

STESICHORUS

COLLEGIUM DIVI IOHANNIS BAPTISTAE

THE POEMS

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION,
TRANSLATION,
AND COMMENTARY

BY

M. DAVIES

*Associate Professor in Classical Languages and Literature,
University of Oxford, and
Fellow of St John's College, Oxford*

AND

P. J. FINGLASS

*Professor of Greek and Head of the Department of Classics,
University of Nottingham, and
Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford*



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

that Stesichorus himself or his contemporaries anticipated this practice themselves.¹⁸²

An alternative view explicitly denies that Stesichorus was a choral poet, and claims that he was solely a citharode.¹⁸³ The chief objection to a choral Stesichorus arose out of the *Geryoneis* papyrus, Π², which informed us that this poem lasted at least 1,300 lines. According to Barrett, 'choral presentation of a work of this kind and this length would surely be intolerable. It will have been delivered, surely, like the epic on which it is based, by a single performer, accompanying himself doubtless on the lyre.'¹⁸⁴ Barrett was giving his gut feeling in an oral paper read shortly after the publication of Π², but subsequent repetitions of his case have failed to adduce evidence in its support. There have been no attempts to prove the implied hypothesis that a group of people is unable to coordinate an effective performance of a long sung lyric. Nor is the similarity of Stesichorus' poetry to epic a cogent consideration: similarity of content need not imply similarity of performance. An attempt to cite pseudo-Plutarch *On Music* in support of a citharoedic Stesichorus¹⁸⁵ has met with scepticism: there is no explicit statement in the treatise to this effect, and the inference made seems tenuous.¹⁸⁶ The case as a whole appears insufficient to challenge the choral hypothesis.

5 MYTH

Stesichorus' poems show an impressive mythological range. Most fall naturally into three groups: the Trojan cycle (*Helen*, *Palinode(s)*, *Sack of Troy*, *Returns*, *Oresteia*), the Theban cycle (*Europeia*, *Thebais?*, *Eriphyle*), and poems about Heracles (*Geryoneis*, *Cerberus*, *Cycnus*). That leaves the *Games for Pelias*, which

¹⁸² For the question of Stesichorean reperformance see below, section §9.

¹⁸³ Thus Wilamowitz (1913) 239 n. 3. For others supporting this position see Burnett (1988) 129 n. 68.

¹⁸⁴ Barrett (1968) 22–3.

¹⁸⁵ [Plut.] *De Mus.* 1132bc; see West (1971a) 307–11 = (2011–13) II 86–92.

¹⁸⁶ See Burnett (1988) 129–31, Hagel (2010) 403 n. 87, Curtis's edition, pp. 26–7.

covers an event from the saga of Iolcus associated with the Argonauts; *Scylla*, perhaps an episode from the return of Odysseus and thus part of the Trojan cycle; and *Boarhunters*, a work taken from Aetolian myth. At least five different cycles, then, are represented in Stesichorus' output. These cover the major part of the world familiar to the Greeks: Laconia (*Helen*, *Oresteia*), Arcadia (the Pholus episode in the *Geryoneis*), Thebes (*Europeia*, *Thebais?*, *Eriphyle*), Aetolia (*Boarhunters*), Thessaly (*Games for Pelias*, *Cycnus*), perhaps Phoenicia and Crete (*Europeia*), Troy (*Helen*, *Palinode(s)*, *Sack of Troy*, *Returns*, *Oresteia*), Egypt (*Palinode(s)*), Italy or Sicily (Aeneas' probable destination in the *Sack of Troy*), and Spain (*Geryoneis*). This is truly panmediterranean poetry. Of all the regions explored by the Greeks down to Stesichorus' day, perhaps only the Black Sea and Cyrene are omitted; and even they may have featured in any retrospective account of the Argonauts' expedition in the *Games for Pelias*.

Yet despite coming from Magna Graecia, Stesichorus apparently shows a preference for myths from the Greek homeland; only the *Geryoneis* and *Sack of Troy* display interest in mythology with a specifically western connexion.¹⁸⁷ Contemporary parallels for this attitude appear in the poetry of the slightly later western poet Ibycus, whose fragments contain virtually no western references,¹⁸⁸ and in the metopes from the temple of Hera at Foce del Sele, which do not depict any distinctively Italian or Sicilian myths.¹⁸⁹ This preference will reflect the cultural

¹⁸⁷ Müller (1822) 313 suggests that Stesichorus himself, as a poet from the west, encountered Aeneas' voyage to Hesperia in a western source. It is possible that some of the lost poems were concerned with myths of the west, but since we have the names of well over half of Stesichorus' works (see section §3 above), further discoveries are unlikely to change the picture dramatically.

¹⁸⁸ He refers briefly to Geryon (fr. S176.17–18 *PMGF*) and apparently to the founding of a Chalcidian colony, perhaps Rhegium (fr. S227); see Bowie (2012b) 91, 93–4.

¹⁸⁹ The comparison is made by Marconi (2007) 200–4. Cf. how Hall (2012) 31 cites the archaic metopes of Selinus as an example of Sicilian 'oscillation between civic identity and a mainland orientation'.

leanings of the western Greeks, who were still strongly connected to the old country: just as they continued to make dedications at Delphi and Olympia and to participate in panhellenic games, so too they retained their interest in the traditional myths of Greece.¹⁹⁰ But it is also consistent with the view, advanced in the previous section, that Stesichorus performed his poetry not just in his homeland, but across the Greek world. Nor is there evidence to suggest that the engagement with western mythology that we do find in Stesichorus was shaped by the particular ideological concerns of western Greeks. Before the discovery of the papyri, a scholar could write that ‘one purpose of the *Geryoneis* was the glorification of the brave Greeks who were winning new lands for Greek settlement’.¹⁹¹ But this precociously post-colonial reading was not borne out by the publication of Π², with its surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of Geryon during his conflict with the Greek hero Heracles.

Some western myths known from later sources might go back to Stesichorus: Heracles’ visit to Italy and/or Sicily on his return from Spain to Greece,¹⁹² which could have been described in the *Geryoneis*, and Orestes’ purification at Rhegium,¹⁹³ a hypothetical episode from the *Oresteia*. But associating either story with Stesichorus is merely the result of surmise. Moreover, there are reasons to treat these speculations with caution. The *Geryoneis* already portrayed an episode from Heracles’ return, but this was in Arcadia. Stesichorus might have included events in Italy or Sicily as well, and a reference to Pallantium in the poem may provide a trace of such a narrative,¹⁹⁴ but that would have taken up space in a poem already not short of incident. As for Orestes’

visit to Rhegium, our source for this myth relates that he undertook this journey after recovering his sister and the statue of Artemis from Scythia, and that after his purification he crossed over to Tyndaris in Sicily, where the statue was celebrated by the inhabitants. The town of Tyndaris was not founded until 396, so that part of the story, at least, must date from after then.¹⁹⁵ And the inclusion of Orestes’ recovery of his sister, as well as the trip to the west, would make even the two-book *Oresteia* strain at the seams.

One clear way in which Stesichorus’ mythology looks back to that of old Greece is via its associations with Homer. The connexion between these poets was first mentioned, as we have seen, by Simonides, and by many ancient critics thereafter.¹⁹⁶ But only when the papyri began to be published could we appreciate how close that association went in terms of myth.¹⁹⁷ The first papyrus to appear, perhaps from the *Returns* (Π³), surprised scholars with its close reworking of a minor episode from the *Odyssey*: ‘who could have suspected’, Peek asked, ‘that the dependence [sc. of Stesichorus on Homer] could have gone so far in matters of content too?’¹⁹⁸ The *Geryoneis* papyrus (Π²) revealed the profound influence exercised by various episodes from the *Iliad* on the portrayal of Geryon and his conflict with Heracles. The same kind of literary background was posited by Burkert for the Lille papyrus (Π¹): ‘Stesichoros . . . is probably less original in content than in elaboration and presentation; [fr. 170] slavishly depends on the *Odyssey*, and [fr. 97] will reproduce a situation from the *Thebais* in a similar way.’¹⁹⁹ Stesichorus is not alone in evoking Homer in his poetry: perhaps the earliest poetic response outside epic to the *Iliad* is found in Alcaeus.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Bowie (2012b) 86: Stesichorus ‘chooses some central, traditional Greek myths in order to emphasise the Greekness that the settlers in Sicily and South Italy shared with their metropoleis in mainland Greece and the islands’.

¹⁹¹ Dunbabin (1948) 330.

¹⁹² Cf. Hecat. 1 F 76 *FGrHist*, Hellen. fr. 111 *EGM*.

¹⁹³ Cf. Σ Theocr. prol. Ba (p. 2.13–20 Wendel), Morgan (2012) 38, 44.

¹⁹⁴ See fr. 21n.

¹⁹⁵ Diod. 14.78.6. ¹⁹⁶ See p. 22 above.

¹⁹⁷ Stesichorus’ relationship with Homer’s language and metre will be discussed in subsequent sections.

¹⁹⁸ Peek (1958) 173 ‘Wer hätte geahnt, daß die Abhängigkeit auch im stofflichen so weit gehen könnte?’; cf. Fränkel (1962) 320–1 = (1975) 281–2.

¹⁹⁹ Burkert (1981) 35 = (2001–11) 1 154–5.

²⁰⁰ Fr. 44.6–8 Voigt; see West (1988) 151–2 n. 5 = (2011–13) 1 36–7 n. 5.

But in no other archaic poet is this response so widespread and sustained.

The comparison with Homer should, however, mark the beginning of our investigation of Stesichorus' mythological choices, not its end. Above all, we should beware of assuming that allusion implies a lack of originality. The imitation of the *Odyssey* in Π³ may be close, but even here subtle differences suggest Stesichorean reshaping. So a bird omen which in Homer is preceded by a list of gifts is placed by Stesichorus in front of that list, perhaps gaining greater prominence. Stesichorus may also have limited the omen's audience to Helen, its interpreter, and Telemachus, whom it concerns, concentrating attention on the pair most involved in the event, instead of assembling a larger group, as in Homer; at the very least, Stesichorus' Helen takes a dominant role in comparison with her Odyssean counterpart. Further differences would no doubt be apparent if we had more of the papyrus; even with the brief text that survives, 'detailed comparison shows that the poet did not slavishly imitate the [Homeric] scene, but rather combined aspects from a variety of portent scenes . . . and employed "formulaic" expression from the epic tradition as a whole.'²⁰¹

Nor is the use of the *Iliad* in the *Geryoneis* an example of poetic dependence. Scenes and motifs which in Homer celebrate the greatness and pathos of human heroism are applied by Stesichorus to the terrifying Geryon, humanising the beast and encouraging the audience to admire his valour and to feel the tragedy of his predicament.²⁰² Compassion for the foe is, of course, a familiar feature of the *Iliad*.²⁰³ Yet such profound sympathy for a multiple-headed monster goes beyond Homer:²⁰⁴ we are not

encouraged to ponder the inner emotional world of Scylla in the *Odyssey*, for example, as she feasts on Odysseus' crew.²⁰⁵ At once Homeric and unHomeric, Stesichorus' presentation of Geryon testifies to an extraordinary poetic self-confidence: he takes over key moments of the *Iliad*'s plot, such as Sarpedon's speech to Glaucus, or Hector's to Hecuba outside the walls of Troy, and reapplies them to radically different contexts, creating a distinctive emotional effect. In Homer poetic novelty is celebrated for the first time in western literature;²⁰⁶ Stesichorus asserts his own originality by his audacious reshaping of Homeric epic.

The breadth of Stesichorus' mythical range ensures that his poetry encompasses subject matter far beyond Homer's. As we have seen, not just the Trojan, but the Theban, Calydonian, and Iolcan cycles are represented in his work; and several of his poems focus on Heracles, a hero prominent in neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey*.²⁰⁷ All this mythical territory would have been staked out by epic long before Stesichorus; but his response to that poetic tradition shows the same passion for innovation that we can identify in his interactions with Homer. So Stesichorus' *Cycnus* presents a quite different account of a story already treated in the Hesiodic *Aspis*. By making his Heracles retreat in the face of Cycnus and his father Ares, he creates a more complicated narrative with greater scope for characterisation; we may suspect that his poem saw rather more drama than its epic predecessor, and rather less shield.²⁰⁸ Moreover, Stesichorus' Cycnus fashions a temple of skulls to Apollo out of the remains of his victims; this macabre edifice, absent from the *Aspis*, would have made Cycnus' criminality more tangible and thus raised the stakes for his battle with Zeus's son.

²⁰¹ Maingon (1989) 48; see further her discussion, Grossardt (2012) 41, and fr. 170n.

²⁰² See e.g. fr. 15, 17, 19.44–7n.

²⁰³ Cf. Griffin (1977) 46 = Cairns (2001) 379: Homer's 'treatment of the Trojan enemy [is] in no way monstrous or hateful'.

²⁰⁴ Homer does generate some sympathy for the Cyclops Polyphemus by portraying him in conversation with his ram (cf. Newton (1983)), but this is neither as sustained nor as moving as in Stesichorus.

²⁰⁵ Whether Stesichorus managed a more humane portrayal of this creature in his *Scylla* we cannot tell.

²⁰⁶ Hom. *Od.* 1.351–2.

²⁰⁷ For Heracles in the *Iliad* see Kelly (2010) 261 n. 10; in the *Odyssey*, Andersen (2012). See further Bernardini (2010), Fowler, *EGM* II §8.1.

²⁰⁸ See the introduction to that poem, section §8 below, and Finglass (2015a).

As for Burkert's hypothesis that Stesichorus' *Thebais* simply reproduces an episode from the epic *Thebais*, the evidence suggests that Stesichorus set his work on a quite different track. Oedipus is probably dead at the start of Stesichorus' poem, whereas in the epic he is very much alive and shortly to curse his sons. That fundamental distinction probably led to all kinds of consequential differences, such as the prominence given by Stesichorus to Oedipus' widow: it is unlikely that she could have taken so commanding a role when her husband was still alive. This outcome may have motivated Stesichorus to cast the story as he did: as Tsitsibakou-Vasalos remarks, 'a rich cast of female characters emerges from Stesichorus' mutilated poetry',²⁰⁹ and strong women may have been a distinctive feature of his oeuvre. Far from being a 'slavish' (Burkert's word) copy of an earlier epic, his poem may rather have placed a decidedly feminist slant on the material that he inherited.

In his treatment of myth Stesichorus often gives prominence to themes and ideas that Homer downplays or avoids altogether. In the *Sack of Troy* the initial focus on Epeius puts the spotlight on a surprisingly lowly character at the start of the poem: a water-carrier becomes the recipient of divine favour, displacing Odysseus, whose role in the construction of the wooden horse is more usually emphasised.²¹⁰ The central part played by monsters – Geryon, Cerberus, Scylla, Pholus, and so on – in his work is something quite different from what we find in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, where such figures play a circumscribed role.²¹¹ The magic involved in the presumed translation of Helen to Egypt, and the use of poisoned arrows by Heracles, are unHomeric phenomena.²¹² Stesichorus seems comfortable with a broader range of action than that preferred by Homer; this may be

²⁰⁹ Tsitsibakou-Vasalos (1996) 24; apart from the Queen in the *Thebais*, she refers to Clytemnestra, Eriphyle, Callirhoe, and Althaea.

²¹⁰ See Finglass (2013c). ²¹¹ Cf. Griffin (1977) 53 = Cairns (2001) 384.

²¹² 'The cycle... admits miracles of a sort which Homer does not' (Griffin (1977) 42 = Cairns (2001) 370).

the result of a conscious decision to differentiate himself from Homer as well as to imitate him.

Sometimes we observe Stesichorus differentiating himself from his own previous work in his quest for mythological originality. So he makes Iphigenia daughter of Theseus and Helen in the *Helen*, but of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra in *Oresteia*. In each case, the version of the myth that he chooses suits clear poetic goals.²¹³ In the *Helen*, Iphigenia is a symbol of Helen's chequered past, and her sacrifice at Aulis ensures that her mother receives a terrible punishment for her adultery. The *Oresteia*, by contrast, makes Iphigenia the daughter of the man who sacrifices her, and of the woman who kills that man, presumably in part because of the sacrifice. Elsewhere, in the *Palinode*, Stesichorus confronts a standard element of the mythological tradition – Helen's voyage to Troy with Paris – and declares it to be false. Here too he offers a different myth from one found in another poem of his, the *Helen*; yet unlike (we presume) the case of Iphigenia in the *Helen* and *Oresteia*, here he highlights the difference by apologising for his previous poem. The act of offering different mythological accounts now becomes something worth highlighting for its own sake: the poet can offer equally engaging, yet diametrically opposed, versions of Helen's life thanks to his artistic versatility. The family that Stesichorus ascribes to Theseus, probably in the *Palinode*, shows considerable innovation, although in this case we can only speculate as to his reasons.²¹⁴

Far from merely repeating existing myths and imitating Homer, Stesichorus took a delight in challenging established stories and adapting them to suit his literary intentions. In this he is the model for all subsequent engagement with Homer. Any later poet who interacts creatively with Homeric epic is following and implicitly paying tribute to the first poet to perfect this technique: Stesichorus.

²¹³ Sitzler (1907) 185.

²¹⁴ See Finglass (2013a) 43–6.

example.²⁹⁰ This reflects his early position in the metrical tradition; as Haslam puts it, 'further developments – more thoroughgoing epitrite integration, more flexible fusion of metrical parts, more sophisticated rapport of metre and syntax – these are left to Stesichorus' successors, the choral lyric poets and the tragedians'.²⁹¹ Yet although this developmental model has some validity, we should resist concluding that, from a metrical point of view, Stesichorus is merely a poor man's Pindar. Our analysis has identified distinct rules governing the composition of Stesichorus' metres; rules which existed not for their own sake, but in order to create the balance between regularity and variation that is the hallmark of ancient Greek metrical patterning. Read aloud, his stanzas, rightly characterised by West as 'more voluminous and flowing than those of Alcman',²⁹² retain an aesthetic appeal. How their rhythms were integrated with the music is unknowable; but the length of Stesichorus' career, and the continuing popularity of his poetry, suggest that audiences throughout the Greek world found his combination of metre and melody irresistible.

8 STYLE

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of Stesichorus' poetry to assess is his style. With a poet whose work survives in full we can formulate stylistic hypotheses based on a few instances, and test them by examining the corpus as a whole. Such an operation, or at least its second part, is generally not available for students of Stesichorus. Nevertheless, it is worth drawing attention to certain apparently distinctive features of his poetry, however tentative our conclusions. The following discussion of three particular aspects of Stesichorus' style – imagery, redundancy,

²⁹⁰ Cf. how, according to the data collected by Rossi (1983) 8–9, Stesichorus uses hyperbaton less than Pindar. Note however his effective delay of the name Κύπρις in fr. 85.1–3, perhaps until after the end of a period (n.).

²⁹¹ Haslam (1978) 57. ²⁹² Thus West (1992) 339.

and narrative – is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to stimulate readers to consider this crucial yet under-researched aspect of his output.

The remnants of Stesichorus' poetry present relatively little imagery, but what we have is often intriguing. In an unidentifiable context he refers to δυσφάεια στάσις, 'gloomy discord'.²⁹³ This noun, common in poetry and prose from the sixth century onwards, usually attracts metaphors associated with disease. The unique image may be exploiting the metaphorical connexions of darkness with death: in a single phrase Stesichorus deftly implies the massacres that are the inevitable consequence of civic turbulence. Another passage, from the *Games for Pelias*, refers to a χειροβρώς δεσμός, the 'hand-eating bond' wrapped around a boxer's fists.²⁹⁴ The wounds caused by this equipment are vividly described by the metaphor: the wearer bites into his opponent's flesh not with his mouth, but with his hands. Simultaneously, the χειρ-element suggests that the wearer's hands are eaten away by the tight straps that dig into them: if the opponent was the only one who suffered, there would be no reason to limit the locus of his suffering. Thus in a couple of words Stesichorus vividly depicts the gnawing pain meted out, and suffered, by the ancient boxer. The linguistic periphrasis elevates the mundane piece of sporting gear; the image reminds us of its brutally destructive capacity. A phrase so densely packed with meaning would make for a suitably gripping start to the poem, which is almost certainly where it appeared.

Stesichorus' imagery sometimes works in a more extended fashion. A developed simile may follow the decision of the Trojans in the *Sack of Troy* to take the fatal horse within the city, a high point in the action; however, the text is highly fragmentary, and a portent is at least as likely.²⁹⁵ A certain example, or rather pair of examples, occurs at a climactic moment in the

²⁹³ Fr. 222.8. See however the commentary *ad loc.* for the possibility that this fragment is not by Stesichorus.

²⁹⁴ Fr. 1. ²⁹⁵ Fr. 103.45–8.

Geryoneis: the elimination of the monster's first head by means of an arrow.²⁹⁶ The image begins with a reference to the arrow's head, usually a dead metaphor. But the picture becomes more interesting when we hear that the head has (probably) 'death' around it: 'arrow heads do not properly have anything around them, much less something as abstract as death'. Now Stesichorus introduces a reference to blood and bile, which makes the reference to death more concrete. The image is completed by the mention of the hydra, after which the arrow can at last pierce Geryon's head. 'The literal bloody death from the heads and necks of the hydra has been applied to the head of the arrow. As that arrow pushes silently into one of the heads of Geryon, it pierces flesh and bone so that Geryon's head and body become blood-smear'd just like the head of the arrow which killed him. The Hydra's death pains, blood, and bile have produced more pain, blood, and death.'

The results of the arrow's flight are then described, again via imagery: the fall of Geryon's wounded head to one side resembles a poppy shedding its leaves.²⁹⁷ A similar image is found in Homer, again to describe the effect of a head wound, but with important differences. Homer's poppy merely leans its head to the side thanks to the weight of seed and rainwater, whereas Stesichorus' is apparently in the process of dismemberment, losing its leaves and 'disfiguring its gentle form'.²⁹⁸ The picture is more violent than Homer's; its emotional impact is complicated by Geryon's surviving heads, which allow him to fight back despite an injury which in Homer was fatal. The use of two separate images in swift succession marks this whole passage as a high point in the action. Yet this concentration of imagery nevertheless produces an effect of considerable variation: the dead metaphor gradually brought to life is succeeded by a formal simile with Homeric antecedents. If the loss of the first head

²⁹⁶ Fr. 19.31-43. The progress of the metaphor is well described by Garner (1990) 15, from whom the quotations in this paragraph are taken.

²⁹⁷ Fr. 19.44-7. ²⁹⁸ See *ad loc.*

was treated in such a heightened manner, we can only guess how Geryon's ultimate end was described.

Another striking feature of Stesichorus' style is its *redundancy*.²⁹⁹ Lists of all kinds are found throughout his poetry, whether or not all the information that they contain is entirely necessary. So at the beginning of the *Oresteia*, the poet commands the Muse to set aside war and to turn instead to joyful topics: marriages of the gods, feasts of men, and banquets of the blessed ones.³⁰⁰ It requires considerable ingenuity to take these as the subject matter of Stesichorus' poem,³⁰¹ and we should probably understand them not as three rigorously separate categories (indeed, they partly overlap, since presumably all divine marriages involve banquets), but as part of a technique aimed at emphasising the basic idea of joyful themes by means of accumulation. These happy strains must at some point have yielded to the darker themes that the poet at first seemed to be rejecting, and that shift will have been all the more pronounced thanks to what appeared to be redundancy at the opening.

Emphasis through elaboration can be observed elsewhere. One fragment expresses the contrast between Apollo and Hades by enumerating three things enjoyed by the former, two by the latter.³⁰² The point is not the gods' fondness for these particular five sources of pleasure (which again overlap), but the antithesis between the divinities, highlighted in each case through a list. Accumulation of terms also occurs in narrative. The objects thrown at a married couple during their wedding procession come in four varieties;³⁰³ whereas five different kinds of gifts, listed in a single line, are offered to a maiden.³⁰⁴ The latter context is obscure; in the former, the abundance of projectiles marks the popular joy at Menelaus' wedding, and the irony that such celebration attends a wedding that will indirectly trigger the most bloody of conflicts. Repetition can be found in emotive

²⁹⁹ He shares this quality with certain fragments of Ibycus: Wilkinson remarks of fr. 286 *PMGF* that 'almost every noun has an adjective or qualifying phrase, creating depth and intensity'.

³⁰⁰ Fr. 172. ³⁰¹ See *ad loc.* ³⁰² Fr. 271. ³⁰³ Fr. 88. ³⁰⁴ Fr. 3.

contexts, too: when Geryon's mother expresses her wretchedness in three successive phrases linked by καί, the plangency of her grief is evoked by the style.³⁰⁵ More conventional lists of gods and men are found: the warriors and contingents assembled to master the Calydonian boar,³⁰⁶ the gods who have failed to defend Troy,³⁰⁷ and another series of divinities assembled for an uncertain purpose.³⁰⁸ Presumably the list of formerly pro-Trojan gods is delivered in a bitter, or hopeless, context: 'they all promised to protect us', someone may be saying, 'yet our city has still been overthrown'. And the recollection of the numerous opponents of the boar will have emphasised the fearsomeness of the animal, which requires so many brave men to take him on.

A related phenomenon can sometimes be observed when individual nouns are given multiple adjectives. Several subjects are so distinguished: night, the streams of Tartessus, Poseidon, the Hydra, the cup of Pholus, the daughter of Tyndareus.³⁰⁹ These do not actually overlap in semantics: we find 'holy dark night', 'the boundless, silver-rooted streams', and so on. The use of two adjectives where one or none would have been sufficient gives a leisurely quality to the descriptions;³¹⁰ the repetition of individual adjectives over a brief passage has the same effect.³¹¹ Yet the apparent redundancy is sometimes more pointed. The fragment describing Aphrodite's anger against Tyndareus concludes by saying that the goddess made his daughters 'twice-married, thrice-married, husband-deserters'.³¹² To an extent this phrase simply repeats the same idea across three different words: Aphrodite afflicted the girls with sexual immorality. Yet the expression also allows a rhetorical climax, moving as it does

from 'twice' to 'thrice', before ending with the most disapproving term of all: a woman might conceivably marry twice or three times without being at fault, but deserting her spouse is a quite different matter. That terrible last word itself contrasts with the earlier description of Aphrodite as 'the gentle gift-giver':³¹³ the 'gifts' that she showered on Tyndareus' daughters were hardly the best advertisement for her gentleness. The figure 'twice and thrice' is in part a typical means of emphasis, equivalent to 'many times'; yet simultaneously it encourages the audience to start reckoning up the numbers of marriages contracted by Tyndareus' offspring. The numbers attract attention because just beforehand Stesichorus has emphasised Tyndareus' failure to acknowledge Aphrodite, *alone* among *all* the gods, through juxtaposition of these terms.³¹⁴ What might have seemed mere verbal accumulation turns out to form part of a carefully constructed passage where counting takes on a thematic importance for all concerned.

The very term 'redundancy' implies a less than admirable feature; yet as we have seen, the lavishness of Stesichorus' style is often directed at observable literary aims. Perhaps the single best example of this is the famous passage from the *Palinode(s)* quoted by Plato.³¹⁵ Three successive statements deny Helen's responsibility for the Trojan War. A hostile critic might attack the redundancy: why make three when one would do? Such a response misses the point: the charges against Helen are so grave, and so familiar, that a succession of denials is required; these move from a blanket statement that the story is not true, to a specific claim that Helen never sailed to Troy. Moreover, the rejection in this passage of an account put forward in Stesichorus' own poetry makes the denials all the more emphatic: 'the triple negatives in anaphora... and the explicit mention of a "spurious account"... ensure that... we keep the familiar version (i.e., that of our *Iliad*) prominently in view from the

³⁰⁵ Fr. 17.2-3. ³⁰⁶ Fr. 183. ³⁰⁷ Fr. 114.11-12. ³⁰⁸ Fr. 187.

³⁰⁹ Fr. 8a.4-5, 9.4-6, 18.4-5, 19.35-6, 22a.1-2, 85.3-5.

³¹⁰ Barron (1984) 14 writes 'the use of epic clichés is as much a feature of early lyric as it is of the epics themselves'; we agree, but would distance ourselves from both elements of the phrase 'epic clichés'.

³¹¹ To cite examples from the lengthy fr. 15 alone: φίλος (16, 25), θεοὶ μάκαρες (19, 25-6), ἀθάνατος (3-4, 8).

³¹² Fr. 85.4-5 διγάμους τε καὶ τριγάμους... καὶ λιπεράνορας.

³¹³ Fr. 85.2 ἠπιωδώρου. ³¹⁴ Fr. 85.2-3 πᾶσι θεοῖς μόνας... Κύπριδος.

³¹⁵ Fr. 91a.

Stesichorus' style. But we need not adopt his literary preferences, nor indeed does he speak for all of antiquity on this subject;³²⁵ accordingly, we place his tendentious verdict at the end, not the beginning, of this investigation. Our contention is that when we examine Stesichorus' poetry with minds unprejudiced by the *obiter dictum* of that most influential literary critic, we may learn to appreciate the distinct aims of his poetry and the subtle means by which he achieves them.

9 TRANSMISSION

Today, after more than two and a half millennia, we are in a position to read and appreciate substantial parts of Stesichorus' work. This remarkable fact results from a process of transmission, centuries long, which this section aims to trace.³²⁶

The earliest performances of Stesichorus' work around the Greek world³²⁷ will have generated demand for texts: scripts for the performers, books for interested amateurs and fellow-poets who desired a permanent memorial of what they had heard. These written copies in several Greek communities will have increased the poems' chances of outliving their author.³²⁸ Stesichorus seems to have acquired a substantial reputation quickly: Simonides mentions him alongside Homer as

³²⁵ In Hermogenes' view (Περὶ ῥημάτων 2.4 = Tb28 Ercoles), Stesichorus' poetry was 'sweet' (ἡδύς) 'because of its use of many epithets' (διὰ τὸ πολλοὺς χρεῖσθαι τοῖς ἐπιθέτοις).

³²⁶ The classic analysis of the transmission of all the lyric poets, Wilamowitz (1900a), is out of date thanks to the papyri, and a replacement is badly needed; as Liberman (2007) 64 writes (with reference only to part of the transmission, but the point can be expanded to encompass the whole), 'une étude systématique des éditions alexandrines des poètes lyriques mettrait en lumière ce que l'étude d'une édition singulière laisse obscur'. For recent accounts of the transmission of Alcman and Bacchylides see respectively Carey (2011) and Hadjimichael (2011).

³²⁷ See section §4 above.

³²⁸ 'The survival of poetry is linked to its ability to reach beyond its local audience to a larger Greek public' (Carey (2011) 441).

a source of authority.³²⁹ Simonides will have known Homer's works mainly through performance, and probably Stesichorus' too; but in each case written texts may have played a role.

Even at this early stage, the transmission may have gone awry. Any piece of mythological narrative lyric could in theory have been wrongly attributed to Stesichorus, thanks to the absence of a personal element in his poetry; hence the corpus known to Simonides as 'Stesichorus' may already have been contaminated.³³⁰ We do not believe that such misattribution was widespread, however, for two reasons. First, the surviving fragments show similarities of style, content, and form beyond what might have been expected for poets working in a similar genre.³³¹ Second, later writers were able to tell apart Stesichorus' lyric narratives from those belonging to other poets. The works of the relatively obscure poets Xanthus, a predecessor of Stesichorus, and Xenocritus of Locri, a predecessor or contemporary, were known to writers of the fifth and fourth centuries.³³² One of Xanthus' poems was explicitly distinguished by a Peripatetic scholar from a work by Stesichorus on the same topic. So there is evidence that archaic lyric narrative was not simply all amalgamated under the name of Stesichorus. Nevertheless, it would be rash to rule out the possibility of error on a limited scale.

A related problem involves confusion between the works of Stesichorus and those belonging to the slightly later west Greek poet Ibycus.³³³ Athenaeus testifies to this problem when

³²⁹ See section §1 above.

³³⁰ Compare how works in hexameters from the sixth century were incorrectly attributed to Homer and Hesiod. Simonides himself, in the fragment which refers to Homer and Stesichorus, implicitly attributes to Homer a poem containing an episode (the games for Pelias) which does not occur in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. For the related phenomenon of literary forgery see West (1999c) 368–73 = (2011–13) 1414–21. For misattribution in other anonymous genres, such as oratory and medical writing, see Wilamowitz (1900a) 30–1.

³³¹ See sections §§5–8 above. ³³² On these two poets see pp. 22–3 above.

³³³ See Cingano (1990) 189–208, Ucciardello (2005) 21–3.