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HISTORY AND *HYPONOIA*: HERODOTUS AND EARLY LITERARY CRITICISM*

Abstract: This article addresses two problematic passages in which Herodotus discusses Homeric poetry (2.116 and 2.53). These passages may make more sense on the hypothesis that Herodotus was familiar with some of the more radical assumptions and methods of ancient literary criticism. In particular, Herodotus seeks to interpret Homeric poetry according to *hyponoiai* ('hidden, underlying meanings') and may have been influenced by allegorical approaches to Homer in his views on poetic invention of the gods' attributes.

In Book II of his *History* (113–9), Herodotus recounts a story he heard from Egyptian priests, that Paris and Helen were shipwrecked in Egypt on the way to Troy, and that Helen spent the whole of the war there until she was later recovered by Menelaus. Herodotus ultimately endorses this version of events (120), based on a combination of evidence including material remains (an Egyptian shrine), Egyptian oral tradition, his own standard of plausibility, and some passages from the Homeric epics. Without addressing the overall complexity of Herodotus' historical method, this article takes a closer look at the last-named type of evidence, Homeric poetry. Herodotus' departure here from Homer's explicit account of the Trojan War is often described as a radical claim that historical writing is superior to poetry.[1] And yet, Herodotus cites rather than contradicts Homer; and closer examination of how he does this, despite the obvious discrepancy between Homer's account and his own preferred version, shows a great deal about the historian's view of the poet. I hope it will also show that this view is not revolutionary, but in many ways quite typical of the main currents of critical approaches to Homer up to and including the historian's own time. Another passage (2.53), more often discussed under this rubric, may take on a new complexion in light of the argument.

The first passage runs as follows (2.116):

> Ἑλένης μὲν ταύτην ἄπιξιν παρὰ Πρωτέα ἔλεγον οἱ ἱρέες γενέσθαι· δοκέει δέ μοι καὶ Ὅμηρος τὸν λόγον τοῦτον πυθέσθαι· ἀλλ᾽ οὐ γὰρ

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[1] E.g., Koster (1970) 13–14; Neville (1977) 4–7; Lateiner (1989) 99–100; Austin (1994) 123; Thomas (2000) 271.

ὁμοίως ἐς τὴν ἐποποιίην εὐπρεπὴς ἦν τῷ ἑτέρῳ τῷ περ ἐχρήσατο, [ἐς ὅ] μετῆκε αὐτόν, δηλώσας ὡς καὶ τοῦτον ἐπίσταιτο τὸν λόγον. (2) δῆλον δέ, κατὰ παρεποίησε ἐν Ἰλιάδι (καὶ οὐδαμῇ ἄλλῃ ἀνεπόδισε ἑωυτόν) πλάνην τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου, ὡς ἀπηνείχθη ἄγων Ἑλένην τῇ τε δὴ ἄλλῃ πλαζόμενος καὶ ὡς ἐς Σιδῶνα τῆς Φοινίκης ἀπίκετο. (3) ἐπιμέμνηται δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐν Διομήδεος ἀριστείῃ· λέγει δὲ τὰ ἔπεα ὧδε·

ἔνθ' ἔσαν οἱ πέπλοι παμποίκιλοι, ἔργα γυναικῶν
Σιδονίων, τὰς αὐτὸς Ἀλέξανδρος θεοειδὴς
ἤγαγε Σιδονίηθεν, ἐπιπλὼς εὐρέα πόντον,
τὴν ὁδὸν ἣν Ἑλένην περ ἀνήγαγεν εὐπατέρειαν.

[(4) ἐπιμέμνηται δὲ καὶ ἐν Ὀδυσσείῃ ἐν τοῖσιδε τοῖσι ἔπεσι·

τοῖα Διὸς θυγάτηρ ἔχε φάρμακα μητιόεντα,
ἐσθλά, τά οἱ Πολύδαμνα πόρεν Θῶνος παράκοιτις
Αἰγυπτίη, τῇ πλεῖστα φέρει ζείδωρος ἄρουρα
φάρμακα, πολλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ μεμιγμένα, πολλὰ δὲ λυγρά.

(5) καὶ τάδε ἕτερα πρὸς Τηλέμαχον Μενέλεως λέγει·

Αἰγύπτῳ μ' ἔτι δεῦρο θεοὶ μεμαῶτα νέεσθαι
ἔσχον, ἐπεὶ οὔ σφιν ἔρεξα τεληέσσας ἑκατόμβας.]

(6) ἐν τούτοισι τοῖσι ἔπεσι δηλοῖ ὅτι ἠπίστατο τὴν ἐς Αἴγυπτον Ἀλεξάνδρου πλάνην· ὁμουρέει γὰρ ἡ Συρίη Αἰγύπτῳ, οἱ δὲ Φοίνικες, τῶν ἐστὶ ἡ Σιδών, ἐν τῇ Συρίῃ οἰκέουσι.

This, the priests said, was the way Helen came to Proteus. But it seems to me that Homer also learned this story. Yet since it was not as suitable for epic composition as the other which he did use, he discarded it, though he made clear that he also knew this story. (2) This is clear from the way in the *Iliad* he introduced[2] (and nowhere else does he correct himself) the wandering of Alexander, how when bringing Helen he went off course and wandering came to various places, including Sidon in Phoenicia. (3) He recounts this in the *aristeia* of Diomedes. The verses run as follows:

In this place were very ornate robes, the work of women
of Sidon, whom godlike Alexander himself

[2] Although How & Wells probably over-translate *παρεποίησε* as 'introduced an inconsistent digression', my argument may suggest other ways that the verb here could retain the nuance of stealth or subterfuge seen in other uses. Note however that the word is a conjecture; a simple *ἐποίησε* can be restored by simply bracketing the otiose *γάρ*.

> brought from Sidon, sailing over the wide sea
> on the same voyage on which he brought back noble Helen. (*Il.* 6.289–92)

[(4) He mentions it also in the *Odyssey* in these verses:

> Such useful drugs did the daughter of Zeus [Helen] possess
> good ones which Polydamna the wife of Thon gave her
> a woman of Egypt, where the life-giving earth yields the most
> drugs, many goods ones mixed with ill. (*Od.* 4.227–30)

(5) And these others Menelaus speaks to Telemachus:

> The gods held me yet in Egypt, though I was eager to go,
> since I had not offered them complete hecatombs. (*Od.* 4.351–2)]

(6) In these verses the poet makes clear that he knew of Alexander's wandering to Egypt. For Syria borders on Egypt, and the Phoenicians (to whom Sidon belongs) live in Syria.

Sections 4–5 are bracketed as a suspected interpolation; although there are good reasons for this suspicion,[3] my argument seeks to address the passage as a whole.

The citation of Homer is most striking for its apparent logical inconsequence. Herodotus may well imagine that the visit to Sidon is one element from a larger narrative of Paris' wanderings, perhaps known to him from other poetic or logographic traditions now lost.[4] And yet the detail about Sidon would be a strange way for Homer to indicate that Paris' wanderings brought him to Egypt. As Sayce remarks, 'the logic of Herodotus is as much at fault as his geography.'[5] Sidon is not Egypt; hence the special pleading of section six: 'For Syria borders on Egypt, and the Phoenicians (to whom Sidon belongs) live in Syria.' Likewise, it is often noted that the *Odyssey*'s mention of Menelaus' sojourn in Egypt *after* the war has nothing to do with Helen's alleged stay there *during* the war, buttressing the suspicion that the whole citation of the *Odyssey* is an interpolation, or a poorly adjusted afterthought on the part of Herodotus.

For an historian wishing to show his independence from poetic tradition, it would have been easier simply to declare Homer wrong. The obvious in-

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[3] See below, n.12.

[4] Note especially the phrase *πλάνην τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου*, suggestive of a broader narrative, and the reference to other ports of call (*τῇ τε δὴ ἄλλῃ πλαζόμενος*) for which there is no evidence in Homer.

[5] Sayce (1883) 187.

ference is rather that Herodotus is determined to use Homer as evidence for his view, even at the cost of some strain and awkwardness. And it is important to note that this has to do with Homer in particular, not poetic tradition generally. Herodotus very likely knew other poetic accounts he could have cited more profitably, in particular the 'phantom Helen' story attested for Stesichorus and possibly also Hesiodic poetry; the former may well have placed the real Helen in Egypt during the war.[6] Such poetic accounts would have been much easier to bring into line with the Egyptian version than Homer's; indeed, assuming Stesichorus, if not Hesiod, placed Helen in Egypt, it would have been only a matter of rationalising away the phantom Helen, if this had not already been done by an intermediary source.[7] This suggests that Herodotus is going out of his way to cite Homer in particular, indeed bending over backwards to make Homer agreeable to his thesis. He would much rather cite Homer than contradict him, and it is reasonable to say that for Herodotus, as for others of his time, Homer remains an especially authoritative source not to be questioned lightly, nor to be spurned if you can possibly get him on your side.[8]

Granted, then, that Herodotus is trying very hard to enlist Homer in support of his views on Helen, closer examination of how he does this shows that the apparent awkwardness of his citation conceals a very specific idea of how the poet communicates with his audience—or, rather, audiences. The whole citation depends on the claim that Homer knew the true account but intentionally told the story differently because the true account was not appropriate to epic as a genre. As Ford notes, this probably means that the true account does not show the Greeks in a positive light and is therefore unsuitable to epic as a medium of praise.[9] Yet at the same time, Herodotus seems to think that Homer's knowledge of the true account is not revealed inadvertently, but rather that the poet *intentionally* reveals his knowledge. He

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[6] For Hesiod, see F 358 MW: *πρῶτος Ἡσίοδος περὶ τῆς Ἑλένης τὸ εἴδωλον παρήγαγε* ('Hesiod first introduced the eidolon to the story of Helen'); the fragment (from the scholia to Lycophron) is judged dubious and the editors suggest Hesiod is confused with Stesichorus. For Stesichorus the best evidence is F 193 Campbell, from a literary papyrus of the 2nd century AD (*P. Oxy.* 2506): *αὐτὸ[ς δ]έ φησιν ὁ Στησίχορο[ς] τὸ μὲν ε[ἴδωλον] ἐλθεῖ[ν ἐς] Τροίαν, τὴν δ' Ἑλένην π[αρὰ] τῷ Πρωτεῖ καταμεῖν[αι* ('Stesichorus himself says that the eidolon went to Troy while the real Helen remained with Proteus'). For a sceptical assessment see Woodbury (1967) 163–4.

[7] Cf. Neville (1977) 4–5; Ligota (1982) 9–10; Austin (1994) 127–8; Pallantza (2005) 155. Harsher critics, e.g. Fehling (1989) 59–61, have argued that the whole passage is, in fact, a rationalisation of Stesichorus. Others, e.g. Lloyd (1988) 47, argue that the rationalised account was adopted by Herodotus from another, unnamed source, most likely Hecataeus.

[8] Cf. Graziosi (2002) 195; Pallantza (2005) 153–4.

[9] Ford (2002) 150; cf. Verdin (1977) 60–1.

twice uses the verb δηλόω to indicate that Homer 'makes clear' that he knows the true story (δηλώσας ὡς καὶ τοῦτον ἐπίσταιτο τὸν λόγον, 1; δηλοῖ ὅτι ἠπίστατο, 6). In Herodotus this verb, when used of persons, almost always indicates that someone intentionally shows, communicates or proves something to another. On the other hand, although it often indicates verbal exposition, it is also used quite frequently of indirect, veiled, or even nonverbal modes of communication: e.g., 1.123.3 (Harpagus' secret message to Cyrus); 3.72.3 (verbal and nonverbal communication compared); 4.118.4 (the gesture whereby Darius could have indicated that he marched only against the Scythians); 7.17.2 (communication by dream); 9.3.1 (communication by fire signals).[10] Finally, it is worth noting that the verb is often used by Herodotus himself to indicate his intention to show or prove a particular fact to his audience.[11]

Yet insofar as Homer intentionally communicates something here, it is not so much the truth about Helen's sojourn in Egypt as *his own knowledge of the truth* (δηλώσας ὡς … ἐπίσταιτο, δηλοῖ ὅτι ἠπίστατο) while he keeps the true account perfectly well-hidden. But for whom would such a furtive gesture be intended? Egypt is so far from being explicitly mentioned that one would have to know a great deal of the truth already in order to detect any hint of it in Homer's brief mention of Sidon; taken on their own, Homer's verses would hardly be sufficient to reveal the truth to the ignorant. That is, mention of Paris' visit to Sidon within a narrative that otherwise ignores the true account of Helen's sojourn in Egypt must be imagined as a kind of 'knowing wink' to an elite audience possessed of special expertise or prior knowledge. The hints whereby Homer indicates the true account could only be properly interpreted by an expert, indeed someone like Herodotus who is in a position to piece together other evidence such as Egyptian lore and geography – a person who already knows enough of the true account to read it back into Homer's words. Also in his discussion of the *Odyssey*, Herodotus seems to be saying that Homer *secretly* indicates his knowledge of the true account. Taken in the context of Menelaus' experiences *after the war*, the passages

[10] Only very rarely does the verb denote inadvertent revelation, the clearest example being 1.57.3, where the Chrestinites and Placinians show their kinship by speaking the same language.

[11] E.g., 2.33.1; 1.106.2; 2.101.2. Here also different methods of communication are at work, for example when the historian distinguishes a concise and a more detailed way of explaining a point (2.24.2, 25.1), contrasts his verbal description with the deceptive representations of map-makers (4.36.2), or describes something by means of figures or analogies (1.192; 4.81.4, 99.5). Note that when Thucydides says that Homer 'makes clear' (δηλῶν, 1.10.4) the average number of men per ship in Homer's 'Catalogue of Ships', he means that the poet gives representative figures rather than declaring the average outright.

cited would not be sufficient to teach the true account to the ignorant. They can only indicate the poet's awareness of a truth that itself cannot be recovered from his narrative, i.e. that Menelaus did indeed have to stop off in Egypt on the way home to recover Helen, because she was there all along. There are some good reasons to view sections 4–5 as an interpolation, but logical inconsequence is not one of them.[12] In view of the type of argument Herodotus is trying to construct, the *Odyssey* passages are no less relevant than the passage from *Iliad* 6. The reasoning is the same in both cases, namely that Homer indicates his knowledge through a furtive hint or a kind of knowing wink. The intended audience of this latter gesture ought not to be the same as the general audience whose expectations are met through the overt narrative, but rather a more restricted and elite audience especially equipped to reconstruct the true story.[13]

What can we say, then, about Herodotus' critical stance towards Homer? The crucial points are the following. First, Homer knows the truth, probably through his own *historia*.[14] Second, Homer may choose (or craft) a different version of events to relate explicitly because it is the most appropriate to the requirements of his genre, which must mean ultimately that it meets the expectations or demands of his general audience. Third, Homer is concerned to indicate his knowledge of the true account, even when he does not reveal the true account itself. Fourth, Homer indicates his knowledge by way of cryptic hints and 'hidden meanings', a device known to ancient criticism as *hyponoia*.[15]

Admittedly, application of the latter term does little to elucidate Herodotus' idea of Homer, since even within ancient criticism *hyponoia* appears to have meant different things to different people. Though it is often translated as 'hidden meaning', this may bring in too much of our own essentially anachronistic contempt for those who purport to find 'secret messages' in written texts. A more impartial rendering might be 'underlying thought.'

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[12] The chief difficulty is that the summary remarks in section 6 seem to apply exclusively to the passage cited from the *Iliad*, as though nothing had been said about the *Odyssey*. Powell (1935) 76–7 suggests that discussion of the *Odyssey* was inserted by Herodotus at a later stage, and that the historian intended to smooth out the passage in a later editing of his work that never took place. To some extent, the very irrelevance of the *Odyssey* passages argues against interpolation, for an interpolator seeking to buttress the historian's argument could hardly have introduced a less helpful addition.

[13] Cf. Hunter (1982) 54 n.7.

[14] Nowhere does Herodotus grant the poets' claim to divine inspiration; his use of the verb πυθέσθαι in this and other passages suggests that the poet, like the historian, must learn his facts through active inquiry; cf. Ford (2002) 148; Graziosi (2002) 116–7.

[15] Graziosi (2002) 116–8.

Though once associated primarily with allegorical interpretation, *hyponoia* is now recognised as having had somewhat broader application; in the Classical period the term could be used for a variety of critical modes, from the esoteric and cryptic readings of the allegorists to the interpretations of the sophists, whose *hyponoiai* may have been not so much 'hidden meanings' as something close to our own idea of valid interpretative inferences.[16] Nevertheless, early uses of the terms suggest esoteric interpretations that seek to enhance the moral or educational value of Homeric poetry for a select audience: So in Plato's *Republic* (378D), Socrates insists that the poets' stories about divine strife are unacceptable 'whether composed with or without *hyponoiai*' (*οὔτ' ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας οὔτε ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν*) that might explain away their literal meaning, because the young are ill-equipped to recognise such hidden meanings.[17] In Xenophon's *Symposium* (3.6) Socrates states that the rhapsodes, despite their knowing Homer's poetry by heart, are fools because 'they do not know *hyponoiai*' (*τὰς ὑπονοίας οὐκ ἐπίστανται*) of the kind that Niceratus has learned from his sophistic teachers.[18] Knowledge of such *hyponoiai* seems to be distinct from the ability merely to explicate Homer's 'fine thoughts' (*καλὰς διανοίας*) as one would expect from a competent rhapsode like Plato's Ion.[19] As these (admittedly rather hostile) references suggest, *hyponoiai* often tended to the esoteric, codifying a specialised knowledge of a text's meaning that went beyond the common knowledge of an ordinary or unschooled audience or even of a professional performer.

The implication of esotericism points in turn to *hyponoia*'s admittedly strong association with allegorical interpretation, a tradition that can be traced back to early figures such as Theagenes of Rhegium and Pherecydes, both of the sixth century, and later Metrodorus of Lampsacus in the fifth. Of Pherecydes we only know that he interpreted cosmogonic myths allegorically and was supposed to have commented on Homeric verses in a similar vein.[20] Theagenes, on the other hand, is supposed to have been the first to argue comprehensively that Homer's account of strife among the gods was

[16] Richardson (2006) 64–6; cf. Pepin (1976) 85–6; Perret (1982) 68–70; Califf (2003) 26.

[17] Note that Socrates does not explicitly deny the validity of these interpretations; he only argues that they are not sufficient to protect young listeners from being corrupted by such stories.

[18] The implied value of such teachings is ironic. On this and the preceding example see Ford (2002) 72–3.

[19] See *Ion* 530D with the discussion of Ford (2002) 70–1; note that Ion boasts his superiority to a number of commentators, including the allegorist Metrodorus (discussed below). On *dianoia* cf. n. 26 below.

[20] For the evidence, see Tate (1927) 214–5.

an allegory for the interaction of natural elements such as fire and water.[21] Metrodorus is credited with an even more improbable system, interpreting the Iliadic heroes as heavenly bodies but the gods as bodily organs such as the liver and spleen.[22] Such allegorical interpretations may have originated in an effort to defend Homer from charges of impropriety brought by early critics like Xenophanes. But there was no doubt a strong desire, not to say a reflexive one, to cite Homer as an authority in support of one's own views, even where the subject matter of an author's own developing genre (e.g. cosmogony or natural science) was quite distant from the heroic mythology of old epic.[23] Unsurprisingly, allegorical arguments appear to have depended on quite far-fetched inferences from Homer's actual words; and it seems likely, as Ford has emphasised, that *allegoresis* was a process that served to define elite audiences who had a privileged and esoteric access to Homer's 'true' teachings over and against the uninformed masses who had access only to his overt meaning,[24] an impression that is reinforced by the use of allegorical interpretation in later texts such as the Derveni Papyrus and the *Homeric Problems* of Heraclitus.

Graziosi, one of the few scholars to note that Herodotus is here engaged in interpretation by *hyponoiai*, concludes that we are dealing with a 'sophistic moment' for the historian, comparing the 'strained' interpretation of Simonides in Plato's *Protagoras* (339a–437a), often taken to be a parody of sophistic literary criticism.[25] There is no doubt that aspects of Herodotus' approach have affinities with sophistic criticism, in particular his consideration of the aesthetic requirements of epic as a genre. On the other hand, while the discussion of Simonides in the *Protagoras* is certainly abstruse, it would be reasonably accessible to any intelligent person on the basis of sound rhetorical training rather than specific, esoteric knowledge.[26] This can hardly be said of Herodotus' inference from Homer, where the fact that Paris stopped in

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[21] For evaluation of the evidence (primarily a scholion to Homer *Il.* 20.67 that may go back to Porphyry), see Ford (1999) 35–6.

[22] For the evidence and a general estimation of Metrodorus see Califf (2003).

[23] For various accounts of defensive vs. constructive origins of allegorical interpretation, see Tate (1934) 106–8, Clarke (1981) 61–2; Ford (2002) 68–72; Califf (2003) 28–9; Long (2006) 214–5; Koning (2010) 60–2.

[24] Ford (2002) 76–80, esp. 78: 'With allegoresis, the authoritative and venerable ancient history presented by Homer to all Greece became a riddle to be deciphered by the wise.'

[25] Graziosi (2002) 117–8 with n. 69; cf. Ford (2002) 150 with references. For Herodotus' reflection of sophistic method in other areas see especially Thomas (2000), esp. 249–69.

[26] Cf. Richardson (2006) 65. Most (1994) 129–31 argues that Socrates' interpretation is meant as serious criticism. Ford (2002) 85 notes the emphasis on authorial *dianoia* ('thought') and its rhetorical expression in the *Protagoras*, but also points out that Socrates' discussion of Simonides at *Rep.* 332b shades into allegorical interpretation.

Egypt simply could not emerge from a straightforward reading of the text, even a very close one. Moreover, there are several notable similarities between Herodotus' approach to Homer, as revealed in our passage, and what we can surmise about early allegorical interpretation. Both approaches assume that the overt story told by Homer is not satisfactory, whether it is intellectually uninteresting, morally objectionable, or historically implausible. Both seek to protect the bard's traditional status as a source of truth by arguing that the overt story is not seriously meant, but rather conceals a covert discourse which has the truth-value that the overt narrative lacks. Both seek to cite the Homeric text in support of a discourse—whether philosophical or historical—from which it seems, on the surface, to be very remote. Both assume that the poet reveals the truth through cryptic hints and allusions. Finally, both interpret Homer from the standpoint of an elite audience with special qualifications, such that the poet's hints are a kind of knowing wink directed to those with sufficient acumen and the necessary prior knowledge to decipher them.

Insofar, then, as the *hyponoiai* of ancient criticism are likely to have ranged from what we would call simply 'meaning', to 'underlying meaning' accessible only to the intelligent, to 'hidden meaning' accessible only to the initiated, the meaning identified by Herodotus in our Homeric passages would appear to fall more towards the esoteric, if not cryptic, end of the spectrum. For although Paris' visit to Sidon, or Menelaus' time in Egypt after the war, are hardly 'allegories' for the fact that Helen remained in Egypt for the entirety of the war, they are nevertheless hints at the truth that are entirely intentional but can only be rightly interpreted by a specially qualified, elite audience.

Apart from this purely methodological perspective, the most significant difference between our Herodotean passage and what we know of early *allegoresis* is actually the type of narrative detail focused upon. Herodotus, as one would expect from an historian, focuses on details of the underlying or implied historical narrative. The allegorists, on the other hand, seem to have focused first and foremost on the rather problematic role played by the gods in Homer and other early poetry. Let us turn, then, to a passage in which Herodotus makes much more sweeping claims about Homer's contribution to Greek culture, and indeed about his treatment of the gods. This is the famous passage in which Herodotus discusses the Egyptian origin of the Greek names for the gods. According to Herodotus, the names of the gods (with some exceptions) came from Egypt to the Pelasgians, who asked and received permission from the oracle at Dodona to use them. Before this they had apparently called upon a generic group of '*theoi*.' However, the gods remained otherwise undifferentiated until, about four centuries before He-

rodotus' own time, Homer and Hesiod gave them their basic mythology and specific attributes (2.53):

> ὅθεν δὲ ἐγένοντο ἕκαστος τῶν θεῶν, εἴτε αἰεὶ ἦσαν πάντες, ὁκοῖοί τέ τινες τὰ εἴδεα, οὐκ ἠπιστέατο μέχρι οὗ πρώην τε καὶ χθὲς ὡς εἰπεῖν λόγῳ. (2) Ἡσίοδον γὰρ καὶ Ὅμηρον ἡλικίην τετρακοσίοισι ἔτεσι δοκέω μευ πρεσβυτέρους γενέσθαι καὶ οὐ πλέοσι· οὗτοι δέ εἰσὶ οἱ ποιήσαντες θεογονίην Ἕλλησι καὶ τοῖσι θεοῖσι τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες καὶ τιμάς τε καὶ τέχνας διελόντες καὶ εἴδεα αὐτῶν σημήναντες.
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> Whence each of the gods was born, whether they all always existed, what sort of appearance they have, this was not known until yesterday and the day before, so to speak. (2) For I believe that Hesiod and Homer lived no more than four hundred years before myself, and they are the ones who created a theogony for the Greeks, gave titles to the gods, distributed their honors and arts, and indicated their appearance.

Herodotus goes on to note that the priestess at Dodona told him about the Egyptian origin of the gods' names, but that he speaks about Homer and Hesiod on his own authority. The passage has been much discussed, particularly the seeming contradiction between Herodotus' statement that 'nearly all' the names of the Greek gods came from Egypt and the fact that he himself sometimes notes that the Egyptians have a different name for a god than the Greeks do, e.g. Isis/Demeter.[27] And yet the conclusion to the passage quoted above would seem to suggest that the Greeks knew *nothing but the names* of the gods until Homer and Hesiod provided these with the rest of their mythological identity. Moreover, nothing is said to endorse the *historia* or divine inspiration of these poets, such that it may even be implied that all

[27] For some theoretically sophisticated attempts to solve the problem, see Burkert (1985); Hartog (1988) 241–8; Scullion (2000). The most likely answer seems to be that of Lattimore (1939): Herodotus believed the Greek names of the gods, with some exceptions, to have come from Egypt. If the Egyptians of his time happened to use other names than those known to the Greeks, this did not contradict his thesis; it meant merely that the Egyptians had still other names that had not been adopted by the Greeks. It is possible that Herodotus' guides in Egypt used Greek and Egyptian names interchangeably and with equal comfort, possibly giving him the impression that both sets of names were Egyptian in origin; cf. Mikalson (2003) 171–2. Alternatively, Herodotus may imagine that the Egyptian names have changed or evolved since the distant time in which they were adopted by the Pelasgians, as Harrison (2000) 256 argues.

this background is a mere poetic fiction.[28] The passage as a whole seems to imply that the fundamental mythology of the Greek gods, their interrelationships, their personalities and their realms of power are all relatively recently invented and added as a kind of supplement to their mere names, which is the only really ancient thing about them.[29]

In a different way from our previous passage, this one also has been taken to represent a radical undermining of the poets' authority, since it identifies much of what they say about the gods as a mere fiction. Viewed from the perspective of early, allegorical interpretation of Homer, however, it may look less revolutionary.[30] Consider the precise areas in which Homer and Hesiod are said to have fabricated the identity of the gods: their genealogical interrelations; their physical appearance; and, most importantly, their 'honors' (*timai*) and the realms of human endeavor (*technai*) over which they were thought to preside. Even on our scanty evidence, it is abundantly clear that the gods were a focal point of early allegorical criticism. Moreover, the fragmentary remains of some of the earliest allegorical interpretation show a distinct interest in the names of the gods, evidently based on the idea that poets either extrapolated special meanings from the names of the gods or even invented the names themselves.[31] The interpretation of names was supported in turn by showing that the gods' attributes or activities in the

[28] Cf. Mikalson (2003) 173; Koning (2010) 68. Thomas (2000) 280–1 emphasises rather that Herodotus aims to distinguish levels of knowledge about the divine, with naming being relatively safe knowledge (because a purely human practice) while knowledge about the intrinsic nature of the divine is less certain.

[29] Cf. 2.23, where Herodotus remarks that the idea of Ocean was most likely invented by Homer or some other poet, who 'found the name and put it into his poetry' (Ὅμηρον δὲ ἢ τινὰ τῶν πρότερον γενομένων ποιητέων δοκέω τὸ οὔνομα εὑρόντα ἐς ποίησιν ἐσενείκασθαι). On whether εὑρόντα here means 'discover' or 'invent', see Verdin (1977) 61 n. 25, who opts for the latter translation while noting that the former meaning is far more common in Herodotus. For the importance of this passage with regard to Herodotus' historical method, see Fowler (1996) 79.

[30] Cf. Pépin (1976) 43.

[31] For the importance of the gods' names for the author of the Derveni papyrus, see Hussey (1999) 309–15; Obbink (2003) 184–6 and (2010) 18–9; Richardson (2006) 71–2 sees a parallel in the remains of Stesimbrotus of Thasos, another alleged allegorist. See Algra (2001) for allegorisation of the gods' names in Zeno of Citium's remarks on Hesiod's *Theogony*, and Steinmetz (1986) for extension of Zeno's methods by later Stoics; for allegorisation of Hesiod in general see Koning (2010) 91–3. On allegorisation of the gods' names in Plato, see Laird (2003) 157–8. Harrison (2000) 256–64 and Thomas (2000) 277–9 point out that there was an active debate about the etymology of both Greek and foreign names in Herodotus' time.

poems corresponded to their supposed allegorical significance.[32] One can readily imagine that the genealogical interrelationships of the gods were also thought relevant to these systems of meaning.

Herodotus does not tell us why Homer and Hesiod embarked on their project of defining the gods and setting them in relation to one another, but he probably doesn't imagine that they did this in order to create a complete and ready-made religious system for the Greek people.[33] What, then, was their motive? Herodotus, frustratingly, focuses solely on establishing the relative phases through which Greek religion evolved, and does not explain why Homer and Hesiod set about creating a 'theogony', or even whether this was an intentional project or merely a consequence of their story-telling. But before assuming the latter explanation, it is worth recalling that *allegoresis* was not originally conceived of as a mode of interpretation, but rather as a mode of composition attributed to the poets themselves. Herodotus may well have shared the assumption of allegorists that attributes and realms of the gods were invented by the poets in the service of a pre-ordained 'system' that had nothing to do with the actual nature of the gods themselves. On this view, the names and whatever basic differentiations came along with the names would be our only sure knowledge about the gods; mythological and religious traditions that might have arisen from the poets' stories will have resulted from misinterpretation on the part of the uninitiated.[34]

Conclusion

The conception of Herodotean literary criticism sketched above is not, at first glance, flattering to the historian, who is often praised for his knowledge of epic poetry and for the way his own work reflects a firm grasp of Homer's narrative methods and fundamental themes. I have argued that the historian's two main discussions of Homer suggest a familiarity with, and a certain affinity for, traditions in ancient criticism that seem to us quite distant from the true meaning and nature of the old epic. Yet the seeming contradiction may be more apparent than real in view of recent scholarship on the origins, intellectual foundations, and historical reach of *allegoresis* as a critical

[32] For the realms of action of the gods as a 'quasi-allegorical' feature of Homeric poetry, see Clarke (1981) 65–6.

[33] Koning (2010) 69–72 puts great emphasis on Ἕλλησι and argues that the verbs used of the poets imply a special, if not divine, authority, but not all his parallels are equally convincing. Cf. Koster (1970) 13–4.

[34] Cf. Mikalson (2003) 172–3, Gould (1994) 105. As Porter (2011) 24–5 notes, an important if indirect consequence of allegorical reading was the attribution of fictionality to a poem's surface meaning.

process. Early allegorical approaches to Homer were once viewed as a bizarre chapter in ancient literary criticism, essentially defensive and reactionary in nature, and eventually marginalised and replaced by the more moderate critical methods of the sophists and, eventually, Aristotle. Recent scholarship has sought to contextualise allegorical interpretation as an extension of traditional modes of reception or even the poet's own traditional mode of composition, undertaken by a new class of literate elites eager to preserve, but also to co-opt, the social value of Homeric epic. At the same time, it has been argued that the literary critical methods of the sophists incorporated rather than displaced the practices of the allegorists, and even that Plato and Aristotle did not completely disavow interpretation according to *hyponoiai* or 'hidden meanings', even if these hidden meanings eventually came to be more in line with what we would consider valid interpretative inference.[35] In my view, Herodotus occupies a more important place in this developing picture than has been realised. For all of his natural grasp of the general ethos and narrative workings of the old epic poems, when he sets himself to analyze them critically, he uses the same set of assumptions and methods as his immediate forebears, including some that are (to our perspective) essentially misguided. There are, of course, significant differences between Herodotus and early allegorical interpretation, not least of which is the fact that while the allegorists, from what we know, were attempting to make Homer speak about something completely different from his ostensible subject, Herodotus only tries to make Homer speak accurately about the past—that is, precisely what Homer purports to do. Herodotus' use of *hyponoiai* in combination with the resources of historical inquiry (including, as I noted at the beginning, archaeological and ethnographic research) all with an eye to discovering a verifiable truth rather than corroborating an imagined one, clearly looks forward to a tradition in the study of literary monuments that is alive and well today.

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[35] See n. 16 above.

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