

Ketevan Nizharadze (Tbilisi)

## Poetic Reflection of Saving and Spread of Information in Homeric Epos

Saving and spread of information is one of the most typical characteristics of Greek civilization. This phenomenon has been typical for the civilizations in ancient Near East long before the formation of ancient culture. However, we have to mention that, because of the democratic character of Hellenic culture, this phenomenon had much more common feature in Greece and achieved significantly advanced level of diversity of delivering and receiving channels. Similar to other areas of Greek culture, Homer can be considered as a teacher for the Greeks in terms of forming their attitude towards information.

In this report I will try to discuss briefly how far did Homer go in terms of classification of the information, defining its destination and meaning as well as ranking the types of information.

First of all we have to discuss the issue of terminology. The variety of formatives associated to Homer can be connected to the information such as λόγος – a word, ἀοιδή – a song etc. However there is one term used by Homer which, in certain contexts, utterly contains the understanding similar to the one meant in the term “information” from nowadays perspective.

This term is ἀγγελίη. Although Homer grants several meanings to it (an information, a notification), the most important between them is the one which is mostly close to the term “information”.<sup>1</sup> Let us provide some examples.

In the second book of *Iliad* after the catalogue of Achaean ship Homer describes the arrival of the divine messenger – Iris to the Trojans:

And now from Jove, with heavy tidings charged,  
wind-footed Iris to the Trojans came.

II, 786-787

Iris brings ἀγγελίη ἀλεγεινῆ, i. e. painful, sorrowful news. In this case one may assert that Iris is a divine messenger. Homer usually attributes the term ἄγγελος<sup>2</sup> only to the divine messengers and, accordingly, the news brought by Iris is ἀγγελίη. However, if we discuss other cases, such doubts will be removed. Book XVIII (17-19) describes the arrival of Antilochus to Achilles in order to announce the death of Patroclus. In this episode Homer uses the formative ἀγγελίη twice; once with the epithet ἀλεγεινῆ (painful) and then with the epithet λυγρή. The result of this notification is well-known. In this case it is obvious that ἀγγελίη refers to the news which does not necessarily come from god and it contains semantic which is similar to "information".

We have to mention that this combination of words (ἀγγελίη ἀλεγεινῆ and λυγρή ἀγγελίη) are used in *Iliad* several times and mostly it refers to the death of Patroclus.<sup>3</sup> However, in many other cases it can be used without an epithet and during the expression of completely non-tragic story. I. e. in Book XVI of *Odyssey* a messenger is sent to Penelope in order to notify the arrival of Telemachus (327ff). In Book XV Odysseus tells Eumeus about his desire to arrive in the castle and bring Telemachus ἀγγελίη about his father (312). There is no need to discuss other examples since it is obvious that in all these cases ἀγγελίη refers to the contemporary definition of "information" to certain extent.

We also have to mention very significant role of delivery and spread of information in Homeric epos, considering that the poems are large systems of information inspired from the Muses. This process is indirectly realized in the action when the fresh and actual notification is brought to the place of destination. I.e. the couriers bring certain information to Achilles (I, 325) which afterwards becomes the reason of activating the anger. In *Odyssey* Hermes informs Calypso about the decision of the gods (V, 97-115) which gives an impulse to the whole development of the poem.

The area of spreading information in Homeric epos is usually a forum. People might just gather for listening certain information and their gathering have official character. In this case their meeting can make legitimate decision. Homer usually describes this process by the phrase-

formula αὐτὰρ οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ ῥ' ἤγηρθεν ὀμηγερέες τ' ἐγένοντο. In the final scene of "Iliad" many people gather in Hector's funeral:<sup>4</sup>

The people again assembled,  
round the pyre of mighty Hector.

XXIV, 789-790

In *Iliad*, Book II (85ff ) Agamemnon gathers an army in order to notify them about his decision. His speech, i.e. the information he delivers to the army gives an impulse to the desire to return home. Odysseus addresses to the same gathering (II, 246 ff) and his speech makes an army to change the decision.

In *Odyssey* Telemachus is inspired by Athena-Mentes and decides to gather Ithaceans (II, 6 ff). The information he delivers on this gathering is enough for the Ithaceans to give him consent in order to go and look for his father, i.e. to legitimate him. In all the cases gathering of the people has a purpose of receive and spread the information or make a decision afterwards, based on this information.

In Homeric epos the information can also have paradigmatic character (exemplum). It might refer to the story which has already happened and is afterwards inserted in the speeches of the protagonists in order to make the speech more convincing. In this regard it is worth mentioning that in *Iliad* the centre of nearly all speeches with circular composition is such exemplum. This paradigm basically narrates the story which happened in the past. For example, while meeting Glaucos, Diomedes brings the story of Licurgos as a paradigm in order to raise an argument that "Gods should not be resisted" (VI, 130-140). In order to persuade Priam, Achilles tells the story of Niobe (XXIV, 602-617). Exemplum can also reflect the information which refers to the well-known event. I.e. in the second book Odysseus reminds the army, what happened in Aulis before the outbreak of the war (II, 303 ff).

Homer presents quite wide spectrum of carriers of the information. They might be: god – i. e. Iris, who announces the will of Zeus and other gods to mortals or immortals,<sup>5</sup> mortal – when Odysseus tells his adventure to Pheaks,<sup>6</sup> specially authorized courier – Talthibius,<sup>7</sup> ambassador – scene from *Illiad* Book IX,<sup>8</sup> spirit of the deceased – so-called νεκρία from *Odyssey* is interesting in this regard,<sup>9</sup> or the poet himself the illustrative example of which is Demodocus in *Odyssey*.<sup>10</sup>

The sign from god by which the human beings are tempted or warned can also deliver the information. It can also be expressed in the prediction of the prophet, natural phenomenon or other signs. In the second book Odysseus recalls the story of sacrifice which happened before the outbreak of the war, when the dragon crawled out from the sacral stone, swallowed eight nestlings with their mother and was afterwards hardened into stone by Zeus. This was the sign that, after nine years of fighting, in the tenth year Achaeans would be able to capture Troy (II, 303-332).

According to Homer the memory of human beings is the best savior of the information, which is illustrated in the address of Andromachus to Hector and mourn of Hector by Helen (VI, 407-439; XXIV, 762-775). They tell the past stories and recall the most vulnerable moments which happened to them. Genealogical tradition is also an important source of information, i. e. Glaucos represents the longest chain of his genealogy with five stages (VI, 145-211). Besides that, he tells the stories of his ancestors into details, since for him the information about his origin is mostly important.<sup>11</sup>

Inanimate object can also deliver the information, for example, completely ordinary object at first sight – an oar. In *Odyssey* the spirit of Elpenor, who is notable for his imperceptibility, asks Odysseus to return to Aiaia, bury his corpse, build a hill and stick an oar into the hill, which would be savior of Elpenor's memory. In fact, Odysseus comes back to Aiaia and fulfills his desire (*Odyssey*, XII, 9 – 15).

Work of art can also save the information. In this regard the shield of Achilles is very remarkable in *Iliad*, which is mostly magnificent example of Ekphrasis and provides the global process of multilateral interaction in micro-informative structure. The shield of Achilles is a work of art where the cosmic phenomena and oceanus are portrayed together with the world of mortals and basic elements of their existence (XVIII, 478-607). The pictures which are represented there contain much more than just an indication towards the events of a certain city.<sup>12</sup>

Muse is the basic source of poetical inspiration and, in fact, main informative database (if we use modern terminology) for the poet. He may ask her to inspire the whole poem, for example – anger of Achilles in *Iliad* (I, 1 ff), or story of the man who travelled far and wide in *Odyssey* (I, 1 ff), and also precise information concerning the details of certain episodes. In

the second book in the beginning of ship catalogue the poet addresses to the muses in a following manner:

Tell me now, ye Muses that have dwellings on Olympus -  
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  
and a voice unwearying, and though the heart within me were of bronze.

484-493

Accordingly we can conclude that Homer ranks the recipients and carriers of the information where the poet is on the top of the list, as he is the only one who can receive the information indirectly from the divine sphere and provide it to the audience in such a manner to please them greatly.<sup>13</sup>

After performing the song on the episode of Trojan War by Demodocus in *Odyssey*, Odysseus addresses to him:

Demodocus, I praise you above all mortal men,  
one taught by the Muse, Zeus' daughter, or perhaps by Apollo,  
for you sang the Achaeans' fate with truth and feeling,  
all of their actions and their suffering, all the efforts they exerted,  
as if you had been there, or heard it from one who was.

Poet is the highest expression of delivering the information for Homer, he is a model for other human beings and therefore Alcinous, fascinated by the narration of Odysseus, tells to him:

You have told us your adventures the skilfulness of a bard.

XI, 368

On the other hand, however skillful the ordinary narrator can be in terms of telling a story, there is one big difference between him and a bard – it has been mentioned that Odysseus and the others “have one basic difference from the bards: the narration of the former is either documentary reflection of the event or invented story usually based on the principle of delivering the information. In this case the protagonist can amaze an interlocutor or listener with the volume of knowledge as well as with fascinating manner of narration. However, he can not please them. His narration is, in well as with fascinating manner of narration. However,

he can not please them. His narration is, in the best case, fascinating transmission of the information which can be listened only once. This is not an artistic information which causes aesthetic pleasure and can be listened many times. The ability of granting artificial form to the information, developing and generalizing it and reviving the protagonists of usual stories is the gift of the Muse."<sup>14</sup>

Actually in the address of Odysseus to Demodocus it is underlined that in the song, which is performed by Demodocus apparently not for the first time, the story of Achaeans is revived in a manner that it can make the listeners cry, being excited and pleased. However, the information delivered by the poet has one more important function: it grants immortality to the events and protagonists and the song is transmitted from generation to generation. Therefore the protagonists of Homeric epos are worried that the information about their unworthy behavior can be delivered to the future generations as well.

Thus far it can be concluded that Homeric epos provides the forms of saving and spread of information which are typical for the everyday life, on one hand, and which guarantees the long-term saving of the information, on the other. It is genealogical memory which saves the information on the ancestors. Basic form of granting immortality to the information is its fixation and expression through works of art and, first of all – by means of poetry. It demonstrates the importance of the culture which we can nominate as “commemorate culture” in Homeric epos, which has become essential, at first, for the ancient civilization and, later on – for the whole European civilization.

#### **Bibliography:**

- › 1. Langenscheidt's dictionary explained as as the equivalent of an information.
- › 2. For a review cf. Dularidze T., *The Phenomenon of Mission in Homeric Epos*, Messenger, 2014.
- › 3. Cf. Ebeling H., *Lexicon Homericum*, Lipsiae 1985, 8.
- › 4. About the using this formule cf: Holkeskamp K. J., *Agorai bei Homer in: Volk und Verfassung im vorhellenistischen Griechenland. Beiträge auf dem Symposium zu Ehren von Karl-Wilhelm Welwei (Bohum, 1.-2. März 1996)*, hrsg. Von W. Eder und K. J. Holkeskamp, Stuttgart 1997, 1-19; Cf: *Homers Iliad*, Gesamtkommentar, Hrsg. J. Latacz. Bd. I. 1. Gesang, 51.
- › 5. For the confirmation of extracts in Homer's text cf: op. cit. 601.
- › 6. So-called “Pheacia” in *Odyssey* begins from the Book VI.

- › 7. About Talthibios and the institute of courier cf. Dularidze T., op. cit. 19 ff. Cf: Latacz, op. cit. 120.
- › 8. For the overview of this scene cf. Dularidze T., op. cit. 22 ff.
- › 9. Book XI.
- › 10. He is acting in the episode of so-called "Pheacia".
- › 11. For the detailed analysis cf: Nizharadze K., *Scenes from Iliad*, Tbilisi 2014, 76ff.
- › 12. About this scene cf: op. cit. 170ff.
- › 13. For the role of poet cf: Гордезиани Р., Проблемы гомеровского эпоса, Тбилиси 1978, 345 ff.
- › 14. Cf: Гордезиани Р., 1978, 343.

### **Abstract**

Similar to other areas of Greek culture, Homer can be considered as a teacher for the Greeks in terms of forming their attitude towards information. In this report I discussed how far did Homer go in terms of classification of the information, defining its destination and meaning as well as ranking the types of information. The variety of formatives associated to Homer can be connected to the information such as *λόγος* – a word, *ᾠδή* – a song etc. However there is one term used by Homer – *ἀγγελία* – which, in certain contexts, utterly contains the understanding similar to the one meant in the term "information" from nowadays perspective. Although Homer grants several meanings to it (an information, a notification), the most important between them is the one which is mostly close to the term "information". Homeric epos provides the forms of saving and spread of information which are typical for the everyday life, on one hand, and which guarantees the long-term saving of the information, on the other. It is genealogical memory which saves the information on the ancestors. Basic form of granting immortality to the information is its fixation and expression through works of art and, first of all – by means of poetry. It demonstrates the importance of the culture which we can nominate as "commemorate culture" in Homeric epos, which has become essential, at first, for the ancient civilization and, later on – for the whole European civilization.