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Part III: Time

Otta Wenskus

Time in Greek epic

Abstract: While many things do not change in the history of Greek epic (we are, for instance, never told the exact age of the protagonists), and other structural elements that indicate time fluctuate (e.g. the importance of dawn or the phases of the moon), the treatment of the seasons undergoes considerable change. The seasons are not mentioned in the main narrative of the *Iliad* but they may feature to some extent in the *Odyssey*, although we are never told in plain words which season it is at any point in the narrative. In the first two books of Apollonius' *Argonautica* the seasons play a considerable role: for example, the Etesian winds and one of the autumnal phases of Arcturus are applied once each to narrow down the date, even though Apollonius makes fun of the use of the latter. Quintus of Smyrna very possibly employs the rising of the *Pleiades* as a phase date in the main narrative of his *Posthomerica*, but Nonnus of Panopolis, despite toying with astrology (unlike his predecessors), shows no sustained interest in chronology.

1 Preliminary remarks

Much work has been devoted to time structure in ancient literature, and quite rightly so, but this has had the unfortunate side effect that at the time of writing far too many scholars seem to be unable to see the *histoire* for the *récit*, and even among those who have not lost that ability¹ hardly anybody knows enough about ancient astronomy and calendarics to fully understand how time was perceived by the authors they study. For example, Rengakos (1995) points out that the author of Hom. Il. 10.252 uses an expression which clearly shows that he did perceive time as something that passes although he does not use the term χρόνος. Rengakos is obviously right, but unfortunately does not stop to explain just how Odysseus knows that most of the night has indeed passed: viz., by the change(s) of the stars' positions.² Analysing astronomical and, in the case of Nonnus, astrological expressions of time in Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic authors is difficult even for

¹ See, e.g., Latacz (²1989), Di Benedetto (²1998), Klooster (2007), Di Benedetto/Fabrini (2010), and Rengakos (1995), who refutes some of the exaggerations of those who claim that the author(s) of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had no sense of time at all.

² See Rengakos (1995, 12) and Wenskus (forthcoming[b]). For reasons of space I cannot offer a comprehensive discussion of ancient astronomy here, but I refer readers to Wenskus (1990), where I also analyse the relevant Hesiodic passages, and Wenskus (forthcoming[b]).

the astronomically literate because the authors in question make so many mistakes, and modern commentaries tend to compound those. Unfortunately there seem to be no reliable monographs, or even longer articles, on astronomy in Apollonius Rhodius, Quintus of Smyrna, and Nonnus of Panopolis I could refer the reader to; I will just give a brief outline of some aspects of time in those texts and discuss some of the more interesting and significant cases, particularly problems which do not seem to have been identified hitherto.

2 Homer, *Iliad*

It is true that the aforementioned disregard for *realia* hardly ever matters in the case of the *Iliad*;³ however, there are a few notable exceptions. To name the most important one: when does the action of the *Iliad* actually take place? It is not surprising to anyone familiar with oral history that the poets of the Archaic Age never even try to work out how many centuries or generations separate their audiences from the time of the narrative,⁴ but what about relative chronology within the narrative? Latacz (²1989) and Aumüller (1996–1997) are almost certainly right to side with those who would have the *Iliad* commence at the end of the ninth year of the war, but the very fact that eminent scholars still opt for the tenth year is significant. Our authors do have a sense of time, but we must bear in mind that until quite recently many people did not know exactly how old they were.⁵ In the case of the Greeks this only changed in the Hellenistic era when the casting of birth horoscopes became popular. The attitude towards domestic animals was different: in Hom. Il. 23.654–6 the poet tells us that the mule Achilles offered as first prize in the boxing contest is six years old; this may be no more than a rough estimate but it is still more than we are told about any human. There are more cases in point in the *Odyssey*. Relative age can be important to establish authority,

3 Like Laser (1958), Danek (1988), and many others, I am almost certain that *Iliad* 10 is a skilful later addition. For another argument in favour of Laser's theory that *Iliad* 10 presupposes the *Odyssey*, see my section on *Odyssey* 12 and *Iliad* 10 in Wenskus (forthcoming[b]).

4 Unlike Apollonius' *Argonautica*, the *Iliad* does not stress the fact that the narrated events took place a long time ago. At the beginning of Book 12, for example, the fact that no traces of the walls the Greeks had erected to protect their ships are visible at the time of composition is not attributed to the ravages of time but to a brief and energetic intervention of the gods, particularly Poseidon. For the skill with which Apollonius sets his work into a carefully constructed time frame, see Klooster (2007).

5 See, however, Hes. Op. 694–9, on the right age to get married: about 30 for a man, four years after the onset of puberty for a woman.

but this usually concerns cases where the age gap is considerable or where an elder brother calls a younger brother to order, even among the Olympians, as does Zeus at the beginning of *Odyssey* 15. It is therefore not to be wondered at that, when it comes to chronology, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are often less than crystal clear. Misunderstandings and overinterpretations are almost inevitable but can be corrected. As Aumüller has shown conclusively, Hom. Il. 2.295 ἡμῖν δ' εἵνατός ἐστι περιτροπέων ἐνιαυτός cannot mean that nine years have already passed, and once we translate ("for us it is the ninth revolving year"), it is obvious that the τροπ- of περιτροπέων need not refer to one of the solstices (τροπαί).⁶ This interpretation is compatible with 2.134 where Agamemnon, using the perfect tense, says that nine years have already passed: he is probably referring to the Greeks' departure from their respective homes, while Odysseus in 2.295–6 is certainly referring to the beginning of the actual siege. I think Aumüller is right, but when is Troy going to fall? In the tenth year, the poet informs us in 12.15, but when exactly? We get the distinct impression that Troy is going to fall soon after the events narrated in Book 24, which would mean that the whole Trojan War did not last ten years but rather nine years and a few months. To return to 2.295–6, it is interesting that the year is perceived as 'revolving', the same seasons recurring over and over again and in the same order, but the poet of the *Iliad*⁷ never tells us which of the events happened in which season, not even on which day of the lunar month, although quite a lot of the action takes place at night and the phases of the moon would

⁶ Solstices are well attested in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (e.g. the winter solstice at Hes. Op. 479 and 564, and the summer solstice at 663, never without ἡέλιος), but not in the *Iliad* and probably not in the *Odyssey*. Unlike Aumüller (1996–1997) I would not exclude the possibility that περιτροπέων does refer to the summer solstice, because the movements of the heavenly bodies and the time in which this movement takes place are sometimes seen as virtually the same thing (e.g. Hom. Il. 16.779), and because it is plausible that the Greeks would have left home in spring, when the sea became navigable, and thus would have arrived at Troy not much before the summer solstice. The fact that in some, but not all, Greek *poleis* (e.g. Athens) the civil lunisolar years began with the first sighting of the young moon after the summer solstice may also be relevant. For the authors of the Hippocratic *Epidemics* I and III the year started in autumn; see Wenskus (1990, 111). I am almost certain that either one or several authors of the Trojan Epic Cycle or some later scholar, possibly Callisthenes, did understand περιτροπέων as a reference to the summer solstice: this would explain the otherwise peculiar assertion of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (D.H. 1.63) that Ilion fell at the end of spring, 17 days before the summer solstice; see my discussion of the *Little Iliad* below.

⁷ I try to avoid the name 'Homer' in my discussion; in the few cases I use it I mean the author or authors of the *Iliad* (including Book 10) and the *Odyssey*.

have had to be factored in by any real life commander.⁸ The author of the *Little Iliad* realised this but, it seems, not the author(s) of the *Iliad*. True, whenever the night in question is said to be dark this may very well mean that there was no moon at the moment, but we are never told whether the night is dark because it happened to be cloudy, because it was the night before the new moon, because the moon had already set, or because it had not yet risen: this is information every tactician would have needed. At least Hephaestus puts the full moon on Achilles' shield in 18.484 and, if he knew anything at all about astronomy, this would mean positioning the rising full moon opposite the setting sun, or vice versa as is the case, for example, on the eastern pediment of the Parthenon where, however, the luminaries are anthropomorphised.

As for lunar months, when Odysseus is speaking hypothetically in 2.292, he uses the example of a man who is separated from his wife for just one single month, and in 5.385 Dione reminds her daughter Aphrodite that the Aloids once held Ares captive for 13 months,⁹ i.e. for a full solar year plus about 20 days.¹⁰

Now, before Hipparchus discovered the precession of the equinoxes,¹¹ the tropical and the sidereal year were thought to be identical, i.e. people thought that the time between one of the solstices or equinoxes and one of the stellar phases, i.e. the morning or evening risings and settings of some of those fixed

⁸ Before the development of radar technology, knowledge of the phases of the moon was of the essence, especially, but not only, in aerial warfare, and they still need to be factored in for actions during the night.

⁹ When I use the term 'month' without qualification, it is to be understood as the time between one new moon and the next. By 'new moon' the Greeks meant the first visibility of the young lunar crescent, not, as we do, the time of the conjunction (syzygy) of sun and moon when the angle of elongation between sun and moon (with earth at the apex) is zero and the moon is usually invisible. The ancient Greek lunar month almost, but not quite, coincides with one type of what modern astronomers call the synodic month, i.e. the time between two successive syzygies of the same type (conjunctions or oppositions of sun and moon, viz. new moons or full moons). There are at least three other kinds of lunar months (tropical, sidereal, and draconitic) in classical antiquity; however, not in our epics, with the exception of the draconic month (the interval between the moon's successive passing of the same moving node, essential for the calculation of eclipses) in Nonn. D. 6.75.

¹⁰ I would not go so far as Cassio (2012), who seems to consider *Odyssey* 5 unauthentic, but it is certainly untypical in more ways than one.

¹¹ A slow process with two important consequences: a) there was no bright star near the North Pole during the whole of classical antiquity, and b) the dates of the stellar phases have changed, particularly for stars like the *Pleiades* which are very close to the ecliptic. But even after Hipparchus the whole concept was usually either unknown or totally misunderstood from classical antiquity until today; see Wenskus (forthcoming[b]).

Iliad

stars which play a role in astrometeorological calendars, are always the same.¹² The solstices (but not the equinoxes) and some of the stellar phases are thus used in the same calendars in the *Erga* part of Hesiod's *Works and Days*.¹³ But neither the equinoxes nor the solstices are ever mentioned in the *Iliad*,¹⁴ not even in the flashbacks or the similes. They seem to be subject to the same peculiar restriction as the stellar phases tend to be according to Nilsson (1920, 146): "So far as I have been able to discover, the stars are never used in a narrative, i.e. where the date of any familiar event is to be given, but only where practical rules for the constantly recurring occupations and labours are concerned, and also for the festivals."¹⁵ The *Iliad* is even less concerned with precise chronology: even within the similes and comparisons either the season¹⁶ and/or a seasonal occupation are/is specified, or the name of one of the stars, star clusters, or constellations which feature so prominently in Hesiod's calendars of the agricultural and the nautical year. Some of those constellations are prominent in the description of Achilles' shield at Hom. Il. 18.483–7, but, unlike in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, a stellar date is never used, not even a vague or poetical one, although the audience is obviously expected to know said dates including their connotations. In Hom. Il. 5.5–7 Diomedes is compared to the "harvest star", probably Sirius as in the more extended simile of 22.26–32 (and in the more vague one of 11.62–5). The case of 22.26–32 is particularly interesting: as 22.25 shows in secondary focalisation, this is what Priam thinks when looking upon Achilles who, as Priam is well aware, is about to kill Hector. Sirius, the Dog of Orion, is very bright but an evil sign, bringing much fever to the suffering humans. There is no contradiction between Sirius being a sign and Sirius

¹² Astrometeorology has nothing to do with astrology, which is not nearly as old as most people think, and will only concern us when we get to Nonnus.

¹³ Unlike the solstices, the equinoxes cannot be observed by just measuring the length of the sun's shadow. *maybe 6 or possibly*

¹⁴ However, see also Hom. Il. 2.295 ~~probably~~ referring to the summer solstice.

¹⁵ We shall see below that this restriction no longer applies to Apollonius of Rhodes.

¹⁶ Winter (Hom. Il. 3.1–9, 12.279), spring (2.89, 2.468–71, 6.148), and harvest (ὄπωρη: 5.5–7, 16.385, 22.26–32). Those seasons were probably not of equal length. We do not know when they were supposed to begin or end. I tentatively suggest that harvest time began with the wheat harvest (in June), but the middle of May is also a distinct possibility: the time of the morning rising of the *Pleiades*, when peasants begin to prepare for the wheat harvest; on Hesiod specifically mentioning the sharpening of the sickles, see Wenskus (1990, 42–3). One of the scholiasts on Hom. Il. 22.27 incorrectly considered ὄπωρη to be synonymous with φθινόπωρον and finds fault with the poet for using it in this context; see Nilsson (1920, 110) and Wenskus (1990, 34). As for the end of ὄπωρη, it obviously occurs during the rainy season, see 16.385, quite possibly at the beginning of said season, approximately in early October: the time modern Greeks call πρωτοβρόχια.

being an active agent of evil: he is a sign of evil precisely because he brings it to pass.¹⁷

What we do find in the *Iliad* is the counting of days from one significant event to the other, but if we want to figure out how many days have passed since Agamemnon insulted Chryses we need to do some additions, which is not as unproblematic as it sounds because in some cases it is not quite clear when we should start counting. Much depends on whether we intend ἥως, which usually (and in prose always) means “dawn”, as a *pars pro toto* (as is certainly the case in 24.413–14, since it happens to be night), or as indicating the actual time of day, or both (as in 1.493). Latacz (1989, 136–51) is most helpful here: the action of the *Iliad* seems to take 51 days.¹⁸ The same numbers of days crop up again and again, viz. nine, ten, eleven, and twelve. The number nine even occurs in two of the major external *analepses* (6.174: the myth of Bellerophon told by Glaucus; 24.610: the myth of Niobe told by Achilles), and in one of the few auctorial external *prolepseis* (12.25: the destruction of the wall). The days (and probably the nights, but the only clear case is the problematic 10.252–3) are usually divided into three parts: morning, around midday, late afternoon until sundown.¹⁹ We do not know if we are to suppose that those three parts of the day are of roughly equal length, but it is safe to say that expressions such as 16.777 ὅφρα μὲν Ἡέλιος μέσον οὐρανὸν ἀμφιβέβηκει (“when the sun was in the middle of the sky”) do not refer to the time the sun actually culminated but to several hours, not necessarily divided into equal lengths by the sun’s culmination, as the hottest part of the day usually starts about an hour after this event.²⁰ There is another *caveat*: in cases like this, never translate, as is often

¹⁷ See Wenskus (1990, 33–5).

¹⁸ See the tables in Brügger (2009, 29–30); the minimum is 49 days, the maximum 52. Di Benedetto (2010, 263–70) contributes some very astute observations and arrives at almost exactly the same conclusions as Latacz, but at the very end either suddenly changes his system or simply forgets to count the day of Hector’s actual funeral. I do not understand why Pavese (2000) would say that Di Benedetto copied Latacz in this respect (this is excluded both by Di Benedetto’s work ethics and by said *Trennfehler*), and I understand even less why Di Benedetto’s oversight has remained hitherto uncorrected. Could it be that modern readers, like the poet of the *Iliad*, think that the exact counting of days does not really matter that much, at least in the case of the *Iliad*?

¹⁹ See James (1978).

²⁰ Something similar occurs with dates: περί or ἀμφί plus a stellar phase or an expression denoting the solstices or equinoxes usually mean a period, the longer part of which starts after the astronomical event in question. In the case of the solstices, for the same reason, the hottest period of the year starts well after the summer solstice and the coldest usually after the winter solstice. Cf. Wenskus (1990, particularly 173–4).

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the custom, “when the sun was in the zenith”.²¹ The sun can only ever be in the zenith between the tropics, although it admittedly sometimes feels as if it were directly over our heads even in far more northerly latitudes. As for the fixed stars, only very few ever pass near, let alone through, the zenith of any given latitude. We need to be even more careful in the case of archaic Greek texts: we have no way of knowing whether the Greeks of the Archaic Age were already aware of the fact that the sun moves in arcs of circles during daytime; they may have thought it rises until it reaches a certain height and then just moves in a more or less straight line until it starts setting.²² I do not think they did realise the sun moves in circles, at least not in the early Archaic Age. After all, we instinctively avoid looking directly into the sun. We may look directly at the stars, but only very patient observers do so for a whole night, for obvious reasons: people who stayed awake all night did so because they had to for practical motives. Shepherds had to watch their flocks and protect them from predators; they or, rather, some of them, looked at the sky every now and then and saw that the moon or a particular star had moved from east to west, or set, or risen. Unlike modern astronomers, even the Greeks of the Classical Age were far more interested in risings and settings than in culminations, and in pre-classical Greek texts stars are hardly ever mentioned as being high up in the sky. When Hesiod says that after the autumn rains Sirius spends just a small part of the day over our heads (Hes. Op. 417–19), this is a brilliant extrapolation (Hesiod or his source realises that after sunrise Sirius does not simply vanish but continues his path unseen), but this should not blind us to the fact that ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς cannot possibly mean “directly over our heads” because, even if the time Sirius spends high above in the sky is brief, it nevertheless lasts more than just a moment. This expression, then, seems to be synonymous with expressions of the ‘in the middle of the sky’-type.

²¹ See Wenskus (forthcoming[b]). Hom. Il. 18.488 and Hom. Od. 5.274 are hard to fit into a flat sky scenario, but I think I may have hit upon a solution not involving deletion, which will be the subject of another article.

²² According to Fehling (1985) and Fehling (1994, 11–15) it is by no means ‘natural’ to think of the sky as a hemisphere, let alone a full sphere. Doing so was the first revolutionary step towards modern cosmology, but we do not know by whom, when, or where it was first taken, and any speculation to that effect would be foolhardy. Compare the hieroglyph of Nut, the Egyptian goddess of the sky, which shows her doing a kind of push-up, keeping her back straight, or any pre-school child’s drawing of the sky. Even people who know the sky ought to look hemispherical do not actually perceive it as such but (I am simplifying here) as a flattened spherical cap, which is the result of the same optical illusion that makes the sun and the moon look bigger when near the horizon.

Special prominence is given to dawn or, in many cases, the personified Dawn, although not nearly as much as in the *Odyssey*.²³ But when does dawn start? Modern astronomy has established a very neat division into three parts for both morning and evening twilight: civil, nautical, and astronomical, depending on how far the sun is under the horizon, but this kind of precision was impossible before the discovery of atmospheric refraction and the invention of mathematical astronomy. What is more, not even Ptolemy in his *Phaseis* seems to be interested in establishing when dawn and dusk start or end. However, I am willing to go out on a limb and say that, as a rule, the *Iliad*'s dawn roughly corresponds to our civil morning twilight,²⁴ and the very rare ἀμφιλύκη νύξ (the only case in archaic epic is Hom. Il. 7.433) even more roughly to nautical morning twilight, perhaps starting during the second half of astronomical twilight: note that this passage does not declare ἀμφιλύκη νύξ to be a part of dawn: ἤμος δ' οὐτ' ἄρ' πω ἠώς, ἔτι δ' ἀμφιλύκη νύξ, "when it was not yet dawn but ἀμφιλύκη νύξ"; ἀμφιλύκη νύξ is almost untranslatable because "twilight", for us, is just a more scientific synonym for "dawn" or "dusk", and translating "nautical twilight" would be wildly anachronistic. Perhaps we could translate: "when dawn had not yet broken but it was still grey twilight." As 11.1–2 shows, Dawn, when personified, precedes, but by this very fact does not need to announce, sunrise: rather, she herself brings light to mortals and immortals. This is easily explained: even before sunrise (or, as modern astronomers would say: apparent sunrise),²⁵ a phenomenon hardly ever mentioned in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* (unlike sunset or the time when the sun is "in the middle of the sky"), it is already light enough to do whatever needs doing. As dawn is seen as the bringer of light, it is not particularly surprising that there is one verse in the *Iliad* where ἠώς seems to mean the whole morning (21.111).

The morning star is said to precede dawn in 23.226–7; its name, Ἑωσφόρος, would suggest it also brings dawn, but in the *Iliad* the evening star appears only in a comparison with Achilles' sparkling spear at 22.315–19, where he is called the most beautiful of heaven's stars: just as Achilles is both the most beautiful among the Greeks and, as we have been told repeatedly, fated to die soon, the beautiful evening star is only visible when setting and may thus be a symbol of death.²⁶

²³ Cf. the list in James (1978, 153–4). See also Janni (2011a) and Janni (2011b).

²⁴ As Janni (2011a) has shown, the sense of ἠώς changes over the centuries: in other poetic texts ἠώς can be synonymous with "daylight".

²⁵ The Greeks did not know it then, but, due to atmospheric refraction, the sun seems to be above the horizon some time before and after it actually is; with the length of time depending on the observer's latitude.

²⁶ See Wenskus (1990, 34–5) and Wenskus (forthcoming[b]).

There are other specifications of the time of day, particularly in 11.1–18.242, the part covering the third day of fighting, the one single day which occupies the largest section of text, which stands to reason. I go even further than Di Benedetto who thinks²⁷ that Hom. Il. 11.86–9 “when a woodcutter would start preparing his meal” refers to the same segment of time as 16.777 “as long as the sun was in the middle of the sky.” True, 16.777 does establish a temporal correlation with the events of 11.90–180, but it is not a precise one and there is no redundancy. In fact, a much briefer period is covered at 11.86–91: not the whole *siesta* of the woodcutter, but just the presumably rather short time it takes him to prepare his meal,²⁸ and this is when the Greeks break through the ranks of the Trojans. Contrast this with 16.777 where the poet uses the pluperfect to express duration. Two verses later, 16.779, a period of medium length is probably meant by “when the sun μετενίσσετο (went over? returned?) towards the unyoking of the oxen.” This is hard to translate but it is clear what the poet meant: by moving in space the sun also moves in time, which is why humans can see what time it is (in the Archaic age, approximately) by looking at the sky. This seems the very origin of expressions like “time passes”.²⁹ As for the prefix μετ(ά), I would tentatively suggest that it means (as it does *mutatis mutandis* in Hom. Od. 12.312 where it appears in *tnesis* and refers to the movement of the stars) that a considerable part of the day has passed, i.e. the time during which the sun was high up in the sky and both the Greeks and the Trojans endured heavy losses.³⁰ Not only the sun, but also parts of the day can be said to “set”: Hom. Il. 21.230–1 εἰς ὃ κεν ἔλθῃ δέϊλος ὄψε δύνων.

That night was divided into three parts (watches, probably) is a detail we only find in Book 10. In all the other books of the *Iliad*, night is not divided into periods the way day is. Whatever the original meaning of the expression νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ was, our poets no longer seem to know it. They use it because it sounds good and makes a convenient verse ending. In the case of 22.317 it could have the original meaning if that meaning was indeed “in the milking time of night”, i.e. “at the beginning of night”, but this is impossible in the case of 22.28. However, *pace de Jong* (and others), it probably does not mean “in the dead of night” either (though it might in 11.173 and 15.324) because Sirius is said to be rising and bringing fever, i.e. the poet is referring to the Dog Days when Sirius rises shortly before dawn. The passage does not explicitly state that many other stars are also visible at the same

²⁷ See Di Benedetto (²1998, 264).

²⁸ Note the use of the aorist.

²⁹ I do not know whether the Greeks of Homer's time already thought that the movement of the luminaries and the stars actually caused time but I am inclined to think that this idea would have been too abstract.

³⁰ Untermann (1987, 97) seems to think the verb means “was about to return”, perhaps rightly so.

time, but it may just be a mistake as in 8.555–9 where two *topoi* seem to have been combined: the starry night and the moonlit night, a fact which bothered Homeric scholars even before the time of Aristarchus.³¹ The halo effect, the tendency to either like or dislike everything about a person, particularly one you feel strongly about, including things you could not possibly know, is one of the most powerful systematic errors, and we are almost certainly wrong to think the poets of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* knew more about astronomy than most of their contemporaries, which does not seem to have been that much.³² If they mention the rising of the Dog Star that does not mean they actually observed it, just as we (as individuals) celebrate Easter or Passover without calculating the dates ourselves. We shall see that, as real star lore is getting less and less common among the elites (with the exception of a few mathematically gifted specialists), poets talk more and more about the stars, putting in more and more erudite details but also getting more and more of their facts partly or totally wrong. But I think this process actually starts with the *Iliad*, or even earlier.³³

3 Homer, *Odyssey*

That Odysseus has been absent from home for 20 years when he finally returns to Ithaca is something we all think we know. But do we really? It is certainly not what we are being told (certainly not at the beginning of the *Odyssey*),³⁴ and, what is more, when Odysseus tells Telemachus that he has returned in the twentieth year (Hom. Od. 16.206), this can hardly be true, at least in the literal sense. Most scholars seem to agree that Helen is exaggerating in Hom. Il. 24.765 when she says that for her it is the twentieth year, so it seems safe to assume that Odysseus is exaggerating as well, though much less so. We have already seen that the *Iliad* seems to presume that Troy will fall during the tenth year, not after ten years have passed. So does the *Odyssey*: Nestor states that the war before Troy lasted nine years (Hom. Od. 3.118) and Hermes declares that the war lasted nine years and that the Greeks started their journeys back home in the tenth (5.107–8).³⁵ Odysseus tells the Phaeacians that he stayed on Aeolus' island and on the island of Helios for a month each (10.14 and 12.325), on Circe's island for a year (10.469), and on

Tim the narrative
✓ (see also Halitson in 2, 175)

³¹ See Wenskus (1990, 37 and n. 99).

³² See Wenskus (forthcoming[b]).

³³ See Wenskus (1990, 35–7).

³⁴ Weiher's (1967) translation of Hom. Od. 1.16 is utterly misleading.

³⁵ See also Odysseus in one of his 'lying tales' at Hom. Od. 14.240–1.

Calypso's island for seven years (7.259). The rest of his travels cannot have taken more than a few months at most. There are several solutions, but only two of them are remotely probable: a) 20 is just a round number, b) the poet got mixed up, which is not nearly as improbable as it sounds,³⁶ and does not contradict the theory, which I am far more inclined to believe now than I was in 1990, that the poet of the *Odyssey* actually refers to specific seasons during the narrative, something the poet of the *Iliad* definitely did not. Before we tackle this difficult subject, a few observations that show that the *Odyssey* uses expressions of time far more generously than the *Iliad*, and for much greater effect. The theory that the poet got mixed up is not contradicted by the assumption that he has prolonged Odysseus' stay on Calypso's island (seven whole years instead of, say, three or five, which would have been more than enough) because he needs that time for Telemachus to grow up.³⁷ One might object, of course, that Telemachus is already a toddler when Odysseus' leaves for Troy, but the *Odyssey* is more poignant if Odysseus misses all of his son's childhood and Telemachus does not recognise his own father; on the other hand, with the exception of Euryclea and the dog Argos, nobody else recognises Odysseus either.

Neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* discloses how old the characters of their narrative are, or even how old they look, as in the cases Athena ages or rejuvenates Odysseus or Penelope. We can hardly count the monstrous (if beautiful) Aloads who, according to their mother Iphimedeia, whom Odysseus encounters in the *Nekyia* (Hom. Od. 11.311–12), were nine ells broad and nine fathoms tall when they were just nine years old. As in the *Iliad*, the (approximate?) age of animals seems to be more important than that of humans: the hide of a nine year old oxen has been used to make the bag Aeolus gives to Odysseus (Hom. Od. 10.19), and Circe makes Odysseus' companions assume the form of nine year old pigs (10.390). When animals are killed for food, five years seems to have been considered the ideal age: e.g. the best boar of Eumaeus' herd (14.414–19) and one of Autolycus' oxen (19.420). However, for humans, be they slaves or princes, the terms used are vague and, especially in the case of Telemachus, subjective: the first character who goes as far as to say that the only way to get rid of the suitors is to kill them is Athena (disguised as Mentès). She presents this as something Telemachus, no longer a child, ought to start planning carefully (1.294–7); subsequently Telemachus insists four times that he is no longer a child (2.313, 18.229, 19.19, 20.310).³⁸ So, when Antinous, taking counsel with his fellow conspirators, expresses the wish that Telemachus, whom

³⁶ See Wenskus (forthcoming[b]).

³⁷ See Di Benedetto/Fabrini (2010, *ad* Hom. Od. 1.10).

³⁸ This is also what Penelope says about him in Hom. Od. 19.530. See also Euryclea in 19.88.

he still considers to be a child, might die before reaching maturity (4.665–8), this shows, not just his nastiness, but also what our poet calls ἀτασθαλίη: persisting in doing the wrong thing in spite of warnings by gods or seers and, in this case, in face of the evidence: for Antinous, Telemachus is still a *force négligeable*. This seems to go for all the suitors: at 4.673 all of them applaud Antinous.³⁹ When the *Odyssey* starts, it is already the fourth year the suitors have been in Odysseus' house, as Penelope got away with weaving and unravelling Laertes' shroud for three whole years before being betrayed in the fourth (2.89, 2.106, 13.377, 19.151, 24.141). The fact that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra lorded it over Argos for seven whole years (3.305–6) before Orestes returned to avenge his father in the eighth year is also relevant, since from the beginning to the end of the *Odyssey* Orestes, Aegisthus, and Clytemnestra are presented as a foil to Telemachus, the suitors, and Penelope respectively.⁴⁰ Seven years is also the period of Menelaus' wanderings before returning to Sparta in the eighth (4.82). But what does Telemachus mean when he says that Nestor has reigned over three generations (if that is indeed the right translations) in 3.245, or when he calls Eumaeus ἄττα?⁴¹ Just how much older than Telemachus is Eumaeus? Di Benedetto [2008] comes to the conclusion that Eumaeus must be "about" 29 years old.⁴² But was the poet's audience supposed to figure this out? I am far from convinced, particularly, as 29 is not one of the conventional numbers of the *Odyssey*. Perhaps it is best to imagine Eumaeus as younger than Odysseus⁴³ but older than Telemachus, without trying to achieve a higher degree of precision. And Nausicaa? The narrator and his characters are far too tactful to specify how much time has passed after the onset of her puberty. She is old enough to get married; everybody thinks so, in fact, she is already being courted (6.34–5). That is all we need to know, and the poet of the *Odyssey* is not the only one to think so. None of the Greek epic poets I have consulted ever tells us how old his protagonists are.

³⁹ The one relatively decent and reasonable suitor, Amphinomus, is never mentioned before Hom. Od. 16.351.

⁴⁰ On those synchronisms and on Hom. Od. 4.82, see Di Benedetto/Fabrini (2010, *ad* Hom. Od. 1.297).

⁴¹ Six times in all, the first time at Hom. Od. 16.31; he is the only one to use this word in the *Odyssey* and only when addressing Eumaeus.

⁴² In his notes on Hom. Od. 14.440 and 16.31 Di Benedetto, whose tendency to assume an in-universe perspective has led to some brilliant insights but sometimes gets a bit out of control, seems to take at face value the information that Odysseus returns after 19 whole years have passed, which I think unlikely unless the poet himself got mixed up. But, in this case, why trust the very same poet when it comes to calculating the age of Eumaeus?

⁴³ Anticlea brought up Eumaeus together with her youngest child, Ctímene (Hom. Od. 15.363–4).

Now, for the seasons: first of all, in the *Odyssey* we have four seasons instead of the *Iliad*'s three. In addition to winter, spring, and harvest time, we now have summer (ἔρος), which therefore must take up the first part of the *Iliad*'s ὀπώρα and perhaps the end of the *Iliad*'s spring as well. That ἔρος is not just a synonym for ὀπώρα may be deduced from Hom. Od. 11.190–4, 12.75, and 14.384; of which 11.190–4 is particularly interesting: in winter, Anticlea tells Odysseus, Laertes and his servants sleep in the house, but when ἔρος comes and ὀπώρα, he sleeps outside. That raises the question: How about spring? Is spring considered to be a part of winter? Quite probably, as in spring the ground is still cold, while in early autumn it is still warm and even quite late in autumn tends to be warmer than in early spring. Our poet does not tell us when he thinks spring began: possibly, as Hesiod did, about 60 days after the winter solstice, at the evening rising of Arcturus and the return of the swallow (Hes. Op. 564–70). Spring is mentioned several times in the *Odyssey*, in the short simile of Hom. Od. 9.51 (where spring is called ὦρη; possibly echoing Hom. Il. 2.468)⁴⁴ and the long and disturbing simile of which the nightingale's song in early spring is the *illustrans* (Hom. Od. 19.518–23, in Penelope's prayer/monologue), and in 22.299–301, the first of two similes contained in the author's narrative. Now, it has been suggested by several scholars⁴⁵ that Odysseus returns to Ithaca in late winter or early spring. This is a distinct possibility but impossible to prove. The poet never tells us explicitly that it is spring (or, if he does, he commits an astronomical blunder, as we shall see), perhaps because old habits (and restrictions) die hard. So, what do we have?

The nights are obviously cold, with frosty mornings,⁴⁶ which would fit any date from October to April. In 18.367, in a hypothetical scenario, Odysseus all but challenges Eurymachus to a haymaking competition in the spring, when the days are long. This neither confirms nor disproves the hypothesis that it is now very late winter or early spring when the days are not yet long. The simile of 21.411, where the sound of Odysseus' bow is compared to the cry of the swallow, may be just a simile, but what of the fact that Athena takes the shape of a swallow and perches on one of the inner roof beams in 22.239–40? Of course, this would be particularly convincing in a spring scenario, but then Athena does not behave like a swallow would or could, deflecting as she does many of the suitors' spears (22.273). To sum it up, there is a cluster of references to spring in the second half of the poem as opposed to just one short simile in the first half, but such clusters can

⁴⁴ Hom. Od. 468–71 shows that ὦρη without further qualification means spring whenever a particular season is referred to.

⁴⁵ As early as in the Hellenistic Age, as is suggested by Arat. 1582–5; see also Austin (1975).

⁴⁶ Cf. the mornings on the island of the Phaeacians (Hom. Od. 5.467) and in Eumaeus' farmhouse (14.459); see also 17.191.

occur automatically and do not prove anything *per se*. In fact, Braun (2000, 215–18) thinks, perhaps rightly, that early autumn is meant. While one of his arguments, the grapes on Calypso's island (5.69), is inconclusive as this might be a miraculous plant, both the abundant acorns Eumaeus' pigs are feeding on (13.409) and the activities on Laertes' farm (24.222–30) do fit a date in autumn better than one in spring, but only by a slight margin.

There is just one group of verses that would only fit a date in autumn, provided the poet has not made a mistake: Hom. Od. 5.272–7. In 1990, when I first tackled this text, I was still too much under the influence of Nilsson and just mentioned the possibility that the poet is dating Odysseus' departure from Calypso's island with a stellar phase in 5.272 without discussing it as thoroughly as it deserves.⁴⁷ The expression the poet uses is ὀψὲ δύνοντα βοώτην. I translate “Bootes, who was setting in the evening” because this verse cannot refer to the fact that the constellation Bootes takes a long time to set: ὀψέ means “late”, not “slowly”, and while Braun is right to say that at least two ancient scholars do in fact tell us it can mean “slowly”, this does not prove anything. Homeric scholars sometimes assume unattested meanings in order to make sense of a text, and this text is puzzling. As I see it, we are left with three mutually exclusive possibilities: a) the poet just copied this group of verses from another context where it actually fitted, in which case 5.272–7 does not tell us anything about the season our narrative is set in. This is possible and at least vastly preferable to b) the poet was aware that Arcturus, the brightest star of the constellation Bootes, has his evening setting in late autumn. But this is highly improbable: not only is this phase not attested in pre-classical Greek, but it would mean that not only Odysseus but also Telemachus decide to take to sea at the worst possible time of the year, which is particularly unlikely in the case of Telemachus as nobody tries to dissuade him, not even Noemon who seems to have no qualms to lend him his boat;⁴⁸ c) The poet of the *Odyssey* commits a polar error, mixing up the evening setting with the evening rising. The latter is one of the signs that winter is over in Hes. Op. 564–70, together with the return of the swallow. This is the solution I would adopt today.⁴⁹ In fact, even experts find polar

⁴⁷ See Wenskus (1990, 38 n. 102). I still regard my criticism of the BV *scholion* and, in particular, of Hainsworth's (1993) commentary as valid.

⁴⁸ See Braun (2000).

⁴⁹ One of the *scholia* to Aratus on *Phainomena* 91 proposes another solution: that the poet of the *Odyssey* did not mean the constellation Aratus called Bootes but the one he (and the poet of the *Odyssey* two verses later) called Orion. Although this solution has the advantage of fitting a spring scenario, it is wildly improbable as no other source ever identifies the two constellations. It is, however, possible that our poet mixed up the evening setting of Orion with the evening setting of Bootes.

errors very hard to avoid when talking at length about stellar phases, as one can not only mix up morning and evening phases on the one hand and settings and risings on the other, but also the first time a setting or rising is observed with the last one, or instructions which belong to the same polar expression, e.g. the sowings and harvests connected to the phases of the same star or group of stars.⁵⁰ I would go farther than I dared to go in 1990 when I tried⁵¹ to make sense of the astronomical *crux* of 567: Hesiod says it is the first evening Arcturus is setting, while he ought to have said “last”. Although I would not positively exclude the explanation I gave then, I now think it is far more probable that Hesiod, too, committed a (slight) polar error. To sum it up, if the poet of the *Odyssey* worked out a timeline, it would probably have been the following: Odysseus departs from Calypso’s island at the end of winter/beginning of spring (not ideal for sailing but just feasible), all goes well for 17 days (Hom. Od. 5.272), then Poseidon sends a storm that lasts two days and two nights. On the evening of the day after that, Odysseus reaches the island of the Phaeacians, where he stays for three days, leaving on the evening of the third day and waking up on the shore of Ithaca the morning after, in early spring. That stellar phases are not mentioned in the similes is not surprising: there are far fewer similes in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*, and there does not seem to be any overlap.

The passing of months is mentioned several times, unspecifically in Hom. Od. 11.294 (also in 10.469–70 and 19.152–3 = 24.142–3, though the authenticity of the verses referring to the months has been doubted by some editors).⁵² The number of months is specified twice by Odysseus in his *Apologoi* (10.14 and 12.325: a whole month) and once in one of his ‘lying tales’ (14.244: “just one month”), and by Agamemnon in 24.118 (a whole month, but the poet is using a different expression

⁵⁰ Quoting Hes. Op. 383–4, even Hübner (1998, 838) pairs the morning rising of the *Pleiades* with the sowing of wheat instead of the preparations for the wheat harvest, even though wheat, according to the same couple of verses, ought to be sown, not at the rising, but at the setting of the *Pleiades*. Cf. also Wenskus (1990, 87 and 89).

⁵¹ See Wenskus (1990, 46), quoting David Pingree who kindly discussed this problem (and many others) with me in 1987.

⁵² The second half of Hom. Od. 10.470 *περὶ δ’ ἡμέτερά μακρὰ τελέσθη* may be due to secondary focalisation: Odysseus’ companions are getting impatient, and the days seem long to them. It probably does not refer to the measurable length of the days, certainly not in the sense of “the days started getting shorter”, which would refer to the summer solstice (as Hom. Od. 18.367 shows, days in spring can be called “long”). However, “the nights were now shorter than the days”, referring to the autumnal equinox, is even less probable: the period of the summer solstice, which started shortly before the morning rising of Orion, was considered unstable and thus dangerous for seafaring, and the morning rising of Arcturus, which occurred about the same time as the autumnal equinox, was positively dreaded; see Wenskus (1990, 43–4) on Hes. Op. 619–77.

here, for metrical reasons). When Antinous reacts to Telemachus' rebuke regarding his treatment of the disguised Odysseus, this particularly unpleasant suitor repies (17.407–8) that, if all suitors gave as much (i.e. treated him as roughly), they would keep this beggar away for three months. As for the phases of the moon, Odysseus (still in disguise) tells Penelope, not quite truthfully as he has, in fact, already arrived, that "Odysseus will return this very *λυκάβας*, on the day one moon fades and the next one begins" (14.161–2 and 19.306–7). The etymology of *λυκάβας* is unknown; it might mean "month" or "year", but that is not the point: Odysseus refers to the day the Athenians called "the old and new" and we "the new moon". But is this also what the poet means in 14.457–8, with the *hapax legomenon* *σχοτομήνιος*? It is possible; however, since it is raining the whole night anyway, I would translate "moonless" instead. As in the *Iliad*, days are counted from one important event to the next in the *Odyssey*, totalling 41 days in the main narrative.

As for the division of the day in the *Odyssey*, we have roughly the same picture as in the *Iliad*: morning, midday, and evening, and – as in the *Longest Day* of the *Iliad* – the time of the unyoking of the oxen is mentioned in the *Longest Day* of Odysseus' *Apologoi* (Hom. Od. 9.58).⁵³ Dawn is mentioned extremely often in the *Odyssey*; I am inclined to think Di Benedetto is right to say that the poet of the *Odyssey* distinguishes between two phases of dawn: when our poet calls dawn not *ἡριγένεια*, but *χρυσόθρονος*, a later period of the morning is meant.⁵⁴ The two attributes never occur in the same verse or group of verses, 23.347 being no exception because in this verse *ἡριγένεια* is used like a kenning in lieu of a proper name, but *ῥοδοδάκτυλος* is often, if not always, combined with *ἡριγένεια*, which in this case is possibly used adverbially in the sense of "rising early".⁵⁵ The verse *ἦμος δ' ἡριγένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως*, which is used twice in the *Iliad* but 21 times in the *Odyssey*, may thus be translated as follows: "when, rising early in the morning, rosy fingered Dawn appeared." *Χρυσόθρονος* could refer to a golden garment of the goddess (or to a garment with golden embroidery) or possibly to a golden throne. If Dawn is supposed to be rising, it is hard to picture her sitting on a throne when she does so, while the colour of a garment may seem to change. So, *χρυσόθρονος* is either a generic adjective, in which case it could mean "of the golden throne", or it is contextually bound, in which case it probably refers to her garment.

⁵³ Two verses earlier, *ἥως* seems to mean the whole morning: there are no other obvious cases in the *Odyssey*.

⁵⁴ *Χρυσόθρονος* occurs only in the *Odyssey*: e.g. Hom. Od. 15.56 and 20.91; see also 6.48, with *ἡύθρονος*. See also Di Benedetto/Fabrini (2010, 52–7).

⁵⁵ See also Janni (2011b).

Dawn is more important as a person in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*. She has a house and a dancing floor on Circe's island (Hom. Od. 12.3–4), Calypso mentions her as one of the two goddesses whose mortal lover was killed by the envious gods (5.121–2), and Di Benedetto thinks that for this very reason the poet of the *Odyssey* uses, at the beginning of the same book, the two-verse formula also attested (for no particular reason except that of variation) in Hom. Il. 11.1–2: ἥως δ' ἐκ λεχέων παρ' ἀγαυοῦ Τιθωνοῖο / ὄρνυθ', ἵν' ἀθανάτοισι φάος φέροι ἡδὲ βροτοῖσι, "Dawn rose from her bed, leaving noble Tithonus, in order to bring light to immortals and mortals." If, as seems probable, if not certain, the poet of the *Odyssey* identified Tithonus, husband of Eos, with Tithonus, brother of Priam (Hom. Il. 20.237), this would mean that, for the time being at least, Eos is married to or permanently living with a mortal, and there is nothing in the text to suggest Tithonus is decrepit.⁵⁶ The poet of the *Odyssey* would thus seem to make Calypso a liar before she even opens her mouth.⁵⁷ Alternatively, if the poet meant to allude to the version of the *Hymn to Aphrodite*, which later became canonical, his message may have been that unions between mortals and immortals are always problematic and that Odysseus did the right thing when he declined Calypso's offer of immortality. Be that as it may, this is the most interesting case of the poet of the *Odyssey* mentioning dawn in a deformularised expression to make a point, but not the only one.⁵⁸ The same goes *mutatis mutandis* for sunrise, which is hardly ever mentioned but is given prominence in Hom. Od. 3.1–3, where the Sun is said to do what, as a rule, is seen as Dawn's job: bringing light to mortals and immortals. That Dawn by herself cannot bring light is presupposed by Helios' threat (12.382–3) to descend to Hades and to shine for the dead, and by Zeus' answer (12.385–6). Sun is far more important for the plot of the *Odyssey* than Dawn is, which is why he is the first god mentioned in the *Odyssey* (1.8), with the exception of the Muse, while Dawn does not show any personal initiative in the narrative of the *Odyssey*: in 23.243–6 Athena wants to prolong the night to give more time to Odysseus' and Penelope's first reunion and

⁵⁶ Was the audience supposed to figure out how old a character, in this case Tithonus, was at the time? From an in-universe perspective, even if he was very much younger than his brother Priam, he could not have been a young man any more. Or did the poet of the *Odyssey* think a different, divine, Tithonus is referred to, or did he suppose that Tithonus, the brother of Priam, was made immortal? That Tithonus was made immortal but not ageless is not attested before the *Hymn to Aphrodite* (h. Ven. 218–40). Sappho only says Tithonus, being mortal, grew old eventually: Sapph. F 58.19–22 (those verses were only partially known to Voigt (1971) but form the end of the Old Age poem in the Cologne papyrus).

⁵⁷ Di Benedetto/Fabrini (2010, 55) is too fond of Calypso to see this; I do not share his view that "il poeta dell'*Odissea* si sintonizza con il discorso di Calipso, assicurando ad Aurora un secondo amante."

⁵⁸ See Di Benedetto/Fabrini (2010, 55–6).

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thus holds back Night⁵⁹ (obviously from leaving the sky) and keeps back Dawn near the Ocean, not even allowing her to yoke her horses (Lampus and Phaethon, mentioned only here), and in 23.347 Athena, thinking that Odysseus and Penelope have by now slept to their hearts' content, makes Dawn rise, certainly later, but probably faster⁶⁰ than usual.

As in Hom. Il. 23.226–7, in Hom. Od. 13.93–4 the Morning Star is said to announce Dawn, but the two couples of verses are not identical: only in the *Iliad* the Morning Star is given a name. The Evening Star seems to be missing in the *Odyssey*: the word Ἑσπερος probably means just “evening” in all cases, and in some cases it cannot mean anything else, particularly in the identical verses of 1.422–3 and 18.304–6, where it is called “black”. In 18.304–6 this may be poignant as it is the last time the suitors will ever go to sleep.

As for the division of the night into three parts, the verse in question, Hom. Od. 12.312 (≈ 14.483) is either marred by a blunder so grotesque that virtually no Greek of the Archaic Age could have made it or, far more probably, has been misunderstood by all modern translators, commentators, grammarians, and lexicographers I have checked, while there are many good and some excellent translations of the parallel passage, Hom. Il. 10.251–3. I think the author of *Iliad* 10 tried to express himself more clearly than the author of the *Odyssey* had, who says ἥμος δὲ τρίχα νύκτος ἔην, μετὰ δ' ἄστρα βεβήκει (Hom. Od. 12.312 ≈ 14.483).⁶¹ I translate, aiming for accuracy rather than beauty: “But when it was the third part of the night and the stars had already completed a considerable part of their paths.” This is a kind of logical *hysteron proteron*: from the positions of the stars any given observer would have deduced that it was by now past midnight (well past midnight in our strict modern sense). As the stars never set all at the same time (roughly speaking, at any given latitude about half of all the stars are above the horizon during any part of the night, which means that for every star which sets, another one rises at approximately the same time, and of course the circumpolar stars never set at all), this cannot mean what many translators thought it meant, viz. that “the stars are setting.”⁶² That is the kind of thing Vergil admittedly seems to say in Verg. Aen. 8.59, but the Romans were far less ‘star conscious’ than the Greeks of the Archaic Age and used words for

⁵⁹ To archaic thinking, night (not only Night) is seen not as the absence of light, but as a physical entity.

⁶⁰ See Di Benedetto/Fabrini (2010, 56).

⁶¹ For an incomplete, but representative overview of modern translations and an exhaustive discussion of the verses in question, see Wenskus (forthcoming[b]). For the *Odyssey* as a source for *Iliad* 10, see esp. Laser (1958).

⁶² Saying that stars are setting or have set only makes sense when you specify which stars you are talking about, as Sappho does in fr. 168 B Voigt.

“setting” in the sense of “fading”, as the text of the aria “Nessun dorma” in Giacomo Puccini’s opera *Turandot* has it.⁶³ The other group of translators, most of them misled by μετὰ, think it means “when the stars had already culminated”, which sounds learned but would be almost as wrong and for almost the same reasons; plus, the concept of culmination is probably anachronistic for the Archaic Age. The author of *Iliad* 10 decided to substitute the unambiguous προ- for his source’s μετὰ and has Odysseus say: Hom. Il. 10.251b–3 Μάλα γὰρ νύξ ἄνεται, ἐγγύθι δ’ ἥώς. / ἄστρα δὲ δὴ προβέβηκε, παροίχωκεν δὲ πλεον νύξ / τῶν δύο μοιράων, τριτάτῃ δ’ ἔτι μοῖρα λέλειπται, “Night is pressing on, dawn is near; in fact, the stars’ course is far advanced, two parts of the night have passed, and only the last third is left.”

Note that in both passages Odysseus is the speaker, and also that, as two of the *Iliadic scholia* point out, dawn cannot be all that close in the case of *Iliad* 10: Odysseus is exaggerating because he wants his companions to hurry. In the case of the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, Odysseus just wants to say that the plan proposed by Eurylochus, to leave the Island of the Sun at dawn (Hom. Od. 12.293), was foiled by Zeus who sent a storm that built up during the last third of the night. In 14.483 Odysseus, to give more verisimilitude to one of his ‘lying tales’, adds the corroborative detail that so close before dawn the night was so cold he, ‘the Cretan’, could not stand it any more.

4 The *Little Iliad*

In fr. 14 West (= 12 Allen, 11 Davies, 9 Bernabé) the *scholion* on Euripides (E. Hec. 910) informs us that Callisthenes in Book 2 of his *Hellenica* writes:

Troy was conquered in the month of Thargelion, according to some historians, on the 12th, but according to the author of the *Little Iliad*, on the eighth day before the end of the month. For he tells us the exact date, saying as he does that the capture occurred when “it was the middle of the night, and the bright moon had just risen.”⁶⁴ But it rises at midnight on the eighth day before the end of the month only, and on no other night.

This is a blatant overinterpretation. By the time of Callisthenes astronomy had made giant steps, exact measurement of time was aimed at, and “midnight” is thus used in the modern sense. The author of the *Little Iliad*, however, just needed the moon to rise late enough to give the Greeks time to sail unobserved from their

⁶³ See Wenskus (forthcoming[a]).

⁶⁴ Or possibly: “was just rising”: Νύξ μὲν ἔην μέσση, λαμπρὰ δ’ ἐπέτελλε σελήνη.

hiding place near Tenedos to the shores of Troy,⁶⁵ and early enough to illuminate the sacking of the city. The date given by the other historians not named by Callisthenes is certainly the result a similar overinterpretation, and as for the month Thargelion, the last but one in the Athenian calendar, which only an Athenian or an author writing after the establishment of the Metonic calendar would have used,⁶⁶ this is probably a misinterpretation of an expression meaning “in late spring” or “in early summer.” I would suggest two mutually exclusive possibilities: a) one of the cyclic poets said that the Greeks sacked Troy for 17 days and left to return home at the time of the summer solstice, which would also fit with what Dionysius of Halicarnassus tells us D.H. 1.63: “Ilion fell at the end of spring, 17 days before the summer solstice”;⁶⁷ b) the expression may have been the phase date “at the morning rising of the *Pleiades*”.⁶⁸ Probably all dates for the fall of Troy are the result of similar overinterpretation. In the extant epic texts⁶⁹ there is no trace of the ways for giving the exact date of the lunar months, not even of the division of the month into three parts of roughly ten days each, which features so prominently at the end of Hesiod’s (or, to put it more cautiously, the Hesiodic) *Erga*.

5 Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*

Apollonius obviously decided not to follow Homer when it comes to dating the events of his narrative within the year, and not only because he knows far more about the geography of the Mediterranean, let alone the Black Sea, than the Homeric poets could be expected to.⁷⁰ This is just one of his reasons, albeit a very important one. One of the other reasons is certainly his interest in the winds: his

⁶⁵ Which probably was what Vergil meant in Verg. Aen. 2.255 *a Tenedo tacitae per amica silentia lunae*, see Grafton/Swerdlow (1986, 216).

⁶⁶ For the use of the names of the Athenian months in non astronomical scientific texts, see Wenskus (1990, 139–42 and 152–3).

⁶⁷ This may in turn be a misinterpretation of an expression like the one of Hom. Il. 2.295, see my note 6.

⁶⁸ See Q.S. 2.665 and Aeschylus (A. Ag. 826), where the capture of Troy is said to have taken place “about the time of the setting of the *Pleiades*”. In Wenskus (1990, 64–6) I opted for the evening setting (late March/early April) while not excluding the morning setting (late October), but after discussing this problem at length with Enrico Medda I now prefer the morning setting, which is attested far more often.

⁶⁹ Not counting the *Homeric Hymns*. For the phases of the moon in the *Hymn to Hermes*, see Wenskus (forthcoming[b]).

⁷⁰ Rengakos’ theory (1995, 15–16) only explains why Apollonius gives explicit dates for the outward journey, but not for the return journey, of which a considerable part covers territory Apollo-

expressions of time (both of the year and of the day) are frequently combined with information concerning wind and weather, and yet another one, his desire to emulate (and occasionally explain and correct), not only Homer but also Hesiod (including the *Scutum*, a text we consider to be spurious), and almost certainly Aratus as well, plus a plethora of other sources unknown to us. But he goes about this very discreetly, at the beginning at least, becoming more and more specific as he makes his heroes approach Colchis, thus retracing the history of seasonal dates in ancient epic: In similes only in the *Iliad*, possibly in the narrative of the *Odyssey*, at the end of the narrative of the Ps.-Hesiodic *Scutum*, albeit not with a stellar phase. The very first date Apollonius provides is so vague we cannot even be positive it actually is a date: A.R. 1.9 χειμερίοιο ῥέεθρα χιών διὰ ποσσὶν Ἀναύρου. Apollonius wants to explain why the crossing of the Anaurus is so difficult. The river is swollen, which suggests, but does not prove, a date in winter. That the landscape was sprinkled with snow we learn much later, in 3.69 (Hera is speaking). Apollonius also wants to remind us of the simile of the χειμάρρος, which is used to great effect by the poet of the *Iliad* in Hom. Il. 5.87, 11.492–7, and 13.136–46, who compares, first Diomedes, then Ajax to a river swollen in winter, and then Hector to something even more dangerous: a boulder swept along by such a river.⁷¹ In the *Argonautica*, on the other hand, the swollen river Anaurus is just the first of many dangers Jason will have to face. Note, too, that at the end of the *Scutum*, Ps.-Hes. Sc. 477–8, it is the very same Anaurus, swollen in winter, which obliterates the traces of the grave and the monument erected in honour of Ceyx.

If Jason, as seems probable, reached Iolcus in winter, this would have given him time to organise his expedition to make the most of the sailing season. That the Argonauts did cast off in spring is suggested by A.R. 1.366 χειμερὶν δὲ πάλαι ἀποέκλυσεν ἄλμην. Apollonius thus gives us a date for the beginning of the voyage, though not a precise one. Compare Theoc. 13.25–7: the Argonauts embark on their voyage at the rising of the *Pleiades*, late in spring. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing who imitated whom. The first stellar date of the *Argonautica*, the winter (in the case of this constellation: the morning) setting of Orion, A.R. 1.1201–2, combines Homeric, Hesiodic, Aratean, and possibly Theocritean elements: Homeric, because it is part of a simile, Hesiodic, because this phase is first attested in Hes. Op. 614–16, who, however, mentions Orion only in a list together with the calendarically far more important *Pleiades* and the *Hyades*, and possibly Theocritean because Theocritus, too, mentions the setting of Orion in a nautical context and emphasises

nus knew nothing about, as his geographical blunders in Book 4 show, but not why there are no explicit dates in the whole narrative of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*.

⁷¹ See Di Benedetto (1998, 147–8).

Probably

the danger it brings at Theoc. 7.52–4.⁷² But Apollonius may have used a *parapegma* (i.e. a solar calendar as opposed to a civil lunisolar one) or some other type of calendar.⁷³

The next date, in A.R. 2.498, concerns the Etesian winds whose beginning is usually, though not by Hesiod, connected with the rising of Sirius. Those steady trade winds are the reason the 40 (according to Apollonius who follows the *communis opinio*), or 50 (according to Hes. Op. 663–5) days in high and late summer are by far the best season for sailing.⁷⁴ This is, then, the first relatively precise date given by Apollonius for his narrative, but perhaps he also implicitly wants to say that the Etesians, while mitigating the baneful effects of the Dog Days (see the *aetion* below) and being generally favourable for sailors because of their reliability, would blow in the wrong direction for those who, like the Argonauts, need to cross the Black Sea from the south west to the north east.⁷⁵ This attention to the winds is typical of Apollonius, only in this case he labours under a misconception: that the Etesian winds blow everywhere (A.R. 2.498–9; note the emphatic enjambment). This is an undue extrapolation. I do not know which winds or currents might have hindered the Argonauts in late summer while navigating the Black Sea, but the Etesians are confined to the eastern Mediterranean including the Propontis. They did make it very difficult to enter the Propontis and cross over into the Black Sea,⁷⁶ but the Argonauts have already reached the southern coast of the Black Sea! The long digression which follows thus has nothing to do with the place the Argonauts are staying at, but with the *aetion* of a cult (2.498–527) which, if it indeed existed, was not only unparalleled in Classical and Hellenistic Greece but was celebrated on an island not remotely near the route the Argonauts took: the cult of Sirius on the island of Ceos. I doubt that this cult (provided it existed) was particularly old. Sirius, whether as a dog or as a star, does not appear on the coins of Ceos before the end of the 3rd century BC, and if the testimony (F 141 Wehrli = Cic. div. 1.57.130) is to be trusted, Heraclides of Pontus, our first source for a particular connection of the Ceans to Sirius, only said the Ceans diligently observed the rising of Sirius

⁷² See Wenskus (1990, 49). Unlike Theocritus, Apollonius never mentions the phases of stars not attested in pre-Hellenistic non-astronomical literature, particularly the Kids (not a constellation in our sense but three stars in the constellation *Auriga*). Apollonius does mention the Northern Crown (A.R. 3.1001–4), but in the context of an aetiological myth, not in a stellar date.

⁷³ For *parapegmata*, see Wenskus (1990, esp. 10–11, 27–32, and 131–2) and Wenskus (2012).

⁷⁴ See Rehm (1907), Schmidt (1958), and Wenskus (1990, esp. 44–5, 134–6, 148–50, and 165–7).

⁷⁵ See Klooster (2007, 64 n. 7).

⁷⁶ See Demosthenes (or Ps.-Demosthenes) D. 35.13 and Arist. HA 8.15.600a4–5: Aristotle says that during the Dog Days the Bosphorus is churned up; he does not mention the Etesians. In Wenskus (1990, 132) I committed the *lapsus* (twice running, alas) of writing ‘Pontus’ instead of ‘Bosporus’.

in order to forecast whether the following year would be salubrious or not.⁷⁷ There is no mention of a cult in this fragment, as we have it, and while we would be excused to think this was owed to the bias of Cicero who, in this dialogue, is not interested in cults as such, but in forecasts and prophecies, we must also take into account Theophrastus (Thphr. Vent. 14) who only mentions the Cean cult of Zeus (meaning Zeus Icmius) but does not mention Sirius. This is the kind of *argumentum e silentio* we can trust up to a point, as Theophrastus frequently mentions the rising of Sirius in his scientific treatises.⁷⁸ Nilsson⁷⁹ is therefore probably right to doubt that the Ceans actually sacrificed to Sirius at the same time, especially as I have found no mention of a cult of Sirius on Ceos apart from this very passage of Apollonius and his scholiasts. I think the missing link between Heraclides and Apollonius is Callimachus (Call. 75.32–7 Pfeiffer): according to 75.35, it is the duty of the priests of Zeus Icmius to calm “evil Maera”, which is an alternative name for Sirius. Callimachus is probably just saying, in his roundabout way, that the priests of Zeus prayed and sacrificed to Zeus, not Sirius, to alleviate the heat of the Dog Days, which may easily have been misunderstood by Apollonius to mean Sirius, too, received an actual cult.⁸⁰

Just before he has the Argonauts landing on Colchis, Apollonius gives us a stellar date while making fun of stellar dating at the same time: Zeus sends the north wind, thus “announcing, with rain, the moist path of Arcturus” (ὕδατι σημαίνων διερχὴν ὄδον Ἀρκτούρου, A.R. 2.1098). This wonderful joke seems to have escaped virtually all scholars, with the partial exception of Rehm (1896, 6–8), who calls it a *paradoxon*.⁸¹ How can a star be a sign of rain if you cannot see it because it is raining? Nonnus seems not to have noted this inherent contradiction in Nonn. D. 42.290–1; Alfred Tennyson neatly sidestepped this problem in his *Ulysses*,⁸² but for Apollonius there are no gaps in the clouds (Tennyson’s “scudding drifts”) through which a star as brilliant as Arcturus might have been glimpsed during the brief moment of visibility just before sunrise. In A.R. 2.1104–5 Apollonius makes sure to say that no stars at all were to be seen. But that is not all, Hesiod had assured his addressees that the gods have established signs so men can plan their work (Hes. Op. 395), and even the pessimistic author of the *Prometheus Bound* only went as far as calling the phases of the *Pleiades* hard to observe (A. Pr. 67), which is

⁷⁷ See Gottschalk (1980, 130); for the whole problem of the cult of Sirius, Wenskus (1990, 149).

⁷⁸ See Wenskus (1990, 150–63).

⁷⁹ See Nilsson (1920, 183–4).

⁸⁰ For the evil effects of Sirius rising, this time on sheep, see also the simile of A.R. 3.957–60. The model is obviously Hom. Il. 22.25–32.

⁸¹ Cf. Wenskus (1990, 32).

⁸² See Wenskus (forthcoming[b]).

perfectly true even when the weather is fine:⁸³ Apollonius is being ironic rather than pessimistic.⁸⁴

Two questions remain: Does Apollonius realise the stellar phases depend on the latitude of the observer? This would not have been a problem for an author whose narrative is set in Greece and Asia Minor only, but if Apollonius had been thorough, it would have meant taking into consideration whether the Argonauts happened to be in Colchis or in the Libyan desert. But he probably was as little aware of this problem as was Aratus.⁸⁵ The second question is, did Apollonius mean the morning rising or the evening setting of Arcturus? Both took place in autumn: the first, in the time of Aratus and the latitude of Athens, in the middle of September; the second at the end of October. The second was considered to be the more dangerous of the two,⁸⁶ but the first is mentioned more frequently and in earlier texts and is thus probably meant by Apollonius. Perhaps even more importantly, we know that, if the morning rising is meant, we are dealing with more than just a literary *topos*: this phase actually played a considerable role in the life of merchants navigating the Black Sea, even if the most dangerous part was, again, the crossing of the Bosphorus, this time in the other direction: Demosthenes' (or Ps.-Demosthenes') speech against Lacritus (35.10–26) quotes a deed containing the clause that, if the party in question left the Black Sea after the rising of Arcturus, the interest rate for the loan in question rose dramatically, from a mere 22% to a hefty 30%. I have argued that the parties in question must have used an official *parapegma* to establish a legally binding date for this phase; otherwise one of the parties could have claimed Arcturus had already risen, and the other could have denied this.⁸⁷

⁸³ See Wenskus (1990, 67–9).

⁸⁴ As are Miguel de Cervantes and P. G. Wodehouse: Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (chapter 20) has Sancho Panza give an elaborate (if probably wrong) description of the position of the Big Dipper (the Hunter's Bugle) to prove that dawn is near. When his master, who in this case is the reasonable one, objects that no stars are visible, Sancho gets rather evasive. While Don Quixote has read too many tales of chivalry, Sancho Panza behaves as if he knew how he was supposed to behave if he had been a character of the bucolic poetry that was so popular in Cervantes' time; in fact, Sancho says he learnt his star lore when he was a herdsman. P. G. Wodehouse begins the last chapter of his Bertie Wooster novel *Much obliged, Jeeves* (1971) with the words: "The following day dawned bright and clear, at least I suppose it did, but I wasn't awake at the time."

⁸⁵ The precession of the equinoxes had already had a considerable effect on the phases of the *Pleiades* but had not been discovered yet.

⁸⁶ See the prologue of Plautus' *Rudens*, spoken by Arcturus himself. The evening setting of Arcturus does not appear in our sources before the end of the 5th century BC.

⁸⁷ See Wenskus (1990, 131–2).

The description of the palace of Aeetes, again, combines Homeric and Hesiodic elements, this time with paradoxography: in A.R. 3.225–7 Hephaestus has constructed four miraculous fountains, one of which gets hot at the morning setting of the *Pleiades* (end of October/beginning of November) and cold at their morning rising (middle of May).⁸⁸

While no actual months are mentioned, the month of falling leaves (φυλλοχόος μείς) is mentioned in a simile (A.R. 4.216–17).⁸⁹ As regards the phases of the moon, like most writers who mention them, Apollonius does not do so for dating purposes but to explain why it is light enough to do what he needs his characters to do: the full moon illuminates the Hylas episode (1.1231–2) or Selene rising just in time to see Medea's flight (4.54–6). The simile of the new moon which can be glimpsed or thought to be glimpsed through the clouds (4.1479–80, imitated by Verg. Aen. 6.453–4), is justly famous.

For reasons of space I cannot discuss all of the many variations of the expressions Apollonius uses for the times of day and night,⁹⁰ but only a selection of particularly interesting examples:⁹¹ in A.R. 1.1273–4 the Morning Star is pictured not just as rising but as rising over the rigging, which is a vivid and convincing touch, while 4.1629–30 sounds suspiciously as if our poet thought the Evening Star may be observed rising, too, unless ἀνα δ' ἤλυθεν is to be translated as “appeared”. Pollux is compared to the Evening Star in 2.40–2; I hasten to say that West is certainly right to think the identification of the *Dioscuri* with Morning and Evening Star respectively is not part of ancient Indo-European lore,⁹² and those verses clearly show that Apollonius did not identify the sons of Zeus with any heavenly bodies.

In 2.669–71 Apollonius goes out of his way to explain the Iliadic *hapax legomenon* ἀμφιλύχη (“grey twilight”). In Hom. Il. 7.433 it is an adjective, but

⁸⁸ There are four fountains as on Calypso's island (Hom. Od. 5.70–1) which do not seem to be miraculous but conveniently flow in different directions; that Hephaestus constructed the fountains of Aeetes' palace calls to mind the robot dogs constructed by the god to guard the palace of Alcinous (Hom. Od. 7.91–3), and the mention of the two morning phases of the *Pleiades* in the same context has several precedents but esp. Hes. Op. 383–4. Strange fountains play a major role in paradoxography; however, I know of no exact parallel, which stands to reason because the fountains of Hephaestus are fictional.

⁸⁹ Cf. Call. fr. 260.12 Pfeiffer (or possibly μήν, as in Hes. fr. 333).

⁹⁰ See James (1978, 169–75).

⁹¹ For more instances, see James (1978, 172–3).

⁹² See West (2007, 234).

Apollonius uses it as a noun: it was not yet day, but no longer night: there was already a light shimmer, and this is what early risers call ἀμφιλύκη.⁹³

In at least one case, Apollonius' desire to improve on Homer, this time by being more precise, leads to a downright anachronism that seems to have escaped modern scholars. In A.R. 3.1029 Medea insists Jason must start his sacrifice to Hecate, not just in the middle of the night, but exactly at midnight (διαμμοιρηδᾶ), give or take a quarter of an hour, I suppose. She does not tell Jason how he is to know when this will be the case. Without a decent *klepsydra*, only an extremely experienced astronomer would have been able to tell when it was (more or less) exactly midnight, and even he would have needed an astrolabe or some other quite advanced instrument. The vague information about the position of the Great Bear (3.1191–6) would not suit midnight in late September or early October if Apollonius meant that this constellation had approached the horizon. The *scholia* do not address this problem, perhaps wisely. At any rate, Apollonius was probably unaware of the anachronism: neither he nor any of the later epic poets under discussion ever adopt the division of the day into hours, be they temporal or equinoctial,⁹⁴ with the exception of Nonn. Met. 11.33 who, however, just follows his model John 11.91 when he lets Jesus ask the rhetorical question whether the day does not have twelve hours, meaning “isn't the day long enough?”

6 Quintus of Smyrna, *Posthomerica*

Although the Greeks had adopted the division of the ecliptic into the twelve signs of the Zodiac by the 4th century BC, there is no trace of either this division or the constellations of the Zodiac in Apollonius; but there are some interesting traces in Quintus of Smyrna. Those traces are not sufficient, however, to determine whether Quintus was aware of the fact that the signs of the Zodiac are not the same thing as the constellations of the Zodiac, although there was some overlap: the signs of the Zodiac have been named after the constellations most of them roughly coincided with in the 5th century BC,⁹⁵ but they are just as abstract as the equator is: each sign of the Zodiac is a segment of the ecliptic; all are exactly 30° long and were

⁹³ Rengakos (1998, 49) goes a bit too far when he says Apollonius paraphrases the term in the style of a Homeric glossary. The similarities of A.R. 2.669–71 and the *scholion Iliad* D to Hom. Il. 7.433 are not that striking and easily explained by the identity of the subject matter.

⁹⁴ Temporal hours are the hours meant by the Romans, i.e. hours of unequal length depending on the seasons; equinoctial hours is what we mean when we speak about hours, or at least what we used to mean before the phenomenon of variations of the earth's rotation was discovered.

⁹⁵ There is hardly any overlap today because of the precession of the equinoxes.

a convenient set of markers for giving the position of the sun (its longitude), not only in astrological contexts but for astronomical purposes as well. The zodiacal constellations,⁹⁶ on the other hand, are of different size and brilliance: *Virgo* is huge and contains one star of the first magnitude, *Spica*, while *Aries* is tiny and contains just one star of the second magnitude, and *Cancer* is hard to spot, containing only very faint stars (the relatively brightest are of the fourth magnitude). But the only sign (or constellation) of the Zodiac Quintus mentions more than once is the sign of *Capricorn*, always in the same context: the beginning of astronomical winter, four times in all, three times in similes and once (Q.S. 7.300–2) in a somewhat generic warning. That the winter solstice is meant is obvious in 1.356, 2.532–4, 7.300–2 (in this case Deidamia is speaking: she is the only one to also mention Capricorn's neighbour Sagittarius), and 10.336–40. Why Quintus would limit himself to those two signs I have no idea, particularly as a) for him the year seems to commence in autumn (3.327), and b) the *Pleiades* are mentioned a few times (2.604–5, 2.665, 5.364–9, 7.308–31, 13.551–61). Why not mention the constellation they belong to, *Taurus*? Admittedly, this might seem redundant, but in 7.305–7 Quintus really could have let Deidamia specify which of the equinoxes was the (more) dangerous one by naming either *Aries* or *Libra*.⁹⁷ And why does Quintus mention *Capricorn* but no other sign/constellation in 10.336–40, in the context of the list of Helios' four daughters, 10.336–61? Quintus does not say so, but he obviously means the *Horae* in the sense of "personifications of the seasons", while in 2.500–6 and 2.593–606 the twelve daughters of Helios are obviously the months, probably the zodiacal months. Nonnus later called both groups *Horae* in Nonn. D. 11.484–12.117, but his descriptions of both groups are far more elaborate, probably because he is drawing more than Quintus of Smyrna did on personifications of the seasons in particular, so prominent on mosaics and *sarcophagi*, among other things.⁹⁸ By now the division of the year into four seasons, which was already quite well established in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (esp. in the extremely influential *De natura hominis*), is old enough to replace not only any other division, but also the association of the *Horae* with spring and the number 3. Still, like the poet of the *Iliad*, Quintus

⁹⁶ Of which there are not twelve, but 13, the 13th being Ophiuchus. This is a little known fact, but a fact nonetheless: the sun spends just a few days in the constellation Scorpio but a little more than three weeks in the constellation Ophiuchus.

⁹⁷ However, the fact that Quintus mentions 'the' equinox at all is one of the relatively modern features of his astronomy, as is the fact that he knows the sun moves in circles (Q.S. 1.118). This is not exactly state of the art – those discoveries were made many centuries before Quintus – but it postdates the Homeric epics.

⁹⁸ Cf. Machaira (1990) and Abad Casal (1990, esp. 535) on the combination of *Horae* with the signs of the Zodiac and/or armillary spheres.

does not tell us unambiguously in which season his narrative is set, unless we understand Q.S. 2.665 to refer to the morning rising of the *Pleiades*: the personified *Pleiades* precede Dawn, so the setting is a mythological one, but still it is a distinct possibility that we are to understand this as a phase date.

Unlike Nonnus, Quintus does not seem to mention the practice of astrology, at least not unambiguously. It is true that ἀστέρας are mentioned among the signs taken into account by Calchas in Q.S. 12.5, but that does not mean we are supposed to imagine Calchas casting horoscopes. Simple astral *omina* may be meant, like those observed by Babylonian seers long before the pseudo-science we call astrology was developed, and which play a role in at least one passage of Nonn. D. 38.31–45: the seer Idmon encourages the army of Dionysus. Or, more probably considering the lasting popularity of Aratus, Quintus may be talking about weather signs like the (exceptional) visibility of the constellation *Ara*; but, unfortunately, this is one of the cases in which Quintus misunderstands his source, Arat. 402–30, completely. There is one detail in Aratus' description at 405, relative to the position of *Ara* "opposite" Arcturus, which is highly problematical, but it is clear that Aratus does not refer to a phase date of *Ara* but to the fact that when this faint little constellation was visible close to the horizon while the rest of the sky was cloudy, this was a sign of storm. He is right because those factors presuppose the rare and worrying combination of an exceptionally clear horizon plus clouds everywhere else. Now, it is easy to see where Quintus went wrong in Q.S. 13.482–4: a) this passage is not found in the weather sign section but in the catalogue of constellations, and b) when stars are said to be close to the horizon, most of the times a phase date is meant. Arat. 402–30, however, is an exception because *Ara* never rose far above the horizon even then (today it is invisible even in southern Europe), which means that *Ara* was rather close to the horizon even when culminating.⁹⁹ Whereas Quintus' error is understandable and seems to have escaped his commentators, what he meant in Q.S. 4.74–5 is a mystery: How can both *Ursa Major* and *Ursa Minor* turn their heads east? In his commentary Vian (1963–1969, *ad loc.*) refers us to Arat. 28–30, but what Aratus says there is not only dissimilar but downright incompatible with what Quintus wrote: the Celestial Bears face in different directions. I cannot pinpoint any source Quintus may have misunderstood, not even Theoc. 24.11–12. What Theocritus says about the relative position of *Ursa Major* and Orion does not actually make any sense which would be compatible with Greek usage and astronomy at the same time. Theocritus might have misunderstood Hom. Il. 18. 487–8 (= Hom. Od. 5.273–4), but why would he say *Ursa Major* was approaching her

⁹⁹ That the culmination is meant in Arat. 414 is probable; this is also how Cicero understood this verse, translating as he did: *Aram sub media caeli regione locatam* (fr. 34.193 Pellacani).

setting? Did he mean, as seems probable, the lowest elevation?¹⁰⁰ This is certainly what Nonnus meant in Nonn. D. 25.400, as he has just said in 25.395–6 that neither Bear ever sets. At any rate, Apollonius, Theocritus, Quintus, and Nonnus all seem to be unaware of the fact that indicating the position of *Ursa* relative to the horizon could only indicate the time of night if the date was given and *uice uersa*.¹⁰¹

7 Nonnus of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*

So, did Nonnus get it right, at least? Not quite, seeing that much of his *Dionysiaca* is set in India, including Book 25. That stars which are circumpolar in Greece need not be so even in northern India seems to be one of the many facts of which Nonnus was not aware. Other facts he probably chose to ignore are the identity of the Morning and the Evening Star, which Nonnus portrays as different mythological persons in Nonn. D. 6.24–49, 12.1–12, and esp. 38.365, where the Morning Star gives the Evening Star a good shove. The role of astrology, while not nearly as all pervading as Stegemann (1930) thought,¹⁰² is undeniable, but I cannot help thinking Nonnus realised in time that he would have had to know more mathematics than most people care to learn in order to write a poem in which astrology could have been the dominating force from the beginning to the end. Fortunately Nonnus decided against such an approach: astrology is a pseudo-science, but in order to do it ‘properly’ practitioners have to be astronomically and mathematically competent, not to mention systematic thinkers, and Nonnus was not. Neither does he show a sustained interest in chronology, ‘sustained’ being the operative word.¹⁰³ So the astronomically impossible¹⁰⁴ horoscope Astraeus casts for Persephone in 6.58–102 is little more than an erratic block. It does show, though, that Nonnus was aware of

¹⁰⁰ This is the explanation proposed by Gow (1965, *ad loc.*) in his commentary, who, however, does not use the technical term “elevation” but “nearest approach to the horizon.” Gow has also made the connection with Nonn. D. 25.400.

¹⁰¹ Hannah (2005, 18–27) thought that what the poet of the *Iliad* said in Hom. II. 18.485–7 meant that *Ursa*, too, was used in agricultural calendars, but I have found nothing which might corroborate this.

¹⁰² See the review by Bogner (1931).

¹⁰³ See Bogner (1931, esp. 181 and 183), and James (1981, particularly 135) on the surprising relative scarcity of expressions for the passage of night and day in the *Dionysiaca*: just 42, four of them one-word expressions, in a poem of 21 287 lines.

¹⁰⁴ See Chuvin (1992, *ad* Nonn. D. 6.80–5).

the fact that Earth's shadow is conical (6.77–8).¹⁰⁵ Again, scientific progress makes itself felt in ancient epic with a delay of several hundred years.

8 Time in Roman epic: the need for a different approach

As we have seen, when Greek authors stress the importance of the visible risings and settings of certain fixed stars, this does not mean they actually observed them in person. This is even more true in the case of the Romans. Some of them may have watched the heavens but not in order to observe the stellar phases. There are two main reasons for this: 1) As Rome is located further north than Athens, the solstices and the equinoxes are more important to Roman authors because the difference in the length of the days is far more noticeable in Rome. 2) The sheer size of the Roman Empire, particularly the differences between its northernmost and its southernmost latitude, made dating by stellar phases (which depend on the geographical latitude of the observer) impractical quite early on. The solstices and the equinoxes, on the other hand, are the same the whole world over, as are the zodiacal dates used both for astronomical as for astrological purposes. Whether in prose or in poetry, there is not a single stellar date in Roman literature which does not depend on a Greek source, or several sometimes incompatible Greek sources.¹⁰⁶ Cato the Elder never mentions any stellar date at all, and the only reason given by Quintilian for acquiring a certain amount of star lore (Quint. inst. 1.4.4) is the fact that we (and this includes us) need to acquire said lore in order to understand poetry fully. While, for example, Hesiod may have actually observed stellar phases, this is certainly not true in the case of Vergil. When Vergil mentions stars this is a purely intertextual phenomenon.¹⁰⁷ When we study time in Roman epic, therefore, we have to ask a different set of questions.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ As do some other passages; for which, see James (1981, 128).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Wenskus (1998).

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Wenskus (forthcoming[a]).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Wolkenhauer in this volume.

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X Vergil, Dante und der halo effect, WJA

XX This article will be divided into at least two parts. The first, Basic astronomy, will appear in Hermes.