

### XVIII. Homer and the Alphabet

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Few battles have been fought so bitterly and for so long and with such indecisive results as that which scholarship knows as the Homeric Question. It is true that many telling blows have been struck by both Unitarians and Analysts: but these seem to have done little to resolve the issue beyond dislodging the incautious on either side from untenable positions. It is also true that the most successful scholar in the field, Milman Parry, was conspicuously non-belligerent: but both sides claim him as their champion. And whether one man composed—in any sense that the word may legitimately carry—either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, or both, in substantially the form in which we now possess them, is as open a question as ever. The object of this paper is to direct attention to a possibly helpful source of information which may promote a new conception of the problem. I refer to the development of the Greek alphabet.

By the fourth century B.C. the Ionic alphabet of twenty-four letters (essentially unchanged even today) was established throughout the Hellenic world as a standard script. It had not always been so. The Greek alphabet was originally simply an adaptation to Greek of the twenty-two symbols of the Phoenician consonantal alphabet. The exact date and place are irrelevant to my argument.<sup>1</sup> What is important, however, is that the initial

<sup>1</sup> The most likely date seems to be about 750 B.C., possibly a decade or two later. Concerning the place I agree with Cook and Woodhead, *AJA* 63 (1959) 175 ff., that this was in the eastern Mediterranean but outside Greece (possibly, as they suggest, Al Mina; but there are other candidates). The adaptor of the Phoenician symbols will have been a bilingual Greek. Benedict Einarson has convinced me that the signs of the Phoenician alphabet were taken over with the Phoenician names of the letters, learned parrot-fashion, and applied acrophonically, so that even the isolation of the vowels—generally imputed to the brilliance of the Greek genius—was largely a matter of luck: thus *'-aleph* was heard as *A-lpha*, *H-e* as *E*, *CH-eth* as *H-eta* or *E-ta*, *Y-od* as *I-ota*, *'-oyin* as *O-*, and *W-au* as *U-* (the Greeks did not hear the Semitic consonants at the beginning of these names). Wade-Gery's suggestion (*Poet of the Iliad* [Cambridge 1952] 13) that the alphabet was devised as a notation for Greek verse is impossible,

adaptation spread to various parts of Greece before the task of accommodating the symbols to the Greek language had been completed. During the next three hundred years a variety of local Greek alphabets competed for supremacy, each exhibiting differences from the others of a small but important nature, and the most far-reaching of these differences was to lead to the alphabetic breach between Greece and Rome. They had arisen from certain necessary adjustments which the original sponsor of the Greek alphabet had not foreseen. It will not disturb us here that a detailed account and explanation of these differences is highly controversial. Our chief concern will be to determine, if we can, how the history of the written text of the Homeric poems is related to the evolution of the Greek alphabet from its earliest form to the standard Ionic alphabet of twenty-four letters. I shall anticipate my conclusion by suggesting that the Ionic was the alphabet in which the Homeric poems were first written down; and that it was the influence of the first text of Homer which caused the Ionic alphabet to become the standard script of the Greeks and in so doing to effect the abandonment of all the other Greek local alphabets, in particular the firmly established script of the Athenians.

The chief and indeed only obstacle to this suggestion is a theory held by most Homeric scholars that our texts of Homer were at some stage transliterated from the old Attic alphabet into the Ionic.<sup>2</sup> If the theory is correct, no *eta* or *omega* or *xi* or *psi* appeared in the original text of Homer; nor did doubled consonants or vowels; elided vowels were written, and so was the digamma.

I begin my demolition of the theory<sup>3</sup> by refuting the external

but a refutation would involve a lengthy argument. Nor, should anyone raise the question, do I think poets had any hand in devising the use of *eta* for *ê* and *omega* for *ô*, since the sounds were originally distinct in quality more than quantity (Schwyzer, *Griech. Gram.* 1.145 ff.).

<sup>2</sup> The evidence for this theory is clearly and concisely assembled in Appendix I of Gilbert Murray's *Rise of the Greek Epic*<sup>4</sup> (Oxford 1934). Further details are to be found in Rudolf Herzog's *Die Umschrift der älteren griechischen Literatur in das ionische Alphabet* (Basel 1912) and A. Meillet's "Sur une édition linguistique d'Homère," *REG* 31 (1918) 277-314. The theory forms the basis of Chapter 1, vol. 1, of P. Chantraine's *Grammaire homérique*<sup>2</sup> (Paris 1948-53), the latest work on the subject.

<sup>3</sup> A murderous attack on the theory forms a particularly enjoyable chapter of Wilamowitz's *Homerische Untersuchungen* (Berlin 1884) (Part 2, Chapter 3). In this paper I have used rather different arguments and come to very different conclusions.

evidence from the scholia. Of course, if the theory were fact, we should expect abundant and conclusive testimony from the ancient commentators; we should expect mention of texts known to have exhibited the old script; indeed, we should expect a widespread and wordy discussion of a matter so dear to the philologist's heart. But all that can be produced is eight trivial passages, in which ancient commentators give us, not evidence, but conjectural readings which they endeavor to support by an appeal to the old Attic script. I cite only two passages in full, but give sufficient of the remainder to show the worthlessness of the evidence:

1. *Il.* 7.238: οἷδ' ἐπὶ δεξιᾷ, οἷδ' ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ νωμῆσαι βῶν.

The scholiast in TV declares that the correct reading is βούν (the conjecture of Aristophanes) and that *BON* was misinterpreted by the transliterators. Now βούν is a common word in Attic: no Athenian could possibly have mistaken *BON* for anything else. Nothing else exists. Here then we have a case of *difficilior lectio potior*: it may be original, it may be a mistake; it cannot be a misinterpretation of the word correctly handed down as βούν elsewhere in Homer. Arguing from the Sanskrit *gām* that βῶν is original, Wackernagel suggests<sup>4</sup> that Attic copyists "kannten bei βούς die Bedeutung 'Schild' nicht mehr. Das βῶν von H 238 war für sie ein Fremdwort: so liessen sie es unangetastet. Dagegen wo sonst βῶν vorlag, war es ihrem βούν gleichwertig, und so setzten sie dieses dafür ein." This is reasonable, and it necessitates that the orthography βῶν is original: otherwise βόν would have been "unangetastet."

2. *Od.* 1.274 ff.:

μνηστῆρας μὲν ἐπὶ σφέτερα σκίδνασθαι ἄνωχθι,  
μητέρα δ', εἴ οἱ θυμὸς ἐφορμᾶται γαμέεσθαι,  
ἄψ ἴτω . . .

Conceivably the last verse began ἄψ ἵμεν (so Bentley) in a pre-Homeric version, and Page demonstrates<sup>5</sup> that there has been stitching here (which I attribute to Homer). As the passage stands, there is an arresting anacoluthon: μητέρα is accusative,

<sup>4</sup> *Sprachliche Untersuchungen zu Homer* (Göttingen 1916) 12 f.

<sup>5</sup> D. L. Page, *Homeric Odyssey* (Oxford 1955) 55 ff.

because the poet is aligning it with *μνηστοήρας*; but after the conditional clause has intervened, he ends the sentence with a finite verb requiring a nominative subject.<sup>6</sup> The scholiast here fancies his hand at emendation, and conjectures the simple (but unnecessary) *μήτηρ*, arguing that *METEP* was misunderstood as *μητερ*, and then some ignorant person added an *alpha*. It is difficult to see how anyone, faced with *METEP* . . . *ITO*, could fail to render this as *μήτηρ* . . . *ἴτω* in the Ionic alphabet, and write *μητερ* instead. The vocative is obviously out of place, and *μήτηρ* is, one would have thought, the only possible transliteration. Clearly, the theory of transliteration has here been conjured up to support an unsound conjecture prompted by unusual syntax.

3. *Il.* 11.104: *ὦ ποτ' Ἀχιλλεύς*: most MSS.

*ὄν ποτ' Ἀχιλλεύς*: the conjecture of Zenodotus.

Aristonicus explains Zenodotus' error as due to misreading of *O* in the old script and then adding a *nu*. The explanation will not hold water: what Zenodotus misunderstood was not the old Attic alphabet, but the dual *ποιμαίνοντ'* in line 106, and he "emended" *ὦ* to agree with the supposed *ποιμαίνοντα*.

4. *Il.* 14.241: *ἐπισχοίης*: most MSS.

*ἐπίσχοιες*: several MSS. and Herodian.

*ἐπίσχοιας*: *β*<sup>9</sup>, favoured by Wackernagel.<sup>7</sup>

The scholiast of A informs us that *—οιες* was due to a mistake of the transliterators. But this is merely an attempt to find an argument to justify the choice of the reading *—οίης*, and does not explain the papyrus reading. All three forms are philologically anomalous, and the difficulty would seem to be caused by something other than a mistransliteration.

5. *Il.* 21.127: *ὄς κε φάγησι*: MSS.

*ὦς κε φάγησι*: the conjecture of Aristophanes.

Porphyrus attests<sup>8</sup> that Aristophanes expressly based his conjecture on the theory of a mistransliteration. But the manuscript reading defies objection, so that this passage too fails to lend support to the theory.

<sup>6</sup> So Chantraine (above, note 2) 2.16, correctly.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.* (above, note 4) 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Quaest. Hom.* 8.287 Schrader.

6. *Il.* 21.363: *μελδόμενος*: MSS.

*μελδομένου*: the conjecture of Crates.

The Geneva scholiast argues that *ΜΕΛΔΟΜΕΝΟ* was misunderstood and that the *Umschreiber* added a *sigma*: but the conjecture is wrong, and the scholiast's explanation is therefore conjectural and not based on documentary evidence.

7. *Od.* 1.52: *δλοόφρωνος*: MSS.

The scholiast (followed by one or two MSS.) suggests that the old script read *ΟΛΟΟΦΡΟΝ*, i.e. *δλοόφρων*, then that "somebody misunderstood it" and added —*os*. Stanford adequately defends the manuscript reading, so that the conjecture, and with it the explanation, falls to the ground.

8. *Od.* 1.254: That the manuscripts here vary between *δέύη* and *δέύει* should cause no one to think of a change of alphabet, for the ending of the second person singular indicative middle fluctuates in texts where no such consideration arises. The scholiast tells us that *δέύη* was the reading of Aristophanes' text and that this implied that Athene was addressing Telemachus ("you have need of"—manifestly correct). When, however, he goes on to suggest that *δέύει* may be the better reading because the two words were once identical in the old script, I can only imagine that he is trying to introduce a third person singular (impersonal) "there is need of." The value of this commentator's support for the theory of an old script is, of course, nil.

From a consideration of the ancient testimony it emerges that every single instance adduced is both invalid and conjectural; it emerges that no ancient commentator whose work is extant had certain knowledge that the text of Homer was ever written in any script but the Ionic. Moreover, even the false conjectures of the ancients are limited to claims that *eta* and *omega* had once no place in the text. There is no suggestion that Homer's text had ever displayed *digamma* or *heta* or *koppa*; or that doubled consonants and vowels were expressed but once; or that *xi* and *phi* and *psi* were ever wanting in copies of the poems. And yet examples of such orthography were known to the ancients and are found in many an inscription. The *digamma* is mentioned by several grammarians, of whom one, Apollonius Dyscolus (*De*

*pron.* 136c), expressly attests its usage by Alcman. Simply from their silence about the *digamma* in Homer, one might justifiably infer that no text of Homer exhibited this letter. Touching the matter of *eta* and *omega* I suggest that, being familiar with local alphabets (especially the Attic) which did not employ these letters, the ancients referred to spellings and conventions in these alphabets as ἡ ἀρχαία σημασία, ἡ παλαιὰ γραμματική and the like, “the old style of writing,” meaning styles in usage before the Ionic alphabet was standardized. This is indicated by Galen<sup>9</sup> when he mentions the difficulties he has in reading old medical documents: he specifically refers only to a change of orthography from *epsilon* and *omicron* to *eta* and *omega*, to which he does not himself bear witness (ἐν τοῖς πάνυ παλαιοῖς ἐδάφοις γεγράφθαι οὕτω φασίν); one cannot suppose him to be referring to Hippocrates’ own writing, which must have been the standardized Ionic alphabet with *eta* and *omega*, but to the writings of non-Ionians. Similarly with the commentators on literary texts: they knew of inscriptions and other writing which lacked *eta* and *omega* and perhaps even of the conversion of legal documents so written into the standard Ionic alphabet. But here their knowledge stops: no details are given—no names, no dates; never once do we hear of a metagrammatized *version* made from an older copy. The scholiasts seem to have assumed, quite erroneously, that *literary* texts had been conscientiously recopied from beginning to end, scribes patiently altering, where appropriate, *epsilons* to *etas*, etc. It is significant that the old scholars only invoke the theory to support their own shaky conjectures. Never are we given gratuitous and unprejudiced information: we are not told that the first line of the *Iliad* (for example) was originally written thus and thus, or that the ancients had trouble in distinguishing between τόν and τῶν or φίλος and φίλους, or any other information of casual interest. Corruption of older forms and interpolation of later forms—above all, Attic—it is reasonable to expect, and it would be remarkable if the text of Homer was immune from this. But that any methodical revision of script has occurred may confidently be denied. In short, antiquity knew of no *metacharactêrismos* of Homer. Nor did it know of a *metacharactêrismos* of any other author. The only two pieces of alleged evidence are soon shown

<sup>9</sup> *Opera*, ed. Kühn, vol. 16.468; 17, part 2.111; 18, part 2.778.

to be valueless. The first is the scholiast's remark on Pindar, *Nem.* 1.24 that the correct reading is ἐσλοῦς, the conjecture of Aristarchus, which was originally written ἐσλός in the "old style" and overlooked by the *metacharactêrizontes*: but from the reference to the antistrophe it seems that Aristarchus made his conjecture on metrical grounds, as he did according to the scholiast at *Ol.* 2.97; and since the literary Doric accusative plural in -ōs (attested by the meter) is found at *Nem.* 3.29, it is probable that confusion between -os and -ous occurred because they were both authentic inflections. The second is the scholion on Euripides, *Phoen.* 682: for the genuine reading σοί νιν ἔκγονοι (so all editors), the false conjecture σῶι νιν ἔκγόνωι is proposed, and reference made to the legislation passed in Euclides' archonship: as Valckenaer points out, the scholiast had not read the fragment of Euripides in which the name ΘΗΣΕΥΣ is described as to its spelling, and had wrongly jumped to the conclusion that every *eta* and *omega* had been written ε and ο before 403 B.C.

The second part of my disputation against the transliteration-theory concerns those passages of Homer in which scholars have succeeded in restoring philologically correct forms by its invocation. Here we must decide, not whether the forms existed at an early stage of the tradition, nor even whether Homer was aware of them, but whether they were ever written. It will be my contention that the "restored" forms existed only on the lips of early bards and never occupied a place in the text. The transliteration-theory is seriously impaired by the fact that the Greeks of historical times seem not to have possessed any knowledge of some of these reconstructed forms: had these forms occurred when the art of writing was known, scribes familiar with them would have found some orthographical device to preserve them. For instance, the genitive singular of the second declension at one stage passed through the form -oo: about this there is no doubt, nor that such a form must be postulated in several passages of Homer to secure a philologically and metrically correct verse. However, neither Greek literature nor Greek monuments nor Greek tradition reveals a single trace of the form. What we find in Homer is this:

*Il.* 15.66: Ἰλίου προπάροιθε (i.e. Ἰλίου);

*Il.* 15.554: ἀνεψίου κταμένοιο (i.e. ἀνεψίοο).

I see no reason to doubt that Homer himself and possibly his immediate predecessors inherited such phrases without being aware of the original inflection; Homer would naturally be aware that in lengthening the penultimate vowel of *Ἰλίου* and *ἀνεψίου* he was having recourse to a traditional metrical license. Now according to the transliteration-theory *Ἰλίοο* was written *IAIO* (why on earth the doubled vowel was written only once, I cannot imagine: would any accountant write 22 as 2?)<sup>10</sup> and this incorrectly transliterated. But the theory fails to account for *Il.* 9.64 *ἐπιδημίου ὀκρυόεντος*. It is agreed that this represents an original *ἐπιδημίοο κρυόεντος*. The word *κρυόεις* is well known to Homer, and on the transliteration-theory the letters should have been misinterpreted as *ἐπιδημίου κρυόεντος* with a meter-saving lengthening of the penultimate vowel in the first word. In this instance and in many others, as Webster has argued,<sup>11</sup> the error is "due to mishearing; a young oral poet misinterprets an older poet's rendering." Accordingly, much of the conjectural support for the transliteration-theory I reject and attribute to "mishearing." Both Murray and Chantraine admit that in certain instances analogy and not faulty transliteration may be at work: thus at *Il.* 24.207 *ὤμησης* is not "wrong for *ὤμεστης*" but a formation modeled on *ὄρχηστής*, and at *Od.* 10.510 *ὠλεσίκαρπος* has not usurped the place of *οὐλεσίκαρπος* but has been influenced by *ὠλεσα*, *πανώλης*, etc. At *Od.* 8.73 the tradition points to a hypothetical *κλέε' ἀνδρῶν*: I suppose this to have occurred when the tradition was oral; in the course of time the fact that the first word was elided was forgotten<sup>12</sup> and an *alpha*-termination disiderated; hence someone remodeled the words as *κλέα ἀνδρῶν*, rescuing sense and maintaining inflectional propriety at the cost of a mere hiatus.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore unnecessary to suppose that *KAEANAPON* was misinterpreted or even written.

<sup>10</sup> Meillet (*op. cit.* [above, note 2] 284) even wonders whether *σῆεσαι* (e.g. *Od.* 9.400) is a mistransliteration of *ΣΠΕΞΙ*, the correct form being *σπέεσαι*!

<sup>11</sup> T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London 1958) 97.

<sup>12</sup> Passages like *Il.* 24.154 *ὄς ἄξει* (= *ὄς ɤ' ἄξει*) do not encourage Chantraine's notion (*op. cit.* [above, note 2] 1.6) that elided syllables were either pronounced or written in the original text: else in these cases we should expect *epsilon* to have been preserved and given rise to one of the usual *digamma*-surrogates (*gamma* or *tau*); since the *digamma*-surrogate is absent here (where of all places one would most expect to find it), it does not look as if either the *digamma* or the *epsilon* was ever written at all.

<sup>13</sup> "Intolerable," says Palmer intolerantly, *apud* M. Platnauer, *Fifty Years of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford 1959) 18.



There is no evidence that the *digamma* ever appeared in the first or any subsequent written text of Homer (at least, not in antiquity): Meillet's *Urtext* with such spellings as ΔΕΡΦΟΝ (*Il.* 2.460) and ΑΦΕΛΙΟΙΟ (*Il.* 22.135) would, had it existed, have without doubt secured notice somewhere.<sup>14</sup> Pisani does indeed profess<sup>15</sup> to find "Spuren von geschriebenem Digamma im homerischen Text," but his twenty-odd examples all turn out to be either mistakes or metrical corrections (e.g. *Il.* 15.268: ῥίμφα εἰ: one MS. has a schoolboyish attempt to remove the "hiatus" with ῥίμφα γε; this goes back, we are gravely informed, to ΠΙΜΦΑ ΓΕ from an earlier ΠΙΜΦΑ ΦΕ!).<sup>16</sup> I do not know how Homer pronounced ῥίμφα εἰ. It is possible that he left the pronoun in hiatus, conscious that such prosody was sanctioned by tradition; possible, also, that other metrical irregularities were similarly smoothed over, that in *Il.* 18.288 he pronounced μέροπες ἄνθρωποι as μέροπεσς ἄνθρωποι, and in *Il.* 24.154 ὃς ἄξει (ὃς ɸ' ἄξει) as ὃσς ἄξει.

At first sight ἔγρετο (*Il.* 7.434; 24.789) in a context which demands the meaning "was gathered" seems like a certain misreading of ΕΓΡΕΤΟ instead of the correct ἤγρετο (yet note that this form is not found elsewhere in Homer): however, the verbs ἀγείρω and ἐγείρω, which share an aorist ἤγειρα, are commonly confused, at *Il.* 23.287, for example, where the MSS. are divided between ἄγερθεν and ἔγερθεν, and at *Od.* 20.123, where the MSS. are divided between ἀγρόμεναι and ἐγρόμεναι: these confusions cannot possibly be imputed to an incorrect transliteration. Such mistakes were made orally and may go back to Homer himself.

What tells heavily against the supposition that the epics were once written in an old alphabet without *eta* or *omega* is the "dis-

<sup>14</sup> For example, in Tryphon, *Pathê lexêôn* 11; *Anec. Oxon.* 4.323.3 Cramer; Schol. Dion. 778.9; Apollonius Dyscolus, *De pron.* 136c; Terentianus Maurus, in *Gramm. Lat.* Keil, 6.344; and our other ancient authorities.

<sup>15</sup> *RhM* 97 (1954) 166 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Another typical example of Pisani's is *Il.* 6.284:

γε ἴδοιμι: most MSS. (correctly).

γ' εἶδοιμι: about six MSS.

γε εἶδοιμι: one MS. (13th cent.).

Pisani argues that the solitary manuscript most nearly preserves an original γε εἶδοιμι. But it is clear that γε ἴδοιμι comes first; then by wrong division or to close the hiatus γ' εἶδοιμι comes next. A solitary manuscript then writes the elision in *scriptio plena*.

tracted" forms such as *Il.* 17.637 ὀρόωντες. A correct explanation of these forms is given by Parry<sup>17</sup>: minstrels, who had heard their masters singing ὀράοντες but who were accustomed in ordinary speech to utter ὀρώωντες, succumbed in time to the influence of the vernacular; whilst preserving the accentuation and metrical properties of the tradition they began to impose on the syllables -άο- a "distracted" form of their ordinary pronunciation, i.e. they began to sing ὀρόωντες. This was an established feature of epic before the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were written down. As Parry observes: "That this change was a purely oral process is shown by the fact that when the root had an *alpha* there was a tendency to keep the genuine uncontracted forms, as in αἰοιδιάει (the voice repeating in -άει the movement of αἰοι-), κραδάων, ναιετάουσι, etc." Now unless ὀρόωντες was so written in the first text of Homer, it is difficult to see how the form could ever have arisen. Wackernagel's view<sup>18</sup> that an original ὀράοντες was corrupted in the course of the tradition postulates a chain of improbable errors; nor would these corruptions have been universal; an original ὀράοντες (or ὀρέοντες) would have been unaffected by transliteration and in all probability would have been preserved. If, on the theory of an original text in the Attic alphabet, we assume that *HOPOONTEΣ* was written, then it is equally unlikely that the participial ending would have been interpreted as being anything else but -οντες. If we assume that such a method of spelling as *HOPONTEΣ* (meaning ὀρόωντες) was ever encountered by *metacharacterizontes*, only one interpretation was possible: ὀρώωντες (faulty meter is unlikely to have been corrected to the strange ὀρόωντες when ἔσορώωντες was such an easy proposal, and when another moment's thought would have suggested the uncontracted ὀράοντες). From a consideration of this and other types of distraction (e.g. ἐήνδανε, ἡβώωσα, θώωκος, μνωόμενοι), it does not seem likely that these forms were the product of a transliteration.

Other difficulties arise when one tries to imagine how trochaic *HEOΣ* could ever have been transcribed as iambic ἔως (and this at the beginning of the verse, too). Could these Athenian *Umschreiber* not scan? It is much more likely that the sounds which issued from Homer's lips when he pronounced trochaic ἦο were

<sup>17</sup> *HSCP* 43 (1932) 33 f.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.* (above, note 4) 66 ff.

written  $\epsilon\omega$  by a convention (presumably the process we call quantitative metathesis was still taking place in the vernacular): hence, whilst the formula terminating the first line of the *Iliad* was originally scanned *Πηληϊάδεη'(ο) Ἀχιλλῆος*, there is no reason to believe that this scansion ever reached a written form; nor is there any to forbid the natural assumption that the sounds which issued from Homer's lips involved hiatus (*Πηληϊάδεω*) rather than elision (*Πηληϊάδεη'*). That our texts exhibit an orthography which in such cases hinders a correct metrical interpretation suggests that Homer declaimed his verses to a scribe: a poet conscious of his metrical composition might discriminate between trochaic and iambic  $\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ , but a scribe's attention would be concentrated on the recording of the other man's words and not primarily concerned with scansion. Had Homer written down the text of his poems himself, he would likely have obviated these metro-orthographical difficulties. And so would an *Umschreiber*, who had ample opportunity to consider the scansion of  $\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  or  $\delta\varsigma$   $\alpha\acute{\xi}\epsilon\iota$  at the beginning of a line. But a scribe taking down from dictation has no time to resolve such problems. Herein I see slight but positive corroboration of A. B. Lord's theory<sup>19</sup> that the epics are oral dictated texts.<sup>20</sup>

It is possible that in the original text of the Homeric poems (1) doubled consonants in the same word were sometimes at least written but once; and (2) the "spurious diphthongs"  $\epsilon\iota$  and  $\omicron\upsilon$ <sup>21</sup> were sometimes at least denoted by *E* and *O*. In support of this the most cogent evidence is *Od.* 7.107 *καίροσέων*: Lobeck's proposed etymology from *καίροεις* is certain, and his conclusion that the word intended was *καίρουσσέων* (from \**καίροεσσέων*)

<sup>19</sup> *TAPA* 84 (1953) 124 ff., acceptable on its own merits.

<sup>20</sup> The practice of dictation in ancient times was probably much more widespread than we are accustomed to think. Birt (*Das antike Buchwesen* [Berlin 1882] 309) refers to Egyptian paintings portraying a number of scribes writing a dictated text. Evidence is meager for the Greek classical period, but that in Roman times poets, orators, prose-writers and in fact anyone who possessed a literate slave frequently dictated whatever he wanted to write is unquestionably authenticated (Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*<sup>3</sup> [Leipzig, Berlin 1915–18] 2.954 f.). Writing at any length was a laborious business, and H. G. Meecham (*Light from Ancient Letters* [London 1923] 104) well suggests that St. Paul dictated his epistles, not because he was illiterate (see *Gal.* 6.11), but probably because he could write only slowly or with difficulty. Possibly, as Einarson suggests, many dictated from a desire to spare their eyes. It is of course just as legitimate to speak of Homer "writing" as of modern literary men who do not put pen to paper but dictate to tape-recording machines or stenographers.

<sup>21</sup> See C. D. Buck, *Greek Dialects* (Chicago 1955), sect. 25.

is inescapable; a sixth-century Milesian inscription<sup>22</sup> offers *TEIXIOSΗΣ* for *Τειχιούσσης*, an exact parallel. However, this isolated example may conceivably be rather the result of early mispronunciation,<sup>23</sup> and hardly establishes a rule which we can be sure was universal. Van der Valk's arguments<sup>24</sup> that spellings like *ᾠδδές*, *ἐλλαβε*, etc. are original (true though this may be) are not conclusive. Inscriptional evidence<sup>25</sup> favors an original Homeric employment of doubled consonants, which occur in the earliest Ionic inscriptions, but not the conventional spelling (*ει*, *ου*) of the spurious diphthongs, which continue to be represented by *E* and *O* till a very late date. Nevertheless, the spelling *εἰμί* is attested for the eighth century,<sup>26</sup> and genitives in *-ου* (so spelled) are found in some parts at an equally early date. It is perhaps best to suspend judgment until Miss L. H. Jeffery's much awaited *Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* is available for study.

In thus finding in our texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* no evidence that the poems were ever written in any alphabet other than the Ionic, I conclude that this was the script of the original copy. Until recently it was generally held that the existence of the Ionic alphabet, which we can reasonably mark by the introduction of *omega*, the last letter, could not possibly be dated early enough for its employment by Homer to be postulated. However, Thera inscriptions exhibit a symbol for *δ* as early as the eighth century; and Klaffenbach<sup>27</sup> refers to a potsherd found at Delos and datable to about 700 B.C., which displays the conventional shape of the letter; and a seventh-century *omega* from Smyrna has also been attested.<sup>28</sup> Klaffenbach's confident verdict that the Ionic alphabet had reached its final stage of evolution at a date in the last part of the eighth century removes in my opinion—for I hold the now orthodox view that Homer's life spanned the eighth and seventh centuries—any chronological

<sup>22</sup> *SIG* 3d.

<sup>23</sup> So Kretschmer, *Glotta* 3.308 f.: "Sprach man damals (before the transliteration) *καυροσέων*, so ist dieser Fehler nicht erst bei der Umschrift und durch dieselbe entstanden. Sprach man aber bis zur Zeit des Alphabetwechsels das richtige *καυρουσέων*, so sehen wir nicht ein, wie man dazu kam, bei der Umschrift falsch zu transkribieren." This is essentially the position of Wilamowitz.

<sup>24</sup> M.H.A.L.H. van der Valk, *Textual Criticism of the Odyssey* (Leiden 1949) 75 f.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, W. Larfeld, *Griechische Epigraphik*<sup>3</sup> (Munich 1914) 252 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Athens: ΘΑΠΙΟ ΕΙΜΙ ΠΙΟΤΕΠΙΟΝ, *Hesperia* 5 (1936) 33.

<sup>27</sup> G. Klaffenbach, *Griechische Epigraphik* (Göttingen 1957) 40.

<sup>28</sup> *JHS* 71 (1951) 249.

obstacle to its employment in the original text of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Another question now poses itself. What kind of alphabet was used by Hesiod and Archilochus and Theognis and Alcman and Sappho and Pindar and Aeschylus? Neither our texts of these authors nor the ancient commentaries upon them provide a single piece of reliable evidence that their works at any time suffered a transliteration of alphabet. It is true that a few scholars have sought to appeal to such a transliteration; but, to say nothing of the awkward fact that dictation to a copyist will account for practically all of them, the evidence adduced is pitifully trivial.<sup>29</sup> Only numerous examples can establish the cumulative evidence necessary for a proof. But these examples must be significant. Cumulative evidence has been industriously, but uncritically, collected by Herzog.<sup>30</sup> But almost all of it concerns not transliteration, but orthography and textual corruption. For example, he regards elision as being only expressed in writing after the time of the *metacharactêrismos*, but not before, when the words were written in *scriptio plena*; the doubling of consonants similarly is held to prove the *metacharactêrismos* theory; and so are many orthographical corruptions of quite different significance. I select a few random examples: Hesiod, *Erga* 183: ξενოდόκωι (Atticization: for ξεινο-); *Hom. Hymn. Apoll.* 218: Ἰωλκόν and Ἰολκόν (Atticization: for Ἰαωλκόν); Theognis 260: φεύγειν (misinterpretation: for φεύγεν); Alcaeus *fr.* 338.1 Lobel-Page: ὠράνω (confusion: for ὀράνω; notice that at *fr.* 355 and Sappho *fr.* 1.11 Lobel-Page the first syllable must be long, suggesting that both spellings existed side by side); Pindar, *Olymp.* 6.49: Φοίβω (Doricization: for Φοίβου); Bacchylides 8.44: κόραι (Atticization: for κοῦραι); Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 298: τῇ ἰδεῖν (false division and miscorrection: for τῇ δ'έν). On page 95 of his dissertation Herzog refers to thirty-eight examples in Aeschylus of confusion between -ον (acc. sing.) and -ων (gen. plur.): one of them, *Sept.* 390 πρέσβιστον ἄστρον (where a *Perseverationsfehler* has corrupted the correct -ον -ων), will suffice to indicate the unreliability of his collections. None of these mistakes was caused by an *Umschrift*. Is it probable that the Alexandrian scholars would have been ignorant of or silent about such a major revolution in the history of Greek letters, had one really taken place? What powerful evidence

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, J. Irigoin's *Histoire du texte de Pindare* (Paris 1952) 25 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.* (above, note 2), 61-96.

for Homer's Athenian parentage, if his text went back to an original in the Attic alphabet! But of this Aristarchus says not a word. Even if we assume that a sixth-century Athenian copy of Homer is the archetype of all our information about the text,<sup>31</sup> it would still follow that it was written in the Ionic alphabet. As Wilamowitz points out,<sup>32</sup> the Teian Anacreon lived at Pisistratus' court and amused the aristocracy with verses in Ionic; he surely used the Ionic alphabet; even if we believe the story that Onomacritus of Athens, Orpheus of Croton, and Zopyrus of Heraclea wrote out Homer for Pisistratus,<sup>33</sup> *woher in aller Welt sind sie auf attisches Alphabet verfallen?* Moreover, the Alexandrians made use of many editions of Homer, including the so-called city editions, representative of the whole Greek world from Massilia to Sinope. That all—and thus their archetype—were written in the Ionic alphabet there is no reason to doubt; nor that their archetype goes back considerably before 403 B.C.—at least to Pisistratean times.<sup>34</sup> The number of times that texts of pre-Socratic literature were copied out in antiquity must have been very great, and so must have been the number of *Umschritte*. That is, if there ever were any. And from the silence of persons who would have commented upon this enormously widespread and laborious process had they known of it, from Aristophanes Comicus to the Byzantines, I conclude that all Greek literature from the earliest times was written in the Ionic alphabet.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> A bold attempt to reconstruct—for the *Iliad*—the exact number of verses of this hypothetical text has been made by G. M. Bolling (*Ilias Atheniensium: the Athenian Iliad of the Sixth Century B.C.* [Baltimore 1950]), whose critical use of quotations and scholia leans heavily on the supposition (refuted for both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by van der Valk's *Textual Criticism of the Odyssey*) that the Alexandrians had manuscript support for their atheteses. Most critics who have expressed an opinion have judged that Bolling (who rejects, for example, 1.4–5 and the *Shield of Achilles*) has failed in his attempt. Wackernagel's *Sprachliche Untersuchungen zu Homer*, a more cautious attempt on the philological side to identify the Attic in Homer, suggests that a considerable amount of surface corruption may have been caused by Attic influence, but it falls short of proving an Attic archetype.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.* (above, note 3) 303.

<sup>33</sup> Touching the so-called Pisistratean recension (as opposed to a copy of Homer which may have been made for Pisistratus) I accept Davison's contention (*TAPA* 86 [1955] 1 ff., a refutation of Merkelbach, *RhM* 95 [1952] 23 ff.) that the story is a fiction of the Pergamenes designed to discredit Aristarchus, and is based on nothing more than implausible slanders of Megarian irredentists.

<sup>34</sup> According to van der Valk (above, note 24) 14, Cantarella in his *L'edizione polusticho di Omero* dates the Chia and Massaliotice as early as the seventh century.

<sup>35</sup> A slight modification is necessary here, for the digamma seems to have been occasionally used by Alcman, Alcaeus, and Corinna. Yet even this modification is explicable by the highly epichoric dialect these lyric authors employed.

In this matter the evidence of the inscriptions favors the suggestion in a negative way. The early history of Greek epigraphy is a puzzling record of many different local scripts slowly giving way for no apparent reason to the Ionic. I do not think that the Ionic alphabet is inherently better: the distinctive signs for  $\epsilon$  and  $\delta$  are helpful perhaps, but not essential: the adequacy of five vowel-signs is shown by English and other modern languages which have at least as many vowel-sounds as ancient Greek. English and French show that men do not devise new symbols to denote new sounds which arise out of the constant phonetic change to which language is subject: men extend the use of existing symbols. Men are ultra-conservative in their writing conventions: the exotic syllabary of the Cyprians successfully resisted the alphabet for centuries, and the Semitic consonantal scripts have done so for millennia; today neither the Chinese nor the Japanese show any eagerness to discard a cumbrous congeries of characters for the vastly easier and more accurate twenty or so symbols of the alphabet. Even within the framework of the alphabet the resistance to innovation is astonishingly powerful: consider the many modern English words whose fossilized spelling gives little clue to their phonetic value; consider as but one example the force of the conservatism which has preserved the life of the seventeenth letter of the alphabet—this was the old Greek *koppa*, obsolete at its very inception into the Greek alphabet, where it fulfilled no distinct function; but it survived in the Chalcidian local alphabet and was bequeathed in turn to the Etruscans, the Romans, and the medieval and modern world. How, then, if our texts of Homer, descend from an Athenian text written in the old Attic alphabet, how was this alphabet, in the very centuries of Athens' power and efflorescence, completely eclipsed and superseded by the alien Ionic? The answer must be that Homer was not written in the old Attic alphabet, and that the script of his text was primarily responsible for the victory of the Ionic alphabet and for its universal employment by other literary writers. This victory was won long before 403 B.C., when it was finally adopted by decree at Athens: the silence of contemporaries makes it certain that this uncontroversial legislation did little more than recognize existing practice. The real battle was fought much earlier; and in view of the numerous inscriptions and legal documents written in the Attic alphabet, it is impossible to account for its displacement save

through enormous literary influence. I imagine that those Athenian children who learned to write acquired first a knowledge of the Attic alphabet and then, when they began to read Homer, learned the Ionic. Modern science provides a reasonable parallel with the metric system competing with the English system of weights and measures. The modern child who proceeds to specialize in science will use the metric system as a matter of course; the ancient child who was fired with a passion for letters followed in Homer's footsteps and used as a matter of course the Ionic alphabet. The analogy points to a warning. Just as the metric system obtained legal sanction as long ago as 1799, and the date of its invention—or even its existence—could not be inferred from the usage of modern society in the English-speaking world, so too the first literary use of the Ionic alphabet is not to be thought of as easily determinable from the Greek inscriptions. No dictionary existed in early Greece, and no code of accepted spelling compelled a local functionary to use one form of letter rather than another; it is possible that our Greek inscriptions reflect the orthography and script of stone-masons and artists rather than literary men. When the influence of Homer began to exert itself, it would first do so on the work of other writers and only much later on the accustomed spelling of the guilds of artisans. It is also probable that the first copy of the poems was jealously guarded by the Homeridae and, in the initial period, recopied on only a few occasions. Such considerations should deter us from making rash inferences from the orthography of early inscriptions.

Whether Homer dictated his poems to a member of his family,<sup>36</sup> how long it took him to complete both poems—weeks, months, or years—whether he inserted the *Doloneia* after finishing the rest of the *Iliad*, indeed even whether Homer was literate himself, let

<sup>36</sup> The scholion on Pindar, *Nem.*2.1 credibly suggests that in the earliest application of the word the Homeridae were Homer's own descendants: a son or sons are referred to by Herodian, *Peri mon. lex.*9.27, *Vit.Suid.*37, but more prominent mention in the *Lives* is made of a daughter, who married a Chiot (*Vit. Herod.* 25), possibly the ancestor of the Homeridae. An interesting thread of the tradition, possibly as old as Pindar (*fr.* 265), tells that the *Cypria*, mostly ascribed to Stasinus, was given by Homer as a dowry with his daughter. Could Stasinus, I wonder, have been Homer's amanuensis?



others say. But let us squarely face the fact that under some conditions the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* received a written form. Now it is not easy to conceive that either epic was written down in the compass of a single book. Whether parchment or papyrus was used, the roll, which was the earliest book-format, must have been Homer's book; and although evidence is scanty, a small book-roll is suggested by the length of the *Works and Days* and such other early Greek literature as we can form some idea of. The size of these book-rolls, therefore, must have imposed on Homer the necessity of composing in units, to say nothing of similar artistic demands imposed by working on such a scale as his. It is remarkable that attempts to detect a pattern in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have established that certainly some, and probably all, book-divisions are intrinsic to the design.<sup>37</sup> All the relevant testimony that antiquity furnishes us with is two passages<sup>38</sup> to the effect that Aristarchus and his school divided up the poems and numbered the divisions with the letters of the alphabet. But since Aristarchus and Aristophanes maintained that the *Odyssey* ended at 23.296 and yet proceeded to athetize lines occurring thereafter, it follows that the book-division and numbering of books was earlier.<sup>39</sup> That a few papyri lack such a division is adequately explained by Mazon.<sup>40</sup> Whether the authenticity of a book is in question or not, whether we take books like the first book of the

<sup>37</sup> I refer in particular to the work of Sheppard (*Pattern of the Iliad* [London 1922]), Myres (*JHS* 1932; 1952; 1954), Whitman (*Homer and the Heroic Tradition* [Cambridge, Mass. 1958] chapters 11 and 12), and Webster (*From Mycenae to Homer*, chapter 8, section 4). *Iliad* 24 balances *Iliad* 1; *Iliad* 23 balances *Iliad* 2; and so on, except that the series is not a complete correspondence. The internal symmetry of the *Necyia* suggests that this section of the *Odyssey* was framed as a unit, i.e. as a book; and I should argue the same for many other books in the poems. Many will poke fun at Myres' and Whitman's elaborate theories of symmetrical pattern. About details I suspend judgment, but in principle I am persuaded that here in truth we have an artificial device for composition on the grand scale, a device which—so far as I can see—is the very *σφραγίς* of Homer himself. All this is essentially different from the simple inversions illustrated by Odysseus' questioning of his mother and her reply, *Od.* 11.170 ff. (questions *a, b, c, d, e, f, g* answered in the order *g, f, e, d, c, b, a*), a feature of rhapsodic style dealt with by S. E. Bassett, *Poetry of Homer* (Berkeley 1938) 119 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Pseudo-Plut. *Vita Hom.* 2.4; Eust. 5.29.

<sup>39</sup> Wilamowitz's view (*op. cit.* [above, note 3] 369, note 47), that it was Zenodotus who brought about the 24-book division, is rendered unlikely by the independent attitude to Zenodotus's work adopted by Aristarchus, whose extant opinions suggest that whatever was bequeathed him as canonical owed nothing to Zenodotus.

<sup>40</sup> P. Mazon, *Introduction à l'Illiade* (Paris 1942) 140, note 1.

*Iliad* or the first book of the *Odyssey*, or books like the *Doloneia* or the *Necyia*, the small book-roll seems to have been Homer's unit.<sup>41</sup> These rolls must have been numbered; and from ancient times to our own they *have* been numbered—with the twenty-four letters of the Ionic alphabet. The common belief is that the Alexandrians devised this system of numbering when they divided up the poems. But if, as I maintain, it was not they but Homer who divided up the poems, then the books must have been numbered from the beginning. In short, I suggest that numeration by the Ionic alphabet goes back to Homer himself. The principal methods of Greek numeration are two, the so-called Herodianic system (in many ways like the Roman) and the so-called alphabetic system (employing twenty-seven letters in a fashion akin to our decimal system): now the latter system had by the time of the Ptolemies become official, being regularly used in inscriptions and on coins, and it had virtually replaced the other; mathematicians employed it exclusively, and it is the system whereby our Greek literary papyri are paged. This then is the system of numbering which one would expect the Alexandrians to have employed.<sup>42</sup> There remains a much rarer, but seemingly much older, system of using the Ionic alphabet, thought by Carl Robert<sup>43</sup> to have originated appreciably earlier than 450 B.C. and occasionally used, it would seem, in the numbering of books.<sup>44</sup> Here, too, it is possible that the influence of Homer's example was responsible for the practice.

This study of Homer and the alphabet unlocks the door to a new conception of Homer, which harmonizes at once with the knowledge of the technique of oral-composition discovered by Milman Parry, with the undeniable evidence of multiple sources discovered by the Analysts, with the fusion into a single design discovered by the Unitarians, and with the unequivocal testimony of Hellenic

<sup>41</sup> The shortest book in the *Iliad* (19) contains 424 lines, the longest (5) 909; for the *Odyssey* the figures are (6) 331 and (4) 847. The average is 633 lines for a book of the *Iliad*, 504 for a book of the *Odyssey*.

<sup>42</sup> "A number of papyrus-rolls found at Herculaneum . . . state on the title-page, after the name of the author, the number of books in alphabetic numerals . . . e.g., ΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΟΥ | ΠΕΡΙ | ΦΥΣΕΩΣ | ΙΕ . . . (where ΙΕ = 15)." (Heath, *Hist. of Gk. Math.* [Oxford 1921] 1.35).

<sup>43</sup> *Hermes* 18 (1883) 466 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Certain works of Aristotle were at some time divided into books and numbered in this system. In the fourth century the tickets of jurors at Athens were marked with the letters A to K (Heath, *loc. cit.* [above, note 42]).

tradition which tells us that Homer created both poems. It suggests that Homer was a collector and stitcher of lays who effected the first great literary exploitation of the alphabet by compiling and preserving in two designedly comprehensive epics the vast treasures of oral literature. It suggests that, by the very magnitude of his work and by the influence which his work exerted, it was Homer who imposed on a nation at variance over the elements of writing the standard of the Ionic alphabet. The artistic merits of Homer's work have won the irreversible acclamation of posterity: it were as superfluous to praise as futile to deny them. To what extent originality is one of his virtues is an academic question and does not affect Homer's greatness; for, whilst there were Greek poets before Homer, not one has any title to his genius. Their poems can have lasted only for an hour or two and had life only whilst voice was heard; they were fluid poems, subject to expansion or contraction as occasion demanded. None of them could have labored on Homer's elaborate scale, which of itself presupposes the idea of recording the work in permanent form. It is unnecessary to suppose that Homer's poems were occasioned by a festival or produced in response to an invitation by its program committee.<sup>45</sup> They were written down, not as competition-pieces of the moment, but as treasures for ever. The vision of Homer's predecessors was circumscribed by the limitations of oral literature; they recited for the occasion, and each of their individual recitals died in the very act of creation. But Homer found in the alphabet the elixir of life whereby the mortality of the spoken word was vanquished and whereby he could pass beyond the limitations of time and compass imposed by a single recitation. Out of the long but unseen procession of Greek heroic bards Homer stands forth alone, pre-eminent not solely for his magnificent performance but also for his achievement in securing for it the immortality neither aimed at nor won

<sup>45</sup> The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, like all other written literature, were written in order to be read. No doubt Homer had in mind his colleagues or apprentices, who with the aid of a fixed text would be able to give authentic recitals of their master's work. It is possible that a festival did hear the première performance of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: but even if this were established with incontrovertible proof, it would amount to no more than an interesting irrelevancy. The prodigious effort necessary for producing the text of a 24-book epic was not exerted for a single performance. "The blind Chiot," says Wade-Gery (*Poet of the Iliad* 74), "is surely measuring himself against all comers, earlier or later: he is asking for immortality, not for a prize."

by theirs. He is Tiresias, and even in the land of the hereafter can speak to the generations of eternity; they are the merest shadows, without name as without voice:

*οἷος πέπνυται, τοὶ δὲ σκιαὶ αἰσσοῦσιν.*