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## Outside the Homeric lens: the *Epic Cycle* and the Trojan War tradition

We often forget that the *Iliad* narrates events of only fourteen days in the tenth year of the Trojan War, most of them within a three-day span.<sup>1</sup> We frequently find ourselves subconsciously filling in gaps in the Homeric Epics with details from a larger "Epic Cycle"- the death of Achilles and sack of Troy, for instance- and confusing this material with the Homeric. The monumental status which the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have acquired overshadows what is frequently overlooked: "each epic immensely expands a single incident – the Quarrel and the Return."<sup>2</sup> Some two thousand and three hundred years later we have inherited the Homeric texts as they were fixed in writing by the Alexandrian scholars - at this time already a canon and a classic.<sup>3</sup> In antiquity, admiration for the Homeric epics caused other traditions about the Trojan War to erode with time until they largely faded away: a preference, even a choice, of which many of us are still guilty.<sup>4</sup> The Homeric poems' privileged status, however, not only does not tell us much about their place in their original environment but actually obscures it. This paper argues that in the Archaic Age the Trojan War was still a living and organic tradition, explored through a large and diverse corpus of media and genres in which the Homeric epics were not dominant, but instead one among many of its expressions. A close examination of the *Epic Cycle* in comparison to the Homeric poems, as well as Trojan War themed iconographic representations, illustrate that the *Cycle* is largely based on a tradition reaching back into a pre-Homeric past and is thus not only independent in content and form but served different purposes and social needs.<sup>5</sup> The *Epic Cycle* is therefore useful in

1 Throughout this essay, I refrain from speaking of 'Homer' but rather prefer to use the term 'Homeric epics', since I wish to avoid both the claim that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were composed by the same person, and that a poet named Homer is responsible for these compositions.

2 Ruth Scodel, "The Story-teller and his Audience," In *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler, 45-59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47.

3 The Alexandrian scholars first stabilized the Homeric epics into what became the "vulgate" text sometime in the third century B.C, to which belongs the earliest commentator, Zenodotus of Ephesus. The forty surviving fragments from this period contain "wild lines," which although they are not present in the vulgate, are however always repetitive and superfluous, with no effect on content. The Alexandrian scholars reversed this process of accretion by paring them down, but it is clear that a standard version was well established at this period. Powell, Barry B. *Homer*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), second edition, 11-13.

4 A quick glance at the scholarly literature makes it clear how much intellectual effort is expended yearly on the Homeric epics in contrast to other material treating the Trojan War. To provide an example, in the Cambridge companion to Homer, a total of eight pages is devoted to Cyclic and other epics for the whole volume as part of Ken Dowden's chapter "The Epic Tradition in Greece." Ken Dowden, "The Epic Tradition in Greece," in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 196-204. Already in the seventies, Jasper Griffin wrote that "the Homeric poems are the subject of such a flood of print that a definite justification is needed by one who adds to it." Jasper Griffin, "The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* vol. 97 (1982), 39.

5 Jonathan Burgess, *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle*, (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 5; 132. I do not wish to pin down either the Homeric epics or the *Epic Cycle* to any specific point in time, since it is not useful for my purpose. Rather, I am interested in examining them at

reconstructing the shape of Trojan War story-telling in the Archaic Age, allowing for different level of understanding of the tradition in its entirety and the Homeric epics within it.<sup>6</sup> As I intend to show that, “if the tradition of the Trojan War were a tree, initially the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* would have been a couple of small branches, whereas the Cycle poems would be somewhere in the trunk.”<sup>7</sup>

Oral myth-making roots were ancient, reaching far back to the Bronze Age, and its evolution multi-layered. As the post-Mycenaean period increasingly emerges as less ‘dark’, it has become clear that the expansion beginning around the early eighth century B.C was based on the use of old travelling routes from the late Bronze Age – paths which in fact “may never have been entirely forgotten.”<sup>8</sup> Practical information and tales were passed from one generation to another among sailors, merchants and other travelers as they revisited the places which had generated these stories in the first place. By the Archaic Age, the tradition had already a long history of organic evolution as different time periods contributed to its growing body, and other myths were also incorporated within it.<sup>9</sup> That is not to say that its ‘oral’ quality makes the tradition one seamless whole. Oral tradition did not belong exclusively to bards – other verse genres, nonprofessional, unmetrical renderings, folktales, ‘travelers’ tales and artistic representation concurrently narrated traditional stories.<sup>10</sup> Thus the Homeric epic “was only one type of solo performance for entertainment and for negotiating the values of the community,” emerging “against a rich background of the poetic tradition.”<sup>11</sup> As a genre, epic itself is a “world of variety” and Greek epic tradition in particular

a point when they were neither static nor fixed. It suffices to stress that both stem from traditions going back to the early Archaic Age when they coexisted rather than followed each other linearly in sequence, an approach I take from Burgess, who cautions that “the oral context of the composition and performance of early epics should make us wary of pinning an early epic to a specific point in time.” Jonathan Burgess, “Neoanalysis, Orality, and Intertextuality: An Examination of Homeric Motif Transference,” *Oral Tradition* vol. 21, no. 1 (2006), 153.

6 The *Epic Cycle* survives only in fragments and prose summaries provided by Proclus. These were added to the Venetus A manuscript as additional background for the Homeric epics.

I use the term “Trojan War tradition” to refer to the oral myth about the war in its largest sense within which the epics are merely parts. *Epic Cycle* refers to the stabilized Hellenistic text stemming from a much older oral branch going back to the Archaic Age which I term the “Cyclic tradition.”

7 Burgess 2001, 1.

8 Hans Niemeyer, “The Phoenicians in the Mediterranean, Between Expansion and Colonization: A Non-Greek Model of Overseas Settlement and Presence,” in *Greek Colonization: An Account of Greek Colonies and Other Settlements Overseas*, ed. Gocha R. Tsetskhladze, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), vol. 1., 148.

9 These include, for instance, the Homeric references to Heracles and the Theban War.

10 Burgess 2001, 4; Scodel 2004, 47. This variety of song-making is self-referenced in the Homeric poems, suggesting that pre-Homeric poetry existed in genres other than epic. Andrew Ford, “Epic as Genre,” in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry B. Powell, 174-193 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 400-1. There are metatextual references to unmetrical rendering, such as Phoenix’ on Meleager in the *Iliad* book 9 and Odysseus’ own in books 9-12 of the *Odyssey*.

11 Dowden 2004, 195; John M. Foley, “Epic as a Genre,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler, 171-188 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 171. We must remain aware that “Homer’s songs represent a tiny fraction of what was on offer in his day, all over the Greek world.” Robert Fowler, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler, 1-11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

was not shy to incorporate all kinds of sources. Our very understanding of epic as a genre is an anachronistic assumption of the generic distinctions that solidified in the Hellenistic age: the boundaries would have looked rather different in the Archaic period. The Homeric epics occupied only a small part of this tradition, “a blink of the Olympian eye” in an immense saga.<sup>12</sup> As will become apparent, the Homeric poems are neither typical nor representative of the Trojan War tradition.

Since so much of the argument for a late, Homeric-influenced creation of the *Cycle* is based on its format, it is necessary to trace back the evolution leading to this fixed text. In reconstructing the living tradition in the Archaic Age, it is thus important to stress the difference between the *Epic Cycle* and the ‘Cyclic’ material which served as its basis – a late Hellenistic compilation based on early, pre-Homeric material. The Hellenistic editorial process cropped and assembled together a number of poems about the birth of the Gods, and the Theban and Trojan Wars into a collection of verse, which was later made into prose summaries (by Proclus amongst others).<sup>13</sup> Earlier references and the discordant and odd transitions between the poems show, as Burgess has aptly demonstrated, that the poems were originally separate.<sup>14</sup> Thus “the apparent unity of the *Epic Cycle* is actually an illusion caused by later manipulation of the poems selected to construct it.”<sup>15</sup> In their earlier state these tended to overlap in content and occasionally offer conflicting versions.<sup>16</sup> The irony is that the loss of aesthetic appreciation for the *Cycle* poems, which opened the way for their manipulation, resulted in the very construct used as an argument against their early and independent development from the Homeric epics.<sup>17</sup> Despite negative attitudes of Alexandrian scholars towards the “Cyclic” poems, the edited compilations were preserved because of a continuing interest in the raw data of their narrative, which in itself is suggestive of their contribution.<sup>18</sup> Thus the single most important point to be retained about the transformative process which led from a Cyclic tradition into a fixed *Epic Cycle* is that its artificial

12 Donald Lateiner, “The *Iliad*: an Unpredictable Classic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler, 11-31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

13 The *Epic Cycle* compilation includes the *Cypria*, *Aethiopis*, *Little Iliad*, *Iliou Persis*, *Nosti* and *Telegoni*. Summaries other than the one by Proclus were also made- for instance Apollodorus’ *Epitome*, which is essentially a summary of the *Epic Cycle*. M. Davies, *The Epic Cycle* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), 7-8.

14 In his *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses individual poems of the *Epic Cycle* without any indication that they belong together (Arist. *Poet.* 1459a-b).

15 Burgess 2001, 21.

16 There are irregularities in Proclus’ divisions between the poems. For example, Proclus ends the *Aethiopis* before Ajax’s suicide, which follows in the summary of the *Little Iliad*, but a scholiast on Pindar reveals that “the author of the ‘Aethiopis’” says that Aias killed himself about dawn (Scholiast on Pindar, *Isth.* 3.53). In addition to overlap, the poems also occasionally differ about the material they share, such as the summary of *Iliou Persis* by Proclus where Odysseus kills Astyanax, which is contradicted by a fragment of the *Little Iliad*, where it is Neoptolemus who kills him (Scholiast on Lycophron *Alex.*, 1268).

17 A growing devaluation of the poems would have made manipulation more permissible. Motivation for changes could have included a desire to provide a continuous mythical overview- removing ‘superfluous’ parts-, to provide relevant background information for the Homeric epics, and to modify contradictory information.

18 Cameron, A., *Callimachus and his Critics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995 In his chapter “The Cyclic Poem,” Cameron argues that the criticism of Callimachus resembles Aristarchus, directed at non-Homeric aspects of language and style. Aristarchus as a rule considered them later than and inferior to Homer but there is evidence for professional rivalry with his predecessor Zenodotus who had not adopted the same attitude towards Cyclic poetry.

assemblage and cropping in order to ‘fit’ around the Homeric epics was a late phenomenon, taking place in a hostile environment very different from the one in which they originally circulated. The use of this structure as an argument for the Cyclic poems’ post-Homeric origins is therefore inadequate.<sup>19</sup>

Just as the structural analysis of the *Epic Cycle* shows that the Cyclic poems were not manufactured to ‘fit’ around the Homeric epics, the nature and treatment of their content further suggests that they were created independently. The notion that the Homeric epics were very different from other poems of their age is not new, but their comparison with the *Epic Cycle* opens new avenues of heuristics. Their difference was presented in aesthetic terms as early as Aristotle.<sup>20</sup> It is much more historically significant, however, that the Cyclic poems have a different purpose and function than their Homeric counterparts. As Griffin has convincingly argued, as soon as one engages with the *Cycle* it becomes clear that it “contained a number of things to which the *Iliad*, and to a lesser extent the *Odyssey* also, was inhospitable.”<sup>21</sup> Except for Odysseus’ first person narrative to Alkinoos (books 9-12) the fantastic, the miraculous and the romantic are something the Homeric epics exclude- in a very conscious way.<sup>22</sup> The *Epic Cycle* on the other hand abounds with the fantastic, exceeding far beyond the austere limits to which it is confined in the *Iliad*.

For one, Cyclic heroes possess supernatural powers, such as Lynceus, whose eyesight allowed him to survey the whole Peloponnese, or the daughters of Anius, Oeno, Spermo and Elais (Wine-girl, Seed-girl, Oil-girl), who have the power to produce at will their eponymous commodities, thereby feeding the Achaeans at Troy for nine years.<sup>23</sup> Objects are equally imbued with magical qualities: Troy could not fall as long as the Palladium was kept within its walls; Philoctetes and his bow and arrows had to be brought within Troy in order for its capture; Telephus’ wound could only be cured by the weapon which inflicted it.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, in the *Iliad* there is no hint that Troy is protected by any talisman. In the *Aethiopis*, Memnon and Penthesilea are central characters while in the narrative of the *Iliad*, exotic peoples, such as Ethiopians and Amazons, are distanced under the guise of allusions.<sup>25</sup>

Such a different emphasis on the fantastic is not limited to minor details, but affects key protagonists and alters the themes of the works. An alternate version claims that the arm of Achilles was impenetrable, a quality suppressed in the Homeric epics. Instead, Achilles fears that Aeneas’ spear would go through his shield and a rational explanation of superior craftsmanship is provided for the shield’s sturdiness: “howbeit through two folds he (Aeneas) drave it, yet were

19 Herodotus, for example, rightly suspected the *Cypria* to be un-Homeric not because of its quality but because of disagreement (Hdt. 2.117). Also cf. Hdt. 4.32 for doubts about the *Epigoni* belonging to Homer.

20 “compared with all other poets Homer may seem, as we have already said, divinely inspired... [and the Homeric epics] surpass all other poems in diction and thought” (Arist. *Poet.* 1459a-b)

21 Griffin 1977, 39.

22 Dowden 2004, 202.

23 “Straightway Lynceus, trusting in his swift feet, made for Taygetus. He climbed its highest peak and looked throughout the whole isle of Pelops, son of Tantalus; and soon the glorious hero with his dread eyes saw horse-taming Castor and athlete Polydeuces both hidden within a hollow oak.” (Scholiast on Pindar, *Nem.* 10. 114); (Cypria fr. xx).

24 Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.68.2 (*Iliou Persis*); *Ilias Parva*, *Cypria*

25 *Il.* 3.189 (Priam recalls the Amazonomachy); *Il.* 6.196 (family history of Glaucus); *Il.* 1.423 (the gods visit the Ethiopians); *Od.* 4.84 (Menelaus recounts his adventures with the Ethiopians).

there still three, for five layers had the crook-foot god welded.”<sup>26</sup> Even more interesting is a hint within the *Iliad* of a vestige of the alternate version, for in the final battle scene of Patroclus Apollo must strip him of Achilles’ armour before he can be killed.<sup>27</sup> This action, which requires divine intervention, only makes sense if the armour was impenetrable, but otherwise appears out of place.

More generally, the Cyclic poems offer an accommodating world where death can be evaded and immortality is bestowed generously. In this tradition, Achilles and Ajax are said to be invulnerable and a number of heroes are granted immortality.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, “an un-killable warrior in the *Iliad* is an absurdity,” since the concept itself undermines the serious concern of the Homeric epics with death, and would hamper the very heroic nature and tension on the battlefield that the *Iliad* meticulously creates.<sup>29</sup> Invulnerability is simply un-Homeric. Instead, “the *Iliad* defines itself as concerned with both the social and personal costs of the pursuits of warrior honour,” where the dramatization of sacrifice is heightened by suffering and the inevitability of death.<sup>30</sup> Beloved of the gods though they are, none are spared. A comparison of the *Cycle* with the Homeric epics thus shows profoundly different attitudes towards life and death, human heroism and the relation of gods and men. In fact, the *Iliad* is so centered on the heroic figure that “the poet follows aristocratic individuals, not lines or masses of infantry into combat to a degree that one wonders why the latter groups are there at all.”<sup>31</sup>

Homeric heroism is not limited to the battlefield but expands into all facets of life. On the contrary, the careful contrast created between the pairs of Helen and Paris and Hector and Andromache – an adulterous and unlawful liaison versus a rightful union – is blurred in the *Epic Cycle*.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Odysseus’ dedication to his wife in the *Odyssey* is contrasted with a cynical portrayal of his misconduct in the *Telegony*, in which he marries a Thesprotian princess even though nothing prevents him from returning home to Penelope.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the tale of Achilles hiding among women at Scyros is rejected

26 *Il.* 20.265. Achilles’ fear is followed by a rebuke from the poet: “fool that he was, nor knew in his mind and heart that not easy are the glorious gifts of the gods for mortal men to master or that they give place withal” (ibid). The passage however does not imply invulnerability but simply superior craftsmanship which makes it “harder” to break through this god-made armour. Certainly the hero himself was not aware of any impenetrable quality, and the spear indeed does certain damage.

27 Ibid 16.801

28 Immortality is known for 1) Memnon after being slain by Achilles (*Proclus, Chrestomathia, ii*) 2) Achilles himself who was taken by Thetis to the White Island (ibid) 3) Castor and Polydeuces who were granted immortality by Zeus “every other day” (ibid), with an alternate version where only Polydeuces becomes immortal and Castor remains mortal (*Clement of Alexandria, Protrepticus ii. 30. 5*)- versus in the *Iliad*, where, unbenownst to Helen, both are already dead and buried in Lacedaemon (*Il.* 3. 243) 4) Iphigenia who is saved from sacrifice and made immortal by Artemis (*Proclus, Chrestomathia, i*)

29 Griffin 1977, 40

30 Scodel 2004, 47

31 Lateiner 2004, 13

32 In the Homeric epics, Helen has only one child by Menelaus, her daughter Hermione, and is generally shown in a respectable light- especially in the *Odyssey*, where she has returned to Sparta. In contrast, in the *Epic Cycle* she has numerous children- including Pleisthenes by Menelaus and Aganus by Paris (*Scholiast on Euripides, Andr. 89*), is abducted and raped by Theseus (*Scholiast on Homer, Il. iii. 242*) and marries Deiphobus after Paris’ death (*Ilias Parva*).

33 Eustath. *Od.* 1796.3 (*Telegony*)

indignantly by the scholiasts, insistent on the Homeric version where he visits as hero and conqueror.<sup>34</sup>

Homeric aristocrats are certainly not puritans but their love affairs, as well as eating and drinking, are expressed with scrupulous decency.<sup>35</sup> The *Iliad* further stands out for consistently excluding lowly individuals and motives: “traitors and cowards [are] stylized out of existence.”<sup>36</sup> A refusal to fight is interpreted as heroic resentment, whereas in the *Epic Cycle* heroes are ready to do anything to avoid military service.<sup>37</sup> The examples are many, and they make clear that the Cyclic poems relish romantic intrigue and provocative even perverse details at the expense of somber and heroic behaviour.<sup>38</sup> These qualities, so incompatible with the Homeric epics and interwoven throughout the entire fabric of the Cyclic tradition, demonstrate that these poems were designed with very different aims and targeted a different kind of audience.

To further this argument, I would like to explore an analogy from eighteenth century Europe. In a study tracing back the older versions of popular folktales (best known to us though the brothers Grimm), Darnton uncovers major discrepancies in treatment. A master of the genre, Perrault published his *Contes de ma mère l'oye* in 1697 in response to a new vogue for fairy tales in fashionable Parisian circles. Taking material from the oral tradition of the common people, he polished it to suit the taste of the salon sophisticates and précieuses who were his main audience.<sup>39</sup> Examining the older versions of these popular stories before they passed through this filter of aristocratic etiquette is startling to say the least, as all sorts of scandalous behaviour- ranging from rape, incest and cannibalism- dominate the narratives.<sup>40</sup> In Darnton's words, “far from veiling their message with symbols, the storytellers of eighteenth-century France portrayed a world

34 Proclus, *Chrestomathia*, i.

35 Griffin 1997, 47

36 Griffin 1977, 45. Most telling is the Homeric portrayal of the Trojans, especially Hector, who are painted as flawed but in a sympathetic light nonetheless. The Cyclic portrayal, on the other hand, was not so nuanced, and as Scodel points out, there is little doubt that the older tradition cast the Trojans unambiguously as “bad guys.” (Scodel 2004, 51-2). Regarding individual cases, the *Odyssey* prefers to skip over Ajax's madness (*Od.* 11.549), during which he attacks the Achaean leaders (recounted in the *Ilias Parva*), and the murder of Palamedes which, according to the *Nostoi*, drove his father Nauplius to avenge himself upon the Greek fleet by luring it on to the rocks, whereas in the *Odyssey* this disaster is attributed to the anger of Athena alone (*Od.* i 327)

37 Examples of Homeric excuse are *Il.* 6.326 (Paris); *Il.* 13.460 (Aeneas); as well as Achilles himself and Meleager in Book 9. By contrast in the Cycle Amphiaras' wife had to be bribed in order to make him go to Thebes, Achilles hid among women and Odysseus pretended to be mad. Unmasked by Palamedes, Odysseus exacts revenge by murdering him with Diomedes' help. (*Proclus, Chrestomathia*, i)

38 For instance, there is a focus on the erotic tension of Penthesileia's murder by Achilles, who is later made fun of by Thersites “for his supposed love.” The hero is agitated and kills Thersites for the insult (*Proclus, Chrestomathia*, ii). To this can be added the fate of Nemesis, who “had been joined in love with Zeus the king of the gods by harsh violence” after arduous attempts to escape (*Athenaeus*, viii. 334 B).

39 Darnton, Robert, “Peasants Tell Tales: the Meaning of Mother Goose,” in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, 9-72; 265-270 (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 11. From Perrault these were passed to the brothers Grimm thought the intermediary of Hassenpflugs. Darnton remarks that the tales that thus reached them were neither German nor very representative of the folk tradition.

40 e.g. the cannibalizing of the grandmother and the erotic prelude to the devouring of the little girl in the original story of *Little Red Riding Hood*, or the hardly romantic reason for Sleeping Beauty's awakening- child-birth ensuing from rape.

of raw and naked brutality.<sup>41</sup> Their propensity for the bawdy, comical, supernatural, exotic and violent, which was suppressed in the later “traditional” fairy tales, hint at a different and cynical way of viewing the world.<sup>42</sup> Although their context is clearly far removed from the Greek Archaic Age, the pattern which they follow offers an intriguing scheme for thinking about the differences between the *Epic Cycle* and the Homeric epics. If such a comparison can be fruitful, as I believe it is, the Homeric epics can be understood as originally appealing to an aristocratic audience, whereas the *Epic Cycle* preserved a tradition which was more widely distributed among the common people. Such an interpretation certainly fits within Burgess' strong argument that the initial influence of Homeric epics on the larger mythological tradition was not great in the Archaic Age.

Artistic representations of the Trojan War demonstrate that the Homeric epics, at an early date, did not greatly affect this tradition. For the modern scholar, it is extremely difficult to approach ambiguous iconography without bias stemming from familiarity with the Homeric epics and the canonical status they enjoy.<sup>43</sup> Ahlberg-Cornell, for example, argues that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* caused an artistic revolution from the eighth century onwards. This conclusion, according to Burgess, must be firmly rejected.<sup>44</sup> Cook's tables, which are classified thematically, on the contrary show little Homeric influence on early Greek artists, with the first example being from the late seventh century (see Appendix). Kannicht similarly reaches the conclusion, admittedly contrary to his expectations, that the *Iliad* is “virtually neglected by seventh-century art.”<sup>45</sup> This provoking stance was finally supported by Snodgrass's work, which was “the first major study that does not express surprise, regret or apologies for the absence of early Homeric images,” and sees meager evidence for Homeric influence down to the mid sixth century.<sup>46</sup>

Cyclic images, on the other hand, such as the judgment of Paris, Achilles fighting Penthesileia, and Memnon and the wooden horse not only preceded the Homeric representations, but remained much more popular throughout the seventh and into the sixth century. Their identification does not rest on the same pitfalls as the dubious Homeric images since they do not require a close connection to a specific epic. Instead they allude to a “Cyclic” tradition of the Trojan War belonging to the Archaic Age, of which the *Epic Cycle* neither claims to be the origin or the center, but rather simply a late representation of the tradition fixed in text.<sup>47</sup> Taken together with the very different focus, style and purpose exhibited by the *Cycle* fragments, this strongly suggests an independent Cyclic and pre-Homeric tradition that existed and continued to thrive contemporaneously with the Homeric epics in the Archaic Age. This strand of the Trojan War

41 Darnton 1984, 15

42 *ibid.* 50-51

43 This task is perhaps even harder than fairly dealing with the Cyclic fragments, which presents similar pitfalls.

44 G. Ahlberg-Cornell, *Myth and Epos in Early Greek Art* (Jonsered: Paul Astroms Forlag, 1992), 32-5; 62-3. Several assumptions are made which are clearly problematic, notably the failure to make a distinction of representations that *happen* to be in the *Iliad* from those *inspired* by it. Furthermore, since epic had by no means the monopoly over traditional stories, there is no need to presume that artists needed exposure to the Homeric poems in order to be inspired to create mythological representations.

45 R. Kannicht, “Poetry and Art: Homer and the Monuments Afresh,” *Classical Antiquity* vol. 1 (1982), 85.

46 Burgess 2001, 53

47 *ibid.* Greek artists dealt with Cyclic themes but not necessarily specific poems.



tradition was both widespread and more representative before the gravitational pull which grew from the later Homeric success “recast it in relation to, and at the service of, reading Homer.”<sup>48</sup>

These conclusions have important implications not only for our understanding of the living Trojan War tradition in the Archaic Age, but the position of the Homeric epics within it, and the way they interacted with the contemporary audience. Since the 1940s, neoanalysis has used the *Epic Cycle* in order to attempt to restore Homeric poetry to its early historical context. By using the information about the Cyclic tradition available to us, it is possible to reconstruct the outlines of the Trojan War tradition with which an early Greek audience would have been equipped when it first heard the Homeric poems. The performance of a single or a few episodes did not occur in a narrative vacuum – it was supported by popular knowledge of the larger mythological body, the ‘notional epic.’<sup>49</sup> The Homeric epics directly appeal to and reference it, but also do so in more subtle ways.

The narrative doublets which have long been recognized within the poems may also expand outside the boundary of the epics, a process neoanalysis terms motif transference. One of the best known cases of motif transference is the parallel between the death of Patroclus and that of Achilles.<sup>50</sup> Three passages about Achilles’ mourning of Patroclus, 1) Achilles stretched lying in the dust 2) Thetis and the nereids coming out of the water to mourn in an outburst of sorrow and 3) Thetis holding Achilles’ head in her arms, are all much more appropriate in depicting the death of Achilles himself, both in terms of body gestures and the degree of mourning.<sup>51</sup> Thus without ever reaching this climax, the *Iliad* foreshadows the hero’s death with a heightened dramatic effect.

From this point of view, motif transference is “not a passive accumulation of influences but an active narratological tool that evokes Trojan War material.”<sup>52</sup> In this context, Homeric poetry, which is commonly portrayed as a replacement of the pre-Homeric tradition, is actually a dependent outgrowth from a larger mythological pool that is both assumed and appreciated. Finkelberg’s claim that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were “intended to supersede the other traditional epics from the very beginning and that they achieved this goal by means of a thorough revision of the heroic tradition” should therefore, in my opinion, be rejected.<sup>53</sup> Only by recognizing the Cyclic tradition’s independent and pre-Homeric

48 Elton Barker, “Momos advises Zeus: changing representations of ‘Cypria’ fragment 1,” in *Papers on Ancient Literatures: Greece, Rome and the Near East: Proceedings of the “Advanced Seminar in the Humanities”*, ed. Ettore Cingano and Lucio Milano, 33-73 (Padova: S.A.R.G.O.N. Editrice e Libreria, 2008).

49 Scodel 2004, 47

50 Malcolm Willcock, “Neoanalysis,” in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry B. Powell, 174-193 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 175; Burgess 2006, 160-61; Bruno Currie, “Homer and the Early Epic Tradition,” in *Epic Interactions - Perspectives on Homer, Virgil, and the Epic Tradition Presented to Jasper Griffin by Former Pupils*, ed. M.J.B. Clark, G. F. Currie, and R. O. A. M. Lyne, 1-47 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23-40.

51 *Il.* 18.26-7; *Il.* 18.71 1) The formula of a line and a half used to describe Achilles lying is a recurring epitaph used to describe fallen heroes, such as Hector’s brother and charioteer Kebriones, who “in the whirl of dust lay mighty in his mightiness.” (*Il.* 16.775-6). 2) The outpouring of grief by Thetis and all the sea nymphs is only fit for Achilles himself. As Odysseus descends in the underworld he describes the reaction: “when she heard the news of your death your mother rose from the sea and the immortal sea-nymphs with her” (*Od.* 24.47-9). 3) The gesture of holding his head is appropriate for the dead, as in the scene of Andromache mourning Hector (*Il.* 24.724).

52 Burgess 2006, 149

53 Margalit Finkelberg, “Homer as a Foundation Text,” in *Homer*, ed. Harold Bloom, 169-189 (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 169-70.

roots and its supporting function for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* can we understand the nature of the living Trojan War tradition in the Archaic Age and its reception by a contemporary Greek audience. A reparation of the *Epic Cycle*’s damaged reputation and its recovery from obscurity- already in antiquity- offers exciting and new avenues for the exploration of a great saga and the society which created it.

Tzveta Manolova

#### Appendix:

	<i>Cypria</i>	<i>Iliad</i>	<i>Aethiopsis</i> and <i>Little Iliad</i>	<i>Iliou Persis</i>	<i>Cyclopeia</i>
subjects	Judgment of paris; arming of Achilles (Phthia); Troilus	Ajax vs. Hector; Patroclus sets out; Menelaus vs. Hector over Euphorbos; embassy	Achilles vs. Penthesileia, Memnon; Ajax carries Achilles; suicide of Ajax	Wooden horse; death of priam; Menelaus & Helen; death of Astyanax	Cyclops images
	7 images (+1?)	4 images (+3?)	7 images	9 images (+2?)	7 images (+1?)
700					
675					
650					
625					

Schematization of Cook’s table provided in Burgess 2001: 182

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