

IX.—The Birth of Athena

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I. METHODOLOGY

A paper on the birth of Athena should try to justify its existence at the outset by stating the methodological principles whereby it hopes to throw fresh light on the subject. The author takes as his motto what Jaeger says apropos of myth in Hesiod in *Paideia*: "Myth is like an organism which undergoes incessant transformation and renovation. The poet completes that transformation: but he does so not simply at his own whim. For it is he who creates a new life-pattern for his age, and he reinterprets the myth to harmonize with his knowledge of that pattern. Only by the incessant metamorphosis of its central idea can the myth continue to live."¹ Translating this notion of myth into a methodology, the author assumes that (1) the focus of attention in the study of Greek mythology should be on concrete representations of myth in art and literature; (2) the intensive analysis of particular concrete versions of a myth should be directed at grasping the individuality of each version, its differences from other versions; (3) the individual version should be seen as an innovation in the mythological tradition of the culture; (4) the innovations in the tradition should be seen in historical context, as responses to changing human experience.² To attempt a philosophic justification of these assumptions would be out of place, and of doubtful value: in the last resort their validity depends on the results.

II. THE BIRTH OF ATHENA IN HESIOD'S *Theogony*

Our earliest version of the birth of Athena is Hesiod's *Theogony*, lines 886–900. We are there told that Zeus' first royal consort, after his victory over the Titans, was Metis, but that when she was about to give birth to Athena, Zeus tricked her and swallowed her, at the advice of Gaea and Uranus, to forestall a threat to his

¹ W. Jaeger, *Paideia* (Oxford 1945) 1.66–67.

² Cf. the methodological statement in E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York 1939) 3–17.

kingship: Metis was destined to produce first Athena, "the equal of her father in power and wisdom," and then a son who would usurp Zeus' kingship. But Zeus swallowed her, and in his belly she gives him knowledge of good and evil. Hesiod goes on to list six further consorts, beginning with Themis (lines 901-923), and then says that Zeus produced Athena out of his own head (lines 924-926).

Many scholars, including Solmsen in his recent and valuable study of the *Theogony*, have followed Wilamowitz regarding lines 886-900 as an interpolation, leaving merely the statement that Zeus produced Athena out of his own head (lines 924-926).³ As with so many alleged interpolations in Hesiod, the arguments for excluding these lines are based on the application of inappropriate standards of consistency both to the text of Hesiod and to the body of Greek mythology. That Pindar contradicts the passage, and makes Themis Zeus' first consort, can equally well be explained by the hypothesis that here, as in many other cases, Pindar is contradicting a tradition which was incompatible with his own theology;⁴ after examining the character of Metis, we will understand why he preferred to make Themis rather than Metis Zeus' first consort. And the supposed inconsistencies in the text disappear if close analysis and historical imagination are brought to bear on the problem of reconstructing Hesiod's thought, rather than reconstructing Hesiod's text to make it conform to our thought.

The integrity of this, or any other, questioned passage in the *Theogony* depends, in the last resort, on whether it is indispensably connected with the unquestioned core of the poem. A careful study of the themes which bind the different parts of the *Theogony* into a structured unity shows that the myth of Metis is indispensable.⁵ In the first place, the whole structure of the *Theogony*

³ F. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca 1949) 67-68; Wilamowitz, "Athena," *SB Berlin* (1921) 957-958; Kruse, *RE* 15.1409-1410. The integrity of the passage has been maintained by Rzach, *RE* 8.1192 (cf. his edition); Schmid-Stählin, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte* (Munich 1929) 1.1.281; A. B. Cook, *Zeus* (Cambridge 1914-1940) 3.743-744 note; W. F. Otto, *Die Götter Griechenlands* (Frankfurt 1947) 53; some misgivings about Wilamowitz' position are expressed by M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (Munich 1941-1950) 1.411 note. I am ignoring the Chrysippus variant (lines 929 a-t in Evelyn-White's edition) which is now generally agreed to be not authentic.

⁴ Pindar, *Fr.* 30 (Schroeder). This is recognized by Solmsen, *loc. cit.*; Nilsson, *loc. cit.*; F. Schwenn, *Die Theogonie des Hesiodos* (Heidelberg 1934) 50 note.

⁵ The author has made an analysis of the structure of the *Theogony*, as part of the introduction to a forthcoming edition of the *Theogony* in translation, to be pub-

raises the question, how did Zeus avoid the fate of Uranus and Cronus?⁶ Without the myth of Metis, the theme of the tricky struggle between the father and an alliance of the mother with one of her sons, is not carried through; without the myth of Metis we would not have the reversal of the role of Gaia and Uranus, who had supported Rhea against Cronus (lines 470–486), and now support Zeus against Metis (lines 891–897; cf. 884), thus signaling that the cosmic evolutionary process is reaching its goal. In the second place, what may be called the problem of Metis is one of the central preoccupations of the *Theogony* as a whole: the story of Prometheus (lines 507–616) tells the conflict between the Metis of Zeus and the Metis of Prometheus.⁷

The myth of Prometheus is the best clue to the myth of Metis. Hesiod is, of course, drawing on very old traditions of the mischief-making capacity of the trickster and culture-hero, a standard type in primitive mythologies to which Prometheus transparently belongs.⁸ But at the same time he is transforming these traditions to make them a vehicle for interpreting his own, quite modern, experience. He has transformed Prometheus the trickster into a Satanic figure, the Greek equivalent of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, thus arriving at the notion of a Fall of Man.⁹ As in the Hebrew story, so also in Hesiod's Fall of Man the central idea is

lished by the Little Library of Liberal Arts. It must be noted that if lines 886–900 are omitted, line 901 must be emended (*πρώτην* for *δευτέρον*), and in any case makes a much poorer transition from line 885 than does line 886.

⁶ Cf. P. Philippson, "Genealogie als mythische Form," *SymbOslo, Fasc. Supplet. 6* (1936) 20–21. Solmsen 25, 67–68, 128 is misled by his desire to explain the stability of Zeus' regime by making Zeus not guilty of "shameful deeds" as his predecessors were. But quite apart from swallowing Metis, Zeus is guilty of violence against his father, which was what doomed Cronus (lines 207–210, 629–630, 729–730). Zeus' regime is stable because he does not suppress his children, even the dangerous offspring of Metis.

⁷ The relation to the Prometheus story was recognized by Schmid-Stählin, *loc. cit.* Hesiod interrelates parts implicitly by stylistic devices such as repetition of key words (*δόλος*, *μῆτις*): cf. I. Sellschopp, *Stilistische Untersuchungen zu Hesiod* (Hamburg 1934). The same polarity, at a lower level, appears in the juxtaposition of the children of Night and the Nereids: the children of Night include *Ἀπάτη* (line 224), while the Nereids include names allegorically significant of beneficent intelligence (lines 257–262).

⁸ Cf. J. G. Frazer, *Apollodorus* (London 1921) 2.326–50; N. O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief* (Madison 1947) 23–24.

⁹ Cf. W. Headlam, "Prometheus and the Garden of Eden," *CQ* 28 (1934) 63–71; K. von Fritz, "Pandora, Prometheus, and the myth of the Ages," *Review of Religion* 11 (1947) 227–260; F. J. Teggart, "The Argument of Hesiod's Works and Days," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8 (1947) 45–77; Solmsen 76–91.

that of rebellion against the authority of the divine ruler. The myth reflects one of the fundamental dilemmas in Hesiod's vision of the world: on the one hand he insists on the absolute supremacy of Zeus; on the other hand he is aware, as the *Works and Days* shows, that the universe does not display that harmonious order which he believes to be the will of Zeus. Prometheus is a disorderly force in the universe, and the disorderly rebellion is emphatically portrayed as a struggle between two kinds of Metis. And the contrast between Zeus and Prometheus suggests what the two kinds of Metis are. Zeus as the royal Metis, the wisdom which belongs to him as heavenly king, and which belongs to those kings on earth whom Homer calls "equal to Zeus in Metis." Prometheus has the technical Metis, which belongs to the culture-hero type of god such as Hephaestus *πολύμητις* and Hermes *αἰμυλομήτης*, and which, according to Homer, makes the successful woodcutter, helmsman and chariot driver.¹⁰

If we bear Prometheus in mind, we will understand the myth of Metis better. Metis is not the Wisdom that Stoic allegorists and most modern commentators take her to be. Metis is an ambivalent concept, and as such characteristic of Hesiod:¹¹ the abstraction contains the Metis of both Zeus and Prometheus. Hence in the myth she plays an ambivalent role: she is a threat to Zeus and at the same time an indispensable aid to Zeus. We must also interpret the dangerous aspect of Metis in the light of the Prometheus myth. Hesiod is using the traditional mythological motif of the superannuation of the king, and his replacement by his son — the motif round which he built the Uranus-Cronus-Zeus sequence. But it is surely his idea to make Metis the mother of Zeus' possible successor, just as it is his idea to make one of his typical implicit contrasts between Metis and Themis, the personification of order in Zeus' cosmos, who is Zeus' second consort with whom he has no conflict. We are therefore entitled to say that the dangerous aspect of Metis is her Promethean side: more specifically we are entitled to say that at the back of Hesiod's mind, when he thought of the unnamed

¹⁰ Cf. H. Ebeling, *Lexicon Homericum* (Leipzig 1880–1885) s.v. *μητις*, *πολύμητις*, *ἀγκυλομήτης*, *αἰμυλομήτης*. As Cook 1.14 and 3.744 note observed, the aboriginal meaning of the word is magical cunning; cf. Brown 11–23, 63–64. Thus Solmsen's third reason (*op. cit.* 68) for regarding our passage as an interpolation is based on a misinterpretation of the word *μητις*.

¹¹ Cf. P. Philippon, 23, 35.

potential brother of Athena, who would take Zeus' kingship away, was the culture-hero type of god: as we shall see, in the later form of the myth it is always the culture-hero type of god who wields the axe to release Athena from the head of Zeus. Making the necessary allowances for the inevitable imprecision of mythological concepts, we may perhaps translate the abstraction Metis, in its dangerous aspect, as "creative ingenuity," as a force making for cultural renewal: Hesiod is followed by Acusilaus and the Orphics who en-throne Metis side by side with Eros as primal cosmic forces, and by Plato in the little myth in the *Symposium* which makes *Poros* ("Ingenuity") the son of Metis, and by *Penia* ("Poverty") the father of Eros.¹²

What of Athena? Modern commentators all see in the myth an expression of Athena's close relations with Zeus on the one hand and with Metis on the other. But, if the foregoing analysis is correct, we must recognize that the text actually presents an ambivalent relationship between Athena and both her parents. If Athena had been born from her mother in the normal way, she, "the equal of her father in power and wisdom" (line 894), as well as her potential brother would have represented a threat to Zeus' supremacy. But by giving birth to her out of his own head Zeus finds a way to release her safely subordinated to himself. The two phases of the story, which Wilamowitz and his followers find "inconsistent," are deeply, though ambivalently, united.¹³

The idea that Athena represents in any way a latent threat to the supremacy of Zeus may seem surprising, but the context indicates what was at the back of Hesiod's mind. Metis is one of Athena's most characteristic attributes;¹⁴ but for Hesiod the significant thing is that she has Metis in both its royal and its technical aspect. In Homer she is the patron both of kings and craftsmen; in the cult of classical times she was both *Polias* and *Erganê*.¹⁵

¹² Acusilaus frg. 1 (Diels): *Orphicorum Fragmenta* 56, 60, 65, 83, 85, 97, 168-170, 184 Kern; Plato, *Symposium* 203BC. O. Kern, "Metis bei Orpheus," *Hermes* 74 (1939) 207-208.

¹³ Solmsen's second argument against the authenticity of the passage, *op. cit.* 68.

¹⁴ O. Gruppe, *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte* (Munich 1906) 2.1215 note; Otto 51. Note the epithet in *Homeric Hymn* 28.2, which tells the myth of her birth.

¹⁵ L. R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States* (Oxford 1896) 1.295-315; D. Le Lasseur, *Les Déeses armées* (Paris 1919) 61-103; E. Buchholz, *Die homerischen Realien* (Leipzig 1884) 3.1.133-149; Nilsson 1.405-13. That Hesiod is aware of her technical side is shown by *Works and Days* 430.

Led by the logic of his mythology and his experience to speculate on the possible overthrow of Zeus' regime by the forces making for cultural renewal in his world,¹⁶ he felt that the functional affinity between Athena and Zeus as guardians of the state might, if Athena's affinity with the culture-heroes were not eliminated, result in Athena's emergence as the symbol of a new kind of state; this, as we shall see, is what actually did take place when the social changes which were only beginning in the age of Hesiod had matured. Hesiod's solution is to eliminate Athena's connection with the culture-heroes by eliminating her natural connection with Metis, as well as by subordinating her to Zeus. When she emerges from the head of Zeus, she is a pure and terrifying symbol of state power — "the terrible lady who stirs up the fury and leads the army, who never retreats, who loves tumult and wars and battles" (lines 925–926).

III. THE AX-BLOW TO THE HEAD OF ZEUS

The classical form of the birth of Athena, in which she is released from the head of Zeus by the blow of an ax administered usually by Hephaestus, but sometimes by Prometheus or Hermes, first appears in the art of the sixth century B.C.; its first appearance in literature is in Pindar's *Seventh Olympian*; its climactic epiphany is on the East Pediment of the Parthenon.

A. B. Cook's masterly iconographic analysis has demonstrated that the artistic representation of Athena delivered from the head of Zeus by the blow of an ax originated in Athens in the first half of the sixth century B.C.; he has shown that the presence of the goddesses of childbirth, the Eileithyiai, who are strictly speaking superfluous when Zeus is delivered by the ax-blow, is carried over from an earlier type in which Zeus is attended by the Eileithyiai without the ax-bearer, the implication of the earlier type being that, as in Hesiod, Zeus' own labor produces the birth.¹⁷

It is also one of A. B. Cook's great contributions to mythological studies to have seen where the new and extraordinary motif of the ax-blow to the head of Zeus comes from. It comes from the quaint and famous ritual of the Buphonia in the cult of Zeus Polieus at

¹⁶ Cf. A. A. Trever, "The Age of Hesiod," *CP* 19 (1924) 157–68, the best analysis of the social situation revealed in the *Works and Days*.

¹⁷ Cook 3.662–726. The Athenian origin of the myth is also indicated by the fact that connections in cult between Hephaestus and Athena outside of Athens are rare or non-existent: Malten, *RE* 8.348.

Athens. The main points in this sacred drama were (1) the central actor is a person known as the "ox-striker" (Boutypos) or "ox-slaughterer" (Bouphonos) who wields an ax; (2) the slaughter of the ox is regarded as a crime; (3) the "ox-striker" immediately flees from the scene; (4) the knife which completed the slaughter was solemnly indicted before the Prytaneium, condemned, and punished by being thrown into the sea; (5) the ox itself, supposed to come to life again, was stuffed with hay and yoked to a plough. The peculiar form of the drama indicates that the slaughtered ox is regarded as an incarnation of divinity.¹⁸

The unknown mythmaker who first launched the myth of Athena released from the head of Zeus by the blow of an ax got the idea from participating in the ritual of the Buphonia. But this does not tell us what the new myth means, any more than a reference to Plutarch's *Lives* tells us the meaning of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. To get at the meaning, we must scrutinize the new creation more carefully, evaluating the contribution of the mythmaker by isolating what is not accounted for by his borrowings, and measuring its significance by contrasting it with the tradition which he sought to change:

From the Buphonia the mythmaker took the figure of the ax-bearer; he also took from it the notion of the blow as some kind of criminal assault: at least the ax-bearer is generally portrayed as in flight after the deed. What he did not borrow is the mythical personality of the ax-bearer: reference to the Buphonia will not explain why it is Hephaestus, Prometheus or Hermes who wields the ax.¹⁹

Why is it Hephaestus, Prometheus or Hermes who wields the ax? A. B. Cook, after having gone so far, loses the road at this critical point: his explanation is that Athena and Hephaestus were united in marriage in pre-Hellenic times, and, now that Athena

¹⁸ Cook 3.570-662; L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) 158-174. If Deubner 173 is right in saying that the Attic cult of Zeus Polieus is not older than the archaic age, then our myth, which assumes the ritual of the Buphonia and its attachment to Zeus Polieus, can be no older.

¹⁹ I find no mention of Hephaestus in the ritual of the Diipolieia, or the etiological myths, or the genealogies of the priestly families: Cook 3.570-605; Deubner 158-174. The association of Boötes, Hephaestus, Athena, Poseidon in the Erechtheum is part of a different ritual and mythological cycle: Cook 3.758; G. W. Elderkin, "Cults of the Erechtheion," *Hesperia* 10 (1941) 114.

had become a virgin, could only be united in this artificial way.²⁰ This explanation is an instance of a kind of misplaced ingenuity which is all too frequent in mythological studies. It is in the first place impossible to believe that either the artists or their audience saw the myth in this light — they were neither so erudite nor so pedantic — and the meaning of the myth is what it meant to them. In the second place Cook resorts to dubious contructions about the relations between Hephaestus and Athena in pre-Hellenic times, while ignoring the certain fact that in Homer, in Solon, and in Attic cult it is their affinity as culture-heroes, their common connection with craftsmanship, that brings the two together.²¹ Finally, Cook fails to explain the range of variation in the personality of the ax-bearer — why Prometheus or Hermes? Hephaestus, Prometheus, Hermes (and the Palamaon mentioned in one obscure reference) are all of the culture-hero type, and all connected with craftsmanship, all famous for their Metis, the lady involved in Hesiod's version of the myth.²² The inescapable conclusion is that it is part of the meaning of the myth that Athena is released from the head of Zeus by the culture-hero type of god.

Now let us examine the change which the new myth makes in the tradition of the birth of Athena. By introducing the culture-hero as the ax-bearer, the new myth reasserts the connection between Athena and the technical Metis. Hesiod, as we saw, recognized and at the same time tried to eliminate the connection; the little evidence we have suggests that in the interval after Hesiod Metis was eliminated: she does not figure in either the vase paintings or the *Homeric Hymn* (28). The new myth accepts the traditional elimination of Metis as mother, only to reintroduce her equivalent as midwife. In the second place the borrowings from the ritual of the Buphonia alter the relations between Zeus and Athena: in the new version, strictly speaking, it is not Zeus but rather the ax-bearer who brings Athena into the world. And the ax blow constitutes some kind of assault on Zeus: this nuance is implied not only by the analogy of the Buphonia, but also by the

²⁰ Cook 3.735. So also H. J. Rose, *Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London 1928) 50–51; G. Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* (London 1949) 267–268.

²¹ Cf. Cook 3.188–287; *Odyssey* 6.232–233; Solon Frg. 1.49 (Diehl).

²² References in Cook 3.660–661. Note that Hermes as well as Hephaestus figured in sixth century representations of the scene (temple of Athena *Chalkioikos* at Sparta, cf. Cook *ib.*). On Palamaon see Göber, *RE* 18.2499–2500.

motif of the flight of the ax-bearer in the art representations themselves. Therefore the new version of the myth (as distinct from Hesiod's), so far from expressing the "close relation" between Zeus and Athena, as all the handbooks, following all the authorities, say,²³ actually makes Athena more independent of Zeus. Her new relationship to him is enigmatic: it may be described as "affiliation by assault."

In the new myth Athena is delivered by the technical Metis, but the Athena so delivered is not the goddess of craftsmanship, but the goddess of the state — Athena Polias. Hesiod had emphasized that the goddess who emerged from the head of Zeus was the martial goddess; in the interval after Hesiod this emphasis had been underlined by the addition of the motif that she sprang fully armed from the head of Zeus.²⁴ Artistic representations of the new myth carry on this tradition, and the analogy with the Buphonia reaffirms it. Out of the head of Zeus Polieus emerges Athena Polias.

Stating the implications of this mythological analysis in more modern terms, we conclude that the central ideas in the new version of the birth of Athena are (1) the emergence of a new Guardian of the State out of the old Guardian of the State; (2) the enigmatic character of the relation of the new to the old; (3) the delivery of the new by the forces of cultural progress.

The myth was the Athenians' way of expressing what we know to have been some of the salient facts of their social and religious history in the archaic age. The myth was created in the first half of the sixth century B.C. Solon's reforms at the beginning of the sixth century are the great landmark marking the birth of a new kind of city-state. The upsurge of devotion to Athena *Polias* around the time the myth was created is evidenced by the institution of the Panathenaic festival in 566/5 B.C., and the concurrent emergence of the Athena *Promachos* type on Athenian vases and coins.²⁵ The simultaneous rise of Athenian commerce and industry

²³ E.g. Rose 50: "the close connexion between Zeus and Athena"; Nilsson 1.411: "Die nahe Verwandtschaft ihres Wesens mit dem des Zeus"; etc.

²⁴ Motif added by Stesichorus, according to the scholiast, Apollonius Rhodius 4.1310. See also *Homeric Hymn* 28.5.

²⁵ Deubner 23; W. Zschietzschmann, "Attische Bildkunst um 560," *JDAI* 46 (1931) 54; Nilsson 1.409; A. Frickenhaus, "Das alte Athenabild des alten Tempels in

— the forces of technical Metis — is a truism of Greek history, as is also their role in the emergence of the new kind of state. It is also certain that the sixth century B.C. saw a corresponding rise in the status of the culture-hero gods, Hephaestus, Prometheus and Hermes.²⁶ And since the new Athenian state launched by Solon reaches its climax under Pericles, it is no accident that the climactic epiphany of the myth is on the East Pediment of the Parthenon.

We have argued that the myth gives Athena greater independence vis-à-vis Zeus. It is of course a well-known fact that while Athens maintained the cult of Zeus Polieus, they really entrusted their city to Athena Polias. As Wilamowitz pointed out, Zeus increasingly became a remote and exalted figure no longer felt to be concerned with the immediate practical affairs of men.²⁷ Athena's new independent role may be seen in Aeschylus' mythology: Zeus is supreme, but Athena mediates the momentous dispute in the *Eumenides*, like Solon "casting her strong shield over both sides, and letting neither win unjust advantage"; similarly in the Prometheus trilogy she apparently arranged the resolution of the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus which established Prometheus in Attic cult.²⁸ But the most illuminating illustration comes from Solon himself. In a famous poem he says: "The decree of Zeus and the will of the blessed immortal gods will never lead our city to destruction. Such is the great-hearted guardian who holds her hands over us, the mighty daughter of a mighty father, Pallas Athena."²⁹ The new Athena can stand up to Zeus.

Athen," *AM* 33 (1908) 17-32; C. T. Seltman, *Athens its History and Coinage* (Cambridge 1924) 41-44.

²⁶ For Hermes, cf. Brown 108-132. Hephaestus and Prometheus have not been adequately studied from the historical point of view, but it seems probable that their rituals at Athens (on which see Deubner 211-213) were elaborated in the sixth century; also the myth of the return of Hephaestus to Olympus, Wilamowitz, "Hephaistos," *GötNachr* (1895) 217-245; and the myth of the release of Prometheus whom Hesiod left in chains, Schmid-Stählin 1.1.247.

²⁷ Wilamowitz, *Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin 1931-1932) 2.164-165; cf. Wilamowitz, "Athena" (above note 3) 962-965.

²⁸ G. Thomson, *Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1932) 35; Schmid-Stählin, 1.2.261. But note the scepticism of Thomson's reconstruction expressed by Solmsen 150.

²⁹ Solon, *Frg.* 3.1-4 (Diehl). On the differences between Solon's and Hesiod's theology, see Solmsen 107-123, and W. Jaeger, "Solon's Eunomie," *SB Berlin* (1926) 77-82.

IV. ATHENA IN HOMER: ORIGIN OF THE MYTH

All the modern authorities say that Homer knew the myth of Athena's birth from the head of Zeus.³⁰ The positive evidence cited in support of this dogma is quite unsubstantial. The meaning of the epithet *Trilogeneia* is too obscure to be evidence at all: and even if it did mean "true daughter of her father" it obviously does not in itself imply either that she had no mother or that she was born from her father's head.³¹ Likewise the epithet *obrimo-patrê*, "mighty daughter of a mighty father," proves nothing.³² We are left with the passage in *Iliad* 5.875–880: Ares is speaking to Zeus (I quote Chase and Perry's translation) — "We are all aroused against you, for you gave birth to a heedless maiden, accursed, whose mind is ever set on violent deeds. . . . Her you reprove neither by word nor deed; rather, you set her on, since you yourself bore this insolent child." In line 875 *σὺ γὰρ τέκες ἄφρονα κόρην* proves nothing; and if line 880 *αὐτὸς ἐγείναιο παῖδ' ἀτλήλον* is compared with *Odyssey* 20.201–202 *Ζεῦ πάτερ . . . οὐκ ἐλεαίρεις ἄνδρας, ἐπὴν δὴ γείναιο αὐτὸς*, it becomes clear that it does not in itself imply a paternity any different from Zeus' paternal relationship to mankind.³³

And the tacit methodological assumptions which have persuaded authorities to accept such flimsy evidence for attributing knowledge of the myth to Homer must be questioned. One such tacit assumption is that there is some abstract, general form of the myth of the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus distinct from the particular versions in which it is embodied, like a Platonic idea.³⁴ Actually

³⁰ Including Cook 3.737 note; Otto 52; Wilamowitz, *Glaube* 1.332; Nilsson 1.411; Le Lasseur 131. In the nineteenth century the opposite opinion was sometimes asserted: T. Bergk, *Kleine philologische Schriften* (Halle 1886) 2.638; P. Stengel, "Die Sagen von der Geburt der Athene und Aphrodite," *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie* 131 (1885) 77–80.

³¹ Wilamowitz, "Athena," (above note 3) 956 note, does use this argument, but is more cautious in *Glaube* 1.237 note. For recent speculations on the epithet see G. W. Elderkin, "Studies in Early Athenian Cult," *Classical Studies Presented to Edward Capps* (Princeton 1936) 106–110.

³² This argument is emphasized by Cook 3.737 note.

³³ For *τέκες* of ordinary paternity, cf. Ebeling, s.v. *τίκτω*. Note that *αὐτὸς* is in a much more emphatic position in *Odyssey* 20.202.

³⁴ An example of this kind of confusion may be found in the commentary on *Homeric Hymn* 28, which tells of the birth of Athena, in T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, E. E. Sikes, *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford 1936) 425: "The actual process of the birth is not described; and this, as Gemoll notes, may account for the omission of Hephaestus with his ax." Thus the essential fact is lost, namely that the Hymn does not give the version developed in Athens c. 560 B.C. And this essential fact is a good reason for

we have two concrete versions of the myth, the Hesiodic and the archaic: both of them, in their mythological style and their ideological implications, are utterly un-Homeric, and carry the unmistakable stigmata of their own particular period.³⁵ What particular form of the myth can we attribute to the Homeric Age? Mythological studies must either quit investigating such questions or else give concrete answers.

As a matter of fact the authorities are vaguely aware that the known versions of the myth do not fit into the Homeric outlook: they say that Homer deliberately avoids explicit narration of the myth, because of his "rationalistic" attitude toward the gods.³⁶ The lesson contained in Calhoun's trenchant criticism of this kind of Homeric scholarship has not been learned. If we reflect on all the primitive stories which Homer did successfully weave into his fabric, or on the fact that Pheidias in the middle of the fifth century B.C. was not so "rationalistic," we will have to dismiss this explanation of why Homer fails to give us the myth.³⁷

The real reason why the known versions of the myth are incompatible with the Homeric outlook is that it seems impossible to attribute to Homer either that ambivalent tension between Zeus and Athena which is the crux of the Hesiodic myth, or that enigmatic independence of Athena vis-à-vis Zeus which is the crux of the archaic myth. We may say, paradoxically, that the Homeric Athena is too close to the Homeric Zeus to be born in the manner imagined at a later period. Homer feels no contradiction between the royal Metis and the technical Metis: Athena's favorite Odysseus is a marvellous embodiment of both.³⁸ And the sense of historical change and cultural renewal which broods in the background of the known versions is quite alien to the Homeric outlook. If, therefore, Homer had given us a myth of Athena's birth from the head of

rejecting Wilamowitz' judgment on the Hymn, *Glaube* 2.164: "ohne Zweifel für die Panathenäen gedichtet."

³⁵ There are good reasons for holding that the archaic form cannot be older than the archaic age, cf. above note 18.

³⁶ So Wilamowitz, *Glaube* 1.332 note; Otto 52; Nilsson 1.411.

³⁷ G. M. Calhoun, "The Higher Criticism on Olympus," *AJP* 58 (1937) 257-274, and "Homer's Gods — Myth and Märchen," *AJP* 60 (1939) 1-28.

³⁸ Note especially *Odyssey* 13.291-299, where Athena complaisantly congratulates Odysseus and herself for *μητις, κέρδεα, μῖθοι κλόπιοι, δόλοι*. This ethic is incompatible with Hesiod's: note his attitude to fraud in *Works and Days* 193-194, 320-324, 352, 359. The Homeric passage would be for Hesiod one of those "many false, true-seeming things" which the Muses tell (*Theogony* 27).

Zeus, it would probably have been what the standard interpretations mistakenly say the later versions are, the symbol of her peculiarly close relation to her father. Homer could easily have done this: but then why did he not do it?

Another tacit assumption which disposes the authorities to believe that the myth or at least the Platonic idea of the myth is of indefinite antiquity and therefore known to Homer is a prejudice against attributing mythological inventions to Hesiod. But we are now beginning to appreciate Hesiod's *Theogony* as a work of creative mythopoeic imagination, and to see how myths were freely reshaped to fit into its structure.³⁹ The actual fact is that the *Theogony* attributes peculiar births to three of the Olympians — Athena born from the head of Zeus; Aphrodite born from the sexual organ of Uranus; Hephaestus born from Hera without sexual union — while the *Iliad* explicitly attributes different and normal births to two of these, Aphrodite and Hephaestus. It is therefore reasonable to infer, as Aristarchus did, that the peculiar birth of Athena is one of a set of mythological innovations made by Hesiod as he developed the complicated structure of the *Theogony*. This inference is strengthened by the interrelation in the structure of the *Theogony* of the three peculiar births: Hera is motivated by jealousy at the birth of Athena, and Hesiod has intended some contrast between the birth of Aphrodite, the feminine female, from the sexual organ at the beginning of the *Theogony* and the birth of Athena, the *mascula virgo*, from the head at the end.⁴⁰

Hesiod, of course, did not invent the myth out of whole cloth. As Aristarchus observed, the passage in *Iliad* 5.875–880, discussed above, formed a good springboard; his own myth of Aphrodite, and also of Cronus swallowing and regurgitating his children, provided analogies; Oriental theogonic literature, with which Hesiod was somehow acquainted, shows further parallels;⁴¹ miraculous eccentric births are a stock motif in folk tales;⁴² the epithet

³⁹ The chapter on the *Theogony* in Solmsen 3–75 is in this respect a really valuable contribution. The old attitude that “the *Theogony*, as it now stands, is certainly a patchwork” (Cook 3.745 note) is certainly out of date.

⁴⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony* 188–206, 886–900, 924–929; *Iliad* 3.374, 20.105, 5.370–371, 1.572–579. Aristarchus *apud* schol. *Iliad* 5.875–80; cf. Wilamowitz, *Glaube* 1.332 note.

⁴¹ Cf. H. G. Güterbock, “The Hittite Version of the Hurrian Kumarbi Myths: Oriental Forerunners of Hesiod,” *AJA* 52 (1948) 123–134; J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton 1950) 120–124.

⁴² Cook 3.95 note, 737–738 note; S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington 1932–1936) 5.308–314 (Types T540–565).

Tritogeneia may well indicate the existence of an old tradition of the miraculous birth of Athena, like Aphrodite, from the sea.⁴³ Whether there were stories of Athena's birth from the head of Zeus before Hesiod is a relatively unimportant question. Hesiod was the first who had the mythopoeic vision to grasp the myth in a form which gave it significance in Greek culture, and also the artistic skill to give his vision currency.

⁴³ Cf. Elderkin, "Studies in Early Athenian Cult" (above note 31) 106–110; also his "Cults of the Erechtheum" (above note 19) 113–124.