

Was there a future for the Phaeacians of the Homeric *Odyssey* ?

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A book by Douglas Frame (*Hippota Nestor*), published in 2009, has shown that the poetic construct of the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey* functions as a self-representation, as it were, of the Ionians of the Ionian Dodecapolis in its heyday, dating back to the late eighth and early seventh century BCE. And the reason for the Homeric description of the Phaeacians as paragons of feasting is that the primary occasion for the performance of Homeric poetry in that era was a spectacular festival or *thusiā* ‘feast’ known as the Panionia, which became the most public expression of the wealth, power, and prestige of the Dodecapolis. In my presentation here, I build on Frame’s arguments by tracing the poetic construct of the Phaeacians further. As I will argue, this construct was appropriated also by the leadership of the city of Corinth in the political context of their colonizing the island of Corcyra sometime around the late eighth century. And this construct was reappropriated, I will also argue, at a later period when Corcyra as a preeminent daughter city of Corinth broke away from the mother city and became a rival state. In terms of my argumentation, there are traces of these poetic appropriations and reappropriations in variant readings that we find embedded in the textual tradition of the Homeric *Odyssey* as it has survived into our era. The case in point will be the variant readings that we find in *Odyssey* xiii 152. The fact that there are only traces of textual variation in this line can be explained in terms of a systematic pattern of suppressing Homeric variants in the context of the Athenian festival of the Panathenaia, which eventually became the primary vehicle for transmitting the performance traditions of the *Odyssey* as well as the *Iliad*.

My presentation originates from an article I published in 2002, entitled “Reading Bakhtin Reading the Classics: An Epic Fate for Conveyors of the Heroic Past.”¹ That article is divided into ten arguments, each one of which responds to earlier arguments made by Mikhail Bakhtin in a seminal essay originally published in 1975, the English translation of which appeared in 1981 under the title “Epic and Novel.” Here I offer a reworking of the tenth of these ten arguments of mine, where I challenged a formulation of Bakhtin that I

¹ This article, Nagy 2002, has been evaluated most incisively by Walsh 2003.

can summarize this way: *epic tends to shut itself off from the present time of its performance.*

My presentation here is part of a larger project, since I plan to rework my original 2002 article in its entirety, intending to publish in 2014 an online second edition on the website of the Center for Hellenic Studies (chs.harvard.edu). In the process of preparing this second edition of my “Reading Bakhtin Reading the Classics,” I have become increasingly aware that the tenth of my ten arguments is free-standing and should also be presented on its own. That is what I am attempting in this presentation. As for the subtitle of my original 2002 title, “An Epic Fate for Conveyors of the Heroic Past,” it helps me focus on a central question that motivates what I am presenting here. And that question is, *did the Phaeacians survive into the present time of Homeric performance, or was it their fate to be shut off from such a present time?*

My argumentation in this presentation and in the larger 2014 project differs significantly from my earlier argumentation in the 2002 article because my thinking is now strongly influenced by the 2009 book of Frame. In the 2002 article, I had not yet taken into account the evidence for the Ionian origins of the Phaeacians as a poetic construct. And I should add that I have by now also taken into account a 2008 book entitled *Zeus in the Odyssey*, by Jim Marks. This book, though it does not take into account my 2002 article, is helpful in exploring the political context of Corcyra in analyzing the variations that we find in *Odyssey* xiii 152.

Finally, I should note that an abridged version of what I have to say here about *Odyssey* xiii 152 will go into an online CHS publication entitled *A Homer commentary in progress*, edited by Douglas Frame, Leonard Muellner, and myself. I will also be commenting there on the larger context of *Odyssey* xiii 146-184, as also of viii 565-569.

I start with *Odyssey* xiii 146-184. As we join the narrative, we find that the god Poseidon is very angry at the Phaeacians for providing Odysseus {82|83} with one of their ships to convey the hero back to his home in Ithaca. The god now plans to take revenge, and he asks Zeus to approve his plan, which has two parts: (1) to smash the ship as it sails back home to the Phaeacians and (2) to make a huge mountain ‘envelop’ their city:

νῦν αὖ Φαίηκων ἐθέλω περικαλλέα νῆα

ἐκ πομπῆς ἀνιοῦσαν ἐν ἡεροηδέϊ πόντῳ
ῥαῖσαι, ἴν' ἤδη σχῶνται, ἀπολλήξωσι δὲ πομπῆς
 ἀνθρώπων, μέγα δέ σφιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι

So now I want to smash the very beautiful ship of the Phaeacians

when it comes back, in a misty crossing of the sea, from its conveying
 mission,

so that these people [= the Phaeacians] will hold off, at long last, and stop
 their practice of conveying

humans. And I want to make a huge mountain envelop² their city.

Odyssey xiii 149-152

Before Zeus gives his approval, he modifies the terms of Poseidon's two-part plan for vengeance. In the case of the first part, as we are about to see, the Will of Zeus is not that the ship be smashed but only that it be turned into a rock at the very moment that it sails into the entrance to the harbor - a rock destined to be a famous landmark for all time to come. In the case of the second part of the sea god's plan, it seems that Zeus will indeed allow Poseidon to make a huge mountain 'envelop' the city. Here is the precise wording of these two parts of the Will of Zeus, addressed as commands to Poseidon:

ὁππότε κεν δὴ πάντες ἐλαυνομένην προΐδωνται
 λαοὶ ἀπὸ πτόλιος, θεῖναι λίθον ἐγγύθι γαίης
 νηὶ θοῇ ἵκελον, ἵνα θαυμάζωσιν ἅπαντες
 ἄνθρωποι, μέγα δέ σφιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι

When all the people of the city look out and see the ship sailing in,

turn it into a rock, just as it is about to reach land.

² I choose this translation of ἀμφικαλύψαι in light of the observations of Merry 1878 on xiii 152: "Poseidon does not propose to bury the city, but to shut it off from the use of its two harbours by some great mountain mass." See also Peradotto 1990:78n18.

Make it look like a swift ship, so that people will look at it with wonder

- all of humanity will do so; and make the huge mountain envelop their city.

Odyssey xiii 155-158

I print the last verse here, xiii 158, as it is printed in most modern editions of Homer.³ In this verse, the god Poseidon is commanded to seal off the Phaeacians forever within the confines of the epic past.

There is another version of this verse, however, adduced by the Alexandrian editor Aristophanes of Byzantium, which reads: {83|84}

ἄνθρωποι, μηδέ σφιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι

- all of humanity will do so; but do not make the mountain envelop their city.

Odyssey xiii 158 (variant)⁴

This different version was disputed by the later Alexandrian editor Aristarchus of Samothrace: he preferred the version of xiii 158 that I printed earlier above, which is the one that survives in the medieval manuscript tradition.⁵

According to the version that survives only by way of Aristophanes, the future of the Phaeacians is not at all closed off. It remains open-ended, extending into the “present” when the epic is being narrated.

Two questions immediately come to mind. First, how could this different version fit the overall narrative of the Homeric *Odyssey*? Second, is the textual basis of this version “legitimate”? Addressing the first question first, I start by taking a close look at how the immediate narrative proceeds from here.

³ For example: van Thiel 1991.

⁴ This variant, adduced by Aristophanes of Byzantium, is reported by the scholia (Ἀριστοφάνης δὲ γράφει, μὴ δέ σφιν: H at xiii 152, evidently with reference to xiii 158). The scholia go on to say that Aristarchus opposed (ἀντιλέγει) this reading in his *hupomnēmata* or commentaries (evidently preferring μέγα δέ σφιν over μηδέ σφιν). See Dindorf 1855:566; cf. Hoekstra 1989:174 and Friedrich 1989:396n2. Conceivably, Aristophanes adduced πόλιν ἀμφικαλύψαι instead of πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι. At xiii 158 and 177 there is variation in the medieval manuscripts: either πόλιν ἀμφικαλύψ- or πόλει ἀμφικαλύψ-.

⁵ See the previous note.

Complying with the reaction of Zeus to the original two-part plan of revenge, Poseidon proceeds to turn the returning ship into a rock (xiii 160-164). The first part of Poseidon's two-part plan has now been accomplished, although in modified form, in compliance with the Will of Zeus.⁶ The ship has been petrified at the approach to the harbor, instead of being 'smashed' at midsea.⁷

At this midpoint in the ongoing narrative about the fate of the Phaeacians, we hear their reaction to the petrification of their ship. They are in shock: they cannot understand how this disaster could have happened to them (xiii 165-169). But Alkinoos, their king, has comprehended what is still in the process of happening. He explains to the Phaeacians that he now understands a prophecy that his father Nausithoos had once told him: it must have been this present disaster, Alkinoos says, that his father had prophesied to him - along with that other disaster still waiting to be narrated in the *Odyssey*. Here is the precise wording of the explanation given by King Alkinoos:

φῆ ποτε Φαιήκων ἀνδρῶν περικαλλέα νῆα
 ἐκ πομπῆς ἀνιοῦσαν ἐν ἡεροηδέϊ πόντῳ
 ῥαισέμεναι, μέγα δ' ἦμιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψειν⁸

He [my father] once said that he [Poseidon] will smash the very beautiful ship of the Phaeacian men

when it comes back, in a misty crossing of the sea, from its conveying mission,

and that he will make a huge mountain envelop our city.

Odyssey xiii 175-177

⁶ On the systematic subordination of the Will of Poseidon to the Will of Zeus in the *Odyssey*, see Segal 1994:210; see also his analysis, p. 219, of Zeus as "the most detached of all the gods." For important further elaboration on these themes, see Cook 1995:123-127.

⁷ The formulaic language of epic is quite precise here in making a distinction between a 'smashing' of the ship at midsea and a petrification of the ship at the approach to the harbor; see Cook 1995:124.

⁸ There is variation in the medieval manuscripts: either ἀμφικαλύψαι or ἀμφικαλύψειν.

The audience of the *Odyssey* already knows this prophecy as recapitulated in xiii 173-177, because Alkinoos had already “quoted” it to Odysseus {84|85} at viii 565-569.⁹ At that earlier point in the narrative, however, Alkinoos had said something in addition, which he does not say now:

ὡς ἀγόρευ’ ὁ γέρων. τὰ δέ κεν θεὸς ἢ τελέσειεν,
ἢ κ’ ἀτέλεστ’ εἴη, ὡς οἱ φῶλον φῦλον ἐπλετο θυμῶ

That is what the old man said. And the god [Poseidon] could either bring these things to fulfillment

or they could be left unfulfilled, however it was pleasing to his heart.

Odyssey viii 570-571

Now, instead of “repeating” this part of the old man’s prophecy, Alkinoos commands the Phaeacians to take immediate action:

ὡς ἀγόρευ’ ὁ γέρων. τὰ δὲ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται.
ἀλλ’ ἄγεθ’, ὡς ἂν ἐγὼ εἶπω, πειθώμεθα πάντες.

That is what the old man said. And now you and I see that all these things are being brought to fulfillment.¹⁰

But come, let us all comply with exactly what I am about to say.

Odyssey xiii 178-179

⁹ The textual transmission of viii 565-569 and xiii 173-177 leaves the two passages matching almost exactly, word for word. There is some degree of non-matching, though: thus the ship is *εὐεργέα* ‘well-built’ in most manuscripts at viii 567 vs. *περικαλλέα* ‘very beautiful’ in most manuscripts at xiii 175, while the mutually alternative forms are attested in a minority of manuscripts at both places. In terms of oral poetics, such variation may be justified even where the “quoting” of a character’s words happens to be a narrative requirement of the composition, as it is here.

¹⁰ On the “evidentiary” function of *δή*, see Bakker 1997:75-76, 78-79. This particle *δή* is used by a speaker when he or she “assumes that the listeners are willing to see the evidence produced, so that conducting the discourse becomes an activity aimed at shared seeing, a being together in the situation created by the speaker’s phrasing” (Bakker p. 76). In the present context, I translate this “evidentiary” function of *δή* by adding ‘And now you and I see that’ to ‘all these things are being brought to fulfillment’.

When Alkinoos had first “quoted” the prophecy of his father at viii 570-571, the “quotation” had left a loophole: Poseidon may or may not bring ‘these things’ to fulfillment, as he wishes. But now at xiii 178-179 there is the greatest urgency, and Alkinoos exclaims hyperbolically that ‘all these things are being brought to fulfillment’. The rhetorical point of this hyperbole is to motivate the Phaeacians to take immediate action. Even though the half-hopeful words of Alkinoos at viii 570-571 are not repeated but are replaced by the increasingly desperate words of xiii 178-179, there is still a trace of hope - provided that the Phaeacians take immediate action by following the emergency orders of Alkinoos, which are formulated in the verses that immediately follow, xiii 180-182.

King Alkinoos orders the Phaeacians to do two things without delay: to resolve never again to engage in the otherworldly *pompē pompē* ‘conveying’ (xiii 180) of mortals back to their real world and to offer a sacrifice of twelve bulls to Poseidon (xiii 180-182).¹¹ The Phaeacians must do these two things before the second of the two disasters should happen. The hope, Alkinoos says, is that Poseidon may still take pity and stop his plan:

αἴ κ' ἐλέησῃ
μηδ' ἤμιν περίμηκες ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψῃ

... in hopes that he [Poseidon] will take pity

and will not make the tall mountain envelop our city.

Odyssey xiii 182-183

{85|86}

The Phaeacians immediately proceed to make sacrifice to the sea god, supplicating him (xiii 184-187). At this sacrifice, we may presume that they do indeed resolve never again to engage in the otherworldly ‘conveying’ of mortals back to their “real” world.¹² Such a resolution by the Phaeacians would of course cancel their own otherworldly status as

¹¹ For an incisive analysis of the otherworldly aspects of the Phaeacians’ activity of *pompē* ‘conveying’ (xiii 180) by way of their supernatural ships, see Cook 1992, especially pp. 240-241, 245. See also in general the valuable interpretations of Segal 1994:12-64.

¹² Cf. Cook 1995:124n36, who comments: “Poseidon’s essential aim has been achieved with his transformation of the ship: the Phaiakes cease to offer escort to mortals.” On the hermeneutics of the “reality” of Ithaca as opposed to the “world apart” that is Phaeacia, see Segal 1994:12-25.

mediators between the inner world of the narrative and the outer world of “reality” as implicit in the “present” time when the narration of epic is actually happening.

In terms of the mythological hermeneutics developed by J. Gordon Howie, the Phaeacians are hereby being shifted from the “*Spatium Mythicum*” to the “*Spatium Historicum*.”¹³ But questions remain. Are they being shifted merely in the sense that they have been removed, as of now, from the narrative? If the price of their survival is the loss of their status in the “*Spatium Mythicum*,” will we ever get to see them again in the so-called “*Spatium Historicum*”?

But the most basic of all remaining questions is really this: what will happen to the Phaeacians *according to the narrative*? We cannot be completely certain. The Homeric narrative about the Phaeacians breaks off at *Odyssey* xiii 187, at the very moment when they are offering sacrifice and praying to Poseidon to take pity on them. As Peradotto points out, the narrative break takes place most abruptly, dramatically, and even exceptionally—at mid-verse.¹⁴ In the first part of the verse at xiii 187, the Phaeacians are last seen standing around the sacrificial altar; in the second part of the verse, Odysseus has just woken up in Ithaca. A new phase of the hero’s experiences has just begun in the “real” world of Ithaca.¹⁵

The narrative, then, ultimately leaves it open whether the Phaeacians will or will not be enveloped by the huge mountain.¹⁶ Peradotto describes this uncertainty as a way for Homeric poetry “to avoid saying ‘yes’ to one system and ‘no’ to another, in a higher and more complicated system, the poem, that only precariously maintains them both.”¹⁷ For Peradotto, the two competing systems that are subsumed “precariously” by the overriding Homeric system are, on the one hand, the element of fairy-tale or “*Märchen*” and, on the other, the element of “tragically oriented myth.”¹⁸

¹³ Howie 1989:25 and 28. His model of the “*Spatium Mythicum*” is comparable to Peradotto’s model of “*Märchen*” (1990:82-83), on which I have more to say presently.

¹⁴ Peradotto 1990:81.

¹⁵ On the return of Odysseus to Ithaca as the notional end of the heroic age and the notional beginning of the “present” time of Homeric composition, see Martin 1993.

¹⁶ Peradotto pp. 80-81.

¹⁷ Peradotto p. 83.

¹⁸ Peradotto p. 83.

In what follows, I offer a different explanation for whatever competing “systems” may be at work in this narrative. To anticipate my conclusions: Homeric poetry has left here an opening not only for two different outcomes but also for two different ways of thinking of an outcome.

I start my explanation by stressing again the importance of the loophole of viii 570-571, as formulated by Alkinoos: the god Poseidon may or may not bring his threat to fulfillment: he may do as he pleases. Moreover, we have already seen that even the first disaster did not quite happen in the way that the father of Alkinoos had prophesied - or the way that the god Poseidon had originally wanted it to happen before Zeus went ahead and modified the original terms in the process of formulating the eventual Will of Zeus.

Still, despite such tentatively hopeful signs, the plot of the *Odyssey* {86|87} accumulated many other signs that point toward the inevitability of disaster for the Phaeacians.¹⁹ Can we really be sure, then, that there is still a way out? It all depends ultimately on whether Zeus had modified the terms for the second part of Poseidon’s plan, not just for the first part. And that depends on whether we read the version featuring the variant μηδέ = *mêde mēde* as adduced by Aristophanes instead of the variant μέγα δέ = *mega de* as preferred by Aristarchus and as transmitted by the medieval manuscripts.

Here I return to the second of my two initial questions about *Odyssey* xiii 155-158: is the textual basis of this different version featuring *mêde mēde* really “legitimate”? We can now add a related question: if it is legitimate, then does that delegitimize the version featuring *mega de*?

For Erwin Cook, the outcome of the epic narrative depends on our making an actual choice between two variants, *mega de* vs. *mêde mēde* at xiii 158, and he proceeds to choose μηδέ = *mêde mēde* in line with his interpretation of the epic narrative’s treatment of Poseidon’s interactions with Zeus.²⁰ I agree with Cook’s interpretation, but it leaves unanswered the question of legitimacy. How can we justify the textual transmission of the

¹⁹ Howie 1989:31 speaks of “the inevitability of the second phase of the prophecy.”

²⁰ Cook 1995:124n36; also Friedrich 1989.

form *mêde mēde* in this context?²¹ Further, how can we justify the meaning of this variant in terms of Homeric poetry?

The actual need to choose one or the other variant depends on the way we look at Homeric poetry. If this poetry is merely a static text, then we are indeed forced to make a choice. If, however, we view Homeric poetry as a living system - an oral tradition that evolves ultimately into the textual tradition inherited by the Alexandrian editors - then we do not have to choose whenever we see a variation. Rather, as I will now go on to argue, the choices were already being made by Homeric poetry itself, which could opt for different variants in different phases of its own evolution.

My reasoning here derives from an overall “evolutionary model” that I have worked out as a general way to account for the making of Homeric poetry.²² In terms of this model, as I now plan to argue, the living and evolving oral tradition of Homeric poetry itself allowed for a choice either to seal off its own past from the present time of narration or to reach into this present time and thereby make its presence fully manifest.

According to the narrative option linked with the first of our two variants from *Odyssey* xiii 158, *mega de*, the outlook is hopeless for the Phaeacians, since Poseidon’s plan to seal off the city of the Phaeacians has been restated by Zeus and is therefore tantamount to the Will of Zeus, which the Homeric tradition conventionally equates with the way things ultimately turn out in epic narrative, as in *Iliad* I 5.²³ At the beginning of the *Odyssey*, however, Zeus himself undercuts the equation of epic plot with the Will of Zeus (i 32-34).²⁴ That is, there are {87|88} differences in shades of meaning between the Iliadic and the Odyssean perspectives on the Will of Zeus as the plot of epic.²⁵

According to the narrative option linked with the second variant *mêdemēde*, the outlook is still hopeful. After all, at an earlier point in the narrative, xiii 144-145, we can see

²¹ Cf. Friedrich pp. 398-399: “Aristophanes’ reading has against it the whole weight of the [medieval] manuscript tradition, and Aristarchus’ authority to boot.” He leaves it open whether Aristophanes conjectured *mēde* or whether he found it attested in the ancient manuscript tradition (p. 396). Still, he argues strongly for the upgrading of *mēde* “from the apparatus to the text” (p. 399).

²² Nagy 1996a:109-114 and 1996b:29-112; cf. Seaford 1994:144-154. For an incisive overview, see Thalmann 1998:300-301.

²³ Nagy 1990:238, with further bibliography.

²⁴ Extensive commentary, with bibliography, in Nagy 1990:241-242.

²⁵ Nagy 1990:241-242.

a way out when Zeus tells Poseidon to exact any punishment he pleases ‘if any human dishonors you not at all’ (ἀνδρῶν δ’ εἴ περ τίς σε . . . | οὐ τι τίει xiii 143-144). The context is this: Poseidon has been angrily questioning Zeus, calling on him to explain the Will of Zeus (Διὸς δ’ ἐξείρετο βουλήν xiii 127) - that is, to explain the overall plot of the narrative - now that the Phaeacians have conveyed Odysseus back home to Ithaca. How can I be honored among the gods, Poseidon plaintively asks Zeus, ‘when the Phaeacians do not honor me at all?’ (ὅτε με βροτοὶ οὐ τι τίουσι | Φαίηκες xiii 129-130). But then, as we have already seen, the story goes on to say that the Phaeacians will indeed initiate a remedy after the first disaster by proceeding to honor Poseidon with sacrifice in order to avert the second disaster.

The narrative option that I link with the variant *mêdemêde*, according to which the Phaeacians are to be spared the second disaster of an all-enveloping mountain, depends on whether this variant as adduced by Aristophanes in place of *mega de* at xiii 183 is a genuine *formulaic* variant or only a *textual* variant. If it is the latter, then *mêde mēde* may be just an editorial conjecture.²⁶ That possibility would severely reduce the chances for arguing that *mêde mēde* is a genuine alternative to *mega de*. In what follows, however, I will argue against that possibility on several levels.

From an analysis of the formulaic system in which *mêde mēde* is embedded, this form can be justified as a functioning element in that system, just as the form *mega de* is a functioning element: in other words, *mêde mēde* and *mega de* can be considered compositional alternatives in the formulaic system of Homeric diction.²⁷

²⁶ Peradotto 1990:79 argues that *mêde* at xiii 183 is just that, an editorial conjecture: “Aristophanes, scandalized by a pusillanimous Zeus who would make himself accessory to the destruction of the Phaeacians, alters μέγα δέ in line 158 to μηδέ.” As Peradotto points out (*ibid.*), “With few exceptions modern critics generally tend to reflect Aristophanes’s tender-mindedness.” At pp. 79-80, he quotes some interesting examples.

²⁷ As Leonard Muellner points out in a message written 3/10/1998 to me and to Chad E. Turner, the variant μηδέ at xiii 177 is syntactically and formulaically parallel to the μηδέ of xiii 183. In a message written 2/3/1998, Turner had pointed out to me that the metrical placement of the variant μηδέ at xiii 198 is singular (although there are cases where this word straddles the last syllable of a spondee and the first syllable of a dactyl in the third and fourth feet, he finds no other cases in the second and third feet). But the formulaic system is capable of generating rare forms and combinations. For a striking example, we may compare the singular attestation of μηδέν at *Iliad* XVIII 500: here is a word that is found this one and only time in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together, and yet it can be shown to be *formulaic*. See Muellner 1976:101-102, 106.

Moreover, there is immediate contextual as well as formulaic evidence to support the argument that *mêde mēde* is a functioning compositional variant in the formulaic system. Let us consider the wording of Zeus in his answer to Poseidon's angry questioning:

ἔρξον ὅπως ἐθέλεις καί τοι φίλον ἔπλετο θυμῷ

Do as you wish and as was pleasing to your heart.

Odyssey xiii 145

This open-ended wording of Zeus matches formulaically the wording of Alkinoos, when he had originally "quoted" the prophecy of his father:

ὡς ἀγόρευ' ὁ γέρων. τὰ δέ κεν θεὸς ἢ τελέσειεν,
ἢ κ' ἀτέλεστ' εἴη, ὡς οἱ φίλον ἔπλετο θυμῷ {88|89}

That is what the old man said. And the god [Poseidon] could either bring these things to fulfillment

or they could be left unfulfilled, however it was pleasing to his heart.

Odyssey viii 570-571

The formulation of Zeus, then, in leaving it still undecided whether or not the Phaeacians are to be 'enveloped', can be used as evidence to argue that *mêde mēde* is indeed a genuine compositional alternative to *mega de*.

As for the possibility that *mēde mēde* is an emendation based on an editorial conjecture, my own cumulative work on Homeric variants as adduced by the three great Alexandrian editors of Homer (Zenodotus, Aristophanes, and Aristarchus) leaves me skeptical, since I find that these editors normally do not make emendations without manuscript evidence.²⁸

In making the specific argument that both variants *mega de* and *mēde mēde* are genuine compositional alternatives, I return to my general argument that Homeric poetry is

²⁸ Nagy 1996a:107-152. This finding is a source of ongoing debate, some of which I survey in Nagy 1998.

not a static text but a slowly evolving system.²⁹ In terms of this general argument, the variant *mega de* produces a narrative closure for the Phaeacians: their fate is sealed. The variant *mēdemēde*, however, produces an outcome that is open-ended.³⁰

These two variants, I contend, reflect different phases in the evolution of Homeric poetry. Let us begin with the variant *mega de*, the context of which can be linked with a relatively more Panhellenic phase of epic.³¹ I have defined this phase elsewhere as one that “concentrates on traditions that tend to be common to most locales and peculiar to none.”³² The Panhellenic phases of epic make contact with the “present” time of narration by shading over any “local color” that might distract from the widest possible range of ways to visualize this “present.”³³ A Panhellenic version, then, will tend to universalize the concerns of the present.

But there are also other, less Panhellenic, ways for epic to make contact with the “present” time in which narration happens: the “local color” can be highlighted, though only at the cost of narrowing the range of ways to visualize this “present.” The context of the variant *mēde mēde* can be linked with such a relatively less Panhellenic phase of epic. This variant makes contact with the epic “present” in a less universalized and more localized way. One focus of localization is historical Corcyra, modern-day Corfu.

The fact is, the Corcyraeans of the Classical period claimed to be residents of the land of the Phaeacians, as we know from a remark of Thucydides (1.25.4); from another remark of his, we know also that they worshipped King Alkinoos as their local cult hero (3.70.4).³⁴ According to Howie, “the value of the Phaeacians for the Corcyraeans was that they gave

²⁹ Nagy 1996b:29-112, where I stress that the pace of evolution in Homeric poetry as a system slows down markedly after the eighth century BCE.

³⁰ We may compare the open-endedness conveyed by the word μηδέν = *mēden* in *Iliad* XVIII 500, centering on the moral dilemma of an aggrieved man in a litigation that is pictured on the Shield of Achilles. The unnamed man in the picture is locked into a stance of eternal refusal, extending indefinitely into the future: see again Muellner 1976:101-102, 106. With reference to this picture, see also Nagy 1997:195: “the *Iliad* need not end where the linear narrative ends, to the extent that the pictures on the Shield of Achilles leave an opening into a virtual present, thus making the intent of the *Iliad* open-ended.”

³¹ On the relativity of Panhellenism (despite the absolutist implications of the term) as a cultural impulse, see Nagy 1990:53.

³² Nagy 1990:54, with further discussion of Panhellenic models.

³³ Further discussion in Nagy 1990:57, where I describe Panhellenism as “a hermeneutic model for explaining how the myth-making mind can become critical of variants in myth.”

³⁴ Hornblower 1991:70 and 469; see also Howie 1989:28.

them a stake in the mythical past independent of their mother-city [Corinth], which was famous as a centre of the worship of the sea-god [Poseidon] and as site of the panhellenic Isthmian Games in the god's honour."³⁵ A similar view is offered by Jim Marks: after the colonization of Corcyra by Corinth in the late eighth century, the eventual split between the daughter city and the mother city made it possible for the Corcyraeans to appropriate for themselves the pre-Corinthian mythological heritage of their island.³⁶ I prefer the analysis of Douglas Frame, who shows the myth of the Phaeacians originated from the Ionian Dodecapolis and was then relocated in Corcyra.³⁷ On the basis of Frame's analysis, I would argue that such a relocation of the myth can be traced back to the founding of Corcyra by Corinth in the late eighth century BCE, and that the appropriation of the myth by the Corinthians can be traced back to a rivalry between Corinth and the Dodecapolis. Later on, once the island state of Corcyra broke free from Corinth, the myth of the Phaeacians could also be freed from Corinthian ownership.

The identity of the Corcyraeans as heirs of the Phaeacians depends on the Will of Zeus as he formulates it in *Odyssey* xiii 155-158, and it depends especially on the variant *mēde mēde* of xiii 158, which yields an open-ended narrative that reaches directly into the "present" of the Classical period and beyond.

Here I return to what I have already said about the colonization of Corcyra by Corinth in the late eighth century BCE: as a political and cultural fact of life, the self-identification of the Corcyraeans with the Phaeacians can be traced back to the early date of this colonization.³⁸ The variant represented by *mēde mēde* at xiii 158 may be just as early, and in fact it may be the vehicle for expressing just such a political and cultural fact of life. This is not to say that the other variant represented by *mega de* at xiii 158 may not be just as early. It is only to say that both variants were still available to the Homeric tradition of epic as it evolved during the pre-Classical period. In such an early period, the affirming - or the denying - of a claim of descent from the Phaeacians was essential not just poetically but

³⁵ Howie 1989:27.

³⁶ Marks 2008:58-59

³⁷ Frame 2009:256-257n158.

³⁸ Hoekstra 1989:174 offers this formulation: "A possible *terminus post quem* is the third quarter of the eighth century when Eretrians, soon followed by Corinthians, settled there." For a critical survey of testimonia, see Howie 1989:29.

also politically and culturally.³⁹ It really mattered then, and it continued to matter well into the Classical period of the fifth century and beyond, as we have seen from the remark of Thucydides (1.25.4, 3.70.4) about the Corcyraeans' claim that they inherited the land of the Phaeacians, whose king, Alkinoos, they worshipped as their local hero.⁴⁰

I add here a reference made by Callimachus to Scheria, the mythical island of the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*. In his poetry, Callimachus too equated this mythical place with a historical place, the island of Corcyra (*Aetia* Book 1 F 12, 13, 15). As I have argued in another project, Callimachus was following here an alternative Homeric tradition, to which I refer short-hand as the Homerus Auctus.⁴¹ This version was different from the Athenian version of Homeric poetry, to which I refer as the Koine.⁴²

This different version of the Homerus Auctus is actually attested at verse 158 of *Odyssey* xiii. In the scholia linked to this verse (at xiii 152), as we have seen, Aristophanes of Byzantium reported a reading that differed from the reading he found in the Homeric Koine.⁴³ The difference in meaning, as we have also seen, had to do with an equation of the mythical Scheria, island of the Phaeacians, with the historical Corcyra.

This equation was possible in terms of the variant reading, but it was impossible in terms of the reading found in the Homeric Koine, that is, in the Athenian Homer stemming from the new era of the democracy in the fifth century BCE. In the Koine version of the *Odyssey*, the Phaeacians are cut off from the world outside their mythical past after Poseidon interposes a huge mountain that seals them off forever. In this particular version, the wording at verse 158 of *Odyssey* xiii is μέγα δέ σφιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι 'and make the huge mountain envelop their city'. In the non-Koine version favored by Callimachus and by Aristophanes, by contrast, Zeus enjoins Poseidon not to interpose the

³⁹ On the impact of prevailing political and cultural forces on the evolution of Homeric poetry before the Classical period, see my comments in Nagy 2002:81 on the fifth of Bakhtin's ten selected formulations.

⁴⁰ For parallel claims in the pre-Classical period, see Nagy 1990:153-155, especially with reference to (1) the Peisistratidai of Athens, who claimed descent from Peisistratos, son of Homeric Nestor; (2) the Penthilidai of Mytilene in Lesbos, claiming descent from Penthilos, son of Orestes; (3) the Neleidai of Miletus, claiming descent from Neleus, father of Nestor.

⁴¹ Nagy 2008|2009:590.

⁴² Nagy 2008|2009:590-591.

⁴³ Nagy 2008|2009:590-591.

mountain. As we know from the testimony of Aristophanes, the variant wording is μηδέ σφιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικαλύψαι ‘but do not make the mountain envelop their city’.⁴⁴

In terms of the Koine version heard by Athenians in the new era of the democracy, the mythical place of Scheria cannot be identified with the historical place of Corcyra, since Scheria had been sealed off forever. In terms of the non-Koine version favored by Callimachus, by contrast, the possibility of such an identification is not sealed off but left open. Thus the Phaeacians are saved from the fate of losing contact with the real world of their future, and they retain the alternative fate of becoming the forerunners of the people of Corcyra.⁴⁵

But the Koine version of Homer negates such an identification of Scheria with Corcyra. I interpret this negation in terms of politics as well as poetics. The political terms correspond to the imperial design of Athens in the era of the democracy. If the mythical Scheria can be sealed off from the historical Corcyra, it is owned by Athens; if it is not sealed off, it is owned by Corcyra.⁴⁶ The Athenians may be said to own the mythical place of Scheria because of a political reality, that is, because they actually controlled the Homeric Koine in the era of the democracy. In the undifferentiated Homerus Auctus as emulated by Callimachus and his contemporaries, by contrast, the imperial designs of the Athenians were not so clearly foregrounded.⁴⁷

In the Hellenistic period of the Alexandrian editors of Homer, the question of choosing *mega de* or *mēde mēde* would have mattered purely from a poetical rather than a political or cultural point of view. The Corcyraeans’ claims to the land of the Phaeacians would not be a major concern any more, at least not politically. But it would still really matter in another way: the question is, what about the petrified ship of the Phaeacians? Was this petrified ship a figment of the poetic imagination, walled off in the “Spatium Mythicum” of the epic past, or was it the same thing as the real-life rock at the entrance to the harbor of Corcyra, accessible to all humanity in the “Spatium Historicum” of the contemporary

⁴⁴ Nagy 2008|2009:591.

⁴⁵ Nagy 2008|2009:591.

⁴⁶ Nagy 2008|2009:591. Douglas Frame notes that we may see traces here of converging Athenian and Panionian agenda.

⁴⁷ Nagy 2008|2009:591-592.

Hellenic world? The disagreement between Aristarchus and Aristophanes over the choice of *mega de* or *mēde mēde* respectively must have centered on such questions.

In *Odyssey* xiii 155-158, we hear how the Phaeacians will one day look out at {89|90} their harbor and see their returning ship suddenly turn into a rock, and we hear also how that fabulous petrified ship will continue to be a most wondrous sight for future generations of humanity to see and to keep on seeing for all time to come. These epic verses of Homeric poetry, one commentator surmises, may be providing an aetiology “for the fact that the rock which rises from the sea just outside the harbour of Corfu was taken to be ‘Odysseus’ ship’.”⁴⁸ There are references to this “real-life” rock in Pliny (*Natural History*) 4.53 and Eustathius (Commentary on *Odyssey* vol. II p. 44 line 27), and to this day the “petrified ship” remains a most celebrated tourist attraction for visitors to Corfu.⁴⁹ But the essential point is, the reference to this rock is already there in the *Odyssey* - that is, in a version of the *Odyssey* that says *mēde mēde* instead of *mega de* at xiii 158.

One way, we see a beautiful snapshot from the enchanted imaginary world of the epic past. The other way, we see a comparably beautiful vista in the enchanting touristic world of Corfu in the non-epic present, still anchored in the {90|91} permanence of the epic past. Either way, petrified ship or scenic rock, what we see is a beloved cultural landmark of Hellenism.

All this is not to say that we must ultimately choose between these two versions of seeing things Homeric. It is only to say that both variants were still available to the Homeric tradition of epic as it evolved into the Classical period and beyond. And it is to ponder the power of epic either to close down or to open up its pathways to the present. The fate of the Phaeacians in conveying the heroic past to the present depends on that power, which is a power of Homeric proportions.

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⁴⁸ Hoekstra 1989:174.

⁴⁹ Cf. Howie p. 32, Hoekstra p. 174. Here is the wording of Pliny 4.53: ... *a Phalacro, Corcyrae promuntorio, scopulus in quem mutatam Ulixis navem a simili specie fabula est*. Note too Pliny 4.52: *Corcyra ... Homero dicta Scheria et Phaeacia*.

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