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Theory and Method in John Tzetzes’ *Allegories of the Iliad and Allegories of the Odyssey*

Adam Goldwyn

S ometime before 1143, the Byzantine grammarian and scholar John Tzetzes wrote his *Exegesis on the Iliad*, a commentary on Homer’s epic which explained the hidden meanings embedded in the poem.¹ In it, Tzetzes says that as Homer was getting on in years, he decided “to leave for future generations a memorial of his excellence” (Tz.Ex. 42.5-6: μνημά τι τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἀρετῆς καταλιπεῖν τοῖς μετέπειτα).² But, Tzetzes continues, “since he knew how rare wisdom was in life” (Tz.Ex. 42.6-7: Εἰδὼς δὲ ὡς σπάνιον τῷ βίῳ πέφυκε τὸ σοφόν), he chose to write about the events of the Trojan war “so that his poems might also become pleasing to everyone” (Tz.Ex. 42.13: τὰ περὶ τὸν Τρωϊκὸν συγγράμασθαι πόλεμον, ὡς πᾶσιν ἐπίσης ἐντευκτὰ γίγνοιτο τὰ τούτου ποιήματα”). Tzetzes thus sets out a rationale for Homer’s composition of his epics, what Eric Cullhed calls “the usefulness – the *biopheleia* – of Homer [that] lies at the heart of the case made for him” by Byzantine Homerists and allegorists such as Tzetzes, his contemporary Eustathios of Thessalonike and predecessor Michael Psellos. In this vein, “Tzetzes presents Homer as a teacher of useful arts (*technai biopheleis*) such as ‘grammar, poetry, rhetoric, metallurgy, mechanics, magic,

¹ The dating is discussed on p. 19 of Papatomopoulos’ introduction to the edition and has had no serious challenge in the scholarship, as for instance most recently, Cesaretti 2017, 174, n. 48.

² All translations of the *Exegesis* are my own based on the edition of M. Papatomopoulos, *Ἐξήγησις Ἰωάννου Γραμματικοῦ τοῦ Τζέτζου εἰς τὴν Ὁμήρου Ἰλιάδα*, Athens, 2007.

etc.”³ Homer, however, was also wise enough to recognize that most young men have no interest in philosophy or any other deeper truths; how, then, could he impart his wisdom to people more concerned with exciting tales of heroism and war? For Homer, so Tzetzes believed, the answer lay in allegory. Thus, referring to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Tzetzes suggests that Homer “made their subject-matter altogether twofold: at the same time legendary – as an enchanting attraction to young men and as a pastime – and also mathematical and natural and philosophical as bait for more divine souls” (Tz.Ex. 43.5-9: διπλῆν διόλου τὴν πᾶσαν αὐτῶν ὑπόθεσιν ποιησάμενος, τὴν μὲν μυθώδη καὶ οἶονεῖ τινα θελκτικόν ἐφορκὴν τῶν νέων καὶ φυχαγώγημα, τὴν δὲ μαθηματικὴν τε καὶ φυσικὴν καὶ φιλόσοφον καὶ οἶονεῖ δέλεαρ τῶν θειοτέρων ψυχῶν). Perhaps Tzetzes already had just such a divine soul in mind in the person of Bertha von Sulzbach, a Bavarian princess who had arrived in Constantinople to marry the future Manuel I Komnenos in 1142, just a year before Tzetzes wrote the *Exegesis*.

The work that Bertha – soon to be the Empress Eirene – commissioned him to write for her, the *Allegories of the Iliad*, likely published in the years between the *Exegesis* and her marriage in 1146, was mutually beneficial.⁴ She received a work containing essential knowledge about a foundational text of her adopted home; he received a wealthy imperial patron who required both basic plot-level knowledge of the poems and a system for interpreting them – an ideal reader both financially and

³ Cullhed 2014, 53.

⁴ All the Greek and translation are from Goldwyn and Kokkini 2015, based on the edition of Jean François Boissonade, *Allegoriae Iliadis* (1851). For the dating of the work, see Rhoby 2010, 160, which suggests that the text itself was written before her marriage, and the introduction (at least) written after, since it refers to her as empress. The transition from Eirene to Kotertzes as patron also complicates attempts to offer a precise date. For Tzetzes’ role as a popularizer of Homer and general surveys of his career, see Kaldellis 2007, 301-7; Kaldellis 2009; 26-9, Brisson and Tihanyi 2004, 117. For Tzetzes’ Homeric works in the context of his larger scholarly project and in the Byzantine scholarly tradition, see Budelmann 2002, 141-70. For the empress as patron and her sometimes testy relationship with Tzetzes, see Hill 1999, 171-3. For Tzetzes’ poetics in the fifteen syllable “political verse,” see M. Jeffreys 1974, 148-61 and, for the suggestion of orality, 173.

intellectually. Rather than simply retelling the legendary subject matter, the *Allegories of the Iliad* intersperses basic introductory material (plot summary) with more sophisticated modes of reading (allegorical interpretation). It has been suggested by Anthony Kaldellis that both levels of understanding were essential for the new empress: “Bertha wanted or needed to know who all these heroes, gods, and goddesses were who were constantly being mentioned in all the orations she had to endure for so many long hours.”⁵ Tzetzes’ allegorical method allowed her to enter into and participate in the culture of learned allusion that characterized the Komnenian court, with its elevated rhetoric and frequent – and frequently obscure – literary references. What follows, then, is a parallel reading of both the theoretical exposition of allegory he provides in the *Exegesis* with the application of that theory in the *Allegories of the Iliad* and the *Allegories of the Odyssey* in order to demonstrate how he rendered the Homeric texts ideologically and aesthetically pleasing to a contemporary elite Byzantine audience generally and to the empress in particular. More broadly, such an examination will reveal much about Tzetzes’ own idiosyncratic reading and writing practices, thus illuminating one example drawn from the Byzantine scholarly tradition of the much longer and multiform tradition of Homeric reception.

Tzetzes’ Levels of Allegorical Analysis

As a more theoretical work describing the different levels and types of allegorical analysis, the *Exegesis*, then, offered a way to understand the relationship between the surface narrative of the *Iliad* and the deeper meaning embedded in it; it offers the interpretive key that can unlock the allegorical meaning hidden within the deceptively straightforward tale of heroes at war.⁶ Tzetzes suggests that Homer wove three kinds of allegory into the text, which he identifies as rhetorical (ῥητορικῆ),

⁵ Kaldellis 2009, 27.

⁶ For a translation of Tzetzes’ discourse on the Egyptian origins of allegory in the only surviving fragment of his *Chronicle*, see Brisson 2004, 117.

natural (φυσική), and mathematical (μαθηματική).⁷ The rhetorical is the kind of stylistic flourish which renders the drier aspects of history into the more exciting ones of myth. Tzetzes does not explicitly define this kind of allegory, rather, he illustrates it by means of examples, showing for example, how the flying horse Pegasus is in fact an allegory for a sailing ship (for which, see below). Noting that “it is not probable that such things ever existed” (Tz.Ex. 43.16: οὐ γὰρ εἰκὸς τοιαῦτα γενέσθαι ποτέ), Homer nevertheless uses them to make “especially the young people more willing to read because of the appeal of the myth” (Tz.Ex. 44.5-6: προθυμοτέρους πάντως τοὺς νέους ποιῶν εἰς ἀνάγνωσιν διὰ τὸ τοῦ μύθου θελκτήριον). Natural allegory allows the Trojan War to be read as revealing the laws and operations of the physical environment, such as climatology, geology, hydrology and cosmogony. The mathematical refers to the Byzantine school system’s focus on astrology and astronomy (and is not to be confused with the more common modern meaning of arithmetic, etc.). These three, then, form the core of Tzetzes’ allegorical method for understanding the mythological events described in the Trojan War.

But this is not the entirety of his method, for he also devotes a section of the *Exegesis* to specific ways to interpret the gods, noting that, regarding Homer, “the word ‘god’ is perceived in five ways by him” (Tz. Ex. 45.9-10: Τὸ δὲ θεὸς ὄνομα πενταχῶς τοῦτω ἐκλαμβάνεται). First, “Homer calls the gods elements” (Tz.Ex. 46.12: θεοὺς Ὅμηρος τὰ στοιχεῖα καλεῖ), that is, climatological and environmental phenomena (which ties in with the natural allegory above): wind, rain, waves. Second, the gods can be understood as “psychic powers and passions, like knowledge, prudence, anger, desire, and the rest” (Tz.Ex. 46.13-15: τὰς ψυχικὰς φησι δυνάμεις καὶ τὰ πάθη, οἷον γνῶσιν, φρόνησιν,

⁷ Tz.Ex.43.12-13. The subject has been treated at length in Cesaretti 1991, 125-204 discusses Tzetzes’ allegorical readings of Homer; this remains the definitive and most comprehensive treatment of the subject. See also Goldwyn and Kokkini 2015, xii; Kazhdan and Epstein 1985, 134; and Roilos 2005, 125 for a different summary of Tzetzes’ categories. Kazhdan and Epstein call “the elemental” and Roilos “physical” what I call “natural” and “pragmatic” what I call “rhetorical.” For the ancient roots of Tzetzes’ system, see Hunger 1954; for the broad contours of allegorical reading in the Komnenian period, see Roilos 2005, 113-224, and, for Tzetzes in particular, 124-6.

θυμόν, ἐπιθυμίαν, καὶ τὰ ἕτερα); third, as “kings and queens” (Tz.Ex. 47.15-16: τοὺς βασιλεῖς καὶ τὰς βασιλίδας); and fourth as “wise men” (Tz.Ex. 48.4: τοὺς σοφοὺς), both of which tie this way of reading to the rhetorical allegory. Finally, the gods are “what is destined” (Tz.Ex. 50.11: εἰμαρμένον), often understood as being signified by astrological signs, which ties it in with mathematical allegory. The theoretical model for allegory which Tzetzes outlines in the *Exegesis* would become the template for his allegorical interpretation of Homer in the *Allegories of the Iliad* and *Allegories of the Odyssey*.

From Theory to Practice: The Judgment of Paris as Programmatic Allegory

The *Allegories of the Iliad*, a book by book retelling of the Homeric source which alternates between plot summary and allegorical analysis, offered Tzetzes the chance to put the theoretical model of allegorical analysis he had delineated in the *Exegesis* to work in narrative form. His discussion of the Homeric epic itself is preceded by a long prolegomenon which comprises over a thousand of the work’s approximately six thousand lines. In it, Tzetzes offers a programmatic allegorical reading of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis and the ensuing Judgment of Paris.

Each of the goddesses makes her suggestion as to why the Trojan prince should judge them most beautiful, with Hera offering him “sovereignty over east and west” (Tz.All.II. pro.159: ἄρχειν [...] δύσεως καὶ τῆς ἕω), Athena offering “to make all of Greece his slave” (Tz.All.II. pro.161: Ἐλλάδα πᾶσαν ἔλεγε δούλην αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι) and Aphrodite offering him Helen (Tz.All.II. pro.163). This, however, is merely the superficial level of mythology; later Tzetzes reveals the true allegorical nature of what is being offered: “Athena, who is wisdom, Hera, who is bravery, | and lust, by which I mean Aphrodite” (Tz.Pro. 243-4: τὴν Ἀθηναῖαν, τὴν φρόνησιν, τὴν Ἥραν, τὴν ἀνδρείααν, | καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν δέ, φημί, τὴν Ἀφροδίτην). This is the first allegorical moment in the text, and fits easily within Tzetzes’ description in the *Exegesis* of the gods as “psychic powers.” This allegory, however, was not of Tzetzes’ own invention; rather, it is drawn, as he says, from John of Antioch (Tz.All.

Il. pro.246), a reference to either the sixth-century chronicler John Malalas (who was from Antioch) or the seventh-century chronicler John of Antioch, both of whom provide this same allegorical reading.⁸ Tzetzes, however, then announces: “But Tzetzes subtly allegorizes everything. So pay attention!” (*Tz.All.II.* pro.250: ὁ Τζέτζης δ’ ἅπαντα λεπτῶς ἀλληγορεῖ. Καὶ πρόσσχες).

Over the next 80 or so lines, Tzetzes offers his first original allegory, describing the wedding of Peleus and Thetis as a natural allegory. With Peleus representing the earth and Thetis representing the sea, their wedding was when “the earth and the sea were articulated,” (*Tz.All.II.* pro.265: ταῖς διαρθρώσει τῆς γῆς καὶ τῆς θαλάσσης). The gods, who in the mythological surface reading are the wedding guests, are allegorized as natural and climatological phenomena and physical elements, just as he described in the *Exegesis*. No longer the psychic powers of bravery, wisdom and desire, Hera becomes the finer state of the ether (*Tz.All.II.* pro.271), Athena the low-lying and moist air (*Tz.All.II.* pro.270), and Aphrodite “the harmonious mixture of all the bonded elements” (*Tz.All.II.* pro.280: ἡ εὐκрасία τοῦ παντὸς συνδέσμου τῶν στοιχείων). Having identified each of the goddesses as elements, Tzetzes then reveals the truth of the passage by re-narrating the scene according to allegory. As the earth had only just come into being,

terrible distress and confusion arose among the elements,
as that natural philosopher Empedokles also says.
For sometimes the completely moist air would prevail,
the gloomy, low-lying, muddy one,
which we have said was Athena; while other times, the fiery air,
which we have said was Hera, the mother of Hephaistos,
overwhelmed everything and caused it to burn;
sometimes the mild air began to shine for a moment.

ζάλη δεινὴ καὶ σύγχυσις γέγονε τῶν στοιχείων,
ὡς καὶ ὁ φυσικὸς φησὶν Ἐμπεδοκλεῖς ἐκεῖνος·

⁸ For the debate about whether this is Malalas or John of Antioch, see also Goldwyn and Kokkini 2015, xv and Goldwyn 2015. For the literary background of the Judgment of Paris in Byzantine literature, see E. Jeffreys 1978, especially 126-31 for Tzetzes.

ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ὁ κάθυγρος ἀήρ ὑπερενίκα,
ὁ ζοφερός, ὁ πρόσγειος, ὁ συντεθλωμένος,
ὄν Ἀθηνᾶν εἰρήκειμεν, ὅτε δὲ ὁ πυρώδης
ὑπερνικῶν τὰ σύμπαντα καὶ μέλλων καταφλέγειν,
ὄνπερ καὶ Ἥραν εἶπαμεν μητέρα τοῦ Ἥφαιστου·
ποτὲ δὲ εὐκρατος ἀήρ ὑπέλαμπε βραχὺ τι.
(Tz.*All.II.* pro.291-98)

The golden apple, then, is no longer the prize for the most beautiful goddess, but, according to the natural allegory, it

was established as the prize of the most powerful element. For if the low-lying air prevailed completely, darkness would again shroud this shining world, and if the fiery thinner air prevailed, all-consuming fire would overwhelm the whole world. But because the mixture of Aphrodite prevailed, she took the prize of victory, and now still holds it, this world, the golden apple, the beautiful, blended and harmonious through the governance of God.

ἔπαθλον τοῦ κρατήσαντος ὑπέκειτο στοιχείου.
Εἰ γὰρ ὁ πρόσγειος ἀήρ ἐνίκησε τελέως,
σκότος ἂν τοῦτον τὸν λαμπρὸν πάλιν κατέσχε κόσμον·
εἰ δὲ λεπτομερέστερος ἐκράτησε πυρώδης,
πῦρ ἂν τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κατέσχε καταφλέγον.
Ἐπεὶ δ' ὑπερενίκησε σύγκρασις Ἀφροδίτης,
ἔπαθλον νίκης ἔσχηκε, καὶ νῦν ἔτι κατέχει
τὸν κόσμον τοῦτον τὸ χρυσοῦν τὸ μῆλον, τὸ ὠραῖον,
συγκεκραμένον εὐρυθμον θεοῦ τῇ κυβερνήσει.
(Tz.*All.II.* pro.301-9)

Thus, Tzetzes offers this section as an allegory functioning on three interpretive levels: first, as a mythological story about the wedding of Peleus and Thetis; second, drawing from the earlier sources, as an allegory in which the gods are transformed into psychic powers; and, third and most elaborate, an allegory most probably of Tzetzes' own invention, a natural allegory in which the wedding of Peleus and Thetis and the Judgment of Paris describe the creation of the earth and the regulation of its climate.

The only type of allegory not yet used by Tzetzes is the rhetorical, which recasts history in the language of myth. The first instance of rhetorical allegory appears in line 437 of the prolegomena, where Tzetzes discusses the

nonsense [that] has been said about Achilles,
that, being fearful of war, he dressed up as a woman
and concealed himself among the girls at the loom,
but when Odysseus tossed swords along with the spindles
he revealed himself, by preferring the sword.

Ἄπερ δὲ πεφλυάρηγται περὶ τοῦ Ἀχιλέως,
ὡς φοβηθεὶς τὸν πόλεμον ἐφόρει γυναικεῖα
καὶ σὺν παρθένοις ἰστοουργῶν κρυπτόμενος ὑπῆρχε,
τοῦ Ὀδυσσεῶς ξίφη δὲ ῥίψαντος σὺν ἀτράκτοις,
κατάδηλος ἐγένετο τὸ ξίφος προτιμήσας.
(Tz.*All.II.* pro. 437-41)

Tzetzes then goes on to offer “a wise allegorical explanation” (Tz.*All.II.* pro.442: τινὰ σοφὴν ἀλληγορίαν). Thetis, receiving the famous prophecy that her son could go to war and live a glorious short life or stay at home and have a long inglorious one, opts for the latter, and “held him back with her fervent maternal love, | which the myths call women’s clothing” (Tz.*All.II.* pro.454-5: κατεῖχε μητρικῶ καὶ διαπύρω πόθῳ· | ὃ γυναικεῖαν ἔνδυσιν ὠνόμασαν οἱ μῦθοι). By means of this allegory, Tzetzes suggests, Homer transforms a relatively dull event from the past – a mother not wanting her son to go to war – into an exciting tale by imbuing it with more interesting rhetoric. As in the examples given in the *Exegesis*, Tzetzes asserts that the superficial narrative is deceptive – Achilles would never dress like a woman to avoid war – but that Homer casts the event in this manner to make, as he said in the *Exegesis*, “young people more willing to read because of the appeal of the myth.”

Tzetzes then indulges in some of the conventional rhetoric of self-promotion which was common to Byzantine writers working on commission, asserting that even if one had read all the preceding accounts of the Trojan War by

Homer and Stesichoros,
Euripides, Lykophron, Kollouthos and Lesches,
and Diktys' well-written *Iliad*,
Triphiodoros and Quintus, even a hundred books, not
even then would you have learned the story in greater detail.

Ὅμηρος, Στησιχόρους,
Εὐριπίδας, Λυκόφρονας, Κολλούθους τε καὶ Λέσχας,
καὶ Δίκτυν συγγραψάμενον καλῶς τὴν Ἰλιάδα,
Τριφιοδώρους, Κόϊντον, κᾶν ἑκατὸν βιβλία,
οὐκ ἂν λεπτομερέστερον οὕτως ἐξηκριβώσω.
(Tz.*All.II.* pro.480-84)

He then addresses his imperial patron directly, saying:

If, up to now, your divine and benevolent Majesty is not content
with this very small section we have written,
and wishes additionally a translation of Homer's verses,
as many have previously told me on your Majesty's behalf,
like Herakles, I will complete this labor as well.

Εἰ μέγρι δ' οὐδ' ἔπερ γράψαιμεν τμήματος σμικροτάτου
τὸ θεῖον καὶ φιλόνηθρον οὐκ ἄρκεσθῆ σου Κράτους,
θελήσει δὲ μετάφρασιν καὶ στίχων τῶν Ὁμήρου,
καθὰ προεἶπόν μοί τινες, ὡς ἐκ τοῦ σοῦ τοῦ Κράτους,
ὡς Ἡρακλῆς, τὸν ἄεθλον καὶ τοῦτον ἐκτελέσω.
(Tz.*All.II.* pro.500-4)

This suggests that the first five hundred lines of the poem served as a preview or sample text for the empress; should she like what she sees, she would then, as Tzetzes suggests, commission him to complete the project. The first five-hundred lines, then, were the grammarian's chance to impress his imperial patron and win her approval for the remaining – and presumably much more lucrative – 5,500.

He does this through a variety of means; indeed, the prolix versification, elaborate metaphors, erudite references to obscure history and authors, insistent self-promotion and endless flattery of the empress that are the essential elements of his style are on full display in the tour de

force opening 30 lines.⁹ But these are the surface manifestations of what Tzetzes is selling; his real product, as with his repeated claim that one can learn more from him than reading one hundred books,¹⁰ is his unsurpassed knowledge of the true meaning of Homer. Thus, the opening allegorical passages offer Tzetzes the chance to display the full scope and depth of his skills. It is in this context, too, that his appropriation of what must have been a familiar and relatively simple allegory about the Judgment of Paris and his elaboration of that into something much more detailed and multifaceted must be understood. This interpretive conflict between the multiple narrative layers and Tzetzes' role as the interpreter is best summed up in a line from his own work: "I have thus given the mythical account of the text; | learn here the truth and the allegory" (Tz.*All.II*.1.177-78: Ταῦτα μὲν εἶπον μυθικῶς ὡς κεῖνται τῷ κειμένῳ· | τὸ δ' ἄληθές νῦν μάθανε καὶ τὴν ἀλληγορίαν).

Tzetzes' efforts must have paid off, since the empress (or someone in the imperial circle on her behalf) did indeed commission Tzetzes to allegorize the remainder of the *Iliad*. For reasons unknown, the empress' patronage stopped when Tzetzes had completed the prolegomena and the first 15 books of his *Allegories*. Books 16 to the end were financed by Konstantinos Kotertzes, an otherwise unknown figure about whose identity there has been only speculation.¹¹ The tone of the work also shifts markedly with the new patron. Though the reasons for such a shift are unknown, it may be due to the relative positions of the patrons: as a non-Greek, the empress's knowledge of the Homeric corpus and of medieval Greek would have been much more limited, thus the need for a commensurately simpler exegetical style; Kotertzes, by contrast, most likely a native speaker of Greek and, like all educated Byzantines, a stu-

⁹ This same strategy is also employed by Tzetzes in his *Allegories of the Odyssey*, in which the first sentence is – at 46 lines – among the longest, most syntactically complex, and thematically and metaphorically dense sentences in the work. The text for the *Allegories of the Odyssey* can be found in Hunger 1955 and Hunger 1956; an English translation is forthcoming as Goldwyn and Kokkini 2018.

¹⁰ See Tz.*All.II*. pro.483 and Tz.*All.II*. pro.494.

¹¹ Goldwyn and Kokkini 2015, ix.

dent of Homer since his youth, may well have been better prepared for more complex allegorical analysis.¹²

In what follows, each of the different types of allegorical interpretation (rhetorical, natural, mathematical) will be analyzed separately, thus offering a substantive overview of Tzetzes' allegorical method in practice.

Rhetorical Allegory

Entertainment is, according to Tzetzes, a crucial aspect of Homer's method. Indeed, as Tzetzes argued in the *Exegesis*, Homer's reason for choosing the Trojan War as his subject matter was not because he had an interest in the heroes who fought there or the deeds they performed, but because it was entertaining. As such, it would keep an indifferent audience interested in the philosophical lessons Homer wanted to teach. To understand how Homer uses rhetorical allegory, therefore, allows the reader to access these lessons by seeing through those aspects of the narrative which are purely for entertainment.

Bellerophon and the Chimaira

In the *Exegesis*, the example Tzetzes gives of rhetorical allegory is the combat between Bellerophon riding his winged horse Pegasus into battle against the monstrous Chimaira. Though mentioned only briefly in the *Exegesis*, Tzetzes offers two allegorical interpretations of this scene in the *Allegories of the Iliad*: first in Book 6 and again in Book 16. In the first instance, he describes Bellerophon as “that most prudent man, the slayer of the Chimaira, | the three-headed monster, with winged Pegasus” (Tz.*All.II.* 6.51-2: ἀνὴρ ὁ σωφρονέστατος, ὁ Χίμαιραν φονεύσας, | θηρίον τὸ τρικέφαλον, τῷ περωτῷ Πηγάσῳ) and then allegorizes it rhetorically as follows: Bellerophon is

¹² Goldwyn and Kokkini 2015, ix.

the man who put to flight three sets of foreigners with his ship,
the Solymoi, the Amazons, and third those sitting in ambush;
the Solymoi were brave men like lions,
the army of the Amazons, the daughters of Ares,
was like a chimera, like a goat climbing a steep mountain,
and those lying in wait to ambush him were like a serpent.

ὁ τροπώσαμενος ἔθνη τριπλᾶ τῷ πλοίῳ,
Σολύμους, Ἀμαζόννας τε, τοὺς τῆς ἐνέδρας τρίτους·
Σολύμους μὲν, ὡς λέοντας, ὄντας γενναίους ἄνδρας,
ὡς χίμαιραν, ὡς αἴγα δὲ κρημνοβατοῦσαν πάλιν,
τῶν Ἀμαζόνων τὸν στρατὸν Ἄρεος θυγατέρων,
ὡς δράκοντα τὴν ἐνέδραν τῶν ἐλλοχόντων τοῦτω.
(Tz.*All.II.* 6.53-58)

Thus, his winged horse Pegasus is allegorized as a ship, while the Chimaira becomes the three tribes he is said to have subdued, with each of the animals comprising it – the lion body, goat head, and serpent tail – standing in for the primary characteristics of the tribe: the lion is brave, the goat can climb mountains and the serpent is sneaky (thus they lie in ambush).

In Book 16, Tzetzes further expands the allegory, first allegorizing it as he finds it in his stated source, Palaiphatos,¹³ in which Chimaira, the daughter of Amisodaros, is a female brigand who lives “up in the high and steep places of Lykia” (Tz.*All.II.* 16.58: ἐν ὑψηλοῖς Λυκίας τε καὶ παρακρήμνοις τόποις) and with her two brothers turned that place into a robber’s den. Tzetzes then says that “we we will untangle this passage in another way” (Tz.*All.II.* 16.62: ἡμεῖς δ’ οὕτω σοι λύομεν ἐντεῦθεν τὸ χωρίον) positing that “Chimaira was a steep place in Lykia, | steep, very bushy, hospitable to criminals, | which Amisodaros made a robbers’ nest” (Tz.*All.II.* 16.63-65: ἡ Χίμαιρα κρημνώδης τις ἦν τόπος ἐν Λυκία, | κρημνώδης, λοχμωδέστατος, φίλος τοῖς κακούργοις, | τὴν ἦνπερ Ἀμισώδαρος ληστήριον ἐποίει). Their ability to climb this mountainous topography suggests the goat aspect of the Chimaira, while the description of them as “lion-like men” (Tz.*All.II.* 16.68: λεοντώδεις ἄνδρας) for

¹³ For the relevant background, see Goldwyn and Kokkini 2015, 538, n.61.

their strength in combat and their practice of “stealthily killing” (Tz.*All. II.* 16.67: κτείνοντας λάθρα) represent the leonine and serpentine aspects, respectively. In the first instance, Chimaira was a person who lived in the steep places; in the second, Chimaira is the steep places themselves.

Tribes

Since rhetorical analysis deals so specifically with finding historical explanations for myth, it is not surprising that Tzetzes often addresses the treatment of the mythological peoples of the past in historicizing terms, as in the case of the Amazons and the Solymoi. In this class of rhetorical allegory can also be found the Sintians, sometimes referred to also as the Lemnians, since they lived on the island of Lemnos. For instance, he allegorizes Hephaistos’ fall from Olympos to Lemnos and his nursing back to health by the Sintians rhetorically by rendering the mythological narrative into historical terms. The god of fire and the forge becomes a bolt of lightning which struck the earth and “from which the men of old discovered fire | on Lemnos, which represents the whole world, where the masses live” (Tz.*All. II.* 1.332-33: ἐξ ὧν τὸ πῦρ ἐφεύρηται τοῖς πρότερον ἀνθρώποις | ἐν Λήμνῳ, κόσμῳ σύμπαντι οὗ μένουσιν οἱ ὄχλοι). Lemnos, then, becomes allegorized as the inhabited world as a whole, while its inhabitants, the Sintians, become the first inventors:

For having invented every craft from fire,
they brought harm to all life and all men;
for before the crafts there was no war, no slave, no master,
but everyone lived in freedom and harmony.

[...]

they were the first to invent the making of arms for war.

τοὺς εὐρετὰς τοὺς πρώτους.

Εὐρόντες πᾶσαν τέχνην γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐκεῖνοι
πάντα τὸν βίον ἔβλαψαν καὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους·
πρὸ γὰρ τεχνῶν οὐ πόλεμος, οὐ δοῦλος, οὐ δεσπότης,
ἀλλ’ ἐλευθέρως ἅπαντες ἔζων ἐν ὁμοιοῖα.

[...]

πρώτους πρὸς τὸν πόλεμον εὐρόντας ὄπλουργίαν.

(Tz.*All. II.* 1.334-38, 340)

Tzetzes uses Hephaistos' fall to explain the origins of fire, metallurgy and the crafting of technology for war. The Lemnians as armorers recurs again in Book 18, when Thetis tells Achilles that he cannot go to war without armor. In the *Iliad*, Thetis comes up from the sea to tell Achilles that she will go to Olympos to get him new armor and weapons, since Hektor had taken his old ones from Patroklos. Tzetzes allegorizes Thetis as “water and the sea” (Tz.*All.II.* 18.208: ὕγροῦ καὶ τῆς θαλάσσης); thus Achilles cannot go to war “until they bring him armor from across the sea” (Tz.*All.II.* 18.212: ἔστ' ἂν αὐτῷ κομίωσιν ὄπλα διὰ θαλάσσης), a historical explanation rather than a mythical one. Thetis' trip to Hephaistos on Olympos is thus explained: Achilles “sent some men to Lemnian armorers, | or to another island, or to another land, | from which they brought him back such weapons” (Tz.*All.II.* 18.215-17: τινὰς ἀπέσταλκεν εἰς ὄπλουργοὺς Λημνίους | ἢ πρὸς ἑτέραν νῆσον δέ, εἴτε καὶ χώραν ἄλλην, | ἐξ ἧς καὶ ἀπεκόμισαν οἷα τὰ ὄπλα τοῦτω). Again, Tzetzes asserts, Homer uses the more exciting mythical story of gods and divine armor to teach his readers something about the economy and populations of ancient peoples.

Supernatural Animals

Another frequent use of rhetorical allegory by Tzetzes is his treatment of mythical animals. As a rational historical explanation was found for the Chimaira, so too does Tzetzes find rational explanations for other creatures. Athena, for instance, in Book 19 of the *Iliad*, comes to Achilles in the form of a falcon, and using her divine powers, eases his hunger pains. Tzetzes allegorizes this as follows:

When a shrill cry is uttered by a harpy (this is a bird
that snatches chicks from birds' nests,
and meat from the butcher and those who have any),
so, when it cries aloud, it moves them to battle,
like a bird of good omen and of fortune that gives good counsel;
and Achilles forgot about his lack of food and hunger
as he set forth eagerly to war and battle,
which Homer here calls ambrosia and nectar.

Ἄρπη ὄξυ βοήσασα (ὄρνεον δ' ἔστι τοῦτο,
 ἀρπάζον τὰ νεόττια ὀρνίθων κατοικίων,
 καὶ ἐκ μακέλλης κρέα δὲ καὶ ἐκ τῶν κατεχόντων),
 αὕτη λοιπὸν βοήσασα τούτους κινεῖ πρὸς μάχην,
 ὡς οἰωνὸς τῶν δεξιῶν καὶ τύχης εὐξυμβούλου·
 καὶ Ἀχιλεῖ δὲ γίνεται λήθη λιμοῦ καὶ πείνης
 προθύμως ἀνορμήσαντι πρὸς πόλεμον καὶ μάχην,
 ὃ ἀμβροσίαν Ὀμηρος καὶ νέκταρ ἄρτι λέγει.
 (Tz.*All.II.* 19.112-19)

Thus it is no longer the divine powers of Athena disguised as a bird, a mythical explanation for Achilles' lack of hunger, but rather a rational one: Achilles sees a bird of good omen and simply forgets about his hunger. Tzetzes then offers a similar kind of rhetorical allegory, turning the divine foods of ambrosia and nectar into the other things for which Achilles is metaphorically hungry: war and battle.

In the next lines, Tzetzes allegorizes another supernatural animal, Achilles' horse Xanthos:

What were the words of Xanthos, Achilles' horse,
 which predicted his death?
 A pitiful lamentation; he tells everything to men
 of good sense, and they foretell what will happen;
 and from the sign of the horse's mournful voice
 <Achilles> foresaw that it predicted death for him.
 Because the voice happens to be a gust of air,
 they said that Hera makes <the horse> speak.

Τίς ἢ φωνὴ τοῦ Ξάνθου δέ, τοῦ Ἀχιλέως ἵππου,
 ἧπερ προεμαντεύσατο καὶ θάνατον ἐκείνῳ;
 Ἐλεεινὸς ὀλοφυρμός· τοῖς δὲ φρονοῦσι πάντα
 λαλεῖ, καὶ προσημαίνουσι τὰ μέλλοντα γενέσθαι·
 καὶ τοῦ σημείου τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ ἵππου τῆς θρηνώδους
 θάνατον ἐμαντεύσατο ἐκείνῳ προμηνύειν.
 Ἐπεὶ φωνὴ τυγχάνει δὲ τις πληξίς τοῦ ἀέρος,
 ἔφασαν ὡς φωνήεντα τοῦτον ποιεῖ ἡ Ἥρα.
 (Tz.*All.II.* 19.127-34)

In the *Iliad*, the horse was given the power of human speech by Hera, and he laments Achilles' impending death in human words. In his alle-

gory, Tzetzes explains this divine moment in rational terms, suggesting that Achilles inferred the message that he would die not from the horse's actual words, but simply from the sound of the horse's neighing. Hera, moreover, is no longer the goddess giving speech, but the wind, since the voice travels through moving air.

Tzetzes treats supernatural animals the same way in the *Allegories of the Odyssey*. In the opening lines of Book 1, he asks:

What are the oxen of the sun? Plough oxen,
those working the earth and feeding people
and providing the living with the light of the sun to see
and not to die from hunger and descend to Hades.
How did the sun deprive them from their homecoming,
listen most briefly now; you may learn what is necessary, expansively.
It was unholy for people of old to eat a plough ox.

βόες Ἥλιου τίνες δέ; οἱ ἀροτῆρες βόες,
ὡς ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν γῆν καὶ τρέφοντες ἀνθρώπους
καὶ βλέπειν παρεχόμενοι ζώντας τὸ φῶς ἡλίου
καὶ μὴ θανεῖν ἐκ τῆς λιμοῦ καὶ κατελθεῖν εἰς Ἅϊδου.
πῶς δὲ ὁ Ἥλιος ἀντοῖς ἀφείλετο τὸν νόστον,
ἄκουσον βραχυτάτως νῦν· μάθοις δ', οὗ χρή, πλατέως.
τοῖς πρὶν ἀνθρώποις ἀσεβές, ἐσθίειν βούν ἐργάτην.
(Tz.*All.Od.* 1.13-19)¹⁴

In the *Odyssey*, the oxen of the sun were the property of the sun god Helios, and thus forbidden for human consumption by divine command. Tzetzes offers a different explanation, suggesting that the proscription against eating them stems from a much more mundane reason. The oxen of the sun, he says, are plough oxen, and Homer only calls them the oxen of the sun because, by helping humans grow and cultivate food, they keep humans in the sun, that is, not in dark Hades dead from starvation. Thus, people did not refrain from eating them because of some divine injunction, but for the entirely rational reason that to do so would

¹⁴ English translation from Goldwyn and Kokkini 2018 (forthcoming), based on the Hunger 1954 edition of the poem.

satisfy their short term need for food but would also increase the risk of starvation in the future.

Supernatural Fire and the Pyrogenic Mirror

Tzetzes summarizes the beginning of Book 5 of the *Iliad* as follows:

to Diomedes daring and perseverance
were given by Athena, glorifying the man;
from his helmet and his shield
a flameless fire burned like the Dog Star.

Τότε τῷ Διομήδει δὲ τόλμαν καὶ καρτερίαν
ἢ Ἀθηνᾶ παρέσχηκε δοξάσασα τὸν ἄνδρα·
ἐκ περικεφαλαίας δὲ τούτου καὶ τῆς ἀσπίδος
πῦρ ἀφλεγὲς ἀνέκαιεν ὅμοιον τῷ κυνάστρου.
(Tz.*All.II.* 5.1-4)

Tzetzes then gives a rhetorical allegory for this passage:
Diomedes, wanting then to be recognized by everyone,
constructed a mirror with his shield and helmet crest
which used the sun's rays to emit illusory fire.

Ὁ Διομήδης θέλων δὲ τότε γνωσθῆναι πᾶσι,
κάτοπτρον κατεσκεύασεν ἀσπίδι καὶ τῷ λόφῳ
πυρὸς ἐκπέμπον δόκησιν ἀκτίσι ταῖς ἡλίου.
(Tz.*All.II.* 5.6-8)

In the *Iliad*, the fire is given by Athena as a marker of Diomedes' divinely inspired prowess. Tzetzes, however, finds an entirely rational reason: Diomedes' armor is covered in mirrors. This interpretation allows for a brief excursus on this historicity of mirror-fires in ancient warfare: Tzetzes lists a variety of engineers and military strategists who used the mirror technique, including Anthemios of Tralleis (6th century CE), who "wrote on mathematical formulas governing the use of burning-mirrors and on arranging mirrors to point in the same direction,"¹⁵ Archimedes, who used mirrors to burn Marcellus' ships during the Ro-

¹⁵ Goldwyn and Kokkini 2015, 533, n. 14-9.

man invasion of Syracuse from 214-212 BCE.¹⁶ Tzetzes then suggests that strategists

ordered such mirrors to be made for crests and shields,
and, if possible, for breastplates and swords as well,
so that the enemy would be awestruck in every way.

τοιαῦτα μὲν τὰ κάτοπτρα λόφοις καὶ ταῖς ἀσπίσιν,
εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ θώραξι καὶ σπάθαις ἅμα τούτων,
ὅπως παντοίως ἔκπληξις εἶη τοῖς ἐναντίοις.
(Tz.*All.II.* 5.20-22)

As with previous examples of rhetorical allegory, Tzetzes interprets Homer as offering a more exciting mythological explanation for a rather more mundane piece of historical information about the development of military technology. However, Tzetzes also seems to suggest some utility in this particular allegory: if the reader understands Homer's method, then something can be learned about how to defend a city or frighten one's enemies through the use of mirrors, though why this would be relevant for the Empress is left unsaid.

The mirror allegory appears again as the explanation for divine fire at 18.228. At *Iliad* 18.202, Achilles, unable to enter the battle without armor, is nevertheless ordered by Iris to go stand at the trench to scare the Trojans. Athena drapes the aegis over him and a fire gleamed forth from him. So the myth says, but Tzetzes offers a different interpretation:

He prudently covered his head and his shoulders with an artful cowl,
mirror-bright,
with prudence, emitting fire through the reflections of the sun,
which overgarment he calls the aegis given by Athena,
and, unwillingly standing above the ditch, and shouting loudly,
he put the Trojans to flight and took back Patroklos.

Καὶ καλυφθεὶς τῇ κεφαλῇ συνάμα καὶ τοῖς ὄμοις
σκέπασμά τι μηχανητόν, κατοπτρικόν, φρονήσει,
πῦρ ταῖς ἀντανακλάσεσι προσπέμπον τοῦ ἡλίου,

¹⁶ Goldwyn and Kokkini 2015, 532, n. 11.

ὄπερ ἐπέन्दυσίν φησιν αἰγίδος ὑπ’ Ἀθήνης
καὶ ἄκων πρὸς τὸ τάφρευμα στάς, καὶ βοήσας μέγα
Τρῶας μὲν τρέπει πρὸς φυγὴν, Πάτροκλον δὲ λαμβάνει.
(Tz.*All.II.* 18.228-32)

As in the previous examples, the pyrogenic mirror allows Tzetzes to explain divine manifestations in the *Iliad* as lessons drawn from history but narrated in a more exciting fashion.

Natural Allegory

The programmatic allegory of the Judgment of Paris lays out one of Tzetzes’ most detailed natural allegorical interpretations of Homer. In interpreting the wedding of Peleus and Thetis and the various gods in natural terms, Tzetzes offers a cosmological reading of this famous scene. But Tzetzes’ natural allegories are as often concerned with the operations of the physical world on a smaller scale and more in line with the conventional affiliations of the gods.

The Gods as Ecological Forces

At 1.35, for instance, the opening scene of the *Iliad* in which Agamemnon rebuffs the Trojan priest Chryses’ request for the return of his daughter, Tzetzes writes that “Chryses prayed to Apollo against the Greeks, | that is, he prayed for the sun to become very intense” (Tz. *All.II.* 1.36-137: ἠϋξατο τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι ὁ Χρύσης καθ’ Ἑλλήνων | ἦγουν ἐπηύξατο σφοδρὸν τὸν ἥλιον γενέσθαι). Tzetzes transforms the literal manifestation of the god in the *Iliad* into an allegorical one based on his association with the natural world. In the *Iliad*, Homer describes Apollo as shooting his arrows at the Greeks from afar; Tzetzes, however, continues the allegory, offering rationalized natural reasons for the ensuing deaths caused by Apollo’s arrows:

And it became very intense, following much rain
upon the army; the crowded concentration of tents
raised up foul smelling vapors of feces and corpses,

polluting and corrupting all the air,
while he, moreover, assisting with his magical skills,
unleashed a terrible plague, killing people and cattle.
And he first started by killing the animals, since they are
bent down toward the earth, where the plague originates,
since they have a much keener sense of smell than men;
shortly thereafter it started killing men also.

Ὁ δὲ σφοδρὸς γενόμενος μετὰ πολλοὺς τοὺς ὄμβρους
εἰς στράτευμα, πολυπληθὲς πύκνωμα σκινημάτων,
ἀτμοὺς δυσώδεις ἀνιμῶν καὶ κόπρων καὶ πτωμάτων,
μίανας δυσκρατώσας τε σύμπαντα τὸν ἀέρα,
καὶ συνεργοῦντος καὶ αὐτοῦ ταῖς μαγικαῖς ταῖς τέχναις,
λοιμοὺς ἐπήγαγε δεινούς, φθειρῶν ἀνθρώπους, κτήνη.
Καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἀπήρξατο τὰ κτήνη διαφθεῖρειν,
ὡς κεκυφότα πρὸς τὴν γῆν, ἧς ὁ λοιμὸς ἐκτρέχει,
καὶ ὡς εὐοσφραντότερα κατὰ πολλὸν ἀνθρώπων·
μετὰ μικρὸν δ' ἀπήρξατο κτείνειν καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.
(Tz.All.II. 1.38-47)

Here, Tzetzes offers an epidemiological analysis of the plague: as in Homer, it first hits the animals, though Tzetzes' explanation suggests that this is for explicable and rational (if scientifically unsupportable) reasons: their noses are closest to the ground, where the air is most corrupt.

Apollo allegorized as the sun is also to be found in other places throughout the work, as for instance when the Trojans break through the Greek defensive works:

Apollo then demolished the Greek trench,
and made it passable for all the Trojans;
since the trench had been excavated and was loosened by
the rain, the sun made it crumble like a small dry loaf of bread,
made porous by water and swiftly crushed.

Τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων τάφρον δὲ συγγέας ὁ Ἀπόλλων
διαβατὴν ἐποίησε πᾶσι Τρωσὶ τῷ τότε·
τὴν τάφρον οὖσαν ὀρυκτὴν καὶ μανωθεῖσαν ὄμβροις
ὁ ἥλιος κατέσεισεν, οἷα ξηρὸν ἀρτίσκον,
ἀραιωθέντα τῷ ὑγρῷ καὶ συντριβέντα τάχει.
(Tz.All.II. 15.138-42)

In this passage, an action attributed to the god, specifically the destruction of the trench built by the Greeks, is instead attributed to nature: the god as the allegory of the sun. Tzetzes summarizes this allegorical motif in *Iliad* 16, when Patroklos' attempts to reach Troy are frustrated by the god:

<Homer> said, Apollo the Far-Striker
(who according to others strikes from afar and shoots his arrows,
but is, in our view, the sun acting from afar).

ἐκάεργος Ἀπόλλων
(ὁ καθ' ἑτέρους πόρρωθεν εἴργων τε καὶ τοξεύων,
κατὰ δ' ἡμᾶς ὁ ἥλιος πόρρωθεν δρῶν τὰ ἔργα).
(Tz.*All.II.* 16.283-85)

As the ancient Greeks often associated Apollo with the sun, a connection which allows Tzetzes to interpret divine interaction in the *Iliad* as the operations of the physical world, so too are the other gods associated with natural phenomena: Poseidon with the sea, Hera as the wind, Zeus as the sky. In Book 8, for instance, Tzetzes uses natural allegory to describe the gods: “Hera’s speech and Poseidon’s sighing | signify the movement of the winds and the roar of the sea” (Tz.*All.II.* 8.84-85: Ἡ λαλιὰ τῆς Ἥρας δὲ καὶ στόνος Ποσειδῶνος | πνευμάτων κίνημα δηλοῖ καὶ μύκημα θαλάσσης). This kind of natural allegory appears throughout the *Allegories*.

In Book 12 of the *Iliad*, the poet takes the audience beyond the scope of the Trojan War itself in a prolepsis about the destruction of the Greek wall. The poet attributes the destruction of the wall in the *Iliad* to the anger of Poseidon and Apollo, who built it but find its permanence an affront to their own immortality and who are offended that they did not receive appropriate sacrifices from those who benefited from it. As a result, they cause the rivers to flood over the wall. Homer thus offers a divine explanation for the natural process of erosion; Tzetzes, however, does the reverse, interpreting the divine in natural terms: Poseidon and Apollo become “water and time, which is completed through the movement of the sun” (Tz.*All.II.* 12.8-9: τὸ ὕδωρ, καὶ ὁ χρόνος | ὅστις ἐκ τῆς κινήσεως πληροῦται τοῦ ἡλίου). Thus, the walls are destroyed by the

slow erosion of water over time, Poseidon and Apollo. Tzetzes elaborates on this further a few lines later:

Time opened up all these rivers
and sent them flowing against the wall for nine days,
while the sky, Zeus, was raining along with them,
and Poseidon was striking the walls with his trident; that is,
when the sea with great tempests
assailed it, the wall was destroyed.

τούτους τοὺς πάντα ποταμοὺς ἀναστομώσας χρόνος
ἐνναήμερως ἔπεμπε ῥέοντας πρὸς τὸ τεῖχος,
ὀμβροῦντος ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς καὶ οὐρανοῦ, Διὸς δέ,
καὶ Ποσειδῶνος πλήττοντος τὰ τεῖχη τῇ τριαίνῃ·
ἦγουν καὶ τρικυμίας δὲ μεγάλαις τῆς θαλάσσης
ποιησαμένης προσβολάς, τὸ τεῖχος ἠφανίσθη.
(Tz.*All.II.* 12.18-23)

The gods here are not the anthropomorphized deities of the *Iliad*, who, as part of their divine powers have control over certain natural forces, but are themselves the personified versions of the natural phenomena with which they are associated: sun, water, sky.

Natural Allegory for Divine Intervention in the Lives of Mortals

A second way in which the gods are allegorized as natural phenomena is when explaining their direct interventions in the lives of mortals. When, for instance, in book 5 of the *Iliad*, Diomedes breaks Aineias' hip with a boulder, the latter's mother Aphrodite comes and whisks him away. Tzetzes, however, finds a natural explanation for this divine intervention:

but his mother Aphrodite saved him
with the help of the place on Ida where he was born.
For he fled, using as cover the trees,
which Homer calls Aphrodite's arms
and the folds of her gleaming robe which saved Aineias.

ἡ δὲ γενέθλιος αὐτὸν ἔσωσεν Ἀφροδίτη
καὶ τόπος ὁ τῆς Ἰδῆς δὲ οὐπὲρ αὐτὸς ἐσπάρη·

ἔφευγε γάρ, τοῖς δένδρεσιν ὡς σκέπη κεχρημένος,
ἄπερ φησὶν ὁ Ὅμηρος χειῖρας τῆς Ἀφροδίτης,
καὶ πέπλου πτύγμα φαεινοῦ σώσαντος τὸν Αἰνεΐαν.
Χειρὸς δὲ τρώσιν νόησον εἶναι τῆς Ἀφροδίτης,
(Tz.All.II. 5.57-62)

Aphrodite is not literally Aineias' mother, as in Homer; rather, she is his birthplace, a kind of mother: he is able to use his greater familiarity with the local environment to escape Diomedes. Her robes, moreover, which literally shelter him in the *Iliad*, are here allegorized as a different kind of (natural) camouflage: the dense forest.

Similarly, at the opening of Book 14, Agamemnon orders the Greeks to go home, but as they are on their way to the ships, Poseidon comes to Agamemnon in disguise and reassures him of the Greeks' eventual victory and then yells a loud encouragement to the Greeks. Since in Tzetzes the gods do not exist in anthropomorphic form and thus cannot directly intervene in human affairs, Tzetzes has to find a way to account for their appearance in the text, and here again he turns to natural allegory, writing:

Poseidon and Hera signify the following:
the sea was tossed by adverse winds,
and did not allow the Greeks to flee to their homelands,
but urged everyone to be more steadfast in battle;
when Agamemnon saw that actually happening
(this, according to Homer, is Poseidon's grasping of his hand),
he was thinking how Achilles might be rejoicing.

Ὁ Ποσειδῶν καὶ Ἥρα δὲ τάδε δηλοῦσιν εἶναι·
ἢ θάλασσα κεκίνητο πνεύμασιν ἐναντίοις,
πρὸς τὰς πατρίδας Ἑλλήνας φεύγειν δ' οὐ παρεχώρει,
παρώτρυνε τοὺς πάντας δὲ μάχεσθαι στερροτέρως·
ὃ πρακτικῶς γινόμενον ἰδὼν ὁ Ἀγαμέμνων
(ὃ κράτησις καθ' Ὅμηρον χειρὸς ἐκ Ποσειδῶνος),
ἐν τούτοις ἐλογίζετο πῶς Ἀχιλεὺς ἂν χαίροι.
(Tz.All.II. 14.8-14)

Poseidon's loud voice thus becomes the roaring of the sea, a logical and creative interpretation correlating Poseidon's voice with a stormy sea,

and his encouraging the Greeks to stay becomes the adverse tidal conditions that force them to stay.

The same method applies even when describing the lack of divine intervention: at the opening of Book 8, Zeus asserts his strength over all the other gods, saying that if there was a golden chain with him pulling on one end and all the other gods, he would still be stronger than all of them combined. This powerful assertion of his superiority renders the other gods speechless. Tzetzes summarizes this episode, and then notes:

These words contain this wise allegory.
After those all-night thunders of which we spoke,
the sky was a little hazy during the day,
neither clear nor rainy but, as I said, a little <hazy>;
this he calls the total silence of the gods,
which he also says was the prohibition of help to either side.

Ταῦτα τοιαύτην ἔχουσι σοφὴν ἀλληγορίαν.
Μετὰ βροντάς, ἃς εἶπομεν, ἐκείνας τὰς παννύχους,
ἡμέρας ἦν ὁ οὐρανὸς μέσῳς τεθλωμένος,
μὴ καθαρὸς, μηδ' ἔνομβρος, ἀλλ', ὥσπερ εἶπον, μέσῳς·
ὅπερ καὶ ἄκραν σιωπὴν θεῶν κατονομάζει,
ὅπερ καὶ κώλυμά φησιν ἀμφοῖν τῆς βοηθείας.
(Tz.*All.II.* 8.12-17)

Because of Zeus' association with lightning and the other gods' associations with various parts of the air, Tzetzes turns this scene into a natural allegory rationalizing the gods as the calm after a storm.

Mathematical Allegory

Tzetzes himself, as many other authors of the period, aspired to be a court astrologer and dream reader,¹⁷ so it is no surprise that, due to his expertise in the subject and the court's interest, allegories which cast the gods as astrological and astronomical phenomena would play such an important part. This form of analysis uses the references to the gods in

¹⁷ For which, see Mavroudi (2006), 77-79.

the *Iliad* as referring to their eponymous planets. Thus, for instance, in Book 3 Hector chastises Paris for refusing to engage in single combat with Menelaos. Tzetzes' Hector says that Paris is no warrior, and that his other skills will not save him: "Music will not help you against death, | nor beauty, nor your hair, the gifts of Aphrodite" (Tz.*All.II.* 3.25-26: Οὐκ ὠφελήσει σοι οὐδὲν ἢ μουσικὴ θανόντι, | οὐ κάλλος, οὐδὲ τρίχωςις, δῶρα τῆς Ἀφροδίτης). Tzetzes then suggests that this reference to Aphrodite can either be interpreted as "desire" (Tz.*All.II.* 3.27: ἐπιθυμίας), Aphrodite's defining psychological characteristic or "the star," (Tz.*All.II.* 3.27: τοῦ ἀστέρος), by which Tzetzes means the planet Venus. Tzetzes then elaborates on this astrological interpretation:

For all those born under Venus
 (when it is not out of its proper sect, it offers
 more and better assistance to those positions in which it is fitting),
 beautiful and desirable women and men,
 if they bear the mark of Venus on the first,
 rather on the twenty-eighth degree of Cancer,
 the men mingle with goddesses, that is, with queens
 or women equal to the gods, as Ptolemy writes,
 and the women mingle with gods, or men equal to gods.

Οἱ γεννηθέντες πάντες γὰρ ἀστέρι Ἀφροδίτης,
 καὶ μᾶλλον τῆς αἰρέσεως ὄντι μὴ παραιρέτη,
 ἀρκεῖται μᾶλλον καὶ καλῶς οἷσπερ ἀρμόζει τόποις.
 Ὁραῖοι καὶ ἐπέραστοι γυναικῆς τε καὶ ἄνδρες,
 ἂν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ, μᾶλλον δὲ τῇ εἰκοστῇ ὀγδόῃ
 μοίρᾳ Καρκίνου φέρωσιν αὐτὴν τὴν Ἀφροδίτην,
 θεαῖς οἱ ἄνδρες μίγνυνται, τουτέστι βασιλίσσαις
 ἢ ἰσοθέοις γυναιξίν, ὡς Πτολεμαῖος γράφει·
 γυναικῆς πάλιν δὲ θεοῖς, εἴτε καὶ ἰσοθέοις.
 (Tz.*All.II.* 3.28-36)

Because Aphrodite represents desire, those born under the star-sign of Venus are imbued with the kind of sexual desirability which the goddess herself represents.

The death of Sarpedon is another moment in which Tzetzes uses this kind of allegory. After narrating the Lycian commander's death, Tzetzes says:

But I must indeed say who in all this is Zeus,
the father of Sarpedon, who strove to save him,
and who is Hera, who longed for his death,
and how and from where the sky rained blood,
just as <it rains> grain, ash, snakes and so much else.

Αλλά γε δὴ ρητέον μοι τίς Ζεὺς τὰ νῦν ὑπάρχει,
τοῦ Σαρπηδόνοσ ὁ πατήρ, ὁ σπεύδων τοῦτον σῶζειν,
καὶ τίς ἢ τὴν ἀναίρεσιν Ἥρα ποθοῦσα τούτου,
καὶ πῶσ καὶ πόθεν οὐρανὸς ἔχει βροχὰς αἱμάτων,
ὡσπερ καὶ σίτων, καὶ τεφρῶν, ὄφρων, ἄλλων πόσων.
(Tz.*All.II.* 16.116-20)

Since Zeus cannot literally be Sarpedon's father, as he is in the *Iliad*, Tzetzes must find another way for explaining such a scene, and thus turns to an astrological reading of their relationship:

Here Homer the all wise, the sea of words,
describes the birth horoscope of Sarpedon
and says this: that he had the star of Zeus, that is,
he was born under the star positions where rulers were born;
hence he says that his father was the star.

Νῦν Ὅμηρος ὁ πάνσοφος, ἡ θάλασσα τῶν λόγων,
γενέθλιον θεμάτων γράφει τοῦ Σαρπηδόνοσ
καὶ λέγει τοῦτο· τοῦ Διὸσ ἔχειν μὲν τὸν ἀστέρα,
ἐν οἷσ τόποισ πεφύκασιν οἱ ἀρχηγοὶ γεννᾶσθαι,
ὄθεν καὶ τούτου λέγει δὲ πατέρα τὸν ἀστέρα.
(Tz.*All.II.* 16.122-27)

Tzetzes connects Zeus, as the ruler of the gods, with the birth sign under which human rulers are born; since Sarpedon ruled the Lycians, Homer says he is his father. Hera's role in Sarpedon's death is also allegorized astrologically:

Hera is also a star, which, along with the other malevolent stars,
and most importantly Mars, Homer shows defeated Jupiter
during Sarpedon's birth, and thus he says that Sarpedon
died under the alignment where we have said he died.

Ἦρα δ' ἀστήρ ἐστὶν ὁμοῦ, ὄνπερ τῷ γενεθλίῳ
 σὺν τοῖς ἀστέρων φαυλοργοῖς, σὺν Ἄρει δὲ μᾶλλον
 νικᾶν τὸν Δία δείκνυσιν, ὅθεν καὶ θνήσκειν λέγει
 τοῖς οἷς τρόποις εἰρήκειμεν θανεῖν τὸν Σαρπηδόνα.
 (Tz.*All.II.* 16.128-31)

Sarpedon's death is thus attributed to the star sign under which he was born, with Mars in an ascendant astrological position over Jupiter; the astrological aspects of his birth thus determine his death.

The horoscope is used again at 22.32 to allegorize the divine intervention found in the *Iliad*. Tzetzes first quotes directly from *Il.* 22.165, in which Zeus registers his dismay at Hector's impending death at the hands of Achilles, and then moves to an allegorical explanation:

I mean that the gods are the stars and planets,
 from which they say all that is destined happens to people;
 for Homer is astrologizing in this passage,
 and tells you the horoscope of the battle that took place then,
 that Saturn and Mars, the most evil of the planets,
 were looking down upon each other in quartile aspect.

Θεοὺς ἄρτι μοι νόησον, ἄστρα καὶ τοὺς ἀστέρας
 ἐξ ὧν ἀνθρώποις γίνεσθαι φασὶ τὰ εἰμαρμένα·
 ἀστρολογεῖ γὰρ Ὅμηρος νῦν τοῦτῳ τῷ χωρίῳ,
 καὶ λέγει καὶ θεμάτιον τῆς μάχης σοι τῆς τότε,
 ὅτι ὁ Κρόνος Ἄρης τε, οἱ κάκιστοι ἀστέρων,
 ἐκ τετραγώνου σχήματος ἀλλήλους καθεώρων.
 (Tz.*All.II.* 22.37-42)

Thus it is not as anthropomorphic deities looking down from on high and intervening in human affairs that the gods hold sway in the Trojan War of Tzetzes' imagination. Rather, it is as the stars and planets, understood according to their astrological readings; Tzetzes concludes: "For since the horoscope was harmful, | it signified that Hektor would die by deceitful means" (Tz.*All.II.* 22.54-55: Ἐπεὶ γὰρ τὸ θεμάτιον ἐπιβλαβὲς ὑπῆρχε, | καὶ δόλοισι ὑπεσήμαινεν Ἔκτορα τεθνηκέναι).

Tzetzes and the Philosophy of Allegory

It has been suggested by Anthony Kaldellis that “allegory was for [Tzetzes] not part of a consistent philosophical approach,”¹⁸ but a careful reading of the theoretical approach for allegorical interpretation Tzetzes described in the *Exegesis* and the application of that approach in the *Allegories* demonstrate that his approach, that is, the hermeneutics of Homeric allegorical interpretation, remained relatively stable throughout his career. Kaldellis is right, however, in that Tzetzes was neither consistent nor philosophical.

For his lack of consistency, one need only look at the example of rhetorical allegory of the Chimaira; Tzetzes offers two readings, but offers no explanation why this particular instance can be interpreted in two different ways, nor which reading should taking priority over the other. In several other places throughout the work, however, Tzetzes makes explicit choices for which kind of allegory to use: at 20.151, for instance, after a reference to the gods, Tzetzes writes:

So henceforth understand the gods as elements.
Do not understand them at all in a historical sense,
nor spiritually, nor in an astronomical manner as stars.

Οὕτω θεοὺς στοιχειακῶς ἐνθάδε σύ μοι νόει.
Πραγματικῶς δὲ μηδαμῶς, μηδέ γε ψυχικῶς μοι,
μηδ' ἀστρονομικώτατα τούτους ἀστέρας νόει·
(Tz.All.II. 20.152-54)

Elsewhere Tzetzes suggests that there is only one proper allegorical reading in even stronger terms: asserting that a reference to Hermes should be understood as natural allegory, he says that “psychological understanding of these is the utmost ignorance” (Tz.All.II. 20.275: νοεῖν δὲ ταῦτα ψυχικῶς ἐσχάτου ἀγνωσίας). Except through the blunt force of assertion, Tzetzes offers no consistent rationale for which passages to allegorize and which to elide, nor which passages can be allegorized in multiple equally accurate ways and which must be interpreted according to only one method.

¹⁸ Kaldellis 2009, 27.

Perhaps of greater significance than the haphazard application of the allegorical system is its lack of a coherent philosophical or moral outlook. For all his interest in Homer as a philosopher, for all his interest in Homer's *biopheleia*, Tzetzes seems to have no philosophy of his own and never articulates how Homer can improve one's life; for Tzetzes, the usefulness of Homer is axiomatic and therefore remains the central, if unexamined, principle of the work. Tzetzes is concerned with making sure his audience understands the ways in which one character or description in the epic (i.e. Zeus) can be translated into scientific, historical, or rhetorical terms (i.e. Destiny). Homer may have "[been] at the height of knowledge beyond what was humanly possible" (Tz.*All. Il.* pro.77: σοφὸς δ' ἄκρως γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπου φύσιν), but Tzetzes never elaborates on how this knowledge may benefit his audience beyond achieving some truer understanding of the epics themselves. He advocates no moral or ethical positions, and offers no explicitly ideological readings of Homeric epic. Thus, though Tzetzes' allegorical theory and method can be categorically described, as (if to a lesser degree) can the social, economic and cultural circumstances in which he was working, of his personal philosophy, of his private motivation, of what benefits allegorical interpretations of Homer could offer – if indeed there were any beyond remuneration and imperial favor – one can only speculate.

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