

Hesiodic *Works and Days*

Translated by Gregory Nagy

¹Muses of Pieria, you who make glory [*kleos*] with your songs,
²come and tell of Zeus, making a song about your father,
³on account of whom there are mortals both unworthy of talk and worthy,
⁴both worth speaking of and not—all on account of great Zeus.

5 Easily he gives power, and just as easily he ruins the powerful.

⁶Easily he diminishes the distinguished, and magnifies the undistinguished.

⁷Easily he makes straight the crooked and withers the overweening

⁸—Zeus, the one who thunders on high, who lives in the highest abode.

⁹Heed me, seeing and hearing as you do, and with justice [*dikē*] make straight [*ithunein*] the divine laws [*themis* plural].

10 While you do that, I am ready to tell genuine [*etētuma*] things to Perses.

So then, the *genos* of the *Erides* was not a single one, but on Earth

there are two of them. One is to be praised when a person takes note in his *noos*,

but the other is to be blamed. They have the opposite kinds of *thūmos*.

One of them promotes evil war and strife,

15 the wretched one! No mortal loves this one, but, by necessity,

in accord with the will of the immortals, humans give *tīmē* to this burdensome *Eris*.

As for the other one, she was the first of the two to be born of dark Night.

And Zeus, seated on high, abiding in the aether, made her to be

far better for men, rooted in Earth as she is.

20 She rouses even the resourceless person to work.

For when one man who needs work looks at another man

who is rich, who strives to plow, to plant,
to keep his household in order, then it is that neighbor envies neighbor,
as the rich man is striving for his wealth. This *Eris* is good for mortals.

25 Potter envies potter, carpenter envies carpenter.

Beggar envies beggar, singer envies singer.

You, Perses, must place these things in your *thūmos*.

Do not let the *Eris* who rejoices at others' misfortunes keep your *thūmos* away
from work,

as you skulk about looking and listening for occasions of quarreling [*neikea*] in
the *agorā*.

30 The *hōrā* for quarreling [*neikea*] and *agorai* is a short one indeed

for anyone who does not have lasting supplies of life-sustenance

as provided by the *hōrai*. The Earth bears the sustenance, which is the grain of
Demeter.

Feeding on this sustenance to the point of *koros*, you are ready to promote
quarreling [*neikea*] and strife

over the property of others. Well, you will not be getting a second chance

35 to do what you are now doing. But come, let us now sort out [*dia- krinesthai*] for
ourselves the quarrel [*neikos*],

³⁶with straight judgments [*dikai*], which are the best when they come from Zeus.

Earlier, we divided up our inheritance, and then you seized and took away

much more than was yours, thus increasing the glory of kings

who devour gifts, who voluntarily render this *dikē*.

40 They are inept [*nēpioi*], not knowing how much the half is more than the total

or how much of a good thing there is to be found in mallow or asphodel.

The gods had hidden away the true means of livelihood for humankind, and they
still keep it that way.

If it were otherwise, it would be easy for you to do in just one day all the work
you need to do,

and have enough to last you a year, idle though you would be.

45 Right away, you could store your steering-oar over the fireplace,
and what you had plowed with your oxen or hard-working mules could go to waste.

But Zeus hid it [the true means of livelihood for humankind], angry in his thoughts,

because Prometheus, with crooked plans, deceived him.

For that reason he [Zeus] devised plans that were to be baneful for humankind.

50 And he [Zeus] hid fire. But [deceiving Zeus again] the good son of Iapetos
[Prometheus]

stole it for humankind from Zeus the Planner

inside a hollow fennel-stalk, escaping the notice of Zeus the Thunderer.

Angered at him, Zeus, the cloud-gatherer, spoke:

“Son of Iapetos, knowing more schemes than anyone else,

55 you rejoice over stealing the fire and over deceiving my thinking.

But a great pain awaits both you and future mankind.

To make up for the fire, I will give them an evil thing, in which they may all
take their delight in their hearts, embracing this evil thing of their own making.”

Thus spoke the father of men and gods, and he laughed out loud.

60 Then he ordered Hephaistos, renowned all over, to shape
some wet clay as soon as possible, and to put into it a human voice
and strength, and to make it look like the immortal goddesses,
with the beautiful and lovely appearance of a virgin. And he ordered Athena
to teach her own craft to her, weaving a very intricate web.

65 And he ordered Aphrodite to shed golden charm over her head;
also harsh longing, and anxieties that eat away at the limbs.

And he ordered Hermes, the messenger and Argos-killer,

to put inside her an intent that is doglike and a temperament that is stealthy.

Zeus spoke, and the gods obeyed the Lord Son of Kronos.

70 Right away the famed Lame One shaped out of the clay of the Earth

something that looked like a comely virgin—all on account of the will of Zeus, son of Kronos.

Athena dressed her and tied her girdle, adorning her.

And the goddesses who are named *Kharites* [Graces], as well as the Lady Peithō [Persuasion],

placed golden necklaces on its skin, and the *Hōrai*,

75 with their beautiful hair, plaited springtime garlands around her head.

Pallas Athena placed on her skin every manner of ornament [*kosmos*].

And within her breast the messenger and Argos-killer fashioned

falsehoods [*pseudea*], crafty words, and a stealthy disposition,

according to the plans of Zeus the loud-thunderer. And the messenger of the gods

80 put inside her a voice, and he called this woman

Pandōrā, because all the gods who abide in Olympus

gave her as a gift [*dōron*], a pain for grain-eating men.

But when the gods completed this deception of sheer doom, against which there is no remedy,

Father Zeus sent the famed Argos-killer to Epimetheus,

85 the swift messenger of the gods, bringing the gift [*dōron*]. Nor did Epimetheus

take notice [verb *phrazesthai*] how Prometheus had told him never to accept a gift [*dōron*]

from Zeus the Olympian, but to send it

right back, lest an evil thing happen to mortals.

But he [Epimetheus] accepted it, and only then did he take note in his *noos* that he had an evil thing on his hands.

90 Before this, the various kinds of humanity lived on earth

without evils and without harsh labor,

92 without wretched diseases that give disasters to men.

94 But the woman took the great lid off the jar

95 and scattered what was inside. She devised baneful anxieties for humankind.

The only thing that stayed within the unbreakable contours of the jar was *Elpis* [Hope].

It did not fly out.

Before it could, she put back the lid on top of the jar,

according to the plans of aegis-bearing Zeus, the cloud-gatherer.

100 But as for the other things, countless baneful things, they are randomly scattered all over humankind.

Full is the earth of evils, full is the sea.

Diseases for humans are a day-to-day thing. Every night,

they wander about at random, bringing evils upon mortals

silently—for Zeus had taken away their voice.

105 So it is that there is no way to elude the intent [*noos*] of Zeus.

Now, if you are so disposed, I shall sum up for you another thing I have to say.

I shall do it well, and with expertise, and you should put it in your thoughts.

Here it is: the gods and mortal humans have the same origins.

In the very beginning, a Golden Generation of shining-faced humans

110 was made by the immortals who abide in Olympian homes.

They were in the time of Kronos, when he was king over the sky.

They lived like gods, having a *thūmos* without anxieties,

without labor and woe. Nor did wretched old age

weigh upon them. Their feet and hands did not change,

115 and they had good times [verb *terpesthai*] at feasts [*thaliai*], exempt from all evils.

And when they died, it was as if they were overcome by sleep. All manner of good things [*esthla*]

belonged to them. And the grain-giving [root *dōr-*] earth, without prompting, bore produce aplenty. And they, placidly

and in serenity [*hēsukhiā*], lived off their fields, amidst much material wealth.

120 They were rich in flocks, *philoī* to the blessed gods.

¹²² And they [= the Golden Generation of humankind] are superhumans [*daimones*].

They exist because of the Will of Zeus.

¹²³ They are the good, the earthbound [*epi-khthonioi*], the guardians of mortal humans.

¹²⁴ They guard acts of justice [*dikē*] and they guard against wretched acts of evil.

125 Enveloped in mist, they roam everywhere throughout the earth.

¹²⁶ They are givers of prosperity. And they had this as a privilege [*geras*], a kingly one [*basilēion*].

¹²⁷ Then a second Generation, a much worse one, a later one,

¹²⁸ the Silver, was made by the gods who abide in their Olympian homes.

¹²⁹ They were like the Golden one neither in their nature nor in their power of perception [*noēma*].

130 As a boy, each was be raised for a hundred years by dear mother,

¹³¹ each one was playing around, quite inept [*nēpios*], at home.

¹³² But when the time of maturing [*hēbân*] and the full measure of maturity [*hēbē*] arrived,

¹³³ they lived only for a very short time, suffering pains [*algea*]

¹³⁴ for their acts of heedlessness [*aphradiai*],¹ since they could not keep overweening *hubris*

135 away from each other, and they were not willing to care for [*therapeuein*] the immortal gods,

¹³⁶ not willing at all, nor were they willing to make sacrifice on the sacred altars

of the blessed [*makares*] gods,

¹³⁷ the way humans are required by cosmic law [*themis*] to behave, each group according to its own customs. Anyway, they too, when the time came,

¹³⁸ were hidden away by Zeus son of Kronos. He was angry at them because they did not give honors [*tīmai*],

¹³⁹ no they did not, to the blessed [*makares*] gods who possess Olympus.

140 But when the earth covered over this generation [*genos*] as well

¹⁴¹ —and they are called the blessed [*makares*],² abiding below the earth [*hupokhthonioi*],³ mortals that they are,

¹⁴² the Second Ones, though they too [like the First Ones, who are the Golden Generation] get their share of honor [*tīmē*].

¹⁴³ And Zeus the father made another Generation of mortal men, the Third.

¹⁴⁴ He made it of Bronze, not at all the like the Silver.

145 A Generation born from ash trees, violent and terrible. Their minds were set on the woeful deeds of Arēs

¹⁴⁶ and on acts of hubris. Grain

¹⁴⁷ they did not eat, but their hard-dispositioned heart [*thūmos*] was made of hard rock.

¹⁴⁸ They were forbidding: they had great force [*biē*] and overpowering hands

¹⁴⁹ growing out of their shoulders, with firm foundations for limbs.

150 Their implements were bronze, their houses were bronze,

¹⁵¹ and they did their work with bronze. There was no black iron.

¹⁵² And they were wiped out when they killed each other with their own hands,

¹⁵³ and went nameless to the dank house of chill Hādēs,

¹⁵⁴ yes, nameless [*nōnumnoi*]! Death still took them, terrifying as they were,

155 yes, black Death took them, and they left behind them the bright light of the Sun.

¹⁵⁶ But when this Generation too was covered over by the earth,

¹⁵⁷ Zeus made yet another Generation on earth, which nurtures many, a fourth one.

¹⁵⁸ This one, by contrast [with the third], was just [*dikaion*]. It was better.

¹⁵⁹ It was the godlike generation of men who were heroes [*hērōes*], who are called

160 demigods [*hēmi-theoi*]; they are the previous generation [= previous to ours] who lived throughout the boundless earth.

¹⁶¹ These [*demigods*] were overcome by evil war and the terrible din of battle.

¹⁶² Some died at the walls of seven-gated Thebes, the land of Kadmos,

¹⁶³ as they fought over the sheep of Oedipus.

¹⁶⁴ Others were taken away by war over the great yawning stretches of sea

165 to Troy, all on account of Helen with the beautiful hair.

¹⁶⁶ Then they [= this Generation]⁴ were covered over by the finality of death.

¹⁶⁷ But they received, apart from other humans, a life and a place to live

¹⁶⁸ from Zeus the son of Kronos, who translated them to the edges of the earth,

¹⁶⁹ far away from the immortal gods. And Kronos is king over them.⁵

170 And they live with a carefree heart [*thūmos*]

¹⁷¹ on the Islands of the Blessed [*Nēsoi Makarōn*] on the banks of the deep-swirling river Okeanos,

¹⁷² blessed [*olbioi*] heroes [*hērōes*] that they are, and for them there is a honey-sweet harvest [*karpos*]

¹⁷³ that comes to fruition three times each year, produced by the life-giving land.

¹⁷⁴ If only I did not have to be in the company of the Fifth Generation

175 of men, and if only I had died before it [= the Fifth Generation] or been born after it,

¹⁷⁶ since now is the time of the Iron Generation. What will now happen is that men will not even have a day or night

free from toil and suffering.

They will be worn down, and the gods will give harsh cares.

Still, despite all this, even they will have some good mixed in with the bad.

- 180 But Zeus will destroy even this Generation of mortal men,
when the time comes that children will be born with gray hair at their temples.
This will be a time when the father will not have equanimity with his children,
nor the children with their father,
nor the guest [*xenos*] with his host, nor comrade with comrade.
Nor will a brother be *philos*, as he had been before.

- 185 Once men grow old, their sons will give them no *tīmē*.
They will reproach their parents, shouting at them with harsh words.
Wretches! Men who do not know about the retribution of the gods! Such men
would not even give to their aging parents the honor that is their due.
These deciders of *dikē* by violence! They will destroy each other's cities.

- 190 There will be no appreciation [*kharis*] for the man who swears correctly, for the
man of *dikē*,
for the *agathos* man. Instead, it will be the doer of evil deeds and the man of
hubris
that they will give *tīmē* to. In the grip of violence will be *dikē* and *aidōs*.
The inferior man will harm the superior one,
speaking with crooked words, under oath.

- 195 A constant companion of all of wretched humankind will be Envy,
the badmouthing one, the one that delights over the misfortunes of others, the
one with the hateful face.
And then, flying off to Olympus, away from the broad earth,
covering their beautiful complexion with white veils,
heading for the race of immortals and leaving humans behind,

- 200 *Aidōs* and *Nemesis* will depart. What will be left behind are baneful pains
for mortal humans. And there will be nothing to ward off evil.

Now I will tell an *ainos* to kings, discerning as they presumably are.

This is what the hawk said to the nightingale, the one with the patterned voice, grasping her in his talons, carrying her far off into the clouds.

205 She in the meantime, pierced by the curved talons,

was lamenting. But he spoke to her from his position of superior power:

“What *daimōn* makes you cry out this way? One who is far more powerful holds you fast.

You will go wherever I take you, singer [poet] that you are.

I can do what I wish with you: either make a meal out of you or let you go.

210 Foolish is the one who is ready to stand up to those who are more powerful.

Such a person is deprived of victory, suffering pains in addition to the disgrace of defeat.”

So spoke the swift-flying hawk, the long-winged bird.

You, Perses, must listen to *dikē*, and you must not make *hubris* thrive.

For *hubris* is bad for the wretched mortal. A noble [*esthlos*] man cannot

215 easily bear the burden, and he is weighed down under it [*hubris*],

incurring *Atai*. It is better to go the other way,

towards the things of *dikē*. The *dikē* comes out prevailing over *hubris*

in the end. The inept [*nēpios*] person learns only by going through the experience.

Horkos [‘Oath’ personified] runs in pursuit, catching up with crooked *dikai*,

220 and there is a clamor as *Dikē* is dragged off by men who take her wherever they want,

devourers of gifts, as they sort out, with crooked *dikai*, what is or is not *themis*.

Weeping, she [*Dikē*] pursues the city and the haunts of its inhabitants.

Invisible, she brings evil upon men

who exile her and apportion her so as to make her crooked.

- 225 As for those who render straight *dikai* for *xenoi* and for local people alike,
and who do not veer away from what is *dikaion*,
for them, their city flourishes, and the inhabitants blossom.
Peace, the nurturer of young men, ranges about the land, and never do they
have
wretched war manifested for them by Zeus who sees far and wide.
- 230 Men who have straight *dikē* are never visited by Hunger
or by *atē*. Instead, at feasts, they reap the rewards of the works that they
industriously cared about.
For them the earth bears much life-sustenance. On the mountains, the oak tree
bears acorns at the top and bees in the middle.
Their wooly sheep are laden with fleeces.
- 235 Their wives bear children resembling their fathers.
They flourish with all good things, without fail. And they do not have to find their
way home
on ships, but the grain-giving land bears fruit.
But those who have evil *hubris* and wanton deeds on their minds
for them the son of Kronos, wide-seeing Zeus, marks out *dikē*.
- 240 Many times it happens that an entire *polis* suffers the consequences on account
of just one evil man
who transgresses and plans reckless deeds.
For these men the son of Kronos brings down from the skies a great disaster,
famine along with pestilence. And the people waste away.
Their women do not give birth, and their households are depleted—
- 245 all on account of the plans of Zeus the Olympian. There will be a time when
Zeus will destroy their vast host of fighting men. Or he can exact retribution
against them by destroying their city-walls
or their ships sailing over the *pontos*.

You kings! Mark well, all of you,

this *dikē*. For nearby and present among humankind

250 are the immortals, and they take note of those who, with crooked *dikai*,
oppress each other, not caring about the retribution of the gods.

They are countless—no, more, they are three times countless—ranging all over
the earth, nurturer of many.

They are the immortal ones, coming from Zeus, guardians [*phulakes*] of mortal
men,

who watch over the *dikai* and guard against reckless deeds.

255 They are invisible, ranging everywhere over the land.

Then there is the virgin *Dikē*, born of Zeus.

She has great esteem and *aidōs* among the gods who abide in Olympus.

Whenever someone does her harm, using crooked words,

right away she takes her place at the side of Zeus son of Kronos,

260 and she proclaims the *noos* of men that is without *dikē*, with the result that the
people have to pay retribution

for the deeds of recklessness committed by their kings. These kings, having
baneful thoughts in their *noos*,

pronounce *dikai* in a crooked way, making them veer and go astray.

You kings! Guard against these things and make straight your words,

you devourers of gifts! And put crooked *dikai* out of your mind completely.

265 The man who plans misfortune for another man is planning misfortune for
himself.

A bad plan is the worst plan for the one who planned it.

The Eye of Zeus sees all and takes note of all in his *noos*.

If he so wishes, he will watch over the present situation. It does not escape his
notice

what kind of *dikē* this present *dikē* is that the *polis* holds within itself.

270 The way things are now, I would not want myself or a son of mine to be a man

of *dikē* in my dealings with men—

if it were true that a man of no *dikē* [justice] would have a *dikē* [judgment] going more his way—

that is, if it were true that it is a misfortune to be a man of *dikē*.

But my hope is that such a state of affairs has not yet been brought to pass by Zeus the Planner.⁶

Perses! I call on you to put these things in your mind.

275 Heed *dikē*, and put *biē* completely out of your mind.

For this way [of *biē*] is the norm that Zeus has imposed
on the fish and beasts and winged birds,

that is, to eat each other. For they have no *dikē*.

But to humans he gave *dikē*, which is by far the best.

280 For if anyone stands ready to speak publicly the things of *dikē*,

with full awareness,⁷ to him Zeus grants bliss [*olbos*].

But whoever knowingly swears a false oath as he bears witness,

lying, such a man harms *dikē*, bringing about a damage that cannot be compensated.

The future lineage of such a man will be left darkened over.

285 But the future lineage of a man who swears properly will be superior.

Inept [*nēpios*] Perses! As I speak to you, I have good thoughts in my *noos* towards you.

To be evil is an easy choice, and there are many ways to do it.

The way of evil is smooth and accessible.

But the immortal gods have put between them and us the sweat that goes with *aretē*.

290 The path towards it [*aretē*] is long and steep.

It is rough at first, but, as it reaches the top,

it finally becomes easy, hard as it was before.

The best man is the one who, unlike the others, takes note of everything in his *noos*,

marking well what is for the best in the future and in the fulfillment of time.

295 Noble [*esthlos*] is he who puts his trust in one who speaks what is genuine.

But whoever does not think with his *noos* nor listens to one who does,

taking it to his *thūmos*, such a man is worthless.

Keep in mind what I urge you to do,

Perses, and get to work, you offshoot of Zeus, so that Hunger

300 may hate you, and that you may be loved by Demeter with the beautiful garlands,

the honorable one, and that she may fill your granary with life-sustenance.

Hunger is the natural companion of the utterly idle man.

Both gods and men begrudge helping such a man who is idle

in his life. He is similar in temperament to the stingless drones

305 who, idle as they are, waste away the hard work of the bees,

eating it all up. Let it be *philon* for you to make arrangements in moderation,

so that your granaries may be filled with seasonal life-sustenance.

It is from working that men get many sheep and wealth.

And it is by working that a man becomes more *philos* than other men to the immortals

310 and to mortals. They all hate the idle.

Working is no cause for reproach [*oneidos*]. Not working is cause for *oneidos*.

If you do work, the idle man will envy you

as you get wealthy. Your wealth is attended by *aretē* and god-given glory [*kudos*].

Whatever kind of *daimōn* you have, working is the better way,

315 if only you would turn your deranged *thūmos* away from the property of others

and directed it towards work, as I urge you.

There is no genuine *aidōs* in looking after the needs of a man who is wanting.

Aidōs can be of great harm or benefit to men.

Aidōs goes with being poor. Brazenness goes with being wealthy.

320 Wealth is not to be seized by force. The god-given things of life are by far better.

For if someone takes hold of great wealth by force and violence,

or robs it by way of the tongue, as often

happens, whenever the sense for personal gain leads the *noos* of humans astray,

as the sense of Dishonorableness [*An-aideia*] drives away the sense of Honorableness [*Aidōs*],

325 then the gods, with the greatest of ease, blot over such a man, and they deplete his household,

and wealth stays with him for but a short time.

And whoever treats badly the suppliant and the *xenos* as well,

or whoever enters the bed of his brother,

sleeping secretly with the brother's wife, thus committing an act that veers from what is right,

330 or whoever heedlessly wrongs orphans,

or whoever directs against his own aged father at the threshold of old age

harsh words of quarreling [*neikos*],

either Zeus himself manifests his anger at such a man, or, in the end,

the man pays a harsh penalty in retribution.

335 But you should keep your deranged *thūmos* completely away from these things,

and, to the best of your ability, you must make sacrifice to the immortal gods,

in a holy and pure fashion, and you must burn splendid thigh-portions.

On other occasions, you must supplicate them with libations and with burnt offerings,

both when you go to bed and when the sacred light of dawn comes,
340 so that they may have a propitious heart and *thūmos* towards you.

This way, you will be buying the arable land of others, not the other way around.

Invite for a feast the man who is *philos* to you; but the man who is an enemy [*ekhthros*], let him go.

The man who is most important to invite is the one who lives nearest to you.

For if some misfortune happens in any given place,
345 the neighbors come over in haste, ungirt, but the in-laws come girt.

A bad neighbor is as much a pain as a good one is a great boon.

Whoever has the good fortune to have a good neighbor has the good fortune of having *tīmē*.

You will never lose as much as an ox if you have a good neighbor.

Have the grain measured out properly when you borrow from a neighbor, and pay it back properly
350 in the same measure or even better, if you can.

This way, when you are in need, you can find something to rely on.

Do not seek personal gain that is evil. Evil personal gain leads to some kind of *atē* or other.

Be *philos* to the one who is *philos* to you, and seek the company of those who seek yours.

Give to the one who would give to you, and do not give to the one who would not.

355 One gives to the giver, and gives not to the one who gives not.

The act of Giving [*Dōs*] is good, while the act of Taking forcibly [*Harpax*] is bad, the giver of death.

Whoever willingly gives a gift, no matter how great,
rejoices in the giving and takes pleasure in his *thūmos*.

But the man who seizes something [instead of having it as a gift], yielding to dishonorableness [*anaideia*],
360 no matter how small it is, it will freeze over the heart [of the person who is

being robbed].

For even if you are storing things up just bit by bit,
even that would become a big thing if you do it often.

But whoever adds something to what is already there wards off burning-bright
hunger.

Whatever is already stored up at home will not take care of a man.

365 At home it is better [for storing up more things], for outside it is risky.

It is a good thing to take from what is at hand, and it is a pain for the *thūmos*
to be without what is no longer at hand. And I urge you to take note of these
things.

Take your fill when the jar [of wine] is up to the top or nearing the bottom,
and be sparing in the middle. Thrift is dreadful when you reach the bottom.

370 Let the wages that you agree upon be adequate for a man who is *philos* to you.

But get a witness—you can do it with a smile—even if you are dealing with your
own brother.

Men have been undone both by being trusting and by not being so.

Let not a woman who dresses to show off her behind deceive your *noos*, cajoling
you with her crafty words, ready to infest your granary.

375 Whoever puts his trust in a woman puts his trust in tricksters.

It is the best thing to have an only child to maintain the ancestral household.

That is the way that wealth can increase in the house.

Then, as an old man, you should leave behind one more young boy

[apparently an only grandson] by the time you die.

But Zeus, if he wants to, can easily give untold wealth to a greater number of
people.

380 The more attention to work there is by more people, the greater the surplus.

If the *thūmos* within your *phrenes* yearns for wealth,

this is the way you should work, working on tasks one after another.

When the Pleiades rise above the horizon [just before sunrise],
that is the time to start reaping. When they set [just before sunrise], start
plowing.

385 They are hidden for forty nights and forty days.

As that time of the year comes around again,
they appear for the first time when the iron [used for reaping] is getting
sharpened.

This is the way it is done on the plains. But it is near the sea
that others live, while still others live in the glens of hillsides,

390 far away from the waves of the sea, abiding on a rich land.

When you sow, do it with your clothes stripped off. The same goes for when you
drive your oxen as you plow.

And for when you reap. Do this if you want all the produce that you gather in
from Demeter to be in season, so that all the crops
may each grow in season. This way, you will avoid being in need in the future,

395 having to go begging to the households of others—and accomplishing nothing.

Just the way it is now, as you come to me. But I will not give you anything. Thus
I will add nothing to what you got in the first place.

Nothing more will be measured out for you. Get to work, you inept [*nēpios*]
Perses!

Get to work on the tasks that the gods have marked out for humans,
so that you will never have to feel pain in your *thūmos* over your children and
your wife

400 as you go looking for life-sustenance by approaching one neighbor after the
next, and they will not care.

For I can easily imagine that you could succeed twice, or maybe even three
times.

But if you keep on importuning them,

you will not succeed in your quest. You can talk all you want, and it will be in
vain.

No matter how your words range from one direction to the next, you will not succeed. So I urge you

to make plans to pay off your debts and to ward off hunger.

405 The first thing is to have a farmhouse with a woman and an ox for plowing.

I do not mean a wife. I mean a woman that you own as a slave. Such a woman can help out while you plow with the oxen.

And you must make sure that you have all the property that you need in the household.

This way, you will not have to ask someone else to lend you this or that. While you are trying to talk someone into it who is unwilling,

the season will pass you by and your yield will be depleted.

410 And do not put things off till the next day or the day after.

For a man who is an idle worker will not fill his granary

by putting things off. Attention to your work will make the yield increase.

The man who postpones work is always wrestling with the Spirits of *atē*.

When the power of the searing sun abates,

415 with its burning heat that makes men sweat, and when the autumn rains

of mighty Zeus arrive, as the human complexion turns

much lighter, and as the constellation Sirius

starts to travel much less over the heads of death-bound mortals

and starts to take much more enjoyment from the night,

420 then it is that wood is most worm-free when it is cut,

as the leaves fall to the earth from the branches.

Then it is that you should be mindful [*memnēmenos*] to cut wood, which is now the seasonal task.

Then you can cut out a three-foot length for a mortar and a three-cubit length for a pestle,

and a seven-foot length for an axle. That is the way that is fitting.

425 And if you make it eight feet, then you can cut out of it the head of a mallet.

Cut out a three-span length for the segment of an oxcart the length of ten quarter-feet.

There are also many kinds of wood used for bent shapes. When you find a tree with the shape of a plow-base,

take it right home, whether you find it on a mountainside or in the field, especially if it is holm-oak. Which is the most sturdy for oxen to plow with,

430 when the servant of Athena [a carpenter] fixes it to the stock of the plow with pegs and fastens it to the yoke-pole.

And take the trouble to have two plows in the household,

one with a natural curve and another jointed into a curve. It is better this way.

This way, if you break the one, you have the other to hitch up to your oxen.

435 Yoke-poles made of laurel or elm-wood are the most worm-free.

The same goes for stocks made of oak and for plow-bases made of holm-oak. As for oxen, get two males nine years old.

Their strength cannot be worn down,

since they are in their prime. They will be the best to do work with.

They will not get into a fight with each other right in the middle of plowing,

440 breaking the plow and making futile all the work done up to then.

Let the oxen be driven by a sturdy man of forty years.

For his meal, let him eat a loaf scored into eight portions and broken into four.

Let him make the furrow straight, paying close attention to his work

and not taking sidelong glances at his peers. Instead, let him keep

445 his *thūmos* on his work. Someone else no younger than he would be just right for spreading the grain around, avoiding oversowing.

A younger man would let his attention flutter towards his peers.

Mark well when you hear the sound of the crane,

sending forth her call from above, the same time every year.

450 She brings the *sēma* for plowing every year; and she marks

the season of rainy winter. And it stings the heart of the man who does not own oxen.

Then it is that you should give fodder to the horned oxen in their stalls.

For it is easy to say: "Give me two oxen and an oxcart."

But it is easy to say no in reply: "There is work here to be done by my oxen."

455 A man who fancies that he is rich will say: "Well then, build an oxcart!"

How inept he is! He does not even know that it takes a hundred pieces of wood to build an oxcart.

The thing is to take care of first things first and to put one's own house in order.

When the time for plowing reveals itself for mortal men,

everyone must set out to work, servants and master alike,

460 plowing dry or moist land, according to the season.

Get to work early, so that your fields will yield produce in plenty.

Work over your fields in the spring. But fallow land broken up in the summer will not disappoint you.

Sow on fallow land when it is still loose [from the rain].

Fallow land can be a talisman, warding off disaster.

465 Pray to Zeus of the Underground, and to holy Demeter,

that the sacred grain of Demeter may become heavy with ripeness,

as you begin the plowing, laying hold of the end of the plow-handle

and coming down on the backs of your oxen with a switch

as they pull at the yoke-pole with their strappings. Standing a bit further back,

470 the servant who has the mattock should give the birds grief

as he makes the seed disappear inside the earth. Good management is the best thing

for mortal men, while bad management is the worst.

So also with the grapes: they will be weighed down, teeming with their juices,
if the Olympian one himself grants a good ripening.

475 Then you can clear your wine-jars of cobwebs. And I expect that you

will take pleasure as you partake of the life-sustenance that is within your household.

And so you will be well off as you approach gray springtime, and you will not be looking wistfully in the direction of others. Instead, it will be the other person who will be in need of your help.

But if you plow the Zeus-given earth at the [winter] solstice,

480 you will reap squatting, having little to grasp in your hand,

binding the sheaves the wrong way. You will be covered with dust, an unhappy man.

You could fit into a basket everything you have to bring back. Few people indeed will marvel at you.

The *noos* of Zeus is different at different times,

and it is hard for mortal men to take note of it in their *noos*.

485 For if you plow late, you could have this remedy that I will now tell you.

When the cuckoo first sounds its call amidst the leaves of the oak tree,

bringing pleasure to mortals throughout the boundless earth,

then it is that Zeus might rain on the third day, and it might not stop

till the water rises to a point where it does not quite spill over inside the imprint of an ox's hoof.

490 And then it is that the one who plows late will compete with the early.

Keep all this well in your *thūmos*, and do not fail to mark

the gray spring, when it comes, and the rain in season.

Pass by and do not go inside the abode of the smith and its heated lounge

in the season of winter, when the cold keeps men from their work in the field.

495 For it is at this time that a man who is not idle can make his household greatly thrive.

This way, the resourcelessness of evil winter will not seize you

with poverty, as you hold your emaciated hand down on your swollen foot.⁸

Many are the evils that an idle man, who keeps expecting that his empty hope will become the real thing,

in want of life-sustenance, takes to his *thūmos*.

It is not a real hope that cares for a man who is in need,

500 as he sits around in a lounge while he has no adequate means.

Point out to your servants, even in the middle of the summer:

“Summer will not last forever; build your granaries.”

As for the month of Lenaion, bad days, all of them bad enough to take the hide off an ox,

505 make sure you take measures against it, along with its frosts,

which are wretched when the wind Boreas blows over the land,

which rushes across horse-breeding Thrace and then stirs up the wide sea with a blast. And the earth and the forest roar.

Many oaks with their leaves on high, and many a thick fir

510 does it bring crashing down to earth, nourisher of many, in mountain glens,

as it sets down upon them while the whole immense forest resounds.

The beasts shudder, putting their tails under their genitals,

even those that have fur covering their skin. Even for them

the cold one [Boreas] blows right through them, shaggy-chested though they are.

515 He [Boreas] goes right through even the hide of an ox; even that will not stop it.

He blows through the fine hair of a goat. But not at all through the fleeces of sheep,

because their wool is thick:

the force of the wind Boreas does not blow through them. But it makes the old man all curved over.

And yet it does not blow through a tender-skinned maiden,

520 who stays indoors with her *philē* mother.

She has not yet learned the works of golden Aphrodite.

There she is: she has washed well her tender skin and anointed it with rich olive oil,

as she is lying down in the inner room of the household

on a winter's day—while the Boneless One gnaws at his own foot

525 in his fireless house and wretched haunts.⁹

The sun shows him no range to head towards.

Instead, it [the sun] comes and goes over the community and the city of dark-skinned men.

But it shines more tardily for all the Hellenes.

Then it is that the creatures of the forest, horned and unhorned alike,

530 gnash their teeth pitifully as they flee through the woods of the glens.

For all of them there is one thing in their *phrenes*:

how to find some cover in cozy nooks

in a hollow rock. Then, like a three-legged one,

whose back is broken down and whose head looks down upon the ground,

535 like such a one they range about, trying to escape the white snow.

At that time wear, as I bid you, something that will shield your skin,

a soft cloak and a tunic that reaches to the feet.

You must weave thick woof on a thin warp.

Wear this, and the hairs will not bristle,

540 standing on end all over your body.

As for your feet, fasten onto them tight-fitting boots made from the hide of a

slaughtered ox.

Make them snug with felt on the inside.

When the frost comes around in due season, stitch together the skins of first-born goats

with the sinew of an ox. This way, you will have on your back

545 something to keep off the rain. And on your head

wear a shaped hat made of felt. This way, your ears will not get wet.

For the dawn is cold when the wind Boreas swoops down.

At dawn, a wheat-bearing mist, coming from the starry sky,

spreads upon the fields of men thus blessed, all over the land.

550 It draws its wetness from the ever-flowing rivers,

rising high over the earth with the help of a gust of wind.

Sometimes it turns into rain, towards evening time,

and other times into wind, as Thracian Boreas drives the thick clouds.

Finish your work and get home before he [Boreas] comes,

555 so that a dark cloud, coming down from the sky, may not envelop you,

making your skin clammy as it soaks your clothes.

Avoid it, for this is the month that is most harsh.

It is wintry, harsh for livestock and harsh for men.

Then it is that your oxen should have half their usual share of food. But let the hired man have the greater part of his portion.

560 For the nights, helpful as they may be, are long.

Keep these things in mind until the year comes full circle,

when the days and nights are the same length, when once again

Earth, the mother of all, bears her varied produce.

When Zeus has had sixty wintry days take their due course after the solstice,

565 then the star Arcturus [Watcher of the Bear] leaves the sacred stream of the
Okeanos
and first rises at dusk above the horizon.
After him [Arcturus] rises the daughter of Pandion, the swallow, the one whose
call sounds at dawn.
She comes back to the light for humankind, as springtime begins anew.

570 Before she comes, prune the vines. It is better this way.
When the House-Carrier¹⁰ climbs up from the ground and onto the plants,
fleeing the Pleiades, then there should be no more digging of vineyards.
Instead, sharpen your sickles and wake your servants in the morning, to get
them busy.
Avoid sitting down in shady places and sleeping till dawn

575 in the season of harvesting, when the sun scorches the skin.
At this time, exert yourself and bring home the produce,
getting up at dawn. This way, you will have sufficient life-sustenance.
For the period of dawn takes up a third part of a full day's work.
Dawn gets you started on your journey, and it gets you started on your work.

580 When dawn appears, it gets many mortals started on their journeys
and it puts yokes on many oxen.
When the golden thistle is in bloom and the loud-sounding cicada,¹¹
perched on a tree, pours down his clearly-heard song
incessantly from under his wings, in the season of summer, with all its labors,

585 then it is that goats are fattest, wine is best,
women are most wanton, and men are weakest;
for Sirius dries up their heads and their knee-caps,
and the skin gets dry from the heat. At this time, at long last,
let there be a shady place under a rock, wine from [Thracian] Biblos,

590 barley-cake soaked in milk, the milk of goats that are reaching the end of their lactation,
and the meat of a cow fed in the woods, one that has not yet calved,
and of first-born kid goats. That is the time to drink bright-colored wine,
sitting in the shade, having one's heart sated with food,
turning one's face towards the cooling Zephyr.

595 Then, from an ever-flowing spring that flows downward, untainted by mud,
pour a drink that is three parts water, but make the fourth part wine.
Get your servants busy with winnowing the sacred grain of Demeter,
when strong Orion first appears,
on a threshing-floor that is exposed to the winds and is smoothed over

600 Then, with a measure, store it in jars. And when you have finally
stored all your life-sustenance safely inside your house,
then I bid you to seek out and hire a man with no household of his own and a
servant-woman who has no children of her own.
A servant-woman with a little calf under her [a child to nurse] is a bad thing.
Take good care of the sharp-toothed dog. Do not begrudge him his food.

605 Otherwise, the man who sleeps by day [the robber] will take your possessions
Bring in the fodder and the chaff. This way, there will be enough
for your oxen and your mules. After that,
let your servants give a rest to their knees and unyoke your pair of oxen.
But when Orion and Sirius reach the middle of the sky [at dawn],

610 and when rosy-fingered Dawn sees Arcturus,
then it is, Perses,¹² that you should cut off and take home all the grape-clusters.
Show them to the sun ten days and ten nights.
Then shade them over for five more, and, on the sixth, draw off into jars

the gifts of joyous Dionysus. But when
615 the Pleiades and the Hyades and strong Orion
begin to set, then it is that you should be mindful [*memnēmenos*] to plow
in season. And so the *pleiōn*¹³ may be lodged well and firmly under the earth.
But let us suppose that the desire for stormy navigation seizes you,
when the Pleiades, fleeing the strong and violent Orion,
620 plunge into the misty *pontos*,
and the blasts of winds of all kind rage.
At this time you must not have ships sailing the wine-colored sea.
Instead, be mindful [*memnēmenos*] to work the land, as I bid you.
Haul up your ship on dry land and pack it with stones
625 all over, which will stand up to the power of the winds blowing their dampness.
And pull out the plug of the bilge-drain; otherwise, the rain of Zeus will rot it
[the ship].
Put away in your house all the tackle and fittings,
and store neatly the wings [sails] of your *pontos*-traveling ship.
Hang up the well-made steering-oar over the smoke [of the fireplace].
630 And you yourself should wait until the time for seasonal navigation has come.¹⁴
Then you can haul your ship back to the sea, and put cargo
safely into it, so that you may bring home with you some profit [*kerdos*],
just as my father and yours, you inept [*nēpios*] Perses,
used to sail around in ships, lacking a genuine [*esthlos*] livelihood.
635 One day, he came to this place right here, having crossed a great stretch of
pontos.
He left behind him the Aeolic [city of] Kyme, sailing on a dark-colored ship,
fleeing not wealth, not riches, not material bliss [*olbos*].

No, he was fleeing wretched [*kakē*] poverty, which Zeus gives to men.

And he settled down near Helikon, in a settlement afflicted with human woes,

640 Askra by name. It is a place that is bad [*kakē*] in the wintertime, difficult in the summertime. It is a place that is never really good.

But you, Perses, you must be mindful [*memnēmenos*] of all the things that require work,

each to be done in season. That goes especially for navigation.

Praise the small ship, but put your cargo into a big one.

The greater the cargo, the more profit [*kerdos*] you can pile on top of profit [*kerdos*] —

645 provided the winds hold back their evil [*kakai*] blasts.¹⁵

But if you turn your *thūmos*, with its veering thoughts, towards trading by navigation,

fleeing debts and joyless hunger,

I will show you how to take measure of the raging sea,

even though I have no skills in navigation or in ships.

650 For never yet have I sailed in a ship over the wide *pontos*,

unless you count the time when I went to Euboea from Aulis, the place where, once upon a time, the Achaeans,

having gathered together a mighty host of fighting men, were waiting out a storm.

They had come from all over sacred Hellas and were heading for Troy, known for its beautiful women.

It was there that I, heading for the funeral games of warlike Amphidamas,

655 crossed over to Khalkis.¹⁶ And there were many games

and prizes arranged in advance by the sons of great-hearted Amphidamas.¹⁷ And I say solemnly that it was there [in Khalkis]

that I won a contest in song and that I carried off as a victory prize a tripod with handles on it.

And I dedicated this [tripod] to the Muses of Helikon,

in the place where they first put me on the path of clear-sounding song.

660 This much is my experience in many-pegged ships.

Even so, I will tell you the *noos* of aegis-bearing Zeus,

for the Muses have taught me to sing a song that has no limitations on it.¹⁸

Fifty days after the [summer] solstice,

towards the end of the labor-filled season of summer,

665 that is when navigation is seasonal for mortals. Then your ship

will not be wrecked and the sailors will not be destroyed by the sea,

unless Poseidon the earth-shaker is intent upon doing so,

or unless Zeus the king of the immortals wishes to destroy them.

For the fulfillment of all things, both good and bad, is in their hands.

670 At this time the winds are well-defined and the *pontos* is not harsh.

At this time, you can be free from anxiety as you entrust your swift ship to the winds.

Haul your ship down to the *pontos* and put in all your cargo.

But exert yourself to get back home as quickly as possible,

and do not wait for the time of the new wine and the autumn rains

675 and the approaching bad weather, with the terrible blasts of the wind Notos,

who stirs up the sea as he comes along with the rain of Zeus,

that plentiful autumn rain, and he makes the *pontos* harsh.

Another time of navigation for humankind is in the spring,

when a man first sees, as large a footprint as a crow

makes, leaves that are that size

680 on the top of the fig-tree. Then you are ready do embark upon the sea.

This, then, is the time of navigation in the spring. But I

do not recommend it. It is not pleasing to my *thūmos*.

It is a matter of grasping at opportunities, and it is a difficult thing to avoid
misfortune. And yet, even these things

685 are done by men, in their acts of ignorance in matters of *noos*.

For wealth is life [*psūkhē*] itself for wretched mortals.

It is a fearful thing to die among the waves. But I bid you
to take note of all these things in your *phrenes*, as I tell you.

Do not put all your means of livelihood inside hollow ships.

690 Leave the greater part behind, and put the lesser part in as cargo.

It is a fearful thing to happen upon a disaster among the waves of the *pontos*.

Just as it is a fearful thing to put too great a load on your oxcart,
thus breaking the axle and spoiling your haul.

Take care to keep things moderate. Timing [*kairos*] is best in all things.

695 Make sure that you are the right age [seasonal, having the right *hōrā*] when you
bring home a wife to your house,

when you are not much less than thirty years old

nor much more than that. This is a seasonal marriage.

The wife should have four years after puberty, and then she can marry in the
fifth year.

Marry a virgin, so that you may teach her the ways of affection.

700 Try your hardest to marry someone who lives near you.

And take a good look all around you, so that you will not marry someone who
will become the occasion for jokes by your neighbors.

There is no better possession for a man than a wife

who is good. And there is nothing worse than a bad one,

one who sneaks away the dinner for herself. The man, no matter how strong he
may be,

705 is burned out by the fire of such a woman. No need for a torch! And she brings
him to a raw old age.

Guard against the anger of the blessed immortals.

Do not make a comrade equal to a brother.

But if you do, you should not beat him to it by hurting him first.

And do not lie just to please your tongue. But if he wrongs you first,

710 either saying or doing something that is contrary to your *thūmos*,

then be mindful [*memnēmenos*] to repay him double. But if he

takes you back into the state of being *philoī*,¹⁹ and is ready to offer *dikē*,

then accept him. A wretched man is he who makes different

philoī at different times. Let not your *noos* make into a lie your appearance [of friendship].

715 Avoid the reputation of having too many *xenoi* or none at all.

Or of being the companion of wretched people. Or of being one who brings a quarrel [*neikos*] against noble people.

Do not ever bring yourself to reproaching [making *oneidos* against] a man for having baneful poverty, the kind that eats away at the *thūmos*.

It [the poverty] is sent by the blessed immortals.

The best treasure for mortals is a tongue that is sparing.

720 And the greatest *kharis* is a tongue that moves in moderation.

For if you say something bad, soon you will hear something spoken about you that is even worse.

Do not be stormy²⁰ at a banquet attended by many *xenoi*.

When it [a banquet] is a common effort, the gratification is very great and the expense is very small.

Do not pour a libation of bright-colored wine to Zeus after dawn

725 with unwashed hands. Nor should you do so to any other immortal.

Otherwise, they will not heed your prayers but will spit them back.

Do not stand upright, with your face turned toward the sun, when you urinate.

Be mindful [*memnēmenos*] to do so after it [the sun] sets and before it rises.

And if you are traveling [at nighttime], do not urinate either on the road or off the road,

730 and do not get naked. The nights belong to the blessed ones [the gods].

The godly person, who knows what is sensible, does it squatting.

Or else, he goes to the wall of an enclosed court.

Do not expose your genitals, splattered with semen, inside your house when you approach the fireplace. Avoid this.

735 When you return from a funeral where words of bad omen have been uttered, do not try to beget a descendant. But do so after a banquet of the gods.

Do not ever cross the beautifully running streams of ever-flowing rivers on foot before you pray, keeping your eye on the beautiful streams and having washed your hands in the lovely clear water.

740 Whoever crosses a river with hands unwashed of wickedness

incurs the anger of the gods, who will cause him pains in the future.

From the five-branched one,²¹ at a festive banquet of the gods,

do not cut the withered from the green²² with gleaming iron.

Do not put the wine-pouring vessel on top of the wine-mixing vessel

745 when people are drinking. For a baneful fate results in compensation for this.²³

When you build a house, do not leave it rough-hewn.

Otherwise, a cawing crow may roost on it and make a croaking sound.

From cauldrons that do not have the correct ritual words pronounced over them, do not take anything to eat or to wash with. For there is a retribution in compensation for these acts.

750 As for things that it is sacrilegious to disturb by moving, it is not good

to let a twelve-year-old boy sit on them. It makes a man unmanly.

Nor let a twelve-month-old boy do so. For here too a similar thing happens.

A man should not wash himself in water that has been used by a woman for her ablutions.

In the course of time, there is a baneful retribution in compensation for this act as well.

755 When you come upon sacrificial offerings all ablaze²⁴

do not engage in mockery [*mōmos*] of the fire-ritual. The god is angry at this as well.

Do not urinate into the streams of rivers that flow towards the sea,
nor into springs. Avoid it at all costs.

And do not relieve yourself into them. It is not a very good thing to do that.

760 Act this way, and you will avoid the ominous talk of men—a thing to be dreaded.

For ominous talk is a bad thing. It gets off the ground easily,

very easily, but it is burdensome thing to bear, and it is hard to put aside.

Ominous talk never completely dies down, since many

will utter it. Ominous talk is even a god.²⁵

765 Take care to mark the days²⁶ [of the month], which come from Zeus, giving each day its due.

Do this for your servants. The thirtieth day of the month is best

for inspecting different kinds of work that have to be done and for apportioning food-supplies.

This is the day that people spend by sorting out [*krinein*] what is *alētheia* and what is not.²⁷

For what I now tell you are the days of Zeus the Planner.²⁸

770 To begin with, the first,²⁹ fourth,³⁰ and the seventh³¹ are each a holy day

—it was on the seventh that Leto gave birth to Apollo of the golden sword.

So too the eighth³² and the ninth.³³ And yet, these two days of the waxing part of the month

are particularly good for various kinds of work by mortals.³⁴

The eleventh and the twelfth are both good

775 for shearing sheep and for gathering the benign grain.

But the twelfth is much better than the eleventh.

It is on that day that the spider, levitating in the air, spins its web
in full day,³⁵ while the Knowledgeable One³⁶ amasses her pile.

On that day a woman should set up her loom and get on with her work.

780 Avoid the thirteenth day of the waxing part of the month

for beginning to sow. But it is the best day for getting your plants bedded in.

The sixth day of the middle of the month is very unfavorable for plants,

but it is good for giving birth to male descendants. As for females, it is not at all
favorable

either to be born at all on that day or to get married.

785 Nor is the first sixth day an appropriate one for a girl to be born.

But, for gelding kid goats and sheep

it is a kindly day. Also for making an enclosure for the sheep.

It is good for the birth of a boy, but such a child will grow up liking to utter
words of mocking reproach,

which are lies, crafty words, and stealthy relations.³⁷

790 On the eighth day of the month geld the boar and the loud-roaring bull.

Do the same with the work-enduring asses on the twelfth.

On the Great Twentieth, a full day,³⁸ a knowledgeable man
should be born.³⁹ Such a man is very sound in his *noos*.

The tenth is favorable for a boy to be born; for a girl, it is the fourth

795 of the mid-month. On that day, sheep and shambling horned oxen,

as well as the sharp-toothed dog and work-enduring asses,

are to be tamed to the touch of the hand. But take care in your *thūmos*

to avoid the fourth of the beginning and ending of the month.

Do not have your heart eaten away with troubles on this day, which is very much a day when the gods bring things to fulfillment.

- 800 On the fourth of the month bring home your wedded wife,
having sorted out the bird-omens, which are best for doing this.
Avoid fifth days. They are harsh and ominous.
For they say that it was on the fifth that the Erinyes assisted
at the birth of Horkos [Oath], to whom Eris gave birth, to be a pain to those who
break an oath.
- 805 On the seventh of the mid-month cast the sacred grain of Demeter
upon the smoothed-over threshing floor, looking carefully about you.
Have the woodman cut beams for the rooms in your house
and plenty of ship-timbers which are suitable for ships.
On the fourth, begin to build sleek ships.
- 810 The ninth of the mid-month is better when evening approaches.
But the first ninth is the most painless for humans.
It is good for conception and for being born
for man and woman alike. It is never a completely bad day.
Or again, few people know that the thrice-nine of the month is best
- 815 for opening a wine-jar and for putting yokes on the necks
of oxen, mules, and swift-footed horses,
or for hauling a swift ship with many oars down to the wine-colored *pontos*.
Few give it its *alēthēs*⁴⁰ name.
Open your jar on the fourth. The fourth of the mid-month is the most holy of
them all.
- 820 Again, few do it [give it its true name].⁴¹ I mean the after-twenty [the twenty-
first],⁴² which is best
when dawn comes. As evening approaches, it is less good.
These, then, are the days, a great blessing for earth-bound men.

The others fall in between. There is no doom attached to them, and they bring nothing.

Different people praise different days,⁴³ but few really know.⁴⁴

825 Sometimes the day is a step-mother, and sometimes it is a mother.⁴⁵

With respect to all of these days, *eudaimōn* and *olbios* is he who

knows all these things as he works the land, without being responsible to the immortals for any evil deed,

as he sorts out [*krinein*] the bird-omens, and as he avoids any acts of transgression.

Notes

[[back](#)] **1.** This noun *aphradia* 'heedlessness' is derived from *phrazesthai* 'take note', a verb that designates the activity of *mētis*.

[[back](#)] **2.** This word is in opposition to *epi-khthonioi* 'earth-bound' at line 123; and *that* word is in opposition to the epithet of the gods, *ep-ouranioi* 'sky-bound'. Whereas *epi-khthonioi* does not exclude the category of *hupo-khthonioi*, in that they can be imagined as being either below the earth or simply earth-bound; the *hupo-khthonioi*, on the other hand, must be imagined as being below the earth.

[[back](#)] **3.** The Proclus commentary reads *phulakes* 'guardians'.

[[back](#)] **4.** I interpret the *mén* here as parallel to *mén* at lines 122, 137, 141, 161, not to *mén* at line 162 (*pace* West WD commentary p. 192).

[[back](#)] **5.** In a longer version, as attested in a papyrus, this line, 169, is followed by four lines not attested elsewhere; in this version, these five lines, labeled 173a (= 169), 173b, 173c, 173d, 173e in West's edition, follow line 173 (and 168 is followed by 170). These additional lines tell of the releasing of Kronos by Zeus and introduce the subject of the Fifth Generation.

[[back](#)] **6.** Cf. West WD commentary p. 225.

[[back](#)] **7.** The use of *gignōskein* 'be aware' here is parallel to what we find in Theognis 670.

[[back](#)] **8.** In the Proclus commentary, there is a reference to a law, native to the city of Ephesus, to the effect that a child could not be exposed until the father's feet were swollen.

[[back](#)] **9.** It was a common belief that the octopus would eat its own 'foot' when it was starving. West *WD* commentary p. 289 comments: "The starved man squeezing his swollen foot would lead on to the octopus who nibbles his foot for lack of food."

[[back](#)] **10.** That is, the snail.

[[back](#)] **11.** Sometimes wrongly translated as 'grasshopper'. The same goes for the Aesop fable "The Grasshopper and the Ant," which is really "The Cicada and the Ant" (no. 373 in the B.E. Perry edition).

[[back](#)] **12.** West *WD* commentary p. 40 remarks: "Perses is not named again [after line 397] until the final paragraph of the agricultural section 609-17, and there only as a colourless vocative. He seems to be resurrected at this point precisely because it is the final paragraph. The vocative indicates that a particularly significant point has been reached, and it gives us a final reminder of the addressee's identity."

[[back](#)] **13.** At present there is no consensus about the meaning of this word. In this context, it may be understood as 'seed'. I believe that it is connected with the name of the Pleiades and with a myth concerning a plunge by one of them beneath the horizon.

[[back](#)] **14.** This right time is defined starting with line 663.

[[back](#)] **15.** Lines 643-645 seem to me sarcastic in tone.

[[back](#)] **16.** In Euboea.

[[back](#)] **17.** There is a 'son of Amphidamas' mentioned in *Iliad* 23.87: he was killed by Patroklos in a fit of rage over a dice-game. It is on account of this deed that Patroklos had to leave his own household and to move in with Peleus.

[[back](#)] **18.** Commentators follow H. Fränkel, *Festschrift Wackernagel* (1923) pp. 281f.

[[back](#)] **19.** There is a striking parallel to this expression in the poetry of Sappho.

[[back](#)] **20.** The word is *duspemphelos*, applied to 'navigation' at line 618 above. In the present context, it carries with it the civic "ship of state" metaphor.

[[back](#)] **21.** That is, the hand with five fingers. This is a kenning.

[[back](#)] **22.** A vegetal metaphor for the cutting of the withered from the quick part of the fingernail.

[[back](#)] **23.** In storage, the wine-pouring vessel is in fact customarily on top of the wine-mixing vessel. West *WD* commentary p. 340 remarks: "So the essence of the rule is that while the utensils are in use one must avoid an arrangement which is normal when they are not in use. The reason is unclear." I think that the reason may not be quite so unclear. Note that the "normal" use is in a ritual context. In a ritual context, the meaning of a word or an act can be the symmetrical opposite of the

meaning of the same word or act in a non-ritual context. For example, *muō* means 'I have my eyes closed' or 'I have my mouth closed' in a secular context and 'I see a special vision' or 'I speak a special utterance' in a ritual context.

[[back](#)] **24.** The implication is that the person who comes upon the sacrifice here is a casual observer, not necessarily acquainted with the idiosyncrasies of the local ritual. In Menander *Dyscolus* 447ff, we find a brief reference to such idiosyncrasies.

[[back](#)] **25.** In other words, you can think of it as a personified divine force.

[[back](#)] **26.** First we had the "works"; now we have the "days."

[[back](#)] **27.** West WD commentary p. 351 remarks: "Civil calendars often fell out of step with the moon..., and it was on the 30th that errors arose. Each month had to be allowed either 29 or 30 days, but the last day was called *triakas* (or in Athens *henē kai nea*, 'the old and the new') in either case, the preceding day being omitted in a 'hollow' month. So it was always a question of when to have the 30th." In other words, each *polis* had its own traditions about the calendar (West here calls these traditions "civil calendars"). At the time of the 30th, then, there is a crisis about arriving at a pan-Hellenic norm from the standpoint of each *polis*. This norm is conveyed here by the notion of *alētheiē* 'truth' (see the note at *Theogony* line 28). [On the civic calendars of the various Greek city-states, see A. E. Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology (Handb. d. Altertumswiss. I.7)*, 1972.]

[[back](#)] **28.** The 30th may be a crisis point, varying from *polis* to *polis*, but the crisis leads to a shared pan-Hellenic perspective. The poet has blotted over the differences, simply noting that *alētheia* 'truth' is being sorted out [= is in a crisis: the verb is *krīnō* on the 30th. After the 30th, it is possible to arrive at a fixed sequence of given days traditionally spent in given ways by all Hellenes (for the apparent exception in the 4-*polis* island of Keos, see the passages quoted by West p. 351). The poet will now highlight this fixed sequence, which is the pan-Hellenic perspective. Zeus, as the god who is the planner of the universe, is an appropriate symbol for the the organizing principle that underlies the pan-Hellenic perspective.

[[back](#)] **29.** In the *Odyssey*, the new moon is the context for a festival of Apollo (14.162 = 19.307; 20.156, 276-278, 21.258).

[[back](#)] **30.** For example, Aphrodite was specially worshiped on this day.

[[back](#)] **31.** The most important holy day of Apollo.

[[back](#)] **32.** For example, the 8th at Athens was the day for honoring Poseidon and Theseus.

[[back](#)] **33.** For example, the 9th at Athens inaugurated the City Dionysia.

[[back](#)] **34.** That is, they may be holy days, but they are not necessarily holidays. This hedge suggests that the 8th and the 9th are less "pan-Hellenic" than the 1st, 4th, and 7th.

[[back](#)] **35.** The waxing and waning of the day are in symmetry with the waxing and waning of the moon.

[[back](#)] **36.** That is, the ant. See the note on the cicada at line 582.

[[back](#)] **37.** The stealthy relations may include sexually suggestive "sweet-talk." The features enumerated here are characteristic of a traditional persona such as Perses, or such as portrayed in the poetry of Archilochus.

[[back](#)] **38.** See the note on line 778.

[[back](#)] **39.** The characterization seems to suit the persona of Hesiod himself.

[[back](#)] **40.** The Hesiodic name 'thrice-nine' would be the pan-Hellenic designation, as implied by the word *alēthēs*. See the note about *alētheia* at line 768. Local designations of this day may have been subject to tabu. The number thrice-nine is particularly sacred: see the references collected by West WD commentary p. 361.

[[back](#)] **41.** This interpretation differs from what is found in the standard editions.

[[back](#)] **42.** Note again the periphrasis, as in the case of thrice-nine at line 814.

[[back](#)] **43.** Here we see the localized perspective.

[[back](#)] **44.** Here we see the pan-Hellenic perspective. The word 'know' is to be understood in the sense that we have seen at line 792.

[[back](#)] **45.** This riddle can be better understood by reading Georges Dumézil, *Camillus: A Study of Indo-European Religion as Roman History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1980).

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