

Wise Man and Poet in Ancient Greece: Features and Overlaps

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Abstract In ancient Greece, the notion of wisdom was expressed by the word σοφία, which implied different nuances of meaning and was used to identify the activities of very different categories of people: among them, even the poet was often recognised (or at least defined) as σοφός, as a ‘wise’ man, or a ‘sage’. This paper aims to analyse the reasons for this identification, especially from the perspective of the audience: what were the features of a poet – who introduced himself as a poet – that could lead his audience to assume that he was a σοφός? The answer probably has more to do with the forms of expression of a traditional ancient Greek poet than with the content of his poetry.

Keywords Ancient Greece. Sophia. Poetry. Tradition. Performance. Audience.

Summary 1 Open Questions on Sages and Poets. – 2 The Sage: Some Features. – 3 The Poet as a ‘Sophós’. – 4 Final Remarks.

1 Open Questions on Sages and Poets

The aim of this research is to focus on the perception of two very common figures of the ancient Greek culture – we may say two social players –, such as the wise man (the sage) and the poet. More specifically, we would like to consider their connotations, the features of these two figures that made them recognisable apart from the content they communicated, or conveyed. In other words, we are asking ourselves: what were the formal/standard elements that predisposed an audience to recognise a person as a wise man or a poet? What qualities – or skills – did a person need to have in order to be considered as such, in both cases? What kind of information (messages)

did this person have to communicate, regardless of the audience's possibility (or ability) to verify the origin and validity of the data he communicated? And finally: with due approximation, could the qualification 'sage' or 'poet' function as a professional label, i.e. could a person be recognised as a sage by profession or a poet by profession, or were these qualifications ancillary to other social identifications?

In order to provide some answers to the previous questions, we will focus on the Archaic and Classical periods, but we will need to look at later sources that preserve information about people of the period under investigation. In the following pages we will also consider literary evidence quite varied in type and chronology, concerning examples of teachings or sayings attributed to sages and poets, but we will always try to deduce details of the perception of these figures from these sources as well. And we will also have to make inevitable generalizations from a variety of cases, which may include exceptions and 'deviations' from the average.¹

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1 The average we are trying to enucleate. We are talking about 'the' wise man and 'the' poet in order to discuss some very general elements connotating these two figures, and so we consciously and temporarily gloss over the established multiplicity of 'realizations' (social and historical manifestations) of both figures: "a general category of 'the poet' does little justice to the broad spectrum of poetic activities, types of poetry and types of poet. [...] Many of even the most regarded in the canon are highly idiosyncratic figures, highly critical or (so far as we can tell) even rather innovative figures" (Thomas 1995, 119).

2 The Sage: Some Features

The first of the two figures that we want to take into account is that of the wise man, also because it is more complex to specify his ‘expressions’, that is to say the habits, the customs, the behaviours that were usually adopted to identify or qualify someone as a wise man.² Wisdom, however, had a quite distinct lexical definition: in ancient Greece the main word used to qualify someone as ‘wise’ was σοφός (adjective), and so the word to express the ‘wisdom’ was σοφία (noun).³

2.1

There are only weak hypotheses about the etymology of this word, so that Chantraine can close the entry of σοφός with a concise “pas d’étymologie”.⁴ But the use of the word σοφός in epic and lyric poetry helps us to define the idea implied in this semantic sphere, probably at its origins: σοφός is ‘(someone) who knows (something)’, especially ‘(someone) who is aware of an art’ or ‘of a profession’; he is ‘expert’, ‘skilled’ in some crafts, sometimes also ‘learned’. And the range of crafts that can be involved in this concept of σοφία is very wide, including for example sailing, governing, legislating, but also making a sacrifice in a proper way: we have exhaustive examples of this meaning, spread from Homer to Plato.⁵

Il. 15.408-15

οὐδέ ποτε Τρῶες Δαναῶν ἐδύναντο φάλαγγας
 ῥηξάμενοι κλισίησι μιγήμεναι ἠδὲ νέεσσιν.
 ἀλλ’ ὥς τε στάθμη δόρυ νήϊον ἐξιθύνει 410
 τέκτονος ἐν παλάμῃσι δαήμονος, ὅς ῥά τε πάσης
 εὐεῖδῃ σοφίῃς ὑποθημοσύνησιν Ἀθήνης,

2 In comparison with this, the case of the poet will be easier to analyse, because a poet – among other skills we will discuss – was firstly defined by the ‘tool’ he used, that is poetry, non-colloquial (marked) language, often with music: see § 3.1.

3 On the history of the word meaning, in general, see Snell 1924, 1-20; Malingrey 1961, 32-8 (and 46-9); Gladigow 1965, with Bollack 1968. The most ancient occurrences of the derivative σοφιστής seem to converge on the meaning of ‘poet’, rather than ‘wise’: see § 3.2. The family of σώφρων/σωφρόσυνη, instead, is more related to the sphere of behavior, meaning ‘presence of mind’ (even ‘mental health’), ‘foresight’, even ‘self-control’: cf. e.g. Il. 21.462-3 (with Erbse 1986, 185 ff.); Hipponax, fr. 65 Degani (= 63 West²), with the note ad loc. in Degani 2007, 113 (for the definition of Myson as σωφρονέστατος).

4 Chantraine 1980, tome IV-1 (1977), 1031. A new hypothesis (about the Semitic origin of the word-root) was recently proposed in Giordano 2013.

5 See also Gladigow 1965, 9-15.

ὧς μὲν τῶν ἐπὶ ἴσα μάχῃ τέτατο πτόλεμός τε·
ἄλλοι δ' ἄμφ' ἄλλησι μάχην ἐμάχοντο νέεσσιν,
Ἐκτωρ δ' ἄντ' Αἴαντος εἴεσατο κυδαλίμοιο.

415

... nor ever could the Trojans break the battalions of the Danaans and make way into the midst of the huts and the ships. (410) But as the carpenter's line maketh straight a ship's timber in the hands of a cunning workman, that is well skilled in all manner of craft by the promptings of Athene, so evenly was strained their war and battle. So fought they on, divers of them about divers ships, (415) but Hector made straight for glorious Aias. (Transl. A.T. Murray, 1924 [P])⁶

Cf. Bacchyl. *Dith.* fr. 6 Irigoien (= **26 Maehler), 5-6: Εὐπαλά[μοι'] υἱε[τ'] | τεκτόν[ω]ν σοφῶ[τάτω], "to Eupalamus' son Daedalus, most skilled of carpenters" (transl. D.A. Campbell, 1992).

Hes. *Op.* 646-9⁷

Εὐτ' ἂν ἐπ' ἐμπορίην τρέψας ἀεσίφρονα θυμὸν
βούληαι [δὲ] χρέα τε προφυγεῖν καὶ λιμὸν ἀτερπέα,
δείξω δὴ τοι μέτρα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης,
οὔτε τι ναυτιλίας σεσοφισμένους οὔτε τι νηῶν.⁸

If ever you turn your misguided heart to trading and wish to escape from debt and joyless hunger, I will show you the measures of the loud-roaring sea, though I have no skill in sea-faring nor in ships. (Transl. H.G. Evelyn-White, 1914 [P])

Archil. fr. 211 West² / Hom. fr. 22 Allen (*versus heroici*), quoted by Ammonius in Porph. *Isagog. prooem.* 4 (ed. A. Busse, 9, *Comm. in Arist. Gr.* 4.3)

Ὁ μέντοι Πυθαγόρας φησὶ "φιλοσοφία ἐστὶ φιλία σοφίας" πρῶτος τῶν παρὰ τοῖς παλαιότεροις ἐπιστὰς ἀμαρτήματι. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι σοφὸν ὠνόμαζον τὸν ἠντιναοῦν μετιόντα τέχνην, ὧν εἷς ἦν καὶ Ἀρχίλοχος λέγων
τρίασαν ἐσθλὴν καὶ κυβερνήτης σοφός, [Archil. fr. 211 West²]
καὶ ὁ ποιητῆς
ἐπεὶ σοφὸς ἦραρε τέκτων [Hom. fr. 22 Allen]
καὶ...

⁶ When the indication of the translator is closed by "[P]", this means that the translation comes from the collections of *Perseus Digital Library*, Tufts University.

⁷ See also § 3.5 (and fn. 41).

⁸ See Ercolani 2010, 375 (note *ad loc.*).

Pythagoras, however, says that “philosophy is the love of wisdom”, and he was the first to notice the error of the ancients. For since they called ‘wise’ whoever practised any kind of art – one of these was Archilochus, who said: “Noble the three-pronged spear, and a wise pilot”, and the poet: “Since wise carpenter fitted it”, and ... (Transl. M. Chase, 2020)

Cf. Bacchyl. *Ep.* 12.1 ss. Maehler (= Irigoin): ὡσεὶ κυβερνήτας σοφός, ὑμνοάνασσι εὐθύνη Κλειοῖ | νῦν φρένας ἀμετέρας, | εἰ δὴ ποτε καὶ πάρος, “Like a skilled helmsman, Clio, queen of song, steer my thoughts straight now, if ever before” (transl. D.A. Campbell, 1992);⁹ Aesch. *Supp.* 769-70: φιλεῖ | ὦδ’ ἵνα τίκτειν νῦξ κυβερνήτη σοφῶι, “In a cautious pilot night is likely to beget anxiety” (transl. H. Weir Smyth, 1926 [P]).

Alcm. fr. 2 (i) Page (PMG 2)

Κάστωρ τε πώλων ὠκέων δματῆρες ἵππόται σοφοί
καὶ Πωλυδεύκης κυδρός

Castor – tamers of swift steeds, skilled horsemen – and glorious Polydeuces. (Transl. D.A. Campbell, 1988)

Cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 5.114-15: ἔν τε Μοῖσαισι ποτανὸς ἀπὸ ματρὸς φίλας, | πέφανταὶ θ’ ἄρματιλάτας σοφός, “Among the Muses, he has had wings since he was a child in his dear mother’s lap, and he has proved himself a skilful charioteer” (transl. D. Arnsion Svarlien, 1990 [P]).

Pl. *Phdr.* 266c

Σω. [...] τὰ δὲ νῦν παρὰ σοῦ τε καὶ Λυσίου μαθόντας εἰπέ τί χρὴ καλεῖν· ἢ τοῦτο ἐκεῖνό ἐστιν ἢ λόγων τέχνη, ἢ Θρασύμαχος τε καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι χρώμενοι σοφοὶ μὲν αὐτοὶ λέγειν γεγόνασιν, ἄλλους τε ποιοῦσιν, οἱ ἂν δωροφορεῖν αὐτοῖς ὡς βασιλεῦσιν ἐθέλωσιν;

Socrates. [...] “But tell me now what name to give to those who are taught by you and Lysias, or is this that art of speech by means of which Thrasymachus and the rest have become able speakers themselves, and make others so, if they are willing to pay them royal tribute?”. (Transl. H.N. Fowler, 1925 [P])

⁹ Further occurrences are in Bacchyl. *Ep.* 10.39-42 Maehler (= Irigoin), and *Ep.* 13.162-5 M. (= I), with a more generic meaning.

2.2

Even assuming that these were the roots of the σοφός/σοφία meaning, we can also observe that it soon shifted to the meaning of ‘clever’, and then ‘wise’ in a general sense, and often without implying a process of education, or apprenticeship: there are examples of this employ of the terms already in late-archaic authors.¹⁰

(?) Anac. fr. 72.1-2 Page (PMG 417)

πῶλε Θρηκίη, τί δή με
 λοξὸν ὄμμασι βλέπουσα
 νηλέως φεύγεις, δοκείς δέ
 μ' οὐδὲν εἰδέναι σοφόν;

Thracian filly, why do you look at me from the corner of your eye and flee stubbornly from me, supposing that I have no skill? (Transl. D.A. Campbell, 1988)

Pind. *Oi.* 2.82-8

πολλά μοι ὑπ' ἀγκῶ-
 νος ὠκέα βέλη 83
 ἔνδον ἐντὶ φαρέτρας
 φωνάεντα συνετοῖσιν· ἔς
 δὲ τὸ πᾶν ἔρμανέων 85
 χατίζει. σοφὸς ὁ πολ-
λὰ εἰδὼς φυᾶ·
 μαθόντες δὲ λάβροι
 παγγλωσσίᾳ κόρακες
 ὧς ἄκραντα γαρυέτων
 Διὸς πρὸς ὄρνηχα θεῖον.¹¹ 88

I have many swift arrows in the quiver under my arm, (85) arrows that speak to the initiated. But the masses need interpreters. The

10 See also Colli 1977, 9 (“Si tenta qui [...] di documentare [...] quella che di solito viene chiamata - con riduttiva designazione cronologica - “la filosofia presocratica”, ma che mi sembra più pertinente denominare “la sapienza greca”. Coloro infatti le cui parole vengono qui raccolte erano chiamati “sapianti” dai loro contemporanei, e ancora Platone li indica con tale nome. In quell’epoca “sapienza” significava anche abilità tecnica, oppure saggezza della vita, prudenza politica: ma sapiente - che non fosse tale in qualcosa e in qualcosa no, ma sapiente in assoluto - era uno che possedeva l’ecceellenza del conoscere”, from the edition criteria); Ercolani 2013, 251-3; also Griffith 1990, 188-9. On the difficult interpretation of the significance of σοφία in Xenophanes’ fr. 2 West², see below § 3.1, note 28.

11 See Lanata [1963] 2020, 82 ff. (fn. ad loc.), and also below § 3.7, note 51.

man who knows a great deal by nature is truly skilful, while those who have only learned chatter with raucous and indiscriminate tongues in vain like crows against the divine bird of Zeus. (Transl. D. Arnson Svarlien, 1990 [P])

Aesch. *Prom.* 1035-8

Χο. ἡμῖν μὲν Ἑρμῆς οὐκ ἄκαιρα φαίνεται
λέγειν, ἄνωγε γάρ σε τὴν αὐθαδίαν
μεθέεντ' ἐρευνᾶν τὴν σοφὴν εὐβουλίαν.
πιθοῦ, σοφῶι γὰρ αἰσχρὸν ἐξαμαρτάνειν. 1035

Chorus. "To us, at least, Hermes seems not to speak untimely; for he bids you to lay aside your stubbornness and seek the good counsel of wisdom. Be advised! It is shameful for the wise to persist in error". (Transl. H. Weir Smyth, 1926 [P])

Cf. Aesch. fr. 390 Radt *inc. fab.* (= Stob. *Flor.* 3.194.12 Hense): ὁ χρήσιμ' εἰδῶς, οὐχ ὁ πολλ' εἰδῶς σοφός, "He is wise who knows the things that are useful, and not he who knows many things".

Hdt. 2.49.1-2

ἤδη ὧν δοκέει μοι Μελάμπους ὁ Ἄμυθέωνος τῆς θυσίης ταύτης οὐκ εἶναι ἀδαῖς ἀλλ' ἔμπειρος. [...]. (2) ἐγὼ μὲν νῦν φημι Μελάμποδα γενόμενον ἄνδρα σοφὸν μαντικὴν τε ἑωυτῷ συστήσαι καὶ πυθόμενον ἀπ' Αἰγύπτου ἄλλα τε πολλὰ ἐσηγήσασθαι Ἑλλησι καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον, ὀλίγα αὐτῶν παραλλάξαντα·

Now then, it seems to me that Melampus son of Amytheon was not ignorant of but was familiar with this sacrifice. [...]. (2) I say, then, that Melampus acquired the prophetic art, being a discerning man, and that, besides many other things which he learned from Egypt, he also taught the Greeks things concerning Dionysus, altering few of them. (Transl. A.D. Godley, 1920 [P])

These preliminary remarks on the original meaning of σοφός provide us with an important framework for setting out (and understanding) some of the characteristics of the ancient Greek wise men that emerge from our literary evidence, and therefore to sketch a sort of phenomenology of them.¹²

¹² For a broader view of the performances of the sages (and a definition of 'performance'), see Martin 1993, 115 ff.: the idea of an agonistic inspiration of the sages' actions (120) can be seen as complementary to the sketch of the sages' deeds we are

2.3

For this purpose, probably the best research field is offered by the lives of the so-called ‘seven sages’: that group of men (more than seven, depending on the different traditions)¹³ lived approximately during the archaic or late-archaic epoch, who have been recognised as ‘wise’ since the fifth century BCE at least (when we find the first evidence of their lives and deeds).¹⁴ Most of the documentation about these men, however, comes from much later sources – such as the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* of Diogenes Laertius (second-third century CE) – and therefore suffers from an ‘a posteriori’ conception of wisdom: the σοφία is interpreted after the development of the φιλοσοφία, after Plato and Aristotle; and wisdom is understood as the pursuit of a process of education and spiritual evolution.¹⁵ But, as a

making in these pages. More generally, see also the concise but updated framework of Martin 2017. A further complementary perspective on the issue is offered by Calame 2019: see esp. 56-60, on the ‘statut-auteur’ of σοφός.

13 Cf. Martin 1993, 109.

14 Cf. e.g. Hdt. 1.59, and 7.235.2 (on Chilon), or 1.29 ff. (on Solon); and, in general, see Snell [1971] 2005 for a rich collection of references; on Epimenides and Pherecydes, see also Colli 1978, vol. 2. For the number of the ‘sages’, cf. Pl. *Prt.* 343a (among people who φιλοσοφεῖν, he mentions Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilenes, Bias of Prienes, Solon of Athens, Cleobulus of Lindus, Mison of Chenes, and Chilon of Sparta); Plut. *De E apud Delphos* 385de, and *Conv. sept. sap.* 1 ff. (146b ff.); Diog. Laert. 1.13 (in the proemium, he mentions – as called ‘σοφοί’ in the antiquity – Thales, Solon, Periander of Corinth [instead of Mison in the first list of Plato], Cleobulus, Chilon, Bias, Pittacus, then adds Anacharsis the Scythe, Mison, Pherecydes of Syros, Epimenides of Crete, and – explaining the isolation of this tradition – even Pisistratus of Athens. It is more difficult to judge the mention of Bias in Hipponax, fr. 12 Degani (= 123 West²), because of the lack of the context (see also Degani 2007, 84, comm. ad fr. 12). On the contrary, the mentions of Pittacus made by Alcaeus in several fragments only attest the political actions of Pittacus – badly judged by the poet –, but not his reputation as a sage: see e.g. Andrisano 1994, 70-1. In any case, we do not know when the idea of a group of sages was born, and/or who its creator was: see Fehling 1985, 9-19 (for the platonic genetic theory of the group); Martin 1993, 112-13 (and 125 fn. 16); Busine 2002, 9 ff. (esp. 28-35: see also note 16 below); Engels 2010; Leão 2010. If we follow the account of Diog. Laert. 1.22 (quoting Demetrius of Phalerus), Thales was the first to be called ‘σοφός’, in the years immediately following the archonship of Solon (another ‘wise man’): a new interpretation of this tradition has recently been provided by Leão 2022. See also the next note.

15 Cf. e.g. the proemium of Diogenes again, immediately before and after the passage already quoted in the previous note: φιλοσοφίαν δὲ πρῶτος ὠνόμασε Πυθαγόρας καὶ ἑαυτὸν φιλόσοφον, ἐν Σικυῶνι διαλεγόμενος Λέοντι τῷ Σικυωνίων τυράννῳ – ἢ Φλιασίων, καθὰ φησιν Ἡρακλείδης ὁ Ποντικός ἐν τῇ Περί τῆς ἄπνου – μηδένα γὰρ εἶναι σοφὸν [ἄνθρωπον] ἀλλ’ ἡ θεόν. θάττον δὲ ἐκαλεῖτο σοφία, καὶ σοφὸς ὁ ταύτην ἐπαγγελλόμενος, ὅς εἰς ἄν κατ’ ἀκρότητα ψυχῆς ἀπικριβωμένος, φιλόσοφος δὲ ὁ σοφίαν ἀσπαζόμενος (Diog. Laert. 1.12); φιλοσοφίας δὲ δύο γεγόνασιν ἀρχαί, ἡ τε ἀπὸ Ἀναξιμάνδρου καὶ ἡ ἀπὸ Πυθαγόρου· τοῦ μὲν Θαλοῦ διακηκότος, Πυθαγόρου δὲ Φερεκίδης καθηγήσατο. καὶ ἐκαλεῖτο ἡ μὲν Ἰωνική, ὅτι Θαλῆς Ἴων ὢν, Μιλήσιος γάρ, καθηγήσατο Ἀναξιμάνδρου· ἡ δὲ Ἰταλικὴ ἀπὸ Πυθαγόρου, ὅτι τὰ πλεῖστα κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν ἐφιλοσόφησε (Diog. Laert. 1.13); “But the first to use the term, and to call himself a philosopher or lover of wisdom, was Pythagoras; for, said he, no man is wise, but God alone. Heraclides of Pontus,

result of this concept of the history of philosophy, the ancient wise men (namely the ‘seven sages’) have also been interpreted as an initial and magmatic manifestation of wisdom, before (a certain) σοφία ‘became’ the scope of the φιλοσοφία: this happened from a very early stage on our philosophical tradition, and for these reasons their figures have often been included in the *corpora* of philosophers, such as that of Diogenes. Moreover, from a documentary point of view, the anecdotes about the seven sages collected by Diogenes should have been based on ancient traditions about their lives and deeds, so that we can refer to this work – among others – to study the features of the ancient σοφοί.¹⁶

2.4

As a starting point of our approximate identikit of the wise man, we can mention a first, general feature: the σοφός usually manifests himself in being able to say and do uncommon things; and this attitude can have very different expressions, more impressive (if not supernatural) or more funny. For instance, a σοφός can sleep for very long periods of time, expanding the duration of a normal life; or, even without sleeping solutions, he can live for a span of years considerably longer than the human average: the life of Epimenides is exemplary in this sense.¹⁷ But a wise man, more often and less supernaturally, can simply have habits that deviate from the norms: habits

in his *De mortua*, makes him say this at Sicyon in conversation with Leon, who was the prince of that city or of Phlius. All too quickly the study was called wisdom and its professor a sage, to denote his attainment of mental perfection; while the student who took it up was a philosopher or lover of wisdom. [...] But philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom, has had a twofold origin; it started with Anaximander on the one hand, with Pythagoras on the other. The former was a pupil of Thales, Pythagoras was taught by Pherecydes. The one school was called Ionian, because Thales, a Milesian and therefore an Ionian, instructed Anaximander; the other school was called Italian from Pythagoras, who worked for the most part in Italy” (transl. R.D. Hicks, 1972 (1925¹) [P]). For an overview of the ancient and ‘new’ meanings of σοφία and σοφός, after the birth of the philosophy (φιλο-σοφία), cf. Arist. *Metaph.* 1.1-2 (esp. 981b 10-20; 982a 4 ff.), with Gigon [1959] 1983, 43-9; Palumbo 1987; and see § 2.9. Cf. also Diog. Laert. 3.9-19, on Plato and Epicharmus, with quotation of fragments such as Epicharm. 278 Kassel-Austin. Less useful is Lyle Johnstone 2009, for instance 36-85 (cf. also Ruth Scodel on *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2010.08.59, <https://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2010/2010.08.59/>).

16 Most probably, the sanctuary of Delphi played an important role during Late Archaism in promoting the figures of the seven sages and, above all, the connection of their action with the sanctuary itself: cf. Busine 2002, 28-9, by late. For the moment, however, we will exclude from our analysis the question of the origin of their wisdom, and – in particular – the theme of the divine inspiration of their customs, expressions, sentences, etc., since this concerns the ‘quality’ of the contents transmitted by the messages of the sages, and not the primary perception of their figures (see § 3.3, fn. 35).

17 Cf. Diog. Laert. 1.109-10.

and actions sometimes wired, such as Thales' astronomical extravagances, or Periander's obsession with the secret of his own tomb.

Diog. Laert. 1.34 (Thales)

λέγεται δ' ἀγόμενος ὑπὸ γράδος ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας, ἵνα τὰ ἄστρα κατανοήσῃ, εἰς βόθρον ἐμπεσεῖν καὶ αὐτῷ ἀνοιμῶξαντι φάναί τὴν γραῦν· “σὺ γάρ, ὦ Θαλῆ, τὰ ἐν ποσὶν οὐ δυνάμενος ἰδεῖν τὰ ἐπὶ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ οἶε γινώσσεσθαι;”.

It is said that once, when he was taken out of doors by an old woman in order that he might observe the stars, he fell into a ditch, and his cry for help drew from the old woman the retort, “How can you expect to know all about the heavens, Thales, when you cannot even see what is just before your feet?”. (Transl. R.D. Hicks, 1972 (1925¹) [P])

Diog. Laert. 1.96 (Periander)

λέγουσι δέ τινες ὡς θελήσας αὐτοῦ τὸν τάφον μὴ γνωσθῆναι, τοιοῦτόν τι ἐμηχανήσατο. δυσὶν ἐκέλευσε νεανίσκοις, δεῖξας τινὰ ὁδόν, ἐξελθεῖν νύκτωρ καὶ τὸν ἀπαντήσαντα ἀνελεῖν καὶ θάψαι· ἔπειτα βαδίζειν ἄλλους τε κατὰ τούτων τέτταρας, καὶ ἀνελόντας θάψαι· πάλιν τε κατὰ τούτων πλείονας. καὶ οὕτως αὐτὸς τοῖς πρώτοις ἐντυχὼν ἀνῆρέθη.

There is a story that he did not wish the place where he was buried to be known, and to that end contrived the following device. He ordered two young men to go out at night by a certain road which he pointed out to them; they were to kill the man they met and bury him. He afterwards ordered four more to go in pursuit of the two, kill them and bury them; again, he dispatched a larger number in pursuit of the four. Having taken these measures, he himself encountered the first pair and was slain. (Transl. R.D. Hicks, 1972 (1925¹) [P])

2.5

A wise man is also able to provide his community with fair laws, or to renew the existing laws: by playing this role, a σοφός exploits his overall view of the human nature and, more specifically, his clear knowledge of the power-relations that exist in a particular social group (or polis), and that he can translate in a political vision. Furthermore, and in parallel with this competence, a wise man often shows that he knows how to act in case of dangerous problems that

involve all the community, like a plague: again Epimenides already mentioned (see § 2.4), for instance, understands the way to purify the community.¹⁸

2.6

This wider view of the humans and the human life often depends on the wise man's attitude to travelling, to experiencing different realities, different societies: travelling is the reason for the wise man's greater knowledge of customs, but it also becomes the occasion (for the wise man) to share his knowledge with everyone he meets. The best personification of these skills (in addition to the previous ones, explained in § 2.5) is Solon, the Athenian lawmaker and traveller, but also the key-figure of the famous episode of his meeting with the Lydian king Croesus.¹⁹

2.7

Sometimes σοφία can be expressed through prophecies, predictions, or riddles, because – like an oracle – the wise man tells the truth in a way that cannot be linear: his messages require an effort to be understood by common people. And, as is often the case with these forms of communication, the message of the sage can take on a poetic form.²⁰

Paradigmatic are the anecdote of the suggestion of Pittacus about marriage (that also inspired an epigramme of Callimachus: cf. Diog. Laert. 1.79-81, with the quotation of Callim. ep. 1 Pfeiffer), as well as the riddles of Cleobulus, or the predictions of Pherecydes.

Diog. Laert. 1.89-91 (Cleobulus: riddles)

(89) Κλεόβουλος Εὐαγόρου Λίνδιος, ὡς δὲ Δοῦρις, Κάρ. [...] οὗτος ἐποίησεν ᾄσματα καὶ γρίφους εἰς ἔπη τρισχίλια. [...] Φέρεται δ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς Παμφίλης Ὑπομνήμασι καὶ αἰνίγμα τοῖον·

(91) εἷς ὁ πατήρ, παῖδες δυοκαίδεκα. τῶν δὲ ἑκάστω

¹⁸ This is also an aspect of the involvement of sages in religious activities: see Martin 1993, 121-2.

¹⁹ Cf. Hdt. 1.32-3.

²⁰ See Martin 1993, 117-18 (“Like the oral art of epic verse making, proverbs are thus completely traditional and yet always innovated. They are embedded in situations in which the social use of artful speech and metaphor becomes a powerful tool for influencing events”), together with Russo 1997. It is also possible that at some point the form of the aphorism became the very communicative mark of the wise: see Havelock [1963] 1973, 235-6.

παῖδες δις τριάκοντα διάνδιχα εἶδος ἔχουσαι·
αἱ μὲν λευκαὶ ἔασιν ἰδεῖν, αἱ δ' αὖτε μέλαιναι·
ἀθάνατοι δέ τ' εὐῶσαι, ἀποφθινύθουσιν ἅπασαι.
ἐστι δὲ ὁ ἑνιαυτός.

(89) Cleobulus, the son of Euagoras, was born at Lindus, but according to Duris he was a Carian. [...] He was the author of songs and riddles, making some 3000 lines in all. [...] The following riddle of Cleobulus is preserved in Pamphila's collection: (91) "One sire there is, he has twelve sons, and each of these / has twice thirty daughters different in feature; / some of the daughters are white, the others again are black; / they are immortal, and yet they all die". And the answer is, "The year". (Transl. R.D. Hicks, 1972 (1925¹) [P])

Diog. Laert. 1.116 (Pherecydes: predictions)

Φερεκύδης Βάβυος Σύριος, καθά φησιν Ἀλέξανδρος ἐν Διαδοχαῖς, Πιττακοῦ διακῆκοεν. τοῦτόν φησι Θεόπομπος πρῶτον περὶ φύσεως καὶ <γενέσεως> θεῶν Ἑλλήσι γράψαι. πολλὰ δὲ καὶ θαυμάσια λέγεται περὶ αὐτοῦ. καὶ γὰρ παρὰ τὸν αἰγιαλὸν τῆς Σάμου περιπατοῦντα καὶ ναῦν οὐριοδρομοῦσαν ἰδόντα εἰπεῖν ὡς {οὐ} μετ' οὐ πολὺ καταδύσεται· καὶ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ καταδύναι. καὶ ἀνιμηθέντος ἐκ φρέατος ὕδατος πiónτα προειπεῖν ὡς εἰς τρίτην ἡμέραν ἔσοιτο σεισμός, καὶ γενέσθαι. ἀνιόντα τε εἰς Ὀλυμπίαν ἐν Μεσσήνῃ τῷ Ξένῳ Περιλάῳ συμβουλευσαὶ ἐξοικῆσαι μετὰ τῶν οἰκείων· καὶ τὸν μὴ πεισθῆναι, Μεσσήνη δὲ ἐάλω.

(116) Pherecydes, the son of Babys, and a native of Syros according to Alexander in his *Successions of Philosophers*, was a pupil of Pittacus. Theopompus tells us that he was the first who wrote in Greek on nature and the gods. Many wonderful stories are told about him. He was walking along the beach in Samos and saw a ship running before the wind; he exclaimed that in no long time she would go down, and, even as he watched her, down she went. And as he was drinking water which had been drawn up from a well he predicted that on the third day there would be an earthquake; which came to pass. And on his way from Olympia he advised Perilaus, his host in Messene, to move thence with all belonging to him; but Perilaus could not be persuaded, and Messene was afterwards taken. (Transl. R.D. Hicks, 1972 (1925¹) [P])

2.8

All these examples presuppose a more general feature of the figure of the ancient σοφός, that is very peculiar: the σοφός of the archaic and late-archaic Greek culture is someone who is involved in the culture of the polis, someone who is part of a polis, who is recognised by the people of the polis, and who acts in the polis (or even in different poleis), often trying to improve the quality of life of his community (or different polis communities).²¹

The knowledge of the σοφός is based on a broad view of the world, but does not contradict the foundations of the traditional culture: the tool of the wise man's action is not the revolution, but a re-direction (or re-functionalization) of what already exists. Not even the creators of new schools of thought, such as Thales or Pythagoras, were actually 'real world disrupters', because their theories were based on a traditional perception - and acceptance - of reality and the world.²² And, even in the case of sages-travellers (Solon comes to mind first, with Epimenides again, or Pythagoras), the increase in knowledge resulting from visits to distant places and peoples does not lead to the transfer of 'novelties' to Greece: the sage only shares with the Greeks those things - information, reform proposals, advice, etc. - that are compatible with Greek culture. In this sense the σοφός is also a traditional figure, someone who is perfectly integrated into the traditional culture of the archaic Greek society.²³

2.9

This statement can be confirmed by a symmetrical observation, concerning some anecdotes about the early philosophers, Heraclitus in particular. The philosophical aspects of the relations between these 'new intellectuals' and the sages are multifaceted and have been the subject of extensive discussion among scholars, which we can only mention here, recalling some points of the debate: the modern philosopher usually has a destructive attitude towards the knowledge and beliefs of the common people; he can understand the reality in a deeper way than the traditional men (and wise men); his ideas are new, exclusive, and not for everyone. For these reasons, he is often presented as an anti-traditional character, and the champions of the

²¹ See also Martin 1993, 115.

²² See again Palumbo 1987.

²³ This is also illustrated by the fate of Anacharsis, a Scythian who, according to tradition, was treacherously murdered by his brother during a hunt, perhaps because he promoted Greek customs in his homeland: cf. Diog. Laert. 1.102.

traditional culture - including sages, and also poets (see § 3.3) - became the target of his blame; but even the traditional vocabulary of wisdom is seemingly subjected to a shift in its meaning, or at least in its references.²⁴ Some fragments from Heraclitus seem very significant to explain this process.

Obscure Messages and Contempt of the Masses

Heraclit. 22 A 1, 6 Diels-Kranz (= Diog. Laert. 9.1.6)

ἀνέθηκε δ' αὐτὸ [= τὸ βιβλίον περὶ φύσεως] εἰς τὸ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἱερόν, ὡς μὲν τινες, ἐπιτηδεύσας ἀσαφέστερον γράψαι, ὅπως οἱ δυνάμενοι <μόνοι> προσίοιεν αὐτῷ καὶ μὴ ἐκ τοῦ δημῶδους εὐκαταφρόνητον ἦ.

This book he deposited in the temple of Artemis and, according to some, he deliberately made it the more obscure in order that none but adepts should approach it, and lest familiarity should breed contempt. (Transl. R.D. Hicks, 1972 (1925¹) [P])

Heraclit. 22 B 1 Diels-Kranz (= Sext. Emp. Math. 7.132)

τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδε ἐόντος ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι, καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι, καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόασι, πειρώμενοι ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγεῦμαι, κατὰ φύσιν διαιρέων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅκως ἔχει. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὐδοντες ἐπιλανθάνονται.²⁵

Although this account holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard. Although all things come to pass in accordance with this account, men are like the untried when they try such words and works as I set forth, distinguishing each according to its nature and telling how it is. But other men are oblivious of what they do awake, just as they are forgetful of what they do asleep. (Transl. Ch.H. Kahn, 1979)

²⁴ In general, by starting from what we can understand from our fragments, the debate about the vocabulary of Heraclitus (and his use and meaning of σοφία/σοφός, for instance) has been intense and should be considered partly still open, at least for specific fragments: cf. Gladigow 1965, 75 ff.; Leshner 1983.

²⁵ See Marcovich 1967, 8-11; Diano, Serra 1980, 89-109.

Heraclit. 22 B 34 Diels-Kranz (= Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.115.3)

ἄξύνετοι ἀκούσαντες κωφοῖσιν εἰκόασι· φάτις αὐτοῖσιν μαρτυρεῖ παρεόντας ἀπεῖναι.

Uncomprehending, <even> when they have heard <the truth about things?>, they are like deaf people. The saying ‘absent while present’ fits them well [lit. “bears witness to them”]. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Against Traditional Wise ‘Characters’

Heraclit. 22 B 40 Diels-Kranz (= Diog. Laert. 9.1.1 [= Heraclit. 22 A 1 D.-K.]; cf. Ath. 13.601b)

πολυμαθίη νόον ἔχειν οὐ διδάσκει· Ἡσίοδον γὰρ ἂν ἐδίδαξε καὶ Πυθαγόρην αὐτίς τε Ξενοφάνεά τε καὶ Ἑκαταῖον.²⁶

A lot of learning does not teach <a person the possession of> understanding; <could it do so,> it would as so taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, or for that matter (?) Xenophanes and Hecataeus. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Heraclit. 22 B 129 (*dub.*) Diels-Kranz (= Diog. Laert. 8.6 = Pythagoras, 14 A 19 Diels-Kranz [*amplior*])

Πυθαγόρης Μνησάρχου ἱστορίην ἤσκησεν ἀνθρώπων μάλιστα πάντων καὶ ἐκλεξάμενος ταύτας τὰς συγγραφὰς ἐποίησατο ἑαυτοῦ σοφίην, πολυμαθίην, κακοτεχνίην.

Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, trained himself to the highest degree of all mankind in <the art of> investigation, and having selected these writings constructed a wisdom of his own – a lot of learning, a disreputable <piece of> craftsmanship. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Cf. also Heraclit. 22 B 83 Diels-Kranz (= Pl. *Hp. mai.* 289b): ἀνθρώπων ὁ σοφώτατος πρὸς θεὸν πίθηκος φανεῖται καὶ σοφίη καὶ κάλλει καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν “In the matter of wisdom, beauty, and every other thing, in contrast with God the wisest of mankind will appear an ape” (transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987).

²⁶ See Marcovich 1967, 64-6; Diano, Serra 1980, 172. For the poets, as traditional ‘characters’, also cf. Heraclit. 22 B 42, 56, 57, 107 Diels-Kranz (passages discussed further, see § 3.3). For the inclusion of Pythagoras, whom the sources also record as the first to take the name φιλόσοφος for himself, see previous note 15 (Diog. Laert. 1.12).

New Meaning and Pertinence of σοφός/σοφία

Heraclit. 22 B 32 Diels-Kranz (= Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.115.1)

ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μόνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα.²⁷

One thing, the only wise thing, is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Heraclit. 22 B 35 Diels-Kranz (= Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.140.6)

χρὴ γὰρ εὔ μάλα πολλῶν ἱστορας φιλοσόφους ἄνδρας εἶναι καθ' Ἡράκλειτον.

[For, according to Heraclitus, men who are] lovers of wisdom ought very much to be enquirers into many things. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Heraclit. 22 B 41 Diels-Kranz (= Diog. Laert. 9.1.1 [= Heraclit. 22 A 1 D.-K.; cf. 22 B 40 D.-K.]

εἶναι γὰρ ἐν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, τότε ἐκυβέρνησετ πάντα διὰ πάντων.

[He says that] the wise <thing> is a single <thing> (or, *differently punctuated*: one thing, the wise thing, <is>) – knowing the plan †which steers† all things through all things. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Heraclit. 22 B 50 Diels-Kranz (= Hippol. *Haer.* 9.9)

Ἡράκλειτος μὲν οὖν φησιν εἶναι τὸ πᾶν διαιρετὸν ἀδιαιρετον, γενητὸν ἀγενητον, θνητὸν ἀθάνατον, λόγον αἰῶνα, πατέρα υἰόν, θεὸν δίκαιον· “οὐκ ἐμοῦ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφὸν ἐστὶν ἐν πάντα εἶναι” ὁ Ἡράκλειτος φησι.

Heraclitus affirms that the All is Divisible/Indivisible, Born/Unborn, Mortal/Immortal, Word/Eternity, Father/Son, God/Righteous One. He says: “Listening not to me but to the Word [λόγου], it is wise to agree [ὁμολογεῖν] that all is one”. (Transl. M.D. Litwa, 2016)

²⁷ For the debate about the interpretation of this fragment, also see Marcovich 1967, 445-6; Diano, Serra 1980, 162-5.

Heraclit. 22 B 108 Diels-Kranz (= Stob. *Flor.* 1.174 Hense)

Ἡρακλείτου. ὀκόσων λόγους ἤκουσα, οὐδεὶς ἀφικνεῖται ἐς τοῦτο, ὥστε γινώσκειν ὅτι σοφὸν ἐστὶ πάντων κεχωρισμένον.

Of all those whose accounts I have listened to, none gets to the point of recognising that which is wise, set apart from all. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Heraclit. 22 B 116 Diels-Kranz (= Stob. *Flor.* V 6 Hense)

ἀνθρώποισι πᾶσι μέτεστι γινώσκειν ἑωυτοῦς καὶ σωφρονεῖν.

All people have a claim to self-knowledge (*literally*, self-ascertainment) and sound thinking. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

The attitude that emerges in Heraclitus' fragments probably should be read as the birth of a self awareness different from that of past or contemporary wise men: the new intellectual (like Heraclitus) is less σοφός and more φιλόσοφος, and aims to trace a distance between himself and common people, or common views of σοφία.

On the other hand, in a poet who was also a pillar of traditional culture - I mean Pindar - we can recognise a kind of mirrored response to these assessments: Pindar probably blamed the new philosophers for their futile research, for their strength in constructing a new knowledge that was perceived as unconventional, and not traditional at all.

Pind. fr. 209 Maehler (= Stob. *Ecl.* 2.1.21)

Πινδάρου· τοὺς φυσιολογοῦντας ἔφη Πίνδαρος “ἀτελῆ σοφίας καρπὸν δρέπειν”.

Natural philosophers were said by Pindar “to cull the unripe fruit of wisdom”. (Transl. W.H. Race, 1997)

3 The Poet as a ‘Sophós’

This mention of Pindar also leads us, finally, to include the figure of the poet in our discussion, with some variations on what we have done for the wise man: indeed, against the multiplicity of terms used to identify the poet (also depending on the type of poem composed or performed by each of them), we can assume that the recognition of a poet took place first and foremost on the basis of one of his essential features, namely the use of a language – a communication *medium* – distinct from the common language.

3.1

It is precisely because of this fundamental competence – an expression of σοφία – that a poet could also be considered a σοφός (‘[someone] who is aware of an art’, as at the origin): several passages from archaic and late archaic poets (Pindar *in primis*) seem to confirm this view.²⁸

Thgn. 1.19-21 West²

Κύρνε, σοφιζομένωι μὲν ἐμοὶ σφρηγῖς ἐπικείσθω
 τοῖσδ’ ἔπεισιν, λήσει δ’ οὔποτε κλεπτόμενα, 20
 οὐδέ τις ἀλλάξει κάκιον τοῦσθλοῦ παρεόντος.²⁹

Kyrnos, let a seal [sphrēgis] be placed by me, as I practice my poetic skill [sophiē], / upon these utterances [epos plural]; that way they [i.e. the utterances] will never be stolen without detection, / and no one will substitute something inferior for the genuine thing that is there. (Transl. G. Nagy, 1985)

²⁸ Some occurrences will also be discussed below in § 3.7. It is more difficult to define the significance of the term σοφία in Sappho, fr. 56 Neri (= Voigt: see Neri 2021, 660), and in Xenophanes, fr. 2 West². On this last fragment, see Untersteiner [1956] 2008, 113-14 (note to vv. 11-12, where, after a rich recap of the debate about these lines, the scholar concluded: “io vedo in σοφία espressa l’idea di abilità conoscitiva, di perfezione nel conoscere”); Gladigow 1965, 32-8; and even concisely Cavalli 1992, 176 note 9 (note to the same lines: “Probabilmente il significato arcaico di *sophia* come ‘abilità in una determinata arte’ qui si è già ampliato nel concetto più vasto di ‘sapienza che deriva dalla propria abilità’, e quindi allude alla natura educativa e utile alla città della poesia filosofica di Senofane”). On Xenophanes, more generally, cf. also Palumbo 1987, 44-52; Gentili 2006, 239-40.

²⁹ On this passage see the remarks of Nagy (28-9), Ford (82-4), and Cobb-Stevens (166-7) in Figueira, Nagy 1985.

Thgn. 1.993-6 West²

εἰ θεΐης, Ἀκάδημε, ἐφήμερον ὕμνον αἰεΐδειν,
ἄθλον δ' ἐν μέσσωι παῖς καλὸν ἄνθος ἔχων
σοί τ' εἴη καὶ ἐμοὶ σοφίης πέρι δηρισάντοιν, 995
γνοίης χ' ὅσσον ὄνων κρέσσονες ἡμίονοι.

If you were to set a prize, Academus, for the singing of a lovely song, and if a boy with the fair bloom of youth were the prize for you and me as we compete in artistry, you would know how superior mules are to asses. (Transl. D.E. Gerber, 1999)

Pind. Ol. 1.8-11

ὄθεν ὁ πολύφατος ὕμνος ἀμφιβάλλεται
σοφῶν μητίεσσι, κελαδεῖν
Κρόνου παῖδ' ἐς ἀφνεὰν ἰκομένους 10
μάκαιραν Ἱέρωνος ἐστίαν

From there glorious song enfolds the wisdom of poets, so that they loudly sing (10) the son of Cronus, when they arrive at the rich and blessed hearth of Hieron. (Transl. D. Arnson Svarlien, 1990 [P])

Pind. Pyth. 3.113

Νέστορα καὶ Λύκιον Σαρπηδόν', ἀνθρώπων φάτις,
ἐξ ἐπέων κελαδενῶν, τέκτονες οἷα σοφοί
ἄρμοσαν, γινώσκομεν· ἃ δ' ἀρετὰ κλειναῖς ἀοιδαῖς
χρονία τελέθει· παύροις δὲ πράξασθ' εὐμαρές. 115

We know of Nestor and Lycian Sarpedon, whom men speak of, from melodious words which skilled craftsmen join together. Through renowned songs excellence (115) gains a long life. But few find that easy to accomplish. (Transl. D. Arnson Svarlien, 1990 [P])

Cf. Pind. *Isthm.* 9.7-8; *Pae.* 6 (= fr. 52f Maehler) 51-3.

Bacchyl. (*hyporchemata*) fr. 14 Maehler (= 1 Irigoin).

Λυδία μὲν γὰρ λίθος
μανύει χρυσόν, ἀν-
δρῶν δ' ἀρετὰν σοφία τε
παγκρατῆς τ' ἔλέγχει
ἀλάθεια ... 5

For as the Lydian stone indicates gold, so men's excellence is proved by the poet's skill and all-powerful truth. (Transl. D.A. Campbell, 1992)

A.P. 13.28.1-6 ([Βακχυλίδου ἢ Σιμωνίδου]; Antigenes, fifth century BCE)³⁰

Πολλάκι δὴ φυλῆς Ἀκαμαντίδος ἐν χοροῖσιν ὦραι
 ἀνωλόλυξαν κισσοφόροις ἐπὶ διθυράμβοις
 αἱ Διονυσιάδες, μίτραισι δὲ καὶ ῥόδων ἀώτοις
 σοφῶν ἀοιδῶν ἐσκίασαν λιπαρὰν ἔθειραν,
 οἱ τόνδε τρίποδά σφισι μάρτυρα Βακχίων ἀέθλων
 ἔθηκαν· ...

Often in truth, in the choruses of the tribe Acamantis, did the Hours, the companions of Dionysus, shout in triumph at the ivy-crowned dithyrambs, and overshadow the bright locks of skilled poets with fillets and rose blossoms. The chorus now hath set up this tripod as a witness of their Bacchic contest. (Transl. W.R. Paton, 1918)

Eur. *IT* 1234-8

Χο. εὐπαις ὁ Λατοῦς γόνος,
 ὅν ποτε Δηλιάσιν καρποφόροις γυάλοις
 <ἔτικτε>, χρυσοκόμαν
 ἐν κιθάραι σοφόν, ὅστ' ἐπὶ τόξων
 εὐστοχίαι γάννυται

Chorus "Lovely is the son of Leto, (1235) whom she, the Delian, once bore in the fruitful valleys, golden-haired, skilled at the lyre; and also the one who glories in her well-aimed arrows". (Transl. R. Potter, 1938 [P])

Cf. *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* 6

κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον Γανύκτωρ ἐπιτάφιον τοῦ πατρὸς Ἀμφιδάμαντος βασιλέως Εὐβοίας ἐπιτελῶν πάντας τοὺς ἐπισημοὺς ἄνδρας οὐ μόνον ῥώμῃ καὶ τάχει, ἀλλὰ καὶ σοφίᾳ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα μεγάλας δωρεαῖς τιμῶν συνεκάλεσεν. καὶ οὕτοι [*scil.* Homer and Hesiod] οὖν ἐκ τύχης, ὡς φασί, συμβαλόντες ἀλλήλοις ἤλθον εἰς τὴν Χαλκίδα.

Now about the same time Ganymctor was celebrating the funeral rites of his father Amphidamas, king of Euboea, and invited to the gathering not only all those who were famous for bodily strength and fleetness of foot, but also those who excelled in wit, promising them great rewards. And so, as the story goes, the two went to Chalcis and met by chance. (Transl. H.G. Evelyn-White, 1914 [P])

30 Cf. Page 1981, 12.

3.1.1

More challenging is the case of an Hesiodic fragment quoted by Clemens of Alexandria, together with a fragment of the Homeric *Margite* (which is of clearer interpretation):

Hom. *Marg.* fr. 3 Gostoli (= 2 West?) / Hes. fr. 306 Merkelbach-West, quoted by Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.25.1-2

Ὅμηρος δὲ καὶ τέκτονα σοφὸν καλεῖ [cf. *Il.* 15.411-12, see § 2.1] καὶ περὶ τοῦ Μαργίτου, εἰ δὴ αὐτοῦ, ὡδὲ πῶς γράφει·
τὸν δ' οὔτ' ἄρ σκαπτῆρα θεοὶ θέσαν οὔτ' ἄροτῆρα,
οὔτ' ἄλλως τι σοφόν, πάσης δ' ἡμάρτανε τέχνης. [Hom. *Marg.* fr. 3 Gostoli]

Ἡσίοδος γὰρ τὸν κιθαριστὴν Λίνον “παντοίας σοφίας δεδαηκότα” [Hes. fr. 306 M.-W.] εἰπὼν καὶ ναύτην οὐκ ὀκνεῖ λέγειν σοφόν, “οὔτε τι ναυτιλίας σεσοφισμένον” γράφων [cf. Hes. *Op.*].

Homer even calls an artisan wise, and writes something as follows about Margites (if the poem is Homer's): “The gods did not make him a digger or ploughman, / or wise in any other field; he missed out on every skill”. Hesiod said that Linus the lutenist was “expert in every form of wisdom”, and does not hesitate to call a sailor wise, writing, “not endowed with wisdom in navigation”. (Transl. J. Ferguson, 1991)

If the debate focuses on the equivalence ‘σοφία = practical/professional competence’ (as Clemens seems to attest), we should assume that Linus was mentioned by Hesiod as having ‘the knowledge (δεδαηκότα)³¹ of all practical/professional fields (παντοίας σοφίας)’: so a (good) poet like Linus – in the Hesiodic vision – also demonstrated his σοφία (poetic competence) by being able to sing about any human profession (that is various σοφίαί, other than his).

31 For the use of this verb, see also § 3.7.

3.2

Besides σοφός, the derivative σοφιστής also seems to have specialised in the meaning of ‘poet’ (rarely even ‘wise’),³² although its number of occurrences is much more limited and sometimes controversial, if not pejorative (at least in sources from fifth century BCE Athens).

σοφιστής = ‘Poet’

Pind. *Isthm.* 5.28-9

μελέταν δὲ σοφισταῖς
Διὸς ἕκατι πρόσβαλον σεβιζόμενοι·

[Heroes] who are honoured by the grace of Zeus provide a theme for skilled poets. (Transl. D. Arnson Svarlien, 1990 [P])

Cratinus, *Archilochoi* fr. 2 Kassel-Austin (PCG) / Iophon, *Aulodoi (satyroi)* fr. 1 Snell-Kannicht (TrGF), quoted by Clem. Al. *Strom.* 1.24.1-3 (a passage immediately preceding the one quoted in § 3.1.1)

ὄθεν οἱ Ἕλληνες καὶ αὐτοὶ τοὺς περὶ ὀτιοῦν πολυπράγμονας σοφοῦς
ἅμα καὶ σοφιστὰς παρωνύμως κεκλήκασι. Κρατίνος γοῦν ἐν τοῖς
Ἀρχιλόχοις ποιητὰς καταλέξας ἔφη·
οἷον σοφιστῶν σμήνος ἀνεδιφήσατε. [Cratinus, fr. 2 K.-A.]
Ἰοφῶν τε ὁμοίως <ὡς> ὁ κωμικὸς ἐν Αὐλφδοῖς σατύροις ἐπι
ῥαψωδῶν καὶ ἄλλων τινῶν λέγει·
καὶ γὰρ εἰσελήλυθεν
πολλῶν σοφιστῶν ὄχλος ἐξηρτυμένος. [Iophon, fr. 1 S.-K.]

As a result, the Greeks themselves have called those who spend too much time on a single object sages or sophists indifferently, the words being related. Anyway, Cratinus in the *Archilochuses* ends a catalogue of poets with: “What a swarm of sophists you have been groping after”. Similarly Iophon, like the comic dramatist in *The Satyr-Flutists*, says of rhapsodes and others: “Yes, there arrived / a great mob of sophists all at the ready”. (Transl. J. Ferguson, 1991)

The meaning of ‘poet/musician’ is probably also implied by the use of the term σοφιστής in Aeschylus’ fr. 314 Radt (from Athen. 14.32

³² Cf. Diog. Laert. 1.12 (proemium): οἱ δὲ σοφοὶ καὶ σοφισταὶ ἐκαλοῦντο· καὶ οὐ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ποιηταὶ σοφισταὶ, καθὰ καὶ Κρατίνος ἐν Ἀρχιλόχοις τοὺς περὶ Ὅμηρον καὶ Ἡσίοδον ἐπαινῶν οὕτως καλεῖ.

[632c]), but this poses problems of textual reconstruction and interpretation; whereas the meanings of the term in *Prometheus bound*, vv. 62 and 944, are already more generalising and vague (influenced by the increasing 'sophistic' philosophical trend).³³

3.3

However, the identification 'poet = σοφός' should have been endorsed for many other reasons, that we now can attempt to sketch after our observations about the sages.³⁴

In general, a poet often had an extensive knowledge of facts, persons, actions, etc., simply because of his experience of people, poleis, sometimes even different countries (in the case of travelling-poets: see also § 3.5). More specifically, the knowledge of a poet could include: information useful for the common/practical life (that is the present); events of the past, actions of people lived in a different time and in a different space, deeds of people qualified as different from the normal (heroes), and so subjects we can consider 'myth' (even though for ancient Greeks myths were parts of their past); predictions about something still not happened, suggestions about the future, predictions also in an enigmatic form.³⁵ In sum, the poet was able to communicate content that could be interpreted as signs of wisdom, and this impression could also have been reinforced because his content was traditional, because it was part of a traditional cultural heritage that the poet was contributing to preserve.³⁶

In a traditional oral culture, more specifically, the repetition of a traditional message is also authoritative, because it is both the repetition of something already known (and approved), and the reassertion of something that should be done (repeated) in an already defined way (so it is prescriptive): repeating (re-performing) such content is authoritative, but it also gives authority to the repeater (performer),

33 Cf. Euripides, fr. 905 Kannicht (μισῶ σοφιστήν, ὅστις οὐχ αὐτῷ σοφός); and see also Marzullo [1993] 2023, 478 ff.

34 By 'poet' in these pages I continue to mean any person who, though not necessarily a poet by profession, practised poetry with some frequency, not exceptionally or episodically (as might happen to anyone attending occasions such as symposia). More inclusive, however, is the reading of Martin (1993, 113-15), who, for example, recognises poetry as a feature of the seven sages: see also § 2.7.

35 As I have already said with regard to the aim of the present research (see above § 2.3, fn. 16), I have deliberately excluded the subject of the divine origin of the content transmitted by a poet inspired by a god, also because these elements were part of the assertions that poets could certainly make, but that the audience could not 'verify' in the immediate term.

36 On 'wisdom poetry' in ancient Greece, see e.g. Ercolani 2012; 2015; 2016.

that is to the poet.³⁷ And this was one of the main reasons why several traditional poets have also been included in the target of the Heraclitean blame, like the wise men, as we saw before (§ 2.9).³⁸

Heraclit. 22 B 42 Diels-Kranz (= Diog. Laert. 9.1.1 [= Heraclit. 22 A 1 D.-K.]

τόν τε Ὅμηρον ἔφασκεν ἄξιον ἐκ τῶν ἀγῶνων ἐκβάλλεσθαι καὶ ῥαπίζεσθαι καὶ Ἀρχίλοχον ὁμοίως.

[He used to affirm that] Homer ought by rights to be ejected from the lists and thrashed, and similarly Archilochus. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Heraclit. 22 B 56 Diels-Kranz (= Hippol. Refut. 9.9)

ἐξηπάτηνται, φησίν, οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς τὴν γνῶσιν τῶν φανερῶν παραπλησίως Ὅμηρῳ, ὃς ἐγένετο τῶν Ἑλλήνων σοφώτερος πάντων. ἐκεῖνόν τε γὰρ παῖδες φθειρας κατακτείνοντες ἐξηπάτησαν εἰπόντες· ὅσα εἶδομεν καὶ ἐλάβομεν, ταῦτα ἀπολείπομεν, ὅσα δὲ οὔτε εἶδομεν οὔτ' ἐλάβομεν, ταῦτα φέρομεν.³⁹

People are deceived, [he says,] in the recognition of things that are obvious in much the same way Homer, who was wiser than all the Greeks, was deceived. For he was deceived by the words spoken to him by some boys killing lice: "What we saw and caught we leave behind, while what we did not see or catch we take <away with us>". (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

Heraclit. 22 B 57 Diels-Kranz (= Hippolit. Refut. 9.10)

διδάσκαλος δὲ πλείστων Ἡσίοδος· τοῦτον ἐπίστανται πλείστα εἰδέναί, ὅστις ἡμέρην καὶ εὐφρόνην οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν· ἔστι γὰρ ἕν.

For very many people Hesiod is <their> teacher. They are certain he knew a great number of things - he who continually failed to recognise <even> day and night <for what they are>! For they are one. (Transl. T.M. Robinson, 1987)

37 This could also be the key to understand some particular poet-character, apparently endowed with political functions, such as the poet that Agamemnon left at home, to guard (?) his family and his court: cf. *Od.* 3.267-72, with Scully 1981.

38 On the following fragments, see Babut 1976; Diano, Serra 1980, 172-6 (comm. to frs. 83-4, 86-7); Palumbo 1987, 36 ff. (especially 37 fn. 11).

39 See also Colli 1980, 3:174-80 (fnn. 9-11).

Heraclit. 22 B 106 Diels-Kranz (= Plut. *Cam.* 19.1)

περὶ δ' ἡμερῶν ἀποφράδων εἴτε χρὴ τίθεσθαι τινὰς εἴτε ὀρθῶς Ἡράκλειτος ἐπέπληξεν Ἡσιόδῳ τὰς μὲν ἀγαθὰς ποιουμένῳ, τὰς δὲ φαύλας [cf. *Op.* 765 ff.], ὡς ἀγνοοῦντι φύσιν ἡμέρας ἀπάσης μίαν οὔσαν, ἐτέρωθι διηπόρηται.

Now concerning 'dies nefasti', or unlucky days, whether we must regard some as such, or whether Heracleitus was right in rebuking Hesiod for calling some days good and some bad, in his ignorance that the nature of every day is one and the same, - this question has been fully discussed elsewhere. (Transl. B. Perrin, 1914 [P])

3.4

The occasions for this transfer of knowledge (or repetition of content already known) from the poet to his audience should usually have been public: it is obvious to think, first, of the rhapsodic and choral poets involved in contests or ritual performances. But, sometimes, also private or semi-private occasions - like symposia - could host 'wisdom moments', as we can infer from lines of Theognis, or Solon, or also Mimnermus. And even the descriptions of personal life moments or adventures was always associated to the communication of some traditional rules, or values.⁴⁰

3.5

These preliminary observations about the poets, however, have also concerned some of the content of their poems, but - to return to the declared focus of our research (see § 1) - we should also ask ourselves what feature(s) of a poet might make a poet recognisable independently of his poetic content. This feature of recognition should have been extremely important, also because a rather stable element in the characterization of many poets was their mobility, as in the case of the 'generic' wise men (non-poets) we mentioned at the beginning (see § 2.6). Many ancient poets are known to have travelled, for personal (often political-military) reasons, or in order to perform their poems for a specific audience: these events also produced the increasing of their knowledge, the acquisition of a broader view of the reality (hence their 'wisdom'). The lives of Homer, for instance, give us the

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. Alcaeus, fr. 38 and 347 Voigt; Archilochus, fr. 13 (elegy) and 128 (trochaic tetrameters).

picture of a poet always moving among the poleis of the coasts of the Aegean sea: this image of Homer is surely a multi-layered product, the result of variations and insertions made by many generations of post-classic readers, but should be based on elements of ancient origin, coherent with the habits of an archaic epic poet. And even the *bios* of Hesiod implied an openness to travel abroad – for a poet traditionally thought as very steady, reluctant to move⁴¹ – in case of important events that were a sort of call for professional poets (such as the funeral celebration for the death of a local ruler).

Finally, therefore, we might ask an essential question: when a poet arrived to a new place, where his name was not yet known, what features could facilitate his recognition as a good/reliable poet? Why (or on what grounds) should (or at least could) an audience be well disposed to listen to a poet, assuming that he would report true and useful things, rather than inventions and false things?⁴²

3.6

The answer probably lies in the poet's main tool, which we have already mentioned several times, i.e. poetry: this is the means by which the poet was able to manifest his knowledge and skills, but also the competence that entitled the poet to be called σοφός, i.e. aware of the art of composing poems. More specifically, this poetic competence was the ability to express information (ideas, myths, values, etc.) by using a marked communication, a language organised by metres, created with a peculiar vocabulary, made up of peculiar syntactic structures (formulae, etc.), often associated with a specific music: in short, a language formalised in a traditional way, easy to recognise by people who shared the same culture. If σοφία was the knowledge of something, especially an art, or a profession, then the poet could reveal his skill by using his art, that is the poetic language, in the occasions of performing poetry: this single action was the expression of his being σοφός, even before the communication of any content that could be considered 'wise'.

The control of this poetic skill (σοφία), by the poet, was also the parameter for judging the quality of a poet, by the audience: every audience (the public of every Greek polis) probably had the competence to recognise the features of valuable – that is traditional – poetry,

⁴¹ And so hostile to trades: cf. *Op.* 232-7, 646 ss. (quoted in § 2.1), with the evidence from the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* (see above § 3.1). See also Mureddu 2021, XLIII-XLV. On these implications of σοφία, see also Giordano 2013, 35 ff.

⁴² On the matter of the truth, and reliability, of the messages conveyed by the poet, see e.g. Aloni 2013; Riu 2019.

because this competence was acquired (by every man in the audience) by attending time after time the same occasions of producing and listening to poetry (festivals, rituals, symposia, etc.). Thus, every audience should have been able to distinguish between average-poets, not outstanding, and very good poets, true owners of full 'verification competence': probably the only ones deserving the name of σοφοί.⁴³

3.7

This mechanism of recognition probably was consciously or unconsciously present to the same poets, but in any case it seems to be preserved – or mirrored – in many paradigmatic depictions of the art and skills of the poet, or self-depictions of the poet in action, above all in those declarations of poetics in which the content of the poem is distinguished from poetic skills, i.e. from the ability to create poetic language (made up of metres, formulae, sometimes music, etc.): usually in these passages the content that a poet conveys may be exceptional, super-human (cf. the beginning of the catalogue of ships in the *Iliad*), and in this case it almost always comes from the gods; otherwise the content can be very subjective, depending on personal life experiences, as for iambic and elegiac poetry; in both these cases, nevertheless, the ability to put these contents into verse – the poet's σοφία – is a skill separately emphasised, as a distinct element that marks the quality of communication.⁴⁴

Often this remark – that of possessing a σοφία – is expressed with lexical occurrences that might suggest a certain normativity, or at least a standardization: knowledge of the technique is usually indicated by the verb ἐπίσταμαι (which could be applied to various fields, not only the poetic)⁴⁵ and related words; but sometimes we also find expressions alluding to the learning of the poetic technique (now successfully acquired), and thus characterised by the use of the verb διδάσκω and its derivatives.

⁴³ See Havelock [1963] 1973, 129-30.

⁴⁴ See also Snell [1946] 1963, 190 ff. ("Cap. VIII. Sapere umano e divino"); Palumbo 1987, 39 ff.

⁴⁵ For the technical/practical scope of this verb, see e.g. *Il.* 13.221-3: τὸν δ' αὖτ' Ἴδομενεὺς Κρητῶν ἀγὸς ἀντίον ἠΐδα· | ὧ Θόαν οὐ τις ἀνὴρ νῦν γ' αἴτιος, ὅσσοι ἔγωγε | γινώσκω· πάντες γὰρ ἐπιστάμεθα πτολεμίζειν ("And to him Idomeneus, leader of the Cretans, made answer: 'O Thoas, there is no man now at fault, so far as I wot thereof; for we are all skilled in war'"; transl. A.T. Murray, 1924 [P]). See also Snell 1924, 81-96; Chantraine 1970, 360.

Super-Human Content

Il. 2.484-93

Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχουσαι·
ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαὶ ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα, 485
ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν·
οἳ τινες ἡγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανοι ἦσαν·
πληθὺν δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μυθήσομαι οὐδ' ὀνομήνω,
οὐδ' εἴ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ' εἶεν,
φωνὴ δ' ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δέ μοι ἦτορ ἐνείη, 490
εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
θυγατέρες μνησαίαθ' ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθον·
ἀρχοὺς αὖ νηῶν ἐρέω νῆάς τε προπάσας.

Tell me now, ye Muses that have dwellings on Olympus - (485) for ye are goddesses and are at hand and know all things, whereas we hear but a rumour and know not anything - who were the captains of the Danaans and their lords. But the common folk I could not tell nor name, nay, not though ten tongues were mine and ten mouths (490) and a voice unwearying, and though the heart within me were of bronze, did not the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus that beareth the aegis, call to my mind all them that came beneath Ilios. Now will I tell the captains of the ships and the ships in their order. (Transl. A.T. Murray, 1924 [P])

ἐπίσταμαι (= To Know How to Make Poetry)

Od. 11.362-9

τὸν δ' αὖτ' Ἀλκίνοος ἀπαμείβετο φώνησέν τε·
“ὦ Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὸ μὲν οὐ τί σ' εἴσκομεν εἰσορόωντες
ἠπεροπιῆά τ' ἔμεν καὶ ἐπικλοπον, οἷά τε πολλοὺς 365
βόσκει γαῖα μέλαινα πολυσπερέας ἀνθρώπους
ψεύδεά τ' ἀρτύνοντας, ὅθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο·
σοὶ δ' ἔπι μὲν μορφή ἐπέων, ἐνὶ δὲ φρένες ἐσθλαί,
μῦθον δ' ὡς ὄτ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπίσταμένως κατέλεξας,
πάντων Ἀργείων σέο τ' αὐτοῦ κήδεα λυγρά”.

Then again Alcinoos made answer and said: “Odysseus, in no wise as we look on thee do we deem this of thee, that thou art a cheat and a dissembler, such as are many (365) whom the dark earth breeds scattered far and wide, men that fashion lies out of what no man can even see. But upon thee is grace of words, and with-in thee is a heart of wisdom, and thy tale thou hast told with skill,

as doth a minstrel, even the grievous woes of all the Argives and of thine own self". (Transl. A.T. Murray, 1919 [P])

Od. 21.404-9

ὥς ἄρ' ἔφαν μνηστήρες· ἀτὰρ πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς,
αὐτίκ' ἐπεὶ μέγα τόξον ἐβάστασε καὶ ἶδε πάντη, 405
ὥς ὄτ' ἀνὴρ φόρμιγγος ἐπιστάμενος καὶ ἀοιδῆς
ῥῆϊδίως ἐτάνυσσε νέῳ περὶ κόλλοπι χορδὴν,
ἄσπας ἀμφοτέρωθεν εὐστρεφὲς ἔντερον οἴος,
ὥς ἄρ' ἄτερ σπουδῆς τάνυσεν μέγα τόξον Ὀδυσσεύς.

So spoke the wooers, but Odysseus of many wiles, (405) as soon as he had lifted the great bow and scanned it on every side - even as when a man well-skilled in the lyre and in song easily stretches the string about a new peg, making fast at either end the twisted sheep-gut - so without effort did Odysseus string the great bow. (Transl. A.T. Murray, 1919 [P])

Thgn. 1.769-72 West²

χρὴ Μουσῶν θεράποντα καὶ ἄγγελον, εἴ τι περισσόν
εἰδείη, σοφίης μὴ φθονερὸν τελέθειν, 770
ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν μῶσθαι, τὰ δὲ δεικνύεν, ἄλλα δὲ ποιεῖν·
τί σφιν χρήσεται μούνος ἐπιστάμενος;⁴⁶

A servant and messenger of the Muses, even if he knows exceeding much, should not be grudging of his lore, but seek out this, illumine that, invent the other; what use can he make of this if none know it but he? (Transl. J.M. Edmonds, 1931 [P])

διδάσκω (= To Teach/Learn How to Make Poetry)

Od. 22.340-8 (Phemius)

ἦ τοι ὁ φόρμιγγα γλαφυρὴν κατέθηκε χαμάζε 340
μεσσηγὺς κρητῆρος ἰδὲ θρόνου ἀργυροήλου,
αὐτὸς δ' αὐτ' Ὀδυσῆα προσαΐξας λάβε γούνων
καὶ μιν λισσόμενος ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα·
"γουνούμαί σ', Ὀδυσσεῦ· σὺ δέ μ' αἶδεο καὶ μ' ἐλέησον.
αὐτῷ τοι μετόπισθ' ἄχος ἔσσεται, εἴ κεν ἀοιδὸν 345
πέφνης, ὅς τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισιν ἀεῖδω.

⁴⁶ See the remarks of Ford (92-3) in Figueira, Nagy 1985.

αὐτοδίδακτος δ' εἰμί, θεὸς δέ μοι ἐν φρεσὶν οἶμας skill / contents
 παντοίας ἐνέφυσεν· ἔοικα δέ τοι παραείδειν
 ὧς τε θεῶ· τῷ μὲν ἡ λιλαιέο δειροτομήσασαι".⁴⁷

(340) So he laid the hollow lyre on the ground between the mixing-bowl and the silver-studded chair, and himself rushed forward and clasped Odysseus by the knees, and made entreaty to him, and spoke winged words: "By thy knees I beseech thee, Odysseus, and do thou respect me and have pity; (345) on thine own self shall sorrow come hereafter, if thou slayest the minstrel, even me, who sing to gods and men. Self-taught am I, and the god has planted in my heart all manner of lays, and worthy am I to sing to thee as to a god; wherefore be not eager to cut my throat". (Transl. A.T. Murray, 1919 [P])

Sol. fr. 13 West² (= 1 Gentili-Prato²), (33-6,) 51-2

θνητοὶ δ' ὧδε νοέομεν ὁμῶς ἀγαθὸς τε κακὸς τε,
 εὖ ρεῖν ἦν αὐτὸς δόξαν ἕκαστος ἔχει,
 πρὶν τι παθεῖν· τότε δ' αὐτίς ὀδύρεται· ἄχρι δὲ τούτου 35
 χάσκοιτες κούφαις ἐλπίσι τερπόμεθα. [...]
 ἄλλος Ὀλυμπιάδων Μουσέων πάρα δῶρα διδαχθεῖς, (51)
 ἱμερτῆς σοφίης μέτρον ἐπιστάμενος.⁴⁸

We mortal men, alike good and bad, are minded thus: – each of us keepeth the opinion he hath ever had till he suffers ill, and then forthwith he grieveth; albeit ere that, we rejoice open-mouthed in vain expectations. [...] (51) another through his learning in the gifts of the Olympian Muses, cunning in the measure of lovely art. (Transl. J.M. Edmonds, 1931)

A kind of anthology of this kind of expression is also preserved in the last part of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, vv. 475-9, 482-6, 507-12:

ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ οὖν τοι θυμὸς ἐπιθύει κιθαρίζειν, 475
 μέλπεο καὶ κιθάριζε καὶ ἀγλαίας ἀλέγυνε
 δέγμενος ἔξ ἐμέθεν· σὺ δέ μοι φίλε κῦδος ὄπαζε.
 εὐμόλπει μετὰ χερσὶν ἔχων λιγύφωννον ἐταίρην
 καλὰ καὶ εὖ κατὰ κόσμον ἐπιστάμενος ἀγορεύειν.

(475) But since, as it seems, your heart is so strongly set on playing the lyre, chant, and play upon it, and give yourself to merriment,

⁴⁷ For the meaning of αὐτοδίδακτος, see Russo 2004, 191-2 (fn. vv. 347-8).

⁴⁸ See also Gladigow 1965, 16-20; Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010, 183-5.

taking this as a gift from me, and do you, my friend, bestow glory on me. Sing well with this clear-voiced companion in your hands; for you are skilled in good, well-ordered utterance.

[...]

ὅς τις ἂν αὐτὴν
τέχνη καὶ σοφίη δεδαημένος ἔξερεείνη
φθεγγόμενη παντοῖα νόφ' χαρίεντα διδάσκει
ῥεῖα συνηθείησιν ἄθυρομένη μαλακῆσιν, 485
ἐργασίην φεύγουσα δυήπαθον· ...

Whoso with wit and wisdom enquires of it cunningly, him it teaches (485) through its sound all manner of things that delight the mind, being easily played with gentle familiarities, for it abhors toilsome drudgery.

[...]

καὶ τὰ μὲν Ἑρμῆς
Λητοῖδην ἐφίλησε διαμπερὲς ὡς ἔτι καὶ νῦν,
σήματ' ἐπεὶ κίθαριν μὲν Ἑκηβόλω ἐγγυάλιξεν
ἱμερτήν, δεδαῶς ὁ δ' ἐπωλένιον κιθάριζεν· 510
αὐτὸς δ' αὐθ' ἑτέρης σοφίης ἐκμάσσατο τέχνην·
συρίγγων ἐνοπήν ποιήσατο τηλόθ' ἀκουστήν.⁴⁹

And Hermes loved the son of Leto continually, even as he does now, when he had given the lyre as token to the Far-shooter, (510) who played it skilfully, holding it upon his arm. But for himself Hermes found out another cunning art and made himself the pipes whose sound is heard afar. (Transl. H.G. Evelyn-White, 1914 [P])

But, in line with this distinction – or awareness of the distinction – between content and technique (σοφία), it is also worth reading an interesting fragment of Bacchilides, unfortunately out of context, transmitted by Clement Alexandrinus:

Bacchyl. *Paeans*, fr. 2 Irigoin (cf. 5 Maehler), quoted by Clem. Al. *Strom.* 5.68.5

“ἕτερος ἔξ ἑτέρου σοφός / τό τε πάλα τό τε νῦν”, φησὶ Βακχυλίδης ἐν τοῖς Παιᾶσιν· “[οὐδὲ γὰρ ῥᾶστον] ἀρρήτων ἐπέων πύλας / ἔξευρεῖν”.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ See Bollack 1968, 551: “Les deux exemples de l’*Hymne à Hermès* (483 et 511) sont instructifs par la juxtaposition de *τέχνη* et de *σοφία*, le premier terme s’appliquant à l’adresse éblouissante, quasi magique, alors que le second désigne plutôt un ordre exprimable du savoir, en l’occurrence un genre musical et son harmonie propre”.

⁵⁰ Square brackets of Irigoin: the translation presupposes that the words οὐδὲ γὰρ ῥᾶστον are of Clemens, and not part of the quotation from Bacchylides (as in edition of Maehler).

“One gets his skill from another, now as in days of old”, says Bacchylides in his *Paean*s; for it is no easy matter “to discover the gates of verse unspoken before”. (Transl. D.A. Campbell, 1992)

In fact, the transfer of skills from one poet to another (ἕτερος ἐξ ἑτέρου σοφός) seems to allude to the process of learning by apprenticeship that must have been at the basis of every poet’s training, from time immemorial (τό τε πάλαι τό τε νῦν): a process that – on this point, however, the state of preservation of the fragment suggests to be even more cautious – was inseparable from the transmission of some traditional content (not necessarily new, cf. ἀρρήτων ἐπέων πύλας ἐξευρεῖν), in order to substantiate the songs and, at the same time, to allow the training and acquisition of the skill of poetic creation.⁵¹

3.8

The permeability of the two spheres was, moreover, inescapable and natural, not least because – besides poetic content – even poetic skill (σοφία) could be represented, in the sense we have tried to outline, as a divine gift, a privilege received from the divinity, which allowed a man to excel in the creation of poetry.

(Skill/Content)

Od. 8.487-98

“Δημόδοκ’, ἔξοχα δὴ σε βροτῶν αἰνίζομ’ ἀπάντων·
ἢ σέ γε Μοῦσ’ ἐδίδαξε, Διὸς πάϊς, ἢ σέ γ’ Ἀπόλλων·
λίην γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν οἶτον αἰεΐδεις,
ὅσσοι ἔρξαν τ’ ἔπαθόν τε καὶ ὅσοι ἐμόγησαν Ἀχαιοί,
ὥς τέ που ἢ αὐτὸς παρεὼν ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας.
ἀλλ’ ἄγε δὴ μετάβηθι καὶ ἵππου κόσμον ἄεισον
δουρατέου, τὸν Ἐπειὸς ἐποίησεν σὺν Ἀθήνῃ,
ὄν ποτ’ ἐς ἀκρόπολιν δόλον ἤγαγε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς
ἀνδρῶν ἐμπλήσας οἳ ῥ’ Ἴλιον ἐξαλάπαξαν.
αἶ κεν δὴ μοι ταῦτα κατὰ μοῖραν καταλέξῃς,
αὐτίκ’ ἐγὼ πᾶσιν μυθήσομαι ἀνθρώποισιν,
ὥς ἄρα τοι πρόφρων θεὸς ὦπασε θέσπιν ἀοιδίην”.

⁵¹ See also Fearn 2007, 2-20 (briefly, Giuseppetti 2015, 294 ff., fn. 20); Giordano 2013, 40. On the possibility of recognising an ‘answer’ to Pind. *Ol.* 2.86 ff. (quoted above in § 2.2) in this fragment of Bacchylides, see also Gentili 2006, 91-1; Catenacci in Gentili 2013, 50-3, 410 (fnn. 86-8).

“Demodocus, verily above all mortal men do I praise thee, whether it was the Muse, the daughter of Zeus, that taught thee, or Apollo; for well and truly dost thou sing of the fate of the Achaeans, (490) all that they wrought and suffered, and all the toils they endured, as though haply thou hadst thyself been present, or hadst heard the tale from another. But come now, change thy theme, and sing of the building of the horse of wood, which Epeius made with Athena's help, the horse which once Odysseus led up into the citadel as a thing of guile, (495) when he had filled it with the men who sacked Ilios. If thou dost indeed tell me this tale aright, I will declare to all mankind that the god has of a ready heart granted thee the gift of divine song”. (Transl. A.T. Murray, 1919 [P])

Hes. *Theog.* 22-34

αἵ [scil. the Muses] νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλὴν ἐδίδαξαν ἀοιδίην,
 ἄρνας ποιμαίνονθ' Ἑλικῶνος ὑπο ζαθέοιο.
 τόνδε δέ με πρῶτιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον,
 Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο· 25
 “ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον,
 ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
 ἴδμεν δ' εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.”
 ὡς ἔφασαν κοῦραι μέγαλον Διὸς ἀρτιέπειαι,
 καί μοι σκῆπτρον ἔδον δάφνης ἐριθιλέος ὄζον 30
 δρέψασαι, θηητόν· ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν
 θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τὰ τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἐόντα,
 καί μ' ἐκέλονθ' ὑμεῖν μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων,
 σφᾶς δ' αὐτὰς πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν αἰεῖδεν.

And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon, and this word first the goddesses said to me - (25) the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis: “Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things”. So said the ready-voiced daughters of great Zeus, and they plucked and gave (30) me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvellous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things that were aforetime; and they bade me sing of the race of the blessed gods that are eternally, but ever to sing of themselves both first and last. (Transl. H.G. Evelyn-White, 1914 [P])

Hes. Op. 654-62

ἔνθα δ' ἐγὼν ἐπ' ἄεθλα δαΐφρονος Ἀμφιδάμαντος
Χαλκίδα [τ'] εἰσεπέρησα· τὰ δὲ προπεφραδμένα πολλὰ 655
ἄεθλ' ἔθεσαν παῖδες μεγαλήτορες· ἔνθα μέ φημι
ἕμνῳ νικήσαντα φέρειν τρίποδ' ὠτώεντα.
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼ Μούσησ' Ἑλικωνιάδεσσ' ἀνέθηκα
ἔνθα με τὸ πρῶτον λιγυρῆς ἐπέβησαν ἄοιδῆς.
τόσσον τοι νηῶν γε πεπεύρημαι πολυγόμφων· 660
ἀλλὰ καὶ ὧς ἐρέω Ζηνὸς νόον αἰγιόχοιο·
Μοῦσαι γάρ μ' ἐδίδαξαν ἀθέσφατον ἕμνον ἀείδειν.

Then I crossed over to Chalcis, to the games of wise Amphidamas where the sons of the great-hearted hero proclaimed and appointed prizes. And there I boast that I gained the victory with a song and carried off a handled tripod which I dedicated to the Muses of Helicon, in the place where they first set me in the way of clear song. (660) Such is all my experience of many-pegged ships; nevertheless I will tell you the will of Zeus who holds the aegis; for the Muses have taught me to sing in marvellous song. (Transl. H.G. Evelyn-White, 1914 [P])

Archil. fr. 1 West²

εἰμὶ δ' ἐγὼ θεράπων μὲν Ἐνυαλίιο ἄνακτος
καὶ Μουσέων ἐρατὸν δῶρον ἐπιστάμενος.⁵²

I am the servant of lord Enyalios / and an expert in the lovely gift of the Muses. (Transl. L. Swift, 2019)

Ibyc. fr. 1(a) Page (282 PMG), 23-6

καὶ τὰ μὲ[ν ἄν] Μοῖσαι σεσοφ[ισμ]ένοι
εὖ Ἑλικωνίδ[ε]ς ἐμβραῖεν λογι·
θνατὸς δ' οὐ κ[ε]ἴν ἀνήρ 25
διερὸ[ς] τὰ ἕκαστα εἴποι
ναῶν ὧς Μεν[έ]λαος ...

on these themes the skilled Muses of Helicon might embark in story, but no mortal man (untaught?) could tell each detail... (Transl. D.A. Campbell, 1991)

⁵² See Lanata [1963] 2020 on this fragment: "Il poeta possiede una ἐπιστήμη, una perizia tecnica sua propria che è la misura della sua libertà di fronte alla Musa" (35).

Thus the Muses did not teach Hesiod a song, but taught him how to sing in general (μὲν ἐδίδαξαν... ἀείδειν σοφία, *Op.* 662), and also inspired him with imperishable content (ἀθέσφατον ὕμνον, *Op.* 662); Archilocus, on the other hand, asserted first and foremost his primary human dimension (as a warrior, not as a poet, cf. v. 1), which clearly justified much of his poetry (i.e. content), but at the same time claimed a consolidated experience also as a creator of poetry (ἐπιστάμενος, cf. v. 2), of that art which goes back to the Muses and which – perhaps – Archilochus himself had imagined to acquire by divine gift (if we think of the biographical tradition documented by the epigraph of Mnesiepes).⁵³ In Ibycus, finally, there is a kind of retro-projection: the very creators of poetry – the Muses – are described in the same way as a poet who has mastered the poetic technique;⁵⁴ the Muses are thus qualified by an attribute denoting their σοφία, precisely because they are the very paradigm of poetic skill, the model of perfect mastery of poetic σοφία (to which every poet should aspire).⁵⁵

4 Final Remarks

Taking into account both the poetic declarations and descriptions of poets (and poetic ‘investitures’) that we have considered, and the features of the wise men that we have tried to identify, we could perhaps suggest that (1) ἐπίσταμαι (and related words) identified the process of learning a craft/art, considered from an ‘internal’ point of view, i.e. that of the person learning the craft (in the same way as διδάσκω, and related words, which focused on the learning process),⁵⁶ and that instead (2) σοφός (and related words) was applied to the person who had reached the end of this process and was finally able to master his craft, but above all who was perceived as such by an audience.

In the case of poetry, the ability to communicate in a marked form (different from the everyday form of speech), according to expressive codes fixed by tradition (= poetic σοφία), could lead an audience to recognise a σοφός in a poet (i.e. a poet as σοφός), even regardless of the content – mostly unverifiable, moreover – that he would express. Therefore, σοφός may have been an ‘external’ marker, an indicator of the poet’s perception by his audience: an epithet applied to a man

⁵³ See Ornaghi 2009, 38-42; and also Aloni 2011.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hes. *Op.* 649, quoted in § 2.1.

⁵⁵ See also Wilkinson 2013, 71-5. Different echoes have been recognised in this passage by Hardie 2013, 10-14. As a term of comparison, see also Edmunds in Figueira, Nagy 1985, 100-1 (and the conclusions of pages 109-11), on the mentions of the Muses in Theognides (and in the only surviving fragment [fr. 1 West²] of ‘Pigres’ of Halicarnassus). On the divine origin of poetic skills, compare now also Stewart 2016, 207-9.

⁵⁶ See also Bollack 1968, 551.

who, at the top of his training, was finally perceived as superior by the environment in which he was acting, thanks to his established skill;⁵⁷ whereas, to be ἐπιστάμενος was perhaps the internal aspect – the poet's own awareness or consciousness – of a state that was externally perceived by others as possession of σοφία. This remark should be seen as complementary to some – even recent – observations on the authority of poetic language:⁵⁸ here, in addition, we suggest that the perception of the authoritativeness of the message was in the form, rather than in the content itself; that is, the recognisability of the 'sapiential' (wise) character came, even before the content, through the authoritative form (appropriately poetic) that the message could take.

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⁵⁷ To the parameters and audience-skills required to make this kind of recognition I would like to come back in further research (but for now compare the incisive assessment made by Griffith 1990, esp. 189-92).

⁵⁸ Such as those of Ercolani 2013: "In un contesto di oralità, la parola che vuol essere autorevole deve essere formalizzata. Il massimo livello di formalizzazione si realizza nella parola poetica, dove all'elaborazione linguistica si affianca la strutturazione metrico-ritmica: il risultato è un verso in cui sono elaborati vari tipi di messaggi ritenuti rilevanti, cioè da diffondere e tramandare, siano essi nozioni tecniche, norme comportamentali o procedurali, valori etici" (252).

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