

EPEIUS IN THE KITCHEN: OR ANCIENT GREEK FOLK TALES VINDICATED

A scholar who tries to explain a difficult passage of a Greek text may be conceived as exploring a complex of concentric circles, the innermost circle encloses the immediate context of the passage, the outermost the whole of human experience.¹

Bertold Brecht's wonderful poem *Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters* (*Questions from a Reading Workman*) begins by posing (or making his 'reading workman' pose) a number of awkward questions:

*Wer baute das siebentorige Theben?
In dem Büchern stehen die Namen von Königen.
Haben die Könige die Felsbrocken herbeigeschleppt?
Und das mehrmals zerstörte Babylon –
Wer baute es so viele Mal auf?*

*Who built seven-gated Thebes?
In books one only finds the names of kings.
Did the Kings haul the blocks of stone all the way up?
And Babylon, the much-destroyed city –
Who was it built it up again so many times?*²

We know that Brecht often had an interesting 'take' on antiquity: for instance, in a letter he called Thersites – specifically the Shakespearean manifestation of that individual – 'one of the most lovable characters in world literature'.³ But in posing these disconcerting questions he was in a sense anticipated by someone from antiquity itself.

'Who built the Trojan Horse?' might seem a parallel question. In fact, the situation is more complex. Ancient authors, including

¹ K.J. Dover, *Fifty Years (and Twelve) of Classical Scholarship*, ed. M. Platnauer (Oxford, 1968), 123 = *Greek and the Greeks. Collected Papers* (Oxford, 1987–8), i.191.

² All translations from Brecht's poem are my own.

³ B. Brecht, *Letters*, tr. R. Manheim, ed. J. Willett (London, 1990), 341.

Homer, name Odysseus as the mastermind behind the ruse but the far less well-known Epeius as actual builder, with Athena providing the ultimate inspiration.⁴ The lyric poet Stesichorus, in his narrative poem the *Iliupersis*, of which several fragments survive, explained more precisely the relationship between Athena's contribution and Epeius: she inspired the hero because she felt pity for him, since he was perpetually carrying water for the sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaus, the leaders of the Trojan expedition.⁵

'Who carried water for the Greek forces at Troy?' is a question that Brecht's reading workman might have relished. It is certainly a question that goes unanswered in the Homeric epics, whose author has been described as displaying 'a certain high-handed reluctance to be bothered with peripheral questions of detail' in relating past events.⁶ This indifference extends to such practicalities as water supply, and it is an indifference shared by other representatives of the genre as displayed worldwide. Thus, with regard to 'heroes and non-heroes', Tamil epics draw a 'distinction between their respective employments, exploits in war and drudgery'; their poets are interested in a hero's 'spotless white clothes' cleaned 'by the washer woman', but not in the washerwoman herself.⁷

However, there are traces in Homeric scholia (marginal comments in our texts of Homer summarizing ancient scholars' views) of an interest in the relationship between, on the one hand, mythology's heroes and royal families and, on the other, the mundane activities of everyday life. This interest is particularly associated with the great Alexandrian scholar Aristarchus (217–157 BC), though indications exist that others before him had also puzzled their heads about the matter.⁸ The language of the relevant scholia often seems naïve and inappropriate, inadequate either as literary or social criticism by modern standards, and this may partly explain why its relevance to the topic we

⁴ For details see the forthcoming commentary by M. Davies and P. Finglass, *The Poems of Stesichorus*, shortly to be published by Cambridge University Press.

⁵ This detail, too, will be treated in Davies and Finglass (n. 4).

⁶ J. Griffin (ed.), *Homer. Iliad Book 9* (Oxford, 1995), on *Iliad* 9.168; see also his note on verses 223–4.

⁷ K. Kailaspathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), 262.

⁸ See in particular M. Schmidt, *Die Erklärungen zum Weltbilds Homers und zur Kultur der Heroenzeit in den bT Scholien zu Homer, Zetemata* 62 (1976). For pre-Aristarchean interest in the topic see, e.g., the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus (*SVF*, iii, fr. 708), quoted below p. 95. For his appropriate interest in the concept of the 'simple life', see fr. 705–15; for his interest in Homeric problems in general, see fr. 769–77. Translations of Chrysippus and the Homeric scholia quoted in the present article are my own.

are about to examine has not hitherto been observed. But if one penetrates beneath this surface inadequacy, one will discover ideas that are important for the inquiry in hand, and which have wide-ranging repercussions, as we shall see presently. A general and idealized picture emerges from these scholia of a splendidly simple life, as allegedly reflected by the Homeric epics, in which even heroes and royalty did not think it below their dignity to carry out tasks which in later times would be deemed menial or fit only for slaves.⁹

Thus the passage in *Iliad* 3.261–2, where King Priam drives his own chariot, evokes the observation that ‘all heroes then were experienced in practical matters and capable of working with their own hands (*autourgoi*)’.¹⁰ Similarly, when his wife, Queen Hecuba, herself carries a *peplos* (‘robe’) as offering to Athena’s statue (*Il.* 6.293), this is said to show that women of free status carried out important tasks (*spoudaia*) themselves, just as, for instance, Penelope herself brings Odysseus’ bow to the suitors at *Od.* 21.59–60. Agamemnon slaughters a sacrificial animal at *Il.* 3.271–3, ‘doing it with his own hands [the verb *autourgeo*] in a competent manner’. And when Telemachus at *Od.* 2.11 sets out for the assembly escorted only by two hounds, we are told that ‘some critics see this as reflecting the unsophisticated (*agroikos*) life of people in the old days’.

Again, a scholion on *Od.* 1.332 sums up Aristarchus’ interpretation of a later passage in the poem, the notoriously puzzling scene where Penelope comes before the suitors to tempt them and extract presents. Aristarchus sought to explain it in terms of the freedom of movement of what he called ‘women of ancient times’, and this generalization leads on to another interesting claim:

the ancients regarded working with their own hands as compatible with free status. So much so in fact that even doing the washing had no sense of shame attached to it, and

⁹ See in general Schmidt (n. 8), 159–72, on what he calls ‘Das einfache Leben’ (‘the simple life’). The relevant Greek word is *haplotes* (‘simplicity’). For a list of its occurrences in the Iliadic scholia, see H. Erbse, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem* (Berlin, 1969–88), vi, Index III, s.v. For some instances, with discussion, see Schmidt (n. 8), 170 ff.

¹⁰ For a list of the occurrences of the word *autourgia* in the Iliadic scholia and for selected examples with discussion see Erbse (n. 9), vi, Index III, s.v.; Schmidt (n. 8), 166 ff. Since even the gods, or at least Poseidon, are credited with this capacity (scholion on *Il.* 13.35, where that god drives his own chariot) and since we are shortly to see the similarities between the worldview attributed to Homer in certain scholia and that of folk tale, it is amusing to note that, in the latter, ‘not only simple girls and women wear their aprons to work and for ornamentation; princesses, queens, empresses – even nixies, the Virgin Mary, and God do as well’ (L. Röhrich, *Folktales and Reality*, tr. P. Tokofsky [Bloomington, 1991], 194, emphasis added).

the daughters of kings would go off to do it and to carry water and other such servile activities that are nowadays rejected.¹¹

The attitude here finds an echo in another scholion, that on *Od.* 3. 411, where, ‘despite being a king’, Nestor orders his own sons to fetch things for a sacrifice:

they say that in those days, people led a simple life and one free from empty self-regard, and didn’t put on airs. Indeed, even the daughters of kings like Nestor would wash their clothes with their own hands, and thought it no disgrace to act in this way, because of their simplicity of outlook.¹²

Such passages are irresistibly reminiscent of the values of the folk tale as analysed by modern experts. Researchers in this field have frequently investigated the extent to which folktales reflect contemporary society. Thus the distinguished folktale scholar Lutz Röhrich, in his classic monograph *Folktale and Reality*, remarks on the ‘extremely simple social reality’ of folk tale, where it can happen that

Kings take part in the slaughtering of their livestock. They have their own smithy to do the most necessary work on the palace themselves; they fell their own wood in the forest... In the true folktale it is only natural that the princess... learns about her enchanted brother’s existence on the day of the ‘big wash’... At their father’s request, the king’s daughters take the watering can to the meadow and bleach the wash.¹³

A related issue is raised by a further scholion, this time on *Iliad* 8.93. Again one encounters an initial naivety: the commentary is seeking to explain – a characteristically innocent undertaking – the epithet *polumechanos* (‘much resourceful’), which is so often applied to Odysseus in epic, by reference to the numerous practical skills which the hero had to display during his adventures: building a boat, steering a ship, and so on. Interestingly, one sphere of practical activity mentioned in this list is that of being a cook or chef (*mageiros*)¹⁴ and the ability to bake and carve, with reference to *Od.* 15.323, where the still-disguised hero tells Eumaeus that no-one can rival him in the arts of cooking and carving.

¹¹ See Schmidt (n. 8), 161, nn. 7–8.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Röhrich (n. 10), 194. The book was originally published as *Märchen und Wirklichkeit* (Wiesbaden, 1956).

¹⁴ For a recent study of this figure, with full bibliography, see J. Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef. The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Oxford, 2000).

The picture of Odysseus the chef was also evoked by the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus in one of his works (fr. 708):

it is fitting that the poet should have represented his heroes as dining on nothing but meat and as preparing it themselves. For there is nothing ridiculous or shameful in seeing them cooking and boiling and doing the serving themselves. Indeed, they prided themselves on their versatility (*eustrophia*) in this respect.

To prove his point, the philosopher quoted such passages as *Od.* 15.233, and also *Il.* 9.202 and 9.209, where Achilles and Patroclus themselves serve the heroes who have come on an embassy to the former's hut, Patroclus mixing the wine and Achilles carving the portions of roasted pig.

The issue of food and eating bring us to the next stage of the argument. It has been stated that to the *Iliad* 'of course, the problem of commissariat [i.e. the problem of supplies in a ten-year war] is not interesting, except for the good wine which Jason's son sent [the Greeks] from Lesbos' in 7.467.¹⁵ To write thus is to overlook one passage, *Il.* 19.42–4, where Achilles rouses all the Greeks, 'and those previously accustomed to remain in the place where the ships were drawn up, including the steersmen. . . and the *carvers of meat* (*tamiai*: see LSJ s.v. I.1), *the dispensers of food*'. The context of this particular detail is that Achilles is summoning the *entire* Greek forces to a critically crucial meeting. Earlier scholars were snooty about this whole portion of the poem (which Sir Denys Page magisterially deemed 'a flaw in the fabric of the *Iliad*'¹⁶), many of them regarding it as a later interpolation. Much more sympathetic, and representative of present-day thought on the matter, is M. W. Edwards' contribution to the Cambridge commentary on the *Iliad*.¹⁷ Of the passage in general he remarks that 'the importance of this assembly is underlined by the presence of even the lowly non-combatant personnel, which is reiterated at v. 54' (he compares the equally critical divine assembly at 20.4–9, to which even very minor deities are summoned). On the specific question of verse 44 he perceptively suggests that 'the mention of the catering corps staff. . . perhaps

¹⁵ J. Griffin, 'The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer', *JHS* 97 (1977), 41 = D. L. Cairns (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad* (Oxford, 2001), 369. For a defence of the relevant Iliadic passage against charges of inauthenticity, see A. Kelly, 'The Ending of *Iliad* 7: A Response', *Philologus* 152 (2008), 5–17.

¹⁶ D. L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley, CA, 1959), 312.

¹⁷ M. W. Edwards (ed.), *The Iliad. A Commentary. Volume V. Books 17–20* (Cambridge, 1991).

anticipates the later emphasis on the need for the army to eat'.¹⁸ (One may further detect a slight and sly touch of humour on Homer's part, when in verse 42 he uses the noun *agon* to describe the way in which were drawn up those ships whose steersmen and carvers are now being summoned to a quite different *agon*.) The care which the poet has expended on so trivial-seeming a detail in order to anticipate an important theme is very remarkable as clue to his interest in overall structure.

When, therefore, the cyclic epic the *Cypria* deigned to explain how the Greek forces at Troy were provisioned (magically, by the daughters of Anius), it was not being quite as un-Homeric as Griffin suggests, with his remark about 'a pedantic desire to work out problems implicit [*sic*] in the *Iliad*' (though the element of magic *is* alien to that poem).¹⁹

This brings us to the Roman comic playwright Plautus, or, rather, a single verse of his:

Epeum fumificum, qui legionī nostrae habet coctum cibum.

the smoke-stained Epeius, who cooks for our legion.

Although we have no context for this line, it is clear that its humour lay in comparing some individual acting as cook with the mythological figure of Epeius, who was also regarded as a cook. Now a later portion of the poem by Brecht quoted at the start of this article asks further pungent questions:

*Cäsar schlug die Gallier:
Hatte er nicht wenigstens einen Koch bei sich?*

Caesar conquered the Gauls.
Didn't he have at least one cook with him?

¹⁸ Actually anticipated by Leaf's commentary (London, 1902), 321, whose slightly less sympathetic phrasing is worth recalling: 'if it were not for the predominant interest in questions of feeding throughout the book, one would suppose 43–44 to be a later gloss. As it is, the author [whom Leaf was reluctant to identify with Homer] seems to have thought it right that the all-important commissariat department should not lack its bard. He therefore explains that the non-combatants are employed as helmsmen when at sea and as superintendents of supply on shore. They are usually too much engaged in official duties, it seems, to waste time on attending assemblies.' The second sentence seems to echo Dr Johnson's famously unsympathetic critique of English metaphysical poetry (in his *Life* of Cowley): 'a coal-pit has not often found its poet' (he continues: 'but that it may not want its due honour, Cleiveland has paralleled it with the sun') (S. Johnson, *The Works of the English Poets*, vii [London, 1810], 19).

¹⁹ See Griffin (n. 15), 41=369.

And later:

*Jede Seite ein Sieg.
Wer kochte den Siegeschmaus?*

Each page of history has a victory.
Who baked the meal celebrating the victory?

Food and eating are, of course, mentioned in the *Iliad*, and have considerable symbolic significance,²⁰ but the answer to the question ‘who did the cooking?’ is, as we have seen, only alluded to in one unique passage. In descriptions of sacrifice, the impression is sometimes given that it was the heroes themselves who carried out all the tasks (compare *Il.* 3.271 quoted above, where Agamemnon himself slaughters the sacrificial animal, and *Il.* 9.209, where Achilles does the carving). This would fit not only the aforementioned poetic indifference towards details but also the narrative economy involved in, for instance, Priam’s driving of his own chariot when preparing for the truce at *Iliad* 3.310, without the intervention of intermediate servants.²¹

This seems to receive a sympathetic echo in the previously quoted single line of an unknown lost play by Plautus, *fr. incert.* 1 Leo, cited by Varro in *De lingua Latina* 7.38. It is our sole source for the idea that Epeius, the hero who (as we saw above) built the Trojan Horse, was cook to the Greek army, an idea that seems a variant of the notion that his menial occupation was to carry water. Since, as we shall see in the next paragraph, the water-carrying has its roots in folk tale, it appears worth asking whether the same is true of Plautus’ words. An investigation of the obvious handbooks and encyclopaedias dealing with folk-tale themes quickly suggests a negative answer, and the potentially promising entry under ‘hero...as cook’ in the very useful comparative index to Malcolm Lyons’ *The Arabian Epic. Heroic And Oral Storytelling* only cites examples that involve the motif of *disguise* as a cook.

²⁰ See, for instance, my article ‘Food and Feasting in Homer: Stylisation and Realism’, *Prometheus* 23 (1997), 97–107. For a recent general monograph on food and its social functions, see Richard Wrangham, *Catching Fire* (London, 2011). An interesting review by Alexander Murray (*Oxford Magazine* 322 [Hilary Term, 2012], 11–13) draws out the social implications of the decline of commensality in Oxbridge colleges.

²¹ For a compendious list of those passages in Homer where heroes are said to perform menial tasks and those where servants or slaves are, see B. Hainsworth (ed.), *The Iliad. A Commentary. Volume III. Books 9–12* (Cambridge, 1993) on *Il.* 9.202.

For instance, a passage from the composition that is *Sirat al-Zahir Baibars* exemplifies the pattern ‘hero adopted by cook’, in which the hero Ibrahim becomes a cook, which gives him the opportunity to poison the cup of an enemy. This climax is incompatible with the story of Epeius, but it is striking that Ibrahim’s role is facilitated because he has been taken up by a cook, for whom he works so efficiently that he is given the daughter’s hand in marriage. The detail of being taken up by a cook is reminiscent of one of the Brothers Grimm’s *Märchen* (No. 136: *Der Eisenhans*): a king’s son wanders forth until he comes to a palace – ‘zuletzt nahm ihn der Koch in Dienst und sagte, er könnte Holz und Wasser tragen und der Asche zusammenkehren’ (‘so the cook took him into service and told him he could carry wood and water and sweep the ashes together’), the last detail being undeniably reminiscent of the role of Cinderella in folk tale. But the reference to water-carrying is further reminiscent of the alternative tradition of Epeius’ role mentioned above, and the Grimms’ tale belongs to a circle of stories in which heroes are ‘required to perform tests of everyday work and daily duties which try the quiet heroism of patience and obedience’.²² It is thus no coincidence that its hero is similar to ‘Ashkeladden’ or ‘Ashlad’, folk-tale’s male Cinderella, and it is very likely that the picture of Epeius as water-carrier exemplifies precisely the same concept of menial service leading paradoxically to a great achievement, and that Epeius as cook is a variant of the self-same pattern, involving what we might call an ‘unpromising’ hero or heroine.²³

This latter conclusion is supported by a further consideration which emerges from examining the tell-tale epithet *fumificus* (‘blackened’) in the Plautine fragment. For another instance of an unpromising hero involved in menial labour is Rainouart, the hero of the Guillaume d’Orange Cycle, who is ‘literally a blackened hero in two senses, being a Saracen, born swarthy, and also serving as a kitchen churl blackened and soiled with the fire-shovel’ – surely second cousin to the smoke-blackened Epeius implied by Plautus’ fragment.²⁴

²² Röhrich (n. 10), 213.

²³ On this folk-tale figure, see my article “‘Unpromising’ Heroes and Heroes as Helpers in Greek Myth”, *Prometheus* 37 (2011), 108–27. On ‘Ashlad’, see my remarks in “From Rags to Riches”: Democedes of Croton and the Credibility of Herodotus’, *BICS* 53.2 (2010), 40.

²⁴ On the blackened hero in general, see D. A. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore, MD, 2000) 278 ff. and 283 ff. My quotation regarding Rainouart comes from 275 f. It is interesting that on 276 ff. of this discussion of folk tale’s ‘anti-heroes’ Miller proceeds to discuss the phenomenon of the ‘coward knight’: there was a tradition of the proverbial cowardice of Epeius (see Pfeiffer on Callimachus fr. 197.2; for the comparative form of the proverb ‘more cowardly than Epeius’,

As to whether Plautus²⁵ – or Stesichorus for that matter – invented the picture of Epeius' menial toil by transposing it from the world of folk tale, there is still nothing to add to the common-sensical conclusion of H. J. Rose on the Stesichorean version that 'this may be local tradition or [the poet's] invention'.²⁶ Whatever the truth about this issue, I believe that, looking back at the preceding pages, we may claim to have stumbled across the answer to a much more significant problem – like 'Saul, the son of Kish', who, in Matthew Arnold's words, 'went forth to look for his father's asses and found a kingdom' (itself a folk-tale motif – compare 'Jack and the Beanstalk').²⁷ To explain precisely what this problem is, I must begin by mimicking the language of the Homeric scholia we have been glancing at.

In the olden days, then – say the nineteenth century – classical scholars saw no shame in dabbling in areas outside their field as strictly defined, and often displayed an admirable and enviable acquaintance with contemporary collections of folk tales, usually European, in order to illuminate, as they supposed, the ancient literature they were studying. They exhibited a heroic simplicity of outlook on these matters. In fact, influenced by the presuppositions of contemporary Romanticism, they were far too sanguine, and sadly underestimated the complexities of the issue. As so often, a reaction occurred, and present-day classicists are, rightly, much more cautious and sceptical about drawing on the resources of modern folk-tale collections. How can printed texts of the nineteenth century onwards possibly illuminate literature that predates them not merely by centuries but by millennia? Why should we blandly assume so close a continuity in attitudes to life

see N. Zagagi, *Tradition and Originality in Plautus*, *Hypomnemata* 62 [1980], 44 ff.). Where this idea originated is unclear, but a coward may also be a braggart waiting to be unmasked, and the Epeius who wins the boxing match in the Iliadic Funeral Games for Patroclus is certainly a braggart. For boastfulness as a typical feature of the chef in antiquity, see Wilkins (n. 14).

²⁵ Eduard Fraenkel was a little too categorical in his refusal to contemplate the possibility that a reference to Epeius already occurred in Plautus' Greek model, though he was, of course, right to observe that this fragment's metaphorical use of the Latin term *legio* is a Plautine idiom (*Plautinisches im Plautus* [Berlin, 1922], 71 = *Elementi Plautini in Plauto* [Florence, 1960], 97 f. = *Plautine Elements in Plautus* [Oxford, 2007], 70) and to emphasize Varro's accompanying statement that the phrase *Epeius fumificus* serves 'only to indicate any cook at all'.

²⁶ *OCD*² s.v. 'Epeius'.

²⁷ See my remarks in M. Davies, 'Two Medieval Saints' Lives and the Judgement of Paris', *Prometheus* 30 (2004), 126, where I should have pointed out that the pattern in question is allowed for by Vladimir Propp in his famous monograph *The Morphology of the Folktale*, tr. L. Scott (Bloomington, 1958), 110, where he exemplifies the pattern with 'Ivan [the archetypal hero of Russian folk tales, who] sets out after a steed but returns with a princess'.

and society stretching over this vast and backward abyss of time? Is it not the most abject *petitio principii*, the most outrageously paradoxical reversal of logical and other sequence, to explain ancient literature by recourse to texts printed and published so much later, whose contents we have no direct evidence to suppose pre-existed that literature? How can we possibly know what folk tales of the ancient world were like?²⁸

And yet... A great Greek scholar has written that 'each generation develops its own preferences among the available avenues of study, in turning away from those in which its predecessors made idiots of themselves'.²⁹ And, after citing specific examples of the idiocy, he observes that 'so much of this was wrong that it became bad form to inquire in these directions at all'. I think a similar situation has arisen in the case of the relevance of folk tale to classical studies. And yet we have seen remarkable similarities and resemblances – unspecific, but all the more impressive for that – between the outlook preserved in several Homeric scholia and that extrapolated from folk tales by modern experts. The alleged simplicity of life in the old days is common to both. I quote merely a few more instances from Lutz Röhrich: 'in gypsy folktales a girl delouses God, incense cures his toothache, and he wanders through the world like a gypsy himself. . . .The folktale palace is not surrounded by pomp. When the princess looks out of the window, [the hero] is walking down the street on his way home from the butcher. . . .Folktale kings have neighbours across the field just like other farmers. . . .A prince drives a wagon into the forest to chop wood'.³⁰ Here at least we do find concrete evidence of a continuity of attitude over the ages.

All this does not go to prove, of course, that actual narratives survived intact over the centuries,³¹ but it does suggest that, in the context

²⁸ Detlev Fehling is particularly eloquent on this topic in his book *Herodotus and His 'Sources'* (Leeds, 1989), 209 f., against the notion that there could be 'some unalterable traditional oral narrative repertoire drawn on by authors of all lands and ages. This view, long cherished by literary scholars, must now be considered out of date. Above all, it must be realized that modern collections of folktales can tell us absolutely nothing about the subjects of oral narrative in earlier times. Like written literature, oral narrative is subject to changes in fashion; and the folktales of the modern period are the products of nostalgic romanticism, not relics of some primeval stage in the development of the human mind. . . there is no such thing as an oral tradition stable over a long period of time' (this is a translation and development of a position first expressed in the German original of the monograph, *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot* [Berlin, 1971]).

²⁹ M. L. West, *Immortal Helen* (London, 1975), 15 = *Hellenica* (Oxford, 2011–13), i.94f.

³⁰ Röhrich (n. 10), 193ff.

³¹ For the claim that they have, see e.g. G. Anderson, *Fairytales in the Ancient World* (London, 2000), *passim*.

of popular narratives, attitudes to life and society can survive relatively intact, and, if so, why not story-patterns?³² We may not know for certain exactly what folk tales the ancient Greeks had or what their contents were. But we can assume from the attitudes implied in our Homeric scholia that some Greeks believed in a past age when kings lived simple lives and were not stuck-up; when heroes were not ashamed to dirty their hands with honest hard work; and when queens and princesses were ready to participate in the weekly wash. If this does not constitute proof that the ancient Greeks had folk tales similar to ours, what would?

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³² Aristarchus is not likely to have invented the concept of ‘the simple life’ (we know that the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus was a forerunner in this: see above n. 8), nor are generations of, for instance, Silesian peasants likely to have had access to the fragments of his ideas preserved in Homeric scholia.