

Abstract

This contribution aims to reconstruct the history of a missing Homerism in Greek epic poetry: the term ζῆλος 'emulation', 'jealousy' -, which is presumed but not attested in the Homeric poems. The issue is not only stylistic and lexical, insofar as it illustrates the value of tradition in a genre like the epic that is subject to precise rules, but also has a wider social and cultural impact. The rejection of feelings and passions that are too human, in fact, is an essential characteristic of an aristocratic genre such as epic poetry. Beyond the explanation of the reasons for the absence of the word in the Iliad and the Odyssey, as a matter of fact, it is possible to document its entry into Hesiod's hexameter, whose audience of "frugal, anxious, small landowners" (Most) had to be more open to the perspectives of emulation and envy.

A survey of later epic poetry shows the different behaviour of those authors compared to what was to all intents and purposes to be perceived as an extraneous term to the genre and its derivations. While Apollonius Rhodius tries to emancipate himself from this legacy with only one attestation (Arg. 1.616), Callimachus and Theocritus appear more audacious.

The imperial epic offers a no less interesting picture, with Quintus Smyrnaeus (5x) pedantically incorporating the lessons of Homer and Apollonius. Only Nonnus of Panopolis, in late antiquity, assigns its rightful place in poetry to ζῆλος (40x), and transcends Homeric and Hellenistic perspectives.