

## The Derveni Papyrus in the Homeric Scholia

The author of the Derveni Papyrus, commenting on a fifth century Orphic Cosmogony, used to be thought an eccentric and intellectually aberrant mystic. Now that his techniques of allegory and literary interpretation, together with his connections to presocratic philosophy and the sophists have become better understood, it is time to place his composition firmly within the ancient Greek commentary tradition. After noting that the Derveni commentator is already working within the commentary tradition, this paper will assess a connection between the Derveni commentary and the later commentaries to the Homeric poems that points to a close relation between them of mutual dependence or parallel descent in certain details. The form of the Derveni commentary (as demonstrated by A. Lamedica, "Il Papiro di Derveni come commentario. Problemi formali," in *Proceedings of the XIXth International Congress of Papyrology*, Cairo 1989, ed. A. H. S. El-Mosalamy, vol. 1 (Cairo 1992) 325-33) already exhibits the salient formal features (manner of citation of examples, quotation of lemmata, same critical terminology for eliciting meaning from poetic language) of the exegetical commentary as it emerges in the commentaries of Hellenistic scholars more than a century later, as preserved in the papyri and Mediaeval scholia. This is further confirmed by the points at which the commentary tradition of the Homeric scholia themselves seem to show knowledge of the Derveni commentary or at any rate transmit both poetic and exegetical material contained exclusively in the Derveni commentary: for example in P.Derv. col. xii, a discussion about snow-capped Olympus (cf. F. Schironi, *ZPE* 136 (2001) 15), and P.Derv. col. xxvi on the meaning of the adjective eas). One example (brought to light by A. Bernabé in *PEG* and recently discussed by G. B. D'Alessio in *JHS* 124 (2004) 16-37) will illustrate the relationship I have in mind: At P.Derv. col. xix 11 the Derveni commentator quotes from his theogonic poem exactly the same verse, otherwise unattested (hinas d' egkatelex' Achelwiou argurodinou) as that quoted by the commentator to *Iliad* 21 in P.Oxy. II 221 as a comparison arguing against the genuineness of *Il.* 21.195 in Achilles' exultation over the death of Asteropaios, which stresses that the river Skamandros has been of no more help to him than his own ancestry (which included the river Axios), noting that 'not powerful Acheloios matches his strength against Zeus, (195) not the enormous strength of Ocean with his deep running waters, Ocean, (196) from whom are all rivers and the entire sea' etc. The citation draws the Derveni theogony and its commentator's allegorical interpretation of Acheloios into the history and understanding of the episode involving Achilles, Asteropaios, and Acheloios in *Iliad* 21. It shows a knowledge of a text of *Iliad* 21 at a stage that lacked verse 195 after 194, allowing 196 to run on in a way that gave rise to reflection on the metonymical nature of Acheloios the river (god) and his interpretation of Acheloios as the cosmic element of water. Unlike Achilles, whom the Homeric text makes contrast with or opposed to Zeus in respect to might or power, the Derveni commentator contrasts Acheloios as water with air as Zeus, ultimately assimilating them as one and the same. For the Derveni commentary, meditation on the Homeric verses and narrative here has mixed with Presocratic cosmogony and physics in the field of commentary to produce allegory. For the Homeric commentator, the verse quoted serves as authoritative narrative parallel for a text of *Il.* 21 that made 196 run on directly from 194, thus making Acheloios and not Okeanos the father of all rivers and springs. But where did the commentator find the verse about Acheloios? For the Homeric commentator, knowledge of the Derveni commentary, directly or indirectly, is the most economical explanation for his access to the verse (since it is unlikely that he drew on Orphic literature for philological parallels, and we have no knowledge of any other epic poem containing the line or imitating *Il.* 21.194). Knowledge of the Derveni commentary has been suspected elsewhere in the tradition of ancient scholarship: namely by Philochorus (*FGrHist* 328 F 185; cf.

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*Cronache Ercolanesi* 24 (1994) 111-35). The upshot of all this, I argue, is that the Derveni commentary was better known in antiquity than has been realised and now earns a place in literary history at the level of other known commentaries like those of Aristarchus and his followers—while anticipating them by well over a century.