

Hesiod, tr. A.N. Athanassakis
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WORKS AND DAYS



Pierian Muses, your songs bring fame and glory.
Come! Let us hear from you the praises of your father,
great Zeus, through whose will men
are exalted by the speech of others or remain unknown.
5 With ease he grants power, with ease he crushes the mighty
and with ease he lowers the noble and raises the lowly.
Yes, Zeus who thunders from his lofty dwelling
with ease straightens the crooked and shrivels the insolent.
Hear and see, O Zeus! Let your decrees be straight and fair!
10 And I will speak to Perses the naked truth:
There was never one kind of Strife. Indeed on this earth
two kinds exist. The one is praised by her friends,
the other found blameworthy. These two are not of one mind.
The one—so harsh—fosters evil war and the fray of battle.
15 No man loves this oppressive Strife, but compulsion
and divine will grant her a share of honor.
The other one is black Night's elder daughter;
and the son of Kronos, who dwells on ethereal heights,
planted her in the roots of the earth and among men.
20 She is much better, and she stirs even the shiftless on to work.
A man will long for work when he sees a man of wealth
who rushes with zeal to plow and plant
and husband his homestead. One neighbor envies another
who hastens to his riches. This Strife is good for mortals.
25 Then potters eye one another's success and craftsmen, too;
the beggar's envy is a beggar, the singer's a singer.
Perses, treasure this thought deep down in your heart,
do not let malicious Strife curb your zeal for work
so you can see and hear the brawls of the market place.

30 Not much time for brawls and gatherings can be spared
by the man in whose house the season's plentiful harvest,
Demeter's grain, fruit of the earth, has not been stored.
Have plenty of this and then incite brawls and strife
over another man's possessions. Lose no time! Seize
35 your only chance to let straight justice
—Zeus's fairest—settle this quarrel.
Our inheritance was divided; but there is so much
you grabbed and carried away as a fat bribe
for gift-devouring kings, fools who want to be judges
40 in this trial; they know neither how the half is greater
than the whole, nor how asphodel and mallow nurture.
The gods keep livelihood hidden from men.
Otherwise a day's labor could bring a man enough
to last a whole year with no more work.
45 Then you could hang your oar over the smoke of your fireplace
without a thought for the work of oxen and hardy mules.
But Zeus was angered in his heart and hid the means to life
because Prometheus with his crooked schemes had cheated him.
This is why Zeus devised sorrows and troubles for men.
50 He hid fire. But Prometheus, noble son of Iapetos,
stole it back for man from Zeus, whose counsels are many.
In the hollow of a fennel stalk he slipped it away,
unnoticed by Zeus, who delights in thunder.
So the cloud-gatherer in anger said to him:
55 "Son of Iapetos, there is none craftier than you,
and you rejoice at tricking my wits and stealing the fire
which will be a curse to you and to the generations that follow.
The price for the stolen fire will be a gift of evil
to charm the hearts of all men as they hug their own doom."
60 This said, the father of gods and men roared with laughter.
Then he ordered widely acclaimed Hephaistos to mix earth with water
with all haste and place in them human voice
and strength. His orders were to make a face
such as goddesses have and the shape of a lovely maiden;
65 Athena was to teach her skills and intricate weaving,
and golden Aphrodite should pour grace round the maiden's head,
and stinging desire and limb-gnawing passion.
Then he ordered Hermes the path-breaker and slayer of Argos
to put in her the mind of a bitch and a thievish nature.

70 So he spoke, and they obeyed lord Zeus, son of Kronos.
Without delay the renowned lame god fashioned from earth,
through Zeus's will, the likeness of a shy maiden,
and Athena, the gray-eyed goddess, clothed her and decked her out.
Then the divine graces and queenly Persuasion
75 gave her golden necklaces to wear, and the lovely-haired Seasons
stood round her and crowned her with spring flowers.
Pallas Athena adorned her body with every kind of jewel,
and the Slayer of Argos—Hermes the guide—through the will
of Zeus whose thunder roars placed in her breast
80 lies, coaxing words, and a thievish nature.
The gods' herald then gave her voice and called this woman
Pandora because all of the gods who dwell on Olympos
gave her a gift—a scourge for toiling men.
Now when the Father finished his grand and wily scheme
85 he sent the glorious Slayer of Argos and swift messenger
to bring the gift of the gods to Epimetheus,
who did not heed Prometheus's warning never to accept
a gift from Olympian Zeus, but send it back,
for fear that some evil might befall mortals.
90 First he accepted it and then saw the evil in it.
Earlier, human tribes lived on this earth
without suffering and toilsome hardship
and without painful illnesses that bring death to men—
a wretched life ages men before their time—
95 but the woman with her hands removed the great lid of the jar
and scattered its contents, bringing grief and cares to men.
Only Hope stayed under the rim of the jar
and did not fly away from her secure stronghold,
for in compliance with the wishes of cloud-gathering Zeus
100 Pandora put the lid on the jar before she could come out.
The rest wander among men as numberless sorrows,
since earth and sea teem with miseries.
Some diseases come upon men during the day, and some
roam about and bring pains to men in the silence of night
105 because Zeus the counselor made them mute.
So there is no way to escape the designs of Zeus.
I will give you the pith of another story—if you wish—
with consummate skill. Treasure this thought in your heart:
Men and gods have a common descent.

110 At first the immortals who dwell on Olympos
created a golden race of mortal men.
That was when Kronos was king of the sky,
and they lived like gods, carefree in their hearts,
shielded from pain and misery. Helpless old age
115 did not exist, and with limbs of unsagging vigor
they enjoyed the delights of feasts, out of evil's reach.
A sleeplike death subdued them, and every good thing was theirs;
the barley-giving earth asked for no toil to bring forth
a rich and plentiful harvest. They knew no constraint
120 and lived in peace and abundance as lords of their lands,
rich in flocks and dear to the blessed gods.
But the earth covered this race,
and they became holy spirits that haunt it,
benign protectors of mortals that drive harm away
125 and keep a watchful eye over lawsuits and wicked deeds,
swathed in misty veils as they wander over the earth.
They are givers of wealth by kingly prerogative.
The gods of Olympos made a second race
—a much worse one—this time of silver,
130 unlike the golden one in thought or looks.
For a hundred years they were nurtured by their prudent mothers
as playful children—each a big baby in his house—
but when they grew up and reached adolescence
they lived only for a short while, plagued by the pains
135 of foolishness. They could not refrain from reckless violence
against one another and did not want to worship the gods
and on holy altars perform sacrifices for them,
as custom differing from place to place dictates.
In time Zeus, son of Kronos, was angered and buried them
140 because they denied the blessed Olympians their due honors.
The earth covered this race, too;
they dwell under the ground and are called blessed mortals—
they are second but, still, greatly honored.
Zeus the father made a third race of mortals,
145 this time of bronze, not at all like the silver one.
Fashioned from ash trees, they were dreadful and mighty
and bent on the harsh deeds of war and violence;
they ate no bread and their hearts were strong as steel.
No one could come near them, for their strength was great

150 and mighty arms grew from the shoulders of their sturdy bodies.
Bronze were their weapons, bronze their homes
and bronze was what they worked—there was no black iron then.
With their hands they worked one another's destruction
and they reached the dank home of cold Hades
155 nameless. Black death claimed them for all their fierceness,
and they left the bright sunlight behind them.
But when the earth covered this race, too,
Zeus, son of Kronos, made upon the nourishing land
yet another race—the fourth one—better and more just.
160 They were the divine race of heroes, who are called
demigods; they preceded us on this boundless earth.
Evil war and dreadful battle wiped them all out,
some fighting over the flocks of Oidipous
at seven-gated Thebes, in the land of Kadmos,
165 others over the great gulf of the sea in ships
that had sailed to Troy for the sake of lovely-haired Helen;
there death threw his dark mantle over them.
Yet others of them father Zeus, son of Kronos, settled at earth's ends,
apart from men, and gave them shelter and food.
170 They lived there with hearts unburdened by cares
in the islands of the blessed, near stormy Okeanos,
these blissful heroes for whom three times a year
the barley-giving land brings forth full grain sweet as honey.
I wish I were not counted among the fifth race of men,
175 but rather had died before, or been born after it.
This is the race of iron. Neither day nor night
will give them rest as they waste away with toil
and pain. Growing cares will be given them by the gods,
and their lot will be a blend of good and bad.
180 Zeus will destroy this race of mortals
when children are born gray at the temples.
Children will not resemble their fathers,
and there will be no affection between guest and host
and no love between friends or brothers as in the past.
185 Sons and daughters will be quick to offend their aging parents
and rebuke them and speak to them with rudeness
and cruelty, not knowing about divine retribution;
they will not even repay their parents for their keep—
these law-breakers—and they will sack one another's cities,

190 The man who keeps his oath, or is just and good,
 will not be favored, but the evil-doers and scoundrels
 will be honored, for might will make right and shame will vanish.
 Base men will harm their betters with words
 that are crooked and then swear they are fair.
 195 And all toiling humanity will be blighted by envy,
 grim and strident envy that takes its joy in the ruin of others.
 Then Shame and Retribution will cover their fair bodies
 with white cloaks and, leaving men behind,
 will go to Olympos from the broad-pathed earth
 200 to be among the race of the immortals, while grief and pain
 will linger among men, whom harm will find defenseless.
 Though kings are wise, I will tell them a fable:
 this is what a hawk said to a nightingale with a many-hued neck
 that he snatched with his claws and carried high up in the clouds.
 205 As his hooked talons skewered her she raised a pitiful cry,
 and he spoke to her these lordly words:
 "Lady, why all the screaming? You are your better's captive;
 you have to follow me, though you are a great chanteuse,
 I can have you for dinner, or let you go, if I wish,
 210 for only fools oppose their betters in strength
 to suffer the pain of defeat crested with shame."
 So spoke the hawk, that fast, long-winged bird.
 Perses, obey justice and restrain reckless wrongdoing,
 for such wrongdoing harms the poor, and even the noble
 215 find it an unwelcome burden that weighs them down
 and brings them ruin. The road to fair dealings
 is the better one. Justice is the winner in the race
 against insolent crime. Only fools need suffer to learn.
 The Oath Demon follows the trail of crooked decrees;
 220 Justice howls when she is dragged about by bribe-devouring men
 whose verdicts are crooked when they sit in judgment.
 Weeping and clothed in mist, she follows through the cities
 and dwellings of men, and visits ruin on those
 who twist her straight ways and drive her out.
 225 But those who give straight verdicts and follow justice,
 both when fellow citizens and strangers are on trial,
 live in a city that blossoms, a city that prospers.
 Then youth-nurturing peace comes over the land, and Zeus
 who sees afar does not decree for them the pains of war.

230 Men whose justice is straight know neither hunger nor ruin,
but amid feasts enjoy the yield of their labors.
For them the earth brings forth a rich harvest; and for them
the top of an oak teems with acorn and the middle with bees.
Fleecy sheep are weighed down with wool,
235 and women bear children who resemble their fathers.
There is an abundance of blessings and the grainland
grants such harvests that no one has to sail on the sea.
But far-seeing Zeus, son of Kronos, is the judge
of wanton wrongdoers who plot deeds of harshness.
240 Many times one man's wickedness ruins a whole city,
if such a man breaks the law and turns his mind to recklessness.
Then the son of Kronos sends a great bane from the sky,
hunger and plague, and the people waste away.
Women bear no children, and families dwindle
245 through the counsels of Zeus the Olympian,
the son of Kronos, who punishes wrong by wiping out
large armies, walls, and ships at sea.
Kings, give this verdict no little thought,
for the immortals are ever present among men,
250 and they see those who with crooked verdicts
spurn divine retribution and grind down one another's lives.
Upon this earth that nurtures many Zeus can levy
thirty thousand deathless guardians of mortal men,
who keep a watchful eye over verdicts and cruel acts
255 as they rove the whole earth, clothed in mist.
Justice is a maiden and a daughter of Zeus;
the gods of Olympos respect her noble title,
and whenever men mistreat her through false charges
she rushes to sit at the feet of Zeus Kronion
260 and she denounces the designs of men who are not just,
so that the people pay for the reckless deeds and evil plans
of kings whose slanted words twist her straight path.
Keep her commands, O gift-devouring kings, and let
verdicts be straight; yes, lay your crooked ways aside!
265 He that wrongs another man wrongs, above all, himself,
and evil schemes bring more harm on those who plot them.
The eye of Zeus sees all, notices all;
it sees all this, too, if it wishes, and knows exactly
what sort of host this town is to justice.

270 As matters stand, may neither I nor my son
 be just men in this world, because it is a bad thing
 to be just if wrongdoers win the court decisions.
 But I do not believe yet that Zeus's wisdom will allow this.
 Perses, put all this deep in your mind,
 275 obey the voice of justice and always refrain from violence.
 This is the law Zeus laid down for men,
 but fish and wild beasts and winged birds
 know not of justice and so eat one another.
 Justice, the best thing there is, he gave to men;
 280 Zeus who sees far and wide blesses the affairs
 of the man who knows justice and proclaims it before the public.
 If a man as a witness knowingly swears a false oath
 and lies, and so in his incurable folly tramples on justice,
 his offspring will sink and slowly vanish,
 285 while the seed of him whose oath is true will prosper.
 I will speak to you, Perses, you great fool, for your own good;
 you can choose to have evil, and heaps of it, too,
 for its house lies near and the path to it is smooth.
 But the immortals decreed that man must sweat
 290 to attain virtue; the road to it is steep and long
 and rough at first, but even so the journey
 gets easy once you set foot on the peak.
 Best is the man who thinks for himself
 and sees how things will turn out at the end.
 295 Noble, too, is the man who listens to good advice.
 But useless is the man who has no brains of his own
 and, worse yet, pays no heed to the words of others.
 But you, well-born Perses, never forget my command:
 Work! Work, and then Hunger will not be your companion,
 300 while fair-wreathed and sublime Demeter
 will favor you and fill your barn with her blessings.
 Hunger and the idling man are bosom friends.
 Both gods and mortals resent the lazy man,
 a man no more ambitious than the stingless drones
 305 that feed on the bees' labor in wasteful sloth.
 Let there be order and measure in your own work
 until your barns are filled with the season's harvest.
 Riches and flocks of sheep go to those who work.
 If you work, you will be dearer to immortals

310 and mortals; they both loathe the indolent.
No shame in work but plenty of it in sloth.
If your work brings you wealth, you will be envied by the slothful,
because glory and excellence follow riches.
Whatever your lot, nothing will be as good as work,
if you take my advice and turn your foolish mind
315 away from the possessions of your fellow men
to labor in the service of what is your own.
Shame of the useless kind attends the poor,
and shame can either harm or profit men;
shame brings poverty while boldness leads to riches
320 —not stolen wealth, god-given is much better.
If a man by might of hand seizes great wealth,
or robs with clever words—and such things do happen
when men's minds are tricked by the greed for profit,
and regard for man loses the race to shamelessness—
325 then easily the gods blot out such a man and reduce
his house. Yes, such fortunes do not last long.
It is equally bad to mistreat suppliants and strangers,
or to sleep with your brother's wife,
flouting decency in the secrecy of her bedroom,
330 or through foolishness to wrong someone's orphaned children,
or to fling cruel words at aging parents
as they stand before the threshold of old age.
Such acts of injustice anger Zeus himself,
who rewards them harshly upon their completion.
335 But do restrain your foolish mind from such deeds.
In proportion to your means offer the gods sacrifices
that are pure and unblemished, and burn choice thighs for them.
At other times seek their favor with burnings and libations
when you go to sleep and when the holy light looms in the horizon,
340 so that you win their favor for your affairs,
not having to sell your land, but buying more from others.
Invite your friends to dinner and leave your enemies out
and remember that neighbors come first.
If misfortune strikes your house, neighbors will come
345 in their bedclothes; kinsmen will dress up.
Bad neighbors are pests, good ones a great blessing.
A good neighbor is a boon to him who has one.
If your neighbor is honest, your ox is safe.
Neighbors should measure well, and you must give back

- 350 no less than you take, and even more if you can,
that you may find enough when you are in need again.
Ruin trails dishonest profit; keep away from it.
Love those who love you, and help those who help you.
Give to those who give to you, never to those who do not.
- 355 Gifts go to givers, the stingy go away empty-handed.
Giving is good, robbing bad—it courts death.
The man who gives from the heart, even if his gift is great,
takes pleasure in it and is rewarded with inner delight.
But even a small thing grabbed by the shameless man
- 360 may chill his heart like a coat of hoar frost.
If you pile one little thing on top of another,
and do this often, you will soon have a heap.
The man who adds to what he has fends off hunger that glazes the eyes.
One does not worry about what lies stored in his home.
- 365 Home is safer; what lies out of doors is harmed.
To take from what one has is good, but grief comes
with longing for what one lacks. Do think of all this.
Drink all you want when your jar is full or almost empty;
sparing is good at midpoint and useless when the bottom shows.
- 370 Wages promised to friends should always be paid,
and even with your brother smile and get a witness,
for blind faith is as dangerous as excessive trust.
Do not be deceived by a woman who wags her tail
as she chatters sweetly with a greedy eye on your possessions.
- 375 You trust a thief when you trust a woman.
Wealth will increase inside your house,
if you beget an only son to nurture it.
And may you die old leaving another son behind.
Zeus can grant his bounty just as easily to many;
- 380 more children mean more cares, but more income too.
If your heart is set on becoming wealthy,
do as I say and cap work with more work.
Start reaping when the Pleiades rise, daughters of Atlas,
and begin to plow when they set.
- 385 For forty days and forty nights they lie hidden,
but as the year moves on in its cycle
they can be seen again when you first sharpen your iron.
Nature has laid down this law for all whether they live on the plain,
or dwell by the sea, or whether far from the stormy deep

390 they farm a rich piece of land in the hollow woodlands:
"Strip down when you sow, and strip down again when you plow
or reap, if you want to bring home for storage
each of Demeter's gifts in the right season."
This way each thing will grow in season, and need will not
395 compel you to knock on doors in vain as a beggar.
This is how you came to me but I have given enough
and shall give no more. Work, foolish Perses,
for this is what the gods have decreed for men;
otherwise sad-hearted, you will drag your wife and children along
400 to beg support from neighbors deaf to your pleas.
You will be successful once or twice but, if you annoy them further,
you will be wasting your many words;
your skill with speech will not succeed. But I bid you
find ways to pay your debts and escape hunger.
405 First build a house and get an ox for the plow, and a woman,
not a wife but a slave woman, to follow your oxen,
and keep everything in readiness at home,
because it will break your heart to ask and not receive,
while the time passes and you suffer a loss.
410 Do not postpone for tomorrow or the day after tomorrow;
barns are not filled by those who postpone
and waste time in aimlessness. Work prospers with care;
he who postpones wrestles with ruin.
When the sun's fierce swelter abates
415 with the coming of Zeus's rains in autumn,
a man's body feels much lighter
because the dog star, now night's lover
much longer, stands only a brief part of the day
over the heads of men, death's fattened victims;
420 then wood cut with the ax from trees that shed their leaves
and stop sprouting is too tough to be eaten by worms.
Remember! That is the right time for lumbering.
Cut a three-foot log for your mortar and a three-cubit pestle.
A seven-foot axle makes for a perfect fit,
425 and an eight-foot piece will give you a mallet as well.
For ten-palm wagons cut fellies no longer than three spans;
for this you need many curved pieces. Bring a plow beam home,
and try to look for one of holm oak in some hill or flatland;
it is the sturdiest kind for your oxen when they plow

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- 430 after a craftsman fastens it to the share
and drives pegs through it to attach it to the pole.
Take the trouble to keep two plows at home,
one of a single stock, the other of pieces fitted together.
This is best, for if you break the one, you yoke the oxen to the other.
- 435 Poles of elm or laurel are the most immune to worms.
Make your share of oak and your beam of holm oak.
Own a pair of nine-year-old oxen; in their prime,
their strength endures and they are best for work.
They will not kick and butt over the furrow
- 440 and so break the plow and leave the work undone.
A forty-year-old farmhand should follow your oxen
—one fed with a loaf big enough to be broken into four and then into eight pieces.
He will tend to his labor and drive a straight furrow;
too old to look about for companions, he will keep his mind
- 445 on the job. Younger men than he cannot scatter
the seed better and avoid waste.
Younger men are too anxious to join their companions.
When the crane flies high above in the clouds
each year, pay heed to her cry.
- 450 This signal that winter's rains are about to come
knives the heart of the man who has no oxen.
Then you must feed well the curved-horned oxen you keep in your barn.
You can easily say "Give me a pair of oxen and a wagon"
and just as easily hear "Sorry, my oxen have work to do."
- 455 Fanciful men build wagons only in their minds;
fools do not go even so far; yet, a hundred pieces of wood
for making a wagon must be at home in ready supply.
As soon as time for plowing comes
you and your slaves must rush to the task
- 460 the season dictates and plow both wet and dry land;
early risers harvest fields laden with grain.
Plow in the spring. The fallow land you plow in the summer will not deceive you.
Sow fallow land when the soil is still loose;
such land will spare you curses and the clamor of hungry children.
- 465 Pray to Zeus of the earth and holy Demeter
to make Demeter's holy grain ripen to fullness.
Pray when you start plowing just as your hand grasps
the handle and the whip comes down hard
on the backs of your oxen as they tug at the strap pins;

470 and let a young slave follow you with a mattock
 to make the birds toil hard for the seed he hides.
 For mortals order is best, disorder is worst.
 This way grain-heavy ears will bend over the ground,
 if the lord of Olympus himself grants success in the end,
 475 and you will wipe your pots clean of cobwebs.
 Yes, joy will be yours when you draw on your stored supplies,
 and, well-stocked, reach spring as it blossoms white,
 not casting begging glances at others—others will need you.
 If you plow the good earth at the winter solstice
 480 you will reap tiny handfuls, squatting in the dust
 to cross-bind them with little thrill in your heart;
 few will admire what you bring home in a basket.
 Aegis-bearing Zeus has a design for each occasion,
 and mortals find this hard to comprehend.
 485 But here is some consolation for the man who plows late;
 when the cuckoo's song is first heard among the oak leaves
 to the delight of mortals throughout the wide earth,
 then may Zeus send rain three days later,
 just enough to fill an ox's hoofprint.
 490 This way the late plower will be a match for him who plows early.
 Treasure all this in your heart and always mark
 the coming of spring with its white blossoms or of rain in season.
 Walk past the smithy and its crowded lounge
 in winter when cold keeps men away from work
 495 —even then an industrious man can increase his fortune—
 so that in the grip of an evil winter's needy impasse
 you are not forced to rub your swollen feet with a scrawny hand.
 The lazy man trusts in empty hope and is left
 without means; so his mind is turned to wrongdoing.
 500 It is the wrong kind of hope that courts the poor,
 who do not have enough and yet gossip in idleness.
 Before midsummer has passed tell your slaves:
 "Build barns! It will not be summer forever."
 In the month of Lenaion the days are bad;
 505 they skin oxen alive. Beware of this month and its frosts
 that grip the earth when the gusty north wind
 stirs the broad sea and blows through Thrace
 —that nurturer of horses—as land and forest bellow.
 Up in the mountain woodlands it blows against

510 many high-crested oaks and sturdy firs
 and fells them to the rich earth as the vast forest groans.
 Wild beasts shiver then and curl their tails under their bellies—
 chilly wind pierces the shag that coats the breasts
 even of animals whose skin is covered with deep fur;
 515 it will go through the hide of an ox
 and through a goat's long hair, but fleecy sheep
 are safe from the blast of the north wind.
 It sends an old man scurrying for protection,
 but does not blow through to a maiden's tender skin,
 520 for she stays indoors with her dear mother,
 still unaware of golden Aphrodite's deeds;
 she bathes her soft skin well and rubs it down
 to sleekness with oil and then lies down, hidden away in her bedroom.
 So it is in the winter when Mr. Boneless chews his foot
 525 in the gloomy haunts, where his fireless house lies;
 for the sun does not show him the way to the feeding grounds
 but circles over those who dwell in the lands
 of black men and is slow to shine on all the Greeks.
 Then horned and hornless lodgers of the forest,
 530 teeth chattering wretchedly, flee throughout the woodlands
 and there is only one thought in their hearts:
 they long to find shelter in windproof lairs
 inside some hollow rock. Then mortals have three legs;
 their backs are bent and their heads sweep the ground—
 535 they are walking tripods fleeing the white snow.
 Then you must clothe your body well
 with a fringed tunic and a soft cloak over it.
 Weave cloth in which there is much weft for little warp
 and wear it, so that your hair does not stand on end
 540 and bristle all over your body.
 From the skin of a slaughtered ox make sandals
 lined with felt and bind them snugly about your feet.
 When the cold season comes stitch together skins
 of firstling kids with an ox sinew and wrap your back
 545 with them to keep the rain off; and on your head
 wear a tight-fitting cap to keep your ears dry.
 Mornings are cold when the north wind blows
 and damp fog descends from the starry sky
 and hovers like a chilly veil over men's wheat patches.

550 This is a mist drawn up from ever-flowing rivers
and then raised by stormy winds high above the earth;
sometimes it comes as evening rain and often as wind
when Thracian gusts whip thick clouds to frenzy.
Run faster than this wind; finish work and head for home,
555 wary of a dark cloud that swoops from the sky to envelope you
and soak your body and clothes until you are dripping wet.
Take precautions. This is a wintry and stormy month,
cruel for men and cruel for sheep.
Give oxen half rations and men more than their usual share
560 because the kindly nights are now too long.
Heed this advice until the end of the year,
when nights and days are no longer unequal
and until the earth, mother of all, gives her many fruits.
When—Zeus willing—counting from the winter solstice
565 sixty days have passed, then the star Arcturus
leaves the sacred stream of Okeanos
and first rises brilliant at eventide,
then the swallow, shrill-voiced daughter of Pandion,
flies up into the light when the new spring begins;
570 it is best to prune your vines before her arrival.
But when the house-carrier from the ground climbs on plants,
fleeing the Pleiades, then no longer hoe your vines
but sharpen your sickles and wake up the slaves.
Do not dawdle on shady benches and do not sleep past dawn,
575 when it is time to reap and the sun shrivels the skin.
At that time rise before the crack of dawn
and bring the grain home to secure abundance of good.
The dawn claims the third portion of a day's work,
the dawn gives a headstart for journeys and jobs,
580 the dawn's arrival sends many men on their way
and puts the yoke on the necks of many oxen.
When the thistle blooms and the chirping cicada
sits on trees and pours down shrill song
from frenziedly quivering wings in the toilsome summer,
585 then goats are fatter than ever and wine is at its best;
women's lust knows no bounds and men are all dried up,
because the dog star parches their heads and knees
and the heat sears their skin. Then, ah then,
I wish you a shady ledge and your choice wine,

590 bread baked in the dusk and mid-August's goat milk
 and meat from a free-roving heifer that has never calved—
 and from firstling kids. Drink sparkling wine,
 sitting in the shade with your appetite sated,
 and face Zephyr's breeze as it blows from mountain peaks.
 595 Pour three measures of water fetched from a clear spring,
 one that flows unchecked, and a fourth one of wine.
 As soon as mighty Orion rises above the horizon
 exhort your slaves to thresh Demeter's holy grain
 in a windy, well-rounded threshing floor.
 600 Measure it first and then store it in bins.
 But when your grain is tightly stored inside the house
 then hire an unmarried worker and look for a female servant
 with no children—nursing women are a burden.
 Keep a dog with sharp teeth and feed it well,
 605 wary of the day-sleepers who might rob you.
 Bring in a lasting supply of hay and fodder
 for your oxen and mules. Once this is done let your slaves
 rest their weary knees and unyoke the oxen.
 When Orion and the dog star rise to the middle of the sky
 610 and rosy-fingered dawn looks upon Arcturus,
 then, Perses, gather your grapes and bring them home
 and leave them in the sun for ten days and nights,
 in the shade for five, and on the sixth day
 draw the gift of joyous Dionysos into your vats.
 615 When the Pleiades, the Hyades, and mighty Orion set,
 remember the time has come to plow again—
 and may the earth nurse for you a full year's supply.
 And if longing seizes you for sailing the stormy seas,
 when the Pleiades flee mighty Orion
 620 and plunge into the misty deep
 and all the gusty winds are raging,
 then do not keep your ship on the wine-dark sea
 but, as I bid you, remember to work the land.
 Haul your ship onto land and secure it to the ground
 625 with stones on all sides to stay the blast of rain and wind,
 and pull out the plug to avoid rotting caused by rain water.
 Store up the tackle compactly inside your house
 and neatly fold the sails, the wings of a seafaring ship.
 Hang your rudder above the fireplace

630 and wait until the time to sail comes again.
Then drag your swift ship to sea and load on it
a tight cargo—one that will send you home with profit. *migration*
This is how our father, Perses, you precious fool,
sailed on ships, pressed by the need for a better life.

635 He once left Aeolian Kyme and on his black ship
came to this place, after a long bout with the sea,
and he was not fleeing from great riches and comforts
but from grim poverty that Zeus gives to men.
He built his house near Helikon in the worthless village

640 of Askra, a place bad in winter, worse in the summer, never good.
But, Perses, do remember that each kind of work has its season
and, above all, navigation.
Praise a small ship, but load your cargo on a big one.
The bigger the cargo the greater the profit heaped on profit,

645 if the winds keep nasty gales in check.
Whenever you want to turn your foolish mind to trade
to escape your debts and the hunger that plagues you,
I will teach you the rules that govern the sea,
though I am no expert on navigation and ships,

650 since I never sailed the open seas on a boat,
except when I went to Euboea from Aulis, where once
the Achaeans weathered a grim storm and then with a great host
from holy Greece sailed over to Troy, land of fair women.
There I crossed over to Chalkis for the prizes

655 in honor of wise Amphidamas, the many prizes proclaimed in advance
by his magnanimous sons. And I claim that there
I was the victor in a song contest and won an eared tripod,
which I dedicated to the Helikonian Muses,
where they first taught me mastery of flowing song.

660 This is all I know about well-riveted ships,
but even so I can speak the mind of aegis-bearing Zeus,
for the Muses taught me to sing and never weary.
For fifty days, past the summer solstice
and past the end of summer's toilsome part,

665 men can sail with safety, for then a ship
will not be shattered, and the sea will not wipe out the crew,
unless this is the will of Poseidon who shakes the earth,
or Zeus, king of the gods, wants you destroyed;
both have power over good fortune as well as misfortune.

670 Then the winds have clear directions and the sea is safe.
 Then, free of care, trust the winds
 and draw your swift ship to sea and load it full.
 But rush home as soon as you can;
 come back before the new wine and the fall rains,
 675 well ahead of winter and the violent gales of the south wind.
 This wind trails the great fall rains sent by Zeus
 and makes the sea stormy and too rough for sailing.
 The second season for sailing comes in the spring:
 when a man sees on the topmost shoot of a fig tree
 680 leaves as large as a crow's footprint,
 then he may sail across the sea.
 This is the time for spring sailing. I myself do not have
 one good word for it—it does not fill my heart with glee.
 The whim of chance rules it, and disaster is hard to escape
 685 but men take it up because their minds are foolish.
 Man is witless, and his soul is in his purse.
 The death of those who die among the waves is harsh,
 and I ask you not to let my advice go unheeded.
 Do not load all your goods on hollow ships;
 690 your cargo should be less than what you leave behind.
 The disaster you chance upon at sea is dreadful,
 and dreadful the outcome if you overload your wagon
 and thus break the axle and see your load destroyed.
 Observe due limit and timeliness in all your actions.
 695 The right time to bring a wife to your home
 is when you are only a few years younger than thirty,
 or just a few years older. This is the time for marriage.
 Five years past puberty makes a woman a suitable bride.
 Marry a virgin so you can teach her right from wrong.
 700 Choose from among the girls who live near you and check
 every detail, so that your bride will not be the neighborhood joke.
 Nothing is better for man than a good wife,
 and no horror matches a bad one, a glutton
 who reclines to eat and needs no fire to roast
 705 even a stalwart man and age him before his time.
 Heed the vengeance of the blessed immortals
 and do not make a friend your brother's equal.
 If you do so, do not be the first to do wrong
 and to lie for the sake of lying.

- 710 And if a friend is first to displease you by word or deed,
remember to pay him back doubly in kind. But again
if he offers his friendship and wants to make amends,
be gracious. Only scoundrels change their friends.
Your face should mirror what is in your mind.
- 715 Do not be called a host of too many or of none,
and neither befriend the lowly nor quarrel with the noble. —
Do not allow yourself to mock baneful poverty
that wears men's hearts away; it, too, comes from the gods.
A man owns no better treasure than a prudent tongue;
720 there is no small pleasure in it, if it moves with grace.
Bad words flung at others bounce back with double strength.
Let your manners be gentle at feasts attended by many.
When all share the cost the expense is little and the joy great.
Never pour a libation to Zeus after dawn,
725 or to the other immortals, if you have not washed your hands.
They will not hear your prayers but spit them back at you.
Do not piss as you stand and face the sun,
but do it after the sun sets and before it rises,
and even then do not be naked, for nights belong to the gods.
- 730 Do not piss either off or on the road while you walk.
The devout and wise man squats for this act,
or does it against the sturdy wall of some yard.
And in your house do not sit by the hearth
with your genitals exposed and bespattered with semen.
- 735 Sire your children when you return from a feast of the gods,
not when you come back from an inauspicious burial. Never piss into springs.
Never cross the fair waters of ever-flowing rivers
before you wash your hands with lovely and limpid water
and pray as you look upon the stream before you cross.
- 740 If a man crosses a river with unwashed hands and impure heart,
the gods bear a grudge and bring pains upon him later.
At a joyous feast for the gods never with gleaming iron
cut off the dry from the green of your five-branch,
Let those who drink never place the serving cup
745 over the mixing bowl; bad luck comes with this, too.
And on the house you build carve a luck-bringing sign
so that no crows will perch on it and caw.
When you eat and bathe do not use vessels
unhallowed by sacrifice; otherwise you may be harmed.

- 750 It is not good for boys twelve days or twelve years old
to sit on that which is motionless,
for such an act unmans even a man in his prime.
A man should not sleek his body with a woman's bath water,
for in time even this is cruelly punished.
- 755 And if a man chances on victims burning in sacrifice,
let him not mock the unknown and thus anger some god.
Never piss where rivers pour into the sea
or into springs, but always avoid this.
It is just as bad to relieve yourself in such places.
- 760 Do as I say, and remember how destructive people's gossip is;
it is easy to get a bad reputation
but hard to live with it and harder to shed it.
What is said of you does not vanish,
if many say it; such talk is a kind of god.
- 765 Zeus sends the days; observe them in due measure
and explain to your slaves that the thirtieth is the best
for overseeing work and giving men their rations.
Here are the days that come from Zeus the counselor,
if people judge their true nature and live by it:
- 770 The chief sacred days are the first, the fourth, and the seventh;
Leto bore Apollon of the golden sword on the seventh.
The eighth and the ninth of the waxing month
are outstanding days for men to engage in work.
The eleventh and the twelfth are both good days
775 for shearing sheep and reaping a fine harvest.
The twelfth is much better than the eleventh;
spiders hover in the air and spin their yarn
at this day's fullness, and the wise one piles up his harvest.
On this day let a woman set up her loom and weave.
- 780 Do not start your sowing on the thirteenth day
of the waxing month; this day is best for nurturing plants.
The sixth day of midmonth does not favor plants
but is good for the birth of boys; it does not favor
either the birth or the marriage of girls.
- 785 The sixth day of the month's first part is not proper
for the birth of girls, but gelding of kids and lambs
hurts less then, and pens built for your flocks will be better.
It favors the birth of boys who are sharp-tongued
and who lie and coax and are fond of secret whispers.

- 790 On the eighth of the month geld your boar and bellowing bull
and on the twelfth do the same to your hardy mules.
Men born in the fullness of the great twentieth day
are wise, and their minds are never slack.
The tenth is good for the birth of a boy and the fourth
795 of midmonth for the birth of a girl. On this day stroke your sheep,
your shambling curved-horned oxen, your sharp-toothed dog,
and your hardy mules. And keep in your mind
the ills of the fourth day when the month waxes and wanes;
guard against this day, which can break your heart.
- 800 Bring a wife to your home on the fourth of the month,
but first watch for the bird signs best for this venture.
Be on your guard on all fifth days; they are harsh and dread.
They say that on the fifth the Furies assisted
at the birth of Oath, whom Strife bore as a scourge to perjurers.
- 805 On the seventh of midmonth look about with care
and then pour down Demeter's holy grain on a threshing floor
that is well-rounded. On this day the lumberman should cut
beams for the house and tight-fitting timbers for ships.
On the fourth day start building your trim boats.
- 810 The ninth of midmonth is better toward evening,
and the least harm for men is found in the first ninth;
this is a good day for men and women both to plant offspring
and to be born themselves. Yes, this day is never all bad.
Few know that the twenty-seventh is the best day
- 815 for opening a cask or placing the yoke on the necks
of oxen, mules, and fleet-footed horses,
and for dragging to the wine-dark sea a ship
of many row locks. Few men call this day by its true name.
Open wine jars on the fifth. The fourth of midmonth is holiest.
- 820 Again, few men know that after the twentieth of the month
the fourth is best at dawn and not as good toward evening.
The people of this earth profit greatly from these days.
The other days are meaningless, untouched by fortune.
Men have days they favor, but few really know.
- 825 The same day can be a mother now, a stepmother later.
Happy and blessed is the man who knows all this
and does his work without offending the immortals,
ever watching birds of omen, ever shunning transgression.