Classical Quarterly **45** (ii) 296–317 (1995) *Printed in Great Britain*

THE WISDOM OF THALES AND THE PROBLEM OF THE WORD *IEPOΣ*[1]

Those who write about early Greek literature often assume that each item in the ancient vocabulary answers to a single concept in the world-view of its users. It seems reasonable to hope that the body of ideas represented by a particular Greek word will frame one's discussion better than any question that could be asked in English: so that a cautious scholar might prefer to discuss the phenomenon called αἰδώς, for example, than to plunge into a study of Greek ideas of 'honour and shame' irrespective of whether those anthropologists' labels mark off a single body of ancient ideas.[2] But the question is not merely one of common sense: in recent years, for example, a strategy of extrapolating deep ideas from single words has been deliberately developed by such scholars as Gregory Nagy, who constantly moves back and forth between the semantic patterns of individual words and corresponding thematic patterns found in myths. Here is a recent example from his analysis of Pindar's conception of the unity between athletic victory and mythical heroism:

> In Pindaric usage ἄεθλος applies equally to the contests of athletes and to the life-and-death ordeals of heroes. We have already seen from the myth of the chariot race of Pelops that the ordeals of heroes on the level of myth correspond aetiologically to the contests of athletes on the level of ritual, in that the myths can motivate the rituals. Now we see that a word like ἄεθλος can collapse the very distinction between the myth and the ritual.[3]

Such approaches can be justified especially easily in the case of Homer—or, as in this case, poetry shaped in great part by Homeric reminiscence—since the subject-matter of heroic song is linked especially closely to the specialised vocabulary of the *Kunstsprache*.[4] Nonetheless it remains possible, at least in theory, that such a strategy may distort or obscure the ancient realities. Societies or individuals are not necessarily the prisoners of their inheritance, in Greece or anywhere else: so that when an interpreter ties himself to a single word, even one as important-looking as αἰδώς or ἄεθλος, it will always be possible for critics to object that its meanings are linked by a purely linguistic convention that is irrelevant to ethical or social tradition.

As far as I know, this problem has never been addressed head-on by classical scholars: and indeed it admits of no watertight solution, since we can do little more than tackle each case of it by leaning on common sense and concordances in lieu of a real acquaintance with ancient thought and speech.[5] That said, the question that

[1] This article is loosely based on a paper read at a conference entitled 'What is a god?' held by the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of Wales in July 1994. Thanks are due to all who commented on that paper, especially Alan Lloyd and Seth Schein. I am especially grateful to David Sedley, Reviel Netz, and Torsten Meissner for careful criticism of the present version, and also to Michael Reeve for help on the subject of threshing-floors.

[2] I refer here to D. L. Cairns' study, *Aidōs: the psychology and ethics of honour and shame in ancient Greek literature* (Oxford, 1993). Cairns organizes his study according to the attested meaning(s) of αἰδώς and its cognates, while also setting it against the general background of the anthropologists' controversy over 'shame-cultures' and 'guilt-cultures' (see esp. 14–47). Although this approach is supple and reasonable in practice, it can still be objected that Cairns treats αἰδώς as 'the *concept* under investigation' (p. 1, with my italics) without defending his belief that word and concept are one and the same.

[3] G. Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* (Baltimore, 1990), 137.

[4] See G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1979), 2–3, 78–9; G. Nagy, 'Homeric questions' (*TAPhA* 122 [1992], 17–60), 27.

[5] I have not found a useful treatment of this theme from a philosophical perspective: the tradition headed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf has addressed itself more to the relationship between thought-proceses and grammatical structures than to that between world-

hangs over the relationship between lexical and conceptual unities can usefully be brought to bear on individual questions of early Greek lore and thought, and a particular interest attaches to any argument based on the hypothesis that certain words do indeed map significant cultural unities. My aim here is to put forward one such argument by reconsidering a well-known story of Thales of Miletus' attitude to divinity in the light of the range of meaning of a single adjective, ἱερός, as it is observable in the earliest Greek verse. I will argue that the Thales story draws on a traditional connexion of ideas which is also implicit in the semantics of ἱερός, but which seems never to have been set out in a more deliberate or self-conscious form by any surviving poet or philosopher. I will depend on two reconstructions—of the original version of the story, and of the meaning of ἱερός—which are highly speculative in different ways. I hope the two will complement each other and that each will gain force by the parallel. If the overall argument carries conviction it will exemplify the intimate relationship that *may* exist between a word and a pattern of thought, and incidentally it will suggest that one at least among Thales' dicta was less bizarre in its own time than it can seem to modern ears.

Thales on gods and magnets

It is well known that Thales used the example of magnetic attraction to prove or illustrate some point about the world. The story seems to have been passed down as an anecdote rather than a fixed verse or prose account,[6] but two passages of the *De Anima* allow a tentative reconstruction of the shape in which it reached Aristotle. First, in a discussion of theories that represent motion (κίνησις) as the defining principle of the soul, Aristotle remarks that 'Thales also, from what they tell, seems to have considered the soul to be a cause of motion (κινητικόν τι), if indeed he said (εἴπερ ἔφη) that a stone has a soul because it moves iron' (405a19). The authors of handbooks on the Presocratics have taken it that ψυχή was the subject of the original story as well as of Aristotle's interpretation,[7] but the second passage of the *De Anima* makes me think otherwise. When Aristotle moves on to discuss theories that represent soul as a cosmic principle, he tells us that 'Some say that soul is intermingled in all things, which is perhaps why Thales thought that all things are full of gods (πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι)' (411a7). Adding a scrap of evidence from Plato's *Laws*, where the same words πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι appear as what seems to be a suppressed quotation (*Laws* 10.899b), we can infer that those words were remembered as Thales' own. All agree that this dictum must have been connected in some way with the story of the magnet: but the exact relationship is unclear, since in the earlier passage Aristotle said that the magnet bore witness to the presence of 'soul' rather than 'gods'. Now on both occasions Aristotle's purpose is to further his own train of

picture and vocabulary. Among the Hellenists a distinct but kindred question crops up in critiques of Bruno Snell's theory (*Die Entdeckung des Geistes* [4th ed., Göttingen, 1975], ch. 1) that Homer does not see either the body or the 'psychic self' as a unity because he does not call either by a single all-encompassing name. The riposte is that the absence of a word to represent a concept does not imply lack of awareness of the concept itself. See most recently R. Gaskin, 'Do Homeric heroes make real decisions?' *CQ* 40 (1990), 1–15.

[6] The strongest tradition in antiquity was that Thales left nothing in writing except a 'nautical Star-Guide' (see no. 29 D–K, also Diogenes Laertius 1.29, with G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic philosophers* [2nd ed., Cambridge, 1983], 87–8). Since Diogenes Laertius' reference to the magnet story mentions Hippias as well as Aristotle, it is possible that his book was Aristotle's source (suggested by KRS, 95).

[7] See esp. the elaborate sequence of thought worked out by J. Barnes, *The Presocratic philosophers* (2nd ed., London, 1982), 5–6.

thought about the soul and his predecessors' conception of it; and in the second passage his own words show that he is eager to *reinterpret* Thales' words about all-pervasive θεοί as if they implied a doctrine of all-pervasive ψυχή. A little earlier in the treatise he has admitted to twisting other arguments of his predecessors in the same way, drawing Anaxagoras into his discussion on the grounds that his doctrine of νοῦς ought to imply an underlying (but unstated) conception of ψυχή as well (see 404a25–404b6, 405a13–19). It is an obvious possibility that he has made a similar move without explicit acknowledgement when quoting the story of the magnet as an indication of Thales' conception of the soul: and indeed his own words encourage this suspicion, since εἴπερ ἔφη may well indicate doubt—'*if he really* said' rather than '*since* he said'.[8] In other words, when Aristotle says that Thales attributed a soul to the lodestone he may be guessing at the sage's deeper meaning rather than simply recounting the transmitted story. If this is right, it seems very likely that both passages refer to one and the same story, and that in its original form it probably referred only to θεοί rather than ψυχή.[9] My reconstruction, then, is that in the traditional story Thales used a magnetic stone to make pieces of metal jump in the air, and on that basis[10] he said in so many words that all things are full of gods.

To justify this reconstruction I must suggest why Aristotle should have been so willing to apply the story to the soul. Considered as theology, πάντα πλήρη θεῶν ἐστίν contrasts uncomfortably with the theologies of later Presocratics: Thales is saying that godhead is present in everything and is manifested in—or actually identified with—each instance of spontaneous motion, while his successors seem more to seek a dichotomy between what can be called divine and what can be grasped directly by the senses.[11] Xenophanes is the most extreme example, with his vision of godhead divorced from the things of human experience:

> Αἰεὶ δ'ἐν ταὐτῶι μίμνει κινούμενος οὐδέν,
> οὐδὲ μετέρχεσθαί μιν ἐπιπρέπει ἄλλοτε ἄλληι,
> ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει (fr. 26 and 25 D–K)

He remains ever in the same place, moved nothing at all, nor is it fitting for him to go different ways at different times, but he stirs all things by his plans, without effort of thought.

[8] I take this line despite the fact that KRS (95) judge that 'εἴπερ need not, and probably does not, express doubt', while Barnes (loc. cit.) takes it as 'since' while admitting uncertainty. The grammatical problem is interesting. My computer survey shows that Aristotle uses εἴπερ most often in connecting the steps of an argument, where it approximates to 'if it be granted that...'. Naturally this will be indistinguishable from 'since...' whenever the argument is one that Aristotle himself is espousing. He uses εἴπερ much less often when facts, disputed or otherwise, are being discussed: here there are a number of instances where it suggests scepticism. In subject-matter and form the closest parallel to our passage is one where Aristotle refers to a bizarre theory about the anatomy of lower animals which was said to have been held by Democritus: the clause begins with the words εἴπερ ὠιήθη (*P.A.* 665a32), apparently indicating doubt—'if he really thought' such an odd thing (compare also *G.A.* 722b8–10, *E.N.* 1181a6). Note also that J. Denniston (*The Greek particles* [Oxford, 1954], 488 n. 1), collects a number of examples of εἴπερ from other authors (including Plato, *Protagoras* 319a, *Laws* 902a) in which the tone is 'clearly sceptical'. All this suggests that in our passage Aristotle may be indicating that he doubts the reliability of the version which he is setting down, or that he suspects that either he or his immediate source has misunderstood it.

[9] I do not know whether it is significant that Aetius refers to the two stories as one (1.7.11 = Thales A23 D–K); cf. KRS p. 97 n. 1, who are content that Aetius is simply combining the two passages of the *De Anima*.

[10] There is no telling whether the demonstration should be read as a proof or as a more or less poetic analogy.

[11] On god in Presocratic philosophy as an ἀρχή distinct from phenomena see the succinct treatment of L. P. Gerson, *God in Greek philosophy* (London, 1990), 14–20.

If Thales were thinking not about gods as such but about something more abstract or theoretical, namely the ψυχή that Aristotle has defined as the first principle of living things or the whole world (οἷον ἀρχὴ τῶν ζώιων, 402a6), then he would fit much more comfortably into a neat Presocratic progression. A theory of all-pervasive Soul would bear comparison with theories like those in which Anaximander opposes tangible phenomena to the Indefinite, Anaximenes opposes them to Air, Anaxagoras to Mind, and so on. If the story is one of θεοί, the wisdom of Thales might look to the philosophical mind like a gross overstatement: why should the dancing movement of iron filings prop up such an all-embracing conclusion about the presence of gods in the world?

It is possible to sidestep the last question by putting the story in the class of 'traditional' rather than 'philosophical'. Cherniss, for example, suggested that different versions might have attached themselves to several of the Seven Sages.[12] Thales' words recall those with which Heraclitus invited his hesitant friends to join him in the kitchen: 'Enter—for there are gods even here', εἶναι γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεούς.[13] Important as this may be, it does not absolve us of the need to make sense of the story at its face value. That is no less difficult today than it seems to have been for Aristotle:[14] and it is in the hope of throwing some light on it, albeit from an oblique angle, that I want to step back into the semantic complexities of the word ἱερός. The range of meaning of this word will suggest, as it were in miniature, that in the early Greek world-view there is an implicit connexion of ideas about divinity that makes it not only reasonable but deeply traditional that Thales should have argued as he did. Because this connexion has no parallel in our modern languages and modern preconceptions about what it means to be a god, at first I will be unable either to summarise it in words or to propose a straightforward translation of ἱερός itself; and I will need to move in a roundabout fashion through different attestations of the word in search of shared threads of images and associations, which will eventually weave themselves into a network of meaning rather than a single tight definition.

The untranslatable word ἱερός

In Homer, Hesiod and the early lyric poets altars, sacrifices, hecatombs, temples, cities and the like are all described as ἰ(ε)ρός,[15] a priest is ἱερεύς, a victim is ἱερήϊον; ἱερεύειν and ἱερὰ ῥέζειν are the usual verbs for offering sacrifice, and the latter can also refer to reverent treatment of a priest. Equivalent words are found in Linear B,[16]

[12] H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's criticism of the Presocratics* (Baltimore, 1935), 296 n. 26.

[13] Aristotle, *P.A.* 645a17 = Heraclitus A19 D–K. Presumably the point is that the goddess Hestia is present in the form of the hearth itself.

[14] For example, Barnes is at pains to prove that 'Thales' argument is not a naive aberration or a puerile sophism' (op. cit., 8), as if that possibility were a problem. W. Jaeger, *The theology of the early Greek philosophers* (Oxford, 1947), 20–22, accepts that the demonstration with the magnet was connected with the assertion that all things are full of gods, but plays the reductionist card when he says that 'although [Thales] speaks of gods, he is *obviously* using the word in a sense rather different from that in which the majority of men would use it' (my italics). G. Lloyd, *Polarity and analogy* (Cambridge, 1966) is closer to the mark: 'If many pre-philosophical texts imply the belief that certain things (including many that we should class as inanimate) are alive, Thales may well have been the first Greek thinker to *state* this idea in a *general form*' (234, his italics).

[15] The form ἰρός is interchanged with ἱερός *metri gratia.*

[16] A full treatment of the Linear B attestations would be out of place here. The most helpful studies have been C. Gallavotti, 'Il valore di ἱερός in Omero ed in miceneo', *AC* 32 (1963) 409–28; M. Gérard-Rousseau, *Les mentions réligieuses dans les tablettes mycéniennes* (Rome,

where *i-je-ro* corresponds to ἱερός[17] and the priestess, the priest and the 'worker of sacred things' are *i-je-re-ja*, *i-je-re-u*, and *i-je-ro-wo-ko*, corresponding respectively to ἱέρεια, ἱερεύς, *ἱεροϝοργός. The religious application of the word seems well established throughout the history of the language: a priest is one who does what is ἱερόν, and things are ἱερά if they are the possessions or dwellings of gods or they provide the means for people to express their relationship with them. This fits the straightforward view that Greek religion is directed at objects that are distinct from the ordinary stuff of mortal life—from the profane, as it were—which in turn makes good sense as the basis on which a Xenophanes might take the further step of defining god as an unmoved mover cut off from the everyday world. If we want to explain what ἱερός *means* in these contexts we can take an easy short cut and translate it as 'holy', 'sacred' or the like, and this will produce an acceptable English rendering. Nonetheless it seems to me that this handy equivalence cannot be the whole truth, since in the earliest literature there is a large residue of instances where such a gloss will not make sense. Only after we have tried hard to explain this latter group will we be able to appreciate the full range of ideas that our word can evoke each and every time that it is used, even in places where 'holy' or 'sacred' seems enough to fit the context. Here at the outset it is worth pointing out that even in the strictly religious sphere there is a crucial difference between ἱερός and the English word 'holy'. Holiness applies both to godhead itself and of things that are marked off by a special relationship with it: the Christian, for example, will say that God is holy, that a saint is holy, or that an altarcloth or an icon is a holy thing. But only the last three of these are ἱερός, because in its religious sense that word is applied not to gods proper but to what is *of* gods, across a wide swathe of the range of relationships represented by the genitive. The contrast between ἱερός and θεός or δῖος, like that between Latin *sacer* and *divinus*, marks a dividing line between that which contains or manifests, or aims at, divinity and that which is divine in itself.[18] This means that a redefinition of ἱερός will offer a clue to the Greek conception of the relationship that exists between godhead itself and the things that people can see and touch and endow with cultic significance.

We turn now to the instances of ἱερός that defy the conventional translation. In Homer there are too many of these to digest at a glance, and three key examples will be enough to launch us on our enquiry. In the first, a warrior is pierced in the jaw by a spear-thrust and plucked headlong from his chariot, and a simile likens him to a fish caught by an angler:

> ἕλκε δὲ δουρὸς ἑλὼν ὑπὲρ ἄντυγος, ὡς ὅτε τις φὼς
> πέτρῃι ἔπὶ προβλῆτι καθήμενος ἱερὸν ἰχθὺν
> ἐκ πόντοιο θύραζε λίνωι καὶ ἤνοπι χαλκῶι (*Il.* 16.406–8)

He wrenched him with his spear and pulled him over the chariot-rail, like when a man sitting on a promontory rock draws out a *hieros* fish from the sea with a line and [spear or harpoon of] bright bronze.

1968), 108–14; J. L. Garcia-Ramon, 'Griechisch ἱερός und seine Varianten, vedisch *isira-*', in R. Beekes *et al.* (eds.), *Rekonstruktion und relative Chronologie* (= Akten der 8. Fachtagung der IG Gesellschaft, 1987, published Innsbruck, 1992), 188–91.

[17] Sometimes, perhaps, to ἱερόν as 'sacred place' or 'sanctuary': suggested by Gerard-Rousseau, op. cit. 112–13.

[18] See E. Benveniste, *Indo-European language and society* (London, 1973; tr. from French ed. of 1969), 456–61. On the folly of explaining ἱερός, ἁγνός and kindred words by imposing handy modern equivalents, see also J. Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales de la pensée religieuse et actes constitutifs du culte dans la Grèce classique* (Geneva, 1968), 21–2.

How does the adjective characterize the fish? Some have held that it must be 'sacred' in the sense of being caught not for eating but for sacrifice:[19] but the only evidence to support this is that warriors in the *Iliad* are never actually described as eating fish. The explanation seems strained, most obviously so because the subject matter of similes is drawn less from the heroic world than from the realities of the poet's own time. One can take refuge in the fact that veneration of fish and their pools is historically attested in Asia Minor,[20] or that scholars of much later times recorded traditions about fish that were considered sacred or taboo.[21] There is no independent evidence that such beliefs are known to Homer: and in any case such a reference would hardly fit the context, since the sacredness of the fish would be irrelevant to the simile image and its comparison with a warrior transfixed by a spear-point. The allusion would be little less obscure to Homer's audience than to us. Unless a familiar word is being somehow misused ἱερός here must signify something quite different to 'holy' or 'sacred'.

Our next example is a pair of familiar Homeric periphrases which function as name-epithet formulae:

> αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ τό γ' ἄκουσ' ἱερὸν μένος Ἀλκινόοιο.... (*Od.* 7.167, etc.)
> But when the *hieros* bodily force of Alcinous heard this...
>
> τοῖσι δὲ καὶ μετέειφ' ἱερὴ ἲς Τηλεμάχοιο.... (*Od.* 2.409, etc.)
> The *hieros* muscular strength of Telemachus addressed them...

What are ἱερὴ ἲς and ἱερὸν μένος? Almost by reflex we might invoke Parry's theory of the mechanical function of name-epithet formulae, in order to dismiss these phrases as vague or meaningless; but even in its most harsh form Parry's theory proposes only that an individual instance of a formula may lack an immediate reference *in its context*, not that the formula itself can be empty of meaning.[22] Besides, recent studies have shown that Parry underestimated the deftness with which Homer deploys such formulae.[23] This will be confirmed by a glance at other periphrases of the same shape as those with ἱερός. For example, the sentence

> Παφλαγόνων δ' ἡγεῖτο Πυλαιμένεος λάσιον κῆρ (*Il.* 2.851)
> Pylaimenes' shaggy heart led the Paphlagonians...

[19] U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Die Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin, 1931), 21–2; P. Wülfing-von Martitz, ''Ἱερός bei Homer und in der alteren griechischen Literatur', pt. 1 (*Glotta* 38 [1960], 272–307), 298–300.

[20] The most famous such cult was that of the fish-goddess Atargatis, for whom sacred fish were reared in pools at Hierapolis and later Edessa (see H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and beliefs at Edessa* [Leiden, 1980], 76–121). The cult has continued into modern times in a Muslim guise (see S. Lloyd, *Foundations in the dust* [2nd ed., London, 1980], 50–51, with Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.4.9).

[21] See Janko ad loc. (in vol. 4 of *The Iliad: a commentary* [Cambridge, 1992]), reporting a number of ancient conjectures, some of which refer to fish which an angler could not catch (such as the dolphin). The most intriguing example is from Aristotle (*H.A.* 9.620b34) who records that divers call the ἀνθίας a 'holy fish' because its presence is a sign that there are no dangerous predators nearby. I cannot see how a reference to this fish would fit the Homeric context, because what Aristotle describes is a deep-sea fish which a diver might see from a boat but Homer's angler would be unlikely to catch from his promontory. Cf. also D'A. W. Thompson, *A glossary of Greek fishes* (London, 1947), s.v. ἀνθίας.

[22] M. Parry, 'The traditional epithet in Homer', reprinted in A. Parry (ed.), *The making of Homeric verse* (Oxford, 1971). Parry's central point, that 'no noun-epithet formula... can contain an epithet whose meaning can be particularised' (130), should not be confused with the more destructive claim that an individual formula can be vague or woolly in its own verbal meaning.

[23] See N. Austin, *Archery at the dark of the moon* (Berkeley, 1975), 1–80; R. Sacks, *The traditional phrase in Homer* (Leiden, 1987); O. Tsagarakis, *Form and content in Homer* (= *Hermes* Einzelschriften no. 46, Wiesbaden, 1982).

carries a vivid image of the proud chieftain marching pigeon-chested at the head of his men; similarly Heracles is named as 'the Heraclean strength' in a way that brings out his essential nature as a mortal hero:

> οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ βίη Ἡρακλῆος φύγε κῆρα... (*Il.* 18.117)
> Not even the Heraclean strength escaped doom...

Again, in an expression very close to the Telemachus formula, Odysseus is 'κρατερὴ... ἶς Ὀδυσῆος' (*Il.* 23.720) when grappling in a bout of wrestling, at the time when the muscular strength represented by the word ἶς is most obviously to the fore. There is every reason to expect that ἱερὴ ἶς and ἱερὸν μένος should refer to equally real qualities in Telemachus and Alcinous: but translations into vaguely poetic English—'the holy might of the king', and the like—do not provide much comfort. There is no good evidence that Homer sees kingship as 'holy' in some sense akin to the modern tradition of the Divine Right of Kings.[24] The only possible exception is Agamemnon, whose hereditary authority is represented by a sceptre that descends via Pelops from Zeus (see *Il.* 2.102–8, 2.205–6, 9.98–9),[25] but his position as overlord of all the Achaeans is not comparable to that of the prince of a small island or the king of the Phaeacians. Even if some such comparison were to be pushed to its limits to explain these formulae, it would not make sense that μένος or ἶς should be the focus of divine authority. In the Homeric view of the body, ἶς is the strength of vigorous motion in the limbs, localised in the muscles or tendons which are themselves called ἶνες in the plural,[26] while μένος is an ebbing and oozing fluid identified with emotional passion and physical vigour, which is tangible as blood, semen, or bodily fluids mixed with the breath that is whooped up into the lungs.[27] If kingship were considered sacred because it descends from Zeus, I cannot see how its holiness would reside in such things. Once again the phrases ἱερὴ ἶς and ἱερὸν μένος seem to draw on a strand of meaning which has no obvious English equivalent.

Finally we turn to two passages where our adjective qualifies the soldiers who guard the perimeter of the Achaean camp: Hermes considers how to bring Priam back from

[24] Janko (op. cit., p. 12) suggests ἱερὸν μένος might be a Mycenaean equivalent of 'Royal Highness'. See also A. Hoekstra, *Epic verse before Homer* (Amsterdam, 1979), 88–9, suggesting that it is a Mycenaean royal title preserved as a fossil in the epic language.

[25] The importance of the sceptre as symbol of Agamemnon's overlordship is stressed (perhaps exaggerated) by M. P. Nilsson, *Homer and Mycenae* (London, 1933), 215–26. J. T. Hooker, *'Ιερός in early Greek* (= *Beitrage zur Sprachwissenschaft, Vortrage und kleinere Schriften* no. 22, Innsbruck, 1980), 11–13, argues incisively that ἱερὴ ἶς and ἱερὸν μένος do not refer to a doctrine of the divine origin of kingship.

[26] ἶς in the singular is the strength of motion in general and that of the active body in particular. It is most clearly identified with the muscles of motion in particular when it is said to be located 'in the bent limbs', ἐνὶ γναμπτοῖσι μέλεσσιν (*Il.* 11.669, *Od.* 11.393–4, 21.283), when Odysseus' strength in wrestling is κρατερὴ... ἶς Ὀδυσῆος (*Il.* 23.270), and when one throwing a stone 'pushes his ἶς behind it', ἐπέρεισε δὲ ἶν' ἀπέλεθρον (*Il.* 7.269, *Od.* 9.538). A word with accusative ἶνα and plural ἶνες definitely denotes a muscle or tendon (see *Il.* 17.522, 23.191, *Od.* 11.219, and cf. ἰνίον, of the neck-muscle, *Il.* 5.73, 14.495), and in early Greek practice it seems almost certain that ἶνες acts as the plural of ἶς. However, the declension ἶς: ἰνός is mysterious, paralleled only by Ζεύς: Ζηνός and ῥίς: ῥινός, so that the etymologists are unwilling to accept for certain that ἶς stands for the concrete muscles themselves as well as the sort of strength that resides in them ('possible, non plus', Chantraine s.v.).

[27] μένος has no equivalent in English, and its complex character can only be illustrated by examples. Although it is often the force of motion in an abstract sense it is also directly identified with breath whooped into the lungs, *Il.* 3.8, 22.312, *Od.* 22.203, etc.; blood mixing with breath in the breast, *Il.* 1.103–4; semen, *Od.* 2.271–2, Archilochus 196a.52W; tears or nasal mucus, *Od.* 24.318–19. See most recently R. Padel, *In and out of the mind: Greek images of the tragic self* (Princeton, 1992), esp. 23–30.

the ships while eluding the sentries, λαθὼν ἱεροὺς πυλαωρούς (*Il.* 24.680–1), and Agamemnon says that he will send Nestor to encourage the night watchmen, φυλάκων ἱερὸν τέλος (*Il.* 10.56). Arguably the Achaean army is sacred or holy in that its mission is to avenge Paris' breach of the rules of guest-friendship sanctioned by Zeus; but although this is perhaps the sense of our adjective in one *Odyssey* passage, where the army is ἱερὸς στρατός (24.81), as a rule this theme is not made explicit in the *Iliad* in the way that it is (for example) in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.[28] In any case it is hard to believe that Homer would allude to this theme nowhere except when referring to those who are assigned the inglorious task of guarding the camp by night, and that the contexts would be a passage where a god hopes to elude them and another where the king is suggesting that they may have fallen asleep on duty.

Making sense of the range of meaning of ἱερός

Short of applying endless special pleading to make all these instances mean something like 'holy' or 'sacred',[29] the easiest solution would be to claim that for some reason these instances of ἱερός do not belong in a single field of meaning at all. There are several such avenues of escape. Philology can comfort us with the suggestion that ἱερός is not one word but several, two roots having produced two formally identical words which were then confused and conflated in Greek practice.[30] Cautious Homeric scholarship opts for the surmise that the word is 'a convenient metrical filler' and is therefore liable to be semantically vague or insignificant.[31] Again, ἱερός might be what Michael Silk has called an 'iconym', that is a word which is used in certain contexts because of its sound or its literary associations rather than because of any denotative meaning that might come into play elsewhere.[32] The only advantage of these proposals is that they relieve us of our embarrassment on being unable to translate the words of a familiar Greek text, and indeed each of them drags up complexities or

[28] At *Il.* 13.624–5 Menelaus rails against the Trojans that the wrath of Zeus Xeinios will destroy their city; this is the most direct reference to the theme in the *Iliad*, and it falls short of a suggestion that the Achaean army is consecrated to the divine purpose.

[29] This is the line taken by Wülfing-von Martitz (op. cit., n. 19 above). I will not respond to his arguments in detail, since he avoids the whole issue of interpretation by depending on (i) an extremely vague definition of religious activity and sacredness, and (ii) the assumption that Homer is capable of using words in the wrong contexts for metrical reasons or for no reason at all. Cf. also J. P. Locher, *Untersuchungen zu ἱερός, hauptsächlich bei Homer* (diss. Bern, 1963).

[30] There have been many versions of this theory, beginning with P. Kretschmer, 'Pelasger und Etrusker', *Glotta* 11 (1921) 276–82, who proposed that a word cognate with Vedic *iṣira–* and meaning 'fast, vigorous' was confused with a word of quite separate origin which meant 'sacred'. There is no good Greek evidence for the latter, but Kretschmer was able to support his theory by citing similar-looking Italic and Germanic words which might have had cognates in Greek. Etruscan *aesar*, 'sacred', could also be adduced to support the theory that ἱερός in this sense was a borrowing from languages to the west. On Kretschmer see A. Pagliaro, '*Ἱερός* in Omero e la nozione di "sacro" in Grecia', in his *Saggi di critica semantica* (Florence, 1953), 95–101; Hooker, op. cit. (above, n. 25), 8–9, with further references on p. 28, nn. 2–6. More recently Garcia-Ramon, op. cit. (above, n. 16), puts forward an extremely complex ancestry to explain the variety of attested uses of ἱερός, proposing that several distinct IE forms have coalesced into a single Greek word. It is hard to get to grips with his argument, since he begins by assuming that in practice ἱερός has two meanings, roughly 'holy' and 'fast', and that the attestations of the latter are no more than 'Relikte der ursprünglichen Bedeutung' (203). If (as I argue) that division into two meanings is unwarranted, Garcia-Ramon's hypothesis becomes unnecessary for explaining the data.

[31] In *The Iliad: a commentary* (Cambridge, 1985–1993), see Kirk at 4.378, Janko at 16.407–8, Edwards at 17.464–5; in *A commentary on Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford, 1987–1992) see Heubeck at 2.409.

[32] M. Silk, 'LSJ and the problem of poetic archaism: from meanings to iconyms', *CQ* 33 (1983) 303–30.

difficulties as great as those of the original problem itself. As for the first, the suggestion that ἱερός might have had a second ancestor is pure speculation, and there is no pressing evidence to support it;[33] for the second, it must be bad practice to decide that an adjective is an ornamental epithet on the sole grounds that we do not understand it at a glance; and as for the question of iconyms, before we explain a word in this way we ought to be absolutely satisfied that we have exhausted the possibilities for assigning a meaning to it, just as we would stare very hard at a difficult passage of English verse before deciding that the author was playing with words in the manner of Joyce or Dylan Thomas. The gulf that separates us from what we are studying makes it far more likely that modern preconceptions about religion and the world have obscured a unity that made the same adjective appropriate and expressive both in the familiar religious contexts and in those of fish, sentries, Alcinous and Telemachus.

Greek ἱερός and Vedic iṣira-*: holiness and motion?*

The task, then, is to compare the range of uses of ἱερός in the hope of assigning them all to a single bundle of early Greek ideas. Here I take my lead from the theories advanced by A. Pagliaro and J. T. Hooker,[34] who stand out among the many scholars who have tried to explain ἱερός by looking to the Vedic cognate *iṣira-*, whose form corresponds exactly to ἱερός. The meaning of *iṣira-* is disputed,[35] but on the evidence it refers to the presence of strength or spiritually powerful movement: such seems, at least, to be the thread that links most of its contexts, referring as it does to such things as wind (*RV* 7.35.4, *AV* 6.62.1, 10.8.35) or a wind-god (*RV* 10.73.5), divine horses (*RV* 6.62.3, *AV* 19.49.1) and a chariot (*RV* 5.75.5), the fire of Agni (*RV* 3.2.14) and of Bṛhaspati (*RV* 7.97.7), the war-god Indra (*RV* 7.87.9) and his dance (*RV* 6.29.3), the divine drink called *soma* (*RV* 1.168.9, 10.157.5, 9.96.15), a loud or vigorous voice (*RV* 9.84.4, 10.98.3) and the 'nimble spies' known as Rudras (*RV* 9.73.7). As will become clearer later in our discussion, many of the contexts of *iṣira-* are very similar to those of difficult instances of ἱερός; and it is particularly striking that Homer's ἱερὸν μένος is exactly equivalent to the Vedic *iṣirena... manasa* (*RV* 8.48.7), so that this formula has as good a claim as any to have survived from an ancient Indo-European epic tradition. But however interesting the isogloss is to the historian of languages, it gives only limited help to the student of Greek realities. The survival of the same Indo-European root in both Greek and Vedic does not guarantee that either language preserved the most significant element of whatever meaning it held in the lost parent tongue; so that even if I knew Vedic (which I do not) I would not be justified in trying to use one of the two words as a gloss on the other. However, it seems reasonable to begin by using the comparative evidence as a first pointer for tackling our problem: beside the established fact that the quality of being ἱερός very

[33] It is sound philology that the forging of etymological theories must remain the servant of the study of meaning: as Benveniste has written, 'En présence de morphèmes identiques pourvus de sens différents, on doit se démander s'il existe un emploi ou ces deux sens recouvrent leur unité' ('Problèmes semantiques de la réconstruction', in his *Problèmes de linguistique générale* [Paris, 1966]). The principle applies as urgently in investigating a single language as in reconstructing the common parent of several.

[34] See above, nn. 25, 30. The numerous other philological studies of ἱερός, as cited in footnotes above and below, do not significantly advance the study of its *meaning* beyond the arguments of Pagliaro and Hooker.

[35] The clearest exposition known to me is still that by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'Gr. ἱερός—skr. *iṣirah*', in *Mélanges E. Boisacq*, vol. 1 (= *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire*, Brussels, no. 5 [1937]).

often identifies something as linked to or possessed by a god, we can place the working hypothesis that that quality *may* also have something to do with speed and mobile power.

As far as that goes, my approach is identical to those of Pagliaro and Hooker; but as I proceed from example to example I will move in a rather different direction to that taken by either of those scholars. Briefly summarized, Pagliaro argues that the common ground between 'holy' and 'fast-moving' is the awe evoked by manifestation of the physical power of gods, so that he takes 'prodigioso' as the closest modern equivalent; while Hooker argues that where ἱερός does not mean 'sacred' it corresponds exactly to *iṣira-*. Shrewd and perceptive as both their arguments are, they both leave the reader feeling that something has been missed. In particular Hooker, whose conclusions have much in common with the argument I want to advance, does not venture far enough towards an overall redefinition of ἱερός. He proposes a working definition of *iṣira-* as 'active, life-giving, life-partaking' and tries to fit the difficult instances of ἱερός into that field without considering the relationship between them and the familiar sacral instances. It is perhaps for this reason that he admits himself unable to make sense of at least one of the Homeric examples.[36] To judge by the remarks of recent Homeric commentators, the consensus now seems to be that ἱερός is at best a vague word: in Russo's words, 'Historical-etymological explanations, it would seem, remain inconclusive, and... ἱερός in Homer tends towards a general "elative" meaning that allows its application to an extraordinarily wide range of objects.'[37] This despairing conclusion will be unnecessary if we can sketch a *single* province of meaning to include both the mysterious passages like those I have quoted and the larger group where ἱερός is applied to things owned by or directed at the gods.

Motion, vitality and growth

At first sight the most striking application of the Vedic parallel is to Homer's image of the fish caught on the hook, where we could take the words ἱερὸν ἰχθύν to mean that the fish is 'fast-moving' in the sense that it frisks and thrashes about as it is drawn out of the water. This stab in the dark cannot be substantiated on its own, but it fits the context remarkably well, pointing up the similarity between the fish's desperate writhing and the contorted fall of the warrior from his chariot.[38] Corroborative evidence comes from an unexpected quarter in the shape of the noun ἴρηξ/ ἱέραξ, 'hawk', which philologists have tried in vain to associate with the verb ἵεμαι.[39] If we see in this word the same stem ἱερ- with the animal suffice -αξ, then it explains itself easily as the name of the swiftest of birds.[40] Once Homer seems to draw explicitly on this basic association. Hermes swoops down from Ida in the guise of a hawk, and a

[36] On ἱερῶι ἐνὶ κύκλωι as a description of the judges' circle of seats in a city *agora* (*Il.* 18.504) Hooker confesses himself dissatisfied with his own conjecture that 'the entire emphasis is thrown on the massivity of the circle' (27).

[37] Russo at *Od.* 18.60, following Gallavotti, op. cit. Garcia-Ramon, op. cit. 85–6, declares in the same way that the investigation of the word's meaning has led to no satisfactory result.

[38] Similar in spirit is the image worked up by Patroclus when he compares the fall of one of his victims to the plunge of a diver into the sea (*Il.* 16.745–50).

[39] See Chantraine, *LfgrE* s.v. The proposed connexion with (*F*)ἵεμαι does not work well because in its many Homeric attestations ἴρηξ/ἱέραξ never shows a digamma; the only evidence that can be adduced for the digamma is a gloss in Hesychius, βείρακες ἱέρακες, which on its own is indecisive.

[40] Cf. Gallavotti, op. cit. 411. P. Ramat, 'Gr. ἱερός, Scr. *iṣirah* e la loro famiglia lessicale', *Die Sprache* 8 (1962), 4–28, argues that various other Greek words of less obviously similar form are cognate, but he does not consider ἱέραξ.

relative clause apparently expands on the connotations of the noun to emphasize its reference to the bird's swiftness, which is not immediately obvious from the Aeolic form ἴρηξ:

βῆ δὲ κατ' Ἰδαίων ὀρέων, ἴρηκι ἐοικώς,
ὠκέϊ φασσοφόνωι, ὅς τ' ὤκιστος πετεηνῶν (*Il.* 15.237–8)

He went down the slopes of Ida like a hawk, a swift dove-killer, which is the most rapid of flying things.

Compare an instance of ἱερός in a fragment where Alcman tells the girls that he is exhausted, his limbs can no longer bear him, and he wishes he could fly away in the shape of a seabird:

...βάλε δὴ βάλε κηρύλος εἴην,
ὅς τ' ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ἅμ' ἀλκυόνεσσι ποτήται
νηδεὲς ἦτορ ἔχων, ἁλιπόρφυρος ἰαρὸς ὄρνις. (fr. 26 Page)[41]

Would I were a seagull, which flits sad-hearted on the foam of the wave among the halcyons, a *hieros* bird of the salty-swollen sea.

There is no evidence that seabirds like the κηρύλος of this passage were consecrated to particular deities; while if they were believed to be gods or deified mortals, like the fabulous halcyons themselves,[42] then the norms of religious language (explained above, p. 300) would dictate that they might be described as θεοί but not as ἱεροί. But if ἱερός here means something more like 'swiftly moving', it fits well with the context of Alcman's hope to rid himself of his inability to dance or stand.

So far I have done no more than to provide a second contextual gloss to supplement the familiar sacral translation, and it will carry no weight unless it can be fitted into a field of ideas that will also provide room for the familiar religious uses of ἱερός. How can we make the motion of the leaping fish and the 'holiness' of altars or cities seem more like aspects of a single quality? I will begin by proposing a contextual link between two of the problematic instances which we have quoted, then extend that link so as to draw in further instances, and follow the same chain of ideas towards a new view of those where 'holy' or 'sacred' seemed an adequate translation. If the chain is not too long and twisted it will provide the core of our redefinition.

Let us turn from the fish to Alcinous and Telemachus. Although both are men of royal blood and royal authority, fulfilled in one case and potential in the other, we have seen that they are not 'holy' or 'sacred' in the sense of being consecrated directly by the gods. But Homeric kingship has another, more mysterious power, something

[41] Although the emendation of εἴαρος (all ancient sources) to ἰαρός (first by Hecker in 1852; approved by Bergk ('fortasse recte') and printed by Page) is now universally accepted, it must be justifed anew if we are to use it in support of a new interpretation of the word. Briefly, the arguments against εἴαρος are (i) that it is odd or even impossible in Alcman's dialect; (ii) that the words ἱερὸς ὄρνις are attested in several later poems which may well be borrowing directly from Alcman (for sources see Page's apparatus); (iii) that ancient lore about the halcyons connects them with the time of the winter solstice, when they built their nests, rather than with the spring of the year. The last point seems to me the decisive one: for corroboration see Aristophanes, *Birds* 250–51, 1594, alluding to Alcman's passage and referring to 'halcyon days', with Aristotle, *H.A.* 542b6–15; and see the incisive discussion by F. M. Pontani, 'Note Alcmenee' (*Maia* 3 [1950], 33–53), 46–9.

[42] For the story that the *kerylos* is the male equivalent of a halcyon see the passage of Antigonus Carystius printed with Page's edition of the Alcman fragment; for the real-life halcyon as the kingfisher see Aristotle, *H.A.* 593b12ff., and further references collected by D'A. W. Thompson, *A glossary of Greek birds* (2nd ed., London, 1936), s.v.; and on legends explaining the halcyons as transformed mortals see P. M. C. Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek myths* (Oxford, 1990), 239–41, with further references.

that is located in its effects rather than its origin or sanction. The disguised Odysseus describes the supernatural effects of good kingship when he flatters Penelope, likening her fame in the world to that of a good king,

> ...ὥς τέ τευ ἢ βασιλῆος ἀμύμονος, ὅς τε θεουδὴς
> ἀνδράσιν ἐν πολλοῖσι καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἀνάσσων,
> εὐδικίας ἀνέχῃσι, φέρῃσι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα
> πυροὺς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθῃσι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῷι,
> τίκτῃ δ' ἔμπεδα μῆλα, θάλασσα δὲ παρέχῃ ἰχθῦς
> ἐξ εὐηγεσίης, ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ... (*Od.* 19.109–14)

...as of some blameless king who, being god-fearing as he rules over many strong men, upholds good judgements, and the black earth produces wheat and barley, and the trees are laden with fruits, and the flocks bear healthy young, and the sea produces fish because of his good leading, and the people thrive because of him...

His wise rule not only leads to political harmony but also makes the earth itself thrive with vigorous and fruitful life. Hesiod sets forth the same principle more prosaically (*W.D.* 225–37) when he evokes the well-governed city in which the people flourish, ἀνθεῦσιν (*W.D.* 227) while the land is full of agricultural richness; and the other side of the same coin appears in the famous simile (*Il.* 16.384–93) which describes how Zeus punishes those who have made crooked public decisions, σκολιὰς κρίνωσι θέμιστας (387), by sending torrential storm, rain and flood to overrun the land and ruin crops. There is a hint of this theme even in the passage where Nestor reminds Agamemnon that his sceptre descends from Zeus: the context shows that he is reminding the king not of his royal freedom but of his responsibility to provide good advice for the people (*Il.* 9.98–9). The same idea goes some way to explain a difficult instance of ἱερός in the scene of the city on the Shield of Achilles, where the elders are sitting in a circle, ἱερῷι ἐνὶ κύκλωι, as they listen to the opposing arguments in a lawsuit: the power of the elders is akin to (or replaces) that of a king,[43] and to call it ἱερός suggests that its soundness or corruption will have the same influence for good or ill over men and beasts and the land.[44] It is difficult to write with certainty about this tradition, since it seems largely to be lost in later Greek lore, but it is interesting that northern European traditions of the same kind link the health of the land to the *bodily* well-being of the king. The most famous example is in the Grail story, where the spear-wound of the Maimed King is the cause of blight and famine in his country.[45] This cannot be more than a vague typological comparison, but it suggests a way of making sense of ἱερὴ ἶς and ἱερὸν μένος. As we have seen, ἶς and μένος refer in their normal senses to forces or organs of bodily vigour; and for Homer a king holds his power in or through his ἶς, ἶφι ἀνάσσει (of a mortal king, *Od.* 11.284, 17.443; of Apollo, *Il.* 1.38 = 1.452).[46] If the ἱερὴ ἶς or ἱερὸν μένος of Alcinous or Telemachus

[43] Presumably these passages reflect different stages in the passage of power from the central authority of the Mycenaean high-king (*wanax*) to petty kings (βασιλῆες) or a legislative council of elders (γέροντες). See R. Drews, *Basileus: the evidence for kingship in Geometric Greece* (Yale, 1983), 98–115.

[44] Similarly, when Hesiod sets forth the same doctrine at length he correlates the virtue of the people as a whole with the fruitfulness of the land (*W.D.* 225–37) but goes on to develop the principle into an admonition towards the petty kings, βασιλῆες, in particular (238–69).

[45] See R. Sherman Loomis, 'The origin of the Grail legends', in R. Sherman Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1959), and cf. M. L. West's note at *W.D.* 225–47. For similar typological correlates from the Near East see L. I. Stella, *Il poema di Ulisse* (Florence, 1955), 19–22.

[46] Compare the passage in which Sarpedon says that his and Glaucus' Lycian subjects will be glad when they see their rulers fighting with vigour and courage, because they will realise that their privileges are matched by their ἶς ἐσθλή (*Il.* 12.320–21).

is what identifies him as both physically vigorous and spiritually fruitful, and if such virtue is borne out in the power that makes earth and flocks thrive and the sea teem with fish, then we have a link stretching from ἱερὸν μένος or ἱερὴ ἶς on the one hand to the ἱερὸς ἰχθύς on the other. The essence of the king's being is productive of growth and vigour and burgeoning life in his people and in nature, while the frisking fish is manifesting that same quality in his actions. The fact that Odysseus' description of the good king's rule includes a reference to fish is no doubt a coincidence, but it encourages me to believe that we are on the right track. We begin to redefine the connection with movement which we proposed on the strength of the Vedic evidence: things that are ἱερά are full of motion in the sense that they are spontaneous and fruitful and imbued with vital impetus, and this quality is manifested in their growth as much as in their movement from place to place.

If this is right, the bodily vitality and mobile strength of Telemachus and Alcinous are ἱερά not only because of what kings can engender in their peoples and lands but also because of both men's human vigour and health. Telemachus' ἶς is literally the same as his muscular strength—for example, he alone among the young men in the hall is capable of stringing Odysseus' bow (*Od.* 21.124–9)—while one guesses that Alcinous' ἱερὸν μένος is the more mellow vitality of a hale and genial old man.[47] This is worth emphasizing because the case of Telemachus in particular points to a further link with the sentries of the Achaean camp, ἱεροὺς πυλαωρούς and φυλάκων ἱερὸν τέλος. These men belong to the youngest group in the Achaean army, the κοῦροι (see *Il.* 9.68, 86): it is natural that in any army the youngest would be assigned the task of guarding the camp at night, and when Nestor finally arrives to encourage them he addresses them as 'dear children', φίλα τέκνα (*Il.* 10.192). They are the youngest, the ephebes, the fledgling warriors who embody a different form of the same fruitful and burgeoning life as that which rushes through kings and princes, growing crops and animals and fish.

If it seems odd that Homer's sense of human flourishing should be so closely bound up with the life not only of animals but only of plants, we can reassure ourselves from the evidence of the texts on several levels of expression. The connexion between the life of plants and that of young men and women is borne out not only in such marked contexts as Odysseus' daring comparison of Nausikaa's beauty to a palm tree (*Od.* 6. 162–69), and the many similies which compare the life of a warrior who is slain young with the sprouting of a plant which is destined to be cut down,[48] but also and more subtly in the semantic range of the word ἄνθος itself. Despite our habit of translating the word as 'flower', both the range of its earliest attestations and its etymological link with the verbs in -ηνοθε, 'rises up', show that an ἄνθος is essentially 'that which springs up', so that it extends to the growing and sprouting of many other living things besides flowers. The noun and the cognate verb are found not only with plants of all kinds but also whole populations, as the inhabitants of Hesiod's prosperous city who flourish, ἀνθεῦσιν (*W.D.* 227), while the fruitful youth of adolescents manifests itself as ἄνθος in another sense, as the first growth of beard or (in girls) the downy bloom that is visible on the skin.[49]

[47] This suggestion implies that the adjective is being used simultaneously in subjective and objective senses, but the connection between the two ideas seems so intimate that this double connotation need not present a problem.

[48] See e.g. *Il.* 4.482–7, 5.560, 13.178–81, 17.53–60, 18.55–9, 18.55–9, 18.437–40, and cf. *Od.* 14.175.

[49] Even when applied to vegetation ἄνθος does not mean simply 'flower', since the word is used not only of flowers proper (*Od.* 7.126, etc.) but also of grass (*Od.* 9.449), fruit (*Il.* 9.542), and leaves (*Od.* 14.353). It applies also to such things as a tongue of fire (πυρὸς ἄνθος,

Vitality, growth and godhead

A gulf still yawns between this group of ideas and whatever it is that makes ἱερός the appropriate word in straightforwardly religious contexts. A clue is provided by one notoriously difficult instance. As the battle rages over the dead Patroclus, the horses of Achilles stop in their traces to mourn, and Zeus fears that they will be captured, so he impels them to rush away from the danger. Automedon in the chariot finds that he cannot direct the horses and harry the foe at the same time:

> οὐ γάρ πως ἦν οἷον ἐόνθ' ἱερῶι ἐνὶ δίφρωι
> ἔγχει ἐφορμᾶσθαι καὶ ἐπίσχειν ὠκέας ἵππους.... (*Il.* 17.464–5)

Since he was alone on the *hieros* running-board, he could not [both] thrust with his spear and urge on the swift horses.

At this stage of the argument we need not fear that the running-board is simply 'sacred' because it belongs to a great hero, or because it is drawn by Achilles' divine horses (see *Il.* 16.148–54); but it would also be less than the whole truth to say that ἱερός here refers merely to the fact that the chariot is 'swiftly moving' because the horses are in rapid retreat. In fact their sudden rush results from added vital energy, μένος, which Zeus has breathed into them to make them gallop away from danger (17.441–58): the chariot is imbued with motion which is not only swift but also of divine origin. Just as Alcinous' μένος was ἱερός in the sense that it was productive of riches and growth in the fields and the sea, or more simply because of the innate vitality of his body, so here the μένος poured into the horses has produced movement which is itself ἱερός. Since the chariot is *by the same token* both swift and affected by the personal influence of a god, the passage suggests one way in which it is possible (if no more) for the two extremes of the semantic range of ἱερός to add up to one and the same thing. Something similar can be identified in the way Odysseus uses the word to describe different parts of Circe's realm on Aeaea. When her house is described as ἱερὰ ... δώματα, or the like (*Od.* 10.426, 445, 554) it is easy to reason that the house is 'of the gods' since an Immortal lives there (compare *Il.* 6.89, etc.); but once more this seems not to be the full story. When Odysseus walks up to the house through the lush and magical woods of the island, ἱερὰς ἀνὰ βήσσας (*Od.* 10.275), the woods can

in a *varia lectio* at *Il.* 9.212), the gleam of gold (ἄνθος ... καθαρόν, Theognis 452), the surging foam of a wave (Alcman 26.3 Page) and the scent of a herb (*Od.* 10.304), but the best clue to its meaning is in the context of sprouting or flourishing hair. In the *Odyssey* boys killed in early youth are described as having died before they attained a beard, πρίν σφωϊν ὑπὸ κροτάφοισιν ἰούλους/ἀνθῆσαι πυκάσαι τε γένυς εὐανθέϊ λάχνηι (*Od.* 11.319–20), and Alcman similarly has χαῖτα ... ἐπανθεῖ of a girl's hair (1.53 Page; cf. Anacreon, 414 Page). It seems certain that ἀνθερεών, 'beard' or 'chin', is also related. In addition E. K. Borthwick, 'The "flower of the Argives" and a neglected meaning of ἄνθος', *JHS* 96 (1976) 1–7, has shown abundantly that ἄνθος is the *vox propria* for the nap or down on cloth. This begs to be compared with verbs compounded from -ηνοθε, 'springs up', whose form makes it a convincing cognate with ἄνθος (see Chantraine, *LfgrE* s.v.). The early poets use ἀνήνοθε, ἐπενήνοθε and κατενήνοθε of the sprouting of hair on the head (*Il.* 2.219, *H Dem* 279) or wool, λάχνη, from a cloak (*Il.* 10.134) as well as the rising of a smell into the air (*Od.* 17.270; cf. *Od.* 8.365, more doubtful). This shows that semantically as well as formally these verbs correspond closely to ἄνθος; and if the core of the noun's meaning is 'that which springs up', then ἥβης ἄνθος (*Il.* 13.484, *H Herm* 375, *H Dem* 108, etc.) will be the springing-up of youthful vitality or the tangible bloom or hair on the skin, rather than 'the flower of youth' in some vague or figurative sense. For full discussion and further references, some more doubtful, see Borthwick's article, with J. M. Aitchison, 'Homeric ἄνθος', *Glotta* 41 (1963) 271–8; and for ἄνθος as the scent or bouquet of wine see also R. Renehan, 'Greek lexicographical notes: second series' (*Glotta* 47 [1969] 220–34), 222, with further examples.

be seen as ἱερός not only because they belong to a goddess but more precisely because they flourish and burgeon as a result of the same preternatural power that gives her sway over men and beasts. The principle is the same when the olive-tree on the coast of Ithaca is ἱερὴ ... ἐλαίη (*Od.* 13.372): it is sacred to Athena, as its significance in the narrative makes clear, and by the same token it is a richly flourishing growth, τανύφυλλος ἐλαίη (13.102).

This path leads us to an instructive group of instances concerning corn. When a feast is set before the warriors in Nestor's tent, Homer names the items of food and drink on the table:

> .. ἐπὶ δὲ κρόμυον ποτῶι ὄψον,
> ἠδὲ μέλι χλωρόν, παρὰ δ' ἀλφίτου ἱεροῦ ἀκτήν,
> πὰρ δὲ δέπας περικαλλές ... (*Il.* 11.630–32)

... and an onion as relish for drink, and yellow honey, and alongside it the meal of *hieros* corn, and beside that a beautiful cup ...

This is not a very spiritual context, and it is not enough to say that the Homeric phrase simply identifies the corn-meal as (potentially) sacred to Demeter because in other circumstances bread or corn is sprinkled in sacrifice. Elsewhere in Homer a simile evokes the time of winnowing in a way that suggests a more subtle link between the richness of the corn, Demeter's presence and the kind of growth or vitality that we have associated with other instances of ἱερός:

> ὡς δ' ἄνεμος ἄχνας φορέει ἱερὰς κατ' ἀλωὰς
> ἀνδρῶν λικμώντων, ὅτε τε ξανθὴ Δημήτηρ
> κρίνηι ἐπειγομένων ἀνέμων καρπόν τε καὶ ἄχνας,
> αἱ δ' ὑπολευκαίνονται ἀχυρμιαί ... (*Il.* 5.499–502)

Like when the wind carries chaff along the *hieros* corn-spaces as men are winnowing, when under the impetus of the winds fair-haired Demeter separates wheat from chaff, and the heaps of chaff grow white ...

My translation of ἀλωάς here as 'corn-spaces' represents an ambiguity in the Greek: in Homeric usage ἀλωή can be used of any place in which plants—trees, vines, corn—are made to grow and flourish, but in later Greek the word tends to be restricted to threshing-floors in particular.[50] It is possible that here the place where the winnowing is done is called *hieros* because a threshing-floor might be ritually consecrated to Demeter;[51] but since our previous passage showed that the grain will be ἱερός even when it arrives on the dinner-table,[52] it seems that the meaning of ἱερὰς ... ἀλωάς must lie in some intrinsic quality of corn or of the act of winnowing. The key is in the idea of vitality: the fruits of the earth are tossed up into the air, flails

[50] LSJ misleadingly put 'threshing-floor' at the beginning of their definition, but *LfgrE* s.v. explains that it is only in post-epic Greek that the word ceases to be normal for gardens, fields and the like. For the wide range of early uses see e.g. *Il.* 5.90, 9.540, 18.57, 18.561, 21.77; *Od.* 1.193, 6.293, 7.122, 24.221; and for 'threshing-space' in particular see *Il.* 13.588–92, 20.496. On the narrowing of the word's semantic range in later Greek practice see scholiasts at *Il.* 5.90, 5.499.

[51] Note especially the Attic Haloa, a fertility festival held in Demeter's honour at Eleusis. Because the festival was held in mid-winter, Greek antiquarians were puzzled by the apparent association of the festival with threshing-floors (the most recent study is A. C. Brumfield, *The Attic festivals of Demeter* (New York, 1984), 104–31; see also S. Guettel Cole, 'Demeter in city and countryside', in S. E. Alcock and R. Osborne (edd.), *Placing the gods: sanctuaries and sacred space in ancient Greece* [Oxford, 1994], 202 with n. 12).

[52] Note also Hesiod, *W.D.* 597–9, 805–7, where what is winnowed and threshed is called Δημήτερος ἱερὸν ἀκτήν.

flashing as the corn is miraculously transformed into the stuff of life-giving bread.[53] This seems to be what is implied by the image of Demeter herself separating out wheat from chaff: the richness of the corn implies the presence of the goddess, as well as *vice versa*. Correspondingly, ἱερός is the appropriate adjective for corn-meal in Nestor's tent not because it *might* be consecrated to Demeter, but because it has in it that essential richness which can also act as a sign of her personal presence. Here in the everyday world of human activity, no less than in the magical strangeness of Aeaea and Achilles' chariot, the two extremes of the semantic range of ἱερός seem to jostle for supremacy.

The anthropomorphic world

We can progress further by considering the latent anthropomorphism of the Homeric world. When celestial phenomena or parts of the natural world are directly identified as gods, their mysterious and spontaneous motion or growth tends to be what reveals their personal identities. This helps us with a few further instances of ἱερός. Circe's servant nymphs are born from springs and woods and rivers,

> γίγνονται δ' ἄρα ταί γ' ἔκ τε κρηνέων ἀπό τ' ἀλσέων
> ἔκ θ' ἱερῶν ποταμῶν, οἵ τ' εἰς ἅλαδε προρέουσι (*Od.* 10.350–51)

They are born from the springs and the groves, and the *hieros* rivers, which flow down to the sea.

Following our earlier principle, these rivers cannot be ἱεροί in the sense of being consecrated to gods: all rivers are gods in themselves, so that not they but the sacrifices that men offer to them would be ἱερά in the familiar sacral sense.[54] In the present passage, ἱερός seems to refer not only to the rivers' wonderful ability to engender nymphs[55] but also to their rapid and spontaneous movement as they surge down to the sea.[56] Just as in the passage cited above in which Hermes flew like a hawk, ἶρηξ, here the relative clause glosses or explains the less familiar connotations that ἱερός assumes in this context. It is consistent with this principle to say that it is because of the swift movement of rivers that they are liable to take on the identity of personal gods: the fact that the rushing water flows with a ἱερὸς ῥόος (*Il.* 11.726) is the root of the belief that the river contains godhead.

The same principle helps to make sense of a difficult group of passages in which daybreak and nightfall are called ἱερός:[57]

> εἰς ὅ κε ... δύηι τ' ἠέλιος καὶ ἐπὶ κνέφας ἱερὸν ἔλθηι
> (*Il.* 11.193–4 = 11.208–9 = 17.454–5)
> ... until the sun sinks and *hieros* gloom arrives.
>
> ὄφρα μὲν ἠὼς ἦν καὶ ἀέξετο ἱερὸν ἦμαρ ...
> (*Il.* 8.66 = 11.84 = *Od.* 9.56)
> When it was dawn and *hieros* day was increasing ...

It is deceptively easy to translate these as 'the holy day' and 'the fall of godly night', phrases whose slightly Tennysonian air would not prevent them from passing muster

[53] For the miraculous quality of the action of winnowing, and the flashing brightness of what is tossed up into the air, compare the other Homeric simile on the subject (*Il.* 13.588–90).

[54] See *Il.* 11.726–7, where the two senses of ἱερός come into play in successive lines: sacrifices, ἱερά, are offered on the banks of the ἱερὸς ῥόος of a river.

[55] Compare the cave on Ithaca which is ἱρὸν νυμφάων (*Od.* 13.104)—sacred to the nymphs, or flourishing with their preternatural life?

[56] Compare the adjective διιπετής, of rivers (*Il.* 16.174, 17.263, etc.; *Od.* 4.477, 7.284, etc.).

[57] I have learnt much from Hooker's analysis of these difficult phrases (op. cit., 25–6).

in answering an Unseens paper.[58] We can make better sense by drawing on the connexion which we have proposed between *hieros* and growth or movement: for Homer and Hesiod, day and night are not states but processes, and under the appropriate names they are gods in their own right, imagined as anthropomorphic figures who move across the sky. The usual Homeric epithet for night is 'swift', θοή (e.g. *Il.* 10.394, 14.261, *Od.* 12.284). The most famous evocation of this idea is in Hesiod's *Theogony*, where Day and Night greet each other as they pass over the threshold of the world:

> ...ὅθι Νύξ τε καὶ Ἡμέρη ἆσσον ἰοῦσαι
> ἀλλήλας προσέειπον, ἀμειβόμεναι μέγαν οὐδον
> χάλκεον. ἡ μὲν ἔσω καταβήσεται, ἡ δὲ θύραζε
> ἔρχεται, οὐδέ ποτ' ἀμφοτέρας δόμος ἐντὸς ἐέργει. (*Theogony* 748–51).[59]

...where Night and Day greet each other as they pass close together, crossing over the great brazen threshold. One of the two is going in, and the other is passing out, and the house never holds both inside at once...

The same image is hinted at when Homer explains the pattern of northern day and night by saying that 'the paths (κέλευθοι) of day and night are close together' (*Od.* 10.86), and implicitly when the swift assault of a god or hero is compared with the movement of night (*Il.* 1.47, 12.462–3). Since the words κνέφας ἱερὸν and ἱερὸν ἦμαρ refer specifically to the *fall* of night and the *dawning* of day, it is natural to take the adjective as predicative, acting almost with the force of an adverb: darkness or light is *moving swiftly* across the sky, and once again the mysterious vitality of this movement is the sign of a god's personal presence.

'*Holiness*' *and movement*

If our (still hypothetical) link between movement, fruitfulness and divinity has made sense of the instances of ἱερός that are obviously problematic, the next step must be to see whether the same connexion of ideas will shed light on the use of ἱερός in contexts where 'holy' or 'sacred' satisfies the translator. Consider the sense in which ἱερός appears with the names of cities, as in familiar formulae like Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον.[60] It is easy to say simply that the city or the acropolis is sacred to a god, as the citadel of Troy with its temple of Athene (ἐν πόλει ἄκρῃ, *Il.* 6.88, 297); but on the other hand many cities are described as ἱερός which have no particularly famous association with the temple or sanctuary of an individual deity.[61] Echinae and Zeleia and Eetion's city of Thebe are all ἱερός (*Il.* 2.625, 4.103 = 4.121, 1.366), and Alcaeus speaks of Βαβύλωνος ἴρας (48.10 L–P). It is worth comparing the adjectives ζάθεος and ἠγάθεος, which qualify the names of cities in exactly the same way. Other

[58] Stesichorus (185.4 Page) and Euripides (fr. 114 Nauck) both speak of Νὺξ ἱερά, and since Night is herself a goddess they seem not to be using the adjective in the familiar religious sense. However, it may be too much to say that they are continuing to use it in the sense of 'swift', since it is unlikely that this sense survives even vestigially into the classical language; it is much more likely that both poets are looking to the word's Homeric associations rather than its precise semantic value.

[59] Cf. Parmenides 1.11–13 D–K.

[60] S. Scully, *Homer and the sacred city* (Ithaca, 1990), esp. 16–40, has been very useful in preparing this argument, although he begins from the premiss that the word ἱερός itself must refer literally to the consecration of the city to a particular deity. His argument comes close to mine when he establishes that 'sacredness' is essential to the city's identity and is bound up with its separation from the lifeless countryside surrounding it (see below).

[61] Wülfing-von Martitz, op. cit. 278–88, lists all the cities that Homer calls ἱερός and manages to find evidence that every one of them contained an early temple, sanctuary or the like. This explanation is highly reductionist, since clearly the dwelling-place of any Greek community will have contained cult-sites.

compounds in ζα- and ἀγα- refer to the abundance of a quality or essence, not of something bounded or tangible: so that a city which is ζάθεος or ἠγάθεος will be full of divinity in the broadest sense, not merely the personal domain of the particular god whose temple it contains. Is there some quality in any city, *qua* city, that characterizes it as essentially *hieros* in every sense—full of growth or movement and also full of godhead, and hence embodying an implicit connection of ideas like that which linked the personal Demeter with the vitality and fruitfulness of bread?

As before, an answer is suggested by imagery which allows the city to take on a personal identity. In a revealing passage Achilles wishes that only he and Patroclus were left alive of the Achaeans, ὄφρ' οἷοι Τροίης ἱερὰ κρήδεμνα λύωμεν (*Il.* 16.100),[62] 'so that that we alone could loose the *hieros* headdress of Troy.' Agamemnon hints at the same image when he says that captured Troy would bow its head, ἠμύσειε (*Il.* 2.373 = 4.290), or that by granting victory to besiegers Zeus has 'unloosed the heads of many cities', πολλάων πολίων κατέλυσε κάρηνα (*Il.* 2.117–18 = 9.24–5). Thebes with its wondrous walls, ἱερὰ τείχεα (*Il.* 4.378), is 'well-garlanded', ἐϋστέφανος (*Il.* 19.99; cf. *Theogony* 978),[63] and in the Hesiodic *Shield* when Poseidon protects Thebes from sack he keeps hold of its headdress, κρήδεμνον ἔχει ῥύεταί τε πόληα (105). The crucial point is the meaning of the κρήδεμνον itself: although the word can stand for 'what binds the head' in any sense, as a woman's garment it takes on special importance as a symbol of the married state.[64] When Andromache swoons on the rampart after seeing her husband dead, and she casts the symbol of her marriage from her head, 'the *kredemnon* that golden Aphrodite gave her on the day that Hector led her from the house of Eetion' (*Il.* 22.470–72).[65] Achilles is drawing on the same association of ideas when he speaks of the *hiera kredemna* of Troy: the flourishing city laid low by assault is imagined as a married woman, an embodiment of motherhood and nurture.[66] The image is precisely equivalent to that employed in the iconography of Phrygian Cybele, who wears a crown of city walls in her aspect of Great Mother:[67] the κρήδεμνα which encircle the woman are precisely identified with the walls of the city, and the woman is thrown down and violated when the walls are pierced by the sackers. The same field of imagery is entered in a different way in Near Eastern texts such as the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, where the devastated city is imagined as a widow.[68]

[62] Similarly *Od.* 13.388, *H Dem* 150–25.

[63] See also Pindar, *Ol.* 8.32–3, Anacreon 391 Page.

[64] κρήδεμνον is clearly from κάρα + δέω (see Chantraine s.v.), and the range of its possible applications is so wide that it can be used of the seal that encircles the head of a wine-jar (*Od.* 3.392) as well as the magical garment that Ino gives to Odysseus to stretch across his breast (*Od.* 5.346, etc.). There is dispute over whether the κρήδεμνον as a woman's garment is closer to a shawl, a veil or a ribbon (see N. J. D. Richardson at *H Dem* 151–2, Hoekstra at *Od.* 13.388). It hangs down over the wearer's cheeks as well as binding the head (see e.g. *Od.* 1.334), so that presumably it resembles a combination of all three of those modern garments.

[65] Elsewhere in Homer the symbolic value of the κρήδεμνον seems to be alluded to when Penelope uses it to hide her face from the suitors (*Od.* 1.334 = 16.416 = 18.210 = 21.65). M. N. Nagler, *Spontaneity and tradition: a study in the oral art of Homer* (Berkeley, 1974), 44–60, argues acutely that the *kredemnon* is a symbol of chastity—by which he means that of faithful womanhood rather than sexual abstinence as such. On the importance of the *kredemnon* as a symbol of marriage see most recently D. L. Cairns, 'Off with her αἰδώς' *CQ* xlvi (1996).

[66] W. Burkert, *Greek religion* (English ed., Oxford, 1978), 140, suggests that Achilles' image of 'loosing the headdress' of Troy refers to the violation of the virgin Athene who guards the city. This seems to me quite wrong: if we must take the image as alluding to the violation of a female distinct from the city itself, then a closer parallel is provided by Nestor's rallying-call that the Achaeans should fight until each of them takes one of the Trojan *wives* to his bed (*Il.* 2.354–5).

[67] See Scully, op. cit. 35–6.

[68] *Lamentations* 1.1.

These images encourage us to see the Homeric city as a place where human life flourishes and bears fruit in concentration. Its inherent vitality sets it apart from the barren countryside surrounding it. Stephen Scully has pinpointed this theme in his recent study of the Homeric city, where he pins the *hieros* quality of the city on what he calls 'the sacredness of communal space':

> No longer integrated with what nature forms, man of the polis... separates himself from the wild and larger world which surrounds him... The spirit of enclosure and the conferring of human identity define the sacral essence of the Homeric polis and are the reasons Zeus initiates its creation...[69]

Although Scully reaches this conclusion by moving in a direction quite different from mine,[70] his argument here is consistent with the suggestion that the city is ἱερός in virtue of its essential vitality and richness, in the same way as corn or rivers or fecund kingship. The spatial organization of the city makes it both vivid and reasonable to imagine the topmost citadel as the centre in which that vitality is concentrated, so that the innermost citadel of Troy is its ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον. The cultic reflex of this fact is the formal consecration of the citadel to a specific deity, in this case Athene; but to pin ἱερός exclusively on that would be to ignore the significance of the separation of the fruitful city from the surrounding world. The fact that the walls of Troy were made by Apollo and Poseidon,[71] and those of Thebes by the power of Amphion's lyre,[72] can be seen as a working-out in mythical terms of the preternatural significance that they carry because they define and encapsulate the life of the cities themselves. In other words, the citadel is ἱερόν both because it is consecrated and because of its essential nature as a focus for fruitful human activity.

The marking-off of circular spaces

At this point I am in danger of suggesting a vague or impossibly broad definition. I need to say how things that are ἱερός are to be distinguished from those that are not; and I must also explain why things that are 'imbued with fruitful life' should be so closely akin to those that are consecrated and set apart as the stuff of religious activity. There is a further thread of meaning linking several of our passages, to which the ἱερὰ κρήδεμνα of the city will provide the first clue. Evidently these are the battlements, the part of the city which is loosened or broken in the sack: so that the quality of being ἱερός is here concentrated on the *circle* which defines the city. The theme of circular enclosure recalls above all the ἱερὰς... ἀλωάς, the rounded threshing-floors (cf. ἐϋτροχάλωι ἐν ἀλωῆι, Hesiod, *W.D.* 599, 806, and a *varia lectio* at *Il.* 20.496)[73] where the richness of the corn is concentrated and where Demeter is present; and it also recalls the ring of seats in which the elders sit, ἱερῶι ἐνὶ κύκλωι,

[69] Scully, op. cit. 25. The theme of the separation of communal life from the surrounding world is developed further in his Ch. 7, 'Oikos and Polis'. [70] See above, n. 60.

[71] See *Il.* 7. 452–3, 21.436–60. Scully points out (52–3) that the tower on the battlements of Troy is called θεῖος πύργος (*Il.* 21.526; cf. 8.519) in the immediate context of a conversation between its builders, Apollo and Poseidon, concerning the preservation of their handiwork (see *Il.* 21.435–60, 516–17).

[72] The story is at least as old as the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (see fr. 182 M–W).

[73] I take ἐϋτρόχαλος as 'well-rounded', rather than as 'smoothed down with a roller', the latter being West's interpretation ad loc. Because all that is clear from the word itself is that it contains the root τροχ-, referring to a circuit or a wheel, either interpretation can be defended. In favour of mine (which is supported, incidentally, by *LSJ* s.v.) it can be said (a) that there is no other reference in early Greek to the 'smoothing down' of a threshing-floor or anything like one; and (b) that among the other instances of εὐτρόχαλος, which admittedly are of much later date, there is no example in a sense similar to West's, while there are several approximating to 'circular' or 'rounded' (note esp. κύκλος ἐϋτρόχαλος, Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 3.135).

when they exercise their power by casting judgement.[74] In each case what is ἱερός is a circular space set apart from the barren or insignificant things that surround it. This also adds clarity to the difficult phrase φυλάκων ἱερὸν τέλος, which we saw used of the ring of young sentries around the Achaean camp. The root of τέλος refers to an encompassing or completion that gives form to something otherwise intangible:[75] for example the world-encircling river Ocean is the τελήεις ποταμός (Hesiod, *Theogony* 242, 959), the cycle of the year is τελεσφόρος ... ἐνιαυτός (*Il.* 19.32, *Od.* 4.86, etc.; and cf. *Il.* 8.404), and when death takes its victim the τέλος θανάτοιο covers him over (see e.g. *Il.* 5.553, 16.502–3, 16.855 = 22.361, with 9.416), an image of encirclement and capture that implies an assault by the hands of Death in person.[76] When the circle of young warriors is their ἱερὸν τέλος,[77] it is in the completion and perfection of this circle that the quality of being ἱερός resides.

We have seen several themes recurring in different combinations: the abundance of vigorous life, the potential for self-propelled growth and movement, and lastly the enclosure of those powers or phenomena in a circular space defined and set apart from other and more barren things. What, then, of the ordinary religious uses of ἱερός? It does not take much imagination to guess that the gods are those who engender and bring with them a superabundance of life, and that this is what defines them as divine: when Hera can call Zeus' head his ἱερὴ κεφαλή (*Il.* 15.39) this must be because his divine life and power is concentrated in it, rather than simply because mortals revere him. In men's dealings with gods, sacred spaces like the precinct or the altar or the temple concentrate and define that power in exactly the same way that the walls of the city enclose their own species of vitality within them. Religious activity does not simply link man to the gods; more specifically, it draws and concentrates the abundant life and power of the gods into the channels that man has marked off for the purpose.[78] This, it seems to me, is the full depth of meaning that is evoked when sacrifices are ἱερὰ καλά, offered on the ἱερῶι ... βωμῶι. In Homeric language the sacrifices themselves are alternatively ἱερὰς ἑκατόμβας or τελήεσσας ἑκατόμβας,[79] participating in divine vitality when they reach fulness and are enclosed in the circular space of altar and sanctuary. It is because the priest presides over this concentration of sacred vitality that he is ἱερεύς and the verb for his actions is ἱερεύω or ἱερὰ ῥέζω. When the inscription on a statue reads *ΤΗΣ ΗΡΑΣ ΙΕΡΟΣ ΕΙΜΙ*, it declares not

[74] Compare Scully, op. cit. 17–18, who identifies the κύκλος of the passage as the *agora* set apart from the rest of the city.

[75] See the brilliantly imaginative essay of R. B. Onians, *The origins of European thought about the body, the mind, the soul, the world, time, and fate* (Cambridge, 1951), 426–66. More cautiously, Z. P. Ambrose, 'Homeric τέλος', *Glotta* 43 (1965) 38–62, examines the meaning of τέλος as spatial or temporal fulfilment, while D. Holwedra, '*ΤΕΛΟΣ*', *Mnemosyne* 16 (1963) 337–63, has some very useful insights into the circularity of τέλος (see esp. 359–63).

[76] Note the passage where Apollo seeks to protect a Trojan by 'warding off the heavy hands of death' from him, ὅπως θανάτοιο βαρείας χεῖρας ἀλάλκοι (*Il.* 21.548; Allen's reading, κῆρας for χεῖρας, has weaker ancient authority). Compare Patroclus' ghost's image of the κήρ of death which 'gaped around him', ἀμφέχανε, when he died (*Il.* 23.79).

[77] Compare ἐν τελέεσσι (*Il.* 11.730; similarly 10.470), of warriors drawn up in serried ranks. Hainsworth in his note at *Il.* 10.56–8 suggests 'duty', 'service' as gloss for τέλος there; but this fits the context only if we take it as a vague metonymy.

[78] Compare J. Rudhardt's evocation of the religious meaning of ἱερός: 'Chargé à des degrés divers, naturellement ou par une opération ad hoc, d'une puissance apparenté aux forces créatrices ou à l'activité divine: pour cette raison, utile ou favorable à l'efficacité des rites' (op. cit. [above, n. 18], 29).

[79] Some examples. τελήεσσας ἑκατόμβας: *Il.* 1.315, 2.306, 8.548 (the last a dubious line); *Od.* 4.352, 4.582, 13.350, 17.50, 17.59, and four times in *H Apoll*; ἱερὴν ἑκατόμβην, *Il.* 1.99, 1.431, 1.443, 23.146, *Od.* 20.276; ἱερὰς ἑκατόμβας, *Od.* 3.144, 4.478, 11.132 = 23.279.

merely that the statue is consecrated but that it participates in the life and power of the goddess. When a Linear B tablet reads as the equivalent of '*Ἱερείας δοῦλοι ἕνεκα χρυσοῖο ἱεροῖο*',[80] it will not be enough to translate the words as 'priestess' and 'sacred gold' (or 'gold of the temple'); rather, the force of *ἱερός* and *ἱερεία* may be that the woman is imbued with the power and strength of the gods and that the gold itself contains superhuman power and vitality.

In this light we can better understand the shift from the wide semantic range of *ἱερός* in Homer to the narrower and purely religious sense familiar from fifth-century authors. It seems that over time it became more crucial to the word's meaning that what is *ἱερός* should be formally separated off from what is not. Many of our Homeric examples—the fish, the chariot, Alcinous and Telemachus—did not draw in the theme of circularity or segregation in any obvious way, but the formal separation of sacred from profane is evidently crucial to the way *ἱερός* behaves in the language of later Greek religion. The range of meaning of *ἱερός* became narrower and more specialised, so that it ceased to be used except of things that were both full of divine life *and* separated off from the ordinary spaces of human activity. In this way the strictly 'sacral' application of the word became its definition. It would be neat to fit this semantic shift into a more general scheme of the development of Archaic and classical religion. The argument would run that the tendency to restrict *ἱερός* to divine things separated off from the ordinary world of mortal experience, rather than applying the adjective indiscriminately to any example of abundant vitality, is the linguistic equivalent of a tendency in religious practice to define and mark off cultic activity by restricting it to ever more permanent and sharply-defined cult sites and other sacred spaces. Such a scheme in the history of Greek religion has been argued (or assumed) by many scholars over the years: recently, for example, F. de Polignac[81] has suggested that the *polis* took on its civic and religious identity through a process of organisation in which the enclosure and marking-off of the city itself corresponded structurally to the marking-off of sacred space for sanctuaries beyond the walls. A parallel could be drawn with the word *τέμενος*, a 'space cut off', which in Homer refers to a space set apart for either religious or secular purposes (for the latter see e.g. *Il.* 8.48, 23.148, *Od.* 8.363)[82] but is restricted in later Greek to the space marked off

[80] From Pylos. Ae 303: *pu-ro i-je-re-ja do-e-ra e-ne-ka ku-ru-so-jo i-je-ro-jo*. See M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Cambridge, 1956), 166; L. R. Palmer, *The interpretation of Mycenaean Greek texts* (Oxford, 1963), 127.

[81] The first version of de Polignac's theory (*La naissance de la cité grecque* [Paris, 1984], esp. 27–31) has drawn considerable criticism on the grounds that the 'indeterminacy of sacred space' in the early period cannot be firmly established either on textual or archaeological evidence: for example, his model and its underlying assumptions have been trenchantly attacked by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood ('Early sanctuaries, the eighth century and ritual space', in *Greek sanctuaries: new approaches*, N. Marinatos *et al.* (edd.), [London, 1993]), while C. Morgan, 'The evolution of a sacral 'landscape': Isthmia, Perachora, and the early Corinthian state', in *Placing the gods* (see above, n. 51) has taken the example of sanctuaries at Corinth to show in detail that the archaeological evidence suggests a pattern of strong continuity in the history of cultic practice. On the question of continuity see also A. Schachter, 'Policy, cult and the placing of Greek sanctuaries', in *Le sanctuaire grec: Entretiens Hardt 1992* (Vandoeuvres-Geneva, 1994). De Polignac has now supplemented his exposition with a more cautious essay ('Mediation, competition and sovereignty: the evolution of ritual sanctuaries in Geometric Greece', also in *Placing the gods*), in which he redefines his theory as being concerned not with 'the *birth* of the city or state' but rather with '*transition* towards a more finished, "adult" stage of society and institutions'. From the point of view of the historian of ideas a question-mark continues to hang over the theory.

[82] On this general theme see J. Wright's stimulating (but inevitably speculative) essay ('The spatial configuration of belief: the archaeology of Mycenaean religion', also in *Placing the gods*) on the interpretation of sacred and secular space in Mycenaean sites. Wright observes that some

as the sanctuary of a god.[83] Fascinating as this suggestion is, however, it is largely based on inferences about religious ideology drawn from evidence that is inherently ambiguous, both archaeological and textual; and in general it seems risky either to presume such a neat progression in the history of ideas or to tie it to the niceties of semantic change.

Thales: divinity and movement

We can end much more safely by restricting ourselves to a final brief word on the story of Thales with which we began. We have seen that in early Greek language—or at least in the language of its canonical poets—the evidence of ἱερός reveals that an intimate link between divinity and growth or movement is embedded both in the nuts and bolts of language and in the imagery to which that language gives birth. If we were to try to think in Archaic Greek—a harmless exercise, if unscientific—then the semantic range of ἱερός could encourage certain trains of thought that seem arbitrary in English. Magnets make things move with spontaneous energy, things full of such energy are ἱερός, and things that are ἱερός are *ipso facto* imbued with what defines a god as a god. If we can unpack the wisdom of Thales in this way, his pronouncement about the magnetic stone becomes natural and easy to understand. Of course it would be extravagant to claim that ἱερός itself would necessarily have been the peg on which Thales' own train of thought was hung; but nonetheless its semantic range bears witness to an implicit connexion of ideas which could have led inevitably to his conclusion about movement and gods in the mind of anyone who framed his thoughts in the early Greek language and saw the world through the filters it provides.

Christ's College, Cambridge MICHAEL CLARKE

Mycenaean settlements are arranged in concentric circles while others are axially arranged, and suggests that they reflect the increasing centralization of authority, being 'spatial symbols of a society on the verge of transformation from an undifferentiated to a highly differentiated order' (48). This leads to a broader discussion of 'centredness' in Mycenaean social and religious organization.

[83] See B. Bergquist, *The Archaic Greek Temenos: a study of structure and function* (Lund, 1967), drawing an interesting contrast between the Greek sanctuary defined in terms of space ('volume' is her term) and the emphasis on monumental bulk characteristic of religious architecture in Egypt and the Near East (see esp. 126–36).