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9 (2021) 2

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Impersonalización, modalidad deóntica y discurso judicial:<br>un estudio del modal δεῖ en Lisias<br><i>Raquel Fornieles Sánchez</i>                                  | 7   |
| Compensazione del danno ( <i>timoria</i> ) e giustizia come reciprocità<br>nella demostenica <i>Contro Midia, sul pugno</i><br><i>Elisabetta Poddighe</i>            | 25  |
| La función de Posidonio como fuente de Estrabón<br><i>Rafael Sáseta Naranjo</i>  | 69  |
| Maximus of Tyre on the Zeus of Homer and Plato<br><i>Mikolaj Domaradzki - Tomasz Bednarek</i>  | 93  |
| Il martirio in epoca severiana di S. Alessandro presso Baccano<br>lungo la via Cassia tra testimonianze agiografiche e dati archeologici<br><i>Giuseppe Cordiano</i> | 109 |
| Tracce dell'organizzazione di una <i>figlina</i> imperiale a <i>Mursa</i><br><i>Mattia Vitelli Casella</i>   | 121 |
| The Mediterranean Spearfish in Ancient Greek and Latin<br><i>Konrad Tadjczyk - Krzysztof Tomasz Witczak</i>  | 141 |

## RECENSIONI

## REVIEWS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>Cinzia Bearzot</i><br>C. Bosak-Schroeder, <i>Other Natures: Environmental Encounters<br/>with Ancient Greek Ethnography</i> (2020) | 165 |
|---|-----|



# Maximus of Tyre on the Zeus of Homer and Plato\*

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ABSTRACT: The present article discusses the ingenious account of Zeus that was put forward by Maximus of Tyre in his *Oration*s IV and XXVI. When reading into Homer various Platonic and Stoic concepts, Maximus originally amalgamates the notion of Demiurge with that of Providence. As he thus unearths Homer's latent theology, Maximus not only praises the heritage of Greek culture but also demonstrates the close affinity between poetry and philosophy.

KEYWORDS: allegoresis; demiurge; fate; Homer; Maximus of Tyre; Plato; providence; Stoics – allegoresi; demiurgo; fato; Massimo di Tiro; Omero; Platone; provvidenza; Stoici.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

While Plato famously diagnoses (*Resp.* 607b 5-6) that there is an «ancient quarrel» (παλαιὰ διαφορά) between philosophy and poetry<sup>1</sup>, his diagnosis had an important resonance in Greek thought: numerous attempts were made to save the traditional foundation of Hellenic παιδεία by using allegorical interpretation for the purpose of demonstrating the essential agreement between the views of the poets and those of the philosophers<sup>2</sup>. One of such attempts was undertaken by Maximus of Tyre, a philosopher and rhetorician, who lived in the second century CE<sup>3</sup>. As our understanding of Maximus' complex approach to Homer has sig-

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<sup>1</sup> On which, see, e.g., Kannicht 1980, Gould 1990 or Levin 2001.

<sup>2</sup> For good surveys, see, e.g., Wehrli 1928; Buffière 1956; Pépin 1976; Lamberton 1986; Brisson 1996; Ramelli - Luchetta 2004 or, most recently, Radice 2020.

<sup>3</sup> It is crucial to note here that when Maximus embraces allegoresis, he departs from Plato, who flatly repudiated this practice (*Resp.* 378d 3-8). Maximus' unequivocal espousal of allegoresis brings him closer to such Platonists as Numenius rather than

nificantly improved over the last years<sup>4</sup>, the modest aim of this paper will be to briefly analyze his intriguing account of Zeus, which appears in *διαλέξεις* IV and XXVI<sup>5</sup>.

This fascinating piece of allegoresis deserves attention not only because it nicely illustrates how the practice of allegorical interpretation could be employed with a view to appeasing the ancient feud that Plato referred to. Undoubtedly, Maximus uses allegoresis to salvage the canon of Greek poetry by showing the full (if not immediately clear) harmony between philosophical content and literary form. In this aspect, then, his approach adheres to the apologetic tradition that goes back to the sixth century BCE and is typically associated with the somewhat obscure figure of Theagenes of Rhegium<sup>6</sup>. However, there is much more to Maximus' recourse to allegoresis, since his interpretations also nicely show how Middle Platonist thinkers sought to resolve various heated controversies between Platonism and Stoicism. In this respect, then, *Orations* IV and XXVI offer crucial insights into the state of philosophical discourse in the period that lies between the emergence of the great Hellenistic schools and the dawn of Neoplatonism<sup>7</sup>. A point particularly important for the present considerations is the theological question of whether the divine should be conceived of in more noetic and transcendent terms or

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Plutarch, the latter being somewhat ambivalent about the practice (see Domaradzki 2020b, 140).

<sup>4</sup> Groundbreaking work in this area has been done by Buffière 1956 and Kindstrand 1973. The former work provides an exhaustive discussion of the general context, whereas the latter offers an excellent analysis of Maximus' idiosyncratic use of Homer. Thus, Buffière 1956 deals with Maximus' place in the long «bataille autour d'Homère» (pp. 19-20), his attitude towards the idea that Homer's myths are «miroirs du monde invisible» (pp. 41-43), his interpretation of Odysseus as «le sage platonicien» (pp. 386-388) and his account of «les démons homériques» (pp. 525-528). Kindstrand 1973, on the other hand, devotes two chapters of his pioneering study to Maximus' sophisticated use of the poet: «Die Homerlektüre des Maximus» (pp. 45-71) and «Das Homerbild des Maximus» (pp. 163-192). For other discussions of this topic, see also Pépin 1976, 189-190 (who focuses on Maximus' view of myth in *Oration* IV) and, most recently, Daouti 2016, 59-76 (who analyzes *διαλέξεις* IV and XXVI, albeit in rather general terms – cf. Trapp 2018, 304).

<sup>5</sup> The Greek text has been consulted with the editions of Hobein 1910; Trapp 1994 and Koniaris 1995. The translation (at times modified) is that of Trapp 1997a.

<sup>6</sup> On whom, see, e.g., Domaradzki 2011 and 2017 as well as Biondi 2015 with further references. It is noteworthy that both Theagenes (*DK* 8 A 2) and Maximus (XXVI, 8g-h) allegorically interpret Homer's notorious theomachy as the battle of the elements, which was a *topos* in the tradition of apologetic allegoresis (see, e.g., Heraclit. *Quaest. Hom.* 52-58 or [Plut.] *Vit. Hom.* 102).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Trapp 2018, 303 but already Dillon 1996, 399-400 or Trapp 1997b, 1945-1946.

rather in more providential and immanent ones<sup>8</sup>. Thus, as will be shown, Maximus' account of Zeus represents an interesting contribution to the philosophical debate on divine agency.

Prior to discussing Maximus' curious interpretation of Zeus, it is necessary to mention two aspects of the historical context in which his account was put forward: the flowering of the Second Sophistic, on the one hand, and the merging of various Platonic and Stoic concepts, on the other. The representatives of the Second Sophistic followed in the footsteps of the Sophists from the 5th century BCE, inasmuch as they also blended topics characteristic of philosophy, rhetoric and poetics. In the course of doing so, they regularly sought to dazzle the reader with a display of erudition, they gladly imitated the language of ancient authors, and they fervently praised the heritage of Greek culture<sup>9</sup>. Unsurprisingly, then, the poetry of Homer was regarded not only as an unparalleled example of the greatest poetic art, but also as a treasure trove of all knowledge and wisdom. While unveiling the poet's hidden *πολυμάθεια* frequently required resorting to allegoresis, the practice was eagerly embraced by many Stoics and Platonists<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the upshot was that Homer's esoteric message often proved to contain ideas that could be characterized as both Platonic and Stoic<sup>11</sup>. Hence, although Maximus is usually categorized as a Πλατωνικός, Michael B. Trapp is surely right to caution that the situation is actually «more complicated and more interesting»<sup>12</sup>. Indeed, Maximus' ingenious allegoresis of Zeus perfectly illustrates this point.

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<sup>8</sup> Maximus' approach to this problem has been brilliantly analyzed by O'Brien 2015, 117-138 and Reydams-Schils 2017, 125-138. This article is greatly indebted to both these highly stimulating accounts.

<sup>9</sup> For excellent discussions of the cultural milieu and historical context, see, e.g., Anderson 1993 or Whitmarsh 2005. Ramelli 2014 has made a strong case that ancient interpreters would often employ allegoresis with a view to valuing antiquity, which thus helped to foster and consolidate cultural unity.

<sup>10</sup> It is vital to observe here that many Platonists perceived their allegoresis as a development of the Stoics' hermeneutical efforts. Indeed, as Boys-Stones 2001, 50 has astutely pointed out, Porphyry (*ap. Euseb. Hist. eccl.* VI 19, 8 = Harnack fr. 39), places the Stoics Chaeremon and Cornutus at the head of his list of great Platonist and Pythagorean allegorical interpreters (see also *ibid.*, 58, 73, n. 26, 112 and further Domaradzki 2021, 36, n. 11).

<sup>11</sup> Suffice it to mention here Pseudo-Plutarch's elaborate allegoresis of the Circe episode: the author fuses various Platonic and Stoic views, as he glides from a Platonizing account of the story (the enchantress symbolizes metempsychosis) to a Stoicizing one (the sorceress personifies pleasure). For a recent discussion of this issue, see Domaradzki 2020a with further references.

<sup>12</sup> Trapp 1997a, xxiii. This, on the other hand, is characteristic not only of Maximus but of his various contemporaries as well. Indeed, as Männlein-Robert 2018, 661 correctly points out: «Seine Integration nicht weniger stoischer oder kynischer Elemente

## 2. THE HOMERIC ZEUS

Maximus presents his allegorical interpretation of Kronion in his *Oration* IV. This lecture builds on the assumption that philosophy naturally originates from poetry: the latter employs metres and myths, whereas the former uses a less oblique language (IV, 1b-c), but basically philosophy is a – *sit venia verbo* – ‘distillation’ of poetry. As ancient medicine was replaced with more modern science (IV, 2a-e), so the enigmatic teachings of Homer or Hesiod were superseded by the more explicit doctrines of Aristotle or Chrysippus (IV, 3b-d). This transformation was necessary because people’s worldview had changed dramatically: in the days of old men relished the mysterious discourse, but now they have come to crave more straightforward messages. Crucially, however, the abundant use of figurative language by such profound thinkers as Plato<sup>13</sup>, Pherecydes<sup>14</sup> and Heraclitus<sup>15</sup> shows unequivocally that when it comes to certain topics, allegory is indispensable not only in poetry but also in philosophy (IV, 5a)<sup>16</sup>. Thus, enigmatic discourse is indicative of the author’s respect for the highest truths and poetry conceals subtle philosophy hidden beneath the veneer of cryptic and arcane stories. Consequently, Maximus

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sowie auch pythagoreischer Themen, ein Gemenge, das mitunter zum Verdikt des Eklektizismus führt, entspricht üblicher mittelpatonischer Praxis, wie sie auch bei anderen Platonikern erkennbar wird (z.B. Attikos und Tauros)». The term ‘eclecticism’, however, does not seem very helpful, whether one is trying to make sense of Maximus in particular (see, e.g., Trapp 1997b, 1948) or an ancient thinker in general (see, e.g., Engberg-Pedersen 2017, 3-10).

<sup>13</sup> From the several telling examples that Maximus provides here (IV, 4c-f), we need to single out Plato’s famous description (*Phdr.* 246e 4 - 247a 1) of Zeus riding his «winged chariot» (πτηνὸν ἄρμα) with an «army of gods and daemons arranged in eleven squadrons» (στρατιὰ θεῶν τε καὶ δαιμόνων, κατὰ ἔνδεκα μέρη κεκοσμημένη), since Maximus also adduces this image in his account of Zeus in *Oration* XXVI (on which see below, nn. 42-44).

<sup>14</sup> Maximus refers (IV, 4g) to such Pherecydean images as the wedding of Zeus with Chthonie and the hanging of the embroidered robe on the oak (see *DK* 7 B 2). For an extensive discussion of these images’ significance, see Schibli 1990, 50-77. Maximus invokes Pherecydes’ images to provide examples of «allégorie sur les dieux» (Saudelli 2016, 87), but it is debatable whether these images can be classified as deliberate allegories (see Domaradzki 2017, 317 with n. 71).

<sup>15</sup> As an illustration of the Ephesian’s enigmatic style, Maximus gives (IV, 4h) the celebrated *DK* 22 B 62 (ἀθάνατοι θνητοί, θνητοί ἀθάνατοι), which, however, he paraphrases as «mortal gods, undying gods» (θεοὶ θνητοί, θεοὶ ἀθάνατοι). For an analysis of Heraclitus’ meaning in B 62, see Kahn 1979, 216-220; for a discussion of Maximus’ use of it, see Saudelli 2016, 87-88.

<sup>16</sup> The very same argument for the indispensability of allegory appears, for example, in Heraclit. *Quaest. Hom.* 24.

drives home the point (IV, 7a) that both poetry and philosophy form a «single and concordant art» (μία καὶ ὁμόφωνος τέχνη). While this consonance is, then, exemplified with several instances of allegorical interpretations, Maximus' account of Zeus is particularly noteworthy for the purpose of our discussion, since it smoothly harmonizes the Platonic and Stoic concepts of divinity.

Maximus sets forth his interpretation in strong opposition to Epicurean theology. Thus, he begins with the forceful assertion (IV, 8a) that he deems Homer's myths to be superior and preferable to the «far odder» (ἀτοπώτεροι) doctrines of Epicurus. To support his claim, he first interprets (*ibid.*) the poet's depiction of how Kronion weighed the two «fates» (κῆρε) of Achilles and Hector on his golden scales (*Il.* XXII 209-213) as symbolizing the «Fate» (εἰμαρμένη) that governs the «souls» (ψυχαί) of all men. When allegorizing this Homeric passage, Maximus substitutes, then, the word ψυχάς for the poet's κῆρε (*Il.* XXII 210)<sup>17</sup>, which provides a rationale for the reference to the philosophical concept of εἰμαρμένη. Subsequently, this allegoresis of the Olympian as Destiny is followed by an interpretation which takes (IV, 8b-c) Zeus' nod of assent (*Il.* I 524-528) to be an allegory of the workings of Providence:

Αἰσθάνομαι τῶν Διὸς νευμάτων· διὰ τούτων γῆ μένει, καὶ ἀναχεῖται θάλαττα, καὶ ἀήρ διαρρεῖ, καὶ πῦρ ἄνω θεῖ, καὶ οὐρανὸς περιφέρεται, καὶ ζῶα γίνεται, καὶ δένδρα φύεται· τῶν Διὸς νευμάτων ἔργα καὶ ἀνθρώπου ἀρετὴ καὶ εὐδαιμονία.

I see [the effects of] Zeus' nods: through these the earth remains still, the sea spreads out, the air flows through, the fire runs up, the heavens revolve, the animals are born and the trees grow; the virtue and happiness of man are likewise the works of Zeus' nods.

When reading into the Homeric deity the notion of Fate amalgamated with the notion of Providence, Maximus states in no uncertain terms that this divine agency is directly involved in all aspects of the universe: from the physical realm (earth, sea, air, fire, heavens, animals, trees) to the social one (human virtue and happiness). While a parallel interpretation of Zeus' nod is offered in *Oration* XLI<sup>18</sup>, Maximus' account raises the

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<sup>17</sup> Naturally, this substitution, as Kindstrand 1973, 66 aptly notes, builds on «eine Bedeutung, die das Wort nicht bei Homer hat».

<sup>18</sup> Here the universe likewise forms as a result of Zeus' νευμα. Thus, Maximus explains (XLI, 2e-f) that *Il.* I 528 «hints enigmatically» (ἠνίξατο) that «at Zeus' nod the earth took form, and all that is nourished on the earth, and the sea took form and all that is born in the sea, and the air took form and all that is carried in the air, and the heavens took form and all that is moved in the heavens» (ὁμοῦ δὲ τῷ Διὸς νευματι γῆ ξυνέστη, καὶ ὅσα γῆς θρέμματα, καὶ θάλασσα ξυνέστη, καὶ ὅσα θαλάττης γεννήματα, καὶ ἀήρ ξυνέστη, καὶ ὅσα ἀέρος φορήματα, καὶ οὐρανὸς ξυνέστη, καὶ ὅσα ἐν οὐρανῷ κινήματα).

question of how Zeus can still be a transcendent divinity if he engages so intimately in the universe.

The above allegoresis – as Jan Fredrik Kindstrand brilliantly observes – takes its points of departure from the verb *κατανεύσω* (*Il.* I 527) in order to demonstrate «wie durch die *νεύματα* des Zeus alles geschieht und alles besteht»<sup>19</sup>. The god's *νεῦμα* is, then, an expression of will and command<sup>20</sup>, for it causes the world to take form: the universe obeys Zeus' nod and thereby comes to be. This beautiful allegory of Kronion's *νεῦμα* highlights the god's transcendence, since it suggestively portrays the deity as being clearly separated from matter, which the god operates on and orders<sup>21</sup>. Yet, although Maximus' ingenious interpretation of Zeus' nods preserves the god's superiority and supremacy, it also brings up the problem of how this divinity can exercise providential care over matter: does the demiurgic causality of Zeus' *νεῦμα* entail some sort of physical contact with and/or presence in the world?

Although this may *prima facie* seem to be the case, Gretchen Reydams-Schils, in a recent study, has persuasively argued that one should be very careful here, because Maximus' reference to these *νεύματα* is deliberately ambivalent: Zeus' nods could be construed either in a Platonic (i.e., incorporeal) or in a Stoic (i.e., corporeal) sense<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, Maximus supplements the above account with an additional explanation (*IV*, 8h) which hails Zeus as the «most venerable and sovereign Mind» (*νοῦς πρεσβύτατος καὶ ἀρχικώτατος*), whom «all things follow and obey» (*πάντα ἔπεται καὶ πειθαρχεῖ*)<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the god is now characterized in more noetic terms as a supreme Intellect which thinks all things and thus maintains the cosmos. Evidently, then, Maximus' account of Zeus explicitly marries several fundamental Stoic and Platonic concepts, inasmuch as it oscillates between the Platonic Demiurge and the Stoic Providence.

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Having enumerated all these «works of Zeus' nods» (*ἔργα τῶν Διὸς νευμάτων*), Maximus similarly concludes his interpretation (*XLI*, 2g) with a passionate affirmation of his allegiance and a vehement rejection of the archenemy from the Garden: «I believe Homer, I trust Plato and I pity Epicurus!» (*καὶ Ὁμήρῳ πείθομαι, καὶ πιστεύω Πλάτωνι, καὶ οἰκτεῖρω τὸν Ἐπικούρου*). For excellent discussions of Maximus' account of the divine in *Oration XLI*, see O'Brien 2015, 120-124 and Reydams-Schils 2017, 125-129.

<sup>19</sup> Kindstrand 1973, 175.

<sup>20</sup> See *LJSJ s.v. νεῦμα*.

<sup>21</sup> As O'Brien 2015, 123 acutely observes.

<sup>22</sup> Reydams-Schils 2017, 127.

<sup>23</sup> It is conceivable, as Kindstrand 1973, 175, n. 56 also surmises, that Maximus posited some sort of etymological connection between the words *κατανεύσω* and *νεύματα*, on the one hand, and *νοῦς*, on the other.



As far as Stoic metaphysics is concerned, suffice it to mention here the crucial testimony of Diogenes Laertius, who relates that the philosophers from the Porch considered «God» (θεός), «Mind» (νοῦς), «Fate» (εἰμαρμένη) and «Zeus» (Ζεύς) to be «one [thing]» (ἓν)<sup>24</sup>, and further believed the world to be administered by «Mind» (νοῦς) and «Providence» (πρόνοια)<sup>25</sup> as well as by «Fate» (εἰμαρμένη)<sup>26</sup>. That this view of Zeus was popular with the Stoics is likewise attested by, for example, Cicero, who similarly reports Chrysippus to have equated Jupiter with the *fatalis necessitas*<sup>27</sup>. However, Maximus' identification of Zeus with Mind also shares an important parallel with Xenocrates' metaphysics. We know that as he was deriving the universe from his first principles, Xenocrates interchangeably used the terms «Zeus» (Ζεύς), «Odd» (περιττός) and «Mind» (νοῦς) with reference to the «First God» (πρῶτος θεός)<sup>28</sup>. While he further believed this divine principle to rule «in the heavens» (ἐν οὐρανῷ)<sup>29</sup>, John M. Dillon has noted that Xenocrates' Monad could easily be taken as «immanent within the cosmos», which would then make his Zeus fairly similar to the Stoics' force governing the universe, the obvious difference being though that Xenocrates regarded his supreme principle as immaterial rather than material<sup>30</sup>. And although scholars have cautioned that such an understanding of Xenocrates' doctrine should be eschewed<sup>31</sup>, this tension is clearly present in Maximus' interpretation, which, as has been noted, exploits the ambiguity between a more corporeal and more incorporeal view of the divine involvement in the world: on the one hand, Zeus' νεῦμα simply causes the world to take form and, on the other, this divine intelligence incessantly permeates the whole universe and governs it. Finally, we should also note here that a highly comparable interpretation of Zeus is offered by Pseudo-Plutarch<sup>32</sup>. Having

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<sup>24</sup> Diog. Laert. VII 135 = SVF I 102 = SVF II 580.

<sup>25</sup> Diog. Laert. VII 138 = SVF II 634. See also Aët. I 7, 23 = SVF I 157.

<sup>26</sup> Diog. Laert. VII 149 = SVF I 175 = SVF II 915. See also Aët. I 7, 33 = SVF II 1027.

<sup>27</sup> Cic. *Nat. D.* I 40 = SVF II 1077.

<sup>28</sup> Aët. I 7, 30 = Isnardi Parente fr. 213.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>30</sup> Dillon 1996, 25-26.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Isnardi Parente 1981, 400, who observes: «Il passo può peraltro indurre a fraintendimenti che sono da evitarsi, per la coloritura cosmico-immanentistica che il dossografo dà nel suo riferimento alla teoria senocratea». In a similar vein, Reydam-Schils 2013, 35-37 makes the case that Xenocrates actually did not abandon the concept of a transcendent divine principle in favor of some immanent divine agency (cf. also Reydam-Schils 2017, 127, n. 4).

<sup>32</sup> The text is that of Kindstrand 1990 and the translation (at times modified) is that of Keaney-Lamberton 1996.

ascertained that Homer indubitably deemed Kronion to be «cognizable by mind» (νοητός)<sup>33</sup>, Pseudo-Plutarch stresses (*Vit. Hom.* 114) that the poet «knows that god is Mind, with universal knowledge, managing the universe» (οἶδε δὲ ὅτι νοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς ὁ πάντα ἐπιστάμενος καὶ διέπων τὸ πᾶν). Hence, in typical Middle Platonic fashion, Pseudo-Plutarch lets Stoic and Platonic concepts coalesce in his account of Zeus as Mind administering the world<sup>34</sup>, which, once again, sits well with Maximus' vacillation between the Platonic Demiurge and the Stoic Providence.

Naturally, Maximus' allegoresis has a clear apologetic dimension, since it seeks to defend Homer's theology against the devastating criticisms that from Xenophanes onwards have been levelled against the poet (see, e.g., *DK* 21 B 11-12 or 14-16). As Maximus' defense of Homer consists in unveiling the poet's latent theology, his interpretation of Kronion demonstrates that through the vivid image of Zeus nodding, Homer has conveyed the profound truth of how the divine not only generates the world but also cares for it. Thus, by depicting how the Olympian gives rise to the world and regulates it, Homer has hinted enigmatically at the theological positions of both Platonism and Stoicism. The image of Kronion's νεῦμα is, then, a poetic allegory of the more explicit philosophical doctrines. Maximus aims here to persuade his readers about the usefulness of comprehensive and thorough education: philosophical investigations need to be complemented with extensive studies of the great Greek poetry, for this ancient reservoir of precious (if enigmatic) insights is entirely congruous with the novel teachings of the philosophers, provided one is willing to go beyond the surface meaning of the Homeric myths and unravel their allegorical message. That is precisely why Maximus strongly insists that archaic poetic names are fully equivalent to modern philosophical concepts (*IV*, 8g and 9a). This approach is consistent with the philhellenic program of the Second Sophistic (see above).

However, rescuing the traditional foundation of Hellenic παιδεία from its detractors is by no means the only goal that guides Maximus' allegoresis, as he also strives to strike a happy medium between the more Platonic and the more Stoic view of divine agency. And although Maximus, in his account of Zeus, lets the providential aspect of divinity

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<sup>33</sup> On the basis of *Il.* I 498 and XX 22-23, on which see further Buffière 1956, 521 with n. 1 and Hillgruber 1999, 254.

<sup>34</sup> It may not be superfluous to note here though that already «the Anaxagoreans» (οἱ Ἀναξαγόρειοι) are reported (*DK* 61 A 6) to have «interpreted» (ἐρμηνεύουσι) Zeus as «Mind» (νοῦς), on which see, e.g., Buffière 1956, 129 or Domaradzki 2010, 242.

dominate over the purely noetic one<sup>35</sup>, his ultimate goal is to dissuade his audience from slipping into the ‘atheism’ of Epicurus. *Oration* IV concludes (IV, 9a-f), then, with a passionate repudiation of the view that «the immortal neither toils itself nor causes toil for others» (τὸ ἀθάνατον οὔτε αὐτὸ πράγματα ἔχει, οὔτε ἄλλω παρέχει)<sup>36</sup>. This account of divinity is dismissed and derided as being utterly impious and abominable. Hence, apart from a *protreptic* purpose (promotion of a refined synthesis of Platonic and Stoic theologies), lecture IV has also a more *apotreptic* objective: Maximus urges his readers to turn *to* Homer’s covert theology and *away from* Epicurus’ overt blasphemy. His allegoresis of Homer’s Zeus reveals that it is the poet’s esoteric conception of divinity that is truly noble and inspiring: as the toil of Zeus (i.e., Fate and Mind) is immense, people need to worship and revere this deity constantly, for without the divine labor our κόσμος would immediately degenerate into χάος. All this shows that when read appropriately (i.e., allegorically), Homer’s beautiful epics remind us of the omnipresence of divinity in our world. This is why the great Greek poetry must play a pivotal role in educating young people.

### 3. THE PLATONIC ZEUS

Maximus offers a complementary account of the Olympian in *Oration* XXVI. This lecture also unearths Homer’s hidden philosophy, which is here famously defined (XXVI, 1c) as «detailed knowledge of matters divine and human» (ἐπιστήμη ἀκριβῆς θεῶν τε περὶ κἀνθρωπίνων). This conception of philosophy was espoused by many Stoics<sup>37</sup> and Middle Platonists<sup>38</sup>, but can ultimately be traced to Plato himself<sup>39</sup>. Unsurprisingly, Maximus insists (XXVI, 3b) that not only Plato’s view of philosophy but also his «language» (φωναί), «vocabulary» (ὀνόματα), «phrasing» (ρήματα) and «thought» (γνώμη) are prodigiously indebted to Homer.

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<sup>35</sup> As Reydams-Schils 2017, 132-133 cogently argues.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Κυρ. δόξ. I = Diog. Laert. X 139.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Sext. Emp. *Math.* IX 13, 3-5 = *SVF* II 36: τὴν φιλοσοφίαν φασὶν ἐπιτήδευσιν εἶναι σοφίας, τὴν δὲ σοφίαν ἐπιστήμην θεῶν τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Alcin. *Didasc.* I 152, 2-5: Φιλοσοφία ἐστὶν ὄρεξις σοφίας, [...] σοφία δ’ ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων.

<sup>39</sup> As has been brilliantly pointed out by Trapp 1997a, 215, n. 7, who also provides the references. For an exhaustive discussion of this thoroughly Platonic definition and its later Hellenistic transformations, see Männlein-Robert 2002, who, among other testimonies, analyzes the aforementioned (nn. 37-38) accounts embraced by the Stoics (pp. 29-30) and Middle Platonists (pp. 31-32). Cf. also Männlein-Robert 2018, 661.

This *topos* of Plato's great and hidden debt to the poet was frequently invoked by the allegorists<sup>40</sup>, but Maximus is prepared to push the argument about the «kinship» (συγγένεια) between Homer and Plato quite far: not only is Plato a «nursling» (θρέμμα) of Homer's poetry but he is also «more similar» (ἐμφορεστέρος) to the poet than to Socrates (XXVI, 3a). Maximus' position that Homer had in fact been the first philosopher and that Plato was essentially his faithful disciple sits very well with the account of the relationship between poetry and philosophy that was articulated in *Oration IV*<sup>41</sup>, for this lecture likewise points to the mutual relationship between the two: Homer's epics constitute a «twofold entity» (χρῆμα διπλοῦν) in the sense that, as poetry, they are expressed in myths, but, as philosophy, they convey the highest truths (XXVI, 5b).

To illustrate the close affinity between poetry and philosophy, Maximus juxtaposes (XXVI, 7a-b) Plato's depiction of the «Great Zeus in heaven» (μέγας ἐν οὐρανῷ Ζεύς)<sup>42</sup>, who drives his «winged chariot» (πτηνὸν ἄρμα)<sup>43</sup> and «leads [the procession of] the gods» (ἡγεῖται θεῶν)<sup>44</sup>, with Homer's portrayal of the Olympian deities. Obviously, the latter is demonstrated to be a prefiguration of the former. Thus, *Il.* VIII 7-9, 42, XIII 27 and XV 190-193 are quoted (XXVI, 7c-f) with a view to showing how the poet inspired the philosopher's description of Zeus as commanding the other deities, riding a chariot and presiding over the sky<sup>45</sup>. Hence, the poet's vision is an anticipation of the philosopher's version: Maximus' interpretation reveals that Homer's poetical philosophy has

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<sup>40</sup> Thus, for example, both Heraclitus (*Quaest. Hom.* 17) and Pseudo-Plutarch (*Vit. Hom.* 129) consider the story about Athena grasping Achilles by the hair (*Il.* I 188-200) to be a prefiguration of Plato's psychology, on which see Domaradzki 2020a, 232 with further references.

<sup>41</sup> Trapp 1997b, 1952 rightly observes that the vision of the history of philosophy emerging from *Oration* IV and XXVI is that of a «golden chain» which «runs through the history of mankind, from the earliest poet-sages to Thales, Pythagoras and Heraclitus, thence to Socrates and his immediate disciples, and on to their heirs in the later fourth and third centuries B.C.».

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Plat. *Phdr.* 246e 4: ὁ μὲν δὴ μέγας ἡγεμὼν ἐν οὐρανῷ Ζεύς. See also Daouti 2016, 64: «L'image de dieu sur son char qui se dirige vers le ciel tel qu'il est présenté dans le *Phèdre* de Platon a des similarités éclatantes avec les images des dieux offerts par Homère».

<sup>43</sup> See above, n. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Brumana 2019, 771, n. 49 aptly points out (*ad loc.*) that Maximus' ἡγεῖται is not only an obvious reference to Plato's ἡγεμὼν (see above, n. 42) but also an affirmation of Zeus' priority and providential care (cf. Plat. *Phdr.* 246e 5-6: πρῶτος πορεύεται, διακοσμῶν πάντα καὶ ἐπιμελούμενος).

<sup>45</sup> Pseudo-Plutarch (*Vit. Hom.* 114) makes a comparable use of *Il.* I 544, VIII 27 and 31-32, on which see Hillgruber 1999, 252-253.

its modern counterpart in Plato's philosophical poetry. While the poet's image of Zeus resurfaces in the philosopher's exposition, both these accounts have it that there is a supreme god who is superior to all other deities that come after him.

It is worth noting though that while both *Oration* IV and XXVI make explicit references to Homer's depiction of Zeus, it is only in the former case that a hidden meaning is extracted from the poet's portrayal of Kronion, who is here deciphered as Fate. In *Oration* XXVI Maximus does not unravel any allegory in the poet's description of Zeus, which makes his use of the Homeric deity different from his approach to it in *Oration* IV, where the Olympian is allegorically interpreted as Destiny. In *Oration* XXVI Maximus makes references to Homer's portrayals of the Olympian deities to show their similarity to Plato's account of divinity in the *Phaedrus*<sup>46</sup>. Such an appeal to poetry has to be distinguished from allegoresis<sup>47</sup>. Clearly, it is one thing to take a scene from the poet as an *anticipation* of a belief and quite another to take it as an *allegory* of a belief<sup>48</sup>. In *Oration* XXVI Maximus adduces Homer's images of the Olympian deities to demonstrate that they *prefigure* Plato's vision. In *Oration* IV he reads into the poet's portrayal of Zeus Homer's secret doctrine of Providence. Both lectures, however, suggest that those philosophers who, like Epicurus, hastily disregard the latent philosophy of Homer and mistakenly perceive him solely as a poet, produce doctrines that contain nothing of value. Naturally, the goal of Maximus' analyses is to expose and rectify this grave error.

Finally, it is worth observing here that in the *Phaedrus* Plato himself emphasizes the enormous difficulties in literally explicating such complex issues as the nature of the soul. He, therefore, begins his exposition by stating in no uncertain terms that his ensuing depiction should at best be viewed as a *probable image* (see 246a 5: *ἔοικεν* and 6: *ἐοικέτω*). Given that Plato openly acknowledges the figurativeness of his portrayal, it comes as no surprise that Maximus is willing to ascribe the same awareness to Homer. As has already been noted, certain convoluted matters require metaphors and allegories, irrespective of whether the author is classified as a poet or as a philosopher. This can be seen not only in the works of

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<sup>46</sup> For a helpful survey of various uses of Plato's *Phaedrus* in the second century, see Trapp 1990, who in the Appendix also provides a detailed catalogue of specific references made to the dialogue by diverse authors (pp. 171-173).

<sup>47</sup> As Wehrli 1928, 71 has once cautioned: «Irgendeine Geschichte kann auch als bloßer Vergleich herangezogen werden, ohne daß man von einer Umdeutung eigentlich sprechen kann».

<sup>48</sup> See Domaradzki 2020a, 235.

Plato but also in the aforementioned cases of Pherecydes and Heraclitus. This is precisely why Maximus cautions not only against rashly dismissing Homer's poetry but also against taking it entirely literally.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Let us briefly recapitulate. Maximus' account of Zeus uniquely combines the theological position of Stoicism and Platonism, as it seeks to reconcile two divergent conceptions of divinity: the transcendent demiurge whose nod generates the world and the providential ruler whose guidance administers it. The account that has been the focus of the present paper retains the clear distinction between god and matter, but also stresses that the divine Mind is directly and intimately involved in all aspects of the universe. Crucially, Maximus incorporates a certain ambivalence into his allegoresis of Zeus' *νεύματα*, as he apparently takes these nods to be both incorporeal and corporeal: the former reading implies the existence of a supreme Intellect which thinks all things and thereby maintains the cosmos, whereas the latter reading entails that there is an immanent force which pervades the universe and governs it. Thus, when answering the theological question of how a noetic divinity can be in charge of the material cosmos, Maximus fuses the Platonic Demiurge with the Stoic Providence. The purpose of this amalgamation is to prove that Homer's description hints enigmatically at the more novel conceptions advanced by philosophers. Given that in his interpretation Maximus does not shun Stoic concepts (e.g. *εἰμαρμένη*), his account of Zeus confirms that one should be careful about his Platonism, even if Maximus is, indeed, customarily classified as a *Πλατωνικός*.

Maximus' overall approach to Homer is guided by the strong conviction that Homer was an inspired sage, who purposefully concealed his wisdom under the guise of mythical stories. As the poet deliberately expressed his profound philosophy in riddles and enigmas, it is necessary to interpret his epics allegorically. Thus, allegoresis reveals the value of studying the great Hellenic poetry, which proves to be a treasure trove of priceless ancient insights that are entirely consistent with the contemporary teachings of philosophers. While this value becomes evident when one is prepared to excavate the allegorical message from underneath the various mythical formulations, a case in point is Plato's theology. The portrayal of divine agency that is to be found in the Platonic dialogues is in fact an elaboration of Homer's depiction of divinity. The fact that the poet's suggestive description of Zeus can be either an allegory (*Ora-*

tion IV) or an anticipation (*Oration XXVI*) of Plato's account testifies, beyond any doubt, that Homer has to be recognized as the first philosopher. His superb poetry not only reminds us that Zeus (i.e., Mind and Fate) keeps our κόσμος from falling into χάος, but also encourages us to honor this deity continually. This is why Maximus ardently admonishes his audience to turn *to* the pious teachings of Homer and *away from* the irreligious doctrine of Epicurus. All in all, then, allegoresis makes it possible for Maximus to demonstrate the greatness of Homer's poetry and its indispensability for Hellenic παιδεία.

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

DK

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LSJ

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