Homer and Hesiod

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Abstract
One of the most frustrating aspects of Homeric studies is that so little literary material outside the Homeric corpus itself survives to enhance our understanding of the cultural landscape of the period. Recent scholarship suggests that a large and diverse poetic tradition lay behind the figure we refer to as "Homer," but little of it survives. Indeed we have little continuous written Greek for another century. The one exception is Hesiod, who composed two extant poems, the Theogony and Works and Days, and possibly several others, including the Shield of Heracles and the Catalogue of Women. As we shall see, while Hesiodic poetry was not occupied specifically with heroic themes, it was part of the same formal tradition of epic, sharing with Homer key metrical, dialectal, and dictional features.

Comments
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While Homer appears to glorify war, Hesiod provides a much more sobering assessment of conflict. This same opposing of viewpoints – one favoring the noblemen, the other the commoner – has been a recurring them in the history of human civilization, notably in the Marxism of the 18th century. But regardless of this perspectival conflict, both epic poets provide a glimpse at the ways in which people of ancient societies strove to understand our place in a world, in a cosmos, ruled by divine beings. What is our purpose?