

Project's background:

From a historical research perspective, both the Homeric Poems and the *Mahābhārata* pose significant challenges, yet at the same time, offer invaluable insights into the worlds of Archaic Greece and Ancient South Asia. That is why, since the beginnings of modern historical studies, the problem of the relationship between the presented world of the epics and the realities of the respective period has been a key task for researchers. This project is part of a larger research initiative undertaken by the Principal Investigator. It will involve a systematic analysis of poetic referentiality, which may be followed in the future by the juxtaposition of data from the epics with archaeological findings.

Project's aims:

The project examines how the *Odyssey* and the *Virāṭaparvan* (in the broader context of the *Mahābhārata*) depict a heroic past while also subtly engaging with the realities of their implied audiences. The goal is to explore how these epics create, navigate and explore the tension between a stylised epic world and the contemporary experience of their audience. The approach challenges traditional assumptions about the origin of important anachronisms in the poems, showing that some inconsistencies in the epic can be explained by the literary qualities of the poem rather than the multilayered history of the text.

Main Hypothesis:

The poets deliberately inserted elements in the narratives that resonate with the experiences of their audiences, creating thematic and emotional bridges between the epic past and their contemporary world. These references are not inconsistencies, as it has long been claimed, but purposeful literary strategies.

Theoretical Framework & Methodology:

- While acknowledging the valuable contributions of oral studies, it is assumed that these epics can be considered cohesive literary compositions, serving as examples of oral-derived texts rather than fluid oral traditions.
- Concepts such as the implied audience (Iser), traditional referentiality (Foley), and narratological tools (de Jong, Mangels) will be employed throughout.
- The key concept for this project is “non-traditional referentiality” (Węcowski, for Homer), i.e. instances where the poem reflects the audience's world rather than the epic past.
- The tension between the epic world and real-life references is considered a deliberate poetic device intended to create synergies, stir emotions, or provide amusement.
- The Principal Investigator assumes that the *Virāṭaparvan* forms an interesting “breach” in the epic world, more reflective of contemporary realities than other books of the *Mahābhārata*, which makes investigating it particularly relevant for this project.

Comparative Focus:

- Despite their differences, the *Odyssey* and *Virāṭaparvan* share significant narrative and poetic features, partially due to their shared Indo-European heritage and epic genre conventions.
- The project will involve the implementation of methods developed in another field of study, like the concept of “non-traditional referentiality,” introduced by Węcowski in his analysis of the Homeric Poems, to analyse the *Mahābhārata*.

Research Plan:

- Defining characteristics of the normative epic world in the *Odyssey* and the *Mahābhārata*.
- Analysing non-traditional referentiality in the *Virāṭaparvan*.
- Conducting an analysis of non-traditional referentiality in the *Odyssey*.
- Investigating implied audience-epic world tension across both texts.
- Comparing patterns and differences in the poetic referentiality.
- Final interpretation and synthesis.

Expected Results:

- Building bridges between Classical and Indological epic studies, providing new insights into the poetics of both epic traditions.
- Offering a methodologically sound alternative to straightforward historical explanations of important anachronisms in the epics.
- Enhancing the understanding of how epic poets crafted narratives to resonate with their audiences.

Team, International Cooperation & Dissemination of the results:

- Led by Kacper Lepionka, with guidance from Marek Węcowski (Greek history/epic, University of Warsaw) and Simon Brodbeck (*Mahābhārata* specialist, Cardiff University).
- Includes research trips to major academic centers in Berlin, Oxford, London and Edinburgh.
- Results will be presented at conferences and published in reputable journals.