

THE FOCUS CLASSICAL SOURCES

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Greek Religion  
A Sourcebook

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counts. *Asebeia*, however, does not include blasphemy or presenting the gods in what we might consider an irreverent or derogatory manner.

The Athenian orator Antiphon (c. 436–338 BCE) notes that impiety deprives the wrong-doer of hope. In the *Oeconomicus*, a treatise by Xenophon on estate management, the protagonist expresses his concept of piety and its benefits. Isocrates (436–338 BCE), the Athenian orator and advocate of panhellenism, gives advice on piety and morality.

- 1.29 ANTIPHON, *ON THE CHOREUTES* 5. An individual who acts impiously and commits transgressions against the gods would deprive himself of the very hope that is the greatest of human blessings.
- 1.30 XENOPHON, *OECONOMICUS* 11.8. I think I have learned that the gods made it impermissible for human beings to succeed without knowing what must be done and without taking care that these things are done. To some who are wise and diligent they give prosperity, but not to others. Therefore I begin by serving the gods, but I try, as is right for me when I pray to the gods, to act in a way to find health and strength of body, honor in the city, goodwill among friends, honorable safety in war, and wealth that is honorably increased.
- 1.31 ISOCRATES, *ANTIDOSIS* 282. You should realize that those who receive more from the gods both now and in the future are those who are most pious and most diligent in their devotions to them; and that those who fare better with their fellow humans are those who are the most conscientious in dealing with their associates, whether in their homes or in public, and are consequently most highly esteemed.

## THE GODS IN HESIOD'S *THEOGONY* AND HOMER'S *ILIAD*

- 2.1 HERODOTUS, *HISTORIES* 2.53. But from where each of these gods came into existence, and whether all of them had always existed, and what they looked like, all this was not known until the day before yesterday, so to speak.

For I believe that Hesiod and Homer, who were four hundred years before my time,<sup>1</sup> and no more than that, made for the Greeks the genealogies of the gods, giving them their appropriate titles, assigning their honors and skills, and describing their appearance.

Writing in the mid-fifth century BCE, Herodotus discusses the origin and nature of the gods, noting that Homer and Hesiod gave systematic accounts of the gods' origins, genealogies, appearance or form, and gave them their various titles.<sup>2</sup> Herodotus' statement, however, does not mean that these poets invented Greek religion. Rather, they put together a version of the various myths concerning the gods that became the generally accepted tradition. The poems of Homer and Hesiod are a culmination of the long Greek tradition of oral poetry.

The dating and authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have long been the subject of scholarly discussion. Both epics are focused on the period during and immediately after the siege of Troy by the Greeks, an event that is generally dated c. 1200 BCE, but most scholars agree that the two epics were composed by Homer in the second half of the eighth century, and probably did not reach their final form until the sixth century BCE.

1 *four hundred years*: Herodotus overestimates the dates of Homer and Hesiod; modern scholars date them to the eighth rather than the ninth century BCE.

2 *titles*: either patronymics, such as "Zeus, son of Cronus," or cult titles such as Zeus Xenios, the protector of strangers.

Hesiod is thought to have been writing c. 700 BCE. In his poem *Theogony* Hesiod relates the origin and genealogies of the gods.<sup>3</sup> He distances himself from the stories he is about to relate by attributing his inspiration to the Muses who, he says, know both truth and fiction and mingle them as they wish.

## 2.2 HESIOD, *THEOGONY* 22–34.

Once they [the Muses] taught Hesiod beautiful song  
as he watched his sheep under holy Helicon;  
this is the first thing the goddesses told me,  
the Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus Aigiochos:<sup>4</sup>

25

“Rustic shepherds, evil oafs, nothing but bellies,  
we know how to say many lies as if they were true,  
and when we want, we know how to speak the truth.”

This is what the prompt-voiced daughters of great Zeus said;  
they picked up and gave me a staff, a branch of strong laurel,  
a fine one, and breathed into me a voice  
divine, to celebrate what will be and what was.<sup>5</sup>

30

They told me to sing the race of the blessed who always are,  
but always to sing of themselves first and also last.

Hesiod asks the Muses how the world and its gods were created.

## 2.3 HESIOD, *THEOGONY* 104–115.

Greetings, children of Zeus; grant me lovely song,  
and praise the holy race of immortals who always are,  
who were born from Gaea and starry Ouranos,  
and from dark Nyx, and those salty Pontus raised.<sup>6</sup>  
Tell how at first gods and earth came to be,  
and rivers and vast sea, violent in surge,  
and shining stars and the wide sky above,

105

110

<sup>3</sup> For commentary on Hesiod's *Theogony*, see Caldwell 1987.

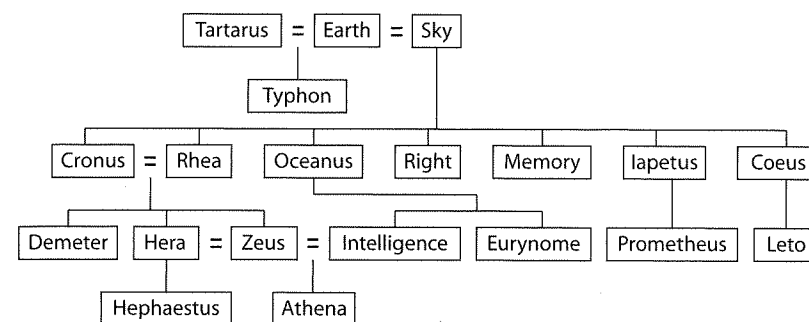
<sup>4</sup> *Helicon*: a mountain in Boeotia, about halfway between Thebes and Delphi. *Olympian Muses*: the Muses were the divine patronesses of song and singers; they were called “Olympian” because of their father Zeus’ connection with Mount Olympus. *Aigiochos*: literally the one who carries the aegis, a large goatskin cloak or shield with tassels that was said to be immortal. When shaken, it struck fear into the enemy. The attaching of a distinctive epithet to the name of a god or mortal is a convention of epic poetry, e.g. Poseidon is described as the “Earth-Shaker” in *Theogony* 456 (2.6), Athena as “owl-eyed” in *Theogony* 895 (2.7).

<sup>5</sup> *staff*: in the Homeric assembly of chieftains, the staff was the symbol of the authority to speak, and was held by kings or princes, priests, prophets, heralds, and speakers. *laurel*: the laurel was sacred to Apollo as god of prophecy; hence Hesiod’s claim “to celebrate what will be and what was.”

<sup>6</sup> *Gaea*: Earth. *Ouranos*: Sky. *Nyx*: Night. *Pontus*: Sea.

[and the gods born from them, givers of good]  
how they divided their wealth and allotted honors  
and how first they held valed Olympus.<sup>7</sup>  
Tell me these things, Muses with Olympian homes,  
from the first, say which of them first came to be.

115



**Figure 2.1.** Abridged Genealogy of the Gods (after Caldwell 1987, Table I).

The Muses reply that the first stage of the cosmogony occurred without sexual intercourse. First there was Chaos, then Gaea (Earth), Tartaros, and Eros (Desire). Erebus and Night were born from Chaos, and Night and Erebus produced Aether and Day. Finally Gaea produced Ouranos (Sky), the mountains and the sea. Then, in the second stage, Ouranos and Gaea had intercourse and produced twelve children, the last of whom was Cronus. These twelve came to be called the Titans.

## 2.4 HESIOD, *THEOGONY*, 116–138.

First of all Chaos came into being; but next  
wide-breasted Gaea, always safe foundation of all  
immortals who possess the peaks of snowy Olympus,  
and dim Tartarus in a recess of the wide-pathed earth,  
and Eros, most beautiful among the immortal gods,  
limb-weaker, who conquers the mind and sensible thought  
in the breasts of all gods and all men.<sup>8</sup>

120

From Chaos were born Erebus and black Nyx,

<sup>7</sup> *valed Olympus*: the Greek literally means “with many folds,” a reference to the many valleys in the mountain range.

<sup>8</sup> *Chaos*: Abyss, an opening or gap, not disorder or chaos in a modern sense. *Gaea*: the earth, and also the primal mother. *Tartarus*: generally the lowest part of the underworld, but here, apparently, the lowest part of the earth. *Eros*: Love, Desire, the power of generation.

from Nyx were born Aether and Hemera,  
whom she conceived and bore, joined in love with Erebus.<sup>9</sup> 125  
Gaea first bore a child equal to herself,  
starry Ouranos to cover her all over, and  
to be an always safe home for the blessed gods.  
She bore the high Ourea, pleasing homes of divine  
nymphs, who dwell in the valed mountains.<sup>10</sup> 130  
She also bore the barren sea, violent in surge,  
Pontus, without love's union; but next  
she lay with Ouranos and bore deep-whirling Oceanus,  
and Koios and Kreios and Hyperion and Iapetus,  
and Theia and Rhea and Themis and Mnemosyne 135  
and gold-crowned Phoebe and attractive Tethys.  
After them was born the youngest, crafty Cronus,  
most terrible of children; he hated his lusting father.<sup>11</sup>

At the instigation of Gaea, Cronus castrated Ouranos, and from the severed  
genitals sprang the goddess Aphrodite.

#### 2.5 HESIOD, *THEOGONY* 188–208.

As soon as he [Cronus] cut off the genitals with adamant,  
they were carried over the sea a long time, and white 190  
foam arose from the immortal flesh;<sup>12</sup> within a girl  
grew; first she came to holy Cythera, and  
next she came to wave-washed Cyprus.<sup>13</sup>  
An awesome and beautiful goddess emerged and  
grass grew under her supple feet. Aphrodite 195  
[foam-born goddess and well-crowned Cythereia]  
gods and men name her, since in foam she grew;  
and Cythereia, since she landed at Cythera;

9 *Erebus*: Darkness. *Aether*: Brightness, the upper air. *Hemera*: Day

10 *Ourea*: Mountains

11 *Oceanos*: a river that encircled the earth as opposed to Pontus, Sea, which lay in the middle of the landmass. *Themis*: Right or Established Custom. *Mnemosyne*: Memory or Remembrance. These twelve children of Ouranos and Gaea are later named Titans by their father; see *Theogony* 207 in 2.5.

12 The name Aphrodite contains the word *aphros*, Greek for "foam", and thus is generally thought to mean "born from the foam." Caldwell (1987: 40) suggests that foam symbolizes semen. The goddess of sexual desire was born from a god's genitals, just as Athena, the goddess of wisdom, was born from the head of the god Zeus; see 2.8.

13 *Cythera*: an island off the southern coast of the Peloponnese in Greece. *Cyprus*: a large island in the eastern Mediterranean. Both places were centers of Aphrodite's worship, especially Paphos in Cyprus.

and Cyprogenes, since she was born in wave-beat Cyprus;  
and "Philommeides," since she appeared from the genitals. 200  
Eros accompanied her, and fair Himeros followed,  
when first she was born and went to join the gods.<sup>14</sup>  
She has such honor from the first, and this is her  
province among men and immortal gods:  
girls' whispers and smiles and deceptions, 205  
sweet pleasure and sexual love and tenderness.

Great Ouranos, their father, called his sons Titans,  
reproaching the sons whom he himself begot.

Rhea and Cronus produce Hestia (Hearth), Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon  
and Zeus. To avoid being superceded by his children, Cronus eats them at  
birth.<sup>15</sup>

#### 2.6 HESIOD, *THEOGONY* 453–506.

Rhea lay with Cronus and bore illustrious children:  
Hestia, Demeter, and gold-sandaled Hera and  
strong Hades, who lives in a palace under the ground 455  
and has a pitiless heart, and loud-sounding Earth-Shaker<sup>16</sup>  
and wise Zeus, the father of gods and men,  
by whose thunder the wide earth is shaken.  
Great Cronus would swallow these, as each  
would come forth from the holy womb to his mother's knees, 460  
intending that none of Ouranos' proud line but  
himself would hold the right of king over the immortals.  
For he learned from Gaea and starry Ouranos  
that it was fate that his own son would overthrow him,

14 *Philommeides*: literally means genital-loving. Hesiod is punning on the similarity of pronunciation between *medea*, genitals, and *meid-*, laughter. *Philommeides*, laughter-loving, is an epithet used of Aphrodite in Homer, *Iliad* 3. 424, *Odyssey* 8.362 and Hesiod, *Theogony* 989. *Himeros*: Longing, Desire.

15 See Figure 1.3 for genealogy.

16 *Hestia*: goddess of the hearth, the focal point of the home (*oikos*) who has little mythical function but was very important in people's lives. *Demeter*: goddess of grain, vegetation, and fertility. *Hera*: goddess of weddings and marriage. In myth she is portrayed as the powerful but jealous wife of Zeus, a resentful stepmother who bears Hephaestus without having sexual intercourse because of her anger at Zeus' many affairs and his illegitimate offspring; see below 2.8, *Theogony* 927–929. *Hades*: god of death and the underworld. *Earth-Shaker*: Poseidon, god of the sea, who is also connected with earthquakes and horses.

although he was powerful, by the plans of great Zeus.<sup>17</sup> 465  
 So he kept no blind man's watch, but alertly  
 swallowed his own children; incurable grief held Rhea.

With the help of her parents Gaea and Ouranos, Rhea deceives Cronus  
 by substituting a stone for the infant Zeus, who is reared on the island of  
 Crete.

But when she was about to bear Zeus, father of gods  
 and men, she begged her own dear parents,  
 Gaea and starry Ouranos, to help her think 470  
 of a plan by which she might secretly have  
 her son, and make great crafty Cronus pay the  
 Erinyes of her father and the children he swallowed.<sup>18</sup>

They heard and obeyed their dear daughter  
 and told her what was destined to happen 475  
 concerning king Cronus and his strong-hearted son.

They sent her to Lyctus, to the rich land of Crete,  
 when she was about to bear her youngest son,  
 great Zeus; vast Gaea received him from her  
 in wide Crete to tend and raise. 480

Carrying him through the swift black night, she came  
 first to Lycos; taking him in her arms, she hid him  
 in a deep cave, down in dark holes of holy earth,  
 on Mount Aegaeum, dense with woods.

Rhea wrapped a huge stone in a baby's robe, and fed it 485  
 to Ouranos' wide-ruling son, king of the earlier gods;  
 he took it in his hands and put it down his belly,  
 the fool; he did not think in his mind that instead  
 of a stone his own son, undefeated and secure, was left  
 behind, soon to overthrow him by force and violence and 490  
 drive him from his honor, and rule the immortals himself.

Cronus is forced to disgorge his older children, first vomiting the stone which  
 Zeus places at Delphi. Zeus receives his thunderbolts from the Cyclopes.

Swiftly then the strength and noble limbs  
 of the future lord grew; at the end of a year,  
 tricked by the clever advice of Gaea,  
 great crafty Cronus threw up his children, 495

17 For he learned...: see Caldwell 1987: 54: "Gaia and Ouranos foretell, but do not determine, the future. Their prophecy to Cronus may put him on the alert, but his efforts will necessarily fail."

18 Erinyes: underworld goddesses of revenge, who avenge the killing of blood relatives.

defeated by the craft and force of his own son.  
 First he vomited out the stone he had swallowed last;  
 Zeus fixed it firmly in the wide-pathed earth  
 at sacred Pytho in the vales of Parnassus,  
 to be a sign thereafter, a wonder to mortal men.<sup>19</sup> 500

He released from their deadly chains his uncles,<sup>20</sup>  
 Ouranos' sons, whom their father mindlessly bound.  
 They did not forget gratitude for this help,  
 and gave him thunder and the fiery lightning bolt  
 and lightning, which vast Gaea earlier had hidden; 505  
 relying on these, he is king of mortals and immortals.<sup>21</sup>

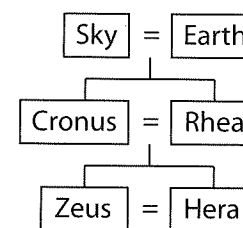


Figure 2.2. Succession of Divine Rule  
 (after Caldwell 1987, Table 2).

The gods make Zeus their supreme ruler and he gives them their various  
 honors. When Metis, his first wife, was about to give birth to Athena, Zeus  
 swallowed her.

## 2.7 HESIOD, *THEOGONY* 881–900

But when the blessed gods had finished their work  
 and decided the matter of rights with the Titans  
 by force, they urged wide-seeing Olympian Zeus  
 to be king and rule the immortals, by Gaea's  
 advice; and he divided their honors among them.<sup>22</sup> 885

19 *Pytho*: Delphi. *Parnassus*: the mountain range in the hinterland of Delphi. *stone*: Hesiod identifies this stone with the famous *omphalos*, the navel stone at Delphi, which was said to mark the center of the universe.

20 *uncles*: the Cyclopes, also children of Ouranos and Gaea; see Caldwell 1987: 56.

21 Caldwell 1987: 55, "Zeus is a sky-god like his grandfather Ouranos, associated especially with rain, storms, and lightning. He is king of the gods because he is most powerful, but he is also most wise. He seems to be connected with no particular city or region, but is the most panhellenic of the gods. He is also the most sexually active."

22 For Homer's account of the honors assigned to Poseidon, Hades, and Zeus himself, see Homer *Iliad* 15. 187–193, below 2.19.

Zeus, king of gods, made Metis his first wife,<sup>23</sup>  
 she who knows most of gods and mortal men.  
 But when she was about to bear the owl-eyed  
 goddess Athena, then he deceived her mind with a  
 trick of wily words, and put her down in his belly,<sup>24</sup> 890  
 by the advice of Gaea and starry Ouranos. Thus  
 they advised him, so that no other of the eternal  
 gods would hold the office of king but Zeus.  
 For from her wise children were fated to be born:  
 first a daughter, owl-eyed Tritogeneia,<sup>25</sup> 895  
 like her father in strength and wise counsel,  
 but then she was going to bear a son  
 proud of heart, king of gods and men;  
 but first Zeus put her into his own belly,  
 so the goddess might advise him on good and evil. 900

Hesiod lists Zeus' other children by different mothers, including the gods Apollo, Ares, Hermes, Dionysus, and the goddesses Athena and Artemis. Hera produces Hephaestus "without love's union."

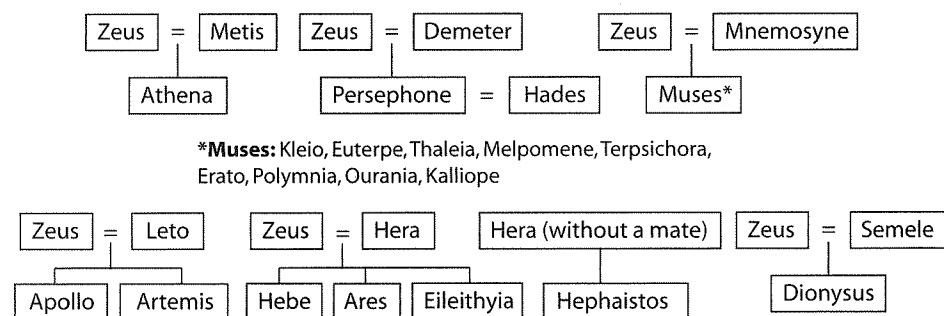


Figure 2.3. The "wives" of Zeus (adapted from Caldwell 1987, Table 14).

23 *Metis*: the name means "crafty intelligence", she is a daughter of Oceanus (*Theogony* 358).

24 *put her down in his belly*: i.e. swallowed her; see Caldwell 1987: 77: "Since Metis, like all water-deities, can change her shape, Zeus seems to have tricked her ("with wily words") into assuming a shape in which she could easily be swallowed." On Athena's birth from Zeus' head, see *Theogony* 924 in 2.8.

25 *Tritogeneia*: another name of Athena. *owl-eyed*: Athena is often associated with the owl, especially in Athens.

## 2.8 HESIOD, *THEOGONY* 912-942.

Next he came to the bed of nurturant Demeter;  
 she bore white-armed Persephone, whom Aedoneus  
 seized from her mother; but Zeus allowed it.<sup>26</sup>

Then he loved fair-haired Mnemosyne,<sup>27</sup> who bore 915  
 the nine Muses with golden headbands,  
 whose delight is banquets and the pleasure of song.

And Leto, joined in love to Zeus Aigiochos,  
 bore Apollo and archeress Artemis, beautiful 920  
 children beyond all of Ouranos' descendants.

Lastly he made Hera his blooming wife;  
 she bore Hebe and Ares and Eileithia,<sup>28</sup>  
 having joined in love with the king of gods and men.

He himself bore from his head owl-eyed Athena,  
 the awesome, fight-rousing, army-leading, unweary 925  
 mistress whose delight is din and wars and battles;  
 but Hera, who was angry and at odds with her husband,  
 without love's union bore famous Hephaestus,  
 excellent in arts beyond all of Ouranos' descendants.

....  
 And the Atlanteid Maia bore to Zeus glorious Hermes,  
 herald of the gods, after going up to his holy bed.  
 And the Cadmeid Semele bore an illustrious son,<sup>29</sup> much- 940  
 cheering Dionysus, after joining Zeus in love,  
 mortal with immortal; now they both are gods.

26 Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, was carried off by Hades to be his bride in the underworld. She was restored to her mother for part of the year, during which time the crops grew. During Persephone's absence in the underworld, Demeter mourned, thus neglecting the crops. *Aedoneus*: a longer form of the name Hades, god of the underworld.

27 *Mnemosyne*: see 2.4 with n. 11.

28 Hebe was the goddess of youth, Ares, the god of war, and Eileithia goddess of childbirth.

29 *Cadmeid Semele*: Semele was a daughter of Cadmus, king of Thebes.

## The gods in Homer's *Iliad*

The genealogies of the gods as related in Hesiod's *Theogony* are essential for understanding the dysfunctional Olympian family depicted in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The plot of the *Iliad* is driven by the divisions among the Olympian gods, who take sides during the siege of Troy. Of the more important male gods, Apollo sides with the Trojans and Poseidon with the Greeks. The goddesses Hera and Athena are on the side of the Greeks, whereas Aphrodite is on the side of the Trojans. This alignment assumes familiarity with the story of the judgment of Paris, the Trojan prince who preferred the gift of Aphrodite to those of Hera and Athena. Aphrodite's gift to Paris was the most beautiful woman in the world. And so Paris abducted Helen, the wife of the Greek Menelaus, causing Menelaus' brother Agamemnon to lead an army against the Trojans.

Divine intervention should be regarded in light of Thales' statement, which begins this book, that all things are full of gods. In the struggle between the Greeks and Trojans, often a god initially intervenes in human disguise and is seen by only one individual. Stories from more historical times continue this tradition of divine intervention. For example, Herodotus reports that Pan appeared to the Athenian runner sent to Sparta to ask for help before the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE.<sup>30</sup> As Lloyd-Jones observes, "we must acknowledge that Homer's gods are effective and his religion real, but that his human characters are free to decide and are responsible for their decisions."<sup>31</sup>

Early in Book I of the *Iliad* Athena warns Achilles not to kill Agamemnon, who has refused to accept the ransom offered by the Trojan priest Chryses to retrieve his daughter.<sup>32</sup> Achilles tries to reason with Agamemnon but a quarrel ensues. Achilles is considering what action to take when Hera sends Athena to restrain him. Achilles recognizes the goddess, who is seen only by him, and realizes that he must obey; otherwise, he will lose the gods' favor.

### 2.9 HOMER, *ILIAD* 1.188–222.

So he spoke, and distress came over the son of Peleus;<sup>33</sup>  
the heart in his shaggy chest pondered, this way and that,  
whether to draw the sharpened sword from beside his thigh, 190  
scatter the crowd and slaughter the son of Atreus,<sup>34</sup> or  
to put a stop to his rage and hold his heart in check.

<sup>30</sup> See 1.1 and 14.7.

<sup>31</sup> Lloyd-Jones 1983: 10.

<sup>32</sup> The priest's daughter had been captured by the Greeks and was Agamemnon's concubine.

<sup>33</sup> son of Peleus: Achilles.

<sup>34</sup> son of Atreus: Agamemnon.

While he debated this in his mind and heart, and was starting  
to pull his mighty sword from the scabbard, Athena came  
down from the sky; the white-armed goddess Hera had sent her, 195  
her heart full of love and concern for both of the men alike.  
She stood behind Peleus' son and grasped his tawny hair  
appearing to him alone; none of the rest of them saw her.  
Achilles turned round, stunned, and recognized her at once,  
Pallas Athena; her two eyes shone with a terrible light. 200  
He addressed her, speaking words that flew from his lips on wings:  
"Why on earth have you come here, offspring of Zeus who carries the  
aegis?"<sup>35</sup>

To observe the outrageous behavior of Atreus' son, Agamemnon?  
Now I shall tell you something that will, I think, be accomplished:  
the arrogance he is displaying is soon going to cost him his life." 205  
The grey-eyed goddess Athena addressed him then in his turn:  
"I've come to put a stop to your fury, if you'll be persuaded,  
down from the sky; the white-armed goddess Hera has sent me,  
her heart full of love and concern for both of you men alike;  
come, cease from this strife; do not pull out your sword with your  
hand; 210  
instead abuse him with verbal insults regarding the future;  
for I shall tell you something that will indeed be accomplished:  
one day you'll have three times the amount of splendid gifts  
because of this outrage; hold back therefore, persuaded by me."

Answering her, swift-footed Achilles addressed her in turn: 215  
"Goddess, I must pay careful attention to what you say,  
despite the rage in my heart; for this is the better way;  
if someone obeys the gods they listen to him in return."

He spoke, and checked his weighty hand on the silver hilt  
and drove the mighty sword back inside its scabbard, obeying 220  
the word of Athena; and she went back to Olympus to join  
the rest of the gods in the palace ruled by Zeus who carries the aegis.

Achilles withdraws from the fighting and asks his mother Thetis to go as a suppliant to Zeus, begging him to help the Trojans so that the Greeks will regret Achilles' absence from the battlefield.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Zeus who carries the aegis: see above 2.2 with n. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Thetis: a sea nymph, daughter of the sea god Nereus, and thus immortal. Achilles' father Peleus was mortal.

2.10 HOMER, *ILIAD* 1.498–516.

She [Thetis] found the resounding son of Cronus sitting apart  
from the rest, on the topmost peak of many-folded Olympus;  
she sat before him, taking hold of his knees with her left 500  
hand, her right hand touching his chin from underneath,<sup>37</sup>  
and addressed lord Zeus, the son of Cronus, in supplication:  
“Zeus father, if ever I brought you benefit, either by word  
or by deed among the immortals, I beg you, fulfill my desire:<sup>38</sup>  
honor my son, who is doomed to the shortest life among mortals. 505  
Agamemnon, lord of men, has done him dishonor by taking  
and keeping his due reward, which he stripped from him in person;  
*you* honor him therefore, Olympian Zeus, deviser of counsels;  
bestow victorious power on the Trojans until the Achaeans  
pay my son his due and enrich his standing with honor.” 510

So she spoke; cloud-gathering Zeus addressed her not,  
but sat for a long time silent. Thetis clung to his knees  
tightly, without letting go, and spoke for a second time:  
“Promise me truly and bow your head in assent, or else  
refuse—since you’re untouched by fear—so that I may know 515  
for sure how far I’m the most dishonored of all the gods.”

Zeus gives his promise, despite fear of his wife Hera’s anger. The details of his  
plan to help Achilles, however, are not revealed until later in the poem.

2.11 HOMER, *ILIAD* 1.517–530.

Then greatly upset, cloud-gathering Zeus addressed her in turn:  
“What a dreadful business this is! You will stir up hatred between  
myself and Hera, who always provokes me with words of abuse.  
As it is she is constantly casting reproaches against me among 520  
the immortal gods; she says I am helping the Trojans in battle.  
But go away now, so that Hera may not notice you here;  
I’ll make these things my own concern and see them accomplished.  
Come, I shall bow my head in assent, that you may be persuaded;  
for this is the mightiest guarantee that I can provide 525  
among the immortals: nothing can be reneged on, revoked  
or left unaccomplished, once I have bowed my head in assent.”

The son of Cronus spoke and nodded his blue-black brows;

37 *touching his chin*...: the ritual act of a suppliant, one who humbles himself in order to  
ask a favor. Another way of supplicating was to grasp the knees of the person being  
supplicated; see below line 512.

38 *if ever I brought you benefit*...: an allusion to an earlier story that Thetis had saved  
Zeus when the other gods wished to bind him (*Iliad* 1.396–406).

the ambrosial locks of hair on the lord’s immortal head  
fell tumbling forward, making mighty Olympus shake. 530

When Hera learns of Thetis’ visit, a domestic argument ensues, in which  
Zeus asserts not only his supremacy over his wife, but also his right to  
withhold his thoughts from the other gods.

2.12 HOMER, *ILIAD* 1. 544–550.

The father of men and gods said, answering her in reply:  
“Hera, do not expect to have knowledge of all that I say, 545  
for it will be hard on you, even though you are my wife;  
if something is fitting for you to hear, then no one at all,  
whether god or human, will know about it before yourself;  
but if I wish to reflect on something away from the gods,  
don’t keep on questioning me about that and asking for details.” 550

Peace is restored within the Olympian family as Hera’s son Hephaestus  
advises his mother to stop quarreling with Zeus about mortals, since he has  
the power to overthrow them all. Book I of the *Iliad* ends with a description  
of the gods feasting on Olympus.

2.13 HOMER, *ILIAD* 1. 571–604.

And then the famous craftsman Hephaestus began to address them,  
in an act of kindness to white-armed Hera, his own dear mother:  
“What a dreadful business this will be, no longer supportable,  
if the two of you are to quarrel like this on account of mortals,  
and persist in raising a ruckus among the gods; there will be 575  
no pleasure at all in this good feast if the worse wins victory.  
I advise my mother—although she already knows this herself—  
to act with kindness towards our own dear father Zeus,  
that our father may not reproach her again and disrupt our feast.  
For if he wishes, he the Olympian lightning-lord 580  
can hurl us out of our seats; for he is the strongest by far.  
Approach him and try to appease him with soft and gentle words,  
and then the Olympian lord will at once be gracious to us.”

So he spoke, and darting up he placed in the hand  
of his own dear mother a two-handed drinking-cup and addressed  
her: 585

“Endure, my mother; despite your sorrow submit to his will,  
for fear these eyes of mine may see you, dear as you are,  
being beaten; and then I won’t have the power to protect you, despite  
my distress; it is harsh to pit oneself against the Olympian...”

....



So he spoke, and Hera, the white-armed goddess, smiled, 595  
and smiling accepted the drinking-cup from the hand of her child;  
and then he poured sweet nectar for all the rest of the gods,<sup>39</sup>  
which he drew from a mixing-bowl and served from left to right;  
and when they saw Hephaestus the cripple hobbling about  
in the palace, unquenchable laughter arose from the blessed gods. 600

And so they feasted all day long till the sun went down,  
and none of their hearts was deprived of an equal share of the feast,  
or of the sound of the beautiful lyre in Apollo's hands,  
or of the Muses, who sang and responded with beautiful voice.

As Athena intervened on behalf of Achilles,<sup>40</sup> so the goddess Aphrodite  
intervenes on behalf of the Trojan prince Paris. Menelaus, the former husband  
of Helen, is about to capture Paris and drag him by his helmet to the Greek  
army. The goddess breaks the helmet strap and takes him back to Troy.

2.14 HOMER, *ILIAD* 3.369–384.

He [Menelaus] spoke, and darting forward took hold of the horsehair-  
shaded  
helmet, twisted him [Paris] round and started to drag him towards 370  
the finely-greaved Achaeans;<sup>41</sup> the richly-embroidered strap  
was choking his tender neck—the tight strap holding the helmet  
under his chin. And he would have got him there and reaped  
unquenchable glory, but Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus,  
quickly noticed and broke the strap made out of the hide 375  
of an ox once killed by force. The helmet came away empty  
in the hero's sturdy hand; he whirled it around and threw it  
towards the finely-greaved Achaeans; his stalwart comrades  
retrieved it; but he went rushing back, heart set on killing  
the man with a spear of bronze; but Aphrodite had seized him, 380  
easily—being a goddess—and cloaked him densely in mist,  
and set him down in his perfumed bedroom fragrant with incense.  
Then she went herself to summon Helen; she found her  
high on a tower, with a crowd of Trojan women around her.

Unlike Achilles, who acknowledged the power of the gods, Helen challenges  
Aphrodite and refuses to go to Paris, whom Homer calls Alexandros.  
Enraged, Aphrodite threatens to withdraw her favor.

<sup>39</sup> *nectar*: the gods' equivalent of wine.

<sup>40</sup> See 2.9.

<sup>41</sup> *finely-greaved*: the greaves are armor protecting the lower part of the leg. *Achaeans*:  
Greeks.

2.15 HOMER, *ILIAD* 3.399–420.

"Troubling divinity, why do you long to deceive me like this?  
Will you take me even further away, to a well-inhabited 400  
city in Phrygia somewhere or charming Maeonia,  
if there's some mortal man there too who is dear to your heart?  
Is it because Menelaus has now won victory over  
glorious Alexandros [Paris], and wants to bring me back home—  
loathsome as I am—is this the reason you're standing here 405  
at my side now, heart full of trickery? *You* go and sit with him!  
Retreat from the paths of the gods and direct your feet no more  
to Olympus; devote yourself to grieving for him and protecting  
him till he makes you his wife or his concubine—his slave!  
But *I* won't go to him—that would rightly bring me reproach— 410  
to attend to that man's bed; all of the Trojan women  
will blame me later. Infinite is the distress in my heart."

Glorious Aphrodite addressed her then in a rage:  
"Do not provoke me, you stubborn fool, lest in my rage  
I abandon you and hate you exceedingly—just as much 415  
as I love now—and devise woeful hatred for you from both  
Danaans and Trojans alike, and an evil doom destroy you."<sup>42</sup>  
So she spoke, and dread filled Helen, daughter of Zeus;  
wrapped in her brightly gleaming robe she went in silence,  
unseen by the Trojan women, the goddess leading the way. 420

In attempting to rescue her son Aeneas from battle, Aphrodite is wounded  
by the Greek warrior Diomedes, son of Tydeus. Apollo intervenes and saves  
Aeneas. Diomedes taunts the goddess.

2.16 HOMER, *ILIAD* 5.334–354.

But when he found her [Aphrodite], pressing hard on her heels through  
the throng,  
the son of Tydeus [Diomedes] mighty of heart leaped forward at her, 335  
reaching and wounding her dainty wrist with his sharpened spear;  
the spear stabbed into her skin, straight through the ambrosial gown  
that the Graces themselves had worked for her, and cut her hand  
close to the heel; immortal blood came flowing out  
from the goddess—the ichor that flows in the veins of the blessed  
gods. 340  
For the gods do not eat grain, or drink any gleaming wine;<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Danaans*: Greeks.

<sup>43</sup> *gleaming wine*: the gods drink nectar, not wine; see above *Iliad* 1.597 in 2.13.

that is why they have no blood and are called the immortal ones.  
 Crying out loud she dropped her son; but Phoebus Apollo  
 saved him from the battle with his own hands, by wrapping around him  
 a blue-black cloud, so that no one among the Danaans swift 345  
 of horse might strike his chest with bronze and strip him of life;  
 Diomedes, great at the war-cry, shouted loudly at her:  
 "Daughter of Zeus, retreat from war and the battle's heat;  
 is it not enough to use your deceptions on women, who have  
 no strength? Yet if you do make war your business, I think 350  
 you will shudder to hear about warfare even from far away."  
 So he spoke; she left in a frenzy, sorely distressed;  
 wind-footed Iris took her and led her away from the throng,  
 burdened with pain, her beautiful skin stained dark by the wound.<sup>44</sup>

Zeus' plan of helping the Trojans goes into abeyance when Hera seduces  
 him and Poseidon rallies the Greeks. When Zeus awakes, he reestablishes  
 control and reveals details of his plan.

2.17 HOMER, *ILIAD* 15.59–77.

"Let Phoebus Apollo urge on Hector into the battle,  
 breathe vigor [*menos*] into him once again and make him forget 60  
 the pain distressing him in his mind;<sup>45</sup> then let him again  
 turn back the Achaeans, driving them into a strengthless rout,  
 and in their flight let them fall back on the many-benched ships  
 of Peleus' son, Achilles; and he will rouse into action  
 his comrade Patroclus,<sup>46</sup> whom glorious Hector will kill with his spear 65  
 in front of Troy, when he has destroyed many more young men  
 in their prime, including glorious Sarpedon, my own son.  
 Enraged at Hector, glorious Achilles will kill him in turn,  
 then I shall engineer a continuous counterattack  
 pushing ceaselessly back from the ships until the Achaeans 70  
 capture steep-walled Troy in accord with the plan of Athena.<sup>47</sup>  
 Before that I won't put a stop to my rage, or allow  
 any other immortal to go down there and protect the Danaans,  
 not until the desire of Peleus' son is fully accomplished,

44 *Iris*: the messenger of the gods.

45 *Hector*: a son of Priam; he is the best of the Trojan warriors. *breathe vigor into him*: the Greek *menos* is defined by Dodds 2004: 8 as a "mysterious access of energy;" or "a new confidence or eagerness."

46 *Patroclus*: the friend and companion of Achilles.

47 "Then I shall engineer...": these events go beyond the scope of the *Iliad* which ends with the funeral of Hector.

as I promised him at the outset, bowing my head, on the day 75  
 when the goddess Thetis came as a suppliant, grasping hold  
 of my knees, and begged me to honor Achilles, sacker of cities."

Hera acknowledges Zeus' supremacy.

2.18 HOMER, *ILIAD* 15.104–109.

"How naive and senseless we are to set our hearts against Zeus!  
 Our desire is to get close up and stop him by means of words 105  
 or else by force; but he just sits apart and ignores us,  
 paying us no attention, because he says that among  
 the immortal gods he is clearly supreme in power and strength.  
 That is why each one of you suffers whatever evil he sends you."<sup>48</sup>

Zeus continues to have problems with his family. Ordered by Zeus to leave  
 the battlefield, Poseidon points out that he, Zeus, and Hades drew lots for  
 the allocation of the world.

2.19 HOMER, *ILIAD* 15.185–195.

"Oh no! As great as he is, these arrogant words are too much, 185  
 if he's going to force me, his equal in honor, against my will.<sup>49</sup>  
 There are three of us brothers, the sons of Cronus, whom Rhea bore,  
 Zeus and myself and Hades, the third, who rules down below.  
 All things were divided in three, with honor allotted to each;  
 when the lots were drawn I won the grey salt sea as my share 190  
 to dwell in forever, the misty darkness was Hades' share,  
 and Zeus's share was the brightness and clouds of the broad sky above;  
 earth remains common to all and so does lofty Olympus.  
 Therefore I shall not live as Zeus is minded, but let him  
 remain content in his own third share, powerful though he is." 195

When confronted by the imminent death of his son, the Trojan Sarpedon,  
 Zeus wonders whether to rescue him. But his wife Hera reminds him of  
 Sarpedon's mortality.

2.20 HOMER, *ILIAD* 16.431–443.

And when he saw them, the son of Cronus, deviser of crooked  
 schemes, addressed these words to Hera, his sister and wife:  
 "Oh no! It is destiny that Sarpedon, dearest of men,  
 be overcome at the hands of Patroclus, son of Menoetius.  
 My heart is divided in its desire and my mind is debating: 435  
 should I seize him out of the tearful battle and take him away  
 from here, and set him down in Lycia's flourishing land,

48 See Hephaestus' advice to Hera in 2.13.

49 This message is intended for Zeus.

or should I overcome him now at Patroclus' hands?"

Then Hera the ox-eyed lady answered him in reply:

"Most dreaded son of Cronus, what word is this you have said! 440

Do you wish to release from woeful death a man who is mortal,  
one who was destined from long ago to meet this fate?

Do it, then. But we won't all praise you, the rest of us gods."

After convincing Zeus that he should yield to destiny, Hera suggests that Sarpedon's body be sent to his homeland for full burial honors. Zeus weeps for his son.

2.21 HOMER, *ILIAD* 16.450–461.

"But if he is dear to you indeed and your heart is lamenting, 450

let him remain in the powerful clash of the battlefield

to be overcome by the hand of Patroclus, son of Menoetius,

but when the spirit and breath of life have left him, then

send Death and refreshing Sleep to bear him away from the fighting

and carry him off until they reach broad Lycia's people; 455

there his brothers and friends will pay him proper respect

with a mound and a marker-stone—the due reward of the dead."

So she spoke and the father of men and gods was persuaded.

He poured a rain of bloody tear-drops onto the ground

to honor his own dear child, who was going to be destroyed 460

by Patroclus in fertile Troy, far from his land of his fathers.<sup>50</sup>

After Patroclus is killed by Hector, Achilles is willing to accept Agamemnon's apology and return and fight to avenge Patroclus' death. Agamemnon disclaims responsibility for his behavior by blaming the intervention of Ate or Delusion.

2.22 HOMER, *ILIAD* 19.86–96.

"... But I am not responsible,

Zeus is, and Fate, and the Fury who wanders shrouded in mist;

they filled my mind with savage Delusion (*Ate*) at the assembly,

on the day when I stripped from Achilles his due reward in person.

But what could I have done? Gods always accomplish their will. 90

Delusion, the eldest daughter of Zeus, deludes us all

to our ruin; her feet are tender—she never touches the ground,

but walks on the heads of men doing damage to human minds,

entangling first one person and then the next in her snares.

Even Zeus was blinded once by Delusion—Zeus who says 95

50 After Sarpedon is killed, Zeus sends Apollo to rescue the body (*Iliad* 16.666–683).

that he is supreme among men and gods."<sup>51</sup>

Since Achilles is returning to the battlefield, Zeus holds a council of gods and orders them to take sides and join in the fighting. But when challenged by Poseidon to join the fray, Apollo remarks that humans should fight their own battles.

2.23 HOMER, *ILIAD* 21.462–467.

Earth-Shaker, you would say I've taken leave of my senses,

if I'm to go to war with you for the sake of mortals,

wretches who are like leaves, one moment warm and alive

as they eat the fruits of the plowed-up earth, but a moment later 465

perishing lifeless. Come, let us put a stop to our fighting

as quickly as possible; let them strive on their own behalf.

Zeus asks the gods whether Hector should be rescued.

2.24 HOMER, *ILIAD* 22.167–187.

The father of men and gods was the first to speak among them:

"Oh no! I see with my own eyes a man who is dear to me

being chased around the wall of the city. My heart is lamenting

for Hector, who burned for me the thigh-bones of many oxen 170

on the peaks of many-folded Ida, at other times too

in the highest part of the citadel; yet now glorious Achilles

is chasing him round the city of Priam on his swift feet.

Come, tell me what you think, you gods, and help me devise

the proper counsel: should we save him from death, or should we 175

overcome him, good man though he is, at the hands of Achilles?"

The grey-eyed goddess Athena addressed him then in her turn:

"Father, lord of bright thunder and dark clouds, what have you said!

Do you wish to release from woeful death a man who is mortal,

one who was destined from long ago to meet this fate? 180

Do it, then. But we won't all praise you, the rest of us gods."<sup>52</sup>

Answering her, cloud-gathering Zeus addressed her in turn:

"Tritogeneia, my own dear child, take heart, for I spoke

without eagerness in my heart and I wish to be gentle towards you;

act in the way that your mind directs you and stop holding back." 185

51 *Even Zeus was blinded...*: see the comments of Lloyd-Jones 1983: 23, "That helps Agamemnon to save face, but it does not cancel his responsibility," and of Garland 1994: 21, "Though we do not need to assume that Homer is endorsing Agamemnon's face-saving explanation of his poor behaviour, there is no reason to doubt that belief in *ate* was widespread."

52 Note the identical words of Hera in 2.20.

So speaking he urged on the already eager Athena,  
and she went darting down from the craggy peaks of Olympus.

Zeus weighs the fates of Hector and Achilles on the golden scales, and  
Apollo abandons Hector.

2. 25 HOMER, *ILIAD* 22.208–213.

But when in their running they came to the springs for the fourth time,  
then

the father held out a golden balance, and placed in its pans  
two heavy fates of death with its endless burden of grief, 210  
one for Achilles, the other for Hector, tamer of horses;  
he grasped the center and raised it, and Hector's destined day  
sank down to the realm of Hades, and Phoebus Apollo left him.

Realizing that he was deceived by Athena, who had disguised herself as his  
brother Deiphobos, Hector accepts his fate.

2.26 HOMER, *ILIAD* 22.294–305.

Shouting loudly he summoned Deiphobus of the white shield,  
asking for a long spear, but his brother was nowhere near him; 295  
then Hector knew in his mind what had happened, and said out loud:

"Oh no! The gods have clearly called me to meet my death.  
I thought that the hero Deiphobus stood here close by my side;  
but he is safely within the wall, and Athena deceived me.

Now evil death is near me and stands no more at a distance; 300  
there's no escape; it turns out that this was dear all along  
to Zeus and Zeus's son, the far-shooter,<sup>53</sup> who in the past  
were eager to keep me safe; but now my destiny's found me.

In that case let me not be destroyed without struggle and glory,  
performing some mighty deed that those in the future will hear of."<sup>54</sup> 305

The dying Hector warns Achilles that he will be killed by Paris, aided by  
Apollo. Achilles declares his acceptance of fate.

2.27 HOMER, *ILIAD* 22.355–366.

Gleaming-helmeted Hector addressed him in turn as he died: 355

"I could foresee this, knowing you well; I would never have  
persuaded you, for the heart in your breast is made out of iron.  
Take heed lest I become a cause of wrath from the gods  
upon your head, on the day when Paris and Phoebus Apollo  
destroy you, good man though you are, at the Scaean gates." 360

<sup>53</sup> the far-shooter: Apollo.

<sup>54</sup> some mighty deed: ...: concern for future fame was the prime motivation of the epic hero.

So he spoke, and the end of death was folded around him;  
the spirit flew from his limbs and down to the realm of Hades,  
lamenting its lot and leaving behind his manhood and youth.

Glorious Achilles addressed him in turn even though he was dead:

"Die! As for me, I'll accept my fate at whatever time

Zeus and the other immortal gods may wish to fulfill it.

365