Inventing Origins? Aetiological Thinking in Greek and Roman Antiquity

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Inventing Origins? Aetiological Thinking in Greek and Roman Antiquity

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On the cover: "Who left the tap running?" by Simon McGrath located at Bondi Beach in Australia. Photo by NAPARAZZI (CC BY-SA 2.0). Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/naparazzi/6372234773. This 2011 sculpture was a part of a series titled Sculptures by the Sea, which aimed to stimulate discussion on the environmental responsibility of human beings in light of climate change. Yet, as every artwork, it produces multiple meanings, beyond the artist's original intention. The features of a technical device (here: a tap) imitate nature (here: a swan). The tap/swan seems to explore its origin (looking at the water, where a real swan should be). Furthermore, the artwork visualizes a 'growing circuit' (the tap makes use of the water and at the same time fills up the water level) – an aspect that can be related to the idea of aetiology as a tool for thinking, which uses the past, or rather, an alleged origin, while simultaneously shaping the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Inventing Anchors? Aetiological Thinking in Greek and Roman Antiquity

Antje Wessels and Jacqueline Klooster

1 Aetiology – Between Past and Future

"Why is it that…?" At first sight, aetiologies pursue a universal aim: to gratify the human desire to understand the origin of a phenomenon. In drawing *causal* connections, aetiologies establish a temporal continuity between the present and the past: they link an object or event to its (proposed) origin. The functions and techniques of aetiologies, however, vary greatly. As our volume demonstrates, aetiologies do not exclusively explore origins, but are also concerned with the future. And while they present themselves as pure *descriptions*, they often tend to *shape* the past. They do so, for example, in order to anchor or legitimize a proposed project, vision or agenda in an appropriate authority (the proposed 'origin'). Yet, what is the point of searching for origins and why are aetiological stories employed as a specific technique to prepare – and sell – the future? What exactly are the functions and techniques of aetiologies?

Earlier volumes on the topic of aetiology have shown a marked emphasis on two eras, the Hellenistic period and Augustan Rome. This evidently raises the question why some eras are so fruitful in generating aetiological stories. An explanation can be sought in the specific political and socio-cultural circumstances obtaining at the time. We may think here, for instance, of the need to legitimize novel forms of power in new seats of empire, which are contested, insecure, or not invested with a traditional authority, and therefore have to be anchored in the past. The story, or rather manifold stories, about the origins of Rome, for example, are not the result of free-floating antiquarian exercises; rather, they represent or reflect political, religious, and ideological struggles and negotiations. Likewise, the *Aitia* of Callimachus, far from being a sterile demonstration of erudition, can be interpreted as an attempt to create cultural cohesion in the Hellenistic world and to work towards the establishment and celebration of Ptolemaic power.

As these examples illustrate, aetiological stories are extremely popular in periods of crisis and change. It is not without reason that in former research on

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'aetiology', e.g. the splendid volumes by Martine Chassignet (2008: *L'étiologie dans la pensée antique*) and Christiane Reitz and Anke Walter (2014: *Von Ursachen sprechen. Eine aitiologische Spurensuche – Telling origins. On the look-out for* aetiology), and the recent monograph on the uses of time in aetiological narratives by Anke Walter (2020: *Time in Ancient Stories of Origin*), we find a focus on authors, such as Callimachus (*Aetia*) or Ovid (*Fasti*), who were writing during periods of transition. Our volume aims to complement and expand this approach by including further periods, such as the cultural revolution at the beginning of Roman literature (third century BCE) or the establishment of new authority for popes and royals in the Renaissance. In addition, it explores 'aetiology' not only as a form of narrative but also as a tool for thinking.

2 Aetiology – A Tool for Thinking

Distinct from its medical connotation, where aetiology is basically understood as diagnostics (finding a cause for a medical condition to enable eventual healing and recovery), aetiological stories in literature, politics, or religion, rather show a strong emphasis on the effect and are typically employed to *introduce* something. Apparently there is a close connection between aetiology and innovation. The question is: why?

To gain better insight into this connection, we start from two assumptions: (a) Unlike the 'new', an innovation doesn't come 'out of the blue'. Rather, it is partly new and partly old; in any case it is partly in line with existing or traditional thoughts, concepts, and ideas, while at the same time opening new perspectives. (b) Unlike the new, an innovation *must* include some elements which are familiar to its recipients. It will only be successful if familiar aspects are successfully *communicated* to them. As a consequence, if there is too little in the past (or even nothing) to which a project could be linked, then these elements have *ex post* to be constructed – for example, if not enough familiar elements exist (or none at all), if there is no common ground to be addressed (in the sense of a cluster of concepts that the proposed recipients can recognize and understand) or if there is no authority that could legitimize the project. Aetiological thinking in fact often creates such a link to an appropriate 'origin', in order to convince the recipients that the proposed innovation is in line with its tradition or with what it aims to *present* as its 'tradition'.

3 Discontinuity is Translated into Continuity

Aetiologies aim at creating continuity. They are less concerned with 'roots' than with the 'routes': the continuity between an alleged origin and its desired result, be it the introduction of a ritual, an institution or political program, or the innovation of a literary genre. Analogous to etymological explanations (for example, the etymologies provided by Varro or discussed in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiarum sive originum*), aetiologies present the 'origin' (e.g. a historical or legendary event) not as an *explanandum*, but as *explanans*, as an agent which, at a later stage, would turn out to have unfolded its potential or will unfold it in the desired future.

As a result, aetiological stories show the tendency to ignore alternative traditions which would interfere with the proposed linearity between the object to be explained and its origin. Ambiguities, pluralism, and diversity are reduced; alternative models are excluded; discontinuities are translated into a model of continuity. For example, when in the third century BCE Romans claim that their dramatic productions are in line with the tradition of Greek literature and culture, alternative origins of Roman theater, such as indigenous Italic traditions, are simply cut off. A methodologically similar approach can be found in the Philhellenic projects of the first century BCE (e.g. Cicero), and again, in early modern times and 18th-century-Philhellenism (e.g. Winckelmann).

4 Single Origin – Multiple Origins – No Origin?

Aetiologies are often in search of one single origin, striving for unambiguous connections. Yet, an absence of ambiguity is not a universal feature of aetiologies. A rather different approach to dealing with multiple traditions – and, as a consequence, with a diversity of expectations and common grounds – is to provide *multiple* explanations for a *single* event or fact and to exhibit this variety explicitly. In the case of multiple explanations (*Mehrfacherklärungen*) none of the alternative explanations is privileged, let alone considered to be exclusive; nor are they meant to display an author's uncertainty. The variety of possible explanations is rather explicitly highlighted and showcased in order to demonstrate the author's erudition or philosophical agility. *Mehrfacherklärungen* aim to *demonstrate* the variety and ambiguities of the tradition, and the multiple ways of assessing that tradition. In Plutarch's *Greek and Roman Questions*, for example (a text discussed by Michiel Meeusen in the present volume), we frequently find several explanations for obsolete

or incomprehensible cult rituals. Plutarch is inclined to present *various* approaches for discerning their origins: historical explanations are juxtaposed with mythical ones or even plainly allegorical ones. While Plutarch appears to be seriously interested in exploring origins, he indicates at the same time that there are multiple ways of seeing and approaching the world. How we arrive at an interpretation depends largely on our 'discipline' (or 'theoretical' framework).

Finally, we find approaches which are sceptical that *any* foundational act can explain the origin of a phenomenon (e.g. a religion or a city). Paradoxically, while these approaches present the origin itself as *contested* (as discussed in Susanne Gödde's contribution to our volume), at the same time, they ostensibly refer to it. While responding to the need of ascertaining an origin, there is also an increasing awareness – already in antiquity – of the instability of aetiological stories and the (partly) fictional character of their content.

5 The Paradoxical Structure of Aetiological Thinking

Aetiologies essentially display a paradoxical structure. They pave the way for progress and innovation by casting an anchor into the past and they prepare their audiences for open-mindedness by explaining the past as well as reducing complex ambivalence and plurality to plainly causal and temporal relations. There is one further aspect to be mentioned: aetiology also displays a paradoxical conception of time. An aetiological *story* unfolds chronologically, from the past to the present with an indication of the future, adhering to the order of cause and effect, beginning with the origin and ending with the effected result. The *thinking* upon which these aetiological stories are based, however, displays a completely different 'chronology'. In aetiological thinking, the 'origin' is not at the beginning, but rather at the end of the process. Indeed, this mode of thinking puts it all the other way around. Whereas the stories it produces are perfectly in line with our ideas of chronology – the past precedes the present, and the present the future –, aetiological *thinking* starts from the end in order to result in a 'description' of the past. To put it most pointedly: the effect is the cause of the cause.

Certainly, modern scholars are well aware that the 'past' is always (re-) constructed from a later perspective and that there is no such thing as the 'truth'. Aetiological thinking, however, brings this perception to a head. It doesn't recoil from intentionally shaping or creating an appropriate past, even when, at the same time, it presents its (fictional) results as true causes or authoritative legitimations.

6 This Volume …

is based on a conference held on 16–18 November 2016 at the University of Leiden. During our conference two major aspects emerged:

First, as indicated above, there is a close connection between aetiology and innovation. An aetiological narrative doesn't *build* on previous events, rather, it casts an *anchor* into the vast sea of the past to select and identify an origin deliberately. In this sense, aetiology aims at transforming discontinuity into a model of continuity, while also conflating or even inverting cause and effect. As Jacqueline Klooster argues in her contribution to this volume, this procedure is remarkably discernible in discourses of empire and dynastic rule, such as that of the Ptolemies in the Hellenistic period. The Ptolemies, who originally come from Macedonia but now rule Egypt, incorporate aetiological stories in *ex eventu* prophecies in court poetry so as to imply that their presence in North Africa is in fact divinely ordained, that they were always meant to be exactly where they are now. Here, aetiological *narratives* and aetiological *thinking* exhibit a paradoxical approach to the relation between cause and effect and hence also to 'chronology'.

Second, aetiological thinking – as a tool – goes beyond the human desire to learn something or to legitimize a proposed project; it also has essential aspects.

As we shall see in this volume, techniques of aetiological thinking are mainly employed during periods of fear, threat, and danger. Aetiological thinking helps to explain and explicate what could not be understood otherwise. It helps to structure an indefinite and thereby potentially threatening environment by defining distinct elements and assigning these elements to specific causal agents. Once a 'cause' has been determined, it is possible to exert control and influence. An individual who is subjected to a fearful environment now turns into an *agent* in his own right who, potentially, is able to act in and control his environment, even if only in words. From an anthropological point of view, aetiological thinking is thus a mental technique which helps to overcome fear. It allows for the articulation or organization of the indefinite or unknown world by providing definite, knowable explanations and thus creating a *mental space* between this unknown world and the human mind.

According to cognitive theories that have been developed since the 16th century, the ways of understanding and approaching the world can be considered as an evolutionary process. Whereas early stages of the mind, such as magical thinking, don't succeed in providing systematic explanations, logical thinking allows understanding of the causal principle behind an object or phenomenon. If we accept such an evolutionary approach to the human mind

where logic is preceded by magic, aetiological thinking would be somewhere in between. It is a first step towards logical thinking, for it searches for reasons and recognizes the difference between a cause and its effect. Yet, at the same time, it is still guided by specific teleological interests and happy to establish the (wrong) connections which would support them.

A rather optimistic classification of aetiological thinking along these lines is given by Hermann Gunkel in his *Genesis*:

> Das Kind sieht mit grossen Augen in die Welt und fragt: warum? Die Antwort, die es sich selbst giebt, und mit der es sich bald beruhigt, ist vielleicht sehr kindlich, also sehr unrichtig, und doch, wenn es ein gemütvolles Kind ist, fesselnd und rührend auch für den Erwachsenen. Solche Fragen wirft auch ein antikes Volk auf und beantwortet sie, so gut es kann.... Was wir hier also vorfinden, sind Anfänge menschlicher Wissenschaft, natürlich nur geringe Anfänge, aber als Anfänge doch uns ehrwürdig. (1901: xi–xii)

> The child looks at the world with wide eyes and asks: why? The answer that he gives himself, the answer which soon him calms down, is perhaps very childish and therefore quite incorrect, and yet, if he is a cheerful child, the answer is captivating and touching, even for the adult. Such questions are also raised by an ancient people and answered as best they can.... What we find here are the beginnings of human science, of course only small beginnings, but as beginnings nevertheless respectable.
>
> transl. J. HAMILTON

Gunkel indeed considers aetiologies as a preliminary form of scientific thinking. Aetiologies may provide wrong answers. However, in terms of evolutionary development (of an individual as well as human mankind), they are the first serious attempts to 'grasp' the environment – a first step to overcome human subjection to an undefined world.

Two questions emerge from this assumption: (a) Can we indeed assume a unilinear development of the human mind, i.e., is aetiological thinking superior to former approaches, and does it succeed in actually replacing magical thinking? and (b) Does aetiological thinking help to *overcome* existing fear, or does fear remain a stimulus when it comes to shaping aetiological stories?

In a more sophisticated approach, at the turn of the 20th century, the art historian Aby Warburg has pointed out that we must generally be careful with assuming an evolutionary process in which primitive approaches would simply

be replaced by later, more valid ones. The development of logical thinking, for example, in Warburg's terms the creation of a "Denkraum", remains rather under continual threat of a recourse to magical thinking.

Something similar seems to obtain for aetiological thinking. While indeed displaying a first step towards logical thinking and scientific approaches, it likewise remains under permanent threat of atavistic thinking. Moreover, it is not even free from magical elements and can be dangerous itself. A rather disturbing example is the structure and increased emergence of conspiracy 'theories' in crisis situations. While pretending to employ techniques of *ratio* and exploring the 'truth', conspiracy theories themselves display features of irrational, magical thinking. They have the tendency to reduce a field of possible reasons to one single origin, and they are resistant to any negotiation or revision. The imperative need to figure out 'who has pulled the strings', will never abate, even if there is external evidence that the proffered causal link is incorrect or that the existence of a specific agent behind the scenes is highly questionable. Thus, whereas aetiological thinking *can* be helpful, it can also be extremely perilous. Especially when it is employed to promote political purposes, the creation of causal relations can lead to deliberate, ideologically tinged connections. To explore the reasons *why* aetiological thinking is employed and to investigate *to what end* aetiological stories are presented, will remain an ongoing challenge – not only for historians, but for everybody and for all times.

This volume presents ten case studies. Nine chapters revolve around ancient aetiological discourse: ancient texts and their techniques of employing (or questioning) aetiology as a tool for thinking. One chapter (Susanna de Beer's chapter) will help to understand how the ancient aetiological discourse is imitated in one of the key eras of its 'Nachleben': when Renaissance Popes, in a context of competition, aimed at turning Rome herself into an anchor in order to promote their own political projects. The volume explores aetiological discourse from three perspectives.

The three chapters collected in Part 1: *Aetiological Thinking: Old & New, From Present to Past to Future*, focus on aetiology as a mental and ideological device to structure and legitimize the projected future in Attic tragedy and Hellenistic poetry (contributions by Annette Harder and Jacqueline Klooster). Part 2: *Aetiology and Politics*, explores the political dimensions of aetiological discourse in periods of change: Roman comedy (Andrea de March), Augustan literature (Alexander Kirichenko) and Renaissance genealogical and dynastic discourses (Susanna de Beer). Finally, Part 3: *Aetiology in Myth and Science: From Religion to Research*, demonstrates how aetiological thinking marks

the transition from religious contexts, such as pagan cult ritual (Susanne Gödde) and late antique Hermeticism (Sean McGrath), to rational thinking, as found in Palaephatus's rational explanations of mythology (Hugo Koning), in quasi-scientific parodies in the satirical works of the Imperial Age (Inger Kuin), and in ancient scientific writing (Michiel Meeusen).

6.1 *Part 1: Aetiological Thinking: Old & New, From Present to Past to Future*

The first part, *Aetiological Thinking: Old & New, From Present to Past to Future*, opens with Annette Harder's chapter "Anchoring Innovations through Aetiology." With examples from Pindar, Euripides, Apollonius of Rhodes, Callimachus, Vergil, and Ovid she shows that aetiology is a way of anchoring the present in the past, but also of anchoring innovations for the future in the present, particularly on religious, ideological, and political levels. Harder also analyzes how aetiological stories may be adapted to a new context, where they can be used to establish new institutions that differ or depart from the ones they originally sponsored. As this chapter demonstrates, an important tool in this process is the use of intertextuality.

Next, Jacqueline Klooster explores why *Ex eventu*-prophecies form such a frequent phenomenon in ancient literature, occurring for example in Pindar's *Pythian* 4, Euripidean tragedy, and Vergil's *Aeneid*. In such cases, a god or seer prophesies the *future* (which equals the present or even past for the intended recipients of the text), and thus lends special authority and confirmation to the course of history, or to the present, often with distinctly political or ideological overtones. Thus, an aetiological story is often wrapped in a prophecy. Starting from these observations, Klooster analyzes the structural similarities between aetiological and prophetic texts.

6.2 *Part 2: Aetiology and Politics*

The second part, *Aetiology and Politics*, investigates how aetiologies can contribute to the successful performance and introduction of new agendas and how they can help to anchor literary or political innovations and make them more accessible to their proposed audience. In his chapter "*Veterem atque antiquam rem novam ad vos proferam*," Andrea de March explores how aetiological thinking is addressed in Plautine comedy, a genre which built on a long (also indigenous Italic) tradition, but became successful only after presenting its productions as 'barbarian translations' (i.e., into Latin) of certain Greek models. In his chapter, De March demonstrates that Plautus' meta-literary discourse in fact aims at 'double anchoring' his poetic innovations. At first

sight, Plautus seems to promote two contradictory statements: he claims to rely on old Greek models *and* to present 'something new'. Yet, in another regard, these two statements can be seen as complementary parts of one and the same persuasive strategy. Plautus employs aetiological thinking in order to suggest continuity. By being portrayed as deriving from the prestigious Greek literary precedents, his comedies and their new features are legitimized by an authority, which can be considered to be accepted by his audience.

Similar techniques can be seen in Augustan literature, specifically with respect to the reception of Callimachus' *Aitia*. Here, however, aetiology not only serves as a device to anchor Roman literary innovations in Hellenistic literature. The Roman reception of Callimachus' *Aitia* first of all includes political dimensions. In his chapter "*Callimachus Romanus*. Propertius' Love elegy and the Aetiology of Empire," Alexander Kirichenko argues that the way Propertius claims a Callimachean 'origin' for his poetics provides him with an anchor for conceptualising a "conjunction between the elegiac longing for an ever-retreating object and the never-ending imperial expansion of Augustus' empire".

Finally, Susanna de Beer investigates how ancient Rome in the Renaissance has been turned into an anchor in itself. Her chapter "The Origins of Rome in the Renaissance. Revival & Reinvention, Rejection & Replacement" presents three different ways of employing the ancient aetiological discourse of Rome's foundation. By discussing a selection of Latin texts that were produced in specific political or religious contexts, De Beer argues that these approaches can be analyzed as competing heritage claims to the Roman past to legitimize different 'presents'. The foundation myths of Rome played a key role in the papal politics of *renovatio imperii* of the Renaissance. However, this ideology also had its opponents, who tapped into the same aetiological discourse to undermine the papal claims to Rome. They had various techniques to do so: they ridiculed the foundation myths or interpreted them in a completely different way. Others tried to 'prove' the discontinuity between the foundation stories of Rome and the Renaissance city by emphasizing the state of ruin or neglect of its most important sites of origin. Paradoxically, the opponents of the papal *renovatio imperii* often also advocated a *translatio imperii* by means of the same aetiological discourse. On the basis of Rome's Trojan origins new foundation myths were invented and adapted to fit new political or religious contexts. Although all these aetiologies essentially create a link between the past and the present, the particular type of link is different: in Rome itself, the discourse focuses on the continuity of place, whereas outside Rome genealogical ties to Rome's origins are emphasized.

6.3 *Part 3: Aetiology in Myth and Science: From Religion to Research*

Part 3, *Aetiology in Myth and Science: From Religion to Research*, opens with Susanne Gödde's chapter "Resistance to Origins. Cult Foundation in the Myths of Dionysus, Apollo, and Demeter," which analyses the narrative status of religious foundation myths. Many foundation myths, especially those of cities or cultic institutions, construct origins as circuitous, as the result of a conflict or as a successful struggle against former resistance. Examples include the introduction of the cult of Dionysus into Athens, the foundation of Apollo's oracle in Delphi, and the aetiology of the Eleusinian mysteries. All of these narratives articulate a conspicuous resistance to the arrival and institution of a particular deity. This raises the question why this is the case and what it reveals about how the Greeks conceptualized religious order. Moreover, the well-known foundation myths of Athens and Thebes consider the origins of the respective city as the result of a quarrel, tracing the ideologies of these cities back to an act of violence. The question is highly relevant for our view on 'aetiology': Do we really find a strong and authoritative concept of beginnings in these narratives? Or do they not, rather, avoid claiming a singular starting point or founding act?

In religious contexts, aetiological thinking seems to be the result of a long-term development. As the following chapter suggests, however, it also contributes to a successful *Nachleben* of religious cults. In his contribution "Beginning with Hermes: Promoting Hermeticism through Aetiology in *Corpus Hermeticum* 1," Sean E. McGrath examines the cult of Hermes Trismegistus, one of the Hellenistic cults with the longest *Nachleben*, by exploring the use of aetiological motives in the *Poimandres*. In a dialogue with the eponymous deity Poimandres, the alleged archaic Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus receives a revelation about the creation of the world couched in concepts from (middle) Platonism, especially the cosmogony from the *Timaeus* and the dualism between the immortal soul and the transient body. The dramatic setting establishes the Egyptian Hermes as the original source of Platonic philosophy, later appropriated by Greek thinkers. Presenting Hermes as a first inventor corresponds to a wider tradition of Greek philosophers who receive Egyptian wisdom. Furthermore, Poimandres' account contains striking similarities with the creation myth in *Genesis* which serve as an 'anchor' to establish common ground between the Hermetic texts and Jewish readers. The *Poimandres*, therefore, uses aetiology both as a form of competition with other intellectual and religious traditions and as a technique for appealing to a wider audience.

Apparently, on the one hand, aetiologies help to stimulate the *Nachleben* of a religious cult. Unlike other cults of similar character, which perished during antiquity, the figure of Hermes reached both the Christian and Islamic world

in the medieval era and even saw a revival during the Renaissance. On the other hand, the development of aetiological thinking is part of – and contributes to – processes of rationalization.

Discourses in which this transition becomes especially clear are the rational explanations of well-known myths, as we find them in Hellenistic literature – an aspect which is at the heart of Hugo Koning's chapter on "Aetiology and Rationalizing Mythography." Koning explores the aetiologies which are presented by the Hellenistic mythographer Palaephatus. His rationalizations of some of Greece's best-known myths depend on finding the 'origin' that sparked the tale. According to Palaephatus, the Hydra that Heracles fought, was actually a fortress by that name; Aeolus was no lord of winds but an astronomer; and Medea did not boil people but invented the steam bath instead. By systematically searching for natural and credible origins behind traditional tales, Palaephatus rationalizes myth and supplants a mythical view of early times with an acceptable, modern or 'historical' one. Palaephatus is clearly searching for origins; the way he does so, however, is entirely different from other projects which present aetiological myths. Instead of 'othering' the mythical past, visualizing the long-lost world of myth as a place where gods and heroes perform superhuman feats which have created the world as it is today, Palaephatus strives to normalize the past, erasing all traces of the supernatural, and linking it as close as possible to his present-day experience.

As this example demonstrates, there is a clear transition from myth to rationalization, which also affects the approaches to aetiology. Yet, as pointed out above, this shouldn't suggest that there is a one-directional history of the human mind or that these developments in modes of thinking have been accepted throughout. Already in early Roman literature (e.g. in Ennius' and Pacuvius' tragedies) we find traces of critical attacks on philosophical explanations of myths, and, of course, we find them in later periods as well. A good example of how the rationalization of myths has been criticized via aetiological thinking, is Lucian's *De parasito* (*On the parasite*), a text from the second century CE. As Inger Kuin shows in her chapter "Patroclus was a Parasite. Lucian's Satirical Aitia," Lucian's treatise is a clear parody of the genre of encomium, but it also takes aim at the efforts of myth rationalizers, from Prodicus (5th BCE) to Heraclitus (2nd CE), to explain origin myths, by explaining the *origins* of origin myths. With his satire Lucian exposes the double bind that troubled myth rationalizers: on the one hand, they want to stay true to their standards of plausibility, on the other hand, they want to salvage the aetiological tradition as much as possible. As a result, many of their 'rational' explanations are scarcely more credible than the mythical aetiologies they were meant to explain in the first place. Lucian's parodies aim to show that

the rationalizers fail to understand the difference between everyday causality and mythical causality: unlike 'scientific' explanations (e.g., historiographical, medical), aetiological narratives can be 'true' even if they are unlikely. This type of truth can be played with through humor – as Lucian himself does time and again – but trying to apply (proto-)scientific reasoning to myths will make you look like a fool.

Part 3 concludes with a chapter demonstrating that critical views on rationalization and monocausal, linear thinking were not limited to satirical works, but rather also an issue in serious, scientific contexts – albeit with different results. In scientific treatises, such as Plutarch's *Aitiai*, we find the tendency to assume multiple causes. As Michiel Meeusen points out in his chapter "Crossing Borders: Aetiological Overlaps in Plutarch's Collections of *Questions*," aetiological research is an important aspect of Plutarchan writing. It plays a significant discursive role throughout the *Vitae* and the *Moralia*, and Plutarch composed a significant number of collections of Αἰτίαι. One collection in particular, the Αἰτίαι φυσικαί (*Quaestiones naturales*), offers an intriguing perspective on Plutarch's causal interest in natural phenomena. Meeusen's chapter examines how the Αἰτίαι tie in with Plutarch's aetiological program more generally, that is, which intertextual dynamics can be observed in the work. By providing an analysis of the conceptual overlaps within the oeuvre, Meeusen demonstrates that they reveal the openness and all-round applicability of many kinds of knowledge to different contexts – an intertextual dynamic that lies at the heart of Plutarch's πολυμάθεια project.

7 To Conclude ...

Taking in this overview, we can state that aetiology as a tool for thinking was used not only to overcome primal fears by shaping a 'Denkraum', or to sell (literary and political) innovations and pave the way for logical, plain explanations of the past while planning the future. Importantly, it also re-opens a space for discussion. Plutarch's openminded questions, allowing for multiple possible explanations (πότερον ...; ἤ ...; ἤ ...;), should be the agenda of scientific research in general, and we hope that this will go for our volume as well. The ten case studies presented here touch upon a number of crucial aspects of aetiological thinking, but, of course, no volume is able (nor claims) to give a final and complete explanation of the phenomenon explored. We have asked "Why Aetiologies?" and have provided several approaches and explanations. It is our hope that the analyses of aetiological narratives in previous research may be complemented and further enlightened by the present volume with its focus on aetiology as a tool for thinking, and that our explorations of the

topic will help to stimulate further discussions and innovative approaches. Especially in a period of crisis and change such as we are currently witnessing, a critical evaluation of aetiological thinking, its opportunities and risks, remains relevant more than ever.

8 Our Thanks Go Out to …

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PART 1

Aetiological Thinking: Old & New, From Present to Past to Future

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CHAPTER 1

Anchoring Innovations through Aetiology

Annette Harder

1 Introduction

As we can see in this volume, aetiology is a popular concept. It is found all through Greek and Roman history in a great variety of sources, including poetry.[1] Generally speaking, it helps to create a firm basis for the present in the past by showing that the present is the result or continuation of what happened or was begun in the past.[2] Thus a story from the past can be used as a means of legitimizing or explaining the present and of creating a sense of roots and continuity, i.e. of 'anchoring' the present, often against a religious, ideological or political background. We can find examples of this in poets like Pindar, Aeschylus and Euripides and in the Homeric hymns, but the device becomes increasingly popular with poets of the Hellenistic period, when the need to legitimize new institutions by framing them as part of an ongoing tradition seems to have been stronger than ever, and is then taken up by the Romans for whom aetiology became an important tool to shape their own past in connection with their ambitious present.

With respect to the aetiological passages discussed in this chapter, basically the pattern is that something is there and that you explain and foreground it by relating it to an event in the past which caused the present situation. Many examples of this kind of aetiology are found at the end of plays by Euripides, where a *deus ex machina* often announces a ritual following from the events in the play.[3] In this way the distant world of the play is connected with the present of the audience, for which this ritual is still part of the present. A

1 For a brief survey with further references see Harder 2012, vol. 1, 24–27. See also Loehr 1996 (with a useful theoretical survey of the concept on pp. 3–38); Asper 2013; for interesting observations about aetiology and identity the chapter on 'Aetiology Overseas' in Kowalzig 2007 and for the connections between aetiology and religion Waldner 2014. On aetiology before Callimachus Codrignani 1958 is still useful.

2 See also Loehr 1996, 30: "'Aitiologie' (mythisch) bezeichnet … die Verbindung eines real-existierenden, gegenwärtigen Sachverhaltes mit einem Ereignis in der Vergangenheit, das die *Ur*-Sache ist. Diese *Ur*-Sache ist Zentrum des Sachverhaltes, denn sie fixiert und legitimiert ihn …".

3 See e.g. Dunn 1996 and 2000; Scullion 2000.

typical example is *Ion* 1581–1588 where Athena predicts the future of Ion's descendants – sketching a future of Athenian expansion which at the time of performance around 413 BCE might seem somewhat utopic:

οἱ τῶνδε δ' αὖ
παῖδες γενόμενοι σὺν χρόνωι πεπρωμένωι
Κυκλάδας ἐποικήσουσι νησαίας πόλεις
χέρσους τε παράλους, ὃ σθένος τὴμῆι χθονὶ
δίδωσιν· ἀντίπορθμα δ' ἠπείροιν δυοῖν
πεδία κατοικήσουσιν, Ἀσιάδος τε γῆς
Εὐρωπίας τε·τοῦδε δ' ὀνόματος χάριν
Ἴωνες ὀνομασθέντες ἕξουσιν κλέος.

They in their turn shall have sons who in the appointed course of time shall found cities on the islands of the Cyclades and on the mainland coasts, to lend their strength to my city. They shall colonize the lowlands on either side of the strait that divides Europe from Asia; called after this prince, they shall bear the glorious name of Ionians.

transl. P. VELLACOTT

In Hellenistic and Roman narrative poetry one finds different ways of presenting the *aitia*. There it is the narrator who connects past and present on behalf of his readers and in these cases one can start either from the present, explaining that something is still as it is today because of what happened in the past, or one can start from the past, drawing attention to the fact that traces of the events from the past are still present in the world of today (often with the words ἔτι νῦν 'even now' drawing attention to the connection of past and present). The first approach we find in the *Aetia* of Callimachus, where present rituals are causing surprise and lead to questions (particularly in the first two books) and are subsequently explained with stories from the past, as, e.g., in fr. 3.1–2, where the *aition* of the Charites at Paros starts with the question why sacrifices to them are without flutes and wreaths. The second we find in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, where many episodes in the Argonauts' journey end with a remark that traces of it are still visible today, as in, e.g., the *aition* of the anchor at Cyzicus in A.R. 1.955–960.[4]

In this chapter we will explore the possibilities of aetiology as regards the way in which it can be used in poetry as a tool to anchor contemporary innovations in a mythical past as well as to anchor future institutions by casting

4 See further Harder 2003 and 2012, vol. 1, 25.

events in the present as their *aition*, and we will look at the way in which *aitia* that have become obsolete can be 'recycled' to fit a new context. These uses of aetiology suggest that in antiquity there was an ongoing awareness of its religious, ideological and political possibilities and also of the vitality and versatility of the concept: both form and contents could be adapted to new circumstances and adjusted in order to be effective there.

2 Aetiology and Innovation

As indicated in the introduction, aetiology is not only used to anchor a well-established present and to draw attention to specific aspects of it, but one may also relate the concept of anchoring *innovations* to aetiology. According to this concept innovations can be made more acceptable to the general public by connecting them in a meaningful way to what was already there in order to create a sense of familiarity and continuity, which helps to accept the new institution or invention.[5] In connection with aetiology we may distinguish various ways of anchoring innovations: anchoring the present in the past, anchoring the future in the present and anchoring by means of recycling.

3 Anchoring the Present in the Past

Sometimes we see that a new or future institution in the present is linked to an aetiological story from the past and presented as sanctioned by these events, as if it were a continuation of something that had been predicted a long time ago or had in some way been there all the time. Another example from Euripides may serve to show how this could be achieved. This is the passage about the alliance of Athens and Argos at the end of Euripides' *Supplices*, where Athena as *deus ex machina* explains that in repayment for the help offered by Theseus Adrastus must swear an oath (E. *Supp.* 1191–1195):

> ὁ δ' ὅρκος ἔσται μήποτ' Ἀργείους χθόνα
> ἐς τήνδ' ἐποίσειν πολέμιον παντευχίαν
> ἄλλων τ' ἰόντων ἐμποδὼν θήσειν δόρυ.
> ἢν δ' ὅρκον ἐκλιπόντες ἔλθωσιν πόλιν,
> κακῶς ὀλέσθαι πρόστρεπ' Ἀργείων χθόνα.

5 On the concept of 'anchoring innovation' see in general Sluiter 2017.

> And this shall be the form of the oath: 'Never shall Argives march against Attica in arms; if others march, Argos shall interpose her sword. And if they break their oath and march, then let them bring down upon Argos shame, destruction and defeat.'
>
> transl. P. VELLACOTT

As Collard in his commentary on 1165–1234 and in his introduction observes,[6] the actual phrasing reflects that of contemporary peace treaties. He plausibly argues that it is likely that Euripides conceived this play and the speech of Athena "when an Athens-Argos alliance was one possible direction of Athenian diplomacy", and, in fact, in 420 BCE an alliance between Argos and Athens was made. So here we may observe how a new step in current war diplomacy was given a basis in the past by means of an aetiological passage.[7]

Two further points are worth observing here: (a) the aetiological explanation acquires extra authority because, as in the example from the *Ion* quoted above, it is the *deus ex machina* who is announcing it; (b) from a chronological point there is an interesting ambiguity, because this divinity and the watching audience operate at different moments in time: on the one hand the aetiology refers to an institution which for the audience is part of their present or, in the case of the *Supplices*, of their near future, on the other hand it is predicted by a divinity from the distant past for whom this institution is still in the future. Basically this means that the god or goddess in his or her present is shaping the past of his or her own future, of which, being immortal, they will inevitably be part too; this future, then, overlaps with the present or future of the audience. Thus the gods are presented as helping later generations, such as the audience in the theatre, to accept the innovations by anchoring them in their past and sanctioning them by their divine authority. Their physical presence as a character on stage in the theatre helps to underline this authority and to blur the distance in time.

A good example of anchoring a new institution from the Hellenistic period is the way in which Apollonius Rhodius ends his *Argonautica* in 4.1730–1764 with a passage explaining how the descendants of the Argonauts came to North Africa and settled in Cyrene.[8] Euphemus dreams that he breast-fed and slept with a clod of earth, given to him by Triton (4.1552–1563), which turned

6 Collard 1975, 10–11 and 406–423.

7 On the political dimensions of this episode see also, e.g., Hose 2008, 77–78.

8 On *aitia* in Apollonius Rhodius see in general Valverde Sanchez 1989, who discusses the *aition* of the clod of Euphemus on pp. 266–269; and more recently Klooster 2014.

into a woman. This woman tells him that she is a daughter of Triton and Libya and nurse of his children and asks to be thrown into the sea near Anaphe. From there she promises to rise again as a home for Euphemus' descendants. When he tells his dream to Jason, Jason remembers a prophecy by Apollo and explains that the clod, which is part of the Libyan land, will become an island (Thera) where the descendants of Euphemus will live (A.R. 4.1749–1754):[9]

> Ὦ πέπον, ἦ μέγα δή σε καὶ ἀγλαὸν ἔμμορε κῦδος.
> βώλακα γὰρ τεύξουσι θεοὶ πόντονδε βαλόντι
> νῆσον, ἵν' ὁπλότεροι παίδων σέθεν ἐννάσσονται
> παῖδες, ἐπεὶ Τρίτων ξεινήιον ἐγγυάλιξεν
> τήνδε τοι ἠπείροιο Λιβυστίδος· οὔ νύ τις ἄλλος
> ἀθανάτων ἢ κεῖνος, ὅ μιν πόρεν ἀντιβολήσας.
>
> Truly, my dear friend, great and glorious fame has been allotted to you, for after you cast the clod into the sea, the gods will turn it into an island, where later generations will dwell, because Triton gave you this piece of the Libyan mainland as a guest-gift. It was he and no other of the immortals, who met us and gave it to you.
>
> transl. W.H. RACE

Euphemus then throws the clod into the sea. Then the island Calliste emerges, where the descendants of Euphemus, driven from Lemnos to Sparta and travelling from there to Calliste, led by Theras, will live. They will then call the island Thera. Apollonius leaves out the sequel, which must have been familiar for his readers from Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode* and Herodotus (4.150–158) and was also told by Callimachus in his *Hymn to Apollo*: that from Thera Cyrene in Libya was colonized, which brought the Greeks to North Africa. Although in the time of Apollonius the Greeks had been in Cyrene for a long time (Hdt. 4.159 adds how many Greeks migrated to Cyrene), this story may also help to legitimize the still relatively new widespread presence and rule of the Greeks in Egypt in the third century BCE as well as explain the lasting importance of Cyrene, while showing how these later Greeks are part of a continuous Greek tradition that began well before the Trojan War.[10] This is more straightforward than the tragic examples, as the reader and the narrator may be regarded as operating

9 See on this passage now Hunter 2015, 312sq. and his commentary on the individual lines. See also Jacqueline Klooster's contribution to this volume.

10 See e.g. Stephens 2000, esp. 201–203; Mori 2008, 112; Klooster 2014, 533–535.

at the same moment in time. It should be noticed, though, that the narrator, when quoting Jason, refers to a divine authority at some length, so that the prediction as it were gains status and may thus convince the readers as well as the Argonauts. Thus the epic seems to recall the device of the *deus ex machina* from tragedy as a way to sanction the aetiological connection by means of a prophecy by a divine authority at the end of a literary work.

It also seems that what Apollonius is doing here inspired aetiological aspects of Vergil's *Aeneid*.[11] The notion of a character from an epic story and his offspring having impact on the present recurs when in *Aeneid* 6.724–887 Anchises is prophesying how the *animae* of selected dead, who have been purified, will return to a life on earth after a thousand years and will rule in Italy and Rome, beginning with Silvius, the son of Aeneas, and in the course of many generations will lead to Caesar and the Julian family of Augustus and the promising Marcellus, who would die at an early age. In the course of his long prophecy Anchises mentions many Roman kings and heroes by name and speaks about the expansion of the Roman empire, so compared to the brief and cryptic passage in the *Argonautica* the passage is long and elaborate. Still the same elements can be observed: in both texts there is a prophecy concerning a future settlement of ideological and political importance, connected with an epic character and his offspring, and this prophecy gains authority by the nature of the speaker, the dream fitting in with the prophecy by Apollo in the *Argonautica* and the venerable Anchises (who recalls Teiresias in *Odyssey* 11 and has a role in inspecting the *animae* in *A.* 6.677–683) in the *Aeneid*. A detail in the passage from the *Aeneid*, a simile in 707–709, where the souls of those who will get a second life, i.e. the future descendants of Aeneas, are compared to buzzing bees swarming around lilies in a field near the river Lethe, in a subtle way recalls not the end of the *Argonautica*, but the end of the Lemnian episode in A.R. 1.879–885, where the Lemnian women, swarming around the departing Argonauts and wishing them a good journey are compared to buzzing bees gathering honey around lilies in a dewy meadow. As will become clear at the end of the *Argonautica*, one of these Lemnian women will be the mother of the offspring of the Argonaut Euphemus.

11 Of course this is just one aspect of the many – and complex – connections between the *Argonautica* and the *Aeneid*, which within the compass of this article can be dealt with only briefly. On the *Argonautica* and the *Aeneid* see in general Hunter 1993, 170–189; Nelis 2001; Mori 2008, 224–235; on aetiology in the *Aeneid* also Binder 1988.

4 Anchoring the Future in the Present

What we saw in the previous examples is that a character in the past is speaking and acting in a way that predicts and shapes a future which coincides with the present of the narrator and the reader. More experimentally, the present can also be cast as the past of the future by a speaker or narrator who, unlike the tragic *deus ex machina* and the characters in epic poetry, operates at the same moment in time as his audience: an event or action in the present will then provide a reason for a specific institution in the future and acquire, as it were, aetiological status.

This concept is briefly discussed and related to the example of *aitia* from the past in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, where in 1421–1424 Pheidippides challenges the authority of the old law and addresses his father as follows:

> Οὔκουν ἀνὴρ ὁ τὸν νόμον θεὶς τοῦτον ἦν τὸ πρῶτον,
> ὥσπερ σὺ κἀγώ, καὶ λέγων ἔπειθε τοὺς παλαιούς;
> ἧττόν τι δῆτ' ἔξεστι κἀμοὶ καινὸν αὖ τὸ λοιπὸν
> θεῖναι νόμον τοῖς υἱέσιν, τοὺς πατέρας ἀντιτύπτειν;
>
> Well was not he who made the law, a man, a mortal man, as you or I, who in old times talked over all the crowd? And think you that to you or me the same is not allowed, to change it, so that sons by blows should keep their fathers steady?
>
> transl. B. BICKLEY ROGERS

Here the *aition* of the old law is presented as an act of a man from the past and Pheidippides claims that the same is possible for him and that he in his turn can institute a new law for the future, emphasizing the aetiological and innovative status of his act by the words καινὸν αὖ τὸ λοιπόν.

What Pheidippides suggests as a possible course of action is in fact done by Callimachus and Ovid, as we find this kind of proceeding in the catasterism of the lock of Berenice at the end of Callimachus' *Aetia* and in the apotheosis of Caesar at the end of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[12] A closer look at these texts reveals that here too some extra authority seems to have been deemed necessary for making the aetiology convincing and giving it status. Thus the speaker in the *Lock of Berenice* is not just some mortal narrator, but the lock of Berenice herself. This lock was sacrificed for the safe return of Berenice's husband,

12 See for further discussion Harder 2003.

Ptolemaeus III Euergetes, from the Syrian War and has just been lifted up to the realm of the stars and gods through the agency of Aphrodite and has thus acquired a divine status (fr. 110.52–64):

καὶ πρόκατε γνωτὸς Μέμνονος Αἰθίοπος
ἵετο κυκλώσας βαλιὰ πτερὰ θῆλυς ἀήτης,
ἵππο̣[ς] ἰοζώνου Λοκρίδος ᾽Αρσινόης,
.[.]ασε̣ δὲ πνοιῇ μ̣ε, δι᾽ ἠέρα δ᾽ ὑγρὸν ἐνείκας
Κύπρ]ιδος εἰς κόλ[πους ἔθηκε
...
ὄφρα δὲ]
...
φάεσ]ι̣ν ἐν πολέεσσιν ἀρίθμιος ἀλλ̣[ὰ φαείνω
καὶ Βερ]ενίκειος καλὸς ἐγὼ πλ̣όκαμ[ος,
ὕδασι] λουόμενόν με παρ᾽ ἀθ̣α̣[νάτους ἀνάγουσα
Κύπρι]ς ἐν ἀρχαίοις ἄ̣στρον [ἔθηκε νέον.

And straightaway the brother of the Ethiopian Memnon came rushing on, circling his swift wings, a gentle breeze, the Locrian horse of Arsinoe with her purple girdle, and took me with his breath, and carrying me through the humid air he placed me in Cypris' lap ... And in order that ... I would also shine, I, the beautiful lock of Berenice, Cypris brought me, washed in the water, to the immortals and placed me as a new star among the old ones.

transl. M.A. HARDER

From this authoritative position the lock demands an ongoing ritual of sacrifices to itself, recalling the rituals for the dead in tragedy (as in e.g. E. *Hipp*. 1423–1430), as we know from Catullus' translation of Callimachus' poem (*Catul*. 66.79–94), where the lock asks for sacrifices by young brides (79–88) and by Berenice on festive days for Aphrodite (89–94).[13] At the same time the lock's position, now that it has acquired a divine status among the stars, is comparable to that of the *deus ex machina* in tragedy. However, unlike these gods it is not speaking from the past, but shares the same moment in time with the audience and predicts their shared future.

13 For discussion of the fact that in Catullus lines 79–88 do not correspond to the remains of Callimachus' text in *P. Oxy*. 2258 see Harder 2012 on fr. 110.79–88. For the issue of anchoring a future institution in the present it does not really make a difference whether or not both rituals were originally part of (versions of) Callimachus' text.

As Apollonius' aetiological technique may have inspired Vergil, so Callimachus' idea of casting the present as the past of the future may have been an example for Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*.[14] In the apotheosis of Caesar (Ov. *Met*. 15.745–879) the notion of a catasterism of a historical character at the end of a catalogue poem is reminiscent of the fate of the lock of Berenice in the *Aetia*, as the announcement of Caesar in 749 as *sidus … nouum stellamque comantem* ('a new star and comet', but with a notion of *coma* 'lock of hair' in the adjective, which recurs in 849 *crinem* 'tail of hair') clearly suggests by recalling Callimachus' ἄστρον … [νέον] immediately at the beginning of the episode.[15] At the same time the narrative technique of the passage in Ovid and the emphasis on the intervention of the gods also recalls the *Argonautica*. As in the *Argonautica* the events are told by the narrator, but arranged by the gods, so here too there is a great deal of divine agency, again recalling the device of the tragic *deus ex machina*. It is Venus who puts herself in charge of the apotheosis of Caesar,[16] when she cannot prevent him being murdered and is aware of the need to provide Augustus with a divine ancestor. Consequently in 15.818–842 Jupiter promises that Caesar will become a god and promises victory to Augustus. Then Venus asks to turn Caesar's soul into a star and in 843–850 she actually brings his soul to the stars:

> *Vix ea fatus erat, media cum sede senatus*
> *constitit alma Venus nulli cernenda suique*
> *Caesaris eripuit membris nec in aera solvi*
> *passa recentem animam caelestibus intulit astris*
> *dumque tulit, lumen capere atque ignescere sensit*

14 On the aetiological character of the *Metamorphoses* see in general Myers 1994; Waldner 2007; on Callimachus and Augustan aetiological elegy, including Propertius and Ovid, see Miller 1982.

15 Interestingly, it has been suggested that Ov. *Met*. 1.438–451, about Apollo slaying Python and founding the Pythian Games with the wreath of oak leaves as a prize, as the laurel does not yet exist (but will at the end of the following story about Apollo and Daphne), may refer to Callimachus' *Victory of Berenice* with the *aition* of the wreath at the Nemean Games at the beginning of *Aetia* 3; see Loehr 1996, 139–141; Waldner 2007, 215. If so, the framing of the *Metamorphoses* by the story of Apollo and Python, which is the first story after the flood, and the apotheosis of Caesar would recall the framing of *Aetia* 3 and 4 between the two poems dedicated to Berenice. Besides, the story of Apollo and Python also is the first story of *Aetia* 4 (fr. 86–89a), so that in a way it frames that book with the *Lock of Berenice* at the end. Ovid's positioning of the Python story thus recalls both framing devices in the *Aetia*.

16 On the important role of Venus in the aetiological programme of the *Fasti*, in close connection with the role of the Charites in Callimachus' *Aetia*, see Walter 2014, 432–437 and *passim*.

emisitque sinu: luna volat altius illa
flammiferumque trahens spatioso limite crinem
stella micat

> Scarce had he spoken when fostering Venus took her place within the senate-house, unseen of all, caught up the passing soul of her Caesar from his body, and not suffering it to vanish into air, she bore it towards the stars of heaven. And as she bore it she felt it glow and burn, and released it from her bosom. Higher than the moon it mounted up and, leaving behind it a fiery train, gleamed as a star.
>
> transl. J.F. MILLER

Thus Augustus is provided with a divine ancestor and a basis has been created for his own apotheosis. The episode ends in 868–870 with a prayer for a long life and subsequent divine status for Augustus and in 871–879 it is added that the poet too will rise above the stars and live for ever.[17]

So, in both cases events in the here and now or very recent past of the reader are cast as the causes of later institutions. Divine agency plays an important part and, as in the *Argonautica*, recalls the *deus ex machina* of tragedy, also because these passages are found towards the end of works.[18]

5 Anchoring by Means of Recycling

A somewhat problematic aspect of aetiological texts which are anchoring innovations may be their later reception, because at a certain moment they become 'antiquarian', as the innovations are no longer 'new'. When past and present in the texts are no longer those of the readers and when institutions

17 Perhaps we also have an example of casting present events as an *aition* of the future in *P. Oxy*. 63.4352, fr. 5 col. II 11–17, where after the death of Hadrian's lover Antinous Semele takes the young man as her husband and turns him into a new star (cf. 13 νέον φάος) and Hadrian offers him a town (Antinoopolis) and the Nile gives him an island, so that Antinous' death leads to institutions in the future. However, as the papyrus is dated ca. 285 CE (as after line 17 a paragraphus marks the beginning of a new poem or section which celebrates Diocletian), we cannot be sure that the poem was contemporary with the death of Antinous, even if – as seems likely – we have two separate poems. For some further discussion see Livrea 1999; Focanti 2018, 29–102, who opts for a single poem (see especially pp. 32–34).

18 On the use of divine authority in connection with aetiological stories see also Harries 1989, especially 174–182 about gods and goddesses used to authenticate the aetiological stories about their festivals in Ovid's *Fasti*.

which were once new have become old or obsolete, as e.g. in the case of the lock of Berenice discussed above, they lose their original function and become just 'stories'. Apparently there was some awareness of this in antiquity, as in several of the instances of anchoring innovations by means of *aitia* discussed in the sections above we can observe the interesting phenomenon of the aetiological stories being 'recycled' to serve new circumstances at a time when the original contexts have become something of the past. We can see this happening with the story of the Argonauts and the foundation of Cyrene, which was the theme of Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode*, where it was playing a part in a political discourse connected with the *laudandus* Arcesilas of Cyrene. In Apollonius Rhodius and Callimachus Arcesilas is no longer relevant and the foundation of Cyrene is then given new significance in the context of Ptolemaic Egypt.[19]

Also in the case of the lock of Berenice a 'history' of the re-use of the *aition* can be sketched. We have seen that Ovid recycled it in the context of imperial Rome, by means of his allusions to it in the episode of the apotheosis of Caesar at the end of the *Metamorphoses*. Between Callimachus and Ovid, however, two more steps in the 'history' of the *aition* can be discovered. The first is the version of Catullus in his poem 66, also mentioned above. Although Catullus presents this poem as a translation (in *Catul.* 65), there are several small changes. One of these is the end of the poem, where in Callimachus' text the temporal aspect of a shared present is emphasized again at the end of the poem, where the queen (probably Berenice) is addressed in a final farewell in fr. 110.94a. In the text of Catullus the poem ends with line 94 and there is no farewell, which seems to fit in with the fact that for him the topical aspect of the poem is no longer relevant and the interest of the aetiological story has become mainly antiquarian. Also his choice to include lines 79–88 may be accounted for by the new situation (see further above). The second step is to be found in Vergil's *Georgics*, where the prologue includes a passage about the deification of Caesar (Verg. *G.* 1.24–42). Damien Nelis has recently offered a convincing picture of the connections between the *Georgics* and Callimachus' *Aetia*[20] and pointed to the series of allusions in Verg. *G.* 1.32 *nouum … sidus* to *Catul.* 66.64 *sidus … nouum* and Call. *Aet.* fr. 110.64 ἄστρον … [νέον],[21] which is then again picked up in Ov. *Met.* 15.749 *sidus … nouum*. It is striking that in Vergil's work the deification of Caesar is mentioned in the *prologue* instead of at the end of the work and that he does *not* tell an aetiological story. Even so the suggestion of a divinely sanctioned *aition* is there in the background through the allusions

19 On Apollonius' reworking of Pindar see particularly Stephens 2000, 201–203.

20 See Nelis 2013. For earlier work on Vergil and the *Aetia* see George 1974.

21 For another possible allusion to the Greek phrase see also n. 17.

to the earlier texts and the variation on the pattern of the *Aetia* and the reader seems to be alerted anew to the political dimensions of the story of the lock of Berenice, which were absent in Catullus' version. Subsequently Ovid moved the deification to the end of his work again and added a new aetiological story, reminiscent of the original one, but fully adapted to the new context and elaborating the brief hint of Vergil.[22]

6 Conclusion

On the basis of these few examples aetiology in the hands of Greek and Latin poets can be regarded as an interesting way of anchoring not only the present as the *status quo*, but also of anchoring innovative elements of the present in the past as well as anchoring innovations for the future in the present, particularly on a religious, ideological and political level. In the case of anchoring innovations for the future in the present one might, on a conceptual level, speak of 'anticipatory aetiology' as a means of anchoring future innovations. The means used by the various poets discussed in this chapter to achieve these effects are well thought out and seem to aim at being as convincing as possible in order to get the new message across. One of the means to do this is to give the gods a leading role in the anchoring, either as proclaimers of a new situation being caused by earlier events or as the agents who direct more or less current events towards a desired purpose in the future and thus help to create a convincing *aition*. Besides, a creative use of intertextuality, relating the texts to earlier literary models, particularly in Greek tragedy, provides the gods themselves as agents of aetiology with the background of a long tradition. It anchors them as convincing authorities by drawing attention to the aetiology of their particular role in earlier texts. Another way of using intertextuality can be seen in the ways in which later authors adapt older aetiological stories to new circumstances, while still sharing in the authority of the earlier stories.[23]

22 An interesting attempt concerning the recycling of stories from Callimachus' *Aetia* has also been made by Peter Bing (2019), who shows that in late antiquity Aristaenetus adapted the love stories of Acontius and Cydippe and Phrygius and Pieria from Callimachus' *Aetia* in such a way that, while the Callimachean *aitia* anchored the concept of a happy royal marriage in a Ptolemaic context, his letters 1.10, 1.15 and 1.19 by subtle adaptations did the same for the royal couple of Aristaenetus' own age. Here, however, the focus is slightly different as it is not so much the actual *aitia* as the idea of love as a beneficial power that is the point at hand.

23 It would be useful to explore more aetiological texts, Greek as well as Latin, from this angle in order to acquire a larger picture and to refine the results of this brief investigation. Besides, also other aspects of aetiology in relation to anchoring innovation would be

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worth exploring, e.g. the way in which choices are made concerning the question which aspects of the present or future to anchor in which past among the – increasingly – many and sometimes contradictory stories of the past that were available; the various political or cultural contexts of this kind of aetiology; further aspects of the use of divine organizers and/or speakers to sanction the *aition* and its innovative outcome.

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CHAPTER 2

The Parallels between Aetiology and Prophecy in Ancient Literature

Hindsight as Foresight Makes Sense

Jacqueline Klooster

1 Introduction: Hindsight as Foresight[1]

As Annette Harder shows in her contribution to this volume, aetiological stories are often used to anchor innovations in the present: "Sometimes we see that a new or future institution in the present is linked to an aetiological story from the past and presented as sanctioned by these events, as if it were a continuation of something that had been predicted a long time ago or had in some way been there all the time", as she phrases it. This can take the form of so-called *ex eventu* prophecies by a *deus ex machina* in tragedy, as Harder illustrates with examples from Euripidean tragedy. Both in the *Ion* (1581–1588) and in the *Supplices* (1191–1195) the goddess Athena enters the stage near the end and prophesies a future that is meant to forecast the present of the Athenian audience watching the tragedy. Later, Hellenistic poets take over this poetical device and use it for their own purposes, but a central function of such passages remains the embedding of some kind of ideological claim (possibly of an innovative kind, as Harder shows) by means of an authoritative speaker represented as prophesying with foresight out of the past.

W.H. Auden termed this procedure 'hindsight as foresight' in his poem *Secondary Epic* (1959),[2] in which he criticizes its use as found in Vergil's *Aeneid* (in particular in the scene of the manufacturing of Aeneas' shield in book 8 and in the prophecies of Anchises in the underworld in book 6):

1 Anchoring Innovation is the Gravitation Grant research agenda of the Dutch National Research School in Classical Studies, OIKOS. It is financially supported by the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science (NWO project number 024.003.012). For more information about the research programme and its results, see the website www.anchoring-innovation.nl. This chapter was written with the generous funding of this project. For the concept of 'anchoring innovation' see Sluiter 2017. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are by Jacqueline Klooster.

2 Published in *Homage to Clio*, Auden, 1960.

No, Virgil, no:
Not even the first of the Romans can learn
His Roman history in the future tense,
Not even to serve your political turn;
Hindsight as foresight makes no sense.

The use of aetiology as prophecy is here being interpreted as the result of a 'political turn', and Auden states that it "makes no sense" to have the present guaranteed by gods in the past. He shows up the less persuasive sides of the procedure by pointing out, for instance, that history doesn't simply stop at the moment Vergil and Augustus would have liked it to stop:

What cause could he show why he [*Vulcanus*] *didn't foresee*
The future beyond 31 B.C.?

Apart from this, the rhetoric of a god-given, providential rule is inherently morally corrupt, so Auden implies, since it can so easily be abused, for instance by

Some blond princeling whom loot had inclined
To believe that Providence had assigned
To blonds the task of improving mankind.

Of course, Auden has a point: to people who no longer believe in superhuman entities such as the Olympian gods, or an overarching Providence that steers world history, it seems crudely manipulative to stage divine guarantors of present glory in fictions about the far past. As a rhetorical strategy it lacks subtlety, to say the least, and we would no longer buy into it.

In this chapter, however, I would like to take a step back, away from the modern point of view and from the functional, rhetorical approach, and rather ask whether we can identify the *structural characteristics* that link prophecy (both actual and *ex eventu*) and aetiology. Is it possible that precisely these structural similarities caused their frequent coupling in ancient literature? In particular I wish to address the issue of how the form and style of aetiological narratives and prophecies provoked similar interpretive responses in audiences.[3]

I start by addressing the question why aetiology and prophecy seemingly 'belong together' in the ancient mind. In order to do so, I will look into the structure of aetiology and prophecy as narrative modes, or *Denkformen*. In

3 The similarity between the interpretation of oracles and that of poetry has been put on the scholarly agenda most influentially by Struck 2004, 162–204.

particular I will ask: what do these narrative forms aim at, and how do they reach their goal? This involves a look at ancient divinatory practices. Secondly, following Struck, I will argue that both prophecy and aetiology are related to allegorical speech in that they both, in their different ways, proceed by providing a symbolic representation of 'truth'. This may help explain why the two often occur together.

2 Prophecy and Aetiology in Ancient Divination

What is aetiology? Aetiological stories usually work by explaining, in a story situated in the (far) past, how something the reader can observe in his or her contemporary world, has come into being. The *explananda* can for instance take the form of religious rituals, names of cities, remarkable shapes in the landscape, or the names of constellations. Often such stories are marked by 'and since that day', 'and until this very day', or similar phrases, to provide a connection between the far past and the present of the author and his audience; examples of where we can find such stories have been mentioned in the introduction to this volume.

So how does aetiological narrative relate to prophecy? Let me first define that by prophecy I mean both the art of the seer (*manteia*) and the act of declaring the will of the gods (*propheteia*), categories that may overlap to some extent.[4] The umbrella concept of 'divination' under which these forms of prophecy fell was in antiquity divided into inductive and intuitive divination.[5] The first type is based on the interpretation of signs (e.g. the flight and behavior of birds) to get access to the will of the gods. The second type occurs under direct inspiration of a divinity, and can be either spontaneous or invoked through ritual acts; it results in prophetic utterances or dreams. Both forms of prophecy may relate to either the past of the future, and most often they concern the relation between both.

Whenever a seer concentrates on the past, this usually means (s)he is trying to discover whether the will of the gods has at some point been crossed by humans, which has led to an unwanted situation in the present. When this human failure in respect regarding the divine world (through unlawful acts, pollution, lack of sacrifice *vel sim.*) has been discovered, the seer can then

4 For a definition of prophecy and divination in Greek antiquity, see: Köckert *et al.* 2006 (prophecy); Maul *et al.* 2006 (divination). For a comparative approach, see also Beerden 2013.

5 Cicero respectively calls them *genus artificiosum* and *genus naturale*, *Div.* 2.26–27; cf. *Div.* 1.11; 1.34.

prophesy about what needs to be done in the present/future to redress the wrong and appease the gods – if that is still possible. We can think of the opening of the *Iliad*, where Calchas is called upon to explain why the Greek army is being struck with the plague, and what can be done to remedy it. In the plot of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* where a similar epidemic is the result of Oedipus' crimes, only the penitence of the unwitting parricide and incestuous husband will lift the plague from Thebes.

Literary renderings of intuitive prophecy, such as the prophetic outburst of Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1072–1330), likewise often connect events from the past with what will happen in the future. Thus, according to Cassandra, the inherited curse of the Atridae, caused by the slaying of Thyestes' children by Atreus, will lead to the death of Cassandra and Agamemnon by Clytemnestra's doing in the play itself (*A.* 1215–1240), and beyond to Clytemnestra's murder by Orestes (*A.* 1280–1285, referring to the events portrayed in *Choephoroi*). It may be noted that practically all prophecies to be found in Greek literature are prophecies that have been pronounced in the (mythical) past, and for the most part they therefore refer to things that have already happened at the time the audience hears about them as a prophecy.[6]

Based on the above definitions of aetiology and prophecy, let us take a first look at the possible similarities and parallels between the two. Taking them at face value, we could say that both aetiology and prophecy center on the discovery and expression of knowledge that is not readily available to all. A distinctive feature is the strong causal link between the past and the present or future – there is no place for 'chance' in the sense of 'unmotivated events' in this worldview. It is of course much easier to obtain knowledge about what has happened in the recent past or is still going on in the present than it is to find out what happened in the far past or what will happen in the future. But it is equally possible to possess only partial knowledge of the present or the recent past, i.e., a person can only see certain aspects of his or her present situation, while others may for some reason remain hidden from view (we may think again of the unfortunate Oedipus, as blind to his present state as he is to his past). Anyone wishing to obtain knowledge about the unknown territories of the past, the present or the future, will try to get at it by way of an authority in possession of this knowledge. In ancient Greek poetry – and presumably also in daily life – the ultimate authority in these fields would be a divinity, and his or her mouthpieces among humankind, that is to say, anyone who could claim

6 The past they refer to is either the far past or a more recent past; although see Annette Harder's contribution for some examples of literary prophecies that seem to point forward to the actual present/future of the audience of the poem in question.

to stand in direct contact with the divine: seers, prophets, the Pythia and other tellers of fortune.

In this worldview, past, present and future are related to each other causally in a closed system with hardly any room for chance events. Nevertheless, this unfailing causality is not always easy to see or understand. This explains why prophets are so often disbelieved or misunderstood (think of Tiresias in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, or again, Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*). Nevertheless, the basic belief underpinning Greek divination is that anyone with the power to oversee all the causal links between events is theoretically in possession of a universal knowledge of everything that has happened, is happening, or will in future times happen in the heavens and on the earth. This indeed, is exactly the way the knowledge of the bird seer Calchas is characterized in *Iliad* 1.69–70:

> Κάλχας Θεστορίδης οἰωνοπόλων ὄχ᾽ ἄριστος,
> ὃς ἤδη τά τ᾽ ἐόντα τά τ᾽ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ᾽ ἐόντα.
>
> Calchas, the Son of Thestor, the best of the bird seers, who knew the present, the future and the past.

As is widely recognized, this sounds similar to the function of the poet in Hesiod's description of his area of expertise after initiation by the Muses (*Th.* 31–32):[7]

> ἐνέπνευσαν δέ μοι αὐδὴν
> θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τά τ᾽ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ᾽ ἐόντα
>
> And they breathed into me a divine voice, that I might sing of the future and the past …

This brings us to the issue of the structural similarity (in archaic Greek thought at least) of the seer and the poet: both stand in direct contact with the gods (in the cases of Calchas and Hesiod these are respectively Apollo and the Muses). These gods thus guaranteed their revelations about the past and/or the future, or rather, in many cases, the *causal relation* between past, present and future.

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7 West 1966, *ad Th.* 32 writes: "In the absence of written records, the ability to see into the distant past is no less marvellous than the ability to see into the future, and there is no reason for a sharp distinction between the two. Neither is possible without some form of divine revelation, for only the gods have the necessary first-hand knowledge." The *locus classicus* is Hom. *Il.* 2.484–486, with the remarks of e.g. Murray 1981 and De Jong 1987, 51.

How does this link back to aetiology? In aetiological narratives the causal link between a state of affairs obtaining in the present and a forgotten past origin is revealed (again). The fiction of aetiological narratives is thus that the causal connection between the moment of origins and the present has always existed, but has become obscure and forgotten by the passing of time. The poet, with help from the Muses or other gods of poetry, may obtain knowledge of this past, and reveal the lost links of causality, and thus instruct and enlighten the reader.[8]

Returning to the issue of a possible structural parallelism between aetiology and prophecy we can now recognize that this very parallelism is, in a way, both the force and the weakness of both. Both forms of narrative claim to present some kind of revelation: either of a (still) hidden knowledge of the future or of a lost knowledge about the past. This naturally entails that in both cases doubts as to the correctness of the truth claims about future or past events and/or the reconstruction of causality may arise. This, in turn, explains why both aetiology and prophecy try to claim authority for their narrator (poet or prophet) or the informant of this narrator (usually a god) as a truth guarantee. Of course, this can in both cases lead to challenges as to the trustworthiness of the narrator. As noted, prophets and poets regularly receive the accusation that their stories are not truthful. Proverbial is Cassandra's myth, as found for instance in the reference to the disbelief she has formerly encountered (*A.* 1212). But we can also think of the way Oedipus (with great dramatic irony) insults Tiresias as 'blind in all senses' in Sophocles (*OT* 370). If we look at poets, we will see that the way Hesiod seems to present his Muses as potentially untruthful (*Th.* 27–28) might even fit this scheme.[9] Even more broadly speaking, the early criticism of Homer and Hesiod by rationalists like Xenophanes and Herodotus may also serve as an example[10] – not to mention Plato's criticism of the truth claims of the poets.[11]

8 Intriguing reflections on how information about the past reaches the narrator through the Muses (in a specifically aetiological narrative) is present in the Muse invocations of Apollonius Rhodius, 1.18–22; 3.1–4; 4.1–5; 4.552–557; 4.1318–1388. See on this: Gonzalez 2000; Cuypers 2004; Morrison 2007, 271–311; Klooster 2011, 216–225. Of course, Callimachus' Muse invocations also explicitly address this issue. See Harder 2012 on this in the appropriate places.

9 There is a large bibliography on the passage: cf. e.g. Verdenius 1972; Stroh 1976; Pucci 1977; Thalmann 1984, 146–149; Nagy 1990, 44–47; Stoddard 2004; Tsagalis 2006.

10 For the early reactions to the truth claims of ancient epic, see the fragments conveniently gathered in Lanata 1963.

11 For Plato's criticism of Homer, see e.g. Murray 1996.

3 The Explanatory Aims of Aetiological Narrative

So far, I have concentrated on *structural* similarities between aetiology and prophecy as ways of thinking about the connections between the past, the present and the future. But for my last point I would like to take another look at the way the *explanatory aims* of aetiology have been evaluated in modern scholarship. In the past, scholars have often claimed that aetiological thinking represented an early form of scientific thought – a naïve way of primitive mankind to explain how the world came into being, and how it turned out the way that they could see around them every day.[12] Nowadays, hardly anyone believes that this is a sufficient description of the actual goals of aetiological narratives. Aetiological myths often clearly do not aim at the acquisition or presentation of exact and accurate knowledge of the past in the way that modern scientific (or even historical) enquiry does.[13] The fact that an ironic poet like Callimachus claims that this knowledge *is exactly* what aetiology is really about, should tell us enough.[14]

Johanna Loehr distinguishes between 'Wissensbedürfnis' and 'Lebensbedürfnis' in this context.[15] In her view, an *aition* is hardly ever told to provide factual, exact knowledge about the past. Rather, the aim of such *aitia* is to function as moral injunctions, ethical standards or examples for the present by the telling of symbolic, figurative stories about the past. Moreover, the fact that events in such stories are often situated in a primordial age, as she suggests, *ipso facto* lends them a certain authority.

This is not, however, the authority of historical, factual truth. Indeed, the stories told in ancient aetiological myths were in antiquity already understood to contain moral, symbolic truths hidden under the surface, rather than actual or factual truths: they needed to be decoded by the audience. This can be illustrated for instance by the well-known aetiological *Myth of the Four Races* as told by Hesiod in the *Works and Days* (106–201), details of which are interpreted by Socrates in Plato's *Cratylus* (398b–c). The *Myth of the Four Races*, in which the Hesiodean narrator tells of the moral decline of humanity by speaking of a Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Race, is meant to explain the human

12 Gunkel 1901, xi–xii.

13 Loehr 1996, 1–38, esp. 34–38.

14 For Callimachus' playfulness, see the still valuable essay of Snell 1975[1946]. His thirst for (utterly irrelevant and obscure) knowledge is expressed in *Aetia* frgg. 3.1–2; 7c.1–3; 31c+31g; 43b.1–6; 178.21 Harder. On the "desire … to bring origins to light" as the 'plot' of the *Aetia*, see Sistakou 2019. For the fact that this aetiological knowledge is at heart predominantly irrelevant, see Asper 2013.

15 Loehr 1996, 34–38.

condition, in particular the hardships experienced by current humankind. But already in the classical age, Hesiod's use of metals to refer to races was seen as metaphorical, and this apparently also raised the question how the other details of the myth were to be understood. In this vein, Socrates addresses the question why the Golden Race is called 'golden', and connects this with the fact that earlier (at Hes. *Op*. 122) the members of this race are said to have become δαίμονες. This, he explains, merely means that the Golden Race was a race of 'good' and 'wise' men, and to be wise means to be 'knowing' (δαήμονες).[16] That, Socrates playfully asserts, is the actual meaning of the passage; so we should not understand Hesiod in terms of 'real' golden men, or 'real' *daimones*; the poet speaks figuratively.

Interestingly enough, this kind of interpretation was not only applied to poetic texts, but also to the explanation of actual aetiological lore, in particular questions of ritual practice, which of course is inherently interpretable as 'symbolic'. This can for instance be shown by Plutarch's *Quaestiones Romanae* (on which see in more detail Meeusen, in this volume). In this first century prose work, the author discusses the reasons for 113 ancient Roman ritual customs, whose rationale has seemingly become unclear with time. The entries mostly have the following structure: they open with the question 'why is it that' (Διὰ τί …;), after which a number of possible explanations are provided. Intriguingly, these explanations can range from 'historical' (the custom originated because person/situation A initiated it) and 'mythical' (the custom is related to mythical hero/event B), to socio-cultural/ethical/religious (the custom was the result of Roman character trait C/ethical-religious consideration D) to actually symbolical or allegorical (the custom symbolizes some deeper meaning E not immediately apparent).[17] The following passage may serve as an example (*Moralia* 279d–e):

> 'Διὰ τί τὴν τράπεζαν οὐκ εἴων ἀναιρεῖσθαι κενήν, ἀλλὰ πάντως τινὸς ἐπόντος;'
> πότερον αἰνιττόμενοι τὸ δεῖν ἀεί τι τοῦ παρόντος εἰς τὸ μέλλον ὑπολιπεῖν καὶ τῆς αὔριον ἐν τῇ σήμερον μνημονεύειν, ἢ νομίζοντες ἀστεῖον εἶναι τὸ συστέλλειν καὶ ἀνέχειν τὴν ὄρεξιν ἔτι παρούσης τῆς ἀπολαύσεως; ἧττον γὰρ ἐπιθυμοῦσι τῶν ἀπόντων ἐθισθέντες ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν παρόντων. ἢ καὶ πρὸς οἰκέτας φιλάνθρωπον τὸ ἔθος; οὐ γὰρ οὕτω λαμβάνοντες ὡς μεταλαμβάνοντες ἀγαπῶσι, κοινωνεῖν τρόπον τινὰ τραπέζης ἡγούμενοι τοῖς δεσπόταις. ἢ τῶν ἱερῶν οὐδέποτε δεῖ κενὸν οὐθὲν περιορᾶν, ἱερὸν δ᾽ ἡ τράπεζα;

16 See on this passage, and similar interpretations, Struck 2004, 35.

17 See on the *Quaestiones Romanae* e.g. Payen 2013, and further Michiel Meeusen's chapter in this volume, with bibliography.

> Why did they not allow the table to be taken away empty, but insisted that something should be upon it?
>
> Was it (1) because they were symbolizing (αἰνιττόμενοι) the necessity of ever allowing some part of the present provision to remain over for the future, and today to be mindful of tomorrow? Or (2) did they think it polite to repress and restrain the appetite while the means of enjoyment was still at hand? For persons who have accustomed themselves to refrain from what they have are less likely to crave for what they have not. Or (3) does the custom also (καὶ) show a kindly feeling towards the servants? For they are not so well satisfied with taking as with partaking, since they believe that they thus in some manner share the table with their masters. Or (4) should no sacred thing be suffered to be empty, and the table is a sacred thing?
>
> transl. F.C. BABBITT

Without wishing to enter into the order of the answers given here, or their precise interpretation, I would like to point out how interesting in particular the first exegetic strategy is, hinging as it does on the *symbolic* meaning of the actual ritual act. As this shows, how the custom *originated* is clearly less important than what it may (still) convey as a lesson today, in this interpretation: that one should ever be mindful of the future. This explanation represents a *Lebensbedürfnis*, rather than a *Wissensbedürfnis*.[18]

4 Prophecy, Aetiology: Obscurity

This assessment of aetiology as serving a *Lebensbedürfnis* rather than a *Wissensbedürfnis* also brings me to my last point. That aetiological narratives explaining certain situations in the present (often with future implications) were usually not expected to be factually, literally true, but rather *morally* and *symbolically* so, actually provides another parallel with forms of prophecy, such as the oracle and the intuitive prophecy.[19] Oracles and intuitive speeches by inspired prophets are proverbially ambiguous or obscure, e.g. through their use of metaphor, allegory or otherwise symbolic circumscriptions of the past

18 Cf. also *Quaestiones Romanae* 18, 'Why did they offer a tithe to Heracles?' (*Moralia* 276e–f), in which a similarly 'symbolic' explanation with ethical overtones is given next to two alternative mythical/historical ones.

19 The idea that the interpretational strategies required by prophecy influenced allegorical readings of poetry is discussed by Struck 2004, 165–182.

and the future.[20] In that sense they too are not 'literally' true; rather, through their obscurity, they invite the effort of an interpreter to get at the deeper meaning (the *hyponoia*) hidden by ambiguity or in the images used, in order to understand the divine injunction couched in the riddles; they, like aetiological myths about the past, need decoding.[21]

We can think of two famous examples from Herodotus (but countless more from other sources could of course be provided). The oracle received by Croesus in 1.53, to the effect that he would 'destroy a great empire if he crossed the Halys', and the oracle received by the Athenians in 7.141, the relevant part of which says:

> τῶν ἄλλων γὰρ ἁλισκομένων ὅσα Κέκροπος οὖρος
> ἐντὸς ἔχει κευθμών τε Κιθαιρῶνος ζαθέοιο,
> τεῖχος Τριτογενεῖ ξύλινον διδοῖ εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς
> μοῦνον ἀπόρθητον τελέθειν, τὸ σὲ τέκνα τ᾽ ὀνήσει.
>
> When all the other things shall have been taken, as much as the limits of Cecrops holds within it, and as much as divine Cithaeron encompasses, then far-seeing Zeus will give a wooden wall to Tritogeneia to remain unscathed alone – it will help you and your children. (my translation)

In both cases, Herodotus underlines the efforts needed to interpret correctly the obscure oracles. Croesus famously fails in this respect, and, mistaking the meaning of the ambiguous oracle, becomes the cause of his own defeat, as the Pythia later explains.[22] In the midst of heated discussions about its meaning (7.142) Themistocles interprets the oracle about the wooden walls of Athens

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20 On the enigmatic quality of oracles, see Plutarch (*Moralia* 407a–b; 409c–d); Clemens of Alexandria *Strom*. 5.4.21; Struck 2004, 170–180. On intentional obscurity and its uses in ancient texts, see Sluiter 2016.

21 A beautiful illustration of the parallel felt between the interpretation of poetry and divination is given in Cicero *Div*. 1.34. On the topic in general, see Struck 2004, 167–170. Sluiter 2016, 44 observes: "intentional obscurity may be used as a pedagogic stimulus to encourage the reader or student to look further and deeper and make a greater effort".

22 In Hdt. 1.91.4 the Pythia says: 'But as to the oracle that was given to him, Croesus is wrong to complain concerning it. For Loxias declared to him that if he led an army against the Persians, he would destroy a great empire. Therefore he ought, if he had wanted to plan well, to have sent and asked whether the god spoke of Croesus' or of Cyrus' empire. But he did not understand what was spoken, or make further inquiry: for which now let him blame himself.' Translation A.D. Godley. As she further explains (1.91.5), Croesus has also misunderstood the oracle concerning Cyrus (1.55.2) to the effect that his kingship would

'correctly', as the event proves, understanding these 'walls' metaphorically to stand for ship hulls. His ingenuity garners him great success: the Athenians, who before the proposal of the correct solution had seemed doomed, are saved and emerge victorious from the battle of Salamis.[23] These are merely two of the most striking and well-known stories to illustrate the structural ambiguity of oracles and the way this aspect gets thematised by authors concerned with issues of interpretations of such texts.

5 A Case Study: Thera and the Colonization of Libya in Apollonius, Pindar and Herodotus

I would like to end with the consideration of one particularly intriguing case of aetiology as prophecy (or vice versa) as found in Apollonius' *Argonautica* book 4.1729–1764 (also discussed by Harder), because, as I suspect, it deliberately plays on and combines the figurative nature of both aetiological stories and prophecy.

The Argonaut Euphemus has received a clod of earth in Libya from the god Triton. He dreams that the clod grows into a diminutive girl, which he suckles at his breast, after which he has sex with her. Afterwards, still in his dream, he weeps, feeling guilty as though he has committed incest with his daughter. But the girl consoles him (A.R. 4.1741–1745):

> Τρίτωνος γένος εἰμί, τεῶν τροφὸς ὦ φίλε παίδων,
> οὐ κούρη, Τρίτων γὰρ ἐμοὶ Λιβύη τε τοκῆες.
> ἀλλά με Νηρῆος παρακάτθεο παρθενικῇσιν
> ἅμ πέλαγος ναίειν Ἀνάφης σχεδόν· εἶμι δ' ἐς αὐγάς
> ἠελίου μετόπισθε τεοῖς νεπόδεσσιν ἑτοίμη.
>
> I am Triton's child, my friend, the nurse of your children, not your daughter, for Triton and Libya are my parents. Entrust me to the daughters of

not remain safe if a mule should rule over the Persians. The metaphorical 'mule' is Cyrus, who is part Persian, part Median.

23 Although others had understood the 'wooden walls' to be ships hulls, Themistocles argues that this must be correct by focusing on the address to Salamis as 'Holy Salamis' (ὦ θείη Σαλαμίς) in the oracle's last line but one ('Holy Salamis, thou shalt destroy the offspring of women'). He correctly saw that this signified that the victims (in a naval battle at Salamis) would be the Persians, not the Greeks (7.143.1).

> Nereus to live in the sea near Anaphe, and I shall later emerge into the sunlight, on hand for your descendants.
>
> transl. W.H. RACE

Later, Jason explains the explanation the girl has given to Euphemus: the latter has to throw the Libyan clod into the sea, after which it will turn into an island (4.1749–1754). The narrator confirms in a prolepsis that this is what actually happened, after which Greek colonizers reached Libya via the island, first called Calliste, later Thera (4.1755–1764). The aim of this episode seemingly is to provide a justification for Greek presence in Libya.[24]

Two features of this episode catch the eye: the complex layering of symbolism, and the related emphasis on interpretation. The clod is initially a piece of earth, symbolically given as a guest gift by the god Triton (4.1551–1555). Next, in the prophetic dream, the clod manifests itself as a girl, daughter of Triton and Libya, nurse of the children of Euphemus. Finally, Jason explains that the clod will metamorphose into an island. The narrator confirms this, and thus provides the interpretation that the clod will turn out to be both literally an island and figuratively speaking the nurse of Euphemus' descendants, born from the Lemnian women.

Hypothetically, it is entirely possible that a story like this, about the island Thera and the descendants of Euphemus would either be told purely in terms of a metamorphosis (from anthropomorphous nymph into actual island), or only in terms of literal 'clods of earth' turning into islands. We can for instance think of the parallel story of the nymph Asterie who, after becoming a star, turns into the island Delos.[25] On the other hand Pindar tells the story of the birth of the island Thera purely in terms of the 'clod' about which Medea prophesizes in *Pythian* 4. The clod is not personified as such, although the

24 See Annette Harder's chapter in this volume. On the clod as embodying the symbolic claim of the Greeks to Cyrene, see Stephens 2003, 178–183; Hunter 2015, 312. On this episode, see Thalmann 2011, 82–87, who stresses the sexual metaphors as signifying colonization. On this topic more in general, see Dougherty 1993. See now also the discussion in Klooster 2019, 57–75, and Morrison 2020, 107–111, 138–140. The latter rather points to the gap existing between the mythical aetiology given here and the 'present' of the Ptolemaic readers in 3rd century Alexandria, which is underlined by the leaving out of the result of the colonization story: the story ends before the founding of Cyrene. In his interpretation, this is deliberate, and aims at bringing to light the discontinuities between mythical past and the present day.

25 The story is told in the *h. Ap.* and Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos*. On the strangeness of the ambiguous nature of Delos there (apparently somehow pictured as a girl, a star (?) and an island at the same time), see Klooster 2012.

metaphorical language used to describe its purpose does point in the direction of sexual intercourse.[26]

An intriguing parallel story in which a girl emerging from the sea becomes the mother of the founders of Libyan Cyrene is found in Herodotus (4.154–155). This episode, apparently an alternative to the more common Theraean story about the colonization of Libya,[27] in fact features a girl, named Phronime, who is thrown into the sea on the orders of her father Etearchus (on the suggestion of the latter's cruel second wife) by a certain Themison, a guest-friend of Etearchus. Themison has been tricked into this crime by a promise, as Herodotus recounts (4.154.4):

> ὁ δὲ Θεμίσων περιημεκτήσας τῇ ἀπάτῃ τοῦ ὅρκου καὶ διαλυσάμενος τὴν ξεινίην ἐποίεε τοιάδε· παραλαβὼν τὴν παῖδα ἀπέπλεε, ὡς δὲ ἐγίνετο ἐν τῷ πελάγεϊ, ἀποσιεύμενος τὴν ἐξόρκωσιν τοῦ Ἐτεάρχου σχοινίοισι αὐτὴν διαδήσας κατῆκε ἐς τὸ πέλαγος, ἀνασπάσας δὲ ἀπίκετο ἐς τὴν Θήρην.
>
> But [he] was very angry at being thus tricked on his oath and renounced his friendship with Etearchus; presently, he took the girl and sailed away, and so as to fulfill the oath that he had sworn to Etearchus, when he was on the high seas he bound her with ropes and let her down into the sea and drew her up again, and presently arrived at Thera.
>
> transl. A.D. GODLEY

Arriving safely on Thera after her sea baptism, Phronime becomes the concubine of a notable Theraean, Polymnestus, who eventually fathers Battus by her, the legendary colonizer of Cyrene (4.155.1). The story reveals some striking parallels with Apollonius' episode, notably that the girl is thrown into the sea but emerges again to become the mother of the Theraean colonizers of Libya. It seems likely that Apollonius took elements from both Pindar (Euphemus and the clod, thrown into the sea, the prophecy, the sexual metaphors of colonization) and Herodotus (the actual girl thrown into the sea who becomes the mother of the Cyrenaean kings) and combined them into the curious prophetic dream-cum-aetiology in his fourth book.

With its surprisingly layered symbolism, the passage seems to acknowledge the metaphorical meaning inherent in both prophetic and aetiological

26 Notably Pi. *P.* 4.42–43: καί νυν ἐν τᾷδ' ἄφθιτον νάσῳ κέχυται Λιβύας/εὐρυχόρου σπέρμα πρὶν ὥρας ('The immortal seed of spacious Libya has been shed upon this island prematurely').

27 Hdt. 4.154.1: 'For the Cyrenaeans tell a wholly different story about Battus, which is this: …'. I discuss this parallel in more detail in Klooster 2019, 57–75.

stories and by doing so moreover stages a continuum of interpretive efforts: the Argonauts and the narrator interpret the initial prophetic dream, and the eventual narratees will try to decode the poetic episode with their knowledge of variant stories, both mythical and historical about this Greek past, but the main message they need to take away seems to be: the Greek presence in the Cyrenaica is legitimate, time-honored and divinely sanctioned, whichever way we look at it.

6 Conclusion

Seen in the context of ancient ideas about prophecy and poetry, *hindsight as foresight makes perfect sense*, to contradict Auden. Like the future, the past is hard to oversee. Any poet or prophet wishing to speak about it, therefore needs to support his/her claims to knowledge with the authority of a divine perspective, which ideally speaking enables the revelation and interpretation of the causal connections between past, present and future – although of course such prophetic revelations and divine authority can be and often are indeed problematized by poets.[28] In aetiological contexts, this causal connection generally implies a legitimation of the present *status quo*, and an injunction about future actions to maintain this *status quo*. Prophecies mostly focus on the injunction about the future, which is supported by an explanation of how the present came into being. When combined into *ex eventu* prophecies, they can do both. The trouble with knowledge of the present and the past is that it is hard to obtain, and can apparently only be given in symbolic terms. Both aetiological and prophetic narratives should therefore be taken figuratively rather than literally. Their figurative, often obscure, truth needs interpretation, the uncovering of the actual significance. It is this set of beliefs that has led to the flourishing of aetiological prophecy in many genres in Greek and Latin literature.

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28 See for instance the role of Jupiter in the *Aeneid* with O'Hara's observations on the inconsistencies in his prophecies (O'Hara 2010).

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PART 2

Aetiology and Politics

∵

CHAPTER 3

Veterem atque antiquam rem novam ad vos proferam: A New Drama, a Surprised Audience, and a 'Live Aetiology'

Performing the Origin of the Amphitruo

Andrea de March

1 Introduction: Performing Aetiology on the Roman Stage*

In this chapter the term 'aetiology' will not be employed according to its usual meaning, namely a mythical narrative that explains the origins of some cultic ritual or institution,[1] as in Harder's and Klooster's investigations. Rather, consistently with the genre of the text that will be analysed in what follows (i.e. comedy), a possible case of performed, or 'live aetiology' is taken into account. As it will be shown, the peculiarity of a staged aetiology consists of its seemingly improvised character, which aims to clarify some aspects of the drama itself that are supposed to disappoint the spectators right after being announced in the prologue. Of course, clarification and the ensuing conciliation with the disappointed audience are accomplished by means of a genetic account of the seeming anomalies.

This is what allegedly happens at the start of Plautus' *Amphitruo*, where the announced presence of gods, which is a paradigmatically tragic feature, and the imagined confusion this causes amongst an audience expecting a comedy, becomes a fictive pretext for an apparently instantaneous rewrite of the play (seemingly, a tragedy) into a comedy, and thus for an instantaneous

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1 Nevertheless, in the case study I am going to present, the general function of aetiology still applies, which consists in providing "an explanation [...] of the αἴτιον, i.e. of the origin, of some phenomenon affecting the present-day situation of the author and his public" (Fantuzzi 2006).

metamorphosis of its genre. It is the god Mercury (the prologue-speaker and one of the gods starring in the play) that, speaking on Plautus' behalf as his meta-poetic mouthpiece, simultaneously triggers and dissipates the spectators' disappointment. However extravagant, Mercury's puzzling announcement and simultaneous offer to instantly transform the play's genre will prove to be in fact a crucial rhetorical device aiming to promote the eccentric nature of the *Amphitruo*, a self-proclaimed tragicomedy (*tragicomoedia*, l. 63, see below). Therefore, Mercury's generic metamorphosis promotes the acceptance of a new and seemingly hybrid kind of drama by inventing on the spot the reason[2] of the presence of tragic features in what is supposed to be a comedy. The spectators themselves, with their surprise at the announcement of a tragedy, are made the first direct cause (i.e. the αἴτιον) of the drama's generic heterogeneity.

It will be shown also that Mercury's 'live aetiology', which develops an explanatory and persuasive discourse,[3] shares the anchoring function that already used to recur in ancient aetiological discourses. Mercury's metamorphosis will not completely change the plays' generic status, but will make the tragic elements of the *Amphitruo* acceptable for the audience by anchoring them in a frame that helps the spectators find the expected and longed for comic side of the play (i.e. the presence of the comic *servus callidus* together with the tragic gods).

2 Staged and Scholarly Aetiologies: Plautus and Plautinists in Search of an Origin

Therefore, Mercury's remarkable concern with the development of an aetiological account of the play's origin from a *veterem atque antiquam rem* (l. 118, see below), namely from an 'old and ancient thing', betrays his need for legitimacy. As will soon become clear, Mercury fears that some spectators might reject his announcement of a hybrid play as not conforming to the established literary conventions. Therefore, by emphatically stressing the antiquity of the alleged source, he seems to counterbalance the 'surprise effect' of the

2 *Pace* Gunderson 2015, 183: "[T]he prologue of the *Amphitruo* […] gestures more to the symptoms than to the cause."

3 Therefore aetiology can be equated with other ancient "discursive practices" such as mythology, genealogy, and etymology whose function is to provide a "tool for thinking" (*Denkform*) that helps the understanding of current situations by putting "emphasis on *causality, motivation, and explanation*" (see Sluiter 2015, 899–903).

announced newness of the current drama.[4] Moreover, by ending the aetiology of the *Amphitruo* with the mention of an anonymous model (*res*) whose antiquity affectedly attests to the play's inclusion of a traditional (Greek) dramatic storyline and repertoire, Mercury exploits a reassuring device that anchors such a drama as Plautus' *Amphitruo* in the common ground of the recipients, to whom it would otherwise appear unfamiliar.[5]

At this point, before starting my reading of the prologue to the *Amphitruo*, a very short methodological premise is necessary, given the vast and complex articulation of Plautine studies.[6] The recurrence in Plautus' *palliatae* of a dramatic repertoire that manifestly recalls that of Hellenistic New Comedy (*Nea*) is traditionally interpreted by scholars as the result of the poet's participation in the "translation project"[7] of Greek literary works that allegedly marked the beginnings of Latin literature. This view, partly based on Plautus' own (ironic) definition of his comedies as 'barbarian translations' of some specified Greek models,[8] has been so dominant that several generations of Plautinists concentrated their efforts on trying to assess the poet's degree of originality and faithfulness towards his models, often with the ultimate aim of reconstructing the otherwise lost Greek plays.[9] However, because of the almost complete[10] loss – if not absence, or even invention, as has been suspected in some cases[11] – of Plautus' models, a circular reasoning[12] affects this speculative approach: given that Plautus' alleged 'models' are in fact a philological guess inferred from his

4 "*Amphitruo* was a daring experiment." Moore 1998, 110.

5 For etymology, mythology, genealogy (and aetiology as well) as discourses anchoring new notions in the recipients' common ground, see Sluiter 2015, 900–902. On the need to anchor an innovation to favour its acceptance, and more in general, on the concept of 'anchoring innovation', see Sluiter 2017, 20–38.

6 The issue of Plautus' relation with his Greek models, real or presumed, is "the Homeric Question of Latin Studies" (Halporn 1993, 191).

7 Feeney 2016, 45–64. Against this most recent perpetuation of the old paradigm cf. Wiseman 2016, 35sq.

8 See *Asinaria* 11: *Demophilus scripsit, Maccus vortit barbare*, and *Trinummus* 19: *Philemo scripsit, Plautus vortit barbare*.

9 For the state of the question and possible new approaches see Danese 2002, 133–153, and 2014, 35–51. Fraenkel's work on the *Plautinisches* (1922) marked a turning point in the re-evaluation of Plautus' originality: see Fraenkel 1960 (a later Italian edition revised by Fraenkel himself). See also the works of the so-called 'Freiburg School'.

10 Only Menander's fragmentary Δὶς ἐξαπατῶν can be compared with part of Plautus' *Bacchides*. See Handley 1968.

11 Vogt-Spira makes a case for Plautus' invention of the Greek model mentioned in *Asinaria* 10–11. See Vogt-Spira 1991, 32–34.

12 As pointed out in Barbiero 2016, 651sq.

'barbarian versions', assessing the poet's work on such a comparative basis proves to be a self-referential operation.

Conversely, an investigation that overcomes such an approach – which is itself aetiological! – and looks instead for other possible (i.e. rhetorical and discursive) reasons lying behind Plautus' self-claimed reliance on certain models has been seldom attempted.[13] The prologue to the *Amphitruo* lends itself to the exploration of a fresh non-comparative (thus non-aetiological) approach to the vexed question of Plautus' 'models'.[14] It is worth pointing out that both – several – Plautinists and Plautus' intended audience deem the Greek models (whatever this concept means) a normative point of reference. Therefore, they both need an aetiological explanation (either philologically shaped or performed on the stage) in order to contextualise and accept any Plautine innovation.

3 Wonder and Exchange: Meta-Theatrical Negotiations with the Audience

Mercury opens the *Amphitruo* with a sixteen lines-long[15] offer of exchange for the audience (Pl. *Am.* 1–4):

> *ut vos in vostris voltis mercimoniis*
> *emundis vendundisque me laetum lucris*
> *adficere atque adiuvare in rebus omnibus,*
> *et ut …*[16]
>
> As you want me to grant you abundant profits
> while you are buying and selling goods,
> and to assist you in every situation,
> and as you …

These very first lines already give an idea of what the whole prologue (ll. 1–152) will be about, namely suspense, surprise, and mediation. Notwithstanding his

13 Focussing on the *Bacchides*, Barbiero 2016 is a fresh attempt to abandon the traditional 'comparative' approach to Plautus' reference to Greek models.

14 Therefore, my chapter is not a contribution to the vexed *Quellenforschung* of the *Amphitruo*, which is outlined in Oniga 2002, 199–225.

15 This is the "longest sentence in P[lautus]" (Christenson 2000, 134).

16 The Latin text is from Lindsay's *OCT* edition (except for l. 59), translations are my own.

almost complete disguise as a human,[17] Mercury starts his self-introduction by mentioning his own habit of granting to the spectators commercial profits (ll. 1–7) and good news (ll. 8–10), thus identifying himself as a mediator, and precisely, albeit implicitly, as the messenger god.[18] Having to cope straightaway with the clash between Mercury's human aspect and divine powers, the audience is engaged in a game of guesswork, and thus kept in suspense.[19] Such suspense is prolonged until line 19, where Mercury finally discloses his own name (*nomen Mercuriost mihi*), to which he probably alluded already in line 1 (merc*imoniis*~Merc*urius*). This double onomastic reference frames Mercury's role as a mediator (his Greek name Hermes is cognate with the word ἑρμηνεύς – *hermeneus* – 'interpreter'[20]), thus stressing his prerogative, and anticipating its relevance also for his new mission as a prologist, during which he will accomplish several dealings with the audience, the first of which is the *quid pro quo*[21] that opens the prologue and by which Mercury asks the spectators to reciprocate[22] his favours by granting him their attention (l. 15) and fair judgment of the play (l. 16).[23]

Besides his own identity, Mercury discloses also that he is performing as a prologist on Jupiter's behalf (l. 19, *Iovi' iussu venio*). Later on, he addresses Jupiter both as 'the creator of benefits for everybody' (ll. 44–45, *benefactis* [...] *architectust omnibus*) and as 'the king of the gods' (l. 45, *deorum regnator*). More interestingly, Mercury adds that his father will 'personally take part in

17 The plot revolves around the machinations that Jupiter devises with the assistance of his son Mercury in order to seduce Alcumena, Amphitruo's wife. While Amphitruo and his slave Sosia are busy fighting a war, Jupiter takes on Amphitruo's guise staging his fake return to Alcumena, a device that allows him to sleep with her. Mercury disguises himself as Sosia in order to prevent the real Sosia, after he comes back, from interrupting his father's affair. During this intercourse Heracles is conceived, whose birth will mark the end of the play. The appropriation of the humans' identity by the gods triggers a series of misunderstandings, which characterises the *Amphitruo* as a 'comedy of errors'.

18 His divine status becomes clear at l. 12: *mi esse* ab dis aliis, *nuntiis praesim et lucro*.

19 The style (meter and alliterations), which makes the play begin as solemnly as a tragedy, also contributes to the audience's suspense. See more on Mercury's rapport with the audience in Moore 1998, 115sq.

20 See Feeney 1998, 27sq.

21 For Christenson 2000, 134 this is "an inverted prayer of the *do ut des* type".

22 At ll. 41–47 he denies this very intention, actually confirming it.

23 The god's desire to receive a positive response shines through even in the phrasing of his exchange, whose style is marked by the anaphora of several *ut*-clauses listing his benefits in the first fourteen lines (ll. 1, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14), which are counterbalanced by only two respective *ita*-clauses in the last couplet (ll. 15–16), where the object of his request is finally disclosed. Such a stylistic asymmetry not only suggests that Mercury's request is very generous compared to the spectators' considerable debt to him, but also shows once again his taste for suspense, given the delayed disclosure of his appeal.

the comedy/play' (l. 88, *ipse hanc acturust Iuppiter comoediam*, and l. 94, *hanc fabulam, inquam, hic Iuppiter hodie ipse aget*). Although in this instance *comoediam/fabulam agere* primarily means that Jupiter will perform as an actor, if we instead understand the phrase's other possible meaning, namely 'to *enact* the comedy/play',[24] Mercury's portrayal of his father then seems to imply that Jupiter's ordinary role as king of the gods and *architectus* will be mirrored on the stage through his assumption of a meta-theatrical position similar to that of a director of the play. Given that the plot is based on the intrigues devised by Jupiter to seduce Amphitruo's wife Alcumena, the development of the story turns out in fact to depend on his directions.[25]

But Mercury's most crucial revelation is the following (ll. 50–55):

> *nunc quam rem oratum huc veni primum proloquar;*
> *post argumentum huius eloquar tragoediae.*
> *quid? contraxistis frontem quia tragoediam*
> *dixi futuram hanc? deu' sum, commutavero.*
> *eandem hanc, si voltis, faciam ⟨iam⟩ ex tragoedia*
> *comoedia ut sit omnibus isdem vorsibus.*
>
> Now, I'll first tell you what I came here to ask,
> and then I'll outline the plot of this … tragedy!
> What? Did you frown because I said
> that this would be a tragedy? I'm a god: I'll change it!
> If you want, I'll turn this very tragedy into a
> comedy without changing its verses.

Mercury envisages a sudden feeling of wonder – this emotion is like a refrain that resounds in the whole prologue[26] – striking the audience with his unexpected utterance of the word 'tragedy'.[27] The god's declared priority to disclose first the object of his request (which in fact has been already revealed

24 See *OLD* s.v. *ago* 25, and the following note.

25 See Slater 2000, 198; Moore 1998, 112. In a meta-theatrical aside, at l. 868, Jupiter confirms his intention to bring the play to an end himself: *ne hanc incohatam transigam comoediam*. Plautus himself might have interpreted Jupiter, continuing his previous experience as an author and performer of *Atellanae*: see Hanses 2014, 238, n. 46. On the possible meta-theatrical meaning of the word *architectus* see Christenson 2000, *ad* 45 and Schoeman 1998, 37. Conversely, for the hypothesis that Mercury interprets the role of the playwright (the alter-Plautus), see Sharrock 2009, 133sq.

26 See Christenson 2000, 29–31.

27 Also in the prologues of *Captivi, Poenulus*, and *Rudens* Plautus plays with the audience's generic expectations in a similar way.

at ll. 15–16), and its immediate deferment because of the ensuing necessity to cope with the spectators' bewilderment, is pure fiction.[28] The *paraprosdokian* effect triggered by the pronunciation of the word *tragoediae* at the end of an almost formulaic line where *comoediae* is expected instead (as in l. 96: *dum huius argumentum eloquar comoediae*; cf. *Miles gloriosus* ll. 84–85) is a device that allows our god to simulate improvisation,[29] and show the audience that by his divine powers he can immediately change the genre of the drama (note the rapidity expressed through the asyndeton: *deus sum, commutavero*) for the sake of their satisfaction.

In the light of the above meta-theatrical considerations, it could be thought that Mercury, as a prologist, would be subject to the director of the play (i.e. Jupiter) and limit himself to acting as his mouthpiece by merely fulfilling his orders. Instead, Mercury never gives any impression of passivity. What is more, Mercury gives the impression that the ultimate duty to fulfil the public's expectations urges him even to reshape what his father, the omnipotent 'architect', has entrusted to him. More importantly, he also gives the impression that the spectators, by showing their feelings, can influence the making of the play. This illusory meta-theatrical interaction between audience and prologist characterises the account of the impromptu transformation of the *Amphitruo* into a comedy as an 'interactive' aetiology, for the audience's disappointment is presented as the extemporaneous αἴτιον that directly triggers the creation of the current comedy.

4 *Tragicomoedia*: Literary Invention or Aetiological Pretext?

At first glance, spectators are witnessing an unusual kind of *vertere*: instead of the familiar 'barbarian translation' from Greek to Latin mentioned in other Plautine prologues, Mercury announces the imminent translation of the play's genre. The *Amphitruo* features therefore a double metamorphosis, namely the gods' transfiguration into humans, and its own from tragedy to comedy.[30] While the former transformation does not take place onstage, the latter is

28 See Hollmann 2016, 87–116 (especially 97–101, and 111).

29 Some improvisatory techniques in the *Amphitruo* prologue are listed in Auhagen 1999, 111–129.

30 Fusillo 1998, 73–81; Hanses 2014, 242–255. See Bettini 2012, 37–59 for the relationship between *vertere* and metamorphosis. *Vertere* is the word used at l. 121 to describe Jupiter's transformation into Amphitruo (*in Amphitruonis vortit sese imaginem*). See Hanses 2014 on the reception of the *Amphitruo* in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (esp. 231–233).

instead performed before the audience by Mercury himself, even though only by words.[31]

In fact, despite his initial promise, the play is not turned into a full comedy. Mercury points out that although he perfectly knows the audience's *desiderata* (l. 58),[32] he cannot comply with his own initial promise of giving them a comedy. As he reveals, there are some internal obstacles that impede a full transformation of the play's genre (ll. 59–63):

> *faciam ut commixta sit tragico comoedia.*[33]
> *nam me perpetuo facere ut sit comoedia,*
> *reges quo veniant et di, non par arbitror.*
> *quid igitur? quoniam hic servos quoque partis habet,*
> *faciam sit, proinde ut dixi, tragico*[*co*]*moedia.*
>
> I'll make it be a comedy mixed with a bit of tragedy.
> For I don't think it's fair to transform into a full comedy a play
> where kings and gods perform.
> What then? Since the slave too has some parts,
> I'll transform it into a tragicomedy, according to what I said.

The impossibility to fully satisfy the audience's expectations is explained as due to the impossibility to change the *dramatis personae* of the alleged original tragedy: hence the presence of gods and kings in the *Amphitruo* (l. 61). Mercury further points out that gods and kings are not suitable characters for a comedy, and this binds him to the transformation of the play, at best, into a 'comedy mixed with some tragic flavour' (l. 59). After presenting the inescapable presence of kings and gods as the *Amphitruo*'s tragic αἴτιον, Mercury provides also the comic αἴτιον by explaining why the play can be identified in its essence as a comedy, or, as he calls it, as a 'tragicomedy'. The *Amphitruo*, he says, will feature also the *servus* (implicitly *callidus*), who is the comic character *par excellence*

31 I owe the term '(semi)performative' (and its application to the function of Mercury's meta-theatrical claims) to Gonçalves 2015, 54–69.

32 *Teneo quid animi vostri super hac re siet.*

33 With Traina 2000, 47, n. 59 and against current editors, I follow the reading of the manuscripts *tragico comoedia*, without expunging one syllable *-co-* as a dittography, and rejecting Leo's integration ⟨*sit*⟩. *Tragico* can be interpreted as an instrumental ablative (of the substantivised neuter adjective *tragicum*, with an abstract meaning) depending on *commixta*. Only after explaining the aetiology of the tragicomedy at ll. 60–62, Mercury actually creates the *hapax* '*tragicomoedia*' at l. 63. Here there is most likely an actual extra syllable *-co-*, probably due to the copyist's excessive confidence in Mercury's remark *proinde ut dixi*, which made him transcribe *tragico comoedia* from l. 59 literally.

for the intended Plautine spectator. After this brief explanation of the play's current *status quo*, the prologist concludes his mediation by presenting the new hybrid genre as a compromise he created (note the first person in *faciam*) in spite of his initial promise.[34]

In fact, Mercury's announcement of the birth of a new dramatic genre is not meant to be serious, for the *Amphitruo is* a comedy. The label *tragicomoedia* occurring in line 63 (see the above-given version of l. 59) is a *hapax* that in fact no later Roman author will ever adopt as a generic definition, since there will not be such a thing as a tragicomic genre.[35] Moreover, in the rest of the *Amphitruo* Plautus makes both Mercury and Jupiter call the play 'comedy' (as at l. 88 in the next passage), which suggests that he does not really regard the *Amphitruo* as a tragicomedy.[36] In addition, according to the morphology and semantics of Latin compounds, the term *tragicomoedia* is still the definition of a comic genre.[37] Therefore, the function of this passage is on the one hand to surprise the audience, and on the other hand to display Mercury's expertise at defining literary genres.[38] The 'sociological' principle by which he categorises characters into tragic or comic ones goes back to the peripatetic tradition, finding echoes in Aristotle's *Poetics*.[39] In the light of such an important reference, Mercury's announcement of a tragicomedy sounds even more daring, for the *Amphitruo* is presented as undermining the generic boundaries established by an authoritative literary tradition.

However, Mercury's literary criticism enables him at the same time to justify the novelty of the *Amphitruo* by showing that, when taken singularly, the traditional tragic and comic definitions still apply. By performing (note the double occurrence of the verb *faciam*) the play's generic metamorphosis in front of the spectators, our god actually splits the tragic and comic aspects of the drama showing their respective adherence to the traditional definitions. That said, Mercury's invention of the pretext of the public's rejection of an initial tragedy and of its 'live' transformation into a comedy dissimulates that Plautus

34 On the close relationship between mediation and translation in antiquity see Bettini 2012, 122–143.

35 "[T]he term *tragicomedy* was coined [by Plautus] as a joke" (Foster 2016, 16. See the whole chapter *The Name of Tragicomedy. Problems of Identity* for the history of the term 'tragicomedy' as a generic label from the Renaissance onwards, pp. 9–34).

36 See also ll. 96; 868; 986–987, and Dupont's introduction in Gonçalves 2015, xvii.

37 See Oniga 1988, 132sq, esp. n. 46.

38 Moore 1998, 113sq.

39 Arist. *Po*. 1448a. See Christenson 2000, *ad* 60–63 and Hunter 2016, 18sq. Paradoxically, in the *Amphitruo* kings and gods actually accomplish a comic function, whereas human characters, Alcumena above all, manifest (also) tragic attitudes, for which see Gunderson 2015, 211–216.

has thought well in advance about some recipients' possible concerns with the play's novelty,[40] and therefore premeditated how to facilitate their acceptance of it. This pre-emptive defence is shaped as a little introductory show entrusted to the seeming improvisation of Mercury, who presents in an aetiological dialectic the relation of Plautus' work with the current literary conventions.

5 'Not (Completely) New': Finding an Origin for Originality

There are two passages in the prologue to the *Amphitruo* where Mercury deals specifically with the innovative aspects of the comedy. A first chance to discuss what might, or as he puts it, might *not* be perceived as 'new' in the play is offered to Mercury right after announcing to the audience that Jupiter himself will perform in the play (ll. 88–93):

> *ipse hanc acturust Iuppiter comoediam.*
> *quid? admiratin estis? quasi vero novom*
> *nunc proferatur Ióvem facere histrioniam;*
> *etiam, histriones anno quom in proscaenio hic*
> *Iovem invocarunt, venit, auxilio is fuit.*
> *praeterea certo prodit in tragoedia.*
>
> Jupiter himself will perform in this comedy.
> What? Are you surprised? As if truly a novelty were offered now,
> namely that Jupiter performs as an actor.
> Yet last year, when on this stage the actors
> invoked Jupiter, he came to their aid.
> Moreover, he definitely appears in tragedy.

Although this is not the first time that Mercury makes such an announcement inviting the spectators not to wonder at Jupiter's concerns as an actor,[41] his *histrionia* (l. 88) is imagined to really surprise the public only now. Unlike previous cases, the remark *quid? admiratin estis?* suggests that this time Mercury envisages the audience actually feeling astonished. In fact, just as he did when announcing the play's tragic *argumentum* (see ll. 52–53 above), here too the prologist aims to insinuate that bewilderment is the feeling with which he

40 On the audience's theatrical knowledge see Slater 2014, 110–113.

41 Cf. l. 29 on his 'human' fear of the audience's judgement, and ll. 86–87 – right before this passage – on his fear of claques.

expects the spectators to receive this news. Mercury himself suggests the reason of this implied reaction, namely the novelty represented by Jupiter's performance.[42] In order to dissimulate his effort to influence the spectators' emotions, he phrases his address in a negative way, inviting them *not* to (mis)take the god's *histrionia* 'as something new'. In fact, novelty is the very feature to which he wants to draw the audience's attention, therefore his denial proves to be highly affected and rhetorical.

The same applies to the defence that Mercury develops against the imaginary charge of introducing some *novum* in the dramaturgy of a comedy. His reminder that the previous year Jupiter appeared in a drama following some actors' call for his intervention, suggests that the king of the gods already manifested himself as a *deus ex machina*,[43] a typical tragic feature which implies that he recently performed in a tragedy.[44] Consequently, Mercury ends this mini-apology by declaring Jupiter's participation suitable to tragedy (l. 93).[45] In fact, such a defence of the god's participation in the *Amphitruo*,[46] which just few lines earlier was defined as a comedy (l. 88), proves to be inconsistent, and aims rather to play once more with the spectators' generic expectations and literary knowledge.

A second possible novelty of the *Amphitruo* is discussed right after Mercury's summary of the first half of the plot (ll. 97–115), when the god comes to his own role in the story. At this stage of the prologue, he draws the audience's attention to his own disguise as follows (ll. 116–119):

> *nunc ne hunc ornatum vos meum admiremini,*
> *quod ego huc processi sic cum servili schema:*
> *veterem atque antiquam rem novam ad vos proferam,*
> *propterea ornatus in novom incessi modum.*
>
> Now, don't be surprised at this costume of mine,
> because I have come here disguised like this, as a slave:

42 Slater 2014, 117 observes that Jupiter's appearance on the stage was actually quite rare both in Greek and Roman drama.

43 Stewart 1958, 360sq.

44 At *Rudens* 86 (*non ventus fuit, verum Alcumena Euripidi*) Plautus proves to know a tragic version of this myth, possibly a Latin adaptation by Ennius. At ll. 41–44 Mercury lists some gods he saw appearing in other tragedies (*ut alios in tragoediis/vidi …*).

45 Some editors expunge this as a gloss.

46 At the end of the play (scene 5.1), he does manifest as a *deus ex machina*. See Hanses 2014, 226. Conversely, Slater 2014, 122–124 seems to argue for the god's appearance on a roof, like in a *theologeion*.

> I'll bring you an old and ancient thing anew,
> this is why I have come here dressed up in a new way.

Once again, Mercury abruptly invites the spectators not to be surprised at his slave costume, as if it started being an issue only at this point. Lines 124–128 explain it as part of Jupiter's plan to seduce Alcumena, which in the course of the play will compel Mercury to deceive Sosia by stealing his identity and thus keep him far from his father's liaison. However, the explanation comes somewhat late, for Mercury has been wearing this costume since the opening of the prologue without explaining why. This device enables Mercury not only to keep the audience, who are certain of little beyond his divine name, in suspense, but also to associate the issue of his disguised appearance with the issue of the insertion of gods into a comedy, and thus pick up on the discussion about novelty which started with the debate on Jupiter's *histrionia*.

Unlike before, here (l. 119) Mercury reveals straightforwardly that the newness of his disguise is the reason why the audience should wonder at it. He explains the alleged novelty of his 'entering the stage disguised in a new way' in a tautological manner, for he says that it springs from the renewal (the predicative function and position of *novam* – 'anew' – is crucial) of an 'old and ancient thing', namely of some previous dramatic treatment of the myth revolving around Heracles' birth.[47] Our lack of information about aspects such as slaves' costume[48] and pre-Plautine dramas about Amphitruo[49] prevents us from establishing in regard to what Mercury's 'way to wear the costume' is precisely new. However, in the light of what he has said so far, Mercury's claim seems to be more rhetorical than technical, being the natural conclusion of his explanation of the play's double nature.[50]

Even such a seemingly concrete gesture as pointing to the costume (l. 116, *hunc ornatum*, l. 117, *sic cum servili schema*) as visible evidence of the play's novelty is highly rhetorical. At line 143 the god reveals that, besides the slave's

47 Cf. *Captivi* 52: *haec res agetur nobis, vobis fabula*. For the prologist of the *Captivi,* the distinction between *res* and *fabula* is crucial: as an internal character, he regards the play as reality (*res*), whereas for the spectators it is pure dramatic fiction (*fabula*). For Christenson 2000, *ad* 118 *res* means 'play'.

48 Cf. Harpax's description of the slave Pseudolus' outward appearance in the eponymous play (ll. 1218–1220). On recurrent stories of slave disguise in Roman anecdotes, and on the social impact of clothing in ancient Rome (of slaves in particular), see George 2013, 41–45, and 49–51.

49 See Stärk 1982, 275–303.

50 "While all the implications of the statement are difficult to pin down, the close proximity of the words *veterem* and *antiquam*, as opposed to *novam* and *novom*, indicates some sort of antithesis or contrast between the traditional and the innovative" (Schoeman 1999, 44).

disguise, he wears also some little wings – *pinnulae* – under his hat, which are Mercury's most peculiar identification mark as the messenger god. He therefore seeks to present himself as epitomising in his own costume the comic renewal of the mentioned 'very old' tragic repertoire, and as embodying his own promise to make the *servus callidus* appear in the play together with the god(s).[51] However, the concreteness of such a demonstration is mere illusion, for the spectators witness in fact an actor telling them that his way of wearing the slave costume is new because he formerly (i.e. in previous unspecified tragedies, or before his unseen/unperformed transformation into Sosia) used to dress up as a god! At the end of the prologue, the audience cannot but take this claim at face value, as well as the claim that the participation in a comedy of gods who actually look like human characters represents the most original feature of the *Amphitruo*.

6 Conclusion: The Nature and Function of Plautus' Performed Aetiology

The gods' participation in a comedy is not per se an absolute novelty.[52] For the twofold sake of impressing the audience and promoting the *Amphitruo* as an original and worthwhile work, it seems that Plautus is willing to invent the newness of such a feature. By endowing Mercury with some literary expertise and thus making him his own mouthpiece, Plautus aims to present in the privileged space of the prologue his own art, discussing simultaneously its originality and its relationship with the established literary tradition. Even though by the time of the *Amphitruo* Plautus is a popular poet, he still feels the need to promote his comedies as new literary achievements,[53] and while doing

51 See Dupont in Gonçalves 2015, xvii. In the play, Mercury will challenge and defeat in a servile one-upmanship (ll. 265–270) the real *servus* Sosia (who proves to be *callidus* at ll. 180–184, 198–200). At ll. 984–1004, Mercury shows himself aware of impersonating this role.

52 Gods do appear in Greek comedy (sometimes through the *mechane*, see Slater 2014, 107). Also the hybrid label 'tragicomedy' is not completely new, for the Sicilian comic poet Dinolochus already used the inverted term κωμῳδοτραγῳδία (test. 3 K.-A., *PCG* I 179).

53 Plautus develops this strategy more extensively (i.e. beyond the space of the prologue) also in the *Bacchides*, *Casina* and *Pseudolus*, which belong to the poet's maturity. Also the *Asinaria*, which is Plautus' oldest extant comedy, features the same promotion of the play as an innovative drama that is nevertheless anchored in an authoritative (i.e. Greek) literary tradition. For some more in-depth details on the chronology of Plautus' poetics of innovation see De March 2019, 16. In general, see De March 2019 for a detailed and

this he seems to perpetuate a Greek comic *topos* that goes back to poets like Aristophanes and Antiphanes.[54] By inventing the novelty of the mixed nature, tragic and comic, of his play (which is not a new device either[55]), Plautus brings this motif into the *Amphitruo*.

However, promoting oneself as an innovative playwright may give the impression, at least theoretically, that the accomplishment of literary innovations produces a radical break with the established tradition, which might compromise the acceptance of the 'new' as irregular and unorthodox. Therefore, it is "in order to make sure the audience responded warmly to his [Plautus'] plays"[56] that the prologue to the *Amphitruo*, besides presenting the drama as new, establishes also a relationship with literary tradition. Through a range of discursive characteristics such as polemics (i.e. the audience's fictitious objection), explanation, and causality,[57] Mercury develops a discourse that tries to persuade the recipients that their concerns and fears of being disappointed are groundless.

The illusory device of the extemporaneous adaptation of a tragedy into a comedy that Mercury performs for the sake of the audience's satisfaction turns out to be a 'live aetiology', and, as such, an entertaining spectacle in itself. By virtue of this strategy, the play is traced back to an anonymous origin, a *vetus atque antiqua res*. The double stress on its antiquity conveys the idea that the source's alleged authoritativeness legitimises the metamorphosed version. Consequently, Mercury can finally conclude his performance by presenting the gods' presence in a comedy no longer as a daring innovation, but as something 'worthwhile' (*operae pretium*, l. 151) instead.

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extensive analysis of all Plautus' statements on the novelty of his own plays. However, only in the *Amphitruo* the audience's acceptance is elicited by means of aetiology.

54 Plautus claims to be original several times in his plays (e.g. *Captivi* 53–58, *Casina* 70, and *Pseudolus* 568–569 above all). Aristophanes does the same in some of his parabases (see Bierl 2004, 9–19). Remarkable is Antiphanes' *Poiesis* (fr. 189 K.-A., *PCG* II 418sq.), on the comic poets' duty to innovate, unlike tragedians.

55 See n. 27.

56 Moore 1998, 124sq.

57 Sluiter 2015, 902sq.

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CHAPTER 4

Callimachus Romanus

Propertius' Love Elegy and the Aetiology of Empire

Alexander Kirichenko

1 Introduction

In the prologue to the fourth book of his elegies, Propertius announces that he will now sing of *sacra diesque … et cognomina prisca locorum* (Prop. 4.1.69) and describes himself as a *Romanus Callimachus* (Prop. 4.1.64).[1] On the surface, the text simply expresses the poet's intention to leave behind the erotic poetry of the first three books and to turn instead to the composition of Callimachean-style aetiological elegies.[2] But this impression is complicated by the fact that, taken as a whole, Propertius 4.1 is doubtless one of the most bizarre programmatic poems in Augustan literature. The patriotic fervour, with which Propertius pledges to place his 'slender' – typically Callimachean – poetic talent in the service of the fatherland,[3] is suddenly interrupted, in the second half of the poem, by the Oriental astrologer Horos who, citing his unmatched prophetic gift, claims that the best thing that Propertius could do would be not to experiment with new topics but to continue what in the first three books he has proved he can do best – to sing of his love for the infinitely elusive girl.[4] As a result, this nostalgic evocation of the poetic persona created by Propertius in his previous oeuvre blurs the apparent straightforwardness with which the poet stages his transition from erotic to aetiological poetry. The goal of this chapter is to show that, rather than simply point to the thematic heterogeneity of Book 4,[5] the juxtaposition of Propertius' patriotic manifesto and Horos' plea for more love elegy could be interpreted as an invitation to

1 All references are to P. Fedeli's Teubner edition.

2 See e.g. Miller 1982, 380–383. For more nuanced assessments, see e.g. DeBrohun 2003, 9–13; Hutchinson 2006, 1–16.

3 Prop. 4.1.59–60. Cf. 2.1.39–40.

4 Prop. 4.1.135–147. For a discussion of the poem's unity, see Miller 2004, 186; Hutchinson 2006, 59–62.

5 Hutchinson 2006, 16–21, who sees "discontinuity" as the main principle behind the organization of the book. See also DeBrohun 2003, 22–24, with references, on the growing awareness of the semantic complexity behind the book's thematic heterogeneity.

perceive Propertius' earlier poems for Cynthia and his new aetiological poetry not as mutually exclusive options but as two intricately intertwined aspects of a single poetic project.[6] But since in 4.1 Propertius not only presents himself as the author of Roman *Aetia* but also unmistakably derives the substance of his portrayal of Rome from Book 8 of Virgil's *Aeneid*,[7] it would be impossible to appreciate the peculiarity of his aetiological construct unless one begins by juxtaposing it with these two literary models.

2 From Archaic Aetiologies to Callimachus' *Aetia*

One of the most conspicuous hallmarks of Greek aetiological myths is their capacity to conceptualize both cultural memory and political space. The standard 'ever since then' formula of aetiological narratives is indeed only possible in the presence of a material anchor (a natural feature, a monument, or a ritual) that can be declared to preserve the memory of how things were in the mythical past.[8] But most Greek aetiological myths also involve movement in space. Myths of gods and heroes either traveling with the express goal to found a city or a sanctuary or simply leaving enduring traces on their longer journeys not only serve to account for the spread of Greek culture throughout the Mediterranean but also cohere into a mental map of socio-cultural links among countless Greek communities.[9] Thus, in addition to creating the sense of physical continuity within specific locations, aetiological myths serve

6 Unlike those scholars who, with varying degrees of sophistication, regard the *amor* of Books 1–3 and the *Roma* of Book 4 as a pair of opposites (cf. e.g. DeBrohun 2003, esp. 24–28), I propose to interpret Propertius' elegiac *amor* as a means of conceptualization ('aetiologization'?) of Augustus' imperial *Roma*. Seen this way, Propertius' love elegy will emerge as a crucial contribution to the formation of a genuinely Roman version of the classical Greek discourse of 'political Eros', on which see Ludwig 2002; Wohl 2002; Scholtz 2007.

7 Cf. Hutchinson 2006, 60.

8 Kowalzig 2007, 25–32, esp. 27: "The visible locality or the ritual space where the story happens or a rite is still to be observed form the most important link between the events portrayed in the aetiological tale and the religious reality which the myth seeks to explain. […] After this one point of metamorphosis in a primordial time, the *aition* claims, the state of affairs has always remained the same." Cf. Asper 2013, 64–69.

9 Kowalzig 2007, 24: "Religious aetiology creates a map of Greece entirely shaped by itinerant gods, heroes and humans from a distant past, who establish cults and rituals, and set up and carry around cult images and other spoils from a time long ago. […] Few are the cult places in Greece which are not either themselves the product of an individual story or linked into a mythical cycle […]. If we traced all the voyages of the gods and heroes on a giant map of the Mediterranean, positioning little figures where they left behind a cult, few spots would remain blank." See also Annette Harder's and Jacqueline Klooster's chapters in this volume.

to endow local traditions with a larger meaning by connecting them to the overarching network of shared cultural memories.[10] As a result, what on the surface may look like a fragmented plurality of physical places forms a complex aetiological network held together by the invisible pull of a common mythical past.

In a similar manner, the myths told in Callimachus' *Aetia* stress not only temporal continuity within individual sites but also geographical links among them. Not only is there a constant emphasis in the *Aetia* on religious and social mobility, exemplified by pilgrimages to foreign lands, by the adoption of foreign cultic practices, or by marriages between members of different communities.[11] In addition, a great number of the poem's narratives are written, as it were, on the margins of Panhellenic myths, connecting obscure local legends with the epic cycle or the myths of Heracles, Theseus, or the Argonauts.[12] The result is the image of an infinitely interconnected world, in which every insignificant locality enjoys a respectable position within a greater scheme of things.[13]

But Callimachus' mental map of the Greek world projects an image that would have been inconceivable in the archaic period. Traditional aetiological myths view the Panhellenic world from their own local perspectives, so that the shared network of Greek civilization only emerges as a result of an overlap of those perspectives. In stark contrast to this multinodal structure, in the *Aetia* local aetiologies are perceived from Callimachus' own privileged

10 Cf. Malkin 2011, 3–64.

11 All references in this note are to Harder 2012, vol. 1: frgg. 43b–c (the festival of Theodaesia celebrated both on Crete and in Boeotian Haliartus), frgg. 67–75e (the marriage between Acontius of Ceos and Cydippe of Naxos as a paradigm of intermarriage), frgg. 80–83b (the peace between Miletus and Myos is traced back to the Milesian king Phrygius falling in love with Pieria of Myos at an Artemis festival). In some stories, connections between individual communities are conceived of in terms of hostility: e.g. frgg. 31c–g (the statue of Artemis at Leucas wearing a mortar on her head is a reminder of Epirus invading Leucas), frgg. 78–78c (the Ionians banning the inhabitants of Isindos from their religious festivals). Cf. Harder 2003, 294sq.

12 E.g. frgg. 3–7b (the wreathless sacrifice to the Charites on Paros commemorates the death of Minos' son Androgeos), frgg. 7c–21d (the aischrological ritual on the island of Anaphe traced back to the Argonauts' rescue from the Colchians), frgg. 22–23c (the fact that, on Lindos, the sacrifices to Heracles are accompanied by curses re-enacts the curses of the Lindian farmer whose bull was eaten by Heracles), frgg. 76b–77d (the marriage ritual at Elis commemorating Heracles destroying the city), frgg. 108–109a (the anchor of the Argo left on Cyzicus). On multiple Panhellenic "mythological frames" in the *Aetia*, see Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2012, 177–193. Cf. Harder 2003, 296–302.

13 Selden 1998, 323–329, esp. 324: "In the four books of *Aetia*, Callimachus compiles divarications through which diverse heterotopic details have been lifted out of their proper setting and transferred to another context: an observance, a name, a festival, an institution." For a detailed discussion of Callimachus' 'geopoetics', see Asper 2011.

viewpoint equidistant to all of them.[14] Moreover, while traditional aetiological myths aim to explain the origins of physical elements of local landscapes or rituals, Callimachus' standpoint is detached from the original 'material' features that his aetiologies set out to explain.[15] As a result, instead of the plurality of physical places loosely tied into a network of shared cultural memories, we have a materialized centre from which individual physical places can be perceived only as objects of memory. This centre is cast in the *Aetia* not simply as a notional *Mouseion*, conjured up by Callimachus' conversation with the Muses – a place where the scholar-poet pedantically stores obscure local myths for the intellectual pleasure of other *cognoscenti*.[16] Rather, this centre is constituted by Alexandria itself – a Panhellenic city that has no tangible Greek past of its own and whose past and cultural identity can only be constructed as a sum total of the cultural memories of its recently arrived Greek inhabitants.[17]

It is particularly the scene of the banquet at the house of the Athenian immigrant Pollis (Call. *Aet*. fr. 178) that draws attention to the emergence of a new cultural reality in Alexandria.[18] One of the most striking things about this scene is a contrast between Callimachus' attitudes to different sets of aetiological lore – the matter-of-fact tone with which he briefly refers to the well-known aetiological background of Athenian festivals celebrated by Pollis at his private house[19] and the enthusiasm with which he literally jumps on Theogenes, a guest from the utterly insignificant island of Icus, in order to learn the mythical origins of a particularly bizarre ritual.[20] The juxtaposition of these two sets of aetiological lore creates the image of Alexandria as a society in which not

14 On "the Libya-centric geography" of the *Aetia* (Alexandria, strictly speaking, being a part of Libya: Stephens 2003, 181sq.), see Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2012, 171–173.

15 Cf. Asper 2013, 69–77.

16 On Callimachus' notorious 'learnedness', see e.g. Schmitz 1999. More generally, on the 'learnedness' of Alexandrian poetry, see Bing 1988. On Callimachus' *Mouseion*, see Männlein-Robert 2010.

17 A similar image of Alexandria as a Panhellenic space is conjured up in Theocritus' *Idyll* 15. See Selden 1998; Asper 2011, esp. 176sq., on the "Ptolemaic measures to unify the heterogeneous Greek population in Egypt". Cf. Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2012, 202sq.

18 Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 76–83.

19 The allusive tone in which Callimachus lists the typical characteristics of Pithoigia, Choes, and Aiora (Call. *Aet*. fr. 178.1–4) shows how familiar – from literature rather than from autopsy – he expects those festivals to be to his readers. For the literary texts explicating the aetiological details alluded to by Callimachus, see Habash 1995, 567–574 (E. *IT* 947–960 and Ar. *Ach*. 960sqq.) and Rosokoki 1995 (Eratosthenes' *Erigone*).

20 Call. *Aet*. fr. 178.21–22. The ritual commemorated Peleus' shipwreck at Icus and involved a young girl carrying an onion: Call. *Aet*. fr. 178.25, Harder 2012, vol. 2, 953. For Phanodemus' *Iciaca* (*FGrH* 325 T7) as Callimachus' possible source, see Benedetto 2011, 361–363, with references.

only is every Greek *a priori* a stranger, but in which each stranger's cultural heritage is equally valuable, irrespective of whether they come from Athens or even from Icus.

The banquet stages an almost impossible mixture of different cultural protocols. The Athenian festival(s) of the Anthesteria and/or Aiora celebrated by Pollis is a carnivalesque public celebration of new wine that involves a drinking contest – the gulping down of huge quantities of undiluted wine,[21] which strikes Callimachus as a barbaric custom.[22] But at Pollis' house, the recreation of this tradition is part of a private symposium – a ritualized occasion that, as we know from numerous fragments of archaic Greek elegy, fostered a radically different attitude to wine-drinking by promoting moderation and self-restraint.[23] It is precisely this conventionally sympotic stance that both Callimachus himself and his new best friend from Icus so eagerly endorse in that they drink wine mixed with water while engaging in a civilized table talk.[24] In their original contexts, these two cultural protocols would have been utterly incompatible with each other,[25] but at Pollis' house they easily coexist side by side – so that every guest can find a niche that best suits his inclinations. As a consequence, the only kind of 'like-mindedness' that can be attributed to Pollis' guests[26] – or, by extension, to the Greeks in Alexandria in general – seems to consist in their readiness, if not to embrace, then at least to tolerate their mutual differences.[27]

But Callimachus' portrayal of Alexandria goes beyond the construction of a 'politically correct' multicultural space. The two framing poems of Books 3 and 4 of the *Aetia* (*Victoria Berenices* and *Coma Berenices*) enact the process of

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21 For a detailed discussion of both literary and archaeological sources on the Athenian Anthesteria, see Hamilton 1992. See also Maurizio 2001.

22 Call. *Aet*. fr. 178.11–12.

23 Cf. Murray 1990; Schmitt Pantel 1992; Hobden 2013. For a discussion of sympotic, not only elegiac, poetry as evidence for the archaic symposium as a model of social cohesion within the polis, see Corner 2010.

24 Call. *Aet*. fr. 178.15–16: ἦ μάλ' ἔπος τόδ' ἀληθές, ὅ τ' οὐ μόνον ὕδατος αἶσαν,/ἀλλ' ἔτι καὶ λέσχης οἶνος ἔχειν ἐθέλει. Cf. Scodel 1980.

25 The communal drinking of wine mixed with water at the symposium forms a sharp contrast both to Aiora, which commemorated the murder of Icarius by shepherds drunk on undiluted wine, and to Choes, which included a contest in drinking *neat* wine (cf. Ar. *Ach*. 1229) – a ritualized re-enactment of Orestes' *solitary* wine-drinking: Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 79. See also Corner 2010, on the symposium as a microcosm of the 'middling' ideology of the polis, and Maurizio 2001, on the Anthesteria enacting a carnivalesque 'hysteria' that serves to transcend and destabilize civic identity.

26 Cf. Call. *Aet*. fr. 178.5: ἐς δαίτην ἐκάλεσσεν ὁμηθέας.

27 For the heterogeneity/'otherness' of the Greek population of Alexandria, see Selden 1998; Asper 2001.

fusion of the cultural memories of Alexandria's Greek immigrants into something approaching a new common identity. In his epinician to Berenice,[28] Callimachus establishes a parallel between the queen's return from the Nemean games and the wanderings of Io – both an alias of the Egyptian goddess Isis and a mythical ancestor of numerous Greek heroes.[29] This parallel makes Ptolemaic Egypt appear not like a foreign place anymore but like a common source of 'Hellenicity' to which all Greeks are now, as it were, invited to 'return'.

If the *Victoria Berenices* positions Egypt at the very centre of the conceptual space of Greek culture, the *Coma Berenices* conceives of the centrality of Alexandria in terms of aetiological time.[30] The striking 'discovery' by the court astronomer Conon that a lock of the queen's hair has been transformed into a constellation is presented as the basis of a new state cult to be celebrated (at least according to Catullus' Latin translation of the poem) by every woman on her wedding night.[31] The narrative is obviously based on the same myth-and-ritual pattern as the local aetiologies told in the rest of the *Aetia*.[32] But it is the difference between the *Coma Berenices* and traditional aetiologies that is particularly revealing. This aetiological miracle takes place not in an immemorial mythical past but in the here and now of contemporary Alexandria; the object whose origin it purports to explain is not an obscure quirky-looking statue but a phenomenon of universal proportions visible to the entire world from now and for all eternity; and what it does is not to validate a local custom by appealing to the common Panhellenic past but to imagine a (perhaps somewhat grotesque) mechanism for the penetration of the Ptolemaic royal cult into the privacy of every single bedroom, potentially around the whole world.[33] To all those Greeks, whose local cultural memories

28 See Fuhrer 1992; Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 83–85; Harder 2012, vol. 2, 384–392.

29 *Victoria Berenices*, fr. 54 (Harder = *SH* 254): Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2012, 163–170 and 185–187, with a full discussion of references to various Panhellenic myths (Helen, Proteus, Io) in the poem.

30 Cf. Gutzwiller 1992. On the shift in aetiological time in the *Coma Berenices* ("the present as the past of the future"), see Harder 2003, 302–304.

31 *Catul.* 66.79–86. For a discussion of the connection between Callimachus' and Catullus' versions of the poem, see Harder 2012, vol. 2, 793–795. See also Gutzwiller 1992, 381sq., following Pfeiffer: "[T]he suggestion that Catullus invented the αἴτιον is unconvincing, because the ritual is just the sort of cult practice we would expect the Euergetai to establish in order to perpetuate the myth of their romantic marriage." Cf. Hollis 1992; Jackson 2001; Clayman 2011, 240–242.

32 Harder 2003, 303.

33 Cf. Prioux 2011, 207. On the Egyptian background of the catasterism, see Koenen 1993, 105–108; Selden 1998, 326–354.

constitute the bulk of the *Aetia*, this ideological construct would make the contemporary reality of Ptolemaic Alexandria appear like a new time of origins on a par with the mythical time of gods and heroes. As a result, the partial analogy between the structure of local aetiologies and the structure of royal ideology effectively turns the *Aetia* into an account of the 'causes' of Alexandria itself – an account that begins by constructing the city's Panhellenic identity from a mixture of the local cultural memories of its Greek inhabitants and then engulfs those memories into a single totalizing vision projected by the royal cult.

3 From the *Aetia* to *Aeneid* 8

By focusing on the hospitable reception of the Trojan refugee Aeneas by the Arcadian immigrant Evander, Virgil's *Aeneid* 8 casts pre-historical Latium as a country that is as welcoming to foreigners as Callimachus' contemporary Alexandria.[34] The similarity between this episode of the *Aeneid* and the *Aetia* is underscored by the fact that Aeneas' visit with Evander is based on Heracles visiting Molorcus in the *Victoria Berenices*[35] – the poem that, as I pointed out above, most crucially contributes to enhancing the sense of social cohesion of Alexandria's culturally diverse population. In addition, Virgil follows Callimachus in using the 'ever since then' reasoning of aetiological myths in order to conceptualize the functioning of contemporary ideology.

On the one hand, Virgil draws a contrast between Pallanteum, the precursor of Rome that consists of nothing but a citadel and a few scattered huts, and contemporary Rome, the imperial city that 'equals the sky'.[36] But on the other, the proto-Rome visited by Aeneas is a cultural landscape already thoroughly imbued with aetiological memories, which still persist into the reader's Augustan present. Aeneas' arrival coincides with the celebration of Hercules' victory over Cacus at the *ara maxima*, a notable feature of the Augustan cityscape whose aetiological rationale Evander traces back to the earliest stages of Greek mythical past.[37] And on the whole, the pre-historical city that Evander so eagerly shows his Trojan guest turns out to possess numerous 'reminders

34 Reed 2007, esp. 3–5, on the *Aeneid* dramatizing "our sense of the Roman not just as the combination of Trojan and Latin, but as forged out of cross-cultural exchanges from many sides".

35 Tueller 2000.

36 Verg. *A.* 8.98–100. Cf. Verg. *A.* 8.347–348: Edwards 1996, 31sq.

37 On the significance of the Heracles and Cacus episode in the ideological fabric of the *Aeneid*, see Morgan 1998.

of the men of the past' (*virum monumenta priorum*, Verg. *A*. 8.312; cf. *reliquias veterumque … monumenta virorum*, 356). The very name of Latium is etymologically derived from the fact that Saturn, who introduced agriculture into the land previously inhabited only by the uncivilized Nymphs and Fauns, found here a refuge from Jupiter's pursuit (*latuisset*, Verg. *A*. 8.323).[38] Furthermore, Aeneas sees the *porta Carmentalis*, one of Rome's city gates, which is now said to commemorate the 'ancient' (even from Aeneas' standpoint) honor accorded to the nymph Carmentis who was the first to predict the future glory of Aeneas' descendants and of 'noble Pallanteum'.[39] In a similar vein, Evander continues to trace the origins of the names and functions of further familiar features of the Augustan cityscape to a mythical past that, obviously, predates the arrival of Aeneas – the name of the Lupercal derived from the Arcadian *Pan Lycaeus*[40] and the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on the Tarpeian Rock built on the spot where Evander's Arcadian fellow-immigrants claim to have seen Jupiter himself.[41] Even at this early stage of its hoary pre-history the landscape surrounding the future site of Rome is already marked by crumbling, still more pre-historical, ruins – the citadels built by Janus and Saturn.[42]

Like the numerous individual locations of the Greek world conjured up in Callimachus' *Aetia*, Virgil's Rome is cast as a material carrier of aetiological memories.[43] But the obvious difference between Callimachus' mental map of the vast expanses of the Mediterranean and Virgil's circumscribed cityscape is more than a difference in scale. This difference crucially affects the manner in which Callimachus and Virgil conceptualize their respective imperial centers. While Callimachus' Alexandria is a blank slate that can only derive cultural meaning from the sum total of the aetiological memories of its newly arrived Greek immigrants, Virgil's Rome is a unique place that is always already oversaturated with materially tangible cultural memories, which point both to the mythical past and to the vast world outside the city's narrow confines.[44] It is probably for this reason that the analogy that Virgil draws between ancient aetiologies and contemporary imperial politics results in a much more coherent ideological construct. Virgil achieves this effect by unobtrusively making narrative and/or historical events appear to follow the basic mechanism of aetiological myths re-enacted in rituals – by portraying Aeneas' victory over Turnus

38 O'Hara 1996, 207sq.; Rimell 2015, 33sq.
39 Verg. *A*. 8.337–341. On the etymological wordplay here, see O'Hara 1996, 209.
40 Verg. *A*. 8.342–346: O'Hara 1996, 209sq.
41 Verg. *A*. 8.347–354, esp. 352–353: *Arcades ipsum/credunt se vidisse Iovem*.
42 Verg. *A*. 8.356–358. Cf. Edwards 1996, 11 and 31sq.
43 Cf. Tueller 2000.
44 Cf. Edwards 1996, 10–15, on Rome as "always already an especially time-laden place".

as a notional re-enactment of Hercules' victory over Cacus and Augustus' triumph over Antony and Cleopatra as a notional re-enactment of Hercules' and Aeneas' victories.[45] As a result, Rome itself – Evander's Pallanteum morphing into the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, the main monument to Augustus' victory at Actium[46] – emerges as a ritual space that compresses Roman history, from its mythical past to its imperial present, into a sequence of habitually enacted triumphs, while the *Aeneid* as a whole becomes a kind of an aetiological account of the emergence of empire – an account that effectively conceives of heroic myth as the 'origin' of Augustus' imperial power.

Thus, the main difference between Callimachus' and Virgil's aetiological constructs has to do with the fundamental difference between their spatial/temporal parameters. While Virgil echoes Callimachus in turning *aeti*ology into an instrument of *ide*ology, he replaces Callimachus' centripetal model of a new metropolis attracting immigrants from the entire Greek world with the centrifugal model of an infinitely expanding universal empire. As we have seen, Callimachus conjures up the image of a newly founded Panhellenic city, whose past consists of imported cultural memories and whose universal appeal is largely predicated upon the (arguably) rather dim light shed by the fanciful constellation of the Lock of Berenice. By contrast, Virgil's *imperium sine fine* (Verg. *A.* 1.279) is both firmly rooted in the past and incontestably real: the city of Rome is not only endowed with rich cultural memories of its own, but those memories also provide a kind of an aetiological foundation for its determination to subdue any as-yet unconquered territories on the remotest margins of the empire.

4 Callimachus and Virgil in Propertius 4.1

Propertius 4.1 is doubtless one of the most consistent adaptations in Augustan poetry of the image of Rome painted in *Aeneid* 8.[47] At the beginning of the poem, Propertius echoes Virgil's Evander giving a tour of proto-Rome to his Trojan guest in that he, too, addresses a *hospes* whom he urges to imagine what Rome may have looked like prior to the advent of 'the Phrygian Aeneas'

45 For a detailed discussion of the 'aetiological' conjunction between Hercules, Aeneas, and Augustus staged in *Aeneid* 8 in the ritual space of Pallanteum/the Palatine, see Kirichenko 2013, 79–86, with references.

46 Miller 2009, 185–252. On the etymological wordplay between Pallanteum and the Palatine, see O'Hara 1996, 202.

47 On connections between Propertius 4.1, Tibullus 2.5, and Virgil's *Aeneid* 8, see Hutchinson 2006, 60.

(Prop. 4.1.2). Like Virgil, Propertius draws a contrast between the visually unimpressive rustic beginnings of Rome and the stunning imperial city familiar to his readers (Prop. 4.1.1–38). And like Virgil, he conceives of the rise of Rome as a rebirth of Troy and implicitly suggests that there may be a parallel between Aeneas overtaking Latium and Augustus' regaining control over empire.[48]

But on closer scrutiny, these parallels serve to draw attention to the fundamental difference between Virgil's and Propertius' conceptions of the relationship between mythical past and historical present. While for Virgil the Augustan present of Rome is, as it were, aetiologically preordained by its (pre)-Aenean past, Propertius persistently stresses an astonishing gap between past and present. In stark contrast to Virgil's Pallanteum that Aeneas finds filled to the brim with multi-layered cultural memories, the *maxima Roma* that Propertius introduces to his *hospes* was, prior to Aeneas' arrival, a domain of nature – nothing but 'hill and grass' (Prop. 4.1.2 *collis et herba*) inhabited only by cows, sheep, and herdsmen.[49] For over thirty lines, Propertius continues in this vein, presenting the first origins of Rome as a pristine bucolic landscape conceived of, by contrast with such modern architectural marvels as the temple of Apollo on the Palatine (Prop. 4.1.3), as cultural void, which, rather than preserve aetiological memories of unique mythical events, merges with the predictable cycles of nature.[50] Propertius lets this bucolic timelessness continue unabated until the time of Romulus, who, suckled by the Capitoline wolf, functions as

48 Cf. Propertius' Virgilian trajectory from Rome as Troy reborn (*Ilia tellus/vivet*, Prop. 4.1.53–54) to the temple of Apollo on the Palatine as a monument to Augustus' triumph over the foes of empire, whose construction produces the same conceptual effect as the advent of Aeneas: before Aeneas, Rome was only 'hill and grass' (Prop. 4.1.2); where the Apollo temple stands now, there were only Evander's cows (*atque ubi Navali stant sacra Palatia Phoebo,/Euandri profugae concubuere boves*, Prop. 4.1.3–4).

49 Prop. 4.1.7–30: Edwards 1996, 41sq. Cf. Rothwell 1996; Fantham 1997.

50 Propertius persistently defines the primordial landscape of Rome in terms of negation of cultural, religious, and political symbols that characterize it now – cows instead of the Apollo temple (4.1.3–4), the Tarpeian rock without the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (*Tarpeiusque pater nuda de rupe tonabat*, 7), the Tiber flowing only for the cattle (8; for a discussion of this probably corrupt line, see Hutchinson 2006, *ad loc.*), a single hearth as an equivalent of a kingdom instead of the modern temple of Quirinus (*unus erat fratrum maxima regna focus*, 10), the Curia holding skin-clad rustics (*pellitos … rustica corda, Patres*, 12), a shepherd's horn calling Romans to assemble (*bucina*, 13), and the senate meeting in a meadow (15–16). Likewise, Roman religious festivals, such as the annual pastoral festival of Parilia (19–20) and the sacrifices to Vesta (21–22), did not worship foreign gods (= re-enact foreign myths? 17–18) but simply mirrored 'nature': e.g. the 'licentious' rite of the *luperci Fabiani* imitated the ploughman whipping his bulls with a thong (25–26; see Hutchinson 2006, *ad loc.*, for the evidence on the cult). Cf. Barchiesi 1997, 188, n. 7, on these lines as a summary of the Roman cult calendar.

an icon of autochthonous origin par excellence.[51] This ahistorical continuum simply skips over the pivotal event that, for Propertius, marks the introduction of culture into this pristine natural landscape – the advent of the 'Phrygian Aeneas' presented at the very beginning of the poem as the paradigm-shifting event responsible for the emergence of Rome's imperial grandeur.

Thus, Propertius presents the origins of Rome as irreducibly twofold (cf. *hinc*, 4.1.31 and 45): they can be traced either to the primordial *collis et herba* or to the Iliadic hero who brings this pristine landscape previously unspoiled by foreign culture into the orbit of Greek civilization. The visual images that constitute the cityscape of Propertius' Rome point only to the Aeneas legend – the temple of Apollo on the Palatine that can indeed be construed as evidence of the rebirth of Troy.[52] But such imperial 'golden temples' serve to erase the memories of the original *collis et herba* and of the 'clay gods' which they had replaced.[53] The only link between the imperial Rome of today and the city's bucolic origins consists for Propertius in the word Rome itself – one name given to two fundamentally different things.[54] Unlike in Virgil, the rustic past and the contemporary 'golden' appearance of Rome are linked to each other neither by aetiological reasoning nor by materially graspable cultural memories, not even by a tenuous analogy. Quite the contrary: the main tenor of the poem is the wonder caused by the striking *discrepancy* between the original emptiness and the currently observable cultural plenitude and imperial omnipotence.

By portraying Rome as a blank slate transformed into an awe-inspiring centre of imperial power Propertius not only diverges from his Virgilian model but also indirectly evokes Callimachus' *Aetia* where, as we have seen, Alexandria's stunning political authority is similarly constructed as arising, as it were, from a void filled with imported cultural paradigms. Propertius seems to follow in Callimachus' footsteps by casting his own elegiac poetry, too, as an imaginary space that forms an analogy to, and thereby conceptualizes, the political space of his imperial city.

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51 Prop. 4.1.32: *quattuor hinc albos Romulus egit equos* and 38: *sanguinis altricem non pudet esse lupam*.

52 See n. 49 above. See Stahl 1985, 255–260, who reads 4.1 as "a review of Rome's history from the viewpoint of the Julian family." Cf. Welch 2005, 21.

53 Prop. 4.1.5: *fictilibus crevere deis haec aurea templa*.

54 Prop. 4.1.37: *nil patrium nisi nomen habet Romanus alumnus*. Given the fact that the only traceable continuity between past and present is of purely verbal nature, it is hardly surprising that in Book 4 (Varronian?) etymology becomes an important method of accounting for the passage of time in aetiological terms. See esp. Vertumnus etymologizing his own name at 4.2.9–12. Cf. Fantham 1997.

In his polemics against the Telchines in the prologue to the *Aetia*,[55] Callimachus appeals to the history of elegy as a genre, in order to determine what kind of elegy is most appropriate for writing about the origins of Alexandria.[56] As Ewen Bowie has shown in an influential article, there were two basic forms of archaic elegy – short, thematically diverse pieces recited at symposia and longer, chronologically continuous poems (cf. ἓν ἄεισμα διηνεκές, Call. *Aet*. fr. 1.3) probably designed for public festivals, which recounted local foundation legends and which, needless to say, included tales of 'kings and heroes' so bitterly missed by the Telchines (cf. Call. *Aet*. fr. 1.3–5).[57] And in his response to the Telchines, Callimachus indeed seems to be drawing a contrast between precisely these two types of elegies – the short elegant poems by Mimnermus and Philitas contrasted with their long ktistic poems on the

55 The prologue is doubtless the most discussed passage of the *Aetia*. For the enormous bibliography on the prologue, see Harder 2012, vol. 2, 6–93. My discussion of the prologue to the *Aetia* is based on Kirichenko 2017.

56 According to the standard reading, based on the (fictitious) tradition of the quarrel between Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes and indirectly buttressed by the countless imitations of the *Aetia* prologue in Roman poetry, Callimachus defends his elegiac poetry against the proponents of traditional *epic*. See e.g. Schwinge 1986; Zanker 1987, 155sq.; Asper 1997, 217–224. Alternative readings include Cameron 1995, esp. 303–338, who sees Antimachus' *Lyde*, a long *elegiac* catalogue of mythological love stories, as the main target of Callimachus' polemics, Barbantani 2002, according to whom Callimachus draws a contrast between his own collection of short elegies and contemporary historical/encomiastic poems in elegiac couplets such as *SH* 958 (*P.Hamb*. 312, inv. 381), and Harder 2012, vol. 2, 10–11, who interprets the prologue "as referring to poetic style and quality in general". By contrast, my interpretation of the prologue takes into account not only formal characteristics (long vs. short, or 'cyclic' vs. 'polished'), but also content, function, and dramatic setting. In my view, the Telchines' discontent with the *Aetia* only becomes understandable as a reaction to what they see as a discrepancy between content (*grand* poetry of *origins*) and form (a collection of – 'childish', cf. fr. 1.6: παῖς ἄτε – short poems). For a similar view of the literary polemics in Callimachus' *Hymn to Apollo* (traditionally interpreted, like the polemics in the prologue to the *Aetia*, as an opposition between long epic poetry and Callimachus' own short poem), see Kirichenko 2010, where Phthonos' disappointment is shown to arise from his having expected a *hymn* of an appropriate length along the lines of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.

57 Bowie 1986, esp. 15–21 (on the symposium, *pace* West 1974, as the only context securely attested for the performance of short elegiac poems irrespective of their content – sympotic, erotic, or martial/exhortatory) and 27–34 (on the performance at public festivals of long, 1000 lines and longer, ktistic/historical elegies, such as Mimnermus' *Smyrneis* (a history of the city of Smyrna, which took its name from an Amazon), Tyrtaeus' *Politeia/Eunomia*, Semonides of Amorgos' *Archaeologia*, Xenophanes' poem on the foundation of Colophon and the colonization of Elea, Panyassis' *Ionian history*, and, possibly, Ion's *Ktisis of Chios*). See also Dougherty 1994.

histories of Smyrna and Cos.[58] In this connection, the criticism of the Telchines may indeed be construed as a reaction to the discrepancy between the poem's title and its form. Primordial traditionalists that they are, the Telchines seem to expect from an elegiac poem entitled τὰ αἴτια and written by a poet based in Alexandria to be a continuous account of the city's origins.[59] But instead, they get a collection of short 'sympotic' pieces, whose indebtedness to the archaic tradition of sympotic poetry becomes apparent not only in the episode of the banquet at Pollis' but also because Callimachus' conversation with the Muses in the first two books also seems to be conceived as a kind of table talk.[60] What escapes the Telchines, however, is that it is precisely the form chosen by Callimachus – a formally unified collection of short aetiological poems – that is ideally suited to account for the origins of the Panhellenic metropolis of Alexandria as a fusion of the local cultural memories of its Greek immigrants.[61]

In the prologue to Book 4, Propertius also casts his own poetry as an icon of the political time/space of the city that he seeks to glorify. His astonishment at the great city walls of Rome that, implausibly enough, have 'grown out of the milk of the Capitoline Wolf'[62] is translated into a determination to erect

58 Call. *Aet*. fr. 1.9–12 Asper: χὠ Κῷος] γὰρ ἔην [ὀλ]ιγόστιχος· ἀλλὰ καθέλκει/….πολὺ τὴν μακρὴν ὄμπνια Θεσμοφόρο[ς·/τοῖν δὲ] δυοῖν Μίμνερμος ὅτι γλυκύς, αἱ γ᾽ ἁπαλαί τοι/νήνιες,] ἡ μεγάλη δ᾽ οὐκ ἐδίδαξε γυνή. For Mimnermus, see Bowie 1986, 28: "It is difficult not to conclude that *Nanno* is the title of one book [sc. of Mimnermus], *Smyrneis* of the other, and West made a strong case for *Nanno* being a collection of short poems. In that case Callimachus' contrast between αἱ κατὰ λεπτὸν [ῥήσιες] and ἡ μεγάλη γυνή … will have been between *Nanno* and the *Smyrneis*," and 29sq., on the *Smyrneis* as a poem treating the foundation of Smyrna. For the evidence on Philitas' poem on Cos, see Sbardella 2000, 28–41, esp. 39 on the possibility of this poem being "non dissimile, sotto l'aspetto tematico, dai poemi di fondazione o *ktiseis*".

59 Tellingly, Apollonius of Rhodes was the author of a number of ktistic poems, one of them being *Alexandreias ktisis*, in all probability ἓν ἄεισμα διηνεκές. For the scanty evidence on these poems, see Sistakou 2008.

60 See Call. *Aet*. fr. 43, esp. 12–17. For a thorough discussion of frgg. 178 and 43 as framing the "second book of the *Aetia* as a sympotic discourse" (Callimachus telling the Muses some of the stories that he had heard at Pollis' symposium), see Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2012, 140–145. Cf. Cameron 1995, 133–137; Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 80sq; Harder 2012, vol. 2, 955sq. Most revealingly, a great portion of fr. 43 (vv. 46–92) is a catalogue of *ktiseis* (foundations of Sicilian cities) leading up to Clio's detailed narrative of the foundation of Zancle.

61 Cf. Selden 1998, 325, who describes the world conjured up in the *Aetia* as "an uncircumscribed series of discrete sites, each of which marks in turn an intersection of diverse itineraries and is hence constituted as a set of historic and geographic alibis. The text itself here functions as the mastersite for their collocation."

62 Prop. 4.1.55–56: *optima nutricum nostris, lupa Martia, rebus,/qualia creverunt moenia lacte tuo!*

figurative 'city walls' in his own 'pious verse' (*moenia namque pio coner disponere versu*, Prop. 4.1.57).[63] The origin of these poetic 'city walls' is as paradoxical as the origin of Rome itself. For despite its proverbially Callimachean slenderness, Propertius' poetry is predestined to overshadow the fame of Ennius, the paradigmatic poet of Rome's origins whose 'shaggy crown' (*hirsuta corona*, Prop. 4.1.61) now conceptually places him smack in the middle of the city's pre-civilizational landscape.[64] Furthermore, Propertius predicts that these metaphorical 'city walls' of Rome will bestow glory on the 'citadel walls' of his own Umbrian hometown (*scandentis quisquis cernit de vallibus arces,/ingenio muros aestimet ille meo*, Prop. 4.1.65–66).[65] The image of Rome as a stunning artifact forever transforming the original, purely natural, landscape is effectively reified in Propertius' image of the genesis of his own poetic artefact – radically transforming the existing cultural landscape and, therefore, destined for immortality.

But Propertius' prologue evokes not only the characteristically Callimachean 'geo-poetics', which conceptualize political space by mirroring it in the notional space of poetry, but also the dialogic nature of the prologue to the *Aetia*. Just as the core of the *Aetia* prologue consists in Callimachus' dialogue with the nit-picking Telchines, so in his prologue, too, Propertius juxtaposes two speeches – his own programmatic statement and its critique by the Egyptian astrologer Horos. Horos recycles in his speech a number of recognizably Callimachean motifs in order to advance a patently non-Callimachean cause. On the surface, Horos' soliloquy is one of the numerous Augustan adaptations of the passage from the prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia* in which Apollo encourages the poet to persist in his determination to compose experimental poetry, never 'traveling down a well-trodden path'.[66] But in stark contrast to all other reflexes of this Callimachean passage in Roman poetry, Horos transforms this manifesto of poetic innovation into a deeply conservative, 'Telchinian'

63 On the parallelism between Augustus' material city and Propertius' textual city, see Edwards 1996, 7. For the image of Propertius as a 'city-builder', see also DeBrohun 2003, 42; Welch 2005, 25–27, with further references.

64 Cf. Hutchinson 2006, 72: "The line of thought connects with the rusticity of early Rome in 1–38: hairiness is characteristic of the archaic and the countrified."

65 Cf. Edwards 1996, 55. For a reading problematizing the tension between the walls of Rome, which Propertius intends to construct, and the walls of Assisi, which he intends to glorify, see DeBrohun 2003, 86–117.

66 Cf. Call. *Aet*. fr. 1.21–28: καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρώτιστον ἐμοῖς ἐπὶ δέλτον ἔθηκα/γούνασιν, Ἀπ[ό]λλων εἶπεν ὅ μοι Λύκιος, κτλ, and Prop. 4.1.133–134: *tum tibi pauca suo de carmine dictat Apollo/ et vetat insano verba tonare Foro*. Cf. Verg. *Ecl*. 6.3–5. See Hutchinson 2006, *ad loc*. On the reception of Callimachus' programmatic poetics in Roman poetry in general, see Wimmel 1960; Thomas 1993; Cameron 1995, 454–483; Hunter 2006.

rather than Callimachean, plea – into an attempt to talk Propertius out of his plan to write aetiological poems and instead to return to the 'business as usual', to the composition of love elegies in the spirit of Books 1–3.[67]

No less significant is that Horos derives his pedigree from Conon – the Ptolemaic court astronomer mentioned in Callimachus' *Aetia* as the 'discoverer' of the catasterism of the lock of Berenice.[68] This parallel, too, serves to underscore the patently 'non-Callimachean' nature of Horos' voice. Within the *Aetia*, Conon's discovery serves to authenticate Callimachus' adaptation of aetiological reasoning to royal ideology, so that Conon's astronomical wisdom cum ideological inventiveness may in fact be regarded as conceptually coextensive with Callimachus' erudite and experimental writing.[69] Propertius' Horos is, by contrast, a comical figure devoid of independent authority: he corroborates his astrological credentials by citing silly banalities, literary clichés, and prophetic mumbo-jumbo,[70] and his knowledge of Propertius' previous life (most notably of Apollo appearing to the poet in his youth to urge him to write love elegy) is for the most part derived from Propertius' own poetry.[71] Unlike Callimachus' Conon, Propertius' Horos is capable of no cosmic revelations. Rather than the poet's *alter ego*, Horos seems to be cast as an enthusiastic fan of Propertius' love elegy, a fan prepared to go to any lengths to obtain from his favorite poet more of what he already holds dear.

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67 Prop. 4.1.135–146: *at tu finge elegos, fallax opus*, etc. On the mixture of Callimachean voices in the figure of Horos, see also DeBrohun 2003, 19–22.

68 Cf. Call. *Aet*. fr. 110.7–8: … με Κόνων ἔβλεψεν ἐν ἠέρι τὸν Βερενίκης/βόστρυχον ὅν κείνη πᾶσιν ἔθηκε θεοῖς and Prop. 4.1.78: *a proavo ducta Conone domus*.

69 On the ideological ingenuity of Conon's 'discovery', see Gutzwiller 1992, 362–373.

70 For silly banalities, see Prop. 4.1.89–106 (Horos predicting that Arria's twin sons departing for war will die in battle and ordaining Cinara lying in labor to make a vow to Juno – a standard religious practice, which, comically enough, Horos claims she would have never learnt if she had consulted the oracle of Zeus Ammon, a haruspex, an augur, or a necromancer); for literary clichés, cf. 4.1.107–118 (Horos contrasting his infallible prophetic art with Calchas' prophecy, both impious and inaccurate, which urged Agamemnon to kill his own daughter but failed to predict the tragic *nostoi* of the Greek heroes); and for prophetic mumbo-jumbo, see the highfalutin injunction at 4.1.150: *octipedis Cancri terga sinistra time*. Cf. Coutelle 2005, 521–534. For a brief discussion of different attempts to endow Horos' sinister constellation of the 'eight-footed Crab' with a decipherable meaning, see Hutchinson 2006, 85sq.

71 Horos' description of Propertius' homeland at 4.1.121–126 echoes Propertius' own description at 4.1.63–66; the mention of the funeral of Propertius' father at 4.1.127–128 echoes the funerals lamented by Propertius in 1.21 and 1.22 (esp. 7–8: *tu proiecta mei perpessa es membra propinqui,/tu nullo miseri contegis ossa solo*; cf. DeBrohun 2003, 13–15); and the Callimachean epiphany of Apollo at 4.1.133sqq. points back to Propertius' earlier appropriation of that portion of the *Aetia* prologue in 3.3. Cf. also Apollo's (or Horos'?, see Hutchinson 2006, 84) *at tu finge elegos … haec tua castra!* and 2.7.15: *meae … castra puellae*.

But although, as a faithful fan, he can effortlessly reproduce some of the most memorable concepts of Propertius' erotic poetry – such as, most prominently, *militia* and *servitium amoris*[72] – Horos completely fails to appreciate the Callimachean spirit of poetic/ideological experimentation that Propertius enacts in 4.1. Thus, despite his sympathetic tone, Horos is a 'Telchinian' figure. And as I would like to show now, the role that Horos plays in Propertius is indeed similar to that of the Telchines in Callimachus' *Aetia*. Just as the Telchines' demand for a conventional ktistic linear narrative enables Callimachus to parade his loose collection of aetiological elegies as a poetic form best suited to conceptualize the 'origins' of Panhellenic Alexandria, so Horos' demand for more erotic poetry, too, allows Propertius to showcase his love elegy as a poetic genre indispensable for the conceptualization of the 'aetiology' of the Roman Empire.[73] Like Callimachus, Propertius conceives of his imperial city in terms of absence, but what it means for Propertius to be a *Roman* Callimachus is to replace memory with desire as a figure of absence – to replace Callimachus' image of Alexandria as a projection of obscure local aetiologies with the image of Rome as a locus of the insatiable desire for imperial domination.

5 Propertius 1–3: *eros* and *imperium*

Propertius' love for Cynthia in Books 1–3, a fixation that admits of no alternative,[74] is too uniformly turbulent to cohere into a linear plot.[75] Rather than

72 Prop. 4.1.135: *haec tua castra*, 137: *militiam Veneris blandis patiere sub armis*, 141–142: *et bene cum fixum mento decusseris uncum,/nil erit hoc: rostro te premet ansa suo*. Cf. DeBrohun 2003, 16sq.

73 Besides, as a sympathetic interlocutor incapable of understanding anything beyond the literal meaning of the poet's words, Horos resembles a similarly comic (and similarly 'Telchinian') character drawn in another Augustan programmatic poem – the jurist Trebatius who, in Horace's *Satire* 2.1, misinterprets the critique leveled at Horace for violating the *generic* laws of satire as a legal danger that the poet may face for violating the law of libel, the charge that, according to Trebatius, the poet could best avoid by composing encomia to Octavian. As I have shown elsewhere (Kirichenko, 2016, 217–226), Trebatius' literal-minded misinterpretation serves to draw attention to the extent to which Horace's *Satires* (most notably *Satire* 2.1 itself) are in fact informed by a profoundly encomiastic meaning.

74 This is indeed the main leitmotif of the *Monobiblos* (Book 1). See esp. Prop. 1.12.20: *Cynthia prima fuit, Cynthia finis erit*. Cf. Greene 1998, 37; Miller 2004, 60sq.

75 The only 'plot' that can plausibly be extracted from Books 1–3 is a story transition from youthful erotic excess to 'adulthood': Fear 2005; Wallis 2013, 229sq. Cf. Wyke 1987b, on Book 1 encouraging the illusion of Propertius documenting a real love story and Book 2 replacing that illusion with a purely meta-literary discourse. For a discussion of earlier

tell a personal 'love story', this series of fragmented vignettes conjures up a cultural stereotype whose literary pedigree can be traced to New Comedy and Hellenistic epigram[76] – an obsessive love for a 'hetaera' who is so desirable that she 'enslaves' her countless lovers, forcing them to cry patiently at her door while she entertains their rivals and to celebrate every rare night they get to spend with her as the pinnacle of human happiness.[77] But while maintaining (and, in fact, enhancing) the basic parameters of this familiar scenario, Propertius uses it as a basis for a self-assertive metapoetic construct, so that his agonistic passion for Cynthia becomes indistinguishable from the process of gaining literary authority.

The *docta puella* that we encounter in Book 1 is not so much a mimetically credible representation of a human character as a dense intertextual image that subsumes countless literary prototypes with the express purpose to eclipse them all.[78] In 1.2, Propertius praises Cynthia's 'natural' beauty and beseeches her to abstain from using any 'artificial' cosmetics (Prop. 1.2.1–14), but while presenting his own poetry as the only 'adornment' suitable for her, he simultaneously reveals that Cynthia's unadorned 'nature' can only be conceived of as a projection of countless images derived from Greek literature and art.[79] Still more overtly, his girl's status as a work of art is emphasized in 1.3 where Propertius compares a sleeping Cynthia to a number of paradigmatic mythological figures (Ariadne, Andromeda, a Bacchante, and Io) and treats her immobile body as raw material for his own creative fantasy in that he effectively

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attempts at biographical readings and a critique of such approaches, see Keith 2008, 86–114.

76 For a concise account of this literary background, see Sens 2011, xlii–xlviii. On Propertius and Hellenistic epigram, see Keith 2008, 45–51. On the influence of Hellenistic epigram on Roman love elegy in general, see contributions in Keith 2011. On connections between New Comedy and Roman love elegy, see Konstan 1994, 141–159.

77 On the Hellenistic background of elegiac *paraklausithyra*, see James 2003, 136. For the *komos* as a method appropriate only for courting a *hetaera*, not a marriageable girl, cf. Men. *Dysc*. 58–68. See also X. *Mem*. 3.11.13–18, where Socrates presents the tricks used by a hetaera to attract lovers as a kind of magic: Faraone 1999, 3sq. For interpretations of Propertius' Cynthia as a *meretrix*, see Miller 2004, 62.

78 On the impossibility to pinpoint the identity of Cynthia, who by turns appears to be a married *matrona* and a *meretrix*, a free woman and a slave, see Miller 2004, 61–63. On Cynthia in Book 1 as a "'woman in a text' – a text that inscribes male desire and also reflects the self-conscious literary concerns of the poet", see Greene 1998, 37–66. Cf. Wyke 1987b and 1989, 28–34.

79 The second half of the poem consists of a catalogue of 'naturally' attractive heroines of Greek myth (Prop. 1.2.15–20), known as such from Apelles' paintings (21–22), and the extended image of poetry as a girl's best adornment (25–32). On the "rhetoric of adornment" in Propertius and elsewhere, see Wyke 1994b.

'molds' her image like an artist – crowning her with his garland, arranging her dishevelled hair, and putting apples in her slack hands (Prop. 1.3.19–24).[80] Further poems of Book 1 not only reveal that Cynthia by far surpasses all those heroines of Greek literature and art that she resembles,[81] but also point to her existential dependence on the poet's desire[82] and, vice versa, to the poet's existential dependence on her presence.[83] As a result, Cynthia becomes virtually synonymous with Propertius' love elegy,[84] a Roman genre that seeks not only to appropriate but also to surpass a large segment of Greek cultural imaginary[85] and that, in the process, redefines the very essence of Roman culture. The most revealing witness of this thorough transformation is doubtless the venerable old door in 1.16, which used to welcome triumphal processions but is now reduced to being the sole addressee of the never-ending series of pitiful elegiac *paraklausithyra*.[86]

Within this metaliterary framework, the poet's single-minded determination to pursue his agonistic struggle for Cynthia, who promises endless bliss to multiple admirers while demanding absolute fidelity from each of them,[87] becomes understandable in terms of literary rivalry[88] – as a struggle for the dominance over the literary landscape and, ultimately, as a struggle for poetic immortality. Propertius stages this struggle by positioning his poetry vis-à-vis other contemporary literary productions. His contrast between heroic epic and love elegy

80 For a detailed discussion of this poem's allusions to contemporary pictorial representations, see Valladares 2005, esp. 227 (on Prop. 1.3.19–24). See also Greene 1995, on Cynthia as a projection of male voyeuristic fantasies. On the (inter-)textuality of the poem's two speakers in 1.3 (the second one being Cynthia herself who wakes up to deliver a monologue reminiscent of Ariadne's speech in Catullus 64: i.e. she counters the male beholder's barrage of cultural fantasies with yet another cultural fantasy), see Zetzel 1996, 86–91.

81 E.g. Prop. 1.4.5–10 (Cynthia's beauty is superior to that of Greek mythical heroines); 1.5.7–8 (Cynthia is beyond comparison). Cf. 1.13.29–32.

82 Cf. Prop. 1.4.25–28: *non ullo gravius temptatur Cynthia damno/quam sibi cum rapto cessat amore deus:/praecipue nostri. maneat sic semper, adoro,/nec quicquam ex illa quod querar inveniam!*

83 Cf. Prop. 1.12 (on Cynthia's absence lamented in 1.11), esp. 11–12: *non sum ego qui fueram*, etc. On the mutual dependence between Propertius and Cynthia, cf. Greene 2005, 63sq.

84 Cf. Kennedy 1993, 50sq.; Wyke 1989, 33; Miller 2004, 63–66.

85 See also the notion that the *words* of the elegiac *puella* can overpower Jupiter at 1.13.32: *illa suis verbis cogat amare Iovem*.

86 Prop. 1.16.1–2: *quae fueram magnis olim patefacta triumphis,/ianua Tarpeiae nota pudicitiae*, etc. and 47–48: *sic ego nunc dominae vitiis et semper amantis/fletibus aeterna differor invidia*.

87 Cf. Prop. 1.5.25–26 and 1.15, esp. 32: *sis quodcumque voles, non aliena tamen*. On Cynthia encoding 'homosocial' relationships between men, see Miller 2004, 67sq., with references.

88 Quite revealingly, in 1.11 Propertius is jealous of a rival stealing Cynthia *from his songs*: *an te nescio quis simulatis ignibus hostis/sustulit e nostris, Cynthia, carminibus*? (7–8).

allows him to redefine the *servitium amoris* (Roman poetry's enslavement to a collective cultural fantasy?) as the *militia amoris* – a strenuous military service that, to a contemporary poet, guarantees a surer passage to the Achillean 'undying fame' than would yet another imitation of the Homeric model.[89]

In his intertextual dialogue with Gallus, too, Propertius seeks to replace the older poet as Rome's preeminent love elegist.[90] Although in 1.10 he explicitly acknowledges Gallus as the main inspiration behind his own erotic poetry,[91] Propertius stresses that what he gives back is in fact much more than he owes,[92] and he flaunts his superior poetic power by implicitly contrasting, in 1.8, the rhetorical success of his own erotic poetry with Gallus' plaintive acquiescence to his inability to persuade his beloved[93] and by making, in 1.18, a recognizably Gallan landscape resonate with Cynthia's name.[94] As a consequence, Propertius presents himself as 'conquering' the territory of Roman love elegy with the same single-minded resolve with which he seeks to subject to Cynthia

89 See esp. the contrast between epic and elegy in 1.7 and 1.9: in 1.7, while Ponticus vies with Homer (3) Propertius derives his fame from Cynthia (*haec mea fama est/hinc cupio nomen carminis ire mei*, 9–10), but in 1.9 Ponticus, too, succumbs to 'love', i.e. begins to write love poetry. Cf. Stahl 1985, 48–71; Greene 1998, 47–51; Coutelle 2005, 144–158.

90 For a detailed discussion of Gallus in Propertius 1 in general, see Cairns 2006, 70–249, esp. 77sq., on the scholarly dispute surrounding the identity of Propertius' 'Gallus'. Cf. Janan 2001, 33–52; Miller 2004, 68–83.

91 Prop. 1.10.1–10. Propertius' account of watching Gallus have sex with his *puella* would indeed make the best sense if understood as Propertius reading Gallus: Cairns 2006, 116sq., with references.

92 Prop. 1.10.14sqq.: *est quiddam in nobis maius, amice, fide*, etc.: Cairns 2006, 117.

93 The extent of Propertius' evocation of Gallus in this poem can only be indirectly surmised on the basis of Virgil's *Eclogue* 10, where Gallus is portrayed as 'dying of love' for Lycoris who has left him to accompany her new lover on a military campaign. Cf. esp. Verg. *Ecl.* 10.22–23: *tua cura Lycoris/perque nives alium perque horrida castra secuta est*, 45–49, esp. 49: *a, tibi ne teneras glacies secet aspera plantas!* and Prop. 1.8.1–8, esp. 7–8: *tu pedibus teneris positas fulcire pruinas,/tu potes insolitas, Cynthia, ferre nives?* The second half of the poem (27–46) shows that Propertius' begging, unlike Gallus', has worked: *vicimus:/assiduas non tulit illa preces* (28): Cairns 2006, 114. Cf. Coutelle 2005, 163–165.

94 This 'Gallan' landscape is, again, the landscape in which Virgil's Gallus is 'perishing' in *Eclogue* 10. Cf. esp. Verg. *Ecl.* 10.52–54: *certum est in silvis inter spelaea ferarum/malle pati tenerisque meos incidere amores/arboribus: crescent illae, crescetis, amores* and Prop. 1.18.19–22: *vos eritis testes, si quos habet arbor amores,/fagus* (a conspicuously Virgilian – Gallan? – tree: *Ecl.* 1.1) *et Arcadio pinus amica deo* (cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 10.14–15: *pinifer … Maenalus* and 26: *Pan deus Arcadiae*)/*a quotiens teneras resonant mea verba sub umbras* (cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 1.4–5: *tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra/formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas*),/*scribitur et vestris Cynthia corticibus*! This Virgilian/'Gallan' landscape is not only overwritten (*scribitur*), but will also 'resound' (again cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 1.4–5), with Cynthia's name: 1.18.31–32: *sed qualiscumque es, resonent mihi 'Cynthia' silvae,/nec deserta tuo nomine saxa vacent*: Cairns 2006, 119sq.

the entire totality of erotically enticing images of Greek culture. Cynthia herself emerges in turn as an icon of Propertius' poetic immortality – the poet and his creation destined to be forever inseparable as a work of poetic art.[95]

All these themes continue to dominate Book 2 of Propertius' elegies as well, where Cynthia is explicitly showcased as a miraculous creation *de nihilo* (2.1.17) whose effect is predicted to be as lasting as that of the *Iliad* (2.1.14).[96] Since Cynthia's status as a literary symbol has by now been firmly established (she is said to be immensely popular throughout Rome),[97] Propertius begins to draw a line between his undivided passion for Cynthia's poetic fame and immortality[98] and the more conventional understanding of erotic desire: in 2.22, he suddenly confesses that, contrary to what we have become accustomed to assume, he in fact loves *many girls*,[99] and in 2.23 he adopts a tone reminiscent of Horace's *Satires* in order to debunk the literal understanding of the elevated elegiac concept of *servitium amoris* by contrasting the sexual frustration suffered by an *exclusus amator* with the easy 'love' purchased from Oriental (slave-)prostitutes.[100]

But while Cynthia gradually ceases to function as an embodiment of physical sex appeal, there gradually emerges a homology between Cynthia as a

95 In 1.17, the fear of dying in a shipwreck (= disappearing without a trace; cf. Hor. *Carm*. 1.28) leads to Propertius wishing for Cynthia to bury him and to keep proclaiming his name after death: 23–24. Still more emphatically, the fear of death can only be alleviated in 1.19 by the prospect of Cynthia's posthumous love (*sed ne forte tuo careat mihi funus amore*, 3) and of the poet himself becoming an *image* of Cynthia (*illic quidquid ero, semper tua dicar imago:/traicit et fati litora magnus amor*, 11–12). On death in Propertius, see Papanghelis 1987.

96 See Greene 2005, on the equation between the *puella* and the poet's *ingenium* in 2.1. Cf. Wyke 1987b.

97 Prop. 2.24.1–2: *'tu loqueris, cum sis iam noto fabula libro/et tua sit toto Cynthia lecta foro?'* Note, too, that the poet's indignation in 2.5 with the fact that Cynthia's 'misconduct' is known throughout Rome (*hoc verum est, tota te ferri, Cynthia, Roma,/et non ignota vivere nequitia?* 2.5.1–2) serves to unmask her beauty as a purely 'verbal' construct: *scribam igitur, quod non umquam tua deleat aetas: 'Cynthia, forma potens: Cynthia, verba levis* (27–28).

98 See e.g. Prop. 2.3.29–32: *gloria Romanis una es tu nata puellis:/Romana accumbe*[*n*]*s prima puella Iovi,/nec semper nobiscum humana cubilia vises;/post Helenam haec terris forma secunda redit*. Cf. 2.8, 2.14, 2.15, 2.27, and 2.34, esp. 93–94.

99 Prop. 2.22, esp. 13: *quaeris, Demophoon, cur sim tam mollis in omnis*. He then continues to brag about his sexual prowess (*saepe est experta puella/officium tota nocte valere meum*, 23–24) and to stress that one girl is simply not enough for someone like him (*sic etiam nobis una puella parum est*, 36).

100 Prop. 2.23.21–24: *et quas Euphrates et quas mihi misit Orontes,/me iuverint: nolim furta pudica tori./libertas quoniam nulli iam restat amanti,/nullus liber erit, si quis amare volet*. Cf. Hor. *S*. 1.2, esp. 116–118.

metaliterary construct and the political space of Augustus' empire – a territory that Propertius, now a member of Maecenas' circle, cannot afford to leave uncharted.[101] In 2.10, the 'writing' of the ever-elusive 'girl', who effortlessly subsumes and surpasses all erotically enticing images of Greek culture, is declared to be over (*quando scripta puella mea est*, Prop. 2.10.8), and her evanescent image now imperceptibly morphs into the ever-retreating boundaries of empire that Augustus effortlessly brings under his control (cf. esp. *si qua extremis tellus se subtrahit oris*, 17) as well as into the impossible task of praising Augustus' striking achievements – a task that Propertius fearlessly undertakes nonetheless (cf. esp. *quod si deficiant vires, audacia certe/laus erit*, 5–6).[102] Similarly, Augustus' imperial rule and Cynthia's popularity in Rome begin to appear as two conceptually coextensive notions when, in 2.31, Propertius comes late to a rendezvous with his mistress because he has been held back by the striking imagery of the newly opened temple of Apollo on the Palatine, the principal monument to Augustus regaining control over all of empire,[103] and when, in 2.32, Cynthia ('Cynthia'?) is said to be free to visit *any* temple in Rome, her ubiquity enabling her to conquer the imagination of every Roman.[104]

The status of Propertius' literary project as a kind of iconic 'enactment' of Augustus' empire-building becomes still more pronounced in Book 3. Echoing the tone and the imagery of Horace's poetic manifesto in *Carmen* 3.30 (*exegi monumentum*),[105] in 3.1 Propertius conceives of his introduction to Rome of

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101 See Cairns 2006, 250–294. On Maecenas in Propertius 2.1, see Greene 2005, 67–76, esp. 76: "The image of the *puella*, it seems, merely provides the means through which one man may pay tribute to another."

102 Wyke 1987b, 49–53, esp. 53: "The narrative trajectory is from a male writer to a male reader, in which *bella* and a *puella* simply demarcate the boundaries between modes of discourse." Cf. Keith 2008, 115–138. See also Lyne 1998, on the possibility that the pair 2.10/2.11 stood at the end of the original Book 2a. Note, however, that the farewell to Cynthia, 2.11.1: *scribant de te alii*, sounds as much like a typical *recusatio* (cf. Hor. *Carm*. 1.6.: *scriberis Vario*) as does 2.10, and, as is generally the case with Augustan *recusationes*, both are followed by more poetry on the subjects the poet ostensibly refuses to handle. See also Miller 2004, 146–157, on the "homology of the Augustan and elegiac subject positions".

103 On Propertius 2.31 as "our principal guide" to "this grand temple", see Miller 2009, 196–206. On 2.31 as evidence of Propertius' "devotion to the regime", see Cairns 2006, 269sq. For a 'depoliticizing' reading of 2.31, see Welch 2005, 89–95.

104 Prop. 2.32.1–16 (Propertius is jealous because Cynthia is seen by so many men) and 61–62: *quod si tu Graias es tuque imitata Latinas* [sc. heroines of Greek myth, Roman legend, and Catullus' Lesbia],/*semper vive meo libera iudicio*! Propertius' 'liberation' (= publication) of 'Cynthia' finds a distinct parallel in Horace's 'liberating' his *liber* in *Ep*. 1.20: Kirichenko 2016, 226–232.

105 Cf. Prop. 3.1.3–4: *primus ego ingredior puro de fonte sacerdos/Itala per Graios orgia ferre choros* and Hor. *Carm*. 3.30.13–14.

the elegiac poetry inspired by Callimachus and Philitas as a triumphal procession – the first step on the way to a poetic immortality comparable to that granted by Homeric poetry.[106] After singling out, in 3.2, his poetic 'girl' as the sole object of his memorialization and after echoing, in 3.3, the prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia* in order to reject the composition of Ennian-style glorifications of Rome in favour of light-hearted love poetry,[107] he soars, in 3.4, into an ecstatic vision of Augustus' triumph over Parthia, which now effectively merges with Propertius' own poetic triumph celebrated in 3.1.[108] What further enhances the sense of fusion between these two triumphs is the fact that the poet now pictures himself embracing his 'girl' as he reads to her an endless list of captured cities.[109]

In a similar vein, Propertius begins his address to Maecenas in 3.9 by declaring his 'Callimachean' talent to be unsuitable for singing of grand epic themes (*non sunt apta meae grandia vela rati*, 4). But at the same time, he establishes a comprehensive analogy between his own poetic persona and the ethical ideal embodied by Maecenas – a conjunction that allows him to envisage the possibility of surpassing the limitations imposed on him by his 'slender' poetic 'nature': just as Maecenas' modesty conceals an almost epic authority (21–34), so Propertius, too, is now prepared to live up to his patron's call (*te duce*, 47) to immortalize the greatest events of Roman history as well as Augustus' contemporary conquests (47–56).[110]

While erotic themes do not completely disappear from Book 3, love as an excruciating longing for an ever-retreating object of desire gradually gives way to a marriage-like arrangement governed by laws and mutually satisfactory agreements[111] and finally, in 3.21, is given up completely in favour of the inner

106 Prop. 3.1.10: … *Musa triumphat* …; 25–34 (Troy owes its immortality to Homer, and Homer to his poem of Troy); 35–36: *meque inter seros laudabit Roma nepotes:/illum post cineres auguror ipse diem*. On the Callimachean substratum of Propertius 3.1, see Hunter 2006, 7–16.

107 Prop. 3.2.17–18: *fortunata, meo si qua est celebrata libello!/carmina erunt formae tot monumenta tuae* – a monument more lasting than the Pyramids, etc. and one granting immortality to the poet (19–26, cf. Hor. *Carm*. 3.30.1–7). For a detailed recent study of Propertius' Callimachean/Ennian dream in 3.3, see Scioli 2015, 134–172. Cf. Coutelle 2005, 500–507.

108 Cf. Prop. 3.1.9–12: *quo me Fama levat terra sublimis, et a me/nata coronatis Musa triumphat equis,/et mecum in curru parvi vectantur Amores,/scriptorumque meas turba secuta rotas*; 3.4.3: *parat ultima terra triumphos* …; 13–14: [sc. *dies*] *qua videam, spoliis onerato*[*s*] *Caesaris axe*[*s*]*/ad vulgi plausus saepe resistere equos*.

109 Prop. 3.4.15–16: *inque sinu carae nixus spectare puellae/incipiam et titulis oppida capta legam*.

110 Cf. Cairns 2006, 267–269. On Maecenas' 'exemplarity' in this poem, see also Gazich 1995, 127–132.

111 Prop. 3.20.21–30, dominated by the vocabulary of legal obligation: *foedus, fides*, etc.

poise granted by the study of Greek literature and philosophy.[112] And while redirecting his eroticized longing from chasing the infinitely elusive intertextual 'girl' to the noble task of glorifying Augustus' control over the infinitely vast empire,[113] Propertius begins to distance himself from the madness of elegiac love by projecting it onto the defeated enemies of Rome – Marc Antony implicitly cast in 3.11 as a typical elegiac lover forfeiting his Roman masculinity to Cleopatra, who in turn emerges as a larger-than-life version of Cynthia, vulgarized as a crazed whore threatening to enslave the entire male world of Rome.[114] As a result, the misguided futility of elegiac desire retrospectively marks it off as an effeminate and/or infantile emotion sharply contrasted with the sure masculinity radiated by Augustus' imperial rule.[115] At the end of the book, Propertius echoes Augustus' 'imperiousness' in that he, as it were, kills his Cynthia twice – by laying bare, in 3.24, her status as an empty cipher consisting of nothing but projections of Greek poetic stereotypes and by declaring, in 3.25, her heretofore immortal beauty to be susceptible to ageing and death.[116] What is more, in 3.22 he fills the void (about to be) left behind by Cynthia's evanescent phantom with a rapturous image of Italy.[117] Italy is conceptualized here more or less in the same manner as Cynthia was in Book 1 – as a composite notion that subsumes and surpasses all wonders of Greek mythology.[118] But in contrast to the tantalizing Cynthia whom Propertius has emphatically

112 Cf. Clarke 2004. See also O'Neill 2005, 255–257.

113 In Book 3, 'love' also gradually gives way to imperial triumphs – e.g. in 3.12, where Postumus abandons his wife Galla (her faithfulness surpassing that of Penelope!) to follow Augustus on his imperial conquests.

114 Propertius draws a parallel between his enslavement to Cynthia and an entire catalogue of precedents from myth and history (3.11.1–26), which culminates in the image of Marc Antony enslaved by Cleopatra: *quid modo qui nostris opprobria nexerit armis/et* (*famulos inter femina trita suos!*)*/coniugis obsceni pretium Romana poposcit/moenia et addictos in sua regna Patres* (29–32); *meretrix regina* (39); *quid nunc Tarquinii fractas iuvat esse securis …/si mulier patienda fuit?* (47–49).

115 On the feminine persona of the elegiac lover, see Greene 2005, 61sq., with references. On the elegiac lover as a "youthful Roman elite male", on the fundamental (as it were, 'systemic') effeminacy of "all Roman youths", the contrast between elegiac effeminacy and the masculinity of Augustan ideology, and the attainment of notional adulthood at the end of Propertius 3, see Fear 2005. Cf. Wyke 1994a.

116 Prop. 3.24.1: *falsa est ista tuae, mulier, fiducia formae*, 5–6: *mixtam te varia laudavi saepe figura,/ut, quod non esses, esse putaret amor* and 3.25.31–34. On the issue of unity of 3.24/3.25, see Heyworth 2007, 412. Cf. Wallis 2013, 235sq. See also O'Neill 2005, 257–259. On Cynthia's ageing, see Gardner 2013, 207sq.

117 For a list of parallels between 3.21 and Virgil's *laudes Italiae* in the *Georgics*, see Heyworth and Morwood 2011, 315sq.

118 Prop. 3.22.17–18: *omnia Romanae cedent miracula terrae/natura hic posuit, quidquid ubique fuit*. Italy is a land of beautiful lakes and rivers, and it by far surpasses those countries that

deprived of any extra-textual reality, Italy is not only real but is also cast as a safe retreat promising the stability of marriage rather than the pain caused by the excruciating elegiac desire.[119]

6 Propertius 4: An Aetiology of Empire

Book 4 makes more explicit the (dis-)analogy between erotic desire and poetic empire-building that has begun to take shape in the previous books: Propertius continues to project the basic template underlying the textual construct of Cynthia onto the political space of empire, to demystify Cynthia as a literal object of erotic longing, and to contrast unmanly elegiac desire with masculine self-control and imperial domination. But what Propertius additionally does in Book 4 is to postulate, much more emphatically than in the previous books, an intricate *conjunction* between erotic desire and imperial conquest and to translate this conjunction into broadly aetiological terms.

The image of Rome conjured up in 4.1 as a cultural void transformed into a locus of imperial plenitude is echoed in 4.2, where the Etruscan god Vertumnus, once a shapeless piece of wood but now an elaborately wrought statue that can be dressed to look like virtually anything one can imagine,[120] is cast as an empty cipher, whose meaning, not unlike that of Cynthia in Book 1, is derived exclusively from the extraneous images that one chooses to project onto it.[121] In a similar vein, the aetiological account of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius in 4.10 casts Rome as a place whose identity is derived exclusively from imperial conquests – as an empty receptacle of the three sets of *spolia opima* that commemorate the expansion of the imperial territory from the city's borders to Etruria and ultimately to Gaul.[122]

By contrast with the emphasis on endless flexibility and spatial expansiveness in some of the topographic poems, Propertius' allusions to the erotic themes of Books 1–3 retrospectively endow his love elegy with a sense of

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produced such mythological monstrosities as Andromeda chained to a rock, Thyestes devouring his own children, etc.: 3.22.23–36.

119 Prop. 3.22.39–42: *haec tibi, Tulle, parens, haec est pulcherrima sedes,/hic tibi pro digna gente petendus honos,/hic tibi ad eloquium cives, hic ampla nepotum/spes et venturae coniugis aptus amor*. Cf. Cairns 2006, 353sq.

120 Prop. 4.2.21sqq.: *opportuna mea est cunctis natura figuris:/in quamcumque voles verte, decorus ero*, etc. Cf. Welch 2005, 35–55.

121 Cf. Edwards 1996, 55.

122 Prop. 4.10.45–48: Edwards 1996, 54. For a very detailed 'subversive' reading of this poem, see Welch 2005, 133–165.

total completeness and closure. In 4.5, Cynthia's perpetual elusiveness, which in the previous books has been presented as a function of her status as a poetic fantasy, is entirely reduced to a single remarkably trivial cause – to the instructions whereby the procuress used to urge the girl to admit only wealthy admirers, spurning the poet and his immaterial gifts.[123] But although the poet now seems to celebrate the procuress's death by urging every 'lover' to throw stones on her grave (4.5.77–88), the disappearance of what now emerges as the sole obstacle on the way to erotic fulfilment simultaneously turns Propertius' love elegy, which could only thrive on unsatisfiable erotic longings, into a thing of impossibility.[124]

In 4.7, Cynthia herself is dead too, but, rather than an ever-retreating object of desire, the soliloquy she delivers from her grave reveals her to be a partial analogue of Cornelia, a model Roman matron who likewise speaks from the dead in 4.11:[125] like Cornelia, Cynthia portrays herself as a faithful 'wife',[126] but in contrast to Cornelia, she complains about having received from her wayward 'husband' no decent funeral (27–32), but only 'verses written in my name' (*quoscumque meo fecisti nomine versus*, 77), which she now asks him to burn but which, as we know full well, will grant immortality both to Cynthia herself and to whomever else Propertius has chosen to mention in his poetry.[127]

Finally, the fact that, in 4.8, Cynthia turns out to be still very much alive (the story told by Propertius happened 'last night': *hac nocte*, 4.8.1) serves to corroborate her fictional status.[128] But the character we encounter in this poem has nothing to do with the Cynthia that we got to know in the first three books. In lieu of the excruciating drama of erotic enslavement, we are now confronted

123 Prop. 4.5.21–62. Cf. Myers 1996.

124 On the centrality of absence/separation for the functioning of Propertius' love elegy, see Walde 2008.

125 Cairns 2006, 358–361. For a sophisticated analysis of Cornelia as an Augustan *exemplum*, see Lowrie 2008. For a reading sensitive to the fissures in the poem's 'Augustanism', see Janan 2001, 146–163.

126 Needless to say, Cynthia having sex with her lover on the streets of Saburra (4.7.15–20) is a far cry from Cornelia's matronly virtues. But at the same time, she presents herself as no less faithful than Cornelia: *iuro … me servasse fidem* (4.7.51–53; cf. esp. 4.7.53–54: *si fallo, vipera nostris/sibilet in tumulis et super ossa cubet* and 4.11.27–28: *si fallo*[*r*]*, poena sororum/infelix umeros urgeat urna meos*), residing now in the portion of the underworld reserved for such virtuous heroines as Andromeda and Hypermestra: 4.7.63–70. On "Cynthia's truth", see Janan 2001, 100–113.

127 Cf. Prop. 4.7.93–94: *nunc te possideant aliae: mox sola tenebo:/mecum eris et mixtis ossibus ossa teram*. As in Books 1–3, Propertius' postmortem existence is inseparable from Cynthia.

128 Hutchinson 2006, 189.

with a version of a droll adultery mime featuring a (for all we know, faithful)[129] woman who safely returns from an archaic chthonic ritual (which serves to test young girls' chastity)[130] to find her boyfriend sandwiched between two drunken prostitutes (*inter utramque fui*, 36) – a situation that she efficiently resolves by chasing away her rivals (57–62), by imposing on Propertius the 'law' of fidelity (73–82, esp. *formula legis*, 74, and *legibus utar*, 81), by ritually purifying the room (83–86), and by reclaiming her rightful place in his bed (87–88).[131]

While 4.8 conceives of male erotic desire as a purely physical urge that can be restrained (however provisionally) by a pragmatic marriage-like arrangement, elegiac love as a longing for the absent and/or unattainable is relegated in Book 4 into the domain of female sexuality.[132] What is more, this desire is, more overtly than in the previous books, marked as a fundamentally imperial impulse. In 4.4, Tarpeia, a Vestal virgin inhabiting the original bucolic landscape of Rome that, as in 4.1, is devoid of cultural images,[133] is willing to betray her uncivilized country because she is attracted to the artfully wrought armour (*picta … arma*, 4.4.20) worn by Rome's enemy, the Sabine king Tatius.[134] Tarpeia's maddening desire turns Rome's attraction to things foreign into the originary force behind its imperial identity.[135] But the fact that Tatius, the object of Tarpeia's unpatriotic desire, kills her with the foreign arms she has found so irresistible[136] simultaneously reveals the unsettling contradiction between Rome's 'pure' origins and its all-consuming imperialism – the temple

129 Propertius' fantasy of Cynthia's trip to Lanuvium as a pretext for an erotic adventure (*causa fuit Iuno, sed mage causa Venus*, etc., 4.8.16–26) sounds in context like a recycled reflection of his jealous fantasies in the earlier books, e.g. in 1.11 or especially 2.32, where Cynthia also travels to Lanuvium (2.32.6). Cf. Greene 1998, 59–66.

130 Prop. 4.8.3–14. On the cult at Lanuvium, see Hutchinson 2006, 191sq., with references.

131 Janan 2001, 114–127. On Cynthia's jealousy, see Caston 2012, 98–100.

132 On the female perspectives in Book 4 in general, see Wyke 1987a.

133 Cf. Prop. 4.4.1–14 and 4.1.1–38. What is more, Tarpeia's attempt to betray Rome to a foreigner takes place during the Parilia (4.4.73–78) – singled out at 4.1.19 as one of the most salient manifestations of the original Roman religion that did not worship foreign gods.

134 Prop. 4.4.19–21: *vidit harenosis Tatium proludere campis/pictaque per flavas arma levare iubas:/obstipuit regis facie et regalibus armis*. Note that almost in all other literary versions of the Tarpeia story her motivation for betraying Rome is said to be greed rather than love: Miller 2004, 189–192; Welch 2005, 56; Hutchinson 2006, 116–119.

135 Of course, the Romans and the Sabines subsequently merge into a single state (Livy 1.11–13, esp. 1.13.4: *regnum consociant: imperium omne conferunt Romam*; ironically enough, Propertius' Tarpeia envisages the same scenario taking place under the lead of the Sabines: 4.4.55–62), so that Tarpeia emerges as a symbol not only of treason but also of Rome "absorb[ing] her former enemies completely" (Janan 2001, 75) – and thus a symbol of imperial expansion. Cf. Welch 2005, 57.

136 Prop. 4.4.91: *ingestis comitum super obruit armis*.

of Jupiter Capitolinus on the Tarpeian rock commemorating what now looks like a (tragic) aetiology of that fundamental contradiction.[137]

The aetiological import of Propertius' version of the Tarpeia story becomes particularly revealing if the poem is read alongside 4.3. In stark contrast to 4.4's portrayal of Tarpeia's love for an enemy, 4.3 presents the tension between the (conceptually empty) purity of Rome and the (spatially remote) plenitude of empire in terms of marriage. To Arethusa, the perpetual absence of her husband Lycotas always conquering new territories at the increasingly distant edges of the world turns Rome itself into an empty place devoid of meaning,[138] so that she can only alleviate her longing for the absent by means of symbolic substitutes (a map of the empire over which she obsessively pores[139] and her husband's weapons that she kisses in lieu of his body)[140] as well as by entertaining the (doubtless illusory) hope that he will triumph only over foreign countries rather than foreign women.[141] Far from being a model of conjugal

137 See Miller 2004, 192–195, on Tarpeia's nature as "the *coincidentia oppositorum*".

138 While he is fighting in Parthia, Thrace, Britain, or India (4.3.7–10), she feels close to death (11–16) and wishes she could, like an Amazon, join him in battle (43–48) instead of being confined to Rome, where, without him, it feels meaningless to wear expensive clothes and jewelry (51–52) and where *omnia surda tacent* (53), etc. See Janan 2001, 54. There are multiple revealing (dis-) analogies between Arethusa longing for *Lyco*-tas and Gallus longing for *Lyco*-ris in Virgil's *Eclogue* 10 (cf. esp. Prop. 4.3.23: *dic mihi, num teneros urit lorica lacertos?* and Verg. *Ecl.* 10.49: *a, tibi ne teneras glacies secet aspera plantas!*; note, too, that Arethusa's counterpart in 3.12, a poem that imagines exactly the same scenario as 4.3, is named Galla, see n. 114 above): ironically enough, the shift from the male elegiac desire for the ever-absent *puella* to the female view of the imperial marriage to an ever-absent man results for Arethusa in a futile longing not only for her husband, who eerily resembles an effeminate elegiac lover (*teneros … lacertos*, 4.3.23, *imbellis … manus*, 24; cf. Janan 2001, 58sq.), but also for the 'freedom of movement' enjoyed by the elegiac *puella*: cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 10.22–23: *tua cura Lycoris/perque nives alium perque horrida castra secuta est* and Prop. 4.3.45–48: *Romanis utinam patuissent castra puellis!/essem militiae sarcina fida tuae,/nec me tardarent Scythiae iuga, cum Pater altas/acriter in glaciem frigore nectit aquas.*

139 Prop. 4.3.37: *cogor et e tabula pictos ediscere mundos.* On the significance of Arethusa's map, see Janan 2001, 65–69.

140 Prop. 4.3.29–30: *at mihi cum noctes induxit vesper amaras,/si qua relicta iacent, osculor arma tua.*

141 Prop. 4.3.25–26: *haec* [sc. *lorica* and *hasta*] *noceant potius quam dentibus ulla puella/det mihi plorandas per tua colla notas!* and 67–69 *sed* (*tua sic domitis Parthae telluris alumnis/pura triumphantis hasta sequatur equos*)*/incorrupta mei conserva foedera lecti!* Of course, *pura hasta* is a technical term for a headless spear awarded to a victorious soldier (see Hutchinson 2006, *ad loc.*, with references), but in the context of Arethusa's urgent concern with her husband's sexual conduct (on *hasta*, among other elongated weapons, as a sexual metaphor, see Adams 1982, 19–22, as well as 199, on *purus*), one cannot help but feel reminded of Augustus calling Horace *purissimum penem* in Suetonius' *Vita Horati.*

happiness, the 'proper' distribution between the gender roles within this imperial marriage (she desires while he conquers) functions as a metaphor for the irreducible discrepancy in Augustan culture between the desire for primordial simplicity (for the 'hill and grass' of 4.1 or the Vestal virgin's purity in 4.4) and the desire for universal domination, which ultimately equates Rome with the geographically vast and morally complex empire.[142]

It is hardly surprising that in his two most overtly imperial poems (4.6 and 4.9) Propertius glosses over this unsettling discrepancy and instead celebrates a notional fusion between the elegiac desire for the absent and the imperial desire for universal conquest. In 4.9, Propertius puts an elegiac spin on the myth of Hercules' victory over Cacus, which, as we have seen, Virgil recounts in *Aeneid* 8 as an aetiology of the *ara maxima*. In stark contrast to Virgil's paragon of epic heroism, Propertius' Hercules bears traits both of a Roman elegiac lover and of a Callimachean poet. Seized by thirst after his battle against Cacus, Hercules asks for water from the spring at the sanctuary of Bona Dea, strictly off-limits to men, delivering what sounds like a version of an elegiac *paraklausithyron* in which he ingratiates himself with women by citing his former 'elegiac' enslavement to the queen Omphale.[143] It is highly significant, however, that, unlike an elegiac lover, Hercules desires not a woman but water from a very special spring: for on a closer look Propertius' framing of Hercules' thirst turns out to bundle multiple allusions to Callimachus into a powerful metapoetic gesture.

The most conspicuous among these allusions is the priestess' attempt to dissuade Hercules from penetrating into the female sanctuary by appealing to the myth, told in Callimachus' fifth *Hymn*, of Tiresias blinded by Athena because he, driven by thirst, approached a spring where the naked goddess happened to be bathing.[144] Furthermore, Hercules' need to quench his thirst

142 Most revealing is the juxtaposition of the restoration of the old mores and the emphasis on universal conquest in Augustus' *Res Gestae*, esp. 3: *bella terra et mari civilia externaque toto in orbe terrarum saepe gessi* and 8: *legibus novis me auctore latis multa exempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro saeculo reduxi et ipse multarum rerum exempla imitanda posteris tradidi*. On this tension, see e.g. Galinsky 1996, 58–77.

143 Prop. 4.9.47–50. Cf. 3.11.17–20, where Omphale, among other heroines of myth and history, is paralleled with Propertius' enslaving *puella*. On Hercules as an elegiac *exclusus amator*, see Anderson 1964; Pinotti 1977; Cairns 1992. On the function of elegiac 'liminality' in Book 4 as a whole, see DeBrohun 2003, 118–155, and 156–200, on the reverberations of Hercules' cross-dressing in the rest of the book. On Hercules' 'gender bender', see also Welch 2005, 120–131.

144 Cf. Prop. 4.9.53–60 and Call. *Lav.Pall.* 75–82, esp. 77: διψάσας δ' ἄφατόν τι ποτὶ ῥόον ἤλυθε κράνας. On Callimachus' Tiresias myth, see Stephens 2015, 237sq. The conclusion of 4.9 also evokes a number of Callimachus' *Hymns*. Cf. Prop. 4.9.71–72: *sancte pater salve, cui iam favet aspera Iuno:/Sanc*[*t*]*e, velis libro dexter inesse meo* and Call. *Jov.* 94: χαῖρε πάτερ,

at the sanctuary of Bona Dea is linked to 'the fertile/pregnant earth providing no water' (*terraque non* [*n*]*ullas feta ministrat aquas*, 4.9.22), which conjures up the image of the water-deprived Rhea begging the Earth in Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus* to 'give birth' to water (Γαῖα φίλη, τέκε καὶ σύ, Call. *Jov*. 29). Rhea's prayer is motivated in Callimachus by the fact that Arcadia, now so rich in water (Call. *Jov*. 18–27, esp. εὔυδρος, 20), did not, at the time, possess a single river![145] By contrast, Propertius' Hercules not only finds himself on a riverbank, but the pre-historic Tiber is also said to have carried so much more water than it currently does that the flooded Velabrum formed a veritable harbour.[146] This discrepancy is highly meaningful. The fact that Hercules does not consider the possibility of drinking from the 'stagnating' river (*stagnabant*, Prop. 4.9.5), by which he is literally surrounded, but, instead, does everything in his power to obtain water from a forbidden spring located in an out-of-the-way sacred precinct distinctly evokes one of the most frequently imitated Callimachean passages – the conclusion of the *Hymn to Apollo* in which the god himself rejects poetry that resembles the muddy waters of 'the huge Assyrian river' and welcomes poetry similar to the pure water of a tiny spring sacred to a powerful goddess.[147]

Propertius' Hercules immediately abandons the stance of an incessantly pining elegiac 'lover' when his *paraklausithyron* is spurned by the priestess, and, without any further ado, he simply breaks into the sanctuary to quench his thirst, thereby regaining his heroic identity.[148] As a result, Propertius' poem not only aetiologizes the *ara maxima* as a locus of Hercules' victory over women, who have 'ever since then' been forbidden to approach the altar,[149] but also creates a monument to the 'elegiac' past of the greatest Greek hero, whose ability to feel 'elegiac' desire, paradoxically enough, turns out to be

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χαῖρ᾽ αὖθι; *Dian*. 268: χαῖρε μέγα κρείουσα καὶ εὐάντησον ἀοιδῇ; *Lav.Pall*. 140–142: χαῖρε θεά, κτλ. Cf. Pinotti 1977, 53.

145 Call. *Jov*. 18–27 is a catalog of Arcadian rivers that *did not* exist yet when Rhea gave birth to Zeus.

146 Prop. 4.9.5–6: *qua Velabra suo stagnabant flumine quaque/nauta per urbanas velificabat aquas*.

147 Call. *Ap*. 108–112: Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοῖο μέγας ῥόος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πολλά/λύματα γῆς καὶ πολλὸν ἐφ᾽ ὕδατι συρφετὸν ἕλκει./Δηοῖ δ᾽ οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι μέλισσαι,/ἀλλ᾽ ἥτις καθαρή τε καὶ ἀχράαντος ἀνέρπει/πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβὰς ἄκρον ἄωτον; Asper 1997, 109–134. On allusions to this passage in Augustan poetry in general and in Propertius in particular, see Wimmel 1960. Cf. esp. Prop. 3.1.3: *puro de fonte*.

148 Prop. 4.9.61–62: *sic anus: ille umeris postis concussit opacos,/nec tulit iratam ianua clausa sitim*. Note that Hercules' thirst has now become imbued with an epic *ira* = the μῆνις of the *Iliad*.

149 Prop. 4.9.69: *haec nullis umquam pateat veneranda puellis*.

inextricably linked to his status not only as an adherent of Callimachean aesthetics but also as a conqueror of the entire world.[150] By 'heroically' violating one of the most characteristic conventions of Roman love elegy in order to drink from a 'Callimachean' spring, Hercules reveals that Propertius' version of 'Callimachean poetics' may indeed consist in enacting a transformation of the elegiac desire for the unattainable into an act of heroic conquest.

This conjunction between elegiac desire and heroic conquest serves as a notional aetiology of Augustus' victory at Actium celebrated in 4.6.[151] Like the *ara maxima* in 4.9, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine is presented in this poem as a commemoration of a victory over a woman (*dat femina poenas*, Prop. 4.6.57) physically banned from the 'sacred space' of Rome: Cleopatra is presented as so incompatible with Rome's masculine power that even by being paraded in a triumphal procession (something that her suicide had luckily averted) she would have defiled the city.[152] The Apollo temple is cast in the poem as a token of a complete conceptual fusion between Rome and the empire that it finds itself in the never-ending process of conquering. The naval battle of Actium memorialized by the temple not only witnesses the gathering of the whole world (*huc mundi coiere manus*, 4.6.19) but also marks its subjugation to Augustus (*vince mari: iam terra tua est*, 4.6.39). What is more, the temple itself is not only a condensed image of this universal event transposed into the very heart of Rome, but also provides a venue for an imaginary competition among elegiac poets (cf. the habitual evocation of Callimachus and Philitas at 4.6.1–4) whose songs give expression to the ever-insatiable longing for the remotest edges of the empire already subservient to Rome or still waiting to be subdued in the future.[153]

By staging a conjunction between the elegiac longing for an ever-retreating object and the never-ending imperial expansion, Propertius reveals that the semblance of a secure control over empire by no means cancels out the desire for the increasingly more unreachable. No amount of imperial plenitude can,

150 Prop. 4.9.73–74: *hunc, quoniam manibus purgatum sanxerat orbem,/sic Sanc*[*t*]*um Tatiae composuere Cures*.

151 Another important point of contact between 4.9 and 4.6 is that both of them are deeply indebted to Callimachus' *Hymns*. See Cairns 1984, 137–149, for an analysis of the 'hymnic' (and in particular Callimachean) features of 4.6. The most explicit reference to Callimachus is 4.6.27–28: *cum Phoebus linquens stantem se vindice Delon/*(*nam tulit iratos mobilis un*[*d*]*a Notos*), which evokes the *Hymn to Delos*. On this poem, see also Kierdorf 1995; Miller 2009, 80–92.

152 Prop. 4.6.65–66: *di melius! quantus mulier foret una triumphus,/ductus erat per quas ante Iugurtha vias!*

153 Prop. 4.6.77–82. For a specimen of a 'subversive' reading of 4.6, see Welch 2005, 96–111, with references.

in other words, fill the original emptiness of 4.1's bucolic 'hill and grass'. Far from suppressing the sense of tantalizing disquietude inherent in the image of *imperium sine fine*, Propertius presents the perpetual transformation of 'elegiac' desire into imperial conquest, the process that he enacts throughout his own poetic oeuvre, as a crucial mechanism of empire-building – as a kind of 'aetiology' of empire.

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CHAPTER 5

The Origins of Rome in the Renaissance

Revival & Reinvention, Rejection & Replacement

Susanna de Beer

1 Introduction[1]

This chapter analyses how humanist poets during the Renaissance employed the aetiological discourse concerning the origins of Rome. By this aetiological discourse I do not only mean the foundation myths of Rome themselves, but also the body of ancient literature in which these myths were told, as well as the aetiological thinking and reasoning they reflect. I aim to show that these poets, as well as the influential people for whom they often wrote did not just have antiquarian or literary interest in these ancient foundation myths. Instead, I argue that in essence the same things were at stake for the humanist writers as for their ancient predecessors, when they used aetiological stories to explain and legitimize a certain *status quo*: a political, cultural or religious institution or practice.[2] More specifically, I explain how numerous parties (cities, nations, empires etc.) employed the same aetiological discourse not in isolation, but *in competition* with each other.

2 Revival

In the following Latin epigram the Italian humanist Aurelio Brandolini hails pope Sixtus IV (1471–1484) as 'second founder' of Rome.[3] Sixtus is compared – and even found superior – to Romulus and all other ancients, being father, god and master all in one.

1 This work was supported by grants from The Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). I am also very grateful for the feedback received from the audience and organizers of the conference *Inventing Origins*, and from the anonymous reviewer. Finally, many thanks to Caroline van den Oever for reading and thinking along in various stages of this project.

2 See Fantuzzi and Rüpke 2006.

3 For Brandolini's life and works see Rotondò 1972. For his poetry for Sixtus IV see De Luca 1938. Some of his poems are also quoted in Blondin 2005.

Aurelio Brandolini, 1.18.26–31; 36–37
Ausus at est Sixtus veteremque resurgere solus
Iussit Romam, immo condidit ipse novam;
Reddidit hic urbi formam veteresque ruinas
Substulit: et passim coctile fecit iter.
Nobile pontis opus struxit delubra refecit. [30]
Multa quidem: fecit sed nova plura tamen. [...]
Romule, cede pater, veteres concedite cuncti.
Hic urbis pater est. Hic deus, hic dominus.

But Sixtus dared this and he alone ordered old Rome to rise up again; no, actually he himself founded a new Rome! This man returned beauty to the city and he removed the old ruins and he laid out in all directions a road of baked brick. He built a famous work of a bridge and he restored churches, many to be sure, but he built still more new ones. [...] Father Romulus, yield! All ancients, yield! He is the father of the City. He is god and he is master.[4]

Brandolini's poem is typical for how humanist poets employ the ancient aetiological discourse regarding Rome, in that it connects to all three levels mentioned above. First, it refers to the concrete foundation myth of Rome by Romulus. Second, it directly alludes to ancient literary examples in which these aetiologies were mentioned by means of intertextual references, among others, Ovid's *Fasti*. Finally, it adopts similar strategies of using this aetiological myth for purposes of political legitimization like those used by ancient poets.

The specific interest displayed by Renaissance princes and poets in the mythical origins of *Rome* in particular, can be explained by the fact that in medieval and Renaissance Europe the ancient Roman Empire still functioned as the basic template for legitimizing political power and cultural authority.[5] As a result, to claim the kind of power and authority associated with the ancient Roman Empire, Renaissance writers argued that the origins of Rome were their origins too. This aetiological reasoning can be considered a specific, very powerful method of backing up heritage claims.[6] To support heritage

4 Text and translation in Blondin 2005, 4.

5 See e.g. Dandelet 2014 and Enenkel and Ottenheym 2017, especially chapters 1–3.

6 See Graham and Howards 2008; Lowenthal 1985 and idem 1998. I have explained in greater depth the benefits of a heritage approach for the analysis of humanist Latin poetry about Rome in De Beer 2020b.

claims one has to argue for a privileged link with a certain positive past. The further back that past can be traced, the more authoritative the claim is usually considered to be. As a consequence, privileged links with *origins* are regarded as very powerful tools in such claims.[7]

In the Renaissance, given the general high authority of Antiquity in this period, the best strategy for any heritage claim was to argue for a privileged link with specifically *ancient* origins. If such claims, in addition, employed the specific literary or artistic language of Antiquity, they were considered particularly powerful and authoritative.[8] This is exactly what happens in Renaissance Rome, where the Roman foundation myths were revived to play a key role in papal politics, as can be exemplified by the pontificate of Sixtus IV. In this case, restoring the link between the mythical past and the present served to underline the legitimacy of papal power on the grounds of its proposed continuation of the ancient Roman imperium.[9] As a result, this mythical past is fervently explored in literature of the time, as testified by Brandolini's epigrams for Sixtus IV, but also e.g. by Andrea Fulvio's *De Romuli et Remi expositione* or Raffaele Maffei's poem *De origine urbis*.[10]

However, the importance of Rome's origins in the Renaissance can not only be inferred from literature, but also from papal interferences in the city itself, such as Sixtus' transference of the famous bronze statue of the she-wolf from the Lateran to the Campidoglio, and from his commission to add the figures of Romulus and Remus to the statue.[11] During his pontificate the places associated with Rome's origins were also examined with special interest, as shown by contemporary excavations at the Forum Boarium, the location where Aeneas famously heard the story of Hercules.[12]

In adopting this strategy of revival, the Popes benefited from the continuity of the location, which constituted their privileged link with the ancient

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7 See Lowenthal 1998, especially chapters 8 and 9, which deal with the arguments of priority and rootedness, which both related to the idea of origins.

8 For the revival of Latin language and literature as a central mission of humanism, see Baker 2017.

9 For the idea of Rome and the Roman Empire in Renaissance religious thought see O'Malley 1968, especially 118–138. For the reception of the *Aeneid* to this purpose, see Hardie 2014, especially chapter 6 ('*Imperium sine Fine*: The *Aeneid* and Christianity'), which explains how the *Imperium Christianum* was considered a continuation of the *Imperium Romanum*.

10 See Muecke 2007.

11 For this aspect of Sixtus' papacy see Blondin 2005; Miglio *et al.* 1986.; Benzi 1990; and Benzi *et al.* 2000.

12 Verg. *A.* 8.190–305. For these excavations see Parisi Presicce 2000.

Roman past, and offered the opportunity to make visible places and works of art connected to the foundation myths. They could still be pointed out in the Roman landscape or put on display as *lieux de mémoire*.[13] At the same time the Renaissance Popes had the disadvantage that the ancient Roman city had fallen severely into ruin, which could also be considered a sign of discontinuity between ancient and Renaissance Rome. To deal with this disadvantage effectively, the papal propaganda, alongside a focus on Rome's origins, also adopted the scheme of the *renovatio imperii* and the idea of a Golden Age returned.[14]

In so doing, the Popes imitated a method that had formed the core of the Augustan propaganda as well. Seen from this perspective, Brandolini's epigram grants Sixtus a double privilege: it not only creates a link between him and Rome's mythical past by comparing him to Romulus; it also aligns him with Augustus, pointing to both their efforts to 'renew Rome'.[15] This is thus the origin of Pope Sixtus IV as the *Restaurator Urbis*. The allusion to Ovid's *Fasti* can also be seen in this light. To claim Sixtus' superiority over Romulus, Aurelio Brandolini uses a phrase comparable to the Ovidian *Romule, concedes* (*Fast.* 2.133) and portrays him as the father of Rome, just as Ovid had called Augustus *pater patriae* (*Fast.* 2.127) and *pater orbis* (*Fast.* 2.130).[16] However, whereas Ovid compares Augustus' rule over the earth with Jupiter's rule over heaven, Brandolini presents Sixtus as *pater*, as well as *deus* and *dominus*.[17] As a consequence, Sixtus is represented as a city founder who outdoes Romulus *and* Augustus and is at the same time associated with the Christian Lord.[18]

However, the Popes were by no means the only party in Renaissance Europe that claimed Roman origins, thereby legitimizing the power and authority represented by the Roman Empire. In the remainder of this chapter we will see what kinds of strategies were open to poets representing other political, religious or cultural powers to employ the same or similar aetiological stories

13 For this concept see Nora *et al.* 1984–1992. For the collection and display of antiquities to this purpose see Christian 2010.

14 See Stinger 1985, especially chapters 5 and 6.

15 More on this relationship between Renaissance and Augustan Rome, see De Beer forthcoming.

16 For modern takes on (the forthrightness of) Ovid's praise of Augustus in the *Fasti*, see e.g. Hinds 1992 and McKeown 1984.

17 Ov. *Fast.* 2.132 (*hominum tu pater, ille deum*).

18 *Dominus et Deus* is how God is addressed, among others, in the Book of Revelation 4.11, but it is also the formula by which Emperor Domitian was often named, for example in several of Martial's epigrams (among others in 5.8.1, 7.34.8, 8.2.6, 9.66.3, and 10.72.3). For the relationship between this imperial and religious discourse see Thompson 1990, 104–107.

and to argue for their privileged link with these Roman origins. Alongside the revival of these myths, as we have seen in Brandolini, we will encounter examples of their reinvention, rejection and replacement. By applying insights from heritage studies, this chapter seeks to understand what goals these different ways of appropriating the Roman aetiological discourse served, and what they can teach us about the role of aetiological reasoning in the relationship between past and present.

3 Reinvention

Pierre de Ronsard, *La Franciade* 1.1–12
Muse qui tiens les sommets de Parnasse
Guide ma langue e me chante la race
Des Rois François yssuz de Francion
Enfant d'Hector, Troyen de nation
Qu'on apelloit en sa ieunesse tendre
Astyanax et du nom de Scamandre.
De ce Troyen conte moy les travaux
Guerres, desseins, et combien sur les eaux
Il a de fois (*en despit de Neptune*
Et de Iunon) *surmonté la Fortune*
Et sur la terre eschapé de peris,
Ains que bastir les grands murs de Paris.

Muse atop the summits of Parnassus, steer my speech and sing for me that race of French kings descended from Francion, Hector's son and of Trojan stock, who in his tender childhood was called Astyanax or by the name Scamandrius. Tell me of this Trojan's misfortunes, of the wars he fought, of his mission, and tell me how many times on the seas (despite Neptune and Juno) he overcame Fortune, and how many times on solid ground he escaped from danger, before going on to build the walls of Paris.[19]

These lines are the beginning of the national epic *La Franciade* by Pierre de Ronsard – a work which was begun before 1572, but was never completed. This passage is clearly modelled on the opening lines of the *Aeneid* and connects to

19 Text from Ronsard 1993. Translation adapted from Ronsard 2010.

the same Trojan origins that are fundamental in the aetiology constructed in that epic poem.[20] However, the aetiological story itself is reinvented, as it does not lead to the foundation of Rome by Aeneas, but to the foundation of Paris by Francion or Francus.[21]

These opening lines might come across to us as a parody, but we should keep in mind the basic premises: the issue of political legitimization was of very real importance in this period, the use of the past for this purpose was completely natural, and ever since its publication, the *Aeneid* had been the most authoritative source for this message and method.[22] The great advantage of the *Aeneid* is that it not only emphasizes the importance of Rome's location for its foundation, but also includes and thus legitimizes the scheme of the *translatio imperii* (the transfer of the *imperium*) as a basic element in the foundation of a world empire. This made this specific myth of the origin of Rome via Trojan roots much easier to appropriate for non-Romans than, for example, the story of Romulus and Remus. Foreign claimants might not own the location of Rome, but were still able to create a privileged link to these Trojan roots of Rome via genealogy, as we see in Ronsard's example.

However, there is an inherent paradox in the *Franciade*, as in other such alternative genealogies. Although it clearly imitates the *Aeneid* and owes its rhetorical power to that model, it also strongly opposes and competes with the foundation story told in the *Aeneid* at the same time. By letting Paris be founded directly by a Trojan prince, it neglects the importance of Aeneas and overwrites the foundation of Rome with an alternative story based on the same authoritative origins. Seen from the viewpoint of heritage studies this is completely natural, since heritage claims are always competitive, and part of a process of inclusion and exclusion.[23] By claiming Trojan origins for her own purpose, France automatically competed with Rome, whose origins were

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20 E.g. Verg. *A.* 1.5 (*multa quoque et bello passus*); 1.3 (*et terris iactatus et alto*); 1.4 (*saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram*); 1.7 (*altae moenia Romae*); 1.6–7 (*genus unde Latinum/Albanique patres*). I owe these specific references to the anonymous reviewer of this chapter.

21 Francion or Francus was considered to be the same as Astyanax, the son of Hector, who was renamed by the Greeks after they had taken Troy. See Beaune 1985, chapter 1, esp. 19–30.

22 For the reception of the *Aeneid* in this manner, see Hardie 2014, especially chapter 5 (Empire and Nation), which focuses on the inclusion in the *Aeneid* of both the *translatio* from Troy and the *renovatio* of Saturnus' reign.

23 See Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996. Indeed, the *Aeneid* itself bears witness to the competitiveness of heritage claims: Virgil's claim, in the epic's very first verse, that Aeneas was 'first' (*primus*) of the Trojans to reach Italy, is disputed in the same text when soon after Venus states Antenor had already settled in Patavium – while Aeneas himself is yet

found in this same Trojan heritage. This process reflects the political, religious and cultural landscape of the time, in which France competed with Italy for cultural primacy. In this same context we could also consider the following contemporary sonnet that the famous French humanist Joachim Du Bellay dedicated to Ronsard:

Joachim Du Bellay, *Les Regrets* 19
Ce pendant que tu dis ta Cassandre divine,
Les louanges du Roy, et l'heritier d'Hector,
Et ce Montmorancy, nostre François Nestor,
Et que de sa faveur Henry t'estime digne:

Je me pourmene seul sur la rive Latine,
La France regretant, et regretant encor
Mes antiques amis, mon plus riche tresor,
Et le plaisant sejour de ma terre Angevine.

Je regrete les bois, et les champs blondissans,
Les vignes, les jardins, et les prez verdissans
Que mon fleuve traverse: icy pour recompense

Ne voiant que l'orgueil de ces monceaux pierreux,
Où me tient attaché d'un espoir malheureux
Ce que possede moins celuy qui plus y pense.

While you sing your divine Cassandre, the praises of the king and Hector's heir, and Montmorancy our French Nestor, and while Henry judges you worthy of his favor, I wander alone on the Latin shore, longing for France, and longing, too, for my old friends, my richest treasure and for my pleasant Angevin home. I miss the woods and the ripening fields, the vines, the gardens, and the meadows turning green through which my river runs: here instead of all that, seeing only the pride of these piles of stone, where I am held by a vain hope for that which he least attains who desires it most.[24]

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stranded on North African shores (Verg. *A*. 1.242–249; cf. also Ov. *Fast*. 4.77–78). Servius (ad loc.) attempts to reconcile the apparent contradiction in *A*. 1.1.

24 Text in Du Bellay 1966. Translation in Du Bellay 2006.

In the first quatrain of this poem Du Bellay hints at the Trojan origins of France through a reference to *La Franciade*, which, as we have seen, traces France's origins back to the Trojan Hector (l. 2: *l'heritier d'Hector*). Du Bellay then contrasts Ronsard's literary activities in France to his own stay in Rome (l. 5: *la rive Latine*), which he represents as an unwanted exile. Du Bellay indeed visited Rome in the retinue of his uncle Jean du Bellay in the 1550's. To understand why he represented his stay in Rome as an exile in this poem, we can best compare it to his much more elaborate Latin elegy *Patriae desiderium*, of which this sonnet forms a partial translation.[25]

This Latin elegy playfully imitates and contrasts with Ovid's exile poetry, putting France in the place of Rome, and Rome in the place of Tomis. However, unlike Tomis, in Du Bellay's poetry Rome is not the stereotypical uncultivated and thus unattractive place; it has *lost* its attraction. This loss of attraction is exemplified in the sonnet by the Roman ruins (l. 12: *ces monceaux pierreux*), the 'dead Rome' in which Du Bellay is still stuck, while longing for the 'new Rome' that is inhabited and shaped by Ronsard: France. By this means, the sonnet exemplifies the inherent connection between the two ways of challenging the Roman revival of the aetiological discourse: by reinventing and rejecting it.

4 Rejection

We have already observed that Roman humanists like Brandolini accommodated the Roman ruins by inscribing them into their discourse of the *renovatio Romae*. Now we see that their competitors instead used them as proof that Renaissance Rome was no longer the same as ancient Rome. In his Latin *Descriptio Romae* Du Bellay again returns to this image of Roman ruin and decay:

> **Joachim Du Bellay, *Descriptio Romae* 129–133**
> *Caetera tempus edax longis tegit obruta seclis,*
> *Ipsaque nunc tumulus mortua Roma sui est.*
> *Disce hinc humanis quae sit fiducia rebus:*
> *Hic tanti cursus tam brevis imperii.*
>
> Devouring time covers everything else, overgrown during long centuries, and now dead Rome herself has become her own tomb. Learn from this

25 This is elegy 7, text in Du Bellay 1984. See further on this elegy IJsewijn 1991. On Du Bellay's translation practices see Ford 2013, chapter 2.

> what faith to put in human affairs: this is the short lifetime of such a great empire.[26]

Not only is Renaissance Rome different than ancient Rome, in Du Bellay's opinion, ancient Rome is dead. Apart from the fact that this image allows for reflections on Rome as a symbol for the vicissitudes of Fortune and of devouring time herself, Du Bellay's poem can also be seen to undermine the papal revival of the aetiological discourse of Rome.[27] By presenting Rome's link with her own ancient past as broken, it renders illegitimate the papal claim on the Roman origins. Furthermore, through its emphasis on the *definitive* and *irreversible* end of Rome, exemplified by the image of death, it counters the scheme of a *renovatio Romae* that was so central to the image of papal Rome.

The question remains why these Roman claims had to be countered, or disarmed explicitly. Why was it not enough for the competitors of Renaissance Rome, like the French Ronsard or Du Bellay, to reinvent an alternative and competitive aetiology and leave it at that? To understand this, we have to return to the functioning of heritage again. As we have already observed, the condition for any heritage claim is to have, or at least to argue for, a privileged link with that past. We have also seen that such a privileged link could be constituted by the continuity of location (as in papal Rome), or by a continuous genealogy (as in Ronsard's *Franciade*). From this point of view we can also understand the exceptional power of the aetiology in Virgil's *Aeneid*, combining as it does these two strategies into one mythological story.

However, of these two rhetorical strategies, the first one is regularly considered the more convincing one: a link constituted by the continuity of location and by the rootedness of the present in the past, is more privileged than a link on the basis of genealogy.[28] We can see this preference already in the foundation myth of Rome, where the fall of Troy is a condition for the foundation and flourishing of the Roman Empire. When, in Lucan's *Bellum civile*, Caesar suggests that Troy will be rebuilt, this is regarded as a direct attack on the legitimacy of, and threat to the existence of Rome.[29] We can understand this if we consider that Troy's claim to her own *local* origins will always be stronger than those of Rome, which were essentially based on a *translatio*.

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26 Text in Du Bellay 1984. See further Horstmann 2010.

27 The devouring time is a reference to Ov. *Met*. 15.234–236 (*tempus edax rerum, tuque invidiosa vetustas/omnia destruitis vitiataque dentibus aevi/paulatim lenta consumitis omnia morte!*).

28 See Lowenthal 1998, especially chapter 9, and Kennedy 1999.

29 Luc. *BCiv*. 9.990–999. See Edwards 1996, 65.

Now it is this exact same scheme, the same combination of claims and attacks, that underlies the Renaissance attempts to undermine the papal claims to ancient Rome. Again, by so doing they not only directly appropriate the foundation myth of Rome for their own specific goal, by turning Renaissance Rome into ruined Troy, but they are also subject to the same heritage schemes that their ancient predecessors were confronted with. In this scheme, only if Rome were dead, (i.e., if the continuity of location changed into a discontinuity) would the arguments for a *translatio imperii* on the basis of Trojan genealogies be considered legitimate.

In line with this observation, many of the Renaissance poets who reinvent the ancient aetiological discourse of Rome to legitimize the foundation of a different city than Rome, at some point also criticize the Rome of their time in an attempt to oppose the Roman revival of this same discourse. We do not only find these anti-Roman sentiments exclusively in France, but also for example in the context of the Holy Roman Empire, another competitor of the Papal States.[30] Consider for example the following epigram by the German humanist and poet Conrad Celtis, who was crowned poet laureate by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III and later worked in the service of Emperor Maximilian to create a kind of German Renaissance.[31] In the epigram, the body of an ancient girl who has recently been dug up is presented as speaking and reflecting on the differences between Antiquity and the present state of Rome:

Conrad Celtis, *Epigram* 3.40: *De puella Romae reperta*
Annos mille super tumulo hoc conclusa iacebam;
haec nunc Romanis extumulata loquar:
Non veteres video Romano more Quirites,
iustitia insignes nec pietate viros.
Sed tantum magnas tristi cum mente ruinas
conspicio, veterum iam monumenta virum.
Si mihi post centum rursus revideberis annos,
nomen Romanum vix superesse reor.

About a girl discovered in Rome
More than a thousand years I have been buried in this tomb; now, having been dug up I shall say these things to the Romans: I do not see the old Quirites, with their Roman ethos, neither do I see men famous for their

30 Hirschi 2012, especially chapter 7 (Humanist Nationalism); and Stadtwald 1996.
31 On Conrad Celtis in the context of German Humanism see especially Robert 2003.

> justice and sense of duty. But, saddened, I only see enormous ruins, now reminding us of people of the past. If I will see you again in a hundred years from now, I think the Roman name will hardly have survived.[32]

The main point of this epigram is similar to the passage by Du Bellay quoted above: Renaissance Rome is nothing like ancient Rome anymore. Thus Celtis too rejects the papal discourse of *renovatio* by cutting the link between past and present Rome, or in other words, by 'proving' the discontinuity between the foundation of Rome and the Renaissance city. Interestingly, in his image of the Roman ruins as 'monuments of men of old', Celtis refers to Virgil's *Aeneid* 8, where Aeneas visits the future site of Rome with Evander and already back then stumbles on monuments of an earlier past.[33] In Celtis' poems this can be regarded as an ironic twist, since it instead represents the Roman aetiological poem par excellence as a poem about Roman ruins.[34]

However, unlike Du Bellay, Celtis does not only emphasize the state of ruin or neglect of Rome's cityscape, he also emphasizes the contrast between the past virtues and the present vices of Rome. This focus on morality was clever, because from the foundation onwards it was part and parcel of the Roman self-image to consider theirs the City of Virtue. It was actually taken for granted that the divine sanction of the Roman Empire was based on the virtue of the Romans directly.[35] Removing virtue from Rome would therefore also counter Rome's claim on the continuity of this empire.[36]

Thus, in short, the method by which the papal discourse is rejected in this poem consists of the following assumptions: first the original magnificence

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32 For this epigram see Martínek 1982, who corrects the text found in Celtis 1963, 57. I have also discussed this epigram in De Beer 2020a. Celtis refers to the excavation of the well-preserved corpse of a girl on the Via Appia in 1485, about which he must have heard during his stay in Rome from 1487 to 1489. Celtis is not the only poet using an ancient character coming alive to reflect on the changed face of Rome. Cristoforo Landino imagines Augustus coming alive again in *Xandra* 2.30, 21–24, cf. Pieper 2008, 252–261; and Paolo Spinoso stages the Sarcophagus of Santa Costanza speaking, cf. Bianchi 2004, 163.

33 The specific reference is to Verg. *A*. 8.356 (*reliquias veterumque vides monimenta virorum*).

34 Edwards 2015.

35 See Edwards 1996, 21sq. for this close connection between empire and moral superiority.

36 See Edwards 1993, 19, for the city of Rome being a crucial reference point for Roman moralists already in Antiquity. This reasoning on the basis of morality fits very well, is actually intertwined, with the religiously inspired anti-Roman sentiments, since virtue is also a key element of the Christian discourse. It was even part of this sentiment to consider Rome saved from her vices exactly by converting to the Christian religion, cf. Stadtwald 1996, 44.

and virtue of ancient Rome are accepted, then the continuity between present Rome and this glorious past is denied, and finally the poet emphasizes that this change is irreversible. However, in addition to arguing for Roman immorality by assuming a movement of moral decline, often from antiquity onwards, it could also be argued for by presenting it as a stereotypical Roman trait. Consider the following example, again by Celtis, in which he presents Romulus as speaking to the Romans:

> **Conrad Celtis, *Epigram* 3.13: *Vox Romuli ad Romanos***
> *Vestalis mihi mater erat, rapiens lupa nutrix,*
> *regnaque vulturibus sunt mea structa feris.*
> *Hinc tria vos capiant speciosa flagitia cives:*
> *stupra, gula et saevae mentis avaritia.*
> *Nec vos fasque pium moveat, nulla ira deorum,*
> *maximus in coelis Mars pater illa tegat.*
>
> **The voice of Romulus addressing the Romans**
> A Vestal virgin was my mother, a greedy wolf my nurse, and my kingdom was built on wild vultures. Hence three splendid vices can take possession of you, citizens: sexual immorality, gluttony and avarice of a savage mind. And lest religious law or the anger of the gods move you, your greatest father Mars protect these vices in heaven.[37]

Whereas this second epigram has a similar message to the first, i.e. Renaissance Rome is a den of immorality, the method by which it is reached is the complete opposite. Now Celtis takes some important elements from the foundation myths of Rome and has them represent, or even suggests they caused, the inborn vices of the Romans.[38] Romulus' descent from Rhea Silvia, a Vestal virgin, is a sign of sexual license; his being nursed by a wolf a sign of gluttony and greed; and the fact that he triumphed over Remus because he saw twelve instead of six vultures a sign of avarice and savagery. Finally, Romulus' father Mars, the god of war, represents the Romans' lack of reverence for religious laws, which explains the proliferation of these vices.

These interpretations of the myth can thus be considered aetiologies in their own right: the origins of Rome being used as explanations of a certain *status quo*. This trope too, that vice was native to the Romans, infused in Rome's very

37 Text in Celtis 1963, 49.

38 The argumentative structure of the epigram points in the same direction, with the deictic '*hinc*' in l. 3. For the Neo-Latin epigram in general see De Beer, Enenkel and Rijser 2009.

foundation, can be traced back to ancient texts.[39] But of course they are more than that, as Celtis did not randomly select his stories. They are exactly the same myths that the contemporary papacy adopted to legitimize their power. However, picking up on the ancient discourse on Roman decadence, Celtis' interpretation of the Roman *origines* is exactly opposite to the one we find in the papal aetiological discourse of Rome. In this manner Celtis ridiculed the stories and rejected their positive message, while still adopting the same method as his opponents.

What stands out from these two examples by Celtis is that he was absolutely inconsistent in how he rejected the papal discourse, and how he reached the conclusion that Rome was a den of immorality. In fact, the two strategies he adopts are logically incompatible. Whereas the first one regards Rome's immorality as the result of a movement of moral decline, the second one sees it as an unchanging, timeless, stereotypical characteristic of Rome. The first thus assumes ancient Rome to have been a virtuous place, whereas the second one assumes Rome to have been immoral from her origins onwards. In each case he thus agrees with his papal opponents in certain respects, but opposes them in others. In the first case he agrees with them on the virtuous origins of Rome, and in the second on the continuity between ancient and contemporary Rome as being essentially the same.

Not only in Celtis' epigrams, but in the Renaissance discourse of Rome at large, it appears completely normal and acceptable for authors to adopt opposing strategies when it comes to the link between past and present. We could see this as a reflection of their complete and ruthless dedication to their goal, which they wanted to reach no matter what the cost. However, this paradox is also in some ways inherent in the aetiological discourse of Rome itself, which thrives on the positive associations of the ancient Roman heritage, but is used in a highly competitive setting. Moreover, the various strategies adopted by the humanists were directly taken from ancient literature, which they cleverly played out against each other.[40]

5 Replacement

This combining of strategies is also obvious in Celtis' *Inaugural Lecture at the University of Ingolstadt*, held in 1492:

39 E.g. Hor. *Epod.* 7; Liv. 1.6.4. (*avitum malum, regni cupido*).
40 See Hardie 1992.

> 5. (1) *Sed ad vos ego iam, nobiles viri et adolescentes generosi, orationem converto, ad quos avita virtute et Germano illo invicto robore Italiae imperium commigravit* [...] (7) *Tollite veterem illam apud Graecos, Latinos et Hebraeos scriptores Germanorum infamiam, qua illi nobis temulentiam, immanitatem, crudelitatem et, si quid aliud, quod bestiae et insaniae proximum est, ascribunt.* (8) *Magno vobis pudori ducite Graecorum et Latinorum nescire historias et super omnem impudentiam regionis nostrae et terrae nescire situm, sidera, flumina, montes, antiquitates, nationes, denique quae peregrini homines de nobis ita scite collegere* [...].
>
> But I now turn to you, celebrated men and well-born youths, to whom by the virtue of our ancestors and by that invincible German strength the Italian empire has migrated [...]. Wipe away the hackneyed slanders against the Germans by the Greek, Latin and Hebrew writers who ascribe to us drunkenness, savagery, barbarity and everything else brutish and deranged. Consider it shameful to be unfamiliar with the histories of the Greeks and Latins, and consider it beyond all shame to be unfamiliar with the territory, stars, rivers, mountains, antiquities and nations of our own region and our own land, and with all the things that foreign people have skillfully collected about us.[41]

In the first sentence Celtis claims the imperial power associated with the Roman empire for Germany, by assuming the *translatio imperii* on the basis of German virtue.[42] German power thus has a 'Roman' origin. At the same time Celtis assumes an inborn, 'German', origin of this same greatness. At least, for these German youths at the University of Ingolstadt he emphasizes that even more important than the Roman past is to know the German past.[43] This seeming paradox can be solved by stating that in Celtis' view only the German virtue is inborn, and that on this basis the imperial power which used to be

41 Text in Celtis 2003, 16–40. Selection and translation (with my adaptions) from Collins 2012.

42 See Goez 1958; Renger and Wiesehöfer 2006; and specifically in the case of the Holy Roman Empire: Kunst 2006. For how the concept was adopted by Celtis, see a.o. Hirschi 2012, 160. Generally speaking, humanists found legitimization of this historical scheme both in the *translatio imperii* from Troy to Rome as narrated in the *Aeneid* (cf. Hardie 2014, 104), as well as in the prophecies in the Old Testament Book of Daniel, on which the teaching of the Four Kingdoms was based (cf. Enenkel and Ottenheym 2017, 78).

43 Borchardt 1971.

Roman in origin has been transferred to them. This does not necessarily render them Roman in all respects.

However, instead of picking on paradoxes, let us consider the question of why Celtis focuses on German origins in the first place, and how it is connected to the rest of his thought. For if the inaugural lecture presents Celtis' theory, we can see how it works in practice in the following passage from his poetic *Germania generalis*, in which he writes the following:

> **Conrad Celtis, *Germania generalis* 60–65**
> *Indigena* [*sc. gens*] *haud alia ducens primordia gente*
> *Sed caelo producta suo, Demogorgonis alvus*
> *Protulerat patulas ubi cuncta creata sub auras.*
> *Germanos vocitant Itali, Graij sed Adelphos,*
> *Quod fratrum soleant inter se vivere more:*
> *Nomen, nobilibus quod adhuc venerabile nostris.*
>
> An indigenous people, not deriving its origin from another people, but produced under its own heaven, when the womb of the Demogorgon had produced everything that was created under the wide skies. The Italians call them 'Germans', but the Greeks 'Adelphoi', because they used to live among each other as brothers: a name that is still honored by our noblemen.[44]

In this passage the key term is 'indigenous'. By emphasizing that the Germans have local origins, Celtis uses the strong rhetorical power of heritage claims based on rootedness and location. Thus we may conclude from this passage that the German people, created indigenously from German soil, are still the same and still display the same characteristics as their ancient ancestors. This kind of reasoning also has the advantage that it can operate separately from Rome, and that it can replace a reasoning based on Roman origins.

However, Rome is never far away. First: the history of the Germans that is told in the *Germania generalis*, and in which the youths from Ingolstadt should be more interested than that of the 'Greeks and the Latins', is primarily found in ancient Roman sources. In fact, in the same sources as 'the hackneyed slanders against the Germans' are found, which the students should 'wipe away'. Celtis cleverly avoids saying it, but in reality the people who slandered Germany

44 Text and commentary in Celtis 2001.

are the same foreign people who skillfully collected all the information about them in the first place: ancient Roman historians like Tacitus.

Just as Ronsard explicitly referred to the *Aeneid* and used the same aetiological thinking as Virgil to reach a different conclusion, here we can observe how Celtis explicitly refers to ancient Roman aetiological thought about Germany and turns it to his advantage. In fact, by claiming the Germans' superiority because they are indigenous, Celtis uses in reverse the exact same arguments once made by Tacitus to prove their barbarism: that they are untainted 'noble savages', and that they are the product of their peculiar harsh climate.[45] Thus Celtis appropriates the image of Germany created by the Roman historians and turns the traditional contrast between Roman virtue and German vice into its opposite. Seen from this perspective it is actually to the Germans' advantage that they do not stem from the Romans, who we have seen in Celtis' epigrams to be morally bankrupt.[46]

Rome is not far away in another respect as well. By focusing on the local origins of German greatness, Celtis could impose a similar scheme of decline and renewal (*renovatio*) *on the same location* that had been so central to the Italian Renaissance's discourse about Rome. In this way he generated a German-based Renaissance instead of an 'imported' Roman-based Renaissance. This was however in many ways still an imitation of the Italian Renaissance.[47] We can see to what extent Celtis in fact adopted Italian strategies for example in his efforts to write a history of Germany (*Germania illustrata*), clearly inspired by Biondo's antiquarian works on Rome and Italy (e.g. his *Italia illustrata*).[48] German and Italian humanists nevertheless held different views on what exactly constituted the period of decline in between, the Germans having a much more positive view of their own 'Middle Ages' than the Italians.[49]

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45 I owe the formulation of this paradox and specific references to Tacitus to the anonymous reviewer. Cf. Tac. *Germ*. 2.1 (*ipsos Germanos indigenas crediderim*). For *caelo producta suo* (vs. 61) see Tac. *Germ*. 2.2 (*quis porro, praeter periculum horridi et ignoti maris, Asia aut Africa aut Italia relicta Germaniam peteret, informem terris, asperam caelo, tristem cultu aspectuque nisi si patria sit?*). About the reception of Tacitus in Germany, see Krebs 2005; and Krebs 2011.

46 The contrast between German virtue and Roman vice is also implied in this passage, in which the peaceful cohabitation of the Germans 'as brothers' triggers the memory of the fratricidal nature of the Romans, exemplified by Romulus killing his brother Remus (with thanks to Jacqueline Klooster for this suggestion).

47 For (the incompatibility of) these two kinds of thought in Celtis see Jaumann 1999.

48 For this project, to which the *Germania generalis* also belonged, see Collins 2012 and Celtis 2001, 441–483.

49 That said, it is equally important to realize that a large part of what we nowadays consider medieval was actually regarded ancient by the humanists, as explained in Enenkel and Ottenheym 2017, 76–88.

6 Conclusion

In referring to and reflecting on the origins of Rome, Renaissance poets employed the ancient aetiological discourse in similar ways as their ancient Roman predecessors had. In their aetiologies they used the same myths, the same literary templates, and had the same objectives: to legitimize a certain political, cultural or religious status quo. However, since the status quo that had to be legitimized was not the same, the resulting aetiologies were not exactly the same either.

During the Renaissance there were many different parties (e.g. cities, nations, empires) interested in claiming ancient Roman origins as these were still the most authoritative origins one could wish for. This resulted on the one hand in various strategies to argue for a privileged link with these ancient origins, by *reviving* or *reinventing* the Roman foundation myths. On the other hand, because of the competitive nature of heritage, the process gave way to various strategies to undermine the privileged links of others, by *rejecting* the Roman origins. Finally, in an attempt to appropriate the powerful scheme of a *renovatio*, some shifted the attention to *local* instead of Roman origins.

Which strategy was chosen depended on the specific goals that had to be served. Whereas the Popes, who had the advantage of location, could simply revive the Roman foundation myths, non-Roman (or non-Italian) parties often combined the other strategies to make their own case as strong as possible and to weaken the Roman case at the same time. In all of this, they did not care too much for consistency, but focused on the message instead.

What all these strategies have in common is that they were adopted and derived their authority from the ancient aetiological discourse, which turned out flexible enough to accommodate all these different uses. For one thing, Rome's foundation myths were especially suitable for appropriation both within and outside of Renaissance Rome, precisely because they combine stories that emphasize the continuity of location with those that create continuity on the basis of genealogy. Most importantly, however, the ancient discourse offered the Renaissance poets examples of how aetiology could create a privileged link between the ancient Roman past and some desired present.

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PART 3

Aetiology in Myth and Science: From Religion to Research

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CHAPTER 6

Resistance to Origins

Cult Foundation in the Myths of Dionysus, Apollo, and Demeter

Susanne Gödde

1 Introduction

Aetiological myths exercise a particular fascination by virtue not only of their content, but also their incongruous use of a common narratological practice: they construct their plots backwards, starting the creative process not from the beginning, but from the end.[1] Once the beginning – the cause and explanation of an already well-known result – has been identified, the mythic events can, of course, be related in chronological order. The interpreter should therefore bear in mind that the course of the story has not necessarily been shaped by a logical sequence of individual narrative elements, but predominately by the intended outcome. When regarded in this way, aetiological myths can be said to reverse the temporal order of beginning and end by emphasising the end more strongly than the beginning, the consequence more than the cause. At the same time, *aitia* are emphatically interested in beginnings and origins. It is the beginning that is meant to lend dignity and meaning to the resultant and contemporary practice or institution.

The interpreter is invited to read aetiological myths in two different ways. Anyone who follows the conventional reading practice of reading from beginning to end and who understands the outcome as the result of the preceding parts of the plot must, at the same time, take into account that the end of the story was known to the author before its beginning. The reader who begins at the end, however, and moves 'backwards' towards the beginning will realise the beginning's dependency on the end. This manner of reading necessarily entails the question of whether the events related provide the only possible explanation for the *explanandum*. This problem becomes more prominent when we encounter multiple aetiologies competing for a single outcome.[2] Similarly, aetiologies in which an asymmetrical relationship exists between the explanation and the thing explained also give rise to doubts regarding the

1 On reverse composition in aetiological narratives see most recently Gödde 2019.

2 See Loehr 1996.

stringency and monocausality of a given explanation. This leads to the question how – and how clearly and in what terms – aetiological myths lay claim to the *factuality* and *truth* of the explanations they offer.[3] Do they present one possible explanation amongst many? Or is the myth presented intended as the only possible explanation, and therefore as the true explanation?

Authors of aetiological myths, by speaking from the perspective of the present, in most cases, acknowledge at least implicitly that they were not themselves witnesses to the past of which they tell, but can access and analyse it only by means of narrative.[4] This underscores the often *fictional status* of aetiological stories. The presence of the narrator, and the (usually distant) past in which the narrated origin is situated, stand in marked contrast to one another. In view of this divide, scholarship has tended to emphasise the ability of aetiological myths to establish continuity between the past and the present.[5] Aetiological myths are commonly said to make it easier to cope with and control the past by constructing it not just as the *origin* of, but also as the *reason* for the present. In other words, it is claimed that aetiologies serve as a strategy for appropriating history for ideological use. This has been shown most recently by Jacqueline Klooster in her work on Apollonius of Rhodes, whose aetiological narrative she characterises as the "Hellenising of the known world".[6] At the same time, however, Klooster emphasises that it is "useless to know what Apollonius actually believed to be true", since the Argo voyages over an "imaginary map".[7]

Although the terms 'aetiology' and 'aetiological' are frequently strengthened by attributes such as 'authenticating' and 'foundational' (in both its emphatic and literal senses), their use should not obscure the fact that the aetiological *explanandum* alone constitutes a historical fact, while the narrative itself should be considered a poetic fiction. This distinction, which also applies to the original use of the term by the Old Testament scholar Hermann Gunkel,[8] is commonly ignored in the different theoretical approaches to mythology.

3 A thorough examination of these questions can be found in Veyne 1983.

4 For an exception to this, in which an aetiological myth is reported within a narrative, see Verg. *A*. 8.184–305, where Evander refers to the foundation of the cult of Heracles at the Ara Maxima. I thank the anonymous reviewer from Brill for this reference. On this passage see also Alexander Kirichenko's chapter in this volume.

5 For the construction of the past in mythology, see e.g. Dowden 1992; for Hellenistic literature, see Bing 1988; cf. also Veyne 1983, who emphasises aetiology's obsession with origins in his chapter 'Restoring Etiological Truth to Myth' (English translation: Veyne 1988, 71–78).

6 Klooster 2014, 531.

7 Ibid., 536.

8 Waldner 2014, 35. On Gunkel see also the introduction and Jacqueline Klooster's chapter in this volume.

Proponents of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion, such as Mircea Eliade, understand myths as being *per se* aetiological, because, in their view, all myths claim to handle fundamental aspects of human existence.[9] Under different auspices, 19th century analysts of myth, such as the classicist Karl Otfried Müller in Göttingen, postulated a close connection between mythology and history. According to this perspective, each and every myth refers back to and explains a historical event, and thereby gains, in the words of Müller, "faktische Wahrheit" ('factual truth'), with the result that "in ihm das Faktische mit dem Gedachten verschmolzen [ist]" ('facts and imagination coalesce with each other').[10]

As these brief remarks on conceptualising aetiology show, the term encompasses an entire spectrum of types of explanations. These range from the 'foundation' of the human condition, as in Hesiod's Prometheus narrative,[11] to the politico-ideological construction of territorial relations that we see in Apollonius[12] (amongst others). They also include what I have called 'asymmetrical' aetiologies, in which the *aition* functions to a certain extent as a pretext for telling a story that could have achieved essentially the same effect without providing a final explanation of how something came into the world. (I think we can safely say that this holds true for many stories in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.) Aetiologies can therefore be regarded as oscillating between poetic fiction and claims to historical facticity. They play with possible realities.

In their function of conveying knowledge about something previously unknown and explaining what has not yet been understood, aetiologies also present a dichotomy between known and unknown as well as between rational and irrational. Their tone is always rationalising, inasmuch as they create, explain, and organise contexts and correlations. Viewed from this perspective, aetiologies may also be said to challenge something – or, put more concretely: with their impetus to rationalise, aetiologies oppose the irrational, which they retrospectively domesticate and make comprehensible. They thereby contribute decisively to the debates surrounding religious institutions and rituals. Whether aetiologies confirm these institutions and rituals, or instead question them critically from an 'enlightened' standpoint, remains to be analysed.

In what follows, I would like to focus on three cultic aetiologies which, in my view, do not only explain and legitimate the development of their respective

9 Ibid., 34.
10 Müller 1825, 67 and 70.
11 Cf. Vernant 1974, 1979 and 1987; see also Renger 2012.
12 On Apollonius Rhodius see Annette Harder's chapter in this volume.

cults, but, at the same time, designate it as *problematic* and *oppositional*, and even *defer* the ultimate moment of foundation in and by the narrative itself. The aetiologies in question are those of ecstatic Dionysian ritual, Apollo's cults in Delos and Delphi, and the Eleusinian mysteries. I hope to show how aetiological explanations can depict not only the origin of cults, but also a certain resistance to the foundation of these cults – a resistance which brings into relief the stunning otherness of the divine presence and which should not be seen as reflecting actual historical opposition to a cult.

2 Dionysus and the Resistance Myths

Among the myths surrounding the god Dionysus can be found a cluster of stories commonly referred to as 'resistance myths'.[13] In this type of myth, the protagonists – whether individually or as a collective – refuse Dionysus cult worship, and, as a rule, also reject the accompanying ecstatic practices or, in some versions, his notably strange and unfamiliar cultic image and attributes. At least nine instances of resistance to his cult can be traced in extant literary, historical, philological, and lexicographical works, in each of which the resistance myth tends to assume a different narrative role and religious meaning. While examining these sources, we must always take the individual context into consideration and carefully avoid subsuming the divergent versions indiscriminately under an allegedly common story pattern. An extensive discussion of the general relationship between myth and literature[14] and the question whether distinct mythical story patterns exist independently of their poetic adaptations, however, lies beyond the scope of this chapter. The focus will instead be on the aetiological dimension of these stories, i.e. on the possible connection between resistance – or, in some cases, delay – and foundation.

The first variant of the above-mentioned pattern is the myth of Icarius:[15] here, resistance and rejection are not openly directed against the god himself,

13 Both complete and partial lists of stories belonging to this pattern can be found, together with comments on this underlying motif, in Kolb 1977, esp. 116, n. 97; Kerényi 1976, ch. 4.5; Sourvinou-Inwood 1994; Cole 2007, 330sq.; Lämmle 2007, esp. 372, n. 132; Gödde 2011, 101–103.

14 For brief remarks on the relation between myth and religion and their dependence on literature, see Gödde 2016, 121–123; for a more extensive treatment, see Graf 1991, especially chapters 3–7.

15 Eratosthenes, *Erigone* frgg. 22–26 Powell; for the latest discussion of the fragments, possible sources and variants of the story, and further bibliography, see Rosokoki 1995. The most detailed version of the story is found in Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 47.34–264. For the Icarius myth as reflecting resistance to the cult of Dionysus, see Lämmle 2007, 372, n. 132;

but against the gift of wine which Dionysus has brought to the Attic farmer Icarius. Icarius, in turn, brings wine and the knowledge of its cultivation to his neighbours, who promptly fall victim to the effects of drinking it unmixed and kill Icarius in their intoxication. Icarius' corpse is found by his daughter, Erigone, who hangs herself for grief. Some versions[16] relate that the young girls of Athens were in consequence stricken with madness and followed Erigone's example by hanging themselves; the oracle of Apollo at Delphi thereupon advised the Athenians to honour Icarius and Erigone with annual rites. The murder of Icarius, the bearer of Dionysus' gift, can here be seen as the equivalent of the immediate rejection of the god's cult in other versions of the motif. Primarily, however, the story serves to explain the practice of paying cult to Icarius and Erigone.

In another myth, the daughters of Eleuther (2) are reported to have mocked the appearance of Dionysus, who, draped in a black goatskin, came to them in a vision. In retribution for their disobedience, he drove them mad; only after consenting to honour the god were they freed from this state.[17]

An analogous myth tells of the Athenians' (3) rejection of a particular statue of the god which Pegasus brought from Eleutherae in Boeotia to Attica. The Athenians spurned the god and in return were punished with a disease of the male genitals. In order to be released from this epidemic, they sought the advice of the Delphic Oracle, who instructed them to accept and honour the god in their city. 'The Athenians', as a scholiast has it, 'complied with the oracle's instructions and made phalloi, both publicly and privately, and honoured the god with them in memory of their affliction, but perhaps also because the god is the cause [αἴτιος] of the procreation of children (for drunkenness excites pleasure and acts as an aphrodisiac)'.[18]

Burkert 1972, 247–249 and Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 187, n. 54 both discuss the relation of this myth to the festival of the *Choes* during the Anthesteria. The Icarius myth also contains familiar elements of the *theoxenia*-motif, whose probable relation to the foundation of the *Choes* is discussed by Rosokoki 1995, 107–114 and Flückiger-Guggenheim 1984, 108–111.

16 Hyg. *Astr*. 2.4.196sqq.; schol. Bernens. in Verg. *G*. 1.33; Hyg. *Fab*. 130; Ael. *NA* 7.28; see Rosokoki 1995, 50sq. and 57.

17 Suda s.v. μέλαν: [...] καὶ Μελαναιγίδα Διόνυσον ἱδρύσαντο ἐκ τοιαύτης αἰτίας. αἱ τοῦ Ἐλευθῆρος θυγατέρες θεασάμεναι φάσμα τοῦ Διονύσου ἔχον μελάνην αἰγίδα ἐμέμψαντο· ὁ δὲ ὀργισθεὶς ἐξέμηνεν αὐτάς. μετὰ ταῦτα ὁ Ἐλευθὴρ ἔλαβε χρησμὸν ἐπὶ παύσει τῆς μανίας τιμῆσαι Μελαναιγίδα Διόνυσον.

18 Schol. ad. Ar. *Ach*. 243a: περὶ δὲ αὐτοῦ τοῦ φαλλοῦ τοιαῦτα λέγεται. Πήγασος ἐκ τῶν Ἐλευθερῶν – αἱ δὲ Ἐλευθεραὶ πόλις εἰσὶ τῆς Βοιωτίας – λαβὼν τοῦ Διονύσου τὸ ἄγαλμα ἦκεν εἰς τὴν Ἀττικήν. οἱ δὲ Ἀττικοὶ οὐκ ἐδέξαντο μετὰ τιμῆς τὸν θεόν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀμισθί γε αὐτοῖς ταῦτα βουλευσαμένοις ἀπέβη. μηνίσαντος γὰρ τοῦ θεοῦ νόσος κατέσκηψεν εἰς τὰ αἰδοῖα τῶν ἀνδρῶν

In two partly parallel myths, the daughters of Minyas (4)[19] and the daughters of Proetus (5),[20] respectively, reject the ecstatic rites of Dionysus and prefer to remain at home working at their looms. Both groups of maidens go mad, and one of the Minyades is reported to have killed her son in her madness. Plutarch links the story of the Minyades' fate with the Agrionia festival, at which a priest of Dionysus pursued the fleeing daughters with a sword. Ovid and some Hellenistic poets conclude the myth with the transformation of the girls into birds. Whether the sequence of resistance and punishment is meant to be an *aition* for the ultimate installation of the cult is not revealed explicitly by Plutarch.[21] As for the Proetides, in most versions, the girls are healed by the seer Melampus, considered by Herodotus as the founder of the cult of Dionysus in Greece (2.49).[22]

The aspect of violence is intensified in two variants of the resistance-motif: the myths of the *theomachoi* Perseus (6)[23] and Lycurgus (7),[24] who prosecute Dionysus and his female followers. Whilst Lycurgus is punished by Zeus with

καὶ τὸ δεινὸν ἀνήκεστον ἦν. ὡς δὲ ἀπεῖπον πρὸς τὴν νόσον κρείττω γενομένην πάσης ἀνθρωπείας μαγγανείας καὶ τέχνης, ἀπεστάλησαν θεωροὶ μετὰ σπουδῆς· οἳ δὴ ἐπανελθόντες ἔφασαν ἴασιν ταύτην εἶναι μόνην, εἰ διὰ τιμῆς ἁπάσης ἄγοιεν τὸν θεόν. πεισθέντες οὖν τοῖς ἠγγελμένοις οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι φαλλοὺς ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ κατεσκεύασαν, καὶ τούτοις ἐγέραιρον τὸν θεόν, ὑπόμνημα ποιούμενοι τοῦ πάθους. ἴσως δὲ καὶ ὅτι παίδων γενέσεως αἴτιος ὁ θεός· ἡδονὴν γὰρ καὶ ἀφροδίσια μέθη ἐξανίστησι (Text: Wilson 1975; English translation adapted from that of Ridgeway 1910, 51sq.; see also Paus. 1.2.5; Philochorus *FGrH* 328 F5).

19 Daughters of Minyas: Plu. *Quaestiones Graecae* 299e–f; Ael. *VH* 3.42; Ov. *Met*. 4.1–40, 390–415.

20 Daughters of Proetus: Hes. fr. 79 Most [131 Merkelbach-West]; Pherecydes *FGrH* 3 F114; Acusilaos *FGrH* 2 F29; Apollod. 1.9.12 and 2.2.2. For further commentary on this myth and its different versions, see Mattes 1970, 22sq. and 55; Henrichs 1974; Dowden 1989, 71–96; Gantz 1993, 188sq. and Cole 2007, 330.

21 On the Agrionia, see Burkert 1972, 189–200. Burkert's treatment of the difficult material is, unfortunately, as obscure and elusive as the sources themselves.

22 Dowden 1989, 71–95 claims that there were originally two different traditions (one for the 'Proetides' and one for 'Women of Argos'), and that these were contaminated. According to Dowden, whilst the original version of the Proetides' story related that the girls were driven mad by Hera and healed by Artemis (which then lead to the foundation of the cult of Artemis Hemera at Lousoi), a 'Dionysiac source', which was similar to or identical with the Hesiodic *Melampodia* (see Löffler 1963), related that the women of Argos were maddened by Dionysus and healed by Melampus. This version of the myth does not explicitly include a cult foundation, *pace* Seaford 1994, 254, who concludes, referring to the Proetides as well as to the Minyades, that "in both cases the divine imposition of horror must be motivated – by the rejection of his cult, which is nevertheless eventually installed".

23 Perseus fighting against Dionysus: Paus. 2.20.4; 2.37.7–8. On *theomachoi* in tragedy, see Kamerbeek 1948.

24 Lycurgus prosecuting Dionysus: *Il*. 6.130–140.

blindness for his aggression towards Dionysus, the outcome of Perseus' struggle with Dionysus is more difficult to assess. The myth of Perseus is unique insofar as the sources make no mention of the god being initially rejected by mortals, but instead begin with Dionysus' assault on the Argives. Perseus is able to ward off Dionysus and his maenads, whose tombs were still shown to visitors in Pausanias' time as relics of these mythical events. Although this conflict, apparently initiated by Dionysus, ends in his defeat, it nevertheless leads to the establishment of a temple and cult in his honour – this time without the god's retaliation against his former human opponents. Pausanias reports: '[…] there is […] a temple of Cretan Dionysus. For they say that the god, having made war on Perseus, afterwards laid aside his enmity, and received great honours at the hands of the Argives, including this precinct set specially apart for himself.'[25] The victory of Perseus is singular in the resistance myths surrounding Dionysus.

A further variant of the resistance myth can be seen in the failure of the Tyrrhenian pirates (8) to recognise the god's divinity, as told in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*. The best known – and most complex example – of conflict arising over the cult of Dionysus is, of course, that found in Euripides' *Bacchae* (9).[26]

In almost all of these myths, it is possible to construe Dionysus' reaction to being rejected, at least at first glance, as 'punishment': the daughters of Eleuther, as well as those of Minyas, Proetus, and, in the *Bacchae*, of Cadmus, are driven into the very frenzy that they had sought to spurn, and kill their own or another's children. The Tyrrhenian sailors of the Homeric hymn are transformed into dolphins, and Lycurgus is punished with blindness – by Zeus, however, and not by Dionysus; in later versions of the story, Lycurgus also kills his own son. The only figure for whom the sources have not transmitted a punishment is Perseus, whose opposition to Dionysus possibly has a different status from the campaigns of other *theomachoi*. Icarius also might be regarded as a special case, since his neighbours rebel against the gift of Dionysus by killing its bearer (i.e. Icarius), but are not themselves punished. The myth is probably

25 Paus. 2.23.8 (transl. W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod 1918). See also Burkert 1972, 197, n. 33, whose reconstruction of the Argive events includes the death of Dionysus (Burkert does not cite a source for Dionysus' death in this context, however, and I am unable to locate any reference to it in the ancient texts).

26 For the motif of resistance as an important aspect for interpreting Euripides' *Bacchae*, see especially Seaford 1994, 254sq. with n. 96 and 293: "[…] the myth of Pentheus, which relates the institution of Dionysiac cult at Thebes, is typical of the aetiological myth of cult in describing the catastrophe or savagery that preceded the institution of the cult."

meant to give an explanation not only for the veneration of Icarius and his daughter, but also for the practice of drinking wine mixed with water.[27]

I have shown in an earlier article how singular and significant the pattern of resistance is in myths of Dionysus;[28] in no other myth about a god do we find this motif with the same vividness.[29] The motif has often been seen as reflecting Dionysus' foreignness, i.e. the notion that he came to Greece from distant Lydia in the east or Thrace in the north, and that he and his apparently 'barbaric' ecstatic rituals were rejected because of this. His origin, however, has since been decisively proven to be Greek. Furthermore, it must be considered that the motif of resisting Dionysus belongs exclusively to mythological narratives. It bears no correspondence to any historically documented religious-political measures taken against his cult, which in fact maintained a respectable reputation alongside other divine cults until the Roman Bacchanalian scandal of 186 BCE.[30] The resistance-motif should clearly be understood as reflecting the otherness of Dionysus,[31] as an "attestation to the violent intensity of his epiphany",[32] or as an articulation of "ritual tensions and symbolic opposition" in his cult.[33] In what follows, I would like to expand upon these earlier observations by delving deeper into the aetiological structure of these myths, and by presenting a comparable motif from the myths of other gods: the opposition to establishing a divine cult. This approach allows aetiologies to be seen as a narrative form that not only validates religious cults, but also defamiliarises them and calls them into question.

The Dionysian resistance myths are frequently – and perhaps incautiously – subsumed under a single rubric. In his book *Introducing New Gods*, for example, Robert Garland summarises this rubric in a chapter titled "The World of the Athenian *Aition*" as a succession of four stages: "petition, rejection, reprisal and cult of atonement".[34] Garland's thesis that this aetiological rubric represents an attempt to explain the *historical* fact of Dionysus' introduction into Greece, i.e. his geographical and cultural otherness and strangeness, need not concern us here. The postulated four-stage model can also, as I would like

27 Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 274, who regards the Icarius myth as reflecting the notion of a loss of control over oneself, parallel to the disturbance of societal order caused by Dionysus' cult in the myths of Pentheus and Lycurgus.

28 Gödde 2011.

29 Traces of this motif may, however, also appear in the myths of Apollo and Demeter, as I will show below.

30 For this important observation, see Versnel 1990, 149sq.

31 Parker 1996, 160.

32 Otto 1933, 71sq.

33 Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 274.

34 Garland 1992, 158.

to propose, be detached from historical developments and instead seen as reflecting the cult symbolically or even psychologically. In this case, it is not so much that the myth attempts to explain an actual foreign origin of Dionysus, but rather that it represents a way to process and understand the cultic experience of 'otherness' that accompanies ecstatic ritual. The *theomachoi* would then represent – on the level of myth – a rational opposition to the god. The act of resistance explains first and foremost the introduction of the cult, which is established in reciprocity for relief from divine punishment and as reparation for initially rejecting the cult. Garland, in strongly theological terms, speaks here of a 'cult of atonement'.

The following aetiological scenario – although admittedly hypothetical and primarily heuristic – is conceivable: confronted with the venerable cult practice of Dionysian ecstatic ritual, writers of local and cult histories recognised the need to explain and legitimise the behaviour of the practitioners – behaviour which was not always easy to understand and certainly did not seem very rational at first sight. They then imposed rationalising logic to the effect that a society could hardly be willing to tolerate and integrate such strange and possibly even dangerous conduct. This could only come to pass as a consequence of the god's power and his threat – or implementation – of punishment. With the invention of a *forced* acceptance of Dionysian cult under opposition, Greek culture could save, as it were, its rationality – without having to abolish ecstatic Dionysian ritual (which may not have been so unpleasant after all).

To some extent, this explanation is based on an idealised typology of the narrative pattern and the cult behind it. It assumes that the Greeks imagined, on the level of mythological thought and aetiological reflection, that they had accepted the cult only under compulsion, in order to avoid being punished with enduring and violent ecstatic frenzy. This could instead be directed into controllable channels without being abolished. Dionysus enforces his cult and protects it against the resistance of future cult participants by threatening them with prolonged, self-destructive violence: the authors of local cult history use this recurrent narrative to justify excessive behaviour at particular festivals as a form of ritual observance, without which the god would inflict something far worse upon them.

In contrast both to Sourvinou-Inwood, who analyses the myth's content as chiefly psychological and didactic,[35] as well as to Garland, whose interpretation is dominated by the nexus of guilt and punishment, Walter Burkert proposes an explanation with a stronger structural emphasis. Referring to the Agrionia ritual, Burkert speaks of the "polar tension between divine madness

35 Sourvinou-Inwood 1994, 289.

and human order as acted out in a singular ritual",[36] but he refers also – in the context of foundational violence – to the "reestablishment of order in the polis [as] the antithesis of perversion".[37]

The status of aetiology in the resistance myths discussed is, without doubt, also largely dependent upon the genre and type of text in which a myth is transmitted. Once a basic model has been developed for the relevant material, this model must be examined against a possible counter-model and critical attention given to the differences. Violent conflicts between the *theomachoi* and the god do not always result in the immediate establishment or renewal of the god's cult. Specifically, Euripides' *Bacchae* does not end with Dionysus' victorious entrance into the city of Thebes, as the interpretation of René Girard and others imply,[38] unless we conjecture that this was the logical consequence of the dramatic plot and took place outside of it. According to the Athenian *aitia*, known to us primarily from ancient local historians and commentators, the daughters of Eleuther are punished with madness and the Athenians with a disease of the genitals.[39] While in these *aitia* both punishments are in fact brought to an end with the establishment of cults – that of Dionysus Melanaigis and the phallic procession in Athens, respectively – the same is clearly not the case in the Homeric version of the Lycurgus myth, in which Dionysus flees to the protection of the sea-goddess Thetis. As these examples show, it is reasonable to differentiate between what one might call 'closed' aetiologies – those involving a resolution to the conflict and compensation for initial cult rejection, and which are to be found mainly in non-poetic sources – and

36 Burkert 1972, 198; transl. P. Bing 1983, 177.

37 Burkert 1972, 193; transl. P. Bing 1983, 172. The assumption that the violence acted out in myth is only the precedent of re-established order is also crucial for Dowden's interpretation of the material. He writes of the Agrionia festival (1989, 84) that "[t]he rhythm implies that female superiority and *sparagmos* of the male, suspending the norms of civilized society, are the centre of the festival. But male pursuit restores the status quo. For society as a whole this is a new beginning apparently celebrated in a New Year ritual [...]."

38 Girard 1972, 185sq.: "Après avoir causé la mort de Penthée, le dieu chasse de la ville les restes de cette famille. La paix et l'ordre peuvent revenir dans une Thèbes qui rendra, désormais, à la nouvelle divinité, le culte qu'elle réclame." Cf. also ibid., 190: "La légitimité du dieu se reconnaît non pas au fait qu'il trouble la paix mais qu'il restaure lui-même la paix qu'il a troublée, ce qui le justifie *a posteriori* de l'avoir troublée, l'action divine se muant en colère légitime contre une *hubris* blasphématoire dont rien, jusqu'à l'unanimité fondatrice, ne le différencie." (German translation: Girard 1994, 194 and 198sq.). See also Seaford 1994, 254–256 with n. 96, who implies that Dionysus announced the installation of his cult in the lost part of his final speech and who writes, 255: "The *Bacchae* provides us with another crisis that ends with the creation of a polis cult for Dionysos." See further ibid., 293 and n. 26 above.

39 See above notes 17 and 18.

a tendential disinclination from monocausal and stabilising aetiologies in epic and tragic sources.

According to Plutarch, the myths of the daughters of Minyas were commemorated and re-enacted in the Agrionia ritual. The mimetic and mnemonic relationship that Plutarch establishes between early times and his own day represents a further variety of aetiological narrative. Analysis is complicated not only because the myths of the Minyades and Proetides partly overlap one another, but also because the transmission of the myths and reports of the ritual is fragmentary. It would be incautious to see the establishment of the Agrionia festival as equivalent to the introduction of the cult of Dionysus Melanaigis by Eleuther, the Athenian *phallophoria*, or the erection of a temple for Dionysus in Argos after his unsuccessful confrontation with Perseus. The foundation of the Agrionia is not part of the mythological account of the Minyades story, but rather a ritual and mimetic reflection of it.[40] Although it is tempting to insert the ultimate acceptance and cultic veneration of the god into the narrative at the same point where it is found in other stories of this pattern, we must bear in mind that this element is absent from sources on the Minyades and Proetides and can only be added by analogy. The order of the polis, which Walter Burkert and others regard as being evoked by the Agrionia in 'antithesis' to the perversion of order, might however be present in the conclusion of the story, when the girls are healed from their madness.

Dionysian resistance myths represent a unique group of aetiological myths, because they tentatively make a moment of negation into the motivating cause for reflecting and explaining a cult. In most cases, this opens the possibility of joining the foundation of a cult with the impressive entrance of its god, who asserts himself against opposition. The cult is thereby rationalised and, at the same time, rendered problematic. If we accept this as conventional, then the two cases that deviate from this model take on added significance. As mentioned above, Dionysus' cult never comes to be established in Euripides' *Bacchae*, because the 'punishment' is so violent as to be beyond redress;[41] in the Homeric version of the Lycurgus myth, the cult cannot be founded, because Dionysus, himself the victim of violent pursuit, finds himself in a position too weak for asserting his power and defending his cult.

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40 In the case of the Agrionia, the exact relation between myth and ritual is especially difficult to grasp. Does the ritual reflect an antecedent myth, as assumed above, or, conversely, is the myth to be understood as the retrospective explanation of an existent ritual? This question has occupied scholars of myth since the beginnings of the discipline. See e.g. Graf 1991, ch. 5, and below, n. 46.

41 But compare the opposite position taken by Seaford 1994, see above, notes 26 and 38.

In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to look briefly at the motif of resisting cult foundation in the Homeric hymns to Apollo and Demeter. It must be taken into account that these works differ from the narratives of resistance to Dionysus not only by nature of their genre, but also in that they present a more general aetiological feature: both hymns relate how a particular divinity comes into being and acquires the *timai* for which he or she receives veneration.[42] The obstacles encountered by Apollo and Demeter merely delay the foundation of their cults and must be distinguished from the active resistance met by Dionysus. These obstacles nevertheless deserve a closer look: why have the poets of the hymns chosen to render the establishment of the cults as problematic at all? Does this choice reflect a way of thinking critically about gods and their cults? Or is it rather a narrative feature to provide entertainment and increase the suspense, or a rhetorical device meant to accentuate the power of the gods?

3 Apollo and Cult Foundation in Delos and Delphi

In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, opposition to the birth and cult of Apollo first arises on the divine plane, amongst gods and local deities personifying places. Fear of the powerful new god as articulated by 'lesser' deities can, however, readily be interpreted as a projection of human anxieties upon divine protagonists.[43] Leto's desperate search for a place to bear her two children, Artemis and Apollo, belongs to the myth of Apollo since the *Homeric Hymns*, in which the god and his mother are turned away by virtually the entire Mediterranean world. The narrator explains that the reason for this was fear of Apollo: 'they were very tremulous and afraid, and none, however rich, ventured to accept

42 On the general aetiological features of the Homeric hymns, see Parker 1991 and Chappell 2006. Both papers draw attention to aspects that provide the starting point for this chapter as well; cf. Parker 1991, 11: "[I]n a 'theogonic' and aetiological poem, the reader can indeed make sense of the narrative, but in terms less of motives than of results"; Chappell 2006, 336: "Since the purpose of the narrative is to tell how the god came to have some of his present functions, the structure is often determined by this rather than by what we would consider logically or psychologically motivated reasons."

43 The motif of fear is central for the interpretation of the hymn presented by Strauss Clay 1989, 20sq., who criticises the attempt of most scholars to mitigate the aggressive tone of the opening lines. Her reading recalls the structural sequence of resistance and reparation in the Dionysus myths: "Initial fear yielding to subsequent joy accompanies his [*sc.* Apollo's] manifestations throughout the hymn and forms the identifying feature of the god" (29). In the course of the *Hymn to Apollo*, it becomes clear that, as in the narratives about Dionysus, epiphany is intimately interwoven with the motifs of fear and resistance.

Phoibos' (47–48).[44] This is not the first mention of fear in connection with Apollo; the hymn had already introduced the motif in its opening scene, where the Olympian gods themselves 'tremble' at his entry (τρομέουσιν, 2). As Leto fails to move the isle of Delos to receive her even with promises of future fame, the motif of fear remains present: 'they say', replies (the personified) island of Delos, '[that] Apollo will be an all too wild sort (λίην … ἀτάσθαλον), and lord it greatly over immortals and mortals across the grain-giving land. So my heart is terribly afraid that as soon as he sees the light of the sun he may spurn this island, as I am indeed rocky of soil, and kick it over into the sea's expanses' (67–73).[45] Only by swearing a powerful oath that Apollo will honour the island beyond all measure can Leto assuage Delos' fear and win her binding pledge to receive the god.[46]

In later versions of the myth, most prominently in Callimachus' *Delian Hymn*, the motif of Leto's wandering and her repeated rejection are caused by personal animosity: here, it is Hera who threatens lands, cities, islands, and rivers with violence should they receive her rival Leto. The fearful, panicked reaction of these localities is, in Callimachus, thus directed primarily towards Hera, and not at Apollo[47] – an indirect and playful way of delaying the birth of the god in the poem, and, at the same time, a way of 'correcting' a perceived demonisation of the god.

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44 αἱ δὲ μάλ' ἐτρόμεον καὶ ἐδείδισαν, οὐδέ τις ἔτλη/Φοῖβον δέξασθαι καὶ πιοτέρη περ ἐοῦσα. Greek text: Allen, Halliday, and Sikes 1936; English translation: West 2003.

45 Together with the opening of the hymn, this scene has been frequently dismissed as humorous or grotesque: for a contrary stance see Strauss Clay 1989, 35–37, who views the term ἀτάσθαλος as expressing the "savagely lawless and overbearing nature" of the god (quotation: 36). Strauss Clay's reading focusses on the theogonic pattern of the succession myth and sees Apollo as "the potential violator of the Olympian order" (38). Nevertheless, she concludes that Apollo eventually "proves to be a formidable guarantor of his father's order" (94). My interpretation here follows a similar line and holds that fear of the god builds part of a dynamic which questions and delays the destined installation of his cult.

46 For a more structural interpretation of the *aition*, see Graf 1991, 101 who writes: "Doch der Mythos ist intimer mit dem Kultort verflochten, als daß er eine bloß äußerliche Begründung für die Heiligkeit des Ortes gäbe. Dem Paradox der Geburt des so mächtigen Gottes auf der winzigen Insel […] entspricht das Paradox des Kultes, daß die kleine Insel Ort eines so bedeutenden Heiligtums wurde […]."

47 Hera's jealousy also makes a brief appearance in the *Hymn to Apollo*. Cf. Richardson 2010, 90: "This motif is alluded to at 97–107, where Hera tries to prevent Eileithyia from assisting the birth, but it is not given full prominence." Strauss Clay 1989, 42sq. assesses the twofold explanation of Leto's rejection as follows: "The divine hostility of Hera to the new god runs parallel to the terrestrial fear. Both, presumably, do no more than amplify the greatness of Apollo. But we have already seen that the fear of the nations, which may be our poet's innovation, introduces a whole new cosmic and theogonic dimension into the hymn."

In the second or 'Delphic' part of the poem, the Homeric hymn continues its narrative of the god's violent and fear-inspiring entrance into the world as he begins his search for a suitable site to found an oracle. Here, the Telphousa episode (255–276) varies the motif of fear to one of rivalry. The spring Telphousa finds reason to dissuade the god from building his temple next to her, claiming that the location would be much too bustling and noisy for this – a pretext to avoid being supplanted by the more powerful god Apollo. Following the foundation of his sanctuary in Delphi, Apollo returns and destroys the spring (375–387). The episode provides an *aition* for the epithet and cult honours of Apollo Telphousios,[48] and suggests that the god was only able to win the location for himself by means of violence in the face of opposition. Again, it is important to remember that the epithet and corresponding cult in which the episode results have, in fact, provided the starting point for the creation of the story, and that the quarrel between the god and the nymph represents only one of many possible ways to reach this outcome. The cult epithet opens up a gap in the narrative, which the poet then fills with a programmatic aetiology that characterises the god in a certain way.[49] At the same time, Apollo's violent appropriation of the cult site can also be said to reveal his authority and power, and to expose the distance felt by the environment towards the god.

The motif of slaying a dragon, which stands at the beginning of numerous foundation acts in Greek myth,[50] involves a form of opposition that belongs to

48 This is one of three *aitia* in the hymn which explain a cult name of Apollo: Pythios (372–374), Telphousios (385–387), and Delphinios (493–495). Telphousa has been interpreted as one of the opponents of the god, similar to Hera and the Delphic serpent: see Strauss Clay 1989, 73 with n. 176. For the general aetiological character of this hymn, see e.g. Kolk 1963, who connects the hymn's narrative with the Delphic Septerion festival, at which the slaying of the dragon was re-enacted every year. The connection between the myth and the ritual was already a matter of dispute for ancient interpreters. Kolk's emphasis on Apollo's atonement as being at the centre of this ritual misses the point of the hymn, which is clearly not interested in Apollo's expiation following the killing, a fact which Kolk himself mentions several times (11, 26, 52), but does not allow to divert him from his central argument. On this complex, see Chappell 2006, 339sq., who also has a valuable discussion on the general aetiological nature of the Homeric hymns on p. 336. More recent scholarship on the nexus of myth and ritual tends to see a much looser relationship between the two categories: see e.g. Graf 1991, 111: "Mythos und Ritual sind also eigenständige Gebilde, die sich zwar punktuell berühren können, aber eigenen Strukturgesetzen folgen." See also Strauss Clay 1989, 49 who opts for a Panhellenic reading of the Homeric hymns and against tying "these compositions to specific locations and occasions".

49 It is, of course, difficult to determine to what extent a given aetiological narrative has been supplied by an older tradition and to what extent it can be regarded as a poetic innovation supporting a particular intention.

50 Cf. Trumpf 1958.

a different class from the instances previously discussed. What all these variations on the theme of resistance have in common is their rhetorical structure: they help to establish Apollo as a god who overcomes numerous obstacles – obstacles which ultimately cannot hinder his victorious arrival. Apollo's fight for a place in the pantheon is initially carried out at the divine level amongst gods and nature deities.[51] Unlike the Dionysian resistance myths, it is not the humans who here reject the god and his cult. Rather, it is the divine order itself that is depicted as contested and rife with conflict. This dimension of the story is emphasised most prominently by the long digression on the creation of a second monster, Typhon.[52] Generated by Earth at Hera's behest, Typhon is given to the Delphic dragon as a nursling – a plot development that, at first glance, seems rather loosely motivated. By creating Typhon as a double of the first wild monster, which soon after receives the name of Python, the poet is able to allude to a significant episode of the Hesiodic *Theogony* and to form a parallel between Apollo's rise to power and the ascent of Zeus to the position of king over gods and men. In addition, the role of Hera as a goddess who initiates strife and obstructs Zeus's mighty progeny is again emphasised. Although the actual enemy of Apollo is not Typhon, but the dragon Python, the digression expands and augments the theme of resistance and delay by evoking another power struggle amongst the Olympic gods. The digression even replaces a detailed report of Apollo's combat with the dragon, which is instead related in only a few verses.

Humans first come into play as Apollo recruits members for his priesthood from a Cretan trading ship. Taking the form of a large and uncanny sea monster, an enormous dolphin, Apollo appears to the Cretans and strikes fear and terror amongst the crew (400–404). He then takes control of the helm and steers the ship off its original course, instead sailing towards Crisa, near Delphi, where the crew members will serve him from then on.[53] His arrival in Crisa is accompanied by the radiance of his epiphany as a star and celestial fire, and inspires fear (δέος) in those present (440–447). It remains only for

51 It is telling that the hymn does not mention any previous owner of the oracular site such as Themis or Gaia, who are found in other sources, e.g. A. *Eu.* 1–20 and E. *IT* 1234–1283; see Strauss Clay 1989, 61 with n. 122. On chronology of the myths surrounding the divine ownership of the Delphic oracle, see also Sourvinou-Inwood 1987.

52 On the Typhon digression, see Strauss Clay 1989, 63–74 and Yasumura 2011, 117–131.

53 This part of the narrative is reminiscent of Dionysus' capture of the pirate ship in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* (see above, § 2, number 8): there, all but one of the sailors fail to recognise the god and are transformed into dolphins. The steersman, the only member of the crew to show respect towards Dionysus, should perhaps be interpreted as the first follower or priest of the newly established cult; compare the role of the Cretans in the *Hymn to Apollo*.

Apollo to give instructions for cult observance; the aetiology here follows the basic formula of command and execution. His cult is then inaugurated with its first sacrifice, procession, and choral performance. Resistance is suppressed, for the Cretans, overwhelmed by the god's presence, are speechless with fear and can only do as they are bidden. With consummate authority, Apollo leads and shows them (δεῖξε δ' ἄγων, 523) his temple in Parnassus, where they are to dwell; the cautious objection of the Cretans, who ask the very human question of how they are to provide themselves with food in this rugged place (526–530), is dismissed with divine arrogance as reflecting human folly and lowliness (531–533).

In the narrative patterns we looked at earlier, Dionysus forces his cult upon humans as punishment for – and in spite of – their opposition. In the foundation of Apollonian cult, on the other hand, which is no less forceful than its Dionysian counterpart, the fear-inspiring epiphanies of the god forestall opposition from arising in the first place. The emphasis on the terror present at the inception of his cult, however, suggests rejection and resistance, at least for the hymn's audience. Aetiology thus becomes a narrative mode of problematisation; its object is not only to support and establish a theology, but also to prompt a debate about religious ideas and practices.

4 Demeter and the Foundation of the Eleusinian Mysteries

The precise relationship between the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the Eleusinian mysteries is, as is well known, a much debated topic in scholarship, and interpreters are frequently warned against reading the hymn all too narrowly against the background of the large and influential mystery cult.[54] For our purposes, it is sufficient to analyse the aetiological connection inherent

54 The hymn is, in spite of all controversy, often regarded as 'the foundation myth of the Mysteries' and believed to have been acted out during the initiation ceremony at Eleusis as a 'mystic drama': this view is defended by, amongst others, Richardson 1974, Parker 1991, 4, and Bremmer 2011, 383 (who, however, bases his reconstruction primarily on other sources). For criticism of this position, see Clinton 1992, who contends that the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, especially the Iambe episode, is an *aition* for the Thesmophoria. Strauss Clay 1989, *passim*, argues against reading cultic ceremonies into the hymn and claims that the poem is to be understood as a "deemphasizing of local cult in the interest of a broader Panhellenic perspective" (231). Verses 192–311 are, however, in her view, "overtly etiological, reflecting the preliminary ritual preceding initiation" (233). In 473–479, Strauss Clay likewise sees the "establishment of the [Eleusinian] Mysteries", which she calls "the final goal of the narrative" (261). For an overview of sources and older scholarship, see Richardson 1974, 12–30.

in the hymn: as in the *Hymn to Apollo*, the close nexus between cult foundation and the acts of the god does not remain external to the poem, but instead forms part of the narrative. It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the temple which Demeter commands the Eleusinians to build (270–274) and the rites which she 'shows' them (473–479) can be understood as a means of reconciliation in response to an earlier conflict. It is this question on which the remaining discussion centres; the exact analogy between the poetic narrative and the historical cult is less important for our purposes and will be left aside.

As Jenny Strauss Clay has shown, communication is established in the hymn between all three 'cosmic' spheres: the world of the Olympians, the world of human beings, and the underworld. The overarching theme of the hymn is, as in the *Hymn to Apollo*, the negotiation and division of various realms of power and influence amongst the gods.[55] The cult foundation itself is, like its counterpart in the Dionysian narratives, a form of redress and way to appease Demeter's anger.[56] In other words, it functions to replace and compensate for the attempt to make Demophon immortal, which had failed due to the folly and human weakness of his mother, Metaneira. From a structural point of view, mortals, represented by Metaneira, have 'rejected' a divine gift – immortality for Demophon – by showing that they were incapable of accepting or coping with such a gift. At the same time, the episode illustrates that immortality is not assumed to belong to the human condition. The denial of a divine gift is something different from the refusal of mortals to accept a divinity's cult entirely (as in the case of Dionysus) or their being paralysed with terror at the god's coming into power and epiphany (as in the case of Apollo). Nevertheless, in the Homeric hymn, Demeter demands the erection of a temple (270) as well as worship and propitiation (ὄργια … ἐμὸν νόον ἱλάσκοισθε, 273–274) in the very moment that her undertaking has been frustrated by a mortal woman, whom Demeter then rebukes for her foolishness and lack of understanding (Νήϊδες ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἀφράδμονες, 256). Cult, according to this aetiological narrative,

55 Strauss Clay 1989, 202–266 sees the Demeter of the *Hymn* as challenging Zeus's power. On the whole, however, the hymn demonstrates how divine power relations are reorganised, how Zeus's authority is reconfirmed, and how Demeter acquires new *timai*.

56 The foundation of her cult, however, follows in two stages, each of which is separately motivated: firstly, the erection of a temple and an altar as recompense for the failed attempt to immortalise Demophon (270–274) and, later, the establishment of the mysteries themselves in 473–479. In the first case, the propitiation of Demeter's anger is clearly stated as the logic of the cult (274: 'how in future you can propitiate me with holy performances'); the actual foundation of the mysteries at the end of the poem expresses the new relationship between mortals, gods, and the underworld in a more general way (see Strauss Clay 1989, 260–265) and furnishes Demeter (and Persephone) with a new realm of *timê* (see Nickel 2003).

responds to disruption by its recipients and may be seen as the result of tensions and negotiation between men and gods.

In comparison to the narratives of Dionysus and Apollo, the logic – or aetiology – of the institution of Demeter's cult is slightly different: the myth explains why Demeter cannot simply allow mortals, represented by Demophon, to share in divine immortality. The categorical difference established between gods and humans does not permit the goddess to 'enforce' her gift as Dionysus does with ecstatic worship, or Apollo with his oracle in Delphi. Two forms of compensation take the place of the intended gift of immortality. Firstly, humans must soothe the wrath of Demeter by building a temple and performing her rites (273–274).[57] Secondly, they do not receive the immortality that had nearly been granted to them, but instead receive 'only' a single aspect of it in the form of an almost divine bliss, which they can attain by initiation at Eleusis. Significantly, Demeter divests herself of her human guise and appears in all her divine radiance before the Eleusinians just as this arrangement is made (275–276).[58] It is precisely the difference between gods and humans that had ruined her original plan and brought it about that humans might partake of immortality only in a very modified form. On another level, however, the narrative also reflects tensions in the divine realm. In this respect, the failure to bestow immortality upon humankind mirrors the subordination of Demeter to Zeus's authority.[59] The literary structure of the hymn brings out these categorical differences, and turns them into the moment of opposition in the establishment of the cult.

It would assuredly be incorrect to speak of 'punishment' here. Furthermore, to speak of the 'compensation' as a 'cult of atonement', as Garland does when referring to Dionysian ecstasy,[60] is also to describe the situation in overly

57 The motif of Demeter's wrath makes a double appearance in the hymn: when she is angry at Metaneira for interfering with Demophon's immortalisation, and, on a larger scale, when she is enraged because of the rape of her daughter. Nickel 2003 examines this motif as part of a narrative pattern which he calls the 'wrath, withdrawal and return pattern' resulting in the restoration or augmentation of a god's *timê*. One might argue that the same pattern also underlies the Dionysiac resistance myths. Nickel summarises the aetiological feature of the pattern as follows (80): "The goddess's initial deprivation and dishonour must end with the restoration and augmentation of her τιμή. Along the way, her actions are determined with a view to this result."

58 As we have seen above, epiphany is a crucial point in foundation narratives: the question whether humans accept a divine cult is connected to the issue of whether they can recognise or bear the god's divine presence and appearance. At the same time, the god's epiphany is a sign for the divine power that renders human resistance useless.

59 Strauss Clay 1989, 265.

60 See above, n. 34.

strong terms. In a very general sense, however, if in part implicitly, all of the aetiologies which we have examined give as the 'reason' or basis of divine cult both human inferiority and the failure to recognise divine power.

It is not without a certain irony that Demeter, after her orders to build a temple have been dutifully carried out by the Eleusinians, is moved by her sorrow for Persephone to allow a severe drought to occur that threatens not only mortals, but also the gods (305–313). This episode, which demonstrates the extent of Demeter's wrath and power, predominantly affects the divine level of the plot. That said, it is nevertheless significant that Demeter both instructs the Eleusinian kings in cult ritual to honour her *and* lets the fruits of the fields grow again in precisely the same moment, immediately after she has received Zeus's promises of reconciliation from Rhea (473–479). In this way, the Eleusinian Mysteries founded by Demeter in the hymn reflect not only the failed immortalization of Demophon, but also the negotiation of power and the final reconciliation on the divine plane. The *aition* of the cult revolves around grief, wrath, strife, and separation, and the foundation is a complex reaction to a serious crisis. Honouring the gods does not seem to come easily to the mortals of myth; the motivations for cult foundation are complex, and veneration is authoritatively forced upon mortals by the gods.

5 Conclusion

To conclude, I would like briefly to reflect back on the different ways of conceptualising aetiology considered at the beginning of this chapter. There, I had emphasised primarily the *narrative* aspects of the concept – the interplay with realities and possibilities that stands, to a certain extent, in tension with the rationalising and explanatory character of the *aition*. An aetiological myth explaining how the present state of things arose need not be true, but merely plausible.

The three examples – the cult myths of Dionysus, Apollo, and Demeter – together represent a special case in aetiology (and we might also want to consider to what extent it is an exceptional type): all of them make use of the narrative model not just to tell of foundations, but also to call them into question. It strikes me as remarkable that the acts of explaining *and* calling into question are joined in these narratives. By approaching his material as an aetiology, an author can present the path towards founding cult as one of resistance, and the establishment of cult-worship as an overpowering divine act, one initially seen as a threat by human beings.

The rationalising character that lends itself so well to aetiologies thus operates on two levels. Firstly – and this corresponds to the conventional understanding of aetiology – it presents a series of actions to explain how a known cult came to be. Secondly, as could be shown by the Dionysian resistance myths, it opposes the divine violence that so irrationally intrudes. It effects this by incorporating the counter-reaction of the human cult recipients, who are unable and unwilling to accept the irrational.

The degree to which the myths stage the powerful god's triumph against human opposition differs in the myths discussed. Some cult aetiologies prefer a 'closed' form in which the narrative ends with the cult's foundation; others do *not* aim at narrating the establishment of a cult at the end – and it is certainly worth asking whether we should apply the term 'aetiology' to these texts at all.[61] A third variant, exemplified by the sources on the Agrionia, joins a mythological event with its mimetic re-enactment in cult. In this case, we are not provided with any form of narrative or compensatory logic that might make the installation of the cult understandable; the relationship of the cult to its mythical protagonists and their fates could rather be described as commemorative.

My aim in this chapter has been to show that aetiologies, by elaborating the cause into a narrative and reflecting upon the rationale and motivation of the *explanandum*, can be used to call the *explanandum* implicitly into question. In an aetiological narrative, a cult is not only – and not always – made plausible and familiar; rather, as I hope to have shown, its complex origins, the winding path to the narrator's present, illuminate just as emphatically the cult's strangeness and unfamiliarity.[62]

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61 See above on Euripides' *Bacchae* and the Lycurgus myth in Homer.

62 I am deeply grateful to Emrys Schlatter for his thorough translation of the German version of this chapter as well as for valuable suggestions concerning parts of the argument.

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CHAPTER 7

Beginning with Hermes

Promoting Hermeticism through Aetiology in Corpus Hermeticum 1

Sean E. McGrath

1 Introduction[1]

The Roman imperial period saw the flourishing of a great variety of new deities, cults and other types of religious movements. The question how to promote a new cult in the face of the large existing competition was therefore quite relevant for their followers. One of the techniques that can be applied for its promotion, as I show in this contribution with respect to Hermeticism, was the construction of an appropriate aetiology. In the first treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a movement bordering between religion and philosophy applied aetiological motifs to appropriate ideas from Greek philosophy and create a sense of 'common ground' meant to attract Jewish followers.

Hermeticism originated in the Hellenistic period, during which the Kingdoms founded in the wake of Alexander's conquests facilitated cultural exchange between Greeks and various other cultures around the Eastern Mediterranean. Greek thought and myth had always drawn much inspiration from eastern cultures,[2] and the enduring intercultural contact in the Hellenistic kingdoms provided new impulses for religious syncretism. During this time, many local gods were imported into other regions, a process which continued in the imperial period. For instance, Isis and Serapis, respectively an Egyptian goddess and a god who was a syncretistic mixture of Egyptian and Greek elements created by the Ptolemaic dynasty, were revered throughout the Roman world. Some other religious movements, such as Gnosticism, were heavily influenced by contemporary philosophy. This also applies to Hellenistic Judaism and, somewhat later on, early Christianity.[3] Many of these

1 I would like to thank the editors, especially Jacqueline Klooster, and the reviewer for their many helpful suggestions that significantly improved the quality of this contribution, as well as Alexandra Madeła for her help with linguistic issues.

2 See e.g. West 1997; Haubold 2013; Bachvarova 2016.

3 For the influence of Hellenistic philosophy on contemporary Judaism, see for instance Niehoff 2013. For the role of Greek philosophy on early Christianity see, among others, Rasimus, Engberg-Pedersen and Dunderberg 2010 and Rist 1985, on Christian Platonism.

new religious movements can be considered the results of interaction between the Greco-Roman *Leitkultur* and regional elements, the products of cultural contacts on an unprecedented scale for this region.

Among this multitude of religious novelties we place the cult of Hermes Trismegistus, Hermeticism, which must certainly be reckoned as one of the Hellenistic cults with the longest *Nachleben*. The figure of Hermes captivated not only his original followers from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt but also reached the Christian and Islamic world in the medieval era and saw a revival during the Renaissance.[4] This raises the question how we can account for the success of specifically this religious tradition *vis-à-vis* other cults of similar character which did not survive antiquity.

One advantageous factor for its survival is that Hermeticism was successfully re-appropriated by Christian intellectuals in late antiquity: Hermes was considered a prophet of Christ, and Christian authors approvingly quoted Hermetic texts.[5] Yet even before that, there are about four centuries between the earliest signs of life of the cult from the Ptolemaic period[6] and discussions of Hermeticism by Christian writers. There must have been numerous reasons for the enduring popularity of Hermeticism throughout the imperial era. One of these is Hermeticism's ability to legitimate itself through the (apparently successful) utilization of aetiological topoi and invented traditions. The cult of Hermes Trismegistus, in reality a result of the synthesis of Greek and Egyptian deities in the Hellenistic period, presents itself as a much more ancient tradition, based on archaic Egyptian prophecies, a factor which seems intended to contribute to its prestige.

After a short introduction on Hermeticism and the social milieu in which it flourished, I demonstrate how reading the first treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum* through the lens of aetiology can elucidate the techniques used to promote Hermeticism. This treatise, known as *Poimandres*, provides an account of the creation of the physical world, containing elements from Greek, especially Platonic, philosophy and from the Jewish creation myth from the Biblical book of *Genesis*.

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4 Ebeling 2007 provides an overview of Hermeticism until the modern era. Van den Broek and Hanegraaff 1998 contains articles on the reception of Hermeticism after antiquity. On the later history of the *Corpus Hermeticum* until the present day see also Copenhaver 1992, xlv–lix.

5 This was especially the case in Lactantius, but also in other early Christian authors, as Fowden 1986, 205–210 demonstrates.

6 The existence of at least the magical branch of Hermeticism in the Ptolemaic period is affirmed by Fowden 1986, 2.

First, I discuss how the motif of the 'first inventor' is employed to claim an authoritative position for the Hermetic texts: Hermetic literature asserts that its founder is the source of much of Greek wisdom, while in reality it is an outcome of the Greek intellectual tradition. By positing Hermes as the first to express many Greek ideas and presenting him as the teacher of leading Greek thinkers, his followers attempted to appropriate fundamental concepts from Hellenistic philosophy.

Secondly, I argue that the appropriation of aetiological tropes from the Jewish account of creation (as found in *Genesis*) serves as an 'anchor' to make Hermeticism accessible to a Jewish audience. Anchoring describes the process in which innovations are related to previously known objects or ideas in order to make these novelties acceptable to a community. If an innovation is successfully anchored in a common ground, it is more likely to be accepted and adopted.[7] I argue that similar mechanisms are in play in the case of the *Poimandres*: it is not philosophically necessary that the creation of the world in the Hermetic creation account must resemble that of the book of *Genesis*. Instead, the overlap functions as a means to attract a Jewish readership to the cult of Hermes.

2 The Origins of Hermeticism

The origins of Hermeticism are not entirely clear. Yet despite the absence of any definitive evidence, the current scholarly consensus is that Hermeticism has its roots in Ptolemaic Egypt, where the Greek god Hermes was assimilated with the Egyptian deity Thoth.[8] Aside from some changes in the worship of these two traditional gods, this led to the emergence of a new figure known as Hermes Trismegistus, who was more than simply the sum of the titles and domains of these two deities. This new Hermes became known as an Egyptian prophet who had endowed mankind with philosophical and theological wisdom, and who was often cited among other *human* authorities. Yet all extant Hermetic literature remains (deliberately?) vague on the exact ontological status of its ultimate source; refusing to state whether he is merely an enlightened human or has some share in the divine in his own right. He is, in any case,

7 Cf. the introduction and Annette Harder's chapter in this volume.

8 Greek and Egyptian gods had, however, already been compared with each other since at least Herodotus. In *Hist*. 2.67 he seems to imply that Hermes and Thoth are the same deity: he claims that the ibis was sacred in a city he calls Hermopolis, which was the Greek name for Khemenu, the main cult center of Thoth.

distinguished from the gods Hermes and Thoth from which he is derived,[9] being instead presented as a sage who conversed with the gods at an undefined period in the past.[10]

The story propounded in some texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is that Hermes Trismegistus is an ancient Egyptian figure whose mystical prophecies have been translated into Greek.[11] Several of these texts, philosophical and/or religious in character, have come down to us. First of all, there is the Greek *Corpus Hermeticum*. An originally Greek treatise has also reached us in Latin translation under the name of *Asclepius*; the Greek title was most likely *Teleios logos*. There are also some fragments of Hermetic texts quoted by other ancient and medieval authors. Finally, our corpus has been enriched in 1945 with the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library, in which (among mostly Gnostic texts) three Hermetic treatises were found, written in Coptic.[12]

These texts contain a doctrine that is not entirely consistent throughout the corpus, but the main tenet of Hermeticism is clearly based upon a dualism between the material body and the immaterial soul. Hermes is said to have taught his followers to abandon and transcend the mortal body. By doing so, one could reach a higher plane of existence and achieve a state of immortality and divinity instead of perishing as a human.[13]

Despite the insistence in the *Corpus* that Hermetic literature was composed by an ancient Egyptian sage in the remote past, the textual evidence suggests something different. The Hermetic texts are the product of a multicultural environment from a later point in history.[14] Their doctrine derives from Greek philosophy, especially from (middle) Platonism and Stoicism, yet some Egyptian

9 Such as in Ps.-Manetho, quoted by Syncellus p. 72 (as published in Waddell 1940, 208–211), but also in *Ascl.* 37.

10 Fowden 1986, 23sq., 27sq.; Ebeling 2007, 13.

11 See for instance Iamb. *Myst.* 8.4, who argues that any resemblances to philosophical concepts from the Greek tradition are the result of the translator's efforts. Within the corpus, this is implied most emphatically in *Corp.Herm.* 16.1–2, in which Asclepius warns Ammon not to allow the Greeks to translate these texts into their own language. Fowden 1986, 37 suggests that this passage in fact reflects contemporary tensions between Egyptians and Greeks at the time it was written. Ebeling 2007, 25 sees this as a method to justify errors, as their true meaning would be obscured by the process of translation.

12 A more elaborate survey of extant Hermetic literature is given by Ebeling 2007, 15. Aside from these philosophical texts, there are texts which are referred to as the technical *Hermetica*, dealing with topics such as alchemy, astrology and magic. These technical works will not be discussed in this chapter.

13 This doctrine is taught in the case of the *Poimandres* in *Corp.Herm.* 1.21–26.

14 Denzey 2013, 104 has the most complete and up-to-date bibliography regarding the various cultural influences on the Hermetic texts.

deities belong to their main cast,[15] and they also draw from the Septuagint.[16] The texts have been broadly dated to the first centuries of the Common Era, but a number of factors make a definitive chronology difficult. First of all, the *Corpus* does not distinguish between individual authors; all texts are simply ascribed to the pseudepigraphical author Hermes. In reality, they were most likely revised by later writers, and it is impossible to identify the various layers of composition. Some texts refer to other treatises in the *Corpus*, which means that their author(s) was/were familiar with other Hermetic literature and write(s) in reaction to this.[17] The individual texts were, therefore, not part of a single body of texts; collection must have occurred at a later date.[18] Additional problems are caused by the many textual corruptions within the *Corpus*.[19]

Hermeticism most likely originated in the urban centers of Egypt. As Gareth Fowden argues, the city of Alexandria provided an especially fertile environment for the cultural contact and syncretism that characterizes extant Hermetic literature. From there, this new Hermes spread to other parts of Northern Africa and the eastern half of the Empire, while remaining popular in Egypt – Hermeticism never grew quite as popular in the west.[20] Material culture related to this cult is conspicuously absent. To our knowledge, no temples for Hermes Trismegistus exist, nor other ritual items such as statues or figurines. We know, therefore, very little about cultic practices and are entirely dependent on the literary accounts that have been transmitted.

But why would cult practitioners in Alexandria and other Egyptian cities claim that their Hermes Trismegistus was specifically an ancient Egyptian, and that their cult writings were translations of an originally Egyptian text? The most likely answer to this question lies in the prestige that Egypt enjoyed among Greeks. They generally admired the antiquity of Egypt, despite their insistence on the great cultural differences. Numerous accounts cast important Greek thinkers like Solon, Pythagoras and Plato as visitors to Egypt, having

15 The most noteworthy are some of the characters that appear in Hermetic literature, especially Tat (a Hellenized spelling of Thoth), but also e.g. Isis and Ammon. The title Trismegistus ('thrice greatest') itself is Egyptian in origin, but first occurs during the Hellenistic era, applied to Thoth (cf. Copenhaver 1992, 93). The epithet resembles its precedents in Egyptian religion.

16 The relationship between the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Septuagint is highlighted by Pearson 1981 and Dodd 1954.

17 Fowden 1986, 187 discusses the issue of anonymous authorship.

18 On the collection of the Hermetic literature, see Copenhaver 1992, xl–xlv.

19 See Wildberg 2013 for a philological survey of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, especially of *Corp.Herm.* 3.

20 On the Alexandrian origin, see Fowden 1986, 162, 193 and *passim*, and 196–198 for Hermeticism outside Egypt.

been taught ancient Egyptian wisdom by the local priests.[21] In such a context, one could hardly imagine a more authoritative source of religious truth than the prophecies of an archaic Egyptian sage in direct contact with divine beings. The Egyptian connection could therefore serve to legitimate the cult. Yet Hermes's followers went even further: as we shall see, they did not only portray their Hermes as a figure from the remote past, but also presented him as the source of all subsequent Greek wisdom.

3 Appropriating Greek Philosophy

Many Greek thinkers are fascinated by the aetiological motif of the first inventor. Deities and other mythological characters are often credited with technical and intellectual innovations.[22] We also, however, encounter the opposite pattern: developments in historical times could be attributed, retrospectively, to mythical figures. For instance, Maren Niehoff argues that Flavius Josephus presents the Jewish patriarch Abraham as the first to devise a monotheistic creation in terms that would be familiar to a Stoic audience. She writes as follows about *Jewish Antiquities* 1.155–156:

> Josephus' Abraham clearly thinks here in terms of Stoic Nature theology. Like Chrysippus and his followers, he infers one divine power from the beneficial organization of the cosmos, which he identifies with the creator. [...] Josephus' language is highly competitive. His Abraham was the first (πρῶτος) to prove God's existence and uniqueness, "innovating and dramatically changing the universally held conception concerning God." The Jewish religion thus emerges not only as compatible with rational theology, but as its very cradle.[23]

With this practice of appropriation, Josephus is in fact rewriting intellectual history: he claims that the Stoic concepts of divinity and creation are posterior to or even derived from Judaism, i.e., that the Jews had developed these ideas long before the Stoics. According to Niehoff, this passage is Josephus's

21 For Solon see briefly Hdt. 1.29 and the much more elaborate account in Pl. *Ti.* 21c–25d. Pythagoras' visit to Egypt is mentioned in numerous sources, such as Hdt. 2.81, Isoc. 11.28, D.L. 8.1.3. For Plato see Str. 17.1.29, D.L. 3.6. This topos of a trip to Egypt is also discussed by Ebeling 2007, 25.

22 On this topic, see also the chapters by Inger Kuin and Hugo Koning in this volume.

23 Niehoff 2013, 104; cf. also p. 98, in which she demonstrates that Philo of Alexandria makes the same argument (but less elaborately than Josephus).

legitimation of his religion to a Hellenic and Roman readership, in order to make them appreciate the antiquity and wisdom held by the Jewish people.

The adherents of Hermeticism similarly attempt to appropriate elements of the intellectual culture they were raised in. This will become evident from an examination of the first and most discussed treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, known as the *Poimandres*. It tells us how an androgynous deity, Poimandres, taught Hermes[24] the true nature of the world and the way to attain salvation from death, which relies on knowledge received through revelation. Most of the *Poimandres* is structured in the form of a dialogue between Hermes and Poimandres in which Poimandres answers Hermes's questions, a format that might find its origins in the invocations of, and later dialogues with, the Muses from Greek poetry.[25] The *Poimandres* begins as follows:

> ἔδοξά τινα ὑπερμεγέθη μέτρῳ ἀπεριορίστῳ τυγχάνοντα καλεῖν μου τὸ ὄνομα καὶ λέγοντά μοι, Τι βούλει ἀκοῦσαι καὶ θεάσασθαι, καὶ νοήσας μαθεῖν καὶ γνῶναι; […] φημὶ ἐγώ, Μαθεῖν θέλω τὰ ὄντα καὶ νοῆσαι τὴν τούτων φύσιν καὶ γνῶναι τὸν θεόν· πῶς, ἔφην, ἀκοῦσαι βούλομαι. – φησὶν ἐμοὶ πάλιν, Ἔχε νῷ σῷ ὅσα θέλεις μαθεῖν, κἀγώ σε διδάξω.
>
> *Corp.Herm.* 1.1–3

> An enormous being, completely unbounded in size, seemed to appear to me and call my name and say to me: "What do you want to hear and see; what do you want to learn and know from your understanding?" […] I said, "I wish to learn about the things that are, to understand their nature and to know god. How much," I said, "I want to hear!" Then he said to me: "Keep in mind all that you wish to learn, and I will teach you."[26]

Poimandres subsequently shows Hermes a vision which Hermes does not understand and provides an interpretation in the form of an account of the creation of the physical world. The revelation about the nature of things and of god are in part derived from (middle) Platonism, with a significant portion of the *Poimandres*'s cosmology echoing Plato's *Timaeus*.[27]

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24 Although Hermes's name is not mentioned in the text itself, later Hermetic literature alludes to the *Poimandres* and clearly indicates that its speaker is Hermes. Cf. Copenhaver 1992, 94 with the relevant bibliography on this topic.

25 Important models of this type are Hes. *Th.* 21–35 and Call. *Aet.* fr. 2 Harder.

26 The Greek text of the *Corpus Hermeticum* is taken from Nock and Festugière 1945–1954. All translations are by Copenhaver 1992.

27 For a more thorough exploration of the Platonic influences in *Corp.Herm.* 1 see the commentary by Copenhaver 1992, *passim*; also Denzey 2013, 114–117.

This debt to the *Timaeus* is visible at the start of Poimandres's account of creation (*Corp.Herm.* 1.9–11). In the beginning, the intellect (νοῦς), which is also known as father and god (πατὴρ θεός, 1.6), gives birth to a second god, a demiurge (δημιουργός), who in turn creates seven helpers. These helpers, the planets, encompass the sensible world and are collectively known as 'fate' (εἱμαρμένη). The seven helpers are made to move by the demiurge and through their revolution all living beings are created from the four elements. The concept of a demiurge is derived from Plato's *Timaeus*, according to which the physical world was crafted from extant matter by an intelligent creator-god. Furthermore, the influence of later strands of Platonic thought can also be distinguished. For instance, the relationship between intellect and demiurge is strikingly similar to Numenius's theology. Numenius also distinguishes a first god, the intellect (νοῦς) who is also called the father, from a creator god, the demiurge, who produced the cosmos. This demiurge is analogous to the intellect and called its imitator.[28]

The creator-god is not the only striking influence of the Platonic tradition. The Hermetic theory of salvation as explored in the *Poimandres* draws heavily on the Platonic dualism of an immortal soul in opposition to the transient body. Hermes learns from Poimandres that if we actively choose to transcend the material world, we can reach the upper realms and become gods ourselves and thereby achieve freedom from death and decay. Furthermore, Nicola Denzey has demonstrated how developments in Middle Platonism also appear in the *Poimandres* and other Hermetic literature; specifically, a negative evaluation of the material world (cosmic pessimism) and the view that the cosmos is complex, multi-layered, populated with malevolent demons in the lower realms (demonology), with different forces of fate located in different regions.[29] For instance, in *Corp.Herm.* 1.22–23, Poimandres states that they, the intellect, only grant the pious, good, and pure a share of intellect and access to the higher realms, while they entrust the evildoers to a vengeful demon (δαίμων). Another typical feature of earlier imperial Platonism is the association of the planets with specific vices. This idea looms in the background in Poimandres's instructions for transcending the body, which involves abandoning various vices in seven stages, which correspond to the seven planets.[30]

A thorough investigation of the various philosophical influences on the *Poimandres* lies outside of the scope of this chapter, but I hope to have given

28 Copenhaver 1992, 104 states that the idea that the demiurge came forth as a second god from the intellect is also found in many middle Platonic texts.

29 Denzey 2013.

30 Denzey 2013, 114sq.

an impression of the tradition against which we should read this treatise. Centuries of Greek thought are reflected by the revelation of the Hermetic deity Poimandres,[31] and Hermes is cast as the first human to learn the nature of the universe. He is subsequently sent out by Poimandres to spread the truth among his fellow men (*Corp.Herm.* 1.27):

> ταῦτα εἰπὼν ὁ Ποιμάνδρης ἐμοὶ ἐμίγη ταῖς δυνάμεσιν. ἐγὼ δὲ ευχαριστήσας καὶ εὐλογήσας τὸν πατέρα τῶν ὅλων ἀνείθην ὑπ' αὐτοῦ δυναμωθεὶς καὶ διδαχθεὶς τοῦ παντὸς τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν μεγίστην θέαν, καὶ ἦργμαι κηρύσσειν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας καὶ γνώσεως κάλλος.
>
> As he was saying this to me, Poimandres joined with the powers. Then he sent me forth, empowered and instructed on the nature of the universe and on the supreme vision, after I had given thanks to the father of all and praised him. And I began proclaiming to mankind the beauty of reverence and knowledge.

Hermes may also be claiming that he preserved the revelation in written form. The Greek is ambiguous, literally meaning 'I have recorded Poimandres' good service to myself'. (ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν εὐεργασίαν τοῦ Ποιμάνδρου ἀνεγραψάμην εἰς ἐμαυτόν, *Corp.Herm.* 1.30). This has generally been interpreted metaphorically: "Within myself I recorded the kindness of Poimandres" (Copenhaver), "I inscribed in my memory" (Scott), "Pour moi, je gravai en moi-même" (Festugière). I am, however, not aware of another instance of a similar use of ἀναγράφω. Festugière and Nock acknowledge that this remark can also be taken in a literal sense: "Mais peut-être: 'J'enregistrai par écrit pour moi-même'" ('I recorded it in writing for myself').[32] Perhaps the best way to make sense of this phrase is by taking εἰς ἐμαυτόν with εὐεργασίαν: 'I wrote down the good service Poimandres conferred on me.' With that interpretation, the very treatise we are reading is Hermes' own account of Poimandres's revelation.

Hermes is in any case considered to be responsible for the circulation of Poimandres's creation account among mortals, and the treatise thereby implicitly provides an origin for all other Hermetic writings as well as major strands of the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition. In Hermetic chronology, these

31 Poimandres does not occur outside of Hermetic literature and even within Hermeticism they remain an obscure figure. It is tempting to see their name as a derivation of the Greek ποιμαίνω and ἀνήρ, but most scholars believe that the name in fact has a Coptic origin. On this issue see especially Scott 1924–1936, vol. 2, 15sq.; also Dodd 1954, 99, n. 1; Copenhaver 1992, 95.

32 Nock and Festugière 1945–1954, 1.26.

revelations occur prior to the development of Greek philosophy and therefore, it is implied, ideas attributed to philosophers such as Plato actually originated from the divine revelations to Hermes.

This raises the question whether the Hermetics succeed in presenting their prophet as founder of a long philosophical tradition. In fact, we have intriguing evidence that this appropriation of philosophical material was indeed quite effective. The followers of Hermes succeeded in convincing later (non-Hermetic) intellectuals that Platonic doctrines had originated from an allegedly primeval prophet. Lactantius, writing in the early fourth century, suggested that Plato was inspired by Hermes Trismegistus (Lact. *Epit.* 37.4):

> *denique Plato de primo ac secundo deo non plane ut philosophus, sed ut uates locutus est, fortasse in hoc Trismegistum secutus*
>
> Plato, then, clearly does not speak about the first and the second god as a philosopher but like a prophet, maybe following Trismegistus in this.[33]

Within one century of Lactantius' careful suggestion (*fortasse*) that Plato might have been following Hermes, Proclus stated in his fifth-century commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* that Plato most likely drew on Hermetic literature (Proc. *In Ti.* 2.386 = Iamb. fr. 38 Dillon):

> καὶ μὴν καὶ ἡ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων παράδοσις τὰ αὐτὰ περὶ αὐτῆς φησιν· ὅ γέ τοι θεῖος Ἰάμβλιχος ἱστόρησεν, ὅτι καὶ Ἑρμῆς ἐκ τῆς οὐσιότητος τὴν ὑλότητα παράγεσθαι βούλεται· καὶ δὴ καὶ εἰκὸς κἀκ τούτου τὸν Πλάτωνα τὴν τοιαύτην περὶ τὴς ὕλης δόξαν ἔχειν.
>
> And indeed Egyptian tradition also says the same about [matter]. At any rate, the divine Iamblichus reported that Hermes, too, wants materiality to be derived from substantiality. And in fact it is even likely, [he adds,] that Plato gets this kind of view of matter from [Hermes] as well.[34]

With his allusion to Iamblichus, we get the impression that Proclus follows a well-established tradition in which Plato had been inspired by Hermes.[35]

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33 The translation of this passage is my own.

34 The translation of this passage is taken from Runia and Share 2008.

35 Dillon 1973, 312sq. argues that the passage Proclus is quoting is most likely taken from Iamblichus' commentary on the *Timaeus*. Notably, similar ideas were even held well into the Renaissance, as Marsilio Ficino believed that Hermes had taught Pythagoras during

Neither of the authors places any doubt in Hermes's antiquity and the relative chronology of these two authorities. At some point during the early imperial period, Hermetic thinkers had placed their prophet at the very beginning of Greek philosophy and argued that many subsequent thinkers were in fact drawing on Hermes and therefore on Egyptian wisdom as the source of their ideas.

4 Anchoring Creation Accounts

We have already seen how the Hermetic account of the creation of the universe was heavily influenced by the Platonic tradition. Yet there is another crucial influence in the *Poimandres*, namely the Biblical creation story of *Genesis* 1.1–2.3. The author of this treatise must have been familiar with the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the *Septuagint*. Dodd especially demonstrated how closely the two texts are related and that much of the terminology employed in the *Poimandres* is taken from the Septuagint.[36] Yet Biblical influence is not limited to the lexical level: the process of creation itself takes place in the *Poimandres* in almost exactly the same order as during the first six days of *Genesis*. The order is identical except that the separation of land and water, which took place on the third day of the Biblical account, is not described in the *Poimandres*.[37] On the other hand, typical features from creation myths of other cultures are absent, making the Jewish element in this text all the more striking.[38]

We could then classify the *Poimandres* as an adaption of *Greek* philosophy against the backdrop of *Hebrew* myth, which is presented as the revelation of an ancient *Egyptian* sage. This package of multicultural influences reflects the milieu in which the *Poimandres* was written and more broadly the environment in which the Hermetics operated. Yet the *Poimandres* is not a mirror reflecting the mixed character of urban society of early imperial Egypt. Each of

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his stay in Egypt, through whom these teachings were transmitted to Plato (see Iversen 1984, 27).

36 Dodd 1954, 107. On the Jewish influence on the *Poimandres*'s vocabulary see also Pearson 1981, 340sq.

37 Dodd 1954, 103: "apparently he omitted it, either through inadvertence, or because he wished the creation of the heavenly bodies to follow immediately upon the separation of the upper and lower elements."

38 Dodd 1954, 100–103. Of course, Genesis itself also drew on earlier sources. I am, however, unable to pursue the question of common sources or further intermediaries between *Poimandres* and *Genesis* in the limited scope of this survey. See n. 2, above, on other cultural interactions between Greek and Eastern literature.

the three cultural influences present in the treatise is limited to certain aspects of the text and remains unaffected by the other sources.

The presence of Egyptian culture in the *Poimandres* is rather limited. Except for the names of Hermes Trismegistus and Poimandres, both of which have Egyptian roots,[39] there are only little traces of actual Egyptian influences in the intellectual framework.[40] This seems to be informed almost entirely by the Greek tradition, although Pearson does assert that the *Poimandres* has some similarities with Jewish apocalyptic literature.[41] The *Septuagint* contributes mostly to the style of the text,[42] as well as supplying the structural model for the creation myth. The doctrine itself, however, does not necessitate influences outside of Greek tradition. In other words, we are not dealing with a cross-cultural mixture of philosophical systems but rather with an essentially Greek core surrounded by Jewish and to a lesser degree Egyptian flavouring.

So why do *Genesis* and Jewish literature more broadly feature so conspicuously in the *Poimandres*, if they do not substantially influence the doctrine this treatise presents? One way to interpret the Jewish elements in the *Poimandres* is through the concept of 'anchoring'. The creation account of the *Poimandres* can be approached as a conceptual anchor to create common ground for a Jewish audience in order for them to identify with the cult of Hermes Trismegistus more easily. The Jewish reader would have no problem recognizing the creation of the world of this Hermetic text with what he or she is already familiar with from Hebrew scripture. But why would the authors of the *Poimandres* aim to cater specifically for potential Jewish followers? Pearson has argued that, due to the political tensions of the first and second century, Judaism had become less fashionable in comparison to other philosophical and religious movements during the early Empire.[43] The Jews were therefore, in the eyes of Hermetics at least, a desirable target audience, providing a large pool of people who could potentially be converted to Hermeticism.

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39 Cf. n. 15 on the title *Trismegistus* and n. 31 on Poimandres.

40 Iversen 1984, 29–33 argues for the influence of Egyptian theology on the Hermetic texts and gives numerous parallels between the two. Many of his examples, however, can just as easily and in my opinion more plausibly be ascribed to the Platonic tradition, for instance the two entities of the creator and demiurge (although the androgynous nature of both the Egyptian and Hermetic creator is striking), or Jewish influences, such as the creation of the world from a watery darkness.

41 Pearson 1981, 339.

42 This does not mean that the form of the text is not influenced by Greek models. Nock 1972 has argued that *Corp.Herm.* 1 is also influenced in form by the diatribe, a popular type of literature in the imperial period.

43 Pearson 1981, 347sq.

The beginning of *Genesis*, that is to say, the creation of the physical world, is especially suitable for this purpose. A common origin suggests that, fundamentally, Jews and Hermetics inhabit the same world. In this case, aetiology in the sense of a creation story functions as a means of connecting diverse communities. Jews could more easily assimilate to a religious movement essentially based on Greek philosophy because it did not require a radically different outlook on the world. They could map the tenets of Hermes onto the world as they knew it. Perhaps the Hermetics even attempted to argue that becoming a follower of Hermes was not a binary choice between one and the other, as both traditions ultimately derive from a common source.

Unfortunately, we have no evidence whether this strategy was actually successful. We have no way of knowing whether Jews indeed converted to Hermeticism or, perhaps more likely, whether they thought it possible to be both a Jew and a Hermetic (although this attempt to create common ground suggests that the Hermetics did not consider these two as mutually exclusive). Lactantius did not find it problematic to follow the teachings of Hermes as a Christian, so perhaps the prophet Hermes Trismegistus could also have been considered complementary to the prophets found in the Hebrew Bible.

On the other hand, the attempt to convert Jews may have failed miserably, after which the idea was given up. This may explain why the *Poimandres* contains significantly more Jewish influences than most of the other Hermetic texts, which may have been written at a later point in time. The followers of Hermeticism may have underestimated the value Jews placed on their descent and not their religion as the denominator for their collective identity.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that we can receive greater insight in the social function of the *Corpus Hermeticum*'s first treatise by approaching it through the lens of aetiological discourse. Aetiology can be employed both as a means to highlight the inclusivity of a certain group and as a form of competition in which various traditions make claims as to be the anterior source of a certain idea or concept and thereby vie for a form of cultural prestige. Both of these purposes are present in the *Poimandres* simultaneously, yet each is aimed at a different target audience.

Platonic philosophy belonged to the dominant currents of Greco-Roman intellectual culture and therefore, a relatively marginal and initially regional religious movement needed to demonstrate its respective merits *vis-à-vis* the more mainstream religious and philosophical traditions. The *Poimandres*'s

attempt to distinguish itself does not differ radically from the model of cultural competition in the writings of leading Jewish intellectuals of the early imperial period. One of the Hermetics' means to achieve a unique standing among the multitude of contemporary religious movements was to position their prophet as a first founder on whose revelations consecutive Greek thinkers ultimately relied. Hermes Trismegistus was turned into an ancient, authoritative figure and thereby, his cult could claim to be the primary source of spiritual truths.

As a consequence, Hermetics succeeded in imagining an origin of the world which coincides with that of Jewish scripture. They employed aetiology as a means to forge, in retrospect, a connection between two historically unrelated cultures. Through their endorsement and adoption of the creation account from the book of *Genesis*, the followers of Hermes sought to diminish the relative differences between themselves and the Jewish people.

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CHAPTER 8

The Aetiology of Myth

Hugo Koning

1 Introduction

Aetiology is a fundamental aspect of mythology, since one of the most universal functions of myths is to bind the world of the present, so puzzling and challenging to (archaic) mankind, to the more 'ideal' world of the gods who created the cosmos somewhere in the mythical past. Aetiology is the Bifröst or 'rainbow bridge' connecting now and then, man and god, question and answer. Its function is to create continuity between categorically different entities. In this chapter, I will focus on a rationalist attempt to eliminate the differences between those entities and thus erase the need for any bridge to cross them. The rationalist in question is the fourth century mythographer Palaephatus, 'the teller of old tales'.

Throughout his work, Palaephatus presents himself as a researcher into origins, but his project goes beyond the collecting and retelling of traditional stories. Instead of such 'standard' mythographical practice, Palaephatus creates an 'anti-mythography' that denies supernatural beings and mythical events. Instead of presenting the remote, mythical past as something fundamentally different and extraordinary, it is Palaephatus's aim to normalize it, erasing all traces of the supernatural and thus drawing it as close as possible to his normal, contemporary experience. Below, I will explore the tension between the rhetoric of discontinuity inherent in mythographical discourse and the historical continuity which Palaephatus proposes for his own project. As we will find that human speech, according to Palaephatus, is usually to blame for creating a misleading view on the past, I will also discuss the role of speech in his work.

2 Aetiological Myths

What do we generally mean by aetiological myths? Such myths mostly deal with gods, monsters or heroes who in some distant past performed a certain deed, the result of which has shaped a particular aspect of the world and/or its inhabitants as we see them today. Somehow, these otherworldly characters left

a mark or a sign that can still be recognized at later times, providing the link that enables the "process of binding the volatile present to the traditionally and divinely sanctioned regularity of the past".[1] This mark can manifest itself in the sphere of mankind, offering an otherworldly origin to customs, cults, rituals, institutions, and so on.[2] Alternatively, the original event manifests itself as a more palpable sign or mark, usually in the landscape: caves, mountains, rivers, cliffs, groves, etc.[3]

These aetiological events are usually situated in a mytho-historical period that is considered to be different from the contemporary one: still in flux and not yet fixed.[4] It is a world coming into existence, characterized, among other things, by its huge potential for creation.[5] One example of this mythological phase is the widespread notion of a Golden Age for humans; it is a world where work is unnecessary because food is generated *sponte sua*, and aging and disease are unknown.[6] Everything is born from the ground without any human so much as asking for it. This view of the early world in flux is present in mythologies around the world, and also features prominently in Greek mythology. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod gives us a clear picture of this strange and nascent world (that is slowly finding its definite form in the *Catalogue of Women* and is finally settled in the *Works and Days*, set in the here and now).[7] We should note that the poet is careful to present the age of gods and heroes as distant and

1 Kirk 1970, 258.

2 An example is the story of the first sacrifice at Mecone in Hesiod's *Theogony* (535–560), which explains to the Greeks why they perform sacrifices as they do.

3 For instance: the fire-shooting monster Typhoeus was buried under a mountain which since then has been known as Etna (Pind. *Ol.* 4.6–7, perhaps inspired by Hes. *Th.* 859–867). There are in fact numerous myths about colossal enemies of the Olympians being transformed into volcanoes by burying them under rocks, mountains or even entire islands (Alcyoneus, for instance, lies buried beneath Vesuvius, Polybotes beneath the volcanic island Nisyros, and Enceladus beneath Etna as well).

4 See e.g. Bascom 1965 on the primal nature of the world in which myths take place. The gods and monsters operate in our world, but it has not yet taken the form by which we recognize it as ours.

5 For instance, after his castration some blood of Uranus falls on the ground, and immediately an entire race of giants and other creatures is born (Hes. *Th.* 178–187).

6 See e.g. Eliade's chapter on 'Sacred Time and Myths' (Eliade 1959, 68–113) and especially his discussion of the "prestige of the beginnings" in *Myth and Reality* (Eliade 1963, 21–53) for examples. See Hes. *Op.* 109–126 for the first description of this blessed era.

7 Hesiodic authorship for the *Catalogue* is disputed (and rather unlikely); nonetheless, the poem fits squarely between the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* as far as their overall view of cosmogony is concerned. See e.g. Strauss Clay 2005, 26 on the *Catalogue* as "a perfect complement to heroic epic" and Haubold 2005, 96 on the poem as "suspended between two stages of world history".

categorically different than our present Iron Age. Homer, too, sees the world of the heroes as one that is irretrievably gone; we are often reminded of the inferiority of present people when compared to the characters of the heroic age. The period of heavenly bliss is gone; the most we humans can aspire to is a good mixed with evil.[8]

Generally speaking, aetiology is firmly wedded to origin myths, traditional stories that typically tell us of the three stages of creation: theogony, cosmogony and anthropogony.[9] These tales of birth, creation and epiphany are especially suited to aetiology because they are situated in a time that is ancient enough to 'fit the requirement' of being categorically different, and because they present the crucial moment of 'generation' – the primal burst that defines the nature of whatever it is that is created, and at the same time provides the 'knob' to which aetiological tales could be attached. Some mythologists would even go so far as to claim that the only 'real' myths are creation myths.[10] For the present chapter, however, it will suffice to say that creation myths are central to mythology and crucial for aetiology.

Aetiological myths thus explain a particular aspect of the contemporaneous world, be it a quality of the landscape, a custom, the shape or color of an animal, the human condition, anything. In fact, the adjective 'aetiological' has in terms of mythology sometimes been understood as the equivalent of 'explanatory'.[11] Obviously, this should not be understood in strictly cognitive terms: aetiologies provide more than just 'explanations' in an intellectual sense. For instance, a Norse myth telling how Heimdall slept with three couples on earth and thus fathered three types of men not only explains where rulers, warriors and laborers come from, but also validates and justifies political and economic differences between individuals.[12] Aetiologies also provide a shared identity and a future perspective for all who by telling a tale and listening to it underwrite its value; any foundation myth will serve as an example.

8 The *locus classicus* is Homer's image of Zeus having two jars in his palace, one filled with good and the other with evil; he either gives individuals something from both jars, or only from the jar of evil (*Il.* 24.566–574); see also Vernant's classic analysis of the myth of Prometheus in Hesiod (Vernant 1974, ch. 8).

9 See Schipper 2011, 4.

10 See e.g. Eliade 1963, 18–21.

11 See e.g. the introduction to Leeming 2005, 126: "Myth has always had an explanatory or etiological aspect".

12 The so-called 'charter' myth, a term coined by Malinowski 1926.

3 Palaephatus's Project

Let us now turn to Palaephatus, a fourth century mythographer known for collecting and investigating myths – not necessarily aetiological ones – about heroes and monsters.[13] Palaephatus is dedicated to a particular rationalizing approach to myth, different from the well-known practice of the allegorists. His two-fold aim is to a) reduce myths to a historical core and b) find out how the (demonstrably incorrect) myth came into existence (i.e. to find the *aition* of the myth, so to speak). In the Περὶ ἀπίστων (*On Unbelievable Tales*) that has come down to us, Palaephatus treats some fifty myths that way, though perhaps the original work was considerably larger. Throughout his work, Palaephatus purports to be focused on target A, and in his foreword he claims to be interested in reconstructing the historical truth; nevertheless, it is clear to any reader that target B is on the front of his mind, as his work is mainly concerned with the origin and explanations of the myths that are under discussion. That much is obvious from the fact that Palaephatus (despite the claim, made in the foreword, of having investigated the stories by interviewing local wise men and surveying the actual locations of the tales) does not discuss any external material. All he works with are the myths themselves, and hence, his two aims are intertwined. So, whereas aetiological myths in general often focus on a certain feature of the landscape and contain stories that tell us how geographical peculiarities were formed, Palaephatus views Greek mythology itself as a kind of landscape and searches for the origins of the myths themselves (see also Inger Kuin's chapter in this volume).

An example of Palaephatus's treatment of myths is Palaeph. 29, on Pelops and Hippodameia:

> Περὶ Πέλοπος καὶ τῶν ἵππων.
> Φασὶν ὅτι Πέλοψ ἦλθεν ἔχων ἵππους ὑποπτέρους εἰς Πῖσαν μνηστευσόμενος Ἱπποδάμειαν τὴν Οἰνομάου θυγατέρα. ἐγὼ δὲ τὰ αὐτὰ λέγω ἅπερ καὶ περὶ τοῦ Πηγάσου. ἐπεὶ Οἰνόμαος, εἰ ᾔδει ὑποπτέρους ὄντας τοὺς ἵππους τοῦ Πέλοπος, οὐκ ἂν δὴ τὴν θυγατέρα αὐτοῦ ἔδωκεν ἐπὶ το ἅρμα αὐτοῦ ἀναβιβάσαι. ῥητέον οὖν ὅτι Πέλοψ ἦλθεν ἔχων πλοῖον, ἐπεγέγραπτο δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς "Ἵπποι ὑπόπτεροι", ἁρπάσας δὲ τὴν κόρην ᾤχετο φεύγων. ἔλεγον δὲ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὡς ἁρπάσας τὴν Οἰνομάου θυγατέρα ἐπὶ τῶν Ἵππων ὑποπτέρων ᾤχετο φεύγων. καὶ ὁ μῦθος προσανεπλάσθη.

13 See Stern 1996, 1–24 or Koning (forthcoming) for an introduction to Palaephatus and his work.

> The Horses of Pelops
> The story is that Pelops came to the city of Pisa with winged horses to woo Hippodameia, the daughter of Oenomaus.
>
> Here I would say the same thing which I did about Pegasus. If Oenomaus had known that Pelops' horses were winged, he would never have allowed Pelops to put Hippodameia onto his chariot. What we must say is the following: that Pelops came to Pisa with a ship; that the words 'Winged Horses' were written across the cabin on its deck; and that Pelops abducted Hippodameia and fled.
>
> The people said: 'Pelops carried off Oenomaus' daughter on his Winged Horses and took to flight.' Thus the myth was fashioned.[14]

Palaephatus's *modus operandi* is clear. The Greeks tell a myth about a creature that cannot exist, and he provides a rational explanation that reconstructs reality in a way that is in accord with the principles at work in the world as we know it (principles we would nowadays refer to as laws of biology and physics). Moreover, the rationalization also explains why the myth was created that way.

Generally speaking, Palaephatus discerns three ways in which a myth can be explained. All three hinge on misunderstanding,[15] and feature misunderstood (1) appellations, (2) situations and (3) expressions, or, to use Palaephatus's own terms, misunderstood 'names' (ὀνόματα), 'deeds' (ἔργα) and 'words' (λόγοι);[16] we will come back to these terms again below.

4 History and Continuity

In order to understand Palaephatus's reconstruction of the past, we need to focus on his view of time and development. As the mythographer states in

14 Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Palaephatus are taken from Stern 1996; the Greek text is from Festa's Teubner edition (1902). Italics are mine.

15 The central role played by misunderstanding reminds us of Müller's 'disease' or 'forgetfulness' of language (cf. Müller 1867), a now obsolete theory that explains myths as the explanations, cast in narrative, of misunderstood expressions of a primal people by their uncomprehending successors. The vocabulary of this Ur-people was limited, mostly used to describe heavenly phenomena, and its expressions were often used metaphorically. Palaephatus, too, believes in the 'corruptive' power of words, and also puts the difference between literal and figurative speech to use in this theory. Unlike Müller, Palaephatus allows for expressions other than meteorological ones, and does not need generations to pass for the 'disease' to kick in: the act of misunderstanding follows directly after an expression or event.

16 See Koning (forthcoming).

the foreword, much of his method is based on a (presumably misunderstood) philosophical axiom that 'that which is, has been, and will be':[17]

> ὅσα δὲ εἴδη καὶ μορφαί εἰσι λεγόμεναι καὶ γενόμεναι τότε, αἳ νῦν οὐκ εἰσί, τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐκ ἐγένοντο. εἰ γάρ ⟨τί⟩ ποτε καὶ ἄλλοτε ἐγένετο, καὶ νῦν τε γίνεται καὶ αὖθις ἔσται. ἀεὶ δὲ ἔγωγε ἐπαινῶ τοὺς συγγραφέας Μέλισσον καὶ Λαμίσκον τὸν Σάμιον ἐν ἀρχῇ λέγοντας "ἔστιν ἃ ἐγένετο, καὶ νῦν ἔσται".
>
> As for the many forms and monstrous shapes which have been described as once having existed, but which now do not exist – these, I believe, did not exist in the past either. For anything which ever existed in the past exists now in the present and will exist hereafter. The writers Melissus and Lamiscus of Samos meet with my approval when in the beginning of their works they say this: "What came into being still exists and will exist hereafter."

According to this line of reasoning, a creature like a sphinx or minotaur cannot have existed in the past, because it does not exist today. This "model of biological and historical stasis"[18] appears, at least to modern readers, as a limited conception of development, since it denies evolution.[19] The origins of this particular idea have interested scholars, and, since the Suda states that Palaephatus was a student of Aristotle, some point to the Aristotelian notion of the fixity of species. This is an interesting question in itself, but somewhat beyond the scope of the present chapter. What interests me here, is Palaephatus's obvious notion that there can be no past that is different from our world in terms of biology and physics. This notion accords well with his general negation of the commonly held mythological view of the early days of the universe, briefly described in the introduction, during which well-known, empirically confirmed regularities of nature were not or not wholly in place, and all kinds of supposedly impossible matters did occur: superhuman feats,

17 Scholars disagree on the exact citation (I follow Diels and most others in excluding ἐν ἀρχῇ ['in the beginning'] from the citation. Melissus is an Eleatic philosopher whose words are probably misrepresented here (see the discussion in Hawes 2014, 43sq.). Lamiscus is unknown.

18 Hawes 2014, 44.

19 See Santoni 1998 for a general discussion of theoretical assumptions in Palaephatus's proem. Trachsel 2005 attempts to isolate peripatetic traces in Palaephatus's work. Zucker 2016 is, in my view, rightly sceptical about the influence of Aristotle.

impossible hybrid creatures, and so on. Palaephatus assumes a 'historical continuum' which effaces any break between the age of heroes and the present one.[20] As Hawes explains:

> Although the Greek past was conceived as a chronologically continuous entity stretching from the theogony to the present (…), events on this timeline were not homogeneous. The existence of a heroic past implies a breach between those earlier inhabitants of Greece whose superhuman deeds are celebrated and the recent period of more limited achievements. The Greek myths belonged to a world empirically different from the present (…). Rationalization, by contrast, requires an unchanging universe. It projects contemporary norms of possibility onto the past so that human experience through time is homogeneous.[21]

In spite of this Palaephatus does allow a modest kind of evolution in terms of culture, technology and thought. He mentions a couple of times that in earlier days (the days in which myths originated) human life was considerably less complicated. Apparently, this period was characterized by the necessity of physical labour, especially in terms of working the ground. This notion is present, for instance, in Palaeph. 7:

> Περὶ τῶν Διομήδους ἵππων.
> Περὶ τῶν Διομήδους ἵππων φασὶν ὅτι ἀνδροφάγοι ἦσαν, γελοίως· τὸ γὰρ ζῷον τοῦτο μᾶλλον χόρτῳ καὶ κριθῇ ἥδεται ἢ κρέασιν ἀνθρωπίνοις. τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς ὧδε ἔχει. τῶν παλαιῶν ἀνθρώπων ὄντων αὐτουργῶν, καὶ τὴν τροφὴν καὶ τὴν περιουσίαν οὕτως κτωμένων, ἅτε τὴν γῆν ἐργαζομένων, ἱπποτροφεῖν τις ἐπελάβετο, καὶ μέχρι τούτου ἵπποις ἥδετο, ἕως οὗ τὰ αὑτοῦ ἀπώλεσε καὶ πάντα πωλῶν κατανάλωσεν εἰς τὴν τῶν ἵππων τροφήν. οἱ οὖν φίλοι ἀνδροφάγους τοὺς ἵππους ὠνόμασαν. ὧν γενομένων προήχθη ὁ μῦθος.
>
> The Horses of Diomedes
> They say that Diomedes' horses ate men. Ridiculous! Horses enjoy barley and oats rather than human flesh.
>
> Here is the truth: *men of long ago made their living with their own hands, and it was by tilling the ground that they acquired food and abundant resources*. But a certain Diomedes became preoccupied with the breeding of horses. His delight in them reached the point that he lost his

20 Stern 1999, 217.
21 Hawes 2014, 43.

property: he sold everything he had and squandered it on the raising of his horses. So his friends called the horses 'man-eaters' – and that is how the myth began.

The passage italicized by me has not attracted much attention by scholars. Since some of Palaephatus's explanations hinge on inventions, he must assume that people were less developed, in a technological sense, in earlier times. But why does he focus on the hard work? I believe that part of the answer is caused by a need to explain the fact that even in the early stages of human life, people could devote themselves to breeding horses: a society needs a certain level of 'abundance' to allow for such economic diversity. But the focus on the necessity of working 'with your own hands', and on 'tilling the ground' also strengthens his denial of the mythological view of the primordial world. Obviously, in Palaephatus's view, the earth has never been a 'giver of goods'. The Hesiodic notion of *bios automatos*, that blissful characteristic of the Golden Age, is negated, and Palaephatus recognizes only the *condition humaine* described by Hesiod as the present one. It is a harsh view, which states that unending agricultural labour is the only way to ensure survival, and that only hard work can lead to material success. Palaephatus in passing corrects the Myth of the Ages and states that the Hesiodic Iron Age has always been the Age of mankind.

5 Against Utopia

I would like to explore this path a bit further. There are some other entries in the Περὶ ἀπίστων that focus on the earlier, simpler phase of humankind in terms of lack of wealth or money. Palaephatus mentions twice that in these earlier times, money had not been invented yet. In fact, some precious metals were not even known yet, especially silver and copper (necessary for coins), metals that are first brought to light by a character called Lynceus.[22] I would suggest

22 See Palaeph. 9: 'Lynceus. It is said that Lynceus could even see what was underground. The report is false; the truth is as follows. Lynceus was the first to mine for copper, silver and such metals. In his searching for these metals he would carry portable lamps underground, where he would leave them while he brought up sacks of copper and iron. People said: "Lynceus sees even what is under the earth; he goes down and brings up silver!"' (Περὶ Λυγκέως. Λέγεται ὡς Λυγκεὺς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆν ἑώρα. τοῦτο δὲ ψευδές. τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς ἔχει ὧδε. Λυγκεὺς πρῶτος ἤρξατο μεταλλεύειν χαλκὸν καὶ ἄργυρον καὶ τὰ λοιπά· ἐν δὲ τῇ μεταλλείᾳ λύχνους καταφέρων ὑπὸ τὴν γῆν, τοὺς μὲν κατελίμπανεν ἐπὶ τοῦ τόπου, αὐτὸς δὲ θυλάκους ἀνέφερε τοῦ χαλκοῦ καὶ τοῦ σιδήρου. ἔλεγον οὖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι "Λυγκεὺς καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆν ὁρᾷ καὶ καταδύνων ἀργύριον ἀναφέρει.")

that the notion of the original absence of money is connected to another view on the early phases of human history that is impossible in Palaephatus's eyes: the belief in the existence of ancient super-civilizations that have broken down or been destroyed.

In order to fully understand this, we need to go back to Palaephatus's foreword. Apart from establishing his 'rule of continuity' (i.e. what is, has been and will be), in this passage he also comments on the relationship between deeds and words:

> ἀνθρώπων γὰρ οἱ μὲν εὐπειθέστεροι πείθονται πᾶσι τοῖς λεγομένοις, ὡς ἀνομίλητοι σοφίας καὶ ἐπιστήμης, οἱ δὲ πυκνότεροι τὴν φύσιν καὶ πολυπράγματοι ἀπιστοῦσι τὸ παράπαν μηδὲ γενέσθαι τι τούτων. ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκεῖ γενέσθαι πάντα τὰ λεγόμενα (οὐ γὰρ ὀνόματα μόνον ἐγένοντο, λόγος δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν οὐδεὶς ὑπῆρξεν· ἀλλὰ πρότερον ἐγένετο τὸ ἔργον, εἶθ' οὕτως ὁ λόγος ὁ περὶ αὐτῶν)·
>
> Now some people, who have no acquaintance with philosophy or science, are too credulous and believe everything that is said to them. Others, of a more subtle and inquisitive nature, totally disbelieve that any of these tales ever happened. My own belief is that there is a reality behind all stories. *For names alone without stories would hardly have arisen: first there must have been deeds and thereafter stories about them.*

Palaephatus seems extraordinarily keen on connecting occurrences with the 'words' (or 'stories', or 'expressions', λόγοι) that are used to describe them.[23] The two are often closely connected in his explanations of mythology.[24] Palaephatus's distinction between words and deeds has a philosophical ring to it. Anna Santoni believes that the mythographer is referring more or less generally to the practice of distinguishing between λόγοι and ἔργα as we also

23 It is worth noting that in this passage from the foreword, Palaephatus uses the term λόγος, which is mostly neutral; he uses μῦθος, 'myth', or its derivatives μυθώδης and μυθικός, for traditional narrative. See Hawes 2014, 51: "Within the *Peri Apiston*, traditional stories are inevitably labelled μῦθοι and their rationalized replacements typically called λόγοι", with n. 47. But this statement needs qualification; see below.

24 Some examples are: τούτου τοῦ πράγματος ἀληθινοῦ γενομένου ὁ μῦθος προσανεπλάσθη ('this was the real event from which the myth was fashioned', Palaeph. 3); τούτων γενομένων τὰ λοιπὰ ἐμυθεύθη ('the rest of the myth was fashioned from these events', Palaeph. 4); ὧν γενομένων ἐμυθολογήθη ἐκεῖνα ('afterward these events were turned into a myth', Palaeph. 5); ὧν γενομένων προήχθη ὁ μῦθος ('these were the events that led to the myth', Palaeph. 7 [own translation]); οὗ γενομένου γράφουσι τὴν ὕδραν ὄφιν καὶ τὸν μῦθον προσαναπλάττουσιν ('after this event people wrote that Hydra was a serpent and the myth was fashioned', Palaeph. 38 [Stern adapted]).

find it in sophistic thought, mainly as portrayed by Plato;[25] one can think of reference texts such as Plato's *Gorgias* (82B3 D.-K.), *Sophist* 260b–264b and especially *Cratylus* 384d–e. The linguistic conventionalism commonly associated with the sophists is supposedly taken even further by Palaephatus, who is taken to mean here that if there is a *logos* about something, that something must necessarily exist in the outside world we call reality. There are deeds first, and the stories follow after.[26]

In a recent article, however, Van den Berg has argued convincingly that the Palaephatean distinction between words and deeds has a singular, specific Platonic intertext, namely the tale of Atlantis in the *Critias*. The main reason for focusing on this text is the inclusion of a third term, 'names', that complicates the basic opposition between λόγοι and ἔργα. *Critias* 109d–110a reads:

> ὧν τὰ μὲν ὀνόματα σέσωται, τὰ δὲ ἔργα διὰ τὰς τῶν παραλαμβανόντων φθορὰς καὶ τὰ μήκη τῶν χρόνων ἠφανίσθη. τὸ γὰρ περιλειπόμενον ἀεὶ γένος, ὥσπερ καὶ πρόσθεν ἐρρήθη, κατελείπετο ὄρειον καὶ ἀγράμματον, τῶν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ δυναστῶν τὰ ὀνόματα ἀκηκοὸς μόνον καὶ βραχέα πρὸς αὐτοῖς τῶν ἔργων. τὰ μὲν οὖν ὀνόματα τοῖς ἐκγόνοις ἐτίθεντο ἀγαπῶντες, τὰς δὲ ἀρετὰς καὶ τοὺς νόμους τῶν ἔμπροσθεν οὐκ εἰδότες, εἰ μὴ σκοτεινὰς περὶ ἑκάστων τινὰς ἀκοάς, ἐν ἀπορίᾳ δὲ τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐπὶ πολλὰς γενεὰς ὄντες αὐτοὶ καὶ παῖδες, πρὸς οἷς ἠπόρουν τὸν νοῦν ἔχοντες, τούτων πέρι καὶ τοὺς λόγους ποιούμενοι, τῶν ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν καὶ πάλαι ποτὲ γεγονότων ἠμέλουν. μυθολογία γὰρ ἀναζήτησίς τε τῶν παλαιῶν μετὰ σχολῆς ἅμ' ἐπὶ τὰς πόλεις ἔρχεσθον, ὅταν ἱδητόν τισιν ἤδη τοῦ βίου τἀναγκαῖα κατεσκευασμένα, πρὶν δὲ οὔ. ταύτῃ δὴ τὰ τῶν παλαιῶν ὀνόματα ἄνευ τῶν ἔργων διασέσωται.

25 See Santoni 1998 and Santoni 2000 23–26; and the critical note of Van den Berg 2017, 309sq., n. 5.

26 This supposedly Palaephatean notion is reminiscent of one of the most important questions in mythological studies, e.g. that on the priority of rite ('deed') or myth ('story'). Ritualists took their cue from W.R. Smith ("myth was derived from the ritual", Smith 1894, 18) and focused on the priority of rite: man acted first and later developed tales to provide context for that behaviour (although even Jane Harrison, the central figure of the Cambridge Ritualists, was prepared to concede that myth and rite could "arise *pari passu*" (Harrison 1912, 16). The other side is chosen by such figures as Usener, Gadamer and especially Blumenberg, who regarded myth as a fundamental tool for opposing the anxieties of primal man (a theory Blumenberg developed at length in his *Arbeit am Mythos*). Some scholars attempted to cross the divide; one example is Walter Burkert, who argued for a symbiotic relationship of rite and myth (see Burkert 1979, 57), downplaying the question of priority.

> The names of these first inhabitants have been preserved, but their deeds have perished on account of the catastrophes that befell those who succeed them and the long passage of time intervening. Those of their race who survived these successive destructions were, as I said before, left as an illiterate mountain people who had only heard the tradition of the names of their rulers of their country and beyond these only little of their deeds. Now, they were pleased to give their descendants the names of these rulers, even though they were unaware of their ancestors' virtues and institutions – except for some dim legends concerning each of them. Then, for many generations, these survivors and their children lived in distress for their survival and gave thought to their needs; they made *logoi* about supplying these needs, and had no interest in the events of the distant past. For it is in the train of Leisure that Mythology and Inquiry into Ancient Things arrive in cities, once they have observed that in the case of some peoples the necessities of life have been secured, but not before. This is why the names of the ancients have been secured but not their deeds.[27]

Plato's tale of Atlantis presents a picture of a rich, beautiful, wealthy, and developed ancient civilization that existed long ago but was annihilated because of a global catastrophe. Only the names of its long-lost people somehow survived, their deeds gone forever (although Plato does concede 'some dim legends' about them); the few survivors did not have the leisure to occupy themselves with old tales and made stories about more pressing concerns. According to Van den Berg, Palaephatus responds to this Platonic notion of surviving names and lost stories of great deeds by instead insisting on the "authentic character of mythological stories".[28] That only names survive, seems illogical: why should the survivors use names that have no meaning for them?

As we have seen above, Palaephatus strongly believes in the survival of 'deeds' and 'stories' as well – together with 'names', they are the cause of the misunderstandings leading to myth. Plato's account in the *Critias* presents a highly developed civilization that was destroyed altogether, creating a 'break' in the timeline of human history, similar to the mythological one between the Heroic Age and the Iron Age. This kind of historical discontinuity, however, cannot be accepted by Palaephatus, whose reconstructive aims depend on

27 Pl. *Cri.* 109d2–110a7. I am following (with slight modifications) the translation in Van den Berg 2017 (which is the slightly adapted translation of Strauss Clay).

28 Van den Berg 2017, 313.

continuity of some kind. Therefore, he creates a small-scale history of gradual progress instead: that is his way of establishing a solid link between past and present. This is the reason, I suggest, why he focuses on the *similarity* of the world of then and now, not extolling former ages but instead lowering them to even below our own experiences. His early humans are neither heroes nor a technologically advanced super-species, but rather stupid people, poor people, people unaccustomed to wealth and precious metals.

It is tempting to believe that Palaephatus' denial of a bygone super-civilization is also targeting Euhemerus' vision of Panchaea (although it is unclear whether he knew Euhemerus' work).[29] Euhemerus' description of Panchaea is in fact closely related to Plato's account of Atlantis,[30] and both worlds are characterized by superior wealth and technology. This is exemplified by the following passage (taken from Diodorus, the main source for the lost work of Euhemerus):

> ἀναθήματα δὲ χρυσᾶ καὶ ἀργυρᾶ πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα τοῖς θεοῖς ἀνάκειται, σεσωρευκότος τοῦ χρόνου τὸ πλῆθος τῶν καθιερωμένων ἀναθημάτων. τά τε θυρώματα τοῦ ναοῦ θαυμαστὰς ἔχει τὰς κατασκευὰς ἐξ ἀργύρου καὶ χρυσοῦ καὶ ἐλέφαντος, ἔτι δὲ θύας δεδημιουργημένας. ἡ δὲ κλίνη τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ μὲν μῆκος ὑπάρχει πηχῶν ἕξ, τὸ δὲ πλάτος τεττάρων, χρυσῆ δ' ὅλη καὶ τῇ κατὰ μέρος ἐργασίᾳ φιλοτέχνως κατεσκευασμένη. παραπλήσιος δὲ καὶ ἡ τράπεζα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τῷ μεγέθει καὶ τῇ λοιπῇ πολυτελείᾳ παράκειται πλησίον τῆς κλίνης. κατὰ μέσην δὲ τὴν κλίνην ἕστηκε στήλη χρυσῆ μεγάλη, γράμματα ἔχουσα τὰ παρ' Αἰγυπτίοις ἱερὰ καλούμενα …
>
> There are many great dedications of gold and of silver which have been made to the gods, since time has amassed the multitude of such offerings. The doorways of the temple are objects of wonder in their construction, being worked in silver and gold and ivory and citrus-wood. And there is the couch of the god, which is six cubits long and four wide and is entirely of gold and skilfully constructed in every detail of its workmanship. Similar to it both in size and in costliness in general is the table of the

29 The rationalization of Palaephatus is often compared to the work of Euhemerus (see e.g. Stern 1996, 8). It is theoretically possible that Palaephatus knew of the ideas of Euhemerus as voiced by Euhemerus himself, Palaephatus flourishing around 340–330 (as is the *communis opinio*) and Euhemerus flourishing around 310–300 (idem).

30 See e.g. Clay and Purvis 1999, 45: "In stark contrast to the heavenly, dull, and austere city of Plato's *Republic*, lie two earthly, radiant, and wealthy islands at the 'sacred extremes' of the Greek world: Atlantis to the west and Panchaia to the east."

> god which stands near the couch. And on the centre of the couch stands a large gold *stele* which carries letters which the Egyptians call sacred …[31]

The materially rich world presented here is the exact opposite of Palaephatus's view of early human life as an age of poverty and backwardness.

6 The Power of Words

If we follow Van den Berg, one of the main tenets of Palaephatus's method is that the names, deeds and words that have given rise to myth are both ancient and traceable. There are no spectacular leaps of fancy or bursts of creative genius that create myths – rather, myths seem to stem from words or *logoi* in a more basic and banal way: a historical deed is described and the words are misunderstood.[32] That is not to say that poetical fancy is wholly absent from Palaephatus. In his time, it was customary to blame poets for the creation of fanciful *logoi*. Especially in the historiographical tradition, we find the topos of stressing the truth-value of historiography and pointing to the fictional bent of the poets.[33] Palaephatus taps into this tradition in his foreword:

> γενομένων δέ τινα οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ λογογράφοι παρέτρεψαν εἰς τὸ ἀπιστότερον καὶ θαυμασιώτερον, τοῦ θαυμάζειν ἕνεκα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. ἐγὼ δὲ γινώσκω ὅτι οὐ δύναται τὰ τοιαῦτα εἶναι οἷα καὶ λέγεται· τοῦτο δὲ καὶ διείληφα, ὅτι, εἰ μὴ ἐγένετο, οὐκ ἂν ἐλέγετο.

> But the poets and early historians, in order to astonish people, have turned certain past events into unbelievable and wonderful tales. Now I know that such tales cannot be true, but at the same time I understand that there would not be stories if there were not real events behind them.

31 D.S. 5.46.5–7 (transl. C. Oldfather).

32 This simple route from *logos* to *mythos* should not be understood in the light of the ongoing discussion about the relation between Mythos (mythical, figurative language) and Logos (rational, scientific discourse) that is still relevant in the history of ideas. See Most 1999 for a useful attack on the traditional view of early thinking slowly liberating itself from Mythos in order to become rational and enlightened, embracing Logos. See Lincoln 1999, 207–216 for the science of mythology as myth, and Coupe 2009, 15 for the argument that in postmodern times "we have witnessed, not a retreat from myth, but a much more pervasive sense of myth".

33 See the scepticism of e.g. Th. (1.20–22); the rationalizing approach to myth is already visible in Herodotus and presumably predates him (see Stern 1996, 10–13).

There seems to be a programmatic tone about this, and there is a passage in the Περὶ ἀπίστων that goes even further in ascribing to poets a wilful purpose of creating a *dieu policier* (Palaeph. 6):[34]

> Φασὶν Ἀκταίωνα ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων κυνῶν καταβρωθῆναι. τοῦτο δὲ ψευδές· κύων γὰρ δεσπότην καὶ τροφέα μάλιστα φιλεῖ, ἄλλως τε καὶ αἱ θηρευτικαὶ πάντας ἀνθρώπους σαίνουσιν. ἔνιοι δέ φασιν ὡς Ἄρτεμις μὲν ⟨εἰς ἔλαφον μετέβαλεν⟩ αὐτόν, ἔλαφον δὲ ἀνεῖλον αἱ κύνες. ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκεῖ Ἄρτεμιν μὲν δύνασθαι ὅ τι θέλοι ποιῆσαι· οὐ μέντοι ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἔλαφον ἐξ ἀνδρὸς ἢ ἐξ ἐλάφου ἄνδρα γενέσθαι· τοὺς δὲ μύθους τούτους συνέθεσαν οἱ ποιηταί, ἵνα οἱ ἀκροώμενοι μὴ ὑβρίζοιεν εἰς τὸ θεῖον.
>
> They say that Actaeon was devoured by his own dogs. But the story is false, for a dog is most affectionate toward its master and provider, and hunting dogs in particular fawn on everyone. Some, however, say that Artemis changed Actaeon into a deer, and that it was this deer that the dogs killed. Now it seems to me that Artemis can do whatever she wants, yet it is not true that a man became a deer or a deer a man. *It is the poets who have made up such myths, so that people who hear them will not commit outrageous acts against divinity.*

If one looks further, however, poets are not particularly prominent in Palaephatus as the creators or composers of myth. Apart from the parts of the foreword and Palaeph. 6 quoted above, there is only one more occasion of poets being pointed out as the creators of myth (Palaeph. 2), and on one other occasion we find a particular type of professional authors, the mythographers, in this role (Palaeph. 26).[35] But far more often it is just people, witnessing some unprecedented event, who express it in words (*logoi*) and in this way create

34 The notion of a *dieu policier* goes back at least as far as the pseudo-Euripidean *Sisyphus* (TrGF I 43 Critias fr. 19); the idea is foreshadowed in Hesiod's account of the 'thrice ten thousand' guardians of Zeus, who 'watch over judgments and cruel deeds, clad in invisibility, walking everywhere upon the earth' (*Op.* 252–255, translation G.W. Most).

35 The explicit point made in the foreword should thus perhaps be interpreted more as a topos than a significant part of Palaephatus's view and method. The same holds for his claim of autopsy and inquiry, stated at the conclusion of the foreword: 'I visited many lands and inquired of the older people what knowledge they had about each of these tales, and I am here writing down what I learned from them. I myself saw the condition of each place, and in what follows I have written not merely what I was told, but after going myself and making inquiry.' (ἐπελθὼν δὲ καὶ πλείστας χώρας ἐπυνθανόμην τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ὡς ἀκούοιεν περὶ ἑκάστου αὐτῶν, συγγράφω δὲ ἃ ἐπυθόμην παρ' αὐτῶν. καὶ τὰ χωρία αὐτὸς

the mythical core or 'germ' of the tale; once again, we see misunderstanding as the key factor in the birth of myths.[36] It is mostly just 'they' or 'the people' who create the myth.[37]

Generally speaking, mythographers rarely use direct speeches in their accounts.[38] Palaephatus in this sense surprises us, because there is hardly an item in his collection without some direct speech. This is partly because his rationalizations often depend on a direct verbal expression that in itself carries the core of the mythification. But there is also much direct speech that is not really necessary at all for explaining the myth.[39] In these cases, the reader can already understand what Palaephatus is driving at, but still he finds it necessary to include some direct speech, however brief. This apparently redundant use

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εἶδον ὡς ἔστιν ἕκαστον ἔχον, καὶ γέγραφα ταῦτα οὐχ οἷα ἦν λεγόμενα, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν καὶ ἱστορήσας.)

36 Cf. Stern 1999, 221: "Myth with Palaephatus is always the result of misunderstanding, never of design".

37 Here, too, Palaephatus touches upon a significant theme in the history of the science of mythology: are myths by their very nature traditional, i.e. were they created at some undefinable point in history in ways largely untraceable by a collective, or were they made up by an individual? Most 1999, 36–40 has shown the important influence of Heyne on the development of the idea that myths come from a 'Volk', but early modern theorists like Frazer mostly think of (unknown) individuals as the creators of myth (see Csapo 2005, 51–57), a way of thinking that was targeted by ritualists who focused on the collective as the 'unit of worship'. Naturally, there are also theorists (like Jung) who believe that the aspect of tradition is not relevant to myth and who allow for modern myths to be created by contemporary authors (like J.R.R. Tolkien, on whose mythmaking in general see Chance 2004).

38 Fowler 2006, 40.

39 An example is Palaeph. 15 on Europa: 'Europa. They say that Europa, the daughter of Phoenix, was carried across the sea on the back of a bull from Tyre to Crete. But in my opinion neither a bull nor a horse would traverse so great an expanse of open water, nor would a girl climb upon the back of a wild bull. As for Zeus – if he wanted Europa to go to Crete, he would have found a better way for her to travel. Here is the truth. There was a man from Cnossus by the name of Taurus who was making war on the territory of Tyre. He ended up by carrying off from Tyre quite a number of girls, including the king's daughter, Europa. So people said: "Bull has gone off with Europa, the king's daughter." It was from this that the myth was fashioned.' (Περὶ Εὐρώπης. Φασὶν Εὐρώπην τὴν Φοίνικος ἐπὶ ταύρου ὀχουμένην διὰ τῆς θαλάσσης ἐκ Τύρου εἰς Κρήτην ἀφικέσθαι. ἐμοὶ δὲ οὔτ' ἂν ταῦρος οὔθ' ἵππος δοκεῖ τοσοῦτον πέλαγος διανύσαι [δύνασθαι], οὔτε κόρη ἐπὶ ταῦρον ἄγριον ἀναβῆναι· ὅ τε Ζεύς, εἰ ἐβούλετο Εὐρώπην εἰς Κρήτην ἐλθεῖν, εὑρεῖν ἂν αὐτῇ ἑτέραν πορείαν καλλίονα. τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς ἔχει ὧδε. ἀνὴρ Κνώσιος ὀνόματι Ταῦρος ἐπολέμει τὴν Τυρίαν χώραν. τελευτῶν οὖν ἐκ Τύρου ἥρπασεν ἄλλας τε πολλὰς κόρας καὶ δὴ καὶ τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως θυγατέρα Εὐρώπην. ἔλεγον οὖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι "Εὐρώπην τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως Ταῦρος ἔχων ᾤχετο." τούτων γενομένων προσανεπλάσθη ὁ μῦθος.) Another example is Palaeph. 10 (on Caeneus).

of direct speech is remarkable; there are numerous instances where the actual vocalization is, as far as the argument is concerned, completely unnecessary.[40]

I suggest that the inclusion of direct speech, actual *logoi* once spoken in the history as reconstructed by Palaephatus, are vital to express the mythographer's conviction that words are always instrumental in creating a myth. Hawes' observation that the term *logos* is mostly neutral and can be viewed as the 'origin' out of which a myth can be created[41] is correct, but it is striking that in almost all of Palaephatus's entries, the myth he is going to rationalize is also introduced by neutral terms such as φασίν ('they say', 24 times) and (a form of) *logos* (λόγος, λέγει, λέγεται, 16 times). He even sometimes uses a term used for writing 'history' (ἱστορεῖται, Palaeph. 22 and ἱστοροῦσιν, Palaeph. 30 and 41). Conversely, the term *mythos* is seldom used.[42] This practice seems to underscore the equation between direct speech, the actual spoken *logos*, and the garbled, misunderstood version that we know as myth. Reflection on verbal expressions is central to Palaephatus's project: there is no other way that he can dismantle the 'otherworld' populated by heroes and monsters. The past and present world of humans is almost the same according to Palaephatus: there is a gradual but not a categorical difference. Only the power of human speech and imagination could cause the severe discontinuity of the mythological view of early human life.

7 Conclusion

In the history of aetiology, Palaephatus is an odd character. Usually, aetiology works against (and thus presupposes) discontinuity: it is the function of aetiology to create a bridge from the present to a valued and distinctly other past by highlighting (or, actually shaping) a link to that past. As was stated in the introduction, aetiology not only explains but also validates, rejuvenates and

40 See e.g. Palaeph. 1 (on Centaurs), 5 (on the Teumesian Fox), 15 (on Europa), 19 (on Cottus and Briareos), 24 (on Geryon), 26 (on Glaucus, son of Minos), and 28 (on Bellerophon). In some other entries, it could be argued that the piece of direct speech makes at least one element explicit that was implicit before, but any audience would have already guessed that (see e.g. Palaeph. 29 on the Winged Horses, quoted in full above, and Palaeph. 33, on Orpheus).

41 See n. 23 above; she points to expressions like ἀπὸ δὴ ταύτης τῆς ἰδέας καὶ τοῦ λόγου ὁ μῦθος ἀπίστως ἐπλάσθη (Palaeph. 1), that are obviously parallel to the link between 'events' and myths as exemplified in n. 24 above.

42 μυθεύεται in Palaeph. 2; μῦθος in Palaeph. 26, 33, and 40.

identifies. It makes the wondrous, desired past manifest itself in some way in the present. The bridge is always man-made and is constructed by words or images that require some leap of faith, some form of willingness to believe.

Palaephatus is a researcher of origins and causes, but it is the construction of myths themselves that is the object of his investigation. He denies a discontinuity between the past and the present and stresses their essential sameness. In his system, there is no need for a bridge that requires some form of imagination; rather, the bridge requires an undoing of this imagination. He regards human misunderstanding, as manifested in the ubiquitous power of *logos*, as a disruptive, perverting factor that obscures the past.

Interestingly, this particular method is quite powerful as a tool of explanation, and Palaephatus specifically appeals to the mental faculties of his audience. At the same time, however, he drains aetiology of its other, perhaps more interesting functions. Without imagination, without the wondrous, bizarre and beautiful otherworld, there is little room for rejuvenation, shared identity, or sense of belonging. Palaephatus's reconstructed past is so close to our present that it can tell us very little about ourselves.

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CHAPTER 9

Patroclus was a Parasite

Lucian's Satirical Aitia

Inger N.I. Kuin

1 Introduction[1]

'No one knows so little of Homer, so as not to know that the best of the heroes are parasites' (*Par.* 44). This bold claim comes from Simon, an interlocutor in a dialogue by the second century CE author Lucian of Samosata, titled *De parasito* (*On the Parasite*). Simon's argument in this piece is that the parasitic art deserves to be considered a *technē* because the Homeric heroes invented the practice. *De parasito* is a clear parody of the genre of encomium, but it also takes aim at the efforts of myth rationalizers, from Prodicus (fifth century BCE) to Heraclitus (second century CE), to explain (origin) myths by explaining the origins of origin myths. In this chapter I will argue that *De parasito*, together with such pieces as *De saltatione* (*On the Dance*), *De astrologia* (*On Astrology*), *Electrum* (*Amber*), and *Muscae encomium* (*Praise of the Fly*), represents Lucian's playful response through parody to rationalizing aetiologies of myth.

Myth rationalizers test myths against the standards of probability and plausibility of the present, and reinterpret or alter them to fit such standards.[2] Arguing, for instance, that it is impossible that Atlas carries heaven on his shoulders, they maintain that he was among the first astrologers. Similarly, Medea was not really a sorceress but rather an inventive and entrepreneurial

1 I would like to thank the editors of this volume for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter, as well as Richard Hunter for his help with the paper from which this chapter derives. I have presented this work at the CRASIS Annual Meeting at Groningen University in 2016 and at the Venice International University Advanced Seminar in the Humanities 2014; I thank the audiences at both conferences for their insightful comments and questions. Greta Hawes kindly shared the proofs of her book on myth rationalization with me, which was not yet published when I first started this project (Hawes 2014). This chapter has been written with the support of the Anchoring Innovation research project. Anchoring Innovation is the Gravitation Grant research agenda of the Dutch National Research School in Classical Studies, OIKOS. It is financially supported by the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science (NWO project number 024.003.012). For more information about the research programme and its results, see the website www.anchoringinnovation.nl.

2 Hawes 2014, 2sq. See also Hugo Koning's chapter in this volume.

beautician.[3] The tendency to reinterpret gods and heroes as human 'first inventors' goes back to Prodicus and, later on, Euhemerus (third century BCE). Lucian puts this motif on its head by applying it to lowly pursuits like parasitism, or by expanding the number of first inventors to ridiculous proportions. Both the practice of myth rationalization and the application of the first inventor motif specifically originated several centuries before Lucian's lifetime. Nonetheless, in the second century CE several authors produced myth rationalizations, using also the first inventor motif; two relevant authors from the period whose works have been preserved are Pausanias, the well-known travel writer, and the much less known writer Heraclitus the Paradoxographer (not to be confused with the natural philosopher from Ephesus). Lucian's parodies should be read as a response to these kinds of texts, and thus as an engagement with one of the trends of the literary culture of his day.

I will start this chapter with a discussion of the efforts of myth rationalizers generally and Lucian's distortions and parodies of these efforts. Next, I will focus on the first inventor motif and its application by Lucian's contemporaries, as well as Lucian's humorous response to them. With his satire Lucian exposes the double bind that troubled myth rationalizers: on the one hand, they wanted to stay true to their standards of plausibility, on the other hand, they wanted to salvage the mythical and aetiological traditions – the very fabric of Greek culture and therefore seen as intrinsically valuable – as much as possible. As a result, many of their 'rational' explanations are scarcely more credible than the myths they were meant to explain in the first place. I argue that Lucian's parodies aim to show that the rationalizers fail to understand the difference between everyday causality and mythical causality: unlike methodical, proto-scientific explanations from historiographical or medical writing, mythical narratives can be *true* even if they are unlikely (cf. also Klooster in this volume). Lucian playfully exposes the futility of trying to explain the origins of origin myths, which ultimately amounts to aetiologizing aetiologies.

2 Lucian and Myth Rationalizers

In her recent monograph on the subject of myth rationalization Greta Hawes has emphasized that this method is not in principle antagonistic to myth. Practices of questioning, appropriating, and even altering myth are embedded

3 The first example comes from Heraclitus the Paradoxographer, the second one from Palaephatus (cf. Hugo Koning's chapter in this volume); see the third section below for references.

within the system from the start, while traditional versions of myths continue to live and flourish alongside.[4] Traces of the tendency to explain and rationalize myth can already be found in early prose authors like Hecataeus (sixth century BCE), Prodicus, and, of course, Herodotus. Critical remarks about myth rationalization in Euripides and Plato show that it was a relatively well-known phenomenon in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.[5] The first extant author who participated in myth rationalization in a systematic way was Palaephatus, who wrote in the late fourth century BCE. Hawes traces the tradition of myth rationalization forward in time, via Euhemerus, Conon, and Plutarch to the work of Pausanias and Heraclitus in the second century CE.[6] Before turning to Palaephatus,[7] I will illustrate the practice of myth rationalization with a passage from Pausanias, Lucian's contemporary.

Pausanias' *Periegesis* is of course much more than just myth rationalization, but explanations of myths are a recurring feature of the work. One example is his account of Boeotia, where he explains the well-known story of the spring of Narcissus as follows (9.31.7–8):[8]

> τοῦτο μὲν δὴ παντάπασιν εὔηθες, ἡλικίας ἤδη τινὰ ἐς τοῦτο ἥκοντα ὡς ὑπὸ ἔρωτος ἁλίσκεσθαι μηδὲ ὁποῖόν τι ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁποῖόν τι ἀνθρώπου σκιὰ διαγνῶναι. ἔχει δὲ καὶ ἕτερος ἐς αὐτὸν λόγος, ἧσσον μὲν τοῦ προτέρου γνώριμος, λεγόμενος δὲ καὶ οὗτος, ἀδελφὴν γενέσθαι Ναρκίσσῳ δίδυμον, τά τε ἄλλα ἐς ἄπαν ὅμοιον τὸ εἶδος καὶ ἀμφοτέροις ὡσαύτως κόμην εἶναι καὶ ἐσθῆτα ἐοικυῖαν αὐτοὺς ἐνδύεσθαι καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ θήραν ἰέναι μετὰ ἀλλήλων· Νάρκισσον δὲ ἐρασθῆναι τῆς ἀδελφῆς, καὶ ὡς ἀπέθανεν ἡ παῖς, φοιτῶντα ἐπὶ τὴν πηγὴν συνιέναι μὲν ὅτι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σκιὰν ἑώρα, εἶναι δέ οἱ καὶ συνιέντι ῥᾳστώνην τοῦ ἔρωτος ἅτε οὐχ ἑαυτοῦ σκιὰν δοξάζοντι ἀλλὰ εἰκόνα ὁρᾶν τῆς ἀδελφῆς.

4 Hawes 2014, 223–225; cf. Pirenne-Delforge 2009, 39sq. (this text is adapted from Pirenne-Delforge 2008, 64–86); Hunter 2016.

5 In Pl. *Phdr*. 229c–230a Socrates dismisses a rationalization of a myth about Boreas as ἄγροικός τις σοφία, 'a rustic kind of wisdom'; cf. Hawes 2014, 15–17; *contra* Werner 2012, who argues that Socrates is talking about allegory instead of myth rationalization in this passage, and Brouwer 2014, who disputes that Socrates is being critical of rationalization; on the distinction between allegory and rationalization see Hawes 2014, 28–35. At E. *Ba*. 286–297 Teiresias explains the myth of Dionysus' birth from Zeus' thigh through far-fetched, rationalizing wordplay; the whole scene seems parodic in nature, cf. Segal 1997, 280; Hawes 2014, 14sq.

6 Hawes 2014, 6–13. On rationalization in Plutarch, specifically of underworld myths, see also Hilton 2019.

7 On Palaephatus and aetiology see also the chapter by Hugo Koning in this volume.

8 The story is told in great detail at Ov. *Met*. 3.339–508; on the myth in general see Nelson 2000.

> It is utter stupidity to imagine that a man old enough to fall in love was incapable of distinguishing a man from a man's reflection. There is another story about him, less known than the previous one, but told also nonetheless. Narcissus had a twin sister, they were exactly alike in appearance, they had the same hair and wore the same clothes, and they even went hunting together. Narcissus fell in love with his sister, and when the girl died, he would go to the spring. Though he knew that he saw his own reflection, it was still some relief of his love-pains for him to think that he saw not his own reflection, but the image of his sister.[9]

For Pausanias the idea that an adult man could mistake his own reflection for someone else defies common sense. He retains, though, the basic idea that there is a spring in Boeotia where these events played out that one can visit in present time, and that the transmitted knowledge about the location of this spring is accurate. The rationalization cited by Pausanias here introduces instead a twin sister looking identical to Narcissus into puberty, arguably replacing one incredible story element with an equally unlikely narrative twist. Although Pausanias cites not his own but someone else's rationalization here,[10] he does so seemingly with approval, and elsewhere he does offer original rationalizations.[11]

The narrative of the piece *Electrum* by Lucian follows a similar structure as Pausanias' account of the spring of Narcissus: someone travels to the site of a famous mythological event, and uses the opportunity to reflect on the plausibility of said event. But in fact, I suggest, *Electrum* functions as humorous criticism of the type of rationalist inquiry that Pausanias, whose work Lucian was likely familiar with,[12] and others represent. The piece starts out as follows (*Electr.* 1):

> Ἠλέκτρου πέρι καὶ ὑμᾶς δηλαδὴ ὁ μῦθος πέπεικεν, αἰγείρους ἐπὶ τῷ Ἠριδανῷ ποταμῷ δακρύειν αὐτὸ θρηνούσας τὸν Φαέθοντα, καὶ ἀδελφάς γε εἶναι τὰς αἰγείρους ἐκείνας τοῦ Φαέθοντος, εἶτα ὀδυρομένας τὸ μειράκιον ἀλλαγῆναι ἐς τὰ δένδρα, καὶ ἀποστάζειν ἔτι αὐτῶν δάκρυον δῆθεν τὸ ἤλεκτρον. τοιαῦτα γὰρ ἀμέλει καὶ αὐτὸς ἀκούων τῶν ποιητῶν ᾠδόντων ἤλπιζον, εἴ ποτε γενοίμην ἐπὶ

9 Translations throughout are my own unless stated otherwise. For Pausanias' text I follow the Teubner edition of Rocha-Pereira.

10 Nelson 2000, 370, n. 23; cf. Hawes 2014, 197.

11 On these see Veyne 1988, 95–102, and further discussion below.

12 Hutton 2005, 201sq.; cf. Pretzler 2013, 27, 103.

> τῷ Ἠριδανῷ, ὑπελθὼν μίαν τῶν αἰγείρων ἐκπετάσας τὸ προκόλπιον ὑποδέξεσθαι τῶν δακρύων ὀλίγα, ὡς ἤλεκτρον ἔχοιμι.
>
> About amber you too clearly have been convinced by the story that the poplars off the Eridanos river shed tears of it mourning Phaethon, and that those poplars are the sisters of Phaethon, who out of sorrow for the boy were changed into trees, and that their tears still drip with amber. Such tales indeed I heard myself from the singing poets and I hoped, if I ever should get to the Eridanos, to catch some of these tears, standing under one of the poplars and stretching out a fold of my cloak, so that I would have amber.[13]

The narrator continues to say that he happened to be at the Eridanos recently,[14] and had a chance to verify this aetiology himself. As it turns out there was no amber to be found, there were no poplars to be seen, and the locals had not even heard of the name Phaethon (*Electr.* 2).[15] Lucian's first person narrator is measuring an element from the Phaethon myth by the standards of a historiographer dedicated to autopsy: if Phaethon's sisters were indeed turned into poplars crying amber, these trees must still be there today. The use of the word 'clearly' (δηλαδή) in the first sentence signals that the speaker is not to be taken seriously. It is not at all clear that anybody *but* the narrator would invest the Phaethon myth with such factual accuracy as to expect material gain from it. Lucian ridicules the fruitless rationalist quest of our narrator from the start.

After finding out that the locals have not even heard of Phaethon the narrator tells them (and by extension the audience) the myth. The locals respond saying that they have not seen anyone falling from a chariot, and that they do not have the amber-shedding poplars. The narrator, he says, became ashamed of his 'childish belief' (παιδίου τινός, *Electr.* 3) in the lying poets, on top of his disappointment in being cheated out of the amber. The answers from the locals underline the naiveté of the narrator: he accepts their statement that

13 For Lucian's texts I follow the Loeb editions, which are generally preferred over the OCT.

14 The Eridanos is a somewhat elusive river, but typically understood as the Po (Plin. *Nat.* 37.11); cf. Ahl 1982, 394sq. Lucian locates the Eridanos in Italy at *Salt.* 55. For a full account of the amber story as connected to Phaethon see Ov. *Met.* 2.340–366. Apollonius Rhodius also tells the story at 4.596–618.

15 Ahl 1982, 394sq. writes that amber may have been transported from northern Europe to the Adriatic via the Po, but did not originate there. Plutarch in *De sera numinis vindicta* mentions that the people living on the banks of the Po put on mourning once a year in honor of Phaethon (*Moralia* 557d), but according to Pliny Phaethon died in Ethiopia, where there is a temple, an oracle, and amber production in his honor (*Nat.* 37.11); cf. van der Sluijs 2008, 228.

they have not seen Phaethon fall out of the sky as damning proof against the Phaethon myth, failing to make the distinction between the heroic (mythical) and human eras. Even though in the rationalizer's outlook there is continuity between mythical and historical time – this is why it is reasonable to test myths against contemporary standards of plausibility – Phaethon's generation lived a long time prior to the narrator's.[16] Based on his frame of reference the devoted rationalist can aim at finding material traces of events from myth, but even he should not expect to be able to track down eyewitnesses. Lucian's narrator is a caricature of a myth rationalizer.

The persistent narrator of *Electrum* proceeds to look into another aetiology connected with the Eridanos: that by this river Apollo turned some singers into swans, which explains the birds' melodious song (*Electr.* 4). The locals again disappoint, saying that the swans of the Eridanos croak in an 'unmusical and feeble' way (ἄμουσον καὶ ἀσθενές, *Electr.* 5). For the narrator, who has conflated the role of swans as birds of Apollo with the aetiology about Phaethon's lamenting friend Cycnus (Κύκνος, which means 'swan') being turned into a swan by the same god,[17] the locals' report means that the aetiology must be dismissed. Pausanias offers a seemingly more productive rationalization of the metamorphosis of Cycnus into a swan, when he suggests that the aetiology arose because a king with musical abilities who shared his name with swans ruled over the Ligurians (Λίγυες). They lived between the Alps and the Po and their name in Greek is, aside from accentuation, indistinguishable from the adjective 'clear-voiced' (λιγύς). This much Pausanias is willing to 'believe' (πείθομαι), but that a man was turned into a bird he finds 'unbelievable' (ἄπιστον, 1.30.3).[18] Pausanias and Lucian's narrator share the same approach: they are trying to salvage what they can from aetiological myth, using autopsy and reasoning to test these stories. In caricature form the myth rationalizer is frustrated because of his search for and reliance on eyewitnesses; Pausanias' honest attempt gives us an etymologizing aetiology for the myth that leaves us, however, none the wiser about swans, and why (or if) they are good singers.

In the last section of *Electrum* the narrator changes the topic, and his search for amber takes on a different function. He says that he fears first time audience members might 'expect to find amber in his performance' (ἤλεκτρά τινα … ἐλπίσαντες εὑρήσειν παρ᾽ ἡμῖν, *Electr.* 6). The narrator is commenting on the genre of the upcoming piece: his performance is not going to be poetry, and it will

16 On the issue of time and chronology in relation to aetiology see Walter 2020.

17 Cf. Nesselrath 1990, 125–129. Lucian refers to swans as having beautiful voices also at *Bacch.* 7 and *VH* 2.15. For the Cycnus story see also Ov. *Met.* 2.367–380.

18 Cf. Ahl 1982, 389; Hawes 2014, 202.

be 'simple and without mythical elements' (ἁπλοϊκὸν καὶ ἄμυθον, *Electr.* 6). The quest to find material evidence of myth is compared to the (potential) mistake of audience members who expect highfalutin poetry from the performance of a Lucianic piece. The underlying message is that a rationalist attitude towards myth is erroneous, because it looks for historical plausibility and likelihood in a genre that deals with a different kind of truth. Myth rationalizers make a genre mistake by asking the wrong kinds of questions of myth.

As we have already seen, a popular component of rationalization was to explain a myth through wordplay and (quasi-)etymology. Palaephatus explains mythical animals and monsters through names: Pasiphae fell in love with a handsome man named Taurus (Palaeph. 2); a man of the same name also abducted Europa (Palaeph. 15); Phrixus and Helle were not saved by a ram, but by a man named Ram who built a ship for them (Palaeph. 30). Lucian ridicules this kind of etymologizing rationalization of myth in his *Muscae encomium*, a mock encomium of the fly (μυῖα).[19] The anonymous first-person speaker explains the origin of the fly by a story of a girl named Fly or Muia, who lived long ago, and was 'very pretty, but garrulous, talkative, and fond of singing' (πάνυ καλήν, λάλον μέντοι γε καὶ στωμύλον καὶ ᾠδικήν, *Musc. Enc.* 10). Muia became a rival of Selene by falling in love with Endymion, a young man blessed with everlasting sleep, and Selene turned her into a fly, writes Lucian; flies still bother sleepers, particularly young and beautiful ones, in remembrance of Endymion (*Musc. Enc.* 10). The story of Muia is not otherwise attested, and Lucian likely made it up himself.[20]

The Muia-etymology parodies both the etymologizing myth rationalizations based on names that we find in Palaephatus and Pausanias, as well as aetiological myths that are based on etymology and onomastics. Just as in the myth rationalizations, Lucian's speaker methodically transfers the characteristics from the person Muia to the fly: in Palaephatus Taurus is very beautiful just like the bull in the myth; in Pausanias' slightly more complex etymology the musical king Cycnus rules over the 'clear-voiced' Ligurians, while in the myth the swan is clear-voiced. In Lucian's piece much humour is derived from the lowliness of the subject, but the distorted causality that underlies the idea that

19 Compare Dio Chrysostom's encomia of the parrot (Philostr. *VS* 1.7) and the gnat (Synes. *Dio* 3.81); among Libanius' *Progymnasmata* encomia of Thersites (4) and of the ox (8) have been transmitted (nos. as in Gibson 2008). On this genre see Pease 1926; cf. Hopkinson 2008, 142sq.

20 In Apollodorus (1.7.5) Endymion uses his wish granted by Selene to ask for eternal sleep, and Zeus fulfills it; there is no reference to the wish in Pausanias (5.1.3–5) or Apollonius (4.57–58 with scholia *ad loc.*); cf. Hopkinson 2008, 149. The Muia-story is reminiscent of Hera's turning Io into a heifer.

flies bother sleepers in remembrance of Endymion suggests that Lucian was taking aim at etymologizing myth rationalizers as well.

3 Lucian and First Inventors

In the fragments of the philosopher Prodicus the origins of religion are explained, in part, by the fact that the first (human) inventors of crafts needed for survival came to be considered as gods.[21] Under the influence of Prodicus' ideas Palaephatus and later Euhemerus frequently explained mythical narratives using the so-called first inventor motif, in which a god or hero is interpreted as the first human inventor of a certain instrument or skill. Because of the novelty of their creation these inventors then came to be considered as supernatural beings.[22] Palaephatus, for instance, argues that the centaurs invented horseback riding, but appeared from a distance to be horse-men, causing the myth (Palaeph. 1). In another example he writes that Medea did not rejuvenate men by boiling them, but rather was the first to use hair dye, and to understand the benefits of the steam bath (Palaeph. 43).[23] In Lucian's time the first inventor motif, a device that is part of the larger practice of myth rationalization, is taken up again by Heraclitus the Paradoxographer. In his *De incredibilibus* (*On Unbelievable Tales*) the myth of Atlas is explained, for instance, as follows (*Incred.* 4):

> Οὗτος παραδέδοται φέρων οὐρανὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων, ὃ ἀδύνατον ὑπὸ οὐρανὸν καὶ αὐτὸν ὄντα. ἀνὴρ δὲ σοφὸς ὢν τὰ κατὰ ἀστρολογίαν πρῶτος κατώπτευσε, προλέγων δὲ χειμῶνας καὶ μεταβολὰς ⟨ἀνέμων καὶ ἐπιτολὰς⟩ ἄστρων καὶ δύσεις ἐμυθεύθη φέρειν ἐν αὑτῷ τὸν κόσμον.
>
> It is traditionally said that Atlas carries heaven on his shoulders, which is impossible, even though Atlas himself is under heaven. Atlas was a wise man who was the first to observe the principles of astronomy. He foretold

21 Henrichs 1975, 107–123; cf. Mayhew 2011, xvii–xviii, xxi–xxiii.

22 Euhemerus' name has become associated so closely with explaining gods as human inventors that this is sometimes referred to as 'euhemerizing'. An important difference between Euhemerus and Palaephatus is that the latter only deals with the myths of heroes and monsters, staying away from the gods, cf. Colpe 1995, 39–41; Winiarczyk 2002, 1–10, 107–118; Stern 2003, 51–71; Hawes 2014, 25–28.

23 According to Palaephatus Pelias' death after said 'steam bath' was due to his feebleness. For a full list of first inventors in Palaephatus see Stern 1996, 20sq. The centaur-rationalization also occurs in Heraclitus (*Incred.* 5); cf. Stern 2003, 64sq.

> storms and changes [in the winds and the risings] and settings of stars, and so the myth arose that he carried the cosmos within himself.[24]

The impossibility of Atlas being able to carry heaven on his shoulders is 'solved' by interpreting him as the inventor of astronomy. In this kind of a rationalization the first inventor motif fulfils a double duty: it explains the aetiology of a certain myth, and, as Hawes writes, it promotes "a particular area of knowledge through association with the cultural capital of myth".[25]

When Lucian turns his attention to the first inventor motif he criticizes both functions, promotional as well as explanatory. The passages that I will discuss are taken from three different texts: *De astrologia, De saltatione*, and *De parasito*.[26] In these pieces Lucian, again, plays with the genre of encomium, and he takes on myth rationalization's first inventor motif using ridicule, exaggeration, and subversion. To start, I will return to Simon's defence of parasitism from which this chapter takes its title. *De parasito* is a discussion between Tychiades and the self-professed professional parasite Simon on whether being a parasite is a *technē* or not. It is a parody both of the quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy, and of philosophical debates on the definition of *technē*.[27]

As we have seen, Simon enlists the heroes as the inventors of parasitism to bolster the antiquity and repute of the parasitic art;[28] Nestor, Idomeneus, *and* Patroclus were parasites according to Simon. Tychiades pushes back against Simon's enlisting of Patroclus, and Simon turns to Homer to make his case: Patroclus said that he wanted his bones to be close to Achilles' corpse, because

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24 This emendation was suggested by Festa in his 1902 Teubner edition, whose text I follow throughout. I follow Stern in translating ὑπὸ οὐρανὸν καὶ αὐτὸν ὄντα as 'even though Atlas himself is under heaven': "'Because' might seem a more likely translation, but the sense, I believe, is not as good" (Stern 2003, 93, n. 68). The same explanation of the Atlas-myth also occurs in Dionysius Scytobrachion (*BNJ* 32 F7.60.2 = D.S. 3.60.2), cf. Stern 2003, 75. Heraclitus' explanation of Asclepius as an innovator who died not by Zeus' thunderbolt but of a high fever (26) does appear to be original.

25 Hawes 2014, 121.

26 The authenticity of all three pieces has been contested. Harmon 1921, 235 tentatively rejects *De parasito*, but Hall 1981, 334–339, Nesselrath 1985, 1–8, and Anderson 1979, 59–66 have accepted it, and it is now uncontroversial. Lightfoot 2003, 195 and McNamara 2013 understand *De astrologia* as authentic, *contra* Caster 1937, 260–263; cf. Jones 1986, 170. *De saltatione*, disputed by Helm 1906, 369sq., must be understood in the context of Lucian's association with the court of Verus who loved pantomime, cf. Anderson 1977; Jones 1986, 68–75.

27 For examples of such debates and their relevance to *De parasito*, see Hall 1981, 331–334; cf. Nesselrath 1985, 123–230.

28 Compare the notion that Homer's Nestor and Odysseus were the first orators, see e.g. D.Chr. 2.20, cf. Nesselrath 1985, 433–444.

he was 'nourished' in his house (ἐτράφην, *Il.* 23.84). Further, Patroclus said that Peleus took him in, and called him his 'servant' (θεράποντα, *Il.* 23.90). Simon continues (*Par.* 47):

> τουτέστι παράσιτον εἶχεν. εἰ μὲν τοίνυν φίλον ἐβούλετο τὸν Πάτροκλον λέγειν, οὐκ ἂν αὐτὸν ὠνόμαζεν θεράποντα· ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ἦν ὁ Πάτροκλος. τίνας τοίνυν λέγει τοὺς θεράποντας, εἰ μήτε τοὺς δούλους μήτε τοὺς φίλους; τοὺς παρασίτους δῆλον ὅτι.
>
> That is, he [Peleus] maintained him as a parasite. If he had wanted to call Patroclus a friend, he would not call him a servant, for Patroclus was a free man. Whom, then, does he mean by servants, if neither slaves nor friends? Clearly, parasites.

Lucian's Simon takes the familiar ancient debate about Patroclus' status in relation to Achilles, and repurposes it for a first inventor story that purports to provide a legitimizing aetiology for the parasitic art.[29] Again, because the parasitic art is so unlikely as a *technē*, any attempt to make it one is humorous. Simon's flimsy argumentation for the claim that Patroclus *was* a parasite, and thereby one of the first inventors of the art, pushes the piece into the realm of parody.

De saltatione takes as its subject the merits of pantomime, the hugely popular silent dance that was frequently assailed by orators in the imperial period.[30] Unlike *De parasito* it cannot be read as a mock-encomium because of its historical context: it was probably written for emperor Lucius Verus who loved pantomime.[31] Nonetheless, the piece does appear to have some humorous elements, notably a complete, parodic version of a first inventor rationalization offered by the interlocutor Lycinus (*Salt.* 19):

> δοκεῖ γάρ μοι ὁ παλαιὸς μῦθος καὶ Πρωτέα τὸν Αἰγύπτιον οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ ὀρχηστήν τινα γενέσθαι λέγειν, μιμητικὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ πρὸς πάντα σχηματίζεσθαι καὶ μεταβάλλεσθαι δυνάμενον, ὡς καὶ ὕδατος ὑγρότητα μιμεῖσθαι καὶ πυρὸς ὀξύτητα ἐν τῇ τῆς κινήσεως σφοδρότητι καὶ λέοντος ἀγριότητα καὶ παρδάλεως θυμὸν καὶ δένδρου δόνημα, καὶ ὅλως ὅ τι καὶ θελήσειεν. ὁ δὲ μῦθος παραλαβὼν

29 On Achilles and Patroclus see e.g. Pl. *Smp.* 180a–b.

30 Molloy 1996, 86–100; cf. Lada-Richards 2007, 68sq., 92sq., 104–112; Webb 2008, 62–92, 140sq.; Bowersock 2008, 69–77.

31 See n. 26.

> πρὸς τὸ παραδοξότερον τὴν φύσιν αὐτοῦ διηγήσατο, ὡς γιγνομένου ταῦτα ἅπερ ἐμιμεῖτο.
>
> I think that the ancient myth about Proteus the Egyptian means nothing else than that he was a dancer, an imitative man and capable of shaping and changing himself into anything, even the liquidity of water and the sharpness of fire, through the expressiveness of his movement, and also the fierceness of the lion, the rage of the leopard, and the waving of the tree, so on the whole, whatever he wished. Myth in taking on the tradition described his nature more paradoxically, that he became whatever he imitated.

Lycinus closely follows the traditional model of myth rationalization through the first inventor motif: he starts from the traditional myth, proposes his own, improved explanation, and concludes by analyzing how the erroneous myth arose. Following this rationalization Lycinus makes explicit his purpose of glorifying the human *technē* by giving it a mythical forefather: contemporary pantomime dancers follow in Proteus' footsteps when they seemingly become the characters they imitate;[32] Lycinus adds that the story of Empusa, a monstrous ghost who could assume different forms, can also be explained by her having been a dancer (*Salt*. 19).[33] This casual addition of Empusa to the rationalization of the Proteus myth, in my view, tips the passage as a whole into the realm of satire. Lucian underlines the opportunism of simultaneously bending myth to fit a rationalizing framework and elevating human innovations by giving them mythical progenitors.[34] Proteus and Empusa as the 'original' pantomime dancers work well as parodies of the stories of Medea the beautician and Atlas the astrologer.

Our final examples of the first inventor motif in Lucian come from *De astrologia*, a mock-encomium of astrology.[35] Strikingly, some of these mock rationalizations were taken over by a fifth century CE anonymous author to

32 Libanius (*Or*. 64.117) and Aristaenetus (1.26.11–12) compare dancers to Proteus, but without offering the myth rationalization, cf. Molloy 1996, 272; Lada-Richards 2007, 185, n. 43.

33 See e.g. Ar. *Ra*. 294.

34 On the humour of this passage cf. Anderson 1977, 279; *contra* Lawler 1943, 116sq., who connects Lycinus' explanation to an old ritual dance performed by priests to portray mimetically concepts like wind or fire.

35 I follow McNamara 2013 in reading the piece as a caricature of a Stoic philosopher overly dedicated to astrology; *contra* Spickermann 2013, 150 who strains to reconcile *De astrologia* with the often humorous attitude toward ancient religious practice of Lucian's corpus.

be used in a catalogue of serious myth rationalizations, titled *De incredibilibus* (just as the work of Heraclitus the Paradoxographer). Lucian's speaker begins with Orpheus, who enthralled his followers not through music, but through his (imperfect) first attempts at astrology (*Astr.* 10). Next, Tiresias was not both male and female, but he was the first to observe the difference between wandering female and male stars (*Astr.* 11). Thyestes did not have a golden ram, but he was the first to point out the constellation Aries (*Astr.* 12). A rationalization of the Bellerophon story follows, which was borrowed by the anonymous paradoxographer; I give Lucian's version here (*Astr.* 13):

> ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ περὶ Βελλεροφόντεω τοιάδε φρονέω· πτηνὸν μέν οἱ γενέσθαι ὡς ἵππον οὐ μάλα πείθομαι, δοκέω δέ μιν ταύτην τὴν σοφίην μετέποντα ὑψηλά τε φρονέοντα καὶ ἄστροισιν ὁμιλέοντα ἐς οὐρανὸν οὐχὶ τῷ ἵππῳ ἀναβῆναι ἀλλὰ τῇ διανοίῃ.
>
> I think the following about Bellerophon as well: I do not at all believe that he had a winged horse, but I think that, pursuing this knowledge [i.e. astrology, IK], contemplating the things up high, and communing with the stars, he reached heaven not by means of his horse but through his intelligence.[36]

The fact that the anonymous author could borrow from Lucian's text with hardly any alteration illustrates well the difficulty scholars have had in interpreting *De astrologia*.[37] On the level of the paragraph the narrator's rationalization of Bellerophon as astrologer can well appear 'straight': the anonymous paradoxographer saw no harm in using it, and several other passages from the same piece, for his earnest, scholarly purposes.[38] But the accumulation of first inventors and early adopters of astrology, as well as some very tenuous explanations, make the rationalizing section as humorous as the rest of the work.

The speaker of *De astrologia* follows his account of Bellerophon with mentions of the astrologers Phrixus (*Astr.* 14) and Daedalus (*Astr.* 14–15). Probably the most far-fetched explanation is reserved for the Pasiphae myth: she, having heard from Daedalus about the constellation Taurus and about astrology, 'fell in love with the doctrine' (ἐς ἔρωτα τοῦ λόγου ἀπίκετο, *Astr.* 16), and this is

36 Cf. anon. *Incred.* 14 (Greek text in Festa 1902, 94); translation in Hawes 2014, 244.

37 See n. 26 and n. 35.

38 Further borrowings are *Incred.* 13 = *Astr.* 19; *Incred.* 15 = *Astr.* 15; *Incred.* 19 = *Astr.* 21; cf. Hawes 2014, 120–123, 244, 247.

why people believe that Daedalus assisted in the wedlock of Pasiphae and the bull. The speaker now says that among all these early astrologers 'each made different discoveries, as they dissected the science into parts' (κατὰ μέρεα τὴν ἐπιστήμην διελόντες ἕκαστοι αὐτῶν ἄλλα ἐπενοήσαντο, *Astr*. 17). It is as though, after the rather unlikely interpretation of the Pasiphae story, he is answering a tacit complaint from the audience, namely: 'Are you really going to argue that *every* mythical character invented astrology?'

The speaker, in fact, only has two more astrologers in store: Endymion, he says, established the motions of the moon (*Astr*. 18), while Phaethon put together the course of the sun, although he left the theory incomplete at his death (*Astr*. 19). According to the speaker most people are ignorant of Phaethon's contribution, and this is why they believe the traditional myth, but, he adds, 'these things did not happen in this way, and it is not pious to believe them; Helios did not beget a son, and his son did not die' (οὐχ οὕτω ταῦτα ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ὅσιον αὐτοῖσι πείθεσθαι, οὐδὲ Ἥλιος παῖδα ἐποιήσατο, οὐδὲ ὁ παῖς αὐτῷ ἀπέθανεν, *Astr*. 19).[39] Lucian depicts the speaker as being so zealous in refuting the traditional myths that he starts to contradict himself: if Helios did not *have* a son, how could this son not have died? The speaker's disappointment that people are ignorant of the fact that Endymion and Phaethon were astrologers is equally damning. People do not know this, because it is absurd.

In *De astrologia* Lucian lampoons all the elements that constitute the first inventor motif: an explanation of how the erroneous myth came about, tenuous connections between the myth explained and the specific invention, a one size fits all approach whereby one and the same invention can be used to explain numerous mythological narratives, and the attempted elevation of a particular invention by citing as many mythical progenitors as possible. We found a similar parodic approach to this myth rationalization device in *De parasito* and *De saltatione*, but *De astrologia* is clearly the fullest expression of Lucian's satirical treatment of the first inventor motif. Through exaggeration and overuse he renders this particular mode of explaining the origins of myth ridiculous.[40]

39 McNamara 2013, 245 interprets this sentence as meaning that "the sun never begets children and even if it did, such a son his [*sic*] would not have died in this way". This seems an overly sympathetic reading of the narrator's much simpler phrase.

40 Lucian also takes aim at the first inventor motif in his *Podagra* (*Gout*), where a silly number of figures of myth are said to have suffered from gout, though not Cronus (*Pod*. 248–262); cf. Whitmarsh 2013, 185, see further below.

4 Conclusion: Myth and Causality

The rationalist attitude toward myth subjects the stories of myth, some of them also aetiological, to the aetiological mode of explanation, asking the question of where these myths came from. Myth rationalization responds to the problem that by the standards of plausibility of systematic inquiry many mythological narratives are problematic. During the Second Sophistic perhaps more than at any other time being Greek, or being Roman for that matter, meant being fluent in the language of Greek mythology, which is why problematic myths could not simply be brushed aside. In order to preserve and perpetuate these mythological stories salvageable elements are put into a new mould of causality. If the myth as it is cannot be maintained as a causal narrative in its own right, at the very least myth rationalizers want to explain what the cause of the myth was. The first inventor motif takes this process one step further, by using the rationalized and revised myths as aetiologies not only for the original myths, but also for familiar crafts and inventions. Lucian's parodies aim to show that rationalizers make a category mistake in applying proto-scientific methodologies from historiography or medicine to myth. Through their attempts they destroy the non-discursive, imaginative truth offered by myth. The first inventor motif is even more problematic in that it produces, under the pretext of systematic reasoning, aetiological narratives that are, at best, as problematic as the myths they try to explain, or, at worst, completely foolish. For Lucian it is better to play with myth through humour, than to ruin it by fruitlessly looking for its causes.

In his *Saturnalia* Lucian has Cronus rationalize *his own* myth. According to the god people erroneously assume that Zeus put him in chains, because his movements became restricted in his old age by gout (*Sat.* 7). In one blow Lucian one-ups rationalizers of myth by having more fun with the material, and parodies their methods by putting them in the hands of Cronus.

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CHAPTER 10

Crossing Borders

Aetiological Overlap in Plutarch's Collections of Questions

Michiel Meeusen

1 Aetiology in Plutarch

Aetiological research is an important aspect of Plutarch's writings and plays a significant discursive role throughout the *Vitae* and the *Moralia*.* Plutarch (ca. 45–120 CE) sought explanations for a wide range of topics, not just restricting his research to cultural and historical questions but also paying attention to, amongst others, literary, linguistic, philosophical, and scientific ones. As this chapter will try to show, his aetiological research and the explanatory techniques that it involves are not only intended to demonstrate the author's manifold learning (πολυμάθεια) to his reader, but also – if not primarily – to support and propagate an underlying philosophical agenda. This is not surprising, since besides being one of the most renowned intellectuals of his time, Plutarch was famous for his avid adherence to Plato and the Academy. In his case, aetiology thus goes beyond anchoring past in present or legitimizing current states of affairs by inventing past events *ex post facto*. His primary aim is philosophical, in that he is in search of the most fundamental causes of things. If any anchoring is involved here, it will consist in finding a firm aetiological footing for these things in the framework of a Platonic worldview. It needs no illustration that Plutarch's concept of the truth and his search for it is, indeed, essentially inspired by Platonic philosophy.[1]

Plutarch composed a significant number of aetiological collections, several of which are still extant today, while others are now lost or partially preserved in fragmentary form. The *Lamprias Catalogue*, an ancient list of works ascribed to Plutarch supposedly compiled by his son Lamprias, mentions nine works concerning αἰτίαι. It is not always clear which precise topics these titles may have dealt with, but the surviving material suggests that they were all in question and answer form:

* I am grateful to Michael Trapp for correcting linguistic weaknesses of an earlier draft of this chapter.

1 See Opsomer 1998.

1. *Explanations of Aratus'* Weatherlore (nr. 119: Αἰτίαι τῶν Ἀράτου Διοσημιῶν = frgg. 13–20 Sandbach),
2. *Roman Customs Explained* (nr. 138: Αἰτίαι Ρωμαϊκαί = *Quaestiones Romanae*),
3. *Foreign Customs Explained* (nr. 139: Αἰτίαι βαρβαρικαί),
4. *Explanations of Current Stoic Doctrines* (nr. 149: Αἰτίαι τῶν περιφερομένων Στωικῶν),[2]
5. *Explanations and Topics* (nr. 160: Αἰτίαι καὶ τόποι),
6. *Explanations of Exchanges* (nr. 161: Αἰτίαι ἀλλαγῶν),
7. *Greek Customs Explained* (nr. 166: Αἰτίαι Ἑλλήνων = *Quaestiones Graecae*),
8. *Explanations concerning Women* (nr. 167: Αἰτίαι γυναικῶν),[3]
9. *Explanations of Natural Phenomena* (nr. 218: Αἰτίαι φυσικαί = *Quaestiones naturales*).

The chapter at hand will be concerned mainly with the last of these works, the *Quaestiones naturales*, on the basis of which we aim to draw important inferences for Plutarch's aetiological project more generally. The work is still extant, albeit in a battered form. Including the additional chapters from Gybertus Longolius' 1542 Latin translation (*Quaestiones naturales* 32–39) and from Michael Psellus' *De omnifaria doctrina* (*Quaestiones naturales* 40–41 = §§ 170 and 188 Westerink), the collection consists of 41 problems that straddle a variety of questions pertaining to the broad field of ancient Greek 'physics', including inquiries into ancient zoology, botany, meteorology and their subdisciplines. Finding its model in the Aristotelian *Problemata physica* (*Natural Problems*), which circulated widely in intellectual milieus in Plutarch's time, the collection specifically inquires into the physical – that is material and instrumental – causes of individual natural phenomena. The questions are typically introduced with 'Why?' (διὰ τί;) and are followed by a number of explanations, which themselves are phrased interrogatively, in the form of a compound question: 'Is it because X? Or because Y? Or Z?' (πότερον …; ἢ …; ἢ …;). In line with its Aristotelian model, the types of problems Plutarch tries to solve concern very particular, and at times rather peculiar, topics: for instance, 'Why does seawater not provide nourishment to trees?' (*Quaestiones naturales* 1, 911c); 'Why is rain that accompanies thunder and lightning more fertilising for seeds?' (*Quaestiones naturales* 4, 912f); 'Why does the octopus change its colour?' (*Quaestiones naturales* 19, 916b); 'Why do the tears of boars taste

2 Sandbach 1969, 22, n. 1 suggests reading ἱστοριῶν instead of Στωικῶν.

3 Nachstädt (in Nachstädt, Sieveking and Titchener 1935, 225) suggests that the title is corrupt and should be Ἀρεταὶ γυναικῶν, thus identifying it with the Γυναικῶν ἀρεταί listed as no. 126 (= *Mulierum virtutes*).

sweet, while those of deer taste salty and ordinary?' (*Quaestiones naturales* 20, 916f); 'Why are bees quicker to sting people who have just committed adultery?' (*Quaestiones naturales* 36); etc.

By their explorative approach and interrogative formulation of the proposed *Mehrfacherklärungen* (πότερον …; ἢ …; ἢ …;), the natural problems at hand remain fundamentally unsolved. It is precisely through this aporetic and anti-dogmatic attitude on the author's side that room is left for further research and that final judgement is postponed.[4] The same approach is found in the Aristotelian *Problemata physica*. What seems to be very different between Plutarch's natural problems and those ascribed to Aristotle, however, is the epistemological foundation on which their natural scientific research is based. Plutarch postpones final judgement, since he, in line with Platonic-Academic theory, refuses to put much confidence in knowledge deriving from sensory data, whereas Aristotle's avoidance of argumentative conclusiveness was more practically motivated, aiming to foster further research and debate on specific scientific topics in the Lyceum context. In the end, Aristotle put much more trust in the feasibility of natural science than Plutarch as a Platonist ever did. The same dubitative stance can be traced in his other thematic collections of *quaestiones*, where it is applied to other topics (especially the *Quaestiones Romanae, Platonicae* and *convivales*).

Plutarch discusses natural problems throughout his entire oeuvre. In his *Quaestiones convivales* around one third of the questions deal with natural scientific topics. Plutarch there cross-fertilises the question and answer format with the literary genre of the symposium: each symposiast contributes to the debate by formulating plausible explanations much in the same way as is seen in a more condensed form in the *Quaestiones naturales*. In the *Vitae*, Plutarch sporadically incorporates natural scientific 'digressions' (παρεκβάσεις) in his biographical narratives, a similar procedure as seen in the opening of some of his dialogues.[5] By transgressing the textual boundaries between several of Plutarch's writings, these scientific materials testify to the adaptable and versatile nature of this type of knowledge, as being applicable to very different literary contexts. Plutarch uses the natural problem format in its traditional, Aristotelian form only in the *Quaestiones naturales*, where he treats such problems in an autonomous fashion, thus creating an independent textual medium that allows for a separate collection of the results of his research on particular natural scientific topics. Even though the direct literary contexts of his natural

4 This feature ties in closely with the author's Sceptical-Academic position in natural scientific research. Compare the ἐποχή statement at the end of *De primo frigido*, 955c.

5 See *De Pythiae oraculis* 395a–396c and *De defectu oraculorum* 410b–411d.

problems can, thus, clearly differ between the distinct 'genres' in which they are integrated, the problems themselves generally share a consistent approach to dealing with natural phenomena by finding their model in the Aristotelian *Problemata physica*.

What we learn from this is that physical aetiology in particular (among several other types of aetiology) plays an important unifying role throughout Plutarch's entire oeuvre.[6] The aim of this chapter is to corroborate this view for Plutarch's collections of *quaestiones* as a distinct genre of writing (viz. in the *Quaestiones Platonicae, Graecae, Romanae* and *convivales*). Conversely, I will examine how the *Quaestiones naturales* tie in with Plutarch's aetiological programme more generally. To this end, I will argue that the different strands of aetiology present in this work (not only physical aetiology) testify to the, at times, very close affiliation with his other aetiological writings, including technical-philosophical, literary-exegetical and cultural-historical collections. By providing an analysis of the conceptual overlaps with these works, I will try to demonstrate that this phenomenon of aetiological blending reveals the openness and all-round applicability of many kinds of knowledge to different contexts; afterwards I will turn to the underlying philosophy of these writings. The aspect of overlap applies both to the research techniques and to the research contents of Plutarch's collections of *quaestiones*: accordingly, in what follows the overlap between aetiological and exegetical techniques, and between physical and cultural contents, will successively concern us.

2 Classification and Overlap

In antiquity – and much later – the genre of problems (commonly denominated as προβλήματα, ζητήματα, ἀπορήματα, ἀπορίαι, αἰτίαι, etc.) provided a useful tool for questioning all kinds of topics, not only in the field of natural science but also, amongst others, those of medicine, philosophy, theology, mechanics, history and literature. The question and answer approach has a clearly educational purpose, in that the discursive relation between author and reader often resembles that of a teacher and his student (presumably, the Aristotelian *Problemata* themselves reflect the style of debate in the Lyceum during Aristotle's life and especially after his death).[7] By its piecemeal structure, the genre of problems serves as a useful mnemonic device aimed at

6 On the issues of unity and consistency in the *corpus Plutarcheum*, see Barthelmess 1986, 62–64 and the contributions in Nikolaidis 2008 and Opsomer, Roskam and Titchener 2016.

7 See Mayhew 2015, vii.

fixating knowledge in a clearly structured way, where questions and answers are recorded in a tight repetitive sequence.

In his contribution on the "archéologie" of the genre of problems, Christian Jacob at one point identifies problems very concretely with sets of index cards ("fiches"), which are further categorised into thematic folders ("dossiers de travail").[8] Scholars have also conceived of Plutarch's collections of *quaestiones* in this way, imagining them as some sort of systematised card-index boxes.[9] However, nothing is known with any certainty about the actual form in which these writings were composed: in fact, due to the often miscellaneous style in which they came down to us there is not much obvious organisation to them. Still, Plutarch's collections of *quaestiones* function as a convenient medium for the efficient storage and retrieval of several kinds of inquiries, thus serving as some kind of an intellectual archive. They provide an accumulative textual format for the author's progressive research, where new problems and answers could always be added or older ones revised. The thematic categorisation of Plutarch's collections of *quaestiones*, by distinguishing several sub-sections (viz. cultural, historical, scientific, literary, philosophical etc.), certainly improved their efficient usability, even if they are not catalogued in a fully systematic fashion. Yet, at the same time, the technique of thematic categorisation seems to have had specific disadvantages, since on certain occasions, there may have been difficulties in classification.

Take, for instance, *Quaestiones Platonicae* 7, 1004d–1006b, which deals with the mechanism of 'cyclical replacement of motion' (ἀντιπερίστασιν τῆς κινήσεως) and its operation in several natural phenomena, including magnetic attraction, as discussed in Plato's *Timaeus* 79e–80c.[10] There is no reason to go into the details of this passage here. Presumably, the reason why Plutarch chose to classify this problem with *Quaestiones Platonicae* is that there is a close link with Plato's text. But because of its focus on natural phenomena and physical aetiology, it would not have been out of place in *Quaestiones naturales* either.[11] There is, in fact, a close parallel concerning the aetiology of magnetism between *Quaestiones Platonicae* 7, 1005b–d and *Quaestiones naturales* 19, 916d, where Plutarch (in the context of the octopus' ability to change colour)

8 Jacob 2004, 43sq. (with Oikonomopoulou 2013, 134).

9 One should not, however, confuse Plutarch's collections of problems with the notes (ὑπομνήματα) he says that he drafted for personal use (*De tranquillitate animi* 464f). See Meeusen 2012. See already Gudeman 1927, col. 2526, who speaks of "Zettelkasten". See also Dorandi 2000 more generally. On ancient conceptions of memory in itself as an 'archive', see Small 1997, 81–137, 224–239.

10 On the concept of ἀντιπερίστασις, see Opsomer 1999.

11 Cf. Oikonomopoulou 2013, 144.

mentions that some people assume the mechanism of cyclical motion of particles to be the explanatory principle.[12] This point is not further elaborated upon, though, and is only mentioned in order to illustrate Empedocles' emanation theory, to which Plutarch alluded previously (the main point is that these emanations settle into the pores of the octopus and change its colour when they contract due to fear).

But why exactly did Plutarch choose to incorporate this chapter about cyclical movement in the *Quaestiones Platonicae* and not in the *Quaestiones naturales*? The answer to this question is probably genre related. The *Quaestiones Platonicae* do not, in fact, belong to the genre of αἰτίαι but of ζητήματα, and therefore have a different function (its Greek title is Πλατωνικὰ ζητήματα = *Lampr. Cat.* nr. 136). Scholars have pointed out that Plutarch's use of the concept of ζήτημα often has an exegetical connotation, in that it mostly concerns the elucidation and interpretation of particular enigmatic passages in a given philosophical or poetic text.[13] By contrast, in his aetiological writings Plutarch is in search of the underlying causes of natural phenomena, the origins of specific cultural traditions etc., by means of plausible explanations: these problems mostly concern more general intellectual topics, so that the strict connection with a text is absent. This is not, of course, to deny that Plutarch often relies on written sources in his aetiological writings (in the *Quaestiones naturales* he quotes from a wide range of philosophers, poets, doctors, etc. – including Plato himself),[14] nor does it imply that there is full consistency in Plutarch's own wording (at least in some cases the nuances in semantics seem completely artificial).[15] What is more important, though, is that the mainly exegetical character of the genre of ζητήματα does not devalue its philosophical interest for Plutarch. This is true at least for the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, because, for Plutarch, a correct understanding of Plato's texts would enable him to grasp the philosophical truth that they contained.[16] As I will argue further on, a similar philosophical dynamic lies at the heart of Plutarch's

12 There is a clear verbal reminiscence in the phrases ἐν κύκλῳ περιιών and περιελεύσεις (Doehner 1858 falsely proposes περιελάσεις).

13 Cf. *Quaestiones Platonicae* 8, 1006f: τοῦτο μὲν οὖν τοιαύτην ἔχει τὴν ἐξήγησιν. Cf. also *De tranquillitate animi*, 464e: περὶ τῶν ἐν Τιμαίῳ δεομένων ἐπιμελεστέρας ἐξηγήσεως. See Dörrie 1959, 2 and Opsomer 1996, 72.

14 This is the case in *Quaestiones naturales* 1, 911d and in *Quaestiones naturales* 5, 913c–d. In these passages, the Plato quotes support Plutarch's main arguments rather than the other way around.

15 E.g. regarding Plutarch's use of ζήτημα in *Quaestiones convivales*, cf. Harrison 2000, 196 ("The terms ζήτημα and πρόβλημα would appear to be interchangeable in this work since no pattern is detectable").

16 Cf. Opsomer 1996, 74.

aetiological writings, implying that the same goal is aimed at, albeit by different means.

3 Aetiological and Zetematic Overlap

In light of the technique of Plutarchan aetiology, and of ancient aetiology more generally, one may wonder how strict the distinction from a zetematic approach really is (or needs to be). Indeed, the two types of inquiry do not strictly exclude one another: for instance, the eight fragments that remain from Plutarch's Αἰτίαι τῶν Ἀράτου Διοσημιῶν, or *Explanations of Aratus'* Weatherlore (frgg. 13–20 Sandbach; *Lampr. Cat.* nr. 119), combine an aetiological and a zetematic approach, where it is Plutarch's aim to provide an interpretation of Aratus' verses by explaining the atmospheric phenomena at issue, mostly concerning weather predictions. The same exegetical-aetiological strategy applies to the Aratus quote in *Quaestiones naturales* 2, 912d. This passage mentions that frogs croak more loudly and clearly out of joy when they expect rain, because it sweetens the water of the pond. Plutarch's main point is that this sweet constituent in rainwater makes it more fertilising for plants than irrigation water – which is the principal problem at hand (Διὰ τί μᾶλλον ὑπὸ τῶν ὑετίων ἢ τῶν ἐπιρρύτων ὑδάτων τὰ δένδρα καὶ τὰ σπέρματα πέφυκε τρέφεσθαι; 911f). He quotes Aratus (*Diosemia* 214–215 = *Phaenomena* 946–947) to back up the point about frogs, but the backing up itself is not interpretation-free, since the lines are taken to imply that there is a causal connection between the sweetness of rainwater and the joy of frogs (912c–d):

> ἓν γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο ποιεῖται σημεῖον ὑετοῦ μέλλοντος Ἄρατος εἰπών 'ἦ μάλα δείλαιαι γενεαί, ὕδροισιν ὄνειαρ,/αὐτόθεν ἐκ λίμνης πατέρες βοόωσι γυρίνων.'
>
> This one point Aratus also makes into a sign of impending rain saying: 'straight from the pond, the tadpoles' fathers cry: truly wretched race, the victuals of water snakes'.

A similar exegetical-aetiological technique is applied to the verses of other poets, most notably Homer, who is quoted no less than five times throughout the *Quaestiones naturales*: viz. in *Quaestiones naturales* 5, 913d (concerning the nature of salt taste: *Od.* 5.322–323), 19, 916b (concerning colour change in cowardly people: *Il.* 13.279), 20, 917a (concerning the fiery temperament of wild boars: *Od.* 19.446), 21, 917d (concerning the Homeric noun χλούνης, used of boars with one testicle only: *Il.* 9.539), and 34 (concerning the swiftness

of the west wind: *Il.* 19.415–416). The style of these passages is reminiscent of Plutarch's Ὁμηρικαὶ μελέται, or *Homeric Studies*, originally in four books, from which only few fragments remain (frgg. 122–127 Sandbach; *Lampr. Cat.* nr. 42). That this work must have had a specific interest in physical aetiology is shown by fr. 127 Sandbach, which concerns atmospheric influence on the consistency of the shoots of plants.[17] In another context, viz. regarding the problem of why people use fresh water rather than seawater to wash clothes, Plutarch quotes from Odysseus' encounter with Nausicaä after his shipwreck (*Od.* 6.137, 218–219, 226). He notes that Homer, in describing how Odysseus warns the maidens to stay away and goes to the river to clean off the briny scum from his skin, is, in fact, a sensitive observer of natural phenomena (ὑπερφυῶς τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὸ γινόμενον συνεωρακότος κτλ., 'the Poet sensitively observes what is happening', *Quaestiones convivales* 1.9, 627e).[18] The quote is meant to underpin the argument that the finest and lightest constituent in seawater dries quickest, leaving behind a briny scum, which can be washed away with fresh drinking water.

What this amounts to is that Barrow's "rough and ready rule", according to which citations in Plutarch's *Moralia* are only recorded for the purpose of superfluous illustration – in the sense that they do not contribute to the main arguments as such – does not seem to be apposite.[19] Plutarch's citations from the poets do directly contribute to the aetiologies at hand, but at the same time this invokes an exegetical method: in the end, it is not so much the verses themselves as Plutarch's interpretations of them that contribute to the main argument.[20]

4 Physical and Cultural Overlap

Physical research is not the only strand of aetiology Plutarch uses in his *Quaestiones naturales*. Most notably, a number of chapters treated therein

17 Fragment quoted in a scholion on *Il.* 15.624.

18 Cf. also, e.g., *Quaestiones convivales* 7.1, 698d–f (Homer was the first to have observed, συνεωρακέναι, that the receptacle for our nourishment is the oesophagus, and for breath the windpipe). On physical allegory and scientific explanations in Heraclitus' contemporary *Quaestiones Homericae*, cf. Russell and Konstan 2005, xxi–xxii.

19 Barrow 1967, 156. The same conclusion was reached for *Quaestiones Romanae* by Van der Stockt 1987, 291.

20 Plutarch also applies this strategy, for instance, to Heraclitus' famous river statement in *Quaestiones naturales* 2, 912a: 'you could not step into the same rivers twice, because other waters flow upon you'. He reinterprets this in a very literal, physical fashion in order to support the theory that river water has a fresh and new-born property. As such, the deeper and original ontological meaning of Heraclitus' saying is no longer relevant.

express a sensitivity for cultural inquiry. This type of questioning reminds the reader of the problems treated in the *Quaestiones Graecae* and *Romanae*. In those collections, Plutarch deals with a wide gamut of Greek and Roman cultural phenomena, mostly enigmatic customs and names, after the manner of Callimachus' *Aetia*, albeit in a prosaic question and answer format.[21] This does not imply (as we will see) that there is no place at all for physical aetiology in these collections, but the main aetiological dynamic still consists of explaining cultural phenomena in terms of historical, political, anthropological and etymological categories.[22] In what follows I will try to show that the technique of aetiological overlap, where natural and cultural topics are blended together, is symptomatic of the unity and coherence of the author's global research agenda.

In *Quaestiones naturales* 14, 915c, for instance, Plutarch wonders why the people of Doris, a small state located on the border between Thessaly and Boeotia, pray for a bad harvest of hay. What this paradoxical prayer implies, so we learn from the aetiology, is that a bad harvest of hay is connected with a good harvest of grain: hay is 'badly' harvested if it gets rained on because it putrefies, but rain is good for grain as protection against the hot southerly winds. In *Quaestiones naturales* 10, 914d, to give another example, Plutarch refers to a story told of the people of Halai, a deme located on the north-east coast of Attica. The people received an oracle instructing them to dip Dionysus in the sea (which may be a reference to the ritual submerging of the statue of Dionysus into the sea). This detail is added (in parenthesis) in order to illustrate the main problem, which is the question why people pour salt into wine: this is either because the heat of seawater is an aid against chilling of the wine, or because its earthy constituents help against unpleasant odours, putrefaction, or turbidity in the wine. In *Quaestiones naturales* 23, 917f, to give a final example, Plutarch explains why people do not hunt in the vicinity of Mt. Etna in Sicily. The reason is that a great amount of mountain violets grows there, the

21 Notably, Plutarch does not cite Callimachus' *Aetia* very frequently throughout his oeuvre: they are mentioned only once (in *Parallela Graeca et Romana* 315c–d: ὡς ⟨Καλλίμαχος⟩ ἐν δευτέρῳ Αἰτίων). For a collection of Callimachus passages in Plutarch, see Magnelli 2005, 218–220. Even so, Plutarch is well acquainted with aetiological literature more generally. For Plutarch's references to other aetiological authors, see *Amatorius* 761b (ὡς ἐν τοῖς Αἰτίοις Διονύσιος ὁ ποιητὴς ἱστόρησε) and *Rom.* 21.8 (Βούτας δέ τις, αἰτίας μυθώδεις ἐν ἐλεγείοις περὶ τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν ἀναγράφων). For aetiology in ancient literature more generally, see Harder 2012, vol. 1, 24–27 (esp. 26) and the contributions in Chassignet 2008 (esp. Schmidt's contribution on Plutarch's lost *Quaestiones Barbaricae*, 165–183).

22 For the different aetiological categories in *Quaestiones Romanae*, see Boulogne 1992. See also Payen 1998, 49–54, who argues for a coherent cultural landscape in both collections, based on geographical markers in the text.

sweet fragrance of which occupies the place and captures the exhalations from the animals. At the end of the aetiology Plutarch refers to the mythological abduction of Korè by Pluto. Pluto abducted Korè when she was picking flowers in that region: therefore, so Plutarch writes, people honour and worship the place as a sanctuary (ἄσυλον) and do not attack the animals that graze there.

Notably, also the other way around, Plutarch's interest in natural scientific matters can be found in the *Quaestiones Graecae* and *Romanae*. For instance, *Quaestiones Graecae* 7, 292c–d deals with the so-called 'floating clouds' (Τίνες αἱ πλωιάδες νεφέλαι;): these, so Plutarch writes, are clouds that are most filled with rain and are in constant motion. Apart from its linguistic interest – a common feature of the *Quaestiones Graecae* – the link with Greek culture is not immediately obvious in this chapter. Therefore, Sir William Reginald Halliday in his 1928 commentary writes that "Plutarch would more tidily have placed [this 'alien'] among his *Aetia Physica*".[23] This is supported by the fact that Plutarch in this chapter quotes from the fourth book of Theophrastus' *Meteorology* (192 FHSG). The wrong location (or relocation?) of this problem can perhaps speak to the practical, but at times, indeed, hasty and messy, use and consultation of Plutarch's collections of *quaestiones*. However, at a more conceptual level, the chapter is not out of place (linguistics being a common topic in the collection) but rather demonstrates how natural scientific material effectively contributes to the general coherence of Plutarch's corpus of *quaestiones*, and hence of his oeuvre more generally. Other natural scientific material is found in *Quaestiones Graecae* 10, 293a (on the small plant called 'sheep-escaper') and in *Quaestiones Graecae* 9, 292e (on the month called 'Bysios', wrongfully associated with the word φύσιος, 'growth').

In the *Quaestiones Romanae*, the Roman counterpart of the *Quaestiones Graecae*, there is also room for a natural scientific type of discourse.[24] This has been analysed in detail by Jacques Boulogne, so only a few examples should suffice to illustrate it.[25] In the very first chapter of the collection, Plutarch

23 Halliday 1928, 14.

24 There are differences in the type and method of inquiry between both collections, however. In *Quaestiones Graecae* most of the questions are introduced with τί, τίς or τίνες (cf. *Quaestiones Graecae* 1–25, 29, 30, 32, 34, 38, 40, 44) and the answers are mostly formulated dogmatically instead of interrogatively. The introduction with διὰ τί is less frequent than in *Quaestiones Romanae*, but not absent (see *Quaestiones Graecae* 9b, 31, 36, 37, 39, 45–51, 53, 55, 58). Each problem in *Quaestiones Graecae* often receives only one clear-cut solution (or better: definition) rather than a number of successive explanations, as is the case in *Quaestiones Romanae*. See Preston 2001, 96, Boulogne 2002, 179sq. and Payen 2014, 246sq.

25 See Boulogne 1992, 4704–4706 and 2002, 98. Cf. *Quaestiones Romanae* 1, 263e; 2, 264b; 19, 268c–d; 24, 269c–d; 38, 273e; 77, 282c–d; 78, 282e–f; 101, 288b; 102, 288c; 106, 289c; 111, 290a–b.

wonders why the Romans order the bride to touch fire and water (Διὰ τί τὴν γαμουμένην ἅπτεσθαι πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος κελεύουσι; *Quaestiones Romanae* 1, 263d–f; cf. Ov. *Fast*. 4.785–806). He gives four explanations. 1. The element of fire is masculine and water feminine: the first provides motion, the second matter; 2. Fire purifies and water cleanses, and the bride needs both qualities; 3. Fire and water complement each other, just as man and woman do when they are united by marriage; 4. The marital partners should not desert each other even if they only have fire and water to share with each other. Considering the frequency of passages relating to natural science in the *Quaestiones Romanae* and *Graecae*, scholars rightly speak of a 'cosmic' approach to cultural history by Plutarch. Catherine Darbo-Peschanski writes in this regard that:

> Plutarque penserait donc une "cosmologie de l'histoire" comme prolongement et achèvement, sur le mode du redoublement analogique, de la cosmologie physique. [...] La conséquence en est qu'on peut s'interroger sur les causes (αἴτια) de ce que font et de ce que produisent historiquement les hommes comme on s'interroge sur les causes des phénomènes physiques.[26]

As to the 'cosmological' backdrop in the *Quaestiones Romanae* and *Graecae*, she writes:

> Les Αἴτια ne seraient donc pas un simple recueil de curiosités sur lesquelles un esprit érudit s'exercerait à des tentatives d'explication pour le plaisir de spéculer. Ils semblent s'inscrire dans la logique des oeuvres jugées les plus importantes de Plutarque et, comme les *Vies* ou les traités physiques, mettre au centre de leur propos la rationalité du devenir et du *cosmos* ainsi que les limites de la connaissance qu'on peut avoir de celle-ci.[27]

The use of physical aetiology in the context of cultural-historical inquiries enables a more abstract, cosmological approach to the subject matter, as is confirmed by Plutarch himself in *Quaestiones Romanae* 106, 289b–c, regarding the problem of why the Romans revere Fortuna as 'First Born' (Πριμιγένειαν). There Plutarch explains, in the third and final explanation, that 'Fortune is a principle of everything, and Nature is composed on the basis of what is according to

26 Darbo-Peschanski 1998, 27. Cf. *Quaestiones Romanae* 78, 282e: κόσμου.

27 Darbo-Peschanski 1998, 28.

Fortune, whenever order is generated in what is available by chance' (τὴν τύχην πάντων οὖσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ τύχην συνισταμένην, ὅταν τισὶν ὡς ἔτυχεν ὑποκειμένοις τάξις ἐγγένηται). This explanation (which has parallels in Plutarch's other cosmological writings)[28] he emphatically deems 'more natural and philosophical' (φυσικώτερον ἔχει λόγον τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον) than the previous two, which concern the role of Fortune in the specific cases of the birth of Servius and Rome respectively. By speculating about first principles and their operation in this world, as Plutarch does here and also in other problem chapters, the collection of cultural-historical inquiries acquires an overarching cosmological framework. It is by this framework that the work as a whole links up with genuine philosophy. This is the case also, for instance, in *Quaestiones Romanae* 19, 268c–d, where a discussion about the Roman calendar ends up in an astronomical account of the movement of the sun, described as 'the lord and leader of all substances in flux' (τὸν κύριον καὶ ἡγεμόνα τῆς ῥευστῆς οὐσίας ἁπάσης). The sun in this case is probably none other than the material reflection of the Platonic Demiurge, who ordered the world of becoming in a providential way.[29] What chapters like these nicely illustrate is how the discussion of seemingly trivial topics can eventually evolve into speculations of high philosophical calibre.

5 Plutarch's Philosophy of πολυμάθεια

The types of aetiological overlap studied on the basis of Plutarch's *Quaestiones naturales* contribute to a sense of mutual coherence between Plutarch's collections of *quaestiones* more generally. This does not only testify to the, at times, very close affiliation between the different research projects and strategies at hand in these collections, but also reveals the openness and all-round applicability of many kinds of knowledge to different contexts – an intertextual dynamic that lies at the heart of Plutarch's πολυμάθεια project.

The feature of thematic diversity (ποικιλία) is brought to a climax in the miscellaneous *Quaestiones convivales*, where Plutarch reports on a vast range of discussions held with his peers during festive events throughout

28 Many thanks to Bram Demulder for pointing out the relation with Plutarch's *De animae procreatione in Timaeo* (despite the fact that the concept of τυχή is frustratingly absent there) and for further elucidating this passage to me ("τύχη is the substratum, the material ἀρχή, which is ordered by the Demiurge [i.e. who engenders τάξις] and thus becomes φύσις"; personal communication). Reading the passage in light of *De fortuna Romanorum* may provide further theoretical background but goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

29 Cf., e.g., *De genio Socratis* 591b and *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet* 945b–c.

the Mediterranean region (including numerous natural problems).[30] A seminal passage is in *Quaestiones convivales* 8.10, 734d, where L. Mestrius Florus, Plutarch's Roman *patronus*, is reading a copy of Aristotle's *Problemata physica*, which he shared with his friends for pleasant conversation during their daytime strolls. We read that Florus was 'himself full of questions, as is natural for a philosopher' (αὐτός τε πολλῶν ἀποριῶν, ὅπερ εἰώθασι πάσχειν ἐπιεικῶς αἱ φιλόσοφοι φύσεις, ὑπεπίμπλατο), thus confirming Aristotle's saying that 'great learning provides many starting-points' (τὴν πολυμάθειαν πολλὰς ἀρχὰς ποιεῖν, fr. 62 Rose). This quote originates from Aristotle's lost Περὶ παιδείας, or *On Education*. Its meaning is not immediately clear from the context, but in light of Plutarch's description of Florus as a philosopher full of questions who shares the Aristotelian *Problemata* with his friends for discussion, the quote does indeed seem to have educational interest. It is very much in line with Plutarch's own aporetic stance in philosophy, where it is acknowledged that the ultimate truth goes beyond our human understanding – a very Platonic-Academic standpoint.[31] The inquisitive style of the genre of problems, where even the answers are formulated interrogatively, is reminiscent of this aporetic and anti-dogmatic stance. Nothing is conclusive in Plutarch's collections of *quaestiones*, so that doubt will always remain. In this sense, the discussion of all-round scholarly problems does, indeed, provide many 'starting points', but it does not receive final closure.

The ultimate goal for Plutarch, as a Platonist, is to look for philosophical knowledge of first principles; but this will eventually go beyond our human intelligence. We have seen how the discussion of seemingly trivial topics can eventually evolve into more weighty debates of philosophical significance. Notably, the chapter at hand in *Quaestiones convivales* 8.10 examines the nature of dreams and ends with a reference to divination (τὸ μαντικόν), an important modus of divine communication for Plutarch. The goal of the *Quaestiones convivales*, then, is to show how philosophy can be done in real life discussions, over a glass of wine. Plutarch's other aetiological collections of *quaestiones*, by contrast, provide the fuel for such debate. They show that great learning (πολυμάθεια), as engendered by discussing all-round scholarly problems, provides many useful starting-points (ἀρχαί) for more abstract inquiries into philosophical issues. Getting a clear grasp of these philosophical issues is the eventual goal of such inquiries, but this will always remain beyond our mortal reach for Plutarch. The ultimate border that as a Platonist he aims to

30 For a recent study of *Quaestiones convivales* as a sample of ancient miscellaneous literature see Morgan 2011.

31 See Opsomer 1998.

cross is that of matters relating to the sublunary realm, as he directs his gaze at sunnier, divine regions. Arguably, it is this radical philosophical – indeed theological – agenda that lies at the core of Plutarch's πολυμάθεια project and which sensitively deepens more traditional concepts of ancient aetiology.[32]

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32 What I have not done in this chapter (but have done elsewhere) is to explore the position and value of physical aetiology in Plutarch's natural philosophical programme in general, and more specifically his dualistic view on causality, as inspired by Plato. See Meeusen 2014, 2015 and 2016.

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