

Two Fragments of the Epic Cycle

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THE FRAGMENTS of the epic cycle were restored and published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by G. Kinkel, E. Bethe, T. W. Allen, and later, with a more qualified and effective philological work, by A. Bernabé and M. Davies.¹ Another edition with an English translation was recently published by M. West.² Nevertheless there remain many open questions, concerning the structure and the content of the poems, the text, and the placing of the fragments themselves, whose context is often unknown.

One of these questions regards the proem of the *Ilias parua*, to which fr.1 Bernabé = 2 *dub.* Davies (quoted by Plutarch, *Conv. sept. sap.* 10, 154A) seems to belong:

Μοῦσά μοι ἔννεπε κείνα, τὰ μήτ' ἐγένοντο πάροιθε
μήτ' ἔσται μετόπισθεν.

This is an invocation to the Muse, considered as the meta-

¹ G. Kinkel, *Epicorum Graecorum fragmenta* I (Leipzig 1877) 15–59; T. W. Allen, *Homeri opera* V (Oxford 1912) 102–144; H. G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homeric* (London/Cambridge [Mass.] 1914) 480–539; E. Bethe, *Homer. Dichtung und Sage* II (Leipzig/Berlin 1922) 149–200. In the first half of the twentieth century a step forward was made by A. Severyns, *Recherches sur la Chrestomathie de Proclus* IV (Paris 1938) 75–97: an excellent edition of the surviving section of the *Chrestomathy* of Proclus, which includes summaries of the poems of the Trojan cycle (*Cypria*, *Aethiopis*, *Ilias parua*, *Iliupersis*, *Nosti*, *Telegonia*). The two more recent editions of the fragments: A. Bernabé, *Poetarum epicorum Graecorum testimonia et fragmenta* I (Leipzig 1987) 36–105; M. Davies, *Epicorum Graecorum fragmenta* (Göttingen 1988) 27–76. See also Davies' *The Greek Epic Cycle* (Bristol 1989) 1–12 (on the cycle in general) and 32–91 (on the poems dealing with the Trojan theme).

² M. L. West, *Greek Epic Fragments* (London/Cambridge [Mass.] 2003) 64–171 (the text of the fragments is newly arranged, but relies on preceding editions for information about manuscript readings).

phoric source of inspiration for poetry: a Homeric standard, which was to become (if not already, then in the sixth century B.C.) a conventional pattern for the epic genre. But fr.1 Davies = 28 Bernabé (quoted in the *Vita Homeri Herodotea*, 202 Allen = 15 Wilamowitz) also seems to belong to the same proem:

Ἴλιον ἀεῖδω καὶ Δαρδανίην εὐπῶλον,
ἧς πέρι πολλὰ πάθον Δαναοί, θεράποντες Ἴαρος.

In this fragment, marked by a more original and “modern” style, the poet speaks in the first person and presents himself as the author of the song.³ The two fragments are likely to have occurred in the same passage of the poem (the proem) and express the same point (the *incipit*, the start of the narrative), but in a very different way. Consequently scholars have considered them incompatible.

Fr.1 Davies already existed in the fifth century B.C. and is stated unambiguously by the *Vita Homeri* to be the opening of the *Ilias parua*. Fr.1 Bernabé occurs in a fictional poetic contest in Plutarch in the mouth of Lesches, but with no further details. However, Plutarch is a reliable witness, who also quotes other fragments from the *Ilias parua* and other cyclic poems.⁴ Fr.1 Bernabé cannot come from any other poem but the *Ilias parua*, as this is the only one ascribed to Lesches: the idea of the existence of another poem, named *Iliupersis*, written by the same poet (a hypothesis based on a disputed passage of Pausanias) is rejected by the common consent of scholars and

³ That the poet reveals his individuality and claims authorship of the poetry expresses a higher level of self-awareness, which is incompatible with the Homeric epics and thus with a date in the ninth/eighth centuries. The first evidence of an individual personality in literature is given by Hesiod in the seventh century (the remarkable presence of autobiographical information in the *Works and Days* and the story of the author’s meeting with the Muses, *Theog.* 22–35). Such a degree of self-consciousness will become common later, in the iambic, elegiac, and lyric poetry, from the seventh century on.

⁴ Plut. *Cleom.* 9.6 = *Cyp.* fr.18 (Bernabé); *De Alex. Magn. fort.* 2.5 (337E) = *Il. parua.* fr.2; *De cohib. ir.* 11 (459D) = *Cyp.* fr.18; but also *Rom.* 12.2 = *Epig.* test. 3; *Thes.* 28.1 = *Thes.* fr.1; and so on.

editors.⁵ Thus, there is no good reason why this fragment cannot be attributed to the *Ilias parua* of Lesches. Indeed, it cannot come from any other part of the poem but the proem, as the invocation to the Muse clearly shows.

The disparity between the two fragments is not merely formal or stylistic (the *ego* of the poet vs. the conventional figure of the Muse), but substantial and even anthropological, because the use of the first person reflects the achievement of a high level of self-awareness: it is a statement of individuality, inconsistent with the Homeric-type invocation ascribing the prerogative of poetic inspiration to the Muse (a personal but divine and higher figure). Therefore, the choice should be based not only on philological reasons, but also on sociological and cultural ones, according to the level of self-awareness that can be expected of a poet living in the seventh/sixth centuries.

The two solutions are both plausible: as testimony for this, both are presented in the latest editions of the epic cycle. Alberto Bernabé ascribes the invocation to the Muse to the *Ilias parua*, relegating the *ego*-fragment to the remains *alterius uel aliae Iliadis paruae* (in accordance with the hypothesis that there were two or more poems with this title).⁶ Malcom Davies for his part ascribes the *ego*-fragment to the (one existing) *Ilias parua*, whilst he relegates the conventional invocation to the *dubia*, as if perhaps a too simple, even banal and trite feature.⁷ However, another poem of the cycle, the *Epigoni*, dealing with the Theban myth and the conquest of Thebes, surely began with a similar

⁵ Pausanias (10.25–27) describes the great murals painted by Polignotus in the Cnidian Lesche at Delphi and comments on their relationship to the poetic sources. Besides Homer and Lesches, he refers to Stesichorus' *Iliupersis*: this explains his slip in naming Lesches' poem as *Iliupersis* instead of *Ilias parua* (10.25.5).

⁶ This thesis is discussed by A. Bernabé, “¿Más de una Ilias Parua?” in *Aphophoreta Philologica E. Fernández Galiano* (EClás 87 [1984]) I 141–150; cf. his *Poetarum* 76 and 84.

⁷ Davies, *Epicorum* 53, 60–61. The fragment with the invocation of the Muse has been completely left out by West, *Greek Epic Fragments* 125, who prefers the *incipit* in the first person, in accordance with Davies. Indeed, fr. 1 Davies is partly recorded on two vases found in South Russia: see J. G. Vinogradov, *Pontische Studien* (Mainz 1997) 385 and 419.

invocation to the Muse.⁸ Therefore, this was not an unusual *incipit* for the cyclic poems, just as it was not for the Homeric ones.⁹

If this is the case, who is right? Alberto Bernabé or Malcom Davies and Martin West?¹⁰

It seems to me that the issue is not correctly stated. A suggestion comes from the proem of Vergil's *Aeneid* (1.1–11):

*Arma uirumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam fato profugus Launinaeque uenit
litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
ui superum, saeuae memorem Iunonis ob iram,
multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet urbem
inferretque deos Latio; genus unde Latinum
Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae.
Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso
quidue dolens regina deum tot uoluere casus
insignem pietate uirum, tot adire labores
impulerit. tantaene animis caelestibus irae?*

This proem presents a peculiar, bipartite structure, as it begins with the *incipit* in the first person (1, *arma uirumque cano*), but a little later adds the invocation to the Muse (8, *Musa, mihi causas memora*). Thus, the poet reveals himself and emphasises his own role as narrator, and the conventional figure of the Muse is given a subsidiary position as the keeper and inspirer of mem-

⁸ In fact, fr.1 Bernabé = 1 Davies, $\nu\upsilon\upsilon$ ἀθ' ὀπλοτέρων ἀνδρῶν ἀρχώμεθα Μοῦσαι (quoted in the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*, 235 Allen = 15 Wilamowitz), belonged to this poem and was precisely its starting-point. But cf. also Horace *Ars P.* 136–137: *nec sic incipies ut scriptor cyclicus olim: | fortunam Priami cantabo et nobile bellum* (on this see C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry* II [Cambridge 1971] 214: “the wording of the preceding verse seems to make it sufficiently clear that Horace latinized one specific proem of a cyclic epic not now extant”).

⁹ *Il.* 1.1 μῆνιν ἄειδε θεά; 2.761 σὺ μοι ἔννεπε Μοῦσα; *Od.* 1.1 ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε Μοῦσα; *Hymn.Hom.* 5.1 Μοῦσά μοι ἔννεπε; 19.1 ἀμφί μοι ... ἔννεπε Μοῦσα; *Hes. Th.* 114 ταῦτά μοι ἔσπετε Μοῦσαι.

¹⁰ In fact the scholarly world is not equally divided on this question. The majority of scholars today side with fr.1 Davies. So for example W. Kullmann, *Homerische Motive. Beiträge zur Entstehung, Eigenart und Wirkung von Ilias und Odyssee* (Stuttgart 1992) 96–97.

ory. Scholars have noted that in this proem the traditional, Homeric feature is blended and “mediated” with cyclic influence: hence the poet created a new and original phrasing.¹¹ But a similar pattern can be recognised, about two centuries before Vergil, in the proem of the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, who appeals to Apollo for poetic inspiration and marks his presence as a narrator in the *incipit* (1.1–2, ἀρχόμενος σέο Φοῖβε παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν | μνήσομαι) and once more a little later (20–21, νῦν δ’ ἂν ἐγὼ γενεήν τε καὶ οὔνομα μυθησαίμην | ἠρώων κτλ.), relegating the Muses to a marginal position, as song-helpers (22, Μοῦσαι δ’ ὑποφήτορες εἶεν ἀοιδῆς). Vergil in his turn takes an original and personal way *suo more*, remaining faithful to his *auctor princeps* Homer and turning to Apollonius too.

But it cannot be excluded that Vergil found this proem-feature in another model and brought it from that text, which could be the same *Ilias parua*. In fact, the two fragments at issue (1 Davies and 1 Bernabé), if one of them is not spurious (and this is not so obvious as some scholars have believed), prove the presence both of the self-statement of the poet and of the Muse-invocation in the proem of the *Ilias parua*. Perhaps there was a pattern similar to the Vergilian and the Apollonian ones:

Ἴλιον ἀεῖδω καὶ Δαρδανίην εὐπῶλον,
ἦς πέρι πολλὰ πάθον Δαναοί, θεράποντες Ἄρηος.
[...]
Μοῦσά μοι ἔννεπε κείνα, τὰ μήτ’ ἐγένοντο πάροιθε
μήτ’ ἔσται μετόπισθεν.

It can be argued that the *Aeneid* proem-pattern is a very complex and sophisticated one: the role of the poet and the presence of the Muse are not simply juxtaposed, but complementary and deeply linked with one another. Thus, it does not seem probable that an archaic poet writing in the seventh or sixth century could realise such a peculiar expedient.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. R. G. Austin, *P. Vergilii Maronis Aeneidos liber primus* (Oxford 1971) 26. About Vergil’s relationship to the epic cycle in general: E. Ch. Kopff, “Virgil and the Cyclic Epics,” *ANRW* II.31.2 (1981) 919–947, who rightly asserts that “Virgil may be ranking himself among the followers of Homer as a cyclic author.”

This is true. Yet it is possible that these two features, the self-statement of the poet and the invocation to the Muse, were both present in the proem of the *Ilias parua*. This can be reasonably proposed in light of the diachronic development of the epic cycle. These poems took shape and grew gradually in a stratified process, starting from the archaic oral culture: they were composed and increased progressively, with successive interventions and contributions through the centuries. If this is true of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the composition of the epic cycle was even more complex and intricate, given the lack of an official version (like those of the Homeric epics made in the Alexandrian age, but perhaps already in the pre-classical period). Thus, it is possible that the proem of the *Ilias parua* had two distinct statements, composed in different times and corresponding to different steps of its stratified composition-process.

In the former, original proem, to which the *ego*-fragment (fr.1 Davies = 28 Bernabé) belongs, the poet speaks in the first person, taking a step beyond the Homeric model. In the later element, added by a poet in the second half of the sixth century, probably not long before 500 B.C., the Muse reappears, as the invocation-fragment (fr.1 Bernabé = 2 *dub.* Davies) clearly demonstrates.

The second poet adjusted the proem to make it more similar to the Homeric one and to put it in the train of an authoritative tradition: he probably reviewed and retouched the whole poem, trying above all to make it as compatible as possible with the Homeric epics. In fact, it is probable that all the cyclic poems have been modified and adapted to the Homeric ones.¹² Hence the many inconsistencies and uncertainties that complicate the evidence about the *Ilias parua* and the other cyclic epics, which have had a gradual, multiplex redaction.

Therefore, the matter is not an ordinary interpolation, but a

¹² Cf. J. S. Burgess, *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle* (Baltimore 2001), especially ch. 1, dealing with the stages of transmission of the cyclic epics and in particular the Hellenistic editorial process, which made many changes in these poems and produced inconsistencies and discrepancies between them. The development of these poems is discussed by Burgess also in “Kyprias, the *Kypria*, and Multiformality,” *Phoenix* 56 (2002) 233–245, arguing that the *Cypria* circulated in several forms.

more complex and relevant process, involving the gradual growth and change of the poem, due to the successive work of two (if not more) distinct poets. The later Muse-invocation came into the original proem (maybe not in a pondered and well-structured way) and deeply modified it. By the end of this process, the *Ilias parua* opened with a statement of the individuality of the poet (who differed from Homer by means of this new *incipit*), but proceeded with the Muse-invocation, that was to become (in Homer's footsteps!) a conventional and even inevitable pattern for the epic genre.

In conclusion, fr.1 Davies comes from the original proem of the *Ilias parua*, more ancient in time but more "modern" and peculiar in language. The proem was then "corrected" and brought back into the train of the tradition with an additional, but more banal and trite feature, the Muse-invocation of fr.1 Bernabé. Hence the similar but better arranged proem-pattern of the *Aeneid*: a result of the creative genius of Vergil, who took inspiration from the epic cycle.

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