

## CERTAMEN

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In his “Works and Days” Hesiod relates a story how he once went to Chalkis to take part in the poetic contest during the funeral games of Amphidamas, how he won the contest and was given a tripod as an award (v. 650 ff.):

- 650 οὐ γάρ πώ ποτε νηὶ γ' ἐπέπλων εὐρέα πόντον,  
εἰ μὴ ἐς Εὐβοίαν ἐξ Αὐλίδος, ἧ ποτ' Ἀχαιοὶ  
μείναντες χειμῶνα πολὺν σὺν λαὸν ἄγειραν  
Ἑλλάδος ἐξ ἱερῆς Τροίην ἐς καλλιγύναικα.  
ἔνθα δ' ἐγὼν ἐπ' ἄεθλα δαΐφρονος Ἀμφιδάμαντος
- 655 Χαλκίδα τ' εἰσεπέρησα· τὰ δὲ προπεφραδμένα πολλὰ  
ἄεθλ' ἔθεσαν παῖδες μεγαλήτορες· ἔνθα μέ φημι  
ὑμῶν νικήσαντα φέρειν τρίποδ' ὠτώεντα.  
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼ Μούσησ' Ἑλικωνιάδεσσ' ἀνέθηκα  
ἔνθα με τὸ πρῶτον λιγυρῆς ἐπέβησαν ἀοιδῆς.
- 660 τόσσον τοι νηῶν γε πεπεύρημαι πολυγύμφων

Hesiod does not specify who his opponent was, but according to the general belief in antiquity it had to be Homer. There are several versions of the contest available for us nowadays, each slightly different from the other.

### 1. Certamen<sup>1</sup>

*Certamen* consists of four parts: the life of Homer; the contest between Hesiod and Homer; the death of Hesiod; the death of Homer. About the contest of the poets (*agon proper*) it is written in *Certamen*, that:

1a. The contest took place in Aulis, Boiotia<sup>2</sup>.

1b. Homer and Hesiod competed at the funeral games of Amphidamas<sup>3</sup> in Chalkis, on Euboia. Hesiod asked Homer a number of questions and gave him riddles to solve. Homer answered in skilful and clever improvisations, which made the audience consider him better and worthy of victory. Then Panedes, brother of Amphidamas, who among other stately Chalkidians belonged to the judges, asked the poets to recite a passage which they considered the most beautiful of their poetry. Hesiod presented a part of the *Works and Days* (383 ff.), and

<sup>1</sup> The main editions of *Certamen* (*Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*) are as follows: Thomas W. Allen (ed.) *Homeri opera. Tomus V hymnos cyclum fragmenta Margiten Batrachomyomachiam vitas continens*, Oxonii 1912, pp. 225–238; Antonius Westermann (ed.) ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΟΙ. *Vitarum scriptores Graeci minores*, Brunsvigae, 1845, 1–45; Udalricus de Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (ed.) *Vitae Homeri et Hesiodi in usum scholarum*, Berlin 1929, S. 34–45; H. G. Evelyn-White (transl.) *Hesiod. The Homeric Hymns and Homeric* (Loeb), pp. 566–597.

<sup>2</sup> *Cert.* v. 54 sq.: τινὲς δὲ συνακμάσι φασὶν αὐτοὺς ὥστε καὶ ἀγωνίσασθαι ὁμοσε ἐν Αὐλίδι τῆς Βοιωτίας...

<sup>3</sup> Amphidamas was the leader of Chalkidians in the war of Lelantini between Chalkis and Eretria in the middle of the 7th century. He was killed in the war and the well known funeral games were held in Chalkis. See E. Stein-Hölkeskamp, *Der Neue Pauly* I, 1996, S. 610.

Homer chose a passage from the *Iliad* (13.126–133, 339–344). Despite the judgement of the audience, once more giving victory to Homer, Panedes still declared Hesiod the winner by saying that victory belonged to the poet who was calling people for farming and peace, not for wars and killing.

## 2. Proclus / Tzetzes, *Life of Hesiod*<sup>4</sup>

Homer and Hesiod competed at the funeral games of king Amphidamas on Euboea. They made each other improvise and answer plenty of various questions, and Homer was considered better by the audience. Then, after the poets had recited the most beautiful passage of their poetry in answer to the request of king Panedes, brother of Alcidas, and the audience had once more preferred Homer to Hesiod, the jury led by Panedes and Ganyktor still gave the victory to Hesiod whose passage had propagated peace and cultivation of land.

## 3. Plutarch<sup>5</sup>

a) *Sept. sap. conv.* 153 F–154 A:

Hesiod and Homer competed in Chalkis, at the funeral games of Amphidamas, who had perished in the battle on the plain of Lelantini. According to the version by Plutarch it was Hesiod who answered the questions, was declared winner and given a tripod. This text also refers to Lesches.

b) *Quaest. conv.* 675 A: In Chalkis there took place the funeral games of Amphidamas where Homer and Hesiod competed in reciting epic poetry.

## 4. Schol. Pind. *Nem.* 2.1<sup>6</sup>

Hesiod and Homer competed in singing a *Hymn to Apollo* on Delos.

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<sup>4</sup> Allen 1912, pp. 222–224; Wilamowitz 1929, S. 47–51; Westermann 1845, S. 45–50.

<sup>5</sup> a) *Sept. sap. conv.* 153 F–154 A: τοιαύτας ἀλλήλοις ἀπορίας προβάλλειν. ἀκούομεν γὰρ ὅτι καὶ πρὸς τὰς Ἀμφιδάμαντος ταφὰς εἰς Χαλκίδα τῶν τότε σοφῶν οἱ δοκιμώτατοι ποιηταὶ συνήλθον· ἦν δ' ὁ Ἀμφιδάμας ἀνὴρ πολεμικός, καὶ πολλὰ πράγματα παρασχὼν Ἑρετριεῦσιν ἐν ταῖς περὶ Δηλάντου μάχαις ἔπεσεν. ἐπεὶ δὲ τὰ παρεσκευασμένα τοῖς ποιηταῖς ἔπη χαλεπὴν καὶ δύσκολον ἐποίησε τὴν κρίσιν διὰ τὸ ἐφάμιλλον, ἢ τε δόξα τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν, Ὀμήρου καὶ Ἡσίοδου, πολλὴν ἀπορίαν μετ' αἰδοῦς τοῖς κρίνουσι παρεῖχεν, ἐτράποντο πρὸς τοιαύτας ἐρωτήσεις, καὶ προέβαλ' ὁ μὲν, ὡς φησι Λέσχης,

Μοῦσά μοι ἔννεπε κείνα, τὰ μήτ' ἐγένοντο πάροιθε  
μήτ' ἔσται μετόπισθεν,

ἀπεκρίνατο δ' Ἡσίοδος ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος

ἀλλ' ὅταν ἀμφὶ Διὸς τύμβῳ καναχήποδες ἵπποι

ἄρματα συντροῖψωσιν ἐπειγόμενοι περὶ νίκης.

καὶ διὰ τοῦτο λέγεται μάλιστα θαυμασθεῖς τοῦ τρίποδος τυχεῖν."

b) *Quaest. conv.* 675 A: καὶ τὰς Ἀμφιδάμαντος τοῦ Χαλκιδέως ἐν αἷς Ὀμηρον καὶ Ἡσίοδον ἱστοροῦσιν ἔπεσι διαγωνίσασθαι.

<sup>6</sup> Schol. Pind. *Nem.* 2.1 = [Hesiod], fr. 357 M.-W.: Φιλόχορος δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ συντιθέναι καὶ ῥάπτειν τὴν ᾠδὴν οὕτω φησὶν αὐτοὺς (sc. τοὺς ῥαψωιδούς) προσκεκλησθαι. δηλοῖ δὲ ὁ Ἡσίοδος λέγων

ἐν Δήλῳ τότε πρῶτον ἐγὼ καὶ Ὀμηρος αἰδοὶ  
μέλπομεν, ἐν νεαροῖς ὕμνοις ῥάψαντες αἰοιδὴν,  
Φοῖβον Ἀπόλλωνα χρυσάορον ὃν τέκε Λητώ.

*Certamen*, although in its present form compiled in the 2nd century AD<sup>7</sup>, still includes material from much earlier period. The knowledge of the death of Homer comes already from Heraclitus<sup>8</sup>. The death of Hesiod was related by Thucydides (3.36). In putting down the contest (*agon proper*) different sources have been used – for example, in the line 54f. τινὲς ... φασὶν that the contest took place in Aulis<sup>9</sup>, a couple of lines further the narration goes about the contest in Chalkis. However, the case including the name Aulis is most probably not a version of the contest but just an error, which has already occurred in the source – the name Chalkis, the place of the king's funeral games, was accidentally replaced by Aulis, the name of the neighbouring town across the strait.

The main part of the story is usually considered to be based on *Mouseion*, a work by Alcidamas, the scholar of the 4th century. Although *Certamen* refers to Alcidamas and *Mouseion* not at the end of *agon proper* but at the end of the passage about the death of Hesiod, which follows the *agon proper*, there still exists a generally accepted view that Alcidamas has written about the contest in *Mouseion* as well<sup>10</sup>.

It has also been suggested that Alcidamas, relying on some old tales about contests of seers and poets<sup>11</sup>, and putting together the questions and answers on the basis of appropriate passages from works of earlier authors<sup>12</sup>, has invented the entire story about the contest<sup>13</sup>; and relying on the passage from *Works and Days*, he has taken the contest to Chalkis.

However, the suggestion of the authorship of Alcidamas is strongly opposed by the existence of different versions of the contest. These versions may easily have existed already long before Alcidamas<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, the version of the contest in Delos is very little likely to have come into existence after the appearance of the version of Alcidamas, because in that case it is hardly possible that any other place except

<sup>7</sup> *Certamen*, line 33 refers to Hadrianus, by which *terminus post quem* of *Certamen* is determined.

<sup>8</sup> Heraclitus (22 B 56 DK) tells about “the riddle of lice”. It has no direct connection with the death of Homer but it is very likely indeed that Heraclitus knew the story about the death of Homer, because in later times there has always existed a very particular connection between those two issues.

<sup>9</sup> *Cert.* 54f., see n. 2.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the reference in *Certamen* there exists a piece of papyrus, the s.c. Michigan papyrus from the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 3rd century AD, which tells about the death of Homer and contains the following text: Ἀλκιδᾶμαντος περὶ Ὀμήρου. The scholars unanimously agree that the signature really refers to Alcidamas (See Kirk 1950 *The Michigan Alcidamas-Papyrus; Heraclitus fr. 56D; The Riddle of the Lice*, in: CQ 44, p. 150, n. 1.). Opinions differ when it comes to the part of the text dealing with the death of Homer and the belonging together of the s.c. *Manifesto* and the signature of Alcidamas (*ibid.*, p. 149 ff.; E.R. Dodds 1952 *The Alcidamas-Papyrus Again*, in: CQ NS II. 3,4, p. 187 f.; M. West 1967 *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, in: CQ, 61 443 ff.). According to Stobaeus (4.52.2) and *Certamen* Alcidamas is likely to have written about Homer in several works, both in the *Mouseion* and in a separate work called *On Homer*. But the *Mouseion* by Alcidamas is thought to have contained works of great many poets and the *On Homer* may be just one of the chapters of the above-mentioned book (E. Vogt 1959 *Die Schrift vom Wettkampf Homers und Hesiods*, in: Rh.Mus. 102 Heft 1, S. 211).

<sup>11</sup> For example, the contest of Kalchas and Mopsos in the *Melampodeia* (Hes. fr. 278 M-W); one of the epic writers Lesches and Arktinos (Phanias, fr. 299) and also the contest of Aeschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs* by Aristophanes.

<sup>12</sup> In *Certamen* there are verses very similar to those composed by Theognis (fr. 425; cf. *Cert.* v. 78 f.), which according to Stobaeus originate from the *Mouseion* by Alcidamas (Stob. 4.52.2). In *Certamen* v. 107 f. remind very much of the lines 1282–1283 from the *Peace* by Aristophanes.

<sup>13</sup> Fr. Nietzsche 1870 *Der Florentische Traktat über Homer und Hesiod, ihr Geschlecht und ihren Wettkampf*, in: Rh. Mus., S. 528–540; M.L. West 1967, p. 440 f.

<sup>14</sup> For example: N. Richardson 1981 *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod and Alcidamas' Mouseion*, in: CQ 31, p. 1 f.

Chalkis would have been chosen as the place of the contest.<sup>15</sup> And of course, a version slightly different from the one by Alcidas was used by Plutarch – there the contestant who answered the questions was Hesiod not Homer<sup>16</sup>.

Furthermore, the knowledge of synchronicity of Homer and Hesiod had already existed long before Alcidas. It is true that Xenophanes, the earliest authority in our knowledge who told about the temporal relation between the poets, considered Homer older than Hesiod<sup>17</sup>. But in the 5th century the poets were generally considered as contemporaries, as it is demonstrated by Pherecydes, Damastes and Hellanicus<sup>18</sup>, and also by Herodotus who has said that Hesiod and Homer had lived not more than 400 years before him<sup>19</sup>. Even by Xenophanes the possibility of their being contemporaries is not excluded, Homer could just have been a slightly older contemporary to Hesiod. Ephorus suggested that Homer was one generation younger than Hesiod<sup>20</sup>. Thus he also did not deny the possibility of their contemporariness and of their having a chance to meet each other.

The only evidence known to us, which could serve as source for the synchronicity of the poets, is the story about their contest. Hence it is quite probable that the idea of their contemporariness is based namely on that story. In that case the story about the contest must have been generally known in the 5th century, certainly before Alcidas.

In the version of contest by Plutarch, Lesches is mentioned in addition to Homer and Hesiod. There exist two different understandings concerning the occurrence of the name of Lesches: Lesches was the one who told about the contest between Homer and Hesiod; or Lesches himself competed with Hesiod. It depends on whether to read the text ὡς φησί Λέσχης (as Lesches says) as it appears in one of the manuscripts, or ὡς φασί, Λέσχης (as it is said, Lesches) as it is presented in most of the manuscripts<sup>21</sup>. In the latter case Lesches himself would be one of the contestants with Hesiod as his opponent. In that case it would be necessary to change the text by Plutarch and remove the passage presenting the contestants (Ομήρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου), the validity of which has clearly been assured elsewhere by Plutarch.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, we have no other knowledge to prove the event of the contest between Lesches and Hesiod. Kirk

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<sup>15</sup> Pace West who considers the verses a later imitation of Hesiod, which Alcidas could not know about (1967, p. 440). Richardson is of the opinion that there is no reason to place the particular verses into the period after Alcidas (1981, p. 3).

<sup>16</sup> See also N. O'Sullivan 1992 *Alcidas, Aristophanes and the Beginning of Greek Stylistic Theory*, in: *Hermes* 60, S. 80. According to West, Plutarch, taking his own objective into consideration, might have changed the parts of the contestants (1967, p. 439).

<sup>17</sup> Gell. *N.A.* 3.11 = Xenoph. 21 B 13 DK.

<sup>18</sup> Proclus, *Chrest.* p. 99 f., Allen = Hellanicus fr. 6, Damastes FHG II. 66, Pherecydes FHG IV. 639.

<sup>19</sup> He has said in another place (2.142) that a century includes three generations, i.e. 33,3 years per one generation. Thus Herodotus dates the poets into the first half of the 9th century.

<sup>20</sup> Gell. *N.A.* 3.11 = Ephorus 70 F 1. According to the genealogy of Homer, which has reached us directly from Ephorus, Hesiod belongs to the generation preceding to Homer. The reference in Gellius concerning the fact that Ephorus considered Homer younger than Hesiod, could easily be based on this genealogy.

<sup>21</sup> More precisely about the manuscripts see G. S. Kirk, 1950, p. 150, n. 1.

ὡς φησί Λέσχης read Th. Bergk 1883 *Griechische Literaturgeschichte*, S. 66; Allen 1912 pp. 136, 218; 1924 p. 25f.; J. G. Welcker 1865 *Der Epische Cyclus oder die homerischen Dichter*, S. 251; Fr. Nietzsche 1870, S. 533, and considered Lesches the author quoted by Plutarch.

ὡς φασί, Λέσχης... read Wilamowitz, 1920 S. 405, n. 2, and West, 1967 p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 675 A, see n. 5.

suggests that there were at least three contestants – Homer, Hesiod and Lesches<sup>23</sup>, but we have no data about any contests of aoids with three or more contestants competing at the same time<sup>24</sup>.

It seems therefore more preferable to read ὥς φησί Λέσχης and so admit that Plutarch knew that Lesches had somewhere in his poems spoken something about the contest between Homer and Hesiod (at the funeral games in Chalkis). In this case it is quite possible that the contest was really described or at least mentioned in some of the archaic poems ascribed to Lesches, thus the idea, suggested by Allen times ago, expresses a considerable amount of probability, and should not be so easily dismissed<sup>25</sup>.

It has been thought that Ibycus could also have known about the contest (both the Delos and the Chalkis versions) and may have referred to it in his Polycrates encomium (S 151 Page).<sup>26</sup> This could prove that the story about the contest was known in ancient times already.

It is, therefore, quite possible that the knowledge of the contest in the form of several versions was widely spread by the 5th century. It is probable that the story was formed in the 6th century at the latest<sup>27</sup>. Theagenes from Rhegium, who is known to be one of the first authors to depict the life and poetry of Homer, might have written about it already at the end of the archaic period<sup>28</sup>. In any case there is not a single reason to believe that Alcidas had invented the story about the contest. The most he may have done is just the creation of his own version of the story. Even more, it is probable that the different versions of the story were not only known in the archaic period, but also literarily recorded, for example in the works of Lesches or Theagenes.

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<sup>23</sup> Kirk 1950, p. 150, n. 1.

<sup>24</sup> But there exists knowledge of a contest between Lesches and Arktinos: Phanius Eresius fr. 18 FHG, ap. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* I, 21, p. 144, 8: ...διημιλλῆσθαι δὲ τὸν Λέσχην Ἄρκτινῳ καὶ νευικηκέναί.

<sup>25</sup> Th. Allen thought that Lesches had in addition to the *Little Iliad* composed a biographical poem about the life of Homer and it was used as a source by Alcidas as well as by Plutarch while relating about the contest of the poets (Allen 1924, p. 26). This would suggest that the contest of Homer and Hesiod be known since very ancient times already, at least from the 7th century BC. M. West considers the existence of a biographical poem written by Lesches quite improbable. He says (1967, p. 439), that among the vast number of early hexametric poems known to have existed in antiquity not a single one tells about the persons after the Dark Age. There is little hope that any poems on Homer could ever have existed. He considers it probable that the name of Lesches could have gone into the text of Plutarch from the scholium where the verses by Lesches similar to the ones found in the text were reminded of (*ibid.*, p. 438).

But why should the verses written by Lesches about Homer necessarily constitute a biographical poem? Lesches could easily have described the contest in the form of an excursus in his *Little Iliad* or in some other poem.

<sup>26</sup> See R. Janko 1982 *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns. Diachronic development in epic diction*, Cambridge, p. 259, n. 80, and Richardson 1981, p. 3, n. 9. Janko is of the opinion that according to the fragment of Ibycus, the Delos version of the contest was invented during the time of Polycrates as a rival version to the one of Chalkis, which was based on the text by Hesiod.

<sup>27</sup> See for example Richardson 1981, p. 1–2.

<sup>28</sup> Tat. πρ. Ἑλλ. 31, p. 31.16 = 8 B 1 DK.