Philology and Philosophy in Porphyry of Tyre:
Reading, Interpretation and Authority at the Edge of Late Antiquity

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Classical Studies)
in the University of Michigan
2023

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DEDICATION

A mamma e papà, grazie di tutto

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor, Francesca Schironi. Her unwavering support for my (unconventional) fascination for Porphyry has encouraged me to pursue my interests without paying too much attention to what is considered ‘trendy’ at the moment. She is a model of philological rigor and a demanding reader, whose high expectations and attention to details have pushed me to a constant improvement. She is also an exceptional mentor, generous with her time and always available for a chat or a word of encouragement whenever I needed it. If there is anything of value in my work, I owe it to her: grazie.

My gratitude goes also to the other members of my committee. Sara Ahbel-Rappe initiated me to the mysteries of Neoplatonic philosophy during my first semester as a grad student, when I was fortunate enough to take part in a direct study with her. While I was getting lost in the most obscure details of Porphyrian exegesis, she has always reminded me not to forget the bigger picture, and her incisive comments have saved me from many mistakes. Through his mentorship and his scholarship, Victor Caston has imparted upon me the virtues of clarity and the precision of the analytic method. He has also encouraged me to be bold in my writing and to show readers that the ideas and debates that we find in ancient thinkers still matter. Finally, Richard Janko has been a constant source of inspiration, with his ability to provide constructive criticisms and his dedication to scholarship.

I want to extend my gratitude to Aaron Johnson, whose genuine interest in my project and invaluable feedback have been immensely beneficial. I also want to thank my colleagues in the Ancient Philosophy Program, many of whom I have the pleasure to call friends. I am

particularly grateful to Justin Barney, Sean Costello, Andrew Mayo, Glenn Zhou and Sara Panteri.

During my time in Ann Arbor, I was lucky enough to meet wonderful people who have always made me feel at home: Arianna and Paolo ‘adopted’ me when I was a scared first year student who had just moved across the Ocean; Antonello and Andrew have been like family during the the last five years; Zoe has been the best roommate and friend I could hope for, and she was always there whenever I needed a word of encouragement, a smile, or a patient listener.

But too many are the people who helped making these last seven years a beautiful journey of intellectual discovery and personal growth: Rosa, Tyler, Srdjan, Maria, Kimia, Matt, Greg, Ginny, Alex and Catherine, Lauren, Brittany, Joe, Alanna, Ryan, Marshall, Fernando, Alex,… and countless others: you know who you are! Graduate school can often feel isolating, but thanks to each of you I never felt alone.

I also want to thank my closest friends: Tommaso, Matteo e Filippo. Even if we are thousands of miles apart, I know that we are always there for each other. I cannot express how fortunate I am to have you in my life.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to my family: to my nonna Nene; to my brother Luca and my sister Sofia, who keep me humble and grounded by putting my work into perspective; and to my mamma and papà. You have given me unconditional support and love, prioritizing my happiness and self-fulfillment above everything else. This dissertation is dedicated to you. Vi voglio bene.

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ABSTRACT

For the Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry of Tyre (234–305ca CE) philosophy and exegesis are intimately entangled. And indeed, most of Porphyry's production consists of commentaries and other forms of metaliterary writings. In these works, Porphyry engages with a wide variety of source texts, ranging from the Homeric poems to Plato's dialogues, from scientific treatises to oracular utterances and even the Hebrew Bible. Thanks to such a diverse production, Porphyry constitutes an almost unique case-study for scholars who are interested in commentaries in the ancient world. This dissertation aims at reconstructing the coherent hermeneutics that shapes Porphyry's reading practices. Porphyry believes that the original meaning of a text can be accessed thanks to the philological method, a method that ideally owns its allegiance to nothing but the text itself. Alternative interpretations are dismissed, and their proponents are blamed for trying to superimpose preconceived ideas on the text that they are reading.

In my analysis, I consider three case studies. Chapter 1 and 2 deal with Porphyry's works on Homer, focusing respectively on the *Homeric Questions* and on the *Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey*. In Chapter 1, I show that Porphyry consciously situates his *HQ* within the philological tradition of literary criticism stemming from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Accordingly, Porphyry argues that the poet is completely in control over the meaning of his work, as he himself guides the readers towards a correct interpretation. At the same time, Porphyry envisions the interpretation of Homer as a two-step process, according to which a more basic analysis of Homer's style and diction, that he performs in the *HQ*, prepares readers for more sophisticated forms of exegesis, like the allegorical readings that he presents

in *De Antro*. This latter work is the focus of my second chapter, where I argue that even Porphyry's fanciful allegorical interpretations of Homer are informed by aesthetic theories belonging to the Aristotelian tradition, and thus are fully compatible with the methodological principles that he states in the *HQ*. At the same time, Porphyry stretches the limits of this tradition, with the goal of making it compatible with a more Platonic conception of art and artistic creation, according to which the poet is an analogue to the demiurge.

In chapter 3, I consider Porphyry's criticism of Christian figural interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. I argue that Porphyry dismisses Christian readers for not following the correct philological method. Their interpretations are not based on a careful reading of the text, but rather on a desire to exploit the authority of the Hebrew Bible for the benefit of their own new religion. This leads to even more serious philosophical errors, since an allegorist like Origen ends up undermining the doctrine of the uniqueness and transcendence of God that is conveyed by a correct reading of the Old Testament.

Finally, chapter 4 looks at Porphyry's *Commentary on Ptolemy's Harmonics*. I show that while his attitude towards Ptolemy is more agonistic, his core methodological commitments do not change since he practices a form of philosophical philology. At the same time, he negotiates the tension between source text and commentator by means of a 'charitable criticism': he corrects what he perceives to be minor flaws in Ptolemy's theory with the goal of preserving the overall scientific value of Ptolemy's approach to harmonic science.

INTRODUCTION

˙Philosophers are interpreters (ἐξηγηταί) of things unknown to many people'.[1] As this line eloquently shows, for the Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry of Tyre (234–305ca CE) philosophy and exegesis are intimately entangled. Indeed, most of Porphyry's production consists of commentaries and other forms of metaliterary writings. In these works, Porphyry engages with a wide variety of source texts, ranging from the Homeric poems to Plato's dialogues, from scientific treatises to oracular utterances and even the Hebrew Bible. Thanks to such a diverse production, Porphyry constitutes an almost unique case–study for scholars who are interested in commentaries and exegesis in the ancient world.

Porphyry's exegetical works can be divided into four main groups, according to the nature of the source texts that the reader is interpreting: works on poetic texts, works on scientific texts, works on philosophical texts, and works on religious texts. The following is a list of works by Porphyry that are explicitly meta–literary (i.e. their primary goal is to clarify a source text) and that are known either through the direct tradition, or through a sizeable number of fragments.[2] In the notes, I list the editions of reference.

1) Works on literary texts: the Ὁμηρικὰ ζητήματα ('Homeric Questions'),[3] the first book of which has been transmitted by direct tradition,[4] while many fragments from lost books are preserved in the *scholia*;[5] Περὶ τοῦ ἐν Ὀδυσσείᾳ τῶν νυμφῶν ἄντρου ('On the Cave of the

[1] Porph. *in Cat.* 55.10 Busse: οἱ δὲ φιλόσοφοι τῶν τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀγνώστων πραγμάτων ἐξηγηταὶ ὄντες.
[2] Among the Porphyrian commentaries of which nothing survives, we should mention at least his *hupomnēmata* on some of Plotinus' treatises: cf. Porph. *Plot.* 26.30–31 (= 190T. Smith).
[3] The title Ὁμηρικὰ Ζητήματα is attested in the manuscript *Vaticanus Graecus* 305 f. 171^{r}, and in the D scholia (B308a and Γ175a Van Thiel).
[4] Sodano 1970.
[5] From the scholia on the *Iliad*: Schrader 1880 and MacPhail 2011; from the scholia on the *Odyssey*: Schrader 1890 and Pontani 2007–*present*.

Nymphs in the *Odyssey*'), which survives probably in its entirety;[6] Περὶ Στυγός (*On the Styx*), a work that seems to have been at least partially concerned with Homeric allegoresis and that survives fragmentarily in Stobaeus.[7]

2) Works on Scientific texts: *Commentary on Ptolemy's Harmonics* (Εἰς τὰ Ἁρμονικὰ Πτολεμαίου ὑπομνήματα), a continuous and lemmatic commentary that still survives probably in its entirety.[8] In addition, around thirty manuscripts transmit a work entitled *Introduction to Ptolemy's Apotelesmatiká* (Εἰσαγωγὴ εἰς τὴν Ἀποτελεσματικὴν τοῦ Πτολεμαίου) under the name of 'the Philosopher Porphyry' (Πορφυρίου Φιλοσόφου).[9] In the preface, the author claims that a reader of the *Apotelesmatika* will probably need some help in understanding what Ptolemy says because his language is obscure. However, the authenticity of this work and its relationship with Ptolemy's treatise are debated. In the most recent study on this issue, Levente László has persuasively demonstrated that the work as it has been transmitted is a heavily interpolated Byzantine *recensio*, that only three chapters (*Intr*. 41–43) are truly devoted to the exposition of concepts that we find in Ptolemy, and that the Porphyrian authorship is far from secure.[10] I thus have decided not to use this work in the present dissertation.

3) Works on Philosophical texts:

3a) Works on Aristotle: *On Aristotle's Categories in Question–and–Answer Form* (Εἰς τὰς Ἀριστοτέλους Κατηγορίας κατὰ πεῦσιν καὶ ἀπόκρισιν):[11] an exposition of the content of Aristotle's *Categories* in a catechetical form, which is transmitted by the direct tradition. We also have a consistent number of fragments from commentaries on the following Aristotelian

[6] Dorandi 2019.
[7] Castelletti 2006 and 372F.–380F. Smith.
[8] Düring 1932 and Raffa 2016a.
[9] Boer–Weinstock 1940, 185–228.
[10] See László 2021. He identifies the following sections: *Intr*. 1–3, 42–3 from unknown author and origin; 4–16, 20–40, 44–5 from Antiochus' of Athens *Eisagoga* (1st–2nd cent. CE), perhaps adapted by Porphyry; 46–52 from Rhetorius; 53–55 from Sahl; 17–19 from Abū Maʿshar.
[11] Edited by A. Busse in *CAG* IV.1, pp. 55–142. See also Bodéüs 2008.

treatises: *Categories* (the so–called *Long Commentaries to Gedalius*);[12] *On Interpretation*;[13] *Physics*.[14] The *Introduction* (Εἰσαγωγή) is a crash-course on peripatetic logic, but it is not explicitly devoted to the elucidation of a source-text.[15]

3b) Works on Plato: *Commentary on the Timaeus* (Εἰς τὸν Τίμαιον ὑπομνήματα): this is the only Porphyrian Platonic commentary for which we have a substantial number of fragments.[16] It has also been attributed to Porphyry a sizeable fragment (around 14 pages) from the *Commentary on the Parmenides* that was transmitted anonymously by a single manuscript preserved in the library of the University of Turin. The fragment was published by Kroll at the end of 19th century, and the manuscript was destroyed by a fire in 1904.[17] Pierre Hadot attributed the commentary to Porphyry in an important monograph published in 1968,[18] but this thesis has found both supporters and critics,[19] and it remains contested.

4) Works on Religious texts: *On Philosophy from Oracles* (Περὶ τῆς ἐκ λογίων φιλοσοφίας): a collection and interpretation of oracular responses, which is preserved only fragmentarily;[20] *Against the Christians* (Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν): this is not primarily an exegetical work, but contains enlightening discussions concerning the proper way of reading a text and a considerable number of fragments deal explicitly with Porphyry's interpretation of the Book

[12] 45T.–74F. Smith
[13] 75T.–110T. Smith.
[14] Romano 1985 and 118T.–162T. Smith.
[15] Edited by A. Busse in *CAG* IV.1, pp. 1–22. See also Barnes 2003, XV: 'Porphyry himself indicates for what study the *Introduction* provides preparatory material: not for a study of the *Categories* […] Porphyry presents his essay as a preparation for the study of logic'.
[16] The only edition is still Sodano 1964a, but it is in urgent need of a revision. We have traces of Porphyrian exegesis also on the following Platonic dialogues: *Cratylus*: 168F. Smith; *Sophist*: 169F. Smith; *Philebus*: 173F.–176F. Smith; *Phaedo*: 179F.–180F. Smith; *Republic*: 181T.–187F. Smith. We also know of a work entitled *On Erōs in the Symposium* (Περὶ ἔρωτος τοῦ ἐν Συμποσίῳ): 177T.–178F. Smith.
[17] Kroll 1892. Most recent edition, translation and commentary is by A. Linguiti in *CPF* III, 63–202.
[18] Hadot 1968.
[19] Supporters: Dillon 1992 and 2007; Critique: Bechtle 1999.
[20] 303F.–350F. Smith. The *Suda* (Π 2098 Adler, p. 178,22) mentions a work by Porphyry on the Chaldean Oracles (Εἰς τὰ ᾽Ιουλιανοῦ τοῦ Χαλδαίου); Smith identifies some fragments that may belong to this work: 364aF–368F. See also Addey 2014, 9–10 with n. 37 for a short survey of the evidence.

of Daniel;[21] *On Statues* (Περὶ ἀγαλμάτων): a series of allegorical interpretations of visual representation of traditional Olympian gods, this survives in fragments.[22]

This short survey shows Porphyry's wide–ranging interests. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the division into thematic categories that I propose is, to a certain extent, a modern construct that Porphyry would probably have rejected. Indeed, whether he is reading a poem like the *Odyssey* or a technical treatise like the *Harmonics*, Porphyry is ultimately concerned with the philosophical education and growth of himself and his readers. Thus, he puts the greatest effort into uncovering psychological and soteriological doctrines in Homer, or in discussing ontological and epistemological theories in Ptolemy. As this dissertation will demonstrate, for Porphyry, doing philosophy coincides primarily with the act of reading and interpreting texts. This is of course not unique to him. [23] However, what sets Porphyry apart from previous philosophers–commentators is both the variety of texts on which he comments, as well as the fact that he actively engages and criticizes the reading practices of a rival group (the Christians). This makes him very self–conscious of his own method, and therefore an excellent case-study for answering questions about the role of interpreters and readers at the edge of late antiquity.

A thorough study of his exegetical practices is necessary if we want to understand fully this pivotal figure. If we look at his diverse exegetical production, a question naturally arises: is there anything in common between Porphyry the reader of Homer and Porphyry the interpreter of Ptolemy? Can we bring order to the disorder by identifying a coherent theory of

[21] See ch. 3.i below for the complicated editorial history of this work.
[22] 351F.–360aF. Smith.
[23] As Rappe 2000, 4 rightly points out, 'ancient philosophers tended to see themselves as exegetes of previous texts or doctrines and the Neoplatonists were no exception'. The scholarship on philosophy and exegesis in the ancient world is vast. For exegetical practices in the Hellenistic and Early Imperial Period (up to, but excluding Plotinus) within Platonic and Aristotelian circles, see selectively Donini 1994; Tarrant 2000; Ferrari 2001; Baltussen 2007; Griffin 2015; Falcon 2017, 26–77; Petrucci 2018a. On philosophy and exegesis in post–Plotinian Platonism see, selectively, I. Hadot 1987 and 1997; Rappe 2000, 1–21 and 143–66; Baltussen 2008; Chiaradonna 2012; Hoffman 2012. On reading practices and commentaries in post–Hellenistic philosophy more generally, see e.g. Snyder 2000, ch. 3 and 4 and the collection of essays in Erler–Heßler–Petrucci 2021.

interpretation, independently of the nature of the specific work that Porphyry is reading? Previous scholars who have dealt with Porphyry's commentaries have mostly treated them individually and assessed them within the specific exegetical traditions to which they belong. Thus, there are studies on Porphyry as a reader of Homer,[24] or Porphyry as a reader of Aristotle,[25] etc. Furthermore, even when dealing with his exegetical works, scholarly attention has been mostly directed towards exploring some specific philosophical doctrines that Porphyry extracts from the texts that he interprets, and not on the methodology that shapes his reading practices.[26]

In this study I will show that, even if Porphyry as a reader obviously approaches different texts with different exegetical questions and priorities, we can detect a coherent hermeneutics that is independent of the nature of the source texts.[27] More specifically, two ideas lie at the core of all his exegetical endeavours: first, the reader's task is to recover the intention of the author of a text, that is, the original meaning of a text as it was conceived and constructed by its author. This is possible because the author himself guides the reader in the process of recovering this meaning. Second, the correct way of reading and interpreting a text is incremental: one must begin from a firm grasp of the *literary* features of the work under examination, and then proceed to more sophisticated forms of exegesis. Hence, as my dissertation will show, Porphyry has a deep trust in what we may call the philological method, a method that ideally owes its allegiance to nothing but the text itself. This method, if applied correctly, will turn out to be beneficial for the philosophical growth of readers.

[24] Cf. e.g. Pépin 1966; Lamberton 1987, 108–34; Viltanioti 2019; Pontani 2019.
[25] Cf. e.g. Karamanolis 2018.
[26] Cf. e.g. Akçay 2019, which provides an analysis of the philosophical doctrines conveyed in the *Cave of the Nymphs*; Strange 1987 and Evangeliou 1988 on Plotinus' and Porphyry's interpretations of Aristotle's *Categories*; Tarrant 2019, on Porphyry's allegiance to the Pythagoreans in the *Commentary on Ptolemy's Harmonics*.
[27] In this dissertation, I use 'hermeneutics' as a generic term to indicate the theoretical and methodological concerns that shape a certain way of reading and interpreting a text.

In the rest of this introduction I will (**i**) provide a quick overview of Porphyry's life, since his intellectual biography has until recently influenced our understanding of his works; (**ii**) situate my dissertation within the history of Porphyrian studies (I deal here with general studies that consider his production holistically; narrower studies on specific aspects of his thought or his works will be discussed whenever relevant within the chapters) (**iii**) briefly discuss how my methodology is shaped by recent research on ancient commentaries (**iv**) provide a justification for the selection of the material and an overview of the chapters.

i

We have two main sources for reconstructing Porphyry's life: the autobiographical remarks that we find in his *Life of Plotinus* (*Plot.*), and the later account in Eunapius of Sardis' *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists* (*VP*).[28] Both are problematic: *Plot.* is a masterpiece of self–promotion, while Eunapius is late, and may have had access to no other sources besides *Plot.* itself. Keeping this in mind, the following facts are for the most part uncontested.

Porphyry, whose real name was 'Malkus',[29] was born in Tyre around 234 CE. We do not know where he was educated in his early youth, though there are speculations that he attended the school of Origen at Caesarea.[30] He later moved to Athens, where he became a student of Longinus, the philologist and middle–Platonist philosopher.

In 263 CE he moved to Rome and joined the circle of Plotinus, where he became one of his most brilliant and beloved students (or at least this is what he wants us to believe). During his time in Rome, Porphyry encouraged Plotinus to write down his teachings, thus

[28] Eunap. *VS* 4. It is however hard to know whether Eunapius had access to any other sources besides *Plot.*
[29] Porph. *Plot.* 17: 'Malkus' means king in the semitic language spoken by Porphyry's parents. He thus was called Πορφύριος by Longinus, in reference to the purple color that characterizes royal attire. He was also known as βασιλεύς, the Greek equivalent of Malkus.
[30] See ch. 3.

creating the bulk of what, after Porphyry's own editorial activity, will become the *Enneads*.[31] In 268 CE Porphyry suddenly left Rome and moved to Sicily. As he reports in *Plot.*, the reason for his departure was an attack of depression that pushed him to edge of committing suicide: knowing that a change of environment could be beneficial, Plotinus encouraged him to seek to recover at Lilybaeum.[32]

Porphyry tells us that he never met his master again, which means that he remained in Sicily at least until 270 CE, when Plotinus died. We have little information concerning Porphyry's later years. He must eventually have come back to Rome, where he may have established his own school.[33] In his old age, he married a woman named Marcella, a widow with children of her own. Porphyry must have died around 305 CE.

ii

Porphyry's biography has had a deep impact on the modern understanding and interpretation of his works. In this regard, the most influential study published on Porphyry in the 20th century is probably Joseph Bidez's *Vie de Porphyre* (1913). In this work, the Belgian scholar argues that Porphyry's intellectual and philosophical development was marked by three main turns, as he progressively moved from the east to the west. First, an early 'mystical' phase, during which Porphyry wrote works such as the *Philosophy from Oracles* and *On Statues*. For Bidez, this first period coincides with the years that Porphyry spent close to his ancestral home in Tyre. After he moved to Athens, Porphyry entered a 'philological' phase, when for

[31] *Plot.* 4–6. Before meeting Porphyry, Plotinus had written only 21 treatises. In the sixth years that Porphyry spent in Rome, Plotinus is said to have written 24 treatises. Porphyry clearly wants to present his encounter with Plotinus as a pivotal moment also in the life of his teacher.
[32] *Plot.* 11. Cf. also Eunap. *VS* 4.7, where we are told that Porphyry's suicidal thoughts were ultimately due to Plotinus' teachings that taught him to hate his body. But this is clearly an adaptation of the old story of Cleombrotus, who killed himself after reading Plato's *Phaedo*, as told by Callimachus, *Ep.* 23 Pfeiffer. The story became a canonical *topos* in the later commentators as a warning against misinterpreting Plato's philosophy.
[33] Cf. Eunap. *VS* 4.10, where we are told that Porphyry returned to Rome and 'resumed his interests in discourses' (τῆς περὶ λόγους εἴχετο σπουδῆς). This expression is ambiguous.

the first he came into contact with Greek 'rationalism' while studying under Longinus. During his Athenian sojourn, Bidez argues, Porphyry must have written his works of literary criticism, like the *Homeric Questions* or the *Philological Lectures*. Finally, thanks to his meeting with Plotinus in Rome, Porphyry moved into a 'Platonic' phase, which in Bidez's opinion constitutes the pinnacle of Porphyry's intellectual development. To this third period of Porphyry's life Bidez attributes the writing of the great commentaries on Plato and Aristotle, of the *Sentences* (which is his most 'Plotinian' work), and of other major treatises, including the *Contra Christianos*.

Bidez's reconstruction is grounded in the Eurocentric biases and in the teleological view of the history of philosophy that were characteristic of his day. Yet its persistent influence hindered for a long time any attempt at providing a more unified and coherent interpretation of Porphyry's works.[34] Only at the turn of the millennium were some fatal blows delivered against the tendency of giving compartmentalized interpretations of Porphyry's *corpus*. For example, in his 2002 book *Porphyre et le moyen–platonisme*, Marco Zambon successfully demonstrated that it is impossible to distinguish a pre–Plotinian and a post–Plotinian phase in Porphyry's philosophical production, because throughout his *corpus* we find a continuous engagement with Middle platonic authors and ideas. Similarly, George Karamanolis's 2006 monograph *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement* places Porphyry's harmonizing project within a tradition stretching back at least to Antiochus of Ascalon, in the 1st century BCE.

But the most daring and persuasive interpretation of Porphyry's diverse production is the 2013 monograph by Aaron Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: the Limits*

[34] See the useful review of scholarship in Smith 1987. Smith himself, in his important monograph published in 1974, is mostly interested in assessing the relationship between Porphyry's and Plotinus' metaphysics, and the extent to which Porphyry's theory of the soul and soteriology differs from that of his teacher. This clearly betrays a Plotinian–centric perspective. A perfect example of the lasting influence of Bidez is the monograph by Romano 1979.

of Hellenism in Late Antiquity. By focusing primarily on Porphyry's religious thought, Johnson argues that the Tyrian philosopher, throughout his *corpus*, engages in a project 'double–translations': a 'vertical translation' that aims at reading traditional theological discourses (both Greek and non–Greek) through the lenses of a highly hierarchical Platonic metaphysics, and an 'horizontal translation' that tries to map out the core commitments of Platonic theology back unto the multiplicity of cultural and religious customs of several ethnic groups (Egyptians, Syrians, Jews, etc.).

In a way, this dissertation is inspired by, and builds on, Johnson's study. Indeed Johnson's monograph compellingly demonstrates that we can find unity in Porphyry's production if we avoid looking at specific doctrinal aspects, but rather concentrate on the frame through which Porphyry tries to 'read' and interpret the world around him. This focus on method above doctrine grounds my own approach the Porphyry's commentaries.

At the same time, this dissertation aims at complementing Johnson's research. Indeed, while directing his attention towards Porphyry's 'interpretations' of religious phenomena, Johnson touches only marginally on Porphyry's hermeneutics when it comes to reading and interpreting written texts. In the only chapter that is devoted to Porphyry as a reader,[35] Johnson argues that the Tyrian philosopher presents himself as an elitist teacher who is invested with a 'hierophantic authority' enabling him to bring to the fore hidden truths conveyed by poets, oracles, etc. Hence, Porphyry the 'Master Reader' becomes an almost prophetic figure to whom has been granted a privileged access to the truth. In this dissertation, I will argue in favor of a more nuanced view of Porphyry's reading strategies, as I look at works that Johnson did not consider in his monograph.[36] As my analysis will demonstrate, Porphyry builds his authority as an interpreter on his capacity to master an

[35] Johnson 2013, ch. 4 'The Master Reader: Contexts of Translation'.
[36] Johnson's argument depends almost entirely on his analysis of the *Philosophy from Oracles* and *On Statues*. These works are concerned with interpreting religious phenomena (oracles and cultic statues), not texts in the more traditional sense.

exegetical method, a method that, at least potentially, can be learnt by his students. The 'true' meaning of a text is thus accessible to anyone who knows the correct way of reading it. This is not at odds with Johnson's view that Porphyry is a deeply elitist teacher. Indeed, Porphyry's ideal reader must go through a rigorous philological training that teaches them to consider the details of language and style, the specific cultural and historical circumstances in which the text was produced, etc. This philological approach, I argue, is a *fil rouge* connecting his Homeric exegesis, his Scriptural exegesis, and his scientific exegesis.

iv

While Johnson's monograph provides a major inspiration for my work, both in his general approach and in some specific aspects of his interpretation of Porphyry's philosophical and cultural stances,[37] my methodology also integrates the results of some recent studies that have looked at ancient metaliterary works more generally. These studies have successfully identified some common threads running throughout the entire ancient exegetical tradition. A pioneer in this field is the Dutch scholar Ineke Sluiter. In a series of papers published in the last twenty years,[38] Sluiter has brought to the fore the dialectical nature that characterizes most forms of exegesis in the ancient world. In particular, she has shown that commentators engage in conversations with three interlocutors: students (i.e. the readers of the commentary), competitors/colleagues who had performed previous exegesis on the source text, and the source text itself. This dialectical network provides me with a useful frame for assessing Porphyry's exegesis. Thus, for example, in the first chapter we will see how Porphyry positions himself in relation to his reader Anatolius; in the third chapter, we will focus on Porphyry's antagonistic attitude towards a competitive reading community (the

[37] Johnson's influence is particularly evident in chapter 3 of this dissertation, which provides further arguments against the view of Porphyry as a chauvinistic defender of the Greek tradition.
[38] See Sluiter 2000; 2013; 2016. Similar points are made also by Barnes 1992, and by several essays in Most 1999.

Christians); in my fourth chapter we will see how he dialectically engages more directly with his own source text (Ptolemy).

A second central feature of ancient commentaries highlighted by Sluiter and others is the inherent tension between source text and commentator. This tension plays out in two different camps. First, the issue of 'authority versus unclarity': commentators need to justify their hermeneutic endeavor by presenting their source text as authoritative, but at the same time the source text itself has a weakness, namely it is unclear and in need of further clarification. The second tension is between 'charity and criticism': commentators need to uphold the epistemic authority of their source texts by providing charitable interpretations that show that the author is right, but they also want to find a way to carve out a position for their own intellectual autonomy.[39] We will see different ways through which Porphyry resolves these tensions. For example, by claiming that 'Homer explains himself', he partially rescues the poet from the accusation of being obscure; by criticizing competitor interpreters, he finds a way to extol his own authority without diminishing that of the source text; etc.

Finally, my research would have not been possible without recent studies on the more technical aspects of ancient exegetical practices, both within and without philosophical circles. Thanks to the works of, among others, Elsa Bouchard and, especially, Francesca Schironi,[40] we have now a solid understanding of the exegetical method of the ancient grammarians working within the Alexandrian tradition. These studies have also successfully proved that Alexandrian philology is not philosophically neutral.[41] On the contrary, Aristarchus and his colleagues were working from an Aristotelian perspective, as they looked at the Homeric poems through the lenses of Peripatetic aesthetic and literary theory.[42] As my

[39] On this see also Vallance 1999.
[40] See Bouchard 2016 and Schironi 2018.
[41] See Pfeiffer 1968, 210–33, who depicts Aristarchus' method as the best embodiment of a *philologia perennis*, a scientific approach to the texts that is allegedly free from any ideological and abstractly theoretical principles.
[42] See also Porter 1992, 67–85 for an analysis of the strong philosophical–aesthetic underpinnings of Aristarchus' exegetical method.

dissertation will show, recognizing the philosophical background of Porphyry's philological method is crucial for understanding his hermeneutics and how it connects with his broader philosophical project.

The Alexandrian philological method, which was originally developed for the interpretation of the Homeric poems, was later adapted by teachers of philosophy who used it in their exegesis of the texts of the founders of their schools.[43] Thus, we can speak of a tradition of 'philologia philosophica'.[44] As my dissertation will show, this method, and the Aristotelian poetic and aesthetic theory grounding it, has a deep influence on Porphyry's exegesis not only of Homer, but also of Ptolemy. This is why I will sometimes use technical terminology that I borrow from the ancient grammatical tradition to characterize some of the exegetical activities performed by Porphyry. For example, when I talk of interpretations κατὰ λέξιν or solutions ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως or ἐκ τῆς λέξεως, I mean an interpretation/solution that is based on a close analysis of the style and diction of the source text.[45] Similarly, when I use the term ἱστορία, I refer to a sort of *Quellenforschung*, namely an attempt to identify the mythographic, historical, or philosophical sources of an author.[46]

v

Before outlining the content of the chapters more in details, a couple of words shall be devoted to justifying the selection of the sources. This dissertation is only the first step towards a comprehensive study of Porphyry from the point of view of the history of ancient hermeneutics. My goal in this dissertation is to reconstruct Porphyry's exegetical method by

[43] Cf. e.g. Lapini 2016 (on the Epicureans); Ferrari 2001, on Middle platonic interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* and the idea of 'Platonem ex Platone σαφηνίζειν'; Petrucci 2018b on Taurus of Beirut.
[44] I borrow this term from Petrucci 2018b, 146–86 and 2018c.
[45] Petrucci 2018, 156 with n. 34, on the different forms that this kind of exegesis can take in philosophical commentaries.
[46] This is how *historia* is defined by the grammarian Tauriscus in SE *M* 1.248–49. Blank 2000, 406 thinks that Hellenistic empirical doctors, for whom *historia* was the detailed record of personal experience of previous physicians, may have influenced Tauriscus' use of the term.

looking at his Homeric works, at his critiques of Christian hermeneutics, and at his commentary on Ptolemy's *Harmonics*. These three case–studies provide us with an ideal entry-point into Porphyrian exegetical practices for three reasons.

First, as my analysis will show, in the sources that I selected Porphyry *explicitly* discusses issues concerning his methodology and what he perceives to be the proper way of reading and interpreting a text. Second, these sources are mostly preserved by direct tradition, or, in the case of part of the *HQ*, by *scholia*. By confronting the extant portion of book 1 of the *HQ* with the *scholia* drawn from this section, it has been noticed that the scholiast tends to reproduce the original Porphyrian text quite faithfully, with minimal intervention. One can thus safely assume that the *scholia* preserving Porphyrian material that is otherwise unattested are also close to the original.[47] For *Against the Christians*, my analysis will focus almost exclusively on the few *verbatim* quotations.[48] The evidence that I selected thus allow us to reconstruct Porphyry's hermeneutics on the firmest grounds possible. Third, the Homeric Poems, the Bible and Ptolemy's *Harmonics* are clearly very different texts in the eyes of both modern and ancient readers. Looking at how Porphyry approaches the act of reading and interpreting these texts can thus provide us with a good sample of the adaptability of his hermeneutics, as I try to uncover the methodological assumptions that his commentaries have in common.

A reader who is familiar with Porphyry's *oeuvre* will notice that I do not deal with Porphyry's philosophical commentaries. I have decided not to include them for three reasons. First, we have only one philosophical commentary by Porphyry that has been transmitted in its entirety, the so–called *Short Commentary on the* Categories. It presents an idiosyncratic dialogic form: a teacher and a student discuss about the content and meaning of Aristotle's

[47] See below, ch. 1.i. We cannot have the same confidence for the 'fragments' of his philosophical commentaries, that we find in later philosophers who have their own agenda.
[48] See below, ch. 3.i.

Categories, and Aristotle's treatise is never quoted directly, so that the work stands half–way between a commentary and a paraphrase. Given its almost unique features, both within Porphyry's *corpus* and within the ancient exegetical tradition more broadly, I have decided not to deal with this work for now. Second, the 'major' lemmatic and continuous commentaries on Aristotle's *organon* and Plato's *Timaeus* survive only fragmentarily. Indeed, we have hardly any *verbatim* quotation, but only paraphrases embedded in later commentaries by Simplicius, Proclus, Philoponus, and Boethius. It is thus harder to use these fragments for reconstructing Porphyry's methodology, since our sources do not usually report the reasoning and motivation behind the Porphyrian interpretations to which they refer. I hope that the results of this dissertation will be helpful for assessing the fragmentary material as I plan to expand my study in the future. Finally, I have excluded the *Anonymous Commentary on the* Parmenides because of its dubious origin, in line with the minimalist approach suggested by Johnson that I follow throughout this study.[49]

This dissertation is divided in four chapters. The first two chapters focus on Porphyry's Homeric exegesis in the *Homeric Questions* (*HQ*) and in the *Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey* (*De Antro*) respectively. At the core of Chapter 1, I provide a close reading of the prefatory letter that opens the first book of the *HQ*. This letter is the most extended methodological discussion that we find in Porphyry's extant *corpus*, and it helps to establish a frame for making sense of his hermeneutics more generally. In the rest of the chapter, I select some case studies that demonstrate how Porphyry's method is firmly grounded in the peripatetic tradition of literary criticism.

In chapter 2, I focus on Porphyry's allegorical interpretation of Homer as practiced in *De Antro*. I show how Porphyry's way of finding and decoding allegorical meanings in some Homeric passages is fully compatible with the methodological principles that he expresses in

[49] Johnson 2013, 23–4 and 2016.

the ‘Letter’, as both are informed by aesthetic and poetic views that belong to the Aristotelian tradition. At the same time, Porphyry stretches the limits of this tradition, with the goal of making it a preparatory step leading to a more Platonic conception of art and artistic creation.

In chapter 3 I look at Porphyry’s criticism of contemporary Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. Porphyry is especially concerned with allegorical readings that aim at finding in the Old Testament references to the coming of Christ and his salvific mission. Against the traditional view according to which Porphyry’s dismissal of Christian figural exegesis is grounded in his chauvinistic attitude against anything non–Greek, I show that Porphyry attacks the Christians because they fail to follow what he considers to be the correct hermeneutical process: they do not interpret the Bible from the Bible, which means that they fail to fulfil the philological analysis that must always precede the searching for deeper meanings. As a result, they end up missing the most valuable philosophical teachings that the Hebrew Bible transmits, while they interpret it through the frame of a flawed metaphysical system.

Finally, chapter 4 considers Porphyry’s *Commentary on Ptolemy’s* Harmonics (*in Harm.*). Given the nature of the source text, Porphyry faces different exegetical problems from those that he encounters in his Homeric interpretations. Furthermore, his attitude towards Ptolemy is more polemical. However, I show that his core methodological commitments do not change, as he practices a form of philosophical philology. He begins from a close analysis of Ptolemy’s language and sources, with the aim of assessing Ptolemy’s arguments from a philosophical point of view. At the same time, he negotiates the tension between source text and commentator by practicing a form of ‘charitable criticism’: he corrects what he perceives to be minor flaws in Ptolemy’s theory with the goal of preserving the overall scientific value of Ptolemy’s approach to harmonics. Crucially, even when

Porphyry is philosophically ‘emending’ his source text, he is still guided by the principle of ‘interpreting Ptolemy from Ptolemy’.

In the conclusions, I will briefly summarize the main findings of my study and suggest some avenues for future research.

Chapter 1

'Homer interprets himself for the most part': Porphyry's *Homeric Questions*

The *Homeric Questions* (*HQ*) is the most overtly philological work within Porphyry's exegetical production. As Porphyry himself states in the dedicatory letter to Anatolius: 'Homer interprets himself for the most part'.[50] Hence, Porphyry will seek to 'clarify Homer from Homer'.[51] This places the *HQ* within a tradition stretching back to the great Alexandrian scholars, among whom Aristarchus is the most influential.[52] As several excellent studies have pointed out,[53] this philological approach is grounded in Aristotle's view that poetry is an art with its proper rules and aims, and that the literal artifact must be assessed accordingly without appealing to principles and criteria that do not belong to the poetic art itself. The influence of Aristotle on the *HQ* is indeed undeniable, as it is proved by the fact this work is the most important source of fragments from Aristotle's own lost *Homeric Problems*.

Taking as a starting point the fact that Porphyry consciously situates himself within the Aristotelian–Peripatetic tradition of literary criticism, in this chapter I want to explore two interrelated questions springing from Porphyry's philological approach. First, what is the function of this form of philological–Aristotelian poetic hermeneutics within Porphyry's 'Homeric Project'? Second, how does the interpreter construct and uphold his exegetical authority? Answering these two questions lays the groundwork for gaining a new

[50] *HQ* 1. *Praef*, p. 1.12–13 Sodano.
[51] *HQ* 1.11, p. 56.3–6 Sodano: 'Thinking it appropriate to clarify Homer from Homer, I have shown that he himself explains himself, sometimes in the vicinity, sometimes in another passage' (Ἀξιῶν δὲ ἐγὼ Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν αὐτὸν ἐξηγούμενον ἑαυτὸν ὑπεδείκνυον, ποτὲ μὲν παρακειμένως, ἄλλοτε δ' ἐν ἄλλοις).
[52] As rightly pointed out by Pontani 2019, 49–50.
[53] See especially Bouchard 2016 and Schironi 2009 and 2018.

understanding of the relationship of the *HQ* with *De Antro*, a topic I will explore more fully in the next chapter.

After (**i**) a brief introduction presenting the complicated history of the transmission of the *HQ*, and (**ii**) a survey and classification of the exegetical problems that Porphyry tackles in this work, (**iii**) my analysis will begin from a close reading of the prefatory 'Letter to Anatolius', where Porphyry addresses important methodological questions; next, (**iv**) I will look closely at the first *zetema* from book 1, in order to assess whether Porphyry sticks to methodological principles that he lays out in the 'Letter'; (**v**) I will then consider a series of *scholia* dealing with Homer's use of divine names, where Porphyry seems to be open to physical allegorism; (**vi**) I conclude by considering a neglected *scholion* that provides a concrete example of how the *HQ* interact with *De Antro.*

i

The history of the transmission of Porphyry's *Homeric Questions* is extremely complicated, and detailed study of this issue goes beyond the scope of this chapter. However, a short survey of the main extant evidence is a necessary preamble for my analysis of Porphyry's Homeric hermeneutics.[54]

The only extant witness for the direct tradition of the *HQ* is the manuscript *Vaticanus Graecus* 305 (**V**).[55] In **V**, a preface in the form of a dedicatory letter is followed by 33 sections (which I will call *zetemata*) that are devoted to the explanation of one or more problematic Homeric lines. Given the open–ended nature of this genre, it is impossible to determine whether the first book is preserved in its entirety, or the ending is missing. Each essay gathers

[54] See especially Erbse 1960,17–77, Sodano 1964a, 1965, 1967, 1970, IX–XXXI.
[55] On this manuscript, see Sodano 1965, 97–102 and Sodano 1970, IX–XI. Sodano's late date (1314) is now disputed in favor of an earlier dating (1254 to 1269): see Pontani 2005, 42 n. 3. The manuscript contains, among other works, a sort of anthology of Homeric exegesis: Porphyry's *Homeric Questions* (171^{r}–184^{v}), part of Heraclitus' *Homeric Problems* (184^{v}–189^{r}), and Porphyry's *Cave of the Nymphs*.

interpretative problems that can be solved through similar exegetical procedures, independently of the order in which the verses under investigation appear in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The text of **V** has been edited by Angelo Sodano in 1970, and is believed to be as close as we can get to Porphyry's original work.[56]

As happened to other ancient exegetical works, excerpts from Porphyry's *Homeric Questions* entered the scholiastic tradition when they began to be copied into the margins of Byzantine manuscripts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[57] As Sodano suggests, it is probable that, before entering into the scholiastic *corpora*, the *Homeric Questions* were reorganized into something resembling a running commentary. Sodano calls this *recensio* χ. Whereas in its original form, as preserved in **V**, the *Homeric Questions* discusses passages of both poems side–by–side, the author of χ broke up the *zetemata* into notes that could be more easily connected to specific verses, and then reordered the material according to the order of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It is χ that was excerpted and entered into the marginal *scholia*, since this format made it easy for the Byzantine scribes to match each Porphyrian note with an Homeric line.[58] Some of the *scholia* derive from the preserved section of book 1, and Sodano edits them in parallel with **V**. But most of the *scholia* that are explicitly attributed to Porphyry contain material that is otherwise unknown.

When dealing with Porphyry's fragments preserved by *scholia*, a scholar faces two main challenges. First, the *scholia* do not always report the source from which they are drawn, which means that the attribution to Porphyry is often conjectural. Since the aim of my research

[56]The relationship between **V** and the scholia has been clarified by Sodano 1967 and Sodano 1970, XV–XXI.
[57] The origin of scholiastic *corpora* is still debated: Zuntz 1965, 273–5 thinks that scholia were not assembled before the IX century CE, when the spread of minuscule writing made it possible to produce extensive marginal comments by drawing on different sources. This thesis has been challenged by Wilson 1967, who adduces several pieces of evidence that would push back the origin of marginal scholia to Late Antiquity; McNamee 1995 and 1998 suggests that legal scriptoria in the East, for instance in Beirut, may have inspired the production of bigger books with wide margins filled with composite notes. More recently Montana 2011 has dismissed most of the evidence presented by Wilson and McNamee in favor of an early dating, and has revived Zuntz's theory by suggesting a case–by–case approach to the issue.
[58] For example, *zetema* 15 of *HQ* 1 (p. 86.9–103.10 Sodano), is divided by the author of χ into four parts, which are then distributed as scholia to *Il*. 1.121, 1.105, 4.5 and to *Od*. 2.152.

is not to produce a new edition of Porphyry's fragments, I have decided to rely on the choices made by past editors: Schrader,[59] Erbse,[60] and MacPhail.[61] But each edition has its own limits that must be acknowledged and taken in consideration while using them. Schrader's selection of Porphyry's material is too generous, since he moves from the assumption that all the *scholia* presenting a question–and–answer format must ultimately go back to Porphyry;[62] Erbse aims at reconstructing the oldest layers of the Homeric *scholia* (*scholia vetera*) on the *Iliad*, and therefore he edits only Porphyrian material that penetrated early into the scholiastic *corpora*;[63] MacPhail, on the contrary, has decided to edit only the most recent layer of Porphyry's excerpts. The majority of MacPhail's fragments come from two manuscripts, the *Venetus Graecus* 821 (**B**) and the *Escurialensis* 509 (**F**), where the Porphyrian extracts have been added on the external margin by later hands (*B and *F), and therefore are easier to identify.[64] While *B and *F (that seem to derive independently from the same archetype),[65] constitute the bulk of MacPhail's edition, some fragments come from different sources, and the criteria of selection are not always evident.[66] Furthermore, MacPhail does not consider Porphyrian material that is transmitted by other sources, like the D *scholia* or Eustathius. Hence, while we can safely assume that all the scholia edited by MacPhail are Porphyrian thanks to his more

[59] Schrader 1880 and 1890.
[60] Erbse 1969–1988.
[61] MacPhail 2011. But see also his dissertation (MacPhail 2007) for more details about the selection of the fragments and how his edition relates to previous scholarship.
[62] This assumption was proved wrong by Erbse 1960, who demonstrated that the archetype of the bT scholia had access to exegetical works other than Porphyry's. Hence, it is wrong to assume a Porphyrian authorship for each bT scholion that presents a question–and–answer pattern.
[63] Erbse edits the Porphyrian material that was used by c, the archetype of the bT (exegetical) scholia: see the stemma at Erbse 1969, LVIII.
[64] *F indicates the Porphyrian provenance before every fragment; *B indicates the name of Porphyry only in front of the first scholion, hence the authorship of the *B scholia can be debated. On these manuscripts see Erbse 1969, xvii–xviii and xx and MacPhail 2010, 8–9.
[65] See Erbse 1969, IL.
[66] Cf. e.g. *HQ Il* 17.608–13 MacPhail (=218.16–220.6 Schrader), coming from A; at the same time, MacPhail does not edit all the *B scholia that Schrader attributes to Porphyry: cf. e.g. schol. *B *Il.* 3.236 (=58.5–5.10 Schrader).

minimalist approach, his edition is not complete and therefore does not replace Schrader's completely.[67]

The situation is even more complicated for the Porphyrian scholia on the *Odyssey*, since Schrader remains the only complete edition for books 11–24.[68] Pontani is in the process of producing a new edition of the entire scholiastic corpus on the *Odyssey*, which includes Porphyrian material; unfortunately, at the moment (July 2023) only the first five volumes have been published, covering *Odyssey* 1–10.[69] Given the lack of a trustworthy modern edition for the fragments of the *Homeric Questions on the Odyssey*,[70] I have decided to focus almost exclusively on the Iliadic material.

Even when the attribution to Porphyry is secure because his name is attached to the *scholion* or because the *scholion* overlaps with other securely Porphyrian material, a second issue may arise: do all the *scholia* derive from the *Homeric Questions*? We know that Porphyry composed several works on the Homeric poems, and speculative attributions of certain fragments to Porphyry's lost works have been attempted in the past;[71] however, Schrader has persuasively argued that the burden of proof lies on those who want to deny the provenance of the *scholia* from the 'Homeric Questions', since we do not find any marked distinction in the manuscript tradition between those drawn from the surviving part of book 1, for which the provenance is certain, and those preserving material that is otherwise unknown. Hence, any attempt to identify fragments from different works is entirely speculative.[72]

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[67] See the reviews by Slater 2012 and Hillgruber 2014. The edition is still an improvement if compared to Schrader's because of its minimalist approach, which enables the reader to have a more balanced understanding of Porphyry's work.

[68] It is important to keep in mind that the division between 'Homeric Questions on the *Iliad*' and 'Homeric Questions on the *Odyssey*' is artificial, since the original work by Porphyry deals with both poems at the same time.

[69] Pontani 2007–*present*.

[70] Pontani 2005, 548–551 presents the difficulties in identifying Porphyrian material within the scholia to the *Odyssey*, because Porphyry's *Homeric Questions* seems to have been excerpted more than once for the Odyssiac section.

[71] See e.g. Gildersleeve 1853, 14–23.

[72] See Schrader 1880, 356 with n. 2: only two scholia definitely do not derive from the *Homeric Questions*. These are *schol*. B ad ν 103 (from the *Cave*) and *schol*. *B ad A 175 (from *On the Statues*). Pontani 2019, 46 n.5

ii

If we classify what survives of Porphyry's *HQ* by taking into consideration both the mode of transmission and the form and content of Porphyry's exegesis, we can identify three groups:

1. Book 1 (Preserved by the direct tradition): the focus is exclusively on the *literal* meaning of some Homeric passages, with the attention of the interpreter being directed towards Homer's style and language. The 33 *zetemata* that constitute book 1 can be divided into four subgroups:
   1.1. The majority of the *zetemata* solve interpretative problems concerning Homer's lexical usage: Porphyry clarifies the passages under examination by explaining the meaning of peculiar Homeric words (*glossai*) that may be unfamiliar to readers.[73]
   1.2. Some *zetemata* solve problems that relate to morphological or syntactical issues.[74]
   1.3. Some *zetemata* deal with Homer's rhetorical and stylistic choices, especially similes and metaphors;[75]
   1.4. Four *zetemata* do not fit in any category.[76]

notes that some scholars have tried to identify fragments from the lost Περὶ τῆς ἐξ Ὁμήρου ὠφελείας τῶν βασιλέων. But all such attributions remain highly speculative.

[73] *HQ* 1.1 (p. 2.16–8.5 Sodano); 2 (p. 8.9–12.7 Sodano: in this case the lexical analysis is prompted by an apparent internal contradiction); 3 (p. 12.10–15,6 Sodano); 4 (p. 15.7–17.16 Sodano); 10 (p. 54.3–55.23 Sodano); 11 (p. 56.3–64.17); 12 (p. 64.20–69.5 Sodano); 14 (p. 83.16–86.6 Sodano); 16.a–b–c (p. 103.13–105.12 Sodano); 16f–g–h (p. 107.9–109.12 Sodano); 16l–m–n (p. 114.19–121.22 Sodano); 18 (p. 126.6–129.15 Sodano); 19 (p. 130.3–131.11 Sodano).

[74] Syntactical issues: *HQ* 1.7 (p. 25.25–35.6 Sodano); 16e (p. 106.11–107.7 Sodano); Morphology: 16d (p. 105.13–106.10).

[75] *HQ* 1.5 (p. 17.19–20.10 Sodano); 6 (p. 20.13–25.19 Sodano); 15 (p. 86.9–103.10 Sodano); 17 (p. 122.7–126.6 Sodano); 20 (p. 131.20–134.8 Sodano).

[76] *HQ* 1.8 (p. 35.9–46.8): it deals with scribal errors and biological issues; 9 (p. 46.11–53.19 Sodano): optics; 13 (p. 69.5–83.9 Sodano): emotions and moral psychology. 16i (p. 109.13–114.18 Sodano): the meaning of a controversial passage.

2. Scholia that are closer to Book 1:[77] we have Porphyrian scholia dealing with Homer's lexicon,[78] morphological or syntactical problems,[79] and the explanation of similes and other rhetorical figures.[80] Furthermore, some scholia attempt to clarify details of the narrative that are not, strictly speaking, linguistic. For example, *HQ Il.* ad 8.322–329 asks in which hand Teucer was wounded and in which he was holding his bow; *HQ Il.* ad 24.315–16 investigates which kind of eagle appears as an omen.

3. Zetematic *scholia*: This category embraces the majority of the Porphyrian fragments that are preserved only in the scholia.[81] They present the characteristic pattern of the zetematic genre: a problematic aspect of the text (often an internal contradiction) is identified (πρόβλημα/ζήτημα/ἀπορία), and the interpreter proposes one or more solutions (λύσεις) as he tries to rescue the poet from criticism.[82] In these scholia, the influence of Aristotelian literary criticism on Porphyry is most evident. First, the typology of *zetemata* that Porphyry solves matches the taxonomy proposed in chapter 25 of the *Poetics*.[83] Here,

[77] MacPhail 2011, 6–8 makes a stylistic comparison between the scholia and the Vatican *zetemata*, and compiles a list of scholia that, in his opinion, matches the style of Book 1. Most of the scholia in MacPhail's list deal with lexical and morpho–syntactical problems, but some focus on very different issues. I think that his classification, which is based purely on stylometric criteria, is problematic, because it does not take into consideration possible editorial intervention by the excerptor. I prefer a classification that is based purely on the content and exegetical method.

[78] Lexical: cf. e.g. *HQ Il*. 6.491 MacPhail (= p. 106.6–23 Schrader): difference between τὰ ἠλάκατα and ἡ ἠλακάτη; *HQ Il.* 16.67–68 MacPhail (= p. 209.10–210.12 Schrader): meaning of the noun κλίσις and its compounds and derivatives.

[79] Morpho–syntactical: cf. e.g. *HQ Il*. 1.104 MacPhail (= p. 6.13–7.12 Schrader): gender of the dual form τὼ ὄσσε and identification of the nominative; *HQ Il*. 6.15 MacPhail (= p. 87.13–88.10 Schrader): meaning of the preposition ἐπί.

[80] Similes: cf. e.g. *HQ Il*. 2.145 MacPhail (= p. 27.6–15 Schrader); metaphor: cf. e.g. *HQ Il*. 6.77–79 MacPhail (= p. 89.6–22 Schrader).

[81] As pointed out by Schironi 2018, 535, in theory any question about a text is a *zetema*: this is probably why the title of Porphyry's work is Ὁμηρικὰ ζητήματα even if not all the *zetemata* present the typical pattern that we tend to associate with the genre.

[82] On the history of the genre see Gudeman 1927. The earliest known collection of Homeric *zetemata* was put together by Aristotle, but the practice of raising *zetemata* on the Homeric poems and proposing *luseis* predates the Stagyrite: cf. Porph. *HQ Il.* 10.252–3,7 MacPhail (= p.147.18–26 Schrader), where a *lusis* by Metrodorus of Lampsacus is quoted (on the identification of this Metrodorus with the student of Anaxagoras see most recently Verhasselt–Mayhew 2021, 479–8).

[83] Arist. *Poet*. 25.1461b22–5: 'They bring charges of five kinds: that things [said by the poets] are impossible, irrational, harmful, contradictory, and against what is correct according to the art' (τὰ μὲν οὖν ἐπιτιμήματα ἐκ

Aristotle identifies five kinds of criticisms that characterize poetic *zetemata*: what the poet says can be deemed impossible (ἀδύνατον), illogical (ἄλογον), harmful (βλαβερόν), contradictory (ὑπεναντίον), or against what is correct according to the art (παρὰ τὴν ὀρθότητα τὴν κατὰ ⟨τὴν⟩ τέχνην). In the Porphyrian scholia, we find the Tyrian defending Homer from the accusation of saying something impossible (ἀδύνατον),[84] illogical (ἄλογον/ἄτοπον),[85] or contradictory (ὑπεναντίον/μάχεται);[86] furthermore, while Porphyry never uses the term βλαβερόν, we find several *zetemata* falling under the category of 'lack of propriety' (ἀπρεπές).[87] These technical terms appear in a total of 31 fragments in the edition by MacPhail. It is possible to adopt a more inclusive approach and to count as zetematic also 39 fragments in which a criticism is implied by the kind of question that Porphyry tries to answer, even though we do not find any of the terms listed above, but a more generic formula like διὰ τί. For example, in *HQ Il.* 1.524 Porphyry explains why Zeus does not immediately grant victory to the Trojans, thus fulfilling the promise that he made to Thetis. Even if we do not find the technical term ἀπρεπές, it is clear this exegetical inquiry is motivated by the idea that it is unfitting (ἀπρεπές) for a god not to fulfil a promise.

The influence of Aristotle on Porphyry can be seen not only in how he introduces the *zetemata*, but also in the ways in which he solves them. In the Porphyrian fragments,

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πέντε εἰδῶν φέρουσιν: ἢ γὰρ ὡς ἀδύνατα ἢ ὡς ἄλογα ἢ ὡς βλαβερὰ ἢ ὡς ὑπεναντία ἢ ὡς παρὰ τὴν ὀρθότητα τὴν κατὰ ⟨τὴν⟩ τέχνην). For the text of the *Poetics*, I use the forthcoming new edition by R. Janko.

[84] Cf. e.g. *HQ Il.* 3.379–380 MacPhail (= p. 64.23–65.9 Schrader); *HQ Il.* 5.7 MacPhail (= p. 79.1–26 Schrader).

[85] For ἄλογον, cf. e.g. *HQ Il* 12.25 MacPhail (= p. 174.13–175.3 Schrader); For ἄτοπον, cf. e.g. *HQ Il.* 4.297–99 MacPhail (= p. 73.8–25 Schrader, longer than in M.); *HQ Il.* 6.129–134 MacPhail (= p. 91.19–93.10 Schrader).

[86] Cf. e.g. *HQ Il.* 2.1–2 MacPhail (= p. 22.17–23.3 Schrader); *HQ Il.* 2.649 MacPhail (= p. 48.25–49.13 Schrader); *HQ Il.* 2.827 MacPhail (= p. 71.24–72.6 Schrader, ad *Il.* 4.105–11); *HQ Il* 2.844 MacPhail (= p. 49.23–50.10 Schrader).

[87] Cf. e.g. *HQ Il.* 2.183 MacPhail (= p. 27.27–18.19 Schrader); *HQ Il.* 9.186 MacPhail (= p. 134.25–135.12 Schrader); cf. also *HQ Il.* 9.453sq Schrader (p. 139.4–140.13 in Schrader; partially edited by MacPhail as *HQ Il.* 9.446). On the meaning of βλαβερόν in Aristotle, see Bouchard 2010, who persuasively argues that Aristotle is not referring to actions that are morally harmful *per se*, but to actions that are harmful for the character performing them, and thus unfitting. We don't have any Porphyrian fragments where the *zetema* belongs to the category 'against what is right according to the art' (παρὰ τὴν ὀρθότητα τὴν κατὰ ⟨τὴν⟩ τέχνην); but we have no examples of this typology in Aristotle's extant fragments either.

solutions are often introduced with an explicit reference to the broader category to which they belong: thus, we find λύσεις ἐκ τῆς λέξεως ('solutions from diction', based on a close analysis of Homer's lexical choices and style); λύσεις ἐκ τοῦ ἔθους ('solution from custom', based on differences in habits between the characters of the poems living during the heroic age and the reader); λύσεις ἐκ τοῦ προσώπου ('solution from character', based on differences between characters); λύσεις ἐκ τοῦ καιροῦ ('solution from the current circumstance', based on the specific narrative moment within the poem). Even if Aristotle does not employ this specific terminology, each form of *lusis* employed by Porphyry can be subsumed under one of the twelve different ways of solving *zetemata* that Aristotle lists in the *Poetics*.[88]

This short investigation has brought to the fore Aristotle's influence on Porphyry's Homeric exegesis. It is now time to look more closely at some relevant sections. In **iii** and **iv** below I will provide a close reading of the prefatory letter that opens book 1 and of the first *zetema* transmitted by the Vatican manuscript; in **v** and **vi** the focus will be directed to some Porphyrian scholia.

iii

The manuscript *Vaticanus graecus* 305 (**V**) is the only extant witness for the first book of the *Homeric Questions*.[89] The preserved portion of the text is prefaced by a dedicatory letter addressed to a certain Anatolius whose identity is still disputed.[90] This letter contains

[88] See Mayhew 2019, 12–23. Verhasselt 2020, 224–5 groups Aristotle twelve forms of *luseis* into a tripartite schema: 1) Solutions based on the method of imitation (under which we can place Porphyry's λύσεις ἐκ τοῦ ἔθους); 2) Solutions based on an adequate understanding of the context in which the problem occurs (under which we can place the λύσεις ἐκ τοῦ προσώπου and λύσεις ἐκ τοῦ καιροῦ); 3) Solutions based on a correct understanding of the language (under which we can place the λύσεις ἐκ τῆς λέξεως) .

[89] It is uncertain whether the entirety of book 1 is preserved: see Sodano 1970, IX n.1.

[90] The only explicit association between Porphyry and an Anatolius is found in an obscure reference in a passage from Eunapius, *Vit. phil.* 457: οὗτος (scil. Ἰάμβλιχος) Ἀνατολίῳ τῷ μετὰ Πορφύριον τὰ δεύτερα φερομένῳ συγγενόμενος, πολύ γε ἐπέδωκε καί εἰς ἄκρον φιλοσοφίας ἤλασεν· εἶτα μετ' Ἀνατόλιον Πορφυρίῳ προσθεὶς

interesting methodological statements, and it deserves a close reading.[91] The opening sentence raises several interesting issues on the proper way of reading Homer and the role of the interpreter:

> Πολλάκις μὲν ἐν ταῖς πρὸς ἀλλήλους συνουσίαις Ὁμηρικῶν ζητημάτων γινομένων, Ἀνατόλιε, κἀμοῦ δεικνύναι πειρωμένου, ὡς αὐτὸς μὲν ἑαυτὸν τὰ πολλὰ Ὅμηρος ἐξηγεῖται, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐκ τῆς παιδικῆς κατηχήσεως περινοοῦμεν μᾶλλον ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ νοοῦμεν ἃ λέγει, ἠξίωσας ἀναγράψαι με τὰ λεχθέντα μηδὲ διαπεσόντα ἐᾶσαι ὑπὸ τῆς λήθης ἀφανισθῆναι.[92]
>
> Since often in our conversations, Anatolius, *zetemata* on Homer came up, and even if I was trying to show, on the one hand, that Homer explains himself for the most part, and that, on the other hand, we were for the most part understanding in a general way (περινοεῖν) because of our juvenile instruction rather than fully understanding (νοεῖν) what Homer says, you asked me to write down the things that were said and not to let them being destroyed by forgetfulness as they slipped away.

ἑαυτόν. It is unclear what Eunapius means when he claims that Anatolius 'won the second prize' (μετὰ Πορφύριον τὰ δεύτερα φερομένῳ): according to Dillon–Polleichtner 2009, 61 Eunapius is referring to the internal hierarchy within Porphyry's school; Smith 1987, 745 n.157 suggests that Anatolius was 'standing in for Porphyry, who was in Sicily'; Beutler 1953 (col. 312) thinks that Porphyry and Anatolius were co–disciples at the school of Longinus, where they discussed philological issues on the Homeric poems. As to the identity of this Anatolius, Dillon 1987, 886–887 thinks he should be identified with the Christian bishop of Laodicea who is mentioned by Eus. *Hist. Eccl*. 7.32.6. If this is the case, Anatolius may have met Porphyry when the latter was in Athens in the 250s, and later became the teacher of Iamblichus around 270 CE, when he settled in Caesarea after fleeing Alexandria and before being ordained bishop of Laodicea in 274 or later. *Contra* Goulet 1994, 179. The identification with the bishop is accepted by Johnson 2013, 18, who, following Dillon, speculates that Porphyry and Anatolius must have met while the former was in Athens; therefore, Johnson thinks that an early date for *HQ* is likely. Even if we accept this theory, there is no reason to rule out either the possibility that Anatolius visited Porphyry in Rome, or that the *HQ* were dedicated to Anatolius *in absentia*.

[91] The authenticity of the letter was doubted by Noehden 1797, 4.6, who thought that the Ὁμηρικὰ ζητήματα had been excerpted from a miscellaneous work called Σύμμικτα Ζητήματα in 7 books (cf. *Suda* Π 2098 Adler: Συμμίκτων ζητημάτων ζ'). The same thesis is defended by Heyne, *Homeri Carmina* III, LXIV: he thinks that the original preface to the Homeric section of the Σύμμικτα ζητήματα is preserved in the *B scholion to *Il*. K 252. Valckenaer 1808–1809, II.145–148 claims that both the *Homeric Questions* and the allegorical works by Porphyry were originally part of a single commentary. At a later stage, an anonymous excerptor would have gathered together sections of this work that were methodologically homogeneous under the heading ΄Ομηρικὰ ζητήματα and forged the letter to Anatolius as a preface (*de more Porphyrii libellum suis verbis Anatolio inscripserit*). The authenticity of the *Letter* was persuasively defended by Gildersleeve 1853, 8, who stresses how the same didactic tone can be found also in various passages of the text. Hence, either one posits a very zealous excerptor, who actively modified the Porphyrian excerpts in order to harmonize them with the tone of the preface, or the authenticity of *Letter* must be accepted. The latter hypothesis is more economical. See also Schrader 1880, 341–342, who argues that doubts concerning the authenticity of the text preserved in **V** are due to a false claim by one of the earliest editors of Porphyry, the humanist Andrea Asolanus. Asolanus deceitfully presented his edition of the *Homeric Questions* as a collage that he himself had made from excerpts taken from different manuscripts, while in truth he was just printing the text of **V**. I think that the burden of the proof is clearly on those who want to disprove the Porphyrian authorship of the 'Letter to Anatolius', and therefore I can confidently treat it as an original piece by Porphyry.

[92] *HQ* 1, *Praef.* p. 1.9–19 Sodano. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Porphyry presents the work as a record of past discussions with Anatolius. We do not know the exact context of these discussions; however a formal scholastic setting is possible, since the word that Porphyry uses (συνουσία) is the same that he repeatedly employs in the *Life of Plotinus* in reference to the philosophical classes that he attended in Rome.[93] If this is the case, we can imagine that the relationship between Porphyry and Anatolius was a relationship between teacher and student, and this would explain the didactic tone of the extant portion of the work, where only the voice of Porphyry is heard, and no contributions from Anatolius are recorded;[94] alternatively, Porphyry and Anatolius may have been fellow students.

Porphyry immediately presents himself as a competent interpreter who knows the correct exegetical principle for interpreting the poems: 'Homer explains himself for the most part' (αὐτὸς μὲν ἑαυτὸν τὰ πολλὰ Ὅμηρος ἐξηγεῖται).[95] We will see a concrete example of how this principle is applied in the next section (**iv**). For now, I want to focus my attention on the second half of the sentence, where Porphyry differentiates between two hermeneutic activities that can be performed on the poems: περινοεῖν and νοεῖν.

Porphyry reminds Anatolius that, during their discussions, they were only περινοεῖν what Homer says, and not yet νοεῖν it. Since the *Homeric Questions* are a record of these

[93] Cf. e.g. Porph. *Plot*. 3.46; 5.6; 14.21.

[94] Both hypotheses are presented by Schrader 1880, 348–349, who underlines how the expression πρὸς ἀλλήλους conveys the idea of an equal relationship between peers. συνουσία can refer also to a more informal setting, like a symposium: Porphyry himself took part in philological debates during a banquet celebrating Plato's birthday (cf. 408F.–410F. Smith, from the lost Φιλόλογος ἀκρόασις). Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* and Plutarch's *Table–Talks* provide good examples of this practice too. On the connection between solving *zetemata* and drinking parties in the Museum of Alexandria, see Slater 1982. His conclusions are criticized by Blank–Dyck 1984, 22–24, who propose a more cautious position on the relationship between wine–drinking and problem–solving both in Alexandria and in later periods.

[95] Cf. also *HQ* 1, p.12.18–19: ὡς αὐτὸς ἐξηγήσατο εἰπών ('as he himself interpreted [it] by saying'); p. 15.19–20: τὰς δυνάμεις αὐτῶν τοῦ ποιητοῦ ἐξηγουμένου ('with the poet interpreting their meanings'); p. 56.3–6: Ἀξιῶν δὲ ἐγὼ Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν αὐτὸν ἐξηγούμενον ἑαυτὸν ὑπεδείκνυον, ποτὲ μὲν παρακειμένως, ἄλλοτε δ'ἐν ἄλλοις ('Thinking it appropriate to clarify Homer from Homer, I have shown that he himself explains himself, sometimes in the vicinity, sometimes in another passage'); p. 63.13–16: πάλιν ἑαυτὸν ἐξηγεῖται παρακειμένως δι'ὧν φησιν (again interpreting himself in the vicinity through what he says'); p. 98.6–9: καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἀπὸ τῆς ὄσσης τὸ ὄσσεσθαι αὐτὸς ἐδήλωσεν ἐπὶ τῶν μνηστήρων λέγων ('and he himself showed even more [clearly] that *ossesthai* is from *ossē* when he says concerning the suitors'); p. 132.7–10: ἄξιον σημήνασθαι ὅπως ποικίλλων αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν ἄλλως καὶ ἄλλως ἑρμηνεύει διὰ δύναμιν ('it is worth pointing out how he himself interprets himself in different ways with skill by varying').

discussions, it is necessary to investigate what περινοεῖν means in this context if we want to assess correctly what, in Porphyry's view, the function and value of the *HQ* are for readers of Homer. Most modern translators believe that περινοεῖν should refer to an over–interpretation of the poems.[96] This meaning is not attested in any Greek *lexicon*,[97] but it can be justified by the fact that περι– is often employed to convey the idea of an action that is performed beyond its proper limit.[98] However I think that this rendering of verb is problematic for two reasons: first, if Porphyry and Anatolius were over–interpreting Homer, I cannot see any reason why recording their wrong interpretations could be a useful endeavor; second, since Porphyry connects this activity to the education that he and Anatolius received in their youth (ἐκ παιδικῆς κατηχήσεως), it is more likely that that περινοεῖν indicates a somewhat more elementary understanding of the poems. And this is indeed what emerges if we survey the attested uses of περινοεῖν and derivatives in exegetical contexts.

The first relevant instance is from the book 1 of the *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius. The emperor is thanking Rusticus for having taught him how to read properly, and he contrasts two different approaches to a text:

> καὶ τὸ ἀκριβῶς ἀναγινώσκειν καὶ μὴ ἀρκεῖσθαι περινοοῦντα ὁλοσχερῶς μηδὲ τοῖς περιλαλοῦσι ταχέως συγκατατίθεσθαι·[99]
>
> to read with attention and not to be satisfied with a basic and superficial understanding,[100] nor to agree quickly with those who talk around a subject.

[96] See Sodano 1973, 9: 'Per l'istruzione ricevuta da fanciulli, andiamo escogitando per lo più interpretazioni sottili invece di considerare attentamente quel che egli dice'; Schlunk 1993,3: 'we, because of our childhood instruction, read into rather than reflecting on what he says'; Pontani 2019, 50: 'Surinterpréter, imaginer le texte'. The only exception is the (unpublished) more neutral translation by MacPhail 2007,10: 'but in most cases we form ideas from our elementary catechism rather than understand what he says'. Valkenaer recognized the difficulty of identifying the correct meaning of this verb, but explained it away by emending the text to παρανοοῦμεν ('misinterpreting').

[97] *LSJ* s.v. περινοέω: contrive cunningly, meditate, consider on all side; see also *BDAG* s.v. περινοέω: to ponder, to consider attentively, to conceive, to have an idea, to understand.

[98] See Smyth 1956 § 1693.4: περί in composition can mean 'beyond, over, exceedingly'.

[99] M. Aur. *Med*. 1.7.

[100] 'Capire pressappoco' in the Italian translation by Turolla; 'be content with a superficial bird–eye's view' in the Loeb translation by Jeffrey Henderson.

The contrast here is clear: before meeting Rusticus, Marcus had the tendency to rush through books so that he could get a general gist of their content, but now he has learnt to pay attention to the details.[101] How does this apply more concretely to the exegesis of a text? I think that a partial answer to this question can be found in the Origenian *corpus*.[102] Origen employs the noun περίνοια, a derivative from περινοεῖν, as a somewhat technical term in reference to a specific kind of textual understanding.

For example, we find περίνοια twice in his exegesis of John 2:21–22.[103] The context is John's own figural interpretation of Jesus' famous statement: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it again'.[104] John says that Jesus is referring to his own body, and to his resurrection that will happen on the third day. Expanding on John's explanation of Jesus' words, Origen asks whether the correspondence between Jesus' body and the Temple of Jerusalem should be understood in a simpler way (ἁπλούστερον) or whether he should interpret figuratively each part of the Temple and each phase of the history of its construction.[105] Origen decides to opt for an intermediate level of complexity between the two options:

> Καὶ καταλαμβάνοτες ἐξαιρέτου πνεύματος σοφίας ἑαυτοὺς δεομένους πρὸς τὸ τὰ τηλικαῦτα ἱεροπρεπῶς νοῆσαι, ὡς ἔνι μάλιστα δι' ὀλίγων **τὴν περίνοιαν** τῶν κατὰ τὸν τόπον διαγράψαι πειρασόμεθα. [106]
>
> And having realized that we ourselves are in need of the wisdom of the Spirit to understand in a religious way such great things, we will try to outline as briefly as possible **the basic understanding** of the things concerning this passage.

He restates the same point at the conclusion of his exegesis of the passage:

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[101] Gill 2013, 60: 'Rusticus helped Marcus to recognize the inadequacy of a superficial way of reading'. Farquharson 1944, II.446 wrongly claims that the verb περινοεῖν is used as an equivalent of περιλαλοῦσι (to talk about and about, to be lost in babble). However, the contrast is clearly with ἀκριβῶς ἀναγινώσκειν.
[102] Origen (185 – 253ca CE) is a couple of generation older than Porphyry (234–305ca CE), but his works were known to the Tyrian, who may even have been his student at Caesarea. On the relationship between the two see chapter 3 below, with further bibliography.
[103] Jn 2:21–22: Ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔλεγεν περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ. ὅτε οὖν ἠγέρθη ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τοῦτο ἔλεγεν, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν τῇ γραφῇ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ ὃν εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς.
[104] Jn. 2.19: λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἐγερῶ αὐτόν.
[105] The Biblical text that Origen has in mind must be 1 *Kings* 5–7 (= 3 *Kings* 5–7).
[106] *Comm. Jn.* 10.39.266

> Ταῦτα δέ μοι πάντα εἴρηται ὑπὲρ τοῦ κἂν **ἐν βραχείᾳ περινοίᾳ** γενέσθαι ἡμᾶς τῶν κατὰ τὸν ναὸν καὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ τὴν Ἰερουσαλὴμ πραγμάτων, περὶ ὧν οὐκ ἔστιν νῦν λέγειν κατὰ μέρος.[107]
>
> All these things have been said by me so that we have **a basic understanding**, though short, of the things concerning the temple and the house of the God and the Church and Jerusalem, about which it is not now possible to speak in detail.

In both passages, the term περίνοια clearly does not refer to an over–interpretation of the text, nor to an understanding of the text that is wrong or beyond the scope of what is said in the text. Rather, it indicates an understanding that aims at grasping the general meaning of the passage in a succinct way, without paying too much attention to the details (κατὰ μέρος). It is worth pointing out that this kind of basic understanding does not need to be a *literal* interpretation; on the contrary, in this case it is the figural interpretation of the construction of Temple that Origen has in mind. Similarly, in interpreting the parable of the unforgiving servant in *Mt.* 18:21–35, Origen contrasts a basic understanding of a text (περίνοια), which consists in grasping the moral message of the parable,[108] with an exegesis of the text 'word by word' (κατὰ λέξιν), that aims at shedding light on each detail of the story.[109]

Thanks to this brief survey, we can get a better understanding of the meaning of the term περινοεῖν in the *HQ*. Porphyry is not claiming that he and Anatolius were (wrongly) over–interpretating the Homeric texts. The opposite is true: the conversations that Porphyry and Anatolius used to have on Homer produced only a basic understanding of the poems, an

[107] Orig. *Comm. Jn.* 10.42.296

[108] Orig. *Comm. Mt.* 14.6.7–8: Ἡ μὲν **περίνοια** τῆς παραβολῆς διδάσκειν βούλεται συγχωρητικοὺς εἶναι τῶν εἰς ἡμᾶς ἡμαρτημένων τοῖς ἀδικήσασιν ἡμᾶς (The **basic understanding** of the parable wants to teach that we should be forgiving towards who have wronged us).

[109] Orig. *Comm. Mt.* 14.6.27–31: Μετὰ δὲ τὴν περίνοιαν τῆς παραβολῆς ἔστι μὲν καὶ ἁπλούστερον κατὰ λέξιν πᾶσαν αὐτὴν ἐξετάσαι (After a basic understanding of the parable it is possible also to examine the whole of it word by word in a simpler way). As Harl 1983, 137 rightly points out, κατὰ λέξιν should not be translated as 'literally' in opposition to 'figurately'. By using the comparative ἁπλούστερον Origen is not saying that this second step is easier than the preliminary περίνοια, but that it is simpler than the more advanced form of mystical exegesis that he mentions later in the passage (35–41).

understanding that can be correct, though still preliminary, and incomplete. My interpretation of περινοεῖν is further supported by what Porphyry says next:

> Μὴ ὢν δὲ οἷος τε πρὸς τὰς σὰς δεήσεις ἀντιβλέπειν διὰ σὲ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Ὁμήρου ἐραστάς, πειράσομαι τά τε ῥηθέντα ποτὲ ἀνενεγκεῖν τά τε πάλιν ὑποπεσόντα προσθεῖναι, τὰς μὲν μείζους εἰς Ὅμηρον πραγματείας ὑπερτιθέμενος εἰς καιρὸν σκέψεως τὸν προσήκοντα, ταυτὶ δὲ οἷον προγύμνασμα τῶν εἰς αὐτὸν ἀγώνων ἐν οἷς ἀγνοεῖται μὲν πολλὰ τῶν κατὰ τὴν φράσιν, λανθάνει δὲ τοῦς πολλοὺς τῇ δοκούσῃ ἐπιτρέχειν[110] τῶν ποιημάτων ὁλοσχερεῖ σαφηνείᾳ προσέχοντας.[111]
>
> Since I am not able to resist your requests because of you and because of the other lovers of Homer, I will try to report what was once said and to add what has occurred at later occasions, deferring greater treatises on Homer to a time that is fitting for research, while this work is like a preparatory exercise for those contests on Homer, in which most of the things concerning his manner of expression are unknown, and they escape the notice of the majority of people who direct their attention to the general clarity of the poems that seems to run over [their surface].

Porphyry places the *HQ* within a broader exegetical project, as he compares the *HQ* to a preliminary exercise (προγύμνασμα), a first step towards greater treatises (μείζονες πραγματεῖαι) that he will write in the future. This lends further support to my understanding of περινοεῖν: as in the Origenian passages quoted above, the περίνοια of a text is a preliminary explanation that precedes a more sophisticated form of exegesis, so also for Porphyry the kind of inquiries that he records in the *HQ* are merely preparatory for future exegetical endeavors. Indeed, Porphyry seems reluctant to write them down, and only the insistence of Anatolius and other 'lovers of Homer' (Ὁμήρου ἐρασταί) eventually persuade him. In future treatises Porphyry will finally expose what he considers a full understanding (νοεῖν) of what Homer says.[112]

[110] Cf. *On the Styx* F3.42 Castelletti: a similar use of the verb in an exegetical context.
[111] Porph. *HQ* 1, *praef.*, p. 1.19-2.4 Sodano.
[112] Most scholars think that he is alluding to works like *The Cave of the Nymphs* or *On the Styx*: see e.g. Lamberton 1986, 13–114; Struck 2004, 72; Viltanioti 2019, 29–30. This is probably correct, as I will show in section **vi** below. *Contra* Schrader 1880, 352 who thinks that Porphyry may be referring to other books of the *HQ*.

The second part of the passage quoted above should shed further light on what exactly the role of the *HQ/Progumnasma* is, but unfortunately the meaning is far from clear. Most modern translators have taken the expression ὀλοσχερὴς σαφήνεια as signifying 'general clarity'.[113] According to this interpretation, Porphyry is here criticizing a tendency to consider the Homeric poems clear from a linguistic point of view, which causes most people to ignore issues related with the poet's style (τὰ κατὰ τὴν φράσιν), and thus to skip the necessary 'preliminary exercises'. However, a different translation is possible. The adjective ὀλοσχερής can be employed in philosophical, rhetorical and exegetical context in opposition to ἀκριβής. It thus conveys the idea of a general and preliminary understanding that does not focus on the details.[114] As for σαφήνεια, it can refer either to the quality of clarity that is present in the text, or to the act of making the text itself clear, i.e. to the act of understanding it. Hence, it is possible to render the expression 'those who direct their attention to a rough understanding of the poems that seems to run over them'. This rough understanding (ὀλοσχερὴς σαφήνεια) must be the product of a more superficial reading that avoids questions of style and expression.

We are now in a position to unpack further the structure of Porphyry's 'Homeric project', and the function of the *HQ*. These provide a more basic and general understanding of the poems (περίνοια), are focused on Homer's style and expression (φράσις) and play the role of a preliminary exercise (προγύμνασμα) in view of greater treatises. Those treatises on the other hand, aim at a fuller understanding of Homer (νοεῖν), as they will focus on the deeper

[113] Sodano: 'perché essi pensano a correre dietro a quella che a loro sembra assoluta chiarezza dei versi'; Schlunk: 'because they are intent on pursuing what seems to them the overall clarity of the poems'

[114] Cf. e.g. SE *M* 9.195: 'Concerning the notion of cause, we have discussed it in more detail elsewhere; now being satisfied with a general conception of it (τῇ ὁλοσχερεῖ ἐπινοήσει), we say. . .' (Περὶ μὲν τῆς τοῦ αἰτίου νοήσεως ἐν ἄλλοις ἀκριβέστερον διελέχθημεν· νῦν δὲ ἀρκούμενοι **τῇ ὁλοσχερεῖ** τούτου **ἐπινοήσει** λέγομεν. . .); Plot. *Enn*. 3.8.9,35–36: 'For if it is indeed life and progression, and possesses everything precisely and not in a general way (ἀκριβῶς καὶ οὐχ ὁλοσχερῶς)' (Εἴπερ οὖν καὶ ζωή ἐστι καὶ διέξοδός ἐστι καὶ πάντα **ἀκριβῶς καὶ οὐχ ὁλοσχερῶς** ἔχει). The idea of roughness and lack of refinement that the adjective conveys emerges also from Porph, *in Harm*. 17.10 During, where it is employed in reference to sense–perception: 'For reason needs the criterion based on sense–perception, even if it is quite rough (εἰ καὶ ὁλοσχερέστερον τοῦτό γε), but only for those things that are intelligible through sense perception.' (χρεία γὰρ τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν κριτηρίου, **εἰ καὶ ὁλοσχερέστερον τοῦτό** γε, ἀλλ'ἐπί γε τῶν δι'αἰσθήσεως νοητῶν). For the use of the adjective in Origen and its relationship with περινοία see Harls 1983:136 n.2.

content (διάνοια) of the poems. Unlike those unnamed opponents who. in their 'rhetorical speeches' (ἀγῶνες) on Homer, jump immediately to exposing the thought (διάνοια) of the poet while failing to grasp properly his style (φράσις), Porphyry is aware of the need to tackle first issues related to Homer's manner of expression, before embarking on more sophisticated forms of exegesis.

After establishing the value of the *HQ* within a broader project of Homeric exegesis, the last section of the letter contains an interesting point on how Porphyry envisions the ideal reader of his own work:

> Αὐτὸς δὲ ἕκαστος ἑαυτὸν ἀνακρίνων εὐθυνέτω πρὶν ὑφ' ἡμῶν ἐπαχθῆναι τὴν ἐξήγησιν, ποίαν περὶ τῶν προβαλλόμενων ἐπῶν εἶχε τὴν διάνοιαν. ἢ γὰρ ταὐτὰ γνοὺς ἡμᾶς λέγοντας βεβαίαν τὴν περὶ τῶν νοηθέντων ἕξει κρίσιν, ἢ σφαλλόμενος μεταβήσεται ἡμᾶς τε ὀνήσει πλανωμένους διορθώσας.[115]
>
> Before an explanation is brought forward by us, each one by himself, through a self–inquiry, should assess what understanding he had of the verses under examinations. For he will either consider secure his judgment on the meaning (of the verses) having realized that we say the same things, or if in error he will change his mind and will benefit us when we are mistaken by correcting us.

The proper way of reading Porphyry's *HQ* assumes a dialectical, almost Socratic, dimension. Porphyry advises his readers to hold off looking at how he himself has solved the exegetical problems. Indeed, before consulting the 'expert', each reader shall first try to find a solution to the *zetema* by themselves; only at a second stage the reader is allowed to check what Porphyry's solution is.

At this point, solving exegetical problems becomes a trial, where the aim is to identify the correct interpretations for the verses under consideration. The solution provided by the reader and that advanced by Porphyry are called to make their case. Two outcomes are possible. The easier is that Porphyry's interpretation and the reader's coincide. In this case, the trial ends without further inquiry. But obviously the reader and Porphyry can differ in their understanding

[115] *HQ* 1, *praef.*, p. 2.4-13 Sodano.

of the specific issue under consideration. Interestingly, Porphyry does not assume that he is always right on the ground that he is an expert exegete, but recognizes that his own interpretation may miss the mark: if this is the case, the reader is invited to correct him and provide a better solution. But what parameter should the reader use to assess different solutions to the same problem? As Porphyry states at the beginning of the letter, 'Homer interprets himself for the most part': hence, the poem itself is the touchstone against which one should test one's own interpretations.

This section provides a good insight into how Porphyry envisioned the aim of his work. Since the reader is encouraged to evaluate the proposed solutions and to correct them if needed, we can imagine that Porphyry foresees his collection of Homeric problems as an open work that can still be subjected to modifications and improvements even after its 'publication'. The reader is not a passive recipient but an active partner in Porphyry's exegetical endeavor. Though this is highly speculative, one may almost say that the *HQ* is a *progumnasma* not only insofar as it provides a preliminary understanding of the poems, but also because it is a training ground for would–be interpreters, who are challenged to hone their exegetical skills.

Porphyry's awareness of the cooperative nature of the zetematic tradition emerges also from the following scholion:

> Ἡ συναγωγὴ τῶν ζητουμένων γέγονε μὲν ἤδη καὶ παρ' ἄλλοις· ἡμεῖς δὲ τὰ προβλήματα λαμβάνοντες παρὰ τῶν ἐζητηκότων, τὰς λύσεις ἐπικρίνομεν ἃς ἐκεῖνοι ὑπέταξαν τοῖς προβλήμασι. Καί τινας μὲν τούτων ἐγκρίνομεν, τινὰς δὲ παραιτούμεθα, τὰς δ' αὐτοὶ ἐξευρίσκομεν, τὰς δὲ πειρώμεθα διορθοῦν καὶ ἐξεργάζεσθαι, ὥσπερ τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν ἔσται δῆλον.[116]
>
> The collection of inquiries has already been done even by others; taking the problems from those who have made inquiries, we judge the solutions that they put after the problems. And some of them we approve, some of them we refute, and some we find by ourselves, and some we try to correct and complete, as will become clear to the readers.

[116] *HQ Il.* K 252–53.1–3 MacPhail (= p. 147.5–10 Schrader).

The original location of this fragment within Porphyry's work is unknown.[117] Porphyry stresses the cooperative nature of the zetematic genre, as he acknowledges that his collection builds on the work of his predecessors. As in the final section of the 'Letter', Porphyry notes that each solution (λύσις) can be either accepted, or completely rejected, or modified and improved.

We can now draw some conclusions about how Porphyry constructs his authority in the 'Letter to Anatolius'. Porphyry's claim to expertise is mostly grounded in two elements: first, as he states at beginning of the letter, he knows and masters the correct exegetical principle, namely, that Homer explains himself; second, as my analysis has demonstrated, he knows in which order a correct exegesis of Homer must be carried out. But this does not mean that he conceives himself as an infallible reader. Indeed, Porphyry recognizes that his own solutions may not constitute the final word on a debated exegetical issue, but he invites the reader to use the *HQ* with an inquisitive and open mind, and to be ready to challenge and correct Porphyry's own *luseis* if necessary.

One last note before moving on to considering some concrete examples of Porphyry's Homeric exegesis. This exegetical modesty and trust in a cooperative exegesis do not mean that Porphyry is a precursor of some post–modern readers: the author is not dead and the meaning of a text is not produced by its readers. On the contrary, Porphyry's firm commitment to the idea that 'Homer explains himself' implies that the aim of the reader is to understand the text in a way that is as close as possible to how the author originally conceived and constructed it.[118]

[117] Van der Valk 1963: 104 n. 75 thinks that it may come from the preface of one the lost books. Pontani 2019: 48 n. 4 endorses a similar position. See also Verhasselt–Mayhew 2021, 477–8.
[118] This plays a central role in his polemic against Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible: see chapter 3.

iv

It is now time to look at an example of Porphyry's Homeric exegesis. In this section, I will give a close reading of the first *zetema* from book 1, which, we can safely assume, represents Porphyry's own words.[119]

> Ἐζητοῦμεν τὸν νοῦν τὸν τούτων καὶ τὰς λέξεις· «εἶμι μέν, οὐδ' ἁλίη ὁδὸς ἔσσεται ἣν ἀγορεύω, / ἔμπορος· οὐδ' ἐρετάων ἐπήβολος / γίνομαι· ὥς νύ που ὔμμιν ἐείσατο κέρδιον εἶναι». τί σημαίνει τὸ «ἔμπορος» καὶ τὸ "ἐπήβολος" καὶ πρὸς τί ἀναφέρεται τὸ «ὥς νύ που ὔμμιν ἐείσατο κέρδιον εἶναι»;[120]
>
> We were investigating the meaning of these verses and these words 'I go, and the journey about which I am talking will not be in vain, though I am *emporos*; and I am not *epēbolos* of rowers: so it seemed more advantageous to you (*Od*. 2.318–320).[121] What do *emporos* and *epēbolos* mean, and what does the line 'so it seemed more advantageous to you' refer to?

Porphyry tries to answer two closely connected questions: what do ἔμπορος and ἐπήβολος mean? What is Telemachus referring to when he says that his own present situation is a gain for the suitors? We can see how the two questions correspond to the two steps of the exegesis that Porphyry has outlined in the letter: the semantic/lexical problem is related to Homer's style (φράσις); the second issue concerns a broader interpretative point, namely, Telemachus' thought (διάνοια). The way through which the interpreter must proceed is clear: first, he must clarify the meaning of the words; second, building on the result of the lexical investigation, he can try to provide an explanation of the content.[122] And indeed, the first part of the *zetema* deals with the meaning of the word ἔμπορος.

> τὸ μὲν οὖν «ἔμπορος» οὐ κατὰ τὴν συνήθειαν τέτακται παρ' Ὁμήρῳ, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίας νηὸς περώντων, οὓς συνήθως ἐπιβάτας νῦν λέγομεν. αὐτὸς γοῦν ἐν ἄλλοις παρίστησι λέγων· «ἢ ἔμπορος εἰλήλουθας / νηὸς ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίης», . . . οὐ μέντοι ὁ «ἔμπορος» ἀπὸ τοῦ πορίζειν πεποίηται παρ' Ὁμήρου, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τοῦ πόρου, τουτέστι τῆς πορείας. τὸν δὲ πόρον κυρίως ἐπὶ τῆς τοῦ ὕδατος τάττει

[119] See Sodano 1964a, 71–71 *et passim*: by comparing the text of **V** with the corresponding scholia, he shows that we have no definite proof that the excerptor could read more than what we have in **V**. Hence, it is methodologically safe to assume that V is the closest we can get to the original archetype.
[120] *HQ* 1.1, p. 2,16-24 Sodano.
[121] The line is different in the vulgate: ἔμπορος· οὐ γὰρ νηὸς ἐπήβολος ουδ' ἐρετάων/ γίγνομαι.
[122] It is very likely that Porphyry's interpretations are not original at all, but to determine his sources goes beyond the scope of my analysis. I am concerned only with Porphyry's exegetical strategy and with the methodological assumptions under which he operates. See Nünlist 2009, 202–204 on the principle of ἐπεξήγησις in the scholia.

> πορείας, λέγων· «ὅσσ' ἐμόγησα πόρους ἁλὸς ἐξερεείνων» καὶ «ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ πόρον ἶξον ἐϋρρεῖος ποταμοῖο». . . . καὶ «ἔμπορος» ὁ τοιοῦτος.[123]
>
> The word *emporos* is not employed in Homer according to the common use, but in reference to those who sail on a ship belonging to someone else, whom we now commonly call *epibatai*. For he himself shows this in another passage, where he says 'or as an *emporos* you have gone on someone else's ship' (*Od.* 24.300) . . . But *emporos* is derived in Homer not from *porizein* (to provide), but from *poros* (passage), i.e. journey. And the main passage in Homer is the journey on the sea, since he says: 'As much as I have suffered searching the paths of the sea (πόρους ἁλός)' (*Od.* 12.260) and 'but when they came to the ford of the well–flowing river (πόρον ἐϋρρεῖος ποταμοῖο)' (*Il.* 21.1). . .Such is the meaning of ἔμπορος.

The word *emporos* was not an obscure or archaic word, but was still part of the common language (συνήθεια) at Porphyry's time.[124] Porphyry does not specify how the word is commonly employed; however, since he posits two possible etymologies (either from the verb πορίζειν, i.e. to provide, or from the noun πόρος, i.e. place of passage, ford), and since he claims that the former is not found in Homer, we can deduce that *porizein* must be the verb connected to *emporos* in the language of his days. Therefore, the common meaning to which Porphyry is referring must be 'the one who provides' – i.e. a 'merchant'.[125]

A superficial reader who overlooks the fact that Homer is not using the word according to its standard meaning will later misunderstand the passage. On the contrary, the reader who is attentive to the details of Homer's language and who knows that 'Homer interprets himself' will be able to pinpoint the idiosyncratic way in which *emporos* is employed. Porphyry, being such a skilled interpreter, directs the attention of Anatolius to a different line where Homer seems to be glossing the term: 'or as an *emporos* you have gone on someone else's ship' (*Od.*

[123] *HQ* 1.1, p. 2,24-4,16 Sodano.
[124] συνήθεια is commonly used in the scholia when comparing Homeric Greek with Koine Greek: cf. e.g. *Sch. Il.* 9.219b; 9.481a1 and see Schironi 2018, 599.
[125] See Schironi 2018, 350–358 for Aristarchus' use of etymology for finding the meaning of Homeric *glossai*. In this specific case, posing two different etymologies is not correct, since the verb πορίζειν derives from πόρος: see Beekes, *EDG*, s.v. ἔμπορος and πείρω. ἔμπορος acquired the meaning of 'merchant' because a merchant is a specific type of traveler who often sails on a ship that does not belong to them. A merchant who also owns a ship is a ναύκληρος. Aristarchus already noticed that Homer often uses words in a less specific way than Koine: see Schironi 2018, 600.

24.300). This shows that Homer calls an *emporos* someone who is sailing on a ship that does not belong to them (a 'passenger' we would say).[126]

Building on the results of this lexical analysis, in the last section of the *zetema* Porphyry can finally direct his attention to clarifying the content of what Telemachus is saying to the suitors:

> τί οὖν αἱ λέξεις σημαίνουσι δεδήλωται, τὸ δὲ ὥς νύ που ὔμμιν ἐείσατο κέρδιον εἶναι σὺν βαρύτητι εἴρηται, λέγοντος Τηλεμάχου· ἐν ἀλλοτρίᾳ πλευσοῦμαι νηί· οὐ γάρ εἰμι ἐπιτυχὴς ἰδίας νηός, οὐδὲ ἐρέτας κέκτημαι, τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν ὠφελιμώτερον εἶναι ἐφάνη, τοῦτ' ἔστι τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ἐμὲ ἰδίαν ναῦν ἀλλ' ἔμπορον πλεῖν· ἀναφέρει δὲ εἰς ἐκεῖνο, ὅτι εἰς πενίαν αὐτὸν κατέστησαν. προεῖπε γάρ· ἢ οὐχ ἅλις, ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν ἐκείρετε πολλὰ καὶ ἐσθλὰ κτήματ' ἐμά, μνηστῆρες, ἐγὼ δ' ἔτι νήπιος ἦα (β 312. 13). ἔστιν οὖν οὕτω τὸ νόημα· ἀντὶ ναυκλήρου δι' ὑμᾶς ἐπιβάτης γέγονα τἀμὰ καταναλώσας.[127]
>
> It has thus been shown what these words mean, but 'so it seemed more advantageous to you' (*Od.* 2.320) has been said with discomfort, since Telemachus is saying: 'I will sail on someone else's ship; for I am not in possession of my own ship nor do I have rowers; for this has seemed to be more advantageous to you, the fact that I do not have my own ship, but I sail as an *emporos*.' He is referring to the fact that they have reduced him to poverty. For he said before: 'or is it not enough, that my abundant and noble possessions have been previously consumed, suitors, and I was still a child?' (*Od*. 2.312–13). Thus, this is the meaning: because of you, instead of possessor of a ship, I have become an *emporos,* since you have consumed my possessions.

From a merely semantic point of view, the line does not present any difficulty. Porphyry's investigation concerns a slightly deeper level of textual analysis related to what we may call the psychological motivation that leads Telemachus to blame the suitors and to claim that his current situation is profitable (*kerdion*) for them. Porphyry's interpretation builds on the results of the previous lexical analysis, since by now the reader has understood that Telemachus is lamenting the fact that he has no ships and no crews. Hence, Telemachus is accusing the suitors for having profited from his state of destitution, since they themselves have squandered his

[126] Cf. Zenod. 255 for the same lexical analysis. Porphyry is here appealing to the principle of ἐπεξήγησις ('subsequent explanation'), namely the idea that poets gloss different words: Nünlist 2009, 202–4. See also Schironi 2018, 223–24 and 226–28 for Aristarchus' take on the idea that Homer uses common words with uncommon meanings.
[127] *HQ* 1.1, p. 7.5–8.6 Sodano.

property. This last section moves away from a merely lexicological analysis towards a rhetorical criticism of Telemachus' speech. The son of Odysseus is speaking *sun barutēti.* This expression may simply indicate the state of distress of the character, and thus be rendered as 'with heaviness of heart'.[128] However, the term belongs also to the technical jargon of rhetoric: an argument ἐκ βαρύτητος is a specific kind of argument that the speaker is forced to utter because of the circumstances, often with a tone of indignation:[129] the psychological and the rhetorical dimension merge together in Porphyry's criticism.

As my analysis has demonstrated, this sample of Porphyrian Homeric exegesis shows that the commentator strictly adheres to the principles that he has laid out in the Letter to Anatolius: he interprets Homer from Homer, and he begins from linguistic issues before considering the content of what Homer says. But what is the limit of this form of exegesis? Is Porphyry open to forms of interpretation that go beyond a strictly literal understanding of the poem?

v

While allegorical interpretations are completely absent from book 1 of the *HQ*, some traces of physical allegories remain in the zetematic *scholia* that are attributed to Porphyry.[130] This may come as a surprise for two reasons. First, how can physical allegories be compatible with the idea that 'Homer explains himself'? Second, while the zetematic *scholia* are the most

[128] Schlunk 1993, 7.
[129] Cf. Apsines *Ars Rhet.* 333.18–20 Spengel: 'Whenever you have unsuccessfully introduced a proposal earlier, and you are then going to introduce another one, the scheme from indignation (τὸ ἐκ βαρύτητος θεώρημα) will be fitting if used in a figural way (Ὁπόταν δὲ εἰσηγησάμενός τινα γνώμην διαμάρτῃς, εἶτα ἄλλην εἰσηγεῖσθαι μέλλῃς, ἁρμόσει σοι ἐσχηματισμένως τὸ ἐκ βαρύτητος θεώρημα).
[130] Besides *HQ Il.* 20.67–75,1–7 MacPhail (=240.14–241.12 Schrader), which I analyze below, the only other instance in MacPhail is *HQ Il.* 15.189,5–6 MacPhail, on the division of the universe among the gods according to their specific sphere of influence. I have not carried out a systematic survey of the Porphyrian scholia on the *Odyssey*. We do not know if this scarcity of physical allegories reflect a lack of interest for allegorical readings in the original Porphyrian works, or whether it is an accident of the tradition. Pontani 2019, 46 thinks that this may be due to the fact that Heraclitus' *Homeric Questions* became the standard go–to place for allegorical interpretations in late antiquity, while Porphyry was an authority for what Pontani calls 'literary criticism'. He also suggests that complex allegorical interpretations do not sit well with the genre of *zetemata*.

heavily influenced by Aristotelian literary criticism, it is generally agreed that Aristotle himself did not use allegory as for solving Homeric *zetemata*.[131] The allegorical readings that we find in the Porphyrian scholia belong to the Stoic tradition of physical and moral allegoresis, according to which the Homeric gods are reduced to symbols of natural phenomena or mental states [132] In this section, I try to reconstruct how Porphyry justifies and reframes physical allegorism in order to make it compatible with the philological–Aristotelian principles grounding his hermeneutics in the *HQ*. I will first consider two Porphyrian scholia dealing with Homer's use of divine names, and then I will turn to the famous scholion on the Theomachy in *Iliad* 20.

The Porphyrian scholion to *Iliad* 2.447 begins with a discussion concerning the *aegis* (αἰγίς).[133] The scholion contrasts the so–called *neoteroi* (τῶν μεθ' Ὅμηρον ποιητῶν) and Homer himself: while the formers believe that the aegis is an attribute of Athena (ἴδιον Ἀθηνᾶς), Porphyry argues that, for Homer, this tool belongs to Zeus. In support of this claim, Porphyry presents two proofs: first, Homer explicitly says that Hephaistos gave the aegis to Zeus after fabricating it (*Il*. 15.307–310); second, the *aegis* is used to stir hurricanes, a prerogative that clearly belongs to Zeus. This second point is relevant for my analysis, since it depends on the polysemy of the word *aigis*: for Porphyry, *aigis* can refer both to Zeus' tool

[131] For the view that Aristotle actively or passively opposed any form of allegoresis see e.g. Pfeiffer 1968, 237, and Struck 2004, 67–68 and *passim*. Lamberton–Keaney 1992, xii–xv identifies four fragments from Aristotle's lost *Homeric Questions* (frs. 145; 149; 153 and 175 Rose) that in their opinions would demonstrate Aristotle's use of allegorical readings to solve interpretative problems. See also Lamberton 1997: 52, and the review by Janko 1998, who opposes the idea that Aristotle practiced allegorical interpretations. More recently Bouchard 2016, 58–68 provides a close analysis of the four Aristotelian fragments and persuasively concludes that they do not constitute positive evidence for Aristotle's use of allegoresis, unless we conflate allegories with metaphors. However, she remains open to the possibility that Aristotle employed allegoresis in passages that are now lost. A similar conclusion is reached by Mayhew 2019, 188–193, who argues that Aristotle was not allegorizing Homer, but rather trying to identify the natural origins of certain mythical elements (e.g. the number of the cattle of the Sun corresponding the 350 days of the lunar calendar).

[132] This kind of allegorical interpretation has been called 'substitutive' by Wolfgang Bernard, since it is based on a mechanical substitution of divine names with natural or abstract concepts; for Bernard, it is very close to personification, because the reader is supposed to identify abstract concepts, that the poet represents as characters, by stripping the narrative to the bare minimum. See Bernard 1990, 1–9 and ch. 1.

[133] *HQ Il.* 2.447 MacPhaill (= p. 40.26–44.20 Schrader).

and to the windstorms provoked by the tool itself.[134] This interpretation is not original, since Aristarchus had already argued against the *neoteroi* in support of a Zeus' ownership of the *aigis* by using similar etymological arguments.[135] But beginning from this lexical note on the polysemy of *aigis*, Porphyry expands his discussion to present an important feature of Homeric diction: the poet often exploits the ambiguity of words that can designate at the same time either the cause of a certain event or the event itself.[136]

Following the typical pattern that we find in Book 1, Porphyry proceeds to resolve other problematic Homeric passages that can be explained through the lexical trope that he has just identified:

> καὶ ἐπ' ἄλλων δὲ πλειόνων ὁ παραπλήσιος ὑπάρχει τρόπος, ὥστε τοῖς πάθεσι καὶ τοῖς πράγμασιν ὁμωνύμους τινὰς ποιεῖν δαίμονας εἰδωλοποιουμένους εἰς κατασκευὰς μυθώδεις, ἐφ' ὧν οὐκ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀποτελούμενον δεῖ νοεῖν, τὸ δὲ παρασκευαστικὸν τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐνεργουμένου συμπτώματος. οἷον ἔρως ἐπὶ τοῦ πάθους αὐτοῦ λέγεται καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὸ παρασκευαστικὸν εἶδος λεγομένου, καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα, πλοῦτος, ἔρις, ὕβρις καὶ ὅσα ἂν τίς ἀριθμήσειε ῥᾳδίως. δεῖ γὰρ παραθεωρεῖν τὴν τῶν τοιούτων διαφοράν, ὡς ὁπόταν εἴπωμεν· ὁ Ἔρως ἐνέβαλεν ἔρωτα τῷ δεῖνι, καὶ πάλιν ἡ Ἔρις ἔριν. τότε γὰρ ὡς θεὸν ἢ δαίμονά τινα δεῖ νοεῖν παρασκευαστικὸν τοῦ ὁμωνύμου συμπτώματος ἢ πάθους, καὶ [τότε] τὸ συμβαῖνον ἐξ ἐκείνου πάλιν ἀνάλογον πάθος ἢ σύμπτωμα, καθάπερ ὁ ποιητὴς ἐν τούτοις δεικνύει·
>
> οἱ δ' ἴσαν, ἦρχε δ' ἄρα σφιν Ἄρης καὶ πότνι' Ἐνυώ,
> ἡ μὲν ἔχουσα κυδοιμὸν ἀναιδέα δηιοτῆτος·
>
> νῦν γὰρ οὐχὶ τὸν ἐνεργῶς θεωρούμενον, ἀλλὰ τὸ παρασκευαστικὸν τοῦ ὁμωνύμου συμπτώματος μυθικῶς εἰδωλοποιούμενον. τὸ δ' αὐτὸ κἀπὶ τούτων νοητέον·
>
> Ζεὺς δ' Ἔριδα προΐαλλε θοὰς ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
> ἀργαλέην, πολέμοιο τέρας μετὰ χερσὶν ἔχουσαν

[134] *HQ Il.* 2.447.4: 'they used to call *aigides* what we now call *kataigides* of violent and twisted wind–blasts that are at the same time dashing down' (ἔλεγον δὲ αἰγίδας τὰς νῦν καταιγίδας τῶν σφοδρῶν καὶ συνεστραμμένων πνευμάτων καὶ ἅμα καταρασσόντων).

[135] Cf. e.g. sch. *Il*. 2.148 a (Aristonicus); 4.167b (Aristonicus) and see Schironi 2018, 693–4.

[136] It is significant that Eustathius, drawing on Porphyry or a common source, considers this as an instance of allegory. See Eust. *in Il*. II.190.6–9 van der Valk: 'And this is the *aigis* of the mythical Zeus. But the allegorized [*aigis*] is transferred to the transferred attributes of Zeus, and if Zeus is taken to be the air, the *aigis* is interpreted to be the calamities and the scary things that are caused by the air, some of which are called not only *kataigides*, but also *aigides* in an uncomposed form' (καὶ αὕτη μὲν ἡ τοῦ μυθικοῦ Διὸς αἰγίς. Ἡ δὲ ἀλληγορουμένη συμμετατίθεται ταῖς τοῦ Διὸς μεταλήψεσι, καὶ εἰ μὲν εἰς ἀέρα ὁ Ζεὺς ἐκλαμβάνεται, αἰγὶς νοεῖται τὰ κατὰ τὸν ἀέρα πάθη καὶ φόβητρα, ὧν ἔνια οὐ μόνον καταιγίδες λέγονται, ἀλλὰ καὶ αἰγίδες ἀσυνθέτως).

οὐδὲ γὰρ νῦν ἄλλο τι πάλιν ἀλλὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἔχουσα παραγίνεται τὸν παρασκευαστικὸν τοῦ κατὰ πρᾶγμα φαινομένου πολέμου. καὶ γάρ ἐστιν ἐκεῖνος ὁ κατὰ τὸ μυθικὸν εἰδωλοποιούμενος τοῦ κατὰ τὸ ἐνεργὲς θεωρουμένου πολέμου σημεῖον, ὃ δὴ νῦν προσαγορεύει τέρας. εἴη δ' ἂν οὗτος κυδοιμὸς μάχης, ὡς θεὸς οἷον ἔμπροσθεν θεωρούμενος, ὁπότε ἐλέγομεν «ἡ μὲν ἔχουσα κυδοιμὸν ἀναιδέα δηιοτῆτος»· ὡσαύτως ἐπὶ τούτου πάλιν, ὃ δὴ πολέμοιο τέρας φησὶν εἶναι, τὸ ἀπαράλλακτον ὑπάρχει.[137]

A similar trope is present also in many other passages, so that [the poet] presents some divinities, that are homonymous with passions and actions, shaping them as images for the sake of a mythical presentation; from these images we should not understand the final result in itself, but what causes the property to be effective in us. For example, *erôs* is said both of the passion itself and of what is designated according to the form that produces it **(**ἐπὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὸ παρασκευαστικὸν εἶδος λεγομένου), and all the things of this kind, like wealth, strife, insolence, and all the things that one could easily itemize. For one should consider the difference among these things, as when we say '*Erôs* injected *erôs* in so and so' and in turn 'Strife (*Eris*) has produced strife (*eris*)'. For sometimes one should consider what causes the homonymous property or passion as a sort of god or demon, sometimes in turn one should understand [by it] the analogous property or passion that results from it, as the poet shows in these verses:

'They went, and Ares and venerable Enyo led them,
The one who bears the shameful roar of battle–strife' (*Il.* 5.592–93)

For [one must understand that] now not the actual god is observed in action, but that the cause of the homonymous property is represented in mythical form. And the same should be understood also in relation to these verses:

'Zeus sent forth *Eris* to the swift ships of the Achaeans,
A grievous goddess, bearing the portent of war in her hands' (*Il.* 11.3–4)

For now she arrives bringing nothing else but war, which is the cause of the war that appears in reality. And indeed the person who is represented mythically is the sign of the war that is observed in actuality, which he now calls a 'portent'. And this could be the roar of battle, having been observed as a god like before, when we said: 'The one who bears the shameful roar of battle–strife'. And likewise in the case of what [Homer] says to be the portent of war, it is the same.

In this section, Porphyry points out that Homer exploits the ambiguity of words that can designate at the same time an event and the cause that produces this same event. After the discussion of the *aigis*, he focuses on gods that personify passions, like *Erôs* or *Eris*. This

[137] *HQ Il.* 2.447.20–8 MacPhail.

insight into Homeric poetic technique is again by no means original, since Porphyry is here probably drawing on material that goes back to Aristophanes of Byzantium.[138] But a Porphyrian touch can be seen in how he subtly manipulates the original theory in order to bring it in line with a Platonic view, since he calls the cause of the passions a 'form' (εἶδος).[139] The reader is warned to be cautious while reading the Homeric poems, since Homer exploits the polysemy of some nouns, which become therefore potentially ambiguous. This is especially true in case of divine names.

This fragment can be connected to a second Porphyrian scholion commenting on *Iliad* 8.1, where the principle of polysemy is broadened in its application.[140] Like the passage discussed above, the scholion deals with the ambiguity of certain divine names. However, the focus is no longer on names that relate to psychological states and passions, but on names that refer to natural phenomena. The starting point is a long excursus on the inherent ambiguity of the Homeric use of 'dawn' (ἠώς). Porphyry directs the reader to the previous analysis of this term that we find in *HQ* 1 (this cross–reference should prove beyond any reasonable doubt the Porphyrian origin of this fragment).[141] As Porphyry argues there, the word *ēōs* in Homer can refer either to the goddess, or to the dawn–light spreading from the goddess herself. This perfectly mirrors his previous discussion on divine names: indeed, using the same exegetical

[138] Cf. Eust. *in Il*. 2, p.193,18–194.1 Van der Valk: 'The grammarian Aristophanes who published a specific monograph on the *aigis* sees both many other not very refined things and that Homer introduces some gods who have the same name as the affections and the actions produced through them, which are shaped in a mythical way' (Ὁ δὲ γραμματικὸς Ἀριστοφάνης ἴδιόν τι σύγγραμμα περὶ αἰγίδος προενεγκὼν ἄλλα τέ τινα λέγει οὐ πάνυ γλαφυρὰ καὶ ὅτι Ὅμηρος τοῖς πάθεσι καὶ τοῖς δι' αὐτῶν ἀποτελουμένοις πράγμασιν ὁμωνύμους τινὰς ἐφιστᾷ δαίμονας, εἰδωλοποιουμένους μυθικῶς). He then continues with the same examples as Porphyry. We find a very similar point also in Plut. *De Aud*. 23a: 'Observing this distinction and discrimination of words in greater and more serious matters, we should begin teaching the young starting from the gods, because the poets use the names of the gods sometimes referring to the gods themselves in their conception, sometimes calling in a homonymous way the forces of which the gods are dispensers and guardians'. (Ταύτην δὴ τὴν διαίρεσιν καὶ διάκρισιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐν τοῖς μείζοσι καὶ σπουδαιοτέροις παραφυλάττοντες ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν ἀρχώμεθα διδάσκειν τοὺς νέους ὅτι χρῶνται τοῖς τῶν θεῶν ὀνόμασιν οἱ ποιηταὶ ποτὲ μὲν αὐτῶν ἐκείνων ἐφαπτόμενοι τῇ ἐννοίᾳ, ποτὲ δὲ δυνάμεις τινὰς ὧν οἱ θεοὶ δοτῆρές εἰσι καὶ καθηγεμόνες ὁμωνύμως προσαγορεύοντες). See also Buffière 1956, 81–82: the early readers of Homer may have interpreted the gods through the lenses of the Hesiodic representations, where divinities are clearly allegories for dispositions and natural elements.
[139] This has been noted by Bouchard 2016, 70.
[140] *HQ Il*. 8.1 MacPhail (= p. 10.23–114.23 Schrader).
[141] Cf. *HQ* 1, p 61.15–63.14 Sodano

principle that we find in the scholion to *Il*. 2.447 quoted above, Porphyry warns the reader that Homer can use the same noun to indicate either to the product (τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα) or to the producer (τὸ ἀποτελοῦν).[142]

In the second part of the scholion, this exegetical principle is widened to include less straightforward instances in which divine names are not used homonymously in the common language. This is the case of Amphitrite:

> ἐκ τούτων λύσεις πῶς ἀγάστονόν τε λέγει τὴν Ἀμφιτρίτην ὅταν εἴπῃ·
>
> Καὶ εἴ ποθι μεῖζον ἕλῃσι
> Κῆτος, ἃ μυρία βόσκει ἀγάστονος Ἀμφιτρίτη (μ.96–97)
>
> καὶ πάλιν κλυτὸν ἐν οἷς φησιν·
>
> ἠέ τί μοι καὶ κῆτος ἐπισσεύῃ μέγα δαίμων
> ἐξ ἁλὸς, οἷά τε πολλὰ τρέφει (ε 421–421)
>
> κλυτὸς μὲν γὰρ ἡ θεὸς, ἡ μεγάλη δαίμων, ἀγάστονος δὲ ἡ θάλασσα.[143]
>
> And from these you will solve how he calls Amphitrite 'roaring loudly' when he says:
>
> 'and if she may perhaps catch a greater
> Sea–monster, creatures that loud–roaring Amphitrite rears in thousands' (*Od*. 12.96–97)
>
> And also 'famed', when he says
>
> 'or a god may incite against me a big monster
> From the sea, which <famed Amphitrite> rears in a great number'. (*Od*. 5.421–422)
>
> For 'famed' is the goddess, the great divinity, 'loud–roaring' is the sea.[144]

Unlike the examples that are preserved in the scholion to *Il*. 2.447 referring to psychological states and emotions (*eris, erôs*), the noun Amphitrite is commonly employed only as the

[142] *HQ Il*. 8.1.15 MacPhail: ἀλλ'οἶδεν, ὅπου τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα, ἐκεῖ καὶ τὸ ἀποτελοῦν.
[143] *HQ Il.* 8.1,21–23 MacPhail.
[144] Cf. also Sch. *Od*. 3.91 H.M: 'among the waves of Amphitrite': [among the waves] of the sea. The wife of Poseidon is called in this way too.' (κύμασιν Ἀμφιτρίτης] τῆς θαλάσσης. λέγεται δὲ οὕτω καὶ ἡ Ποσειδῶνος γυνή) Porphyry allegorizes Amphitrite also in 359.9–11F. Smith, from *On Statues*: she is the female principle and power that produces the sea, whereas Poseidon is the sea–power that presides over the creation of the seawater.

proper name of the sea–goddess. However, Porphyry warns the reader that Homer can use it homonymously: in the poems, Amphitrite can indicate either the goddess who is married to Poseidon, or the sea itself. Porphyry justifies this interpretation through a close reading of the Homeric text that takes into consideration the two epithets that Homer employs in reference to Amphitrite: the adjective ἀγάστονος (roaring loudly) is fitting for the sea, and thus it leads the reader to understand that the poet is not referring to the goddess; κλύτος (famed), on the other hand, is a fitting epithet for a divine being.[145]

After this short survey on Porphyry's exegesis of divine names in Homer, we can turn to the most extended and famous piece of allegorical interpretation from the *Homeric Questions*. Porphyry is solving a *zetema* regarding the *theomachy*, an episode which had been the target of critics of Homer at least since Plato:[146]

> Τοῦ ἀσυμφόρου μὲν ὁ περὶ θεῶν ἔχεται καθόλου λόγος, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τοῦ ἀπρεποῦς· οὐ γὰρ πρέποντας τοὺς ὑπὲρ τῶν θεῶν μύθους φησίν. Πρὸς δὲ τὴν τοιαύτην κατηγορίαν οἱ μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως {ἐπι}λύουσιν, ἀλληγορίᾳ πάντα εἰρῆσθαι νομίζοντες ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν στοιχείων φύσεως, οἷον <ἐν> ταῖς ἐναντιώσεσι τῶν θεῶν. Καὶ γάρ φασι τὸ ξερὸν τῷ ὑγρῷ καὶ τὸ θερμὸν τῷ ψυχρῷ μάχεσθαι καὶ τὸ κοῦφον τῷ βαρεῖ· ἔτι δὲ τὸ μὲν ὕδωρ σβεστικὸν εἶναι τοῦ πυρός, τὸ δὲ πῦρ ξηραντικὸν τοῦ ὕδατος. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς στοιχείοις, ἐξ ὧν τὸ πᾶν συνέστηκεν, ὑπάρχειν ἐναντίωσιν, καὶ κατὰ μέρος μὲν ἐπιδέχεσθαι φθορὰν ἅπαξ, τὰ πάντα δὲ μένειν αἰωνίως. μάχας δὲ διατίθεσθαι αὐτόν, διονομάζοντα τὸ μὲν πῦρ Ἀπόλλωνα καὶ Ἥλιον καὶ Ἥφαιστον, τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ Ποσειδῶνα καὶ Σκάμανδρον. τὴν δ' αὖ σελήνην Ἄρτεμιν, τὸν ἀέρα δὲ Ἥραν καὶ τὰ λοιπά. ὁμοίως ἔσθ' ὅτε καὶ ταῖς διαθέσεσιν ὀνόματα θεῶν τιθέναι, τῇ μὲν φρονήσει τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν, τῇ δ' ἀφροσύνηι τὸν Ἄρεα, τῇ δ' ἐπιθυμίᾳ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην, τῷ λόγωι δὲ τὸν Ἑρμῆν, καὶ προσοικειοῦσι τούτοις. οὗτος μὲν οὖν τρόπος ἀπολογίας ἀρχαῖος ὢν πάνυ καὶ ἀπὸ Θεαγένους τοῦ Ῥηγίνου, ὃς πρῶτος ἔγραψε περὶ Ὁμήρου, τοιοῦτός ἐστιν ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως.[147]

> [His] speech regarding the [Homeric] gods generally concerns what is harmful, and similarly what is improper too: for he says that the stories about the gods are not proper. Against this kind of accusation some people solve [the problem] on the basis of [Homer's] diction (ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως), thinking that everything has been

[145] For other instances of a metonymic use of Amphitrite in both Greek and Latin literature, see Hunter 2006, 77–78. The use of epithets to justify allegorical/metonymical interpretations of divine names is found already in the *Derveni Papyrus*, on which see Schironi 2001, and is accepted by Aristarchus, on which see Cucchiarelli 1997.
[146] See Pl. *Rep*. 2, 377 D4–378 E2.
[147] *HQ Il.* 20.67–75.1–7 MacPhail (=240.14–241.12 Schrader).

> said allegorically about the nature of the elements, for example in the battle of the gods. For they say that dry fights against moist, and hot against cold, and light against heavy; furthermore, water is able to quench fire, while fire is able to dry out water. Similarly, also for all the elements, of which the whole is composed, [they say that] a conflict arises, and they sometimes undergo a partial destruction, but the whole remains eternally. And he (*sc.* Homer) arranges the battle, calling fire Apollo, Helios and Hephaistos, while calling water Poseidon and Scamander. He also calls the moon Artemis, the air Hera, and the rest. Similarly, sometimes he gives the names of the gods also to the dispositions [of the soul], giving the name of Athena to wisdom, Ares to madness, Aphrodite to desire, Hermes to reason/speech, and he adapts them to these. Thus, this mode of defense, being very old and deriving from Theagenes of Rhegium, who was the first to write about Homer, is such being based on the poet's diction (ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως).

This scholion has been widely discussed and studied because it seemingly preserves the earliest extant allegorical interpretation of a Homeric passage. Most scholars have focused exclusively on assessing the reliability of Porphyry as a source for reconstructing the exegetical practices of Theagenes of Rhegium, and his role in the rise of the allegorical interpretation of Homer.[148] I want to direct my attention to how Porphyry frames Theagenes' exegesis, and in particular to the claim that this solution is based on Homer's diction (ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως).

Porphyry introduces Theagenes' allegorical interpretation as a way of defending Homer from the accusation of being impious and harmful in his stories about the gods.[149] In my translation I have followed Elsa Bouchard, who persuasively argues that the subject of φησί in the second clause is not the poet, but an anonymous accuser;[150] consequently, the same accuser must be the author of the λόγος of the first sentence, since the epexegetic γάρ suggests

[148] The most recent edition and commentary on Theagenes' fragments is Biondi 2015; see especially 57–105 for a long analysis of our *scholion*. The bibliography on Theagenes' allegorical reading of Homer is wide: see selectively Buffière 1956, 101–105; Lanata 1963, 106–111; Ford 1999 and 2002, 68–72; Lamberton 2002, 187–89; Ramelli–Lucchetta 2004, 53–55; Domaradzki 2011, 205–228; Bouchard 2016, 30–37.

[149] Scholars debate whether Theagenes allegorized Homer to defend him, or whether he was trying to exploit Homer's authority for promoting his own physical theories. On this issue see the seminal article by Tate 1927 and, more recently, Domaradzki 2011.

[150] The name of Zoilus is often associated to the criticisms that prompted Porphyry's exegesis. Cf. e.g. *HQ Il.* 10.276 MacPhail, where we are told that Zoilus was nicknamed 'Scourge of Homer' (Ὁμηρομάστιξ) and wrote a work 'Against Homer' (καθ' Ὁμήρου). Zoilus' criticisms prompt Porphyry's intervention also in *HQ Il.* 5.7b; 5.20; 8.22 MacPhail. On Zoilus see the entry by Regali in the *Lexicon of Greek Grammarians of Antiquity*, and the entry by Schironi 2011 in *The Homer Encyclopedia*.

a strong connection between the first two syntactic units of the fragments.[151] Hence, we do not have to think that Porphyry agrees with this specific criticism: as we saw above, in the *HQ* Porphyry is simply collecting and solving traditional problems.[152] The way in which the accusation is framed mirrors the usual pattern and vocabulary of the Porphyrian zetematic scholia. Homer is blamed for narrating stories about the gods that are not fitting (ἀπρεπές). This adjective encompasses both the moral and the aesthetic sphere: it can refer either to an action or an agent that is morally blameworthy, or to a poetic failure in the depictions of characters or situations that are unfitting for the context.[153] Both nuances are in play here: the gods are depicted in a way that is not fitting for their divine status because they engage in actions that are morally objectionable.

The influence of peripatetic literary theory does not end here. Perhaps surprisingly, the allegorical interpretation of Theagenes is classified by Porphyry as a solution ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως (*from diction*). Among the twelve ways of solving problems within a poetic text that Aristotle lists in *Poetics* 25, one kind of *lusis* is based on a careful examination of the language used by the poet: Aristotle calls it a λύσις πρὸς τῆν λέξιν. This solution can imply either the clarification of a *glossa*, namely an uncommon word (or a word with an uncommon meaning), or the explanation of a word used metaphorically.[154]

[151] See Bouchard 2016, 32. Alternatively, Svenbro 1976, 114 thinks that the author of the λόγος is Homer. Most modern translators think that Homer is the subject of φησιν too: cf. e.g. MacPhail 2010, 241 'The general discourse concerning the gods is fixed on what is inappropriate and, similarly, what is unseemly, for he says stories about the gods that are not seemly'; Biondi 2015, 24: 'Questo discorso intorno agli dei sembra in linea di massima rientrare nell'ambito di ciò che è inopportuno e anche sconveniente: racconta infatti miti sugli dei niente affatto convenienti'.

[152] *HQ Il.* K 252–53.1–3 MacPhail = 147.5–10 Schrader, quoted and translated above.

[153] The semantic spectrum of πρέπον is explored by Pohlenz in a classical article published in 1933. For the use of πρέπον in literary criticism as it is transmitted by the *scholia* see Nünlist 2009, 250–254; for the Aristarchean scholia see Schironi 2018, 429–433, who explores the Aristotelian background of this concept. Interestingly, we do not find πρέπον nor ἀπρεπής in Aristotle's discussion in *Poetics* XXV. In the *Poetics* Aristotle uses βλαβερός, which may encompass moral criticisms. But see Bouchard 2010, who argues against a moral interpretation of βλαβερός.

[154] Ar. *Poet.* 25.1461a9–21.

The range of solutions covered by the expression λύσις ἐκ τῆς λέξεως becomes much wider in the post–Aristotelian tradition. Frederick Combellack, author of a very useful survey on this topic, identifies more than fifty instances in the Homeric scholia where a solution to an exegetical problem is classified by the commentator as a λύσις ἐκ τῆς λέξεως.[155] He divides them into three groups: 1) Solutions that are based on the proper understanding of a word (which corresponds to Aristotle's *glossai*); 2) Solutions based on the context; 3) Solutions based on the poetic style (an extension of Aristotle's explanation of metaphor). In Combellack's survey, the Porphyrian fragment is the only instance where this label is used to describe an allegorical reading. Hence, this is probably a Porphyrian innovation: since Aristotle's *Homeric Problems* and *Poetics* 25 provide the general model that Porphyry is following, Porphyry may have felt the need to 'domesticate' this form of physical and moral allegories by making it fit within the Aristotelian–peripatetic frame.[156] Even if Aristotle himself would not have endorsed Theagenes' solution, Porphyry's move is easily justified, especially if we think of the definition of allegory as a sustained metaphor that we find in rhetorical treatises.[157]

Furthermore, by regarding Theagenes' solution as nothing more than the explanation of a rhetorical trope employed by the poet, Porphyry shows that this kind of allegorical interpretation still falls within the scope of his exegetical program outlined in the 'Letter to Anatolius'.[158] As my analysis of the scholia to *Il.* 2.447 and 8.1 demonstrates, Porphyry was aware that Homer sometimes employs divine names metonymically to indicate the psychological effects or natural elements over which specific gods have power.[159] Hence, he

[155] See the survey in Combellack 1987. My treatment is deeply indebted to this article.
[156] This has been noted only by Mayhew 2019, 23 n.19.
[157] Cf. e.g. Quint. *Inst*. 9.2.46 and see Lausberg 1998, § 895.
[158] See Lamberton 2001: 188–189, who stresses that 'to defend perceived improprieties in Homeric theology by appeal to such claims as those cited above is, according to the scholion, to defend them from inside the language and rhetoric of the text'.
[159] See also *Il*. 2.246: 'Having fixed the entrails on a spit, they held them over Hephaistos (i.e. the fire)' (σπλάγχνα δ' ἄρ' ἀμπείραντες ὑπείρεχον Ἡφαίστοιο). We may wonder if Porphyry commented on this passage too, since it would have provided a good parallel for Theagenes' allegoresis.

must have thought that Theagenes and those who allegorize the Theomachy were exploiting this specific feature of Homer's style to solve the *zetema* 'from diction'. We do not know to what extent Porphyry himself approved of this solution[160] – Aristarchus, despite being aware of Homer's metonymical use of divine names, would have definitely rejected it. But my analysis has shown that Porphyry was willing to stretch the boundaries of peripatetic literary criticism as he attempted to accommodate within an Aristotelian frame exegetical procedures that more conservative interpreters would have probably condemned. As I argue in the next chapter, this tendency becomes even more evident in *De Antro*. But before abandoning the *HQ*, one last question needs to be addressed: can we find within the extant fragments a specific example that shows how this work can be used as a 'preparatory exercise' (προγύμνασμα) for *De Antro*?

vi

As my analysis of the Letter to Anatolius (**iii**) has pointed out, Porphyry envisions his study of the language and style of Homer (φράσις) in the *HQ* as a necessary preparation for the writing of greater treatises (μείζονες πραγματεῖαι). Scholars have suggested that these treatises may include *De Antro*. Until now, this hypothesis has been presented as an educated guess, but no evidence has ever been provided to support it. Indeed, one may ask how solving the lexical, grammatical and stylistic problems that Porphyry tackles in the *HQ* prepares the reader for the fanciful allegorical interpretations that Porphyry develops in *De Antro*. In this section, I want to address this question by presenting a neglected Porphyrian scholion in parallel with a fragment from Heracleon's *Commentary on the Odyssey*. These two texts can help us to

[160] Porphyry's attitude towards the value of physical allegoresis is nuanced: while practicing it in his work 'On Statues', as a Platonist committed to ontological dualism and to the existence of immaterial substances, he is aware of the limits of this form of exegesis: cf. Porph. *Ep. Aneb*. fr. 81 Segonds–Saffrey and see my discussion in chapter 3.

understand better the systematic coherence of Porphyry's project. I begin with Heracleon's fragment, which is preserved in the *Etymologicum Magnum*:

> Ἠροειδὲς ἄντρον ἐπήρατον: Ἀεροειδὲς, σκοτεινόν· τινὲς δέ φασιν οὐχ ᾗ σκοτεινὸν τὸ σπήλαιον, ἀλλ' ἠροειδὲς εἰρῆσθαι, ὡς τὸ μέγα, ἀερομέτρητον, ὁμοίως τῷ
>
> Ὅσσον δ' ἠροειδὲς ἀνὴρ ἴδεν ὀφθαλμοῖσι (E 770),
>
> ἀναπεπταμένου τοῦ μεταξὺ ἀέρος, καὶ μηδενὸς ἐμποδίζοντος· καὶ γὰρ ἄτοπον θεοῖς σκοτεινὸν ἀνεῖσθαι. Ἡρακλέων ἐν Ὀδυσσείας ὑπομνήματι.[161]
>
> *'Ēeroeides* lovely cave': *Aeroeides*, dark; some say that the cave is not dark, but it has been said to be *ēeroeides* on the ground that it is big, incommensurable,[162] as in
>
> 'As far as a man sees with his eyes into the airy (ἠροειδές) distance' (*Il.* 5. 570)
>
> Because air spreads out in the between, and nothing hinders [the sight]; and indeed it would be unfitting to consecrate a dark [cave] to the gods. Heracleon in his commentary on the *Odyssey*.

As far as I know, this fragment has never been considered in connection with Porphyry's *De Antro*. This is unfortunate, because it is the only extant witness for an exegetical debate concerning Homer's description of the cave in *Odyssey* 13 that probably predates Porphyry by more than two hundred years.[163] The interpretative issue revolves around the meaning of the adjective ἠροειδής in reference to the cave where Odysseus deposits the gifts of the Phaeacians. We are informed by the entry in the *Etymologicum Magnum* of two possible meanings: the adjective can either signify 'obscure' (σκοτεινός), which seems to be the standard interpretation, or 'big' (μέγας).

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[161] *EM* 421.49–53 Gaisford (= Heracleon fr. 21 Berndt). The fragment is missing from Ippolito 2005. The ὑπόμνημα Ὀδυσσείας is very likely to be part of the ὑπόμνημα εἰς Ὅμηρον κατὰ ῥαψῳδίαν that is mentioned by *Suda*

[162] ἀερομέτρητον is *hapax legomenon*. I think that it literally means 'commensurable with the air', i.e. so big that it cannot be measured.

[163] The Heracleon quoted in the *Etymologicum Magnum* is probably the grammarian Heracleon from Tilotis. His chronology is uncertain, but he was probably active in the first half of the 1st century CE: see Matthaios 2016, 229 (=Matthaios 2020, 304–5). Ippolito 2005 dates Heracleon's teaching activity to the reign of Augustus, but without any firm ground. We know from *Suda* that Heracleon wrote a running commentary on every book of the Homeric poems (ὑπόμνημα εἰς Ὅμηρον κατὰ ῥαψῳδίαν): cf. *Suda* η 455 Adler. The fragments of Heracleon have been collected and edited by Berndt 1914; see also Ippolito 2005.

This ambiguity is a direct consequence of the perceived semantic ambiguity of the noun ἀήρ in Homer, from which the adjective derives. The *Lexicon Homericum* of Apollonius Sophista lists two meanings for ἀήρ: it can signify either the element that is spread all around us (i.e. the air), or the mist.[164] Hence, if the adjective ἠεροειδής is connected with ἀήρ as 'mist', then it signifies 'misty' and therefore 'obscure' (σκοτεινός); if, on the other hand, ἠεροειδής is interpreted in light of ἀήρ as 'air', its primary meaning must be something like 'airy'. From here ἠεροειδής came to mean 'big' (μέγας) because, as the air stretches unhindered, something that is like the air is boundless in its extension.[165] As an example for this latter meaning, Heracleon quotes *Iliad* 5.770.

Heracleon also seems to have taken ἠεροειδής to mean 'big' at *Odyssey* 13.103. The *Etymologicum Magnum* preserves Heracleon's motivation for preferring this interpretation: 'it would be unfitting (ἄτοπον) to consecrate a dark [cave] to the gods.' The adjective ἄτοπος is significant, since it belongs to the technical jargon of zetematic literature, as we have seen above (**ii**). Homer was under attack for representing something implausible, and Heracleon proposes a typical 'solution from diction' (λύσις ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως), on the model of what Aristotle recommends in the *Poetics*:[166] he identifies all the possible meanings of a word and he selects the one that would eliminate the thorny issue.[167]

We can now go back to Porphyry's *De Antro*. The adjective ἠεροειδής is also perceived as problematic by the Neoplatonist philosopher. More specifically, Porphyry is concerned by the fact that Homer describes the cave as both ἠεροειδής and ἐπήρατος,[168] since

[164] Cf. Ap. Soph. 12, 8–13 Becker: '*aēr*, when masculine, is that which is scattered all around us [. . .], when feminine, it means mist.' (ἀήρ, ὅτε μὲν ἀρσενικῶς, ὁ περικεχυμένος ἡμῖν . . . ὅτε δὲ θηλυκῶς, τὴν σκοτίαν σημαίνει). It is possible that this semantic ambiguity was already discussed by Aristarchus: cf. e.g. sch. ad *Il*. 17, 644a (Ariston.) and ad *Il*. 14, 288 (Ariston.). See Schmidt 1976, 78–80, and Schironi 2018, 324 with n. 253.
[165] Cf. e.g. *sch.* D ad *Il*. 770; *sch. Od*. 2. 263d1–3; 263e Pontani.
[166] Aristot. *Poet*. 25, 1461ª31–33.
[167] Heracleon's solution is anonymously preserved in a *scholion* commenting on the cave passage: sch. *ad Od*. 13, 103 H: ἠεροειδές] ἀντὶ τοῦ μέγα καὶ ἀναπεπταμένον.
[168] *Od*. 13.103: . . . ἄντρον ἐπήρατον ἠεροειδές.

'nowhere what is obscure is lovable' (οὐδαμῶς τοῦ σκοτεινοῦ ἐπηράτου ὄντος).[169] Porphyry glosses ἠεροειδής as 'obscure' (σκοτεινός), thus making it impossible to solve the alleged contradiction in the same way as did Heracleon. But was Porphyry aware of the debate over the meaning of the adjective?

A scholion to *Iliad* 5.770, which is explicitly attributed to Porphyry, sheds some light on this issue:

> ἀέρα λέγει τὸ ὁμιχλῶδες καὶ ἀόρατον· ἀὴρ γὰρ παρὰ νηυσὶ βαθεῖ' ἦν (ι 144)· ὅθεν καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς (Ι 571), ἡ σκοτεινῶς καὶ ὁμιχλωδῶς φοιτῶσα. τὸ οὖν ἠεροειδές (Ε 770), ὅσον εἶδε μέχρι τοῦ ἀεροειδοῦς, τουτέστι τοῦ ἀφανοῦς καὶ ἀχλυώδους. ἠερόφωνοι οὖν κήρυκες (Σ 505), ὧν ἡ φωνὴ καὶ μέχρι τοῦ ἀφανοῦς καὶ ἀχλυώδους διικνεῖται, ὅπερ ἐν ἄλλοις· φωνὴ δ' αἰθέρ' ἵκανεν (Ο 686), ἀφανὴς δὲ οὗτος ἀνθρώποις.[170]
>
> He calls what is misty and invisible *aēr*. For [he says] 'a thick mist was beside the ships' (*Od*. 9.144). From this also 'Erinys walking in the dark' (*Il.* 9.571) i.e. walking in obscurity and in the mist. Therefore *ēeroeides* (*Il.* 5.770) means 'as far as he can see up to what is misty', i.e. 'up to what is invisible and misty'. Hence, the heralds are *ēerophōnoi* (*Il.* 18.505), whose voice penetrates as far as what is invisible and misty, which [is shown] in another passage: 'his voice reached the ether' (*Il*. 15.505). For this is invisible for men.

This Porphyrian fragment has been attached by the scholiast to *Iliad* 5.770, where ἠεροειδής is used either adverbially or as an adjective modifying ὅσσον. The poet is describing the race of the divine horses of Athena, which can cover at a single stride as far as a man can discern with his sight while looking at the sea from the top of a peak. Ἠεροειδής is used to qualify this extension of space. As I said above, the semantic ambiguity of the adjective is caused by the ambiguity of the noun from which it derives. Porphyry thus begins his note by taking a stance on the debate concerning ἀήρ: using a standard methodology, he identifies a passage where the meaning is, in his opinion, unambiguous (*Od*. 9.144) and then generalizes it. Since, in Porphyry's view, ἀήρ indicates mist and what is impenetrable to sight, the derived adjective must signify misty and obscure. Consequently, in *Iliad* 5.770 ἠεροειδής identifies the limit of

[169] *De Antro* 3.29–30 Dorandi.
[170] *HQ Il.* 5.770 MacPhail. On the placing of this fragment in Schrader's edition, see below.

what the observer can see, which is the line of the horizon that appears misty and hazy. Porphyry's interpretation is the opposite of Heracleon's understanding of the same line: while Heracleon takes *Il.* 5.770 as an instance where ἠεροειδής unambiguously means 'big' (μέγας), and uses it as a *locus parallelus* to justify the interpretation of the adjective at *Odyssey* 13.103,[171] Porphyry thinks that *Il.* 5.770 is in itself ambiguous, and thus refers to other Homeric *loci* to clarify the meaning of ἠεροειδής in the Iliadic passage. But why does Porphyry feel the need to devote such a long discussion to a seemingly unproblematic line?

Schrader proposed an intriguing answer to this question: he suggested that the starting point of Porphyry's discussion on the meaning ἠεροειδής was not *Iliad* 5.770 but rather *Odyssey* 13.103.[172] Schrader's theory is very plausible. As we saw above, *Odyssey* 13.103 gave rise to a *zetema*, and we know that in the *HQ* Porphyry selects traditional exegetical problems and defends or modifies previously proposed solutions.[173] Furthermore, the preserved section of Book 1 clearly shows that each *zetema* was likely to discuss several passages from both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in which similar exegetical issues could be solved in a similar way. As discussed above, when Porphyry's work entered the scholiastic *corpora* after having been rearranged into a sort of running commentary, the original *zetemata* were subdivided into shorter notes that could be more easily attached to specific verses as marginal comments in the manuscripts.

Coming back to the discussion on ἠεροειδής, we can assume that Porphyry started off a *zetema* by reporting the criticism levelled against Homer's description of a sacred cave as obscure in *Odyssey* 13.103; next, he must have considered the solution mentioned by Heracleon, namely that ἠεροειδής here means 'big' (μέγας). But Porphyry rejected this solution by showing that Heracleon misunderstood the meaning of ἠεροειδής in the parallel

[171] Both the bT scholia and Eustathius follow Heracleon here, and they do not hint at a possible alternative meaning: cf. *sch. Il.* 770–2 bT and Eust. *Il.* 606.25.
[172] See Schrader 1890, 114 n. 23.
[173] Cf. *HQ I.* 10. 252–53 MacPhaill, discussed above.

passage that he uses to support his interpretation (*Il.* 5.770). From the preserved Porphyrian fragment, it seems that the Neoplatonist, unlike Heracleon, does not consider the meaning of ἀήρ ambiguous at all: Homer uses it only in reference to an element that is mist–like and that therefore cannot be penetrated by sight (ὀμιχλῶδες καὶ ἀόρατον).[174] For the sake of consistency, then, the adjective ought to be always interpreted as 'misty' (ὀμιχλῶδες) and, by extension, 'dark' (σκοτεινός). This is the case also in *Iliad* 5.770, where 'airy' would have seemed to be the most intuitive meaning. Hence, in Porphyry's view, the *zetema* concerning the meaning of the adjective ἠεροειδής in *Od.* 13.103 is solved: the cave is obscure. But this means that the *zetema* concerning the alleged incompatibility between ἠεροειδής and ἐπήρατος cannot be solved 'on the basis of diction' (λύσις ἀπὸ τῆς λέξεως). A more sophisticated exegesis is thus necessary: this is what Porphyry will perform in *De Antro*.

We can now come back to our original question: how is a correct understanding of Homer's *phrasis* supposed to prepare the ground for the allegorical exegesis that we find in *De Antro*? If my reconstruction of the debate over ἠεροειδής is correct, then we may have a hint at how these two phases of Porphyry's Homeric exegesis were related and intertwined. Indeed, in *De Antro* we find no mention for possible alternative meanings for ἠεροειδής: Porphyry assumes as an undisputed fact that the adjective means 'misty' and 'obscure'. However, as we have seen, Porphyry was well aware of the existence of an alternative that, if accepted, would have preempted his attempt to allegorize the cave. We must therefore assume that, for Porphyry, when he wrote *De Antro,* the issue had already been resolved because he had already discussed it somewhere else: in the *Homeric Questions*. If this reconstruction is correct, then we get a concrete example of how Porphyry considered the kind of linguistic

[174] This is probably the correct interpretation of the Homeric word, as ἀήρ never means air in Homer: see Janko 1992, 196 (on *Il*. 14.286–8).

analysis that he performs in the *Homeric Questions* as a necessary preparation for his 'greater treatises'.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking two questions: what is the value (and the limit) of the kind of exegesis that Porphyry performs in the *Homeric Questions*? And how does the interpreter construct and justify his exegetical authority? As my analysis has demonstrated, at the core of the *HQ* lies the idea that a good interpretation must start from a firm understanding of Homer's style and diction. Hence, the *HQ* are valuable insofar as they train readers in practicing a form of philological exegesis that sheds light on Homer's language and poetic techniques. After successfully completing this preliminary step, the interpreter is ready for more sophisticated forms of interpretation.

From a methodological point of view, the *HQ* is deeply entrenched in Aristotelian literary theory and in the exegetical tradition that stemmed from it: the poem is a microcosm with its specific rules (e.g. lexical peculiarities; rhetorical tropes, etc.). Porphyry's authority depends on his capacity to master these rules, as he attempts to show that 'Homer interprets himself'. At the same time, Porphyry begins to stretch the limits of this tradition: as we have seen, he reframes physical allegory as a form of 'solution from diction'. It is now time to look at the most extreme consequences of this attitude.

Chapter 2

Aristotelian and Platonic Poetics in Porphyry's *Cave of the Nymphs*

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Porphyry's hermeneutics in the *Homeric Questions* is centered around the idea that 'Homer explains himself for the most part' (αὐτὸς μὲν ἑαυτὸν τὰ πολλὰ Ὅμηρος ἐξηγεῖται) and is shaped by the principles of Peripatetic literary criticism that are theorized in chapter 25 of the *Poetics*. I have also argued that, in the *HQ*, Porphyry justifies simple forms of physical and moral allegorism by claiming that they should be considered instances of 'solutions from diction' (λύσεις ἐκ τῆς λέξεως). Thus, he tries to accommodate within an Aristotelian frame a form of exegesis that more conservative interpreters working from within the same tradition would have rejected. But claiming that Apollo represents the Sun or Poseidon represents water is very different from the eccentric psychological and metaphysical allegories that Porphyry develops in his second major extant work on Homer: 'On the Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey' (*De Antro*).

De Antro is a relatively short but intellectually challenging essay of literary criticism that focuses on a marginal passage from the *Odyssey*: the description of the cave in Ithaca where Odysseus hides the precious gifts that he had received from the Phaeacians.[175] Porphyry elaborates a complex allegorical interpretation, according to which the cave becomes the symbol of the material world in which nymphs, representing human souls, undergo the cycle of reincarnation. In the final section of the treatise, the allegory is broadened to include the entire poem: Odysseus' travels and adventures are interpreted as images of the journey of the

[175] *Od.* 13.102–112. Text and translation in appendix.

philosopher's soul seeking purification from the passions that keep them bound to the world of the senses.

While the idea that the Homeric poems contain hidden meanings that ought to be uncovered by skilled readers goes back to the very beginning of Greek literary criticism,[176] modern readers have been struck by the seemingly unreconcilable exegetical approaches that Porphyry adopts in the *HQ* and in *De Antro.* But are these two works truly so different? Building on the results of my previous chapter, where I argued that the philological–Aristotelian exegesis of the *HQ* is considered by Porphyry a necessary preliminary step in the process of gaining a deeper understanding of the Homeric poems, I propose a new reading of *De Antro* with the aim of providing a more coherent picture of Porphyry's 'Homeric Project'. As this chapter seeks to demonstrate, in *De Antro* Porphyry is building a bridge from the Aristotelian and philological method that he practices in the *HQ* towards a Platonic conception of poetic inspiration and mimesis. Porphyry thus creates a new hybrid form of hermeneutics that harmonizes the two main streams of ancient literary criticism, the Aristotelian–philological and the Platonic–philosophical,[177] while at the same time he remains faithful to the principle that 'Homer interprets himself for the most part.'

I begin with two preliminary sections: (**i**) a review of the main scholarly positions concerning the relationship between the *HQ* and *De Antro*, (**ii**) followed by a close reading of

[176] Modern studies on ancient allegorical interpretations, as they were practiced in pagan, Jewish and Christian contexts, include Buffière 1956; Pépin 1976; Lamberton 1986; Whitman 1987, chs. 1–2; Dawson 1992; the collection of essays in Boys–Stones 2003a; Struck 2004; Ramelli–Lucchetta 2004; the collection of essays in Dahan–Goulet 2005; the companion edited by Copeland–Struck 2010. Remarks concerning ancient allegory and allegorical interpretations can be found also in Ford 2002, 67–89; Lamberton 2002; Bouchard 2016, 29–83. For a recent assessment of the rise of this exegetical practice see Domaradzki 2011; id. 2015; id. 2017; Kotwick 2020 argues that we find an example of allegorical interpretation already in the *Odyssey*.

[177] Even if Porphyry's use of allegory may seem closer to Stoic practices than to Plato's view of poetry, the theory of poetic mimesis that underpins his exegesis is markedly Platonic, as I show in the last section of this paper. Long 1992 has persuasively argued that for the Stoics poetry contains snippets of ancient wisdom to be recovered, but the poets are often completely unaware of it. Furthermore, the Stoics do not believe in any 'superior' reality that the poet may contemplate, as they are deeply committed to materialism. For a nuanced view of Stoic allegorical interpretation, at least as practiced by Cornutus, see Boys–Stones 2003b and 2018, 24–28.

a fragment from *On the Styx*, in which Porphyry talks explicitly about the proper way to perform allegorical interpretations on the Homeric poems. I then turn to *De Antro*. My analysis of this work will proceed in four steps: (**iii–iv**) a close reading of the first section of *De Antro*, where I show that Porphyry justifies the need for an allegorical interpretation of the Homeric cave by appealing to aesthetic categories that belong to the Aristotelian tradition of literary criticism; (**v**) next, I look at how Porphyry performs his allegorical exegesis in the central section of the work, with the aim of proving that he is still trying to interpret Homer from Homer; (**vi**) finally, I focus on the last chapter of *De Antro*, where, I argue, Porphyry's poetics takes a 'Platonic turn'.

A final forewarning: because my focus will be on Porphyry's exegetical method and on the poetic and aesthetic theories that ground it, I will touch only marginally on the metaphysical, ontological and psychological doctrines that Porphyry claims to uncover in the Homeric poems. Interested readers should be directed towards the excellent recent monograph by Nilufer Akçay, which is the first book–length study that is entirely devoted to this Porphyrian work.[178]

i

The debate concerning the chronology and the relationship between Porphyry's Homeric works has been lively, and both unitarian and a developmentalist theses have been advanced and defended. One of the earliest and most influential proponents of a developmentalist view was Hermann Schrader. In the *Prolegomena* to his edition of the *Homeric Questions on the Iliad*, which was published in 1880, Schrader attempted to explain away the differences between the *HQ* and *De Antro* by positing an evolution in Porphyry's methodology that matches what we know about his biography. Thus, Schrader thought that the *HQ* are a juvenile

[178] Akçay 2019.

work written under the influence of Longinus in Athens, an influence that transpires in Porphyry's more philological approach and his attention to linguistic and stylistic issues.[179] On the other hand, the allegoresis of *De Antro* and, probably, of *On the Styx*, would reveal the influence of Plotinus' teachings. This 'developmentalist' solution was adopted without substantial modifications by Joseph Bidez in his seminal *Vie de Porphyre*, published in 1913.[180]

A second group of scholars believe that the philological approach of the *Homeric Questions* and the allegorical readings of *De Antro* are not mutually exclusive and incompatible. This 'unitarian' position can be traced back to the *editor princeps* of the *Homeric Questions* and of the *Cave of the Nymphs*, the humanist scholar Janus Lascaris (1455–1535 CE). Lascaris does not present a real argument for his dating, but in an epigram printed at the beginning of his edition he imagines an old Porphyry who has grown weary of his juvenile abstract speculations on metaphysics, and who therefore has decided to dedicate what remains of his life to the study of Homer. Hence, Lascaris implicitly suggests that both *De Antro* and the *HQ* belong to Porphyry's old age.[181]

Against all these biographical speculations, it has been argued that reconstructing a relative and absolute chronology of Porphyry's work is doomed to fail. This criticism was most fully articulated by Robert Lamberton, in his monograph *Homer the Theologian*.

[179] Porphyry himself calls Longinus τοῦ καθ'ἡμᾶς κριτικωτάτου γενομένου: cf. Porph. *Plot*. 20.1–2.
[180] Bidez 1913, 32–3. Schrader's biographical solution maps very well onto Bidez's reconstruction of Porphyry's intellectual biography, for which see the *Introduction* above. The idea of a 'philological' phase that preceded an 'allegorical' phase has been defended also in more recent scholarship. See, among others, Buffière 1956, 423; Pfeiffer 1968, 226; Romano 1979, 110 and 152–153 (where he suggests that the *Cave* must be later than the *Questions*, but not much later) and *passim*; more recently, Pontani 2005, 84–87. A smaller group of scholars proposed a reversed chronology by considering *De Antro* a juvenile work. This position is also based on untenable biases about what counts as a serious intellectual activity, according to which the kind of allegoresis performed in *De Antro* is not fitting for a mature and serious philosopher. To my knowledge, the most extensive defense of this position is in Turcan 1975, 63–64. Turcan thinks that Porphyry came into contact with the allegorical method while studying in Caesarea, where he may have had the chance to meet Origen (but see my discussion in chapter 3). Turcan dismisses the intellectual value of *De Antro* by stating: 'Le *De Antro* n'a rien qui le désigne comme caractéristique de la maturité plotinienne du philosophe'. An early date for all Porphyry's Homeric works was already suggested by Geffcken 1920, 62. See also Sellew 1989, 87–88 with n. 25.
[181] Lascaris published the *editio princeps* in 1518. On Lascaris' edition see Sodano 1965, 102–104.

Lamberton argues against the idea that the *HQ* and *De Antro* are methodologically incompatible, and therefore against the assumption that they necessarily must belong to two different periods of Porphyry's life.[182] On the contrary, Lamberton argues that the *HQ* and *De Antro* complement each other, as Porphyry would be approaching the Homeric poems from two different perspectives.[183] As my analysis will show, I agree with Lamberton's idea that the two works are complementary, but I argue for a much more unitarian interpretation of Porphyry's 'Homeric Project'.

More recently, two essays by Filippomaria Pontani and by Irini Fotini Viltanioti have attempted to provide a more coherent and systematic picture of Porphyry's activity as a Homeric interpreter, though from two different perspectives.[184]

Pontani looks at Porphyry's Homeric works from the point of view of the history of ancient scholarship. He claims that the difference between the *HQ* and *De Antro* should be attributed to the different exegetical genres to which these two works belong. More specifically, Pontani argues, collections of *zetemata* do not welcome complicated allegorical interpretations that take into consideration the broader narrative dimension of the text. I consider Pontani's analysis useful insofar as it tries to place the *HQ* within their proper generic tradition. However, Pontani does not explain what the relationship between the *HQ* and *De Antro* is. This issue is more explicitly addressed by Viltanioti.

The Greek scholar tries to reconstruct a coherent project that binds together all Porphyry's exegetical works on Homer. In her opinion, Porphyry's main aim is to bring to the fore the philosophical value of the Homeric poems. Hence, the *Homeric Questions* would

[182] Lamberton 1986, 108–113.
[183] A unitarian approach has been defended by Struck 2004, 72 and 75–76; see also Johnson 2013, 17–18, who claims that 'it is inappropriate to divide Porphyry's life into an early philological phase at Athens and a later allegorical phase at Rome'.
[184] See Pontani 2019 and Viltanioti 2019.

reveal snippets of philosophy in Homer;[185] the lost *On the Philosophy of Homer* would demonstrate the broader philosophical value of the poems; finally, *On the Cave of the Nymphs* and *On the Styx*, in Viltanioti's opinion, constitute the pinnacle of the project, as they deal with the highest form of philosophy (psychology and soteriology). These last two works are seen by Viltanioti as a sort of handbook of exegetical theory, since they provide a model to follow for those who want to gain benefit from reading poetry:[186] they teach how to extract from Homer doctrines that can help readers to purify their souls and free themselves from the chains of the material world.

Viltanioti's essay has the merit of providing what, to my knowledge, is the most coherent picture of Porphyry's Homeric exegesis; I also believe that her tripartite scheme is not completely incompatible with my reconstruction. However, in my own analysis, I want to shift the focus away from what Porphyry finds in Homer (i.e. the concrete outcomes of his interpretations), and to prioritize the hermeneutic and aesthetic theory grounding his exegesis. This approach brings to the fore some flaws in Viltanioti's reconstruction. While it is true that the *HQ* play a propaedeutic function, their main aim is not to provide readers with a taste of the philosophical significance of the poems, since only very few passages hint explicitly at the philosophical value of reading them.[187] As I argued in the previous chapter, Porphyry's main goal is to clarify Homer's style and diction, and to give his reader the proper philological training that will be necessary as they embark on more complex forms of exegesis. Second,

[185] To support this position, Viltanioti quotes some passages from the *Homeric Questions* where the poet is explicitly said to be philosophizing: cf. e.g. Porph. *HQ* 1, p. 53,9–12 Sodano.
[186] A similar idea was already proposed by Edwards 1996.
[187] Cf. *HQ Il.* 14.246, p. 195.3 Schrader (not in MacPhail, a Porphyrian origin is entirely speculative): 'one must say therefore that each one has spoken as they wished, and Homer in a more philosophical way. '(ῥητέον οὖν ὅτι ἕκαστος εἴρηκεν ὡς ἐβούλετο, Ὅμηρος δὲ φιλοσοφώτερον); *HQ Il.* 13sq., p. 200.13 Schrader (not in MacPhail, a Porphyrian origin is entirely speculative): 'one must say that Homer philosophies' (ῥητέον δὲ ὅτι φιλοσοφεῖ Ὅμηρος); *HQ* 1, p. 53.7–12 Sodano: 'And the philosophers were not the first to define white as the penetrating element of sight, but Homer before them, since he uses *marmarein* as 'to shine', which means to divide and to separate, from which *diakrinein* derives. (καὶ οὐχὶ φιλόσοφοι πρῶτοι τὸ λευκὸν ἀφωρίσαντο τὸ διακριτικὸν ὄψεως, ἀλλὰ πρὸ αὐτῶν Ὅμηρος, μαρμαίρειν λέγων τὸ λάμπειν, ὅ ἐστι μερίζειν καὶ διαιρεῖν, ἀφ' οὗ τὸ διακρίνειν).

while it is true that the allegories of *De Antro* deal with psychology and soteriology, Porphyry is very explicit in pointing out that this treatise does not yet constitute the peak of his Homeric exegesis: as my analysis will show, *De Antro* works as a bridge between the *HQ* and superior studies on Homer that unfortunately are either lost or were never written.[188]

Before delving into my analysis of *De Antro*, I want to briefly consider a fragment from the lost *On the Styx*, in which Porphyry contrasts a good and a bad way of allegorizing Homer. My goal is to provide one more piece of evidence in support of the view that Porphyry the 'allegorist' and Porphyry the 'philologist' are guided by the same commitment, namely, a desire to explain Homer from Homer.

ii

Stobaeus preserves nine fragments from Porphyry's lost work *On the Styx* (Περὶ Στυγός). It is hard to reconstruct the original structure and main goal of this treatise,[189] in which Porphyry must have discussed Odysseus' journey to the Underworld (the so–called *Nekya* at *Od.* 11.1–132 and 385–640).[190] Even though scholars tend to associate *On the Styx* to *De Antro*,[191] in the extant fragments Porphyry does not really provide an allegorical interpretation of any Homeric passage, but rather attempts to justify how Homer describes souls in the Underworld by reconstructing some philosophical commitments that Homer allegedly must have held. For example, the fact that the souls need to drink blood before being able to remember their

[188] For the view that *De Antro* has a protreptic function see also Johnson 2013, 37 and 184, who thinks that the work aims at marshalling the authority of Homer for the sake of encouraging an educated elite to attend to matters of higher philosophy. My analysis will show that this protreptic dimension is mapped onto an attempt to guide readers from an Aristotelian to a Platonic view of poetry, with a shift from the creation (the text) to the creator and its paradigm (the poet and the forms).
[189] For a hypothetical reconstruction of its structure based on the extant fragments and on a comparison with *De Antro*, see Johnson 2013, 31–37.
[190] See *On the Styx* frgs. 2–3 Castelletti (=377F.–78F. Smith).
[191] See especially Johnson 2013, 34.

embodied lives would prove Homer's commitment to the idea that blood is the seat of 'knowledge concerning mortal things' (τὴν περὶ τὰ θνητὰ φρόνησιν).[192]

Nevertheless, in a lost section of this work, Porphyry must have allegorized some Homeric passages concerning the gods, as the following fragment suggests:

> Ἔστι δὲ ἡ τοῦ ποιητοῦ δόξα οὐχ ὡς ἄν τις νομίσειεν εὔληπτος. Πάντες μὲν γὰρ οἱ παλαιοὶ τὰ περὶ τῶν θεῶν καὶ δαιμόνων δι' αἰνιγμάτων ἐσήμαναν, Ὅμηρος δὲ καὶ μᾶλλον τὰ περὶ τούτων ἀπέκρυψε, τῷ μὴ προηγουμένως περὶ αὐτῶν διαλέγεσθαι, καταχρῆσθαι δὲ τοῖς λεγεμένοις εἰς παράστασιν ἄλλων.
> Τῶν οὖν ἀναπτύσσειεν ἐπιχειρησάντων τὰ δι' ὑπονοίας παρ' αὐτῷ λεγόμενα ἱκανώτατα δοκῶν ὁ Πυθαγόρειος Κρόνιος τοῦτ' ἀπεργάσασθαι, ὅμως ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις ἄλλα τε ἐφαρμόζει ταῖς τεθείσαις ὑποθέσεσι, τὰ Ὁμήρου μὴ δυνάμενος, οὐ<δὲ[193] τοῖς> παρὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὰς δόξας, τοῖς δὲ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ προσάγειν τὸν ποιητὴν πεφιλοτίμηται.[194]
>
> The opinion of the poet is not easy to grasp as someone could think. For all the ancients used to express what concerns the gods and daemons by means of riddles (δι'αἰνιγμάτων), and Homer concealed (ἀπέκρυψε) these things even more, since he did not speak about them directly (μὴ προηγουμένως), but he applied his verses to the representation of other things.
> Among those who attempted to unfold what Homer said allegorically, the Pythagorean Cronius seems to have accomplished this task in the most skillful way; nevertheless, in most occasions, he harmonizes other things with pre–formulated hypotheses (ἄλλα τε ἐφαρμόζει ταῖς τεθείσαις ὑποθέσεσι), and not being able [to harmonize] Homer's own sayings, he has made it a point of pride not to accommodate his own opinions to what the poet says, but rather [to accommodate] the poet to his own arguments (οὐ<δὲ τοῖς> παρὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὰς δόξας, τοῖς δὲ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ προσάγειν τὸν ποιητὴν πεφιλοτίμηται).

We do not know the original context of this fragment, even if its programmatic nature suggests that it may come from the prologue of the treatise.[195] In the first section, Porphyry claims that it was custom among the ancients to speak about gods and demons by means of riddles: hence, readers must be particularly careful while reading Homer, lest they be led astray by the literal

[192] Fr. 2.59–60 Castelletti.
[193] I thank Richard Janko for suggesting this emendation. Both Smith and Castelletti print οὔτε, following the integration proposed by Wachsmuth-Hense.
[194] Fr. 1 Castelletti (= 372F. Smith= Stob. 2.1.32).
[195] See Castelletti 2006, 39 and Johnson 2013, 322: both are cautious regarding the original placement of the fragment within Porphyry's lost work, since we do not even know what the main aim of the work was.

meaning of his verses while failing to grasp what the poet really wanted to communicate. Thus, Porphyry defends the legitimacy of interpreting allegorically some passages of the Homeric poems, since the poet himself deliberately decided to hide his opinions concerning gods and daemons by means of riddles (αἰνίγματα) that ought to be decoded.[196]

In the second part of the fragment, Porphyry voices criticism of another philosopher who engaged in the interpretation of Homer: the Neopythagorean Cronius.[197] Given Porphyry's elliptical manner of expression and the lack of a broader context, it is not easy to pinpoint what precisely Cronius is guilty of. However, two strictly interconnected charges can be identified. First, Porphyry accuses Cronius for 'harmonizing other things (ἄλλα) with pre–formulated hypotheses, being unable to harmonize Homer's sayings.' The problem lies in the identification of the referent of ἄλλα. In my opinion, it should be interpreted as 'things said by other people', in opposition to τὰ Ὁμήρου, an expression which obviously indicates what Homer himself says. Hence Porphyry is blaming Cronius for introducing external materials in his exegesis of Homer in order to strengthen his own pre–formulated hypothesis. The second charge follows directly from the first: instead of trying to bring forth what the poet means, Cronius prefers forcing the interpretation of Homer in order to make the poet agree with his own opinions. If my interpretation of the fragment is correct, Cronius' main fault lies in his failure to interpret Homer from Homer.[198]

[196] See Castelletti 2006, 142–44, for a list of the occurrences of αἴνιγμα and αἰνίττομαι in Porphyry. The verb αἰνίττεσθαι is part of the traditional jargon of the allegorists. The term had been part of the technical vocabulary of poetic exegesis since the V–IV century BCE, and is attested multiple times in the so–called Derveni papyrus in reference to the allegorical meaning of Orpheus' poem. A good overview of the earliest usages of the term in connection with poetic interpretations is in Struck 2004, 39–50, who claims that 'αἴνιγμα terms are the real conceptual engines of allegorism'. For an introductory survey of the lexicon of allegory see Buffière 1956, 45–65 and Pépin 1976, 85–94.

[197] We know very little about Cronius. The original context of his Homeric interpretations may have been a treatise 'On Rebirth' (Περὶ παλιγγενεσίας), where he may have argued that Plato's theory of metempsychosis into animals is just a metaphor: cf. Nemesius, *On the Nature of Man* 2, 34.24–35.5 and see Dillon 1977, 379–80. We have traces of his exegesis of the *Republic* preserved in Proclus: cf. Procl. *In Rem*. II 110, 2–6 Kroll. Cf. also II 22,20 Kroll.

[198] Akçay 2019, 16 recognizes that Porphyry is here probably hinting at the Aristarchean principle 'Homer from Homer', but she does not elaborate on the issue.

This brief analysis has demonstrated that it is wrong to think that Porphyry's approach to the interpretation of Homer in his allegorical works is radically different from his approach in the *HQ*. To the contrary, Porphyry thinks that a reader must always aim at 'interpreting Homer from Homer'. This principle is general and flexible enough that it can be exploited in order to justify the most diverse forms of exegesis, as well as to delegitimize interpretations of competitors that allegedly fail to meet the proper standard.[199] Cronius is a bad reader because, in Porphyry's view, he does not own his primary allegiance to the text itself, but to a set of external doctrines that he tries to read into Homer. We will see in the next chapter how a similar criticism is levelled against Christian figural interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. Now it is time finally to turn our attention to *De Antro*, and to see the extent to which Porphyry practices what he preaches.

iii

De Antro begins abruptly,[200] as Porphyry states that the task of the reader is to uncover the hidden meaning that the poet is trying to convey through his description of the cave:

> <. . . > ὅτι ποτὲ Ὁμήρῳ αἰνίττεται τὸ ἐν Ἰθάκῃ ἄντρον, ὃ διὰ τῶν ἐπῶν τούτων διαγράφει λέγων·[201]
>
> … what[202] Homer's cave in Ithaca says enigmatically, which he describes with these verses saying:

[199] See ch. 3.

[200] The original context and the genre of this work is uncertain. Baumbach 2019, 20–21 presents three possibilities: the *Cave* could be either a complete and self–standing work belonging to the tradition of philosophical–exegetical *zetemata*, or an extract from a longer work which is now lost (*id.* 21 n. 32 suggests *On the Philosophy of Homer*, a title transmitted by *Suda* sv. Π 2098 Adler), or part of a greater, and perhaps unfinished project on Homeric allegoresis, to which Porphyry seems to hint at the end of the essay. I do not think that these possibilites are mutually exclusive.

[201] *De Antro* 1.1–2. I follow the most recent edition by Dorandi 2019; I also refer to the continuous line numbers as in his edition.

[202] I follow Goulet–Cazé (in Dorandi 2019, 153–157) in considering ὅτι an interrogative pronoun introducing an indirect question; thus, the first main verb is missing, and we must posit a lacuna at the beginning of the transmitted text. In theory, as Nauck 1886 suggested, the lacuna could be filled with something like Ἐξήτησας, ὦ . . . , ὅτι πότε κλ. If this were the case, the dialogical structure of *De Antro* would make this work very similar to the *Homeric Questions*, at least from a formal point of view (especially if Anatolius is the subject of ἐξήτησας). But for now, this must remain pure speculation.

Through the verb αἰνίττεσθαι, readers are immediately warned that the kind of interpretation that they are going to encounter belongs to the tradition of allegorism.[203] As Glenn Most has pointed out in a recent paper, allegorism intervenes whenever the text is perceived as defective from some points of view, and so new meanings ought to be ascribed to it in order to uphold its canonical status.[204] So what prompts Porphyry to allegorize this Homeric passage?

> Ὅτι μὲν οὐ καθ' ἱστορίαν παρειληφὼς μνήμην τῶν παραδοθέντων πεποίηται, δηλοῦσιν οἱ τὰς περιηγήσεις τῆς νήσου γράψαντες, οὐδενὸς τοιούτου κατὰ τὴν νῆσον ἄντρου μνησθέντες, ὡς φησὶ Κρόνιος· ὅτι δὲ κατὰ ποιητικὴν ἐξουσίαν πλάσσων ἄντρον ἀπίθανος ἦν, εἰ τὸ προστυχὸν καὶ ὡς ἔτυχε πλάσας πείσειν ἤλπισεν ὡς <ἐν> τῇ Ἰθακησίᾳ γῇ ἀνήρ τις ἐτεχνήσατο ὁδοὺς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ θεοῖς, ἢ εἰ μὴ ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ' ἡ φύσις αὐτόθεν ἀπέδειξε κάθοδόν τε ἀνθρώποις πᾶσι καὶ πάλιν ἄλλην ὁδὸν τοῖς πᾶσι θεοῖς, δῆλον. . . . Τοιαῦτα τοίνυν ὁ Κρόνιος προειπὼν φησὶν ἔκδηλον εἶναι οὐ τοῖς σοφοῖς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἰδιώταις ἀλληγορεῖν τι καὶ αἰνίττεσθαι διὰ τούτων τὸν ποιητήν. . . τοιούτων ἀσαφειῶν πλήρους ὄντος τοῦ διηγήματος πλάσμα μὲν ὡς ἔτυχεν εἰς ψυχαγωγίαν πεποιημένον μὴ εἶναι, ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἱστορίας τοπικῆς περιήγησιν ἔχειν, ἀλληγορεῖν δέ τι δι' αὐτοῦ τὸν ποιητήν.[205]
>
> That Homer has not composed this on the basis of inquiry,[206] reporting the recollection of traditional sources, is shown by those who wrote geographical descriptions of the island, since no one mentions a cave of such a kind on the island, as Cronius says; it is clear that, fashioning the cave on the basis of poetic license (κατὰ ποιητικὴν ἐξουσίαν), he would not have been persuasive if, having fashioned this randomly and by chance (τὸ προστυχὸν καὶ ὡς ἔτυχε πλάσας), he believed that he would persuade [readers] that in Ithaca a man had built roads for humans and gods respectively, or if not a man, then nature spontaneously had assigned an entrance for all humans and in turn a different path for the gods. [. . .]. Therefore Cronius, having said previously such things, claims that it is evident not only to the wise, but also to the laymen that the poet through these verses is saying something allegorically and enigmatically (ἀλληγορεῖν καὶ αἰνίττεσθαι). [. . .] Since the narration is full of such obscurities, it is not a creation randomly

[203] Lamberton 1986, 125 n. 122 points out that αἴνιγμα and αἰνίττομαι, together with σύμβολον, are Porphyry's preferred terms in *De Antro* to indicate Homer's allegory. On the contrary, ἀλληγορέω seems to appear only in quotations from Cronius. See also the commentary by M.O. Goulet–Cazé in Dorandi 2019, 157 and 171–72. I disagree with her claim that the term ἀλληγορέω refers to a 'strict allegory', namely to the mode of composition of the poet, whereas αἰνίττομαι indicates a 'loose allegory', namely the mode of allegorical interpretation practiced by Porphyry and Cronius. As it will become evident in my analysis, Porphyry is committed to the idea that the aim of the interpreter is to uncover the intentions of the poet: therefore, allegory for him is always 'strict'.

[204] Most 2016, 59–60.

[205] *De Antro* 2.14–21; 3.25–27; 4.50–53.

[206] I depart from previous translations, who connected καθ' ἱστορίαν to παρειληφώς instead of πεποίηται: cf. e.g. Lamberton 1983, 22: 'The geographical writers show that on the one hand he has not provided a description of actual things passed down by tradition'; Simonini 1986, 27: 'Il poeta non ha tratto la sua descrizione da racconti basati su dati reali'; Dorandi 2019, 117: 'Qu' Homère n'a pas reçu au fil d'une enquête les données transmises dont il fait mention'. Cronius clearly stresses the opposition between καθ' ἱστορίαν πεποίηται and κατὰ ποιητικὴν ἐξουσίαν πλάσσων.

> composed for the sake of enthrallment (πλάσμα μὲν ὡς ἔτυχεν εἰς ψυχαγωγίαν πεποιημένον μὴ εἶναι), but nor does it contain a report of a topographical inquiry (ἱστορίας τοπικῆς περιήγησιν), but the poet says something allegorically through this (ἀλληγορεῖν δε τι δι' αὐτοῦ).

As my analysis of this passage will clarify, Porphyry justifies the need for an allegorical interpretation of the text through critical categories that are widely attested in both grammatical and rhetorical sources, and presents the deficiency of the literal meaning of the Homeric lines as literary and aesthetic. Paraphrasing Cronius,[207] Porphyry first establishes that Homer's description of the cave is not based on traditional accounts, nor on a real geographical location (καθ' ἱστορίαν),[208] but it is a poetic invention (κατὰ ποιητικὴν ἐξουσίαν).[209] If this is the case, a good reader ought to consider what the function of this invention might be within the economy of the poem. The first option is that the poet may have crafted this description for no other reasons than for the sake of entertaining and enthralling his readers (πλάσμα μὲν ὡς ἔτυχεν εἰς ψυχαγωγίαν πεποιημένον).[210]

If we look at the scholiastic corpus, we can see how appealing to the 'randomness' of certain poetic choices was a common strategy that readers employed either to defend Homer

[207] The quotation/paraphrase from Cronius ends at 4.55. We do not know to what extent Porphyry's interpretation is original, since he himself acknowledges a debt towards the Neopythagorean philosophers Numenius and Cronius: see Lamberton 1983, 54–77, who persuasively argues that Numenius' interpretation of the Homeric cave was probably part of a treatise dealing with the Myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*. Hence, even if Porphyry recycles Numenian material, the Homeric focus of Porphyry's work is very different from the Platonic focus of his source. On the alleged Pythagorean exegetical tradition within which Porphyry operates see also Tarrant–Johnson 2018

[208] As pointed out by Goulet–Cazé in her comments in Dorandi 2019, 165, the primary meaning of ἱστορία is inquiry. As a natural development from its original meaning, ἱστορία came to signify the final product of the investigation, namely, a historical, extra–textual truth.

[209] Modern scholars tend to misread Porphyry's phrasing, as they think that Cronius is also ruling out the πλάσμα–option: see e.g. Dorandi 2019,175–76. Though the phrasing is ambiguous in this passage, Porphyry is explicit in claiming that, for Cronius, the cave is a πλάσμα: cf. *De Antro* 4.57. On the use of the term πλάσμα in Homeric criticism see especially Papadopoulou 1998 and Bouchard 2016, 27. Both scholars stress that πλάσμα can be used to indicate a poetic innovation that departs from the tradition. On πλάσμα see also SE *M* I 263, where it is defined as an exposition of 'facts that did not happen, but that are told in a way that is similar to those that happened' (πλάσμα δὲ πραγμάτων μὴ γενομένων μὲν ὁμοίως δὲ τοῖς γενομένοις λεγομένων). In Sextus, who is probably drawing on Asclepiades of Myrlea, πλάσμα is opposed to ἱστορία (exposition of facts that did happen), and μῦθος (exposition of impossible facts). I do not think that this tripartition is relevant for Porphyry and Cronius, as they seem to employ πλάσμα as a general term to indicate a poetic invention, in line with what we find in the scholia.

[210] There is an interesting parallel in Procl. *in Alc.* 18.15–19.12, on Platonic prologues.

from the accuse of being inconsistent, or to foreclose further exegetical inquiries on the passage under consideration.

A good example of an 'apologetic' appeal to randomness is in an A scholion by Aristonicus to *Iliad* 2.45:

> ξίφος ἀργυρόηλον: ὅτι τὸ Ἀγαμέμνονος <ξίφος> νῦν μὲν ἀργυρόηλον, ἐν ἄλλοις δὲ (cf. Λ 29–30) χρυσόηλον. καὶ Εὐριπίδης „σφυρῶν σιδηρᾶ κέντρα" εἰπὼν (Phoen. 26) ἐν ἄλλοις φησί (ib. 805)· „χρυσοδέτοις περόναις". τὰ τοιαῦτα δὲ κυρίως οὐ λέγεται, ἀλλὰ κατ' ἐπιφοράν ἐστι ποιητικῆς ἀρεσκείας. ὥσπερ δὲ τὰ περὶ τὸν θώρακα καὶ τὴν ἀσπίδα διαφορώτερον φράζει (sc. Λ 19–28 et 32–40), οὕτω καὶ τὸ ξίφος κοσμεῖ.[211]
>
> 'Silver–studded sword': [the diple] because here Agamemnon's sword is 'silver–studded', in another passage 'golden–studded' (*Il*. 11.29–30). Euripides too having said 'iron spikes through the ankles' (*Phoen*. 26), in another passage says 'golden–bound pins' (*Phoen*. 805). Such things are not to be taken literally, but are proper of the search for poetic pleasure in accordance with an impulse. As he presents the armor and the shield in a more distinguishing manner (cf. *Il.* 11.19–28 and 32–40), in this way he also embellishes the sword.

From this scholion, we can infer that some readers blamed Homer for being inconsistent in his description of Agamemnon's shield: when it is first mentioned at *Iliad* 2.45, the shield is said to be decorated with silver studs, but when it appears again at *Iliad* 11.29–30, the studs are said to be golden. Drawing on Aristonicus' monograph, who is in turn reporting Aristarchus' opinion,[212] the scholion defends Homer by appealing to the idea of poetic pleasure (ἀρέσκεια ποιητική): Homer is free to follow his impulse (ἐπιφορά) without worrying too much about inconsistencies in small details, provided that a positive reaction is produced in the audience.[213]

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[211] Schol. A *Il*. 2.45a (Aristonicus).

[212] Se Schironi 2018, 439 and 509–10.

[213] On this scholion see Meijering 1987, 65–66; Bouchard 2016, 199–200; Schironi 2018, 509. Cf. sch. A to *Il*. 11, 30 (Aristonicus): '[the diple] because now it is said to be 'golden–studded', but in another passage is 'silver–studded' (*Il.* 2.45). Either out of impulse or he adorns [Agamemnon] with a better panoply on account of his *aristeia*. (ὅτι νῦν μὲν χρυσόηλον, ἐν ἄλλοις δὲ (sc. B 45) „ἀργυρόηλον". ἤτοι κατ' ἐπιφορὰν ἢ διὰ τὴν ἀριστ<ε>ίαν κοσμεῖ διαφορωτέρᾳ πανοπλίᾳ). Here the two parts of the explanation are disjoined: the poet changes the material of the studs either by impulse (κατ' ἐπιφορὰν) or because of the different contexts (διὰ τὴν ἀριστείαν). This is clearly an abridged version of the scholion to *Il*. 2.45: the scholiast must have misunderstood the connection between the last two sentences and created a contraposition that was not present in his source.

Arguing that certain poetic choices are made by Homer at random and for no specific reasons serves also to block off any further exegetical inquiry. A good example is Aristarchus' comment on the beginning of the *Catalogue of the Ships*, which is preserved both in a D scholion to *Iliad* 2.494 and in Eustathius:

> . . . ὁ δὲ Ἀρίσταρχος φησὶν κατὰ ἐπιφορὰν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ Βοιωτῶν τὴν ἀρχὴν πεποιῆσθαι· εἰ γὰρ ἀπ' ἄλλου ἔθνους ἤρξατο, ἐζητοῦμεν ἂν τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς ἀρχῆς.[214]
>
> […] Aristarchus says that [Homer] began from the Boeotians out of impulse; for if he had begun from another people, we would be searching for the reason of that beginning.
>
> Ἀρίσταρχος δέ φησιν ἀπὸ Βοιωτῶν ἄρξασθαι τὸν ποιητὴν οὐκ ἔκ τινος παρατηρήσεως, ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἐπιφοράν, ἤτοι κατά τινα φορὰν καὶ τύχην καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἁπλῶς ἐπιτυχόν.[215]
>
> Aristarchus says that the poet begun from the Boeotians not for a specific reason, but by impulse, or for an urge and by chance and simply randomly.

In the D scholion, the quotation from Aristarchus comes at the end of a list that preserves several answers to the question of why Homer decided to begin the *Catalogue of the Ships* from the Boeotians.[216] Aristarchus' remark is warning against the risk of overinterpreting the Homeric text when a reader seeks to find an explanation for every single detail of the poems. The Alexandrian scholar suggests that Homer may sometimes compose out of impulse (κατ' ἐπιφοράν), which means that his choices may not be due to 'any specific reason' (ἔκ τινος παρατηρήσεως). Also Eustathius reports Aristarchus' opinion on the beginning of the 'Catalogue', and uses a terminology that is very close to what we find in Porphyry's *De Antro* (κατὰ τύχην καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἁπλῶς ἐπιτυχόν). Both authors suggest that, if something in a poem is due to mere chance, then any further exegetical effort becomes pointless: readers shall

Contra Nünlist 2009, 175–76, who on the basis of the shorter scholion thinks that the two explanations are mutually exclusive (but he fails to quote the last sentence of *sch.* to *Il*. 2.45a).
[214] *Sch.* D 494/Z^{s}(a), 14–16 Van Thiel.
[215] Eust. *Il.* 400.1–4 (on *Il.* 2.494).
[216] See Nünlist 2009, 182–83; Bouchard 2016, 200–1; Schironi 2018, 316–18.

refrain from wasting their time, but simply accept and enjoy what the poet says without trying to explain it.

Coming back to Porphyry's *De Antro,* we can now better understand why he needs to rule out immediately that Homer described the cave at random. He is reacting against (or preemptively invalidating) a kind of objection that may render his exegetical effort pointless, since what is the product of mere chance cannot be subjected to any further research.[217] But on what basis can Porphyry confidently claim that the description of the cave in Ithaca is not a not 'a creation randomly composed for the sake of enthrallment' (πλάσμα μὲν ὡς ἔτυχεν εἰς ψυχαγωγίαν πεποιημένον)?

As we saw in the passage above, Porphyry, quoting Cronius, argues that Homer 'would not have been persuasive (ἀπίθανος ἦν) if, having fashioned this randomly and by chance, he believed that he would persuade [readers] that in Ithaca a man had built paths for humans and gods respectively';[218] and at the end of the passage, he adds that 'since this narration is full of such obscurities, it is not a creation randomly composed for the sake of enthrallment (πλάσμα μὲν ὡς ἔτυχεν εἰς ψυχαγωγίαν πεποιημένον μὴ εἶναι).'[219] Two key concepts need to be carefully considered in order to frame Porphyry's claim within its proper theoretical background: the idea that poetry should conduce to enthrallment (ψυχαγωγία), and the idea that this is achieved only if what the poet says is believable (πιθανότης).

The noun *psuchagōgia* and the related verb *psuchagōgein* (lit. 'to lead the soul') were originally associated with magical practices and with necromancy.[220] Between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, these terms began to be used metaphorically in reference to the power of poetry,

[217] Cf. also sch. *Od*. 10.20 T, dealing with the contradictory information about the house of the winds, which in the *Iliad* are said to dwell in Thrace (cf. *Il*. 23.229–30), whereas in the *Odyssey* they reside in Aeolus' palace: 'He has made use of an *ad hoc* poetic creation, therefore one should not investigate such things; these parts of the stories are not open to objections.' (εἴληπται μὲν τὸ πλάσμα πρὸς τὸν καιρὸν, διὸ οὐ δεῖ ζητεῖν τὰ τοιαῦτα· ἀνεύθυνα τὰ τῶν μύθων).
[218] 2.18–20.
[219] 4.51–2.
[220] Cf. e.g. Ar. *Av*. 1555; Pl. *Leg*. 10. 909B3–4. See Halliwell 1986, 64 n. 24; *id*. 2011, 223–226 who insists on the fact that the 'magical' association of the word was still strong in the 5th and 4th centuries.

rhetoric and the visual arts to stir and lead the minds of auditors and viewers.[221] For example, in the *Phaedrus* Plato claims that to produce *psuchagōgia* is the aim of the rhetorical art.[222] Around the same period, Isocrates uses *psuchagōgein* in reference to the charming effects of poetic language,[223] and in Xenophon's *Memorabilia,* Socrates uses *psuchagōgein* to describe the alluring power of Cleiton's statues that lead viewers to believe that they are endowed with life.[224] We can see that both in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Memorabilia, psuchagōgia* is linked with the capacity of tricking the auditor/viewer into giving their assent to a belief, independently of whether this belief is true or false in itself.[225]

Besides the above–mentioned passage from Isocrates, the earliest extant connection between poetry and *psuchagōgia* is in Aristotle's *Poetics*, within the discussion of the parts of tragedy in chapter 6. More specifically, Aristotle defends the superiority of plot (μῦθος) by claiming that two of its parts, namely reversals (περιπέτειαι) and recognitions (ἀναγνωρίσεις), play the most important role in producing *psuchagōgia*.[226] It is difficult to establish the exact meaning of the term for Aristotle, since he does not use it anywhere else; however, in line with what we find in Plato and Isocrates, as well as in later authors, *psuchagōgia* must denote

[221] A hint at the metaphorical meaning is perhaps first found in Aesch. *Pers*.687, though the context is the 'literal' evocation of the spirit of Darius.
[222] Pl. *Phdr*. 261a8: 'Isn't it true that in general the rhetorical art would be a form of *psuchagōgia* through speeches? (Ἆρ' οὖν οὐ τὸ μὲν ὅλον ἡ ῥητορικὴ ἂν εἴη τέχνη ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων); 271c10: 'since the power of speech happens to be *psuchagōgia* (Ἐπειδὴ λόγου δύναμις τυγχάνει ψυχαγωγία οὖσα).
[223] Cf. Isoc. *Evag*. 10.9. See also *ad Nic*. 49.6, where *psuchagōgein* seems to define both the aim of rhetoric and the power of poetry.
[224] Cf. Xen. *Mem*. 3. 10. 6: 'How do you produce this effect in statues, the illusion of being alive, which mostly enthrall people through sight?' (ὃ δὲ μάλιστα ψυχαγωγεῖ διὰ τῆς ὄψεως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τὸ ζωτικὸν φαίνεσθαι, πῶς τοῦτο ἐνεργάζῃ τοῖς ἀνδριᾶσιν;).
[225] Cf. also Pl. *Tim*. 71A7, where *psuchagōgia* refers to the power that *phantasmata* and *eidōla* exercise on the irrational part of the soul. Here again, we must assume that representations possessing psychagogic powers are somehow persuasive.
[226] Arist. *Poet*. 6. 1450^{a}33: 'In addition, the most important parts through which tragedy enthralls (ψυχαγωγεῖ) [the audience] are the parts of the plot, both reversals and recognitions (πρὸς δὲ τούτοις τὰ μέγιστα οἷς ψυχαγωγεῖ ἡ τραγῳδία τοῦ μύθου μέρη ἐστίν, αἵ τε περιπέτειαι καὶ ἀναγνωρίσεις). Later in the chapter, the adjective ψυχαγωγικός is used to describe the visual element of tragedy: cf. 6. 1450^{b}17: 'Spectacle is enthralling (ψυχαγωγικόν), but is most extraneous to the art and least proper to the poetic art' (ἡ δὲ ὄψις ψυχαγωγικόν μέν, ἀτεχνότατον δὲ καὶ ἥκιστα οἰκεῖον τῆς ποιητικῆς).

the positive emotional reaction that a good plot produces in the audience, something like a strong feeling of delight and enjoyment.[227]

After Aristotle, *psuchagōgia* became a common critical term in theoretical discussion on poetics: one may think of the famous statement by Eratosthenes of Cyrene that 'that every poet aims at *psuchagōgia*, not at teaching' (ὅτι ποιητὴς πᾶς στοχάζεται ψυχαγωγίας, οὐ διδασκαλίας).[228] The term often appears in the Homeric scholia too. For example, in an exegetical scholion on *Iliad* 3.6, commenting on the battle between the pygmies and the cranes, the scholiast says that Homer 'enthralls [the reader] through the strangeness of the story' (τῷ ξένῳ τῆς ἱστορίας ψυχαγωγεῖ);[229] similarly, a scholion to *Il.* 22.147–56 argues that Homer indulges in the description of the two springs during the race of Hector and Achilles in order to 'enthrall the listener (αὐτὸς δὲ ψυχαγωγεῖ τὸν ἀκροατήν).[230] R. Meijering has persuasively argued against the old–fashioned way of regarding *psuchagōgia* as a mere synonym of pleasure (ἡδονή). Building on the above–mentioned passages from Plato and Aristotle, who, in her opinion, were working within a tradition stretching back to the sophists and in particular to Gorgias, Meijering has demonstrated that *psuchagōgia* must refer more generally to the power of poetry to carry away the mind of the readers/listeners into the fictional world of the poems.[231] This effect can be achieved only if the listener is persuaded to suspend their disbelief, so that they accept what the poet says *as if* it were true. And this is where *psuchagōgia* is linked to 'believability'(τὸ πιθανόν).

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[227] Halliwell 2011, 226–7 connects the psychagogic power of tragic plots with their capacity to stir the tragic emotions of fear and pity in the audience. *Contra* Hose 2022, 250, who points out that neither at $50^{a}33$, nor at $50^{b}17$ the specific tragic effect is described. I still believe that producing *psuchagōgia* is a necessary (though perhaps not sufficient) condition for producing catharsis.

[228] Eratosthenes *apud* Strabo 1.1.10. It is debated whether Eratosthenes was voicing a poetic theory or simply criticizing fellow geographers who overconfidently used Homer as a geographical source. On the issue see Geus 2002, 265–68, who argues against the idea of an Eratosthenic poetic; see also e.g. Meijering 1987, 58–61; Broggiato 2012; Schironi 2018, 746–47. But the bibliography is very rich.

[229] *Sch.* AbT ad *Il.* 3.6 (ex.).

[230] *Sch.* bT ad *Il.* 22.147–56 (ex.). On *psuchagōgia* in the Homeric scholia, see Nünlist 2009, 144: both the noun and the verb are employed to praise the effectiveness of very diverse poetic choices ranging from descriptions to certain narrative strategies.

[231] See Meijering 1987, 7–9 and 11;

Since claiming that something in a text is unbelievable was a standard way to justify an allegorical interpretation, scholars generally assume that Porphyry is just exploiting a common *topos*.[232] However, the way that Porphyry uses it is quite idiosyncratic and deserves further consideration. First of all, while ancient allegorists almost always begin from implausible elements at the level of the plot, Porphyry's *De Antro* is exceptional, since what is unbelievable is not a certain plot–twist, but an ekphrastic passage. This places Porphyry's allegorical interpretation somehow outside the mainstream.[233] Furthermore, believability (τὸ πιθανόν) is also a central concept in Aristotle's *Poetics* and the critical tradition stemming from it, and the Aristotelian flavor of this term has escaped the notice of most modern scholars who have worked on Porphyry's allegorical method.

In chapter 24 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle suggests that credibility (τὸ πιθανόν) shall be the guiding principle for poetic compositions, as he claims that 'what is impossible but probable ought to be preferred over what is possible but unbelievable' (προαιρεῖσθαι τε δεῖ ἀδύνατα εἰκότα μᾶλλον ἢ δυνατὰ ἀπίθανα;).[234] The issue is further explored in chapter 25, a section of the *Poetics* with which Porphyry, as we have seen in the previous chapter, must have been directly or indirectly familiar. Aristotle first distinguishes between two types of

[232] Cf. e.g. Max. Tyr. IV. 6. The connection between the obscurity of myths and allegory is standard in post–Porphyrian Platonism: cf. e.g. Sallust, *De deis et mundo* 3. 4,6–10 Rochefort; Julian., *Or*. 7. 12, 217c; 17,222c Rochefort. See especially Pépin 1966, 251–58, and Viltanioti 2019, 34. Both point out that Aristotle already believed that the superficial absurdity of myths can prompt further research into their hidden meaning: cf. Arist. *Metaph*. A 2. 982^{b}12–19.

[233] Recently H. Tarrant and M. Johnson have suggested that the ekphrastic nature of the passage may be the reason why it received exegetical attention in the first place: see Tarrant–Johnson 2018, 161–70. There are a few comparable instances of ekphraseis being interpreted allegorically. The most famous is the allegorical interpretation of the fabrication and description of the shield of Achilles in *Il*. 18. 474ff. Cf. e.g. Heracl., *Homeric Questions* 43; 48–51, who justifies the need for his interpretation starting from the ethical and religious deficiency of the literal meaning: Hephaestus should not be working during the night, there should not be precious metals in the sky because they are signs of greed, and the armor itself should be made of gold to be fitting for Achilles, not of bronze and tin. On this passage, see Buffière 1956, 156–65. Crates of Mallos probably provided an analogous interpretation of Agamemnon's shield, described in *Il*. 11, 32–40: cf. Crates, fr. 12 Broggiato, where the shield is said to be an 'image of the universe' (μίμημα τοῦ κόσμου), and Porter 1992, 91–103 on the concept of μίμημα τοῦ κόσμου and how it relates to Aristotle's idea of mimesis. Crates may have played a central role in developing the allegorical reading of the shield of Achilles too, even though no extant evidence explicitly associates his name to the exegesis of that passage: see Broggiato 2001, 157–62 for the *status quaestionis* and a survey of the sources. For similar allegorical readings of Biblical *ekphraseis*, cf. e.g. Joseph. *AJ* 3.151–180; 184–187 on the garment of the high priest (*Ex*. 28).

[234] *Poet*. 24. 1460^{a}26–7. Cf. also *Poet*. 9. 1451^{b}16–19.

errors that can afflict a poetic work: errors that are intrinsic to the art (ἁμαρτία καθ' αὐτήν), and errors that are only contingent (κατὰ συμβεβεκός). The first example of an error that is intrinsic to the art concerns the representation of something that is impossible:

> πρῶτον μέν, <εἰ> (ins. MS A^2) τὰ πρὸς αὐτὴν τὴν τέχνην ἀδύνατα πεποίηται, ἡμάρτηται· ἀλλ' ὀρθῶς ἔχει, εἰ τυγχάνει τοῦ τέλους τοῦ αὐτῆς (τὸ γὰρ τέλος εἴρηται), εἰ οὕτως ἐκπληκτικώτερον ἢ αὐτὸ ἢ ἄλλο ποιεῖ μέρος.[235]
>
> First, [if] the poet has represented impossible things that pertain to the art itself, he has made a mistake; but he is right, if he achieves the goal of the art (for the goal has been mentioned), if in this way he makes this very part or another part [of the work] more stunning.

A similar position is restated towards the end of the chapter:

> Ὅλως δὲ τὸ ἀδύνατον μὲν πρὸς τὴν ποίησιν ἢ πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον ἢ πρὸς τὴν δόξαν δεῖ ἀνάγειν. Πρός τε γὰρ τὴν ποίησιν αἱρετώτερον πιθανὸν ἀδύνατον ἢ ἀπίθανον καὶ δυνατόν.[236]
>
> In general, one should [solve] what is impossible with a view to the composition, or to what is better, or to common opinion. For poetry indeed a believable impossibility is preferable to what is unbelievable and possible.

If we read Porphyry's argument in light of this Aristotelian principle,[237] we can gain a better understanding of his background and of his interpretative strategy. The Homeric description contains impossible elements. Among the problematic features of the Homeric passages, Porphyry mentions the fact that the cave is at the same time obscure (ἠεροειδής) and lovely (ἐπήρατος),[238] the fact that nymphs are weaving purple clothes in a dark place, that the color of the clothes is visible despite the obscurity, etc.[239] These impossible elements would be acceptable, from an Aristotelian perspective, if they fulfilled one of the three functions: they must either contribute to the production of the proper poetic effect (πρὸς τὴν ποίησιν), or conform to common opinions (πρὸς τὴν δόξαν), or depict something as better than it is in the

[235] Ar. *Poet*. 25, 1460^b23–26. I would like to thank Richard Janko for sharing his forthcoming new edition of the *Poetics* with me.
[236] Ar. *Poet*. 25, 1461^b9–12.
[237] I am not arguing that Porphyry has this specific tripartition in mind. I just think that this scheme helps us making sense of Porphyry's position.
[238] *De Antro* 3.29–30, on which see above, Ch. 1.v.
[239] *De Antro* 3.39–41.

real world (πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον). But Porphyry has already made it clear that there was no popular belief about the presence of this cave in Ithaca, and it is hard to see how the representation of the cave would conform to the criterion of the 'better than real' (πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον).

Only one option remains: the poet may be striving to produce a strong emotional reaction in the audience, and he may believe that violating a principle of realism is the most effective way to fulfil this aim. However, the representation ought to still be believable. For Aristotle, what grants believability to a poetic creation is the adherence to the principle of necessity or probability. This is made explicit in the definition of poetry in chapter 9: [240]

> Φανερὸν δὲ ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων καὶ ὅτι οὐ τὸ τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τοῦτο ποιητοῦ ἔργον ἐστίν, ἀλλ' οἷα ἂν γένοιτο καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον.[241]
>
> It is clear from what has been said that this is the work of the poet, not to report what has happened, but what could have happened and what is possible according to what is probable and necessary.

It is important to remember that, in the *Poetics*, probability and necessity are to be understood as text–immanent properties that ground the organic unity of the work independently from the fact that what is being told is possible in the extratextual world. This explains why Aristotle is ready to accept the presence of 'believable impossibilities' (ἀδύνατα εἰκότα): what is impossible in the extra–textual world can still be believable within the poem as long as it follows from what is probable and necessary in the economy of the poem and in its fictional world. But this is not the case for the Homeric passage under consideration:

> Ἀνθρώπων γὰρ καὶ θεῶν ὁ πᾶς μὲν πλήρης κόσμος, τὸ δὲ Ἰθακήσιον ἄντρον πόρρω καθέστηκε τοῦ πείθειν ἐν αὐτῷ κατάβασιν εἶναι τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀνάβασιν τῶν θεῶν.[242]
>
> For the entire world is full of humans and gods, and the cave in Ithaca is far from persuading us that inside it there is a way down for humans and a way up for gods.

[240] Cf. also *Poet*. 7, 1451^{a}12; 9, 1451^{b}8–10; 10, 1452^{a}19–22; 11, 1452^{a}23–24; 15, 1454^{a}33–37.
[241] *Poet*. 9, 1451^{a}37–9.
[242] *De Antro* 2. 22–24.

If interpreted literally, Porphyry notices, this *ekphrasis* does not have any cogent connections with the rest of the poem: while the fictional world of the *Odyssey* is full of both divine and mortal beings, nowhere else does Homer suggest that all human souls and gods must go through Ithaca to enter the realm of the mortals. Hence what Homer says about the cave does stem from what is probable and necessary, but breaks the organic unity of the poem. The cave is not a 'believable impossibility', and consequently it does not produce a positive emotional reaction (*psuchagōgia*) in the reader, who just ends up being confused and at loss. If interpreted literally, this Homeric passage is deficient from a *literary* and aesthetic point of view. Since Homer is an excellent artist, the only way to make sense of this passage is to acknowledge that the poet is here speaking allegorically.

As my analysis of the opening chapters of *De Antro* demonstrates, the need for an allegorical interpretation of the description of the cave is justified by appealing to principles that are strictly literary: they concern the effectiveness and excellence of the *Odyssey* as a literary work, in accordance with the poetic and aesthetic standards set out by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. Homer is not (yet) the inspired visionary but a skillful artist whose excellence ought to be assessed according to the aims of the poetic art itself, namely, the production of a psychagogic effect that is achieved through the creation of a believable fictional world.

It is possible that a more conservative reader like Aristarchus would have rejected the proposed solution,[243] but as we saw in the previous chapter Porphyry is willing to stretch the boundaries of what is acceptable within the frame of Aristotelian literary criticism. In line with this tendency, in the next section we will see that Porphyry attempts to reframe his

[243] We have no extant evidence of Aristarchean comments on this passage. However, one can speculate that, facing the lack of credibility and no other possible solutions, he might have athetized it: cf. e.g. schol. A *Il.* 19. 416–17a *Arist.*, reporting the athetesis of two lines by Aristarchus on the ground that it is not believable (ἀπίθανον) that a horse could speak with an erudite tone. As Bouchard 2016, 120–21 points out, Aristarchus does not seem to be bothered by the fact that Achilles' horse is speaking (clearly an ἀδύνατον), but by the refined tone that the horse employs, which is unfitting for an animal and therefore lacks credibility. On Aristarchus' attitude towards supernatural or impossible elements in the Homeric poems, which is ultimately influenced by Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Bouchard 2016, 117–21 and especially Schironi 2018, 417–26.

allegorical reading as a form of historical criticism that is comparable with the Aristotelian 'solution from custom' (λύσις ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔθους).

iv

As we saw in the previous section, at the beginning of *De Antro* Porphyry, following Cronius, argues against the extra–textual existence of the Homeric cave by insisting that it is a poetic creation (πλάσμα). In the second half of chapter 4, however, Porphyry changes his mind and claims that 'concerning the inquiry of the region, those who thought that the cave and all that he said about it are entirely a creation of the poet (τέλεον πλάσμα τοῦ ποιητοῦ) have clearly written in a quite superficial way'.[244] With an unexpected move, Porphyry argues that the cave is not entirely fictional, but it is real place on the island of Ithaca, as the geographer Artemidorus of Ephesus testifies.[245]

The fact that the cave may have had an independent extratextual existence could jeopardize the entire exegetical project: as we have seen in the previous section, Porphyry initially justifies the need for an allegorical interpretation on the ground that the cave was a poetic fiction (πλάσμα). Now, Porphyry needs to argue that the extra–textual existence of the cave does not preclude the possibility that Homer wanted to communicate something allegorically. The Tyrian is well aware of the uncomfortable situation in which he finds himself, and he thus feels compelled to provide a new justification for his exegesis:

> εἴτε δ' οὕτως ἔχον ἀφηγήσατο εἴτε καὶ αὐτός τινα προσέθηκεν, οὐδὲν ἧττον μένει τὰ ζητήματα τὴν βούλησιν ἢ τῶν καθιδρυσαμένων ἢ τοῦ προσθέντος ποιητοῦ

[244] 4.56–58: Περὶ μὲν οὖν τῆς ἐγχωρίου ἱστορίας ῥᾳθυμότερον φαίνονται ἀναγράψαντες ὅσοι τέλεον ᾠήθησαν πλάσμα εἶναι τοῦ ποιητοῦ τό τε ἄντρον καὶ ὅσα περὶ τούτου ἀφηγήσατο.

[245] Artemidorus of Ephesus fr. 55 Stiehle (=Porph. *De Antro* 4, 61–65): '12 stades east from Panormos, the harbor of Kephalenia, there is the island of Ithaca, 85 stades long, narrow and elevated, which has a port named Phorkis; there is a beach there; and in that place a cave sacred to the nymphs, where it is said that Odysseus was disembarked by the Phaeacians' (τῆς δὲ Κεφαληνίας ἀπὸ Πανόρμου λιμένος πρὸς ἀνατολὴν ἀπέχουσα δώδεκα στάδια νῆσός ἐστιν Ἰθάκη σταδίων ὀγδοήκοντα πέντε, στενὴ καὶ μετέωρος, λιμένα ἔχουσα καλούμενον Φόρκυνος· ἔστι δ' αἰγιαλὸς ἐν αὐτῷ· <καὶ> (add. Janko) ἐκεῖ νυμφῶν ἱερὸν ἄντρον, οὗ λέγεται τὸν Ὀδυσσέα ὑπὸ τῶν Φαιάκων ἐκβιβασθῆναι).

> ἀνιχνεύοντι, ὡς ἂν μήτε τῶν παλαιῶν ἄνευ συμβόλων μυστικῶν τὰ ἱερὰ καθιδρυσαμένων μήτε Ὁμήρου ὡς ἔτυχε τὰ περὶ τούτων ἀφηγουμένου.[246]
>
> whether he described things as they are, or he himself added something, nonetheless the questions remain valid for whoever investigates the intention either of those who built it or of the poet who added to it, since neither would the ancients have built sanctuaries without mystical symbols nor would Homer have described things concerning them at random.

Porphyry first considers the possibility that Homer is describing the sanctuary as it is, without any addition. If this is the case, he argues, then the reader must be aware that it was the custom of the ancients to build sanctuaries full of mystical symbols (σύμβολα μυστικά). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that each detail has a hidden meaning that the reader must uncover. This is not a controversial claim for a Platonist like Porphyry, since the view that the 'ancients' used to talk about divine matters by means of symbolic language was a standard *topos* within the Platonic tradition.[247] But what if Homer himself added some details that do not belong to the 'real' cave?

It is necessary for Porphyry to prove once again that these insertions by Homer cannot be the product of chance (ὡς ἔτυχε), since otherwise, as we saw above, any further exegetical activity would become pointless.[248] And indeed, to preempt this possible criticism, Porphyry argues that Homer would have never described sanctuaries at random. But on what basis can Porphyry defend this claim?

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle argues that a good reader must be sensitive to the historical dimension of the Homeric poems. More specifically, he claims that sometimes poetry represents 'things not as better than in reality, but as they actually used to be.'[249] He then

[246] 4.66–70.
[247] Cf. e.g. Plot. 3.6.19, 25–26: 'The ancient wise men communicating through riddles in a mystical way and in their rites (οἱ πάλαι σοφοὶ μυστικῶς καὶ ἐν τελεταῖς αἰνιττόμενοι.). The same idea is voiced by Porphyry in the fragment from *On the Styx* discussed above (fr. 1 Castelletti).
[248] We can perhaps see here a subtle polemic against Stoic allegorists, who believed that poets usually corrupt the pristine wisdom preserved in traditional myths: see Cornutus 31.14–17 with Long 1992, 73 and Struck 2004, 149–51, who points out that 'this vision of the poet radically differs from that of the Aristotelian tradition, where the poet is the sovereign master of the meaning in his text' (150).
[249] *Poet.* 25, 1461^{a}1–2: τὰ δὲ ἴσως οὐ βέλτιον μέν, ἀλλ' οὕτως εἶχεν.

provides an example from *Iliad* 10.152–53, where Homer mentions that the spears of the companions of Diomedes were 'stuck into the ground upright on their spikes' (ἔγχεα δέ σφιν/ ὄρθ' ἐπὶ σαυρωτῆρος ἐλήλατο). Some critics attacked this passage because they perceived this way of keeping the spears as dangerous: the spears could easily fall and produce a loud noise, thus waking up the entire camp; Aristotle defends Homer by simply pointing out that, as the Illyrians still do in his days, 'this was custom at the time of Homer' (οὕτω γὰρ τότ' ἐνόμιζον. 1461ª4).[250]

We know that Porphyry was acquainted with this historicizing method of solving Homeric *zetemata*. In a fragment from the *Homeric Questions*, he discusses the same issue concerning the position of the spears in *Iliad* 10.152–53.[251] A similar interpretative strategy is adopted in several extant Porphyrian scholia. To mention a second example, while commenting on *Iliad* 11.630–31, [252] Porphyry notices that some critics attacked the content of the passage because it would be 'contrary to medical investigation' (παρὰ τὴν ἰατρικὴν ἱστορίαν): the ingredients that are used for the preparation of a healing potion by Hecamede are not suitable for treating the wounded Machaon. Porphyry reports a solution 'on the basis of custom' (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔθους): given that different medical treatments were common in the heroic past, we should not blame Homer for not describing what current doctors would prescribe. Again, this example shows how Porphyry is sensible to the historical dimension of the Homeric poems, aware that what may seem strange to readers in the 3rd century CE can be justified by appealing to customs that were common at Homer's times.

[250] On this passage from the *Poetics* see Mayhew 2019, 15; see also Verhasselt 2020, 225–29 with a survey of extant fragments from Aristotle's *Homeric Questions* that preserve similar historicizing solutions.
[251] See Porph. *HQ Il.* 10.153 MacPhail (= p. 145, 13–17 Schrader).
[252] Porph. *HQ Il.* 11.630–31, 2–3 MacPhail (= p. 167, 11–14 Schrader, who follows *B in referring the *zetema* to line 624). For other examples of 'solution from custom' cf. also *HQ Il.* 3.379–80, 3 Macphail (= p. 65, 2–4 Schrader), on the habit of carrying two spears; ad 4.297 (p. 73,20–25 Schrader, not in Macphail) on the disposition of the army; 20.67–75, 8 MacPhail (= p. 241, 13–17 Schrader), on the theomachy.

This form of historical criticism helps us to frame Porphyry's exegetical strategy in the passage from *De Antro* under consideration. Porphyry places Homer's description within a specific historical setting and grounds his allegorical interpretation by appealing to the habits of that period. Since it was the custom of the ancients to build sanctuaries full of 'mystical symbols,' and since the cave that Homer describes in Ithaca is a sanctuary consecrated to the Nymphs, it is reasonable, Porphyry assumes, that Homer is following the habit of his days and thus using symbols in his *ekphrasis* too: this is why Porphyry can confidently claim that Homer would have not 'described things concerning sanctuaries at random'. The payoff of considering Porphyry's argument a kind of 'solution from custom' (λύσις ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔθους) is that we can still see the Neoplatonist philosopher operating within the frame of Aristotelian criticism.

This has an important consequence also for how Porphyry approaches the process of decoding the hidden meanings of the Homeric passage. Indeed, Porphyry's Homer is not a 'romantic' poet who communicates through allegorical images that are produced by his unrestrained imagination; rather, he is a skillful artist who draws on a pool of symbols that are already endowed with meanings, and who uses these symbols as ideograms to communicate a certain vision of the world and human fate. This means that, in line with the principles of Aristotelian poetics, Homer is in control over his text, and fully in charge of constructing its meaning. Hence, in decoding the Homeric symbols, the reader must still strive to interpret 'Homer from Homer', as a look at the central section of *De Antro* will demonstrate.

v

In the process of decoding the symbolic language used by Homer, Porphyry tends to list several different interpretations that allegedly are at odds with each other.[253] For example, caves can be

[253] Porphyry's style has been called 'paratactic' by Smith 2007, 13. See also Akçay 2019, 26.

a symbol either of the material world,[254] or of the invisible powers operating within the material,[255] or of the intelligible world itself;[256] the nymphs can be symbols either of the powers presiding over water, or of souls descending into generation;[257] honey can symbolize either purification or destruction due to sensual pleasures;[258] etc. This seemingly incoherent accumulation of meanings has baffled modern scholars. For example, Karl Praechter, in an influential study on Neoplatonic schools published at the beginning of the last century, explained away these alleged contradictions by appealing to Porphyry's personality and personal interests. More specifically, he thought that the presence of multiple explanations for each symbol may be due to Porphyry's desire to show off his erudition.[259]

A more charitable approach was championed by Robert Lamberton. Lamberton has argued that the presence of several, and often contradictory, interpretations for the same symbol helps Porphyry to bring out the richness of the text on which he is commenting.[260] Lamberton also suggests that Porphyry's willingness to find multiple referents for each symbol is a direct consequence of his Plotinian philosophical commitments, especially his commitment to the doctrine of the undescended soul: since an individual exists simultaneously at multiple levels of reality, different interpretations of the same object depend on whether the object is being grasped from the point of view of the embodied soul or of the disembodied mind, or from an intermediary standpoint between these two poles.[261]

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[254] *De Antro* 5.75–6.107
[255] *De Antro* 7.108–9.138
[256] *De Antro* 9.138–139.
[257] *De Antro* 10.153–13.199.
[258] *De Antro* 15.221–27.
[259] Praechter 1910, 127–28.
[260] See Lamberton 1986,121: 'For an exegete who is committed to articulating the meaning of a text in all its richness, and who, having accepted the presence of a second level of meaning behind the first, is quite willing to multiply those levels, the fact that various levels of meaning begin to enter into contradiction is relatively unimportant. All enhance the text.' I find this suggestion fascinating but ultimately problematic, as it is too much dependent on modern reader–response theories that we do not find in Porphyry. On the contrary, the philosopher states that his aim is to uncover the intention of Homer, which suggests that a coherent and more cohesive interpretation would bring him closer to his target.
[261] Porphyry hints at the influence that philosophical progress has over the perception of reality: cf. *De Antro* 12, 190–92: 'But for souls being initiated to nature and for the daemons that preside over generation the world is sacred and loveable even though dark and obscure in its nature.' (ἀλλὰ ψυχαῖς μὲν τελουμέναις εἰς φύσιν καὶ

Building on Lamberton's attempt to ground Porphyry's allegorical exegesis on a solid Neoplatonic basis, Crystal Addey has more recently claimed that criticizing *De Antro* for its alleged incoherence means superimposing a linear way of thinking over the allegorical practice.[262] Indeed, allegory is not a bijective relationship connecting a symbol and its referent in a univocal way. On the contrary, Addey suggests, the co–existence of several interpretations for each symbol is rooted in the Neoplatonic theory of universal sympathy (συμπάθεια), according to which the whole universe, sensible and intelligible, is inextricably interwoven, and therefore the same truth can be expressed in different forms at different levels. Taking as an example the three interpretations of the cave that we have considered above, Addey points out that they do not really express three different realities, but the same reality unfolding from the highest level (the intelligible universe) to the lowest (the material world).

Lamberton's and Addey's discussions have the merit of shedding light on the Neoplatonic background to Porphyry's theory of symbols more generally. But to what extent does Porphyry think that a symbol maintains its polysemic status also *within* the Homeric poems? Claiming that a symbol can be legitimately used to refer to several different things does not imply that all its referents are simultaneously evoked whenever the symbol is used. Indeed, the polysemy of a symbol is not so different from the polysemy of standard words that we considered in the previous chapter: a good reader must be aware of this linguistic feature,so that they can identify the meaning that is relevant for the passage under examination.[263]As my analysis will show, in Porphyry's view the authorial control that Homer exercises over his work partially mitigates the proliferation of meanings of the symbols that he uses.

γενεθλίοις δαίμοσιν ἱερός τε ὁ κόσμος καὶ ἐπέραστος καίπερ σκοτεινὸς ὢν φύσει καὶ ἡροειδής). As noted by F. Jourdan in the French commentary, the 'souls being initiated to nature' must refer to souls who have knowledge of Platonic physics: see Dorandi 2019, 199.

[262] See Addey 2014, 67–71.

[263] We saw an example of this when we looked at the metonymic use of divine names in Homer: see above, Ch. 1.iv.

We can gain a good understanding of Porphyry's exegetical method if we look at the first symbol that he tries to decode, namely, the cave itself. Drawing on a variety of sources,[264] Porphyry argues that caves were used as symbols of three different things:

> Ὅτι μὲν οὖν σύμβολον κόσμου τὰ ἄντρα καὶ τῶν ἐγκοσμίων δυνάμεων ἐτίθεντο οἱ θεολόγοι, διὰ τούτων δεδήλωται· ἤδη δὲ καὶ ὅτι τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας εἴρηται, ἐκ διαφόρων μέντοι καὶ οὐ τῶν αὐτῶν ἐννοιῶν ὁρμώμενοι. τοῦ μὲν γὰρ αἰσθητοῦ κόσμου διὰ τὸ σκοτεινὰ εἶναι τὰ ἄντρα καὶ πετρώδη καὶ δίυγρα, τοιοῦτον δ' εἶναι τὸν κόσμον διὰ τὴν ὕλην ἐξ ἧς συνέστηκεν ὁ κόσμος, καὶ ἀντίτυπον καὶ ῥευστὸν ἐτίθεντο· τοῦ δ' αὖ νοητοῦ διὰ τὸ ἀφανὲς αἰσθήσει καὶ στερρὸν καὶ βέβαιον τῆς οὐσίας.[265]
>
> Through these [examples] it has been made clear that the theologians established the caves as a symbol of the world and of the encosmic powers; it has already been said that they [i.e. the theologians] have posited the cave [as a symbol] also of the intelligible substance, even if starting from different conceptions. For [they established caves as a symbol] of the sensible world because caves are obscure, rocky, and wet, and such they considered the world [to be] because of the matter from which the world is composed, namely [they considered the world] resistant and flowing; but on the other hand [they made the cave a symbol] of the intelligible world because it is invisible to perception, and because of the firmness and solidity of its essence.

Porphyry here summarizes the results of his research into the symbolic meanings of caves that he has carried out in the preceding chapters (5–8). Three possibilities are presented: caves were used either as a symbol of the 'encosmic powers' (ἐγκόσμιοι δύναμεις), or the 'intelligible substance' (νοητὴ οὐσία), or the 'sensible world' (αἰσθητὸς κόσμος).[266] Porphyry justifies these symbolic meanings by connecting each of them to 'different conceptions' (διάφοροι ἔννοιαι), which I take to indicate different ways in which caves and their attributes can be perceived. Hence, when caves are considered from the point of view of their rockiness and wetness, they are used as symbols for the material/sensible world: the sensible world, at least according to a Platonist, shares with rocks the property of being (metaphorically) resistant,

[264] He mentions Zoroaster (5.96–103); the Olympian gods (5.103–107); the myth of Cronos (7.108–114); the Pythagoreans and Plato (8.125–136).
[265] *De Antro* 9.137–143.
[266] For a philosophical analysis of Porphyry's conception of the sensible world and its relation to the intelligible realm as it emerges from *De Antro* see Akçay 2019, ch. 2.

since it cannot be penetrated by reason,[267] while it shares with water the property of being in a constant flux, as it is the place of generation and change. Conversely, when caves are considered from the point of view of their obscurity and solidity, they can be used as symbols for the intelligible world, since the world of the forms is unchanging, and it cannot be penetrated by the senses. Finally, if one takes into a consideration a combination of all these qualities, caves can be used as a symbol for the invisible powers that operate within the material world (the 'encosmic powers'), since these powers occupy an intermediate position between the noetic and the sensible universe. It is thus clear that the associations between symbol and its referents are based on a criterion of similarity, namely on the fact that they both share some specific properties.[268]

But are all these symbolic meanings relevant for the interpretation of the Homeric cave? And if not, how can a reader decide which one is being activated within the poem? Porphyry answers these questions by looking closely at Homer's words and at how the poet himself describes his cave:

> διπλοῦ δ' ὄντος ἄντρου, [ὡς καὶ τὸ παρ' Ὁμήρῳ δίθυρον],[269] οὐκέτι τοῦτο ἐπὶ τῆς νοητῆς, ἀλλὰ τῆς αἰσθητῆς παρελάμβανον οὐσίας, ὡς καὶ τὸ νῦν παραληφθὲν διὰ τὸ ἔχειν, <ὡς> φησίν, 'ὕδατα ἀενάοντα' οὐκ ἂν εἴη τῆς νοητῆς ὑποστάσεως, ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐνύλου φέρον οὐσίας σύμβολον.[270]
>
> But since the cave was double, [like the word *dithuron* in Homer] they no longer considered it in reference to intelligible essence, but as a symbol of the sensible essence, since the one that is also at the moment under consideration, because it has "ever–flowing water", as [the poet] says, would not be a symbol of the intelligible hypostasis, but of material substance.

[267] Cf. e.g. Plato, *Timaeus* 52B2–3.
[268] Pépin 1966, 241–46 talks about a 'calculated pluralism' (pluralism calculé): the symbolic meanings do not just proliferate indiscriminately, but they are carefully justified. See also Struck 2004, 71–5, who however sees Porphyry as explicitly opposing Aristotle's conception of poetry, a point that I am trying to disprove.
[269] This was added on the top of δίπλου. . . ἄντρου in V. Nauck, followed by Dorandi, considers it a glossa, but the American editors printed it in their text. I suspend judgment on the issue, but I still leave it in the quotation and translation because it helps to make my point clearer, though it is not necessary for what I am arguing.
[270] *De Antro* 10.147–51

Porphyry is explicit in arguing that the Homeric cave has only one symbolic meaning: it is a symbol of the sensible (αἰσθητή) and material (ἔνυλος) substance. To support his interpretation, Porphyry looks closely at the Homeric text. In his description, Homer says that inside the cave in Ithaca water flows constantly:[271] this is taken by Porphyry to be an important clue that the poet provides for disambiguating the symbolic meaning of his cave. Indeed, as we saw above, caves were used as symbols of the material world because of their obscurity, rockiness, and wetness.[272] It follows that, since the Homeric cave is closely associated with water, this cave must be taken to be a symbol of the sensible substance. This proves that Homer is exercising a strong control over the meaning of the text, as he guides readers towards the correct understanding of his symbols: in a way, 'Homer is interpreting himself'. Consequently, a good allegorical interpreter like Porphyry pays attention to all the details of the text, with the goal of interpreting Homer from Homer: the Homeric text provides the touchstone against which readers must test their interpretations.

We find a similar procedure also in the discussion of other symbols that Homer uses in the passage under consideration. For example, Porphyry identifies two possible symbolic referents for the Nymphs to whom the cave is consecrated: they can be either symbols of the powers that preside over water, or of the souls that descend into generation.[273] To prove this point Porphyry, drawing on Numenius, presents a wide range of evidence that includes Heraclitus, a passage from *Genesis*, Egyptian rituals etc.[274] He then gets back to the Homeric text, and claims the Nymphs Naiades, to whom the cave in Ithaca is consecrated, represent indeed both the powers presiding over water and the souls descending into generation.[275] One may think that, in this case, the polysemy of the symbol has overcome the control that the poet

[271] *Od.* 13.109: 'Inside there is ever–flowing water' (ἐν δ' ὕδατ' ἀενάοντα).
[272] *De Antro* 9.139–41: τοῦ μὲν γὰρ αἰσθητοῦ κόσμου διὰ τὸ σκοτεινὰ εἶναι τὰ ἄντρα καὶ πετρώδη καὶ δίυγρα.
[273] *De Antro* 9.153–54.
[274] *De Antro* 9.155– 12,196.
[275] *De Antro* 13.197–98.

exercises on his creation, and that Porphyry, not knowing how to solve this *zetema*, blames the ambiguity of Homer's words. However, a closer look at the text shows that Porphyry's move is more sophisticated, as he suggests that Homer himself consciously signals this ambiguity by putting into the cave some symbolic items that are fitting for the nymphs *qua* powers of the water, and others that are fitting for the nymphs *qua* souls:

> λίθινοι δὲ κρατῆρες καὶ ἀμφιφορεῖς ταῖς προεστώσαις τοῦ ἐκ πετρῶν ἐξιόντος ὕδατος νύμφαις οἰκειότατοι· ψυχαῖς δὲ εἰς γένεσιν κατιούσαις καὶ σωματουργίαν τί ἂν εἴη οἰκειότερον σύμβολον τούτων; διὸ καὶ ἀπετόλμησεν εἰπεῖν ὁ ποιητὴς ὅτι ἐν τούτοις
>
> ‘φάρε’ ὑφαίνουσιν ἁλιπόρφυρα, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι’.
>
> ἐν ὀστοῖς μὲν γὰρ καὶ περὶ ὀστᾶ ἡ σαρκοποιία, λίθος δὲ ταῦτα ἐν ζῴοις λίθῳ ἐοικότα· διὸ καὶ οἱ ἱστοὶ οὐκ ἀπ’ ἄλλης ὕλης, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τοῦ λίθου ἐρρήθησαν.[276]
>
> Stony craters and amphorae are most fitting for the nymphs presiding over the water that springs from the rocks; but for the souls that come down into generation and into the creation of bodies what symbol would be more fitting than looms? For this reason, the poet dared to say also that on these [looms] they
>
> ‘Weave sea–purpled clothes, a marvel to behold.’
>
> Indeed, the creation of flesh happens on bones and around bones, and these are stones in animals because they resemble stones; for this reason, the looms were said to be not of any other matter, but of stone.

Once again, the details of the text of Homer should guide the careful readers towards a correct interpretation. In Homer's cave we find amphorae and craters, which are symbolic items fitting for the nymphs *qua* powers of the water. Even if Porphyry does not provide an explicit justification for this association, one can easily see that amphorae and craters were commonly used to store and pour liquids.[277] But Homer puts in the cave stony looms too, which are fitting for the Nymphs *qua* souls.[278] Indeed, Porphyry argues, stony looms symbolize the bones on which flesh is 'woven' when souls undergo embodiment. And indeed the clothes that are being woven on the looms are sea–purple (ἁλιπόρφυρα), a color that reminds that of

[276] *De Antro* 14.205–13.
[277] The fact that they are made of stone (λίθινοι) is also significant: if the vessels were made of terracotta, they would be more fitting symbols for Dionysus because 'the fruit of the vine is brought to maturity by the divine fire' (ἐπεὶ ἀπὸ πυρὸς οὐρανίου πεπαίνεται ταύτης ὁ καρπός, at 13.205). The analogy is clear: both grapes and ceramic implements need to be exposed to heat.
[278] *De Antro* 14.207–8.

the flesh. Hence, even when Homer does not reduce the polysemy of a symbol to a single meaning, he is still responsible for providing clues that will guide readers towards a correct understanding of the text.

These two samples of Porphyry's allegoresis show that the exegetical method in *De Antro* is more systematic than what previous scholars have suggested. It proceeds in two distinct steps. First, Porphyry identifies all the possible referents of the symbol under investigation. After this preliminary survey, Porphyry goes back to the text of Homer and looks for clues that can help him to pinpointing which symbolic meaning is relevant in this context. This approach bears a close resemblance to a standard philological practice that is well–attested in the tradition of Homeric criticism, where an interpreter lists all the possible meanings of a word, before determining which one is relevant in the passage under consideration. So a method that was used to deal with lexical ambiguities is here expanded for solving problems of symbolic/allegorical ambiguities.

vi

In the previous sections, we have seen that in *De Antro* Porphyry justifies the need for an allegorical interpretation of the Homeric passage by using aesthetic and critical categories that belong to the Peripatetic tradition of literary criticism, such as *psuchagōgia*, *to pithanon*, and an appeal to historical customs. Furthermore, in decoding the allegorical meaning of the Homeric passage, Porphyry tries to show that Homer guides the interpreter through textual clues that help disambiguate the referents of the symbols that he uses. In line with Aristotle's poetic theory, the poet remains fully in control of the meaning of his work, and hence the reader shall still try to interpret 'Homer from Homer'.

In the final chapters,[279] Porphyry suggests that the plot of the entire poem can be read as an allegory: Odysseus himself becomes the symbol of a human soul going through multiple cycles of reincarnation, until he finally breaks free from the chains of the material world and is re–established in his own proper seat in the intelligible world.

The expansion of the scope of his allegorical reading prompts Porphyry to justify his exegesis once again:

> Οὐ δεῖ δὲ τὰς τοιαύτας ἐξηγήσεις βεβιασμένας ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ εὑρεσιλογούντων πιθανότητας, λογιζόμενον δὲ τὴν παλαιὰν σοφίαν καὶ τὴν Ὁμήρου ὅση τις φρόνησις γέγονε καὶ πάσης ἀρετῆς ἀκρίβειαν μὴ ἀπογινώσκειν ὡς ἐν μυθαρίου πλάσματι εἰκόνας τῶν θειοτέρων ἠνίσσετο. οὐ γὰρ ἐνῆν ἐπιτυχῶς πλάσσειν ὅλην ὑπόθεσιν μὴ ἀπό τινων ἀληθῶν μεταποιοῦντα τὸ πλάσμα. ἀλλὰ περὶ μὲν τούτου εἰς ἄλλην πραγματείαν ὑπερκείσθω τὸ σύγγραμμα, περὶ δὲ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου ἄντρου πέρας ἔχει τὰ τῆς ἑρμηνείας ἐνταῦθα.[280]
>
> One should not think that such interpretations are forced and that they are the products of those who invent ingenious arguments; but reflecting on the ancient wisdom and on the wisdom of Homer– on how great its intelligence has been–, and on its precision in every virtue, one should not reject the idea that Homer has enigmatically presented images of more divine things in his creation of a mythical tale. For it was not possible to create an entire story randomly, without fashioning his creation starting from some truths. But the book on this issue shall be postponed to a different investigation, the things concerning the interpretation of the cave that is under consideration ends here.

Porphyry reiterates once again the by now familiar idea that Homer could not have composed his work at random (ἐπιτυχῶς πλάσσειν). There is, however, a crucial difference between this final chapter and the initial discussion: while at the beginning of *De Antro* the attention of Porphyry was directed only to the description of the cave in *Odyssey* 13.102–112, here it is the entire subject–matter of the poem (ὅλην ὑπόθεσιν) that cannot be the product of mere chance.[281] To support this claim, Porphyry argues that Homer must have started from some external truths (ἀπό τινων ἀληθῶν) and then reproduced them in his creation (μεταποιοῦντα τὸ πλάσμα).

[279] *De Antro* 34.465–35.496.
[280] *De Antro* 36.497–504.
[281] The term ὑπόθεσις belongs to the technical jargon of literary and rhetorical criticism, and it refers both to the aim that a poet or orator strives to achieve through their literary creation and to the subject matter of the literary artifact itself: see Meijering 1987, 107–113.

This conception of poetic mimesis can be considered Platonic for two reasons. First, in the *Ion* and, more extensively, the *Phaedrus*, we find a theory of inspiration according to which poets are granted access to higher forms of knowledge, which they then are able to transmit in their works.[282] Second, and crucially, the way in which Porphyry describes the process of poetic creation in *De Antro* bears close similarities to how he conceives the activity of the demiurge in his lost *Commentary on the Timaeus*. In a fragment preserved by Proclus, Porphyry comments on Plato's use of the adjective 'the best' (ἄριστος) to describe the demiurge.[283] In this passage, Porphyry argues that the demiurge creates as the best artisan does: their creations are the most beautiful not randomly (κατὰ τύχην), but because they both imitate a superior model.[284] Hence, Homer, like the demiurge, contemplates certain truths and tries to reproduce them in his verses. This mimetic process prevents randomness from entering into the poems, in the same way as imitating the forms guarantees that the cosmos does not happen to be beautiful by chance, but because it is a copy of the most beautiful model. But we can push the analogy a bit further: like the Platonic demiurge, Homer needs to operate with pre–existing materials that are at his disposal, namely, mythical tales (μυθάρια)[285] and traditional symbols. In both

[282] See especially Pl. *Phaedr.* 245A and *Ion* 533D–555A. Though modern scholars debate whether Socrates is speaking ironically in these passages, ancient Platonists took the theory of poetic madness very seriously, since it provided them with a Platonic basis for the rehabilitation of Homer and poetry more generally: cf. e.g. Procl. *in Rp.* VI.2, 1.182.21–185.7 Kroll. Porphyry himself seems to have taken the passage in the *Phaedrus* as a defense of poetic madness: see *HQ Il* .6.129–34, 7 MacPhail (=92.15–17 Schrader): 'And Plato by separating the kinds of madness shows the good and divine ones' (καὶ Πλάτων δὲ διαιρῶν τὰς μανίας δείκνυσι τὰς ἀγαθάς τε καὶ θείας). Cf. also *Plot.* 15.1–5, where Porphyry recounts an occasion when he himself became possessed by poetic madness and composed an allegorical poem.

[283] Cf. Pl. *Tim.* 29A5–6: 'The former (*scil.* the cosmos) is the most beautiful of the things that have come into being, the latter (*scil.* the demiurge) is the best of the causes' (ὁ μὲν γὰρ κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων, ὁ δ' ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων). Ancient readers were baffled by the fact that at 29A2–3 the cosmos is said to be 'beautiful' (καλός) and the demiurge is said to be good (ἀγαθός), while at A5–6 we find the superlative κάλλιστος and ἄριστος.

[284] Porph. *in Tim.* fr. 44 Sodano (=Procl. *in Tim.* 332.9–18, commenting on Pl. *Tim.* 29A4–B1): 'Porphyry adds that, if the Demiurge is the best, it does not follow that he looks to that which is everlasting [as paradigm] if he does not create beautiful products, and that, if he were to create beautiful products, it does not follow that he looks to that which is everlasting if he does not as the best craftsman make beautiful objects, but he could do this by chance' (Προστίθησι δὲ ὁ Πορφύριος, ὅτι οὔτε, εἰ ἄριστος ὁ δημιουργός, ἕπεται τὸ βλέπειν αὐτὸν πρὸς τὸ ἀίδιον, εἰ μὴ καλὰ δημιουργοῖ, οὔτε, εἰ καλὰ δημιουργοίη ⟦τις⟧, τὸ βλέπειν πρὸς τὸ ἀίδιον, εἰ μὴ ὡς ἄριστος δημιουργὸς τὰ καλὰ ποιεῖ, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τύχην). Tr. by Runia.

[285] I take the genitive μυθαρίου as a genitive of matter, clarifying what the creation (πλάσμα) is made of.

cases, the result is a properly ordered creation that tries to be as close as possible to its superior model.

The analogy between the artist and the demiurge is not an innovation by Porphyry: we find hints at this view already in the Middle–Platonic tradition,[286] and this idea clearly lies behind Plotinus's aesthetic theory as it is articulated in *Enneads* V.8.1.[287] This analogy is a response to Plato's criticism of poetry in *Republic* 10. While Plato argues that artistic mimesis is thrice removed from the truth insofar as it imitates sensible objects that are in turn images of the intelligible ideas, later Platonic philosophers suggested that some gifted artists can access a higher level of reality and thus be closer to the truth.[288] In the tradition preceding Porphyry, the analogy between the artist and the demiurge seems to have been applied exclusively to the visual arts; but Porphyry extends it to poetry, thus anticipating what will become a core idea in later Neoplatonic aesthetic.[289]

More relevantly to the current analysis, this final Platonic turn is not presented in opposition to the Aristotelian approach that we have explored above, but rather as its natural outcome. Aristotelian critical categories have pushed readers to consider the description of the cave as an allegory and have helped them to uncover the meanings of the symbols employed by Homer. Once those symbols have been decoded, it turns out that Homer is conveying a very Platonic view of the soul and its destiny. This is explicable, Porphyry argues, if and only if Homer had access to a higher form of knowledge and used it as a paradigm for his poem.

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[286] Cf. e.g Alcinous 9.1, 163.21–23 Whittaker; Sen. *Ep*. 65.7–10 (a brief exposition of a Platonic theory of causes); Philostr. *Vita Apollonii* 6.19.2.

[287] As noted by Halliwell 2002, 320, poetry is absent from any explicit discussion of mimetic arts in Plotinus, though the Neoplatonist philosopher may have treated poetry as a mimetic art for its capacity to guide the human mind to higher levels of reality through allegory. Smith 2017, 75–6, points out how Plotinus' theory is deeply entrenched in a tradition stretching back to the time of Cicero.

[288] Porphyry's claim that Homer must be starting from 'some truths' (ἀπό τινων ἀληθῶν) could be seen as a subtle reply to Plato's accusation that Homer is 'thrice removed from the truth' (τρίτος ἀπὸ ἀληθείας, *Rp.*10.599D2).

[289] See the seminal study by Coulter 1976, especially ch. 4, and the recent monograph by Motta 2018. Cf. also Struck 2004, 243–5 on the demiurgic poet in Proclus.

Conclusion

As my analysis has demonstrated, in *De Antro* Porphyry combines Aristotelian and Platonic poetics. He first justifies his allegorical interpretations by means of categories that belong to the Aristotelian tradition, such as the idea of *psuchagōgia* and a strong sensibility to the (alleged) historical context in which Homer operated. Furthermore, he shows that, even when interpreting Homer allegorically, a reader must still look carefully at all the details of the text, since the poet uses them to guide readers towards a correct understanding. At the same time, he stretches Aristotle's poetical theory to its limits, and he reaches the (very un–Aristotelian) conclusion that Homer conveys Platonic philosophical doctrines. This pushes Porphyry to finally acknowledge, in the last chapter, the limits of the Aristotelian frame. Indeed, while he has been able to uncover the hidden meanings conveyed by Homer, a question remains to be answered: how did Homer know about all of these? To answer this question, Platonic poetics comes to his rescue. At this point, Aristotle has exhausted his function, and Porphyry needs to appeal to a Platonic theory of poetic inspiration that takes into consideration the possibility for the poet to gaze at a higher reality and use it as a model for his creative work. Indeed, as a Platonist who is deeply committed to ontological dualism, Porphyry believes in the existence of paradigmatic causes:[290] he thus turns his attention towards the model that the demiurgic poet is contemplating and reproducing.

Porphyry postpones a fuller treatment of this topic to a future work that unfortunately does not survive. But my reconstruction of Porphyry's argumentative strategy in *De Antro* demonstrates that this short, eccentric essay is a core component of Porphyry's broader philosophical and exegetical project, as he attempts to build a bridge between the two main branches of literary criticism, the philological and the philosophical, and between the two main

[290] Cf. Porph. 120F. Smith: Plato adds a paradigmatic cause (τὸ πρὸς ὅ, ὡς τὸ παράδειγμα) to the four traditional Aristotelian causes.

poetic theories that underpin these traditions, the Aristotelian and the Platonic. Hence, a correct interpretation of Homer that is grounded in what for Porphyry is the proper exegetical procedure is beneficial for the philosophical growth of the readers. As next chapter will show, the contrapositive is also true: interpretations that fail to meet the proper philological standard produce a baneful philosophical system.

Appendix

Odyssey 13.102–112

αὐτὰρ ἐπὶ κρατὸς λιμένος τανύφυλλος ἐλαίη,
ἀγχόθι δ’ αὐτῆς ἄντρον ἐπήρατον ἠεροειδές,
ἱρὸν νυμφάων αἳ νηιάδες καλέονται.
ἐν τῷ κρητῆρές τε καὶ ἀμφιφορῆες ἔασι
λάινοι· ἔνθα δ’ ἔπειτα τιθαιβώσσουσι μέλισσαι.
ἐν δ’ ἱστοὶ λίθεοι περιμήκεες, ἔνθα τε νύμφαι
φάρε’ ὑφαίνουσιν ἁλιπόρφυρα, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι·
ἐν δ’ ὕδατ’ ἀενάοντα. δύω δέ τέ οἱ θύραι εἰσίν,
αἱ μὲν πρὸς βορέαο καταβαταὶ ἀνθρώποισιν,
αἱ δ’ αὖ πρὸς νότου εἰσὶ θεώτεραι· οὐδέ τι κείνῃ
ἄνδρες ἐσέρχονται, ἀλλ’ ἀθανάτων ὁδός ἐστιν.

But at the end of the harbor there is an olive tree with slender leaves,
And near it a lovely obscure cave,
Sacred to the nymphs who are called Naiades.
Inside it there are craters and amphorae of marble.
There bees store honey.
There are very large stony looms, and there the nymphs
Weave clothes of the purple color of the sea, a marvel to behold.
There are waters that continuously flow. And there are two doors,
One towards Boreas through which mortals descend,
But the door towards Notos is more divine: men do not come in
That way, but it is the path of the immortals.

Chapter 3

Bad Readers: Porphyry's criticism of Christian exegesis

Porphyry was the first pagan philosopher with a deep knowledge of several books of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.[291] Most Porphyrian references to the Scriptures come from a work that is commonly known as *Against the Christians* (*Chris.*), a vehement refutation of Christianity that unfortunately survives only in fragments. Indeed, soon after Porphyry's death, with the ascension of Constantine to the imperial throne and the affirmation of Christianity at the highest levels of the imperial hierarchy, *Chris.* began to be perceived as one of the most dangerous threats to the new emerging order, to the point that Constantine himself ordered its destruction.[292] The work is thus lost, while Porphyry became a sort of bogeyman for Christian apologists, who still felt the need to refute his attacks long after Constantine's reign.[293]

This chapter will attempt to reconstruct a specific facet of Porphyry's polemic: his criticisms of Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. It is commonly thought that Porphyry's attacks against Origen and Christian exegetes were ultimately grounded in *a–priori* assumptions concerning which texts ought to be read allegorically. Consequently, Porphyry's criticisms tend to be understood only within the frame of the broader culture war

[291] A complete survey of Porphyry's references to the Bible is in Becker 2016, 28–29. For a commented overview of Porphyry's reference to the Scriptures see Cook 2000, 103–67 (for the New Testament) and Cook 2004, 150–247 (for the Old Testament). Celsus, the author of the earliest known polemical work against Christianity, seems to have had a much more superficial knowledge of the Scriptures: see Cook 2004, 57–8, and Becker 2016, 28 n. 155.
[292] Cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.9.33. The same condemnation is reiterated in 435 CE by Theodosius II and Valentinianus (see *Codex Justinianus* 1.5.6).
[293] The fact that *Chris.* is referenced by authors who lived well after 435 CE demonstrates that some copies of Porphyry's work were still circulating. For a complete list of sources see Becker 2016, 17–20.

between pagans and Christians. I will challenge this dismissive view by arguing that Porphyry's rejection of Christian readings of the Hebrew Bible depends on a coherent theory of interpretation. Indeed, Porphyry attacks Christian readers because he considers their exegesis of the Hebrew Bible flawed both philologically and philosophically. This proves that the main problem with Christian interpretations lies in the wrong methodology of the readers, not in *a–priori* assumptions concerning the status of the source text.

After a brief introduction dealing with preliminary methodological issues (**i**), I will present and criticize the standard view of Porphyry's critique of Christian allegorism (**ii**); next I will provide a detailed close reading of the longest extant quotation from *Chris.* (**iii**–**iv**) and put it in dialogue with other Porphyrian passages, so that we can reconstruct a coherent and philosophically sound picture of Porphyry's criticism of Christian hermeneutics; I conclude by showing how my reconstruction of Porphyry's critique helps us to understand a mysterious Porphyrian quotation preserved in a commentary on the Ecclesiastes by Didymus (**v**).

i

Some words must be said about what Porphyry's *Chris.* is, since this work has received scanty attention from classicists, especially within the English–speaking academic world, and many readers may be completely unfamiliar with it.[294] Porphyry's *Chris.* is quite a mysterious beast, and almost nothing about it is certain or undisputed. Three issues in particular have been at the center of often bitter scholarly debates: its title (and its very existence), its dating and *Sitz im Leben,* and the criteria for selecting and editing its extant

[294] Even in the most recent monographic treatment of Porphyry by Johnson 2013, fragments from *Chris.* do not receive a great deal of attention. But Johnson has dealt with this work in several independent articles (see e.g. Johnson 2010, 2012, 2016). See also Magny 2014, the most recent study in English that is entirely devoted to this work. *Chris.* fares much better in continental Europe (see especially the collection of essays in Morlet 2011a and the new edition by Becker 2016).

fragments. I will briefly address each of these issues, not with the aim of proposing new solutions, but in order to highlight if and how these unsolved questions may influence my analysis.

The debate concerning the title of the work springs from the fact that the earliest explicit reference to a work by Porphyry in 15 books that is unambiguously entitled *Against the Christians* is in the Byzantine lexicon *Suda.* In the list of Porphyrian works that is part of the entry devoted to the Tyrian philosopher, the anonymous lexicographer mentions a Κατὰ Χριστιανῶν λόγους ιε΄.[295] In earlier Christian apologists and writers, on the other hand, we find references to a work written by Porphyry 'against the Christians',[296] or 'against us'. [297] It is ambiguous whether these early authors were referring to the specific title of one of Porphyry's work, or more generally to the topic and aim of one Porphyrian book. This situation has led some scholars to cast doubt on the existence of *Chris*.[298] The fiercest advocate for this position is Pier Franco Beatrice. In a series of articles published in the late 80s and early 90s, Beatrice argued that Porphyry never composed one single coherent treatise in fifteen books with the title *Against the Christians*.[299] Beatrice thinks that Eusebius and other Christian apologists are referring to the Porphyrian work commonly known as *Philosophy from Oracles*, which was perceived by Christians as a direct attack against their

[295] *Suda* Π 2098.10 Adler (= Porph. 2,19T. Smith). As Becker 2016, 16 n. 85 points out, it was common in Late Antiquity to use the word λόγος with the meaning of 'book'.
[296] Eus. *HE* 6.19.9 (= Porph. *Chr.* 6F Becker): ταῦτα τῷ Πορφυρίῳ κατὰ τὸ τρίτον σύγγραμμα τῶν γραφέντων αὐτῷ κατὰ Χριστιανῶν εἴρηται (these things have been said by Porphyry in the third book of the [books] that have been written by him against the Christians). Cf. also e.g. Severian of Gabala, *In Mundi creationem* 6.487,45–6 (Πορφυρίῳ . . .τῷ κατὰ Χριστιανῶν συγγράψαντι); Aug. *Epist.* 102,8 (*de Porphyrio contra christianos tamquam validiora decerpta*).
[297] Cf. e.g. Eus. *PE* 1.9.20, 5–7: μέμνηται τούτων ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς τὴν καθ' ἡμῶν πεποιημένος συσκευὴν ἐν τετάρτῳ τῆς πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὑποθέσεως (the one who has composed in our day a compilation [against us] mentions these things in his fourth **book** against us).
[298] Edwards 2007 argues that the 15 *logoi* mentioned in the *Suda* are a 'lexicographer's fancy' (125) or a posthumous collection of 15 self–standing works that were perceived as hostile towards Christianity. Among these 15 works, there may have been one discrete short treatise that was entirely devoted to the criticism of Christianity, which Eusebius quotes.
[299] First suggested in Beatrice 1989, and more fully argued in Beatrice 1994. Beatrice thinks that also *De Abstinentia*, a lost treatise *On Matter* mentioned by *Suda*, the *Letter to Anebo* and *De Regressu Animae* were not self–standing works, but part of the *Philosophy from Oracles*.

faith. Hence, according to Beatrice, the *Against the Christians* did not exist. The so–called 'Tesi Beatrice' has not persuaded many other Porphyrian scholars.[300] First, the extant fragments that are securely attributed to the *Philosophy from Oracles* are quite different in tone and content from what we find in the fragments commonly attributed to *Chris*. Second, when ancient sources quote the *Philosophy from Oracles*, they draw only from the first 3 books of this work, while in the quotations from Porphyry's work 'Against the Christians' we find references also to books 4, 12, 13, and 14.[301] Finally, a fragment from the prologue of the *Philosophy from Oracles* explicitly states that the aim of this work is to collect philosophical doctrines that can be extrapolated from oracular utterances, not to attack religious opponents.[302]

In this chapter, I will treat Porphyry's fragments as if they were coming from a self–standing work against Christianity in fifteen books. However, it is worth noting that Porphyry's attack against Christian typology, which will be the focus of the last two sections of this chapter, can be seen as an attack against the Christian attempt to see the entirety of the Hebrew Bible as a prophecy concerning the coming of Christ and his mission. So, even if the 'Tesi Beatrice' is unpersuasive, in the *Contra Christianos* Porphyry, among other things, seems to have depicted Christians as bad interpreters of oracles, which provides an interesting foil for what Porphyry himself does (successfully) in his *Philosophy from Oracles*.

The second issue that ought to be briefly addressed concerns the dating of the work. Starting from a notice by Eusebius (260ca-337/40 AD),[303] who seems to claim that Porphyry

[300] Strong and persuasive criticisms have been voiced by Goulet 2004 and Riedweg 2005. An extended discussion of the so–called 'Tesi Beatrice' and of the scholarly debate that it generated can be found in the unpublished dissertation by Muscolino (2008/9, 164–75) and, more concisely, in Becker 2016, 15–17. Beatrice has recently defended his thesis again (Beatrice 2019a and 2019b).
[301] Book 4: 10F, 11F, 12T Becker; Book 12: 13T to 43T Becker; Book 13: 44T Becker (though it may be a scribal mistake); Book 14: 45F–46T Becker.
[302] Porph. 303, 25–27 F. Smith: 'the present collection will contain a record of many doctrines that are in accordance with philosophy, since the gods have prophesized that these things are true' (ἔξει δὲ ἡ παροῦσα συναγωγὴ πολλῶν μὲν τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν δογμάτων ἀναγραφήν, ὡς οἱ θεοὶ τἀληθὲς ἔχειν ἐθέσπισαν).
[303] Eus. *HE* 6.19.12: ὅτε καὶ ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐν Σικελίᾳ καταστὰς Πορφύριος συγγράμματα καθ' ἡμῶν

composed *Chris.* during his staying in Sicily, scholars used to date this work to the years around 270 CE.[304] We know that Porphyry moved to Sicily in 268 to heal his 'melancholy' and stayed there until after the death of Plotinus in 270.[305] This dating of *Chris.* has been challenged several times in the last fifty years. The most influential supporter of a later dating is T.D. Barnes, who in a seminal article published in 1973, and again in an article published in 1994, has argued in favor of pushing back the composition of *Chris.*to around the beginning of the 4th century.[306] This seemingly trivial issue can have deep repercussions on how *Chris.* should be interpreted. Indeed, the later date would place Porphyry's anti-Christian treatise closer to the great persecution by Diocletian, that began in 303 CE. If this were correct, Porphyry may be seen as taking an active part in shaping and promoting the imperial agenda, and *Chris.* could be considered primarily as a piece of polemical propaganda.[307] I do not personally have a strong opinion about the dating of the work; however, I hope that my analysis will show that Porphyry's criticism of Christian readers and exegetes is not merely grounded on ideological preconceptions: Porphyry does not reject Christian allegorism because of an *a priori* refusal to consider the Biblical text as worthy of this form of exegesis. On the contrary, he tries to build his refutation on a systematic method of reading that begins

ἐνστησάμενος (When also Porphyry, who settled in Sicily in our time, having composed writings against us). This short passage has often been used to date the *Against the Christians* during Porphyry's staying in Sicily, but the temporal connection between the two participles (καταστὰς and ἐνστησάμενος) is ambiguous. Barnes 1994, 61 suggests that καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐν Σικελίᾳ καταστὰς shall be taken with a characterizing, and not a temporal meaning, and that Eusebius is subtly insulting Porphyry by connecting him with the intellectual backwater of Sicily rather than providing a genuine biographical information. See also Becker 2016, 23.

[304]For a survey of the relevant scholarship see Cook 2004, 119–25; Muscolino 2008/2009, 109–119; Becker 2016, 22–27.

[305] We do not know when Porphyry left Sicily, but he was still there when Plotinus passed away in 270, as he himself reports: cf. *Plot.* 11.18–19. He eventually travelled back to Rome, where the doctor Eustochius briefed him about Plotinus' last days (*Plot.* 2.11).

[306] A later date was already suggested by the humanist Caesar Baronius in 1602: see Zambon 2011, 114 n.14. For more recent arguments in favor of this later date, see Chadwick 1959, 142–3 and especially Barnes 1973 and 1994.

[307] It has been suggested that Porphyry read part of his work at the conference of Nicomedia, where Diocletian planned the great persecution: see e.g. Digeser 1998 and 2012, 185–6; Schott 2008a, 179–85. These scholars identify Porphyry with an anonymous philosopher, mentioned by Lactantius at *Inst.* 5.2.4, who at Nicomedia 'vomited out three books against the religion and the name of the Christians' ('tres libros evomit contra religionem nomenque Christianorum').

from a close philological and historical analysis of the text and that can employ allegorical interpretations only in specific circumstances.

Finally, a word should be said about how scholars in the last century have approached the task of collecting and editing Porphyrian fragments. Until recently, the authoritative edition of Porphyry's *Chris.* was that of A. von Harnack of 1916. Though ground–breaking and in a sense still indispensable for anyone who wants to study this work, Harnack's edition has two main flaws that risk producing a distorted view of *Chris.* First, Harnack arbitrarily divides the fragments into four thematic groups, while ignoring the (very few) references to book numbers that we find in our sources; second, and more problematic, Harnack does not distinguish between fragments (or testimonia) that are explicitly attributed to Porphyry by the indirect tradition, and those that are attributed to the Tyrian only speculatively by later scholars (what we call *dubia*). The bulk of these *dubia* come from an apologetic work, the *Apocriticus* (or *Monogenes*) written by the 4th century bishop Macarius of Magnesia.[308] The *Apocriticus* has the form of a dialogue between an anonymous pagan (*Hellēn* in the manuscripts) and a Christian. The Greek levels several criticisms at the Christian Scriptures and the Christian faith, while his interlocutor defends the tenets of the Church. In his edition of *Chris.*, Harnack assumed that Porphyry is the main source for Macarius' *Hellēn* in the *Apocriticus*. Consequently, 52 out of the 97 fragments assembled by Harnack come from Macarius.

Harnack's 'inclusive' approach is no longer acceptable.[309] A new edition that follows a more 'minimalist' approach was published in 2016 by Matthias Becker. Becker

[308] The identification of the author is uncertain: see Schott–Edwards 2015, 44–54, who date the work to the last quarter of the IV century CE. The only known Macarius of Magnesia is a bishop who took part in the Synod of the Oak in 403 CE: cf. Photius, *Biblioteca* 39.

[309] Both Goulet 2003, 112–149 and, more briefly, Schott–Edwards 2015, 28–40 show that, in crafting his *Hellēn*, Macarius reworks his source(s) to the point that it is not possible to use the *Apocriticus* as a mine for fragments from lost works. This said, Goulet (127–136) points out that Porphyry remains the best candidate for being Macarius' main source; however, Goulet also warns that editors should be cautious and posit a Porphyrian origin only for those passages in Macarius that present clear parallels with fragments and testimonia that are

differentiates between *verbatim* quotations (i.e. 'real' fragments, F.) and *testimonia* (T.); he also divides his edition in three sections: F and T that are securely attributed to Porphyry and for which we also know the book number; F and T that are securely attributed to Porphyry but for which we have no indication of their original placement; Dubia (D.) that are speculatively attributed to Porphyry.

Becker's edition thus offers a much more solid basis for studying *Chris.* However, one must also take into consideration that any attempt to reconstruct Porphyry's arguments has to reckon with the fact that our Christian sources are unapologetically hostile to him,[310] since they quote or paraphrase the Tyrian philosopher only with the aim of defending their faith. To overcome the challenges presented by the idiosyncratic preservation status of *Chris*., I will adopt an even more 'minimalist' approach than Becker,[311] and build my analysis only on *verbatim* quotations (Becker's F), while putting them in dialogue with passages from other Porphyrian works that engage with issues of Biblical exegesis. I hope that my reconstruction of Porphyry's hermeneutics and attitude towards the Hebrew Bible and its interpreters will help future research in assessing *Testimonia* and *Dubia*. But this goes beyond the scope of the present chapter.

ii

To modern readers, Porphyry's negative attitude towards Christian allegorical readings of the Bible may appear as partisan and hypocritical. As we saw in the previous chapter, Porphyry had no qualms in providing fanciful and eccentric readings of some Homeric passages. Hence, one may be tempted to consider his demolition of Christian allegoresis as merely a polemical

explicitly attributed to Porphyry in other sources. On this issue see also Viltanioti 2017, 187–88 with detailed bibliographical references and Johnson 2013, 47.

[310] Porphyry is impious (56T Becker = fr. 2 Harnack); he is a slanderer (72T. Becker= fr. 5 Harnack), etc. On the reception of Porphyry's *Chris* in our earliest sources (Eusebius, Jerome, Augustine) see Magny 2014.

[311] I borrow the term from Johnson 2016.

stance, a stance that is grounded in the undemonstrated postulate that the Bible is not the kind of text that can be subjected to an allegorical interpretation. If this were case, as many scholars seem to assume,[312] studying this aspect of Porphyry's attacks against Christianity would be of interest only for gaining a better understanding of the 'culture war' of Late antiquity between defenders of traditional Greek *paideia* and the rapidly emerging Christianity,[313] or for intellectual historians who are concerned with processes of canonization and use of 'sacred texts.'

Even if it is certainly true that questions of identity politics played a role in Porphyry's attacks against the Christians and their hermeneutics, I believe that we should refrain from dismissing Porphyry's criticisms merely as ideologically driven cultural propaganda. There are two main reasons that would suggest a more nuanced picture. First, no ancient Christian sources attack Porphyry for his seemingly schizophrenic attitude towards allegoresis. While blaming their pagan opponents for holding a double standard in their exegetical practices was a very common *topos* among early Christian apologists,[314] this specific criticism seems to have never been levelled against Porphyry, at least in the extant works. This is particularly surprising if we think of a writer like Eusebius, who must have been aware of Porphyry's own allegorical works.[315] Yet, when in the *Ecclesiastical History* this same Eusebius reports Porphyry's attack against Origen and Christian allegorical readings of the Hebrew Bible,[316] he does not take the

[312] See, among others, De Labriolle 1948, 264–5; Pépin 1976, 462–66, who speaks of an 'attitude paradoxale de Porphyre'; Cook 2008, who concludes his analysis by claiming that 'for Porphyry Septuagint texts were simply not full of mysteries' (24); Schott 2008a, 70 ('Not all literature should be read figuratively. Some texts, like the more "offensive" parts of the Hebrew Bible, have nothing to offer a philosopher'); Becker 2015, 25–31.
[313] This view of Porphyry as a staunch defender of tradition and of the *status quo* has recently been defended by Schott 2008a, 52–78. But see Johnson 2013 for a provocative interpretation of Porphyry as much more polycentric thinker, who never considered himself as a Greek or as a defender of Hellenic culture. Favoring one or the other position ultimately depends on whether one believes that it is possible to avoid patterns of 'cultural colonization' while operating with the language, intellectual categories and worldview of the dominant power.
[314] Cf. e.g. Orig., *C. Cels* 4.38–39 and 47–51 with Guinot 2005 and 2009; Riedweg 2012 (especially 442–7); Zambon 2019, 217–221
[315] Eusebius is our main source for the *Philosophy from Oracles*, a collection of allegorical interpretations of oracles: cf. Porph. 305 F. Smith, quoted by Eus., *PE* 4.8.2: 'for the gods did not prophesize about these things clearly, but through riddles' (οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ θεοὶ φανερῶς περὶ αὐτῶν ἐθέσπισαν, ἀλλὰ δι' αἰνιγμάτων).
[316] Porph. *Chris.* F. 6 Becker (=Eus. *HE* 6,19,1–11) More on this later.

opportunity to turn the same attack back at the Neoplatonic philosopher. This suggests that Porphyry's criticism of Christian allegorism must have been more subtle and sophisticated than what we find, for example, in Celsus,[317] since Eusebius and the early Fathers seemingly thought that dismissing Porphyry's attacks as hypocritical was not an effective strategy.

But arguments *ex silentio* can be risky; fortunately, however, there is a second and more cogent reason that suggests the need of a more nuanced understanding of Porphyry's criticism of Christian allegorism. As a closer look at the (scanty) evidence makes clear, Porphyry does not reject allegorical readings of the Hebrew Bible *in toto*; on the contrary, he thinks that some passages *can and should* be read allegorically. More specifically, we have some hints that Porphyry found valuable philosophical insights in the creation story of *Genesis*. In his embryological treatise *ad Gaurum*, Porphyry mentions *Genesis* 2:7 in support of the view that the soul enters the body only after the embryo is completely formed.[318] In *De Antro*, he approvingly mentions Numenius' interpretation of *Genesis* 1:2,[319] a passage that would prove that water, being full of divine spirit, attracts souls down to the material world and therefore connected to generation.[320] It is also possible that Porphyry is referencing *Genesis* 3:21[321] in *On Abstinence* 1.31.3, where he employs the image of the 'tunic of skins' (δερμάτινος χιτών) as an allegory of the body that the soul must leave behind in order to be purified and return to its original state.[322]

[317] Assessing the differences between Porphyry's and Celsus' criticism of Christian allegoresis falls beyond the scope of this chapter. For a detailed survey of Biblical references in Celsus' fragments see Cook 2004, 55–149.
[318] Porph. *Ad Gaurum* 11, 8–12. Porphyry only paraphrases the Biblical passage, which in the NIV reads 'Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being'.
[319] 'and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters' (NIV).
[320] Porph. *De Antro* 10.155–57 (= Numenius fr. 30 Des Places).
[321] Καὶ ἐποίησεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῷ Αδαμ καὶ τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ **χιτῶνας δερματίνους** καὶ ἐνέδυσεν αὐτούς.
[322] Porph. *De Abstinentia* 1.31.3: 'We should strip off many tunics, this one visible and made of skin and those that we wear inside, that are next to those made of skins' (Ἀποδυτέον ἄρα τοὺς πολλοὺς ἡμῖν χιτῶνας, τόν τε ὁρατὸν τοῦτον καὶ σάρκινον καὶ οὓς ἔσωθεν ἡμφιέσμεθα προσεχεῖς ὄντας τοῖς δερματίνοις). Bouffartigue–Patillon 2003, 37–41 survey the long history of this metaphor within the Greek philosophical tradition, going all the way back to Empedocles. They argue that the specific expression δερμάτινος χίτων is undoubtedly Biblical in origin, though it is unclear how it entered the late antique pagan tradition.

These scattered passages are far from producing a complete picture of Porphyry's view of the creation story. However, it seems reasonable to assume that Porphyry thought it necessary to go beyond the literal meaning of the beginning of *Genesis*, and to read it as an allegory of the embodiment of human souls.[323] Porphyry thus must have rejected a literal understanding of the narrative and endorsed the idea that, at least in this section of the Torah, Moses was speaking allegorically.[324] So why are Christians criticized for their figural interpretations?

iii

Attempts to provide a more coherent picture of Porphyry's attitude towards allegory have been made in the past. The most influential account was proposed almost sixty years ago by the French scholar J. Pépin. Pépin claimed that, for Porphyry, a text is suitable for an allegorical interpretation if and only if its literal meaning is not morally problematic.[325] Pépin suggested that the main motivating factor beyond this idiosyncratic position is Porphyry's desire to demolish Christian allegoresis, which would become an unfair interpretative practice as it is done on texts lacking any acceptable literal meaning. The key evidence that Pépin adduces in defense of his reconstruction is one of those passages from Macarius' *Apocriticus* that Harnack included in his edition of *Chris*. The passage comes from a section of the work in which the *Hellēn* expresses his repulsion at the seemingly cannibalistic nature of the Eucharistic mystery.

[323] It is likely that Numenius is Porphyry's main source for this reading. We know that Numenius was open to allegorizing the Hebrew Bible (cf. Or. *C.Cels* 4.51 = Numenius fr. 10a and 1c Des Places) and called Plato a 'Moses who speaks Attic' (Μωσῆς ἀττικίζων) (cf. Eus. *PE* 11.10.14 = Numenius fr. 8 Des Places). On Numenius as a source for Porphyry concerning the Bible, see Zambon 2002, 196–204.
[324] On Porphyry's engagement with the first chapters of *Genesis* see also 47F, 48T, 49T and 50T Becker. Seemingly, these fragments suggest that Porphyry criticized the story of original sin on philosophical grounds, because it presents the image of an evil and powerless God. However, this may be a misperception due to the polemical tone of our sources. These fragments can be aporetic in nature: Porphyry raised objections (ἀπορίαι) to a literal understanding of the text, but he also may have proposed solutions (λύσεις) that do not survive. It would be strange for Porphyry to completely dismiss the picture of God that emerges from the first chapters of *Genesis*, given his approval of Jewish religious ideas and piety: cf. e.g. Porph. 323F.; 324F.; 344F. Smith. On these fragments see also Goulet 2010, 149–59 and Morlet 2011b, who points to the possibility that Porphyry had access to Marcionite and Gnostic sources.
[325] Pépin 1966, 235–40.

In particular, he attacks Jesus' exhortation to his disciples that 'unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you don't have life in yourself'.[326] The *Hellēn* claims that, even if these words contain some deeper truth that is expressed through allegory, the literal meaning is so shocking that no one would benefit from them.[327]

I believe that using this passage as a window into Porphyry's hermeneutics and ideas about allegories is problematic. First, as we saw above, it is no longer tenable to use Macarius as a direct source for Porphyry's *Contra Christianos.*[328] Second, even if we accept that Porphyry is the source of this criticism, it would be wrong to read the passage of the *Apocriticus* as a rejection of the allegorical interpretation of Jesus' words. On the contrary, the *Hellēn* is actually open to the possibility that Jesus is speaking allegorically; the problem lies in the particular image that Jesus is employing, an image that is so scandalous and disgusting that his listeners would be too upset to try to find a charitable interpretation of Jesus' words. The critical target of the *Hellēn* is thus not the use of allegorical interpretations on the Bible as such, but Jesus' pedagogical method.[329]

To reconstruct Porphyry's criticism of Christian allegories on more secure ground, we should rather look at a fragment for which the Porphyrian origin is not in doubt: a famous passage from Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*, which transmits the longest *verbatim* quotation from the *Against the Christians*.

The sixth book of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* is entirely devoted to tracing a spiritual and intellectual biography of Origen. Among the many virtues and achievements of Origen that Eusebius praises, he particularly stresses his mastery of the Greek philosophical tradition. As a proof of Origen's reputation, Eusebius reports that many pagan philosophers of

[326] Macarius, *Apocrit.* 3.15.1, 9–10 Goulet: Ἐὰν μὴ φάγητέ μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίητέ μου τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς. It is a slightly altered quotation from Jn. 6:53.
[327] Macarius, *Apocrit.* 3.15.4, 4–10 Goulet.
[328] Becker does not include the fragment in his new edition of the *Chris*: see Becker 2016, 86–94.
[329] This can be an echo of Plato, *Rp.* 2, 3788D, as rightly pointed out by Lamberton 1986, 124 and Viltanioti 2019, 32–33.

his times dedicated works to Origen and submitted their own writings to him for judgment. It in this context that Eusebius quotes Porphyry's judgment of Christian interpreters in general, and of Origen in particular.

In introducing Porphyry's quotation,[330] Eusebius claims that Porphyry's aim was to slander the sacred Scriptures (τὰς θείας γραφὰς διαβάλλειν), but that, being unable to find any fault with the actual doctrines professed by the Christians, the Neoplatonist decided to turn his polemical vein against their interpreters (ἐπὶ τὸ λοιδορεῖν τρέπεται καὶ τοὺς ἐξηγητὰς ἐνδιαβάλλειν). Among those Christian exegetes, Porphyry's main target was Origen. However, in Eusebius' view, Porphyry's attack against Origen produced the opposite effect of praising the Christian interpreter: it shows that even the greatest enemy of Christianity, the 'one who wrote books against us' (ὁ. . . συγγράμματα καθ' ἡμῶν ἐνστησάμενος), acknowledged Origen's cultural background and competence in Greek philosophy. This is why Eusebius decides to quote Porphyry's words in full.

Eusebius splits his quotation in two separate chunks of text. In the first block, Porphyry targets Christian interpreters of the Hebrew Bible (and of the Torah in particular) in more general terms; in the second block, Porphyry explicitly attacks Origen as the most prominent practitioner of this (wrong) hermeneutics.[331] In my analysis, I will follow Eusebius' division, as I want to show that Porphyry's argument touches on two distinct shortcomings of Christian exegesis: its philological weakness (addressed in the first part), and its flawed philosophical background (addressed in the second part).

> Τῆς δὴ μοχθηρίας τῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν γραφῶν οὐκ ἀπόστασιν, λύσιν δε τινες εὑρεῖν προθυμηθέντες, ἐπ' ἐξηγήσεις ἐτράποντο ἀσυγκλώστους καὶ ἀναρμόστους τοῖς γεγραμμένοις, οὐκ ἀπολογίαν μᾶλλον ὑπὲρ τῶν ὀθνείων, παραδοχὴν δὲ καὶ ἔπαινον τοῖς οἰκείοις φερούσας. Αἰνίγματα γὰρ τὰ φανερῶς παρὰ Μωυσεῖ λεγόμενα εἶναι κομπάσαντες καὶ ἐπιθειάσαντες ὡς θεσπίσματα πλήρη κρυφίων

[330] Porph. *Chris.* 6,1–15F. Becker (=Eus. *HE* 6.19.1–3).
[331] Both quotations come from book 3 of *Against the Christians*: Eus. *HE* 6.19.9: ταῦτα τῷ Πορφυρίῳ κατὰ τὸ τρίτον σύγγραμμα τῶν γραφέντων αὐτῷ κατὰ Χριστιανῶν εἴρηται.

> μυστηρίων διά τε τοῦ τύφου τὸ κριτικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς καταγοητεύσαντες, ἐπάγουσιν ἐξηγήσεις.[332]
>
> Some people, being eager to find not a repudiation of the baseness of the Judaic Scriptures, but a solution, turn towards interpretations that are disjointed and discordant with what is written, proposing not so much a justification on behalf of what is foreign, but rather approval and praise for their own. For boasting that the things said by Moses in a clear way are riddles and treating them with divine respect as if they were full of hidden mysteries and casting a charm on the critical faculty of the soul through illusion, they bring their interpretations [over these words].[333]

At the core of Porphyry's criticism lies the idea that the Christian approach to reading the Hebrew Bible, and more specifically the Torah (i.e. the first five books of the Bible that were believed to have been written by Moses), is faulty overall. Porphyry identifies two mistaken assumptions that ground Christian Biblical hermeneutics. First, Christian interpreters are guilty of 'cultural appropriation'. The two key terms for understanding Porphyry's criticism are the adjectives ὀθνεῖος and οἰκεῖος. This pairing clearly suggests that, in calling the Hebrew Bible 'foreign', Porphyry is not making the trivial point that this text is foreign to him, i.e. that it does not belong to the Greek tradition. Rather, he is levelling a more subtle attack by suggesting that the Hebrew Bible is foreign to the Christians too. Hence, in Porphyry's view, Christians wrongfully exploit the authority of the Old Testament in order to bring praise and approval to their own doctrines (παραδοχὴν δὲ καὶ ἔπαινον τοῖς οἰκείοις φερούσας), instead of trying to understand the text on its own terms.

This leads Christians to commit a second mistake concerning the rhetorical and linguistic dimensions of the text: Christian interpreters act as if Moses spoke through riddles (αἰνίγματα) even when the text is clear at the level of the letter (τὰ φανερῶς λεγόμενα). Hence, they allegorize the Bible when it is not necessary, in order to bring the Scriptures in line with their own doctrines. Both mistakes can be seen as a betrayal of the core principle of

[332] Porph. *Chris.* 6,16–22F. Becker (=fr. 39,11–16 Harnack = Eus. *HE* 6.19.4).
[333] In my translation I am trying to render the opposition between ἐπ-άγουσιν and ἐξ-ηγήσεις. A correct interpretation should come from the text (ἐξ), while Christian interpreters bring their interpretations to/over (ἐπί) the text.

Porphyry's hermeneutics. As we saw in the previous two chapters on Porphyry's Homeric works, the interpreter must strive to understand the text in its own terms, using the hints provided by the author and with the help of what readers know about the historical circumstances of composition. This philological approach is well encapsulated in the maxim 'Homer explains himself for the most part'. Christian interpretations are wrong because Christian interpreters do not try to interpret the Bible from the Bible, but force their readings onto the text (ἐπάγουσιν ἐξηγήσεις), and consequently their interpretations are disjoint (ἀσύγκλωστοι) and discordant (ἀνάρμοστοι).[334]

Before looking more closely at what kind of interpretations Porphyry may have in mind here, and on whether his attacks on Christian interpreters are at odds with his own exegetical practices, it is necessary to correct a common misconception: we must separate Porphyry's generally positive view of the Hebrew Bible from his harsh judgement of Christian interpretations of it. As we saw above, in introducing this quote, Eusebius explicitly states that Porphyry did not manage to find any fault with the doctrines transmitted by the Scriptures, and for this reason decided to direct his gibe against Christian interpreters. Eusebius' statement is seemingly disproved by the very first words of the quoted fragments, where Porphyry talks of 'the baseness of the Judaic Scriptures' (τῆς δὴ μοχθηρίας τῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν γραφῶν). How can Eusebius say that Porphyry did not attack the Scriptures, when the Tyrian himself says that they are base?

A possible solution is simply to dismiss Eusebius' claim as a self-serving lie: by falsely saying that even the fiercest enemy of Christianity could find no argument against Biblical doctrines, the apologist is producing a stronger rhetorical defense for the truth and value of

[334] On these two adjectives see Cook 2008, 9–10 and Becker 2016, 45. ἀσύγκλωστος may refer to the lack of internal coherence of the allegorical interpretations, while ἀνάρμοστος would point to their lack of fittingness for the source text. It is also possible that ἀνάρμοστος is ironically alluding to one of the central aims of Christian exegesis: to 'harmonize' the Old and the New Testament (cf. e.g. Orig. *in Mt.* fr. 3 = GCS 41/4, p. 5,18–21 Klostermann–Benz).

the Christian faith. But a more charitable attitude towards Eusebius is possible. Indeed, as was suggested by Johnson, by employing term μοχθηρία Porphyry may be assuming the point of view of his opponents, namely the Christian interpreters, and not expressing a personal judgment on the value of the Scriptures.[335] Indeed, the Hebrew Bible, and the Pentateuch in particular, was a problematic text for the Christians, and several passages were clearly at odds with how God is presented in the New Testament.[336] It is partially to solve these problems that Christians elaborated allegorical readings of the Biblical text.[337] If we interpret Porphyry's seemingly hostile attitude towards the Bible as an attempt to put on the mask of his opponents, we can reconcile this fragment with the positive view of the Jewish cultural and religious tradition that we find elsewhere in his extant works.[338] But I would like to take a step further, and to point to a specific section of the Torah that Christians allegorized because they considered it shameful and that Porphyry instead took literally: Mosaic dietary restrictions.

In book IV of *On Abstinence,* Porphyry surveys the dietary customs of ethnic groups who abstain from the consumption of meat and who are thus praised as very pious insofar as they detach themselves from the cares and chains of the material world. Among those nations whom Porphyry lauds, the Jews are mentioned for following strict laws forbidding the consumption of certain kinds of meat and prescribing a humane treatment of animals. More specifically, Porphyry mentions the prohibition on eating pork, certain fish, and animals with solid hooves; furthermore, he approves of the prohibition to kill creatures that seek refuges inside houses, or that are domesticated and help humans in their labors. Even if Porphyry is using an intermediate source and is not drawing directly on Exodus and Deuteronomy, he

[335] As suggested by Perelli 1998, 243 and Johnson 2012, 56 n.7. See also Johnson 2013, 278–80, to whose analysis I am mostly indebted.
[336] See Orig. *Princ.* 4.3.1–3 and the discussion in Harl 1983, 90–100.
[337] Cf. Orig. *C. Cels.* 4.47.
[338] On Porphyry's positive attitude towards the Jews see Johnson 2013, 273–82.

explicitly attributes the origin of these prescriptions to the lawgiver (ὁ νομοθέτης), i.e. Moses.[339] Since Porphyry shared the belief that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, he must have been aware of the Biblical origins of the dietary laws. For this reason, we can consider this passage from *On Abstinence* as an example of Porphyry's openness to a literalistic approach to the Torah, and as a proof that he considered some passages to be morally praiseworthy if taken literally.

Porphyry's praise of a literalistic interpretation of Jewish dietary laws is significant if we consider that almost all Christians by his time had an opposite view concerning these same rules. Already in Paul, we find an allegorical interpretation of the commandment 'You shall not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treads out the grain':[340] for Paul, it is absurd to think that God should care for the oxen, and so he proposes a moral allegory of this passage.[341]

By the time of Porphyry, it was widely accepted among Christians that Mosaic dietary laws were not binding on them.[342] The rejection of these rules caused an exegetical problem, since Christians had to find a plausible explanation as to why such laws appear in the Scriptures. The most common solution was to allegorize them away.[343] For example, Origen claims that the Jews abstained from eating pigs because this was 'the symbols of something until the coming of Christ' (σύμβολά τινων ἦν μέχρι τῆς Ἰησοῦ ἐπιδημίας).[344] A more

[339] Cf. Porph. *De Abst.* 4.14, where the origin of Jewish dietary restrictions is explicitly attributed to the 'lawgiver' (i.e. Moses). The specific dietary laws mentioned by Porphyry do not appear in the same form in *Deuteronomy* (as noted by Clark 2000, 187 n. 626 and 627). This is probably why this passage is never discussed in connection with Porphyry's Biblical interpretation.
[340] *Deut.* 25:4.
[341] 1 *Cor*. 9:9–10. This same Pauline passage is quoted by Origen as a proof that some parts of the Bible do not have any literal meaning: see Orig. *Princ.* 4.2.6.
[342] For a concise and clear treatment of the issue, see Blidstein 2017, whose main points I am summarizing in this paragraph.
[343] Allegorical interpretations of the Mosaic laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy were not the exclusive domains of Christian exegetes, but they were proposed also by Hellenizing Jewish readers such as Philo: cf. e.g. *On the Special Laws* 4.106–7. Unlike Christians, Jewish authors did not reject the literal meaning of the laws even if they provided allegorical interpretations: cf. e.g. Goulet 2005, who calls Philo a moderate allegorist.
[344] Orig. *C. Cels.* 5.49, 4–5.

extensive discussion on the symbolic value of some dietary laws can be found in his *Seventh Homily on Leviticus*. In this homily, Origen interprets the prohibition on eating certain unclean animals as a moral allegory: unclean animals represent morally and spiritually bad people, from whose words and advice good Christians should stay away. Origen recognizes that some readers may criticize his interpretation and accuse him of 'doing violence to the Scriptures'. However, he defends this method as legitimate by appealing to the apostolic tradition, and in particular by quoting some passages from the New Testament that, in his opinion, would ground an allegorical exegesis of the Mosaic Laws.[345]

This short digression on Porphyry's and Origen's opposing views concerning Mosaic dietary laws help us gain a more precise understanding of the fragment from *Chris.* under consideration. As we saw above, Porphyry blames contemporary Christians for considering as riddles full of mysteries (αἰνίγματα. . . πλήρη κρυφίων μυστηρίων) what Moses has expressed clearly (τὰ φανερῶς παρὰ Μωυσεῖ λεγόμενα). Given what we know of Porphyry's appreciation for some of the dietary laws that Moses presents in the Torah, Christian allegorical interpretations of these prescriptions must have been appeared particularly misleading and wrong to Porphyry. Indeed, for Christians like Origen the dietary laws are shameful if taken literally, and thus must be allegorized,[346] while for Porphyry the text of the Hebrew Bible, at least in this section, does not prompt or justify an exegesis that goes beyond the literal meaning: Christian readings are thus disjointed (ἀσυγκλώστους) and discordant (ἀναρμόστους).

If my interpretation of the fragment is correct, then what we have here is not an unqualified rejection of the value of the Hebrew Bible, but a rejection of the specific

[345] Orig. *Hom. in Lev.* 7.4–5.
[346] Cf. *Hom. in Lev.* 7.5.6: 'But if we stand by the letter and according to that we accept what is seen by the Jews or the multitude as the written law, I would be ashamed to say and to confess that God gave such laws' ('si vero assideamus littera, et secundum hoc, vel quod Iudaeis, vel id quod vulgo videtur accipiamus quae in lege scripta suntan, erubesco dicere et confiteri, quia tales leges dederit Deus'). The homily is preserved only in the Latin translation by Rufinus.

Christian hermeneutics of the text, a hermeneutics that does not aim at understanding the meaning of the Bible in its own terms and in accordance with the cultural tradition that produced the text itself. Christians are bad philologists: they are blamed for forcing upon Scripture allegorical interpretations that are completely alien and unjustified. For Porphyry, if Christians consider the Hebrew Bible shameful, they should simply abandon it instead of trying to fix the text by imposing upon it a meaning that is not there.[347]

A supporter of the traditional view, according to which Porphyry holds a double standard concerning allegory, may at this point argue that, ultimately, Porphyry himself remains the only arbiter in determining what can be read allegorically. To some extent, this is true of any act of interpretation since each reader is ultimately responsible for endorsing or rejecting a certain understanding of the text. But against those who accuse Porphyry of partisan behavior we should point out that his argument is not an *ad hominem* attack against Christians, but is rooted in broader methodological considerations that also underpin his own hermeneutics in other works.

Three points can be made on Porphyry's behalf. First, Porphyry's criticism of Christian allegorists mirrors very closely his criticism of certain Homeric allegorists who do not attempt to uncover what the poet wanted to convey, but just try to impose on the poems their own doctrines. These readers appropriate and exploit Homer's cultural capital and authority for their own benefit. As we saw in a fragment from *On the Styx* discussed in the previous chapter, Porphyry blames the Neopythagorean Cronius for 'harmonizing other things with pre-formulated hypotheses' (ἄλλα τε ἐφαρμόζει ταῖς τεθείσαις ὑποθέσεσι), and for 'not having striven to accommodate his own opinions to what the poet says, but rather [to accommodate] the poet to his own arguments' (οὔ<τε τοῖς> παρὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ τὰς δόξας, τοῖς

[347] One cannot help but wonder to what extent Porphyry's criticisms and ideas may have been influenced by Marcionites and Gnostics. This possibility is briefly suggested by Perelli 1998, 242 and 245–6, but it deserves more attention.

δὲ παρ' ἑαυτοῦ προσάγειν τὸν ποιητὴν πεφιλοτίμηται).[348] Unfortunately we do not know which specific interpretations of Cronius Porphyry had in mind. However, it is clear that Cronius and the Christians are blamed for the same exegetical mistake: they force their preconceived interpretations onto the text that they are reading, instead of being guided by the text itself in their exegesis.[349] Hence, Porphyry's criticism of Christian interpreters is not a polemical attack against a specific religious group, but is grounded on Porphyry's wider reflections on what it means to read and interpret a text.

Second, as we saw in the analysis of the first chapters of *De Antro*, Porphyry seems to turn to allegory only as a last resort to rescue Homer from what he perceives to be a potential aesthetic flaw in the poems. Indeed, he claims that it is clear even to the laymen that the description of the cave is full of obscurities that must be explained.[350] Christian interpreters like Origen follow a very different path. Indeed, Origen repeatedly claims that the presence of 'stumbling blocks' within the Scriptures, namely, passages that have a patent symbolic meaning,[351] warns the reader that the *everything* in the Scriptures contain a deeper spiritual meaning beyond the letter.[352] Porphyry would see this as a hermeneutical fallacy: the fact that some passages can and should be interpreted allegorically (e.g. the creation story) does not imply that, for him, the whole of Scripture must contain deeper meanings (e.g. the Mosaic Laws). For Porphyry, the Bible is not a divinely inspired text,[353] and therefore it must not be treated differently from any other text: a careful analysis of each passage will reveal what ought to be allegorized and what must be taken literally, because not everything is a riddle.

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[348] Porph. 372F. Smith= fr. 1 Castelletti (=Stob. II.1,32). See chapter 2.ii above for a detailed discussion.
[349] Note also the similar language that Porphyry employs: Cronius fails to harmonize (ἐφαρμόζει) his interpretation with the text; Christian interpretations are unharmonious (ἀνάρμοστοι).
[350] Porph. *De Antro* 3.25–28.
[351] Origen mentions the daughters of Lot, the two wives of Abraham, the two sisters married to Jacob, the preparation of the tabernacle, etc.
[352] See Orig. *Princ.* 4.2.2–3 and see Harl 1983, 84–6.
[353] For Porphyry's view on divinely–inspired texts see 305F. Smith, on oracular utterances: 'For the gods did not prophesy about these things clearly, but through riddles' (οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ θεοὶ φανερῶς περὶ αὐτῶν ἐθέσπισαν, ἀλλὰ δι'αἰνιγμάτων).

Third, and closely connected to the previous point, Porphyry believes that allegorical interpretations can be attempted only after a careful study of the literary and historical features of the text under examination. This means gaining an intimate familiarity with the *literal* meaning of a text, so that a reader can then identify passages that necessitate more sophisticated forms of exegesis. But, for Porphyry, Christian readers also fail at this most basic level of the exegetical process. Indeed, as Porphyry argues in a fragment preserved in Jerome, even the Evangelists were ignorant 'not only concerning secular things, but also concerning the divine Scriptures, as it is witnessed by the fact that they attributed to one prophet what has been written in a different place'.[354]

We find concrete examples of Christian ignorance in two other Porphyrian fragments preserved by Jerome. In his *Commentary on Matthew,* Jerome reports Porphyry's criticism of the beginning of the Gospel of Mark. The Evangelist is blamed for having conflated two different passages, one coming from Malachi 3:1 and the other from Isaiah 40:3, as if it were a single quotation entirely taken from Isaiah.[355] Similarly, in Jerome's *Commentary on the Psalms*, Porphyry notices that at Matthew 13:35 the Evangelist mistakenly attributes to Isaiah a quotation from the prophet Asaph.[356] Porphyry's criticism is not just a display of pedantic philological rigor. Rather, it provides further justification for his attacks against Christian allegorical readings. The fact that the Evangelists do not even know where the lines they are quoting and interpreting come from demonstrates that they failed to perform the most basic task of a good reader.

[354] Porph. *Chris*. 45.4–7T. Becker (= fr.9(a) Harnack = Hier. *in Marc*. 1.1–12): *Evangelistae tam inperiti fuerunt homines, non solum in saecularibus, sed etiam in scripturis divinis, ut testimonium quod alibi scriptum est, de alio ponerent propheta.*

[355] Porph. *Chris*. 46T. Becker (=fr. 9(b) Harnack= Hier. *in Matt.* 3.3). The disputed passage is Mk 1:2–3: 'as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: I will send my messenger ahead of you,/ who will prepare your way;/ a voice of one calling in the wilderness,/ 'Prepare the way for the Lord,/ make straight paths for him.' (NIV). The first two lines come from Malachi 3:1; while the last three lines are from Isaiah 40:3.

[356] Porph. *Chris*. 59F. Becker (=fr. 10 Harnack = Hier. *in Psalm.* 77.2). The verse under scrutiny is Mt 13:35: 'I will open my mouth in parables, /I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world' (NIV). This comes from Ps. 78:2, which is attributed to the prophet Asaph.

Understanding Porphyry's criticism of Christian exegesis against the background of his own wider hermeneutical practices has, I hope, demonstrated that Porphyry is not a mere partisan of the pagan camp. Furthermore, my analysis produces a more coherent picture of Porphyry's attitude towards the Hebrew Bible, and in particular towards the Torah. Contemporary Christian apologists who had access to a higher number of Porphyrian works must have been fully aware of Porphyry's sophisticated criticisms, and this may explain why they generally avoided attacking him for holding a double standard.

iv

After criticizing Christian exegetical practices at a more general level, Porphyry directs his darts against Origen, the most influential and well-known Christian allegorist:[357]

> ὁ δὲ τρόπος τῆς ἀτοπίας ἐξ ἀνδρὸς ᾧ κἀγὼ κομιδῇ νέος ὢν ἔτι ἐντετύχηκα, σφόδρα εὐδοκιμήσαντος καὶ ἔτι δι' ὧν καταλέλοιπεν συγγραμμάτων εὐδοκιμοῦντος, παρειλήφθω, Ὠριγένους, οὗ κλέος παρὰ τοῖς διδασκάλοις τούτων τῶν λόγων μέγα διαδέδοται. ἀκροατὴς γὰρ οὗτος Ἀμμωνίου τοῦ πλείστην ἐν τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνοις ἐπίδοσιν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἐσχηκότος γεγονώς, εἰς μὲν τὴν τῶν λόγων ἐμπειρίαν πολλὴν παρὰ τοῦ διδασκάλου τὴν ὠφέλειαν ἐκτήσατο, εἰς δὲ τὴν ὀρθὴν τοῦ βίου προαίρεσιν τὴν ἐναντίαν ἐκείνῳ πορείαν ἐποιήσατο. Ἀμμώνιος μὲν γὰρ Χριστιανὸς ἐν Χριστιανοῖς ἀνατραφεὶς τοῖς γονεῦσιν, ὅτε τοῦ φρονεῖν καὶ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἥψατο, εὐθὺς πρὸς τὴν κατὰ νόμους πολιτείαν μετεβάλετο, Ὠριγένης δὲ Ἕλλην ἐν Ἕλλησιν παιδευθεὶς λόγοις, πρὸς τὸ βάρβαρον ἐξώκειλεν τόλμημα· ᾧ δὴ φέρων αὐτόν τε καὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἕξιν ἐκαπήλευσεν, κατὰ μὲν τὸν βίον Χριστιανῶς ζῶν καὶ παρανόμως, κατὰ δὲ τὰς περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τοῦ θείου δόξας ἑλληνίζων τε καὶ τὰ Ἑλλήνων τοῖς ὀθνείοις ὑποβαλλόμενος μύθοις. συνῆν τε γὰρ ἀεὶ τῷ Πλάτωνι, τοῖς τε Νουμηνίου καὶ Κρονίου Ἀπολλοφάνους τε καὶ Λογγίνου καὶ Μοδεράτου Νικομάχου τε καὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς Πυθαγορείοις ἐλλογίμων ἀνδρῶν ὡμίλει συγγράμμασιν, ἐχρῆτο δὲ καὶ Χαιρήμονος τοῦ Στωϊκοῦ Κορνούτου τε ταῖς βίβλοις, παρ' ὧν τὸν μεταληπτικὸν τῶν παρ' Ἕλλησιν μυστηρίων γνοὺς τρόπον ταῖς Ἰουδαϊκαῖς προσῆψεν γραφαῖς.
>
> The way of strangeness shall be ascertained from a man whom I met when I was still very young, a man who has become very famous and who still is famous thanks to the books he left, Origen, whose fame spread greatly among the teachers of these works. And having been a student of Ammonius, who achieved the

[357] Eusebius separates the two Porphyrian quotations with the standard formula εἶτα μεθ' ἕτερά φησιν ('then after other things he says'). It is unclear whether he is leaving out part of Porphyry's text or if he is simply breaking up a continuous block into two more manageable chunks. As far as I know, the only scholar who considers the two quotations as two separate fragments is Perelli 1998, 239.

> greatest progress in philosophy in our time, he acquired from his teacher experience in arguments as a great profit, but concerning the right choice of life he followed the opposite path from him. For Ammonius, a Christian raised among Christian parents, when he came into contact with thinking and philosophy, immediately changed towards the way of life in accordance with the laws, while Origen, having been educated as a Greek among Greeks, ran aground on barbarian daring; and bringing himself and his disposition in arguments to this [act of daring], he made a trade [of these things], in his daily life living like a Christian and unlawfully, but in his opinions concerning reality and the divine behaving like a Greek and placing the things of the Greeks under foreign myths. For always he was with Plato, and he consorted with the books of Numenius, Cronius, Apollophanes, Longinus, Moderatus, Nicomachus, and the famous men among the Pythagoreans, and he used also the books of Chaeremon and Cornutus the Stoic, and having learnt from them the metaleptic method of the Greek mysteries he applied it to the Judaic writings.

This passage has been the object of countless studies that mostly aimed at assessing the reliability of the biographical information on Origen's and Ammonius' lives and on their cultural and religious affiliations.[358] Less attention has been devoted to uncovering the precise meaning of Porphyry's criticism of Origen. The most common interpretation sees Porphyry as a champion of traditional pagan Greek culture, who is accusing Origen of committing cultural apostasy as he breaks away from his roots and heritage. Origen was born and educated as a proper 'Greek', but turned away from this tradition and fell into the 'barbaric daring' (πρὸς τὸ βάρβαρον ἐξώκειλεν τόλμημα) when he converted to Christianity. Porphyry's criticism would thus be grounded on issues of cultural and ethnic identity, and on the implicit assumption that individuals should stick to their ancestral customs (the traditional Greek religion and way of life);[359] not living in accordance with ancestral tradition would thus be tantamount to acting against the law (κατὰ μὲν τὸν βίον Χριστιανῶς ζῶν καὶ παρανόμως). If this interpretation is correct, Porphyry is here acting as a staunch

[358] For a very detailed overview of the debate concerning the reliability of Porphyry and Eusebius, and the identity of the Origen and Ammonius mentioned here, see Zambon 2011. I think that it is beyond any reasonable doubt that the Origen that Porphyry is criticizing is the Alexandrian Christian exegete; furthermore, for my analysis, it is totally irrelevant whether the biographical narrative of Origen's conversion is true; my aim is to analyze the philosophical message that Porphyry is trying to convey by proposing this narrative. On this issue see also e.g. Goulet 1977; Beatrice 1992; Edwards 1993; Schott 2008b, 259–62.
[359] See Schott 2008b, 262–71.

conservative: he opposes Christians for breaking away from traditional ways of life and for producing new religious and cultural practices that hybridize Greek and Jewish ideas and texts and produce something new but contrary to nature.[360]

This reading has been recently challenged by A. Johnson on two main grounds.[361] First, by a careful study of all the extant references to 'Hellenism' in Porphyry's corpus, Johnson has persuasively demonstrated that the Tyrian is far from being a committed defender of traditional Greek religious and cultural practices.[362] Hence, if Porphyry's attack on Origen were dependent upon Helleno-centric biases, it would be at odds with Porphyry's own critical stances towards the 'Greeks' in several other passages. Second, in support of the 'conservative' reading scholars have often quoted a passage in Eusebius that Harnack prints as Fragment 1 in his edition of *Chris*.[363] Here Eusebius paraphrases the words of an anonymous pagan polemist who explicitly attacks the Christians for occupying a 'middle ground' (μέσον) between Greeks and Barbarians (i.e. Jews). This critic claims that the Christians have abandoned their ancestral customs and become followers of the 'Judaic fables' (Ἰουδαϊκῶν μυθολογημάτων ζηλωταί), and yet do not honor the God of the Jews according to their own laws, but take a new path that is followed neither by the Greeks nor by the Jews. Because of Harnack's decision to place this Eusebian passage at the opening of his collection of fragments, scholars have often interpreted it as a sort of summary of the overall argument of *Chris.* However, as both A. Johnson and S. Morlet have independently argued, it is unlikely that Eusebius is paraphrasing Porphyry; thus, we should not read Porphyry's

[360] This interpretation is deeply influenced by postcolonial theories on hybridity and mimicry as a form of resistance against epistemic imperialism: see Schott 2008a: ch. 2 (esp. 52–5), where he argues that Porphyry's hatred for Christianity was motivated by the perceived threat that the Christian philosophical project was not so different from his own. Christian intellectuals were threatening to turn Porphyry's world upside–down by giving a universalizing value to a barbaric culture, while Porphyry was a staunch defender of the universality of Platonic Hellenism.
[361] Johnson 2012. My analysis relies on Johnson's understanding of Porphyry's criticism, but takes a further step in showing how his interpretation sheds light on Porphyry's criticism of Origen's hermeneutics.
[362] See Johnson 2013, 1–9; 243–56 and *passim*.
[363] Porph. *Chris.* F 1 Harnack (= 88D. Becker= Eus. *PE* 1.1.13–1.2.5).

criticism of Origen through the lense of a text that is not Porphyrian.[364] I would also add that the anonymous critic in Eusebius does not mention the fact that Christians try to find Greek ideas within the Hebrew Scriptures. This marks a clear difference from Porphyry's argument against Origen.

Johnson himself follows a different interpretative path by reading the criticism of Origen against the background of Porphyry's own broader philosophical commitments. At the core of Johnson's interpretation, we find a new and compelling understanding of what Origen's act of daring (τόλμημα) consists in: Porphyry is accusing Origen of falling away from the true (Platonic) philosophy taught by Ammonius, who properly recognized the priority of the intelligible reality. Christian doctrines and religious practices, on the contrary, place an undue emphasis on the material world.[365]

At the center of Christian flawed theology, ontology, and axiology lies their mistargeted devotion for Jesus *qua* incarnate *Logos*. For the Platonist Porphyry, the idea of the incarnation was utter nonsense, as it undermines the transcendence of God.[366] Interestingly, however, Porphyry seems to have held a positive opinion of Jesus as a pious man. In a fragment from his *Philosophy from Oracles*, preserved both in Eusebius and Augustine, Porphyry reports an oracle by Hecate in which the goddess praises Jesus for having been 'most pious' (ἐυσεβέστατον). The gods thus rewarded him by making his soul immortal, but the impious Christians began to venerate him as if he were God.[367] In the

[364] Morlet 2010 and Johnson 2010.
[365] Johnson 2012, 57–60 persuasively argues that Origen's acts of daring parallels the 'metaphysical' daring of the hypostasis in the Plotinian system, which cause their separation from the One.
[366] The incarnation and divine nature of Christ were common targets among pagan critics of Christianity: see Zambon 2019, 272–83 and 288–95 for a short survey on this issue.
[367] Porph. 345F. Smith (= Eus. *PE* 3.6,39–7,2 and Aug. *Civ*. 19.23,43–73): 'In the third book of the 'Philosophy from Oracles' [Porphyry] has put [this] down, reporting more or less *verbatim*: 'Perhaps to some people what I am going to say may seem like a paradox. For the gods declared that Christ is the most pious and has become immortal, and they remember him with words of praise". And proceeding he adds: 'When they asked regarding Christ if he is a god, [Hecate] said: 'You know that the immortal soul survives after the body, but it wanders around when it is separated from wisdom; that soul is **of a man** who is the most distinguished in his piety.' Thus she says that he (*scil.* Christ) is the most pious, and that his soul, like [the souls] of the other pious [men] too, has been made immortal after his death, a soul which the Christians, being ignorant, venerate [. . .].' These

preserved portion of Porphyry's own comment to Hecate's words, the Tyrian argues that Christ was no different from other pious men, whose souls 'become immortal' (ἀπαθανατισθῆναι) after their death.[368] Porphyry also specifies why Jesus was particularly pious: he is one of the 'wise among the Hebrews' (*sapientes Hebraeorum*) who prevented people from praying to lower daemons, but exhorted them to venerate only the 'celestial gods' and in particular 'the father-God'.[369] Within Porphyry's Platonic ontology and theology, the 'father-God' can refer either to the One or, more likely, to the Demiurge:[370] both reside above the sensible world and are completely transcendent. Christians are thus guilty of betraying the teachings of their own master by directing their religious devotion towards the wrong level of the divine/ontological hierarchy: they equate a mere man, belonging to the lowest level, with God, that belongs to the highest level.[371]

Coming back to our fragment, we can now better understand what lies at the core of Origen's 'barbarian daring': a mistaken idea about the divine nature of Christ that leads him away from true Platonic philosophy. This ontological mistake manifests itself in Origen's lawless (παρανόμως) way of living. Since Origen's 'lawlessness' is a direct consequence of his 'barbarian daring', and since, this 'daring' should be interpreted in philosophical terms, it is reasonable to assume that the law that Origen is breaking is natural and philosophical in

things Porphyry says even now.' (« Περὶ τῆς ἐκ λογίων φιλοσοφίας» ἐν τρίτῳ συγγράμματι τέθειται, ᾗδέ πως ἱστορῶν κατὰ λέξιν· Παράδοξον ἴσως δόξειεν <ἄν> τισιν εἶναι τὸ μέλλον λέγεσθαι ὑφ' ἡμῶν. τὸν γὰρ Χριστὸν οἱ θεοὶ εὐσεβέστατον ἀπεφήναντο καὶ ἀθάνατον γεγονότα, εὐφήμως τε αὐτοῦ μνημονεύουσιν.» καὶ ὑποβὰς ἐπιλέγει· «περὶ γοῦν τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐρωτησάντων εἰ ἔστιν θεός, φησίν· ‘Ὅτ<τ>ι μὲν ἀθανάτη ψυχὴ μετὰ σῶμα προβαίνει/ γιγνώσκεις, σοφίης δὲ τετμημένη αἰὲν ἀλᾶται·/ **ἀνέρος** εὐσεβίῃ προφερεστάτου ἐστὶν ἐκείνη/ ψυχή/·’εὐσεβέστατον ἄρα ἔφη αὐτόν, καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, καθάπερ <καὶ> τῶν ἄλλων <εὐσεβῶν>, μετὰ θάνατον ἀπαθανατισθῆναι, ἣν σέβειν ἀγνοοῦντας τοὺς Χριστιανούς. . . ..» Ταῦτα καὶ νῦν ὁ Πορφύριος.).

[368] The idea that some souls become immortal may seem strange for a Platonist who is committed to the immortality of all souls. I believe that Porphyry is referring to the liberation from the cycle of reincarnations, which is the ultimate reward for living a philosophical life.

[369] See Porph. 346F. Smith. On Porphyry's attempt to transpose the traditional pantheon within a Platonic and hierarchical 'taxonomy of the divine' see Johnson 2013, 53–101.

[370] As Johnson 2013, 58–72 points out, there is a certain fluidity in Porphyry's system in terms of naming the three Plotinian hypostases.

[371] Porphyry criticizes the idea of an 'incarnate Logos' also in *Chris.* 66F. Becker, by appealing to the Stoic distinction between *logos prophorikos* and *logos endiathetos*.

nature, and transcends any specific positive law that a city or nation may have.[372] If Origen had a correct understanding of the natural law ordering the hierarchical structure of the (Platonic) universe, he would venerate the true, transcendent God instead of a mere human soul, like Jesus.

So far, I have mostly reiterated and expanded Johnson's arguments. But I want to push this interpretation further in order to show how Origen's 'ontological/theological' mistake is connected to his 'hermeneutical' mistake. Porphyry mentions two aspects of Origen's exegetical practice. First, Origen 'places the things of the Greeks under foreign myths' (τὰ Ἑλλήνων τοῖς ὀθνείοις ὑποβαλλόμενος μύθοις); second, he has learnt the 'metaleptic method' from Chaeremon and Cornutus, and uses it on the Jewish Scriptures (τὸν μεταληπτικὸν τῶν παρ' Ἕλλησιν μυστηρίων γνοὺς τρόπον ταῖς Ἰουδαϊκαῖς προσῆψεν γραφαῖς). These two claims are usually considered together: Porphyry would be blaming Origen for allegorizing the Hebrew Bible, and for trying to find snippets of Platonic philosophy within a text that does not contain them. This reading is implicitly or explicitly grounded in the idea of Porphyry as champion of Hellenism. Porphyry would here be contending that foreign texts, unlike Greek 'mysteries', are not susceptible to any allegorical interpretation, and beyond their literal meaning do not communicate any higher truths concerning the divine.

This reading is problematic for two reasons: first, as we saw in the previous section, Porphyry is open to the idea that at least parts of the Hebrew Bible can be allegorized and contain doctrines that are compatible with Platonic philosophy; second, if the first half of the fragment is better understood in light of Porphyry's Platonism, why should he suddenly change tone and move his criticism of Origen to a less sophisticated level of cultural chauvinism?

[372] This interpretation was first proposed by Zambon 2003 and defended by Johnson 2012, 61–64.

In my opinion, we gain a better understanding of the second half of the fragment if we do not merge the two claims made by Porphyry concerning Origen's hermeneutics. Let us consider first the idea that Origen 'places the things of the Greeks under foreign myths' (τὰ Ἑλλήνων τοῖς ὀθνείοις ὑποβαλλόμενος μύθοις). This statement resembles the more general accusation that Porphyry moved against Christian interpreters in the first chunk of text quoted by Eusebius: these Christians fail to interpret the Hebrew Bible on its own terms, and consequently commit a form of cultural appropriation by forcing the Scriptures into supporting their own Christian doctrines. Similarly, Origen would be forcing Greek philosophical ideas onto foreign myths (i.e., onto the Hebrew Bible).

But the parallelism between these two passages is not as straightforward as may appear. While the forced interpretations of the Christians aim at exploiting the cultural capital of the Scriptures to support their own Christian doctrines, Origen's exegetical posture is different: Porphyry claims that the Alexandrian interpreter is trying to find an agreement between Greek philosophical doctrines and 'foreign myths.' In itself, this is not something that Porphyry would find problematic: for example, as I mentioned in the analysis of *De Antro*, Porphyry had no qualms in finding parallelism between the symbolic meaning of water in in early Greek religion, in Heraclitus, and in *Genesis*.[373]

To gain a more solid understanding of Porphyry's criticism we must look at the meaning of ὑποβαλλόμενος. As Johnson has pointed out, this verb can mean 'to present another's child as one's own'.[374] If this semantic connotation is relevant in our passage, then Porphyry is likely accusing Origen not so much for finding parallelism between the Scriptures and Greek philosophical doctrines, but for having falsely attributed the paternity of these doctrines to the author(s) of the Scriptures, thus implicitly suggesting a priority and

[373] Cf. Porph. *De Antro* 10.153–87.
[374] Cf. Montanari sv.ὑποβάλλω 2 and Johnson 2012, 68 for parallel uses in Plato and Porphyry.

superiority of the Scriptures over Greek philosophers. This is something that Porphyry cannot accept: as far as we know, in his extant writings we never find an argument in favor of the priority of a specific tradition, from which other, later traditions may have derived their ideas.[375] The same is not true for Origen, who constantly argues in favor of the chronological and intellectual priority of the Scriptures, going so far as to say that Plato deliberately quoted from the Bible.[376]

The second point made by Porphyry concerns a question of methodology. Origen is said to have 'used the books of Chaeremon and Cornutus the Stoic, and having learnt from them the metaleptic method of the Greek mysteries he applied it to the Judaic writings' (ἐχρῆτο δὲ καὶ Χαιρήμονος τοῦ Στωϊκοῦ Κορνούτου τε ταῖς βίβλοις, παρ' ὧν τὸν μεταληπτικὸν τῶν παρ' Ἕλλησιν μυστηρίων γνοὺς τρόπον ταῖς Ἰουδαϊκαῖς προσῆψεν γραφαῖς). To begin with, it may be useful to briefly consider the expression μεταληπτικὸς τρόπος, the exegetical method that Origen learnt from Cornutus and Chaeremon. Most modern interpreters simply translate it as 'allegorical method'.[377] However, as it has been rightly pointed out by Perelli, it would be a mistake to equate 'metaleptic method' with allegorical interpretation *simpliciter*.[378] In rhetorical handbooks, *metalepsis* is defined as the substitution of a word with a synonym that is not appropriate for the specific context, or, to quote Trypho, 'a word that reveals homonym as a result of synonym'.[379] Starting from the

[375] On Porphyry's polycentric views of philosophy and culture, see Johnson 2013, 222–57. One may argue that, despite his explicit intentions, Porphyry still reads reality and ethnic particularisms through the lenses of the dominant culture, and that any attempt at cultural translation is *de facto* a form of cultural imperialism: see e.g. Schott 2008a: 15–51, for the idea that any attempt at finding a 'universal philosophy' is inherently imperialistic.
[376] Cf. e.g. Orig. *C .Cels.* 6.17: Plato did teach plausible things concerning the kingdom of God, but he polluted them with idolatry, whereas we find a more perfect understanding of God's nature in the Bible; 6.19: in the *Phaedrus*, Plato quoted the Scriptures.
[377] Cf. e.g. Pépin 1976, 463; Johnson 2012, 56.
[378] Perelli 1998, 233–5 and 253–7, expanding on a comment by de Lubac 1947, 201 n. 80. Translations that were published after Perelli's article have been more careful in remaining closer to the original: e.g. Muscolino 2009, 253 ('procedimento metalettico'); Becker 2016, 135 (die metaleptische Redeweise).
[379] Tryph. *Trop*. iii p. 195,10 Spengel: Μετάληψίς ἐστι λέξις ἐκ συνωνυμίας τὸ ὁμώνυμον δηλοῦσα. Trypho uses as an example *Od.* 15.299, where Homer replaces ὀξύς with θοός to describe a group of islands. Both adjectives can be used synonymously with the meaning of 'quick', but in this specific context their synonymity is used improperly because the relevant meaning of ὀξύς is 'sharp', which does not belong to the semantic

rhetorical definition of *metalepsis*, Perelli believes that Porphyry is blaming Origen for an improper 'transposizione culturale', as he tries to find Greek philosophical ideas embedded in the Jewish Scriptures. By using the word *metalepsis* instead of allegory, Porphyry would thus be passing a negative judgment on Origen's lack of attention to the specific Jewish context of the Scriptures, in the same way as a rhetorical 'metalepsis' does not pay attention to the specific semantic context in which a word is used. Perelli adds that the reference to Chaeremon is particularly relevant, because Chaeremon himself may be held guilty of the same improper cultural transposition, as he uses Greek categories to read Egyptian myths.[380] Perelli's interpretation, however, is not completely convincing. Indeed, Perelli does not take into consideration the fact Origen himself employs *metalepsis* and cognate to refer to a specific form of figural interpretation.

As M. Harl has pointed in her seminal study on Origen's hermeneutics, μεταλαμβάνω and derivatives (including μεταλήψις) are key terms in Origen's biblical exegesis. More specifically, the Alexandrian exegete uses them to describe a transference of meaning from the letter to the spirit of the Scriptures. [381] It thus refers to a specific kind of non-literal exegesis that moves from the sensible to the intelligible.[382]

At the core of Origen's understanding of the Scriptures lies the belief that Jesus is the incarnate *logos*, and that this *logos* inspired Moses, the prophets, and all the writers of the Scriptures.[383] This is clearly reflected in the hermeneutics that Origen presents in the fourth book of his philosophical masterpiece, the treatise *On Principles*.[384] Origen proposes a

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sphere of θοός. Porphyry seems to be using a 'rhetorical' definition of *metalepsis* in *HQ Od.* 1.68, p. 6.20–7.2 Schrader (= *Sch. Od.* 1.68 d2 Pontani). See also Cook 2008, 10–11.

[380] See Chaeremon fr. 5 van der Host, quoted below.

[381] Harl 1983, 133–5.

[382] See Orig. *Jo*. 1.8.45: 'And indeed now it is our task to transfer the sensible Gospel to the spiritual; for what would be the argument of the sensible [Gospel], if it were not transferred to the spiritual?' (Καὶ γὰρ νῦν πρόκειται τὸ αἰσθητὸν εὐαγγέλιον **μεταλαβεῖν εἰς πνευματικόν**· τίς γὰρ ἡ διήγησις τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ, εἰ μὴ **μεταλαμβάνοιτο εἰς πνευματικόν**); cf. also e.g. *Jo.* 1.26.180; *ComPs.* 77.2.

[383] Orig. *Princ*. Pr. 1 and Pr. 4, where he states that the doctrine of the incarnation is one of the points clearly handed down by the preaching of the Apostles and that therefore it is not up for debate or investigation.

[384] Orig. *Princ.* 4.2.4.

tripartite scheme for the exegesis of the Scriptures, according to which each level of meaning corresponds to one of the parts of a human being: flesh (σάρξ), soul (ψυχή), and spirit (πνεῦμα).[385] The flesh of the Scriptures is a morally edifying literal meaning;[386] the soul of the Scriptures is a non-literal meaning that transmits moral teaching; the spiritual/pneumatic interpretation sees the Scriptures as 'shadows of the good things to come' (σκιὰν τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν), namely, Christ and his soteriological mission.[387] Concretely, this form of spiritual exegesis consists for the most part in interpreting historical events and prophecies contained in the Hebrew Bible as images of Christ.[388] This is the case, for example, of the rock from which Moses made water spring in the desert,[389] or of the Jewish Passover,[390] or of the Groom in the *Song of Songs*, etc.[391] Origen is explicit in arguing that this spiritual (πνευματικός) exegesis represents the peak of the hermeneutical endeavor, since it reveals the deepest meaning of the Scriptures and can be performed only by a small group of readers (τελεῖοι) who have achieved the highest level of philosophical, theological and spiritual training.[392] For Origen then, a 'metaleptic' interpretation is a non-literal interpretation of the Bible that refers what is said at the level of the letter to a spiritual level, i.e. to Christ.

[385] The literature on Origen's tripartite hermeneutics, and on whether he did follow this scheme in his exegetical works, is vast: see at least Torjesen 1986, Dively Lauro 2005, Hall 2021, ch 2.
[386] Since Origen says that some passages do not have a somatic meaning at all (*Princ.* 4.25), it is clear that somatic meaning is not just the same as literal meaning, since it would be absurd to claim that a passage does not mean anything at the level of the letter: see Dively Lauro 2005, 52 and Hall 2021, 37–8.
[387] See Orig. *Jo.* 13.26.161: '[It is possible] to find that most of the things that are written in the Law are referred figuratively and allegorically to Christ' (Τυπικῶς μὲν οὖν καὶ αἰνιγματώδως ἀναφερόμενα εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν τῶν ἀναγεγραμμένων ἐν τῷ νόμῳ πλεῖστα ὅσα ἔστιν εὑρεῖν·); *ComMt* 12.3: 'investigate by yourself also of what thing in the New Scripture each sign in the old Scriptures is a type'. (ζήτει δὲ καὶ σὺ πᾶν τὸ ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς γράμμασι σημεῖον τίνος ἐν τῇ καινῇ γρα<φῇ τύπος πράγ>ματός ἐστι).
[388] Orig. *Princ*. 4.2.6. This Christological interpretation often takes the form of what later theologians and biblical exegetes labelled 'typological interpretation'; however, we do not find a coherent terminological differentiation between allegory and typology in Origen: see Martens 2008; Hall 2021, 29.
[389] Following an interpretation proposed by Paul in 1 *Cor*. 10:4.
[390] *Pascha* 13.
[391] Unfortunately no Origenian commentary on books from the Old Testament survives in its entirety. The most extensive and significant extant witness is the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, preserved in a Latin translation by Rufinus: here we find the Groom representing Christ and the Bride representing the Church. The bibliography on Origen's Biblical hermeneutics is vast: see Hanson 1959, Harl 1985: 19–157, Simonetti 1985: 73–98 (especially 88–93 for his use of typology in polemic with Marcionites and Gnostics), Niehoff 2022 (on how the religious and cultural context of Alexandria and Caesarea influenced Origen's commentaries).
[392] Cf. e.g. *HomGn* 1.7.

This may seem to be completely at odds with the exegetical practices of Chaeremon and the Stoics.[393] Indeed Origen, in the *Contra Celsum*, explicitly rejects the reduction of theology to physics that is performed by Stoic interpreters. In particular, he targets physical allegories that reduce Egyptian gods to natural phenomena, arguing that as a result men would be worshipping natural elements like water, earth, and animals instead of their creator.[394] As a Christian, Origen is obviously committed to the existence of non-sensible and incorporeal realities, and it is to this spiritual level that the letter of the Scriptures must be transferred.[395] So why does Porphyry associate Origen's 'metaleptic method' with the Stoics? It would have actually been more fitting for Porphyry to draw a parallelism between Origen and Numenius: we know that the Neopythagorean philosopher did practice allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament, and Origen explicitly praises him for his openness to a non-literal understanding of the Bible.[396] I want to suggest that, by establishing an intellectual genealogy running from the Stoics to Origen, Porphyry is making a substantive philosophical criticism of Origenian hermeneutics and his Christocentric dimension.[397]

Neither Cornutus nor Chaeremon belong to Porphyry's intellectual pantheon. Both philosophers are criticized elsewhere in the extant Porphyrian corpus for their philosophical

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[393] In his extant works, Origen mentions Chairemon once (*C. Cels.* 1.59) as an authority on astrology: his book on comets shows that these astronomical phenomena can foretell also positive events. Cornutus is never mentioned (at least in the extant Greek corpus of Origen). Here my focus is not on the real influence of Chairemon and Cornutus on Origen's hermeneutics (on which see Ramelli 2011 and 2018), nor on what Origen himself knew about them, but on the Porphyrian reception of these two philosophers, and on what it can tell us about Porphyry's view of Origen's exegetical method.

[394] Without mentioning Chaeremon, Origen attacks allegorical interpretations that reduce Egyptian gods to natural phenomena. See Orig. *C. Cels.* 5.38: 'Retelling in details the myths concerning Osiris and Isis is for us superfluous and untimely. Even if these myths are interpreted figuratively, they will teach us to venerate the inanimate water and the earth that lies beneath humans and all animals. For in this way, I think, they transpose Osiris into water and Isis into earth (Τοὺς δὲ περὶ Ὄσιριν καὶ Ἶσιν μύθους περισσόν ἐστιν ἡμῖν νῦν καταλέγειν καὶ οὐκ εὔκαιρον. Κἂν τροπολογῶνται δὲ οἱ μῦθοι, τὸ ἄψυχον ἡμᾶς ὕδωρ σέβειν διδάξουσι καὶ τὴν ὑποκειμένην ἀνθρώποις καὶ πᾶσι ζῴοις γῆν. Οὕτω γὰρ οἶμαι μεταλαμβάνουσι τὸν μὲν Ὄσιριν εἰς ὕδωρ τὴν δὲ Ἶσιν εἰς γῆν).

[395] For the spiritual nature of Origen exegesis, see e.g. *CommCt.* p. 223 Lawson;. *Jo.* 1.26.18, 4.

[396] See Orig. *C. Cels.* IV.51.

[397] I do not think that he is only drawing a parallelism between Origen's and the Stoics' use of non-literal interpretations because of some technical similarities, like the use of etymology, as has been discussed in several articles by Ilaria Ramelli: see e.g. Ramelli 2011: 341–5; *ead.* 2018. I do not deny an actual influence of Stoic hermeneutical procedures on Origen, but I want to show that more may be at stake from a philosophical point of view.

and exegetical shortcomings. This fact has mostly escaped the attention of modern scholars,[398] but I think that it is crucial for understanding Porphyry's argument. Cornutus is mentioned by Porphyry only in reference to his (mis)understanding of Aristotle's *Categories*;[399] Porphyry's criticism of Chaeremon, on the other hand, is more relevant for my analysis because it touches on issues of hermeneutics and theology.[400]

Porphyry was familiar with Chaeremon's allegorical interpretation of the Egyptian gods,[401] as a fragment from the lost *Letter to Anebo*, preserved by Eusebius, testifies:

> ἄκουε δ' οὖν οἷα καὶ ὁ Πορφύριος ἐν τῇ πρὸς Ἀνεβὼ τὸν Αἰγύπτιον ἐπιστολῇ περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν ἱστορεῖ· Χαιρήμων μὲν γὰρ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οὐδ' ἄλλο τι πρὸ τῶν ὁρωμένων κόσμων ἡγοῦνται, ἐν ἀρχῆς λόγῳ τιθέμενοι τοὺς Αἰγυπτίων, οὐδ' ἄλλους θεοὺς πλὴν τῶν πλανητῶν λεγομένων καὶ τῶν συμπληρούντων τὸν ζῳδιακὸν . . . Ἑώρα γὰρ τοὺς τὸν ἥλιον δημιουργὸν φαμένους καὶ τὰ περὶ τὸν Ὄσιριν καὶ τὴν Ἶσιν καὶ πάντας τοὺς ἱερατικοὺς μύθους ἢ εἰς τοὺς ἀστέρας καὶ τὰς τούτων φάνσεις καὶ κρύψεις καὶ ἐπιτολὰς ἐλιττομένους ἢ εἰς τὰς τῆς σελήνης αὐξήσεις καὶ μειώσεις ἢ εἰς τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου πορείαν ἢ τό γε νυκτερινὸν ἡμισφαίριον ἢ τὸ ἡμερινὸν ἢ τόν γε ποταμόν, καὶ ὅλως πάντα εἰς τὰ φυσικὰ καὶ οὐδὲν εἰς ἀσωμάτους καὶ ζώσας οὐσίας ἑρμηνεύοντας.[402]
>
> Listen then to what Porphyry in the *Letter to the Egyptian Anebos* reports about these same things: 'For Chaeremon and the others do not think that there is anything else above the visible worlds, placing at the rank of first principle[403] the [gods] of the Egyptians, and no other gods besides those that are called planets and those that constitute the Zodiac [. . .] For he saw that those who say that the

[398] The only exception is Perelli 1998, 252–3, who speaks of a 'doppia climax discendente' both regarding the names of the philosophers (from the 'best' (Plato) to the 'worst' (the two Stoics) in Porphyry's personal ranking), and regarding the verbs used to characterize the relationship between Origen and them. But he does not explore the further implications of this climax.

[399] Cornutus is mentioned and criticized in the 'short' *Commentary on the Categories*, in the context of Porphyry's discussion about the scope of the Aristotelian treatise, for having wrongly thought that the *Categories* deals with 'linguistic expressions *qua* linguistic expression' (περὶ τῶν λέξεων καθὸ λέξεις), and not with linguistic expressions *qua* signifiers of other things. Cf. Porph. *in Cat.* 59,10–14 Busse and see Griffin 2016, 139–45 and Boys–Stones 2018, 15–24. Both argue that Porphyry's criticism of Cornutus is specious.

[400] On Chaeremon's life and production, see Barzanò 1985. Our sources call him a ἱερογραμματεύς (cf. e.g. Eus. *PE* 5.10.5, 2; Tzetzes, *Chiliades* 5.6.395), a term that designates a high–ranking Egyptian priest, probably devoted to the cult of Isis. He may have been ἐπιστάτης of the Museum at Alexandria, and was invited by Agrippina to tutor the future emperor Nero in 49 CE. We have extant references to four works written by Chaeremon: a history of Egypt (Αἰγυπτιακὴ ἱστορία or Αἰγυπτιακά), a book on hieroglyphs (Ἱερογλυφικά or Περὶ ἱερῶν γραμμάτων), a book on comets (Περὶ κομητῶν), and a book on an unspecified grammatical topic. Fragments are edited and translated in van der Horst 1984.

[401] Porphyry uses Chaeremon also as a source on the ascetic habits of the Egyptian priests: cf. Porph. *De Abst.* 4.6. This passage, though interesting, is not relevant to our discussion.

[402] Porph. *Ep. Aneb.* fr. 81 Segonds–Saffrey (= Chaeremon fr. 5 van der Host = Eus. *PE* 3.4.1, p. 116.12–117.6). Iamblichus paraphrases and distorts Porphyry's words in *Myst.*8.4; 6–7. Cf. also Chaeremon fr. 6 and 7 van der Host (= Eus. *PE* 3.9.15 and 3.13.8).

[403] I follow Saffrey and Segonds in translating ἐν ἀρχῆς λόγῳ ('au rang de principe'). The meaning of this expression is far from clear, as noted by van der Host 1984, 54.

> sun is the demiurge interpret also the things concerning Osiris and Isis and all the sacred myths by referring them either to the stars and their appearances and hidings and risings as they turn around, or to the waxing and waning of the moon, or to the course of the sun or to the nocturnal hemisphere or to the diurnal or to the river, and in general [they interpret] everything in relation to the things of nature and nothing in relation to incorporeal and living substances.'

In this fragment, Porphyry briefly describes both Chaeremon's theology and how this influenced his interpretation of Egyptian myths. Chaeremon is committed to the typical strong form of materialism that lies at the center of Stoic ontology: he denies the existence of anything beyond the material, sensible world (τῶν ὁρωμένων κόσμων). This materialism shapes how Chaeremon interprets the mythical tales on Egyptian gods: he refers all the divine figures and their stories to 'natural elements' (φυσικά) and natural phenomena in the realm of the sensible world: hence, the Sun becomes the creator of the universe (δημιουργόν), while the other figures of the Egyptian pantheon are to be understood as the planets, the moon, the earth, and the river Nile. No elements of Egyptian religion, in Chaeremon's view, should be referred to 'incorporeal and living realities' (οὐδὲν εἰς ἀσωμάτους καὶ ζώσας οὐσίας) for the simple reason that such realities do not exist at all according to Stoic philosophy.[404]

Porphyry is not completely opposed to this form of physical allegory.[405] For example, as we saw in chapter 1, he may be open to an interpretation of the theomachy of the *Iliad* in the manner of Theagenes, who identified the gods with natural elements.[406] Similarly, in the fragments from *On Statues*, Porphyry associates several Olympian gods with 'powers' (δυνάμεις) ruling over natural phenomena.[407] Therefore, his attack against Chaeremon should

[404] We can get an idea of the kind of physical and astronomical interpretations to which Porphyry alludes thanks to Plutarch, who discusses (and dismisses) them in the first part of *De Iside et Osiride*: cf. *De Is. et. Os.* 367C–369A. Not unlike Porphyry, Plutarch thinks that this materialist interpretation has some value, but it stops at the lowest level of reality: see Richter 2001 and Johnson 2013, 226–7.
[405] *Contra* Bernard 1990, 65.
[406] That this kind of interpretation belongs to a 'lower' exegetical level is proved by the preparatory status of the *Homeric Questions*, as stated in the prefatory letter to Anatolius: cf. Porph. *HQ* I, *praef.*,p. 1.19–30 Sodano and ch. 1 above.
[407] These 'powers' may not be visible: cf. e.g. Porph. 355F. Smith: Hera is the 'power of the ether' (ἀέριον δύναμιν); 357aF.: Hestia is the 'ruling principle of the power of the earth' (ἡγεμονικὸν τῆς χθονίας δυνάμεως); Rhea is the 'power of the rocky and mountainous earth' (τῆς πετρώδους καὶ ὀρείου γῆς δύναμιν); etc. But, as suggested by Johnson 2013, 169–70 and more extensively argued by Miles 2015, 79–85, we probably have a

not be interpreted as a complete rejection of a physical allegorical interpretation of the gods,[408] but as a warning concerning the limits of this form of hermeneutics. We have a hint at a concrete example of a higher form of allegory in Porphyry's reading of a famous Orphic hymn to Zeus.[409] Porphyry identifies the Zeus of the poem with the 'Intellect' (νοῦς) that creates everything through his thoughts (νοήμασιν).[410] Porphyry is explicit in arguing that this demiurgic power is manifest only at the intelligible level (φανερὸς ἐν τοῖς νοεροῖς).[411] Chaeremon's fault lies not so much in the content of his interpretations, but in his inability to go beyond a materialist Stoic theology: Chaeremon identifies the natural elements with the first principle while denying the existence of anything prior to them.

In Porphyry's view, a similar mistake was committed by Origen: by associating Origen's exegetical method with the Stoics, Porphyry is subtly suggesting that the Christian interpreter learnt from the wrong teachers.[412] While Origen himself may be claiming to be transposing (μεταλαμβάνω) the 'bodily' meaning of the Scriptures to a higher level, in practice, like Cornutus and Chaeremon, he is still bound within the limits of the material world because of his focus on Christ, a mere human being.[413] If my interpretation is correct, we can see how Porphyry's criticism of Origen has come full circle. The fragment begins with a reference to Origen's act of 'barbarian daring', an act that leads him to abandon his commitment to the true (Platonic) ontology in favor of the distorted view of the Christians,

distorted picture of *On Statues*, since the selection of surviving fragments is influenced by Eusebius' personal agenda: it is likely that the original work contained many more figural readings referring to intelligible realities, as the preface of the work (cf. 351F. Smith) suggests. Cf. also *in Tim.* fr. 70 Sodano, that may contain traces of an astronomical allegory, though it is not clear to me whether Porphyry is equating the gods with the planets bearing their names.

[408] For Porphyry's view that the Olympian gods are part of the material world, see Johnson 2013, 74–5.

[409] Porph. 354F. Smith (=Eus. *PE* 8.2–9.9). The Orphic hymn is fr. 168 Kern.

[410] Ζεὺς δὲ καθὸ νοῦς, ἀφ' οὗ προφέρει πάντα καὶ δημιουργεῖ τοῖς νοήμασιν (354.43–4F. Smith).

[411] Φανὸς ἐν τοῖς νοεροῖς (354.52–3F. Smith).

[412] Eusebius brings against Porphyry and the Platonizing Greek allegorists this very same accusation: cf. Eus. *PE* 3.7–13.

[413] Cf. Porph. 345F. (quoted above) and 346F. Smith and see Granger 2002, 107–12, who suggests that Porphyry is trying to make sense of the figure of Christ from a pagan perspective by considering him an immortalized hero.

with their emphasis on the material world and their worship of a mere man as God.[414] This theological mistake grounds Origen's hermeneutical mistake, as he considers the pneumatic/Christological interpretation as the highest possible form of Scriptural exegesis. This is why Porphyry polemically associates Origen with the materialist Stoics. Both Stoic and Christian hermeneutics are unrecoverably flawed insofar as they are both based on flawed ontologies: they place the individual over the universal, the many over the one.

v

So far, we have seen how Porphyry's criticism of Christian Biblical exegesis focuses on two different, yet interrelated issues. Christians are bad philologists, because they do not try to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures starting from the Scriptures themselves. Christians, and especially Origen, are also bad philosophers, because their figural interpretations produce a flawed ontological hierarchy that raises the soul of a mortal man, Jesus, up to the level of the first principles. Both facets of Porphyry's critique can be seen at work in a fragment preserved by Didymus the Blind's 'Commentary on Ecclesiastes':[415]

> Πορφύριος γοῦν θέλων ἐνκαλ[εῖν ἡμῖν ὅτι πρὸς τοῖς ῥη]τοῖς[416] ἀναπλάττοντες ἀναγωγὰς καὶ ἀλλ[η]γ[ορίας βιαζόμεθα, τὰ τοῦ Ὁμήρου, ἔν]θα[417] ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς καὶ Ἕκτωρ μνημονεύεται, ἠλληγόρησεν φήσας πρὸς τὸν Χ(ριστὸ)ν καὶ τὸν διάβολον· καὶ ἃ ἐλέγομεν ἡμεῖς περὶ τοῦ διαβόλου, αὐτὸς περὶ τοῦ Ἕκτορος, καὶ ἃ περὶ τοῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ, αὐτὸς περὶ Ἀχιλλέως· καὶ συνεχρᾶτο ταῖς τοιαύταις λέξεσιν ὅτι· "πρὸ τῆς ἐπι[κρ]ατήσεως τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως ἐβρενθύετο κατὰ πάντων ὁ Ἕκτωρ καὶ πάντων δυνατώτερος ἐνομίζετο". ὑπὲρ τοῦ διαβαλεῖν δὲ τοῦτο ἐποίει. ὧδε οὖν τὰ τῆς ἀναγωγῆς πέπαυται.[418]

[414] See Johnson 2012, 57–60 for a compelling argument in favor of this interpretation of Origen's 'barbarian daring'.
[415] Didymus (313–398 CE) is an Alexandrian theologian who was deeply influenced by Origen's hermeneutics. Our knowledge of his exegetical production dramatically increased thanks to the discovery at Tura in 1941 of several papyri containing substantial portions of his commentaries. On his method of interpretation see Simonetti 1983 and 1985, 204–16.
[416] The papyrus is damaged. I accept the text proposed by Binder 1968, 92. Alternatively, Merkelbach (in Binder 1968, 92 n. 32) proposes: ἐνκαλ[εῖν ὅτι ἐναντίας τοῖς ῥη]τοῖς.
[417] Binder 1968, 92. A very different emendation is proposed by Beatrice 1995: ἀλλη[γορίας, φησὶν ὅτι Ὠριγένης τὰ ἔπη ἔν]θα. There are no cogent reasons to accept such a radical reinterpretation of the text, and I do not think that there is enough space in the *lacuna* for 29 letters.
[418] Porph. *Chris*. 7F Becker (= Didym. *in Eccles.* 9.10). *Editio princeps* in Binder 1968. See also *CPF* I.1.3.2 Nr. 83/1T (=Linguiti 1999).

> Porphyry, desiring to [blame us for the fact that we use violence] because we fabricate anagogical and allegorical interpretations [besides what is said], allegorized [the things said by Homer], where Achilles and Hector are mentioned, saying that they refer to Christ and the devil. And what we say about the devil, he says about Hector, and what we say about Christ, he says about Achilles; and he made use of such words, saying that: 'before the victory of Achilles he (Hector) was arrogant in relation to everything and believed himself to be more powerful than everyone'. And he did this for the sake of slandering. In this way the things concerning the anagogical meaning come to an end.

In this curious passage, the Alexandrian exegete Didymus claims that Porphyry attacked Christian figural interpretations of the Bible. Unfortunately, the first two lines of the papyrus are damaged; however, the proposed reconstruction produces a picture that is in line with what I have labelled philological criticism: Christians make up (ἀναπλάττοντες) allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures (ἀναγωγὰς καὶ ἀλλ[η]γ[ορίας) that are not grounded in the text, but that rather go against what is said at the level of the letter (πρὸς τοῖς ῥη]τοῖς). Didymus then reports Porphyry's eccentric, yet fascinating allegorical reading of the fight between Achilles and Hector, according to which the Greek hero represents the triumphing Christ, while Hector stands for the defeated Devil.

The details of the original context of this Porphyrian allegory are unknown; however, from the way Didymus introduces it, Porphyry must have proposed this Christological reading of the *Iliad* within a polemic against Christian exegetes. Two interpretations have been proposed: some have argued that Porphyry's figural reading must be taken seriously, since his goal would be to show how the Homeric poems are more worthy to be interpreted allegorically than the Bible.[419] Most scholars, however, think that Porphyry is simply parodying Christian figural readings of the Bible, and he is rejecting them by means of a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*.[420] I believe that the latter interpretation is more persuasive, since it

[419] This is the thesis od Sellew 1989, more recently accepted, without further arguments, by Miles 2022, 2.
[420] This was already the idea of the *editor princeps*: see Binder 1968, 93–4. See also Carlini 1998 (who takes the sentence ὑπὲρ τοῦ διαβαλεῖν δὲ τοῦτο ἐποίει not as part of the quotation from Porphyry, but as a comment by Didymus on Porphyry's allegory, thus proving its parodistic tone); Cook 2008, 21. For a very different interpretation see Beatrice 1995, who believes that the author of the Iliadic allegory is Origen himself, and he

fits with my reconstruction of Porphyry's critique of Christian exegetical practices. Indeed, the Christological allegory of the *Iliad* exemplifies well the two main problems of Christian hermeneutics: its philological weakness and its philosophical flaws.

From a philological point of view, I believe that, for Porphyry, any attempt to allegorize the battle between the two heroes would be a forced interpretation that goes against the principles of his own hermeneutics. As we saw in the previous chapters, Porphyry seems to resort to allegory only on two specific occasions when interpreting the Homeric poems: when the gods are involved, or when a passage, if taken literally, presents insoluble literary problems, like the description of the cave in Ithaca.[421] Hence, passages that are perfectly clear and possess an evident function within the economy of the poems do not need to be allegorized. As it is obvious to any reader of Homer, the fight between Achilles and Hector is a central engine for the dramatic action and plays a crucial role in the development of the narrative; it is thus very different from the description of the cave in Ithaca.

The philosophical issue concerns the content itself of the figural reading. As rightly stressed by Carlini,[422] Porphyry is targeting Christian typology, namely, the idea that events in the Hebrew Bible are images of future events concerning Christ, namely his life, and his second coming and final triumph at the *eschaton*. As we saw, Origen considered this form of exegesis as the peak of his hermeneutic endeavor with the Scriptures. With regards to this

accordingly proposes a different emendation of the first two lines of the fragment. Beatrice's reconstruction has not gained any traction.

[421] For the gods, see especially 372F. Smith (=fr. 1 Castelletti). Heroes in the *Iliad*, unlike gods and other divine beings, were rarely subjected to figural interpretations, because their actions do not raise theological problems. Even a much more extremist allegorist like Proclus refrains from allegorizing Achilles, as shown by Miles 2022. Proclus allegorizes the story of the Trojan War as a myth concerning the descent of the soul into matter: see Lamberton 1986,199–200. The status of Odysseus is different: as we saw, Porphyry accepts Numenius' view that Odysseus' journey should be seen as an image of the journey of the soul. Even if in this case Porphyry 'allegorizes' a hero, it is definitely a milder form of allegory than claiming that the *Odyssey* is a sort of prophetic text that prefigures future events.

[422] Carlini 1998, 387–8. See also Linguiti 1999, 627.

specific eschatological image, namely, the final battle between Christ and the Devil, we can find a very interesting parallel in an Origenian homily on the book of Joshua.[423]

Joshua, chapters 7–8, reports the story of the destruction of city of Ai at the hands of the Israelites. At first, the inhabitants of Ai and their king seem to have the upper hand; then, thanks to a fake retreat, the Israelites are able to ambush and defeat the enemy army. The city of Ai is burnt to the ground and the corpse of the king is defiled before being eventually buried. Origen deals with this episode in his Homily VIII on Joshua.[424] The Alexandrian exegete interprets the fight between the Israelites and the inhabitants of Ai as an image of the final battle between the demons and the followers of Christ. The king of Ai is an image of the Devil itself, while Joshua represents Christ. At first, the forces of evil seem to prevail because of the power of sin, but the arrival of Joshua/Jesus eventually leads to the defeat of the Devil.[425]

While it is impossible to demonstrate that Porphyry had direct knowledge of Origen's exegesis of the book Joshua,[426] the parallelisms between Origen's homily and Porphyry's Iliadic parody are quite striking: Hector, like the king of Ai, was at first bolder and seemingly victorious, but the arrival of Achilles/Joshua marks a change of fortune. Further details of the fall of Ai may remind a reader of the fall of Troy: both cities are conquered thanks to an ambush and burnt to the ground; the king of Ai's corpse is defiled by being left on a pole for

[423] Other Origenian *comparanda* have been suggested: cf. e.g. *Princ.* 4.1.5, where Origen allegorizes *Job*. 3:8 (Jesus as the one who will destroy Leviathan). See Cook 2008, 21 n. 101 for a longer list. None of these passages, however, present the same martial narrative as *Joshua* 7–8, which is much closer to a text like the *Iliad*.

[424] It is preserved only in the Latin translation by Rufinus. English translation in Bruce–White 2002.

[425] I simplify for the sake of clarity, but Origen allegorizes every single element of the narrative, and his figurative readings involve two layers of references: the triumph of Christ on the cross and the final triumph at the *Eschaton*.

[426] Though, if Porphyry did meet Origen at Caesarea and possibly attended his school (as suggested more recently by Beatrice 2019), then he may have been present when Origen delivered the cycle of homilies on Joshua, that are tentatively dated around the Decian persecution of 249–50 CE, when Porphyry was in his late teens (see Bruce–White 2002, 19–20).

an entire day before being buried, while Hector's body is defiled by Achilles before being handed back to Priam for a proper burial.

Porphyry would have found Origen's interpretation unacceptable on two levels. First, historical narratives such as that of the fall of Ai are perfectly clear at the level of the letter, and therefore not in need of any allegorical reading.[427] Second, Porphyry considered Christocentric interpretations as philosophically flawed, because they are based on the wrong assumption that Christ occupies the same ontological level as the first principles. Furthermore, to someone committed to Plotinian Platonism, the idea of a second evil principle, like the Devil, would have appeared abhorrent. Hence, whether Porphyry had Origen's interpretation of this specific biblical episode in mind, or whether he was simply hinting at a common theme in early Christian literature and exegesis,[428] it is clear that the Tyrian is mocking and rejecting typological interpretations of the Bible. This passage from Didymus shows, through parody, how not to read the Bible (or any text for that matter).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined the grounds on which Porphyry dismisses Christian allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament. Porphyry identifies two main flaws in Christian hermeneutics. First, Christian interpreters fail to interpret the Bible in its own terms, since their goal is to exploit the recognized authority of the sacred scriptures for the sake of defending their own doctrines, and not to recover the true intentions of the author(s) of the Hebrew Bible. In consequence, they allegorize passages that are perfectly acceptable at the level of the letter. Second, Christian hermeneutics produces a flawed ontology that places a human, Jesus, at the top of the divine hierarchy.

[427] One should also keep in mind that the book of *Joshua* was not written by the 'prophet' Moses (cf. *De Antro* 9.156); hence it may be completely unsuited to allegoresis in Porphyry's view.
[428] As suggested by Carlini 1998, 390.

We can compare the 'bad' reading habits of the Christians with the 'good' model that Porphyry himself presents in his Homeric works. As we saw in the previous two chapters, Porphyry believes that a good reader should begin from a close analysis of the style, diction, and literary techniques of Homer. After successfully completing this preliminary step, the interpreter is ready for more sophisticated forms of exegesis, which will uncover deeper philosophical meanings while still scrupulously attending to the details of the author's diction, since these are clues that can guide readers towards a correct understanding. If a reader follows the correct path in their interpretation, they will eventually transcend the microcosm of the text and direct their attention towards the 'truths' which the poet contemplates and reproduces in his work.[429]

Christian readers get everything wrong: by failing to understand the Old Testament on its own terms they end up reading into the Bible a flawed metaphysics that obfuscates the most valuable teaching of the Scriptures: the existence of a fully transcendent God. Hence, while Porphyry's own correct hermeneutics ideally lifts readers up towards higher levels of reality (the metaphysical truths contemplated by the poet), Christian figural exegesis of the Old Testament risks producing the opposite results, as its practitioners end up thinking that a mortal human occupies the highest position in their metaphysical system.

[429] *De Antro* 36.501–2 and see above Ch. 2.vi

Chapter 4

Porphyry's Philosophical Philology in the 'Commentary on Ptolemy's *Harmonics*'

Within Porphyry's exegetical production, the *Commentary on Ptolemy's* Harmonics (Πορφυρίου εἰς τὰ ἁρμονικὰ Πτολεμαίου ὑπόμνημα)[430] [*in Harm.*] occupies a somewhat peculiar position. Besides being the longest extant work by Porphyry, *in Harm.* is his only lemmatic and continuous commentary that has been preserved almost in its entirety.[431] It thus offers a great opportunity to see the commentator at work while also allowing us to study formal aspects of Porphyry's commentaries that are hard to recover from his other works that survive only in fragments.[432]

Furthermore, at Porphyry's time, Ptolemy's *Harmonics* did not enjoy the same canonical status as the works of Plato, Aristotle, or Homer, to which Porphyry devoted the greatest part of his exegetical activity. This is proved by the fact that Porphyry is the first

[430] This title is transmitted by the best manuscripts. In other manuscripts, the work is called ἐξήγησις (Paris. Suppl. 292 and Vindob. gr. 176), ὑπόθεσις (Monac. gr. 385 and Vat. Pal. gr. 389), or ἑρμηνεία (Escorial gr. 71; Vindob. gr. 76 and Yalens. Beineck. gr. 270). On this issue see Raffa 2016b, XXIX with n. 9. Porphyry's *in Harm.* is cited in the new edition by Raffa 2016a (R.), but I also provide in parentheses page and line numbers from the old edition of Düring 1932 (D.). The translation by Barker 2016 mostly follows Düring's text and page numbers, with some emendations.

[431] The commentary runs over 172 pages in Düring's edition, covering only 55 pages of Ptolemy's text. It is not complete: we do not have any lemma on Ptolemy 1.16, and it suddenly breaks off at Ptolemy 2.7. On the structure see Barker 2016, 3–9, who speculates that the work was left unfinished by Porphyry because he lost interest in Ptolemy's text once he reached the more technical sections. A similar hypothesis is proposed by Raffa 2016b, L–LIII.

[432] The formal aspects of Porphyry's continuous commentaries will be expanded upon in a future study on his fragmentary works on the *Categories* and on the *Timaeus*. For now, my preliminary conclusion is that Porphyry is still operating within the middle Platonist framework of a continuous, yet thematic commentary, on which see Petrucci 2018a, focusing on the *Anonymous Commentary of Plato's Theaetetus* and Galen's *Commentary on the Timaeus*, and Petrucci 2018b, 173–83. More on this below.

scholar ever to have attempted to write a commentary on the *Harmonics*.[433] This situation places the commentator in a unique position: on the one hand, he needs to justify his hermeneutic endeavor by presenting the text that he is striving to clarify as authoritative, thus making an argument for its canonization; on the other hand, Porphyry needs find a new way to carve out a space for his intellectual autonomy and epistemic authority as a commentator: the usual polemic against competitors – like the criticisms of Cronius that we find in *De Antro* – is obviously not on the table.[434]

In this chapter, I show how this tension is revolved by Porphyry through an exegetical method that can be called philosophical philology.[435] The basic approach presents strong similarities with what we saw in his Homeric works, though adapted to the specific nature of the text: a careful study of Ptolemy's *lexis* that aims at clarifying the meaning of words that can be potentially obscure (though not because they are archaic, but because of their technical nature), and an attempt to identify Ptolemy's sources (*historia*). But the goal of the exegesis is not only to explain Ptolemy's text, but also to assess Ptolemy's arguments from a philosophical point of view. This is where the tension concerning authority comes into play. Porphyry feels free to criticize openly the validity of some of Ptolemy's arguments, and thus to correct his source text. However, as my analysis will show, this does not imply a rebuttal of Ptolemy's scientific and epistemic authority, but rather a form of 'emendation' that is the philosophical equivalent of a textual correction: Porphyry emends 'Ptolemaeum e Ptolemaeo', as he uses Ptolemy's theory of the two criteria to rebuke and correct Ptolemy's quantitative view of

[433] As Porphyry himself stresses: see *in Harm.* 1.19–20 R. (=3.18–19 D.). On the relationship between exegesis and canonicity, see e.g. Finkelberg 2012.
[434] Fighting against previous interpreters was the standard way through which commentators established their own credentials: see Sluiter 2000, 188–190 and 2013.
[435] I borrow this label from Petrucci 2018c, who uses the term *philologia philosophica* to describe the exegetical approach of those Middle Platonists who adopted and adapted traditional tools of Alexandrian philology for interpreting the dialogues of Plato. For a similar tendency among the Epicureans see Lapini 2016.

sound–pitch. As a result, both the intellectual standing of both Porphyry and Ptolemy are not weakened, but mutually reinforced.

My chapter is composed of four sections. (**i**) I begin by looking at the first lemma of the commentary in order to pinpoint the main features of Porphyry's 'philological philosophy'; (**ii**) next, I provide a close reading of the prologue in order to bring to the fore the subtle tension between commentator and source text; (**iii**) finally, I look at Porphyry's criticisms of Ptolemy's quantitative theory of pitches and its role in the exegetical economy of the commentary

i

After a short introductory digression concerning the standard division of musical science in several branches, among which harmonics occupies the most important position,[436] Porphyry directs his attention to the first line of Ptolemy's *Harmonics*, where we find a definition of harmonic science. Porphyry's comment on this first lemma proceeds in three steps: a) identification of the sources (*historia*); b) assessment of Ptolemy's own definition; c) explanation of an ambiguous word (*kata lexin*).[437] I will briefly consider each one of these three moments, and show how Porphyry practices a form of philological philosophy.

a) Porphyry reports the following two alternative definitions of harmonic science:

> **D1** ἐπιστήμην θεωρητικὴν τῆς τοῦ ἡρμοσμένου φύσεως
> Knowledge capable of observing the nature of what is attuned.[438]
>
> **D2** ἕξιν θεωρητικὴν τοῦ διαστηματικοῦ μέλους καὶ τῶν τούτῳ συμβαινόντων.
> Disposition capable of observing intervallic melody and its attributes.[439]

Ptolemy's definition is the following:

[436] *in Harm.* 4.3–13 R. (= 5.21–6.3 D.).
[437] We can compare these three moments with the traditional *schema* that we find, for example, in Dionysius Thrax 1.1 (quoted below): Porphyry practices *historia*, *krisis*, and *exegesis*.
[438] *In Harm.* 4.14–15 R. (=6.4–5 D.). This definition is very similar to what we find in Cleonid. *Isag.* 1, but for chronological reasons he cannot be Porphyry's source. Raffa 2016b: 707 nn. 5 and 6 and Barker 2016: 71 n. 19 think that both definitions come from an Aristoxenian source.
[439] *in Harm.* 4.15–16 R. (=6.5–6 D.).

> **Pt.** Ἁρμονική ἐστι δύναμις καταληπτικὴ τῶν ἐν τοῖς ψόφοις περὶ τὸ ὀξὺ καὶ τὸ βαρὺ διαφορῶν.
> Harmonic is the capacity of apprehending the differences in sounds concerning high and low pitch.[440]

Porphyry's goal is to demonstrate that these three definitions refer to the same object (εἰς ταὐτὸ δὲ συντείνειν).[441] To this end, (1) he must show that the three definitions refer to the same cognitive state and (2) that the three definitions agree as to what the object of this cognitive state is.

(1) Porphyry argues that 'capacity of apprehending' (δύναμις καταληπτικὴ in **Pt**.) is both a kind of 'disposition capable of observing (ἕξις θεωρητική **D1**), and a kind of 'theoretical knowledge (ἐπιστήμη θεωρητική **D2**). Indeed, he points out that ἐπιστήμη, 'according to the ancient usage᾽ (κατὰ τὴν παλαιὰν χρῆσιν), was employed generically to indicate ᾽any form of disposition capable of observing' (κατὰ πασῶν τῶν θεωρητικῶν ἕξεων). Hence, the three definitions can refer to the same cognitive capacity: **D1** and **D2** refer to its genus while **Pt.** refers to its species.

As to the second part, Porphyry argues that the 'differences concerning high and low pitch' determine 'what is attuned' (τὸ ἡρμοσμένον) (**D1**), and what is attuned is called 'melodic interval' (διαστηματικὸν μέλος) (**D2**). Hence, he concludes, the object of the cognitive state is the same in all three definitions. Leaving aside whether Porphyry's argument is indeed correct, the method employed by Porphyry combines philological and philosophical analysis. Porphyry performs an exegesis κατὰ λέξιν (i.e. with focus on the wording of Ptolemy and of the other two anonymous authors) that is sensitive to the historical dimension of the language being used. At the same time, by appealing to the concept of *genus* and *species*, he is using categories that belong to the Aristotelian method of division in order to make sense of the text.

[440] Ptol. *Harm.* 1.1.2–3 During.
[441] From a methodological point of view, Porphyry is following a traditional exegetical principle according to which differences of voices (πολυφωνία) do not imply differences of opinions (πολυδοξία).

b) After having demonstrated that the three existing definitions of harmonics refer to the same object, Porphyry is ready to proceed to the second step of his exegesis: assessing Ptolemy's own definition, with the goal is of showing that it is more precise (ἀκριβέστερος) than the other two. Porphyry's strategy depends once again on a form of exegesis κατὰ λέξιν, as he focuses on the specific terminology that Ptolemy uses and claims that it is 'more inclusive' (περιληπτικότερος) than what we find in **D1** and **D2**. Indeed, Porphyry argues, the 'nature of what is attuned' (τῆς τοῦ ἡρμοσμένου φύσεως; **D1**) and the 'intervallic melody' (τοῦ διαστηματικοῦ μέλους; **D2**) are primarily (προηγουμένως) the objects of harmonic science, but they are not its only objects. Indeed, the same science, though subordinately (κατ' ἐπακολούθησιν), discerns also sounds that are not attuned. Ptolemy is thus correct in talking more generally of 'differences in sounds concerning high and low pitch' (τῶν ἐν τοῖς ψόφοις περὶ τὸ ὀξὺ καὶ τὸ βαρὺ διαφορῶν). Furthermore, Porphyry points out that Ptolemy is right also in using the more inclusive term sound (ψόφος) instead of voice (φωνή) or note (φθόγγος), two words that belong to the specific field of music. Again, Porphyry begins from a careful examination of the wording (philology), which he combines with an Aristotelian theory: the view that scientific knowledge deals not only with its primary objects, but also with their opposites.[442] By combining philology and philosophy Porphyry is able to prove the scientific authority of Ptolemy.

c) After having argued in favor of the superiority of Ptolemy's definition, Porphyry moves to the explanation of what he considers an ambiguous term: *dunamis*. His approach follows a standard philological practice: he identifies possible meanings, and selects the one that is most fitting for the specific context.[443] Probably drawing on Aristotle's distinction between two

[442] Cf. Arist. *Met.* IX.2, 1046^{b}3–13.
[443] Cf. e.g. *in Harm.* 11.20–12.7 R. (=12.6–20 R.), on the multiple meanings of λόγος. The most famous instance is probably in Taurus T26 Petrucci (=Philop. *De Aeternitate Mundi* 145.1–148.25 Rabe), on the meanings of γενητόν in the context of Plato's *Timaeus*. For a similar procedure in *De Antro*, see ch. 2.v above.

kinds of potentialities in the *De Anima* 2.5,[444] Porphyry differentiates between two forms of *dunameis*: the term can refer either to a potentiality that is still incomplete and not yet actualized,[445] or to a capacity that is present in the subject and that can already be activated and directed towards its proper goal.[446] In this context, Ptolemy must be referring to the latter: *dunamis* here means 'what is called after the ability by which it can accomplish fully the things towards which it naturally tends' (τὴν παρὰ τὸ δύνασθαι κεκλημένην τῷ οἷάν τε εἶναι ἐνεργεῖν ἤδη τελείως πρὸς ἃ πέφυκεν).

This brief analysis of the commentary on the first lemma of the *Harmonics* has brought to the fore the main feature of Porphyry's methodology: a close reading of the text that aims at both clarifying and assessing Ptolemy's text from a linguistic and philosophical point of view. The three moments that I have described (identification of the sources; judgement on Ptolemy's text; lexical analysis) recur in most *lemmata*, though their order can vary. We have also seen how Ptolemy's greatness consists in his capacity to combine and improve the works of his predecessors. By stressing this aspect Porphyry builds the scientific authority of his source text; but this is also the place where the subtle fight between commentator and text is fought in the prologue.

ii

As it was customary, Porphyry prefaces his commentary with an introduction that aims at justifying the exegetical endeavor.[447] The preface of *in Harm.*, however, is pervaded by a tension between commentator and source text, a feature that my analysis wants to bring to the fore. This tension subtly emerges from the very first lines:

[444] See Arist. *DA* 2.5, 417[a]21–[b]2. Cf. also Arist. *Met.* IX.1–2.
[445] *in Harm.* 5.20–22 R. (=6.33–7.2 D.).
[446] *in Harm.* 5.22–23 R. (=7.2–3 D.).
[447] On the importance of the introductions in Neoplatonic commentaries see Hadot 1987.

> Πολλῶν αἱρέσεων οὐσῶν ἐν μουσικῇ περὶ τοῦ ἡρμοσμένου, ὦ Εὐδόξιε, δύο πρωτεύειν ἄν τις ὑπολάβοι, τήν τε Πυθαγόρειον καὶ τὴν Ἀριστοξένειον, ὧν καὶ τὰ δόγματα εἰς ἔτι καὶ νῦν σῳζόμενα φαίνεται. [448]
>
> While there are many schools of musical science regarding the subject of attunement, Eudoxius, one could think that two of them have a preeminent position, the Pythagorean school and the Aristoxenian school, and their doctrines have clearly been preserved up to the present days.

Porphyry begins his work with a short historical survey concerning the main schools that practiced harmonic theory. Two of them are remarked upon as the most successful: the Pythagorean and the Aristoxenian.[449] In Porphyry's view, the preeminence of these two schools is due to both their intellectual merits and historical reasons: on the one hand, their scientific achievements surpassed those of all the other schools for the depth of their analysis; on the other hand, their great popularity secured the survival of their books. The name of Ptolemy or a reference to his work does not appear until line 14 of Raffa's edition:

> Ἱκανῶς δ' αὐτὰς πρὸ Πτολεμαίου μὲν Διδύμου τοῦ μουσικοῦ διακρίναντος ἐν προηγουμένῳ περὶ αὐτῶν συγγράμματι, Πτολεμαίου δὲ καὶ ἐξετάσαντος ἐν τοῖς Ἁρμονικοῖς καὶ τὴν ἀπ' ἀμφοῖν ὠφέλειαν ἐπιδείξαντος τήν τε δοκοῦσαν πρὸς ἀλλήλας μάχην συμβιβάσαντος, ἔκρινα τῶν Πτολεμαίου Ἁρμονικῶν ἐξήγησιν καταβάλλεσθαι εἰδὼς μὲν μηδένα ἄχρι καὶ νῦν, ὅσον κἀμὲ γινώσκειν, τουτὶ πεποιηκότα. [450]
>
> Since Didymus, the scholar of music, assessed these schools adequately in his pioneering treatise about them, and since Ptolemy investigated them in his *Harmonics*, and pointed out what is useful in both of them and reconciled the apparent conflict between them, I decided to embark on the exegesis of Ptolemy's *Harmonics*, knowing that no one until now has done this, as far as I am aware.

The first mention of Ptolemy is overshadowed by a quite obscure figure, the *mousikos* Didymus, who is praised by Porphyry for having written a treatise on the differences between Aristoxenians and Pythagoreans.[451] It is noteworthy that Porphyry describes the work by

[448] *in Harm.* 1.1–3 R. (= 3.1–3 D.).
[449] On the differences between these two schools as they were conceptualized in late–antiquity see Barker 2007: 440–442.
[450] *In Harm.* 1.13–19 R. (= 3.13–18 D.).
[451] See *Suda* δ 875 Adler. The lemma is devoted to a certain Didymus, son of Heraclides, who lived at the time of Nero and was a grammarian (γραμματικός) and expert in music. Barker 1989, 230, believes that this must the Didymus mentioned by Porphyry. He should thus not be confused with the (in)famous Didymus Chalkenteros, the Alexandrian grammarian active in the second half of the 1st century BCE.

Didymus as προηγούμενος. This attributive participle, which, following Barker, I translate as "pioneering", stresses the novelty of Didymus' endeavor by placing him at the beginning of a tradition to which Ptolemy's work belongs. Hence, implicitly, the originality of Ptolemy's *Harmonics* is undermined, while its derivative nature is brought to the fore. Thus, the beginning of the introduction is carefully crafted in order to present Ptolemy's work as occupying the lowest position in an ideal tripartite hierarchy: the Pythagoreans and the Aristoxenians produced original thinking; Didymus was the first to systematize their achievements; Ptolemy followed the footsteps of Didymus. The derivative nature of Ptolemy's work is put into a sharp contrast with the novelty of Porphyry's endeavor. The Neoplatonist philosopher stresses that no one has ever attempted to elucidate Ptolemy's work. Hence, Porphyry's commentary can claim for itself that originality that his source text lacks, since the latter is the latest product of a tradition, whereas the former stands, potentially, at the very beginning of a new one, as it attempts to do something that has never been tried before.

However, Porphyry needs to justify the reason why he has decided to spend time and energy in commenting on this derivative text. Thus, he claims that the value of Ptolemy lies in his ability to point out what is useful in the Pythagorean and Aristoxenian schools, and in his attempt to reconcile the two positions.[452]

> Ἐνῆγε δέ με πρὸς τὴν ἐξήγησιν καὶ τὸ μόνον ἢ μάλιστα τὸν Πτολεμαῖον τὴν περὶ τὸ ἡρμοσμένον θεωρίαν τελεῶσαι οὐχ οὕτω τῇ προσθέσει— ὀλίγα γάρ ἐστι παντάπασιν, ἃ τοῖς παλαιοῖς προσεξεῦρεν—ὡς τῇ κρίσει τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς θεωρημάτων. Κριτικὸς γὰρ καὶ ἐλεγκτικὸς τῶν ὑγιειῶν, εἰ καί τις ἄλλος, ἐν τῇ πραγματείᾳ ταύτῃ γέγονε.[453]
>
> I was led to this exegesis by the fact that Ptolemy alone, or Ptolemy above all, brought to perfection the science of attunement, not so much by adding – few are in general the things that he discovered in addition to those discovered by the ancients – as in the assessment of the theories found in them. For Ptolemy has been an interpreter and an cross–examiner of what is sound in this field, if anyone ever has.

[452] The idea of bringing out what is useful in a text is a refrain that we find often in exegetical works on technical treatises: cf. e.g. Manetti–Roselli 1994: 1559–63 on Galen's commentaries on Hippocrates.
[453] *in Harm.* 1.30–2.3 R. (=4.9–13 D.).

Once again, Porphyry downplays the originality of Ptolemy by stressing that the value of his work lies not so much in what he adds to previous scientific traditions, but in his 'assessment of past doctrine' (κρίσις τῶν θεωρημάτων). Porphyry's choice of words is significant because Ptolemy's endeavor is described in terms that are fitting for an exegetical work. According to the *schema* proposed by the ancient grammarian Dionysius Thrax, the 'judgment of the poems' (κρίσις τῶν ποιημάτων) was the last stage in the interpretation of a work.[454] For poetic works, *krisis* meant primarily to assess whether a work (or a specific line in case of Homer) is original or spurious.[455] In interpreting a work of philosophy, on the other hand, the *krisis* consists in assessing whether a certain doctrine 'has been said rightly' (εἰ ὀρθῶς λέλεκται).[456] Furthermore, Porphyry calls Ptolemy a *kritikos*: while referring to Ptolemy's general capacity of judgement and discernment, this is also a technical term for designating a grammarian and exegete. Porphyry is thus describing Ptolemy's text as a sort of commentary on previous doctrines, thus implicitly reshaping the figure of Ptolemy in the image of a commentator.

[454] Dion. Thr. *Ars* § 1:'Grammar is experience of what is for the most part said by poets and prose writers. It has six parts. First, practiced reading aloud according to prosody; second, interpretation according to the poetic tropes present [in the text]; third, straightforward explanation of rare words and matters of fact; fourth, discovery of etymology; fifth, calculation of analogy; sixth, judgement of poems, which is the finest part of all those [contained] in the art [of grammar]. (Tr. by Schironi) (γραμματική ἐστιν ἐμπειρία τῶν παρὰ ποιηταῖς τε καὶ συγγραφεῦσιν ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ λεγομένων. μέρη δὲ αὐτῆς ἐστιν ἕξ· πρῶτον ἀνάγνωσις ἐντριβὴς κατὰ προσῳδίαν, δεύτερον ἐξήγησις κατὰ τοὺς ἐνυπάρχοντας ποιητικοὺς τρόπους, τρίτον γλωσσῶν τε καὶ ἱστοριῶν πρόχειρος ἀπόδοσις, τέταρτον ἐτυμολογίας εὕρεσις, πέμπτον ἀναλογίας ἐκλογισμός, ἕκτον κρίσις ποιημάτων, ὃ δὴ κάλλιστόν ἐστι πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ).

[455] As persuasively argued by Schironi 2018, 413–542. For a survey of different interpretations see Schironi 2018, 97–8.

[456] See DL 3.64,713–65,718 Dorandi: 'The interpretation of his [*scil.* Plato's] works is threefold: for first it is necessary to explain what are each of the things being said; next, for what reason each thing has been said, whether as a main point or in the place of an image, and if [it has been said] for the presentation of doctrines or for the refutation of the interlocutor; and third, if it has been said rightly' (ἔστι δὲ ἡ ἐξήγησις αὐτοῦ τῶν λόγων τριπλῆ· πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἐκδιδάξαι χρὴ ὅ τι ἐστὶν ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων· ἔπειτα, τίνος εἵνεκα λέλεκται, πότερα κατὰ προηγούμενον ἢ ἐν εἰκόνος μέρει, καὶ <εἰ> εἰς δογμάτων κατασκευὴν ἢ εἰς ἔλεγχον τοῦ προσδιαλεγομένου· τὸ δὲ τρίτον, εἰ ὀρθῶς λέλεκται). On this passage see especially Ferrari 2001, 566–7, who notes the parallelisms with the scheme of Dionysius Thrax quoted above, especially between Diogenes' last point and Dionysius' *krisis*; Petrucci 2018b, 156–60 who argues that this tripartition must reflect class–practices rather than the formal structure of written commentaries. The fluid organization of *in Harm*. seems to confirm Petrucci's hypothesis. On Porphyry's *krisis* of Ptolemy see section i above (positive judgment) and iii below (negative judgment).

But what is the advantage of this rhetorical move? This becomes more evident in Porphyry's explanation of the reason why Ptolemy's text needs a commentary:

> ὁρῶν δὲ μὴ εὐσύνοπτον οὖσαν τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τοῖς μὴ τὰς αἱρέσεις ἀκριβῶς ἀνειληφόσιν ἔν τε τοῖς μαθήμασιν εἰσηγμένοις, ὧν ἐν πολλῇ ἕξει γεγονὼς οὗτος ἐμπέπληκε τὰ συγγράμματα, τὴν μὲν πρόφασιν τῆς χρήσεως λαβὼν παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων—οὐχ ἧττον γὰρ τῶν Πυθαγορείων καὶ οἱ Ἀριστοξένειοι ταῖς διὰ τῶν ἀριθμῶν χρῶνται ἀποδείξεσιν—αὐτὸς δ' ἐκ τῆς ἐν τοῖς μαθήμασιν ἐντρεχείας κατακόρως τούτοις χρησάμενος, ἅτε καὶ τοῦ λογικοῦ κριτηρίου αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς καὶ τὸ ἐντεῦθεν ἀδιάπτωτον εἰς τὰ μέτρα τῶν τῇ αἰσθήσει ἀλόγως φαινομένων παραπέμποντος.[457]
>
> I see that reading this work is not an easy endeavor for those who have not carefully acquired a knowledge of these schools and have not been trained in the mathematical science, with which Ptolemy has filled his works, since he himself was a great expert, having taken the justification for using it from his predecessors – for the Aristoxenians too employ demonstrations through numbers no less than the Pythagoreans – and since he used it excessively himself thanks to his skill in mathematics, since also the criterion of reason carried him towards numbers and what is infallible there for the measurements of what appears non-rationally to sense perception.

Porphyry argues that Ptolemy's text is the obscure to those who are not trained in mathematical science or who have not studied carefully the thought and the theories of the old schools. The most obvious rhetorical implication of this statement lies in the fact that Porphyry appears as an authority in both fields, namely mathematics and the history of harmonic theory. Indeed, he marks himself as different from the masses of those people who are ignorant and are unable to understand Ptolemy's text. But, besides this fairly standard self–promotion as an expert, a subtler move can be detected: if, as we have seen, Ptolemy's endeavor is exegetical in nature, the fact that his work is obscure means that he has partially failed in his task.

To understand this last point better, a short digression on the nature of obscurity in ancient commentaries is necessary. A tension generated by the problem of obscurity lies at the core of any exegetical work:[458] on the one hand, the objects of exegesis are texts that are considered valuable and authoritative; on the other hand, commentators must acknowledge that

[457] *in Harm.* 1.20–29 R. (=3.18–4.8 D.).
[458] See especially Barnes 1992, 270–274 and Sluiter 2016.

these texts present an implicit weakness, since they are not clear and, therefore, they need to be explained and made accessible by experts. As Ineke Sluiter has persuasively argued in a recent paper, a 'theory of obscurity' was formulated by ancient interpreters in order to overcome this inherent tension. She outlines four possible typologies of obscurity that demand for explanation: Intentional Good Obscurity, Intentional Bad Obscurity, Unintentional Good Obscurity, and Unintentional Bad Obscurity.[459] I briefly present each category, so that I can establish into which one Ptolemy's *Harmonics* falls according to Porphyry.

Intentional Good Obscurity is the product of a deliberate choice of an author who is usually able to be perfectly clear but who decides to veil his ideas for several reasons, like challenging the reader to go beyond the surface, or keeping his doctrines secret. We find a very early example of this kind of obscurity in the *Derveni Papyrus*, where the author claims that Orpheus deliberately spoke in riddles to keep his doctrines secret for the many.[460] At the opposite side we find Intentional Bad Obscurity. This form of obscurity characterizes authors who decide to veil their ignorance and the triviality of their doctrines by means of a preposterously convoluted language. For example, we find the Middle Platonist Atticus comparing Aristotle to a cuttlefish that besmears everything with darkness in order to make his thoughts impossible to understand and, thus, impossible to refute.[461] Unintentional Good Obscurity is characteristic of texts that were either clear in the past but are now difficult to understand because of changes in language,[462] or that are obscure because the subject is particularly harsh. An example of the former would be the Homeric poems: by the time of Aristarchus, many Homeric words were no longer easily comprehensible to the average Greek-

[459] Sluiter 2016, 36.
[460] See *Derveni Papyrus* col. VII. This deliberate obscurity does not necessarily imply the need for an allegorical interpretation; for example, it became a common trope in late commentators that Aristotle veiled his doctrines in obscurity without using myths or symbols: cf. e.g. Simp. *in Cat*. 8.6.30–7.18: 'Aristotle used neither myths nor symbolic riddles, as some of those before him [did], but preferred obscurity in place of any other screen' (οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ μύθοις οὐδὲ συμβολικοῖς αἰνίγμασιν, ὡς τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ τινες, Ἀριστοτέλης ἐχρήσατο, ἀλλ' ἀντὶ παντὸς ἄλλου παραπετάσματος τὴν ἀσάφειαν προετίμησεν).
[461] See Atticus fr. 7 des Places (= 9.13Jj. BS).
[462] Cf. e.g. Erotianus, *Hippocratic Lexicon*, proem.

speaking reader, and therefore needed clarification. As to obscurity owing to the difficulty of the subject, we may quote the opening line of Calcidius' *Commentary on the* Timaeus: 'even the ancients considered Plato's *Timaeus* difficult, not because of a fault arising from the obscurity of its language, . . . , but because readers were unaccustomed to the technical reasoning at work'.[463] Finally, Unintentional Bad Obscurity is the product of the incompetence of the author, who is not able to perform at higher standard of clarity. So, into which category does Ptolemy's *Harmonics* fall according to Porphyry?

We can start by excluding both kinds of intentional obscurities, since nothing in the text suggests that Ptolemy willingly tried to hide the content of his thought. Therefore, Ptolemy's obscurity is unintentional, and from a superficial reading of Porphyry's words it seems to belong to the category of Good Unintentional Obscurity. Indeed, Porphyry explicitly points out that the topic is in itself hard. However, as we have seen, Porphyry characterizes Ptolemy as a scholar who engages in an endeavor that was mainly exegetical. If the aim of Ptolemy was the explanation and assessment of past doctrines, then obscurity is not only unintentional, but also bad. Indeed, the aim of an interpreter is to make clear what is obscure in the source text that he is working on. In this respect, Ptolemy's work is a failure: its obscurity is due to an excessive use of mathematics, as the adverb κατακόρως implies. Hence, Porphyry subtly suggests that his own *Commentary* will successfully explain the complicated theories expounded by Ptolemy in a clearer and more accessible way.[464]

[463] Timaeus Platonis et a veteribus difficilis habitus atque existimatus est ad intellegendum, non ex imbecillitate sermonis obscuritate nata,. . . , sed quia legentes artificiosae rationis quae operatur in explicandis rerum quaestionibus usum non habebat. (Calc. *in Tim*. 1. Tr. by Magee). For another instance of obscurity due the subject–matter cf. e.g. Gal. *in Hipp. Fract*. 18b, 319–320 Kuhn.

[464] On Porphyry's handling of Ptolemy's mathematical sections, see Raffa 2016b, LXI–LXIII. In general, Porphyry merely fills in the gaps in Ptolemy's arithmetical calculations by explaining Ptolemy's procedures and making explicit all passages: cf. e.g. *in Harm.* 185.5–186.32 R. (=139.27–140.31 D.).

The enhancement of Porphyry's own role and intellectual authority at the expense of Ptolemy is also a major driver in the second part of the introduction, where some methodological principles are laid out:

> Προῃρημένοι τοίνυν τὰ Ἁρμονικὰ τοῦ Πτολεμαίου ἐξηγεῖσθαι ἐπεργασόμεθα μὲν τὰ πλεῖστα μετὰ τοῦ στοχάζεσθαι τῆς συμμετρίας.[465]
>
> Having chosen to provide an exegesis of the Harmonics by Ptolemy, I shall enquire into most of it while aiming at due proportion.

In this passage Porphyry states the principle that he intends to follow in his exegesis of Ptolemy by claiming that he will aim at *summetria*, a word that can be loosely rendered in English as 'due proportion' or 'proper size'. One may think that Porphyry is expressing a purely numerical and objective criterion: the length of his interpretation will be proportional to the length of the lemma on which he is commenting. But this is clearly not the case, since the first half of Porphyry's extant *Commentary* focuses exclusively on the first four chapters from Ptolemy, whereas less than a quarter of the *Commentary* is devoted to chapters 1–7 of Ptolemy's book II.[466] This uneven distribution demonstrates that *summetria* is not a quantitative relation between the length of a lemma and the length of a comment; rather, as a reader soon realizes, this *summetria* must refer to a relationship between the philosophical value that Porphyry attaches to specific *lemmata*, and the length of his comments on those *lemmata*. This is why the first part of book 1 of the *Harmonics* receives the most extensive interpretation: here Ptolemy deals with epistemological issues that are most appealing to a philosophically oriented interpreter like Porphyry; on the contrary, the second part of book 1 and the first half of book 2 contains the most technical sections, about which Porphyry does not have a lot to say.

The unbalanced structure of Porphyry's commentary is significant for two reasons. First, the principle of *summetria* is a strong weapon in the hands of the commentator, who

[465] *in Harm.* 2.12–15 R. (= 4.22–4 D.).
[466] See the table in Raffa 2016b, LI.

becomes the 'measure' through which the value of a text is judged. Porphyry is thus able to exercise a strong authority over the source text by shaping the readers' reception of it, to the point that, if someone were to approach the *Harmonics* only *via* Porphyry's commentary, they would probably be deceived as to Ptolemy's priorities and main goals in the treatise: the mathematical part that occupies the bulk of Ptolemy's work is dealt with only superficially by Porphyry.

Second, this structure sets this commentary within the Middle Platonic exegetical tradition, at least from a formal point of view.[467] As Federico Petrucci has persuasively argued in a series of recent studies, Middle Platonic commentaries combined a lemmatic structure and a thematic focus: on the one hand, they seem to have followed their source text in a progressive way, respecting its order; on the other hand, they were selective as to whether a passage deserved a conspicuous exegetical effort or whether it could be dealt with more quickly (or ignored).[468] While Petrucci's argument is concerned only with commentaries on Platonic dialogues (especially the *Timaeus*), the structure and organization of *in Harm.* seem to embody this model quite well, which is very different from the massive and all-encompassing exegetical works of later figures such as Proclus or Simplicius.[469]

The last aspect of Porphyry's preface that I would like to mention briefly is the charge of plagiarism that Porphyry levels against Ptolemy:

> οὐ παρήσω δὲ πολλαχοῦ τὸ ἐπ' ὀνόματος μηνύειν, ὧν ἂν ταῖς ἀποδείξεσι χρήσωμαι, ἐπεὶ καὶ αὐτὸν τοῦτον, ὃν ἐξηγούμεθα, τὰ μὲν πλεῖστα, εἰ καὶ μὴ σχεδὸν πάντα, εἰληφότα παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων εὑρίσκομεν καὶ ὅπου μὲν ἐνδεικνύμενον παρ' ὧν εἴληφε τὰς ἀποδείξεις, ὅπου δὲ σιωπῇ παρερχόμενον. τὸ γοῦν Διδύμου Περὶ διαφορᾶς τῆς Πυθαγορείου μουσικῆς πρὸς τὴν

[467] From the point of view of its content, it is debated whether we can detect Plotinian influences in the commentary, which makes it hard to assign the work to a specific period in Porphyry's life. Raffa 2016b, XLVII–L argues in favor of a composition after 263 CE (Porphyry's move to Rome and encounter with Plotinus); *contra* Tarrant 2021, who argues against the claim that Porphyry should be described as a Neoplatonist in the context of this commentary.

[468] See Petrucci 2018a, focusing on the *Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Theaetetus* and Galen's *Commentary on the Timaeus*, and Petrucci 2018b, 173–83 on Taurus of Beirut.

[469] My future study of Porphyry's fragmentary commentary on the *Timaeus* will try to shed further light on this issue.

> Ἀριστοξένειον κατὰ πολλοὺς τρόπους μεταγράφων οὐδαμοῦ τοῦτο μεμήνυκεν, καὶ παρ' ἄλλων ἄλλα μετατιθεὶς παρῆλθε σιγῇ, ὡς ἐπιδείξομεν.[470]
>
> I will not neglect in many cases to disclose the name of those whose arguments I use, because I find that the writer himself whom I am explaining has taken most things, if not almost everything, from the ancients, and, in some places, he indicates from which source he has taken the arguments, but in other he passes over them in silence. Transcribing in many ways the book of Didymus *On the difference betweem the Pythagorean musical science in comparison to that of Aristoxenus*, he has never made it evident, and he passed over in silence when he appropriated other things from others, as I will show.

As we have already seen, the derivative nature of Ptolemy's work is a recurrent theme throughout the introduction. However, here Porphyry goes a step further by explicitly accusing Ptolemy of plagiarism. The charge enables Porphyry to depict himself as a much more virtuous scholar who will devote part of his exegetical effort to sheding light on the intellectual paternity of the ideas that Ptolemy appropriated.[471] Once again, we see Porphyry the philologist in action: interpreting a text involves assessing how it fits within the intellectual tradition to which it belongs. But again, if Ptolemy's *Harmonics* is conceived as an exegetical work, then Porphyry is subtly suggesting that its author is a bad exegete, since he fails to perform the *historia* up to the required level.

To sum up, in this section I have tried to point out various agonistic tensions that pervade the introduction of *in Harm*. More specifically, Porphyry seems to engage in a very subtle intellectual battle with his source text to establish his own authority as a commentator. This battle is fought on the field of originality, clarity, and, if I am allowed to use an anachronistic expression, 'academic integrity'. In the next and last section of this chapter, I will analyze a specific instance in which Porphyry criticizes Ptolemy: the problem of the nature of sound-pitches.

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[470] *in Harm.* 3.2–17 R. (5.7–16 D.).

[471] Porphyry seemingly devoted an entire work, entitled *Philological Lecture* (Φιλόλογος ἀκρόασις) to the issue of plagiarism: see 408–410F. Smith. Cf. also *Plot.* 16: Porphyry disproves the authenticity of certain books circulating under the name of Zoroaster.

iii

So far, we have seen two opposite sides of Porphyry's exegetical posture towards Ptolemy: in the comment on the first lemma, Porphyry constructs the scientific authority of Ptolemy by showing how he has built on previous traditions while at the same time improving them; in the preface, Porphyry subtly struggles against his source text with the aim of bolstering his own credentials as a commentator. In this last section, I will focus on an interesting case that, in my opinion, resolves the tension between commentator and source text in a way that is favorable to both sides: Porphyry's criticism of Ptolemy's quantitative theory of sound–pitches.

Seemingly, this should mark the triumph of Porphyry over Ptolemy, as the commentator points out the flaws in Ptolemy's argument and proposes an alternative, better solution: pitches are not quantitative attributes of sound, but qualitative attributes that covary with some underlying quantitative features. However, as my analysis will make it clear, Porphyry's ultimate goal is not to undermine Ptolemy's scientific authority, but rather to reinforce the value of Ptolemy's overall project by emending a minor flaw that risks compromising it: this is why I call Porphyry's criticism a 'charitable criticism'. Indeed, Porphyry's qualitative theory of pitches is grounded in a more rigorous application of Ptolemy's core epistemological commitment, namely, the idea that both perception and reason are equally important criteria for the harmonic scientist. Like a good philologist, Porphyry is 'emending' Ptolemy according to the principle 'Ptolemaeum e Ptolemaeo'. In what follows I will first briefly present Ptolemy's theory of double criteria and Porphyry's own understanding of this principle; next I will consider Ptolemy's criticism of Ptolemy's quantitative view and his proposal of a qualitative theory that is grounded in how we experience sounds; finally I will explore why

Porphyry's 'emendation' of Ptolemy can be seen as a form of charitable criticism resolving the tension between commentator and source text. [472]

In the first chapter of the *Harmonics* Ptolemy identifies both hearing (ἀκοή) and reason (λόγος) as the criteria of the harmonic science:

> Καὶ κριτήρια μὲν ἁρμονίας ἀκοὴ καὶ λόγος, οὐ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον, ἀλλ' ἡ μὲν ἀκοὴ παρὰ τὴν ὕλην καὶ τὸ πάθος, ὁ δὲ λόγος παρὰ τὸ εἶδος καὶ τὸ αἴτιον.
>
> And the criteria of harmonics are hearing and reason, not in the same way, but hearing is in relation to matter and affection, reason in relation to form and the cause.[473]

In his discussion of this passage, Andrew Barker has suggested that, for Ptolemy, matter and affection on the one hand, and form and cause on the other hand, are the same things as grasped by two different faculties, namely perception and reason.[474] Porphyry, however, provides a different interpretation of Ptolemy's two criteria. In commenting on the relevant section of the *Harmonics*, Porphyry makes it clear that the objects of perception and the objects of reason, though related, cannot be completely equated. Even if both reason and perception are directed towards forms, perception grasps forms with matter, reason grasps forms in their pure essences, separated from matter.[475] In the specific case of harmonic science, Porphyry argues that perception is the judge of what is attuned (κριτικὴ τοῦ ἡρμοσμένου), while reason judges the attunement itself (ἡ ἁρμονία).[476] This will become important in Porphyry's defense of a qualitative view of pitches, since pitched sounds are the object of perception and not of reason.

In the second chapter of the *Harmonics*, Ptolemy presents his theory of the 'double criteria' as a way to occupy a middle position between the excesses of the two main schools of harmonic science, namely the Pythagoreans and the Aristoxenians. Ptolemy argues that the aim

[472] What follows is an abridged and adapted version of Milesi 2023, which contains a much more detailed philosophical analysis of Ptolemy's and Porphyry's positions.
[473] Ptol. *Harm*. 1.1, p.3, 3–4 Düring.
[474] See Barker 2000, 18.
[475] *in Harm.* 10.14–21 R. (=11.11–15 D.).
[476] *in Harm.* 11.15–16 R. (=12.1–2 D.): μηδ' ἁρμονίας οὖν κριτικὴν εἶναι τὴν αἴσθησιν ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἡρμοσμένου.

of the harmonic scientist (and of any scientist more generally) is to make sure that rational postulates and sensory data never contradict each other.[477] In Ptolemy's opinion, both the Pythagoreans and the Aristoxenians fell short of fulfilling this ideal goal: the former err by relying too much on reason at the expense of perception, as they deny that some intervals are harmonic, even if they appear such to hearing, only because their numerical ratio is not one of those that are considered to be productive of consonances;[478] the latter rely too much on perception, using reason only as an ancillary tool.[479] In opposition to both schools, Ptolemy fashions himself as able to occupy a middle position, according to which both reason and sense–perception play an equally important role in the study of music.

Porphyry's commentary on this chapter is mostly focused on identifying sources that justify Ptolemy's allusions to the excesses of the Pythagoreans and the Aristoxenians. He thus quotes extensive passages from the lost works of Didymus and Ptolemais of Cyrene that mostly confirm Ptolemy's characterizations of his predecessors.[480] Porphyry concludes by stressing once again that Ptolemy was able to produce a successful synthesis of the two incompatible positions by considering both reason and perception as the criteria to be used by the harmonic scientist.[481] It is thus once again clear that Porphyry approves of Ptolemy's principle of the double criteria, and of his attempt to harmonize the Aristoxenians and the Pythagoreans (as we saw above in the analysis of the preface). Keeping this in mind, we can turn our attention to

[477] Ptol. *Harm.* 1.2, p. 5.13–15 During: 'The aim of the harmonic scientist would be to preserve in every manner the rational postulates of the *kanon* that never contradict the senses in any way, as far as most people apprehend them' (ἁρμονικοῦ δ' ἂν εἴη πρόθεσις τὸ διασῶσαι πανταχῇ τὰς λογικὰς ὑποθέσεις τοῦ κανόνος μηδαμῇ μηδαμῶς ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι μαχομένας κατὰ τὴν τῶν πλείστων ὑπόληψιν).
[478] This criticism is expanded by Ptolemy in *Harm.* 1.5.
[479] On which see *Harm.* 1.9: the Aristoxenians are blamed for studying the 'intervals' (διαστάσεις) between sounds instead of the mathematical ratio (λόγος) existing between two notes.
[480] About Ptolemais of Cyrene, one of the very few female scholars known to us from the ancient world, we know nothing besides what we find in Porphyry. Her work, seemingly entitled *On the Pythagorean elements of music*, is called by Porphyry an 'Introduction' (Εἰσαγωγή) and must have had a catechetical form through questions and answers: see Barker 1989, 230. For a fascinating but highly speculative attempt to identify Ptolemais with a member of the royal family of Cyrene, and more specifically with an otherwise unknown daughter of Demetrius the Handsome (c. 285-249 BCE) and his mother-in-law and lover Apama, see Levin 2009, 231–40.
[481] *in Harm.* 34.15–16 R. (=28.29–30 D.).

the third chapter of *in Harm*., where we find extensive criticism of Ptolemy's quantitative theory of sound-pitches.

In the chapter 3 of the *Harmonics*, Ptolemy wants to determine whether pitches are quantitative or qualitative attributes of sounds. The question can be answered, Ptolemy argues, only by looking at what causes variations in pitch:[482] indeed, as Barker has rightly pointed out, Ptolemy is committed to the principle that causes and effects need to belong to the same category (Categorical Correlation Principle). Using as a starting point of his investigation the idea that a sound is an 'affection of air that is struck' (ψόφος δὲ πάθος ἀέρος πλησσομένου), Ptolemy shows that variations of some quantitative attributes of the medium determine variations in the pitch of the produced sound. Hence, according to the Principle of Categorial Correlation, a pitch must be a quantity because it is caused by a quantity. This focus on causes shows that, in determining the nature of pitches, Ptolemy is not concerned at all with how sound is perceived by us: it seems that, for him, the phenomenological dimension cannot tell us anything about the true nature of an object.[483] This is what, in my opinion, Porphyry finds especially troublesome, because Ptolemy seems to be dumping his commitment to the two criteria.

The bulk of the commentary on chapter 3 of *in Harm.* is devoted to debunking Ptolemy's quantitative theory of pitches in favor of a qualitative view.[484] Porphyry's criticism of Ptolemy's theory is skillfully crafted. First, he shows that Ptolemy's argument is self-refuting from a logical point of view, and that therefore there are no cogent reasons for

[482] Following an established convention, I translate αἴτιον as 'cause'. However, we should not necessarily think that Ptolemy is using the term to indicate what we would call an efficient cause. Rather, it is probable that what he has in mind is more an explanation that grounds the physical phenomenon, or, better still, the item that does the grounding.
[483] Barker 2000, 18 and 34–5.
[484] *in Harm.* 36.1–95.2 R. (= 29.27–78.2 D.). I am aware of only two studies that focus on this section of Porphyry's Commentary: Karamanolis 2006, 257–266 and Barker 2016, 22–27. Both direct their attention only to Porphyry's (failed) attempt to harmonize Plato's and Aristotle's positions on the nature of pitches, at *in Harm*. 55.18–59.22 R. (=45.22–49.4 D.). Barker considers also Porphyry's criticism of Ptolemy's quantitative view, but explicitly excuses himself from analyzing Porphyry's arguments for his qualitative theory of pitches (Barker 2016, 23)

considering pitches as quantitative attributes. He then proceeds to formulate his own positive account, and to show that variations in pitches belong to the category of quality, though they still covary with some underlying quantitative features. Following the structure of Porphyry's argument, I will focus first on the *pars destruens*.

Porphyry's criticism targets mainly the Categorical Correlation Principle, namely that a cause and its effect must belong to the same category.[485] Porphyry shows how Ptolemy finds himself in an insoluble dilemma:[486] whether the Categorical Correlation Principle is sound or not, Ptolemy's argument in favor of a quantitative theory of pitches is logically flawed and therefore should be rejected. This refutation of Ptolemy is achieved by means of a close reding of the source text that brings to the fore its internal contradictions: Porphyry is thus following a strictly philological method that is grounded on the principle of interpreting 'Ptolemy from Ptolemy'. In this case, however, instead of rescuing the text, the commentator brings to the fore its flaws. Porphyry begins his critique by showing that Ptolemy does not fully stick to the Categorical Correlation Principle, and that therefore he has no solid ground for arguing in favor of his quantitative theory:

> τοῦτο δ' οὐ πάντως, φαίη ἄν τις, συνάγεσθαι ἐκ τοῦ λόγου, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ τὸ ποσὸν οὐκ ἐκωλύετο τῆς οὐσίας ποιότητος γίνεσθαι αἴτιον, οὕτως εἰ τὸ ποσὸν αἴτιον τῆς ὀξύτητος καὶ τῆς βαρύτητος, οὐ πάντως ποσὰ ἡ ὀξύτης καὶ ἡ βαρύτης. ἐνδέχεται γὰρ εἶναι ποιά, ἐπείπερ κεῖται οὐ ποσῶν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ποιῶν τὸ ποσὸν τῆς οὐσίας γίνεσθαι αἴτιον. [487]
>
> This does not follow at all from his reasoning, one might say, but as a quantity of substance is not prevented from becoming the cause of a quality, in the same way if quantity is the cause of a high pitch and a low pitch, high pitches and low pitches do not need to be quantities themselves. For it is possible that they are qualities, since the quantity of substance is assumed to be also a cause not only of quantities, but also of qualities.

[485] This principle is never explicitly voiced by Ptolemy, though Barker 2000, 34 also thinks that this is the basis of Ptolemy's argument.
[486] Barker 2016, 22–3.
[487] *in Harm.* 53.23–9 R. (= 44.11–15 D.).

The commentator points out that Ptolemy himself admits that quantities can underpin qualities, as in the case of the density and thickness of bodies: those are qualities, as Ptolemy recognizes,[488] but they depend on quantitative variables. Porphyry uses this inconsistency on Ptolemy's part to invalidate his argument: if it is true that a quality can depend on a quantity, as Ptolemy seems to assume, then there is no cogent reason for considering variations in pitches as quantitative variations only because they are caused by the variation of a quantitative attribute. It is a *non sequitur*.[489]

But let us assume that Ptolemy's view of the correlation between cause and effect is correct. In this case, Porphyry argues, pitches would turn out to be qualities, and not quantities:

> οὐκέτ' οὖν, φήσαι ἄν τις, πρὸς αὐτόν οὐδὲ παρὰ τὸ ποσὸν τῆς οὐσίας ἀποτελεῖται ἡ ὀξύτης καὶ ἡ βαρύτης, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὰς ποιότητας. παρὰ μὲν γὰρ τὸ ποσὸν τῆς οὐσίας ἡ πυκνότης καὶ ἡ λεπτότης καὶ ἡ μανότης καὶ ἡ παχύτης ἀπετελοῦντο καὶ ἦσαν οὐ ποσότητες κατ' αὐτὸν τοῦτον, εἰ καὶ ἐκ ποσότητος ἐγίνοντο, ἀλλὰ ποιότητες. αὗται δὲ ποιότητες οὖσαι αἴτιαι γίνονται τῆς ὀξύτητος τῶν φθόγγων καὶ τῆς βαρύτητος. ὥστ' ἐξ ἀνάγκης, εἴπερ αἱ ποιότητες ποιοτήτων εἰσὶν ἀποτελεστικαί, ποιότητας εἶναι καὶ τὰς ὀξύτητας καὶ τὰς βαρύτητας.[490]
>
> One might therefore say in opposition to Ptolemy that high pitches and low pitches are not even produced by the quantity of substance, but by qualities. For we saw that denseness and thinness and diffuseness and thickness are produced by the quantity of substances, and that even in his opinion they are not quantities, even though they arise from quantities, but are qualities. And these [attributes], which are qualities, are the causes of the high pitch and of the low pitch of notes. Necessarily then, if indeed qualities are productive of qualities, the high pitch or the low pitch [of a note] must be qualities.

Even if we adopt a charitable approach and grant that the categorical correlation between cause and effect is indeed a sound principle, Ptolemy does not have any ground for justifying his conclusions concerning the quantitative nature of pitches. On the contrary, Ptolemy would be

[488] Ptol. *Harm.* 1.3, p. 7.20–21 Düring: 'each one of the two kinds of consistencies mentioned above, despite being a quality, has come about on the basis of the quantity of the substance' (ὅτι καὶ τῶν εἰρμένων συστάσεων ἑκατέρα ποιότης οὖσα παρὰ τὸ ποσὸν γέγονε τῆς οὐσίας).
[489] This same point is more succinctly made at *in Harm.* 54.16–19 R. (= 45.1–3 D.).
[490] *in Harm.* 54.26–55.8 (= 45.8–16).

forced to admit that pitches are qualities, since their immediate causes, density and thickness, are qualitative attributes too.

Porphyry thus pushes Ptolemy into an insoluble dilemma. The only way out is to reject the principle of identity between causes and effects and approach the question from a different perspective. In Porphyry's view, all that Ptolemy has been able to demonstrate is that pitches covary with certain quantitative properties of their underlying causes. But studying the nature of these causes is not sufficient for determining the nature of the effects.

This is made explicit by Porphyry, as he claims that in the case of variations in the pitch of a sound

> ἄρχει μὲν γὰρ τὸ ποσόν, εἴ τέ τις τῶν φθόγγων λέγειν ἐθέλοι, εἴ τε τῶν διαστημάτων, ἥ τε ταχυτὴς τῶν κινήσεων καὶ ἡ βραδυτής. ἡ δ' ἐπὶ ταύτης ὀξύτης καὶ βαρύτης τῶν φθόγγων ποιότητές εἰσι καὶ οὐ ποσότητες.[491]
>
> Quantity initiates [the change], whether one wants to talk of notes or intervals, both the swiftness and slowness of the movements [initiates the change]. But the high pitch and the low pitch of the notes depending on this [movement] are qualities and not quantities.

Porphyry argues that a qualitative change supervenes on a different kind of change without being reducible to it. Porphyry agrees with Ptolemy that a variation of pitches is grounded in a quantitative change: for example, the strike can impact our sense organs at different speeds. However, the kind of change that this impact brings about, and which ultimately determines the pitch that we will hear, is a change in quality and not in quantity. Unfortunately, Porphyry does not provide any concrete 'physical' explanation of what exactly this qualitative change is.

But on what ground can Porphyry confidently claim that pitches are indeed qualitative attributes? The answer can be found in the following two passages:

> Σκοπουμένῳ δὲ τὴν τοῦ ὀξέος πρὸς τὸ βαρὺ διαφορὰν οὐδενὶ προσπίπτει οὔτε ὡς μείζονος μεγέθους πρὸς ἔλαττον μέγεθος ὑπεροχή, οὔτε ὡς πλείονος ἀριθμοῦ πρὸς ἐλάττονα, οὔτε ὡς ἡ τοῦ ἀρτίου πρὸς περιττὸν παραλλαγή, ἀλλά τις ἰδιότης

[491] *in Harm.* 71.17–20 R. (=58.10–13 D.).

> ψόφων καὶ κατ' ἀλλοίωσιν ἑτερότης καὶ μᾶλλον ὡς ἡ τοῦ λευκοῦ πρὸς τὸ μέλαν διαφορὰ ἢ ὡς ἡ τῶν πέντε πρὸς τὰ τρία παραλλαγή.[492]
>
> To no–one who observes the difference between the high pitched [sound] and the low pitched [sound] does this [difference] come to the senses[493] as the excess of a greater magnitude in relation to a smaller magnitude, nor as the excess of a greater number in relation to a smaller, nor as the difference between the even and the odd, but as a property of sounds and as a difference due to an alteration and more like the difference between white and black than the difference between five and three.

He also adds:

> ἐπιστήσας δέ τις τῇ φωνῇ σαφῶς εἴσεται οὐκ οὖσαν τὴν ὀξύτητα καὶ τὴν βαρύτητα οἷον ἔκτασιν ἢ συστολὴν καὶ ταχυτῆτα ἢ βραδυτῆτα· ἰδιότητος δὲ παραλλαγήν.[494]
>
> Anyone by turning their attention to voice will know clearly that a high pitch and a low pitch are not like extension or contraction and swiftness or slowness; but they are differences of a quality.

Porphyry's argument in favor of a qualitative theory of pitches is grounded in the phenomenological dimension of hearing: pitches are qualities because we perceive them as such.[495] This marks a drastic departure from Ptolemy's approach. As we saw, in assessing the nature of pitches, Ptolemy seems to reject the idea that perception can tell us anything valuable about it, and rather investigates its causes. By contrast, Porphyry starts from how we, as sentient beings, experience variations in sound pitches to argue that those pitches are qualities, not quantities.

The rejection of Ptolemy's quantitative theory is a very risky move on Porphyry's part: if pitches are not quantitative attributes of sound, then how can we justify Ptolemy's mathematical approach and Porphyry's own effort to write a commentary on a handbook that

[492] *in Harm.*71.29–72.2 (=58.21–24 D.).
[493] In an epistemological context, the verb προσπίπτω (*lit.* "to fall on") has a technical meaning and describes how something presents itself to the senses in a self–evident way: cf. e.g. Archytas fr. 1.18 Huffman (quoted by Porphyry himself). Further examples in Montanari *sv* προσπίπτω D.
[494] *in Harm.* 73.11–13 R. (= 59.29–31 D.).
[495] This position presents some similarities to Aristoxenus' insistence that the harmonic scientist should focus exclusively on what appears to the perception of a listener (cf. *Harmonica* 13.13–4 Da Rios). However, Aristoxenus deems irrelevant to harmonic science whether perception can help us to grasp the true nature of its object: see Barker 2007, 140–42. As my analysis will show, for Porphyry pitches *really* are qualitative attributes of sound and are not merely perceived as such.

would be based on a faulty assumption? To defend the value of mathematical harmonics, Porphyry argues in favor of view of pitches as emergent qualities that supervene on underlying quantitative properties without being reducible to them. As I analyze Porphyry's arguments at length in a recently published paper, I will not go into details here.[496] But, to get an idea of how Porphyry manages to preserve the feasibility of quantification while upholding a qualitative view of pitches, the following analogy between a musical concord and a mixed drug is enlightening:

> Πῶς οὖν αἱ συμφωνίαι ἐν ἀριθμοῖς καὶ ἡ διὰ πασῶν φέρε ἐν διπλασίονι λόγῳ θεωρεῖται ἀπό τε τοῦ ἑνὸς φθόγγου θατέρου τοσούτῳ ὑπερέχειν λεγομένου; ὅτι δεῖ μὲν καὶ τὴν κατὰ ποιότητα αἰτίαν προσεῖναι. ὥσπερ φέρε κἂν ταῖς συσταθμίαις τῶν φαρμάκων—ἄνευ γὰρ μέτρων καὶ ἀριθμῶν ἀδύνατος ἡ σύστασις· ἀλλ' ὅμως ποιότης ἦν ἡ τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς καὶ ταῖς συμμετρίαις ἐπιγινομένη—οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ἡ τῶν φθόγγων ὀξύτης τε καὶ βαρύτης·[497]
>
> How then do concords exist in numbers and, for example, how is the octave observed in a double ratio and from one note [of the two] that is said to exceed the other by such an amount? Because the qualitative cause must be present too. As, for example, also in the weighing together of drugs – without measures and numbers the composition is impossible; nevertheless what supervened in addition to numbers and combined measures was a quality– for in this way also the high and low pitch of notes [is a quality].

Porphyry compares the consonance of the octave to a mixed drug.[498] The example is very condensed, but its overall significance is in my opinion clear enough.[499] In mixing a composed drug, two features of the ingredients are taken into account, namely their qualities and their weights. Hence, it is possible to provide a quantitative analysis of the mixture by specifying the mathematical *logos* of the ingredients, even if properly speaking the causal powers that ground the efficacy of the final product are to be located in the qualitative features of the

[496] See Milesi 2023, 253–61.
[497] *in Harm.* 73.3–9 R. (=59.22–28 D.).
[498] It is worth noting that comparison between music and drugs were common in the Platonic tradition, as music was seen as the medicine of the soul: see Moro Tornese 2015.
[499] For a similar use of the drug–analogy, see Alexander, *De Anima* 24.23–25.4 with Caston 2012, 114 n. 228, who lists several passages where medical drugs are used as examples for supporting a philosophical argument by the Stoics. See also Caston 1997, 350. Cf. also Alexander, *De Anima* 25.4–9: the soul is not a symmetry, but a capacity (δύναμις) that supervenes upon a symmetry.

ingredients.[500] The same is true for concords. Porphyry endorses the Pythagorean definition of a concord as 'a mixture of a high pitched sound with a low pitched sound'.[501] It is therefore comparable to a mixed drug. By this point, Porphyry has already established that pitches are qualitative attributes, and are therefore analogous to the qualities of the ingredients of a drug. In order to produce the desired effect, these ingredients need to be mixed with each other according to a certain quantitative ratio. Obviously, we cannot measure pitches in the same way as a doctor would weigh his medicines. Nevertheless, we know that pitches covary with specific quantitative attributes of the underlying impact that can be measured. It is therefore still possible to compare two differently pitched sounds according to this quantitative feature, as it is possible to compare two ingredients of a drug according to their weights. This implies that in a way we can say that, in the octave, one note exceeds the other according to the ratio of the double, granting that we keep in mind that we are talking about the underlying quantities in accordance with which these notes covary, not about the note itself. The mathematical approach to harmonics is safe, and Porphyry avoids throwing out the baby together with the bathwater.[502]

An important question remains to be answered: why does Porphyry feel the need to devote such a long portion of his commentary to criticism of Ptolemy's quantitative theory? After all, the idea that a pitch is a qualitative attribute does not really play any major role in

[500] That the specific power of a drug depends on quantitative relationships between the qualities of its ingredients is clearly stated by Galen in e.g. *De Simplicium Medicamentorum ac Facultatibus, proem.*, XII.2.15–3.1 Kühn: 'For differences of individual activities of the drugs come about insofar as each of the drugs exist in relation to a specific quantity of hot, cold, wet, dry, thinness or thickness of parts' (τῷ γὰρ ἐπὶ τοσόνδε θερμὸν ἢ ψυχρὸν, ἢ ὑγρὸν ἢ ξηρὸν, ἢ λεπτομερὲς ἢ παχυμερὲς ὑπάρχειν ἕκαστον τῶν φαρμάκων αἱ διαφοραὶ τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἐνεργειῶν αὐτῶν γίγνονται).

[501] Cf. e.g. *in Harm*. 118.14–15 R. (=95.30 D.): '[The Pythagoreans] claimed that a concord is a blending of a high–pitched sound with a low–pitched sound' (κρᾶσιν ὀξέος ψόφου καὶ βαρέος τὴν συμφωνίαν ἀπεδίδοσαν).

[502] The same concept is expressed at 108.23–27 R. (= 88.1–5 D.): 'One must recognize that, even if the differences among sounds in respect of high and low pitches are qualities, there is no obstacle to giving an account of the notes as if it relates to quantity, since these differences supervene on the quantity of the underlying subject' (δεῖ δὲ γινώσκειν, ὅτι κἂν ποιότητες ὦσιν αἱ διαφοραὶ τῶν ψόφων αἱ κατ' ὀξύτητα καὶ βαρύτητα, οὐδὲν κωλύει ὡς περὶ ποσὸν ποιεῖσθαι τὸν λόγον τῶν φθόγγων ὡς τῇ ποσότητι τοῦ ὑποκειμένου ἐπιγίνεσθαι ταύτας τὰς διαφοράς).

the remainder of his commentary, which is mostly devoted to the explanation of Ptolemy's mathematical analysis of consonances. We can rule out the possibility that Porphyry's preference for a qualitative theory is simply due to a dogmatic allegiance to a previous tradition. Porphyry mentions only one past thinker who endorsed a qualitative view of pitches, Theophrastus.[503] Hence, the position that Porphyry is defending is a fringe position within the history of ancient harmonics.[504]

A more productive approach is to ask whether Porphyry sees a quantitative theory as potentially damaging for Ptolemy's own broader project, and thus he is ready to sacrifice it for the sake of preserving the viability of Ptolemy's approach to the science of harmonics. I call this a 'charitable criticism', since the final aim is still to preserve the value and epistemic authority of the source text. Following this approach, we can identify two concerns that may justify why Porphyry feels the need to reject Ptolemy's quantitative theory. One is voiced explicitly by Porphyry; the other is more speculative, but it helps us to understand why the phenomenological dimension of sound and hearing plays such a crucial role in Porphyry's defense of his qualitative view.

Let me begin with the less speculative answer to our problem. Porphyry claims twice that, if pitches were mere quantities, then the domain of harmonic science would be

[503] *in Harm.* 75.4–79.29 R. (= 61.14–65.15 D. = Thphr. fr.716 Fortenbaugh). Porphyry draws some of his arguments from Theophrastus' discussion, but we do not find anything comparable to his theory of emergence in Theophrastus' fragment. For an analysis of the passage, see Barker 1978; 1985; 2007, 411–36; Raffa 2018, 45–67.

[504] Besides Theophrastus, I am not aware of anyone explicitly claiming that pitches are qualitative attributes of sound before Porphyry. It is worth remembering that Aristoxenus recuses himself from investigating how the way we perceive a sound is related to its true nature (cf. *Harmonica* 13.24–14.3 Da Rios). As for his conception of sound-pitch, he simply defines it as a *pathos* of the voice (*Harmonica* 17. 13 Da Rios). However, he interestingly distinguishes between tension (ἐπίτασις)/relaxation (ἄνεσις) of the instruments and the resulting high pitch/low pitch (ὀξύτης/βαρύτης): cf. *Harmonica*. 16.13–31 Da Rios. For an alternative view of pitches, cf. Alexander. *in Aristotelis Topicorum libros octo commentaria* 106.20– 107.5 Wallies, where Alexander subsumes height and depth of pitches under the category of 'acting upon' (τὸ ποιεῖν), as they refer to the effect that a quick or slow movement of the air has on our sense of hearing. For later hints at a qualitative theory of sound pitches, see Simplicius, *in Cat*. 279.26–30 Kalbfleisch, where height (τὸ ὀξύ) and lowness (τὸ βαρύ) are listed among other contraries falling under the category of quality; Philoponus, *in Aristotelis Analytica Posteriora commentaria* 314,5–7 Wallies: Philoponus explicitly states that musical theorems are about 'the sounding of low and high notes and their commensurability, and these things belong to quality' (τὰ μὲν γὰρ περὶ τὰς ἀπηχήσεις τῶν βαρέων καὶ ὀξέων ἔχει φθόγγων καὶ τὴν τούτων συμμετρίαν, καὶ ταῦτα μὲν τοῦ ποιοῦ).

undistinguishable from the domain of rhythmics.[505] Rhythmics and harmonics were traditionally considered two separate branches of the musical science.[506] Rhythmics focuses on the relationship between the durations of notes, thus defining the rhythmic pattern of a melody (not unlike the modern counterpart), while harmonics studied the relationship between pitches.[507] In Porphyry's opinion, for harmonics to be an independent field of inquiry, its proper objects must fall under a different category than the object of rhythmics. This criticism is quite weak since the velocity/duration of a sequence of sounds and their pitches are clearly different attributes, even if both were quantities. Porphyry seems here to endorse a view of how to build a proper taxonomy of musical science, according to which each branch is defined by the category under which its objects fall, and he seems to believe that there should be no overlap.[508] Thus, rhythmics studies the quantitative attributes of sound and harmonics its qualitative attributes.

This partially explains the reason behind Porphyry's anxiety to disprove Ptolemy's quantitative theory. But I believe that it is not the whole story. As I mentioned above, Porphyry wants to save the phenomenological dimension of music, namely how sounds appear to us *qua* perceiving subjects. This is justifiable if we take into consideration Porphyry's own understanding of Ptolemy's so-called 'theory of the two criteria'. Indeed, a pitched sound is the object of hearing: it is how a sound presents itself to our senses. What our senses primarily perceive are qualities and not quantities. Ptolemy's fixation on the equivalence between causes and effects is a betrayal of his own method: causes can be

[505] *in Harm*. 44.17–27 R. (=37.6–14 D.) and 73.9–19 R. (=59.29–60.2 D.)
[506] The distinction between harmonics and rhythmics as two separate branches of musical science is first attested in Aristoxenus, *Harmonica* 41.9–11 Da Rios.
[507] Cf. Aristides Quintillianus I. 13, 31.6–8: 'Rhythm is a system constituted of durations that are put together according to a certain order. The modifications of these we call arsis and thesis, sound and silence' (Ῥυθμὸς τοίνυν ἐστὶ σύστημα ἐκ χρόνων κατά τινα τάξιν συγκειμένων· καὶ τὰ τούτων πάθη καλοῦμεν ἄρσιν καὶ θέσιν, ψόφον καὶ ἠρεμίαν). For the distinction between rhythm and *harmonia*, see Lynch 2020, 276–78.
[508] This may be an extreme interpretation of the famous Aristotelian prohibition against kind–crossing: cf. Aristotle, *Analytica Posteriora* 1.7. But Aristotle clearly allows for the highest genus of quantity to be studies by two separate sciences (arithmetic and geometry), granted that they do not focus on the same kind of quantity.

grasped through reason, but attributes are to be grasped and assessed by sense perception. Sense perception makes it evident, at least in Porphyry's view, that pitches are qualities and not quantities.

If my analysis is correct, Porphyry's criticism of Ptolemy's quantitative theory of sound pitches should not be understood as a rejection of Ptolemy's overall approach to harmonic science. On the contrary, Porphyry is committed to save Ptolemy's project by correcting what he perceives as a flaw in Ptolemy's system that risks undermining the otherwise valuable results of his exposition. Ptolemy could have easily dodged this mistake if he had been more careful in following through the very same principles that he professes. Porphyry manages to grant a more robust ontological status to the objects of sense–perception while at the same time preserving the possibility of a quantitative analysis of these phenomena.

We can now understand better why I do not think that Porphyry's rebuttal of Ptolemy's quantitative theory of pitches marks the triumph of the commentator over the source text; it is rather a place where the tension is resolved. On the one hand, Porphyry carves out a place for his intellectual autonomy by explicitly departing from the source text and proposing an innovative view that is at odds with Ptolemy's position; on the other hand, my analysis has made it clear that Porphyry's own theory is justified on the ground of Ptolemy's own epistemological commitments: sense perception is as valuable as reason in the study of harmonics, and this is why we can safely claim that sounds are qualities simply by appealing to the fact that they appear as such to us. The payout is that Ptolemy's scientific authority is strengthened since his main epistemological commitment is not only preserved, but more forcefully justified: we need both hearing and reason because the former has as its object a qualitative property, namely, a pitched sound, while the latter has as its object a quantitative feature. These two properties are connected and yet different.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an analysis of Porphyry's exegetical method and posture in his only extant continuous commentary. I have shown that Porphyry practices a form of philosophical philology, a method that begins from standard philological practices (*Quellenforschung* and lexical analysis) with the aim of assessing Ptolemy's arguments from a philosophical point of view. In parallel, I have explored the tension that transpires from Porphyry's text, as the commentator tries to shape the authority of both the source text and his own. This tension is resolved in what I labelled 'charitable criticism': Porphyry criticizes Ptolemy on the issue of pitches, thus amending what he perceives as a flaw in Ptolemy's argument. However, the aim is not to undermine the epistemic and scientific authority of the source text, but rather to strengthen it. Indeed, if the value of Ptolemy lies in his capacity to harmonize past traditions, and his theory of the double criterion represents the core of his harmonizing project, then Porphyry's qualitative view of pitches is the natural result that Ptolemy himself would have reached, had he stuck more carefully to his epistemological commitments. Porphyry is thus amending Ptolemy's view following a philosophical variant of the 'Homerum ex Homero': he is correcting Ptolemy 'e Ptolemaeo'.

CONCLUSION

This study has been a first step towards a comprehensive investigation of Porphyry's exegetical works from the point of view of his hermeneutics. As my study has brought to the fore, at the centre of Porphyry's theory of interpretation we find the idea that a reader must always strive to clarify the text from the text itself. At its most basic level, this means that readers must become familiar with the lexical and stylistic features of the text that they are interpreting. But, for Porphyry, this is only the starting point. A correct interpretation must take into consideration also the cultural and historical context in which a text was produced, since authors do not operate in a vacuum but in accordance with uses and customs of their times, as shown in chapter 2 and 3. Finally, readers do not need to be passively subservient towards their source text, but they can adopt a more agonistic attitude. However, even when the source text is criticized and corrected, one must still aim at amending minor flaws with the goal of upholding its overall value. These instances of 'charitable criticism' must be grounded on a proper understanding of the text itself, which allows readers to differentiate between what is central and what is peripheral. Porphyry's method can thus be legitimately labelled philological.

It follows that Porphyry does not believe that he is endowed with a suprarational capacity that allows him to access the deeper meaning of a text by means of some kind of divine inspiration. On the contrary, he constructs his own authority as an expert reader by capitalizing on his mastery of the philological method, a method that can be taught to, and

used by, his own readers/students. Porphyry's interpretations are correct because, in his opinion, they are free from any ideological agenda: the interpreter must own his allegiance to nothing but the text itself. This allows Porphyry to discard fellow commentators or members of rival groups, who are to be blamed for superimposing their preconceived views on the text that they are reading, instead of using the text itself as a starting point and final touchstone in the hermeneutical process.

We have also seen that Porphyry's hermeneutics is not philosophically neutral, but is grounded in the tradition of literary criticism stemming from Aristotle's *Poetics*. While Porphyry consciously situates himself within this tradition, he is not just a late epigone of the great Alexandrian scholars of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. On the contrary, Porphyry creatively adapts the Aristotelian philological method so that it can benefit the philosophical growth of its practitioners. Thus, we have seen that a correct 'philological' interpretation of the Homeric poems inevitably leads to a Platonic view of poetic mimesis. To the contrary, the philological flaws committed by Christian readers lead them to endorse an upside–down metaphysical system that places a mere human soul at the top of the ontological hierarchy.

In each chapter of this study, I have considered specific case studies that demonstrate both Porphyry's commitment to the philological method and the philosophical insights and benefits that readers can gain if they adopt the correct hermeneutics.

In chapter 1, I focused on the *Homeric Questions*. My analysis has brought to the fore two central points. First, Porphyry consciously situates himself within the Aristotelian tradition of literary criticism, while at the same stretching its boundaries to accommodate forms of Homeric exegesis that more conservative practitioners would have rejected, namely physical allegories. Second, my analysis of the 'Letter to Anatolius' has provided a template for understanding Porphyry's exegetical practices more broadly. Here, we find the golden rule of Porphyry's hermeneutics: 'Homer interprets himself for the most part'. This means

that an author is in control of the meaning of his work and can guide readers towards a correct interpretation. I have also argued that Porphyry envisions the interpretation of Homer as a two-step process: a preliminary step, in which the attention is directed to Homer's language and style (περινοία), prepares readers for more sophisticated forms of exegesis that will bring to light the deeper messages that Homer communicates. Readers must learn to interpret Homer from Homer at a more basic level before embarking on the kind of allegorism that we find in *De Antro*.

These more extreme forms of allegorical interpretations of Homer were at the center of my second chapter. Two main claims were defended. First, that Porphyry thinks that a good reader must still interpret Homer from Homer even when performing an allegorical interpretation, since the poet provides clues that help one to grasp the meaning of the symbols that he uses. Second, in *De Antro*, Porphyry builds a bridge leading from an Aristotelian poetics to a Platonic view of mimesis. Indeed, at the beginning of *De Antro*, Porphyry justifies his allegorical interpretation by appealing to aesthetic categories that belong to the Aristotelian tradition. But once the symbolic meaning is decoded, a reader realizes that Homer must have contemplated some higher truths that he then reproduced in his poems. Hence, the poet becomes a demiurgic figure, and the attention of the reader moves away from the creation towards the creator and the paradigm that he has imitated. Porphyry thus creates a new hybrid form of hermeneutics that harmonizes the two main streams of ancient literary criticism, the philological and the philosophical, while at the same time upholding the excellence of Homer at the level of both form and content.

While the good reader of Homer begins from the letter and ascends towards the 'spirit', Christian allegorists fail to follow the proper hermeneutical procedure. As I argued in chapter 3, Porphyry criticizes Christian readers for being bad philologists: their interpretations are not based on a careful reading of the text, but rather on their desire to

exploit the authority of the Hebrew Bible for the benefit of their own new religion. Consequently, they think that Moses is speaking through riddles even when the text is perfectly clear, thus undermining what is philosophically valuable in the Scriptures, like the dietary laws. But their poor philology leads to even more serious philosophical errors. In his attempts to connect everything that is said in the Hebrew Bible to Jesus and his soteriological mission, an interpreter like Origen ends up undermining the uniqueness and transcendence of God in favor of a flawed theological system that venerates a mere human soul.

A philological approach to reading and interpretation guides Porphyry also in his *Commentary in Ptolemy's Harmonics*. As we saw in chapter 4, Porphyry's methodology in his scientific commentary fully fits within the tradition of philosophical philology. He performs a close study of Ptolemy's *lexis* that aims at clarifying his technical language, while at the same trying to identify Ptolemy's sources. The goal, however, is not only an elucidation of the text, but also a philosophical evaluation of Ptolemy's theories. Hence Porphyry approaches his task as a commentator with a much more agonistic attitude. Indeed, he devotes the longest chapter of his commentary to debunk Ptolemy's quantitative theory of sound–pitches. But even in his criticisms, the aim of the commentator is not to undermine the epistemic and scientific authority of the source text, but rather to strengthen it. This is a form of what I labelled 'charitable criticism'. Since at the core of Ptolemy's scientific method we find the idea that reason and perception must work conjointly in assessing consonances, then Ptolemy himself, had he stuck more closely to his own epistemological commitments, would have endorsed the qualitative view of sound–pitches that Porphyry is defending. Hence Ptolemy's quantitative theory is merely a glitch in the system that Porphyry corrects in order to preserve the broader value of Ptolemy's scientific project.

The results of this study also open new avenues of research. First of all, a more solid knowledge of Porphyry's exegetical methodology can increase our understanding of the

scanty extant evidence for Porphyry's philosophical commentaries. For example, we know that Porphyry wrote two commentaries on the *Categories*, a short commentary by questions–and–answers that explicitly targets students at an early phase of their philosophical education, and a longer continuous and lemmatic commentary addressed to Gedalius that unfortunately survives only in fragments. The presence of two exegetical works on the same treatise should no longer be a surprise in light of what Porphyry says in his 'Letter to Anatolius'. The shorter commentary may provide readers with a basic understanding (περίνοια) of what Aristotle says, while in the longer treatise Porphyry will fully understand (νοεῖν) his source text.

A second question that deserves to be further explored in future is Porphyry's influence on later Neoplatonic exegetical traditions, not only from the point of view of his doctrines, but also from the point of view of his methodology. To what extent do later Neoplatonist commentators such as Proclus (412–485 CE) still follow the rigorous philological approach that we find in Porphyry? Are they still committed to the idea that an author consciously creates the meaning of a text, or do they endorse a more mystical view of the process of artistic creation? Similar questions can be asked also of Porphyry's contemporary Iamblichus.

Finally, in this study I have only touched on alternative hermeneutics to which Porphyry is responding. Thus, for example, the Stoics believed that Homer was not aware of the snippets of pristine wisdom that he was transmitting through his poems. Similarly, it is not entirely clear to what extent Origen saw Moses and the other scriptural authors as consciously weaving their web of symbolic connections, or whether they were merely tools used by the Spirit. A more detailed analysis of the network of reading communities that existed at Porphyry's time may increase our understanding and appreciation of his own exegetical practices and commitments.

To conclude, we may quote a famous line from Porphyry's own *Life of Plotinus*, where the author reports a sneering comment of his current teacher Plotinus against his former teacher Longinus: 'Longinus is a *philologos*, certainly not a philosopher'.[509] But, as this dissertation demonstrates, for Porphyry these two things could be mutually exclusive.

[509] Porph. *Plot.* 14.20–1: "Φιλόλογος μέν", ἔφη, "ὁ Λογγῖνος, φιλόσοφος δὲ οὐδαμῶς."

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