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*Kindred Classics: Poetry and Divination in Ancient
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For my first Classics teachers,
the founders of this thesis,
David Woodhead,
Roy Hyde,
and, above all, my Father.

Preface

The first shoot of this thesis sprouted on Indian soil, in Pondicherry at the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, where I sat one monsoonal Sunday in my room translating the *Mahābhārata*. The prophecy of Vyāsa at the start of the sixth book immediately reminded me of that Theoclymenus' at the end of Book 20 of the *Odyssey*. I made a note in the margin of my vocabulary list and returned to my slow philological labours. But I never forgot it. A year later, when I was casting around for a subject for my Master's thesis, I rummaged it out and considered it anew. I started my thesis research with no preconceptions, braced even for something like a null hypothesis. But to my pleasure I found that, loosening the soil and gently uprooting, a vast subterranean network of similarities revealed itself. Master's thesis complete, I knew that the subject pleaded for more holistic treatment. Two months after hand-in I landed in Pisa to begin it.

I could not, however, eradicate rodent suspicions that the right method for a fuller study did not yet exist. Indo-European (IE) Comparative Poetics, with some notable exceptions, seemed either to claim too much or too little; that is, implausible claims that extant literature preserved a great deal from the proto-culture produced a strong counter-reaction from naysayers, who were then led to deny that anything much at all had endured. This seemed to keep the field at the margins of the wider discipline, ever the clumsy acolyte of self-assured IE Comparative Linguistics. Yet both sides seemed to me to overstate their case. While intuiting that *medio tutissimus ibis*, I struggled to see a way past this Icarian status quo.

Dubiety hovered in the quiet library air for three dismaying years, until another bolt struck: I hit upon the methodology that I felt my study needed. I set about rewriting my findings in confidence that the labour was necessary. The method explicitly distinguishes between different kinds of inheritance – 'strong' and 'weak'. Moreover, it fully accounts for the effect of cultural Universals on theorising inheritance. Despite some important forerunners, these ideas have not yet been formulated and applied in this way; it is my humble hope that the method presented in my introduction outlive its exemplification in the thesis. This work, then, is the product not only of five years, but of two moments.

It is a commonplace of comparative works – or at least their marketing – that they lay claim to being interesting to scholars of single disciplines. In practice, unfortunately, by aiming for both they reach neither, and often end up being of parochial interest to specialised comparatists. Perhaps the drive to expand Classics beyond Latin and Greek in the United States will change this. For my part, I do not see my work as political: my aims are purely scientific, and not at all ideological in this sense. Yet I hope that mixing in long passages of literary interpretation on the single traditions will tempt scholars specialised in one or the other to engage with other aspects of the thesis, and not simply to pick from the salad a nugget of halloumi and a kalamata olive here, or a cube of mango and a bhindi morsel there.

After accuracy, originality has been my lodestar. IE Comparative Poetics is young and undernourished, and needs it to flourish. If entrants are not deterred by the high entry ticket of intense linguistic study, many laurels are still to be won. There are no studies of Indo-European divination. Books which compare Greek and Sanskrit poetry genealogically, with a thematic fulcrum, and from the linguistic to the thematic level, are few or none. Novelty is built into this project, and the thesis was worth writing for that reason alone. But its ambition is greater than this. It demonstrates that it is possible, embracing

novelty, and using a sound methodology, to show extensive shared inheritance between Greek and Indian literature and culture where it has never been suspected. May that discovery be the enticement for further research.

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Conclusion

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Kindred Classics: Poetry and Divination in

Ancient Greece and India

Introduction: Critiques, Methodologies, Proposals

This thesis is a novelty in numerous ways. Comparative treatments of early Greek and Sanskrit poetry are uncommon – even rarer in book length. Those that do exist are mainly interested in using the comparative method of Indo-European linguistics to reconstruct proto-narratives,¹ or in arguing for transmission of certain literary practices from Greece to India or *vice versa*.² Such works have, rightly, not been influential. This thesis is hostile to both and will do neither. Other work seeks to reconstruct piecemeal elements of the Indo-European background of the two poetic traditions, whether for its own sake, or in order to see historical texts anew.³ This thesis should be seen in this tradition, even if it is at

¹ The most important recent proponent of this kind of comparison is the neo-Dumézilian Nicholas Allen. His 2020 book collects most of his published articles on the topic. The work of Emily B. West picks up where Allen leaves off, using the same methodology (see the bibliography for her three essays on the subject), as does a 2006 article by the Sanskritist Kathleen Garbutt (although it does at least have the advantage of considering the relation between IE and Near-Eastern comparison). A recent Oxford comparative doctoral thesis quotes Allen's methodology approvingly (Andrea Doda, 2023, 4-5, 7). Gerald Gresseth 1979 uses a sort of prototype of Allen's methodology, but is non-committal about reconstructing proto-Epic. Other studies notice similarity without suggesting what to make of them: Per-Johan Norelius 2022 rightly discounts diffusion but sees neither universality nor shared inheritance as satisfactory explanations for the similarities; his discussion ends in *aporia*. Maria Marcinkowska-Rosół and Sven Sellmer 2021, 2022, and 2024 are a closely related group of purely typological studies uninterested in genealogical matters. The notion of shared inheritance is mentioned once, only to be hurriedly shied away from (2024, 457). For indirect criticism of this methodology, see Ranko Matasović, 1996, 64-5; for a critical review (which makes the right points but does not go far enough), see Laura Massetti, 2020. Alexis Pinchard 2009 argues that every similarity in Greek and Indian philosophy is due to shared inheritance – a simplistic view which has little to say for itself.

² See the start of the next chapter for a thorough discussion which resolutely repudiates either possibility, with bibliography.

³ See the fundamental Rudiger Schmitt 1967, discussed further below; Calvert Watkins 1995 and Martin West 2007, are milestones, and inspirational. So too is Stephanie Jamison's work, certainly on the RV, but also her two stunning articles using Sanskrit Epic and ancient Indian legal texts to read Homer (Jamison 1994 and 1999; a third comparative article from 2023 is by her own admission more speculative). Gregory Nagy 1974, despite its title, has a great deal to say also about comparative poetics more generally. Watkins 2002 sees a syntactic phenomenon shared between Pindar and the RV as a stylistic as well as linguistic inheritance, and has inspired an uptick in work on the IE Pindar – see Eduard Meusel 2020 and 2021, and Laura Massetti below. Walter Ruben 1975 is *sui generis*: taking shared heredity as the reason for the works' thematic similarities, it examines the four Epics from a rigidly Marxist lens while hardly engaging in other scholarship. It has little to contribute here. George Dunkel 1982/3 shows the rewards of comparing not just the form but the contexts of cognate words in Greek and Sanskrit. For a survey of the state of the art at the time and an invaluable bibliography with summaries of work in IE poetics until time of

odds with many of the methods used in previous studies. It seeks to make a freestanding contribution to comparative poetics (including in the refinement of its methodologies), reconstruct elements of a proto-tradition where possible, and to contribute to understanding of the two traditions taken singly, whether by using comparison as a prism, or as a finger pointing towards an interesting intra-traditional subject. It is not a typological study, but always considers what might have given rise to any given parallel.

It is a comparative work written for anti-comparatists. That is, employing throughout a heuristic of scepticism, it always seeks to prove, and never to assume a cognate relation. It seeks not what *could* be explained by the shared inheritance of a common culture, but what could best and indeed *only* be explained by it. New methods have been developed to this end. IE comparison is too often vitiated by the comparatist's excessive faith in what it can do, and denial about what it cannot. This thesis contends that realism and an exact method will be the acid to purge it of its implausibilities.

Greek comparison is situated on intensely contested ground: elbow-room must be made. I begin, then, with an expansive critique of my predecessors; from this, presentation of my own methodology will emerge. Since Greece and India present different challenges to the comparatist, I treat Greece's issues in the introduction and leave India's to the start of the second chapter. As IE comparative poetics ambles along, Greek-Near-Eastern comparison stampedes forth; in no area is this more true than divination. The field as a whole clearly believes that the comparandum of the Near East has more to contribute to Greek Classics than IE comparison. This thesis therefore also has the provocative aim of being a corrective to this assumption. In my introduction, I argue that the methodologies adopted have artificially swollen the field. The rest of the thesis demonstrates how IE comparison can unearth interpretive treasures, burnish them, and hold them to the light.

The introduction will also explain the unique advantages of limiting the thesis to only divination in only Greek and Sanskrit. The first chapter situates Greek divination in a Near Eastern context, on the presumption that where Greek divination resembles Near Eastern divination, it will be least likely to

publication, with summaries, see Gabriele Costa, 1998, 11-133 and 440-76, with the caveat that the rest of the book is of vastly less use (see West's rightly mordant review, 1999b). Other studies combine linguistic argument with comparative mythology, such as the monumental Douglas Frame 2009, which weaves Sanskrit comparison into the web of the mythological background of Homer's Nestor, and Nagy 1998 and 2005, on Greek heroes, which number Indian Epic among its various comparanda. Most recently, see the work of Laura Massetti, many of whose articles I could cite here, but see especially the book length Massetti 2016, which focusses on IE elements in Pindar and Bacchylides, and her 2024 book on Pindar *Pythian Twelve*, the second half of which is an extended comparison between the Greek text and the *RV* in the Watkins tradition, influenced also by the work of her doctoral supervisor, José Luis García Ramón (see García Ramón 2000 for an example of his work on comparative poetics). Older scholarship had of course noticed the parallels, but seldom analysed them in detail. See e.g. Oldenberg, 1922, 63, and for an exception see Gabriel Germain, 1954, 11-54, whose discussion is interesting and in some ways pioneering, but is light on linguistic and literary detail.

benefit from IE comparison – the presumption will be borne out. The second chapter sets out the commonalities between Greek and Sanskrit intuitive divination, that is, a supernatural knowledge of occult matters irrespective of their time and place of occurrence which depends on the inborn ability of a practitioner, and not on interpretation of omens. It argues that certain correlations on various levels (language, formula, and scene) are best explained as the remnants of a shared heritage. The third chapter argues the same for certain kinds of omen divination in certain poetic contexts, but is less bullish about reconstruction. The fourth chapter examines the commonalities in the figure of the diviner, and what they might tell us about the shared heritage of the two traditions as well as each taken singly. If at times I go over ground which seems obvious to specialists in one discipline, specialists in the other will be grateful.

Comparison and its Discontents: Greece and its Prehistory

Recent work on ancient divination has proliferated in tandem with the comparatist project to nestle Greek culture ever more snugly into a Near-Eastern embrace. The two areas have fruitfully overlapped, with a resulting consensus that Greek divination is essentially an offshoot of Near-Eastern divination.⁴ Works on Greek divination regularly include long sections on Near-Eastern divination, and *vice versa*.⁵ By contrast, no mention of divination is made in any standard work of IE studies. The indices of Émile Benveniste's 1973 *Indo-European Language and Society*, Mallory & Adams' 1997 *Encyclopedia of IE Culture*, even the monumental three volume *Handbook of Comparative and Historical IE Linguistics* (J. Klein *et al.*, 2017-18), yield blank after blank. The multitude of comparative areal studies and the abyss of genealogical studies is an asymmetry representative of the state of Greek comparatism.

This is a spectacular absence. Every attested IE society has divination of some kind, and yet somehow IE divination remains virgin ground. Emblematic is a recent essay which, despite the promising title 'Greek Divination as the Transformation of an Indo-European Process', all too humbly limits itself to an exploration of 'the Greek transference of ancestral Indo-European cult structures and the associated... matrix of religious vocabulary... to a more recently developed divinatory system... influenced by a Mediterranean source (or sources)'.⁶ This sentence vocalises the universal assumption that only areal, not

⁴ For recent bibliography on divination, see the introduction to my first chapter.

⁵ 'Near East' is an unsatisfactory term which, although still in use, has for decades been criticised (see Erik van Dongen, 2014, with bibliography). I use it as a shorthand for the ancient peoples and cultures from Sinai to the Levant and Anatolia, and across Mesopotamia.

⁶ Roger Woodard, 2023, 22. The article furnishes much else to disagree with – to give one example, it assumes that so-called ecstatic divination is attested in Homer, which I will contest in my first chapter.

genealogical comparanda are useful for Greek divination. Yet it is not known what Indo-European comparison can tell us about Greek divination, because no-one has undertaken this work.⁷ No history of Indo-European divination has been written, and no history of the Indo-European background of Greek divination. This thesis, although poetry is its main focus, makes a step in this direction for the first time.

Areal and Genealogical Comparison: Friends and Foes

Multitasking must be possible. The commonalities between Greek and Near-Eastern divination are undeniable, and, given the much earlier attestation of the shared practices in the Near-East, influence from East to West is the natural explanation.⁸ But the fact that Greece imported certain features does not mean that it overwrote all that it had had before. That is, once new practices gained traction, pre-existing divinatory beliefs and practices were not immediately discarded as otiose. A previous generation of scholars underestimated Greece's debt to the Near East for mistakes intellectual and ideological; the risk now is in overcorrecting to commit the inverse error: to allow ideology and intellectual error to obscure Greece's IE quiddity.

This is neither to say that consideration of Greece's IE must always displace that of its Near-Eastern context, nor that it never can. It is well known that Martin West's two compendious works *The East Face of the Helicon* (1997) and *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (2007) sometimes attribute Near-Eastern and Indo-European provenance to the same element of the same Greek text (West had planned a third book to synthesise the findings of these two, but never lived to write it). For example, an arresting simile at *Iliad* XV.80-83 compares Hera's flight from Ida to Olympus to the travel of a man who darts around instantaneously in his thought:⁹ West compares the simile both to a passage in the Middle

⁷ Kenneth Zysk 2023 is no serious exception. The parallels he finds between Semonides and Bharata are vague, and, despite his title, have little to do with divination.

⁸ At least in the field of divination. Elsewhere, recent years have seen a move away from a model of influence to one of mutual growth and development, even cross-pollination (see the influential Haubold, 2013 for *Kulturbund*, and Rutherford, 2021, for continued cross-pollination, with interesting if unsubstantiated [and unsubstantiable] suggestions for mechanisms of transmission). Yet ultimately, influence remains, in a banal sense, a reliable model, since Greek culture, being importantly constituted by 2nd millennium BC IE incomers, is the youngest culture in the Eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, I am uninterested in the question of Greek contributions to her neighbours' cultures, doubt that there were any in the field of divination, and do not treat the kind of literary questions which need above all robust contextualisation. Given these parameters, I use the word and concept 'influence' liberally.

⁹ Throughout, majuscule Roman numerals refer to the *Iliad*, and miniscule to the *Odyssey*. All other texts are referred to according to usual conventions.

Egyptian story of Sinuhe, and to Irish, Welsh, Icelandic, and Vedic parallels.¹⁰ The two sets of parallels are in competition. If one is a good explanation of how the motif came about in Greek poetry, the other cannot be. How to decide the matter?

One recent answer is not convincing, and my thesis will disregard it. In a forceful recent article, Tom Davies has sought to attack the dichotomy between the genetic Indo-European and the areal Near-Eastern, arguing that where the same literary features are attested in Greek, Near-Eastern, and other early Indo-European (e.g. Indo-Iranian) literature, they are in fact relics of a mid to late fourth millennium BC Eurasian Steppe literary tradition.¹¹ Proto-Indo-European, widely diffused at the time as a lingua franca, hosted this tradition. While Davies concedes that there was ‘no direct interface’ between the PIE speaking steppe herders native to the area southern Ukraine and Russia and North of the Caucasus mountains, and Semitic speaking ‘Mesopotamian settled populations’ a thousand miles to the South, he avers that ‘there was an interstitial culture which blended elements of both’, which might have served as a vector of transmission of literature from one to the other (20). As evidence for a linguistic *Sprachbund* stretching over the mountains, he adduces apparent loanwords for ‘horn’, ‘bull’, and ‘wine’, even if, as he admits, being ‘labels borrowed for novel items’, these ‘can be explained without appeal to multilingualism’.¹² He offers as the emblem of this cultural exchange the flood myths attested in the *Cypria* (fr. 1), *Atra-ḫasīs* (1.352-60), and *Mahābhārata* (11. 8.25-26), arguing that the three versions’ interlocking tangle of similarities is due to their preservation of features first developed when the cultures were ‘shaped by mutual assimilation’ in the late fourth millennium BC (23).

¹⁰ 1997, 385 and 2007, 96. The latter set of parallels is far closer, but this is beside my current point. For my discussion of this simile, and an argument for its IE provenance, see my second chapter, pp. 154-56.

¹¹ Davies, forthcoming. Vittore Pisani, whom he does not cite in this connection, had argued for something similar already in the 1960s, claiming that Indo-European culture was a ‘fusione di elementi nomadi e cavalieri provenienti dall’Asia sud-occidentale e di elementi “caucasici” imbevuti di civiltà mesopotamica’, and hence that the Semitic – IE distinction was spurious (1969, 349; for further argumentation see 1-70, and 347-65 [a chapter first published separately as Pisani 1966]). His heterodox view won few adherents at the time. Since Davies argues for substantially the same conclusion, but without reference to outmoded notions such as the Doric invasion and equating late PIE to ‘proto-Sanskrit’, I do not treat Pisani’s work further. For a handful of other studies which argue for something similar, see Davies, 2023, 13, n.37.

¹² 19 – or rather, an extremely limited form of multilingualism. The ‘wheel’ word, which is reduplicated in Semitic, Indo-European, and Kartvelian languages, is a more complicated and highly contested case. Davies takes its reduplication in all three language families to entail that speakers could morphosemantically analyse languages in more than one family; he takes this in turn to be proof of multilingualism. Yet reduplication provides a rare example of an iconic relation between morphology and semantics. To reduplicate is, cross-linguistically, to emphasise or to express intensivity, long duration, or plurality. Lexical borrowing is not a rule-bound process, and reanalysis within the morphosemantics of the target language is as natural a process as reanalysis within its phonotactics. In other words, a more plausible story than conscious morphological calquing is a lexical borrowing of new technology in the usual way, followed by reanalysis as reduplication in the target languages. Even apart from the difficulty of extrapolating so much from only one case, the ‘wheel’ word does not prove multilingualism.

Despite Davies' erudition and dense argumentation, there are grave problems with this hypothesis. Firstly, as he concedes, the evidence adduced for language contact between Mesopotamia and PIE speakers is vanishingly slim. It is a disturbing sign that there is no trace in either tradition of the sort of sustained, intense linguistic contact which would be a reliable sign, even a precondition of literary borrowing. Moreover, PIE and Semitic speakers were very geographically distant from one another. The 'interstitial' Maikop culture of the Caucasus mountains may well have been situated in between the two and have had burial practices which mixed the two. But the mixing of goods does not entail the transmission of literature – pots are traded much more freely than poems. Moreover, the theory places a colossal and surely unbearable burden of cultural centrality on the shoulders of the Maikop, who would be required to exercise substantial cultural influence on city states hundreds of miles to the South, and various decentralised groups of nomads to the North. These are profound difficulties. Moreover, ultimately, unless bodied forth in convincing examples, theories such as Davies' are vapour. Our evidence for this time is so scarce that Davies' theory (however implausible it might *seem*) cannot be disproven just as it cannot be proven. It is best judged on its explanatory power.

Yet here again it falters. In the article's final section, Davies, drawing on the work of Johannes Haubold (2013, 51-71), abstracts the interlocking parallels into a set of motifs – the division of time into ages, the ending of those ages in disaster, the destruction of the earth by a flood, the destruction of the earth by a war, the salvation of a righteous man by the gods (20-24). Historical poets in different traditions, he argues, all drew on this common store of motifs, first formed in the late fourth millennium: the different decisions made by those poets who happen to survive explain interlocking set of similarities. Yet by abstracting motifs away from their contexts, Davies universalises them, then mistakes typological similarity for evidence of diffusion.¹³ This is a concept I shall often revisit in my introduction. Dozens of cultures attest flood myths, and a finite number of features are recycled between them.¹⁴ It is the perfect example of a polygenetic, universal myth, and the worst possible example of a monogenetic, particular one. It is entirely inappropriate to the task to which Davies sets it. This is a problem with the theory, not the choice of example, since, by jettisoning the need for precise alignment, it can only work on this abstracted level. Again, this issue will recur below.

¹³ Davies here aligns himself with recent work on the Near-East which seeks to move away from singular text-to-text correlation (see further e.g. Ballesteros Petrella, 2021, on the Hesiodic Pandora's crystallisation from an alphabet – or cuneiform – soup of vaguely similar tales). This has the benefit of forestalling the criticism that the texts which have survived for us to *read* are not necessarily those which the Greeks were most likely to have *heard*; indeed, there is sometimes good reason to posit a large gap between them (see further André Lardinois' important article, 2018, 898-900). Abandoning specificity, however, necessarily results in work vulnerable to this criticism. At its worst, it provides a path from vague parallels to elaborate conclusions. See further below.

¹⁴ Indeed, they are André Lardinois' *paragon* of a universal myth (2018, 896-7).

How, then, to resolve the seeming tension when both Near-East diffusion and Indo-European inheritance compete to explain the same datum? Or, more urgently for my purposes, does the existence of a third, Near-Eastern parallel destabilise one between two Indo-European cultures? The answer is a simple negative. In competitive cases, the Indo-European perspective will always have *a priori* explanatory priority, since it always has diachronic priority. That is, whatever was Indo-European in Greek culture was already present before Near-Eastern culture could exert an influence, because it was present before the (proto-)Greeks came to Greece itself.¹⁵

Historical linguistics, where the principle works just as well, clarifies the matter. Watkins' suggestion that Greek borrowed its iterative *-sk-* verb forms from Anatolian is idle, because it can be understood as an archaism in Greek: the genealogical trumps the diffusional explanation.¹⁶ Likewise, the kenning 'shepherd of the people' for 'king' is common in Homer, as in the Near-East, and is also found in Vedic and various other Indo-European literatures.¹⁷ Diffusion between the Near-East and Vedic is extremely far-fetched, and so the kenning must have been invented at least twice. This is not difficult to believe of pastoralist societies with kings. Yet clearly, if a convincing Indo-European connection can be established, it is otiose to posit a Near-Eastern connection.

Vitality, this has an asymmetrical effect. It means that, on the one hand, after my first chapter, I do not need to consider Near-Eastern connections further and may devote my energies entirely to genealogical comparison. Yet the opposite is true for areal comparatists, who can and must use IE

¹⁵ I use 'Proto-Greeks' of the speakers of an Indo-European dialect who entered Greece sometime in the second millennium BC. I use 'Pelasgians' for the people they found there. I use 'Greek' of the people who resulted from the mix of these two.

¹⁶ Watkins, 2001, 58. See Ivo Hajnal's superb article, 2018, 2046 for a rejection. For comparative poetics, see Vansevéren, 2021, 231 for a clear exposition and discussion of the issue with further references, and *passim* for the heuristic priority of IE over Near-Eastern comparison.

¹⁷ For a summary of attestations, see West, 2007, 131 for Indo-European; for Greek and Near-East, see West, 1997, 226-27, and Haubold, 2014. For the impossibility of Near-Eastern influence on the RV, see the introduction to my second chapter. For an interesting discussion of this example and whether to view it in Greek through an Indo-European or a Near-Eastern lens, see Sylvie Vansevéren, 2010. I am unpersuaded by her conclusions, for the reasons I am here outlining. Her comments on another formula attested in Greece, Near East, and India, 'the broad earth', are more to the point – 'the existence of an Indo-European parallel considerably weakens the case that this expression was derived from Akkadian' (2021, 232). Christopher Metcalf, too, rightly recognises this principle in a discussion of hymnic openings in Greece and Mesopotamia that 'the strength of the supposed connection is seriously undermined by Vedic parallels' (2015, 169). Later, however, he quotes approvingly the contrary view of Françoise Létoublon (2011, 198-99 quoted at Metcalf, 2015, 223, n.4); yet Létoublon's treatment amounts to assertions without analysis. Metcalf's wider criticism of IE comparison in that discussion, that some things are too general to support hypotheses of inheritance (222-224), is cogent, and will be fully addressed in subsequent sections of the introduction and in my third chapter, pp-170-72.

comparison as a test to check their results. Refusal to do so does not necessarily undermine their edifice, but makes it brittle, and exposes it to the risk of demolition.¹⁸

The concept of universality here becomes central. I call ‘universal’ certain phenomena attested by a vast range of unconnected cultures across the globe – for example, marriage, taboo speech, personal names, prohibition of incest and murder, or music. The comparison of these universals is ‘typological’ comparison. ‘Polygenesis’ is the name for the process by which historically unrelated cultures develop the same phenomena. Not every society needs to have every universal. Some societies, for example, do not have the institution of marriage.¹⁹ These universals may be instantiated in different ways, and those instantiations may themselves be more or less universal.²⁰ For example, in the overwhelming majority of societies, the male is older than his female partner in a marriage. Yet even if this was not true among, say, the nineteenth-century Mordvins, a Finno-Ugric people native to the Volga district in Russia,²¹ my usage is flexible enough to call the tendency a ‘universal’. Universality and particularity exist at opposite ends of a scale, and the terms should not be reserved for its remotest extremities.

Yet even in areas where there are no universal pressures at all, chance can suffice to create polygenesis. This happens also at the linguistic level. One famous example is that in Mbabaram, a Pama-Nyungan language of Northern Queensland, the word for ‘dog’ is ‘dog’, pronounced all but identically to the Australian English. It is demonstrably the product of regular sound change from proto-Pama-Nyungan: it is a mere co-incidence. I shall have more to say about this later in the introduction, and about universality in the introduction to my third chapter. But it is important to clarify the concepts at the outset. Universality and chance, sometimes in combination, sometimes individually, give rise to polygenesis, which along with genealogy and diffusion is an explanation for similarity between different cultures. Crucially, polygenesis interacts with areal and genealogical comparison in contrary ways. It undermines the former and corroborates the latter.

The following critique of Near-Eastern comparison seeks to clear ground to make way for Indo-European comparison. Areal influence (whether mutual or unidirectional – again, my use of the word encompasses both possibilities) from the Near East to Greece is never made explicit. Now, obviously the Greeks knew that these places existed: there were of course figures in *mythology* from these places –

¹⁸ I here draw again on the work of Vansevéren, whose phrasing is milder – ‘The comparative method should allow us, therefore, when looking at the Near Eastern material, to judge where the parallels are indeed cases of borrowing, and not simply independent developments or universals’, 2021, 232. See further Kelly, 2021, 278.

¹⁹ As, for example, the Hadzabe of the Tanzanian Serengeti (Zeinab Badawi, 2024, 22).

²⁰ For this point, see Donald Brown, 1991, 70, and George Murdock, 1945, 124-5 – both dated and flawed, but both foundational works in the field. There is, of course, a voluminous literature about cultural universals, especially for perception of colour, emotion, and language, but also more generally. I can only gesture towards it here.

²¹ See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ‘Mordvins: Family Life’, (article updated 2018).

Cadmus, for example, was a Phoenician. Yet mere awareness is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for familiarity. No Greek poet or writer ever credits a Hittite, Mesopotamian, Hebrew, or Phoenician etc. as source or inspiration for any element of his work, claims to have travelled there, shows any knowledge of the places or any element of their literature, nor intimates any familiarity of their language, culture, or society. There is scarcely any evidence for the multilingualism of Greek intellectuals even in the Classical era.²² This means that influence can only ever be inferred from affinity.²³ In this way, Near-Eastern influence is functionally, above all, an explanatory hypothesis for a similarity. This places it in direct competition with other explanations for that similarity, such as, most urgently, the polygenesis that arises from chance and universality. The two are mutually exclusive: if polygenesis is sufficient to account for an affinity, then diffusion is explanatorily redundant. That is, while it cannot disprove Near Eastern influence, and the evidence may well be *consistent* with a notional instance of Near Eastern influence, where polygenesis can do the same job, claims of Near Eastern influence are no longer arguments, but mere gestures to possibilities which can have no ambition to compel belief. For example, no-one has argued that the Greeks took their notion of marriage from the Mesopotamian institution, even if there are enough similarities between the two that the evidence would be consistent with this hypothesis. There is no work for diffusion to do where polygenesis suffices. This is a profound problem for Near Eastern comparison, since universals, combined with co-incidence, can be extraordinarily powerful explanators of affinity.

For example, a myth in which Pygmies war with cranes (or geese) is found in the Greco-Roman tradition from the *Iliad* onwards (III.1-7), but also in Central Asian, Chinese, and Arab traditions.²⁴ Transmission from Greece to all these cultures seems at first the best explanation for this: however implausible, the degree of affinity is so high that co-incidence seems even more improbable. And yet, spectacularly, an identical myth is also found in several Native American traditions from Canada to Mexico.²⁵ Perplexity ensues. One scholar, muddling dates, bootlessly suggests that the myth might have

²² As the well-known assertion of Glenn Most has it – ‘the similarities between the *Iliad* and *Gilgamesh* or the *Theogony* and *Enuma Elish* are evident and fascinating for us, but they were quite unknown, and of no interest whatsoever, to the Greeks’ (2003, 385, approved by Haubold 2013, 11). He is making the point that, compared to other cultures (and especially the Romans), the Greeks were exceptionally uninterested in translating the texts in other languages. Even so-called ‘maximalist’ comparatists must concede that there is extraordinarily little evidence for multilingualism among Greeks, see e.g. Currie, 2016, 218, and n. 380 for bibliography on this question. This has not stopped scholars attempting to contrive such references. André Lardinois, for example, having quoted Most at the outset of his article (2021, 109), sees a covert recognition of Eastern origin in the phrase ἑτερόν λόγον, ‘another tale’ – the phrase which Hesiod uses to introduce his myth of the ages (*Op.*106). It is impossible to see how so vague a formulation could have so specific a meaning: I do not find his arguments convincing (123-25). See also Lardinois 2018, 903.

²³ Erik van Dongen cogently elaborates this point in an essential article, 2008.

²⁴ For sources and details, see Alex Scobie, 1975 and 1977, and Rémi Mathieu, 1990.

²⁵ See the above note.

crossed the Bering strait in the third millennium BC (Mathieu, 1990, 68). Another sees diffusion from Central Asia West into Europe and East into the Americas as ‘attractive’, but is non-committal (Scobie, 1977, 86). Claude Lévi-Strauss, immediately discounting polygenesis, muses that either some sort of transmission or shared descent from a Palaeolithic proto-myth must account for the correlation (1988, 181).

Yet both diffusion and shared inheritance can be absolutely ruled out: the Americas had no contact with the rest of humanity after the rise in sea-level which reopened the Bering strait, more than ten thousand years ago.²⁶ Even that date is for when the Bering strait became impassable, and so for the latest possible crossings: the *terminus post quem* for the peopling of the Americas is ca. 30,000 years ago.²⁷ Polygenesis is left impregnable, the only conceivable explanation. The reluctance of scholars to embrace the universal explanation, even in so stark a case as this, is striking. This should serve as a warning for those who would compare Greece with Near East. If the myth could be invented again in the Americas, why not elsewhere? Suddenly it does not seem so probable that a Greco-Roman myth was transmitted to Arabia, Central Asia, and China. Yet if the American cases had not been invented by storytellers or adduced by scholars, transmission would have seemed the most convincing explanation.

All inferences of diffusion are in principle subject to this shape of sceptical objection. That is, inasmuch as independent typological parallels show a unit of cultural to be reinventable, they enfeeble diffusion as an explanation. Some similarities simply need no further explanation. If universals and coincidence can account for something so seemingly particular as the myth of a war between dwarves and cranes, they can account for a great deal else. Of course, this does not apply in all cases – diffusion would still be the best explanation if the ancient Near East had a dwarf-crane myth (which it does not). But it should give pause, and raise the bar for the level of similarity exhibited between Greece and Near East necessary before diffusion becomes the best explanation.²⁸ These are not the perverse gripes of a Humean sceptic, nor subjective criteria which raise the bar for proof out of reach of human endeavour. Indeed, in my first chapter, I shall suggest some similarities which clear the bar in the arena of divination.²⁹ The sceptical demand is for scholarly rigour and sound methods, just as in textual criticism, archaeology, or historical linguistics. The boundaries of the field should be set in accordance with the demands of such

²⁶ In the past decade, this has been downdated to around 11,000 (M. Jakobsson *et al.*, 2017) or 12,500 years ago (J. Hoffecker *et al.*, 2016, 65); many earlier studies had put it several millennia earlier.

²⁷ According to Hoffecker *et al.*, *ibid.*

²⁸ Indeed, some works seem to ignore the possibility of universality altogether. See, for example, Bruce Louden’s book length study on the *Odyssey* and Near-Eastern literature (2011), with Stephanie Lynn Budin’s critical review (2012) and Kelly & Metcalf’s comments on the subject, with further examples of criticism along these lines (2021, 12).

²⁹ I shall also argue, however, that the field of divination is much better suited to hypotheses of diffusion than literature, pp. 61-63.

rigour. The unpalatable alternative is to relax the demand for rigour in order to expand the field to the desired boundaries.

By contrast, far from being inimical to it, universality can be folded into genealogical accounts of similarity. Yet sometimes, parallels are *so* close that, paradoxically, polygenesis is the best explanation. I return to this point below.

The more universal a cultural unit is, the more likely it is, *a priori*, to have been a part of the proto-culture. Proto-Greek and proto-Indic herdsmen were just as likely to call their lords ‘shepherds of the people’ as their scions were. In short, polygenesis is always in competition with both areal comparison and shared inheritance as the explanation of a similarity. In the areal case, universality supports polygenesis. The more universal something is, the more, by definition, it is replicable cross-culturally without diffusion. This diminishes the necessity of invoking diffusion as an explanation for the alignment.

Conversely, in the genealogical case, universality, where present, favours shared inheritance, not polygenesis. If something is attested in two cognate cultures, then the possibilities are two: that it belonged to the proto-culture which bequeathed it to its daughter cultures, or that it did not belong to the proto-culture and was reinvented separately by the daughter cultures. The former, all things being equal, is the more plausible explanation since it entails a lesser co-incidence. The more universal something is, the more, by definition, it is likely to be manifest in any given culture, regardless of diachrony.

Universality in this way works in concert with genealogical comparison: its pitfall is not implausibility, but banality. Unlike in the areal case, it is not *incorrect* to say that, for example, Greek and Indic institutions of marriage descended from a previous Greco-Indic institution of marriage. It is simply *uninformative*.³⁰ This is a vital distinction, and not one whose force IE Poetics has always appreciated.³¹ I discuss this in greater length in the introduction to my third chapter, pp-170-72, where the question is most relevant.

³⁰ In most, but not all cases. See again Jamison 1994 for a special kind of Greco-Indic marriage by abduction.

³¹ Martin West’s only comment on the subject is essentially true, but superficial – ‘Nor is the reconstructive method invalidated by objections on the lines ‘the parallel motifs that you note in this and that source need not imply a common Indo-European prototype, because they occur all over the world’. If a motif is indeed universal, all the more likely that it was also Indo-European’, 2007, 21.

Which to Prefer?

Yet regardless of their theoretical advantages and disadvantages, Near-Eastern and Indo-European comparative approaches are only seldom hostile causal theories seeking to explain the same datum. In fact, unless they are dealing in the general or easily replicable, such as the above ‘shepherd of the people’ example, their spheres of influence should, at least *in principle*, be subject to a complementary distribution. That is, where Greek culture was similar to Near-Eastern culture, it will differ from its Indo-European siblings, and *vice versa*. On the one hand, no absolute distinction can be drawn between Near East and Indo-European: the Hittites, well within the near-Eastern Kulturbund, spoke an Indo-European language, and the Mitanni state was run by incomers who had Indo-Iranian names and numbers and worshiped Indo-Iranian gods (or at any rate gods with Indo-Iranian names). It enjoyed a couple of centuries of political supremacy in the mid-second millennium, from Mesopotamia to south-eastern Anatolia.³² On the other hand, the Hittite language branched off from the rest of the Indo-European family at a very early date, and is exceptional in many respects. Perhaps a millennium and a half passed between its split with the rest of the family and the time when it could have first conceivably influenced Greece.³³ Although there was some influence from it towards the Near East (including in the area of divination, as I argue in my first chapter), the evidence points towards more thorough assimilation in the other direction. Greek-Hittite literary comparison rightly comes under the banner of areal, not genealogical comparison. Any discussion of Mitanni will suffer from scarcity of evidence, and almost total absence of emic evidence, yet there is no reason to think that a ruling class definitively imposed an Indo-European culture onto a Hurrian underclass, and good reason to believe the opposite – that the ruling class swiftly adopted the culture of their subjects.³⁴ In other words, in practice the opposition between Near-Eastern and Indo-European is more than accurate enough to be heuristically valuable.

In divination, at least, it turns out that *a priori* expectations are borne out. My first chapter establishes this fact, of essential importance to my thesis: where Greek divinatory practices are like those

³² Eva von Dassow 2022 provides an authoritative overview of Mitanni with exhaustive bibliography. Arnaud Fournet 2010, which she does not cite, goes into more detail on the linguistic issues and provides a more convincing etymology for the word ‘Mitanni’ (37) than that which von Dassow prefers (458).

³³ No further certainty is possible. The standard handbooks give solid overviews, e.g. Watkins, 2004, and Benjamin Fortson, 2010, 170-85. See also Jay Jasanoff’s superb 2017 essay on the impact of Hittite and Tocharian on Indo-European Studies in the *Handbook of Indo-European Linguistics*.

³⁴ See e.g. David Anthony, 2007, 48-50 for a succinct account, and the plausible suggestion that they were originally mercenaries who usurped the king that hired them, and immediately adopted Hurrian customs to maintain their position.

Incidentally, the Hurrians, who spoke a language related neither to Indo-European nor to Semitic, also profoundly influenced the Hittites.

in the Near East, they differ from those in India, and *vice versa*. It establishes a typology of divination in Greece, and matches, where possible, Greek with Near-Eastern practices, focussing on the well-respected Near-Eastern comparanda – the Hittites in Anatolia and the Mesopotamians. Many prominent techniques of divination in Greece, such as ornithomancy, haruspicy, and oracles, are best explained as (to varying degrees) diffused from the Near East. I largely ignore them after my first chapter – happily so, since they are essentially *absent* in Vedic and early Sanskrit literature. These are, of course, the correlations that have discouraged scholars from even the contemplation of an IE genealogy of Greek divination. Yet Greek and *especially* Homeric divination was not simply co-extensive with Near-Eastern elements. There is plenty of promising tillage for genealogical comparison. And indeed this is where, as it turns out, the Near-East provides only meagre, loose, and typological-looking parallels.

The principle is robustly confirmed by the fact that where Greece agrees with the Near-East, India disagrees with both. For example, Isocrates in (probably) the 390s BC reports that a certain Thrasyllus inherited a set of books in the will of a seer friend, Polemaenetos, from which he learns the craft. He then becomes a *Mantis* himself.³⁵ The sudden appearance of this new route to seerhood is best attributed to Near-Eastern influence – written omen collections had since the second millennium BC been the primary means of transmission of divinatory knowledge in Mesopotamia, and are one of the commonest kinds of extant text in Akkadian from the second millennium until the first half of the first. Would-be seers could simply memorise these tablets.³⁶ India, by contrast, provides no parallel for seership consisting in memorisation of lists of omen interpretation: it has nothing to contribute to this discussion, just as the Near East to my later discussion of seers as narrators of narrative poetry in Greek and Sanskrit literature.

In my first chapter, then, I aim to sort where Near Eastern and where Indo-European comparison are appropriate, providing the typology of divination necessary for this task. Each kind of comparison certainly has its contribution to make, yet boundaries must be delineated between where they are appropriate and where not. The approaches must complement each other, but cannot work in tandem.³⁷ It

³⁵ 19.5-6. See further the excellent treatment of John Dillery, 2005, 222-23.

³⁶ See the lucid overview of Mesopotamian omen collections in Ann Guinan, 2002, 9-19.

³⁷ Kelly, taking inspiration from work by Joshua Katz, Dominique Briquet, and Fiona Mitchell, has written ‘a form of literary-historical double motivation’ (see Kelly & Metcalf, 2021, 13 for quote and bibliography, and Kelly’s article in that volume, 277-82, for fuller exposition). This is a problematic concept. Firstly, it is asymmetrical, in that when a cultural unit can be sufficiently explained by IE comparison, areal comparison has no role to play, whereas even where Near-Eastern comparison is incontestable, IE comparison, through its diachronic priority, may still have a role to play. Double motivation is then necessarily to be reserved for cases where genealogical comparison provides a parallel for something in Greece, but Near-Eastern comparison a closer one, as in the famous case of the Hesiodic myth of succession which Kelly and Briquet treat. Firstly, this is no counter-example to IE priority, since the Near East has priority only by virtue of providing a much closer similarity, i.e. other, further parallels in addition to the IE ones. Had, for argument’s sake, an equally close similarity been found in the RV, the NE parallel would have been otiose. As Kelly observes, in such cases, the IE parallel’s use is in demonstrating the receptivity of Greece to Near-Eastern influence in certain areas.

is, to my knowledge, a virtual novelty to combine Indo-European and Near-Eastern comparison in the study of one field in this way.³⁸ Yet the two fields must exist in dialogue. In this way, treatment is not only more comprehensive, but also more persuasive, since each kind of comparison will both point out fruitful areas of enquiry for the other and act as a check against the other's excesses.

Why Divination?

A further novelty of this thesis is the scope of the comparandum. Previous genealogical studies have tended to focus on particular authors, or a kind of linguistic heritage – e.g. poetic syntax, formulas, and metre – or have been interested in religion and cultural phenomena more broadly only insofar as shared vocabulary attests to their presence in the proto-culture.³⁹ Other kinds of study, far less convincing in nature, seek to reconstruct the elements of the plots of proto-Epics.⁴⁰ This study, rather, takes a universal, widely defined cultural phenomenon as its subject, and looks for correlations among the particulars of its instantiations.⁴¹ What are these correlations? Where are they to be found? How numerous are they? How close are they? To what extent are they obscured by difference? Do they change over time? I then step back and seek to draw further conclusions from the answers. What to make of these similarities? Which, if any, are likely to have been inherited from a proto-culture? Which are in fact parallel developments from an inheritance? Are any correlations the result of a co-incidental polygenesis,

Following Ian Rutherford in the same volume, he frames this negatively, as an absence of reasons for Greece to 'block' influence. The metaphor, as Rutherford notes, comes from the field of art (*ibid.*, 202-3, n.5). It is a strange metaphor, and one to be used with care in the field of literature, since it seems to rely on the counterintuitive idea that transmission is the standard situation, and non-transmission the phenomenon that requires explanation.

In any case, in cases such as this, few as they may be, it is IE comparison that is explanatorily superfluous. The reasons for Greek receptivity are interesting and to be noted; yet even if we did not have an IE parallel, we would still have proof of Greece's receptivity in the mere fact of its act of receiving. That is, the act of transmission is itself proof of receptivity. Either the NE parallel is so close that it is best explained by transmission, or it is not. Either way, the IE parallel has no role to play in proving transmission. IE material is thus an appendage – heuristically inert. The term 'double motivation' ends up being misleading, since it implies equality and collaboration where there is none.

³⁸ Metcalf 2015, for example, desultorily mentions Vedic, but does not devote a chapter to it.

³⁹ The foundational work on this subject is Émile Benveniste, 1973 (first published in French in 1969). The chapters 'Proto-Indo-European Culture' and 'Indo-European Religion' in Mallory 1989 (110-27 and 128-42) build on Benveniste. Much scattered work is brought together in the magisterial 1997 *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture*, for which Mallory wrote the archaeological and Douglas Q. Adams the linguistic entries. Mallory and Adams 2006 presents largely the same conclusions. Neither work always clearly marks the different degrees of certainty proper to their various claims.

⁴⁰ See above, n. 1.

⁴¹ I intend 'divination' loosely, including prophecy. My first chapter will deal at length with my definition of the word, pp. 51-2.

and not of shared inheritance, and what might that mean? What methods might we use to know all of this? In the conclusion to the thesis, I go still further, reflecting on why and how cultures change and diverge over time.

As far as possible, I reason from first principles, limiting my initial assumptions to just two – that the IE hosted a poetic tradition, and that its speakers had divination. These are safe assumptions: the number of societies which lack these two phenomena tends to zero. Sometimes, once inheritance is thought proven in one area, scholars are less stringent with their burdens of proof in adjacent areas. Too often this is just intellectual smuggling – an excuse not to examine each case on its own merits. Therefore, I start again for every subsidiary subject of comparison, whether it is a shared formula, a set of omens, the role of the diviner, and so on.

Here again, the advantage of taking an overarching theme asserts itself. As will be seen, there are natural links between these different levels, since they are inherently related phenomena. For example, a shared formula, once soundly established, will attest to the antiquity of what it encodes – in this case, the antique practice of a certain kind of divination which I call ‘intuitive’. This in turn enables a certain kind of omen interpretation, in which the omens can be delivered in speech by a narrating diviner without actually existing in the world of the text. In turn, omens are liberated from the trammels of verisimilitude and may contradict one another or combine in ways inconsistent with the laws of the nature. To draw connections between different areas of this kind of genealogical comparison is thus not idly to assume inheritance, nor to make a cumulative case where several weak parallels in some way ‘add up’ to a strong one. The natural consequence of choosing a network of related phenomena is the mutual reinforcement of parallels across that network.

Divination: History or Poetry?

Hittite and Linear B excepted, the earliest Indo-European texts are overwhelmingly poetic, and so a great deal of the correlations will have to do more with poetry than with divination itself. Divination is an instrument – it becomes a vector for a literary study rather than an end in itself. This is both desirable and inevitable. Literature contained divination because its audience believed in it and thought it important. Representations of it in their literature will have had a great deal to do with real historical practices. Although we can assume that there were subtle differences between literary and historical divination, especially – but not only – when literary texts describe supernatural phenomena, in practice,

when there are no contemporary non-literary sources, formulating those differences would amount to sheer guesswork. For the earliest period it would necessarily rely on the kind of retrojection of much later evidence which I elsewhere deplore. The literary bent is unavoidable.

Yet it is also desirable. The consideration of literary factors, as we will see, unlatches the way new pastures in which particularity flowers. A shared formula is useful not only for what it preserves about divination but is also a result in itself. By treating literary divination, in other words, simultaneous contributions can be made to the study of proto-culture, and to proto-literature, and in turn, through the provision of cultural and literary genealogy, to the study of attested literature and culture.

Divination: More Boons, and its Advantages over Proto-Narrative

Divination is a phenomenon extremely well-suited to this kind of enquiry for several reasons. It is neither too big, nor too small. On the one hand, there are plenty of instances of it at work, and so there are plenty of data. But on the other, there are not so many as to preclude comprehensive treatment. This gives it a profound advantage over the narrative kind of comparison practised by Nicholas Allen, Emily West, and others, since events in Epic narrative (if not in type-scenes) occur not only once per text but, in practice, once per *tradition*. All post-Homeric treatments of the tale of Odysseus and the war of Troy can be shown or assumed to have been reacting to Homer – whether sympathetically or polemically. Likewise, all subsequent treatments of the Kuru War and the vicissitudes of Rāma are, to a greater or lesser degree, engaging in the older monumental treatments. And so other data about plot events, even if they could be found, would not be independent witnesses to the tradition. They would be, from the point of view of genealogical comparison, contaminated by their engagement with the canon. Comparative poetics of this sort is, like comparative linguistics, an empirical endeavour. No comparative linguist would ever reconstruct a word on the basis of a singular attestation in two related traditions. The same should go for comparative poetics. Empirical methods need a large set of data to get off the ground. They abhor generalisation from a single case.

Yet in any case, in practice Nick Allen and Emily West seldom consider texts – contaminated or not – beyond the canonical treatments, and are content to extrapolate from single attestations. This only makes sense on the presupposition that there was not only a shared proto-tradition but a shared proto-narrative. Yet proto-language and proto-tradition on the level of religion, formula, and metre does not entail proto-narrative. It can only be assumed from narrative similarity in extant texts. The project thus

contains a circularity: it holds simultaneously that the existence of the proto-narrative proves that where there are similarities, these are daughter narratives; and also that the daughter narratives are the proof of the existence of the proto-narrative. Introducing a different vector of comparison can break the circle: this is what Jamison 1994 does by introducing the institution of marriage to her genealogical comparison (and note, she seeks only to explain a feature of a Greek text, not to reconstruct a proto-narrative). Divination will serve this purpose for my thesis. Although only reconstructible from literary texts for the periods at hand, it is not merely a textual phenomenon. Therefore, since it can be safely presumed to exist outside the text, it breaks the textual self-referentiality, and forestalls any circularity.

There are other good reasons to discard the Allen proto-narrative model. Single narrative events are under pressure to be changed, not preserved. We see this in historically attested Greek and Sanskrit literature. Whether oral or not, it draws on traditional mythic material only constantly to doctor and reinvent it in *ad hoc*, creative, and so unpredictable ways. Events in plots are *meant* to be changed. They are dire genealogical comparanda because they are *a priori* dire candidates for the long-term stability which the very project of reconstruction presupposes. Another fixed point is the profound social changes in both societies between their separation and the extant Epic texts. Now, myths are not mere anecdotes, but are shared, constitutive texts which structure the social, religious, even metaphysical beliefs of the period. They respond to, even embody social change. Again, this makes it extremely difficult to assume their stability over long periods of group migration and profound social upheaval. Nor is it any use to abstract to unalterable overarching events, such as the fact of Odysseus' return, or the fact of Troy's destruction. To posit the shared inheritance of 'a returning hero', or 'a city's destruction' would abstract away the quiddity on which genealogical comparison relies. It would decompose into banality. Of course it is plausible to reconstruct, say, return stories. But it tells us little specific to that culture. Typological comparison is the appropriate method here.⁴² The proto-narrative project, therefore, falls down on one of two sides – either it is too specific to get off the ground, or it devolves into banal generality.

Lastly, the forces – whatever they might be – which ensure the canonisation of a certain poet's work are blind to the relative traditionality of that poet's treatment. If anything, canonisation will prefer more creative treatments as being more attractive.⁴³ That is, the selection processes which ensure one poet's and not another's treatment of a traditional story is the one which becomes standard are – at best –

⁴² Denys Page, for example, compared the *Odysseys* plotline to Egyptian, Persian, African, and Maori tales of return (1973).

⁴³ So Telemachus famously suggests - τὴν γὰρ ἀοιδὴν μᾶλλον ἐπικλείουσ' ἄνθρωποι, | ἥ τις ἀκούοντεσσι νεωτάτη ἀμφιπέληται, 'for people tend to praise whatever the most novel song is that they come across', i.351-2.

arbitrary from the point of view of the conservatism of that treatment.⁴⁴ The four Epics might in principle be radically innovative in their treatment of plot, but were so influential later, and so drastically reshaped the tradition, that their innovativeness is obscure to us.⁴⁵ Other areas, which rely on convention and traditionality to generate meaning, such as words, formulas, and *divination*, will be immune to this criticism. I take these to be insurmountable flaws in the project of proto-narrative reconstruction. I entirely avoid it in the rest of this thesis.

Divination, unlike an event in a story, must be traditional to make sense. Its practices and practitioners must, to be effective, reflect the contemporary historical situation to some degree. Historical diviners must in turn draw on tried and tested techniques to ensure credibility. Otherwise, they would risk rejection, and poets would risk incomprehension. Omens are like words and formulas: they are signifiers whose meaning is guaranteed by convention – the sum of previous usages. Unlike a moment in a plot, the current instance must be in accordance with past instances to fulfil its function. To stipulate the meaning of an omen on an arbitrary principle is just as nonsensical (‘Humpty-Dumptyism’, in philosophical terms) as to do so with a word. Nor can seers invent powers for themselves *ad hoc* which tradition has not sanctioned (although, as we will see, intuitive divination is remarkably capacious). These conventional, centripetal pressures make divination an *a priori* promising avenue for genealogical comparison. This is not to say that divination does not evolve – my first chapter will track its changes in Greece over time. But I find there that that change adds rather than ousts: new methods of divination come in, gain prominence, and *may* then outcompete the old ones. They do not *displace* them. The change is in development and accretion, not abolition, and older practices remain observable, even if marginalised, for long periods.

The case of zodiac-based astrology shows this. It is popular in contemporary Western newspapers and is still practised enthusiastically by its adherents. But it can be traced back through the Renaissance, Islamic Golden Age, and Late Antiquity to Hellenistic Greece, and from there to second-millennium BC Babylon.⁴⁶ Also encouragingly, it seems culturally detachable, enduring undiminished by changes in social structure, religion, and scientific advancement. The changes and timeframes involved in this thesis

⁴⁴ In oralist terms, these different versions are ‘multiforms’ (Albert Lord, 2019, 67-70). But my point here depends only on the acceptance of the weakest possible form of oral theory: any oral-derived traditional written text is but one instantiation of the infinite array of possibilities which tradition affords.

⁴⁵ Jasper Griffin 1977 inaugurated a school of thought which claims precisely this of Homer.

⁴⁶ See Jim Tester’s overview from Plato to the present day, which briefly treats the Mesopotamian background of the Greek practice (11-15, 1990). For more on the progress of the Zodiac from Babylon to Greece, see the first two chapters of David Pingree, 1997 (the authoritative scholar on the subject).

will seem by comparison rather modest – all the more so for the reasons enumerated in the following section.

Why (only) Greece and India?

This is the perfect combination for those with doubts about the validity of the entire enterprise of Indo-European comparative poetics. Apart from my first chapter, it is the exclusive subject of my thesis. It enjoys several substantial *a priori* advantages over all other kinds of IE comparison.

Firstly, and most importantly, the Greek and Indic branches are closely related within the IE language family. It is well established that they diverged at a comparatively late date from other Indo-European languages and developed for a period by themselves – the time of Greco-Indic unity.⁴⁷ At this time, the people who would (in combination with various substratal indigenes) become Indians and Greeks were one and the same people – culturally and linguistically indiscernible from one another. The group then splintered, migrating in different directions and developing different dialects, then languages – first into Greek and Indic, and then Indic into Vedic and Avestan.⁴⁸ Absolute dating is extremely difficult, and guesses can only be rough.⁴⁹ Martin West valiantly gives some *termini ante quos* – the branching off of Greco-Indic from late Indo-European by 2500, separation of Greek from Indic by 2300, and sundering of Indic and Iranian by about 1600. Of these, the last is by far the most secure, since Mitanni rulers' names are attested from about 1600 and were certainly Indic and not Iranian. The other dates might be a few centuries too late or a couple too early.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ The handier term 'Indo-Greek' is too closely associated with the Hellenistic kingdoms of North-Western India which succeeded Alexander's conquests in that area (see further the introduction to my second chapter) to be used in this context. I avoid the term 'Greco-Aryan', as used most notably by Martin West, because of its inclusion of the unsavoury term 'Aryan'. I therefore use a new coinage, 'Greco-Indic', with 'Indic' standing for 'Indo-Iranian'. Some older works would include Armenian in this clade, but more recent scholarship has tended to discard this idea (as e.g. the book length treatment of James Clackson, 1994, and Ronald Kim, 2018, with bibliography; for a recent naysayer, see Olsen & Thorsø, 2022, 209-16). Phrygian is now heralded as closely related to Greek, but is attested only by inscriptions, and very often fragmentary ones at that (see Ligorio & Lubotsky, 2018, 1816-17 and Lucien van Beek, 2022, 191-93). I shall have nothing more to say about it in this thesis. A few maintain a close connection between Greek and Albanian, the *enfant terrible* of IE phylogeny (e.g. Hyllested & Joseph, 2022, 231-38), but this is not the mainstream view.

⁴⁸ Equally, I elide the Nuristani languages, whose precise position within Indo-Iranian has for a long time now been disputed – it remains an open question whether they are to be considered a third branch along with Indic and Iranian (see Blažek & Hegedüs, 2010, with a survey of previous views).

⁴⁹ See Stefan Zimmer, 2017, Section 6.

⁵⁰ Anthony, 2007, 50-52, though now slightly dated in places, arrives at the same conclusions. His traditional methods are sounder than those of the new corpus 'cladistics', which sometimes attach absolute dates to their *Stammbäume*, e.g. the so-called 'New Zealand tree' of Atkinson *et al.*, 2005, which would place the *terminus ante*

Yet precise absolute chronologies are hardly indispensable, and beside my current point. The advantage for Greek-Sanskrit comparison is in the relatively short passage of time between the time of unity and the attestation of the first texts: the eighth century (or so) for Greece, and the fourteenth (or so) for Vedic. It is within the margins of error of the absolute chronologies that less than a millennium passed between the *RV* and the time of Greco-Indic unity, and less than a millennium and a half between the latter and Homer. This is extraordinary. While it is no guarantee of the conservatism of those texts, it is a very promising starting point. Indeed, no other pair of Indo-European languages shares the same golden combination of early attestation of copious, rich literature with late unity as Greek and Sanskrit. As such, it has always been the most important pair for Indo-European poetics. Precise chronologies aside, it is beyond doubt that *relatively* to other kinds of comparison, Greek – Sanskrit comparison is *a priori* our best chance of peeping over the windowsill into prehistoric literature.

Rüdiger Schmitt's masterful 1967 *Dichtung und Dichtersprache in indogermanischer Zeit* rightly regalanised interest in Indo-European poetics. Yet it soon met with criticism for its almost exclusive use of Indo-Iranian and Greek material in order to reconstruct an *Indo-European* poetic language.⁵¹ On the other hand, colossal synoptic works which give more equal weight to all Indo-European material, such as Watkins' 1995 *How to Kill a Dragon*, or West's 2007 *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, risk diluting the impact of their findings by the incredulity induced by the gigantic timeframes involved.⁵² The Celtic branch is first (usefully) attested in the sixth century AD; the principal languages for old Germanic poetry, Old English and Old Norse, from the eighth on; and Old Church Slavonic in a ninth century translation of the Bible. The speakers of Armenian, though it is attested from the fifth century AD on, had by then already converted to Christianity, and the bulk of early texts have to do with that religion – barren ground for the IE comparatist. Apart from this, the Baltic branch is only attested from the fourteenth century, the Albanian only from the fifteenth. To use material from these latter traditions, as both West and Watkins sometimes do, is to ask the reader to believe in the stability of a unit of culture across more than *four and a half* millennia. The millennium or so necessary for Greek-Sanskrit seems by comparison two shakes of a lamb's tail.

quem of Greco-Indic unity at ca. 3000 BC. Yet the assumption that language change happens at a consistent rate regardless of cultural conditions is profoundly flawed, as Zimmer (see above note) and James Clackson, 2007, 15-19 observe. The latter phrases his crushing criticisms of that model with grace and diplomacy.

⁵¹ See the responses of e.g. Federico Albano Leoni, 1968, Anton Scherer, 1968, and Reinhard Sternemann, 1969.

⁵² Both books have useful sections on sources with dates of first attestation – West at 12-19, Watkins 50-67. The point applies not only to synoptic works. The atemporal, structuralist approach of Christophe Vielle 1996, for example, gives a three way comparison of the heroic traditions of Greece, India, and the Ossetians. The latter are descendants of East Iranian nomads who put down roots in the north Caucasus, whose oral poetry was first recorded in the *nineteenth* century. The result is an interesting but uneasy mixture of genealogical and typological similarity.

Yet just as the time of Greco-Indic is later than that of Indo-European unity, so other correlations go back to their own time of unity. An Italo-Celtic subgroup, for example, is by now generally agreed on,⁵³ even if it is unclear where its branching off is to be placed in the family tree – before Greco-Indic in the third millennium or after it in the early second.⁵⁴ Yet since Antoine Meillet in 1922 it has been recognised that proto-Italic and -Celtic speakers even after their linguistic divergence kept living near one another, and belonged to a North-Western areal group along with proto-Germanic speakers, very probably speakers of Vasconic (i.e. Basque) and other unrelated language families, and even proto-Balto-Slavic speakers. Unlike the proposed *Kulturbund* between Greece and Near-Eastern cultures, this one has a sound philological basis consisting in a range of vocabulary items shared between these languages and contrasting with usages elsewhere in the IE language family. However, again unlike the Greek-Near-Eastern *Kulturbund*, very little work has been done on shared literature or mythology.⁵⁵ For now, it is an open possibility – and one that remains seldom considered, despite its potentially vast implications for the IE comparative poetics.

Indeed, in general, as Celtic and Germanic – let alone Balto-Slavic – texts come to be first attested in bulk, transmission between IE and non-IE traditions becomes ever more likely. Latin literature from the second century BC onwards absorbed Greek literature apace. Then the Roman Empire spread out, shrinking Europe drastically and encouraging migration and miscegenation. It spread Christianity, encouraging the abandonment of pagan beliefs and the poetry which encoded its values.⁵⁶ The fall of the Roman Empire brought another wave of mass migrations across the continent. In this way, the more time goes on, the more people mix, and the more transmission and not shared inheritance becomes an attractive inference to make from a similarity. To reconstruct the tales and poetry of a North-Western areal group of the first millennia BC and AD would be a fascinating and worthwhile task, but, in light of the above, one rather more distant from the reconstruction of proto-Indo-European matters than Sanskrit – Greek comparison. And most urgently, the extent that these speakers formed a *Sprachbund* and so a *Kulturbund* is the same extent to which they are useful only as one datum for reconstruction. That is, insofar as, say,

⁵³ For a naysayer, see Graham Isaac, 2007, 75-95.

⁵⁴ See Michael Weiss, 2022, 108-11 for this question, and *passim* for the evidence for the subgroup.

⁵⁵ See Georg Bossong, 2017, 859, and Weiss, 2022, 110-11 for a recapitulation of the linguistic evidence, and chapter one of Meillet 1922.

⁵⁶ The change was, of course, not immediate, and old traditions could be rehoused within a (more or less) Christian framework – as in Nonnus or the Beowulf poet. The late conversion of the Irish, Slavs, and especially Baltics has sometimes been used to justify the use of late material from those cultures in PIE comparison (e.g. West, 2007, 18-19). While the idea is not without merit, it risks a false syllogism: whereas the arrival of Christianity does indeed enervate traditionality, its absence does *not* guarantee it. Relative isolation, and consequently the relative improbability of transmission or ‘contamination’, is *a priori* a more important factor. This has made the geographically remote Ireland, for example, attractive to genealogical comparatists. A culture can change more in a century of social and religious upheaval than in a millennium of serene isolation.

Germanic and Italic agree on a given cultural unit, that cultural unit in both languages amounts to one datum to be set against single independent branches such as Greek. While, therefore, I am not proposing that this *a priori* objection nullifies the utility of Celtic, Germanic, and Italic, I do claim that it drains away some of the plausibility of Indo-European comparison involving those traditions.⁵⁷

In this light, the impossibility of transmission from India to Greece is a huge advantage of comparison of the pair.⁵⁸ (Save for the relatively parochial Sanskrit – Avestan) Sanskrit – Greek comparison is not just our best opportunity for genealogical Indo-European comparison, it is so *by far*. To limit comparison to these two traditions is to sidestep the principal hazards of Indo-European poetics, namely, the triple spectre of contamination, evolution, and transmission which looms over later sources. The relinquishment of the Icarian project of a cosmopolitan PIE poetics cashes in a vast dividend of increased plausibility. Moreover, among others, Schmitt's designs outstripped his evidence: by claiming that he was working towards PIE, he opened himself to the just criticism that his sources were almost all Greco-Indic. By aiming only at proto-Greco-Indic, at the so-called *Zwischengrundsprach*, I do away with the pretence.

The resulting focus has numerous subsidiary benefits. The first age of scholars of IE comparative poetics who contented themselves with singular observations of similarities gave way to a new age of compendia which sought to present these scattered observations together: first Schmitt 1967, then Watkins 1995, then West 2007. The challenge now is no longer to harvest, but to thresh. To sort, digest, and draw conclusions from parallels are my relentless aims in this thesis. By limiting the study to two traditions, a smaller number of parallels are treated, and so more can be got from them.

Moreover, complementarily, drawing parallels from a limited number of texts creates space for my other main aim in this thesis – to use comparison as a lens through which to look anew at historical poetry. This can be done in two ways. Firstly, genealogical comparison can provide a context for material which is too early to have (non-archaeological) context, in this way helping to explain anomalous

⁵⁷ In the linguistic case, borrowing can be sorted from inheritance on the basis of the form of the word, and which branch's sound changes it has undergone. Unfortunately, this cannot be done for myths or formulas.

⁵⁸ See further the introduction to my second chapter.

Laura Massetti has recently made a similar point, 'Dass griechisch-vedische, griechisch-avestische bzw. griechisch-indoiranische Entsprechungen auf ein gemeinsames Erbe hinweisen und daher als ererbt angesehen werden können, ist ferner dadurch gesichert, dass die Annahme von Entlehnungen durch ein Sprachkontaktverhältnis zwischen dem Griechischen und dem Indoiranischen *im Prinzip ausgeschlossen ist*', (2016, i-ii, my italics). She is also right that 'Besonders ergiebig sind dreifache Entsprechungen zwischen dem Griechischen, dem Indo-iranischen und zumindest einer dritten Sprache, u.a. dem Germanischen bzw. Keltischen, da die Annahme des Sprachkontakts in diesen Fällen ebenfalls ausgeschlossen werden kann' (*ibid.*, ii). As long as only one comparandum from the third category is adduced, my observations are sidestepped.

features, decode riddles, and pick out interesting innovation. For example, Theoclymenus' prophecy at xx.348-72 seems from the comparative viewpoint not to be an anomaly but deeply traditional (see pp. 175-80X-X). Secondly, and more indirectly, comparison can be a prompt to group certain features of a text together; these can then end up, even on their own terms and without reference to other traditions, drawing attention to intra-traditional techniques and innovations. Comparative methods are fruitful also where similarities stop – difference too is salient. So, for example, the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet's reinvention of traditional imagery (see pp- 242-49).⁵⁹

In turn, keeping individual traditions firmly in view provides other heuristic advantages for the practice of the comparison itself. It forestalls texts being tugged out of shape so that they tessellate either with other traditions,⁶⁰ or with pre-confect notions about how poetry or society works in general. Indeed, lamentably in my view, this sort of schematism characterised much of twentieth century IE comparison – including notably that of Georges Dumézil and his acolytes. Here again I must disagree with Nick Allen.⁶¹ Furthermore, consideration of narrative needs, poets' aims and techniques, and aesthetic effects prevents the banalisation of poetic texts into troughs of data to be pumped for the unfeeling litanies of a compendium. Attention to aesthetics and poetic context will not only weed out inappropriate parallels, but produce comparisons of greater rigour, since shared context and poetic aims, as we will see, can be sound indications of shared descent. It will also situate my study firmly within the realm of comparative poetics, rather than, say, comparative religion or comparative mythology. And so both for its inherent and for its heuristic value, I take advantage of the smaller sample size which concentration on two traditions affords in order to foreground investigation into what comparison can say about the traditions taken individually. The nature of the fields means that I lean towards Greek in this, but I hope to make a substantive contribution also to Indology.

⁵⁹ This is widely acknowledged: Kim Beerden, for example, makes a similar point about the use of comparison, 2013, 48-50.

⁶⁰ See Vanséveren, 2021, 232-42 for an example of the dangers of treating parallels out of context, and a plea for this to be avoided.

⁶¹ For the influence of Dumézil on his method, see Allen, 1998 and 2011 (the latter's placement in a major handbook is lamentable, and does not help the reputation of Indo-European comparison). It is hard to suggest items which give an overview of Dumézil's thought, since he later repudiated much of his earlier work, and wrote over 70 books and dozens of articles – an astonishing output, notwithstanding its repetitiousness. In any case, Dumézil 1958 is generally recognised as a foundational statement of his theory, and Dumézil 1968-73 one of its most important applications. His work's schematic nature stymies intermittent engagement and produces a polarising effect: scholars have tended either to be acolytes, working within or extending his scheme, or to ignore it entirely. Criticism has been copious and crushing – see Wouter Bélier, 1991, for a book-length critique, and the overwhelming articles of Bernfried Schlerath (1995, 1996), as well as Matasovic, 1996, 63-4, and West, 2007, 4 for respectful dismissals. Alexandre Grandazzi already in 1997 could, after his own repudiation of the value of Dumézil's voluminous work on the mythologised histories of early Rome (69-91), write of the need to move onwards after 'l'échec des grands systèmes interprétatifs de naguère' (91). It has for decades, in short, been optional at best whether to engage in his work, and I do not propose to do so.

Lastly, it is simply not possible to master the languages, literatures, secondary literatures, and histories of all ten main branches of Indo-European languages. To learn them even to a degree more or less sufficient to undertake comparison is the work of a lifetime. Comprehensive treatment, therefore, is an ideal which risks crumbling into a reality of superficiality, or of arbitrariness, as traditions are treated according to the predilection and training of the scholar and not according to the needs of the subject. Bilateral comparison nullifies this danger.

In my own case, some will criticise this work for the absence of the Iranian material (in which I have no expertise). It is first attested only a little later than Indic, perhaps around the turn of the second to first millennium, and in abstract, cladistic terms, would be as important as the Indian material for reconstruction. Yet in practical terms, *given my subject*, Indic is a vastly superior comparandum for two reasons. Firstly, the earliest Iranian texts, the 855 verses of the Old Avestan Gathas, are hymnic, not narrative in nature, and as such their utility for illuminating divination is drastically limited. This limitation applies also to the *RV*, as we will see. The Young Avesta is composed mainly of liturgical texts, with narrative passages short and desultory. As such, the genres of first millennium BC Iranian literature happen to be ill-suited to examples of divination in action. Had Iranian had a Homer, his neglect would have been inexcusable. Yet the first surviving long Epic narrative in an Iranian language is the *Shahnameh* of Firdawsi, written around the turn of the first millennium AD.⁶²

Secondly, from the very first moment of its attestation, Iranian speakers belonged to a society radically remodelled by Zoroaster – especially religiously. Important vocabulary items radically diverge in meaning from Old Indic and other Indo-European traditions. For example, the Avestan cognate of Vedic *deva*, Latin *deus* and *dīvus*, Lithuanian *dievas*, Old Welsh *duiu-*, all ‘god’, is *daēuua*, which already in the Gathas refers to a rejected class of deity whom the poet deplores. Later, the word would come to mean ‘demon’. Crucial divination-related vocabulary diverged too. Vedic *kavi*, which, as I explore in the second chapter, is a vital term for both Rig-Vedic seer-poets and their gods, is nothing of the sort in Avestan.⁶³ Indeed, the close connection between religion and divination would suggest *a priori* a remodelling also of Iranian divination. This question would require the kind of delicate and lengthy analysis best treated in a separate study. As for West Iranian, where Greek sources mention Achaemenid

⁶² The apocryphical *Bahman Yašt* and compendious Zoroastrian *Dēnkard* contains narrative elements too, but also belongs to the end of the first millennium AD; for an assessment of the antiquity of their material, Boyce, 1984 remains invaluable; for their recent use in comparison with Greek poetry, see Lardinois, 2021, 111-12. For the earliest Iranian texts and their use for IE comparison, see West, 2007, 14, Watkins, 1995, 57-58, and Oktor Skjærvø, 2017, 471-80. For an overview of Avestan literature, with copious quotations of long texts, see Martínez & de Vaan, 2014, 107-17. Above all, see Skjærvø, 2015, 409-21, for an overview of Early Iranian, its sources, and their traditionality in an Indo-Iranian and Indo-European context.

⁶³ See further Skjærvø 2016, which brings out well the differences with Indic.

divination, it seems (inasmuch as they can be trusted) to be indistinguishable from Near-Eastern divination and those elements of Greek culture which Near-Eastern divination had infiltrated. Old Persian sources, mainly seals and inscriptions, have almost nothing to say on the subject.

What Greek, What Sanskrit?

The place of Homer and the *RV* in Indo-European comparison requires little justification. I shall draw on Homer extensively in this thesis, and the *RV*, if much less often, where possible. On the Greek side, I include also other archaic material such as Hesiod, pseudo-Hesiod, and the older Homeric Hymns, and very occasionally, where appropriate, early Classical texts such as Herodotus, the younger Homeric Hymns, and Tragedy. I never stray into the Greek fourth century, since the major changes in Greek divination during the Archaic and Classical periods through the intensification of Near-Eastern influence make it imperative to keep to texts from as early a period as possible. Even in those rare places where I use early classical Greek texts, this will be carefully qualified and justified.

I am more diachronically promiscuous in my use of Indian material – and for good reason. Relatively to Greece, the impassable Himalayas and its peninsular position largely shielded India from other cultures' influence. There is no body of secondary literature arguing for substantial influence of alien literatures on first millennium BC India, let alone one of the extent and sophistication of Greek – Near-Eastern comparison. As I will argue, while Indian divination is importantly coherent from the *RV* (from ca. 1400 BC) to the end of the period of composition of the Epics (ca. 400 AD), Greek divination over a shorter period – from 500 BC to, say, the early to mid-first millennium AD Sibylline Oracles – was remade beyond recognition. My primary Sanskrit texts are, therefore, the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* (composed, roughly, between 400BC and 400 AD). Eclipsed by the *RV*, these have been relatively underutilised in Indo-European comparison. They are mentioned less than half a dozen times, for example, in Watkins' monumental and largely linguistically focussed *How to Kill a Dragon*. Thematically organised comparative studies, by contrast, are more motivated to draw upon the Epics thanks to their abundance and miscellaneousness: Gregory Nagy's interest in them in his partly comparative study on the Epic hero is exemplary (1998). Where possible, I connect what I find there to Vedic material, which would ideally support (and must at least be consistent with) later evidence, using it

to anchor the later more detailed material deep in the past. Moreover, sceptical doubts about diffusion, which would then have to be posited at an extraordinarily early date to influence the *RV*, are neutered.⁶⁴

This is not to say that Indian divination is static, and I shall flag diachronic change where necessary. For example, as the concept of *Tapas* (the meritoriousness earned through the practice of corporal and mental austerities) grew in importance, prophetic power came to be considered something to be earned, rather than something bestowed by the gods, as in Homer and the *RV*. This last change, as with many other social and religious changes, can be seen unfolding within the Epic texts themselves – it is absent in earlier and presupposed in later books.⁶⁵ It is often possible to date passages from the Epics on cultural and linguistic grounds, and I do so where possible. I shall give the *RV* and Sanskrit Epics a fuller introduction at the start of my second chapter, in accordance with my policy throughout of assuming in my readership greater familiarity with Greece than India.

How to Compare? Methods and Pitfalls

I hope to be showing that comparison can only be as good as the methodology which underpins it. In the following section, I elaborate on mine, explaining its advantages. Since this is a genealogical, not a typological study, it will be relentlessly concerned with the ‘so-what’ questions of comparison. That is, it is not enough to gesture towards a parallel between the two traditions without considering what it might show about the relation between them.⁶⁶ How much of Greek and Sanskrit literature can be attributed to inheritance from the time of Greco-Indic unity? What kind of inheritance might this be? How can we tell? What kind of similarity would constitute evidence of shared inheritance, and what would not? Where can we see the cultures growing apart, and why? Are some similarities attributable to parallel change? What role should universality play in all of this? Can we from these similarities reconstruct elements of a shared poetic tradition dateable to a the time of Greco-Indic unity? If so, what kind of elements can be reconstructed, on what basis, and with what degree of certainty? These questions are worth answering for their inherent interest and also for the new perspectives on extant literature they grant. My answers will be relevant to all kinds of genealogical comparison, and not merely that between Greek and Sanskrit.

⁶⁴ For example, see Metcalf, 2015, 222-23 for the impossibility of Sumero-Vedic transmission.

⁶⁵ The Epics were composed over a long period of time – perhaps from 400 BC to 400 AD for the *Mahābhārata*, and 300 BC to 400 AD for the *Rāmāyaṇa*. See further my second chapter, pp. 87-8.

⁶⁶ As for example Christophe Vielle 1996 and Maria Marcinkowska-Rosół and Sven Sellmer 2021, 2022, and 2024 have done. Others compare only to boot all of the explanatory burden onto diffusion – see pp. the introduction to the second chapter, pp. 89-90, and especially n. 239.

The List Fallacy and Polygenesis: a Methodological Heritage Shared between IE and Near East

One answer to this set of questions comes from the work of Nick Allen. His methodology, followed by Emily B. West among others, is a simple one: ‘[i]f the units of a Sanskrit story, one after another, resemble the units of a Greek story, and the resemblances are unforced and persuasive, then the more numerous the resemblances the stronger the case for common origin’ (Allen, 2016, 13). That is, the best explanation for two stories which share a concatenation of like events is that they were both inherited from a proto-story, which in this way can be reconstructed. These resemblances may be of any kind, on any level. They must come one after another, in order, the more and the closer the better. Here, polygenesis through universality or co-incidence have no role to play.

Emily West 2006 is one of the more convincing examples of this methodology in action. She compares a scene from the *Odyssey* and the *Mahābhārata* in which a goddess (Athena and Gaṅgā) drives a hero’s chariot – Diomedes’ and Bhishma’s. An unpromisingly general start, but on closer examination, she claims the resemblance will strike the reader. These similarities, very diverse in their closeness, include contact with the goddess before combat, a wrong done to a female, a bloodthirsty opponent, the goddess attempting to dissuade that opponent, the hero being wounded in the shoulder, a premature celebration, someone not being in a chariot, a faint and a recovery, the goddess driving the hero’s chariot, and a taboo. For West, so detailed and structured is this set of correspondences that they cannot be a co-incidence: the only possible explanation is the shared inheritance of a proto-Greco-Indic scene.

It is true that there is here a phenomenon which requires an explanation, albeit an anecdotal one: any serious reader of both Epic traditions will note repeated instances of scenes which resemble one another to a surprising degree. But there is another, better explanation for such resemblances. Many of the points of comparison enumerated above are general, that is, the sort of thing which can be expected to occur in any narrative (taboo, or revenge on behalf of an outraged female non-fighter). Others depend on battle narrative. Still others depend on certain underlying cultural similarities, such as the presupposition of theistic gods who intervene in the lives of mortals. Yet others depend on the similar levels of cultural development, such as the use of chariots and swords. Epic traditions repeatedly combine and recombine these building blocks to make their narratives. These shared underlying similarities will generate further similarity. For example, if gods intervene in heroes’ lives, they will intervene in heroes’ battles, and this intervention, given the conditions of the technology, might take the form of a god as charioteer. The *Iliad*’s battle narrative is composed of thousands of such small scenes; the *Mahābhārata*’s tens of

thousands. This is where chance comes in. Given a high enough number of opportunities, chance will throw up an alignment which seems, when isolated, to be an extraordinary co-incidence. Yet the temptation to say that the event is so unlikely that some other explanation than chance is necessary must be resisted.

The more often something is repeated, the more unlikely outcomes will occur. Consider the following two cases. Someone is asked to flip a coin. He flips heads ten consecutive times. The chance of this happening is $1/1024$. The most rational explanation for this event, therefore, is that the event is not actually random. Some extraneous cause must be invoked, such as the use of a weighted coin. In the second case, 1024 people are asked to flip a coin. Every time someone flips tails, they are eliminated. After the first round, around 512 people are left, then 256, and so on. The last man standing will have flipped heads ten times in a row. In that case, the rational explanation is indeed that this was a random event. In this way, when situated in the context of the dozens of millions of words of the two Epic traditions, the most rational explanation for apparently unlikely long concatenations of events is not that there is a hidden cause (shared inheritance, or a weighted coin), but that chance is at play. Especially when chance can join forces with universal factors. A model of shared inheritance is needed which does not identify the likelihood of inheritance with the brute number of concatenated similarities. The list methodology amounts to the isolation of the one out of the 1024 coin-tossers, and then the solicitation of our intuition that something must be amiss. The fact that literary factors are more slippery and subject to interpretation makes the case harder not easier for the comparatist employing this method.

Accordingly, in another study, Emily West wrote that “the [two] episodes share too many salient features [...] to support claims that they are the product of coincidence, or parallel manifestations of universal archetypes”.⁶⁷ The opposite is in fact the case. It is precisely where there is great similarity that there is most likely to be co-incidence. Too close an alignment should be a cause for suspicion, not exultation. Indeed, this is a recipe for making genealogical comparison seem as implausible as possible. A methodology is needed which accords with the intuition that where shared inheritance is to be found, it will be piecemeal, scattered, and imperfectly preserved, and not found out of the blue in free-floating, pristine runs of detailed correspondences. Also intuitive is that inherited elements will survive for a reason, tethered to something which survived for good cause. Runs of correspondences such as the Allen methodology produces, by contrast, are arbitrary. No reason is offered – nor could be found – why poets might see value in preserving so arbitrary a concatenation of inherently unconnected events amid a sea of dissimilarities.

⁶⁷ 2014, 170. Andrea Doda quotes the passage approvingly (2023, 53).

The same criticism can be levelled at proponents of areal diffusion. Here too a concatenation of similarities is called ‘systematic’ and heralded as the ‘smoking gun’ by which we apprehend influence red-handed. One celebrated example is the pair of lion similes at *Iliad* 18.318-23 and *Gilgamesh* VIII.61-2.⁶⁸ Achilles has lost Patroclus just as Gilgamesh, Enkidu. Tom Davies states the case well – ‘The lion simile is the keystone of this systematic correspondence. The same poetic figure appears at the same point in the narrative to illustrate the same relationship between the same characters: the tenor of both similes is our hero bent over the body of his dead companion, the vehicle a lion fruitlessly seeking its stolen cubs. The *Vergleichspunkt* in each case is intense and desperate action in response to unbearable grief, painting in miniature the final phase of each poem... Both similes present this response to loss as both maternal and bestial’ (2023, 3). The two similes can, moreover, be comfortably nestled into their literary contexts: they are of a piece with the imagery, theme, and general verbal techniques of both poems.

The parallel has gratified comparatists, since it seems to show the kind of similarity which only borrowing could explain.⁶⁹ For Michael Clarke, this shows that ‘the intertextual relationship... is an objective reality’, and demands that other similarities be examined in the same way (2019, 274-5). Maureen Alden makes double sure, observing that the Homeric simile’s mention of the abduction of a lion cub proves diffusion since lion-cubs were only regularly abducted in Mesopotamia, whereas there is no evidence for so regular a practice in Greece (2005). This is a promising shape of argument, since by introducing the external evidence of an independently attested historical practice it breaks the circularity (for which see below).

The degree of similarity is of course ‘striking’. Yet here again the case for diffusion comes apart. As Tom Davies rightly notes, the closeness of the parallel is in fact a reason for suspicion. If we find such close similarity here, ‘why not more of it?’ (2023, 26). The claim teeters under its own weight. And again, in principle, when two large corpuses of data are closely compared, chance will be enough to throw up co-incidence. Literary Near-Eastern comparison hunts for similarity on all levels – word, formula, phrase, scene, theme, and so on. Each element, then, represents one item of comparison. Even to compare two

⁶⁸ I here give only the English translations, first of Homer, then of Gilgamesh, in Haubold, 2013, 22:

‘... like a bearded lion
whose cubs a hunting man has stolen
out of the thicket; the lion comes back too late, and is anguished,
and turns into many valleys in search of the man’s trail,
in case he might find him, for bitter anger has seized him;
so he groaned heavily, and spoke among the Myrmidons:’ and
‘Like a lioness who has been deprived of [her c]ubs,
he kept pacing about, hence [and forth].’

⁶⁹ See Davies, 2023, 2, n.5 for a dozen recent studies which treat it.

texts of ten thousand words each, then, is to examine – literally – millions of opportunities of comparison. Here, as in IE comparison, sometimes heads will be flipped ten times in a row.

Yet ultimately, the case for diffusion crumbles here because of the flakiness of its building blocks. As I argue further in the next section, similarity asexually reproduces: a small amount may breed a larger amount. For a case of diffusion even to get started, just as for a case of shared inheritance, there must be a case for lower order, not just higher order similarity. Each detail must plausibly be borrowed, not just the structure to which it gives rise.

Here, every element is plausibly independently generated on the basis of universals or shared cultural context. The universality of similes, hunting, friendship, and grief need little defence. Universal too is the emphasis in both texts on heroes' physical strength. The strongest observable animal in both areas at the time was the lion – its habitat was vastly greater in ancient times than now, and the animal was common across Europe and the Near and Middle East. It is then no surprise that, just as those animals enjoy an extraordinary cultural prominence today, both literatures traditionally compare heroes to lions. Lions, however, do not have friends. Their only observable strong bonds are between a mother and cubs. Thus the only possible motivation for a lion's grief is the loss of her cubs.⁷⁰ Perhaps Alden is right that this was not so common an occurrence in Greece (it would be hard to verify). Nevertheless, the only possible reason for the cubs' disappearance is human action, and, even if there were no systematic excursions dedicated to that purpose in Greece as in Mesopotamia, a hunter who stumbles across a lion's den may well spontaneously prefer to capture and sell lion-cubs than to kill them. The alignment between the similes is, therefore, of precisely the sort that can easily be explained by polygenesis. The necessary ingredients are only narrative poetry, friendship, death, valorisation of strength, and lions – parallel innovation will do the rest. That the similes are in artful dialogue with the wider themes and concerns of their poems shows only that the *Iliad* and *Gilgamesh* are masterpieces, subtle and integrated at every turn. There is no need at all to posit any kind of influence to explain the similarity. Sheer concatenation, neither here nor elsewhere, can suffice to demonstrate borrowing. Attention must be paid to the *kind* of similarity in play, that is, whether it is of the sort which can outcompete polygenesis.

⁷⁰ Here I hope also to show that, when broken down into constituent elements, rather than compared wholesale, polygenesis does not need to mean that another culture can be adduced which shows precisely the same concatenation. All that is necessary to demonstrate polygenesis' plausibility as a rival explanation is the inherent plausibility of its elements.

The Circularity of Muscular Diffusion

Indeed, how might such borrowing even occur? What evidence do we have for contact close enough to support a hypothesis like the borrowing of a simile? Precious little: for the total absence of any direct evidence such as translation, attribution, or even the mention of cultures and places supposedly important to Greek literature, such as inner Anatolia and Mesopotamia, see above, pp.8-9. This often means that areal comparatists either ignore the vector question, or their discussion is a version of the following: they begin with a series of speculations about individuals – sailors, foreign nurses, travelling holy men, and so on, perhaps preferring one over another. Sometimes, they add speculation about the place of transmission – Cyprus, the West Coast of Anatolia, and so on. Then they admit that there is no direct evidence for any of this, but they claim that this in fact does not matter, since the literary similarities themselves are proof of cultural contact – after all, they could not have arisen without it. Bruno Currie, who advocates a particularly muscular kind of diffusion which assumes intense cultural contact and bilingualism, is a good example of this template. After his discussion of vectors ends in the admission that there is no solid evidence, Currie concedes that ‘The poems may in fact offer our best evidence for what was possible in Greek–Near Eastern interactions’.⁷¹

This is a grave problem for the areal comparatist. It involves a circular argument: ‘there was literary similarity because there was areal diffusion, and there was areal diffusion because there was literary similarity’. If A, then B; if B, then A; therefore, A and B.⁷² It does not *disprove* a hypothesis that it is based on circular reasoning, and areal diffusion remains possible. But possibility does not compel belief. Given the circularity, areal comparison should focus on those cases where affinity of the right sort is found with such closeness that diffusion is the best explanation for it – better, at any rate, than polygenesis. This will still involve a certain circularity, but it will at least be within a targeted, local response to an explanatory void. If the bar is set any lower than this, Near-Eastern comparison can offer only optional hypotheses, and nothing concrete. Moreover, the *lesser* the posited diffusion, the *lesser* the

⁷¹ 2016, 221. See 217-22 for his wider discussion.

⁷² In other words, Currie just makes an assumption and embraces the circularity. He underestimates the scale of the danger, which is in circularity, not merely the fact that ‘Literary interpretation is apt to be viewed as a soft and subjective datum (if a datum at all), compared to the ‘hard’ data furnished by history, archaeology, or historical linguistics’ (221).

He follows Martin West, whose closing remarks in the *East Face of the Helicon* are equally circular. After a discussion of vectors, he writes that ‘In the final reckoning... the argument for pervasive West Asiatic influence on early Greek poetry does not stand or fall with explanations of how it came about. A corpse suffices to prove a death, even if the inquest is in conclusive’ (1997, 630). West’s analogy proves my point, not his. The corpse in his analogy is the literary similarity, the death is the cause of the similarity, and an inquest would serve to establish what kind of death / cause it is. This too amounts to embracing circularity.

circularity, since the more in line with the independent evidence for contact this will be. Again, my first chapter will go into more detail and offer examples of what I take to be the right kind of areal comparison.

The Kulturbund and its Problem

Yet perhaps this only damages a simplistic model of linear influence. There remains another move, prominently defended by Johannes Haubold and influential among many young scholars (e.g. Tom Davies, Bernardo Ballesteros). This gives up on unidirectional influence as an explanation for an individual detail, and posits a Kulturbund manifest in a mish-mash of similarity of various kinds on various levels. This, for Davies, explains the parallels among the two lion similes (2023, 26-33). By relinquishing direct influence and intertextuality as models, it need commit itself only to low-intensity interactions taking place over a wide area and long time, from the mid-first millennium onwards. The argument will still be circular, but less so, since it presupposes less intense exchange of a kind which, in principle, will have left less evidence. In other words, inasmuch as the exchange is held to be less intense, it will be closer to the independent evidence, and so the circularity will be diminished. By relying, however, on the kind of evidence which in principle would not be left behind, a move is made towards unfalsifiability. Further, the problem of circularity is weakened and by no means solved. But I set this aside for now, since, certainly, the Kulturbund model is an advance on the picture of Homer in some way ‘knowing’ Gilgamesh.

Yet it concedes too much. To abandon the list model and embrace unsystematic, criss-crossing similarities as the outcome of different ‘declensions’ of a Kulturbund encounters the fundamental problem that it ends up holding diffusion accountable for precisely the kind of picture which chance and universals would generate *alone*. Yet again diffusion risks ending up a superfluous excrescence of the causal story. Indeed, the many chance alignments between Ancient Greece and the Ancient Near-East would *a priori* be expected to generate unusually numerous and thorough polygenesis. These are societies organised around cities sustained by agriculture, in similar landscapes, with similar fauna, domestic and wild, a similar climate, at a similar level of technological development, trading the same goods with the same coins. The lion simile is just one particularly ‘striking’ example of what we have every reason to expect was a widespread phenomenon. In other words, the kind and degree of similarity which literary texts show is often consistent with both explanations. Yet the premises of one are a set of indisputable facts,

and of the other a story, untestable and unfalsifiable. Too often scholars have preferred to write a rickety study about diffusion at the expense of a solid one of typological comparison.

Much Near-Eastern comparison in general but especially that based on the Kulturbund model involves a kind of problematic reasoning which I now analyse in greater detail. Ignoring alternatives, it elaborates a set of circumstances, calls them plausible, works hard to adduce arguments for that plausibility, and then says that since no proofs are possible in the Humanities, no more could be asked. Analysis of the concept of plausibility will be a window onto the kind of argument this is. The sentence ‘X is plausible’ is ambiguous. It can be taken in two ways. The first kind of claim says that X, as a hypothesis, is plausible. The second that the fact that the hypothesis X is *true* is plausible. The first is a hypothetical claim, while the second is an ontological one. The first does not entail the second. It must not be confused with it, since the second is a much stronger kind of claim. Near Eastern comparison must work hard to establish that its arguments and plausibilities aim at the second, and do not content themselves with the first. Yet sometimes areal comparison’s arguments are to establish only the first, and not the second kind of claim. Sometimes, once the first, hypothetical kind of plausibility is established, it is confused with the second, ontological kind.

I here modulate into a philosophical key. The relevance of the following example is strictly in the analogous structures of argumentation, not in the details of the cases. The example’s hyperbolic character is useful for bringing out our intuitions on the subject – it is what Daniel Dennett calls an ‘intuition pump’. Again, it is absolutely not intended to expose the essential futility of the areal comparatist’s project – far from it. It is a gesture towards the fallibility of certain methods which that field has employed.

It is perfectly plausible that any given man sitting opposite me on the London Underground is called James. No decisive arguments could be produced which would prove that he is *not* called James. Indeed, good arguments could be adduced in support of this hypothesis. James is a male name, and the man seems to be male. James is an English name, and I am in London. James is a relatively common name. This is all good circumstantial evidence – not conclusive, but not without its force. All the premises are demonstrably true. It is therefore a perfectly plausible belief. Perhaps there is a scholarly tradition whose consensus has long been that the man is called James, which seems to lend the belief further support. Over time, bad arguments, such as the man seeming tall as a James should be, have rightly been set aside in favour of better ones. The field has made progress. Another argument – the last time I sat on the underground, the man opposite me was called James. It might be demurred that this is not a compelling extrapolation. This in turn will invite a rejoinder: does good science not use all evidence available? Once something is demonstrated to be true once, does this not mean that we should be more

ready to accept another identical case? Need it be demonstrated as true every time? Is it not the essence of the Empirical method to extrapolate from one case to the next? The Empirical method is not probatory elsewhere, why should it be here? Why should it be submitted to a kind of Humean scepticism which would set the bar so unreasonably high? There are, moreover, a number of other striking similarities between the two men, which support the transferal. Even if no single argument is decisive, we might decide, the cumulative case that the man is called James just seems irresistible.

Again, it is in a sense perfectly plausible to maintain that the man is called James. In my terms, it is hypothetically plausible. The case is absurd because we intuit that hypothetical and ontological plausibility are not the same thing; that is, that 'James' is merely one of a myriad of plausible names. Theoretically, what would be needed to make a convincing case for 'James', would be good reasons for all those other plausible names to be excluded. That would establish ontological plausibility.

The James case is structurally identical to that Near Eastern comparison which refuses to take account of polygenesis as a rival explanation. It is not enough to make a positive case for hypothetical plausibility. In order to also establish ontological plausibility, it is essential to accompany it with full consideration of alternatives. The fundamental difference between James and diffusion which activates our intuitions here is that whereas there was a myriad of possible names other than 'James', areal comparison need take account of a few other possibilities – polygenesis arising from chance, universals, and shared natural environment. Translated into the terms of my experiment, it is as if James were one of only three or four possible names. This is good news: diffusion must only beat a few rivals. But it absolutely must do so, and every time, otherwise it can never lay claim to ontological plausibility. It would be a misunderstanding for it to throw its hands up and say that absolute certainty is not possible in Classics or the Humanities, or given the scarcity or nature of the evidence.

The second part of the James case shows that diffusion is not transitive. That is, one proof of diffusion does not entail another. The fact that the last man was called James does not make it any more or less likely that the next man will be, even if the two men are similar.⁷³ Every single constituent case for diffusion must outcompete polygenesis for Near-Eastern comparison not to collapse into a similar

⁷³ Walter Burkert famously wrote that 'Once the historical link, the fact of transmission, has been established in a single case, the dam is broken' (2004, 29). The James case here shows that the *fact* of influence is not a transitive phenomenon, even if the *possibility* of influence is. In other words, what learning that the last man was called James confirms for me is, at most, the *possibility* of the next man being called James. Burkert should here be seen in context. He grew up in a world in which most scholars denied that there was diffusion of any sort, i.e. that any man at all could be called James. In that sense, and in that sense alone, any one man being called James was a discovery, since it enfranchised a further *search*. But it does not itself prove anything.

absurdity. And here, as ever, a series of bad arguments do not add up to a good one by virtue of being labelled ‘cumulative’.

In short, by lowering the bar and assuming diffusion, chance similarities and human universals will be trussed up as shared culture. Authentic cases of diffusion will be shoved aside, outclamoured by a throng of exciting false positives. If sometimes it is impossible to tell whether a similarity is the result of polygenesis or diffusion, so be it. A great deal of information about the ancient world is lost, but our frustration at this is not reason enough to reinvent it. As with good genealogical comparison, each case must be painstakingly argued for and judged on its own merits.

Circularity, as we saw, was a devastating problem for a muscular, Bruno Currie type model of diffusion. It tacks too far away from the available evidence of contact, and therefore places too much stress on arguments which infer diffusion from the very similarities which diffusion is intended to explain. These are interesting gestures, but do not compel belief. By contrast, a model which assumes less intense contact over a long period of time, resulting in a Kulturbund in which individual traditions ‘decline’ ideas and narratives which were in the air over an area from the Persian gulf through Mesopotamia, the Levant, Anatolia, Greece, to Sicily, is gravely vulnerable to the criticism that it attributes overwhelmingly to diffusion what polygenesis might also explain. It mistakes a hypothetically plausible picture for an ontologically plausible picture and falls prey to the James-case criticism. Both models, moreover, are also vulnerable to the criticisms most damaging to the other.

My Answer

By scaling back ambition, both criticisms can be countered and a better model of diffusion espoused. To avoid circularity, this model will presuppose diffusion in line with the independent evidence for contact, along with reasonable assumptions about unrecorded contacts (sailors and tradesmen rather than bilingual poets). There are in Archaic and Classical Greek, for example, about five or six words demonstrably borrowed from Hittite, mostly for tradeable items, and a few more which are debatable.⁷⁴ This is about the same number as Modern English takes from Tamil. This is not a secure basis to posit profound influence, cultural exchange, bilingualism, or indeed a shared Kulturbund between Hittites and Greeks. At the same time, it is a good reason to suppose a modicum of low level influence. Secondly, to avoid the James-case reasoning to which the Kulturbund model falls prey, this diffusion will always, at

⁷⁴ Hajnal, 2018, 2041-2; see 2043-08 for more evidence, and 2049-50 for an overall assessment.

every turn, consider polygenesis as a rival explanation for similarity. It will look too at possible IE parallels, which also might outcompete diffusion.⁷⁵ Polygenesis, as I argued in the previous section, asexually reproduces. It is therefore a very powerful explainer of similarity. In order to take account of its danger for IE comparative poetics, a distinction must be made between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ inheritance; I present this below.

Strong and Weak Inheritance: A New and Vital Distinction for Genealogical Studies

Ancient Greece and India layer many further inherited affinities on the bedrock of human universals. For example, not all societies live in a world of intervening polytheistic gods to whom propitiatory sacrifices are made by a priestly class in return for divine favour. They too enjoyed a similar level of development at the relevant times, conducting warfare in a similar way, exploiting agriculture and the domestication of many of the same animals, and so on. Just as in the Greek-Near Eastern case, then, a certain amount of similarity will be spontaneously generated. However, there is a fundamental disanalogy:

The degree to which a shared inheritance determines a Greek-Indian similarity is the degree to which that similarity itself is an instance of shared inheritance.

This is not a tautology, because ‘determining’ is not always the same as ‘being an instance of’. But in this case, it is. In other words, if inherited constituents are placed into innovative, non-traditional combination, there is still a sense in which that combination is the result of inheritance, and so an indirect instance of it. Whereas only chance and universals could generate Greek-Near-Eastern polygenesis, chance, universals, *and shared inheritance* can generate Greek-Indian polygenesis.

Sometimes, chance and universals are enough alone to account for polygenesis. There is no need to invoke inheritance to explain why the two canonical Greek and Sanskrit Epics take a war and a quest as their basic subject. Sometimes, all three will play a part, but the inheritance involved will be of a trivial sort. For example, after the invention of chariots, Greek and Indian gods rode chariots. Here the inherited element, polytheism, is insipid. While it is correct to say that inheritance plays a part in generating the affinity, since Greece and India inherited their polytheistic beliefs from a proto-culture, this is

⁷⁵ For an example of the method I advocate, which shows how diffusion can sidestep IE parallels and outcompete polygenesis as the best explainer of similarity, and for reasons why this is more easily done for divination than for literature, see my first chapter, pp. 52-65.

uninformative. However, sometimes the shared inheritance is what I call ‘rich’ – not at all trivial or composed of many elements, or both.

My fourth chapter provides a good example. In both Greece and India, diviners were often itinerant. Yet there is no hint of this either in Homer (as I argue) or the *RV*. Moreover, itineracy can be also discounted for *a priori* reasons: as has now been established, their forebears at the time of Greco-Indic unity (and still at the time of the Vedas) were semi-nomadic pastoralists. The conditions of the culture were not able to support a distinction between sedentary and itinerant, and so *a fortiori* diviners cannot have been peripatetic. I argue that as the societies became sedentary, and as the cognate religions developed cult centres to be visited by pilgrims on festal days, diviners’ behaviour changed, and they sought to follow and exploit the large, time-rich crowds which festivals generated. This meant they came to spend their time on the move, according to the festal calendar. India developed its system of pilgrimages and festivals later than Greece, and accordingly showed the change in diviners later than Greece. In this way, while it is not true to say that it was a direct heirloom from the time of Greco-Indic unity, it is impossible to sunder explanations for the itineracy of diviners from the socio-religious heritage of Greek and Indian society. It was inherited, but indirectly, thanks to a network of other cultural and religious correspondences.

I call this ‘weak inheritance’. I then split this category into two further kinds. It is ‘rich’ when inheritance plays an important role in creating the similarity, and ‘banal’ when the chance, momentary element predominates. As is clear from this example, this concept can be set to work in any field where genealogy is relevant: here, it contributes to social history or anthropology, and explains how and why societies develop in certain directions; its utility in elucidating literature is downstream of that. But it is also the pre-eminent explanator of the similarities between Greek and Sanskrit poetic texts. Inherited, traditional elements, creatively combined and recombined by Epic poets, *give rise* to ‘striking’ similarities. Similarity breeds further similarity. The consideration of poetic techniques is essential for the discernment of weak inheritance. Narratives are governed by universal regulating principles such as clarity, resolution, tension, anticipation, or surprise. These are some immediate ends of literary texts. Poets who inherit (some of) the same tools will work towards those ends in parallel ways. But the *ways* are not themselves inherited. This happens often, and it is this which explains the overarching anecdotal observation that the two Epic traditions are just generally *similar*.

Again, there is here a disanalogy with areal comparison based on diffusion. There, polygenesis is in competition with diffusion: where polygenesis can plausibly explain similarity, even if this does not *disprove* diffusion, it certainly reduces it to an optional extra, and arguments for it to gestures. Here, conversely, polygenesis works in tandem with genealogy, neither one of which is enough *on its own* to

explain similarity. In genealogical comparison, universality, chance, polygenesis, and shared inheritance are *all* concepts which can work together to explain a similarity.

Weak contrasts with ‘strong inheritance’. Familiar from historical linguistics, this posits that the cause of a shared feature – a word, formula, scene, etc. – between Greek and Sanskrit is direct mutual preservation of a feature of the same order in the parent tradition. Though the simplest model of inheritance, it requires careful justification, and I signpost wherever I make this claim. Here, chance, universality, and polygenesis have no role in explaining a similarity. The essential difference between strong and weak is that, by definition, reconstruction of an element of proto-culture is only and exclusively legitimate on the basis of strong inheritance – never on weak.

Here lies much of my distinction’s importance. Comparative compendia such as Schmitt 1967 and Martin West 2007 mix strong and weak inheritance together. As a result, their utility in reconstructing proto-culture is unclear. West’s immense catalogue was groundbreaking, but light on analysis. Its items still need to be carefully sifted and analysed to determine their true value for the study of proto-culture. Similarly, the work of Nick Allen and Emily West is valuable, but for reasons other than what they purport. They notice only weak inheritance. Sometimes these are rich, and require not only chance and universality but a good deal of non-trivial shared inheritance to be explained. And sometimes only shared inheritance of a banal sort is required, and chance and universality can do most of the work. But all of their studies adduce examples of weak inheritance. None is a correct starting point for the reconstruction of proto-culture, since the concatenative method picks out only weak inheritance.

Lastly, another kind of comparative study which shies away from the ‘so-what’ question can benefit from this distinction. Per-Johan Norelius 2022, for example, adduces an interesting similarity between a Greek and an Indian myth, but can bring himself to accept none of the traditional explanations for such similarity – not polygenesis, diffusion, nor the shared inheritance of a reconstructible element of the proto-culture. He is quite right not to do so: he notices an instance of weak inheritance, in which shared inheritance and chance, momentary innovation combine.

Yet telling strong and weak apart is sometimes difficult or even impossible: much that seems to be strong may in fact be weak. For example, according to the mythology of many Indo-European peoples the Sun travels across the sky in a horse-drawn chariot. This seems to be a good example of strong inheritance; that is, it seems reasonable to reconstruct a detail of this kind in the proto-mythology. Yet it presupposes invention of the spoked wheels needed by horse-drawn chariots. These appear in the archaeological record in the relevant areas in the late third millennium BC, (very probably) long after the

break-up of Indo-European.⁷⁶ In this case, archaeology unmasks the myth as an instance of weak, not strong inheritance, and forces the development of a new story: at the introduction of this arresting, prestigious new technology, which no doubt spread rapidly, traditions developed along parallel lines, renovating an old tradition in which the Sun moved across the sky by other means. West's reaction is a shrug – 'how can we ever know if we are getting back to an original common heritage? Perhaps we cannot' (2007, 24). He then assumes that the myth was diffused along with the technology.⁷⁷ The notion of weak inheritance provides a different, more plausible answer: as the world around them changed, common inheritance underlay innovation, guiding it in parallel directions. The distinction forestalls the sort of binary schematism which holds that an element must either be directly inherited or have nothing to do with inheritance, and gives a framework which allows for a more nuanced analysis of the various dynamics at play.

Weak inheritance is not to be frivolously invoked. Each instance of it will contain a different degree of inheritance, chance, and universality. While thin weak inheritance is not to be ignored, the rich kind is naturally of more interest to the comparatist. To establish richness, there should be an accompanying argument for traditionality which tethers the subject of the claim to something traditional, embedded in other social constructs, such as religion, narrative art, or divination. This point has a special importance for formulas.

Formulas: Weak or Strong? Imperishable Fame, or Reinventable Fame

Above I elaborated the principle that the more a certain event is repeated, the more likely it is that co-incidence, not shared inheritance is the best explanation for correlations. This principle applies also on the level of words – to, say, the 'event' of attributing a noun to an adjective. Given the billions of combinations of word and adjective in the chosen corpus, repetition is not in itself enough evidence to be sure of inheritance of that collocation *qua* collocation. In other words, an adjective-noun combination shared between Greek and Sanskrit does not necessarily entail that that combination was inherited; it remains possible that poets in each tradition independently put together words inherited singly. By what

⁷⁶ This was first noticed by Marcello Durante, 1976, 15. See further West, 2007, 23-24, with bibliography, and 201-07 for examples of this myth in IE cultures.

⁷⁷ 2007, 24. Nagy rightly demurs that the correct conclusion from this example is that cultures 'could react in parallel ways to parallel novelties' (2007).

means, then, can we sort the *formula* from an alignment resulting from momentary independent innovation?

One answer is that, to be an inherited formula, the collocation should be expressed in cognate words. This has long been held to be to the advantage of the pride and joy of the genealogical comparatist of Greek and Sanskrit poetics, the equation of Greek κλέος ἄφθιτον with the cognate Sanskrit words *śravas akṣitam*.⁷⁸ Yet on further consideration, this is an irrelevance: the fact that the words are cognate does not entail that they once constituted a formula in the proto-tradition, since lexical renewal is an arbitrary process from the point of view of traditional formulaic language. I make this argument in detail at the start of the ‘Formulas’ section of my second chapter, and do not repeat myself further here.

Another approach, advocated by, among others, Joshua Katz and Laura Massetti, holds that what jars with its synchronic system is *a priori* a good candidate for diachronic explanation. As Katz writes, ‘if you encounter a synchronic oddity, look for a diachronic explanation’.⁷⁹ This adapts a rule familiar from historical linguistics, that archaisms manifest themselves in irregularity. For example, the old English plural system is preserved in certain irregular contemporary English plurals, such as ‘men’, ‘children’, ‘brethren’. On this idea, we should seek a formula (or indeed any other object of comparison, for that matter) which in some way sticks out from its context or is deployed in a puzzling, counter-intuitive way, since this will be less likely to be the fruit of the momentary innovation of the poet.⁸⁰

This is indeed true. But it still does not help us to distinguish between inheritance and chance, or between the strong and weak inheritance. Often, what is inherited fits well into its synchronic system. Equally, there are many reasons why a formula or any other poetic element might jar which have nothing to do with inheritance. Synchronic discrepancy is useful, as I anticipated above, most of all in the search

⁷⁸ See further chapter 2, n. 318 for some inexhaustive bibliography. Margalit Finkelberg 1986, as Calvert Watkins acknowledges (1995, 173), is right to challenge the formulaic status of the one Homeric attestation of κλέος ἄφθιτον. His riposte, that it can still be assumed that it was once a formula, and that the Homeric passage is thus evidence of one-time formulaic status, assumes its conclusion. My view, that independent reinvention is a far better explanation of these facts, will emerge in the following discussion.

⁷⁹ 2010, 360, and see Massetti, 2024, xvi-xvii. See further Ranko Matasović, 1996, 44, for a similar point and bibliography.

⁸⁰ Areal comparatists have sometimes used a similar principle – that influence gives itself away in a detail’s dissonance with its environment. Walter Burkert was a prominent proponent of this method. Often he advanced as a kind of neo-Analyst, first diagnosing a problem in the text and then adducing an Oriental parallel as a kind of solution. See the essential Adrian Kelly 2008 for crushing criticism of this method, with several examples of Burkert at work.

for a good *candidate* for genealogical comparison. But once a candidate is found, further methods are necessary to establish its inheritedness or not.⁸¹

Comparative poetics has another problem here too. Words are uniquely abundantly attested. Therefore, when a word or its morphology is strikingly out of harmony with the system around it, its value as evidence is never in question, since there are so many instances of it. By contrast, when a formula, poetic technique, scene or other object of comparison is exceptional, it is scarce. To some extent, this is true by definition: unlike in the linguistic case, where the most divergent words are often the commonest ones, in these cases rarity is what *makes* something exceptional. This makes it difficult to generalise, since to draw general conclusions from only a few cases is bad empirical practice. Indeed, linguistics here in fact provides a false analogy. If only a few instances of a word differ unsystematically from the norm, we call these mis-spellings or scribal errors. In the same way, these few instances of exceptional formulas or scenes may be mere blunders – bad independent innovations that flukily result in a misleading alignment. Genealogical comparatists of poetry are right to look to their linguistic colleagues for inspiration. Yet they must always take account of the different dynamics when they do so. Another way to sort chance collocations from inherited formulas must be sought.

Laura Massetti, developing the ideas of Enrico Campanile and Calvert Watkins, has recently offered another answer in an industrious and acute doctoral thesis. Her approach, which she introduces in her preface as ‘Die Herangehensweise der assoziativ-kombinatorischen Semantik’, ‘leistet entscheidende Unterstützung zur Rekonstruktion von ererbten Phrasemen, indem sie es erlaubt, sich auf phraseologische Details zu fokussieren’ (2019, vi). That is, taking an idea of IE pedigree, she collects its instantiations into a broad web of ‘phrasemes’. The inheritedness is guaranteed by the connection to the overarching idea. In this way, she hopes ‘dass auch auf die teilweisen Entsprechungen (Äquabilia) Wert gelegt werden kann’ (*ibid.*, 257). In other words, she makes a Hauboldian kind of move in genealogical comparison, placing the emphasis not on one-to-one correspondences but on the sum of them. Inheritedness, for Massetti, is conferred on each individual instance by its being a node in a nexus.

The second chapter of her doctoral thesis, for example, scours Pindar and Bacchylides for phrases which cluster around the notion of the imperishability of the fame which poetry bestows, a notion well attested across various Indo-European traditions and which goes to the heart of the values of IE society.⁸² Massetti’s treatment is the latest of many. As Martin West writes, ‘Fighting men were stimulated to deeds

⁸¹ Jamison 1994 is an excellent example of the successful use of this notion, because she uses it in the right way – having noticed the strangeness of the two scenes which she compares, she then uses *other* methods to demonstrate their inheritedness and unpack its importance.

⁸² 2019, 113-38, Kapitel 2, Kollokationen von “Ruhm”.

of valour, rulers to acts of justice and liberality... by the anticipation of good repute in the present and the future. Praise by poets was the most potent mechanism for the diffusion and perpetuation of this repute'; and again, 'beyond any reasonable doubt... the idea of posthumous fame was a pervasive theme of Indo European poetry'.⁸³ As Rüdiger Schmitt puts it, 'Es wird zweifelsfrei darlegen, dass der Begriff "Ruhm"... ein integrierender Bestandteil der indogermanischen Heldendichtung ist'.⁸⁴ The comparatist seems here to be on safe ground. It is *a priori* highly plausible that so well-established an idea was encoded in formulaic language, and that some of this language survived in daughter traditions. Here, if anywhere, formulas can be reconstructed.

And yet none is found. There is no common formulaic expression of the kind which might be expected, such as 'the praise of the fame-giving poet', or 'the poet who gifts imperishable fame'. Indeed, there are hardly such expressions within each tradition, let alone a single one that both traditions share: even the formulaic status of Greek κλέος ἄφθιτον has (rightly) been contested.⁸⁵ What there is, is a morass of criss-crossing correspondences between different but related expressions. Sometimes they are expressed using cognate words, sometimes not. The cognates κλέος and *śravas* are keywords, but are used interchangeably with the synonyms δόξα and φήμη in Greek and *yásas* in Vedic. Massetti collates them in two tables, for Greek (2019, 116-7), and Vedic (117-8). κλέος ἄφθιτον is just one of these overlapping, interchangeable collocations. This is important, interesting work. But it does not give a reconstructible formula, unless we redefine formula as 'a combination of one of a set of key words with one of a set of another key words'.

Massetti's methodology responds to the nature of the evidence. Relinquishing the possibility of reconstructing a single formula (in the traditional sense) of Greco-Indic pedigree, she limits herself to claiming that '(Mikro-)Systeme von Assoziationen gebildet werden können, welche sich als von zentraler Bedeutung erweisen, um ein Element als ererbt zu identifizieren' (*ibid.* 258). But which element is inherited? What is the true object of comparison here?

The linguistic correspondences which Massetti and others catalogue are downstream of this true object of comparison – the shared association of poetry, praise, immortality, and fame. Linguistic alignments are the inevitable consequences of that association. They are collocations, not formulas: the result of momentary creative combination on the part of poets in different traditions. Since the languages are closely related, sometimes the poets will end up using cognate words. But this is not a *linguistic*

⁸³ 2007, 397 and 410. See further esp. 396-98, 403-10.

⁸⁴ 1967, 61. See 61-102 for his landmark discussion which draws on many previous studies, and see further chapter 15 and 70-1 of Watkins, 1995 and the Epilogue of Nagy 1974.

⁸⁵ See above, note 78.

inheritance *per se*. It is the linguistic *evidence* of a cultural inheritance. In other words, this is not so much Comparative Poetics but Comparative Anthropology. It is not *wrong* to say that since Greek and Vedic poets used the collocation κλέος ἄφθιτον and *śravas akṣitam*, Greco-Indic poets probably used the same collocation, reconstructible as **klewos ṛdhg^{wh}itom*. It is merely unilluminating to say so. This is no longer reconstruction of poetic language, but of probable collocations based on knowledge of the proto-culture gained independently of formularity. It is akin to reconstructing collocations like ‘the god punished me’ or ‘an accepted sacrifice’. No doubt such sentences were constructed in Greco-Indic – even in words which bequeathed reflexes to daughter languages. But they allow for only a highly qualified kind of reconstruction not informative about poetic language. In short, collocations of low semantic distinctiveness may indeed have been used at the time of unity as well as in their attestations in both traditions. Strictly in this sense, they may be described as inherited. Yet in another important sense, they are *also* polygenetic, since they were not inherited *qua* collocations through a poetic tradition, but merely kept being remade throughout it.⁸⁶

The equivalence of κλέος ἄφθιτον and *śravas akṣitam* has played an essential, even totemic role in the field. But does not yield the much hoped-for instance of strongly inherited Greco-Indic formula. It is weak inheritance: it cannot be explained without genealogy, and genealogy is not sufficient to explain it. It is one of many possible linguistic realisations of a shared idea, but any one of those realisations is owed to the momentary innovation of a poet. Indeed, the fact that a collocation is connected to an idea of IE antiquity has the opposite effect to the one sought. It *increases* the likelihood of the polygenesis of phrases, since combination and recombination of a small number of relevant words is an excellent recipe for linguistic co-incidences. In other words, a shared idea incentivises poets to polygenerate equivalence. This is another trap to avoid in the search for shared formulaic language, and one especially relevant to a thematic study such as this.

⁸⁶ Nor does the redefinition of collocations as formulas make the exercise more illuminating. For more on my definition of formulas, see the ‘Formulas’ section of my second chapter.

This is similar to my distinction between rich and thin weak inheritance, but I do not use those terms here due to a substantial difference: richness and thinness exist on opposite ends of a scale, whereas reconstructibility of poetic language cannot. It either should be reconstructed or should not. Now, that claim can be made with different degrees of *confidence*, but this does not entail a qualitative difference in the claim, as with rich and thin inheritance.

For a recent example of a reconstruction which would benefit from my distinctions here, see José Marcos Macedo 2020, which argues that the Homeric and Vedic collocations ‘messenger of the gods’ derive from a shared ancestor. The author himself admits that ‘the relatively unmarked character of the phrase... may lead us naturally to entertain the idea that [it is] an independent development’ in both traditions (83). My methodology provides a framework for this perceptive intuition.

Strong from Weak: How to Reconstruct an IE Formula

The solution comes not from historical linguistics, but from oral studies. J. M. Foley's provocative dictum that 'oral tradition works like language, only more so' has aged well.⁸⁷ Taking up the essential and no longer controversial insight that formulaic language is an essential constituent of oral poetry, he argues that as with sound and signified, there is an independently determined relation between a formula and its context that goes beyond lexical meaning.⁸⁸ That is, in addition to the literal meaning of the words of a formula, there is another, emergent meaning, determined by the poetic tradition. This second, traditional meaning cannot be understood merely from analysis of the lexical meaning; all uses in a corpus of that formula must be carefully triangulated in context to establish it. These analyses made, further effects can be discerned: traditional meanings remain even when the formula is used outside of its canonical context, often with a twist or an ironic inflection. Just like words, then, formulas have meanings, contexts, and rich non-canonical usages; just as the relation between a word's sound and sense is arbitrary, there is an element of arbitrariness in the relation between literal and traditional meaning.⁸⁹

Therefore, just as formulas work like words, they can be reconstructed like them. What is needed is to find a like collocation of some semantic distinctiveness in both traditions, and establish, through careful consideration of their contexts, that they have not just the same literal meaning but the same *traditional* meaning. Since there is an element of arbitrariness in the relation between these two, reinvention through co-incidence or universality will be extremely unlikely. Put positively, direct shared inheritance is overwhelmingly the best explanation for correlation of this sort. These will be no momentary, fluky correspondences, but flag-bearers of inheritance at its strongest.

For example, the merism 'what was, is, and will be' is subject in both traditions to the same curious and arbitrary restrictions. It is overwhelmingly used in combination with a verb 'to know' or 'to see' (these could of course be expressed by different tenses of the same root in Greek), to denote a supernatural extent of knowledge. This is not a restriction deducible merely from the constituents of the merism. For example, there is never in Greek literature a sentence such as 'he was the best fighter of all those that were, are, and will be', or 'her beauty was the finest of all things that were, are, and will be'. And there is even good evidence for yet another restriction in, again, both traditions. Of the various

⁸⁷ See e.g. 1999, 6; but Foley's work often repeats this dictum (and, more generally, itself). My use of certain of Foley's ideas by no means requires wholesale acceptance of all his methods and conclusions.

⁸⁸ Of course, this is not so when there is an iconic relation between sound and sense, i.e. in onomatopoeic words.

⁸⁹ Incidentally, this is another reason why κλέος ἄφθιτον, or other kindred collocations such as μέγα κλέος, is not a formula: it does not have a traditional meaning which obviously goes beyond the literal one. For more on Foley and the relevance of 'traditional referentiality' to IE comparative poetics, see my second chapter, pp. 130-1.

beings in the Epic universes which show supernatural knowledge, it is used of seers with arbitrary regularity. While chance and universality might have a hand in explaining the lexical shape of the shared merism, it is impossible to see any explanatory role for them at all in the formula's traditional restrictions of context. These relations, like the sound and sense of a word, are arbitrary. Strong inheritance is the only explanation for the two traditions' alignment, and the formula can be reconstructed accordingly. As we will see when I discuss this example in more detail in the second chapter, understanding this will have certain important implications for interpreting occurrences of the merism, regardless of the preceding verb, in both traditions.

Here, finally, is an authentic witness to the pre-History of Greek and Indian poetry, and a potsherd of the poetic tradition of a late IE dialect of the third millennium BC.

Anticipation of Results, and a Second Table of Contents

As a help to the reader, and as a second table of contents, I here present my results ahead of time, gathering all elements of divination common to both Greek and Sanskrit poetry which I reconstruct to the time of unity, along with representative (and inexhaustive) page references to my discussions. I list the obvious and universal alongside the unobvious and particular.

- A seer was a scion of a long paternal lineage of diviners (pp. 113, 258), each of whom enjoyed a gift from a god, perhaps because of a special relationship with him (pp. 100-15).
- This gift was a power which gives him a theoretically limitless ability
 - to know, intuitively, without reliance on everyday perception accessible to any other, and without reference to omens or signs of the gods, events irrespective of when they take / took place (pp. 77, 116), and
 - to see, hear, or spontaneously perceive objects in the world irrespective of their immediate presence, including reading minds human and divine (pp. 76-84, 107-19), and
 - to interpret omens in a non-linear way, with a precision and degree of certainty unavailable to those without this gift (pp. 83-4).
- He is described as he who knows what was, what is, and what will be – a formula whose traditional meaning alerted the poem's audience to his ability to do the above (pp. 130-6, 141-2).

- Existing on the margins of society (pp. 280, 285-6), perhaps living physically apart from the others, he was accorded great respect by his society (pp. 260-4).
 - o Kings and princes sought him out for his advice. Yet he went further than his contemporaries in not always telling them what they wanted to hear, sometimes provoking the kings' wrath (pp. 269-71).
- A type-scene in the tradition exemplifies his literary function (pp. 273-76).
 - o At a moment when lives are at stake, the seer in that tradition enters, perhaps 'as swift as thought' – a formula which marks out his quasi-divine status (pp. 150-56).
 - o If he speaks to the protagonist,⁹⁰ he will confirm or rebuff them in their current course of action, relying either on his intuitive powers of divination to do so, or enumerating and interpreting certain omens. He will then advise either on how they may achieve their aims, or encourage them to abandon them. This advice will be taken either gladly or reluctantly. The taking of the advice signals to the audience that the protagonist will sooner or later achieve his ultimate aims .
 - o If he speaks to an antagonist, he warns them of the disastrous outcome of their current course of action, giving a prophecy (perhaps a bifurcated one) or indicating omens to that effect. The antagonist then rejects the seer, perhaps adding an insult or accusation of venality, or perhaps rejecting the entire divinatory system on which the seer depends. He dismisses the seer. This signals to the audience that the antagonist will not achieve his aims but will soon meet his demise.
- At a climax of the poem, that is, when an important battle, duel, or death approaches, omens appear (pp. 172-74). Perhaps these are elaborated by a seer (pp. 175-80) (perhaps even in a scene of the above shape, pp. 264-5).
 - o These include thunder and lightning (pp. 188-90, 193-4), perhaps from a cloudless sky (pp. 191, 193), shooting stars (pp. 190-92, 194), menacing rainbows (pp. 192-3, 194-96), and a sudden eclipse (pp. 196-202).
 - Perhaps these are creatively combined, mixed with one another and with other dramatic imagery, perhaps fire (pp. 172-80).
 - Perhaps similes accompany the build-up, in which soldiers or their weapons are the vehicles and ominous imagery the tenors (pp. 215-37).
 - o The meaning of these omens, that is, to whom or to which side they predict death, will either be explicitly specified or clear from context (pp. 172-4).

⁹⁰ This is not a rigid rule – see below n. 590 for complications.

- The steeds of the slain weep, perhaps as he sets out to battle, or perhaps after his death (pp.208-12).
- The sky god, perhaps **dieu-ph₂ter*- by name, sheds blood rain at his death (pp.202-08) (but nobody notices, perhaps).

Chapter I – Divining Origins

Introduction

Greek culture was a combination of different elements: a super-stratum of Indo-European culture was fused to a sub-stratum of Proto-Greek and subjected to lateral influence from a Near-Eastern adstratum. Indian culture, by contrast, consisted in the fusion of a super-stratum of Indo-European culture to a sub-stratum of, presumably, Dravidian culture. As I argue in the introduction to the next chapter, there was there, conversely, precious little lateral influence. The aim of this chapter is, where possible, to identify what role these different elements played in the formation of Greek divinatory beliefs and practices. I classify types of Greek divination not only according to methods such as ornithomancy, kledonmancy, etc., but also by the underlying mechanism on which they rely. I will compare Greek with Near-Eastern divination, broadly agreeing with the consensus that there was influence from this adstratum in certain prominent Greek practices, and suggesting where this is most likely discernible. But I will also argue that there is no evidence of such influence in certain other important beliefs and practices, which are, significantly, especially present in the oldest literature we have. My overarching aim is to establish what Greek practices would be good candidates for genealogical comparison to Indian material; archaic practices which are not paralleled in the Near East will form the basis for such comparison. I therefore radically foreground diachrony. My focus is on the earliest evidence and I avoid the simple assumption that later practices are present in earlier periods. Indeed, my discussion will only foray into the late fifth century BC only to show why I take there to be an important change in Greek practice after this time. This chapter can also be read as a free-standing discussion which presents an internally coherent picture of early Greek divinatory practices.

Definitions seduce. By seeking and fronting the commonalities among a variety of phenomena, they risk eliding complexity. The concept of divination, especially but not only in the Greek world, refers to a disparate array of phenomena, and the fact that linguistic practice unites them under one verbal banner does not entail that they must be meaningfully homogeneous in nature. Complicating matters, English usage of ‘divination’ sometimes but not always includes prophecy.⁹¹ Since, however, studies must

⁹¹ In this thesis I will not draw a distinction between the two.

impose limits upon themselves, my first task will be to define this obese concept. This definition will seek to trace not only the fluctuations of diachronic change, but also the exceptionally wide field of reference to which this word is applied. As such, definition must swell into discussion.⁹²

It is vital not to rely too much on ancient definitions, since these have introduced incomplete distinctions which continue to have outsized effects on how moderns have formulated ancient divination. Plato is right, of course, that there is a difference between the inspired divination consequent on possession or madness (variously called *μαντική ἄτεχνος*, ‘divinatio naturalis’, ‘direct / intuitive / inspired divination’) and the technical divination reliant on the observation, for example, of the behaviour of birds (*μαντική ἐτεχνος*, ‘divinatio artificiosa’, ‘indirect / inductive / deductive divination’; *Phaedr.* 244bd, cf. *Ion* 534cd). Cicero understandably follows him (*De Div.* 2.11.26–27, cf. 1.6.11–12, 1.18.34, 2.100).⁹³ This distinction has been hugely influential in all discussions of ancient divination, whether in Greece, Rome, or Israel, and definitions of divination have very often been framed in this dualistic way.⁹⁴ While it would be wrong to deny its validity,⁹⁵ its *utility* as a framework for modern discussion is profoundly limited for a number of reasons.⁹⁶ In order of importance, these are that, firstly, it is not sensitive to

⁹² For other approaches, see the various definitions of Michael Flower, who offers a traditional analytic definition of *mantikē technē* – ‘the art of interpreting the meaning of signs that were sent by the gods’, (72-3, 2008), along with a bipartite definition (ibid. 7, further problematised on pp. 30, 73), and, tentatively, a tripartite one roughly analogous to what I will argue for (87-8). John Dillery, alive to these difficulties, hedges his bets, ‘The *central function* of the *Mantis* was to interpret the divine will through omens (most often of birds) and sacrifice’ (2005, 169, cf. Paul Roth’s use of ‘predominantly’ in his definition, and his comments on the wideness of the semantic field, 1982, 7-8). Sarah Johnston avoids the problem of a unitary definition entirely, instead offering a discussion of ancient views from Hesiod to Augustine (2008, 4-17). Martti Nissinen’s lucid and direct definition, intended to apply equally to the Near East and to Greece, does not quite take into account all Greek evidence, as I will argue (2017, 14-15). Similarly, Kim Beerden’s is a definition of some but not all divination: ‘divination is the human action of production—by means of evocation or observation and recognition—and subsequent interpretation of signs attributed to the supernatural’ (2013, 20). She collapses ecstatic prophecy into this definition by taking the voice of the god as the interpreted sign. This is a good example of the elision of important distinctions which the hunger for unitary definitions can bring.

⁹³ Bouché-Leclercq is the first to introduce the distinction into modern scholarship (1879-1882, vol. 1, p. 107-110). See Ustinova, 2013, 28 n. 13 for an inexhaustive list of modern works which take up the distinction.

⁹⁴ For example, Robert Parker’s entry on ‘*Mantis*’ for *Brill’s New Pauly* takes it up unmodified, as does Margalit Finkelberg’s entry on ‘Prophecy’ in *The Homer Encyclopedia*; Yulia Ustinova 2013, in response to recent reservations about it, defends the heuristic value of the distinction in both Greek and Near-Eastern contexts, beginning her article ‘Any discussion of modes of prophecy in Greece should commence with a set of well-known quotations from Plato and Cicero’ (26).

⁹⁵ The fact that the boundaries between the two are porous does not detract from the reality of the distinction, as Nissinen writes in the context of the Hebrew Bible (2017, 18-19, *pace* Flower, 2008, 86-90). Nor does it matter that the distinction, as originally formulated, was subject to Plato’s biases: this doesn’t matter if it is a real distinction, and bias is not always pernicious (*pace* Flower, 2008, 84-6).

⁹⁶ The call of William Halliday in 1913 has not always been heeded – ‘The antithesis between inductive and intuitive methods of divination must not be pressed too hard: it must be viewed historically’ (57-8). He adds that ‘Bouché-Leclercq noticed the fact that the age of the intuitive seers seemed to precede that of the inductive, but he did not draw the moral’ (58). See 54-58 for the discussion in general.

For a more critical approach to the distinction with further references to where it has been taken up, see Flower, 2008, 26, 84-90, and for a nuanced critique of its applicability to Homer, see Paul Roth, 1982, 77-8. While Johnston

diachronic change, but valid, at best, for the mid-Classical period on; secondly, that it is incomplete, and leaves out other categories of divination; and thirdly that it is one of many possible distinctions, and not necessarily the most important.⁹⁷ It is therefore unhelpfully arbitrary to choose this distinction as the one around which to order discussion. All of the following points will be treated in the following discussion, during which, I hope, the deep limitations of this Platonic distinction will grow clear.⁹⁸

It is necessary, therefore, to place any starting assumptions to one side. While, in the end, it is possible to find three groups of divinatory types, of which two roughly overlap with Plato's, it will be seen that these were prominent at different times, and, most importantly for the rest of my thesis, were of different provenance. I will argue that there was an inherited kind of divination discernible primarily in the activity of *Manteis* in archaic poetry and less prominent later, a sign-reading kind also discernible in archaic poetry but longer-lasting than the first kind, and an ecstatic variety discernible only after the archaic age. Broadly speaking, I take the latter two types to show more Near-Eastern influence, and the former much less, so that it is the best candidate for inheritance. It will therefore form the basis of the comparative discussions of *Manteis* and their activities later in this thesis. Crucially, these definitional problems do not apply to the word '*Mantis*', which, along with its derivatives, at all periods is used of those who engage in any or all of these activities. This terminological imprecision is characteristic of Greek usage; I hope to show that it emphatically does not imply any especially homogeneous activity.

In the following, I concentrate entirely on divination, leaving discussion of those who practise it to a later section. My definition is composed not, as traditionally, of one loose global criterion, but of only one necessary condition and a series of subsidiary conditions of which only one need be met. This will have the advantage of not assuming homogeneity at the outset. I will give instances of the different kinds of divinatory methods (groups of related '-mancies') chronologically until Xenophon, in the order in which they appear in Greek sources, with references to what I take to be their first occurrences. I claim exhaustiveness only for Homer and archaic literature, and foray into Classical material only to elaborate

opts out of using the distinction, she replaces it with an equally schematic and arbitrary one, between institutional and independent divination (2008, 28). Nissinen is in the end basically comfortable with it (2017, 19), even if he has, funnily enough, more misgivings about its applicability to Greece than to Mesopotamia (*ibid.*, 23, see also 2010 for another defence of it).

⁹⁷ As we will see, other important distinctions include those between divination which is solicited or not solicited, and divination which confirms or disconfirms a given proposition rather than communicating freely.

⁹⁸ This distinction turns out to be a lot more useful for ordering Near-Eastern divinatory practices (nowhere more than in the Hebrew Bible, where there is an emic opposition between prophecy and divination e.g. Deuteronomy 18:10; at Ezekiel 21:21-24 extispicy as practised in Babylon is deplored in prophetic speech, just as mediums and consultants of spirits at Leviticus 20:6 and Isaiah 8:19). I suspect that it is uncritical acceptance of the distinction which has led some scholars to the questionable assertion that there is only inductive divination in Homer (see Roth, 1982, 78, 109 n.3 for references to four scholars who have held this claim). Of course, the absence of ecstatic divination in Homer (on which I will agree) by no means implies in itself that inductive divination is the only type in Homer.

its important differences with the Archaic period. I cite a paradigmatic example when more than one is possible.⁹⁹ For now, I bring together both literary and historical sources. Greek divination, therefore, consists in:

Definition:

A statement which predicts explicitly or implicitly a contingent future event or elucidates an obscure current or previous state of affairs by means of the exercise of

Sign Divination

1. The application of rules of interpretation to the flight of birds (Amphinomus, xx.243-8).
2. The interpretation of a dream (Penelope, xix.535-70).
3. The interpretation of a meteorological or celestial phenomenon (thunder, xx.102-4).
4. The interpretation of an everyday occurrence at a particular time (sneeze, xvii.541-45).
5. The interpretation of matters pertaining to a sacrifice (iconography ca. 530, then Cleomenes, Hdt. 6.76).¹⁰⁰

Intuitive Divination

6. An intuitive vision of past or future (Theoclymenus, xx. 350-71).¹⁰¹
7. Intuitive knowledge (Calchas, I.93-99).
8. Intuitive aural perception (Helenus, VII.44-53).¹⁰²
9. Intuitive interpretation of animal behaviour (Calchas, II.302-332).

Ecstatic Divination

10. Ecstatic possession by a god (Sibyl, Heracl. B 92 = Plu. *de Pyth. or.* 6)

⁹⁹ I treat *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as of equal antiquity. References to *Iliad* are denoted by majuscule and to *Odyssey* by miniscule Roman numerals.

¹⁰⁰ Chronology here is vexed. It is uncertain if the reference at [Aesch.] *PV* 493-5 predates Herodotus due to the uncertain dating of that play. See note 114 for the meaning of *θυοσκοός*, and the absence of extispicy in Homer.

¹⁰¹ My use of the word 'intuitive' is technical, and will be explained later.

¹⁰² There are very few examples of this.

11. The voice of a god trapped inside someone's belly (Ar. *Vesp.* 1019-20).¹⁰³

The statement must be non-trivial: a statement such as 'you will die one day' is not divinatory because it is not specific. By 'explicitly or implicitly', I mean to include both bald statements such as 'Athens will be destroyed' and implicative or enigmatic statements such as 'the streets of the city of the Virgin will run with blood'. The statement may be diagnostic – for example, it may explain what past offence has brought about a current plague, or, more straightforwardly, prognostic.¹⁰⁴ Occasionally, as we will see, intuitive divination can present two possible outcomes according to the choice made in a dilemma. Naturally, some of these categories include within them a wider range of phenomena than others: I have sorted these according to the *kind* of vehicle, instead of listing thunder and lightning or eagles and cranes separately.

Sign Divination: Underlying Mechanisms and Longevity

It is clear from the foregoing that the majority of divinatory types present up to the Classical period are already present in Homer. However, it is vital to flesh out this picture through mention of their diachronic prominence. Bird omens are perhaps the most prominent vehicles in Homer. They appear nine times at important points of the narrative, and the poet often describes them and the reactions they provoke in some detail.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, there are only three fleeting mentions of oracles in Homer. Although there are only two prophetic dreams, Penelope's (cited above) and Agamemnon's, which, though of divine origin, is fallacious (II.5-36), both are treated extensively: oneiromancy is of middling prominence. I will, however, have little to say about this method, since, firstly, this is typologically widespread and, secondly, there is little scope for difference in instantiation: a dream is had, a dream is

¹⁰³ Sophocles *Aichmalotides* F59 (ἐν στερνομάντεσι) may be earlier, but I hesitate to cite a two word fragment. Oracles are places where divination takes place. The kind of divination varies from place to place. I go into more detail on this below.

¹⁰⁴ I borrow this neat terminology from Beerden, 2013, 21.

¹⁰⁵ ii. 147-76, xv. 160-78, xv. 525-34, xx. 242-46, and VIII. 247-52, X. 274-5, XII. 200ff., XIII.821-3, XXIV. 315-20, as well as in a dream at xix. 535-53, and, relatedly, in nine divine epiphanies at i. 319-23, iii. 371-2, v. 51, v. 337, 353, xxii. 302-8, VII. 17-22, 58-60, XIII. 62, XIV. 286-91, XIX. 349. See Georgia Petridou, 2015, 87-91 on gods taking the form of birds, and 35 n.30 for comparative studies of these epiphanies with Near-Eastern material; see also Richard Buxton, 2009, 29-48. I suspect that divine bird epiphanies are secondary to the belief that birds manifest the will of the gods, but this could never be proven.

interpreted, sometimes professionally. As Homer, so the Bible, Sanskrit Epic, and the *RV*.¹⁰⁶ What is interesting about them is best discovered through a typological approach.

Thunder and lightning omens, like bird omens, are very common in Homer. The *Iliad* alone furnishes eleven examples,¹⁰⁷ and the *Odyssey* a further two.¹⁰⁸ Other ominous celestial phenomena include shooting stars (e.g. IV.74-85) and rainbows (XVII.547-52). These are signs which are sent by the gods to communicate to men, as is often made explicit.¹⁰⁹ Clearly, then, meteorological and celestial phenomena are a common and perfectly legitimate method by which mortals in Homer can ascertain the will of the gods. Slightly more shadowy are the chance omens such as Telemachus' sneeze or the old lady's spontaneous prayer for the return of Odysseus, which he takes as a good omen (xx.105-22); there are no other examples of this in Homer.¹¹⁰ Again, the portentousness of thunder is a near-universal, and in itself best treated from a typological standpoint.¹¹¹

These first four on the list, along with their associated phenomena, can be made into a coherent group corresponding to what has been called inductive prophecy, one half of the Platonic distinction. This is not problematic to define in a Greek context, whether emically – 'the decipherment of a message from one of the gods encoded in a sign', or etically – 'the deduction, predicated on supernatural belief, of otherwise inaccessible information from certain chance events.'¹¹² This is the form of divination which has received by far the most attention in works on ancient divination, and is well-represented throughout all periods in Greece and worldwide.

This first group is divided into four in my scheme according to the kind of phenomenon interpreted, what I call the omen 'vehicle'. In all cases, the underlying theoretical structure of this group is always the same: god(s) – message – encoded in a sign – recognition / solicitation of the sign – decipherment of the sign – reception of the message. What form the sign takes is interchangeable, and trends are discernible over time as certain vehicles come to be preferred over others. While the

¹⁰⁶ See e.g. Daniel: 2, 4, and Bhārata's psychedelic dream, where he sees his soon-to-be dead father in a lake of faeces drinking sesame oil and laughing maniacally (*Ram.* 2. 63. 9). See also *Rig-Veda* VIII. 47.13-15.

¹⁰⁷ II. 350-3, VII. 478-9, VIII. 75-6, VIII. 133-5, VIII. 170-1, IX. 236-9, XI. 45-6, XIII. 796, XV. 377, XVII. 595-6, XX. 56-7.

¹⁰⁸ xx. 102-114, xxi. 413-5. A significant characteristic of these omens is that they are often the divine response to a mortal request; this will be discussed later.

¹⁰⁹ E.g. XVII. 547-50, IV. 75-6.

¹¹⁰ Though see Hermes' ominous flatulence at *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 295-6, followed by a sneeze (297); see *Ar. Eq.* 638-42 for more portentous gas.

¹¹¹ See further my third chapter for an examination of how ominous thunder, lightning, stars, and rainbows play their part in weak inheritance.

¹¹² For other definitions, see most recently Beerden, 2013, quoted above in n.2., Flower, 2008, 89-90, Nissinen, 2017, 19-23. The dreams in Homer are not quite epiphanic dreams, where a god communicates directly to a mortal: this sort of dream would sit more uncomfortably under this category of divination.

observation of birds, for example, remains present through to the fourth century,¹¹³ it is well-known that its Homeric primacy is superseded by extispicy and most often hepatoscopy by the start of the fifth.¹¹⁴ These are mentioned often in tragedy,¹¹⁵ and played an important role on the historical battlefield.¹¹⁶ Again, the Homeric fondness for thunder and other meteorological and celestial phenomena is not mirrored in later poetry, and the same relative rarity which encouraged their interpretation as signs limits their frequency in historical texts.¹¹⁷ They are nevertheless present throughout the classical period and

¹¹³ For example, the hawks and vultures at Hdt. 3.76, and the statements of belief at [Aesch.] PV. 488-92, Pl. *Phdr.* 244c, Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.3, *Anab.* 6. 1. 23 (eagle on the right).

¹¹⁴ See e.g. Flower, 2008, 25; Collins, 2008, 320. Hepatoscopy was known to Democritus (68 A 138 DK = Cicero, *De Div.* 57), and present in iconography from the last quarter of the sixth century onwards – see Burkert, 1992, 49, Flower, 2008, 53-8, Durand and Lissarague 1979, and van Straten, 1995, 156-7. The iconography is vital, since extispicy's sudden appearance there at roughly the same time as its appearance in prestige literature strongly implies that it cannot have been generic constraints which motivated its absence in Homer, *pace* Flower, 2008, 26. Flower follows other scholars, especially in past generations, who assume that θυσκόος means 'practiser of extispicy'. All evidence for extispicy in Homer turns on the meaning of this obscure word, attested thrice: XXIV. 221 in combination with *Mantis*, xxii. 318-323, xxi. 145.

There are numerous problems with interpreting this word as 'practiser of extispicy'. For such a sense, the first element of the compound would have to be 'live animal victim'. Yet its sense is limited in Homer to those offerings which are not animals. We are told as much by an old scholion on VI. 270, and by Aristarchus, who notes that Homer uses *ιερεύειν*, *ρέζειν*, or *σφάζειν* of animals, and otherwise *θύειν*. Later, of course, it takes on the sense of live animal victim too – immediately we find the problem of retrojection of later onto earlier evidence.

It is very difficult to verify from context what kind of offering is meant, since in each context vegetal and animal offerings would, as far as we can know, be equally appropriate, and at least in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* incidental details never make clear which kind is meant. Proceeding diachronically, the first occurrence of *θύειν* in which the object of burning is mentioned is the (late seventh century) Homeric Hymn to Apollo; there, the god's instructions are that an altar should be set up, a fire lit, and white barley groats should be burnt on it. The next occurrence is in Hipponax, where, again, the verb *θύεσκε* is used of a cabbage (*κράμβη*, Fr. 104 [West], 49-50). The first instance of the verb being used of an animal is as late as Pindar. To presume that θυσκόος refers to extispicy in Homer is therefore to read against the evidence.

Moreover, if a θυσκόος were just a practitioner of extispicy, the paucity of the word's attestation in later literature would look curiously unmotivated. Lastly, it would also be difficult to explain why there would be two centuries without reference to extispicy between Homer and the next evidence of it in Greece, in the last quarter of the sixth century. The absence of extispicy in Homer can therefore be stated with confidence.

¹¹⁵ [Aesch.] PV. 495, Eur. *Phoen.* 1255-8, Eur. *El.* 826-9, for general extispicy Soph. *Ant.* 1005-11.

¹¹⁶ See e.g. Hdt. 5. 44-5, Xen. *Hell.* 3. 1. 17, and my accompanying pictures, where the liver is presented in a clearly martial context. Extispicy is especially frequent in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, where it may be put to a range of uses e.g. whether to attack (6. 5. 21), general military strategy (7.6.43-44), or who should be leader (6. 1. 22), yet seers and their readings are famously almost absent from Thucydides (on the battlefield, only at 4.92, 6.69). This is probably due to the writer's personal aversion rather than actual absence. Flower could well be right that seers were so ubiquitous that it was not always worth mentioning them (2008, 161).

¹¹⁷ A famous exception is the eclipse at Thuc. 7. 50, cf. the eclipses at Hdt. 9. 10, Xen. *Hell.* 1. 6. 1. See also, for poetry, e.g. the clap of thunder at the death of Amphiaraus (*Thebaid* EGF F 9), the shooting star at Hom. *Hy. Ap.* 440-2, the thunder and lightning at Pin. *Py.* 4. 197-200, and the ominous wind at Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.17. It is significant that this method is *not* mentioned by Prometheus in his otherwise comprehensive litany at PV. 484-500. Its frequency in Homer and comparative absence in other genres suggests that there was a generic association to epic or para-epic literature; if so, it is impossible to say whether this preceded Homer or depended on him.

beyond.¹¹⁸ Dreams and miscellaneous chance events likewise sustain roughly the same level of prominence through all periods.¹¹⁹

What to compare? Methodological Considerations

As I argue in my introduction, diffusion cannot be assumed from similarity. A good case requires the right kind and degree of similarity. Otherwise, polygenesis arising from universality and chance will be a better explanation for that similarity. Unfortunately, my starting point here is unpromising. All these kinds of divination look universal in character, widely attested across the globe. Any argument for diffusion must base itself on detail: even if an overarching phenomenon is universal, that does not entail that all features of any one *instantiation* of it need be. To take an example from my introduction, while marriage is a human universal, its nineteenth century Mordvinian incarnation shows the highly unusual peculiarity that wives are canonically older than their husbands by a decade or more. If a neighbouring tribe began to show this unusual practice, the diffusion hypothesis would be much stronger than the polygenetic one. This is the shape of argument necessary.

Unfortunately, however, dreams, weather phenomena, and everyday occurrences furnish little room for manoeuvre. Not being, at least in Greece, multi-layered, conceptually rich kinds of divination, they do not show the level of lower order detail necessary for an argument for diffusion. Generally, dreams are had, then interpreted, professionally or not. Weather is observed, and predictions made on the basis of what appears. Lower order associations are also universal-looking: thunder, lightning, eclipses and so on augur ill. Left (bad) or right (good) position in the sky also seems merely typological.¹²⁰ Chance events such as sneezes simply augur well or ill, and can undergo no further analysis. I treat these no further.

Ornithomancy and extispicy are by comparison much richer and more promising methods. Areal comparative works have naturally tended to focus on these areas.¹²¹ Two so-called ‘orientalising’ periods

¹¹⁸ E.g. Arr. 3. 7 (eclipse), Plut. *Vit. Marc.* 28 (lightning), Polyb. 5. 78 (eclipse).

¹¹⁹ Dreams hardly require this substantiation, but Hdt. 7.12-18, Eur. *IT.* 1259-69, and [Plut.] *Plac.* 5.2 are particularly interesting passages; for dream interpreters, see Ar. *Vesp.* 52f.; Theophr. *Char.* 16,11; for sneezes, see Xen. *Anab.* 3,2,9; for kledonomanancy, see Hdt. 5. 72, [Aesch.] *PV.* 486-7, and κληδών in *LSJ* for more.

¹²⁰ I examine one exception in my third chapter. Whereas rainbows augur well in the ancient Near-East (and fore the modern Christian West through the influence of the Hebrew Bible), they augur war in Greece and India. See pp. 220-23.

¹²¹ There has been a biblical flood of works on ancient divination in the past two decades. Some important works which treat divination in Greece and the Near East are Burkert 1983 and 1992, West 1997, Bremmer 2008, López-

have been recognised during which Near-Eastern influence on Greek culture was at its most intense.¹²² This is better put negatively – after the Bronze Age Collapse, archaeology attests to a period of depressed trade – and presumably contact – during which Greece was isolated from its neighbours. Contact was reinvigorated from the mid-eighth century BC by the Neo-Assyrian expansion to coastal Asia Minor and the contemporaneous establishment of Greek colonies in the area.¹²³ If a standard late eighth to early seventh century date for Homer is accepted, his work would stand in an interesting relation to these influences. He is not quite late enough to show the influence of the second period (apart from a couple of traces, which I will discuss), but comes long enough after the first for any influence to have fully percolated into his world.

There are further complications. Some think that Greek ornithomancy should be compared to Mesopotamian divinatory practices, and others that Hittite material constitutes a more telling comparandum.¹²⁴ Hittite evidence poses an additional problem, since the Hittites were of course Indo-European, and so there is at least in principle the possibility that similarities are due to shared inheritance.¹²⁵ This has rightly made scholars wary about speaking of the Hittite *origin* of Greek ornithomancy, even if ornithomancy was the Hittite method of divination *par excellence*, and they developed extremely elaborate practices for it.¹²⁶ A further complication is that the Hurrians, a very important substratal influence on Hittite culture, had themselves likely been influenced by the divinatory practices of their Mesopotamian neighbours.¹²⁷ The Hurrians may also, in principle, have been subject to Indo-European influence from the conquering élite of the Mitanni (for whom see further my introduction, p. 12) – although extensive influence seems unlikely. A final complication is the possibility that there was influence on Greek ornithomancy from the Pre-Greek people(s) whose culture, fused with that of the migrating Indo-European tribes, also contributed to the formation of Greek culture.¹²⁸ This Pre-Greek culture, to judge by place names showing similar-looking morphemes, was very likely shared with related

Ruiz 2010, Louden 2011, Nissinen 2010 and 2017, Beerden 2013, Haubold 2013, Ustinova 2013, Metcalf 2015, and Ulanowski 2021. Beerden, Nissinen 2017, and Ulanowski are book-length comparative studies on the subject.

¹²² Other models prefer to stress lower level but more consistent contact, but, as it happens, this traditional model will fit my evidence better.

¹²³ For this, see first Burkert, 1992, 1-8, and among very many others Erik van Dongen, 2008, 236-7 and 242-3; West, 1997, 4-12, 587-630.

¹²⁴ For the former view, see most recently the detailed Smith, 2013, who takes up West, 1997, 46-7 and Burkert, 1992, 56. For Hittite comparison, see most recently Rutherford, 2020, 131-3, 140-3, Mouton and Rutherford, 2013, 335-41, and Högemann & Oettinger, 2008, 14-22, but the idea has a long heritage.

¹²⁵ Hittite culture nevertheless was hugely influenced by a substrate of Hattian and Hurrian culture. Both these groups spoke a language unrelated to each other, Semitic, and Indo-European.

¹²⁶ See the brief and lucid exposition of Hittite divination in Beal, 2002, 65-73.

¹²⁷ See *ibid.*, 59.

¹²⁸ See p. 73 for my discussion of the oracle of Dodona for possible pre-Greek influence in another area.

people(s) in Western Anatolia.¹²⁹ These constituted yet another influence on Hittite culture, and so similarity between Greek and Hittite practices could also be due to their absorption of similar substrates. I do not attempt to unpick this complexity (if this could ever be done), nor to offer an unprovable answer to the question of vectors of transmission.

It has been argued that Mesopotamian ornithomancy is the *origin* of all Greek ornithomancy;¹³⁰ indeed, it has even been stated that *all* Greek divination had its origin in the Near East.¹³¹ A subsidiary, polemical aim of this section of the thesis is to point out how unlikely these claims are: again, divination is extremely common cross-culturally, and even if certain features of ornithomancy were adopted from the Near East, this by no means proves that ornithomancy as a whole was unknown in Greece beforehand. What kind of ornithomancy might there have been? As I elaborated in the introduction, if there are two equally close parallels for an item of Greek culture, one IE and one areal, then diachronic priority will always decide in favour of genealogy. Areal comparison would have nothing to contribute. The stakes are high, then, for the question – did ancient India have ornithomancy? And if so, of what kind?

Ornithomancy in the *Rg-Veda*

It is unmistakably present in the *RV* in two quirky and beautiful late hymns to an omen bird, II.42 and .43.¹³² I quote the former in full.

kanikradaj januṣām prabruvāṇa iyārti vācām arīteva nāvām |
 suṃaṅgalās ca śakune bhavāsi mā tvā kā cid abhībhā viśvyā vidat ||
 mā tvā śyena ud vādhīn mā suparṇo mā tvā vidad iṣumān vīro astā |
 pitryām anu pradiśam kanikradat suṃaṅgalō bhadravādī vadeha ||
 avā kranda dakṣiṇāto grhāṇām suṃaṅgalō bhadravādī śakunte |
 mā naḥ stena īśata māghasāṃso brhad vādema vidathē suvīrāḥ ||

¹²⁹ See Beekes, 2010, xv-xvi.

¹³⁰ See Smith 2013.

¹³¹ See e.g. Flower, ‘Modern scholars are well aware that *all of the various types of divination practiced in Greece*, including extispicy, had originated in the ancient Near East and probably arrived in Greece between the eighth and sixth century B.C.’ (2008, 24-5, my italics; cf. 31, 42 on how, for Flower, the figure of the seer was taken from the Near East, and Johnston, 2008, 115). I neither agree that this is the case nor that there is modern consensus on this point.

¹³² For a further possible reference to ornithomancy, see *RV*. I. 125.7.

‘Ever screeching, announcing its kind [=species], it directs its speech like an oarsman his boat. And if you will be of good omen, bird, let no evil eye at all find you.’¹³³

Let not the falcon tear you up, nor the eagle. Let not a hero with arrows, an archer find you. Ever screeching in the direction of the fathers, you of good omen, speaking auspiciously, speak here.

Screech down to the right of the houses, as one of good omen, speaking auspiciously, o bird. Let not a thief gain mastery of us, nor an utterer of evil. – May we speak loftily at the ritual distribution, in possession of good heroes.’¹³⁴

A great deal can be learnt about Vedic ornithomancy from these lines. The words for ‘bird’, ‘*śakūni*’ and ‘*śakunte*’ are vague: they are common and colourless terms for ‘bird’, used especially often in the collection’s later layers. If it once had a more specific meaning, it is now lost. Yet we learn in the second verse that the bird is prey not predator. This is a first, strong contrast with Greek ornithomancy, which is based overwhelmingly on the behaviour of raptors.

Secondly, there is powerful emphasis on speech. The intensive participle ‘*kanikradat*’, from ‘*krand*’, ‘screech’, is fronted, repeated in the second verse, and picked up at the start of the third by the related imperative, ‘*avā kranda*’, ‘screech down’.¹³⁵ Pleas for auspicious *speech* end the second verse, ‘*sumāṅgalō bhadravādī vādeha*’, ‘propitious, speaking auspiciously, speak towards us’, and are echoed in the next line – ‘*sumāṅgalō bhadravādī*’. This is confirmed on a closer reading. With the exception of ‘*krand*’, all words describing the bird’s call are more closely associated with intelligent human speech than birdsong.¹³⁶ The anthropomorphising language implies that the bird communicates vocally, in words. The third verse confirms the method of interpretation – the screech must come down ‘to the *right* of the houses’.¹³⁷ This is confirmed in the next hymn, where the bards welcome auspicious omen birds ‘*pradākṣiṇid ābhi*’, ‘turning to the right’. The omen bird is then compared to ‘*sāmagā*’, ‘a singer of

¹³³ ‘*abhibhā*’ is a difficult and obscure word; ‘evil eye’, though an anachronism, is a good translation for it in context.

¹³⁴ All translations of the *RV* are taken from Jamison and Brereton, 2014. To the knowledgeable Vedic *Ṛṣi* who recognises all bird’s songs, hearing a call is tantamount to an announcement of species.

¹³⁵ The intensive might also have been translated ‘screeching loudly’.

¹³⁶ So ‘*prabruvāṇa*’, ‘announcing’, ‘*vācām*’, ‘speech’, ‘*bhadravādī*’, ‘speaking auspiciously’, ‘*vādeha*’, ‘speak hither / towards us’. The latter is picked up in another form in the closing verse, where it is used of human speech, confirming the connection – ‘*vādema*’, ‘may we speak’. Just as the bird must speak auspiciously, so must the priests at the sacrifice. The next hymn ends with an analogous plea. ‘*krand*’, like English ‘screech’, is redolent of loud sounds proper to animals and objects.

¹³⁷ The point stands even if ‘*dakṣiṇatāḥ*’ is taken as not ‘right’ but ‘south’. See further Jamison’s note, *ad loc.* (2024, with rolling updates online).

hymns', and is 'udgātevā', 'like a chanter' (II.43.1-2). Clearly, the omen's meaning resides in the bird's call. Here again, this is in fulsome contrast to the Greek focus, which, as we will see, is on the bird's behaviour and direction of flight. If the bird's call is mentioned at all, it is as a picturesque detail which contributes to the moment's vividness, not the sign's meaning.

Lastly, it is difficult to imagine a Greek appeal to a bird of omen for favour. Such an appeal would rather be directed towards a god to send a bird. Now, the Vedic appeal is a poetic conceit not to be taken seriously as theology. It is not evidence that the omen bird was *actually* thought to have the power to control events. The bird is a conceptual substitute for the real plea, which is that things go well, i.e. that the sacrifice is efficacious. Nevertheless, there is no sense in either hymn that the bird is the messenger of a higher power or the humble carrier of a sign. As we will see, sometimes birds in Homer appear without reference to the god that sent them. But they are the exception, not the rule. The audience can presuppose that a god sent the sign even when it is not told so explicitly. The Vedic evidence, slim as it is, suggests that birds were not thought of as divine messengers in this way, but as independently in tune with sacrificial efficacy through belonging to the same natural world and law as the ritual itself.¹³⁸

I digress momentarily, speculating about the nature of Vedic ornithomancy beyond its contrasts with Greece. In the two hymns, the birds' auspicious speech is compared to holy recitation, and juxtaposed with pleas for auspicious speech among those present at the sacrifice. Vedic priests had a strict rule precisely analogous with Greek εὐφημία: only auspicious speech must be used during ritual. On this evidence, one possibility is that Vedic ornithomancy was based on an analogy. Just as it was an inauspicious sign for a Vedic priest to use prohibited speech at the time of ritual, so for a bird.¹³⁹ Yet attending to the speech of priests was an imperfect method of divination, since it depended on human action, and so was theoretically open to human manipulation. Omens must be based on unpredictable events.¹⁴⁰ Bird calls satisfy that criterion. Once the ominous import of avian calls at ritual was established,

¹³⁸ The *Gārgīyājyotiṣa*, written around the turn of the 1st millennia, shows how these beliefs were later codified (see further Zysk, 2022, 13, with references).

¹³⁹ Cross-culturally, during the ritual moment special divinatory meaning is paid to otherwise irrelevant phenomena. This belief also underlies extispicy – for which see below. For another Indian parallel, see the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, an important explanatory text of the Vedas of, roughly, the mid-first millennium BC. There, the behaviour of the cow at the ritual is the basis for divination. 'They release [the cow]. If, not urged by any man, she goes eastwards, then let him know that this sacrificer has succeeded, that he has won the happy world. If she goes northwards, let him know that the sacrificer will be more glorious in this world. If she goes westwards, let him know that he will be rich in dependants and crops. If she goes southwards, let him know that the sacrificer will quickly depart from this world. Such are the ways of knowledge.' IV. 5.8.11, tr. of Julius Eggeling, 1882-1900. The observation of the direction of animals' movement is reminiscent of Greek ornithomancy, and a reminder of the explanatory power of polygenesis.

¹⁴⁰ As Sir Thomas Browne knew, such 'augurial and extispicious inventions' must 'from *casual and uncontrived contingencies* divin[e] events succeeding'. He continues, 'Which *Tuscan* superstition seizing

the same principles could be applied outside it. The problem with this view is that bird calls are only juxtaposed with the ritual context; the birds are never actually represented at a sacrifice.

Another possibility, equally consistent with the evidence of the two hymns but more inherently plausible, is that the juxtapositions and comparisons between bird calls, hymns, and the need for auspicious talk during ritual were merely a witty nod to the sacrificial context of the hymn. On this view, the connection between ornithomancy and ritual would be illusory – an artifact of the hymnic genre of our earliest evidence and the genius of the poet. It is certainly in the manner of a collection which takes unflinching delight in forging ingenious connections between ritual and various unrelated, sometimes far-flung phenomena. Still, both avian and ritual speech can be subsumed within the higher category ‘ominous speech’. The belief in the portentousness of chance speech is typologically well attested. The *Odyssey* furnishes an example at xx.97-112 (see below). Although the evidence is slim, the picture gained from it is inherently very plausible. Vedic ornithomancy seems to combine two areas with strong links to divination cross-culturally – birds and speech. The poem’s connection of avian with ritual speech is best seen as the happy invention of a poet linking two kinds of ominous speech – a bird’s and a priest’s.

The two Vedic hymns present a kind of ornithomancy that has nothing to do with Homer. Perhaps it resembled something familiar to the IE speakers who entered Greece in the early second millennium.¹⁴¹ Perhaps not. Certainly, the ominous birds of Sanskrit Epic are habitual screechers.¹⁴² They appear with other omens, sometimes in long litanies, and never enjoy a scene to themselves in the Greek style.¹⁴³ Complementarily, their behaviour and direction of flight is never analysed in the Greek way. On the evidence which there is, it is difficult to imagine a system of ornithomancy of enough complexity to require specialised interpreters. Genealogical comparison, at least with Indic, has nothing to contribute to the study of Greek ornithomancy. Areal comparison has a green light.

upon *Rome*, hath since possessed all *Europe*’ (1672, 1.11) Even if he knew nothing of the Mesopotamian influence on Etruscan divination, his definition of divination has aged well.

¹⁴¹ If so, it would have provided only the vaguest parallel for other practices imported later from the Near East.

¹⁴² For a random but representative selection, see e.g. *Ram.* 3. 22.9; 5. 40.1-2; 6. 26.29, 83.32, .36.

¹⁴³ For more on omen lists, see my third chapter, pp. 172-74.

Mesopotamian or Hittite? The Details

Diffusion and the Principle of Desirability

In the introduction, I put forward the principle that in order to break the circularity attendant on using literary similarity as the evidence for its own cause, areal comparison must not stray far from the degree of similarity suggested by independent evidence. In other words, it is dangerous to assume from literary similarity a vastly more intense contact than is demonstrated by other evidence. I here elaborate the example I briefly gave on pp. 35-6 of Hittite loanwords in Greek. There are perhaps a few borrowed words, all for items of trade such as μόλυβδος, ‘lead’, and κύμβαλον, ‘cymbal’. This confirms what we knew from archaeology – that there was robust trade between Hittites and Mycenaean Greeks (and many others in the Eastern Mediterranean) in the middle of the second millennium BC.¹⁴⁴ Other words are ambiguous – either borrowed or Wanderwörter (‘migrant’ words of unknown origin), such as Greek θύρσος, ‘staff entwined with vine / ivy’. These also, though less strongly, show membership of a shared culture. Other morphological and syntactic borrowings are more or less debatable, not least because Greek and Hittite are cognate languages, and similarity might always in principle depend on shared heritage rather than diffusion (2046-47). All in all, at least linguistically, while ‘Mycenaean-Anatolian language contacts can be assumed with certainty for the Late Bronze Age’, they point merely ‘to a moderate borrowing scenario’ (2050, 2049). Vitally, these borrowings are datable to the Mycenaean period. There is comparatively little evidence for borrowing at a later stage, from Luwian to Greek.

Calvert Watkins, though a great scholar of Greek – Hittite linguistic and cultural contact, therefore, overstates the case in supposing a linguistic Sprachbund between Greek and Hittite and widespread bilingualism (2000, 1143-45). This would result in a far closer relationship than the evidence suggests. Mary Bachvarova, on the professed basis that ‘Greeks were in intense contact with [Anatolian cultures] for hundreds of years before Homer’s time’, wrote a 690 page book on Hittite influence on Homer (2016, 1). In fact, she deduces from the similarities between Homer and Hittite poetry that the *Iliad* was not just influenced by the Near East, but actually resulted from a *merger* of Greek with Near-Eastern traditions. Everything is to be explained by diffusion. This, again, seems to go far beyond the

¹⁴⁴ See Hajnal, 2018, 2041-9 in the *Handbook of Indo-European Linguistics* for a critical assessment of the various proposed linguistic borrowings. I draw on his treatment throughout this paragraph. There were even Mycenaean colonies (if that is the right word) in Anatolia, though these were limited to a corner of Cilicia and a couple of islands off the coast – see *ibid.* 2049, with bibliography.

independent evidence for contact. It is important to note that Bachvarova's maximalist approach is controversial among other areal comparatists.¹⁴⁵

Yet the way is open for more modest cases of diffusion. In the following section, I will argue that Hittite ornithomancy substantially influenced the Greek practice. Not all diffusions are born equal. Whatever is not particularly cross-culturally useful or valuable is not borrowed or traded. Conversely, items which bring some palpable benefit are better candidates for borrowing. Desirability creates a *pressure* for diffusion, and things spread in accordance with that desirability. When this pressure is great enough, diffusion can reach spectacular lengths. The chicken, domesticated from the Red Junglefowl native to South East Asia, was known in Archaic Greece. Romans traded Chinese silk around the Mediterranean in the first century BC. The Spanish Conquistadors immediately embraced the American tomato; within a century of Columbus, it was being cultivated in China and the Philippines.¹⁴⁶ Domestic animals, textiles, and foodstuffs are all different kinds of thing. What they have in common is great desirability. Desire for such items does not so much exploit trade as create it.

These examples also show that traffic in items by no means entails traffic in culture, literature, or ideas. Trade did not mean that Ancient Myanmar influenced the culture of Classical Athens, nor Han China, Rome's. Now, no work of art could be as cross-culturally useful as a chicken: the profound practical advantages of domestic animals made for a particularly powerful kind of desirability. The example is useful in establishing the principle, which will then vary by degrees from case to case. Moreover, chickens could be diffused so far and so early because their spread depended on no other kind of affinity or mutual appreciation. The sheen and texture of silk is clearly cross-culturally appealing, and guarantees its value. Chickens and silk can be traded and appreciated without bilingualism, shared culture, or social interpenetration. In short, it is different from the sort of diffusion which manifests itself in literary texts.

In this sense, divination has more in common with chickens than literature. To us, etically, ancient divination is pseudo-science. But for the ancients, emically, it was simply science.¹⁴⁷ They thought that it told them real truths about the world. Science travels further than Art. Aristotle and Greek scientific texts were translated and intensively studied during the Arab Golden Age by scholars who showed no interest in Greek poetry. Arab scientific texts were then, in turn, translated and read in the European Middle Ages by scholars who had no interest in Arabic poetry. Nor does the science of divination require profound

¹⁴⁵ See Christopher Metcalf's critical review, 2017.

¹⁴⁶ The first two examples are well known. For the third, see Kiple & Ornelas, 2000, 357.

¹⁴⁷ Francesca Rochberg in an important book on Mesopotamian divination and astronomy makes this point forcefully for Mesopotamian practices, with reference also to Greece, 2004, 14-43.

cultural knowledge: the tradition of horoscopes born in Ancient Babylon is happily practised in the modern day from California to Kolkata without any further engagement in other aspects of ancient Mesopotamia. This is a spectacular example of diffusion through time as well as space. Moreover, divination was an especially practical kind of science – of interest to the common man as much as to intellectuals. In other words, there were strong pressures conducing to its cross-cultural adoption. In the case of ornithomancy, once certain simple principles were learnt, it required no further training. It is, therefore, *a priori* precisely the kind of phenomenon that would be transmitted through the sort of moderate interaction to which the linguistic and archaeological evidence points. It can be postulated without literary transfer. A section in the next chapter, on the possibility of diffusion from Greece to India, exemplifies my point here. There, I note how translations of Hellenistic works on astrology appear in Sanskrit translation in the second quarter of the first millennium AD. During the same period, however, there is no explicit mention of awareness of Greek literature, let alone translation of Greek works. The case, then, seems promising at the outset. Now I turn to the texts.

Homeric Ornithomancy, Near-Eastern Augury

The kind of ornithomancy which Homer shows is so common in his narratives that, if it was transmitted, enough time must have elapsed between its introduction and the composition of the *Iliad* for it to be fully absorbed into the culture. Indeed, already in Homer, the very word οἰωνός, ‘bird’, can also mean ‘omen’, just as οἰωνοπόλος can denote any kind of seer. Working roughly from a traditional eighth century date for Homer, a Bronze Age date for the introduction seems plausible – even more plausibly a date before the Bronze Age Collapse and the ensuing relaxation of Eastern Mediterranean trade. This accords with the linguistic and archaeological evidence for Mycenaean contact with Hittite.

Greek ornithomancy aligns in various details with Near Eastern practice. I set these out here, in order to establish the probability of diffusion relative to polygenesis. The task must not be underestimated, since here, as ever, polygenesis can even explain the specific kinds of alignment. Traditional cultures in Borneo and North America, for example, show practices remarkably similar *in their detail* to archaic Greeks’.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Rutherford, 2020, 86-7, 132 with references.

Theoretically, influence might have come from either the Hittite or the Mesopotamian sphere, or indeed both. I shall consider both possibilities, but decide in favour of Hittite influence. Unlike in the Vedic hymns above, Greek, Hittite, and Mesopotamian ornithomancy are almost exclusively interests in raptors. Position in the sky is the eloquent factor, and not the bird's call. If Vedic evidence is our best clue of what Greek ornithomancy once looked like, this is, again, a promising start.

As for the Hittites, ominous birds in Homer may be unsolicited, as at XIII.200-29 and xx.242-7, or explicitly solicited, as at XXIV.307-22, when Priam asks for an eagle as confirmation that he would enter the Achaean camp with divine aid.¹⁴⁹ As we will see later, this is a vital distinction.¹⁵⁰ A further particularity which would reflect Hittite practice is the confirmatory role of this omen. Priam already believes that he knows the will of the gods, thanks to Iris' message. But Hecuba's scepticism persuades him to ask for the winged confirmation which he duly receives. It was standard Hittite practice to cross-check divine will using different divinatory methods.¹⁵¹ It was also a *sine qua non* of Hittite practice to ask a question of the god along the lines of 'if we have nothing to fear, let the gods confirm it'. The bird, by its propitiousness or impropitiousness, would provide the answer 'yes' or 'no'.¹⁵² There are further Homeric parallels for cross-checking which do not involve ornithomancy, as when Zeus thunders from a cloudless sky at Odysseus' request. This numinous thunder induces an old woman's prayer for Odysseus' return, which Odysseus also accepts as a good omen (xx.97-112). It is not difficult to suppose this pattern of question and response, once established, being applied to other signs like thunder. Sometimes, Homeric omen scenes consist in little more than 'a bird appeared, it boded ill', as e.g. xx.243-8. But when they afford more detail than this, those details line up with Hittite ornithomancy. Priam's eagle precisely accords in a series of non-trivial particulars with Hittite divination. Diffusion outcompetes polygenesis as an explanation for this similarity. I do not propose to discuss the relative Hittiteness of every example of Homeric ornithomancy. While not all show the same degree of similarity as Priam's eagle, this is not disconcerting. Diffusion, like inheritance, is piecemeal, and allowances must be made for change and development in the receiving culture. Yet if Hittite practice can explain the specific character of Priam's

¹⁴⁹ Duane Smith, who denies any Hittite influence, is forced to explain this away as an 'anomaly' (2013, 72). He is right that solicitation was much more common among the Hittites than the Greeks, but this does not nullify the parallel.

¹⁵⁰ Chance events of the sneezing kind perhaps find their solicitable counterpart in cleromancy, divination by drawing of lots, first attested at Hdt. 2. 57.

¹⁵¹ See Beal, 2002, 68-70, and Metcalf, 2015, 215-6.

¹⁵² See Rutherford, 2020, 131-3, and, again, Beal, 2002, 68-70 for a clear exposition of these matters. Divination continued until the god declared that they had nothing else to fear.

eagle, they can also provide downstream explanations, that is, of the general character of other less similar cases – other examples of cross-checking, or observation of raptors, for example.¹⁵³

The similarities to Mesopotamian ornithomancy are much more general: in both traditions, the place in the sky is relevant (right vs. left, also present in Hittite and Indian ornithomancy), the omens are generally not asked for, and the bird's call is also relevant. More urgently, the relevant birds, as for the Hittites, are raptors. Arguments which try to find deeper similarities than these are unconvincing. According to the *Šumma Ālu*, an Akkadian compendium of omens widely copied from the early second millennium down to the eighth century and beyond, if an eagle drops a snake onto a man's house, it presages his destruction. Smith has argued for a direct relationship between this and XII.200-7. There, an eagle drops a snake on the Trojans, Polydamas notices, sees in this an impropitious omen, and the Trojan attack fails.¹⁵⁴

I have explored at length in the introduction the grave methodological problems in presupposing a close relationship between Mesopotamia and Homer. Here, the polygenetic scenario need only be more plausible than that Homer directly or indirectly had access to the *Šumma Ālu*, or that he and the *Šumma Ālu* were both working from the same source. As often when observable facts of nature are evoked, polygenesis is far more plausible. Raptors do attack snakes, snakes do sometimes fight back, and raptors do drop the snakes.¹⁵⁵ Literary and cultural influence is the wrong model to explain the correlation.

After Homer – Ornithomancy

'Homeric' should not here stand for 'Greek'. Later, better evidence for Mesopotamian influence on Greek ornithomancy (and other practices too) can be found. The *Šumma Ālu*, as all other Mesopotamian omen texts, consisted in a set of protases and apodoses of incredible specificity; for example, 'If you drop a bird's heart into water, it turns pale (and) it is set in (a network of) white veins (as if) in a net for bundling straw: lahbum-disease will strike the limbs of troops and also the enemy's weapon will overtake us.'¹⁵⁶ This 'if..., then...' pattern is the rule not only in Mesopotamian divinatory texts, but is the structure of many other important genres of treatise, such as medicine, grammar,

¹⁵³ As I wrote above, it is also possible that the similarities are due to mutual absorption of cognate substratal influences. There is no way of knowing which is a more accurate picture. But, again, this is not relevant to my overarching purpose of establishing the non-IE nature of the practice.

¹⁵⁴ 2013, 62-7.

¹⁵⁵ Videos of such attacks may be found online.

¹⁵⁶ Taken from Ulanowski, 2021, 174.

mathematics, and law.¹⁵⁷ It is employed for the exposition of all kinds of signs, including sneezes, dreams, all manner of animal behaviour, and all types of chance events: the Assyrians and Babylonians thought that all worldly objects and events were part of a divine plan and intimately (but occultly) inter-connected; consequently they saw signs everywhere, even in the most trivial events.¹⁵⁸ Successful divination was a matter of correctly applying a memorised list of quasi-inductively formulated rules, rather than an occasion for free interpretation.¹⁵⁹ One such set of rules for ornithomancy crops up, in sixth century Ephesus.¹⁶⁰ The precise translation is disputed, but I quote its sense according to Flower: ‘If (the bird) flying from the right to the left disappears, it is favorable; but if it raises its left wing, and flies away and disappears, it is unfavorable. If flying from the left to the right it disappears on a straight course, it is unfavorable; but if after raising its right wing it flies away and disappears, it is favorable’ (2008, 33). The inscription is unique, but provides another example of the kind of parallel which is best explained by diffusion, not polygenesis. This would continue into the Classical period: for example, just as in Mesopotamia, augurs in Greek Tragedy must take up a predetermined fixed position from which to observe birds.¹⁶¹

After Homer – Extispicy

The case for Mesopotamian influence on Greek extispicy is stronger still, and widely accepted. There is no evidence for it in Homer: it first appears in our sources in the sixth century BC. Full recapitulation being unnecessary for my overarching aim, which remains the identification of good candidates for genealogical comparison, I limit myself to indicating certain important particularities of

¹⁵⁷ See Brown, 2000, 112. Particularly relevant, and particularly striking, is the closeness of the format to law codes. It has been argued that each omen in the list is effectively a divine law of divination, and it is as if the portended events are decided in the court of the gods who judge human endeavour. The events can even be averted as if through appeal to a higher divine court (ibid. 6-7 with references).

¹⁵⁸ See further Annus, 2010, 1-5 for a recent discussion of these underlying assumptions.

¹⁵⁹ On the method underlying the creation of the rules, see Rochberg, 1999.

¹⁶⁰ SIG 1167. See Roth, 1982, 96, 184. I quote the text given by Sokolowski 1955, 84-86, no. 30:

A [... ἐγ μὲν δεξι-] [ἥς ἐς τὴν : ἀριστερὴν | πετ-] [ὁ μὲνος | ἡμ μὲν | ἀποκρύψει | δεξιός | ἦν δὲ | ἐπάρει : τῇ [ν] [ε]ὐώνυμον | πτέρυγα : κἂν ἀπάρει : κἂν ἀποκρύψει : ε[ὐ]ώνυμος | ἐγ δὲ | τῆς ἀριστ[ερῆ]ς : ἐς τὴν δεξιὴν : πετό[μ]ενος | ἡμ μὲν : ἰθὺς | ἀποκρ[ύ]ψει : εὐώνυμος | ἦν δὲ | τὴν [δεξ]τὴν πτέρυγα | ἐπάρας [κἂν | ἀπάρας | ἀποκρύψει] [δεξιός...]

B ἐγ μαρτυρῆσαι | ἐπὶ τοῖς δικάζουσιν | ὁ μὲν ντα | κάπρωι | τὸ Ζῆνα | ἐγ μαρτυρῆν | τὸν δὲ κάπρον | παρέχεν | ὧ ἂν τὸ πρῆχ [μα ἔη | ἦ]ν δὲ : οἱ δικάζον | τε

¹⁶¹ See Soph. *Ant.* 999, Eur. *Ba.* 346-50.

Mesopotamian extispicy which were taken up by the Greeks.¹⁶² As with Mesopotamian and indeed Hittite ornithomancy, the range of information available from Greek extispicy is drastically circumscribed. Contexts are almost always martial, and the meaning of the response is concomitantly very often, in effect, ‘victory’ or ‘defeat’; ‘advance’, or ‘hang back’.¹⁶³ My two accompanying images represent a youth offering a liver for inspection to a soldier. In the first image, the warrior seems to be holding another part of the entrails too – Flower suggests that it is the gall-bladder (2008, 54). In my second image, the white-haired old man bearing a staff standing to the left of the youth (the three figures are no doubt meant to be standing in a triangle) is probably a *Mantis* who with his left hand directs the attention of the warrior towards a certain feature of the liver.¹⁶⁴ But even beyond war, the response is in any case strictly delimited by the question posed, and takes the form of ‘yes’ or ‘no’, favourable or unfavourable.¹⁶⁵ As Derek Collins writes, ‘liver-divination operated according to a fundamentally binary system... [P]ositive answers... meant that there was no divine objection to a proposed course of action. ... [I]f an initial consultation was negative, it could be repeated until a positive result was obtained; but if after several tries the results remained negative, the sacrifices were stopped and tried again on another day’.¹⁶⁶

In other words, the *semantic* content of the response is extremely limited: the sign’s meaning is rather generated by the *pragmatics* of a yes or no statement, that is, its context. This often consists in a question put to the gods. In the Near East, a strings of questions could solicit more specific information. Different methods of divination were regularly used to cross-check, confirm, and better define answers. The normal sequence was celestial omens checked with terrene, then confirmation through hepatoscopy.¹⁶⁷ To my knowledge, this is not mirrored in Greece until the end of the Classical period. In Homer, when there is no specific question, the poet clarifies a sign’s meaning (at least to his audience) through pragmatic factors. In the *Iliad*, straightforwardly, a favourable sign presages victory and an unfavourable sign defeat for the side to whom the omen appears. In the *Odyssey*, similarly, Odysseus’

¹⁶² See e.g. Flower, 2008, 32-3, taking up Burkert, 1983, 117, 1987, 112-3, and 1992, 49-50. The best evidence is the consonance between Greek and Akkadian terminology for the different parts of the liver, which shows a kind of particularity highly unlikely to be co-incidental – ‘gate, river, head, path’. See further Furley & Gysembergh, 2015, 77-95.

¹⁶³ See e.g. Hdt. 9.36 for an early literary example.

¹⁶⁴ The images are taken from van Straten, 1995, V 262 and V 243. The first is of a red-figure amphora by the Kleophrades painter, 500-475 B.C., in the Martin von Wagner-Museum der Universität Würzburg. The second is from a black figure amphora of 525-500, in the Château-Musée, Boulogne-sur-Mer.

¹⁶⁵ See for Mesopotamian examples the representative selection of omens at Ulanowski, 2021, 190-99, or Xenophon’s use of hepatoscopy to find out whether he should accept command at *Anab.* 6. 1.22, 31.

¹⁶⁶ 2002, 336. Cf. Flower, ‘the mute liver can indicate only yes or no to a single proposition (“Should I go on the expedition?”)’, 2008, 102, as Xenophon asked at *Anab.* 7. 6. 44. See also Johnston, 2008, 127, ‘the overall reading could only be either “yes” or “no,”... either [the gods] said that the event that one was enquiring about would turn out well, or they did not. As practiced by the Greeks, this was not a method of divination that allowed for subtleties of meaning.’

¹⁶⁷ See Beerden, 2013, 159-60 for Mesopotamian and Beal, 2002, 58-59 for Hittite practice.

interests are pitted against the Suitors’, whether the immediate question is ‘Is Odysseus dead?’, ‘Will he return?’, or ‘Will he kill the Suitors?’ Despite, therefore, the binary signification of omens, even when they are brief and barely interpreted, the audience can be in no doubt as to what favourable means for Odysseus and unfavourable means for the Suitors. The narrative delimits meaning through these pragmatic factors: the results of this process are, in Greece, necessarily closely tied to the context of the divinatory moment.¹⁶⁸ When a question is asked, it always relates to the present moment – ‘Should I go into the Achaeon camp?’, ‘Should I lead the army?’, ‘Should we cross the river (i.e. attack)?’, ‘Should we ambush Telemachus?’¹⁶⁹ Where the Near East uses questions, Homer uses context within the plot. There, the similarities seem more general in nature, and explicable through polygenetic. Later, by the time of Xenophon, the similarity seems more likely to be the result of diffusion. Yet the differences between the Near East, Xenophon, and Homer also lines up along the division between historical practice and poetry. Further evidence would be needed to make firmer statements.

Just Oracles

Greek oracles rely on a variety of mechanisms of divine communication.¹⁷⁰ In the following section, I will focus on that practised at Delphi, certainly the most prominent oracle throughout Greek history. Importantly, we have only the scantest evidence about divinatory practices at Delphi in the archaic period. Michael Chappell, following an 1894 article by A. W. Verrall, is right that the traditional picture of the Delphic oracle, with its female priestess, versifying male priests, purifying bath in the Castalian Spring, draughts of holy water, laurel leaves, tripod, chasm, and vapours is a quilt composed of patches taken from different authors from the Classical period onwards, and sometimes much later.¹⁷¹ It is wholly absent in the Hymn, which is our only archaic literary source.¹⁷² While this is a work of poetry, not

¹⁶⁸ Different narratives provide different contexts, and therefore different meanings. For example, Euripides’ Aegisthus fears Orestes’ revenge after reading an impropitious liver, although he posed no question (*El.* 831-3). It is also the right context which makes a chance event into an omen. Penelope’s preceding speech, which expresses her wish that Odysseus return, makes Telemachus’ sneeze an omen, as she herself says –

“οὐχ ὀράας ὃ μοι υἱὸς ἐπέπτаре (sneezed) πᾶσιν ἔπεσσι; | τῷ κε καὶ οὐκ ἀτελὴς θάνατος μνηστῆρσι γένοιτο | πᾶσι μάλ’, οὐδέ κε τις θάνατον καὶ κῆρας ἄλῦξει.” (xvii. 541-5).

¹⁶⁹ See above for Priam’s and Xenophon’s questions; the penultimate question lies behind the consultation of the Greeks at Plataea, *Hdt.* 9. 36, and the last behind *xx.* 243-8, where the Suitors were discussing this subject at the appearance of the eagle and dove.

¹⁷⁰ See Burkert, 1987, 114-8 for an overview.

¹⁷¹ I treat some examples from Herodotus in a later section of my thesis. Later sources include Strabo 9.3.5, Diodorus Siculus 16.26, and of course Plutarch’s *De E Delphico*, *De Pythiae Præculis*, and *De Defectu Oraculorum*.

¹⁷² Chappell, 2006, 335-9.

anthropology, and is naturally more interested in picturesque aetiologies about the god's birth than technical descriptions of the oracle's mechanism, the total absence of elements of great prominence in the Classical period – of even the Pythian priestess herself – is surprising. I quote the only lines relevant to current purposes, which describe his priests as

Κρηῆτες ἀπὸ Κνωσοῦ Μινωίου, οἳ ῥα ἄνακτι
 ἱερά τε ῥέζουσι καὶ ἀγγέλλουσι θέμιστας
 φοίβου Ἀπόλλωνος χρυσαόρου, ὅττι κεν εἴπη
 χρείων ἐκ δάφνης γυάλων ὑπο Παρνησοῖο.

‘Cretans from Minos’ Knossos, who sacrifice

To the Prince and announce as the oracles

Of gold-sworded Phoebus Apollo whatever it is that he proclaims

From his laurel tree under the vales of Parnassus.’ (393-6)

It is strange indeed that there is no mention of the Pythian priestess, even if her absence in the poem does not necessarily entail her absence in the temple. Does the reference to the laurel tree suggest some sort of arboreal element to the prophecy, as there was at Dodona, or is it merely part of the description? Does it refer to a ritual practice which is not elsewhere attested? The words are brief and vague. In any case, even if details and underlying mechanism remain obscure, the presence of priests, and above all the idea of the *speech of a prophesying god* (εἴπη // χρείων) make clear that this is a new method of divination which is importantly different to the sign and intuitive divination ubiquitous in Homer. Just like Ištar at Arbela, it is the divinity who speaks.

In the Classical age, as is well-known, the god temporarily inhabits the Pythian priestess and speaks through her mouth, sometimes even in the first person. We find this in the Near East too – if this element was not present in the archaic Delphic oracle, then we could suggest a model of gradual influence, with first the general points of the method and then its details being taken over from the Near East; I have suggested something similar for extispicy. Further important contrasts with other kinds of Greek divination are that, firstly, oracles were tied to a specific location to which one had to go to get a response, whether from Apollo, Zeus, or the Sibyls at Cumae and Erythrae.¹⁷³ Secondly, there is no

¹⁷³ This had long been a practice in the Near East, see Burkert, 1987, 114.

evidence that the priest or priestess is chosen because of any inborn quality or propensity; rather, at least in Classical times, the divine presence is induced through a sort of ritual.¹⁷⁴ Using evidence from the Classical era, we can add that, thirdly, the prophecy depended on a change in the mental state of the god's mouthpiece, sometimes formulated as a kind of madness;¹⁷⁵ fourthly, this method was not available throughout the year, but only on specific days;¹⁷⁶ and fifthly, the oracle responds to a question. All these particularities are shared with practices elsewhere in Asia Minor, the best example of which is the oracle to the Babylonian goddess Ištar at Arbela.¹⁷⁷ This latter was at its height in the seventh century BC, which suggests, at least from the eighth century onwards, a model of mutual growth rather than unidirectional influence. Yet whether exchange was mutual is irrelevant to my overarching purpose – what matters is that this is a new development in Greek culture.

Ecstasies

We have seen how the same underlying mechanism of the interpretation of signs can manifest itself in different ways: the sign may differ (from bird to liver), the approach may differ (question or no question, solicited or unsolicited), and the interpreter may differ (from professional to amateur).¹⁷⁸ In the same way, the underlying mechanism, variously called 'possession', or 'ecstatic prophecy', can manifest itself in different ways.¹⁷⁹ I do not draw a firm distinction between cases where the god is explicitly said to *enter into* the diviner and those where the diviner's mental state is changed without reference to cause: a change in the mental state is sufficient to *imply* the divine nature of the communication. It is, after all, the divine element that transfigures ravings into the sayings of a prophet.

¹⁷⁴ There is a slight blurring of this point in cases where oracles were in the control of a particular clan, as the Iamidae at Olympia, or, in the Archaic era, the Branchidae at Didyma.

¹⁷⁵ The idea that μάντις, 'seer', contains a connotation of madness due to its etymological relation to μαίνομαι, 'I rave, am mad', is linguistically incorrect. See Badawi-Crook, forthcoming.

¹⁷⁶ As at Patara, according to Herodotus (I.182).

¹⁷⁷ See Beerden, 2013, 114; Burkert, 1992, 80; West, 1997, 50; and Flower, 2008, 228-30 for both similarities and differences. Ustinova's dissent at 2013, 39 is unsubstantiated.

¹⁷⁸ For a professional, see Halitherses' interpretation of birds at ii. 146-70, and for an amateur, see Helen's at xv. 171-8.

¹⁷⁹ These terms are both used without precision in modern discussions. The Greeks themselves use an array of terms more or less interchangeably: ἔκστασις, μανία, κατέχειν (the Greek equivalent of Latin 'possessio'), ἐνθεός, and ἐνθουσιάζειν; see further Burkert, 109-11, who also mentions parallels from Asia Minor and ancient Israel.

Accordingly, it is safe to assume an implicit divinity in the explicit ecstasy of the Sibyl in her first reference in Greek literature.¹⁸⁰ That said, this involves the assumption that Plutarch used Heraclitus' words, and not his own, which might have been coloured by later changes in belief. So-called *Engastrimuthoi*, present at least from the time of Aristophanes, present a curious case. These claimed to be possessed by a god, but, unusually, this god manifests himself physically, through a voice in the stomach, rather than psychologically through a changed mental state.¹⁸¹ Interestingly, they appear also in the Hebrew Bible,¹⁸² and are perhaps particular enough that some sort of relationship is more likely than co-incidence; but it is impossible to have a strong view given the paucity of evidence. Oracles, therefore, are part of a wider phenomenon of possession, or ecstatic prophecy. Crucially, this is absent in Homer; I discuss positive evidence of this absence below.

On the one hand, the connection of possession and madness to prophecy is typologically common. On the other, ecstatic prophecy was particularly widespread in Mesopotamia (as in the Hebrew Bible) from the second millennium inside and outside of oracular contexts. Perhaps a soft kind of transitive argument could be forwarded, since it also appears in Greece at the precise *time* when other Mesopotamian methods of divination do. Yet this, as ever, would be vulnerable to the James-case criticism (see the introduction, pp. 33-35). Greek and Near-Eastern divination also agree on a telling detail: exceptionally in both divinatory systems, women also performed ecstatic divination.¹⁸³ Sharing the same arbitrary point of difference would be a promising shape of argument for diffusion. Yet this is still not decisive, since the difference could also in principle be picking up on a human universal. This is the fundamental problem with positing the diffusion of possession westwards into Greece. Higher-order categories of divination are worryingly universal, and so it is easy to imagine that Greece's ecstatic divination was a development downstream of its development of oracles. Once diviners were closely attached to religious sanctuaries, there would have been a new pressure to innovate a closer involvement of the sponsoring god – possession would have been one way to achieve this. This would account for the late mentions of possession at least at Delphi. Alternatively, possession might itself have been transmitted – perhaps in conjunction with oracles, or perhaps even along with only one, which then influenced other oracles from within Greece. The evidence, unfortunately, is consistent with each of the above hypotheses – and others still. It does not permit of the confident espousal of one over another.

¹⁸⁰ Heraclitus Fr. B 92 D.-K. = Plut. *De Pyth.* Or. 6 – she speaks her grave words from a 'maddened mouth', *μαινόμενοι στόματι*.

¹⁸¹ See Katz and Volk, 2000, 124-9 for a concise resumé of this phenomenon. I do not treat incubation, a mixture of oracular and dream divination, which is probably first attested in Greece in the Classical period.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* 125

¹⁸³ Paul Roth discusses the numerous typological precedents for this gender-based division of roles in divination, 1982, 31-4.

Interim Conclusions

Here we have, roughly, the two halves of the original, emic Platonic distinction discussed above. Earlier evidence for this sort of distinction is found, implicitly, in the handy litany of divinatory methods at [Aesch.] *PV*.484-99, which lists methods of sign divination extensively but is silent on ecstatic divination.¹⁸⁴ Complementarily, there is no mention of sign divination in the aetiological account of the origins of the Pythia in the Hymn to Apollo (179-387). Plato is the first to make explicit the difference, but cultural practice and other authors had already done so implicitly.

We have seen that, despite the theoretical continuity of sign divination, there was change in the period between Homer and the classical era in what the vehicle tended to be. I have argued that the Hittites influenced Homeric ornithomancy, and that later changes in preferred vehicle were probably influenced by the take-up of Mesopotamian practices. There has been no real evidence either for oracles (apart from the special case of Dione / Zeus at Dodona) or for the related ecstatic divination in Homer. Rather, to judge from what evidence we do have, these practices entered Greece in the period immediately after Homer, very plausibly thanks to Mesopotamian influence. Of course, my overarching purpose here is merely to establish what kind of divination was present in Greece at the earliest discernible period, but, though *when* matters more than *why*, I have treated both questions.

I also hope to have shown the general danger in retrojection – assuming that later states of affairs are already present in Homer. Firstly, the Platonic distinction between the two kinds of prophecy does not exist because there is no evidence for ecstatic divination, just as there is no evidence of extispicy – the first clear evidence of both is from sixth century. Secondly, in a world without oracles, there is little evidence of Apollo as the god of divination; there is none that he was the god of poetry.

In the foregoing, I have inevitably moved freely between poetic and historical texts. There is therefore always the danger of the sceptical objection that what appears to be diachronic change is actually a generic difference between poetic (or epic) and other kinds of text. Of course, this objection can only go so far given the connection between literature and history. Yet fortunately, it is possible to verify the literary picture by other means. The archaeology tells us that Delphi, the only oracle save Dodona mentioned in Homer, cannot have housed an oracle, let alone an important one, before 750, and the suspicion that there was no extispicy at the time of Homer is confirmed by the two century gap between

¹⁸⁴ The list is as follows: dreams, chance utterances, chance events, the flight and behaviour of birds, hepatoscopy and other kinds of extispicy, observation of sacrificial fire. Still more implicitly, see Hector at *XII*.230-50, who declares that he prefers hearing directly from the gods to ornithomancy.

Homer and its arrival in the iconography. Moreover, when both poetic and historical texts are available, there is pleasing consonance between them. Of course, allowances must be made for poetic licence, and real divination could not have exhibited the serendipity and ease of interpretation found in Homer. But, firstly, practices and beliefs may be identified underneath the poetry (solicitation, question asking, etc.), and there is no reason to believe that *these* are mere poetic contrivance; and, secondly, my primary concern here, as throughout my thesis, is in any case with literature rather than with history.

In discussing potential influence, I have sought to foreground the theoretical structures which underlie divination; further consideration of these structures can help to explain why Greece took up the practices that it did, and what motivated the changes made to them, since there is no reason that this should have been entirely arbitrary. For example, the close theoretical affinity between hepatoscopy and the already traditional ornithomancy could have motivated its adoption in Greece (although, of course, extispicy unlike ornithomancy is always solicited). Extispicy's assimilation to the well-established practices of ornithomancy can explain both its similarities and its differences with Mesopotamian practice. Like ornithomancy, Greek extispicy might or might not be preceded by an explicit question, and always depended heavily on contextual, 'pragmatic' factors to generate meaning; this contrasts with Mesopotamian extispicy, where interpretation was enmeshed in a complex set of pre-determined conditions and accompanied by other methods of divination which further determined its meaning. This Greek emphasis on context is accompanied by a complementary uninterest in the fine-grained semantic meanings of the liver itself; in other words, Greeks were less preoccupied than Mesopotamians with observing every last detail of the liver to get a precise answer, but read it more loosely to get a yes / no answer. Accordingly, hundreds of model livers made for the purpose of teaching divination have been found in Mesopotamia, but none in Greece.¹⁸⁵

This pattern of assimilation is also visible among the development of Greek oracles. Dodona, an isolated but famous exponent of oracles in Greece, and perhaps of pre-Greek pedigree, may have provided a precedent for the idea of divination taking place at a particular site, which helped the Near-Eastern idea of oracular centres take root in Greek culture. It seems that in the earliest period, the method used at Dodona was mainly sign-based, with priests interpreting the behaviour of doves and the rustling of the oak trees, but that by the time of Plato possession by a god was the norm also there.¹⁸⁶ It is not surprising that Dodona should have assimilated to new norms as ideas about oracles evolved.¹⁸⁷ I will argue that the idea that certain individuals were endowed with supernatural perception which could

¹⁸⁵ A few have been found in Italy: ornithomancy was much more rule-bound in Etruria (and hence Rome) than in Greece. The most famous is that kept at the Musei Civici di Palazzo Farnese in Piacenza.

¹⁸⁶ Pl. *Phdr.* 244b, cf. Paus. 10. 12. 10. See further Graf, 2006.

¹⁸⁷ The practice of writing questions on lead also attests to such innovation.

extend to the divine realm was a traditional element of Greek culture of Greco-Indic pedigree; if I am right, this too may have aided the distinct but similar notion of possession to sink its roots into Greek culture.

Introduction to Greek Intuitive Divination

I wrote at the beginning of this section that one of the main problems of the Platonic inductive / ecstatic distinction is that it is not applicable to all forms of Greek divination; I will now discuss those resistant cases. I will argue that these represent a form of divination deeply traditional in Greece, and so are the best object of comparison to early Sanskrit literature. All the foregoing kinds of divination are, again, either too common worldwide or show too great an affinity with Near-Eastern practices to be worth submitting to genealogical comparison. I shall here focus my discussion closely on early literature likely to preserve archaic features and in particular on Homer.

I use the word ‘intuitive’ in my scheme at the start in a special sense, to denote a mode of access to knowledge which depends neither on the interpretation of a sign nor on a temporary change in mental state, but, paradigmatically, on a supernatural, inborn capacity which a subject may access at will. In this way, it is functionally an additional sense, in that it grants perceptual access to real events; it is, however, supernatural, because those events are located in the past, future, or far away, and not in the here and now, and so they are not perceptible to those who lack this capacity. The knowledge gained in this way is neither truly inductive nor truly deductive: it is inductive inasmuch as it is gained through experience using a sense, and deductive inasmuch as it is gained through purely mental exertion and not the perception of external objects regulated by the physical laws of causation. Therefore, I call the knowledge derived by this means ‘intuitive’ because, neither inductive nor deductive,¹⁸⁸ it is presented in literary texts as simply known, without any reference to how or why.¹⁸⁹ It will be clear that I take this to be a radically different phenomenon to sign or ecstatic divination, with its questions, solicitations, and limitations. Although practitioners are not presented as omniscient, knowledge so gained is not theoretically limited in the same way. Unlike oracular divination, it is never preceded by a ritual which serves to bring on the divine, nor is it only available at certain times of the year, but, again, is a capacity

¹⁸⁸ In this way, to borrow from epistemology, it is parallel to truths of introspection such as ‘it is true that I am happy’.

¹⁸⁹ As we will see later, the language of knowledge is often used of practitioners of this kind of divination. See e.g. ii. 170, where Halitherses prophesies as one well knowing (μαντεύομαι... ἐδὲ εἰδώς); I. 70, where Calchas *knows* what was, is, and will be; and XIII. 663 for the seer’s name ‘Polyeidus’.

integral to the subject. Whether implicitly or explicitly, scholars have already noted that there is this third kind of intuitive divination, which is present especially but by no means only in Homer.¹⁹⁰

There is much mixing of different categories of divination: it is the paradigmatic examples of each category that allow separation of one from the other. Theoclymenus provides such a paradigmatic, unmixed example at xx.350-71. For a relatively prominent figure in the poem, he has received scant attention from scholars, and, most relevantly for my current purposes, despite the numerous book-length treatments and legion essays on the topic, he has received almost no attention in the field of Greek / Near-Eastern comparison, whether regarding divination or otherwise.¹⁹¹ It is no co-incidence that he has not been made to line up with Near-Eastern practice: I will later argue that what he is, says, and does is deeply traditional, and finds numerous structured parallels in the Indian tradition. I will treat him in detail later in the thesis, and will subject his extraordinary vision in *Odyssey* xx to close comparative analysis. Here, I content myself with some observations on the speech he makes afterwards.

It is the eve of the slaughter, and the Suitors are dining. Athena has them laugh ghoulishly, and besmears their meat with blood. Without warning, the visiting *Mantis* Theoclymenus stands and addresses the ‘wretched’ (δειλοί) Suitors, declaring that their heads are shrouded in night, a wail has blazed forth, blood runs down the walls, the porch is full of ghosts heading to Erebus, the sun has been obliterated from the sky, and an evil mist has come on. The Suitor Eurymachus, not addressing the *Mantis*, says that he is mad (ἄφραίνει), and calls on the young men to lead him out. I quote Theoclymenus’ rejoinder in full:

“Εὐρύμαχ’, οὗ τί σ’ ἄνωγα ἐμοὶ πομπῆας ὀπάζειν

εἴσι μοι ὀφθαλμοὶ τε καὶ οὐατα καὶ πόδες ἄμφω

καὶ νόος ἐν στήθεσσι τετυγμένος οὐδὲν ἀεικής·

τοῖς ἔξειμι θύραζε, ἐπεὶ νοέω κακὸν ὕμιν

ἐρχόμενον· τό κεν οὗ τις ὑπεκφύγοι οὐδ’ ἀλέαιτο

¹⁹⁰ See, implicitly, Roth, 1982, 43; Flower’s three page discussion is the longest that I can find on the subject (2008, 87-9). He notes that the Platonic inductive / ecstatic distinction does not allow for it, and appreciates two points on which I will insist, that this kind of divination relies on ‘an intuitive ability to see things that others cannot see’, and that ‘We would not call this “possession”, for Calchas is not in an ecstatic state; rather, he operates by prophetic intuition’ (ibid. 87, 88). H. W. Parke, in a still valuable discussion of prophets and oracles in Homer beginning from first principles, rightly but cautiously notes that Calchas’ power of divination ‘To some extent... seems to be the result of an inborn intuition of the god’s will’ (1967, 13), and shortly after rebuffs previous suggestions that Homer only knew sign divination (ibid. 15). He calls Theoclymenus’ prophecy, which I discuss immediately below, ‘ecstatic’, but does not clearly define his use of the term and its relation to Calchas’ ‘inborn intuition’ (16, 19).

¹⁹¹ Bruce Louden observes, almost in passing, that the blood in Theoclymenus’ vision recalls some apocalyptic imagery from the Hebrew Bible (2011, 293).

μνηστήρων, οἱ δῶμα κάτ' ἀντιθέου Ὀδυσῆος
ἀνέρας ὑβρίζοντες ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάασθε.”

“Eurymachus, I did not ask you to provide me with escorts.

I have eyes and ears and feet

And a mind in my breast – no paltry one:

I shall leave by means of these, since I perceive a great ill

Coming on, which none of you Suitors may escape or

Evade, you who in the house of god-like Odysseus

Insult men and work sinful deeds.”

(xx.364-70)

Theoclymenus is prompted by no bird or liver. Although he says that he sees that the Suitors are in grave danger, he is not specific: at 368-9 he implies that he is not saying all that he knows. This sort of piecemeal allusion to coming ill is poetically effective and often employed in Greek literature.¹⁹² It is equally manifest that Theoclymenus is not mad. His response is temperate, if indignant, and explicitly rejects the charge of madness at 367. That the charge of madness is used to detract from prophetic validity, and rebuffed in order to re-assert it, suggests that the idea of prophecy dependent on a change of mental state (and so a kind of madness) had not yet entered the culture.¹⁹³ The verb *voέω* in 367 is eloquent of the underlying mechanism of the prophecy. It is of course a denominative from *voός*, and denotes mental action – *LSJ* sense A. 2, ‘perceive by the mind’, seems most apt here. This is direct perception, unmediated by sign or divine intervention of any kind. Theoclymenus, after the dismissal of the suggestive images of his first speech, in effect interprets them for his audience (and Homer’s). While there is no Homeric parallel for the first, visionary aspect of this scene, as we will see later, Theoclymenus’ images are often repeated in Greek literature, and these and other aspects are spectacularly taken up by Aeschylus’ Cassandra (*Ag.* 1072-1330, discussed at greater length in the next chapter).

¹⁹² *Oedipus Rex* would have been a much shorter play if Teiresias had been readier to spill the beans. But reticence may be motivated, as Calchas who fears reprisal if he speaks the truth (I.68-83).

¹⁹³ Significantly, once ecstatic prophecy had established itself in Greek culture in the Classical era, and madness was drawn into the complex of ideas to do with divination, it is foolishness rather than madness which is used to derogate from the validity of an unwelcome prophecy, see e.g. *μωρία* of Teiresias at Eur. *Ba.* 344, and *μῶρα* of the same at Soph. *OT.* 433.

Prophecies dependent on this capacity but without accompanying vision abound in Homer.¹⁹⁴ Teiresias is perhaps the most prominent exponent of this type of prophecy throughout Greek literature. He is, crucially, *blind*. He is therefore incapable of sign divination.¹⁹⁵ He intuitively relates to Odysseus in the Underworld the future (Odysseus' journey home will be onerous), the past (Odysseus blinded the Cyclops), and the moods of the gods (Poseidon is angry; xi.90-138). Teiresias foresees that Odysseus will come home, find the Suitors there, kill them, and set off on another journey. He can even see different possible homecomings – with or without comrades, depending on whether they eat the cattle of Helios on Thrinacia.¹⁹⁶ As Circe says, Persephone grants understanding (again, νόον) to Teiresias alone among the dead; the rest flit about vainly.¹⁹⁷ We will see later the importance of the concept of divine giftedness among practitioners of intuitive prophecy. The surety, clarity, and specificity of his pronouncements make it quite unlike the kinds of divination seen above.

There are hints that Circe too, among her other powers, has this kind of ability. She says to Odysseus that he needn't explain to her his travails, since she already knows all of them.¹⁹⁸ Yet this does not mean that she is omniscient – she seems not to know whether he is fated to return to Ithaca.¹⁹⁹ Narrative concerns intrude here, since, if Circe were able to prophesy in the manner of Teiresias, there would be no need of the dramatic journey to the Underworld to see him. Conversely, by allowing Circe supernatural knowledge of Odysseus' adventures, the poet forestalls the recounting of what the audience already knows. Homer allows for the precise amount of foreknowledge necessary to maximise dramatic effect, which is always the poet's priority, rather than consistency.²⁰⁰ Importantly, gods are by no means always endowed with intuitive mantic ability; indeed, as Apollo says to Hermes in his Homeric Hymn, prophecy is his and Zeus' domain alone among the gods (533-8). While Apollo's statement is not borne

¹⁹⁴ Oddly, some scholars have denied their existence at all – see Roth 1982, 78, and 109 n.3, for references to some of these denials.

¹⁹⁵ The *Odyssey* does not explicitly say that he is blind but does perhaps imply it in the mention of his bearing a golden staff (χρύσειον σκῆπτρον ἔχων, xi.91). It could equally merely betoken his status. Aeschylus squares the circle. Eteocles thus announces that Teiresias has foreseen a coming attack – νῦν δ' ὥς ὁ μάντις φησὶν, οἰωνῶν βοτήρ, | ἐν ᾧ σὶ νωμῶν καὶ φρεσὶν, πυρὸς δίχα, | χρηστηρίους ὄρνιθας ἀψευδεῖ τέχνῃ, 'But now as the *Mantis* says, the herdsman of bird-omens, | inspecting with his ears and mind, without using sacrificial fire, | the divinatory birds with unerring skill...' (Sept.24-26). For more mixed examples in which seers use an intuitive ability to read signs, see below.

¹⁹⁶ In this way the problem of predetermination and free will is partially avoided. Teiresias' drinking of the black ram's blood at 95-99 introduces a magic element to the prophecy, and is no doubt related to the ghoulish situation in the Underworld. There is no reason to believe that his prophetic ability depends on the sacrifice.

¹⁹⁷ "ταῖ καὶ τεθνηῶτι νόον πόρε Φερσεφόνηια | οἶαι πεπνύσθαι, τοὶ δὲ σκῆλαι ἄϊσσουσιν," x.494-5.

¹⁹⁸ "οἶδα καὶ αὐτή, | ἡμὲν ὅς' ἐν πόντῳ πάθετ' ἄλγεα ἰχθυόεντι | ἡδ' ὅς' ἀνάρσιοι ἄνδρες ἐδηλήσαντ' ἐπὶ χέρσου," x.457-9.

¹⁹⁹ "εἴ τοι θέσφατόν ἐστι σωθῆναι καὶ ἰκέσθαι οἶκον | ἐξ ὑπόροφον καὶ σῆν ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν." x.473-4.

²⁰⁰ A point not lost on Oliver Taplin, who observes that Thetis does not know of Patroclus' fate at XVIII.73-77 (1992, 198-99).

out in literature, it does attest to an important conceptual division.²⁰¹ Intuitive prophecy is conceptually divisible from godhead and should not be discounted as a mere part of what it is to be divine. Moreover, even Zeus, when a myth requires it, can be ignorant of the future. For example, in a well-known myth (told most clearly at Pin. I.27-36, but also at e.g. [Aes.] P.V.768 and Ap. Rhod. 8.799-804), Zeus lusts after Thetis unaware that her son is fated to be greater than his father. It falls to another (Themis in Pindar, Prometheus in [Aeschylus]) to announce this prophecy, which puts Zeus off and ensures that Thetis is granted only a mortal husband.

She herself shows prophetic ability. She tells her son of two possible fates (διχθαδίας κῆρας, IX.411): if he stays at Troy, he will die young but his fame will be imperishable, but if he returns home to Phthia, though unknown, he will live a long life (IX.410-16). Achilles' mind is made up, and he is tragically aware of the ramifications of his decision to fight at Troy from the start of the poem (I.352).²⁰² Thetis' awareness of this early death is manifest also at I.414-18; at XVIII.95-6, she adds the detail that his death will follow soon after Hector's: Homer, here in tragic key, intratextually uses characters looking forward into their future in order to give the audience, extratextually, a glimpse of the narrative's future. Here, unlike in the *Odyssey*, this generates pathos. We will see time and again how poets use divination in this way. Thetis' ability to hear her son from under the sea in that scene also reminds one of the supernatural perception of Calchas, Cassandra, and Lynceus, which I discuss below (I.357-8).

There is, moreover, an Odyssean parallel for the supernatural knowledge of sea-gods. Perhaps Proteus, the old man of the sea, knows from regular experience everything about the sea (as his daughter Eidothea tells Menelaus at iv.385-6) and about the watery end of Ajax (iv.499-511), just as he knows by normal means that Odysseus is on Calypso's isle (τὸν ἴδον, iv.556). But he is also able to tell Menelaus everything, good or bad, that has happened at home in his absence (iv.391-3), he already knows who Menelaus is and what he has suffered (iv.465-7),²⁰³ he can recapitulate in detail the vicissitudes of Agamemnon after his return (iv.521-537), and foreknows that Orestes will slay Aegisthus (but not when precisely, iv.546-7). Despite this unerring (νημερτής, iv.542) supernatural knowledge, he is, again, not

²⁰¹ And so what Menelaus says at iv.379, that the gods know all things (θεοὶ δέ τε πάντα ἴσασιν), is misleading (see further de Jong, 2001, *ad loc.*). Gods are neither omniscient nor omnipotent – not even Zeus, who is constrained by fate at XVI.433-4, and thoroughly deceived by Hera at XIV.153-353. Apollo himself is successfully hoodwinked by Hermes, though he is eventually undeceived (HH. 4.69-395).

²⁰² Though it is only in Book IX that we understand his early death to be dependent on his own choice. We find no Greek examples of bifurcated prophecy of this sort depending on sign divination; indeed it is unclear how this would work in practice given the limitations of the necessarily binary results it gives.

²⁰³ His words here are suspiciously similar to Circe's to Odysseus at x. 457-9. The presence of traditional language here presupposes the traditionality of intuitive knowledge itself.

omniscient, and Menelaus is able to sneak up and get the better of him.²⁰⁴ This is somewhat analogous to Calchas' fear that Agamemnon might avenge himself if he speaks out against him; Calchas is afraid because he does not know what will happen – again, prophetic power does not imply omniscience, either in a god or a mortal (I.73-83). Like Calchas, Proteus knows just enough to play to perfection the role which the poet requires of him – he is bringer of news about Odysseus to Telemachus, aid to Menelaus in his *nostos*, and provider of picturesque tales about Ajax and Agamemnon.²⁰⁵

Achilles is twice reminded of his imminent death through intuitive prophecy. As I show in the next chapter, both examples find rich parallels in Indo-European and especially Indian traditions. The wounded Hector's words to Achilles bring new specificity to what Thetis has already told him: "... On the day, whenever it is, that Paris and Phoebus Apollo | Shall slay you, supreme as you are, by the Scaian gates."²⁰⁶ He dies in the next line. Hector, of course, is no *Mantis*, and shows no signs of prophetic ability elsewhere in the text. Naturally, such prophecy can only be intuitive. Homer bends his own rules. As ever, rules around prophecy are always subordinate to the creation of effective poetry, and not *vice versa*. These words find an exact parallel in the dying words of Patroclus to his killer, Hector: "You yourself shall not live much longer, for Death | And mighty Fate are already stood close by | Ready to tame you by the hands of blameless Achilles, grandson of Aeacus."²⁰⁷ He too dies in the following line. Hector's indignant reply asks why Patroclus prophesies (μαντεύει) his death, when no-one can know whether Achilles will in fact die first by his hand (XVI.859-61). Hector's use of μαντεύει is ironic – he does not believe that Patroclus can prophesy. The audience knows better. The rejection of a prophecy by its recipient draws Patroclus' words and Hector's reaction into typical patterns of literary divination. We saw above how Eurymachus arrogantly ignores Theoclymenus, as he does Halitherses at ii.177-93, and earlier in the *Iliad* Hector himself not only rejects Polydamas' ornithomancy but casts doubt over it as an institution (XII.231-43). As the audience knows, and as I set out in my fourth chapter, ignoring prophecy is the prerogative of the doomed in Greek and Indian Epic.

Achilles' other reminder of his imminent death comes from his divine horse, Xanthus, who is temporarily given a voice by Hera. Xanthus tells him that it is fated that he will die at the hands of a god and a mortal (XIX.416-7). Achilles asks why Xanthus prophesies (again μαντεύει) his death, since he already knows it. He ignores the detail that he will die at the hands of a god and a mortal, of which, as far

²⁰⁴ οὐδέ τι θυμῷ οἴσθη δόλον εἶναι, iv.452-3. Individual gods when they prophesy are not to be equated to the vaguer divine power (sometimes but not always fate or the will of Zeus) on which sign divination depends.

²⁰⁵ As I noted above, very early Greek history is either archaeology or early Greek poetry, and so it is impossible to know how this suspiciously poetically expedient prophecy was related to historical practice.

²⁰⁶ "ἤματι τῷ ὅτε κέν σε Πάρις καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων | ἐσθλὸν ἔοντ' ὀλέσωσιν ἐνὶ Σκαιῇσι πύλῃσιν," XXII.359-60.

²⁰⁷ "οὐ θῆν οὐδ' αὐτὸς δηρὸν βέη, ἀλλὰ τοι ἤδη | ἄγχι παρέστηκεν θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή | χερσὶ δαμέντ' Ἀχιλλῆος ἀμύμονος Αἰακίδαο." XVI.852-4

as we are told, Achilles was not previously aware.²⁰⁸ A sort of intuitive awareness in the horses is also implied at XVII.427-8, where we are told that they were the first to know of Patroclus' death.

In the preceding section, I insisted on the limitations on the kind of knowledge available from sign divination. Information so granted is delimited pragmatically, closely tied to context, and consists in the verification or denial of a proposition – whether expressed in a question or deducible from context, e.g. victory in a battle. I did so because it is possible in this way to recognise the method of divination used to arrive at certain information by considering the nature of that information. In other words, when we are not explicitly told by what method of divination certain information is gained, we can deduce what that method was through the specificity of the information so derived. This allows us to discern many more instances of intuitive divination in Homer and throughout Greek literature.

There are four good Homeric examples of this – one in the *Iliad* and three in the *Odyssey*. As Odysseus sails away having blinded him, Polyphemus says that long ago Telemus son of Eurymus, best in the art of the *Mantis* (μαντοσύνη ἐκέκαστο, IX.509), prophesied (μαντευόμενος κατεγήρα, IX.510) that a man called Odysseus would deprive him of his sight. Polyphemus did not doubt it, but only expected that it would be a big and strong man, not a small one like Odysseus (IX.506-16). There is also the curious prophecy of King Nausithous, Alcinous' father, about the destruction of the Phaeacians, alluded to first at viii.564-71. According to Alcinous, he was wont to say (ἔφασκε, viii.565) that Poseidon was wroth with the Phaeacians because they provide safe passage to everyone, and that eventually he would smash one of their ships and cover their city with a great mountain (μέγα δ' ἦμιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψειν, viii.569), but Alcinous is not sure if that will come to pass. However, when the ship which brought Odysseus back to Ithaca is almost home, Poseidon, newly apprised of Odysseus' return and angry with Phaeacians, turns it to stone (xiii.159-62). Its crew are amazed, and Alcinous sees the fulfilment of the prophecy. He suggests that they sacrifice to Poseidon to avert the ruinous second part of the prophecy. The action then cuts to Odysseus, and we are told no more (xiii.165-87). This is a problematic passage. Perhaps it is relevant that gods sometimes throw around mountains in Sanskrit literature, perhaps not. For my present purposes it is enough to note that the other kinds of Greek divination would clearly not be able to furnish such specificity.

At XIII.663-72, as the battle rages around the Achaean ships, the poet introduces Euchenor, the son of the *Mantis* Polyeidus, a rich and good man. He went to Troy like Achilles in the knowledge that he

²⁰⁸ There is a crescendo of specificity: this prophecy is introduced after Thetis' that he will die at Troy and before Hector's that he will die at the hands of Paris and Apollo. Heroes' horses, although they do not speak, are often aware of their masters' coming deaths in Sanskrit epic. They usually express this by weeping, as Achilles' steeds Xanthus and Ballius weep after Patroclus' death at XVII. 426-8. See further my fourth chapter, pp. 208-12.

was fated to die there, since his father had often told him that he would either die in battle at Troy or at home of disease. He is accordingly dispatched by Paris. The references to wealth and a palace will be relevant later in my thesis, where I set out the high status of *Manteis* (pp. 254-60). His bifurcated fate is of course reminiscent of Achilles' διχθαδίας κῆρας and Teiresias' comments on the uncertain *nostoi* of Odysseus' companions (see above). A similar level of detail is found, lastly, in Halitherses' prophecy at Odysseus' departure, of which he reminds the Suitors after interpreting a bird omen. At that time, he had said that Odysseus, after much suffering and having lost all of his companions would return, unknown, twenty years later. He reiterates this at the assembly.²⁰⁹ Hesiod too furnishes one example: Gaia and Ouranos tell Kronos that he is fated to be overthrown by his son (*Th.*463-65).²¹⁰ It is impossible to imagine these two diving from ornithomancy. Again, these must be included among examples of intuitive divination, because it is impossible that signs should give such specific information.

In my definition of intuitive divination above, I also included a spatial element to the supernatural knowledge. Calchas, we are told, guided the Achaean ships to Troy *through his divinatory power*, which Apollo had given him (ἦν διὰ μαντοσύνην, τὴν οἱ πόρε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων, I.72). This is important, as it states clearly that mastery of objects in space not only goes along with that of events in time, but that these two depend on one and the same ability, denoted by the Greek word μαντοσύνη. Noteworthy in this regard is the close connection between seeing and knowing in Greek culture, emblematised by the verb οἶδα, an old perfect from the ἴδ- 'see' root. Accordingly, it is no co-incidence that Cassandra is the first to see Priam returning with Hector's corpse, but precisely because of the enhanced spatial awareness that her gift affords her (XXIV.697-702). Even if he is not explicit about the reason, the poet is emphatic that she is first: 'Nor did any other | Of men and well-girdled women recognise [them] before, | But it was, indeed, Cassandra, like to golden Aphrodite, who... | perceived...'.²¹¹ The poet is also clear that she is immediately able to discern not just a wagon in the distance, but that it contains her father, the herald, and the body of Hector lying on the bier (XXIV.700-2). The poet uses her intuition to ensure that the perception of Hector, and hence its impact, is immediate. The same word, εἰσενόησεν, is used (in simplex form) of Theoclymenus' perception of the ill coming upon the Suitors. Indeed, the poet avoids the usual sight words ὁρᾶν and ἰδεῖν beforehand too, where Cassandra is the first to 'recognise' (ἔγνω), not to 'see'.

²⁰⁹ “φῆν κακὰ πολλὰ παθόντ’, ὀλέσαντ’ ἀπο πάντας ἐταίρους, | ἄγνωτον πάντεσσιν ἑικοστῷ ἐνιαυτῷ | οἴκαδ’ ἐλεύσεσθαι· τὰ δὲ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται” ii. 174-76.

²¹⁰ πεύθετο γὰρ Γαίης τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, | οὐνεκά οἱ πέπρωτο ἐφ’ ὑπὸ παιδὶ δαμῆναι | καὶ κρατερῷ περ ἐόντι, Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλᾶς. The clear implication here is that they know beforehand the course of fate. When they tell Zeus to eat his wife, Metis, at 891, to avoid a too powerful child, this is framed as φραδομοσύνησι – ‘advice’, rather than prophecy, *pace* West, 1966, *ad* 463.

²¹¹ οὐδέ τις ἄλλος | ἔγνω πρόσθ’ ἀνδρῶν καλλιζώνων τε γυναικῶν, | ἀλλ’ ἄρα Κασσάνδρῃ ἱκέλη χρυσῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ... | εἰσενόησεν XXIV.697-700. My translation here is awkwardly literal to get this point across. Again, this recalls XVII.427-8, where Achilles' divine horses' are the first to know of Patroclus' death.

There is afterwards a reversion to more usual vocabulary as she enjoins her countrymen to come and ‘look’ at Hector (ὄψεσθε Τρῶες καὶ Τρωάδεις Ἴκτορ ἰόντες, XXIV.704). Homer chooses his verbs carefully to suggest supernatural perception, even if he is never explicit on the point.

There are numerous early parallels: in the Hesiodic *Melampodia*, as Strabo relates, Calchas, on returning from Troy, meets the seer Mopsus and challenges him to count the number of figs on a particularly fecund fig-tree. When Mopsus correctly does so, Calchas dies on the spot of astonishment and jealousy (Fr. 214 [Most] = Str. 14. 1.27).²¹² Strabo also relates another tradition, which he attributes to Pherecydes, in which the question was how many piglets there were in a sow’s womb, what gender they were, and when they were going to be born (Fr. 142 [Fowler] = Str. 14. 1.27). The same result ensues.²¹³ In the *Cypria*, Lynceus is gifted with miraculously keen eyesight. As we know from Apollodorus 3. 11.2 and a scholion on Pindar (*Nem.* 10.114a), Lynceus, in search of the Dioscuri who have stolen his cattle, scales Mount Taygetus, the highest peak in the Peloponnese, scans the whole peninsula, and sees the Dioscuri hiding in the hollow of an oak. The scholion quotes some lines from the *Cypria* (Fr. 16), whose poet uses the rare verb διεδέρκετο, again marking Lynceus’ vision as extraordinary through vocabulary.²¹⁴ Pindar, who retells the story, uses the extraordinary *hapax* πεδαυγάζων ἴδεν (*Ne.* 10.61). Lynceus’ very name is connected to the Greek and English word ‘lynx’, an animal with extraordinarily powerful eyesight. Indeed, the etymology of ‘lynx’ may be related to PIE **leuk*, ‘to see’ (Beekes, 2010, *ad loc.*). Lynceus’ supernatural eyesight is as traditional as he is. Lastly, Apollodorus (among others) tells us that in the Epic Cycle both Cassandra and Laocoön warn that the Horse contains soldiers (*Epit.* 5. 17-18). The details of the scene(s) remain obscure, as, indeed, in which poems they belong.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, the perception of the soldiers inside the Wooden Horse is a good example of the smudging of the etic distinction between prophecy and magical sight, which, emically, is simply μαντοσύνη. It is not a distinction and so not a question that would ever have occurred to a Greek audience member.

Finally, there are a couple of cases in Homer which blend the intuitive and sign types of divination.²¹⁶ Apollo and Athena have agreed that one of the Achaeans will duel with Hector. The Trojan seer Helenus supernaturally perceives (σύνθετο, VII.44) this, and encourages Hector to call forth one of

²¹² The fragment doesn’t use a verb for Mopsus’ perception, but εἶδετο is used of the empirical confirmation of his statement (5).

²¹³ West sees this as an Indo-European story pattern, paralleled in Nordic Myth and in India in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 3. 9.26, see West 2007, 74 and 2013, 257.

²¹⁴ The word is used only here, at XIV.344, and at Theoc. *Id.* 25.233 before the turn of the millennium.

²¹⁵ Certainly Laocoön in the *Iliou Persis*, but maybe also Cassandra. According to West, Cassandra’s warning was originally in the *Little Iliad* (2013, 227-9).

²¹⁶ This blending on the level of practice is mirrored on the level of practitioner: we will later see how the figure of the *Mantis* occupies himself with all kinds of divination. These are the porous boundaries of which Flower writes (see my n. 5). But, again, conceptual boundaries do not have to be absolute to be real.

the Achaeans to a duel (VII.46-51). He reassures him that it is not yet his fate to die, since he has heard the voice of the gods.²¹⁷ Naturally, this bridging of the divine and human planes is a useful plot device which moves the action quickly forward, but, importantly, it also shows that such perception is a possibility in the Homeric universe: the poet might just as easily have had Athena or Apollo plant the idea into Hector's *thumos*, or appeared in an epiphany in the guise of another Trojan, as happens elsewhere.²¹⁸ Again, there is no trace of possession, a change in Helenus' mental state, or a divine effort in some way to enter his mind. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see how belief in divinatory possession could take root in a culture where seers (at least in poetry) are able to hear the voice of the gods. I class this as mixed because Helenus' knowledge of the future is mediated through a kind of sign – the god's words.

The μέγα σῆμα related by Odysseus in the *Iliad* is an intriguing example of mixing of types. The Achaeans are on the way to Troy and have stopped at Aulis. The context is a sacrifice, a moment of convergence of divine and human spheres.²¹⁹ A snake appears by the altar, and darts towards a nearby plane-tree, cowering on a branch of which is a sparrow with her eight chicks. The snake devours them all, and Zeus, who had sent forth the snake, then turned it into stone. Amid the general astonishment, Calchas steps forward and interprets this as an omen from Zeus, according to which the Achaeans will toil for nine years at Troy and take the city in the tenth (II.299-330). It is repeatedly made explicit that Zeus sends the snake (309, 318-9, 324), and it is introduced as a great sign, μέγα σῆμα – its credentials as an omen are not to be doubted by internal nor external audience.²²⁰ On the other hand, there is a strong divergence between this and the simple, binary sign divination elsewhere in Homer (let alone the labyrinthine elaborations of Mesopotamian and Hittite divination). Interpretation here is much freer, and it takes a seer to step up and, amid general incomprehension, recognise and interpret the omen.²²¹ No consideration of rules or context could lead to the interpretation given by Calchas here: perforce, he relies on a supernatural ability.²²² As Cicero rightly asks, why should the sparrows represent years and not months or

²¹⁷ “οὐ γάρ πώ τοι μοῖρα θανεῖν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν: | ὥς γὰρ ἐγὼ ὅπ’ ἄκουσα θεῶν αἰγιγενετάων”, VII. 52-3.

²¹⁸ While supernatural aural perception is not paralleled in Homer apart from, as we saw, once by Thetis and Achilles, see e.g. Pind. Ol. 6. 65-7 for a classical parallel, where Apollo gives Iamus the gift of seership, defined as the ability to hear the voice of the gods that does not know how to lie (ἐνθα οἱ ὥπασε θησαυρόν... μαντοσύνας, τόκα μὲν φωνὰν ἀκούειν | ψευδέων ἄγνωστον...).

²¹⁹ Again, the typologically very common tendency to be more receptive to ominous phenomena during sacrifice, of which I take the setting of this omen as evidence, looks forward to the take-up of extispicy two centuries later. See also above, pp. 59-60 for a possible connection between the ritual moment and Vedic ornithomancy.

²²⁰ Odysseus is relating the story – my summary is taken from his direct speech. Presumably he only knows that it is a sign and that it came from Zeus retrospectively, due to the words of Calchas. This explains the violation of ‘Jørgensen’s Law’ (1904).

²²¹ Seers like Halitherses and Theoclymenus elsewhere interpret omens, but do not use their inspired abilities to do so. Omen interpretation is spoken of as if it is a skill at which one can be more or less accomplished.

²²² Aeschylus’ Calchas repeats the trick, not only interpreting the omen of the eagle and the hare in an entirely free way but also correctly diagnosing the correct course of action from it (*Ag.* 122-57).

days? Why should the interpretative focus be on the sparrows and not the petrification?²²³ If it is right, as I and others have argued, that sign divination already in Homer was rendered more binary and rule-based by areal influence, this freer type of sign interpretation might well represent an archaic, traditional form of Greek divination.²²⁴ Theoclymenus' interpretation of a hawk shredding a dove's feathers is another example. He extrapolates from it that Telemachus' family is and will remain the most powerful and royal family in Ithaca.²²⁵

Sign divination is not always a precisely defined discipline in Homer. Sometimes omens are relatively simple, closely defined by their immediate context, and interpretable by non experts. But sometimes, more elaborate omens (or omen interpretations) rely on the intuitive ability of a seer. As Trampedach goes on to say, 'Unlike the mantic professionals in Mesopotamia or Etruria, for example, the Greek seers were not scholars who were bound together by a disciplina and who based themselves on a fixed written canon.' Mixed intuitive divination could be used to fill this gap.

Reflections and Conclusions

I hope by now to have shown that what I call 'intuitive divination' is undeniably present in Homer, even if it is not so prominent as sign divination. It is sometimes situated at the margins of what is possible in the Homeric world, often occurring together with other improbable phenomena – talking horses, shape-shifting sea-gods, silver-footed sea-nymphs, the preternatural laughter of the Suitors, man-eating monsters, magical enchantresses, and blood-guzzling ghosts. But it is no less part of the Homeric world for that, and, moreover, also occurs without any accompanying improbabilities in Homer and elsewhere in

²²³ *De Div.* 2. 30. 65. Collins is right to point to the anachronism of Cicero's analysis here. Perhaps he is 'a forerunner of the intellectualist school of anthropologists who study divination', but I would be inclined to see Cicero as projecting onto Homer later conceptions of divination as a profoundly rule-based practice. Such rule-based, quasi-scientific divination, I repeat, was originally a Hittite / Mesopotamian phenomenon. A sixteenth century BC Assyrian or fourteenth century BC Hittite might also have asked Cicero's questions.

²²⁴ Kai Trampedach discusses the scene at length (2008, Section II). He is right that 'The interpretation follows no definite rule', but we disagree that it 'requires an ability to combine the figurative content of the sign with the actual situation' – I do not see how mere knowledge of the situation is adequate to arrive at Calchas' interpretation. There is a similar case at xv.161-78, where an eagle appears on the right, bearing a goose in its talons. Peisistratus and Menelaus are unsure how to interpret it, but, if it is not purely a metaphor, the gods briefly give Helen the gift of prophecy (αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ μαντεύσομαι, ὥς ἐνὶ θυμῷ | ἀθάνατοι βάλλουσι καὶ ὥς τελέεσθαι οἶω, 172-3). She declares as its meaning that Odysseus will soon return and destroy the Suitors. Unlike Calchas, however, she substantiates her interpretation through analogies between Odysseus and the eagle. Moreover, the people who rejoice at the sight of the omen must have correctly interpreted it too, which contrasts with the shocked incomprehension of the Achaeans (xv. 164-5). In mixed cases, either the intuitive or the rule-based element can preponderate.

²²⁵ "ὕμετέρου δ' οὐκ ἔστι γένος βασιλεύτερον ἄλλο | ἐν δῆμῳ Ἰθάκης, ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς καρτεροὶ αἰεὶ." xv.533-4

other early Greek literature – as we have seen from my mentions of Hesiod, Aeschylus, the Epic Cycle, and the Hymns. Near Eastern parallels, whether with Hebrew prophets or Mesopotamian Bārus, are vague and typological-looking – certainly by comparison with the close parallels I find in Sanskrit literature.²²⁶

A philosophical concept can help to draw out the profound underlying difference between this kind of divination and the first two kinds which I discussed. The Correspondence Theory has been one of the most influential theories of truth in the history of western Epistemology.²²⁷ It states that a belief is true if and only if it corresponds to a state of affairs which obtains in the world. Such a state of affairs can be said, therefore, to be the truth-maker of the belief. The truth-maker for beliefs dependent on intuitive divination is identical to the truth-maker for beliefs about the external world dependent on normal means: just as my belief that there is a cup of coffee on the table is made true (or veridical) by there being a cup of coffee, a table, and a relation of on-ness between the two, so Theoclymenus' belief that the Suitors will be killed is made true by the fact of their being about to be killed (here *intuitively* perceived). This future state of affairs is sometimes but not always formulated as fated. By contrast, there is an extra step in sign divination. Odysseus' belief that the Suitors will be killed is dependent on the bird (that is, the word) of Zeus – it is effectively a testimony, a pledge on the part of the gods that they will bring about the state of affairs which is the truth-maker of the belief. This is equally true of the god who speaks through a possessed human. Perhaps this is one reason why, in the hierarchy of epistemic reliability among mechanisms of divination in Greek poetry, intuitive divination ranks higher than sign divination.²²⁸ When its messages are rejected, it is the individual and their divinatory credentials which are besmirched, and never the institution of intuitive divination itself. By contrast, the validity of ornithomancy is already questioned in the *Iliad* (XII.230-50).²²⁹

And so sign and ecstatic divination are radically distinguishable from intuitive divination because they rely (for the Greeks, if not always for the Mesopotamians and Hittites) on the will of the gods who send the signs or enact the possession.²³⁰ Signs must always be interpreted, and very often the words of the possessed too – in the case of the words of the Pythia, twice: first by the priests who formulate (and

²²⁶ For more on the interaction between Near Eastern and IE comparison, see my introduction, pp. 4-14.

²²⁷ Its validity is nowadays generally thought to be limited to certain kinds of belief, but it is those kinds of belief which I treat here and I do not go into detail.

²²⁸ For more on such hierarchies, with typological parallels, see Flower, 2008, 145.

²²⁹ More accurately, Hector expresses a preference for intuitive over sign divination: it is a comparative disdain. This scene points towards an antagonism and *a fortiori* an emic distinction between the two. Hector doesn't give his reasons, but the fact that he prefers the method which I am arguing is more deeply embedded in the culture may not be irrelevant. Poetry is not theology.

²³⁰ The fact that gods too can receive messages through sign divination (e.g. by Hermes in his Hymn at 30, and by Apollo at 213-4) does not mean that omens are in some way above and beyond the divine. Such exceptions are very rare in archaic literature, and, here, are due to the hymnic genre and the irreverent anthropomorphosis of the gods in this rambunctious poem.

perhaps versify) her response, and then by the recipient(s), who must decode her answer. For Kim Beerden, indeed, the words of the possessed prophet are the sign to be decoded, and so analogous to any other kind of sign (2013, 20). This equivalence works better in enigmatic cases. By contrast, the gods play no part in intuitive divination. This rather depends on the inborn capacity of the seer (although this itself may be god given). It communicates lucidly: even when it takes the form of a vision, its meaning is then made explicit by the seer himself (as we saw with Theoclymenus, and will see in the third chapter with Cassandra).²³¹ It is for this reason that I made no mention of the divine in the necessary condition of my definition of divination at the start of this chapter.

In the next chapter, having made these important distinctions between different kinds of divination, I turn to the *Rig Veda* and Sanskrit epic. I will argue that, while there are few parallels for the kinds of divination most closely paralleled by Near-Eastern practices, there are, as I have sometimes alluded to along the way, strong, structured, and particular parallels for divination of the intuitive kind; I make the case for shared inheritance in this area.

²³¹ See also Penelope's dream, which interprets itself through the words of the eagle (xix. 546-50).

Chapter II – Intuitive Divination: Affinity and What to Make of it

This chapter treats the commonalities between divination in early Greek and Indian literature. I will argue that these are so profound that they can only be explained by inheritance from the time when those cultures were one, and that full appreciation of this helps to shed new light on old texts. It will show in action the methodology outlined in the Introduction.

Indo-Greek Methodological Matters

The oldest extant Indian literature is six or seven hundred years older than Homer, and after its first attestation proliferates at a faster rate.²³² Indian practices of authorship make dating these early texts extremely difficult. Already the earliest layers of the Vedas are collections composed by different authors over centuries; these were themselves the kernels around which enormous swathes of supplementary material later accreted, usually regarding the correct performance of ritual. The same goes for the two epic poems, which were composed by many hands over many centuries.²³³ The wholesale dating of texts is therefore impossible, and I take care to mention, where possible and where necessary, to which level of the text each section can be attributed. While this is an important caveat, it cannot be assumed that what is old is conservative and preserves material of Indo-European pedigree. Time itself influences nothing, but is merely the space in which cultures develop or react.

²³² Based on traditionally accepted datings of the fourteenth to eleventh centuries BC for the *RV* and the eighth century BC for the *Iliad*.

²³³ I am not convinced by arguments to the contrary, as in the work of, most prominently, Madeleine Biardeau and Alf Hiltebeitel (see bibliography for representative works, with critical review by Mary Brockington), but align myself with the ‘analyst’ school of, among others, E.W. Hopkins and John Brockington. Easy parallels with the analyst and unitarian schools of Homeric scholarship are inappropriate, despite the overlapping terminology. The *Mahābhārata* alone is about ten times the length of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined, and received its first complete critical edition about two millennia after the Alexandrian editions of Homer. (There had long been emic editing processes, but these were non-systematic.)

Diffusion, Confusion

Between 327 and 325 BC, vast areas of the north-western sub-continent, from Balochistan through the Indus basin, from Kashmir into Hindu Kush, were conquered by Alexander. After his death, the lands deepest into the sub-continent were immediately reconquered by Candragupta Maurya, himself the founder of a vast empire and a cardinal figure in Indian history. The regions towards Bactria (roughly modern Afghanistan) remained in Seleucid hands until around 250, when Diodorus I gained sovereignty over them, winning lands which stretched from the banks of the Indus in the South-East, west to the Caspian, and north into western Kazakhstan – the so-called ‘Greco-Bactrian’ kingdom. Further campaigns from that base into northern India from the early second century spawned various Indo-Greek kingdoms, which themselves grew into independent states. The last of them survived into the final decades of the first century BC, by which time native empires had fully reasserted themselves.

Although politically and geographically isolated from Greece, these kingdoms did introduce certain elements of Greek culture into the sub-continent. Greek inscriptions are first attested in South Asia’s northwestern corner in the time of Candragupta in the late fourth century BC. It is now widely recognised that there were Greek influences in the material culture of that northwestern corner, most notably that of Gandhāra, but also elsewhere.²³⁴ If we follow traditional estimates for their composition, the dating would also allow for the possibility of Greek influence in the later parts of the epics: E. W. Hopkins’ view which sets the start of the compositional process at around 400 BC and the final limits at around 400 AD remains generally accepted.²³⁵ The *Rāmāyaṇa* is generally considered to have been begun a century or so later than the *Mahābhārata*, and to have been textually fixed at around the same time – even if it seems much more substantially the work of one man, that is, to have undergone much less interpolation (inasmuch as it makes sense to talk of such within the ancient Indian notion of Epic authorship).²³⁶ This temporal overlap has been enough for ‘diffusiomania’ to spread like canker through the field. In the following section, I repudiate diffusion as a legitimate inference to make from the similarities of the two Epic traditions in the vast majority of cases. The stakes are naturally high: if later Greek-Indian diffusion can rival inheritance as an explanation for similarities in the Epic traditions, this

²³⁴ The fundamental treatment from within Western Classics is chapter 6 of John Boardman, 2015. See also the long introduction of Wladimir Zwalf, 1996.

²³⁵ 1901, 397-8. See further the lucid discussion of Naama Shalom, with valuable summaries of previous scholars’ views (Maurice Winternitz, Hopkins, James Fitzgerald, 2017, chap. 4, esp. 107-117), and the magisterial treatment of John Brockington, who raises the first date slightly to the sixth century BC (1998, 130-58). For the Vedic roots of Epic.

²³⁶ See further Brockington, 1998, 377-97.

would cast a pall of scepticism over my observations. It is for this reason that, although there is not much of a case to be made for diffusion, few serious scholars have put it forward, and the prospect of Greek influence is entirely ignored by scholars of Indian Epic, I aim to take seriously and demolish whatever case there is, however flimsy.

Firstly, the chronological window should not be exaggerated – a couple of centuries of contact is a short period for influence to take root and blossom. Moreover, even at the moment of Alexander’s arrival, the overarching epic stories, along with many of their details, were already formed, and so any comparison with Greek material on that level must be discounted. And there would necessarily be an abatement in the intensity of influence with the political decline of the Indo-Greek kingdoms in the first century BC. This rather limited timescale erodes confidence in the exertion of Greek literary influence *a priori* right from the start. Finally, it is generally possible to single out and privilege early Epic material for which influence is drastically less likely even than the notionally debatable later influence.²³⁷

Although, as noted in the perplexingly sympathetic response to his 2002 work in *The Classical Review*, he was a professor of modern Art History and not Classics (Emily Kearns, 2004, 421), Thomas McEvilley 2002 still provides the most robust defence of transmission in the historical period from India to Greece and *vice versa*, and detailed examination of possible routes of transmission. Although his concern is more philosophy than literature, the issues are substantially alike (although not quite identical – see below). Proponents of diffusion whether between Greece and India or the Near East are sometimes content to take similarity as the only proof that diffusion needs.²³⁸ As I wrote in my introduction, this

²³⁷ For a summary of where the more archaic material lies, see Brockington, 1998, 130-58.

²³⁸ Fernando Wulff Alonso 2008 (translated into English in 2014 by Andrew Morrow) argues that *all* Sanskrit epic is based on Greek epic, though he says *nothing* about methods of transmission: see the devastating but still too kind review by Allen (2015). This is ‘diffusiomania’ at its most facile. The tradition of attributing the similarities between the two traditions entirely to transmission has a long and inglorious history – through Arthur Lillie in 1912 (who argued for influence in the opposite direction, from India to Greece) and Hermann Jacobi (1893, 95-99), as far back as Dio Chrysostom (καὶ παρ’ Ἰνδοῖς φασιν ᾄδεσθαι τὴν Ὅμηρου ποιήσιν, μεταλαμβάντων αὐτὴν εἰς τὴν σφετέραν διάλεκτόν τε καὶ φωνήν, ‘Even among the Indians they say that the poetry of Homer is sung, once they have translated it into their language and dialects’, *Or.* 53. 6-7). He no doubt was referring to the common sight in India of bardic recitation – but naturally of native not foreign poetry. Roberto Morales Harvey, however, takes the passage at face value, cites it at length, and treats it as support for his book’s thesis of Greek literature’s deep infiltration of Epic and dramatic Indian literature (2024, 7-9). There is nothing to be said for such claims.

Fiona Mitchell 2018 argues that the motif of an egg in a couple of Hellenistic era cosmogonies in India and Greece is best explained by transmission, but, apart from wondering whether a vaguely similar Phoenician cosmogony might have something to do with it, she hardly treats the question of the route of transmission. Typological similarity is a drastically more compelling explanation for the loose affinities she finds.

Remarkably, it has even been proposed that the *Mahābhārata* exhibits ‘des ressemblances avec l’Énéide qu’il nous a paru impossible d’attribuer au hasard’, and that, therefore, ‘[l]’hypothèse d’une imitation de l’épopée indoue par Virgile se présente alors’ (Josette Lallemand, 1959, 262, 263). For those who will not consider modes of transmission, no hypothesis is too extreme.

The apotheosis of the diffusionist creed is Michael Witzel 2013, which argues that comparison of mythologies around the world allows for reconstruction of a common, shared human mythology dating back

methodology is unconscionably blithe – all the more so when the distances are, as here, colossal; the gap between the extremes of the ancient Greek and Indian territories, the west coast of Anatolia and the valley of Gandhāra, is about 2500 miles as the crow flies, let alone in real human terms.

McEvilley usefully divides his discussion into parts – pre- and post-Alexandrian contact (1-22 and 349-402 respectively). The notional pre-Alexandrian contact would be bi-directional, whereas after Alexander, the best case is for transmission from Greece to India, since Greeks went to India (either for conquest or trade) vastly more than *vice versa*. He assumes that Achaemenid Persia, whose empire spanned the entire interstitial area from 545 to 490, acted as a vector as transmission (6-14), but makes no case for the profound and sensitive Achaemenid reception of Greek and Indian culture that such mediated transmission would entail – none could be made. He also avoids consideration of the complicated relationship between political and cultural unity. But perhaps transmission, especially but not only in this window, was direct, from Greek to Indian. McEvilley successfully demonstrates the plausibility of Greek and Indian traders meeting during this time, but, again, there is no case to be made for the kind of sustained, close contact on which cultural transmission depends. Quoting Burkert, he speculates that there were wandering seers and craftsmen (16-18). While a problematic vector even in the case of Greek – Near-Eastern transmission, as I write in my introduction and fourth chapter, intercontinental wanderers crossing mountains and fording rivers to travel 3000 miles are so improbable as to warrant here only mention, and only for the sake of thoroughness.

McEvilley is mostly concerned with philosophy, and writes in a long tradition that sees pre-Alexandrian Indian philosophy as perceptibly influenced by Greek philosophy. Certain dynamics peculiar to Greek and especially pre-Socratic philosophy could be expected *a priori* to conduce to transmission – a drive for novelty and heterodoxy relatively uncurbed by a need to be traditional, its detachability from other terrene concerns, its practice and consumption by an intellectual élite more likely to travel and take interest in other cultures. Discussion has focussed on the pre-Socratics, and above all Heraclitus and Pythagoras. Kenneth Reagan Stunkel 1979 has debunked much of this older scholarship, which is characterised by a total neglect of consideration of vectors of transmission; following in his footsteps, Alexander Forte and Caley Smith are sceptical of diffusion from India to Greece of the famous chariot-as-soul metaphor. Their discussion yields widely applicable conclusions.²³⁹ The most reliable information

100,000 years. How humble the Indo-Europeanist suddenly seems. Although the book's central thesis is, naturally, unpalatable, and rightly occasioned plenty of negative scholarly reviews, the book is worth reading for its collection and juxtaposition of parallel material from around the world. Once Witzel's diffusion hypothesis is discounted, the endless alignments and surprises of human universals can be savoured.

²³⁹ 2016. See Stunkel's preface and introduction for an overview of scholarship until the 1970s. See also Charles Kahn's trenchant – and warranted – scepticism – '[i]f the comparative method in these areas [philosophy] tends to provoke such strong resistance..., that is not simply because the specialist feels uncomfortable when confronted by

about India available to Classical, let alone Archaic Greeks, held, among other claims, that Indians ate grass (Hdt. 3.100), wool grew on trees (Hdt. 3.106), there were talking birds (Ctesias Fr. 45.8), and men who had the heads of dogs (Ctesias Fr. 45.37).

Yet diffusion of philosophy is a digression. Even if a far better case for it could be made, this would still not entail diffusion of literature. The dynamics peculiar to philosophy listed above do not apply to literature, which would require a profounder mutual engagement for diffusion. Even in the contemporary ‘information age’, a student of Buddhism or yoga need not be a student of Indian literature. It is not the case that influence in one area entails it in another (as I argued in my first chapter and as I shall explore again below).

The Post-Alexander era was always going to be more promising ground for the diffusionist. We know that bards accompanied Alexander’s army on campaign, so that, presumably, Homer was sung in Hellenistic India – a remarkable enough fact in itself.²⁴⁰ Yet Alexander’s army and retinue left India with him, and his territorial gains were taken back in an instant. Greek influence immediately retreated to behind the Himalayas: this is important because the Indo-Greek kingdoms were offshoots of Greek Bactria, and not the direct offspring of Greece itself. Indo-Bactrio-Greek might be a better term. Whatever Greekness they had, it was not one easily assimilable to Greekness elsewhere – even if any sort of Greekness without veneration of Homer would be hard to imagine.

Undeterred, Mcevilley imagines that Bactria and the northern sub-continent were dotted with model Hellenistic poleis, each one endowed with a library (he extrapolates this from Oxyrhynchus), and that ‘the Greek classics were studied by educated Asians’ (363). Having listed some Greek-speaking intellectuals from Anatolia, the Levant, and Mesopotamia (but none from East of Babylon), he claims ‘It is to be expected that the Greek cities in Bactria and India also produced their Hellenistic geniuses’ (364). Even if this were true, it would not be clear that half a dozen cities on the northern periphery of the sub-

texts he cannot control. It is also because those who make use of the comparative method do not always have a clear view of what they are doing’ (299). He rightly observes that ‘the diffusionist hypothesis must stand on very shaky ground, since even the possibility of historical contact is not easy to conceive’ (298), and notes the grave danger in positing diffusion in a vacuum of direct evidence – to assume that diffusion underlies similarity ‘is not only to prejudice the inquiry unnecessarily. It also tends to produce historical fiction... To call this historical fiction is not to say that we know such creative stimulus... did not take place, but only that we have no good reason to believe that it did’ (1979, 299-300). For a rejection of post-Alexandrian diffusion for literature which still today holds up well, see Germain, 1954, 25-30.

And yet diffusion continues to be repropounded, see e.g. Burkert, 2008, 74 on transmission from India to Greece through Iran, and Paolo Magnone, 2016, in the same volume as Forte and Smith. Seaford’s contribution to the volume, although schematic in its insistence on the importance of rise of money on philosophy in both traditions, puts forward a far more fruitful model of autonomous but parallel development.

²⁴⁰ For poets and poetic performance at Alexander’s Court at home and on campaign, see most recently Frances Pownall, 2021, 247-55; see Marco Pelucchi, 2022, 41-2 for performances of Choerilus and Homer.

continent speaking a different language could have a perceptible influence on Sanskrit Epic. Yet, in any case, this is sheer daydreaming. We know vanishingly little about the society and literary culture of the Indo-Greek and Indo-Bactrian kingdoms, and there is no evidence at all – apart from these states' mere presence – for McEvelley's claims.²⁴¹

Archaeology is also of limited help in determining influence on literature. Firstly, the famous Grecian Buddhas are a North-Western phenomenon, mainly centred around the isolated Gandhāra, a small Buddhist kingdom on an irriguous plain tucked into the far northwestern corner of the sub-continent, bordered on three sides by the Himalayas and on the fourth by the Indus river. The Khyber pass on its Western border was a vital crossing point over the Himalayas, and ensured that the region had more traffic with central Asia than anywhere else on the sub-continent. The Gāndhārī language is exceptional, preserving various phonological and morphological archaisms, and its lexicon contains words unattested in other Indo-Aryan languages.²⁴² It had its own script, *Kharoṣṭhī*; derived from Aramaic and written right to left, it was unrelated to the other Indian scripts, all of which were descendants of the archaic Brahmi script.²⁴³ Geographically marginal, culturally divergent, and Buddhist, there is no reason to think that Gandhāra had an overwhelming impact on the Hindu literature of the rest of India. It is not that the Hellenic statuary of Gandhāra demonstrates Greek cultural penetration into the sub-continent; rather, the Greekness of Gandhāra's statuary, once properly contextualised, is one of a constellation of factors which demonstrate *its* divergence from the rest of the sub-continent.

Gandhāra provides the best but not the only examples of Greek influence on Indian art. Yet there are more general methodological issues in using archaeology (and the trade to which it attests) as evidence of other kinds of cultural exchange. The appreciation of an object necessitates *a priori* a far more superficial engagement in another culture than the appreciation of a literary text. It requires no knowledge of language or scripts, nor the deep understanding of the wider society, its norms, or values on which literary appreciation is founded. The eighteenth century European craze for Chinoiserie consequent on the rise of trade with China at the time was not accompanied by an equal rise in appreciation of Chinese literature.²⁴⁴ Furthermore, using art as proof of possible literary influence risks circularity, since

²⁴¹ Specialised scholars are more realistic. See e.g. Stephen Wallace, 'because so few literary sources exist, so few archaeological sites have been excavated, and so much material is illegally excavated and only appears on the black market, we have little to no historical context for much of the ancient evidence that comes out of modern Afghanistan and Pakistan', 2016, 206.

²⁴² See further Richard Salomon, 2008.

²⁴³ See Colin Masica, 1993, 133-37.

²⁴⁴ The same applies to proponents of diffusion from the Near-East to Greece. I disagree with Johannes Haubold, for example, who writes 'Archaeological evidence shows a rapid spread of Levantine culture during the period Burkert called the 'Orientalizing Revolution' (eighth/seventh century BC). There is no reason to doubt that literature followed a broadly similar trend, but the details have remained elusive' (2013, 21). The latter does not follow from

many of the notional Hellenic influences observed in Indian art are open to the same criticisms that I make in a literary context elsewhere, that is, that diffusion is invoked to explain mere typological similarity. Artists are no more likely to footnote their influences than poets.

Maritime trade provides another possible vector of transmission. Indo-Roman and Indo-Mediterranean trade relations are increasingly very well studied, and need little introduction. It is well known that Mediterranean coins and myriad other artefacts begin to proliferate in India from the end of the first century BC onwards, and McEvilley is right to emphasise the presence of Greek merchants in Roman trade outposts along especially the Malabar but also the Coromandel coast of Southern India.²⁴⁵ The intensification of trade across the Arabian Sea from the late first century BC on inaugurated a new age of knowledge of India in the Mediterranean. By the middle of the next century, Ptolemy had accurate information – that the Malabar Coast was South, not West of the Indus, and that the South Indians' name for themselves was Τίμουλα, in English 'Tamil' (*Geo.* 1. 17.4). This trade would flourish for a few centuries, before tailing off as a result of geopolitical shifts in Egypt, the Mediterranean, and India in the second half of the first millennium AD. Newly fragmented empire looked inward, and the conditions necessary for such long-range withered away. By the end of the eighth century AD, for example, the Ancient Suez Canal which connected the Nile to the Red Sea had become unusable.

The first problem in postulating diffusion from such trade is that it was focussed on the South, in the coastal regions of the early South Indian Chola and then the Kalabhra Empires. The action of the Epics, however, overwhelmingly takes place more than a thousand miles away in North India, and it is there that the poems can be assumed to have taken shape (even if they had become pan-Indian in scope by the time of the later layers of the poem – see Brockington, 1998, 198-9). In the Sanskrit Epics, accordingly, the Yavanas were North-Western warriors, Indo-Greeks and Indo-Bactrians. In Tamil literature they were tradesmen.²⁴⁶ If maritime trade underlay literary transmission from Greece to India, it would make much more sense to look for it in the literature of the Tamils, the principle trade partners of the Greeks. At the very most, if it came to Sanskrit literature, it would most probably have done so indirectly via Tamil influence on Sanskrit literature. This is a far harder case to make, since literary contacts between the two traditions at the time are unclear. Unlike later, the earliest Tamil literature does not borrow many words from Sanskrit and shows little influence of Brahmanism. These are desperately

the former, and the absence of independent evidence of vectors of diffusion is far more than a detail. See further my first chapter, pp. 61-63.

²⁴⁵ 2015, 379-83. Tamil Sangam literature knew the Yavanas primarily as traders and purveyors of luxury goods (Karttunen, 2015, 330).

²⁴⁶ See the previous note.

remote hypothetical possibilities. Not only is there no known evidence, but it is hard to imagine what such evidence might come from or look like.

Apart from intense contact between peoples, it would also necessitate a certain curiosity and respect on behalf of the receiving culture. No-one argues that Mayan art and literature had any influence on Velázquez or Cervantes. Mere contact does not establish the desirability on which diffusion is founded (again, see the Introduction). One reliable way, therefore, to establish the probability of Greek influence on the Sanskrit Epics would be to examine the view of the Greeks put forward in the texts themselves. The Augustan Romans spoke of the Greeks knowledgeably, accorded them respect, and venerated them for their cultural achievements. This went along with their intense borrowing from Greek literature. If something similar could be found in Sanskrit Epic, this would be, if not probatory, a very encouraging sign for the diffusionist.

The *Yavana* (from Greek *Iōnes*), are mentioned thrice in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and (at my count) thirty-nine separate times in the Critical Edition of *Mahābhārata*.²⁴⁷ Most of these references are nestled among vast catalogues which name more than a hundred peoples (often the allies of the Kauravas). They are *mleccha*, a term roughly equivalent to Greek *barbaros*. They are most often referred to as warriors living in the far North. In the Sanskrit Epics, they seem never to be connected with the trader Greeks who visited the coast of South India. Unfortunately for the diffusionist, however, far from being the esteemed progenitors of Western civilisation, the composers of epic seem to have viewed them – inasmuch as they made any impression at all – as an uncivilised rabble, odious and sinful. They are often condemned along with other deplorables, such as the Scythians, or *Śaka*, who also at various periods within the same timeframe ruled over kingdoms towards India's northern border.²⁴⁸ Yavanas take no part in Indian myth, and the only Yavanas named in Epic have Sanskrit names, 'Mura' and 'Naraka' (*Mhb.* 2. 13.13): the latter means 'Hell', and the former elsewhere is the name of a demon killed by Kṛṣṇa. As Karttunen remarks, these are names 'suitable... for a barbarian heretic' (2015, 347).

²⁴⁷ For an excellent book length treatment of the *Yavana* in Sanskrit literature, see Klaus Karttunen, 2015 (pp. 3-26 for citation and translation of all epic passages which mention the *Yavana*). Note that a couple of very late passages in Epic also mention Rome and Antioch – see Brockington, 1998, 134.

The word 'Yavana' must either have been borrowed at an early stage, or transmitted by an people who borrowed it at an early stage, since Skt. 'v' reflects Greek digamma (see Witzel, 1995, 104). The latter option is far more likely (this would mirror Greek Ἰνδοί, which was adopted through Persian). 'Yavana' by perhaps the fourth century AD had become a general term for any kind of foreigner (and especially Arabs; see Karttunen, 2015, 99, 326).

Hemacandra's twelfth century lexicon defines 'Yavana' as 'Arab' (*ibid.*, 297, with references). Cf. Persian 'Farangi', which was borrowed in the Middle Ages from the demonym 'Frank', but now is used to refer to any European foreigner throughout South Asia, East Asia, and the horn of Africa.

²⁴⁸ See further Karttunen, 2015, 344-57 for an overview of the Indo-Greeks in Sanskrit literature, drawing often on the *Mahābhārata*.

For example, in a passage which for its language, glorification of Brahmāns, placement in the first *Parvan* (book), and irrelevance to the main plot can be securely placed in the final layer of composition, an enraged holy cow squirts flames from her tail, defecates out Pahlavas (Persians), Śakas spring up from her faeces, Yavanas from her urine, and various other ‘unsophisticated’ foreign tribes, including Dravidians and Sri Lankans, from the foam at her mouth.²⁴⁹ This derisive, scatological passage, clearly intended to deride foreigners, is characteristic of Sanskrit Epic’s attitude towards Greeks. Thus, in the case of the Sanskrit Epics, it is possible to go beyond Charles Kahn’s observation (see n. 240) that since we have no evidence of diffusion beyond similarity itself, we have no reason to believe that there was any. To assume important Yavana influence on Sanskrit Epic is not only to make assumptions from no evidence. It is to disregard evidence pointing in the contrary direction, and to read against the grain of the texts themselves. In other words, the hypothesis that the literature of the Greeks (or Bactrian Greeks, if they even had a Hellenic literary tradition, and if that had anything to do with Homer) influenced the Sanskrit Epics is not merely unverifiable, but is at odds with the evidence which we do have.

Diffusion of Divination?

Just as diffusion in one area need not entail it in another, its absence in one area need not entail its absence in another. I argued in the previous chapter that the fact that divination was emically considered a science granted it utility, and hence desirability as an object of intellectual trade. Literature, by contrast, did not enjoy this desirability. This principle is confirmed in India-Greece relations. After the Indo-Greek period, there appear in India texts which clearly draw on Hellenistic Greek ideas of astrology (themselves ultimately from Babylon) and especially its most important sub-branch, horoscopy. By contrast with literary influence, where there is no explicit hint of borrowing nor of awareness of Greek literature, let alone translation of it, texts on astrology borrow self-consciously from Greek, translating not only terms but whole works from that language. The *Yavanajātaka* of Sphujidvaja, a versification of an earlier translation into Sanskrit of a lost Greek work on astrology, is a good example. While the date is disputed, it is certainly much later than all but the very latest parts of epic, being composed probably in the second quarter of the first millennium AD.²⁵⁰ The work’s name means ‘The Birth-Astrology of the Greeks’.

²⁴⁹ *Mhb.* 1. 165.34-37. The word used for Sri Lankans, ‘sinhalān’ (36), is first attested only in the late third or early fourth century AD in the Pāli *Dīpavaṃsa* (9.1), which provides a reliable *terminus post quem* and confirms the passage’s place in the latest layer of the Epic. I am indebted to Professor Justin Henry for pointing this out to me.

²⁵⁰ David Pingree dates the Sanskrit translation to 269-70 AD, and the Greek original to 149-50 AD (1978, I. 20). Bill Mak has recently drastically lowered the date of the Indian work to sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries AD, though his reasons are open to dispute (2013).

Astrology, defined loosely as the belief that the disposition of the stars can be interpreted as predicting or explaining events on earth, is a typologically very common phenomenon – found widely among pre-Columbian Americans, the ancient Chinese, and various traditional African societies. Striking, therefore, is its near absence in the *RV* and the earliest Greek literature.²⁵¹ Stars, as I will argue in chapter 4 on ‘ominemes’, do have to do with archaic divination in both traditions, but their role does not amount to astrology in the proper sense. As will become clear, the pseudo-science of Astrology has nothing to do with the kind of divination which I treat in the rest of the thesis.

More generally, David Pingree has argued that Indian *Jyotiḥśāstra*, a term which comprises both astrology and astronomy, could have been receptive to Mesopotamian (and especially Babylonian) influence from at least the fifth century BC, as well as later on through Greek mediation.²⁵² The common Mesopotamian influence would have served as a shared foundation, invigorating the Indian interest in the

²⁵¹ Though see Michael Witzel 1983 for an attempt to piece together a Vedic astrology.

²⁵² In other words, from the time of Achaemenid occupation of Gandhāra and the Indus river basin in the sixth century – incidentally, exactly the same area later to be occupied by Alexander; see Pingree 1992 for an exposition of his view of Achaemenid influence, and pp. 8-14, 1981 for a diachronic account of Indian interaction with Greek material. Pingree would extend Mesopotamian influence in India to other areas of divination too (1992), though I am less convinced by his arguments there. Tom Zanker has suggested that shared diffusion from Mesopotamia can explain similarities between fable-like passages in Hesiod and the *Mahābhārata*; yet he does not substantiate this hypothesis by actually adducing such an original Mesopotamian tale (2009). Indeed, similar looking traditions of animal fables in Mesopotamia, Greece, and India have often been attributed to Mesopotamian diffusion. Certainly, fables are typologically among the most easily diffused kinds of literature. They are short, popular in character, require no literary training to tell nor expertise to appreciate. As one important scholar of fables writes, ‘Few literary genres, if... any, show greater continuity throughout their history than the fable, spanning from Sumer to the present day. It has crossed over from literature to literature, from language to language, producing endless derivations, imitations, recreations. Always the same and always different, it has absorbed various religions, philosophies and cultures, which it has served as an expression... the fable is a popular and traditional genre, essentially ‘open’, existing in infinite variants... The copyists of manuscripts believe themselves authorized to introduce intentional variations to content, style or language. There are countless derivations, contaminations, prosifications, versifications, etc.’ (Francisco Adrados, 1999, xiii). This is importantly different from the traditional Epic poetry which I treat. I return to a point which I make repeatedly in the thesis: diffusion of one kind of object – or genre – need not entail diffusion of another. Fable need not entail Epic.

So much for the relevance of fables to this thesis. Though it is not my specialty, and I can only speak in generalities, I briefly digress: There has long been a scholarly debate about what to make of the morass of criss-crossing similarities among Greek, Mesopotamian, and Indian fables. As usual, diffusion is the first explanation for which scholars reach. Yet short stories with animal protagonists and moral messages are a human universal, and widely found not only throughout Eurasia but also Africa and pre-Columbian America. The apparent diachronic priority of Mesopotamia is, in my view, a mere artefact of the fact that Mesopotamia had writing before those places. It should not be taken as proof that Mesopotamia invented the genre and then diffused it to India and Greece. The same goes downstream, on the level of detail: even if a Mesopotamian fable (or fable element) predates a Greek or Indian one, this need only show that it is an older typological parallel – it does not make it a source. Fundamental generic similarity (a universal) and the great abundance of broadly similar tales (which enhance the possibility of chance parallels) are in themselves powerful explanators of similarity. Polygenesis is potent here. At the same time, an earlier Mesopotamian attestation could simply be the first evidence for an international story shared through diffusion: it is much easier to imagine the informal mutual exchange of such tales by unlettered second-language speakers at an ancient port than discussion or performance of elaborate heroic poetry. See Haubold, 2016, 29-31 for a slightly different take on the disanalogies between ancient Fable and ancient Epic.

Greek practice. Moreover, since this Babylonian influence is present neither in archaic Greece nor in India until the fourth century BC at the very earliest, it is often possible to sidestep the issue by mere preference of early material. Pingree's arguments are, as ever, based on inference and his dating of the relevant texts tentative and open to question. He prefers high dates, and assumes influence from similarity – an exercise fraught with danger.

Moreover, the study of foreign (pseudo-)scientific texts and the assimilation of foreign poetry into traditional, oral, narrative literature are not to be blurred – the former by no means entails the latter. Greek scientists and philosophers, especially Aristotle, had an intense influence on the Islamic Golden Age, but the Mediaeval Arabs had no interest in Homer – the *Iliad* was first translated into Arabic in 1904. In this case, the texts bear out this separation: there is hardly a hint of zodiacs or Babylonian astrology anywhere in Indian Epics, even in the latest layers; references to inauspicious events at the time of birth can be sufficiently explained as general similarities owed to cultural universals, and do not go into enough detail to be matched to Babylonian horoscopy. Therefore, it is not only that I avoid Astrology because of the possibility of transmission. It is simply absent in Archaic Greece and the Vedic and Sanskrit Epic texts which I treat.

Indeed, a robust, diachronically sensitive typology of divination, which I have provided in the previous chapter, is vital for repudiating the spectral possibility that similarity is founded on shared diffusion from Mesopotamia. As we saw, while there is plenty of evidence for Near-eastern influence on Greece in the fields of extispicy, ornithomancy, and oracles, there is no evidence for such influence in intuitive divination, which will be the fulcrum of the comparative project of this chapter. Lastly and just as clinchingly, as we will see in the immediately following section, the *RV*, which dates back to a period far before India could ever have undergone Near-eastern influence on such matters, knows the same intuitive ability which is present in Greece and absent in the Near East. Not only does this make it invaluable evidence in itself, but it also guarantees that later texts, where they agree with it, are continuing something deeply archaic.

Intuitive Divination in the *RV*

The *RV* presents a society different in important ways from those which came after it.²⁵³ The picture it gives, however, is fundamentally inflected by its genre: it is no history, but a collection of religious praise poetry dedicated by visionary poet-priests, sponsored by political power, and (usually) addressed to the gods.²⁵⁴ I shall have more to say about the composers of these hymns later in my discussion of practitioners of divination, but it is important to note here that in the *RV* the roles of poet, seer, and indeed priest are performed by the same individual.²⁵⁵ Despite its generic limitations, the *RV* must be the starting point of any genealogical comparative study.

We saw the salient characteristics of intuitive divination in Greece at the end of the last chapter. This depends on an inherent, inborn ability which may be construed as god-given, and needs no ritual to bring it on; it involves no change in mental state, but grants direct epistemological access to events far in the past or future; the knowledge is either accessed instinctively, or through a supernatural perception most often construed as visual.²⁵⁶ The poetic and divinatory ability – which were one and the same in the *RV* – of *Rig-Vedic* poets is characterised in precisely these terms.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Here is not the place to recapitulate these differences in general, but see the introduction of Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton's translation for a comprehensive and up to date presentation of the *Rig-Veda* (2014, 1-84), expanded into a standalone book in 2020, as well as Jamison and Witzel, 2003, with a focus on religious and textual aspects. Habib & Thakur 2003 is an accessible and reliable introduction to the socio-political aspects of the Vedic age. Louis Renou 1971 is a classic and wide-ranging work, but now dated, especially on philological matters.

²⁵⁴ Witzel makes a comparison to the Psalms, aptly querying 'What would such a collection of texts tell us about the history of the Hebrews?' (1995, 93). See that article and its accompaniment at pp. 309-52 in the same volume for more on the socio-cultural background of the *Rig-Veda* and a judicious assessment of its usefulness as a historical document.

What we have today is also one of several recensions (*śākhā*) that have existed, though it does not seem that there was profound variation between them. The arrangement of the hymns according to a discernible order of course attests to a conscious process of organisation, probably not along after the hymns' original composition.

²⁵⁵ See e.g. *RV*. X. 107.6 for an account of the role of the *Ṛṣi*, 'tameva *Ṛṣiṃ* tamu brahmāṇamāhuryajñanyam sāmāghāmukthāśāsam', 'They say that just he is the seer, he the creator of sacred formulations, the leader of the sacrifice, the singer of chants, the reciter of solemn words.' Jamison and Brereton always translate *Ṛṣi* 'seer'.

²⁵⁶ Relevant here is the deep association between sight and knowledge in Indo-European culture, as attested by the semantics of the root *vid, which gives Greek (*w*)oida 'I know', (*w*)idein 'to see', Sanskrit 'vid' 'know', Latin 'video' 'I see', German 'wissen' 'to know', Russian 'videt' 'to see', etc.

For examples and discussion of this in archaic Greek literature, see the final two sections of the last chapter.

²⁵⁷ It has been argued, for different reasons, that poets and seers (and heralds) were once one role in Greek culture (Nagy, 1990a). The identity of seer and poet in the *RV* is the best evidence for the idea. There is indeed some overlap in Archaic Greek literature's treatment of both categories. See further below.

According to a tradition first attested in Kātyāyana's *Sarvānukramaṇī*, the *RV*'s seventh book (or more properly 'Maṇḍala') is almost entirely authored by a certain Vasiṣṭha and his descendants.²⁵⁸

Although a historical poet with this name probably composed some of its hymns, it seems clear that the school of familial or aesthetic descendants which he founded composed certain others.²⁵⁹ In the post-*Rig-Vedic* tradition, Vasiṣṭha would come to be viewed as perhaps the most important *Rig-Vedic* poet, one of the especially venerable Saptarṣis ('Seven Seers', catasterised as Ursa Major already in the *RV*), and composer of some of the most famous and influential hymns in the entire collection. The seventh Maṇḍala is acknowledged as part of the oldest core of the work, and this, along with its general prominence and Vasiṣṭha's status as a paradigmatic *Rig-Vedic* poet, make it a favourable starting point.

While not gods themselves, *Rig-Vedic* poets were certainly immensely revered and accorded divine attributes including supernatural powers. As in Greece (and elsewhere), in India an extraordinary birth was a conventional signifier of divinity, and, accordingly, the last part of a famous hymn, VII. 33.9-14, gives an account of the poet's prodigious birth(s). Although it is a complex and elusive poem, in which it is not always clear who the speaker is, how to construe the syntax, and how the sentences connect to one another, the points germane to my purposes are clear. The first part of the poem treats Vasiṣṭha's successful enlistment of Indra at the battle of the Ten Kings; there follows some enigmatic praise of the excellence of Vasiṣṭha's poetic school and a riddling exposition of Vasiṣṭha's births. He was born when a lightning bolt crystallised into a man, he was born when the seer Agastya presented him to the clan; the poem then swerves into an apostrophe:

utāsi mairāvaruṇo vasiṣṭhorvaśyā brahmaṇ manaso 'dhi jātah |
 drapsam skānam brahmāṇā daivyeṇa viśve devāḥ puṣkāre tvādadanta ||
 sa prāketa ubhayasya pravīdvān sāhasrādāna uta vā sadānah |
 yamenā tatam parīdhiṁ vāyīṣyann āpasarasah pari jajñe vasiṣṭhah || VII.33.11-12

²⁵⁸ The Anukramaṇīs are indexes detailing the order, metre, and authorship of literary compositions in a collection. This, the oldest we have for the *Rig-Veda* dates to the second century BC. The extent to which they preserve archaic information not derived from the *Rig-Veda* itself is disputed.

²⁵⁹ See the first chapter of Jamison 2007 for poetic personae in early Indo-Iranian literature and a defence of the *Sarvānukramaṇī*'s independent preservation of archaic material not deducible from the *Rig-Vedic* text. In any case, the poet (or someone claiming to be him) names himself in 24 of the book's 104 hymns.

“And you are the descendant of Mitra and Varuṇa, o Vasiṣṭha, born from Urvaśī, from her mind, you formulator. A drop (of semen?) spurted forth: with a heavenly formulation all the gods took you in a lotus.

He, foreknowing of both in his insight, possessing a thousand gifts and one gift (more), intending to weave the covering stretched by Yama, was born from the Apsaras – Vasiṣṭha.”²⁶⁰

‘sa *prākṛeta ubhayāsya praviḍvān*’, ‘foreknowing of both in his insight’ is telling. The locative *prākṛete* specifies that the foreknowledge takes place within his insight – in other words, it is a purely mental act dependent on no external stimulus.²⁶¹ The root from which the word is derived, *cit*, combines general mental activity with a certain intentionality; a usual translation would be ‘notice’ or ‘observe’, but when the former element is stressed, it can mean ‘think’, and when the latter, ‘intend’. The prefix picks up that of *praviḍvān*, and may here also have a future force, ‘foresight’. While it does not seem to have a future force in other *Rig-Vedic* usages, as at I. 94.5, II. 17.7, III. 30.1, X. 7.1, X. 104.6, X. 129.2, it is clearly used of the supernatural knowledge of seers who follow Vasiṣṭha in the seventh verse of the same hymn, which I discuss immediately below.

ubhayāsya, ‘both’, is the obscurest word in the line. Jamison presumes it refers to both births (*ad loc.*),²⁶² and, implausible as such an interpretation may seem, such a paradox would not be unexampled in the *RV*.²⁶³ But if so counter-intuitive a meaning were indeed intended to the exclusion of all others, one would expect it to be made quite clear rather than left to be understood by the audience. Moreover, the poem refers to at least four different births. More appealing, therefore, are Sāyaṇa’s gloss *ubhayasya: ubhayaṃ divaṃ ca pṛthivīm ca praviḍvān*, ‘Both: foreknowing [events in] both heaven and earth’, and a suggestion of Geldner’s, ‘Vielleicht ist... Vergangenheit und Zukunft zu supplieren’.²⁶⁴ The translation of *praviḍvān* as ‘foreknowing’ may seem to tell against the last view, but in fact *pra-vid* can also denote knowledge without particular reference to the future, which, under the last interpretation, would be

²⁶⁰ All translations of the *RV* are taken from Jamison & Brereton, 2014. Apsaras are nymph-like female deities closely associated with the arts. The Muses are usually taken to be a peculiarly Greek phenomenon, but certainly the Apsaras would be a close analogue. Here, fascinatingly, Vasiṣṭha is the figurative child of the Apsaras just as Greek poets could be the figurative children of the Muses (as e.g. Orpheus, son of Kalliope at Apollon. 1.23-4).

²⁶¹ I agree with Jamison & Brereton in preferring the locative over the Padapāṭha’s nominative. This makes better sense in combination with *praketaiḥ* at 33.9, discussed below.

²⁶² Her commentary, which is still being updated and expanded at the time of writing (28.11.24) is to be found online:

http://rigvedacommentary.alc.ucla.edu/?page_id=49

²⁶³ See e.g. Dakṣa and Aditi who are born from each other at X. 72.4, and the creator god of X. 121 who is born from the waters in the seventh verse and creates them in the ninth.

²⁶⁴ 1951, *ad loc.* For Sāyaṇa I use Müller’s edition of 1849-74.

understood in the context anyway. Again, it is in the style of the *RV* to leave multiple possibilities open, and it would be scholasticism alien to the spirit of the text to foreclose its resonance by limiting interpretation to one or the other meaning when both, by being equally possible, are equally valid: as we have seen and will see again, seers can indeed see both future and past, and both human and divine realms. In any case, this short phrase describes Vasiṣṭha's power in terms already familiar from the Greek examples discussed in the last chapter. He has knowledge of the future thanks to an inborn, mental ability, present in him from the moment of his birth, and the text suggestively alludes to its supernatural extent. The audience, familiar with the conventions about seers' abilities, is reminded of traditional dyads about the future and the past, and the human and divine realms.

The poem had emphasised the interiority peculiar to this kind of divination two verses previously (VII. 33.9): *ta in nīnyam hṛdayasya prakṛtaiḥ sahasrāvalśam abhi sam cāranti*. Jamison translates, 'Only [the followers of Vasiṣṭha] converge upon the thousand-twiggged secret with the insights of their heart.' This secret of many twigs (or 'many elements', tantamount to 'these many secrets'), are probably both the impossible riddles in the preceding verses and other unknowable matters.²⁶⁵ The collocation *hṛdayasya prakṛtaiḥ*, 'insights of their heart', is unique in the *RV*. Jamison translates *hṛdayasya*, 'heart', as a distributive singular, which seldom sounds idiomatic in English, but the point is clear: the emphasis is on the inward nature of the insight used, and these insights are the instruments by which they achieve understanding. Importantly, while in modern times the heart can be contrasted with the mind, as the irrational versus the rational, in Vedic times as in Ancient India in general *hṛd* / *hṛdaya* was often synonymous with mind, and never has the connotation of emotion or instability.²⁶⁶ The Sanskrit should be understood, in short, as 'they converge... through the insights of the mind'.²⁶⁷

A later hymn can help us to interpret the curious second part of the line treated above, 'possessing a thousand gifts and one gift (more)' (33.13). Challenging Jamison's translation, it shows how the verse connects with seers in Greece, whose divinatory ability, as we saw, is often presented as a gift of the gods. In this somewhat disjointed hymn, Indra and Varuṇa are treated as a unity (VIII. 59).²⁶⁸ Among the conventional entreaties and words of praises, comes the intriguing sixth verse:

²⁶⁵ Geldner 1951 follows Sāyaṇa's attractive gloss, *sahasrāvalśam*: *sahasraśākhāṃ saṃsāram* 'Das tausendfach verzweigte Geheimnis ist die ewige Verjüngung und Generationsfolge der Menschheit'.

²⁶⁶ By contrast, *hṛdi* has a much more physical connotation – 'heart, viscera' (see Louis Renou's note, 1952 vol. 8, p. 56). *hṛd* has more commonly the abstract meaning close to *manas*, 'mind' (see *ibid.* vol. 10, on 1.171.2).

Cognates include English 'heart', Latin *cor*, *cordis*, and Greek *kardia*. Latin *cre-do* and Sanskrit *śrad-dhā*, 'to believe', preserve a semantic reflex of the mental element. See Dagmar Wodtko *et al.*, 2008, 417ff. on this rich root.

²⁶⁷ The claim that *only* the descendants of Vasiṣṭha have this ability is of course a partisan one, and not to be taken literally.

²⁶⁸ This is one of the semi-apocryphal Vāḥkilya Hymns: they were written after the rest of the collection in a perceptibly different language, are more textually unstable, and were not treated by commentators like Sāyaṇa. On

indrāvaruṇā yad ṛṣibhyo manīṣām vāco matim śrutam ādattam agrē |
yāni sthānāny asṛjanta dhīrā yajñam tānvānās tapāsābhy āpaśyam ||

‘O Indra and Varuṇa, in that you in the beginning gave to the seers inspired thought, the thinking of speech, what is heard — the insightful (seers) launched these as poems as they stretched out the sacrifice. I looked upon them with fervor.’

In Greece, both prophetic and poetic speech are the gifts of the gods.²⁶⁹ In the *RV*, of course, no distinction at all is made between the two, and so the verse pertains to both. The four nouns could, as Jamison supposes, describe the progress of poetic composition, from poetic reflection (*manīṣām*) to ‘thought (in the form) of speech’ (*vāco matim*), to the heard poem (*śrutam*). Clearly, the pattern ‘reflection – considered speech – announcement’ could be easily applied to divination.²⁷⁰ Salient also is the double use of derivatives of the Indo-European root *men, the root also of Greek *Mantis*.²⁷¹ The root is key to the language of divination, but given its extraordinarily wide semantic field, it should be treated with care. Suffice it to say here that, first, its association with mental (*mental*) activity suggests the close conceptual association between the latter and divination at the time of Greek-Indic unity (and *not* with signs), and, secondly, that it has no reflexes to do with madness in daughter languages other than Greek, which strongly suggests that this was a peculiarly Hellenic development.²⁷²

the other hand, unlike other supplemental hymns they were transmitted with accents and listed in the *Sarvānukramani*. Even if they are not *Rg-Vedic*, they are still from the Vedic period, perhaps from the first couple of centuries of the first millennium BC, and as such it is legitimate to read them in dialogue with older hymns. See Jamison & Brereton, 2014, 1130 for a concise introduction. Hermann Oldenberg, 1888, 209-19 and Hopkins, 1896 still provide useful background. See note 341 below for a problematisation of using language to date hymns of the *Atharvaveda* – this should be borne in mind while considering the Vāḥkilya Hymns, though, to my knowledge, they have not themselves been subjected to recent linguistic analysis.

²⁶⁹ I discuss this idea in passing in Chapter One, e.g. at pp. 77 and 81, à propos of passages I.72 and x.494-5.

²⁷⁰ So Jamison puts it in her note *ad loc.*, apparently following Geldner, who translates ‘ausgedachte Rede’. Another interpretation would take *vāco* and *matim* separately, since this is not a usual collocation (only elsewhere at I. 123.1), giving ‘reflection, utterance, intelligence, and heard speech’. This too would apply equally well to both prophetic and poetic speech.

²⁷¹ As well as *mainomai*, *menos*, *mimnēskō*, *memona*, *automatos*, *Mentōr*, and possibly *Mousa*; in Sanskrit it gives *mati* (probably formed by the same processes of morphological derivation as Greek *Mantis*), *manīṣā*, and *manas* (twin of Greek *menos*, ‘mind’), *mantra* (‘sacred speech, hymn’), *muni* (‘sage’).

²⁷² This is important because it is often assumed that the vocalism *man-* in Greek *Mantis* is founded on an analogy with *mainomai* (we would expect a zero-grade, ***matis*, cf. *auto-matos*, from **auto-mntos*, and Sanskrit *mati* from **mṇti*). An etymological association between *mainomai* and *Mantis* goes back to Plato *Phdr.* 244c, and would go against what I argued in the previous chapter – that madness and possession were not linked to divination at any early stage in Greek culture. More or less emic as he may be, Plato should not be taken at his word. *mainomai* denotes loss of one’s wits or martial rage in Homer, not prophetic madness or inspiration. Clearly it had nothing to do with *Manteis* for Theognis, who wrote τῶν γὰρ μαινομένων πέτεται θυμός τε νόος τε, // βουλὴ δ’ εἰς ἀγαθὸν καὶ νόον ἐσθλὸν ἄγει, ‘For the mind and soul of the mad is in flight, // And judgement leads to the good and to sound mind’ (1052-3). Clytemnestra uses *mainetai* when she wishes to *denigrate* Cassandra’s mantic credentials (*Ag.* 1064). Its first direct attestation (ignoring Heraclitus DK fr. 92, since Plutarch might have changed the wording) in connection to divine inspiration is Eur. *Ba.* 301, and to prophecy is, remarkably, only in Plato himself. Moreover,

Yet the verse's explanatory value for VII. 33.13 is in the verb *ādattam*, 'you gave'. These abilities are here figured as a gift of the gods – similarly to Greece and differently to Ancient Mesopotamia, where divination is a trade to be learnt through study.²⁷³ *agrē*, 'in the beginning', even hints at a cosmology of the creation of diviners, of the sort found in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo. This formulation of divinatory power as a divine gift is found elsewhere in the *RV*, perhaps most famously in the justly celebrated VII. 88, in which Vasiṣṭha regretfully depicts his once close relationship with his divine patron, Varuṇa, before a rupture brought about by the poet's recent sin:

vasiṣṭhaṁ ha varuṇo nāvya ādhāḍ ṛṣim cakāra svapā mahōbhiḥ |
stotāraṁ vipraḥ sudināṭve ahnām yān nu dyāvās tatanan yād uṣāsah ||

'Varuṇa placed Vasiṣṭha on the boat. Skillful in his work, he made him a seer through his great powers. The inspired poet (made him) a praise singer on that brightest day of days for so far as the heavens, for so long as the dawns will extend.'²⁷⁴

The detail communicates the intimacy between poet and god and signals the poet's pride in his special power, while, incidentally, allowing an insight into how men are made *ṛṣis*. Varuṇa was not the only Vedic

since even in Homer *mainomai*'s semantics differ from those in the classical period, why should it be assumed that it was connected to madness whenever *Mantis* was first coined, instead of something more aligned with comparative material and other derivatives within Greek? It is difficult to see how the following semantic drifts could have taken place in this order: *mainomai* – 'I think deeply' to 'I rage', on which was based *Mantis* 'rage, madness', then 'rager, madman', then 'prophet, seer' by the historical period. A much simpler and more convincing account would be that *mainomai* – 'I think deeply' formed the basis of *Mantis* – 'deep thought', with the subsequent semantic drift happening independently and simultaneously. This would agree with cross-linguistic evidence, i.e. Skt. 'manyate', Avestan 'mainiēte', Old Irish 'muinithir', Old Church Slavonic 'мънѣ' – all 'to think'; Lithuanian 'miniù', 'to remember'. In short, even if it is the reason for the unexpected vocalism in *Mantis*, that is no reason to believe any archaic connection between divination and madness.

There is a further formal problem. Robert Beekes is surely right that *Mantis* originated as an abstract noun, and itself underwent morpho-semantic drift to become an agent noun (2010, *ad loc.*, with references). The suffix *-tis* for an agent is highly unusual in Greek, and points towards a diachronic explanation – the only analogies are partial – *portis* ('calf', hardly an agent), and the notionally Aeschylean *marptis*, 'brigand' – useless datum since it is a conjecture. Either, as Beekes suggests, the *-ti-* is a Doric / Aeolic reflex borrowed into other dialects, or the formation dates back to a time before *ti* became *si* in Attic-Ionic and Arcado-Cypriot, and never underwent the *-ti-* to *-si-* change because the second compensatory lengthening would have necessitated the opaque form ***māsis* (incidentally, *masis* is attested by Hesychius in both simplex and compound forms with the meaning 'megalōs' – this may also have motivated the archaism). I can think of no parallels for the latter case, but equally in the former case it is difficult to imagine how the *-si-* form should *never* be attested, and what would motivate the general adoption of the Doric / Aeolic form.

In any case, it is surely right that the word started out as a feminine abstract noun meaning 'sacred thought', like Sanskrit *mati*, and came to its present meaning through semantic drift, a simple enough metonymy: see the development of the abstract *epimeleia*, 'care', to 'commission', then 'office of commissioner' and finally 'commissioner'. The formal problems, however, are knottier, and certainly should not be reduced to semantic equivalences apparent only from the fourth century on.

²⁷³ On which see the previous chapter.

²⁷⁴ 4. As Apollo in Aeschylus and his Hymn above, Varuṇa is here figured as inspired. The boat is Varuṇa's, and poet and god are pictured sailing on it together in the preceding verse – another token of their confidence.

god who ennobles men in this way: Agni is capable of the same at I. 31.1, where he is ‘the whirling creator of seers for mortals’; and the poet of III. 43 asks (rhetorically) that Indra confirm him in his prophetic abilities – ‘Will you indeed (make) me a seer, (for) I have drunk of the pressed drink’ (5). Soma too can be addressed as *ṛṣimanā ya ṛṣikṛt*, ‘you who have a seer’s mind, you who make men seers’ (IX. 96.18). The blind poet-seer Dīrghatamas could well be referring to his special ability when he proclaims ‘though bound, I roam about in secret by my thinking’. More transparent, at any rate, is what follows: ‘When the first-born of truth [i.e. Agni] has come to me, only then do I attain a share of this speech here.’²⁷⁵ Similarly, at X. 43.7, ‘vardhanti viprā mahō asya sādāṇe yavaṁ na vṛṣtir divyena dānūnā’, ‘the inspired poets at the (sacrificial) seat increase his greatness, like rain the barley, with the heavenly gift [/drop].’ ‘divyena dānūnā’, ‘divine gift’, is a brilliant pun – just as rain is the gift of the heavens which makes the barley grow, so the poets magnify Indra through the divine gift of their inspiration. ‘divyena’ is used first in the literal sense ‘of the heavens’, and then in the metaphorical, ‘divine’.²⁷⁶ The phrase would be perfectly at home in Archaic Greek poetry. In all these passages, divinatory power is figured as a privilege dependent on divine largesse.

In light of this, better sense can be made of the mysterious phrase at VII. 33.12, *śahasrādāna uta vā sadānaḥ* (‘possessing a thousand gifts and one gift [more]’). Meaning must be established before interpretation: Geldner’s understanding of the *hapax sadānaḥ* as *sadādānaḥ* through haplology is unnecessary and unparalleled (he despondently notes *ad loc.* ‘nicht ganz klar’); Sāyaṇa’s gloss is scarcely more illuminating. Jamison’s note summarises the views and *aporiai* of several luminaries of Vedic scholarship (Ludwig, Oldenberg, Klein); her conclusion is worth quoting, ‘If the *uta vā* should be read as disjunctive ‘or’ (as I admit it should), perhaps this is instead... “having a thousand gifts – or one (big) gift.”²⁷⁷ She does admit, however, that ‘What the gifts refer to I have no idea’.

Her idea that the thousand gifts are equivalent to one (big) gift is structurally right. All that is necessary is to plug in the appropriate cultural information – that seership is a gift – and the words

²⁷⁵ I. 164.37. It continues, ‘He goes inward and outward, controlled by his own will – he, the immortal one of the same womb as the mortal one.’ This hymn is both extremely difficult to interpret and heterodox in thought – some have seen in .46, for example, a statement of monotheism, or at least some kind of monism. But what is necessary for present purposes – Agni’s role in enabling the poet to compose hymnic speech – is quite clear.

²⁷⁶ ‘divyena’ is also a key word in Epic poetry for construing the gift of intuitive divination. See below pp. 118-19.

²⁷⁷ She therefore recants the published translation in her commentary. If *uta vā* were taken as additive, a possibility which Jamison rightly discounts, then it would be a simple circumlocution for ‘innumerable gifts’. The hyperbolic number ‘a thousand and one’ is expressed in some languages as ‘a thousand [noun] and [noun]’, as e.g. *The One Thousand and One Nights*, whose Arabic title is ‘*Alf Leila wa Leila*’, literally ‘a thousand nights and a night’. ‘A thousand and one gifts’, made into a possessive *bahuvrīhi* (exocentric compound), would in this way become ‘A thousand-gifted and one-gifted’, which amounts to ‘innumerably gifted’. I do not know why Jamison in her translation adds ‘more’ in parenthesis. This would be simpler Sanskrit than it has been given credit for, but, given the existence of another viable interpretation, *uta vā* should indeed be taken in its natural sense, ‘or’.

become clear. Two verses previously, the poet had characterised the occult knowledge on which seers converge as a ‘tree with a thousand twigs’ (*nīnyam sahasravalśam*), and our phrase makes the same play on singularity and plurality. In one sense, the seer has access to one secret – the capacity to access occult knowledge; in another sense, he has access to a myriad of individual secrets concerning discrete events. As the poet’s beautiful image has it, these are like a thousand twigs branching from the same tree. *śahasrādāna ūta vā sadānaḥ* functions in the same way: in a sense, the ṛṣi has one gift, that of divine sight; in another sense, he has the gift of foreknowing numberless individual events. This makes excellent sense in the wider context of a hymn celebrating the power of Vasiṣṭha, and in its immediate context – ‘Foreknowing both [heaven and earth] in his insight, having a thousand gifts, or one gift,... Vasiṣṭha’. By looking out for the language of divinatory giftedness, visible in the *RV* just as in Archaic Greece, we can read texts anew at the level of the sentence, harmonising the intra-textual with the intertextual and even the inter-cultural.

What the *Rg-Veda* Shows

The picture which has emerged so far is of an inner ability often said to be possessed as a result of divine patronage – that is, a divine gift, and always highly prized by both its possessor and others. In the *RV*, we are shown this power being put to poetic use, enabling the usual subjects of *Rig-Vedic* hymns, including tales of long ago and the dealings of the gods.²⁷⁸ There are hints elsewhere of a more capacious phenomenon, and my treatment here is necessarily inexhaustive. *Rig-Vedic* poets are self-referential and self-reflexive, and it is only thanks to these qualities that we are able to limn their conception of the intuitive sight which underlies both poetic composition and the divinatory ability to see into the far past, far future, and into the realm of the gods: yet they were not literary critics, and discussion of these matters was by no means their primary concern. Indeed, it is fortunate that the *RV* furnishes references so numerous and so rich.

On the other hand, the hymnic genre of the *RV* is not interested in the linear relation of myths. These appear in shards and asides, not in long narratives, and are so fragmentary that often it is impossible to make sense of what the original story might have been. Clearly, however, there was a corpus of myth shared by the original audience of the *RV*, and known well enough by them that they could make sense of even the briefest allusions when we cannot. There was undoubtedly a contemporary

²⁷⁸ See below for its help in knowing the beginnings of the universe and its use in the composition of cosmogonies.

epic tradition which related these myths in narrative form, and which evolved into the tradition enshrined in the two monumental Sanskrit epics;²⁷⁹ it is that tradition which should be rummaged for tales of divination and for the behaviour and capabilities of seers more broadly, not the short, sponsored hymns to deities which comprise the bulk of the *RV*. And so the importance of the *Rig-Vedic* evidence is not in its giving a complete picture of intuitive divination, but in its demonstration that there are discernible already in the *Vedas* elements of the intuitive divination found in Epic.

Intuitive Divination in the *Mahābhārata* (and *Rāmāyana*)

Seers in Sanskrit Epic and para-Epic, as in Greece, are ethereal figures who drift in and out of the action according to the exigencies of the narrative moment (they are in this way a valuable expedient for the poet). They elucidate, prophesy, and intervene; more than any other class of character, they are empowered to instruct and upbraid those in power.²⁸⁰ There are too many examples of intuitive divination in Sanskrit Epic for all to be treated, and I prioritise depth over breadth, discussing representative passages. I start with Sanskrit Epic descriptions of divinatory ability, comparing these as I go to the Greek situation. I then consider in detail a formula which both traditions inherit from the time of Greco-Indic unity.²⁸¹ Next, moving up to the level of scene I treat an example of a seer in action and compare this to a couple of scenes from the *Iliad*. After making an important methodological point, I again ground my discussion in the shared inheritance of a formula. I close by considering the similar effects which poets achieve by granting divinatory ability to non-seers.

The Bestowal of Intuitive Divination, and What it is in Sanskrit Epic

²⁷⁹ See Witzel 2005's long and openly speculative account of how the *Mahābhārata* might have grown out of Epic narratives contemporary with the *RV*. See Witzel 1995 for a similar paper with a socio-political focus, and Asko Parpola, 2002, for a characteristically heterodox view on these issues. See also Christopher Minkowski 1989, especially 416-7, on how Vedic ritual provided for intervals in sacrificial action during which bards were to recite heroic stories – the setting of two of the *Mahābhārata*'s frame stories.

²⁸⁰ Resemblances between practitioners of divination are further explored in the fourth chapter of the thesis.

²⁸¹ 2300-2200 BC would be a plausible *terminus ante quem*; see the introduction.

The most useful passages for understanding how intuitive divination works in Sanskrit Epic are those in which this power is granted to Gāndhārī and Sañjaya by Vyāsa, the greatest seer of Sanskrit Epic and poet of the *Mahābhārata*, since they inevitably include description of the gift. Gāndhārī, daughter of Subala, king of Gandhāra, was granted the gift of having a hundred sons.²⁸² The patriarch Bhīṣma therefore arranged a marriage between her and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, king of the Kurus. Subala hesitated because of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's blindness, but in the end consideration of his illustrious lineage and good morals prevailed. Gāndhārī on receiving news of her marriage 'took a kerchief, folded it many times, and, vowing utter fidelity to her husband, blindfolded her eyes... [for she] resolved that she would not experience more than her husband could.'²⁸³ In short, Gāndhārī immediately shows herself to be the paradigm of the devoted wife.²⁸⁴ The two are matri- and patriarch of the Kuru dynasty, with their hundred sons the principal fighters against the army led by their cousins, the five Pāṇḍava brothers.²⁸⁵

The previous section has concluded with Gāndhārī lamenting the destruction of the war at the gathering of the main characters in the hall of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Then,

apaśyat tatra tiṣṭhantī sarvaṁ divyena cakṣuṣā
 pativratā mahābhāgā samānavratacārīṇī
 ugreṇa tapasā yuktā satataṁ satyavādīnī
 varadānena kṛṣṇasya maharṣeḥ puṇyakarmaṇaḥ
 divyajñānabalopetā vividhaṁ paryadevayat
 dadarśa sā buddhimatī dūrād api yathāntike
 raṇājiraṁ nṛvīraṇām adbhuṭaṁ lomaharṣaṇam...

²⁸² Yudhiṣṭhira's scene with Arjuna at *Mhb*.3.38 is a late passage clearly different in nature from the subject here. See J. L. Mehta, 2009, 76-79 for synopsis and discussion. Thetis provides a Greek parallel of a woman whose marriage is determined by a prophecy regarding her offspring.

²⁸³ 1. 103.13, translation of van Buitenen, 1973. I here recapitulate *Mhb*. 1. 103.9-17.

²⁸⁴ Just like Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Cf. the guidelines for the wife in the roughly contemporary *Manusmṛti* (*Laws of Manu*) 9. 29-30.

²⁸⁵ For the family tree, see the final page of the chapter.

‘Eminent [Gāndhārī], devoted to her husband and still fulfilling her vow to be the same as he was,²⁸⁶

Standing there [in the palace], saw everything with the divine eye.

Engaged in great austerity,²⁸⁷ always truthful in her speech,

And accorded divine knowledge through the precious gift of the great seer

And doer of holy deeds, Vyāsa, she began a varied lament.

Newly endowed with understanding, although she was far away she saw as if she were present

The awe-inspiring, horrific battlefield of the heroes among men.’

11. 16.1-4

I analyse this passage along with the following two. At the beginning of the sixth book of the *Mahābhārata*, the two armies are massed and the great war is about to begin. Vyāsa, who is watching, turns to speak in private to King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The former’s grand introduction is fitting to this important moment – ‘bhagavān ṛṣiḥ sarvavedavidām śreṣṭho vyāsaḥ satyavatīSūtaḥ | ... bharatānām pitāmahaḥ pratyakṣadarśī bhagavān bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit’, ‘Vyāsa, venerable seer, best of all those who know the Vedas, son of Satyavatī, ... forefather of the Bhāratas,²⁸⁸ the eyewitness who, venerable, knows what was, is, and will be’ (6. 2.1-2). He tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra that time has run out, and that he must now watch the inevitable without giving in to grief. He makes an extraordinary offer – “yadi tv icchasi saṁgrāme

²⁸⁶ I owe this interpretation of *samānavratācārīṇī* to Fitzgerald, 2004, *ad loc.* All translations of Epic are mine unless otherwise specified.

²⁸⁷ Again a reference to her self-denial in blinding herself because of her husband. The poet is not interested in thematising Gāndhārī’s blindness by presenting it as somehow exchanged for prophetic vision. If he had been, this would have been a natural place to do so. Greece, by contrast, was interested in this notion – see the famous tale of Teiresias at [Hes.] fr. 211ab [Most = 275 MW], and Phineus (at Apoll. 2.178ff.) and Euenios (Hdt. 9.92-94) for other blind prophets. The motif ties seers together with poets, who from the earliest stage in Greece are also commonly blind, e.g. Demodocus (viii.65), Thamyris (II.594-600), Stesichorus (Pl. Phaedr. 243a), and Homer himself. In India, there is a blind *Ṛg-Vedic* seer-poet, Dīrghatamas, whose speaking name literally means ‘he whose darkness is long’; he mentions his own blindness at 1. 147.3 (cf. 4. 5.13), but it is never presented as in exchange for prophetic vision. (Jamison, 2007, 313 suggests that his name also reflects the difficulty of his hymns, but this is superfluous.) I cannot think of other blind poets or seers in ancient India.

There is not enough to suggest that the exchange of poetic / prophetic vision for physical blindness was an inherited property, rather, it seems an elaboration in line with idiosyncratically Greek ideas about the divine tendency to mix their gifts. As Achilles says, “δοιοὶ γάρ τε πίθοι κατακείται ἐν Διὸς οὔδει // δόρων οἷα δίδωσι κακῶν, ἕτερος δὲ ἐάων”, “two are the jars which lie on Zeus’ floor. From one he gives ills, from the other, blessings” (XXIV.527-8). Cassandra, who had both the gift of prophecy and the curse that no-one would believe her words, manifests the same compensatory pattern.

²⁸⁸ The wider family descended from Bharata to which both Kurus and Pāṇḍavas belong. Again, see the chart on the final page of the chapter.

draṣṭum enaṁ viśāṁ pate | cakṣur dadāni te hanta yuddham etan niśāmaya”’, “‘‘If you want to see [what happens] in battle, o lord of the earth, I shall give you the power of sight. Yes, perceive the battle for yourself!’’ (6. 2.6) Dhṛtarāṣṭra refuses, saying that he could not bear to witness the slaughter of his kinsmen. He adds, however, that he would like to hear about its every detail, through the power of Vyāsa (*tava tejasā*, 6. 2.7). I quote Vyāsa’s reply in full:

“eṣa te saṁjaya rājan yuddham etad vadiṣyati
 etasya sarvaṁ saṁgrāme naparokṣaṁ bhaviṣyati
 cakṣuṣā saṁjaya rājan divyena iṣa samanvitaḥ
 kathayiṣyati te yuddhaṁ sarvajñaś ca bhaviṣyati
 prakāśaṁ vā rahasyaṁ vā rātrau vā yadi vā divā
 manasā cintitam api sarvaṁ vetsyati saṁjayaḥ
 nainaṁ śāstrāṇi bhetsyanti nainaṁ bādhiṣyate śramaḥ
 gāvalgaṇir ayaṁ jīvan yuddhād asmād vimokṣyate
 ahaṁ ca kīrtim eteṣāṁ kurūṇāṁ bharataṣabha
 pāṇḍavānāṁ ca sarveṣāṁ prathayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ”

“‘‘O king, Saṁjaya here shall describe this war to you.
 Everything in this battle shall be within his ken.
 Saṁjaya here, o king, endowed with the divine eye,
 Shall narrate to you the war, and he shall know everything,
 Whether manifest or secret, whether by night or by day;
 Saṁjaya shall even know everything thought in people’s minds.
 Weapons shall not cut him. Fatigue shall not weary him.
 He, the son of Gavalgaṇa, shall return alive from this war.
 And I myself shall tell of the fame of all of these Kurus

And Pāṇḍavas, o Bull of the Bhāratas. Do not grieve.”

6. 2.9-13

Like Gāndhārī, Sañjaya takes on the full suite of prophetic powers here. Naturally, this is also a ploy of great expedience since it internally motivates the narration of the battle: the gift is in the service of the external audience as much as in Dhṛtarāṣṭra's. The implausibility of the latter's refusal of the power of sight is meagre price to pay for so elegant an arrangement. One level up in the *mise-en-abyme* structure of the *Mahābhārata* is Vaiśampāyana, who learns the story from the sage Vyāsa, and recounts it to Janamejaya.²⁸⁹

Returning to the above passage, Vyāsa next describes at great length the terrible omens he sees,²⁹⁰ and discourses philosophically with Dhṛtarāṣṭra (6.2-4). Now turning to the newly enhanced Sañjaya, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks him about the earth and cosmos. The introductory structure may be traditional (Hesiod asks his own Muse the same question [*Theog.* 113-14]), but the bloated dialogue which follows is clearly from the latest period of the composition of the Epic, which saw the accretion of vast amounts of didactic material (6. 5-13). It is in any case irrelevant to my current purpose. 6. 14.1 brings an abrupt break: ‘atha gāvalgaṇir dhīmān samarād etya sañjayaḥ | pratyakṣadarśī sarvasya bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit’, ‘Then wise Sañjaya, son of Gavalgaṇa, having returned from battle, the eyewitness of all, who knows what was, is, and will be...’ There is an obvious problem: Sañjaya returns from the war, but there has been no verse which says that he went there in the first place. Some manuscripts omit 6. 14.1, presumably for this reason; others awkwardly add verses after this one.²⁹¹ More troubling, though, is the very notion that he would go to the battlefield. Wouldn't this defeat the point of Vyāsa's gift, thanks to which, as is said in the very same line, Sañjaya was all but omniscient? Yet on closer examination of the above passage, it seems that Vyāsa does indeed presuppose that he will physically go to battle. He says that he will return from it alive, and, moreover, it would otherwise be pointless to grant him invulnerability and indefatigability. Now is not the place to address this issue, which swiftly involves fundamental questions about the make-

²⁸⁹ Described at *Mhb.* 1. 1.8-9. For more on Vaiśampāyana, Janamejaya, and the wider significance of the poem's frames, see again Minkowski, 1989. Vyāsa's omniscience, of course, also depends on his prophetic abilities. I take up Sañjaya's case here because the matter is made more explicit.

²⁹⁰ To be considered in the next chapter.

²⁹¹ See 59*, found in the *apparatus* of the Critical Edition, *ad loc.*, attested in two Devanagari mss.: ‘Sañjayaḥ at the instigation of Dhṛtarāṣṭra had gone to the field of the Kuru [i.e. the battlefield], with the speed granted him by Vyāsa's gift. Having had a look in the battle, o king, he was back in an instant’, ‘vacanād dhṛtarāṣṭrasya kurukṣetram jagāma ha | vyāsasya varadānena tvaramāṇas tu sañjayaḥ | drṣtvā tu samare rājan kṣaṇenaiva samāgamat.’ [sañjayaḥ and kurukṣetra are written, but presumably these are printing errors or problems with the scan of the text which I use. ‘samare’ should almost certainly read ‘samaram’, giving ‘having seen the battle’, but I translate the text provided.]

up of the text.²⁹² My current purpose is the modest one of establishing that there is in Sanskrit Epic intuitive divination of a kind analogous to what is found in Greek Epic. And at any rate, again, Vaiśampāyana learns the poem from Vyāsa, who knows the story through cognition alone. Logically, Vyāsa should have been able to grant this same power to Sañjaya, but, naturally, the poet(s) who wrote of Sañjaya's travels to and from the battlefield did not think logically.

After delivering the shocking news of Bhisma's death, Sañjaya starts his narration of the day's events. He recapitulates his powers as a kind of prologue:

namaskṛtvā pitus te 'haṁ pārāśaryāya dhīmate
 yasya prasādād divyaṁ me prāptaṁ jñānam anuttamam
 dr̥ṣṭiś cātīndriyā rājan dūrāc chravaṇam eva ca
 paracittasya vijñānam atītānāgatasya ca
 vyutthitotpattivijñānam ākāśe ca gatiḥ sadā
 śastrair asaṅgo yuddheṣu varadānān mahātmanah

²⁹² The text is not clear about how much time Sañjaya spends on the battlefield and how much he relies on his divine eye. Belvalkar, 1946, treats the issue from a thematic and narratological point of view, and Anette Mangels, 1994, 108ff., from a more text-critical point of view. The problem is well summarised by William Johnson, 1998, 118 – he too sees the problem as fundamentally textual, that is, to do with the text's growth. Hildebeitel discusses Sañjaya's divine eye in this and other passages, and treats Belvalkar and Mangels' invocation of higher criticism unsympathetically (2001, 55-59). He is of course right that what he calls 'foreshadowing after the fact' can account for Sañjaya's non-linear narration of the war, but he does not address the numerous other contradictions, including the overarching incongruity that an omniscient narrator, who has access even to others' dreams (as at 7. 5.7) should take the time to go to the battlefield (see Belvalkar for the other contradictions). A further complicating factor is that Sañjaya, as we will see in the next chapter but one, is clearly a seer already in the fifth book, well before Vyāsa bestows the divine eye upon him at the start of the sixth (see Hildebeitel, 2001, 57 for those passages).

It is immoderate to reduce, with Mangels, the 'divine eye' to 'a Buddhist pendant...', a belated addition to make his narration credible', since the text abounds in the incredible, and since in any case this would not account for the references to Sañjaya's intuitive powers before book 6. Yet likewise, Hildebeitel's appeal to the 'suppleness' of it as a narrative device is not reason enough to ignore the many incongruities (all quotations from Hildebeitel, 2001, 57). Belvalkar is more even-handed, and no doubt closer to the truth: 'There must have been a time when even this device of the ['divine eye'] itself, so very effectively employed by the present redactor of the Mahābhārata, might not have been yet thought of, and the fidelity of Sañjaya's narration might have been believed in as a matter of course' (1946, 329) – that is, that there was a time when Sañjaya was a seer all along. Belvalkar might have added in support of this view that we can surmise that this is the way in which Vyāsa narrates the story to Vaiśampāyana. I doubt that the text that we have allows for a more precise statement than that. (My own view, put very briefly, is that the poem functions like a collection, with each section standing only in loose relation to what precedes. It is the very abundance of such contradictions between passages and books that means we are wrong to worry about them. No single oral poem could have been as long as the *Mahābhārata*, nor could it all of it ever have been held in a single mind. The logic of its arrangement is therefore determined by recitation on a smaller scale. It is not *Middlemarch*.)

“‘Having paid your respects to your wise father, [Vyāsa,] son of Parāśara,
 By whose favour I acquired supreme divine knowledge,
 And sight and hearing beyond the senses, o king, and from afar,
 And knowledge of others’ thoughts, and of past and future,
 And knowledge of the causes of strange phenomena,²⁹³ and perpetual movement through space,²⁹⁴
 And imperviousness to weapons in war – by the precious gift of great-souled [Vyāsa].’”

6. 16.7-9

Some books later, with the death of the Kuru commander Duryodhana at the end of the war, the power is quietly withdrawn from Sañjaya: “tava putre gate svargaṁ śokārtasya mamānagha ṛṣidattaṁ pranaṣṭaṁ tad divyadarśitvam adya vai,” “‘Once your son had gone to heaven, o blameless one, I, pained with grief, lost that divine sight which the seer had given me’” (10. 9.58). As Belvalkar says, it is lost ‘so soon as [its] purpose is served’ (1946, 321).²⁹⁵

The similarities with Greek intuitive divination sing out to the comparatist. This knowledge includes the thoughts of other characters, as well as events in the past, present and future. What takes place far away is also emphatically included – it is seen as if one were nearby. This aspect is fully developed in Sanskrit Epic. Indeed *pratyakṣadarśī*, ‘eye-witness’, is a formula often used of seers, as above of Sañjaya at 6. 14.1 and of Vyāsa at 6. 2.2. We saw how Lynceus had supernatural eyesight at the end of the last chapter (*Cypria* Fr. 16), as well as how Cassandra was the first to discern the wagon loaded with Hector’s body in the far distance (*Il.* 24.697-702). Calchas too is the one who guides the Achaeans to Troy ἦν διὰ μαντοσύνην, ‘through his mantic ability’ (*Il.* 1.72). Although often intuitively known without

²⁹³ *Vyutthitotpattivijñānam* is a difficult word to translate. See Hiltebeitel, 2001, 56 n. 96 for other opinions. I do not think it obviously refers to omens, though it may comprise some ominous phenomena. It could also mean ‘knowledge of the causes of dereliction of duty’, though that would be strange in the context.

²⁹⁴ A somewhat obscure phrase, but probably a reference to Sañjaya’s apparent ability to move freely from war to Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s palace at will – see *59, quoted and translated above, n. 291, and Vyāsa’s travel, discussed below.

²⁹⁵ Alf Hiltebeitel intriguingly argues that Dhṛtarāṣṭra ‘is allowed the glimmer of a thought that Vyāsa could do something about’ the sons whom he is unable to control, that is, ‘that they are not under his control but under Vyāsa’s’, since he is narrator (2001, 56). Indeed, these scenes will be important in my later discussion of poets and seers, since on another level, the power which Vyāsa bestows to both Sañjaya and Gāndhārī is that of the ability to narrate – to both internal and external audience. It is not only the seer but the poet who, like Sañjaya, knows what is secret and manifest, by night and day, including the very thoughts of the characters. Vyāsa, arranger of the Vedas, is after all like the composers of the Rig-Vedic hymns both poet and seer, and both of these activities rely on the same intuitive ability, which, like the Vedic gods, he both embodies and can bestow.

reference to means, this knowledge can also be mediated through the senses – primarily sight, but also hearing. No change in mental state is needed to activate this power; rather, users of it remain lucid throughout and rely on something within themselves.²⁹⁶ They can activate the power at will without inducement.

Moreover, it is in these passages a divine gift, as it is for the poet / seers of the *RV*, and sometimes in Greece, as, for example, for Calchas at *Il.* 1.72, Polyphides at xv.252-3, and for Eidō / Theonoē at *Eur. Hel.* 13-14, quoted below.²⁹⁷ Teiresias is recipient of an analogous gift by implication when, in an unfortunately brief fragment of the Hesiodic *Melampodia*, he wishes that Zeus had only ‘given’ him the amount of wisdom fitting for mortals.²⁹⁸ For Solon, Lord Apollo makes a man a seer,²⁹⁹ just as, as we will see in the final chapter, Zeus made him a seer. As in Greece, the gift motif may or may not be mentioned in connection with divination in Sanskrit Epic, and aligns with divine giftedness in other areas too.

Further, in both India and Greece heredity and giftedness co-exist as explanations of seership. An august lineage stretching back to his great-grandfather Melampous establishes Theoclymenus’ vatic credentials at xv.225-57. The poet considers this important enough to devote a great deal of resources to it.³⁰⁰ Homer dwells on Theoclymenus’ father: αὐτὰρ ὑπέρθυμον Πολυφείδεα μάντιν Ἀπόλλων | θῆκε βροτῶν ὄχ’ ἄριστον, ἐπεὶ θάνεν Ἀμφιάραος, ‘And Apollo made powerful Polyphides far the best seer among mortals after Amphiaraus died’ (xv.252-3). Polyphides was the grandson of Melampous, and Amphiaraus his great-grandson. Apollo grants Polyphides a power, and it is left understood that this is

²⁹⁶ Pace Fitzgerald, who assumes Gāndhārī enters a ‘trance’ (2004, 18).

²⁹⁷ μαντοσύνην, τὴν οἱ πόρε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων. See also Cassandra’s words at *Aes. Ag.* 1202, μάντις μ’ Ἀπόλλων τῷδ’ ἐπέστησεν τέλει, “‘Apollo put me into this role.’”

²⁹⁸ ὥφελλες δοῦναι καὶ ἴσα φρεσὶ μῆδεα ἰδμεν | θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποις, *Fr.* 212 [Most] = 276 [MW].

²⁹⁹ ἄλλον μάντιν ἔθηκεν ἄναξ ἐκάεργος Ἀπόλλων, 13.53.

³⁰⁰ Too many resources given his limited role in the poem, some have thought. Denys Page, for example, speaks for many a suspicious analyst commentator – ‘It is natural to presume that a person whose introduction is so long and loudly trumpeted will say or do something of some importance, either now or hereafter; but the truth turns out to be the reverse’ (1955, 84). Recent scholarship has preferred to see the introduction as ‘typically Homeric in that it only provides information which is relevant for [Theoclymenus’] role’ (so de Jong, 2001, *ad* 222-58, see her n. 6 for previous scholars of this opinion). He is a seer, and must be established as such. Yet a mystery persists. Such elaborate introductions are not afforded to Calchas, nor Halitherses. Maybe Arie Hoekstra is right that ‘the length of the digression is out of proportion’ with the need to establish credentials, and that ‘The poet dwells upon genealogy for its own sake’ (1990, *ad* xv.223-81).

The answer is twofold. Firstly, Calchas and Halitherses are recognised as seers by other characters, whereas Theoclymenus never declares himself a seer, and other characters refer to him only as ξείνος, ‘stranger’ (xv.536, .542; xvii.163; xx.360). In Theoclymenus’ case, the poet must tell his audience what elsewhere he shows them. Secondly and relatedly, no other seer meets a challenge such as the Suitors’ to Theoclymenus at xx.360-84. Indeed, the introduction has more to do with this second scene than with Theoclymenus’ ornithomancy in book xv. As I discuss at length later, it is exceptional within Homer. Yet for it to be effective, the audience cannot doubt with Eurymachus that it is the fruit of madness, not divination. A robust genealogy at the moment of his appearance ensures Theoclymenus’ unimpeachability.

bequeathed to Theoclymenus. It is *both* a family affair *and* a question of divine favour.³⁰¹ Again, the relation between these two potentially incompatible models of the acquisition of seership should not be scrutinised too hard. Poets saw them as compatible and drew on both possibilities.

Indeed, according to Aeschylus' Pythian priestess, Apollo himself obtained his prophetic gift from Zeus – τέχνης δέ νιν Ζεὺς ἔνθεον κτίσας φρένα | ἵζει τέταρτον τοῖσδε μάντιν ἐν θρόνοις, “Zeus made his mind inspired with divinatory skill, | And has him installed as the fourth *Mantis* on these thrones here” (*Eum.* 17-8). Aeschylus artfully mixes his terms to include both intuitive and sign divination: Apollo gains a τέχνης, ‘skill’ – a word usually used of a learnt trade, but it is an inborn mental capacity – κτίσας φρένα, ‘made his mind’.³⁰² The prophetess, far from avoiding it, fully embraces the paradox of a god as a god's prophet by the word *en-theon*, literally ‘in-godded’, here strikingly used of a divinity. Analogously, we saw above how Rig-Vedic gods could be seers (see e.g. VII. 88.4, .6, above pp. 103-4). In any case, Apollo is Zeus' son, and here the line is again blurred between gift and heredity. Again analogously, we saw how Vedic poets saw no incompatibility in depicting gods granting the gift of seership, and then presupposing the heredity of that gift from a seer ancestor. The very notion of the Family Books depends on this.

And indeed, in both traditions seership may also *not* be inherited. Not all Vedic Ṛṣis spawned family traditions, just as Calchas has no children. Furthermore, just as some Iliadic seers have non-seer children who do not heed their fathers' warnings of the danger of war and are killed in battle (see chapter four, pp. 255-6), in Sanskrit Epic many seers have non-seer children – so, for example, Vyāsa. Aeschylus's tale of Apollo's investiture as god of prophecy contradicts the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, in which the newborn god suddenly declares, “εἴη μοι κίθαρίς τε φίλη καὶ καμπύλα τόξα, | χρήσω δ' ἀνθρώποισι Διὸς νημερτέα βουλὴν”, “May the *cithara* be mine, and the curved bow, | and I shall prophesy to men the unerring will of Zeus” (131-2). The resulting picture is in both traditions messy and unsystematic. A shared inconsistency is more telling than a shared consistency, just as in linguistics a shared irregularity is more telling than a shared regularity. Very plausibly, this equivocation goes back to the time of unity.

The similarities are piling up. In both Greece and India, intuitive powers may be either granted through divine favour or inherited (or, somehow, both). These depend on an inborn capacity which requires no sign nor change in mental state to activate. It may give an awareness of the occluded present, as well as of past and future. It is subject to no theoretical limit beyond the expedience of the poet. Those

³⁰¹ For another example, see Nereus and Eido below.

³⁰² κτίσας is from κτίζω, ‘I build, found’, but the metaphor is not so striking in Greek as in English; it is often used in Tragedy in such a sense. See *LSJ* A.5.

with such powers are accorded some sort of special social role (on which more later). Language appropriate to this capacity may be used of god or man. These have to do with the fundamental conception of seers and divination. They do not look like similarities which grow out of some other underlying alignment. These are, in other words, examples of strong inheritances. They are similarities best explained as the result of both cultures' preservation of archaic features dating to the time of unity.

Again, I need not claim that all these features are distinctive taken singly. But the overall picture has its richness. It is not clear, for example, that an uneasy mixture of heredity and divine gift can easily be taken for granted. That is, it is interesting that both cultures share the same apparent tension, and then uninterest in resolving that contradiction. Many cultures, moreover, (including ancient Near-Eastern cultures) would add an element of possession to non-sign divination. Ancient India and Archaic Greece signally do not do so. At the same time, the kinds of divination I pick out here are obviously subsumable under the typologically widespread idea of intuitive divination. In other words, this is the Goldilocks amount of similarity for the strong claim – not so much that it stretches credulity that it could remain stable over so many centuries, but not so little that it becomes a trivial claim.

Divinatory Epiphany

I now consider some examples of this power in action in Sanskrit Epic. I begin the section with an epiphany, where, adducing Greek parallels, I give an example of how the weak claim should be used to make sense of similarities between the two traditions. I then ground my argument in the analysis of a shared formula, which I treat in the second part of the following section on formulas; there, I make the strong claim. In the final section, I consider affinities in the narrative use of divination, again invoking the weak claim.

In the eleventh *Parvan* a little before the Gāndhārī passage quoted above, the war is over, the hundred sons all dead, and there is a tense gathering at Dhṛtarāṣṭra's palace including the opposing leader, Yudhiṣṭhira, nephew of Gāndhārī and Dhṛtarāṣṭra. When Gāndhārī catches sight of Yudhiṣṭhira, whom she holds responsible for the death of all her sons, in her mad grief for them (*putraśokārtā*) she conceives the desire to curse him (11. 13.2).³⁰³ Even as the desire takes her,

³⁰³ Fitzgerald thinks that 9. 62.10 suggests that Gāndhārī's curses would be especially potent due to the merit she had earned through her self-denial (2004, 671). Yet this seems to rely on a late conception of *tapas* and is very probably a late line: the second part of that verse is more reminiscent of the language of *Purāṇa* than that of Epic:

tasyāḥ pāpam abhiprāyaṁ viditvā pāṇḍavān prati
 ṛṣiḥ satyavatīputraḥ prāg eva samabudhyata
 sa gaṅgāyām upaspr̥śya puṇyagandhaṁ payaḥ śuci
 taṁ deśam upasāmpede paramar̥ṣir manojavaḥ
 divyena cakṣuṣā paśyan manasānuddhatena ca
 sarvapraṇabhṛtām bhāvaṁ sa tatra samabudhyata

‘The seer [Vyāsa], son of Satyavatī, knew her evil intention
 Towards the Pāṇḍavas ahead of time and understood it completely.
 The supreme seer sprinkled over himself some clean, fragrant water from the Ganges
 And arrived at that place as swift as thought.
 Seeing both by his divine eye and by his unsurpassed mind,
 He therefore understood the thoughts of all breath-bearers [creatures].’

11. 13.3-5

Here we learn that Vyāsa, the ‘supreme’ or paradigmatic seer, *paramar̥ṣir*, of the *Mahābhārata*, is able to ‘know’, *viditvā*, the intention of Gāndhārī, and understand it entirely ahead of time; the act is one of seeing, *paśyan*, but through a special kind of sight which combines eye and mind, just as at *RV. X. 130.6* (see further below). The exceptionally wide semantic field of ‘bhāvaṁ’, which can mean, among other things, ‘being, state, nature, disposition, arrangement’ but which I follow Fitzgerald in narrowing to ‘thoughts’, suggests a correspondingly capacious ability. It is, of course, from the root *bhū*, just as *bhūta-*, *bhavya-*, and *bhaviṣya-*. Secondly, he has the ability to appear, with magical speed in front of Gāndhārī. As we saw before, in both traditions it is customary when introducing a seer to include some allusion to their powers; this passage is no exception.

“[sc. *yudhiṣṭhiraś*] *cintayāno mahābhāgām gāndhārīm tapasānvitām | ghoreṇa tapasā yuktām trailokyam api sādahet*”.

In any case, to touch on momentous questions, I have deep misgivings about the methodological validity of applying one *Mahābhārata* verse to another distant passage, when it is unclear which passage was written first, whether the later writer was (or even could have been) aware of the earlier line, and whether a contemporary audience or reader could have been expected to have the line in mind.

Vyāsa speaks to Gāndhārī, telling her to ““Have no anger toward the son of Pāṇḍu, Gāndhārī. Be at peace. Restrain your passion. Listen to what I’m telling you.”” He reminds her that she refused to bless her son Duryodhana, battlefield commander of the Kurus, but told him that ““Where there is Law there is victory.”” He continues, ““Having taken such thorough account of Law and declared it, wise woman, restrain your anger now. Do not be this way, Gāndhārī, lady who speaks the truth.”” She at first retreats, pleading that ““with the pain I feel for my sons, my mind is almost reeling out of my control””, and accepting both that she must reconcile with her kinsmen, and that it is her sons who were in the wrong. Yet then she demurs, this time addressing the others and not only Vyāsa, and reiterating her right to outrage at the wicked behaviour of Bhīma, who killed her son Duryodhana by cheating in a duel, ““But that deed Bhīma did with Vāsudeva watching enraged me! After he haughtily challenged Duryodhana to a fight with clubs, Bhīma realized, as Duryodhana moved about in the fight in many different ways, that Duryodhana was better trained than he. So Bhīma struck him below the navel! Now how could men of courage ever forsake a rule of Law, one that has been clearly taught by the exalted men who know Law, just to save their lives in a battle?””³⁰⁴ (11. 13.6-19) A debate between Bhīma and Gāndhārī ensues, in which Bhīma, here clearly in the wrong, is evasive and mendacious (11.14).

I will adduce three Greek parallels to this passage, commenting on similarity on the levels of language, narrative, and culture. Where necessary, I will bring in material not strictly related to divination to support my arguments. Helenus in the *Iliad* provides a good example of a Greek seer perceiving another’s thoughts.³⁰⁵ Apollo and Athena have just agreed that Hector will duel with one of the Achaeans. The narrator tells us that σύνθετο θυμῷ | βουλὴν, ἣ ῥα θεοῖσιν ἐφῆνδανε, ‘he understood in his heart the plan which pleased the gods’; he relays the message to Hector.³⁰⁶ The collocation of συντίθημι and θυμός occurs only once elsewhere, at xv.27, where Athena is instructing Telemachus, “ἄλλο δέ τοι τι ἔπος ἐρέω, σὺ δὲ σύνθεο θυμῷ”, ‘But I shall say something else to you, and you understand it in your heart.’ The context confirms that a precise and full understanding is meant by the phrase. Other usages of the verb relate to the understanding of speech, and the reasonably common formula “σὺ δὲ σύνθεο καὶ μεν ἄκουσον”, ‘You listen to me and understand [what I say]’ may be the association which lies behind Helenus’ words at VII.53.³⁰⁷ συντίθημι seems to be a verb particularly suited to denote an understanding

³⁰⁴ Fitzgerald’s translation, 2004.

³⁰⁵ I briefly discuss this scene above, ch.1 pp. 82-3, where I give fuller background. Cf. also Teiresias, who knows the mental state of Poseidon at *Od.* 11.90-138.

³⁰⁶ 7. 44. Aristonicus of Alexandria comments on 44 that μαντικῶς συνῆκεν, οὐκ ἀκούσας αὐτῶν τῆς φωνῆς, ‘he understood mantically, not having heard their voice.’ Inevitably, he reports that 53 was athetized for the perceived contradiction.

³⁰⁷ It does not denote the perception itself, as can be seen from the formula at VI. 334 – “τοῦνεκά τοι ἐρέω· σὺ δὲ σύνθεο καὶ μεν ἄκουσον”, “For I shall tell you: you listen to me and understand [what I say]”, a *hysteron proteron* (cf. *Od.* xv.318, xvi.259, xviii.129, xxiv.265). That the verb takes an accusative, not a genitive is to be expected,

pursuant to a perception. This is brought out at i.328 where Penelope overhears Demodocus, τοῦ δ' ὑπερωϊόθεν φρεσὶ σύνθετο θέσπιν ἀοιδῆν, 'And from above she understood / perceived in her mind the holy song of Demodocus,' a unique abbreviation of 'she heard and understood it was' (cf. xx.92 for a similar but not identical usage). Helenus concludes his speech to Hector “ὥς γὰρ ἐγὼ ὅπ' ἄκουσα θεῶν αἰειγενετάων”, “for thus I myself have heard the voice of the eternal gods” (53). It is not clear whether Helenus here uses the phrase 'heard the voice of the gods' as a periphrasis for 'understood from the gods what is fated', or gives real detail about the means of understanding. Certainly, Helenus understands more than what the audience is shown the gods saying to one another just before. Yet just as certainly the text does not want us to worry scholastically over whether he can overhear only because Athena wants him to, or whether he always has such access to divine conversations. What is important to the poet is what the device allows him to achieve. Even if it is mere language, in method and function it is still a good parallel for the supernatural auditory capacity of which Saṅjaya speaks at 6. 16.8 (see above p. 112), as well as to Vyāsa and Gāndhārī.

The verb of perception in the *Mahābhārata* passage (*paśyan*, 'seeing') is accompanied by two instrumentals (*divyena cakṣuṣā manasānuddhatena ca*, 'by means of his divine eye and of his unsurpassed mind') which clarify the supernatural nature of the perception. We saw this structure above in the *RV* at VII. 33.9 and .12, and we will often see it again – indeed, *divyena cakṣuṣā* 'by means of the divine eye' is a well-attested formula in Epic Sanskrit (see further below, p. 150 n. 373). While, of course, θυμῷ is a ubiquitous word in the traditional language of Greek Epic, and sometimes accompanies verbs of mental activity as a vague locative which provides emphasis, its use here aligns suggestively with the *manasā*, 'by means of his mind' in the Sanskrit passage, as well as with the Rīg-Vedic seers who divine *hrdayasya praketaiḥ*, 'by means of the insights of the heart'.³⁰⁸

In fact, the *RV* provides parallels close enough to suppose that *divyena cakṣuṣā* is a continuation of a formula of Vedic pedigree. Although *divyena* and *cakṣuṣā* are nowhere collocated, they are used separately of intuitive matters. At X. 130.6, the poet casts his mind back to his ancestors in ancient times – 'paśyān manye manāsā cakṣāsā tān ya imān yajñam ayājantā pūrvē', 'Seeing with my mind as my eye, I think of the ancient ones who offered this sacrifice.' The sight words, 'paśyān' and 'cakṣāsā' artfully enclose the mind words, 'manye' and 'manāsā'. 'Mind' and 'eye' are instrumentals in apposition, just as they are 11. 13.5 above. Syntax and word order tether the concepts fast. X. 82.1 plays on the same notion. Viśvakarman is described as 'cakṣuṣaḥ pītā manāsā hi dhīrō...'. Jamison and Brereton translate 'The

since it is the stimulus, not the person which is the object (see Cepraga, 2022, 117-23, for a quantitative analysis of the issue in fifth and fourth century Greek prose).

³⁰⁸ VII. 33.9. See also Diodorus Siculus' Pythia, who sees the past and the future 'in her wisdom' – ὅς σοφία τά τ' ἐόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα προέδορκεν (9. 3.2, discussed further below).

father of the eye, for he is insightful in mind...³⁰⁹ The eye is here that of intuitive sight, as the following clause clarifies. Viśvakarman, as the granter of intuitive power to the poet is the eye's father. See above for X. 43.7, and the use of the strikingly Greek phrase 'divyena dānūnā', 'divine gift', for intuitive power.

Sappho's Hymn to Aphrodite, perhaps the most *Rig-Vedic* poem in spirit of all Greek literature, interacts fruitfully with the Greek and Sanskrit passages discussed immediately above. The poet is lovesick, and in the second stanza invokes her past kindness:

ἀλλὰ τυίδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κατέρωτα
τὰς ἔμας αὔδας αἰοῖσα πῆλοι
ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα
... ἦλθες

'But come here, if ever in the past

Hearing my voice from afar

You listened, and leaving the house of your father

... you came,'

(1.5-8)

Here, Sappho makes explicit what all theistic prayer takes for granted – that the gods can hear those who pray to them, and, given the right conditions, intervene on the basis of what they perceive. In this sense, even if it is seldom said so baldly as here, Greek and Indian Hymns presuppose that gods are endowed with supernatural perception. The workings of intuitive divination in mortals, especially that closely linked to perception, may well have retained a close connection to this divine behaviour. I shall return to this important point in the next chapter but one, when I discuss who seers were, and examine the numerous passages in both Greek and Sanskrit literature which call gods seers. For now, I move on to the third Greek passage which I wish to compare to the above *Mahābhārata* scene.

This, I.118-223, furnishes by far the richest correspondences. Agamemnon has enraged Achilles by demanding that he hand over Briseis to him. As Achilles' hand moves to the hilt of his sword, Hera, aware of Achilles' intention of attacking Agamemnon, dispatches Athena to restrain him. The parallels between the scenes are remarkably exact – and unmatched by any parallels from within their own traditions. Both Achilles and Gāndhārī are aggrieved at an outrage and, after brief consideration, decide

³⁰⁹ They follow Renou, 1955-69, Vol. 15, 170, who gives '(Viśvakarman), père de l'œil (spirituel) – car (il est) voyant par l'esprit...'.

on vengeance. As they are on the brink of effecting it, a divinity supernaturally perceives their intention, materialises with magical speed, and urges them in a speech not to resort to violence. They obey the advice but remain angry, and express their anger in public words (although Athena, unlike Vyāsa, accepts that Achilles is right, allowing him, unlike Gāndhārī, not to concede the point). While the Indian poet is explicit about the capacity to intuitively understand the workings of other characters' minds, the Greek poet leaves it to be understood. The scenes also presuppose travel of a speed possible only for a divinity;³¹⁰ as we will see, such swift travel is denoted in the two traditions by an inherited formula.

The correspondences are various. Some are verbal, some structural, and some are closer than others.³¹¹

English	Greek	Sanskrit
The character is aggrieved	Πηλεΐωνι δ' ἄχος γένετ' 'Pain came upon Achilles'	<i>Putraśokārtā</i> 'Pained by grief for her sons'
Considers vengeance	μερμήριξεν, ἢ ὃ γε φάσγανον ὄξυ ἐρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ τοὺς μὲν ἀναστήσειεν, ὃ δ' Ἀτρεΐδην ἐναρίζοι 'He wondered whether he should draw his sharp sword from his thigh, push the others aside, and slay Agamemnon'	<i>śaptum aicchad</i> 'She wanted to curse [Yudhiṣṭhira]'
Decides on vengeance	ἔλκετο δ' ἐκ κολοῖο μέγα ξίφος 'He was drawing his sword from its scabbard'	<i>tasyāḥ pāpam abhiprāyaṁ viditvā pāṇḍavān prati</i> '[Vyāsa] saw her sinful intention towards the Pāṇḍavas'
The deity / semi-deity instantly appears at the	ἦλθε δ' Ἀθήνη οὐρανόθεν 'Athena came down from heaven'	<i>taṁ deśam upasāmpede paramarṣir manojavaḥ</i>

³¹⁰ The Indian poet's addition of Vyāsa's bath in the Ganges is a droll piece of bravura.

³¹¹ All passages are taken from I.188-225 and *Mhb.* 11. 13.2-19. They are enumerated in the order in which they come in each text.

crucial moment		‘The supreme seer came right to that place as swift as thought’
The latter urges them to hold themselves back and not resort to violence	ἦλθον ἐγὼ παύσουσα τὸ σὸν μένος, αἶ κε πίθῃαι, οὐρανόθεν... ἀλλ’ ἄγε λῆγ’ ἔριδος, μηδὲ ξίφος ἔλκεο χειρί: ἀλλ’ ἦτοι ἔπεσιν μὲν ὀνειδίσον ὥς ἔσεται περ: ᾧδε γὰρ ἐξερέω, τὸ δὲ καὶ τετελεσμένον ἔσται: ... σὺ δ’ ἴσχεο, πείθεο δ’ ἡμῖν. “‘I have come from heaven to stop your wrath, if you will obey me... So come, leave off from violence, and do not take your sword into your hand, rather contend with him in words, since it will not be in vain. Hold back, and obey me.”	<i>śāpakālam avākṣipyā śamakālam udīrayan</i> <i>na kopah pāṇḍave kāryo gāndhārī śamam āpnuhi</i> <i>rajo nigrhyatām etac chr̥ṇu cedam vaco mama</i> “‘Reject the resolution to curse, uphold the resolution to make peace, and do not be angry with Yudhiṣṭhira, Gāndhārī. Be at peace. Hold back your wrath, and obey my order.’
The character submits	‘χρὴ μὲν σφωῖτερόν γε, θεὰ, ἔπος εἰρύσασθαι καὶ μάλα περ θυμῷ κεχολωμένον: ᾧς γὰρ ἄμεινον... ἦ καὶ ἐπ’ ἀργυρέῃ κόπῃ σχέθε χεῖρα βαρεῖαν, ἄψ δ’ ἐς κουλεὸν ᾧσε μέγα ξίφος, οὐδ’ ἀπίθησε μύθῳ Ἀθηναίης: “‘I must obey the words of both of you, goddess, however angry I am in my heart: it is better this way...’ He spoke and held back his heavy hand on the silver hilt, and thrust the great sword back into the scabbard, and did not disobey Athena’s order.’	<i>nāparādhyati bībhatsur na ca pārtho vṛkodarah nakulah sahadevo vā naiva jātu yudhiṣṭhirah yudhyamānā hi kauravyāḥ kṛntamānāḥ parasparam nihatāḥ sahitās cānyais tatra nāsty apriyam mama.</i> “‘Bibhatsu did no wrong, nor Bhīma, nor Nakula and Sahudeva, and least of all Yudhiṣṭhira. For the Kurus were killed in battle, in mutual slaughter along with the others. I can have no complaint with that.”

The character continues to be angry.	Ἀτρεΐδην προσέειπε, καὶ οὐ πῶ λῆγε χόλοιο: ‘He addressed Agamemnon, and did not leave off from his rage,	<i>yat tu karmākarod bhīmo... tan me kopam avardhayat.</i> “‘But what Bhīma did [to Duryodhana in their duel]... enraged me.”
The character publicly expresses recriminations.	“οἶνοβαρές, κυνὸς ὄμματ’ ἔχων, κραδίην δ’ ἐλάφοιο...” “‘You drunkard, who have the eyes of a dog and the heart of a doe...”	<i>katham nu dharmam dharmajñaiḥ samuddiṣṭam mahātmabhiḥ tyajeyur āhave śūrāḥ prāṇahetoḥ katham cana.</i> “‘How ever can heroes have abandoned a law clearly taught by the great-souled men who know it in order to save their lives in battle? How?”

Further parallels lie beneath the surface. Just as Achilles is indignant due to the violation of the principle of exchange and property so important to Homeric heroes, so it is Bhīma’s breach of important ethical norms that enrages Gāndhārī: each is a central transgression in its text.³¹² Both Bhīma and Agamemnon exacerbate their initial transgression with further dissimulation in the immediately following passages, and meet with robust rebukes from their antagonists. Leonard Muellner usefully explores the ethical dimension of the Homeric scene.³¹³ His definition of *mēnis* (which he argues is a peculiarly Greek phenomenon) as a justified, socially authorised emotion provoked by the violation of a principle of social order is an exact description both of Gāndhārī’s reaction to Bhīma and of that of Achilles to Agamemnon.

While the Homeric scene is without close parallel in Greek, the *Mahābhārata* furnishes yet others. Indeed, there is generally a plethora of Sanskrit Epic parallels for every Greek Epic *comparandum*. This is a matter of brute abundance: translations of the *Iliad* usually run to around 500 pages, whereas

³¹² Of course, in the first instance, it is the desire for revenge against Yudhiṣṭhira which motivates Gāndhārī – a desire which in this scene she accepts is ultimately irrational since he is not at fault. The shared pattern remains clear despite the psychologically realistic touch of her grief manifesting itself in rage against first one, then another character, through more and less justified reasoning.

³¹³ 1996, chapter 4 and especially 111-14.

Bibek Debroy's translation of the *Mahābhārata*, the only complete one of the Critical Edition (itself only five sixths of the length of the Vulgate), runs to 3723 pages over ten volumes.³¹⁴ For example, in the seventh book, Yudhiṣṭhira, over-reaching himself due to his mad grief for the freshly slain Ghaṭotkaca, riskily sets out to kill the powerful Karṇa, whom he blames for his death. Vyāsa appears out of nowhere to dissuade him from doing so, and just as suddenly disappears (7.158). As Hiltebeitel puts it, 'Vyāsa thus drops into the very thick of battle to see to it that Yudhiṣṭhira does not step out of character' (2001, 59). We find there the same pattern of grievance, sudden appearance, placating speech, and obedience. In the ninth Parvan, Vyāsa appears just as abruptly on the battlefield to save the bard Sañjaya, whom the gloating Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna is about to kill. Vyāsa has neither weapons nor armour, but Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna immediately obeys his word (28.35-9). In the third Parvan, the pattern is inverted: Yudhiṣṭhira has succumbed to pessimism about his side's chances in a war against the Kurus, and Bhīma fails to cheer him. Vyāsa suddenly materialises, announcing to him 'vedmi te hṛdī mānasam | manīṣayā tataḥ kṣipram āgato 'smi;', 'I know the thoughts of your heart by my insight, and so I have swiftly come here' (37.22). He cheers him with a prophecy of victory and advises on how it will be achieved. This done, *tatraivāntaradhīyata*, 'he vanished on the spot' (37.35). The *Iliad*, of course, regularly shows deities dropping into the battlefield to cheer the despondent or hold back the overconfident.

What to make of these parallels? I here analyse the weak claim in action. Only a certain amount of similarity is required for more profound similarity to be recreated later. That is, it is elements which are inherited, and when many resemblances come together in each tradition, this does not entail that they were inherited as a totality. These concatenated similarities are the result of momentary creative combination, as poets in both traditions respond to exigencies common to all tellers of narratives. Inheritance, universality, and polygenesis are therefore not in competition, but all have important roles in explaining the similarities between Greek and Indian literature. Here, typological universals, such as revenge, grief, and violence (both the threat of it and its containment), interact with familiar elements of the Greco-Indic universe. The arresting verbal correspondences between these passages are simply the fortuitous outcome of the combination and recombination of similarity on higher levels – *mēnis* and the resolution of the problems which it brings, the ability of deities to read minds, to have a stake in human affairs, and to suddenly appear. Inheritance is a higher-order phenomenon – it produces deep affinity on the level of emotion, religion, and divination, and these deep affinities in turn produce momentary lower-order similarities on the level of scene.

³¹⁴ 2015. It includes the *Harivāṃśa*, which is not always considered part of the text.

Thus these scenes are cognate only in the indirect sense that inheritance, even where is not directly instantiated, influences and enables correlation – this is what I call the weak claim. I insist on this, because, as we saw in the introduction to this section, close parallels like these have been taken as evidence for extensive Greek influence on India, extensive Indian influence on Greece, or the extensive inheritance of proto-narrative wholesale. They are no such thing, and the implausibilities of such models risk tarnishing all Greek / Indian comparison.

Formulas

Getting Away from Etymology

For now, I buttress my argument for a genealogical connection between the divinatory practices of the two traditions by treating a mutually inherited formula. In doing so, I fine-tune a new methodology for the comparative analysis of Indo-European formulas. Drawing on the work of Calvert Watkins, I here use formula in the wider sense of a distinctive collocation of ideas which keeps its identity through semantics and context, even if its precise wording differs from instance to instance.³¹⁵ Watkins' view that any semantic unit at all, even something as general as 'he killed a dragon' can be a formula is far from winning universal support – and rightly so. Formulas should have a minimum of semantic distinctiveness, and the more distinctive they are the more convincingly inherited they are, since they are less likely to have been reinvented. Moreover, this semantic distinctiveness should reach beyond lexical meaning into the traditional meaning (for which, see the introduction and below).

Even Watkins' view that cognate formulae need not be expressed in cognate language continues to occasion much demurral. Stefan Zimmer, writing in the authoritative 2017 *Handbook of Comparative and Historical Indo-European Linguistics*, speaks for many – 'it seems safer to keep to those formulas whose age is guaranteed by the double correspondence of both form (etymology) and meaning'.³¹⁶ For

³¹⁵ See especially 1987, 270-1, and 1995, 9-11, 301-3 for Watkins' definition of 'formula', and Section IV of that book for the fruits which he believes that it bears. For an overview of the importance of his project more generally, and a defence of his preferred methodology, see Watkins 1989.

³¹⁶ 81. See 78-85 for the wider discussion. For a long rebuttal and defence of the necessity of etymological alignment, see the excellent and too seldom cited Ranko Matasović, 1996, 47-55. His particularly valuable second chapter outlines and critiques other prominent models of comparative Indo-European poetics, including those on which Watkins himself draws; ultimately, for the reasons I set out here, I do not find his conclusions convincing. Watkins draws heavily on the work of Vladimir Toporov, who already in 1969 argued for the privileging of

Zimmer, the etymological relatedness of constituent lexemes is a necessary condition for that of the formula *in toto*. And yet the randomness of lexical renewal is a complicating factor. This entails that the relation between etymological history and synchronic meaning is often arbitrary, which in turn entails that double correspondence is an arbitrary limitation. Indeed, that the constituent words of a formula attested in two traditions be etymologically related to one another is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of the relatedness of the formula itself, *in toto*.

To say that it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition is to make two separate claims; I shall now justify each in turn, reasoning as much as possible from first principles. In any two closely cognate languages like Greek and Sanskrit, words can be strung together which happen to be etymologically related and semantically identical. Consider for argument's sake these two hypothetical sentences, *πατήρ μήτηρ τε χῆνα ἐρυθρόν ἔπεσον* and *pitā mātā ca haṁsam rudhiram apacan*. They contain exactly cognate constituents with exactly the same meaning, 'a father and a mother were cooking a red goose'. But they do not have formulaic status, and so it is wrong to say that they were inherited *in toto* from a parent tradition. Chance contiguity does not make a formula. As a minimum, each collocation must have formulaic status in both traditions. In this way, since etymological relatedness of a collocation of words is conceptually separable from formulaic status, etymological relatedness cannot be a sufficient condition for it. It is for this reason that, in my introduction, I concluded that *κλέος ἄφθιτον* and *śravas akṣitam* did not constitute an example of a shared formula reconstructible to the time of unity.³¹⁷

Comparative work between the two traditions has hitherto focussed on the search for shared formulas stable in meaning and whose constituent words are cognate. It has not yielded a great deal. As an aid to reasoning whether the etymological relatedness of constituent words should be a necessary condition for the relatedness of a formula, let us consider a hypothetical – that Sanskrit Epic attested a formula *vācam patrinīm pratyavadat* to match the etymology, context of usage, and ubiquity of Homeric *ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα*. This would be a good example of Greco-Indic Comparative Poetics, since the best explanation for the alignment would be inheritance of the phrase from a parent poetic tradition. The fact that Sanskrit *praty-* is not etymologically related to Greek *pros-* would surely be irrelevant even to the most committed etymological fundamentalist: both preverbs play the same semantic and syntactic role in their sentences. Nor is it relevant that the morphemes of the cognate lexemes *patrinīm* and *pteroenta* (> **pet-* 'fly') differ: Sanskrit might have shown the morpheme *-va(n)tīm*, which would have been cognate

semantics over cognate wording (and that the existence of non-IE parallels did not vitiate IE comparison). I rely on Costa's Italian summary of the Russian work (1998, 467).

³¹⁷ For a variety of views on the equivalence, see, inexhaustively, Nagy, 1974, Floyd, 1980, Watkins 1995, 173–8, Volk 2002. On this point, see especially Margalit Finkelberg 1986 and 2007, who argues forcefully that the collocation is not a formula.

with Greek *-(w)enta*, but the fact that *pattravant-* happens not to be attested, and so couldn't be used, is just as irrelevant as the discrepancy in number between singular *vācam* and its plural cognate *(w)epea*. Total etymological relatedness on the level of morpheme is surely an arbitrarily high bar. Conceptually, at least on this level, etymology and genetic relation can in this way be teased apart.

Further consideration of my example reveals that difference in lexeme is just as arbitrary. 'Pattrin', 'winged' from 'pattra', 'wing', is, as it happens, a relatively unusual word in Sanskrit Epic. More common is 'pakṣin', which has precisely the same meaning, 'winged'. It is derived from 'pakṣa', 'wing', which goes back to PIE **peg-*, 'side, breast', a root which also gives Latin *pectus*, 'chest', Russian *pacha*, 'armpit', and Tocharian A *pāśśām*, 'breasts'. **peg-* happens to have spawned no reflexes in Greek. The substitution of *pakṣinīm* for *pattrinīm* would surely be trivial. Both languages, moreover, abound in words for 'word, speech' and 'spoke', which in most contexts function as exact synonyms, and so useful metrical doublets in poetry (which for this reason shows a greater number of synonyms than prose). Further substitutions of these terms would give another hypothetical Sanskrit formula, *vādam pakṣavantam upābravīt*, with precisely the same meaning as ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα and *vācam pattrinīm pratyavadat*. Unlike the latter, however, it would be metrical in the most common Epic Sanskrit metre, the *śloka*. To put the matter negatively, if the hypothetical *vādam pakṣavantam upābravīt* were found in Sanskrit Epic in the same contexts and with the same ubiquity as the Greek formula, it would be wrong to deny the genetic relatedness of the formulas *in toto* by reason of the etymological unrelatedness of its constituents. The etymological discrepancy could easily be accounted for by, firstly, arbitrary semantic drift, and, secondly, pressures exerted by changes in metrical conventions. Put positively, the etymological relatedness of their constituent words is not a necessary condition for postulating the genetic relatedness of formulas taken *in toto*. The initial intuition, once established on the level of morpheme, can easily be extended onto the level of lexeme. And of course, it would be inconsistent to accept the principle in a simple case such as this but not in more complex cases.

Observable historic practice confirms my reasoning. That is, the kind of development for which I am arguing can be seen in surviving literature and attested language. Such change can be seen on the level of word, when lexicalised metaphors are preserved in daughter languages even when the root used to express that meaning changes. For example, in Greco-Indic there was a metonymic association between 'share, that which is allotted' and 'destiny'. This was preserved in Greek *moira* / *heimarmenē* and Epic Sanskrit *vi-dhāna* / *vi-dhi* / *bhāga*, even though the standard roots expressing allotment have diverged into reflexes of **smer-* 'to think of' (Gk. *meiromai*), **vi-dheh₁-*, 'to dispose' (Skt. *vi-dhā*), and **b^heh₂g-*, 'to distribute' (Skt. *bhaja*). The Greek reflex is semantically more distant from the basic meaning of the root as reconstructible from other daughter languages; Greek was no doubt the remodelling tradition. The root

**smer-* developed differently in Indic, so that, spectacularly, Sanskrit *smara*, ‘love’, is the exact cognate of Greek *moros*, ‘death’.³¹⁸ **bheh₂g-*, a root attested only in Greek and Indo-Iranian, gave Greek *phagein*, ‘to have eaten’, i.e., ‘to have received a share’.³¹⁹ Lexical etymology tells an interesting story, but is entirely irrelevant to the analysis of pairs of cognates in their *synchronic* contexts. Metaphor here functions as I argue formula does. The semantics of metaphor remain stable through time. Form – the actual lexemes used – must change to accommodate it.³²⁰ I argue that the same phenomenon is also observable when more than one word is employed – that is, with formulas.

In fact, the best argument for semantic and not lexical identity is the observation of lexical renewal at work within formulas *within a single tradition*. If we can reliably notice the phenomenon in the historical period, it is legitimate to postulate it for unattested periods. Below, I give many examples of how a formula changes form through time. Rather than anticipate them here I ask the reader to bear with me.

So far, I have argued that formulas in cognate traditions need only show semantic and not etymological identity to be candidates for shared inheritance. But what kind of semantic identity might this be? Watkins’ answer to this question, as I alluded to above, is, in essence, that any kind of semantic identity will do, no matter how general. But this seems too promiscuous a vision. To cast so wide a net is to dredge up many generalities and chance momentary collocations. It is no use simply to redefine ‘formula’ to include such collocations. This would not achieve the aim of reconstructing a goblet of Greco-Indic poetic vocabulary. A minimum of semantic distinctiveness is therefore necessary. ‘He slew the dragon’ (and according to Watkins, the formula is more general even than this) is simply too shorn of particularity, too repeatable and reinventable, to have formulaic status. The same goes for honing in on a cluster of semantically related collocations grouped around ideas of IE pedigree. While this is a step in the right direction, and of interest inasmuch as it reconstructs weak inheritance, such items cannot be called

³¹⁸ In Greek the old association between **dheh₁* and ‘fate’ is probably preserved in the connection to fate of θέμις (and its derivatives).

Other cultures use other metaphors: a group including old Armenian, modern Persian, Turkish, and Central Kurdish use the circumlocution ‘writing on forehead’ as the standard word for ‘fate’, e.g. Modern Persian *sar-nevešt* (with thanks to Dr Daniel Amir for pointing this out to me); cf. Arabic *maktūb*, ‘what is written’. The reference to writing, naturally, means that this metaphor can be of no great antiquity.

³¹⁹ See Beekes 2011 *ad. phagein*. The Slavic words certainly and the Tocharian words are very probably borrowings from an Iranian language.

³²⁰ Many of these words exemplify how semantic drift steps in to supply new words to maintain the old metaphor. Semantic drift is the mirror image of the phenomenon I discuss here. It denotes a change in meaning with continuity in form, rather than a change in form with continuity in meaning. In the case of Greek μόρος, for example, the semantic drift must have proceeded, roughly, ‘think of’ > ‘portion’ > ‘fate’ > ‘death’, with the final step a euphemism whose force got lost over time. There is some inscriptional evidence for continued use of the second stage of my list (see *LSJ* A.III). For other more synchronically transparent Greek euphemisms, see εὐφρόνη, ‘kindly > night’ and εὖξενος, ‘hospitable > Black Sea’ (a stormy body of water). These are common processes.

strongly inherited formulas either. Relation to other items of inheritance will motivate polygenesis, even for non-trivial collocations. This is the criticism I applied to the work of Laura Massetti in the introduction, and, again, is another reason why κλέος ἄφθιτον and *śravas akṣitam* should not be considered a Greco-Indic formula.

Traditional Meanings

But formulas have another dimension whose potential for genealogical comparison has not yet been fully appreciated. As most prominently J. M. Foley has argued, formulas themselves have meanings and functions. As I set out in the final section of my introduction, formulas have both a lexical and a traditional meaning. Sometimes, these two are closely linked. ῥοδοδάκτυλος, ‘rose-fingered’, is used only of Ἥως, ‘Dawn’, in Greek hexameter poetry. It is difficult to imagine what else might be ‘rose-fingered’, and so here the traditional meaning follows on from the literal, with a low level of arbitrariness in the connection.

Like other signs, formulas are proper to certain contexts and out of place in others. Yet, like words, when used outside of their proper context, they bring it to mind. If, hypothetically, the epithet ῥοδοδάκτυλος were attributed to another noun, it would immediately remind us of Dawn. Contingently, this happens never to occur. Foley’s discussion of the formula *χερὶ παχείη*, ‘stout hand’, is a better example of his thought and the interpretative fruits this idea can bear.³²¹ In the 13 instances in which it comes in the *Iliad*, it indicates an action proper to a warrior, of the sort that confers glory. Crucially, the traditional meaning is here more distant from the lexical meaning –stout hands and glory are not closely conceptually conjoined. At the same time, the two are not entirely unrelated: we can reconstruct the metonymic associations that lead from one to the other, that is, how the traditional meaning grows out of the lexical one. Warriors have robust hands, and so are wont to win glory. The traditional meaning grows out of the lexical meaning, then grows beyond it.

Like a word, once the basic meaning of the formula has been established, subversive usages become clear. When it is used of Ktesippos, who disgracefully launches a hoof at the stranger at xx.299, the ironic usage throws the outrage into relief. Sense can be made too of the famously puzzling ‘stout hand’ of Penelope at xxi.6.³²² of course this has nothing to do with the anatomy of the delicate Penelope,

³²¹ Foley, 1995, 218-221. For a brief exposition of his ‘traditional referentiality’, see Foley 1997; for a longer one, Foley 1999.

³²² See Russo, Fernandez-Galiano, and Heubeck, 1992, 148-49, for a brief recapitulation of scholarship on the line.

but underlines her ‘quiet heroism’, her ‘continuing and crucial role’ in the revenge.³²³ In that case, unusually, the prioritisation of the traditional meaning motivates a disregard for the mismatch of lexical meaning.

My argument is far from depending on the acceptance of all elements of Foley’s theory. Yet his insight that formulas can have meanings *qua* formulas, and hence rules about usage which are greater than the sum of their words, is essential, and by marrying it to Watkins’ semantic definition of formulas, a new criterion for the identity of a single formula across traditions is born. To be most convincing, the formula *in toto* should have the same traditional meaning across traditions.

This move brings two benefits. Firstly, it will define what a formula is as against a collocation: a formula has this emergent, traditional meaning. A collocation does not. My sentences above, πατήρ μήτηρ τε χῆνα ἐρυθρὸν ἔπεσον and *pitā mātā ca haṃsam rudhiram apacan*, simply mean what they say, in a way in which χειρὶ παχείῃ does not. The same goes for ‘he killed the dragon’, and κλέος ἄφθιτον and *śravas akṣitam* (which are of uncertain formulaic status intra-traditionally anyway). Secondly, it provides the criterion for identifying when formulas are importantly the same across traditions. Like the arbitrary association of a certain set of sounds with a certain meaning, the relation between the literal and traditional meanings of formulas will have a certain element of arbitrariness – the traditional grows out of the literal, then beyond it. When two traditions align in that arbitrariness, this is compelling evidence for shared inheritance. In other words, it is very difficult to imagine a reason apart from inheritance why an arbitrary alignment might come about. Careful consideration of formulas in their context in each tradition, and triangulation of their many uses, is necessary to establish this traditional meaning. Once established, this can then be compared, and a Greco-Indic formula can be reconstructed.

Of course, mine is not the Parry’s original definition of the formula, which insists on a certain combination not just of meaning but of words with a certain metrical shape. But this was a definition developed for a synchronic, not a diachronic study of formulas. The comparative study of formulas across Indo-European traditions has different needs, and so requires a different toolkit. Moreover, as I alluded to above, this definition of formula will be useful also in the analysis of the diachronic development of formulas within a given tradition.

³²³ Foley, 1995, 201, 220-221.

A Greco-Indic Formula in Sanskrit

The formula I treat was used above of Vyāsa at 6. 2.2 and of Sañjaya at 6. 14.1: *bhūta-bhavya-bhaviṣya-vit*, literally ‘knowing what was, what is, and what shall be’.³²⁴ The merism contained in the formula is not in itself particularly distinctive, and could easily be remade by cultures distant in space and time.³²⁵ What is arbitrary, however, is the combination of the merism with a verb of knowledge, and the close metonymic association between that totality and intuitive diviners – what Foley would call the formula’s ‘traditional resonance’. Shared inheritance is by far the best explanation for why that arbitrary association holds in both Sanskrit and Greek poetry.³²⁶ A slightly altered form comes in an account of Vyāsa’s birth, *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyajñāḥ* – the meaning is the same (12. 337.38), followed shortly after by another elegant variation (butchered by my literal translation), again used of Vyāsa, *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyāṇām chinnaśarvārthasamśayaḥ*, ‘he whose doubts have been dispelled on every matter of the past, the present, and the future’ (12. 337.49),³²⁷ where the knowing is itself elaborated into a mellifluous compound which fills half of a line. The formula can also be applied to great seers in general.³²⁸ A similar formula is used of Queen Vidurā, ‘bhaviṣyadbhūtadarśinī’, ‘she who looks to what

³²⁴ In this section, unless otherwise specified, all references are to the *Mahābhārata*.

³²⁵ There are exact parallels in other literatures too. Chadwick & Chadwick, for example, quote a passage from the lay of a Samoyedic tribe of Northern Siberia recorded by Matthias Castrén in the nineteenth century, “I am called Koegel-Khan and I am a shaman, *who knows the future, the past, and everything which is taking place in the present*, both above and below the earth.” His interlocutors then ask him, if that is the case, to tell him “what our people are doing, far away in our own home; but if you do not tell the truth we will cut your head off.” The old man put on his shaman’s dress, and began to shamanise. He shamanised and told all of them the whole and simple truth’ (1940, vol. 3, p. 198). For good measure, the Siberian tale then adds a close parallel to the famous story of Croesus testing the oracles at Hdt. 1. 46-54. To repeat the thesis’ introduction, such parallels in no way undermine the probability of inheritance. The sum of human literature is so vast that mere chance would be enough to account for the co-incidence; the universality of seer-figures only increases the likelihood of such verbal co-incidence. A far greater co-incidence would be the independent innovation of the same formula in two closely related poetic traditions during a relatively brief period of separation. Moreover, there is no evidence here that the phrase had formular status, which would be a far greater co-incidence than the chance use of a merism in a divinatory context. And lastly, diffusion, though unlikely, cannot be ruled out.

³²⁶ A few instances of this formula are listed at Rudiger Schmitt, 1967, 252-4, to which West, 2007, 103-4 adds another few. Both are more interested in ‘what was, is, and will be’ as a merism for ‘all time’ than in the formula’s connection with seers, on which only West remarks, and fleetingly at that. Schmitt quotes only three passages of the RV for Sanskrit, none of which has to do with divination. The Ossetian and Slavic parallels which West cites are general in character, as, ultimately, are the ostensibly promising Avestan parallels which both cite. In short, the fundamental difference between my treatment and these discussions, the only ones known to me of this formula, is twofold. Firstly, my discussion is far ampler and treats many more examples in far greater depth; secondly, I foreground the connection with divination on which the case for strong inheritance depends.

³²⁷ I take this as a straightforward exocentric compound not only because this aligns better with similar formulations, but also because it is a linguistically easier interpretation than ‘he who dispels doubts’, i.e. doubts in general and not only his own. Right branching determinative compounds, while possible in Sanskrit, are never the natural interpretation when in competition with straightforward exocentrics.

³²⁸ *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyajñair maharṣibhir*, 13. 27.67.

was and to what will be'.³²⁹ The poet deflates knowledge to a look, tailoring traditional language to make it appropriate for the non-vatic status of the queen, while drawing on the formula's wider resonance to underline her prodigious wisdom. Noteworthy is that the association between the formula and intuitive divination is necessary for sense to be made of this innovation. The phrase never comes in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (which is slightly later and in general preserves less archaic material than the *Mahābhārata*), but is picked up a few times in the later *Purāṇas*.³³⁰

A corollary of my semantic definition of formulas is that the same formula may take more than one verbal shape, just as, say, Sanskrit *vidhi* and *bhāga* or Greek *moira* and *heimarmenē* both instantiate the same underlying metaphor. While it is well known that poetic formulas often preserve linguistic forms more archaic than those of everyday language, as language falls into desuetude, or as semantic drift takes hold, a level of opacity will eventually be reached such that the old meaning must be remodelled into more current words in order not to compromise fluid understanding. That is, the principle of lexical renewal will eventually assert itself. Moreover, the Greek hexameter and the Indian *śloka*, while they derive from Indo-European prosody, are not themselves of Greco-Indic antiquity, and naturally the formula had to evolve to keep up with metrics too.³³¹ Accordingly, Greek and Sanskrit *Kunstsprachen*, being attested over centuries in various metres, furnish more than one verbal instantiation of the same single semantic formula. These differences can be trivial, with different forms occurring in free variation, or be different enough to constitute distinct versions specialised into distinct contexts. Importantly, while these kindred formulas reflect different stages of linguistic development, they may also circulate simultaneously, just as we find linguistic doublets in which one word reflects a more archaic stage of language (e.g. English 'while' vs. 'whilst', 'cows' vs. 'kine', or 'rarely' vs. 'seldom'). This has long been recognised as a feature particularly of oral poetic language. When the same formula is remodelled in different ways, two co-eval formular versions may be generated, with neither having a more archaic flavour than the other. Naturally, these may then specialise into different – though related – uses. Again, this process is analogous to words, e.g. English 'mister' and 'master', or 'ward' and 'guard', or 'shadow' and 'shade'.

This general principle tessellates neatly with wider beliefs about poetry in ancient India. While Vedic hymns were transmitted *verbatim*, Epics were transmitted *sensatim*. Textual integrity on the level of

³²⁹ 5. 134.12. 'Vidurā', 'wise, intelligent', from the root *vid*, is a speaking name.

³³⁰ E.g. BrP. 26.26, *vyāsaḥ provāca bhagavān bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit*, 'The venerable Vyāsa who knew what was, is, and will be, spoke forth.'

The *Purāṇas*, the oldest of which go back to the mid-first millennium BC, are written in a modified form of (late) Epic Sanskrit, and record devotional, aetiological, and mythical material.

³³¹ Just as, more broadly, language change motivated metric change. For the pre-history of Greek and Vedic metres including some speculative reconstructions, see among others Mikhail Gasparov, 1996 and Nagy, 1996.

word was unimportant. The example of the Vedas gave Indians a greater self-consciousness of their practice. Unlike the Greeks, they called this kind of transmission *Smṛti*, ‘remembering’, and the *verbatim* transmission of the Vedas *Śruti*, ‘hearing’. In other words, fluidity and the capacity for reinvention was explicitly baked into their emic genre of Epic.

Immediately above is a trivial example of the latter type of co-eval generation – *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit* in alternation with its exact synonym, *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyajñāḥ*, with the latter probably the later form.³³² Yet, more interestingly, the former, evolutionary type is also found. *atītānāgata* is very similar in meaning to *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣya*. It too is a *dvandva*, an enumerative compound composed of participles. Here, it is not uncompounded forms of *bhū*, ‘to be’, but compounded forms of the verbs *i* and *gam* ‘to go’ which express time: *ati-ita*, ‘what has passed’, and *an-ā-gata*, ‘what has not come’. Present time is not mentioned, but can easily be understood from context. The majority of usages of the phrase involve seers (and where they do not, calling mantic language to mind is appropriate). The seer Vṛṣaparvan is paradigmatic: he is described as *atītānāgate vidvān kuśalaḥ sarvadharmavit*, ‘knowing both past and future, righteous, knowing all natural Law’ (*Mhb* 3. 155.23). Similarly, Bhīṣma is *atītānāgate vidvān sarvajñāḥ sarvadharmavit* ‘knowing both past and future, omniscient, knowing all natural Law’ (*Mhb*. 12. 224.10).³³³ There, the poet is free to add can then add different root compounds without risking monotony.

There is a very clear diachronic difference in the distribution of *atītānāgata* and *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣya*. All but one usages of *atītānāgata* are from the latest, didactic portions of the Epic, and a strikingly high proportion, three out of sixteen, from the very latest part of the Epic – the appendices.³³⁴ This finding accords with the well-known evolution of formulaic language in the later

³³² The Sanskrit root *jñā* is cognate with English ‘know’, Latin ‘cognoscere’, and Greek *gignōskō*. Both compounds’ heads are roots, an old kind of formation in Sanskrit, but the *-jñā* compound is more linguistically innovative – taking advantage of the vocalic ending, it declines the root.

³³³ Bhīṣma is functionally if not technically a seer. See below for Kṛṣṇa’s bestowal of intuitive powers upon him. Yet even before, he is of supernatural wisdom and is here engaged in a long didactic discourse as he lies upon a bed of arrows at the brink of death (his wisdom imparted, he dies finally at 13.154, in a late passage). For a Homeric parallel for taking on intuitive powers at the brink of death, albeit in a more limited capacity, see Patroclus and Hector, see below pp. 166-68.

To this could be added Nārada’s comment to Kṛṣṇa, ‘jānīṣe tvam gatāgatam’, ‘you know what has gone and what has come’ (12. 82.30).

³³⁴ The one exception is the passage quoted above, of Sañjaya, 6. 16.8. At 7. 122.39, although the context is not didactic, there are good independent reasons to suppose a very late passage – not least the characterisation of Kṛṣṇa. The other occurrences of the phrase are at 1. App.87.4, 1. 1.90, 3. 189.14, 3. 297.64, 5. 43.21, 12. 220.65, 12. App.29B.46, 13. 14.188, 13. App. 139.7, 13.99.26, 14.96.26.

Certain passages missing from entire recensions are dateable for this reason to the last couple of centuries of the composition, after the last common ancestor of extant mss. They are printed at the back of the Critical Edition in Appendices, and are generally thought to be different in outlook and language from earlier parts of the poem. For more on the text of the *Mahābhārata*, see Mehendale, 2007, and V. S. Sukthankar’s fundamental *Prolegomena*, 1933.

layers of Epic. As John Brockington writes, ‘In the *Mahābhārata* the didactic element... shows a distinctly different pattern from the ‘battle books’ (books 6-9) both in frequency and in type of formulaic expression’ (1998, 103-4). There are no occurrences in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and a dozen or so in the *Purāṇas*. *Bhūtabhavyabhaviṣya*, though rarer, does not show the same preponderance in late passages. Given their diachronic distribution, and their exact identity in meaning, usage, and context, the natural conclusion is that *atītānāgata* is a later remodelling of *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣya*. As the constituents of the latter compound developed to take on ever more specialised meanings, the compound became ever more opaque. *bhūta* is a common and highly polysemous word, which can also have the meanings ‘true, real, being, a being, the world, existence, spirit, and person’, as well as more technical meanings. Likewise, *bhavya*, as well as ‘present’, can mean ‘about to be, needing to be’, and so ‘suitable, excellent’, and hence ‘handsome, pleasant, gracious, auspicious, pious’, and, as a noun, ‘result, reward, prosperity’ – as well as more specialised meanings in technical discourse.³³⁵ While *bhaviṣya* retained its original meaning, it is worth noting that future participles are relatively rare in Epic Sanskrit. By contrast, *atītā* always and only means ‘past’ and *anāgata* always and only means ‘future’. By the last stage of the composition of the *Mahābhārata* in the first millennium AD, these other meanings were prominent enough to motivate the creation of a less ambiguous and less metrically unwieldy alternative which, after co-existing for a while, eventually replaced the older form. And so we see unfolding before our eyes, attested in the historical period, the same processes of development of a formula into new verbal forms that I suggest happened in the pre-historical period.

Relatedly, the formula could take an amplified shape by turning the compounded stems into declined substantives, and substituting the head for a participle, as at 3. 186.85 – ‘bhūtaṁ bhavyaṁ bhaviṣyac ca jānan’, ‘knowing what was, is, and will be’, or verb, as at 12. 327.21 – ‘... bhūtaṁ bhavyaṁ bhaviṣyac ca jānīyām iti’, ‘... in order that I know what was, is, and will be’, cf. 12. 275.5 and 6. 64.2. Two charming variations show that other elaborations are possible: ‘yac ca bhūtaṁ bhaviṣyac ca bhavac ca paramadyute tat sarvam anupaśyāmi pāṇau phalam ivāhitam’, ‘And I observe all that was and will be and is, o splendid one, as if it were a fruit in the palm of my hand’ (12. 54.18, cf. 12. 50.18 for the same idea). Bhīṣma is speaking here after Kṛṣṇa has granted him mantic powers – ‘traikālyadarśanam jñānam divyaṁ dātum yayau hariḥ’, ‘Hari [Kṛṣṇa] went to bestow [upon Bhīṣma] the holy knowledge of the revelation of the Three Times’ (12. 47.65). Firstly, obviously, Epic here continues the theme of the bestowal of mantic ability which, immediately above, I found characteristic of seership in both Greece and the *RV*. Still more germanely, knowledge of the Three Times – past, present, and future – is here the

³³⁵ I here rely on Monier-Williams’ *Sanskrit Dictionary*. *bhavya* is a so-called gerundive formation: these can have either present or final force in Sanskrit, as in Latin.

metonym of mantic ability. The compound which I translate ‘revelation of the Three Times,’ ‘traikālyadarśanam,’ is not a common one: it appears once in the *Purāṇas* (*Matsyapurāṇa*, 48.27), and nowhere else in Epic or Vedic. It seems to be an *ad hoc* formation rather than a formula. This should dispel any lingering cynicism about the close conceptual connection between merism and mantic ability. So close was it that one can indisputably stand for the other even when the ideas are expressed in entirely different language. The separation between a formula’s traditional resonance and its lexical form can be taken no further than this, and no further proof could be required for the tradition’s arbitrary connection of merism with divination.

Since Vedic Sanskrit uses compounds much more sparingly than the later language, and since, when it does, they are very seldom of more than two constituents, it is *a priori* extremely unlikely that our formula, if it existed at all in the Vedic period, employed a form analogous to that of the Epic period. Moreover, whereas the form ‘bhūta’ is common throughout the *RV*, the gerundive form bhavya is vanishingly rare and the future bhavisya rarer still.³³⁶ What might our formula, then, have looked like at this time? Above, I laid out how language appropriate to seers could be used of Varuṇa in the *RV*; another such phrase will answer this question. 1.25 celebrates Varuṇa’s sovereignty by enumerating his qualities and emphasising his closeness to his devotees. The poet describes how ‘viśvāny adbhutā cikitvām abhi paśyati kṛtāni yā ca kart(u)vā,’ ‘...watchful, he looks upon all (deeds), unmistakable (to him) - both those done and those that must be done’ (11). More literally, Varuṇa ‘views deeds done and which are to be done’.³³⁷ Again, in itself, the merism is not particularly semantically distinctive and it and other such phrases may be used in many contexts. What is arresting here is the combination of expression and context. Sight is, as I have argued, conceptually close to knowledge. Here, just like Queen Vidurā above, the merism is combined with a verb of sight.³³⁸ Further, crucially, traditional meanings align exactly. Just as for Vyāsa, Varuṇa’s seeing past and future evinces his supernatural, vatic credentials. This is a stunning result. It shows a clear linguistic continuity between Vedic and Epic formulaic language. Where Epic used participles, in Vedic verbal tense carries the majority of the semantic burden. The change from Vedic ‘what was / is to be done’ to Epic ‘what was / will be’ is minimal. Once morphological developments

³³⁶ Both are attested only in the collection’s youngest layer. The former is attested four times, at 1. 129.5, 10. 55.2, 58.12, 90.2; the latter twice, at 1. 161.2 and 10. 86.7.

³³⁷ Again, future participles in -iṣya are unusual in the *RV*, and attestations cluster in its younger layers (to which this hymn too belongs). It would be trivial to distinguish between future and final gerundive kart(u)vā here, since, according to the Vedic world view, what will happen is tantamount to what must happen. My literal translation, unlike Jamison’s, seeks to preserve the equivocation in English. Her translation ‘looks upon’ is, presumably, intended to preserve the compound verb abhi paśyati; I prefer ‘views’ since it implies greater comprehension and involvement.

³³⁸ We have already seen the alternation, embedded also within the lexicon, between sight and knowledge in Indo-European literature – see above, p. 98 n. 257; the use of the suppletive paśyati instead of a derivative of PIE *wid is here trivial.

brought about these new forms, they were marginally preferred for their wider semantic field; that is, the adoption of forms of *bhū* widened the purview of the mantic knowledge from deed to being, further magnifying the seer so described.

A single usage in the *Atharvaveda* (*AV*) hints at a medial stage of development.³³⁹ The passage describes all that is sprung from Brahmācāri, and includes, among other things, ‘bhūtabhavyam’, ‘what was and is to be’ (11. 5.20). Although the relationship between *AV* and *RV* is certainly not as straightforwardly diachronic as once thought, the *AV*’s attestation of this particular compound does seem to reflect a later stage of the language.³⁴⁰ Naturally, it is to be grouped with the philosophical and not divinatory usages. In any case, although the one instance which I can find in of our formula in *Rg-Vedic* literature stands alone, the highly distinctive combination of expression and context surely shows that it is an ancestor of the more familiar Epic formula. The formula’s identity consists in its semantics, and it is remodelled to keep up with the linguistic changes that happen around it. And those semantics are both lexical, on the level of word, and traditional, on the level of formula *in toto*.

And in Greek

In the following section, I find a Greek cognate for this inherited formula, observing also how the same formula manifests itself in various lexical forms. The first appearance of a seer in Greek literature is Calchas’ in the first book of the *Iliad*. He is introduced as οἰωνοπόλων ὄχ’ ἄριστος, | ὅς ἤδη τά τ’ ἐόντα τά τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ’ ἐόντα, ‘by far the best of the augurs, who knew what was, what is, and what will be’ (69-70). The semantic and formal correspondence between 1.70 and Sanskrit *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit* is exact. Both traditions use tenses of the participles of the verb ‘to be’ to express time in combination with a reflex of the root **wid-* to express knowledge. οἰωνοπόλων, strictly ‘augur’, here simply means ‘seer’: by this time, as we saw in the first chapter, Greek divinatory practices had undergone such extensive influence from the Near East that augury is the form of divination *par excellence* in Archaic

³³⁹ For the *Atharvaveda*’s preservation of Indo-European material, see West, 2007, Ch. 8, esp. pp. 329-39, and Elizabeth Tucker, 2016.

³⁴⁰ The traditional view, that the relation between *Atharva-* and *Rg-Vedas* was merely chronological is put forward in E. Vernon Arnold, 1901, cf. Oldenberg 1888, 320. Bloomfield is an early dissenting voice in seeing the differences as more sociolinguistic than diachronic; he is cited with appreciation recently by Tucker, and his view is now mainstream, given e.g. in Gavin Flood’s handbook to Hinduism, 1996, 37. The heterodox Asko Parpola sees the dialectal differences between the *RV* and *AV* as evidence of two different people groups which eventually merged, 2015, 130-34. For the date of the *AV* relative to the *RV*, see Michaels, 2004, 56. I refer here to the Śaunaka recension (for the difference between the two and a history of the recovery of the Paippālada recension, see among others Tucker, 2016, Umberto Selva, 2019, and now also Carmen Spiers, forthcoming).

Epic.³⁴¹ The context is also a perfect match. The formula is used at the first introduction of a seer, and emphatically establishes his credentials.³⁴²

An Interlude: Our Formula, Hesiod, and Poetry

Hesiod confirms that this was a traditional formula in Greece. Yet his use of it is inextricable from a consideration of poetry, and what it might have to do with divination in his text. I therefore digress to consider these questions together. In the prologue to the *Theogony*, the poet first prepares the ground. The Muses, he tells us, ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλὴν ἐδίδαξαν ἀοιδὴν, 'once taught Hesiod lovely song' (22). Later he explains how: they ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν | θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τὰ τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα, '[the Muses] breathed a holy | voice into me, in order that I may sing of what is and what will be' (32). Gods give poets the gift of song elsewhere too, but nowhere is this thematised as extensively as here.³⁴³ The Muses, we learn a few lines later, Διὶ πατρὶ | ὕμνεῦσαι τέρπουσι μέγαν νόον ἐντὸς Ὀλύμπου, | εἰρεῦσαι τὰ τ' ἐόντα τὰ τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα, | φωνῇ ὁμηρεῦσαι, 'hymning to Zeus | the Father upon Olympus, delight his great mind | in speaking of what was and what is and what will be | with harmonious voice' (36-39). These celebrated and much discussed lines use our formula not of intuitive divination but of poetry.³⁴⁴ This poetry must be of the occult dealings of the gods – the poet adds immediately after the first couplet I cite, 'καί μ' ἐκέλονθ' ὕμνεῖν μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων', 'And they ordered me to sing of the tribe of the blessed, immortal gods' (33). Hesiod must use this intuitive power to this end.

These are the only two applications of the formula to poetry in Greek literature. Intratraditionally, they are without context or parallel. However, the *RV*'s lavish comparanda provide a rich background. I briefly digress to consider how they can be read against divination. As we saw, the *RV* makes no distinction between poet and intuitive diviner, in the same way that Hesiod's use of the formula ignores the

³⁴¹ When augury came to Greece, it was the *Manteis*, the practisers of the pre-existing forms of divination who naturally became its experts. Vocabulary strictly proper to augury came to be used for divination in general. In this way, οἰωνός, 'bird of prey', comes to mean 'bird-omen' and indeed 'omen of any kind' already in the *Iliad* (e.g. XII.243). Obviously, we see Calchas and many others in Archaic Greek poetry engage in divination beyond augury: the flexibility of the terminology should not obscure this.

³⁴² Just as genealogy does for Theoclymenus in the *Odyssey* – see above.

³⁴³ At viii. The idea probably underlies the epithet θέσπις, 'holy', when applied to song (see also e.g. i.328).

³⁴⁴ Some lines from the *Certamen* should also be grouped here. They combine our formula with an expression familiar from the Homeric Hymns – Μοῦσ' ἄγε μοι τὰ τ' ἐόντα τὰ τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα | τῶν μὲν μηδὲν ἄειδε, σὺ δ' ἄλλης μνησai ἀοιδῆς, 'Muse, of what was, what is, and what shall be do not sing to me, but, come, remember another song', Cert. 97-8. The poet uses the formula deviantly, in order to signal the novelty of the coming song.

boundary.³⁴⁵ As I have shown in detail, the *RV* draws vigorously on divinatory language to describe the process of poetic expression. And just as the Hesiodic voice, it is that intuitive power which underwrites the worth of the poetry. At VIII. 59.7, which I discuss above,³⁴⁶ Indra and Varuṇa grant the poet a gift, which the poet then uses to compose poems to their praise. Analogously, the Muses breathe a holy voice into the poet (see above), and then immediately after ‘καί μ’ ἐκέλονθ’... | σφᾶς δ’ αὐτὰς πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν ἀείδειν’, ‘they ordered me ever to sing of them first and last’ (33-4). πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον, ‘first and last’ – the poet is to do special honour to them, just as the *Rig-Vedic* poet to Indra and Varuṇa. Accordingly, the poet opens the *Theogony* with a passage hymning their praise, affectionately depicts them singing on Olympus, and describes their divine birth first (36-62).³⁴⁷ Both poems write up the Indo-European rules of reciprocal worship. The poet receives a gift from the gods – an intuitive power, and must use it to gift those gods a hymn in return.

The pattern is not to my knowledge elsewhere attested in Greece. The enigmatic story of Thamyras is not unrelated the pattern. I quote in full.

ἔνθά τε Μοῦσαι

ἀντόμεναι Θάμυριν τὸν Θρήϊκα παῦσαν ἀοιδῆς

Οἰχαλίηθεν ἰόντα παρ’ Εὐρύτου Οἰχαλιῆος:

στεῦτο γὰρ εὐχόμενος νικησέμεν εἴ περ ἂν αὐταὶ

Μοῦσαι ἀείδοιεν κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο:

αἱ δὲ χολωσάμεναι πηρὸν θέσαν, αὐτὰρ ἀοιδὴν

θεσπεσίην ἀφέλονται καὶ ἐκλέλαθον κιθαριστύν:

‘And there the Muses

³⁴⁵ The paradigmatic seer of Sanskrit Epic, Vyāsa, is also the *Mahābhārata*’s author. I return below to this blurred distinction between poet and seer in Sanskrit Epic.

³⁴⁶ And which I repeat here for the reader’s convenience – ‘indrāvaruṇa yad Ṛṣibhyo manīṣāṁ vāco matiṁ śrutam adattam agre | tāni chāndhāmsy asṛjanta dhīrā yajñam tanvānās...’, ‘O Indra and Varuṇa, in that you in the beginning gave to the seers inspired thought, the thinking of speech, what is heard — the insightful (seers) launched these as poems as they stretched out the sacrifice...’

³⁴⁷ They continue to be foregrounded until 103. ‘Sing of them first and last’ just means ‘Give importance in song’ and should not be taken literally as an order to the poet also to close his poem with reference to them. In any case, the ending of the *Theogony* is bloated by interpolation, and it is not clear where the poet who began the poem would have wanted it to end, or even if the ending he had envisioned is preserved in the manuscript tradition.

Met Thamyris the Thracian and curbed his song
 As he set out from Oechalia, from Eurytus the Oichalian.
 For he had declared in a boast that he would be victorious in song
 Even against the Muses themselves, daughters of Aegis-bearing Zeus.
 But they, angered, incapacitated him, and took away from him
 Holy song, and made him forget how to play the cithara.’ (II.594-600)

The pattern of divine vengeance after a blasphemous boast is common in Greek literature (so Marsyas, Arachne), and attested once elsewhere in the *Iliad* (Niobe, XXIV.602-09). But read against the *Theogony* passage, the story can be interpreted in a different way – as an expression of the danger in failing to abide by norms of reciprocity. Thamyris’ actions are the inverse of the Hesiodic voice’s. They denigrate rather than praise, and discredit rather than honour. The Muses’ actions are correspondingly inverted. Rather than giving Thamyris the gift of song, they strip it from him. The tale, therefore, encodes the same ideological message as Hesiod, but through a double negation.

It is difficult to generalise from two cases, and conclusions must be tentative. Yet my argument here is of a piece with well-established features of ancient Greek and Indian culture – namely, reciprocity and giftedness.³⁴⁸ This has the aspect of a deeply archaic belief. Perhaps poets independently in each tradition innovatively married the ideas of reciprocity of divine favour and of the divine gift of poetic inspiration in this way. But it is more likely that Hesiod (and Homer) preserve a deeply archaic pattern much better attested in the *RV*, in which gods are represented as granting poets the gift of song in return for a hymn of praise. Inheritance is a more elegant explanator of the alignment than polygenesis.

This was a bonus parallel strictly related neither to my present subject, the shared formula, nor my overarching subject, divination. I return to these for a moment. Perhaps Hesiod’s use of our formula in this unusual context was an innovation. On this view, he momentarily drew on language proper to divination to achieve his aim of stressing the poet’s visionary gift. This would make the alignment a weak shared inheritance. Or perhaps there is a trace here of a more archaic situation, in which the formula in Greece as in India could be applied indifferently both to poets and to seers. This would make it a strong shared inheritance. It is dispiriting that these Hesiodic lines are so unique – other like passages would allow for a better idea of what in them is innovative and what traditional. Yet whether it is better thought

³⁴⁸ It is legitimate to draw on this other evidence here since my argument is *not* linguistic.

of as pure, strong inheritance, or partial, weak inheritance, comparison with Indian material, in providing a context, renovates understanding of these intensely *Rig-Vedic* lines.

It is also clear that, at the very minimum, Hesiod uses our formula to signal unmistakably the supernatural aspect of a poet's power. That is, it is not that using the formula in connection to poetry unmasks the contingency of its connection to intuitive divination; rather, it shows the connection of poetry itself to intuitive divination.³⁴⁹ This understood, the way is open to read other verses against the same background. Perhaps other features of the Hesiod passage will respond to this context.

Our formula, albeit in shortened form, is first used of song of the poet, and then of the Muses. Just as he, the poet, sings to his fellow men, the Muses 'delight the great mind' of Zeus (37). The poet dwells on the scene: τῶν δ' ἀκάματος ῥέει αὐδὴ | ἐκ στομάτων ἡδεῖα, 'their sweet voice flows unwearied from their mouths' (39-40). The palace 'laughs' (γελᾷ) with the sound of their 'lily voice' (ὀπὶ λειριοέσση, 40-1). They send forth an 'immortal voice', (ἄμβροτον ὄσσαν, 43). Like the poet, they tell of the births of the gods, and as the poet celebrates the Muses, they themselves celebrate Zeus (43-52). This elaborate parallelism finds its own parallel in the *RV*, where, as we saw, seer-poets consistently depict gods as seer-poets too. At VII. 88.4, for example (quoted above), Varuṇa, to the poetic voice's delight, makes him a seer-poet. Varuṇa is described there as a 'viprah'. The word is so often used of gods that it is perhaps incorrect to say that it is taken from human language – it is a word that can be used of god and man. But it is certainly a common term for an inspired Vedic seer-poet (see Jamison & Brereton, 2014, 24-5). The hymn juxtaposes 'viprah' with 'stotaram', 'poet', and elides the verb – surely 'made him' or something similar – for extra impact. Increasing the similarity with Hesiod still further, though 'stotaram' can be a general term for 'poet', its more literal meaning is 'praiser'. Implicit in the Vedic bard's choice of vocabulary is his glad acceptance of the responsibility which Varuṇa's generosity engenders – no less gladly than Hesiod. This juxtaposition expresses verbally what Hesiod shows us. Both poets construe their sponsor god(s) as *the mirror of themselves*. This brings us back to the formula. Hesiod also signals this equivalence verbally, by using the same formula first of himself, and then of the Muses. Just as in the *RV*, the same language is used of inspiring deity and inspired poet to programmatically signal the close relation between the two.

Again I briefly digress from formula and divination. As Hesiod presents it, the result of the Muses' favour is that the poet will be able to tell the truth. Just as in the case of Thamyras, their favour cannot be taken for granted, even once the gift of composition is granted. The Muses declare themselves

³⁴⁹ This is a point on which Foley's traditional referentiality is firm. As I write above, it is that χειρὶ παχείη implies heroism in Penelope, and *not* that Penelope implies *non*-heroism in χειρὶ παχείη.

to be as magnificently superior and arbitrary in their assignation of favour as any other god: “ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, | ἴδμεν δ’ ἐὺτ’ ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι”, “We know how to say many lies which seem true, | but we know how to tell the truth when we want to” (27-8). For Hesiod, the Muses threaten not to make the poet incapable like Thamyras but mendacious. Cosmogony was an important part of the project of the *Theogony*. As such, just as much as Epic if not more so, it was committed to telling its audience *facts* – about the make-up of the cosmos. It was therefore to be judged on the basis of the accuracy of that information. This made the establishment of the credentials of the poet especially important, and helps to explain the long prelude in which the poetic voice lays claim to a special relationship with the Muses.

R̥g-Vedic poets share this anxiety when they recount cosmogonies. In the well-known, mystical, late cosmogonic hymn X.129, for example, the poet opens with a vision of the nothingness at the universe’s very beginning.³⁵⁰ After some speculations, the poet abruptly answers a legitimate question – how might poets know of these matters? ‘sato bandhum asati niravindan hṛdi pratīṣyā kavayo manīṣā’, ‘Searching in their hearts through inspired thought, poets found the connection of the existent in the nonexistent’ (4). As we saw above, ‘manīṣā’, cognate with Greek *Mantis*, can be a technical term for mantic thought. See above, again, for how this can be figured as present ‘hṛdi’, ‘in the heart’. ‘sat’, the participle of the verb ‘to be’, is often substantivised as ‘being’, or, as in Jamison & Brereton’s translation, ‘the existent’. But it is also the usual Vedic word for ‘true’.³⁵¹ Indeed, being and truth are intimately related concepts in Vedic thought. The poet declares that the truth is in some way inside of him, and that he can access it through introspection. Here, then, the R̥g-Vedic poet of a cosmogony lays claim to the veracity of his composition through the evocation of his intuitive power, just like Hesiod.

The concept of truth in Archaic Greek poetry is a vast topic. I can only sketch its outlines here. Yet I digress yet further to contextualise these lines, and gesture at an avenue for further study. Homer and Sanskrit Epic had some of the same commitments to the truth of poetry. When Odysseus praises Demodocus, he does so not on the basis of the beauty of his poetry, but on its accuracy – he sings of the deeds of the Achaeans “ὥς τέ που ἢ αὐτὸς παρῶν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας”, “as if you had been present or had heard it from someone who was” (viii.491). Vyāsa, legendary poet of the *Mahābhārata* and its most powerful seer, is introduced at the start of the sixth book as ‘satyavatīSūtaḥ’, ‘son of Satyavatī’ (6. 2.1). We are reminded that his mother is called, literally, ‘Truthful’. Then – ‘pratyakṣadarśi bhagavān bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit’, ‘the lord who sees with his own eyes, who knows what was, what is, and what will be’ (2). Likewise, Sañjaya, newly invested with intuitive power, becomes ‘pratyakṣadarśi sarvasya

³⁵⁰ For interpretations of this hymn with discussion of previous literature, see Brereton, 1999.

³⁵¹ Equally, ‘asat’ is in both cases the negation.

bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit’, ‘the eyewitness of everything, who knows what was, what is, and what will be’ (6. 14.1). As in the *RV* and Hesiod, in Homer and the *Mahābhārata*, the text assumed that it will be judged not only on its entertainment value, but on its veracity. Accordingly, it protests the reliability of its narrators. In all cases, intuitive powers closely related to divination are involved. These ideas go to the heart of what texts consider valuable about themselves. They do not *a priori* seem, therefore, reinventable, extemporised, or liable to contamination from outside influence. On the other hand, they are good candidates for inheritance because they are not too ambitious – not being particularly distinctive, they can withstand social change; nor are they so intricate as to shed doubt on long-term stability. While fuller and more systematic study would be necessary to make the claim with confidence, it is certainly probable that these similarities are best explained by strong inheritance – that they preserve beliefs about poetry stretching back to the time of unity.

Back to the Formula in Greek

As we have seen, this divinatory language is used indifferently of god and man. In a jeremiad about the rapacity of his fellow citizens, Solon laments that οὐδὲ φυλάσσονται σεμνὰ Δίκης θέμεθλα, | ἢ σιγῶσα σύννοιδε τὰ γινόμενα πρό τ’ ἐόντα, | τῷ δὲ χρόνῳ πάντως ἦλθ’ ἀποτεισομένη, ‘they do not even abide by the august foundations of Justice, who though silent knows well what is and what shall be, and comes in time to take full revenge’ (Fr. 4.14-16 [MW]). The wording is renovated – σύννοιδε updates the more difficult Homeric ἦδη, and γινόμενα is used instead of another form of εἶναι. Solon leaves the knowledge of past time to be understood, just as Hesiod did. Solon’s Justice is a personified goddess of whom religious vocabulary is used in a suggestive hypallage (σεμνὰ θέμεθλα, ‘august foundations of Justice’ for ‘foundations of august Justice’). The appropriation of language proper to seers serves too to elevate Justice’s position and underline the respect she is owed. For Solon, Justice can be eluded for the moment but not forever – a surety founded on the prodigious extent of her knowledge of human affairs.

In Euripides’ *Helen*, Nereus, mirroring the munificence of, among others, Vyāsa, Varuṇa, Apollo, and Zeus, gives his granddaughter Eido the power of prophecy.³⁵² Again, heredity and giftedness join forces (see above). On her marriage, she came to be called Theonoe,³⁵³ τὰ θεῖα γὰρ | τὰ τ’ ὄντα καὶ

³⁵² For the connection between marine divinities and prophecy, see West, 1966, on 233. The sea nymph Thetis, ever preoccupied with prophecies of her son’s death, should also be added to the list.

³⁵³ Speaking names are traditional for Greek seers. Εἰδῶ means ‘knowledge’, and Θεονόη perhaps ‘divine thought’. Elsewhere, for example, Μαντώ, Teiresias’ daughter, formed from the Greek word *Mantis*, must mean ‘mantic

μέλλοντα πάντ' ἠπίστατο, 'for she knew the course of providence – both all that was and all that would be' (13-4).³⁵⁴ The renovation here is profound – very few sequences of syllables can be imported from hexameter to iambic without special resolutions. But the correspondence in semantics and context is unmistakable.

The formula was as long-lived as the Homeric language of which it was a part: Diodorus Siculus can report a Delphic prophecy in which the priestess says that the war between the Meropes and Iones will last until a golden stand made by Hephaestus comes to him “ὃς σοφία τὰ τ' ἔοντα τὰ τ' ἐσσόμενα προδέδορκεν”, “‘who in his wisdom has foreseen what was and what will be’” (9. 3.2).³⁵⁵ The perfect is stative and denotes an ongoing ability. The latter wrote in the first century BC, but of course had access to much older material now lost to us. Suggestive here too is the alternation of knowledge with sight, as often in the Indian tradition. Even the opening words of the *Sibylline Oracles*, a composite text containing material from the first half of the first millennium AD, draw on this traditional formulation: ‘Beginning from the first generation of speech-endowed men | until the latest generation, I shall prophesy on each matter,’³⁵⁶ ὀππόσα πρὶν γέγονεν, πόσα δ' ἐστίν, ὀπόσσα δὲ μέλλει | ἔσσεσθαι, ‘what was before, what is now, and what shall be in the future’ (1.1-4). Our formula, amplified and proudly fronted in the collection, makes for a respectable facsimile of archaic Epic language. One difference, however, sticks out: the verb is explicitly to do with prophecy, προφητεύσω, rather than with sight or vision. It therefore makes explicit the traditional meaning – superfluously from the point of view of oral poetics. Perhaps the poet was not in command of formulaic language, or perhaps he did not trust his audience to decode it. But in any case, the journey of the formula must end here, as the norms of oral poetry crumble away into the written.

The shape of the Sibylline formula could have been adapted from the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women, a verse of which has been reconstructed [ὅσσα τ' ἔην ὅσα τ' ἔ]στι καὶ ὀππόσα μέλλει ἔσεσθαι, ‘what was, what is, and what will be’ (Fr. 204.113 [MW]). This was an extremely popular poem at the time of the *Sibylline Oracles*, as witnessed by the plethora of papyrus finds from the period. The immediate context of the line is also fragmentary, though the preceding line, καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων, ‘of

power’. Πολυῖδος, mentioned at *Il.* 13.663, means ‘knower of many things’. Cf. Vyāsa, ‘arranger’ i.e. of the Vedas or narratives in general, son of Satyavatī, ‘truthful’.

³⁵⁴ For my translation of τὰ θεῖα, see *LSJ* II. 3a. The tense of τὰ τ' ὄντα (which I translate ‘that was’, *pace LSJ* A.1 ὄντα) should align with that of the imperfect main verb, ἠπίστατο. Unlike Sanskrit, Greek has no past participle of its verb ‘to be’. In the hexameter examples, ἔοντα does that service, with the juxtaposition of the clearly present ἐσσόμενα disambiguating its past sense.

³⁵⁵ There is an awkwardness in the idea of foreseeing the past. Perhaps the real force of the prefix of προδέδορκεν is to specify that this is prophetic, not ordinary sight.

³⁵⁶ Ἀρχομένη πρώτης γενεῆς μερόπων ἀνθρώπων | ἄχρις ἐπ' ἐσχατήσι προφητεύσω τὰ ἕκαστα.

mortal men', is suggestive, and would give good meaning if read with the conjecture.³⁵⁷ Unfortunately, nothing more can be said.

Use in Philosophy

In Greece just as in the *Mahābhārata*, philosophical discourse could be written in the same metre as narrative poetry and draw extensively on the same traditional language. It is no surprise, therefore, to find Empedocles using similar language of the cosmos: ἐκ τούτων γὰρ πάνθ' ὅσα τ' ἦν ὅσα τ' ἔστι καὶ ἔσται, 'for from the latter comes all that was, is, and will be' (Fr. 21. 14 [DK]). Parmenides, too, perhaps alludes to the formulation: εἰ γὰρ ἔγεντ', οὐκ ἔστ', οὐδ' εἴ ποτε μέλλει ἔσεσθαι, 'for if it was, it is not, not even if at some point it shall exist again' (Fr. 8.20 [DK]), but the similarity is very vague. And there is an intriguing resemblance to these phrases in the distich which Pausanias claims that the priestesses at the oracle of Dodona sang, Ζεὺς ἦν, Ζεὺς ἐστίν, Ζεὺς ἔσσεται: ὦ μέγ' αὖ Ζεῦ, 'Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus shall be, o mighty Zeus' (10. 12.10). Similarly, in a philosophical discourse in the *Mahābhārata*, *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit* is used of the great soul (*mahān ātmā*, 12. 300.12), and there are some usages of just *bhūtabhavyabhaviṣya*, just *atītānāgata*, and just *bhūtaṁ bhavyaṁ bhaviṣyac ca* in philosophical disquisitions (respectively, 14. 35.13, 14. 37.14, and 1. 1.190, 5. 43.21, 12. 220.65, 13. 99.26, 14. 96.26, and 6. 63.8). The *RV* too uses the merism in a passage of metaphysical rumination which has no connection to seership, 'sarvaṁ yad bhūtaṁ yac ca bhav(i)yam', 'all that was and that is to be' (10. 90.2). Again, there is nothing inherent to the sense of the merism which ties it to intuitive divination. This makes it all the more striking that in both traditions the merism is so scarcely attested outside of our formula.

³⁵⁷ This goes back to Wilamowitz and Schobart's initial publication of P. Berol. 10560, and was taken up by Rzach in his 1908 *Teubner* edition of Hesiod's poetry (see further West 1966, on 32 and Hirschberger, 2004, on Fr. 110. 113, with references). For the use of ὅσα in this context, see Empedocles below.

Apparently, none of these saw the connection with the line from the *Sibylline Oracles*, since otherwise they would presumably have reconstructed [πόσσα τ' ἔην πόσσα τ' ἔ]στι καὶ ὀππόσα μέλλει ἔσεσθαι. These forms also have the advantage of aligning with ὀππόσα later in the line. I leave final judgement to the reader, yet the connection between Catalogue and Oracles is highly probable, and the conjecture should be emended to reflect it.

The verse from the *Oracles* is amplified to allow for the close of line 4: κόσμῳ διὰ δυσσεβίας ἀνθρώπων, 'in the world through the impiety of men', which might align with the end of the preceding line of the *Catalogue*, καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων. The meaning of κόσμῳ, 'world' not 'order', is late and Christian, and itself enough for dating the passage after the late first century, by which time the canonical Gospels were in circulation.

Participial and relative constructions occur in free variation, with no difference in usage or context discernible where there is no difference in semantics.³⁵⁸ The difference is small, to be sure, but it illustrates the fluidity which facilitates the evolution of such formulas. As in the Sanskrit, associated verbs may change. The difficult defective form *ēidē*, semantically an imperfect but formally a pluperfect, does not reappear after its use at *Il.* 1.70. Solon gives the post-Homeric verb *sunoide*, and Euripides *ēpistato* – both younger, far more familiar forms. The formula is brought up to date before our eyes. Diodorus' Pythia gives *prodedorken*, 'foresees'. Alteration of this part of the formula does nothing to obscure its identity. Similarly, when one of the three elements in the second part of the formula was elided, this did nothing to obscure its identity with other attestations – not for us, and so certainly not for an audience well-versed in the traditional formulas of hexameter. In the next section, I argue that, analogously, a change in Greek of the second part of the formula should not do so either.

One Formula, Two Forms

In Odyssey xxiv, the relatives of the slain Suitors are gathering to plot their bloody revenge. At their assembly, the seer Halitherses speaks up. He declares the folly of the Suitors, and intones a warning not to set forth. Like Theoclymenus, he is ignored. He is introduced like so – τοῖσι δὲ καὶ μετέειπε γέρων ἥρωος Ἀλιθέρσης | Μαστορίδης: ὁ γὰρ οἶος ὄρα πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω, 'And the old hero Halitherses son of Mastor spoke | among them, for he alone saw before and after' (451-2). From the basic spatial meanings of πρόσσω and ὀπίσσω branch the temporal meanings, in accordance with the Homeric (and common typological) conceptual metaphor which describes time as a linear progression through space.³⁵⁹ Formally, they preserve the IE dative ending *-ōy, and have an allative force, so literally 'backwards' and 'forwards'.³⁶⁰ The temporal meanings are obviously required here. Here, as sometimes above, two stand for all three times. In this shape, perforce – πρόσσω and ὀπίσσω are a natural pair without an obvious third constituent. The shapes of the formula I treated above alternated, as we saw, between forms of

³⁵⁸ Article and participles at *Il.* 1.70 *Theog.* 32, 38, *Certamen* 97, *Eur. Hel.* 14, Diodorus Siculus 9. 3.2, and *hosa / (ho)posa* and verbs at *Orac. Sib.* 1.3-4, Empedocles *Fr.* 21. 14 (DK), and very probably in the Hesiodic Catalogue (see the note immediately above).

³⁵⁹ For which in Homer see Tom Zanker, 61-94, with discussion of πρόσσω at ὀπίσσω at 89-94. Zanker rightly rejects the old idea that πρόσσω refers to the past and ὀπίσσω the future. He follows the superb comparative article of George Dunkel, 1982/83, who adduces Vedic and Hittite to illuminate the conceptual metaphor in Greek, and integrates Dunkel's findings into a wider picture of spatially construed time in Homer.

³⁶⁰ English uses the same metaphors. 'Going forwards' means 'from now on', and 'looking backwards' means 'considering the past'.

‘know’ and ‘see’. The physical time metaphor here works best with the vision option. The knowledge option is not attested with this shape.

Although verbally quite different, the strong semantic correspondence combines with the contextual correspondence. Just as one was used to introduce Calchas, this introduces Halitherses. The logic on which a formula was defined cross-traditionally by its semantic not verbal shape can here be extended intra-traditionally: the correspondences demand that the two be treated as two verbal shapes of the same formula. Nevertheless, as we will see, these shapes were specialised into slightly different contexts in an elegant complementary distribution.

This serves as the paradigmatic example of this shape of the formula because it is here best fitted to its context: οἶος, ‘alone’ here makes good sense, since Halitherses is not only the single seer present, but also alone in his good judgement. No two seers meet in Homer, and, unless they are wanderers like Theoclymenus, there is only one seer in each society, and one at each assembly. Economy of narrative needs motivates the distribution: if the poet comes to a point of the narrative where a seer would be useful, only one would do.

Polydamas is introduced in the same terms at the council of the Trojans in *Iliad* book 18: τοῖσι δὲ Πουλυδάμας πεπνυμένος ἤρχ’ ἀγορεύειν | Πανθοῖδης: ὁ γὰρ οἶος ὄρα πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω, ‘And wise Polydamas son of Panthous began to speak | to them [the Trojans], for he alone saw before and after’ (250-51). Both instances fill out a line which begins with a patronymic, perhaps also an element traditional to the formulation. Polydamas is never explicitly a seer in the *Iliad*, although he is the wisest of the Trojans: he and Hector were born on the same night, and just as Hector excels all with the spear, Polydamas excels all men in words (252-3). Hector in the following passage disregards his sage advice that the Trojans retreat into the city – a fatal error. Polydamas has also correctly read the bird omen in book 12; his wording there seems to imply both that he does not consider himself a professional augur and that he is very close to one: “ὧδέ χ’ ὑποκρίναιτο θεοπρόπος, ὃς σάφα θυμῷ | εἶδεῖν τεράων καὶ οἱ πειθοίατο λαοί”, “That would be the judgement of a diviner, who has thorough knowledge | of omens in his heart and whom the people obey” (229-30).³⁶¹ Polydamas and Halitherses, as often for seers, find little support from those to whom they speak, which makes sense if, as it seems, οἶος, ‘alone’ was also traditional to the formula.³⁶² Indeed, although Hector will enjoy momentary success in the battle, he will

³⁶¹ Note that a maximalist reading of θυμῷ, ‘in his heart’, would see a reference to intuitive power in Polydamas’ formulation here. See above for similar formulations in both traditions.

³⁶² As we will see in the fourth chapter of my thesis, seers are often cast in the role of the tragically ignored forewarners in Greek and Sanskrit literature. There are many examples in Tragedy too – Oedipus and Teiresias in Sophocles *Oedipus Rex* being the most famous. Cassandra is, of course, the paradigmatic example of this. Indian

set into motion a chain of events which will ultimately lead to his and Troy's downfall. I do not intend to speculate about whether Polydamas was a fully-fledged seer in an earlier tradition or in an earlier version of the *Iliad*. What is clear, however, is that Homer uses language traditional to seers to underline his prodigiously good judgement. The idea explicit at XII.229-30 is implicit in the resonant traditional language of XVIII.250-51. Nevertheless, its use of Polydamas also suggests a slightly more deflated meaning, related to intuitive power but not so inflexibly that it must be restricted to it.

Achilles' disparagement of Agamemnon in Book 1 of the *Iliad* is newly cogent in this light. In his speech announcing his withdrawal from battle, he holds him to account, deploring him as an inferior leader, “ἦ γὰρ ὁ γ' ὀλοῖσσι φρεσὶ θύει, | οὐδέ τι οἶδε νοῆσαι ἅμα πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω, | ὅπως οἱ παρὰ νηυσὶ σόοι μαχέοντο Ἀχαιοί”, ““for he raves in his deadly mind, | nor does he know at all how to perceive past and future at the same time, | in order that the Achaeans join battle safely by their ships”” (1.343-35). Perception of past and future ‘at the same time’ seems to reflect the exceptional ability in the phrase's other usages, rather than suggesting, as Kirk thinks, the quotidian ability to ‘[use] experience of the past to predict what will happen in the future’ (1985, *ad loc.*). This would be an unconscionable bathos, and in any case Agamemnon's situation is unprecedented. Alternatively, ἅμα could be accorded less importance, and rendered equivalent to τέ, ‘both’, which would be difficult to fit into the line and necesSītāte breaking up the traditional unit πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω. The unusual phrase ‘to know how to consider’ makes this contemplation a skill to be possessed (or lacked). It suggests a special cognitive ability akin to intuitive divination. Agamemnon should never have taken Briseis, as Achilles says a little before, and now Achilles will withdraw as a result. Achilles deprecates Agamemnon's lack of foresight through traditional language appropriate to seers: by negating it, Achilles affords these decisive words a new ironic thrust.³⁶³

Ironies, Specialties in Greek and Sanskrit

A similar ironic contrast is achieved by Menelaus' use of the same phrase at III.109-10, where he is organising the duel. While young men are flighty, an old man like Priam πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω | λεύσσει, ‘looks at past and future’ so that he acts in the best interests of all parties. Menelaus tellingly chooses a

Epic finds a similar abundance, e.g. Mālyavān and Rāvaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and Sañjaya and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Maitreya and Dhṛtarāṣṭra / Duryodhana in the *Mahābhārata*.

³⁶³ Kirk calls the two verses ‘untypically heavy-handed’ and suspects a ‘rare’ interpolation (*ibid.*). On my reading, they are pointed and effective. The putative linguistic infelicities are the natural result of the creative refashioning of traditional language.

more effortful word, λεύσσει, ‘look at’:³⁶⁴ whereas seers successfully ‘see’ what is past and future, the old man can only ‘look’ – seek to discern it. His wisdom points him in the right direction, but his powers are more limited. Homer’s innovation exactly matches that of the *Mahābhārata* poet at 5. 134.12, where, as we saw above, he tweaks the standard formula to make it appropriate for the wise queen by substituting ‘vit’, ‘knowing’ for ‘darsinī’, ‘looking’. These are surely momentary innovations which happen to align rather than evidence for the independent inheritance of a deflationary shape in addition to the usual one. Poets’ adaptation of the same inheritance progresses along the same lines, creating likeness upon likeness, and resulting in ever closer similarity.

Adhokṣaja’s blandishments to Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the *Mahābhārata* provide another example of creative variation suited to context. “‘na te ’sty aviditaṁ’”, he says, “‘kiṁ cid bhūtabhavyasya, bhārata’”, “‘nothing is unknown to you of what was and is, o Bhārata’” (9. 62.38). The audience, who know that Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s myopia is his over-riding characteristic, are immediately alive to the passage’s ironies. The merism is deployed craftily: the poet uses its traditional resonance to lend Adhokṣaja’s flattery a cloying hyperbole. The double negative, unique among attestations of the formula, reinforces the wheedling tone, and confirms that Adhokṣaja should not here be taken seriously. Consideration of the Greco-Indic context allows old texts to be read anew and better.

It is sometimes denied that ὃ γὰρ οἷος ὄρα πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω is at all connected to supernatural power because, as we have seen, two out of its three positive usages in Homer concern those who do not have such power.³⁶⁵ Such denials do not, however, take into account the other, closely related formula, which is indubitably connected to *Manteis*, nor the mantic language used elsewhere of Polydamas. Rather, they are part of a long tradition of Homeric scholarship which seeks to downplay the role of the supernatural in Homer. More relevantly, all four usages of this shape of the formula regard not just (supernaturally) good judgement, but the public recognition of the latter; that is, they all occur in contexts where social intelligence and the ability to persuade are the key to the aims of the speech which follows. This is especially relevant for Achilles’ use of the formula: he says there that Agamemnon lacks precisely those abilities. *Manteis* from Homer onwards often have important roles to play in assemblies and as advisors of kings, where they *always* speak the truth.³⁶⁶ Since prodigious sagacity, even when unconnected with *mantic* power, could be represented as a special gift, and since its possessors, like

³⁶⁴ The difference between active and inactive perception is expressed only semantically in Greek but also morphosyntactically in English: ‘look at’ takes a different case frame from ‘see’, just as ‘listen to’ from ‘hear’.

³⁶⁵ E.g. Kirk, 1985, on I.343-45 and Alfred Heubeck, 1992, on xxiv.24.451-54.

³⁶⁶ For *Manteis* in Homeric assemblies, see e.g. Calchas above, Halitherses above and at *Odyssey* ii.157ff. They also had more general roles as advisors: see XXIV.220-22. To my knowledge, there is not one example of a mistaken intuitive *Mantis* in all Archaic and Classical Greek literature. I discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

Nestor, were accorded honour and given precedence in assemblies, it is no surprise to see *mantic* language extended to use in such contexts. As Menelaus shows above, great wisdom is also closely related to old age. At ii.158-9, the poet must specify that Halitherses excels even his co-evals, to clarify that his talents in judging birds and speaking are not merely due to his age.³⁶⁷ Supernatural gifts, old age, *mantic* power, and ability to speak the truth in assemblies therefore must be thought of as a nexus of interconnected ideas. In other words, their role in public assemblies will have encouraged the application of language related to *Manteis* to others who excelled in assemblies (or, when negated, to those who, like Agamemnon in Achilles' eyes, are catastrophically bad at man-management). The distribution of the usages of a pair of semantically extremely close formulas demonstrates, therefore, that one form, ὁ γὰρ οἶος ὄρα πρόσω καὶ ὀπίσω, while retaining its close connection to *Manteis*, specialised itself into public usages, and so came to be applied more generally to non-mantic interventions at assemblies. The other kept a closer association with intuitive divination.

The Heritage

I here make what I call the strong claim, that there was at the time of Greco-Indic unity a formula of the shape 'he (who) knows (/ sees) what was, what is, and what will be', and that an audience deeply familiar with the norms of traditional poetic language would have immediately recognised its evocation of intuitive divination. No other hypothesis can explain the semantic parallels, and their arbitrary alignment with the traditional resonance of intuitive divination. The semantics of the formula and the range of contexts in which it is deployed remained remarkably stable throughout time. I resist the temptation to reconstruct an asterisked proto-form of the formula. Although an additive compound can be excluded, it would be impossible to know whether the second element of a proto-form would have been expressed in participles or in nominal clauses. The future is another complication: different IE languages do so in different ways, most of which look secondary, and so no future is reconstructible to PIE. Greco-Indic undoubtedly specialised the same infix *-s-, or better some combination of that with *-h₁s- or *-h₁se- or *-sġe/o-, into a future sense. The future sense, however, seems to be secondary and branch from an earlier desiderative meaning. It is controversial whether the forms are so exactly matched as to allow for a detailed formal reconstruction even for Greco-Indic.³⁶⁸ Despite the consonance, reconstruction is

³⁶⁷ ὁ γὰρ οἶος ὁμηλικὴν ἐκέκαστο | ὄρνιθας γνῶναι καὶ ἐναΐσιμα μυθήσασθαι. For the connection between old age and wisdom elsewhere in the poem, see ii.16, iii.19-20, iv.204-5.

³⁶⁸ These give the familiar -is- futures of Sanskrit, and in Greek both the sigmatic futures and, less transparently, the liquid futures in -έω. This is one of the cases when Andrew Sihler departs from the *communis opinio* and overstates

difficult – doubly so for the slippery verb ‘to be’. Perhaps **wid*, which underlies both the *-vit* in the Sanskrit and the (φ)ήδη in the Greek, is the only lexical item which reconstructible with some probability.³⁶⁹ Even then, its form is unclear – the pluperfect was a wholly Greek innovation, while the root-headed compound was a Sanskrit innovation. Certainly, poets renovated their forms to keep up with changes both in lexicon and morphology – in the prehistorical as in the historical period. Semantics endured in defiance of this formal turbulence.

The principal semantic instability in the formula was the alternation, often in Greek and once in Sanskrit, between using verbs of sight and of knowledge. Suspiciously, this mirrors the lexical instability in Greek of the outcomes of the most probably reconstructible lexical element, **wid-*. Daughter languages tend to generalise one or the other sense – ‘see’ or ‘know’.³⁷⁰ Greek is exceptional in preserving the alternation, with perfect (w)*eidenai*, ‘I know’, and aorist (w)*idein* ‘to have seen’.³⁷¹ Even then, the present middle is sight related – εἶδομαι, ‘I appear’. From Greek we can reconstruct that **wid-* at the time of Greco-Indic unity made no clear distinction between the meanings ‘see’ and ‘know’.

The difference between the two versions of the formula in Greek falls along this line: ὅς ῥηδὴ τά τ’ ἐόντα etc. involves knowledge in Homer, just as non-deviant usages of πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω always involve sight. Here comparative poetics really does work like comparative linguistics. Just as in Greece the old semantic ambivalence in the root generated different meanings in different tenses of the verbal reflexes, that same ambivalence produced two different shapes of the same formula, each (generally) falling down on one side of the meaning, and specialising into different metrical shapes. I have often and will often remark on the close conceptual association of sight and knowledge in the divinatory language of both traditions: here this plays out in Greek on the level of formula. Appropriately, the spatial metaphor for time attracted the sight element, and the abstract participial description the epistemic element. By contrast, Sanskrit, where *vid* always means ‘know’, generated only one reflex of the formula: this, like the language, always has ‘know’ and never ‘see’, and lines up with the epistemic variant in Greek in using participles to express time. While it is impossible to extrapolate from one case, the one instance of the formula in the *RV*, which has not ‘know’ but ‘see’, hints at the possibility of another shape also in the

the case, 1995, §457, §500. The handbooks are more circumspect – see Clackson, 2007, 119 and Fortson, 2010, 100, 260.

³⁶⁹ There are few alternatives. Ἐπίσταμαι, ‘to know’ is clearly a secondary Greek internal formation. And in any case, in Homer it is overwhelmingly used with an infinitive in the sense ‘to know how to’, or in a participle with a sense ‘expert’. Γινώσκω, ‘to know’, oddly is never found with this formula in Greek. In Sanskrit, *-jñā* is found a handful of times (see above).

³⁷⁰ Sanskrit ‘vid’ ‘know’, Latin ‘video’ ‘I see’, German ‘wissen’ ‘to know’, Russian ‘videt’ ‘to see’, etc.

³⁷¹ Suppletion then filled the gaps: ὀρῶ, ‘I see’, εἶδον, ‘I saw’; οἶδα ‘I know’, ἠπιστάμην, ‘I knew’ – or, in Homer, a pluperfect ῥηδῃ, ‘I / he knew’.

Indic tradition. In Sanskrit Epic, it is other formulas commonly applied to seers (but without close parallel in Greece) which preserve the visual element.³⁷²

The commonalities between seers' powers in the traditions manifest themselves on manifold levels. The formula confirms beyond doubt the existence of intuitive divination and intuitive diviners at the time of Greco-Indic unity, and underlines the distinction I made in the first chapter, that Greek intuitive divination is the place to look for overlap with other IE traditions. Each had the same ideas about what seers could do, and expressed them in similar language and formulas which, even after over a millennium of change, recognisably go back to the same shared source. The development and divergence of those formulas mirrored those of their languages and are an extraordinary example of the tenacity and hence the reconstructibility of Indo-European poetic language.

Another Greco-Indic Formula

I now turn to another case, arguing that the epithet *manojavah*, 'swift as thought', for whose context in the present passage see above on page 120, contains an equation of Greco-Indic date. Although Athena is not described in these terms when she comes to Achilles, the comparison does come in early Greek Epic. The Homeric universe should not be confused with that of Archaic Myth, which seems to have been more comfortable with prodigious locomotion. Pindar, for example, mentions that the prodigious speed of Achilles allows him to catch deer, and Antimachus records that so great was Achilles' leap from his ship onto the beach at Troy that a fountain sprang up (*Nem.* 3.51, fr. 84 W). The common Achillean formulas πόδας ὠκύς, 'swift in his feet', ποδάρκης 'fleet-footed', ποδώκεος 'swift-footed' are the only allusions in Homer to this tradition.³⁷³ In the *Argonautica*, the twin sons of the North Wind Boreas, Zetes and Calais, have wings and can fly (1.219-23, 2.426-8). Jasper Griffin conveniently enumerates the many places where 'The fantastic, the miraculous, and the romantic... exceeded in the *Cycle* the austere limits to which the *Iliad* confines them'.³⁷⁴ As Griffin shows in that article, the very firm distinction between the divine and human found in the *Iliad* and to a lesser extent the *Odyssey* by no

³⁷² Most notably *divyena cakṣuṣā*, '[seeing] with a divine eye', found at *Mhb.* 1.67.24, 1. 111.18, 1.168.22, 1. 170.5, 3. 8.22, 3. 156.4, 3. 292.16, 6.2.10, 11.13.5, 11.16.1, 13. 41. 16, 14.17.31, 14.61.9, 15.27.4, 15.40.21, 18.5.33, and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* only at 3. 50.10. See above and below also for the common *pratyakṣadarśī*, 'eyewitness'.

³⁷³ The latter two, though most often translated by exocentric compounds in English, are in fact dependent determinative compounds expressing an instrumental relation, i.e. Achilles is swift by his feet. 'Foot-swift' would be a more literal translation.

³⁷⁴ 1977, 40. For other examples, see 39-48.

means holds outside those poems – and not least with regard to magical travel. In any case, despite this ambivalent background, Greek examples will be drawn from Homer and beyond.

In Sanskrit

The parallel was noticed by Marcello Durante and later taken up by Martin West, who adds to Durante's list one occurrence each from the Irish, Welsh, and Icelandic traditions, and assumes that it is an Indo-European inheritance in all those traditions.³⁷⁵ Durante begins with the Vedic expression (*martyasya*) *manaso javīyān*, 'swifter than the thought (of a man). It is used four times of the speed of the steeds or chariot of the Aśvins (appropriately for these horsemen gods), one to those of Indra, and one to the drink Soma, which is often compared to prodigiously fast steeds.³⁷⁶ He observes that the phrase always occurs at the end of a metrical unit and concludes that it is 'nettamente formulare'. Yet all instances come from the latest layer of the *RV*, and so are probably expansions of an original compound *manojava* or *manojū* (*java* and *ju* are by-forms of the same lexeme), 'thought-swift' i.e. 'swift as a thought', which are evenly spread throughout the collection. These two compounds, which occur in free variation according to the requirements of the metrical context, are specialised terms: like the phrasal version of the formula, they are only applied to a heavily restricted set of objects in the *RV*. In total, the compounds are applied 16 times to the chariots or steeds of the gods and six times to other things closely associated with the divine.³⁷⁷

In the Epics, the phrase (*martyasya*) *manaso javīyān* is not found, and the compound is always in the form *manojava*. Again, language change is sufficient to account for this, since *-(ī)yāms* type comparatives largely die out after the Vedic period, and roots *in fine compositionis* came to have an archaic flavour.³⁷⁸ As we saw above, the formula must move with the times. I count 37 uses of *manojava*

³⁷⁵ 1976, 121, and 2007, 96 respectively. See also now Massetti, 2019, 68, who gathers and translates half a dozen instances of the 'swift as thought' idea in the *RV* and, in accordance with her methodology, suggests an inherited system of association between them and other more common equations, namely 'swift as a horse / the wind / a bird'.

³⁷⁶ I. 117.2, 118.1, 181.3, 183.1, X.112.2 for the steeds / chariots, IX. 97.28 for Soma. Durante's inclusion of X. 39.2 in his list is presumably an error.

³⁷⁷ *manojava* occurs nine times, at I. 117.15 (Aśvins' chariot), 163.9 (prodigious steed), IV. 26.5 (the falcon which stole Soma from heaven), V. 77.3 (Aśvins' chariot), VI. 62.3 (Aśvins' steeds), 63.7 (Aśvins' chariot), VII. 68.3 (Aśvins' chariot), VIII. 22.16 (Aśvins' chariot), VIII. 100.8 (Indra's chariot).

Manojū occurs seven times, at I. 23.3 (Indra and Vayu), 85.4 (the steeds of the Maruts), 119.1 (Aśvins' chariot), 181.2 (Aśvins' steeds), 186.5 (the bulls that convey Ahi Budhnya), VI. 22.6 (the mace of Indra), X. 81.7 (Viśvakarman).

Note also the passing reference at VI. 9.5 – *mano javiṣṭham patayatsv*, 'the mind, swiftest of all that flies'.

³⁷⁸ Apart from certain fossilized forms, e.g. *jyāyāms*, *garīyāms*, etc.

in the *Mahābhārata*, all of them referred to deities, superhuman entities, and, again most commonly, prodigiously fast horses.³⁷⁹ It is applied to a seer elsewhere only at 2. 5.3 and 6.7, for the entrance and exit of Nārada, a seer second only to Vyāsa in intuitive ability. The intense restrictions to which its use is subject reveals the formula's traditional meaning. The phrase does not merely evince what it literally describes – movement of extreme ease and rapidity. It seems to be specialised into denoting the movement of divinity.

In crucial confirmation of this, it can be used as a kind of synonym for superhuman power, as, for example, at 9. 31.32, “puruṣo bhava gāndhāre yudhyasva susamāhitaḥ | adya te jīvitaṁ nāsti yady api tvaṁ manojavaḥ”, “Be a man, prince of the Gāndhārīs, and fight with determination. For today you will die, even if you were swift as thought.” So too in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, no mortal could face Rāma in battle and return alive, ‘yady api syān manojavaḥ’, ‘even if he were swift as thought’ (6. 38.18). This can be read without reference to other usages as a kind of hyperbole. But the simile's restriction elsewhere bestows an association with divinity and gives these lines an extra thrust. The very similar wording and contexts of these passages imply traditional status also for this hypothetical usage.³⁸⁰

The *Rāmāyaṇa* follows the *Mahābhārata* and the *RV* more generally: the great majority of references, 13 out of 18, are to chariots or steeds, with a couple also to fired arrows, one to a hypothetical bird, and one to the divine monkey, Hāṇumān.³⁸¹ It is certainly not co-incidental that of the 66 occurrences of the swift-as-thought formula in the *RV* and Epic none is applied to a mortal man, nor Rākṣasas, nor miscellaneous other fabulous beings. Only a few, such as the couple of references to the arrows in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, are non-paradigmatic usages which impute rather than reflect traditional meaning.³⁸² This is evidently language which the tradition overwhelmingly associates with gods and the prodigious animals and objects associated with them.³⁸³ And where it is not used in this way, the

³⁷⁹ 1.16.36, 25.6, 25.31, 26.6, 27.14, 143.18, 143.27; 2. 10.21, 47.17-18; 3. 38.28, 42.41, 97.13, 190.48, 260.15; 4. 53.11, 5.45.16, 6. 9.16, 75.47, 75.53; 7. 22.20, 27.1, 87.40; 8.22.48; 9.15.46; 12. 46.35, 231.28; 13. 141.41, 171.32, 135.87; 14. 45.9, 78. 15; 15. 3.3; 16. 4.4. At 2. 11.30 the word comes in a catalogue, and it is unclear to whom it refers. There are a couple of instances of tribes by this name which I do not include here; otherwise my treatment is exhaustive.

³⁸⁰ *Ram.* 1. 75.15 should be grouped here too. Rāma Jāmadagnya is talking about what he *would* do, not what he *can* do, and has pressing reasons to be hyperbolic – “tad imāṁ tvaṁ gatiṁ vīra hantaṁ nārhasi rāghava manojavaṁ gamiṣyāmi mahendraṁ parvatottamam”, “And so do not, o hero descended from Raghava, prevent my escape from here. [If you do not,] I shall go as swiftly as thought to the best mountain, Mahendra.”

³⁸¹ 2. 76.24, 3. 53.29, 5. 45.4, 45.23 (Hanumān), 6. 31.60 (hypothetical bird), 6. 38.18, 38.35, 46.35, 57.28, 109.27, 115.24, 7. 7.4 (arrows), 7.8 (arrows), 28.22, 29.11, 45.19, 68.10. There is one adverbial usage, at 1. 75.15. The fact that this is unparalleled means that we might prefer to read *manojavo*, against the Critical Edition and with Ś1, D1-3, 5, 7, 9, 12, M3 and 4 – manuscripts representing both the Northern and Southern recensions. See the note below.

³⁸² As, to give the same example, the use of χειρὶ παχείῃ of Penelope.

³⁸³ Calvert Watkins has argued that the use of separate vocabulary items for divine and human spheres was a convention of Indo-European date. The example he gives for Indic is the high-register *haya*, ‘steed’, as opposed to the more homely *aśva*, ‘horse’ (cognate of ‘equus’ and *hippos*) (1995, 38f. and 181); indeed, the marked *haya* is

traditional association is still relevant, sharpening interpretation. Now, the lexical meaning is close to this traditional meaning, since to be as swift as thought is to be supernatural. There is not the same degree of arbitrariness in this association as in the formula I treated above. That is, it is clearer here how the traditional grew out of the lexical. As a result, this is a more banal example than the last. Nevertheless, the association with the divine is arbitrary in the sense that it goes beyond the lexical semantics. As I shall find, it is still legitimate to reconstruct strong inheritance on this basis.

In Greek

The Hymns provide paradigmatic examples. Apollo twice moves like a thought in his Homeric Hymn – ἔνθεν δὲ πρὸς Ὀλύμπον ἀπὸ χθονός, ὥστε νόημα, | εἴσι Διὸς πρὸς δῶμα, ‘And then from the earth to Olympus like a thought | he went, to the house of Zeus’ (186-7); ἔνθεν δ’ αὖτ’ ἐπὶ νῆα νόημ’ ὥς ἄλτο πέτεσθαι, ‘and from there he leapt to fly back onto the ship, like a thought’ (448). ὥστε νόημα and νόημ’ ὥς provide a good example of the flexibility of the language of Greek hexameter. At the same time, the different shapes and positions in the line also evince how a semantic, not lexical identity of a formula can manifest itself even when the same words are used, in the same poem.

Perseus in the Hesiodic *Scutum* provides another good example: after an elaborate arming scene in which he dons his winged sandals, ὁ δ’ ὥς τε νόημ’ ἐποτᾶτο, ‘he flew like a thought’. While it is not difficult to understand that speed there is the *tertium comparationis*, Athena makes this explicit when she tells Odysseus that the Phaeacians’ “νέες ὥκεῖαι ὥς εἰ περὸν ἢ νόημα”, “‘ships are as swift as if [they were] a wing or a thought’” (vii.36).³⁸⁴ The language appropriately reflects the ships’ divine provenance, mentioned immediately before – “νηυσὶ θοῇσιν τοί γε πεποιθότες ὥκείησι | λαῖτμα μέγ’ ἐκπερόωσιν, ἐπεὶ σφισι δῶκ’ ἐνοσίχθων”, “‘Trusting in fast, swift ships they skim over the waves, since the earth-shaker Poseidon gave their ships to them’” (vii.34-5). The use of the formula underlines that closeness to divinity.³⁸⁵ We can now read between the lines of Athena’s simile and the narrator’s description of Perseus’ speed: a contemporary audience, deeply familiar with the associations which epic diction had,

almost always in conjunction with *manojava*; *aśva*, seldom. While adjacent, this is a different phenomenon to that with which I am here concerned.

³⁸⁴ Of course the other part of the comparison, though more nondescript, may well have been traditional too, cf. e.g. *Ram.* 6. 71.19 *tasyaite niśitās tīkṣṇāḥ patripatrāṅgavājīnah*, ‘those arrows of his, whetted and sharp, swift as the feather of a bird’s wing.’ But it is a rarer comparison, and there is less evidence for its being formulaic, and hence strong inheritance.

³⁸⁵ See further the supernatural speed of their ships at xiii.81-7, where they are faster than the falcon, the fastest of birds; and at viii.557-64.

would have immediately recognised the *comparandum* as suggesting not merely prodigious speed, but also closeness to divinity.

Some well-known Iliadic lines embellish this idea. The object of comparison is, appropriately, Hera.

βῆ δ' ἐξ Ἰδαίων ὀρέων ἐς μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον.
 ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἄν ἀΐξῃ νόος ἀνέρος, ὅς τ' ἐπὶ πολλὴν
 γαῖαν ἐληλουθῶς, φρεσὶ πευκαλίμησι νοήσῃ
 “ἔνθ' εἶην ἢ ἔνθα”, μενοινήησιν τε πολλά,
 ὧς κραιπνῶς μεμαυῖα διέπτατο πότνια Ἥρη.

‘And she set off from Mount Ida to wide Olympus.

And just as darts the mind of a man who has travelled

To many lands, and he thinks in his wise mind

‘Would that I were here or there’, and he desires greatly [to travel in this way],

Just so swiftly did regal Hera fly eagerly across [the sky]’.

XV.79-83

While, obviously, these enigmatic lines descant on the original comparison, glossing it as a kind of mental teleporting, they are anchored by the same *tertium comparationis* as elsewhere – speed (ὧς κραιπνῶς).³⁸⁶

Both phrasing and subject of comparison unmistakably resemble, among other passages, *RV* I. 118.1:

Hera flies across the sky ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἄν ἀΐξῃ νόος ἀνέρος, ‘just as darts the mind of a man’ and the *Aśvins* fly across the sky in a chariot *martyásya manáso javīyān*, ‘swifter than the thought of a man’. The

Homeric Hymn to Hermes is close in phrasing too: ὥς δ' ὁπότ' ὠκὺ νόημα... ἀνέρος, ‘just as when the swift thought of a man...’. The motif is expanded similarly in the *Mahābhārata*, where Yudhiṣṭhira tells

³⁸⁶ The poet of his hymn evokes Hermes’ rapidity in similar terms, but the parallel is not close enough to warrant full discussion. ὥς δ' ὁπότ' ὠκὺ νόημα διὰ στέρνοιο περήσῃ | ἀνέρος, ὃν τε θαμνιστὶ ἐπιστροφῶσι μέριμναι, | ἢ ὅτε δινηθῶσιν ἀπ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἀμαρναί, | ὥς ἄμ' ἔπος τε καὶ ἔργον ἐμήδετο κύδιμος Ἑρμῆς, ‘Just as when a swift thought pierces the breast | Of a man whom copious cares haunt, | Or when sparkles glisten from the eyes, | Thus did glorious Hermes plot both his word and deed (43-6). Still more distantly related is a dictum of Thales’: τάχιστον νοῦς: διὰ παντὸς γὰρ τρέχει, ‘the mind is the fastest, for it runs through everything’ (Diog. Laert. I. 35).

Nārada “‘bhavān samcarate lokān sadā nānāvidhān bahūn | Brahmānā nirmītān pūrvam prekṣamāṇo manojavaḥ’”, ‘My lord, you constantly traverse the many and various worlds created by Brahmān as swift as thought, seeing [things] ahead of time’ (2. 6.7).³⁸⁷ Although the resemblance is vaguer, the same sort of combination of inheritance, universality, and polygenesis is discernible in *Mhb.* 2. 6.7 and XV.79-83: the strongly inherited element is the swift-as-thought motif, the universality is in the embellishment of traditional material to imagine a man travelling across the world, and this results in the polygenesis of the notion of a man travelling across the world as swift as thought – a rich weak inheritance.

A more deviant usage such as *Theognidea* 985f. can be explained the same way: αἴψα γὰρ ὥστε νόημα παρέρχεται ἀγλαὸς ἥβη: | οὐδ’ ἵππων ὀρμὴ γίνεται ὠκυτέρη, ‘For swiftly as a thought does splendid youth pass, nor is the rush of horses any swifter.’ The poet here economically suggests through the comparison not only the extreme evanescence but also the venerability, even the divinity of youth.³⁸⁸

In Sanskrit the formula was relatively lexically stable. Poets tinkered with morphology and syntax but largely stuck to the same lexemes. In Greece, too, the comparison’s traditional, formular status is confirmed by the repeated use of the same Greek word for thought, νόημα, in six of the seven Greek instances of the comparison. The poet of the *Theognidea* is careful to use it too. That passage is the last occurrence of the comparison in Greek (and, to my knowledge, Latin) literature, and so a reminder of the superior utility of early material in genealogical comparison.³⁸⁹ More urgently, it is a rebuff to any suspicion that the comparison might be of only typological nature. Clearly it was not so obvious a comparison that once it was lost it could be reinvented.

And what of West’s parallels from the Irish, Welsh, and Icelandic traditions?³⁹⁰ They all regard the speed of a man. This is important because it suggests that those traditions did not accord the same traditional meaning to the formula. For the establishment of this, the preponderance of usages of the

³⁸⁷ The itineracy of seers will be treated in the fourth chapter. Beyond its historical reality, this was a fundamental tool, since it allowed poets to introduce seers into narratives at will, just as Vyāsa and Athena in these passages. In Sanskrit Epic, as we will see, seers regularly materialise to advise, upbraid, and pontificate.

³⁸⁸ *Ōkees hippoi* is of course a common Homeric formula, even, originally, a *figura etymologica* (> PIE**h₁ōkéu-es h₁éku-ōs*), since both go back to the same root, of the basic meaning ‘swift’ (for an excellent discussion of this formula with reference to its Indo-European background, see Ryan Platte, 2017, ch.1).

³⁸⁹ The Theognidean passage is of vexed date. West, 1974, 57f. suggests the third century BC for what he calls the *excerpta meliora* of the collection (lines 255-1002), and is followed by Ewan Bowie, 1997, 62f., but his reasoning is probabilistic, not probatory. Indeed, oralists such as Gregory Nagy and Elizabeth Irwin would reject the very notion that the collection’s constituent parts can be dated differently in this way (1983 and 2005 respectively, though neither addresses the question directly). In any case, a third century date would place the last instance of our comparison three centuries after the penultimate instance, in the sixth century BC Hymn to Hermes (for that date, see Nicholas Richardson, 2010, 24-5). The gap would be remarkable but not impossible, since the poet could easily have taken the formula either from Homer or from any number of early poems now lost to us. See also the use of the inherited formula in the Sibylline Oracles, discussed above.

³⁹⁰ See above, p. 151.

comparison in those traditions must involve a divinity. On West's slim evidence, it is impossible to tell. But the three usages of heroes in those traditions – as against *none* in Greek and Sanskrit literature – looks unpromising. Perhaps this is better thought of as weak inheritance – or even typological comparison. Only further study would be able to tell. In any case, the other traditions are useful for underlining the commonality of the Greek and Indian circumscriptions of usage.

Indeed, this is the vital point. In Greece too all usages of the formula 'swift as thought' are either applied to divinities or can be enriched by understanding such a connection as part of the formula's traditional area of application. I insist on this because the fact that the both traditions preserve this apparently arbitrary limitation is outstanding evidence that the formula is of Greco-Indic date. This notwithstanding the closer connection between lexical and traditional meanings, and the reduction of richness which that connection brings. Again, genealogical comparison, in pointing out new connections within each tradition, enhances our readings of various passages of ancient literature. I make the strong claim also here that we can glimpse a fragment of poetic language, and its traditional context, used in the narrative poetry of the late third millennium BC.

Turning back to the comparison between the scenes in the table above, we can further cash out these findings. In the scene between Gāndhārī and Vyāsa, *manojava* underlines Vyāsa's (semi-)divine status, elevating him by implication to the level of a Vedic god coursing across the sky and preparing for his bestowal upon Gāndhārī of prophetic power – another thing that we have seen Vedic gods do. Just as Vyāsa here and elsewhere blurs the boundaries between seer and divinity upwards, Athena does so downwards in the Iliadic passage, employing intuitive powers and advising Achilles, albeit secretly, in a public assembly, just as Halitherses and Calchas do elsewhere in Homer.

Prophets Made, not Born

In this section, I consider how poets in both traditions momentarily grant divinatory power to characters to achieve the analogous effects. Giftedness, as we have seen, was certainly a part of how both Greeks and Indians construed intuitive divination – this is part of the strong shared inheritance. In the following, I examine a weak inheritance deriving from the strong.

After the debate between Bhīma and Gāndhārī, the dejected Yudhiṣṭhira prostrates himself before Gāndhārī and urges her to curse him. She catches sight of his fingernails from underneath her blindfold,

and the intensity of her gaze deforms them.³⁹¹ Her anger now abated, she is once again to lament the war's devastation from a universal standpoint, even finding it in her heart to pity the enemy Pāṇḍavas that killed her sons (11. 14-15). It is then that Gāndhārī is given the 'divine eye' (see above). Using it, she describes the battlefield over hundreds of lines in a scene remarkable for the intensity of its pathos and its taste for gore: the women faint repeatedly onto a swamp of blood and flesh (11. 16.52, 55); a young wife undoes the armour and strokes the blood-smeared corpse and blood-matted hair of her husband as she speaks to him (11.20.8-27); other women join the decapitated heads of their sons and spouses to their headless trunks, before realising that they make the wrong pairs (11. 16.50-51). The episode ends in ring composition. Gāndhārī swoons, as she had at the beginning of the episode when she saw the corpse of her eldest son, Duryodhana. When she comes round her anger has returned. She lays a curiously unmotivated curse on Kṛṣṇa, to whom she has been speaking (in fact it is more prophecy than curse – Kṛṣṇa certainly treats it as such in his reply).³⁹²

The Diviner Narrator – Rich Weak Inheritance

The poet's reasons for granting Gāndhārī the power are quite clear, even if the internal motivation is not quite as urgent this time as it was in the case of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Sañjaya. The impact of the ghoulish description of the battlefield is drastically upgraded by its mediation through the matriarch of the defeated side, mother of a hundred slain sons. When she sees the corpse of her eldest son Duryodhana, leader of the Kuru troops, the poet is at his best – 'sahasā nyapatad bhūmau chinneva kadalī vane', 'she immediately fell to the ground, like a banana cut down in a grove'.³⁹³ The ensuing lament for him is

³⁹¹ *tataḥ sa kunakhībhūto darśanīyanakho nṛpaḥ*, 11. 15.7.

³⁹² 11. 25.39-46. The oldest parts of the *Mahābhārata* clearly take Kṛṣṇa as a prince and hero; the later parts, including the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, take him as a god. This is a good example of the difficulties of interpretation of so distended a text.

śapsye, 25.39, certainly must mean 'I shall curse' here. But the reason she gives, that he simply stood by while people were killed and so caused the destruction of the Kurus through negligence, is tortured. Her speech is also in the form of prophecy, not curse: 'You shall...' and not 'May you...', inasmuch as a firm distinction can be made between the two kinds of speech. Moreover, the change in her attitude towards him is peculiarly abrupt and undermines her characterisation elsewhere. This coda certainly has the aspect of an imperfectly soldered interpolation, perhaps motivated by the desire to refer forward to the slaughter of *Mhb.* 16.4 – itself, of course, a late passage. 11. 25.34, where she swoons in grief, would have been a natural and moving conclusion to the episode. Note also that when she swoons before, at 11. 17.1, the poet mentions the return of consciousness (*sā tu labdhvā punaḥ sañjñām*, 11. 17.2); here, by contrast, the narrator simply continues with the connecting *tataḥ*, a word which often begins new episodes, without telling us that she has come to.

³⁹³ 11. 17.1. This beautiful simile might remind a Hellenist of that comparing the lean of the head of the slain Gorgythion to a poppy laden with fruit and rain (VIII.306-08, cf. Sa. Fr. 105c), or perhaps the similes comparing the

movingly ambivalent in its struggle to balance motherly affection with awareness of wrongdoing. She cradles him, sprinkling tears over his chest as she speaks. This moving scene presupposes that Gāndhārī is able to see what she is doing, and so the poet, to facilitate it, had to solve a problem – the tradition is quite clear that she wears a blindfold in devotion to her blind husband. He finds an ingenious solution which allows him to have it both ways: Vyāsa appears and gives her divine sight.

Greek poets used the same device to freight narration with affect. The Cassandra scene in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is so familiar that it is trivial to detail its *éclat*. I here limit myself to those high points which would not have been possible without the use of the device. Time and causation are central themes in Aeschylus' trilogy, and Cassandra's access to past, present, and future can valuably reveal the links between them. Accordingly, her vision begins with Thyestes' ghastly banquet (1095-7), which suggestively precedes her description of Agamemnon's murder. Aeschylus makes full use of the visual element of intuitive divination, dwelling with the same relish as the Indian poet above on grisly imagery, as at 1097, ὀπτάς τε σάρκας πρὸς πατρὸς βεβρωμένας, 'the roasted flesh [of the children] devoured by their father'. The children re-appear later, their hands full, this time, with their own flesh and innards (1217-22). The traditionally riddling language of seers joins forces with Aeschylus's bejewelled metaphors in this scene – too much so for the Chorus, who are often uncomprehending, and understand Cassandra only once she expresses herself literally (οὐδὲν ἐξηκασμένα, 1244). These plush metaphors are married to the subjectivity of a narrator who participates in the narrative – a striking combination. 'Ah, ah, look! Look!', Cassandra shouts, 'Keep away the bull from the cow!' (ἄ ἄ, ἰδοὺ ἰδοῦ: ἄπεχε τῆς βοῦς | τὸν ταῦρον, 1125-6). Apostrophes, such as that at 1138 (to Agamemnon or to Apollo? Another riddle), are a hallmark of Cassandra's speech and a symptom of her anguish. But they also foreground the subjective element, for, like Gāndhārī's, Cassandra's own suffering is movingly interlaced with that of those she describes. Aeschylus stresses this element more than his Indian counterpart, mixing into the scene laments for her own lot, and that of Troy (1136-39, 1156-61, 1167-72, 1265-78). Eventually, she even prophesies her own imminent death, and indeed its revenge (1256-63, 1279-84). The poet uses Cassandra's powers in that speech to explore central questions around murder and its effects. Poignantly, murder can here be explored in conjunction with its causes and its effects, by one who knows they are to die. More conventional foreshadowing shapes the narrative, signalling to the audience what the Chorus never quite grasps: Agamemnon's death is alluded to (1125-29, 1246), as well as the events of the next plays in the trilogy (1279-84). Aeschylus reserves one last prophetic *coup-de-théâtre* for the end of the scene – the paradox of a prophet singing her own funeral dirge (1322-30). As Eduard Fraenkel purrs, 'What the Greek

falling dead warrior to a tree cut down in a forest (IV.482, XIII.178, XVI.482), but there is no way to gauge the antiquity of these similarities.

poet makes us see with our mind's eye is infinitely more forcible in its effect than anything actually shown on a stage could be' (1950, on 1129).

An unknown Hellenistic tragedian brings Aeschylus' technique one step closer to his Indian counterparts. Aeschylus' Chorus, for the most part, does not grasp Cassandra's words. Aeschylus may have felt bound by the tradition on this point, since Apollo had laid a curse on Cassandra that she not be believed. But the Chorus' incomprehension also enhances the audience's sense of the household's impotency before the ghastly fate which grips them and affords an opportunity for the wrenching dramatic irony so characteristic of the poet and his genre. On the other hand, as we saw, Aeschylus fully exploits the affective possibilities of Cassandra's own involvement in the action. In the *Mahābhārata*, by contrast, not only the narrating Gāndhārī but *also* her narratees are deeply personally involved in the internal narration. And when Sañjaya relates the war to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, it is primarily the latter whose emotive reactions infuse affect. In short, the narratees' reactions, periodically described by the narrator one level up, Vaiśampāyana, are an important part of the *Mahābhārata*'s texture.

The same, it seems, goes for Cassandra in a particularly valuable fragment of Hellenistic Tragedy (TrGF. Fr. Adesp. 649).³⁹⁴ As in the scene in the *Agamemnon* (surely, along with *Iliad* 22, an important intertext for this fragment), Cassandra is singing in lyric cola, indicated in the papyrus by the stage direction ὥδή, 'in song', and her interlocutors in iambics. I understand the scene to be taking place somewhere in the royal palace of Troy.³⁹⁵ In it, Cassandra is using her divinatory powers to relate to Priam the duel between Achilles and Hector as it unfolds on the field in front of the battlements (as we see from line 18). I print and translate Kannicht and Snell's 1981 text:

ΠΡΙΑΜΟΣ

θάρσησον, ὦ παῖ· μὴ κάμῃς· στήσον πόδα,
καὶ σαῖσι β[ο]ύλαῖς προσδέχου τὰ κρείσσ[ονα]·

[ὥδή]

ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ

βέβληκε δεινὸν κάμακα (5)

³⁹⁴ *Editio Princeps* Richard Coles, 1968. See also most recently Sabina Mazzoldi 2001, 270-80, Carmine Catenacci 2002, Fantuzzi & Hunter, 2002, Bruno Gentili, 1977, 61-68 and 2006, 73-88 [note that although these are two editions of the same book Gentili changes his mind on a number of points], and Franco Ferrari 2009.

³⁹⁵ ἐκ δόμων in line 14 permits of two interpretations – either Deiphobus comes out of his part of the palace, or the cry comes out of Priam and Cassandra's. It certainly does not prove that Priam and Cassandra are outside somewhere, much less that they are watching on the battlements through human and not divinatory sight.

ΠΡ. τίς, τέκνον; φράσον· ΧΟΡΟΣ ὁ Πηλιώτης [

ΚΑ. ἀλλ' ἡστόχησε_{≤ν≥}· ΧΟ. εἶπας ὡς ἔχει_┐

ΚΑ. Ἔκτωρ †δεδεμλει†· ΧΟ. δυστυχήs ἀγω_┐

ΚΑ. ἴσως ἐδυστύχησεν [(10)
[ῶδή]
κοινὰ μέχρι νῦν νικῶμεν .[

ΔΗΙΦΟΒΟΣ

τίς ἦχ_[ο]s ἡμᾶς ἐκ δόμων ἀνέκλαγε; [

[ῶδή]
ΚΑ.] ἔα ἔα· τί λεύσ_{≤σ≥}ω; .[(15)

ΔΗ. αἰνίγ_[ματό]s μοι μείζον' ἐφθέγξω λόγ_[ν]·
[ῶδή]

ΚΑ.] .[... πρὸ πύργων οὐκ_[.]σε.]

ΔΗ. μέμνηα_[ς] αὐτὴ καὶ παρεπλάγχθης φρένα[

[ῶδή] (20)
ΚΑ.] οὐ παρεκέ_[λ]ευες; .[
[]πατ_{...τ....}ατο[ca. 9 ll.].[
[] ὅς γῶ_[ν] .ε_{....}ρο_{...ιος}[

[ὦδῆ]
 KA.] νε[ώ]τερόν μοι τι[(25)
 [] ἀκού[σ]α[τ'] ἄ[κ]ραν γῆρυν [—×—
 [] ἀκού[σ]αθ'· Ἐκτωρ ἐξόλωλ[.].[—
 []

[ὦδῆ]
 KA.] [.] ἄχλυσ πόθεν με[
 [] ὄλωλ[.]αι καὶ φάος Τιτα[ν] — (30)
 [] [.]δ[.] γῆν τὸ κλεινὸν Ἴλιον
 [] τῆς σῆς ἔρη[μ]ον χειρὸς Ἑλλή[νων] —
 [] βαλεῖ πρὸς οὐδας []
 [The final four lines are too fragmentary to be translated]

Priam: Courage, my child, don't let up. Stand up straight,
 And let yourself be counselled by a greater power.
 [In song]

Cassandra: He has hurled the mighty shaft. (5)

Pr.: Who, child? Tell me!

Chorus: Achilles [...] ?

Ca.: Yes, but he has missed.

Ch.: Have you said it how [it really is]?

Ca.: Hector [now throws?]

Ch.: [Is it] an unlucky engagement?

Ca.: He has fared equally unluckily.

[In song] (10)

Ca.: Until now, our side is equally close to victory.

Deiphobus: What voice has cried out to me from inside the house?

[In song]

Ca.: Alack, alas! What do I see?! (15)

De.: You have addressed to me a speech greater than a riddle.

[In song]

Ca.: [Are] you not ... in front of the battlements?

De.: Are you mad and have you lost your mind?

[In song] (20)

Ca.: Were you not urging him on?

[...]

[...]

[In song]

A new [...] to me [...] (25)

Hear me cry out as loud as I can [...]

Hear – Hector is dead!

[In song]

A cloud from somewhere [...] me

[...] and light of [...] is dead. (30)

[...] and now famous Ilion

Bereft of your hand (?) [...] of the Greeks

Shall cast to the ground...³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ Although the details are certainly open to challenge, my translation in its overall structure presents the most natural and the most popular interpretation of the fragment. Yet here, too, there are those who wish to expunge the supernatural from Greek literature where possible. Franco Ferrari's is the most forceful exposition of this unconvincing interpretation (2009). He sees the first two lines of the fragment as addressed by Priam to Hector. He would then, rather cryptically, be encouraging Hector to stand and fight Achilles. He denies that Cassandra sings in

Cassandra, like Sañjaya, provides a live transmission of the events.³⁹⁷ In the *Iliad*, Athena induces Hector to stop running and face Achilles by sending to him an apparition of Deiphobus which promises to face Achilles with him (XXII.226-47). When the crucial moment comes, Hector, having called for Deiphobus to give him a new spear, finds no response, and immediately knows that a god has tricked him and so that his doom is nigh (291-305). In the fragment, Cassandra undergoes the same realisation. Her dismay at seeing Deiphobus in the palace in line 15 is explained by lines 18 and 21: she has seen him appear on the battlefield encouraging Hector, as in *Iliad* 22, and when she sees him in the palace, she, like Hector, immediately presumes divine deceit and so Hector's death.³⁹⁸ Line 27 is, therefore, more likely a presumption of Hector's death, of the kind that he makes in *Iliad* 22, and the fragmentary coda foretelling Troy's fall is more inference than prophecy. Although the poor preservation of the papyrus forbids detailed discussion, it is clear that the unknown poet fully exploits the affective potential of his device, providing not only a transmission of the events but also reactions to them in real time. Where Aeschylus'

lyric, since this, given the parallel with her scene in the *Agamemnon*, would strongly imply an access of prophetic vision also here; he therefore explains away the repeated ὥδῆς, 'in song's, as indicating some sort of sung delivery, and assumes that it is all in iambs but that something has gone very badly wrong with the fragment's text and lineation, (already Coles had considered this possibility, 1968, 166. Gentili, by contrast, finds lyric cola in many sequences and assumes all of it is lyric, 1977, 61-68).

Ferrari thinks that the scene takes place on the battlements, so that all may see the duel, and that Cassandra's narration of the events is a 'tocco di realismo': Cassandra merely has better eyesight than Priam because she is younger (29. Such realism is unlikely, and it is unclear to me whether the effect of age on eyesight could ever be recognised in a time before opticians and glasses). On this view, the Chorus can see the action just as well, and, although he explicitly asks his daughter to tell him what is happening, they would brusquely interject to answer his question (rather than reinforcing Priam's by asking their own). The Chorus' comment in line 7, for Ferrari, confirms that they see the battlefield as well as Cassandra. This would be a limp and otiose intervention. My interpretation, however, by taking it as a question, finds a dramatic and pointed allusion to the tradition of Cassandra's supposed unreliability. Moreover, an ambivalent reaction to her from the Chorus would also amplify the links to the Aeschylean scene. Ferrari explains away the reference in line 16 to enigmatic speech (which, as we have seen, is closely associated in Greece and India with prophetic speech) as a mere turn of phrase whose associations with prophecy are co-incidental. It is presumably also co-incidental that she is dismissed as mad at line 19, just like other misunderstood seers. Ferrari supposes line 18 to be from *eimi ibo*, not *eimi sum*, but it is not clear to me how lines 15 and 21 can be made to accord with this interpretation. It is no surprise that this is comfortably the minority view.³⁹⁷ Carmine Catenacci and S. K. Belvalkar hit upon the same metaphor: for Catenacci, Cassandra 'vede e descrive "in diretta"' (2002, 97). For Belvalkar, Sañjaya the war-reporter 'secure[s] all the advantages that an expert army of camera-men, radios, specially chartered aeroplanes and television would give' to his modern counterparts (1946, 315).

³⁹⁸ Cassandra's surprise at Deiphobus' appearance does not tell against her use of divinatory powers. So the embarrassment of, among others, Mazzoldi, 'Ma se Cassandra compie una descrizione profetica del duello, che deve ancora avvenire, risulta difficilmente spiegabile la sua sorpresa alla vista di Deifobo dentro la città, insieme a lei' (although she does, with Coles, eventually come to the correct conclusion, 2001, 271). Here as elsewhere, poets' use of divination is not to be submitted to rational analysis. Being here a narrative device, diviners know only as much as is expedient for the poet – no more and no less. Examples of such apparent inconsistencies are numerous in both traditions. As we saw in chapter one, Menelaus hoodwinks the old man of the Sea in the *Odyssey* despite his prophetic powers, and, above, Gāndhārī reacts to the sight of Duryodhana's corpse as if it were a surprise to her.

Cassandra sang her own funeral dirge, this Cassandra, it seems, movingly sings one for her city. Alas, we can only imagine what Priam's reaction to this revelation may have been.

As Mazzoldi observes, 'la novità contenuta in questo frammento non si tratta di chiaroveggenza sul passato o sul futuro, bensì sul presente, su avvenimenti contemporanei, che Cassandra, veggente / spettatrice, può vedere soltanto grazie alle proprie doti' (2001, 272). In an Indian context, as we have seen, it is no such novelty. As Cassandra to Priam, Sañjaya must tell king Dhṛtarāṣṭra of the death of his sons and field his anguished questions. Just as at the beginning of the narration of the duel Priam asks Cassandra who throws first (line 6), Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Sañjaya at the very beginning of the war "“ke pūrvam prāharams tatra kuravaḥ pāṇḍavās tathā”", 'Who attacked first, the Kurus or the Pāṇḍavas?' (6. 42.1) Similarly, as he says when Bhīṣma dies, *ārtiḥ parā māviśati*, 'excessive grief comes upon me' (6. 15.4). No doubt, Cassandra's sentiment in line 29 was along the same lines.

It is no co-incidence that both Gāndhārī and Cassandra are women. Here, again, higher order similarity on the level of gender roles underlies this lower order likeness. Given the gender dynamics of both societies, to focalise narrative through female eyes was to blend action with its emotional reaction. Not just emotion, but the poetic expression of it in response to the devastation of war is a constitutive feature of female characters in both literary traditions – either as a subject for an entire literary work in itself (as Euripides' *Trojan Women*) or as part of a larger whole (as the *Mahābhārata*'s *Strīparvan*, or 'woman-chapter'). Through this technique, as we have seen, lament could be directly admixed into the narrative, rather than following it sequentially.

The point should not be overstated: emotion, grief, and lament, though gendered, are hardly the preserve of women in either tradition. This dialogic form of narration, in which reaction follows description, is sustained throughout the battle books of the *Mahābhārata*, with King Dhṛtarāṣṭra as emoting internal audience. Throughout book 9 and especially during the decisive moments of the duel between Bhīma and Duryodhana, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son and leader of the Kurus, Sañjaya repeatedly refers to Duryodhana as 'your son' ("“putras tava”", 9. 57.34, 57.41, "“Sūtas tava”", 9. 57.35), including at the cardinal moment when Bhīma finally cheats and fells Duryodhana – "“sa papāta naravyāghro vasudhām anunādayan bhagnorur bhīmasenena putras tava mahīpate”", "“he, tiger of men, making the earth resound, his thighs smashed by Bhīma, your son, fell to the ground”" (9. 57.45). There follows a lyrical passage describing a series of prodigious events; I analyse these at greater length in the next chapter, since it includes much inherited ominous imagery.³⁹⁹ But what concerns us here is that "“tava putre nipātite”",

³⁹⁹ Including Indra shedding a blood rain, just as Zeus does to honour the death of his son Sarpedon in the *Iliad*. See pp. 202-08.

“when your son was felled”, is made a refrain, insistently exploiting the internal narration to drive home the pathos of the moment (57. 48, 51, 52, 54, cf. 56). Duryodhana is not a sympathetic character in the poem, and reminders of the internal narration, in pivoting the audience’s attention towards his father’s grief, are necessary bring to the scene an atmosphere of pity in line with the poem’s dolorous attitude towards death. When Duryodhana finally dies from the mortal wound he sustains in that duel, and the episode ends, Sañjaya’s divine sight is withdrawn. The first words of Vaiśampāyana, the narrator one level up in the poem’s *mise-en-abyme* structure, devastate in their understatement: ‘vaiśampāyana uvāca | iti śrutvā sa nṛpatiḥ putrajñātivadham tadā niḥśvasya dīrgham uṣṇam ca tataś cintāparo ’bhavat,’ ‘Vaiśampāyana said | The King [Dhṛtarāṣṭra], having heard of the slaughter of his son and his kinsmen, sighed, long and ardently. Thought engulfed him.’ (10. 9.59).

More elaborately in India but also in Greece, poets use divination to facilitate the internal narration of events to emotionally involved listeners. Their reactions to the internal narratives then guide and enliven their reception by the external audience. The device also facilitates the achievement of other aims, such as bringing in other relevant material (for example, Thyestes’ banquet in the *Agamemnon*, or Sañjaya’s description of the cosmos at 6.5-13). Again, I do not claim that these parallels prove the inheritedness of the device itself. Rather, brilliant poets hit upon parallel expedients to organise their works and achieve the universal aims of effective narrative – drama, vividness, affect. The parallels are the result of analogous uses of the same tools: it is the tools which are inherited, and not the uses to which they are put. This is the weak claim: the similarities presuppose a shared inheritance, and could not exist without it, but at the same time, the latter is only part of the causal story of the likeness.

There is here kinship with Hesiod and the *RV*’s construal of intuitive power as the underwriter of the veracity of their poetry (see above pp. 136-41). There are two options. Perhaps the relation between divination and poetic composition set out in the Homeric and Hesiodic passages was founded on the shared application of general cultural ideas such as giftedness and truth being only in the mind of the gods. These general similarities would then suffice to account for the generation of profounder similarity. On this view, the apparently deep affinities with the *RV* would in fact be polygenetic, the result of a shared weak inheritance, just as the examples from Aeschylus and *Mahābhārata* 11 treated immediately above. Alternatively, if the Homeric and Hesiodic passages do indeed preserve traces of an archaic state of affairs once much better established in Greece, and if, consequently, the idea that a divine intuitive gift guaranteed poetic veracity is reconstructible to the time of unity – if, that is, it is strong inheritance, then the examples I treat immediately above would be extensions of this notion. The diviner narrators would be the reflexes of that phenomenon. They would end up being partly innovations and partially reconstructions of a onetime strong inheritance – the last throbs of archaic beliefs as new models of poetic

inspiration and divination came to the fore. If this seems complex, then it will accord with our *a priori* suspicions of the messiness and non-linearity of heredity and diachronic change. Certainly, further comparative research would be needed on poetic composition for a good case to be made. But – to get off the fence – I suspect that the latter option is the more plausible. This would mean that diviner narrators, though still examples of weak inheritance, would be immediately downstream of the strong similarities between Hesiod, Homer, and the *RV*.

Further Poetic Uses of Divination

Faced with steering such a vast and baggy narrative to a conclusion, the *Mahābhārata* poets again make use of the bestowal of divine sight to stage a final chorus. Sixteen years after the end of the war, Vyāsa grants the still distraught Dhṛtarāṣṭra a wish, and he chooses to know what befell all the heroes who died in the war. Gāndhārī, Draupadī, Kuntī, and Subhadrā, who have lost sons and husbands in the slaughter, agree that seeing their men for one last time would assuage their grief. Vyāsa assents, and they all set off for the Ganges where that night, in a vision, all the slain warriors emerge from the waters (15. 37-40.16). ‘dhṛtarāṣṭrasya ca tadā divyaṁ cakṣur narādhipa muniḥ satyavatīputraḥ prītaḥ prādāt tapobalāt | divyajñānalopetā gāndhārī ca yaśasvinī dadarśa putrāṁs tān sarvān ye cānye ’pi raṇe hatāḥ,’ ‘Then, o king of men, the seer Vyāsa, son of Satyavatī, was pleased to give the divine eye to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, from the force of his austerity. And illustrious Gāndhārī, endowed with the force of divine knowledge, saw all her sons and the others who had died in the war’ (15. 40.17). All spent a happy night together, before Vyāsa dismissed the vision again. Late addition to the poem or not, it is a touching moment when, at the end of the poem, the blind, devastated father ‘adṛṣtvā... putrān darśanaṁ pratilabdhavān ṛṣiprasādāt putrāṇāṁ svarūpāṇāṁ’, ‘never having seen his sons, snatched a glimpse of their appearance by the grace of the seer’ (15. 43.1). Again, intuitive divination is here a narrative tool which allows the poet to achieve his aims: here, to create a memorable and unusually joyful scene which serves as counterpoint to the poem’s prevailing grimness, and which paves the way for the deaths of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī in the poem’s following section.

The use of the power of intuitive divination as an expedient to facilitate dramatic scenes is common in Homer. As mentioned previously (p 79), at the end of *Iliad* 19 Achilles’ divine steed, Xanthus, tells him that his death is near, that it was Apollo who killed Patroclus, and that he will die at the hands of

a god and a mortal (404-23).⁴⁰⁰ As often, divinatory power here encompasses all that is otherwise unclear to mortals: past events of obscure nature – Achilles cannot have known that it was Apollo who killed Patroclus, future events – the time and manner of his death, and divine action. While we are not told how the horse came to have divinatory powers, there is an intriguing parallel to the temporary bestowal of divinatory power on Gāndhārī (twice) and Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Before the horse speaks, we learn, αὐδήεντα δ' ἔθηκε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη, 'and the goddess white-armed Hera endowed [it] with speech'. At the end of the speech, Ἐρινύες ἔσχεθον αὐδὴν, 'the Erinyes curbed its voice' (407, 418). Like the newly prophetic Gāndhārī and Sañjaya's interlocutors, Achilles is unfazed by this irruption of magic into his world. He asks in response why the horse prophesies (μαντεύεται) his death, since he already knows well that he shall die at Troy (420-3). It would, again, be speculation to suggest that Achilles' lack of surprise and the incongruity of a talking horse in the *Iliad* is in itself evidence of an old Epic world in which animals could talk and prophesy (although I revisit this in the next chapter, in which I discuss prophetic horses). What is clear is that the Greek like the Indian Epic poet can by divine intervention put prophetic speech in mouths where it does not belong, to great dramatic effect.

Similarly, although there is no hint of their divinatory ability elsewhere, both Patroclus and Hector in the *Iliad* prophesy the death of their killer on their own deathbed. They do so in quite specific terms: Patroclus tells Hector not just that he will die, but that his death is close (ἄγγι), and that Achilles will kill him (XVI.852-5). He also knows about the involvement of Apollo in his death (849). For his part, Hector knows that Paris and Apollo will kill Achilles by the Scaean Gates (XXII.359-60). The narrator is not explicit about the sudden advent of mantic ability, but the content of their words leaves no doubt on the matter; moreover, obviously, the plot presupposes that neither character has access to this knowledge before the battles in which they die.

A verbal link ties together Xanthus' and Patroclus' words, raising the possibility that such scenes were traditional: just as Achilles asks, in reply to the prophecy of his death, "Ξάνθε τί μοι θάνατον μαντεύεται; οὐδέ τί σε χρή", "Xanthus, why do you prophesy my death? You need not", Hector asks in reply to the same "Πατρόκλεις τί νύ μοι μαντεύεται αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον", "Patroclus, why do you prophesy my utter destruction?" (XIX.420, XVI.859). But after Hector prophesies Achilles' death, he deviates from this pattern. This is surely significant: Achilles shows once again the acceptance of mortality which sets him apart from the poem's other warriors – "τέθναθι: κῆρα δ' ἐγὼ τότε δέξομαι ὅπποτε κεν δῇ | Ζεὺς ἐθέλῃ τελέσαι ἢ δ' ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι", "Die. For my part, I shall accept my fate whenever it is | that Zeus and the other immortal gods desire to bring it about' (XXII.365-6). Presumably it is their closeness

⁴⁰⁰ For more on this scene, see next chapter, pp. 208-21.

to death which gives Patroclus and Hector extraordinary power – the poet does not say. But if it was indeed traditional for the *envoi* of the slain to be a prophecy of the death of the killer, this would only underline that in Greek as in Sanskrit Epic it was not necessary to be a seer to intuitively prophesy. Poets, in momentarily granting this ability to others, exploit the surprise generated by the rupture of the norm to create striking poetic effects.⁴⁰¹ Again, I am not suggesting that these scenes necessarily go back to any Indo-European or Greco-Indic prototype. My object here is to describe how Greek and Indian poets exploit inherited narrative tools in a similar way and end up composing scenes which are structurally similar. Nevertheless, it is not improbable that generations of Homer's and Vyāsa's forebears exploited these same tools in the same way, all the way back to their shared progenitors.

Conclusion

I have here been making the case for far deeper similarity in the treatment of seers and intuitive divination in Greek and Sanskrit poetry than has hitherto been recognised. Indeed, the possibility that divination could be the *locus* of Indo-European inheritance has hardly been considered before this thesis – and certainly not at length. As I hope to have shown, resemblance can be found in a vast array of passages in both traditions. Sometimes, a single Greek or Indian passage has found numerous interlocking parallels in the other tradition. In fact, there is here a vast interlocking network of similarity, not a series of one-to-one correspondences. My discussion has naturally focussed squarely on the earliest material, but has stretched across 1500 years in India – from the *RV* to the later parts of the Epics, and at least a millennium in Greece – from Homer to the *Sibylline Oracles*.

Along the way, I have made many arguments about the mechanics of inheritance, asserting the utility of a distinction between strong and weak inheritance and rejecting shared etymology as a necessary condition for the reconstruction of formulas. I make the strong claim that Greek and Indian formulas sometimes continue Greco-Indic prototypes which are reconstructible in semantic if not lexical shape. I reconstructed one as 'he who knows (/sees) what was, what is, and what will be'. This formula reveals substantive information about divination: in both traditions, it is – or could be – a spontaneous inner capacity which gave insight into occult matters irrespective of when they happened. It did not need to depend on signs. This aligns perfectly with the way that the seer-poets of the *RV* conceptualise the powers by which they composed their poetry, confirming the antiquity of the notion (and annihilating any

⁴⁰¹ Those others, though, are always high status characters or gods, just as seers tend to be, as I show in the next chapter but one.

sceptical doubts about diffusion). Moreover, the distribution of this formula in Greece unearthed a good possibility that there is more strong inheritance to be found around poetic composition also there – but this is a subject for another study. Another, surer example of strong inheritance in both traditions is in the construal of the intuitive divinatory power as the gift of a god, and its uneasy co-existence with the heredity of that power in both traditions.

Yet further resemblances, on the level of vocabulary, formula, scene, plot device, character, narrative aim, and aesthetic effect, go beyond strong inheritance. Once a certain amount of similarity – whether genealogical or typological – is present, poets, who have the same universal aims of creating effective narratives, and who face similar problems as they seek to bring order to their narratives, innovatively recombine these elements along the same lines to generate sometimes remarkably similar passages. In such large poetic corpora, it is vital to make allowances for the polygenesis which arises from universality and chance, in combination with heredity. Here the weak claim comes in: although not traceable back to a single shared ancestor in a parent tradition, still these could not have existed without an underlying shared inheritance on which they rely. This inheritance is manifest in assumptions not only about divination but every aspect of the traditions, rich or banal, including polytheism, intervening gods, *menis*, winning glory in warfare, and so on.

Moreover, I saw no role for transmission of poetic material from India to Greece or vice versa, as has been sporadically suggested. Apart from certain traded items, there is no evidence independent of the similarities themselves which suggests any kind of cultural contact, let alone of the fierce intensity required to produce the similarities which I find. Such intense contact is necessitated not by the extent of the similarities so much as by their nature: borrowing on the level of formula would require the kind of profound familiarity that only chimaeras such as poets bilingual in Sanskrit and Greek could furnish. No less fantastic is the mediation through Near-Eastern poetry of character, scene, or formula. Of course, this does not entail that there was not influence in other areas, but to invoke transmission on the level of poetry is at best otiose and at worse a retreat from scholarship into fancy.

This is, of course, not to deny extensive influence from the Near-East on Greece. As it transpires, Greek divination shows a near complementary distribution: whereas Greece over time adopted and adapted the sign divinatory practices of her Eastern neighbours, she retained an idea of intuitive divination with deep roots in the culture.

Chapter III – Dark and Stormy Nights: Omens and their Uses

The following chapter asks where, what, and how: where omens come in Greek and Sanskrit Epic, what events carry ominous charge, and how poets make use of them. I begin with omen scenes, and a side-by-side comparison of two important examples from the *Odyssey* and the *Mahābhārata*, but venture also a discussion of Herodotus, whose use of analogous techniques is no co-incidence. Then I explore what kinds of omen are used in the Epics (especially the *Iliad* and *Mahābhārata*), how poets manipulate them, and to what effects. The following section treats a characteristic feature of both traditions – the deployment of ominous imagery in similes, using this as a prism with which to view the texts’ similarities, dissimilarities, and heritage. Throughout, I find that from a foundation of strong inheritance, the weak kind grows. The final part of the chapter, to borrow a metaphor from philosophy, ‘cashes out’ the chapter’s findings by offering new readings of some famous but thorny similes in the *Iliad*, by considering what the *RV*’s use of ominous imagery can tell us about its relationship to narrative Epic, and by examining the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet’s especially inventive use of omens in similes to develop oral Epic poetry in new, Kāvya-like directions. Comparative Poetics, after all, is at its richest when it is *both* an end in itself *and* a contributor of new understandings of individual traditions: such is the aim of this chapter.

Methodological Preliminaries

The phenomena to which ominous import is ascribed tend to be cross-cultural in character. That is, images such as blood or eclipses seem so obviously and inherently ominous that it might seem trivial to single them out and compare them across cognate traditions, since innumerable non-cognate traditions apportion the same meaning to them. Martin West briefly addresses this issue with regard to Indo-European poetics in general, writing that ‘the reconstructive method [is not] invalidated by objections on the lines “the parallel motifs that you note in this and that source need not imply a common Indo-European prototype, because they occur all over the world”. If a motif is indeed universal, all the more likely that it was also Indo-European’.⁴⁰² West is right. Murder, for example, is unequivocally proscribed in ancient Greek and ancient Indian culture, and on this basis it is correct to reconstruct its prohibition at

⁴⁰² 2007, 21. Enrico Campanile, on whom West draws a great deal, makes a similar point (1990, 11). See further the introduction, pp. 8-11.

the time of unity – the universality of the prohibition only redoubles the likelihood of its inheritance, since it would be extremely unusual cross-culturally for murder to be freely permissible. The same would go for, say, the imperative to care for one's children, or the institution of marriage, or the ominous thunderclaps which I discuss below. Just like the prohibition of murder, it is highly probable that, if only we had the evidence, ominous thunderclaps would be attested also in proto-Greco-Indic poetry too. Yet the same typological ubiquity which makes such a reconstruction plausible also makes it drably uninformative. That is, with plausibility comes banality. Such reconstructions tell us little which is *interesting* about ancient Greece and India because they tell us little which is *peculiar* to them. If West is right that universals do not make genealogical reconstructions invalid, it can be objected that they make them trivial.

Yet the converse is not true. That is, non-trivial, non-universal features when shared between cognate cultures may *also* indicate shared heredity (in the same way, when Greece shares such features with the Near-East, they may notionally betoken cultural contact). Yet, since particularities do not benefit from the inherent plausibility of universal motifs, it takes many examples and careful argument to establish their claim to heredity on firm ground. The more particular something is, the more it will stretch credulity that it could have survived unchanged from a time of deep antiquity. As ever, it is necessary to sort through similarities and discard the trivial, the aleatory, or the implausible in order to make an interesting argument about shared inheritance.

This can be done in two ways: firstly, mixing the banal, universal, and usefully plausible types of inheritance with the more interesting and less universal types of omen shores up the latter's probability.⁴⁰³ In this way, I hope to present a picture which is, viewed holistically, both plausible and informative. Secondly, I ground my discussion in literary factors. With literature as a subject of investigation, the reproach of banality is diminished: while it may be of limited inherent interest that both Greek and Sanskrit Epic thought thunderclaps ominous, when, how, and why poets weave them into poetry may still show interesting particularity, and teach us about the two poetic traditions. This thesis' interest in divinatory practices is after all subordinate to its interest in what literary texts have in common. This chapter's main argument, therefore, is for the preservation in both traditions of similar ways of putting ominous imagery to literary use, even when the ascription of ominous import to the phenomenon (as e.g. blood) seems universal in character.

⁴⁰³ And anyway, given the scarcity of work on the topic, there is inherent interest in establishing trivial similarities, even if the chapter's aims go much further.

Throughout, I call units of imagery freighted with divinatory import ‘ominemes’. Ominemes are the omen as a signal from poet to audience, whether visible to a text-internal observer, such as Odysseus and Zeus’ lightning, or not, as an omen in a simile. When protagonists too are aware of them, the same dynamics of signification are at work intra- and extra-diegetically: gods communicate narrative-internally with mortals through an event, just as poet signals narrative-externally to audience through the metaphoric evocation of the same kind of event.⁴⁰⁴ Ominemes usually presage ill, but they may also bode well. They are semantically indeterminate, and it falls to pragmatics to foreclose their meaning. That is, although their meaning is quite general – ‘good!’ or ‘bad!’, the context in which they appear delimits their significance. This generality also means that different kinds of omens are synonymous; as we will see, these important points will answer a series of puzzling questions.

Omens: Where?

The principal difference in the placement of omens between the two traditions is that Greek Epic shows a strong preference to present omens singly, whereas Sanskrit Epic tends to bunch them together in elaborate, phantasmagorical collections, which I call ‘omen scenes’.⁴⁰⁵ These occur at inflection points of the narrative – most notably when an important battle or duel is about to be joined, or when a prominent warrior is about to be slain. As we will see, although Archaic Greek literature too sometimes combines its ominemes, it does so more rarely and sparsely. Omens, like all signs, gain clarity and emphasis by juxtaposition with synonymous signs – two sound reasons for them to abut. Yet Sanskrit Epic goes far beyond this in its taste for superabundance, arrestingly macabre imagery, and uninterest in the bounds of the physically possible. Poets seemed to have competed with one another in the élan with which they recombined and reimagined traditional ominemes.

The omen scene at the start of the *Mahābhārata*’s sixth Parvan epitomises its kind. The end of the fifth Parvan has seen the failure of the last-ditch peace embassies; war is now inevitable. The armies advance towards each other for the first time. The action cuts to the palace of the Kurus, where the distraught King Dhṛtarāṣṭra is in conversation with the sages Vyāsa and Saṅjaya, the latter newly endowed

⁴⁰⁴ Analogously, in the previous chapter I alluded to how seers can act as the voice of the poet in the narrative. This is clearest in the *Mahābhārata*, whose notional author, Vyāsa, is a seer in the story.

⁴⁰⁵ Or in Martin West’s gamesome formulation, a ‘concerto grosso of portents’, 2007, 488. Although noticeable, frequent features of Sanskrit Epic battle narrative, these have never to my knowledge been written about at any length.

with the ‘divine eye’.⁴⁰⁶ Vyāsa then describes to the King the longest series of omens in the poem, at 60 distiches (6. 2.16-3.43). The poet again exploits the narrative potential of spontaneous sight: Vyāsa is in Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s palace and cannot be physically seeing what he describes. It is not clear, and ultimately irrelevant to the effect of the scene, whether Vyāsa sees events that exist outside of his mind or not. The wording of the introductory *sloka* leaves both possibilities open, “‘iha yuddhe mahārāja bhaviṣyati mahān kṣayaḥ yathemāni nimittāni bhayāyādyopalakṣaye’”, “‘O great king, this battle shall see great destruction, since today I descry inauspicious signs at hand’” (6. 2.16). Vyāsa ‘descries’ – whether he sees what is unreal or what is real and absent, spontaneous divination is figured here as a kind of sight. ‘Bhayāya’, ‘impropitious’, and the one-line prophecy make explicit what the following signs augur (obvious as this may be).⁴⁰⁷

The *Mahābhārata*’s encyclopaedic tendencies are here on full display. The same omens – meteors, screeching animals, showers of blood, thunder, and eclipses, among others – are often repeated throughout the passage, with elegantly varied wording, as in this sample:

“‘ubhe pūrvāpare saṁdhye nityaṁ paśyāmi bhārata
 udayāstamane sūryaṁ kabandhaiḥ parivāritam
 śvetalohitaparyantāḥ kṛṣṇagrīvāḥ savidyutaḥ
 trivarnāḥ parighāḥ saṁdhau bhānum āvārayanty uta
 jvalitārkendunakṣatraṁ nirviśeṣadinakṣapam
 ahorātraṁ mayā dṛṣṭaṁ tat kṣayāya bhaviṣyati
 alakṣyaḥ prabhayā hīnaḥ paurṇamāsīm ca kārttikīm
 candro ’bhūd agnivarṇaś ca samavarṇe nabhastale”

“‘O son of the Bharatas, at both dawn and dusk, at both sunrise at sunset,

At all times I see the sun completely obscured by Kabandha-clouds.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ For my discussion of which scene, see chapter 2, pp. 108-13.

⁴⁰⁷ I translate this predicative dative, literally ‘a source of fear’ as ‘impropitious’. ‘Bhayadāni’, ‘fear-generating’, a reading found in some Kashmiri and Devanagari mss. and adopted in the Vulgate, amounts to the same meaning.

⁴⁰⁸ Bibek Debroy 2015, Alex Cherniak 2008, and most other translators here and elsewhere give ‘headless trunk’, not ‘cloud’ for ‘kabandha’, properly a name referring to a headless demon who stars in a memorable episode of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, 3. 65-70. Rather than actual headless trunks covering over the heavenly spheres, it is far better to take

These are tri-coloured – white and red at their edges, black in their middles,
 And lightning-pierced; they shut up the sun on the horizon like iron bars.
 For the past day and night I have observed the sun, moon, and stars
 Ablaze, without distinction between day and night. This augurs a massacre.
 The moon was invisible, devoid of radiance, even at the time of November's full moon.
 And it was fire-red in a firmament of the same colour.”

(6. 2.20-23)

These passages are highly traditional in nature, with the same omens and even wording recurring often across the poems.⁴⁰⁹ Mutually contradictory events described one after the other are not evidence of carelessness nor textual difficulty, but further the surreal atmosphere. The insistence on specifying the omens' meanings exemplifies another important feature of both traditions – “tat kṣayāya bhaviṣyati”, “this augurs a massacre”. Pleonastic as it is, Greek literature will furnish many parallels: neither tradition countenances ambiguity in omen scenes, and such bald statements ensure total clarity.⁴¹⁰ In its length, richness, and psychedelia, the scene is the perfect introduction to sprawling battle narrative at the heart of the poem.

‘kabandha’ in such contexts as the name of a particular kind of cloud, just as, according to Monier-Williams, it can also mean ‘big barrel or cask’ – in any case the eerie association would be present. Vālmīki plays on this association in his tale: Kabandha according to the poet's introductory description was ‘nīlameghanibham’, ‘like a black storm cloud’ (3. 65.16). Later, once Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa cut off his arms, he fell ‘nādayaṇ jalado yathā’, ‘roaring like a thundercloud’ (3. 66.7). He delivers his long speech to them suspended in mid-air (‘ntarikṣagato’, 3. 68.7, ‘khe’, 69.33).

⁴⁰⁹ For other prominent omen scenes, see e.g. 9. 57.47-57, at the death of Duryodhana; 5. 136.20-26 for Bhīma's failed attempt to persuade Duryodhana not to go to war, picked up again a little later at 5.141 in Karna's report to Kṛṣṇa, embellished with prophetic dreams, which declare that the Pāṇḍavas are destined to win the war; *Ram.* 6. 53.40-45 when the dire Rākṣasa Kumbhakarna sets out to battle with Rāma; *Ram.* 6. 94.13-28 is the poem's most elaborate omen-scene. It just precedes Rāvaṇa's riding out to assail Rāma. Note that the current scene is the only one narrated by a seer.

⁴¹⁰ As we will see, other common techniques which establish the meaning of the omens include recording the reaction of characters, or, in Greece, a character's request for an omen before its appearance – a characteristically Hittite pattern probably transmitted to Greece some time in the second millennium BC. There is no Sanskrit parallel for this – see my first chapter.

Theoclymenus

Few synchronic oddities in Homer are more exotic than Theoclymenus, author of the extraordinary prophecy at xx.352-58. Analysts have been hostile, seeking to excise him entirely from the poem. Aristarchus athetised xvii.147-65, where he (re-)interprets an omen for Penelope. Denys Page enumerates his many objections with relish.⁴¹¹ The more moderate Geoffrey Kirk still asserts that Theoclymenus is ‘the only character – with the possible exception of Phoinix – whom one feels to have arrived there almost by mistake’.⁴¹² Bernard Fenik influentially rebuts what he calls Page’s ‘[f]urious and sustained assault’, seeing Theoclymenus as integral to the poem.⁴¹³ Rutherford is more circumspect: ‘It is peculiar that Theoclymenus makes such brief and sporadic appearances in the *Odyssey* and that after this scene [i.e. that of his prophecy] we see and hear no more of him’; he suggests that he was a late arrival to the poem.⁴¹⁴ de Jong calls Theoclymenus ‘one of the open ends of the *Odyssey*’.⁴¹⁵

Against this uncertain background, two points are universally agreed – that Theoclymenus’s prophecy is unique, and that it is highly effective.⁴¹⁶ It inspires reverent admiration in critics: ‘the most eerie passage in the whole *Odyssey*’,⁴¹⁷ ‘the most eerie passage in Homer’,⁴¹⁸ ‘a very remarkable and macabre scene... No other incident in Homer approaches the uncanniness of this’,⁴¹⁹ ‘one of the most remarkable and memorable scenes of the poem’,⁴²⁰ ‘overwhelmingly vivid’.⁴²¹ Theoclymenus’ prophecy is, after all, ‘absolutely unique in Homer’.⁴²²

By the start of book 20, Odysseus, disguised, is on Ithaca. He has revealed himself to Telemachus and Eurycleia has recognised him. He has removed all the arms from the hall in preparation for the slaughter and has met Penelope. In Book 20, the Suitors are dissuaded by an omen from attempting to murder Telemachus (throwing into relief their derision of Theoclymenus’ prophecy that soon follows); they abuse Odysseus, at which Telemachus is angered; Agelaus, a Suitor, urges his fellows to be more

⁴¹¹ 1955, 83-88

⁴¹² 1962, 240. For another analyst view, see Woodhouse, 1930, 64.

⁴¹³ 1974, 233ff. Many of his points were anticipated by Thornton, 1970, 58ff. Fenik settles the matter for Russo (1993, n.350).

⁴¹⁴ Rutherford, 1992, n.345-86

⁴¹⁵ 2001, n.371-2

⁴¹⁶ See Daniel Levine’s discussion of how Theoclymenus brings many important themes to fruition (1983a).

⁴¹⁷ Thornton, 1970, 62

⁴¹⁸ Russo, 1993, n.351-7

⁴¹⁹ Stanford, 1958, n.345ff.

⁴²⁰ Rutherford, 1992, n.345-86

⁴²¹ Levine, 1983a, 5

⁴²² Kirk, 1962, 242

respectful, and then urges Telemachus and Penelope to allow the marriage; Telemachus says he indeed encourages his mother to marry, but will not compel her. This is where our scene, which I now quote in full, somewhat abruptly begins.

ὥς φάτο Τηλέμαχος· μνηστῆρσι δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη 345
 ἄσβεστον γέλω ὤρσε, παρέπλαγξεν δὲ νόημα.
 οἱ δ' ἤδη γναθμοῖσι γελῶων ἀλλοτρίοισιν,
 αἰμοφόρυκτα δὲ δὴ κρέα ἥσθιον· ὅσσε δ' ἄρα σφέων
 δακρυόφιν πίμπλαντο, γόον δ' ὤϊετο θυμός.
 τοῖσι δὲ καὶ μετέειπε Θεοκλύμενος θεοειδής· 350
 'ἄ δειλοί, τί κακὸν τόδε πάσχετε; νυκτὶ μὲν ὑμέων
 εἰλύεται κεφαλαί τε πρόσωπά τε νέρθε τε γοῦνα.
 οἰμωγὴ δὲ δέδηγε, δεδάκρυνται δὲ παρειαί,
 αἶματι δ' ἐρράδαται τοῖχοι καλαί τε μεσόδμαι·
 εἰδῶλων δὲ πλέον πρόθυρον, πλείη δὲ καὶ αὐλή, 355
 ἱεμένων Ἑρεβόσδε ὑπὸ ζόφον· ἡέλιος δὲ
 οὐρανοῦ ἐξαπόλωλε, κακὴ δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν ἀχλύς.'
 ὥς ἔφαθ', οἱ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἠδὺν γέλασσαν.
 τοῖσιν δ' Εὐρύμαχος, Πολύβου πάϊς, ἄρχ' ἀγορεύειν·
 'ἀφραίνει ξεῖνος νέον ἄλλοθεν εἰληλουθώς. 360
 ἀλλὰ μιν αἶψα, νέοι, δόμου ἐκπέμψασθε θύραζε
 εἰς ἀγορὴν ἔρχεσθαι, ἐπεὶ τάδε νυκτὶ εἴσκει.'
 τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε Θεοκλύμενος θεοειδής·
 'Εὐρύμαχ', οὐ τί σ' ἄνωγα ἐμοὶ πομπῆας ὀπάζειν·
 εἰσὶ μοι ὀφθαλμοί τε καὶ οὐατα καὶ πόδες ἄμφω 365
 καὶ νόος ἐν στήθεσσι τετυγμένος οὐδὲν ἀεικής.
 τοῖς ἔξειμι θύραζε, ἐπεὶ νοέω κακὸν ὕμιν
 ἐρχόμενον, τό κεν οὐ τις ὑπεκφύγοι οὐδ' ἀλέαιτο
 μνηστήρων, οἳ δῶμα κάτ' ἀντιθέου Ὀδυσῆος
 ἀνέρας ὑβρίζοντες ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάσθε. 370
ὥς εἰπὼν ἐξῆλθε δόμων εὐ ναιεταόντων,
ἵκετο δ' ἐς Πείραιον, ὃ μιν πρόφρων ὑπέδεκτο.

‘Thus spoke Telemachus. And Pallas Athena roused 345

Unquenchable laughter among the Suitors and drove them out of their wits.

And they were laughing now with jaws not their own;

Blood-smeared was the meat they were eating, and their eyes

Were filled with tears, and their hearts were set on grieving.

God-like Theoclymenus spoke to them, 350

“Ah you wretched men, what is this disaster you suffer? Your heads and

Faces and knees beneath you have been enveloped in night.

A wail has blazed forth, and cheeks have been soaked in tears,

The walls and lovely roof-beams have been dripping with blood;

The porch is full – full also is the hall – of apparitions 355

Who are going to Erebus, down under to the dark quarter; and the sun

Has been obliterated from the sky, and an evil cloud has rushed on.”

Thus he spoke, and they all laughed at him jovially.

Then Eurymachus, son of Polybus addressed them,

“He’s mad, this new visitor, wherever he’s from. 360

Come chaps, send him on his way at once – out of doors

And to the market, since he thinks it’s night!”

Yet god-like Theoclymenus spoke once more,

‘Eurymachus, I did not ask you to provide me with escorts;

I have a pair of eyes and ears and feet

365

And my mind [in my breast] is sound, and far from contemptible.

By means of these I shall take my leave, since I perceive something

Grave is coming upon you, which none of you Suitors may

Escape or avoid, since throughout the house of god-like Odysseus

You abuse people, and sinfully scheme away.”

370

Thus he spoke, and left the well-inhabited house,

And came to Peiraeus, who received him gladly.’

(xx.345-72)

Both the situation of this scene and its imagery share a great deal with Vyāsa’s scene, even if the *Odyssey* poet’s persistently dilatory technique removes the scene somewhat more from the real beginning of the fighting. As ever, to attribute all similarity to inheritance would be as blithe as it would be needlessly cynical to deny it altogether. The challenge is to sort through the likenesses to pick out candidates for inheritance. The Suitors’ ominous supernatural laughter at 345-7, for example, which is unparalleled in Greek Epic, occurs a few times in the Sanskrit Epics, including twice in Vyāsa’s vision, at 6. 2.26 and 3.7.⁴²³ Yet the motif is far too infrequently attested for any argument about its traditionality – in either literature taken singly, let alone in comparison – to get off the ground.

Despite the frequency of Sanskrit Epic omen scenes, Vyāsa’s and Theoclymenus’ visions are unique for being omen scenes delivered in speech (they both follow shortly after more conventional omen scenes recounted by the narrator). The seership of the speaker is presumably relevant, and their abilities to intuitively divine certainly enter into the equation. But in both passages an artful ambiguity is created. I noted above how, in the *Mahābhārata*, the reality of the omens is in doubt – does Vyāsa explain the

⁴²³ Cf. 6. 108.11; *Ram.* 6. 26.25. The reference in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is certainly the only one in that poem. I must disclaim exhaustiveness in the *Mahābhārata*.

According to Levine, the Suitors’ laughter at 345-7 ‘has no Homeric parallel’ (1983b, 100). Eurymachus’ laughter at 358 (as at 374, once Theoclymenus is gone) is more clearly in line with the normal significance of laughter in Homer – it indicates superiority and derision (see further *ibid.*, 97-99). This, incidentally, finds Indian parallels. For example, when Khara, riding out to attack Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with his army of Rākṣasas, sees a suite of gloomy omens auguring his doom, he, just like Eurymachus, laughs (*Ram.* 3. 22. 18).

omens because his interlocutor, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, is blind, or because only he can see omens? And if only he can see them, is that because they are in the palace and they are real but out of view, or because they only exist in his mind? Similarly, why do the Suitors not see the thronging ghosts, eclipse, evil cloud, and dripping blood, nor hear the wail blazing forth? Is their laughter that of jollity or madness? Do they notice that they suddenly begin to cry and grieve? Both poets are interested in creating effects, and not in answering pedantic questions. Ambiguity hovers, making external audience complicit in the incomprehension of the internal audience. Narrative clarity dissolves along with the strictures of the physically possible, and the scenes' strangeness is redoubled.

We have already seen in Chapter 2 how Epic poets exploited mantic second sight to narrative ends. There, I argued that poets use analogous techniques not because they inherited them, but because, faced by the universal needs of creating effective poetry, they hit upon the same expedients. It is the tools which were inherited, not the instruction manual for their use – this could be reinvented. The overarching similarity between Theoclymenus' and Vyāsa's visions is best explained as subject to the same dynamic. Each poet, in search of a fitting way to throw into relief the start of his poem's seminal bloodshed, hit upon an arresting combination of sign and spontaneous divination.

The poets customise their scenes according to their traditions' tastes. The extraordinary abundance of Vyāsa's omens speaks to the *Mahābhārata*'s aesthetic of repetition, surreality, and compendiousness. The *Odyssey* poet, by contrast, hones in on the lexical level, exploiting the rich morphology of Epic Greek to redouble the scene's weirdness through verbal pyrotechnics. Formally, Theoclymenus' perfect forms are archaic and highly unusual.⁴²⁴ Strange vocabulary (his striking compound αἰμοφόρυκτα 'blood-smeared' is found nowhere else in Ancient Greek literature)⁴²⁵ and riddling locutions (most notably at 347, 351-3) intensify the uncanny effect. The internal audiences' reactions, too, contrast revealingly. Dhṛtarāṣṭra replies that ““diṣtam etat purā manye bhaviṣyati na saṁśayah””, ““This, I suppose, must have been ordained long ago. And it shall come about, I do not doubt it”” (6. 3.44). There follow a couple of lines of general reflection on the rewards righteous warriors will find after death. The force of this response lies in its very banality. In the books leading up to the war,

⁴²⁴ εἰλύεται (1), δέδηκε (7 in Homer, once in Hesiod), δεδάκρυνται (4), ἐπράδαται (1), ἐξαπόλωλε (2 in Homer, 1 in Herodotus), ἐπιδέδρομεν (2) – the bracketed numbers indicate the number of times this or a related form occurs, inclusive of this passage.

δεδάκρυνται δὲ παρειαί literally means 'cheeks have been be-teared'. The phrase occurs elsewhere only at xx.204 and XXII.491. I agree with *LSJ* that δεδάκρυνται cannot be middle. Cheeks have no agency in tear-production. This point is not lost on Richard Rutherford, who notes, 'The unnatural use of language reflects the abnormality of what Theoclymenus sees' (1992, *ad* 353).

⁴²⁵ At xxi.17-21, Antinous is shot by Odysseus and blood spurts from his nostrils. He knocks meat from the table, befouling it. The same verb (φωρύνετο) is used as appears in this compound, linking the passages, and creating a verbal foreshadowing for an (extremely) attentive reader.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra is an effete figure: though in an unenviable situation, and not devoid of our sympathy for it, he makes himself culpable by his refusal to act. Here, ‘manye’, ‘I suppose’, and ‘na samśayaḥ’, ‘I do not doubt it’, devastatingly evince Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s self-exonerating bluster. His supine, irrelevant response to Vyāsa’s apocalyptic warning consummates his characterisation in the build-up to the war – an excellent example of the Epic poet’s subtle artistry. In the *Odyssey*, Eurymachus, the coarsest of the Suitors, dismisses the prophecy and slights Theoclymenus, eliciting a dignified response which reassures the reader of his sincerity and mantic pedigree. The *Odyssey* poet has throughout the poem assiduously presented to his audience the Suitors’ arrogant folly, or ἄτη: their rejection of Theoclymenus similarly consummates their characterisation for an audience mindful of the omen earlier in the book and Theoclymenus’ descent from Greece’s most august lineage of seers (see chapter 2, pp. 113-4). In both cases, omen scenes are powerfully combined with the pattern of rejected advice (for which see the next chapter). The two scenes mirror each other in form, function, placement, and the omens they use.⁴²⁶

Some Classical Parallels, briefly

Herodotus’ Delphic Prophecy

Although in this thesis I am unapologetic in focussing on the Greek Archaic age (that most likely in principle to preserve traditional material), I make an exception for two examples of prophetic speech from the Greek Classical age, one from Herodotus and one from Aeschylus, can be read interestingly in this context. Herodotus’ narrative has reached 481/480, and Xerxes is poised to invade Greece. The Athenians send an embassy to consult the Pythia. The response, reported by Herodotus in hexameters, begins by telling them to flee their lands, for all shall be destroyed. It continues,

‘κατὰ γάρ μιν ἐρείπει

πῦρ τε καὶ ὀξύς Ἄρης, Συριηγενὲς ἄρμα διώκων.

πολλὰ δὲ κάλλ’ ἀπολεῖ πυργώματα κοῦ τὸ σὸν οἶον,

πολλοὺς δ’ ἀθανάτων νηοὺς μαλερῷ πυρὶ δώσει,

οἳ που νῦν ἰδρῶτι ῥεούμενοι ἐστήκασι,

⁴²⁶ In the rest of the chapter both of these scenes will be mined for examples of omens. I assess what they might say about heredity below.

δείματι παλλόμενοι, κατὰ δ' ἀκροτάτοις ὀρόφοισι

αἶμα μέλαν κέχυται, προῖδὸν κακότητος ἀνάγκας.

ἀλλ' ἴτον ἐξ ἀδύτοιο, κακοῖς δ' ἐπικίδνατε θυμόν.'

“For fire and destructive Ares

In the wake of the Syrian chariot shall cast it down.⁴²⁷

He shall wreck not only yours but many citadels besides,

And shall give over to ravening flame many temples of the gods,

Who stand now running with sweat,

Trembling in fear; and black blood is shed from

The tops of the roofs, attesting to inevitable destruction.

So leave the sanctuary, and cover over your heart with woes.”⁴²⁸

(7.140)

The prophecy links together strange, dark images. Fire shall somehow ‘cast down’. ‘He’ (presumably Xerxes, but no pronoun or subject is specified – an ambiguity characteristic of the language of prophetic response), shall give temples over to flame.⁴²⁹ By the sweating, trembling gods are meant presumably the statues of the gods in temples.⁴³⁰ The ghastly image of blood dripping from roofs is immediately

⁴²⁷ The reference of μιν, ‘it’ is inherently ambiguous, and does not result from my cutting the preceding lines.

⁴²⁸ This is not the place to discuss whether the verses are Herodotus’ or the Pythia’s, nor the many and knotty linguistic problems of this passage. At any rate, even if not by the Pythia, Herodotus would have been drawing on the same traditional language and images that she would have done; my views on the interpretation of the language will be clear from my translation.

⁴²⁹ An idiom precisely paralleled elsewhere in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek only at xxiv.65 and Hdt. 1.86.6 – and even then of men, not buildings. Cf. *LSJ* II.1, and Battezzato, 2018, *ad* 945.

⁴³⁰ There is to my knowledge no parallel in Archaic and Classical Greece for the ominous disturbance of divine statuary (the mutilation of the Herms reported at Thuc. 6.27 is certainly an οἰωνός, ‘omen’, but the product of human action – an important difference). Yet in Vyāsa’s speech, ‘devatāpratimāś cāpi kampanti ca hasanti ca vamanti rudhiraṁ cāsyaiḥ svidyanti prapatanti ca’, ‘The idols of the gods also tremble and laugh; They vomit blood from their mouths and sweat and fall forwards’ (2.26). Nevertheless, the sweating and trembling idols motif cannot be traced back to a common origin, since proto-Greco-Indic religion cannot have had statues of the gods: the technology to make them simply did not exist in the late third millennium at the time of unity, and free-standing statues are attested in India and Greece not before the first millennium BC (statues are mentioned nowhere in the *RV*). Moreover, no IE nor proto-Greco-Indic word is reconstructible for ‘statue’ – each daughter language innovates etymologically unrelated words, such as Skt. *pratimā*, as here, or later *mūrti*, vs. Gk. *agalma* for a god and *eikōn* for

reminiscent of xx.354, where Theoclymenus describes walls and roof-beams dripping with blood. For Flower, the ‘rapid and not quite logical or grammatical switch of striking images’ is evidence of a text ‘whose poetic quality is spectacularly dismal’ (2008, 238). Certainly, the kaleidoscopic succession of images does not accord with the usual tastes of Greek poets (and so may disturb those accustomed to them). But in this the verses are very much in the manner of Indian Epic poets – so, for example, the extract of Vyāsa’s prophecy above. Non-Homeric narrative poetry in hexameters which survives from the Archaic period is too scanty to support many ideas, but it is at least possible to speculate that these verses (and Theoclymenus’ speech) adhere to a different taste – one more splashy and florid than is customary to Homer.⁴³¹

Herodotus’ Xerxes

This section is the culmination of Herodotus’ most ominous book – the one which, fittingly, treats the lead-up to the Greco-Persian war, the climax of the whole work. It adheres to many patterns which I trace in this thesis. In the next chapter, I argue that the rejection of omens was a common, traditional way in which poets alienate characters from the audience’s sympathies, illustrating their culpability through their folly, and the following section, albeit digressively for this chapter, will make a first contribution also to this complex of comparisons. The earnestness of the Athenians’ reception of the oracles of 7.140 and 7.141 radically contrasts with Xerxes’ repeated neglect and rejection of the good advice and omens which seek to dissuade him from his invasion, which are an important part of his characterisation as a man of disastrous hubris, violent and incorrigible.⁴³² Artabanus’ sage and tactfully phrased exhortations to reconsider the invasion are irately rebuffed, and it is only his status as Xerxes’ paternal uncle which saves him from receiving the “ἄξιον μισθὸν... ἐπέων ματαίων”, “the fitting recompense for your vain words” (7.10-11).⁴³³ Artabanus’ next attempt to dissuade Xerxes from his mission (7.46-52) is met with a less

a man. And in any case, the motif is far too scarcely attested in both traditions for its traditionality to be securely established.

⁴³¹ Despite the subject’s inherent interest, it is irrelevant to my current purpose that this prophecy seems misleading and to stand in contradiction with the second prophecy the Pythia gives on the subject (7.141).

⁴³² See Jasper Griffin, 2004, 48-50, whose essay on the literary features of Herodotus’ narrative gives more space to the matter than I can here. As he remarks, ‘The whole story of Xerxes itself is... the story of divine temptation, superhuman presumption and aspiration, and eventual defeat and despair... That is very Aeschylean’ (49-50).

⁴³³ Xerxes’ diffident change of mind in the ensuing section is uncharacteristic, but necessary to accommodate the story of the visions (7.12-19). The narrative here works episodically, and what comes after does not cancel out the clear function of the Artabanus’ ignored warning.

violent but no less summary dismissal of his uncle (7.53), just like, as we will see, Rāvaṇa dismissed his great-uncle Mālyavān, and Duryodhana his half-uncle Vidura.

As Vannicelli rightly observes (2017, *ad loc.*), the correct context for the omens is Artabanus' observation that

“στρατὸς πολλὸς ὑπὸ ὀλίγου διαφθείρεται κατὰ τοιόνδε: ἐπεὰν σφι ὁ θεὸς φθονήσας φόβον ἐμβάλῃ ἢ βροντὴν, δι’ ὧν ἐφθάρησαν ἀναξίως ἑωυτῶν. οὐ γὰρ ἔῃ φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἑωυτόν”,

“a large army is destroyed by a smaller under these conditions: whenever the god resents it, and hurls panic or a thunderbolt among it, and so they perish in a manner unworthy of themselves. For the god does not allow any other to consider himself greater than he himself is” (7.10E).

Although he does not explicitly mention omens, Artabanus here alludes to important shared ideas about the divine ordination of battles, and how certain divinely instigated events provide clues of their outcome beforehand. Much of this chapter is concerned with the way that characters and audiences are alerted to such signs, and so given to expect certain developments.

Particular to Greece is the notion that overestimation of one's abilities induces divine wrath and ensures one's downfall; accordingly, Xerxes' excessive pride in his army's size and prospects is on full show throughout the book. Sure enough, Artabanus' warnings come true: as the Persian army is encamped at the foot of Mount Ida, thunder and lightning storms fall upon them, killing a great many (7.42). The next day, as they are encamped by the river Scamander, νυκτὸς φόβος ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον ἐνέπεσε, 'by night panic fell upon the camp' (7.43). The text interprets these events as omens for the audience. Xerxes, addressee of Artabanus' speech, ignores not only the omens which he predicts but also the general thrust of his uncle's prevision of defeat. The audience, by contrast, knows that it will soon come to fruition. An intertextual reference to the *Iliad* consummates the implication: Xerxes here and only here sacrifices to Athena of Ilium, who, in a memorable passage which would certainly have been known to Herodotus' audience, turns her back on their entreaties (VI.297-311, for more on which, see below). Herodotus' Homeric language and use of the Homeric poems as an ever immanent intertext points to his use of certain dynamics proper to Epic poetry. That is, he situates his own writing in a context which enfranchises readers to look for other kinds of epic resonances, including, as we will see, the imputation of ominousness to certain images.

Two peculiar birth omens – a mare giving birth to a hare and a mule to a mule with both male and female genitalia – find parallels in Indian Epic, but nowhere in the more decorous Homer, and so I do not

treat them at length.⁴³⁴ Herodotus takes care to observe that Ξέρξης ἐν οὐδενὶ λόγῳ ἐποιήσατο καίπερ εὐσύμβλητον ἔόν, ‘Xerxes took no heed of it, despite how easy it would be to interpret’, just like other ‘baddies’ beset by ἄτη, ‘destructive folly’ such as the Suitors, Duryodhana, and Rāvaṇa (7.57). A little earlier in the narrative, his unease at the sudden solar eclipse had shown a hint of better judgement, but this was undone by his embrace of the Magi’s ruinous and sycophantic interpretation of the omen (I treat the scene in greater detail below, when I treat ominous eclipses).

Directly after that scene, Xerxes receives another warning. Just as Theoclymenus and Vyāsa are quite explicit about the meaning of the prophecy, leaving their interlocutor and the external audience in no doubt as to the omens’ meanings, Herodotus introduces a Lydian called Pythius, who correctly interprets the eclipse for Xerxes: unlike the emperor, he is καταρρωδήσας τὸ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ φάσμα, ‘terrified at the heavenly omen’ (7.38). Although he does not express his interpretation of the omen to Xerxes, the omen’s meaning is fully disambiguated for the audience. Pythius’ speaking name, the male form of ‘Pythia’, is most appropriate for his quasi-mantic role. Xerxes bloodthirstily denies Pythius’ request to spare one of his five sons from the expedition, cutting the favoured son in half, setting the halves either side of the road, and having the army walk through him (7.38-9). Herodotus is just as committed to displaying Xerxes’ maniacal violence and tyranny as his folly. Nevertheless, an audience attuned to the scene pattern appropriate to baddies (ill omen – omen interpretation – rejection of interpretation on part of doomed) will see here, in Pythius’ interpretation and denied request, an elegant variation of that theme, remade to show up the anti-Greek Xerxes’ arbitrary brutality, predilection for the Magi’s blandishment, and inability to be open to good advice. Herodotus’ seventh book, one of the longest accounts in archaic or classical literature of the build-up to a war, is studded with a constellation of different omens foretelling Xerxes’ doom. After the Greek fashion, and with the exception of the bunching of 7.42-43, Herodotus treats these omens singly, unlike Sanskrit Epic’s usual practice. Yet in the details of when they come, what they are, how they are presented, and then how they are rejected, these omens have a great deal in common with the wave upon wave of omen scenes which precede the pivotal battles in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

⁴³⁴ This is a relatively common motif in both *Mahābhārata*. Vyāsa’s speech contains a whole section of prodigious births, including donkeys from cows, a mare from a calf, a jackal from a dog, and a dog from an elephant. Princesses give birth to beasts; and there are born monsters with three horns, four eyes, and, just like Herodotus’ mule, male and female genitals, 6. 3.1-7. Cf. also e.g. *Ram.* 6.26.26. It is typologically common, and well-attested also in Roman and Mesopotamian divination, for which see e.g. Annus, 2010, 12. To this day, western medicine terms foetal or gestational malformations ‘teratic’, from the Greek *teras*.

Aeschylus' Cassandra

Aeschylus' Cassandra scene (*Ag.* 1072-1330) provides suggestive similarities with the foregoing scenes. It begins with a ghoulish vision of ἀνδρσφαγεῖον καὶ πέδον ῥαντήριον, 'the slaughter of men, and the floor spattered with blood' (1092) – she refers to the legend of Thyestes. Later, convulsed by a prophetic vision, she sees his murdered children, 'χεῖρας κρεῶν πλήθοντες, οἰκείας βορᾶς, | σὺν ἐντέροις τε σπλάγχν', ἐποίκτιστον γέμος, | πρέπουσ' ἔχοντες, ὧν πατήρ ἐγεύσατο, 'their hands full of their flesh, a kindred repast, and of guts and viscera, lamentable load – they hold out what their father tasted for all to see' (1220-22). Blood continues to be an important image: she sees a company of men drunk on human blood (1188-9), an executioner's block still hot with the bloody slaughter of the victim (1276-77), and on entering the house she recoils, exclaiming that φόνον δόμοι πνέουσιν αἵματοσταγῇ, 'the house breathes blood-dripping slaughter' (1308). She hears unnatural screams (1236-37), and fire comes upon her (1256). To an extent, then, she draws on the same sort of imagery on which Vyāsa and Theoclymenus do: her vision is just as elaborate and horrifying.⁴³⁵ The more striking overlap with those two figures is due to her position in the plot and function in the drama. Her prophetic words arrestingly herald the play's crucial violence: Agamemnon cries out that he is slain directly after her departure. Aeschylus, just as Herodotus, Homer, and the poets of Sanskrit Epic, uses prophetic words, and (to an extent) traditional ominous imagery just as the plot reaches its climactic, defining violence. His innovation is in keeping with his aims in the rest of the play: by having Cassandra envision past violence, he creates a clear and robust link between past and future, cause and effect.

There are, therefore, clear tendencies in the distribution of omens in narratives. They cluster at climactic moments, just before the joining of battle, with the degree of elaboration of the omen or omen-scene according with the importance of the conflict which it precedes. Seers make convenient vehicles for these omens, and allow for other effects too: they present and interpret omens as advice to a central character, whose reaction to the omen is a powerful tool for their characterisation. The Vyāsa and Theoclymenus scenes, for example, combine the two to magnificent effect. They are composed with care, and are occasions for great poetic bravura for Homer, Vyāsa, Aeschylus, and Herodotus alike.

Of course, these are just tendencies, and omens can and do come wherever they are needed in narratives, including during battle. Yet the shared tendency is eloquent. If it is common-sense that omens

⁴³⁵ In its taste for the macabre, and in other ways too, it also has much in common with the vision of Gāndhārī – a comparison which I make in my second chapter.

come before battles or bloodshed, and that more important omens should precede more important events, then these features are plausibly determined by dynamics universal to all narratives. If so, it is all the more likely that the same situation held in proto-Greco-Indic poetry – a banal point perhaps, but a useful place to start. In the dimmest, most general way, the contours of a Proto-Greco-Indic type scene, in which one or more omens precede battle, can here be traced.

Omens: What?

Objects and phenomena have particular, culturally determined meanings which they retain in poetry. In Western Europe, for example, doves symbolise peace and love, and rainbows symbolise peace and hope. These meanings may change – in the past two decades the rainbow has gained a new association with LGBT activism; but they may also be remarkably constant – doves symbolised peace even in the Old Testament.⁴³⁶ Remarkably, according to A. Guruge, ‘practically all the omens described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are current among the Indians and Ceylonese even today with almost the same implications’ (1960, 230). But these meanings may also differ from culture to culture: doves are associated in ancient Indian culture with Yama, god of death, and, as we will see, the rainbow was a sign of evil omen for the ancient Greeks and Indians.

J. M. Foley and his followers have influentially argued that oral and orally-derived poetry encodes and exploits such meanings with peculiar assiduity, doing so not merely on the level of image, but also creating its own associations on the level of word, phrase, line, and scene. The original audience’s deep familiarity with the conventions of traditional oral poetry was the key to their decipherment and appreciation of these meanings, whether they were used canonically or deviantly. The result was a network of implication, rich but economically conveyed, to which good modern readers must be alive. As Adrian Kelly puts it, in a book which draws heavily on Foley’s work, ‘Without [this], an understanding or reception of the text is necessarily defective, because the audience fails to hear all there is to hear’ (2007, 6). We saw in the last chapter how the genealogical comparatist can use these ideas to shake the IE family tree and gather the interpretive fruits that fall. Here again, although Foley and those

⁴³⁶ As in the ancient Near East in general, and Greek culture from a certain stage through its influence. The dove was associated in Mesopotamian religion with Ištar, goddess of love, and thence with Aphrodite in Greece and Venus in Rome. The equivalence is (to my knowledge) first attested in Greece at Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.550-51; see e.g. Ov. *Met.* 15.386 for Venus and Rome. There is no hint of this in Archaic Greece: sparrows, not doves, tow Aphrodite’s chariot at Sappho 1.10.

influenced by him did not have ominemes in mind when they were formulating their theories, their ideas can fruitfully be adapted: after all, ominemes also function through associative pathways which tradition defines. Nevertheless, although I here draw on the ideas of J. M. Foley, and must acknowledge his influence on my work, what I argue need not rest on the legitimacy of his entire theory of ‘traditional referentiality’, and I do not propose here to recycle his jargon.

Ominemes are their own language and subject to their own rules of communication. This means that, importantly, they are untethered from any one verbal expression. That is, it is irrelevant that the Greek and Sanskrit words for, say, lightning go back to different verbal roots – what is relevant is that that event or image is employed to analogous effect. In the second chapter, I argued for a definition of ‘formula’ which divorced it from a single verbal shape – my approach here is complementary for no other reason than that this is simply how inheritance works. Put simply, cognate language may but need not underlie other kinds of genetic relatedness. Just as they do not disprove it, they do not prove it, and I do not intend in the following to consider etymological connections in the language used of omens.

I begin with ominemes which tend towards the universal – lightning, thunder, shooting stars – and progress down the scale towards the more particular – rainbows, weeping horses, and blood rain. Similarity in their uses and placement confirms the correlation in repertoire. I finish by putting forward the strong claim, that both cultures inherited some of their most important ominemes from a shared proto-culture. The accompanying historical claim, that the same phenomena were considered ominous also in real life, is impossible to verify, despite its high inherent plausibility. This is not intended to be a holistic survey of all kinds of omens in each tradition, an undertaking which would spill far beyond the bounds of this chapter. My focus is inevitably on those ominemes which the two traditions share. Sanskrit Epic in particular has a wide range of omens never attested in Greek literature, which are not my concern.⁴³⁷ It would, after all, stretch credulity to argue that common descent ensured congruence on all points. Rather, here and elsewhere, I argue for a partial and piecemeal shared preservation of deeply archaic material, overlaid but not obscured by much later innovation and deviation; in any case, the ominemes I treat are all squarely among the most prominent in their traditions.

Moreover, as elsewhere in my thesis, ominemes serve as prism for comparative poetics between Greek and Sanskrit Epic. Given the scarcity of the current literature on the kinship between the two traditions either poetically or divinatorily, even obvious points will be worth making. At the least, they will serve as an uncontroversial point of departure for the chapter’s more adventurous proposals.

⁴³⁷ For usefully comprehensive lists of the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s omens in general, see S. N. Vyas, 1967, 148-51, and Guruge, 1960, 237-232.

The Signs

Greek Lightning

To establish ominous meaning, I start with where poets indicate to audiences that a certain event is to be interpreted as an omen. Lightning, as per Artabanus' words above, is perhaps the most prominent omen in both traditions. In Homer, it is Zeus' weapon of choice and is always closely associated with him. Not counting the passages where they are vehicles in similes, which I treat later in their own section, there are ten examples of ominous thunder and lightning in the *Iliad*.⁴³⁸ For example, when the Achaeans are first setting out for Troy, Nestor interprets the lightning as Zeus' confirmation of a happy outcome to their expedition – φημὶ γὰρ οὖν κατανεῦσαι ὑπερμενέα Κρονίωνα... ἀστράπτων ἐπιδέξι' ἐναΐσιμα **σήματα** φαίνων", "“Yes, I declare that the supreme son of Kronos gave his assent... Showing forth fateful **signs** by a lightning bolt on the right”” (II.350-53). The lightning's position in the right of the sky deciphers it as propitious. Right-propitious and left-impropitious is, of course, a universal feature of omens.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus perceives the thunder at xx.102-04 and xxi.413-15. At xx.112-14, a millerwoman deduces that the thunder is of ominous character – the starry cloudless sky only confirms to character and listener that Zeus is showing forth a sign to someone – “ἢ μεγάλ' ἐβρόντησας ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, | οὐδέ ποθι νέφος ἐστί: **τέρας** νύ τεφ τόδε φαίνεις”, ““You have thundered loudly from a starry sky, | nor is there a single cloud: you are surely making this manifest **as a sign** to someone”” (xx.113-14). Her prayer for Odysseus' vengeance in turn becomes a further propitious omen for Odysseus, who overhears it (this is the first example of kledonomanancy in Greek literature). Likewise, at xxi. 413-15, Odysseus, who has just strung the bow, rejoices as he hears Zeus' thunder since he knows it is a sign – Ζεὺς δὲ μεγάλ' ἔκτυπε **σήματα** φαίνων: | γήθησέν... Ὀδυσσεύς // ὅτι ῥά οἱ **τέρας** ἦκε Κρόνου πάϊς, ‘Zeus thundered loudly, showing forth a **sign**: Odysseus rejoiced, since the son of Kronos had sent a **prodigy**’.⁴³⁹ In these cases, we find the key words **τέρας** and **σημα**, which, as xxi.413-15 imply, are used apparently interchangeably: these are the Greek words for our ‘omen’. A formula ties the

⁴³⁸ II.350-3, VII.478-9, VIII.75-6, VIII.133-5, VIII.170-1, IX.236-9, XI.45-6, XV.377, XVII.595-6, XX.56-7. I group together instances where only thunder is used, only lightning is used, and where both are used together. Presumably IX.236 refers to the thunder at VIII.170-1.

Throughout I use the traditional terminology according to which the ‘vehicle’ is the thing *to which* comparison is made (lion), and the ‘tenor’ the object of comparison (soldier). See Richards, 1936, 96-101.

⁴³⁹ Cf. Virgil's homage at *Aen.* 2.692-3.

passages together and confirms the traditionality of the idea: of the five usages of σήματα φαίνων, ‘showing signs’, three are of Zeus’ thunder (II.353, IX.236, xxi.413); once it is not specified which omen he uses (IV.381), and one later usage is a ferocious bear which Dionysus generates to scare sailors (Hom. Hy. 7.46).

As I wrote above, there is a fundamental equivocation in whether omens presage good or ill. Whereas Odysseus rejoiced at Zeus’ lightning, Salomoneus and his people in the Hesiodic *Catalogue* might have despaired at the sign of his anger and his coming attack: ἐβρόντ[ησεν ἀπ'] οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος... τοὺς δ' ἔβα]λεν βροντῇ [τε κ]αὶ αἰθαλόεντι κεραυνῷ, ‘he thundered from the starry sky... and he pelted them with thunder and smouldering lightning bolts’ (*Cat.* fr. 27.13-18 [Most]). I shall return to this apparent alternation later.⁴⁴⁰ In this passage, the lightning bolts, rather than merely signs, interact with the action – a blurring of boundaries which will be seen again below, and which suggests how objects’ meanings, at least in some cases, grow out of their effects.

Yet even where ominemes do not interfere in events nor are explicitly called ‘signs’, they retain their signification. At VII.478-79, fear holds the onlookers when they perceive Zeus’ thunder – the audience is alerted to the thunder’s ‘sematic’ nature by implication through their reaction, just as when Diomedes’ horses fear the ominous thunder at VIII.137. The Trojans, complementarily, correctly interpret Zeus’ thunder in their favour at XV.377-80, and take heart. But sometimes, crucially, the poet simply relies on the audience’s ability to interpret the event as ominous, as at XVII.595 and XX.56-57, where the ominous nature of the lightning is clear despite the absence of explicit comment or human reaction. Audiences contemporary with the poet, trained in the norms of the genre and part of a culture which almost certainly attributed ominous meaning to lightning outside of poetry, will not have failed to see this meaning. Even on a banally statistical level, the ominousness of eight out of ten Iliadic cases suggests that of the other two. I insist on this point even in this clear-cut example, since once established beyond doubt here, it can be put to use later on more contested ground. In short, meanings cannot be switched on and off.

⁴⁴⁰ If it were specified, this lightning would be on the left. The left / right distinction is especially salient in martial contexts, since it allows for the same sign to have different meanings for people or armies who face each other.

Greek Stars and Shooting Stars

The poet is similarly explicit about meteors or shooting stars. Greek, unlike Sanskrit, uses the same word, ἀστήρ, for stars of the shooting and stationary varieties. I treat the two together in the same section for this reason, seeing no difference in the connotative meaning of the two.

At the start of *Iliad* 4, the gods are discussing whether to continue the hostilities between the Achaeans and the Trojans after the duel between Menelaus and Paris. Hera eventually persuades Zeus that they should recommence, and the latter sends Athena down to induce Pandarus to shoot an arrow at Menelaus. I quote in full the description of Athena's journey and the reaction it provokes:

βῆ δὲ κατ' Οὐλύμποιο καρήνων ἄϊξασα.
οἶον δ' ἀστέρα ἦκε Κρόνου πάϊς ἀγκυλομήτεω
ἣ ναύτησι **τέρας** ἡὲ στρατῶ εὐρέϊ λαῶν
λαμπρόν, τοῦ δέ τε πολλοὶ ἀπὸ σπινθηρες ἵενται:
τῷ ἔκυτ' ἤϊξεν ἐπὶ χθόνα Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη,
καὶ δ' ἔθορ' ἐς μέσσον· θάμβος δ' ἔχεν εἰσορόωντας
Τρῳάς θ' ἵπποδάμους καὶ ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοῦς:
ὧδε δέ τις εἶπεσκεν ἰδὼν ἐς πλησίον ἄλλον:
'ἦ ῥ' αὖτις πόλεμός τε κακὸς καὶ φύλοπις αἰνὴ
ἔσσεται, ἣ φιλότητα μετ' ἀμφοτέροισι τίθησιν
Ζεὺς, ὅς τ' ἀνθρώπων ταμὴς πολέμοιο τέτυκται.'
ὥς ἄρα τις εἶπεσκεν Ἀχαιῶν τε Τρώων τε.

‘And she darted down from the peak of Olympus.

Just as the son of Cronus of crooked counsel sets in motion a star

As a **sign** to sailors or to a wide host of soldiers,

Brilliant, trailing a long blaze in its wake –

Just so did Pallas Athena dart towards the ground,

And she lighted between the armies. The horse-taming Trojans

And the well-greaved Achaeans looked on in amazement.

Comments were exchanged between a man and his neighbour, such as

“Either cruel war and harsh battle

Will now break out, or Zeus apportioner of wars

Among men will reconcile both sides.”

Such was the talk between the Achaeans and the Trojans.’

(IV.74-85)

The image is carefully chosen as appropriate to Athena’s course from heaven to earth. Verse 76 implies that it is Zeus’ habit to send a shooting star as a sign, *τέρας*, to armies, and accordingly the soldiers have no trouble in recognising the portent.⁴⁴¹ Their equivocation over its meaning is the product of a combination of two common Homeric motifs – that of two neighbours talking, and of the meaning of a sign being expressed with an either / or construction. Here, instead of presenting two closely related options as is usual, the second meaning is opposed to the first. The vain hope of the soldiers generates pathos, evoking the characteristically Iliadic theme of the gap between the understanding audience and the groping benightment of the characters: the former, privy to the gods’ conversation, know that Athena’s errand is that of restarting the war. As often, the poet tinkers with traditional motifs to create a new, characteristically Homeric effect.

The reference to the sailors at line 76 connects suggestively to a scene in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo, where the god, arriving at Crisa, leaps from the ship like a star trailing a sparky tail (440-2). Wording similar to IV.77 is there used – *τοῦ δ’ ἀπὸ πολλὰι | σπινθαρίδες πωτῶντο*, ‘and a trail of sparks shot off from it / him’ (441-2). The unnatural diurnal setting (*μέσῳ ἡματι*) recalls the unnatural cloudless setting of the lightning at xx.112-14, mentioned above; Nicholas Richardson rightly notes that this unnatural detail makes the scene ‘even more portentous’ (2010, *ad loc.*). Richard Buxton, taking into account the myriad other Apolline metamorphoses in that hymn, sees there a metamorphosis, not just a simile, though the matter is not beyond controversy (2009, 176-77). The connection between the seafaring setting in the hymn and the allusion to sailors above at IV.76 should also be noted.

⁴⁴¹ I align myself with the standard reading of the passage, as expressed in de Jong, 2004, 134-35. For a doughty recent rejection of it along with copious bibliography, see Jonathan Ready, 2017.

Greek Rainbows

In *Iliad* XVII, Zeus, wanting to save the body of Patroclus, sends Athena down from heaven to help the Greeks and turn the tide of battle. Then,

ἤϊτε πορφυρέην ἴριν θνητοῖσι τανύσση

Ζεὺς ἐξ οὐρανόθεν **τέρας** ἔμμεναι ἢ πολέμοιο

ἢ καὶ χειμῶνος δυσθαλπέος, ὅς ῥά τε ἔργων

ἀνθρώπους ἀνέπαυσεν ἐπὶ χθονί, μῆλα δὲ κήδει,

ὥς ἢ πορφυρέη νεφέλη πυκάσασα ἔ' αὐτὴν

δύσσετ' Ἀχαιῶν ἔθνος, ἔγειρε δὲ φῶτα ἕκαστον.

‘Just as when Zeus stretches his shimmering rainbow

Across the sky to be a **sign** for mortals either of war

Or indeed of a gelid squall which prevents

Men from working the land, and imperils their flocks,

So Athena, wrapping herself in a shimmering cloud,

Entered among the tribes of the Achaians, bringing encouragement to each of them.’

(XVII.547-52)

Athena proceeds to take the form of Phoenix and speak heartening words to Menelaus. Zeus often sends Athena down from heaven to rouse up the Achaeans or Odysseus (see also IV.68ff., XIX.340ff., XXII.182ff., i.76ff., xxiv.477ff.), which itself bears an important functional similarity to the lightning which he sends elsewhere. As we have seen, this is one of various passages in which Athena’s *katabasis* is described with an omineme. While Mark Edwards is probably right that it is unnecessary to imagine Athena metamorphosing into a rainbow,⁴⁴² this is irrelevant to my current purpose of establishing its

⁴⁴² 1991, *ad loc.* Pace Fenik, 1968, 182-3, and Willcock, 1984, *ad loc.*, whom he cites. There is of course an array of Homeric passages which can be understood either as similes or as metamorphoses, and a fulsome literature on the subject stretching back into antiquity. See Erbse, 1980, de Jong, 2004, and Buxton, 2004, esp. 142-44. For the best treatment of the question known to me, see Buxton, 2009, 29-48.

general status as a sign – a point on which the poet is quite clear. The equivocation over its meaning is of a different kind here: the sign certainly presages ill, with its more precise meaning differing according only to the context in which it appears. In other words, the semantics are stable, with only pragmatic factors inflecting meaning. I shall interpret this passage more fully below.

Indian Lightning

Greek and Indian examples are easily aligned. The lightning at *Mhb.* 6. 2.21, quoted above, is described with a common formula in such contexts, ‘savidyutaḥ’, literally ‘[cloud] with lightning’. This combination of morpheme and noun occurs dozens of times, and very commonly, as here, in verse final position – on which more later. As in Homer, lightning and thunder is a ubiquitous feature of the divinatory landscape of Sanskrit Epic.⁴⁴³ Yet unlike in Homer, Sanskrit poets take no interest in showing the characters’ reaction to lightning or affording it its own scene. As with other omens, it is overwhelmingly embedded in scenes which show many omens. Complementarily, the absence of lightning is used as a propitious omen after Hanumān and Rāma have killed Vālin and installed Sugrīva as king in Kiṣkindhā – ‘dṛṣtvā ca vimalaṃ vyoma gatavidyudbalāhakam...’, ‘[Hanumān], having seen a spotless firmament, sky free of lightning...’ (*Ram.* 4. 28.1). Lastly, as we saw above for the millerwoman in the *Odyssey*, the ominous status of lightning is underlined by its appearance in a cloudless sky also in Sanskrit Epic, as for example, ‘nirabhram api cākāśaṃ prajagarja mahāsvanam’, ‘Though cloudless, the sky thundered forth a tremendous roar’ (*Mhb.* 1. 26.31), or ‘nirabhre vidyutas tīvrā’, ‘there were violent lightning strikes in the cloudless sky’ (*Mhb.* 6. 67.23)⁴⁴⁴ Poets innovate along the same lines: the detail was recreated independently thanks to the typologically common principle that an event is more probably of ominous import the more it is supernatural in nature. In other words, the ominousness of lightning was strongly inherited, but the extra ominousness of lightning in a cloudless sky is best considered weak inheritance. Similarity, once established, reproduces itself.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³ In the *Mahābhārata* narrative (and not in its similes, which I treat separately below), see 1. 26.31, 126.23; 2. 71.25, 42.25; 3. 221.4; 5. 183.9; 6. 3.32-33, 19.36, 55.109, 67.23; 7. 6.28; 8. 26.34, 58.15; 13.15.7; 14.76.19. For the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see 6. 26.31, 31.5, 53.41, 83.36, 94. 23; 7. 9.24.

I do not claim that this list is exhaustive. I list occurrences of ominous lightning in similes separately, below. References in battle books naturally preponderate.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. also *Mhb.* 2. 42.25, 6. 19.36, *Ram.* 6. 94.23.

⁴⁴⁵ I shall have much more to say about lightning in Vedic and Sanskrit literature at the close of the chapter.

Indian Stars and Shooting Stars

Shooting stars are a favourite omen of Indian Epic, abounding both in omen scenes and in similes. Vyāsa is characteristically virtuosic:

“patanty ulkāḥ sanirghātāḥ śuskāśanivimiśritāḥ.

adya caiva niśām vyustām udaye bhānur āhatah

jvalantībhīr maholkābhiś caturbhiḥ sarvatodiśam.”

“Meteors stars fall, and whirlwinds, mixed with rainless lightning bolts.

And now, the night over, at dawn, the sun is pounded

By four huge, flaming meteors from each direction.””

(*Mhb.* 6. 3.32c-33)

The habit to accumulate and juxtapose omens is here on full display, making for an otherworldly effect, and for a sharp contrast with the more surgical use of the same omineme in Homer and the Hymns. As other ominemes, these cluster in the battle books of the two epics – 6-10 for the *Mahābhārata*, and 6 for the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁴⁴⁶ The meteors attack the sun, introducing a hint of the eclipse motif. I discuss below this technique of mixing different ominemes and what it might mean.

Indian Rainbows

Rainbows, although they do not appear in Vyāsa’s *tour de force* at the start of the sixth *parvan*, and despite their relative rarity compared to other ominemes, are nevertheless an established presence.⁴⁴⁷ Common Epic Sanskrit terms for them include ‘the bow of Indra’, *indradhanuṣ* (still the standard word in most modern Indic languages), *indracāpa*, or *purāṇdaracāpa*, etc.: the kenning underlines the martial

⁴⁴⁶ For ominous meteors elsewhere in Sanskrit Epic, see *Mhb.* 1. 26.28, .30; 2. 71.26, 72.21; 3. 153.3, 161.17, 188.74; 5.136.2, 141.10, 153. 50, 183.22; 6. 19.38, 67. 23, 108.9; 7. 6.27, 64.6, 154.25, 165.11; 8.58.15, 68.50; 9. 10.15, 22.21, 55.9, 57.47; 10. 14.9; 12. 160.40, 273.3, 320.4; 14. 76.16; 16. 1.3; *Ram.* 2. 4.17; 6. 53.41, 57.22, 83.36, 94.18; 7. 9.24. Again, I do not guarantee that this list is exhaustive.

⁴⁴⁷ There is perhaps one reference to a rainbow in the RV at II. 34.13, but it is oblique and disputable: a word for 'rainbow' is not used.

connotations it had in the culture.⁴⁴⁸ When the half-brothers Karna and Arjuna are preparing, long before the war, for what would have been a disastrous duel in the first *parvan*, the heavens indicate their disapproval: ‘tataḥ savidyutstanitaiḥ sendrāyudhapurojavaiḥ | āvṛtaṁ gaganam meghair balākāpaṅktiḥāsibhiḥ’, ‘Then clouds full of thunder and lightning, attended by rainbows and crossed by arched rows of cranes enveloped the sky’ (1. 126.23).⁴⁴⁹ Elsewhere, they appear together with a blazing, lightning riddled cloud (13.15.7), with lightning and blood rain (14. 76.19), and with lightning and meteors (*Ram.* 6. 57.22).⁴⁵⁰ As with other signs, omens’ meanings are deciphered through context.

In two late passages of didactic character, 6. 4.24 and 12. 103.6, rainbows are numbered among propitious omens for soldiers. A mixture of two different principles creates this curiosity. On the one hand, the victor in battle can be attended by propitious omens which forebode success for him; on the other, he can be attended by ill omens which augur disaster for his enemy. Sometimes the position of the signs solves the equivocation. For example, soon after Vyāsa’s narration of the ill omens before the battle, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks him what good omens for a victorious army would be. At the end of the list, Vyāsa declares that ‘**anv** eva vāyavo vānti tathābhrāṇi vayāṁsi ca | **anup**lavante meghās ca tathaivendradhanūṁsi ca’, ‘Winds blow **at their back**, and clouds, birds, rainclouds, and rainbows hover **behind him**.’⁴⁵¹ Winds, rainclouds, and rainbows are signs which are elsewhere impropitious. Here, their position alters the perspective, just as their position in the sky determines the meaning of lightning for Nestor, and bird omens in Greece and the Near East (for which, see the relevant section of my first chapter, pp. 57-66).

Lightning, stars (and especially shooting stars), and rainbows are well-established fixtures of Greek and Sanskrit Epic omens. So far, I have shown the inter-traditional alignment of these signs in meaning and position within their texts. The best explanation for this alignment is strong inheritance – of an uncontroversial but banal, uninformative sort. I have also alluded to agreement in certain typologically common details, such as the position in the sky influencing interpretation, the addition of further supernatural detail underlining ominous meaning (e.g. thunder from a *cloudless* sky), and the equivocation in ominous meaning according to focalisation – a victorious warrior may be attended by a good or bad omen, depending on whether he or his opponent is focalised. These, in combination with

⁴⁴⁸ Indra was both a war god and a rain god. Greece had the martial association without a word etymologically connected to war – ἰρις probably goes back to *ueh₁i-, ‘twist, bend’ (see Beekes, 2010, ad ἰρις, and cf. also Watkins, 1985, ad ‘wei-’).

⁴⁴⁹ ‘balākāpaṅktiḥāsibhiḥ’ literally means ‘smiling with rows of cranes’. ‘Smile’ here is not intended to impute happiness to the clouds but must be a mere reference to the arched v-formation of crane flocks in flight, thought to resemble a smile.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. also 7. 131.71.

⁴⁵¹ 6. 4.24. The sentiment and wording of 12. 103.6, where Bhishma is lecturing Yudhiṣṭhira, is all but identical.

strong inheritance, generate further, weakly inherited similarity. The straightforward cases I have treated until now furnish a sound foundation for a further search for similarity across more slippery ground.

Greek Eclipses

Ominous eclipses are scarcely attested in Greek literature. Here, breaking my own rule for not back-projecting a classical situation onto the Archaic period, I begin with a passage from Herodotus' account of the Greco-Persian wars. This illustrates the durability of a number of important points I make above. Xerxes is on his war-march towards Greece when he sees an eclipse:

ὀρμημένῳ δέ οἱ ὁ ἥλιος ἐκλιπὼν τὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔδρην ἀφανὴς ἦν οὗτ' ἐπινεφέλων ἐόντων αἰθρίης τε τὰ μάλιστα, ἀντὶ ἡμέρης τε νύξ ἐγένετο. ἰδόντι δὲ καὶ μαθόντι τοῦτο τῷ Ξέρξῃ ἐπιμελὲς ἐγένετο, καὶ εἴρετο τοὺς Μάγους τὸ θέλει προφαίνειν τὸ φάσμα. οἱ δὲ ἔφραζον ὡς Ἑλλήσι προδεικνύει ὁ θεὸς ἔκλειψιν τῶν πολίων, λέγοντες ἥλιον εἶναι Ἑλλήνων προδέκτορα, σελήνην δὲ σφέων. ταῦτα πυθόμενος ὁ Ξέρξης περιχαρὴς ἐὼν ἐποιέετο τὴν ἔλασιν.

'Just as the army was setting out, the sun left its usual position in the sky and disappeared, despite the impeccable, cloudless weather; although it was day, night fell. Xerxes, when he saw this and realised what had happened, grew anxious, and asked the Magi what the event portended. They declared that the god was foretelling the eclipsing of the cities of the Greeks, since the sun was the Greeks' divinatory body, whereas the moon was theirs. Delighted by this response, Xerxes took up his march.'

(7.37)

In this rich passage, Herodotus, firstly, exemplifies the same equivocation which I discuss immediately above – Xerxes recognises a portent, but does not know how to tell whether it portends destruction for himself or his enemies. Intra-textually, the omen is unclear. Anxiety results. When the same equivocation applies to the omen's *external* audience, it is rather a problem of focalisation. The Magi's reading will turn out, of course, to be wrong, and Herodotus may well intend their reasoning here to be obviously spurious.⁴⁵² The external audience, by contrast, is in no doubt over its import. Irony is generated.

The ambiguity in the application of omens is durable because it is ineluctably built into their structure. Epic poets (and here Herodotus) must take care to specify omens' meanings, resolving the ambiguity by various methods – by bald statement, by adding the reaction or interpretation of a character, by having a character request an omen, or by mentioning an omens' position. If these reminders

⁴⁵² The Magi are disastrous interpreters elsewhere too, e.g. 7.19, where they wrongly interpret Xerxes' dream to mean that in due course he will have dominion over all men. The interpretation can also be read as a vindication of Greek over Persian ways.

sometimes verge on the otiose, this only underlines the importance of avoiding ambiguity to poets and writers.

Further similarities with the foregoing abound. The structure of the scene is familiar from Homer: a sign appears which presents interpretative difficulties and an appeal is made to an expert to decipher it.⁴⁵³ Herodotus is careful to note that, like the ominous lightning above, the eclipse takes place in a cloudless sky – this is no momentary, quotidian obfuscation, but apparently something supernatural, and all the more ominous for it. Moreover, in history as in poetry, the omen appears at an inflection point in the narrative, just as Xerxes is setting out.⁴⁵⁴ As Herodotus himself remarks elsewhere, φιλέει δέ κως προσημαίνειν, εὖτ’ ἂν μέλλῃ μεγάλα κακὰ ἢ πόλις ἢ ἔθνεϊ ἔσεσθαι, ‘Some sign is wont to appear beforehand whenever a city or a people is about to undergo a great ill’ (6.27). This pragmatic factor clearly delimits the semantic realm of the sign: the phrasing of the Greek leaves the audience in no doubt that the meaning of the eclipse pertains to the expedition on which Xerxes is setting out (ὀρμημένῳ δέ οἱ ὁ ἥλιος, literally ‘to Xerxes setting out the sun...’). Herodotus carefully uses a dative of interest instead of, say, a vaguer genitive absolute. Xerxes’ question reveals that he takes the meaning for granted and is unsure only to whom this meaning is applied. These matters are so obvious that Herodotus does not trouble to spell them out. Sanskrit Epic, which prefers a question and answer structure, makes Dhṛtarāṣṭra less knowledgeable. He relies on Vyāsa to answer his questions. Sanskrit Epic, in other words, explores the same perplexity, but in didactic not dramatic key. Indeed, in general, characters in and audiences of Epic face the same dilemma as Xerxes, and it is up to the poets to disambiguate.

Theoclymenus provides the only parallel for an ominous eclipse in Homeric poetry.⁴⁵⁵ The scholia, Plutarch and some moderns think that this refers to a solar eclipse taking place at the time of Theoclymenus’ speech.⁴⁵⁶ Rutherford is right to reject this idea.⁴⁵⁷ The highly unusual, doubly compounded ἐξαπόλωλε, ‘obliterated from’ or *LSJ* ‘perish utterly out of’, is not the usual word for eclipse

⁴⁵³ And not only with ornithomancy – see also Calchas in *Iliad* I (in my first chapter) and in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (104-45), cf. Vyāsa’s role in explaining omens in the *Mahābhārata*.

⁴⁵⁴ For a Homeric parallel to omens foretelling the doom of a nascent expedition, see IV.381, where the men of Mycenae decline to join the disastrous expedition of the Seven Against Thebes since Zeus shows forth evil omens (παραΐσια σήματα φαίνων). We will see later how ominemes precede the start of the *Iliad*’s fighting and the entry into battle of important fighters.

⁴⁵⁵ I quote the Greek and translation again here, for the reader’s convenience: ‘ἥλιος δὲ | οὐρανοῦ ἐξαπόλωλε, κακὴ δ’ ἐπιδέδρομεν ἀχλύς.’ “‘and the sun | Has been obliterated from the sky, and an evil cloud has rushed on” (xx.356-57).

⁴⁵⁶ *On the Face of the Moon* 19, 93IF; for a modern view, see Austin (1975, 246, 250). Shewan fancifully dates the eclipse to 1178 BC (1928, 196-98). The historicity of Xerxes’ eclipse has also been debated: perhaps it had something to do with one at Susa in 481 (see Pietro Vannicelli, 2017, *ad loc.*, with references). But literature provides more relevant comparanda: I suspect that the Herodotean passage was influenced more by literary factors than any historical event.

⁴⁵⁷ 1992, *ad loc.*

– this is ἔκλειψις / ἐκλείπω, as in the Herodotus passage.⁴⁵⁸ Theoclymenus’ is a verb of violence, and as such finds a kindred image in that of the huge, flaming meteors attacking the sun in Vyāsa’s speech at *Mhb.* 6. 3.33, quoted above.⁴⁵⁹ The enjambment is also strange and prosodically difficult – line-ending δέ, though common in Sophocles, is highly unusual in Homer.⁴⁶⁰ The precise relation between the destruction of the sun and the cloud which comes on is unclear. The ἐπι- of ἐπιδεδρομεν could either be taken to refer to the sun, or more generally to the area being described (wherever that might be). Vyāsa’s speech, incidentally, provides parallels for both cloud and non-cloud eclipses – see below. Yet it is unlikely that the poet means that the cloud obscures the sun, since, even if a hendiadys were possible, the description of the cloud would have to come before that of the sun. In any case, such pedantic questions are beside the point: this kind of riddling ambiguity is characteristic of prophetic speech.

Two other Greek passages, one Homeric and one Aristophanic, here merit discussion. When Helios learns that Odysseus’ men have eaten his cattle, he pleads with Zeus thus:

εἰ δέ μοι οὐ τίσουσι βοῶν ἐπιεικέ’ ἀμοιβήν,

δύσομαι εἰς Αἴδαο καὶ ἐν νεκύεσσι φαείνω.

‘If they will not pay me fitting compensation for my cattle,

I shall go down to Hades’ and shine among the corpses.’

(xii.382-3)

For Rutherford, ‘it is as if Helios has fulfilled his threat.’ His comment belies a profound difference between his approach and mine. I see no particular thematic or narrative reason to link the two distant passages: Helios’ threat is to Odysseus’ companions while the other eclipse pertains to the conduct of the Suitors. Moreover, whereas here Helios is the agent of his own disappearance, Theoclymenus’ vision presents him as the victim of destruction. Much more sense can be made by vertical comparison to the tradition than by horizontal comparison between passages. By keeping in mind that eclipses are an omineme, the Helios passage can be seen for what it is – the creative reimagination of a traditional element through anthropomorphism. Theoclymenus’ eclipse, by contrast, creatively depersonalises, making the sun not a heavenly body momentarily obscured, but an object to be eradicated. Even if there is

⁴⁵⁸ ἐξαπολλύναι occurs only eight times elsewhere in Greek poetry.

⁴⁵⁹ For a reference to a portentous meteor in Homer, see *Il.* 4.75ff., discussed below.

⁴⁶⁰ But not unprecedented – cf. e.g. *XV.* 140, *ii.* 244, *xv.* 115, and Paul Maas’ brief discussion, 1962, 87.

no paradigmatic instance of an ominous eclipse in Homer, other, more fully attested ominemes allow the understanding of the poet's technique.⁴⁶¹

In the *Iliad*, as they fight over the corpse of the freshly slain Patroclus, the narrator strangely notes that οὐδέ κε φαίης | οὔτε ποτ' ἡέλιον σὼν ἔμμεναι οὔτε σελήνην, 'nor would you have said that the sun or the moon was safe' (XVII.366-67), for a thick cloud had been shed over proceedings. 'Safe', σὼν, is used only here not of people, death, or goods. Overwhelmingly it is used of people – in 14 out of 19 usages in Homer and the Hymns.⁴⁶² As in the Theoclymenus scene, a deviant use of language underlines a strange event.⁴⁶³ Also as there, the heavenly bodies are presented as being under attack, or subject to violence, even if the sentiment is diluted by the hedging subjectivity of the phrase οὐδέ κε φαίης, 'nor would you have said'. The fact that those warriors who do not fight around Patroclus' body are in clear daylight points up the uncanniness, and hence the ominousness (370-73). While it is not a paradigmatic case of an eclipse, the suggestive language points in that direction.

⁴⁶¹ Aristophanes perhaps recalls Helios' threat in his *Nubes*. The Chorus of goddesses shows their displeasure at Cleon's taking command by pointing out omens:

βροντὴ δ' ἐρράγη δι' ἀστραπῆς:
ἡ σελήνη δ' ἐξέλειπε τὰς ὁδοὺς, ὁ δ' ἥλιος
τὴν θρυαλλίδ' εἰς ἑαυτὸν εὐθέως ξυνελκύσας
οὐ φανεῖν ἔφασκεν ὑμῖν, εἰ στρατηγήσει Κλέων.

'Thunder burst through lightning;
The moon deserted her paths [i.e. was eclipsed], and the sun
Immediately drew back his wick to himself
And said that he would not shine on you if Cleon be made general.'

(583-86)

The solar eclipse is heaped onto a lunar eclipse, and thunder and lightning, making for a motivic density more common in Indian than Greek literature. For a precise parallel to this mixture in Vyāsa's speech. The plausibility of a horizontal, intertextual connection to the *Odyssey* passage does not detract from the traditionality of the image in both cases. For a close parallel in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see the final section of this chapter.

There is another partial Classical parallel. In a myth first attested in Euripides' *Electra* (727-42), Zeus reversed the course of the stars and the sun, which afterwards rose in the East and set in the West, and not *vice versa*. While different traditions disagree on the details, they agree that this was a sign of divine favour to Atreus. The Euripidean version synchronises the change with Thyestes' theft of the golden lamb, whereas other versions, aligning more with the above examples, associate it with divine disgust at the moment of Thyestes' horrific feast (see further Vincent Rosivach, 1978, 192-93).

⁴⁶² The exceptions are of goods remaining untouched, XXIV.381-82 = xiii.364; and XIII.773 = v.305 = xxii.28, of 'certain death', σῶς αἰπὺς ὄλεθρος.

⁴⁶³ For other unusual language in this passage, see Edwards, 1991, *ad loc*.

Indian Eclipses

The Archaic Greek examples of eclipses are too meagre for much of a pattern to be discerned. Yet eclipses along with other kinds of celestial disturbances are among the most common omens in Indian Epic. Vyāsa's speech alone provides a representative plethora of examples of different kinds:

‘antardhīyata cādityaḥ sainyaena rajasāvṛtaḥ’

‘The sun was made invisible, covered over by the armies’ dust.’ (1.20)⁴⁶⁴

‘śvetalohitaparyantāḥ kṛṣṇagrīvāḥ savidyutaḥ

trivarnāḥ parighāḥ saṁdhau bhānum āvārayanty uta.

jvalitārkendunakṣatraṁ nirviśeṣadinakṣapam

ahorātraṁ mayā dr̥ṣṭaṁ tat kṣayāya bhaviṣyati.’

‘Three-coloured clouds, white and red at the borders, and black in the middle,

Thundering at dawn and dusk, eclipse the sun.

For a day and a night I have seen the sun, the moon, and the stars blazing

All at once, making no distinction between day and night. This portends destruction.’ (2.21-22)

‘alakṣyaḥ prabhayā hīnaḥ paurṇamāsīm ca kārttikīm

candro ’bhūd agnivarṇaś ca samavarṇe nabhastale.’

‘The moon, inconspicuous, bereft of lustre throughout the plenilunar night of the month Kārttika,

Was fire-coloured in a fire-coloured firmament.’ (2.23)

⁴⁶⁴ There is a brief omen scene before the dialogue between Vyāsa and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, from which this example is taken.

‘abhīkṣṇaṁ kampate bhūmir; arkaṁ rāhus tathāgrasat;

śveto grahas tathā citrāṁ samatikramya tiṣṭhati.

abhāvaṁ hi viśeṣeṇa kurūṇāṁ pratipaśyati.

dhūmaketur mahāghoraḥ puṣyam ākramya tiṣṭhati.’

‘The earth shakes repeatedly; Rahu has eclipsed the sun.’⁴⁶⁵

The white planet, Venus, steps beyond the constellation Citrā, and abides there.

This foretells the destruction of the Kurus in particular.

A most terrible meteor approaches the constellation Puṣya, and abides there.’ (3.11-12)

‘grahau tāmṛāruṇaśikhau prajvalantāv iva sthitau

saptarṣiṇām udārāṇām samavacchādya vai prabhām.’

‘Two planets, coppery and red as if on fire, are completely obscuring

The light of the lofty seven seers (i.e. the Big Dipper).’ (3.24)

candrādityāv ubhau grastāv ekāhnā hi trayodaśīm

aparvaṇi grahaṁ yātau, prajāsaṁkṣayam icchataḥ

‘The moon and the sun are both eclipsed during the thirteenth day of a half moon, for a day,

[Thus] beginning the eclipse on a day during which one of the four changes of the moon does not occur [i.e. on an unusual and inauspicious day for such a change] – they both desire a general destruction of mankind.’⁴⁶⁶ (3.28)

‘patanty ulkāḥ sanirghātāḥ śuṣkāśanivimiśritāḥ.

⁴⁶⁵ Rāhu is the demon of eclipse.

⁴⁶⁶ Although this line is difficult, the lunar and solar eclipse is clear.

adya caiva niśāṁ vyuṣṭām udaye bhānur āhataḥ

jvalantībhīr maholkābhīś caturbhīḥ sarvatodiśam.’

‘There come meteors and hurricanes attended by rainless thunder and lightning.

And now, the night over, at dawn, the sun is crushed

By four huge, flaming meteors from each direction.’⁴⁶⁷ (3.32c-33)

The similarities with Greek eclipses are general in kind, and no doubt owe much to universal factors. The combinatory technique, nevertheless, can throw up striking alignments: 6. 2.21-22 above shows the same combination as *Iliad* XVII, quoted above – a cloud obscures the sun and moon but at the same time elsewhere the sun shines bright. And at *Mhb.* 5. 183.21-4, directly after an important hero, Rāma Jamadagnya, is slain, the ‘flaming sun’ is eclipsed, and a cloud falls to produce gloom, just as after Patroclus’ death. The closeness should not however, obscure the aleatory quality of the parallel: two sets of dice, rolled again and again, will sometimes chance to show the same numbers. The agreement is not itself salient, it is a mere function of the repetition of chance action with a limited number of outcomes. In the same way, when elaborations and recombinations of ominemes throw up close similarity, this is no reason to see evidence of inheritance. This goes even for strange, arresting combinations: Theoclymenus’ weird formulation at xx.353, which mixes an ominous cry and fire, is not to be thought inherited because of its alignment with Vyāsa’s at *Mhb.* 6. 3.22 – ‘dikṣu prajvalitāsyās ca vyāharanti mrgadvijāḥ | atyāhitam darśayanto vedayanti mahad bhayam’, ‘On every side wild animals and birds scream, their mouths ablaze; showing horrible behaviour, they forebode great terror’⁴⁶⁸ (3.22). These are, rather, good examples of weak inheritance.

Blood Rain

The ominemes I have treated so far have been on the universal end of the spectrum; that is, there is nothing inherently striking about the use of lightning or (shooting) stars as a foreboding image in

⁴⁶⁷ See further e.g. *Mhb.* 4. 37.4, 5. 141.7-10, .22; 6. 67.24, 9. 20.40-41, *Ram.* 3. 22.11; 6. 83.32, 94.17. For the fall of darkness at the abduction of Sītā (3. 50.9), see my discussion below.

⁴⁶⁸ See further *Ram.* 3.22.10, where jackals screech from mouths ‘discharging flame’, ‘jvālodgāribhīr ānanaiḥ’; also *Ram.* 6. 45.34, ‘vamantyāḥ pāvakajvālāḥ śivā ghorā vavāśire’, ‘Ghastly jackals shrieked, vomiting bright flames’.

poetry. Blood rain, however, is an image typologically far more unusual and far less banal. The probability of, say, lightning's Greco-Indic pedigree simply depends on how widespread the attribution of ominousness is to it cross-culturally – as Martin West wrote, if something is widely attested then it is all the more likely that, if only we had the evidence, proto-Greco-Indic poetry would have attested it. Blood rain, on the other hand, is less likely to have been reinvented and more likely to attest to a shared inheritance. Moreover, although hardly ubiquitous in either, it is by far more common in Greek and Indian poetry than in other Indo-European traditions.⁴⁶⁹ It is unusual also in its distribution and use, and so I argue that it is in its own special category of marked omen.

I start with some examples from Vyāsa's speech, to frame the Greek examples with those from the vastly more copious corpus of Sanskrit Epic – 'āsīd rudhiravarṣaṁ ca asthivarṣaṁ ca bhārata', "And there was a rain of blood and a rain of bone, o descendant of Bharata" (*Mhb.* 6. 2.30);⁴⁷⁰ "utpātameghā raudrāśca rātrau varṣanti śoṇitam māṁsavarṣaṁ punas tīvram āsīt kṣṇacaturdaśīm", 'Fierce-looking clouds spring up and shower blood at night. On the fourteenth of the dark fortnight,⁴⁷¹ there is a heavy shower of flesh'" (3.30). The motif is usually expressed in a determinative, *tatpuruṣa* compound, with the head 'varṣam', 'rain', and an attributive, e.g. 'rudhiravarṣam', 'rain of blood' and 'māṁsavarṣam', 'rain of flesh'.⁴⁷² Just as the absence of thunder and lightning could be a propitious sign, a rain of flowers is the corresponding good omen.⁴⁷³

Blood rain is, moreover, a unique omen in one important way. In Homer, as we have seen, gods and omens are closely linked, but that relationship can be expressed in various ways. Sometimes gods unilaterally decide to send omens; sometimes they send them at a character's request; sometimes a god appears in such a way that it constitutes an omen – as, for example, Athena's appearance as a shooting star. Elsewhere, although omens are introduced by the formula 'Zeus sent...' or the like, these introductory formulas seem rather to be a turn of phrase than a description of real action. And sometimes, as we have seen, omens are presented 'secularly' – not as divinely instigated at all but as spontaneously

⁴⁶⁹ To judge by West's brief list (2007, 488).

The omineme responds well to euhemeristic explanation: red 'blood' rain is a rare but well-observed phenomenon which appears intermittently in the historical record in Eurasia, from Spain to India. Different studies have come to different conclusions about its cause(s). See Paul McCafferty, 2008, with references. A particularly well-studied instance in 2001 in South India is now thought to have been caused by updraughts sucking a particularly exuberant algal bloom into the clouds in Europe, carrying the spores over the sea, and depositing them in heavy rainfall over Kerala (see Felix Blast, 2015). Clearly, one or more of these extraordinary real events could easily have inspired the literary motif, and their sporadic continuation will have fostered its preservation.

⁴⁷⁰ See below for this distich's textual problems.

⁴⁷¹ I.e., the time when the moon stops waning and begins to wax: when it is at its smallest.

⁴⁷² For other rains of flesh and / or blood, see, comprehensively, *Mhb.* 5. 153.28 (from a cloudless sky), 183.22 (when Rāma Jāmadagnya falls); 6. 42.33, 45.36, 83.33, 94.15, 95.47; 7. 6.25 (from a cloudless sky), 172.17; 8. 26.36; 14. 76.19; *Ram.* 6. 26.22 (in Malyavan's speech), 31.5; 7. 6.45.

⁴⁷³ As at e.g. *Mhb.* 9. 60.52, *Ram.* 7. 10.7.

occurring natural phenomena. In Sanskrit Epic, by contrast, such ‘secular’ omens are the abiding rule. As we have seen from the many examples above, it is also far more inflexible in this tendency – gods send omens to men only vanishingly rarely. Indeed, gods (and their desires), although undeniably a presence, are neither so ubiquitous nor so interested in human affairs as they are in Homer. Fate, correspondingly, plays a greater role in Sanskrit than Greek Epic – omens, if they are figured as revealing anything, reveal fate, as Dhṛtarāṣṭra remarked above.

Yet blood rain is special. Even in long omen-scenes in which all the other omens, however preternatural, occur unprompted by divine action, it is Indra, the weather god, who sheds the blood rain. This happens four times in the *Mahābhārata* and four times in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a far higher ratio than for any other sign, marking it out as a sign of special status.⁴⁷⁴ Three out of the four occurrences in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are in the critical sixth book. For example, as Rāvaṇa and Rāma are about to face each other in the decisive duel, ‘vavarṣa rudhiraṁ devo rāvaṇasya rathopari’, ‘the god rained blood on the chariot of Rāvaṇa’ (6. 94.15).⁴⁷⁵ The omen is placed first in its scene and is the only one which results from divine action of the many recounted in this long scene (94.15-29). The extra detail that the blood rain falls on Rāvaṇa’s chariot leaves the omen’s meaning in no doubt (see above for how the ominous eclipse appears to Xerxes as he sets out). The three other occurrences all begin with the same *pada*, or half-verse: clearly by the time of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a formula had been developed to give the motif a verbal home (6. 41.33, 83.33, 7. 9.24).⁴⁷⁶

The *Mahābhārata* provides rich examples. In the short omen scene just before Vyāsa’s long oration to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, in the line after the eclipse which I quote above, the narrator informs us that ‘vavarṣa cātra parjanya māṁsaṇitavṛṣṭimān’, ‘And then Parjanya, equipped with a rain of blood and flesh, rained’ (6. 1.21).⁴⁷⁷ A very similar compound is found also at 5. 141.21, in Karna’s report of the omens before battle is joined.⁴⁷⁸ In a sub-tale in the first Parvan, the trope is ludically adapted to the

⁴⁷⁴ For another exception to the rule, see e.g. *Mhb* 6. 88.5, where the flight of a javelin is compared to Indra flinging lightning.

⁴⁷⁵ Rain verbs in Sanskrit, as in other I-E and indeed non-I-E languages, would normally be impersonal.

⁴⁷⁶ Goldman, 2009, *ad* 45.36, observes that ‘Gorresio (1856, vol. 9, p. 299) translates “deva” as “il terribile Indra” but notes (p. 375) that his commentator [Lokanatha Cakravarti] points out that, based on the Amarakośa [an important lexicon of the mid first millennium], the term could be understood equally well to mean “a cloud.”’ This odd idea can be discounted. Elsewhere, either clouds or Indra-Parjanya rain blood: given a choice between ‘cloud’ and ‘god’, ‘deva’ would far more naturally mean the latter. So the influential commentary of Govindaraja, cf. Goldman, 2009, *ad* 41.33, and *ad* 94.15. In short, we can tell from where Indra is specified that ‘deva’ too must refer to him.

⁴⁷⁷ In the *RV* a distinct god, by the time of the Epics Parjanya had come to be identified with Indra. His name is probably related to other Indo-European weather-gods, such as the Baltic Perkūnas, Slavic Perun, Celtic Taranis, and Hittite Tarḫunna, although the precise etymological relation between these names is still debated.

⁴⁷⁸ māṁsaṇitavarṣaṁ ca vṛṣṭaṁ devena mādḥava, ‘The god has rained a rain of flesh and blood, o Kṛṣṇa’. See p. 173 n. 410 for more background to that scene.

situation. The divine bird Garuḍa is threatening to steal the gods' Soma, and some omens signal to them the danger. But if Indra is a protagonist in the story, who might initiate the ominous blood rain? The poet finds a tongue-in-cheek solution: 'devānām api yo devaḥ so 'py avarṣad aṣṭk tadā', 'then he who is the god of gods, whoever he is, rained blood' (1. 26.31). This is a pleasantry, and not a theological position. As we have often seen, diviners and other characters divine or human in both traditions know only however much is momentarily expedient to the narrative. In Greece too, gods, when they are the anthropomorphic protagonists of narrative, can benefit from divination, as most notably in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, where Hermes (26-29) and even Apollo benefit from omens (212-14). Also importantly, to make sense the joke must presuppose that 'Indra' / 'deva' really does do the raining – these are no dummy subjects.

Immediately above, I quoted the blood rain at 6. 2.30. Although the blood rain is presented secularly, the critical edition marks 'āsīd rudhiravarṣam' and 'asthivarṣam' as doubtful. An alternative reading, attested in in various Kashmiri, Bengali, and Devanagari manuscripts, and preferred by the Northern Recension (or so-called 'Vulgate') gives 'parjanyaḥ pāmsuvarṣī ca, māmsavarṣī ca bhārata', 'Parjanya both showered dust and showered flesh, o descendant of the Bharatas'. Its good sense and wide attestation is a good reminder of the occasional arbitrariness of the choices of the Critical Edition's editors, and the value in looking beyond it.⁴⁷⁹

If the fights between Odysseus and the Suitors, Rāma and Rāvaṇa, and Achilles and Hector are the central moments in their poems, then the *Mahābhārata*'s counterpart is the duel between Bhīma and Duryodhana. A lavish omen scene ensues once Duryodhana is felled by Bhīma's low blow (9. 57.45-58). Of these, only one is the result of divine action – 'tathā śoṇitavarṣam ca pāmsuvarṣam ca bhārata vavarṣa maghavāms tatra tava putre nipātite', 'then Indra rained a rain of blood and a rain of dust, o descendant of the Bharatas, upon the fall of your son' (57.48).⁴⁸⁰ This striking, marked sign sets the seal on this most important of moments.

Likewise, Greek blood rain is unusual for being particularly intentionally deployed. It never appears, for example, when asked for, nor in an epiphany. Just as the weather-god / king of the gods Indra

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. *Ram.* 6. 45.36, where Northern mss. give 'vavarṣa rudhiram devaḥ prahastasya rathopari, 'The god rained blood over the chariot of Prahasta', the passage as it stands would require planets to rain blood; this is a much better reading. See further Goldman, 2009, *ad loc.*

⁴⁸⁰ Sañjaya is the internal narrator recounting events to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Duryodhana's father (for more on this, see my second chapter). The use of the second person here generates pathos through the audience's feeling for Dhṛtarāṣṭra, distracting the audience from Duryodhana, a far more unsympathetic figure. Indeed, 'tava putre nipātite', 'when your son was slain', is repeated in the same place in the line at 51, 53, and 54, giving an attractive ballad-like quality and further marking out this omen scene. Only *Mhb.* 5.47 provides a sort of parallel, in which Sañjaya details a gloomy vision of what will happen if Dhṛtarāṣṭra does not avert the war, with stanzas often ending, 'tadā yuddham dhṛtarāṣṭro 'nvatapsyat', 'then Dhṛtasrastra's people shall regret this war'.

sheds a rain of blood and dust at the death of Duryodhana, when the weather-god / king of the gods Zeus accepts the inevitability of the death of his son Sarpedon,

αἱματοέσσας δὲ ψιάδας κατέχευεν ἔραζε
παῖδα φίλον τιμῶν, τὸν οἱ Πάτροκλος ἔμελλε
φθίσειν...

‘Bloody rain-drops he shed down to the earth

Honouring his own son, whom Patroclus was about to

To kill...’ (XVI.459-61)⁴⁸¹

The participial and relative clauses attribute, unusually, a specific purpose to the omen. Where the audience would expect a phrase ‘showing a sign to...’, there comes the unexpected ‘honouring’ – the only place in Homer where an omen betokens divine honour for a slain warrior. Omens at the death of warriors, after all, are different from other kinds in that they reflect rather than predict.⁴⁸² Zeus (and Indra) is expressing himself, but not communicating with anyone in particular: and the bloody rain goes unnoticed by gods and men alike. This is no trivial distinction, but constitutes an importantly distinctive feature of the omen-culture of both traditions. Not only is it not, to my knowledge, paralleled in Mesopotamian divination, whose focus is squarely on using sundry natural phenomena to see into the future, but is different to it in spirit. In Greece and India, omens, blood rain included, can serve as the picturesque capstone for marking consequential deaths (as seen above for Patroclus’, Sarpedon’s, Droṇa’s Rāma Jamadagnya’s, etc.). Their function can be to underline the salience of an event, sometimes to the characters that behold it, but sometimes only to the poet’s audience. It is impossible to generalise from only one Greek case, but the *arbitrary* combination of the choice of motif, its exceptionally intentional quality, its literary function, and its placement at a specific point in the narrative is certainly arresting.

Greek like Indian blood rain can also prefigure important bloodshed, as Agamemnon’s *aristeia* – perhaps the most destructive of the poem.

⁴⁸¹ These drops seem – for it is ambiguous – to be a mixture including blood rather than blood itself. Sanskrit epic gives a parallel even for this at *Rm.*6.31.5 – ‘*miśraṃ śonitabindubhiḥ*’, ‘[rain] mingled with drops of blood’. The literary effect is the same either way. This further similarity is a weak inheritance.

James Hooker treats Sarpedon’s death from an IE perspective, comparing it to Old Norse material. The article is interesting even if his model of inheritance is too simplistic (1980, 357-63).

⁴⁸² Here, Sarpedon’s special treatment depends on his close relation to Zeus, rather than his importance in the plot. Comparison in pointing to similarity also evinces difference: the lives and emotions of gods are far more intertwined with those of men in Homer than in Sanskrit Epic. That said, at Bhishma’s death, the gods cry out in pain along with the mortal onlookers (*Mhb.* 6. 114.83).

κατὰ δ' ὑψόθεν ἦκεν ἐέρσας
αἵματι μυδαλέας ἐξ αἰθέρος, οὔνεκ' ἔμελλε
πολλὰς ἰφθίμους κεφαλὰς Ἴδι προΐάνειν.

‘And [Zeus] shed down from on high

Drops wet with blood, from the upper air, since he was about to

Send many powerful warriors to Hades.’ (XI.53-5)

Again, the omen is unusually pointed. Here, οὔνεκ’, ‘because’ makes the connection explicit. The same idea of honouring, the only parallel to Zeus’ honour for Sarpedon, had been found a few lines earlier, when Hera and Athena thunder in Agamemnon’s honour (ἐπὶ δ’ ἐγδούπησαν Ἀθηναίη τε καὶ Ἥρη | τιμῶσαι βασιλῆα πολυχρῦσιο Μυκῆνης, XI.45-46).

Pseudo-Hesiod, in the final example of blood rain in archaic Greek poetry, mixes wording similar to Sarpedon’s blood rain with a situation more similar to Agamemnon’s. As his son Heracles comes together in the *Shield*’s climactic duel with Cycnus, son of Ares,

μέγα δ' ἔκτυπε μητίετα Ζεύς,
καδ δ' ἄρ' ἅπ' οὐρανόθεν ψιάδας βάλεν αἵματοέσσας,⁴⁸³
σῆμα τιθεῖς πολέμοιο ἐῷ μεγαθαρσεί παιδί.

‘Counsellor Zeus thundered loudly,

And shed bloody raindrops down from the heavens,

Showing a sign of war to his great-hearted son.’

(383-85)

Thunder elaborates the blood rain, confirming its ominous quality. Like the above examples, it is directed towards an individual – Heracles, to whom it is shown. Homeric poets sometimes describe the revelation of omens to men as signs (IV.76, XI.28, XIII.244). Here, he combines this kind of general comment, on whose language the first half of the line draws, with a delimiting dative in the second half. The result is something in between the two instances of blood rain in the *Iliad* and Zeus’ ominous thunder for Odysseus (xx.102-4, xxi. 413-15). Yet again, a god, unprompted, sends a particularly delimited omen for

⁴⁸³ Friedrich Solmsen’s 1970 edition brackets this line, and reports that Wilamowitz would excise it (it stays bracketed in Merkelbach and West’s third edition of 1990), but other editors such as Glenn Most (2007) and Aloisius Rzach (1908) rightly print it.

one particularly august hero. Despite 385, the poet does not tell us Heracles' reaction, or even if he perceives it. Despite 385, this seems an omen for the external not internal audience.

Against this traditional background, the *Odyssey* can be read anew. Theoclymenus fashions something novel and fittingly homely from this martial motif. Just as the arena for the slaughter of the Suitors is not a battlefield but a palace hall, we find, instead of blood-rain on a plain, blood dripping from the hall's roof-beam and down its walls. The Suitors' domestic transgressions meet with a suitably domesticated motif. Blood befouls the setting of the banquet just as the Suitors had perverted the institution of *xenia*, and the imagery of the coming slaughter is disturbingly prefigured. Similarly, as we saw above, in the Pythia's prophecy to the Athenians, blood drips down from their roofs (Hdt. 7.140).

The special nature of these parallels asks for special treatment. Yet it is difficult to configure them: the evidence is consistent with various possibilities but probatory of none. An inflationary account might hold that blood rain was inherited from the proto-tradition not just as an omen but as a marked omen, and that its special status ensured its reservation for a particular, honorary function in the daughter traditions. Yet deflationary views are more compelling. Here again universal factors impinge: what god would appear in an epiphany as blood rain and what mortal would ask for it? To depict a character's reaction to something as extraordinary as blood rain would be a distraction and risk overwhelming the narrative moment. The inherent qualities of blood rain determine its deployment – it is too arresting to be used as lightning, shooting stars, or rainbows can. The same spectacular ghouliness which assures its efficacy forecloses its usage, and gives the illusion of a profounder inheritance than there was. This is weak inheritance: the inherent qualities of blood rain is enough to account for these similarities in usage.

Grieving Steeds

This motif, related to but not strictly an omineme, should be placed in a category of its own. It is attested only twice in Greek literature, and so again generalisation is difficult. Yet it is so striking an idea, so lavishly elaborated when it does occur, and the *Iliad* preserves so much traditional material unattested elsewhere, that it cannot be avoided. Patroclus lies slain, and the battle rages around his corpse. He had been lent not only Achilles' armour but also the immortal horses, Xanthus and Balius, which Poseidon had given to Peleus, and Peleus to him (XXIII.277-78). After his death,

ἵπποι δ' Αἰακίδαο μάχης ἀπάνευθεν ἔοντες

κλαῖον, ἐπεὶ δὴ πρῶτα πυθέσθην ἡνιόχοιο

ἐν κονίησι πεσόντος ὑφ' Ἑκτορος ἀνδροφόνου.

“The horses of Achilles, standing apart from the battle,

Wept, since they were the first to know that their charioteer

Lay fallen in the dust thanks to man-slaying Hector.’ (XVII.427-9)

Automedon tries to goad and blandish the horses to drive either to the ships or the battlefield, but they stand firm, like a tombstone –

οὔδ' ἐνισκίμπαντε καρήατα: δάκρυα δέ σφι

θερμὰ κατὰ βλεφάρων χαμάδις ῥέε μυρομένοισιν

ἡνίοχοιο πόθοι: θαλερὴ δ' ἐμιαίνετο χαίτη

ζεύγλης ἐξεριποῦσα παρὰ ζυγὸν ἀμφοτέρωθεν.

‘Hanging their heads to the ground. And as they wept

In grief for their charioteer, hot tears flowed out of

Their eyelids to the earth. And their thick manes fell out

Of the yoke-loops towards the yoke on both sides and were defiled.’ (437-40)

Zeus notices the weeping horses, and expresses pity for them, since though immortal they must partake in mortal suffering – for there is no more miserable creature on earth than man, he reflects (443-47). The horses’ grief for Patroclus is elevated into a general grief for the lot of mortal man, and thus becomes an occasion for the expression of one of the poem’s key themes.⁴⁸⁴ That the horses were the first to know of Patroclus’ demise is a hint of the prophetic ability which is fully realised a couple of books later, when, granted a voice by Hera, Xanthus informs Achilles that Apollo, as well as Hector, had a hand in Patroclus’ death, and prophecies that he, Achilles, will soon also be slain by a god and a man (XIX.399-424, see also p. 79). Later, after Patroclus’ cremation is finished, Achilles announces the first event of the funeral games

⁴⁸⁴ Bruno Currie has suggested that these horses also mourn symbolically for Achilles (2016, 121). This is right, but given Zeus’ words, their grief should not be limited to Achilles. His claim that a contemporary audience would have seen there an *allusion* to a narration of Achilles’ death, however, requires assumptions which I would not share (*ibid.* 121-22).

– a chariot race. He is sure that his own horses, being immortal, would be victorious, but he and his horses shall not take part. For they have lost their affectionate groom, who would rinse them and shampoo their manes with olive oil.

τὸν τῷ γ' ἑσταότες πενθείετον, οὐδεῖ δέ σφι
χαῖται ἐρηρέδεται, τὼ δ' ἕστατον ἀχνυμένῳ κῆρ.

“Standing still, they mourn him, and drag their manes

On the ground. And they stand, grieving him.” (XXIII.283-84).

These, the swiftest of horses (*soi-disant*, XIX.415-16), are literally paralysed by their grief. Just as Priam, in the throes of an unbearable bereavement, befouls himself by rolling in dung (XXII.414, XXIV.640), or by smearing it on his head and neck (XXIV.163-65), Xanthus and Balias befoul their manes in the dirt – the same manes, poignantly, that Patroclus had so sedulously groomed, as we are told in the immediately preceding verses (281-82). At XVII.439-40, the point is made even more powerfully – ἐμυαίνετο, ‘were defiled’ is a strong word, which after Homer came also to express moral or religious pollution.

The obvious parallels furnished by Sanskrit Epic have invited long been noted by comparatists.⁴⁸⁵ Vittore Pisani, in his discussion of the affinity, is right to relate the asymmetrical attestations of the motif to the tastes of the tradition: ‘Die Anteilnahme der Natur am Tode der Helden ist bei den Griechen, wenigstens den älteren, nicht üblich’ (1953, 103 = [Schmitt] 1968, 159-60). He might have added that it is only immortal horses who weep – the very same who talk and prophesy. But if it is uncharacteristic of Greek, it is profoundly characteristic of the style of the Sanskrit Epics and especially the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (see further this chapter’s final section). Indeed, as Goldman observes of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, ‘The weeping of horses is a stereotypical portent of calamity for their master’ (2009, *ad* 94.6). As in the *Iliad*, the motif is reserved for death in battle. As the Rākṣasa Makarākṣa rides out amid ill omens to the battle in which he will die, his horses, even before he reaches the battlefield, ‘dīnāḥ sāśramukhā yayuḥ’, ‘galloped depressed, with tears in their eyes’ (6. 65.18). *Vālmīki* combines the motifs of the prophetic and

⁴⁸⁵ E.g. West, 2007, 490-91, who cites Pisani (see below). Each adduces only a few Sanskrit parallels. Schmitt, 1967, oddly seems not to have noticed it. West adds an example from Old Norse and one from Armenian Epic – both are almost too distant to be worth mentioning. Maurice Bowra, in a long discussion of the various ways that heroes interact with their steeds, provides only one example of a horse’s grief after its master’s death: the Kyrgyz Epic hero Manas’ horse neither drinks water nor eats grass, but lies down by its master’s grave and whinnies to the sky (1952, 168). His discussion, which mentions over a dozen instances of horses’ closeness to their heroic masters, culminates in Xanthus’ speech to Achilles (169-70). Although that scene is his fulcrum, he nowhere cites a horse’s prophecy of its master’s death, nor a horse which weeps after it or in foreknowledge of it. (For arbitrary reasons, his book takes no account of Indian material.)

the grieving horse, which the *Iliad* separated. The horse's grief itself becomes an omen. Similarly, Rāvaṇa's horses weep as he rides out to his fatal battle (6. 94.26). Weeping horses are again among the omens which Mālyavān sees and with which he warns Rāvaṇa (6. 26.23), just as in the *Mahābhārata*, where Karna warns that the Kurus' horses weep and take no pleasure in their food (5. 141.11, just as the grieving Priam could enjoy neither food nor wine, XXIV.641-42), whereas the Pāṇḍavas' are in good spirits (141.15). As for other omens, a good version complements the ill one. 7. 48.19 brings a similar contrast among soldiers – joy in the Pāṇḍava camp is opposed to the mood among the Kuru warriors, who, like the Suitors before Theoclymenus' speech, weep profusely.⁴⁸⁶ Indeed, horses weep not uncommonly across the poem, often concurrently with other ill-omens, and always when on the losing side of a battle (e.g. 4. 37.6; 6. 95.48; 7. 54.7, 165.12; 8. 26.37). Sometimes, the motif is creatively extended: at 9. 22.22, war elephants weep and tremble; Vyāsa in his speech before the war tailors the motif to a presage of general destruction – at 6. 2.33, all pack-animals weep, and both horses and elephants weep in their thousands at 6. 3.42.

Yet, again, the parallel is as instructive for the difference it indicates as the similarity. No Indian horses are named, none are immortal, nor have a backstory, and the tears of none receive the tender elaboration afforded to those of Xanthus and Balius. They are always described in one line, and further description is pithy, if present at all.⁴⁸⁷ The *Iliad*, by contrast, is interested not only in the fact of their tears, but gives the horses a voice and a vivid character. Xanthus is both defensive about his role in Patroclus' downfall (XIX.411-14), and even slightly haughty in his reminder to Achilles that, unlike himself, he is mortal (415-17). Zeus, as we saw above, sees the horses' grief and takes the opportunity to reflect on the miserable lot of man. The *Iliad*'s recurrent interest in motivation and mortality leave their imprint in the motif's treatment. By contrast, the universe of Sanskrit Epic's greater tolerance of the marvellous attenuates the striking impression made by the motif, which sits more naturally among the other supernatural events which cluster around important deaths and battles.

The language used of horses' tears in Sanskrit is patterned – either because it was formulaic traditional or because there are only so many ways to say 'shed a tear' in the language (or both). Usually, the expression is some sort of combination of 'aśrūṇi', 'tears', with a form, perhaps with prefix, of 'muc',

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. also 12. 305.16, where the seer Yajñavalkya explains to Yudhiṣṭhira that sudden weeping is a sign of imminent death. Yajñavalkya specifies the left eye ('vāmam akṣi'): as elsewhere, sinister direction underlines inauspiciousness.

⁴⁸⁷ At *Mhb*.5. 141.11, the weeping horses 'pāṇīyaṁ yavaśaṁ cāpi nābhinandanti', 'take no joy in food or drink'. Makarākṣa's steeds are also 'dīnāḥ', 'depressed', and 'caraṇair ākulair gatvā', 'proceeding with clumsy steps' (*Ram*. 6. 65.18). At *Mhb*.7. 54.7, the tearful mounts 'śakṣṇmūtre mumucūr', 'emitted urine and excrement'. Even if manure is not unknown to the Homeric universe (e.g. XXII.414, XXIV.640, xvii.297, etc.), nowhere are animals (or humans) actually shown producing it – this at least was outside of Homer's sense of decorum.

‘release’, or ‘srj’, ‘emit’; sometimes the word for human weeping is used, ‘rud’ (e.g. *Mhb.* 6. 95.48, 7. 54.7). The Greek scene uses both (κλαῖον at XVII.428, and 438-39). More urgently, two Iliadic scenes involve one clearly formulaic phrase: θαλερὴ δ’ ἐμιαίνετο χαίτη | ζεύγλης ἐξεριποῦσα παρὰ ζυγὸν ἀμφοτέρωθεν (XVII.439-40, for translation see above) is very close to a phrase which directly precedes the verse in which Hera gives Xanthus the voice with which he prophesies to Achilles, πᾶσα δὲ χαίτη | ζεύγλης ἐξεριποῦσα παρὰ ζυγὸν οὐδας ἵκανε, ‘and all his mane fell out of the yoke-loops towards the yoke and came to the ground’ (XIX.405-06).⁴⁸⁸ The phrase comes nowhere else in Greek literature, let alone in the *Iliad*. Through their hanging their heads, Homer shows us the horses’ emotion without telling us of it. In the second instance, again like the horses of Sanskrit Epic, Xanthus hangs his head mournfully at the *foreknowledge* of his master’s demise, not after it. Different kinds of Homerist will interpret the linguistic overlap in different ways. Where a Neo-analyst might prefer to see an allusion from one passage to the other, I would prefer the oralist stance of seeing the correlation as evidence of traditional language (vertical, not horizontal reference). The traditional meaning would be to alert the audience to the anthropomorphosis of the horse, preparing the way for the description of its emotional involvement in the action. If the language which expresses it is traditional, then *a fortiori* the motif of the grieving horse was traditional too. If so, strong inheritance would be the best explanation for a correlation which, despite the scantiness of Greek attestation, and even amid the din of difference, sings out noisily. Further correlations in detail, as ever, should be attributed to weak inheritance.

Omens in Similes

Preamble

My central contentions in this section are that

1. The ominous connotation of images cannot be switched on or off.
 - a) Certain images of ominous import elsewhere therefore retain their ominous colour when used in similes.
2. Greek and Sanskrit poets use ominemes as vehicles for similes in far more systematic a way than has been hitherto appreciated.

⁴⁸⁸ The third example of the grieving horses, in book XXIII, describes the same phenomenon in different words.

3. This technique (but no one instantiation of it) is part of the shared inheritance of both poetic traditions.

While there has never been a systematic treatment, there has been a piecemeal appreciation of the phenomenon I here treat: various critics, especially Hellenists, have remarked on the ominousness of many similes discussed below, sometimes due to the requirements of context, and sometimes due to the obvious ominousness of a vehicle such as lightning, which is common also in omen scenes. A couple of paragraphs by William Scott is representative: he notices that similes are sometimes used to engender a ‘sense of foreboding’ at ‘the start of a battle or a risky undertaking’ (1974, 98). He discerns only two basic images which have this effect – stars and storms (*ibid.*, 99), though he does briefly later discuss lightning, rainbows, and dark clouds (*ibid.*, 99-100). He is also right to mention that, advantageously for the poet, the simile is a flexible device in creating atmosphere, since it ‘is not tightly involved with events’ (*ibid.*, 100). The following differs from his treatment in both scope and substance.

The exegetical value of what I propose is found above all when there are no supporting indications of an emergent meaning – when the denotative meaning and context do not so obviously imply the connotative. The approach is grounded in Homeric practice elsewhere. That is, Homer at times uses similes predictively without relying on the resonance of ominemes. For example, at XIII.137-48, Hector rampages through the phalanxes like a boulder rolling inexorably down a hill – until, continues the simile, it comes to a stop on the plain. Sure enough, after the simile, Hector gets held up by Achaean reinforcements. Similes in Homer can and do look forward, shaping audience expectations, with and without ominous connotations. I shall largely treat the *Iliad*, where the omen-in-simile is more common, but will also treat the *Odyssey*, with occasional mention of other Archaic poetry. I then turn to Sanskrit Epic.

As I have emphasised, there is an essential ambiguity to the nature of battle omens, since if they augur well for one, they augur ill for another, and so the very same sign may augur well or ill. This ambiguity is sometimes resolved by orientation – the propitious eagle which comes to Telemachus at xv.160-61 appears on the right, and the impropitious eagle which comes to the Suitors at xx.242-43 appears on the left. But often it is left to the audience to understand to whom an omen is propitious, or it is simply specified. This cannot happen with omens-in-similes, and this impossibility has sometimes been the source of interpretative difficulties, where scholars have sought to interpret propitious omens as impropitious ones and *vice versa*. Understanding this alternation in focalisation is therefore vital for the correct appraisal of some of the similes which I treat.

Finally, it is worth considering the relationship between this and other approaches. The emergent, connotative meaning should always be consonant with the literal, denotative one. Here, I have phrased this as a prescriptive rule, but in practice it will function as a descriptive rule: the two approaches are not merely parallel but intertwined, and, as we will see, the conclusions reached by reading the emergent meanings can sometimes (but by no means always) be arrived at merely through analysis of literary meanings. Consequently, the following discussion will include a good deal of traditional close reading of passages.

Birds in Greece, Briefly

I have hitherto ignored ornithomancy in this chapter, since, as I showed in my first, it is far more indebted to Near-Eastern diffusion than IE inheritance. Yet it will be useful here in establishing the principle that events tied to omens in the minds of audience and poet remain so in similes. Again, I build here on previous work. Naomi Rood has argued that in the *Odyssey* bird similes are intimately linked to Odysseus' vengeance (2006, 4ff.), claiming that 'birds evoked a coherent social memory of the gods and vengeance'. In this way, 'the meaning of the curious simile of the grieving vultures [at xvi.216-19] becomes manifest' (1). Yet the association is peculiar to the *Odyssey*, and it only seems to Rood that birds evoke specifically vengeance because of the contextual, pragmatic factors which delimit the meaning of that poem's omens. In other poems, where vengeance is not so clearly at stake, this is not the case. In the *Iliad* too, many bird similes depict situations suspiciously similar to the typical Homeric bird omen. At XXII.139ff., Achilles chases Hector like a shrieking falcon a dove, as the omen at xv.525-28. At XXII.308-11, an extraordinary simile compares Hector to a high-flying eagle which flies through dark clouds to snatch a lamb or hare.⁴⁸⁹ But the audience's knowledge of what is about to happen destabilises the equivalence, and the simile is laden with irony. We know that he is the hare, not the eagle, and a few lines later he is dead.⁴⁹⁰ At XIII.460, Automedon swoops like a bird of prey on a flock of geese – just as in Penelope's dream-omen xix.536-53, and the omen at xv.161-66. The other fighting bird similes, at XV.690, XVI.428, XVII.755, xxii.302-9, xxiv.538 similarly aggrandise their tenors by implicatively, through ominous imagery, foreboding death to their adversaries.

⁴⁸⁹ Combination with dark clouds supports the ominous significance. de Jong notes a 'menacing connotation' (2012, *ad loc.*).

⁴⁹⁰ That is, the connotative focalisation of the simile does not match the alignment of tenor and vehicle. Hector's movement is like that of a high-flying eagle, but, connotatively, he must be focalised into being the hare.

Bird similes, however, are too Greek to be usefully compared to Sanskrit, and not my focus. Their use is in establishing Homer's interest in using ominous imagery in his similes. I now turn to the ominous imagery which permits of comparative treatment, giving ominemes in similes in both traditions the holistic analysis which hitherto they have been denied. Many of the similes I treat have been considered problematic – in my view, because they are misunderstood. By paying attention to their connotative ominousness, we can unlock their correct interpretation.

Lightning in Greek and Indian Similes

In book 13, the two Ajaxes have cut back Hector's rampage. The disguised Poseidon is going through the ranks of the Achaeans rousing them up, and has just encouraged Idomeneus, who, pleased with the Achaean progress, supposes that the will of Zeus must be on their side. Then –

Ἰδομενεὺς δ' ὅτε δὴ κλισίην εὐτυκτον ἴκανε
 δύσετο τεύχεα καλὰ περὶ χροῖ, γέντο δὲ δοῦρε.
 βῆ δ' ἵμεν ἀστεροπῇ ἐναλίγκιος, ἦν τε Κρονίων
 χειρὶ λαβὼν ἐτίναξεν ἀπ' αἰγλήεντος Ὀλύμπου
 δεικνὺς σῆμα βροτοῖσιν, ἀρίζηλοι δέ οἱ αὐγαί·
 ὥς τοῦ χαλκὸς ἔλαμπε περὶ στήθεσσι θεόντος.

'Idomeneus, when he came to his well-built hut
 Fitted around his body his lovely armour, and took hold of two spears.
 He set out like the lightning which Zeus son of Kronos
 Takes up in his hand and brandishes from splendid Olympus
 Showing a sign to men, and its rays dazzle.
 Thus shined his bronze about his breast as he ran.'

(13.240-245)

The reference to Zeus is no empty embellishment. It reminds the audience of the *sematic* nature of lightning – the close connection between it and the bloodthirsty will of Zeus, which determines the fighting throughout and which Idomeneus has just claimed is on the Achaean side. It is an enriching irony that Zeus is in fact currently opposed to the Achaean cause.

The comparison is somewhat impressionistic, and not straightforwardly susceptible to a point-of-correspondence type analysis. On the denotative level, Idomeneus appears with the sudden *éclat* of lightning and its bright rays are compared to his gleaming armour.⁴⁹¹ But through his embodying it, we learn not just about how he looked, but also what his approach into battle means. Connotatively, Homer is signalling to his audience that the entry of the destructive Idomeneus presages destruction – just as lightning does.

As very often with such similes, it comes before a particularly decisive moment in the battle. Idomeneus is springing into action at the start of his mini-*aristeia*, and, after a conversation with Meriones, will soon make a string of kills. XIII.241 is in effect a highly compressed version of the arming scenes that regularly precede *aristeiai* and signal coming individual excellence. Arming scenes and omens-in-similes complement one another. An arming scene creates the expectation of martial distinction, and the comparison of a warrior to an omen motif in a simile associates his entry with the coming doom of his opponents.⁴⁹² Functionally, these are near synonyms. In short, the choice of simile is a sign to the audience that spells trouble for the Trojans, just as the lightning bolts at xx.112-14 and xxi.413-15 do for the Suitors.⁴⁹³ There, Zeus was communicating future events to Odysseus; here, the poet is communicating the future narrative to the audience. In both cases the traditional language – the sign and the signified – is the same.

At the start of book 10, as Agamemnon lies awake at night distraught at the precarious Achaean position, the poet is good enough to be quite specific:

ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἄν ἀστράπτῃ πόσις Ἥρης ἠϊκόμοιο

⁴⁹¹ This is a traditional comparison – see below p.218.

Richard Janko observes that Zeus holds the lightning like Idomeneus holds his spears, but this reads against the Greek, which compares Idomeneus to lightning, and not Zeus. And yet, comparing other verbally and contextually like passages, he does conclude that: 'The parallels, as well as the action, evoke a sinister sign here' (1994, ad loc.).

⁴⁹² This is not to say that omen similes always signify success – sometimes, as immediately below, and as certain bird-omen similes above, they connote doom for the tenor. See further my discussions below of the poem's most important arming scenes and *aristeiai* – Diomedes V.4-7, Agamemnon XI.26-8, and Achilles XIX.381, also XI.61-66.

⁴⁹³ Kelly, who simply groups this simile along with other examples of omen scenes, thinks that the Trojans' reaction to seeing Idomeneus at 330, after the dilatory conversation with Meriones, is a delayed reaction to this simile *as* omen (2007, 113-15). But the reaction is textually far away, the audience and not the Trojans see the lightning, and Idomeneus' aspect is fearsome enough to warrant the reaction without recourse to an omen.

τεύχων ἢ πολὺν ὄμβρον ἀθέσφατον ἢ ἐχάλαζαν
 ἢ νιφετόν, ὅτε πέρ τε χιὼν ἐπάλυνεν ἀρούρας,
 ἢ ἐποθὶ πτολέμοιο μέγα στόμα πευκεδανοῖο,
 ὧς πυκὶν' ἐν στήθεσσιν ἀνεστονάχιζ' Ἀγαμέμνων
 νειόθεν ἐκ κραδίης, τρομέοντο δέ οἱ φρένες ἐντός.

‘Just as when the spouse of lovely-haired Hera thunders
 Readying either a huge, awesome rainstorm or hailstorm
 Or snowstorm, when snow covers the fields,
 Or the great mouth of a devastating war,
 So often did Agamemnon grieve from the depth of the heart
 In his breast, and his innermost spirit took fright.’

(X.5-10)

There is confirmation that lightning, apart from Zeus’ use of it to respond to mortal prayers, can be used as a sign of war even without restriction of its appearance to the side who will win (or lose). Critics have themselves fulminated over the inappropriateness of the comparison. To take a sample: Walter Leaf fumes that ‘The simile is so confused as to be practically unintelligible... singularly pointless... turgid and tasteless’ (1900, *ad loc.*). Bryan Hainsworth rephrases the same thought in the less exuberant terms of modern scholarship – the comparison is ‘overstretched, to say the least’, and ‘the first example of much strained thought and language in this book’ (1993, on X.5-9).

Yet there is an alternative to ascribing the ostensible awkwardness to the *maladresse* of the poet. Instead of groping with Leaf for a similarity on the basis of the frequency of Agamemnon’s groans and the frequency of lightning in a storm (*loc cit.*), in this case, it is best to de-emphasise the traditional approach to similes, as elaborations on a point of comparison; rather, what is relevant here is not correspondence between Agamemnon and the qualities of the lightning, but the correspondence between the situation and the lightning’s signification. Indeed, the vehicle’s elaboration, which dwells on lightning’s meaning, not qualities, is a clue to this effect. At this critical juncture of the narrative, Agamemnon grieves, plots, and in the following lines considers at length the perilous Achaean position. A sense of imminent bloodshed and a look forward to the engagement at the start at book 11, itself prefaced

by numerous omen motifs, is therefore quite relevant, and the simile successfully introduces this note of foreboding to Agamemnon's distress. The context makes clear that it is Agamemnon and the Achaean cause which is threatened by the foreboding simile. The innovation of the *Doloneia* poet here is to create a simile which works primarily on the level of emergent meaning, and barely if at all on that of literal meaning.⁴⁹⁴ The technique is exactly analogous to the *Odyssey* poet's use of *χειρὶ παχείῃ*, 'stout hand', at xxi.6. The lexical mismatch is a signal of the salience of the traditional meaning.

Lightning does not have this emergent meaning in long similes alone. Elsewhere, *only* the gleam of the brazen armour of heroes is compared to lightning; the comparison is never used of the armour of a dead hero, nor of other shiny objects like crowns, chariots, or gold.⁴⁹⁵ This distribution, which cannot be co-incidental, is vital confirmation of my argument. Moreover, the language in which the comparisons are couched is highly traditional, and points towards a robust, longstanding traditional connection between lightning, bronze (the metal of war), and war itself. *χαλκὸς | λάμψ' ὥς τε στεροπὴ πατρὸς Διὸς*, 'the bronze | shone like the lightning bolt of father Zeus', at X.153-54, matches XI. 65-66 – [Hector] *πᾶς δ' ἄρα χαλκῷ // λάμψ' ὥς τε στεροπὴ πατρὸς Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο*, 'All [of Hector] shone | in bronze like the lightning bolt of father Zeus who wields the aegis'.⁴⁹⁶ The kenning *χαλκοῦ τε στεροπῆς / στεροπῆν*, 'the lightning [accusative or genitive] of his bronze' is found at XI.83, XIX.363, iv.72, xiv.268, xvii.437, always beginning the verse. The modern reader who wishes to understand Homer as a contemporary audience would have done, and wishes to take account of all that can be read in the text, must remember that with every comparison to lightning the poet suggestively evokes war and foreshadows coming slaughter.

Lightning is used as the vehicle of a simile many dozens of times in the *Mahābhārata*.⁴⁹⁷ It is almost exclusively used in martial contexts, and attributes menace to the tenor. Sometimes it is applied directly to a warrior, as to Arjuna at 1. 125.9; sometimes to plural soldiers, as at 6. 16.25; or to a particular army, as the Kurus' at 6. 56.5; sometimes to war-elephants and chariots, as at 7. 129.6; or to a particular chariot, as Indra's at 3. 161.17. Formulaic language attends these similes, as, for example, the common phrase *'meghā iva savidyutah'*, 'like clouds streaked by lightning' (at e.g. 6. 16.25, 18.5, 89.32; 7. 72.22, 129.28). As in Greece, a common tenor for lightning is armour or weaponry. At 8. 66.1, Arjuna's enemies *'vidyutprakāśam dadṛśuḥ samantād dhanamjayāstram samudīryamāṇam'*, 'saw Arjuna's shafts hurled all around like lightning'. Elsewhere his magical bow, the Gandiva, is described as *'vidyutam'*

⁴⁹⁴ Hermann Fraenkel has to some extent anticipated my argument here (1921, 28-9).

⁴⁹⁵ X.154, XI.66, XI.83, XIX.363, iv.72 (the only non-martial occurrence), xiv.268, xvii.437. At XI.66 (Hector), and XIX.363 (Achilles), the collocation comes in a chain of synonymous omen motifs.

⁴⁹⁶ *χαλκός*, 'bronze', as commonly elsewhere, stands for 'what is made of bronze, armour'.

⁴⁹⁷ For lightning in similes in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see below.

meghamadhyasthām bhrājamānām ivāmbare’, ‘shining like the heaven’s lightning between the clouds’ (6. 67.4, cf. 4. 58.11-12 for the same comparison, and 6. 67.4 for weapons in general, 7. 129.28 for bows and standards). It does not show the same restriction to bronze armour as in Greece, but this could have been suspected *a priori* – bronze was not invented at the time of unity.

When particular emphasis is desired, the comparison is joined with other portentous imagery to redouble the note of menace: ‘kāñcanam kavacam bibhrat pratyadṛśyata phalgunah sārkaḥ sendrāyudhataḍit sasamdhya iva toyadaḥ’, ‘Wearing his golden armour Arjuna appeared like a raincloud at dusk pierced by the sun and shot through with rainbows and lightning’ (1. 125.9).⁴⁹⁸ The ominemes act as synonyms, stabilising and reinforcing one another’s meanings just as they do in Sanskrit omen scenes. Like in Greece, they can also be combined with other traditional tropes which point forward to battle. As the warrior Bhīmasena is preparing to sally forth, the narrator lingers over his appearance.

‘bhīmaseno mahābāhuḥ kavacī śubhakuṇḍalī
 sāṅgadaḥ satanutrāṇaḥ saśarī rathinām varaḥ
 tasya kārṣṇāyasaḥ varma hemacitraḥ maharddhimat
 vibabhau parvataśliṣṭaḥ savidyud iva toyadaḥ
 pītaraḥkṛtāSītāSītāir vāsobhiś ca suveṣṭitaḥ
 kaṇṭhatrāṇena ca babhau sendrāyudha ivāmbudaḥ’

‘Great-armed Bhīmasena, wearing a cuirass and lovely earrings,
 Armlets and body-armour, equipped with arrows, best of the charioteers –
 His unbreakable armour was made of black iron and decorated with gold.
 He looked like a cloud streaked with lightning over a mountain.
 He was well-dressed in yellow, red, and white garments
 and neck-armour. He was like a cloud adorned with a rainbow.’

⁴⁹⁸ Although I have not done the necessary quantitative analysis to say with precision, Arjuna’s preponderance in my selection of examples may reflect a wider over-representation in lightning similes in the poem – though one which I have only anecdotally perceived. If real, the fact that his father is Indra could be the cause.

(7.102.54-56)

As with Idomeneus above, the poet mixes ominous similes into the pre-battle description of Bhīmasena's armour. The Indian poet's more open-ended technique is not interested in foreclosing interpretation by specifying points of comparison. Bhīmasena merely 'vibhabhau... iva', 'looked like' or 'babhau... iva', 'was like' the object of comparison. This common characteristic of Sanskrit Epic similes of any kind contrasts strongly with the Greek tendency to make the point of comparison explicit, even if one point initiates the simile and another ends it, and even if the interplay between tenor and vehicle is much richer than the explicit point(s) of comparison would have it. In this case, the poet in choosing an image to imply both beauty and menace allows space for the audience to fully savour the connotations of his imagery. His technique is directly paralleled by the poet of the Agamemnon simile in the *Doloneia*, discussed immediately above. As we have seen and will see, ominous resonance is often at play in Homeric similes which are, in the Indian manner, unusually untethered to their context. Perhaps it is their disconnection from the main action which helps the resonance to impress itself on the audience, or perhaps poets simply prioritise one kind of purpose to the detriment of the other.

Rainbows

As above, the *Iliad* poet finds room for ominous imagery amid his studious enumeration of Agamemnon's arms (XI.16-45). The scene provides the only other occurrence of a rainbow in archaic Greek literature apart from that treated above. Agamemnon's shield is described with especial care:

τοῦ δ' ἦτοι δέκα οἶμοι ἔσαν μέλανος κυάνοιο,
 δώδεκα δὲ χρυσοῖο καὶ εἴκοσι κασσιτέριοι·
 κυάνεοι δὲ δράκοντες ὀρωρέχατο προτὶ δειρὴν
 τρεῖς ἐκάτερθ' ἴρισσιν ἐοικότες, ἅς τε Κρονίων
 ἐν νέφεϊ στήριξε, τέρας μερόπων ἀνθρώπων

'It had ten strips of black glossy enamel,

Twelve of gold and twenty of tin,

And glossy snakes stretched up towards its neck

On both sides, like three rainbows which the son of Kronos

Fixes in the clouds as a sign to voiced men'

(XI.26-8)

Again, the poet's development of the vehicle highlights rainbows' portentous import, nudging the audience's interpretation in the right direction. And again, no point of comparison is specified, even if the image of an arched snake recalls the curve of a rainbow. The sign's context leaves its meaning in no doubt. As Mark Edwards saw, the rainbow is not 'the sign of divine goodwill which it is in the Judaeo-Christian tradition', but 'associated with storm-clouds and trouble' (1991, on XVII.546-52). This rainbow is a sign of war. A few lines later, Agamemnon is attended by a peal of thunder, which, uniquely in the *Iliad*, is sent by Athena and Hera, and is said to *honour* (τιμῶσαι) Agamemnon, just like Zeus' blood rain honours Sarpedon at XVI.460 (for which see above). Neither he nor anyone else seems to notice: as with the blood rain, the sign is for an external not internal audience.

Although, as ever, for every Greek example there are multiple Sanskrit parallels, the rainbow is relatively uncommon in similes also in India. There too it is sometimes found in an arming scene, compared, along with other ominemes, to a warrior about to set out for battle. For example, as the powerful demon Trishiras, son of Rāvaṇa, sets out to face Rāma, *triśirā ratham āsthāya virarāja dhanurdharaḥ savidyudulkaḥ sajavālaḥ sendracāpa ivāmbudaḥ*, 'Bow in hand, Trishira mounted his chariot and shone like a cloud lit by rainbows, lightning, flames, and meteors' (6. 57.22).

It is most commonly matched to a bow – a comparison naturally suggested by terms such as 'bow of Indra', and so on (for which, see above pp. 194-5).⁴⁹⁹ These bows are coloured like a rainbow (e.g. 6. 70.9), shine like a rainbow (e.g. 7. 31.65), or do not contain a specific point of comparison (e.g. 3. 84.11, 7. 150.79). Sometimes they too combine multiple vehicles, as Arjuna's prodigious Gāṇḍīva bow at 4. 58.10-11, when he repels hordes of Kurus,

yathā balāhake vidyut pāvako vā śiloccaye

tathā gāṇḍīvam abhavad indrāyudham ivātataṁ

yathā varṣati parjanya vidyud vibhrājate divi

tathā daśa diśaḥ sarvāḥ patad gāṇḍīvam āvṛṇot

⁴⁹⁹ Bows are like rainbows at e.g. 6. 70.9, 7. 31.65, 150.79, 8. 17.92, and *Ram.* 6. 63.6.

‘Just as lightning in a raincloud or fire on a mountain

Thus was the Gāṇḍīva bow, stretched out like a rainbow.

Just as lightning flashes brightly in the sky when Parjanya rains,

Thus flying Gāṇḍīva covered all the ten directions.’⁵⁰⁰

Rainbows are an uncommon simile vehicle because they have an unusual set of qualities. Many things may be strong like lions, or gleam like lightning or stars, but few objects have the shape or qualities to suggest a comparison with rainbows. When such a comparison is found, the result can be particularly striking: Homer’s rainbow-like snakes are an ingenious example. Athena’s rainbow-like descent at XVII.547-52 (see above) perhaps relies on the perception that rainbows are kinds of bridges from heaven to earth (in Norse Mythology, they are the means by which gods travel between those realms). Sanskrit Epic provides effective examples too: Bhīma, on his quest to find beautiful flowers for Draupadī in the forest, must get past the disguised Hanumān’s tail –

sāvajñam atha vāmena smayañ jagrāha pāṇinā

na cāśakac cālayitum bhīmaḥ puccham mahākapeḥ

uccikṣepa punar dorbhyām indrāyudham ivocchritam

noddhartum aśakad bhīmo dorbhyām api mahābalaḥ

‘Then, smiling contemptuously, Bhīma grabbed the tail

Of the great monkey with his left hand. But he could not budge it.

Using both arms he thrust upwards at the tail stretched like a rainbow.

But even with both arms mighty Bhīma was not able to lift it.’

⁵⁰⁰ I.e. covered all the sky with arrows.

‘patad’, ‘flying’ is a strange epithet for a bow. A causative would make good sense, ‘making [arrows] fly’, but it would be extremely unusual for a simplex to stand for a causative. If the word is to be kept, then ‘flying’ must refer in a general way to the bow’s fast action. The editor of the Critical Edition flags the problem, underlining ‘patad’ with a squiggly line to indicate his doubt over the correct reading. He records a Kashmiri manuscript which gives ‘jvalad’, ‘flaming’, which gives much better sense, even if it is not a collocation found elsewhere in the poem. Otherwise, maybe we must ‘bite the bullet’ and interpret a causative sense.

(3. 147.17-18)

The two are half-brothers, and, Hanumān unmasked, will soon affectionately converse. Yet the simile is no trivial embellishment, but, through the rainbow's martial associations, expresses the spectacular destructive power of the same tail with which, as recounted in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Hanumān had once torched Lanka. Bhīma must not underestimate it. The charming comparison of a long, curved tail to a long, curved rainbow makes for a device as elegant as it is economical. As above, the elision of a particular point of similarity allows the resonance to fully resound. Both traditions' Epic poets exploit, at their best, the unusual qualities of the rainbow in their search for creative similes rich in connotation.

Homeric Star Similes

Stars are an unusual case. My discussion of stars in the Homeric narratives focussed on shooting stars, but, unlike in Sanskrit Epic, where there is a superabundance of them, there are no shooting star similes in Homer. Nevertheless, I will argue that Homeric star similes, when read together with the bird, lightning, and rainbow similes discussed above, can be seen to carry ominous charge just as much as they do. It is significant that, as we will see, Homer often names which stars he means. The meanings of bird and lightning omens can be determined by the place and time of their appearance; accordingly, in similes, the place and time of appearance of those phenomena are often mentioned. But stars, which are predictable in place and time, need another way of achieving this specificity: the mention of the name and sometimes the qualities of a particular star serves this purpose.

As we will see, in Homer focalisation combined with the elaboration of the vehicle makes for similes endowed with special effects – what I mean by this will grow clear in the following long section. Long similes have been recognised as a peculiarly Greek phenomenon, and such effects will find little parallel in the Indian tradition: the following, therefore, is intended not only as a contribution to comparative poetics but also as a freestanding contribution to Homeric Studies. It will be complemented afterwards by a freestanding contribution to Vedic and Sanskrit Studies, which will examine the early unfurlings and later deviations of ominemes in similes.

There are eleven mentions of stars in the *Iliad*, nine of which are in similes; there is one mention and one simile in the *Odyssey*.⁵⁰¹ I begin with the star similes that come in arming scenes: functionally, these are closely allied to the arming scene similes which I analyse above, and will serve to entrench stars' status as ominemes. Diomedes' elaborate arming scene in *Iliad* 5 is a good example of the convention. There,

δαῖέ οἱ ἐκ κόρυθός τε καὶ ἀσπίδος ἀκάματον πῦρ

ἀστέρ' ὀπωρινῷ ἐναλίγκιον, ὅς τε μάλιστα

λαμπρὸν παμφαίνησι λελουμένος Ὠκεανοῖο:

τοῖόν οἱ πῦρ δαῖεν ἀπὸ κρατός τε καὶ ὤμων.

'Unwearying fire burnt from his helmet and his shield

Like the autumnal star, which, washed

In the sea, burns most radiantly;

Just so did the fire burn from his head and shoulders.' (4-7)

Sirius, the sky's brightest star, is meant.⁵⁰² This is certainly the same star as at XXII.26-32 – the same word is used of it (ὀπωρινῷ / ὀπώρης, 'of late summer, autumnal'), and there is the same stress on brightness. Here as there it must be a κακὸν σῆμα (XXII.30). The next line, καὶ τε φέρει πολλὸν πυρετὸν δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσιν: 'And brings scorching heat to suffering mortals', provides a clue as to what might have determined the ill-auguring nature of the star in the culture. In the current context, it is easily understood as portending death for Diomedes' opponents and not for him.⁵⁰³

This simile helps us to read another in another arming-scene, when Hephaestus' helmet with its golden horsehair plumes ἀστήρ ὥς ἀπέλαμπεν, 'shone like a star' as Achilles dons it (XIX.381).⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ IV.75-7, V.5-6, VI.295, VI.401, VIII.555-9, X.251-2 XI. 62-3, XIX.381-2, XXII.26-31, XXII.317-18, xiii.93, xv.105-8; cf. Hes. *Op.* 564-7. ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ τρίχα νυκτὸς ἔην, μετὰ δ' ἄστρα βεβήκει, 'and when it was the third portion of the night, after the stars had gone to sleep', at xii.312 and xiv.483 looks purely descriptive and I do not treat it; in the same category is οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, 'of the starry night', at 5.769, 6.108, 8.46, 19.130, xx.113, Hes. *Th.* 106, 414, 463, 737, 808, 891, *Op.* 548: it is *a star* which is ominous, not stars as a collective nor the quality of starriness.

⁵⁰² The fire of course is itself an ominous sign, and there are arguably many other contexts where it has this emergent meaning. But it is a polysemous sign, and very common in the four epics, and too common to be treated at length. The supernaturalness of the fire also points towards its and its vehicle's emergent meaning.

⁵⁰³ So Leaf, 1900, but not Kirk 'there is no sinister implication to this simile', 1990.

⁵⁰⁴ Note, again, the closeness of fire to this simile, at 365-6 and 375-80.

Although the poet is not explicit which star it is, comparison with the previous simile and other like ones helps us to understand that the meaning of the simile reaches out beyond emphasis on brightness.

Achilles' arming scene is a good example of a cluster of striking, foreboding imagery, with a host of similes including fire (twice), a storm at sea, and a star all coming 365-381.⁵⁰⁵ The ominous imagery crescendos into the prophecy of Achilles' horse Xanthus which ends the scene and book (397-423, treated in my chh. 1 and 2).

For two pairs of star similes, in books 6 and 22, emergent meanings are crucial. The action is reaching its climax in book 22. Achilles, misled by the phantom of Hector, has just been disabused by Apollo and speeds towards Troy for a long-delayed showdown with Hector. The 'camera' abruptly pans to Priam who sees him

παμφαίνονθ' ὥς τ' ἀστέρ' ἐπεσσύμενον πεδίοιο,
 ὅς ρά τ' ὀπώρας εἴσιν, ἀρίζηλοι δέ οἱ αὐγαὶ
 φαίνονται πολλοῖσι μετ' ἀστράσι νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ,
 ὃν τε κύν' Ὀρίωνος ἐπικλήσιν καλέουσι.
 λαμπρότατος μὲν ὃ γ' ἐστί, κακὸν δέ τε σῆμα τέτυκται,
 καὶ τε φέρει πολλὸν πυρετὸν δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσιν:
 ὧς τοῦ χαλκὸς ἔλαμπε περὶ στήθεσσι θεόντος.

'Rushing across the plain blazing like the star
 Of late summer, and its rays shine
 Brightest of the many stars at the dead of night,
 And they call it 'Orion's dog' by name.
 While it is the most luminous, it is a sign of ill,
 And brings scorching heat to suffering mortals.
 Thus the bronze shone about his breast as he ran.'

⁵⁰⁵ The imagery culminates in perhaps the Iliad's most Indian simile: παμφαίνων ὥς τ' ἠλέκτωρ Ὑπερίων (XIX.398; it is used of Paris too at VI.513). There are around 200 comparisons to the sun of this type in the *Mahābhārata* alone.

(XXII.26-32)

The fact that the change of scene to Priam comes before the simile is not only dramatically effective, but also hones the ominous import of the simile. Although the omen is communicated only to the audience, it is *implicatively* perceived by Priam, who sees Achilles at the moment of comparison. The perceptual element is reinforced by δειλοῖσι, which belongs to the language of Homeric speech, and not that of narrative: 38 out of 40 Homeric occurrences are in speeches, and in using character-language the poet seeks to convey a sense of Priam's reaction. Priam himself will shortly use the same collocation (XXII.76).⁵⁰⁶ The audience is left in no doubt that the ill omen casts its shadow over him and his city, and accordingly, when Priam comes back into view after the simile, he is grieving as if he now knows the end is nigh.⁵⁰⁷ The ill-auguring simile reflects Achilles' disastrous presence: at this critical moment, Homer ingeniously achieves the effect of an omen scene without an omen. The unenlightening denotative meaning is, as Moulton saw, all but trivial here. Indeed, what would be the point in so stressing the brightness of Achilles' armour at so crucial a juncture? Homer is interested in the effect of the simile, not in the sheen of Achilles' breastplate in itself (1977, 26-27). The simile is also characteristic of Homeric technique for choosing to elaborate one omineme, rather than, in the manner of the Sanskrit Epic poets, heaping different ominemes on top of one another.

Perspective is vital in understanding the difference between this simile and the book's other star simile, with which it is often paired. Achilles and Hector have joined battle, and the latter has realised that he has been deceived by Athena and so is doomed. After a soliloquy in which he accepts his fate, he charges at Achilles, and Achilles at him. Then –

οἷος δ' ἀστήρ εἴσι μετ' ἀστράσι νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ

ἔσπερος, ὃς κάλλιστος ἐν οὐρανῷ ἴσταται ἀστήρ,

ὧς αἰχμῆς ἀπέλαμπ' εὐήκεος, ἦν ἄρ' Ἀχιλλεὺς

πάλλεν δεξιτερῇ φρονέων κακὸν Ἑκτορι δίω

‘Just as the evening star goes among its fellow stars

⁵⁰⁶ See de Jong, 2012, on 31, and 2004, 126.

⁵⁰⁷ ὥμωξεν δ' ὁ γέρον, κεφαλὴν δ' ὃ γε κόψατο χερσὶν // ὑπόσ' ἀνασχόμενος, μέγα δ' οἰμώξας ἐγγέγωνει, XXII.33-34.

In the dead of night, and stands the loveliest star in the heavens,
 Thus [the light] shone from the well-sharpened spear which Achilles
 Brandished in his right hand, resolved on Hector's ill.

(XXII.317-20)

This jarringly positive vehicle has provoked uncertain reactions. For Carroll Moulton, the star 'paradoxically... hints at serenity' (1977, 320). For Richardson, there is a telling 'contrast' between the star's 'beauty... and quiet appearance' and 'the deadliness of the attack' (1990, *ad loc.*). These observations are correct, but do not go far enough. More fancifully, Irene de Jong in her commentary contrasts with the simile at 25-32, and, altering slightly a suggestion of Richardson, suggests that the evening star at nightfall somehow evokes the coming to an end of '[t]he *days* of Hector's glory', through which the comparison has a 'menacing tone' (2012, *ad loc.* Her italics). Even more fancifully, Ready, relying on Tsagalis' interpretation of it (2008, 153-87), sees a menacing tone in the phrase νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ (on whose literal meaning there is no consensus), and connects with the preceding simile comparing Hector to a bird: Achilles' simile 'caps' Hector's, because Achilles the star remains perpetually in the heavens, while Hector the eagle is only 'intermittently airborne' (2011, 213-14). In any case, despite his recognition of the positivity of κάλλιστος, he detects a note 'foreboding death' (*ibid.*, 214). For Kelly, the comparison is 'a signal of doom'; he attempts to resolve the ostensible tension between doom and beauty by suggesting that the simile evokes the terrible nature of heroic excellence (2007, 371, relying on an earlier work of de Jong, 2004, 126). In short, previous scholars are agreed that the simile must be taken as in some way menacing or foreboding (so much the context requires) but they do not agree on how.

The key to understanding the simile lies in focalisation – the flip of perspective. When Priam was looking on, Achilles' arrival was a κακὸν σῆμα, a bad omen. Now, the poet focalises Achilles and the Achaeans, for whom the death of Hector is indeed a thing of beauty.⁵⁰⁸ In this way we can read κάλλιστος as the positive epithet it clearly must be. This simile does interact with the previous one, but the relationship is one of balance, and the poet realises a characteristically Iliadic theme through contrast, not parallelism. Achilles is both pestilential executioner and consummate hero, both the baneful Sirius and loveliest of stars. It is a matter of perspective. Homer, by using the star vehicle in the two similes, by manipulating perspectives, and by exploiting the Janus-faced nature of ominemes, brings to connotative, metaphorical realisation one of the poem's key themes.

⁵⁰⁸ For a different understanding of the focal switching in similes in this passage, see Christos Tsagalis, 2008, ch. 12.

Another positive star simile, in book 8, has Hector as its subject. Zeus has decided on a dark day for the Achaeans, and is true to his word. Hector has been running riot among the Greeks, whom Zeus has prevented Athena and Hera from helping, and the king of the gods declares that the destruction will continue into the next day – so fate decrees. Night falls, Hector calls an assembly, and announces that they will sleep on the plain and burn watchfires during the night before a huge assault the next morning. Then the Trojans

εἶατο παννύχιοι, πυρὰ δέ σφισι καίετο πολλά.
 ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἐν οὐρανῷ ἄστρα φαεινὴν ἀμφὶ σελήνην
 φαίνεται ἄριπρεπέα, ὅτε τ' ἔπλετο νήνεμος αἰθήρ:
 {ἐκ τ' ἔφανε πᾶσαι σκοπιαὶ καὶ πρόονες ἄκροι
 καὶ νάπαι: οὐρανόθεν δ' ἄρ' ὑπερράγη ἄσπετος αἰθήρ,}
 πάντα δὲ εἶδεται ἄστρα, γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα ποιμήν:
 τόσσα μεσηγὺ νεῶν ἠδὲ Ξάνθοιο ρόαων
 Τρώων καίωντων πυρὰ φαίνετο Ἰλίοθι πρό.

'Lay there all night, and many fires burned.
 Just as when the stars blaze brightly in the heavens
 Around the radiant moon, and the air is windless,
 {And all the watch-places and tips of the headlands and meadows
 Stand out, and the immense upper air breaks out from the empyrean,}
 And all the stars are visible, and the shepherd's heart rejoices,
 So many were the fires which burnt in between
 The ships and the streams of the Xanthus, before Troy.⁵⁰⁹ (VIII.554-61)

⁵⁰⁹ I include the bracketed lines for the sake of completeness. For West, they are 'irrelevant', the aorists are 'inappropriate', and the lines fit better at XVI.299-300 (2001, 204-05). They are also suspected by Aristophanes and Aristarchus, and omitted by Zenodotus (Kirk, 1990, on 555-61). The close repetition of the two ἄστρας which excision would beget is hardly not in the Homeric style. On balance, I find these arguments persuasive, but the matter is trivial to my present purposes.

At this point, the Trojans are at their most confident, and the Achaeans at one of their lowest ebbs in the entire poem. In the following scene, the distraught Agamemnon will even propose calling off the whole war effort (IX.1-29). Context and content allow for no doubt that this omen-in-simile augurs well for the Trojans:⁵¹⁰ the narrative has been with the Trojans since VIII.489, and it is the Trojan fires which are likened to the stars. The serenity of the sky and the stillness of the night, which is explicitly *devoid* of storms (556), are propitious. As further clarification that the sign augurs well, in the same way in which he sometimes uses the words τέρας and σῆμα, the poet adds the shepherd whose joyous reaction cues the audience's. He might put us in mind of Hector, emblem of the Trojans. The Trojans themselves were full of confidence only a few lines previously (μέγα φρονέοντες, 553).⁵¹¹

The shepherd's apparently aesthetic pleasure at the still night and starry sky is one of the features which has made this a rockstar simile in modern times.⁵¹² While his reaction does not seem strange in our sentimental post-Romantic universe, it would be unparalleled in Homer for being the only instance of a human rejoicing (γέγηθε φρένα) at nature.⁵¹³ The latter is, as a rule, menacing and dangerous, not least to shepherds.⁵¹⁴ The shepherd's reaction does, however, correspond to the emotions of Hector and the Trojans at this moment of the narrative, and, as I will argue below, is an important clue that the simile is ominous.

Γέγηθε φρένα prompts us see Hector in the shepherd. The phrase occurs five times in Homer and the *Hymns*, and always carries a parental or quasi-parental overtone.⁵¹⁵ At XIII.492-5, a similar phrase is associated with a shepherd: Aeneas rejoices (γέγηθει) when he sees his comrades following him, just like a shepherd is glad (γάννυται φρένα) when his flocks follow the ram to a spring.⁵¹⁶ Although the verbal link

⁵¹⁰ Kelly disagrees and sees star similes as always and only 'represent[ing] the onlookers' dangerous or disastrous situation' (2007, 370). Nevertheless, recognising the impossibility that the Trojans at this point are in a disastrous situation, he identifies the shepherd in this simile with Hector (ibid., 372), and eventually comments 'The situation is, eventually, as dangerous for the Trojans as it is for the Greeks' (372 n.7). However, similes interact (whether denotatively or connotatively) with their narrative moment, not the text as a whole.

⁵¹¹ For identifying other shepherds in similes with characters in the narrative, see Kelly, 2007, 371-2, and Kirk, 1990, *ad loc.* The equivalence at hand has been somewhat controversial: scholars have had difficulty in accepting that such positivity can be associated with the doomed Trojan cause and see it as inept – see Adam Parry (1956, 103) and M. D. Reeve (1973, 193), while others have no problem at all in doing so – see Fraenkel (1921, 6, 34) and Edwards (1991, 31). Still others are ambivalent – see de Jong (who eventually decides in favour of seeing Hector in the shepherd due to demands of context, 2004, 131-2), and Kelly (who, though inclined to do so, is led astray by the need to see the star as 'negative' and so ends up arguing for 'referential blurring', 2007, 372, n.7, with further bibliography on this apparent problem).

⁵¹² For a critical reaction, see e.g. Scott, 2009, 18, who calls this Homer's 'most famous' simile; cf. Kirk 'resplendent', 1990, *ad loc.* For a literary reaction, see Leopardi's 'Canto Notturmo di un Pastore Errante dell'Asia'.

⁵¹³ The closest parallel is v.74, where Hermes is delighted (τερφθείη φρεσὶν ἦσιν) by the Edenic setting of Calypso's house. The scene, word, and concept is different, and he is a god.

⁵¹⁴ See the shepherds at III.10-11, IV.275-79, XVII.61-67, XVIII.161-2.

⁵¹⁵ So Kelly, 2007, 373. Usages not discussed are XI.683, vi.106, *Hy. Dem.*232, *Hy. Aphr.*216.

⁵¹⁶ Kelly, ibid., ascribing the change to metrical exigency, rightly sees no relevance in the different wording.

is not exact, the poet still creates a quasi-parental overtone to Aeneas' concern for his comrades, and the passage provides a useful parallel for what I am arguing here: shepherd and Trojan hero are quasi-paternally delighted by the actions of the flock and fellow soldiers.⁵¹⁷ But regardless of the paternal aspect of the verbal link, the shepherd rejoices here at the calmness of the night not because it is aesthetically pleasing, but because it bodes well for him and the flock over whom he has a duty of care.⁵¹⁸ By implication, Hector, as the principal defender of Troy and as the leader and main speaker in the assembly which has just been called, has the same (quasi-paternal) duty of care towards the Trojans,⁵¹⁹ and implicatively rejoices at the still night, which is a boon to the camping Trojans and desirable for their big assault the next day.

A well-auguring omen, received and recognised by its intended audience, often provokes a positive, often joyful reaction, as at VIII.247-52, X. 274-6 (χαῖρεν), XIII.821-3, xvii.545-7, xx.89-90 (κῆρ // χαῖρ'), xx.120 (χαῖρεν), and, most relevantly, XXIV.315-21 (γῆθησαν), xxi.414 (γῆθησεν).⁵²⁰ The linguistic link reinforces the ominous connotation of the simile, confirming also that it is of the well-auguring type. Homer's carefully chosen connotations bring out the sense of Trojan dominance and menace as they burn their campfires on the plain.

Books 9 and 10 relate events during the night, and so the main fighting, all the more anticipated after the narrative delays, resumes at the start of book 11. We have already seen how the moments before an important battle are often hotspots for omen motifs. The book opens with the visit of Strife to the Greek camp and Agamemnon's elaborate arming scene, which, like omen motifs, both serve to presage coming bloodshed. Interwoven with this come the omen motifs: at 27-8, the snakes on Agamemnon's shield like rainbows in clouds; at 45-6 thunder to honour him; and at 54-5, the blood rain so common in Indian epic, bunched closely together in the manner of Indian Epic. 56-60 describe the array of Trojan heroes, and 61-66 Hector:

Ἐκτὼρ δ' ἐν πρώτοισι φέρ' ἀσπίδα πάντοσ' ἐΐσην,

⁵¹⁷ Of course ποιμένα/ι λαῶν is a common collocation in Homer. For the leader as 'shepherd of the people' in Greek, Sanskrit, Near-Eastern, and other Indo-European literature, see West, 2007, 421 and 1997, 226-7. For a leader who is like a father to his subjects, see Odysseus at ii.47, ii.234, v.12 - πατήρ δ' ὥς ἡπιός ἦεν.

⁵¹⁸ The shepherd, who in Homer is always figured as living in a parallel world far away from war, is nevertheless affected by the same signs. See above, XVII.548-50, X.5-10.

⁵¹⁹ See Kelly, 2007, 66. For Hector's importance to Troy, see e.g. 6.403. When Hector dies, it is as if Troy falls with him (22.410-11). See also the etymology of his name - Ἐκ-τὼρ, 'Holder', i.e. of the city.

⁵²⁰ To pre-empt my discussion in the following section, the practical and the ominous are often linked, and signs of war are often signs that presage a natural hazard - see in this chapter X.5-9, XVII.549, XXII.31. Here, uniquely in the *Iliad* (but not Sanskrit epic), the converse is found - a propitious sign is linked to propitious nature.

οἷος δ' ἐκ νεφέων ἀναφαίνεται οὐλιος ἀστήρ
 παμφαίνων, τότε δ' αὖτις ἔδυν νέφεα σκιόνετα,
 ὥς Ἴκτωρ ὅτε μὲν τε μετὰ πρώτοισι φάνεσκεν,
 ἄλλοτε δ' ἐν πυμάτοισι κελεύων: πᾶς δ' ἄρα χαλκῷ
 λάμψ' ὥς τε στεροπὴ πατρὸς Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο.

‘Hector bore his well-rounded shield among the vanguard,
 Like a destructive star appears from the clouds
 All ablaze, then goes back into the shadowy clouds,
 So Hector, when he appeared now among the vanguard,
 Now giving orders among the stragglers: all of him shone
 In bronze like the lightning bolt of father Zeus, the aegis-bearer.’

The vehicles here – star, dark cloud (σκιόνετα), lightning – are all ominous and all familiar from Sanskrit epic. οὐλιος, ‘destructive’, advertises that the star is of the ill-auguring type – Hector here is seen from the Greek perspective. The surface meaning of the star simile accords with this: inventively, it assimilates the coming and going from view of an impropitious star to Hector’s coming and going from *Achaean* view as he ranges throughout the army.⁵²¹ Thanks to the specifying οὐλιος, it is no leap of faith from this literary

⁵²¹ I print the *paradosis*, which gives οὐλιος. West, ever committed to his editorial principles, follows Bergk in preferring the early variant Αὔλιος, mentioned by Aristonikos, and (supposedly) echoed by Callimachus and Apollonius Rhodius (respectively fr. 177.5f = Supp. Hell. 259. 5f., and 4. 1629f.). Hainsworth, Leaf, Paul Mazon, Thomas Allen, D. B. Monro, A. T. Murray, *LSJ*, van Thiel – in short almost everyone who is not M. L. West, Theodor Bergk, or Aristonikos rightly reads οὐλιος. The fact that the mediaeval manuscript tradition gives οὐλιος is by no means decisive, but, in this case, West’s reasons (as stated in his *Studies*, 2001, 211) are defective.

The comparison is founded on the star’s coming in and out of view, and Hector’s movement from μετὰ πρώτοισι to ἐν πυμάτοισι. He is visible to the facing Greek army only when he is among the fighters of the frontline, μετὰ πρώτοισι.

Secondly, comparing 22.26-31, West writes that ‘the “baleful” star would presumably be Sirius... and if Sirius were meant, it would surely have been identified more clearly’. But there is no reason to presume that every ill-auguring star is Sirius, and anyway it is questionable logic to presume something, then discount the presumption because it is only a presumption. Thirdly, Bergk’s observation that οὐλιος could be corrupted into Αὔλιος through a crasis οὔλιος is cited by West presumably out of confusion: as he himself writes, it is a pre-Aristarchan ancient variant reading, and not produced by scribal error. Moreover, οὐλιος is a Homeric *hapax*, and as such not a good contender for this sort of confusion (Αὔλιος would be a *hapax* in Homer too). Fourthly, we have seen how it is quite in Homer’s manner to specify whether an omen-in-simile is ill- or well-auguring, and οὐλιος would do this. And so there are compelling reasons to read οὐλιος that have nothing to do with traditional referentiality, though the latter would ultimately still allow for the same emergent meaning, with, in that case, context clarifying the star’s valency.

meaning to the emergent meaning that trouble is coming to the Greeks in the form of Hector.⁵²² This simile therefore complements the one discussed immediately above. There Hector is to be identified with the observer of a propitious star omen; here, observed by the Achaeans, through comparison he embodies an impropitious one. We have already seen this sort of balance in the two star similes applied to Achilles in book 22.

Hector is also unusually closely identified with the lightning omen-in-simile which follows – instead of the usual comparison of bronze with lightning, here Hector is himself the subject of ‘shone’ (λάμψ), and so the true tenor of the lightning simile. This variation serves to focus and clarify the scope of the omen contained in the simile. No nuance of different meaning is discernible between the lightning and the cloud-obscured baleful star: these are synonymous signs used contiguously to reinforce meaning, analogously to the employment of synonymous words in a sentence such as ‘he was well and truly a violent and bloodthirsty man’. These similes, in connotatively auguring ill for the Achaeans, balance Agamemnon’s and effectively prepare the way for the following simile (in which the two battle lines meet like two lines of reapers and battle evenly, neither side thinking of flight [67-73]), and set the stage for the ultimately even-handed and indecisive conflict in the rest of the book.

Reading in this way, new salience is given to the two star similes in book 6. On the battlefield, the seer Helenus recommends that Hecabe, offering her best *peplos*, pray and sacrifice to Athena to hold back the rampaging Diomedes, and sends Hector to Troy to deliver her the message. Calling to the other matrons, Hecabe goes to her chamber to select an offering from among her robes (πέπλοι VI.289),

τῶν ἔν’ ἀειραμένη Ἑκάβη φέρε δῶρον Ἀθήνῃ,
ὃς κάλλιστος ἔην ποικίλμασιν ἢ δὲ μέγιστος,
ἀστὴρ δ’ ὃς ἀπέλαμπεν· ἔκειτο δὲ νεῖατος ἄλλων.
βῆ δ’ ἰέναι, πολλὰ δὲ μετεσσεύοντο γεραιαί.

‘Hecabe took up one of her robes to give to Athena –

The loveliest for its embroidery, and the largest.

⁵²² Hainsworth, following Leaf, compares Hes. *Op.* 586-8 and 22.26-30, and identifies the star here with Sirius, but, though reasonable, it is not necessary to assume that the latter was the only ill-auguring star for the Greeks (1993, *ad loc.*).

It shone like a star, and lay beneath the others.

She set off, and the other matrons joined her.'

(VI.293-6)

The women then go to Athena's temple where they find Theano, her priestess. She sets the *peplos* in Athena's (statue's) lap and prays for her to break Diomedes' spear and have mercy on Troy, promising also a sacrifice of twelve bulls. Athena refuses the prayer: ὥς ἔφατ' εὐχομένη, ἀνένευε δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη, 'Thus she prayed, but Pallas Athena refused [the prayer] (VI.311).

In this case, the simile provides points of correspondence well suited to the context: the special Sidonian thread (290-2) glimmers brightly like a star. Although clothes often shine, only here in the *Iliad* is there a star simile of this kind.⁵²³ Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold compare XI.61-5 and XXII.25-32 for other examples of ominous star similes, and suggest that '[t]he simile adds to the sense of foreboding: the peplos shines like a star, but may not bring good fortune' (2010, on 295).⁵²⁴ Read with the totality of other star similes, this one signals to the audience not only the *peplos*' beauty, but also its impropriety (clear from the context and the audience's knowledge of Athena's views on the war). It prefigures Athena's extraordinary refusal of the prayer and coming Trojan losses on the battlefield.

A passage in the *Odyssey* is an instructive counterpart. The scene has just shifted from Ithaca to Sparta, where Telemachus has been interviewing Helen and Menelaus for news of his father. Athena has come to tell him to go home, and the king and queen decide to give him parting gifts. Helen goes to her store-room, and chooses a *peplos*:

ἔνθ' ἔσαν οἱ πέπλοι παμποίκιλοι, οὓς κάμεν αὐτή.

τῶν ἔν' ἀειραμένη Ἑλένη φέρε διὰ γυναικῶν,

ὃς κάλλιστος ἔην ποικίλμασιν ἡδὲ μέγιστος,

ἀστὴρ δ' ὥς ἀπέλαμπεν· ἔκειτο δὲ νεῖατος ἄλλων.

⁵²³ The parallels cited by Stoevesandt, 2016, *ad loc.* are not precise: they involve comparisons between garments and the sun (xix.234), the sun or the moon (xxiv.148), and between a veil and the sun (14.185). These are the same parallels as those noted by Scott (1974, 67). We know the sun is a star; the Greeks did not. There is no reason to think that they are connotatively synonymous. For shining clothes, further to the above examples, see also vi.74 and 3.419.

⁵²⁴ They continue, 'for a possible exception: 401n., though Astyanax too is doomed' – this simile is discussed immediately below.

‘There she kept the elaborate robes which she herself had made.

Helen, divine among women, took up one of them,

The loveliest for its embroidery, and the largest.

It shone like a star, and lay beneath the others.’

(xv.105-8. xv.107-8 = VI.294-5)

Menelaus then picks out and gives to Telemachus a gorgeous gold and silver mixing bowl, given to him by the king of the Sidonians (makers of the Iliadic *peplos*’ thread). Helen gives the *peplos* to Telemachus, and says it is for his future bride, that until then it should be looked after by his mother, and that she wishes him a safe return to Ithaca. Telemachus receives it with joy (ὁ δ’ ἐδέξατο χαίρων, xv.130). We have seen above how joy can be an appropriate response to a good omen, or in this case a *peplos* which shines like a good omen. Especially in the *Odyssey*, χαίρω is one of the key words which is often used to denote this joy, as at X.274, xvii.545-7, xx.89-90, xx.120.

Again fundamental is the recognition of the dual nature of signs in Homeric Epic: not just the same sign, but the same sign in the same words may, depending on the context, augur well or ill. Here, of course, the context makes the garment propitious. This is one of various ways in which this Odyssean passage is the comic mirror image of the tragic Iliadic passage.⁵²⁵ The dual nature of omen motifs is the key to this responson. Here, an omen-in-simile works along with the omens and encouraging words elsewhere in book 15 to foster an air of positivity and expectancy as Telemachus safely returns to Ithaca in preparation for the poem’s triumphant denouement.

Other similes are nested in more ambiguous contexts which require more careful unpicking. After the rejected sacrifice, Hector reproves Paris for not fighting and comforts the self-reproaching Helen. He

⁵²⁵ I summarise the correspondences in the following table –

<i>Odyssey</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
Propitious star simile	Impropitious star simile
Gift from senior (Helen) to junior (Telemachus)	Gift from junior (Hecabe) to senior (Athena)
Gift accompanied by prayer for safety of receiver	Gift accompanied by prayer for safety of giver
Gift accepted (with joy)	Gift refused
Prayer for safety is successful, and receiver (Telemachus) avoids danger	Prayer for safety is unsuccessful, and giver (Hecabe / Trojans) remains in danger

I am concerned here with vertical reference to the tradition, and not horizontal reference to other passages or texts (intertextuality). A neo-analyst would draw different conclusions. For more gift / prayer scenes similar to this one, see de Jong, 2001, on xv.109-32.

goes to find his distraught wife on the battlements where she is watching the battle in anguish. Seeing him and running towards him,

ἥ οἱ ἔπειτ' ἦντησ', ἅμα δ' ἀμφίπολος κίεν αὐτῇ
παῖδ' ἐπὶ κόλπῳ ἔχουσ' ἀταλάφρονα, νήπιον αὐτῶς,
Ἑκτορίδην ἀγαπητόν, ἀλίγκιον ἀστέρι καλῶι,

'Then she met him, and with her went the maid
Holding the tender child at her breast, baby that he was,
Hector's beloved son, like a lovely star.'

(VI.399-401)

Again, critics have been divided over how to interpret this star simile. For Stoevesandt, it straightforwardly 'probably refers to the loveliness emanating from the child' (2016, *ad loc.*). By contrast, for Moulton, it is the association with the sense of foreboding in the previous simile, which he takes to be dependent on the association with the ill-starred journey home from Sparta, that determines the 'foreshadowing of evil' also in this simile (1977, 24-26). Graziosi and Haubold do not try to reconcile the perceived inconsistency, writing of an 'endearing description' but noting that the phrase 'also has more ominous connotations' elsewhere, and quote Moulton (2010, *ad loc.*). Kirk's position is similar: quoting Moulton, he writes that his idea of the second star simile keeping the ominous charge is 'just possible', but also that 'the star that is emphatically characterised as καλῶ seems chosen... to show the child as sweet and loveable' (1990, on VI.400-1).⁵²⁶

Kirk makes the fundamental point. We have already seen more than once how the poet specifies or hints at whether a sign is to be taken as ill-or well-auguring.⁵²⁷ Stars are often granted this sort of specificity, as at XI.62 (οὐλιος), XXII.30-31 (κακὸν... σῆμα; φέρει πολλὸν πυρετὸν δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσιν), and especially XXII.318 (κάλλιστος ἐν οὐρανῷ ἵσταται ἀστήρ).⁵²⁸ A connotative meaning cannot be at

⁵²⁶ See also Buxton, 2004, 143-4, who seems to endorse Moulton's reading, and sees it as an example of 'potential definitional imprecision' in some Homeric similes. Such seemingly imprecise similes are indeed, as he writes, brief, concentrated, and intensive, but they are those things through evocation of tradition-determined resonances, and should not be compared to the open-ended vagueness of Aeschylean metaphors.

⁵²⁷ See VIII.559, X.8, XVII.548, also VIII.171.

⁵²⁸ The κάλλιστος *peplos* at VI.294 does not determine that the star simile is well-auguring. It is always the simile vehicle which counts, and epithets and qualities applied to the tenor are not relevant in establishing the meaning of the vehicle emergent or otherwise.

odds with a literal meaning. Nor does a foreboding note make sense in the simile's *immediate* context. This absurdity can be illustrated by, for a moment, making explicit the implicit – 'clutching to her breast the tender child, still a baby, the beloved son of Hector, like a beautiful *death-auguring* star'.

We have seen above how the poet associates a star simile with a particular character viewpoint, in a technique similar to focalisation, in order to clarify to whom the ominous import is meant to apply.⁵²⁹ Here, there is a related technique which is closer to the sort of character focalisation in similes for which de Jong has argued:⁵³⁰ this simile focalises Hector, and its beautiful star points forwards to a happy future for his son.⁵³¹ Again, the *immediate* context is clarificatory: it is, as Graziosi and Haubold argue, rich in focalising language and 'accumulates epithets and words of endearment', including ἀταλάφρονα, 'tender', νήπιον, 'a babe', ἀγαπητόν, 'beloved', and finally ἀλίγκιον ἀστέρι καλῶι, 'like a lovely star' (400–1; 2010, on 400–3). Immediately after, Hector looks at his child in tender, smiling silence (404), and the name Ἀστυάνακτ' hints at the same glorious future (403).⁵³² To use de Jong's terms, the primary function of the simile is to illustrate the beauty of Astyanax; the secondary function, focalising Hector, makes Astyanax the well-auguring symbol of hope and deliverance for the Trojans.

The audience's knowledge of the eventual fate of Astyanax creates not ambiguity or contradiction, but evokes the tragic gap between Hector's delusive hopes and Andromache's true fatalism, freighting the simile with pathos. Soon afterwards, Hector makes explicit the implicit, wishing for a future in which Astyanax will be the renowned king of the Trojans, even better than his father (476–81); later still, he talks of the possibility that Troy will one day again be prosperous and free of the blight of the Achaeans (526–9). Oliver Taplin perspicaciously sees this tension as determined and poetically true – '[t]he scene as a whole contains conflicting hopes and fears which make sense in human terms. Hector fears he will fail but hopes he will not' (1992, 123). Hector's tenderness and hopes for his son are expressed in the focalised vocabulary, in the simile which focalises his point of view, and, later, explicitly in a prayer in direct speech. They are not incompatible with his and Andromache's fatalism, but delicately balanced against it, as hopes against fears. Knowledge of the ultimately dismal fate of Hector and his family makes the hopeful affection in this scene pathetic. It should not make a modern reader understand ἀστέρι καλῶι either as a sign of ill or even as ambiguous.

⁵²⁹ Specifically Priam at XXII.25–32, and Hector and the Trojans at VIII.554–61, also Hector and the Achaeans at XI.61–66.

⁵³⁰ 2004, 123–36. She writes of the 'primary function' of some similes as explicating and elaborating on their narrative context, and the 'secondary function' as expressing the feelings of characters.

⁵³¹ For a related example of traditional referentiality being used by the poet to emphasise the tragic gap between Hector's imminent doom and his hopes for success, see Kelly's discussion of ἐκ Διός and XXII.280, 2007, 168–9.

⁵³² ἦτοι ὁ μὲν μείδησεν ἰδὼν ἐς παῖδα σιωπῇ, 'and he smiled silently as he looked at his child' – this is Hector's only smile in the poem.

Star similes bring out to the full the difference in use between similes in Greek and Sanskrit Epic. Although shooting stars are a far more common vehicle than stars *per se*, these are not unexampled. At *Mhb.* 6. 67.27, ‘nakṣatravimalābhāni śastrāṇi’, weapons shine spotlessly like stars’. A beautiful simile comes at *Mhb.* 7. 129.24: ‘tataḥ sā bhārātī senā maṇihemavibhūṣitā dyaur ivāsīt sanakṣatrā rajanyām, ‘Then that army, adorned with gold and jewels, was like the starry sky at night’. Just as Athena’s course from heaven to earth was described as like a shooting star’s at IV.74-85 (see above), the dead Droṇa ascends from earth to heaven ‘vidhūmām iva saṁyāntīm ulkāṁ prajvalitām iva’, ‘shooting like a smokeless, flaming meteor’ (7. 165.57). Projectile weapons are by far the most common tenor for shooting stars. *Mhb.* 6. 75.35 is representative: ‘śaktim cikṣepa saṁkruddho maholkām jvalitām iva’, ‘Enraged, he launched his spear like a huge blazing meteor’.⁵³³ This can be creatively varied, for example, in the case of a javelin which misses its mark: ‘nyapatad dharaṇīprṣṭhe maholkeva gataprabhā’, ‘it fell to the ground like a lustreless comet’ (*Mhb.* 6. 100.31), or applied to chariot-lamps on a dark battlefield (7. 144.36). Where Greek Epic, then, as we have seen, invests the kind of rich meaning into star similes which responds to close analysis, Sanskrit Epic prefers to use short similes in quick succession as adornments. Yet the overarching similarity in technique is still clear: both traditions attribute a foreboding meaning to stars, using them with particular assiduity in similes in battle, where their ominousness can shine bright. Homer’s interest in artfully varying focalisation should not obscure the overarching similarity in technique, which is best explained as the vestige of a common poetic tradition.

Origins and Deviations: *Rg-Veda* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*

The *RV* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s use of this system of associations is far less straightforward than that of the *Mahābhārata*. The following section will examine this claim and find that these differences say much about what kind of text each is. For reasons of space, I treat only lightning – the most commonly used image and the one whose status as an omineme is most firmly established.

⁵³³ For comparisons with a javelin or spear, see 4. 52.18; 5.182.5, 182.8, 182.10; 6. 88.5, 100.31, 107.12; 7. 67.65, 90.22, 114.48, 154.54; 8. 10.21, 20.21; 9. 16.41; 10. 6.13; with arrows, see 4. 53.38; 6. 44.31; 7. 84.10, 107.34, 120.86; or with a thrown mace, see 6. 81.36; 7.14.20; 9. 10.44.

The *Rg-Veda*

As I wrote in my second chapter, the *RV*, being a collection of hymns and not narrative poetry, has little room for using ominemes as narrative devices, and in general shows less interest in drawing on these traditional systems of referentiality. Its aims and concerns are reflected in its own associative pathways which link divine and mortal realms, above all at the moment of sacrifice. Western scholarship calls these ‘homologies’; the indigenous word, attested from late Vedic times onwards, is ‘bandhu’, ‘link’, cognate with English ‘bind’. A bull, for example, stands for the ritual drink Soma; ritual fire, the sun; a cow, the earth.⁵³⁴ This distinctive feature of Vedic literature certainly seems, from the Indo-European comparative viewpoint, an innovation. They are nowhere to be found in Indian Epic poetry. The significance of these homologies is metaphysical and theological rather than literary, and no strict analogy between the two kinds of association can be drawn. But the correspondence in underlying function of the two associative systems, which both use one object to evoke something which goes beyond it, often through metaphor and simile, would explain the scarcity of ominemes in the *RV*. In other words, the Indian tradition shows a generic split: narrative epic poetry and hymnic poetry use imagery in constitutively distinctive ways.

It could be objected that, given the earlier attestation of Vedic poetry, the difference in associative systems is in fact a diachronic one, with the *RV* faithfully preserving the only state of affairs of its time. On this view, all similarities in Epic ominemes in Greece and India which I adduce would be a mirage, the mere consequence of the later development of such features in India, whether due to polygenesis or diffusion. Yet this is wildly implausible. Apart from the practical difficulties of diffusion (for which see the introduction to my second chapter), and the inherent implausibility of such polygenesis, it would entail the unconscionable assumption that Vedic literature – and especially the *RV* – is a representative record of the general literary landscape of their time. It is not: we could hardly, for example, reconstruct the entirety of the Hebrew Bible from the book of Psalms, let alone that tradition’s recorded and unrecorded amatory, popular, and narrative works. A far more reliable guide to the reconstruction of lost earlier narrative poetry is the earliest narrative poetry which we do have – that is, the earliest layers of the Epics. The diachronic objection would also entail the inherently improbable positions that at some point between the time of the *RV* and Epic’s first attestation, narrative poetry would have dropped the hymnic homology system and developed an extremely sophisticated system of referentiality. It is not a plausible

⁵³⁴ As Renou puts it, ‘le “mot” est donc bien la piste immatérielle qu’on suit pour identifier les réalités cachées’ (1958, 22). See further Jamison and Brereton, 2014, 23-24 for a rich synthesis; Jan Gonda, 1975, 248-53 for a fuller if somewhat idiosyncratic treatment; Michael Witzel, 1996, 8-9, and the pioneering study of Oldenberg, 1919.

story. Much more appealing is the position that the two systems' important differences are constitutive of two distinct literary genres. Each genre has that adapted to its interests (altars, offerings, and cattle, as against weapons, armour, and death) and to its aims (elaboration of a worldview which integrates the immediate with the divine and cosmological, as against tools which shape narrative, create drama, and massage audience expectations). Given the specialised, idiosyncratic nature of the Vedic homology system, its intimate connection with religion (an area of great innovation in daughter traditions), and its absence in Greece, it is reasonable to think it an innovation within the Indic (or Indo-Iranian) tradition.

However, in those few places where the *RV* draws on martial language, the associative system of Epic intrudes. For example, a very late hymn (but still ca. 1000-900 BC) added to the end of the sixth Maṇḍala riddlingly praises not gods but weapons. It opens 'jīmūtāsyeva bhavati pratīkaṁ yad varmī yāti samadāṁ upasthē | anāviddhayā tanvā jaya tvaṁ sa tvā varmaṇo mahimā pipartu, 'His mien is like that of a thundercloud, when he drives armored into the lap of battles.⁵³⁵ With an unpierceable body, conquer! Let the greatness of your *armor* carry you through' (VI. 75.1).⁵³⁶ 'jīmūtāsyeva', 'like a thundercloud', is emphatically fronted. According to Jamison, it 'signals that we are out of the core *RVic* lexical domain: this word for 'thunder-cloud' is found only here in the *RV*'.⁵³⁷ To develop Jamison's observation – the hymn programmatically signals its deviance to the audience not only lexically but also by its use of a comparison traditional to narrative, not hymnic poetry: the warrior is like a thundercloud. Jamison translates 'his mien', i.e. the warrior's appearance, yet the Sanskrit is vague. A more literal translation could keep the ambiguity – 'Like a thundercloud is the appearance, when, armed, he drives...'. It is unclear whether the appearance is that of the warrior, the armour, or the driving into battle. The comparison is of the untethered type, further tying it to those seen above in Epic.

The Maruts, storm deities associated with Indra, are a common subject of hymns. Figured as a group of several dozen, their characteristics are appropriately tempestuous, and they are often figured as soldier-like, replete with war-chariots, missiles, and armour. They are portrayed as wielding lightning bolts in their hands, with real spears on their back (V. 54.11). Or, drawing more closely on Epic imagery, they are themselves like lightning, with the rain like their weapon, as at VII. 56.13, 'vi vidyuto na vṛṣṭibhī rūcānā anu svadhām āyudhaiḥ yacchāmānāḥ', 'Like lightning flashes shining forth with the rains, (you are) holding yourselves ready with your weapons according to your nature'. At V. 54.11, they grip in their hands lightning which shines like fire, just like Indra does at I. 52.6 – a comparison which we will see inverted immediately below.

⁵³⁵ There is a slight incongruity. The subject of these clauses must be the warrior who is then apostrophised.

⁵³⁶ Jamison's translation italicises the answer to the riddle.

⁵³⁷ *Ad loc.*, taken from her online commentary.

Yet sometimes the poets' techniques are more subtle. In a comparison familiar both from Homer and from the *Mahābhārata*, their lightning is conventionally figured as spears. For example, at I. 168.5, after the enumeration of various other qualities, they are referred to as 'ṛṣṭividyuto', 'lightning-speared', or, more literally, 'for whom lightning is the spear'.⁵³⁸ V. 52 uses the same compound. After the hymn's first section concludes in ring composition, with the fifth verse recalling the first, the Maruts arrive – 'ā ruḥmair ā yudhā narā ṛṣvā ṛṣṭīr āsrkṣata | anv enāṁ ahā vīdyuto māruto jajjhātīr iva', 'here with brilliants, here with battle, the lofty men have launched their spears aloft. Following them (came) the lightning flashes – following the Maruts, [thundering] as if giggling'.⁵³⁹ As she explains in her online commentary, Jamison changed her mind after the translation went to print, and now takes 'ṛṣvā', 'lofty', as *apo koinou*. As Jamison seems there to allude, it is simply vague in its reference in a way impossible to convey in contemporary English – another example of the RV's taste for determinate ambiguity. Similarly unexpressed is the precise relation between the Maruts and the lightning flashes. Are the bolts to be identified with spears, or does the extraordinary, anthropomorphising simile insinuate greater autonomy than this?⁵⁴⁰

Verse 13 marks the end of the poem's second section by the ring-compositional response – 'ya ṛṣvā ṛṣṭividyutaḥ kavayaḥ santi vedhasaḥ | tam ṛṣe mārutaṁ gaṇaṁ nāmaṣyā ramayā girā', 'To this lofty Marut flock, lightning-speared, who are seers and ritual adepts, pay homage, o seer, and bring it to a halt / delight it with song'.⁵⁴¹ The conundrums of the sixth verse can be solved when read retrospectively after this one, in a process which Jamison calls 'repair'.⁵⁴² The use of 'ṛṣvā' in clear alignment with Maruts implies that it should retrospectively resolve the ambiguity in verse 5 – it is the Maruts not the spears which are 'lofty'. Yet, to extend Jamison's idea, the relation between the Maruts and the lightning is also 'repaired' by the compound 'ṛṣṭividyutaḥ' (the same as is used at I. 168.5), which clarifies that the

⁵³⁸ The full verse runs, 'ko vo 'ntar māruta ṛṣṭividyuto rejāti tmanā hanvéva jihvayā | dhanvacyutā iṣām na yāmāni purupraiṣā ahanyo naitāsaḥ', 'O you Maruts with lightning as your spears, who is the one among you who sets (the fixed places) to quivering by your own breath'.

⁵³⁹ Breaking my rule, I here adapt Jamison's translation.

⁵⁴⁰ Jamison's translation of 'jajjhātīr iva' as 'giggling (girls)' seeks to convey the tone of this arresting, onomatopoeic word, which, following Paul Thieme, she takes to be from 'pedagogical discourse', as she writes in her online commentary (with bibliography). The literal translation for which I substitute it points towards an aural point of comparison – peals of thunder as peals of giggles. Yet even if it brings a 'whiff of family life', it should not be taken to evoke the lightning's or the Maruts feebleness, but, rather, the ease and abandon of total confidence in war. For other strikingly homely similes for objects of war, see below, RV VI.75.

⁵⁴¹ Here again I adapt Jamison's translation.

⁵⁴² See her commentary, *ad loc.* Jamison, 2006 gives a full treatment of her idea, treating also this hymn. At 2014, 67, she summarises the notion – 'The poet sets a problem—lexical, syntactic, or thematic—earlier in the hymn and then "repairs" this problem later in the hymn by substituting the expected word, syntactic construction, or thematic element for the problematic one. The audience is thus first put off-balance by a disturbance in the poetry and then rebalanced when the superficial solecism is fixed.'

lightning bolts are indeed to be identified with spears in the Epic manner. This verse ends the section with more ring-composition, before the hymn's second half shifts attention to the ritual moment.

At 8. 7.25, another striking compound is used – they are 'vīdyuddhastā', 'lightning-handed'. In view of the other passages, this is to be interpreted as 'having lightning in their hand' and not 'having a hand which was lightning'. '-hasta' is a common compound head applied to men holding weaponry in Epic, and so the echo of more common collocations such as 'spear / bow / mace in hand' underlies the Vedic usage, creating a spectral comparison. In short, the homology Marut / warrior leads the *RV*'s language towards the bourne of Epic. Where it rubs up against the martial, Epic language is absorbed through the generic boundary, and Vedic homology blends with Epic referentiality.

A late hymn compares the radiance of Agni to lightning. The previous verse has dwelt on his constructive role in the preparation of food. This one, in an abrupt inversion, evokes his destructive side – 'taṇā śrīyo varṣyāsyeva vīdyutāś cītrās cikitra uṣasām na kṛtavāḥ | yad oṣādhīr abhisṛṣṭo vanāni ca pari svayam cinuṣe annam āsyé', 'Your beauties,⁵⁴³ brilliant like the lightning flashes of a rain-bearing (cloud), show brightly like the beacons of the dawns, when, set loose toward the plants and woods, you encompass them yourself as food in your mouth' (X. 91.5). Whereas Agni helps to cook food in the previous verse, in this one he predatorily feeds himself in wildfire form. The simile's details recall Epic – the point of comparison is brightness or beauty, an unobtrusive fulcrum which allows further resonances to breathe. The image is also elaborated along the lines of Epic, with the lightning coming in a raincloud. The theme is fully realised a couple of verses later, as wildfire Agni, goaded by the wind, surges through fields of dry crop – 'ā te yatante rathyoṣṭhā yathā prthak chardhāmsy agne ajarāṇi dhakṣataḥ', 'your unaging troops [=flames] take up their places separately like charioteers, as you go burning, Agni' (X. 91.7). Connotation blooms into denotation. As he evokes Agni's deadliest form, the poet draws on the imagery and associations of martial Epic, making signals that an audience versed in both Hymn and Epic would surely have understood. Other, generally late *RVic* poets keep him company, as, in their search for novelty and desire to push the boundaries of the hymnic genre, they draw on the resources of other genres.

⁵⁴³ The Sanskrit plural is clumsy in English, but kept by Jamison, presumably, in order to preserve the poet's evocation of Agni's manifold nature. Given the emphasis of my interpretation, a more literal translation such as 'splendours', or 'lustres' would be preferable.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*

Throughout this chapter and my thesis as a whole, I draw more extensively on the *Mahābhārata* than the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This is partly because, trivially, the former poem's greater length and heterogeneity provides more evidence – of two equally traditional works, the longer will provide more traditional material. Yet the two poems are also importantly different in kind. Although western nomenclature yokes them together, emic terminology distinguishes between *Itihāsa*, the *Mahābhārata*, and *AdiKāvya*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The two poems, although sharing much in language, outlook, and social context, differ strikingly in their taste for imagery, with the *Rāmāyaṇa* showing an inexhaustible relish for visual embellishment. In this, it looks forward to the *Kāvya* genre, where the taste for opulent imagery is taken to extraordinary heights. Although there is no doubt that both are the products of a long oral tradition, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is more closely associated with its author, Vālmīki, and is obviously much more substantially the work of one hand. The magnitude and mixedness of the *Mahābhārata* preclude in themselves so unitary a compositional history, and its *mise-en-abîme* structure and frequent sub-tales stage its own authorial promiscuity. In this way, the *Mahābhārata* is the more *traditional* in the etymological sense – the more handed-down. If I pay more attention to it than to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, this was not my intention at the outset but the natural result of these differences.

This tension in the *Rāmāyaṇa* between individual and traditional composition plays out on the level of simile: sometimes the poet exploits certain images, like lightning, for their ominous resonance in just the way that we have seen so far. Above all, he does so when his subject matter approaches war, and so the sixth book, the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, 'Book of war', is greatly over-represented in my thesis. Just as in *RV*, treatment of a certain subject invites the use of a certain technique, and so the omen scenes at the Rākṣasas' entry into battle (see above), or Mālyavān's pre-battle warning speech (see the next chapter), are moments when the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s debt to tradition are most laid bare. Yet, as we will see, sometimes the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet disfigures or ignores traditional resonances. I will argue that this alternation between regard and disregard is deeply revealing of the kind of poem it is. It also, incidentally, throws into relief how much the other three poems share, and how easy it would have been for them, like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, to dismantle tradition or scooch away from its conventions. The *Rāmāyaṇa* usefully reminds us that, universal as the ominous nature of, say, lightning may be, that does not entail equal universality in the uses to which it is put.

I start with the similes which use lightning to spell doom, as in the other three Epics. At 4. 29.21, for example, Rāma's bow 'vidyudgaṇopamam', 'looks like a streak of lightning' (cf. 1. 73.18 for another

lightning-bow simile). Elsewhere, arrows are like lightning bolts (e.g. 3. 6.19, 27.15; 6. 34.29, 48.3), or a mace (3. 28.25) – or, as in the *RV*, armour (6.53.24) and spears (e.g. 6. 47.19, 88.19). Sometimes, the menacing resonance of lightning is applied in similes to fresher, less traditional tenors, such as an attack (1. 25.14), or a blow (4. 16.21), or the eyes of a Rākṣasa about to fight (6. 48.53), or indeed Hanumān torching Lanka with his blazing tail (5. 52.6).⁵⁴⁴ Again like the other three Epics, it elaborates the traditional comparison through creative variation. Particularly effective is the simile which accompanies the fearsome demon Atikāya into the action: ‘āṇṛto rathaśaktībhir vidyudbhir iva toyadaḥ’, ‘surrounded by his chariot-spears, like a raincloud by lightning bolts’ (6. 59.13). The *Rāmāyaṇa* poet’s taste for the visual predisposes him against the untethered type of omineme simile seen above. He finds here, rather, a tenor effortlessly appropriate to the conventional vehicle, which, in his hands, becomes informative about the disposition of what it describes and adds extra piquancy to the image’s ominous resonance.

As the two prodigious monkey brothers Sugrīva and Vālin are duelling, two unique similes introduce a note of irony:

‘tataḥ sutumulaṁ yuddhaṁ vālisugrīvayor abhūt...

talair aśanikalpaiś ca vajrakalpaiś ca muṣṭibhiḥ

jaghnatuḥ samare ’nyonyaṁ bhrātarau krodhamūrchitau’

‘There ensued a riotous fight between Vālin and Sugrīva...

Like thunderbolts their palms, their fists like lightning,

Overcome with rage the brothers beat each other in the brawl.’

(4. 12.17-18)

Since monkeys in Vālmīki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* never wear armour or use human weapons like swords or spears, the poet here tailors the tenor of the traditional lightning simile to his simian subject. The comparisons do not aim to be informative about the monkeys’ anatomy, but to dignify their contest through the traditional resonance of the vehicles. Nevertheless, the poet handles tradition ludically, embracing the absurdity in the application of the magniloquent language of *Itihāsa* to wrestling monkeys. The artful chiasmus (which I ape in my translation) heightens the effect. Recollection of the traditional tenors of the comparison in the

⁵⁴⁴ For lightning as part of an admixture including other ominemes, see e.g. 6. 57.22, 63.6, 64.6.

Mahābhārata – and in Homer too, for that matter – is vital to the appreciation of how the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet, characteristically, ironises and revivifies tradition in the passage.

The abduction of Sītā, one of the poem’s central catastrophes, is accompanied by an omen scene, but *Rāmāyaṇa*-style. Its great instructive value in that poem’s treatment of ominemes justifies a broader treatment, which will serve as the context for the passage’s three lightning similes. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa have been distracted by the demon Mārīca, who has taken the form of a magical deer.⁵⁴⁵ Alone, Sītā perceives from the behaviour of the birds and beasts that something terrible is about to happen (3. 50.3-5). As Rāvaṇa approaches, she winds herself around a tree like a vine and cries out to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa for help (5-8). As Rāvaṇa grabs her by the hair (8), the whole universe is covered in darkness (9), just as at the battle over Patroclus’ corpse above. A little later, in a characteristically Indian mixture and repetition of motifs, ‘hriyamāṇāṁ tu vaidehīm dṛṣṭvā dīno divākaraḥ pravindhvastaprabhaḥ śrīmān āsīt pāṇḍuramaṇḍalaḥ’, ‘the bright sun, when he saw Sītā being abducted, depressed, threw off his lustre and his disc grew wan’ (36). The anthropomorphosis of the sun is here much more similar to the Aristophanic and Odyssean passages discussed above than anything in the *Mahābhārata* – poets innovate towards each other to make for a weak inheritance. After the darkness falls, Brahmā sees (‘dṛṣṭvā’) Sītā in distress with his divine eye (‘divyena cakṣuṣā’, for which see p. 118), and inscrutably remarks “‘kṛtaṁ kāryam’”, “‘What must be done has been done’” (10). The distich bears obvious similarities to Zeus’ seeing (ἰδὼν) his son Sarpedon’s imminent death, and, after consideration, accepting the inevitability of his death (XVI.432-62). After all, just like Brahmā’s sententious resignation, Zeus must recognise, as Hera says, that his death is “‘πάσαι πεπρωμένον αἴσῃ’”, “‘fated by destiny long ago’” (442).⁵⁴⁶

Characteristically attentive to Sītā’s appearance, the poet soon launches into almost twenty distiches of description. Fronted to pole position is an important simile: ‘taptābharaṇasarvāṅgī pītakaūseyavāsanī rarāja rājaputrī tu vidyut saudāmanī yathā’, ‘All her limbs ornamented with pure gold, wearing yellow silk, the princess shone like well-garlanded lightning’ (13).⁵⁴⁷ The ominous resonance is

⁵⁴⁵ The poet describes the deer’s tongue ‘mukhān nihsarantīm meghād iva śatahradām’, ‘darting out of its mouth like lightning out of a cloud’ (3. 41.26), in an elegant forewarning of the danger – and imagery – to come.

⁵⁴⁶ The similar scene-shape and phrasing is no co-incidence, but attests to the two cultures’ similar conceptions of fate and the divine – more weak inheritance.

⁵⁴⁷ ‘saudāmanī’, the epithet of the lightning, is hard to translate. Pollock, 1991, *ad loc.*, notes that the collocation is formulaic, but this observation is of limited use – this is most likely its first attestation and it is formulaic only in Purana and Kavya. Its two appearances in the *Mahābhārata* are in late layers – the first in the sub-tale of Nala, where it is applied to Damayantī (3. 50.12), and the second in the sub-tale of Sukanyā, where the Asvins praise her as such (3. 123.6). On balance, it is very probable that both were written after the passage at hand, and possibly influenced by it, given its prominence and the fact that the context is always a description of a woman’s beauty. Pollock, following an unknown lexicographer, takes ‘sudāman’ to mean ‘cloud’, but this looks like a guess based on its context in this collocation. It is theoretically possible that ‘saudāman’ goes back to a name of a person or place, ‘sudāman’, but such a meaning would be unlikely and trivial. Lightning is nowhere else in Sanskrit Epic given a geographical epithet, nor associated with a particular place. The only plausible name to invoke would be the

appropriate to the disastrous situation, but, untypically, the tenor is not the aggressor, but the victim. The poet opportunely reminds us that Sītā is wearing lightning-like clothing – yellow silk (as he had already described at 3. 44.12 and 44.15 – perhaps laying the groundwork for this simile), and so he brings the omineme together with his habitual concern with Sītā's appearance. Indeed, this inveterate interest in the visual description of women is another feature that situates the *Rāmāyaṇa* poet in the tradition of *Kāvya*, rather than that of the *Mahābhārata*. Here, then, the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* unites the two genres: the vehicle of an *Itihāsa* simile combined with the tenor of a *Kāvya* simile brings together the *Itihāsa* effect of foreboding ill with the *Kāvya* interest in evoking female beauty.

The next eight verses are entirely descriptive, containing ten metaphors and similes. Although they contain dark, portentous imagery, it is idiosyncratic, not traditional in nature, and seldom paralleled in the *Mahābhārata*, let alone Homer. Rāvaṇa looks like a mountain consumed by fire (14); her golden dress like a cloud coloured red at sunset (16); her face like a lotus ripped from its stalk (17), like the moon glimpsed between dark clouds (18); she golden, and he, dark, seemed like a lustrous band in dark sapphire (21).⁵⁴⁸ Then, following on from the previous line's contrast between the two characters' hues, the poet revisits and refashions his simile. Sītā 'vidyudghanam ivāviśya śuśubhe', 'shone like lightning inside a cloud' (22). The surrounding imagery detracts only a little from the omineme's resonance, which remains there for those alive to it.

Sītā sheds her jewellery and garlands of flowers, which fall to the ground (23-26). Then her bejewelled anklet 'vidyunmaṇḍalasamkāśam papāta madhurasvanam', 'which was like a disc of lightning, fell, sweetly sounding' (27). Even in view of Sanskrit Epic's high tolerance for repetitiousness, to repeat the same simile vehicle three times in fourteen distiches is striking. The reiteration in itself evokes the repetitious style of omen-scenes in *Itihāsa*, but the traditional simile is inventively remade with a novel tenor, and the characteristically delicately observed addition of a new point of comparison: the round anklet is like a *disc* of lightning.⁵⁴⁹ The simile, read closely and situated in its traditional context,

weather-god Indra's – so, apparently, Monier-Williams *ad* 'saudāmanī' – but the epithet 'sudāman' is never applied to him. 'dāman', however, is a common Epic word meaning 'string, garland', and the derivative of the compound might just mean 'well-garlanded' and refer to an especially dramatic tangle of lightning. Lightning comes in garlands elsewhere, as at 2. 61.8 ('vidyunmālī... parjanya', 'lightning-garlanded Parjanya'), and 6. 87. 25, where arrows cover over the sky 'ghanair ivātapāpāye vidyunmālāsamākulaiḥ', 'like clouds at the start of the monsoon thick with garlands of lightning'. The collocation was conventional enough that there is in the *Rāmāyaṇa* a Rākṣasa called 'Vidyunmālī', literally 'having garlands of lightning' (at 4. 32.10, 5. 5.18, in 6.33, he meets his comeuppance in battle). See also below for a bracelet falling 'vidyunmaṇḍalasamkāśam', 'like a disc of lightning' (6. 50.27), and indeed 'ghūrṇitavīcimālam', 'a garland of turbid waves' (6. 61.48), 'mālayeva balākānām' 'like a garland of cranes' (4. 12.37), and 'nakṣatramālayā', 'a garland of stars' (4. 14.8). The meaning 'well-garlanded', therefore, would be firmly within Vālmīki's manner.

⁵⁴⁸ On the meaning of this difficult distich, see Pollock, 1983, 287-88.

⁵⁴⁹ Pollock, 1991, *ad loc.*, takes 'vidyunmaṇḍalasamkāśam' as adverbial, with the 'maṇḍala' element describing the curve of the falling anklet and lightning, translating 'gently tinkling it fell like an arc of lightning'. But 'arc' would

underlines the perversity of Rāvaṇa's attack: the tenor of the lightning simile is not the proper traditional one – the glint of armour or weaponry, as found in the *Mahābhārata* (and Homer), but a lady's accessory. The anklet's other qualifier, 'madhurasvanam', 'sweetly-sounding', sharpens the incongruousness. The simile's subversion of poetic norms is mimetic of Rāvaṇa's subversion of social norms.

Much of the same can be said for another simile which follows shortly after: 'tām maholkām ivākāśe dīpyamānām svatejasā jahārākāśam āviśya sītām vaiśravaṇānujaḥ', 'Sītā was like a huge meteor blazing with inborn radiance as the son of Viśravaṇa [Rāvaṇa] snatched her and took to the sky' (29). Again, the poet selects an image which in describing Sītā's beauty both resonantly marks the disaster of her abduction and points forward to the strife which it will occasion. Characteristically for the meticulous Vālmīki, the meteor analogy is appropriate for the woman as she streaks across the sky. Descanting on the astronomical theme, the next two distiches compare her falling adornments to, again, falling stars (30) and her necklace to a bright moon (31). The rest of the Kāṇḍa relates the outraged reaction of various flora and fauna (32-42). Throughout it, the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s imaginative reuse of traditional ominemes has been on full show. In its taste for affective detail, pathetic fallacy, and sensual visual description, the scene is consummately Vālmīki-esque. And unlike Homer and the *Mahābhārata* poets, vehicles are carefully tethered to tenors by informative points of comparison. Nevertheless, studded liberally among its idiosyncrasies are conventional motifs which bind the passage inextricably to its tradition – both Indian and Greco-Indic.

Other parts of the poem bear witness to these similes' importance in their scene. The vulture Sampati, in his report to the monkey-prince Aṅgada, devotes four distiches to the news of Sītā's abduction. He says that he saw Rāvaṇa carrying off a lovely young woman, who struggled in his grip and cried out for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (4. 57.15-16). He imagines it must have been Sītā, since she was calling out Rāma's name (18). There is only distich of description, and it picks up our simile: 'sūryaprabheva śailāgre tasyāḥ kauśeyam uttamam asite rākṣase bhāti yathā vā taḍidambude', 'her choice silk shone against the dark Rākṣasa like the light of the sun on a mountain peak, or like lightning in a cloud' (17). The line confirms that the lightning simile is central to the effect which the poet wishes to create in the scene.

A masterful simile in the fourth Kāṇḍa makes play on, among other things, this series of lightning similes. The passage is certainly a late interpolation extrinsic to the oldest core of the poem. Yet, since in the current section I am concerned not with the reconstruction of Greco-Indic heritage but with the

be an extremely unusual meaning for 'maṇḍala', and the compound is much better taken as an accusative in agreement with 'nūpuram' anklet, so that 'maṇḍala' has its usual meaning 'disc'.

analysis of the later permutations of that heritage, this is irrelevant.⁵⁵⁰ Vālin defeated and Sugrīva installed on the throne, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa set out once again into the wilderness. At the start of the Sarga, Rāma begins a conversation with his brother. Fully engaging Kāvya mode, he launches into a lyrical description of the onset of the rainy season – a moment of the year particularly amenable to long *ekphraseis* in the Indian tradition. The passage is striking for its inverted pathetic fallacy: images from human life are used to elaborate the description of nature.

The rains are the clouds' 'garbham', 'embryo' (27.3), red clouds are the sky's 'wounds' (5), winds 'sigh', and the white and red sky looks like a lovesick man anointed with red sandal paste (6). Even as he describes nature, Rāma's cannot but betray his anguish at his sundering from Sītā. His fixation grows ever clearer: soaked in rainwater, 'sīteva śokasaṁtaptā mahī bāṣpaṁ vimuñcati', 'the earth sheds a tear, like Sītā consumed by her grief' (7). The mountains' rainclouds, streams, and murmuring winds are like Brahmāns' black antelope skins, sacred threads, and murmured recitations (10). Then,

kaśābhir iva haimībhir vidyudbhir iva tāḍitam

antaḥstanitanirghoṣaṁ savedanam ivāmbaram

nīlameghāśritā vidyut sphurantī pratibhāti me

sphurantī rāvaṇasyāṅke vaidehīva tapasvinī

'The sky, flogged by lightning as if by golden whips,

Resounds deep down with thunder, as if crying out in pain.

The lightning gleaming within the black cloud looks to me

Like poor Sītā gleaming in Rāvaṇa's grip.'

(11-12)

The simile's resonance is twofold – both horizontal within the text and vertical within the tradition. Firstly, a knowing audience will take pleasure in recognising the same equivalence as was used three times in the famous abduction scene, but with tenor and vehicle surprisingly switched.⁵⁵¹ Rāma, of course, cannot know how appropriate his words are. Yet the simile works also on a vertical level, by exploiting

⁵⁵⁰ The extreme textual instability of the Sarga as recorded in the Critical Edition is a symptom of this lateness.

⁵⁵¹ The scene will certainly have been known in detail to the interpolator of this Sarga. For another switch of tenor and vehicle, see 20, 28, where lightning is compared to war-elephants in battle.

and confirming the association between the omineme and Sītā's abduction. In addition, it is effective on its own terms: in the Sarga's clearest articulation of its main theme, it reveals Rāma's sad compulsion to relate all worldly events to his trauma. A traditional simile is reinvented and put to ingenious and novel use – not only to elaborate narrative events but also reveal a character's state of mind.

So far I have treated examples which either use traditional resonance straightforwardly or doctor and refashion it while keeping it in view. But equally important in assessing the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s relationship with tradition – and with orality itself, inasmuch as such devices are distinctive to oral poetry – are passages in which the poem moves past these networks of referentiality. This new kind of poetry values images solely for their inherent qualities, and not for their traditional associations. Sometimes, those associations even work against the poet's aims in a certain context. For example, the gods send the five chief Apsarases (water-nymphs) on a mission to seduce the sage Māṇḍakarni, in order to nullify the powers which he has gained by austerities, whose extent is beginning to worry them; the lovely Apsarases are described as 'vidyuccalitavarcasaḥ', 'radiant as flashing lightning' (3. 10.14). The tale ends happily, with the ascetic marrying all five. The context demands that the simile only evoke their beauty, with any portentous overtones entirely contrary to the needs of that context.⁵⁵²

Similarly, when the sage Agastya wishes to contrast Sītā's fidelity to Rāma with what he sees as the prevailing tendency of her sex, he describes women as having 'śatahradānām lolatvam', 'the unpredictability of lightning' (3. 12.6). It is an effective simile, but not traditional. A long description of the beauty of the women in Lanka whom Hanumān sees concludes thus – 'vibhūṣaṇānām ca dadarśa mālāḥ śatahradānām iva cārumālāḥ', 'he saw garlands of ornaments, like lovely garlands of lightning' (5. 4.19). So when, soon after, attention turns to Lanka's palace buildings, which are 'yathā mahat prāvṛṣi meghajālaṁ vidyutpinaddham savihaṁgajālam', 'like a great lattice of clouds in the rainy season with a lattice of birds, swathed in lightning bolts' (5. 6.1),⁵⁵³ or 'taḍidbhir ambhodavad arcyamānam', 'as resplendent as a raincloud with lightning' (6.7), the audience may be unsure how to interpret the lightning. Do the similes, embedded in straightforwardly laudatory language evoking the beauty without ominous overtones, contain a note of foreboding, or are they to be taken at face value? In other words, are they to be read as traditional poetry, or in the new, individualistic style? The context does not decide either way, and the original audience is likely not to have had a uniform reaction. The question is further complicated by the description of Rāvaṇa a little later, as looking 'saṁdhyāraktam ivākāśe toyadam

⁵⁵² The verse may have influenced the description of another Apsaras who is lightning-like in her beauty at 1. 62.5. For the growth of the poem and the lateness of the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Brockington, 1998, 377-97.

⁵⁵³ The verse, like all others in this late Sarga, employs the figure *ekapādāyamaka*, by which an element in the first half of the verse is repeated in the second with a different meaning. See further Goldman, 1996, *ad loc.*, with references.

sataḍidguṇam’, ‘like a red cloud laced by lightning in the sky at evening’ (8.6); then again lit by lamps ‘meghaṁ vidyudgaṇair iva’, ‘like a cloud by cascades of lightning’ (8.27).

The foreboding note might seem appropriate to the poem’s main antagonist, who has red eyes (5) and sleeps hissing like a serpent (10). And yet the poet’s long description of the Rākṣasa generally depicts him as exceptionally beautiful, and adorned with an array of delightful jewellery, with only the odd detail hinting at his turpitude. His breath is fragrant with the scent of flowers and lovely food, but also ‘pānagandhapuraḥsaraḥ’, ‘mixed with the odour of strong liquor’ – not a positive detail (8.21). The ambivalent description of Rāvaṇa elsewhere creates an indeterminacy in the context for the lightning imagery, which thus itself becomes indeterminate. The poet, seeking both to evoke his beauty and suggest his danger, succeeds in creating an artfully ambiguous simile to that end. The same goes for other similes throughout the book, as at 16.15, where Rāvaṇa’s matchless wives (‘rāvaṇasyottamastriyaḥ’) follow him ‘ghanam vidyullatā iva’, ‘like a tendril of lightning a cloud’. The metaphor within this last simile is unique, and hints at the language of Kāvya, where the ‘latā’, ‘creeper’ or ‘creeper’s tendril’, is an important image and often used in descriptions of human beauty – the poet achieves yet another ingenious marriage of *Itihāsa* and *Kāvya*.

The case of lightning showcases, then, Vālmīki’s achievement in creating an intensely visual poem whose imagery at turns recreates and moves past the tradition from which it grows. Looking not only back to *Itihāsa* but also forward to *Kāvya*, it fully exploits the expressive possibilities of both. His technique is for its time highly inventive – even *avant-garde* – in its experimental adaptation of traditional imagery to novel situations and uses, and its subjection of it to artful ambiguities. It is uniquely untraditional among the four Epics under discussion, and shows, as the *RV*, how closely linked omens and ominemes are with genre in India.

Conclusion

I have not here provided an exhaustive analysis of all kinds of omen in both traditions. Rather, I have selected a representative few, of differing levels of banality and richness, and used them as a tool with which to unearth inheritance. The ominous import of some of these ominemes is unsurprising – so lightning, eclipses, and (shooting) stars. Their typological ubiquity means that reconstruction of such beliefs to the proto-culture should not be controversial. Others, however, such as blood rain and weeping horses, are not so universal. Yet these may be reconstructed for the proto-culture for another reason: given

how *rare* they are cross-culturally, it seems more elegant to suppose that they were invented once, in the proto-culture, and perpetuated through the millennium and a half (or so) between the time of unity and our first texts. While reinvention cannot be excluded as an explainer, heredity outcompetes it in plausibility. Another omineme, the rainbow, combines aspects of both these categories: it is unsurprising that it was thought ominous, but that it was thought impetuous is a non-trivial detail best thought of as inherited along with it. This is strong inheritance in action – all of these shared features can be reconstructed to poetic tradition of the time of unity.

Yet, plunging deeper into the thicket, I found many further similarities both divinatory and literary. These are the weak inheritances. As ever, a binary inherited / not inherited model is too unfeeling a heuristic with which to untangle the spaghetti mass of similarities which the traditions serve up. For example, I found that certain particularities in the usage of blood rain as an omineme did not need to be reconstructed – consideration of the inherently exceptional nature of that omineme sufficed to account for the extra layer of alignments. There, those factors were universal. Universal-looking too is the tendency in both traditions to emphasise omens by juxtaposing them, or adding further supernatural details according to the rule that the more supernatural an omen is, the more ominous it is. Likewise, the narrative needs of the moment determine whether or not characters see and remark upon omens. Equally baked into the nature of omens is their semantic alternation – the same signs can signify both good and ill, and must be further decoded either semantically, through explicit comment, or pragmatically, through context.

Yet sometimes, in addition to the strongly inherited bedrock of omen vehicles, the factors which create further higher-order similarity of weak inheritance are also themselves inherited. In both traditions, for example, omens may occur spontaneously or may be sent by a god – this presupposes a universe of intervening gods. More richly, omens may be perceived directly or may be internally narrated by diviners – this presupposes diviners with intuitive divination, and also attests to the close connection between diviner and poet discernible in Greece and clearest in India, where one man may even explicitly play the same role. Perhaps the tendency to place arresting omens at moments of high drama – the start of an important battle, the commencement of a duel, the death of an important hero – could be called universal. Yet it is such a strong tendency that it might make more sense to construe it as independently inherited in itself. Similarly, I shall argue in the next chapter that the rule, unviolated in either tradition, that only the doomed reject omens is too consistently respected to be weak inheritance. The adherence seems arbitrary – it is best thought strong. With Near-Eastern techniques such as ornithomancy and extispicy placed to one side, close consideration of the literary use of omens in Greece and India reveals profound similarities, many of which are best explained as heirlooms from a time of unity. These complement the affinities in intuitive divination I set out in the previous chapter.

My comparative study of omens in similes foregrounds difference as much as similarity. Both similes and omens abound in both traditions. Perhaps putting the two together should be thought traditional in the strong sense, that is, a technique which was inherited *qua* technique. Or perhaps the ubiquity of similes and omens should be thought of as being constantly reinvented by poets through time. Yet ultimately, asking about the inheritedness or not of the omen in simile technique is not the right question. All literature freights images with meaning. Oral poetry, as Foley has shown, takes this one step further in its development of what he calls ‘traditional referentiality’. But analysis only becomes interesting on the level of the particulars.

Here, their contrasting tastes fully assert themselves. Homer’s special interest in similes induces him to linger, embellish, and pack dense meaning into a few words, even at the risk of obscurity (at least to moderns). Omens were an important part of his traditional world: as such, Homer – and especially the *Iliad* poet – conducted various creative experiments in how similes might incorporate them and harness their resonance, just as he experimented with how similes might relate to the main narrative and indeed one another. For example, recent work has shown Homer’s aliveness to the creative possibilities of narrative focalisation. His combination of this with omens in similes could, as in the similes of *Iliad* 22, yield stunning results. Inasmuch as they respond powerfully to such close reading, Homeric similes ask to be read closely.

Moreover, Homer, and especially the *Iliad* poet, puts omens in similes in places where the other three poems have omens. Why might he do so? Of the four Epic poems, the *Iliad* poet had the lowest tolerance for the preternatural. In this chapter and elsewhere, it is precisely where the magical and surreal irrupt into Homer that most similarity with Sanskrit Epic is found. Viewed diachronically, a new narrative about Homer emerges: one way that the *Iliad* innovated away this preternatural heritage was his placing his omens in similes. In this way, the *Iliad* poet could draw on ominous imagery to convey signals to his audience without deviating from his commitment to realism. He would also create more of the rich, involved similes which were so to his (and / or his tradition’s) taste. The decades old thesis, postulated on evidence entirely internal to the Greek tradition, that the Homeric poems’ relative realism is a recent innovation would find confirmation. Although the details of the differences between the Homeric and the non-Homeric early Archaic Greek tradition are fugacious, here is one place where, plausibly, we find a gap.⁵⁵⁴

The poets of the *Mahābhārata* were not so interested in using the simile as an outlet for their creativity. Omens in similes there, while an undeniable presence, are handled ruggedly. They are short,

⁵⁵⁴ See further above, p. 182.

vary little, and do not respond to close analysis. This points to a general feature of the *Mahābhārata* – with a very heavy stress on the general – that it is more interested than the other three Epics in creating effects on the level of paragraph, and less than the others on the level of line, phrase, or word. A holistic view gives little sense of a systematic drive to innovate on traditional uses of the omen in simile. Yet, as ever, this impression may be a function of the poem’s textual history, and the vast variance in time, quality, and authorship which it displays. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, by contrast, responded energetically to close reading. There was a strong interest in the innovation of compelling new effects with the omen in simile; these were often achieved with grace and delicacy. The poet’s (or poets’) treatment connected revealingly with his project elsewhere to push traditional oral poetry forward into a new sensibility. Vālmīki here stands at the boundary between (oral) Epic and (written) Kāvya, deconstructing one edifice to use its bricks to construct another.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁵ A crucial caveat must be attached to these conclusions. The *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* contain the work of dozens, if not hundreds of authors. The Homeric Epics, by contrast, are substantially the works of two minds. The contrasts I draw here can therefore stand for the two traditions only inasmuch as Homer can stand for Greece – the degree to which he may do so is, of course, contested.

Chapter IV – Divination: Who did it?

This chapter has two aims. The first is to show the important affinities in the uses to which poets of both traditions put seers. The parallels I find evince the underlying claim that seers, despite some divergences in their methods they use to divine, remained a coherent *social class*, with analogous functions in literature and, as far as we can tell, outside it too. The best explanation for the overlap is that each tradition preserves a modicum of heritage: seers at the time of Greco-Indic unity were high status individuals but also, constitutively, outsiders. These general qualities (and the slight tension between them) manifested themselves in a variety of analogous ways and some disanalogous ones. Both similarity and difference are eloquent of both cultures. My second, subsidiary aim is to dispel certain preconceptions about seers in Archaic Greece and especially Homer, which I argue are the result of the scholarly tendency to fill in Archaic gaps with Classical evidence; that is, a later situation in Greece has been inappropriately retrojected onto the Archaic age. To achieve this second aim, it is necessary only to consider more closely Greek evidence alone, with comparative evidence from Sanskrit here serving as a prompt to look in the right direction.

I start by establishing seers' high status. In both traditions, one of their chief functions is to challenge and warn, more or less peremptorily, the royal protagonists of Greek and Sanskrit Epic. The reactions of the advised then serve as a signal to the audience of the attitude they should have towards that character. In a way, the seer functions as the mouthpiece of the poet within the narrative, and a symmetry is created between the intra- and extra-diegetic: for the characters of the poems, the seer indicates how fate will unfold, whereas for the audience, he indicates how the narrative will unfold.⁵⁵⁶ For example, Thetis' dilemma for Achilles (die young with eternal fame vs. long life and obscurity (IX. 410-16)) gives, within the text, two possible actions; outside the text, it gives two possible plots. Plot for us is fate for them. Those who reject seers' warnings and especially those who threaten seers on that basis are unfailingly doomed. The pattern is strong enough to invoke strong inheritance. This done, I turn to the putative itinerancy of seers, finding that it was not a traditional feature in Greek, Indic, or Greco-Indic society, but was developed separately due to analogous practical pressures and a modicum of shared inheritance. This is weak inheritance in action. Taking a step back, I then consider how diachronic change

⁵⁵⁶ Here again seer and poet come together. The parallels have been noted by critics of both traditions. See further, for Greece, Kai Trampedach's observation that 'The epic seers, whose prophecies always prove to be right, represent the poet within the narrative' (2008). In the *Mahābhārata* the theme is even more concrete: Vyāsa, the poem's author, is the narrative's main seer. See Alf Hiltebeitel's invaluable discussion of his special role in the poem, with full reference to previous scholarship, 2001, 40-91.

destabilises attempts to paint a picture of the world of Sanskrit Epic, and end with broader methodological considerations.

The High Status of Seers

The cast list of Greek and Sanskrit Epic – certainly the *Iliad* and *Mahābhārata*, but also the *Odyssey* and *Rāmāyaṇa* – is fundamentally aristocratic. All main protagonists are of royal or even divine stock. Lower and servant classes are sometimes seen and seldom heard; where they do appear in the main narrative, their humble status precludes important influence. The societies of the four Epics are feudal, with all but absolute power residing in the king. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the nobles in the assembly of the court of Ayodhya are little more than claqueurs. The poet describes their obsequiousness with relish – at times perhaps even with mockery, as when the nobles rejoice at Dasaratha’s speech ‘vṛṣṭimantaṁ mahāmeghaṁ nardantaṁ iva barhiṇaḥ’, ‘like peacocks at the rumble of a big raincloud’ (2. 2.13). Later, prince Bharata’s magnanimous speech so impresses them that they ‘harṣān mumucur aśrūṇi’, ‘wept tears of joy’ (2. 76.16).⁵⁵⁷ Likewise, the constituents of assemblies in the *Mahābhārata* tend merely to provide a backdrop of approbation for the real action, which is between the individual speakers – always royal protagonists.⁵⁵⁸ The dynamic is clearly on display at 2. 62.22, where no king in the assembly dares to speak against Duryodhana, despite the outrage he does to Draupadī, being ‘dhārtarāṣṭrasya bhītāḥ’, ‘afraid of the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra’.

No Trojan challenges Priam’s authority in the *Iliad*;⁵⁵⁹ in the *Odyssey*, no Phaeacian Alcinous’. When kings do have commoner antagonists, the Epic texts normally strongly condemn them. The plebeian Thersites’ execrations of Agamemnon are returned with interest by Odysseus, who then beats him with a staff for good measure (II.211-77). His grotesque appearance signals his turpitude, according to the usual principle that outer disfigurement betokens inner baseness (212-20). In the *Odyssey*, the members of the palace staff who betray their master and ally with the Suitors find no mercy either in the king or in the narrator: the maids who sleep with suitors are hung from the rafters (xxii.465-73), and the disloyal priest Leiodes is pitilessly dispatched (xxii.310-29). I do not claim that these examples are

⁵⁵⁷ In the Greek tradition, this power structure is mirrored on the divine level, where Zeus’ say is final – despite the vigorous challenges to which it is sometimes subjected.

⁵⁵⁸ See e.g. 5. 79.9 for an assembly of kings, and 3. 27.21 for an assembly of brahmins.

⁵⁵⁹ Hecuba’s challenge to Priam at XXIV.201-16 is no exception – she is his wife, not a political actor, and her objection is founded on ignorance of the issue at hand – she does not know of Hermes’ visit. See further chapter 1, pp. 64-5.

exhaustive. Indeed, the political landscape of all four Epics leaves little room to challenge royal power for those who do not have it. Where they do, they pay a heavy price.

Seers are the exception. In both traditions, they have a remarkably wide license to instruct, direct, and even upbraid kings, thanks to their contact with the outranking powers of fate and the gods. In the *Iliad*, indeed, seers could even *be* kings – or at any rate, belong to the elite. Adrastus and Amphius, rulers of the towns Apaistos and Pityeia in Mysia, were the sons of Merops, king of Percotia, ὃς περὶ πάντων | ἤδεε μαντοσύνας ‘who excelled all others | in his mantic knowledge (II.831 = XI.329-30).⁵⁶⁰ Presumably having foreseen their death at Troy, he forbade his sons to go to war, but, led on by fate, they disobey (832-4),⁵⁶¹ and Diomedes kills them (XI.333-34). Some lines later, we learn that the similarly aristocratic Chromis and Ennomos lead a contingent of Mysoi. The latter was an οἰωνιστής: | ἀλλ’ οὐκ οἰωνοῖσιν ἐρύσατο κῆρα μέλαιναν, | ἀλλ’ ἐδάμη ὑπὸ χερσὶ ποδώκεος Αἰακίδαο | ἐν ποταμῷ, ‘seer, | yet he did not stave off dark death through omens, | but was tamed at the hands of swift-footed Achilles at the river’ (II.858-61).⁵⁶² Most strikingly, it is Nausithous, father of Alcinous and king of Phaeacia (vi.7-8, vii.62), who prophesied that one day Poseidon would punish his people (viii.564-71, xiii.172-8). Lastly, Euchenor, son of the *Mantis* Polyidos, is ἀφνειός τ’ ἀγαθός τε, ‘both rich and goodly’ – a clue of elite status (XIII.664). Melampus, whose story is alluded to but not told in the *Odyssey*, is one of the richest among the Pylians (ἀφνειὸς Πυλίοισι μέγ’ ἔξοχα, xv.227) and ends up ruling part of a kingdom too.⁵⁶³

Although there is no mention of their social status, these should be grouped with Abas and (another) Polyidos,⁵⁶⁴ sons of Eurydamas, ὄνειροπόλοιο, ‘a dream-interpreter’ (V.149). We learn that τοῖς οὐκ ἐρχομένοις ὁ γέρων ἐκρίνατ’ ὀνείρους, | ἀλλὰ σφεας κρατερὸς Διομήδης ἐξενάρτιζε, ‘the old man

⁵⁶⁰ The formulation presupposes a hierarchy of *Manteis*, with some better at the prophetic arts than others. If there are inept seers, we do not see them in Greek Epic or Tragedy, nor Sanskrit Epic and para-Epic, though criticism of good seers implies their possibility. Archilochus fr.s 182-3 might involve the first attested criticism of – or indeed invective against – a historical seer, but their fragmentariness will admit of only the most tentative hypotheses (Laura Swift’s excellent analysis is fittingly modal, 2019, *ad loc.*; Jan Bremmer’s confidence certainly misplaced, 1996, 99).

⁵⁶¹ οὐδὲ οὖν παῖδας ἔασκε | στείχειν ἐς πόλεμον φθισήνορα: τὼ δὲ οἱ οὐ τι | πειθέσθην: κῆρες γὰρ ἄγον μέλανος θανάτοιο. This story, presumably told more fully elsewhere but nowhere to be found in surviving sources, is another example of the rejected warning motif, which I treat further below. For a kind of mirror image of the tale, see the story of Oedipus’ curse of his two sons, recounted in the Cyclic *Thebaid* (fr.s 2-3).

⁵⁶² As we saw in my first chapter, the Greek words *Mantis* and *Oiōnistēs* are used interchangeably in Homer. Among others, Jonathan Ready, on whose otherwise penetrating discussion of the social status of seers I otherwise draw (43-5), fails to appreciate this (43, n.52).

⁵⁶³ I treat Melampus more fully below, pp. 279-80. See also Phineus in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, who ruled over the Thracians (2.238, cf. the further detail given by the scholion, 141.10-11W).

⁵⁶⁴ The name, literally meaning ‘much-knower’, is shared with the seer quoted above. It is impossible to tell from so summary a reference, but, given his name, it seems likely that this Polyidos inherited some sort of mantic power from his father.

judged in favour of them not going to Troy, but in any case mighty Diomedes slew them' (V.150-1).⁵⁶⁵

Relatedly, the two instances of oneiromancy in Homer both involve the prophetic dreams of royals – Penelope (xix.535-70) and Agamemnon. As Nestor observes of the latter's dream, “εἰ μὲν τις τὸν ὄνειρον Ἀχαιῶν ἄλλος ἔνισπε | ψευδὸς κεν φαῖμεν καὶ νοσφιζοίμεθα μᾶλλον: | νῦν δ' ἴδεν ὃς μέγ' ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν εὔχεται εἶναι”, “‘if some other of the Achaeans had related this dream, we would rather have called it false and disregarded it. But as it is, he who boasts to be the greatest of the Achaeans saw it’” (II.80-2). The implication is clear: it is thanks to his status that Agamemnon's reading of his own dream should be obeyed.

Nestor's words, brief as they are, evince the close link between social status and divinatory credibility in Homer, and underline the importance of not retrojecting a Classical situation onto Homer.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁵ These are difficult lines to translate. While there is no perfect solution, I consider the possibilities and put forward a new interpretation. Kirk is right to discard the meaning, ‘the old man interpreted no dreams for them for their homecoming’, i.e. he divined their death – ἐρχομένοις cannot mean ‘homecoming’, and must refer to the brothers' departure for Troy. He prefers ‘he did not interpret the dreams as they left’, i.e. ‘he did not foresee their fate’. This, though, would be an odd comment – why would the dream consultant not consult the dreams? It also jars with its context – it is hard to read along with the adversative ἀλλά which begins the next line. Furthermore, the hyperbaton of οὐκ would be unconscionably brutal; Kirk provides no parallel for it. Other possibilities merit consideration.

To understand the kind of sense required, other examples of seer fathers whose sons go to war should be considered. As we saw, Merops foresees his sons' death, but they disobey him and go anyway. Similarly, the seer Polyidos tells his son Euchenor that if he goes to Troy he will die, but Euchenor chooses to go anyway, in order to avoid being fined for refusal to join the army; and in any case his father had also told him that if he stayed at home he would die of illness (XIII.663-70). Lastly, Achilles himself knows from his mother that he is destined to die at Troy, but he chooses to stay (see my first chapter, page 78). Given this context, Kirk's notion that Eurydamas failed to prophesy to his sons appears all the more unlikely. The sense must approximate ‘He judged that they should not go, but...’ Such a sense can indeed be got from the Greek. Certain sets of words, whose meanings are abstract and neutral, in Homeric Greek as in other languages, often develop positive or negative connotations (and sometimes both, producing an auto-antonym). For example, ἀξιός whose basic meaning is ‘worthy [of x]’, can also mean ‘goodly’ or ‘worthy’ (note the same phenomenon in the latter English example), and (though more rarely) ‘cheap’; συμφορά, whose basic meaning is ‘event’, comes to mean ‘disaster’, and more rarely ‘happy event’ (cf. πάθος, ‘experience’ > ‘calamity’, Lat. ‘casus’, ‘event’ > ‘calamity’). Words regarding divination are particularly susceptible to this kind of semantic drift. Τέρας, for example, whose basic meaning is ‘sign, portent’, comes to mean ‘marvel’ in a positive sense as well as ‘monster’ in a negative one (its usual sense in Modern Greek). The basic meaning of Latin ‘prodigium’ is ‘omen’, but it can also mean ‘good omen’ or ‘bad omen’, with only the context determining which is the appropriate meaning (English ‘prodigy’ preserves this feature). The artificiality of lists of meanings in dictionaries should not foreclose interpretation, and we should be open to *ad hoc* usages along these lines. The sense of the line for which I would argue is ‘for them not going, the old man judged dreams’, as in ‘judged propitious dreams’. In other words, ‘the old man judged dreams in favour of their not going’. The full force of the benefactive dative ἐρχομένοις is here brought out. The difficulty is here due to the use of a participle – had a verbal noun been used, the line would be perfectly transparent. Perhaps the use of the participle was encouraged by the lack of a common verbal noun for the ἐρχ- root. It being the technical term for setting off to war, the poet wanted to use it regardless. Full force can then be given to ἀλλά, with the sense continuing – ‘nevertheless [they did go, and] Diomedes slew them’, or ‘but in any case, Diomedes...’ The suppressed phrase was naturally otiose, since the sons are obviously present in Troy. The poet relied on his audience's knowledge of the trope to decode his elliptical formulation. Either that, or a line has dropped out of the text.

⁵⁶⁶ Here too critics have been given to unhelpful generalisations, e.g. ‘The Greek seer, who legitimizes his religious authority through his personal charisma, is not capable of holding political authority as well’ (Flower, 2008, 30), an

Clearly, these seers are far removed from the *Manteis* lampooned as shysters in Old Comedy,⁵⁶⁷ and the cringing prophecy pedlars whom Plato disdains.⁵⁶⁸ Complementarily, seers' loss of credibility was inseparable from their loss of status. Aristophanes' vituperations culminated in contempt's very extremity – indifference: after their unanimous failure to predict the disastrous outcome of the Sicilian Expedition of 413, seers disappear from his works.⁵⁶⁹ On the one hand, the disparity may be as much to do with generic difference as with diachrony – certainly a chresmologue would be out of place in Aeschylean Tragedy or Hellenistic Epic, nor can we know how seers would have been treated if there were such a thing as extant eighth century Comedy. Yet on the other hand, as I hope to be showing, there are substantial differences between Homeric and the historical practitioners of divination in the Classical period – certainly the rich and royal seers in Homer find meagre historical or mythical parallels in Classical times.

The Homeric poems represents our best chance of understanding Greece in the early Archaic age, and the society from which it developed, and full heed must be paid to them. Even if Homer's Teiresias and Halitherses are not kings, they exist in a world in which it was possible for kings to prophesy, and for seers to rule. For Jan Bremmer, this makes Greece unusual in its East-Mediterranean context: he justly contrasts Greece's attestation of King-Seer with their total absence in the Near-East.⁵⁷⁰ Sanskrit Epic, by contrast, is rich in parallels. As I write in the introduction, such complementary distributions are most

especially puzzling statement given that critic's discussion of the prominent and politically active fifth-century Athenian seer Lampon (*ibid.* 123, cf. Bremmer, 1996, 106).

⁵⁶⁷ See e.g. Ar. Pax.1046-7, ὡς ἀλαζῶν φαίνεται: | μάντις τίς ἐστίν; 'He looks a charlatan. Is he some *Mantis*?'

⁵⁶⁸ Rep. 364b-c, ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντις ἐπὶ πλουσίων θύρας ἰόντες πείθουσιν ὡς ἔστι παρὰ σφίσι δύναμις ἐκ θεῶν ποριζομένη θυσίαις τε καὶ ἐπωδαῖς, εἴτε τι ἀδίκημά του γέγονεν αὐτοῦ ἢ προγόνων, ἀκεῖσθαι... 'Beggars-priests and seers go to many a man's door and claim that they have the god-given power to heal by means of sacrifices and incantations [the pollution resulting from] a misdeed, whether it is his own or one of his ancestors'...

Burkert opens his influential 1983 article with the quotation from the *Republic* and adduces interesting parallels with Assyrian practices. Yet not only are these door-to-door seers absent in Homer, so is the concept of pollution which the practice presupposes. Aeschylus' Cassandra refers to the same class, when she asks ἢ ψευδόμαντις εἰμι θυροκόπος φλέδων; 'Or am I a false prophet, a prattling door-knocker?' (Ag. 1195)

⁵⁶⁹ For the Sicilian Expedition and the seers' failure, see Thuc. 8. 1.1. I am indebted to Bremmer, 1996, 106-7 for this astute observation.

⁵⁷⁰ 147-8, 2008. See his n. 84 for a useful list of attestations of King-Seers throughout Greek culture, including some late examples which I do not discuss here. By this time, Bremmer has rightly recanted his earlier work, which had claimed that 'we cannot fail to observe that the king-seers whom we have found all appear either to derive from later sources (Mounichos, Anios) or to be kings of fairy-like peoples, such as the Phaeacians, or non-Greek areas, such as Mysia, Thracia, and Molossia. Moreover, the kingship of Melampus is almost certainly a figment of the imagination of his historical descendants, the Melampodids, Greece's most renowned family of seers' (1996, 101). Whether distant, fantastical, or aimed at aggrandisement, all are evidence that the Greeks believed that seers *might* be Kings, even if we have no plausible record of a historical one in Greece. He may be close to the truth when he suggests later in that passage that it would have been in kings' interests to claim divinatory power, since it would entrench their power. It would also, I would add, obviate conflicts of the kind discussed in this chapter. In any case, we are agreed that Archaic seers 'belong to the highest strata of society' (*ibid.* 101).

desirable, since comparison can then proceed without the spectral possibility of influence from the Near-East.

Indeed, there was a whole category of the ‘King-Seer’, ‘Rājarṣi’ in Sanskrit literature.⁵⁷¹ While this term could be used non-technically as a general term of aggrandisement or deference for Ṛṣis, it also had a more technical sense referred to seers who were – or were once – kings. The Asura King Vṛtra, for example, became Maṇimān the seer. The delicately arranged line embraces the duality – ‘maṇimān nāma rājarṣiḥ sa babhūva narādhipaḥ’, ‘He became a King-Seer by the name of Maṇimān, the defender of men’ (*Mhb.* 1. 61.42). The formula ‘narādhipaḥ’, ‘defender of men’, is used exclusively of kings; its placement at the end of the verse is a subtle reminder of Vṛtra / Maṇimān’s double identity.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* too features Rājarṣis: the backstory of King Viśvāmitra is told in a (late) passage of its first book (51-69). In the part germane to the current subject, King Viśvāmitra, having isolated himself in a forest hermitage and completed a punishing series of austerities, is abruptly visited by Brahmā, who says to him, “‘anena tapasā tvām hi rājarṣir iti vidmahe’”, ‘Thanks to this austerity, we know that you are a King-Seer’” (56.5). Just as abruptly, Brahmā disappears. Incidentally, although it is here framed as an acknowledgement rather than as the bestowal of a gift, this should be counted as another example of the gods’ important role in creating seers. The passage is a late and elaborate aetiology of an important seer of *Ṛg-Vedic* pedigree (the third Maṇḍala of the *RV* is attributed to him and his lineage). When, a few chapters later, Viśvāmitra’s lineage is related, seership is shown to be just as hereditary as kingship: Viśvāmitra’s descendants Devarāta, Dhṛṣṭaketu, Kīrtirāta, and Svarṇaroman are all explicitly called Rājarṣis (1. 70.6, 8, 11, 12).

Nevertheless, the coherence of the category ‘Rājarṣi’ should not be overstated. The long period of the *Mahābhārata*’s composition meant that it could exhibit diachronically distinct ideas about the same phenomenon. These separate notions, proper to separate stages of the text’s development, are sometimes so different from one another that tension and contradiction results. Seers’ inhabitation of the forest, for example, was a late idea which, once established, was only awkwardly reconcilable with the need for kings to rule. Lakṣmaṇa seeks to resolve the tension when he says to Rāma that according to the ancient laws only once the King has delegated the running of his kingdom to his sons should he be free to live as a hermit in the forest (2. 20.20-1). More extraordinary is a very late didactic passage, in which Bhisma is declaring norms of caste behaviour. When he comes to the correct behaviour for the warrior, Kṣatriya class, he remarks “‘rājarṣitvena rājendra bhaikṣacaryādhvasevayā apetaḥ ṛghadharmo ’pi carej jīvitakāmyayā’”, “‘O Indra of Kings, in the condition of a King-Seer, one may live for as long as one

⁵⁷¹ The head noun of the Sanskrit compound is ‘rsi’, ‘seer’: this is a kind of seer, not a kind of king.

wants, dwelling on the road and begging for alms, having homelessness as one's law" (12. 63.22).

Bhisma here embraces the paradox of a homeless beggar King-Seer. He brings together, firstly, the older conception, familiar from the *RV* and the older layers of Epic, of seers as a class of people of high status who are the recipients of a divine gift, with, secondly, the late conception of a humble mendicant whose religious devotion gains him *tapas* (the meritoriousness earned by piety and the practice of religious austerity), which in turn could gain him supernatural powers including intuitive divination. The growing influence of the theory of castes smudged categories further: given the context of the speech, Bhisma here could merely have used the term 'Rājarsi' since he considered it apposite for a Kṣatriya, the caste from which kings were drawn. As ever, each culture makes inheritance its own, dovetailing its patrimony to its idiosyncrasies to make a characteristic fusion. Qualifications do not wholly obscure the pattern, and affinity shines through difference in detail: the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* provide a better parallel of Merops the seer and king of Percote than any other piece of Greek literature. Seers were of high status in both traditions – this is the strong inheritance. Downstream of that is the possibility, sometimes realised in both traditions, of the marriage of divinatory and political power – seers being kings.

Royal or not, seers are as a rule afforded royal treatment. At the start of the second *Parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, King Yudhiṣṭhira has just built a new assembly hall of unrivalled radiance. Princes and seers arrive to pay tribute to him, including Narada, the paragon of the Epic seer.⁵⁷² He arrives with a sonorous named retinue of fellow Ṛṣis, among whom his supremacy is stressed – this 'divine seer' ('devarṣir', 2. 5.2-3) is 'extremely illustrious' ('sumahātejā') and 'of measureless splendour' ('amitadyutiḥ'). Though traditional, the epithets are strong and uncommon. He travels 'as swift as thought', 'manojavaḥ', (5.3 and later 6.7), a term whose traditional resonance evinces his divinity (for which see the comparative discussion in the second chapter). At his arrival, Yudhiṣṭhira and the Pāṇḍavas spring up immediately (*sahasā*) to greet him, and offer him jewels or anything else he might desire (5.4-5). The trappings of high status are unmistakable.

Narada plunges into an exhaustive set of questions about Yudhiṣṭhira's conduct, and then an even more copious expatiation on other magnificent halls and their assemblies (2. 5.7-12.1). At the end of his speech, he enjoins Yudhiṣṭhira to institute a royal consecration (11.67), and leaves (11.72). Yudhiṣṭhira unquestioningly agrees (12.1), and, with the pretext now supplied for the convocation of a vast assembly,

⁵⁷² One of the most prominent seers in the Indian tradition in general, Narada is a familiar character in Sanskrit literature and the culture at large. The same goes for the Epics: the *Rāmāyaṇa* opens, for example, with a conversation between Vālmiki and Narada, and he is tasked with narrating the death of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Kunti, and Gāndhārī in a late interpolation of the *Mahābhārata* (15.45-47). As a rough guide to his ubiquity, his name is mentioned 483 times in the 5933 pages of Bibek Debroy's 2015 translation of the Critical Edition of the *Mahabharata* (although he is absent in the *Rig-Veda*). Like Vyāsa, various works of a didactic nature were attributed to him in later antiquity, and he would become an important figure in the *bhakti* tradition.

the plot of the poem is set in motion. Although Agamemnon's acquiescence is more begrudging, his agreement to a seer's demand is no less expeditious (I.106-21), and sets in motion the plot of the *Iliad*. While neither Yudhiṣṭhira nor Agamemnon are blameless personalities in their poems, their deference to seers' demands plays an important role in characterising them both as fundamentally worthy of the audience's sympathies and as on the side of the eventual victors. They contrast with the folly and arrogance of Rāvaṇa and Eurymachus,⁵⁷³ and the cynicism of divination, however well-intentioned, of Hector. Again, correspondences are thorough-going and structural. Poets in both traditions found seers invaluable as a *deus ex machina* figure who could appear whenever needed, command commanders, and get kings to do what poet and plot required them to do. Whether or not this was reflected by a commensurate status in contemporary society, their use in this capacity presupposes great social prestige in the Epic world. Their itineracy in Sanskrit Epic was another useful pretext by which they could be introduced whenever needed. Complementarily, as we will see, when leaders refuse to heed mantic advice, this is an unfailing signal of impending doom.

RV: Genre and Anticipation

Yet these are late-looking developments. Discussion of the role of seers in the Epics should begin with the *RV* and a search for continuity between the two. Unfortunately, as I wrote in my second chapter, p. 98, the *RV* is a source profoundly limited by its genre. As I am in the course of showing, one of the characteristics of seers is that they are often at odds with political power; that is, they represent an alternative source of authority which, through its direct access to the divine realm and divine will, can undermine royal ascendancy. When seers' pronouncements do not align with the political power's agenda, as with Calchas and Agamemnon in the first book of the *Iliad*, or Halitherses and the Suitors below, this presents a test of leaders' mettle. As we will see, successful leaders on the winning side take the advice; the doomed reject it.

Again, no firm distinction is made in the *RV* between seers and poets: intuitive ability is here a tool of poetic composition, an expedient for the accurate relation of events which happened long ago or in the divine realm. Yet *Rig-Vedic* poets also write for a patron, a wealthy man of political importance who supports the poet, sponsors the sacrificial offerings, and so pays for them to appeal to the gods on his behalf. The *Rig-Vedic* poet must take care before setting his intuitive ability at odds with political power,

⁵⁷³ For the latter, see e.g. the observations of Stephanie West at ii.177-207 (Heubeck *et al.*, 1988).

because his project depends on the alignment between poetic and political interests. Hostility between the two in a *Rig-Vedic* context would potentially be as self-imperilling as criticism of the patron of a Greek Epinician. For Pindar, this would be unthinkable: praise poetry must praise.⁵⁷⁴

It is all the more surprising then that fissures are visible: the interests of the Ṛṣi group can be teased apart from the patron group. Sponsors who stint – or even refuse – may meet with criticism.⁵⁷⁵ At VIII. 26.10, for example, the Aśvins are begged to burn up the ‘pañīn’, ‘misers’ – wealthy who refused to sponsor the poet, or sponsors who were not generous enough. This poet, however, hopes to be luckier. He prays to the Aśvins – ‘yuvādāttasya dhiṣṇyā yuvānītasya sūribhiḥ | ahār-ahar vṛṣaṇa mahyām śikṣatam’, ‘O holy ones, out of what is given by you and what is brought by you, do your best for me along with my patrons day after day, o bulls’ (12). The relation of ‘sūribhiḥ’, ‘patrons’, to the rest of the line is ambiguous. It is an instrumental without pre- or postposition. Jamison takes it as comitative, but, as she admits in her notes, a true instrumental force is certainly possible – perhaps even preferable.⁵⁷⁶ This would give ‘work to my favour (śikṣatam) abundantly (mahyām) through patrons’, i.e. ‘get me patrons that grant me prosperity’. Patrons are the means by which the poet achieves his aims, which, here at least, are represented as separable from those of the sponsoring class. Certainly he must praise. But there remains room for him to look out for his own interests.⁵⁷⁷

Poets acknowledge the potential for their interests not to align. They can leverage their patrons for their own benefit. This includes issuing dark warnings to misers, as at IV. 25.7 – ‘na revatā pañinā saḥkhyam indro... saṁ grñīte’, ‘Indra does not agree to comradeship with a rich miser’. If they do not heed the warnings, the seer-poet can even call down a curse upon them, as in the unusual VI. 53, ten verses of violent vituperation of miserly patrons, e.g., ‘vi pūṣann ārayā tuda paṇer iccha hṛdi priyam | athēm āsmabhyām randhaya || ā rikha kikīrā kṛṇu pañinām hṛdayā kave | athēm āsmabhyām randhaya’, ‘Thrust through (them) with an awl, Pūṣan. Seek what is dear to the heart of the niggard. And make him subject to us. || Shred them, make them shrapnel – the hearts of the niggards, you poet. And make them subject to us’ (6-7). The hymn’s refrain, ‘make them subject to us’, unmasks the contingency of the poet-patron alliance, letting slip that the relationship can be more antagonistic than most hymns care to make it seem. At its worst, the principle of reciprocity so fundamental to Vedic (and Proto-IE) society amounts to

⁵⁷⁴ No accidental comparison, since it has long been argued that the two traditions share features of Indo-European pedigree: for comparison between the RV and Pindar, see among others Calvert Watkins 2002, Eduard Meusel 2021, and Laura Massetti 2017, 2024, 95-181, and forthcoming. Massetti 2019 and Meusel 2020, which treat the Indo-European heritage in Pindaric language more broadly, are book-length studies based on doctoral dissertations.

⁵⁷⁵ See further Jan Gonda, 1975, 79.

⁵⁷⁶ So Geldner – ‘durch die freigebigen Herren’ (1951, *ad loc.*).

⁵⁷⁷ Cf. I. 51.15; II. 2.12, 4.9; IV. 29.5 for other prayers for prosperity which distinguish between poet and patron. Of course, when the patrons are generous, they may themselves receive a hymn of praise or *dānastuti* – see e.g. I.126 (a sexually obscene hymn – in Jamison & Brereton 2014’s words, a ‘humdinger’, *ad loc.*) and V.27.

a kind of blackmail. The seer-poet, exploiting his close relation with the divine, wags a self-interested finger as he declares that Indra ‘sam ĩm paṇer ājatī bhojānam muṣe vi dāśuṣe bhajati sūnaraṃ vasu’, ‘drives together the sustenance of the niggard, to steal it, but he shares out liberal goods to the pious’ (V. 34.7). By ‘dāśuṣe’, ‘pious’, the poet of course means those pious enough to pay him lavishly for hymns of praise. The poet’s warning to possible patrons is implicit but clear. This intermediary with the divine has a message from Indra – use it or lose it.⁵⁷⁸

In short, generic limitations left scope for difference in interests between seer-poet and patron only at the margins. Epic, which was subject to no such restrictions, could and did develop this antagonism much more fully. Yet the seeds of the Epic situation are unmistakably present even in the *RV* – much more clearly than in Greek Epinician, for example. That Rig-Vedic Ṛsis even felt able to push generic boundaries by reproving patrons in this way hints at the partialness of the picture the *RV* gives of its own time, and anticipates the self-confidence and insubordination of their Epic seer scions.

Halitherses, Telemachus, and Tact

Halitherses’ moment in the spotlight in *Odyssey* 2’s assembly exemplifies many of these points. Telemachus has spoken vigorously, but pragmatically – he recognises the limitations of his position – as he says, “ἡμεῖς δ’ οὐ νό τι τοῖσι ἀμυνέμεν”, “I myself am not such as can stave off ruin” (ii.60).⁵⁷⁹ Antinous rebukes him briskly (85-128), and Telemachus, cowed, ends his response with resignation – “εἰ δ’ ὅμῃν δοκέει τόδε λωίτερον καὶ ἄμεινον | ἔμμεναι, ἀνδρὸς ἐνὸς βίοντος νήποινον ὀλέσθαι, | κείρετ’”, “But if it seems better and preferable to you | to destroy the livelihood of another man with impunity, waste away” (ii.141-43).⁵⁸⁰ Telemachus cannot but be mindful of the ultimate impossibility of direct conflict with the Suitors. His words here certainly evince his bitterness, but also reveal his inability to say frankly what he really thinks.

In lieu of a direct threat of violence or vengeance, Telemachus then prays to the gods for vengeance in general terms (ii.143-45). Zeus at this moment sends down two eagles which fly over the

⁵⁷⁸ For other unflattering mentions of the ‘paṇi’, ‘miser’, see, inexhaustively, I. 182.3, 184.2; IV. 51.3; V. 34.7, 61.8; VI. 13.3, 33.2, 45.22, 52.14, 61.1; VIII.26.10.

⁵⁷⁹ I take this as a majestic plural. He continues, “ἢ τ’ ἂν ἀμυνάιμην, εἴ μοι δύναμις γε παρείη”, “I would defend [the household], if I were able to” (62).

⁵⁸⁰ These lines repeat i.376-8, where they have the same effect. They are similar to Hera’s words in the fourth book of the *Iliad*, where her vehement speech in favour of the continuation of the war peters out into a sulky recognition of Zeus’ supremacy – ‘ἔρδ’ : ἀτὰρ οὐ τοι πάντες ἐπαινέομεν θεοὶ ἅλλοι’, “Do as you please, then. But not all of us gods will praise you for it’ (IV.29).

heads of the assembled men, lacerating each other with their talons (ii.146-54). As is usual in both traditions, the narrator leaves no ambiguity, adding that ὄσσοντο... ὄλεθρον, ‘they presaged destruction’ (ii.152). The people wonder at it but are puzzled about its meaning. Halitherses therefore steps up. He tells them clearly and publicly that a great ill is coming upon the Suitors, for Odysseus is close at hand, and plotting their doom (ii.162-6). He continues, “ἀλλὰ πολὺ πρὶν | φραζώμεσθ’, ὥς κεν καταπαύσομεν: οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ | παυέσθων: καὶ γάρ σφιν ἄφαρ τόδε λώϊόν ἐστιν”, “‘but let us consider | ahead of time how we can put an end to this – or rather, let them [i.e. the Suitors] | put an end to it; for this is certainly in their best interests’” (ii.167-9). Where Telemachus at the end of his speech left it – albeit trenchantly – to the Suitors to decide what was best for them, Halitherses not only declares what is best for them, but tells them to do it (even if he diplomatically tempers the sentiment by his use of a third, not second person imperative, “παυέσθων”, ii.169). Where Telemachus euphemistically prayed that Zeus grant “παλίντιτα ἔργα”, ‘requiting deeds’ (ii.144), Halitherses assures the Suitors that Odysseus is already plotting not merely revenge, but “φόνον καὶ κῆρα”, ‘slaughter and destruction’ (ii.165). In light of Telemachus’ speech, and not only, Halitherses’ candour and peremptoriness is remarkable.

The fact that he is here interpreting an omen only slightly mitigates the effect. Firstly, his is a strange kind of interpretation. Usually, Homeric ornithomancy is symbolically tied to the ominous event to be interpreted, as Helen’s explanation at xv.172-78, or Polydamas’ at XII.211-29. Here, however, the specificity of Halitherses’ words goes far beyond the symbolism of the event. The omen is a moment of drama, and it is more important to the poet that Halitherses drive home his point than that the interpretation of the omen be punctiliously plausible. Extra-diegetically, it is a pretext for a prophecy; intra-diegetically, it is an occasion for Halitherses to speak his mind publicly. Seers elsewhere are just as able to mix intuitive divination into their omen interpretation – see, most notably, Calchas’ interpretation of the sparrow and snake omen in *Iliad* II, discussed in the first chapter, pp. 83-4.

In the speech’s second half, the poet has Halitherses intensify the warning. After his curt declarations, he asserts his pedigree – “οὐ γὰρ ἀπείρητος μαντεύομαι, ἀλλ’ ἐν εἰδώς”, “‘for I do not prophesy as one inexperienced, but as an expert’” (170), which acts, ingeniously, as a segue to the prophecy which he declared when Odysseus joined the Achaeans at the outset of the Trojan War – that having suffered greatly, and having lost all his companions, Odysseus would return home twenty years later, unbeknownst to all (171-6). “‘All this shall now come to pass’” (τὰ δὲ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται, 176). It is Halitherses, not Telemachus, who is enfranchised to stand up to the Suitors, urge them to change, and confront them with uncomfortable truths.

As he will do later in the poem with Theoclymenus, Eurymachus takes it upon himself to reject and ridicule Halitherses’ omen interpretation, warning, and prophecy. He denies that the birds were

ominous (181-2), wishes that Halitherses had died with Odysseus (182-3), and casts doubt on Halitherses' motivation, suggesting that he seeks a bribe from Telemachus (184-6).⁵⁸¹ He even sinisterly threatens him to stop encouraging Telemachus, or expect requital (188-93). He then reasserts the Suitors' intention to wed Penelope (194-207). The ruinous folly of the Suitors is here on full display. Telemachus responds limply, contenting himself with bringing the matter to a close – “ταῦτα μὲν οὐχ ὑμέας ἔτι λίσσομαι οὐδ' ἀγορεύω”, “I shall no longer entreat you nor speak with regard to these matters” (210). He does not feel able to press on by supporting Halitherses and continuing to prosecute the line which the latter has opened. Here, as in the Theoclymenus scene, it is up to the seer to speak truth to power.

Warnings Despised

Relatively to the other two Epics, the *Odyssey* and *Rāmāyaṇa* share with each other a *relatively* uncomplicated moral universe. They work hard to alienate the Suitors and the Rākṣasas from the audience's sympathies – work in which their rejection of omens is importantly complicit. By contrast, in the *Mahābhārata*, plenty of Kuru fighters (e.g. Karna, Droṇa, Bhīṣma) are sympathetic figures, and King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, though far from irreproachable, is generally considered pitiable. Even Duryodhana is not irredeemably objectionable.⁵⁸² In the *Iliad*, Hector, Andromache, Priam, and even Helen are sympathetic, and the poem's most contemptible figure is Thersites, a Greek. I use the words ‘protagonist’ and ‘antagonist’ loosely, to refer to characters on each side of these moral divides. Although Hector and Rāvaṇa have little in common, they share at least the basic similarity of animosity towards those with whom the audience primarily identifies. Their demises are one important climax in each poem.

Yet despite these differences, the four texts share an interest in warning the doomed of their impending demise – and of the doomed rejecting or ignoring those warnings. Often, as we will see, their high status and access to divine will meant seers were the natural vehicle of these warnings. The *Rāmāyaṇa* triplicates the pattern. Rāvaṇa's own brother, Vibhīṣaṇa, suggested for both ethical and practical reasons that peace would be judicious (6. 9.7-22). The narrator endorses his opinion. Yet Rāvaṇa, ‘driven by fate’ (kālacoditaḥ, 10.1), angrily accuses Vibhīṣaṇa of envy and consorting with the enemy, and insultingly dismisses him. Vibhīṣaṇa flees to join Rāma's contingent (6.10.2-11.1). Similarly,

⁵⁸¹ This is a common reproach for seers in both traditions. Rāvaṇa, for example, accuses Malyavan of acting at the instigation of his enemies, “‘ripoḥ... paraprotsāhanena” (6. 27.6), and Sophocles' Creon accuses Teiresias of venality (*Ant.* 1036-37).

⁵⁸² See e.g. Justin Meiland, 2007, 16-23, for a nuanced view not without sympathy.

the returning spy Śaraṇa, overawed by the sight of Rāma's forces, urges the return of Sītā and peace (6.16.22-29). Rāvaṇa furiously declares that even if all the gods were to assault him, he would not give up Sītā, alerting us to his impiety and preparing for the omen rejection to come (17.2). He humiliatingly accuses Śaraṇa of ineptitude (20.4-12).

Mālyavān caps the tricolon. Although he does not have the status of a seer, he might expect, as both his adviser and his maternal great uncle, a special claim on Rāvaṇa's attention.⁵⁸³ And yet the audience can guess Rāvaṇa's reaction to Mālyavān's climactic third warning. As drums and conches herald Rāma's advance towards his fortress, Rāvaṇa broods, and voices his faith in his army's valour (6.26.1-4). Mālyavān speaks up at this critical point, telling Rāvaṇa that the gods and seers are against him (10), and that he has seen various omens, such as thundering clouds drenching Lanka with hot blood, weeping horses, and jackals and vultures shrieking (26.21-30). He predicts the destruction of the Rākṣasas (21) and urges Rāvaṇa to make peace (32). Rāvaṇa, overpowered by anger, accuses Mālyavān of duplicitous support of Rāma (27.3, 6-7), and envy of his power (27.6). He then predicts his own imminent victory (27.9-13). The humiliated Mālyavān does not respond, but, with a pleasantry, 'left and went to his own home' (27.14-15), just as Theoclymenus does. Rāvaṇa has rejected three opportunities to repent, one after the other. Immediately after responding to Mālyavān, Rāvaṇa draws up his troops at the gates (27.16. ff.).

As ever, the *Mahābhārata* abounds in examples. On the eve of the war the Kurus, Bhishma notwithstanding, ignore an embassy from the Pāṇḍavas (5.20-1), as well as the more elaborate warning delivered immediately afterwards by Sañjaya.⁵⁸⁴ This pattern of warning and rejection of warning is common also in the crucial second Parvan of the *Mahābhārata*. Vidura, Vyāsa's son and half-brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Paṇḍu, notable throughout the Epic for his wisdom, is their most common vehicle. His is the Polydamas / Mālyavān / Artabanus role – like these, it is not divinatory powers but his kinship with the main protagonists that gives him the leverage necessary for criticism. For example, he intercedes during the fatal dice match to counsel Dhṛtarāṣṭra to be wary of Duryodhana and the calamity which he and the gambling will bring. Rebuked by Duryodhana and accused of secretly consorting with enemies, Vidura rejoins that he is a fool, reiterates his warning, and leaves with a frigid farewell (2.55-7). The rejected warning is sometimes, but not always delivered by a seer. But when it is someone else, they are

⁵⁸³ The manuscript tradition is confused about his exact relation to Rāvaṇa. I follow Goldman (2009, 705). Note the similarity with Herodotus' Artabanus, who is Xerxes' paternal uncle – see pp. 182-84.

⁵⁸⁴ 22-32. It is not relevant to my current purposes that the speech is padded out with much didactic material and involves the sort of repetition attendant on textual problems. If, as it seems, the passage attracted different layers of interpolation, this would attest to its relative prominence in the poem.

always of the highest rank, connected by familial ties to the doomed. They also often use omens in their argument.

These episodes are not only like Vyāsa's and Theoclymenus' scenes (treated in detail in the second chapter) in structure, function, and various points of detail (such as, notably, the kinds of omens invoked), but also to various scenes in the *Iliad*. Although the scene is different in tone from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Hector too is implored by his family to give up a fight they believe he cannot win. His kinsman Polydamas appeals to him to retreat in the assembly, but it is Hector's bullish reply that wins the assent of the Trojans (XVIII.249-310). The poet lets his judgement be known – ὦς Ἐκτωρ ἀγόρευ', ἐπὶ δὲ Τρῶες κελάδησαν | νήπιοι: ἐκ γάρ σφεων φρένας εἴλετο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη, 'Thus spoke Hector, and the Trojans sounded their approval – fools, for Pallas Athena had removed their wits' (311-12). Hector's rejection of the warning will be ruinous for him and for Troy.

Andromache too famously intercedes towards the beginning of the poem (VI.405-440). Her appeal paints a dark future. She begins by telling Hector that she will soon be his widow, since the Achaeans will soon kill him. Not mentioning the contrary possibility, Andromache uses the future indicative, as if his death were a foregone conclusion. “δαίμονιε”, she opens, “φθίσει σε τὸ σὸν μένος”, ““My dear man, your valour will be the death of you”” (407). She continues, “τάχα χήρη | σεῦ ἔσομαι: τάχα γάρ σε κατακτανέουσιν Ἀχαιοί”, ““Soon I shall be | your widow, for soon the Achaeans will kill you”” (408-9).⁵⁸⁵ As we have seen, Epic divination often recommends a specific course of action, and Andromache ends her speech by begging Hector not to fight. Here, just like Theoclymenus in the *Odyssey* and Vibhisana, Sarana, and Mālyavān in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the doomed are given a glimpse of a disastrous future whose inevitable approach they refuse to acknowledge.⁵⁸⁶

Likewise, when he sees the freshly disabused Achilles coursing across the plain towards Troy and his duel with Hector, Priam accosts his son. Priam begins by begging Hector not to fight Achilles alone, “ἵνα μὴ τάχα πότμον ἐπίσπης | Πηλεΐωνι δαμείς, ἐπεὶ ἦ πολὺ φέρτερός ἐστι”, ““lest you meet your doom forthwith, | tamed by the son of Peleus, since he is far stronger than you”” (XXII.39-40). Had Priam been a seer, his words might have amounted to prophecy. As it is, his certainty is due, firstly, to reasonable

⁵⁸⁵ Andromache shows herself no prophet – of course Achilles will kill Hector alone. Nevertheless, Graziosi and Haubold maintain that ‘her vision is grimly prophetic since, although Achilles alone kills Hector, all the Achaeans surround his corpse and stab it at 22.369-75’ (2010, ad 407-13).

⁵⁸⁶ Telemachus' scepticism at i.413-16, where he claims to lay no trust in news of his father's impending arrival, nor in seers' declarations of the same, is of a different order, and should not be grouped as it sometimes is (e.g. Trampedach, 2008, n. 53) with other rejections of divination. Firstly, Telemachus, no doubt because he is here speaking to the Suitors, overstates his own scepticism – he is hopeful enough of his father's return that he will soon embark on an investigatory mission seeking news of it. Secondly, there is a difference between directly rejecting seers' advice, and the diffidence and despondency resulting from the non-fruit of a long-predicted and much hoped-for event. I discuss the passage further below.

inferences based on observation of Achilles' irresistible power, and, secondly, to pessimism. As elsewhere, it is followed by specific advice which is not taken – “ἀλλ' εἰσέρχαιο τεῖχος ἐμὸν τέκος, ὄφρα σαώσης | Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάς, μὴ δὲ μέγα κῆδος ὀρέξης | Πηλεΐδῃ, αὐτὸς δὲ φίλης αἰῶνος ἀμερθῆς”, “‘But enter the walls, my child, so that you might save | the Trojan men, and women, and so that you do not afford great glory | to the son of Peleus and be yourself deprived of your life’” (57-59).

At XXII.59-76, Priam has a vision of the future destruction of Troy and defilement of his own corpse. It is unique for its vividness in the *Iliad*. It caps Andromache's presentiments, which had focussed on the fate of her nuclear family, while keeping the familial focus.⁵⁸⁷ Again, its status as a prophecy should not be overstated – Priam's words do not depend on any intuitive ability; rather, they describe what Priam presumes and predicts. At 67, for example, Priam does not know – as the audience would – that it is Neoptolemus who will kill him, saying merely “ἐπεὶ κέ τις... ῥεθέων ἐκ θυμὸν ἔλῃται”, “‘once someone... has snatched the life from my limbs...’” (67-8).⁵⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the verbs are again future indicative, not conditional. Zeus *will* waste him away (φθίσει, 61 – note the verbal link with VI.407 above); his dogs, now man-eating, *will* drag his corpse (ἐρύουσιν, 67); and having drunk his blood they *will* lie in the porch (πλέοντες... κείσονται, 70-1). The poet contrives to introduce apocalyptic imagery in a quasi-prophecy just before the poem's climax – just as the other three Epics do. The juxtaposition of those works, in this way, puts the *Iliad* poet's technique in a new light. If – to forestall my conclusion – the vivid evocation of the future through foresight and omens is indeed traditional to crucial moments in Greco-Indic Epic, then Priam's speech represents a powerful innovation. Instead of scenes including divination and appeal, as we find in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and *Odyssey*, the poet collapses a future vision into an (ignored) appeal to the doomed, electrifying it with the new emotional charge of a desolated father's words to his son. The result is one of the most memorable passages in the poem.

Though not the interventions of a seer, the Andromache and Priam scenes have not only the same form (i.e. presentation of the future, future tenses), but also the same function as divination scenes. Most banally, they stoke suspense by pointing the reader towards the inevitable conclusion of the battle, just as the poets in the other three Epics do. But they are also vital for characterising Hector. While divination is crucial to Achilles' characterisation, since it allows him to know, through his divine mother and speaking horse, that he will die at Troy, the homely Hector is told of his death through the appeals of his family. Of course I do not here wish to tackle the immensely complex question of heroic motivation in the *Iliad*: I

⁵⁸⁷ The narrator darkly insinuates the consequences of Hector's death for Troy a couple of lines before Andromache's speech at VI.403 – οἷος γὰρ ἐρύετο Ἴλιον Ἐκτωρ, ‘for Hector alone was Troy's defender.’ Both points are well made by Michael Anderson, 1997, 30-33.

⁵⁸⁸ As de Jong rightly points out, 2012, *ad loc.* He is just as ignorant of the details of his own demise as Andromache was of her husband's.

content myself with observing that the role that Priam and Andromache's visions play in characterising Hector is parallel to that which prophecy plays for Achilles. Nor, of course, is the distinction absolute: Achilles is deeply concerned about his family – his son Neoptolemus and his father Peleus (XIX.323-37, XXIV.540-2, cf. xi.492-500), just as the dying Patroclus prophesies to Hector his own death (for which see my first chapter). Yet in this way the *Iliad* poet, using the same tools (i.e. vivid imagery, visions of the future, intercessions at important life-and-death moments), finds the same effects which the three other poets achieve through omens and divination. The technique is precisely analogous to techniques I treat in my second chapter (pp. 156-58), where I juxtaposed the macabre description of the battlefield by Gāndhārī, newly invested with divinatory powers, with Aeschylean / Hellenistic Tragedy's Cassandra: in these scenes, the character's emotional proximity to the action brings a vigorous new affective thrust to the narrative. The moment of Priam's abrupt quasi-divinatory vision corresponds to Gāndhārī's abrupt and momentary access to intuitive powers, just as Priam, sire of fifty Trojan princes, corresponds to Gāndhārī, mother of a hundred Kaurava princes. In both scenes, a quasi-prophetic vision of destruction is the tool by which each poet consummates his portrayal of the emotional impact of the wars' carnage. Given the same toolkit, great poets will find analogous expedients to analogous questions.

The similarities between the Priam, Cassandra, and Gāndhārī scenes are therefore just as attributable to polygenesis as to shared inheritance – this is the weak claim. Yet the broader set of similarities between the four Epic texts, which repeatedly choose to introduce rejected warnings at crucial moments, is most plausibly explained as an inherited technique. That is, there is no reason to suppose that so commonly attested a technique was not present in the parent culture, but independently reinvented by the daughters. This is the strong claim: when characters choose to reject warnings, this signals to the audience that they are doomed.⁵⁸⁹ These are delivered by those with high status and reliable knowledge of the future – either seers or elders who are quasi-prophetic or read omens.⁵⁹⁰ The pattern which would endure well into the Greek Classical age.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ I am careful to say 'character' not 'antagonist', since the pattern can be applied indifferently. Even if, in practice, the vast majority of dying characters are antagonists, protagonists too disobey warnings before their deaths. For example, Achilles explicitly warns Patroclus not to assail the walls of Troy, but to turn back and keep the fight on the plain (XVI.91-96). As the narrator tells us, had he only heeded Achilles' warning, he would have survived (XVI.684-87). In the *Aethiopis*, Achilles himself is very probably the subject of this same pattern. Proclus' summary tells us only that Θέτις τῷ παιδὶ τὰ κατὰ τὸν Μέμνονα προλέγει, 'Thetis foretells to her son events after Memnon'. This has long been thought to refer to a prophecy that Achilles' death will follow immediately after Memnon's, which indeed it does (see Malcolm Davies, 2016, *ad loc.*, with references). Reading between the lines, then, Achilles too ignores a clear warning of his death just before it.

⁵⁹⁰ For the relation between diviners and wise old men see further chapter 2, pp. 146-48.

⁵⁹¹ E.g. Soph. *OT*. 380-9, *Ant*. 1033-1061; Euripides *Hel*. 744-760, *Ba*. 255-258, fr. 795 (Nauck 2); Aristophanes *Pax* 1043-1126; *Av*. 958-999; Thucydides 5.103.2, 8.1.1.

Seers Threatened

The propensity of kings to threaten seers with violence betokens their high status, not their vulnerability. These threats, moreover, are always empty. When the Achaeans seek Calchas' counsel in the first book of the *Iliad*, the introduction of the narrator leaves his pedigree in no doubt.⁵⁹² Yet Calchas worries for his own safety, since he suspects that what he has to say will anger Agamemnon, to whom he refers not by name but by magniloquent circumlocution – “ἄνδρα... ὃς μέγα πάντων | Ἀργείων κρατέει καὶ οἱ πείθονται Ἀχαιοί”, “the man who rules over all | the Argives and whom the Achaeans obey” (78-9). Perhaps he sincerely intends to flatter Agamemnon, or perhaps to ironise his status. In any case, he acknowledges his supremacy. He makes Achilles promise to protect him, to which Achilles agrees (74-91). His concern bespeaks Agamemnon's ill judgement, and his well-placed suspicion that Agamemnon is ready to transgress social convention, rather than proving his inherently ‘lower rank’ or ambivalent status.⁵⁹³ The contempt shown Thersites throws the point into relief. As we saw above, he is simply abused and beaten when he challenges the Achaean leadership. Thersites' judgement is wrong – the Achaeans, as the audience knows, will eventually be victorious. He is the mirror image of Calchas in the first book. One is wrong, his advice ignored, and his violent treatment befits his vile status; the other is right, his advice is taken, and his concern for his safety is unfounded and serves only to underline the irascibility and myopia of the source of the threat. In the only mention of Calchas in the poem other than those in books one and two, Poseidon takes Calchas' form when he ascends from the deep to rouse up the Achaeans (XIII.43-6). Naturally, the god chooses this august figure to maximise the weight his words will

⁵⁹² I discuss these lines in my first and second chapters but repeat and translate them again here for the reader's convenience

τοῖσι δ' ἀνέστη
 Κάλχας Θεστορίδης οἰωνοπόλων ὄχ' ἄριστος,
 ὃς ἤδη τά τ' ἐόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα,
 καὶ νήεσσ' ἡγήσατ' Ἀχαιῶν Ἴλιον εἴσω
 ἦν διὰ μαντοσύνην, τήν οἱ πόρε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων.

‘And he stood up among them
 Calchas, son of Thestor, by far the best of seers,
 Who knew what was, what is, and what will be,
 And who led the ships of the Achaeans towards Ilion

Through his mantic power, which Phoebus Apollo had given him.’ (68-73)

⁵⁹³ As Kai Trampedach, whom I quote, has argued (2008). Trampedach misunderstands 80 – “κρείσσων γὰρ βασιλεὺς ὅτε χώσεται ἀνδρὶ χέρηϊ”, “for a king waxes greater whenever he is angry with a lesser man”. It is an enigmatic line, but certainly does not show that Calchas is in general a lesser man than other heroes: it is a mere gesture towards the incontestable political fact that Calchas, like everyone else, is subordinate to Agamemnon. Perhaps it is also a veiled allusion to Calchas' foresight of the immoderate – and disastrous – exercise of this power that Agamemnon will soon effect over Achilles. Interestingly, bT reports that Zenodotus athetized the verse. See John Dillery, 2005, 172-3 for a view on king-seer antagonism which is closer to mine.

have, further underlining his status. Calchas is here and throughout the Epic ultimately afforded the respect which his introduction suggests that he merits.⁵⁹⁴

The *Mahābhārata*, which of all four Epics is most assiduous in its lionisation of seers, provides a suggestive parallel to the Calchas scene. Sañjaya, who despite the scene of the bestowal of the ‘divine eye’ has intuitive divinatory powers also elsewhere,⁵⁹⁵ serves as plenipotentiary to the Kuru court – itself a notable honour and a token of his prestige. Like Sarana the spy in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, he returns from his pre-war embassy from them to the Pāṇḍavas and delivers grim news about their strength, which prompts discussion (5. 46-64). Finally, Dhṛtarāṣṭra takes Sañjaya aside in private and asks him directly for his opinion of the relative strength of the two armies (5. 65.4-5). He replies ‘na tvāṁ brūyāṁ rahite jātu kiṁ cid asūyā hi tvāṁ prasaheta rājan’, “‘There is no chance I could tell you in private, o King, since your vexation would get the better of you’”, and insists that Vyāsa and Gāndhārī, his father and wife, be brought in, since ‘tau te ’sūyāṁ vinayetām’, “‘they might hold back your vexation’” (5. 65.6-7). Sañjaya gets half his wish. Vyāsa reads his and Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s mind, instantaneously appears, and tells Sañjaya to answer Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s question (65.8-9). Sañjaya hints at his fear of physical retribution, the possibility of which hovers throughout the scene. At the very least, this short interlude functions as a rhetorical strategy, by which the poet throws into relief Sañjaya’s ensuing words – a strategy all the more valuable in the context of the long, meandering discussion between the two. Violence is not the currency of seers. Yet their singular ability to speak truth to power can make them vulnerable if their message is controversial or seems unreliable. While this motif is more fully realised in the *Odyssey*, where we saw Halitherses and Theoclymenus suffer credible threats of violence from Eurymachus, and *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is present, albeit in attenuated form, in the *Iliad* and *Mahābhārata*. It would flower again in fifth century Greek literature – notably in the figure of Teiresias in such plays as *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, and *The Bacchae*.

This point, however, is not to be overstated for the *Mahābhārata*, where Sañjaya’s apprehension is the exception, not the rule. More characteristic is Maitreya’s animus with Duryodhana in the third Parvan. The seer, having arrived out of the blue, advises that Duryodhana seek peace (3. 11.7-27). In reply, ‘duryodhanaḥ smitaṁ kṛtvā caraṇenālikhan mahīm na kiṁ cid uktvā durmedhās tasthau kiṁ cid avāṇmukhaḥ’, ‘Duryodhana affected a smile, and scratched the dusty ground with his foot. He said nothing but just sat there, head slightly bowed – the fool’ (11.29). The energetic deference of Yudhiṣṭhira

⁵⁹⁴ The case of Neleus and Melampus stands in interesting relation to these (xv.225-39). There, Neleus seems to carry through the threat to punish the seer, sequestering his money for a year (he was a rich man, see above) and fining him (perhaps he had a hand also in imprisoning him – this is not clear). In the end, Melampus will take his revenge and there is (very probably) a happy ending. Unfortunately, the details of the myth are obscure. See further below, in the ‘Itinerary’ section.

⁵⁹⁵ See my second chapter, p. 111, n. 293, and Belvalkar, 1946, 329-31.

towards Narada, described above, throws into full relief the intensity of Duryodhana's slight. Maitreya, eyes bloodshot with rage, guarantees, in a kind of prophetic curse, that since he will not heed his advice for peace, ““tvadabhidrohasaṁyuktaṁ yuddham utpatsyate mahat””, ““a great war shall break out, and with it your own demise, when mighty Bhīma shall smash your thigh by the strokes of his mace”” (3.11.34). Yet if he seeks peace, he will avoid this fate – it is his choice (11.36).⁵⁹⁶ Dhṛtarāṣṭra desperately tries to change the subject, but Maitreya is not interested, for once, in making a long speech. He leaves abruptly, and Duryodhana soon after (11.37-39). The scene lays bare Maitreya's almost untouchable position in the hierarchy of the world of Indian Epic. The consistency of their high status and their ability to challenge power leads to the same results in all four Epics. Inheritance, yet again, mixed with universal building blocks of narrative, produces structured similarity.

A Shared Moral Universe, and the Stakes of Comparison

The parallels I adduce, apart from their inherent interest, reveal more fundamental similarity. All four Epics take seriously the need to morally justify the gory defeats of their antagonists.⁵⁹⁷ Although this is a vast subject, and necessarily I limit myself to a few comments, the contours are clear even without a comprehensive treatment. Warnings are invaluable because they force a character into the explicit refusal of an alternative to their current enterprise. That is, by introducing the possibility of another course of action, which is, crucially, always that endorsed by the poet's and audience's moral code and always that aligned with the true interests of the character, warnings give space to characters to express a conscious decision to enact harm. Showing them talking the wrong decision dramatises their culpability. This is especially important in works which begin *in medias res*. We are never shown, for example, the Suitors' original decision to move into Odysseus' palace and court Penelope. By showing at length and in detail the Suitors' rejection of warnings in only the poem's second book, the poet stages the establishment of that *status quo*. Warnings work vigorously in this way to construct the moral universe of narrative. Their rejection by antagonists in the Epics – Duryodhana, Rāvaṇa, and the Suitors – firmly establishes their blameworthiness, and so their deservingness of punishment. In turn, it justifies the actions of the other side who annihilate them. The pattern is discernible behind the *Iliad*'s interest in moral ambivalence: in

⁵⁹⁶ For other 'bifurcated' prophecies in Greek literature, see my first chapter, pp. 80-1.

⁵⁹⁷ With only a few exceptions – as, for example, the *Doloneia*, whose triumphalism has little truck with moral ambiguities. Likewise Arjuna's all too easy exploits in the equally late and interpolated Virataparvan (49-61).

Hector's case, even his rejection of warnings makes him heroic, not culpable, they still signal to the audience his imminent defeat. Comparison suggests that the *Iliad* is innovative in this respect.

Seers intensify the effect: their great social authority, and their connection to fate and the divine raises the stakes of their warnings. To reject a seer's advice is either, as Hector, to call into question the institution of divination, or, as Eurymachus, to traduce the diviner's integrity. Both are powerful taboos. To refuse the advice of an elder is wanton; that of a seer, wanton and impious. Moreover, seers are unlike other characters in that, according to the conventions of Epic in both traditions, they are infallible. The audience can safely assume the accuracy of their pronouncements and so the ill-judgement of those who oppose them.

Warnings, like divination, take a future situation as their premise. They are a kind of speech which finds confirmation not in the moment, but at a time subsequent to the moment of speech. Establishment of the credentials of the predictor is therefore crucial to a warning's project – otherwise, it would not be taken seriously. Those credentials may merely be founded on the wisdom of age. But very often they use the canonical way in which poets indicate plot to characters – involve omens and intuitive divination. Seers like Theoclymenus, Halitherses, Vyāsa, and Maitreya, therefore, are the perfect vehicles for such warnings. Elsewhere, omens ratify the warnings of wise men like Polydamas (in *Iliad* 18), Artabanus, and Mālyavān. In the *Iliad*, the pattern is more refashioned and the divinatory element deflated, but the future tenses of Andromache and Priam's warnings, the audience's knowledge of Hector's death, and the visionary quality of especially Priam's speech bestow a divinatory feel even where divination is itself absent. These passages would respond to my suggestion in the conclusion to the last chapter, that the *Iliad*, being the most hostile to the preternatural of all four Epics, innovates away from divination by keeping the pattern but replacing the divinatory element. There, I argued that the *Iliad* poet sometimes puts omens in similes to maintain realism while keeping a foreboding effect. Here, he replaces seer with family member but keeps the visionary elements of the interventions. As I argued above, this also has the advantage of enhancing the scenes' emotional charge.

The texts also agree in their attribution of motives for the rejection of advice. Here my treatment will necessarily be summary. I treat only culpable stupidity, selecting a few representative samples from the passages discussed above. Above the Trojans are νήπιοι, 'fools' for following Hector and rejecting Polydamas' advice, just as Odysseus' companions are νήπιοι for ignoring his warnings and eating the cattle of the sun-god, earning thereby their own destruction (i.8).⁵⁹⁸ The Suitors do not appear at the start

⁵⁹⁸ See also ix.44, where Odysseus' νήπιοι companions do not obey his orders to flee before Ciconian reinforcements arrive.

of the poem, but the voice of the narrator conspicuously affirms the moral mechanisms which justify their demise already in the proem. Athena, at the crucial moment just before Theoclymenus gives them their final warning, παρέπλαγξεν... νόημα, ‘drove them out of their wits (xx.346). How ironic, then, when Eurymachus, the warned, accuses Theoclymenus, the warner, of being out of his mind (“ἀφραίνει ξείνος”, “‘this fellow’s mad’”, xx.361).

Indian Epic narrators, though generally agreeing with their Greek counterparts in seldom passing normative comment on proceedings, also make an exception in such cases. Duryodhana, as we saw above, was ‘durmedhās’, ‘a fool’, for his treatment of Maitreya the seer. The same, also above, rejected Vidura, saying ‘bālān ivāsmān avamanyase tvam’, ‘you consider us fools’ (2. 57.1). Where Homer leaves the irony implicit, Vidura comments on it with an angry flourish – ‘... tvam manyase rājaputra bālo ’ham ity eva sumandabuddhe’, ‘you, o Prince, dare to consider me a fool, you total imbecile’ (2. 57.14). ‘sumandabuddhe’ is a strong and arresting word: Vidura is adamant that Duryodhana is the true fool here. ‘bāla’ means ‘childish’, or ‘foolish’, just like Greek νήπιος. The weak claim explains – the universal association of children with fools leads to an extraordinarily close alignment when combined with a modicum of shared inheritance. That shared inheritance, though, is best explained by the strong claim – it was deeply traditional to both India and Greece that doomed men who reject warnings should be figured as fools, and that that ruinous stupidity partially merits them their gory end.⁵⁹⁹

A Greco-Indic Type-Scene

I define this term loosely, as a scene whose contours are determined by tradition, involving a set series of actions occurring reliably in the same order to describe the same event with the same narrative function. Verbal repetition plays no part in my definition. In non-comparative scholarship, type-scenes can be seen as existing on a scale, with verbatim repetition of swathes of verses sometimes present (as in Homeric arming scenes) and sometimes not (as in Homeric assembly scenes).⁶⁰⁰ From a diachronic

⁵⁹⁹ I do not claim that this is the only reason – arrogance, avidity of power, and many motives besides are important too. See for example Yudhiṣṭhira’s words to the dying Duryodhana, ‘prāptavān asi yal lobhān madād bālyāc ca’, ‘you have reached this end because of your avarice, wantonness, and stupidity’ (*Mhb.* 9. 58.20). In India, the doctrine of *Karma* would provide a theoretical underpinning for these narrative tendencies. A comparison with Greece and a search for *Karmic* workings within its Epic would be a worthwhile undertaking, but here is not the place for it: this would be a subject for future research.

⁶⁰⁰ The literature on Homeric type-scenes is, naturally, oceanic in extent. But for a pair of overviews, see Mark Edwards, 1992 (with 285-86 on verbal repetition), and the succinct Alexander Loney, 2020, who is strong on what he calls this ‘continuum between conformity and flexibility’ (213).

comparative standpoint, verbal repetition would be a tradition-specific later development. In this way, type-scenes would align with my understanding of formulas, for which, as I argued in my second chapter, the employment of non-cognate verbal roots need not nullify the claim to shared heredity. The abolishment of verbal repetition as a constitutive criterion of type-scene is, in any case, likely to be more a more palatable claim, since such loose type-scenes are found also within single traditions.

As I wrote in the introduction, the reconstructive model can quickly stretch credulity by its assumption that granular particularity can remain so stable over millennia of upheavals in every other sphere. But just as it is simplistic to assume that, like words, all similarities between Epic traditions must go back to an Ur-instance, it is doctrinaire always to discount this possibility out of hand. Therefore, notwithstanding my thesis' focus upon the historical texts, I pause here to put forward a kind of reconstruction consonant with my aims and methodology elsewhere.

Reconstruction works differently, and more or less plausibly, on different levels. To take the extremes, a word in the proto-language certainly can be usefully reconstructed by triangulation of attestations in daughter languages, but a poem *in toto* certainly cannot. As previous work has shown, formulas lie somewhere in between – certainly they are not so plausibly reconstructible as words, but nor is the case *a priori* hopeless as for entire poems.⁶⁰¹ Scenes are further along the scale than formulas. As I explained in the introduction, I am not convinced by attempts to reconstruct scenes in proto-Epic by comparison of singular scenes in later Epic. The data set is far too restricted, and singular scenes are far too plastic and protean to support long-range durability of the kind required.

Type-scenes, however, are subject to different dynamics. For one thing, the data set for them is bigger, since they are attested many times within one poem, and this allows for more extensive data collection and more steady triangulation. But more importantly, they are less susceptible to any substantial *ad hoc* variation, since this would negate their traditionality – in this way, they work like words and formulas, which both rely on relative homogeneity of usage for the generation of meaning. Type-scenes, therefore, more than other kinds of scene, are subject to pressure to keep the same shape diachronically.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰¹ Again, see my second chapter for a reconstruction of the semantic if not formal shape of some Greco-Indic formulas, and my introduction for other work in that area.

⁶⁰² See Andrea Doda, 2023, 91-95 for a suggestion of a type-scene attested in Homer and *Beowulf*, and the suggestion in passing by Albert Lord that type-scenes are reconstructible. Doda's scene requires the reconstruction of more particular detail than mine, and the presupposition of detailed stability for well over three millennia (see further my introduction for the advantages of Greek-Sanskrit genealogical comparison). It is better thought of as weak inheritance.

As I write in the introduction, reconstruction of an anthropological, not linguistic kind is at its most plausible when it is at its most banal. That is, it would be perfectly correct to reconstruct for proto-Greco-Indic society a duty to respect one's parents, but this says little distinctive about any of those societies – it is simply too common, too insipid an imperative to be interesting. This alignment of plausibility and banality is an ineluctable property of reconstruction of type-scenes. Certainly, heroes in Greek and Sanskrit Epic arm themselves and go to sleep, and follow a certain sequence of actions in type-scenes when they do so, but the tracking of these patterns tells us little distinctive about these societies. Consequently, the shared type-scene which I briefly treat here is not so impressive a 'result' as the shared formula of the last chapter. Nevertheless, it is not so banal as a hero putting on a helmet.

In both traditions certain characters ignore warnings from wise men, very often seers, thus signalling their impending doom to the audience. My presentation of this complex of affinities could be viewed as an argument for a type-scene in proto-Greco-Indic poetry. Given the subject of the thesis, I have concentrated on the scenes which involve a seer, but even notwithstanding this limitation, a scheme could be worked out along the following lines:

- At a moment when life and death hangs in the balance, a wise man / seer makes an entrance
- He warns the antagonist that if they pursue their intentions, the outcome will be disastrous
 - o The warner may accompany his warning with an exposition of the omens supporting his intervention, or, if a seer, make a prophecy
 - o The warner may also accompany his warning with an accusation of stupidity, arrogance, or greed
- The warned rejects the warner, and states his determination to see his current course of action to its conclusion
 - o The warned may then insult the warner, including an accusation of stupidity or venality
 - o He may also undermine the credentials of the divinatory system on whose basis the intervention was made
- The warner departs or is dismissed
- The warned meets their comeuppance

There is here a good balance between universality (there are certainly many examples of ignored warnings presaging doom in literature in general) and particularity (since the shape does correspond in a reasonable number of details). In other words, there is here the right balance between richness and banality. Ultimately, each reader must choose between the following two possibilities: either both Epic traditions independently developed these type-scenes arrestingly similar in form and function thanks to

other similarities – this would make the similarities weak inheritance; or each tradition preserves the type-scene of the Ur-tradition – strong inheritance. On this view, the profound integration of the scene with the vital task of establishing the moral stakes of narratives ensured its survival, when defined flexibly enough, over millennia. The latter is the simpler, neater, and more plausible possibility.

Divinatory Didaxis

Odysseus and Rāma are both directed to seek out sages who hold the key to the completion of their quests. Circe tells Odysseus to visit Teiresias in the Underworld (x.491-96), who then gives him invaluable advice about how to get back to Ithaca, the situation there, and what to do about it (xi.101-38). The *Rāmāyaṇa* doubles the motif: Rāma, exiled to the forest, first meets the seer Śarabhaṅga, who directs him towards the seer Sūtīkṣṇa (3. 4.30), who in turn passes on elaborate instructions about how to get to the secluded home of the august Vedic seer-poet Agastya (3. 10.28-51). The latter then gives Rāma magical weapons fashioned by Viśvakarman, the blacksmith god, and previously owned by Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Indra, to use to win back Sītā (3. 11.28-34). The combination of intuitive powers and gravitas made seers valuable tools to poets for organising their plots, and, naturally, there are analogies in those uses.

Yet there are also disanalogies. Seers are prominent vehicles for Sanskrit Epic's long didactic sections. Didactic digressions are always framed as a conversation between two characters, with Yudhiṣṭhira and Dhṛtarāṣṭra habitually the stooges who volley the orating seer a supply of conveniently ingenuous questions.⁶⁰³ The subjects embrace a vast range of topics, from the right conduct of monarchs, to metaphysical ruminations on the nature of the soul, to how to treat a menstruating woman. Indeed, this is a peculiarity not so much of Indian Epic, but of the *Mahābhārata*, where it is among the most important roles which seers have.⁶⁰⁴ The common sight in that poem of a king as the naïve listener of a discoursing seer puts them in the role of pupil and teacher, and implicates them in the power dynamics proper to this

⁶⁰³ We have seen Sañjaya in this role in the sixth Parvan and Maitreya in the fifth. The *Mahābhārata*'s vast *Śānti*- and *Anuśāsanaparvans* are almost exclusively composed of this material.

⁶⁰⁴ See John Brockington in his still essential discussion of the formation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, 'The insertion of didactic, ethical, philosophical and political material, which was perhaps intended to give the *Rāmāyaṇa* too an encyclopaedic dimension, took place to a much more limited extent than with the *Mahābhārata*' (1998, 395). This is not to say that the themes of political life, *dharma*, and right conduct are absent from the *Rāmāyaṇa* – in the second Kanda, for example, they are especially prominent – but that that poem tends to approach those questions in a more fluid way than long disquisitions.

kind of relationship – especially rigidly hierarchical in ancient (and modern) India. It further strengthens the seer's claim to parity, even superiority over royal, earthly power.

Greece, where Didactic and Epic are distinct genres, provides only the limpest parallels: Homer never stages long didactic digressions, and Hesiod's *Opera* never breaks out into narrative for its own sake. Nevertheless, they use (largely) the same *Kunstsprache* and metre – an arresting affinity. There are no obvious typological reasons for it. Epic and Didactic share no more in subject matter than Epic and Lyric, or Didactic and Lyric – perhaps even less. There are two possibilities. It could be presumed that Epic is an older genre than Didactic, and that Epic's cultural prominence suggested it as a linguistic and metrical model for a later Didactic genre. Alternatively, Didactic traditions are just as old as Epic ones, and the two genres grew up together, in dialogue. Didactic's seeming youth would on this view be an unjustified assumption, or an illusion arising from the chancy earlier preservation of Epic texts.⁶⁰⁵ After all, the fact that the Didactic elements in Sanskrit Epic are from the latest layers of the text shows only that the genres were amalgamated into the same text at a late stage – it need not imply that Didactic is a younger genre in itself. Ultimately, the evidence from both traditions is consonant with both situations, and probatory of neither. The matter cannot be settled. A third question can also be asked: were Epic and Didactic always sharply distinguished genres, or are the shared language and metre witnesses to a deep affinity, relics of a fluid pre-historic tradition in which no distinction was made between the two? – A fascinating question, but one which, again, our evidence provides no way of answering.

Some Conclusions

In all four Epics, then, seers enjoy a singularly high status, being more empowered than any other social class to speak uncomfortable truths to the most powerful. This contrasts with the situation in Mesopotamia where seers tended to be much more domesticated, the instruments of royal power. The same does not go, of course, for the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. For example, Bruce Louden sets out a comparison between Calchas and Agamemnon and Ahab and Elijah (2006, 158-60). The general similarities he enumerates are a useful reminder of the structural nature of seer-king friction (158-9): kings in any culture will be aware that the seer's supernatural power could trump or undermine a king's terrene authority. There is a structural issue baked into the interests of kings and seers. The further, verbal

⁶⁰⁵ And even this claim could be problematised, if Vedic prose or even the *Atharvaveda* were defined as Didactic. Martin West, moreover, famously claimed that Hesiod's *Opera* was older than Homer: for why, see 2011, 15-19, esp.ly 17 n.9, and 2012, 224-41, and esp.ly 225-27. His view, rightly, has won few adherents.

parallel which he adduces is certainly a common innovation from this universal, and requires no invocation of intertextuality, diffusion, or a Kulturbund to be explained.⁶⁰⁶ However, whether kings do so or not, the audience will never doubt that political expedience is never a good enough reason to discount the will of gods as expressed by a seer.⁶⁰⁷

Yet there may in principle be other reasons to do so. Although there are hints in Greek Epic that it is possible even for the wise to cast doubt on a seer's veracity, importantly, we never see this happen in practice. Closer consideration of those passages, however, will reveal the dynamics which underpin seers' status. As Odysseus says, with reference to Calchas' prophecy of the sparrows and the snake (for which see my first chapter), “τλήτε φίλοι, καὶ μείνατ' ἐπὶ χρόνον ὄφρα δαῶμεν | ἢ ἐτεὸν Κάλχας μαντεύεται ἤε καὶ οὐκί”, ““Endure, my dear men, and remain a while until we know | whether what Calchas prophesied was true or not” (II.299-300). Unlike Odysseus', of course, the poet's audience knows that it is true. Similarly, as Priam is convincing Hecuba that he must visit Achilles' tent in the Achaean camp to ransom the body of Hector, he observes that “εἰ μὲν γάρ τις μ' ἄλλος ἐπιχθονίων ἐκέλευεν, | ἢ οἱ μάντιές εἰσι θυοσκόοι ἢ ἱερῆες, | ψεῦδός κεν φαῖμεν καὶ νοσφιζοίμεθα μᾶλλον”, ““For if someone else had given the order, a mortal, | either a seer who oversees the sacrifice or a priest, | we would have called it a lie and would rather have ignored it” (XXIV.221-23. He continues that, as it is, Hermes appeared and addressed him, and so he must go). Even the enlightened Odysseus and Priam can, in principle, doubt seers. And yet they never do: this is reserved, in all four poems, for the doomed.

To sum up the foregoing in simple terms, the status of seers in Greek and Sanskrit Epic depends in principle on their veracity; but since they are always veracious, they are always of high status.⁶⁰⁸ Their status is, therefore, in one sense precarious, because it is contingent. But in practice, it is not at all contingent, since there are no counter-examples in Greek or Sanskrit Epic – nor indeed the *RV*. Presumably, Epic poets, consciously or not, reproduce in their poetry the way in which seers were viewed in their society – only the skilled ones were accorded attention and respect. Yet poetry comes apart from reality: the invaluable utility of seers in narrative poetry ensured that, in practice, the mendacious seer is nowhere in Epic. A literary norm is thus created by which the external audience can be assured of the truthfulness of prophecies even when the internal audience cannot. Often, in any case, the internal

⁶⁰⁶ 159-60. Both Agamemnon and Ahab declare that they deplore seers who prophesy only ill for them. He very briefly gestures towards the universality of the pattern at 158, n.18. For more on Louden's work, see further my introduction, p. 10, n. 29.

⁶⁰⁷ See further my introduction for what to make of cases when both Near-Eastern and IE traditions furnish a parallel for the same Greek comparandum.

⁶⁰⁸ The dynamic is clearer in the Greek case, but applies also to the Indian: see above, for example, for the particular terms of Rāvaṇa's denial of Malyavan's speech and the omens before riding into battle.

audience is just as unquestioning as the external. The result is a class of characters whose characteristics, functions, and narrative uses, perhaps more than any other, are profoundly alike in the two traditions.

Itineracy

In Greece

It is often assumed that Greek *Manteis* were traditionally itinerant. Although there is some truth to this belief, their itineracy is a more complex issue than has been recognised. It must be carefully defined. The stakes are high, since the long-range international peregrinations of *Manteis* have been invoked, most notably by Walter Burkert, as the crucial medium of cultural exchange between Greece and the Near East from the Archaic period (and before) into the fourth century.⁶⁰⁹ Yet, as I hope here to show, the genuinely vagrant *Manteis* and Chresmologues of the Classical era must not simply be assumed to have had vagrant precursors in Homer.⁶¹⁰ Itineracy was certainly a feature of *Manteis* from the fifth century on. But by that time, the divinatory landscape had been transformed by intensification of influence from Mesopotamian practices: it was even possible in Greece to become a seer by the study of books.⁶¹¹ Yet my thesis should by now have made clear the peril of retrojecting classical situations onto Homer.

As ever, my focus is on the earliest available evidence. I first consider Greece, then India, beginning with prominent Homeric seers and then turning to general comments unrelated to individuals. In the *Odyssey*, Theoclymenus appears abruptly and unheralded, just as Vyāsa and Maitreya. But the poet motivates his sudden advent by a flight for a homicide (φεύγων ἐξ Ἄργεος ἄνδρα κατακτάς, xv.224). We then learn that he is a descendant of the famous seer Melampus, who himself was fated to move from Pylos to Argos (τόθι γάρ νύ οἱ αἴσιμον ἦεν | ναιέμεναι, xv.239-40). We are told that he flees both from his fatherland and from Neleus (πατρίδα φεύγων | Νηλέα τε, 228-9), who had forcefully sequestered his

⁶⁰⁹ Burkert, 1983, and see also note 616.

⁶¹⁰ As e.g. Paul Roth does, 1982, 178, though see 177-80 for a useful list of peripatetic *Manteis* in historical times. See also Kirk, 1985, *ad.* II.594-600, for an example of the logic employed – ‘Wandering singers are ignored elsewhere in Homer, but were a probable fact of life’. He does not explain why Homer, who is elsewhere so attentive to poets, would neglect this important detail, nor what possible generic pressures motivation there might be to do so.

Kirk writes à propos of Thamyris, whose story is told in these lines (I myself quote and discuss them in my second chapter, pp. 136-39). The poet does not say that Thamyris is peripatetic, merely that he is on a journey. Momentary travel is not to be confused for habitual itineracy. The poet mentions the journey so that he can bring in the places involved; these are relevant due to the vignette’s placement within the Catalogue, which proceeds geographically.

⁶¹¹ Isocr. 19.6, see also the reference in the *Republic* with my note and references, above p. 257.

property for a year (ὅς οἱ χρήματα πολλὰ τελεσφόρον εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν | εἶχε βίη, 230-1). Neleus was the king of the land – here again there is antagonism between seer and leader.⁶¹² We are not told why. A contemporary audience would, presumably, have been able to fill in the gaps which we cannot. Yet what matters to my current argument is not the details, but the fact that it was a particular event, and not a lifestyle, that motivated Melampus' migration.⁶¹³ Similarly, Polyphides, Theoclymenus' father, moves to Hyperesia because of a disagreement with his own father, Amphiarus (254-5). The latter himself died abroad: the text merely says at Thebes (247), but it is surely legitimate to assume that he was already associated with the expedition of the Seven against Thebes. Seers are certainly swashbuckling fugitives, migrants, and campaigners – but not itinerant. They too move around for specific reasons, just as, say, Telemachus' visits to Pylos and Sparta (iii.1-iv.624), or the Cretan in Odysseus' lying tale (xiv.191-359). There is an important difference between a *Mantis* who travels, and travel being constitutive of his profession. When seers travel, it has nothing to do with their profession.

Nor is there any hint that Halitherses is itinerant. On the contrary, he speaks in the assembly (see above) as a loyal Ithacan invested in Odysseus' return. Calchas too is no more itinerant than any other Achaean, just as Helenus simply lives in Troy. Highly unusually, the poet does not mention where Calchas is from.⁶¹⁴ This indeterminate fact, with the aid of back-projection, could be distorted into a datum supporting his itineracy. Yet other functions are more plausible. As Trampedach argues, it betokens his disinterestedness.⁶¹⁵ The seer Polyidos prophesies to his son, who, it seems, is not himself a seer, that he will either die of disease at home (οἷς ἐν μεγάροισιν, XIII.667) or be killed by a Trojan – presupposing in this way that he has a home. It is not that later evidence can fill a gap where Homer is quiet. There is good evidence in Homer *against* the habitual, professional travel of seers.

It is, however, the general evidence which is normally taken as proof of the itineracy of Homeric seers. xvii.381-86 are key lines. Eumaeus is speaking to Antinous, who is indignant at his kindly summons of the beggar Odysseus to the table of the Suitors. Eumaeus remarks,

“Ἀντίνο’, οὐ μὲν καλὰ καὶ ἐσθλὸς ἔων ἀγορεύεις:

⁶¹² At the end of the tale, Melampus takes his revenge (231-8). Whatever the details are, clearly, as usual, when there is conflict between the two, the seer is the ‘goodie’ and the king the ‘baddie’. The presence of a wedding, of Neleus' daughter to Melampus' brother, strongly suggests that Neleus' punishment was part of a happy ending.

⁶¹³ What we know of one part of the story is well summarised from other sources, principally xi.281-6 and Hes. Fr. 35 [Most = 37MW], by Arie Hoekstra, 1990, ad xv.231-6. He concentrates on the marriage, cattle, and imprisonment. Unfortunately, the details of the migration and the conflict with Neleus remain obscure. Incidentally, regarding seers' high status, it is notable that Melampus' brother, Bias, is able to court Pero, daughter of Neleus, king of Pylos.

⁶¹⁴ A vital point which I owe to Trampedach, 2008, n.9.

⁶¹⁵ I disagree, however, that it shows that he is ‘integrated within its hierarchical order’ (*ibid.*). The seer stands at once within and outside that social order – as I shall argue later. Calchas' lack of provenance reflects that.

τίς γάρ δὴ ξεῖνον καλεῖ ἄλλοθεν αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν
 ἄλλον γ', εἰ μὴ τῶν οἱ δημοεργοὶ ἔασι,
 μάντιν ἢ ἱητῆρα κακῶν ἢ τέκτονα δούρων,
 ἢ καὶ θέσπιν ἀοιδόν, ὃ κεν τέρπησιν ἀεῖδων;
 οὔτοι γὰρ κλητοὶ γε βροτῶν ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν”

“Antinous, fine man that you are, you do not speak well here.

For who would come along and summon a stranger

Other, that is, than if he were one of the workmen –

A seer or medical doctor or carpenter

Or a holy bard who charms by his song?

For these are the men in the boundless world to be summoned.”

He continues that poor beggars too, though never summoned, are no less deserving of hospitable treatment.

Walter Burkert works these lines hard in his 1992 *The Orientalizing Revolution*, which is deeply committed to the itineracy of seers and singers both in Greece and in the Near East: he invokes them as a vital conduit of culture between the two regions. Of the evidence for Greece, which he sets out on page 23, these *Odyssey* lines are, remarkably, the *only* datum for itineracy from the Archaic age – slim beams for a heavy edifice.⁶¹⁶ As I write in my first chapter, while I do not deny Near-Eastern influence into Greece, there is not enough evidence to suppose that itinerant professionals such as diviners, doctors, and poets are the intermediaries. Below, I make the case that there is no reason to prefer this meaning, which can only be found if it is already expected. That is, I argue that this back-projecting interpretation is circular, and that the Greek, read in context, naturally has a different meaning.

αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν is perhaps a colloquial touch meant to evoke the hearty speech of the swineherd – all its occurrences are in direct discourse.⁶¹⁷ It is, presumably, analogous to the English idiom ‘come and /

⁶¹⁶ They have been put to such use before and since – see West, 1997, 610-11, and n.77 for further bibliography. Burkert’s interpretation is something of a commonplace, see e.g. Russo, 1992, *ad* xvii.385, ‘These verses are our earliest evidence for poets and other craftsmen as wandering professionals for hire in Greek society’.

⁶¹⁷ ii.246, xvi.197, xxiii.185, xxiv.506, XXIV.418.

come along and'. ἄλλοθεν, literally 'from elsewhere', is best taken by sense and word order closely with καλεῖ. It narrows the meaning of this polysemous word, clarifying the nuance 'to summon', rather than, say, 'to call out for'. ἄλλον, 'other', by reason both of word order and of meaning should be taken closely with what follows. γ' should be closely attended to. A limitative force, with the meaning 'at any rate', makes good sense: Eumaeus introduces a qualification to a previous sentiment, listing the exceptions to the general rule formulated at 382.⁶¹⁸ A periphrasis, making a statement of the rhetorical question, would run, 'No-one would invite a guest, other than if...', with the sub-clause introducing a limitation to the main clause. Yet Eumaeus mixes his constructions.⁶¹⁹ He does not say ... [τίς ξεῖνον καλεῖ], εἰ μὴ τῶν οἱ δημοεργοὶ ἔασι, ἢ μάντις ἢ... '[who summons a stranger], unless he were one of those who are workmen or seers or...', nor does he say [τίς γὰρ δὴ ξεῖνον καλεῖ] ἄλλον γ' ἢ δημοεργὸν ἢ μάντιν ἢ..., '[who summons a stranger] other than a workman or seer or...'.⁶²⁰ He keeps both the conditional clause and the ἄλλον γ', and then continues listing accusatives as if he had said ἄλλον γ' ἢ all along. The anacoluthon, though impossible to convey in English, is both emphatic and comprehensible in Greek. The syntax is mimetic: it ingeniously creates the impression that the exceptions occur to Eumaeus as he is speaking. His construction changes with his thought.

ξεῖνον is the essential word. The context only requires it to mean 'outsider, stranger'. In this context, that is, it specifies that the person is to be summoned, and not someone already resident in the palace such as a nurse or maid. The ξείνος is constitutively a person in some way outside the speaker's community – otherwise, they would not be able to be hosted. In other contexts, therefore, it can mean 'foreigner'. Here, however, the relevant community is that of the palace. Such a person would have the right to the hospitable treatment which Antinous seeks to deny to Odysseus. There is no reason to understand that this outsider comes from afar, is from a foreign land, or itinerant beyond the trivial sense of travelling when summoned to work rather than, say, working in shop. It is guesthood and the right to hospitality, not foreignness, which is at stake in the exchange.

⁶¹⁸ See Denniston for this sense, 'γε frequently has a restrictive force. The speaker or writer confines the applicability of his statement within certain limits' (1954, 114).

⁶¹⁹ It must be mixed because the protasis cannot be merely parenthetical, since this would leave the main clause without the negative which the sense requires. That is, Eumaeus is of course saying that one *would* invite such workmen.

⁶²⁰ Alternatively, καλεῖ τινα could be understood after εἰ μὴ. This amounts to the same meaning, although it would require a slight change in my translation. It would also shift the anacoluthon, since, on this view, the string of accusatives would be in apposition with this supplied τινα. The construction, whatever is supplied, is harsh but, again, perfectly comprehensible.

Nor are these lines evidence that seers are to be grouped into one social class along with the other kinds of professional there listed.⁶²¹ Again, the context makes clear that Eumaeus only brings these professions together in order to contrast the desirableness of summoning them with the undesirableness of summoning a beggar. Their grouping is *ad hoc*, based on the arbitrary common denominator of their being summoned (and hence worthy of the treatment of a guest), rather than being live-in staff like a nurse or a cook. The nature of their work means they must travel from home to home in their community, like a modern plumber or a 19th century European doctor. They may differ according to other criteria, such as status – it is impossible to imagine a Homeric carpenter as venerable as a Calchas or Phemius.

Nor is ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν, 'across the boundless earth', evidence of long-range itineracy. Sometimes, it indeed denotes movement over the earth, as at XXIV.342, where Hermes' winged sandals bear him ἡμὲν ἐφ' ὕγρην | ἡδ' ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν ἅμα πνοιῇ ἀνέμοιο, 'either over the ocean or over the boundless earth as swift as a gust of wind'. Yet, although ἐπί + accusative can mean movement 'towards' or 'across', it also commonly denotes position 'upon', especially upon the earth.⁶²² And indeed, apart from the four usages where movement towards must be understood,⁶²³ it is simply the equivalent of the English expression 'in the world', and is used to emphatically generalise an indefinite proposition.⁶²⁴ Crucially, two out of four general, non-physical usages of ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν in Archaic Hexameter are preceded by βροτῶν, just as our example. Of the other two, one is preceded by the trivially different βροτούς, the other by a form of καλέω, which also precedes the formula in our example.⁶²⁵ The

⁶²¹ John Dillery is wrong to argue that the lines show that *Manteis* too belong to 'an intermediate group between the nobility and their retainers and slaves' (2005, 177). Such a conclusion is only possible if all other examples of *Manteis* in Homer are ignored, and if a very particular interpretation of the lines is arbitrarily preferred.

⁶²² See the *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, A.3; *LSJ* C. I.5. Examples abound. See e.g. II.308, δράκων ἐπὶ νῶτα δαφνιδὺς, 'a dragon blood-red on its back'; Hes. *Op.* 11-12, οὐκ ἄρα μόνον ἔην Ἑρίδων γένος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν | εἰσὶ δύο, 'There was not one kind of Strife alone, but there are two | on the earth'; Hes. *Th.* 95-96 ἐκ γάρ τοι Μουσέων καὶ ἐκ ἡβόλου Ἀπόλλωνος | ἄνδρες αἰοῖδοι ἔασιν ἐπὶ χθόνα καὶ κιθαρισταί, 'For the men on the earth who are singers and lyre-players | are from the Muses and far-shooting Apollo'; Sa. 16.2-3, ... ἐπὶ γὰρ μέλαι[ν]αν ἔμμεναι κάλλιστον, '... to be the most beautiful thing in the world'.

⁶²³ The same sentence is used of the same subject at i.97-98 and v.45-46. Apart from this, the only other physical usage of ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν of the physical traversal of space is at xv.79. xvii.418 is an anomalous case. The beggar Odysseus tells Antinous that if he gives him food, ἐγὼ δέ κέ σε κλείω κατ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν, 'I would praise you across the world'.

⁶²⁴ So, for example, VII.446, "ἦ ῥά τίς ἐστι βροτῶν ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν | ὅς τις ἔτ' ἀθανάτοισι νόον καὶ μῆτιν ἐνίψει," "surely there is some mortal in the boundless world who still considers and cares for the immortals?"; xix.107, "ὦ γύναι, οὐκ ἂν τίς σε βροτῶν ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν | νεικέοι," "My lady, no-one in the boundless world would pick a fight with you"; Hes. *Theog.* 187, ... Νύμφας θ' ἅς Μελίης καλέουσ' ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν, '... and the nymphs known as the Meliae across the boundless earth' – here especially clearly the phrase simply amounts to the meaning 'worldwide'; Hes. *Op.* 487, τέρπει δὲ βροτούς ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν, '... and delights men across the boundless world'. (cf. the similar *Op.* 160, προτέρη γενεὴ κατ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν, 'the first generation in the world', presumably a variation to avoid the hiatus with the vowel-final γενεή). These and the citations in the previous note are all the uses of the phrase in extant Archaic Hexameter.

⁶²⁵ By contrast, κλητός is nowhere used in Greek literature used with ἐπί with the physical sense 'to be called across'.

implication is overwhelming: Eumaeus means ‘any man whatever, any man in the world’, rather than ‘summoned over a great distance’. Only by ignoring the linguistic evidence and back-projecting a classical situation can the lines be fashioned into evidence for the itineracy of seers.

This passage should be read along with i.415-6. The despondent Telemachus tells the Suitor Eurymachus that he would not believe in a message telling of Odysseus’ return, if one were to come, “οὔτε θεοπροπίης ἐμπάζομαι, ἢν τινα μήτηρ | ἐς μέγαρον καλέσασα θεοπρόπον ἐξερήται”, “nor do I pay any attention to whichever prophecy my mother | teases out of a seer she summons to the palace.”⁶²⁶ We are not told how nor from where Penelope summons the seer. To assume, then, that Penelope summons the seer from far away, and that these lines are evidence for the long-range peregrinations of seers, is circular reasoning.⁶²⁷

In short, there is no good evidence for the itineracy of seers in Homer; indeed, only with the back-projection of the lifestyle of Classical seers centuries later can such a meaning be got from these passages. On the other hand, as we saw above, there is no hint that Merops, Ennomos, Eurydamas, Halitherses, Melampus, Calchas or any other seer had an itinerant lifestyle – there is in fact good evidence to the contrary. Indeed, Merops and Ennomos not only have homes but rule from them. Lastly, Teiresias is Theban in Homer: the collocation Θηβαίου Τειρεσίαο, ‘Theban Teiresias’, used at x.492, x.565, xi.90, xi.165, xii.267, xxiii.323 has the aspect of a formula, and implies not only the reality but the importance of that seer’s provenance to his characterisation in myth. The Sophoclean Teiresias is summoned to the palace when required, but is, of course, not itinerant. He can be summoned precisely because it is known where he lives. This, which continues the Homeric situation, is what, if anything, should be retrojected to explain the *Odyssey* passage. This is a situation with which Eumaeus’ words can accord.

Again, it cannot in principle be excluded that, in addition to the high status seers in Homer who interacted with the royal protagonists, there was also a lower class who moved from town to town, summoned (and presumably paid) according to need, as existed in later Classical times, and that their absence from Homer was due to generic pressures. Homer was no anthropologist, and did not chronicle every element of the society which he portrays. But there is no positive reason to believe that there was. Certainly there is no evidence in Homer for the sort of long-range international peregrinations which Burkert assumes underlay cultural exchange between Greece and the Near East at the time. Their

⁶²⁶ As Dillery writes, θεοπρόπος is simply equivalent to *Mantis* here, as at XII.228 (2005, 171).

⁶²⁷ For a refreshingly deflationary account of migration of priests, poets, and seers between Greece and the Near-East, see van Dongen, 2008.

invocation is in any case unnecessary – cultural exchange could merely have depended on the frequent trade between the areas to which archaeology happily attests.

In India

The situation in Sanskrit Epic is complex in a different way. The far ampler evidence allows the clear discernment of a hierarchy of seers – not just Ṛṣis but also Mahārṣis. Vyāsa, poet of the *Mahābhārata*, forefather of many of the most important protagonists, and *deus ex machina* par excellence heads the class. Though not strictly a member of the divine pantheon, Vyāsa often behaves and is treated as a god in the *Mahābhārata*. He is the arranger (and sometimes composer) of the divine Vedas, original narrator of the *Mahābhārata*, and forefather of its cast of main characters by virtue of siring both Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu.⁶²⁸ Mighty kings address him in the most deferential terms.⁶²⁹ In the post-Epic *Purāṇas* he would be considered an incarnation of Brahmā or Viṣṇu. We have seen how gods in ancient Greece and India not only prophesy but also can be called prophets (see my discussion of the *RV* in chapter II, and e.g. Brahmā at *Ram.* 3. 50.10, Apollo at *Aes. Eum.* 17-19). Vyāsa crosses the boundary in the other direction. He stands the pre-eminent Ṛṣi, right at the threshold of the divine – ‘a little lower than the gods but... higher than ordinary mortals’.⁶³⁰

Although, as we saw in the second chapter, he is of no fixed abode, it is not strictly accurate to call him itinerant. Like a god, he simply materialises wherever and whenever the poet requires him, thanks to his magical ability to divine others’ thoughts and travel as swift as thought. Yet Vyāsa’s is a special case from which it is difficult to generalise – he functions in this way more like a divinity than a human seer. Conversely, Mahārṣis can be characterised by their tendency to interact with royalty and indeed to be itinerant. Unlike in Homer, their itineracy is clearly represented. Narada, for example, visited Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s palace on his travels, while ‘lokān anucaran sarvān’, ‘roving around all the worlds’ (2. 5.2).

⁶²⁸ The story is recounted at *Mhb.* 1.100. His half-brother, Vicitravīrya, had died childless, and he is enlisted to produce offspring with his half-brother Vicitravīrya’s wives. More devoted to intense meditation in the forest than to personal hygiene, his appearance is so feral that one of them went pale during coition (and gave birth to a pale child, Pāṇḍu), while the other had to close her eyes to bear sleeping with him (and gave birth to a blind child, Dhṛtarāṣṭra). Pāṇḍu means ‘pale’; Dhṛtarāṣṭra, ‘bearer of the nation’.

⁶²⁹ E.g. 6. 4.13, where Dhṛtarāṣṭra says “*tvaṁ hi dharmah pavitraṁ ca yaśaḥ kīrtir dhṛtiḥ smṛtiḥ | kurūṇām pāṇḍavānām ca mānyaś cāsi pitāmahaḥ*”, “For you are the law, purifier, honour, fame, joy, and memory. You are the reverent grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kurus.”

⁶³⁰ As J. L. Mehta puts it, 2009, 79, in a valuable essay on Vyāsa.

Similarly, Maitreya has no fixed address, but tours centres of pilgrimage (‘tīrthayātrām anukrāman’, 3. 11.11).

On the other hand, Ṛṣis may also inhabit hermitages. This is so common in the Sanskrit Epics as to be somewhat trivial to list. It can be true even of the most august of Mahārṣis, as Vasiṣṭha’s home in Badarīpācana (referred to at e.g. 3. 80.75, 81.156, 82.121, 100.3). Rāma too meets many Ṛṣis in hermitages, especially on his travels in the forest, who often instruct him what to do (e.g. Bharadvāja 2. 84.1, 6. 112.1, Atri 2. 109.5, Sūtikṣṇa 3. 6.1-5). He makes a point of touring them to learn from them, as he tells Sūtikṣṇa – “‘tvarāmahe vayanā draṣṭum kṛtsnam āśramamaṇḍalam ṛṣīṇāṃ puṇyaśīlānāṃ daṇḍakāraṇyavāsināṃ’”, ‘We are in a hurry to visit the hermitages of all the pious Ṛṣis who live in forest of Daṇḍaka’ (3. 7.6).

Ṛṣis, Sūtas, and Poets

Gesturing towards some important features of Ṛṣis, I make two important points. The Sanskrit term ‘Rsi’ has a much broader application than English ‘seer’ or Greek *Mantis*.⁶³¹ Of uncertain etymology, by the turn of the first millennia, it most basically refers to a class of men (and sometimes, but rarely, women) of greater than usual holiness and wisdom, who may put their magical powers to a variety of uses. Prime among these powers, and most relevantly here, are their enhanced epistemic abilities, which allow them intuitively to know future and past. The class is broad enough to admit those who are essentially divine, like Vyāsa, and those who, born human, achieve the status of Ṛṣi through study and the practice of austerity (as many of the Ṛṣis in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, including Sūtikṣṇa, referred to above).⁶³² The kind and extent of Ṛṣis’ powers differ; naturally, the class was subject to extensive internal classification. Most of these are later than our period and irrelevant to current purposes, but it is worth noting the important group of seven Mahārṣis, known as the Saptarṣis.⁶³³ Present already in the *RV*,⁶³⁴ these are especially venerable, and may even be partially responsible for the creation of the universe (see *RV*. I. 164.15, though interpretation is uncertain). As *RV*. IV. 42.8 seems to say, and as the commentator Sāyaṇa relates, mortals can appeal to them for offspring, as if they were gods able to grant such a wish.⁶³⁵ Yet, as

⁶³¹ The English term ‘holy man’ has some advantages, but some irrelevant connotations, and so I avoid it.

⁶³² See my chapter two for examples, in Greece and India, of gods as *Manteis* and *Ṛṣis*.

⁶³³ In the *Mahābhārata*, at least at 12. 120.16, these are Marīci, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Vasiṣṭha, and Angiras. The list is slightly altered from its first secure attestations in the late Vedic period (the first third of the first millennium BC), cf. e.g. Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2. 2.4.

⁶³⁴ I. 164.36, IV. 42.8, IX. 62.17, X. 82.2, 109.4, 131.7.

⁶³⁵ See the introduction to *RV* IV.42 in Jamison & Brereton, 2014.

at X. 82.2, they may also themselves make offerings, testifying to their liminal status – greater than men, lesser than gods. They can converse with the gods too (X. 109.4). Importantly, there is no distinction emic to the RV between seer-Rsis and poet-Rsis – these occupations, though separated so starkly in Greece, are both indifferently subsumed under the umbrella of possible Ṛṣi activity in ancient India. Some *Rig-Vedic* seer-poets, like Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra, are figured as Mahārṣis.⁶³⁶ As we have seen, the Sanskrit Epics too are composed by Ṛṣis – Vyāsa and Vālmīki.

In time, another class, the Sūtas, grew in importance. As Monier-Williams attests, no one English word could ever cover the wide array of the Sūta's functions. He was originally the factotum of the epic hero – his charioteer, equerry, butler, and herald. His perpetual presence at the side of the hero, moreover, made him the perfect candidate for the narration of the hero's victories, and so the Sūta was also the panegyrist and chronicler of his master. In this way, he was also associated with the narration specifically of Epic poetry, the warrior, *kṣatriya* genre par excellence. Over time, they came to work more closely with priests specialised in working at pilgrimage centres, no doubt because large groups of people with lots of leisure time were a natural place for the performance of poetry.⁶³⁷ Inasmuch as they followed the pilgrimages, then, they were itinerant. By the end of the Epic period, it seems that Brahmāns had taken over responsibility for the recitation of Epic and (by this time) for its text.⁶³⁸ I here stray from my subject – there is nothing supernatural about a Sūta, nor was he in any way related to divination. He takes up the storytelling role of the Ṛṣi but without the supernatural element. Yet once again, Greek and Indian traditions, responding to universal pressures, develop along similar lines. In the Homeric poems, bards are attached to courts, and sing at dinners, but the first historical evidence has them singing at large festivals like the Panathenaia. Similarly, while the *Rg-Vedic* seer-bards are closely attached to their aristocratic sponsors,⁶³⁹ the later Sūtas (again, importantly, not endowed with supernatural powers, and not related to divination) travel autonomously from one gathering of pilgrims to the next. Itineracy, in both cases, must be a later development mirroring social and religious shifts more widely in the culture.

⁶³⁶ Although the Seven Mahārṣis are not always identified with the same figures, just as, say, the names of the Nine Muses or Three Graces differ in Greece, these two always feature no doubt thanks to their status as prominent Rig-Vedic poets.

⁶³⁷ This is well brought out in an excellent article by Yaroslav Vassilkov, who provides a usefully clear discussion of the Sūta's functions more generally (1999, 142-6), cf. also Brockington, 1998, 19.

⁶³⁸ See *ibid.* 144, with reference to the pioneering Winternitz 1908. This is more true of the *Mahābhārata* than the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The extent to which Brahmāns revised the text has been ferociously disputed. It is a central question in the debate about the constitution of the text (for which see the introduction to my second chapter).

⁶³⁹ Although they may be itinerant inasmuch as they travel from place to place looking for a patron, cf. I. 117.6, 5. 6.8. But this should not be confused with nomadism as a lifestyle. The same goes for carpenters who go around the community looking for a job, cf. 1. 110.2, with a reference to Ṛṣis too in the same verse.

Crucial methodological points emerge. First, allowance must be made for the distorting effects of the nature of the earliest evidence to survive – hymns on the one hand, epic poetry on the other. Neither can be expected to be a complete picture of the society which produced it. Yet this does not amount to permission to read against the grain of the evidence which we do have, which overwhelmingly does not point to itinerant seers (or poets). Second, diachrony and context are fundamental components of comparison: without consideration of the earliest texts in the tradition, the itineracy of Greek and Indian bards and seers may naively have been seen as part of those cultures' shared inheritance.

However, this is impossible for another, still more essential reason. The social conditions of proto-Greco-Indic society forbid it. The creators of the *RV*, in Jamison's pithy formulation, 'formed... a semi-nomadic pastoralist society, in which seasons of settlement alternated with seasons of migration' (Jamison, 2007, 6, and 2020, 31-2). Obviously, there could not be itinerant bards or seers in such a society, since – even if some sort of increased nomadism were possible – they would not be sufficiently distinguished from the usual way of life. It is also hard to imagine how a nomad could survive alone under such conditions, amid a landscape filled with hostile, constantly warring tribes, some of which were not Vedic-speakers.⁶⁴⁰

The Indo-European proto-Greek society which split off from the Indo-Aryan branch at some time in the late third millennium BC was structured in much the same way. Certainly they were rootless and migratory enough to have splintered and diverged into places as distant as Greece and India. The geographical references of the *RV* slowly expand over time, from its oldest layers' focus on Hindu Kush and the Indus Valley, to the later layers' mentions of places well eastwards towards Himachal Pradesh. A salutary warning emerges for the comparatist – even if bards and later seers were itinerant in later societies, this cannot be due to shared inheritance. Not only is this situation not depicted in our earliest texts, but it can *a priori* be deduced from the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the ancestors of those texts.

⁶⁴⁰ Traders will be an exception. The 'vaṇik vaṇkuḥ', 'winding merchant' of *RV* V. 45.6 is presumably a salesman often on the road in search of wares. This is a mere reference to the necessities of his profession, and there is no reason to assume that he is a nomad in the sense that he has no fixed home.

RV I.125.1-3 is an interesting case. A figure called 'Prātaritvan', translated by Jamison & Brereton as 'the early comer', declares, 'āyamadya sukṛtaṃ prātarichanniṣṭeḥ putraṃ vasumatā rathena', 'I have come here today early in the morning with a goods-filled chariot, seeking one who performs (sacrifice) well, the son of my seeking' (3, 'early in the morning' is understood from context). As often, the chariot represents the hymn, with the poet its rider. This is a fascinating glimpse into the process by which a *Ṛṣi* sought a patron, but hardly evidence for nomadism.

Divergence, or Not

Parallel development is the root of this alignment. The large festivals where bards performed were not a feature either of the *RV* or of pre-Homeric, Dark Age Greece, which, it is agreed, had far lower rates of trade, travel, and migration. A few centuries later, by the mid-Archaic period in Greece and some centuries later in India,⁶⁴¹ the preconditions of settlement, security, and prosperity were sufficiently well established that both polytheistic religions could develop an elaborate calendar of festivals which took place at pilgrimage sites spread across the homelands of their adherents. In Greece divination was incorporated into this religious revolution: certain pilgrimage sites specialised in it by making provisions on sacral days for pilgrims to approach a priest with a question and receive a divine answer. Oracles developed in this way. They grew rapidly in prominence after their meagre first attestations in Homer, where they hardly feature. It is overwhelmingly likely that Greek culture was here influenced by that of its neighbours in the East Mediterranean, where oracles had been a fixture for centuries before their first literary or archaeological attestation in Greece (see my first chapter for a broader exposition of near-Eastern influence on Greece before and after Homer). India, well outside that East-Mediterranean cultural area, would never have oracles – that is the single most important divergence in the two divinatory cultures.

Yet universal factors could bring about and sustain parallel developments. Mere practicalities, for example, can explain the fact that in both traditions, unless sponsored by a certain household, bards moved around to make a living. Once the religions developed great religious congregations, bards naturally sought out these large, ready-made audiences at leisure. Seers in Greece seem to have been itinerant for a similar reason – by the Classical period, as we have seen, they went, patronless, door to door offering prophecies. Others attached themselves to armies, following an old model best exemplified in Homer by Calchas, and exemplified in the *Mahābhārata* by Sañjaya; Herodotus reports that both Greek and Persian armies were accompanied by seers whom they sponsored.⁶⁴² In any case, by the start of the sixth century much of the Greek divinatory market had been cornered by the rise of oracles.

⁶⁴¹ According to John Brockington, ‘Pilgrimage to [these centres] is clearly a relatively late feature in the *Mahābhārata*’, and so datable to the first centuries AD. These epic passages ‘are the oldest evidence for this particular form of religious activity and correspondingly valuable’ (1998, 240).

⁶⁴² 9.38. See also chap. 6, ‘Seers in Warfare’ in Flower, 2008, whose discussion of seers in Xenophon is particularly valuable.

In India, the situation is more complex for seers as for poets. Aristocrats sponsored *Ṛg-Vedic* Ṛṣis to compose hymns on their behalf, a practice which would have been familiar to Pindar,⁶⁴³ but we know almost nothing about how the narrative poetic tradition worked at the time. Sanskrit Epic shows a variety of different performance contexts, at least some of which can be attributed to diachronic shifts over its centuries-long transmission – from narration in palaces and forests (if we can indeed extrapolate from the frame narratives in the poems themselves), to roving Sūtas, and finally to Brahmāns. In India, again, some seers roam around, and others live in the forest, an important and richly symbolic environment in Sanskrit literature. As Sheldon Pollock writes, it is ‘in stark opposition to the town or city; it is a place prior to, or at least exterior to, many of the claims and obligations of the social world’ (1991, 12). The seeds are found already in the mid-Vedic period (roughly the middle quarters of the first millennium) which showed expositions of Vedic interpretation laced with metaphysical rumination called ‘Āraṇyakas’, ‘forest texts’, after their silvan setting – these esoteric learnings were constructed as in some way deviant from or opposed to usual social structures.

The antithesis of civilisation, the forest was home to the extra-human – monsters, shape-shifters, Rākṣasas, and seers. It points to the crux of the issue. Both itineracy and inhabitation of forests are symbolic expressions of the same underlying condition – those who practise divination exist outside usual social boundaries. To a great extent, the same goes in Greece. Theoclymenus’ divagations do not make him a nomad, but they do situate him outside the usual networks of social commitments which apply to others. Calchas, as we saw, though he is a part of the Achaean war effort, is highly unusual in not having a provenance, and is attached to no particular contingent. He is uniquely absent from the catalogue. Teiresias, though Theban, is set apart from the other spirits in the Underworld when Odysseus visits him. Similarly, it is a constitutive feature of Greek oracles that they are in remote locations, maintaining in this way the autonomy from political structures on which their credibility relied.⁶⁴⁴ Oracles and seers needed detachment from social structures in order to have the independence to criticise them with plausible impartiality. The pattern is clear despite its mitigations, such as the king-seers in Homer, or Halitherses’ presence at the Ithacan assembly.

India and Greece are not unique in this: separateness from society is a cross-culturally common condition for diviners. Yet beyond this banality, the condition is instantiated differently according to time and place; that is, within the universality are particularities eloquent of the culture. By seeing these various instantiations as part of the same overarching phenomenon, they can be shown in revealing new

⁶⁴³ For a valuable if presumptuous discussion with full bibliography of the principles of reciprocity and the payment structure of Indo-European poets, see Watkins, 1995, 70-75; also Benjamin Fortson, 2010, 32-3.

⁶⁴⁴ See Catherine Morgan, 1990, 183 for the importance of Delphi’s position, and compare Nissinen, 2001, 178, on that of the oracle of Ištār at Arbela.

relationships with one another. In India the separation found expression in genuine itineracy, like that of Vyāsa and Maitreya, or in Ṛsis' living and divining in the forest: in a kind of assimilation, they took their place in the symbolically anti-cultural environment *par excellence*. This is a post-Vedic development, there being no hint of such practices in the semi-nomadic cattle-herding society of the *RV*. There, the forest is home to the deplorable non-Aryan. In this way, seers came to be associated with the emerging class of ascetics, and intuitive divination became another advantage of the accumulation of *tapas*. In Greece, by contrast, oracles were situated outside the bounds of Archaic city states, just as historical diviners would later be itinerant, plying their trade in socially marginal spaces. In Tragedy, grand old *Manteis* of myth must be summoned to the palace, as Teiresias in Sophocles.⁶⁴⁵ I therefore make the weak claim for the outsider status of seers. Although the way that it manifested itself differed geographically and diachronically, diviners' extra-social position was plausibly a feature inherited by both traditions from the time of Greco-Indic unity.

Conclusion

I have argued that seers in both traditions are high-status individuals who exist outside usual social boundaries, a claim which is important for several reasons. Firstly, it confirms the overarching argument of my thesis, that there was extensive preservation of Greco-Indic divinatory heritage on every level – not only in the kind of divination practised and the literary uses to which it was put, but also in the diviners themselves, their roles in Epic, and the literary uses to which they were put as characters. They are used as the vehicles of rejected warnings, to advise kings, to direct quests, and to indicate and disambiguate omens. More generally, their connection to fate and the gods made them a powerful device for poets to get characters to do things in their narrative – hence their close identification with the voice of the poet. In one case, this manifested itself also in strong inheritance, with a type-scene of the rejected warning. This continued to be useful to poets for establishing their moral universe by alienating antagonists from the audience's sympathies.

Nevertheless, the similarities cannot *merely* be accounted for by shared inheritance. Here as throughout the thesis, I am not only interested in reconstructing elements in proto-Epic based on parallels. I often find the opposite – that profound social changes between the time of unity and the time of the Epics leave little room for reconstruction. For this reason, I concentrate on a deeper level of similarity –

⁶⁴⁵ See e.g. Soph. *OT*.288-9. Teiresias in that play proudly asserts his impartiality, clarifying to whom his loyalties lie: οὐ γάρ τι σοὶ ζῶ δοῦλος, ἀλλὰ Λοξία, 'I am not your slave, but Loxias' (410).

prestige and outsider status – and attribute further, more detailed similarity to polygenesis – the resolution of universal or practical problems along the same lines. A good example of this, the weak claim for inheritance, is the itineracy of seers – although there is no evidence for it in the oldest texts (the *RV* and Homer), both traditions independently developed it for a combination of like reasons.

Conclusion

This thesis makes three contributions. The first is in the development of a new methodology for the comparative analysis of IE (or other genealogically related) poetic traditions, and an execution of that methodology to make sense of a set of similarities between ancient Greek and Indian poetry. The second is in the application of that method to reconstruct wherever possible the divination in the poetic tradition hosted by the late IE dialect which was the direct ancestor of Greek and Vedic. Subsidiarily, I have tried to contribute, where possible, to the history of divination apart from its poetic representation. This is thus a first study of IE divination. The third is to use comparison to read extant texts anew.

Methodology

My methodology demands that Near-Eastern comparison be considered for Greek material. The total unresponsiveness of the Sanskrit evidence to certain important Greek divinatory practices – notably ornithomancy, oracles, and extispicy – confirms what, following many others, I argue in the first chapter, that their appearance in Greece was due to influence from neighbouring, Near-Eastern cultures. Oracles and extispicy are nowhere to be found in the Indian texts. Ornithomancy, while present in the *RV*, is radically different in detail. This set aside, genealogical comparison may proceed.

The method introduces nuance by making several important distinctions. The most important is between the strong and weak claims, according to which inheritance is not to be expressed in binary terms, as present or absent. When present, it may be manifest to different degrees. When it is present to a high degree, reconstruction is legitimate. When to a low, it is not: this low degree is defined as when polygenesis and inheritance occur together and inextricably. This, therefore, leads to another important distinction – reconstruction must come apart from inheritance: the latter need not imply the former. In other words, not all constituent parts of a detailed similarity between two traditions are to be reconstructed as features of the proto-culture.

Another distinction, between rich and banal inheritance, is also vital. Banal inheritance, although the most plausible kind, is uninformative about any of the cultures involved. For example, incest was prohibited in all ancient IE societies, and therefore it is safe to reconstruct this prohibition for the proto-

society. Here, it is the very universality of the prohibition that lends it high plausibility. Rich inheritance, on the other hand, may be reconstructed for a different reason. In these cases, it is rather the arbitrary particularity, that is, the *non*-universality of the item which allows it to be reconstructed. Here shared inheritance must outcompete polygenesis as the explanation for the similarity – if it does not do so totally, weak inheritance is the result. In practice, zooming out will always show that banal always underlies rich inheritance. Fundamental universals such as ‘divination’, ‘poetry’, and ‘formula’ underlie all my further observations in this thesis, including paradigmatic examples of rich inheritance, such as the formula ‘he who knows / sees what was, what is, and what will be’ (as discussed in chapter 2). Yet it is vital to continue to take account of the richness / banality distinction because they require different reasons for their reconstruction. These cut across strong and weak inheritance in different ways. Unlike the binary strong / weak distinction (i.e. something can either be legitimately constructed or not), the richness / banality distinction should be visualised on a scale. That is, it mirrors the scale of universality and particularity. The prohibition of parent-child incest is as close to universal as a prohibition can get. On the far opposite, particular end would be, for example, the prohibition of newlyweds of the Bornean Tidung people from going to the lavatory for three days after the moment of marriage. Prohibitions of masturbation are somewhere in between. They are typologically widespread, but not so much so as to be considered a universal. For example, Hinduism is not interested in condemning it for lay-people, whereas it is considered a terrible sin in the closely kindred Zoroastrianism.⁶⁴⁶

The result can be graphically represented as below. Items of culture will cluster around the shapes. What is very universal will be easily reconstructible – this is the oval. What is very particular (or arbitrarily particular) can also be reconstructed – this is the triangle. Yet sometimes, very particular parallels still do not provide a sound basis for reconstruction, either because they are not of the right kind or because they are *too* detailed. This is why the left side of the rectangle stretches to the far left corner. (And sometimes it is impossible to tell on which side of the line a given item should be.) At other times, while they contain some degree of inheritance, parallels mix in universals (or chance factors) to too high a degree for reconstruction to be the right model – this is the right side of the rectangle. When the degree of universality becomes high enough, we can again switch back over and begin reconstructing again, though we will now be reconstructing for a different reason (oval and rectangle overlap because at the margin it will be unclear whether that threshold has been crossed).

⁶⁴⁶ For which see Martin Schwartz, 1985, 654.



If a weak inheritance is close to the left side of the scale, it will be rich and interesting (especially when it contains a high degree of inheritance). But if it shows too much particularity – if it is too close a parallel, it will not be reconstructible. The area of the graph of the most interest to the genealogical comparatist is the triangle in the top left hand corner.

Divination and Reconstruction

In my thesis, I suggested that such rich, non-trivial heritage could be found widely in both cultures. Here I repeat all the elements, rich and banal, reconstructible for diviners and divination in the poetic tradition hosted by the late IE dialect spoken by the common ancestors of Greek and Vedic speakers. When the degree of certainty with which something can be constructed is not absolute, I signal this by ‘perhaps’.

- A seer was a scion of a long paternal lineage of diviners, each of whom enjoyed a gift from a god, perhaps because of a special relationship with him.
- This gift was a power which gives him a theoretically limitless ability
 - to know, intuitively, without reliance on everyday perception accessible to any other, and without reference to omens or signs of the gods, events irrespective of when they take / took place, and
 - to see, hear, or spontaneously perceive objects in the world irrespective of their immediate presence, including reading minds human and divine, and
 - to interpret omens in a non-linear way, with a precision and degree of certainty unavailable to those without this gift.
- He is described as he who knows what was, what is, and what will be – a formula whose traditional meaning alerted the poem’s audience to his ability to do the above.
- Existing on the margins of society, perhaps living physically apart from the others, he was accorded great respect by his society.

- Kings and princes sought him out for his advice. Yet he went further than his contemporaries in not always telling them what they wanted to hear, sometimes provoking the kings' wrath.
- A type-scene in the tradition exemplifies his literary function.
 - At a moment when lives are at stake, the seer in that tradition enters, perhaps 'as swift as thought' – a formula which marks out his quasi-divine status.
 - If he speaks to the protagonist,⁶⁴⁷ he will confirm or rebuff them in their current course of action, relying either on his intuitive powers of divination to do so, or enumerating and interpreting certain omens. He will then advise either on how they may achieve their aims, or encourage them to abandon them. This advice will be taken either gladly or reluctantly. The taking of the advice signals to the audience that the protagonist will sooner or later achieve his ultimate aims.
 - If he speaks to an antagonist, he warns them of the disastrous outcome of their current course of action, giving a prophecy (perhaps a bifurcated one) or indicating omens to that effect. The antagonist then rejects the seer, perhaps adding an insult or accusation of venality, or perhaps rejecting the entire divinatory system on which the seer depends. He dismisses the seer. This signals to the audience that the antagonist will not achieve his aims but will soon meet his demise.
- At a climax of the poem, that is, when an important battle, duel, or death approaches, omens appear. Perhaps these are elaborated by a seer (perhaps even in a scene of the above shape).
 - These include thunder and lightning, perhaps from a cloudless sky, shooting stars, menacing rainbows, and a sudden eclipse.
 - Perhaps these are creatively combined, mixed with one another and with other dramatic imagery, perhaps fire.
 - Perhaps similes accompany the build-up, in which soldiers or their weapons are the vehicles and ominous imagery the tenors.
 - The meaning of these omens, that is, to whom or to which side they predict death, will either be explicitly specified or clear from context.
 - The steeds of the slain weep, perhaps as he sets out to battle, or perhaps after his death.
 - The sky god, perhaps **dieu-ph₂ter-* by name, sheds blood rain at his death (but nobody notices, perhaps).

⁶⁴⁷ This is not a rigid rule – see above n. 590 for complications.

I here bring together all the thesis' instances of the strong claim. My method is conservative: these results are, I hope, something close to the minimum which can be reconstructed. I have not been willing to trade in plausibility for ampler results. I do not mention here the weak claims which explain other alignments, such as the itineracy of seers. Nor do I mention possible connections between seers and poets, since further work would be required to formulate those similarities with any precision.

Nevertheless, even with such a conservative method, this is a substantial result, which spans from formulas to type-scenes to a plethora of motifs, little events, and building blocks of narratives. The result enfranchises, firstly, further study which incorporates the evidence of other IE traditions – subject to the caveats enumerated in the introduction. Secondly, it enfranchises the application of this method to other areas of the same evidence. What of curses, for example? Or the treatment of animals? Or, indeed, poets and poetry itself?

The methodology is oven-ready. It is ripe to be applied to smaller scale studies for which the elaboration of a methodology would not be practicable.⁶⁴⁸ This study, and others like it, will, I hope, push the study of Indo-European culture and poetics away from compendia and into more analytical, discursive kinds of comparison. Indeed, in order to progress, the discipline needs new ideals. The pioneering work of last century's Near-Eastern comparatists such as Martin West, Walter Burkert, and Sarah Morris has given rise to a new generation of studies which, shedding the defensive tone for a newfound self-assurance, analyses cultural phenomena holistically across the Eastern Mediterranean, now to be defined inclusively of Greece. If anything, as the critiques I set out in my introduction show, this areal comparison has been the victim of its own success – its early achievements have led to over-reach. Indo-European Studies should respond with similar ambition. A discrete subject could be chosen, analysed by specialists in a series of bilateral comparisons according to sub-group, and complemented by consideration of horizontal transmission (e.g. from Greece to Rome, from the Near-East to Greece), and a strong synopsis. Complementarily, I hope that my second chapter's rejection of the possibility of the horizontal transmission of literary material from Greece to India (or *vice versa*) will allow genealogical comparison to proceed without any futile appeal made to this red herring.

⁶⁴⁸ For examples of these, see the first section of introduction, with notes and bibliography.

Collateral Results: What Comparison does for Extant Texts

Lastly, I have hoped to show how genealogical comparison can contribute substantially to the independent study of Greek and Sanskrit poetry. Along the way, usually in my discussion of weak inheritance, the comparative enterprise has led to the proposal of many readings. The following is inexhaustive. For Greece, I have argued for a traditional meaning to the formula ‘he who knows / sees what was, what is, and what will be’ (ὅς ἤδη τά τ’ ἐόντα τά τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ’ ἐόντα), and examined the intra-traditional diachronic development of all attestations of this formula, defined semantically and not lexically. This suggested new slants on some Homeric passages. It also included an analysis of Hesiod’s use of the formula, and offered a perspective on how his usage of it connects with Homer’s. From this arose a discussion of the commonalities between seers and poets. The same goes for another formula – ‘as swift as thought’. By attributing a traditional meaning to this, its occurrences can be read with a new resonance. Comparison also offered a new perspective on Theoclymenus’ vision in the *Odyssey*. No longer does it seem so strange and anomalous. From a diachronic standpoint, it is one of the most traditional parts of the poem. Here it is indeed true that, as in historical linguistics, a synchronic oddity asks for a diachronic explanation.

Similarly, certain Iliadic similes, including some unusually puzzling ones, responded energetically to comparison with the three other Epics. At narrative junctures where the other three poems introduce omens (before important battles, duels, and deaths), the *Iliad* often introduced ominous language in its *similes*. This points to a wider feature of that poem, which habitually exhibits ominous imagery not only on the level of narrative reality, but in its epiphanies and similes. Understanding that they function as omens – and sometimes *focalised* omens – helps us to read those similes. Moreover, other synchronic oddities such as talking horses, eclipses, blood rain, and sudden accesses of prophetic ability at death, are precisely where that poem aligns with Sanskrit Epic. These moments, from a diachronic, comparative perspective, can be seen anew as moments of profound conservatism, not as anomaly or innovation. Against this background, the interplay between preservation and innovation can be newly described.

Wider comparative arguments require more minute, collateral observations. In my third chapter, for example, I defended certain interpretations of difficult Homeric lines, such as V.150-1 and xvii.381-6, as well as giving readings of various other Homeric scenes, such as Halitherses in the assembly in *Odyssey* ii. Other striking moments in the poem, such as Andromache’s and Priam’s appeals to Hector,

could also, through comparison, be seen against a new diachronic background – as innovative deviations from the traditional scene of a diviner’s warning.

In India too the unobvious juxtapositions required by the search for inheritance, both within and between works, sets them in revealing new relationships, and results in new interpretive vistas. For example, in the second chapter the search for intuitive divination in the *RV* led me to group together certain verses. They ended up gaining clarity from this relation, and new readings could be offered. I also argued for a traditional meaning to ‘he who knows what was, what is, and what will be’ (*bhūtabhavyabhaviṣyavit*), and a diachronic relationship between it and a related form (*atītānāgate vidvān*). This decoded tricky verses which, for example, refer to the ‘knowledge of the Three Times’, and gave a new understanding of how poets manipulate traditional meanings to create irony. I also saw a Vedic precursor to the Epic formula at *RV*. I. 25.11, and possibly even the *Atharvaveda*. As in Greece, ‘as swift as thought’ was subject to an arbitrary restriction in context: this alignment is only explicable by invoking only explicable to its traditional meaning. In both cases, I argued for bridging the gap between *RV* and Epic on both a cultural and linguistic level. Indeed, the same goes for the *RV*’s use of ominous imagery, as I show at the end of the third chapter. In the fourth chapter, even on the purely abstract level of content, I argued that the animus between seer and king in Sanskrit Epic finds its predecessor in Ṛg-Vedic seer-poets’ execrations of misers.

As I found in the third chapter, the traditional meanings of certain simile vehicles in the *Mahābhārata* enhances our appreciation of the poet’s aims and technique. That text’s use of traditional referentiality is underexplored: it is an area of oral poetics which has never been extensively applied to Indian material. Moreover, when the *RV* touches on martial subjects, it reveals a glimpse of an approach to traditional imagery which chimes much more resonantly with the *Mahābhārata*, attesting to the deep roots of what that poem preserves. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, by contrast, veers away towards Kāvya in its treatment of the same lightning imagery. Vālmīki experimented widely and successfully, treating the tradition encoded in the *Mahābhārata* with creativity and irreverence. Comparison here, by looking for similarity, ends up bringing out salient, generic differences between these three texts.

More urgently, this thesis has found that the *RV* has deep cultural and linguistic commonalities with Sanskrit Epic poetry. The gulf between the Vedic and the Sanskrit, the Vedic and the Hindu, the Vedic and the Epic, the Aryan and the Brahmin, the *Śruti* and the *Smṛti* is real and to be respected. But it is not to be overstated: sometimes the gap is bridged. The precursors of the language and world of Sanskrit Epic are, on the evidence of this thesis, unmistakable already in the *RV*. For Greece, I have stressed the opposite, showing how obfuscatory and counter-productive it can be to back-project onto

Homer evidence from centuries later. The contrast speaks to a difference in a scholarly assumption rather than in text.

A consideration of seers' itineracy in both traditions led to a null result for reconstruction but prompted fruitful reflection of the reasons for the alignment. This resulted in suggestions as to the origin of oracles in Greece, and of the analogies (and disanalogies) in the instantiation of itineracy among bards and seers in both traditions. Whereas Greece assimilated these seers to pedlars contemptibly going from door to door in a city, India assimilated them to forest-dwelling sages who stored up spiritual power from their fanatical practice of religious austerities. Divination was integrated into wider social change: inasmuch as this change ran parallel, so divination ran parallel; where it did not, practices diverged. Even after divergence, the diachronic view from inheritance retains its explanatory power for synchronic oddities, such as, for example, king-seers living in the forest. The rigours of diachronic analysis can yield benefits unconnected to the comparative enterprise.

The overall view is of piecemeal, motivated change. These two exuberant boughs of the family tree grew apart, slowly and inexorably. But the dates of their sundering and their adoption of writing are close enough for the careful comparatist who scratches under the boughs' bark, extracts the poetic amber, and places it under the microscope.

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