conquer. Thus, he gathered soldiers in the Greek land. He found the sons of the seven dead heroes willing to fight with him, all of whom wished to avenge the deaths of their fathers. The other six were Aigialeus, the son of Adrastos, Diomedes, the son of Tydeus, Sthenelos, the son of Kapaneus, Promachos, the son of Parthenopaos, and finally, Alkmaon and Amphilochos, the sons of Amphiaraos.

The oracle in Delphi predicted that they would win the war if they elected Alkmaon as their leader. The seven followed this advice and thus sealed the fate of Thebes. First, they conquered the villages around Thebes. During a battle in the open plain, Alkmaon defeated Laodamas, the king of Thebes. The Thebans then fled within the walls of their city and were surrounded by the seven sons.

Teiresias, the famous Theban seer, realized that the war was lost. He saved the lives of the Theban people with his last council: the Thebans should send a negotiator to the seven sons and meanwhile take the opportunity to flee from Thebes. Teiresias also fled, but he died shortly afterwards. The other Thebans founded the city of Histiaia, far away from Thebes.

The seven sons took Thebes and, as previously promised, they sacrificed the most beautiful thing they saw to the oracle of Delphi. This turned out to be Daphne, the daughter of Teiresias. All the other spoils were taken by the sons to their homelands. Thersander became king of Thebes and thus restored the throne to the descendants of Polyneikes. A miserable fate awaited Alkmaon, the leader of the sons. He killed his own mother, Eurypyle, as revenge for the cunning trick that she had used to persuade himself and his father to fight against the Thebans. For this deed, he was persecuted by the Erinyes.

Polyneikes	The king	
Eteokles	The traitor who takes power	
Thersander	The king's son	
The Thebans	The other traitors	
Antigone	The woman who does not conspire with the traitors	
Adrastos	The one who gives shelter to the king	
Tydeus	The negotiator	
Teiresias and	The seers who predict the outcome	
Amphiaraos		
Menoikeus	The nobleman who dies first	
Tydeus and	Exiles	
Polyneikes		
Kreon	The man who prohibits the transportation of the dead	
Daphne	A woman who is sacrificed	
Antigone, Kreon, Haimon, Those who are caught in a cycle of		Those who are caught in a cycle of
Eurydike, Alkmaon and		misery after the victory of their camp
Eurypyle		

Table 2.4: Role schema of the seven against Thebes.

The story of the seven against Thebes is a much more classic siege story of a city, in comparison with the story of Mykenai. A broad coalition of fighters, coming from a vast area, goes out to attack and besiege a city. A battle of life and death is then fought at the walls or on a battlefield near the city. Such siege stories were probably timeless in Greece, given the great antiquity of fortified cities and fortresses. Yet, the story of Thebes shows a series of important similarities with the king story, as evidenced by the role schema in Table 2.4.

It is much more difficult to compare the Theban cycle chronologically with the other three stories. Diomedes, one of the seven sons who fought against Thebes, is the only one to have also had a significant role in the war against Troy. Apart from him, the Theban cycle has its own cast of characters that are not of importance elsewhere. Many important characters, like Laios and Oidipous, lived some generations before Agamemnon and company in the virtual chronology of the stories.

It is a remarkable fact that the heroes fighting in Thebes originated from the Peloponnese. Polyneikes is indeed a Theban, but he collects the coalition in the Peloponnese. The whole story is much closer to the struggle of one region against a foreign enemy. In that sense, it resembles more the scenario of the Trojan cycle. The distinction between the betrayed king (Polyneikes) and the other members of the attacking coalition is much more blurred, just as in the Trojan cycle.

In the enumeration of the armed forces against Troy in the Iliad, the Thebans are indeed notable absentees. This leads us to suspect that the Thebans played a similar role in the oral tradition as the Trojans, namely that of an external enemy against which the popular heroes of the Peloponnese went to battle together.

That being the case, can we consider the Theban cycle a precursor of the Trojan cycle? In terms of the development of the story, this seems plausible. Yet, it begs the question why the important heroes of the Peloponnese, like Agamemnon, Menelaos, Odysseus, and Nestor, fight in Troy but not in Thebes. One possible explanation is that certain oral characteristics became popular in different periods. The joint struggle against a foreign enemy can then, for example, have developed first, while the cooperation between the main heroes grew popular slightly later. The Trojan cycle was then formed just in time to claim the main characters. Another plausible possibility is the joint backsliding of the characters, Agamemnon, Menelaos, Odysseus, and Nestor, from the Theban cycle to the Trojan cycle, without leaving the slightest trace. Unless, that is, we can consider the conversation between Agamemnon and Diomedes about Thebes during the ordering of the troops (Iliad IV 370-410) to be a trace.

In any case, the development of the Theban cycle was much more modest than that of the Trojan cycle. It did not become an interpenetration of all the existing stories.

# Detailed storyline of the king story

Having outlined the short contents of four of the most famous Greek stories, we can analyze the king story in all its detail. By bringing together and ordering the common characteristics in the four stories, we obtain a larger story with a clear plot. We can find the following series of oral characteristics:

- 1. In his absence, the king is betrayed by his own family. He loses his power and must reconquer his city by force.
- 2. The king is cheated by his wife. She is within the city and marries someone else.
- 3. A wise man gives a decent education to the king's son and prepares him for the throne.
- 4. The king gathers soldiers. A coalition of loyalists is prepared to fight to death on his side. Together they plan an attack on the city.
- 5. The heroes of the attacking coalition are listed and characterized.
- 6. The journey of the attackers to the city is full of difficulties and side wanderings. The first plan of attack fails and they must launch a second expedition.
- 7. Seers predict a dramatic end to it all.
- 8. The city is defended by the traitors. They position watchmen and ambushes and make all kinds of preparations. They try to murder the king in a cowardly way.
- 9. The attackers avoid the watchmen by assembling or arriving at some distance from the city.
- 10. Among the traitors, there are one or a few who remain loyal to the king.
- 11. A loyal friend of the king resides in the vicinity of the city and is a support for the attackers. He receives them hospitably in his home or he serves as advisor and educator of the king's son who was left behind.
- 12. A negotiator is sent to the city, but in vain.
- 13. The king or the negotiator mingles with the traitors and challenges them with words (at a banquet) or with deeds (during solemn games). He is threatened with death, but escapes.
- 14. The city is attacked.
- 15. Among the traitors, a distinguished man from a noble family dies first.
- 16. The king dies, but his supporters do not give up the fight.

- 17. Many years pass in which the supporters of the king fruitlessly try to unite in order to break the power of the traitors.
- 18. The king's son has now reached adulthood. He is informed about the power and kingship to which he is entitled. He then joins the battle.
- 19. A single exile or somebody who had been imprisoned until then, joins the battle. His arrival foreshadows that the end is near.
- 20. One or more of the attackers get inside the city by way of a ruse.
- 21. The two sides, attackers and traitors, meet on the decisive day at a banquet or solemn games.
- 22. Many men who were celebrating unsuspectingly, are massacred.
- 23. The city falls through various wiles, the assistance of the gods, and the practical instructions of seers.
- 24. The attackers are victorious and wreak a terrible revenge. They kill or sacrifice one or more women. They also gather great riches.
- 25. Some of the traitors who have not gone too far astray, are spared or may flee.
- 26. Corpses are transported and buried. This causes more strife and new deaths.
- 27. The aftermath of the war is miserable for the survivors. They are driven to madness and punished by the gods.
- 28. The next cycle of exiles and return dramas begins.

# Discussion of the king story

The four stories together provide enough material for an extensive king story that is independent of specific people and places. It is immediately clear that this larger story must have known numerous variants. Several oral characteristics can be found at different points in the story or in different roles of the characters. For example, we find that the first plan of attack fails, both in the arduous journey of the king to the city and in the death of the king before the city is taken. We also find the meeting between the hostile parties during a banquet or solemn games both in the negotiation before the fight and in the ultimate fall of the city. There is also the single man who decides the fight with his arrival; this parallels with both the king's son and the exile of foreign origin.

The very last story characteristic on the list, the beginning of the next cycle of misery, is nestled within three of the four stories. The stories of Mykenai and Thebes are split in two for this reason. After the failure of the first attempt to attack and the death of the king, there is the opportunity to make the classical transition to the next cycle of misery. The successful attack is therefore known as a separate story. The Trojan cycle is divided into many different stories.

#### The Odyssey as the classic example

The Odyssey provides us with the most detailed version of the king story. It has best preserved the themes and logic of the story and was not split into several separate cycles.

We can conclude that the Odyssey evolved from the king story thanks to several characters and events that stemmed from it. The most important indications are often those in which the older logic of the king story has been replaced by a more recent one, as is preserved in the Odyssey.

An example thereof is Theoklymenos, who gets a lift to Ithaka from Telemachos. However, in the Odyssey that was passed down to us, Theoklymenos disappears completely from view on his arrival in Ithaka. One may wonder then why he is mentioned at all. Thanks to the king story, we may understand that in older versions, Theoklymenos was one of the heroes in the coalition that tried to defeat the suitors.

In the Odyssey, Telemachos tours the palaces of various kings with the purpose of gathering information about his father. In older versions, heroes like Nestor, Menelaos, Peisistratos, and Theoklymenos may very well have been part of the coalition of fighters gathered by Telemachos. This possibility is still suggested by the suitors. Even Orestes and Antilochos, who are mentioned in the Odyssey, are eligible for the role of attacker. The Odyssey clearly no longer has this logic, but it does say that Peisistratos and Theoklymenos travel with Telemachos to Ithaka. The unnatural way in which these companions disappear from sight upon arrival in Ithaka leads us to suppose that the story has previously worked differently. Thus, it appears at the arrival in Ithaka that a man named Peiraios was a travelling companion during this tour. This name seems to be a corruption of Peisistratos, which recalls the great antiquity of the story once more. Peiraios is instructed to provide shelter for Theoklymenos, after which there is no further mention in the Odyssey of any of these coalition members.

The degeneration of Peisistratos to Peiraios indicates that this character may have been of greater importance in older stories. However, we find another important degeneration, namely that of Mentor to Mentes. Both kings have the role of counselor and educator of Telemachos. Yet, they are introduced clearly separately in the Odyssey. Here too we detect the evolution and therefore the antiquity of this important role.

The role of counselor and educator is essential in the king story. We also find a number of other major and minor characters that have this role: Eumaios, the swineherd; Medon, the herald; and Halitherses, an old friend of Odysseus. However, Eurymachos, one of the suitors who is eventually slain by Odysseus, also gives fatherly advice to Telemachos.

The dividing line between those traitors who are spared and those who cannot rely on grace is also outlined carefully in the Odyssey. Thus, the swineherd and cowherd have always remained loyal, while the goatherd is a false traitor. Odysseus makes an analysis of some of the suitors before he kills them. The nobleman Eurymachos and priest Leodes cannot rely on mercy, despite their pleas; however, Phemios, the bard, and Medon, the herald, go unpunished. A significant detail in this context is the fact that Odysseus proposes to the suitors that they should fight or flee, just before he commences the massacre. Unlike the Trojan and Theban cycles, however, none of the traitors in the Odyssey take flight. Therefore, Odysseus' comment points again in the direction of an older story in which there were traitors who took flight.

Finally, there is the negotiation that fails, during a meal or solemn games, in which the good heroes venture among the traitors. In the Odyssey, this event is scattered over several key passages. In the first two chapters, there are two banquets with the suitors. Mentes and Telemachos, and later also Mentor and Halitherses, make a vain attempt to change the suitors' minds. Telemachos and his supporters are threatened and at that moment the suitors begin to hatch their murder plans. More towards the end of the Odyssey, it is Odysseus himself who ventures among the suitors. First in a wrestling game with Iros, the local beggar, and later during a solemn archery contest with the suitors. The fourfold elaboration of the hazardous negotiation attempt in the Odyssey makes us suspect that this story element was very central in the king story.

Regarding the Odyssey, we can conclude that it has its own collection of local characters, who are not derived from other known stories. The storyline and the most important scenes stem directly from the king story. Although many of the characters' roles have weakened and changed over time, the original themes are well preserved in general.

### And what of the Iliad?

The Iliad is a cardinal source of information about the oldest Greek mythology. Thus, in part II, we will use the Iliad to distinguish in detail the oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition. But what of the king story in the Iliad? What can we find in its architecture and themes? The king story appears to have been so popular that it left certain traces behind on the main lines of the Iliad. Let us consider the following aspects (in brackets are the locations in the Iliad, ranging from chapters I to XXIV):

- King Achilleus is betrayed by Agamemnon. During the greater part of the story, he will remain absent. (I)
- The Greek army is collected but dissolves immediately. (II)
- The Trojans are warned by a watchman. (II)
- The main characters of the Greek coalition are listed and characterized. (II and III)
- The Greeks and Trojans negotiate and organize a duel. (III and VII)
- Some remain loyal to Achilleus, while others choose the camp of Agamemnon. (IX)
- A ruthless war is fought. (IV-XXII)
- The Trojans are frivolous and celebrate. (VIII and X)
- After the death of Patroklos, Achilleus joins the fight. (XVI-XX)
- The fall of Troy is symbolized by the death of Hektor. (VI, XXII, and XXIV)
- Achilleus wreaks a terrible revenge. (XXII)

- Corpses are transported. (VII and XVII-XXIV)
- The Trojans are mad with grief and forecast their own demise. (VI, XXII, and XXIV)

It is immediately clear that the Iliad did not grow from the king story. There is no king's son nor is it clear how we should distinguish between the two camps. Are we talking about the enmity between Achilleus and Agamemnon or that between the Greeks and the Trojans? At most, it can be said that certain themes and motifs of the king story have ended up in the Iliad somewhat arbitrarily. Thus, it may well be that the end of the Iliad is determined by the motif of the transportation of corpses and the misery that follows from this.

It has appeared already from the above analysis of other stories that neither Achilleus nor the Trojan cycle as a whole are typical of the king story. Regarding the creation of the Iliad, therefore, we may make little progress with the discovery of the king story.

### **Story types**

"The king story" described in this chapter can be considered a *story type*, of which the stories about Ithaka and other cities are concrete examples. It is difficult to say how many different types of story prevailed in prehistorical Greece. In the next chapter, we discover "the hero story" via the same method. This is a story type with many more examples than the king story. A third story type is the *tele-story*, which will only be introduced here to show that the Alpha-tradition consists of more than the king story and the hero story.

# Chapter 3

# The hero story

### Discovering evolution via special roles

Greek mythology has an almost inexhaustible range of heroes, some of whom are better known than others. Many stories in this chapter deal with very typical heroes, who defeat vicious enemies through their great strength, bravery, and intelligence. We have already seen some heroes in the king stories, like Odysseus, Agamemnon, and Achilleus. Yet, other heroes, like Bellerophontes and the famous twins Kastor and Polydeukes, also show many similarities in their biographies.

The many hero stories will enable us to get a grip on the evolution of the Alpha-tradition. Namely, certain oral characteristics evolve from others. For instance, we will conclude that the defeating of mythical monsters is an oral characteristic that was applied to stories about the looting of cattle. Just like a number of other oral characteristics, the fighting of mythical monsters derives from the Near East. For this reason, the stories are arranged according to a certain logic. We start with those stories that are richest in detail and various external influences, after which we will slowly penetrate the core.

Greek mythology is unmistakably influenced by stories from the Middle East. The many common oral characteristics have been studied by scientists such as West (1997) and Burkert (2004). Through the hero stories, we may also find parallels that, to my knowledge, have not been described previously. They follow from the discovery of very old patterns and stories that have been spread over a large area. However, we will go one step further in this chapter. After his investigation of the Eastern oral traditions, West concluded that Greek mythology and the Homeric works evolved as a whole from Eastern stories. By uncovering the core of the hero story, we discover that the Eastern oral characteristics are not the oldest in Greek mythology. The hero story appears to be older than the many influences from the East.

Furthermore, the discovery of the hero story will also allow for many new explanations and interpretations of all kinds of details in the surviving Greek literature. These range from the relationship between the hero and his educators, via an etymological explanation of the name Odysseus, to motifs like a wounded foot.

In order to analyze the hero story at the end of this chapter, in the section "Discussion of the hero story," the reader should bear some characteristics well in mind: the hero, his parents and educators, the place from where he comes and where he achieves his fame, his allies, and the enemies and monsters he fights. This will allow us to distinguish the many roles that certain people, animals, and places play, and to retrace the necessary evolutions of those roles.

# **Extensively tested heroes**

In this section, we zoom in on the stories of four classical heroes: Theseus, Perseus, Herakles, and Bellerophontes. A striking similarity in their lives is the series of heroic deeds they undertook. It goes without saying that this is not unimportant in our attempt to discover the history of development of the Greek hero story. The extensively tested heroes relate to the hero story as Troy relates to the king story: their stories are composed of many stories that are arranged in an expandable pattern over time. Only in the sections that follow, from "Divine heroes" to "Authentic heroes" will we see that a single heroic act is a sufficient basis for a hero story.

## Hero story 1: Theseus

The hero Theseus is known as the brave young man who defeated the Minotaur, a monster, half man, half bull, that devoured people in the middle of a labyrinth on the island of Krete. Theseus killed the Minotaur with the help of Ariadne and the thread she gave him, the so-called "thread of Ariadne." However, this story is just a small part of Theseus' overall story. Here is the full story: Aigeus, king of Athens, married Princess Aethra from Troizena, a small town on the coast of the Peloponnese. Already on their wedding night, however, Aethra was unfaithful to her husband. After making love with him, she waded through the sea from Troizena to the island of Sphairia. There, she made love once more, this time with the god Poseidon. After this double intercourse, Aethra became pregnant with Theseus.

However, Aigeus was also unfaithful to his wife. When he discovered that his wife was pregnant, he left her behind in Troizena and returned to Athens. However, he asked her that if she should have a son to raise him into a strong man. He put a sword and sandals under a heavy stone. When the son was strong enough to lift the sword, he should go to Athens with these objects. In this way, Aigeus would recognize him and make him the heir to the throne.

Theseus grew into a strong man. He inherited both the human features of Aigeus and the divine traits of Poseidon. When he became an adult, Aethra told him about his true origins and the mission he had to accomplish. Theseus lifted the stone and went with the sandals and sword to Athens.

Along the way, Theseus encountered three bandits. The first was Sinis, a bandit so strong he could bend pine trees. He tied every passerby to two pine trees that he bent towards each other. He then let the trees loose, so that his victims were torn apart. The second bandit, Skiron, waited for his victims along a narrow mountain pass on a cliff. He forced everyone who passed by to wash his feet. When they knelt to do so, he kicked them into the abyss. The third bandit was Prokrustes. He offered passersby a place to sleep. He stretched those who were too small for his bed until they fit inside. From those who were too big, he cut the feet and head. Theseus killed all three bandits by making them undergo exactly the same tortures as their victims had undergone. In this way, he made safe the narrow passage between Athens and the Peloponnesian peninsula.

Meanwhile, Aigeus had remarried, this time with Medeia. Together they ruled over Athens. When Theseus arrived to them, he did not immediately reveal himself to Aigeus, but Medeia recognized him at once as the son of her husband. She devised a cunning plan to kill Theseus, because she wanted her own son Medon to be the heir in Athens. Thus, she commanded Theseus to kill the bull of Marathon. When it emerged that Theseus had succeeded in this task, she tried to poison him. Just at that moment, however, Aigeus recognized his son by the sandals and sword he was carrying with him. He was just in time to slap the cup of poison from Theseus' hands and Medeia was exiled abroad.

After Aigeus had been united with his son, he prepared him for the kingship in Athens. However, there remained a major problem for the Athenians. Each year, seven boys and seven girls had to be brought to Krete as food for the Minotaur, a monster that was half bull and half human. If this was not fulfilled, King Minos would start a war against Athens. Therefore, Theseus undertook a heroic deed for his father. He let himself be carried away to Krete as one of the seven boys, with the aim of killing the Minotaur.

Upon his arrival on Krete, Theseus fell in love with Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, and she with him. Ariadne helped Theseus to defeat the Minotaur. The monster was wandering in a huge labyrinth into which the boys and girls were brought. Ariadne gave Theseus a sword and a very long thread, which he could begin to unroll when he entered the labyrinth. This enabled Theseus to kill the Minotaur and then to find his way back to the exit of the labyrinth together with the other boys and girls.

Theseus returned to Athens together with Ariadne and the other boys and girls. However, his luck did not last long, because the gods turned against him. His beloved Ariadne was killed on the island of Dia by Artemis, the archer goddess, while Theseus himself was cursed and forgot the deal he had made with his father that if he succeeded in his mission, he would hoist a white sail on his return. If not, the ship, returning without the 14 youngsters, would hoist a black sail. Theseus, however, forgot to hoist the white sail. As a result, Aigeus, who was watching from the cliffs as the ship returned with a black sail hoisted, committed suicide by jumping into the sea. Since then, the sea has been called the Aegean Sea.

In this story, we can of course distinguish many oral characteristics. We will discover the most important ones, one by one in the course of this chapter. A first oral characteristic is that of *the hero who achieves fame abroad*. Theseus proves himself first in Athens and after that also in Krete. This universal theme is equally applicable in our modern times as compared to 3500 years ago. Who does not know the chorus of the song about New York: "If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere!"

Let us also distinguish the roles in the story that deserve our special attention: those of the allies and enemies, of the different places, and of the animals and monsters. Just like in the king story, we can gather such roles into a schema, as shown in Table 3.1.

Theseus	The hero		
Troizena and	The places of origin of the hero		
Sphairia			
Athens	The place where the hero becomes king		
Krete	The place where the hero achieves fame		
Aigeus	The father and king who gives commands, but who dies		
	due to the negligence of the hero		
Aethra	The mother and educator of the hero		
Medeia	A wicked woman who wishes the death of the hero		
Ariadne	An ally of the hero and the princess whom he marries		
Sinis, Skiron, Prokrustes, the bull Monsters killed by the hero		rs killed by the hero	
of Marathon, and the Minotaur			

**Table 3.1:** Role schema of the biography of Theseus.

The following story is about a hero who is no less well known than Theseus: Perseus.

### Hero story 2: Perseus

Of all the heroes who ever had to deal with a cruel monster, Perseus can surely be called the most audacious. Imagine having to kill a monster whose appearance alone can literally petrify you. This monster was Medusa. Once a beautiful woman, Medusa had insulted Athene, who had thereupon transformed her into the ugliest creature on earth. It was the task of Perseus to kill her:

Akrisios, king of Argos, was told by the oracle of Delphi that he would be killed by the son of his daughter. Thereupon, Akrisios locked his daughter Danaë in a bronze chamber. However, the mighty Zeus managed to reach the beautiful Danaë by transforming himself into a golden dust rain. Thus, Zeus made love with Danaë and made her pregnant with a son.

Danaë called her son Perseus. When Akrisios learned this news, he locked Danaë and Perseus in a wooden coffin and threw them into the sea. The pair washed ashore on the island of Seriphos, where they were rescued by Diktys, a fisherman and also the brother of King Polydektes, who reigned over the island. Diktys raised Perseus to adulthood. King Polydektes fell in love with Danaë and wanted to marry her. The love was, however, not mutual and Perseus had to guard his mother constantly against Polydektes. Thus, the cunning king thought awhile. He claimed he wanted to marry another woman, Hippodameia, and organized a big party where all the guests had to bring a horse that could serve as a wedding gift. The poor Perseus, who had been raised by a fisherman, had no horse and had to come to the party empty-handed. He proposed that Polydektes ask for a different gift, whatever he wanted. The king held Perseus to this promise. He asked him to bring the head of Medusa, a monstrous woman with snakes for hair and a face that would turn anyone who looked at it into stone. The gods had punished her in this way, because the adulterous woman had desecrated the temple of Athene.

Athene helped Perseus in his difficult task. She told him to go to the Hesperides, who could equip him with godly weapons and the knowledge he required to defeat the monster. In order to find the Hesperides, Perseus went first to the Graiai in Libya. These were three immortal women who shared a single eye. When they passed the eye from one to the other to look at him, Perseus stole the eye and said he would give it back only in exchange for the location of the sacred garden where the Hesperides lived.

The Hesperides gave Perseus the weapons he needed to defeat Medusa. The helmet of Hades could make him invisible, through the reflective shield of Athene he could look at Medusa without being petrified, and with the sword of Zeus he could cut off her head. From themselves, the Hesperides also gave him a bag in which to store the severed head and finally the sandals of Hermes with which to flee the revenge of Medusa's sisters.

Perseus found Medusa in a cave where she was sleeping with her sisters Stheno and Euryale, two immortal monsters. He approached them unseen and chopped off Medusa's head in the reflection of the mirroring shield. Thanks to the sandals of Hermes, he was then able to flee.

On his way back to Seriphos, Perseus passed along Ethiopia. There, he met his wife Andromeda. In order to marry her, he first had to defeat the sea monster Ketos for King Kepheus and his wife Kassiopeia. Once he had succeeded in so doing, he was attacked by an army of marriage rivals. Perseus petrified them all by taking the head of Medusa from the bag. Together with Andromeda, Perseus continued to the island where he had been raised.

In the meantime, Danaë had suffered greatly from the continuing advances of Polydektes. When Perseus arrived in Seriphos, he gave Polydektes the promised wedding gift. He took the head of Medusa from the bag once



Figure 5: Perseus petrifies Andromeda's suitors with the head of Medusa.

more and thus petrified Polydektes. Perseus appointed Diktys the new king and he himself travelled further on to Argos, where it was his destiny to kill his grandfather, Akrisios. Perseus discovered this destiny, however, and went into voluntary exile. Nevertheless, Perseus and Akrisios were both present at the funeral games of the king of Larissa. Akrisios died after being hit by the disc thrown by Perseus during the games. Perseus later became the founder of Mykenai, which he built near Argos.

We may wonder why, for heaven's sake, Perseus promised Polydektes any present from him that he would name. Would it not have been easier to find a horse after all? It must be said that, in that case, Perseus' exploits would quickly have lost their gloss for posterity. However, by comparing this with other hero stories we recognize a universal oral characteristic in the promise of Perseus: *the formal agreement between the hero and the king who gives orders*. For some reason, the hero always comes in debt to a mighty king, after which it is the custom that the king can ask the hero for anything. The role schema of the story of Perseus' life can be found in Table 3.2.

Perseus	The hero	
Argos and Seriphos	The places of origin of the hero	
Mykenai	The city founded by the hero	
Danaë	The mother and educator of the hero	
Diktys	The wise educator of the hero	
Akrisios	The grandfather who banishes the hero in his	
	youth and who is later slain by the hero	
Polydektes and	Kings who give a command to the hero	
Kepheus		
Medusa and Ketos	Monsters killed by the hero	
The Hesperides, the	Allies of the hero	
Graiai, and the gods		

Table 3.2: Role schema of the biography of Perseus.

In the next story, about the hero Herakles, we will see that Perseus had the easier challenge.

### Hero story 3: Herakles

Of all the Greek heroes to have lived before the Trojan War, Herakles is the most famous. He is known to many by his Roman name: Hercules. His main characteristic is his exceptional power, although he also shows some ingenuity from time to time. On the orders of Eurystheus, he had to execute 12 superhuman labors. The most important occurrences in his extensive biography are as follows:

Alkmene, the wife of the Theban king Amphitryon, was one of the many women who had slept with Zeus. To the chagrin of Hera, Alkmene conceived a son with Zeus. In order to punish her husband, and because she loved Mykenai and Sparta better than Thebes, Hera played a trick on Zeus. On the day that Alkmene was to give birth, she made Zeus swear an oath: the descendant of Zeus to be born on that day would rule over all its neighbors. Zeus did not see through the ruse and swore the oath. However, Hera then hurried to Mykenai to ensure that Eurystheus, an indirect descendant of Zeus via Perseus, was born before Alkides (Herakles). This made the king's son in Thebes subordinate to his son in Mykenai. On the same night, Alkmene had also been fertilized by her husband Amphitryon. Thus, she gave birth to a twin. The son descended from Zeus they called Alkides, the son of Amphitryon, Iphikles. However, fearing the wrath of Hera, Alkmene left Alkides behind as a foundling. The poor infant was found by Athene, his divine half-sister, who brought him to Olympos and left him in the care of Hera. Hera did not recognize the infant and she suckled him out of pity. However, Alkides sucked so hard that Hera dropped him in pain. Her milk squirted from Olympos into the vast heavens and formed the Milky Way. Hera refused to raise Alkides any longer. However, by drinking her milk, Alkides had been invested with superhuman power.

Not knowing what else to do, Athene brought Alkides back to earth to his parents in Thebes. They took him back into their family and renamed him Herakles, which means "fame for Hera," in order to propitiate the mighty goddess. This did not help much, however. Hera sent two serpents to Herakles' cradle to kill him. Iphikles cried out in fear, but Herakles strangled the two serpents with his bare baby hands. Because of this act, the seer Teiresias made the prediction that Herakles would defeat many monsters during his lifetime.

As a child, Herakles killed his music teacher with a lyre. As a punishment, Herakles was sent to the mountains by Amphitryon, to herd cattle.

When Herakles grew up, he married Megara, daughter of Kreon, and had several children with her. However, Hera continued to plague Herakles. She brought him into a state of madness, in which he killed his wife and all his children. Upset by his blind act, Herakles fled to seek the advice of the famous oracle of Delphi. There, he learned that he would only be purged from his sin after serving King Eurystheus for 10 years and by executing his every command.

Eurystheus ordered Herakles to conduct 10 major labors that no ordinary mortal could ever accomplish; however, Herakles succeeded in executing each in turn. He skinned the lion of Nemea; he defeated the many-headed Hydra of Lerna; he caught the Keryneian hind and also the Erymanthian boar. He then used the skin of the lion as armor, bore a huge club with him, and used the poisonous blood of the Hydra in which to sop his arrows. When he brought these monsters to Eurystheus, Eurystheus was so frightened that he hid underground in a bronze jar from where he could safely observe whether Herakles accomplished his tasks effectively. Herakles then cleaned the stables of Augeas by leading two rivers through them. He killed the Stymphalian birds, caught the bull of Krete, and tamed the carnivorous horses of Diomedes. As his final tasks, he stole the belt of Hippolyte and led the cattle of Geryon from their pastures. With this, Herakles had accomplished all the tasks that Eurystheus had commanded.

However, Herakles was still not purified of his crime for Eurystheus did not accept that two of the tasks had been properly fulfilled. When cleaning the stables, Herakles had – in violation of the rules – asked Augeas for a wage, while in killing the many-headed Hydra, he had been assisted by his charioteer Ioloas, the son of Iphikles.

Therefore, Eurystheus devised two new tasks. The first was to steal the apples of the Hesperides, which hung in the paradisiacal garden guarded by the Hesperides. The tree itself was guarded by a hundred-headed serpent. For this task, Herakles also required help. He asked Atlas, who carried the heavens on his shoulders and who was the father of the Hesperides, to bring the apples for him. In return, Herakles would take over from him the burden of the heavens. Atlas stole the apples from the garden but suggested to Herakles that he bring the apples to Eurystheus himself. Herakles agreed, but cunningly asked Atlas to relieve him from carrying the heavens for a moment so he could better arrange his garment. Once Atlas had the heavens back on his shoulders, Herakles fled with the apples.

The twelfth and final task that Eurystheus assigned to Herakles was to capture Kerberos, the three-headed hellhound, and bring him to Mykenai. For this, Herakles had to descend into the underworld. He struggled with Kerberos until he surrendered and followed Herakles obediently. Eurystheus locked himself up in his own dungeon out of fear of the terrible monster.

After fulfilling these tasks, Herakles was purified from his sin and became a free man. He experienced countless adventures. For instance, he joined the Argonauts, a group of heroes that was seeking the Golden Fleece, a sheep fleece of pure gold.

Herakles took revenge on those who had mistreated him. He destroyed the cities of Laomedon and Augeas, because these kings had withheld from him a reward. Even the gods had to endure evil from Herakles. He struck several gods with his arrows, including Hera, whom he struck in the right breast with a barbed arrow. Nessus, a centaur, half man and half horse, assaulted Deianira, Herakles' last wife, whereupon Herakles struck him in the heart with an arrow.

Herakles had children with numerous women and remarried several times. Eventually, he met a terrible end by the actions of Deianira. Hoping to win back his love, she gave him a cloak soaked with the blood of Nessus. The cloak, however, tore the flesh from Herakles bones. Both Deianira and Herakles committed suicide. After his death, Herakles was included among the gods on Olympos.

Herakles	The hero		
Thebes	The place of origin of the hero		
Mykenai	The place where the hero swears allegiance to		
	the king		
Hera	The educator and arch-enemy	for whom the hero	
	commits glorious deeds		
Amphitryon	The wise educator		
Herakles' music	The educator who is killed by the hero		
teacher			
Eurystheus	The king who wishes the hero dead and who		
	gives him orders		
Ioloas and Atlas	Allies of the hero who will be rewarded for their		
	efforts		
Athene	A divine ally of the hero		
Diomedes, Augeas,	Hostile, greedy kings who owe the hero a reward		
and Laomedon			
Megara and Deianira	Princesses who marry the hero		
The Nemean Lion, the Hydra of Lerna, the Keryneian		Monsters or	
hind, the Erymanthian boar, the Stymphalian birds,		animals that the	
the bull of Krete, the horses of Diomedes, the cattle		hero catches or	
of Geryon, and the hellhound Kerberos		kills	

**Table 3.3:** Role schema of the biography of Herakles.

Table 3.3 presents the role schema of the biography of Herakles. His full biography is the most comprehensive of all the Greek hero stories. Many details are not mentioned here, including a whole series of women who crossed his path. It seems that Herakles once impregnated 50 women in a single night, all of whom, miraculously, bore sons. Modern science tells us that the chance of so doing is less than one in a trillion, making it very probable that the ancient Greeks falsified their ancestral trees.

An important oral characteristic in this story is *the glory for the educator*. The great deeds of the hero also reflect on the person who has motivated the hero. Herakles apparently had several educators, one of whom is hidden in his name: Hera, the mightiest of all goddesses. We have already found the occurrence of the gods in the stories of Theseus and Perseus and we will find more examples in the section "Divine heroes."

#### Hero story 4: Bellerophontes

The last hero in the section "Extensively tested heroes" is Bellerophontes. This hero is not as famous as Theseus, Perseus, or Herakles, and unlike this trio his story is fully reflected in the Iliad.

In chapters V and VI of the Iliad, a total war had erupted between the Greeks and Trojans on the battlefield between the walls of Troy and the Greek ship camp. Diomedes, son of Tydeus, is the brave hero who surprises friend and foe by his great deeds. He even fights the gods who are supporting the Trojans. In chapter VI, he confronts Glaukos, son of Hippolochos. Before they start a duel, Diomedes asks Glaukos for his origin, and Glaukos responds with a long story about the exploits of Bellerophontes, his noble ancestor:

"High-hearted son of Tydeus, why ask of my generation? As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity. The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning. So one generation of men will grow while another dies. Yet if you wish to learn all this and be certain of my genealogy: there are plenty of men who know it. There is a city, Ephyre, in the corner of horse-pasturing Argos; there lived Sisyphos, that sharpest of all men, Sisyphos, Aiolos' son, and he had a son named Glaukos, and Glaukos in turn sired Bellerophontes the blameless. To Bellerophontes the gods granted beauty and desirable manhood; but Proitos in anger devised evil things against him, and drove him out of his own domain, since he was far greater, from the Argive<sup>1</sup> country Zeus had broken to the sway of his scepter. Beautiful Anteia the wife of Proitos was stricken with passion to lie in love with him, and yet she could not beguile valiant Bellerophontes, whose will was virtuous. So she went to Proitos the king and uttered her falsehood: 'Would you be killed, O Proitos? Then murder Bellerophontes who tried to lie with me in love, though I was unwilling'. So she spoke, and anger took hold of the king at her story. He shrank from killing him, since his heart was awed by such action, but sent him away to Lykia, and handed him murderous symbols, which he inscribed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>The Greeks are called either Achaians, Argives, or Danaäns in the Iliad and the Odyssey. The name Graeci for Greeks was used by the Romans and stems from a later time. Hellenes is used only twice, and only in the catalogue of ships of the Iliad.

in a folding tablet, enough to destroy life, and told him to show it to his wife's father, that he might perish. Bellerophontes went to Lykia in the blameless convoy of the gods; when he came to the running stream of Xanthos, and Lykia, the lord of wide Lykia tendered him full-hearted honor. Nine days he entertained him with sacrifice of nine oxen, but afterward when the rose fingers of the tenth dawn showed, then he began to question him, and asked to be shown the symbols, whatever he might be carrying from his son-in-law', Proitos. Then after he had been given his son-in-laws wicked symbols first he sent him away with orders to kill the Chimaira none might approach; a thing of immortal make, not human, lion-fronted and snake behind, a goat in the middle, and snorting out the breath of the terrible flame of bright fire. He killed the Chimaira, obeying the portents of the immortals. Next after this he fought against the glorious Solymoi, and this he thought was the strongest battle with men that he entered; but third he slaughtered the Amazons, who fight men in battle. Now as he came back the king spun another entangling treachery; for choosing the bravest men in wide Lykia he laid a trap, but these men never came home thereafter since all of them were killed by blameless Bellerophontes. Then when the king knew him for the powerful stock of the god, he detained him there, and offered him the hand of his daughter, and gave him half of all the kingly privilege. Thereto the men of Lykia cut out a piece of land, surpassing all others, fine ploughland and orchard for him to administer. His bride bore three children to valiant Bellerophontes, Isandros and Hippolochos and Laodameia. Laodameia lay in love beside Zeus of the counsels and bore him godlike Sarpedon of the brazen helmet. But after Bellerophontes was hated by all the immortals, he wandered alone about the plain of Aleios, eating his heart out, skulking aside from the trodden track of humanity. As for Isandros his son, Ares the insatiate of fighting killed him in close battle against the glorious Solymoi, while Artemis of the golden reins killed the daughter in anger. But Hippolochos begot me, and I claim that he is my father; he sent me to Troy, and urged upon me repeated injunctions, to be always among the bravest, and hold my head above others, not shaming the generation of my fathers, who were the greatest men in Ephyre and again in wide Lykia. Such is my generation and the blood I claim to be born from." (Iliad VI 145-211)

This story of Bellerophontes is the most complete hero story that we can find in the Iliad. The main stages of the life of Bellerophontes are described, starting from a young man who makes a name for himself, to an old father who loses his son. A special role in this story is reserved for the king of Lykia. He is not mentioned by name, but can be regarded as *the king who lets the hero make a name for himself*. Before his arrival at the court of Lykia, Bellerophontes is an ordinary young man. The king of Lykia turns out to be a teacher who makes of Bellerophontes a great hero and rewards him with valuable gifts. Other people also have a special significance, as is evidenced by the role schema.

Bellerophontes	The hero
Ephyre in Argos	The birthplace of the hero
Lykia in Asia Minor	The place where the hero achieves fame
Anteia	A wicked woman who wants to kill the hero
King Proitos	An authoritative person in the youth of the hero
The king of Lykia	The instructing king
The tablet with fatal	A formal agreement
signs	
The gods	Allies of the hero
The princess of Lykia	The woman who marries the hero
The Solymoi and the	Enemies who are fought
Amazons	
The Chimaira	A fabulous monster that is slain

The tablet with signs is included in the role schema in Table 3.4 as a special story element. This reference in the Iliad is often cited by experts, because it is the only place in the whole of the Iliad or the Odyssey where the art of writing is mentioned. The fact that the signs are furthermore described as depraved and encrypting an evil message may, I believe, indicate a certain distrust of writing in the Dark Ages. In the context of the hero story, however, the script characters fit as a formal agreement between the hero and the king, just like Perseus and Herakles had a strict penalty contract.

The Chimaira and Pegasus, the written signs and the multiple trials, connect this story about Bellerophontes with later influences within the oral tradition. At the end of this chapter, in the section "Discussion of the hero story," we will learn more about this.

With that, we can close the section "Extensively tested heroes." Yet, we must mention one more hero story here, namely that of Odysseus, the cunning king of Ithaka. Because of the many trials he underwent according to the will of Poseidon, the wrathful god of the sea, the story of Odysseus also belongs in this section. We will also find his long journey to the ocean (Okeanos) and his long, painful captivity there (with Kalypso) in other hero stories.

We will also encounter Odysseus a second time in this series of hero stories. As will be shown later, a hero story in the Odyssey about the youth of Odysseus is one of the most authentic.

# **Divine heroes**

In the section "Extensively tested heroes," we saw the clear interference of the gods in the lives of the heroes. The stories in the section "Divine heroes" go one step further. The gods themselves now take a leading role. We may wonder at this point whether we are still uncovering the Alpha-tradition. The stories of the gods do not seem to be the most authentic hero stories. To settle this question, we must wait for the section "Discussion of the hero story" later in this chapter. The god stories will be very instructive in uncovering the universal features of the hero story.

## Hero story 5: Hephaistos

A particularly intriguing Greek god is Hephaistos, the god of fire and metalwork and son of Hera and Zeus. To the Romans, he became known as Vulcan, the blacksmith who forges tools deep under the earth in volcanic temperatures. What makes Hephaistos so intriguing is the similarities he exhibits with a series of famous mythological figures. We will discover them one by one, although it can be said here already that all these figures, unlike Hephaistos, are humans rather than gods.

The story of Hephaistos can be reconstructed on the basis of three passages in the Iliad (I 571-594, XV 18-30, and XVIII 393-407) and the Progymnasmata of the Roman Libianus.

Hephaistos, the son of Hera and Zeus, was the god of fire and metalwork. One day, his parents had a fight over Hercules, the demigod whom Zeus had fathered with Alkmene. Hera had brought Herakles off course with ferocious storms during the tasks he had to perform for Eurystheus. This aroused the anger of Zeus so much that he chained Hera by her hands and feet to set an example for the other gods. Hephaistos attempted to rescue his mother, but he was caught by Zeus who took him by his foot and hurled him from heaven on Mount Olympos to the earth. There, he was found by the Sintians on the volcanic island of Lemnos, and they took good care of him. Since this incident, Hephaistos had limped on one foot.

Hera was so embarrassed by her son's lame foot that she flung him once more from Olympos. He was found by Thetis and Eurynome, the daughter of Okeanos, who suckled him as if he was their own child. Hephaistos spent nine long years in a cave on an island in the middle of the ocean. Except for Thetis and Eurynome, nobody knew where he was. Hephaistos repaid the goddesses for his upbringing by carrying out many works. Many were the beautiful artworks he forged for them, including an inviolable armor for Achilleus, Thetis' son.

Later, Hephaistos took revenge on his mother. To this end, he made a magnificent throne for her, adorned with many gems, but the gift was poisoned. When Hera sat down on the throne, she was detained by an ingenious mechanism, so that she could no longer stand up. Since Hephaistos was the only one among the gods and humans who could liberate Hera, the gods decided to take him back to Olympos.

Hephaistos	The (anti-)hero who receives no gratitude from
	his own mother
Olympos	The place of origin of the hero
The earth	A place of captivity where the hero finds good
	caretakers
Hera and Zeus	The quarreling parents who cast the hero out
Thetis and Eurynome	The good educators for whom the hero performs
	great deeds

Table 3.5: Role schema of the adventures of Hephaistos.

The first human with whom I will compare Hephaistos is the hero Herakles. Hephaistos and Herakles exhibit some striking similarities. To begin with, they both have a love-hate relationship with Hera, by whom they were suckled and later disowned. For both, this is the start of many great deeds. As shown in the above story, both are involved in the same dispute between the supreme gods Hera and Zeus. They both take revenge on Hera and both are eventually included amongst the eternal gods on Olympos. This may suggest that Hephaistos and Herakles partially derive from the same mythological figure. A modern example of such an evolution is Santa Claus, who derives via the Dutch Sinterklaas partially from the Norse God Odin and partially from a – probably legendary – Christian saint on the west coast of Turkey.

Hephaistos and Herakles also show clear similarities in their physical characteristics. Both are extremely strong. Hephaistos is often given the epithet "mighty-armed," yet, because of his lame leg, he is also the "lame-legged." In the Iliad (XVIII 410-417), we learn more about his stature:

He rose from the anvil, a huge, panting bulk, limping along, but beneath him his slender legs moved nimbly. (...) With a sponge he wiped his face and both his hands, and his mighty neck and shaggy breast, and put on a tunic, and grasped a stout staff, and went out limping.

Could it be that both Hephaistos and Herakles represent the same archetype of the tough muscle bundled with a huge upper body on thin legs? Halfnaked and with a huge stick, club, or hammer in hand, they give a much rougher impression than other Greek heroes.

### Hero story 6: Hera and Zeus

Even Hera and Zeus, the supreme gods who rule over all the other Olympian gods, can be found as the main actors of a hero story. The main part of the story is found in the Iliad (XIV 193-360):

Hera and Zeus, the couple who reigned over the Olympic gods, were both children of Rhea and Kronos. However, a curse seemed to dog the lineage of the gods, with every marriage degenerating into dreadful quarrels. Rhea and Kronos were no different. A prediction was made to Kronos that he would be expelled from power by his own child and to escape this fate, he ate all his children by Rhea, including Hera, her brothers Poseidon and Hades, and her sisters Demeter and Hestia. When Rhea gave birth to Zeus, her sixth child, she could no longer tolerate this habit of her brother and husband. She left Zeus behind somewhere as a foundling and gave the unsuspecting Kronos a stone to eat instead. Zeus was thereafter raised by a goat.

When Zeus grew to adulthood, he took revenge on Kronos at the instigation of his mother. He gave Kronos an emetic, making him spew the stone and the five other gods. Kronos was then banished to the underworld. Hera was brought to the palace of Tethys and Okeanos, who raised her and cared for her kindly. When Hera had grown to adulthood and married Zeus, violent quarrels rose again between the couple because of the children that Zeus had fathered with other goddesses. Therefore, much to the anger of Zeus, Hera tried to thwart Herakles. With the help of Hypnos, the god of sleep, she could act freely to send Herakles off course with ferocious storms. Another time, she tricked Zeus, while he was supporting the Trojans in their fight against the Greeks. She asked Aphrodite for her girdle of Love and Desire, while to Hypnos, she swore a solemn oath that he would marry Pasithea if he put Zeus to sleep. She then went to Troy to entice Zeus to sleep with her. She claimed to be heading to Tethys and Okeanos, her educators, in order to reconcile them after an argument. However, when they lay down together, Hypnos put Zeus in a deep sleep. Hera then incited Poseidon to help the Greeks in battle, and the Trojans were hit hard.

Hera and Zeus	The heroes who start quarreling
Kronos and Rhea	The bad parents of the heroes
Tethys, Okeanos, and	The good, wise educators
the goat	
Troy	The location of the exploits
Aphrodite, Hypnos,	The supporters of the heroine
and Poseidon	
Pasithea	The woman who is given in marriage to the ally

**Table 3.6:** Role schema of the quarrel between Hera and Zeus.

This is, in any case, not an authentic story. It appears more to be an imitation of a hero story with people in the lead roles. Although the story provides explanations about the ancestors of the main gods, we seem to have arrived far from the oldest mythology. In any case, this is an important conclusion for reaching a relative dating of the many stories.

## Hero story 7: Kastor and Polydeukes

In the role schemas of the hero stories, we have until now regularly seen that a supporter assists the hero, as Ariadne assists Theseus and Ioloas does Herakles. In some hero stories, no distinction can be made any longer between the hero and his supporter. Both are heroes who go through fire and water for each other. The best example are the famous twins that were immortalized as a constellation:

Tyndareos and Leda were the king and queen of Sparta. Together, they bore the twins Kastor and Polydeukes. However, Polydeukes was not sired by Tyndareos; in the same night in which Kastor was begotten, Leda had also slept with Zeus, who was disguised as a swan. Exactly the same happened for the sisters of the twins: Klytaimestra was the daughter of Tyndareos, while Helen was descended from Zeus.

Thirteen years later, Helen was kidnapped by Theseus, the king of Athens, and Peirithoös. They brought her to Athens, where she served as a slave for Aethra, the mother of Theseus, until she was old enough to marry. However, Theseus and Peirithoös were overconfident and were captured by Hades in the underworld.

Kastor and Polydeukes launched a revenge expedition. They gathered soldiers in Sparta and went to Athens. Overwhelmed by the superior numbers and without the leadership of their king Theseus, the Athenians were forced to give Helen back. Kastor and Polydeukes also kidnapped Aethra, brought her to Sparta, and made her the maid of Helen.

Kastor and Polydeukes wanted to marry Phoebe and Hilaira, respectively, the two daughters of Leukippos. Unfortunately, these two were already betrothed to the cousins of the Spartan twins, Idas and Lynkeos, who lived in Thebes and were also twins. Therefore, Kastor and Polydeukes kidnapped the women they desired and brought them to Sparta. Polydeukes married Phoebe and Kastor married Hilaira. Both women bore sons: Phoebe to Mnesileos and Hilaira to Anogon.

Apparently, the four cousins repaired their relationship, as they undertook a theft of cattle together in Arkadia. When it was time to partition the herd, however, they resumed fighting. Idas then made a cunning proposal: they would sever a calf into four equal pieces and eat it as fast as possible. The twins that finished first would be given the entire herd. Kastor and Polydeukes agreed to this, not realizing that Idas had an extraordinary appetite. Idas immediately ate both his own portion and that of Lynkeos, and went away with all the animals.

Kastor and Polydeukes devised a plan to take revenge. When the cousins from Thebes were invited to Sparta one day, they decided to leave the party prematurely while their sister Helen took care of the guests. In this way, they had the chance to rob back the herd of Idas and Lynkeos. However, the Spartan twins were not quick enough in robbing the herd. Upon the return of the Theban twins, Kastor, who was on the lookout, was slain by Idas. When Polydeukes dropped in, he managed to kill Lynkeos, but he would have been killed by Idas himself if his father Zeus had not intervened. The mighty god killed Idas with a thunderbolt in order to save his own son.

Zeus gave Polydeukes the choice to become entirely immortal himself or to become half immortal and share the other half with his twin brother. Polydeukes chose the latter, upon which the two brothers moved every other day between Olympos and the underworld.

Kastor and Polydeukes	The heroes and each other's allies
Sparta	The place of origin of the heroes
Arkadia, Athens, and Thebes	The places where the heroes gain fame
Idas, Lynkeos, Theseus, and	Hostile heroes who are fought
Peirithoös	
Phoebe, Hilaira, and Helen	Women who are kidnapped
The Arkadian cattle	Cattle that are stolen by the heroes

 Table 3.7: Role schema of the biography of Kastor and Polydeukes.

Thus, we have yet another pair of human heroes who were admitted to Olympos. I suspect there must be a reason for all these admissions as Olympians. At some point in time, the Greeks must have become open to new truths and a broader view of reality. Especially when one considers that some of Kastor and Polydeukes' characteristics do not derive from Greece at all, as will be apparent in the subsection "Eastern influences" of the section "Discussion of the hero story."

### Hero story 8: Peirithoös

The story of Peirithoös has some similarities with that of Kastor and Polydeukes. Together with Theseus, Peirithoös forms a close pair, with one having more earthly traits and the other more heavenly traits:

The parents of the hero Peirithoös were Dia and Ixion. However, Ixion was not the real father of the hero, because Dia had slept with Zeus to conceive him. Peirithoös grew into a strong young man, equal to the gods in wisdom. When he reached adulthood, he heard of the fame of Theseus and went to Athens to challenge the hero. He stole the cattle that grazed near Marathon, a town near Athens and Theseus went to war to punish Peirithoös. When the two heroes met, however, they were so impressed with each other's strength and fighting spirit that they laid down their arms and began a close friendship.

Peirithoös and Theseus made a solemn pledge: they would assist each other in kidnapping a woman. Even further, they each desired a daughter of Zeus. First, they kidnapped for Theseus a woman named Helen, the most beautiful on earth, and brought her to Athens. However, Peirithoös made a foolish choice: he desired Persephone, goddess of the underworld and wife of Hades. Together, Theseus and Peirithoös descended into the underworld where they were warmly welcomed by Hades, who kindly invited them to partake of a meal. However, Hades had the heroes sit in the seat of oblivion. When they sat down, snakes curled around their limbs and they were trapped forever.

Theseus was freed by Herakles and brought back among ordinary mortals. However, Hades did not let Peirithoös escape. Thus, the two close friends were separated, with Peirithoös in the underworld and Theseus on earth.

Peirithoös	The hero
Athens	The place where the hero achieves fame and
	makes a solemn promise
The underworld	The place where the hero remains in captivity
Theseus	The hostile king, commander, and ally of the
	hero
Hades	The enemy who keeps the hero in captivity
Helen and	The women who bring much mischief
Persephone	
The cattle of Theseus	Animals caught by the hero

 Table 3.8: Role schema of the friendship between Peirithoös and Theseus.

Apparently, there was no longer much room left on Olympos. Therefore, Peirithoös had to serve his sentence in the underworld, where he joined other unfortunates like Tantalos and Sisyphos. Theseus, the most fortunate in this story, was at least permitted to stay on earth during his lifetime. This was the last hero story in the section "Divine heroes." In the next section, "Heroes from Thebes to Troy," we discuss heroes who play an important role in the Theban and Trojan story cycles.

# Heroes from Thebes to Troy

The fame of the many Greek hero stories is very diverse. Achilleus can safely be called a hundred times more famous than a hero like Peirithoös. These differences not only apply to us, they also applied to the Greek audience of 3000 years ago. It is obvious that the more famous stories were much grander and have grown more in detail. Moreover, they have been adapted more often to remain in accordance with other major stories in which the same persons, places, and events played a role. For this reason, some heroes are gathered in this section whose biography is incorporated into the great story cycles about Troy and Thebes.

## Hero story 9: Achilleus

Of all those who fought on the battlefield of Troy, Achilleus was the greatest and brightest hero. His name lives on in all of us, if not in our memories, then at least in the tendon that connects the heel to the lower leg. This vulnerability was the cause of Achilleus' death, as illustrated by the following story:

About the sea goddess Thetis the prophecy was made that she would bear a son who would surpass his father. Zeus had a crush on Thetis, but he dared not sleep with her because of this prophecy. Together with his brother Poseidon, Zeus arranged a marriage for Thetis with a mortal man. This man was Peleus, king of Phthia.

Although Thetis did not love Peleus, she bore a child with him, Achilleus. Thetis tried in vain to make her child immortal. For this purpose, when he was a baby she held Achilleus by one foot over a fire. When Peleus caught Thetis during this act, she let her son fall and ducked back under the sea. Rejected by the people and the Olympic gods, she remained there with the other sea goddesses.

Through the actions of his mother, Achilleus had become inviolable, except in the place where she had held him by his heel. He was brought up by Phoinix, the envoy at the court of Peleus, and Cheiron, a centaur, half man and half horse.

As a young man, Achilleus volunteered with King Agamemnon to free Helen from the Trojans. Achilleus captured many women in the vicinity of Troy, but one day he began a quarrel with Agamemnon over Briseis, one of the captured women. Achilleus swore solemn oaths and refused to fight any longer. However, after much insistence, he let Patroklos fight in his place and with his armor. Thereupon, Patroklos was slain. Achilleus returned to the fight to avenge Patroklos and was rewarded by Agamemnon with precious gifts. Soon after, however, Achilleus himself was slain by an arrow in his vulnerable heel.

Achilleus	The hero whose parents are arguing
Phthia	The place of origin of the hero
Troy	The place where the hero achieves fame
Thetis	The mother who leaves the hero behind with a
	vulnerable foot
Peleus, Phoinix, and	The wise educators of the hero
Cheiron	
Agamemnon	The king to whom the hero swears a solemn oath
	and who later rewards him
Patroklos	The ally who takes the role of the hero
Helen and Briseis	Women who bring much misery

Table 3.9: Role schema of the biography of Achilleus.

Some perhaps know the similarity between Achilleus and Siegfried the Dragon Slayer, who became inviolable by bathing in the blood of the dragon Fafnir. Thus, the Germanic hero remained vulnerable only in one place, between the shoulder blades, because a large leaf had fallen there during his bath. This cost him his life.

Achilleus undoubtedly shares many similarities with other mythological figures, both younger and older on the timeline of history. However, I would like to recall one such figure: Hephaistos, the Greek god of fire and metalwork. Hephaistos was also nursed by Thetis, in the middle of the ocean, after being disowned by his own mother. Thetis was the granddaughter of Tethys, wife of Okeanos and educator of Hera and this suggests that Achilleus, Hephaistos, Thetis, and Hera are all involved in a piece of explanatory mythology in which the origin of the gods is traced back to Okeanos, the ocean. Another clear parallel between Achilleus and Hephaistos is the weak spot on their feet. For both, this weakness symbolizes their earthly, human deficiencies. Moreover, both their divine mothers were dissatisfied with their shortcomings, which was the immediate reason for them abandoning their sons. The logic of this connection recalls that Hephaistos was once a human, who became deified just like Achilleus and Herakles. For Hephaistos, this process completed to such a degree that we now consider him a true god.

Finally, there is the parallel of the son who surpasses his father. Or does he? For Achilleus, this is immediately apparent from the above story, but in what way does Hephaistos surpass his father Zeus? While at present, this seems slightly difficult to explain, when we study the parallels with the East in the subsection "Eastern influences," we will discover that this parallel with Achilleus explains everything about the god Hephaistos.

#### Hero story 10: Agamemnon and Menelaos

Because of his divine traits, we can also fit Achilleus in the section "Divine heroes," where he takes his place amongst such heroes as Hephaistos, Peirithoös, Kastor, and Polydeukes. The brothers Agamemnon and Menelaos, on the other hand, are akin to the heroes who help each other through thick and thin. Their story provides a glimpse into the history of the Trojan War:

Tyndareos and Leda, the king and queen of Sparta, had twins: Helen and Klytaimestra. Yet, the sisters did not have the same father. Leda had slept in the same night with her mortal husband and with the father of the gods. Klytaimestra was the daughter of Tyndareos, while Helen was descended from Zeus.

Helen was an exceptional beauty. When she reached adulthood, many men wanted to marry her, among whom were Menelaos and Agamemnon, two Mykenaian princes, and also Odysseus. Tyndareos, who wanted to give Helen in marriage, had a difficult choice to make. Thus, Odysseus made a cunning proposal to Tyndareos. All the suitors who asked for the hand of Helen had to swear allegiance to her marriage, regardless of the choice that Tyndareos made. So it happened, and Tyndareos chose Menelaos as a husband for Helen, while betrothing Klytaimestra to Agamemnon.

Menelaos and Helen had a daughter, Hermione, while Agamemnon and Klytaimestra had a son, Orestes. However, a great misfortune befell the marriage of Menelaos. Helen was kidnapped by Paris and carried off to Troy. Menelaos then called upon the help of his brother and the other suitors who had sworn allegiance to his marriage. Under the leadership of Agamemnon, they retrieved Helen from the Trojans and led her to Sparta.

Upon their return, Agamemnon was the victim of a conspiracy. His wife Klytaimestra had remarried Aigisthos and together they had Agamemnon murdered.

Agamemnon and	The heroes and each other's allies
Menelaos	
Mykenai	The place of origin of the heroes
Sparta	A neighboring kingdom where the heroes want to
	marry a princess
Tyndareos	The king for whom a pledge of allegiance is sworn
Helen and	The princesses who are married by the king and
Klytaimestra	who bring much mischief
Paris	The enemy who is fought

 Table 3.10: Role schema of the friendship between Menelaos and Agamemnon.

The formal agreement between the king and the hero, as we have already encountered with Perseus, Herakles, and Bellerophontes, is made here between the father of Helen and the Greeks who fought at Troy. This part of the hero story has clearly gained a permanent place in the main story cycle of Greek mythology.

Thus far, we have made only slow progress in the search for the essence of the hero story. Many relationships have emerged that have not provided much clarity about their true origin and meaning. We need to compare all the treated stories. On the basis of the role schema, the structure of the hero story can be more or less discerned.

From this point on, we will concentrate on the core of the hero story. It will appear that the hero story is essentially a psychological tale with a universal meaning. Psychologists have supplied explanations for numerous tales from different cultures with varying success. Armed with this knowledge, we will try to find an in-depth explanation of the hero story.

### Hero story 11: Orestes

Let us take a closer look at the life of Orestes. We have already encountered this hero as the king's son in the king story about Mykenai. Here is a brief

summary of his hero story:

Orestes was born in Mykenai as the son of Agamemnon and Klytaimestra. When he was still young, King Agamemnon left the palace in Mykenai to lead an expedition against the Trojans. To propitiate the gods, Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigeneia, the sister of Orestes. Klytaimestra was so angry because of this act that she decided to kill Agamemnon on his return. She remarried Aigisthos and exiled Orestes from Mykenai. Elektra, another sister, led Orestes to King Strophios, a friend of Agamemnon. There, Orestes was raised together with Pylades, the son of Strophios.

When Orestes grew up and his father was slain by his mother, he undertook a revenge expedition. Together with Pylades and his sister Elektra, he killed Klytaimestra and Aigisthos. He then married Hermione. Because of the murder of his mother, Orestes was pursued by the Erinyes, the goddesses of revenge.

Orestes	The hero whose parents have argued
Mykenai	The place of origin of the hero and where he
	eventually becomes king
Klytaimestra	The wicked mother who is slain by the hero
Strophios	The wise educator
Elektra and Pylades	The allies of the hero
Hermione	The princess whom the hero marries

Table 3.11: Role schema of the heroic deeds of Orestes.

We have already seen several examples of *the hero who kills his educator*. Hitherto, these were mostly unintentional acts: Perseus killed his father during a game with a discus while Theseus was indirectly responsible for his father's suicide, when he forgot to hoist the white sail. Yet, in the previous hero stories, there were also a few deliberate killings. Herakles killed his music teacher, while Perseus killed Polydektes by showing him the head of Medusa. Among the gods there is Zeus who banished his father Kronos to the underworld, which we can consider a euphemism for premeditated murder.

In the king story about Thebes, we found the hero Alkmaon, who was pursued by the Erinyes for the murder of his mother, just like Orestes. As with Orestes and many other heroes, the murder of a parent is always associated with an intense argument between the parents. For a number of heroes, we saw that they had a strongly disturbed relationship with an educator, like Hephaistos and Herakles with Hera, Bellerophontes with King Proitos, and Achilleus with his mother Thetis. In some cases, especially for Hephaistos, there is a real love-hate relationship. The disturbed relationship between the hero and one of his parents is also most often linked to a feud between the parents. This is even true for some of the educators who are not parents, like Danaë and Polydektes for Perseus, and Anteia and Proitos for Bellerophontes.

It appears that a psychological theme emerges that is related to tensions within the family. As yet, this cannot be expressed more accurately. However, let us first study the most famous example of a myth with a psychological theme.

#### Hero story 12: Oidipous

A familiar story in the Theban cycle is that of Oidipous, who gave his name to the Oidipous complex, a development phase in the youth of a child during which the child is attracted to the parent of the opposite sex. The story goes like this:

Laios and Iokaste were king and queen of Thebes. There was a curse on Laios, which he learned of from the oracle at Delphi: he would be killed by his own son. When Iokaste gave birth to a son, Laios tried to escape his fate by letting the child die. He pierced his son's ankles and bound his feet together. He then left him to his fate on Mount Kithairon. However, a Korinthian shepherd found the newborn and brought him to the king and queen of Korinth, Polybos and Merope. The child was baptized Oidipous, which means "swollen foot," because his feet were severely swollen by the cruel treatment.

Oidipous was raised by Polybos and Merope, unaware of the fact that Laios and Iokaste were his real father and mother. When he had matured to adulthood and wanted to know his destiny, Oidipous went to the oracle of Delphi. The oracle told him that he was destined to kill his own father and marry his mother. Oidipous, who believed Polybos and Merope to be his parents, decided not to return to Korinth. Seeking a better destiny, he wandered through the country.

At an intersection of three roads, he met Laios, his real father, who was still king of Thebes. A quarrel erupted between the two men about who had priority on the road. The quarrel escalated and Oidipous killed Laios and his entourage, except for one man, without knowing who Laios was. Thus, the curse that had been cast upon Laios came true. Oidipous continued to wander and eventually arrived in Thebes itself. There, the population was plagued by the Sphinx, a winged monster with the head of a woman and the body of a lion. The Sphinx stopped the Thebans along the mountain passes and asked them to solve a riddle: "What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?" The Thebans, who did not know the answer, were cast in the abyss. Oidipous managed to solve the riddle,<sup>2</sup> after which the Sphinx jumped into the abyss. In gratitude, Oidipous was crowned the new king of Thebes by the Thebans. Thus, Oidipous married Iokaste, his own mother, who bore him several children. In this way, the curse that had been cast upon Oidipous came true.

In order to save Thebes from a new plague, Oidipous had to figure out who had murdered Laios, the former king of Thebes. From the prophet Teiresias, Oidipous learned the blind deeds he had committed. Thereupon, Oidipous stabbed his eyes and Iokaste committed suicide.

Oidipous	The hero
Thebes	The place of origin of the hero
Laios	The father who has a disturbed relationship with
	the hero and who is slain by him
Iokaste	The mother who brings disaster on the hero
Polybos and Merope	The wise educators of the hero
The Sphinx	A fabulous monster that is slain by the hero

**Table 3.12:** Role schema of the biography of Oidipous.

Approximately a century ago, this story set Sigmund Freud to thinking. He assumed, rightly in my view, that old fairy tales contain a psychological truth. With the killing of his father and marriage to his mother, Oidipous symbolizes a development phase around the age of six, when a child is attracted to the parent of the opposite sex and sees in the parent of the same sex a competitor. This interpretation is reinforced by the symbolism of the intersection of three roads where Oidipous and Laios fought for priority. This point represents a woman's loins, where the vagina lies at the intersection formed by the transition of the inner thighs to either side of the mound of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>The answer is "man." He crawls on all fours as a baby, walks on two legs as an adult, and uses a cane in his old age.

Venus: (Y). This also suggests that birth is a central moment in the symbolic struggle between father and son.

This interpretation is plausible and correct in respect of the story of Oidipous, but in order to explain all the variants of the hero story, we need a more comprehensive interpretation. How else can we explain the tensions between the male heroes and their female educators, such as those we find in the stories of Herakles, Hephaistos, and Orestes?

In the following section, "Authentic heroes," we will encounter more psychological issues that are related to family relationships.

# **Authentic heroes**

The many hero stories have become known to us in very different ways: ancient poems, hymns, preserved theater scripts, anthologies of ancient myths and legends, and even sculptures, vase decorations, and temple facades. The Iliad and the Odyssey, which are the oldest remnants within this whole, are obviously the most appropriate sources to trace back the oldest and most authentic hero stories. Therefore, we conclude the series of hero stories with four heroes whose biographies are outlined in a number of digressions in the Iliad and the Odyssey: Melampous, Meleagros, Phoinix, and Odysseus. Each of these digressions covers only a few dozen verses. Nevertheless, they suffice to determine the core of the hero stories.

## Hero story 13: Melampous

We find the story about the hero Melampous spread across two digressions in the Odyssey (XI 281-297 and XV 225-242). The main characters are the family of the old Nestor, the well-known king of Pylos who fought in Troy. His father was Neleus and he also had a sister Pero, who is the stake for the exploits of Melampous:

Pero, the daughter of Neleus, was a very beautiful woman. All the men in the area wanted to marry her. However, Neleus was a miser. He wanted to marry Pero only to the man who managed to drive the cattle of King Iphikles of Phylake to Pylos. Melampous, a descendant of a lineage of seers, ventured to the contract. He himself did not wish to marry the beautiful Pero, but he wanted to win her as a gift for his brother. During his mission, however, he was trapped by his feet and shepherds enchained him in painful shackles. Melampous was imprisoned for a full year by King Iphikles in Phylake. Meanwhile, Neleus seized the possessions of Melampous.

After one year, Melampous was released in exchange for the predictions he had made as a seer for King Iphikles. Melampous still managed to drive the cattle herds to Pylos, so Pero was married to his brother. Melampous then took revenge on King Neleus and he moved to Argos. There, he bore two sons, Antiphates and Mantios.

Melampous	The hero
Pylos	The place of origin of the hero
Phylake	The place where the hero is first imprisoned and later
	achieves fame
Argos	The place to where the hero moves and builds a
	successful life
Neleus	The instructing king who wishes the death of the hero
Iphikles	A hostile king who finally rewards the hero for his
	actions
The cattle of	Cattle that are brought to the instructing king
Iphikles	
The brother of	An ally who is helped by the hero
Melampous	
Pero	A woman who causes much calamity and who is
	finally married to the ally

 Table 3.13: Role schema of the heroic deeds of Melampous.

The verses in the Odyssey are slightly confusing. For instance, Melampous is not mentioned in the first digression, which only speaks of a nameless seer. Moreover, there seem to be two contradictory reasons why Melampous went to Phylake: for the sake of the mission, or to escape a feud with the powerful King Neleus. Moreover, the towns of Pylos and Phylake are located in two completely different regions of Greece, while a feud over herds of cattle is normally an issue between neighboring towns. While this does not at all affect the authenticity of this story, it does suggest that it is an old story that has several variants. In any case, the different variants support the oral characteristic of the hero who achieves fame abroad.

A second important oral characteristic in this story, which we already saw in the king story, is *the revenge on the return*. As long as Melampous is imprisoned far from Pylos, Neleus can maintain his unrighteous dominion. Inevitably, however, the day arrives in which the hero returns and there is nobody then who can prevent his revenge. This oral characteristic of a hero who is captive far away, can better explain the large distance between Pylos and Phylake.

## Hero story 14: Meleagros

In chapter IX of the Iliad (IX 524-599), Phoinix tries unsuccessfully to persuade Achilleus to the fight. During this attempt, he relates the story about the fame of a hero from the past, Meleagros. According to Phoinix, this story is not new, but stems from long ago.

A fierce battle had flamed up around Kalydon, a city in Aetolia. The Kouretes fought frantically to destroy the city and kill the Kalydonians. The goddess Artemis had sent them this calamity, because Oineus, the king of Kalydon, had brought her no sacrifices. Thus, she sent a monstrous boar to the lush orchards around Kalydon. The beast caused a huge amount of damage and uprooted trees full of blossoms and fruit. Many men who ventured in the vicinity of the boar were slain.

Meleagros, Oineus' son, was charged with the task of killing the animal. To this end, he gathered hunters and dogs from many cities in the surrounding area. With this large group of men, they succeeded in overpowering and killing the animal, but the anger of Artemis was not yet over. After the boar had been slain, she provoked a quarrel between the hunters over the head and shaggy coat of the beast. Thus, the war between the Kouretes and the Kalydonians arose.

Again, Meleagros was the brave hero who protected the Kalydonians from harm. As long as he fought outside the walls of Kalydon, the Kouretes fared poorly. But anger because of a quarrel with his mother Althaia prevented him from continuing fighting. He withdrew from the fight and locked himself in his room, speaking only with his wife Kleopatra. His mother had cursed him for slaying her brother. Weeping and kneeling, Althaia had prayed to the gods that Meleagros would be struck by revenge. The goddess of revenge had heard her prayer. Therefore, Meleagros withdrew from the battle and the Kalydonians were severely oppressed.

The eldest and most venerable among the Kalydonians besought Meleagros to leave his room and save the city. They promised him great gifts and said he could choose a few nice pieces of land in the fertile plain of Kalydon, suitable for vineyards and agriculture. Oineus also begged him and even his mother Althaia. His sisters and friends begged him, but Meleagros remained adamant. Only when his wife Kleopatra told him of the sufferings of people whose city is taken – the men slain, the city in ashes, the children and women kidnapped by the enemy – was Meleagros' heart touched. He went to war and saved Kalydon from destruction.

Meleagros	The hero
Kalydon	The place where the hero achieves fame
Artemis	The goddess who brings much mischief
Althaia	The mother who curses the hero
Oineus	The king who promises the hero gifts
Kleopatra	The woman who assists the hero during his
	lonely seclusion
The boar of Artemis	A monstrous beast that is slain by the hero

Table 3.14: Role schema of the heroic deeds of Meleagros.

This story of Meleagros revolves primarily around the reward for the hero. The gifts for the hero form a part of the hero story, which overlaps with the theme of chapter IX of the Iliad. This is also the direct reason why the digression about Meleagros is included in the Iliad. Nevertheless, an important theme reappears here, namely the fame for the educator. Meleagros was raised by his father Oineus, who shares in Meleagros' glory when he rescues their city Kalydon. However, an interesting detail in this story is the name of the wife and ally of Meleagros, Kleopatra, which also refers to this theme. *Kleo* means 'glory' and *patra* means 'father.' Via a short digression within the longer digression about Meleagros, we also know that Kleopatra brought fame to her father, when she was kidnapped one day by the god Apollo. Her father won the fight with Apollo, which was fought with bows and arrows.

It is very typical for the theme of old stories to be underscored by digressions and motifs. In the previous story about Melampous, the theme of fame abroad was also underlined by Melampous' move to Argos at the end of the story.

The Meleagros story brings the theme of fame for the educator in a very specific way. What we cannot ignore are the great similarities with the story of Patroklos, who persuaded Achilleus to fight. Patroklos is only a variant of the name Kleopatra, and thus also means 'fame for the father.' Both stories are therefore influenced by the same blending of ancient themes. Phoinix, the educator of Achilleus, emphasizes these themes using the Meleagros story.

## Hero story 15: Phoinix

In his long speech to Achilleus in chapter IX of the Iliad, Phoinix also tells of his own childhood (IX 444-484). The complete digression contains numerous oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition, and it is therefore analyzed in detail in Part II, along with other passages from the Iliad. At this point, we are mainly interested in the oral characteristics associated with the hero story. For this reason, a brief synopsis follows here of the digression that can be found in its entirety on p. 137:

The parents of Phoinix quarreled over a mistress of Amyntor, Phoinix' father. Therefore, Phoinix' mother begged him to sleep with the mistress. Phoinix did so, after which his father cursed him. He enlisted the terrifying Erinyes to prevent a son of Phoinix from ever being raised by Amyntor. Therefore, Phoinix could no longer bear to stay in his parents' house. However, his relatives and cousins begged him to remain. They kept him prisoner and took turns to keep watch.

Nevertheless, Phoinix escaped and fled from Hellas, until he arrived in Phthia, the land of King Peleus. Peleus welcomed him as a father would welcome his own son. Phoinix received great riches from King Peleus and was made king of the Dolopians at the borders of Peleus' kingdom.

This story is recognizable as a hero story thanks to the themes that we have discovered already: the move abroad and the king who rewards the hero with lavish gifts. However, the real theme of this story is the tension between the hero and his educator. Phoinix makes the digression to illustrate that Achilleus wanted to leave him – his educator and war instructor – just like Phoinix left his father at the time. With that, we return to the domain of psychology.

Phoinix leaves the house of his parents and has sexual intercourse for the first time. After his flight abroad, he even becomes king of many people. This marks the phase of transition to adulthood.

Before we proceed to the final hero story, we should dwell a little upon the Erinyes, the dreadful goddesses summoned by Phoinix' father, who are also known as the Furies. These goddesses must ensure that Amyntor never

Phoinix	The hero whose parents were arguing
Hellas	The place of origin of the hero
Phthia	The place where the hero finds a better life
Phoinix' mother	The mother who incites the hero to a quarrel
	with his father
Amyntor	The father who curses his son
The mistress of	The woman who is the cause of much misery
Amyntor	
The relatives and	Those who hold the hero captive but who also
cousins of Phoinix	shield him from his arch-enemy
Peleus	The king who receives the hero like his own son
	and who rewards him

**Table 3.15:** Role schema of the youth of Phoinix.

raises a son of Phoinix. Is this perhaps an early reference to an abortion? In this case, we would expect Eileithyia to be mentioned, rather than the Erinyes. The tradition may have become unclear in this respect. In any case, these Erinyes are listed elsewhere along with Hades and Persephone, the god and goddess of the underworld. We will meet this sinister company later in connection with crime, revenge, and murder. Here, Phoinix narrowly escapes one of the most evil of these crimes: the honor killing!

## Hero story 16: Odysseus

The best example of a hero story is saved for last. In the Odyssey (XIX 386-490), we find a digression made by the narrator – the legendary Homer – himself, about the youth of Odysseus. Surprisingly, this is a textbook example of the Greek hero story, in which several of the major themes are carefully elaborated:

When Odysseus, after his long wanderings, invaded his own palace disguised as a beggar, he was recognized and almost betrayed by Eurykleia, his own educator. Eurykleia was busy washing the feet of Odysseus, when she recognized him by a scar that he had carried since childhood. This scar was a result of the destiny that Odysseus had been given at his birth.

Odysseus was named at birth by Autolykos, his maternal grandfather. Autolykos was the famous king of Parnassos, who outsmarted all with lies and theft. When he was visiting Ithaka, Eurykleia asked him to name his grandson. Autolykos raged against many people and thus he called his grandson Odysseus, which means 'rage.' Moreover, he said that Odysseus should come to Parnassos when he had reached adulthood.

Many years later, the young adult Odysseus went to Parnassos, where he was warmly received by King Autolykos and his sons. Together with the sons, Odysseus was sent to hunt at Mount Parnassos. There, Odysseus and his companions were suddenly attacked by a wild boar. Odysseus was the first to try to kill the boar, but during this attempt the boar wounded Odysseus' knee with his tusk. Nevertheless, Odysseus managed to kill the boar with his spear. He was then cared for by the sons of Autolykos. As a reward for his brave deed, Autolykos sent his grandson back to Ithaka with lavish gifts. There, Eurykleia heard of the fame that Odysseus had achieved in Parnassos and about the scar on his knee.

As an old woman, Eurykleia almost caused the death of Odysseus by betraying him prematurely when she recognized him. However, Odysseus grabbed her by the throat and swore to her that he would show her no pity, despite her being his own educator.

Odysseus	The hero who rages against his own educator
Ithaka	The place of origin of the hero and where he also
	becomes king
Parnassos	The place where the hero achieves fame
Eurykleia	An educator on whose behalf the hero achieves great
	fame, but who brings calamity upon him
Autolykos	The instructing king, who lets the hero make a name
	for himself
Autolykos' sons	The allies who take care of the hero when he is
	wounded
The wild boar	A wild animal that is slain by the hero

Table 3.16: Role schema of the youth of Odysseus, who makes his name.

This short story collects several themes of the hero story, including the fame for the educator that we saw earlier. Furthermore, in the name Eurykleia we recognize the term "kleos." The fame that is achieved abroad and the reward that the hero receives for this are neatly contained in Odysseus' journey to Parnassos. Another important theme in this story is that of the hero who makes a name for himself. Autolykos, the grandfather of Odysseus, is responsible in two ways for the name of his grandson: first, literally at his birth and second figuratively at Odysseus' transition to adulthood.

We recognize the tensions with an educator in the wrath of Odysseus, which is directed against Eurykleia. Just like Oidipous, Herakles, and Kleopatra, Odysseus makes his name as a result of difficulties with his educators. However, Eurykleia is ultimately not killed in the Odyssey. She is critically questioned and must indicate all the women who have behaved unchastely. Odysseus then hangs them all mercilessly. If we also consider the fate of the Trojan women, the women in Thebes and Mykenai, of Penelope in the variants of the Telegony,<sup>3</sup> and the fate of educators like Klytaimestra and Eurypyle, then we must conclude that Eurykleia and Penelope in the Odyssey can count themselves among the blessed. It looks very much as if, in older versions of the story, these two women were also killed at the return of Odysseus. The fact that Odysseus returns on the very day that Penelope was to marry one of the suitors, says a great deal. The impeccable, loyal characters of Penelope and Eurykleia are a particularity that does not fit within the Alpha-tradition.

## Detailed storyline of the hero story

Just as for the king story, we can now overview all the hero stories together and create a description of one big hero story. The following characteristics form one whole:

- 1. A hero is born in a certain Greek city.
- 2. The hero's destiny is announced at his birth: he will have to go to a neighboring kingdom later in life.
- 3. The hero has a disturbed relationship with his parents, an educator, or a local ruler. The parents of the hero quarrel violently or live separately.
- 4. A woman is the cause of much misery in the life of the hero. She has a bad character, or she is the indirect cause of an abusive situation.
- 5. The hero is detained, handcuffed, abused, or rejected during his youth. His feet are injured.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>The Telegony follows the Odyssey in the Trojan cycle. This story will be discussed in more detail in Part II.

- 6. A good educator takes care of the young hero. He or she also takes care of the hero's wounds.
- 7. The hero gets his name from the relationship with his parents or educators; he is named after the fame he achieves for them or after the accident that they inflict upon him.
- 8. The hero seeks his destiny or others need his help with a difficult task. Thus, the hero arrives in a neighboring kingdom.
- 9. The hero commits grand, remarkable deeds in the kingdom.
- 10. The hero is one of many who want to marry the daughter of the king of the kingdom.
- 11. A formal agreement is made between the hero and the king. The hero swears an oath.
- 12. The hero must execute one or more commands for the king. He must steal cattle, capture or kill a wild animal, or fight a hostile king.
- 13. In order to succeed, the hero receives special weapons.
- 14. The hero cannot carry out the tasks alone and is assisted by an ally with whom he begins a very close friendship.
- 15. The hero and ally change roles. The ally takes on the task of the hero and is rewarded for this.
- 16. The king is bewildered when he sees that the hero has succeeded in his mission. He orders that the hero be murdered in an ambush or with a ruse. However, the hero manages to avert the calamity.
- 17. The hero is recognized as a man of exceptional pedigree by the king and his entourage.
- 18. The king rewards the hero. He gives him his daughter, his kingship, and great riches.
- 19. The hero takes revenge on a person who has mistreated him during his life. He kills one of his parents or an educator.
- 20. The hero reaches the peak of his lifetime. He rules over the city over which the instructing king has reigned and bears many children.

21. Despite the great deeds during his life, the hero dies in unfortunate circumstances.

These 21 characteristics define the main lines of the hero story. In the next section, "Discussion of the hero story," we discuss the similarities between the many hero stories in more detail.

## Discussion of the hero story

The hero story brings us back to the cradle of Greek mythology. We find the same characteristics in the life histories of almost all Greek heroes. The core of the story is quite universal: the hero receives a royal education, commits glorious deeds, and ultimately becomes king himself. The Alpha-tradition complements this story with the great difficulties and misery that befall the hero: after his birth, he arrives into a troubled family, is wounded or imprisoned, and at the end of the story he suffers a pitiful setback. The murder of a family member creates even more drama.

### Tale theme 1: the family

The hero story is mostly divided into two separate tales, each with their own themes. The first contains the psychological themes, which mainly deal with the most basic relationships within the family. These themes are universal and can hardly be linked to a particular historical culture. The second tale involves heroic exploits and deals with heroes, kings, wealth, and power. We can trace the origins of this tale to the Greek Bronze Age. The themes of the two tales overlap, as in the glory for the educator.

The psychological themes are predominantly found in the youth of the hero. To a large extent, they indicate a disturbed relationship between the hero as a child and one of his educators. In some stories, the child is abused or abandoned, while in others the child is the victim of a quarrel between the parents. A disturbed relationship between the educators of the hero is indeed a topic of importance in a number of hero stories. The parents are constantly fighting, live separately, or are adulterous.

All these psychological themes are closely related and are often mixed. Thus, we see for example that the child has a troubled relationship with his educator, because he must choose between the quarreling parents. It becomes even crazier when the child becomes involved in the adulterous lifestyle of his educators in his growth to sexual maturity, as we see in the stories of Oidipous, Phoinix, and Bellerophontes. Killing the educator can be seen as a point of overlap between the themes of the adult hero and psychological issues about the youth of the hero. Eventually, I suppose we do not have to dramatize the many cases of incest and murder within the family. The logical operation of applying oral characteristics in oral traditions creates the most absurd stories.

In the story of Perseus, we discern most of the psychological themes. This famous hero, who was eventually to found the city of Mykenai, collected a range of educators in his biography. His grandfather Akrisios locked him up in a coffin and threw him into the sea. Perseus unwittingly took revenge on his return by killing Akrisios with a discus. Perseus had a good relationship with his mother Danaë, but not with her lover Polydektes. Danaë and Polydektes are typical examples of educators who cannot get along with each other. Danaë did not like Polydektes and Polydektes even arranged a marriage with another woman. This ill-fated man was slain consciously by Perseus. Perseus finally received a good education from the wise Diktys, who then gains fame through the success of his pupil.

We should classify the exploits of Perseus, the killing of Medusa, Kepheus, and the suitors, and the formal promise to Polydektes, as belonging to the other tale. This part of the story is covered by the transition to adulthood and the hero who makes a name for himself. The same goes, of course, for the marriage with the beautiful Andromeda.

### Tale theme 2: the life of a hero

The second tale deals in detail with the heroic exploits. This tale overlaps with the previous one in its theme of the fame – kleos in Greek – that is shared by several people: the hero, of course, but also *the educator* of the hero. Thanks to the great deeds of the hero, the educator is shown to have been successful in his mission. The names of some characters refer to this core theme: Patro-klos, Hera-kles, Eteo-kles, Kleo-patra, and Eury-kleia. Patroklos and Kleopatra mean 'fame for the father,' while Herakles means 'fame for Hera.' As shown by the tradition about Herakles, Hera was indeed the educator of Herakles for a brief moment.

However, there is another character who shares in the glory of the hero, namely the *commanding king*, who instructs the heroic exploits. According to this view, we can also declare the glory of Hera, because Hera was indeed the one who commanded the exploits of Herakles from her divine throne, out

of sight of ordinary mortals. The archetype of the commander is a king who rewards the hero with riches and a princess, as is evidenced by many of the stories.

Yet, these two characters, the educator and the instructing king, are intermingled in the many variants that we find. Very often it is the educator, the parent, or the grandparent, who is the instructor. However, this seems to conflict with the fact that the hero finds his instructor abroad, after going in search of his destiny. Resolving this contradiction has led to numerous variants, with that of Oidipous undoubtedly being the most ingenious.

There is a third character that we find in the core of almost all epics, namely *the arch-enemy* of the hero. This character, in many cases a woman, desires the hero's death or treats him very cruelly. With that, Hera takes on the three essential roles in her relationship with Herakles: that of educator, commander, and arch-enemy.

Just outside the core, we find *the caregiver*, which is often a woman. This character stays with the hero during his exile or captivity, takes care of his wounds, and gives good advice. Closely related to him or her is *the ally*, who provides direct assistance in executing the difficult tasks. The goddess Athene is almost always found in this role.

Two supporting roles with an interesting evolution are those of *the monster* and *the hostile king*. The last role seems to be dependent on the first, because there is almost always an animal that is stolen from the king. In a significant proportion of the variants, it is cattle or a bull. There are also many heroes who catch a wild boar, although the stories about this must have been aggregated into one great story about the boar of Kalydon. In the labors of Herakles, material objects are also stolen from redoubtable enemies, like the belt of Hippolyte. We can therefore surmise that stealing cattle from a hostile king is a very old variant that precedes most others.

We can observe a tendency to make the animals that are caught increasingly more monstrous. This is a normal evolution for a boar that causes much damage to crops, but we also see this evolution for cattle, which are replaced by a dangerous bull, like the one of Marathon, and later by the carnivorous Minotaur in the labyrinth. Eventually, fabulous monsters become the most popular variant. The role of the hostile king is therefore often associated with that of the instructing king who rewards the hero for catching the monster.

The fabulous monsters have further evolved into supporters of the hero. This evolution is not particularly illogical, given that capturing or killing these animals also results in the success of the hero in the oldest variants. In the labors of Herakles, we already see that the Erymanthian boar is so frightening that Eurystheus, Herakles' enemy, locks himself in a cage. Herakles used the impenetrable skin of the Nemean lion as a sheath, the blood of the Hydra as poison for his arrows, and the carnivorous horses to eat Diomedes. Perseus used the head of Medusa several times to defeat his enemies. Finally, we see a series of fabulous creatures that are a cross between hostile monsters and supporters of the hero: the Graiai with their one eye, Atlas, who supports the sky, and the Hesperides, who guarded the apples of Hera.

Thus far, the discussion of the tale themes has centered around the life of the hero. The next part of the "Discussion of the hero story" concerns the roles and motifs encountered in both tale themes.

#### The mixing of roles and motifs

All the oldest roles, that of the hero, educator, arch-enemy, commander, ally, caregiver, monster, and hostile king, are thoroughly intermixed. The main characters in the epics have characteristics of several of these roles, as already discussed in relation to Hera. In the story of Peirithoös, Theseus is first the hostile king whose cattle are stolen and then the instructing king who orders the abduction of Helen and who rewards Peirithoös, but who is also his ally and close friend. Theseus is therefore simultaneously hero, commander, ally, and hostile king.

Besides the roles of the characters, there are also a number of nonpersonal components of the hero story that deserve our attention. First and foremost, the geographical locations with which the hero is connected. There are almost always *multiple cities* that are important in the life of the hero. Almost every stage in the life of the hero is eligible for his relocation. A city can serve as a place of birth, a place of education, the place where he is held captive, the place where he achieves fame, the place where he becomes king, or the place where he dies miserably. The exception to this rule is Meleagros, who builds his career entirely in Kalydon.

It is striking that these cities are mostly located in the Peloponnese. This is particularly the case for hero stories in which the core roles are preserved most purely, like those of Melampous, Meleagros, and Odysseus. The birthplace of the hero Theseus seems almost artificially located on this peninsula. These findings are an important indication that we must search for the origin of the Alpha-tradition in the Peloponnese or its immediate surroundings. Furthermore, *the formal promise* that the hero and the instructing king make mutually is an essential part of the hero story. For Bellerophontes, the agreement is engraved in a folded writing tablet, while Agamemnon and Menelaos swear a solemn oath. The promise marks the transition of the youth of the hero to his actual exploits. It works in two directions: the hero promises to execute a heavy task, in return for which the king promises generous gifts. The reward can be a woman, wealth, or power, but also the cancellation of the debt after a crime of the hero.

An intriguing element, which belongs perhaps to the original characteristics of the hero story, is *the injury to the foot* or leg of the hero. No fewer than five different heroes and a god suffer seriously from this remarkable phenomenon: Achilleus, Odysseus, Oidipous, Melampous, Philoktetes, and the god Hephaistos. Philoktetes, not discussed here, was bitten by a snake during a stopover of the Greeks on the way to Troy. Therefore, he was left behind on the island of Lemnos. The lame foot is related to *the unfortunate education* of the hero, as is the case for Achilleus, Oidipous, and Hephaistos, or with *the lonely imprisonment* of the hero, as for Melampous, Philoktetes, and again Hephaistos. In general, the injury reminds the youth of the hero and his educators, which in the Odyssey was the reason for mentioning the injury of Odysseus.

#### **Eastern influences**

In the hero stories, we also find a whole series of oral characteristics for which we must conclude that they are younger than the core of the story. They appear mainly in the details, or they have an influence on the roles in the core. Yet, we cannot detect an older logic in these oral characteristics. The explanation is very simple: they come from outside, especially form the East. Oral stories had been handed down for many centuries already with the aid of writing. Stories about Gilgamesh in Phoenicia, the Indian Mahabharata, and predecessors of the Old Testament were in circulation long before the end of the second millennium BC. The Hesiodic works in Greece (c. 8th – 7th century BC, shortly after the Odyssey) are strongly influenced by the many oriental stories. The great difference with the Homeric works in this respect shows the awareness within the Greek oral tradition that the oriental characteristics had a different traditional value.

The Garden of Eden of Adam and Eve, for example, shows clear parallels with the Garden of the Hesperides in the story of Herakles. Both stories contain a beautiful garden, a snake in a tree, apples from the gods that are



**Figure 6:** Herakles steals the apples of the gods in the Garden of the Hesperides. Roman mosaic, Spain, 3rd century AD.

stolen by men, and special women. However, the opening passage of the Old Testament also declares the true meaning of the god Hephaistos and his similarities with other Greek heroes. This is further discussed on p. 102 of this section.

How these parallels came about and when precisely this happened seems much less clear. To this day, literary scholars have failed to date developments preceding the Homeric era. Therefore, the analysis of the hero story is of particular interest. It provides us with a dating of the Alpha-tradition relative to the first eastern influences in Greece.

In the stories themselves, however, we find a possible declaration of how these eastern stories could have spread so widely. One of the Eastern motifs is the linguistic diversity of the peoples on earth, something that will be familiar to many through the parable of the Tower of Babel, which led to the confusion of tongues. The same motif is also found in the Greek story about the Garden of the Hesperides, where each head of the hundred-headed serpent that guarded the apples spoke another language. We can thus conclude that the people at that time had a certain awareness of the many languages that existed then. In addition, we should also realize that the oldest written traditions on earth at that time would have aroused great admiration. The chance is real that this literature had the status of a bible and was taught to bards and scholars over a very large area.

Besides, it was not only the Greek stories that were influenced by the East. In many old stories stemming from the different European linguistic areas, ranging from the Romans to the Vikings, we often find surprising and sharp parallels with oriental stories. Many, but certainly not all, of these seem to show more similarities with Greek stories. Thus, I venture to conclude that the first peoples to use writing were also the greatest authorities in the field of mythology.

The most important oriental characteristic that we find in the hero stories is that of the *twins*. Their forerunners are the Ashwin brothers, divine twins in Hindu mythology. The Ashwin brothers are horsemen who ride a single chariot together and who are responsible for sunrise and sunset, by transporting the sun in a golden chariot. Kastor and Polydeukes exhibit the most detailed parallels with them, although later in Greek mythology the twin gods Apollo and Artemis became the riders of the solar chariot. Other Greek twins are Herakles and Iphikles, Idas and Lynkeos, the Thebans Zethos and Amphion, and their descendants Eteokles and Polyneikes. In Sparta, we find the sisters Klytaimestra and Helen.

That the twins do not belong to the core of the hero story is most clearly evident in the story of Herakles. His twin brother Iphikles plays absolutely no important role in the story, which strongly suggests that Iphikles is a later extension to a story that already existed. The role of Eurystheus, the commander of Herakles, has also shifted in the direction of a twin brother of Herakles, although he is officially a cousin. Eurystheus was born on the same day as Herakles and, as with other twins, like Eteokles and Polyneikes in Thebes, and Romulus and Remus for the Romans, this led to a disagreement over who would be the rightful successor to the power. Likewise, in the Old Testament, Cain and Abel were brothers who contended for power.

An oral characteristic that is closely linked with the twins is that of *the pair of which one is heavenly and the other earthly*. The heavenly one is permitted to live among the gods after his death, or in a paradise, while the earthly one is stuck in the underworld. If the pair are twins, then the heavenly twin is germinated from the seed of a god, while the earthly twin

is fathered by an ordinary mortal. In the order heavenly-earthly we find the following twin pairs: Polydeukes and Kastor, Herakles and Iphikles, Helen and Klytaimestra, and Eteokles and Polyneikes. For the last two, the role division is not entirely clear, although Polyneikes was not awarded a funeral after his death, in contrast to Eteokles. The relationship heavenly-earthly also applies to pairs that are not twins, as is the case for Theseus and Peirithoös. Their descent into the underworld to kidnap Persephone revolves entirely around this characteristic. Herakles and his commander, Eurystheus, have also evolved to this relationship, given that Eurystheus locked himself up in an underground jar.

In the Odyssey, we even find a clue about this heavenly-earthly relationship between Menelaos and Agamemnon. After the Egyptian god Proteus had revealed the disastrous fate of Agamemnon, he spoke the following words to Menelaos:

But for you, Menelaos, O fostered of Zeus, it is not the gods' will that you shall die and go to your end in horse-pasturing Argos, but the immortals will convoy you to the Elysian Field, and the limits of the earth, where fairhaired Rhadamanthys is, and where there is made the easiest life for mortals, for there is no snow, nor much winter there, nor is there ever rain, but always the stream of the Ocean sends up breezes of the West Wind blowing briskly for the refreshment of mortals. This, because Helen is yours and you are sonin-law therefore to Zeus. (Odyssey IV 561-569)

Can we find a clearer proof than this that this oral characteristic made a very late entry into Greek mythology? Menelaos and Agamemnon, possibly among the oldest Greek characters, inherit their heavenly-earthly relationship through their wives. No such relationship is found in the Iliad, while the episode in the Odyssey does not seem to explain other passages or stories. In comparison, the promises made to Tyndareos for marrying Helen, an essential component of the hero story, can serve to explain why all the Greeks were prepared to sail to Troy.

In the Old Testament, Cain and Abel are derived from Enkidu and Dumuzi in Babylonian mythology. The strife between the pair symbolizes the strife between nomadic and agricultural communities. Unlike the strife, however, the nomadicity did not make it to Greece and Italy as an oral characteristic. A fact that speaks for itself with regard to the influence from outside is the occurrence of *distant, exotic, geographic locations*. Particularly in the stories about Herakles and Perseus, we find exotic locations, such as Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia, Phoenicia, and even the Atlas Mountains. Menelaos also visits such distant shores during his wanderings after the Trojan War.

*Famous horses and horsemen* also show up in the details of the hero stories. Ioloas, the ally of Herakles, was also his charioteer, while Kastor and Polydeukes were also known as good charioteers. Moreover, we find a number of names that refer to horses, such as Hippodameia (hippo means 'horse') and Leukippos ('white horse'). Pegasus, the winged horse, is connected with both the hero Bellerophontes and Perseus. H.J. Walker (2015) compares the "twin horse gods" in ancient mythologies, like the Dioskouroi (Kastor and Polydeukes), the Roman Gemini, and the Vedic Indian Ashwin brothers, due to their striking similarities.

*Snakes* are also a helpful clue for distinguishing the influence from the East. The universal symbol for medicine, a snake wrapped around a stick, comes from the East, just like the snake in the tree that deceived Eve. We have also seen oriental parallels with the hundred-headed snake in the story of Herakles and the apples of the Hesperides. Furthermore, in the Greek stories, we find the snakes that Hera sent to Herakles, the snake hair of Medusa, the snakes that curled around the limbs of Theseus and Peirithoös in the underworld, and the sea snakes that killed Laokoön, who warned about the Trojan horse. These snakes do not play a clear role, as they do in the Garden of Eden. They are generally just a threat to the heroes.

In posing a threat, the *fabulous monsters* are closely associated with these snakes, while the Chimaira had the tail of a snake. Many of the fabled animals have the heads and body parts of different animals. They often appear in remote and exotic locations, which leads us to suspect once more that they are not of Greek origin. The Sphinx of Thebes, for example, shows parallels with the eponymous guards of the Egyptian pyramids. Starting from Hesiod's Theogony, many of the fabulous monsters are united in a common family tree below Echidna, half woman, half snake, and Typhon with a hundred snake heads. Herodotus even mentions a hero story that was known to the Greeks living in Pontus on the south coast of the Black Sea, according to which a creature very similar to Echidna was the progenitor of the Scythians (Herodotus 4.8-10).

The belief in an underworld, the domain of Hades where the dead reside, is undoubtedly an ancient religious matter, which is little influenced by the stories from the East. However, in *the visit of a living person to the underworld* we see a direct parallel with the eastern hero Gilgamesh. Some heroes were also trapped in the underworld, like Peirithoös and Hephaistos. Closely related to this is *the captivity in a cramped metal construction*, like the jar of Eurystheus and the coffin of Perseus, which, according to M.L. West, is an oral characteristic coming from the East.

One of the more imaginative oral characteristics is that of *the hero who is raised by an animal*. Achilleus was raised by a centaur, half man and half horse, while Zeus, the supreme god, evidently received his wisdom from a goat. In the earthly paradise of the Old Testament, it was Eve, the first woman on earth, who was instructed by a snake.

Also coming from the East are *declaration myths*, a typical example of which is the explanation that the Milky Way was created when Hera breastfed Herakles. Another example is Zeus's plan to relieve the overpopulated earth by unleashing the Trojan War and causing the rivers of Troy to flood. In this, we see a parallel with the flood of the Old Testament. We can also parallel many of the stories about the mythological-chronological<sup>4</sup> predecessors of the Olympian gods, such as Kronos, Uranus, and Tethys, as well as the giants that they fought, to such declaration myths.

Another interesting parallel – with the New Testament – is that of *the savior who frees the earth from monsters*. The savior is found in Theseus, who killed Sinis, Skiron, and Prokrustes; in Herakles, who rescued imprisoned people and killed a considerable number of monsters; and in Zeus, who banished the child-eating Kronos to the underworld and chained the blasphemous Prometheus to the rocks. In Genesis, Yahweh was the savior who punished Adam and the mighty, renowned men of the old era with a finite life and the flood, while Jesus Christ in the New Testament freed humanity from their original sins.

Important for a proper understanding of history are the *declaration myths of geographical place names*. That these are also related to the influence of the East appears from the myth of Agenor, a Phoenician who was an ancestor of four founding figures: Phoenix, who remained in Phoenicia; Europa, who gave her name to the European continent; Kadmos, the founder of the Greek Thebes; and Kilix, the founder of Kilikia in South-West Turkey. A certain Libya and Aigyptos were also of the family of Agenor. There is little doubt that this family tree was created rather artificially on the basis

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>That is, the chronology according to the myths. The point is that the gods who were the oldest in the myths, may have been the youngest in the true chronology of the evolving oral tradition.

of place names that were already in use in the Greek language. As for the gods, the mythological-chronologically oldest characters were the latest to be added to the pedigrees and are therefore the least traditional.

Some heroes make *a distant journey to Okeanos*, the ocean that flows around the earth. Herakles, Hera, and Odysseus made the arduous journey on their own, while Hephaistos flew a whole day before crashing on the island of Lemnos or in his smithy in the middle of the ocean. Whether this is an oral characteristic coming from the East is debatable. In any case, it is connected with other late characteristics, such as the origins of the gods and exotic places.

The last oriental oral characteristic to be discussed here is that of *the first man on earth, who quickly surpasses the gods*. For that, we need to study the theme of Genesis, the introduction of the Old Testament, in more detail. Adam and Eve lived naked and ignorant in the earthly paradise. Only after they had eaten from the tree of knowledge did they dress themselves and take shelter from a storm. Because of their knowledge, they became equal to Yahweh, the god. Because of this, Yahweh was furious. He cursed them, made them mortal, and banished them from the Garden of Eden, because if they could have stayed there, they would have lived forever. Adam still had many children, but he was doomed to toil and sweat throughout his short life.

In this story, we see strong similarities with Prometheus, Hephaistos, Herakles, and Achilleus in Greece. Let us consider these heroes one at a time: Prometheus was the first man on earth. He was punished<sup>5</sup> horribly by Zeus, because he stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans. In this, we may observe the connection with Hephaistos, who, as god of fire and metalwork, has precisely the knowledge that makes men equal to the gods. He was cast to the earth from Olympos by both Zeus and Hera. Just like Adam, Herakles and Hephaistos were half-naked men, who sweated from hard work and fathered many children, but who also rebelled against the gods. Finally, there is Achilleus, born of Thetis, a mother goddess, who would bear a son that surpassed his father. Just like Adam, Achilleus was doomed to suffer during his short life.<sup>6</sup>

It is not my intention to give a complete enumeration of the Greek oral characteristics that derive from the East. Those that appear in the hero story had to be mentioned here, in order to distinguish the Alpha-tradition from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>He was chained to a rock and every day an eagle pecked a piece of his liver, so the wound never healed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>According to Genesis, Adam would have lived for 930 years. However, in comparison with eternity, this remains nevertheless a serious curtailment.

these oriental characteristics. It should also be said that the Old Testament is only used here as an example because it is well known. This work is only a drop in the ocean of the vast body of literature that is preserved from the East. Both the Greek oral characteristics from the East and the Old Testament derive from stories that are much older.

That these oriental characteristics are indeed younger than the basic components of the hero story can be deduced from the role they play in the stories. The oriental characteristics do not, in fact, play a significant role. They are found as multiple motifs and details, but hardly as themes or elements of the story. Where they seem to play an essential role, they are mostly evolutions of the classical core roles. The hero becomes the first man on earth, the allies become twins or horsemen, the cattle and wild boars become mythical monsters, the prison becomes the underworld or a metal cage, the educators become an animal or a god with strange characteristics, the cities in the Peloponnese become exotic places, and so on.

The stories that contain oriental characteristics have deliberately been treated as the first. That is to say, the stories of Orestes, Melampous, Meleagros, Phoinix, and Odysseus are the most authentic hero stories that we can find, but this does not mean that these stories are the oldest. In particular, the stories of famous heroes like Herakles and Achilleus might exhibit more oriental characteristics, because they kept evolving until a much later date. The story about Melampous is a bit like an old ruin at the outskirts of a city. It is particularly interesting for archaeologists and a proof of the great antiquity of the city. The stories about Herakles and Achilleus, however, are comparable to the town hall and the cathedral. They are perhaps as old as the ruins, but through constant restoration, they have gradually lost their original features.

Although the oriental characteristics have made their entry in Greece only at a certain moment in history, we find them already in the Iliad, the oldest written source. In one of the many digressions, Nestor tells of the fame that the Molions, the sons of Aktor, achieved in the horse race:

Now these sons of Aktor were twins; one held the reins at his leisure, held the reins at his leisure while the other lashed on the horses. (Iliad XXIII 641-642)

Thus, we find already in the Iliad a Greek version of the Ashwin brothers, also twins and horsemen. The stories in the Iliad about Hephaistos, Herakles, and Tethys, the so-called first humans and gods, also prove sufficient. In his comparison of Greek and eastern mythology, M.L. West gives a detailed enumeration of the oriental characteristics that can already be traced back to the Iliad. We must conclude from this that these characteristics had already emerged in Greece before the Iliad.

#### **Story type 3: the tele-story**

Before we proceed to Part II, we will dwell on a particular story that also stems from the Alpha-tradition. This story is nowhere described in detail and as a whole, neither in this book, nor in the annals of Greek mythology. Just like the king story and the hero story, it can be brought to light by comparing a long series of stories with each other and listing their common characteristics.

The story is about a warrior whose destiny it is to end an unrighteous dominion. The warrior is held captive somewhere for a long time, far from the place where he will fulfill his destiny. Along the way, he is aided by a series of supporters, who put him on his way to reach his ultimate goal. The unjust ruler recognizes the warrior too late on his arrival and is slain by him.

We can doubtlessly find a series of king and hero stories in which this core can also be found, either as a component or in its entirety. Yet, a cluster of motifs, themes, and symbols is associated with this core, which betrays a distinct story type tradition. One is the ambiguous meaning of the Greek "tele," which means 'far' if spelled with a  $\tau$ , while "thele," spelled with a  $\theta$ , means 'end.' This one word sums up the whole story about a warrior who is far away and will bring a rule to an end. It also explains the names of Telegonos, Telemachos, and Telephos, who respectively end the dominions of Odysseus, Antinoös, and the Trojans.

I leave it to the interested investigator to discover this tele-story and its oral characteristics. In the context of this book, we should note that the telestory hardly brings new oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition to light. We find the brave hero, the revenge on the return, the change of power, and even wars that are ended by the tele-warrior. Furthermore, there are long wanderings, foretellings, and women who cannot find a happy marriage. These characteristics have already been identified in the hero story. In Part II, we will see that they also belong to the Alpha-tradition. Yet, many characteristics of the tele-story, seafaring being the main one, belong to oral traditions from a later era.

## Part II

# In the wake of the Alpha-tradition

### **Chapter 4**

## **Characterizing the core**

#### From Alpha-story types to Alpha-characteristics

In part I, we have mapped the king story and the hero story and have thus arrived in the Greek Bronze Age. Both story types go far back in time, beyond the Trojan War and even beyond the first influences of the millennia old stories from the East on Greek soil. Yet, they present us with a series of new mysteries. How are these two stories interrelated? Will any old Greek story go back on one of these two?

Let us therefore study the Telegony a bit more closely. Many experts consider that this story is not authentic and that it was only later added to the Trojan story cycle. Unfortunately, the Telegony has become very fragmented during its passing down to us and what remains is only a synopsis, comments, and cross-references. The main character is Telegonos, the son Odysseus begot by the sorceress Circe. In a quest for his father, Telegonos ends up on Ithaka and accidentally kills Odysseus. The synopsis that has been preserved reads very stiffly, but it still contains enough information to discern different oral characteristics. It connects to the end of the Odyssey, which concludes with the death of the many suitors of Penelope:

The suitors of Penelope are buried by their kinsmen, and Odysseus, after sacrificing to the Nymphs, sails to Elis to inspect his herds. He is entertained there by Polyxenus and receives a mixing bowl as a gift; the story of Trophonius and Agamedes and Augeas then follows. He next sails back to Ithaka and performs the sacrifices ordered by Teiresias, and then goes to Thesprotis where he marries Callidice, queen of the Thesprotians. A war then breaks out between the Thesprotians, led by Odysseus, and the Brygi. Ares routs the army of Odysseus and Athena engages with Ares, until Apollo separates them. After the death of Callidice, Polypoetes, the son of Odysseus, succeeds to the kingdom, while Odysseus himself returns to Ithaka. In the meantime Telegonus, while travelling in search of his father, lands on Ithaka and ravages the island: Odysseus comes out to defend his country, but is killed by his son unwittingly. Telegonus, on learning his mistake, transports his father's body with Penelope and Telemachus to his mother's island, where Circe makes them immortal, and Telegonus marries Penelope, and Telemachus Circe.

(Proclus' Chrestomathy, ii. Translation: Hugh G. Evelyn-White)

Do we find in this story the characteristics of the king story or the hero story? Certainly! In particular, we find a number of links to the hero story: the hero who kills one of his parents, the wanderings that bring the hero to another region, the guarding of livestock, and failed marriages. That the death of Odysseus was a mistake is paralleled in some other hero stories.

We find the long captivity of the hero divided throughout the hero story of Herakles. Herakles had to do penance and was commanded by the Delphic oracle to serve under the rule of Eurystheus for 10 years in Mykenai. In this, we find a resemblance to Odysseus, who was commanded by Teiresias to leave his homeland once more. Odysseus had to do penance as a leader in the war against the Brygians.

The education of the king's son and the fame that the educator achieves when the hero becomes king himself, are reflected in the lives of Polypoetes and Telemachos, the half-brothers of Telegonos.

The Telegony also has some similarities with the king story. At the end of the Telegony, Odysseus' corpse is transported to the island of Circe, which is a classical closing of the king story. In the unexpected arrival of Telegonos on Ithaka, we see a connection with the exile or prince whose arrival determines the outcome of battle. There are also a number of background characteristics that fit both in the king and hero stories, such as wars and destruction of cities, royal marriages, and the cycle of misery.

The king story and the hero story are clearly not unrelated. The many oral characteristics in which both stories overlap show this. In addition, the main characters of Greek mythology, like Odysseus and Agamemnon, play a role in both stories. For this reason, it does not seem sensible to consider these story types to be the oldest in Greek mythology. Both story types have grown from something that is still older and that can only be described by a collection of concise oral characteristics, the *Alpha-characteristics*. This brings us to the Alpha-tradition. Just as astronomers looking back to the earliest times through their telescopes can only see gas clouds and nebulae, rather than individual galaxies, we see only Alpha-characteristics for the Alphatradition. The horizon for distinguishing separate stories must lie somewhere in the second millennium BC, when the Mykenaian civilization in Greece was in full bloom.

### Ten core Alpha-characteristics

The first oral characteristic is the mentioning of *wars on cities*. Since the very beginning of the Mykenaian civilization, and even long before, such wars were the reality in Greece. The many fortified cities bear witness to this. Some heroes also take the epithet "city destroyer." The stories that we have already discussed, both the king story and the hero story, witness the same. Even in the stories about Ithaka and Mykenai, we see the traitors portrayed as noble defenders, who use guards to warn of the approach of the enemy in time. The battle for Kalydon and the enmity between the Pylians and the fighters of Elis provide material for epic stories.

The mentioning of wars on cities is an Alpha-characteristic that must be even older than the stories around Ithaka and Mykenai, in which the bitter fight is clearly weakened and has been replaced by more attractive characteristics, like the cunning of Odysseus and the tragic fate of Agamemnon. In the wars against Thebes and Troy, this oral characteristic is better preserved.

A second important oral characteristic that belongs to the core of the Alpha-tradition is the appearance of *bloody feuds*. This element betrays a social background, which, as we will see in the chapter "A Mafia origin," matches the world of the Mafia. The characters of the Alpha-tradition have relationships that are often thoroughly disturbed, especially within their own families. This leads all too often to murder and manslaughter. The old versions of the Telegony, in which Odysseus killed his own wife, no doubt go back to this important oral characteristic.

The king and his court is naturally present in the king story as an oral characteristic. Yet, the king is also present in the hero story as the commander or educator of the hero, or the father of the princess who is married. Likewise, *the brave hero* is also present in the king story, in the form of the hero whose

arrival decides the outcome of the battle, the brave negotiator, and of course the king himself.

An Alpha-characteristic that works closely together with the first three, the wars, the family feuds, and the court of the king, is that of *the change of the power*. This characteristic is thematic for the king story, while it is the final destination of the hero to become king after his difficult wanderings.

The troublesome wanderings are just a part of *the cycle of misery*. The lives of the characters are marked from beginning to end by the deepest misery. Happiness and success are only very volatile in nature and the misery is often passed on from father to son. Almost all the oral characteristics in the core of the Alpha-tradition have a dark side.

This reveals why we often see *the revenge on the return* in the Alphatradition. A hero or king who has been wronged will sooner or later return to mercilessly punish the perpetrator. This Alpha-characteristic goes well together with the bloody feuds between relatives and the frequent changes of power. Moreover, the revenge on the return is a central theme of the king story.

An oral characteristic in which we recognize a positive side is *the special education*. Both the heroes and the king's sons can rely on this. The education usually does not go smoothly, but ultimately the brave young man performs well and brings great glory to the educator who has taken pity on him.

The two Alpha-characteristics with which we can close the core of the Alpha-tradition are *fatal women* and *failed marriages*. The women both actively and passively give rise to endless wars, strife, and misery. Helen among men and Hera among the gods are the archetypes of troublemakers. Pero, the sister of Nestor, brought much misery to the life of Melampous, although she was not to blame for it.

The failed marriages constitute yet another miserable oral characteristic that we saw in many of the stories, both in the hero stories and the king stories. The unconditional marriage bond between Odysseus and Penelope is a prudish characteristic of a much later time, but even in the version of the Odyssey that is preserved, it is not a prosperous marriage. When Odysseus is reunited with Penelope after 20 years of wandering, he says the following:

Dear wife, we have not yet come to the limit of all our trials. There is unmeasured labor left for the future, both difficult and great, and all of it I must accomplish. So the soul of Teiresias prophesied to me. (Odyssey XXIII 248-251) With that, we have discussed the 10 most important characteristics of the Alpha-tradition. They are the oldest mythological characteristics that we can reasonably distinguish on European soil. Presumably, they go back deep into the Bronze Age.

## **Chapter 5**

## The Alpha-tradition in Homer

We have studied the Alpha-tradition in part I by means of a very diverse set of sources. Some stories stemmed wholly or partially from the Iliad and the Odyssey; thus, we can already conclude at this point that the core of the Alpha-tradition must be significantly older than the written record of this work. However, many details of the stories are known to us through play-wrights, historians, and mythographers, who lived much later. For example, the story about the fall of Troy is best preserved in the second chapter of Vergil's *Aeneid*, a famous Roman poem that only dates from the first century BC.

It would be interesting at this point to study the Alpha-tradition exclusively in the Iliad and the Odyssey, the very oldest and most extensive written sources from Greek soil. We may then at least guarantee that we do not encounter oral characteristics that are younger than the eighth century BC. Therefore, in this chapter, we will take a close look at a series of passages in the Iliad and the Odyssey. We find the Alpha-tradition in well-defined passages in the Iliad, usually in the form of a digression in the dialogues of the characters. The series of oral characteristics from which we can recognize the Alpha-tradition will thus be extended considerably.

The Iliad mentions some of the fantastical hero stories from the previous chapter, "The hero story." These include Hephaistos who is cast out of Olympos, Herakles who frees the Trojans from the sea monster, and Bellerophontes who kills the Chimaira. Yet, the style of the Iliad is usually quite different from that of the hero stories. Supernatural phenomena occur less often, and the passages are concisely constructed as a mechanical sequence of oral characteristics. One example of this is the collection of fighters prior to the battle for Kalydon and the killing of the Kalydonian boar. By studying the story of the war against Kalydon in other sources than the Iliad, we understand that this "collection" must have grown to grand forms. A series of famous heroes was gathered, which outmarched the coalition for the Trojan War, but this is not apparent from the Iliad. In it, we read very dryly:

The son of Oineus killed this boar, Meleagros, assembling together many hunting men out of numerous cities with their hounds; since the boar might not have been killed by a few men. (Iliad IX 543-545)

We do not find even a brief suggestion that Meleagros proves himself amongst heroes like Perseus, Theseus, and the divine twins Kastor and Polydeukes. The Iliad tells of a local war between the Kouretes and the Kalydonians in a western corner of Central Greece.

It seems that the Iliad harks back to an earlier stage of the story about Kalydon, which was not mixed with other stories. In the passage about the flight of Tlepolemos, the collection of warriors is described even more cryptically:

At once he put ships together and assembled a host of people and went fugitive over the sea, since the others threatened, the rest of the sons and the grandsons of the strength of Herakles. And he came to Rhodes a wanderer, a man of misfortune, and they settled there in triple division by tribes, beloved of Zeus himself, who is lord over all gods and all men. (Iliad II 664-669)

Why does Tlepolemos collect troops before he leaves? In order to conquer Rhodes? However, a war is out of the question here. Nevertheless, the Iliad uses an oral characteristic, namely the collection of soldiers, that is presumably very old.

It seems, however, that the bards who developed the Iliad were well aware of the great antiquity of some parts of the oral tradition. They knew the older logic of their stories, as well as the most modern variations. With this wealth of knowledge, they could get to work. They consciously chose where they used the oldest oral characteristics and where they afforded themselves more recent characteristics. Presumably, this explains why a series of passages in the Iliad and the Odyssey prefer oral characteristics that are in use much less elsewhere. All in all, I find 40 passages of this kind. Among these common oral characteristics, there are many of the Alpha-tradition that we already described in the chapter "Characterizing the core," like kings, heroes, wars, and feuds. However, the Homeric works have more in store for us. Thanks to their enormous size and attention to detail, we can distinguish many more oral characteristics.

### Forty-Six Alpha-passages

Let us collect all these passages and appoint them the *Alpha-passages*. Apart from the lists of warriors, these passages are usually quite short but readable bits of text. In the Iliad, we find the following 42 Alpha-passages:

I 248-274	Nestor recalls his fight against the Centaurs
II 101-108	The descent of the scepter of Agamemnon
II 494-770	The catalogue of ships: a list of the Greek leaders
II 816-877	The list of the Trojan leaders
III 184-190	Priam describes the war against the Amazons
IV 370-410	Agamemnon tells of the exploits of Tydeus in Thebes
V 381-415	Dione condemns the fight of Herakles against the gods
V 636-651	Sarpedon praises the fight of Herakles against the Trojans
V 800-813	Athene praises the exploits of Tydeus in Thebes
VI 129-141	Diomedes draws lessons from the hubris of Lykourgos,
	who fought the gods
VI 145-211	Glaukos glorifies the exploits of his ancestor Bel-
	lerophontes
VI 396-428	Andromache arouses pity with her life history
VII 123-158	Nestor compares Hektor with the hero Ereuthalion in the
	fight against the Arkadians
VIII 362-369	Athene reminds Zeus of the help she gave to Herakles
	during his trials
IX 122-156	Agamemnon promises great treasures to Achilleus
IX 264-298	Odysseus tells of the riches promised to Achilleus
IX 437-484	Phoinix explains how he became king of the Dolopes
IX 496-514	Phoinix moralizes about Prayers and Ruin (or Delusion),
	the daughters of Zeus
IX 524-599	Phoinix talks of the war at Kalydon

X 260-271	The descent of the helmet with the boar teeth
X 284-291	
	Diomedes recalls the exploits of Tydeus at Thebes
XI 668-762	Nestor describes his exploits in the battle against the
	Epeians
XI 762-790	Nestor tells of the recruitment of soldiers in Phthia
XII 310-328	Sarpedon boasts of his kingship over the Lykians
XIII 685-718	A list of leaders, peoples, and descendants
XIV 109-127	Diomedes boasts of his descent
XIV 249-262	Sleep recalls the fight of Herakles against the Trojans
XIV 301-328	Hera and Zeus digress about their past
XV 14-33	Zeus reminds Hera of the cruel punishment he gave her
XVI 173-197	The enumeration of the leaders of the Myrmidons
XVIII 394-407	Hephaistos recalls his education
XVIII 429-443	Thetis laments her life story
XVIII 509-540	A description of a besieged city on the shield of Achilleus
XIX 85-136	Agamemnon draws lessons from the delusion of Zeus
XIX 287-300	Briseis laments her life story
XX 178-243	Aineias boasts of his divine origin
XXI 439-460	Poseidon curses Laomedon, who insulted him
XXIII 77-90	Patroklos recalls his early childhood
XXIII 626-646	Nestor boasts of his success in former contests
XXIII 678-680	The funeral games of Oidipous
XXIV 518-551	Achilleus sympathizes with the fate of Priam
XXIV 601-619	Achilleus makes a wise comparison with the tragedy of
	Niobe

While the Odyssey contains much fewer Alpha-passages, the following four are quite beautiful examples of such:

Od. V 118-136	Kalypso describes her relationship with Odysseus
Od. XI 235-640	Odysseus tells of mythical characters
Od. XV 223-256	The descent of Theoklymenos
Od. XIX 392-468	The scar on the leg of Odysseus

Thus, approximately 1500 verses are marked in the Iliad, which is almost one tenth of the total volume. In the Odyssey, the number is clearly less, with approximately 500 verses over only four passages. Some of the hero stories we already encountered in Part I are recalled in these passages. Phoinix recounts his own hero story to Achilleus while Glaukos boasts of the deeds of his ancestor Bellerophontes. The trials of Herakles are mentioned both by humans and gods. Yet, not all hero stories in the Iliad are included in this list of passages. In this chapter, "The Alpha-tradition in Homer," we only discuss the passages in which many oral characteristics of the Alphatradition appear together. The hero story of Hera in chapter XIV of the Iliad, which is 200 verses long, is therefore not included. The story of the flight of Tlepolemos, which is incorporated into the catalogue of ships, is included, because of the oral characteristics with which it is told.

Just on the basis of the short titles that summarize the content of the passages, we may already discover a number of oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition, as it occurs in the Iliad. They are almost always digressions in the dialogues of the warriors at Troy or in those of the gods, who watch the fight from close by. The digressions concern past wars or stories from a distant past, about mythical characters, life histories, or pedigrees. Often, the purpose of the digression is to apply wisdom and morality in ancient tales to the situation around Troy. We also see already a few specific preferences, which the bards have used, to give the Alpha-tradition a place in the Iliad: Nestor as narrator, Herakles as a hero of the past, and the war against Thebes as a story.

### **Forty-Nine Alpha-characteristics**

Let us now discuss the oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition one at a time, as they are reflected in the Alpha-passages of the Homeric texts, and provide references for each of them. The 10 oral characteristics in the core of the Alpha-tradition, like the wars, bloody feuds, and kings, can also be found in the Alpha-passages:

#### 1. Wars on cities

The war against Thebes is legendary in the many digressions. However, the destructions of many other cities are also mentioned. Thus, Herakles is responsible for the destruction of Troy and Pylos. Several characters recall a legendary war from the past, such as the war against the Centaurs, the Amazons, or the Epeians.

(See Iliad III 187, Iliad IX 529, Iliad XI 671)

#### 2. Bloody feuds

Feuds within the family are common. The reason for this is usually a

murder or an unhappy marriage. Partners, parents, and children curse or threaten to kill each other.

(See Iliad II 662, Iliad IX 454, Iliad IX 567)

#### 3. The king and his court

The Alpha-passages figure rich, famous kings, who rule over many countries, with many subjects. They are the kings of peoples like the Argives, the Myrmidons, the Pylians, or the Kadmeians.

(See Iliad I 263, Iliad IX 483, Iliad XII 319, Iliad XIX 296)

#### 4. The brave hero

The hero in the Alpha-passages is strong, brave, noble, combative, and courageous. He does not have an easy time, because his life is full of difficulties, which incite him to commit many great deeds. The Alpha-passages mention several heroes whose deeds have become world famous.

The trials of the hero can be very diverse. Recurring elements are the defeat of wondrous creatures or people, the stealing or guarding of large herds of cattle or horses, and defeating an entire army of soldiers.

(See Iliad IV 372, Iliad VI 155, Iliad VII 137)

#### 5. The change of power

The dominion over vast farmlands, cities, and tributary subjects should of course be passed on to the next generation. Apart from committing heroic deeds, this proves to be a matter of descent, nepotism, and strategic marriages.

(See Iliad IX 156, Iliad IX 483, Iliad XX 180)

#### 6. The cycle of misery

The Alpha-passages are full of tragedy, misfortune, and misery. After a dramatic event, the characters are often driven mad and commit even greater follies. They lose their loved ones and are deserted by men and gods.

(See Iliad II 665, Iliad VI 203, Iliad XXIV 603)

#### 7. The revenge on the return

This important oral characteristic is illustrated casually in the Alphapassages as a part of some important hero stories. Thus, the heroes Tydeus and Bellerophontes defeated an entire army while returning from an important act.

(See Iliad IV 392, Iliad V 648, Iliad VI 187, Odyssey XV 236)

#### 8. The special education

In order to later become king, the king's son needs to obtain a decent education in the palace of his parents. However, not every king's son is so favored. All too often, a king's son must wander around or is abandoned or exiled, but he always ends up well. A good soul warmly welcomes him and gives him a decent education.

(See Iliad IX 442, Iliad XVIII 398, Iliad XXIII 90)

#### 9. Fatal women

The equality of the sexes is nonexistent in the Alpha-passages. Many positive adjectives, such as heroic, noble, and powerful, are frequently used to describe the male characters. The women, on the other hand, are often portrayed as jealous, greedy, adulterous, and lying witches, who have the power to curse men. Even impeccable women may be stigmatized as a source of intrigue and misery.

(See Iliad IX 452, Iliad IX 566, Iliad XIX 97)

#### 10. Failed marriages

Within marriages, misery rules. The partners are unhappy, and they sleep or live separately. Adultery, resentment, and jealousy underlie this situation.

(See Iliad IX 450, Iliad XIV 305, Iliad XVIII 433)

These are the 10 oral characteristics at the core of the Alpha-tradition. This core is therefore also reflected in the Alpha-passages in the Homeric works. This reinforces the suspicion that this is not some random cluster of oral characteristics that co-occur in certain stories. This is apparently an oral tradition that remained intact even in the eighth century BC. Moreover, in the Alpha-passages, these characteristics are also largely separated from the many oriental features that have become attached to the hero stories.

This numbering will now be continued for the other oral characteristics that are encountered in the Alpha-passages. These numbers can then be used in the section "Ten analyzed Alpha-passages" to discuss the Alpha-passages in Homer in detail.

#### 11. Divine dynasties

The Alpha-bards sang of royal genealogies that led all the way back to the gods. The fame of their ancestors is the greatest pride of the heroes. From their side, the gods were very concerned about the fate of their own human children. What is true of men may also have applied to precious heirlooms. Weapons and fast horses of noble blood were once, many generations in the past, bestowed by the gods upon an ancestor.

(See Iliad II 101, Iliad VI 154, Iliad XX 215)

#### 12. Places and personal names

The bards must have known a large amount of data by heart in order to improvise the Alpha-passages. They introduced each new character in a story with a description of his residence and his lineage, or at least by mentioning the name of his father. They could recite countless place names and pedigrees: who lived where and with which god the mother of the father of hero X had slept. A systematic report of such data is found in the catalogue of ships, which describes the captains of the Greeks and Trojans.

(See Iliad II 294, Iliad IX 150, Iliad XIV 116)

#### 13. Large herds of cattle, horses, or sheep

The herds of cattle are a background element in many Alpha-passages. They belong to the riches of a king. Herding the flocks is a tricky task, because enemies are on the lookout everywhere to steal the herds. Of some places it is stated that they are rich in horses or sheep, like the horse-nourishing Argos.

(See Iliad IX 154, Iliad XI 678, Iliad XX 188)

#### 14. Long wanderings

Strongly related to the series of trials is the wandering of a hero before he reaches his destiny. Tlepolemos even guided a whole army from Argos to Rhodes. In any case, a hero only becomes king after long wanderings.

(See Iliad II 667, Iliad VI 201, Iliad IX 478)

#### 15. Digressions

A striking oral characteristic of the Alpha-passages is the digression. Often, it is the old Nestor who begins to elaborate on an old story in the Iliad in the following structure: "Once, when I was young, ... (then comes the story) ..., that is how it was when I was young." Sometimes, there are even digressions within digressions.

(See Iliad I 260, Iliad IX 524, Iliad XXIV 602)

The digression is, in fact, a narrative technique to integrate certain content in the story. Most other oral characteristics in this list are story elements. There is something very strange going on with the digression as an oral characteristic. All the Alpha-passages that are included in the list are in fact digressions. This selection can be confusing, especially since we know since the discussion of the king's story that many passages in the Odyssey, even apart from the four selected Alpha-passages, stem from the Alpha-tradition. For the discussion in this chapter, "The Alpha-tradition in Homer," it is useful to select only those passages that contain a high density of Alpha-characteristics.

How is it possible to insist that the digression is an oral characteristic that is connected with the Alpha-tradition? Is it not simply the choice of the poet of the Iliad and the Odyssey - the legendary Homer - to bring the Alpha-tradition in the form of digressions? To this end, the importance of digressions within digressions must be stressed. In the Odyssey, we see this even on a large scale. Odysseus tells the Phaiakians about his own trials in a long story, which is merely a digression within the time course of the Odyssey. As part of these trials, he tells of his descent into the underworld and the many mythical characters he saw there. For each character, Odysseus makes a short digression. Within the digression about Chloris, Odysseus tells of her children, which include the old Nestor and Pero. At that point, the Homeric narrator can finally relate a part of the hero story about Melampous, namely as a digression about Pero. This build-up in the Odyssey shows that the use of digressions in the Alpha-tradition is not the random choice of a single bard at a late stage of the Iliad but is a traditional characteristic that is connected to the Alpha-tradition.

#### 16. Recruiting soldiery

When a war is imminent between two peoples, a tour through many cities is first made to recruit soldiers. The many meetings with kings about which Nestor tells, took place during several such recruitment tours.

(See Iliad II 664, Iliad IX 544, Iliad XI 716)

#### 17. The move to a distant place

Many of the heroes and kings settle after a long journey in an area far

from their homeland. The reason for this is often a flight or an exile because of a crime, a curse, or a destiny.

(See Iliad II 668, Iliad IX 481, Iliad XXIII 85)

#### 18. Strange peoples

All kinds of strange peoples constitute formidable opponents in battle, such as the rugged mountain people of the Centaurs, the Amazons who were strong as men, the illustrious Solymoi, Paionians with curved arches, and Phrygians with trotting horses.

(See Iliad I 268, Iliad II 848, Iliad VI 184)

#### 19. The seven-gated Thebes

The city most frequently mentioned in the Alpha-passages of the Iliad is Thebes. The city is centrally located in Greece and was fought against in the generation before the Trojan War. Tydeus and his son Diomedes represent two generations of fighters at Thebes in the Iliad. The Thebans are typically called "Kadmeians," since they are descendants of Kadmos.

The number seven is mentioned strikingly often in connection with the city of Thebes, also known as "the seven-gated Thebes." The hero Tydeus even defeated an army of exactly 49 Thebans. Seven to the square! Moreover, Eurystheus was the firstborn of the genus, before Herakles, because his mother gave birth in the seventh month.

(See Iliad IV 378, Iliad XIX 99, Iliad XXIII 679)

Both the Iliad and the Odyssey are a part of the Trojan cycle. In the eighth century BC, the vision prevailed that the war in Thebes had happened before the war of Troy. Moreover, extensive stories about Thebes have been preserved. Thus, it is not surprising that Thebes was chosen as a central element in a separate world of tale-telling that is situated in the past relative to the rest of the story in the Iliad. However, there is some chance that Thebes once had the role in the Alpha-tradition that was taken over by Troy in the Dark Ages.

#### 20. The remuneration of the king

After a hero has undergone his trials, he is richly rewarded by the king. He receives extensive fields, orchards, and vineyards. The main reward is the hand of the princess and half of the kingdom.

(See Iliad IX 122, Iliad IX 578, Iliad XX 185)

#### 21. Polytheism

Many well-known and lesser-known gods are mentioned in the Alphapassages: Zeus, Athene, Poseidon, Hera, Hephaistos, Ares, Demeter, Apollo, Dionysos, Hermes, Spercheios, etc. They are usually mentioned separately in connection with specific nature elements, rivers, or regions, or as an ancestor of humans. For example, Dionysus fled, chased by Lykourgos, from the sacred Nyseian hill (Iliad VI 133) and dived into the sea, where he was taken to the bosom by Thetis.

The gods are often protectors of certain regions or individuals, but they expect regular sacrifices in return.

(See Iliad II 865, Iliad VI 132, Iliad XVI 174)

#### 22. The punishment of the gods

For some reason, mortal humans live at odds with the almighty gods. On the one hand, people are guilty of outrageous insults and humiliations of the gods. On the other hand, some gods are very touchy and undertake excessive retaliation. Even crimes between people and the mistakes of other gods are mercilessly punished by the gods. The criminals are maimed, killed, or robbed of their loved ones.

(See Iliad II 599, Iliad VI 138, Iliad XXIV 605)

#### 23. The hero who defeats a whole army

When a single hero exterminates a full army, we are certainly dealing with an Alpha-passage. Sometimes, the hero leaves one man alive, so that he can recount the heroic deed. The fight does not take place in the open plain; more often there is an ambush to surprise the enemy.

Just as often, the hero finds himself surrounded by enemies during games. Tydeus first defeated the Thebans during a friendly game, before killing all but one of an army of 50 men in an ambush.

(See Iliad IV 397, Iliad VI 189, Iliad XXIII 632)

#### 24. The exiled son

All too often, a king's son misses out on a proper upbringing and starts wandering at a young age. Examples in the Alpha-passages are Phoinix, Patroklos, and the god Hephaistos. Eventually, the son always finds his destiny and a glorious future awaits him.

(See Iliad IX 462, Iliad XVIII 396, Iliad XXIII 85)

In the Alpha-passages, we often find the exiled son in combination with other oral characteristics, such as the special education and the reward of the king. This indicates a limitation on the use of a small number of oral characteristics with short titles, to describe the world of the Alpha-passages. The bards who improvised such stories did not do so on the basis of a list of oral characteristics. What they had ready in their memories were all kinds of complex patterns.

In the combination of the exiled son, the special education, and the reward of the king, we discover a new oral characteristic, namely *the hospitable educator*: a noble, hospitable king gives a wandering hero a home and a decent education. However, it is not the intention to list every oral characteristic of the Alpha-tradition here, but rather to summarize them efficiently.

#### 25. Destinies

Will an expedition turn out to be a success or a failure? Is the king's son destined for a long life and will he rule over many subjects? The fate of the mortals is fixed from birth and cannot be escaped. The gods often know the fates, but they must also accept them. Thus, Herakles, a son of Zeus, was doomed to undergo the trials of Eurystheus, much against the wishes of Zeus himself. On earth, seers, prophets, and oracles make statements that are inevitably fulfilled. Some mortals can even spell a curse, which is again inescapable.

(See Iliad VI 407, Iliad IX 566, Iliad XXIV 551)

#### 26. The abduction of cattle

The abduction of livestock is often the immediate cause of a bitter strife between hostile neighbors. The repelling or killing of the guards of a herd is a great heroic deed, but it can be followed by a war between neighboring cities.

(See Iliad VI 423, Iliad XI 677, Iliad XX 188)

#### 27. The number nine

The numbers nine and twelve are used more often than other numbers. In particular, the number nine is often used to count the number of days or years and seems to symbolize a long period of time. These numbers are, however, also characteristic of the Ionian Epsilon-tradition.

(See Iliad VI 174, Iliad IX 470, Iliad XXIV 610)

#### 28. Herakles, Tydeus, Neleus, Peleus, and Nestor

The Alpha-passages have a clear preference for certain heroes, who belonged to an earlier generation than the heroes at Troy. The main hero is Herakles, followed by Tydeus, Neleus, Peleus, and Nestor. The last of these was so old that he belonged both to the earlier generations and to the warriors at Troy. Lesser-known heroes also sometimes have a special reputation, like the club-bearing Areïthoös, the giant Ereuthalion, or the two Molions, who always fought together.

(See Iliad V 639, Iliad XI 690, Iliad XIV 250)

We may wonder why some specific heroes are listed here as a separate oral characteristic, while the general characteristics of the brave hero were mentioned previously. Herakles can be considered a sub-characteristic of the brave hero, while the heroic deeds of Herakles, for example, are a subcharacteristic of Herakles. However, the combination of an oral characteristic and a sub-characteristic, such as "hero" and "Herakles," can be useful to distinguish the Alpha-passages from other passages in the Iliad. The heroes Aias and Hektor, for example, have little to do with the Alpha-passages, just as little as heroes who fight in war chariots in the open plain.

#### 29. The hero assisted by the gods

The gods sustain their darlings with words and deeds, during the trials they undergo. Herakles could even count on the assistance of two gods: Zeus and Athene. The hero is guided by the gods on his journey to new trials or to his future kingdom. The gods can also turn against the hero. This is what Bellerophontes had to experience after his glorious deeds.

(See Iliad VI 171, Iliad VIII 362, Iliad X 285)

#### 30. The honorable funeral

Even after death, a mortal human is not relieved of doom and gloom. His soul remains restless, until he is buried. Unfortunate is the sight of the dead one who remains lying at the place where he was slain. His eyes and mouth remain open. Nine days the children of Niobe lay in their own blood, after they were slain by Artemis and Apollo.

The dead can rest if they are buried honorably by family and relatives in their own country. People come from far and wide to compete in the funeral games that are organized for the dead.

(See Iliad VI 417, Iliad XXIII 679, Iliad XXIV 612)

#### 31. Ate, goddess of delusion

Who never commits a foolish deed, overcome by shortsightedness and cloudy thoughts? The characters in the Alpha-passages blame the gods for such foolishness, especially the goddess Ate (in Greek  $\alpha \tau \eta$ ), who strikes both humans and gods with blind folly. Ate is a divine personification of a concept that is often translated as Delusion, Ruin, Mischief, or Folly. According to the Iliad, she is a daughter of Zeus. In the Alpha-passages, she is also mentioned together with Erinys, goddess of revenge. These two goddesses participate in the same cluster of oral characteristics, which will be further explored in oral characteristic 39 about Erinys. Furthermore, the Greek word  $\alpha \tau \alpha \sigma \theta \alpha \lambda \iota \alpha$  means reckless stupidity.

(See Iliad IV 409, Iliad IX 504, Iliad XIX 91)

#### 32. The flight after a crime

When the hero has murdered a family member, he must flee to another region in Greece, to escape the vengeance of his own family. This is followed by a long wandering, a series of heroic deeds, or a successful takeover in the new region.

(See Iliad II 664, Iliad IX 478, Iliad XXIII 86)

This oral characteristic about the flight after a crime has a similar function as the exile of a son. Both oral characteristics help to tell a part of the hero story, which is usually only briefly sketched in the Alpha-passages.

#### 33. The marriage with a king's daughter

Marrying a princess or queen is very important for an ambitious hero. In this way, he acquires the kingship, or he may extend his power. The marriages are arranged, with the woman serving as small change in the politics of the men.

(See Iliad VI 192, Iliad IX 142, Iliad XIV 267)

#### 34. Riches of the soil

The Alpha-passages contain many words, especially epithets, that refer to the qualities of the soil and the landscape. The place names are described as sandy, wide, woody, with a rich soil, rocky, hollow, feeding horses, "mother of sheep" or "overgrown with rushes." The landscapes are mountains and valleys, fields, meadows, rivers, orchards, or vineyards. The "populous" Koös is indicated with quite a special landscape quality. Apparently, the soil there is rich in soldiers and taxpayers.

(See Iliad II 496, Iliad IV 383, Iliad IX 479)

The term "riches of the soil" fails to accurately capture the oral characteristic. Perhaps, "landscape descriptions" would be better, although this ignores the fact that the descriptions are often about the soil, and more specifically about the riches that the soil brings. Riches of the soil, soil descriptions, and landscape descriptions are a series of sub-characteristics. Breaking down this oral characteristic into three distinct oral characteristics, however, does not well reflect its weight. We must again conclude that the complex patterns the bards kept in mind are difficult to capture in a series of oral characteristics.

#### 35. The story of a character's life

Many Alpha-passages give an anecdotal description of the life of a character. When somebody explains his pedigree, he even gives several short biographies for each of his ancestors.

(See Iliad VI 413, Iliad IX 447, Iliad XIV 114)

#### 36. The secret intercourse of a mortal and a god

Sons of gods are conceived when some human sleeps with a god. The mightiest gods, like Zeus and Poseidon, have children with many mortal women, but even goddesses, like Aphrodite, Demeter, and Kalypso, slept with earthly men. The gods often simply seduce women in the bedroom, while the goddesses visit men in the open field. In any case, intercourse with a god leads to pregnancy.

The adultery is mostly conducted in secret, yet it seems that no deed remains hidden from the omniscient gods. The intercourse between a goddess and a man usually leads to misfortune for both, while Zeus suffers greatly from the jealousy of his wife Hera.

(See Iliad II 515, Iliad II 821, Iliad XVI 176)

#### 37. The painful, prolonged captivity

If a character is not wandering far from his homeland, then chances are high that he will get stuck somewhere in a hopeless situation, during which time he must suffer great pain and sorrow.

Odysseus is stuck with the goddess Kalypso, Phoinix with his own family, and Hephaistos somewhere in the middle of the ocean. Melampous is detained and tortured by King Iphikles, after a failed attempt to steal his cattle.

(See Iliad II 721, Iliad V 385, Iliad XVIII 396, Odyssey XV 230)

#### 38. The mortal abducted by a god

Just like a hero or a king's son can find a better life with an educator who welcomes him hospitably, he can also be taken up to heaven by the gods. Sometimes a person, such as Ganymede and Kleopatra, is robbed by one of the gods "because of his or her beauty." Erechtheus was raised by the goddess Athene and received the Temple of Athene instead of Olympos as his residence.

(See Iliad II 547, Iliad IX 564, Iliad XX 234)

#### 39. Erinys and wrathful goddesses

When somebody commits murder, he inevitably contracts the fatal revenge of the relatives of the dead. However, if it is not a family member, it is Erinys, the goddess of revenge, who executes an appropriate punishment. In the Iliad, we find a number of different formulations associated with Erinys. Agamemnon blames Zeus, Destiny, and Erinys, the mist-walking, for his blindness. He then accuses Ate (Delusion), the accursed daughter of Zeus who deludes all. At other times, help is requested of the gruesome Erinys, the Zeus of the underworld, and the feared Persephone. The Zeus of the underworld is Hades, who rules the underworld together with his wife Persephone. Commonalities in the formulations are their way of walking, mist and darkness, vengeance, delusion, gruesome adjectives, Zeus, daughters of Zeus, and wicked female goddesses. Erinys is mentioned once in the plural in the Iliad, as the Erinyes, who are also known as the Furies.

(See Iliad IX 454, Iliad IX 571, Iliad XIX 87)

#### 40. Delegate counselors

Proud kings do not always contact each other directly. Often, they will send a delegate counselor or confidant, who enters a neighboring or enemy fortress. Some examples include Nestor (envoy of Agamemnon), Phoinix (envoy of Peleus), and Tydeus (envoy of Polyneikes). Such envoys also often have the role of counselor or educator at the court of the king. More specifically, they have the task of leading the king's sons when they go to war. Achilleus was led by Phoinix, but also by his bosom friend Patroklos, while Achilleus' son Neoptolemos was led by Odysseus after Achilleus' death.

(See Iliad IV 384, Iliad IX 438, Iliad XI 785)

This oral characteristic, the delegate counselors, refers so clearly to a particular social situation that it must stem from a specific society that once existed in reality. Moses Finley (1954) made the same argument for the concept of guest friendship, a social use of which we find many examples in the Ionian Epsilon-layer of the Homeric works, but not in the Alpha-passages. In the next chapter, "A Mafia origin," we will compare the delegate counselors to a social role in the Sicilian Mafia. While guest friendship could very well be a social code from the eighth century BC in Greece, this seems unlikely for the delegation of war envoys.

#### 41. Holiness

Sometimes religious institutions are mentioned, especially in connection with certain regions and gods. Athene educated Erechtheus in her own temple in the city of Athens, where the Athenians annually asked for his favor with a sacrifice of bulls and rams. Onchestos is mentioned as the forest rich sanctuary of Poseidon.

(See Iliad II 549, Iliad VI 132, Iliad XVI 182)

#### 42. The abduction of a woman

Women appear as victims in the Alpha-passages. It is often the gods who assault innocent women, both mortals and lesser known goddesses. For example, Kleopatra was kidnapped by Phoibos Apollo, the god of the bow, much to the opposition and sadness of her parents. However, earthly heroes like Herakles and Achilleus also kidnap their wives.

(See Iliad II 659, Iliad VI 425, Iliad IX 564)

#### 43. Superlatives

Things are often presented in a slightly exaggerated fashion in the Alpha-passages. Individuals or peoples are frequently mentioned with superlatives that designate them as the most beautiful, the smartest, the strongest, the best, and so on. Examples are Sisyphos, the sharpest of all men, Ganymede, the loveliest born of the race of mortals, and the Abioi, most righteous of all men.

(See Iliad I 266, Iliad II 673, Iliad XX 220)

Like the digressions, the superlatives are a narrative technique rather than a story element. These particular superlatives show that the characteristics of the Alpha-passages are not only story elements that are connected by logical links, like king, wealth, and orchard. The superlatives are very typical and are found almost exclusively in the Alpha-passages.

#### 44. The human who fights the gods

Mortal men sometimes think they are better than the gods and may even dare to start a downright fight with a god. The heroes Herakles, Lykourgos, and Idas battled with the goddess Hera and the gods Hades, Dionysus, and Apollo.

(See Iliad V 392, Iliad VI 131, Iliad IX 559)

#### 45. Palaces with solid walls

The houses of the kings and heroes are nice and big. They are referred to as palaces and castles that are solidly built, surrounded by high walls, and built on an altitude. The walls of some cities are sacred and there are stories about their legendary builders.

(See Iliad II 559, Iliad XIV 122, Iliad XIX 99)

#### 46. The overpowering of a wild animal

One of the dangerous tasks for the heroes that is regularly mentioned is the killing or capturing of wild animals, like horses, boars, or dragons. The hero who has killed or captured such an animal will keep the animal - or a part of it like its coat - as a trophy.

(See Iliad V 651, Iliad VI 179, Iliad IX 539)

#### 47. Games

Since 776 BC, the names of the winners of the Olympic Games have been recorded in Greece. However, given the multitude of myths about the origin of the games, the Ancient Greeks probably did not know their origin themselves. In any case, we find such games in the Alphapassages. For instance, Tydeus defeated all the Thebans in a contest, when he went entirely alone among the enemy as envoy. In general, such games were held in honor of a deceased hero.

(See Iliad IV 389, Iliad XVI 186, Iliad XXIII 634)

How should we now date the oral characteristics of the Alpha-passages? The link with the Olympic Games at least does not indicate a great age. Apart

from the Alpha-passages, we find the funeral games for Patroklos and contests that Odysseus took up against the Phaiakians and a beggar in Ithaka. Some aspects of the games, such as horse racing, are also hidden in Homeric epithets and comparisons. All these things make me suspect that this oral characteristic – the games – developed at the end of the Dark Ages. Yet, it is not so clear exactly how old the games themselves are.

There are other oral characteristics in the Alpha-passages for which we face the same problem, such as the many proper names, foreign peoples, sanctity, and polytheism. Knowledge about peoples, cultures, and religion can indeed reach far back in time, but it seems unlikely that these matters were handed down via the Alpha-tradition. They simply reflect the knowledge of the bards and the public about the past. This requires a special hypothesis: the oral characteristics with which the Alpha-passages are constructed are those that the bards *thought* to be the oldest. Some were effectively handed down through a separate oral tradition, the Alpha-tradition. Other oral characteristics may have followed their own detours through time.

#### 48. Cunning ambushes

Open confrontations on the plains are not the business of the heroes of the Alpha-tradition. Usually, the enemy is outwitted by patiently waiting in ambush or by inventing a cunning trick. Deadly settlements usually take place at a particular geographic location, such as a narrow pass or river.

(See Iliad IV 392, Iliad VII 143, Iliad XVIII 513)

In the stories outside the Iliad and the Odyssey, we find the cave where Medusa was outwitted, a ravine into which the Sphinx threw people, and a crossing of mountain paths where Oidipous killed his father. The sly approach works both for humans and monsters.

#### 49. Old age

It is sometimes stated of a character whether or not he has reached an old age. Nestor is the archetype of the old man, just as Achilleus was destined for a short life.

(See Iliad II 663, Iliad VII 125, Iliad IX 452)

The list of characteristics enumerated above can suffice. The Iliad is too short to distinguish further details. Besides the 10 oral characteristics at the core of the Alpha-tradition, there are many other similarities to be noted between

the king and hero stories, and the Alpha-passages. Some examples are the long wanderings, the struggle for the throne, heroes who can handle a whole army almost alone, seers, murders of family members, exiled kings' sons, fleeing criminals, marriages with princesses, lonely imprisonments, and the inevitable retaliation.

We now face the task of analyzing all the oral characteristics together, in order to draw conclusions about the origin and meaning of the Alphapassages. We can already make an important observation: the oral characteristics of the Alpha-passages are very diverse and many stem from the Alphatradition. They include the classic life of a hero, motifs, like the theft of cattle, themes, such as the relationship between men and gods, many proper names of people and places, typical scenes and formulas, like those about recruiting soldiers, and a typical vocabulary, like the one about the landscape types. Together, they support an oral art that can be used to improvise digressions in stories that were current at the end of the Dark Ages in Greece. The fact that the digression is itself an oral characteristic of the Alpha-passages allows us to suspect that we are dealing with a remnant of the Alpha-tradition that has mainly been preserved in digressions. The oral art of versifying the Alphapassages is, in other words, a part of the eighth-century Alpha-tradition.

The list of Alpha-characteristics contains very few references to the Greek language, except for a number of proper names. The oral characteristics are mostly concepts and ideas rather than concrete words (lemmas). Such concepts are language independent and can be fully described in a modern language such as English. But does this suffice to study an ancient oral tradition?

To this end, let us once more put the language of the Iliad and the Odyssey under the microscope. For both works, a strict poetical methodology has been used, from which no passage escapes. Both the Iliad and the Odyssey are composed in an Ionic dialect that dates from the eighth century BC, with assisting words from the older Aeolic dialect. These words help the bards to properly complete the cumbersome hexameter system. This means that neither the so-called Alpha-passages nor the precise formulations of the Alpha-characteristics, stem from the Mykenaian period. Only the translatable aspect of some oral characteristics has been preserved throughout the centuries, during which the old formulations were systematically replaced by more modern formulations.

#### Ten analyzed Alpha-passages

We now know that the list of oral characteristics of the Alpha-passages is sufficiently diverse to support a special oral art. Nevertheless, a number of questions remain to be examined. Do these oral characteristics occur sufficiently often together in the Alpha-passages, to speak of a separate oral art? And do they not also occur outside the Alpha-passages?

Let us therefore take an even closer look at the Alpha-passages in the Iliad and give for each oral characteristic a reference to the corresponding number in the list. That way, it will quickly become clear how many oral characteristics are sometimes hidden in a short piece of text.

The very first Alpha-passage in the Iliad is about the main characters of the Iliad: Achilleus, the hero in battle, Agamemnon, the leader, and also the wise, old Nestor, who intervenes when a trivial quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilleus starts to get dramatically out of hand. The Alpha-passage includes a digression by Nestor about a legendary battle:

Nestor [28] the fair-spoken rose up, the lucid speaker of Pylos [12], from whose lips the streams of words ran sweeter than honey. In his time two generations of mortal men had perished, those who had grown up with him and they who had been born to these in sacred [41] Pylos, and he was king [3] in the third age [49]. He in kind intention toward both stood forth and addressed them: "Oh, for shame. Great sorrow [6] comes on the land of Achaia. Now might Priam and the sons of Priam in truth be happy, and all the rest of the Trojans be visited in their hearts with gladness, were they to hear all this wherein you two are quarreling, you, who surpass all Danaäns in council, in fighting. Yet be persuaded [40]. Both of you are younger than I am [49]. Yes, and in my time [15] I have dealt with better men [4] than you are, and never once did they disregard me. Never yet have I seen nor shall see again such men as these were [43], men like Peirithoös, and Dryas, shepherd of the people [3], Kaineus and Exadios, godlike Polyphemos, or Theseus, Aigeus' [12] son, in the likeness of the immortals [4]. These were the strongest [43] generation of earth-born mortals, the strongest, and they fought against the strongest [43], the beast men [18] living within the mountains, and terribly they destroyed [1] them. I was of the company [16] of these men, coming from Pylos, a long way from a distant land [14], since they had summoned [40] me. And I fought single-handed, yet against such men no one of the mortals now alive upon earth [43] could do battle [1]. And

also these listened to the counsels I gave and heeded my bidding [40]." (Iliad I 248-273)

In this Alpha-passage, we find 14 of the 49 oral characteristics: a war (1), kings (3), heroes (4), misery (6), many proper names (12), a long wandering (14), a digression (15), the gathering of soldiery (16), strange peoples (18), the hero Nestor (28), a counselor (40), a holy city (41), superlatives (43) and an old age (49). This shows how strongly the oral characteristics appear in combination. Some oral characteristics are conceptually connected. It goes without saying that wars can be associated with the recruitment of soldiers and a wandering of the participants. However, there is no compelling reason for many combinations. Why would the strange peoples also be the strongest who lived on earth? The combination of the strange peoples with the superlatives indicates a separate oral art.

The wise words of Nestor bring little improvement to the situation. Agamemnon selects Achilleus' girl for himself and Achilleus then surrenders to an endless wrath. The greatest warrior no longer fighting at the forefront weighs heavily on the morale of the Greeks. Nevertheless, they all regather for battle, which is an opportunity for the narrator to enumerate all the leaders in a long digression, known as the catalogue of ships. The following Alphapassage on the leaders Tlepolemos and Nireus is a small part of this:

Herakles' [28] son [11] Tlepolemos [12] the huge and mighty led from Rhodes [12] nine [27] ships with the proud men of Rhodes [12] aboard them, those who dwelt about Rhodes and were ordered in triple division, Ialysos and Lindos and silver-shining Kameiros [12]. Of all these Tlepolemos [12] the spear-famed was leader, he whom Astyocheia [12] bore to the strength of Herakles [28]. Herakles [15] brought [42] her from Ephyra [12] and the river Selleëis [12] after he sacked [1] many cities of strong, godsupported fighters. Now [15] when Tlepolemos [12] was grown [8] in the strong-built mansion [45], he struck to death his own father's beloved uncle [2], Likymnios [12], scion [11] of Ares [21], a [15] man already ageing [49]. At once he put ships together and assembled [16] a host of people and went fugitive [32] over the sea, since the others threatened [24,39], the rest of the sons and the grandsons of the strength of Herakles [28]. And he came to Rhodes [12] a wanderer [14], a man of misfortune [6], and they settled [17] there in triple division by tribes, beloved [29] of Zeus himself, who is lord [3] over all gods and all men, Kronos' son, who showered the

wonder of wealth [3] upon them. Nireus from Syme [12] led three balanced vessels, Nireus son [11] of Aglaia [12] and the king [3] Charopos, Nireus, the most [43] beautiful man who came beneath Ilion<sup>1</sup> beyond the rest of the Danaäns next after perfect Achilleus. But he was a man of poor strength and few people with him [16]. (Iliad II 653-675)

The oral characteristics found in this passage clearly occur very condensed. No fewer than 23 of the 49 oral characteristics appear in this passage, with a density of nearly two oral characteristics per verse. This is, of course, in large part due to the compact narrative style of the catalogue of ships.

Later in the story, Agamemnon inspects the troops and thereby meets the main Greek leaders. Among them are Diomedes, son of Tydeus, and his charioteer Sthenelos, son of Kapaneus. The fathers, Tydeus and Kapaneus, once belonged to the coalition of the seven against Thebes, but they were unable to conquer Thebes. However, the sons of the seven, including Diomedes and Sthenelos, did succeed in conquering the city. In regard to this fight, Agamemnon makes a digression during his tour, to the annoyance of Sthenelos:

So he spoke, and left him there, and went among others. He came on the son of Tydeus, high-spirited Diomedes, standing among the compacted chariots and by the horses, and Kapaneus' son, Sthenelos, was standing beside him. At sight of Diomedes the lord of men Agamemnon scolded him and spoke aloud to him and addressed him in winged words, saying: "Ah me, son of Tydeus [28], that daring breaker of horses [4], why are you skulking and spying out the outworks of battle? Such was never Tydeus' way, to lurk in the background, but to fight the enemy far ahead of his own companions [4]. So they say who had seen him at work [1], since I never saw nor encountered him ever; but they say he surpassed all others [43]. Once on a time [15] he came, but not in war [1], to Mykenai [40] with godlike Polyneikes, a guest and a friend, assembling people [16], since these were attacking [1] the sacred [41] bastions [45] of Thebe [19], and much they entreated us to grant him renowned companions [16]. And our men wished to give them and were assenting to what they asked for but Zeus turned them back [29], showing forth portents [25] that crossed them. Now as these went forward and were well on their way [14], and came to the river Asopos [12], and the mead-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Ilion is another name for Troy.

ows [34] of grass and the deep rushes [34], from there the Achaians sent Tydeus ahead with a message [40]. He went then and came on the Kadmeians<sup>2</sup> [19] in their numbers feasting all about the house [45] of mighty Eteokles [3]. There, stranger though he was, the driver of horses [4], Tydeus [28], was not frightened, alone [23] among so many Kadmeians [19]. but dared them to try their strength with him [47], and bested all of them easily, such might did Pallas Athene [29] give him. The Kadmeians who lash their horses [47], in anger compacted an ambuscade [48] of guile on his way home [7], assembling together fifty fighting men, and for these there were two leaders, Maion, Haimon's son, in the likeness of the immortals, with the son of Autophonos, Polyphontes [12] stubborn in battle. On these men Tydeus let loose a fate that was shameful. He killed them all [23], except that he let one man get home again, letting Maion go in obedience to the god's signs [25]. This was Tydeus, the Aitolian [12]; yet he was father to a son worse than himself at fighting, better in conclave." So he spoke, and strong Diomedes gave no answer in awe before the majesty of the king's rebuking; but the son of Kapaneus the glorious answered him, saying: "Son of Atreus, do not lie when you know the plain truth. We two claim we are better men by far than our fathers. We did storm the seven-gated foundation [45] of Thebe [19] though we led fewer people beneath a wall [45] that was stronger. We obeyed the signs [25] of the gods and the help [29] Zeus gave us, while those others died of their own headlong stupidity [31]. Therefore, never liken our fathers to us in honor." (Iliad IV 364-410)

In this passage, we can see very well how the Alpha-tradition works at different length scales. Namely, we can find the oral characteristics of the influential king story here. It is not King Polyneikes, but Tydeus, who takes up the central role of the king. He ventures alone among the enemy, defeats them all in solemn games, bypasses an ambush, and finally kills almost all enemies. We even find the element of revenge at the return, but what stands out here is that this return does not correspond to the original logic of the king story:

The Kadmeians in anger compacted an ambuscade of guile on his way home. Tydeus killed them all, except that he let one man get home again. (Iliad IV 391-397)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Kadmeian is another name for Theban.

The return of Tydeus is a return *from* Thebes instead of a return *to* Thebes, as the logic of the king story requires. We find a similar scene for the hero Bellerophontes:

Now as he came back the king spun another entangling treachery; for choosing the bravest men in wide Lykia he laid a trap, but these men never came home thereafter since all of them were killed by blameless Bellerophontes. (Iliad VI 187-190)

The association with the return is present in two ways here: the return of Bellerophontes to Lykia and the return of his enemies to their home. Furthermore, the revenge of Melampous on Neleus on his return in Pylos is ambiguous and hidden in the details of the vocabulary. In the translation of R. Lattimore, we read:

[Melampous] drove away the loud-lowing cattle from Phylake to Pylos, and achieved the unjust labor godlike Neleus imposed on him. (Odyssey XV 235-237)

The second part of this sentence contains ambiguous vocabulary (in Greek, it reads as  $\epsilon\tau\iota\sigma\alpha\tau\sigma$   $\epsilon\rho\gamma\sigma\nu$   $\alpha\epsilon\iota\kappa\epsilons$   $\alpha\nu\tau\iota\theta\epsilon\sigma\nu$   $N\eta\lambda\eta\alpha$ ). Most translators stress that Melampous *avenged* Neleus for the unjust labor, or even interpret the unjust labor as a revenge on Neleus. A.T. Murray translates: "[Melampous] avenged the cruel deed upon godlike Neleus." These verses show that the revenge at the return is, on the one hand, a central theme of extensive cycles within the Alpha-tradition and on the other hand a standalone oral characteristic, concealed in the details of the vocabulary. It involves the same oral characteristic, with the same associations with a city, ambushes, and the massacring of the enemy.

One of the envoys who were sent to the tent of Achilleus was Phoinix, who was employed by Peleus, father of Achilleus, as a counselor and war envoy to educate Achilleus as a warrior. In his speech to persuade Achilleus to join the fight, Phoinix also makes a digression with the typical oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition. In it, he tells what is at first sight a very bizarre story about his first meeting with Peleus:

Therefore apart from you, dear child, I would not be willing to be left behind, not were the god in person to promise he would scale away my old

age [49] and make me a young man blossoming as I was that time [15.35] when I first left Hellas [17], the land of fair women, running [32] from the hatred of Ormenos' son Amyntor [12], my father, who hated me for the sake of a fair-haired mistress [10]. For he made love to her himself, and dishonored his own wife [10], my mother; who was forever taking my knees [9] and entreating me to lie [10] with this mistress instead so that she would hate [9] the old man [49]. I was persuaded [9] and did it; and my father when he heard of it straightway called down his curses [25], and invoked against me the dreaded furies [39] that I might never have any son born of my seed to dandle on my knees; and the divinities, Zeus of the underworld [39] and Persephone [39] the honored goddess, accomplished his curses [25]. Then I took it into my mind to cut him down [2] with the sharp bronze, but some one of the immortals checked my anger [29], reminding me of rumor among the people and men's maledictions repeated, that I might not be called a parricide [2] among the Achaians. But now no more could the heart in my breast be ruled entirely to range still among these halls [24] when my father was angered. Rather it was the many kinsmen and cousins about me who held me closed [37] in the house, with supplications repeated, and slaughtered fat sheep in their numbers, and shambling horn-curved cattle [13], and numerous swine with the fat abundant upon them were singed and stretched out across the flame of Hephaistos [21], and much wine was drunk that was stored in the jars of the old [49] man. Nine [27] nights they slept nightlong [37] in their places beside me, and they kept up an interchange of watches [45], and the fire was never put out; one below the gate of the strong-closed courtyard [45], and one in the ante-chamber [45] before the doors of the bedroom. But when the tenth [27] night had come to me in its darkness, then I broke the close-compacted doors [37] of the chamber and got away, and overleapt the fence [45] of the courtyard lightly, unnoticed by the guarding [37] men and the women servants. Then I fled [32] far away [14] through the wide spaces of Hellas [12] and came as far as generous [34] Phthia [12], mother of sheepflocks [34,13], and to lord [3] Peleus, who accepted me with a good will and gave me his love [8], even as a father loves his own son [8] who is a single child [5] brought up among many possessions [3]. He made me a rich [3] man, and granted me many people [3,20], and I lived [17], lord [3] over the Dolopes [12], in remotest Phthia [12]. (Iliad IX 444-484)

The analysis of this short passage provides a clear confirmation of the views of oralism, the scientific theory that states that the Iliad builds on an oral tradition, in which bards improvise stories using a fixed collection of techniques. The passage of the encounter between Phoinix and Peleus is completely constructed using a series of oral characteristics from the Alpha-tradition. The listener is therefore faced with the confusing fact that Phoinix, the envoy at the court of Peleus (oral characteristic 40), also becomes a king in a neighboring kingdom of Peleus (oral characteristic 3).

The same goes for some passages in which the life of a god is discussed. After the death of Patroklos by the hand of Hektor, Achilleus is so overcome with grief and revenge that he begs Thetis, his divine mother, to bring him new weapons. When Thetis arrives for this purpose at the home of Hephaistos, the god of metalwork, she is warmly welcomed by his wife Charis. She finally calls her husband:

"Hephaistos, come this way; here is Thetis, who has need of you." Hearing her the renowned smith of the strong arms answered her: "Then there is a goddess we honor and respect in our house. She [15,35] saved me when I suffered [37] much at the time of my great fall [24] through the will of my own brazen-faced [9] mother, who wanted to hide [9] me, for being lame. Then my soul would have taken much suffering [37] had not Eurynome [21] and Thetis [21] caught me and held me [8], Eurynome, daughter [11] of Ocean [21], whose stream bends back in a circle. With them I worked nine [27] years as a smith, and wrought many intricate things; pins that bend back, curved clasps, cups, necklaces, working there in the hollow of the cave, and the stream of Ocean around us went on forever with its foam and its murmur. No other among the gods or among mortal men knew about us [37] except Eurynome and Thetis. They knew, since they saved me. Now she has come into our house; so I must by all means do everything to give recompense to lovely-haired Thetis for my life. Therefore set out before her fair entertainment." (Iliad XVIII 392-408)

The youth of Hephaistos is entirely explained by the oral characteristics of "the special education" (oral characteristic 8), "the exiled son" (oral characteristic 24), and "the painful, prolonged captivity" (oral characteristic 37). We almost have to conclude that the Alpha-tradition was more powerful than religion and belief in the gods. As discussed after his hero story in Part I, Hephaistos has probably partially evolved from a human hero.

When Achilleus is once more prepared to fight at the side of the Greeks, Agamemnon reconciles with Achilleus in a long speech. This speech also contains a digression, this time about the delusion of Zeus by the goddess Delusion. Agamemnon begins by explaining that he was deluded at the time that he kept Achilleus' girl for himself:

"Yet [15] what could I do? It is the god who accomplishes all things [25]. Delusion [21,39] is the elder daughter of Zeus, the accursed [9] who deludes [31] all; her feet are delicate and they step not on the firm earth, but she walks the air above men's heads and leads them astray [9]. She [15] has entangled others before me. Yes, for once Zeus even was deluded [31], though men say he is the highest [43] one of gods and mortals. Yet Hera [10] who is female [9] deluded even Zeus in her craftiness on that day when in strong wall-circled [45] Thebe [19] Alkmene was at her time to bring forth the strength of Herakles [28]. Therefore Zeus spoke forth and made a vow before all the immortals: 'Hear me, all you gods and all you goddesses [21]: hear me while I speak forth what the heart within my breast urges. This day Eileithyia [21] of women's child-pains shall bring forth a man to the light who, among the men sprung of the generation of my blood [11,36], shall be lord [3,5] over all those dwelling about him.' Then in guileful intention the lady [9] Hera said to him: 'You will be a liar, not put fulfillment on what you have spoken. Come, then, lord of Olympos, and swear before me a strong oath that he shall be lord [3] over all those dwelling about him who this day shall fall between the feet of a woman, that man who is born of the blood [11] of your generation.' So Hera spoke. And Zeus was entirely unaware of her falsehood [9], but swore a great oath, and therein lay all his deception [31]. But Hera in a flash of speed left the horn of Olympos and rapidly came [40] to Argos of Achaia, where she knew was the mighty wife of Sthenelos [12], descended of Perseus [28]. And she was carrying a son, and this was the seventh [19] month for her, but she brought him sooner into the light, and made him premature, and stayed the childbirth of Alkmene, and held back the birth pangs. She went herself and spoke the message [40] to Zeus, son of Kronos: 'Father Zeus of the shining bolt, I will tell you a message for your heart. A great man [4] is born, who will be lord over the Argives, Eurystheus, son of Sthenelos [12], of the seed of Perseus [28], your generation [11]. It is not unfit that he should rule [3,5] over the Argives.' She spoke, and the sharp

sorrow [6] struck at his deep heart." (Iliad XIX 90-125)

The delusion of Zeus is related to his difficult marriage to Hera (oral characteristic 10) and the hero story of Herakles, to which several oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition are connected. Fatal women (oral characteristic 9) constitute the main theme of this Alpha-passage. Several women are depicted here as depraved and evil. Delusion embodies blind folly itself and she targets both humans and gods, while Zeus is the victim of an intrigue between Hera, Alkmene, Eileithyia, and the wife of Sthenelos. All this shameless gossip about women finally serves as an illustration of a single bringer of misfortune, namely Briseis, the utterly innocent girl about whom Agamemnon and Achilleus were arguing. Achilleus had already given the starter to this theme in his reconciliation speech to Agamemnon:

Son of Atreus, was this after all the better way for both, for you and me, that we, for all our hearts' sorrow, quarreled together for the sake of a girl in soul-perishing hatred? I wish Artemis had killed her beside the ships with an arrow on that day when I destroyed Lyrnessos and took her. (Iliad XIX 56-60)

After Achilleus has reconciled with Agamemnon, he goes to war, kills many Trojans, and chases them inside the walls of their city. Only Hektor cannot bear the humiliation of fleeing within the city. He waits for Achilleus before the city walls, but soon recognizes Achilleus as the better fighter and flees. Three times Achilleus chases Hektor around Troy, before killing him in front of all the Trojans, who are watching from the city walls. Priam, Hektor's father, is beside himself with grief. He is almost so foolish as to run out of the city and beg Achilleus to return his son's body to him. His relatives, however, manage to stop him and Achilleus drags the corpse of Hektor through the dust to the Greek camp.

The gods have better plans for Priam and the dead Hektor. They soften the resentment of Achilleus and give notice to Priam to sneak into the camp of the Greeks at night with a large ransom for the corpse. There, the two men meet and surrender to bitter weeping, each for their own grief. Achilleus concludes their conversation with wise words:

"Your son is given back to you, aged [49] sir, as you asked it. He lies on a bier. When dawn shows you yourself shall see him as you take him away. Now you and I must remember our supper. For even [15] Niobe, she of the lovely tresses, remembered to eat, whose twelve [27] children were destroyed [6] in her palace [45], six daughters, and six sons in the pride of their youth, whom Apollo [21] killed [22] with arrows from his silver bow, being angered with Niobe, and shaft-showering Artemis [21] killed [22] the daughters; because Niobe likened [22] herself to Leto [21] of the fair coloring and said Leto had borne only two, she herself had borne many; but the two, though they were only two [23], destroyed all those others. Nine [27] days long they lay in their blood, nor was there anyone to bury [30] them, for the son of Kronos made stones [45] out of the people [22]; but on the tenth [27] day the Uranian gods buried [30] them. But she remembered to eat when she was worn out with weeping [6]. And now somewhere among the rocks, in the lonely mountains, in Sipylos [12], where they say is the resting place of the goddesses who are nymphs [21], and dance beside the waters of Acheloios [12], there, stone still, she broods on the sorrows [6] that the gods gave her. Come then, we also, aged [49] magnificent sir, must remember to eat, and afterward you may take your beloved son back to Ilion, and mourn for him; and he will be much lamented." (Iliad XXIV 599-619)

The theme of this Alpha-passage is evidently the cycle of misery (oral characteristic 6), a theme that characterizes the end of the Iliad. The misery is illustrated through the punishment of the gods (oral characteristic 22).

The unfortunate Niobe apparently lived in a large palace (oral characteristic 45), with her 12 children. We get an interesting indication of the evolution of this oral characteristic in the passage above, namely that Zeus turned all the residents of the palace into stones. This brings to mind the ubiquitous ruins at the time of the Dark Ages in Greece.

The oral characteristic itself does not, therefore, reflect the world of the Mykenaians. The rich, walled citadels are discussed from the perspective of the audience. The same also seems to apply to the description of the house of Phoinix' parents (see p. 138): the guards who were positioned within the "strong-closed" courtyard, and in the ante-chamber before the doors of the bedroom, perhaps reflect the multiple ramparts of a Mykenaian citadel, but they are certainly not an accurate description of it. The Alpha-passages hark back to a distant past, but their oral characteristics have continued to evolve over time.

Outside the passages listed to delineate the Alpha-tradition in the Iliad, most of which are digressions, the oldest Homeric poetry also includes a series of shorter passages with the oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition. These are closely related to combat passages in the Iliad and are less interesting as material to study the Alpha-tradition. They soon confront us with the conclusion that we can draw no strict boundaries between the Alpha-passages and the other Greek oral traditions. Let us therefore examine a few. We find the very first passage of this type in Chapter IV of the Iliad:

There Telamonian Aias struck down the son [11] of Anthemion Simoeisios [12] in his stripling's beauty, whom [15] once his mother descending from Ida bore beside the banks of Simoeis [12] when she had followed her father and mother to tend the sheepflocks [13]. Therefore they called him Simoeisios [12]; but he could not render again the care [8] of his dear parents; he was short-lived, beaten down beneath the spear of high-hearted Aias. (Iliad IV 473-479)

In Chapter V, it is the turn of two Greeks to be slain by Aineias, the famous hero who will later become the ancestor of the Romans:

Now Aineias killed two great men of the Danaäns, the sons of Diokles [12], Orsilochos [12] and Krethon [12], men whose father [15] dwelt in Phere the strong-founded [45], rich [3] in substance, and his generation [11] was of the river Alpheios [12], who flows wide through the country of the Pylians [12], and who [21] got a son [11], Ortilochos, to be lord [3] over many men, but the son of Ortilochos was high-hearted Diokles; and to Diokles in his turn were two twin sons born, Orsilochos and Krethon, both well skilled in all fighting. These two as they were grown to young manhood [35] followed along with the Argives in their black ships to Ilion, land of good horses.

(Iliad V 541-551)

The characterizations of the fighters on the battlefield have many similarities with the characterizations of the commanders of the army. The following passage about the leaders of the Myrmidons is included as a passage of the Alpha-tradition: One battalion was led by Menesthios [12] of the shining corselet, son [11] of Spercheios [12,21], the river swelled from the bright sky, born of the daughter of Peleus [28], Polydore [12] the lovely, to unremitting Spercheios, when a woman lay with an immortal [36]; but born in name to Perieres' [12] son [11], Boros [12], who married Polydore formally, and gave gifts [33] beyond count to win her. (Iliad XVI 173-178)

The catalogue of ships, the long list of all the Greek army segments, contains similar characterizations of the commanders. However, such lists of leaders also include digressions, in which the Alpha-tradition is present in a purer form. We can say that with the characterizations of the fighters on the battlefield, we have arrived in a border area of the Alpha-tradition. In any case, the combat passages show an inner consistency, which will be revealed as the European Beta-tradition in the next book in this series.

Also within the Odyssey, many passages can be identified that stem from the Alpha-tradition, although most have evolved and have been influenced by other Greek oral traditions. The many themes of the king story about the fight for Ithaka do not appear within the extent of a short Alphapassage. A clear example can be found in the digression that the goddess Kalypso makes about her relationship with Odysseus, who washed ashore on her deserted island of Ogygia. Hermes was sent by Zeus, under pressure from Athene, over the Ocean to Kalypso and Odysseus, with the message that Odysseus had to leave Ogygia for his homeland. Kalypso is particularly appalled by this and gives the following answer to Hermes:

You are hard-hearted, you gods, and jealous beyond all creatures beside, when you are resentful toward the goddesses for sleeping [36] openly with such men as each has made her true husband [38]. So when Dawn [21] of the rosy fingers chose out [38] Orion, all you gods who live at your ease were full of resentment, until chaste Artemis of the golden throne in Ortygia came with a visitation of painless arrows and killed him [22]; and so it was when Demeter of the lovely hair, yielding to her desire, lay down [36] with Iasion and loved him in a thrice-turned field [34], it was not long before this was made known to Zeus, who struck [22] him down with a cast of the shining thunderbolt. So now, you gods, you resent it in me that I keep beside me a man [38], the one I saved [8] when he clung astride of the keel board all alone [14], since Zeus with a cast of the shining thunderbolt had shattered [22] his fast ship midway on the wine-blue water. Then all the rest of his excellent companions perished [22], but the wind and the current carried him here [6] and here they drove him, and I gave him my love [8] and cherished him [8], and I had hopes also that I could make him immortal [38] and all his days to be endless.

(Odyssey V 118-136)

This passage emphasizes three oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition: "the punishment of the gods" (oral characteristic 22), "the special education" (oral characteristic 8), and "the mortal abducted by a god" (oral characteristic 38). A fourth oral characteristic, "the painful, prolonged captivity" (oral characteristic 37), we find a little later:

She, the queenly nymph, when she had been given the message from Zeus, set out searching after great-hearted Odysseus, and found him sitting on the seashore, and his eyes were never wiped dry of tears, and the sweet lifetime was draining out of him, as he wept for a way home. (Odyssey V 149-153)

The number of oral characteristics per verse in this passage is quite low compared to the Iliad, in which the Alpha-passages are often very cryptic. The Odyssey seems to have learned some lessons regarding the digestibility of ancient tales for a modern audience. Instead of giving a single cryptic description of a mythical story, Kalypso, in her digression, makes concise and appropriate comparisons with two known stories.

Many more mythical stories are later cited by Odysseus, when he describes his journey to the underworld for the Phaiakians during a long nightly story. This story is also sufficiently varied and is even interrupted halfway by Odysseus, who proposes going to sleep. The Phaiakians, however, appreciate his story so much that they encourage him to continue his telling. Odysseus describes encounters with his own mother, with the seer Teiresias, with famous figures such as Herakles, and with his comrades in Troy, including Agamemnon and Achilleus.

Despite the increased attention to variation in the Odyssey, we can still find one Alpha-passage throughout the whole poem that uses the cryptic style of the Iliad without any restraint. It seems as if a textbook example of an Alpha-passage had to be produced in the Odyssey, in order to make the bards of the future familiar with this oral art. This is a long digression made by the narrator himself, and not, as was usual in the Iliad, by a character in the story. The function of the digression is, I believe, to show the audience that Theok-lymenos, whom Telemachos met during his tour, was an excellent seer. Let us close the analysis of the Alpha-tradition in the Homeric works with this textbook example:

So, while he [Telemachos] was busy with prayer and sacrifice to Athene beside the stern of the ship, there came to him an outlander from Argos [12], where he had killed a man [2]; now he was a fugitive [32]. He was a prophet [25], and by blood [11] was of the stock of Melampous [12]. Melampous [15] once had lived in Pylos [12], mother of sheepflocks [13,34], a rich [3] man among the Pylians [12], at home in his high house [45]; but then he came to the land of other men, fleeing [32] his country [17] and great-hearted Neleus [3,28], the proudest of all men living [43], who until a year was fulfilled kept much of his substance [3] by force, for Melampous meanwhile in the halls of Phylakos [12] was held in constraint of wearisome bondage [37], suffering strong pains [37] for the sake of Neleus' [28] daughter [9,33], and the bitter infatuation [31] which the goddess Erinys [39], wrecker of houses, inflicted upon him. Yet he escaped death, and drove away [26] the loud-lowing cattle [13] from Phylake [12] to Pylos [12], and achieved the unjust labor godlike Neleus [28] imposed on him, and led [33] back the lady to his brother's house; but he himself went to the land of others [17], to horse-pasturing [34] Argos [12], since now it was ordained [25] for him that he should live there [17] and be lord [3] over many Argives. And there he too married [33] a wife and established a high-roofed house [45], and had children [11], Mantios [12] and Antiphates [12], strong sons. Antiphates had a son [11]; this was great-hearted Oïkles [12]. His son was Amphiaraos [12], leader of storming armies, whom Zeus of the aegis loved [29] in his heart, as did Apollo [21], with every favor, but he never came to the doorsill of old age [49], but perished [6] in Thebes [19], because his wife [9,10] had been bribed with presents. He in turn had sons [11], Amphilochos [12] and Alkmaion [12]. The children [11] born to Mantios were Polypheides [12] and Kleitos [12], but Dawn [21] of the golden throne [3] carried [38] Kleitos away, because of his beauty, so that he might dwell among the immortals [38]; but Apollo made high-hearted Polypheides a prophet [25], and far the best [43] among mortals, after Amphiaraos had died. He, angered [6] with his father, in Hyperesia [12] lived [17,32] and was lord [3], and there he was a prophet [25] for all men. It was this man's son, by name Theoklymenos, who now came to Telemachos and stood near, and there he found him pouring libration and praying beside his fast black vessel.

(Odyssey XV 222-258)

Thus, we have fully explored the Alpha-tradition in the Homeric works. Apparently, the bards at the end of the Dark Ages had many strings to their bow. Instead of mastering a single oral tradition, they could choose between several options. Given that the oral characteristics in the Alpha-passages are so diverse, yet are combined to a high degree, the Alpha-passages need to be classified as a separate oral art.

If we want to go further upstream to the source of Greek mythology, we must now return to an analysis of the Alpha-tradition as a coherent whole. The next chapter discusses the essentials: what is the social background from which the Alpha-tradition originated? This background provides a logical explanation of the oral characteristics and their interrelations in the core of the Alpha-tradition. We enter the world of the Mafia.

### **Chapter 6**

## A Mafia origin

The Godfather is a three-part film classic in which a Sicilian Godfather, Don Corleone, manages his criminal family business in New York. According to the director, Francis Ford Coppola, it was "the story of a great king with three sons. The oldest was given his sweet nature and childlike qualities; the second, his passion and aggressiveness; and the third, his cunning and coolness." The movies are based on a book by Mario Puzo, who was inspired in turn by the operational methods of the Sicilian Mafia clans in the United States of the 1940s and '50s. They give us a unique opportunity to acquaint ourselves

with an environment that is alien to the modern world citizen. The stories comprise a succession of family intrigues, criminal settlements, crime commands, killings within and outside the family, blood revenge, flights abroad, ambushes, ruses, and takeovers. The main drivers of the Mafiosi are to uphold family honor and to acquire power and excessive wealth. They revive themselves at weddings and solemnly organized parties.

In the world of the Mafia, with its blood revenge, family intrigue, and wealth, we recognize the oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition, which is a strong indication that it has an important part of its roots in a society that shared the same ideals.

There is, in any case, a significant similarity between the prehistoric Greece and Sicily from the previous centuries. Both are geographically isolated, mountainous regions, where the common people were dependent on income from agriculture and livestock. Could it be that the mixing of Indo-European peoples with indigenous peoples in Greece created the same conditions as those that engendered the emergence of the Mafia in Sicily? This question will be examined in this chapter and therefore we will start with what we can most easily study, namely the origin and evolution of the Sicilian Mafia.



**Figure 7:** Mykenai was a power bastion, built to withstand a long siege. Due to their isolation, the Greek fortresses were, just like the Sicilian Mafia, not hampered much by a higher authority.

Thanks to several revolutions in 19th-century Sicily, the nobility were exiled and their private armies dissolved, leading to a situation of lawlessness. The old principle of blood revenge soon had as a consequence that an ordinary quarrel between farmers gave rise to a cycle of killings. This lawlessness led to the emergence of organized family clans who put themselves above the law of the state.

The Sicilian communities in which the Mafia arose, were conservative and closed. A number of things were sacred to them, such as marriage, family honor, and the strict practicing of the Christian religion. Immigrants and other cultures did not easily integrate in these communities. A love affair with a Sicilian was not without its dangers, because if it was not conducted according to the rules, it could possibly lead to an honor killing.

Blood revenge was an important social factor in the world of the Mafia. This code determined that, in the case of a murder, it was the moral duty of the sons of the family to find the killer and murder him as well. Consequently, families with numerous sons gained more power, while smaller families could not afford to have a feud with a large family. This also explains why the boss of a family was also a godfather: he adopted sons from outside the family at a young age, in order to tie them to the code of blood revenge. Daughters did not contribute immediately to an increase in power, but could nevertheless be used to the advantage of powerful families, who married their daughters off to sons-in-law who would swear allegiance to the family.

This situation in Sicily ensured that certain Mafia families became very dangerous and very powerful. The neat relationships in which they engaged from their straitlaced religious background gave them access to the highest circles of power. Anyone who could not be bribed with money was easily intimidated by the many sons and faithfuls of the family. In this way, the Mafia grew from proud, local families who maintained a high honor, into large criminal organizations with branches worldwide. The Mafiosi arrived, among other places, in the United States, where the FBI uncovered much of their culture and their systematic practices.

Despite the increased knowledge that modern states have today about criminal organizations, unfortunately we cannot at present say that they have definitely gained the upper hand. After all, the responsibility lies with those who elevate opulence above peace. He who cannot find the true path to happiness is doomed to live in unnecessary tensions.

But let us face the truth and think back to the origins of the Mykenaian civilization in Greece: a peaceful culture does not necessarily prevail. What sustains itself best is what continues to exist, even if it is a culture of tension and violence. Regarding the Sicilian Mafia, we must conclude that the name, "the Mafia," has become synonymous with any modern crime culture. However, the Sicilian Mafia has been studied most comprehensively and a series of Italian terms describes the social positions of its members.

A Mafia organization consists of many members, whose loyalty is based on solemn oaths and initiation rituals. The organization has a hierarchical structure, in which the members can hold six positions: godfather (Don), successor (capo bastone), counselor (consigliere), captain (capo regime), soldier (soldato), or allied. Only the allies are not included in the Mafia, because, for example, they have a different cultural background. They simply work together with the criminal organization. All others are Mafiosi, so-called "men of honor," who can rise within the hierarchy. To obtain formal membership, a candidate must first be initiated by another member. The candidate is then tested for a certain period and must execute a command, usually committing a murder, before finally being inaugurated.

The lowest grade for a Mafioso is that of a soldier, under the leadership of a captain. The captains are under the direct leadership of the successor, who serves as an additional buffer for the safety of the Don, the supreme boss. The successor is usually the son, or at least a close relative, of the boss. The consigliere, however, does not belong to the family and has no ambition to become the supreme leader himself. He supports the successor and the Don with good advice and acts as envoy in the name of the Don.

Another social aspect of the Alpha-tradition is better known to us: that of the nobles, kings, and throne successions. It is questionable how well this world matches with that of organized crime. In any case, the Alpha-tradition is not at all about a single dynasty with a king who had an almost divine status, as was the case for Egyptian pharaohs and Chinese emperors. The many kings can therefore easily be identified with the leaders of a family clan.

#### **Comparison 1: horror and murder**

Having now examined the aspects of the modern Mafia, we can compare it with the Alpha-tradition. Several of its oral characteristics are explained by the honor killings and vendettas, which determine the lives of the characters. Too often, it is evident from the life histories of the characters that they have moved (oral characteristic 17), that they had to flee, or that they were banished (oral characteristic 32). The reason for so doing is almost always that they have committed a murder, in many cases within the family (oral characteristic 2). In a dream of Achilleus, the recently slain Patroklos tells of such a history. He begs Achilleus to be buried close to him and reminds him how he ended up in the house of Peleus, Achilleus' father, in his childhood:

Do not have my bones laid apart from yours, Achilleus, but with them, just as we grew up together in your house, when Menoitios brought me there from Opous, when I was little, and into your house, by reason of a baneful manslaying, on that day when I killed the son of Amphidamas. I was a child only, nor intended it, but was angered over a dice game. (Iliad XXIII 83-88) Apparently, there is no lower limit on the age of the perpetrators and the victims of honor killings and blood feuds. About Theoklymenos, the prophet who met Telemachos, it was mentioned casually that he was *a fugi-tive from Argos, because he had slain a man* (see p. 146). Moreover, his ancestor Melampous had to flee for fear of the "mighty and proud Neleus." The underlying crime does not even have to be a murder. Phoinix fled for instance because he quarreled with his father, after he had slept with his con-cubine (see the passage on p. 137). Apparently, there was a deep fear of honor killings.

The inevitable wrath of the Erinyes, the goddesses of revenge (oral characteristics 39) constitutes the most fantastical oral characteristic related to blood revenge. Orestes was confronted with such revenge after the murder of his own mother. The idea is simple: even a flight to distant places does not always provide complete safety. When a mighty king really wanted revenge, he sent out his men to find the killer.

A murder or dishonorable act can also result in a long and painful captivity (oral characteristic 37). There appear to be several reasons for this. In some cases, the prisoner has to be shielded from the outside world in order to avoid a violent settlement, while in other cases the imprisonment itself is the punishment for shameful or criminal behavior. The first case is applicable to the story of Hephaistos and to the many boys who had to flee their families in their early childhood. Herakles is the clearest example of the hero who must do penance for his crimes. The stories of Phoinix and Melampous even have a confusing storyline because of these different possible causes for imprisonment. Phoinix was guarded by his own family members, who also begged him to flee far away. On the one hand, Melampous seems to be fleeing Neleus, although he must also perform a difficult task for him. It is therefore not clear whether Iphikles, who imprisons him, is a friend or enemy of Melampous. We can surmise that familial clans were sometimes forced by circumstances to imprison members of their own clan, both as a punishment and as a means to escape a vendetta.

Besides murder and imprisonment, the Don also intimidates his opponents in a Mafia clan with cruel punishment. The punishment that the gods impose on haughty people (oral characteristic 22) and the punishments of the Erinyes, the goddesses of revenge (oral characteristic 39) may very well have their origin in such intimidation. For instance, Prometheus, who stole the fire from the gods, was chained by Zeus to a rock, where an eagle ate a piece of his liver every day. Of Melampous, we read that he was painfully shackled.

#### Comparison 2: a man's world

The world of the Alpha-tradition is, just like that of the Mafia, undeniably a man's world. The main characters are male heroes described with all sorts of flattering adjectives (oral characteristic 4). Their exploits supply the fabric for the many stories, mostly about wars and war deeds. In chapter IX of the Iliad, Phoinix tells of the abduction of Kleopatra. Both Idas and the god Apollo are depicted there as macho men who seek the confrontation for the honor of a woman:

Idas, who was the strongest of all men upon earth in his time; for he even took up the bow to face the King's onset, Phoibos Apollo, for the sake of the sweet-stepping maiden; a girl her father and honored mother had named in their palace Alkyone, sea-bird, as a by-name, since for her sake her mother with the sorrow-laden cry of a sea-bird wept because far-reaching Phoibos Apollo had taken her. (Iliad IX 558-564)

Women are often assigned passive roles. Defending the family honor is the job of the men, while women are often the stakes of war and strife (oral characteristic 42). In the hero stories of the Alpha-tradition, we saw Helen, who was abducted to Troy, Pero, who was married off in return for cattle, Deianira, who was assaulted, and Danaë, who was coveted by a powerful king. In all these cases, the men fought a feud among themselves and some died. Women may also be victims of an honor killing. In Ithaka, numerous handmaidens were killed for besmirching the honor of Odysseus, by sleeping with lovers in his palace. In a variant of the Telegony, Penelope was even killed because of infidelity. Menelaos had also sworn to kill the unfaithful Helen, but enchanted by her beauty, he dropped his sword when he saw her.

The abduction of women is certainly not unrealistic in this society. Marriage itself might be considered an abduction of the woman. After her wedding day, she is taken to the family of her husband, which may not be on good terms with her old relatives and the chances are that she will never see her old home again. As is evidenced by the stories of Kastor and Polydeukes, a woman can even be considered a slave of her husband's family. The conclusion of a marriage contract between two families was therefore a delicate matter. It was often easier to abduct a woman, so the man did not have to pay a dowry. Some descendants of the nomads in Kyrgyzstan still do this today.

#### **Comparison 3: the testing of the members**

We find a number of important similarities between the Alpha-tradition and the Mafia world in the hero story. A small part of that story is the theft of cattle by the hero. These must be stolen for the commanding king from a neighboring hostile king. This clearly shows how local are the feuds between these kings. The kings of the Alpha-tradition can thus easily be compared with the Dons of a Mafia family.

We can find the most important similarities, however, in the great themes of the hero story, like the fame for the educator, the command of the king, and the succession to the throne. The education of the sons is of particular importance in Mafia circles. When they reach adulthood, they must defend the interests of the family. Therefore, a successful Don is a godfather who adopts children at a young age, like Peleus, who adopted Patroklos at a young age and Strophios, who took Oidipous with him as a foundling. Oineus achieved fame with his own son Meleagros, who killed a wild boar and later drove off the Kouretes.

The second theme, the command of the king, refers to heroes who have not been brought up in the palace of the king. Sons-in-law and new members of a Mafia family are not welcomed lightly. They must prove themselves through a brave act and by swearing solemn oaths. This theme forms the core of the hero story in the Alpha-tradition. Herakles and Bellerophontes are clear examples of outsiders who want to gain the favor of a powerful "Don," while Agamemnon and Menelaos are prototypical sons-in-law who swear oaths in exchange for the hand of a daughter. In the Alpha-tradition, outsiders such as Herakles, Bellerophontes, and Perseus always appear to have the same motivation for gaining the favor of a king: they are exiled or fleeing, because they have committed a crime. This phenomenon is not alien to the Mafia world. The man who has provoked the resentment of a mighty Don can seek refuge as a faithful of another powerful family. The approach can also be motivated by personal gain, which seems to be the case for Peirithoös and Theseus.

A third theme in the hero story of the Alpha-tradition is the takeover of power. At the end of the story, the hero is the heir to the throne of the king, for which he must first perform tasks. This is the equivalent of a Mafia member who begins as a soldier, then acquires more and more power, and ultimately takes over the position of the Don. This also explains why the king and his wife are so afraid of the hero and even set a trap with the plan of murdering him. Bellerophontes was even wished dead by two different kings. As he succeeded in his tasks, he gained increasing respect and eventually succeeded in cunningly defeating the men who had been charged with the task of murdering him. Thus, he inevitably became the successor to the throne.

Although women in the Alpha-tradition generally have a passive role, they become active when it regards the succession of power. They are ready to help their own favorite child into power. To this end, Medea tried to kill Theseus, when she recognized him as the child of Aigeus with another woman, but she drew the short straw against Aethra, who made the beautiful Helen a slave for Theseus and later herself. Among the goddesses, we see that Hera favored Eurystheus because he was the ruler of her favorite city Mykenai. Herakles, the son her husband fathered with a mistress, therefore became a servant of Eurystheus. In the Godfather trilogy, it is Kay, the exwife of Don Michael Corleone, who chooses the side of their common son Anthony.

The fear of a takeover by an ambitious member of the Mafia family is a phenomenon that is also known from the United States. A certain Bompensiero, who began to acquire great power as capo in the Los Angeles Mafia clan in the 1970s, was appointed by the Don as consigliere of the family. The position of consigliere was so dangerous at that time in Los Angeles that the Don had no doubt that he would be eliminated. A few months after his appointment, Bompensiero was shot dead in a phone booth.

#### **Comparison 4: consiglieri**

In the Mafia, the consigliere plays an important role as the counselor who is the right hand man of the Don. This adviser also acts as envoy to the outside world. This role can also be detected in the Alpha-tradition. The three main examples are Nestor, advisor of Agamemnon, Phoinix, counselor of Peleus, and Mentor, counselor of Odysseus. Phoinix and Mentor also have roles as educators of the son at the court where they work.

As for Agamemnon in Mykenai, we can now perhaps hypothesize a particular theory. According to the known tradition, there was no counselor or educator working at the court of Agamemnon, though he was still a very prototypical king in the Alpha-tradition. A strange fact at the court of Mykenai is also that Orestes, son of Agamemnon, married Hermione, daughter of Menelaos. As Agamemnon and Menelaos were brothers, Orestes married his cousin. Would the keys to a fascinating explanation perhaps lie in this fact?

The hypothesis that we can make here is that Menelaos was at one time – before the creation of the Trojan cycle – not the brother of Agamemnon, but the counselor and educator at the court of Mykenai. Orestes was then raised by Menelaos, like Telemachos was raised by Mentor in Ithaka, and Achilleus and Patroklos by Phoinix in Phthia. The marriage between Orestes and Hermione would in that case not be strange. As previously seen in the section "Eastern influences," Menelaos and Agamemnon inherited their heavenly-earthly relationship via their sisters. This showed that this relationship was relatively young, and fits well with the hypothesis that these two heroes became brothers rather late in the tradition.

Menelaos regularly provides a helping hand for Agamemnon, as in the negotiation within the walls of Troy, the tour of the camp to awaken the Greek leaders, and attempts to help Orestes in his attack on Aigisthos. In that respect, however, he is not alone. In the Iliad, Odysseus also participates regularly in executive duties as Agamemnon's envoy, as when he guides Achilleus' son Neoptolemos to the battlefield. Finally, we have Menoitios, special adviser to Peleus and father of Patroklos; Mentes, counselor of Odysseus; and Strophios, another counselor and educative assistant of Agamemnon. Because we find three names of counselors that start with *Men-t* (Menoitios, Mentes, and Mentor), we can assume that all three became corrupted from a single name (e.g., Menoitios). Menelaos might be a further corruption of this name. Moreover, a son of Peleus, Menesthios, is listed as the first among the leaders of the Myrmidons (Iliad XVI 173). In any case, everything indicates that the role of a counselor-educator at the court of a king is a very old role that belongs to the core of the Alpha-tradition.

As we have now formed a nice picture of the Alpha-tradition and its similarities with the Mafia world, we need to rethink where and when we need to place this world. Many scientists have hypothesized that the world of the Iliad and the Odyssey is the same as that in which the audience found itself: in Greece of the eighth century BC. We must now leave the fairytale world of the Alpha-tradition and begin an investigation into the reality of the poem.

#### The interaction with moral traditions

Where were the ancient Greeks who formed the audience of the legendary Homer? Breathlessly they listened, sitting on polished stones in a circle around the bard, who recalled, singing with the help of his lyre, the oldest stories. The evening sun lit up the sultry valleys, the temples on the hills, and the ruins of the castles in which their heroes had once lived. In their fantasy, both worlds merged into a single universe that knew perpetual laws.

However, the poet woke them up with a description of two cities.<sup>1</sup> In one city, a wedding procession came along the streets, preceded by dancers and singers and tumbling jesters. A bard sang in the market, his audience around him. Slightly further down, the elders of the people sat in a circle and held jurisdiction over a money matter. One trader stated that he had received no money, while the buyer claimed to have paid everything. The wisest men argued in turn for one or the other, while in the middle a reward was given to those whose judgement was the purest.

The other city was besieged by its neighbors. Enemy warriors lay in ambush at the watering hole for cattle next to the city. When the shepherds came there with their sheep flocks and their herds, they were surrounded and slain. However, watchmen on the ramparts had observed this. The townsfolk thus armed themselves and went out to attack the enemy.

So, where were the public? Did they live in a world where cities were besieged, herds stolen, and blood revenge prevailed? This does not seem very likely at the end of the Dark Ages. After the Greeks had left the mighty castles and begun to live in modest communities following a drastic population decline, they broadened their horizons thanks to the colonization of distant areas. They dominated much of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and their laws were focused on trade and the establishment of new colonies. The spirit of the age in Greece had changed many times since the early Mykenaian times. We have every reason to believe that the audience of the Iliad and the Odyssey made a sharp distinction between their own modernity and the idyllic times long past.

Nevertheless, we find some descriptions of the blood revenge in the Iliad and the Odyssey that present us with riddles. These regard the so-called Homeric similes, which mainly aim at captivating the audience. Odysseus makes the following simile of blood revenge:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>cf. Iliad XVIII 490-540.

But let us make our plans how all will come out best for us. For when one has killed only one man in a community, and then there are not many avengers to follow, even so, he flees into exile, leaving kinsmen and country. But we have killed what held the city together, the finest young men in Ithaka. (Odyssey XXIII 117-122)

In an attempt to persuade Achilleus to be reconciled with Agamemnon, Diomedes also cites fleeing blood revenge:

A man takes from his brother's slayer the blood price, or the price for a child who was killed, and the guilty one, when he has largely repaid, stays still in the country, and the injured man's heart is curbed, and his pride, and his anger when he has taken the price. (Iliad IX 632-636)

We find a very classic Homeric simile of blood revenge in the final chapter of the Iliad. When Priam, king of the Trojans, arrives as supplicant at the camp of Achilleus, hoping to ransom the body of his son Hektor, he is compared to another type of supplicant:

As when dense disaster closes on one who has murdered a man in his own land, and he comes to the country of others, to a man of substance, and wonder seizes on those who behold him, so Achilleus wondered as he looked on Priam. (Iliad XXIV 480-483)

Achilleus' surprise is compared here with the surprise of Eurystheus, Peleus, and the king of Lykia, when they respectively saw Herakles, Phoinix, and Bellerophontes appear as refugees at the gates of their palaces. We must apparently decide that the Alpha-tradition does not appear at all in Mykenaian times, but rather in the eighth century BC. This is when the Homeric simile was composed under the assumption that it would better explain to the public the strange relationship between Achilleus and Priam. How could this ever be a compelling simile if the listener did not know this situation from his own experience?

To understand this, we must act as apprentices to strict believers, be they Christian, Muslim, or Jew, who study their scriptures daily and draw wisdom and faith from them. Such people often cherish a strong desire for the world in which their bibles arose. Through a continuous visualization of other living conditions, men develop corresponding societal norms.

I am thinking in particular of a video I saw once on the Internet, of a group of Muslims – a minority within a minority – who were seeking to introduce the Sharia in Western Europe. The group met because of a marriage and considered, as part of the celebrations and led by an expert, how the marriage would be arranged according to the Sharia. That a man could have several wives in this system was naturally discussed. At that point in his speech, the expert made an important clarification for his audience. He explained why plural marriage was a social virtue; namely, there are more women than men, so that, without multiple marriages, some women would remain unmarried. Although his audience did not criticize this proposition, the text expert went a step further. He described the wars waged between believers and unbelievers, and the many Muslim heroes who died as a result. Since fighting was the job of men, a numerical imbalance resulted that needed to be restored through plural marriage.

Almost a millennium and a half separates us from the world in which the Sharia arose, and things have, to say the least, changed profoundly. Nevertheless, this world delivers the inspiration for moral laws in the present for a certain audience. I think we should keep this firmly in mind, if we wish to understand the Homeric similes of blood revenge. The ancient Greeks had few other teaching materials available apart from their own oral tradition. This allowed the moral laws of the Mafia world to survive a thousand years later, carried by the Alpha-tradition.

### Chapter 7

## Closure

#### Summary

In this book, we have become acquainted with the Alpha-tradition, an oral tradition that was handed down in ancient Greece, long before the composition of the earliest written works. The Alpha-tradition can be distinguished from the rest of the Greek oral tradition on the basis of 49 oral characteristics that we find in the oldest stories and in certain passages of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Some examples are the king and his court, the revenge at the return, and failed marriages. The oral characteristics fit together in the same social background, namely that of a Mafia world.

The oral characteristics of the Alpha-tradition represent only a fraction of all the possible oral characteristics to be found in Greek mythology. There are numerous other categories outside of this tradition: the special practices of guest-friendship, chariots on the battlefield, religious and ethnic tales, the typical household from the Greek oikos, the interrelationships between the Olympian gods, the trade contacts with the Phoenicians, and so on. A random selection from the mythological material of the Greeks does not lead us to the Alpha-tradition. The vast majority of the oral characteristics go no further back in time than a few hundred years. The Greek Dark Ages and the renaissance period that followed, form the background of the average oral characteristic.

This book also tries to reveal the developmental history of the Alphatradition. This is a very complicated issue. Stories and themes alternate constantly in an oral tradition. A story can become quite popular in a certain period, return to disuse a century later, only to regain importance at a later date. New themes can become hyped and thereby bring older stories into tribulation. At the same time, different versions of a story can develop in parallel and take on lives of their own. Therefore, an oral tradition seems like a swirling current that is impossible to describe.

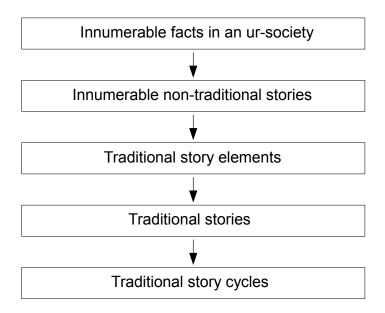
Nevertheless, it is possible to create order in the chaos. By patiently comparing old stories and detailed passages with each other, we may observe all kinds of deeper patterns. By then comparing these patterns with each other, we can identify evolutionary trends. We saw, for example, the hero who robs cattle and kills dangerous wild boars. This pattern has evolved to become the hero who fights dangerous bulls and fabulous monsters. The wanderings of Odysseus and Perseus at sea have evolved from the wanderings of heroes who are banished from a city in the Peloponnese, are helped elsewhere, and later return to take revenge. By this method, we can order some oral characteristics and even stories in time.

The younger oral characteristics are found to be especially those that the Greek tradition inherited from the East. Divine twins, fabulous monsters, exotic places, and renowned charioteers are some examples. Two oral characteristics seem to summarize many of the youngest influences: "Troy" and "shipping." The oldest of the oral characteristics cluster around the Peloponnese, family relations, and the practices of Mafia clans who ruled independently from their strongholds over the area.

#### A general evolution theory of oral traditions

What, then, is the truth about the Greek myths? Is there a reliable historical core in the many stories? Let us close this book by answering these questions via a bold attempt to establish the evolution of the Alpha-tradition through time. First, a general approach to the issue is presented, as shown in Figure 8. We then tread on thin ice, by bringing the evolutions that were outlined in this book together into a single whole.

As for the generic approach, we can break an oral tradition into five phases. It begins in an ur-society, in which certain historical events frequently occur, such as family feuds, wars, murders, takeovers, and so on. Such facts are immediately retold in all sorts of stories, in all walks of life. Those stories are not traditional, however, and consequently have no eternal life. Thanks to the family tradition of passing such stories from father to son, they last a few generations and come to influence the tradition. The bards, who are constantly improvising stories, create new patterns based on the recent stories. In



**Figure 8:** The evolution of historical facts to the Theban and Trojan story cycles passes through a series of steps in which individual facts get lost.

this way, new traditional story elements emerge over the course of hundreds of years. Only in a culture that is more or less stable for a sufficiently long time can there arise an oral tradition that reflects the culture.

Traditional stories arise from the traditional story elements. Every story that stands the test of time absorbs the traditional story elements. In the story of Odysseus and Kalypso on the island of Ogygia alone, we may find a dozen elements that fit the Alpha-tradition: the failed marriage, the wanderings of the hero, the prolonged captivity, the prisoner who settles a fight, the difficult arrival to the battle, the hospitality of an educator, the wife who assists and cares for the hero, the punishment of the gods, the god who sleeps with a mortal, the god who makes someone immortal, and gods who assist the hero. In this way, the story constantly evolves and contradictory versions often arise and mix with other stories. If ever the story contained a kernel of truth, this kernel slowly gets lost through this process.

Odysseus had very similar relationships with Circe, Nausikaa, and Kallidike. During the conquest of Troy by the Greeks, Hekabe, the queen of Troy, was assigned to Odysseus. Odysseus' relationship with Hekabe is a good example of an element that the story around Troy has absorbed. This brings us to the final stage in the formation of the Greek mythological landscape: the evolution to traditional story cycles. Here, the many stories and variants get a permanent place in a large framework.

Fascinatingly enough, the five evolutionary stages of an oral tradition are simultaneously at work at any time in history. Whereas writing puts an end to its perpetual evolution, an oral tradition seems to have no beginning. He who could go back in time and understand all the languages that were once spoken, could determine for any people that it has its oral traditions, with oral characteristics, stories, and even entire story cycles. At the same time, even while one story is told, new stories are created, which, much later, will become a part of the oral tradition in a completely different form.

The myths surrounding the New Year celebrations in Europe may well serve as an example. All these stories go far back in time. Although it is hundreds of years since the Americans crossed the Atlantic Ocean, their New Year myths, such as Halloween and Christmas, go back to their European predecessors. Some of these stories have a core that goes back to the Germanic and Celtic belief, more than a thousand years ago, when Christianity had not yet found acceptance in Europe. The myth of Saint Nicholas in Belgium and the Netherlands goes back to the god Odin, who was accompanied by black ravens and rode a horse with eight legs. Nicholas himself was a Greek-Orthodox Christian, who lived on the west coast of Turkey in the fourth century AD. The many Disney fairy tales, with their castles, princes, and princesses, also go far back in time.

Yet, many features of these myths are much more recent. Naturally, Christianity has exerted a strong influence, but the story of Saint Nicholas in Belgium and the Netherlands is also influenced by the colonial period, only 200 years ago, when the concept of "racism" evidently had a totally different meaning. This created a "Black Pete" who adopted a number of characteristics of the African victims of former slavery. This myth is also changing in our modern times. Thus, through a more appropriate understanding of racism, the Black Petes could, for example, change into chimney devils that are dirtied by soot. This would bring them closer again to the ogres and monsters that still accompany Saint Nicholas in Austria.

We can also reasonably assume that the Greek myths go back as far in time. The less universal oral characteristics, such as Africans in the Saint Nicholas Story, would be 100 or 200 years old. The universal oral characteristics, such as the contrast white-black, go back much further, 1000 years or more.

#### A concrete evolution theory of the Alpha-tradition

#### Wars and family dramas

Let us now try the impossible and establish a possible evolution of the Greek story cycles. We flash back through space and time to the Mykenaian civilization, somewhere halfway through the second millennium BC, when long bygone wars between cities in the Peloponnese were chanted in the mighty palaces. The wars around Kalydon, between the men of Pylos and Elis, and between Thesprotians and Brygi provided material for long narratives. Special stories were known about Ithaka. A terrible man lived there, King Odysseus, the bringer of vengeance who killed his own educators, and according to other variations his unfaithful wife Penelope. This story developed over time and partially fused with a classic war around Ithaka. Penelope, her lovers, and Odysseus' educators were the defenders of the city, while Odysseus incited an army as commander. Thanks to this fusion of the stories around Ithaka, an early king story emerged.

Stories were also circulating about Mykenai, which received extra importance as the power of the rulers in Mykenai increased. Agamemnon lived there with his wife Klytaimestra. He had a counselor, Menelaos, who was also responsible for educating his son Orestes. When Agamemnon went to war, he could count on the help of Nestor, king of Pylos, and also the best war adviser on earth. The bards in Pylos thought otherwise and sang stories in which Agamemnon was not even mentioned. Yet, the stories about Mykenai became much better known.

In the same period, the family drama became much more popular than the classic war story. One of the most famous stories about the family drama was that of Oidipous, who killed his father and married his mother. For Agamemnon's family too, the drama became popular. The death of the legendary Mykenaian king had been a rather unimportant and variable part of the tradition until then, but now it suddenly seemed to be established that Agamemnon had been murdered by his wife Klytaimestra.

#### The war against Thebes

Although most developments in the Alpha-tradition followed the spirit and preference of the public, certain historical facts were of course not without importance. The repeated destruction of the city of Thebes was a rewarding opportunity for the bards to apply their stories to recent facts. In particular, when it appeared that the city was not reoccupied, and only ruins remained, the appeal of the stories about Thebes became strong. After some time, a story developed about a war between Thebes and a coalition of heroes on the Peloponnese. Almost all Greek heroes with a degree of notoriety were associated with Thebes or the war against Thebes. This was a unique development in the centuries-old tradition of storytelling. Until then, every Greek castle had its separate stories. Some heroes had indeed become widely known, but the war against Thebes united all heroes into a single story. Odysseus, Agamemnon, Nestor, Menelaos, Diomedes, and many other heroes now stood side by side. Over the centuries, many Greek castles were also gradually subjected to Mykenai. A common attack led by Agamemnon was therefore very plausible for the public.

Through the central story of the war against Thebes, many other stories came to have a more defined shape. The warring heroes, like Odysseus and Agamemnon, were betrayed by their wives during their absence. After the misery of years at war, further disaster awaited the heroes. On their return home, they were killed by their wives, or, struck with madness, assassinated one of their relatives. The role of Menelaos at the court of Agamemnon also continued to develop under the influence of the war. Because of his dangerous role as a negotiator and his brave deeds on the battlefield, he became a more full-fledged hero. Therefore, Menelaos eventually came to be considered the king of Sparta and brother of Agamemnon. The education of Orestes during the war was left to Strophios, the king of Korinth. Odysseus and Nestor filled the void that Menelaos had left as advisor of Agamemnon. Thus, the most important kings of the Peloponnese became one big family through the ages.

Nevertheless, Agamemnon was just one of many heroes, especially in the early stages of the story about the war against Thebes. This led initially to a jumble of contradictory versions, because many heroes were depicted as the biggest and best in the war against Thebes. The first technique that the bards used to untangle this knot was to work out multiple roles. Thus, the brave hero on the battlefield, the wily negotiator, and the cunning hero who decided the battle came to stand alongside the great leader. A new idea in the oral tradition brought more relief: many heroes were divided into two generations – the heroes-of-the-past and the heroes-of-the-present. This allowed two successive wars against Thebes to be reconciled, so that more heroes could be given significant roles.

Heroes from ancient tales, such as those from the wars around Kalydon and Pylos, were classified among the heroes-of-the-past. They consequently lost some importance, mainly because their relationship with the popular heroes-of-the-present, who had competed at Thebes, weakened. Some heroes were already so connected with stories from both the of-the-past and the ofthe-present generations that some creativity was necessary. Nestor, who had served in the war around Pylos, thereby became known as a very old warrior of-the-past, while still fighting with the heroes-of-the-present.

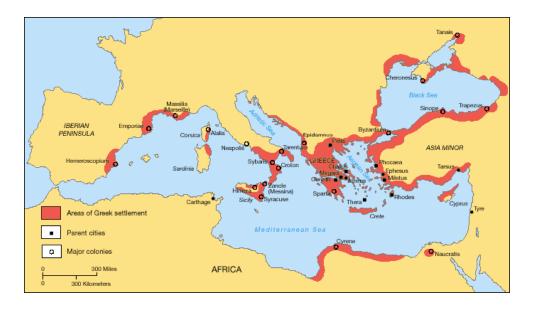
#### The Dark Ages

This is how matters stood on the day when the darkest thunder clouds gathered over the eastern Mediterranean. The Mykenaian civilization and the empire of the Hittites in present-day Turkey collapsed. The power of the Egyptians was restricted to the immediate area of the Nile Delta. Everywhere, there was war, destruction, and revolution. The Greeks were the main victims of these ruthless revolutions. Their castles were destroyed and populations displaced. Immediately afterwards, in the last two centuries of the second millennium BC, the population in Greece decreased to a quarter of what it had been during the prime of the Mykenaian civilization.

Yet, the Greeks quickly regained their pride thanks to the increased freedom of movement that they enjoyed in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which were liberated from the powerful Hittites and Egyptians. They colonized the west coast of Turkey and regions further afield like southern Italy and Cyprus (see Figure 9). The peoples of the East, from Syria to India, were also given access to the Mediterranean, which had previously been blocked by the Egyptians and Hittites. The Phoenicians, located on the east coast of the Mediterranean, became a successful trading nation and formed the bridge between Greece and the East.

In these circumstances, the Greeks learned about the distant cultures from the East and the stories that circulated there. Contrary to their own stories, the stories of the East were written down and were thousands of years old. Their attraction was major, and they mingled easily with the Greek oral tradition.

The new spirit of the age also had its influence on the preference of the Greeks. The heroes and kings from the Mykenaian period thus became navigators and founders of various cities and colonies. The so-called heroes-of-the-past again became more popular in this period, because they stemmed – seemingly – from the earliest times in the past. Another reason was that the story of the war against Thebes no longer fit so well with the new relation-ships between the Greek tribes. The journey of the Argonauts united these



**Figure 9:** The widespread Greek trading routes and colonization toward the end of the Dark Ages led to the influences of the oral traditions from the East.

tendencies: the heroes-of-the-past gathered in a coalition to undertake a joint shipping expedition on distant seas. For the same reason, the ancient story of the war against Kalydon also attracted more attention. As a consequence, the most famous heroes-of-the-past also showed their presence in a coalition there.

The stories of some of the heroes-of-the-past, such as Herakles and Perseus, were revived. Such heroes were regarded as ancestors or founders of new colonies and old cities like Thebes and Mykenai. They also took on a mythical, superhuman character. Stories about cities, heroes, and gods were supplemented by a variety of oriental characteristics. The tele story, an ancient variant of the hero story, became popular once more due to the influence of many recent seafaring tales. The hero, trapped in a remote location but destined to bring a reign to an end, merged with the brave sailor who returned to his homeland after years of wandering.

#### The war against Troy

By the fall of the empire of the Hittites, the Aegean Sea became a Greek inland sea. The Aeolian Greeks colonized the west coast of Turkey in the north. There lay the ruins of Troy, once a powerful bastion of the Hittites. Many stories about the ruins began to spread among the colonizing Greeks. In their eyes, it had been their heroes who had brought an end to this proud display of power from the past. Herakles passed here with the other Argonauts, which naturally made him the destroyer of Troy. Similar stories emerged on Turkey's southwest coast, where the Greeks colonized Lykia.

A story in the north that gained much fame was that of Achilleus, who devastated many cities on the west coast of Turkey, and eventually also Troy. By analogy with Thebes and in line with the turbulent history that was known about it in the region, the myth developed of a double devastation for Troy. In Lykia lived the descendants of Bellerophontes, a hero from the Peloponnese who had freed the colonized area on the west coast of Turkey from monsters and barbarians. The Lykians were also integrated into the story of Achilleus. Together with the Trojans, they fought against Achilleus, who led the Myrmidons.

The story of Troy appealed to the imagination of all Greeks. It fit much better with the new spirit of the age than the war against Thebes. Many bards applied their tales about Thebes directly to the city of Troy. Some made it still easier and made the "seven-gated" Thebes a city in the vicinity of Troy, "near the town Plakos," which sounds very similar in Greek. Increasingly, Troy's surroundings became the battleground for all the heroes-of-the-present. The coalition that had once assembled to fight the Thebans now sailed by ship to Troy.

The war around Troy was quickly hyped in the oral tradition. Heroes from all the regions of the proud Mykenaian civilization of yore, except for the Thebans, united against Troy under the leadership of Agamemnon. Heroes of the newly colonized regions rallied with the Trojan forces. The classic themes of the older stories did not lag behind for long. The unfaithful wife of the king, the arduous wanderings towards the fight, the endless fight on the battlefield, the cunning attack that settled the fight, and many other characteristics had existed for many centuries in many other stories and were greedily applied to one of the greatest myths of the known literary history: the Trojan War.

This myth grew into a full cycle, serving as a reference point for all other stories. Even the gods and the origins of mankind were involved, all in accordance with the oriental influences. Zeus conceived of the Trojan War as a plan to rescue the overpopulated Earth. Even an apple – the famous apple of discord, harbinger of much strife and misery – was not lacking. The Trojan horse symbolized several features that were associated with the fall of a city, such as the cunning penetration of the city, a battering ram, and chariots.

Despite the omnipresence of the Trojan cycle, the traditional stories from the Mykenaian time did not lose their individuality. Odysseus and Agamemnon did not change their biographies. Their births, their loved ones, their offspring, and their deaths remained what they had been for many centuries.

With that, we know enough about the truthfulness of Greek mythology. There is not so much a kernel of truth in the stories, but rather a *background* of truth. This background does not come from the region around Troy, but from the Greek mainland. Instead of a historic war against Troy, we have an ancient oral tradition, the Alpha-tradition, which goes back much further in time than the presumed date of the Trojan War. It reminds us of the heroic era that stands at the cradle of Greek civilization.

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# **Overview of the Alpha-characteristics**

- 1. Wars on cities
- 2. Bloody feuds
- 3. The king and his court
- 4. The brave hero
- 5. The change of power
- 6. The cycle of misery
- 7. The revenge on the return
- 8. The special education
- 9. Fatal women
- 10. Failed marriages
- 11. Divine dynasties
- 12. Places and personal names
- 13. Large herds of cattle, horses, or sheep
- 14. Long wanderings
- 15. Digressions
- 16. Recruiting soldiery
- 17. The move to a distant place
- 18. Strange peoples
- 19. The seven-gated Thebes
- 20. The remuneration of the king
- 21. Polytheism
- 22. The punishment of the gods
- 23. The hero who defeats a whole army
- 24. The exiled son
- 25. Destinies
- 26. The abduction of cattle

- 27. The number nine
- 28. Herakles, Tydeus, Neleus, Peleus, and Nestor
- 29. The hero assisted by the gods
- 30. The honorable funeral
- 31. Ate, goddess of delusion
- 32. The flight after a crime
- 33. The marriage with a king's daughter
- 34. Riches of the soil
- 35. The story of a character's life
- 36. The secret intercourse of a mortal and a god
- 37. The painful, prolonged captivity
- 38. The mortal abducted by a god
- 39. Erinys and wrathful goddesses
- 40. Delegate counselors
- 41. Holiness
- 42. The abduction of a woman
- 43. Superlatives
- 44. The human who fights the gods
- 45. Palaces with solid walls
- 46. The overpowering of a wild animal
- 47. Games
- 48. Cunning ambushes
- 49. Old age