

POSEIDON, WALLS, AND NARRATIVE COMPLEXITY IN THE HOMERIC *ILIAD*

INTRODUCTION

The sea god Poseidon is taken for granted as such in Classical Greek literature and iconography. Yet one does not have to look far in the literary or iconographical sources to find material that conveys a somewhat different impression. This has been noticed, and in the past there have been some interesting attempts to surmise Poseidon's origins and significance from the evidence at hand.¹ This paper is not an attempt to reconstruct a putative Mycenaean deity,² but will examine certain episodes of the Homeric *Iliad* to suggest possible reasons for the inconsistencies and anomalies that appear.

The Homeric poems seem to convey a variety of messages about Poseidon. In the *Iliad*, he lives in the sea. When he travels in his chariot across the sea, the axle does not get wet. Sea monsters, knowing their master, frisk at his passing. However, these aspects of his power do not receive any more attention than this, and it may not altogether be because the story of the *Iliad* takes place on land. Instead, his domination over the earth is asserted, in formulaic titles such as γαῖήοχος 'Εννοσίγαιος, Earthshaker the earth-holder, κρείων 'Εννοσίχθων, Lord Earthshaker, and in the vocative 'Εννοσίγαι' εὐρυσθενές, Mighty Earthshaker.³ His preferred mode of transport, when he is not bounding like a horse,⁴ is the four-horse chariot. He is the patron of horses and horsemanship; indeed he is occasionally referred to, more frequently in the *Odyssey*, as κυανοχαίτα, black-maned.⁵ He is also a builder of walls.

In the *Iliad* the most striking expression of his power has nothing to do with the sea at all; he shakes the earth so much that Hades shrieks in terror, for fear that the horrors of death may be exposed to mortals and immortals alike. In the *Odyssey*, in spite of the maritime context, his most powerful acts are much the same; he splits a great crag in order to drown Aias, and apparently has the power not only to shatter the ship of the Phaeacians but to obliterate their city with a mountain (8.567–9, 13.149–52).⁶

In spite of this, Zeus' ascendancy, as the older brother and the stronger, is constantly asserted. Among the gods Hera and Poseidon are depicted as rebellious and

¹ Best known is still F. Schachermeyr, *Poseidon und die Entstehung des griechischen Götterglaubens* (Wien, 1950). Schachermeyr stands by his thesis in *Die Levante im Zeitalter der Wanderungen vom 13. bis zum 11. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Wien, 1982), pp. 98–9.

² E. Wüst's discussion and comments, *RE* 453–4, set out the evidence and the problems.

³ The choice of title and epithet is linked to case and colometry, but all convey the same emphasis. κρείων or εὐρυκρείων is frequently added to 'Εννοσίχθων when this term is used instead of Poseidon's name (8.208, 11.750, 13.10, 14.150, etc.). In the same way κλυτός or γαῖήοχος is frequently added to 'Εννοσίγαιος (9.362, 13.43, 14.135, 14.355, 15.221, 23.584, etc.). The vocative 'Εννοσίγαι' εὐρυσθενές is found only twice in the *Iliad*, in 7.455, 8.201.

⁴ ὀρέγνυμι is used of the stride of horses and of Poseidon, but is a common verb otherwise, used for stretching out hands, thrusting weapons, extending glory.

⁵ The question of Poseidon's equine attributes is too large for discussion in this paper. Cf., however, *Il.* 23.307, in which Poseidon and Zeus preside over the management of horses, and 582–5, in which Antilochus must touch his horses and swear by the Earthshaker.

⁶ See below, p. 9.

competitive towards Zeus. However, whereas Hera as consort must have recourse to influence rather than power, Poseidon is not so strictly defined or contained.

In the *Odyssey*, these problems do not seem to appear as the story is now set in a seascape. However, first Odysseus himself and then the Phaeacians become the focus for the power struggle between Zeus and Poseidon. The formulaic expressions referring to Poseidon are those used in the *Iliad*, with no reference to the sea.

These two epics by no means always coincide in depicting what the nature and function of the god Poseidon is meant to be.

In discussing these problems, I want to consider three episodes, two from the *Iliad* and one from the *Odyssey*; the second and third will require more attention than the first.

THE EPISODES

The episodes to be discussed are:

1. The intervention of Poseidon, *Iliad* 13.1–15.225.
2. The building of the walls at Troy by Poseidon and Apollo and by the Greeks, *Iliad* 7.442ff., 12.1–35.
3. Poseidon's compact with the Phaeacians, *Odyssey* 8.564ff., 13.125ff.

The first time Poseidon's name is mentioned, it is in the context of the old favour done for Zeus by Thetis. Achilles is speaking to his mother at *Iliad* 1.393–406. Certain of the gods, Hera, Poseidon, and Pallas Athena, had plotted against Zeus and intended to curb his power.

ὅππότε μιν ξυνδῆσαι Ὀλύμπιοι ἤθελον ἄλλοι,
Ἥρη τ' ἠδὲ Ποσειδάων καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη . . . (399–400)

We are not told, nor does it seem to be a concern, exactly who would succeed Zeus, or even if there was to be a successor. The point is that Zeus' supremacy is not accepted without question, and those who question it are Hera his sister and spouse, Poseidon his brother, and Athena his daughter.⁷ This alliance is maintained throughout the tale as given in the *Iliad*. It is expressed in dynamic form by the enmity the gods show to one another in the matter of Troy.

Poseidon does not have an active part in the saga until Book 7, which contains the problematic mention of wall-building. The only references to Poseidon between Achilles' appeal in Book 1 and the god's emergence in Book 7 are in Book 2: in 477–9, when Agamemnon is like Zeus in face and expression, has a waist like Ares, and a chest like Poseidon, and in the Catalogue of ships (506), where there is a reference to his grove at Onchestos. The Catalogue contains no other reference to Poseidon; in terms of genealogy only Zeus and Ares are accredited with sons, and Poseidon is not even referred to in the list of horses (761–79).

Between Books 4 and 8, however, there begins another episode, which is told in Books 7 and 12, and contains a curious anomaly. The problem with the passage in Book 7 may be summarized as follows. Thucydides speaks with certainty of a wall built by the Greeks on their arrival at Troy.⁸ In Book 7 of the *Iliad*, however, Nestor

⁷ It is not until Hesiod's *Theogony* that we learn how Athena came to be Zeus' daughter.

⁸ See, for discussion, A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1945), pp. 114–16, on Thuc. *Hist.* 1.11.1; D. L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley and

suggests (327–43) that the Greeks desist from battle, burn and bury their dead, and build a defensive ditch and wall; his suggestion is carried out at 430–41. This, of course, is the tenth year of the war.

These are the crucial lines:

τύμβον δ' ἄμφι πυρὴν ἓνα χεύομεν ἐξαγαγόντες
ἄκριτον ἐκ πεδίου· ποτὶ δ' αὐτὸν δείμομεν ὦκα
πύργους ὑψηλοὺς, εἰλαρ νηῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν.
ἐν δ' αὐτοῖσι πύλας ποιήσομεν εὖ ἀραρυίας,
ὄφρα δι' αὐτῶν ἱππηλασίη ὁδὸς εἴη . . . (7.336ff.)

τύμβον δ' ἄμφ' αὐτὴν ἓνα ποίεον ἐξαγαγόντες
ἄκριτον ἐκ πεδίου· ποτὶ δ' αὐτὸν ἔδειμαν
πύργους θ' ὑψηλοὺς, εἰλαρ νηῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν.
ἐν δ' αὐτοῖσι πύλας ἐνεποίεον εὖ ἀραρυίας,
ὄφρα δι' αὐτῶν ἱππηλασίη ὁδὸς εἴη . . . (7.435ff.)

In 442ff. Zeus and Poseidon dispute as the Achaeans build their wall:

“Ζεῦ πάτερ . . .
οὐχ ὀράς ὅτι δὴ αὐτὴ κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοὶ
τείχος ἐτείχισσαντο νεῶν ὕπερ, ἄμφι δὲ τάφρον
ἤλασαν, οὐδὲ θεοῖσι δόσαν κλειτὰς ἐκατόμβας;
τοῦ δ' ἦτοι κλέος ἔσται ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδναται ἧώς·
τοῦ δ' ἐπιλήσονται τὸ ἐγὼ καὶ Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
ἦρψ Λαομέδοντι πολίσσαμεν ἀθλήσαντε.”

Zeus responds in some irritation:

σὸν δ' ἦτοι κλέος ἔσται ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδναται ἧώς . . . (7.458)

τείχος ἀναρρήξας τὸ μὲν εἰς ἅλα πᾶν καταχεύαι . . . (7.461)

Certain details should be noted here. First, Poseidon addresses Zeus as *πάτερ*, the respectful form of address used by other gods who accept Zeus' seniority. He appeals to Zeus for recognition; the long-haired Achaeans have built a wall without due deference to him or to Apollo, who built with him the Trojan wall for Laomedon. The Achaean wall is a structure that will be famous wherever the dawn breaks. Zeus' response is crisp: fame on this scale is Poseidon's and he has no cause for concern. Once the war is over Poseidon may sweep it all away into the sea.

The ditch and the wall are mentioned in this context once more in 12.1–33. The Greeks have still shown Poseidon no respect as a wall-builder; they have still offered no hecatombs. The point is reiterated, again by Zeus, that as long as Hector is alive and Achilles angry and Troy untaken the wall will stand, but no longer. Suddenly, the poet takes a historicizing stance; he tells us that later Poseidon and Apollo, assisted by rain from Zeus, did indeed destroy the wall, diverting the rivers to do so:

ὅσσοι ἂπ' Ἰδαίων ὀρέων ἄλαδε προρέουσι,
Ῥησὸς θ' Ἐπτάπορος τε Κάρησός τε Ῥοδῖος τε
Γρήνικός τε καὶ Αἰσηπος δῖός τε Σκάμανδρος
καὶ Σιμόεις, ὅθι πολλὰ βοάγρια καὶ τρυφάλεια
κάππεσον ἐν κονίησι καὶ ἡμιθέων γένος ἀνδρῶν.
τῶν πάντων ὁμόσε στόματ' ἔτραπε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων

ἐννήμαρ δ' ἐς τείχος ἱεὶ ῥόον· ὕε δ' ἄρα Ζεὺς
 συνεχές, ὄφρα κε θάσσον ἀλίπλοα τείχεα θεῖη.
 αὐτὸς δ' ἐννοσίγαιος ἔχων χεῖρεςσι τρίαῖναν
 ἡγεῖτ', ἐκ δ' ἄρα πάντα θεμεῖλια κύμασι πέμπε
 φιτρῶν καὶ λάων, τὰ θέσαν μογέοντες Ἀχαιοί,
 λεία δ' ἐποίησεν παρ' ἀγάρροον Ἑλλήσποντον . . . (12.19–30)

This passage, where the poet looks into the future, is remarkable for several reasons:

- the calamity that eventually sweeps away the wall is sufficient for a whole community;
- eight rivers will be diverted to contribute to the flood, including six that are not mentioned elsewhere in the poem;
- Zeus will contribute flooding rains;
- the earthshaker has his trident in 12.27, which is the only reference to it in the *Iliad*;⁹
- there is only one other reference to the Hellespont, in the Catalogue of ships (2.845);
- ἡμίθεος* does not occur elsewhere in the Homeric poems. It means *demigod* and occurs twice in Hesiod. In fact, 12.23:

κάππεσον ἐν κονίησι καὶ ἡμιθέων γένος ἀνδρῶν . . .

seems to find development in the line of Hesiod which explains what heroes are:

ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἱ καλέονται
 ἡμίθεοι . . . (Hesiod, *Op.* 159–60)

The notion of heroes being half divine is clear in Hesiod and Pindar but not in the Homeric poems. It has been suggested¹⁰ that this episode refers to destruction myths, and the features mentioned above, while marking the passage as fitting awkwardly into the *Iliad*, certainly have resonances of such material.

After this stirring prediction, it is curious that the rest of Book 12 consists of a furious Trojan attack on the Achaean wall, culminating in the fine depiction of Hector as he springs triumphant through the shattered gate, glittering with bronze and the look on his face like nightfall. Poseidon is not mentioned again. In Book 13, however, we find that he has emerged from the sea (13.15) and is sitting watching the war on the wooded peak of Thracian Samos (13.12–13), waiting for Zeus' attention to wander. Swiftly he comes down, and the woods and mountains tremble under his feet. He takes three strides and with the fourth he reaches Aegae in Achaea. He yokes up his horses and sets off over the waves. Great creatures in the sea frisk in the waves at his passing; they know their master. The sea leaps for joy but does not wet the axle of his chariot. This seems to combine in Poseidon attributes of both a land god and a sea god. He is seated on a mountain to observe human affairs, just as Zeus is accustomed to sit on

⁹ B. Hainsworth, in G. S. Kirk (ed.), *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1993), p. 320, notes the contrast between this sole mention and the commonplace of the trident in archaic and subsequent iconography.

¹⁰ R. Scodel, 'The Achaean wall and the myth of destruction', *HSCP* 86 (1982), 33–50, sees here a theme of the destruction of heroes (pp. 36–90), and the Trojan War as a myth of destruction in parallel to Babylonian myths (p. 41), maintaining a connection of destruction by water. Scodel suggests a connection with the Tower of Babel myth, concerning the effrontery of raising lasting monuments (p. 46).

Mount Ida; his progress over land is stupendous; and he rides in his chariot as Zeus, Hera, or Athena might do. The notion of Poseidon stabling his horses under water at Aegae and Tenedos is awkward.¹¹ This is the beginning of a self-contained episode that covers from 13.10 to 15.225.

Certain features distinguish this episode from the rest of the poem. First, it places the sway of the fortunes of battle in the context of a power struggle between Zeus and Poseidon, with Poseidon temporarily in the ascendancy. We should recall 14.510:

... ἐπεὶ ῥ' ἔκλινε μάχην κλυτὸς ἐννοσίγαιος

in which this is made explicit and further enhanced by the accompanying appeal to the Muses. In Book 4.30ff., however, the quarrel is all between Zeus and Hera; Poseidon is not mentioned. He is only brought into the dispute in Book 8, when Hera appeals to him for support. He rejects the possibility outright, and takes no active part in the narrative until his dramatic intervention in Books 13–15.

Secondly, Poseidon is portrayed as a god of more significance than might appear from other sections of the poem, where he is firmly relegated to the same level as Hera, Athena, and Apollo.

Thirdly, there is a problem with the wall. The opening of Book 14 presents Nestor and Agamemnon in council. Nestor has observed the Trojans overrunning the Achaeans, and he sees that the wall has been wrecked—*ἐρέριπτο δὲ τεῖχος Ἀχαιῶν* (14.15). Agamemnon is despondent; he and Nestor discuss the wreck of the wall and we are told how it was first erected:

πολλὸν γὰρ ῥ' ἀπάνευθε μάχης εἰρύατο νῆες
θὶν' ἔφ' ἄλδς πολιῆς· τὰς γὰρ πρῶτας πεδίοιενδε
εἴρυσαν, αὐτὰρ τεῖχος ἐπὶ πρυμνήσιν ἐδειμαν. (14.30–2)

This is clearly not the wall that Nestor suggested that the Achaeans build possibly two days before.¹² At no time in the discussion between the Achaean leaders (14.27–134) is it suggested that this wall has not existed since the Achaeans first landed. Furthermore, at no time during this episode, in which Poseidon is explicitly opposed to Zeus,

τῷ δ' ἀμφὶς φρονέοντε δύω Κρόνου νῆε κραταιῷ
ἀνδράσιν ἡρώεσσιν ἐτεύχετον ἄλγεα λυγρά (13.345–6)

is he connected with this wall, nor does he show any interest in whether it stands or falls. For these reasons, I see 13.10–15.225 as a self-contained episode.

After Poseidon has capitulated to Zeus and retired into the sea, Apollo leads the Trojans in a recovery and kicks another breach in the wall. Again, no connection is made either with Zeus' promise to Poseidon in Book 7 or with its fulfilment in Book 12.

What is this wall? Is it one wall or more? Which wall is a concern to Poseidon and what does it have to do with him?

To take the questions in order:

¹¹ W. Leaf, *The Iliad*, ed. with commentary (2nd edn London, 1900), ad loc. wanted to delete 11–16, the lines that depict Poseidon's progress over land; R. Janko, in G. S. Kirk, (ed.), *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 43–6 on 13.10–38, points out that these lines effectively express Poseidon's three main attributes: earthshaker, sea-god, and *hippios*.

¹² These two days include the curiously extended evening which encompasses the embassy to Achilles, the lay of Dolon, and Odysseus' two suppers.

WHAT IS THIS WALL?

The wall which Nestor recommends in Book 7, and which the Achaeans build in one night,¹³ is near the funeral pyre. In 436 it is a *τείχος* with lofty towers, in 338 only the towers are mentioned.¹⁴ This wall is to be a defence—*εἰλαρ*—for the ships and the Greeks themselves. Stakes are not mentioned in Nestor's recommendation, but the Achaeans insert them (441). Nestor's instructions and their execution are described in passages that are closely similar, as is customary in the Homeric poems when reference is made to what has already been mentioned.¹⁵ This is wall one.

On the other hand, in 7.445ff., when Poseidon appears to complain about the wall, it is *νεῶν ὕπερ*, close by the ships,¹⁶ and has a ditch around it. No lines or phrases from the two earlier passages are repeated here; admittedly, as such repetition is normally associated with the giving and carrying out of instructions, this is not by itself necessarily of significance, but it is worth noticing in combination with other factors. This is wall two.

Hector mentions a wall as an objective in 8.173ff.:

“Τρῶες καὶ Λύκιοι καὶ Δάρδανοι ἀγχιμαχῆταί . . .
 γιγνώσκω δ' ὅτι μοι πρόφρων κατένευσε Κρονίων
 νίκην καὶ μέγα κῆδος, ἀτὰρ Δαναοῖσι γε πῆμα·
 νήπιοι, οἳ ἄρα δὴ τάδε τείχεα μηχανόωντο
 ἀβλήχρ' οὐδενόσωρα· τὰ δ' οὐ μένος ἄμὸν ἐρύξει . . .” (8.173, 175–8)

In 8.336 we are told that the ditch is deep, and in 343 that there are stakes set in it and it is broad and deep. This could be either wall one or wall two.

In 9.350 Achilles refers to the ditch and the stakes, and also to the fact that Agamemnon has built this wall without his help, thus making it clear that he has done so since Achilles' withdrawal from the campaign. This passage seems to be making a deliberate connection with Nestor's wall. This may be wall one again.

In 12.1–33 the wall to be destroyed one day by Poseidon, Apollo, and Zeus is near the ships; there is no mention of the funeral pyre or burial mound. Again, it is not clear whether this is wall one or wall two.

In Book 12.34ff., which are largely concerned with Hector's brilliant assault on a wall, we are given an impression of a substantial edifice. As Poseidon has said in 7.449–50—and the second half of 449 and the whole of 450 are repeated in 12.5–6—the wall has been built to protect the ships and no hecatombs have been offered. The repetition implies that at this stage the poet wishes to indicate that this is the wall to which Poseidon objects in Book 7. There are beams and stones in its structure (29), it is well-built (36), it has turreted towers (*δούρατα πύργων* 36), there are stakes set in the ditch (50–63), there are high gates defended by the Lapiths (127ff.), there are battlements (258, 263, 308, etc.), and something called *κροσσάων*, which are only mentioned in this episode; there are also gates with a long bar. Of course, an heroic attack on a defensive wall needs details such as these, but the general impression of the edifice is, nonetheless, surprising after its late and modest introduction in Book 7. In

¹³ The timing here is vague and nebulous; see Kirk's discussion, above n. 8, pp. 286–8.

¹⁴ Kirk's comments on 338, 435–40 (above n. 8, pp. 279–80, 288) that 430–441 was written before 331–40, are appropriate but offer no reason for this order of composition.

¹⁵ An example is 1.11–15, 20–34, 54–71.

¹⁶ I do not think that *ὕπερ* should be taken as the equivalent of *εἰλαρ* here, although Ebeling, *Lexicon Homericum*, does so in order to find a translation for *ὕπερ*.

view of Poseidon's objections, and its proximity to the ships, this may be wall two again.

In 14.30–2 the sequence of the narrative as given suggests that we are being told the origin of this wall; however we interpret *τείχος ἐπὶ πρυμνήσιν* (32), it is plain that it was built when the ships were drawn up onto the beach, which surely would have been when the Greeks first arrived.¹⁷ Now it seems that it has been breached; this should please Poseidon but he is still intent upon encouraging the resistance to Hector. In Book 15, as we have seen, Poseidon capitulates and leaves the fight; Apollo now encourages Hector and the Achaeans:

τάφρω καὶ σκολόπεσσιν ἐνιπλήξαντες ὀρυκτῇ
ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα φέβοντο, δύνοντο δὲ τείχος ἀνάγκῃ. (15.344–5)

This wall is clearly a ditch and rampart, with protective palisades; is it the wall one day to be destroyed by Poseidon and Apollo, or is it the wall breached by Hector? Are they one and the same? At any rate, Apollo kicks it down as a boy will kick over a sandcastle; a whole spear's cast of it to make a causeway for the Trojans. A commentator has said¹⁸ that at this point the wall disappears from the action, but it is still there in lines 384 and 395, and Achilles shouts across it or one like it, making twelve young Trojans die of fright, in his terrific return to action in 18.196–231.

Finally, the issue of the walls seems still less clear cut in Book 20. In 20.29–30 Zeus is afraid that Achilles may destroy 'the wall' before the ordained time:

“νῦν δ’ ὅτε δὴ καὶ θυμὸν ἑταίρου χῶεται αἰνῶς,
δεῖδω μὴ καὶ τείχος ὑπέρμορον ἐξαλαπάξῃ.”

This must mean the wall of Troy, but is disconcerting, as the notion of an ordained time has only been mentioned so far in connection with the Achaean wall: in 2.155, 7.459–63, and in detail in 12.1–33. In 20.48–9 Athena stands by the trench outside the wall—*τάφρον ὀρυκτῇ τείχεος ἐκτός*—to raise her war cry; again, it is not clear which wall this is, but the mention of the ditch may well designate the Achaean wall, and we have the precedent, if it is one, of Achilles shouting across the trench in Book 18. Lastly, in the section concerned with the duel between Aeneas and Achilles, a completely different wall is mentioned for the first time and clearly designated (144–8). Poseidon has suggested that rather than interfere in the duel, the gods who are fighting with him sit on Heracles' wall, which the Trojans and Athena built for him when he fought the sea-monster. Apollo, Ares, and their supporters sit on the hill Kallikolone, another spot not otherwise mentioned in the *Iliad*. The association of a fore-ordained time of destruction with the wall of Troy occurs again in 21.515–17, when Apollo, having made peace with Poseidon, goes to protect the wall they built in case it falls before the fated day.

IS IT ONE WALL OR MORE?

There is a definite discrepancy between what we are told in Book 7 and what goes on elsewhere in the *Iliad*. There is also a discrepancy between the style of wall described in Book 12 and the ditch and rampart referred to elsewhere. In Book 14, Nestor is appalled to discover that the Trojans are overrunning the Greeks and the wall is

¹⁷ See Page's discussion, above n. 8, pp. 315–24.

¹⁸ Janko (n. 11), p. 267, note to ll. 362–7.

shattered. There is still enough of it, however, for Apollo to kick a great breach in it in Book 15. Furthermore, Poseidon seems in Book 15 to be interested only in opposing Hector, and whether or not the wall stands is not an issue at all. Whether Apollo kicks all of it down or only part of it, it is nonetheless clear that Poseidon's compact with Zeus, that he and Apollo will demolish it when Troy has fallen, has no bearing on this episode in the fighting. Finally, Zeus' remark about the fore-ordained destruction of 'the wall' in Book 20, and Apollo's concern in Book 21 for the wall that he and Poseidon built, are disconcerting. If there were ever a case for multiple authorship, this is one.

It looks as though there are at least three¹⁹ threads of narrative here, one of which is a distraction.

The main thread, which was understood by Thucydides, is the defensive wall around the ships of the Greeks, and the desire of the Trojans to breach it. This is the wall that is breached in Book 12, breached again in Book 15, shouted across by Achilles in Book 18, and used as a vantage point by Athena in Book 20. There is no need for concern that this wall is suddenly so elaborate in Book 12, so shattered in Book 14, or so comprehensively breached in Book 15. Book 12 is the story of an assault, brilliantly concluded by the splendid image of Hector, alight with battle-lust, appearing in the breach. An assault narrative would be a failure without a substantial wall to break down.²⁰ Even this section of narrative has its difficulties: the Lapiths at the gates are not mentioned again, Hector disappears and returns, Sarpedon and Glaucus appear where they were not before, and Paris and Aeneas arrive and do nothing.²¹ Book 14 is a part of the narrative of Poseidon's intervention; it should be noted that in this episode, which lasts from the beginning of Book 13 to Poseidon's discomfiture and departure in Book 15, the wall is not depicted as any concern of Poseidon's whatever. The remainder of Book 15 is Apollo's: his gleeful destruction of the rampart—and by comparison with the edifice in Book 12 it is a rampart—belongs entirely to the narrative of the moment, and the dissonance with the ideas expressed earlier about the wall is no concern to the poet. This thread of narrative has no connection with the idea that any wall, let alone an Achaean wall, is an offence to Poseidon.

The second thread is the wall built at the suggestion of Nestor. It may well be that Nestor's suggestion is the way in which the compiling poet chose to incorporate an episode maintaining the tradition of the Achaean wall, but it falls in the context of a truce for the purposes of burying the dead, and makes no sense in the context of either the suggestion of the truce or its execution. Worse, when he objects to the wall Poseidon mysteriously uses the word *αὐτε*:²²

¹⁹ There is a reference in 20.144–52 to the wall built for Heracles by the Trojans and Athena. This seems to belong to the cycle of tales referring to Heracles and Troy, and has nothing to do with Poseidon, but it becomes his business in so far as the poet attributes to him the idea that the gods should use it as a grandstand.

²⁰ It is curious that this is the only assault narrative in the *Iliad* itself, and there is no corresponding attack on the Trojan wall, as the attempt described in 16.698–711 is abortive. The only surviving narrative in Homer of a successful attack on the Trojan wall is, of course, that in the *Odyssey*, which refers to a subterfuge.

²¹ See Hainsworth's discussion ad loc. (n. 9), pp. 313ff.

²² I find that *αὐτε* is used in an adversative sense; it may be a weak conjunction simply meaning *but* (1.237, 404, etc.), or occur more strongly in contexts of exchanging conversation (1.206, 237, etc.), acting in turn (2.105, 107, etc.), repeated action, particularly with such expressions as *εἴ ποτε* or *ὑστερον* (1.579, 7.291, 377, 396, etc.), or with verbs of motion to convey the notion of return. Here it seems to convey the notion that the Achaeans *in their turn* are building a wall.

οὐχ ὁράας ὅτι δὴ αὐτε κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοὶ
τείχος ἐτείχισσαντο νεῶν ὕπερ... (7.448–9)

The distraction is the element of narrative starting with Poseidon's objections to a wall in 7.442–63 and linked to the tale of its destruction in 12.1–33 by the mention of the ships, repetition of the line and a half referring to the lack of hecatombs, and by the reference to the Achaeans in 29. Whether or not it is an echo of a Near Eastern destruction myth, what is still in question is why such material should be deployed in the context of relations between Zeus and Poseidon. This context is so important that it is actually repeated in the *Odyssey*, and therefore merits discussion here.

PHAEACIA

In *Odyssey* 8 Athena, in the form of a little girl, very respectfully tells Odysseus where he is: he is in Phaeacia, where the inhabitants were given their skill with ships by the Earthshaker (7.35).

Alcinous remembers what Nausithous said about Poseidon at 8.564ff.; he resents the way the Phaeacians share their skill on the sea with others and one day will have his revenge. This is picked up at 13.125–83, when the Earthshaker remonstrates with Zeus, reminding him of their agreement, which was that Odysseus is supposed to struggle all the way home, not be carted in comfort by the wretched Phaeacians. This interchange is very like that over the business of the wall at *Iliad* 7.442ff. We should note that Zeus is able to press Poseidon to a compromise here just as he was able to persuade Poseidon to curb his resentment in *Iliad* 7:

ὦ πόποι, ἐννοσίγαι' εὐρυσθενές, ὅλον ἔειπες. (Il. 7.455 = Od. 13.140)

Zeus reassures Poseidon and proceeds to a compromise. He refers to him (142) as *πρεσβύτατον καὶ ἀριστον*; this is curious as Zeus is definitely the elder in *Iliad* 13.355. Perhaps Zeus is excluding himself. Then comes the punishment of the Phaeacians; see above on 8.564ff. Alcinous recalls his earlier words:

“ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ με παλαίφατα θέσφαθ' ἱκάνει
πατὴρ ἐμὸν, ὃς ἔφασκε Ποσειδάων' ἀγάσασθαι
ἡμῖν, οὐνεκα πομποὶ ἀπήμονές εἰμεν ἀπάντων...” (13.172–4)

The features to notice in these two episodes are:

- the implacability of Poseidon;
- his resentment of humankind and their aspirations;
- the truculence of his appeal to Zeus.²³

The thematic similarity of these two passages is often commented upon; what I want to emphasize is the light they shed not only on the relationship between the two poems in their present form but on the importance of Poseidon. It has been remarked²⁴ that nothing in the *Iliad* is repeated or referred to in the *Odyssey*. I see here

²³ This kind of grudging resentment is attributed to Zeus only in the Prometheus cycle, so vividly exploited by Aeschylus in his portrait of Zeus as brutal tyrant in *PV*.

²⁴ L. M. Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), basing her study on the understanding that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* interpret material available to the poets, mentions Munro's law on p. 15: D. B. Munro (ed.), *Homer's Odyssey*, vol. 2, *Books 13–24* (Oxford, 1901),

a clear reference between the poems, indicating selection of material and similarities of approach beyond coincidence. Poseidon's attitude is important to each narrative, and the repeated line suggests a corpus of stock material concerning the god.²⁵

WHICH WALL IS A CONCERN TO POSEIDON AND WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH HIM?

What may well provide the key to the whole question of these walls is the comment from Zeus in 20.30. He is afraid that Achilles may destroy 'the wall' before the ordained time. Apollo expresses the same fear about the wall of Troy that Poseidon built, with or without his help,²⁶ in 21.515–17. If in fact Zeus is referring to this wall, then the passage at the beginning of Book 12 may have a context.

It may be that the destruction narrative in 12.1–33 appears to complement the episode in 7.445–63, but has a basis in another tradition. I noted earlier that certain features of 12.1–33 set it apart from other sections of the narrative. The connection is clearly made with the conversation between Zeus and Poseidon in Book 7, but the catastrophe described is more appropriate to the sweeping away of Troy itself than a mere rampart. The number of terms not otherwise used in the *Iliad* or in some cases the Homeric poems may indicate that we have here the elements not of a cosmic destruction myth but of an attitude of Poseidon to Troy itself. The notion of Zeus, Apollo, and Poseidon joining together to sweep the walls of Troy from the face of the earth has symmetry: what the gods give, they take away. In 21.435–460 Poseidon says that he built the walls of Troy at Zeus' behest; it thus makes sense that he should be the one to destroy them.

Why, then, should Poseidon's objection to walls be attached to the idea of an Achaean wall? The answer may be that the compiling poet, faced with several threads of narrative, worked under an obligation to depict Poseidon in a particular way. The poet was concerned with Poseidon's attitude to wall-building, and clearly sees it as Poseidon's prerogative. In the thread of narrative that connects Poseidon with walls, the Achaean wall is seen as competition to the Trojan wall, and this is why Poseidon says *αὐτε* in 7.448. It seems likely that the defensive wall built around the ships at the beginning of the siege was a well-established part of the narrative; it may be that the compiling poet was compelled to make insertions in the narrative of Nestor's truce in order to reconcile different traditions. If the references to the walls in Books 7 and 12, as well as Achilles' remarks in Book 9, are seen as insertions made in order to retain important material about Poseidon and Zeus, things start to come together.

POSEIDON AND ZEUS

The overriding theme in these episodes is the concept of rivalry between Zeus and Poseidon. The whole of the *Iliad*, to a lesser extent the *Odyssey*, and the Hesiodic

p. 325; D. L. Page, *The Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford, 1955), p. 158 thought this meant the poet had never heard of the *Iliad*; Slatkin with G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1979), pp. 20ff., sees this as deliberate editorial exclusion.

²⁵ There is, however, a difference in emphasis. The episodes of the wall, in all their complexity, are still merely episodes in the *Iliad*, whereas the episode of Poseidon and the Phaeacians is the story of Poseidon's attitude to Odysseus writ small. The latter would be the whole topic of the poem were it not for the figure of Athena.

²⁶ There is a discrepancy between 7.445–6 and 21.446–9; in the former Poseidon says that he and Apollo built the walls; in the latter that he himself built them and Apollo tended the flocks.

corpus vigorously assert the ascendancy of Zeus. His right to this ascendancy is expressed in dynastic terms of primogeniture, all the more striking for being so intricately contrived. The episode from 13.1 to 15.225 shows three deities in a piece of classic palace meddling, with Hera as sister-consort holding the balance of power, exactly as Thetis does in Book 1.²⁷ Poseidon's complaint as he quits the field in Book 15 has the humorous overtones of a badly written will:

Τὴν δὲ μέγ' ὀχθήσας προσέφη κλυτὸς ἐννοσίγαιος·
 “ὦ πόποι, ἦ ῥ' ἄγαθὸς περ ἔων ὑπέροπλον ἔειπεν,
 εἴ μ' ὁμοτίμον ἔοντα βίῃ ἀέκοντα καθέξει.
 τρεῖς γάρ τ' ἐκ Κρόνου εἰμὲν ἀδελφεοί, οὓς τέκετο Ῥέα,
 Ζεὺς καὶ ἐγώ, τρίτατος δ' Αἴδης, ἐνέροισιν ἀνάσσω.
 τριχθὰ δὲ πάντα δέδασται, ἕκαστος δ' ἔμμορε τιμῆς·
 ἦτοι ἔγων ἔλαχον πολιὴν ἅλα ναιέμεν αἰεὶ
 παλλομένων, Αἴδης δ' ἔλαχε ζόφον ἡρόεντα,
 Ζεὺς δ' ἔλαχ' οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἐν αἰθέρι καὶ νεφέλῃσι·
 γαῖα δ' ἔτι ξυνή πάντων καὶ μακρὸς Ὀλυμπος.
 τῷ ῥα καὶ οὗ τι Διὸς βέομαι φρέσιν . . .” (15.184–94)

This conflict is seen in three ways: as a dynastic struggle, as a struggle for authority over wall-building, and as a struggle for authority over sea-faring. There is more than a hint that both the latter are godlike activities, and not to be undertaken without due regard for the god.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

We could say that these and other such episodes in the saga of Troy exist in this form to transmit information about the gods and their importance. The detail about heroes and genealogies is by comparison incidental. In the Homeric poems, Poseidon is a jealous god. He resents wall-building and navigation, two fundamental skills of the growing community. The voice of reason, pointing out that no deity need be threatened by such endeavours, is allocated to Zeus, as the future embodiment of those principles important to the established community: justice, hospitality, the keeping of oaths.

A COMMENT FROM ATTIC TRAGEDY

In the prologue to *The Trojan Women*, Euripides gives the following words to Poseidon (1–7):

ἦκω λιπὼν Αἰγαῖον ἄλμυρὸν βάθος
 πόντου Ποσειδῶν, ἔνθα Νηρηίδων χοροὶ
 κάλλιστον ἵχνος ἐξελίσσουσιν ποδός.
 ἐξ οὗ γὰρ ἄμφι τήνδε Τρωϊκὴν χθόνα
 Φοῖβός τε κἀγὼ λαῖνους πύργους πέριξ
 ὀρθοῖσιν ἔθεμεν κανόσιν, οὐποτ' ἐκ φρενῶν
 εὐνοὶ ἀπέστη τῶν ἐμῶν Φρυγῶν πόλει . . .

We should note here that Euripides is quite clear that Poseidon built these walls with Apollo, that Poseidon has always been friendly to the Trojans, and that he and Athena do not see eye to eye about Troy. Equally clear is the caution with which Athena approaches Poseidon at 48ff.:

²⁷ For discussion see Slatkin (n. 24), *passim*.

ἔξεστι τὸν γένει μὲν ἄγχιστον πατρὸς
 μέγαν τε δαίμον' ἐν θεοῖς τε τίμιον,
 . . . προσενέπειν;

This is not consistent with loyalties depicted in the *Iliad*; in 20.31–40 Zeus despatches the gods to join the battle; down to the ships go Hera, Athena, Poseidon, Hermes, and Hephaestus. The gods line up in 67–74: Apollo against Poseidon, Athena against Ares, Artemis against Hera, Hermes against Leto, Xanthus/Scamander against Hephaestus. There is no hint in the *Iliad* of the antipathy between Poseidon and Athena that is such a feature of myths concerning Athens.

This discrepancy clearly shows how myth could be manipulated to express different ideas. Much work is now being done to show how myth was used to serve the ideology of the city state.²⁸ Tragedy is the product of the city state in the full flush of its success; this play was written for a city that counted among its local myths the account of the competition between Athena and Poseidon to be patron of the city of Athens. There is not space to go into all the aspects of that myth here, but it should be noted that *eris* between Poseidon and Athena is an important feature of it, regardless of the Homeric tradition. This implies at the very least that adhering to the details of a tradition was not a priority in the retelling of myth. Some of the irrationalities in the portrayal of Poseidon in the Homeric poems can be attributed to cultural change reflected in the compilation of a wide range of material over a considerable time; I want to suggest that others are included knowingly, to accommodate particular conceptions of the god.

THE EARTHSHAKER

Poseidon is the earthshaker; as such he is a threat to all buildings. He is also the earth-holder; as such he should be propitiated by builders. We know that the distinctive Mycenaean cyclopean walls, which were resistant to earthquakes, were an object of admiration in subsequent periods;²⁹ perhaps it is not outrageous to suggest that people felt the vulnerability of their constructions compared with these remains. Poseidon is also associated with the sea; this is consistent in references in the *Iliad*, in the narrative of the *Odyssey*, in subsequent literature, and in the iconographical representations that survive. Furthermore, in the *Odyssey* his objections to the technology of building are transferred to the technology of travelling in ships.

Given the sources available, it is idle to speculate on the nature and function of Poseidon before the Olympic pantheon was established as a concept. However, it is possible that his Homeric attributes are neither so complex nor so irrational as at first appears. The conflict between Zeus and Poseidon makes sense in the context of the need to subsume the separate attributes of the pantheon to the Pan-Hellenizing ideals embodied in Zeus. When it comes to the puzzling Earthshaker himself, it may be that an active and growing maritime culture actually conceived the shaking of the earth as emanating from the sea.³⁰ Under the influence of volcanic eruption, islands will

²⁸ See N. Loraux, *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship and the Division Between the Sexes* (Princeton, 1993), and *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA, 1986); also J. Maitland, 'Dynasty and family in the Athenian city state: a view from Attic tragedy', *CQ* 42 (1992), 26–40.

²⁹ See, for instance, Pausanias 2.16.5, 2.25.8, etc.

³⁰ This impression is confirmed by C. Doumas, 'The elements at Akrotiri', *Thera and the Aegean World III: Papers to be Presented at the Third International Congress, Santorini, Greece*,

disappear and appear in the sea; certain activities associated with Poseidon are suggestive in this context. In Medea's song, Pindar, *Pythian* 4.20ff., Euphemus, son of Poseidon and one of the Argonauts, receives a clod of earth from a θεός ἀνέρι εἰδόμενος. He is the Triton; he says that he is Eurypylus, son of Poseidon Earthshaker and Earth-holder. The clod was washed overboard and became Kalliste, later Thera. Another story tells us that during the Gigantomachy Poseidon hurled a rock at the giant Ephialtes;³¹ it fell into the sea and became the island of Nisyros. Tidal waves may accompany both volcanic eruptions and earthquakes;³² the sea will often withdraw ominously before returning in full force. Thus did the Earthshaker receive his maritime attributes.

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3rd–9th September, 1989, 28; Doulas notes that Seneca (*Nat. Quaest.* III.14) records this as the opinion of Thales. The scholium ad loc. (Maass-Dindorf), on ἐννοεῖν γαί' εὐρυπυλῆς II. 7.455 notes that Thales said that the land was borne by the water.

³¹ This giant is otherwise known as Polybotes. There is confusion in the tradition; for instance Pausanias, 1.2.4, notes that going up from Piraeus there is a temple of Demeter and near it [a statue of] Poseidon on horseback, throwing a spear at the giant Polybotes. Pausanias says the inscription in his time refers not to Poseidon but to someone else.

³² Pausanias shows the extent of ancient opinion on this topic when in 7.24.7–11, in the context of destruction by Poseidon, he describes warning signs and types of earthquake. He notes particularly in 7.24.12–13 how Helice was destroyed by earthquake and tidal wave.