

Myth and poetry in Archaic Greece A comparative approach

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To the memory of Lauri Honko

Introduction

IT IS A BEWILDERING fact in Homeric studies today that opinions of what is probable, what not, differ so radically. What seems convincing to some is ridiculous to others, making for a situation in this field of scholarship in which serious discussion is difficult. The problem is to some degree, but by no means exclusively, linked to the question of how individual scholars take their stand in relation to the oral-formulaic theory. What is obvious is that the frames of reference in which scholars of various disciplines or with various preferences read the two great epics determine their understanding of the poems to a degree almost beyond communication.

As an illustration, I shall mention a few important modern hypotheses about the writing of the Homeric poems that seem to me sturdily unconvincing: the idea that as soon as the Greeks learned to write they recorded the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in writing;¹ the idea that the great poet and the great inventor of the Greek alphabet met and immediately realised how they could make their geniuses cooperate;² the idea that the hexameter was invented by an individual about 700 BC, and that this same person created the Homeric diction;³ or, to revert to a somewhat older suggestion, the idea that Homer had at his disposal a wall of unlimited length, and that he inscribed on it his poems, deleting this and adding that during the process.⁴ I can only note that such ideas appeal to quite a few other people, whereas other hypotheses that I find convincing are rejected. To begin

1 Janko 1998.

2 Powell 1991.—Powell's hypothesis has been competently rejected by Woodard 1997:160f. and 253ff.

3 Berg and Haug 2000.

4 Goold 1977.

with, I shall therefore state that the ideas of the present paper all stem from the basic hypothesis that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were orally composed.

The tradition of comparing Homer with epic from other cultures is of long standing. Already Robert Wood and Friedrich August Wolf were deeply inspired by folk traditions of their day, and ever since comparison has been an important element in Homeric studies. There are two main approaches: either scholars study stories and motifs across time and space, or they concentrate on poetic technique. It is the latter form of comparison that has been dominant since Parry and Lord's establishment of the oral-formulaic theory, and it is to this approach that my paper belongs. These scholars studied the actual process of composing orally, composition in performance, and saw the formulas and themes as necessary tools in this form of art.

Their theory has been criticised for being too rigid, for creating an unconvincing great divide between oral and written, and for many other weaknesses. But it has certainly been a stimulus for research, both in Homeric scholarship, where it began, and in modern folkloristics and anthropology. The way fieldwork is conducted has changed radically as a result of their theory, the methods both of recording and publishing have been totally altered, and the volume of epic traditions alive in the 20th century documented in such a way as to make them accessible to scholars from other disciplines is by now considerable. Every new documentation of an epic tradition, even though its main importance is of course for the study of the tradition in question, serves to verify or falsify parts of the oral-formulaic theory.⁵ The wealth of such modern fieldwork has not been as intensely used in Homeric scholarship as it could and should have been although John Miles Foley and his periodical *Oral Tradition* constitute the exception that confirms the rule and have done much to open new perspectives in Homeric studies.

Besides the fact that the theory has been so obviously productive, it has another very attractive feature, namely that it offers an alternative to the evolutionary model. Why is it relevant at all to study one phenomenon—say, ancient Greece—by comparing it with another, such as, for instance, Montenegro in the 1930s? Because there is an evolution that all human societies go through, but at a different pace? That was the generally accepted worldview when comparative studies were first introduced. But it has grown increasingly problematic, especially because it involves ideas of lower and higher steps on a ladder of progress, with our own society occupying the top rung. What a coincidence! Parry and Lord's focus on the technical, material and social circumstances of composition provides an ideologically more neutral basis for comparison.

5 For a survey with bibliography see Jensen 1994-95. A detailed discussion of 11 select examples of edited oral epics are to be found in Honko 1998a:169-217.

Interests guiding the present study

Comparison on the basis of the oral-formulaic theory can be carried out in different ways with a whole range of different purposes. It leads to questions such as: How does it influence our reading of the Homeric poems if we consider them orally composed? What does it mean for our understanding of Archaic and early Classical literature, and of the intertextuality among surviving works? How do we imagine the functions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in society? And, especially, how were the two epics ever written? Scholars who consider them orally composed have to have a hypothesis about the origin of the written poems that have been transmitted to us.

For the sociologically oriented questions, comparison with oral poetry in our own times is important as a help towards establishing a convincing setting for the poems. We have the texts, but few or no reliable external sources to inform us about how they were composed and received in their own time. For this use, documented oral epic serves as a kind of laboratory, and much of Parry and Lord's influence has had to do with this aspect. By studying how living oral traditions actually work, we can hopefully build up a frame of reference describing what is probable, what not. For this kind of study, it is the normal, average performance that is most relevant, not the single, extraordinary event. To stick to Parry and Lord's Serbo-Croatian example, Avdo Mededovic's tour-de-force in singing his extremely long epic of *The Wedding of Smailagic Meho*, published in vols 3-4 of their collection, is of less interest than the singers in vols 1-2 and the study of their various performances.⁶

What I shall be doing here is to concentrate on what can be learned about Archaic Greek poetry from a specific living tradition, of Karnataka in India. The reason is simply that it has been documented in an unusually careful way. Actually, such a one-to-one comparison is problematic in being arbitrary: there is no special similarity between this tradition and Homer, neither in the content and form of the tradition in question, nor in the society to which it belongs. Accordingly, I am not advocating this kind of comparison as superior to the way Parry and Lord-inspired Homeric scholars usually proceed, that is by comparing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to a general model of oral epic. It is still the theory as such that is behind my present procedure, which I consider complementary rather than alternative to it. The advantages in making a one-to-one comparison between two specific traditions are, firstly, that it is clearer what you are handling and more easily controllable for others, and, secondly, that you can take into consideration not

6 Parry and Lord 1953-54; Parry, Lord and Bynum 1974.

only the edited poem, the singer and the audience, but also the editor and the scholarly interests that lie behind a given fieldwork study.

The Siri project

I am referring to a monumental investigation carried out in cooperation between Finnish and Indian scholars and directed by Lauri Honko.⁷ The title of the edition is significant: *The Siri Epic as performed by Gopala Naika*. The book publishes a specific performance executed by a specific singer, not a tradition. It is printed in its original language and in English translation, and is accompanied by a monograph of almost 700 pages.

Fig. 1 reproduces pp. 792-3 of the edition as an example of the poem and the way it is presented. It shows that the translation aims at reproducing the original faithfully, the same phrase being rendered in the same way every time it occurs. Thus source language is given priority over target language, as is normally the case in scholarly translations.⁸ The meter of the original seems to be free, and while the style is more redundant than that of the Homeric poems, reiterations undergo small variations all the time (*cf.* 14777, 14882 and 14906-8) and are thus not immediately comparable to the Homeric formula. Again, unlike in Homer, there is a kind of refrain with the filler word *Naraayina* being inserted as in v. 14873 or making up whole verses as vv. 14879-80 (In everyday prose *Naraayina* is an exclamation meaning 'Oh God!'⁹). As in Homer, verses tend to be meaningful units chained to each other in what Parry termed adding style. In the Siri epic, a characteristic way of building up a description is seen in vv. 14901-4, in which each verse consists of a repetition and an addition of information. *Inquits* are explicit as in Homer, and typically formed with the verb of saying ending a verse, followed by the grammatical subject filling one or a couple of verses (*cf.* 14876-7, 14884-6, 14893-5 and 14906-8).

The tradition that is represented in this way is located in South Kanara, a region in the Indian state of Karnataka. The language is called Tulu, and is spoken by *ca.* 2 million people, thus being a microscopic language in an Indian context. It has no official orthography; in school Tulu children are taught Kannada, the official language of the region, and this is the language that Tulu speakers use for written messages in general. A few works of literature have actually been recorded in writing, but Tulu literature as such is exclusively oral.¹⁰

7 Honko 1998a & b.—Detailed reviews: Foley 1999 and Jensen 2002.

8 The translation policy is discussed Honko 1998a:586-93.

9 Honko 1998a:281.

10 Honko 1998a:226-27, 234-56.

55. (14873–15063)

- naraayina magaa sagee naaraayina nakkere nakkere
 namma napperuṅṅ namma nammeruṅṅ
 14 875 namma najjeruṅṅ panti paṭṭaa parakke uṅṅduu
 nandolige naaluṣaanoguu namo oo pooyo pooyondu paṅṅere
 abbayoo daaraya panuppi jookuluu paṅṅonuu
 poopoo daanee nandolige naaluṣaanogu
 naraayinaa naaraayina de oo
 14 880 naraayina oo naaraayina baalelu oo
 poodu pooduṅṅ mukkaḍappuu muuji kariyaa panppii sudekkuṅṅ
 pooyone baaleluu abbaaya daarayanuppi jookuluu
 yeeriyaa vooḍodaa kuṅṅnaa yeeriyaa vooḍoda kuṅṅnaa
 vooḍo koṅḍoo bala paṅṅere
 14 885 abbaaya oo daaraya oo
 naraayinaa naaraayina oo baaleluu
 yeeriyee ponuṅṅjoove yeeriyee ponuṅṅjoove
 voṅṅji vooḍo yittunaa muuḍaayi narikku pootuṅṅde
 voṅṅji vooḍo yittunaa paḍḍaayi uppugu pootuṅṅde
 14 890 voṅṅje vooḍoo moonṅṅu jalloo yaanu dekkudu kaṭṭude
 baaroṅṅji kaṭṭaaṣoda kaḍappuu muuji kariya panuppi sudendu
 kalla kuṅṅḍuḍu kaṭṭudu naaṅṅde oo poṅṅjove
 yinitta dinamanoḍuu vooḍo buḍiyere naapuji paṅṅere
 mukkaḍappudaa kaḍappuda oo
 14 895 vooḍoodaa kuṅṅnee panuṅṅbee
 aatu paateroo keeṅṅdoonee ponnuu oo
 naraayina oo baṅga baareda koḍire koṅḍo oo baruvone ponnuu
 niiruḍuṅṅdu diiḍiyone ponnuu
 pattu bireḷundane malppone ponnuu
 14 900 naraayina oo naaraayina oo
 yeṅṅkuḷeḍaa nana oo sammaale ulleeru
 vojramaalookanda kooṭi kumarendu paṅḍudu pudaritti nana oo
 sammaale oo
 kooṭi deevateleguṅṅ samanaayi sammaale yeṅṅkuḷenaa
 kooṭi kooṭii jookulegu migilaayi sammaale yeṅṅkuḷena ulleruṅṅ
 14 905 aarena yinii kale sagtiḍu
 yiyyereḍdu naayerere yeṅṅkulu karee vonduvo paṅṅere ponnuu
 abbaaya oo daaraya oo
 naraayinaa naaraayina oo ponnuu
 paṅḍi naalaayii doṅḍeḍaavodaṅḍaa
 14 910 koḍireṭṭuu kullii baaleluu
 navaa dumbuu miindonu teelonondu poopuṅṅde

55. Four-Shrine Nandolige

- “Naraayina, dear younger sister, Naaraayina, elder sister, elder sister,
 the sudden vow said by our mother, our father,
 our Ajjeru is there!
 Shall we go to Four-shrine Nandolige? Shall we go?” Thus they said,
 the children called Abbaya, Daaraya, so saying
 they go to Four-shrine Nandolige, see,
 Naraayina Naaraayina de oo
 14 880 Naraayina oo Naaraayina, the children.
 Going, going to a river called Mukkaḍappu triple ferry
 they went, the children called Abbaya, Daaraya, the children.
 “Hey, boatman Kuṅṅna, hey, boatman Kuṅṅna,
 come, bring a boat!” said
 Abbaya, Daaraya,
 Naraayina Naaraayina oo, the children.
 “Hey, women, hey, women!
 One boat which was here went east for rice!
 One boat which was here went west for salt!
 14 890 A boat with holes, a broken oar, I have washed, moored!
 A very elusive crossing is this river called Triple ferry.
 To a stone-peg I have moored mine, women!
 On the day of today the boat cannot leave!” he said,
 the boatman Kuṅṅna
 of the Mukkaḍappu crossing says.
 The girls heard those words.
 Naraayina oo, the girls bring a top leaf of a baṅga-banana.
 The girls put it on the water.
 The girls make the ten-finger salutation.
 14 900 “Naraayina oo Naaraayina oo.
 Our uncle is now there!
 Our uncle by the name of Kooṭi Kumara of Vojramaalooka,
 now,
 our uncle who is equal to a crore of divine beings,
 our uncle who is superior to a crore, a crore of children is there!
 Today, by his power, by his force
 from this side to that side we shall get ashore!” said the girls
 Abbaya, Daaraya,
 Naraayina Naaraayina oo, the girls.
 The spoken tongue just set in the throat,
 14 910 the children sitting on the top leaf,
 look, forward swimming, floating they go!

The main editor, Lauri Honko, first came into contact with Indian epic scholars in 1984, and in October 1985 a seminar was arranged in Udupi on Finnish and Tulu epic. Among other things a Tulu translation of a passage of *Kalevala* was presented and used as the script for a dramatic performance.¹¹ Honko's Indian colleagues introduced him to the singer Gopala Naika, and during the following years Honko paid many visits to Naika, attended his performances and discussed his art with him: on various occasions he also recorded performances, the acquaintance culminating in a mammoth recording in December 1990, the one published in print.¹²

Naika is an illiterate farmer living in the village of Machar in South Kanara, and his chief occupation is cultivating rice. In addition, he is the priest of a cultic community, and his talents as an epic singer come into play in both connections.¹³ He knows six epic poems in all, but considers the Siri epic most important among them. Honko and his team recorded the five other epics as well.¹⁴ Some years earlier, in the winter of 1985-86, Naika had dictated the Siri epic in a version consisting of 8,538 verses to an Indian folklorist and his assistant. This recording took place at Naika's own initiative. He wished to make the Siri epic accessible as a book so that children could read it in school.¹⁵

The poem is normally performed in one of two contexts, as a work song recited to an audience of women workers in the paddy fields, and as part of the cult, especially at the yearly celebration of the harvest. In the paddy fields Naika and the women sing by turns: he recites a verse and they repeat. While the singing is going on, the women's hands work diligently, sorting out and planting the small rice plants. Some of the women are professional singers, too, and may take over the lead singer's role.¹⁶

During ritual performance both parties identify with the protagonists of the epic, the women with the heroine Siri or one of the other heroines, and Naika as priest with her son Kumara.¹⁷ There are also more restricted cultic events in private houses, in which the priest performs the epic for his group of Siri women. But the great annual harvest festivals are open to everybody. Here the women are still the primary and interacting audience, but the whole event takes place in the presence of a huge mass of onlookers of both sexes and from different social classes. The

11 Honko 1998a:219-27.

12 Honko 1998a:228-33, 261-69.

13 Honko 1998a:228, 597.

14 Honko 1998a:563-69, Honko 1998b:xvii.

15 Honko 1998a:257-60, Honko 1998b:xvii-xviii.

16 Honko 1998a:484, 548-57.

17 Honko 1998a:430-31, 449-50.

performance begins by Naika singing a solo narrative that lasts a couple of hours and then gradually develops into dialogue. In his functions as singer and priest he has male helpers, and they all impersonate Kumara; they ask the women one after another who they are, and the women answer in the person of one of the heroines, relating her story. Some passages may also be acted out dramatically. The performance culminates in some of the women falling into trances.¹⁸

But the Siri story is present at the festival in other ways, too, and performed by other artists; for instance, a famous game between two sisters that ends with their death is performed as a drama.¹⁹ Honko and his team witnessed a number of the Siri festivals and on one occasion were even allowed to videotape a whole event.²⁰

The published poem

When Honko arranged with the singer to record the epic from beginning to end, Naika stated that except for the version previously dictated this was not how he usually performed.²¹ In normal performance his narratives were briefer so as to be finished in one session; he might concentrate on a single episode or give a brief version of a full story.²² From December 20th to 28th 1990, Naika sang his poem to the scholars and their technical equipment, a video camera and two tape recorders. He does not accompany himself on an instrument, so he just sat there on a bench under a tree, singing and singing. Towards the end of the project, he now and then asked Lauri Honko if it would perhaps be a good idea to abbreviate a bit—a request that to the present reader seems quite touching, but which was firmly rejected by Honko, fortunately enough for scholarship.²³ Anyway, we are of course unable to check if he did in fact abbreviate as compared to how he could have presented his story. The 1990 version consists of an introductory invocation of divine powers in 563 verses, and the epic proper, which runs to 15,683 verses. The dictated and the sung version tell the same story in the sense that they follow the same course of events, but with all kinds of variation. The longer version gives more details and engages in more embellishment than the shorter one, but there are also cases of episodes being related in the shorter, dictated version and left out of the longer, sung performance.²⁴

18 Honko 1998a:337-88.

19 Honko 1998a:232f., 409, 412-17.

20 Honko 1998a:389-421.

21 Honko 1998a:276.

22 Honko 1998a:30.

23 Honko 1998a:310.

24 Honko 1998a:258-60.

Honko is duly impressed by Naika and his achievement, and he is at pains to emphasise that this recorded version of the Siri epic is of almost the same length as the *Iliad*.²⁵ But this assertion is not quite acceptable. For one thing, the average verse of the Indian poem is shorter than the hexameter, and then the many *Naraayina* occurrences make for verses and half-verses empty of content.

That oral poets are capable of performing works of immense length ought not really to provoke astonishment since over the years quite a few scholars have reported on the existence of such mammoth poems.²⁶ In a way, what is really new in this case is that a large-scale poem has been published, and in view of the enormous investment of time and money that the Siri project must have required, it is not difficult to understand why such publications are rare.

In the sung version the narrative follows the heroine Siri and her offspring, three generations in all. The protagonists are human, but are one after another taken into *maaya*, which seems to mean that they die and achieve divine status. At the end of the narrative their cult is instituted, and the epic is thus closely linked with the cult in which it is performed, commemorating the deeds of the heroes and heroines, describing the institution of their cult, and giving meaning and legitimacy to the festival. Thus there is a strong aetiological element in the poem.

It is very much a woman's epic. Not only are the protagonists female, but the themes that are handled are basic women's problems, concerned with puberty, pregnancy and childbirth, the intricacies of married life, jealousy and friendship inside the family, and even women's status in society if they are without male supervision. The story takes place in the highest circles, among kings and queens, but the themes are recognizable to women of all social categories. Honko has many dialogues with Naika about the epic and what it means to him, but says rather less about the audience and its reactions. However, there seems good reason to think, as Bengt Holbek does when interpreting fairy tales, that for the storytelling community they provide a means of verbalising problems and even conflicts that are too sensitive to be discussed directly.²⁷

Siri is married twice. Her first marriage ends in divorce because her husband visits a prostitute, which makes Siri so angry that she leaves him and returns to her foster-father's palace where she gives birth to her son Kumara. The foster-father dies, however, and a distant male relative claims his realm and fortune. A court is convened and Siri called before it. In this passage the narrative clearly sides with

25 Honko 1998a:11.

26 Bowra 1952:354-56 (Jugoslav, Uzbek and Kara-Kirghiz examples), Lord 1960:105-09, Parry, Lord and Bynum 1974 (Avdo Mededovic), Biebuyck 1976:20f. (Bambara singers), Roghair 1982 (Indians from Andhra Pradesh), Saada 1985:24 (a Tunisian singer), Reynolds 1995:265 (Arabs of Northern Egypt), Gyaltsho 2001:281 (a Tibetan singer), Ying 2001 (a Kirghiz singer).

27 Holbek 1987: 409, 601-03.

Siri; it tells in some detail how, for instance, the claimant bribes the members of the court, and it is emphasised how she is all alone as a woman in an assembly consisting entirely of men, among whom is also her divorced husband (4100-4111, 4211-4299). Siri leaves the palace with her infant son and a single maid, and after a period of wandering both son and maid are taken to *maaya*. Before leaving, little Kumara predicts that Siri will marry again. It turns out that her new husband already has a wife, and this passage deals with problems between the two wives, they are jealous of each other and behave mischievously, but the husband settles the conflict. In this part, interestingly enough, Siri is not right all along, but has to be reprimanded by her husband (7568-7571). She bears her second child, a daughter, and goes to *maaya*. The narrative now follows the daughter Sonne, who is brought up by a foster-father together with another girl, Gindye, and this passage of the poem circles around the relationship between sisters, which is again not without problems. Also in this sequence the heroine is blamed and taken to task. Sonne has another problem, too, since she is late in reaching maturity. She is extremely beautiful and has married a prince, but is scorned by working people in the palace—cooks, women grating coconuts, and sweeping women—because she has not yet begun to menstruate (10649-10687). However, she finally bears twin daughters and goes to *maaya*. In the story of her daughters the relationship between sisters is again verbalised. They grow up to be expert players of a game called *cenne*, but at a certain point get so heated over a game that one kills the other by hitting her with the game board and afterwards drowns herself in remorse (13841-14052). They both go to *maaya*, where their uncle Kumara receives them; at their death they had been just about to marry, and the tragedy is resolved by the sisters reappearing supernaturally at the wedding, where they find two girls to substitute as brides. The poem ends with detailed descriptions of how they set up a temple together with Kumara, with instructions about the rites of worship, and Kumara promises that he will protect the people.

The epic is full of fairy tale motifs, too. For instance, gods take human shape to control and test the mortals. Siri is born miraculously from an *areca* flower as an answer from the gods to the prayers of a pious old man who has no offspring. Vows and other promises are recurrent; sometimes they are kept, as in the case of Siri's foster-father, more often they are broken. The last third of the poem is tied up in a great bow of suspense by a vow given by Sonne in order to become pregnant at all (11310-11410). She has the twin daughters, but afterwards does not keep her vow, and their tragic death is a punishment for this. Certain narrative patterns are recurrent: in the just mentioned example we may note the pattern of childlessness—vow—childbirth. Siri's birth and childhood are echoed by Sonne's birth and childhood. Even though Sonne is born naturally to Siri, the baby appears to her foster-father lying in an *areca* flower (9058-9105). Like her mother she grows up

in the palace of an old man; but a variation is introduced by means of the foster-sister. And of course, it is a thoroughly religious poem, concerned with the relations between gods and humans, and having as its overall theme the institution of the cult of Siri and Kumara.

I have drawn special attention to the dominant female themes, because it seems obvious that they are linked to the fact that the poem regularly addresses a female audience. This aspect seems not to have appealed to Honko, who only touches upon it in passing. But the kinds of problem handled in the poem must seem highly familiar to the women attending its performance, and it must be easy for them to identify with the heroines, not only at the harvest festival. Thus the Siri epic may serve as confirmation of another of the elements of the oral-formulaic theory, that of the decisive role of an audience for the content and moral of a text. Honko, who besides being a folklorist was also a historian of religions, is much more intent on the religious function of the epic, and his monograph contains much important reflection upon such matters.

The Siri project and the oral-formulaic theory

Every publication of field studies in oral traditions serves to verify or falsify Parry and Lord's original theory. Honko is more aware of this fact than most fieldworkers, and his monograph is from beginning to end a detailed explicit and implicit discussion of the way in which his experience comments upon the oral-formulaic theory. My remarks in the following, besides being of course much briefer, differ in some respects from his.

The formulas of the Siri epic do not fit into Parry's definition, since they vary all the time. This occasions Honko to criticise Parry's basic notion of a formula.²⁸ But Parry built his definition on two traditions only, the Homeric and the Serbo-Croatian, and until now, as far as I know no other oral poetic traditions have been found containing formulas of exactly the same character. This does not single out Homeric formulas from all the rest, but different traditions from each other, and presumably has to do with the different formal demands that characterise different kinds of poetry. It might be maintained that it is therefore not tenable to speak of formulas at all. But without the word formula we would lack a term for the striking general characteristic of oral traditions that they reiterate not only words—as does all language—but phrases. Instead, analysts must formulate special definitions for each separate tradition, just as is done in describing rhythm, verse structure and the like, whereas a definition of the formula covering the phenomenon in general would have to be broader. Honko does not comment in detail upon the length and thrift that Parry pointed out in the system of Homeric formulas,²⁹ and it would of

28 Honko 1998a:100-104.

course be a huge extra job to compile statistics for the formulas in the Siri epic; but allowing for the inherent variations they do seem to recur with striking regularity.

Parry's notion of the adding style is easily applicable to the Siri epic. The way verse structure and sentence structure interact is as described by Parry: normally each verse brings an understandable unit of content, and only with the addition of the next verse does it become apparent whether or not the sentence was actually finished.³⁰ This is regularly confirmed as a characteristic of oral narrative poetry without giving rise to problems of definition, and it is natural to relate it to the conditions of performance as meeting a need in both singer and audience to have the action presented in clear units, each of which adds an understandable item of information.

It is also easy to recognise the composition by theme, both in the sense of recurring type scenes and of narrative patterns.³¹ I have tried to bring this out in my summary of the poem's content.

The flexibility of oral narrative has been confirmed in study after study, and Honko's is no exception. It is remarkable and well documented how singers of oral epic are able to restructure their stories according to the circumstances of a given performance, and this is at the roots of the whole theory.³² Every performance is to some degree a recomposition, and in oral epic traditions singer and poet are synonymous. Not only do the two full recordings of the whole Siri story differ from each other as described above. On various occasions Naika sang individual episodes for the scholars, but his versions of the same episode were never identical. They were not arbitrarily different either.³³ A remarkable example is his various performances of another epic, the *Kooti Cennaya*. In January 1992 the Honko team recorded him performing this epic over three days, almost 15 hours of net singing. Three years later Naika told them that he had performed the same epic on All India Radio in 20 minutes. The scholars were astounded and asked him to do the same for them, and he did so on the spot, performing a version that lasted 27 minutes. Honko describes this brief version as a kind of torso, not as easily understood as the long version Naika had given previously, but he had been right in asserting his ability to abbreviate.³⁴ When comparing versions of Naika's Siri epic, Honko maintains that the singer has in his mind a storyline that remains stable through the various performances, however different they may be from one another. In

29 Parry 1971:276.

30 Parry 1971:251-65.

31 Lord 1960:68-98.

32 Lord 1960 *passim*, especially 13-17.

33 Honko 1998b:xlix.

34 Honko 1998a:30.

Honko's understanding, when a singer has learned a new text he works on it, repeating it to himself and in performance until it achieves a form with which he is satisfied and which then stays in his mind, ready for use on various occasions, to be embellished with further detail or kept at a minimum. Honko uses the term mental text for the phenomenon, and underlines its crucial importance for the technique of composition in performance.³⁵

This fits in well enough with Parry and Lord's material, even though Lord preferred to stress the constant variation; he actually had striking examples of singers who kept their storyline remarkably well over the span of almost 20 years that passed between Parry and Lord's original fieldwork and Lord's follow-up in the 1950s. One of them even paused to smoke a cigarette at the same point in the story as he had on the first occasion.³⁶

Referring to Ruth Finnegan and Paul Zumthor, Honko speaks of the common fund of stories shared by oral performers as the pool of tradition, '*i.e.*, a pool in which the elements reside to be used in different combinations by different performers.'³⁷ Among Tulu speakers the heroine Siri occurs not only in epic and drama, but in other literary forms as well, such as ritual, lyric poetry or storytelling, and she may be referred to in all kinds of way. One might say that her epic is the basis of it all, but not in any single version such as, for example, that recorded by Honko and his team. It is a more general knowledge of the heroine's story that the pool of tradition contains. What we are told in the monograph about other singers and genres is, however, relatively meagre.³⁸ Honko clearly designed his fieldwork to concentrate on one individual singer. There seems to be nothing in Tulu tradition to compare to the South Slavic Cor Huso,³⁹ or to Homer, for that matter, no great first inventor to whom traditions are ascribed. On the contrary, Naika expresses his understanding of the tradition beautifully at the end of a brief poem dedicated to his Siri epic:

The epic flows like a river.
Where has water been born? ⁴⁰

The Siri project is especially illuminating in respect of the recording process. I shall discuss this in some detail in the final part of my paper and here only draw atten-

35 Honko 1998a:92-99, 519-47.

36 Parry and Lord 1954:408, Lord 1960:102-123.

37 Honko 1998a:66-74, the quotation on p. 70.

38 Honko 1998a:245-53, 519-24.

39 Parry 1971:437, 473, 477.

40 Honko 1998b. The poem is printed at the beginning of vol. II, the pages being unnumbered.

tion to a few immediately striking points. First, the fact that the recorded narrative is almost double the length of the dictated version confirms the experience Parry and Lord had in Yugoslavia. Dictation and writing form a tedious process, which tends to make the singer lose inspiration and opt for brief solutions.⁴¹ Next, it is interesting that Naika himself took the initiative of having a written version produced since this is a departure from the oral-formulaic theory. According to Parry and Lord, the idea of having oral epics recorded comes not from the singers themselves, but from somebody alien to the tradition. This is understandable, since both the singers of tales and their audiences feel certain that oral transmission is reliable. Of course, there may be bad singers who make a mess of stories or even tell lies on purpose, but good singers relate what happened, and the singing community is in no need of writing or other artificial media to guarantee that songs are preserved. It is actually worth noting why Naika wished to have his song made into a book. It was not in order to have it preserved, but to obtain access to an otherwise unreachable audience, children at school, and national pride on behalf of the Tulu language and the local heroine was a main reason. In India the classical epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* form part of the school curriculum in book form, and presumably Naika felt that for Tulu children the Siri epic would be more appropriate. His wish can hardly be said to have been fulfilled, or rather, it has been fulfilled in a way he could not have imagined. The version that he dictated ended up on a scholar's shelf,⁴² and the huge sung version that now exists as an impressive two-volume book is scarcely suitable for use in the classroom. But at its release in Udupi in Karnataka, March 1999, it was handed over to Gopala Naika under great festivities with many dignitaries present, the event was celebrated with a scholarly seminar, and newspapers both in South India and New Delhi brought articles on the subject.⁴³ So his efforts did achieve an increase of interest in Tulu culture.

Whether the published volumes will in their turn influence oral tradition remains to be seen. My guess is that they will not, since their readers will be folklorists and other scholars rather than the local Siri worshippers.

The Siri project and Archaic Greek poetry

Behind Honko's Indian project lies an interest in *Kalevala*. Research on the great Finnish epic has always been conducted in close connection with Homeric studies, and Honko's approach is, for this reason as well, eminently useful for classical

41 Parry 1971:450-51, Lord 1960:124-8.

42 Honko 1998a:257.

43 'Releasing the Siri epic in two cultures,' FF Network for the Folklore Fellows 18, 1999, 25-6.

studies. He puts the kind of questions to his fieldwork that Homeric scholars also want to have answered.

Honko takes pains to inform his readers about Naika's audiences, both those that are made up of the typical addressees of his normal performances and that which was present at the recorded performance. The latter regularly consisted of three people: Honko himself, leading the process and looking after the video recorder, Anneli Honko, who handled the tape-recorders, and Chinnapa Gowda, the scholar who had had Naika's epic written down from dictation, and who on this occasion was taking notes and acting as interpreter. Honko had asked for a version that was as full as possible. He made it clear to Naika that he as the singer was free to decide how he would organise his narrative, and that he could take as much time as he needed. Naika chose to proceed chronographically through three generations of heroines, beginning with the birth of Siri, taking us through her story and those of her daughter and granddaughters, and ending with the death of the twins. If we imagine that the poets of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were similarly asked to perform their stories in the longest version possible, it seems that they preferred to maintain an episodic narrative but to expand it in all kinds of way.

On some occasions guests were present at the recording. A professor from Mangalore University, Viveka Rai, attended on December 23rd. At the end of the morning's performance he pointed out that a detail had been left out, and Naika agreed to sing the forgotten piece of narrative and let the scholars insert the passage into the printed text in due course.⁴⁴ However, in another connection Honko had protested against what seemed to him an inconsistency: Siri was furious with her husband because he had visited a harlot, but it had not been told how she came to know. Here Naika defended his narrative, claiming that Siri had supernatural faculties and knew what had taken place without being informed.⁴⁵ It is a tempting suspicion that Naika's reactions reflect his assessment of the expertise of the two listeners. At any rate, while Naika often corrected himself on minor points, the name of a locality for instance, the correction of the error noted by Rai was the only case in which Naika made use of the possibility offered him by the recording process of revising his performance. If the rhapsodes who dictated the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* felt for their performances in the same way, it is easier to understand why the poems contain the inconsistencies so energetically pointed out by analytic scholars.

Naika's normal audience consists of rather poor working women, while the epic heroines move in the highest circles. That should warn us against making hasty conclusions from the world of the epic to that of its audience.

44 Honko 1998a:296ff.

45 Honko 1998a:291.

One day a woman singer was invited, a certain Ramakka, one of Naika's Siri women who had learned her art from him and had been a member of his group for more than 30 years.⁴⁶ Naika first proposed that she should continue the performance from the point he had reached, but Honko wanted that the whole recorded version should be one singer's work. Therefore it was decided that she should give a passage that Naika had already sung, without her being present. So Naika told her what part of the story she was supposed to perform, sang a few verses and asked her to take over, which she did. Honko and Naika's respective attitudes to the matter reveal their different opinions on stability and change of a song. Ramakka's version of the passage was actually rather different from Naika's and considerably shorter.⁴⁷ The procedure is remarkably similar to the situation in book 8 of the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus asks the Phaeacian singer to tell the story of the wooden horse and makes explicit from which point to begin. It also reminds us of the so-called Panathenaic rule: Solon or Hipparchus demanded of the rhapsodes at the Panathenaea to recite Homer in such a way that where one ended, the next one should begin.⁴⁸ If 'Homer' means, not the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but the story of Troy, the organiser of the recital wanted the singers to perform an episode each, but between them to tell the full story of the war.

Classicists know well enough that the texts transmitted to us are just a small bit of what once existed, but they tend to forget this wisdom in their actual scholarly procedure. Careful studies are made of how Pindar or Sophocles refer to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but were these poems accessible to them at all? Without booksellers and libraries? It could be argued that they heard them recited, but if any element of the oral theory has been unanimously confirmed by fieldwork during the last half century, it is the flexibility of the long narrative traditions. Honko's observations offer us tools for a more precise description of how oral literatures work. The individual singer has his/her mental text, however much it may differ from performance to performance, and if it is at all possible to meet the demands of a given audience, it is because the mental text is there, ready to be abbreviated, expanded or in other ways made to fit the circumstances. But such texts are not transmitted from one singer to the next. Ramakka maintained that she had had no other teacher than Naika, and nevertheless her mental text seemed to be different from his. What is common is the pool of tradition, a mass of stories and storylines that singers share in a more general sense, and which may be implemented in different literary forms and by different individuals.

46 Honko 1998a:300.

47 Honko 1998a:298ff.

48 Hom. *Od.* 8.492-8; Pl. [*Hipparch.*] 228B; Diog.Laert. i.57. Discussions of the Panathenaic rule are recurrent in Homeric scholarship; for two recent examples see Collins 2001 and Nagy 2002.

This makes for a more dynamic understanding of early Greek literature. Considering the existence of Troy stories told in different genres—epic, lyric and drama—I find it probable that the intertextuality at work is linked with such a common pool of tradition rather than with any single poem. No doubt the Trojan cycle was also productive in less prestigious forms, such as the songs and tales performed in the *lesche* or at the loom, as described by Jan Bremmer in his contribution to this volume. And of course there was a wealth of other mythical cycles, too, local as well as pan-Hellenic. Thus Pindar's *epinicia* offer a glimpse into pools of tradition special to local communities or great families, and an important part of the praise-poet's art must have been to be knowledgeable in such matters and skilled at incorporating the elements most suited for the occasion. The wealth of mythic themes painted on vases offers a better impression of the tradition than the picture we have through literature. As presented by the *LIMC* it is obvious how painters had their pools of tradition, too: stories are not told at random, but certain episodes are selected and there are rules for how they are to be told. Still there is variation enough to suggest that painters had their individual mental texts, too.

The Siri project and the recording of the Iliad and the Odyssey

There is much to be learned from Honko's work regarding the process by which the Homeric poems, as well as other early literary works in Greece, were recorded in writing. Basically, if you consider the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* orally composed, the simplest hypothesis concerning how they were written is that they were dictated by a singer—or possibly two—to a scribe. After all, dictation to scribes was the normal way of writing in historical times, even for literate authors in Greece and Rome.

The process that Naika and Honko went through was in many ways different from what a process of dictation must have been like in ancient times. Dictating is different from performing, the technical equipment of Honko's team made it radically different from any kind of recording in antiquity, and the balance of status and power between singer and scribe also made for different situations. But the fact that a singer was being asked to change his performance from the demanding, but also inspiring task of entertaining a live audience to the tiresome process of recording for scribes or scholars is actually similar. While taking pains to meet Honko's requirements, Naika obviously chose to treat his unusual audience, the scholars of whom two did not even understand his language, as if they were one of his typical audiences consisting of women. And what is perhaps most remarkable, he performed the introductory invocations of the gods as if he were launching into a ritual performance, even though from his point of view the occasion must have been a fake ritual. Of course, it may be that I misunderstand his invocation, and

that the powers that he calls into presence are those necessary for a performance. If they are a counterpart to the Greek Muses, the need for them is easily understood, for the singer is embarking on an unusually demanding task. But if they are the divine powers called for in the cult—and that is what the text suggests—Naika demonstrates a remarkable degree of abstraction in inviting their participation in an occasion of this kind.

I have argued elsewhere that the recording of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* took place in Athens during the Pisistratid tyranny, and following one of the great Panathenaic festivals. I imagine that in a similar fashion to Naika the Homeric rhapsode(s) kept in mind the great, festive audience that had been present during the live performance, and that this is how the passages specially meant to please a big, mixed audience consisting of men and women, young and old, free and slaves, were maintained in the dictated texts. If the rhapsode(s) had only had scribes to inspire him/them, the text would hardly have had the freshness we enjoy today.

A special interest of mine is how an epic is structured by the singer. The handbooks inform us that the 24 books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* respectively were introduced by Alexandrian scholars, but like so much else in Homeric scholarship this is based on shaky source-material. Parry's very last published work was the abstract of a paper he intended to read to the American Philological Association on the subject of 'The Singer's Rests in Greek and Southslavic Heroic Songs.' Regrettably the abstract gives only the barest outline of his thoughts⁴⁹. Decades ago Notopoulos argued—influenced by his studies of modern epic singers in Crete—that each Homeric book was a performance.⁵⁰ This is, however, problematic, since no scribe is able to keep up with the speed of a sung performance. Some years ago I argued that the division reflects the process of dictation, each book being the portion singer and scribe managed per day.⁵¹ Working on that hypothesis, I searched through all the publications of living epic I could get hold of in order to find information of the recording process and the way singers take their breaks, but, frustratingly, this is not part of what scholars normally include when publishing their fieldwork.

Honko, by way of contrast, has a whole chapter in which he gives detailed information about what happened when, who was present, how long the sessions were, what breaks the singer took, *etc.*⁵² On several occasions Honko discussed the

49 Parry 1971:420.

50 Notopoulos 1964.

51 Jensen 1999. (Honko 1998a & b were only released in 1999 and not accessible to me when I wrote the paper.)—My opinions were discussed in the same volume of *SO* and by Janko 2000. The paper is mentioned by Cerri 2002:13 as a merely risible example of unserious scholarship.

52 Honko 1998a:276-321.

structure of the narrative with Naika, and the latter's comments were invariably concerned with content. For instance, there are passages that must be performed without breaks such as the description of Siri's pregnancy: if this was not the case, the divine heroine would feel offended and avenge herself on the singer.⁵³ This sheds an interesting light on Naika's relationship with his poem, showing how he feels that the narrative brings the protagonists and their time as human beings back to life. The performance is a re-enactment and, as such, dangerous, calling forth divine powers that are beyond the singer's control. Naika does not mention concerns for his human audience.

As structured by Naika's breaks, the poem falls into 36 'segments' of unequal lengths, varying from 88 to 795 verses. Honko analyses the way the singer ends a segment and begins the next, finding two main types: either he repeats the last few lines of the preceding segment on beginning a new one, or he simply continues. In both cases he ends and begins with *Naraayina*. A special problem is to remember after a break exactly at what point of the story the narrative had been interrupted. Naika sometimes asked Chinnapa Gowda for help, but as a rule he was in full command of the storyline. When in some cases Naika ended a segment with an almost graphic representation of a scene, Honko understands this as a mnemotechnic aid, remaining in the singer's mind with almost visual clarity. Since Naika was not used to performing in this way, he must have developed these techniques on the spot, and Honko even notices a development during the days of performance.⁵⁴

Honko states that he decided upon writing this chapter at a late phase of the editorial work, when the poem had already been analysed and organised as it is in the edition, divided into 5 'sub-epics,' which are again subdivided into 56 'cantos' in all. Comparing the two systems he notes that even though they differ in matters of detail, they are not absolutely at variance with each other. Furthermore, studying the segments brought about by the singer's breaks he finds a cohesion of content in them.⁵⁵ That Naika was actually trying to organise his narrative in coherent parts is clear from some of the remarks he makes, for instance when he states of a passage he is just going to perform: 'It is like becoming one chapter.'⁵⁶

However, Naika's pauses differ in length from 3 minutes to a whole night and can hardly all have been felt to be equally significant. A couple of details confirm this assumption: First, even though Naika had said that Siri would not accept any interruption in the representation of her pregnancy (2448-3110), he made a pause

53 Honko 1998a:289.

54 Honko 1998a:278, 316ff.

55 Honko 1998a:318f.

56 Honko 1998a:284.

of 14 minutes after v. 3015, and Honko finds an irony in this breaking of a taboo.⁵⁷ Similarly, Honko wonders at a strange intersection between segment 24 and 25, which falls in the middle of a speech. At this point the singer is exhausted, drinks water, coughs, and only continues singing after a break of 25 minutes.⁵⁸ These awkward breaks might instead be interpreted as a signal that a relatively short pause was not felt by the singer to interrupt the narrative. The most important factor for the overall structure of the performance must have been the pauses at noon and in the evening. The length of the sessions was dependent on temperature for singer and audience and daylight for the video recorder, and morning sessions were always longer than those in the afternoon. To a singer accustomed to regulating his performances according to circumstances, this must have offered a rhythm that was reasonably simple to operate with.

Naika distributed his narrative over the 11 sessions as follows:

				hours	vv.	vv. per min.
1	Dec. 21.	morning	1-1350	2.16	1350	9.9
2		afternoon	1351-2447	1.53	1097	9.7
3	Dec. 22.	morning	2448-4783	3.41	2336	10.6
4	Dec. 23.	morning	4784-6657	2.59	1874	10.5
5		afternoon	6658-7511	1.17	854	11.1
6	Dec. 24.	morning	7512-9356	2.59	1845	10.3
7		afternoon	9357-10623	1.52	1267	11.3
8	Dec. 27.	morning	10624-11994	3.07	1371	7.3
9		afternoon	11995-12979	1.40	985	9.9
10	Dec. 28.	morning	12980-14674	2.46	1695	10.2
11		afternoon	14675-15683	1.39	1009	10.2

Net singing time: 26.09 hours.

It is impressive how long passages Naika was able to perform in a single session, and at a certain point it became necessary to make a break of some days because his voice had become strained. His singing tempo varied; it seems that he speeded up the further he got into his performance; the two 'beginnings,' on December 21 and 27 are below average.

If we look at how Naika arranged his long narrative, we find that it actually falls into harmoniously rounded narrative elements to which titles may be easily attached. Only in one case, no. 6, did I feel uncertain how to characterise the subject:

- 1 The prehistory
- 2 Siri's birth, youth, and wedding

⁵⁷ Honko 1998a:290.

⁵⁸ Honko 1998a:305f.

- 3 Siri's wedded life and divorce; the birth of her son Kumara
- 4 Siri's period of wandering
- 5 Siri's second wedding
- 6 Siri's last years; the birth of her daughter Sonne
- 7 Sonne's childhood and wedding
- 8 Sonne's wedded life
- 9 Sonne's two daughters, Abbaya and Daaraya
- 10 Abbaya and Daaraya's weddings
- 11 Institution of the cult

Of course this does not prove anything about the structure of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but it does show that from a comparative point of view the idea of the books reflecting the writing process is neither absurd nor improbable.

What happened to the Homeric text after the original recording? We can only speculate, but it is worth noting that in the case of the Siri epic eight years passed from recording to publication. Again, Honko is remarkably careful to state what the scholars did to the text during those years. It is not my topic here to discuss the process of redaction that the original recording of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* must have undergone, but at least it is clear from the comparison that we ought to pay homage not only to the great poet(s), but to the scribes as well.⁵⁹

59 I am grateful to John D. Kendal for revising my English.

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