

Zeitschrift: Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

Band: 51 (1994)

Heft: 3

Artikel: Prometheus orientalized

Autor: West, Stephanie

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-39787>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 20.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Prometheus Orientalized

By Stephanie West, Oxford

“Kein Volk ist gross geworden ohne engste Verbindung
mit dem Treiben seiner Nachbarn, auch das griechische nicht”

(W. Aly)

Greek indebtedness to the older civilizations of the Near East is no longer regarded with the wariness which long prevailed, and we have seen a growing appreciation that the Hellenic world was influenced by its eastern neighbours not just in material culture but also in religion and mythology¹. It is now clear that there were very many conduits for such influence; we no longer need to regard as crucially important Hesiod's father's decision to relocate from Cyme to Boeotia. Our understanding of archaic Greek literature has benefited immensely from its study within a wider Levantine context. In this article I hope to show that the transformation of Hesiod's ambivalent petty trickster² into the founder of human civilization depicted in the *Prometheus Vincitus* did not originate in the fifth century but was already familiar when the play was first produced, and resulted from the assimilation of Prometheus to a major figure of the Mesopotamian pantheon, the crafty Enki/Ea³.

* My warmest thanks to Stephanie Dalley and Martin West for much advice and encouragement. I have also been helped by Sebastian Brock, Nan Dunbar, Detlev Fehling, Judith Mossman, Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, Peter Parsons, Andres Reyes, and Donald Russell, and profited from discussion of a version of this paper delivered at a meeting of the Oxford Philological Society in November 1992.

1 On the change from a determined anti-orientalism to a less isolationist approach see W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, Mass. 1992) 1–8; his own work during the last twenty years has gone far to overcome the scepticism of Hellenists who felt that too much weight had been attached to unimportant similarities. A series of articles published by Franz Dornseiff in the 1930s (collected in *Antike und alter Orient*, Leipzig 1959), emphasising the close connection between archaic Greece and Near Eastern cultural traditions, deserved more influence than they achieved in his lifetime; the intellectual independence, which gave much of his other work a maverick quality, here led him to insights of lasting value.

2 The Hesiodic Prometheus exemplifies very clearly the combination of slyness and stupidity characteristic of the Trickster; see further P. Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (London 1956).

3 Enki in Sumerian, Ea in Akkadian; the god of wisdom and the arts, patron of the various professions, lord of the potable ground and spring waters, and creator of man. Berossus

It is not an absolute novelty to link Prometheus with Enki/Ea. Forty years ago Jacqueline Duchemin noted interesting similarities, developing her ideas further in her study on Prometheus published in 1972⁴. But her book leaves the impression of a somewhat random assemblage of partial Near Eastern parallels, and has had little impact on either classicists or assyriologists⁵. Recently G. A. Caduff's very valuable monograph on Deukalion's flood and related stories⁶ drew attention to important points of resemblance, but the implications of his study for the *PV* deserve further exploration.

My argument does not (so far as I can see) depend on any controversial assumptions about the authorship of the *PV*; if, for the sake of brevity, I refer to the hero as "the Aeschylean Prometheus", this should be interpreted as shorthand, and not as allegiance to the traditional attribution. But since the question of authenticity at present dominates discussion, it may be distracting if I leave the reader to guess what view I hold. I believe that at least the theme of the play (and of the *Prometheus Solutus*) originated with Aeschylus, but that another was responsible for realising the poet's conception (which may have amounted to no more than ideas adumbrated in conversation) some 15 to 20 years after his death. It is an old idea that some of the play's peculiarities should be charged to Aeschylus' gifted eldest son, the tragedian Euphorion⁷, and as suspicions about the play's authenticity have hardened, the case for regarding him as its real author has come to look extremely strong⁸. According to the *Suda* (s.v. Εὐφορίων = *TGrF* 12 T 1) he won four victories with his father's plays⁹; but many have found it hard to believe that Aeschylus at his death left four practically complete tetralogies, and if we accept the figure it is a natural inference that a good deal of work would have been needed for post-humous production to be feasible¹⁰. Filial over-scrupulousness in the assign-

equates him with Kronos (*FGrHist* 680 F 9). "Häufiger als jeder andre Gott spielt Enki in den sumerischen und akkadischen Mythen eine Rolle." (*Reallex. d. Assyriologie*, Berlin/Leipzig 1938, s.v. Enki).

4 «Le mythe de Prométhée à travers les âges», *Bull. Ass. G. Budé* 3e s., 3 (1952) 39–72 (esp. 41 n. 11); *Prométhée: histoire du mythe de ses origines orientales à ses incarnations modernes* (Paris 1974) esp. 33–67; see also «Le Zeus d'Eschyle et ses sources proche-orientales», *RHR* 197 (1980) 27–44 (esp. 31–33, 42–44).

5 It is not included in the bibliography to Griffith's commentary, *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1983); nor does the recent study by S. N. Kramer/J. Maier, *Myths of Enki, the crafty god* (New York/Oxford 1989), which casts its net very widely in search of Enki's *Nachleben*, mention Prometheus or Duchemin's work.

6 *Antike Sintflutsagen*. Hypomnemata 82 (Göttingen 1986).

7 An unsatisfactory expedient in Wilamowitz's view, *Aischylos. Interpretationen* (Berlin 1914) 124.

8 See further M. L. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart 1990) 51–72.

9 Υἱὸς Αἰσχύλου τοῦ τραγικοῦ, Ἀθηναῖος, τραγικὸς καὶ αὐτός· ὃς καὶ τοῖς Αἰσχύλου τοῦ πατρὸς, οἷς μὴπω ἦν ἐπιδειξάμενος, τετράκις ἐνίκησεν. ἔγραψεν δὲ καὶ οἰκεῖα.

10 We should not assume that this common-sense consideration escaped contemporary Athenians. The rather surprising dearth of ancient references to the *PV* might be connected with a general understanding that it was not Aeschylus' work through and through.

ment of responsibility would have produced a situation as perplexing from our point of view as deliberate pseudepigraphy.

More relevant, and more awkward, is the question whether, when the *PV* opens, the audience should be supposed to have watched already that morning a play dealing with Prometheus' theft of fire; in other words, was the *PV* preceded by the *Prometheus Pyrphoros*? That it was not is strongly suggested by the amount of time devoted to the exposition of present circumstances and previous events, going far back in the past to the outbreak of the Olympian rising against the Titans (199ff.), a period earlier than any beginning to be envisaged for a play portraying the gift of fire to men. Moreover, the emphasis on the newness of Zeus' rule¹¹, characterized in the prologue through its agents, Kratos and Bia, would be strange if Zeus was already established as supreme ruler in a previous play. There are in any case strong arguments for supposing the *Prometheus Pyrphoros* to be simply Aeschylus' satyr-play *Prometheus* of 472, also known as *Prometheus Pyrkaeus*¹².

Against this some, finding a Prometheus dilogy hard to credit, have argued that there must have been a further play on a related theme, and, since it is hard to imagine what could have followed Prometheus' release without anticlimax, the desiderated play must be supposed to have come first. But we do not know enough to rule out a dilogy *a priori*. Even if it was unusual to combine a pair of related tragedies with a third play on an unconnected subject, if the Prometheus plays were among the tragedies which Euphorion successfully put on in his father's name after Aeschylus' death, some unconventionality would surely have been perfectly natural where the great tragedian's *Nachlass* (or alleged *Nachlass*) was concerned. Alternatively, we might argue that a shift in focus in the *Prometheus Solutus* from a single-minded concentration on Prometheus would have allowed the development of a connected, but different, subject; it is not hard to think of attractive scenarios¹³.

There is more force, at first sight, in the argument that the dramatist at times refers so succinctly to earlier events that an Athenian audience, for whom Hesiod's account of Prometheus might be supposed to hold a quasi-canonical status, would have been perplexed if they had not already enjoyed a fuller treatment of these matters in the course of the preceding play¹⁴. We have outstanding examples in Prometheus' allusions to Oceanus' complicity in his

11 35, 96, 149–151, 310, 389, 439, 942, 955, 960.

12 See further R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983) 188f.; A. L. Brown, *BICS* 37 (1990) 52.

13 I am attracted by the theory that Herakles' deification was to be the culmination of a final play, the reward for his services in the Gigantomachy, the last challenge to Zeus' rule, in which Herakles played a role as decisive as Prometheus' had been in the conflict with the Titans. But I suspect that the play intended to show all outstanding scores settled may not actually have been written.

14 See further M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie* (Göttingen 21954) 77f.

enterprise (330f.)¹⁵ and to Kronos' curse (910f.)¹⁶. However, we are not entitled to assume that whatever is not in Hesiod was the dramatist's own invention or that the audience would have dismissed from their minds any other treatment of this body of legend with which they were familiar¹⁷. I shall argue below that the dramatist assumed in his audience a general familiarity with the treatment of Zeus' rise to power offered in the Cyclic *Titanomachia*.

Certainly the long rhesis in which Prometheus offers his account of earlier events (199–241) deals very summarily with matters about which we should like to be told more. We now learn that Prometheus' theft of fire was not the first occasion on which the Titan had frustrated Zeus' policy for mankind. As he set his regime in order after the defeat of Kronos Zeus, Prometheus tells us, planned a final solution to the human problem:

βροτῶν δὲ τῶν ταλαιπώρων λόγον
οὐκ ἔσχεν οὐδέν', ἀλλ' αἰστώσας γένος
τὸ πᾶν ἔχρηζεν ἄλλο φιλῦσαι νέον.
καὶ τοῖσιν οὐδεὶς ἀντέβαινε πλὴν ἐμοῦ.
ἐγὼ δ' ἐτόλμησ'· ἐξελυσάμην βροτοὺς
τὸ μὴ διαρραισθέντας εἰς Ἄϊδου μολεῖν.
τῷ τοι τοιαῖσδε πημοναῖσι κάμπτομαι¹⁸.

To us this looks distractingly enigmatic. Why did Zeus form this plan? How did he intend to execute it? How and why did Prometheus secure our survival? This very cursory treatment of so important a matter raises questions which might have been expected to provoke the Chorus' curiosity. But they receive this information so phlegmatically that we must infer that it caused no such perplexity to the play's first audience. We, however, must work out the answers for ourselves.

It has often been suggested that this passage should be connected with Prometheus' part in ensuring Deukalion's survival from the Flood (and thus securing the continuance of the human race), as related by Apollodorus¹⁹:

15 Griffith's note ad loc. gives a good account of the difficulties; see further below n. 43.

16 A particularly tantalizing passage; it is difficult to imagine how this curse, of which we hear nowhere else, could fail of fulfilment, nor is it easy to find an example of a curse revoked. Since Zeus has not been dethroned, the problem must have been solved in the *PS*.

17 In view of the doubts surrounding the play's authorship we should not set too much weight on the principle of Aeschylean interpretation enunciated by Fraenkel on *Ag.* 59: "To presuppose, in the manner of Hellenistic narrative, that the reader is familiar with some earlier treatment of the subject is not his way."

18 Aesch. *PV* 231–237. On the textual problem in 235 see Griffith ad loc. G. O. Hutchinson's cj. ἐκ δ' ἐλυσάμην (*CR* 34, 1984, 2) is attractive.

19 Apollod. 1.7.2.1–4. – Thus, e.g., Schoemann (1844), Weil (1864), Thomson (1932); similarly Caduff, op. cit. (n. 6) 24, 101f., 131, 211. It is disconcerting to find some recent scholars uncertain about the reference (so R. Unterberger, *Der gefesselte Prometheus des Aischylos*, Tübingen 1968, 49; Griffith ad loc.).

Προμηθέως δὲ παῖς Δευκαλίων ἐγένετο. οὗτος βασιλεύων τῶν περὶ τὴν Φυῖαν τόπων γαμεῖ Πύρραν τὴν Ἐπιμηθέως καὶ Πανδώρας, ἣν ἔπλασαν θεοὶ πρώτην γυναῖκα. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀφανίσαι Ζεὺς τὸ χαλκοῦν ἠθέλησε γένος, ὑποθεμένου Προμηθέως Δευκαλίων τεκτηνόμενος λάρνακα καὶ τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἐνυέμενος εἰς ταύτην μετὰ Πύρρας εἰσέβη. Ζεὺς δὲ πολὺν ὑετὸν ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ χέας τὰ πλεῖστα μέρη τῆς Ἑλλάδος κατέκλυσεν, ὥστε διαφθαρῆναι πάντας ἀνθρώπους, ὀλίγων χωρὶς οἱ συνέφυγον εἰς τὰ πλησίον ὑψηλὰ ὄρη. τότε δὲ καὶ τὰ κατὰ Θεσσαλίαν ὄρη διέστη, καὶ τὰ ἐκτὸς Ἰσθμοῦ καὶ Πελοποννήσου συνεχύθη πάντα. Δευκαλίων δὲ ἐν τῇ λάρνακι διὰ τῆς ὑαλάσσης φερόμενος <ἐφ'> ἡμέρας ἐννέα καὶ νύκτας <τὰς> ἴσας τῷ Παρνασσῷ προσίσχει, κάκεϊ τῶν ὄμβρων παῦλαν λαβόντων ἐκβὰς ὑφ' αὐτοῦ Διὸς φουξίωι.

Prometheus' intervention was evidently a familiar part of the story for Epicharmus' audience, as is clear from the fragments of his *Prometheus and Pyrrha*²⁰, where we see Pyrrha expressing some anxiety that Prometheus is a confidence trickster bent on absconding with their property, thus anticipating the obstructive role of Mrs. Noah in mediaeval mystery plays²¹.

Epicharmus and Pindar (*Ol.* 9.49ff., a. 466) are the earliest witnesses to the myth of the great flood which Deukalion and Pyrrha alone survived. This importation from the east does not fit altogether comfortably a setting in Central Greece²², and it is uncertain when it was first attached to Deukalion; there is no justification for supposing that it was already connected with him in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*²³. But, at all events, the story travestied by

20 *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 25 (London 1959) 2427 F 1.27(?) (= CGF 85); see further Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, rev. T. B. L. Webster (Oxford 1962) 265–268. A λάρναξ (the word regularly used for Deukalion's vessel) is mentioned four times and its roofing discussed. F 51 would suit rather well the construction of this craft. Though Lobel believed it came from a different roll from F 1, Professor Parsons does not think that there is enough difference in the hands to require this, and observes that "it may be worth noting a more objective criterion: the line-spacing in the two fragments seems to be exactly the same". We might wonder whether Prometheus' attempted camouflage in Aristophanes (*Birds* 1494ff.) reflects his portrayal in Epicharmus.

21 This may be more than coincidence. Late mediaeval legends, preserved in English, Irish, Swedish, and Slavonic sources, present Noah's wife in league with the Devil to prevent the building of the ark; it has been argued that these legends embody a traditional story used and re-interpreted in a Gnostic myth related by Epiphanius (*Haer.* 26.1). See further B. A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis 1990) 84–94, R. Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London 1972) 136–145, R. Stichel, *Die Namen Noes, seines Bruders und seiner Frau* (Abh. Ak. Wiss. Göttingen 112, 1979) 84f.

22 Most obviously, the mountainous terrain makes a universal flood implausible. See further G. S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth 1974) 271–274.

23 Cf. M. L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford 1985) 55ff.: "The story that Deukalion and Pyrrha created a new race of men by throwing stones behind them appears as the sequel to the flood in Pindar and later, but does not presuppose it, any more than the stories of men being created from ants for Aiakos (F 205) or from serpents' teeth for Kadmos presuppose a prior cataclysm. The flood story would imply an earlier race of men before the heroes. According to the *Works and Days*, of course, there were three such races. But the

Epicharmus in the early fifth century should have been familiar enough to the *PV*'s first audience as a matter of general knowledge; there is no need to interpret Prometheus' words as an allusion to matter dealt with in a preceding play.

The close relationship of Deukalion's flood to Noah's was early noted²⁴. But for over a century it has been clear that we must go further east to gain a proper view of the Deluge narrative in *Genesis* (6.1ff.), which we now know to represent a monotheistic adaptation of Mesopotamian legend²⁵. This is best preserved in the eleventh tablet of the early seventh-century twelve-tablet text of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from Assurbanipal's palace library at Nineveh, and since its discovery this version has held the limelight, though incorporation in the narrative of Gilgamesh's exploits entailed some abridgement of the flood story at beginning and end, in order to focus on the process by which its survivor, Ut-napishtim, achieved immortality²⁶. As it is the better preserved, it will be convenient to consider this version before the earlier and fuller treatment offered in the text conventionally named after its hero, *Atrahasis*.

In *Gilgamesh* the Flood story is given as first-person narrative (XI.1ff.):

Ut-napishtim spoke to him, to Gilgamesh,
 'Let me reveal to you a closely guarded matter, Gilgamesh,
 And let me tell you the secret of the gods.
 Shuruppak is a city that you yourself know,
 Situated [on the bank of] the Euphrates.
 That city was already old when the gods within it
 Decided that the great gods should make a flood.

They bound themselves with an oath of secrecy, but Ea warned his protégé Ut-napishtim indirectly, through the susurrations of the reeds from which his hut was made.

Catalogue knows no such scheme. In F1 the heroes' world is described in terms similar to Hesiod's Golden Race, as if they were the first men. The poet seems either not to have known the flood story, or to have excluded it." Similarly Kirk (*JHS* 92, 1972, 79) sees an indication of fairly late importation in the story's poor integration in the total mythological context. Caduff (op. cit. [n. 6] 100, 131) traces to the Hesiodic *Catalogue* an epicism in Apollodorus' account ("in dessen Darstellung der Sage geht eine Formulierung eindeutig auf eine hexametrische Vorlage zurück, die nur die Kataloge sein kann") διὰ τῆς θαλάσσης φερόμενος <ἐφ'> ἡμέρας ἑννέα καὶ νύκτας <τὰς> ἴσας, cf. Od. 7.253, 9.82f., 10.28f., 12.447, 14.314; Hom. *Hy. Apoll.* 91ff., *Hy. Cer.* 47ff. The inference seems rather precarious.

24 Cf. Philo, *De praemiis et poenis* 23: τοῦτον Ἕλληνας μὲν Δευκαλίωνα, Χαλδαῖοι δὲ Νῶε ἐπονομάζουσιν, ἐφ' οὗ τὸν μέγαν κατακλυσμὸν συνέβη γενέσθαι. See further Caduff, op. cit. (n. 6) 31–35.

25 The divergences between the two narratives combined in *Gen.* 6–9 well illustrate the variety of mythic traditions circulating in the ancient Near East.

26 See further S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford 1989) 39–47; the geographical spread of tablets preserving parts of this text is wide, and versions in Hittite and Hurrian are attested. For the passages from *Gilgamesh* and *Atrahasis* quoted in this article I have used Dr. Dalley's translation.

“Dismantle your house, build a boat.
 Leave possessions, search out living things.
 Reject chattels and save lives!
 Put aboard the seed of all living things, into the boat.
 The boat that you are to build
 Shall have her dimensions in proportion,
 Her width and length shall be in harmony,
 Roof her like the Apsu.”²⁷

Ea’s communication is confined to what Ut-napishtim needs to know; no explanation is offered. Ut-napishtim anticipates questions from his fellow-citizens; he is told to say that Ellil, the chief of the gods, has rejected him, and that he must go down to the Apsu and stay with his master Ea. Energetically assisted by his fellow-citizens he builds an enormous vessel (XI ii), and loads it with silver, gold, “the seed of all living things”, all his kin, and “cattle from open country, wild beasts from open country, all kinds of craftsmen”. The storm lasts for seven days, and terrifies the gods themselves; now that mankind can no longer bring them offerings, hunger and thirst have reduced them to a pitiable condition (XI iii):

The gods cowered, like dogs crouched against an outside wall.
 Ishtar screamed like a woman giving birth ...
 The gods, humbled, sat there weeping.
 Their lips were closed and covered with scab²⁸.

Seven days after the rain ceased Ut-napishtim started to test how far the waters had receded, sending out, successively, a dove, a swallow, and a raven; the first two birds returned, but the raven “ate, preened(?), lifted its tail and did not turn round”²⁹. He then disembarked, unloaded his craft, and sacrificed (XI iii–iv)³⁰:

The gods smelt the pleasant fragrance,
 The gods like flies gathered over the sacrifice.

27 Apsu: the domain of fresh water below the earth, the source of springs; Ea’s home.

28 Ut-napishtim may be thought improbably well informed about events in heaven; there has obviously been some carelessness in converting a third-person narrative to the first person.

29 In *Genesis* (8.6–12) Noah sends out a raven, followed by a dove, which twice returns, the second time with “an olive leaf pluckt off; so Noah knew that the waters were abated off the earth”; the third time it “returned not again unto him any more”. The experimental raven looks as if it belongs to a different version from the dove. In the account of the Deluge given in the *Sibylline Oracles* (1.242–256) Noah sends out two doves followed by a μελανόπτερον ὄρνις (presumably a raven). According to Plutarch (*De soll. anim.* 13, 968f) Deukalion performed a similar test, with a dove.

30 Again, like Noah (*Gen.* 8.20) and Deukalion (Apollod. 1.7.2, quoted above, p. 132f.). Sacrifice re-establishes normal relations.

When Ellil arrived and saw the boat he realised that one of the great gods must have betrayed the plan, and was furious. Ninurta

said to the warrior Ellil,
 “Who other than Ea would have done such a thing?
 For Ea can do everything!”

Ea protests against the arbitrary injustice of wholesale destruction³¹, incidentally revealing that the decision to send the flood was a reaction to human wickedness:

“You are the sage of the gods, warrior,
 So how, O how, could you fail to consult, and impose the flood?
 Punish the sinner for his sin, punish the criminal for his crime,
 But ease off, let work not cease; be patient ...
 I did not disclose the secret of the great gods,
 I just showed Atrahasis³² a dream, and thus he heard the secret
 of the gods.”
 Now the advice (that prevailed) was his advice.

The story ends happily, with Ellil’s gift of immortality to Ut-napishtim and his wife, who are taken to “dwell far off, at the mouth of the rivers”.

On internal evidence it was obvious that adaptation to its context in *Gilgamesh* had entailed some abridgement of the flood story; the antecedents and consequences of the Deluge are related more fully in *Atrahasis*, from which we learn that this was in fact the third (and last) divine attempt to extirpate the human race³³. The principal text of this strange early history of mankind was written (i.e. presumably compiled and arranged) by the scribe Nur-Aya under Ammi-šaduqa, king of Babylon from 1702 to 1682³⁴; but several exemplars were available in Assurbanipal’s library, and one tablet was found at Ras Shamra in Ugarit.

31 Cf. the divine reassurances of *Genesis* (8.21f., 9.11–17) that there will be no repetition of the Deluge, implying an acknowledgment that it was too drastic a measure.

32 Atrahasis, “extra wise”, here simply an epithet of Ut-napishtim. (It has been suggested that Prometheus is a Greek translation of Atrahasis, see Dalley, *op. cit.* [n. 26] 12f., Duchemin, *Prométhée* 38f., but this guess does not seem to me very helpful.) We did not hear anything about a dream when Ut-napishtim related Ea’s warning, but presumably we are meant to infer that Ea alerted him in a dream to attend to the message to be conveyed via the wall of his hut.

33 For *Atrahasis* see Dalley, *op. cit.* (n. 26) 1ff.; Burkert’s discussion (*op. cit.* [n. 1] 88–91, 100–106) is very valuable.

34 The careful colophon giving this information offers a striking and instructive contrast to the haphazard practices characteristic of Greek book production. But some elements of the Babylonian colophon passed to the Greek world via Aramaic practice; see further C. Wendel, *Die griechisch-römische Buchbeschreibung verglichen mit der des vorderen Orients* (Halle 1949) 1–12, H. Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone*, Kevelaer 1968.

The opening takes us back before man's creation, to "the paradoxical primordial situation"³⁵:

When the gods instead of man
 Did the work, bore the loads,
 The gods' load was too great,
 The work too hard, the trouble too much,
 The great Anunnaki made the Igigi
 Carry the workload sevenfold ...
 The gods had to dig out canals,
 Had to clear channels, the lifelines of the land ...
 They were counting the years of loads.
 For 3,600 years they bore the excess,
 Hard work, night and day.

Eventually they down tools, and in an atmosphere of widespread agricultural unrest Ellil hears their protest (I iii):

"Every single one of us gods declared war!
 We have put [a stop] to the digging.
 The load is excessive, it is killing us!
 Our work is too hard, the trouble too much!
 So every single one of us gods
 Has agreed to complain to Ellil."

Ea is sympathetic (I iv); he proposes that Belet-ili the womb-goddess should create a man:

"Let man bear the load of the gods!"

The womb-goddess is prepared to undertake this task in collaboration with Ea, and the first human-beings (seven males and seven females) are created from clay mingled with the flesh and blood of a slain god³⁶. Men must be made sufficiently like the rebellious gods to perform the latter's duties, but sufficiently different to be discouraged from claiming equal privileges³⁷. It is absolutely clear that man's place in the kosmos is characterized by work, and it is his task to provide for the gods (who come to depend on human offerings). The new labour-force (I vii)

35 Burkert, *op. cit.* (n. 1) 88.

36 Similarly *Enuma Elish (The Epic of Creation)* VI (Dalley, *op. cit.* [n. 26] 260f.). Mesopotamian gods, unlike Greek, can be killed by violence, though not subject to natural death.

37 Cf. J. Bottéro/S. N. Kramer, *Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme: mythologie mésopotamienne* (Paris 1989) 580f.

Made new picks and spades,
 Made big canals
 To feed people and sustain the gods.

(gap of about 13 lines)

600 years, less than 600, passed,
 And the country became too wide, the people too numerous.
 The country was as noisy as a bellowing bull.
 The God grew restless at their racket,
 Ellil had to listen to their noise.
 He addressed the great gods,
 "The noise of mankind has become too much,
 I am losing sleep over their racket."³⁸

This introduces the first of three attempts of increasing seriousness to annihilate men, first by fever, then by famine, and lastly (and almost successfully) by flood. But Ea gives clever advice to his protégé Atrahasis³⁹ (evidently a figure of some authority), so that by playing the gods off against one another the human species is able to survive. It is simplest the first time. A new temple is built for Namtara the plague god, and special offerings are brought to him alone; the god, naturally influenced by such flattery, ends the plague. Next time it is harder. At first, when Ellil bans rain, Adad the storm god can be played off similarly; he sends abundant dew, so that the crops grow plentifully. But when Ellil calls the gods to order and a closer watch is kept, there is desperate starvation (II v):

When the sixth year arrived
 They served up a daughter for a meal,
 Served up a son for food ...
 Only one or two households were left.

Again, Ea managed to suggest to Atrahasis a counter-measure without technically violating his oath, though it meant trouble with his fellow-gods. Having twice been frustrated in his genocidal scheme Ellil resolved to send the flood, and the story proceeds on the lines familiar from *Gilgamesh*. We are not told what happened to Ea's protégé once his sacrifice had satisfied the gods' hunger. Instead, we hear about the divine council, at which Ea, after defending his defiance of the gods' decision, proposes measures for population control,

38 Similarly, near the beginning of *Enuma Elish* (Dalley, op. cit. [n. 26] 233f.) the rowdiness of the younger gods leads Apsu to plan their destruction; but his scheme is frustrated by Ea, who in due course is responsible for the triumph of Marduk.

39 The special relationship between clever god and clever man may remind us of that between Athena and Odysseus (or between Hermes and Autolycus, *Od.* 19.395–398).

including perinatal mortality and the establishment of three groups of women attached to temples and debarred from child-bearing⁴⁰.

The parallel between Ea's role and that of Prometheus in saving the human race from extinction by surreptitiously warning a protégé thus seems undeniable⁴¹. If Prometheus' own reference to his intervention (*PV* 234ff.) suggests a bolder move than stealthy advice⁴², it is tempting to see him championing human interests in a divine council, as Ea does, when Zeus observes that his plan has been frustrated and has to be deterred from drastic action against the vulnerable survivors⁴³. Zeus' agents dub Prometheus σοφιστής (*PV* 62,944), a comment perhaps on the skill in argument by which he had once persuaded the Olympians that moderate φιλανθρωπία need entail no betrayal of divine interests and that the extirpation of mankind might have disadvantages.

Plato's Aristophanes (*Symp.* 190c) indicates that for Greek gods as for Mesopotamian the cessation of sacrifice would be seen as the most serious of such disadvantages, though its honorific aspect is clearly regarded as far more important than its nutritional value; Ovid's Olympians (*Met.* 1.246–249) take a

40 W. G. Lambert, «The Theology of Death. Death in Mesopotamia», in: B. Alster (ed.), *Papers from the Twenty-sixth Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Mesopotamia*, 8 (Copenhagen 1980) 53–66, argues that Ea's proposals also included the introduction of natural death by aging. (A reduction of the human lifespan to 120 years immediately precedes the flood in *Genesis* 6.3, perhaps implying a similar association of ideas.)

41 Cf. Caduff, op. cit. (n. 6) 131f., 215f., 280.

42 If the flood-hero made no provision for preserving more than his immediate family, it would be difficult to prove that he had not acted on his own initiative (as in Ovid, *Met.* 1.313ff.); if Prometheus' instructions to Deukalion did not go beyond what is implied in Apollodorus (see above, p. 132f.), his intervention would not have entailed too much risk to himself. The Mesopotamian narratives involve the construction of immense vessels designed to accommodate “all the seed of living things” (cf. Lucian's account of the flood, *Syr. D.* 12), in themselves incontrovertible evidence that their builders had reliable advance warning of the coming cataclysm.

43 Cf. A. Kleingünther, *ΠΡΩΤΟΣ ΕΥΡΕΤΗΣ* (Leipzig 1933) 77 n. 20. The apparent inconsistency between Prometheus' claim to have stood alone in opposing Zeus' plan (234) and his tribute to Oceanus' support (330f.) may be explained by reference to different stages in the process which insured mankind's continuance. During the actual flood the addition of the ground-water controlled by Oceanus to abnormally heavy precipitation would have stacked the odds even more severely against the survival of Deukalion (his grandson). (In the Mesopotamian flood stories all the water comes from above, the ground-water being Ea's province; by contrast, in *Genesis* 7.11 “the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened”; cf. Lucian, *Syr. D.* 12 αὐτίκα ἡ γῆ πολλὸν ὕδωρ ἐκδιδοῖ). At 330f. Prometheus pays tribute to his father-in-law's non-co-operation in Zeus' anti-human policy; his vehement opposition to Oceanus' wish to intercede on his behalf should surely be taken as stemming from a realization that Oceanus' impunity depends on Zeus' assuming that his earlier inactivity was unconnected with Prometheus' scheme, simply a matter of sluggishness or remoteness from the centre of government. Oceanus had no place on Olympus (Homer, *Il.* 20.7, finds his absence from divine councils entirely natural), and when the question of mankind's survival came up for discussion Prometheus could not have expected his father-in-law to attend to second his defence; Oceanus had done all that he could be required to do as an accomplice.

similar view⁴⁴. But this is not the limit of human usefulness; the range of men's services is well set out by Lucian's Prometheus, in defending his creation (*Prom.* 14): ὅτι δὲ καὶ χρήσιμα ταῦτα γεγένηται τοῖς θεοῖς, οὕτως ἂν μάθοις, εἰ ἐπιβλέψειας ἅπασαν τὴν γῆν οὐκέτ' αὐχμηρὰν καὶ ἀκαλλῇ οὔσαν, ἀλλὰ πόλεσι καὶ γεωργίαις καὶ φυτοῖς ἡμέροις διακεκοσμημένην καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν πλεομένην καὶ τὰς νήσους κατοικουμένας, ἀπανταχοῦ δὲ βωμοὺς καὶ θυσίας καὶ ναοὺς καὶ πανηγύρεις.

As in *Atrahasis* mankind is here presented as a labour-force created to serve the gods⁴⁵. We might wonder whether the Syrian satirist's Prometheus here revives an argument which had once deterred Zeus from annihilating Deukalion and Pyrrha: were Zeus to extirpate mankind in order to engender a different race (233), there would be an uncomfortable interval before the new creation achieved a similar level of competence. Indeed, if we accept the view of human development offered in the *PV* (442ff.), without Prometheus' assistance a new race would not be able to rise above a condition of primitive savagery.

We have, in fact, a further significant similarity between Ea and the Aeschylean Prometheus, in that both are credited with almost exclusive responsibility for mankind's cultural advance. Here we see a fundamental difference from the Hesiodic trickster, as the Titan surveys the various aspects of civilization which men owe to him, concluding with justified pride (506) πᾶσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως.

Many discussions obscure the peculiarities of this passage by stressing its apparent affinities with other fifth-century treatments of man's technical and intellectual advance. E. R. Dodds well emphasised its pre-sophistic features and archaic anthropology: "There is no attempt to mark the stages of evolution, no recognition of the decisive influence of the food-producing techniques (cattle-herding and agriculture), no reference to the origins of communal life.

44 The gods' anxiety over deprivation of their food supply is of course central to Aristophanes' *Birds* (cf. *Plutus* 1099ff.), see further below n. 84. The theme is most effectively reworked in Lucian's *Juppiter Tragoedus* (cf. *Icar.* 32, *Tim.* 7, 9); see further R. Bracht Branham, *Unruly Eloquence* (Cambridge, Mass. 1989) 163–177.

45 A decidedly non-Greek conception (even if it has something in common with the Platonic view of mankind as the gods' possession, κτήμα θεῶν καὶ δαιμόνων (*Legg.* 906a, cf. *Phd.* 62b–d); see further F. Graf, *Greek Mythology: an Introduction* (translated by T. Marier, Baltimore/London 1993) 91. Was Lucian influenced by non-Greek traditions here? He also offers a parallel to the memorably gruesome picture of hungry gods gathered like flies around a sacrifice (*Gilgamesh* XI iii, quoted above, *Atrahasis* III v): κἄν μὲν θύῃ τις, εὐωχοῦνται πάντες ἐπικεχηνότες τῷ κάπνῳ καὶ τὸ αἶμα πίνοντες τοῖς βωμοῖς προσχεόμενον ὥσπερ αἱ μυῖαι (*Sacr.* 9). In view of the very wide earlier diffusion of *Gilgamesh* (including versions in Hittite and Hurrian) we might consider the possibility that Aramaic versions were also produced, and known to Lucian. His idea that Homer was originally a Babylonian (*VH* 2.20) is generally treated as simply a wild flight of fancy; but many scholars have detected the influence of *Gilgamesh* on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and Lucian was quite shrewd enough to have reasoned similarly if he knew something about the Babylonian epic.

Technology takes a very minor place: even the potter's wheel, which Attic tradition associated especially with Prometheus, is left out as too unimportant or too banal ... The science on which he dwells at greatest length is that of divination, lovingly described in all its various branches"⁴⁶. Though Prometheus' gifts have effected a general intellectual stimulation, rousing mankind from a dreamlike confusion (443f., 447–450), we are not given a sense of systematic progress, but of the conveyance of a package of assorted techniques handed over in an already developed form⁴⁷. Prometheus treats the various facets of civilized life as his personal achievement, not as the results of diversified individual and collective endeavour made possible by his gift of fire. Few, indeed, of the advances which he mentions obviously depend on the use of fire⁴⁸, while practically all the specialisms to which he here lays claim are elsewhere ascribed to other gods or men⁴⁹. The practices and skills here listed are certainly to be understood as beneficial, further evidence of Prometheus' φιλανθρωπία⁵⁰. They have also, of course, revealed the potential of the race which Zeus was minded to destroy.

Assimilation to Ea/Enki would account for Prometheus' elevation to a universal culture hero. "Ea was a master craftsman, patron of all the arts and crafts, and endowed with a wisdom and cunning that myths and stories do not tire of extolling."⁵¹ In Sumerian mythology Enki is presented "as an active, productive organizer and administrator who originates and operates the cultural processes essential to civilization, and does so creatively and resourcefully"⁵². Inherent in this view of the god was "the belief in the existence from

46 *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford 1973) 5f.; cf. Kleingünther, op. cit. (n. 43) 66 n. 3: "Die 'Kulturtheorie' im Prometheus v. 442–506 steht ganz für sich und unterscheidet sich durchaus von den späteren 'sophistischen'." J. Ebach, *Weltentstehung und Kulturentwicklung bei Philo von Byblos* (Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz 1979) 376–383, offers a suggestive comparison with the technogony of Philo of Byblos, which likewise omits ceramics.

47 Contrast Xenophanes (B 18 DK) οὔτοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν, ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον; see further A. Tulin, «Xenophanes Fr. 18.D–K. and the origins of the idea of progress», *Hermes* 121 (1993) 129–138.

48 It might be argued that everything which distinguishes civilization from savagery (social and intellectual as well as technical developments) stems ultimately from mastery of fire; cf. Hom. *Hy. Heph.* 1–4, Lucr. 5.1011ff.; Diod. Sic. 1.8; Vitruv. 33.16ff.; see also E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (Oxford 1939) 40–57; but such a thesis is scarcely self-evident, and cannot be regarded as a natural assumption for a fifth-century Attic audience.

49 See further C. B. Gulick, «The Attic Prometheus», *HSCP* 10 (1899) 103–114.

50 G. F. Schoemann (*Des Aeschylus Gefesselter Prometheus*, Greifswald 1844, 50–54) argued eloquently that Prometheus' gifts, serving only to improve mankind's material existence, were to be understood as positively harmful: "Er hat die Menschen klug gemacht, bevor sie gut waren, hat ihnen durch die Klugheit Mittel gegeben, ihre niederen Bedürfnisse zu befriedigen, bevor sie die Ahndung höherer hatten"; for a similarly gloomy view of Prometheus' gifts see K. McNamee, *PP* 40 (1985) 405f. But if the audience was meant to question the beneficial effects of Prometheus' instruction, we should expect some guidance from the chorus (cf. Griffith's notes on 472–475, 500–503).

51 A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (rev. ed., Chicago 1977) 195.

52 Kramer/Maier, op. cit. (n. 5) 38; see further *Reallex. d. Assyriologie* s.v. Enki.

time primordial of a fundamental, unalterable, comprehensive assortment of powers and duties, norms and standards, rules and regulations, known as *me*, relating to the cosmos and its components, to gods and humans, to cities and countries, and to the varied aspects of civilized life”⁵³. We get a fascinating impression of Sumerian urban civilization from the itemized catalogue of the transfer of *me* by Enki to the goddess Inanna for her city of Erech, as in the following brief sample: “I will give to holy Inanna, to my daughter – and it will not be disputed: the craft of the carpenter, the craft of the copper-worker, the craft of the scribe, the craft of the smith, the craft of the leather-worker, the craft of the fuller, the craft of the builder, the craft of the reed-worker.”⁵⁴ As in Prometheus’ speech we are given an impression of an assemblage of perfected practices and skills transferred by the god, not of a laborious training process⁵⁵. It is of course taken for granted that this comprehensive cultural aid is a blessing⁵⁶.

A Mesopotamian model in the background might explain some slightly puzzling features of Prometheus’ catalogue. The peculiar importance assigned to divination, though appropriate to Prometheus’ role as an intermediary between gods and men⁵⁷, seems more in accordance with Mesopotamian views than with Greek. Perhaps more significant is the praise of script specifically for its function in preserving literature (460f.): γραμμάτων τε συνθέσεις, μνήμην πάντων, μουσομήτορ’ ἐργάνην: contrast Euripides, *Palamedes* F 578, where the utility of writing for overseas correspondence, wills, and contracts is highlighted. The association of script with poetry, and by extension with the transmission of a traditional cultural legacy, is well illustrated by the opening of *Gilgamesh* (I i 22ff.), where the reader is told to “Look for the copper tablet-

53 Kramer/Maier, op. cit. 57. On the *me* see further G. Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos “Inanna und Enki” unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me* (Rome 1973).

54 Ibid. 62.

55 We get a similar impression of a multipurpose package handed over ready for use with Oannes’ gift to primordial man of πάντα τὰ πρὸς ἡμέρῳσιν ἀνήκοντα βίου as narrated by Berossus (*FGrHist* 680 F 1); ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ χρόνου ἐκείνου οὐδὲν ἄλλο περισσὸν εὐρεῖσθαι.

56 We find an interesting exploration of the view that technical advance involves moral regress in *Enoch* 6–10 (apparently early second century B.C.), where fallen angels (the Watchers) corrupt mankind by revealing heavenly secrets (weapon technology, the manufacture of jewellery and cosmetics, magic, astrology, astronomy, and meteorology); the flood follows, as the only remedy for human depravity. Welcker, soon after the publication of an English translation of the Ethiopic version of *Enoch*, previously thought to have been lost, drew attention to its possible relevance here (*Die aeschyleische Trilogie Prometheus*, Darmstadt 1824, 79–82), but the question is complex; it is not clear whether *Enoch*’s hostility to technology represents a reaction to Greek ideas or a more ancient tradition.

57 Men could be helped through the diviner’s skill, while gods would benefit from the sacrifices which human beings would be ordered to make by their diviners; for an interesting West African parallel see R. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford 1970) 191f. The advantages to be gained from reliable knowledge of the future are of course highly relevant to Prometheus’ own situation.

box, / Undo its bronze look, / Open the door to its secret, / Lift out the lapis lazuli tablet and read it”⁵⁸. In Greek this view of writing is strikingly novel: not only is script now to do Mnemosyne’s work, but this is presented as its supreme function⁵⁹. We should at all events note the intellectual emphasis of Prometheus’ gifts to men. Of the two τέχναι which most obviously come to mind when Prometheus predicts that his theft of fire will bring technological advance (254) ceramics are omitted and metallurgy (500–503) here restricted to mining⁶⁰.

Along with the development of Prometheus’ role as the champion and benefactor of mankind we see his status enhanced as compared with that of his Hesiodic precursor (a figure too marginal to be mentioned in Homer). In Hesiod (*Th.* 507–510) Prometheus is merely the son of a Titan, Iapetus⁶¹, by the otherwise unknown Klymene; he is thus Zeus’ cousin. In the *PV* he is son of Themis/Gaia (18,209f.) and by implication of Ouranos (cf. 165), and thus himself a Titan⁶², and Zeus’ uncle. His greater seniority enhances his authority, and makes credible his claim to have assisted Zeus in putting his government on a secure footing and in ordering the Olympians’ several provinces (304f., 439–441). Against this background we do not find absurd the Oceanids’ suggestion that one day his power might rival that of Zeus. His elevation again suggests assimilation to Ea/Enki, whose high status within the Mesopotamian pantheon is sufficiently exemplified by the opening of *Atrahasis*. But with this transformation of Hesiod’s petty trickster “into a culture-hero on the grandest scale, an enemy to give Zeus pause”⁶³ goes a corresponding change in the character of the ruler of the universe from Hesiod’s wise and righteous god into a ruthless and arbitrary despot⁶⁴, the Oppressor of mankind whose recon-

58 In Berossus’ version of the flood story (*FGrHist* 680 F 4) the conservation of written records is the first measure to be taken by the flood-hero Xisouthros; he is instructed γραμμάτων πάντων ἀρχὰς καὶ μέσα καὶ τελευτὰς ὀρύξαντα θεῖναι ἐν πόλει Ἡλίου Σιπάρους before constructing a suitable vessel. After the Deluge the survivors are directed to dig up the tablets, which presumably are supposed to contain the information required for the reconstruction of civilized life.

59 See further Winnington-Ingram’s excellent discussion, *op. cit.* (n. 12) 182 n. 21. It is perhaps relevant that the interpreters and translators of the Assyrian empire are likely to have been drawn from the professional scribes, whose training involved familiarization with their literary classics; see further Wendel, *op. cit.* (n. 34) 94.

60 Though cf. 714 σιδηροτέκτονες Χάλυβες.

61 It is conventional to compare Biblical Japheth (Ἰαπεθ *LXX Ge.* 5.32 etc.), but it is hard to see what to make of the apparent resemblance: see further M. L. West on Hes. *Th.* 134.

62 The significance of Prometheus’ status as a Titan is well brought out by K. Reinhardt, *Aischylos als Regisseur und Theologe* (Bern 1949) 30–48. The modern connotations of “titanic” surely reflect the influence of this play.

63 Griffith, *op. cit.* (n. 5) 9.

64 Cf. Dodds, *op. cit.* (n. 46) 33: “Far from attempting to whitewash Zeus, Aeschylus appears ... to have gone out of his way to exhibit him in the most unfavourable light. All that he has added to the Hesiodic tradition – Prometheus’ new status as son of Themis, the goddess of

ciliation with our Champion Shelley judged an entirely unsatisfactory sequel⁶⁵.

It has been on the whole taken for granted that the dramatist was responsible for the exaltation of Prometheus and for its less attractive corollary, the brutalization of Zeus. But if assimilation to the Mesopotamian Ea provides a convincing explanation for the most significant differences between the Hesiodic and the Aeschylean Prometheus, the process is more easily envisaged at a period when the Greeks were more receptive to influence from their Near Eastern neighbours; the fifth century saw a marked hardening of Greek, and particularly of Attic, prejudice against non-Greeks⁶⁶. I shall not discuss in detail the logistics of such eastern influence; it is no longer widely assumed that Oriental-Greek communication in the archaic age was confined to a single channel debouching in Hesiod. The divine patron of technical and intellectual skills (including divination) might be expected to hold a particular appeal for the itinerant specialists (δημιοεργοί) who, as Burkert has persuasively argued, must have played an important part in disseminating Near Eastern ideas and practices during the orientaling century (750–650)⁶⁷, the period of Assyrian conquest, widespread Phoenician commerce, and Greek exploration. But we have no reason to assume that such influence ceased in the mid-seventh century, and the lack of attestation to the Flood story in Greek legend before the fifth century⁶⁸ might argue against an early date for Prometheus' assumption of the role of mankind's crafty saviour. It should be stressed that the Mesopotamian flood story was very widely diffused; we are not dealing with material which might appear atypical if we were better informed⁶⁹. We may reckon with a wide spectrum of transmission, and the absorption of the Flood story into Greek legend and poetic tradition might well have been a gradual and multifarious process⁷⁰. Certainly Hellenic habits of equating foreign gods with

Justice, and as inventor of all arts and sciences, his services to Zeus in the war against the Titans, and his frustration of the plan to destroy mankind, not to mention the Io scene – all this tends to exalt the character of Prometheus and to blacken that of his divine adversary."

65 Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1818/19).

66 See further E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* (Oxford 1989) esp. 1–69.

67 Burkert, *op. cit.* (n. 1) esp. 9–33. We might compare the role of such itinerant specialists as icon-painters, cobblers, and pedlars in disseminating *Märchen*: see further J. Bolte/G. Polivka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Gebrüder Grimm* iv (Leipzig 1930) 6.

68 See above, n. 23.

69 On the dissemination of the flood story see Dalley, *op. cit.* (n. 26) 3–8. J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia 1982) 249, well points out that the narrative could answer various literary purposes: "The flood story, presumably told in the first place because of its intrinsic interest, and serving in *Atrahasis* to explain the origin of infant mortality and other problems, is used in the epic to help explain why the gods' gift of immortality to Utnapishtim is not repeatable."

70 See further R. Mondi in L. Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore/London 1990) 150.

Greek would have met with no resistance from Near Eastern informants⁷¹. The identification of Ea with Prometheus might not be absolutely satisfactory, since the former's role as god of the subterranean waters belonged to Oceanus, while Mesopotamian theology appears to have attached little importance to mastery of fire. But these inconcinnities would not be a serious objection to the equation⁷².

Our reading of the *PV* must be significantly affected if we view its apparently distinctive presentation of Prometheus and Zeus as part of a tradition thoroughly familiar to the play's first audience, a well established version of the events which shaped the world; what might otherwise have been found shocking or blasphemous needed no further apology if it could be shown that the poet was following tradition⁷³. That tradition was, I assume, to be found in poetry. Xenophanes, in his precepts for the proper conduct of the symposium, bears witness to the popularity of Titanomachic and related themes (1.19ff.):

ἀνδρῶν δ' αἰνεῖν τοῦτον ὃς ἐσθλὰ πίων ἀναφαίνει,
ὥς ἦι μνημοσύνη καὶ τόνοσ' ἀμφ' ἀρετῆς,
οὐ τι μάχας διέπειν Τιτῆνων οὐδὲ Γιγάντων
οὐδὲ < > Κενταύρων, πλάσμα < τα > τῶν προτέρων,
ἢ στάσιας σφεδανάς· τοῖς οὐδὲν χρηστὸν ἔνεστιν·
θεῶν < δὲ > προμηθεῖην αἰὲν ἔχειν ἀγαθήν⁷⁴.

Xenophanes may of course have known several poetic treatments of the rebellion against the Titans, but it does not seem a very promising theme for amateur extemporization, and it is worth a closer look at the epic which ap-

71 See further W. von Soden, *Einführung in die Altorientalistik* (Darmstadt 1992) 172 on Akkadian *Gleichsetzungstheologie*. The custom of establishing correspondences between the gods of different nations was generally accepted around the Mediterranean world (with the significant exception of the Jews).

72 A further important similarity between Ea and Prometheus is their responsibility for the creation of man (see above, p. 137, for Ea's part in the creation of man in *Atrahasis*; in *Enuma Elish* he acts in co-operation with Marduk). Prometheus is not attested in this role before the fourth century, though it is tempting to suppose that the idea was long familiar; it seems implicit in Aristophanes' reference to men as πλάσματα πηλοῦ (*Birds* 686) (cf., perhaps, Aesch. *Inc. fab.* F 369 Radt) and concern for his handiwork provides a natural motive for Prometheus' φιλανθρωπία. See further W. Kraus, «Prometheus», *RE* 23.1 (1957) II 26 (c. 696–698).

73 For the ancient critical assumption that poets had every right to follow tradition and could thus be exculpated from apparent blasphemy cf. Sch. bT on *Il.* 5.385: ἐπίτηδες μύθους συλλέξας Διώνη περιτίθησιν ὁ ποιητής, δι' ὧν τῆς οἰκείας ἀπολύεται βλασφημίας ὥς οὐ καίνισας, ἀλλὰ παλαιαῖς παραδόσεσι πεισθεῖς; Sch. A on *Il.* 19.108: τὸ μὲν οὖν ὅλον μυθῶδες· καὶ γὰρ οὐδ' ἄφ' αὐτοῦ ταῦτά φησιν Ὅμηρος οὐδὲ γινόμενα εἰσάγει, ἀλλ' ὥς διαδεδομένων περὶ τὴν Ἡρακλέους γένεσιν μέμνηται; see further D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic* (Oxford 1991) 41.

74 θεῶν: χρεῶν ci. H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (Oxford 1975) 327 n. 1. It is interesting that Xenophanes, who dismisses stories of Titans, Giants and Centaurs as fabrications, also expresses rationalist views about human progress: see above, n. 47.

pears to have covered all the three themes to which he adverts, the Cyclic *Titanomachia*⁷⁵ variously ascribed in antiquity to Arctinus and Eumelus of Corinth; this uncertainty over its attribution may be interpreted as equivalent to “anonymous”. Its few, tantalizing fragments show that it covered far more ground than its title suggests⁷⁶, from the origins of the kosmos to (at least) the labours of Herakles. The rising of Zeus and his brothers against Kronos and the measures by which Zeus established his authority, culminating in the successful suppression of the Giants’ revolt would have provided a skeleton capable of supporting a very wide range of legend, and Herakles’ divinization, as a reward for his vital assistance in the Gigantomachy, would have made a most fitting conclusion; but we cannot form a satisfactory conception of the work’s scale, scope, and (probably rather additive) structure⁷⁷.

Nearly 150 years ago Welcker, undeterred by the absence of any reference to Prometheus in the fragments of the *Titanomachia*, argued that the Cyclic epic had been the inspiration of the Prometheus plays⁷⁸, basing his case mainly on the fragments relating to Chiron (F 6, 9)⁷⁹, whom he took to be the θεῶν τις διάδοχος τῶν σῶν πόνων (1027) whose voluntary descent to Hades will mean the end of Prometheus’ torment⁸⁰, connecting Hermes’ prediction with the story in Apollodorus (2.5.4; *PV* 1026ss.) that Chiron, accidentally afflicted with an incurable wound from one of Herakles’ (poisoned) arrows and unable to die, surrendered his immortality by negotiation with Prometheus; from this (somewhat questionable) combination Welcker argued that Herakles and Prometheus must also have figured in the Cyclic *Titanomachia*. As Kranz pointed

75 For a useful brief account see M. Davies, *The Epic Cycle* (Bristol 1989) 13–18; for more detailed discussion see F. G. Welcker, *Der epische Cyclus* ii (Bonn 1849) 409–420, W. Kranz, “Titanomachia”, in: *Studi in onore di Luigi Castiglione* (Florence 1960) i 475–486 (= *Studien zur antiken Literatur und ihrem Nachwirken*, Heidelberg 1967, 89–96), O. Gigon/J. Dörig, *Der Kampf der Götter und Titanen* (Olten/Lausanne 1961).

76 Titles for literary works were a fifth-century development among the Greeks, and their use frequently rather haphazard; loose designations, sufficient to identify the book or section of a work in question, were enough; see further E. Nachmanson, *Der griechische Buchtitel* (Göteborg 1941).

77 F 8 Davies is cited from Book 2, but its context is quite uncertain. “Unförmig und unübersichtlich dürfen wir uns das Werk vorstellen” Gigon, op. cit. (n. 75) xxi. An early *Titanomachy* appears to be the source of various tales about the gods in the *Iliad* (see Janko on 14.153–353, 15.185–193), but its relationship to the epic conventionally ascribed to Arctinus or Eumelus is quite uncertain.

78 Loc. cit. (n. 75). Xenophanes’ προμηθεΐη (F 1.24; first here) might be thought suggestive.

79 Gigon, op. cit. (n. 75) xix, argued that F 6 is a late fabrication, but his objections seem insubstantial. F 9 is assigned to the Γγαντομαχία, but there seems little doubt that the *Titanomachia* is meant. Confusion of titanomachy and gigantomachy was widespread (cf. Eur. *Hec.* 466–474, with schol. on 471. *IT* 222–224); but a case like this is more probably to be explained by a lack of interest in exact citation or in the precise form of titles.

80 On the difficulties of this interpretation of 1026–1029 see Griffith ad loc. and p. 302: Herakles is almost certainly meant.

out⁸¹, the case for Herakles' inclusion has been virtually established from a citation by Philodemus, which was not known to Welcker, referring to the watch kept on the apples of the Hesperides (F 10), which would lack point except in connection with an attempt to steal them, and thus implicates Herakles; this, in turn, suggests that Herakles' labours were likewise the context of the poem's allusion to the Sun's λέβης (F 7; cf. Stesichorus F 8).

So far, however, we lack any direct evidence for Prometheus' appearance in the epic which, Welcker argued, "den Aeschylus so hoch begeisterte, dass er das mächtigste und tiefsinnigste Werk des Alterthums ihm nacheifernd dichtete"⁸². His reconstruction must appear at first sight decidedly speculative. But much about the play becomes more easily intelligible on the assumption that the dramatist could presuppose in his audience some familiarity with a version of Prometheus' story other than Hesiod's⁸³ and the Cyclic *Titanomachia* fits our requirements; it is not easy to specify an alternative. It is tempting to suppose that it also lies behind Aristophanes' fantasy of a blockade on Olympus, and, in particular, suggested Prometheus' role in the *Birds*⁸⁴.

Xenophanes, as we have seen, singles out for particular disapprobation subject-matter characteristic of the *Titanomachia*, and no doubt by the fifth century it had come to seem crude and primitive⁸⁵. Violence among beings immune to death lacks heroic quality; detailed narration of strife among immortals almost inevitably loses credibility or trivializes the divine⁸⁶. In the exultation of victory over the Titans Zeus danced (F 5): μέσσοισιν δ' ὄρχεϊτο πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε⁸⁷. No words could more vividly convey the conception of the god's youthful vigour so impressively illustrated in the archaic sculptures from the west pediment of the temple of Artemis on Corfu (600–

81 Op. cit. (n. 75) 94.

82 Op. cit. (n. 75) 418. Marx's enthusiasm for the *PV* perhaps derives from Welckers' lectures; see further S. S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford 1972) 3.

83 Cf. Wilamowitz, op. cit. (n. 7) 121, 132.

84 On Aristophanes' use of themes from the Titanomachy and Gigantomachy see H. Hofmann, *Mythos und Komödie: Untersuchungen zu den Vögeln des Aristophanes*. Spudasmata 33 (Hildesheim 1976) esp. 79–90, 119–139.

85 We may view Zeus' wooing of Io more tolerantly if we compare the obstetric horror entailed by Kronos' strange union with Philyra (F 9).

86 Cf. Longin 9.7–8. Milton's narrative of the war in heaven (*Paradise Lost* Book 6) illustrates the problem ("The book in which it is related is, I believe, the favourite of children, and gradually neglected as knowledge is increased" commented Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets: Milton* 258). However Raphael prefaces his account by warning against a literal interpretation (5.571–574): "What surmounts the reach / Of human sense, I shall delineate so, / By likening spiritual to corporal forms, / As may express them best."

87 Cf. Pamprep. 4.13: Ζῆνα γιγαντοφόνοιο κυβερνητῆρα χορεῖν[ς]. "Imagination fails to see the Zeus of the *Iliad* dancing" (J. Griffin, *JHS* 97, 1977, 48). But nothing in the *Iliad* is comparable to the Olympians' triumph over the senior gods, and in any case Zeus in the *Iliad* is more mature and secure in his supremacy; this extraordinary motif should not be treated as exemplifying the difference between the Cyclic epics and Homer.

580)⁸⁸, where the beardless god, identified beyond question by his weapon, the thunderbolt, attacks a much larger male figure, more probably to be identified as Kronos (τὰ πρὶν δὲ πελώρια νῦν αἰστοῖ, *PV* 152) than as a Giant. It is not surprising if the classical period found the dancing god somewhat unseemly⁸⁹. But the old poem was not altogether forgotten, and some familiarity with its subject-matter may be supposed to have extended far beyond the few who had actually read it.

The exercise of vast power by an impatient teenager insecure in his authority might well, despite laudable intentions, produce results indistinguishable from malevolent cruelty; but the young autocrat of the *PV* did not originate in a fifth-century mind. Wilamowitz surely indicated the right approach to the play's problematic theology when he wrote "Es gilt die Lösung, die Fr. Vischer für die Grausamkeiten des Judengottes im alten Testamente gibt 'da war der liebe Gott selbst noch jung'"⁹⁰. With the Flood story we see Greek and Jewish gods following a precedent set by the leader of the Mesopotamian pantheon. Noah's God is certainly represented as learning from experience and coming to terms with human imperfection; thenceforth the rainbow was to be a recurrent assurance that the world, for all its wickedness, would not be unpeopled by a further deluge (*Gen.* 8.21–23; 9.8–17). The first of Prometheus' acts of philanthropic subversion formed part of a demonstration that the extirpation of mankind was not as good an idea as Zeus had originally supposed; this is a basic feature of the flood story, whatever the name of the god responsible for the deluge. παύων δὲ τε νήπιος ἔγνων: Prometheus' prediction that Zeus would learn with the passage of time (981) did not call for second sight. There has been much debate as to whether the *PV*'s sequel might have shown Zeus capable of moral development⁹¹. The attempt to evoke the time when Zeus was young and new to rule encourages the expectation of some observable difference, and the best antidote to the appalling image of a totalitarian regime based on terror and violence, as depicted in the prologue, must be the conviction that, whatever Zeus was once like, he is now the upholder of justice and

88 So M. Robertson, *A History of Greek Art* (Cambridge 1975) 65f., following the interpretation proposed by Dörig (Dörig/Gigon, op.cit. [n. 75] 13–16), Zeus' lack of beard surely indicates the Titanomachy rather than the Gigantomachy.

89 David, after the capture of Jerusalem, "danced before the Lord with all his might" and his wife Michal "saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord: and she despised him in her heart" (2 *Sam.* 6.14; 16). In the Gnostic *Acts of John* (94–97) Jesus, anticipating arrest, joins with his disciples in mystical song and dance, an interesting addition to the account given in the canonical Gospels, see W. Schneemelcher, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen* (Tübingen ⁵1989) 166–168; J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford 1993) 318–320; the passage inspired Holst's *Hymn of Jesus*.

90 Op. cit. (n. 7) 150. Lucian's Timon observes that when Zeus was young he was much more energetic in his punishment of sinners (*Tim.* 3–6).

91 See further H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London ²1983) 91–103, 244–246; *JHS* 76 (1956) 55–67 = *Greek Epic, Lyric, and Tragedy* (Oxford 1990) 238–261 (where references to earlier discussions may be found).

the protector of suppliants and strangers, far beyond any challenge to his supremacy.

Prosecution of the case against the *PV*'s authenticity has drawn attention to numerous technical weaknesses, and we might wonder whether its author was over-ambitious⁹². Grander subject-matter was hardly conceivable, but supernatural characters present more intractable problems to the dramatist than to the narrative poet⁹³. But whatever the play's defects, the Aeschylean Prometheus has held a long-lasting and widespread appeal to the imagination of later writers. The hybridization of the Mesopotamian god of wisdom and the Hesiodic trickster was to prove extraordinarily fruitful.

92 On the assumption that the play results from another's realization of an originally Aeschylean conception, we might wonder whether Aeschylus was deterred from developing his idea by a just appreciation of its hazards.

93 Milton had once seen in the subject-matter of *Paradise Lost* material for a drama; the Trinity College Cambridge MS contains four drafts of an outline, written perhaps in 1640, see *Paradise Lost* ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow 1971) 3–5.