

TRUTH AND MEMORY IN CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

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September 18, 2010

HERODOTUS 2.53

Where each of the gods came from, whether they had always existed, and what outward forms they had, the Greeks did not know until yesterday or the day before, so to speak. I think that Hesiod and Homer were 400 years older than me, and no more, and it is they who made the theogony for the Greeks. They gave names to the gods, apportioned their offices and functions, and declared their outward forms. The poets [such as Orpheus] who are said to be earlier than these men I think are later. This part involving Hesiod and Homer is my own opinion.

HESIOD, THEOGONY 2234

The Muses once taught Hesiod a beautiful song,
As he was tending his sheep at the foot of holy Mount Helikon.
This is the speech the goddesses first addressed to me,
Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus:
“Shepherds dwelling in the fields, base objects of reproach, mere bellies!
We know how to say many false things that are just like real things.
But we also know, whenever we are willing, how to speak things that are true.”
Thus spoke the daughters of great Zeus, they whose words fit together.
And they gave me a scepter, having plucked a shoot of thriving laurel,
A sight to behold. And they breathed into me a voice that is divine,
So that I could give glory to the things that will be and the things that have been.
And they commanded me to sing the race of the blessed ones, who have always been,
But always to sing of the Muses themselves both first and last.

HOMER, ILIAD 2.484-493

Tell me now, Muses having Olympian homes,
For you are goddesses, and you are there, and you know everything,
But we hear only the report and don't know anything;
Who were the leaders of the Danaans and their chiefs?
I could not tell their multitude, nor could I name them,
Not if I had ten tongues or ten mouths,
An unbreaking voice, and a heart of bronze within me,
Unless the Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus,
Remembered all those who came up to Ilium.
I will tell in turn the commanders of the ships, and all the ships together.

HECATAEUS

In my opinion, the Greeks tell many foolish stories.

Homeros = he who fits words together Hesiodos = he who sends out a song