Surveying the various analyses of time in Greek literature, a first observation immediately offers itself: most narrative texts display an order that is chronological. This phenomenon is hardly surprising, since the very definition of a narrative is to some extent built on the notion that time progresses. Most narrators will proceed in an order that is essentially chronological, with the result that their texts are recognizable as a narrative. Even the narratives of Pindar, which have generally been treated as anachronical because they seemed to be structured according to the principle of ring-composition, upon closer examination appear to be mostly chronological too. What seemed to be temporal ring-composition often turns out either to be thematic ring-composition, or the narrator makes use of the device of ‘initial summary with subsequent elaboration’: he first gives the gist of the story in summary form and then narrates it in more detail in essentially chronological order.

A text that is not strictly chronological is Hesiod’s *Theogony*: while the general sequence of the genealogies is chronological, within the single genealogy, the narrator regularly pushes ahead and narrates the birth and experiences of characters who belong to later generations of the same family branch. The demands of genealogy here prevail over strict chronology. For genuinely anachronical narratives we must turn to those of secondary narrators (in epic or drama). Thus, while some of the narratives embedded in drama are chronological (especially prologue narratives and messenger-speeches, but also, for example, Atossa’s report of her dream in Aeschylus’ *Persians*), choral narratives and narratives recounted in dialogue form often display very different orders. A notorious example of temporal complexity is the *parodos* of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. A recurrent type of anachronical order is first to move backwards in time and then forward again (so-called ‘epic
regression’). Even in oratory, where narratives tend to be chronological for the sake of clarity, Demosthenes may opt not only to fragment his narrative (this phenomenon is found in other orators too) but to present events in an anachronical order that best suits his strategy of persuasion.

Occasionally, we find only a semblance of chronology, as is the case in many Aristophanic narratives. They begin chronologically, but soon, under the influence of emotions, end in temporal chaos and the piling up of events in a random order.

Another variation on the chronological order is found in the genres of biography and historiography. Here a narrator may wish, for reasons of thematic unity, to group together events that in fact belong to different times. We find this feature in Herodian, Plutarch and Philostratus. Philostratus even alternates chronological narration with achronical, paradigmatic narration: the linear account of Apollonius’ life is interspersed with anecdotes which are hard to pinpoint temporally but illustrate behaviour that is characteristic of him.

**Time awareness**

An important aspect of the handling of time and one that lies at the basis of many others, such as rhythm and frequency, is the question of explicit time awareness: do we regularly find time-markers that help us identify at which point of the story we are and how much time each event takes up? Interesting and manifold variations are discernible here, which show that there is no generic uniformity in this respect. Thus in epic and elegiac poetry there is a marked difference between on the one hand Homer and Apollonius of Rhodes, who regularly provide precise time-markers, indicating the days and nights and often the individual parts of a day (and the seasons in the case of Apollonius), and, on the other, Hesiod, the Homeric hymns, Callimachus and Theocritus, who are vague where the marking of time is concerned. Interestingly enough, there is one Homeric hymn, the one to Hermes, which does abound in time-markers. Their frequency and specificity turn this hymn, which recounts Hermes’ theft of Apollo’s cattle, into a kind of ‘police report’. In Callimachus the occasional time-marker is inserted not so much for the sake of establishing a precise chronology but in order to convey a programmatic or meta-poetic message. By beginning his *Aetia* with the story of the Charites at Paros, which takes place when