

General Introduction

Hesiod and His Poems

The *Theogony* is one of the most important mythical texts to survive from antiquity, and I devote the first section of this translation to it. It tells of the creation of the present world order under the rule of almighty Zeus. The *Works and Days*, in the second section, describes a bitter dispute between Hesiod and his brother over the disposition of their father's property, a theme that allows Hesiod to range widely over issues of right and wrong. *The Shield of Herakles*, whose centerpiece is a long description of a work of art, is not by Hesiod, at least most of it, but it was always attributed to him in antiquity. It is Hesiodic in style and has always formed part of the Hesiodic corpus. It makes up the third section of this book.

The influence of Homer's poems on Greek and later culture is inestimable, but Homer never tells us who he is; he stands behind his poems, invisible, all-knowing. His probable contemporary Hesiod, by contrast, is the first self-conscious author in Western literature. Hesiod tells us something about himself in his poetry. His name seems to mean "he who takes pleasure in a journey" (for what it is worth) but in the *Works and Days* he may play with the meaning of "he who sends forth song." As with all names—for example, Homer, meaning "hostage," or Herodotus, meaning "a warrior's gift"—the name of a poet may have nothing to do with his actual career.

Hesiod's father, so the poet tells us, once lived in ASIA MINOR, in Aiolian KYMÊ, then moved to ASKRA in mainland Greece, a small, forlorn village at the foot of MOUNT HELIKON near THEBES, where Hesiod lived. Like Homer, Hesiod became an *aoidos*, an oral "singer." While he was tending his flocks on Helikon, the Muses, inspirers of poetry, came to him in a vision, giving him a staff of laurel and the power of song. They commanded him to sing of the gods, which he does in the *Theogony*. For this reason "Helikon" is synonymous with poetic inspiration in the Western tradition. Later, in *Works and Days*, Hesiod tells of a dispute with his brother Persês about the division of their inheritance. His brother took more than his fair share,

depending on gift-devouring elders for corrupt judgments rather than on his own hard work.

Hesiod also tells us that his father had sailed the seas in search of livelihood, but he himself had no experience of the sea, except for a journey from AULIS to CHALCIS on the island of EUBOEA (a distance of about 200 yards!). In Chalcis, in a poetry contest at the funeral games for one Amphidamas, he won a tripod, which he dedicated to the Muses in their shrine on Mount Helikon. Scholars have speculated that Hesiod's successful poem was some version of the *Theogony*. Because of the poet's close relationship with the Muses, he can speak with authority about past, present, and future. Hesiod is inspired with a mission divinely ordained.

Scholars have argued since antiquity about the meaning of these few details. There is no reason not to accept them at face value, however one wishes to interpret Hesiod's description of his meeting with the Muses. He must mean that his poetic gifts came to him without human teachers, but this is a poetic exaggeration. All singers have teachers. As Hesiod himself explains, the Muses can tell both truth and lies.

The Problem of the Alphabet and the Date of Hesiod

We cannot accurately date Hesiod's poetry, though he must belong to the eighth or ninth centuries B.C. Ancient traditions made him a contemporary of Homer. What, then, is the date of Homer? Good evidence places him at or near the time of the invention of the Greek alphabet, the first writing capable of recording his poetry, and the poetry of Hesiod, which no earlier system of writing could have done. No alphabet, no Homer—and no Hesiod. The problem of the invention of alphabetic writing is intimately associated with attempts to date Homer and Hesiod.

The Greek alphabet was invented on the basis of the preexisting West Semitic (so-called Phoenician) writing, an odd sort of phonetic syllabary with a small number of signs (around twenty-two) representing consonantal qualities with an implied vowel to be provided by the reader. The original Greek alphabet, by contrast, consists of two sorts of signs, the so-called consonants, which cannot be pronounced by themselves, and five vowel signs,

which can be. Four of the vowel signs were adapted from West Semitic consonantal syllabograms and the fifth, upsilon, was created by splitting a West Semitic sign into a consonant (digamma, our “F”) and a vowel added to the end of the series after “T,” where it still resides today. Only a single person working alone could have made this arbitrary alteration to its model. Three additional consonantal signs were also added to the signary. To this division of the signary into two kinds of signs was added the spelling rule that a pronounceable vowel sign must always accompany an unpronounceable consonantal sign. It is virtually the same system of writing in use today in the Western world and by others who use an alphabet, the writing on this page.

The Greek alphabet is one of the most important developments in the history of culture: It is the basis of modern civilization, including Eastern civilizations that have adopted it in order to function in the modern world. For the first time it became possible to record in writing an approximation of what somebody said, a technology of universal application. Earlier systems of writing, which were only partly phonetic, did not allow such freedom.

The earliest epigraphic finds of Greek alphabetic writing are dated to around 775–750 B.C. They come from ERETRIA in Euboea near the EURIPUS CHANNEL, over which Hesiod traveled to the funeral games of Amphidamas, not far from Mount Helikon on whose slopes Hesiod lived. Other early finds have turned up in a site in nearby BOEOTIA; from an Eretrian colony in Italy; and, recently discovered, from an Eretrian colony in northern Greece. PHRYGIA, an early adopter of the system, has also produced early finds. The Greek alphabet seems to have been invented somewhat before our earliest epigraphical finds, say ca. 850 B.C., no doubt in Euboea or near there. The inventor, whom we may call “the Adapter,” was probably a Semitic speaker, a Phoenician familiar with the very old West Semitic (that is, Phoenician) writing, which goes back to about 1500 B.C.

West Semitic writing was used to make rough phonetic notations of Semitic speech, and sometimes Semitic poetry, providing only the consonantal qualities, with the result that it can be pronounced only by a native speaker. The Adapter of this Semitic system of writing to make the Greek alphabet must have been bilingual, perhaps the product of intermarriage. Semitic speakers were certainly living in Euboea at this time, and the Phoenician

Kadmos, whose Semitic name means “man of the East,” founded the city of Thebes in Boeotia, according to legend. The Adapter’s name may have been Palamedès, who in legend made changes to the alphabet and whose father was Nauplius, a legendary king on the island of Euboea.

Evidently the Adapter attempted to apply the West Semitic syllabary to the recording of Greek oral verse, as the system had been used to record roughly Semitic speech; but because of the very different phonologies of the two languages, he was able to make little headway. At this moment he discovered the division of the list of signs into two kinds and the spelling rule that a pronounceable sign, a vowel sign, must always accompany a non-pronounceable sign, a consonantal sign. The new system of writing would make it possible to recover an approximation of the sound of the Greek hexameter, which depends on vowel sounds for its complex meter. In fact, the earliest epigraphic finds in the Greek alphabet are hexametric.

The likely inspiration for this invention is Homer himself, who was certainly famous in his lifetime and who attracted the Adapter’s attention. The *Odyssey* celebrates the earliest exploration of the far West, a journey actually made by Euboean settlers, and Euboeans would have been a natural audience for the poem. The earliest Greek settlement in the West was on the island of ISCHIA in the Bay of Naples, where Euboeans established a trading colony. Very early examples of Greek alphabetic writing have been found on Ischia, including two perfect hexameters that seem to refer to the text of the *Iliad*.¹

Hesiod, if a contemporary with Homer as reported, would have been well known to the Adapter too; or he may have been recorded somewhat later. Tellingly, neither Homer nor Hesiod ever mentions writing, although they otherwise describe many features of daily life. They must have lived in an illiterate age. Homer composed in a West Ionic dialect, the speech of Euboea, the same dialect as Hesiod—all singers shared a common dialect for oral composition—though Hesiod must have spoken Aeolic as his native dialect.

Early Greek alphabetic writing appears to have been used primarily for the recording by dictation of oral poetry, never for such mundane usages as

1. The famous Cup of Nestor inscription. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nestor%27s_Cup#The_.22Cup_of_Nestor.22_from_Pithekoussai.

keeping business accounts, though those who understood the system used it to scribble their names on pots and stones. It was not easy to read. Reading an early alphabetic text was completely different from the experience of a modern reader, because apprehension took place through the ear. The sound was puzzled out from the graphic mark; then the meaning of the text was understood. An early text of the first lines of Hesiod's *Works and Days* might have looked something like this:²

𐀀𐀁𐀂𐀃𐀄𐀅𐀆𐀇𐀈𐀉𐀊𐀋𐀌𐀍𐀎𐀏𐀐𐀑𐀒𐀓𐀔𐀕𐀖𐀗𐀘𐀙
 𐀚𐀛𐀜𐀝𐀞𐀟𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥𐀦𐀧𐀨𐀩𐀪𐀫𐀬𐀭𐀮𐀯𐀰𐀱𐀲𐀳𐀴𐀵
 𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥𐀦𐀧𐀨𐀩𐀪𐀫𐀬𐀭𐀮𐀯𐀰
 𐀱𐀲𐀳𐀴𐀵𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥𐀦𐀧𐀨𐀩𐀪
 𐀫𐀬𐀭𐀮𐀯𐀰𐀱𐀲𐀳𐀴𐀵𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥
 𐀦𐀧𐀨𐀩𐀪𐀫𐀬𐀭𐀮𐀯𐀰𐀱𐀲𐀳𐀴𐀵𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥
 𐀦𐀧𐀨𐀩𐀪𐀫𐀬𐀭𐀮𐀯𐀰𐀱𐀲𐀳𐀴𐀵𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥
 𐀦𐀧𐀨𐀩𐀪𐀫𐀬𐀭𐀮𐀯𐀰𐀱𐀲𐀳𐀴𐀵𐀶𐀷𐀸𐀹𐀺𐀻𐀼𐀽𐀾𐀿𐀠𐀡𐀢𐀣𐀤𐀥

The writing was probably continuous. The text begins from right to left, then curls around at the end to read left-to-right, then again right-to-left. (Such writing is called *boustrophedon*, “in the manner of an ox turning” in a furrow.) There was no separation between words, a convention of modern literacy: Linguists cannot even define “word,” except as an item that occurs in a dictionary. There were no diacritical marks—commas, periods, colons, capitals, or paragraph divisions. An *ou* is written as *o*; no distinction is made between long *ē* (later eta) and short *e* (later epsilon) or between long *ō* (later omega) and short *o* (later omicron); elided vowels are written out; and doubled consonants are not ordinarily written.

Such early Greek texts as Hesiod’s poetry were visible representations of a continuous stream of sound. By contrast, we read from sight, from the appearance of the writing on the page, where the text is richly supported by diacritical devices of all kinds. In general we do not sound out the words but understand them from their visual representation. Much misunderstanding of ancient Greek literature depends on modern scholars’ thinking that the ancient Greeks read texts as we do, but they did not.

2. From M. L. West, ed., *Works and Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 60.

The Social Environment of Early Greek Poetry

In the eighth and ninth centuries B.C., the days of Homer and Hesiod, texts circulated in small numbers among a restricted and refined upper class of wealthy amateurs—seafarers, warriors, aristocrats. There was no scribal class in ancient Greece, unlike in all earlier civilizations, where literacy was confined to one percent or less of the general population. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, where immensely complex systems of writing, only partly phonetic, were in use, and even in the Persian imperial bureaucracy, where the syllabic West Semitic system was in use, scribes were scarcely distinguished from the ruling class. In Palestine, writing was more widely used, but to be literate was always equivalent to being a possessor of power, and Eastern scribes guarded their power smugly and with arrogance.

In Greece there was no book trade in early times and no general readership. Greek aristocrats socialized in the all-male symposium, the drinking party. If women were present, they were prostitutes. A small number of these men had learned the secrets of alphabetic literacy from one another, passed down from the Adapter's hand. Possessing this secret, they were able painstakingly to puzzle out a small number of poetic texts that circulated in the symposium.

Greek aristocrats read not for pleasure but in order that they might memorize poetry that had once been oral and represent it at the symposium to the accompaniment of the lyre. These texts, the schoolbooks of the literati, originated in the songs of *oidoi*, oral poets, who had dictated their verse to someone who understood alphabetic writing. Such *oidoi*—Homer and Hesiod—could not themselves read or write. This is how Greek, and Western, literacy began.

Later, specialists gave up the lyre and accompanied their delivery to the beat of a staff. They were called *rhapsodes*, “staff singers,”³ and could speak in a learned way about the meaning of their texts. Plato (ca. 428–ca. 348 B.C.)

3. Later Greeks, as early as Pindar (ca. 522–ca. 443 B.C.), played with this word, making it come from *rhapto*, “to stitch,” as if singers were “song stitchers,” linking together formulaic expressions to create their verses; but it must derive from *rhabdos*, “staff,” just as *citharode*, “lyre singer,” and *aulode*, “flute singer,” derive from the appropriate instruments.



Figure 1. A drunken symposiatist reclines on a couch and vomits into a jar, assisted by a naked cupbearer. Such cupbearers were often the object of amorous attention by older Greeks. Notice the lyre on the wall, used to accompany the symposiatist's recitation of poetry. Athenian red-figure painting, ca. 500–470 B.C. National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen (Photo: Stefano Bolognini; https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c9/Nationalmuseet_-_Copenhagen_-_brygos_vomiting1.jpg)

makes fun of these pretenders to wisdom in his dialogue *Ion*. Rhapsodes were not oral poets, but they understood the secrets of alphabetic writing and bathed in the glory that came from reciting and commenting on memorized versions of great oral poets.

It is common to speak of rhapsodic interpolations in examining ancient texts, but they were probably uncommon. A rhapsode may make up verses to suit his pleasure, but unless they are written down in the tradition that becomes canonical—that is, copied and recopied—they do not survive. Therefore the texts of Homer and Hesiod that we possess must be substantially the texts that these poets composed, recorded by dictation at the dawn of alphabetic literacy. Of course such texts are liable to the usual distortions that come from copying and recopying, but these distortions are always minor and do not affect the main narrative, in spite of an inordinate amount of scholarly speculation about interpolated, nongenuine, portions of the Homeric and Hesiodic poems.

By the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., those literate in the alphabet realized that they could compose fresh verse in writing, a revolutionary development. This is the age of the lyric poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho, and many others. It is the beginning of modern alphabetic literacy. Still heavily influenced by their education in recorded epic, such poets often echo epic poetry in their language and themes, but their poetry was created in writing, not orally composed. These literate poets are much given to the creation of new words that, thanks to the genius of alphabetic writing, could be pronounced by absent readers. Such poetry was, however, still meant to be memorized and recited in public, and never read for pleasure as we read modern poetry. The greatest flower of this development was Greek tragedy, wherein several copies of a written, previously unknown text could be distributed to a company of actors, who could all be expected to pronounce and memorize it. Nothing like this had ever happened before in the history of culture, and some of these texts, from the fifth century B.C., have survived to this day.

Hesiod's Debt to the Near East

Hesiod, and Homer, share in a community of Near Eastern literary themes and styles, and we cannot doubt a direct connection, although the details of

transmission remain obscure. The relationships of humans to gods are similar in East and West, as are such specifically poetic themes as the origin of the cosmos, the loss of a golden age, women's introduction of evil into the world, and the necessity of labor in order to survive in a fallen world distant from the paradise in which humans once lived. In Eastern literature and Western, human suffering comes from the gods' anger, as do human blessings and divine favor granted to certain people. Kingship comes from heaven in both traditions. The division of the universe into heaven, earth, sea, and underworld is Eastern, as is the picture of a world bounded by water and a land of no return ruled by a king or queen, a place of gloom and filth, where reside the bloodless dead and the enemies of the gods.

Narrative strategies are similar too: for example, the initiation of an action by describing an unsatisfactory situation, followed by a complaint to the gods, the gods' deliberation, then measures taken. Messengers drive the action. Stereotyped formulas introduce direct speech. There are scenes of feasting, wherein singers entertain and visitors arrive, and scenes of arming and journeys by chariot. In descriptions of war, single combat is waged, as between Zeus and Typhon, and similes, long or short, enhance vividness. Resemblances between actual verbal formulations can be surprisingly close.

The *Theogony*, a description of the creation of the present world order, owes a great deal to Mesopotamian myth. Euboean traders, in addition to their exploration of the far West, had established a colony in the eastern Mediterranean, at a place called AL MINA on the north Syrian coast, near the mouth of the ORONTES RIVER (see Map 1). Apparently it was hereabouts that Euboeans learned of such Eastern stories as how the storm god overcame an earlier generation of gods and monsters in a battle to establish his own power.

Although Zeus is Indo-European in origin—his name means something like “shiner”—his office, epithets, and forms of behavior are taken from Eastern archetypes. Just north of Al Mina is MOUNT CASIUS, which the Hurrians of northern Syria, a people who spoke a language of unknown affinity, considered the home of their storm god, Teshub. Teshub is pictured in art holding a triple thunderbolt and an axe or mace, just as does Zeus (figs. 2 and 3). The Hurrians took over stories from the very ancient



Figure 2. Eastern storm god, perhaps the Hurrian Teshub. In his right hand he holds a mace and in his left hand a forklike implement, evidently representing a thunderbolt. He is bearded and wears a conical cap and a sword. Late Hittite stele from Kürtül, ca. 700 B.C.; Archeological Museum Kahramanmaraş, Turkey (Photo: Klaus-Peter Simon; https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/34/Kahramanmaras_Museum_Kürtül.jpg)



Figure 3. The storm god Zeus hurls his thunderbolt from his right hand, a weapon with a triple prong at either end. An eagle(?) perches on his left hand. Athenian red-figure water jar, ca. 480 B.C.; Musée du Louvre, Paris (Photo: Bibi Saint-Pol; https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a1/Zeus_Louvre_G204.jpg)

Sumerians of southern MESOPOTAMIA, who also spoke a language of unknown affinity, and from the Akkadians, a Semitic people who lived in southern and central Mesopotamia, and handed these stories to the Indo-European Hittites, who lived in the central plateau of ANATOLIA. Then, in the ninth to the seventh centuries B.C., the Hittites occupied the lands of the Hurrians. From this tradition must come Hittite-Hurrian stories about the storm god Teshub.

The Hittite-Hurrian *Kingship in Heaven*
and *The Song of Ullikummi*

Teshub's victory over earlier generations of gods, which scholars call the Succession Myth, is told in several tablets found in the Hittites' central Anatolian capital, HATTUSA, from around 1300 B.C. Small portions survive of one poem, *Kingship in Heaven*, which has clear relevance to Hesiod's Greek story. The poem tells how in earlier years a certain Alalu was king in heaven, and Anu (Sky) was his servant. For nine years Alalu was king in heaven. Then Anu made war against Alalu, defeated him, and sent him under the dark earth. Then Anu was king, and Kumarbi was his servant. Kumarbi gave Anu things to eat and drink and bowed down at his feet. For nine years Anu ruled. Then Kumarbi warred against him. Anu flew into the sky. Kumarbi, close behind him, grabbed Anu's feet and bit off his genitals. Anu's sperm went into Kumarbi's stomach, but Anu laughed and said that Kumarbi was now pregnant with Teshub (the Hurrian storm god), the river TIGRIS, and another god.

Kumarbi spit out the semen—but here the tablet breaks off. When it resumes, we learn that Anu (Sky) argued with Teshub (the storm god), still inside Kumarbi, over how Teshub should escape from Kumarbi's body. Kumarbi felt dizzy and asked Ea (ē-a, the clever Near Eastern god of fresh water and magic) for something to eat. Kumarbi ate something that hurt his mouth. At last the storm god Teshub, being warned not to come out through various openings, especially not through Kumarbi's anus, came out of the "good place," apparently Kumarbi's penis. The rest is lost, but somehow Teshub escaped from Kumarbi's body, overthrew Kumarbi, and became king of heaven.

Another Hittite-Hurrian tale, called *The Song of Ullikummi*, tells us more about the celestial kingship and Kumarbi's struggle for power, as in Hesiod's description of Zeus's fight with the monster Typhon, a child of Earth who threatens the creation. Kumarbi was not at all happy with the way things had gone, and he planned to destroy Teshub. Kumarbi "took wisdom into his mind," rose from his chair, took a staff, put sandals on his feet, and set out to a place called Cool Pond. There Kumarbi had intercourse with a huge rock: "Five times he possessed it, and again ten times he possessed it." The rock became pregnant and gave birth to a stone child. The child was placed on Kumarbi's knees; Kumarbi named him Ullikummi, "destroyer of Kummiya," the city of the storm god Teshub.

Kumarbi then delivered the child to Ubelluri, a giant who, like the Greek Atlas, carried heaven and earth. Ubelluri placed the child Ullikummi on his shoulder, where he grew an acre each month. Soon he was so big that the sea came up only to his waist and his head reached the sky. To get a good look at the monster, Teshub climbed up Mount Casius. Overwhelmed, Teshub sat down and cried. The goddess Ishtar tried to enchant Ullikummi by her womanly charms, but her attempts were in vain because the stone monster Ullikummi was deaf and blind.

The storm god Teshub decides to fight Ullikummi. He marshals seventy gods, but they are powerless. Ullikummi reaches Kummiya, Teshub's home, in the mountains of southeastern Anatolia. Teshub goes for help to Ea, the always-helpful god who lives in the *apsu*, the subterranean fresh water. Ea orders the gods of the old generations, who live in the underworld, to produce the tool by which heaven and earth once had been cut apart. With this tool Teshub cuts Ullikummi from the body of Ubelluri, breaking his power. Teshub now takes heart and mounts his chariot to fight again. Here the tablet breaks off, but certainly Teshub, highest god of the Hittite-Hurrian pantheon, overcame the monstrous Ullikummi to become king of heaven.

The Babylonian *Enuma elish*

The Succession Myth of the *Theogony* is also found in the famous Babylonian poem *Enuma elish*, "When on high," which tells of the victory of the

Babylonian storm god, Marduk, over the watery chaos demon Tiamat. The text reached its present form well before 1100 B.C., although it preserves far older material. The poem was recited at the Babylonian New Year festival. Telling of the first days of the creation, the story had the magical power to renew the world at the critical joining of one year with the next.

The poem opens with the gods of the primordial waters, male Apsu, fresh water, and female Tiamat (*tē-a-mat*), salt water, mingled together in an indeterminate mass. From Apsu and Tiamat came forth four generations of gods, including Anu (Sky) and the powerful and clever Ea. The new gods came together to dance. Their activity and noise disturbed Apsu's rest. With his officer Mummu, Apsu went to Tiamat to suggest that the new gods be destroyed. Although the loving mother Tiamat vigorously opposed Apsu's wish, Mummu urged it, and Apsu kissed his officer in gratitude.

When the younger gods heard of the plan to destroy them, they fell into a panic. Only Ea, "who knows everything, the skillful, the wise," kept his head. He cast a spell over Apsu and Mummu, sending them into a deep sleep, killed Apsu, and strung a rope through Mummu's nose. On top of the dead Apsu, Ea built his house, into which he moved with his wife, who gave birth to the real hero of the poem, Marduk, god of BABYLON.

Marduk was in every way extraordinary and mighty, and he had four mouths and four ears. Marduk's grandfather Anu (Sky) was so proud of his grandson that he fashioned four winds for Marduk's plaything, appropriately for the future storm god. The winds blew constantly back and forth, once more stirring the waters of Tiamat. Again the older gods complained. Tiamat, who had earlier defended the younger gods, now determined to destroy them. She gave birth to an army of monsters. To lead the horde, she chose a new husband, Kingu, "her only lover," placed him on a throne, and armed him with the mysterious Tablets of Destiny, which confer power over the universe.

When Ea hears of the fresh preparations, he loses his nerve and consults the other new gods, who demand that Ea war against Tiamat. At this point the tablet is broken, but apparently Ea was unsuccessful, for when the text resumes, it is Anu who attacks Tiamat. She puts her hand against him, and Anu runs away in terror. The gods lose all hope and sink into despair.

Then Marduk comes forth. He agrees to fight Tiamat and her army of monsters, but only on condition that he be granted absolute power. He takes a bow and arrows, a mace and a net, and with lightning flashing before him and seven winds at his back he mounts his chariot—the image of a thunderstorm. Marduk roars down the road toward Tiamat, but when he sees her, he loses his nerve (like Ea and Anu before him). Then he regains his courage and so insults her that Tiamat is seized by uncontrollable rage. She gives out a roar and attacks. Marduk spreads out his net, drives a storm into her mouth, puffs her up, and kills her with an arrow. He throws down her corpse and catches the army of monsters in his net, fixes them with nose ropes, and binds their arms.

Marduk imprisons Kingu and seizes the Tablets of Destiny. Then he smashes Tiamat's skull and splits open her corpse like a clamshell. He raises up the parts, making the sky and earth. He makes the constellations, establishes the calendar, puts the North Star in the sky, and brings forth the sun and moon. From Tiamat's spittle he makes the clouds, the wind, the rain, and from her poison the billowing fog. He heaps a mountain over her head and pierces her eyes, from which flow the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. He heaps other mountains over her breasts, then bends her tail into the sky to make the Milky Way. With her crotch he holds up the sky.

Marduk returns home in triumph, delivers the Tablets of Destiny to Anu, and presents his captives before the gods. He washes off the gore of battle, dresses in royal attire, and sits on a high throne to receive homage from the gods. He proclaims that he will build a great temple, a luxurious dwelling for himself and all the gods. He brings the rebel Kingu before the assembly, executes him, and from his blood makes human beings.

Marduk then divides the gods into those who live in the sky and those beneath the earth. The grateful gods eagerly build the palace of which Marduk had spoken, and after two years they complete the great ziggurat of Babylon. A banquet is held, and Marduk is proclaimed lord of the universe. The story ends with a long list of the fifty names of Marduk (over a fourth of the total poem), with detailed explanations of each of them. In this way the world was made, and the same order of kingship was established among the gods as in Babylon itself.

Prominent Themes in Eastern Creation Stories

In *Enuma elish* and other Mesopotamian myths, the original creative element is watery, feminine, and ambivalent, both life-giving and life-destroying. The dangerous, chaotic waters may be represented by a monster or dragon that is overcome by a hero, who fashions the cosmos. There is a complex association between water, chaos, monsters, and death. Creation and dragon combat can be one and the same. The hero establishes the world order and his own permanent reign over the corpse of the monster.

Eastern myths, like Hesiod's story in the *Theogony*, envision the formation and organization of the world and of human society as process and change. The world has not always been the way it is now. Its initial unity in the primeval waters has moved to diversity. Creation is not from nothing but, as in Hesiod, from a primordial something by means of sexual reproduction and a series of successively more powerful generations. A younger generation opposes, overcomes, and controls or destroys an older generation until the present world order comes into being.

Similarities between the Hittite-Hurrian and Hesiodic myths are striking. According to *Kingship in Heaven*, first a primordial god (Alalu) was ruler, then the sky god (Anu) ruled, then another god (Kumarbi), and then, probably, the storm god (Teshub). The same sequence of generations appears in Hesiod. First came Chaos (= Alalu?), then Sky/Ouranos (= Anu), then Kronos (= Kumarbi), then the storm god Zeus (= Teshub). Both Anu (Sky) and Ouranos (Sky) were castrated by their sons, and gods were born from the severed organs.

As long as heaven and earth are locked in sexual embrace, forming a solid whole, there is no space within which the created world can appear. Castration was a real practice imposed on enemies taken in ancient war (and in modern too), but in the logic of the myth castration is separation, and separation is creation. Both males, Kumarbi and Kronos, have children within themselves. The children of each, Teshub and Zeus, both of them storm gods, overcome their fathers to win victory in heaven.

According to the Hittite-Hurrian *Song of Ullikummi*, the storm god, Teshub, must defend his reign against a dragon of chaos, Ullikummi, even as

Zeus takes on the formidable Typhon. The Hittite-Hurrian Ea uses the weapon with which heaven and earth were separated to cut the enormous Ullikummi, born from a rock, away from Ubelluri, the giant who holds up the world; Zeus too uses a special weapon, the thunderbolt, against the monster Typhon. Teshub takes his stand on Mount Casius in Syria to view Ullikummi, the same mountain on which the battle against Typhon takes place, according to Apollodorus, a Greek compiler of myths of the second century A.D. In fact the name “Typhon” seems to be derived from the West Semitic Sapon, the god of Mount Casius. The stone that Kronos swallows instead of his children is similar in the equation of stone with offspring in the Hittite-Hurrian myth.

In *Enuma elish*, first came the generation of Apsu and Tiamat and their descendants. These new gods bring a principle of movement into the world (their dance) that contrasts sharply with the older forces, standing for inactivity and inertia (symbolized by their desire to rest). The primordial gods’ resistance to change leads to a battle in which the newer gods overthrow the older. This succession motif is also the basis of Hesiod’s story.

In the first round of the battle, the wise and clever Ea overcomes wicked Apsu by a spell; his magical power resides in the spoken word. Ea’s cleverness is contrasted with Apsu’s brutish lust to destroy, a common folktale motif. The dragon’s slayer is clever and tricky; his opponent, dull and stupid. Tiamat (like Hesiod’s Earth in the *Theogony*) is both beneficent and malevolent, first opposing her husband’s destructive designs but then giving birth to an army of monsters. Later, in a repetition of the succession motif, Tiamat is destroyed by her grandson Marduk, who becomes ruler of the world.

In both *Enuma elish* and in Hesiod’s *Theogony* the first generation of gods is made up of primal pairs: Apsu, the male sweet waters, and Tiamat, the female salt waters; and in Hesiod, Sky and Earth. The fathers Apsu and Sky hate their first children, who are begotten within the mother. In an initial round of conflict, the sons, clever Ea and wily Kronos, overthrow their fathers. In a second round of conflict, gods of the third generation—the storm god Marduk and the storm god Zeus—revolt against an earlier generation. Terrible monsters are overcome: Tiamat and her offspring in *Enuma elish*; the Titans and Typhon, children of Earth, in the Greek story. The

storm god is then made king. Eastern and Hesiodic myths alike report a cosmic history that begins with mighty powers of nature and ends in the organization of the universe as a monarchic, patriarchal state.

There are differences in detail and profound differences in tone between the Eastern stories and the Greek. The writing systems of the Mesopotamians and Hittite-Hurrians, unlike the Greek alphabet, were unable to record the suppleness and color of spoken language. Nonetheless, there are enough similarities to place beyond doubt that the Hesiodic cosmogonic tradition is old and has passed across linguistic and cultural lines. Hesiodic myth partly reflects the Greeks' own attitudes, but its basic structure, and many of its cultural assumptions, come from non-Greek peoples.

Other Eastern Motifs in Hesiod's Poetry

Works and Days, too, belongs to an ancient Eastern literary genre called Wisdom Poetry, wherein a wise or prophetic teacher admonishes an errant ruler or relative. Many of Hesiod's moralizing maxims in the *Works and Days* have clear Eastern parallels—for example, the admonition to labor and the need to avoid idleness. The Prometheus myth's explanation of sacrificial practice has Eastern precedents. Often in the East many deities work together to make a creature, as the Olympian gods make Pandora. Parallels to the certainly non-Greek Myth of the Five Races are found in Iran and Judea, including such specific features as long life, good weather, and a single language for the Golden Age, followed by short life and a breakdown of family and virtue in the last age. Animal fable is part of the Eastern genre of wisdom from the earliest times, as represented in Hesiod's story of the Hawk and the Nightingale. The promise of good times to follow on righteous behavior is paralleled by Yahweh's instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai, as are similar Hesiodic moral precepts by other Eastern sources. Hesiod's list of lucky and unlucky days has clear Eastern parallels.

The myths of Herakles, one of which is told in *The Shield of Herakles*, seem almost entirely inspired by Eastern tales. The story of Herakles' birth, told in the *Shield*, is very like Egyptian propaganda for the birth of Pharaoh in the New Kingdom, wherein the great god Amon visits the queen on the

same night as her husband. Most of Herakles' traditional exploits, though not told in the *Shield*, find Eastern parallels too, sometimes close (the lion combat, the seven-headed Hydra, the Golden Apples of the Hesperidès), and are especially reminiscent of the adventures of Samson. Like Herakles, Samson kills a lion with his bare hands and is undone by a woman. The notion of a cycle of labors is Eastern, reminding us of the eleven labors of a Mesopotamian hero named Ninurta.

The Transmission of Eastern Motifs to Greece

Somehow Eastern literary expression, then, became part of the special language of the Greek *aidos*, the singer of tales. But how did such elements cross from East to West? How did they cross the barriers of language and custom? Homer and Hesiod were *aidoi* ("singers"), heirs to ancient traditions of making oral verse, whereas in the East the scribal schools were transcendent. In comparing Western literature like Hesiod's poems with Eastern literature, we are comparing alphabetic, *aidic*, dictated documents by men of questionable social status with nonalphabetic exercises produced in the scribal schools by learned professionals of high social status, meant to impress and educate students and peers. But Hesiod's story of the storm god's war against his forefathers and a dragon of chaos can have come to Greece only through oral means.

It is easy to conceive of bilingual speakers, not being sure if we mean biliterate as well, or instead. If we think of bilingualism as meaning the ability to speak two languages, we can imagine a bilingual community wherein people spoke both Greek and a Semitic language. The transmission of oral song must have taken place in such an illiterate environment. Greek-speaking singers may have heard and learned from Semitic-speaking singers, but the closeness of Semitic expressions and poetic style to Greek expressions and poetic style make it more likely that individual bilingual poets could sing in both a Semitic language and in Greek. It is striking that the flow of tradition is entirely in one direction, as if an inheritor of an ancient tradition of Semitic song passes it on to a feeble Hellenic tradition that is quickly enveloped and taken over.

Bilingual speakers are common in the world today, but in an illiterate environment it is probably not possible for a Greek to learn a West Semitic language well through casual contact or vice versa. We must therefore assume intermarriage and bilingual households, some of them including oral performers who could sing in either language. Such households are at every level plausible and are probably attested archeologically in mixed Semitic-Greek epigraphic finds from eighth-century Ischia, in ITALY, and Eretria, in Euboea.

The transmission of culture from Semitic speakers to Greek speakers remains a mystery, but it somehow took place. Hesiod's poems are the strongest testimony to this.