

The Theogonic Zeus and the Qualities of Kingship

Like the weather-god succession myths of the Near East that were its sources,¹ the *Theogony*'s description of Zeus' role in the cosmic order focuses as much on the means by which he ascends to supremacy as on features of his rule once established.² This paper assesses Zeus' role in the cosmos in light of both these aspects, examining key episodes in Zeus' ascent to rule before going on to identify important features of his ultimate dispensation. A conjecture is then advanced as to how these passages may potentially shed light on the *Theogony*'s much-criticized passage on kings.³

How does Zeus come to power?

The distinguishing characteristics of Zeus' rule are nowhere seen more clearly than in the means by which he acquires it. Zeus' collaborative efforts, particularly means by which he wins the support of elder gods, contrast markedly with the act of castration by which Kronos' came to power.⁴ Four examples will suffice.

Styx. The first instance of Zeus' deal-making skills occurs even before his birth, at least in the temporal order of the poem. In winning over Styx to his side, Zeus makes the nature of his offer to the older gods explicit: join him against the Titans, and one will not only keep existing τιμῶν but also get new ones, even if one

¹ The literature is vast. See West (1966): 20-30 for the classic statement; Scully (2015): 50-68 for a recent assessment.

² Pace Allan (2006): 28 (Zeus' ascent to power is subordinate to his maintenance of it). Allan's claim, asserted without argument, can be maintained only if one ignores important passages (Styx, the Cyclops) and neglects the contribution of others (Hecate, the Hundred Handers) to Zeus' ascent.

³ Hes. *Theog.* 80-93. For an example of criticism, see West (1966) *ad loc.*

⁴ As with Ouranos before him, Kronos' character gets brief mention, but their true function within the *Theogony*'s succession myth is to provide predecessors to whom Zeus can succeed. See Mondi (1984): 342 n. 42 and the secondary sources cited therein.

had none before.⁵ The contrast with Kronos' style of rule is apparent, and the words 'ὕπὸ Κρόνου underline his agency for some being entirely without τιμαί.⁶ Zeus' fulfillment of his promises⁷ also contrasts with the duplicitousness implied by Kronos' epithet of ἀγκυλομήτης.⁸

Hecate. Zeus' coalition-building efforts continue with Hecate. She proves a tougher bargainer than Styx, obtaining more τιμαί⁹ even though she already had a share in the τιμαί of all other immortals.¹⁰ Hesiod makes much of Zeus' maintenance of all Hecate's pre-existing prerogatives ὥς τὸ πρῶτον, but also hints that Zeus might be justified in reducing her τιμαί because she is μονογενής.¹¹ That Zeus did not reduce Hecate's τιμαί even where he could point to some justification for doing so underscores the reliability of his promise not to deprive those who join him of any existing honor. The reliability of Zeus' undertakings is thus an instrument by which he acquires power and, by implication, a feature of the cosmic order he establishes.

The Cyclops. The Cyclops and their gift to Zeus of his characteristic weapons make an early appearance,¹² but the nature of their connection appears only much later.¹³ Here, the bargain is not expressly stated, as it was with Styx. Rather, Zeus' freeing of the Cyclops is characterized as a one-off act with no express *quid pro quo*. Indeed, ἀπεμνήσαντο χάριν εὐεργασιάων¹⁴ suggests both that Zeus' act was a good deed as opposed to part of a bargain and that the Cyclops' gift was an act of genuine

⁵ Hes. *Theog.* 392-6. Hesiod does not explicitly state that Styx was without τιμαί under Kronos, but the fact that she was first (πρώτη 397) to respond to his overtures, and the placement of this episode immediately following Zeus' appeal to those without τιμαί (395-6) strongly implies that she was.

⁶ Hamilton (1990): 44 *ad loc.* 395.

⁷ Hes. *Theog.* 402-3 (ὥς περ ὑπέσθη . . . 'εξετέλεσσ').

⁸ *Id.* 476 *et al.*

⁹ *Id.* 411 (περὶ πάντων), 415 (μάλιστα).

¹⁰ *Id.* 421-2, 428. West (1966): 277 ventures that Hecate's τιμαί overlay a more general Hesiodic scheme of allocation, but his remarks that the τιμαί assigned to any god could be as flexible as his worshippers' needs are more persuasive.

¹¹ Hes. *Theog.* 425-6. Female only children (ἐπικλῆροι) were at a considerable disadvantage at many stages of early Greek law. See Gagarin (1986): 67 n. 72.

¹² Hes. *Theog.* 139-141.

¹³ *Id.* 501 *et seq.*

¹⁴ *Id.* 503.

gratitude. While Zeus may have had expectations of gratitude from the Cyclops from, his willingness to act to benefit others without guarantee of requital marks a departure from the attitudes attributed to Kronos and constitute a feature of his ascent to rule.

The Hundred Handers. Like the Cyclops, the Hundred Handers make an early appearance,¹⁵ but their support of Zeus is not established until much later. Zeus can claim sole credit for neither their recruitment nor their release.¹⁶ Zeus is not above a bit of dissembling, however, resorting to critical ambiguity to suggest that he alone deserves credit.¹⁷

While the participation of the Hundred Handers was a necessary condition for victory over the Titans, it is less clear whether it was a sufficient condition. This question is critical to the interpretation of the passage describing Zeus' ἀριστεία¹⁸ and the more general question of the extent to which Zeus owes to his victory to others. In a battle where others played decisive roles and even his weapons were not his own, was Zeus merely a free-rider on the efforts of those he inveigled to fight on his behalf? For answers to this question one must consider the Titanomachy together with the (unsatisfactorily) similar Typhanomachy.

The extent, and effectiveness, of Zeus' contribution to victory in the Titanomachy is much disputed,¹⁹ but perhaps a solution may be sought in the cultural context of the work as a whole. An epic poet operating within an oral culture is constrained by tradition and his audience's familiarity with much of his source material.²⁰ There is evidence to suggest that Hesiod confronted a pre-existing

¹⁵ *Id.* 147-153.

¹⁶ *Id.* 626 (Γαίης φραδομοσύνησιν); 624-6 (καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι . . . ἀνήγαγον).

¹⁷ *Id.* 653 (ἡμετέρας διὰ Βουλᾶς). The ambiguity fooled Kottos, at any rate. *Id.* 655-60 (σῆσι δ' ἐπιπροσύνησιν) (emphasis supplied).

¹⁸ See Mondi (1986): 27-29.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Pucci (2009) vs. Rengakos (2009).

²⁰ Kullmann (1985): 313, 319.

tradition attributing defeat of the Titans to the Hundred Handers.²¹ This reading suggests that Zeus' ἀριστεία is an insertion by Hesiod into that pre-existing myth, in an attempt to magnify Zeus' importance in the context of a work that is an extended hymn of praise to him.²² The poetic technique is one familiar from the Iliad, where battle descriptions are often interrupted by passages focusing on a single character.²³

How one evaluates these claims turns largely on how one interprets the clause ἐκλίνθη δὲ μάχη in 711: is the unspecified agent Zeus' contributions individually or the actions of his side collectively? Mondi makes a powerful argument that whereas Zeus' ἀριστεία is marked by the vocabulary of fire, smoke and burning (Zeus' characteristic weapons), the final lines of the Titanomachy (700-12) refer to forms of noise and destruction not attributable to those weapons, and that the critical words in 711 thus relate to the collective effort.²⁴ This reading finds support in Hesiod's earlier statement that the war continued ten years without issue before the Hundred Handers joined,²⁵ and also in the later statements that the Hundred Handers fought in the front rank and performed the decisive acts of bombarding, defeating, dispatching and binding the Titans.²⁶

In the Typhnomachy, the relative importance of Zeus' contribution is less ambiguous. His weapons in this battle remain the βροντή, στεροπή and πύρ²⁷ given him by the Cyclops but he wins the fight on his own, without the help of 300 boulders

²¹ Mondi (1986) 31-2. See also Schönberger (1999): 144, 146 (suggesting the Hundred Handers may have been a Boeotian local myth).

²² Mondi (1986): 25. This position represents an attractive middle ground between earlier German scholarship that would excise Zeus' ἀριστεία entirely and more mid-century 20th century scholarship that resorted to somewhat artificial readings to downplay the contributions of the Hundred Handers. See *id.* 27-8 nn. 5-9 and the sources cited therein.

²³ See, *e.g.*, Hom. *Il.* 5.1-8 (Diomedes); Mondi (1986): 41 ("epic poetry characteristically presents the audience with just one scene at a time, and for the duration of the episode no other action exists, prior **or simultaneous**") (emphasis supplied).

²⁴ Mondi (1986): 32-6.

²⁵ Hes. *Theog.* 638 (ἴσον δὲ τέλος τέτατο πολέμοιο).

²⁶ *Id.* 713-720 (ἐνὶ πρότοισι; κατὰ δ' ἐσκίασαν βελέεσι; νικήσαντες; πέμψαν; ἔδησαν). The antecedent of οἱ (715) and the subject of the verbs and participles here can hardly be other than the Hundred Handers of 714.

²⁷ *Id.* 845.

flung by 300 hands. Many editors have sought to excise the Typhanomachy on account of the passage's extreme characterization of Zeus' combatant²⁸ and a perceived redundancy with the Titanomachy.²⁹ Yet that evidence by itself is an insufficient basis for athetizing the passage, as such a view inevitably is premised on a conception of Hesiodic rhetoric that is artificially narrow.³⁰ Rather, one may account for this passage if one remembers that, though the *Theogony* has as its aim the glorification of Zeus, Hesiod was constrained by an existing tradition crediting victory over the Titans to the Hundred Handers.³¹ Like the insertion of Zeus' ἀριστεία into the Titanomachy, the inclusion of a Typhonomachy that Zeus wins single-handedly can be viewed as part of a rhetorical strategy to highlight his role in achieving the victories central to the cosmic order.

What characteristics distinguish Zeus' reign?

Zeus' ascent to the primacy over the other gods differs from that of Kronos' also in its fulfillment: whereas Kronos' kingship is not evidenced by the consent of any god (other than perhaps Gaia), Zeus is chosen as ruler over the immortals by act of acclamation.³² This confers upon his reign a legitimacy that Kronos' never had. Zeus' election also represents an innovation from the division by lot found in Homer.³³

The contrast with Kronos is also apparent in Zeus' exercise of his power, in particular his fairness in allocating τιμαί. Zeus not only respects the *acquis* of elder immortals who lend him their aid, he also demonstrates fairness in new grants of τιμαί

²⁸ Lamberton (1988): 89 rightly notes the comic-book quality of the imagery.

²⁹ See, e.g., Worms (1953): 29-44, esp. 34, 40-41, 43; Solmsen (1982) 1-31.

³⁰ West (1966): 379-383; Lamberton (1988): 53-54.

³¹ See note 22 above.

³² Hes. *Theog.* 883-5 (albeit on advice of Gaia).

³³ See, e.g., Hom. *Il.* 15.187-93.

once his power is secured.³⁴ Honors were apportioned under Kronos,³⁵ but Zeus' ability to recruit allies indicates that the distribution was not universally perceived as fair. A comparison with Homer is again instructive: in the *Theogony*, Zeus is the most powerful of the immortals, but not to such a disproportionate extent that he is more powerful than all others collectively, as in the *Iliad*.³⁶ His allocation of τιμαί in Hesiod reflects this relative balance.

A further characteristic of Zeus' rule is found in the initial steps taken to establish stability against further disruption, marriage foremost among them. Prior to Zeus' ascent to supremacy through defeat of Typhoeus, the ultimate destabilizing force in the Hesiodic cosmos is Gaia, in particular her fertility.³⁷ Her motive principle -- constantly favoring the younger generation over the older, and the youngest within each -- necessarily leads to recurrent threats to the established order.³⁸ The defeat of Typhoeus, Gaia's most extravagant production, not only represents Zeus' victory against his last major challenger for power,³⁹ it also puts an end to Gaia's ability to destabilize any existing order through her fertility.⁴⁰

This taming of the feminine principle by the masculine also finds expression in the *Theogony's* account of Zeus' marriages, particularly the first, to Metis.⁴¹ Earlier episodes had established clearly enough that fathers can be overthrown by sons. Zeus, the overthrower of Kronos, would have been aware of this risk even

³⁴ Hes. *Theog.* 885 (ἐν διεδάσσατο τιμάς).

³⁵ Zeus' appeal to Styx assumes that some deities during Kronos' reign enjoy τιμαί and others not (389-96), and the Olympians strip the Titans of their τιμαί after their defeat (881-2).

³⁶ Hom. *Il.* 1.580-1, 15.22-24 and especially 8.7-27.

³⁷ Clay (2003): 17.

³⁸ *Id.* 26-27 (Kronos (137), Zeus (478) and Typhoeus (821) are each ὀπλότατοι).

³⁹ *Id.* 156.

⁴⁰ *Theog.* 861-2 (καίετο...καὶ ἐτήκετο κασσύτερος ὤς). The reading in this paragraph owes much to Clay (2003): 26 *et seq.*

⁴¹ Clay (2003): 18, 28 adopts a specifically gendered translation of Μητις as Feminine Guile, but the use of μητις and its compounds to describe masculine characters like Kronos and Prometheus cautions against such a translation.

absent timely reminders by Gaia and Ouranos.⁴² The incorporation of Metis, with its aim of preventing the birth of powerful offspring, represents not just the incorporation of an abstract principle of intelligence into Zeus' rule, but also the elimination of a potential rival.⁴³ Zeus's subsequent act of giving birth to Athena constitutes a further demonstration of his arrogation of female prerogatives to his (male) rule.⁴⁴

Finally, and despite Zeus' withdrawal of fire (562-4) and infliction of women (570 et seq.) – Zeus' influence on human affairs is shown as beneficial. The main avenue by which he exercises his benign influence is the generation of new gods that are expressly stated to be beneficial. One example is Persephone, a goddess of vegetal fertility.⁴⁵ Perhaps more importantly Zeus begets divine offspring that provide the benefits not of nature, but of culture, most notably the Seasons: Εὐνομία, Δίκη and Εἰρήνη.⁴⁶ These goddesses protect cropland⁴⁷ and, by extension, the efforts men put into it and, as the goddesses' names imply, the political culture that makes it possible to enjoy the fruits of that effort. This theme is more fully developed in *Works & Days*,⁴⁸ where Δίκη is of particular importance.⁴⁹ Closely associated with the Seasons are similar troupes fathered by Zeus, the Charities and the Graces, who also have important roles in securing the benefits of culture.⁵⁰

⁴² Hes. *Theog.* 891.

⁴³ Cf. Allan (2006): 31 n. 146 (Zeus "learns from the mistakes of the divine succession before him").

⁴⁴ Clay (2003): 28.

⁴⁵ West (1966): 37.

⁴⁶ Hes. *Theog.* 902-3.

⁴⁷ The interpretation of ἐργ' ὠρεύουσι is not without controversy, but the parallel usage of ἐργ' in 879 suggests this reading. West (1966): 406 *ad loc.* However one defines the benefit the Seasons confer, the τ' in 903 makes clear that conferring it is their specific τιμή. See GP (1950): 520-522.

⁴⁸ This argument does not require that both poems were written by the same author. Instead, all that is logically required is that the author(s) of each work were operating within a common tradition and adopting a common rhetorical stance. See Allan (2006): 27 ("Hesiod is best seen not as an actual historical figure... but as a poet who has chosen to perform particular genres of song in a particular persona") and the extended discussion in Lamberton (1988).

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Hes. *Op.* 215-6, 255-61. Δίκη has a broader range of meaning in the *Works & Days* than it does in the *Theogony*, encompassing not just concepts of justice and order but also procedural elements thereof. Gagarin (1973): 89. It is plainly wrong to assert, with Tandy & Noble (1996: 43), that Δίκη has no moral force in Hesiod, for the reasons ably discussed in Erbse (1993): especially 13-16, 27-28.

⁵⁰ West (1966): 397.

To be sure, there remain other deities that cannot be reconciled with the principles of Zeus' rule, foremost among them Night's progeny. Zeus cannot rid the world of them, but he can beget goddesses that counterbalance them.⁵¹ Equally important, he can bar them from Olympus by banishing them to Tartarus.⁵² Thus, while Night's progeny still afflict mankind, Zeus' Olympus and the cosmic order it embodies provide a bulwark of protection.

What are the institutional characteristics that make up this bulwark? Those participating in the Zeus-led order have a stake in its continued maintenance through, among other things, the four characteristics of Zeus' reign described above: legitimacy, fairness, stability and benefit. To that extent, the cosmic order introduced by Zeus represents an advance on its predecessors within the *Theogony*.⁵³ In addition, Olympus has a council chamber, communal feasts, and a meeting place,⁵⁴ and Hesiod's Olympians, unlike Homer's, meet in a council chamber, not in Zeus' house.⁵⁵ Perhaps most noteworthy for this argument, Hesiod expressly refers to Zeus as βασιλεὺς, a term Homer never applies to him.⁵⁶ It is at once evident from these features that the Olympian order established by Zeus is political in nature: Hesiod's Olympus is a πόλις (however idealized), not Homer's Olympian οἶκος.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Cf. the "new" Moirai (904-6), who dispense not just ill but also good to each man at birth, with the "old" Moirai (220-3), who pursue them relentlessly. The Seasons, too, counterbalance other daughters of Night. Clay (2003): 29.

⁵² E.g., Hes. *Theog.* 758-9.

⁵³ Allan (2006): 27 challenges long-standing interpretations that see the Olympian gods of *Theogony* as a moral advance over those of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. Even if Allan's arguments were more persuasive than they are, they are not relevant to the argument made here that the Zeus-led system represents an advance, not over what is portrayed in Homer, but over its predecessors within the *Theogony* itself.

⁵⁴ Hes. *Theog.* 802 (βουλὴν; δαῖτας); 804 (εἰρέας).

⁵⁵ Cf. Hes. *Theog.* 804 and Hom. *Il.* 8.2, 20.4; Scully 2015: 3; West (1997): 178.

⁵⁶ Hes. *Theog.* 866.

⁵⁷ See generally, Scully (2015): 32-33, 36-37.

Of Zeus and Kings

It is in light of this understanding of Zeus as a βασιλεὺς, holding sway over an Olympian πόλις, that we can perhaps understand the *Theogony*'s passage on kings.⁵⁸ The attitude toward kings here differs markedly from that in the *Works & Days*,⁵⁹ and the passage itself sheds little light on why kings should be the special objects of Zeus' care.⁶⁰ It is submitted that aid in interpreting the *Theogony*'s verses on kings may fruitfully be sought in the various passages described earlier in this paper. Zeus wins over elder gods who perceive themselves as slighted under Kronos, such as Styx, with mollifying words.⁶¹ Similarly, by keeping promises made even where he might point to some justification for breaking them (e.g., to Hecate), he demonstrates to others that he acts in accordance with the principles of fairness and the sense of order (δίκη) that comes from fulfillment of undertakings.⁶² Similarly, one may see strategic acts of generosity, such as the freeing of the Cyclops and the Hundred Handers, and the implementation of a regime in which all participants have a stake in its maintenance, as characteristic of successful kings. In all these senses, then, kings may be said to be the objects of Zeus' special care because the qualities they require are, within the *Theogony*, those he demonstrates in the acquisition and maintenance of his reign.⁶³

⁵⁸ Hes. *Theog.* 80-93.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hes. *Theog.* 80-97 and 434, 430 with *Op.* 238-47. See West (1966): 44; Tandy & Neale (1886): 19-21.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 82 (διοτρεφέων); see also 95-96 (ἔασιν . . . ἐκ δὲ Διὸς Βασιλῆες).

⁶¹ *Id.* at 89-90 (βλαπτόμενοι; μαλακοῖσι ἐπέεσιν).

⁶² *Id.* at 85-6 (πάντες ἐς αὐτὸν ὀρᾷσι . . . ιθείησι δίκησιν).

⁶³ The peaceful resolution of disputes mentioned in 80-93 finds little echo elsewhere in the *Theogony*, as its succession myth is essentially one of violent revolution. Dispute resolution by kings is instead a theme picked up and dealt with at length by Hesiod in *Works & Days*.

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INDEX LOCORUM CETERORUM

Hom. <i>Il.</i>	20.4
1.580-1	
5.1-8	
8.2	
8.7-27 1	
5.22-24	
15.187-93	
	Hes. <i>Op.</i>
	215-6
	238-47
	255-61

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