

## CHAPTER 1

# Food in Greek Literature

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### Food

In the fourth book of Homer's *Odyssey*, Menelaus tells the young Telemachus, Odysseus' son, who has come to visit him in search of information about his father, about how he (Menelaus) was delayed on his return from Troy by adverse wind conditions on the island of Pharos off the Egyptian coast. Supplies were running low, and with them what strength Menelaus and his comrades had left, but Eidothea, daughter of Proteus, the old man of the sea, took pity on them:

She met me as I roamed by myself, apart from my companions. They spent their time wandering around the island, fishing with bent hooks, for hunger gnawed at their stomachs.

Homer, *Odyssey* 4.367–9

This is one of the passages in which, as has long been recognized, the tale of Menelaus' homeward voyage, his *nostos*, foreshadows that of Odysseus, but does so in a lower, less heroic key. The distinction which Menelaus draws between himself and his crew is repeated when Odysseus and his men are stranded on the island where the cattle of the sun-god graze; hunger forces Odysseus' men to fish (12.332 repeats 4.369), and finally, when Odysseus is absent and asleep, his men succumb to their hunger and kill some of the cattle, with disastrous results. Hunger and the incessant demands of the belly (*gastér*), a theme that resonates much more loudly in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad* (cf., e.g., *Od.* 7.215–18), becomes in fact a leitmotif of the scenes on Ithaca in which Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, tests the suitors and plots their destruction. While the feasting suitors consume Odysseus' flocks, leaving it to the careful and trustworthy Eumaeus to preserve the dwindling stocks as best he can (cf. esp. 14.5–28), the theme of the hunger that pursues the non-élite and outcast members of society is foregrounded in Book 18,

in which the disguised Odysseus is forced to fight against the beggar Iros for a haggis (*gastér*) “full of fat and blood” (18.45, on which see the notes of Russo, Fernandez-Galiano, & Heubeck, 1992, 49–50, and Steiner, 2010, 162). The seer Theoclymenus realizes that the day of death is at hand for the suitors when Athena distracts their wits, they are afflicted with weird fits of laughter, and “the meat they ate was foul with blood” (*Od.* 20.345–8).

However, what particularly attracted the attention of learned readers in antiquity about the respective tales of Menelaus and Odysseus was not, in fact, the way they are used to differentiate the heroes from those beneath them, but rather the focus on the eating of fish as a food of “last resort.” It was noted at least as early as the fourth century BC that fish did not form a regular part of the Homeric diet (cf. *Pl. R.* 3.404b12-c3, Eub. fr. 118 KA = 120 Hunter); in the *Iliad*, in fact, fishing only occurs in similes (cf. 5.487, 16.406–8, 747 (diving for sea-squirts, a wretchedly unheroic occupation), 24.80–2), and Hellenistic scholars, the so-called “separators,” who believed that the two poems were the work of different poets, used the absence of any fish-eating from the *Iliad* as one piece of evidence (scholium on *Il.* 16.747). The greatest Homeric scholar of the Hellenistic period, Aristarchus, argued against the “separators” that Homer minimized references to fish and seafood because it was trivial (*mikroprepes*), just as “he does not show them eating vegetables” (scholium on *Il.* 16.747, cf. Ath. 25d). The matter has been much discussed in modern scholarship (cf. Davidson, 1997, 11–20), but it does seem most likely, as Aristarchus essentially realized, that Homer’s focus on meat-eating, particularly as an accompaniment to sacrifice, is part of the creation of a heroic, distanced world, and is not to be taken as a realistic reflection of elite life in the Bronze Age. The greater prominence of fishing and fish-eating, even if under constraint, in the *Odyssey*, is both a reflection of that poem’s greater concern with “the ordinary man” and the lessening of poetic distance between the events related and the Homeric audience (cf. 19.113, cited below).

As this example demonstrates, food and its uses in narrative carry symbolic value, as they do in many cultures and literary traditions. The cannibalism of the Cyclops and the corrupt and incessant feasts of the suitors both offend against the privileged good order of a well run society, as is seen, for example, in the paradigmatic episode at the beginning of *Odyssey* 3 in which Nestor and his sons greet Telemachus and the disguised Athena on the Pylian shore and, after completing their sacrifice, offer their visitors “roast meat” and wine. The most famous expression of this good order in antiquity was Odysseus’ so-called “Golden Verses” from the start of Book 9:

I say that there is nothing more delightful than when good cheer holds the whole *demos*, and through the hall feasters sit in rows listening to a bard, and beside them are tables full of bread and meat, and a wine-steward draws wine from a mixing-bowl and pours it into the cups.

The eating of food is, or should be, a sign of sharing in a community; Achilles refuses to eat as one manifestation of removing himself from the Achaean fellowship in his grief for Patroclus (*Il.* 24.129), but when he has accepted Priam’s offer of ransom for the body of Hector, thus returning to the shared world of heroic social values, he himself urges Priam to share a meal with him, an act that seals their agreement (24.601–28). This social value of eating is also stressed through the fact that, in the formulaic Homeric mode of composition, more verses are standardly devoted to the preparation

and distribution of food than to the actual process of eating, which is often dismissed in a single verse, “but when they had set aside their desire (*eros*) for drinking and eating.”

The manifestation of these ideas at the macro-level is the flourishing of the land and the food supply in a justly governed state. The disguised Odysseus tells Penelope that she is like a just king, under whom

the dark earth bears wheat and barley, trees are laden with fruit, flocks give birth without fail, the sea provides fish, and the people flourish because of his good rule.

Homer, *Odyssey* 19.111–4

So too for Hesiod, the presence of justice in a community is manifested in peace and the absence of famine:

For them the earth bears abundant life, on the mountains the oak bears acorns and bees live in its center; thick-fleeced sheep are weighed down by their wool, women bear children who resemble their parents, and the people flourish with good things continually. They do not travel on ships, for the life-giving earth bears crops.

Hesiod, *Works and Days* 232–7

The *Works and Days* is centrally concerned with the relation between justice and the ordering of agricultural life; the struggle for food is what determines life, and famine is a reality, as indeed it was throughout the ancient Mediterranean. Work and the practice of justice will mean that “Famine will hate you, but you will be loved by fair-garlanded Demeter, the revered lady, who will fill your barn with the stuff of life” (299–301). Some four centuries after Hesiod, Callimachus told the story of Erysichthon, who inspired Demeter’s anger by cutting down the trees in a grove sacred to her in order to build a hall for “constant feasting,” itself a wasteful disregard of the proper use of food and resources. Demeter punishes this impious desire by precisely inspiring Erysichthon with insatiable hunger, so that he not only eats his parents out of house and home, but also eats “the mules ... and the racehorse and the war-horse and the white-tailed creature [? weasel] which made the little animals [i.e. mice] tremble” (Callimachus *Hymn to Demeter* 107–10). The prayer with which the hymn ends shows the persistence of the Hesiodic ideal throughout antiquity, as indeed we would expect in any pre-industrial society:

Hail, goddess, and preserve this city in concord and prosperity, make everything abundant in the fields: feed the cattle, bring fruits, bring crops, bring the harvest, support peace also, so he who sows may also reap.

Callimachus, *Hymn to Demeter* 134–7

Eating was not always a laughing matter.

Food, however, could be. A principal inheritor of the Hesiodic vision that associated plentiful food with a Golden Age (*Op.* 116–20) and a world of peace and concord was Attic, as also Sicilian (Epicharmus), comedy. In comedy, however, such visions of plenty had more to do with wish-fulfillment and the carnival world created by these dramas – note especially the culinary conclusion to Aristophanes’ *Ekklesiiazousai* – than with moralizing proreptic, as in Hesiod. Food could still, of course, carry argumentative force. In Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* the central character makes a private peace treaty with the

Spartans, which means that all of the good things of Greece of which the blockaded Athenians are deprived can flow into his private market. Particularly welcome is the eel from Lake Kopais that a Boeotian merchant brings:

O dearest girl, desired for so long, you have come, longed for by comic choruses and dear to Morychos. Servants, bring out my grill and the fan! Children, behold the noblest eel which has come as we desired after five long years. Greet her, children! I will give you charcoal in honor of this lady who has come to visit. Carry her out! Not even in death may I ever be separated from you, wrapped in beets!

Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 885–94

Dicaeopolis' emotion is marked by an amusingly paratragic tone (we may be reminded of Electra greeting her brother at Soph. *El.* 1224ff); the return and recognition of such "dear ones" marks, as in tragedy, that the tables are turning and things are definitely looking up.

Comedy's delight in dwelling on fantasies of food is particularly seen in a series of passages from Attic Old Comedy, preserved in Athenaeus, which translate Hesiod's Golden Age vision into exercises in imagination and ingenuity in describing "the way things used to be" (Ath. 267e–70a, cf. Baldry, 1953). This is a world in which everything grows spontaneously, food cooks itself, and hunger is banished:

Every creek-bed ran with wine, cakes battled with bread around people's mouths, begging them to swallow down – please! – the very whitest. Fish came home, roasted themselves, and were there ready on the table. A river of soup flowed by the couches, rolling along warm pieces of meat, channels of sauces were freely available ... roast thrushes, with side-dishes of cakes, flew into people's throats ... and the children played knucklebones with slices of sow's womb and tastiest bits of meat.

Teleclides fr. 1 KA

Comedy revels in descriptions of food. Our evidence is doubtless skewed by the dominance of Athenaeus as a source for the fragments of comedy, beyond the preserved plays of Aristophanes, but it does seem that fourth-century comedy before Menander, the so-called Middle Comedy, did to some extent turn away from political satire towards more social themes, and that dining narratives and, all but certainly, staged meals and symposia became prominent. It is in this period that the boastful comic cook becomes a standard, and standardly absurd, character (cf. Dohm, 1964), and the fragments represent the same concern with gastronomy that is visible in, for example, the contemporary hexameter verse of Archestratos (see below). The search for the finest (and most expensive) ingredients and their preparation now apparently becomes a matter of great interest to the theatre-going public, and culinary extravaganzas may attain almost mythic status. Food has moved very far from being simply a way of dispelling hunger.

The comic *mageiros*, a "cook" who also supplies and if necessary butchers the ingredients, is not a slave employed by an élite household, but (usually) a free man of relatively low status available for hire. He is characterized by a very exaggerated sense of his own skill and importance; comic cooks present themselves as philosophers, generals, musical experts, and all-round saviors and benefactors of humanity. One of Philemon's cooks claims that the merest whiff of his cooking brings the dead back to life (fr. 82.25-6 KA),

and in the following passage of Athenion (date uncertain) a cook places “the art of cooking” (*mageiriké technē*) at the heart of, and the anthropology of, human progress:

- Cook.* Don't you know that the art of cooking has contributed more to pious living than any other art?
- B.* Is it that kind of thing?
- Cook.* Of course, you barbarian! It freed us from a savage existence in which no social compacts were possible and from the unpleasantness of cannibalism and introduced an order (*taxis*) and gave us this life we now enjoy.
- B.* How did it do that?
- Cook.* Pay attention and I'll tell you. When there was only cannibalism and nastiness, a man who was no fool was the first to sacrifice a victim and roast meat; since this meat was more pleasant than human flesh, they stopped chewing on one another and instead began to sacrifice and roast their flocks. Once they had some experience of this pleasure, they developed the art of cooking further from this beginning ... This was the only source for our general security, namely to work on our skills and further develop the art of cooking through the use of spices ... After this, as time went on, someone introduced a stuffed haggis ... and wheeled in a fish that had never been seen before, vegetables, expensive saltfish, porridge, honey ... Everyone now wanted to live together, people crowded together, cities were inhabited, all, as I said, because of the art of cooking.

Athenion fr. 1 KA

Part of the paradoxical wit of Euripides' sophisticated Cyclops in his satyr-play *Cyclops* is that the monster, “a deadly cook (*mageiros*) hated by the gods” (v. 396–7) with serious culinary interests (cf., e.g., Konstan, 1990), welcomes the chance to eat human flesh (properly cooked) as a pleasant break from hunting wild animals (vv. 241–9, 382–404).

It was not only comedy that caught the culinary bug in the fourth century. Probably from the early part of the century we have extracts from a lyric *Deipnon* by one of the poets named Philoxenus (*PMG* 836), written in the highly mannered verbal style of contemporary kitharody (“the new music”); this followed the progress of a very elaborate dinner through course after relentless course. From probably the middle of the century come also significant extracts of the *Hédupatheia* (“Good living,” the most probable title) of Arcestratos of Sicilian Gela, a hexameter account in perhaps some 1200 verses of the best foodstuffs, particularly fish, from all over the Greek world, together with some advice on best practice in dining; this poem seems to have been within the Hesiodic tradition of catalogue and didactic verse, though in this case seasoned with a dose of epic parody (cf. Olson & Sens, 2000). The following extracts are not untypical:

Do not spurn the gilthead from Ephesus, the fat one, which the locals call “the little Ionian”. Get hold of it, nursing of the holy river Selinous, wash it thoroughly and then roast and serve it whole, even if it is ten cubits long.

Arcestratos fr. 13 Olson & Sens (2000)

In Rhodes, if someone does not want to sell you the thresher-shark, the one which Syracusans call “fat sea-dog”, then snatch one, even at risk of death, and after that suffer whatever fate has in store for you.

Arcestratos fr. 22 Olson & Sens (2000)

One of the most difficult problems concerning Archestratos' poem is that of tone. Although some allusive parody of Homer and Hesiod is identifiable ("in autumn when the Pleiads set, prepare the bonito any way you can", fr. 36.1–2 Olson & Sens, 2000), this is far from pervasive and most of the poem seems to be delivered "with a straight face"; moreover, the recipes which Archestratos offers are very far from outlandish. The skill with which the highest verse form is used for a very untraditional poem on a very modern subject must be an important part of the wit; the poem's opening verse, "making a display (*epideigma*) of my research (*historiê*) to all of Greece" promises not just information but also the cleverness of a sophistic "display." We are drawn in both to identify with Archestratos' gourmet narrator and to be amused by the urgency of his gastronomic concern. Although there is a temptation to take the extraordinary detail with which different foods are linked to different cities and regions as pseudo-learning, intended to be seen for what it is, there is in fact no clear sign of this in the text, and we ought not to underestimate the number of people who actually did care about where the finest food was to be obtained; such people are not unknown today.

If the tone of Archestratos' poem seems often hard to catch, the "Attic Dinner Party" of Matron of Pitane (cf. Olson & Sens, 1999), dating very probably from the late fourth century BC, sounds the unmistakable note of epic parody:

Tell me, Muse, of the dinners, much-nourishing (*polutropha*) and many in number, which the orator Xenocles set before us in Athens ...

Matron fr. 1.1–2 Olson & Sens (1999)

The parody of the opening of the *Odyssey* suggests something of the same mock earnestness which we have seen in the cook speeches of comedy, and indeed Matron was heir to both the Homeric and the Aristophanic traditions; the "comedy of language" produced by this happy synthesis operates through the obvious incongruity between low subject-matter and grand language. Whereas in Homer it was the elderly Ithacan hero Aigyptios who was "bent over with age and knew countless things" (*Od.* 2.16), in Matron it is prawns which are "bent with age, but good to eat" (fr. 1.64 Olson & Sens, 1999). Fish and seafood indeed dominate what survives of Matron's parade of gastronomic pleasure, a suitably marine equivalent to Homer's Catalogue of Ships, but the very variety of food set forth, the obvious fantasy of the accounts (the fish presented could not all have been caught and served in the same period), the excess with which the food is enjoyed, and the narrator's moments of weakness all look forward perhaps to Trimalchio's dinner-party in Petronius' *Satyricon*:

My stomach could not hold out, for it was hard pressed by satiety: black broth and boiled pigs' trotters were subduing it ...

Matron fr. 1.93–4 Olson & Sens, 1999

The modern editors of the fragments of Matron's poem (Olson & Sens, 1999, 29–33) seek to associate it with Athenian political divisions of the late fourth century (Xenocles was one of Athens' richest citizens in this period, and one of the guests was Stratocles, perhaps the most notorious supporter of the hegemony of Demetrius Poliorcetes in the last decade of the century), but how significant the political "spin" of the poem was and thus how biting the political satire must remain in the realm of conjecture.

Unsurprisingly, food is at home not just in comedy, but in other “lower” genres such as iambic poetry. The wretchedly broken fragments of the sixth-century iambic poet Hipponax of Ephesus contain some of our most vivid references to, and images of, food; Hipponax revels in portraying a lowlife of sexual and other excess, and food is a vital part of, and very meaningful signifier in, the heady physicality of this world:

One of them dined every day, at his leisure and without stint, on tuna and thick sauce, like a Lampsacene eunuch, and so ate up his inheritance. Now he has to dig at the rocks on the hillsides, chewing on ordinary figs and barley bread, stomach-filling for slaves.

Hipponax fr. 26 West

The very familiar metaphorical use of “eating” for wasting resources of all kinds is dramatized most famously in Penelope’s suitors, who waste the resources of Odysseus’ house (cf. above), but it was to become, for example, a standard complaint of the fathers of New Comedy against their wastrel sons. Happiness and its reverse are measured in what one can and cannot eat:

not putting his teeth around francolins and hares, not seasoning pancakes with sesame, nor dipping waffles into honey

Hipponax fr. 26a West

Hipponax’s culinary exuberance is not matched in what survives of Callimachus’ *Iambi*, for which Hipponax stands as the authorizing archaic model, and this is perhaps one marker of the discretion and selectivity with which Callimachus exploits the iambic heritage.

The *Life of Aesop*, a “popular” narrative drawn from several sources which might, in its current form, go back to the second century AD, begins with a scene in which two slaves gobble up some delicious figs belonging to their master and try to pin the blame on Aesop, a very ugly fellow-slave who is mute and therefore cannot defend himself. Aesop, however, outsmarts them and the culprits get a good thrashing. Slaves steal food – this is the working assumption of literature at all levels, but behind this assumption lie, of course, real facts about hunger and nutrition-levels barely sufficient to sustain life. In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* the god “kidnaps” Cretan merchants and makes their ship sail to Crisa, the port of Delphi where they are to serve him in the temple. Their leader asks the god

Lord, since you have brought us far from our dear ones and our native land, this must have been in accordance with your wishes. How are we now actually to feed ourselves? We ask you to give thought for that. This land is not pleasant for the bearing of crops nor rich in meadowland, so that we could both survive and serve the temple visitors.

*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 526–30

No one, abandoned in much of the Greek countryside, would find it easy to feed themselves; Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* thematizes this, along with the hero’s other sufferings. From another perspective, it was indeed pressure on the food supply that often led Greek cities to send forth colonizing missions. Food signifies at every level of society. Athenaeus preserves some 460 trimeters from the *Chreiai* of Machon, who perhaps wrote at Alexandria in the first half of the third century (Gow, 1965). The world of Machon’s “anecdotes” is one of parasites, courtesans, and conspicuous consumption, but it is also

a world that unpicks the assumptions and pomposities of polite society and does so with a sharp satirical eye (cf. Kurke, 2002). Excessive eating is very much part of that imagined society. Perhaps some four centuries later, the *Letters of Parasites* of Alciphron again dramatize, with a kind of black humor, the wasteful excesses of a (real or imagined) élite and the pathetic desperation of the parasite, who endures humiliations of every kind just for the sake of eating and/or eating well. At one level, such literary parasites are, as was recognized in antiquity and is made clear in Alciphron through intertextual allusion, the descendants of Odysseus with his curses on the incessant demands of the wretched belly (cf. above), but descendants who, unlike Odysseus, alienate our sympathy because of their refusal to observe the Hesiodic injunction to work to ensure that they have enough to eat (*Op.* 299–313). On the other hand, in laying bare the divisions within society the *Letters* also reflect obliquely the basic distinction between rich and poor, which extends far beyond the absurd world of the literary parasite. The same exuberance that we have seen in comic descriptions of food here sits somewhat uncomfortably with the mockery of those whose resources and/or family connections put them outside the charmed circle. In one letter a parasite tells his colleague how he was rescued by the doctor Acesilaus, who saved his life by bleeding him and making him vomit, and he claims now to have ‘seen the light’:

What things those filthy-rich chaps made me endure, taking it in turns to force me to drink too much and to eat more than the hollow of my belly can hold. One stuffed sausage into me, another shoved a huge chop into my jaws, and another mixed a drink for me, not wine, but mustard with fish-sauce and vinegar and poured it down me as though I was a storage-jar. I filled the pans, the jars and the chamber-pots with vomit, so that Acesilaus himself was amazed at where and how I had room for such a mess of food ... I shall turn to work and will walk around the Peiraeus, carrying ships’ cargoes to the warehouses for a fee. It’s better to feed my belly on thyme and barley groats, but with some security of life, than to treat myself to cakes and pheasants while every day expecting death that comes unseen.

Alciphron, *Letters of Parasites* 4.3–6 Benner-Fobes

## Drink

In the *Works and Days* Hesiod gives his recipe as to how to spend the days of fiercest summer heat:

At that time there should be the shade of a rock and Bibline wine and milk-bread and milk from goats which are drying up and the meat of a cow which grazes in the woodland and has not yet had a calf and of first-born kids. As you recline in the shade, also drink some glittering wine, once you have taken your fill of food, with your face turned towards the fresh west wind. Pour in three portions of water from an ever-flowing spring which has not been muddied, and then a fourth portion of wine.

Hesiod, *Works and Days* 588–96

The poet’s recipe is clearly an imaginary ideal, and as such – with our eye on later culinary literature, such as Archestratos (cf. above) – we observe that he is already detailed and particular in his imaginings: wine from a special Thracian location, meat fed in a particular way. The gourmet impulse is already there. Two aspects of Hesiod’s prescription



for the use of wine at this idyllic picnic are of particular interest. First, Hesiod clearly marks the enjoyment of wine as an activity that follows that of food: here already we see the classic pattern of dining followed by symposium, as we know it from countless ancient sources. The modern practice of drinking wine with food is not the ancient Greek way, or at least not the way of the ancient Greek literate imagination and at least not from the archaic period on (contrast the Homeric situation reflected in Odysseus' "Golden Verses" above). Second, wine is to be drunk mixed with water – the drinking of unmixed wine being the drunken habit of non-Greeks – and the strength of the mixture is by modern standards very weak, three parts water to one of wine.

If Odysseus' "Golden Verses" do not quite describe what we recognize as the "classic symposium," they became (unsurprisingly) a foundational text for sympotic best practice. The *Odyssey* in fact places the correct use of wine at the center of its prescriptions for social practice through the long tale of Odysseus trapped in the Cyclops' cave. Odysseus had taken with him to the cave a very special wine that had been given to him by Maron of Ismaros, a priest of Apollo:

[It was] a wonderful, unmixed wine, a drink for the gods ... When they drank this honey-sweet red wine, Maron would pour one measure of wine for twenty of water, and a wonderful, divine fragrance would rise from the mixing-bowl, and at that time no one would wish to refrain from drinking.

Homer, *Odyssey* 9.205–11

A strength of one to 20 is the stuff of fairytale, but Maron shows himself a civilized Greek in his respect for the wine's power. Odysseus finally escapes from inside the cave by offering the Cyclops unmixed draughts of this very strong wine, which the Cyclops declares to be very much to his liking:

"The life-giving land bears grapes for the Cyclopes – rain from Zeus nourishes them – and we have excellent wine. But this wine is pure ambrosia and nectar!"

Homer, *Odyssey* 9.357–9

Three large rustic bowlfuls of this wine are enough to knock the Cyclops into a drunken stupor, whereupon Odysseus and his men put out his single eye. If the Cyclops' connoisseurship in the verses just quoted is amusing (did he really say that, or is this part of Odysseus' skill as a story-teller?), the fact that he does not see Odysseus mix water with the wine, nor ask for this to happen, is a further sign that he is beyond the pale of civilized social practice. The proper use of wine is, like Odyssean cleverness (*mêtis*) and craft technology (vv. 384–6, 391–3), a marker of those qualities that, before long, would come to distinguish the "Greek" from the savage and the "barbarian." The mixing of water with wine in special mixing-bowls (*kratêres*) from which all the guests were served had the very practical function of allowing steady drinking during gatherings lasting several hours, but it also emphasized the social fellowship of drinking and was a visible symbol of how wine was to be properly used. Wine was a gift of the god Dionysus, and Greeks were very aware that gods expected their gifts to be properly used:

Such gifts Dionysus gave to men as both a delight and a burden. The man who drinks more than sufficient will find wine a wild thing: it binds together his feet and hands and tongue and mind with bonds which cannot be seen and soft sleep loves him.

Hesiod fr. 239 M-W = 179 Most

From one perspective, Euripides' *Bacchae* dramatizes the transference to the level of cultic myth of the blessings and the dangers that Dionysus, "a god most terrible, but also for men most gentle" (vv. 860–1), brings with him.

Much of what survives of archaic Greek poetry after Homer was probably performed in the setting of the symposium, and the proper conduct of the symposium and the use of wine form important subjects for that poetry, particularly in the elegiac tradition (Bielohlawek, 1940; Ford, 2002, 35–9); symposiasts were very self-conscious of the specialness of this form of semi-ritualized drinking. One of the fullest such passages occurs in the corpus of elegiac poetry ascribed to Theognis of Megara, but is probably the work of Euenus of Paros (fifth century BC):

Do not detain anyone of our number who does not wish to stay, nor send forth anyone who does not want to leave, nor, Simonides, wake from slumber anyone of us who, fortified by wine, has been taken by soft sleep ... As for myself, I have reached my limit of honeysweet wine, and I shall go home to the sleep that brings release from cares; I am at the stage where wine-drinking is most pleasant for a man – I am neither sober nor very drunk. The man who exceeds his limit of drink is no longer in control of his tongue or his mind, he says stupid things which are disgraceful to sober men, and when he is drunk shame holds him back from nothing ... Either get up and go before you are drunk – do not let your belly overpower you as though you were some low menial hired by the day – or stay and do not drink. But your constant watchword is "Pour it in!"; that is why you get drunk ... you do not know how to say no.

Theognis 467–91

The social slur of "do not let your belly overpower you as though you were some low menial hired by the day" not only picks up the "belly" motif that we have already seen as prominent in the *Odyssey* (cf. above), but also reminds us that the symposia largely represented in archaic poetry were élite occasions in which the sense of éliteness was important. Another passage from the same corpus puts very similar sentiments in the mouth of someone who is already over the limit:

My head aches from the wine, Onomakritos, and the wine overpowers me, I am no longer in charge of my wits, and the room is revolving. Come, let me stand to test whether perhaps the wine has captured my feet as well as the mind in my chest. I fear that, now that I am fortified [by drink], I shall do something foolish and incur terrible reproach.

Theognis 503–8

Both the symposium itself and the proper way to conduct both dining and drinking were then taken over as literary themes by the learned Greek prose of the Roman imperial period (e.g. Plutarch, *Sympotic Questions*, *Symposium of the Seven Sages*, Dio Chrysostom 27), as suitable frames for the display of learning, for the nostalgic recreation of the classical past, and for the exploration and confirmation of themes of crucial ideological importance within the very differently organized, and very hierarchical, social structures of the Greek élite living under Roman rule.

The six verses of Theognis 503–8 (above) might easily, if transmitted differently, have been labeled as an epigram, and Hellenistic literary epigram was indeed one of the most important heirs of the sympotic traditions of archaic poetry (cf., e.g., Giangrande, 1968; Cameron, 1995, ch. 3). As with early elegy, the symposium is the imagined setting for

literally hundreds of Hellenistic epigrams, and the eternal themes of wine, women (and boys), and song remain important:

“Drink, Asclepiades: Why these tears? What’s wrong? You’re not the only one cruel Cypris has captured, nor are you the only one against whom bitter Love has directed his bow and arrows – why become ash while you’re alive? Let us drink the strong draught of Bacchus. There’s only a finger breadth left till dawn; or shall we wait to see again the lamps which escort us home to bed? ... Soon enough, poor fool, we shall rest through the long night.”

Asclepiades, *Anth. Pal.* 12.50 = 16 Sens

The poet here finds consolation not just in drink, but also in reworking a famous drinking-song of the archaic Lesbian poet, Alcaeus (fr. 346 V); the song reminds us that others have gone before – the lovelorn drinker is never really alone (on this poem cf. Hunter, 2010, 284–8; Sens, 2011, 102–11). Epigram also inherited, notably from Attic comedy, scenes of preparations for festivity:

There are four of us drinking, each has a girlfriend: one Chian jar is not sufficient for eight. Boy, go off to Aristios and tell him that the first jar he sent was half-full – it was certainly two *choes* short, and even more, I think. Run – we all gather at the fifth hour.

Posidippus, *Anth. Pal.* 5.183 = 124 Austin-Bastianini

The epigram asks us to wonder whether it is the host or the wine-merchant whose business practices are rather dodgy ... and, not for the first or last time, we smile to see ourselves reflected on the glittering surface of an ancient wine.

## FURTHER READING

For surveys of food in ancient literature see Part 6 of Wilkins, Harvey, & Dobson (1995) and Chapter 9 of Wilkins & Hill (2006); books devoted to food and drink in the ancient world, such as Dalby (1996), will inevitably draw much of their evidence from creative literature. For genres where food is of particular importance, the following provide argument and bibliographical guidance: epic, Bakker (2013); comedy, Wilkins (2000a); Arcestratos and gastronomic writing, Wilkins & Hill (2011), Olson & Sens (2000); Athenaeus, Braund & Wilkins (2000). The work of Gowers (1993) is a study of food in Roman literature, but also suggests many avenues of exploration relevant to Greek literature.