

Hesiod's "Nautical-Themed Pashmina Afghan":
The *Nautalia* as a Discursive Challenge to Homer's Epics

A number of scholars have commented on Hesiod's description of the proper time for sailing in his *Works and Days*. Notably, Ralph Rosen (1990) considers the *Nautalia* of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (618-694) as a metaphor for poetic art especially as a contrast between the poetry of Homer and Hesiod. In particular, Rosen argues that Hesiod engages in a complex dialogue with Homer's *Iliad*. In his discussion of Hesiod's brief journey from Aulis to Euboea in *Works and Days* 650-655, during Hesiod's *sphragis*, he draws a comparison between these lines and the journey the Greek army makes in order to fight the war against Troy. This is the only passage Rosen uses to discuss Hesiod's comparison of qualifications against those of Homer; and the lines are limited to the comparison of only one of Homer's epic poems. There is no discussion whether Hesiod ever makes a comment on the *Odyssey*, a gap this paper aims to address.

I propose that Hesiod is using sailing as a metaphor not only for poetic art and to underscore the commercial dangers associated with it, but also that he is working within the poetic tradition to challenge the poetic authority of both of Homer's epics. As I will demonstrate, in addition to the *Iliad*, Hesiod makes another very specific reference to Homer's *Odyssey*. In lines 667-668 of the *Works and Days*, Hesiod uses imagery that draws upon a certain intertextual knowledge of Homer, which he assumes his audience possesses. The lines read: εἰ δὲ μὴ πρόφρων γε Ποσειδάων ἐνοσίχθων ἢ Ζεὺς ἀθανάτων βασιλεὺς ἐθέλησιν ὀλέσσαι ("unless indeed the earth-shaker Poseidon had a mind or Zeus king of the immortals wanted to destroy them"). I argue that by mentioning both Zeus and Poseidon in the context of storms at sea, Hesiod does indeed make a pointed reference to the *Odyssey*. Poseidon is a deity of particular importance to Odysseus' wanderings, since Odysseus offends the god, as is evident in *Odyssey* 9,

which leads to his vendetta against the hero. Hesiod elaborates on his own relationship to poetry, especially epic, by his references to the dangers of sailing in Homer's narratives. The *Nautalia* is a strange tangential description of Hesiod's own limited experience with sailing, which he interjects into the section of this work on proper times for farming. Hesiod is no doubt participating in a rich and complex mode of storytelling, and while his reference to sailing is odd in this section, it is appropriate, for Hesiod uses it in order to infuse his narrative with allusions to the poems that dominate the epic genre.

Bibliography

Rosen, R. M. (1990). "Poetry and Sailing in Hesiod's 'Works and Days.'" *Cl Ant* 9.1: 99-113.