

Misleading and Unclear to the Many: Allegory in the Derveni Papyrus and the Orphic Theogony of Hieronymus

"This verse has been made misleading and it is unclear to the many, but to those who understand correctly it is clear that Okeanos is the air and air is Zeus." (Derveni Papyrus col. 23.1-3)

The discovery and publication of the Derveni Papyrus has, among other things, fueled a new interest in the history of allegorical interpretation in the Greek philosophical and religious traditions. Even when the papyrus was first published, scholars often sneered at the peculiar interpretations provided by the Derveni author, but recent studies have taken the Derveni Author more seriously as a thinker, trying to understand the context in which these interpretations could be offered. I argue that allegorical exegesis like that of the Derveni Author was a technique employed by wisdom experts of all types by the time of Plato (even if Plato and Aristotle themselves viewed it with suspicion). The Derveni Author uses it, like Euripides' Tiresias or Socrates in the *Protagoras*, to advertise his expertise in competition for authority as a ritual expert. Understanding the widespread use of allegorical interpretation allows us to reconsider the date of the Orphic theogony that Damascius associates with Hieronymus and Hellanicus. This theogony has often been dated to the 1st or 2nd centuries (BCE or even CE!), since the allegories have been imagined to be the products of later Stoic allegorism. There is no allegorical interpretation in the text, however, that lacks a parallel in the allegorical tradition of the 5th and 4th centuries, and parallels with the Aristotelian treatise *On the World (de Mundo)* suggest that the 4th and 3rd century Peripatetics, not the 2nd and 1st century Stoics, may be the source of this information about Orphic cosmology.