

ΓΕΝΕΣΙΣ ΠΑΝΤΕΣΣΙ:

The *Iliad* 14.201 and 14.246 Reconsidered

Il. 14.200-201 (repeated at 14.301-302; Hera speaks)

εἶμι γὰρ ὄφομένη πολυφύρβου πείρατα γαίης,
᾽Ωκεανόν τε θεῶν γένεσιν καὶ μητέρα Τηθύν ...

"For I am going to see the limits of fertile earth, Okeanos begetter of gods and mother Tethys ..."

Il. 14.244-248 (Hypnos speaks)

ἄλλον μὲν κεν ἔγωγε θεῶν αἰειγενετάων
ῥεῖα κατευνήσαιμι, καὶ ἄν ποταμοῖο ῥέεθρα
᾽Ωκεανοῦ, ὅς περ γένεσις πάντεσσι τέτυχται.
Ζηνὸς δ' οὐκ ἄν ἔγωγε Κρονίουκος ἄσσον ἰκοίμη
οὐδὲ κατευνήσαιμι, ὅτε μὴ αὐτός γε κελεύοι.

"Another of the everlasting gods would I easily send to sleep, even the streams of river Okeanos who is the begetter of all; but Zeus son of Kronos would I not approach, nor send to sleep, except that he himself so bid me."

Il. 21.194-197 (about Zeus)

τῶι οὐδὲ κρείων Ἀχελῷος ἰσοφαρίζει
οὐδὲ βαθυρρέϊταιο μέγα σθένος ᾽Ωκεανοῖο,
ἔξ οὔ περ πάντες ποταμοὶ καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα
καὶ πᾶσαι κρῆναι καὶ φρεῖατα μακρὰ νάουσιν.

"Him not ever Lord Acheloos equals, nor the great might of deep-flowing Okeanos, from whom, indeed, all rivers and all sea and all springs and deep wells flow"(all translations by G.S.Kirk).

The first two of these passages are normally regarded nowadays to be references to Okeanos as the origin of the gods (all the gods) and the origin of all things, and so as an anticipation of Hesiod and Thales, of both theogony and philosophic cosmology¹. Such an in-

¹ I give just a few references to the most recent and authoritative books: *The Iliad: A Commentary*. Vol. IV; Books 13-16, by Richard Janko (Cambridge 1992) 181 f.; Alexander Zaicev, *Das Griechische Wunder: die Entstehung der griechischen Zivilisation* (Konstanz 1993) 181 ("Ahn und Schöpfer von den Lebenden allen"); in Russian original (Leningrad 1985 p. 192) Okeanos is designated as "the origin

terpretation became prominent already in antiquity². More exactly, some commentators, both ancient and modern, use only one line of the interpretation (either theogonic or philosophic), which is reasonable: Okeanos must be the origin of either the gods or of things, and it is highly improbable that the two different notions could be referred to within the space of forty lines. But it is not this distinction that I am here interested in, for I am going to argue that both lines of the traditional interpretation are essentially wrong.

Let us begin with 14.246. First of all, πάντεσσι does not necessarily refer to all **things**; it can refer to **persons** of some kind as well. And the latter is more plausible just because this is the case in 14.201, where Okeanos is called θεῶν γένεσιν. Moreover, the natural reading of 14.244-246 is that πάντεσσι refers to ῥέεθρα. To use A.T.Murray's translation in the *Loeb Classical Library*, "were it even the streams of the river Oceanus, from whom they all are sprung". And the third passage (21.194-197) fits all that very well, for there is an obvious similarity between ἐξ οὗ περ πάντες ποταμοὶ καὶ πᾶσα θάλασσα καὶ πᾶσαι κρῆναι, on the one hand, and γένεσις πάντεσσι, on the other. If there is still room for doubt, it should be noted that Okeanos of 14.246 is compared with Zeus not because Okeanos is of special importance, but precisely because of his relation to the streams of waters, which are chosen because they are in constant movement. Hypnos boasts that his power is so great that he can make sleep, i.e. stand still, even the waters of the river Okeanos, of that Okeanos that is the source of all (running) waters.

It is true that the text is not very clear. I assume that ῥέεθρα is used in a double function. On the one hand, it is just a part of a composite description of Okeanos, ποταμοῖο ῥέεθρα Ὀκεανοῦ, similar to ποταμοῖο μέγα σθένος Ὀκεανοῖο, *Il.* 18.607; βαθυρρεῖταιο μέγα σθένος Ὀκεανοῖο, *Il.* 21.195 (cf. Ὀκεανοῖο ῥέεθρα, *Il.* 23.205), so that

of all things"; see also his commentary to the Russian translation of the *Iliad* by N. Gnedič (Leningrad 1990) 495 f. (ad 14.201 et 246); Walter Burkert, *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur* (Heidelberg 1984) 88; Idem, "Oriental Myth and Literature in the *Iliad*", Robin Hägg (ed.), *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.* (Stockholm 1983) 51-56, esp. 54; G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1983) 10-17; Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford 1947) 10 and notes.

² Plat. *Crat.* 402a-b; *Theaet.* 152e, 180c-d; Aristot. *Met.* 983 b 27-31 (Aristotle himself is sceptical about such an interpretation); Plut. *Mor.* 364c-d (*De Is. et Os.* 34); Eus. *Praep.* ev. 14.20.1; Theodoret. 2.9; see also *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem*, rec. Hartmut Erbse (Berolini 1974) III 605; 620 (ad vv. 14.201.246); verse 14.246a interpolated by Crates (see Plut. *De fac. orb. lun.* 938d) shows a similar perception.

ποταμοῖο ῥέεθρα Ὀκεανοῦ means first and foremost Okeanos himself. On the other hand, the independent meaning of ῥέεθρα ("streams", "waters") is actualized in πάντεσσι. However complicated this reading may seem, the alternative ones involve more serious difficulties. πάντεσσι as neuter (referring to all things) would be unprepared and without a parallel, which would be strange for such a strong assertion; it is also strange that a characterisation proper rather to the highest deity ("the source of all things") should have been applied to Okeanos precisely in a context in which the superiority of **another** deity, Zeus is emphasized. As to the other traditional reading, θεῶν is too far from πάντεσσι and the change of case from genitive to dative is not easy to assume, especially because θεῶν γένεσις of 14.201 and 302 shows that genitive should be expected.

I conclude that 14.246 has nothing to do with the question about the origin of all things.

Now the two passages of Book 14 seem to belong to a whole. (Even the word γένεσις appears in Homer only in 14.201=14.302 and 14.246.) What follows from that? I believe that 14.201 means nothing other than what is meant in 14.246. All the streams are gods. So θεῶν of line 201 means just these stream-gods. The close parallelism between 14.246 and 21.195-197 is clearly in favour of this interpretation.

But why is it Okeanos who is especially called θεῶν γένεσις? This is easy to grasp from the passage of Book 21 and even more so from a long passage in Hesiod (*Theog.*337-370). Okeanos is the father of plenty of gods; Hesiod makes him the father of three thousand daughters (364).

I conclude that 14.201 has nothing to do with the origin of all the gods. Okeanos of this line is merely the origin of some (though many) gods³.

So there is neither cosmology nor theogony in the strict sense in Book 14. Yet the two passages are still of interest for the study of Greek intellectual history.

When Hera speaks that she is disturbed by the endless strife between Okeanos and Tethys, so that they have already avoided the marriage-bed and love now for a long time (14.205-207), there is, I think, a curiosity behind all that, a curiosity pertaining to the fact that so many rivers and streams came to be once upon a time and so few if any come to be now. Further, it may be worth noting that the poet chose γένεσις, not πατήρ. Stream-gods are gods of a special

³ As, for instance, the Ida mountain, called μητέρα θηρῶν (14.283 et al.), is hardly thought of as the mother and source of all animal life on earth! (Cf. *Il.* 11.222: ἐν Θρήικῃ ... μητέρι μῆλων).

kind, for the rivers and streams are observable and palpable. The choice of the word possibly indicates that the poet is careful about the difference between the realm of things and the realm of persons, even when speaking about the divine powers. An interest in an extraordinary power of generation as that with which Okeanos is endowed is worth noting as well.

The ancient misinterpretation of the passages in question is also instructive. It shows once more the importance of Hesiod's initiative to set forth a consistent theogony and make it public. It shows the tremendous impact of this initiative on educated Greeks, so that Homeric passages were interpreted in the "Hesiodic sense" quite early, definitely by the time of an Orphic poem quoted in Plat. *Crat.* 402b and maybe already in the seventh century B.C.⁴ It seems plausible that the passages of Book 14 were understood in the "Hesiodic sense" by people around Thales. If so, this should have created (or contributed to) a situation of the encounter of divergent and equally respectable truths (different versions of the cosmogonic process) in their minds, that is a situation favourable for the emergence of new forms of thought⁵.

However fruitful a "Hesiodic" (and later on a "philosophic") reading of Homeric lines could be, it must not preclude us from establishing now a more adequate view of the passages in question and, therefore, of Greek intellectual development.

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Оба принятых в науке толкования *П.* 14. 246 (Океан — источник всех вещей; Океан — источник всех богов) стали традиционными еще в древности. В действительности, однако, Океан охарактеризован здесь лишь как источник всех водных потоков. Поскольку последние в известном смысле являются также божествами, то Океан, от которого ведут происхождение не один-два, а великое множество божеств, было уместно наделить выразительным эпитетом "источник богов" (*П.* 14. 201 = 14. 302). Традиционное (ошибочное) понимание сложилось в результате восприятия гомеровских строк в гесиодовском, а потом и философском духе.

⁴ On the controversial issue of Alcman's cosmogony see G.W. Most, "Alcman's Cosmogonic Fragment", *CQ* 37(1987)1-19.

⁵ Cf. Dmitri Panchenko, "Thales and the Origin of Theoretical Reasoning", *Configurations* 1(1993) 3:387-414. (At the time of writing that article, my perception of Homeric Okeanos was still largely affected by the traditional view).