



Convergences and Divergences Between God and Hero in the Mnesiepes Inscription of Paros

Citation

Nagy, Gregory. 2008. Convergences and divergences between god and hero in the Mnesiepes Inscription of Paros. In *Archilochus and his Age: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Archaeology of Paros and the Cyclades* (Athens), ed. D. Katsonopoulou, I. Petropoulos, and S. Katsarou, 259-265. Athens: Archaeological Institute of Paros and Cyclades.

Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42665437>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Open Access Policy Articles, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#OAP>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

Convergences and divergences between god and hero in the Mnesiepes Inscription of Paros

Gregory Nagy

[[This article was first published in 2008 in *Archilochus and his Age II* (ed. D. Katsonopoulou, I. Petropoulos, S. Katsarou) 259-265. The original pagination of the article will be indicated in this electronic version by way of curly brackets (“{“ and “}”). For example, “{259|260}” indicates where p. 259 of the printed article ends and p. 260 begins.]]

In his pathfinding book, *Archilochos Heros*, Diskin Clay has questioned the applicability of a well-known formula for distinguishing between the cult of heroes and the cult of gods in archaic, classical, and postclassical Greek historical contexts.¹ The formula is derived from the use of the words *thuein* / *theos* and *enagizein* / *hērōs* by Herodotus (2.44.5) in distinguishing between one cult of Herakles as a god and another cult of Herakles as a hero. Both *thuein* and *enagizein* mean ‘sacrifice’, but the first word is associated with the practice of sacrificing to a *theos* ‘god’ and the second, to a *hērōs* ‘hero’. Herodotus observes that both of these cults are attested on the island-state of Thasos, daughter-city of Paros. As Clay argues, this neat divergence, seemingly applicable in the case of Herakles as worshipped at Thasos, does not apply in the case of another figure, Theogenes, who was likewise worshipped at Thasos. The worship of Theogenes at Thasos was not bipartite as in the case of Herakles. Rather, the worship of Theogenes was expressed in convergent wording that collapses the distinction between god and hero.²

I argue that such a convergence of wording with reference to the cult of figures like Theogenes is appropriate to cult heroes as traditionally worshipped in hero cults throughout

¹ D. Clay, *Archilochus Heros: The Cult of Poets in the Greek Polis* (Washington DC and Cambridge MA 2004).

² Clay pp. 69-71.

the Greek speaking world in the archaic, classical, and even post-classical periods. For example, in the wording of Herodotus (9.120.3) concerning the hero cult of Protesilaos and in the wording of Pausanias (9.39.12) concerning the hero cult of Trophonios, there are references to the cult hero as a *theos* ‘god’ in the context of imagining him in an afterlife. In my previous work I argued that such convergent wording is in fact typical of hero cults: the given cult hero is envisioned as a mortal in the preliminary phase of the ritual program of worship and then as a god in the central phase, at a climactic moment marking the hero’s epiphany to his worshippers.³

To reinforce this argument, I adduce here the wording attested in the Mnesiepes Inscription with reference to the worship of Archilochos as cult hero in the island-state of Paros, the mother-city or metropolis of Thasos. As a case in point, I highlight the following twenty-three lines of the inscription:⁴ {259|260}

<-Μνησιέπει ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησε λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶμεν

<-ἐν τῷ τεμένει, ὃ κατασκευάζει, ἰδρυσαμένω

<-βωμὸν καὶ θύοντι ἐπὶ τούτου Μούσαις καὶ Ἀπόλλ[ω]ν[ι]

<-Μουσαγέται καὶ Μνημοσύνει· θύειν δὲ καὶ καλλι-

5 <-ερεῖν Διὶ Ὑπερδεξίωι, Ἀθάναι Ὑπερδεξίαι,

<-Ποσειδῶνι Ἀσφαλείωι, Ἡρακλεῖ, Ἀρτέμιδι Εὐκλείαι.

<-Πυθῶδε τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι σωτήρια πέμπειν. [*paragraphē* mark here]

<-Μνησιέπει ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησε λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶμεν

<-ἐν τῷ τεμένει, ὃ κατασκευάζει, ἰδρυσαμένω

³ G. Nagy, “Prologue,” *Flavius Philostratus: Heroikos* (translated with an Introduction and Notes by J. K. Berenson Maclean and E. B. Aitken; Atlanta 2001) xv-xxxv, especially p. xxv note 17.

⁴ As edited by Clay (n1) 105-106.

- 10 <-βωμὸν καὶ θύοντι ἐπὶ τούτου Διονύσῳ καὶ Νύμφαις
 <-καὶ ὦραις θύειν δὲ καὶ καλλιερεῖν Ἀπόλλωνι
 <-Προστατηρίῳ, Ποσειδῶνι Ἀσφαλείῳ, Ἡρακλεῖ.
 <-Πυθῶδε τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι σωτήρια πέμπειν. [*paragraphē* mark here]
 <-Μνησιέπει ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησε λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶμεν
- 15 <-τι]μῶντι Ἀρχίλοχον τὸμ ποιητάν, καθ' ἃ ἐπινοεῖ.
 χρήσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος ταῦτα τόν τε τόπον
 καλοῦμεν Ἀρχιλόχειον καὶ τοὺς βωμοὺς ιδρύμεθα
 καὶ θύομεν καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ Ἀρχιλόχῳ καὶ
τιμῶμεν αὐτόν, καθ' ἃ ὁ θεὸς ἐθέσπισεν ἡμῖν.
- 20 περὶ δὲ ὧν ἠβουλήθημεν ἀναγράψαι τάδε παρα-
 δ]έδοταί τε ἡμῖν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀρχαίων καὶ αὐτοὶ πεπραγ-
 μ]ατεύμεθα. λέγουσι γὰρ Ἀρχίλοχον ἔτι νεώτερον
 ὄντα ...

<-To Mnesiepes did the god [Apollo] make the oracular declaration that it is more propitious and just plain better⁵ if⁶
 <-in the precinct [*temenos*] that he [= Mnesiepes] is constructing he [= Mnesiepes] sets up [participle of *hidruein*]⁷

⁵ Viewing the two comparatives as a pair, I note that *lōion* ‘better’ is the marked member while *ameinon* ‘better’ is the unmarked. My translation approximates this relationship.

⁶ The participial construction that follows can best be rendered by way of ‘if’. For parallel syntax in a parallel oracular context, I cite *SEG* 21.519.5-8 (Attic) ἀνεῖλεν λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶναι τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Ἀχαρνέων καὶ τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Ἀ[θ]ηναίων οἰκοδομήσασι τοὺς βωμοὺς το[ῦ] | Ἄρεως καὶ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς τῆς Ἀρείας. Another example is Xenophon *On the Constitution of the Athenians* 8.5: ἐλθὼν σὺν τοῖς κρατίστοις εἰς Δελφοὺς ἐπήρετο τὸν θεὸν εἰ λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶη τῇ Σπάρτῃ πειθομένη οἷς αὐτὸς ἔθηκε νόμοις. Still another example is Didymus (Grammaticus), *In Demosthenem* (P. Berol. 9780) (1312: 003) “Didymi in Demosthenem commenta” (ed. L. Pearson and S. Stephens; Stuttgart 1983) column 14, lines 46-47: ἀνελόντος τοῦ θεοῦ λῶιον κ(αὶ) ἄμεινον (εἶναι) μὴ ἐργαζομένοις.

<-an altar and makes sacrifice [participle of *thuein*] on it to the Muses and to Apollo

<-the Mousāgētēs and to Mnemosyne. And⁸ that he make sacrifice [infinitive of *thuein*] (and perform correctly the sacred acts [infinitive of *kallhiereuein*])

5 <-to Zeus Hyperdexios, to Athena Hyperdexia,

<-to Poseidon Asphaleios, to Herakles, to Artemis Eukleia.

<-(And) that he organize a delegation [infinitive of *pempein*] to go to Delphi and offer there to Apollo a sacrifice for well-being. [paragraphē mark here]

<-To Mnesiepes did the god [Apollo] make the oracular declaration that it is more propitious and just plain better⁹ if⁰

<-in the precinct [*temenos*] that he [= Mnesiepes] is constructing he [= Mnesiepes] sets up [participle of *hidruein*]¹¹

10 <-an altar and makes sacrifice [participle of *thuein*] on it to Dionysus and to the Nymphs

<-and to the Hōrai. And¹² that he make sacrifice [infinitive of *thuein*] (and perform correctly the sacred acts [infinitive of *kallhiereuein*]) to Apollo {260|261}

<-Prostatērios, to Poseidon Asphaleios, to Herakles.

<-(And) that he organize a delegation [infinitive of *pempein*] to go to Delphi and offer there to Apollo a sacrifice for well-being. [paragraphē mark here]

⁷ The aorist form of the participle here cannot be interpreted as a marker of tense; it is simply a marker of aspect. Still, the aorist of the participle of the verb in this context at line 2 and again at line 9 corresponds to the perfect of the indicative of the same verb in the context of line 17.

⁸ The conjunction δέ here triggers a “conjunctive reduction”: the syntax now shifts from a marked participial construction to an unmarked infinitival construction.

⁹ For the syntax see the note at line 1.

¹⁰ For the syntax see the note at line 1.

¹¹ For the syntax see the note at line 2.

¹² For the syntax see the note at line 4.

<-To Mnesiepes did the god [Apollo] make the oracular declaration that it is more propitious and just plain better¹³ if¹⁴

15 <-he [= Mnesiepes] honors [participle of *timân*] Archilochus the poet, in accordance with the intent (of the god).

And, in the light of this oracular declaration of Apollo, we call this place [*topos*]¹⁵ the *Arkhilokheion* and we have set up [indicative perfect of *hidruein*]¹⁶ the relevant altars

and we make sacrifice [indicative present of *thuein*]¹⁷ both to the gods and to Archilochus and

we honor [indicative present of *timân*] him in accordance with what the god declared to us.

20 Now, concerning what we wanted to put on record in writing, the following are the things that have been handed down to us by the ancients and that we have made our concern. For they say that Archilochus, when he was still a young man, ...

Mnesiepes Inscription E₁ II 1-23 ed. Clay pp. 105-106

Before I analyze the relevance of this text to my argumentation, I offer two general comments about the Mnesiepes Inscription: (1) in its lettering, it strongly resembles the Parian

¹³ For the syntax see the note at line 1.

¹⁴ For the syntax see the note at line 1.

¹⁵ This *topos* ‘place’ called the *Arkhilokheion* in line 17 is the same place as the *temenos* ‘precinct’ of the divinities in lines 2 and 9.

¹⁶ The perfect indicative here in line 17 corresponds to the aorist participle in lines 2 and 9.

¹⁷ The present indicative here in line 18 corresponds to the “present” participle in lines 3 and 10.

Marble, which can be dated precisely to 264/3 BCE;¹⁸ (2) in its formatting, it looks like “a papyrus roll spread out across a marble wall.”¹⁹

I also offer a specific comment about the formatting of the Mnesiepes Inscription. Among the special features of this formatting is the device of *ekthesis*, which can be described as a reverse indentation. The *ekthesis* marks quotations of (1) oracles relating to the hero cult of Archilochus and (2) passages taken from poetry attributed to Archilochus himself.²⁰ A particularly close parallel in formatting can be found in the inscription *IMagnesia* 17 from Magnesia-on-the-Maeander, dated somewhere after 221/0 BCE, which contains quotations of oracles relating to the foundation of that city.²¹

In the text taken from the Mnesiepes Inscription as I replicate it above, I indicate by way of the sign “<-” the lines set off by way of *ekthesis*. This set of lines contains three oracular responses worded in prose and attributed to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. In other parts of the Mnesiepes Inscription, which I have not replicated above, we find five other sets of lines set off by way of *ekthesis*. Three of these sets contain poetry attributed to Archilochus (*E*₁ III 6-8, 31-35; *E*₂ I 15-44). The remaining two contain oracular responses worded in dactylic hexameter and attributed to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. One response is directed at the father of Archilochus, Telesikles, who is told that the poet will be *athanatos* ‘immortal’ in song (*E*₁ II 50-52 = Delphic Oracle no. 231 PW).²² The other response is directed at the people of Paros, who are said to have consulted the oracle in order to find out why their men were afflicted with sterility and what remedy had to be taken (*E*₁ III 47-50): the oracle says that this affliction

¹⁸ Clay p. 11.

¹⁹ Clay p. 11.

²⁰ Clay p. 156n16, with references to parallel phenomena in other inscriptions.

²¹ Clay p. 11 and p. 156n16.

²² Commentary by G. Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore 1990) 431-432 (14§35).

of the Parians was a punishment for their having dishonored Archilochus on the grounds that he was too ‘iambic’ (E₁ III 38), and that the remedy to be taken was the undoing of this dishonor by honoring Archilochus as a cult hero.²³

This theme of honoring Archilochus is basic to the three oracular responses directed at Mnesiepes in the passage from the Mnesiepes Inscription that I have replicated above. All three {261|262} responses concern the foundation of a sacred precinct or *temenos* (E₁ II 2 and 9) known as the *Arkhilokheion* (E₁ II 17), where Archilochus is to be worshipped as a cult hero within a larger complex of cults involving the worship of two sets of divinities associated with two altars (E₁ II 1-13). The wording of the Mnesiepes Inscription makes it explicit that the cult hero Archilochus is worshipped jointly with the divinities who are worshipped in the precinct named after him: the use of the verb *thuein* ‘make sacrifice’ in this context (E₁ II 18) is decisive.

Likewise decisive is the use of the verb *timân* ‘honor’ with reference to the worshipping of Archilochus (E₁ II 15). Typically, this verb is used to designate the worship of divinities as well as cult heroes.²⁴ In some contexts, moreover, the verb *timân* ‘honor’ refers to the worship of divinities and cult heroes together within the same cult complex: an example of such a context is a passage in Herodotus (5.67.5) where the historian refers to political fluctuations in the joint worship of the god Dionysus and of the hero Adrastus in Sikyon.

In general, there is a pattern of symbiosis in the worship of divinities and cult heroes in the context of hero-cults, and I have studied this pattern at length in my previous work, citing as one of many examples the joint worship of the Muses and Archilochus inside the *temenos* of the

²³ Commentary by Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* pp. 395-400 (13§§32-39).

²⁴ For examples, see G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore 1979; 2nd ed. 1999) 118 (7§1n2).

Arkhiokheion in Paros.²⁵ A key to the symbiotic relationship between the Muses and Archilochus is the characterization of Archilochus as a *therapōn* of the Muses: this word *therapōn*, which means ‘ritual substitute’ in this context, occurs both in the poetry attributed to Archilochus (F 1) and in the poetry attributed to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, as we see from an oracular verse referring to the death of the poet (Delphic Oracle no. 4 PW).²⁶

It is precisely in the context of this symbiotic worship of Archilochus and the Muses that the myth about the mystical encounter of Archilochus with the Muses is narrated in the Mnesiepes Inscription (lines E₁ II 23 and following). So the relationship between Archilochus and the Muses is a matter of myth as well as ritual. The myth that narrates how Archilochus met the Muses in a meadow and traded his father’s cow for the lyre of poetry is embedded in the ritual context of the sacred space where the poet and the Muses are worshipped together.

As Clay has persuasively argued, the sacred space where this mythical encounter took place is notionally identical with the sacred space of the ritual complex where Archilochus and the Muses were worshipped together - and where the Mnesiepes Inscription was actually located.²⁷ In terms of Clay’s argument, the *raison d’être* of the Mnesiepes Inscription was to justify this localization, which may have involved the relocating of a preexisting cult of Archilochus and the Muses; evidently it also involved a consolidation with other preexisting cults of other divinities like Zeus Hyperdexios, Athena Hyperdexia, Poseidon Asphaleios, and so on.²⁸

²⁵ Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans* pp. 304-306 (18§§4-6). For more on the practice of sacrificing to divinities within the precincts of cult heroes, see Clay p. 157n26, with important further citations.

²⁶ Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans* pp. 301-302 (18§1). See also Clay p. 157n19. For a brief survey of the meaning ‘ritual substitute’ inherent in the noun *therapōn*, see V. Tarenzi, “Patroclo ΘΕΡΑΠΙΩΝ,” *Quaderni Urbinati* 80 (2005) 25-38.

²⁷ Clay pp. 10-12.

²⁸ Clay pp. 12-13.

Just as the Muses are linked to Archilochus not only in ritual but also in myth as correlated with the ritual complex of the hero's sacred space, so also other divinities are linked to him within that same ritual complex. A case in point is the god Dionysus, who as we have seen is aetiologically relevant to the 'iambic' function of Archilochus just as the Muses are aetiologically relevant to his more general poetic function. Another case in point is the god Apollo in his role as *Mousāgētēs*, that is, as a choral leader of the Muses (E₁ II 3-4). As I have argued in my previous work, this mythological role of Apollo is relevant to the ritual role of Archilochus as the *therapōn* or 'ritual substitute' of the Muses.²⁹ {262|263}

By now we have seen that the hero cult of Archilochus was the context for narrating myths about Archilochus, mediated by the Life of Archilochus as transmitted by way of written records like the Mnesiepes Inscription - or like the Sosthenes Inscription. But this hero cult was also the context for preserving and transmitting the poetry of Archilochus.³⁰ Moreover, the verses embedded in the stories of the Life of Archilochus were not extrinsic to the mythological and ritual agenda of that Life. Rather, they were intrinsic. The poetry of these verses, as notionally lived by Archilochus in the Life of Archilochus, was in fact the foundational myth of Archilochus. And the *nomen loquens* of the primary transmitter of this poetry may be relevant to what seems to be his priestly function: he is *Mnēsiepēs*, 'he who recalls [*mnē-*] the verses [*epea*]'.³¹

²⁹ Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* pp. 363-364 (12§49).

³⁰ Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans* pp. 304-305 (18§4n4); Clay p. 156n14.

³¹ Nagy, *Pindar's Homer* pp. 363-364 (12§49n133). For attestations of other such names like *Mnēsiepēs* on the island of Paros, see Clay p. 156n14 on *Praxiepēs* and *Ktēsiepēs*.