

The Cattle of the Sun God

Reading Skill

Historical and Cultural

Context Which details here suggest that ancient Greeks believed the gods controlled the weather?

830
57 In the small hours of the third watch, when stars
that shone out in the first dusk of evening
had gone down to their setting, a giant wind
blew from heaven, and clouds driven by Zeus
shrouded land and sea in a night of storm;
so, just as Dawn with fingertips of rose
touched the windy world, we dragged our ship
835 to cover in a grotto, a sea cave
where nymphs had chairs of rock and sanded floors.
I mustered all the crew and said:

‘Old shipmates,
our stores are in the ship’s hold, food and drink;
the cattle here are not for our provision,
840 or we pay dearly for it.

Reading Skill

Historical and Cultural

Context How does this passage show that ancient Greeks believed their gods had humanlike emotions?

58 Fierce the god is
who cherishes these heifers and these sheep:
Helios; and no man avoids his eye.’

845 To this my fighters nodded. Yes. But now
we had a month of onshore gales, blowing
day in, day out—south winds, or south by east.
As long as bread and good red wine remained
to keep the men up, and appease their craving,
they would not touch the cattle. But in the end,
when all the barley in the ship was gone,

850 hunger drove them to scour the wild shore
with angling hooks, for fishes and seafoal,
whatever fell into their hands; and lean days
wore their bellies thin.

The storms continued.

855 So one day I withdrew to the interior
to pray the gods in solitude, for hope
that one might show me some way of salvation.
Slipping away, I struck across the island
to a sheltered spot, out of the driving gale.
I washed my hands there, and made supplication
860 to the gods who own Olympus,⁷⁰ all the gods—
but they, for answer, only closed my eyes
under slow drops of sleep.

Now on the shore Eurylochus
made his insidious plea:

'Comrades,' he said,

865 'You've gone through everything; listen to what I say.
All deaths are hateful to us, mortal wretches,
but famine is the most pitiful, the worst
end that a man can come to.

Will you fight it?

870 Come, we'll cut out the noblest of these cattle
for sacrifice to the gods who own the sky;
and once at home, in the old country of Ithaca,
if ever that day comes—
59 we'll build a costly temple and adorn it
with every beauty for the Lord of Noon.⁷¹
875 But if he flares up over his heifers lost,
wishing our ship destroyed, and if the gods
make cause with him, why, then I say: Better
open your lungs to a big sea once for all
than waste to skin and bones on a lonely island!

880 Thus Eurylochus; and they murmured 'Aye!'
trooping away at once to round up heifers.
Now, that day tranquil cattle with broad brows
were gazing near, and soon the men drew up
around their chosen beasts in ceremony.
They plucked the leaves that shone on a tall oak—
885 having no barley meal—to strew the victims,
performed the prayers and ritual, knifed the kine

70. **Olympus** (ō lim' pēs)
Mount Olympus, home of
the gods.

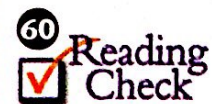
Vocabulary

insidious (in sid' ē əs)
adj. characterized by
craftiness and betrayal

71. **Lord of Noon Helios.**

Literary Analysis

Epic Hero How are
the values of Eurylochus
different from those of
Odysseus?



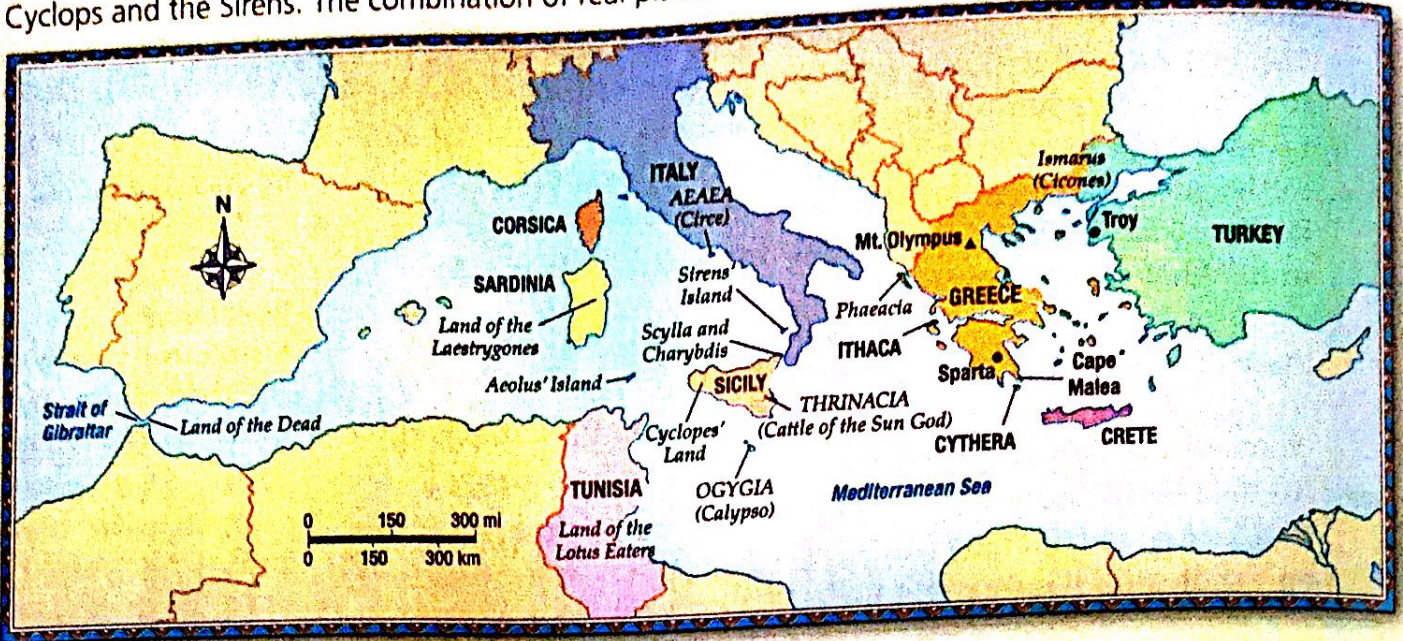
Who owns the heifers
and sheep on the island?

LITERATURE IN CONTEXT

Geography Connection

Real Places and Imaginary Events In the *Odyssey*

Odysseus' journey carries him to real places, including Troy, Sparta, and the Strait of Gibraltar. However, in the story, many of these real places are populated by imaginary creatures, such as the Cyclops and the Sirens. The combination of real places and fantastic events is part of the story's appeal.



Connect to the Literature

How does the inclusion of real places make the story's imaginary events more believable?

and flayed each carcass, cutting thighbones free to wrap in double folds of fat. These offerings, with strips of meat, were laid upon the fire.

890 Then, as they had no wine, they made libation with clear spring water, broiling the entrails first; and when the bones were burnt and tripes shared, they spat the carved meat.

Just then my slumber left me in a rush, my eyes opened, and I went down the seaward path. No sooner had I caught sight of our black hull, than savory odors of burnt fat eddied around me; grief took hold of me, and I cried aloud:

'O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever, you made me sleep away this day of mischief! O cruel drowsing, in the evil hour! Here they sat, and a great work they contrived.'

72. **contrived** (kən trɪvd') v. thought up; devised.

Lampetia⁷³ in her long gown meanwhile
had borne swift word to the Overlord of Noon:
'They have killed your kine.'

905 And the Lord Helios
burst into angry speech amid the immortals:

910 'O Father Zeus and gods in bliss forever,
punish Odysseus' men! So overweening,
now they have killed my peaceful kine, my joy
at morning when I climbed the sky of stars,
and evening, when I bore westward from heaven.
Restitution or penalty they shall pay—
and pay in full—or I go down forever
to light the dead men in the underworld.'

915 Then Zeus who drives the stormcloud made reply:
'Peace, Helios: shine on among the gods,
shine over mortals in the fields of grain.
Let me throw down one white-hot bolt, and make
splinters of their ship in the winedark sea.'

920 —Calypso later told me of this exchange,
62 as she declared that Hermes⁷⁴ had told her.
Well, when I reached the sea cave and the ship,
I faced each man, and had it out; but where
could any remedy be found? There was none.
925 The silken beeves⁷⁵ of Helios were dead.
The gods, moreover, made queer signs appear:
cowhides began to crawl, and beef, both raw
and roasted, lowed like kine upon the spits.

930 Now six full days my gallant crew could feast
upon the prime beef they had marked for slaughter
from Helios' herd; and Zeus, the son of Cronus,
added one fine morning.

All the gales
had ceased, blown out, and with an offshore breeze
we launched again, stepping the mast and sail,
935 to make for the open sea. Astern of us
the island coastline faded, and no land
showed anywhere, but only sea and heaven,
when Zeus Cronion piled a thunderhead
above the ship, while gloom spread on the ocean.

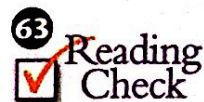
73. *Lampetia* (lam pē' shə)
a nymph.

74. *Hermes* (hər' mēz') *n.* god
who serves as herald and
messenger of the other
gods.

75. *beeves* (bēvz) *n.* alternate
plural form of "beef."

Literary Analysis

Epic Hero What details
in lines 920–921 clarify
the flashback presented
here?



What do Odysseus'
shipmates do while he
is sleeping?



La Nef de Télémaque (The Ship of Telemachus), New York Public Library Picture Collection

940 We held our course, but briefly. Then the squall struck whining from the west, with gale force, breaking both forestays, and the mast came toppling aft along the ship's length, so the running rigging showered into the bilge.

On the afterdeck the mast had hit the steersman a slant blow 945 bashing the skull in, knocking him upside, as the brave soul fled the body, like a diver. With crack on crack of thunder, Zeus let fly a bolt against the ship, a direct hit, 950 so that she bucked, in reeking fumes of sulphur, and all the men were flung into the sea. They came up 'round the wreck, bobbing awhile like petrels⁷⁶ on the waves.

No more seafaring homeward for these, no sweet day of return; 955 the god had turned his face from them.

I clambered fore and aft my hulk until a comber 960 split her, keel from ribs, and the big timber floated free; the mast, too, broke away. A backstay floated dangling from it, stout rawhide rope, and I used this for lashing 965 mast and keel together. These I straddled, riding the frightful storm.

Nor had I yet seen the worst of it: for now the west wind 965 dropped, and a southeast gale came on—one more twist of the knife—taking me north again, straight for Charybdis. All that night I drifted, and in the sunrise, sure enough, I lay off Scylla mountain and Charybdis deep. There, as the whirlpool drank the tide, a billow 970 tossed me, and I sprang for the great fig tree, catching on like a bat under a bough. Nowhere had I to stand, no way of climbing, the root and bole⁷⁷ being far below, and far above my head the branches and their leaves, 975 massed, overshadowing Charybdis pool. But I clung grimly, thinking my mast and keel would come back to the surface when she spouted.

65 ◀ Critical Viewing

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' son Telemachus searches for his father in a ship like this one. From what you observe in the painting, how does this ship compare with modern ships? [**Compare and Contrast**]

76. **petrels** (pe' trēlz) *n.* small, dark sea birds.

Literary Analysis

Epic Hero Which of Odysseus' heroic qualities does he demonstrate in this passage?

77. **bole** (bōl) *n.* tree trunk.



Reading
Check

How is Odysseus' ship destroyed?

And ah! how long, with what desire, I waited!
till, at the twilight hour, when one who hears
980 and judges pleas in the marketplace all day
between contentious men, goes home to supper,
the long poles at last reared from the sea.

Now I let go with hands and feet, plunging
straight into the foam beside the timbers,
985 pulled astride, and rowed hard with my hands
to pass by Scylla. Never could I have passed her
had not the Father of gods and men,⁷⁸ this time,
kept me from her eyes. Once through the strait,
nine days I drifted in the open sea
990 before I made shore, buoyed up by the gods,
upon Ogygia⁷⁹ Isle. The dangerous nymph
Calypso lives and sings there, in her beauty,
and she received me, loved me.

But why tell

68
995 the same tale that I told last night in hall
to you and to your lady? Those adventures
made a long evening, and I do not hold
with tiresome repetition of a story.”