

Zeus and Prometheus: Greek Adaptations of Ancient Near Eastern Myths

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To the memory of Raymond Westbrook*

1 Introduction: The Origins of Evil

Hesiod, a slightly younger contemporary of Homer, is the first Greek poet whom we know by name and life story. He tells us of his meeting with the Muses on Mount Helicon who bestowed the gift of song upon him, of his father who emigrated from the Anatolian coast to the miserable little village of Askra in central Greece, and of his quarrel with his brother Perses who continually tried to get a larger share of their inheritance by bribing the aristocratic judges. However we assess the “autobiographical” references in Hesiod’s work, his world certainly is one of farmers who work hard to succeed, avoid the public square in the large town with its political and judicial disputes, are suspicious

* I dedicate this paper to the memory of Raymond Westbrook, Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University, who died far too early in July 2009. He was a scholar of rare learning and broad knowledge in the legal history of the Ancient Near East, Israel, Greece, and Rome. He was also most generous in helping those who sought his advice. In March 2009, he had commented substantively on my presentation of this paper at a colloquium at Miami University. I have profited immensely from an ongoing conversation with him on questions of mutual interest, especially on the transmission of legal forms and ideas from ancient Mesopotamia to early Greece and Rome. I regret deeply that he was not able to complete his papers that would have responded to some of my most urgent questions and doubts.—An earlier version of this chapter was published in German as Raaflaub 2008. Many have encouraged me to publish it in English as well. I thank Dr. Thomas Schaber, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, for his kind permission to do so. Thanks are also due to Stephen Scully for commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter and sharing with me a draft of his chapter in this volume, and to many colleagues and students who offered helpful comments, suggestions, and encouragement, whenever I presented lecture versions of this chapter. I am aware that I am trespassing into fields in which I am not properly trained, and that the ideas presented here can only be preliminary; they need to be thought through more thoroughly and on the basis of more comprehensive familiarity with sources and bibliography. I hope eventually to provide a fuller treatment in a book on “Early Greek Political Thought in the Cultural Context of the Eastern Mediterranean.”—Addition (June 2014): This paper was submitted in January, 2010, and reflects the state of research at that time. I thank the volume’s editors for persisting and finally succeeding in bringing it to publication. Raymond

of the “gift-devouring” elite leaders, and seek their support among their neighbors rather than family or elite.¹

Trying to understand the world in which he lives, Hesiod asks simple but important questions: what are the factors that determine human well-being? What are the main values that sustain a good community? Why is the world full of evils, and who is responsible for human suffering? What qualities must a good leader have, and how can the bad leaders who make the citizens’ lives difficult be convinced to change their ways? Despite the traditional poetic form in which he presents his thoughts, Hesiod has an independent mind. He is one of the first political thinkers we know of.² His ideas had a deep and lasting impact. He frequently uses stories or myths for an etiological purpose, to explain specific conditions or customs in his own time. Mesopotamian myth often had a similar purpose. The comparison, when we have comparable versions, is illuminating.

Let me illustrate this with the stories that explain the origins of evils in the world. Here is the Sumerian story.³ The gods have just created humans to do the hard work from which they suffered before. They celebrate this achievement with a party at which they drink too much beer. Two of the most powerful gods, Enki, the god of sweet waters and a very smart problem solver, and Ninmah, the goddess of the earth, start to quarrel. Ninmah challenges Enki in a competition in which one creates human beings with defects, and the other has to find a place for them in society: a man who cannot hold his urine, a woman who is unable to bear children, a being who has neither male nor female organs (presumably a eunuch). Enki is able to place them all. The eunuch serves the king, the barren woman the queen, and so on. When they change sides, Ninmah gets into trouble: for example, Enki creates a person burdened with all the ills of old age for whom Ninmah is unable to find a place. The same happens with Enki’s other creatures. Eventually frustrated, Ninmah abandons her efforts. The game and the party are over; the gods leave—but the evils stay. This myth clearly intends to explain the existence of these evils, for example, all those unpleasant, seemingly unnecessary pains

Westbrook’s papers that are of importance to Classicists have been published in Deborah Lyons and Kurt Raaflaub (eds.), *Ex Oriente Lex: Near Eastern Influences on Greek and Roman Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

- 1 Autobiographical elements in Hesiod: esp. Hes. *Th.* 22–34; *WD* 27–41, 633–40. For modern discussion, see Gagarin 1974; Nagy 1990: ch. 3. On Hesiod’s social context: Millett 1984; Tandy and Neal 1996; Edwards 2004; van Wees 2009.
- 2 On Hesiod’s political thinking: Raaflaub 1988: 215–24; a brief summary in id. 2000: 34–37. See also n. 52 below.
- 3 On the competition of Enki and Ninmah, see Jacobsen 1946: 161–65; Kramer and Maier 1989: ch. 2.

and handicaps that accompany old age. But, as Thorkild Jacobsen emphasizes, it also passes judgement: these evils are not part of the original world order; they came into being when the gods succumbed momentarily to envy and a desire to show off.⁴ Humans, we observe, have nothing to do with the origins of evils in this text; created to be the gods' slaves, they are only the victims of the gods' actions.⁵

Not so Hesiod. In his epic the gods create Pandora as a punishment for the offenses of Prometheus, one of the Titans, who twice deceived Zeus, the supreme god. Pandora means "All-gifts" or perhaps rather "All-giver" and her gifts are all evil.⁶ In the version of the *Theogony*, Pandora herself is the evil, a beautiful but wasteful woman—in our world, she would be a maniacal shopper—the ancestress of mortal women who (says Hesiod) are a great affliction to men whose life is miserable with or without them. In *Works and Days*, the gods give Pandora a jar in which they pack all imaginable evils; she seduces Prometheus's dumb brother Epimetheus ("he who thinks afterwards," as opposed to Pro-metheus, who thinks before acting), who ignores explicit warnings in accepting her. She opens the jar and lets all the evils fly out, closing the jar just in time to keep hope or expectation (*elpis*) shut in.⁷ Prometheus suffers his own grievous punishment (*Theog.* 521–34, 613–16), and we shall have to ask why humankind has to suffer for Prometheus's offenses. But there is no doubt that Hesiod explains the existence of evils in the world not with divine irresponsibility and arbitrariness but as the result of transgressions that are directly connected with humankind.

The difference between the etiology of evil in Mesopotamian and Greek myth is huge. Moreover, Hesiod says it explicitly, several times: there is no way that anyone can deceive Zeus; his punishment and that of his daughter, Dike, the goddess of Justice, will not fail to meet the evildoer.⁸ So the gods are important and play a decisive role as promoters and enforcers of justice, but they do so mainly because there is no sufficiently powerful and just *human* agency to

4 Jacobsen 1946.

5 On humans as the gods' slaves, see n. 45 below.

6 Prometheus and Pandora: Hes. *Th.* 571–612; *WD* 42–105.

7 The latter is not uncontested but, in my view, necessary, not least because of Prometheus's gift of hope to humankind in *Prometheus Bound* (below). For a contrary view, see M. West 1978: 169–71 at *WD* 95–100; for further discussion, not least of the meaning of *elpis*, Pucci 1977: 104–5; Verdenius 1985: 66–71. For a constitutive analysis of the myth, see Vernant 1989, 1990; furthermore Ogden 1998; Clay 2003: ch. 5. On Pandora: Walcott 1966: ch. 3; Pucci 1977: ch. 4; *Brill's New Pauly* 10 (2007): 436–37; *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* 7.1 (1994): 165–64 (both with bibliog.).

8 Hes. *Th.* 550–52, 613–16; *WD* 106, 248–67; on the role of Dike and justice in Hesiod, see Gagarin 1973; Erler 1987. Hirzel 1907 remains important.

rely upon for such purposes. The problems that Hesiod and other early Greek thinkers tackle fit into an entirely human framework of cause and effect. The gods punish evildoers and their communities and, through seers, poets, or leaders blessed by them, they may offer advice about salutary measures to be taken in a crisis, but they neither cause nor resolve such a crisis. The poet of the *Odyssey* and Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, say it emphatically: the gods are benevolent; they are not the instigators of human suffering beyond what fate (*moira*) has allocated to each. It is the humans, the citizens, who cause social ills and are responsible for their own demise, and they themselves must resolve these problems.⁹

In the case of the origins of the evils, Hesiod's etiological myth and its Mesopotamian counterpart are completely different and thus seem independent of each other. In emphasizing differences, I should add, I generally do not pass judgement: by "different" I do not mean "better" or "worse," I only mean "different." I am sure that in its own cultural context the Mesopotamian explanation of the origins of evil made as much sense as Hesiod's interpretation did to the Greeks. I could even imagine that storytellers offered moral or ethical interpretations in oral performances, but this is a highly contested issue that does not need to be addressed here.¹⁰

In this essay, I want to focus on the question of how Greek thinkers dealt with ideas that clearly *did* originate in the east. This is a question of considerable importance. For, as is well known, during the so-called "Orientalizing Period" from the late 8th to the early 6th centuries BCE, the Greeks absorbed an enormous amount of outside influences in all areas of culture, coming especially from Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, and Egypt (which I group here together under "the Ancient Near East").¹¹ This process of cultural dissemination, however, has often been understood too simply, as if it corresponded, so to speak, to a one-way route, on which ship after ship loaded with goods moved from south to north and east to west in the Mediterranean, ending in harbors with warehouses from which the imported goods were distributed and integrated seamlessly into the receiving culture, like bricks in a wall. This view

9 *Odyssey* 1.22–43; Solon, *fr.* 4 West. For the larger implications of these views, see Raaflaub 2005: esp. 255–68.

10 See, for example, Alster 1992 and relevant chapters in Foley 2005; Sasson 1995. See also M. West 1997: ch. 12.

11 For bibliography on the cultural interaction between Greece and the Ancient Near East, see, Burkert 1992: 135–52; Raaflaub 1993: VII–XXIII, and, recently, Burkert 2004: 131–42.

runs into several major difficulties. One, on which I shall focus today, concerns the integration of external impulses into another culture.¹²

Usually, such impulses are adapted (sometimes profoundly) to the conditions prevailing in the receiving society. What results from this process will therefore differ (sometimes substantially) from the “raw material” imported from abroad. On the level of material culture, such differences may have been relatively small: for example, Greek craftsmen could imitate sphinxes and sirens that were typical in the Near East, or learn from itinerant Phoenician artisans the art of making large decorated bronze bowls and plates.¹³ Yet even here differences could be substantial: certain Greek statues (the *kouroi*) were obviously based on Egyptian models, and their ‘archaic smile’ recalls that of late Hittite statues, but they underwent rapid artistic change and played in Greek society a role that differed vastly from that of their models in Egypt.¹⁴ On the level of social or political customs and institutions, I suggest, differences were larger and more fundamental.¹⁵ To examine one aspect of this hypothesis, I will look at two myths that reflect such customs and institutions. They are well attested in Mesopotamian literature and play an important role in Hesiod and in a fifth-century tragedy: the myth of the succession of several divine kings and that of the culture hero. That Near Eastern influences play a role especially in Hesiod’s epics is obvious and well-known; a famous example is the “Myth of the Ages,” characterized by four metals.¹⁶

2 Zeus and the Succession Myth

The so-called “succession myth” is recounted in several episodes of the *Theogony*.¹⁷ Uranos (Sky) fathers numerous children with Gaia (Earth) but

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- 12 For more detailed discussion of these issues, see Humphreys 1993; Raaflaub 2008: 33–44; 2009a: 38–39.
 - 13 Kreutz 2004; on sphinxes: Scully 1997: 249–50 (emphasizing changes in the process of imitation); on bronze bowls, Markoe 1985; Hoffman 1997: 32–37 (with n. 21), 125–32. See also Ebbinghaus 2008 on animal-headed vessels.
 - 14 On the *kouroi*, see Hurwit 1985: 186–202; Kyrieleis 1993: 150–51; Fehr 1996; Osborne 1998: 75–85. On the ‘archaic smile’: Işık 2004.
 - 15 For a comparative study of Israelite, Greek, and Roman law codes (unfortunately not including Mesopotamian ones), see Burckhardt et al. 2007.
 - 16 Myth of the Ages: Hes. *WD*. 106–201; for eastern parallels, see Walcott 1966: 85–86; M. West 1978 on this section, esp. 172–77; 1997: 312–19; Woodard 2007.
 - 17 Succession Myth: *Th*. 116–210, 453–506, 617–735, 820–885. See Brown 1953; M. West 1997: ch. 6.

prevents their birth and causes the mother severe pain. The underlying idea presumably is that earth and sky were not yet separated.¹⁸ Gaia then prompts her eldest son, Kronos, to cut off his father's genitals with a sickle made of the mysterious metal *adamas*, thereby severing their union. Her children can now be born, and Kronos assumes power. He in turn swallows his children immediately after birth to prevent another rebellion. His wife, Rhea, hides the youngest, Zeus, and tricks Kronos into swallowing a stone instead. When he has grown up, Zeus causes Kronos to vomit the stone and his siblings, overthrows him and takes over the kingship of the gods. In a great battle, Zeus and the Olympian gods defeat Kronos and the Titans and imprison them forever in the depths of Tartarus. Another victory, over the Earth-born monster Typhoeus, secures Zeus's power.

Myths told among the Hurrites, Hittites, and other West Asian societies offer remarkable parallels.¹⁹ Here there are four generations of divine kings. After nine years of rule, the first, Alalu is defeated by Anu, the Sky God, who in turn rules for nine years. Kumarbi attacks him, grabs him by his feet when he tries to escape to heaven, bites off his genitals, and swallows them. He thereby is impregnated with three powerful deities. He manages to spit out two of them but fails to get rid of the third, Teššub, the Weather God. Because the following passage is sadly fragmentary, it is uncertain but perhaps likely (because of Hesiod's analogy) that Kumarbi then swallows a stone and tries to eat Teššub after his birth. We *do* know that eventually the Weather God is born, defeats Kumarbi in battle, banishes him and the gods connected with him, and assumes power himself. The story is continued in the myth of Ullikummi, a stone child born of the union of Kumarbi and a rock, who grows up to become a giant monster threatening the gods. Only by using a copper sickle that had served long ago to separate heaven and earth, do the gods succeed in cutting off the monster's feet, toppling and defeating it.

No one will doubt that Hesiod drew on such models when composing the *Theogony*. This raises important and difficult questions. How were such motifs transmitted to Greece? Most of the relevant eastern texts known to us date many centuries before Hesiod: the Hittite texts ca. 1400–1200, the *Enuma elish* in the late 12th century BCE or later.²⁰ In Mesopotamia, such texts were

18 For other explanations, see M. West 1966: 211–14; Hölscher 1968: 51.

19 On the Kumarbi and Ullikummi myths, see Güterbock 1946, 1948, 1952; Hoffner 1998: 40–65; Haas 1994: 82–90, 96–98, 113–15; 2006: ch. 8. On the Storm or Weather Gods of the Ancient Near East, see Schwemer 2001, 2007.

20 For the date of the latter, see Abusch 1995. Halpern, in a personal communication, dates the present form to the 8th century, with forerunners in the 10th.

transmitted in scribal schools far into the first millennium, but Greeks (or their eastern informers) were unlikely to have access to these. Scholars disagree about whether versions of these texts were transmitted orally as well, and how such oral and written traditions might have interacted with each other—although in my view the mere fact that Greek epics reflect much eastern material proves widespread oral traditions that perhaps formed part of a cultural *koinē* in the eastern Mediterranean. Surviving evidence suggests that Mesopotamian epics no less than orally transmitted songs or tales all over the world adjusted to changing conditions. Most likely they were also elaborated in performance. Yet, when-, how-, and by whomever Near Eastern motifs were transmitted to Greece—in the late Bronze Age or early archaic period, via North Syria and the Levant or Anatolia to Crete or the central Aegean and central Greece, or via a “cultural *koinē*” in the Eastern Mediterranean—we do not know the versions the Greeks encountered. Inevitably, therefore, we compare what is only partially comparable.²¹

Moreover, on all levels things are more complicated. For example, Kumarbi, the equivalent of Kronos, makes not one but several efforts to overthrow the Weather God, and three of his creatures occupy the divine ruler’s throne at least temporarily.²² Volkert Haas interprets the Kumarbi cycle as a calendar

21 For a detailed comparison of Greek and Near Eastern versions of the succession myth: Steiner 1958; Schwabl 1962. For continuing adaptation in Near Eastern epic, see, e.g., Cohen 1993: 406–53; for the importance of oral traditions in Mesopotamia, see now Westenholz 2009. For some of the questions raised here, see Mondì 1990; Penglas 1994 (with the review by Scully 1997); M. West 1997: ch. 12; Haubold 2002; Bachvarova 2005, 2008; Bryce 2008; see also earlier discussion by, e.g., Lesky 1950, 1955; Heubeck 1955; Hölscher 1968: 49–82 and, on the traditions preserved by Sanchuniathon and Philo of Byblos, Baumgarten 1981; M. West 1997: 283–86. Regarding the “transmitters,” Burkert 1992; 2004 suggests itinerant specialists, including Phoenicians who settled in the Aegean (well attested in Crete: Morris 1992: ch. 1 and 124–49; Hoffman 1997; Stampolidis and Kotsonas 2006). From a West Asian perspective: Grottanelli 1982; Zaccagnini 1983. Even if poets and singers themselves do not seem to have crossed cultural boundaries, regional and supra-regional cults and festivals offered many opportunities for transmission of ideas and stories; see now Bachvarova 2009 and other chs. in Hunter and Rutherford 2009. Niditch 2009 points out tales and characters in early Israelite traditions that recall Greek ones and thinks it important “to acknowledge that more than one epic tradition enlivened the ancient Mediterranean world, and that cross-fertilization between various traditions is to be expected.” The question of a cultural *koinē* has been suggested by various scholars and is in urgent need of comprehensive discussion; see, e.g., Seybold and Ungern-Sternberg 1993, 2007; Sherratt and Sherratt 1993; Matthäus 2005.

22 Hoffner 1998: 46ff.; Haas 1994: 85–99; M. West 1997: 103–5. For differences, see also Scully, this vol.

myth that divides the year into the four seasons marking the agricultural year, dominated by the gods of the storm flood (Alalu), sky (Anu), grain (Kumarbi) and weather (Teššub). Kumarbi himself, created before the differentiation between the male and female principles by the separation of Earth and Sky, is sexually undifferentiated, “both father and mother of Teššub.”²³ Except for the functions of the Sky (Uranos), Fertility (Kronos), and Weather (Zeus), none of this is found in Hesiod.

More importantly, in the Hittite version the story is told in a straightforward way, without an ethical or political interpretation or purpose. I do not doubt that it too had a deeper cultural meaning but, whatever it was, it is hardly visible in the preserved texts. It is possible, of course, that in oral performance the singer or narrator elaborated on these aspects, but, as said earlier, this aspect is greatly controversial among specialists.²⁴ In Hesiod’s account, such a purpose is unmistakable. The *Theogony* is a hymn to Zeus and the just world order he has created (47–74); his rule is embedded from the beginning in the community of gods, and the poet places much emphasis on the justice and fairness of his rule.

By contrast, the rule of Zeus’s predecessors appears as violent and unjust. Uranos is a brutal and oppressive ruler. Although Kronos liberates himself and his siblings from such oppression, he “has a crooked cleverness” (*ankylomētēs*), does this in a violent act of usurpation, and commits “a great deed” “out of wickedness” (*atasthalīē*) that will call for revenge (*tisis*, 209–10).²⁵ Fully aware of this, Kronos fears to be overthrown by his own son, as a prophecy predicts (461–65). So he too suppresses his children. This in turn causes his wife, Rhea, to rebel against him and to save Zeus through deception in order to make Kronos pay for the blood-guilt he has incurred by unmaning her father and swallowing his children (472–73). As a consequence, he too is overthrown, and Zeus rules among the immortals (450–500).

Here we face a problem. Zeus no less than Kronos appears to be a usurper. He defeats and expels Kronos and assumes power himself (490–91, cf. 496). Even worse, Zeus too knows a prophecy that he is fated to be overthrown by an overpowering son (894–98). In order to prevent this, he swallows his first wife, Metis, who is pregnant with Athena. A second pregnancy and its dangerous consequences are now impossible (886–900). Based on these *actions*, at least in his beginnings, Zeus might seem hardly better than Kronos. Yet Hesiod

23 Haas 1994: 85, 115.

24 See n. 10 above.

25 For the meaning of *atasthalīē*, see, e.g., *Od.* 1.7, 1.34, 12.300, 23.67; S. West 1988: 72 (with bibliog.).

disagrees. He depicts Rhea and Zeus acting upon the prophecy and advice of the oldest and highest authorities among the gods, Uranos and Gaia (469–76, 889). Zeus avenges earlier injustice and replaces a ruler who deserves to suffer divine punishment. He certainly assumes power violently, but this is not represented as an act of injustice: it is never called “wicked.” Kronos swallows his children, while Zeus tricks Metis “deceitfully with cunning words” and puts her away in his belly, again on the advice of Earth and Heaven, so that no other god can become king (888–93). Zeus thus integrates Metis into his own body, so that she, “the wisest among gods and mortal men” can “advise him of what is good or bad” (887, 892–93). The word *mētis* means wisdom based on insight and experience, or cunning intelligence.²⁶ Zeus thus acquires a quality that a good ruler needs to stay in power. And his *mētis* certainly will be straight, not crooked like Kronos.²⁷ The intention seems obvious: no stains must appear on Zeus’s white shirt!²⁸

More than that: Zeus goes on to demonstrate his power and leadership abilities by defeating a series of dangerous challengers: the Titans and the monster Typhoeus (629–721, 820–68). In order to do so, he intelligently attracts important supporters: he corrects injustice committed by his predecessor and liberates the Cyclopes, who give him thunder and lightning (139–46, 501–6), and the three Hundred-Armers, superb fighters and prison guards (147–53, 617–735, 815–19). Moreover, by guaranteeing the continuation of honors and privileges to those who held them before and promising proper ones to those who were disadvantaged under Kronos, Zeus proves his willingness to reward his supporters (390–96), as he demonstrates in the case of Styx and her sons: Styx becomes the guarantor of the great oath of the gods, and Zeal, Victory, Power, and Force (Zelos, Nike, Kratos, and Bie) receive homes close to Zeus’s own and thus, so-to-speak, form his bodyguard (383–390, 397–401).²⁹ Hesiod comments: “In the same way Zeus fulfilled his promises to all throughout” (402–3).

26 Detienne and Vernant 1991. On the function of this part of the myth, M. West 1966: 401.

27 Just as the judges are supposed to pass straight, not crooked judgements (*WD* 219–26, 250–51, 256–64).

28 See below at n. 52. Peter Rose (oral communication) thinks that the potential for a tyrannical disposition is visible in what he calls “Zeus’s mean streak” in his reaction to Prometheus’s deception (*Th.* 550–52, but see M. West 1966 on 551) and in his rejoicing in Prometheus’s and humankind’s punishment (*WD* 59; M. West 1978: *ad loc.* “the cackle of triumph”). Yet, I suggest, this entire episode should also be read in terms of an intense rivalry between two leaders, an experience thoroughly familiar to Hesiod’s audiences.

29 M. West 1966: 272 (on *Th.* 384) translates *zēlos* with glory: “not envying but being envied.” “Zeal” might fit the context equally well. For a close analogy to the reward offered to Styx’s sons, see *Od.* 21.213–16 with Odysseus’s promises to the faithful herdsmen, Eumaios and

After the final victory the gods urge Zeus “to be king and lord of the immortals. And he allotted them privileges (*timai*) satisfactorily” (881–85). The programmatic announcement of the *Theogony*’s beginning is fulfilled. Zeus rules not as a usurper and tyrant but with the consent and support of all gods, and based on just principles. Yet there is even more. Applying the methods of his genealogical systematization, Hesiod surrounds Zeus with wives and daughters representing personified virtues and values that mark an ideal king (886–917):³⁰ wisdom and intelligence, adherence to tradition and law, good order, justice, and peace, grace (an indispensable quality of leadership),³¹ memory (of tradition and custom) and all aspects of the arts, not least honey-sweet speech that is crucial for success in the assembly—which brings us back to the hymn to the Muses introducing the *Theogony* (80–90).

Overall, then, Hesiod paints a carefully constructed image of a good leader who is able to gain power and popularity and is wise and just enough to maintain his rule. Undoubtedly, this image is intended as a model for elite leaders in human society, presenting a stark contrast to the injustice and corruption that characterizes the “gift-devouring” kings in Hesiod’s other epic, *Works and Days*.³² Hesiod thus re-interprets an old foreign story, integrating it into an ethical and political framework that seems to be absent in the extant Near Eastern “originals.”

I should add that in this respect the Babylonian Creation Epic (*Enuma elish*) seems more closely comparable to the *Theogony* (although the succession myth told there is very different from that in Hesiod and the Hittite tradition).³³ Marduk too is elected to power, he is responsible for dividing privileges and setting up the stations for the gods, and he institutes a form of governance that is associated with social harmony and general satisfaction. Despite these important similarities, Hesiod differs from the *Enuma elish* in essential ways that would require a similarly detailed examination. Since Stephen Scully is offering such a study in the present volume, I will only mention a few relevant examples. Some of the differences are mainly due to cultural differences. Thus Marduk’s rise to the position of king of the gods, like Zeus’s, is approved by

Philoittios: they will become followers and brothers (*hetairoi kai kasignētoi*) of Telemachos and receive a wife and house next to Odysseus’s own.

30 For the intricate arrangement of this section, see Ramnoux 1987.

31 MacLachlan 1993; Meier 2000.

32 Clay 2003 rightly emphasizes the organic connection between the two main works of Hesiod. See also Solmsen 1949.

33 The Babylonian *Creation Myth* (*Enuma elish*) is in Foster 2005: 438–86; see Jacobsen 1976: 167–91; Michalowski 1990; M. West 1997: 280–83; for a comparison with Hesiod’s *Theogony*, see Brown 1953; Walcot 1966: 27–54; Mondl 1984, and the excellent study of Scully, this vol.

the divine assembly. Yet in Hesiod this happens *after* Zeus has proved himself a capable and just leader, and, in distributing functions and privileges, Zeus recognizes existing claims and does not deprive the other gods of their independence. In other words, the gods recognize Zeus's superiority and leadership without submitting to him unconditionally.³⁴ By contrast, Marduk uses a dire crisis to make kingship a condition for his martial exploits; his creation of a new (and very different) world order too will follow after his elevation. Moreover, the gods subject themselves to his absolute power: together with the power to rule, they also surrender their own autonomy and capacity to support themselves. The type of divine assembly and mode of decision making, too, differ: here a sober and simple meeting (*agorē*),³⁵ there a sumptuous feast with much consumption of food and alcohol, followed by solemn coronation rituals and the prostration of the gods before their new king.³⁶ Overall, then, we have, on the one hand, an absolute, divinely sanctioned king at the top of a strictly hierarchical social order whose position predetermines his power and functions, and, on the other hand, the reflection, typical of the poet's time, of a Greek communal leader, a *primus inter pares*, whose position depends on his *proven* capabilities. A similar story but very different, with culturally determined interpretations that do not, in principle, exclude the possibility of the *Enuma elish* having served as a model for Zeus's role in the *Theogony*.

Another difference, though, is more profound and significant to the present discussion. At the end of *Enuma elish*, Marduk's qualities are listed impressively in fifty names or titles. Of these, exactly one mentions Marduk's function as god of justice; only two out of 200 lines are devoted to this topic (Foster 2005: 478):

who administers justice, uproots twisted testimony,
in whose place falsehood and truth are distinguished.

To repeat, Hesiod's story clearly has Near Eastern antecedents but these do not contain the model for his focus on the emergence of Zeus as a *just* leader and creator of a *just* world order although there is no doubt that elsewhere in Near Eastern traditions (for example, in royal inscriptions) justice plays a crucial

34 Hesiod does not say the latter explicitly but it is a given in Greek epic tradition and belief; see, e.g. *Il.* 15.184–217.

35 Scully (this vol.) shows how this detail fits into Hesiod's construction of Olympus as an ideal *polis*.

36 Mary Bachvarova considers it possible that at the end of the Kumarbi-Ullikummi-myth, which is preserved only in fragments, the rule of the victorious king of the gods was also legitimized by the assembly of the other gods (email, Oct. 2, 2005).

role. Whatever Hesiod learned from Near Eastern traditions, and however he learned it, he fundamentally reinterpreted it, filled it with new content and meaning and made it serve his purposes and reflect the concerns of his time and society. Hence, if we limit ourselves to finding out what Hesiod borrowed from foreign traditions, we miss the crucial aspects of how he used and transformed these traditions.

3 Prometheus and Myths of Culture Heroes

Turning to a different myth, in extant Greek poetry, Prometheus appears prominently in both of Hesiod's epics and in a fifth-century tragedy, *Prometheus Bound*. Scholars have claimed that Prometheus' character as a trickster and culture hero was essentially borrowed from West Asian myths, by assimilating him to an important figure in the Mesopotamian pantheon, the wise Enki or Ea.³⁷ As above, let us examine the different versions of this figure.

What I find strangely unclear in Hesiod is Prometheus's relationship to humankind. His troubles begin at the time when gods and humans ceased to live together (that is, probably, at the end of the Golden Age).³⁸ During a sacrifice, Prometheus tricks Zeus into accepting the larger but worse parts of the sacrificial animal. As a punishment, Zeus hides the fire. Prometheus deceives Zeus again by stealing the fire, thereby prompting the creation of Pandora and all its miserable consequences. Now what does he, son of a Titan, a god, have to do with sacrifices, which are obviously an obligation not of gods but of humans? Why does Zeus punish humankind (first by withholding fire, then by the evils brought into the world by Pandora) for cheating at a sacrifice and stealing the fire—when both offenses were committed not by humans but by the son of a Titan?³⁹ The story of the fateful sacrifice in the *Theogony* obviously is etiological: it explains why humans sacrifice to the gods at all and why they receive the better parts of the sacrificial animal, and perhaps also why gods and humans are separated and humans no longer live in a Golden Age. But all this does not explain why *humans* suffer for Prometheus'

37 Duchemin 1974; Penglase 1994: ch. 9; S. West 1994. See also Trousson 1964.

38 The Prometheus myth in Hesiod: *Th.* 507–616; *WD* 42–105. For interpretation (including the sacrifice at Mekone), see Walcot 1966: ch. 3; M. West 1966: 305–308; Clay 2003: ch. 5. Further bibliog. in *Brill's New Pauly* 12 (2008): 6–10; *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* 7.1 (1994): 531–53.

39 That humankind is punished as a result of Prometheus's actions is said explicitly in *Th.* 550–52, 561–64, 570; *WD* 47–59.

transgressions. The answer to *this* question could be that Prometheus was very early seen as a sponsor or protector, or even the creator of humankind, in some ways as “ultimate man” or “superman,” and that Hesiod already took this tradition for granted.⁴⁰

The fact that Zeus withholds from humankind the ability to make, preserve, and carry the fire and that Prometheus steals it back from Zeus, proves that fire is essential to humans. The poet does not explain here in what ways this is true, and he does not speak explicitly of technology and civilization but it seems clear enough that by his very act of securing the fire for the humans Prometheus makes them capable not only of simply surviving but of developing their culture. Hesiod’s Prometheus, therefore, is at least potentially a culture hero.

Now the idea that the Greek Prometheus is assimilated to the Mesopotamian Enki/Ea seems appealing. In Mesopotamian myth, Ea is the protector and advisor of Utnapishtim, Enki of Atrahasis.⁴¹ These two figures (the counterparts of Noah in the Hebrew Bible and Deukalion in Greek myth) each construct, upon divine advice, an ark, fill it with all types of living beings, survive the great flood, and secure the continuation of humankind and all the animals that would otherwise have perished. In Greek myth Prometheus plays the role of Ea/Enki. It is hardly doubtful that this is a migrating tale originating in the East.

Enki is the Mesopotamian culture hero who, like Prometheus, is responsible for most, if not all, human achievements.⁴² In contrast to Prometheus, Enki is one of the most powerful gods in the pantheon. His personality varies from sex maniac and drunkard to wise advisor and resolver of problems. He is a creator god who made a large part of the cosmos; he controls the *me*, the mysterious forces and rules that keep the world order going; he is the god of life-giving

40 On the creation of humankind: e.g., Walcot 1966: ch. 3; Luginbühl 1992 (224–26 on Prometheus); Clay 2003: ch. 4.

41 On Ea and Ut-napishtim, see tablet XI of the Gilgamesh epic, in Pritchard 1969: 93–97; George 2003: 88–99. On Enki and Atrahasis, Lambert and Millard 1999. Noah: *Gen* 6:5–9:17; Deukalion, son of Prometheus: Hesiod, fr. 2–4 Merkelbach and West; Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 9.49ff.; Epicharmus, *Poetae comici Graeci* I, fr. 113 (p. 73); see also Ovid, *Metam.* 1.336ff.; *Brill’s New Pauly* 4 (2004): 321–22; *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* 3.1 (1986): 384–85. Generally on the myth of the Great Flood: Dundes 1988; Bottéro and Kramer 1989: ch. 13; García Martínez and Luttikhuisen 1998; see also Scodel 1982.

42 On Enki, see *Reallexikons der Assyriologie* 11 (1938): 374–79; Jacobsen 1976: 110–16; Kramer and Maier 1989: 1–21; Black and Green 1992: 75; Bottéro 1992.

waters and fertility.⁴³ He is also considered the god of craftsmen, artists, and scribes. Let us look at two myths that seem especially illuminating.⁴⁴

Enki and Inanna deals with the organization of the earth and its cultural processes. Placed in charge by the supreme gods, Anu and Enlil, Enki traverses his territory and provides for the essential needs of humans. He bestows fertility on the rivers and the fields irrigated by them. He fills the creeks with fish, the swamps with plants; he fertilizes the oceans, calls up rain-clouds on the horizon, and for each of these areas he appoints a divine overseer. Irrigation makes it possible to cultivate the land.

Enki trained the plow, the yoke, and the team,
great prince Enki furnished them with oxen . . .
He opened the mouth of the holy furrow,
made grow the grain in the seeded field.

(317–20, trans. Kramer and Maier 1989: 50)

He sows the fields with all kinds of grains and vegetables. Then Enki builds houses, covers the steppes with rich vegetation and herds of wild animals, endows the domesticated animals with milk and fat and protects them in barns and pens. Finally, he builds temples, draws boundaries, and establishes the arts of weaving and sewing clothes.

Although humans profit in multiple ways, this myth is dominated by the perspective of the gods. It is a charter myth praising the great achievements of Enki. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, in Mesopotamian myth humans are slaves of the gods and were created only for this purpose.⁴⁵ Enki's care for their well-being therefore ultimately serves the higher purpose of enhancing the well-being of the gods: fat sheep make fat sacrifices.

Enki . . . filled the dining halls of the gods with luxury . . .
He packed the houses of the gods with goods.
With Enki they rejoiced and exulted.

(365–68; trans. Kramer and Maier 1989: 52)

43 On the *me*, see *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* VII (1990): 610–13; Black and Green 1992: 130; see also Farber-Flügge 1973.

44 For translations of the myths about Enki and Inanna, see Kramer and Maier 1989.

45 See the beginning of *Atrahasis* (Lambert and Millard 1999: 43–67; Dalley 1989: 9–18) or *Enki and Ninmah* (Kramer and Maier 1989: ch. 2) or tablet VI.1–38 of *Enuma elish* (Foster 2005: 384–85). See also Bottéro and Kramer 1989: 502–40.

Finally, the long catalog of Enki's gifts to earth and humankind does not seem to contain anything that points beyond the subsistence level of a farming community; the god does not pay attention to the values and qualities that make communal life possible on a higher level of culture. This is remarkable, since in the beginning of the story Enki is praised as lord of wisdom who blesses cities, initiates decisions and orders, is experienced in divination, supervises the calendar, knows the number of the stars, assigns the people their places to live, makes them follow their leaders, locks up the weapons in armories and guarantees the people's safety, and realizes justice.⁴⁶

What matters here is even more clearly visible in another tale, *Inanna and Enki*, that tells of the transfer of the sum of cultural factors (*me*) from one city (Eridu) to another (Uruk) and thus explains why one Sumerian city rose to predominance at the expense of another.⁴⁷ This story presupposes that from time immemorial there existed a comprehensive catalog of values, abilities, powers, obligations, rules, and norms that concerned the cosmos and the earth, gods and humans, cities and countries, and many aspects of civilized life, and that guaranteed their relations and functioning. The supreme gods entrusted Enki with the administration of these "factors." He kept them in his temple in Eridu. In the story, the protector of Uruk, Inanna, visits her father, Enki. At the end of a long party with much drinking, Inanna persuades Enki to hand all these *me* over to her. She defends them against Enki's multiple efforts to regain them, and brings them triumphantly to her own city, Uruk.

Several times, these factors, around one hundred in total and divided into various categories, are recited. They primarily comprise insignia, abilities, behaviors, and emotions that pertain to royal and priestly rule. A few belong to the sphere of family and farming life, or to crafts or technical skills. What I find most important is that this fixed package of pre-existing goods is kept, lost, and traded by the gods, completely independently of the humans who are affected by such machinations.

I now turn to the tragedy, *Prometheus Bound*, attributed to Aeschylus. Many scholars doubt its authenticity but still date it to the fifth century.⁴⁸ Uniquely, its action unfolds primarily among gods and outside the inhabited world. Prometheus, chained to a rock by Zeus's henchmen, talks with various visitors about his conflict with the new king of the gods and its causes, and hints at the inevitable settlement of this conflict by compromise. Zeus is here

46 Lines 1–51, 61–80 (Kramer and Maier 1989: 39–41).

47 Kramer and Maier 1989: ch. 4; Farber-Flügge 1973.

48 On the question of the authenticity of *Prometheus Bound*, see Griffith 1977; Bees 1993. On sources and interpretation, e.g., Lefèvre 2003. On all these issues also Griffith 1983.

sensationally represented as a tyrant. The quarrel between Zeus and Prometheus broke out, we learn, because, after ascending to power, Zeus distributed among the gods their shares of privileges (229–31), but ignored the human race and even planned to eliminate it and to create a new one (231–39). Why he wanted to do so remains unexplained. Nobody had the courage to contradict Zeus. Prometheus alone dared to save humankind from destruction. For this he now suffers bitter punishment. In fact, as it turns out, he did more than that: he expressly acted against Zeus's orders and endowed humankind not only with the fire but with the ingredients of culture.

The play focuses on interactions among gods; humans are only the cause and object of their quarrel. Nor are Prometheus's contributions to the cultural development of humankind important in themselves; they merely illustrate the extent of his rebellion against Zeus's tyrannical orders. Because the conflict between Zeus and his opponent is central to the play, the poet enhances Prometheus's own significance: instead of a cousin of Zeus he is here his uncle, instead of the son of an insignificant Titan he is a direct descendant of the primordial gods (Uranos and Gaia, Sky and Earth), whose wisdom and knowledge of the future he shares. This enables him, before their conflict erupts, to serve as Zeus's clever advisor and help him defeat the Titans. Moreover, his knowledge of the future gives him a trump card: Zeus needs him to survive a son's usurpation threatened by a prophecy (a motif already prominent in Hesiod).⁴⁹ Presumably in another play, his conflict with Prometheus must have been resolved, as the latter himself suggests.

The catalogue of cultural achievements Prometheus claims to have given the humans is worth quoting (with my emphasis):

Of brick-built, sun-warmed houses, or of carpentry,
 they had no notion; lived in holes, like swarms of ants,
 or deep in sunless caverns; knew no certain way
 to mark off winter, or flowery spring, or fruitful summer;
their every act was without knowledge (gnōmē), till I came.
 I taught them to determine when stars rise or set—
 a difficult art. Number, the primary science, I
 invented for them, *and how to set down words in writing—*
the all-remembering skill, mother of many arts
(mnēmēn hapantōn, mousomētor' erganēn).
 I was the first to harness beasts under a yoke

49 Prometheus as Zeus's advisor: 199–223, 304–5, 439–40; Zeus's dependence on Prometheus: 167–77, 186–92, 517–25, 755–90, 907–63; see Griffith 1983: 8–9.

with trace or saddle as man's slaves, to take man's place
 under the heaviest burdens; put the horse to the chariot,
 made him obey the rein, and be an ornament
 to wealth and greatness. No one before me discovered
 the sailor's wagon—flax-winged craft that roam the seas.
Such tools and skills (mēchanēmata) I found for men . . .
 Now hear the rest of what I have to tell, *what crafts (technai)*
and methods (poroi) I devised—and you will wonder more.
 First in importance: if a man fell ill, he had
 no remedy, solid or liquid medicine,
 or ointment, but for lack of drugs they pined away;
 until I showed them how to mix mild healing herbs
 and so *protect themselves against all maladies*.
 Then I distinguished various modes of *prophecy*,
 and was the first to tell them from dreams what Fate ordained
 should come about; interpreted the hidden sense
 of voices, sounds, sights met by chance upon the road.
 The various flights of crook-clawed vultures I defined
 exactly . . . how to interpret signs in sacrifice . . .
 So much for prophecy. Next the *treasures of the earth*,
 the bronze, iron, silver, gold hidden deep down—who else
 but I can claim to have found them first? No one,
 unless he talks like a fool. So, here's the whole truth in one word:
All human skill and science (technē) was Prometheus' gift!
 (450–506, trans. Vellacott 1961: 34–35)

Prometheus thus mentions the construction of houses, carpentry, distinction of seasons by means of observing the sky, use of numbers and writing, taming wild animals and using them for agriculture and transportation, sailing, medicine, prophecy and the interpretation of omens, and the exploitation of treasures of the earth. In sum, “all skills came to the humans from Prometheus.” This global claim obviously transcends the range of items given in the catalogue, but this hardly matters. The poet, after all, is not a historian or sociologist of technology; Prometheus offers here no more than a set of (carefully selected) examples.

Another statement seems more important: “I caused men no longer to foresee their fate.” How so? “I planted firmly in their hearts blind hopefulness.” (We immediately think here of Hesiod whose Pandora allows all evils to escape from her jar but keeps hope trapped in it.) This, the chorus comments, is indeed a great and useful benefit. In addition, says Prometheus, I gave them fire. From

this, all agree, “the mortals . . . will learn many skills” (247–62). For this double offense Prometheus suffers punishment. Finally, he endowed the humans, who were witless like children, with reason and intelligence (443–50). Previously,

they had eyes, but sight was meaningless;
heard sounds, but could not listen; all their length of life
they passed like shapes in dreams, confused and purposeless.

Now they act with insight and comprehension (*gnōmē*).

Even more: the poet describes the art of writing, invented by Prometheus, as an “all-remembering skill, mother of many arts” (460–61). In other words, writing makes it possible to fix memory and is the foundation of all arts. Prometheus, this means, does not give the humans all the arts but he teaches them the basic skills on which these depend. Nor does he give them wealth, but he teaches them to tame animals that, placed under the yoke or hitched to the wagon, offer them relief and symbolize wealth. This is crucial: what Prometheus gives to humankind is not a bag full of prefabricated elements that he himself disperses on earth, but skills and elementary abilities, reason and intelligence, that help them become human, only *now* in the full sense of the word, and develop their civilization themselves. He helps humans to help themselves: the words the poet uses (*technai*, *mēchanēmata*, *poroi*) designate means necessary for achievement. Prometheus is not a producer and distributor, but a teacher and educator. Learning is crucial to this poet: in his story even Zeus, the all-powerful god, has to learn and transform himself in order to survive.⁵⁰ In addition, Prometheus takes away knowledge of fate, including fear of death, and gives humans hope, that is, optimism, confidence—for the future and presumably in themselves. This makes possible initiative, development, progress; this results in culture. In this sense Prometheus is right: all skills ultimately come from his gifts!

Why is all this so upsetting to the gods and especially Zeus? I think because thereby the humans receive the potential to transcend their limitations. This interpretation receives crucial support from three aspects that Prometheus mentions at the end of his catalogue (478–504): remedies for illnesses, which means the ability to preserve and extend life; prophecy, that is, the ability to anticipate the future; and the exploitation of minerals, which is equivalent to the potential for technological advancement. I think we are here quite close to the famous “Ode to Man” in Sophocles’ *Antigone*: *polla ta deina* . . . But what is missing in Prometheus’s list is a crucial factor that both Sophocles in

50 Meier 1993: 149–50.

his ode and Protagoras in his famous myth emphasize: human's ability to live together, to be social beings. Scholars presume, plausibly, that the poet of the *Prometheus* did not simply omit these qualities, but that they were bestowed on humankind in the great reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus that must have followed in a later play.⁵¹

Despite all the liberties that the tragic poet takes with the traditional story told by Hesiod, he constantly presupposes this tradition and plays with it. In Hesiod, Prometheus's trickery at the sacrifice and the subsequent theft of fire are embedded in a specific context of human evolution: the separation of humans from the gods, the end of the Golden Age. In *Prometheus Bound*, humankind is not only expelled, so to speak, from Paradise and compelled to work in order to survive, but threatened by complete annihilation. And Prometheus here does not only help them overcome this threat but gives them the potential of closing the gap to the gods again. This is dangerous and annoying indeed, and it would be even more so if the excessive and stubborn traits in Prometheus's character (178–80, 318–19, 964–65, 1034–35) could be presumed typical of humans as well. Zeus's anger is perfectly understandable from this perspective, quite apart from his tyrannical disposition, and on this even his divine critics agree.

Moreover, Hesiod had been motivated not least by political and social issues agitating his own time (including the injustice and favoritism typical of elite leaders). This had prompted him to portray Zeus as an ideal leader who could serve as a model for judges and leaders in Hesiod's own world. For good reasons, he therefore painted Zeus's predecessors in a negative light and stressed as much as possible the *justice* of Zeus. This made it necessary to plaster over an unclean and disturbing transition in Zeus's early career. We noticed the problem before: how do we get from Zeus, the violent usurper, who in his beginnings is hardly better than his father Kronos, to Zeus, the ideal ruler of gods and the world who is recognized and supported as such by all gods? Zeus the tyrant lurks in the wings of Hesiod's stage but is shut up in a closet.⁵² The tragic poet has no such compunctions: he aims his scalpel exactly at this point and focuses with great determination precisely on Zeus's tyrannical potential. This aspect, and Zeus's eventual transformation from tyrant to just ruler, must have been very important to this poet and, presumably to his audience.

We need to remember here that tragedy in ancient Athens was not detached and elitist theater; it was deeply embedded in society. Often the poets enacted on stage problems and conflicts that were of great concern

51 Soph. *Ant.* 332ff.; Plat. *Prot.* 320ff., esp. 322c–d; Meier 1993: 152; Griffith 1983: 167–68.

52 See above, n. 28.

to their fellow citizens. In doing so, they helped the community gain a deeper understanding of such conflicts. The crucial aspects might be highlighted in a way that could not fail to attract the audience's attention. So too in *Prometheus Bound*: whether or not models already existed, it was a daring innovation to apply all the characteristics of a tyrant, with which the audience was thoroughly familiar, to Zeus, who was better known as protector of justice, and to get Zeus involved in a struggle for survival with Prometheus. As Prometheus predicts, this struggle must have been settled by compromise, and Zeus must have changed in a lost play from tyrant to wise ruler. Yet Zeus's unusual characterization in the extant play must have made it clear to the audience that matters of the greatest importance to them were at stake here. This much I consider certain. Unfortunately, what these matters might have been remains uncertain, especially since the play's date and authorship remain contested.⁵³

Christian Meier has suggested, however, that in *Eumenides* Aeschylus had also dramatized a conflict between gods and allowed the new gods (Apollo, Athena, Zeus) to be criticized by the old ones (the Furies) as usurpers and breakers of the laws of tradition. Here already the role of Zeus the tyrant was well prepared, and the poet of *Prometheus Bound* only went a logical but decisive step further in this direction. We know the date and political context of the *Eumenides*: 458, four years after crucial reforms that sealed the breakthrough of democracy in Athens but prompted severe dissatisfaction and communal strife. In that situation it made perfect sense to enact on stage a deeply worrisome and potentially lethal conflict between an old and new divine order that could only be resolved by integrating the old order into the new one.⁵⁴ Something similar may well underlie the plot of *Prometheus Bound* but we cannot know this for sure.

At any rate, I hardly need to emphasize how far all this is removed from any possible Mesopotamian models of thought and interpretation. In conclusion, then, the poets of the *Theogony* and *Prometheus Bound* clearly used ancient and foreign Near Eastern myths and reinterpreted them on the basis of the conceptions, needs, and concerns of the time and society in which they lived. Such re-interpretation was largely influenced by the poets' political reflection; the poems are thus immensely valuable testimonies to Greek political thinking. By appropriating and re-interpreting them, the poets made the mythical past

53 Meier 1993: 137–59 offers a political interpretation of *Prometheus Bound*. Generally on the politics of Greek tragedy, see Meier 1993; Saïd 1998; Boedeker and Raaflaub 2005 (with bibliog.).

54 Meier's political interpretation of *Eumenides*: 1990: 82–137, 246–70; 1993: 102–37. On the democratic reforms of 462/1: Meier 1987; Raaflaub 2007.

significant and useful for the present and at the same time maintained the present's interest in the past—a crucial condition for the Greek historical thinking that emerged at the same time. The poets' portraits of Zeus as the last in a series of divine kings, and Prometheus as a culture hero, are also part of a theory of cultural evolution—another important strand of Greek thought with Near-Eastern antecedents.⁵⁵ Yet, and this is crucial: in every respect, what the poets made of foreign models and impulses was distinctly new and different.

Indeed, it is not sufficient to find out what the Greeks borrowed from elsewhere; it is crucial to investigate how they transformed and adapted such borrowings. The next step would be even more fascinating: to ask what values and worldviews caused identical ideas to be interpreted so differently in different cultures. What does this teach us about social structures, hierarchies, relations, pressures, openness and lack thereof? Such a comprehensive comparative analysis would help decisively to overcome the unsatisfactory models of one-sided “influence” and “import” of cultural goods.

55 For some of these aspects, see Raaflaub 1988, 2000, 2009b. For theories of cultural evolution, see Blundell 1986; Cole 1990.

Cultural Contact and Appropriation in the Axial-Age Mediterranean World

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