

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE FORMATION OF BIOGRAPHICAL TRADITIONS

Having studied the traditions about poets' lives in detail, we may now make some conclusions about how, when and by whom these traditions, and biographical traditions of poets in general, were formed.

#### 1. Sources

The identifiable sources which provide information are local traditions about the poets' families and lives, poets' own verses, some specific sources (lists of victors, for example), traditions formed by particular groups, literary works, writings of chronographers, grammarians, musicologists, etc. In some cases, a tradition of one poet's life has influenced the formation of the tradition about another poet.<sup>1</sup>

It is only natural that people took interest in the lives of the important poets of their society. The poems were preserved in memory and writing, and stories, both true and invented, were told about them. Gradually the local traditions were evolved with all the different strands and variations. Typical information transmitted by local traditions is the details concerned with the poet's origin, family and ancestors (e.g. the Cymeian tradition about Hesiod's origin), the stories which link the poet to a particular place and people (e.g. Terpander's deeds in Sparta), and the details or legends about the circumstances of the poet's death and his cult (e.g. the Parian account about Archilochus' death in a sea battle against the Naxians, and the description of the establishment of his cult).<sup>2</sup> Also some inscriptions provide (true or fictional) information about the poets, e.g.

---

<sup>1</sup> About the sources of biographical traditions in general see also Fairweather 1974:232–256. She has included also Classical and later poets in her study.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also the Spartan and Athenian traditions of Tyrtaeus (Suda s.v. Τυρταῖος, Pl. *Leges* 1.629a–b and schol. *ad loc.*, etc.), Corinthian and Lesbian traditions of the escape of Arion of Methymna (Hdt. 1.24), the numerous local strands in Homer's tradition (see the biographies of Homer referred to in p. 9 n. 5), and Jacoby 1933. There is no way to say with any certainty whether or which of the details in local traditions are historically correct or not.

the Glaucus and Docimus' inscriptions, and Mnesiepes' and Sosthenes' Inscriptions in Archilochus' tradition, IG 7.4240c which includes the name of Hesiod's father Dios, and IG 14.1213 with Stesichorus' home town and his father's name.

Another, and the most frequently used source is the poet's own poetry. Anything that the poet said in his or her verses, especially if they used the first person statements, could have been linked to their life, and so the hints and details found in the poems were often used and developed into elaborate stories of the poet's origin, family members, life-style and activities.<sup>3</sup> The information drawn from the poems gives to the particular tradition its individual character, and forms the basis for most of the major stories. They often give grounds also for speculations about the poet's date. Not all topics mentioned by the poets, however, entered the biographical traditions or were developed any further. For example, there are no stories of drunken Archilochus, or about Hesiod's life as a shepherd apart from the account that he was tending the sheep when he met the Muses; Hipponax is never presented as a lame *pharmakos* even though several fragments of his poetry, written in a "lame" iambic metre, describe the ritual of a scapegoat, nor have we accounts of Sappho's wedding or marriage, her old age, or of the location of her grave, which could have easily been developed on the basis of her verses.

Specific sources such as lists of victors were used at least in the case of Terpander and other Lesbian musicians, and possibly also in Archilochus' tradition (cf. the account that he won the contest for the hymn to Demeter in Paros).

The biographical traditions were shaped and transmitted by people who were involved with the performance of poetry and music, the audience who listened to the performances, the scholars who studied different aspects of poets' creation, and groups who wished for one reason or another to link themselves with the poet. Sometimes such groups can be identified: the Pythagoreans, for example, had an influential role in shaping Hesiod's and Stesichorus' traditions (cf. especially the story of Hesiod's death/Stesichorus' birth, the details of Stesichorus' brothers, and the story of Autoleon/Leonymus' journey to the White Island); the performers and the audience of iambus and comedy developed considerably some aspects in Sappho's, Archilochus' and Hipponax' traditions (e.g. the exaggeration of their lascivious or harsh character), the circle

---

<sup>3</sup> For example the tradition of Archilochus and the daughters of Lycambes, or the story of Hesiod's initiation.

of Delphian priests may have had some influence on Archilochus' tradition (cf. the oracles in his tradition).<sup>4</sup> Early musicologists, such as Glaucus of Rhegium and Aristoxenus of Tarentum, studied Terpander's, Sappho's and others' music and innovations in it, philosophers, grammarians and chronographers were interested in the works and life of all poets. The fiction writers too, such as Lucian, had their part to play in the process of formation and transmission of traditions.<sup>5</sup> One biographical tradition could influence another, as is clearly visible in the case of Hipponax whose tradition adopted details from the Lycambes story of Archilochus' tradition.

## 2. Time

The extant biographies, more or less continuous, of the poets discussed in this work, belong to the Hellenistic period. These are the Mnesiepes' and Sosthenes' Inscriptions on Archilochus, and Sappho's "biographical" papyrus POxy 1800. From an earlier period we know that Theagenes of Rhegium (6th c. BC) wrote a treatise on Homer, Aristotle had works on poets, and Chamaeleon (4th/3rd c. BC) on Sappho, Alcman, Stesichorus, Homer, Pindar, Anacreon and Aeschylus.<sup>6</sup> These treatises have not survived. The majority of the information we have about the poets, comes from the scattered references in the works of ancient authors, and therefore we cannot expect the direct sources about the traditions to reach back much further than the end of the sixth and beginning of the fifth century BC. The fifth-century authors, however, frequently refer to the details and stories about the poets as well known facts. This implies that the core of many stories had been developed and were well known already by the beginning of the Classical period. In Hesiod's case, the story of his fathering of Stesichorus, his death according to a misunderstood oracle, and the removal of his bones from Locris to Orchomenus were referred to by Pindar, Thucydides and by the author of the (Pythagorean) *Peploi*

---

<sup>4</sup> The Homerids shaped Homer's tradition (Pi. in Eustath. in *Il.* 4.17, Acusil. and Hellan. (4 F 20) in Harpocr. Ὀμηρίδαι, Isocr. *Hel.* 65, Pl. *Rep.* 599e, cf. also Pi. *N.* 2.1–5, Pl. *Ion* 530d). See also Burkert 1979, West 1999, Graziosi 2002: 201 ff., etc. The Pythagoreans and Neoplatonists wrote about Pythagoras, see for example Iamblichus' *De Vita Pythagorica liber* and Porphyry's *De Vita Pythagorae*.

<sup>5</sup> See the references to Stesichorus, Pythagoras and Homer in his *VH* 15 and 20–22.

<sup>6</sup> Theag. 8 A 1–4 DK, Arist. fr. 70–77 R. and the lists of his works in pp. 3, 11, 20 R. About Chamaeleon see p. 195 n. 153.

(6th c. BC?), and his father Dios and the rest of his ancestors were represented in a detailed early fifth-century genealogy which took account of his Cymeian origin and synchronicity with Homer. Since the synchronism Hesiod-Homer is most probably based on the story of their encounter at a song-contest, the story of their competition at Chalcis must have been known by the beginning of the Classical period, possibly from the work of Lesches (7th c. BC?), supported by Hesiod's own lines in the *Opera* (646–662, see also a parallel reading which mentions Homer).<sup>7</sup> Another version of the story known from verses ascribed to Hesiod (fr. 357 MW), located the contest in Delos. We do not know the date of this fragment, but as it seems to be connected with the creation of the *Hymn to Apollo*, which Thucydides ascribed to Homer, the version of the story of the contest on Delos too may have been known by the beginning of the fifth century. Also Hesiod's authorship of the *Opera* and *Theogony* appears to be strongly established by the fifth century, as Simonides calls Hesiod "a gardener" and says that he told legends of gods and heroes (cf. also Aristophanes *Ran.* 1030).

Also Homer's tradition is of very early origin: in addition to the story of the contest, many accounts of his life were known to the early Classical authors. Anaximenes, Damastes, Simonides and Thucydides mention Chios as his home town, Pindar calls Homer both Chian and Smyranean, Bacchylides says that Homer came from Ios, for Stesimbrotus he was a Smyranean, for Hippias a Cymeian, and for Callicles a Salaminian.<sup>8</sup> It was known that he was blind (Thucydides), that his father was Maion (Hellanicus, Stesimbrotus), Dmasagoras (Callicles) or a river Meles (Eugaeon, Critias), that he gave the *Cypria* as a dowry to his son-in-law Stasinus (Pindar), and that there were the Homerids on Chios who were named after the poet (Pindar, Hellanicus, Acusilaus).<sup>9</sup> Heraclitus refers to his death and criticizes him, as did Xenophanes and Stesimbrotus as well.<sup>10</sup> Different accounts of his time and his genealogies were in circulation in the fifth century.<sup>11</sup> It was also believed at that time that he composed the

<sup>7</sup> Schol. *Op.* 657a Pertusi.

<sup>8</sup> Anaxim. 72 F 30, Damast. fr. 11 Fowler, Simon. (or Semonides of Amorgus, see Campbell 1991:510 n. 1) eleg. 8 Campbell, Thuc. 3.104.1–6, Pi. fr. 264 Sn.-M., Bacch. fr. 48 Bl., Stesimbr. 107 F 22, Hipp. 6 F 13, Callicl. 758 F 13.

<sup>9</sup> Thuc. 3.104.1–6, Hellan. 4 F 6, Stesimbr. 107 F 22, Callicl. 758 F 13, Eug. fr. 2 Fowler, Crit. in Philostr. *VS* 490, Pi. 265 Sn.-M., *N* 2.1–5 and ap. Eustath. in *Il.* 4.17, Acusil. and Hellan. 4 F 20.

<sup>10</sup> Heracl. 22 B 22,42,56, Xenoph. 21 B 11,12 and in Diog. L. 9.18, Stesimbr. ap Pl. *Ion* 550cd.

<sup>11</sup> Damastes 5 F 11, Hellan. 4 F 5, Pherec. 3 F 167, Gorgias 82 B 25 DK, Hdt. 2.53, Xenoph. in Gell. *NA* 3.11.

*Thebaid* (Callinus) and *Margites* (Archilochus(?), Cratinus, Aristotle), and the *Cypria* (Pindar), although the latter's ascription to Homer was debated (Herodotus), just as there were doubts about his authorship of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* (believed to be Homer's by Heraclitus(?), Pindar and Herodotus, and questioned by Hellanicus).<sup>12</sup>

In Stesichorus' tradition the pre- and early-Classical elements are his links with the Pythagoreans (cf. the above-mentioned connection with Hesiod known perhaps from Pythagorean work, and the reports that Stesichorus' brothers belonged in their circle), his Himerean origin from an *oikistes* Euclides (mentioned by Thucydides), and the story of his temporary blindness and the palinode (known to Isocrates and Plato, and based probably on his own poetry). Stesichorus' poetry was well enough known to fifth-century Athenian audiences for Aristophanes to splice Stesichorean quotations deliberately (and recognizably to the listener) with his own verses in his comedies.

Also Archilochus' poetry appears to have been well known by the fifth century, as his bad reputation as a pathetic slanderer (based on his own poetry) is mentioned by Pindar and Critias. He too was criticized by Heraclitus. There may have been some stories about his performances in circulation, as Pindar quotes Archilochus' "*Tenella*"-song which was (in later sources) linked to the poet's victory at the contest for the *Hymn to Demeter* on Paros, or to his performance of a *Hymn to Heracles* at Olympia. The synchronism between him and Gyges was firmly established by the time of Herodotus; his connection with the colonization of Thasos was probably known to Xanthus and Critias (mid-fifth century). His initiation to poetry, although first related in detail in a Hellenistic inscription, must have been known in the first part of the fifth century, as it is depicted on a vase from ca. 450 BC. Several other details concerning Archilochus in Hellenistic inscriptions (references to his father's and Lycambes' visit to Delphi, the Delphic oracles in the tradition, the trouble over "too iambic" verses at the Dionysiac festival, and his death in the (sea-)battle with the Naxians), were drawn from earlier sources referred to by name (Demeas) or as "they say."<sup>13</sup>

In the case of Hipponax, the earliest extant sources are available from a somewhat later time than in the case of other poets, but it is clear

<sup>12</sup> Callin. ap. Paus. 9.9.5, Archil. fr. 303, Cratin. fr. 368 K.-A., Arist. *EN* 6.7.2, Pi. fr. 265 Sn.-M., *N* 7.20f., *P* 4.277ff., Heracl. 22 A 22 DK, Hdt. 2.117, 4.29, Hellan. 4 F 7.

<sup>13</sup> About Archilochus see the discussion and references in chapter 108.

that the two main topics of his tradition, his connection to choliambic verse and the story of Boupalus, were established by the second part of the fifth century, as Aristophanes quotes (or misquotes) his choliambic verse and mentions Boupalus who should be silenced by beating (*Ran.* 659ff., *Lys.* 360f.). Aristophanes may have also been aware of some details of the family of Chian sculptors to which Boupalus and Athenis belonged.<sup>14</sup>

Terpander's reputation as a preeminent musician (and perhaps his connections with Sparta, on which his fame was largely based) may have been mentioned by Sappho, and his reputation as innovator of music was firmly established by Pindar's time. Hellanicus knew about his victory at the Carneian festival in Sparta. Therefore, we have hints that both main topics in Terpander's tradition, his activities in Sparta and his musical inventions, had been formed by the Classical period.<sup>15</sup>

Herodotus refers to "some of the Greeks" when he talks about Rhodopis, a rich courtesan and mistress of Sappho's brother Charaxus. He also knows that Sappho's home was in Mytilene and her father was called Scamandronymus. Another detail in Sappho's tradition, which may have been known by the fifth century (perhaps as an expansion from Sappho's verses) is the story of her leap from the Leucadian cliff, possibly referred to by Anacreon and Euripides. There are also some details which, although known from later sources, are quite plausibly drawn from an earlier tradition: the oracles in Archilochus' tradition; the information that Stesichorus' name was originally Tisias and he had a brother called Helianax; also the story of Hipponax and Iambe was probably known well before Choeroboscus who provides an account of it.

The character of the references by Classical authors to the lives of the poets indicates that the readers were fully aware of the stories. Therefore, the main stories must have been well established some time before they are first mentioned in the extant sources. The number of references and the fact that the same details are often referred to by different sources and in different variations show that not all of them were the inventions of the authors of our sources. It is not unreasonable to assume that the biographical traditions of early poets began to develop in their life time or at least very soon after their death. We have later examples of the process

---

<sup>14</sup> Aristoph. *Av.* 574 with sch. *ad loc.* There is also a possibility that a (continuous?) tradition of Hipponax existed in Ephesus up to Callimachus' time, which transmitted his poetry and possibly also accounts of his life, see p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 63.

of formation of legends during the poets' life time: Xenophanes called his contemporary Simonides of Ceos a niggard (κίμβιξ), and Pindar's complaint of contemporary poets' love for money was understood as a hint at Simonides' avarice.<sup>16</sup> Anacreon is represented wearing a woman's head-dress on a contemporary vase by the Cleophrades Painter (ca. 520 BC), Aristophanes poked fun at Euripides in the *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae* during his lifetime and in the *Frogs* only a year after the poet's death, and Ion of Chios told about his witty friend Sophocles' fondness for boys in his *Sojournings*.<sup>17</sup> In an environment where not many written texts were around and the poems were performed and transmitted mainly orally, the link between a particular poem and a poet would hardly have persisted, if people had become interested in poets' lives and started to invent the stories about them only long after their death.

In the Hellenistic period and later the already existing stories continued to develop further and, in accordance with already established conventions they were elaborated and enriched with new details: for example, the tyrant against whom Stesichorus warned the Himereans became Gelon instead of Phalaris, the Lycambes story in Archilochus' tradition was enriched with different accounts about the girls' fate. Sometimes the commentators attempted to rationalize the stories which seemed unsuitable or incredible to them: the stories of Sappho's bad reputation induced, for example, the rise of a legend of the second Sappho the courtesan, and Hesiod's own description of his initiation to song was degraded into an allegoric dream.<sup>18</sup> The topics in which the Post-Classical authors seem to have taken special and continuous interest are the chronological speculations on poets' dates, and the issues which followed from the growing scope of research done on the poets' works which led them, for example, to associate particular poets with the "invention" of particular metres and ascribe to them many innovations in poetry and music.<sup>19</sup> We also usually hear of the exile of a poet from later sources.

<sup>16</sup> Xenoph. (21 B 21 DK) ap. schol. Aristoph. *Pax* 695, Pi. *I* 2.6 ff. with the scholia *ad loc.* See also Bell 1978:34f. Aristophanes (*Pax* 695) accused Simonides of the same sin not long after the poet's death.

<sup>17</sup> Anacreon: see Boardman 1975:219 and fig. 131, Zanker 1995:24f. Sophocles: Ion of Chios (392 F 6) ap. Athen. 603e–604d.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the numerous Homeroi in the *Vita Hesiodi* 3,—an attempt to reconcile the different speculations on Homer's date, on the authorship of his poems, and on the tradition of his synchronicity with Hesiod (whom the author of the *Vita* places four hundred years later than Homer).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the long list of various inventions in Plin. *NH* 7.57.

3. *Formulaic themes*

As is apparent from the previous chapters, the biographical traditions of poets contain numerous formulaic themes which are repeated in small variations from tradition to tradition.

One of the traditional elements is certainly the significant (divine or otherwise important) origin. The shared lineage of Hesiod and Homer includes gods (Poseidon, Apollo), a Titan (Atlas), nymphs (Calliope, Methione), poets (Orpheus, Linus, Melanopus), and an *oikistes* (Chariphemus); Homer's separate genealogies add the nymph Cretheis, a river-god Meles, mythological/epic figures Polycaste and Telemachus, an Ietan *daimon*, and a poet Musaeus.<sup>20</sup> Stesichorus was believed to be either the son of Hesiod or Euclides the founder of Himera, Archilochus' father was Telesicles the *oikistes* of Thasos, Terpander was allegedly a descendant of either Hesiod or Homer. Significant origin is very characteristic in the biographies of people of other walks of life too: many heroes have divine ancestors such as Zeus (the ancestor of the Atreids, Heracles, Perseus, Sarpedon, Agenor, Ajax, Peirithous, etc.), Poseidon (allegedly a father of Theseus, and grandfather of Neleus and Pelias), Aphrodite (Aeneas' mother), Nereids and Nymphs (Achilles, Jason).<sup>21</sup> Pythagoras' ancestors include Zeus and Apollo, the seer Teiresias is the son of a nymph Chariclo, the seer Melampus' grandfather is Abas a diviner and "the first man to discover that illnesses could be cured by drugs and purification," and another seer Mopsus' forefathers are Apollo and the above mentioned Teiresias.<sup>22</sup> Significant origin, of course, adds a status and authority to the person, whether a poet, a seer or a hero.

The poetic, musical, or mantic initiation, as a defining event in the life of a poet or seer, is also a recurring theme in their biographical traditions. Hesiod was initiated into song by the Muses on Helicon, Stesichorus when a nightingale sang while sitting on his lips, and Archilochus when he exchanged a cow for the Muses' lyre. Hipponax became inspired when he met Iambe, and Terpander, perhaps, when he received Orpheus' lyre. Aeschylus was said to have started to write tragedies after he had met

<sup>20</sup> For Homer's references see his biographies (see p. 9 n. 5).

<sup>21</sup> Schol. Eur. *Orest.* 5, Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.8, 1.4.1, 3.12.2, 3.12.6-7, 3.13.6, *Il.* 14.313 ff., Hes. *Cat. fr.* 140, 141 MW, Plut. *Thes.* 6.1, etc.

<sup>22</sup> Pythagoras: Iambl. *VP* 3-4, 7. Melampus: Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.2.2. Teiresias: *ibid.* 3.6.7. Mopsus: Apollod. *Epit.* 6.3, Hes. *fr.* 278 MW and Str. 14.5.16 (675-676).

Dionysus in a dream.<sup>23</sup> Melampus learned the language of birds and the prediction of the future from the snakes who licked his ears and purified them.<sup>24</sup> Helenus and Cassandra too acquired the gift of prophecy with the help of snakes, or according to another account, Helenus learned the art of prophecy from a Thracian soothsayer, and Cassandra received it from Apollo.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes the initiation is linked to the loss of sight as in the case of Homer who received the gift of poetry when Thetis and the Muses took pity on him after he became blinded by the dazzle of Achilles' armour, and in the case of Teiresias to whom the prophetic powers were given as a compensation for the loss of sight either by Athena or Zeus.<sup>26</sup> Blindness, however, is not a very prominent feature in the traditions of poets. Apart from Homer only Thamyris and Stesichorus lost their sight. They were, however, blinded not to balance the initiation but as a punishment for their mistakes. The gift of poetry and music could sometimes also be removed from a poet, cf. the stories of Marsyas and Thamyris who lost their skill because of arrogance, and Cassandra, of whose prophecies Apollo took away the power to convince after she had refused to share his bed with him.<sup>27</sup>

Next, a frequent detail in the biographical traditions is the poet's (seer's etc.) troublesome relationship with authorities: Hesiod's quarrel with greedy and unjust kings was known from his own verses and continued to be referred to; Stesichorus was reported to have been in opposition to Sicilian tyrants; Archilochus and Hipponax fell out with the Parian and Ephesian authorities respectively because of their indecent and harsh verses; Terpander was fined by the Spartan ephors for adding a string to his cithara; Sappho's and Alcaeus' families had problems with the rulers of

<sup>23</sup> Paus. 1.21.3.

<sup>24</sup> Apollon. 1.65–68; Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.11.

<sup>25</sup> Eustath. *ad Hom.* pp. 663, 626, Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.12.5.

<sup>26</sup> Homer: *Vita Hom.* vi.45 ff., cf. [Hdt.] *Vita Hom.* 8, and also schol. E ad *Od.* 8.63, in which Moira deprives Homer of his sight and grants him song instead. According to [Hdt.] *Vita Hom.* 7, Homer lost his sight because of illness. Another story says that as an infant he was fed with honey from the breast of his nurse, the prophetess, daughter of the priest of Isis, and later some birds provided him with ambrosia (Alex. Paph. in Eusth. in *Od.* 1713.17). Teiresias: Pherecydes and Hesiod (fr. 275 MW) in Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7, Callim. *Hy.* 5.57 ff., Suda s.v. Τειρεσίας, Eustath. in Hom. p. 1665.42, schol. in *Od.* 10.494, Hygin. *Fab.* 75, cf. Paus. 9.33.1. See also Graziosi 2002:132–133, 138–143 and 148. Also Demodocus, the bard in the *Odyssey*, was deprived of his eyes in exchange for sweet song (*Od.* 8.62 ff.). He, however, is rather a literary figure and has no tradition outside the *Odyssey* and therefore is not quite a comparable to others in this context.

<sup>27</sup> Marsyas: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.4.2, cf. Hdt. 7.26. Thamyris: *Il.* 2.594 ff., Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.3.3. Cassandra: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.12.5.

Lesbos.<sup>28</sup> Pythagoras left Samos because of the tyranny of Polycrates, and later had conflicts with the Sicilian tyrants Phalaris and Dionysius, Solon had troubles with Peisistratus, of whose politics he did not approve, and Bias of Priene was in opposition to Alyattes who attempted to conquer his home town.<sup>29</sup> Another group which was constantly tangled in quarrels with rulers is the heroes, as in the legends of Orestes, Jason, Perseus, Theseus, and others.

Travelling from city to city goes with the way of poets' (seers', heroes') life. The master traveller is Homer, but all others travelled as well. Hesiod went, according to different accounts, to Euboea, Delphi, Delos, and Locris, Stesichorus visited the cities in Sicily and South-Italy and went to Arcadia, and Archilochus sailed about the Aegean and to Thasos and sang a song at Olympia. Terpander went to Sparta, Delphi, Egypt, and perhaps also to Lydia, and Sappho travelled to Sicily and Leucas. Only Hipponax' tradition lacks any significant journeys: he is reported to have moved only from Ephesus to Clazomenae. Among other poets, Anacreon had to move to Abdera in Thrace, and later lived in Samos and Athens, Ibycus went from Italy to Samos and Corinth, Alcman and Tyrtaeus were believed to have moved to Sparta, one from Lydia and another from Athens.<sup>30</sup>

The main reason for poets to travel was the participation in song contests at festivals, funeral games, and other occasions which included poetry and singing.<sup>31</sup> The archetypal legend of poetic contest is certainly the one between Homer and Hesiod at Chalcis. Comparable stories exist about Arctinus and Lesches who competed in epic poetry, and of the seers Mopsus and Calchas who held a riddle competition in Clarus near Colophon.<sup>32</sup> Both Hesiod and Homer are reported to have wished to enter also the contest at the Pythian games, but were disqualified for not

<sup>28</sup> About Alcaeus see Str. 13.2.3 (617), Diog. L. 1.74, 2.46, Arist. *Pol.* 1285a, [Acro] on Hor. *Carm.* 2.13.28, Cic. *Tusc.* 4.71, and the fragments of Alcaeus' poetry.

<sup>29</sup> Pythagoras: Iambl. *VP* 11, 189–199, 215–221, Diog. L. 8.3. Solon: Diog. L. 1.49, 51 f., Plut. *Sol.* 29 f. Bias: Diog. L. 1.83.

<sup>30</sup> Anacreon: Suda s.v. Ἀνακρέων and Τέω, and the references in n. 51. Ibycus: Suda s.v. Ἴβυκος, Antip. Sid. in *Anth. Pal.* 7.745. Alcman: Suda s.v. Ἀλκμάν, *Anth. Pal.* 7.18, 7.19, 7.709, schol. B on Alcman. 1.58 f. Tyrtaeus: Pl. *Leg.* 1.629ab and schol. *ad loc.*, Lycurg. in *Leocr.* 106, Paus. 4.15.6, etc.

<sup>31</sup> About the travelling poets see also *Od.* 17.383f, *HyAp* 169–176.

<sup>32</sup> Arctinus and Lesches: Phaenias 299 F 18, Lesches won. Mopsus and Calchas: Hes. fr. 278 MW, Calchas died of disappointment after losing the contest. Cf. also the mock contest between Euripides and Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.

knowing how to sing and play the cithara at the same time.<sup>33</sup> Terpander is said to have taken victories at the Carneian and Pythian festivals, and Archilochus at the contest for the hymn to Demeter in Paros. Orpheus was believed to have won the musical competition at the first Isthmian games, and Chrysothemis and Philammon are listed among the Pythian winners.<sup>34</sup> Different was the outcome for Marsyas and Thamyris at their contests with Apollo and the Muses respectively,—they lost, and Marsyas was consequently flayed alive, whereas Thamyris was deprived of sight and of the power of singing.<sup>35</sup>

Poets had, of course, other reasons for travelling as well: Archilochus travelled as a soldier and went out, just like Semonides of Amorgus and Solon, to found a colony, Terpander and Thaletas were invited to Sparta to heal people and settle conflicts.<sup>36</sup> Travelling is also a characteristic of the seers (for example in the traditions of Melampus, Calchas, Epimenides, Mopsus, Helenus, Pythagoras) and heroes (Theseus, Heracles, Perseus, Jason, etc.). The latter group needed to travel mainly in order to accomplish heroic deeds, such as to kill monsters and highwaymen, and save damsels in distress.

One of the most popular destinations (besides Delphi) was Egypt, where people travelled to perform their music (Terpander) or learn geometry, mysteries and other skills from the local priests and wise men (as in the case of Pythagoras, Melampus, Thales, Solon, Lycurgus).<sup>37</sup> Also Alcaeus is reported to have travelled there and, according to a somewhat esoteric strand of tradition, Homer was born in Egypt.<sup>38</sup> Sappho herself did not go to Egypt, but her brother did and met the courtesan Rhodopis there.

Sometimes the reason for travelling was expulsion after a quarrel with authorities, as happened in case of Archilochus, Hipponax, Sappho and Alcaeus.<sup>39</sup> Terpander had to leave his home town because of a murder,

<sup>33</sup> Paus. 10.7.2–3.

<sup>34</sup> Favorin. *Corinth.* 14, Paus. 10.7.2.

<sup>35</sup> For the references about Marsyas and Thamyris see 209, n. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Semonides: Suda s.v. Σημίνας. Solon: Diog. L. 1.51 and the Suda s.v. Σόλων. Thaletas: Plut. *Lyc.* 4, Pratin. 713 iii PMG, cf. Paus. 1.14.4, Ael. *VH* 12.50.

<sup>37</sup> Pythagoras lived and studied 22 years in Egypt: Iambl. *VP* 18–19, 151, 158–159, Diog. L. 8.3. Melampus: Hdt. 2.49, Diod. 1.97. Thales: Diog. L. 1.24, 27. Solon: *ibid.* 1.50, Plut. *Sol.* 26.1. Lycurgus: Plut. *Lyc.* 4.5.

<sup>38</sup> Alcaeus: Str. 1.2.30 (37). Homer: Alex. Paph. in Eustath. in *Od.* 1713.17, cf. *Cert.* 3, *Vita Hom.* v.1, *Vita Romana* 2, Suda s.v. Ὅμηρος.

<sup>39</sup> About Alcaeus (and his brother) see Arist. *Pol.* 1285a, Hor. *Carm.* 2.13.21–32, [Acro] on Hor. *ad loc.*, cf. POxy 2506 fr. 98, Favorin. *De exil.* (col.9) 10.2 Barigazzi.

exactly as Hesiod's father had had to do, according to a less known version of tradition. Stesichorus was expelled from Pallantium for an unknown reason. Exile is, in general, one of the most persistent topics in poets' biographical traditions (see also the traditions of Anacreon, Onomacritus, Xenophanes, *et al.*), and is frequently found in legends about heroes (Theseus, Jason, Sarpedon, Neleus, Tydeus, Diomedes, Patroclus, etc.).<sup>40</sup>

In addition to connections created by conflicts and contests, famous persons had story-level links with each other in several other ways too.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes they were believed to have been relatives, as in the case of Homer and Hesiod (cousins), Hesiod and Stesichorus (father-son), Hesiod and Terpander (father-son), Homer and Terpander (ancestor-descendant).<sup>42</sup> Bias and Melampus were brothers, the epic poets Creophylus and Stasinus are both reported to have been the sons-in-law of Homer.<sup>43</sup> The poets had also famous lovers: Archilochus, Hipponax, Anacreon and Alcaeus are all reported to have been the lovers of Sappho, Terpander's beloved was Cepion the musician, and Solon's the young Peisistratus.<sup>44</sup> The poets often had pupils: the above-mentioned Cepion was sometimes identified as Terpander's pupil, Anagora, Gongyla and Eunice as Sappho's pupils, Olympus was the pupil of Marsyas, Arion the pupil of Alcman; Homer's teacher was said to be either Creophylus or Aristeas of Proconnesus, and his pupil was Arctinus.<sup>45</sup> Lasus taught, according to tradition, Pindar to play the lyre and Lamprus was Sophocles' teacher; Thales is said to have taught Lycurgus of Sparta the manner how Rhadamanthys and Minos published their laws.<sup>46</sup> Pythagoras had

<sup>40</sup> Anacreon: Suda s.v. Ἀνακρέων and Τέω, Str. 14.1.30 (644). Onomacritus: Hdt. 7.6. Xenophanes: Diog. L. 9.18–20. Theseus: Plut. *Thes.* 35.3. Jason: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.27f., Hyg. *Fab.* 24. Sarpedon: Hdt. 1.173, Paus. 7.3.7. Neleus: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.9, Diod. 4.68. Tydeus: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.1. Diomedes: Dict. Cret. 6.2. Patroclus: *Il.* 23.85ff., Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.8.

<sup>41</sup> Most of them were connected chronologically as well but these links are chronological necessity rather than the expression of traditional elements.

<sup>42</sup> According to an obscure scholium (sch. B (a\*) Ov. *Ib.* 521), Archilochus was Hipponax' son-in-law.

<sup>43</sup> Bias: Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.2.2. Creophylus: Suda s.v. Κρεόφυλος, cf. Plat. *Resp.* 10.600b with schol., Procl. *Vita Hom.* p. 100, Eustath. in *Il.* p. 330.43, Tz. *Chil.* 13.652, schol. Tz. *Ex Il.* 37.25, Iambl. *VP* 11, Apul. *Flor.* 15.16. Stasinus: Ael. *VH* 9.15, Tz. *Chil.* 13.637f., Phot. *Bibl.* 319a34, cf. Suda s.v. Ὀμηρος.

<sup>44</sup> Solon: Plut. *Sol.* 1.

<sup>45</sup> Olympus: schol. Aristoph. *Eq.* 9(d). Arion: Suda s.v. Ἀρίων. Creophylus: Str. 14.1.18 (638), Eust. in *Il.* p. 330.43. Aristeas: Eustath. *loc. cit.* Arctinus: Artemon (fr. 33 W) in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.131.6.

<sup>46</sup> Lasus: schol. Pi. 1.4 Dr. (*Vita Thomana*). Lamprus: Athen. 1.20e. Thales: Eph. 70 F 149.

several famous teachers, such as Creophylus, the latter's descendant or pupil Hermodamas, Pherecydes of Syros, Thales of Miletus, Epimenides of Crete, but also the Egyptian priests, Chaldean magi, Phoenician hierophants, and Delphic priestess Themistoclea.<sup>47</sup> In turn, Pythagoras himself had many disciples, just as Homer had the Homerids, Creophylus the Creophylids, and Hesiod "those around him."<sup>48</sup> Linus taught music to Heracles, but in general, the heroes were usually sent to Cheiron for education.<sup>49</sup> Then there are stories about one famous figure meeting another: Lycurgus was said to have visited Homer on Chios and received his epics from him, Solon met Croesus, Anacharsis and Aesop; Thales helped the army of Croesus to pass the river Halys by turning the course of water; all the Seven Wise Men are reported to have met in Delphi, Corinth, Sardis, or at the Panionium on Mount Mycale.<sup>50</sup> Some poets were reported to have lived in the courts of tyrants in great luxury: Ibycus and Anacreon belonged in the court of Polycrates and his father, Anacreon later moved from Samos to the court of Hipparchus where also Simonides lived for a while.<sup>51</sup> After Hipparchus' death Simonides, along with Aeschylus, was summoned to Syracuse by Hiero.<sup>52</sup>

Oracles are frequently found in biographical traditions. Hesiod was warned that he would die at the temple of Nemean Zeus, and there were also two oracles concerning the fate of his remains. Archilochus' tradition includes a prophecy about the poet's immortality, two oracles concerning the colonization of Thasos, another one commanding the

<sup>47</sup> Iambl. *VP* 9, 11, 14, 18, 19, 151, 158–159, Diog. L. 8.2–3, 8.

<sup>48</sup> Pythag. Iambl. and Porph. *VP passim*. The Homerids: see the references in p. 203 n. 4. The Creophylids: Arist. fr. 611.10 R., Plut. *Lyc.* 4.5, Porph. *VP* 1, 15, Iambl. *VP* 11, Diog. L. 8.2, Apul. *Flor.* 15.16. Hesiod: Arist. *Met.* B 4 p. 1000a9, Pollux 5.42.

<sup>49</sup> Linus: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.3.2. Cheiron: Pi. N. 3.94 (Jason), *Il.* 11.831 f., [Hes.] fr. 204.87 ff. MW, Pi. N. 3.43–53, Apollod. *Bibl.* 13.3.6 (Achilles), 3.4.4 (Actaeon), 3.10 3, Pi. *loc. cit.* (Asclepius), Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.13.3–4 (Peleus).

<sup>50</sup> Lycurgus: Eph. 70 F 149, cf. Arist. 611.10 R., and Plut. *Lyc.* 4.3 f., according to which Lycurgus received Homer's epics from the descendants of Creophylus, cf. also Ael. *VH* 13.14. Solon: Hdt. 1.30 ff., Plut. *Sol.* 5, 27 f., Diog. L. 1.50. Thales: Diog. L. 1.38. The Seven Sages: Plut. *Sol.* 4.1, Diog. L. 1.40, see also the story of the tripod which circulated among the Wise Men: Plut. *Sol.* 4.2, Diog. L. 1.28, 82.

<sup>51</sup> Paus. 1.2.3, Ael. *VH* 9.1.4, Str. 14.1.16 (638), Plut. *Mor.* 604f, [Pl.] *Hipp.* 228bc. The reports, or some of the reports of famous people meeting each other, just as some of the accounts of travelling, exile, and origin, may be historically correct, in which case they cannot be strictly regarded as formulaic motifs in the particular biographies. Formulaic themes often reflect what the story-tellers regarded as typical and appropriate for a particular type of illustrious persons. Sometimes the story-tellers may have even had in mind some historical exemplum which they then applied to other figures.

<sup>52</sup> Paus. *loc. cit.*, *Vita Aeschyli*, p. 332 Page OCT.

Parians to honour the poet, two oracles given to his killer, and one more concerning the establishment of the Hellenistic cult of the poet. In Terpander's tradition there is an oracle for the Spartans to send for the Lesbian poet in order to be reconciled among themselves again. Homer's tradition includes four oracles: an obscure prophecy about his future fame given by his Egyptian nurse, two different Pythian oracles given to Homer about his native land and his death, and one given allegedly to the emperor Hadrian about the poet's origin.<sup>53</sup> Oracles are to be found also in the traditions of Pythagoras, Calchas, Solon, Lycurgus, of heroes such as Theseus, Achilles, Perseus, Jason, Heracles, Orestes, and others, and of the tyrants Periander, Peisistratus, Polycrates, Croesus, *et al.*

According to Virgil, Hesiod could call ash trees down the mountain sides with his song. The power over creatures and natural phenomena has parallels in other stories about seers and poets: Orpheus charmed tigers and moved rocks and trees by singing and playing the lyre, Melampus understood the language of birds and animals, and Homer evoked adverse winds on the sea and caused fire by his song.<sup>54</sup> Amphion built the walls of Thebes by making the rocks to roll in their place by the power of music, and Pythagoras mastered wild animals, birds and snakes, calmed storms, and was greeted by the river Nessus.<sup>55</sup>

Poetic, musical and mantic skills are frequently used for healing diseases or for restoring peace, as is clearly visible from the traditions of Terpander, Archilochus, Hesiod, Homer, Stesichorus, Thaletas, Tyrtaeus, Alcman, Arion, Pythagoras, Melampus, and Epimenides.<sup>56</sup> Even the bones, especially the remains of heroes, were often believed to have beneficial powers, and therefore their location had to be kept secret, so that those who wanted to find it could do it only by divine help. The

---

<sup>53</sup> Alex. Paphius in Eustath. ad *Od.* 1713.17, *Cert.* 3 and 5, [Plut.] *Vita Hom.* I.4, Procl. *Vita Hom.* 4 and 5.

<sup>54</sup> Orpheus: Verg. *Georg.* 4.510, Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.3.2, Eur. *Backh.* 561 ff., Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.23–34, Diod. Sic. 4.25.2–4, Paus. 9.30.4. Melampus: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.11–12. Homer: [Hdt.] *Vita Hom.* 256–275, 421–429.

<sup>55</sup> Amphion: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.5. Pythagoras: Iambl. *VP* 60–62, 134–135, 142, Diog. L. 8.11.

<sup>56</sup> Hesiod and Homer: Iambl. *VP* 111 (=164). Thaletas: Pratinas in [Plut.] *Mus.* 42.1146b, Paus. 1.14.4, Ael. *VH* 12.50. Tyrtaeus and Alcman: Ael. *loc. cit.* Arion: Boeth. *Inst. mus.* 1.1. Pythagoras: Iambl. *VP* 64–65, 68, 110, 112, 135, 164. Melampus: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.12, 2.2.2, Diod. 4.68, Paus. 2.18.4. Epimenides: Diog. L. 1.110. Cf. the story of Oedipus who was promised the throne of Thebes, if he restored the normal life in the city by solving the Sphinx' riddle (Soph. *OT* 380–403, Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.8). Achilles healed Telephus' wound (Cy. arg. 7, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.17, 20, cf. *Il.* 11.832).

Spartans, for example, when they could not prevail in the war against Tegea, were instructed by the Pythia to bring the bones of Orestes to Sparta, and the Athenians were directed to take the bones of Theseus from Scyrus as a remedy to help overcome plague or famine or, as it stands in another strand of tradition, the bones of Theseus which protected Scyrus against enemies had to be removed from the city before the Athenians could conquer it.<sup>57</sup> The location of Oedipus' grave in Colonus had to be kept in secret in order to keep the country safe.<sup>58</sup> Among the traditions of poets, the feature of beneficial bones is visible in Hesiod's tradition, whose remains were brought, by the advice of the Delphic oracle, from Ascra or Locris to Orchomenus in order to cure plague.

Another feature which Hesiod shares with some other poets, famous seers and heroes, is the existence of animal-helpers in his tradition. Hesiod's body was carried to the shore by dolphins, exactly as the body of young Melicertes which was eventually buried by Sisyphus, and in whose honour the Isthmian Games were established.<sup>59</sup> Arion was rescued by a dolphin from the hands of Corinthian sailors who wanted to rob his gold and kill him.<sup>60</sup> A dog helped to identify the murderers of Hesiod, and another dog, called Maera, helped to find Icarus' body.<sup>61</sup> Of the birds, cranes ensured that vengeance was taken on the murderers of Ibycus, a crow guided the Orchomenians to the place where Hesiod's bones lay, and an eagle sent by the Pythia helped the Athenians who were looking for the bones of Theseus.<sup>62</sup> Melampus the seer was helped by snakes, woodworms and a vulture.<sup>63</sup>

Inventiveness is another strong characteristic in biographical traditions of poets. The *πρῶτος εὐρετής* of choliambic metre was Hipponax; the iambic metre was ascribed either to Hipponax, Semonides or

<sup>57</sup> The Spartan story: Hdt. 1.67 f. The Athenian story: Plut. *Cimon* 8, *Theseus* 36, sch. on Aristid. 46.241. The Spartans were also instructed by an oracle to bring the bones of Orestes' son Tisamenus from Achaean Helice to Sparta (Paus. 2.18.6–8 and 7.1.8, Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.8.2–3, cf. Fontenrose 1978: 74f.).

<sup>58</sup> Soph. *OC* 1756–1767.

<sup>59</sup> Pi. fr. 6.5 Sn.-M.; Arist. fr. 637 R.; Plut. *Mor.* 677b; Paus. 1.44.11, Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.3.

<sup>60</sup> Hdt. 1.24, Plut. *Mor.* 160d; cf. the alleged song of thanksgiving by Arion, in PMG 939. See also the story of Coeranus, a good-hearted Parian man who was saved from distress at sea by dolphins whom he had some time before rescued and set free (Plut. *Mor.* 984f–985b, cf. Archil. fr. 192, Phylarchus 81 F 26, Ael. *NA* 8.3).

<sup>61</sup> The story of Icarus: Hyg. *Astron.* 2.4, Paus. 9.38.4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibycus: *Anth. Pal.* 7.745, Plut. *Mor.* 509f, Suda s.v. Ἴβυκος. The Athenians: Plut. *Mor.* 162ef, Paus. 9.38.3–4, cf. Fontenrose 1978:73–74 and Q164.

<sup>63</sup> Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.11–12, cf. Paus. 4.5.3.

Archilochus, and the latter was believed to have created many other metres and poetical techniques.<sup>64</sup> To Stesichorus the invention of hymns, several metres and new themes in poetry were assigned, Terpander was responsible for many musical innovations, and Sappho was regarded as the inventor of the *pectis* and the plectrum. The *Mixolydian* mode was believed to have been invented either by Terpander, Sappho or Phytocleides, and the hendecasyllabic (“Sapphic”) metre by Sappho or Alcaeus.<sup>65</sup> Herodotus makes Hesiod and Homer responsible for composing the first Greek theogonies and giving names to Greek gods.<sup>66</sup> The stringed instrument *sambyce* was, according to tradition, made by Ibycus, several nomes and rhythms were ascribed to Olympus, Polymnestus and Thaletas, the dithyramb to Arion, and the elegiac couplet either to Callinus, Archilochus or Mimnermus.<sup>67</sup> Amphion was believed to have invented music in general, Pan the flute with a single pipe, and Marsyas the double-pipe.<sup>68</sup> The seers, too, were creative: Teiresias, they say, discovered divination by entrails of birds, Amphiaraus divination by fire, Epimenides was the first to build temples and to purify buildings and land.<sup>69</sup> Pythagoras made many discoveries in mathematics and music, was the first to introduce weights and measures into Greece, to declare that the Evening and Morning Stars are the same, to call the universe *kosmos*, to use the word “philosopher,” to call the earth spherical, and so on.<sup>70</sup>

It seems that famous people were usually believed to have lived a long life. Hesiod’s lifetime, as we know, is reported to have been exceptionally long and to have included two periods of youth. Stesichorus, whose statue at Thermae represented him as a bent old man, was said to have died at the age of eighty-five. Homer was almost always represented as an

<sup>64</sup> About the *πρωτος ευρετης* motif and the *heuremata*-literature in general see Kleingünther 1933.

<sup>65</sup> Phytocleides the aulete as the inventor of the Mixolydian mode: [Plut.] *Mus.* 16.1136d.

<sup>66</sup> Hdt. 2.53. Hexameter was believed to be the invention of Phemonoe the daughter of Apollo and the first Pythia (Paus. 10.5.7, cf. Plin. *NH* 7.57), the Pleiades (Paus. 10.12.10), Phantothea the wife of Icarus, or the Titaness Themis (both in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.16.74–80).

<sup>67</sup> Suda s.v. Ἰβυκος and Ἀρίων, Athen. 4.175de, [Plut.] *Mus.* 5.1133ab, 7.1133df, 10.1134d, 11.1134f, 29.1141b, 33.1143a, cf. Str. 10.4.16 (480–481), Hdt. 1.23, Orion *Lex.* s.v. ἔλεγχος.

<sup>68</sup> Plin. *NH* 7.57 which contains a long list of various inventions of many fields. Another list of inventions is in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.16.74–80. About the *heuremata*-catalogues see Kleingünther 1933:143–151.

<sup>69</sup> Plin. *NH* 7.57, Diog. L. 1.112.

<sup>70</sup> Iambl. *VP* 58, 115–121, 159, 161, Diog. L. 8.14, 46f.

old man, Simonides of Ceos is reported to have lived either eighty-nine, ninety or more years, Anacreon for eighty-five, Solon and Periander both for eighty years.<sup>71</sup> Both Bias the wise man of Priene and Chilon of Sparta are reported to have died in their extreme old age.<sup>72</sup> Pythagoras' life span was said to have reached eighty or almost a hundred years, Thales lived either seventy-eight or ninety years, and Pittacus over seventy, eighty or a hundred years.<sup>73</sup> Teiresias was granted up to seven or nine generations, Sarpedon three, and Nestor over two generations; Epimenides' life lasted, according to different accounts, either 150, 154, 157, 190, or 299 years, of which he spent fifty-seven or ninety years sleeping.<sup>74</sup> Exceptional among our poets are Archilochus who was (believed to have been) killed in battle and therefore could not live to old age, and Sappho whose tradition of suicide seems to have been strong enough to overrule her own remarks about her old age. We have no direct information about the length of Terpander's life, but as he was believed to have taken victories at four Pythian games, he could not have died young.<sup>75</sup> There is no information about Hipponax' age in ancient sources.

None of our poets died a natural death. On the contrary, dying of most bizarre causes seems to be one of the strongest formulaic elements in traditions. Hesiod and Stesichorus were murdered, Archilochus died in battle or in the hands of the people he had insulted in his verses, or committed suicide, Hipponax either starved to death or hanged himself, Terpander was suffocated by a fig and Anacreon by a single pip, and Sappho leapt to her death.<sup>76</sup> There are many comparable examples in the stories about other notable persons. Ibycus for example was killed by highwaymen and Alcaeus is reported to have fallen in battle.<sup>77</sup> Pythagoras was, according to some accounts, murdered by the Crotonian mob. Alternatively he may have starved himself to death out of despair at the

<sup>71</sup> Homer: *Cert. passim*, Procl. *Vita Hom.* 8, etc. Simonides: Suda s.v. Σιμωνίδης [ς,439], *Marmor* Ep. 57, [Lucian.] *Macrob.* 26. Anacreon: [Lucian.] *ibid.*, cf. Val. Max. 9.12 ext. 8. Solon: Diog. L. 1.62. Periander: *ibid.* 1.95.

<sup>72</sup> Bias: Diog. L. 1.84f. Chilon: *ibid.* 1.72.

<sup>73</sup> Pythagoras: Iambl. *VP* 265, Diog. L. 8.46. Thales: *ibid.* 1.37f. Pittacus: Diog. L. 1.79, Suda s.v. Πιττακός, [Lucian.] *Macrob.* 18.

<sup>74</sup> Teiresias: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7, cf. Paus. 9.33.1, Tz. *On Lycophr.* 682 and Hes. fr. 276 MW. Sarpedon: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.1.2. Nestor: *Il.* 1.250. Epimenides: Diog. L. 1.109, 111, Suda s.v. Ἐπιμενίδης.

<sup>75</sup> See p. 164 n. 149.

<sup>76</sup> Anacreon: Val. Max. 9.12. ext.8.

<sup>77</sup> Ibycus: Ibycus: Suda s.v. Ἴβυκος, Antip. Sid. in *Anth. Pal.* 7.745, Plut. *Mor.* 509e-510a, Phot. *Bibl.* 1.48b, cf. Iambl. *VP* 126. Alcaeus: POxy 2506 fr. 98.

death of his disciples and extinction of his school. Again he was said to have died during the war between Agrigentum and Syracuse, when while fleeing he chose not to cross a field of beans and was killed.<sup>78</sup> Sophocles was choked to death by a grape or, according to other versions, he died either because of overjoy at obtaining a victory at a drama contest, or because he sustained his voice so long without a pause that he lost his breath at the public recitation of the *Antigone* and died.<sup>79</sup> Drusus the son of the emperor Claudius was choked by a pear.<sup>80</sup> Homer and Calchas both died of sadness over a failure to solve a riddle, Chilon of Sparta, on the other hand, died of overjoy when his son was victorious in boxing at the Olympic games.<sup>81</sup> Lycurgus was said to have starved himself to death in Delphi where he had travelled after he had exacted an oath from the Spartans that they would keep his laws until he should return.<sup>82</sup> Another law-giver, Zaleucus of Locri, committed suicide after he had breached the law made by himself that no citizen could enter the Senate house in arms.<sup>83</sup> Aeschylus was hit and killed by a falling tortoise, Euripides was torn in pieces by hounds and Orpheus by the Thracian women; Alcman and Pherecydes of Syros died of *phtheiriasis*, an infestation by lice.<sup>84</sup> Also most heroes were killed. As we can see, according to biographical traditions, to die a terrible or unusual death is almost inevitable for famous people whether they are poets, law-givers, soothsayers or heroes.

Finally, the legends of poets' lives sometimes gave rise to proverbial expressions. Old age came to be referred to as "Hesiodic" (τὸ Ἡσιόδειον γῆρας), about those who reviled others it was said that they "trample on Archilochus" (Ἀρχίλοχον πατεῖς), people who came off second best were

<sup>78</sup> Pythagoras: Diog. L. 8.39,40, Arnob. *Adv. gent.* 1.40, Porph. *VP* 56,57, cf. Iambl. *VP* 249, Diog. L. 8.41,45. According to another story, Pythagoras' throat was cut at the edge of a bean-field near Croton (Diog. L. 8.39).

<sup>79</sup> Ister and Neanthes in the *Vita Anon.*

<sup>80</sup> Plin. 7.5, Val. Max. 9.12.8, Suet. *Claud.* 27.

<sup>81</sup> Homer: Arist. fr. 76 R., *Cert.* 18 (lines 315 ff. Allen), [Hdt.] *Vita Hom.* 36, [Plut.] *Vita Hom.* i.4, Procl. *Vita Hom.* 5 (p. 100 Allen), *Vita Hom.* v and vi, etc. Calchas: Str. 14.1.27 (642) (Hes. fr. 278 MW), 14.4.3 (688) and 14.5.16 (675–676), cf. Serv. ad Verg. *Eclog.* 6.72, in which Calchas dies on account of a misunderstood prophecy. Chilon: Diog. L. 1.72.

<sup>82</sup> Plut. *Lyc.* 29.3 f. Eustath. in *Il.* p. 62.

<sup>83</sup> According to Suda (s.v. Ζάλευκος) he fell fighting for his country.

<sup>84</sup> Aeschylus: Suda s.v. Αἰσχύλος and Χελώνη μυῶν. Euripides: Suda s.v. Εὐριπίδης. Orpheus: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.3.2, Paus. 9.30.3, Ov. *Met.* 11.1 ff., etc. Alcman: Arist. *Hist. an.* 556b–557a. Pherecydes: Phot. *Bbil.* 553a, Iambl. *VP* 184 and 252.

“not quite as good as the Lesbian singer,” i.e. Terpander (μετὰ Λέσβιον ὤδόν). If somebody was completely devoid of culture and education, he was said not to know even the “three [verses/strophes] of Stesichorus” (τρία Στησιχόρου), and the shape of Stesichorus’ magnificent tomb in Catania was turned into an expression “all eight” (πάντα ὀκτώ) which was used in card games as a name of a throw which came to eight. Ibycus’ tradition gave besides the well-known “cranes of Ibycus” (derived from his death story) an expression “ἀρχαιότερος / ἀνοητότερος Ἰβύκου” which was used of hopelessly stupid people.<sup>85</sup> “The way of Chilon” (Χιλώνειος τρόπος) referred to brief Spartan style of speech, “Ἐπιμενίδειον δέγμα” was used in reference to secrets and was derived from a story according to which long after Epimenides’ death his skin was found, covered with tattooed letters which no one could read.<sup>86</sup> Pythagoras’ tradition contains numerous proverbs, such as “The long-haired lad of Samos” (τὸν ἐκ Σάμου κομήτην), “Humans are bipeds, and birds, and a third besides” (ἄνθρωπος δίπους ἐστὶ καὶ ὄρνις καὶ τρίτον ἄλλο)—both referring to Pythagoras as someone special and worthy of great respect; “They belong to the Pythagoreans” (τῶν Πυθαγορείων εἰσὶ) was used of those showing each other unusual goodwill, and “These are not Ninon’s times” (οὐ τάδε ἐστὶν ἐπὶ Νίνωνος) refers to the man who cruelly persecuted the Pythagoreans.<sup>87</sup> From the countless accounts of Theseus’ exploits rose a proverb “Not without Theseus” (οὐκ ἄνευ Θησεώς), and he himself and a man comparable to him was called “another Heracles” (ἄλλος οὗτος Ἡρακλῆς).<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, the biographical traditions are shaped according to formulaic themes. A closer look at them reveals, however, that even though figures of different walks of life often share some of the formulaic topics, each “profession” seems to attract a characteristic set of formulaic themes at the same time. Whereas travelling, death under unusual circumstances, quarrels with authorities, significant origin and links with other “celebrities” occur again and again in traditions of almost every poet, seer, tyrant, wise man, or hero, the poets seem to have been believed

<sup>85</sup> Suda s.v. Ἰβυκος, Diogen. 2.71 and 5.12 Leutsch & Schn.

<sup>86</sup> Chilon: Suda s.v. Χίλων. Epimenides: *ibid.* s.v. Ἐπιμενίδης.

<sup>87</sup> Iambl. VP 11, 30, 144, 230 and 264.

<sup>88</sup> Plut. *Thes.* 29.3. I have not found a proverb about Homer. The lines of his poems, however, sometimes became proverbial: e.g. “πόλλ’ οἶδ’ ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ’ ἐχίνος ἔν μέγα” (“the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing”) which was ascribed either to Homer or Archilochus (*Paroem. Graeci*, Z V.68 Leutsch & Scheidewin).

to be, in addition, poor but generally more inventive people than others, they have usually experienced an initiation into their art, they have pupils, they take part in song contests and are often banished from their home towns. They also have some power over the natural phenomena, their deeds give rise to numerous proverbs, and they are sometimes honoured with a cult after their death. The seers are represented typically as wise and wealthy people who write poetry, have famous teachers and take part in politics. They are usually initiated into their art and possess, similarly to the poets, a power over natural phenomena. The wise men or sages are typically witty and wealthy old men who have learned their wisdom in Egypt, they are law-givers or judges, counsellors and teachers, they compose poems and utter maxims. They also belong roughly in the same time, the first part of the sixth century.<sup>89</sup> The tyrants, on the other hand, are traditionally powerful, wealthy, often wise, and sometimes cruel people whose life is guided by oracles. Their personal life is usually unhappy. Characteristic of heroes is that they grow up abroad, their name is changed at some point of their life, they have many lovers and children, they tend to kill a close relative and are often exiled. They found new cities, take part in contests,<sup>90</sup> sometimes use magical objects, and after their death their bones have beneficial powers and they are honoured by an important hero-cult. Their traditions too almost always include oracles. The typical topics, arranged roughly by the frequency of occurrence in different traditions are listed in the following table.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Martin (1988) distinguishes the skill to write poetry and perform it and the involvement in politics as characteristic features of the Seven Sages. By these criteria only, however, Stesichorus (who is never listed among the Wise Men) would come very close to filling the requirements of a Sage.

<sup>90</sup> Hero-contests were in skills useful in heroes' everyday life which was full of chasing monsters, punishing highwaymen, stealing, fighting, and rescuing princesses. The athletic contests for heroes included wrestling, armed duelling, boxing, foot-race with or without full armour, throwing of discus and javelin, archery, riding and chariot race. About hero-contest see Favorinus *Corinth.* 14 (the first Isthmian Games), *Il.* book 23 (the funeral games of Patroclus), Verg. *Aen.* book 5 (the funeral games of Anchises), and Paus. 5.17.9–11 (the funeral games of Pelias).

<sup>91</sup> The "links with others" stands for the connections with other notable persons either on story-level or in chronography. The "two or more persons" means that some strands of tradition provide two or more persons under the same name owing to rationalization of the tradition. Cf. the two Sapphos (the poetess and the courtesan), and the three Homeroi. "Divine/immortal" means that the person is called divine or immortal in the tradition. See the Appendix for the references.

Table 8.1: Formulaic themes in the traditions of different “professions.”

Poets [Poetry]	Seers [Clairvoyance]	Wise Men [Wisdom]	Tyrants [Politics]	Heroes [Heroic deeds]
Travelling	Links with others	Links with others	[General at war]	Travelling
Links with others	Wisdom	Maxims	Links with others	Quarrels
Inventions	Travelling	Unusual death	Travelling	Significant origin
Unusual death	Quarrels	Poetry	Wisdom	Cult
Initiation	Significant origin	Old age	Oracles	Oracles
Exile	Unusual death	Politics	Contests/single combats	Grows up abroad
Quarrels	Initiation	Law-giver/judge	Proverbs	Many lovers and children
Significant origin	Cult	One of the 7 Wise Men	Old age	Unusual death
Power over nat. phen.	Inventions	Travelling	Supports arts	Links with others
(Song) contests	Contests (in wisdom)	Significant origin	Unhappy personal life	Exile
Pupils	Politics	Wit	Poetry	(Hero) contests
Poverty	<i>Oikistes</i>	Inventions	Unusual death	Proverbs
Proverbs	Power over nat. phen.	Quarrels	Quarrels	Change of name
Wisdom	Old age	Egypt	Significant origin	Politics
Cult	Oracles	Wealth	Two or more persons	<i>Oikistes</i>
Old age	Egypt	Cult	Wealth	General at war
Oracles	Two or more persons	Pupils	Maxims	Kills a close relative
Visiting Egypt	Wealth	Proverbs	Law-giver/judge	Establishes a festival or rite
Two or more persons	Teachers	Oracles	One of the 7 Wise Men	Magical objects
Change of name	Own oracle	Establishes a festival or rite	Kills a close relative	Teachers
Blindness	Pupils	Poverty	Establishes a festival or rite	Poetry
Politics	Proverbs	Two or more persons	Cruel	Egypt
<i>Oikistes</i>	Change of name	Blindness	Exile	Divine/immortal
Teachers	Blindness	<i>Oikistes</i>	Egypt	Inventions
Divine/immortal	Animal-helpers	Clairvoyance	Wit	Initiation
Animal-helpers	Divine/immortal	Teachers	Heroic deeds	Unhappy personal life
	Maxims	Supports arts		
	Law-giver/judge			
	One of the 7 Wise Men			
	General at war			
	Many lovers and children			
	Establishes a festival or rite			
	Magical objects			

In recent scholarship the representation of the poets in ancient sources has often been compared to the representation of the heroes, and it has been concluded that the poets were perceived, worshipped and honoured as “new” heroes.<sup>92</sup> This is true if we read the word “hero” as a “significant person in the community.” However, if we compare the “professions” of poets and heroes we see that while the poets do indeed share some of the formulaic themes with the heroes in their traditions, such as participation in contests (Hesiod, Homer, Archilochus, Terpander), founding cities (Archilochus, Semonides, Solon), beneficial powers of their bones (Hesiod), the change of name (Homer, Stesichorus), and existence of (Hellenistic) cult (in Hesiod’s, Homer’s and Archilochus’ case), their traditions have their own distinctive set of formulaic themes (initiation, inventions, pupils, poverty, power over nature, etc.). Therefore it is not quite correct to say that the poets were, as a whole, perceived as heroes, at least not in pre-Hellenistic times.<sup>93</sup> As a whole each ‘professional’ group seems to have had distinctive traditional features in

---

<sup>92</sup> Lefkowitz 1978, 1981, Clay 2004, Zanker 1995:158 ff., Currie 2005:129–130, *et al.*

<sup>93</sup> The two sources sometimes brought as a support for the view of the heroization of poets (e.g. in Currie 2005:129–130), Empedocles 31 B 146 DK and Pindar fr. 133 are about the doctrine of metempsychosis rather than the worship of poets. Both passages are also general, giving no evidence about the “heroization” of any particular poet. Pindar says that in the ninth year the souls of athletes go back to earth and become kings, “men swift in strength and greatest in wisdom,” and are called holy heroes. He gives no details about the existence of any cult of the σοφοί. Empedocles maintains that the souls of seers, poets, healers and chiefs become “gods,”—not linking them with heroes at all. On Alcidas’ account about honouring the poets in different cities, see p. 108 above. The only archaic poets in whose case it is possible to accept the existence of pre-Hellenistic formal cult on the basis of the evidence we have, are Homer and Hesiod, even though the sources referring to their cult are late (Alcaeus of Messene, Aelian, the *Certamen*). In Hesiod’s case, the tradition about his death in Locris is so early and detailed that the existence of his cult in some form at the precinct of Nemean Zeus in Locris is quite plausible (see p. 35). The *Certamen* (ch. 17) reports that the leaders of Argos, being exceedingly delighted with the praise of their race by Homer, set up a bronze statue of the poet and introduced a daily, monthly and yearly sacrifice for Homer, and also sent another offering every fifth year to Chios in honour of him. They revered him, however, as a poet, not as a hero: cf. Aelian (*VH* 9.15) who maintains that the Argives ranked all other poets second to Homer, and when they sacrificed they invited Apollo and Homer to their feasts. In addition there are two late accounts about the cult of the mythical Orpheus and Linus the son of Urania and Amphimarus: Conon reports (26 F 45) that Orpheus’ head was buried in a *heroon* (the tomb of a hero) but later the place became a *hieron* (a temple of a god) and he was offered sacrifices that the gods receive (cf. Philostr. *Her.* 28.8–12). According to Pausanias (9.29.6), people offered sacrifices (ἐναγίζουσι) to Linus before they offered sacrifices (πρὸ τῆς θυσίας) to the Muses every year in Thespieae.

addition to the overlapping ones, and the poets were perceived and honoured rather as poets, seers as seers, wise men as wise men, tyrants as tyrants, and heroes as heroes.<sup>94</sup>

Another aspect the modern commentators have been interested in is the value of biographical traditions as historical documents. Owing to the formulaic framework of the traditions, to the ambiguous meaning of the first person statements in early poetry, and to the nature of other sources, which did not always concern themselves with strict historical veracity, it is clear that the stories and details in them should not be taken at face value. It would be equally incorrect to say, however, that the biographical traditions may not contain any truth at all, or in other words, that we cannot know anything about early Greek poets' lives.<sup>95</sup> There is no reason to doubt too much that Hesiod lived in Ascra; that Stesichorus came from Himera and Archilochus' home was on Paros where he served as a soldier, that he spent some time of his life on Thasos, had a friend called Glaucus, and was killed in a battle. In the same way, Sappho was in all probability born in Mytilene and Terpander in Antissa, and the latter probably visited Sparta during his life. Hipponax was probably an Ephesian and acquainted with the family of Chian sculptors in which Boupalus belonged. Terpander was certainly a prominent and celebrated citharode whose songs on traditional themes were set mainly in dactylic metre, and he may well have won the Carneian song-contest and made some important innovations in music. It is very likely that Sappho's father was called Scamandronymus and brother Charaxus, and among her friends were Gongyla, Atthis, Anactoria and Mica.<sup>96</sup> At the same time, of course, there are many fictional details in the traditions. Therefore, even though biographical traditions of early poets include many fictional and

---

<sup>94</sup> Compton (2006) argues that poets were perceived as scapegoats, warriors and heroes in Greco-Roman society. But the traditions of poets are rich in all kinds of motifs and if one sets one's mind to it, one can easily find references to show that the poets may have been perceived as scapegoats, but also as travellers, inventors, rebels, and so on. It is therefore misleading to isolate a particular feature or features in this way. See also Lefkowitz' review (2007) of Compton's book.

<sup>95</sup> E.g. Lefkowitz 1978 and 1981.

<sup>96</sup> Homer's tradition is formulaic and complex to the greatest extent. The most plausible elements in his tradition are that he lived on the coast of Greek Asia Minor, and composed traditional hexametric epic poetry primarily on the theme of the Trojan War. The best attested candidates for his home town are Smyrna, Chios and Cyme, he may have been blind and called Melesigenes as a boy, and he may have had a tomb on Ios. Everything in Homer's tradition is, however, highly controversial and questionable from the point of view of historical veracity. About Homer's tradition see Kivilo 2010.

formulaic details and story-patterns, and great care is needed while trying to distinguish between plausible details and sheer fiction in traditions, we may still be able to learn something of the historical personalities.<sup>97</sup> Even so, however, the results of such speculations will always remain open to debate.

---

<sup>97</sup> See also Fairweather 1974:275, Compton 2006:323–324.