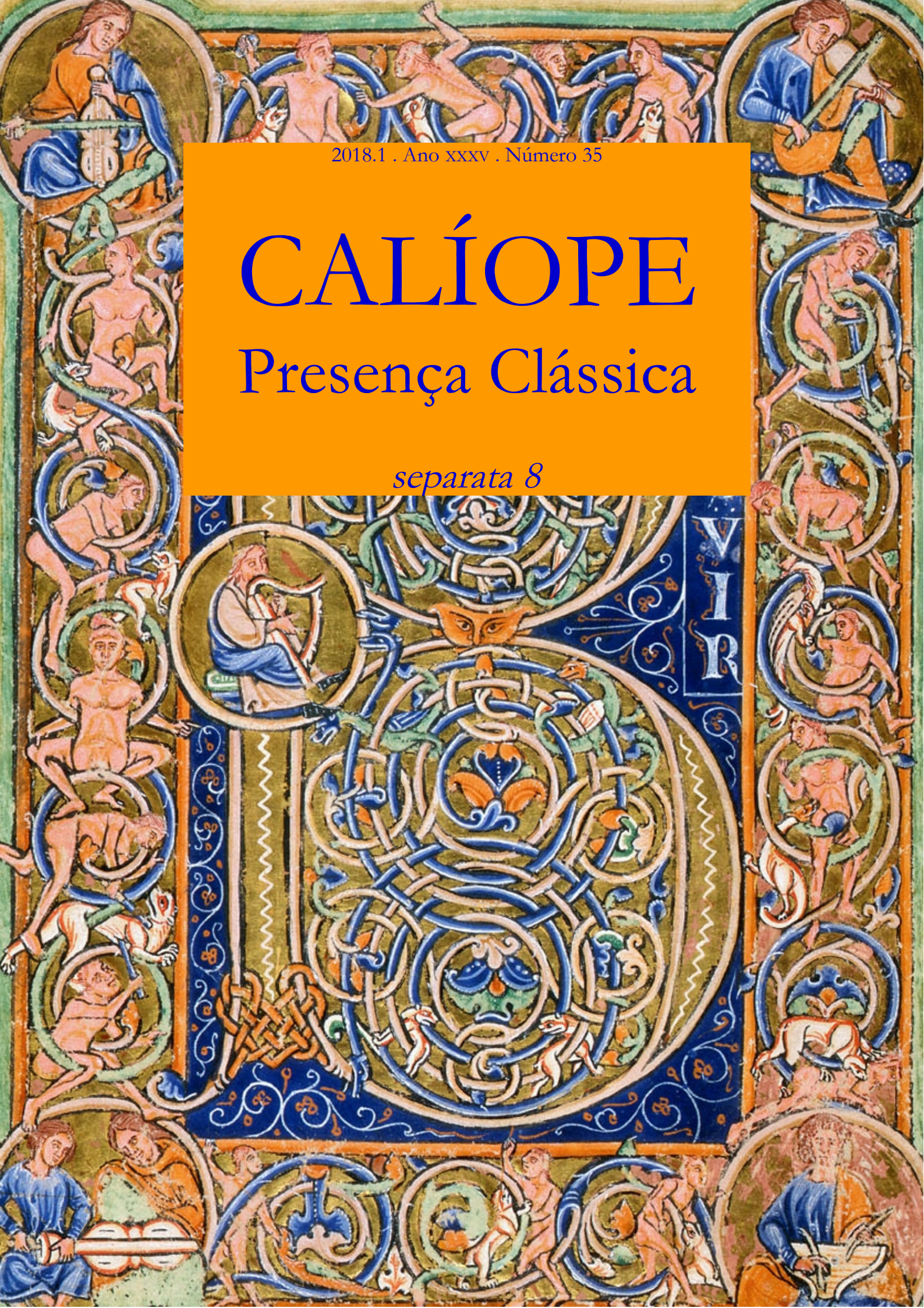


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# A re-invocation of the Muse for the Homeric *Iliad*<sup>1</sup>

Gregory Nagy

## RESUMO

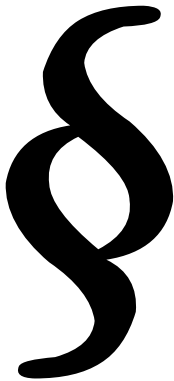
O texto investiga acerca da identidade e do papel da(s) musa(s) na *Iliada*, colocando em questão porque a musa singular do primeiro canto tem sido reinvocada no canto dois como conjunto de múltiplas musas.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Musa; invocação; *Iliada*; *Odisseia*.

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0 I focus in this essay on the Muse who is invoked by the Master Narrator in *Iliad* 1, at the very beginning of the epic. And I ask this question: why does this single Muse in *Iliad* 1 get re-invoked in *Iliad* 2 and beyond as a set of multiple Muses? An answer, I think, comes from the Muse herself. But who is she, anyway? I argue that the singular Muse of *Iliad* 1, refracted as the multiple Muses of *Iliad* 2 and beyond, is Calliope, divine mother of Orpheus. I am not the first, and I will surely not be the last, to make such an argument, but my reasoning, however tentative, has its own merits, I think.

§1 The Master Narrator of the *Iliad* begins his narration at *Iliad* 1.1 by focusing on the anger of Achilles, and he invokes the Muse, whom he addresses here simply as *theā* ‘goddess’, to sing for him the song about this anger:  $\mu\epsilon\ \nu\iota\nu\ \epsilon\iota\delta\epsilon\ \theta\epsilon\grave{\alpha}$  ‘sing, goddess [*theā*], the anger’. By implication, the Master Narrator is saying here that the song that he will perform is something that he hears from the Muse.

§2 But then, at *Iliad* 2.484–487, there is a re-invocation of multiple Muses—signaled in the plural. I highlight the wording of *Iliad* 2.484:  $\sigma\pi\epsilon\tau\epsilon\ \nu\ \nu\ \mu\omicron\iota\ \mu\omicron\sigma\alpha\iota\ \lambda\acute{\upsilon}\mu\pi\iota\alpha\ \delta\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha\tau\ \chi\acute{\omicron}\tau\epsilon$  ‘now, you Muses who have your dwellings on Mount Olympus’. The Muses are invoked here in the plural, by contrast with the singular Muse who had been initially invoked at *Iliad* 1.1.

§3 The immediacy of the Master Narrator’s performance, as signaled in *Iliad* 1.1, is counterbalanced by an attitude of remoteness from the composition, as signaled in *Iliad* 2.484–487. Such a counterbalance indicates the Narrator’s deference to the epic tradition of Homeric poetry. The Narrator does not claim that he *knows* the tradition: instead, he says he just ‘hears’ it from the Muses, goddesses of poetic inspiration, and this act of ‘hearing’ is *kleos*, *Iliad* 2.486. The noun *kleos* is derived from the verb *kluein*

‘hear’, and so the literal meaning of *kleos* is ‘the thing heard’. This special kind of hearing has an enormous prestige that translates into the idealized meaning of ‘glory, fame’ as applied to the composition and performance of Homeric poetry. The Narrator of Homeric poetry is proud of his capacity to ‘hear’. To hear what? To hear ‘the thing heard’, which is *kleos*. This capacity translates into ‘glory, fame’ not only for Homeric poetry but also for the poet who performs the poetry. Such a poet claims access to both the form and the content of what he ‘hears’ the Muses tell him.

§4 The Master Narrator’s invocation of the Muses at *Iliad* 2.484 shows a heightened level of poetic self-awareness about the importance of what is about to be narrated. The poet is recognizing here the special need for accuracy in re-creating a comprehensive catalogue of essentially all the cultural ancestors of the Greek-speaking world. Also on other occasions where the Muses are invoked as plural goddesses, at 11.218, 14.508, and 16.112, there are comparable poetic concerns.

§5 Unlike what we see at *Iliad* 2.484, 11.218, 14.508, 16.112, where the Muses are invoked as plural goddesses, there is a singular Muse being invoked at *Iliad* 2.761, matching what we saw at the beginning of the *Iliad*, 1.1, and at the beginning of the *Odyssey*, 1.1. Similarly in the First Song of Demodokos, *Odyssey* 8.73–82, which is featured as a proto-*Iliad*, there is a singular Muse that inspires the singer of tales at the beginning of his performance, at *Odyssey* 8.73.<sup>2</sup>

§6 So also in the Third Song of Demodokos, O.08.499–533, when the singer of tales marks the beginning of his performance at O.08.499, the anonymous ‘divinity’ that he invokes at that point is a *theos*, in the singular. Short-term, this *theos* ‘divinity’ can be understood to be either Apollo or ‘the Muse’, as the disguised Odysseus himself remarks at O.08.488. Long-term, however, Apollo and the Muses are surrogates here for Zeus himself, who at O.13.025 is finally identified as the transcendent source of inspiration for the singing of Demodokos.<sup>3</sup> The figuring of Zeus as

such a transcendent source was traditionally considered to be a signature, as it were, of ‘Homer’ himself, as we read in the reference at Pindar *Nemean* 2.1–3 to the *Homēridai*, a guild of singers from Chios who claimed, as ‘descendants of Homer’, to be the legitimate transmitters of ‘Homer’ as their poetic ancestor. An example of such a reference is the wording at the very beginning of Pindar *Nemean* 2.1–3: □ θεν περ κα □ □ μηριδαί | □ απτ □ ν □ πέων τ □ πόλλ □ □ οιδοί | □ ρχονται, Δι □ ς □ κ προοιμίου ‘(starting) from the point where [*hothen*] the *Homēridai*, singers, most of the time [*ta polla*] begin [*arkhesthai*] their stitched-together words, from the prelude [*prooimion*] of Zeus ...’.

§7 I think that the invocation of a singular Muse at *Iliad* 2.760–770 has to do with the singularity of the subject, which is in this case Achilles. The Muse is asked for an answer to the Iliadic question: who is the ‘best of the Achaeans’? The answer of the Muse is that Achilles is the best. He is the singularity of the *Iliad* as epic, just as Odysseus is the singularity of the *Odyssey* as epic. That is why, I suspect, Calliope is the perfect singularity of a Muse for these notionally singular heroes of two singularly important epics. After all, Calliope is the Muse of Epic.

§8 I find it relevant that Calliope is also the Muse of kings (Hesiod *Theogony* 79–93). Similarly, as I have argued elsewhere, Orpheus was once the singular poet of kings, but his status was degraded in the Athenian phase of Homeric reception.<sup>4</sup>

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the identity and the role of the muse(s) in the *Iliad*. It questions why the single muse of the first book is re-invoked in the second book as a set of multiple muses.

KEYWORDS

Muse; Invocation; *Iliad*; *Odyssey*.



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<sup>1</sup> This essay is a re-working of an online version published 2018.08.16 in *Classical Inquiries*, <https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/?s=Calliope>.

<sup>2</sup> On the First Song of Demodokos as a proto-*Iliad*, I refer to the argumentation in G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (1979; 2nd ed. 1999) ch. 1.

<sup>3</sup> G. Nagy, *Homer the Preclassic* (Berkeley 2010) 103–109, [http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS\\_Nagy.Homer\\_the\\_Preclassic.2009](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_Nagy.Homer_the_Preclassic.2009).

<sup>4</sup> Nagy, *Homer the Preclassic* p. 345.