

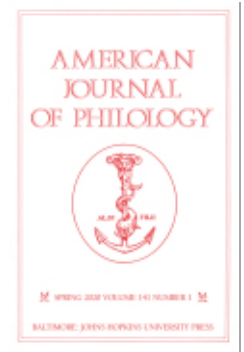


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Early Greek Allegoresis

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ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION IN HOMER: PENELOPE'S DREAM AND EARLY GREEK ALLEGORESIS

MIRJAM E. KOTWICK



Abstract: The invention of allegorical interpretation is usually attributed to Theagenes of Rhegium (6th century B.C.E.), who, Porphyry reports, interpreted the Homeric battle between the gods (*Il.* 20) as the opposition among physical elements. I argue that the practice of allegorical interpretation is present in Homer's text itself. I first establish the procedures and rationale behind allegorical interpretation in Theagenes, Metrodorus, and the Derveni Papyrus. I then reveal the presence of this interpretative practice in the interpretation of Penelope's dream in *Od.* 19. This result elucidates the Homeric text and indicates that our earliest instance of allegorical interpretation is to be found in a Homeric depiction of a dream interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION (= ALLEGORESIS) FINDS A HIDDEN MEANING behind the literal meaning of a text.¹ This hermeneutic practice enjoyed periods of popularity in many parts of antiquity and beyond.² The historical origins of this practice are obscure. When scholars speak about the murky beginnings of Greek allegoresis, they typically point

¹The method of interpreting a text allegorically ("allegorical interpretation" or "allegoresis") is to be distinguished from using the poetic device of allegory or figurative speech (e.g., calling the state a ship). Allegoresis is a method of exegesis (done by a reader); allegory, by contrast, is a method of composing a text (done by a poet). On the terminological distinction between allegory and allegoresis see, e.g., Domaradzki (2017, 300–3).

²See Copeland and Struck 2010.

to the early stages of Homeric exegesis performed by Theagenes of Rhegium (6th century B.C.E.) and Metrodorus of Lampsacus (early 5th century B.C.E.), two shadowy figures of whose exegetical practices we only have scant reports by authors who lived much later.³ Tradition has it that Theagenes interpreted Homer's battle between the gods as a depiction of oppositions between physical elements. Scholars often explain this kind of allegorical exegesis as a defense strategy:⁴ Theagenes and others of a like mind interpreted Homer allegorically in order to defend him against charges of impiety, such as those famously formulated by Xenophanes (DK 11 B21). According to this view on allegoresis' origin, this hermeneutical practice is not present in Homer's text, nor does it emerge from Homeric poetry itself; rather it is imposed on the text due to specific historical requirements.

Some have argued that Homer himself used at least the closely related poetic device of figurative and allegorical speech.⁵ A famous example of such speech is found in the *Λιταί* (*Litai*), the personified Prayers, of which Phoenix speaks in his speech to Achilles in book 9 (502–12). The *Litai* trail lamely behind Anger (*Ate*), just like someone who has acted in anger and offended another later regrets and asks for pardon. That Homer knew and used the poetic device of allegory, specifically, as here, in the form of a personification, is fair enough. But what about the technique of allegorical *interpretation*? What about the hermeneutic approach that claims to uncover from beneath the literal, surface meaning of a text an entirely different meaning, the approach, in other words, that

³There is furthermore Stesimbrotus of Thasos, whom Ion in Plato's *Ion* names next to Metrodorus as exegete of Homer (*Ion* 530c; see also Xenophon *Smp.* 3.6). But it is far from certain that he employed allegoresis. On Stesimbrotus see Burkert 1986 and Richardson (2006, 71–5); cf. also Piano 2016. Tate (1927, 214–15) points to Pherecydes as one of the earliest allegorical reader of myth, yet again the evidence is scant (see DK 5 7B, cf. 4 D 13, R 19–26 LM). On Pherecydes as the beginning of allegorical interpretation see also Domaradzki 2017.

⁴See, for instance, recently: Herren (2017, 79): “. . . the defense of allegory was first used by Theagenes of Rhegium. It is likely, then, that allegorical interpretation arose out of the need to defend the ancient poets.” The view that allegoresis was born out of a defensive reaction has a longer tradition: see Pépin (1976, 93, 97–8); Blönnigen (1992, 20–1); Morgan (2000, 63–4); Ramelli and Lucchetta (2004, 54); Brisson (2004, 32); Feeney (1991, 8). However, already Tate (1934, 105–14) argues against the assumption that the origin of allegorical interpretation is a defense strategy. On the problematic distinction between defensive and positive allegoresis see Domaradzki (2017, 307–14).

⁵Small (1949, 428): “Homer actually is occasionally allegorical. . . . Homer . . . employs allegory sparingly and in an unsustainable, unsystematic fashion; . . . His allegory is in reality a mere *figura*.” See also Buffière (1956, 56–7) and Ford (1999, 35–8).

substitutes the literal meaning with this other, supposedly true meaning? That Homer was familiar with this *method of interpretation* appears to be a much more daring claim. What would be needed to sustain this claim is a passage in Homer's text where this interpretative practice is used.

My aim in this paper is to point to and analyze just such a passage. I argue that we can find allegorical interpretation at work in book 19 of the *Odyssey*, namely in the interpretation of Penelope's dream about an eagle that killed her geese. My claim that Homer's time was aware of and had command of a method of allegorical interpretation is not entirely new. Glenn Most (1993) argued that the earliest instance of "Dichterallégorie" is found in book 16 of the *Iliad*. In *Il.* 16.33–5, Patroclus reproaches Achilles for his inhuman stubbornness by calling him the son not of Peleus and Thetis, but of rocks and water.⁶ Most claims that by replacing the names of Peleus and Thetis with the domains and characteristics they represent—Peleus, the mountain Pelion, Thetis, the ocean—Patroclus de-personifies them and so makes use of the basic strategy of allegoresis.⁷ Yet this example seems only to take us half way from an instance of an allegory (as in the *Litai*) to a clear showcasing of the technique of allegoresis. In this article, I want to complete this step and show that allegorical interpretation in Homer has more than just a lurking presence in short remarks such as Patroclus' replacement of the name "Peleus" with "rocks." I intend to show that the interpretation of Penelope's dream in *Odyssey* 19.535–69 showcases a fully developed example of allegorical interpretation that approaches a story with specific presuppositions and that applies specific interpretative strategies to uncover its hidden meaning. Allegorical interpretation is present *in* Homeric poetry. It may hence be called similar to phenomena such as glossing⁸ and etymological explanation⁹ in that it used to be taken as superimposed by a later tradition and exegesis but is in truth already present in Homer's poems themselves.

⁶*Il.* 16.33–5: "Pitiless: the rider Peleus was never your father nor Thetis was your mother, but it was the gray sea that bore you and the towering rocks, so sheer the heart in you is turned from us" (Transl. Lattimore).

⁷Most (1993, 212): "Vielmehr werden die traditionell als Personen aufgefaßten Thetis und Peleus jetzt plötzlich als problematisch angesehen und deshalb entpersonifiziert, so daß sie sich schließlich als unpersönliche Naturkräfte entpuppen—als ob der Dichter sagte 'Da tobte Ares, nein, vielmehr der Krieg.' Aber gerade dies ist die Grundstrategie der Allegorese." See also Ford (1999, 35–8).

⁸See Graziosi and Haubold 2015.

⁹See Rank 1951.

If my claim is correct, then the procedure and rationale of allegorical reading is much older than Theagenes' use of it for his exegesis of Homer. In this article, I will focus on this result. Yet, I want to briefly point to an implication that can be derived from my argument. For if my claim about *Odyssey* 19.535–69 is correct then it is also true that our earliest instance of allegorical exegesis comes in the form of an interpretation of a dream and not of a poem. This points to an early connection between dream interpretation and early Greek allegorical interpretation of poetry.¹⁰ Scholars have noticed that there is an interesting correspondence between divinatory practices and allegorical interpretation of texts,¹¹ but mostly offered only general observations about the nature of this correspondence.¹² I also see such a correspondence, but believe that there exists considerably stronger evidence for this connection than has been generally brought under analysis. This article wants to contribute to this debate by providing a piece of such evidence. A discussion of the relation between allegorical interpretation and dream interpretation however lies outside the scope of this article.

In the following I will defend the claim that we can find a full-scale instance of the exegetical practice of allegorical interpretation depicted in Homer's *Odyssey*. Thus, the hermeneutics of allegoresis were known already to Homer. To show this I will take the following steps: I will first analyze the testimonies about Theagenes of Rhegium and Metrodorus of Lampsacus that are standardly seen as our earliest evidence of allegoresis (section I). As this evidence is rather slim, I will, second, turn to a brief analysis of the Derveni papyrus (section II). This text offers extensive testimony of allegorical interpretation as it was practiced in the 5th century B.C.E.¹³ The evidence of these sources taken together will allow me to name four characteristic features of early Greek allegorical interpreta-

¹⁰This relationship might hold for divinatory practices generally. For one can also find promising similarities to the interpretation of omens in both the *Iliad* (e.g., *Il.* 2.308–32; 12.195–229, on whose symbolism see Athanassakis (1987, 260–2), and the *Odyssey* (e.g., *Od.* 15.160–78). See also Buffière (1956, 52–3).

¹¹For general observations on the relation between allegory and divination see Buffière (1956, 39–57), Ford (2002, 72–80), Struck (2004, 163–88), and Most (2016, 62). See also Lange and Pleše (2014, 104–6).

¹²Scholars point to a shared terminology (as, for instance, in the term αἰνίγμα “riddle”) and a common purpose (such as decoding a deeper, symbolic meaning) between the interpretation of oracles or dreams and allegorical interpretation.

¹³The treatise contained in the Derveni papyrus can be dated to the end of the 5th century B.C.E. See Kotwick (2017, 14–16).

tion. With these four characteristics in place I will then, thirdly, turn to my analysis of Penelope's dream in *Odyssey* 19 (section III). Since all four features can be found in the Homeric passage, our earliest instance of allegoresis is to be found in Homer.

I. THEAGENES OF RHEGIUM AND METRODORUS OF LAMPACUS

Theagenes of Rhegium's (second half of the 6th century B.C.E.) interpretation of the battle between the gods in book 20 of the *Iliad* is typically seen as the earliest extant allegorical interpretation.¹⁴ Theagenes' interpretation is reported to us by Porphyry, who is writing roughly 800 years later, and most likely did not have direct access to Theagenes' writings. Porphyry calls Theagenes the first who interpreted Homer's depiction of the gods allegorically.¹⁵ Although this ascription may likely be the result of the tendency to identify a *πρῶτος εὐρετής*,¹⁶ in lack of another candidate scholars generally follow suit.¹⁷ Porphyry makes the further claim that allegorical interpretation was intended to defend the poet (*τρόπος ἀπολογίας*) against charges of an impious depiction of the gods.¹⁸

¹⁴See Buffière (1956, 101–5); Pépin (1976, 97–8); Kennedy (1989, 85–6); Ramelli and Lucchetta (2004, 54); Brisson (2004, 32); Obbink (2010, 18); see Domaradzki 2011, who emphasizes the key role that Theagenes plays in the development of ancient allegoresis. Tate (1927), however, puts Pherecydes before Theagenes, followed by Struck (2004, 39–50 and 171–9). See Domaradzki (2017), who emphasizes the scantiness of the evidence for a Pherecydean allegoresis.

¹⁵Porphyry, *Homeric Questions* Y 67–75, §7; p. 240 MacPhail (= DK 2 8A), “This kind of defense is very ancient and it goes back to Theagenes of Rhegium, who was the first to write about Homer.” On Theagenes see Biondi (2015), and specifically on Porphyry's testimony of Theagenes see Biondi (2015, 57–105).

¹⁶Ford (1999, 36).

¹⁷Feeney (1991, 11): “for whatever reason Theagenes' contribution was distinctive or authoritative enough to guarantee the survival . . . at least of his name, as the first person to interpret the gods of Homer as being something other than what a surface reading would suggest.” For a recent defense of Theagenes as “the father of allegorical interpretation” see Domaradzki 2011.

¹⁸Porphyry (*Homeric Questions* Y 67–75, 1; p. 240 MacPhail) calls Homer's account of the gods inappropriate (*τοῦ ἀσυμφόρου*) and unseemly (*τοῦ ἀπρεπούς*). Does this judgment go back to the time of Theagenes? As Pfeiffer (1978, 26) points out, these terms are likely Hellenistic and thus do not necessarily state Theagenes' own motivation. However, already Xenophanes, the earliest critic of Homer (e.g., DK 21 B 11), uses the diction of *πρέπον* in describing how gods should be depicted (*ἐπιπρέπει*, DK 21 B 26). See also Ford (2002, 12) and the discussion in Biondi (2015, 85–98).

Yet again we should be cautious as to whether or not this was Theagenes' original motivation.¹⁹

Porphyry gives the following examples of an allegorical interpretation of Homer that Theagenes is said to have initiated: The battle between the gods in book 20 is a description of the opposition between the elements out of which the cosmos is composed: hot fights cold and dry fights wet; water extinguishes fire and fire dries up water. And so gods like Apollo, Hephaistos, and Helios signify fire when they fight against Poseidon and Skamander, who signify water. According to another sample interpretation that follows the same principle, Artemis is the moon, and Hera air.²⁰ And according to another, the gods represent human dispositions, Athena is practical wisdom and Aphrodite desire.²¹

Porphyry most likely illustrates this kind of interpretation with examples from interpreters other and later than Theagenes. He does not make the claim that all of these different interpretations (often distinguished as "physical allegory" and "moral allegory") go back to Theagenes, but only that Theagenes once started this kind of reading. However, it appears not unreasonable to assume that (at least from the perspective of Porphyry or his source) the basic idea that the fight between the gods in book 20 in truth represents an opposition between the physical elements goes back to Theagenes. As Domaradzki (2011) argues, the cosmologies that thinkers such as Anaximander and Anaximenes developed more or less contemporaneously with Theagenes are based on the opposition between hot and cold or wet and dry and on a development of the cosmos out of these oppositions.²² In other words, the interpretation of Homer's text attributed to Theagenes makes use of contemporaneous philosophical ideas. But since these early Greek cosmologies give us only a *terminus post quem*, certainty about Theagenes' significance is out of reach.

What can we say about the method and rationale that underlie the interpretation of the gods as physical elements? Although Porphyry does not say much about how Theagenes or like-minded readers of Homer arrived at their interpretations, it is worth taking a closer look at the following passage. Porphyry says:

¹⁹ See also Ford (1999, 35–7). More confident is Domaradzki 2011.

²⁰ The idea that Hera (HPA) is associated or equated with air (AHP) is already present in Homer (*Il.* 21.6–7). See Buffière (1956, 106–10) and Feeney (1991, 9).

²¹ See Pépin (1976, 97–8).

²² Domaradzki (2011, 212–19). See also Biondi (2015, 61–3).

. . . οἶον <έν> ταῖς ἐναντιώσεσι τῶν θεῶν. καὶ γάρ φασι τὸ ξηρὸν τῷ ὑγρῷ καὶ τὸ θερμὸν τῷ ψυχρῷ μάχεσθαι καὶ τὸ κοῦφον τῷ βαρεῖ. ἔτι δὲ τὸ μὲν ὕδωρ σβεστικὸν εἶναι τοῦ πυρός, τὸ δὲ πῦρ ξηραντικὸν τοῦ ὕδατος. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ πᾶσι στοιχείοις, ἐξ ὧν τὸ πᾶν συνέστηκεν, ὑπάρχει ἡ ἐναντίωσις καὶ κατὰ μέρος μὲν ἐπιδέχεσθαι φθορὰν ἅπαξ, τὰ πάντα δὲ μένειν αἰωνίως.

. . . as for instance, in the battle-scenes between the gods. For they say that the dry fights with the wet and the hot with the cold and the light with the heavy. Furthermore, that water extinguishes fire, and fire dries up water. In the same way there is an antagonism inherent in all elements, out of which the cosmos is built, and though they individually are destroyed at one point, they remain eternally as a whole.

Porphyry, *Homeric Questions* Y 67–75, §2–4 (p. 240 MacPhail; 8 A 2 DK)²³

The equation and thence substitution of seemingly different things—gods and physical elements—rests on a resemblance or analogy that can be seen in their basic nature and behavior. The fighting among the gods (<έν> ταῖς ἐναντιώσεσι) is analogous (ὁμοίως) to the fighting among the elements (ἐναντιώσις). One element wins over the other, but this does not annihilate the defeated element as such. This holds also for Homer’s gods. They may fight and wound each other, but they are immortal. Thus, there is a structural or functional resemblance between Homer’s gods and the elements and it seems to be this kind of parallelism that lies at the basis of the interpretation of the gods as elements.²⁴

TABLE 1. Allegorical Interpretation of Theogenes (?)

Text	Allegorical meaning	Explanation	Likeness
gods	elements	both fight and can defeat each other, but exist eternally	resemblance in function

²³The translation is my own.

²⁴Porphyry does not give any more specific justifications for the equation of specific gods with specific elements. And although it seems obvious that the equation, for instance, of Helios and fire rests on a certain material resemblance between the sun and the element fire, we cannot know whether this was Theogenes’ argumentation. For a discussion of the equations see also Biondi (2015, 60–72).

The next standard representative of early allegorical interpretation is Metrodorus of Lampsacus (5th century B.C.E.).²⁵ Metrodorus was a student of Anaxagoras. This relation is especially relevant for his practice of allegoresis, for, as Diogenes Laertius (2.11 = DK 61 A 2) tells us, Metrodorus' reading of Homer is a continuation and development of Anaxagoras' viewpoint. Whereas, according to Diogenes' report, Anaxagoras held that Homer's poetry is about virtue and justice (D.L. 2.11 = DK 59 A 1), Metrodorus, according to Philodemus' report (*On Poems* 2 = *P.Herc.* 1676 fr. 2.20ff = DK 61 A 4),²⁶ gave a more concrete interpretation of the Homeric characters than Anaxagoras. According to Philodemus, Metrodorus interpreted Agamemnon as *aithēr*, Achilles as the sun, Helen as the earth, Paris as air, and Hector as the moon.²⁷

We do not know anything about Metrodorus' justification for his allegorical interpretations. Yet scholars have proposed conjectures, for instance, Wilhelm Nestle suggested that equating Helen with earth and Paris with air could have been justified by the following analogies:²⁸ Paris embraces Helen, who is the center of the Trojan War, as air embraces the earth in the center of the universe.²⁹ When Achilles pursues Hector, they both circle Troy (*Il.* 22.131–259) as the sun and the moon circle the earth,³⁰ and Achilles kills and outlives Hector as the sun outshines the moon.³¹ Agamemnon maintains the war just as the *aithēr* carries and

²⁵ Pépin (1976, 99–101); Janko (1997, 76–9); Morgan (2000, 98–100); Califf (2003, 21–36); Domaradzki (2010, 233–48).

²⁶ On this fragment see Pozdnev (2019). That Philodemus is speaking about Metrodorus (perhaps among others?) is confirmed by Hesychius' testimony: Hesychius attributes to Metrodorus the interpretation of Agamemnon as *aithēr* (DK 61 A 4).

²⁷ Philodemus also reports the interpretation of Demeter as liver, Dionysus as spleen, Apollo as bile. It is not clear from Philodemus' testimony, however, whether those interpretations were also by Metrodorus. Since Philodemus speaks in the plural of mad people who read Homer allegorically, it seems more likely that the interpretation of gods as human organs is to be attributed to a "mad man" other than Metrodorus. Cf. the discussion in Hammerstaedt (1998, 28–32), Janko (1997, 79), and Pozdnev (2019).

²⁸ Nestle's (1907, 503–10) outline was adopted and adapted by Buffière (1956, 127–32); see also Richardson (2006, 68), Califf (2003, 30–3), and Domaradzki (2010, 239–41).

²⁹ This fits with Anaxagoras' view of the cosmos. See DK 59 A 42.3 and A 88. Nestle (1907, 508): "die Erde aber ruht in der Umarmung der Luft." See also Buffière (1956, 127).

³⁰ Cf. DK 59 A 12, and A 42.6–10.

³¹ In support of the association of Achilles with the sun see Homer's statement that Achilles' armor is "shining like the sun" (*Il.* 19.397–8; 22.134–5). On the moon being inferior to or dependent on the sun see Anaxagoras DK 59 A 42.8 ("The moon does not possess its own light but receives it from the sun."), A 76, A 77, and B 18. See Nestle (1907, 506) and Buffière (1956, 128).

enflames the sun.³² If these conjectures are correct, then Metrodorus based his interpretation on functional and qualitative similarities that the epic characters share with the celestial bodies and physical elements they represent.

Overall, we cannot say much with certainty about the specifics of the allegorical method that Theagenes and Metrodorus used. This dire situation regarding evidence for allegorical interpretation prior to Plato has, however, changed dramatically since the discovery of the Derveni Papyrus, to which I turn now. Moreover, the evidence in the Derveni papyrus will help us to delineate some main features of early Greek allegoresis that the testimony of Theagenes and Metrodorus, however scant it is, can corroborate.

II. THE DERVENI PAPYRUS

The Derveni Papyrus³³ offers rich evidence for how allegorical interpretation was employed at the end of the 5th century B.C.E.³⁴ There is nothing that comes close to the Derveni papyrus in terms of length and detail prior to the Stoic allegoresis by Cornutus (1st century C.E.)³⁵ and Heraclitus the Allegorist (1st–2nd century C.E.).³⁶ The Derveni Papyrus contains a treatise in which an anonymous author argues by means of allegorical interpretation that an Orphic theogony speaks in truth about presocratic physics. To get a sense of the Derveni author's allegoresis, let us first take a brief look at what he tells us about his method. At the beginning of his interpretation, the author describes the Orphic text as composed in a riddling mode (αἰνι[γμ]ατώδης, ἐν [αἰν]ίγμ[α]τι, col. 47,6–7 = VII.5–6 KPT). Since Orpheus speaks in riddles, his words need to be decoded to reveal their true, deeper meaning. The Derveni author's decoding strategy—his allegoresis—involves the following steps:³⁷ terms or phrases are singled out

³² Cf. DK 59 A 71 and 73. See Nestle (1907, 507) and Buffière (1956, 128).

³³ The *editio princeps* is by Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006 (= KPT). A new text by Richard Janko can be found in Kotwick (2017), the edition I am following here.

³⁴ On the dating of the Papyrus see Kotwick (2017, 14–17). On the allegorical interpretation in the Derveni Papyrus see Most 1997 and 2016; Obbink 2003 and 2010; Struck (2004, 29–39); Bernabé (2018) and Kotwick (2019). See also the commentary on the Derveni papyrus in Ramelli 2007.

³⁵ Most (1989) and Most (2010, 26–38).

³⁶ Russell and Konstan (2005).

³⁷ On the method of the Derveni author see also Kotwick (2017, 46–59) and Kotwick (2019).

from the Orphic poem and decontextualized (col. 53,6 J = XIII.6 KPT); those words or phrases are then decoded according to a resemblance or likeness that the author detects between the literal meaning of the word or phrase and an entity of the physical world. This resemblance or likeness can have two basic forms. It can be a *linguistic* resemblance between words (such as in a pun, paronomasia, or polysemy) or it can be a resemblance in the *function* or *quality* of two things.

I will illustrate this procedure with a few brief examples (see Table 2 for an overview). According to the Derveni author's interpretation, the Orphic myth about how Zeus came to power actually is an account of how the physical world came into existence under the influence of the cosmic principle *Nous* ("mind"), which is identical to the element air. And so, for instance, the Derveni author allegorizes the god Kronos via a pun as Kro-*Nous*, that is, as *Nous* in his capacity to make the particles of existing things (τὰ ἔόντα) strike against each other (κρούειν).³⁸ The word τροφός describes in the Orphic text the goddess Night as "nurse" of the gods.³⁹ The Derveni author traces this noun back to the verb τρέφω, which can mean "to rear" (hence the meaning "nurse"), but which has also the more basic meaning "to solidify." The polysemy of the verb τρέφω allows him to interpret τροφός as the "solidifying force" that he ascribes to the coolness of (the time of) night (col. 50,11–13 J = X.11–13 KPT). The word ἄδντον, verbal adjective of δύνω/δύω "to sink, enter," means in the Orphic verse "what cannot be entered" and refers to the holy shrine of prophesying Night. The Derveni author relies on the polysemy and hence ambiguity of ἄδντον, which can also mean "something that does not set," and takes it to signify the darkness of night (taken as a period of time), which contrary to the daylight "does not set" (col. 51,1–4 J = XI.1–4 KPT). Another example is the interpretation of Ὀλυμπος, the gods' dwelling place, as "time" (χρόνος) (col. 52,3–10 J = XII.3–10 KPT). Here the Derveni author relies on the fact that Olympus and time are both μακρός, an adjective that comprises both English "long" and "high."⁴⁰

³⁸See Col. 54,2–4, 7 J (= XIV.2–4, 7 KPT) and Kotwick (2017, 222–8).

³⁹OF 6 (reconstruction by Santamaría 2012, 58–9): [Ζηνί] πανομφεύουσα ἰθεῶν, τροφός ἐξ ἀ[δύτοι]ο.

⁴⁰In English we call a mountain "high" rather than "long," but the Greek adjective μακρός captures both meanings: it is used to describe Olympus, a place that is "tall" or "high" (e.g., μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον *Il.* 1.402; *Od.* 10.307; μακρὸς Ὀλυμπος *Il.* 15.193), and time, something that is "long" (*Od.* 10.470 ἡματα μακρά; 11.373 νόξ . . . μακρή; *Hdt.* 1.32.2 ἐν . . . τῷ μακρῷ χρόνῳ; see also *A. Pers.* 741 διὰ μακροῦ χρόνου, *Soph. Ant.* 422 ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ). See Kotwick (2017, 199–200).

Another example is the interpretation of the goddess Aphrodite as the unification that *Nous* triggers among the elemental particles during the early stage of the formation of the world (col. 61,4–10 J = XXI.4–10 KPT). This interpretation rests on a functional analogy: as Aphrodite unifies humans through sexual intercourse (col. 61,7–9 J = XXI.7–9 KPT), so *Nous* unifies elemental particles during the formation of the cosmos. Both powers unify and thereby create new entities. Next, the author interprets the verb *πείθειν*, “to persuade,” which he derives from the goddess *Πειθώ*, as *εἴκειν*, “to give way to,” because both verbs sound similar (both have two *ει*-diphthongs as their only vowels) (col. 61,10–11 J = XXI.10–11 KPT). And in my final example, the Derveni author relies on a functional analogy when he equates the word “mother” with *Nous*: both bring forth life (col. 66,1 J = XXVI.1 KPT).

TABLE 2. Allegorical Interpretation in the Derveni Papyrus

Text	Allegorical meaning	Explanation	Likeness
Kronos	<i>Nous</i> as he makes things collide	Kronos sounds like Kro- <i>Nous</i> (<i>Nous</i> who causes κρούειν)	linguistic resemblance: pun, paronomasia
Nurse, the goddess Night	night (time) consolidates and coagulates things	τροφός (“nurse”) comes from τρέφω (“to rear”) which also means “to solidify”	etymology, polysemy of τρέφω
the inner shrine of Night	night does not set	both can be called ἄδυτον	linguistic resemblance: polysemy of ἄδυτον
Olympus	time	both are μακρός	qualitative analogy
Aphrodite	<i>Nous</i> unifies particles	both create new entities through unification	functional analogy
πείθειν (“to persuade”)	εἴκειν (“to give way to”)	πείθειν and εἴκειν sound similar (π-ει-θ-ειν / εἰ-κ-ειν)	linguistic resemblance: pun, assonance
mother	<i>Nous</i>	both bring forth living beings	resemblance in function

My analysis of the allegorical technique in the Derveni papyrus emphasizes the similarities on which the equations of one thing as another rest. I believe that this is the core of the interpretation. Yet, the Derveni papyrus allows us to recognize further salient features of the allegorical method. The testimonies of Theagenes and Metrodorus, limited as they are, corroborate those features to some extent. They are summarized in the following list, which starts with the most basic and general feature and ends with the most crucial.

1. Allegorical interpretation operates on two levels. There is the level of the literal sense of a word or narrative and there is the distinct level of the allegorical meaning of a word or narrative.
2. Allegorical interpretation operates on narratives.⁴¹ The starting point of the interpretation is a narrative, e.g., the Orphic myth in the case of the Derveni Papyrus and the storyline of the battling gods in the case of Theagenes. The narrative includes a sequence of events and various characters. Likewise the result of the interpretation is a narrative, as in the Derveni papyrus the cosmogonic process that the author derives from the myth. This feature constitutes a crucial difference between allegorical interpretation proper and the earliest instance of “Dichterallégorie” that Most pointed to. In Most’s case we are dealing with two personifications that are not further embedded in a narrative.
3. From the second feature follows the third: A crucial step in allegorical interpretation is the decontextualizing of single words or phrases from the original narrative. These words or phrases are then interpreted independently from their original context.
4. The fourth and most characteristic feature is the detection of a similarity or analogy between the literal meaning of a word (or short expression) and its allegorical meaning. The equation and substitution of two very different things happens on the basis of one similar aspect that both share.⁴² Those similarities can be grouped under functional/qualitative resemblances on the one hand and linguistic resemblances on the other.

With these criteria of early allegorical interpretation in place I turn now to *Odyssey* 19. There we can find a depiction of an allegorical interpretation that shares all four features outlined.

⁴¹ See also Dawson 1992, 3–4.

⁴² Cf. Kotwick (2019).

III. PENELOPE'S DREAM AND ODYSSEUS' INTERPRETATION (*OD.* 19.535–69)

In book 17 Odysseus returns to his home disguised as a stranded stranger. His son Telemachus knows his true identity, but his wife Penelope, her suitors, and the servants in the house do not. In book 19,⁴³ Odysseus, still disguised as a stranger, and Penelope finally have a conversation, yet Penelope does not yet recognize that the stranger is her husband, and she remains reluctant to believe in his imminent return.⁴⁴ Towards the end of their conversation, Penelope tells the stranger about a dream she had.

“ἀλλ’ ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον.⁴⁵ (535)

χῆνές μοι κατὰ οἶκον εἰκόσι πυρὸν ἔδουσι
ἐξ ὕδατος, καὶ τέ σφιν ἰαίνομαι εἰσορώσα·
ἐλθῶν δ’ ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχήλης
πᾶσι κατ’ ἀχένας ἤξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δ’ ἐκέχυντο
ἄθροοι ἐν μεγάροισ’, ὁ δ’ ἐς αἰθέρα διὰν ἀέρθη. (540)

αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κλαῖον καὶ ἐκώκυον ἐν περ ὄνειρῳ,
ἀμφὶ δέ μ’ ἠγερέθοντο εὐπλοκαμίδες Ἀχαιαί,
οἴκτρ’ ὀλοφυρομένην, ὃ μοι αἰετὸς ἔκτανε χῆνας.
ἄψ δ’ ἐλθῶν κατ’ ἄρ’ ἔξετ’ ἐπὶ προὔχοντι μελάθρῳ,
φωνῆ δὲ βροτῆ κατερήτυε φώνησέν τε· (545)

‘θάρσει, Ἰκαρίου κούρη τηλεκλειτοῖο·
οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ’ ὑπάρ ἐσθλόν, ὃ τοι τετελεσμένον ἔσται.
χῆνες μὲν μνηστήρης, ἐγὼ δὲ τοὶ αἰετὸς ὄρνις
ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὖτε τεὸς πόσις εἰλήλουθα,
ὃς πᾶσι μνηστήρσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω.’ (550)

ὣς ἔφατ’, αὐτὰρ ἐμὲ μελιδῆς ὕπνος ἀνήκε·
παπτήγασα δὲ χῆνας ἐνὶ μεγάροισ’ ἐνόησα
πυρὸν ἐρεπτομένους παρὰ πύελον, ἦχι πάρος περ.³
τὴν δ’ ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς·
“ὦ γύναι, οὐ πως ἔστιν ὑποκρίνασθαι ὄνειρον (555)
ἄλλη ἀποκλίναντ’, ἐπεὶ ἦ ρά τοι αὐτὸς Ὀδυσσεύς
πέφραδ’, ὅπως τελείει· μνηστήρσι δὲ φαίνεται ὄλεθρος
πᾶσι μάλ’, οὐδέ κέ τις θάνατον καὶ κῆρας ἀλύξει.”

⁴³ On the structure of book 19, see Vester (1968).

⁴⁴ Cf. West (2014, 267–72).

⁴⁵ The phrase ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον is a ὕστερον πρότερον, since Odysseus must first listen before he can interpret it (see Rutherford, 1992: 195); on the phenomenon of ὕστερον πρότερον in Homer see Bassett (1920). The formula ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον is not attested elsewhere in Homer (cf. *Od.* 19.98 εἴπη ἔπος ἡδ’ ἐπακούση). Cf. Kessels (1978, 97): “ὑπόκριναι does not cover our ‘interpret,’ but rather means ‘give an opinion about something in answer to someone’s question.’”

“But come, listen to a dream of mine and interpret it for me. I have twenty geese in my house, and they feed on grains of wheat from the water trough, and I love to watch them. But a great eagle with crooked beak came down from the mountain, and broke the necks of all and killed them. So the whole twenty lay spread out in the house, but he soared high in the bright air. Then I began to weep and I cried out aloud in my dream, and around me gathered the fair-haired Achaian women as I cried out sorrowing for my geese killed by the eagle. But he came back again and perched on the jut of the gabled roof. He now had a human voice and spoke aloud to me: ‘Don’t be afraid, o daughter of far-famed Ikarios. This is no dream, but fortunate reality, which you will see come true. The geese are the suitors, and I, the eagle, have been a bird of portent, but now I, your own husband, have come home again, and I shall inflict shameless destruction on all the suitors.’ So he spoke; but then the honey-sweet sleep released me, and I looked about and saw the geese in my palace feeding on their grains of wheat from the water trough, just as they had been.” Then resourceful Odysseus spoke in turn and answered her: “Lady, it is impossible to interpret this dream twisting it to mean anything else, since Odysseus himself has told you its meaning, how it will be fulfilled. The suitors’ doom is evident for one and all. Not one will avoid his death and destruction.”

Homer, *Odyssey* 19.535–58 (Translation by Lattimore, modified)

Penelope dreamed that an eagle appeared in her yard and killed all her geese as they were feeding from the trough. The eagle then flew away, leaving her upset about the death of her geese.⁴⁶ The eagle later returned and, addressing her with a human voice, explained that this dream depicts a future reality: the eagle represents her returning husband Odysseus, and the geese the suitors, all of whom Odysseus will kill.

The interpretation of the dream is an allegorical interpretation, since it shares all four features we derived from the cases of allegoresis discussed so far. Penelope’s dream has been called “symbolic” and “alle-

⁴⁶Some modern commentators have interpreted Penelope’s intense grief about the death of her geese as indicating a repressed desire for the suitors (Rankin 1962; Russo 1982, 9–11). Yet, as has been argued by other commentators (Kessels 1978, 93–5; Rutherford 1992, 194–5; Pratt 1994, 148–9), this view is misguided. First of all, there is no evidence that the ancients regarded dreams as expressions of otherwise unconscious desires, a theory developed by Freud at the end of the 19th century (on the problematic application of modern psychological theories to ancient dreams see Price 1990, 366–70). Second, this view ignores the fact that Penelope does not see the geese as representing the suitors. Her grief is straightforward; she saw her beloved animals being killed and is understandably upset about that.

gorical” before.⁴⁷ But I intend to go a step further and focus not so much on how the dream’s content is symbolic or allegorical, but rather on how the dream is *interpreted allegorically* within the story.

The interpretation of Penelope’s dream works as follows:⁴⁸ The dream (ὄναρ) actually depicts reality (ὑπαρ), because the word ὄναρ, “dream,” resembles the word ὑπαρ, which means something like “reality.”⁴⁹ The two words sound similar: both consist of four letters, beginning with a vowel, and ending in -αρ.⁵⁰ Thus, the interpretation of the one as the other rests on a linguistic similarity.

The geese⁵¹ represent the suitors through several resemblances, both on the linguistic and the functional level. First of all, the equation of geese and suitors rests on a resemblance in function: both are eating in Odysseus’ house. Penelope describes the geese in the dream as eating in the house (χῆνες μοι κατὰ οἶκον . . . ἔδουσιν, 19.536) just as the suitors are described as doing throughout the *Odyssey*⁵² (οἱ δὲ οἶκον ἀτιμάζοντες ἔδουσιν / ἀνδρὸς ἀριστήρος, “those who eat away and dishonor the house of a great man,” 21.332; μνηστήρας . . . , οἱ θ’ ἐὼν οἶκον / κήδεσκον καὶ κτήματ’ ἔδον, “the suitors, who were afflicting his house and eating his property,” 23.8–9).⁵³ Second, there may be intended a linguistic resemblance in form

⁴⁷ Cf. van Lieshout (1980, 208), who speaks of “theriofication or metaphor from the animal-world.” See also Rutherford (1992, 194). Athanassakis (1987) calls it an allegorical dream.

⁴⁸ At this point of my analysis I focus on the fourth and most crucial feature of allegoresis that I outlined on pp. 10–11 above.

⁴⁹ The exact meaning of ὑπαρ is not clear. *LfgRE* s.v. ὑπαρ B: “meaning uncertain, denotes the opp. of irreality.” Cf. the pairing of ὄναρ and ὑπαρ in *Od.* 20.90. Leumann (1950, 126) understands ὑπαρ as a Homeric neologism that is based on an “etymological play”: “eine Gegensatzbildung des aeolischen Heldenliedes zu ὄναρ auf Grund der Tatsache, dass der Dichter in letzterem die (aeolische) Präposition ὄν (ἀνά) fühlte.” This etymology had been suggested already by Hermann (1918, 285), who also points to the fact that ὑπαρ is indeclinable, which is further evidence for it being created as “Gegenstück” zu ὄναρ. See also Rank (1951, 81–2), Kessels (1978, 186–9) and van Lieshout (1980, 41–4). If it is true that the word ὑπαρ is coined in our passage, then its resemblance to ὄναρ certainly was a factor in the coinage, which in turn fits very well with my analysis of allegoresis given here.

⁵⁰ Hermann (1918, 285) calls it a “reimende Form.” This rhyming is underlined by their position in the verse, where each is preceded by a monosyllabic word: οὐκ ὄναρ, ἀλλ’ ὑπαρ. Each pair consists of one dactyl. On Homeric nouns in -αρ see Chantraine 1942, 208.

⁵¹ As Rozokoki 2001 points out, the χῆνες are masculine here (see οἱ . . . ἀθρόοι in 19.539–40), since they stand for the suitors, whereas the noun χῆν is used as a feminine in *Od.* 15.160–78.

⁵² Rozokoki (2001, 2).

⁵³ See also *Od.* 14.81: ἀτὰρ σιάλους γε σῦας μνηστήρες ἔδουσιν; 1.160: ἐπεὶ ἀλλότριον βίον νῆπιον ἔδουσιν, / ἀνέρος, and 14.417, 18.280, 15.516, and the suitors’ behavior in 17.529–40.

of assonance between the two words χῆνες and μνηστῆρες, as both contain e-sound-vowels only.⁵⁴ The similarity between χῆνες and μνηστῆρες is highlighted by their metrical features and position: the first hemistich of line 548 reads χῆνες μὲν μνηστῆρες, where μὲν adds another e-sound vowel and two spondees follow upon each other. There may even be an etymological pun involved: χῆνες could be understood as derived from the verb χάσκω, “to gape, open the mouth wide,” which would make the geese just such “gaping fools” (κεχηνότες)—to borrow a formulation from Aristophanes, *Frogs* 990—as the suitors are.⁵⁵ Finally, there is a proportional analogy: All geese are killed by the eagle (πᾶσι κατ’ αὐχένας ἤξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δ’ ἐκέχυντο / ἀθρόοι ἐν μεγάροισ’ . . . , 539–40), which indicates that all suitors will be killed by Odysseus (ὃς πᾶσι μνηστῆρσιν ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω, 550, and πᾶσι μάλ’, οὐδὲ κέ τις θάνατον καὶ κῆρας ἀλύξει, 558). In addition to these explicit analogies, there are two functional similarities between the geese and the suitors that are not made explicit in the interpretation given in the dream, but that become clear only when the dream comes true in book 22 of the *Odyssey*. Those are that both the geese and some of the suitors are killed by injuries to their necks⁵⁶ and are then piled up after they have been killed.⁵⁷

Next is the interpretation of the eagle as Odysseus. There are two functional similarities: Just as the eagle is coming to the house from the mountain (ἐλθὼν δ’ ἐξ ὄρεος, 538), so Odysseus is coming to his house from far away (εἰλήλουθα, 549). And just as the eagle kills the geese (ἔκτανεν, 539), so Odysseus will kill the suitors (ἀεικέα πότμον ἐφήσω, 550). In addition to these functional resemblances there may also be a linguistic justification based on the paronomasia of the phrases τοὶ αἰετὸς ὄρνις (“eagle bird for you”) and αὐτε τεὸς πόσις (“your husband again”).⁵⁸

⁵⁴ On assonance in Homeric poetry see Rank 1951, 28–34.

⁵⁵ See Athanassakis (1987, 265–6). This etymological derivation seems plausible to the Byzantine scholar Eustathius, who connects the χῆνες with the verb ἐπιχαίω “to gape up, desire greedily” which perfectly describes the suitors’ behavior: Eustathius, *Comm. ad Hom.* T 536; p. 217.42: τὸ τῆ τρυφῆ ἐπιχαίνειν, ὃ πέρ ἐστιν ἐτυμολογία χηνῶν. On etymological wordplay in Homer see Loudon (1995, 28–9) and on popular etymology present in the Homeric text see Graziosi and Haubold (2015, 8–10).

⁵⁶ See *Od.* 19.539: πᾶσι κατ’ αὐχένας ἤξε καὶ ἔκτανεν (about the geese) and the following passages concerning the suitors: *Od.* 22.15–16 (δι’ αὐχένος) and 22.326–8 (κατ’ αὐχένας).

⁵⁷ In *Od.* 19.539 ἐκέχυντο is used for the geese and in *Od.* 22.389 for the suitors: ὡς τότε ἄρα μνηστῆρες ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοισι κέχυντο “like these, the suitors now were lying piled on each other”; see Rozokoki (2001, 2).

⁵⁸ The equation is underscored by the repetition of the pronoun expressing “for you” (τοὶ) or “your” (τεὸς) (cf. Russo 1982, 8).

The two expressions echo each other in sound and are almost anagrams ($\tau\text{-}\sigma\text{-}\alpha\text{-}\epsilon\text{-}\tau\text{-}\sigma\text{-}\rho\text{-}\nu\text{-}\iota\text{-}\zeta \sim \alpha\upsilon\text{-}\tau\text{-}\epsilon\text{-}\tau\text{-}\epsilon\text{-}\sigma\text{-}\pi\text{-}\sigma\text{-}\iota\text{-}\zeta$).⁵⁹ We may describe this as a pun or paronomasia, a playful use of two similar sounding sequences of letters,⁶⁰ or, to use an ancient term, as *parechesis* (Hermog. *Inv.* 4.7).⁶¹

TABLE 3. The Allegorical Interpretation of Penelope's Dream

Dream-Text	Allegorical meaning	Explanation	Likeness
ὄναρ (dream)	ὑπάρ (reality)	similarity in sound	linguistic resemblance: pun, paronomasia
χῆνες (geese)	μνηστῆρες (suitors)	both eat in Odysseus' house both have e-sound vowels only χῆνες derived from χάσκω, "to gap, open mouth"	resemblance in function linguistic resemblance: pun, assonance (vowels η and ε) etymology, pun, paronomasia
all (πᾶσι) geese	all (πᾶσι) suitors	the elimination is total	proportional analogy ⁶²
eagle	Odysseus	both come to the house (ἐλθὼν, εἰλήλουθα) both kill (ἔκτανεν, πότμον ἐφῆσω)	resemblance in function, polysemy of ἐλθεῖν resemblance in function

⁵⁹Cf. the examples given by Louden (1995, 29–31) of what he describes as “non-etymological collocations of words sharing several common sounds.”

⁶⁰The play with similarities between the sounds of two words is certainly not confined to this passage in Homer. Word play is a widely used feature of Homeric poetry. See Louden 1995 for a categorization of the phenomenon and further literature. In our passage, however, word play is part of a hermeneutic process that bases the interpretation of a word on the word's similarity with another one.

⁶¹On the related phenomenon in Homer that two thematically related word forms are made to echo each other even at the expense of regular grammar see Hackstein 2007 and Graziosi and Haubold 2015, 13–18.

⁶²There is no numerical analogy between the 20 geese and the suitors who far exceed 20 in number (see 16.245–53): 52 from Doulichion, 24 from Same, 20 Achaians from Zakynthos, and 12 from Ithaka, which makes a total of 108. See *Lfgre* s.v. μνηστήρ B3 and West (2014, 271n202). Cf. also Pratt (1994, 150–1), who suggests that Penelope interprets her dream (without disclosing it to the audience though) as a bird-sign according to which

TABLE 3. (*continued*)

Dream-Text	Allegorical meaning	Explanation	Likeness
		τοι αἰετὸς ὄρνις (“eagle bird for you”) and αὐτε τεὸς πόσις (“your husband again”) are sequences of similar letters (τ-οι-αι ~ αυ-τ-ε / ε-τ-ο-ς ~ τ-ε-ο-ς / ο-ρ-ν- ι-ς ~ π-ο-σ-ι-ς)	linguistic resemblance: paronomasia, anagram

The interpretation of the dream in *Odyssey* 19.546–50 is thus based on the same kind of reasoning as the allegorical interpretation in the Derveni Papyrus and shares all four features of allegoresis outlined above. First, there is a clear distinction of two levels: the level of the literal meaning of the dream and the level of what it really means. Second, there are narratives: the story about the eagle that comes to the house and kills the geese is a narrative sequence just like the story of Odysseus coming to the house and killing the suitors. Third, the interpretation is based on single words and phrases that are decontextualized from the narrative so that these words can be interpreted independently. Fourth, the interpretation of these words or phrases relies on a similarity in function or action or a similarity in sound (paronomasia, pun, and assonance). As we find all four features of allegorical interpretation in the interpretation of Penelope’s dream we can conclude that Homer knew this interpretative technique well. It is not an invention of the 6th century but is much older.

The interpretation of Penelope’s dream is significant for the study of early Greek allegoresis, not merely because it provides the first instance of this interpretative technique. It is significant also because Homer lets Penelope and Odysseus react to and comment upon the technique. Let us first stay with Odysseus. Odysseus completely and expressly approves of the interpretation and says that it is impossible to interpret the dream in any other way. He says that it cannot be “twisted (ἀποκλίναντ’) to have

the 20 geese represent the 20 years of Odysseus’ absence. The killing of the 20 geese would mean that her 20 year-long wait is over. This in turn indicates to her that either Odysseus is going to return or that she is going to marry one of the suitors. Pratt’s reading is problematic, first, because nothing in the text suggests that Penelope has her own private, undisclosed interpretation. Second, as Penelope points out in 559–69, she does not believe that the dream—on whatever interpretation—has the potential to become true.

a different meaning,”⁶³ thereby using a verb (κλίνω) that also appears in the Derveni papyrus to describe how words can be changed slightly to produce a different meaning.⁶⁴ Odysseus might trust the interpretative method applied or he is simply very confident that he will kill the suitors in just this way. The external listeners—us included—are forced to accept the interpretation as well, because the events that it predicts do take place in Book 22 of the *Odyssey*.⁶⁵ In stark contrast, however, Penelope does not believe that the prediction derived from the interpretation is correct and that her husband will return. The way in which Penelope expresses her disbelief is telling here.

τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε περίφρων Πηνελόπεια·
“ξῆν’, ἢ τοι μὲν ὄνειροι ἀμήχανοι ἀκριτόμυθοι (560)

γίνοντ’, οὐδέ τι πάντα τελείεται ἀνθρώποισι.
δοιαὶ γάρ τε πύλαι ἀμενηνῶν εἰσὶν ὄνειρων·
αἱ μὲν γὰρ κεράεσσι τετεύχεται, αἱ δ’ ἐλέφαντι.

τῶν οἱ μὲν κ’ ἔλθωσι διὰ πριστοῦ ἐλέφαντος,
οἱ ῥ’ ἐλεφαίρονται, ἔπε’ ἀκράαντα φέροντες. (565)

οἱ δὲ διὰ ξεστῶν κεράων ἔλθωσι θύραζε,
οἱ ῥ’ ἔτυμα κράινουσι, βροτῶν ὅτε κέν τις ἴδῃται.
ἀλλ’ ἐμοὶ οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν ὄϊομαι αἰνὸν ὄνειρον
ἐλθέμεν· ἢ κ’ ἀσπαστὸν ἐμοὶ καὶ παιδὶ γένοιτο.

Circumspect Penelope said to him in answer: “My friend, dreams are things hard to interpret, hopeless to puzzle out, and people find that not all of them are fulfilled. There are two gates through which the insubstantial dreams issue. One pair of gates is made of horn, and one of ivory. Those of the dreams which issue through the gate of sawn ivory, these are deceptive dreams, their message is never accomplished. But those that come into the open through the gates of the polished horn accomplish the truth for any mortal who sees them. I do not think that this horrible dream that I had came to me through this gate. My son and I would be glad if it did so.”

Homer, *Odyssey* 19.559–69

⁶³ *Od.* 19.555–6: οὐ πως ἔστιν ὑποκρίνασθαι ὄνειρον / ἄλλη ἀποκλίναντ’.

⁶⁴ Col. 66,11 J = XXVI.11 KPT: ἐξῆν αὐτῷ γράμματα παρακλίναντι. See also Pl. *Cra.* 404d ἐκκλίνουσι τὸ ὄνομα and 410a σμικρὸν τι παρακλίνοντες.

⁶⁵ The dream in Book 19 is connected to the bird omen at 15.525–38 (see Athanassakis 1987, 263–4 and Pratt 1994, 150 n. 9) in that both passages involve birds that are taken to indicate the homecoming Odysseus. Instead of many geese there is only one goose that the eagle catches. Helen’s interpretation of the bird omen is less elaborated than the dream interpretation in Book 19.

In the explanation of her disbelief Penelope declares that dreams are difficult to interpret (ἀμήχανοι ἀκριτόμυθοι)⁶⁶ and that they do not all predict the future. She explicates this by giving a theory about the nature of dreams. Dreams are of two kinds, she states: The first kind comes to the dreamer through a gate of ivory (ἐλέφαντος). Those dreams deceive (ἐλεφαίρονται) the dreamer and never come true. The second kind comes to the dreamer through a gate of horn (κεράων). Those dreams do in fact come true (κραινουσι). Having stated this binary scheme, Penelope announces, but does not further justify, the conviction that her αἰνὸν ὄνειρον, her “frightening” (and perhaps “riddling”) dream is of the first kind, and thus does not come true.

Whereas Homeric scholars have given much attention to the background and purpose of Penelope’s explanation,⁶⁷ I am interested in how Penelope’s account works. Dreams that come through the gates of horn (κεράων) become true or accomplished (κραινουσι), because κέρασ and κραινώ sound alike. And dreams that come through the gates of ivory (ἐλέφαντος) are deceitful (ἐλεφαίρονται),⁶⁸ because again ἐλέφας and ἐλεφαίρεσθαι sound alike.⁶⁹ And finally, it is possible that when Penelope calls her dream αἰνὸν “frightful,”⁷⁰ she really means to say that it is a riddle

⁶⁶Since she opened the conversation about the dream with an invitation to interpret it (535), ἀκριτόμυθος cannot mean “stories that are un-interprettable,” but must mean something like “tales that are hard to interpret.”

⁶⁷Is Penelope’s theory a Homeric invention or is it based on an old belief about dreams? That the image of the dream-gates is part of a traditional belief—traditional at least within the world of the *Odyssey*—is suggested by another mentioning of dream-gates in *Od.* 4.808–9. See Rank (1951, 104–8) and van Lieshout (1980, 38–9). Highbarger 1940 sees the origin of the dream gate image in Egypt or Mesopotamia. Kessels (1978, 106–7) and Pollmann (1993, 233) see in it an ad hoc-invention by Homer. See also Rozokoki (2001, 4–6). On the afterlife of the image, especially in Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.893–6 see Pollmann 1993.

⁶⁸On the meaning of ἐλεφαίρεσθαι “to cheat,” “do harm to” see *Il.* 23.388 and Hes. *Th.* 330.

⁶⁹See Rank (1951, 104–8), Rutherford (1992, 169–70); Russo (1992, 103–4). Cf. Loudon (1995, 39–41). Since antiquity, commentators proposed interpretations of the “true” symbolic meaning of Penelope’s horn and ivory gates. This is somewhat surprising, since Penelope spells out clearly what the two materials stand for, at least for her. Eustathius (*Comm. ad Hom.* T 562; p. 218.30–219.36) gives a list of interpretations of horn and ivory. For instance, horn is associated with eyes and things seen, ivory with the mouth; things *seen* are trustworthier than things *heard* by hearsay (see van Lieshout 1980, 38–9). Haller (2009, 397–417) offers the most recent comprehensive treatment of the question what the two materials “really mean.” Haller argues that the gates of ivory stand for teeth and the gates of horn for Odysseus’ bow. See also DeSmidt (2006, 284–9) on the symbolism of horn and ivory in connection to Odysseus’ bow and scar.

⁷⁰The adjective expresses a strong feeling (see *Lfgre* s.v. αἰνός “furchtbar, schrecklich, Abscheu erregend”).

(αἴνος),⁷¹ This dream is *ainigmatic*, just as the Derveni author calls the Orphic text.⁷² It is evident that Penelope makes use of the same interpretative strategies that were used for her dream: she relies on linguistic resemblances such as in pun and paronomasia, and on polysemy.

TABLE 4: Penelope's Interpretation of the Two Dream-Gates

A tale about dreams	Allegorical meaning	Explanation	Likeness
gates of horn (κεράων)	dreams become true, are accomplished (κραίνουσι)	κέρας (“horn”) and κραίνω (“to accomplish”) sound alike	linguistic resemblance: pun, paronomasia
gates of ivory (ἐλέφαντος)	dreams are deceptive (ἐλεφαίρονται)	ἐλέφας (“ivory”) and ἐλεφαίρομαι (“to cheat”) sound alike	linguistic resemblance: pun, paronomasia
horrible dream (αἰνόν)	riddle, story (αἴνος)	αἰνός (“horrible”) and αἴνος (“story,” “riddle”) differ only in accentuation	linguistic resemblance: ambiguity, polysemy of αἴνος / αἰνός

That Penelope relies on the same kind of linguistic similarities that were used for her dream appears somewhat paradoxical because she is here arguing against the truthfulness of her dream. However, it may indicate to us that an allegorical approach was the default attitude for an intellectual encounter with dreams and other likewise riddling phenomena. Penelope's critique of the interpretation of her dream is clearly not directed towards

⁷¹The combination of αἰνός with ὄνειρος occurs only here. The singularity of this combination speaks in favor of my interpretation: the dream is called αἰνός because it is an αἴνος. Eustathius (*Comm. ad Hom.* T 568; p. 219.43–5) thought this was a conceivable pun: Αἰνόν δὲ ὄνειρον ἢ τὸν σκοτεινόν, ὡς καὶ ἐπαινὴ Περσεφόνηα ἢ αἰανὴ, ἢ τὸν αἰνιγματώδη παρὰ τὸ αἴνος, ὃς δηλοῖ ποτὲ καὶ τὸ αἴνιγμα, καθὰ πολλαχοῦ ἐφάνη. As Verdenius (1962, 389) has shown, the word αἴνος, deriving from αἰνίσσομαι (“to speak in cover terms,” Verdenius; or “to speak allegorically”), means “covert expression” and “allusive tale” in Soph. *Phil.* 1380. Verdenius also points to *Od.* 14.508, where αἴνος means “tale containing an ulterior purpose” (cf. however, *Il.* 23.652, where αἴνος means “praise”; see also Hes. *Op.* 202, where αἴνος means “fable”). On the development of the term αἴνος see also Nagy (1999, 238–41) (followed by Struck 2004, 179), who, however, argues that the original meaning of αἴνος is “praise,” out of which developed via an “ideology of exclusiveness” the idea of αἴνιγμα as “riddle” as something that makes sense only to an exclusive group. See also Ford (2002, 72–6).

⁷²See pp. 7–8 above.

the allegorical method as such; instead, she has other reasons for disbelieving that her dream bears any truthful message.⁷³

IV. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

A comparison of the earliest testified instances of allegorical interpretation of poetic texts with Penelope's dream and its interpretation in *Odyssey* 19 has revealed some fundamental similarities in their interpretative techniques. They share principle attitudes towards interpretation and rely on a pool of specific arguments that justify through various forms of similarities the substitution of the literal meaning with the supposedly true meaning that is hidden beneath it. This makes Penelope's dream in *Odyssey* 19 an important piece of evidence for the early use of allegorical interpretation. Our earliest instance of allegoresis is found in this Homeric depiction of an interpretation of a dream.⁷⁴

My analysis of Penelope's dream with respect to the technical specifics of the interpretation employed shows that allegoresis was older and more widespread than the sparse references to Theagenes of Rhegium and Metrodorus of Lampsacus would suggest. If my argument holds, allegoresis is as old as our earliest pieces of Greek literature. Theagenes did not invent allegorical reading, and so it is misleading to suggest that allegoresis' original purpose is to defend Homer from philosophical attacks. It was as a technique of interpretation well known to Homer and his time.⁷⁵

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⁷³The paradoxical reaction to her dream fits neatly into Penelope's behavior towards the prospect of her husband's return throughout books 17–22. While there are more and more signs and prophecies predicting that Odysseus' return is imminent, Penelope trusts those predictions less and less.

⁷⁴The question of how dream interpretation and allegorical interpretation of poetry relate cannot be discussed here. Yet, this article intends to contribute to this question by showing that Penelope's dream should be considered as an important piece of evidence in the discussion of this question.

⁷⁵I would like to thank Edmond Kotwick and Joseph Lemelin for critical discussions of earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful for the detailed comments by the anonymous referees.

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