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# ЗБОРНИК РАДОВА

ВИЗАНТОЛОШКОГ ИНСТИТУТА  
LVI

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JOVANA ŠIJAKOVIĆ  
Institute for Byzantine Studies, SASA, Belgrade  
[jovana.sijakovic@vi.sanu.ac.rs](mailto:jovana.sijakovic@vi.sanu.ac.rs)

## A NOTE ON HOMER THE RAVEN\*

In the works of Clement of Alexandria pieces of Homeric verses surface from time to time as a testimony to a Christian truth or an interpretation of Scripture. Such instances in Gnostic writings presented evidence that these Gnostic writers treated Homer as their own prophet. It seems that in light of these accusations, Clement takes care to note that Homer did not understand the words he gave a voice to, any more than a raven does when he echoes what he hears. Furthermore, in all cases where Clement comes conspicuously close to implying a prophetic-like status for Homer, he does not fail to employ a phrase which explicitly divorces the poet from any theological authority.

*Keywords:* Clement of Alexandria, Homeric exegesis, Gnostic exegesis, προφήτης, μάντις

According to Clement of Alexandria, Homer is undoubtedly the poet to turn to if one wants to learn how to be a poet,<sup>1</sup> but Homer's insights and understanding of the divine world are a different matter altogether. This is why Clement, like many philosophers before him, could be quite harsh with the Poet but unwilling to avail himself of the full force of a language soaked in Homer. When he does not mock Homeric wisdom, he discloses it as stolen or as a chance event. The second case is usually followed by an interpretative strategy which uncovers the supposed conformity of Homeric verses with Christian doctrines by a method similar to the one Gnostic interpreters employed, as witnessed by heresiological works of the period. Clement argued against (falsely called) Gnostics who offer unholy knowledge (ἀνόσιος γνῶσις).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stromata 7.16.101.4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 7.7.41.3.

By outperforming them he was eager to show that a ‘true gnostic’ is a true Christian. The Homeric interpretations are marginal to the larger theological and cosmological issues at stake, but in the intellectual setting of Alexandria, they seem to have been hardly avoidable.

### The “Evil Interpreters” and Homer the Prophet

Describing the Gnostic treatment of God’s Word, the second-century bishop of Lugdunum Irenaeus speaks of evil interpreters (ἐξηγηταὶ κακοί).<sup>3</sup> Namely, they prey on inexperienced minds and mislead them by combining words and expressions that are not connected in the Holy Scriptures, in the process converting the natural meaning (τὸ κατὰ φύσιν) to an unnatural one (τὸ παρὰ φύσιν). The evil exegete is likened to a composer of a Homeric cento (κέντρων) who would want to give the impression that Homer himself is the artisan behind the meaning resulting from the original verses being patched together in a new way. This “cento exegesis” often relies on the grammatically and semantically obvious meaning of the decontextualized words or phrases, rearranged in a different way, in order to change the subject or object, which was unstated but implied in the original context. Yet it can also just be a first step in amalgamating excerpts from different writings,<sup>4</sup> which are then to be interpreted allegorically in light of one another.<sup>5</sup>

Since Homeric passages appear among excerpts from the Holy Scriptures in Gnostic writings, St. Irenaeus ridicules Gnostics for approaching the Poet as “their own prophet”.<sup>6</sup> For many of the same reasons, a few decades later, in another famous polemical work, *Refutation of All Heresies* (early 3<sup>rd</sup> century),<sup>7</sup> certain representatives of Gnostics (Naasseni) are labelled as inventors of a novel grammatical art (ἐφευρεταὶ καινῆς τέχνης γραμματικῆς).<sup>8</sup> Here, too, they are scorned for revering Homer as “their own prophet who indicates things in a covert manner”. The author describes how they drew support from Homeric verses, aligning them in their allegorical readings next to the lines of Scripture. One such instance is the Hermes–Christ–Logos exegesis.<sup>9</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> *Adversus haereses* 1.9.4.

<sup>4</sup> Or, what seems to be often the case, not directly from these writings but from various compilations of excerpts. The conclusion is suggested by the fact that many different authors make use of the same extracts. Anthologies would have made it easier to crisscross and piece together the passage from the Scriptures and Greek literature using catchwords; cf. *Scopello*, *Les citations d’Homère dans le traité de L’Exégèse de l’âme*.

<sup>5</sup> Clement’s associative thinking, which leads to the accumulation of material from different sources, does not necessarily involve allegoresis; cf. *den Boer*, *Allegorese in het werk van Clemens Alexandrinus*.

<sup>6</sup> *Adversus haereses* 4.33.3.

<sup>7</sup> Traditionally ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome; for discussion regarding the author of the work see *Litwa*, *Refutation of All Heresies*, xxxiii–xlii.

<sup>8</sup> *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 5.8.1: Τούτοις καὶ τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἐπόμενοι οἱ θαυμασιώτατοι γνωστικοί, ἐφευρεταὶ καινῆς τέχνης γραμματικῆς, τὸν ἑαυτῶν προφήτην Ὅμηρον ταῦτα προφαίνοντα ἀρρήτως δοξάζουσι καὶ τοὺς ἀμύητους τὰς ἀγίας γραφὰς εἰς τοιαύτας ἐννοίας συνάγοντες ἐνουβρίζουσι. Cf. n. 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Refutatio* 5.7.30 – 5.7.41.

Hermes who is pictured in the *Odyssey* (24.1–12) as guiding the souls of the suitors (μνηστήρων) is interpreted as the Logos, who is the guide of the souls that are awakened from sleep and recall to memory their heavenly origins.<sup>10</sup> It is contended that Scripture (Ephesians 5:14) speaks of the same kind of souls (“suitors”) in lines that read: “Awaken, you who sleep, and rise up;<sup>11</sup> then Christ will illuminate you.” The verses (Od. 24.3–5) about Hermes’ golden rod (ῥάβδον χρυσεῖην) and an excerpt from Scripture (Ps 2:9) about the one who “will shepherd them with an iron rod (ῥάβδω σιδηρᾷ)” are interwoven in this exegesis and taken as nods to the blessed nature of the same Logos. The detail of the rod being golden in the *Odyssey* as opposed to iron is construed to reflect the Poet’s intention to honour the incomprehensibility of this blessed nature. A different Gnostic group (Sethians) is reproached for deriving their cosmogony doctrines from Homer while pretending to interpret Moses. On yet another occasion the author pities Homer and other poets for falling victim to the same evil art of interpretation (κακοτεχνεῖν) to which Moses’ writings were exposed,<sup>12</sup> alleging that Simon Magus believed Helen of Troy to be an incarnation of *Epinoia*.<sup>13</sup> It is her unsurpassable beauty (διὰ τὸ ἀνυπέβλητον αὐτῆς κάλλος) that creates a turmoil of powers in the cosmos (ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ δυνάμεις), since all wanted to lay claim to her.<sup>14</sup> Another part of Simonian allegoresis of the Pentateuch unearths the nexus and a corresponding meaning behind the moly episode with Hermes (Od. 10.304–306) and the Exodus episode (15:22–25) in which the bitter (πικρὸν) water in the desert turns into sweet (γλυκύ) due to Moses. Bitter water is understood to be the road of knowledge during a lifetime, as is the case with moly, and Moses is taken to be the Logos, to whom Hermes also corresponds.<sup>15</sup> Throughout this heresiological work, the discrediting of certain interpretations of the Scriptures and God-worship ensues through a demonstration of how derivative they are and utterly dependent on non-Christian teachings and beliefs: mysteries of the Greeks and Barbarians, astrology, and wisdom of the Greek philosophers and other prominent men of ancient times.<sup>16</sup> Treating external sources as equal to Christian ones was understood to be a feature of heretical exegesis.

<sup>10</sup> The interpretation plays on the word for suitor, μνηστήρ, as a derivative from μμνήσκω, “remember” (cf. *Beekes*, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 953–954; *Benveniste*, *Formes et sens de μνάομαι*).

<sup>11</sup> The citation has ἐξεγέρθητι without ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν.

<sup>12</sup> Refutatio 6.19.1: Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὁ Σίμων ἐφευρῶν οὐ μόνον τὰ Μωσέως κακοτεχνήσας εἰς ὃ ἐβούλετο μεθρημῆνευσεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ τῶν ποιητῶν.

<sup>13</sup> A kind of divine Thought (cf. *Irenaeus*, *Adversus haereses* 1.23.2; Refutatio 6.18.2–7) which in Simon’s time was incarnated in a certain Helen, a companion of his who was formerly a prostitute (Refutatio 6.19–20). He himself allegedly was “the Power above all things” and he descended in order to redeem “his first Thought” and bring salvation to all men. Simonian worship included representations of him as Zeus and Helen as Athena (εἰκόνα τε τοῦ Σίμωνος ἔχουσιν εἰς Διὸς μορφήν καὶ τῆς Ἑλένης ἐν μορφῇ Ἀθηνᾶς, loc. Cit.; cf. *Irenaeus*, *Adversus haereses* 1.23.4)

<sup>14</sup> Refutatio 6.19. Cf. *Droge*, *Homeric Exegesis among the Gnostics*.

<sup>15</sup> Refutatio 6.15.3–4: πικρὸν γάρ, φησίν, ἐστὶ τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ μετὰ τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ὁδὸς τῆς κατὰ τὸν βίον γνώσεως, <διὰ> τῶν ἐπιπόνων ὀδευομένη καὶ πικρῶν. στραφὲν δὲ ὑπὸ Μωσέως—τουτέστι τοῦ λόγου—τὸ πικρὸν ἐκεῖνο γίνεται γλυκύ.

<sup>16</sup> Refutatio 1. pro 1.8.

A similar use of Homeric quotations parallel with quotations from the Scriptures is directly attested in the Nag Hammadi Gnostic treatise *Exegesis on the Soul*. The text in Coptic is believed to be a translation of the Greek original belonging to the Alexandrian sphere near the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> The two Odyssean references have to do with the understanding of Odysseus (1.48–59) and Helen (4.260–264)<sup>18</sup> as souls longing to come back to heaven, to their original home. Although Scripture excerpts outnumber the Homeric passages, the formulae for introducing these citations do not differ<sup>19</sup> and the general impression the work imparts is that both “Greek and Jewish wisdom have the same prophetic value for the author”.<sup>20</sup> Whether the interchangeability of ancient sources of knowledge was indeed a part of an approach or a matter of a persuasive portrayal of an approach, such prophetic equivalence was the crux of many heresiological disputes among Christians.

Authors from the same period who did not fall from favour with their Christian descendants of the next centuries, despite not shying away from discussing the commonalities in ancient and Christian teachings, make it their concern to differentiate between Christian and non-Christian texts in terms of their prophetic value and the nature of their insight.<sup>21</sup> One should keep in mind that finding parallels was not a practice meant to harmonize Greek and Christian sources.<sup>22</sup> The purpose was to show the superiority of the latter and the imperfections and errors of the former.<sup>23</sup> In most cases they expounded the conviction that Moses was more ancient than

<sup>17</sup> Scopello, *L'Exégèse de l'âme*, 100.

<sup>18</sup> Carcopino, *De Pythagore aux apôtres 85–221*, and Pouderon, *Hélène et Ulysse comme deux âmes en peine*, discuss possible neo-Pythagorean sources for the psychological exegesis of the two epic characters. Pouderon holds that the *Epinoia* interpretation of Helen is a later development specific to the Gnostic myth of *Sophia/Ennoia/Epinoia*. In the first stage the reading of Helen was eschatological; she is a soul who finds redemption after the fall from the world above. Afterwards the same narrative is transferred onto the cosmogonical plane: the divine Thought falls from the celestial realm and in so doing shapes the fate of the world below, but eventually she finds redemption through a saviour and ascends back to the Father. Earlier inquiries into the Helen of Simon Magus posited a connection between her and the cult of Kore in Samaria, cf. Vincent, *Culte d'Helene a Samarie*. The interpretations of later findings seem to support this link and suggest a complex syncretistic state of affairs, cf. Flusser, *Great Goddess of Samaria*. For a general overview of many streams of possible influence relevant to the Simonian figure of Helen see Fossum, *Quispel*, ‘Helena I (simonianisch)’. For a presentation of the central issues of the Gnostic myth, as it appears in different writings attributed to them and in comparison to concurrent schools of thought, see Brakke, *Gnostics*, 52–89. The unsettled issue of identifying the Gnostics is treated in the second chapter of the same study (29–51).

<sup>19</sup> Robinson's translation, *Coptic Gnostic Library*, II 149: “it is written in the prophet Hosea”; 167: “it is written in the poet”; 169: “it is written in the Psalms”. Cf. Refutatio 5.17.32 for the “it is written” (γέγραπται) formula in the example above concerning the rod of the Logos in the *Odyssey* and the Scriptures.

<sup>20</sup> Scopello, *Exegesis on the Soul* (Introduction), 191.

<sup>21</sup> On the reception of Homer, ranging from negative to positive or neutral (as ‘Bildungsgut’), see Bartelink, ‘Homer’.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Justin, *Philosopher and Martyr*, *Apologia*, I 22–23, where the author enumerates important parallels concerning divine roles and actions on both sides, but insists that the truth lies with one side alone.

<sup>23</sup> Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretations of the History of Culture*, 53. The same practice and motives are to be found on the side of the opponents, *ibid.* 76, and in examples of the Jewish subordination of Greek culture earlier, Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 82.



any Greek wise man, including Homer, and, hence, any truth that is to be found in Greek sources is there as a result of the Greek exposure to Jewish wisdom.<sup>24</sup> Such a view is not demonstrated in circles connected to the aforementioned Gnostics.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Justin Martyr famously wrote about the presence of the inborn seed of the Logos in human beings through which ancient writers were able to see the reality, albeit dimly.<sup>26</sup> Some amongst these, therefore, succeeded in reaching true and valuable insights.<sup>27</sup> And yet the author does not show any willingness to look for the seeds of truth in Homer; on the contrary, he groups him with others of his art and the content of their poems is commented on only as being full of demon-inspired myths. The demons misapprehended the prophecies of the Old Testament period, which is taken to fall earlier than the age of Greek mythmaking poets,<sup>28</sup> so certain myths bear only weak semblances to the events which concern the coming of Christ. But the main idea here is that these Greek myths, as well as those of others, were of demonic origin because the demons wanted people to regard things said about Christ as fiction (τερατολογία), just like things said by the poets.<sup>29</sup> Homer's banishment from the model state by Plato's Socrates was a judgment that St. Justin approved of,<sup>30</sup> despite the fact he could masterfully use Homeric wording to deepen his own expression,<sup>31</sup> not unlike Plato himself.

### Clement of Alexandria and Homer the Peculiar *Mantis*

Clement's works exhibit significant features of the intellectual setting in Alexandria, home to many Gnostic teachers whose doctrines combined certain elements of Christian theology, Hellenistic philosophy and mythopoetic tradition and attracted

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Droge, *Homer or Moses?*; *Ridings*, Attic Moses.

<sup>25</sup> Droge, *Homeric Exegesis*, 320. Cf. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 62: "The significant thing seems to be that, despite their exegetical activities, on the whole Gnostics stood apart from the battle of the literatures, having no firm commitment to any particular 'canon.'" Further on, Young notes (*ibid.* 69): "It is believed that freedom of Gnostic readings and conjoining the materials from different sources were among factors that led to definition of the scriptural canon."

<sup>26</sup> *Apologia* II, 13.5: οἱ γὰρ συγγραφεῖς πάντες διὰ τῆς ἐνοῦσης ἐμφύτου τοῦ λόγου σποράς ἀμυδρῶς ἐδύνατο ὄραν τὰ ὄντα.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, Socrates and Heraclites are mentioned favourably in this regard, but that does not preclude some of it being plain borrowing on their part. The *Apologies* are addressing the Roman elite in the time of persecution of Christians. This elite, who appreciates Greek *paideia*, is to understand that some of the best ancient traditions are at peace with Christianity, but no attempt is being made to combine them into one corpus of knowledge. Those old traditions are described as imitations or bearers of partial truth at best.

<sup>28</sup> The chronology he goes by is treated in Droge, *Homer or Moses?*, 60; for Clement cf. *ibid.* 144–146.

<sup>29</sup> *Apologia* I, 54.2: ἀκούσαντες γὰρ διὰ τῶν προφητῶν κηρυσσόμενον παραγενησόμενον τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ κολασθησομένους διὰ πυρὸς τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, προεβάλλοντο πολλοὺς λεχθῆναι λεγομένους υἱοὺς τῷ Διῖ, νομίζοντες δυνήσεσθαι ἐνεργῆσαι τερατολογίαν ἡγήσασθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τὰ περὶ τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ ὅμοια τοῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν λεχθεῖσαι.

<sup>30</sup> *Apologia* II, 10.6.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 3.1. Cf. Glockmann, *Homer in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Justinus*, 109–112.

considerable attention in the Christian community.<sup>32</sup> Gnostic interpretations which entwined Greek mythical notions with the Scriptures, as seen in the examples above, obviously had certain credibility among the targeted audience. The fact that Clement discusses interpretive problems which arose because such interpretations gained traction was lost on readers of the later centuries, as the specific context became history. It is for this reason that Photios in the 9<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33</sup> feels appalled by many things that Clement deliberates on. In spite of admiration for many aspects of Clement's writings, Photios strongly suspects that Clement crossed the heretical lines in some of his exegesis of the Scriptures, or that somebody corrupted his text.<sup>34</sup>

Not unlike Justin Martyr, Clement also speaks of certain divine effluence (ἀπόρροια) instilled into all people, especially those devoted to contemplation.<sup>35</sup> It is because of this that they admit that God is one, even though they do so *inadvertently* (ἄκοντες). This statement in *Protrepticus* is followed by a list of excerpts from ancient authors referring to a god in singular form or to the good. The purpose of this work is to persuade Hellenes to embrace Christianity. Clement invites them to see the errors of their old reasoning and recognize the newly named truth that was there from the beginning. Although this truth did not reside among Hellenes, the author wishes to prove that ancient Hellenic thought in its lucid moments is also a witness to that truth, not readily but inevitably – by the virtues it pursued.<sup>36</sup> When commenting on Plato and ancient philosophy in general,<sup>37</sup> Clement cites parts of their writing that show that they had *grazed* the truth (ἐπαφᾶσαι τῆς ἀληθείας<sup>38</sup>). If any of them did manage to lay hold of the truth *in any degree* whatsoever (εἴ που τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπιδράζαινο), it was by divine inspiration (κατ' ἐπίπνοιαν)<sup>39</sup> or through Jewish teachings which they

<sup>32</sup> *Runia*, Philo, 123

<sup>33</sup> It seems that prior to Photios he was not discussed or appraised; he was occasionally referred to and accorded “vague respect”, *Wagner*, *A Father's Fate*, 211–213.

<sup>34</sup> He specifically refers to Clement's lost work *Hypotyposeis*, which is described as containing blasphemous fiction (βλάσφημοι τερατολογίαι). Other works are judged to be more sound; Photios, *Bibliotheca* 109–111. Cf. the concluding observation in *Ashwin-Siejkowski*, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial*: “He was searching for an intelligent, academic and critical response to those challenges which spread like an infection among Christians in Alexandria. In order to discover an effective medication, he studied the nature of the dangerous viruses. This was misunderstood by Photios who noted only the presence of foreign bodies in the theological tissue of Clement's *Hypotyposeis*.”

<sup>35</sup> *Protrepticus* 6.68.2–3: πᾶσιν γὰρ ἀπαξαιπλῶς ἀνθρώποις, μάλιστα δὲ τοῖς περὶ λόγους ἐνδιατρίβουσιν ἐνέστακται τις ἀπόρροια θεϊκῆ. Οὐδὲ γὰρ χάριν καὶ ἄκοντες μὲν ὁμολογοῦσιν ἕνα τε εἶναι θεόν, ἀνώλεθρον καὶ ἀγέννητον τοῦτον, ἄνω που περὶ τὰ νῶτα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ καὶ οἰκείᾳ περιωπῇ ὄντως ὄντα αἰεί-

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Stromata* 2.19.100.

<sup>37</sup> Understandably, he is much more respectful of the role of Hellenic philosophy than he is of poetry throughout his works; cf. *Lilla*, *Clement of Alexandria*, 9–59. As we read in *Stromata*, Hellenic philosophy can be thought of as a torch sparked by a ray stolen from the sun (5.5.29.5–6), or as a preparatory training for the truth (6.8.62), or, in the case of those acquainted with the truth, as a kind of dessert which one may indulge in after a proper meal if one has the time, provided that this consumption does not lead one to neglect what truly matters (6.18.162.1–2).

<sup>38</sup> *Protrepticus* 6.68.2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 6.71.1–2.

refused to acknowledge.<sup>40</sup> In spite of dealing with falsehood in its entirety, poetry too is invited by Clement to yield testimony about the truth *now at last*.<sup>41</sup> This admission is to occur through Clement's interpretation resembling an interrogation in which the interrogator is trying to extract the truth from an adverse witness. The author cites excerpts from different poets, in which the verses, detached from their original context, appear to refer to one god, father, ruler and creator of all. After these, he excerpts verses disparaging mythical gods. As far as Homer is concerned, *Protrepticus* abounds in references to his poems, often used to point to all that is wrong and incoherent in the ancient view of the world and of the divine. Clement directly states that the poet's song is not beautiful (καλή), because of the indecencies Homer sings about.<sup>42</sup> Those who became the people of God should avert their ears from such obscenities. Clement playfully begs the Poet to stop his song.<sup>43</sup> While he ridicules Homer's representation of the father of gods and men as someone worthy of veneration, the way Zeus begot Heracles<sup>44</sup> and other supposedly divine portrayals, he reads certain unflattering epithets attached to gods in Homeric and other poems as an intentional reprimand of the gods by these poets. This he describes as laudable.<sup>45</sup> He plays with Homeric imagery in many allegorical tones, exhibiting a good knowledge of Homeric exegesis, including the strand that saw in Odysseus a wandering soul. However, he does not try to give a Christian version of this interpretation of the *Odyssey* as a salvation song; he counters it with "the new song", Christ the Logos who appeared as man, instead.<sup>46</sup> The old song is presented as a sort of evidence for an age-old longing for salvation that now can be fulfilled if one turns to the new song recognizing all that was wrong with the Sirenic lore of the old one.<sup>47</sup>

The intended audience of Clement's other work *Paedagogus* are Christians in Alexandria and the issues he tackles concern ethics and virtuous life in a practical context. Homer's poetry is not among the themes of discussion, but Homeric quotations

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 6.70.1.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 7.73.1: "Ἦτο δὲ ἡμῖν (οὐ γὰρ αὐταρκεῖ μόνον ἡ φιλοσοφία) ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὴ ποιητικὴ ἢ περὶ τὸ ψεῦδος τὰ πάντα ἡσυχολημένη, μόλις ποτὲ ἤδη ἀλήθειαν μαρτυρήσουσα, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐξομολογουμένη τῷ θεῷ τὴν μυθώδη παρέκβασιν·"

<sup>42</sup> He is here referring to Aphrodite's act of adultery specifically. In his *Paedagogus* he mentions the same episode when discussing the relation between women's custom of accessorizing and fornication, in a way that suggests that one can draw a certain moral from this poetic myth (2.12.123). Clement interprets the jewels and ornaments with which women adorn themselves as chains of adultery they choose to put on and remarks that the chains in which Aphrodite ends up carry the same allusion.

<sup>43</sup> 4.59.2: Κατάπαυσον, Ὅμηρε, τὴν ᾠδὴν· οὐκ ἔστι καλή, μοιχείαν διδάσκει· πορνεύειν δὲ ἡμεῖς καὶ τὰ ᾠτα παρητήμεθα. Cf. Psalm 33.14, which he quotes in *Stromata* 4.17.109.2: παῦσον τὴν γλῶσσάν σου ἀπὸ κακοῦ καὶ χεῖλη σου τοῦ μὴ λαλῆσαι δόλον.

<sup>44</sup> *Protrepticus* 2.33.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 7.76.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 1.6.3–1.7.1: Καί μου τὸ ἄσμα τὸ σωτήριον μὴ καινὸν οὕτως ὑπολάβης ὡς σκευὸς ἢ ὡς οἰκίαν· «πρὸ ἑωσφόρου» γὰρ ἦν, καὶ «ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος». Παλαιὰ δὲ ἡ πλάνη, καινὸν δὲ ἡ ἀλήθεια φαίνεται. (...) ὅτι δὲ νῦν ὄνομα ἔλαβεν τὸ πάλαι καθωσιωμένον, δυνάμειος ἄξιον, ὁ Χριστός, καινὸν ἄσμα μοι κέκληται.

<sup>47</sup> For a survey of the relevant passages cf. *Šijaković*, *Christian Allegoresis of the Odyssey?* (forthcoming).

are a part of Clement's expression. One instance surpasses mere phrasal use or general comparisons and is especially instructive when compared to the above-discussed Gnostic interpretations of Homer prophesying about Christ-Logos, blacklisted by the author of the *Refutatio*. In explaining the meaning of the apostle's words (1 Corinthians 3:2) "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat", Clement understands milk (γάλα) here to refer to the Logos.<sup>48</sup> He supports this interpretation with other Scriptural mentions of γάλα<sup>49</sup> but also cites Homer<sup>50</sup> as saying that the most righteous men are milk-fed (γαλακτοφάγοι). But here again, as in the case of ancient testimonies in *Protrepticus* (and unlike those in the Gnostic examples), the source concedes the truth despite having no intention of doing so. The Homeric quotation is introduced with the following words: "Something like this Homer divines (μαντεύεται) *inadvertently* (ἄκων)".<sup>51</sup> In making the ancient texts yield the truth Clement goes beyond the reading of authorial intent towards regarding the author as unaware of the full meaning of that what he conveys.

Furthermore, in *Stromata* Homeric verses referring to Zeus in two different ways (Διὸς μεγάλου, Διὸς αἰγιόχου) are cited as mentions of the Father and the Son. This instance of the poet "getting it right" is understood as a random event, a lucky shot at divination (ὡς ἔτυχεν μαντείας εὐστόχου).<sup>52</sup> But in this work, Clement is less concerned with the errors of the ancient authors and more with the good (τὰ καλά) they expounded, which as such derives from God or his people.<sup>53</sup> Here the Alexandrian is ready to let Homer foretell (προμαντευόμενος Ὅμηρος) without commenting on it when he points to the relevance of Homer's words about friendship to Christians, which are to be understood in plain terms.<sup>54</sup> Clement also remarks that all who have spoken about divine things (οἱ θεολογήσαντες), in every culture, did so in a veiled manner, through enigmas, symbols, allegories, metaphors and similar tropes.<sup>55</sup> Together with the string of early ancient poets, Clement mentions Homer among

<sup>48</sup> The line from Corinthians was of special interest since it was adduced by those who "dare to call themselves perfect and gnostics" (Paedagogus 1.6.52.2) as support for the view that distinguishes between types of Christians (γνωστικοί and ψυχικοί) as opposed to the equality of all Christians before God. Cf. *Betz*, Eucharistie als Gottes Milch in frühchristlicher Sicht.

<sup>49</sup> As well as with the nature of breast milk, which plays a significant role in Clement's portrayal of God's love and spiritual nourishment. The issue was treated by *LaValle*, Divine Breastfeeding.

<sup>50</sup> Iliad 13.6, where the preferred reading is γαλακτοφάγοι. The verse was subject to different readings in antiquity in terms of which adjectives apply to which of the named peoples. Cf. *Janko*, Iliad Commentary (VI), 42–43.

<sup>51</sup> Paedagogus, 1.6.36: Τοιοῦτόν τι καὶ Ὅμηρος ἄκων μαντεύεται τοὺς δικαίους τῶν ἀνθρώπων «γαλακτοφάγους» καλῶν.

<sup>52</sup> Stromata 5.14.116.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. *ibid.* 5.4; 6.8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 2.19.102: καὶ μοι δοκεῖ τὸν πιστὸν προμαντευόμενος Ὅμηρος εἰρηκέναι «δὸς φίλῳ».

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 5.4.21.4: Πάντες οὖν, ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, οἱ θεολογήσαντες βάρβαροι τε καὶ Ἕλληνες τὰς μὲν ἀρχὰς τῶν πραγμάτων ἀπεκρύψαντο, τὴν δὲ ἀλήθειαν αἰνίγμασι καὶ συμβόλοις ἀλληγορίας τε αὐτῶν καὶ μεταφοραῖς καὶ τοιοῦτοις τισὶ τρόποις παραδεδώκασιν...

those who philosophize in a covert manner (δι' ὑπονοίας φιλοσοφοῦσι) because they learned how to speak on divine matters from the Old Testament prophets (τῶν προφητῶν τὴν θεολογίαν δεδιδαγμένοι).<sup>56</sup> Further on he writes that, incredible though it may seem because the poet depicts gods as suffering from human imperfections, Homer appears to have knowledge of the divine,<sup>57</sup> since he portrays it as eluding the senses of mortals. This impression is based on the Iliad verses in which Apollo wonders at Achilles for perusing an immortal, without perceiving that he is confronted with a god.<sup>58</sup> But according to Clement the true apprehension (ἀντίληψις νοερά) rests on faith and Homer is in that regard deeply flawed. The words (λέξεις) of Homer that may ring true are not a testament that he understood their meaning (τὰ σημανόμενα).<sup>59</sup> It would be like presuming that the ravens imitating human voices (οἱ κόρακες ἀνθρωπειὰς ἀπομιμοῦνται φωνάς) actually understood what they gave voice to. Ravens, trained by people to proclaim oracles, come up in *Protrepticus* next to goats avidly engaged in ancient divination practices (μαντική) which Clement ridicules as utter madness (μανικὴ), involving a propensity to deranged machinations and chance games.<sup>60</sup> As opposed to μάντις and the derivatives used in the cited examples (μαντεύομαι, μαντεία, μαντική), the word προφήτης carries a different weight and Clement shows care in using it, distinguishing between those who have the status of prophets in the eyes of certain groups<sup>61</sup> and the Christian prophets who are true “organs of divine voice”.<sup>62</sup> This is why his double-edged comments introducing Homeric testimonies do not have Homer actually prophesying, but foretelling, as if a stroke of luck made the poet into a *mantis*. Clement does not relinquish the Homeric testimonies, but makes sure that the credence to be given to them is provisional.

### Concluding Remarks

It is important to note that the image comparing Homer to a talking raven comes from an author who was willing to go further in his appropriation of certain ancient habits of thought and Gnostic approaches of his time than subsequent church fathers. The art of interpretation which Clement practises has many centoesque features of the contemporary “evil interpreters” who held Homer to be a *prophet*, with the notable distinction that he emphasizes that his Homer is not one, not even a real *mantis*. The commonality in the exegetical approach and the distinction in the attitude

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 5.4.24.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 5.14.116.4: καὶ τὸ παραδοξότατον, Ὅμηρος γινώσκειν φαίνεται τὸ θεῖον ὁ ἀνθρωποπαθεὶς εἰσάγων τοὺς θεούς.

<sup>58</sup> Ilias 22.8–10.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 6.17.151.4–152.1. The example given here: a) Homer's λέξεις: πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, the father of men and gods; b) τὰ σημανόμενα which he does not know: μὴ εἰδὼς τίς ὁ πατήρ καὶ πῶς ὁ πατήρ, knowing not who the Father is and how he is the Father.

<sup>60</sup> 2.11.3.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. Stromata 1.14.59.2; 1.15.71.4, cf. *Steneker*, Πειθοῦς δημιουργία, 97, 109, 168.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 6.18.168.3.

leads him to indicate his attitude wherever one might think he is treating Homer the same as “pseudo-agnostics” do. This seems to be a result of a conscious effort. Studies on papyrus fragments attest that the work of bishop of Lugdunum Irenaeus appeared in Alexandria very soon after it was written,<sup>63</sup> and it has been shown that *Adversus haereses* influenced Clement’s thought and writings.<sup>64</sup> This means that Clement was familiar with the portrayal of the evil interpreters of the Scriptures, who treated Homer as their own prophet. On the other hand, the Homeric excerpts which rang relevant to Christian doctrines were widely circulated in that time<sup>65</sup> and they seem to have had a significant audience ready to take them seriously. The power these piecemeal expositions exerted on the audience had to be channelled. It would appear that in the existing intellectual setting they had credibility which was easier to explain away than to negate. Clement’s portrait of Homer the Raven follows from the lines in which he expounds what it means to possess genuine knowledge, to be a true Christian gnostic. Thus, according to such a person, Homer is not a prophet. The chunks of truth about divine matters to be found in his work are there not because he understood them, nor due to higher inspiration, but because he heard something or happened to use a fortuitous combination of words.

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<sup>63</sup> Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in early Christian Egypt*, 23, 53.

<sup>64</sup> Patterson, *Divine Became Human; Osborn, Clement of Alexandria*, 282–292.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. n. 4. Parallels between the narratives in the Septuagint and Homeric myths had already been collated at the time of Philo, who disapproves of the approach, Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria*, 79. In *Refutatio* (5.26.35–36) we also find a remark that suggests that the practice of assembling supposedly corresponding mythical and Scriptural passages side by side was widespread in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.



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Јована Шијаковић

Византолошки институт САНУ, Београд

jovana.sijakovic@vi.sanu.ac.rs

### БЕЛЕШКА О ХОМЕРУ ГАВРАНУ

У делима Климента Александријског Хомерови стихови се понегде појављују као сведочанство за хришћанско учење или одређено тумачење Светог писма. Такви случајеви су у гностичким списима били основ за оспоравање њихове правоверности и оптужбу да гностици држе Хомера за свог пророка. У раду се показује да се у светлу тих оптужби Климент свесно стара да у сличним случајевима (када би се могло учинити да Песнику придаје пророчки статус) хомерско сведочанство уведе фразом која наглашава тобожњи мантички погодак Песника. На тај начин он успева да наведе хомерско сведочанство, истовремено га лишавајући било каквог озбиљног теолошког ауторитета. Необични приступ мотивисан је средином у којој ствара. Неколико извора упућује на то да су одломци Хомера који су сматрани релевантним за хришћанске доктрине били сабирани у својеврсне хрестоматије, те да је у Александрији, у којој је Климент писао против утицајних гностика који нуде „лажно знање”, постојала значајна публика спремна да те паралеле схвати озбиљно. Чини се да у таквом интелектуалном окружењу није било уверљиво негирати дата „подударања”, стога је било упутније понудити неко објашњење. Тако на једном месту Климент појашњава да је Хомер разумео (истините) речи којима се служи, таман толико колико и гавран разуме значење људског говора кога настоји да опонаша (*Шаренице*, 6.17.151.4–152.1). Гаврани обучени од људи да изговарају пророчанства осликани су у *Подсџреку Хеленима* (2.11.3) заједно са козама које ревносно учествују у античким мантичким ритуалима (μαυτικῆ) које Климент исмева као безумље (μαυκί). За разлику од речи μαυτις и изведеница које користи у фрази којима уводи хомерско сведочанство (μαυτεῖομα, μαυτεία, μαυτικῆ), реч προφήτης има другачију тежину у Климентовој употреби. Ако се не односи на хришћанске пророке (истинске „органе божанског гласа“), Климент напомиње лица према чијем веровању неко поседује статус пророка. Отуд приказ Хомера гаврана и његове мантичке среће треба да појасни да чувени песник није пророк у Климентовим очима, а да фрагменти истине о божанским стварима који се могу наћи у његовим стиховима нису ту доспели зато што их је Хомер поимао, нити по вишњем надахнућу, већ зато што је песник начуо нешто или је нехотице згодно узео речи.