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Ounomata and *Epōnymiai*: Knowledge of Divine Names in Herodotus*

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ABSTRACT: This article re-examines various passages from the second book of Herodotus' *Histories* concerning the origins of the divine names. It is argued that the distinction between οὔνομα and ἐπωνυμίη is not between theonym and epithet, but between a word which insists on the function of the name, to identify, and a word which highlights its etymology. When Herodotus writes that most divine οὐνόματα came to Greece from Egypt, he probably means that the Greeks first heard about the gods and learnt their names from the Egyptians, who may have learnt these names from the gods themselves. The Greeks then adapted the names to their own language, while maintaining the general ideas expressed by them. Herodotus' statement that Hesiod and Homer gave the gods their ἐπωνυμίαι is analysed in the context of *Histories* 2.53. It is argued that these ἐπωνυμίαι are poetic names reflecting the characteristics of the gods and inspired by the Muses, and that the verb δίδωμι ('to give') indicates that they were given as offerings to the gods by the poets. Passages 2.3, on human knowledge of divine matters and names, and 2.4, about the Twelve Gods, are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: divine names, knowledge, Graeco-Egyptian contact, Pelasgians, divine signs, anthropomorphism

With Plato in his *Cratylus*, Herodotus is one of the few Greek authors to discuss the origins of the divine names. In various passages of the second book of his *Histories*, he is concerned with what the Greeks know about the names of their gods, and how they acquired this knowledge. However, these passages raise many questions, not least because the exact meaning of the words he uses to refer to names – οὐνόματα and ἐπωνυμίαι – is difficult to understand. Here, I would like to review these passages and offer new interpretations, focusing particularly on vocabulary.

Human knowledge about divine matters

The first passage concerning knowledge about the divine names can be found at the beginning of the second book of the *Histories* (2.3):

> Now, among the stories which I have heard, I am not willing to expound on those regarding divine matters, except for their names (οὐνόματα), because I consider that all humans have equal knowledge about them (περὶ αὐτῶν).

According to one hypothesis, περὶ αὐτῶν ('about them') refers to divine names: all humans have equal knowledge about them because they are 'in the public domain, and accessible to human knowledge'; on the other hand, all humans know equally

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little about the gods.[1] Most scholars rather consider that περὶ αὐτῶν refers to divine matters, but they agree that what Herodotus underlines is human ignorance about the gods.[2] However, according to a different interpretation, 'Herodotus' comment on human knowledge of the divine at 2.3.2 need not imply a lack of human insight (that all men understand "equally badly"); instead it may suggest that "they all 'really know' something", albeit "an (indeterminably) equal amount"'.[3] Here, I would like to suggest a different reading of Hdt. 2.3–4, which I quote in full:

> Κατὰ μὲν δὴ τὴν τροφὴν τῶν παιδίων τοσαῦτα ἔλεγον, ἤκουσα δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ἐν Μέμφι, ἐλθὼν ἐς λόγους τοῖσι ἱρεῦσι τοῦ Ἡφαίστου. καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐς Θήβας τε καὶ ἐς Ἡλίου πόλιν αὐτῶν τούτων εἵνεκεν ἐτραπόμην, ἐθέλων εἰδέναι εἰ συμβήσονται τοῖσι λογίοισι[4] τοῖσι ἐν Μέμφι· οἱ γὰρ Ἡλιοπολῖται λέγονται Αἰγυπτίων εἶναι λογιώτατοι. τὰ μέν νυν θεῖα τῶν ἀπηγημάτων οἷα ἤκουον, οὐκ εἰμὶ πρόθυμος ἐξηγέεσθαι, ἔξω ἢ τὰ οὐνόματα αὐτῶν μοῦνον, νομίζων πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἴσον περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπίστασθαι· τὰ δ' ἂν ἐπιμνησθέω αὐτῶν, ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου ἐξαναγκαζόμενος ἐπιμνησθήσομαι. ὅσα δὲ ἀνθρωπήια πρήγματα, ὧδε ἔλεγον ὁμολογέοντες σφίσι ...
>
> Regarding the upbringing of the children, [the priests of Hephaestus] said so much; but I also heard other things in Memphis when I came to speak with the priests of Hephaestus. And what is more, I turned my steps both towards Thebes and towards Heliopolis for these same reasons, because I wanted to know if they agreed with the learned men who were in Memphis; for the Heliopolitans are said to be the most learned among the Egyptians. Now, on the one hand, among the stories I have heard, I am not willing to expound on those regarding divine matters, except for their names, because I consider that all humans have equal knowledge about them; but when I mention something about them, I will do so because I am forced by my discourse.
>
> On the other hand, regarding human matters, this is what they said, saying the same thing as one another ...

When Herodotus writes that 'on the one hand, among the stories I have heard, I am not willing to expound on those regarding divine matters', the verb 'hear' (ἤκουον) echoes the same verb used at the beginning of the paragraph: 'I heard (ἤκουσα)

[1] Thomas 2000: 279–80.
[2] E.g. Burkert 2013: 208–9; Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 71–4 and 84–6 with bibliography.
[3] Harrison 2022: 101–2.
[4] The manuscripts read λόγοισι, but Wilson, in his new edition, accepts Powell's correction λογίοισι. The phrasing of the sentence as transmitted by the manuscripts seems unusual (a reference to 'priests who are in Memphis' seems likelier than to 'discourses which are in Memphis'), and Powell's correction is strengthened by λογιώτατοι in the next sentence (as read in the more reliable manuscript A, and accepted by all modern editions, rather than the less likely reading λογιμώτατοι in the manuscripts of the d family. Λογιώτατοι is also used at 2.77).

other things in Memphis'. The particle μέν ('on the one hand') is answered by two δὲ particles. The divine matters he will not discuss are first contrasted with those he will, and secondly with the human matters of which the people of Memphis, Thebes and Heliopolis spoke (ἔλεγον). Thus, as noted by Thomas Harrison,[5] Herodotus' refusal to discuss divine matters should not be considered a principle applying to his work as a whole, but only the specific things said by the Egyptian priests.

As for his statement that all humans have equal knowledge (ἴσον ... ἐπίστασθαι)[6] of divine matters, it can be related to the preceding sentence, according to which 'the Heliopolitans are said to be the most learned (λογιώτατοι) among the Egyptians'. The idea of equality expressed by ἴσον is contrasted with the superlative λογιώτατοι. Even though it is not explicit in this passage, these Heliopolitans are certainly priests,[7] as Egyptian priests are Herodotus' main informants in the second book of his *Histories*.[8] What he may be saying here is that even though the Egyptian priests, and especially those of Heliopolis, are highly learned men, they do not know more than anyone else regarding divine matters.[9] Hence the assertion that all humans have equal knowledge about divine matters does not seem to be a general statement but rather a reflection on the expertise of Egyptian priests. Does that necessarily mean that they, like all other mortals, know next to nothing about the gods?

This passage has been read in close association with what Herodotus says at 2.65,[10] where he explains that all animals are held sacred by the Egyptians. He adds that:

> τῶν δὲ εἵνεκεν ἀνεῖται {τὰ} ἱρὰ εἰ λέγοιμι, καταβαίην ἂν τῷ λόγῳ ἐς τὰ θεῖα πρήγματα, τὰ ἐγὼ φεύγω μάλιστα ἀπηγέεσθαι· τὰ δὲ καὶ εἴρηκα αὐτῶν ἐπιψαύσας, ἀναγκαίῃ καταλαμβανόμενος εἶπον.

[5] Harrison 2000: 183.

[6] On the verb ἐπίσταμαι, see pp. 89–90 below.

[7] Obsomer 2020: 110–11 argues that the Heliopolitans are not priests, but his interpretation is based on the reading τοῖσι λόγοισι. If, on the other hand, following Powell and Wilson, we read τοῖσι λογίοισι (see above, n. 4), then we can suppose that λογιώτατοι, which describes the Heliopolitans in the following sentence, echoes λόγιοι describing the priests of Memphis, and therefore that the Heliopolitans in question are also priests.

[8] Obsomer 2020: 110–14; Obsomer 1998. Cf. Schwab 2020: 98–9 and 155–9. On the relationship between Herodotus and his Egyptian informants, see also Moyer 2011: ch. 1 *passim*.

[9] It is noteworthy that even if the Heliopolitans are considered the most learned of all Egyptians, Herodotus only cites them once explicitly as a source (2.73; again it is not clear if priests are meant specifically in this passage: cf. Obsomer 2020: 111). This may be because Herodotus did not spend much time in Heliopolis. The city and its inhabitants are only mentioned ten times in the second book, but six occurrences come from a passage concerning the geography of Egypt (2.7–9). Herodotus knows that there is a festival of Helios in the city (2.59), that there are sacrifices but no other rites (2.63) and the Heliopolitans told him about the phoenix (2.73), but he says nothing else about the city. By comparison, Memphis is mentioned forty times.

[10] E.g. by Harrison 2000: 182–3; Thomas 2000: 274–5; Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 71 n. 36.

> If I said the reasons for which they are consecrated, I would come in my discourse to divine matters, which I avoid discussing above all; but the things I have said touching upon them I said compelled by necessity.

Here, just as in 2.3, Herodotus says that he only speaks about divine matters when he is forced to, although this time, the statement seems to have a more general significance. In this passage, there is nothing to suggest that knowledge about the divine is inaccessible. In contrast, at 2.47, he makes clear that he 'knows' (ἐπισταμένῳ) why the Egyptians only sacrifice swine at a particular festival, but he refuses to divulge this because it is not 'seemly' (εὐπρεπέστερος). At 2.61, it is because it is not 'religiously permitted' (οὔ ... ὅσιον) that he refuses to say whom the Egyptians mourn when they beat themselves at the festival of Isis in Busiris. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of the mysteries of Samothrace (2.51) and the Thesmophoria (2.171), the secret women-only festival of Demeter, it is always in an Egyptian context that Herodotus avoids revealing the origins of religious practices (2.46, 2.47, 2.48, 2.61, 2.81, 2.171) or naming a deity (2.86, 2.132, 2.170), because of piety.[11] This may not be a coincidence and may reflect his respect for Egyptian religion, in which secrecy plays an important part.[12] Chapter 2.65 should probably be interpreted in the same way.

At 9.65, when Herodotus states that no Persian apparently entered the sanctuary of Demeter during the battle of Plataea in 479, he adds: 'I think (δοκέω), if one must form an opinion about divine matters (εἴ τι περὶ τῶν θείων πρηγμάτων δοκέειν δεῖ), that the goddess herself did not admit them [into her sanctuary] because they had set fire to her sacred palace (*anaktoron*) in Eleusis'. Here he is hesitant to express his opinion because the interpretation of divine signs and divine will is a matter of speculation. But it would be a leap to conclude that he believed that nothing could be known about divine matters. What Herodotus calls 'divine matters' (θεῖα or θεῖα πρήγματα) actually includes various things like divine will, which is difficult to decipher (9.65), but also accounts about divine names told

[11] As noted by Harrison 2000: 184 and n. 8, cf. 184–9.

[12] Coulon 2013: 171–7; Assmann 2009: 136–7. Sandin 2008 explains these passages by the existence of a Greek death taboo, and according to Gödde 2007, Herodotus refuses to tell stories about the gods which concern their death or their sexuality, that is stories in which the gods are comparable to humans. However, such explanations do not account for every passage where Herodotus refuses to speak about something relating to the gods. For example, at 2.62 he refuses to say why all the inhabitants of Saïs keep lamps burning throughout the night during the festival of Athena (πανήγυριν, cf. 2.59 τῇ Ἀθηναίῃ πανηγυρίζουσι and *PHib*. 1.27, 165–7). According to Gödde 2007, Herodotus' silence may have to do with the fact that Neith – the Egyptian goddess he calls 'Athena' – is associated with mummification and is the protector of Osiris, whose tomb is located within her sanctuary (2.170). However, what Herodotus calls the 'mysteries' of Osiris (2.171) are not part of the festival of Athena, but a different ritual (also mentioned in inscriptions from Dendara: Cauville 1997 *passim*). In the first millennium BC, Osiris is very frequently worshipped in the temples of other deities in the major Egyptian cities (Coulon 2013: 168), and therefore his presence gives no indication of the ritual in honour of Neith. In fact, we know from an inscription of the Imperial period from Esna that lamps are lit at the festival of Neith in Saïs to commemorate the goddess' arrival in the city (Sauneron 1962: 277–302) – and not Osiris' death.

by the Egyptian priests (2.3) or about the origins of religious practices (2.65). In the last two cases, Herodotus accepts the validity of these human accounts: therefore, it would be a contradiction to claim that mortals know next to nothing about divine matters. How, then, are we to interpret his statement that all humans have equal knowledge about them?

In 2.3–4, Herodotus stresses that he went to Thebes and Heliopolis to see if the people 'agreed (συμβήσονται) with the learned men who were in Memphis', and the human matters he relates are those about which the Egyptians 'say the same things' (ὁμολογέοντες, 2.4).[13] It seems therefore that he recognizes an account as valid and worth mentioning when several of his sources agree. What the priests of Memphis, Thebes and Heliopolis have to say about human matters is consistent, but they probably do not agree concerning divine matters, and this may be why he rejects their expertise in that particular field when he writes that 'all humans have equal knowledge about them'.

This may explain why Herodotus makes an exception for divine names: because what the Egyptians told him is confirmed both by other priestly sources and by his own investigation. For instance, he has 'many proofs' (πολλά ... τεκμήρια) that 'it is not the Egyptians who took the name of Heracles from the Greeks, but rather the Greeks from the Egyptians' (ὅτι γε οὐ παρ' Ἑλλήνων ἔλαβον τὸ οὔνομα Αἰγύπτιοι τοῦ Ἡρακλέος, ἀλλὰ Ἕλληνες μᾶλλον παρ' Αἰγυπτίων, 2.43), since 'the elements that he examined show clearly that Heracles is an old god' (τὰ μέν νυν ἱστορημένα δηλοῖ σαφέως παλαιὸν θεὸν Ἡρακλέα ἐόντα, 2.44). These elements include what the Egyptians say (λέγουσι, 2.43), what the priests of Heracles in Tyre assert (ἔφασαν, 2.44) about the age of their sanctuary and what Herodotus learnt about the foundation date of the sanctuary of Heracles on Thasos (2.44). What the Egyptians say (λέγουσι, 2.50) about the origins of the divine names is also consistent with what he heard from the priestesses in Dodona (ἐν Δωδώνῃ οἶδα ἀκούσας, 2.52; αἱ Δωδωνίδες ἱέρειαι λέγουσι, 2.53)[14] and especially with his own opinion (ἐγὼ λέγω, 2.53) and what he learnt from his enquiry (πυνθανόμενος, 2.50). It has been suggested[15] that Herodotus alludes to Protagoras' statement according to which it is impossible to know if the gods exist or what they look like.[16] If so, he may be responding to such views by promoting the historical method as a way of overcoming the limitations of human knowledge.[17]

Herodotus on divine *ounomata*

What did Herodotus' enquiry uncover about the origins of the divine names? As indicated in 2.50, he thinks (δοκέω) that 'the names of almost all the gods came to Greece from Egypt' (Σχεδὸν δὲ καὶ πάντων τὰ οὐνόματα τῶν θεῶν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου

[13] Cf. 2.147, where Herodotus writes that after recounting what the Egyptians say about their land, he will relate things about which the Egyptians and foreigners 'say the same thing' (λέγουσι ὁμολογέοντες).

[14] Cf. Hdt. 2.54–7 on the link between the oracles of Thebes and Dodona.

[15] Burkert 2013: 208; cf. Harrison 2022: 93–4.

[16] Protagoras DK 80 B 4. On this passage, see recently Corradi 2018; Henry 2022.

[17] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

ἐλήλυθε ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα). This assertion is puzzling since the names used by the Egyptians and the Greeks are very different. Scholars have therefore debated how to interpret οὐνόματα: does it really refer to names? To answer this question, it is useful to investigate Herodotus' use of the word in the *Histories*.

The meaning of OUNOMA

The word οὔνομα appears 277 times in the *Histories*; as a sample, I have studied its 106 occurrences in the first two books. Once, it refers to someone's great fame or reputation (κάρτα οὔνομα, 1.71). Another time, it is a title won in a contest: the title of 'blessed man' (ὄλβιος), which Solon denies Croesus (1.32). In all other occurrences, οὔνομα can be translated as 'name'.[18] Names are words which can be spoken aloud (βῶσαι, 1.146), those of the Persians all end in a sigma (1.139, 1.148) and the names of the Greek festivals all end with the same letter, too (1.148, though this may be an interpolation). Among other things, οὔνομα can refer to a sanctuary (1.143), a festival (1.148, 2.62), the fatherland (2.102, 2.115), an animal (2.73), a boat (2.96) and more often a person (e.g. 1.34, 1.71, 1.84), a place (e.g. 1.165, 1.175, 1.179) or a people (e.g. 1.143, 1.173, 2.30).

Herodotus frequently uses οὔνομα to identify people and places. For instance, when he refers to 'the city that is eight days by road from Babylon, whose name is Is' (πόλις ἀπέχουσα ὀκτὼ ἡμερέων ὁδὸν ἀπὸ Βαβυλῶνος· Ἶς οὔνομα αὐτῇ, 1.179), it is the mention of its name, together with its location, that allows the city to be identified precisely. Elsewhere, he mentions 'the daughter of the king [of Argos], whose name is ... Io daughter of Inachos' (τοῦ βασιλέος θυγατέρα· τὸ δέ οἱ οὔνομα εἶναι ... Ἰοῦν τὴν Ἰνάχου, 1.1). Here the genealogy and complete name, which includes the patronymic, informs Herodotus' audience that this is the same Io well known from myth. Some other people appear without a patronymic but it is their οὔνομα that allows us to identify them when they are mentioned again. Thus, Lygdamis is at first presented as 'a Naxian man, whose name was Lygdamis' (Νάξιος ... ἀνήρ ..., τῷ οὔνομα ἦν Λύγδαμις, 1.61) and who offered money and men to Peisistratus in exile, but in a later passage, we learn that Peisistratus entrusted Naxos to him after he had conquered it (1.64). The names without a patronymic that appear only once in the *Histories* still allow us to verify that the person named is the same known from other sources. For instance, the individual presented as 'a woman whose name is Phye in the deme of the Paeanians' (ἐν τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Παιανιέϊ ἦν γυνή, τῇ οὔνομα ἦν Φύη, 1.60) is also mentioned by other authors, such as Kleidemos (*BNJ* 323 F 15), who gives information not present in Herodotus' text. That the οὔνομα is that which allows the identification of a person or a thing is made clear by a passage where Herodotus mentions 'one of the Delphians, whose name I will not say, though I know it' (τῶν τις Δελφῶν ..., τοῦ ἐπιστάμενος τὸ οὔνομα οὐκ

[18] In the nine books of the *Histories*, Powell 1938: 278, identifies the same three significations: (1) proper name, (2) designation (for instance the designation 'blessed man' at 1.32) and (3) celebrity.

ἐπιμνήσομαι, 1.51): he refuses to give the man's name because he does not want to reveal his identity.[19]

The οὔνομα of a people or group is also closely linked to its identity. The Carians deny that they once bore the name Leleges (1.171) because they consider themselves autochthonous and distinct from the Leleges, who came from the islands. Likewise, the Athenians are ashamed of the name Ionian and reject it (1.143). Its οὔνομα can reflect how the group self-identifies but also how others identify it. Therefore, a group can be known by different names simultaneously. For instance, according to Herodotus (1.173), the Lycians were formerly known as the Termilae, and this old name is still used by their neighbours.[20]

Indeed, an οὔνομα is not always permanently attached to the thing or person named. A person can be known by one name at birth and by another from a certain point in their life: for example, when Cyrus was born, his grandfather Astyages ordered him to be killed, but a cowherd and his wife secretly raised 'the child who was later named Cyrus', and the wife 'gave him some other name and not Cyrus' (τὸν δὲ ὕστερον τούτων Κῦρον ὀνομασθέντα ... οὔνομα ἄλλο κού τι καὶ οὐ Κῦρον θεμένη, 1.113; cf. 1.114). His name was different when his true identity was unknown but that does not mean that it was a false name. It was simply a different οὔνομα, that is the name by which he was identified. Likewise, Herodotus thinks that Battos was named differently at birth, but that the Pythia gave him this name, from the Libyan word for 'king', because she knew that he would become a king in Libya (4.155).

Battos' case is an example of an οὔνομα conceived as a sign[21] which reveals something about the person or thing named. But sometimes it is impossible to identify the origins of a name. For instance, Herodotus does not know why 'three names [Asia, Europe and Libya] are given to the earth, although it is one' (μιῇ ἐούσῃ γῇ οὐνόματα τριφάσια κεῖται, 4.45), or where these names come from. He concludes that he will nevertheless use these conventions (νομιζομένοισι).[22] Herodotus rarely mentions the etymology of personal names (e.g. 1.1, 1.34, 1.60, 1.61), because it is not relevant: what matters is that the name identifies the thing or person named. He also writes that 'the names of the Persians suit their bodies and their magnificence' (τὰ οὐνόματά σφι ἐόντα ὁμοῖα τοῖσι σώμασι καὶ τῇ μεγαλοπρεπείῃ, 1.139). This does not mean that there is always a correspondence between the οὔνομα and the thing or person named. The remark about Persian names may rather imply by contrast that the names of the Greeks did not always reflect their characteristics.[23]

[19] See Hdt. 1.2 for a similar case where Herodotus mentions some Greeks whose names are unknown – that is, who cannot be identified.

[20] The word used to describe the name 'Termilae' is οὔνομα but the word referring to the name 'Lycians' is ἐπωνυμίη. An οὔνομα can be an ἐπωνυμίη: see p. 82 below.

[21] On names as signs in Herodotus, see Hollmann 2011: 141–55.

[22] Or 'the names used customarily' (νομιζομένοισι <οὐνόμασι>). As noted by Harrison 1998: 30, Herodotus 'wants the names to make sense and is disappointed that they do not'.

[23] In some cases, however, he may have thought that 'children were named with a view to the fulfilment of their ominous names' (Harrison 1998: 38).

When Herodotus writes that the Abantes from Euboea 'did not have anything in common with the Ionians, not even the name' (τοῖσι Ἰωνίης μέτα οὐδὲ τοῦ οὐνόματος οὐδέν, 1.146), he seems to imply that they could have been Ionians only in name – that is, that the name they gave themselves or that others gave them might not have reflected their identity. While the names given by oracles can be considered correct, as in the case of Battos (4.155), there is nothing guaranteeing the pertinence of names chosen by humans. For instance, a group of twelve Ionian cities in Asia Minor founded a sanctuary together and 'gave it the name "Panionion"' (τῷ οὔνομα ἔθεντο Πανιώνιον, 1.143),[24] which Herodotus seems to understand to mean 'Most Ionian', though he considers that it would be a 'great folly' (μωρίη πολλή, 1.146) to say that 'they are any more Ionian than the other Ionians' (τι μᾶλλον οὗτοι Ἴωνές εἰσι τῶν ἄλλων Ἰώνων, 1.146).

The verb used to indicate that a name was given to someone or something is usually τίθημι (1.107, 1.113, 1.143, 1.148, 2.43, 2.154), sometimes κεῖμαι (2.17, 2.164).[25] Accordingly, a name is something that is established and attributed to a thing or a person. All this suggests that οὐνόματα can be defined as words used by custom, labels by which the persons or things named are identified by themselves or by others at a precise moment, and which may or may not reflect their identity.[26] It has been argued that Herodotus' text echoes contemporary philosophical views about language, according to which there is a correspondence between the name and the thing named: each name corresponds to only one thing and every thing has a specific name.[27] But the examples studied above clearly invalidate this hypothesis. In fact, analysis of the use of οὔνομα in the *Histories* rather suggests that the author has an empirical understanding of names. He knows examples of things which have only one name and of others whose name changes over time, of names which are correct and others which clearly do not reflect the thing named. He thinks that some names are chosen by the gods but he knows that others are given by human beings, perhaps arbitrarily as in the case of anthroponyms.[28] What all these names have in common is that they identify the thing or person named.

[24] After mentioning the Panionion, Herodotus writes that the twelve cities that founded it resolved to exclude 'other Ionians' (ἄλλοισι Ἰώνων) from it. If he had understood the name of the sanctuary to mean 'the sanctuary of all the Ionians', it would be strange that he does not comment on this contradiction. Therefore, it seems more likely that, to him, the name of the Panionion meant 'Most Ionian'.

[25] According to a study of all references from the first two books of the *Histories*. Once, at 2.23, Herodotus refers to the name of the River Ocean using the verb εὑρίσκω, whose sense here highlights the fact that it is not a name attributed to a real river that has been 'discovered', but, according to Herodotus, name and river are both 'inventions' of Homer. The verb ποιέω appears twice (2.52, 2.42), but in both passages οὔνομα is used together with ἐπωνυμίη, on which see pp. 78–83 below.

[26] As Munson 2005: 42 notes, Herodotus is aware 'that objects are separable from names'. At first sight, Psammetichus' experiment at 2.2 seems to suggest that there is a 'natural' language, but Herodotus does not seem to accept the experiment's conclusions (2.15); on this passage, see in particular Munson 2005: 19–23 and Miletti 2008: 141–3.

[27] Burkert 2013: 203–9.

[28] On Herodotus' views in the context of contemporary reflections about names, see Thomas 2000: 82–5, 230, 278–81.

What are divine ounomata*?*

In the above discussion on the word οὔνομα, I left out occurrences that refer to divine names. Herodotus thinks (δοκέω) that 'the names (οὐνόματα) of almost all the gods came from Egypt to Greece' (Σχεδὸν δὲ καὶ πάντων τὰ οὐνόματα τῶν θεῶν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐλήλυθε ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα, 2.50), not directly but through the Pelasgians, a people supposed by the Greeks to have lived in various regions of the Greek world in the past.[29] 'As I know because I heard about it in Dodona' (ὡς ἐγὼ ἐν Δωδώνῃ οἶδα ἀκούσας, 2.52), Herodotus writes, the Pelasgians did not initially have individual names (οὐνόματα) for the gods; they simply 'called them by the surname "gods"' (θεοὺς δὲ προσωνόμασαν σφέας, 2.52).[30] When he writes that they 'did not create for themselves (or "procure for themselves", ἐποιεῦντο) a name for any of [the gods]' (οὐδ' οὔνομα ἐποιεῦντο οὐδενὶ αὐτῶν, 2.52), the pronoun οὐδείς suggests that a first step towards individualization had already been taken by the Pelasgians. But if they conceived the gods as a plurality, they must have seen them as a group whose individual members could not be identified. 'Later, after a long time had passed, they learnt (ἐπύθοντο) the names (οὐνόματα) of the other gods, which came from Egypt; but they learnt the name of Dionysus much later' (ἔπειτε δὲ χρόνου πολλοῦ διεξελθόντος ἐπύθοντο ἐκ τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἀπιγμένα τὰ οὐνόματα τῶν θεῶν τῶν ἄλλων, Διονύσου δὲ ὕστερον πολλῷ ἐπύθοντο),[31] and these names 'the Greeks received later from the Pelasgians' (παρὰ δὲ Πελασγῶν Ἕλληνες ἐξεδέξαντο ὕστερον, 2.52). The divine names that were unknown in Egypt came from the Pelasgians, with the exception of that of Poseidon, which was first used by the Libyans (2.50).

The underlying idea is that the gods worshipped by the Egyptians, the Pelasgians, the Libyans and the Greeks are the same.[32] However, this passage continues to puzzle scholars because the Greek names bear little relation morphologically to the Egyptian ones and Herodotus is well aware of this. For example, he writes that 'Bubastis, in the Greek language, is Artemis' and mentions 'Horus, the son of Osiris, whom the Greeks name Apollo' (ἡ δὲ Βούβαστις κατὰ Ἑλλάδα γλῶσσάν ἐστι Ἄρτεμις ... Ὧρον τὸν Ὀσίριος παῖδα, τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα Ἕλληνες ὀνομάζουσι, 2.137, 144). How then is the word οὐνόματα to be interpreted? Should we accept that there is a contradiction in Herodotus' text and not try to resolve it?[33] According to some scholars, Herodotus actually considers the Greek divine names to have derived from Egyptian names, but been distorted with the passing of time and by their adoption into first the Pelasgian and then the Greek language.[34] But

[29] On the Pelasgians, see Fowler 2003; Sourvinou-Inwood 2003; McInerney 2014.

[30] Bravo 2009: 61 considers 2.52 spurious because, among other reasons, it is the only attestation of the verb προσονομάζω in Herodotus. But the use of this verb in this context alone is not surprising: the Pelasgians did not 'name' the gods θεούς, since the gods did not have names. Προσονομάζω probably refers to the word that replaces the name.

[31] Cf. 2.146.

[32] Parker 2017: 57 and 60.

[33] As suggested by Mikalson 2003: 172.

[34] E.g. Harrison 2000: 251–64; Borgeaud 2006: 89–91; Ingarao 2020a; Miletti 2008: 78–85, who suggests that Hesiod and Homer also played a part in the creation of the Greek theonyms, when they gave ἐπωνυμίαι to the gods (see Hdt. 2.53; on this passage, see pp. 87–103 below).

when Herodotus writes that 'the Egyptians call Zeus "Amon"' (Ἀμοῦν γὰρ Αἰγύπτιοι καλέουσι τὸν Δία, 2.42), the two names are so different morphologically that it is difficult to see how Herodotus could have thought them related.

Another interpretation is that Herodotus is not referring to the particular sequence of sounds or letters which compose a name, but to the process of distinguishing, identifying and naming individual divine powers that have particular domains.[35] Indeed, discovering a name means more than just discovering a series of sounds or letters. Thus, according to the inhabitants of Chemmis, Perseus 'arrived in Egypt, knowing perfectly well the name of Chemmis, having learnt it from his mother' (ἐκμεμαθηκότα δέ μιν ἀπικέσθαι ἐς Αἴγυπτον τὸ τῆς Χέμμιος οὔνομα, πεπυσμένον παρὰ τῆς μητρός, 2.91). It is unlikely that Herodotus is talking only about a name in this passage. Perseus would at least have learnt that Chemmis was a city in Egypt and here, more generally, the word οὔνομα includes the meaning of 'reputation'.[36] Sometimes, giving a name to something may even amount to inventing it, as when Herodotus writes that 'I do not know the existence of any River Ocean, but I think that Homer or one of the poets of old introduced the name into their poetry having invented it' (οὐ γάρ τινα ἔγωγε οἶδα ποταμὸν Ὠκεανὸν ἐόντα, Ὅμηρον δὲ ἤ τινα τῶν πρότερον γενομένων ποιητέων δοκέω τοὔνομα εὑρόντα ἐς ποίησιν ἐσενείκασθαι, 2.23). Here, Herodotus probably means that the poets invented the idea of a river that flows around the earth and named it Ocean. However, as rightly noted by Richmond Lattimore,

> doubtless ὄνομα can mean something *more* than 'name', but [it is hard to] see how it can mean anything *less* ... If Herodotus means to tell us that the Pelasgians derived from Egypt everything about the gods *except* their names, he is deliberately emphasizing the most misleading of all possible terms.[37]

Names, as we have seen,[38] can be understood as labels allowing identification, but they are still words made up of sounds and letters. Without the name, how would Perseus have learnt about Chemmis, if he had not heard the word pronounced by his mother? When Herodotus writes that at first, the Pelasgians did not have names for their gods because 'they had not yet heard' (οὐ γὰρ ἀκηκόεσάν κω, 2.52) such a thing, we could understand the verb 'hear' in the general sense of 'learn', but it is likely that in this passage, it maintains its oral dimension.

[35] See among others Burkert 2013; Calame 2011a; Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 76–7. Burkert 2013: 207–8 cites Hdt. 4.45 in support of his idea that what Herodotus means is that the Egyptians taught the Greeks to 'divide the names', that is to give a name to each thing. Herodotus wonders why 'three names [the names of Europe, Asia and Libya] are given to the earth, although it is one' (μιῇ ἐούσῃ γῇ οὐνόματα τριφάσια κεῖται, 4.45). He adds that οὐδὲ τῶν διουρισάντων τὰ οὐνόματα πυθέσθαι. Burkert translates this 'nor can I go to ask those who made the divisions of names', but most translators understand that Herodotus does not know the names of those who made the division, that is those who divided the earth into three parts.

[36] This explains its usage in 1.71, mentioned above, p. 65.

[37] Lattimore 1939: 359.

[38] See above, pp. 65–7.

Herodotus' passage about Heracles (2.43–4, 146)[39] also indicates that the οὐνόμα is not simply the process of attributing a name to an individual god; οὐνόματα are also the names themselves. He places the Greek hero's birth about 900 years before his own time (2.145) but the Egyptians place his origins about 17,000 years before the reign of Amasis (2.43) and the Tyrians already had a sanctuary dedicated to him 2,300 years before Herodotus' time (2.44). From this, Herodotus concludes that there was not one, but two distinct Heracles, the Greek hero and another who is much older. He has many proofs (τεκμήρια) 'that the Egyptians did not take the name (οὔνομα) of Heracles from the Greeks, but rather the Greeks took it from the Egyptians, and among the Greeks, the very ones who gave the name Heracles to the son of Amphitryon' (ὅτι γε οὐ παρ᾽ Ἑλλήνων ἔλαβον τὸ οὔνομα Αἰγύπτιοι τοῦ Ἡρακλέος, ἀλλ᾽ Ἕλληνες μᾶλλον παρ᾽ Αἰγυπτίων καὶ Ἑλλήνων αὐτοὶ οἱ θέμενοι τῷ Ἀμφιτρύωνος γόνῳ τοὔνομα Ἡρακλέα, 2.43). That the Greeks thought there was only one Heracles, according to Herodotus, can only be explained by homonymy. What the Greeks apparently took from the Egyptians and gave to the son of Amphitryon is the name, since he was called Alcides at birth according to Pindar[40] and later sources. Herodotus perhaps thought that the Greeks named him after the god Heracles because his exceptional characteristics made him godlike. But he insists that the son of Amphitryon is human (ἄνθρωπον, 2.45; cf. 2.146), with human parents and human limitations, since he would have been unable to slay thousands of people on his own. There is no indication that the Greeks took anything else from the god to give to the hero besides his name.

It seems preferable therefore to understand the οὐνόματα of the gods as 'names', even if they sometimes encompass something more.[41] What are these names? At 1.44, Herodotus uses the verb ὀνομάζω to refer to divine epithets – when Croesus invokes Zeus by 'naming' (ὀνομάζων) him Ἑπίστιος ('Protector of the hearth') and Ἑταιρεῖος ('Presiding over fellowship').[42] That epithets can be called οὐνόματα is not surprising if an οὔνομα can be interpreted as a word which allows identification: one of the main functions of an epithet is to identify either a deity of a specific place or a specific aspect of a deity.[43] However, all the examples of οὐνόματα taught by the Egyptians or the Libyans or created by the Pelasgians (2.43, 2.49–52, 1.146) are 'theonyms', without epithets: Dionysus, Poseidon, Hera, Hestia, Themis, Pan and Heracles (the god), or the collective names of the Dioscuri, the Charites and the Nereids. Here, Herodotus probably excludes epithets because he refers to the οὐνόματα used by the Greeks in general (2.43, 2.49, 2.52, 2.146: Ἕλληνες; cf. 2.50: Ἑλλάς), and not to local names, or because he is only concerned with theonyms but lacks a specific word for them.

[39] On this passage, see Pitz 2016; Parker 2017: 196–7; Ingarao 2020b.
[40] Fr. 291 Snell–Maehler; cf. fr. 52u.
[41] Calame 2014: 81 translates οὔνομα as 'l'identité dénommée'.
[42] On this passage, see Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 125–6.
[43] Parker 2017: 13–17.

The transmission of divine ounomata *to the Greeks*

How are we to explain that the Greeks learnt the names of the gods from the Egyptians, when they are so different morphologically? According to one hypothesis, the divine names used by the Greeks were given to them by the Pelasgians, who translated or transposed the Egyptian names and named the gods unknown to the Egyptians; the Greeks then adopted these Pelasgian names, which had Egyptian origins but Pelasgian forms.[44] This would explain why Greek divine names are different from the Egyptian names, but also why they seem unintelligible to the Greeks, since the Pelasgian language is a barbarian language (1.57).

There are two main arguments against this hypothesis. First of all, there is nothing in Herodotus' text to suggest that he considered all divine names unintelligible. For instance, the etymology linking the name of Aphrodite to the word ἀφρός ('foam', 'froth'), already found in Hesiod (*Theog.* 188–202), is widely accepted by Greeks of all periods,[45] which suggests that Herodotus probably accepted it, too. More importantly, the latter thinks (μοι δοκέουσι) that most of the gods who were unknown to the Egyptians were named (ὀνομασθῆναι) by the Pelasgians, including the Dioscuri, Hestia, Themis and the Charites (2.50), who all bear names that are perfectly intelligible for the Greeks. At least some names given by the Pelasgians have an obvious Greek etymology.[46] As for the others, Herodotus may very well have thought that they also had a Greek etymology that had been forgotten with the passing of time, as did many Greek authors.[47]

The second argument against the hypothesis that the Greeks used untranslated Pelasgian names for their gods is that not all divine names come from the Pelasgians. Herodotus writes that the name of Dionysus, who is called Osiris in Egypt (2.42, 144), was taught to the Greeks by the Greek Melampus; Melampus himself, Herodotus thinks (μοι δοκέει), learnt the name from Cadmus and the other Phoenicians who came to Boeotia from Tyre, but the worship of Dionysus originally came from Egypt (2.49). Should we conclude that the Pelasgians

[44] Borgeaud 1996: 26.

[45] Cf. among others Pl. *Cra.* 406c–d; Arist. *Gen. an.* 2.736a. On ancient etymologies of Aphrodite's name, see Pironti 2005.

[46] We may add that it is not even clear in Herodotus that the Pelasgians spoke a foreign language at the time they adopted the divine names that came from Egypt by order of the oracle of Dodona (cf. Munson 2005: 12–13). Herodotus gives a Greek etymology for the word θεοί, by which the Pelasgians referred to their gods before they started using individual names for them (2.52). Moreover, in this passage the Pelasgians are distinguished from the barbarians, that is the Egyptians. Even though all Pelasgians originally spoke a barbarian language, some who lived side by side with the Greeks in Athens started speaking Greek and became Greek (1.57). At the time of its foundation, the oracle of Dodona was located in a region called Pelasgis, but was apparently operated by Greek-speaking Thesprotians (2.56), therefore, the Pelasgians who lived nearby might also have started speaking Greek before they began to consult the oracle. They could have remained Pelasgians even if they spoke Greek because language is not the only marker of Greek ethnicity (8.144). However, at 1.57, the Athenian Pelasgians become Greek and start speaking the language simultaneously. Therefore, the question must remain open.

[47] For example, Plato in his *Cratylus*.

and Phoenicians always translated the names of the gods that came from Egypt, while the Greeks, for some reason, did not – with some exceptions including the names of the Dioscuri, Hestia, Themis and the Charites? It is an unnecessarily complex hypothesis, for which there is no support in Herodotus' text. It seems to me that, according to the latter, the divine names were indeed translated, but that each people, including the Greeks, adapted foreign divine names into their own language.

The ancient Greeks did not just translate common nouns, but also proper nouns. An example is the Egyptian city of Iunu,[48] famous for its temple dedicated to the solar deity Ra[49] and occasionally called 'Iunu of (the god) Ra'.[50] In Greek, as testified by Herodotus among others,[51] the city was called Heliopolis ('City of Helios/the Sun'). Anthroponyms could be translated, too. Non-Greeks who lived in a Greek or multicultural environment could receive an additional Greek name, which might bear a semantic relationship to their original name. For example, in the Hellenistic period, an Egyptian named Pmois ('The Lion') was called Λέων in Greek, and because Apollo was considered an equivalent of the Egyptian god Horus, individuals bearing the theophoric name Horus could be called Apollonios in Greek.[52] Herodotus himself refers to a woman called Cyno ('Bitch') in Greek and Spako in Median, since *spax* is the Median word for 'bitch' (1.110).[53] If, according to Herodotus, anthroponyms were sometimes transposed into a different language, there is no reason to think that divine names could not be transposed, too.

A look at the way Herodotus treats foreign languages[54] may shed some light on the process of adopting foreign names. The Greeks and especially Herodotus use foreign words for animals or plants that are not indigenous in Greek-speaking regions.[55] For example, petroleum, an oil (ἔλαιον) which 'is dark and produces a strong smell', does not have a Greek name but Herodotus only writes that 'the Persians call it ῥαδινάκη' (τὸ δὲ ἔλαιον <...> οἱ Πέρσαι καλέουσι τοῦτο ῥαδινάκην· ἔστι δὲ μέλαν καὶ ὀδμὴν παρεχόμενον βαρέαν, 6.119).[56] The discovery of foreign things is thus closely interlinked with the discovery of their indigenous names. When the Greeks begin to refer more frequently to foreign things, they can use the foreign name in a Hellenized form, as a loanword. This is the case when Herodotus refers to cinnamon, 'the sticks that we call κινάμωμον, having learnt

[48] Trismegistos TM Geo 761 (www.trismegistos.org/place/761).
[49] See among others Raue 2018. Cf. Hdt. 2.59.
[50] *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* s.v. *jwn.w-raw* (lemma no. 858655). The name 'House of Ra' seems to refer to the temple of Ra and not the city as a whole (Raue 1999: 15–16).
[51] See for instance Hdt. 2.3 and 2.59.
[52] Coussement 2016: 87–91. Cf. for instance Adamasi Guzzo and Bonnet 1991 for Phoenician anthroponyms. This adoption of a Greek name is mainly documented in the Hellenistic period but it probably happened earlier. See also Plato's *Critias* (113a–b), in which Solon, according to the eponymous character, gave Greek names to the Atlanteans after researching the meaning of each name (τὴν διάνοιαν ὀνόματος) and translating them into Greek.
[53] Cf. also Miletti 2008: 105–10 on the difficult passage 6.98 concerning the names of Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes.
[54] See in particular Munson 2005; Harrison 1998; Miletti 2008: 87–97.
[55] Munson 2005: 51–3 and n. 104.
[56] According to the *TLG*, the word πετρέλαιον only appears in the eighth or ninth century AD.

it from the Phoenicians' (τὰ κάρφεα τὰ ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ Φοινίκων μαθόντες κινάμωμον καλέομεν, 3.111).[57]

But the Greeks can also transpose foreign names into the Greek language using words which seem appropriate.[58] In order to do so, they can use various strategies which appear in Herodotus' work.[59] They can give the foreign thing a Greek name which bears a phonetic resemblance to the original word: thus, the Scythian river Porata was named Pyretos by the Greeks (4.48).[60] By analogy, they can also use an existing word that refers to something similar. For instance, when the Ionians gave a Greek name to the animals the Egyptians call χάμψαι, they named them κροκόδειλοι, which originally meant 'lizard', since crocodiles can be seen as giant lizards (2.69).[61] Or a new Greek name can be given, supposed to express the same idea as the foreign name. This is apparently the case when Herodotus writes that the royal banquet called τυκτά by the Persians is named in the Greek language τέλειον (9.110);[62] here, a Greek etymology is given for the Persian word, supposed to derive from the word τυκτός, which, like τέλειος, means 'complete'. The same can be said about anthroponyms. While some are a transliteration or an exact translation of the original, others bear a connection to the original name but do not represent a literal translation: for instance, in the Hellenistic period, an Egyptian man named Nechoutes ('He-is-strong') was called Aniketos ('Invincible' or 'Undefeated') in Greek.[63]

A similar process can then be suggested for divine names in Herodotus. When, he writes, the Pelasgians first encountered the Egyptian gods, they necessarily learnt their Egyptian names first. It is presumably to this first stage that Herodotus refers when he says that the Greeks learnt the names of the gods from the Egyptians, through the Pelasgians. The names would then have been transposed into the Greek language,[64] but the historian does not say anything about this second stage. This is possibly because different approaches were taken for different names or because Herodotus does not know how the names were transposed. He probably does not understand the meaning of most foreign names given to the gods and this may be why he does not comment on their etymology.[65] Thus, he would have been unable to give any precise indication of the way the divine names taught by the Egyptians were transposed into the Greek language.

The one passage where Herodotus alludes to the etymology of a divine name provides a possible example of such a transposition: the Scythian name of

[57] Cf. Munson 2005: 51–2.
[58] Munson 2005: 41–6, cf. 36–9.
[59] For a theoretical approach to the transposition of foreign words in antiquity cf. Colin 2015.
[60] Munson 2005: 34–5.
[61] Munson 2005: 54–6.
[62] Munson 2005: 60–1.
[63] Coussement 2016: 87–91. Cf. Adamasi Guzzo and Bonnet 1991 for the various strategies used to translate Phoenician anthroponyms.
[64] There are several examples of foreign divine names adapted into Greek using transparent names, which presumably transposed the meaning in their original language: Parker 2017: 89–92. See the case of the Carian god whom Herodotus (5.119) names 'Zeus Στράτιος' ('Zeus of the Army'): Parker 2017: 103. Cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.67.3, which lists the various names by which the names of the Roman Penates are 'interpreted' or 'translated' (ἑξερμηνεύοντες).
[65] Herodotus probably spoke only Greek: cf. Harrison 1998: 3–9.

Zeus, Papaios, which he calls 'most correct' (ὀρθότατα, 4.59), probably reasoning that Papaios resembles the Greek πάππας, 'father'.[66] Since Zeus is called 'father' (πατήρ) in numerous Greek sources, starting with the Homeric poems,[67] it is not surprising that Herodotus considers the Scythian name so appropriate. But the name Zeus does not mean 'father' in Greek and its etymology is not obvious. Like his near-contemporaries Aeschylus and Plato, Herodotus may have linked the name to the verb ζάω, 'to live', and understood it as 'producer of life' (Aesch. *Supp.* 584–5: φυσιζόου) or 'the cause of life' (Pl. *Cra.* 396a: αἴτιος ... τοῦ ζῆν).[68] He would thus have considered that both the Greek and Scythian names of the god underlined his role as a giver of life. Since Herodotus thinks that the names of all the gods came from Egypt and since Zeus is not counted among the exceptions (2.50), he must have considered that the Egyptians taught the name of that god both to the Greeks (through the Pelasgians) and to the Scythians; both peoples would then have transposed the idea expressed by the Egyptian name into their own language,[69] even if the Greek and Scythian names did not have exactly the same meaning. If this interpretation is correct, it suggests that Herodotus considers divine names to reflect the characteristics of the gods and therefore that they are not arbitrary labels.

The origins of divine ounomata

If the Greeks learnt the divine names from the Egyptians, the Pelasgians and the Libyans, even in different forms, did the latter invent them based on their knowledge of the deities, or did they also learn them from elsewhere? Herodotus writes that with the exception of the gods who were named by the Pelasgians, 'the Egyptians have always had the names of the other gods in their land' (τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν Αἰγυπτίοισι αἰεί κοτε τὰ οὐνόματά ἐστι ἐν τῇ χώρῃ, 2.50).[70] As for the Libyans, they 'possessed (ἔκτηνται) the name of Poseidon from the beginning' (ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς Ποσειδέωνος οὔνομα ἔκτηνται, 2.50). But how did the Egyptians and the Libyans acquire these names? Herodotus thinks (δοκέω) that the Egyptians 'have existed forever, from the time when humankind came into being' (αἰεί τε εἶναι ἐξ οὗ ἀνθρώπων γένος

[66] Cf. Munson 2005: 44–5.

[67] For instance, Hom. *Il.* 2.146.

[68] As suggested by Munson 2005: 44–5 and n. 68.

[69] Amon, the Egyptian name of Zeus (Hdt. 2.42) actually means 'The hidden one' (Gabolde 2013: 27–8); there is nothing to suggest that Herodotus was aware of this.

[70] Here, Herodotus expresses his own opinion. He says that he thinks (δοκέω) that divine names came to Greece from Egypt, and explains the reasons why he holds such an opinion (introduced by γὰρ), among which is the fact that the Egyptians have always had the names of the gods in their land. When he adds that 'I say what the Egyptians themselves say' (λέγω δὲ τὰ λέγουσι αὐτοὶ Αἰγύπτιοι), it is not to distance himself from this statement, but to indicate his sources. Bravo 2009: 60 considers that the sentence stating that the divine names had come to Greece from Egypt is an interpolation. According to Bravo, Herodotus could not have written that he believed (δοκέω) what he knew for a fact, having heard it in Dodona (ἐν Δωδώνῃ οἶδα ἀκούσας, 2.52). But when Herodotus writes that he knows it, he has no other proof than what the priestesses in Dodona say. Therefore, what he means is that he believes them, because what they say is consistent with his own enquiry. There is no contradiction between believing and knowing here.

ἐγένετο, 2.15). This implies that they also possessed the names of the gods from the very birth of humankind. They did not create or acquire them over time. As name and identification are closely interlinked, as argued above,[71] this means that the Egyptians knew the identities of the gods from the very beginning, unlike other peoples, which suggests greater proximity to the divine.

According to the Egyptians, in the very remote past, 'those who ruled in Egypt were gods, who dwelled together with humans' (θεοὺς εἶναι τοὺς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἄρχοντας οἰκέοντας ἅμα τοῖσι ἀνθρώποισι, 2.144).[72] Here, Herodotus uses indirect speech to indicate that he is only reporting what the Egyptians themselves say. As usual, when he refers to a distant past when the gods perhaps interacted with humans,[73] he only indicates what various peoples claim; he does not seem to have a personal opinion. But nor does he exclude that the first rulers of Egypt may have been gods. Therefore, when he writes that the Egyptians have always had the names of the gods, he leaves open the possibility that the Egyptians had learnt the divine names from the gods themselves, when they were ruled by them. In any case, it is noteworthy that the oracle of Dodona, consulted by the Pelasgians, 'ordered [them] to use the names that came from the barbarians' (τὰ οὐνόματα τὰ ἀπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων ἥκοντα, ἀνεῖλε τὸ μαντήιον χρᾶσθαι, 2.52), and it is the knowledge of these divinely approved names that the Pelasgians passed on to the Greeks.[74]

Unlike these older peoples who may have been closer to the gods in the distant past and who had possessed their names since the very beginning, Herodotus' vocabulary suggests that it is the Pelasgians who named the newer gods, whom they were the first to honour. At first, Herodotus writes, the Pelasgians did not have names for each god, but only 'called them by the surname "gods"' (θεοὺς δὲ προσωνόμασάν σφεας, 2.52). After they discovered the practice of naming individual deities, they also attributed names to some gods unknown to the Egyptians: 'those, it seems to me, were named by the Pelasgians' (οὗτοι δέ μοι δοκέουσι ὑπὸ Πελασγῶν ὀνομασθῆναι, 2.50).

Does this mean that, unlike the names of all the other gods, which may be of divine origin, those of the Dioscuri, Hera, Hestia, Themis, the Charites and the Nereids are mere human conventions? In the *Histories*, the verb ὀνομάζω much more frequently means 'call by a name' than 'assign a name'.[75] Thus, it is not excluded that Herodotus means that the Pelasgians were the first to call these gods by particular names, and not that they invented them. Since name and identity go hand in hand, this passage implies that the Pelasgians somehow discovered the existence and identity of the gods who were unknown to the Egyptians and the Libyans. How they might have discovered them is unclear. They could have received some sign, like an oracle or an epiphany.

[71] See pp. 65–6, 72–3.

[72] Other manuscripts read οὐκ ἐόντας instead of οἰκέοντας. On divine kings in Egypt, see Schwab 2020: 167–9.

[73] Cf. Darbo-Peschanski 1987: 25–35.

[74] Cf. Borgeaud 2006: 91–2.

[75] 'Assign a name': Hdt. 1.24, 1.94, 2.69, 4.6, 5.71. 'Call by a name': 1.7, 1.44, 1.72, 2.77, 2.79, 2.125, 2.144, 3.1, 3.8, 3.33, 4.27, 4.33, 4.94; in the middle voice, 'bear a name': 1.35, 1.113, 5.52, 7.129, 8.44, 3.26, 4.59. 'Utter the name', 'mention': 1.86, 2.155, 2.86, 2.128 (x2), 4.35, 4.197, 9.32, 9.44, 9.94.

If so, they could have been taught the divine names by the gods on this occasion. For instance, it is conceivable that Herodotus thought that the names were not only validated by the oracle of Dodona, like the names that came from Egypt, but that they were chosen by this oracle, just as the name 'Battos' was chosen by the Pythia (4.155). In a fragment of Aeschylus' *Aetnaeans*, which concerns the birth of the Palikoi, to the question 'what name will the mortals establish for them?' the answer is, 'Zeus orders to call them venerable Palikoi' (Τί δῆτ' ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ὄνομα θήσονται βροτοί; | Σεμνοὺς Παλικοὺς Ζεὺς ἐφίεται καλεῖν, fr. 6 Radt). Likewise, Pausanias writes that Pierus 'changed the names' (τὰ ὀνόματα τὰ νῦν μεταθέσθαι, 9.29) of the Muses, but then adds that he may have done so 'in accordance with some oracle' (κατά τι μάντευμα). As these examples show, the fact that a divine name was established by humans does not exclude the possibility that it was received from the gods. In fact, in 2.50, Herodotus is not interested in the specific process by which divine names were attributed by the Pelasgians but in the identity of the first people to use the names that were unknown to the Egyptians. In the end, it seems that Herodotus' enquiry did not allow him to form a precise opinion on the origins of the divine names (οὐνόματα) first used by the Egyptians, Libyans or Pelasgians, but there is nothing in his work suggesting that he considers them to be human conventions.

In fact, the vocabulary of knowledge, which is omnipresent in the passages concerning the origins of divine names,[76] suggests that the opposite is the case. For instance, it is from the Egyptians that the Pelasgians learnt (ἐπύθοντο, 2.52) the names of most of the gods, but the Egyptians said they did not know (οὔτε ... εἰδέναι, 2.43; γινώσκειν, 2.50) the names of Poseidon and the Dioscuri, and it is Melampus who taught (ἐξηγησάμενος, 2.49) the name of Dionysus to the Greeks.

In other passages where Herodotus refers to names which are merely conventions or only used by the Greeks, he uses νομίζω instead of a verb belonging to the semantic field of knowledge. At 4.45, he relates the different traditions concerning the origins of the conventional names of the three continents, and notes that he does not know why they are used but he will nevertheless follow the convention (νομιζομένοισι). At 6.138, he explains why the Greeks customarily (νενόμισται) call cruel deeds 'Lemnian'. In 7.192, he refers to the specifically Greek custom of giving (νομίζοντες) Poseidon 'the name "Saviour"' (Σωτῆρος ἐπωνυμίην).[77]

Likewise, when Herodotus refers to a representation of the gods which is specific to a particular people, he always uses the verb νομίζω ('consider', 'believe').[78] The Persians do not 'consider' (ἐνόμισαν) the gods to be 'of the same constitution as humans' (ἀνθρωποφυέας, 1.131); instead, they 'consider' (νομίζουσι) fire to be a god (3.16). The Mendesians represent Pan with the face and legs of a goat, but they do not really 'consider' (νομίζοντες) this his real form (2.46). The Scythians 'consider' (νομίζοντες) that Ge is Zeus' wife (4.59). The Egyptians 'con-

[76] Hdt. 2.43: οἴδασι, εἰδέναι, μνήμην, ἐξεπιστέατο; 2.49: οὐκ ... ἀδαής, ἔμπειρος, ἐξηγησάμενος, ἔφηνε, σοφισταί, ἐξέφηναν, κατηγησάμενος, μαθόντες, σοφόν, πυθόμενον, ἐσηγήσασθαι, πυθέσθαι; 2.50: οὔ ... γινώσκειν, ἐπύθοντο; 2.52: ἀκηκόεσαν, ἐπύθοντο, ἐπύθοντο; 2.146: ἐπύθοντο, ἐπύθοντο.

[77] On ἐπωνυμίη, see below, pp. 78–83.

[78] On this verb, see Pirenne-Delforge 2020: ch. 6.

sider' (νομίζουσι) that Heracles belongs to the generation of the Twelve Gods (2.43) and they 'reckon' (λογίζονται) that Pan belongs to the Eight Gods (2.46). Therefore, according to the Egyptians, Heracles and Pan are among the oldest gods, but 'are considered' (νομίζονται) to be the youngest by the Greeks.

In contrast, the lexical field of knowledge is used to refer to something that is not culturally determined. In 2.43, Herodotus mentions 'the other Heracles, whom the Greeks know (οἴδασι)'. This Heracles, son of Amphitryon and Alcmene, honoured as a hero (ἥρωι, 2.44) after his death, is considered an historical figure. He is unknown outside the Greek world because he was raised in Greece (even though he has Egyptian origins). His worship is a cultural fact, but his existence is not. The Egyptians only know the other, much older Heracles, and Herodotus sailed to Tyre because he wanted to know (εἰδέναι, 2.44) more about him. In particular, he is interested in matters of chronology. The Egyptians say that they have accurate knowledge (ἀτρεκέως ... ἐπίστασθαι, 2.145) about the age of the gods because they have kept written records about them. In such cases, Herodotus uses the lexical field of knowledge to refer to the existence of the gods and the heroes and to their antiquity, which are seen as objective facts.

However, what a people 'consider' (νομίζω) can be based on knowledge or supposed knowledge. As we have seen, the Egyptians 'consider' (νομίζουσι, λογίζονται) Heracles, Pan and Dionysus to belong to the oldest gods, whereas they 'are considered' (νομίζονται) to be much younger by the Greeks (2.43, 2.146). Herodotus uses the verb νομίζω to indicate that the Egyptians and the Greeks have different ideas about the antiquity of the gods. However, only one of them can be right and the Egyptians' claims that their calculations are correct because they have written evidence, leading Herodotus to revisit the age of Heracles (2.43–4), Pan and Dionysus (2.146). Likewise, in 2.2, Herodotus writes that in the distant past, the Egyptians 'considered' (ἐνόμιζον) themselves to be the oldest people. But King Psammetichus wished to know (εἰδέναι) which people was the oldest and devised an experiment. Ever since that day, the Egyptians have 'considered' (νομίζουσι) that the Phrygians are older than them. Here, what the Egyptians interpret as knowledge based on proof changes what they believe.

Herodotus thus makes coherent use of the lexical field of knowledge and the verb νομίζω, which refers to phenomena that are specific to one or several peoples, whereas the lexical field of knowledge refers to representations of the gods which are held to be objective facts.[79] Had Herodotus considered divine names to be human conventions first used by the Egyptians and then transmitted to other peoples, he would have used the verb νομίζω.[80] This suggests that for him the divine names first used by the Egyptians, or in some cases by the Pelasgians and the

[79] However, a religious practice can be learnt from another people's customs: for example, the Greeks learnt (μαθόντες, 2.49) the phallic procession in honour of Dionysus, which is customary (νόμαιον) in Egypt, from Melampus; they learnt (μεμαθήκασι, μαθόντες, 2.51) to make ithyphallic statues of Hermes not from the Egyptians, but from the Pelasgians. Unlike objective facts about the gods such as their names, ages and genealogy, religious practices have human origins. Therefore, even though they are customs, they can be taught.

[80] Cf. pp. 83–7 below on 2.4, where Herodotus writes that the Egyptians were the first to have the custom (νομίσαι) of the ἐπωνυμίαι of twelve gods and that the Greeks adopted the practice from them.

Libyans, were not only shared among various peoples (and probably all peoples), but were names that existed independently of these peoples. Therefore, Herodotus seems to consider that the names of the gods used by the Greeks are their real names: if so, they must have been taught to humankind by the gods themselves.

Transmission and creation of *epōnymiai*

The meaning of epōnymiē

Two other passages in the second book of the *Histories* concern the origins not of divine οὐνόματα, but divine ἐπωνυμίαι. Herodotus writes that the Greeks took from the Egyptians the practice of using ἐπωνυμίαι of twelve gods (δυώδεκά τε θεῶν ἐπωνυμίας, 2.4), but he also writes that it was Hesiod and Homer who gave the gods their ἐπωνυμίαι (τοῖσι θεοῖσι τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες, 2.53). What are these ἐπωνυμίαι? In the *Histories*, the word refers to divine names six times only: on three occasions, its precise meaning is not obvious from the context (2.4, 2.52, 2.53), and on the three others, it seems at first glance to refer to the epithets of the gods (2.44 x2, 7.192). Once, what is called ἐπωνυμίη is a patronymic (6.53). But in most cases (27 out of 34 occurrences in Herodotus), ἐπωνυμίη can clearly be translated as 'eponym' – a name given after someone or something. For instance, Herodotus mentions 'Therme, the city located on the Thermaic gulf, from which this gulf takes its eponym' (Θέρμῃ δὲ τῇ ἐν τῷ Θερμαίῳ κόλπῳ οἰκημένῃ, ἀπ᾽ ἧς καὶ ὁ κόλπος οὗτος τὴν ἐπωνυμίην ἔχει, 7.121).[81]

It is this latter meaning that the word bears in all other occurrences before the end of the fifth century BC. In his tenth *Olympian Ode*, Pindar writes that he will sing a '"grace" with the eponym of noble victory' (ἐπωνυμίαν χάριν | νίκας ἀγερώχου, 10.78–9) – that is, an epinikion.[82] In the first *Pythian Ode*, he also mentions 'the neighbouring city bearing the eponym of the mountain (Etna)' (ὄρος ... | τοῦ μὲν ἐπωνυμίαν | ... πόλιν γείτονα, 1.31–3). In the *Seven against Thebes*, Aeschylus writes that Eteocles and Polynices 'died correctly according to their eponym, with true glory (ἐτεοκλειεῖς) and with much wrangling (πολυνεικεῖς)' (ὀρθῶς κατ᾽ ἐπωνυμίαν | <ἐτεοκλειεῖς> καὶ πολυνεικεῖς | ὤλοντ᾽, 829–31). In the *Suppliants* 45–7, the punctuation is uncertain and ἐπωνυμίαν could be either a noun or an adjective.[83] However, the general meaning is clear: Epaphus received his eponym because he was born from Zeus' touch (ἔφαψιν, the word ἔφαψις being a synonym of ἐπαφή). Thucydides (1.3.2) writes that before the whole of Hellas shared a common name, different regions had taken their eponyms from the Pelasgians and other peoples. Pelops gave the Peloponnese its eponym (1.9.2), Acarnan to Acarnania (2.102.6) and the river Acheron to the Acherousian lake (1.46.4).

[81] For other examples of ἐπωνυμίη used with the meaning 'eponym', see Hdt. 1.14, 1.94, 1.173, 2.17, 2.42, 4.6, 4.15 (x2), 4.45 (x3), 4.107, 4.148, 4.155, 5.65, 5.66 (x2), 5.68, 5.92, 7.58, 7.61, 7.74, 7.91, 7.92, 7.178.

[82] On the exact meaning of these verses, and the difficulty of translating the word χάρις (literally 'grace'), see Kurke 2013: 91; Fisher 2006: 241. For a different interpretation, see Hummel 1993: 90.

[83] Sommerstein 2019: 107–8.

As for the adjective ἐπώνυμος, it obviously refers to something or someone taking its name from something or someone else in three of its four occurrences in the *Histories*. Herodotus mentions a sanctuary which is 'ἐπώνυμον of Aphrodite "Xeine"' (ξείνης Ἀφροδίτης ἐπώνυμόν ἐστι, 2.112), that is, it is called the 'sanctuary of Aphrodite ξείνη'. In his discussion of Mount Atlas, he writes that the people who live there 'became ἐπώνυμοι of this mountain; for they are called "Atlantes"' (ἐπὶ τούτου τοῦ ὄρεος οἱ ἄνθρωποι οὗτοι ἐπώνυμοι ἐγένοντο· καλέονται γὰρ δὴ Ἄτλαντες, 4.184). In a speech, Xerxes alludes to the conquest of the Peloponnese by 'Pelops the Phrygian' and adds that 'up to this day the people and their land are called ἐπώνυμοι of their conqueror' (ἐς τόδε αὐτοί τε ὦνθρωποι καὶ ἡ γῆ αὐτῶν ἐπώνυμοι τοῦ καταστρεψαμένου καλέονται, 7.11), to translate literally. The fourth occurrence of the adjective ἐπώνυμος in the *Histories* refers to a sanctuary dedicated to Ἀθηναίῃ ἐπωνύμῳ Κραθίῃ (5.45). The LSJ simply translates this as 'Athena surnamed Krathie', but the idea of eponymy is present since Herodotus mentions at the beginning of the sentence that the sanctuary is located near the river Krathis. Here, the goddess' epithet brings attention to the location of her sanctuary, which is relevant to the story told by the author,[84] and the word ἐπώνυμος probably underlined this.

The adjective has the same meaning in all its earlier occurrences since Homer and Hesiod,[85] including when it refers to divine names, especially gods' epithets. The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* recounts that Helios 'putrefied' (κατέπυσ', from the verb καταπύθω; πῦσε, from πύθω) the serpent in Delphi, and adds that 'from this (the place) is now called Pytho, and the people call the Lord (by the) eponymous (name) "Pythios"' (ἐξ οὗ νῦν Πυθὼ κικλήσκεται, οἱ δὲ ἄνακτα | Πύθιον καλέουσιν ἐπώνυμον, 3.371–4). In Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, Eteocles prays that 'Zeus "Alexeterios" ["Defender"] should become eponymous for the city of the Cadmeans' (Ζεὺς ἀλεξητήριος | ἐπώνυμος γένοιτο Καδμείων πόλει, 8–9), that is that he would defend the city. In the *Eumenides*, Apollo asks Hermes to 'guard [Orestes] and, being truly eponymous, to be an escort' (Ἑρμῆ, φύλασσε, κάρτα δ' ὢν ἐπώνυμος | πομπαῖος ἴσθι, 90–1) – an allusion to an epithet of Hermes as escort ('Pompaios') which is not attested before Aeschylus[86] but is also found in Sophocles (*Aj.* 832) and Euripides (*Med.* 759). In the *Eumenides*, again, the Erinyes tell Athena that they are 'the eternal children of the Night, and in their houses below the earth [they are] called the Curses' (ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμεν Νυκτὸς αἰανῆ τέκνα, | Ἀραὶ δ' ἐν οἴκοις γῆς ὑπαὶ κεκλήμεθα, 416–17). The goddess replies: 'I know your lineage and eponymous appellation' (γένος μὲν οἶδα κληδόνας τ' ἐπωνύμους, 418).

In most cases, in the fifth century, the prefix ἐπί- in the words ἐπωνυμία and ἐπώνυμος clearly has the meaning 'after', as in 'named after someone/something/some reason'. Ἐπωνυμίη cannot be translated as 'byname', as it can be used to refer to the principal name of something, for instance the Thermaic Gulf at 7.121. Even in 6.53, where Herodotus writes that Perseus does not have an ἐπωνυμίη from a mortal father, and where the word referring to his patronymic could be translated

[84] The only sanctuary founded by Dorieus is by the Krathis (near Sybaris) and not in 'the territory of Croton' (ἐν γῇ τῇ Κροτωνιήτιδι). Cf. Gaetano 2022: 163.

[85] As indicated by a search in the *TLG*.

[86] However, Hermes is already called Πομπός in the *Iliad* (24.153, 182, 437, 439, 461).

as 'byname', in the sense of a name used in addition to his personal name, the word indicates an eponym – Perseus' patronymic would be based on his father's name, if he had a father. Should we assume that in a handful of occurrences in the *Histories* which exclusively concern the gods, ἐπωνυμία rather means 'byname', with the prefix ἐπί- bearing the sense 'in addition to'? Or is it possible that these occurrences, too, concern eponyms?

In the three passages where ἐπωνυμία seems to refer to a specific divine epithet, the story behind the name is what matters. At 2.44, Herodotus refers to a Heracles who has the ἐπωνυμίη Θάσιος ('Thasian') in Tyre. He is obviously named after the island of Thasos, a fact made clear by the following sentence, which concerns the sanctuary of Heracles on Thasos. The phrasing of the sentence deserves further consideration. Herodotus writes that he saw a sanctuary Ἡρακλέος ἐπωνυμίην ἔχοντος Θασίου εἶναι. The infinitive εἶναι is generally ignored by translators,[87] but this construction is well attested with verbs like ὀνομάζω ('to name') or with the word ἐπωνυμία. For instance, Plato writes of Protagoras, literally, that 'people name the man to be a sophist' (Σοφιστὴν ... ὀνομάζουσί ... τὸν ἄνδρα εἶναι, *Prt.* 311e) and that 'Simmias has the ἐπωνυμία of being both small and tall' (ἐπωνυμίαν ἔχει σμικρός τε καὶ μέγας εἶναι, *Phd.* 102c), because he is taller than Socrates but smaller than Phaedo. This construction probably emerged by analogy with verbs of opinion or declaration.[88] 'To name someone to be a sophist' is not only to call him 'sophist', but also to consider him as such. Likewise, when Herodotus writes that 'Heracles has the ἐπωνυμίη of being Thasian', it means that he is Thasian, as his eponym indicates.

How should we understand this reference to a Heracles called 'Thasian' in Tyre? It is doubtful that there actually was a sanctuary of Heracles bearing such a cult epithet in the Phoenician city.[89] In fact, the word ἐπωνυμίη not only refers to names in a strict sense, but also to adjectives qualifying a person. For instance, Xenophon holds that καλὸς κἀγαθός can be an ἐπωνυμία (*Oec.* 12.2). In the passage of the *Phaedo* quoted above, 'small' and 'tall' are ἐπωνυμίαι and we note that most similar sentences – where the verb ὀνομάζω or the noun ἐπωνυμία are used in a construction with the infinitive εἶναι – concern common nouns or adjectives rather than proper names.[90] Herodotus himself only uses ἐπωνυμίη to refer to proper names. However, a look at the word οὔνομα suggests that exceptions are possible: while οὔνομα almost always refers to a name, at 1.32, Solon says that Croesus does not deserve the οὔνομα of 'blessed man'. Likewise, in the case of Heracles, Θάσιος could be a description rather than a cult epithet. Herodotus' informants may simply

[87] Muller-Dufeu 2016: 245–7 has rightly drawn attention to this. She argues that εἶναι is a complement of ἔχοντος, with ἔχω + infinitive meaning 'can', and she translates: 'J'ai vu aussi à Tyr un autre sanctuaire, d'un Héraclès qui, d'après sa dénomination, peut être celui de Thasos' ('At Tyre I also saw another sanctuary dedicated to a Heracles who, based on its name, could be that of Thasos'). However, ἔχω + infinitive denotes a capacity, not a possibility (cf. Powell 1938: 155–6 for examples in Herodotus).

[88] Kühner 1898: 44, § 355; Smyth 1920: 362, § 1615.

[89] For different interpretations of this passage, see Bonnet 1988: 49–50; Muller-Dufeu 2016; cf. Parker 2017: 196–7.

[90] See the examples in Kühner 1898: 44, § 355.

have referred to a Thasian Heracles, as opposed to the Phoenician one, though it is unclear why they would have attributed to him Thasian origins.

In the same paragraph, Herodotus mentions 'those among the Greeks' (οὗτοι ... Ἑλλήνων) who sacrifice to Heracles both 'as an immortal with the ἐπωνυμίη "Olympios" ... and as a hero' (ὡς ἀθανάτῳ Ὀλυμπίῳ δὲ ἐπωνυμίην θύουσι ... ὡς ἥρωι, 2.44). We do not know who these Greeks are. Among others, Herodotus probably has in mind the Thasians, who are mentioned in the same paragraph and may have honoured Heracles both as a god and as a hero.[91] Yet in Thasos the latter is called Θάσιος in a ritual norm contemporary with Herodotus, and 'Gloriously victorious' (Καλλίνικος) or 'Saviour of the Thasians' (Σωτήρ θασίων) in later sources.[92] Ὀλύμπιος is never attested as an epithet of Heracles, on Thasos or elsewhere, either in epigraphical or in literary sources. It is thus unlikely that Herodotus is saying that he bears the cult epithet Ὀλύμπιος in all the cities where he is honoured as a god. He means rather that Heracles is considered one of the Olympians, Ὀλύμπιος being a title given to the gods who dwell on Mount Olympus.[93]

At 7.192, Herodotus writes that the Greeks started using 'the ἐπωνυμίη of Poseidon "Saviour"' (Ποσειδέωνος σωτῆρος ἐπωνυμίην) after a storm destroyed numerous Persian ships at the battle of Artemision. Here, this expression is another way of saying that the Greeks believed that it was Poseidon who saved them. Just before this sentence, Herodotus writes that the Greeks, seeing the Persian ships destroyed, 'prayed to Poseidon Saviour' (Ποσειδέωνι σωτῆρι εὐξάμενοι); they did not found a cult to Poseidon with the cult epithet Σωτήρ, they simply acclaimed him, calling him their saviour in their prayer. Σωτήρ is not attested as an epithet for Poseidon in the Classical period and is very rare afterwards.[94] Moreover, Herodotus does not seem to be referring to a specific cult, since he considers that it is an ἐπωνυμίη used by the Greeks in general. Therefore, it is not certain that Herodotus understands Σωτήρ as a cult epithet.

Thus, in the cases of Σωτήρ, Θάσιος and Ὀλύμπιος, it does not seem possible to translate ἐπωνυμίη as 'epithet'. They are rather substantives or adjectives qualifying the gods; they can be considered eponyms, if we understand the word in a broad sense and do not limit it to proper names and common nouns. There is no indication in Herodotus or in other contemporary authors that the word ἐπωνυμίη had specialized to mean the gods' epithets in the fifth century. These passages of the *Histories* contrast with the only occurrence where ἐπίκλησις ('byname') refers to a divine epithet, that of 'Athena with the ἐπίκλησις "Assesie"' (Ἀθηναίης ἐπίκλησιν Ἀσσησίης, 1.19).[95] It is only a few lines later that we learn that Assesos is a town in

[91] See Pitz 2016.

[92] Θάσιος: *IG* XII Suppl. 414 = *CGRN* 27. Καλλίνικος: *IG* XII Suppl. 413 and 424a. Σωτήρ θασίων on second-century BC tetradrachms: Prokopov 2006: groups I–XI.

[93] As Heracles does, according to Hes. *Theog*. 950–5 and later sources.

[94] Jim 2022: 126.

[95] Ἐπίκλησις appears only two other times in the *Histories*. At 4.181, it refers to the name of a spring (ἐπίκλησιν δὲ αὕτη ἡ κρήνη καλέεται ἡλίου, 'this spring is called with the ἐπίκλησις "of the sun"', in other words 'the spring of the sun'). At 1.114, it is the designation by which Cyrus is known while his true identity is hidden and he is raised incognito by a cowherd: τὸν τοῦ βουκόλου ἐπίκλησιν παῖδα ('the child with the ἐπίκλησις "of the cowherd"', that is whose designation is 'the son of the cowherd'). In these passages, the ἐπίκλησις seems to refer to the

the territory of Miletus; the goddess' epithet is revealed to identify the sanctuary burnt by the Persians, its etymology is not relevant to the story told by Herodotus.

Ἐπωνυμίαι can be ἐπικλήσεις if they are bynames but, as we have seen,[96] not all ἐπωνυμίαι are. Conversely, some ἐπικλήσεις can be ἐπωνυμίαι if they are given after something or someone, but other ἐπικλήσεις do not deserve the name of ἐπωνυμίαι, if for instance their origins are forgotten. Likewise, οὐνόματα are not always ἐπωνυμίαι: they can be simple labels that have no obvious connection with the thing or person they refer to. But some οὐνόματα, at least, are ἐπωνυμίαι. Thus, Herodotus uses both terms to refer to 'Battos': he was not given this name as an οὔνομα at birth but acquired it later as an ἐπωνυμίη from the Libyan word for 'king' (4.155; cf. 2.42, 4.6, 4.45 x2, 5.65, 5.92). We sometimes find the word οὔνομα used in passages where Herodotus alludes to the origins of a name (e.g. 1.188, 2.30, 2.98, 2.164) and where we would expect ἐπωνυμίη. In such cases, the two words can probably be used interchangeably because all ἐπωνυμίαι are οὐνόματα: they still allow identification of the thing or person named.[97]

Thus, if Herodotus does not use the word ἐπωνυμίαι to refer to the divine names taught by the Egyptians, it does not imply that they cannot be eponymous, meaningful names. The word οὐνόματα is preferred because the focus is the process of identification of a specific deity allowed by the use of a particular name, and because not all divine names have obvious etymologies. It is true that Herodotus seems to establish a distinction between divine theonyms (οὐνόματα) and epithets (ἐπωνυμίαι) when he writes that at first the Pelasgians did not use 'ἐπωνυμίαι, and not even οὐνόματα' (ἐπωνυμίην δὲ οὐδ' οὔνομα, 2.52) for any of the gods. But if Herodotus were referring to epithets, we would expect him to use the word ἐπίκλησις instead of ἐπωνυμίη. We can understand this sentence differently: the Pelasgians did not have meaningful names, but nor did they use names that were arbitrary and mere labels.[98]

second part of the name or designation, and can therefore be understood as a byname. As for the cognate verb ἐπικαλέω, it most often appears with the meaning 'to call' in the sense of 'utter the name of' or 'invoke' (Powell 1938: 135), for instance at 1.86 and 1.87, where the names are those of Solon and Apollo, respectively. But once, ἐπικαλέω is used with the same meaning as ἐπίκλησις: at 2.112, when referring to a sanctuary of Aphrodite ξείνη ('Stranger'), Herodotus writes that 'of all the other sanctuaries of Aphrodite that exist, none is bynamed "Stranger"' (ὅσα γὰρ ἄλλα Ἀφροδίτης ἱρά ἐστι, οὐδαμῶς ξείνης ἐπικαλέεται). At 8.44, the interpretation is less straightforward. Herodotus writes that 'under king Cecrops, [the Athenians] ἐπεκλήθησαν "Cecropids"' (ἐπὶ δὲ Κέκροπος βασιλέος ἐπεκλήθησαν Κεκροπίδαι). Wilson accepts the reading found in the manuscripts of the d family, but other editions prefer the reading ἐκλήθησαν, found in manuscript A. If Herodotus did indeed use the verb ἐπικαλέω, how can we interpret it? He writes that the Athenians were first named (ὀνομαζομένοι) 'Kranaoi', then ἐπεκλήθησαν 'Cecropids' ('descendants of Cecrops'), later their name was changed (μετωνομάσθησαν) to 'Athenians' and finally, under Ion, they were called (ἐκλήθησαν) 'Ionians'. 'Ionians' cannot be considered the name of the Athenians because it never replaced it. It is a secondary name. Likewise, 'Cecropids' could have been used as a secondary name, a surname, while the Athenians were still called 'Kranaoi'; the change of name (μετωνομάσθησαν) would only have happened later, when they became known as Athenians.

[96] See pp. 79–80 above.

[97] Cf. below, n. 192.

[98] This view is supported by the use of οὐδέ instead of οὔτε (see Denizot 2013). If Herodotus had classified all divine names into two categories, theonyms and epithets, and meant to say

The difference between οὔνομα and ἐπωνυμίη is also visible in the verbs used to express that a name was given to someone or something: whereas οὔνομα is most frequently used with the verb τίθημι, as we saw above,[99] ἐπωνυμίη usually appears with the verb ποιέω (1.94, 2.42, 2.52, 4.155, 5.65, 5.68), and once with ἐξευρίσκω (5.66).[100] The verb τίθημι emphasizes the establishment of the name, whereas ποιέω highlights its creation. As far as divine names are concerned, the difference between οὔνομα and ἐπωνυμίη does not seem to be a difference between a theonym and an epithet (or a 'main name' and a 'secondary name'), but between a word which refers to the function of the name – to identify – and a word which allows one to insist on the meaning or origins of that name.[101] I tentatively summarize the relationships between οὔνομα, ἐπωνυμίη and ἐπίκλησις in Figure 1 below.

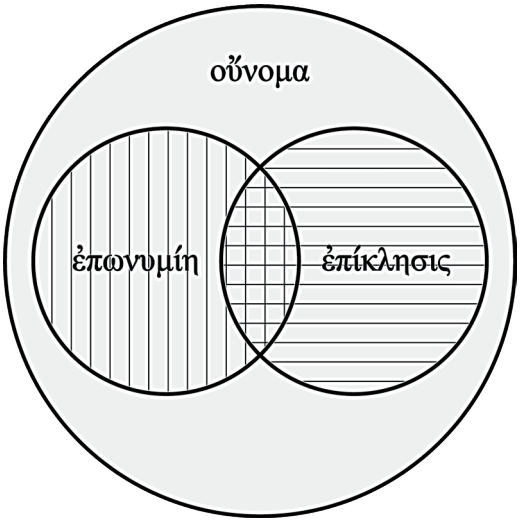

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the relationships between οὔνομα, ἐπωνυμίη and ἐπίκλησις in Herodotus

The epōnymiai *of Twelve Gods*

If the ἐπωνυμίαι of the gods are indeed 'eponyms', names given after someone, something or some reason, this may help us interpret the passage in 2.4 concerning the transmission of divine ἐπωνυμίαι, where the exact meaning of the word is difficult to infer from the context. Herodotus writes that δυώδεκά τε

that the Pelasgians used neither, we would have expected him to use οὔτε, a word which allows one to exclude a totality. With οὐδέ, the first term that is denied can be included in the second and a hierarchy in the arguments is indicated: this is precisely the case with the ἐπωνυμίαι which are included in the οὐνόματα.

[99] See p. 67.

[100] Herodotus uses τίθημι (4.45) and μετατίθημι (5.68) only once. Δίδωμι in 2.53 is an exception, on which see pp. 101–2 below.

[101] The fact that ἐπωνυμίη refers to the process of creation of the name has already been suggested by Ingarao 2020a: 263–5, with the difference that he still considers ἐπωνυμίη to refer to 'epithets', whereas I argue that it should always be translated as 'eponym'.

θεῶν ἐπωνυμίας ἔλεγον πρώτους Αἰγυπτίους νομίσαι καὶ Ἕλληνας παρὰ σφέων ἀναλαβεῖν. A literal translation would be: '[My Egyptian sources] said that the Egyptians were the first to have the custom of the ἐπωνυμίαι of twelve gods and that the Greeks received them from them'.

Is this a foreshadowing of the later discussion on the Egyptian origins of Greek divine names (2.50)? If so, why does Herodotus use the word ἐπωνυμίαι instead of οὐνόματα? Is he referring rather to the practice of giving epithets to the gods?[102] He uses the verb νομίζω here, in contrast to the passages concerning the transmission of most divine names from the Egyptians to the Greeks via the Pelasgians, where only verbs of knowledge are used.[103] Here, Herodotus seems to be referring to a cultural practice that is specific to the Egyptians (even though it was later transmitted to the Greeks). Moreover, if he means either the individual names or the individual epithets of the gods, it is difficult to understand why he refers to twelve gods only, and not to all the gods, as he does in 2.50. Therefore, he is probably not alluding to all divine names, but rather to the divine collectivity called 'the Twelve Gods'.[104]

However, the exact meaning of this sentence is problematic. At first sight, the plural ἐπωνυμίαι seems to suggest that it refers to the individual names of the gods included in this group. If the ἐπωνυμίη could be understood as a byname that is added to the οὔνομα, the main name, we could consider the individual names of the gods to be secondary names added to the main name of the collectivity, 'the Twelve Gods'.[105] However, as we have seen, ἐπωνυμίη should rather be translated as 'eponym'. It is difficult to see how it could refer to the gods' theonyms since there is nothing in the passage to indicate what the individual gods were named after.

Moreover, there does not seem to be a direct correspondence between the individual gods belonging to the group of Twelve Gods in Egypt and in Greece. Even if there is no canonical group of Twelve Gods in the Greek world,[106] Poseidon usually appears as one of the twelve in the lists that have reached us. This seems to have been the case in Athens, as suggested in particular by the frieze of the Parthenon and later by a Hellenistic relief that probably comes from the precinct of the Twelve Gods in the *agora*.[107] Poseidon is also cited by Herodotus' contemporary Herodorus (*BNJ* 31 F 34a) as one of the Twelve Gods in Olympia. Yet Herodotus writes that the Egyptians did not have a cult of Poseidon (2.43, 2.50). The same can be said about Hera, who appears on the Parthenon frieze and in Herodorus' list concerning Olympia but who, according to Herodotus (2.50), was unknown to the Egyptians. Conversely, Heracles, who is considered one of the Twelve Gods of Egypt by Herodotus (2.43, 2.145), never appears in our sources among the Twelve Gods in Greece.[108] Even if Herodotus had in mind a specific – and very hypothetical – group of twelve Greek gods which included Heracles but neither Poseidon nor

[102] As suggested by Mikalson 2003: 176.
[103] See pp. 76–8 above.
[104] Cf. Lloyd 1994: 28–9 on Hdt. 2.4; Long 1987: 147–8; Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 109–10. On the Twelve Gods, see also Hdt. 2.43, 2.145.
[105] Cf. Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 109–10.
[106] Georgoudi 1996.
[107] Georgoudi 1996: 50–8.
[108] Georgoudi 1998: 73–4.

Hera, he would have been aware that other configurations existed, especially in Athens.[109] So how could he have written that 'the Greeks' (Ἕλληνας) adopted the gods' ἐπωνυμίαι from the Egyptians, thus implying a Panhellenic custom rather than an exception? One possible explanation is that he is only relating what his Egyptians sources said (ἔλεγον), and that the Egyptians considered that their group of twelve gods was the same as the Greek one. But he seems to accept this version, since he says that the Egyptians 'showed' or 'proved' it (ἐδήλουν).

In fact, Herodotus only refers to 'twelve gods' here, without an article, and not 'the Twelve Gods', unlike all other passages where he mentions the Twelve Gods, either in Egypt or in Greece (2.7, 2.43 x2, 2.46, 2.145 x2, 6.108). Thus, he does not seem to be referring to an established group of twelve deities. This begs the question, how could the Egyptians have given names to twelve gods if the specific identities of these twelve gods had not been determined? It may be that the Egyptians were not the first to use the individual names of the twelve gods, but rather the collective name 'Twelve Gods'. In 2.4, Herodotus lists various things which the Egyptians were the first to do.[110] Just before mentioning the group of twelve gods whose ἐπωνυμίαι were first used by the Egyptians, he describes the Egyptian calendar, which is divided into twelve parts (δυώδεκα μέρεα), with twelve months of thirty days (τριηκοντημέρους ... τοὺς δυώδεκα μῆνας, 2.4). Elsewhere, he writes that in Egypt, each month is attributed to a specific god (2.82). Thus, according to one hypothesis, the passage about the ἐπωνυμίαι of the Twelve Gods refers to the twelve month-gods.[111] But it seems unlikely that Herodotus would have meant that the Greeks learnt from the Egyptians the practice of giving gods' names to their months, since no such practice is attested before the fourth century BC in the Greek world.[112]

However, that the number twelve appears three times in this passage can hardly be a coincidence. The mention of twelve gods probably follows that of the twelve months because Herodotus wants to stress that the Egyptians were the first to group the gods by twelve, just as they were the first to divide the year into twelve parts. Elsewhere, he writes that in the distant past Egypt itself was divided into twelve parts, ruled by twelve kings (2.147), and that the Babylonians were the first to divide the day into twelve parts (2.109). This suggests that, for him, the practice of dividing or grouping by twelve came from outside the Greek world, and this is what interests him in the passage concerning the ἐπωνυμίαι 'of twelve gods'. The choice of the word ἐπωνυμίαι may underline that it is not only an οὔνομα, a name identifying the group, but a name given because it was a group of twelve gods. In Herodotus, ἐπωνυμίη + genitive can mean 'eponym taken from something'; as in 4.45, where he mentions Asia, Europe and Libya, the three parts of the earth, 'bearing eponyms taken from women' (ἐπωνυμίας ἔχοντα γυναικῶν). Likewise, the δυώδεκα θεῶν ἐπωνυμίας could be the name given to a group because it was made up of twelve gods.

[109] Herodotus cites the Athenian altar of the Twelve Gods twice (2.7 and 6.108).
[110] Cf. Schwab 2020: 159–61.
[111] Long 1987: 147–51.
[112] Rutherford 2010: 46 and 49–50.

There is of course a problem with this hypothesis: why does Herodotus use the plural ἐπωνυμίαι to refer to a single collective name? A first possibility is that he is referring to different groups of twelve gods in Egypt. As we have seen, he is familiar with a group of twelve month-gods, but there is also a group of twelve hippopotamus goddesses who probably protect people born in a specific month.[113] Additionally, there are protector deities of the twelve hours of the day and the twelve hours of the night.[114] In Greek, if several entities are said to be attributed a different name each, the words ὄνομα or ἐπωνυμία can be in the plural, even if each entity has only one name. For instance, according to Herodotus, when Cleisthenes divided the Athenians into ten tribes instead of four, he no longer used the ἐπωνυμίαι of the four sons of Ion (5.66). The plural is used even if each tribe only has one name. Therefore, if Herodotus referred to two different groups of Egyptian gods called 'the twelve gods of the months' and 'the twelve gods of the hours', the plural could be expected for ἐπωνυμίη.

The use of the plural can also be explained even if Herodotus only has one group of twelve Egyptian gods in mind. In some cases, he uses the singular or the plural indifferently to refer to something shared by a collectivity. For instance, he refers to the form of ants using the singular (τὸ εἶδος, 3.102) but uses the plural when he mentions the form of crocodiles or of the gods (τὰ εἴδεα, 2.69; εἴδεα, 2.53). When a group of people share a collective name, this name is usually in the singular. Thus, Herodotus uses the singular to explain the origins of the Tyrrhenians' eponym (ἐπωνυμίην, 1.94), just as he does when he mentions the ἐπωνυμίη of the Lycians (1.173, 7.92), the Ammonians (2.42), the Skolotoi (4.6), the Persians (7.61), the Lydians (7.74) or the Cilicians (7.91). However, in some cases, the word referring to the collective name can be in the plural. Herodotus writes that 'all the Melanchlainoi ('Black cloaks') wear black garments, from which they take their eponyms' (Μελάγχλαινοι δὲ εἵματα μὲν μέλανα φορέουσι πάντες, ἐπ᾽ ὧν καὶ τὰς ἐπωνυμίας ἔχουσι, 4.107). He may use the plural because he is referring to individual Melanchlainoi, who 'all (πάντες) wear black garments', even though they share the same collective name. But in the passage of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* cited above, when Athena says that she knows the 'eponymous appellation' (κληδόνας τ᾽ ἐπωνύμους) of the Arai, she also uses the plural to refer to the single name shared by the collectivity and there is no reference to the individual Erinyes.[115]

Admittedly, the cases of the Melanchlainoi and the Arai are not perfect equivalents to that of the Twelve Gods; each Melanchlainos can be called 'Melanchlainos' individually, and the same can be said about the Arai, whereas an individual member of the Twelve Gods cannot be called 'a Twelve God'. But an exact parallel can be found much later in a passage of Pollux, who writes that ἀρχόντων δὲ τῶν Ἀθήνησιν ὀνόματα οἱ ἐννέα ἄρχοντες (*Onom.* 8.85). A literal

[113] von Lieven 2017: 101–6.

[114] von Lieven 2017: 107–10. It has been suggested that Herodotus meant a greater Ennead of twelve gods instead of nine (Griffiths 1955: 22), but such a group would still be called 'Ennead' and not bear the eponym 'Twelve Gods'.

[115] Therefore, it is not necessary to correct Herodotus' passage concerning the Melanchlainoi, and the sentence does not mean that 'individual members of the tribe had their names on their jackets like football players' (contrary to Wilson 2015: 84).

translation is 'the nine archons are the names of the archons in Athens', but what Pollux means is that '"the nine archons" *is the name* of the archons in Athens'. He then indicates the composition of the group (one eponymous archon, one βασιλεύς, one polemarch and six θεσμοθέται) and adds that 'these make up the Nine' (ἐκ τούτων γὰρ οἱ ἐννέα συμπληροῦνται). Here, he draws attention to the total number of magistrates. Likewise, as we saw, Herodotus highlights the number twelve in the passage under consideration. This may explain the use of the plural, in contrast to 1.143, where the singular is used to refer to the collective οὔνομα 'the Ionians' shared by twelve cities (τῷ ... οὐνόματι, 1.143) but the exact number of cities is not important.

However we interpret the plural ἐπωνυμίας, we see that it may very well refer to a single collective name in Greek.[116] If this interpretation is correct, then what Herodotus writes is literally that 'the Egyptians were the first to use (an) eponym(s) taken from twelve gods'; that is, they were the first to group the gods by twelve and to call them 'the Twelve Gods' after their number. It is from them that the Greeks took the practice of worshipping twelve gods as a group.[117]

The epōnymiai *given by Hesiod and Homer*

What are divine epōnymiai*?*

What about the ἐπωνυμίαι given to the gods by Hesiod and Homer, according to Herodotus' own hypothesis (ἐγὼ λέγω, 'I say', 2.53)? If all ἐπωνυμίαι are οὐνόματα, why were the ἐπωνυμίαι given by Hesiod and Homer not included in the οὐνόματα taught by the Egyptians? Unlike the names which are shared by various peoples, these ἐπωνυμίαι are specific to the Greeks, as rightly noted by Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge.[118] Moreover, in the passages dealing with the οὐνόματα, Herodotus is only concerned with names used in a ritual context. The Pelasgians sacrificed without using divine names, but from the moment the names came from Egypt and the oracle of Dodona ordered them to use them, they 'sacrificed using the names of the gods' (ἔθυον τοῖσι οὐνόμασι τῶν θεῶν χρεώμενοι, 2.52).[119] On the other hand, the ἐπωνυμίαι given by Hesiod and Homer appear in a poetic context.

It has been argued that in this passage Herodotus refers to both poetic and cultic epithets.[120] However, local cult epithets are rare in the works of Hesiod and Homer.[121] For instance, the epithet Πολιάς, which qualifies the Athenian Athena in the *Histories* (5.82) and in fifth-century inscriptions,[122] as well as the epithets

[116] This hypothesis could be verified by a complete analysis of the *Histories*, which would perhaps allow us to identify similar examples.
[117] Thus, there is no need to consider this passage an interpolation, contrary to Bravo 2009: 63–4.
[118] Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 92.
[119] Cf. 2.49, where Herodotus writes that Melampus taught the Greeks 'the name and the sacrifice of Dionysus' (τοῦ Διονύσου τό τε οὔνομα καὶ τὴν θυσίην).
[120] Gagné 2021: 24.
[121] See in particular Herrero de Jáuregui 2021 on toponymic epithets.
[122] For epigraphical sources see for instance *IG* I^3 369, l. 116 and *IG* I^3 375, ll. 4–6.

Θάσιος and Ἀσσησίη discussed above, are absent from the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the Hesiodic poems. They also fail to appear in the *Homeric Hymns*, which Herodotus may have attributed to Homer, as his contemporary Thucydides did.[123] Yet in Hdt. 2.53, as rightly noted by Renaud Gagné,[124] ἐπωνυμίαι is preceded by a definite article (τὰς ἐπωνυμίας). The poets did not only give some ἐπωνυμίαι to the gods, they gave them the whole set of ἐπωνυμίαι used by the Greeks. Therefore, it is unlikely that Herodotus is referring to cultic epithets only used locally, since most of these epithets were not given to the gods by the poets. This does not mean that Herodotus always establishes a clear-cut distinction between poetic and cultic ἐπωνυμίαι, but rather that in the context of the passage discussed, he is only interested in the Panhellenic ἐπωνυμίαι created by the poets, as opposed to those which are only used locally. The definite article (τὰς ἐπωνυμίας) does not exclude the creation of new poetic ἐπωνυμίαι by later poets, but may simply mean that only the names created by Hesiod and Homer were known by all the Greeks (Ἕλλησι). This is the case, for instance, of the name Φοίβος ('Bright'), which first appears in Homer and Hesiod to qualify Apollo and is widely used in the Classical period, almost exclusively in poetic texts.[125]

In the Homeric poems, the name Φοίβος can be used either as an epithet accompanying Apollo's theonym or alone.[126] The same can be said of other qualifications, such as the onomastic element Ἀργυρότοξος ('With the silver bow'), which is also applied to Apollo in several poetic texts, starting with the *Iliad*.[127] Such names can be considered ἐπωνυμίαι even when they are not epithets. Indeed, if ἐπωνυμίη can be translated as 'eponym', then, in 2.53, it can designate all poetic qualifications that refer to the gods and that were given to them because of their characteristics.

The passage in its context

The fact that these ἐπωνυμίαι were given (δόντες) to the gods by Hesiod and Homer seems to suggest that they are mere poetic inventions, but this sentence can be better understood if it is analysed in context. The passage follows Herodotus' assertion that the Greeks learnt the οὐνόματα of the gods from the Pelasgians. I give a literal translation which corresponds to its most common interpretation (2.53):

[123] Thuc. 3.104, concerning the *Hymn to Apollo*. On the reception of the *Homeric Hymns* in the Classical period, see Nagy 2011. Exactly which poems Herodotus means when he uses the name 'Homer' is not clear but it is not limited to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He rejects the attribution of the *Cypria* to the poet (2.117) and he doubts that it was really Homer who composed the *Epigonoi* (4.32), but, on the other hand, the Homeric epics he mentions at 5.67 probably belong to the Theban Cycle (Matijašić 2022: 7 with bibliography).

[124] Gagné 2021: 24.

[125] For instance in Hom. *Il*. 43 and Hes. *Theog*. 14. See the *TLG* and the MAP database for the classical sources.

[126] Pisano 2021: 164.

[127] Calame 2021; Pisano 2021: 157–64. This onomastic element is rarely used in epigraphy: at time of writing, it appears in only four inscriptions registered in the MAP database, three of which are metrical: *DB MAP*, element #866 (https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr/element/866).

> Ἔνθεν δὲ ἐγένετο ἕκαστος τῶν θεῶν, εἴτε αἰεὶ ἦσαν πάντες, ὁκοῖοί τέ τινες τὰ εἴδεα, οὐκ ἠπιστέατο μέχρι οὗ πρώην τε καὶ χθὲς ὡς εἰπεῖν λόγῳ. Ἡσίοδον γὰρ καὶ Ὅμηρον ἡλικίην τετρακοσίοισι ἔτεσι δοκέω μευ πρεσβυτέρους καὶ οὐ πλέοσι· οὗτοι δέ εἰσι οἱ ποιήσαντες θεογονίην Ἕλλησι καὶ τοῖσι θεοῖσι τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες καὶ τιμάς τε καὶ τέχνας διελόντες καὶ εἴδεα αὐτῶν σημήναντες.
>
> But from where each of the gods came into being, or if they all had always existed, and of what sort their form was, [the Greeks] did not know until very recently, until yesterday so to speak. For I think that Hesiod and Homer were four hundred years before me and no more; and it is they who created a theogony for the Greeks and gave the gods their epithets and distributed their honours and crafts and signified their form.

The first and last innovations – the theogony and the form of the gods – echo precisely that which was unknown to the Greeks until recently, until the time of Hesiod and Homer. The poets answered the question 'from where each of the gods came into being' by 'creat[ing] a theogony', and the question 'of what sort their form (εἴδεα) was' by 'signify[ing] their form (εἴδεα)'. As these four innovations are strongly interrelated,[128] it is useful to study them all better to understand Herodotus' statement about divine ἐπωνυμίαι.

When Herodotus says that the Greeks 'did not know' (οὐκ ἠπιστέατο) about the origins of the gods until recently since Hesiod and Homer only lived about 400 years before his time, he implies that this knowledge came from the poets.[129] This passage, which underlines the poets' agency, seems at first glance to suggest that according to Herodotus, the theogony and the τιμαί, τέχναι, form and ἐπωνυμίαι of the gods are mere human inventions that were accepted by the Greeks as conventions due to the poets' authority – that since then, this is how the Greeks have imagined their deities because nothing can be known about them except their οὐνόματα. However, an element which contradicts the idea of Hesiod and Homer as mere 'inventors' is the verb ἐπίσταμαι; the Greeks 'did not know' (οὐκ ἠπιστέατο) the theogony or the form of the gods before that time.

In general, ἐπίσταμαι can be translated as 'to know'. In a few occurrences in Herodotus' work, it can also mean 'suppose mistakenly'.[130] However, in such cases, unlike here, it is always used in the affirmative and the context always allows the reader to understand that it refers to false knowledge. It has been suggested that

[128] Cf. Jaillard 2021: 180–1.

[129] Contrary to Currie 2021: 47–53, esp. 50–3, who argues that since Herodotus probably considers both poets to be heirs to a previous poetic tradition, the Greeks could have gained access to knowledge about the gods shortly before the time of Hesiod and Homer. However, even if Herodotus thought that they were not the very first Greek poets, the tradition transmitted by their predecessors did not necessarily also concern the gods. Indeed, the two poets are not only mentioned to give an indication of chronology (i.e. that the Greeks learnt about the origins and form of the gods around the time of Hesiod and Homer); Herodotus highlights their role in the process of acquisition of this knowledge.

[130] Powell 1938: 137.

ἐπίσταμαι can be understood to refer to subjective certainty in Herodotus rather than knowledge.[131] Such an interpretation would certainly allow us to reconcile the two meanings of the word, but in most cases it seems that the only possible translation is 'to know'. For example, the Egyptians tell a false story about Cambyses that is not compatible with Persian customs (3.2). Since they know (ἐπιστέαται) these customs very well, it cannot be a mistake; it means that they deliberately falsified the story. At 3.74, Herodotus writes that Prexaspes is the only one to know (ἠπίστατο) that Smerdis is dead because he himself murdered him; in other passages, too, ἐπίσταμαι can refer to knowledge of a secret (1.51, 2.47, 3.61, 4.43). Among other things, it is also possible to know a language (ἐπισταμένους, 3.19). In all of these passages, translating ἐπίσταμαι as 'feeling certain' would make no sense.

One of the closest parallels to the statement that the Greeks did not know the genealogy or form of the gods until recently is in 3.103. There, Herodotus announces that he will not describe 'of what sort the form of the camel is' (τὸ μὲν δὴ εἶδος ὁκοῖόν τι ἔχει ἡ κάμηλος) because the Greeks already know it (ἐπισταμένοισι). This phrasing is almost exactly the same as in 2.53 (ὁκοῖοί τε τινὲς τὰ εἴδεα). Herodotus adds that he will instead reveal something about camels that the Greeks do not know (ἐπιστέαται). Here, and in all the other examples where the verb ἐπίσταμαι is used in a negative statement (1.11, 4.136, 6.1, 8.144, 9.89), it refers to an objective fact of which someone has no knowledge.[132] This suggests that in 2.53, too, the verb should be translated as 'to know'.

As we saw above,[133] in the representation of the gods, the lexical field of knowledge indicates that the object of ἐπίσταμαι is something that is not culturally determined but considered an independent fact. Thus, by using the verb ἐπίσταμαι in 2.53, Herodotus stresses not the cultural particularities of the Greek representation of the gods, but rather a shared knowledge to which the poets gave access. The particle δὲ at the beginning of the passage (Ἔνθεν δὲ ἐγένετο ...) does not mark the opposition between what is shared between the different peoples – the names of the gods, received from the Pelasgians, according to the last sentence of 2.52 – and what is specifically Greek, but between what the Greeks learnt from other peoples and what they learnt from the works of Hesiod and Homer: the genealogy and the form of the gods.

Hesiod's and Homer's theogonies

But how can a theogony be created by Hesiod and Homer and at the same time constitute a source of knowledge about the gods for the Greeks? Different interpretations have been proposed by scholars: Herodotus could mean that most Greeks consider Hesiod's and Homer's accounts about the origins of the gods to

[131] Lesher 2016: 9–10.

[132] In 8.144, the Athenians say that the Spartans should know, if they do not know (ἐπιστάμενοι) it already, that they – the Athenians – would never make an agreement with the Persians. Here, the verb ἐπίσταμαι concerns something that could hypothetically happen in the future, but the Athenians still present it as a fact, because they completely exclude the possibility of an agreement.

[133] See pp. 76–8 above.

be true,[134] or that these accounts should be accepted as a form of knowledge, even though they are of human origin, since true knowledge about the gods is inaccessible to humankind.[135] However, as I have argued above,[136] Herodotus does not consider that nothing can be known about divine matters. Moreover, the historian probably does not mean that the poets invented a theogony.

Indeed, ποιέω does not only mean 'create', but also 'compose a poem'.[137] As for the word θεογονία, it never appears in any ancient source without mention of an author: a theogony is a poem, or, more rarely, a work written in prose.[138] For instance, Diogenes Laertius writes that 'Epimenides ἐποίησε a *Birth of the Couretes and Corybantes* and a *Theogony* in 5,000 ἔπη' (1.10.112, *BNJ* 457 T 1). The works (ἔπη) introduced by the verb ποιέω are placed in opposition to those that Epimenides 'wrote in prose' (συνέγραψε ... καταλογάδην). Therefore, it is clear that ποιέω has the meaning 'compose in verse', and that the 5,000 ἔπη are 5,000 verses. The word θεογονία is so closely associated with poetry that Clement of Alexandria later wrote of the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes that 'he does not offer a poetic theogony, but a true theology' (οὐ θεογονίαν ποιητικήν, θεολογίαν δὲ ἀληθινὴν ἐνδείκνυται, 6.72.1). This is also confirmed by the only other passage of the where Herodotus uses the word θεογονία (1.132). He writes that during sacrifices, Persian μάγοι sing (ἐπαείδει) an incantation (ἐπαοιδήν) which, according to them, is a theogony (θεογονίην).[139] Therefore, when Herodotus writes that Hesiod and Homer ποιήσαντες θεογονίην Ἕλλησι, he probably does not mean that they 'invented a genealogy of the gods', but that they 'composed a poem in verses about the birth of the gods'. The phrasing does not exclude the possibility that they invented the accounts of the gods' births which they put into verse, but since these accounts are considered a form of knowledge (as indicated by the verb ἐπίσταμαι), they should not be seen as mere inventions.

In various passages (2.43–4, 2.145–6, 2.156), Herodotus compares what the Greeks and the Egyptians say about the birth of the gods.[140] Like the Greeks, the Egyptians consider that their gods belong to various generations: the first who came into being were the Eight Gods, then the Twelve Gods and then finally the gods who were born of the Twelve Gods. The Greeks and the Egyptians assign each god to a particular generation, but the Greeks are clearly mistaken when they consider that Heracles, Dionysus and Pan are among the youngest. The Egyptians place their births much earlier, and Herodotus' investigation suggests that they are right (2.146):

[134] Tuplin 2022: 294.
[135] Harrison 2022.
[136] See above, pp. 60–4.
[137] As already noted by Currie 2021: 51. Ποιητής also means 'poet' in all four occurrences in the *Histories* (2.23, 3.115, 5.95, 6.52). Ποίησις is used four times, twice in the sense of 'poetry' (2.23, 2.82), but ποίημα never has that meaning: see Powell 1937: 311.
[138] As indicated by a search in the *TLG*.
[139] The exact reading of this passage is uncertain but its meaning is secure.
[140] Cf. Schwab 2020: 169–73.

> δῆλά ὧν μοι γέγονε ὅτι ὕστερον ἐπύθοντο οἱ Ἕλληνες τούτων τὰ οὐνόματα ἢ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν. ἀπ᾽ οὗ δὲ ἐπύθοντο χρόνου, ἀπὸ τούτου γενεηλογέουσι αὐτῶν τὴν γένεσιν.
>
> In fact, it became clear to me that the Greeks learnt the names of these gods later than those of the others; they trace their birth in the genealogy to the time when they learnt them.

The Greeks are clearly wrong about some details of the genealogy, and they and the Egyptians have different views about the exact number of gods belonging to each generation and about the mother of Artemis (2.156), but overall their accounts of the origins of the gods match.

In 2.145, the Egyptians 'say that they know accurately/with certainty' (ἀτρεκέως φασὶ ἐπίστασθαι) how old are Heracles, Dionysus and Pan. The fact that Herodotus adds the adverb ἀτρεκέως to qualify ἐπίσταμαι suggests that when it is used alone, the verb can refer to knowledge that is not accurate/certain.[141] A confirmation is found in 2.119: Herodotus writes that the Egyptians said they knew (ἐπίστασθαι) Menelaus' story by enquiry (ἱστορίῃσι), but they did not know where he went after he left Libya; on the other hand, they said they 'knew accurately/with certainty' (ἀτρεκέως ἐπιστάμενοι) the part of Menelaus' story that happened in Egypt.[142] Likewise, the fact that the poets gave access to knowledge about the gods does not exclude the possibility that they were ignorant of certain facts or wrong about certain details. What the Greeks knew about the origins of the gods from the time of Hesiod and Homer may be that there were different generations and where approximately most deities belonged within the divine genealogies. This is not just a poetic fiction but something that can partly be verified by enquiry.[143]

But how did Hesiod and Homer acquire this knowledge? If it had come from the Egyptians, the Pelasgians or any other people, Herodotus would have explicitly said so, since the origins of knowledge about the gods is precisely what interests him in these passages. In fact, Herodotus opposes what the Greeks learnt from the Egyptians and the Pelasgians – the οὐνόματα of the gods mentioned just before 2.53 – and what they learnt from the poets. This knowledge does not seem to come from the poets' predecessors either, since the Greeks did not know the genealogy of the gods before Hesiod and Homer composed their works. This knowledge then comes neither from the Greeks nor from the non-Greeks. It does not seem to have a human origin and we must therefore consider the possibility that Herodotus holds that it comes from the gods themselves.

[141] On the notion of ἀτρέκεια in Herodotus, see Darbo-Peschanski 1987: 179–83; Fantasia 2007: 99–107.

[142] Ἐπίσταμαι is also used with ἀτρεκέως in 2.54 and 2.154; at 3.130, Herodotus refers to knowledge that is not accurate/certain (ἀτρεκέως μὲν οὐκ ἐπίστασθαι).

[143] See the case of Heracles above, pp. 70, 77.

The form of the gods

After the theogony, the second thing that the Greeks did not know until the time of Hesiod and Homer is the form (εἴδεα) of the gods.[144] Herodotus writes that the poets εἴδεα αὐτῶν σημήναντες (2.53). The verb σημαίνω refers to the transmission of signs and has three main meanings in Herodotus.[145] It can mean (1) 'encode a message and transmit it as a coded sign'.[146] The verb ἐπίσταμαι at the beginning of the passage seems to exclude this meaning: if Herodotus meant that the anthropomorphic representation of the gods in Hesiod's and Homer's works is a sign encoded by the poets hinting at their real form, where did the poets learn about their form before they encoded the message? And how did the Greeks decode the sign – since the fact that they know the form of the gods suggests that they did so?

In Herodotus, σημαίνω can also mean (2) 'transmit as a sign a message encoded by someone else' or (3) 'decode a sign encoded by someone else'.[147] As in the case of the gods' origins, knowledge about their form was transmitted to Hesiod and Homer neither by their ancestors nor by foreign peoples. Therefore, the sign is likely to have been encoded by the gods themselves. Indeed, in various passages of the *Histories*, the verb σημαίνω is used to refer to someone announcing a divine sign. For instance, when Delphi was attacked during the Persian Wars, the prophet Akeratos found weapons in front of the temple which it was impious (οὐκ ὅσιον, 8.37) to touch. He 'announced the marvel' (σημανέων τὸ τέρας) to the Delphians, evidently because he believed the weapons to have been brought out by the god himself. When Athens was threatened by the Persians, the great serpent that guarded the Acropolis did not eat the cake given as an offering. After 'the priestess signified these things' (σημηνάσης δὲ ταῦτα τῆς ἱερείης, 8.41), the Athenians interpreted them as a sign that Athena herself had abandoned the Acropolis.

A person may transmit a coded message without understanding it (as at 2.2), but in some cases it is clear that σημαίνω refers to the decoding of a sign. At 1.108, Astyages has a dream and the dream interpreters (ὀνειροπόλοισι) 'signify' (ἐσήμαινον) that his grandchild will become king in his stead. Since Homer and Hesiod gave the Greeks access to knowledge about the form of the gods, this may be the meaning of σημαίνω in 2.53: they decoded the signs sent by the gods concerning their form and transmitted the message in a poetic form. It is noteworthy that in some cases in the *Histories* the subject of the verb σημαίνω is Herodotus himself, and such passages underline his authority as author.[148] Likewise, the use of σημαίνω may underline Hesiod's and Homer's authority when it comes to decoding messages sent by the gods.

But what does Herodotus mean exactly when he writes that the Greeks learnt about the form of the gods? Why does he use the verb ἐπίσταμαι if the

[144] On εἶδος cf. Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 81. In the *Histories*, it can usually be translated as 'form' (e.g. 2.69, 2.76, 3.24).
[145] See the analysis of Hollmann 2011: 20–7.
[146] Hollmann 2011: 20–2.
[147] Hollmann 2011: 22–4.
[148] Hollmann 2011: 24–7.

representation of the gods differs across cultures? Here, Herodotus probably refers not to their specific form, but more generally their anthropomorphism: they are human-like though they are superhuman in every aspect.[149] According to Herodotus, the Greeks consider the gods to be 'of the same constitution as humans' (ἀνθρωποφυέας, 1.131). This adjective has a broader meaning than ἀνθρωποειδής, 'anthropomorphic' (2.142).[150] However, it certainly includes an allusion to their anthropomorphism, since the fact that the Persians do not consider the gods to be 'of the same constitution as humans' explains why they do not set up statues (ἀγάλματα) of them.[151] There is nothing in Herodotus' text to suggest that he distances himself from the views of the Greeks. Therefore, at 2.53, he may very well mean that what the Greeks learnt from the poetry of Hesiod and Homer is that the gods are anthropomorphic.

Herodotus uses the verb νομίζω to indicate that the Persians did not 'consider' the gods to be 'of the same constitution as humans'. At first glance, this seems to suggest that anthropomorphism is a culturally dependent representation of the gods. However, even if νομίζω and ἐπίσταμαι are not equivalent, what a people believes (νομίζω) can be based on knowledge.[152] Thus, it is possible for the form of the gods to be simultaneously a matter of knowledge and cultural. Indeed, anthropomorphism is not a specificity of the Greek representation of the gods, but rather an idea shared by most ancient peoples. For instance, it is the primary means of depicting the gods among the Phoenicians and in Mesopotamia.[153] Even in Egypt, well-known for its zoomorphic and anthropozoomorphic deities, anthropomorphism is the most common way of representing the divine.[154] Herodotus occasionally alludes to the hybridity of the Egyptian gods.[155] At 2.42, he explains why, according to the Egyptians, Theban Zeus is represented with a ram's head: it is because he once disguised himself using a ram's head and fleece.

[149] On divine anthropomorphism, see recently Gagné and Herrero de Jáuregui 2019.

[150] Cf. Pirenne-Delforge 2022: 212.

[151] Originally, in Greek, ἄγαλμα did not mean 'statue' but referred to a beautiful object which gives pleasure, especially to the gods; in the Classical period, it acquired the more specific meaning of 'statue': Lanérès 2012; Lanérès 2021; Patera 2021. In Herodotus, when the meaning of ἄγαλμα can be determined, it always refers to a completely or partially anthropomorphic representation of a deity (1.183, 2.42, 2.46, 2.51, 3.37, 4.181, 4.189, 5.82–6, 6.82). It can refer to the deity's iconography in general (2.41–2, 4.181) and one ἄγαλμα is described as either a painting or a sculpture of the god (2.46), but it is usually a statue. The only exceptions are the sword and human skull that serve as ἀγάλματα for the Issedones and the Scythians, respectively (4.26, 4.62): in Herodotus, only barbarians produce non-anthropomorphic ἀγάλματα. When he uses the singular to refer to an ἄγαλμα in a temple or a sanctuary, it designates a statue (e.g. 1.31, 1.69, 2.42), as confirmed by 6.118, where the ἄγαλμα is also called ἀνδριάς. When Herodotus mentions ἀγάλματα together with temples and altars (1.131, 2.4, 4.59, 4.108), the setting up of which is described as a Greek characteristic (4.108), he apparently also means statues. The word probably has the same meaning in all its other occurrences, with two exceptions, where Herodotus quotes epigrams inscribed on tripods which describe them as ἀγάλματα (5.60–1). On the vocabulary referring to statues in Herodotus, see also Hermary 1994.

[152] See above, p. 77.

[153] Phoenicians: Bonnet and Niehr 2014: 122–5; Mesopotamia: see e.g. Hundley 2013.

[154] Wilkinson 2008.

[155] Kindt 2021: 130–2.

In 2.46, Herodotus writes that the Egyptians of Mendes, like the Greeks, depict Pan with the face and legs of a goat, for a reason he alludes to and refuses to reveal. But they do not really 'believe' (νομίζοντες) that he has such a form, rather they see him as 'similar to the other gods' (ὁμοῖον τοῖσι ἄλλοισι θεοῖσι). These passages seem to imply that Herodotus' Egyptians consider the gods to be anthropomorphic, even if they are not always represented anthropomorphically.

In Herodotus' world, then, anthropomorphism of the divine is the norm, rather than an exception. When he writes that the Persians do not consider the gods to be 'of the same constitution as humans, as do the Greeks' (ἀνθρωποφυέας ... κατά περ οἱ Ἕλληνες, 1.131), he could have opposed the Persians to most other peoples. He probably singles out the Greeks because his work is aimed at a Greek audience. The fact that the Persians do not represent their gods as human-like is not the only thing that distinguishes them from most other peoples. The only (μούνοισι) gods to whom they have always sacrificed are 'the whole circle of the sky, which they call Zeus', the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, Fire, Water and the Winds. Later, they also learnt (ἐπιμεμαθήκασι) to sacrifice to Urania. Thus, the Persians had not yet learnt the names of most of the gods known to the Greeks or the Egyptians. It seems that, according to Herodotus, the Persians had only limited knowledge about the gods, and that anthropomorphism is part of the knowledge shared by most peoples, with some exceptions such as the Persians.

The recognition of the gods' anthropomorphism is a precondition for the setting up of anthropomorphic statues. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Herodotus never mentions statues in passages concerning the Greeks who lived before the time of Hesiod and Homer,[156] and that he does not say how the Greeks learnt to make statues of their gods. At 2.4, he lists various things which the Egyptians were the first to do:

> δυώδεκά τε θεῶν ἐπωνυμίας ἔλεγον πρώτους Αἰγυπτίους νομίσαι καὶ Ἕλληνας παρὰ σφέων ἀναλαβεῖν, βωμούς τε καὶ ἀγάλματα καὶ νηοὺς θεοῖσι ἀπονεῖμαι σφέας πρώτους καὶ ζῷα ἐν λίθοισι ἐγγλύψαι.
>
> [My Egyptian sources] said that the Egyptians were the first to use ἐπωνυμίαι of twelve gods and that the Greeks received these from them, and they first assigned altars and statues and temples to the gods and carved images in stone.

The structure of this sentence seems to suggest that the Greeks learnt from the Egyptians only to worship a group of twelve gods, not to set up statues. We only hear that the Athenians were the first Greeks to make ithyphallic images of Hermes and that they received this custom from the Pelasgians (2.51). However, according

[156] Herodotus does not reflect on the contradiction between the idea that the Greeks did not know the gods' forms before Hesiod and Homer and the presence, in the *Iliad* (6.302), of an anthropomorphic statue of Athena in Troy at the time of the Trojan War, that is more than 400 years before these poets (cf. 2.145). If he had, he might perhaps have seen it as a Homeric anachronism. As noted by Mikalson 2003: 154–5, Herodotus seems to have removed all reference to the gods in his accounts related to the Trojan War, which makes sense if he thought that the Greeks only had limited knowledge about the divine at that time.

to Herodotus, Lemnos was still inhabited by Pelasgians in the early fifth century (6.140), and some Pelasgians were still present in Macedonia and in the Hellespont in his time (1.58). Therefore, the Athenians may very well have learnt to make statues of Hermes after the time of Hesiod and Homer.[157]

Six hundred years before Hesiod and Homer (cf. 2.145–6), the Greeks had also learnt the phallic procession in honour of Dionysus (2.49). The phallus was apparently considered by the Greeks to be an offering that pleased Dionysus, and not a representation of the god himself.[158] Therefore, the phallic procession does not imply that the Greeks already considered the gods to be anthropomorphic. This ritual had come from the Egyptians and was taught to the Greeks by Melampus, who had himself learnt it from Cadmus (2.49). However, while the Greeks only carried a phallus in procession, the original ritual in Egypt involved small puppets (ἀγάλματα νευρόσπαστα) with an oversized and articulated phallus (2.48). Somewhere along the chain of transmission from the Egyptians to the Greeks, the anthropomorphic representation was lost. This might partly explain why Herodotus thought that the Greeks did not have statues of their gods and therefore that they did not know their form before the time of Hesiod and Homer.

It seems, then, that the Greeks learnt the anthropomorphic form of their gods neither from the Egyptians nor from the Pelasgians. This knowledge only came from Hesiod and Homer and, as in the case of the gods' origins, the poets may have acquired it from the gods themselves.

The gods' timai *and* technai

Since the four innovations of the poets are strongly interrelated in 2.53, should we conclude that like the theogony and the gods' form, the ἐπωνυμίαι, τιμαί and τέχναι of the gods are also part of what the Greeks had not known (οὐκ ἠπιστέατο) until recently, even if they are not explicitly counted among them? Probably not.

In Hesiod, Homer and the *Homeric Hymns*, τιμή is the place of the individual within their society, which depends on their characteristics and determines the honours they receive. The τιμαί of the gods are their specific prerogatives and

[157] The question of the relationship between Pelasgians and Athenians in Herodotus is very complex, because the meaning of several passages is disputed (cf. Laird 1933) and because of apparent contradictions (see in particular Fowler 2003; Sourvinou-Inwood 2003). If we try to make sense of these passages, we can probably say: the first inhabitants of Attica were the Pelasgians, who spoke a barbarian language, but then they became Greek and started speaking Greek (1.58). From the time of Erechtheus, they became known as Athenians (8.44). Later on, other Pelasgians came to live with the Athenians, but they were expelled and went to Lemnos (6.136–40; 4.145). Some Pelasgians also came to Athens, became Greek and taught the Athenians to make ithyphallic statues of Hermes (2.51); this must be a third group, since those who were expelled to Lemnos never became Greek but remained known as Pelasgians. This third group belonged to the same Pelasgians who dwelt on Samothrace and who also taught the Samothracians to make ithyphallic statues. There is no indication of chronology and this account cannot be found in any other source. It may just be Herodotus' attempt to explain why ithyphallic statues are mainly found in Athens and Samothrace.

[158] Frontisi-Ducroux 2014: 325–30.

domains but also their honours.[159] The word seems to have a similar meaning in Herodotus. Just as Hesiod mentions the 'royal τιμή' that belongs to Zeus alone (βασιληίδα τιμὴν, *Theog.* 892), Herodotus writes that Gyges killed Candaules and took his τιμή, his place as king (1.91; cf. 1.12–13). Τιμή also refers to the honours that come with one's place within society, for example when Herodotus mentions sacrifices to 'those among the gods to whom this τιμή belongs' (τοῖσι θεῶν τιμὴ αὕτη πρόσκειται, 1.118). As for the gods' τέχναι, they are their crafts, their skills.

Herodotus uses the verb διαιρέω to refer to Hesiod's and Homer's treatment of the gods' τιμαί and τέχναι. In the *Theogony*, this verb is used to indicate that the gods 'divided' or 'distributed the τιμαί' (τιμὰς διέλοντο, 112) among themselves. In doing so, they assigned each deity a specific place in the network of gods. In the *Iliad* (15.186–93), Poseidon says that he has a τιμή which is equal (ὁμότιμον) to that of Zeus, since everything was divided (δέδασται, here from the verb δατέομαι) into three parts and Zeus, Poseidon and Hades each received a τιμή: Poseidon the sea, Hades the underworld and Zeus the sky.

The particle δὲ at the beginning of 2.53 marks a distinction between the things the Greeks learnt from the Pelasgians (2.52) and the things they did not know until recently. But if the Greeks did not know the τιμαί of the gods and their specific domains before Hesiod and Homer, how would they have honoured the individual deities they had known by name since the time of the Pelasgians? For instance, Herodotus thinks (δοκέει μοι, 2.49) that the seer Melampus introduced the name of Dionysus, his sacrifice and the phallic procession to the Greeks.[160] The Greeks consider that Dionysus was born 1,000 years before Herodotus' time (2.145), but it is clear to him (δῆλά μοι, 2.146) that this date does not correspond to the god's birth but to the time when the Greeks learnt about him. Therefore, the Greeks knew the name, sacrifice and phallic procession of Dionysus long before Hesiod and Homer, who predated Herodotus by about four centuries, by his own estimation (2.53). Even if Melampus did not teach the Greeks everything (πάντα, 2.49) about Dionysus, it is clear that they already knew his τιμαί and domains. How should we then understand that the poets divided or distributed (διελόντες) the τιμαί and τέχναι of the gods?

In the *Theogony*, Aphrodite possesses τιμαί from the beginning (ἐξ ἀρχῆς, 203), as do some other gods. When Zeus starts his war against the Titans, he promises the gods willing to help him that they will all keep the τιμαί they already have and that he will attribute a τιμή to those who had none (393–6). After his victory, Zeus 'divided the τιμαί well' (ἐὺ διεδάσσατο τιμάς, 885; cf. εὖ, 73).[161] Can we assume that Herodotus refers to a better distribution of the τιμαί and τέχναι by Hesiod and Homer? There is nothing in Herodotus' text to suggest that a better distribution was needed. If identifying specific deities means identifying their τιμαί and τέχναι,

[159] See in particular Du Sablon 2014; cf. Pirenne-Delforge 2020: 79–81.

[160] Incidentally, Herodotus also seems to count the name of Dionysus among those that the Pelasgians learnt and transmitted to the Greeks (2.52). This seems to be an incoherence, but Herodotus writes that the Pelasgians learnt the name of Dionysus much later than those of the other gods, and he may have meant that they learnt it after the Greeks learnt the names of the other gods from them: therefore, the Greeks would not have received the name of Dionysus from them but from Melampus.

[161] On these passages, see Leclerc 1998: 92–4.

together with their names, then it is mainly from the Egyptians, via the Pelasgians, that the Greeks learnt the τιμαί and τέχναι of the gods. Given that Herodotus holds the Egyptians in high esteem, especially regarding religious matters, it seems unlikely that he would have meant that their distribution of τιμαί and τέχναι was not good enough. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, it is because of a crisis that the gods want to offer more τιμαί to Demeter (328, 443–4), but there is no trace of such a crisis in the days of Hesiod and Homer. Therefore, it is unclear why the poets would have redistributed the gods' τιμαί and τέχναι.

In fact, the verb διαιρέω does not always mean 'divide' or 'distribute' in the *Histories*.[162] At 2.6, Herodotus 'estimates' (διαιρέομεν) the length of the coast of Egypt. At 7.16, Xerxes has a dream which he interprets as a sign sent by a god. His uncle Artabanus tells him that he is wrong, and that he, older and more experienced, will teach him (διδάξω) what such dreams mean. For Artabanus, they are not sent by the gods. Nevertheless, he considers the possibility that things are not as he διαιρέω. This verb echoes διδάξω and can be translated as 'explain', 'interpret' or 'analyse'. Later on, when Xerxes weeps at the brevity of life, Artabanus says that humans suffer so many misfortunes that death often seems desirable; he adds that the god (ὁ ... θεὸς, 7.46), after giving a taste of a sweet life, refuses to give more. Xerxes answers that human life is such as Artabanus διαιρέαι (7.47, in the middle voice). The verb probably means 'judge', 'describe' or 'analyse' here. It has a similar meaning at 7.47–9, when Artabanus explains why he thinks Xerxes will have two main enemies, the land and the sea; Xerxes answers that he διαιρέαι all these things reasonably (7.50). At 7.103, the verb διαιρέω refers to the answer of Demaratus, the former king of Sparta, questioned by Xerxes: from this Greek, the Persian king wants to know if the Greeks are likely to resist. In all these passages, διαιρέω relates to an analysis made by someone who is presented, or who presents himself, as an authority.[163]

In particular, the verb διαιρέω can be applied to the interpretation of dreams, as in 7.16, which concerns Xerxes' dream. In the *Timaeus* (71e–72a), Plato writes that inspired divination is possible during sleep, but that in order to understand the words pronounced in a dream, it is necessary to 'explain by reasoning' (λογισμῷ διελέσθαι) what they 'signify' (σημαίνει) when one is awake. In the Imperial period, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 2.64.4, 4.60.2) and Plutarch (*Ti. Gracch.* 1.2; *Cim.* 18.3) use the verb to discuss the interpretation of dreams and other signs by experts in divination. In a passage from the *Roman Antiquities*, ambassadors from Rome want to consult an Etruscan seer about a prodigy, and the seer's son tells them that his father will 'interpret [διελεῖται] the prodigy [τέρας] for (them)' (4.60.2). This expression brings to mind section 8.37 of the *Histories*, where Herodotus writes that the prophet in Delphi 'announced the marvel' (σημανέων τὸ τέρας) and likely interpreted it, too. In these passages where they are used with τέρας,[164] the verbs διαιρέω and σημαίνω can probably be considered synonyms.

[162] Cf. Powell 1938: 87.

[163] It has been suggested that the verb has a similar meaning in the incipit of Heraclitus' work (DK 22 B 1): see Kirk 1954: 41–2; Gemelli Marciano 2007: 17–18.

[164] Cf. Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 1.2.

Likewise, in 2.53, the word διαιρέω can have the meaning 'explain' or 'interpret'. However, before it was used by Herodotus, the expression τιμὰς διαιρέω only appears at the end of the prologue of Hesiod's *Theogony* (112) and this suggests that the historian had this very passage in mind. Therefore, when he writes that Hesiod and Homer διελόντες the gods' τιμαί, it is possible that he is engaging in wordplay. According to the *Theogony*, the gods 'distributed' (διέλοντο, 112) the τιμαί and, according to Herodotus, the poets 'explained' or 'interpreted' them (διελόντες). On several occasions in his *Histories*, Herodotus plays with words, using a term twice in the same passage with different meanings.[165] An example can be found in the verb ἀναιρέω at the end of 2.52, just before the statement about Hesiod's and Homer's innovations: the Pelasgians ask the oracle of Dodona if they should adopt (ἀνέλωνται) the divine names taught by the Egyptians, and the oracle ordered (ἀνεῖλε) them to do so. Herodotus makes several allusions to Homer's work[166] – and probably to Hesiod's as well, although this has attracted less scholarly attention – and an intertextual pun is perfectly conceivable.

As we have seen, διαιρέω can refer to the interpretation of a divine sign, and the subject of the verb is usually someone who can be considered an authority. Therefore, it is perhaps because they received a sign from the gods that the poets were able and had the authority to explain the τιμαί and τέχναι of the gods.

The role of the Muses

According to Herodotus, Hesiod and Homer acquired knowledge about the gods' genealogy and form, but such knowledge could have come neither from Greeks nor from non-Greeks. The logical conclusion is that it came from the gods themselves. This seems to be corroborated by the use of the verbs σημαίνω and διαιρέω, which can both refer to the interpretation of divine signs by someone who has the authority to do so.

At the end of the prologue of the *Theogony*, Hesiod asks the Muses to glorify the gods who 'always exist' (αἰὲν ἐόντων, 105), to tell him (εἴπατε, 108; ἔσπετε, 114) 'how in the beginning the gods and earth came into being' (ὡς τὰ πρῶτα θεοὶ καὶ γαῖα γένοντο, 108; cf. 111 and 115) and 'how they divided their τιμαί' (ὡς τιμὰς διέλοντο, 112). Herodotus is clearly alluding to this passage when he writes that the Greeks did not know 'from where each god came into being, or if they had all always existed' (ἔνθεν δὲ ἐγένετο ἕκαστος τῶν θεῶν, εἴτε αἰεὶ ἦσαν πάντες), and that the poets explained their τιμαί (τιμάς ... διελόντες, 2.53). The intertext suggests that the Muses are present in the background of Herodotus' passage.

These goddesses are invoked at the beginning of the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Theogony*, the *Works and Days* and about a third of the *Homeric Hymns*, and the poets claim to have been inspired by them. There is nothing in Herodotus' text to suggest that he denied the Muses any role in the composition of these works. It has been noted that in the proem of the *Histories*, the method of historical enquiry

[165] Sometimes, he even uses a *hapax* simply for the sake of the pun. On wordplay in Herodotus, see Powell 1937; Casevitz 1995 *passim*.

[166] See in particular the various chapters in Matijašić 2022.

(ἱστορίης) replaces the inspiration of the Muses who are invoked at the beginning of the Hesiodic and Homeric poems.[167] However, this does not mean that Herodotus rejects divine inspiration altogether, or that he sees historical investigation as superior to poetic inspiration. He may simply consider that his method is different because he is not a poet and therefore did not have the privilege of being inspired by the Muses. It is certainly tempting to compare Herodotus to insightful philosophers such as Protagoras[168] who were aware that nothing can be known about the gods and therefore that their representations were human constructs. But the idea of a development from 'religion' to 'reason' in the Greek world has been rightly called into question[169] and in the fifth century, the Muses were not dead.[170] It is true that Herodotus does not explicitly mention the goddesses in his text, but if almost all Greeks agreed that Hesiod and Homer were inspired by them, then repeating this would have been superfluous, a statement of the obvious. Herodotus is not arguing that these poets had access to divine knowledge, but that they were the first Greeks to do so, since according to him (ἔμοιγε δοκέειν) the other poets considered to be earlier were in fact later.[171] For Herodotus, if gods could communicate with humans and reveal knowledge about the future through dreams,[172] there is no reason why they could not also share knowledge about the past with some poets through divine inspiration.

Therefore, it is probably because Hesiod asked the Muses to tell him (εἴπατε, 108; ἔσπετε, 114) 'how in the beginning the gods and earth came into being' and 'how they divided their τιμαί' that, according to Herodotus, he was able to teach the Greeks how the gods came into being and to explain their τιμαί.[173] In the *Histories*, the gods mostly communicate in ways that need to be interpreted, in particular through oracles, dreams and omens.[174] It is possible that Herodotus believed that the Muses similarly reveal veiled truths that need to be interpreted.[175] If the poets or the Greeks in general did not interpret the signs correctly, they would only have acquired an imperfect knowledge about the origins of the gods – which may partly explain the differences between the Greek and Egyptian representations of the gods.

At the same time, Herodotus' passage may reflect the complex role played by the poets according to Hesiod: it is from the Muses that the latter derives his knowledge but he still plays an active role in the composition of his poetry.[176]

[167] Among others, see Darbo-Peschanski 1987: 23–4.
[168] See above, p. 64.
[169] See recently Bowden 2016; Vesperini 2017; Bonnechere and Pirenne-Delforge 2019.
[170] Murray 2008: 210–18.
[171] On Hesiod and Homer's primacy according to Herodotus, see Currie 2021: 47–53.
[172] Hollmann 2011: 75–93.
[173] Cf. Tuplin 2022: 293 n. 14.
[174] Fowler 2010: 325–7. On signs in Herodotus' work, see in particular Hollmann 2011.
[175] Cf. the famous verses of Hesiod (*Theog.* 26–9) according to which the Muses can tell lies or fictions which look like realities (ψεύδεα ... ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα) but also reveal αληθέα. On the interpretation of this much-debated passage, see among others Leclerc 1993: 204–21; Daix 2006; Semenzato 2017: 84–8; Riu 2019 esp. 248–9; Vergados 2020: 207–19. Herodotus would probably have interpreted this passage differently from Hesiod's contemporaries, since the meaning of these words had evolved by the fifth century: Levet 2008.
[176] Leclerc 1993: 244–54.

Herodotus is well aware that the poets do not always tell the truth. For instance, he thinks (δοκέω, 2.23) that Homer or another poet invented (εὑρόντα) the name of the river Ocean – context makes it clear that εὑρίσκω means 'invent' rather than 'discover' in this passage. Herodotus also thinks (δοκέει ... μοι, 2.116) that Homer knew the story of Helen's travels to Egypt, but did not tell it because it did not suit (οὐ ... εὐπρεπὴς) his epic poetry. But that does not mean that poetic works cannot transmit knowledge.[177] It has been recognized that parts of Herodotus' *Histories* are fictive, but that the historian conceived these fictions as a means of attaining more general truths rather than as lies.[178] Likewise, he may have considered that even though they are poetic inventions, the works of Hesiod and Homer express real knowledge about the deities.

The epōnymiai *of the gods*

With these observations in mind, we can now turn to the gods' ἐπωνυμίαι. According to Herodotus, these were given (δόντες) to the gods by Hesiod and Homer. As we saw above,[179] Herodotus uses various verbs to indicate that someone gave a name to someone or something, in particular τίθημι with οὔνομα and ποιέω with ἐπωνυμίη. On the other hand, δίδωμι only occurs in 2.53 and the fact that Herodotus chose a different verb here is probably meaningful.

Indeed, the verb δίδωμι is never used with ἐπωνυμία to indicate that a name has been attributed to someone or something before the Imperial period, nor with ὄνομα until the Hellenistic period at least.[180] The only exception comes from Demosthenes' *Against Boeotus 1* (*Or.* 39.32),[181] in which two half-brothers both claim to have been legitimately named Mantitheus after their grandfather. The speaker denies his opponent the right to bear this name, since he was named Boeotus, and not Mantitheus, when their father was forced to acknowledge him as his son and to introduce him into his phratry.[182] The verb used to refer to the attribution of the name is almost always τίθημι: it occurs twelve times throughout the speech and the derived verb μετατίθημι is used twice to refer to a change of name.[183] Δίδωμι only occurs once. Because he wants to avoid the risk of being confused with his half-brother, the speaker asks his opponent either to choose a different patronym, or to keep the name Boeotus that his father 'gave' (ἔδωκε) him. The same demand is also formulated in different terms: Boeotus should declare

[177] Cf. Tuplin 2022: 291–6.
[178] See recently Ellis 2017.
[179] See pp. 67, 83.
[180] As indicated by a search in the *TLG*.
[181] Another possible exception is Hermippus fr. 2 *PCG*: ὁ Ζεὺς "δίδωμι Παλλάς" ἠσί "τοὔνομα". However, the reading is very uncertain and the manuscripts read variously διδώνω πολλὰς, διδώνα πολλὰς and διδώνω πολὺ.
[182] On this speech, see Griffith-Williams 2020. Incidentally, it underlines very clearly that the function of an ὄνομα is to identify: the speaker asks how one could identify who Mantitheus son of Mantias of Thoricus is, if the two half-brothers bear the same name.
[183] Τίθημι: 39.20: ἔθετο x2; 39.22: ἔθετ'; 39.28: θείης; 32: ἐτέθη, ἔθετο, θέσθαι; 36: ἔθετο; 39: θέσθαι, θέμενον; 40: τέθειται, θήσεται. Μετατίθημι: 30.6 and 31: μεταθέσθαι.

himself the son of a different father, or 'be content with the name under which [their father] acknowledged him' as his son (μένειν ἐφ᾽ οὗ σ᾽ αὐτὸς ἐποιήσατ᾽ ὀνόματος, 31).[184] For their father to give (ἔδωκε) Boeotus this name is thus presented as equivalent to acknowledging him under this name. Now, it is thanks to the name (διὰ τοὔνομα, 31) that, upon being introduced into their father's phratry, he had become a citizen and gained various rights which he did not have before. Therefore, to be given (ἔδωκε) this name was a privilege, a gift, rather than 'an outrage and an insult' (ὕβρει καὶ ἐπηρείᾳ, 32), and this is what the verb δίδωμι probably underlines.

Likewise, in Callimachus' *Hymn to Artemis* (3.6–7), polyonymy (πολυωνυμίην) is a privilege that Artemis asks her father to give her (δός). That δίδωμι refers to a gift is confirmed by the passages where the indirect object of the verb is θεός in the dative. Such a construction appears only once elsewhere in Herodotus' work. At 2.113, it is said that a slave may 'give himself to the god' (ἑωυτὸν διδοὺς τῷ θεῷ) in a sanctuary of Heracles in Egypt: here, the slave offers himself and becomes the god's property.[185] In Homer, Hesiod and other poets, too, δίδωμι θεοῖς means 'to offer to the gods': it is possible to 'offer' hecatombs (*Il.* 7.450, 12.6), gifts (δῶρα, *Il.* 20.299), sacrificial animals (ἱρὰ, *Od.* 1.67) or honours (τιμὰς, Hes. *Op.* 138–9; τιμὴν, Eur. *Bacch.* 342).[186]

This suggests that when Herodotus writes that Hesiod and Homer θεοῖσι τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες, he means that the poets gave the ἐπωνυμίαι to the gods as an offering.[187] This would not be surprising, given that the *Homeric Hymns*, which Herodotus may have attributed to Homer,[188] can be considered as offerings to the gods:[189] most of them invite the deity to rejoice (χαῖρε) in the song.[190] The *Theogony* can also be considered an offering. At the beginning of the poem, the Muses urge (ἐκέλονθ', 33) Hesiod to 'celebrate [the gods] in a hymn' (ὑμνεῖν) and, in particular, to 'sing' (ἀείδειν) of them. In obedience to their order, the poet later invites the Muses to 'rejoice' and asks them to 'give me a desirable song' (χαίρετε ... δότε δ' ἱμερόεσσαν ἀοιδήν, 104). Here, Hesiod hopes that his song celebrating the gods will please the Muses, just as the song of the Muses delights (τέρπουσι, 37) Zeus when they celebrate (κλείουσιν, 44) the gods. Specifically, it is the names attributed to them by the poets which please the gods, and various strategies to achieve this goal are attested throughout antiquity.[191]

[184] For the translation of the verb ποιέω as 'acknowledge', see Griffith-Williams 2020, 39–42.
[185] See also Eur. *Ion* 1285.
[186] It may be a poetic expression, as it is not attested in prose until the end of the fifth century BC at least. But if so, it would not be surprising to find it in the *Histories*, since it is well-known that Herodotus' language is often poetic, especially in the second book (see e.g. Mansour 2013; Tribulato 2022).
[187] This may explain the structure of 2.53: the first pair, the theogony and the ἐπωνυμίαι, may be built around an opposition between that which is given to the Greeks (Ἕλλησι) and that which is offered to the gods (τοῖσι θεοῖσι). As for the τιμαί and τέχναι on the one hand, and the form of the gods on the other, they may be grouped together because they are all signs interpreted by the poets.
[188] See above, p. 88 n. 123.
[189] Calame 2011b.
[190] Calame 2011b: 354.
[191] Herrero de Jáuregui 2024; cf. Bonnet and Pironti 2021: 17, who suggest that when Pausanias (7.21.7) mentions the ὀνόματα created or composed by poets for the ornament of their verses

If the ἐπωνυμίαι given to them by the poets are thought to please the gods, it is perhaps because they are not just οὐνόματα but ἐπωνυμίαι, meaningful names that praise them by reflecting their characteristics.[192] As we have seen, Herodotus probably holds that the poets learnt of these characteristics from the Muses. Therefore, the divine ἐπωνυμίαι may derive from an exchange with the gods, who inspire the poets and allow them to create names that they give to the gods as an offering in return. They may be divinely inspired human creations.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the second book of the *Histories*, Herodotus announces that he will not discuss the divine matters he heard from the priests he met in Egypt, 'because I consider that all humans have equal knowledge about them'. He probably means that their accounts of the gods are difficult or impossible to verify and are therefore not worthy of mention in his work. However, he will make an exception for divine names (οὐνόματα) because, apparently, he was able to gather external sources which confirmed the assertions of the Egyptian priests.

According to Herodotus, the Greeks learnt most divine names (οὐνόματα) from the Pelasgians, who themselves had learnt them from the Egyptians. He considers the Egyptian gods to be the same as the Greek gods, but he is aware that they bear different names. The passage concerning the Egyptian origins of Greek theonyms has received different interpretations in scholarship. According to one hypothesis, the names are the same but have been distorted by the passage of time. Such an explanation seems unlikely since the names of some gods are too different in Egyptian and Greek. Other scholars have suggested that we should not interpret divine οὐνόματα as divine names, and hold that Herodotus refers to the process of giving a name to a deity. However, what Herodotus calls οὔνομα in his work is always a name, in the broadest sense: any word which allows for the identification of someone or something. In particular, in these passages, divine οὐνόματα should be understood as the gods' theonyms.

A third explanation can be suggested: Herodotus is actually implying that the Greeks learnt the identities and the names of the gods from the Egyptians, and these names were translated or transposed into Greek, just as toponyms and anthroponyms can be. According to this hypothesis, Herodotus does not see Egyptian theonyms as a random series of sounds, but as meaningful names which reveal something about the gods. As for the Greek theonyms, they are more or less literal translations of Egyptian divine names and maintain the general idea expressed by the name in the original language.

As one of the most, if not the most, ancient peoples on earth, the Egyptians used to be close to the gods, which is why they have always known the identity and names of most of them. Herodotus does not say how exactly the Egyptians acquired the names of the gods, but he leaves open the possibility that they learnt

(ἐς ἐπῶν κόσμον), these ornaments are also thought to please the gods.

[192] Even if the function of the ἐπωνυμίαι is to please the gods, they can still be considered οὐνόματα, since they also identify the gods within the narrative.

them from the gods themselves in a distant past. The lexical field of knowledge used in the passages concerning the transmission of divine οὐνόματα suggests that these names are not mere conventions, but are the real names of the gods, taught by the deities themselves.

Herodotus attributes a different origin to the names he calls ἐπωνυμίαι, which are usually interpreted as epithets. However, the word he uses to refer to an epithet or a byname is ἐπίκλησις. On the other hand, ἐπωνυμίη should be understood as an eponym given after someone, something or some reason. It does not always refer to an epithet. For example, the collective name 'the Twelve Gods' can be considered an ἐπωνυμίη. Additionally, when Herodotus writes that Heracles bears the ἐπωνυμίη Ὀλύμπιος, he probably means that he is counted among the gods who dwell on Mount Olympus, not that he bears the cult epithet Ὀλύμπιος. The gods' ἐπωνυμίαι have various origins. Poseidon was given the ἐπωνυμίη Σωτήρ by the Greeks after he saved them from a military defeat. The eponym of the Twelve Gods came to Greece from the Egyptians, who were the first to use it customarily – that is, to group the gods by twelve. As for the poetic ἐπωνυμίαι, they were given to the gods by Hesiod and Homer.

This does not mean that Herodotus establishes a clear-cut distinction between divine οὐνόματα taught by the gods and ἐπωνυμίαι created by humans. In these passages, he calls the names ἐπωνυμίαι because he wants to draw attention to their meaning or to the fact that they reflect the characteristics of the gods, but all these ἐπωνυμίαι are also οὐνόματα. Some of the divine οὐνόματα that came from the Egyptians can also be considered ἐπωνυμίαι, if they are speaking names as in the case of the Dioscuri or Hestia, but the etymology of other divine οὐνόματα is not clear. In the passage concerning the transmission of knowledge about divine οὐνόματα, Herodotus is not interested in the meaning of these names, only in the fact that they allow identification of the gods.

Moreover, the passage concerning the ἐπωνυμίαι given to the gods by Hesiod and Homer is more complex than it looks. Herodotus writes that the Greeks did not know (ἠπιστέατο) the genealogy or form of the gods before the poets created a theogony and signified their form. The use of the verb ἐπίσταμαι suggests that he does not consider the representation of the gods in Hesiod's and Homer's poems to be a fiction; instead, he suggests that it is they who gave the Greeks access to some knowledge about the gods. The approximate age of the gods can be verified by enquiry, and their anthropomorphic form is confirmed by the fact that most peoples of the Mediterranean worship anthropomorphic deities. Hesiod and Homer did not learn about the genealogy and form of the gods from their predecessors or from other peoples. They only could have learnt it from the gods themselves, most probably from the Muses. Likewise, it is perhaps because they received divine signs from the Muses that the poets were able to explain the gods' τιμαί and τέχναι.

The statement that the poets gave (δόντες) the gods their ἐπωνυμίαι should be understood in this context. The verb δίδωμι is never used to refer to the attribution of a name, but instead indicates that these ἐπωνυμίαι are offerings to the gods. They are likely thought to please the gods because they are not just οὐνόματα, but rather names which reflect the deities' characteristics. Given that the whole passage suggests a transmission of knowledge from the gods to the poets, Herodotus

probably held that it was from the Muses that the poets learnt the characteristics of the gods and therefore were able to create ἐπωνυμίαι which could please them.

Herodotus writes that 'I consider that all humans have equal knowledge about' divine matters. Because of this, he has been compared to Protagoras, who stated that it is impossible to know anything about the gods, and to Plato, who considers that the names by which the Greeks call their gods are mere conventions, as their true names are inaccessible to humans (*Cra.* 400d–e).[193] The lexical field of knowledge suggests, however, that Herodotus disagrees with these philosophers. According to him, knowledge about the gods is not within direct reach of most humans, except by enquiry. However, in the past, certain persons or peoples who enjoyed great proximity with the divine, such as the ancient Egyptians or Hesiod and Homer, were given access to information about the gods and specifically about their names. This perspective, and not Plato's, is probably the view that was shared by most Greeks throughout antiquity.[194]

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[193] Cf. Thomas 2000: 280.
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