

# Genealogy as a form of mythic discourse. The case of the Phaeacians

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## *1. Introduction*

IN THIS PAPER I am going to discuss the Phaeacians (Φαίακες / Φαίηκες) as a mythic collective typologically comparable to many other peoples in Greek mythology such as, for instance, the Amazons, the Centaurs, the Ethiopians, or the Hyperboreans. My approach is mythological, which means that I consider the Phaeacians—Homer is our main source—as belonging entirely in the realm of myth. Consequently, I am not interested in details where the Homeric account may reflect the so-called ‘real’ conditions of Mycenaean and Dark age societies. Let me just mention for example that the description of the founding of the Phaeacian city at a place called Scheria undoubtedly suggests the foundation pattern of a colonial settlement or that, on the other hand, the pattern of government contains some features taken from real life (although it seems that as such it is a construction that could not have been in use anywhere in any historical time).

Still another restriction has to be made: in the rich Homeric narrative I am going to focus on *one single* aspect, namely the association of the Phaeacians with two other mythic groups, the Cyclopes and the Giants. But I hope to be able to show that this aspect significantly contributes to an overall characterisation of the Phaeacians themselves.

Actually, in the scholarly literature the Phaeacians have received relatively little attention outside purely literary analyses of the *Odyssey*. In these treatments the emphasis is placed on Odysseus’ stay among this people which is seen only in relation to the adventures of Odysseus and to the theme and structure of the *Odyssey*. I am not going to question the legitimacy of these kinds of approaches. Suffice it to note that in this way the Phaeacians themselves remain in the background and do not receive a treatment of its own right. I think that—after the entry by Samson Eitrem in the *Real-Encyclopädie* (1937)—until now the most remarkable contribu-

tions to a study of the Phaeacians in a larger framework of Greek mythology are a couple of pages which Pierre Vidal-Naquet has dedicated to the subject in his *Le chasseur noir* (1983) and two articles by Charles Segal: 'The Phaeacians and Odysseus' return' (1962) and 'Divine justice in the *Odyssey*. Poseidon, Cyclops, and Helios' (1992); both of these are now republished with some revisions in Segal's book entitled *Singers, heroes, and gods in the Odyssey* (1994).

Let us first take a look at the relevant passages in the *Odyssey*. Here some information is provided as regards the past and ancestry of the Phaeacians.

They had been brought to their actual land, Scheria, only one generation before the events narrated in the poem. The migration had taken place under the guidance of Nausithous, father of the present ruler Alcinous. The original site of the Phaeacians had been a place called Hypereia near the land of the ruthless Cyclopes, and the reason for the new settlement was in fact that they had been plundered by their stronger neighbours.

οἱ πρὶν μὲν ποτε ναῖον ἐν εὐρυχόρῳ Ὑπερείῃ,  
 ἀγχοῦ Κυκλώπων, ἀνδρῶν ὑπερηνορεόντων,  
 οἳ σφεας σινέσκοντο, βίηφι δὲ φέρτεροι ἦσαν.  
 ἔνθεν ἀναστήσας ἄγε Ναυσίθοος θεοειδής,  
 εἶσεν δὲ Σχερίη ... (Hom. *Od.* 6.4-8)

Formerly they lived in the spacious land Hypereia,  
 near to the overbearing Cyclopes  
 who had kept harrying them, being greater in strenght.  
 From there godlike Nausithous led the people off  
 and settled them in Scheria ...

In another context a further glimpse at the Phaeacian history is given. Now we learn that the above-mentioned Nausithous was the son of the god Poseidon and Periboia who, for her part, was the daughter of Eurymedon, king of the insolent Giants. On Eurymedon it is commented that he had brought to ruin both the reckless people of the Giants and himself. Nausithous had two sons Rhexenor and Alcinous. The former died soon after having been married leaving behind no male offspring but only a daughter, Arete,<sup>1</sup> who later on became the wife of her uncle, Alcinous.

Ναυσίθοον μὲν πρῶτα Ποσειδάων ἐνοσίχθων  
 γείνατο καὶ Περίβοια, γυναικῶν εἶδος ἀρίστη,  
 ὀπλοτάτη θυγάτηρ μεγαλήτορος Εὐρυμέδοντος,  
 ὅς ποθ' ὑπερεθύμοισι Γιγάντεσσιν βασιλεύεν.  
 ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ὤλεσε λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, ὤλετο δ' αὐτός,

1 For Arete's status, see recently Whittaker 1999.

τῆ δὲ Ποσειδάων ἐμίγη, καὶ ἐγείνατο παῖδα  
 Ναυσίθοον μεγάθυμον, ὃς ἐν Φαίηξιν ἀνασσε·  
 Ναυσίθοος δ' ἔτεκεν Ῥηξήνορά τ' Ἀλκίνοόν τε.  
 τὸν μὲν ἄκουρον ἐόντα βάλ' ἀργυρότοξος Ἀπόλλων  
 νυμφίον ἐν μεγάρῳ, μίαν οἶην παῖδα λίποντα  
 Ἀρήτην· τὴν δ' Ἀλκίνοος ποιήσατ' ἄκοιτιν. (Hom. *Od.* 7.56-66)

First Poseidon, the earth-shaker,  
 and the most beautiful Periboia had a son Nausithous.  
 She (Periboia) was the youngest daughter of great-hearted  
 Eurymedon, who in his time had been the king of the overbearing  
 Giants. He led his reckless people into its ruin and perished himself.  
 But Poseidon lay with her (Periboia) and she produced a son,  
 the great-hearted Nausithous who ruled over the Phaeacians.  
 Nausithous had two sons Rhexenor and Alcinous.  
 Apollo of the silver bow shot down the former  
 married but yet without any son in his hall; he left only a daughter,  
 Arete, and Alcinous made her his wife.

To complete the survey of the Homeric passages, a third instance must be recalled, namely, the words of Alcinous when he states that the Phaeacians are 'as close to the gods as the Cyclopes and the wild tribes of the Giants.'

... ἐπεὶ σφισιν (*sc.* to the gods) ἐγγύθεν εἰμὲν,  
 ὡς περ Κύκλωπές τε καὶ ἄγρια φύλα Γιγάντων (Hom. *Od.* 7.205-6)

These are the bare facts furnished by the *Odyssey*. In the present essay I propose to discuss these scattered pieces of information and try to view them within the larger framework of Greek mythology, not only within the οἰκονομία of the Homeric epic. The basic problem is of course what is the sense of the association of precisely these two mythic collectives,<sup>2</sup> the Cyclopes and the Giants—usually seen in Greek culture in a negative light and pointedly characterised in the above passages also by the Homeric narrator as wild, violent and presumptuous<sup>3</sup>—with the Phaeacians who are generally interpreted as a friendly people living a peaceful and highly civilised life in their remote paradise. The Phaeacian episode has actually been called 'the first surviving Utopia in European literature.'<sup>4</sup> Here by 'utopia' is evidently meant a description of an imaginary place connotated by positive at-

2 On the concept of 'mythic collective', cf. Brelich 1958:325-51.

3 Cf. 6.5 Κυκλώπων, ἀνδρῶν ὑπερηνορέοντων, 7.59 ὑπερθύμοισι Γιγάντεσσιν, 7.60 λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, 7.206 ἄγρια φύλα Γιγάντων. We shall return to these characterisations below.

4 Ferguson 1975:14 (followed, e.g., by Bichler 1995:33-39 and Hennig 1997:515).

tributes, 'ideal,' 'prosperous,' 'perfect,' and so forth. The Cyclopes and the Giants seem to be in a diametrical opposition to the Phaeacian mode of existence.

In addition, it is worthwhile noticing that in the second passage quoted above (*Od.* 7.56-66) it is question of a genealogical presentation: Periboia, a giant princess, lay with Poseidon and bore Nausithous who was Alcinous' father and Arete's grandfather. This establishes a kinship between the Giants and the Phaeacians and includes in the ancestry of the latter also the god Poseidon. In fact, in Book 13 of the *Odyssey* we have the *ipsissima verba* of Poseidon (v. 130), where he declares himself as the progenitor of all the Phaeacians: 'Φαίηκες, τοί πέρ τοι ἐμῆς ἔξ εἰσι γενέθλης' 'the Phaeacians who are born of my own offspring.' Evidently for this reason the agora of the Phaeacian city was built up around the fine shrine of the god (*Od.* 6.266 ἐνθα δέ τέ σφ' ἀγορή, καλὸν Ποσειδῆϊον ἀμφίς 'there is a beautiful sanctuary of Poseidon in the middle of the agora').<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere in the poem we learn that Poseidon was also the father of the Cyclopes. At *Od.* 9.519 Polyphemus ascertains to be Poseidon's son: 'τοῦ (sc. of Poseidon) γὰρ ἐγὼ πάϊς εἰμί, πατήρ δ' ἐμὸς εὐχεται εἶναι' 'I am your son and you claim to be my father.'<sup>6</sup> At *Od.* 1.71-73 it is told that the mother had been the nymph Thoosa, daughter of the mythic sea-god, Phorcys: Θόωσα δέ μιν (sc. Πολύφημον) τέκε νύμφη, / Φόρκυνοσ θυγάτηρ, ἀλὸς ἀτρυγέτοιο μέδοντοσ, / ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι Ποσειδάωνι μιγεῖσα 'The nymph Thoosa bore him, daughter of Phorcys, lord of the barren sea, after having made love with him in vaulted caves'.<sup>7</sup>

Judging from the text of the *Odyssey* it is not completely clear whether all the Cyclopes were the sons of Poseidon, or just Polyphemus.<sup>8</sup> It may be more likely to consider them all Poseidon's offspring if we remember that in the above quoted *Od.* 7.61-62 only the Phaeacian king Nausithous had been mentioned as the god's son, but in fact we heard from the mouth of Poseidon himself that he was the ancestor of the whole nation. Obviously in mythical thought these kinds of distinc-

5 Note that whereas in Homer Poseidon's son and Alcinous' father is named Nausithous, other traditions mention between Poseidon and Alcinous the eponym Phaiax (Hellanic. *FGrH* 4 F 77, Diod. Sic. 4.72.3-4, schol. *Od.* 5.35, cf. Conon *FGrH* 26 F 1.III). Nausithous and Phaiax appear together as steersman and officer in Theseus' expedition to Crete (Philochorus [4th - 3rd cent. BC] *FGrH* 328 F 111 in Plut. *Thes.* 17.6). Plutarch adds that Theseus built a heroon for both of them at Phaleron. Nearby there was probably also a sanctuary of Poseidon (Calame 1990:351). What is important here is the association of these two names, their connection with seafaring and their heroic cult somehow connected with the cult of Poseidon. This enables us to catch a glimpse of *cultic* traditions concerning the Phaeacians and of what may lie (also chronologically) outside the Homeric narration. Was there a myth of Nausithous and Phaiax as 'culture heroes' introducing seafaring? Philochorus mentions that these two men were chosen because the Athenians had not practised navigation before: μηδέπω τότε τῶν Ἀθηναίων προσεχόντων τῇ θαλάσση. On heroes as founders of aspects of actual reality, see Brelich 1958.

6 Cf. also *Od.* 9.412 and 529.

tions were not so essential and the ancestry of an individualised member stood for the ancestry of the collective.

In this way through Poseidon, the common ancestor, a bloodline relation can be established also between the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes. Using scattered Homeric passages we have thus been able to detect a 'family connection' of the Phaeacians with two other mythic peoples, the Cyclopes and the Giants, and, on the other hand, with the god Poseidon (related also to the Cyclopes).

## 2. *On premises and methods*

Before attempting to resolve the problem presented above all by the apparently paradoxical relation of the Phaeacians to the Cyclopes and the Giants, I find it necessary to discuss briefly two methodological preliminaries essential for a correct assessment of the present issue. The first of these concerns the decoding of mythological texts. The second is constituted by considerations on genealogy as a form of mythic narrative in archaic Greece.

The passages examined above show that in the actual Homeric context the mentions that link together the three mythic collectives are brief, scattered and have an air of incidentality. They may also seem somewhat superfluous in that they have no relevance to the plot of the epic and someone may indeed wonder if they do fit at all the overall characterisation of the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*. However, if we understand the preserved Homeric text as an act of narration which presupposes mythic material that existed in pre-Homeric and extra-Homeric traditions as well, the picture changes in some important respects.

There are several opinions on the impact of tradition and innovation on the subject-matter of the Homeric epics. This is not the place to enter into a review of the various theories. I personally agree with those who stress rather the character of the epics as traditional oral poetry shaped over several generations of performers expressing collective values and beliefs.

The basic fact is, then, that myths narrated in the Homeric poems were traditional and it is dangerous to categorise them or parts of them simply as 'inventions

7 An additional observation: Polyphemus' mother was *Thoosa* and one of the Phaeacians bore the name *Thoon* (*Od.* 8.113). A coincidence, a 'Homeric *ad hoc* invention' or a piece of authentic mythical conceptions that contributes to the conceptual link between the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes? At *Il.* 18.40 *Thoe* appears in a catalogue of the Nereids among other names suggesting various aspects of the sea. The names *Thoon*, *Thoosa*, *Thoe* were obviously strongly associated with the marine sphere and, on the other hand, recalled the adjective *thoos* 'swift' used in epic diction as a formulaic epithet for a ship. The latter association, of course, lies behind the name *Nausithous*. These kinds of names clearly lead us to the world of Poseidon.

8 In Euripides (*Cycl.* 20) the paternity of Poseidon is explicitly extended to all the Cyclopes. Note also the Corinthian cult (at Isthmia) of the Cyclopes in a precinct adjacent to the temple of Poseidon (Paus. 2.2.1).

of the poet.<sup>9</sup> Of course the mythic substance of the narratives was to a varying degree modified and recreated with the innumerable acts of retelling (*e.g.* in view of the needs of the performer and the audience) but this is actually only one of the basic characteristics in the transmission of myths in general. What we have are different narrations and different variants—to be sure: often only fragments and allusions to these narrations and variants—which, however, make sense in their specific narrative context. The myth itself transcends its every reproduction.<sup>10</sup> This is also why it is not very meaningful to search for an ‘original’ form of a given myth (we cannot even suppose that there had been any).

Although I prefer to analyse the Homeric poems in terms of Greek (oral) *myth-telling* rather than in terms of Greek *literature*, I do not of course deny their complex and (sometimes highly refined) ‘artistic’ nature or their tendency to an internal coherence.<sup>11</sup>

In the mythological analysis of the Homeric epics multiple aspects have to be taken into consideration, among them the diachrony (different chronological layers and elements of different origin in the preserved narration)<sup>12</sup> and the synchrony (how does the narrated form of the myth make sense in its actual context), not to speak of the possibility that the specifically *Homeric* type of myth-telling probably tends to alter inherited mythic patterns for instance mitigating them (humanising gods and heroes, omitting excessive violence, some monstrous elements, *etc.*).<sup>13</sup>

Especially important for the present theme is the principle—pointedly emphasised, among many scholars, for instance by two great mythologers Angelo Brelich and Jean-Pierre Vernant—that mythology forms a network of interrelated narratives.<sup>14</sup> On the level of deciphering an individual myth this means that every single detail (every person, every action, sometimes even every word) in a mythic narrative is significant since it alludes to numerous other accounts in the mythological system. In short, individual myths are incomprehensible if not read intertextually.

9 In this sense see also the remarks in Nagy 1996:113-46 against considering Homeric mythological references as a matter of *ad hoc* personal inventions by the poet. And this is the formulation of Sourvinou-Inwood 1995:9: ‘a poet’s selections are not purely ‘personal’, divorced from collective assumptions, a notion in any case difficult to sustain in the case of the Homeric epics, shaped as they were by parameters determined by collective beliefs and attitudes.’

10 Cf., *e.g.*, Burkert 1979:3, Graf 1987:2, Skaife Jensen 1990:31, Nagy 1996:113-46.

11 Orality does not mean lack of artistry or unity (see Nagy 1979:3-5, Pucci 1987:27-28, Nagy 1996:27-27, Thomas 1992:29-51).

12 This does not mean the ‘analytic’ deconstruction of the material or the search for the origins but rather helps to find out for instance re-elaborations of more ancient motifs and to explain eventual inconsistencies.

13 Cf., *e.g.*, Griffin 1977, Duchemin 1980:854 and *passim*, Brelich 1985:68, Wathelet 1983, Mondini 1990:158.

On this basis, since mythic discourses appear far from being haphazard accumulations of disparate elements, we are able to suppose that the mentioning of the Cyclopes and the Giants in connection with the Phaeacians is somehow meaningful in its narrative context. These short instances obviously made sense alluding to extra-Homeric mythic traditions in theory known to the contemporary Greeks<sup>15</sup> but which escape later interpreters (not only the modern ones but the ancient scholiasts as well). In the minds of the performer and his audience the Cyclopes and the Giants presumably evoked a series of mythic associations with the underlying symbolic and ideological notions.

Accordingly, in order to grasp at least something of the meaning of these associations one ought to study the Cyclopes and the Giants in relation to the whole mythological system and thereafter to attempt to find out their *raison d'être* in the myth of the Phaeacians.

After this premise I shall now turn to discuss the other issue that I proposed above: genealogy as a form of mythic discourse. In the Homeric passages it was question of a genealogical presentation and, as argued above, we can postulate the pertinence of the relationship 'Phaeacians - Cyclopes - Giants' by the assumption that in a mythic narrative every detail is significant. Can we now go further and say that through the common kinship the Phaeacians share some qualities with the two other peoples to whom they are genealogically related?

This is a grounded phrasing of a problem if one considers the very function of genealogies in the characterisations of gods and other mythic entities. Genealogies are an age-old way of defining persons in mythic (and historical) narratives. This is true in a spectrum of civilisations that extends from China and Japan to the ancient Near Eastern and Greek cultures, and further to the contemporary ethnologically documented ones.<sup>16</sup>

14 Cf. Brelich 1972:371, 418, 480, 525, 1977:22-26, Vernant 1980:132, 235-38. Cf. also, e.g., Leach 1982:5, Segal 1986:49-52, Bremmer 1987b:6, Dowden 1992:8. More or less independently there lays in the background the influence of some lévi-straussian ethnographic readings of mythology, however never applied to the body of Greek mythic material (cf., e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1973:152-6, 301-3). Cf. also Vernant 1980:233-40.

15 Cf. Brelich 1969:121: 'I poemi omerici rivelano, mediante rapide allusioni, di conoscere (e supporre presso il loro pubblico la conoscenza di) tradizioni che non hanno motivo o occasione di raccontare.' Slatkin 1991:15 speaks of a displacement in Homer of various mythical traditions 'into more or less oblique references.' Cf. also Dowden 1996:51-53. Accounts on the Cyclopes as part of archaic myth-telling are of course evidenced by the very *Odyssey*, but there were pre- and extra-Homeric traditions as well (e.g. Hesiod, for these questions, cf. below). From the 5th century BC poet Xenophanes (*Fr.* 1.21 W = B 1.21 DK) can be inferred that telling myths about the Giants was a customary practice notwithstanding the absence of Giant myths in Homer.

16 China and Japan: West:1985:22-24, Goldman 1987:505. Near East: West 1966:1-3, 1985:11-17, Wilson 1977. Contemporary world: Henige 1974, Goldman 1987:502-4, Davis 1989, Tonkin 1992:110-1.

In Greece we may recall the production of theogonical myths structured around lineages of gods and mythic entities, of which Hesiod's *Theogony* is of course the most influential. To Hesiod was also attributed the fragmentarily preserved *Catalogue of Women*, a hexameter poem listing ancestries of mythic women. In other kinds of myths as well stress is regularly laid on the person's ancestry.<sup>17</sup> The Homeric epics offer many instances where genealogies are introduced in connection with the appearance of a new hero<sup>18</sup> and in the Theban cycle the genealogical core is still more evident. Even objects can have their 'genealogy' in that the listing of their previous owners charges the present heir with a special significance.<sup>19</sup> It is also to be remembered that the earliest Greek prose compositions from the 6th and 5th centuries BC were principally mythic and semi-mythic genealogies (Hecataeus, Acusilaus, Pherecydes of Athens, Hellanicus of Lesbos).<sup>20</sup>

In substance, the function of these divine and heroic genealogies was to define the person in question, to explain what he/she is. In this way they contributed to order temporality, organise the cosmic system and express present realities by implying definite relations between various entities. The capacity of a genealogy to qualify is essential in Greek mythology; it helps to evaluate mythic persons and their actions in the adequate perspective.<sup>21</sup>

To sum up: in Greek myth-telling genealogy is a deeply rooted narrative form. The genealogical relationship was as a rule an important element in determining the type and identity of a person, and we have no reason to think that the Phaeacians constituted an exception.

Now it is time to justify the above assumptions by taking a closer look at the Phaeacians' relatives and, subsequently, try to find out a possible reason for the association of these mythic peoples.

17 On Greek theogonies and genealogies, *cf.*, *e.g.*, Philippon 1936, Jacoby 1949:134-40, West 1966:12-16, 1985:1-11, Tölle 1967, Broadbent 1968, Schwabl 1969:174-84, Moreau 1986:1-15, Bianchi 1987, Calame 1987, Graf 1987:60-75, Henrichs 1987:248-54, Ricciardelli Apicella 1993, Lang 1994, Jacob 1994:169-202, Malkin 1994:17-22, 98-106, Hall 1997:67-107.

18 To take but one example among many: the dialogue of Glaucus and Diomedes at *Il.* 6.119-236. Here it is exactly the pedigree of the former (six generations) that is essential for the understanding of the passage, *cf.* Gaisser 1969, Piccaluga 1980, Fornaro 1992, Scodel 1992, Harries 1993, Avery 1994, Alden 1996.

19 Two examples: Agamemnon's sceptre at *Il.* 2.101-8 and Odysseus' bow at *Od.* 21.11-41 (see Clay 1983:78-96).

20 For these prose writers' working methods (in certain aspects different from those of oral poetry) in dealing with genealogical material, see Jacob 1994.

21 Some considerations in this sense in Philippon 1936:3-4, Costa 1968:91-100, Brelich 1977:25-26, Goldman 1987, Dowden 1992:10-12.



### 3. *The Cyclopes*

The Cyclopes are one of the most familiar entities in Greek mythology, and a good deal has been written about them even recently.<sup>22</sup> Homeric studies have usually (and rightly, I think) seen the Cyclopean society and the Cyclopean manner of life such as they are described in the *Odyssey* as intentional opposite to the civilised world represented by Odysseus.

In addition, some critics have compared the land of the Cyclopes to that of the Phaeacians and drawn similar conclusions seeing in the tension between the two peoples a polar opposition that structures the epic.<sup>23</sup> I agree that this line of interpretation is justified for many reasons. But, on the other hand, I feel that emphasising only the differences between these two worlds miss the mark in some crucial respects.

We know from what was said at the very beginning of this paper that originally the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes had been neighbours, and, in addition, that Poseidon was involved in the lineage of both peoples. On this basis it may be useful to bring together some aspects of the Cyclopean mythology in order to in the final chapter relate it more closely to that of the Phaeacians.

The description of the Cyclopes in Book 9 of the *Odyssey* (notably vv. 105-29) is unusually rich, turning out to be a real ethnographic treatment. Let us begin with those aspects which seem to be in contrast to the ordinary world and even more so to the Phaeacian world. The Cyclopes live in uncivilised conditions: they make their homes in the caves of the mountains,<sup>24</sup> they do not know agriculture nor seafaring, they lived without common laws, they were presumptuous and

22 A selection of treatments since the seventies (presenting quite a variety of perspectives): Kirk 1970:162-70, Glenn 1971, Calame 1986, Detienne and Vernant 1978:52-76, Burkert 1979:30-34, Austin 1983, Bergren 1983:45-50, Clay 1983:112-32, Mondi 1983, Calame 1986:52-74, Vidal-Naquet 1983:50-52, López Férez 1988, Sihvola 1989:34-36, Skafte Jensen 1990:38-39, Konstan 1990, Goldhill 1991:31-34, Privitera 1993, Pucci 1993, Cook 1995:93-110, Brown 1996.

23 The comparison between the Homeric Cyclopes (nature, impiety, inhospitality) and Phaeacians (culture, piety, hospitality) has been sometimes made, mostly, however, not from the mythological point of view but rather from that of literary technique and with regard to the thematic unity of the whole poem (for various interpretations, *cf.*, for instance, Rose 1969:392-3, Kilb 1973:87-90, Austin 1975:153-4 [‘At the opposite end of the spectrum from the Kyklopes are the Phaiakians. With them the symmetrical balance, the aesthetics of contrast ... come into full flower’], Clay 1983:125-32, Mondi 1983:26-29, Thalmann 1984:1, Sihvola 1989:36, Webber 1989:11, Pucci 1993:27-29, 37-39, Garvie 1994:25). That the Phaeacians could be somehow *similar* to the Cyclopes has not been argued (an exception: Redfield 1983:241-2).

24 Living in caves was considered a pre-cultural and subhuman feature. Men lived ‘formerly in caves in the mountains like beasts’ states the *Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus* (3-4). Until Prometheus brought culture men lived ‘in sunless recesses of caves’ (Aesch. *Prom.* 453). *Cf.* Clay 1980:115, Buxton 1994:105-8. In mythology the mountains were ‘outside and wild,’ and ‘before’ as humanity’s first place of habitation (Buxton 1994:88,90).

violent. Their outward appearance was monstrous, they were of immense size and the very name κύκλωψ points to a physical defect or abnormality.<sup>25</sup>

Polyphemus, the only individualised Cyclops, breaks the rules of guest-friendship so extremely important for the Greek culture and for the behavioural code in the *Odyssey* to the effect that his treatment of Odysseus and his men appears a 'bizarre caricature of hospitality.'<sup>26</sup> The dietary code of Polyphemus is also alien to the Greek custom: he eats raw human flesh, drinks unmixed wine and unmixed milk.<sup>27</sup> In fact, he did not resemble ordinary 'bread-eating' human beings (9.190f. οὐδὲ ἐώκει / ἀνδρὶ γε σιτόφαγῳ). Furthermore, Polyphemus boasts on his savage nature (9.494 ἄγριον ἄνδρα) and reveals an arrogant disdain for the divine order stating that the Cyclopes pay no regard to Zeus and the Olympian gods since they are stronger (9.275-6 οὐ γὰρ Κύκλωπες Διὸς αἰγιόχου ἀλέγουσιν / οὐδε θεῶν μακάρων, ἐπεὶ ἧ πολὺ φέρτεροί εἰμεν).

What is curious in the Homeric description is that to all this savagery and hubris are connected also idyllic features that recall descriptions of Golden Age or Elysium. We are told that because of the rain sent to them by Zeus their fertile soil produces wheat, barley and grape crops. And all this without cultivation (9.108-11). It is quite peculiar that Zeus is here mentioned as the provider of the necessary rain if we remember the above quoted boast by Polyphemus. In the view of the same boast it may also seem somewhat paradoxical that at 9.107 the Cyclopes are said to put their trust in the immortals (οἳ ῥα θεοῖσι πεποιθότες ἀθανάτοισιν). These (at least apparent) inconsistencies will be commented on further below.

In the Hesiodic treatment of the Cyclopes in the *Theogony*<sup>28</sup> there is a statement on their presumptuous character (139 ὑπέρβιον ἦτορ ἔχοντας) but the brighter side of the Cyclopes is dominant. They are skilful craftsmen and they provide Zeus with the thunderbolts he needs to defeat the hostile Titans. In Hesiod—and we shall return to this point later—their father is not Poseidon as in Homer but they are sons of Ouranos and Gaia. In still other mythic traditions they are attributed the construction of the walls of Argos, Tiryns and Mycenae.<sup>29</sup>

Is there any sense or coherence in the mythological presentation of the Cyclopes if these various mentions are taken into consideration? I think that all this

25 The word may be interpreted as 'one-eyed' (*pace* Mondi 1983 who does not see in the name any connection with the 'eye'). The *Odyssey* nowhere explicitly mentions that the Cyclopes have just one eye. A reference to a single round and frontally-located eye is found in Hesiod (*Theog.* 143-5). Another possibility is of course to translate 'Cyclopes' simply as 'Round Eyes' or 'Round Faces.'

26 Quotation from Brown 1996:15.

27 When the Greeks drunk milk they mixed it with honey, see Privitera 1993:29.

28 *Theog.* 139-46, 501-6.

29 Cf. esp. schol. Eur. *Or.* 965. Other sources in Eitrem 1922:2329-30.

information is not at all incongruous but points to the same direction. The ambiguity,<sup>30</sup> the co-existence of negative and positive features, becomes understandable if we consider the mythic time when the Cyclopes were active. In Homer their setting are the pre-cultural chronologically and geographically remote conditions. In Hesiod they help Zeus to slay the Titans and establish the actual universe, acting thus *before* its establishment. Their father Ouranos (in Hesiod, for the Homeric father Poseidon, see the following section) is also himself a highly ambiguous entity that irreversibly belongs to the world before Zeus' rule. In the traditions about the wall-building the Cyclopes help to construct the present world acting as a kind of culture heroes in the earlier preparatory phase before the accomplishment of the final physiognomy of Greece.

In sum, these mythic traditions assign the Cyclopes to the world before the actual order of the universe, to the phase when the world was still primordial and undifferentiated. Consequently also the Cyclopes were primordial and undifferentiated and characterised by a constellation of ambiguous features.<sup>31</sup> Their mode of being would be unthinkable in the present world-order. In fact there are traditions of them being slain by the god Apollon in punishment for the death of Asclepius;<sup>32</sup> Pindar suggests that Zeus himself had killed them.<sup>33</sup>

So taken as a whole we get the following picture. The Cyclopes are ruthless and violent, still, on the other hand, their society is not lacking some Golden Age features which point to a carefree life. They showed a contemptuous attitude toward the gods, but still manifested some kind of piety. This kind of life, full of ambiguities, is restricted to the primordial uncivilised conditions of mankind and, according to one tradition, the Cyclopes were even killed and in this way totally excluded from the actual cosmos. Especially important for the present argument is the theme of the co-existence of uncivilised violent features combined with the idyllic and 'constructive' ones, and the final destruction of the Cyclopean community.

#### 4. *Intermezzo: Poseidon, the common ancestor*

After having discussed the Cyclopes and before turning to the Giants, a few words must be dedicated to Poseidon, the common ancestor of the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes.

In the Greek pantheon Poseidon is best known as 'the god of the sea' and 'the earth-shaker god.' There has obviously been some oscillation in the insertion of

30 Cf. also Vidal-Naquet 1983:51.

31 On this kind of ambiguity in the typology of the mythical collectives in general, cf. Brelich 1958.

32 Hes. *Fr.* 52, 54 MW, Pherec. *FGrH* 3 F 35a (the sons of the Cyclopes killed by Apollo), Eur. *Alc.* 5-6. Other sources in Eitrem 1922:2333.

33 *Fr.* 266 SM.

this ancient deity into the polytheistic system: Homer makes him Zeus' elder brother, whereas in Hesiod he is younger than Zeus.<sup>34</sup> His special ties with the horse are also widely attested.

A closer look at the whole documentation concerning Poseidon reveals that the god is actually not so much associated with order and unity as it may seem, but rather with the 'symbolic world of wild nature.'<sup>35</sup> In the historical period Poseidon was considered a marginal and frightening god: he was not associated with civilised life or civic institutions, his sanctuaries were often located outside the city (but among the Phaeacians in the middle of the agora, *cf. Od.* 6.266 quoted above in section 1) and in mythology his children, as we have seen with regard to the Cyclopes, were often brutal monsters.<sup>36</sup>

We may end with a quotation by Walter Burkert who maintains that even in Homer 'Poseidon remains an embodiment of elemental force; sea storm and earthquake are the most violent forms of energy directly encountered by man, while the horse was the strongest energy which man could then control ... but clarity and illumination does not proceed from it—this must come from Athena or Apollo'<sup>37</sup> (and the order, of course, from Zeus). We have, then, a context of wilderness and primordality connected with violence.

### 5. *The Giants*

What about the Giants?<sup>38</sup> The above discourse of primordality and ambiguity is relevant here, too. The Giants, as the Hesiodic Cyclopes, were sons of Ouranos and in this way belong to the primordial phase of the cosmos. In Hesiod they had their origin in the blood of Ouranos which after his castration fell on earth and fertilised Gaia. They are belligerent, strong, and of great stature.<sup>39</sup>

We saw in section 1 that in Homer, in whom references to the Giants are only few, they were wild and reckless (*Od.* 7.59-60, 206). In another instance Homer distin-

34 *Il.* 15.182, *Theog.* 456-7. A good short survey of the god in Burkert 1985:136-9. For more details, *cf.* Schachermeyr 1950 (not very helpful), Bremmer 1987a, Wright 1996, Maitland 1999.

35 To use the phrasing of Sourvinou-Inwood 1991:233.

36 If we want a somewhat different example we may recall Lamia, the frightful child-killing demon, *cf.* Johnston 1999:180 for the suitability of Poseidon to this genealogy. In fact, Gellius (*NA* 15.21) states: *ferocissimos et immanes et alienos ab omni humanitate Neptuni [sc. of Poseidon] filios dixerunt.*

37 Burkert 1985:139. *Cf.* also Duchemin 1980:870-5 on some passages in the *Iliad* which actually depict Poseidon as a powerful opponent to the order of Zeus, Segal 1994:204 'Homer virtually makes Poseidon one of the deities of primordial creation.'

38 For the Gigantic mythology Vian 1952 is fundamental. *Cf.* also Waser 1918 and Vian and Moore 1988.

39 *Theog.* 50, 185-6.

guishes them sharply from ordinary human beings: οὐκ ἄνδρεσσιν εἰκότες, ἀλλὰ Γίγασιν ‘they do not look like men but like Giants’ (*Od.* 10.120 about the Laestrygians).

The Giants best are known from the Gigantomachy, their revolt against Zeus and the other gods of the present universe. The Olympian gods won and the Giants were killed as punishment. Some sources speak of them as having been buried under various mountains in Greece and Italy.<sup>40</sup> We note that as the Cyclopes also the Giants were exterminated and excluded from the present world-order.

In Greek mythology, there are two famous descendants of the Giants, Lycaon and Tantalus, in whose destinies the above pattern seems to be repeated. Both act in the mythic time before the constitution of the present cosmos; they are famous for their piety but at the same time for violence and hubris. This ambiguity cannot be part of the actual conditions from which both persons are, in fact, obliterated.<sup>41</sup>

It may be that Homer alludes exactly to the battles of the Gigantomachy when he mentions Alcinous’ great grandfather, the giant king Eurymedon, who had destroyed his people and himself.<sup>42</sup> What also interests as to the character of Eurymedon and his people is the highly negative adjective ἀτάσθαλος used of them in this Homeric passage. In early epic diction this word is regularly associated with acts of hubris,<sup>43</sup> and it is clearly against this background that the use is to be explained here.<sup>44</sup>

Instead of referring generically to the Gigantomachy, also another, not necessarily exclusive, interpretation for the presence of Eurymedon in the Homeric text can be formulated. We have fragments of a tradition where a giant called Eurymedon was presented in a highly negative way as a raper of the young Hera whom

40 For these latter sources, *cf.* Vian and Moore 1988:195.

41 These rich mythical narratives are discussed in more detail in Piccaluga 1968 (esp. 187).

42 *Od.* 7.60 ὁ μὲν ὤλεσε λαὸν ἀτάσθαλον, ὤλετο δ’ αὐτός, *cf.* the discussion in section 1 above. According to Hainsworth 1988:324 here ‘the allusion to the Giants’ defeat, if not an *ad hoc* invention, is obscure.’

43 *Cf.* *Il.* 4.409, *Od.* 16.86, *Hes. Op.* 134, *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 67, *etc.* *Cf.* Nagy 1979:163, Clay 1989:35-38 (36: ‘No English term can convey the full range of this Greek word. ‘Overbearing,’ ‘violent,’ ‘reckless,’ or ‘lawless’ offer only partial translations for this highly charged term.’). It is to be remembered that in the Homeric passages quoted in section 1 the giants were also ὑπέρθυμοι (*Od.* 7.59), a term semantically near to ἀτάσθαλοι, and their tribes are wild: ἄγρια φύλα (*Od.* 7.206). The Cyclops Polyphemus was characterised as ἄγριον ἄνδρα (*Od.* 9.494, *cf.* above). In addition, in the Gigantomachy there was a pair of Giant warriors called Agrios and Thoon (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.6.2). The latter is a Phaeacian name, too, see n. 7 above.

44 In *Hes. Fr.* 43a.65 MW Heracles is said to have slain the overbearing Giants. Here we find the third pregnant adjective ὑπερφίαλος which, as ἀτάσθαλος and ὑπέρθυμος, points to the hubristic nature. Also Bacchylides speaks of the hubris that destroyed the Giants (15.63-64) but, as in Homer, no details are provided.

Zeus himself subsequently, after having married Hera, threw into Tartarus.<sup>45</sup> It is not straightforwardly possible to identify the two homonymous Giants if we bear in mind that the sources we have at our disposal constitute only minute fragments of a rich mythic patrimony, the details of which vary from representation to representation.

But, on the other hand, nothing prevents us from supposing the identity, especially since one can find the same kind of motifs in both traditions. In both myths Eurymedon is a negative figure who, because of his hubristic deeds, meets his death (in the latter case explicitly by the will of Zeus). In addition, the activity of the giant is every time anchored in the world before the establishment of the rule of Zeus from which the Gigantic race was definitely eliminated. If the identification is correct we have been able to verify extra-Homeric myths about Eurymedon to which the Homeric narrator in his context only briefly alludes.

When we analysed the Cyclopes there emerged a pattern of primordial beings, violent, ambiguous and full of hubris. The same pattern applies to the Giants as well. A final comparison between the Cyclopes and Giants reveals that both groups were excluded from the present universe by divine punishment.

### 6. ... and the Phaeacians

Now it is finally time to turn to the Phaeacians. On the basis of the above considerations I shall put forward the thesis that the Phaeacians too are a highly ambiguous primordial people who represent something that cannot be part of the present world. Until now the scholarship has been practically unanimous in seeing in them a civilised ideal society: they are excellent seafarers, their society is highly organised, they are extremely refined, they respect the laws of hospitality, they are called ἀγχιθεοί 'near to the gods' (*Od.* 5.35, 19.279) and φίλοι ἀθανάτοισιν 'friends of the gods' (*Od.* 6.203). Alcinous' garden flourishes all year around producing all kinds of fruits, his palace is built with precious metals, and so forth. The Phaeacians do not seem to know the significance of toil and labour, dividing their time between feasts and agonistic competitions.<sup>46</sup> This is how the king Alcinous brings together some aspects of his people's life: 'Dear to us are always banquets, lyre, dances, changes of clothes, warm baths and beds' (*Od.* 8.248-9). Here we are seemingly facing an atmosphere of a Golden Age paradise of blessed life.

However, we have seen that in the Homeric narrative the Phaeacians are associated genealogically and otherwise with the Cyclopes and the Giants, two groups

45 Euphorion (3rd cent. BC) Fr. 99 Powell, schol. *Hom. Il.* 14.296a. There may be also one pictorial representation of Eurymedon (an Attic cantharus with a gigantic figure and the script ]MEΔON), see Vian 1988. Cf. also Vian 1952:175-6.

46 Note that, significantly enough, the games did not include the rude ones, wrestling and boxing (especially stated at *Od.* 8.246).

characterised by markedly ambiguous and negative features. This makes us ask if also in the Phaeacians one can detect respective traits. Indeed, a close reading of the myth reveals a lot of strange features in the Phaeacian idyl 'dolce vita.' If the scholarly tradition has sometimes overemphasised the negative side of the Cyclopes, in the Phaeacians it has in turn overemphasised the positive sides. Only a few scholars have called attention to the fact that the Phaeacian civilisation is not an idealised human society but in fact superhuman and overcivilised<sup>47</sup> and as such extremely alien to the typically Greek concept of the necessity to avoid any excess, crystallised in such catchwords as γνῶθι σεαυτὸν or μηδὲν ἄγαν.

Actually the Phaeacians did not want to be in any contact with ordinary human beings; they had chosen to live far away isolated from the mankind:

οἰκέομεν δ' ἀπάνευθε πολυκλύστῳ ἐνὶ πόντῳ,  
ἔσχατοι, οὐδέ τις ἄμμι βροτῶν ἐπιμίσγεται ἄλλος. (Od. 6.204-5)

We live far apart, out in the surging sea  
at the world's end. No other mortals come to mingle with us.

This idea is pointedly repeated at *Od.* 6.279 where it is noted that no people can be found nearby and, above all, at *Od.* 6.8 where the land of the Phaeacians is located far away from 'bread-eating' human beings: ἐκάς ἀνδρῶν ἀλφιστάων. Here it seems that a clear-cut distinction is made between ordinary human beings and the Phaeacians. We may be reminded of the fact that the Cyclops Polyphemus did not resemble common 'bread-eating' people either (another practically synonymous adjective is used here): 9.190f. οὐδὲ ἔώκει / ἀνδρὶ γε σιτοφάγῳ.

Furthermore, among the Phaeacians hospitality and friendliness are not granted.<sup>48</sup> It is stated that they, in fact, do not generally like the strangers, not to speak of hosting them:

οὐ γὰρ ξείνους οἶδε μάλ' ἀνθρώπους ἀνέχονται  
οὐδ' ἀγαπαζόμενοι φιλέουσ' ὅς κ' ἄλλοθεν ἔλθῃ. (Od. 7.32-33)

The men here do not bear at all with strangers  
and they do not receive friendly those who come from elsewhere.

Many of the Phaeacians are said to be ὑπερφίαλοι 'ruthless', 'insolent,' etc. (*Od.* 6.247), a word of unequivocally negative connotation and which in the *Odyssey* is

47 E.g. Clay 1983:127-8, Carnes 1993.

48 The first to call attention to the unfriendliness of the Phaeacians was Rose 1969. He has met severe criticism (in fact some of his conclusions seem too far-fetched), most vehemently by de Vries 1977. It should be stressed that the Phaeacians are simultaneously friendly and hostile (cf. Carnes 1993:103) and this ambiguity can be explained in relation to the undifferentiated nature of the primordial entities.

used to characterise also the Cyclopes (*Od.* 9.106) and in Hesiod the Giants.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, at *Od.* 8.166 Odysseus says to Euryalus, the arrogant Phaeacian, ‘ἀτασθάλω ἀνδρὶ ἔοικας’ (‘you look like a ruthless man’) recurring to the same powerful adjective denoting *hubris* that defined the reckless Giants as well.<sup>50</sup>

Thus we can state that ambiguous traits are intermingled in the Phaeacian life: overcivilisation and, on the other hand, a rude ‘Gigantic’ and ‘Cyclopean’ quality. Their life is easy, they are hospital but at the same time they are ἀτάσθαλοι and ὑπερφίαλοι as well. It is important to note that in their treatment of Odysseus they actually exaggerate the rules of *xenia* which the Cyclopes did not have at all.<sup>51</sup> This combination of ambiguous features point to the undifferentiated and primordial world which, as already noticed with regard to the Cyclopes and the Giants, does not belong to the actual universe ruled by Zeus.

Emblematic in this regard are also the extra-Homeric mythic traditions that make the Phaeacians not descendants of Poseidon but of Ouranos: when Ouranos was castrated, the drops of semen that fell to earth begat the Phaeacians. In the *Genealogies* of Acusilaus (*FGrH* 2 F 4) we read: ἐκ τῆς ἐκτομῆς τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ ῥανίδας ἐνεχθῆναι συνέπεσεν, τουτέστι τὰς σταγόνας, κατὰ τῆς γῆς, ἐξ ὧν γεννηθῆναι τοὺς Φαίακας. The same tradition recurs in Alcaeus (Fr. 441 LP reported by schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.992) τοὺς Φαίακας ἔχειν τὸ γένος ἐκ τῶν σταγόνων τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ ‘the Phaeacians are sprung in the drops that fell from Ouranos’ and in the Argonautic myth: αἵματος Οὐρανίου γένος Φαίηκες ἔασι ‘the Phaeacians are sprung from the blood of Ouranos (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.992). These testimonies are notably old—we are far away from late antique erudite lucubrations.

It is noteworthy that, as we have had occasion to note above, a descent from Ouranos recurs also in Cyclopean and in Gigantic mythology; in the latter case even to the detail that they had their origin in the blood of Ouranos.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the scholiast to Apollonius of Rhodes juxtaposes the tradition concerning the Phaeacians as the descendants of Ouranos to the panhellenised Hesiodic view that they were the Giants to whom Ouranos’ semen gave rise.<sup>53</sup> What matters is that the oscillation between these two peoples as ‘true’ descendants of Ouranos is a further proof of an association between them in the Greek mythological system.

49 See above n. 44.

50 See above n. 43.

51 Cf. Vidal-Naquet 1983:67.

52 Hes. *Theog.* 176-86.

53 Schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.992 (p. 302 Wendel); the relevant parts are quoted also in Acusilaus, *FGrH* 2 F 4.



I maintain that one is not anymore justified in referring to the Phaeacians simply in terms of an ideal human society since through their linear relation with the Cyclopes and the Giants their mode of being in important respects is anchored in the irreversible past and not to present day conditions.

If the Cyclopes and the Giants were typically *hubristai*, we saw that this was a Phaeacian feature as well. It should be noted that in an analogous way in which those two other races were sealed off from the real world by divine punishment, also the Phaeacians are destroyed by the orders of Zeus and Poseidon and concealed under a mountain: μέγα δ' ἡμιν /δέ σφιν/ ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψειν/ ἀμφικαλύψαι/ (*Od.* 8.569, 13.152,158,177).

To explain this matter has been an arduous problem for the relatively few who have paid attention to the significance of these verses. The situation is quite complicated. Poseidon had in the past conceived a threat against Nausithous, the father of Alcinous, that one day, since the Phaeacians do not seem to realise the dangerousness inherent in navigation and continue to be able to escort men over the high seas without hasard, he will conceal the community behind/under a mountain (*Od.* 8.566-9). This prophesy comes true when the ship that had brought Odysseus to Ithaca returns home (*Od.* 13.180-4). The last vision the *Odyssey* provides of the Phaeacians is a scene where they—in order to change their destiny—praying for Poseidon stand about the altar (*Od.* 13.185-7).

It is not clear if with the verb ἀμφικαλύπτω, used in all relevant passages, is meant a total destruction by burying the whole people or just enclosing them beneath the mountains.<sup>54</sup> For the present argument it is sufficient to remark that in both cases they are definitely eliminated from the present world.

The fact that the Phaeacians are excluded has not been appropriately evaluated. Perhaps it becomes more understandable only now when a comparison has been made to the destinies of the Cyclopes and the Giants.

The reason for the exclusion in the Homeric narrative level was of course motivated by the fact that the Phaeacians helped Odysseus, the object of Poseidon's wrath, to reach his home. In fact, the god discovers to his chagrin that Odysseus returned from the land of the Phaeacians to Ithaca with more gifts that he could ever have taken from Troy (*Od.* 8.135-7). But more generally speaking there may be other and (as to the Greek system of values) more important reasons as well: for instance, the hubristic behaviour in that the Phaeacians were too confident in their easy toilfree existence and in their ability as seafarers. They did not even have to take into consideration possible dangers at sea.<sup>55</sup> In the present conditions every-

54 For this matter of controversy, cf. the most recent discussions in Friedrich 1989, Peradotto 1990:77-82, Carnes 1993:113, Segal 1994:28-29 (all with references to earlier studies).

day labour and the dangerousness of seafaring are realities that the Greek world must face.

We saw at the beginning that the Giant king Eurymedon had brought to ruin himself and his hubristic people. The same pattern is in fact repeated when his descendant the Phaeacian king Alcinous and his people are concealed under/beneath a mountain and totally excluded from the present world. If, on the other hand, we want to make another kind of comparison, this time between the Cyclopes and the Phaeacians, we may note that in the former the uncivilised and violent features are dominant while the idyllic aspect of life is only hinted at, whereas in the latter the basically same situation is differently posed. In the Phaeacian society the paradisiacal features are more evident<sup>56</sup> while their 'Cyclopean' or 'Gigantic' nature is less visible, but, still, as I have argued, it is there.

That is why I think the association—however marginal it is in the actual Homeric text—of the Phaeacians with the Cyclopes and the Giants is meaningful. It contributes to define the Phaeacian manner of life and, consequently, to make the audience realise that also the apparently easy Phaeacian life is not desirable and not possible in the present world in exactly the same way as the Cyclopean and the Gigantic life.

If we agree that the ultimate function of mythology is to help to understand the surrounding universe, its history and arrangement, and man's place in it, the above considerations may have shown that the genealogical presentation was one strategy in the conceptual organisation of the cosmos; it contributed to lay the foundations for the present world's conditions and values.

Notwithstanding the sometimes undoubtedly sound criticism against the use of the concept 'myth' (not an indigenous Greek category) by Calame,<sup>57</sup> I still think that in Greek culture there existed a distinct group of narratives aimed at 'creating culture' *i.e.* laying the foundations for the understanding of present realities, which—in lack of another term—we may conventionally call 'myths.' S. des Bouvrie argues for the term 'symbolic tales.'<sup>58</sup> I hope to have contributed in this case-

55 *Cf. Od.* 8.556-63 (Alcinous states that the swift ships of the Phaeacians go wherever their masters direct them absolutely safely without the need of steersmen or steering oar). *Cf.* also Eitrem 1937:1521-23, Segal 1994:24.

56 As regards the descriptions of various distant paradisiacal places (Elysium, Golden Age conditions, the garden of the Hesperides, *etc.*) it should be noted that in Greek mentality they do not necessarily imply any attractive settings. Rather they belong outside the present universe (in the past or geographically elsewhere). *Cf.* the remarks in Cook 1995:54-56, 98-99 and in Aronen 1999:64. I am not referring, of course, to the eschatological beliefs of Orphism and mystery doctrines.

57 *Esp.* Calame 1996:9-55, *cf.* also Grottanelli 1997:19-23

58 For details, see her paper 'The definition of myth: symbolic phenomena in ancient culture' (in this volume).

study to the view that these mythical representations are not to be considered 'primitive,' 'irrational,' or 'illogical;' rather they constitute a symbolically charged but nevertheless a very 'rational' way of organising existence and reaffirming cultural identity.<sup>59</sup>

59 For more issues concerning the 'irrationality' or 'rationality' of myth, see now the contributions in Buxton (ed.) 1999.

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