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ZEUS' LIGHTNING IN EARLY GREEK MYTH
AND IN KLEANTHES' HYMN*

More than hundred years ago, the French archaeologist Paul Foucart discovered in Mantinea — that famous city in the heart of the Peloponnesus — a heavy stone with a perfectly readable inscription ΔΙΟΣ ΚΕΡΑΥΝΟ. This stone inspired Hermann Usener to write an enthusiastic article.¹ He was enthusiastic because he was convinced that now he had found proof of his fundamental intuition that originally Greeks and Romans worshipped what he called *Augenblicksgötter*. This was, according to him, what had happened in Mantinea. During a heavy thunderstorm, lightning had struck a stone (a stone which may have had traces of iron in it, who knows?). The local people who had witnessed this event, inscribed these letters on the stone, as they believed that from now onwards the stone was a sacred object, it belonged “to Zeus, the Lightning”. Elsewhere similar objects have been found with the inscription ΔΙΟΣ ΚΑΤΑΒΑΤΕΩ, “of Zeus, the one who came down (here)”,² and Pausanias (III, 22,1) tells us that in the South of the Peloponnesus, at Gythion, people showed him a stone as the stone ΔΙΟΣ ΚΑΠΠΩΤΑ “of Zeus, the one who fell down (here)” (from καταπίπτω).

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¹ In *Rheinisches Museum* 60 (1905), pp. 1-30 = *Kleine Schriften*, vol. IV, Leipzig–Berlin, 1913, pp. 471-498.

² Cfr. the expression καταβάρτης κεραυνός ἐκπνέων φλόγα in Aesch. *Prom.* 359.

Usener presents evidence that on several locations, especially where Macedonian and Seleucid dynasties were in power, a separate divinity Keraunos was worshipped. Coins of some Seleucid kings do indeed show a thunderbolt lying on a tripod or a chair, as an object of cult. But this evidence dates of course from the Hellenistic era. It might be the case that in prehistoric times Greeks worshipped the lightning as a separate divine power, but it will never be possible to prove it, however much Usener would like to. The textual and archaeological evidence from the archaic and classical periods makes it abundantly clear that the Greeks always took lightning to be Zeus' weapon. Nobody will blame me if I quote here a sentence, written by Martin Nilsson: "Zeus war für Homer und die Griechen der geschichtlichen Zeit der Wettergott, und zwar besonders der Gewittergott, weil der aufleuchtende Blitz und der krachende Donner die bei weitem eindruckvollsten der atmosphärischen Erscheinungen sind; dem Blitz verdankt Zeus seine Macht und Größe und seine überragende Stellung in der Götterwelt."³

It is common knowledge that Zeus used his thunderbolt whenever he had to fight against cosmic adversaries or when he wanted to punish human upstarts. It will be rewarding to see precisely how this is recorded in the Greek texts of the archaic period. For Zeus' battle against cosmic adversaries Hesiod's *Theogony* is our prime witness. The poet tells us that the Cyclopes had made this weapon — actually, a composite weapon, its three components were βροντή, κεραυνός and στεροπή.⁴ Martin West⁵ gives a pithy explanation of these three words: "βροντή is what you hear, στεροπή is what you see, and κεραυνός is what hits you." The *Theogony* contains two cosmic battle-scenes, the Titanomachia (vv. 617-719) and Zeus' fight against Typhoeus (vv. 820-868). In the Titanomachia, a battle which had gone on undecided for ten years, victory for Zeus and his generation of the younger gods came only at the end, when Zeus

πᾶσαν / φαίνε βίην· ἄμυδις δ' ἄρ' ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ ἤδ' ἀπ' Ὀλύμπου
 690 ἄστραπτων ἔστειχε συναχθόν, οἳ δὲ κεραυνοὶ
 ἔκταρ ἅμα βροντῆι τε καὶ ἀστεροπῆι ποτέοντο
 χειρὸς ἀπὸ στιβαρῆς, ἱερὴν φλόγα εἰλυφώντες κτλ.

³ M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. I, München, 1955, p. 391.

⁴ Hesiod tells us that the Cyclopes made it for Zeus: δῶκαν δὲ βροντῆν ἤδ' αἰθιλόεντα κεραυνὸν / καὶ στεροπήν (*Th.* 504-5, cfr. also 139-141).

⁵ M.L. West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, edited with prolegomena and commentary, Oxford, 1966, p. 207 ad 140.

“... (when Zeus) showed his violent power to full extent. He strode down from heaven and from Olympos, hurling thunderbolts massively and unceasingly. They flew down from his powerful hand, accompanied by thunder and flashes of light, hitting their targets and spreading divine fire.” (*Th.* 689-692).

The ghastly result of this thunderstorm was that on earth the woods all caught fire, and that the sea and even Okeanos started to boil over. Impossible for the Titans to offer any further resistance; they were fettered in painful chains, and sent down deep into Tartaros (vv. 717-728).

The second battle is a grandiose repetition of the first. Typhoeus is a horrible monster with eyes which produce lethal fire, and a hundred snake-like heads which emit unbearable noises. The battle is so terrible that even Hades in the underworld is scared.

855 Ζεὺς δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν κόρυθ' ἐνέεικτο μένος, εἴλετο δ' ὄπλα,
βροντῆν τε στεροπῆν τε καὶ αἰθ' ἀλάδοντα κεραυνόν,
πλῆξεν ἀπ' Οὐλύμποιο ἐπάλμενος· ἀμφὶ δὲ πάσας
ἔπρεσε θεσπεσίας κεφαλὰς δεινοῖο πελῶρου [...]
φλόξ δὲ κεραυνωθέντος ἀπέσσυτο τοῖο ἄνακτος κτλ.

“But when Zeus had gathered his strength and had taken his weapons, the thunder, the flash and the smoky lightning, he jumped down on him [= Typhoeus] from Olympos and struck him, and he burnt away all the frightening heads of the dangerous monster. And from the corpse of the lord who had been struck by lightning a flame jumped up etc.” (vv. 853-856, 859).

— Typhoeus, too, was thrown down deep into Tartaros (868).

Hesiod is also our witness that Zeus used the thunderbolt to exterminate human upstarts. There was Salmoneus, king of Elis, who wanted to compete with Zeus by driving his chariot over a road paved with bronze, thus raising a thundering sound, and by throwing burning torches around, thus imitating Zeus' lightning. You may guess what happened, but what did happen is more gruesome than you had guessed:

15 βῆ δὲ κατ' Οὐλύμποιο χολούμενος, αἴψα δ' ἔκανεν
λαοὺς Σαλμωνῆος ἀτασθάλου, οἳ τάχ' ἔμελλον
πέισεσθ' ἔργ' ἀίδηλα δι' ὑβριστῆν βασιλῆα·
τοὺς δ' ἔβαλεν βροντῆι τε καὶ αἰθ' ἀλάδοντι κεραυνῶι.
ὣς λαοὺς ἀπετίναε δι' ὑπερβασίην βασιλῆος.

“Zeus came down from Olympos, furious with anger, and without delay he arrived at the country of the people of foolish Salmoneus. It took only a few minutes be-

fore they were exterminated because of their insolent king. For Zeus hit them with his thunder and smoky lightning. Thus he punished the entire population because of the trespass of their king” (fr. 30 Merkelbach-West).⁶

Hesiod informs us about yet another famous mythical person who exceeded the limits of mortality. Apollo’s son Asklepios had learnt various medical skills from old Cheiron, the wise Centaur who lived on mount Pelion. Instead of being content with his successes in healing people who were suffering from diseases or wounds, Asklepios went so far as to raise a man from the dead. Zeus reacted with his lightning:

πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε
χῶσατ’, ἀπ’ Οὐλύμπου δὲ βαλὼν ψολόεντι κεραινωῖ
ἔκτανε Λητοίδην, Φοίβωι σὺν θυμὸν ὀρίνων.

“The father of men and gods became furious, and from Olympos he struck Leto’s grandson with his lurid lightning, and Phoibos was greatly annoyed” (fr. 51 Merkelbach-West).

In his *Pythian* 3, 47-58 Pindar narrates the same event, adding the detail that Zeus killed ‘doctor and patient’, both of them. I quote only the last three lines of that passage:

[...] χερσὶ δ’ ἄρα Κρονίων
ῥίψαις δι’ ἀμφοῖν ἀμπνοᾶν στέρνων κάθειλεν
ὠκέως, αἴθρων δὲ κεραινός ἐνέσκιμψεν μόρον.

“But then, with a cast from his hands, Kronos’ son took the breath from both men’s breasts in an instant: the flash of lightning hurled down doom.”

With this last passage, quoted from Pindar, we have moved to the first half of the fifth century B.C. I avail myself of the opportunity to refer to another impressive text from this period, a text which is in perfect harmony with the Hesiodic passages quoted just now. It is Aeschylus’ *Prometheus*. Prometheus, who had chosen to take sides with Zeus against his fellow-Titans (vv. 199-221), is now threatened with annihilation by Zeus because he has given fire to mankind and taught them a variety of skills without which they would never have been able to survive in any decent way (vv. 457-468, 478-506). At the end of the tragedy Prometheus challenges Zeus to destroy him:

⁶ Sophocles treated this same subject matter in a satyrplay, see R a d t, *TrGF* vol. 4, ## 537-541. In the few lines of this play which have been preserved by indirect tradition the expression κεραινία πέμφιξ occurs, which is generally taken to mean “a blast of lightning.”

πρὸς ταῦτ' ἐπ' ἐμοὶ ῥιπτέσθω μὲν
 πυρὸς ἀμφήκης βόστρυχος, αἰθ' ἤρ δ'
 ἐρεθιζέσθω βροντῆι σφακέλωι τ'
 ἀγρίων ἀνέμων κτλ.

“In face of this I defy Zeus to throw his two-forked flame; let the sky be shocked by crash of thunder and spasm of hurricanes ...” (vv. 1043-1046).

Zeus is not one to let this provocation go unanswered and in the very last lines of the play the hero describes in terrifying anapests what is happening to him:

καὶ μὴν ἔργωι κοῦκετι μύθωι
 χθῶν σεσάλευται,
 βρυχία δ' ἠχὼ παραμυκᾶται
 βροντῆς, ἔλικες δ' ἐκλάμπουσι
 στεροπῆς ζάπυροι, στρόμβοι δὲ κόνιν
 εἰλίσσουσι κτλ.

“And yes, actually now, not just verbally, earthquakes make themselves felt, the deep roar of thunder is bellowing and the fiery flashes of lightning dazzle the eye, dust is whirling around ...” (vv. 1080-1085).

This passage, and the entire tragedy, prove that Aeschylus' imagination is still working on the lines drawn by Hesiod: Zeus uses his cosmic weapon to punish and annihilate his cosmic adversaries — so far as possible, for Prometheus is immortal as we know.

You will allow me to return from the classical to the archaic period, for I have not yet adduced any evidence about the lightning from Homer. There is a good reason for that: in Homer such scenes of cosmic battles with Zeus throwing thunderbolts are entirely absent. That may seem surprising, but when we give it more thought, it is less surprising. Homer is fascinated and terrified by lightning — aren't we all? — but his poetic focus is on the effect of lightning upon the common man: its brutal and sudden impact. For Homer is intent upon telling and showing *human drama*, and in his epic narrative there is no place for cosmic struggles between gods and Titans, and monsters do not interest him at all.⁷ In book XIV of the *Iliad* he catches the effect of lightning in four lines of a simile. Ajax has hit Hector's breast with an enormous boulder and Hector sinks to the ground. Then comes the simile:

⁷ *Il.* VIII, 479-481 contains an allusion to the Titanomachia, no more than that; as for monsters, the furious Skamander in *Il.* XXI, 234 ff. might marginally qualify as one (237: μεμυκῶς ἦύτε ταῦρος).

415 ὥς δ' ὄθ' ὑπὸ πληγῆς πατρὸς Διὸς ἐξερίπηι δρυῶς
 πρόρριζος, δεινὴ δὲ θεοῦ γίγνεται ὀδυρῆ
 ἐξ αὐτῆς· τῶν δ' οὐ τιν' ἔχει θράσος, ὅς κεν ἴδῃται
 ἐγγυὲς ἐὼν, χαλεπὸς δὲ Διὸς μέγαλοιο κεραυνός,
 ὧς ἔπεσ' Ἕκτορος ὄκα χαμαὶ μένος ἐν κονίησιν.

“As when an oak is uprooted by a stroke of father Zeus — it gives off an appalling reek of sulphur. All who happen to be near are frightened, for the thunderbolt of mighty Zeus is awful, — just so heroic Hector was struck down in the dust, all of a sudden.” (XIV, 414-419)

You see: it is the panic of the bystanders which Homer wants to convey.

In the *Odyssey* we see the same: Homer is keen on describing the effect of Zeus' lightning on simple, silly men. In book XII, the last of the four books of Odysseus' narrative of his adventures on the way home from Troy, Odysseus tells the Phaeacians that his comrades, having arrived at the island Thrinakia, feasted on the appetizing meat provided by the cows which belong to the sacred herd of Helios, although explicit warnings not to touch these animals had been given by Teiresias (XI, 106 ff.) and by Kirke (XII, 127 ff.). Helios complained to father Zeus, and punishment followed immediately: a terrible storm wrecks the ship, the mast falls down and strikes the helmsman on the head, smashing all the bones of his skull, and he plunges like a diver into the sea.

Ζεὺς ἄμυδις βρόντησε καὶ ἔμβαλε νηὶ κεραυνόν.
 ἦ δ' ἐλελίχθη πᾶσα Διὸς πληγεῖσα κεραυνῶι,
 ἐν δὲ θεοῦ πλῆτο· πέσον δ' ἐκ νηὸς ἐταῖροι.
 420 οἱ δὲ κορώνησιν ἴκελοι περὶ νῆα μέλαιναν
 κύμασιν ἐμφορέοντο, θεὸς δ' ἀποαίνυτο νόστον.

“Then, at one and the same moment, Zeus thundered and struck the ship by lightning. The whole ship reeled to the blow of his bolt and was filled with sulphur. My men were flung overboard and tossed round the black hull like sea-gulls on the waves. For them no homecoming: the god saw to that!” (XII, 417-421)

The loss of Odysseus' ship, central for the plot of the *Odyssey*, is narrated in XIV, 305-309 with identical words, and in shorter form in V, 131-132, in VII, 249-253 and finally in XXIII, 330-331.

Having gone over the evidence presented by these important texts of Homer, Hesiod, Pindar and Aeschylus, I want to pay attention to the *archaeological* evidence of the archaic and classical period. From the archaic

period there is a great number of small bronzes found in or around the sanctuary of Zeus in Olympia (some also found elsewhere); they are all of the type which is called Zeus Keraunios/Keraunobolos: a standing masculine figure, presented as heroically (or should I say: divinely?) naked, and holding a thunderbolt in his right hand.⁸ As there is no context, no scene in which other figures are present, be they divine or human, it is impossible to construct that context. These bronzes simply express the fear felt by the Greeks for this supreme god who wields this formidable weapon.

Recently a scholar with the surprising name of Arafat (evidently not the recently deceased Palestinian leader) published a book *Classical Zeus* which covers the evidence of the Classical period and concentrates on vase-painting.⁹ This has the advantage that scenes are depicted. In one instance we see Zeus brandishing his thunderbolt at a Giant.¹⁰ In another, Zeus is pictorially identified in two ways: there is an eagle sitting on his extended left arm, while his right arm has been drawn back, ready to throw the lightning; here the giant is identified as Porphyryon.¹¹ There is a Chalkidian black-figure hydria with a representation of Zeus brandishing his thunderbolt at Typhon/Typhoeus, a monster with a bearded human head, two wings at his shoulders, and instead of a pair of legs an enormous twisted body of a snake.¹² There is also a vase containing the following scene: Salmoneus holding an imitation thunderbolt in one hand and a sword in the other, leaning backwards, bracing himself for Zeus' punishment.¹³ — As far as the lightning itself is concerned, the painters who are responsible for these scenes on pots of the archaic and classical period present it both as a projectile and as a sort of double flower, with three or sometimes even five shoots or leaves above and under the grip of Zeus' hand.¹⁴

⁸ *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)*, Artemis, 1981, s.v. *Zeus*, ## 29a-e, 34, 37, 62d, 67, 84, 95, 105, 111, 112, 196a.

⁹ K.W. Arafat, *Classical Zeus, a study in art and literature*, Oxford, 1990. This book is a corrected and polished version of a doctoral dissertation supervised by the eminent archaeologist John Boardman.

¹⁰ Arafat, Plate 1 a+b = Louvre G 204. Nolan amphora. ARV 202.90. Berlin Painter.

¹¹ Arafat, Plate 3 a = Paris, Petit Palais 868. Bell-krater. ARV 589. Altamura Painter.

¹² Not in Arafat, but accessible in: J. Boardman [and others] (edd.), *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Greece*, London, 1967, Plate XIII on p. 175 = München, Staatliche Antikensammlungen 596.

¹³ Arafat, Plate 38 a = Chicago 1889, 16. Column-krater. ARV 585.29.

¹⁴ This has been pointed out and discussed long ago by P. Jacobsthal, *Der Blitz in der orientalischen und griechischen Kunst*, (Diss.), Berlin, 1906.

This brief survey of textual and archaeological evidence can lead to only one conclusion: for the Greeks Zeus' lightning was a lethal weapon which produced radical destruction. This is in line with the universal experience of mankind. Whenever and wherever lightning strikes, the result is catastrophic: men are killed on the spot, buildings are destroyed, trees are blackened and what is left of them, falls to the ground (as Homer describes in the simile of *Iliad* XIV, 414-419), even an entire forest can burn to the ground.

Before passing on to the Zeus-Hymn of the Stoic philosopher Kleanthes, there is a station on our road where we have to make a stop, a very important stop. In the first half of the fifth century B.C., at a time when Attic potters and painters were still producing their phantastic images of Zeus throwing his thunderbolt to destroy the power of giants and monsters and when Aeschylus was composing his *Prometheus*, there was a man in Ephesos called Herakleitos who thought, spoke and wrote about lightning-and-Zeus in an entirely different way. Around 480 B.C. he composed a book, probably a collection of oral apophthegmata, oracular utterances, but even so: a coherent and thoughtful explanation of the kosmos and of man in the kosmos. Many elements of this explanation were taken up and expanded by Zeno and Kleanthes, the founding fathers of the Stoa, two centuries later.¹⁵

I quote here five of Herakleitos' famous sayings which are relevant to the subject-matter of my paper:

- (1) τὰ δὲ πάντα οὐκίζει κεραυνός.

“It is the thunderbolt which steers the universe.” (DK 22 B 64)

- (2) κόσμον τόνδε τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ’ ἦν αἰεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται· πῦρ αἰέζων, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα.

“This universe, the same of all, no one of the gods or men made it. No, it always was and is and shall be: an everliving fire, kindling in measures and going out in measures.” (DK 22 B 30)

- (3) ... λέγει δὲ καὶ φρόνιμον εἶναι τὸ πῦρ καὶ τῆς διοικήσεως τῶν ὅλων αἵτιον.

“... he [Herakleitos] also says that this fire is intelligent, and the cause of the arrangement of the universe.” (DK 22 B 64)

¹⁵ On the relation between Herakleitos and the Stoa, see A. Long, ‘Heraclitus and Stoicism’, *ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ* 5-6 (1975), pp. 133-153.

(4) ἔν τὸ σοφὸν ἐπίστασθαι γνῶμην, ὅτι ἐκυβέρνησε πάντα διὰ πάντων.

“There is one wisdom: to know of the Intelligence which steers all things through all things.” (DK 22 B 41)

(5) ἔν τὸ σοφὸν μόνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα.

“One thing, the only true wise, does and does not consent to be called by the name of Zeus.” (DK 22 B 32)

In text (1) it might seem that we are back to Usener and his divinity Ke-raunos. But it is more probable that in this monumental utterance Herakleitos uses the old mythical image of Zeus ruling the universe with his thunderbolt to express a philosophical intuition, an intuition which we find expressed in sayings (2) and (3), viz. that Fire is the basic constituent of all things and determines their structure and behaviour; in short, that it has a directive capacity. Now Herakleitos uses two almost synonymous verbs to denote this directive capacity: *οἰακίζειν* in (1) and *κυβερνᾶν* in (4). This brings us to link saying (1) with (4). Here in (4) *γνῶμη* seems to be a synonym for Logos, the well-known central concept of Herakleitos' philosophy. If this interpretation is correct, then Fire and the Logos itself are to a large degree co-extensive. And when we take fragment (5) into account, then Fire and Logos are not only co-extensive between them, but are also aspects of the completely “Wise Thing, which does and does not consent to be called by the name of Zeus.” If we try to gather the impact of what Herakleitos is saying in these five utterances, especially in relation to the theme of my paper, the most surprising element is that in Herakleitos' philosophical ‘system’ (if we may call it a system), lightning has lost its negative, destructive aspect and has become a constructive and vital — even *ἀείζων*, everliving! — power, ruling the natural processes which make up our universe.

Of course it would be possible to say much more about Herakleitos. But it is right and proper to be brief about him, not only because otherwise this paper would exceed the length set for it, but also for another reason: Diogenes Laertius (IX, 7) says about Herakleitos: *ἢ τε βραχύτης καὶ τὸ βάρος τῆς ἐρμηνείας ἀσύγκριτον*, “the briefness and depth of his style is incomparable.”¹⁶

¹⁶ I refer those who want to pursue this matter further to a paper “Heraclitus' conception of fire”, contributed by W.J. Verdenius to *Kephalaion* (= Festschrift Cornelia de Vogel), edited by J. Mansfeld and L. de Rijk, Assen, 1975; it is found there on pp. 1-8. Just one quotation from it: “The universal tension beneath the surface of things, the hidden order of the world, is not a neutral abstraction but a positive power. It is not embodied in some indefinite matter (as Anaximander will have it) but in a concrete element fire. This may be equated to God” (p. 4).

We are now in a position to give full attention to one of the most impressive religious texts of Classical Antiquity: the hymn addressed to Zeus by the Stoic philosopher Kleantes. I shall first present the text of the hymn in so far as it is relevant for the theme of this paper:

Κύδιστ' ἀθανάτων, πολυώνυμε, παγκρατὲς αἰεὶ,
 Ζεῦ, φύσεως ἀρχηγέ, νόμου μέτα πάντα κυβερνῶν,
 χαῖρε· σὲ γὰρ πάντεσσι θέμις θνητοῖσι προσαυδᾶν,
 ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γενόμεσθα λόγου τίμημα λαχόντες
 5 μοῦνοι, ὅσα ζῶει τε καὶ ἔρπει θνήτ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν.
 τῷ σὲ καθυμνήσω καὶ σὸν κράτος αἰὲν αἰέσω.
 σοὶ γὰρ πᾶς ὅδε κόσμος ἐλισσόμενος περὶ γαῖαν
 πείθεται ἤι κεν ἄγῃς, καὶ ἐκὼν ὑπὸ σεῖο κρατεῖται·
 τοῖον ἔχεις ὑποεργὸν ἀνικητοῖς ἐνὶ χερσὶν
 10 ἀμφήκη πυρόεντα ἀειζώνοντα κεραιυρόν·
 τοῦ γὰρ ὑπὸ πληγῆς φύσεως πάντ' ἔργα <τελεῖται>·
 τῷ σὺ κατευθύνεις κοινὸν λόγον, ὃς διὰ πάντων
 φοιτᾷ μινύμενος μεγάλῳ μικροῖς τε φάεσσι,
 ὧι σὺ τόσος γεγαῶς ὕπατος βασιλεὺς διὰ πάντος.

3 πάντεσσι Scaliger πᾶσι F **4** γένομεσθα Meineke, Zuntz γένος εἰσὶ von Arnim γένος ἐσμὲν F λόγου Meineke σέθεν Zuntz ἤχου F τίμημα Wachsmuth μίμημα F **6** αἰέσω Ursinus αἰδῶ F **7** γὰρ Zuntz δὴ Scaliger δὲ F **8** σεῖο Ursinus σοῖο F **9** ἐνὶ Brunck ὑπὸ F **11** <τελεῖται> von Arnim **12** τῷ Hopkinson ὧι F κοινὸν λόγον Ursinus λόγον κοινὸν F **13** μεγάλῳ Diels μικροῖς τε Brunck μεγάλων μικροῖσι F **14** ὧι σὺ τόσος von Arnim ὡς τόσοςος F

Nota bene: F = Farnesinus, codex unicus huius hymni; Ursinus = editor princeps huius hymni in *Carmina novem etc.*, Antwerpen, 1568, p. 292.

“Most glorious of immortals, god of many names, almighty ever,
 Zeus, overlord of nature, steering the universe with your law,
 take pleasure (in this song). For all mortals are allowed to address you,
 as we take their origin from you, having received the privilege of *logos*,
 5 we alone of all living beings who move upon this earth.
 Therefore I shall perform this hymn and sing your power always.
 For this universe in its rotation around the earth follows you
 where you guide it, and most willingly it is being dominated by you.
 Such is the power of the servant you keep in your invincible hands:
 10 the lightning, pointed at two ends, flaming with fire, living for ever.
 For by its stroke every operation in nature is being fulfilled.
 It is by means of the lightning that you direct the common reason

which permeates the universe, mixing with sun and stars.
Because of all this you are so great, supreme king throughout.”

By a stroke of luck recently two first rate contributions to the interpretation of this hymn have been published, both books coming in 2005 from the same publishing company, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen in Germany. In the first place *Griechische Philosophische Hymnen*, by Günther Zuntz. Now this venerable scholar — when I met him in Cambridge during the winter of 1987 he was 85 years old, and he was proud of being the last living student of von Wilamowitz — died in 1992; but on his desk there was the virtually complete manuscript of a book which was to bear this title. Two of his younger friends, Hubert Cancik and Lutz Käppel, have edited the book with all possible care, and chapter II of this book is devoted to Kleantes' hymn; the following chapters deal with hymns by Proklos and Synesios. The other publication comes from a South-African scholar, Johan C. Thom. As the title of his book *Cleantes' Hymn to Zeus* makes clear, this book is from start to finish a discussion of the hymn we have only just now started to look at.

A first observation covers the entire hymn. On one hand we have here sincere Greek hymn-singing according to old traditions and in the traditional vocabulary,¹⁷ on the other a complex and coherent exposition of a deep philosophical conviction. Before coming to my final argument I want to make a few comments to individual passages in this text, as I have presented and translated it. Not all of these comments are directly related to the theme of my paper, but I simply cannot refrain from making these observations: Kleantes' text deserves to be taken very seriously.

Line 2: πάντα κυβερνῶν — This phrase sounds like a reference to Herakleitos in the first and fourth saying quoted by me.

Line 3: Someone will have been surprised by my translation of χαῖρε as “take pleasure in my song”. For this I refer to a paper by R. Wachter¹⁸ who argues convincingly that in hymnic poetry this χαῖρε is not a simple greeting or farewell, but: “eine Aufforderung an eine Gottheit, eine Votivopfergabe freudig anzunehmen, wobei auf die

¹⁷ For Greek hymnic tradition in general see W.D. Furley & J.M. Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, Tübingen, 2001. For the Cretan Zeus-hymn see vol. 1, pp. 68-77 and vol. 2, pp. 1-20; for a discussion of four Zeus-hymns in Aeschylus see vol. 1, pp. 279-290 and vol. 2, pp. 241-258.

¹⁸ R. Wachter, ‘Griechisch χαῖρε: Vorgeschichte eines Grußwortes’, *Museum Helveticum* 55 (1998), pp. 65-75.

Gabe selber mit einer grammatischen Komponente Bezug genommen werden kann.” (69)¹⁹

- Line 4: λόγου τίμημα — In his book Thom lists the 27 different readings of this line, as they have been proposed by an impressive host of scholars. My reasons for having preferred this particular emendation (actually a combination of Meineke’s λόγου and Wachsmuth’s τίμημα) are twofold: 1. the word λόγου is semantically and palaeographically close to ἤχου of the Farnesinus, and 2. τίμημα rings a bell which is perfectly answered at the end of the hymn where the poet says ὄφρ’ ἂν τιμῆθεντες ἀμειβώμεσθιά σε τιμῆι (36), “in order that we, having been privileged by you, can answer you with our privilege (i.e. our song of praise)”. I assume that in line 4 *logos* refers to the faculty of speech, “the privilege of *logos*”, but of course the Greek word is not by chance the same as the divine Logos which permeates the universe (lines 12-13).²⁰
- Line 7: ὁδε κόσμος ἐλίσσόμενος περὶ γαῖαν — Kleantes follows Aristotle in firmly believing that the sun revolves around the earth. At a conference held in Poland it is worth observing that in this same 3rd century B.C. in which Kleantes composed this hymn, another Greek intellectual, Aristarchos of Samos, gave good reasons for accepting a heliocentric view, thus being the precursor of the great Polish scholar Kopernik, who dutifully refers to his Greek predecessor in his *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1543).
- Line 10: πυρόεντα ἀείζωντα κεραυνόν — For the purpose of my paper these are of course the crucial words. They sound like a literal quotation from what I just presented as Herakleitos (2), πῦρ ἀείζων. For Kleantes lightning is not a momentaneous destructive meteorological event, but a continuous and constructive force in the life of the universe. This constructivity is evident in the next line:
- Line 11: τοῦ γὰρ ὑπὸ πληγῆς φύσεως πάντ’ ἔργα <τελεῖται>. — Also in the Homeric simile (*Il.* XIV, 414-417) which I quoted sometime

¹⁹ See also F u r l e y & B r e m e r, *Greek Hymns*, vol. 1, pp. 61 ff. and vol. 2, p. 5.

²⁰ The emendation accepted most generally is Pearson’s θεοῦ μίμημα, because of the attractive speculation that a Christian scholar may have noted ἡ Χοῦ (“or of Christ”) as a supralinear gloss above θεοῦ; then this gloss may have replaced θεοῦ.

ago, the phrase ὑπὸ πλῆγῆς πατρὸς Διὸς referred to the stroke of lightning.

Line 12: τῶι σὺ κατευθύνεις κοινὸν λόγον — I follow Thom (p. 84) in taking the instrumental dative τῶι to mean that Zeus uses the thunderbolt as a medium or vehicle to direct the universal *logos*; it carries the divine intelligence throughout matter.

Lines 12-13: ὃς διὰ πάντων φοιτᾷ — It is a central tenet of the Stoa that God / *logos* / soul permeates through everything; see von Arnim's *SVF* vol. I, ## 153, 155, 158-159, 161-162, 495, 533; vol. II, ## 946, 1021, 1027, 1029-1048.

Line 14: ᾧ σὺ τόσος γεγάως κτλ. — Zuntz (here following his teacher Wilamowitz) is struck by the lack of grammar and coherence of the text: this line 14 comes awkwardly after the preceding lines. He is sure that before line 14 one or two hexameters are missing. I think it is possible to read the text as found in Stobaeus. But then we have to ask ourselves: does ᾧ refer to the thunderbolt which was mentioned in line 10 and twice referred to by an anaphoric pronoun: τοῦ in 11 and τῶι in 12? Or does ᾧ refer to the *logos* which was in focus in lines 12 and 13? I follow Thom's suggestion (p. 91), viz. that we should take as antecedent of ᾧ *the preceding statements as a whole*. Zeus' cosmic activity by means of thunderbolt and *logos* is the cause (and manifestation) of his supreme greatness.

With these observations I have reached the end of the passage of the hymn which I have presented on my handout. The learned scholars who make up this audience know quite well that in the remainder of the hymn Kleanthes goes on to discuss the embarrassing problem of moral evil in this world, and ends by praying that Zeus may liberate mankind from its ignorance; but all this falls outside the scope of my paper. So I might round off my argument here, and conclude that Kleanthes, and with him the other Stoic teachers, have followed Herakleitos in adopting a surprisingly positive idea of the lightning as Zeus' beneficent instrument. But in connection with the function of lightning, and of fire in general, there is one problem left, and I have to make a detour in order to come to the point.

According to a point made 30 years ago by prof. Jerzy Danielewicz — an observation used by William Furley and myself in our *Greek Hymns* — in the singing of hymns two different channels of communication can be distinguished. One channel might be called the internal one: through it the

message runs from the singing person/chorus directly to the divinity; in the other channel, the external one, the poet conveys a message to his audience.²¹ If we apply this distinction to Kleantes' hymn, it has in the first place to be seen as a song of praise addressed to Zeus ending in a prayer; in the second place as a summary exposition of Stoic doctrine to the assembled audience. Scholars are indeed agreed that Kleantes' hymn functioned as one of the religious observances of the Stoic school; compare Aristotle's paian to Aretè which was sung in the Peripatos. Now the audience which piously attended the singing of this hymn will have been well-informed about an important dogma of the school, viz. that in a regular cosmic cycle this universe is destroyed by fire, the so-called ἐκπύρωσις.²² If we take this as what it *prima facie* seems to be, then in the philosophy of the Stoa the *destruction* of fire, and probably of the lightning, returns with a vengeance. The entire argument of my paper would crumble to pieces if for the Stoics lightning after all turns out to be a negative, catastrophic force!

From this difficult situation I am rescued by my countryman Jaap Mansfeld, a scholar who has worked all his life on the field of Ancient Philosophy, and who is much better acquainted with Stoic texts than me. Already in 1979 he wrote a paper with the title: "Providence and the Destruction of the Universe."²³ On the basis of an extensive study of the relevant Stoic fragments he comes to the conclusion that "the total conflagration of the ordered universe into one fiery condition means a return to what may be considered the by all means *best* possible state of affairs, in which god and nothing else is present in matter or substance." (p. 160). The result of the ἐκπύρωσις is not destruction but purification (*SVF* vol. II, 606: "nothing evil remains, everything becomes intelligent"),²⁴ the universe is changed into a state of purity which is called 'flame' (φλόξ) by Kleantes, and 'bright light' (αύγή) by Chrysippos (*SVF* vol. II, 611). The total conflagration, far from being a catastrophe, may be called a final *apotheosis* (so Mansfeld, p. 174; the italics are mine, J.M.B.). And this brings us back to our starting-point, ancient Greek myth. For in Greek mythopoetic imagination fire had the power to make immortal. In the *Homeric hymn to Demeter* (vv. 235-242)

²¹ J. Danielewicz, *Morfologia hymnu antycznego*, Poznań, 1976; cfr. also Furley & Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, vol. 1, p. 59.

²² *SVF* vol. I, 107, 109, 510-513; vol. II, 596-632.

²³ On pp. 129-189 in the volume *Studies in Hellenistic religions*, ed. M.J. Vermaseren, Leiden, 1979.

²⁴ Cfr. Herakleitos's phrase φρόνιμον εἶναι τὸ πῦρ B64 (text # 3 quoted above).

the goddess attempts to make the child Demophon immortal by placing him in the fire at night; Herakles' fiery death on Mount Oeta leads to his translation to Olympus; Semele, having been burnt to ash by Zeus' lightning, ends up on the same Olympus, side by side with her son: according to Hesiod (*Th.* 942) νῦν δ' ἀμφότεροι θεοί εἰσιν.²⁵

The upshot of our discussion is therefore that the positive function of fire in general and lightning in particular, as sketched by Herakleitos and elaborated by the Stoa, is not such a complete break with Greek mythological tradition as it initially seemed to be.

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²⁵ See W.D. Furley, *Studies in the use of fire in ancient Greek religion*, New York, 1981, pp. 238-239. The last chapter of this monograph, 'The influence of religion on Heraclitus' fire-doctrine' (pp. 236-258) is highly relevant to the issue discussed in my paper.

PIORUN ZEUSA WE WCZESNYM GRECKIM MICIE
I W HYMNIE KLEANTESA

Streszczenie

W okresie archaicznym kosmiczny fenomen pioruna był dla Greków nieomylnym znakiem niszczącej mocy Zeusa, używanej przezeń do eliminowania nieprzyjaznych sił we wszechświecie, a także pozbywania się tych spośród śmiertelników, którzy wazyli się przekroczyć granice swojej ludzkiej kondycji. Homer, Hezjod, Pindar i Ajschylos poświadczają, że takie było powszechne przekonanie im współczesnych. Potwierdza to również malarstwo wazowe. W III wieku przed Chr. w ramach stoicyzmu rozwinęło się nowe, pozytywne postrzeganie pioruna, stoicy mianowicie głosili, że piorun to narzędzie Zeusowej władzy we wszechświecie, ogień zaś jest podstawowym składnikiem wszechrzeczy i określa ich strukturę oraz zachowanie. Autor artykułu dowodzi, że (1) owa stoicka doktryna była obecna już u presokratycznego filozofa Heraklita oraz że (2) najwymowniejszy swój wyraz znajduje w hymnie do Zeusa autorstwa stoickiego filozofa Kleantesa.

Przełożył Stanisław Sarek

Słowa kluczowe: piorun, grom, ogień, logos.

Key words: lightning, thunderbolt, fire, logos.