The Imagined and Historical Styx

JAN N. BREMMER

Abstract: In my contribution, I take a fresh look at the Styx, beginning with an analysis of Homer and the Homeric Hymns, which focus on the Styx as a river (§ 1), whereas Hesiod and the early mythographers concentrate on her divine status (§ 2). I then present a new survey of the various rivers in the ancient world that were called or identified as the Styx, drawing on several sources, including some modern descriptions of the Arcadian Styx from the nineteenth century to show the reactions of the local population to the interest of European travellers (§ 3), and I conclude with a summary of my findings and some thoughts on the uniqueness of the Styx as a river (§ 4).

Keywords: Styx, underworld, rivers, travellers, poetry (ancient and modern)

Rivers are not the most characteristic feature of ancient Greece in our collective memory. Whereas most people will think of the Seine when talking about Paris, or the Thames when talking about London, few will immediately think of the name of a Greek river when talking about a Greek city. Yet it is probably a good guess that most people with some classical education or even general knowledge will be familiar with the Styx, albeit mainly from our oldest sources, Homer and Hesiod. It is therefore noteworthy that the Styx has not been a popular subject of study, just as the rivers of mainland Greece have received surprisingly little attention in the scholarly literature.[1] In fact, the last comprehensive study of the Styx was published almost a century ago in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (*RE*).[2] Needless to say, our understanding of the epics' literary and linguistic features has advanced considerably

1 As can easily be seen by looking at the bibliography in Gnomon Online for the last century. Typically, R. LAURENCE, *Rivers*, in: R. BAGNALL et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* 10 (Malden, 2013) 5850–1, concentrates on Rome and only mentions studies of Roman rivers in his bibliography, whereas A. DAN, *Réflexions sur la perception et les représentations des fleuves dans l'Antiquité*, in: A. DAN / S. LEBRETON (eds.), *Études des fleuves d'Asie Mineure dans l'Antiquité*, 2 vols (Artois, 2018) 1.23–76 mainly focuses on Hesiod's *Theogony* and Greek rivers as symbolising the identity of a community, but not on other aspects of them.

2 F. BÖLTE et al., *Styx* 1–3, in *RE* IV A,1 (1931) 457–65.

since then, just as our interests have changed with new themes, such as gender or ecology (riverscape). I will therefore take a fresh look at the Styx, starting with an analysis of Homer and the Homeric Hymns (§ 1), and continuing with Hesiod and the early mythographers, who placed Styx into a proper genealogy (§ 2). As the Greek world expanded, people identified local rivers or waters with the Styx. The *RE* article mentions some of these, but it is incomplete, so we present here a new survey, also based on more recent editions of several sources. We also include some modern descriptions of the Arcadian Styx from the nineteenth century in order to show how the local people reacted to the interest of European travellers in their famous river (§ 3),[3] and conclude with some final considerations (§ 4). Given the theme of this issue of *Orbis Terrarum*, I will focus on the Styx as a river and a goddess, but I will not enter into a detailed discussion of the oaths sworn by her waters, as that would take us too far away from the central theme.

1. The Styx in Homer

In Homer, the Styx occurs only relatively few times. It is remarkable that all these passages speak of 'the water of Styx' and never just 'the Styx'.[4] It is therefore not wholly surprising that Wilhelm Schulze (1863–1935) suggested that the original name of the river was Στυγοσυδώρ, 'Styxwater'.[5] Yet there is a problem at this point that Schulze did not realise. From Hesiod (*Th.* 361) we know that Styx was a goddess, not a god. We will come back shortly to her female character in the *Theogony* (§ 2), but here it suffices to note that her gender is absolutely clear: Styx is female not male. This is rather surprising since, as was noted long ago, the Greek rivers are nearly always male, and they regularly have a name that suggests their forceful, even dangerous nature: Taur(i)os (bull),[6] Lykos (wolf), Sys (boar), Kapros (wild boar), and Tragos (he-goat).[7] That is also why the onslaught of warriors, such as Hector, Achilles and Diomedes, is compared to a wintry torrent, and later literature uses the comparison for the impulsive mass

3 There is an excellent bibliography of these early travellers in BÖLTE, *Styx*, 457, but without any evaluation or dating of the visits.

4 *Il.* 2.755: δεινοῦ Στυγὸς ὕδατός; 8.369: Στυγὸς ὕδατος; 14.271: ἀάατον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ, etc.

5 W. SCHULZE, *Quaestiones epicae* (Gütersloh, 1892) 440–4.

6 See M. CLARKE, *An Ox-Fronted River-God: Sophocles, "Trachiniae"* 12–13, in: *HSCPh* 102 (2004) 97–112; D. FABIANO, *Hybridism of Greek River Gods. Animal Traits as "Relational Elements" within the Freshwater Pantheon, I Quaderni del ramo d'oro on-line*, in: *Numero Speciale* III (2023) 35–58.

7 P. KRETSCHMER, *Danuvius und das Geschlecht der altindo-germanischen Flussnamen*, in: L. HJELMSLEV et al. (eds.), *Mélanges linguistiques offerts à M. Holger Pedersen* (Copenhagen, 1937) 76–87 at 79–80; U. HUTTNER, *Wolf und Eber: die Flüsse von Laodikeia in Phrygien*, in: J. NOLLÉ et al. (eds.), *Internationales Kolloquium zur kaiserzeitlichen Münzprägung Kleinasiens* (Milano, 1997) 93–109; J. N. BREMMER, *Rivers and River Gods in Ancient Greek Religion and Culture*, in: T. S. SCHEER (ed.), *Nature – Myth – Religion in Ancient Greece* (Stuttgart, 2019) 89–112 at 97–9.

of the people.[8] That is, evidently, also how Homer imagined the Styx, as he specifies 'the steep streams of the water of Styx' (*Il.* 8.369: Στυγὸς ὕδατος αἰπὰ ῥέεθρα) and 'the downwards flowing water of Styx (*Il.* 15.37 = *Od.*5.185 = *HHApoll.* 85: τὸ κατειβόμενον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ).[9] On the other hand, we know that the Indo-Europeans considered their rivers to be female.[10] Does this observation help us to a better understanding of the name Styx?

Unfortunately, the etymology of the name of the goddess/river is not yet properly explained,[11] but the name is clearly connected to the verb στυγέω, 'to hate, to detest' and the adjectives στυγερός, 'hated, loathed', and στυγνός, 'hated, abhorred'.[12] These words are often used precisely in connection with the underworld and its inhabitants, as Albert Henrichs (1942–2017) noted.[13] Although, then, etymology does not help us, we may still wonder, given the female nature of Styx, if the figure behind that name is perhaps of Indo-European ancestry, which might explain her being a goddess.

It is obvious that with this question we enter an area of speculation. Yet there is an argument why this is less farfetched than it might seem at first sight. That is the case because Styx is invoked in oaths by the gods in the *Iliad*. In Book 14, Hypnos says to Hera:

> Come then, and swear to me by the sunless water of Styx, and with one hand take hold of the earth that nourishes many, and with the other the shining sea, so that all the gods who are below the earth with Kronos may be our witnesses, that you will on oath give me one of the younger Graces.[14]

8 *Il.* 4.452–56, 5.87–92, 11.492–96, 13.136–42, 17.263–65, cf. F. R. ADRADOS, *El tema del torrente en la literatura griega arcaica y clásica*, *Emerita* 33 (1965) 7–14. Later literature: Theogn. 347–48; Soph. *Ant.* 712–13; Isocr. 15.172.

9 R. JANKO, *The Iliad: A Commentary, Volume IV* (Cambridge, 1992) 233, translates κατειβόμενον with 'dripping down', but that does not fit the picture of the Styx as a violent river in *Il.* 8.369.

10 N. OETTINGER, *Ist die Elbe weiblicher als der Rhein? Gedanken zu einem scheinbar selbstverständlichen Sprachgebrauch in Europa = SB Bayer. Akad. der Wiss.* 2023.1 (Munich, 2023).

11 P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque, nouvelle édition* (Paris, 2009) 1065–6; R. BEEKES, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2010) 2.1416–7.

12 Thus already Apollodorus *FGrH* 244 F 102: Στύγα δὲ δεινήν (see note 16) τινα καὶ φοβερὰν ὑποστησάμενοι δαίμονα, θεῶν ὅρκον, ἐν Ἅιδου τε ταύτην κατῴκισαν καὶ τῆς προσηγορίας ταύτης ἠξίωσαν ἀπὸ τοῦ στυγνάζειν τοῖς πένθεσι καὶ στύγεσθαι τὰ ἐν Ἅιδου, and JACOBY ad loc.

13 A. HENRICHS, *Zur Perhorreszierung des Wassers der Styx bei Aischylos und Vergil*, in: *ZPE* 78 (1989) 1–29 at 11 note 30, comparing *Il.* 8.368: κύνα στυγεροῦ Ἄϊδαο (Cerberus; add 8.370: στυγέει); 20.65: σμερδαλέ' εὑρώεντα, τά τε στυγέουσι θεοί περ; *Od.* 20.78: στυγερῇσιν Ἐρινύσιν; Hes. *Th.* 739: τά τε στυγέουσι θεοί περ (add 775: στυγερὴ θεὸς); Soph. *OC* 1389–90; Eur. *Alc.* 62, etc.; for Latin evidence; J. O'HARA, *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (Ann Arbor, 2017²) 171.

14 Il. 14.270–75: Ὣς φάτο, χήρατο δ' Ὕπνος, ἀμειβόμενος δὲ προσηύδα·
ἄγρει νῦν μοι ὄμοσσον ἀάατον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ,
χειρὶ δὲ τῇ ἑτέρῃ μὲν ἕλε χθόνα πουλυβότειραν,
τῇ δ' ἑτέρῃ ἅλα μαρμαρέην, ἵνα νῶϊν ἅπαντες
μάρτυροι ὦσ' οἳ ἔνερθε θεοὶ Κρόνον ἀμφὶς ἑόντες,
ἢ μὲν ἐμοὶ δώσειν Χαρίτων μίαν ὁπλοτεράων, tr. A. VERITY, adapted.

And in Book 15, Hera starts her oath to Zeus as follows:

> May my witnesses be earth and the wide high sky above, and the water of Styx that flows downwards, which is the greatest and most terrible oath among the blessed gods.[15]

In these passages, it is swearing by the water of Styx that is the 'most terrible' oath, the adjective δεινός regularly being used in connection with the Styx and other infernal powers, such as the Keres and Erinyes.[16] As 'the name Στύξ is an archaic formation',[17] and the formulaic nature of these lines suggests an older background, it seems right to ask if we have Indo-European parallels to this swearing by water. Now I am not the first student of the Styx to look outside Greece. In 1972, the Sanskritist Hartmut Scharfe posed the same question. Quoting an earlier study by the Orientalist Heinrich Lüders (1869–1943),[18] he noted that in the case of contracts or oaths in ancient India, 'water, preferably Ganges-water, is put before the person taking an oath, or is poured over a person'.[19] In the Indian view, the water of the Ganges came from the sky, and this descent of the Ganges (*Gangâvatarana*) was sometimes even visualised as a waterfall, which would agree with the Styx. However, Scharfe concluded from the historical Styx (§ 3 below) being a waterfall that the Homeric Styx was not a river of the underworld. There can be no doubt, though, that the Styx was situated in the underworld, since Odysseus is told by Calypso that he must go to Hades, where the Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus, 'which is a branch of the water of the Styx',[20] flow into the Acheron. Scharfe clearly confuses history with myth. The fact that the Styx of the underworld was modelled on real rivers does not make it into a real river.

Following Lüders, Scharfe also pointed to a parallel in the poetic *Edda*, where in the *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* the news of Helgi's death is told to his wife and the killer tells her:

15 *Il.* 15.36–38 (= *Od.* 5.184–86; *HHApoll.* 84–86; see also Dem. 40.10):
ἴστω νῦν τόδε Γαῖα καὶ Οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς ὕπερθε / καὶ τὸ κατειβόμενον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ, ὅς τε μέγιστος / ὅρκος δεινότατός τε πέλει μακάρεσσι θεοῖσι, tr. A. VERITY.

16 HENRICHS, *Perhorreszierung des Wassers der Styx*, 12 note 31, compares *Il.* 2.755: δεινοῦ Στυγὸς (add *Od.* 11.157: δεινὰ ῥέεθρα); Hes. *Th.* 776: δεινὴ Στύξ (add 759: Ὕπνος καὶ Θάνατος, δεινοὶ θεοί); Soph. *OR* 471, now with FINGLASS *ad loc*; Eur. *El.* 1252, 1270, etc.

17 BEEKES, *Etymological Dictionary*, 2.1416.

18 H. LÜDERS, *Varuṇa*, 2 vols (Göttingen 1951–1959) 1.28, 2.670; P. THIEME, *Studien zur indogermanischen Wortkunde und Religionsgeschichte = Ber. der Sachs. Akad. der Wiss.* 98 (1952) 53–5; TH. OBERLIES, *Milch und Soma – Die Formalien eines Vertragsschlusses (Nachbetrachtungen zur "Religion des Ṛgveda")*, in: *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 23 (2002) 71–89 at 78 f.

19 H. SCHARFE, *The Sacred Water of the Ganges and the Styx-water*, in: *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 86 (1972) 116–20.

20 *Od.* 10.513–14: ἔνθα μὲν εἰς Ἀχέροντα Πυριφλεγέθων τε ῥέουσι / Κώκυτός θ', ὃς δὴ Στυγὸς ὕδατός ἐστιν ἀπορρώξ, alluded to in Aesch. F. 273a.11–13 RADT: οὗ τόδ' ἀπορρὼξ ἀμέγαρτον ὕδωρ / κἀχέρνι π̣τ̣ο̣ν / Στυγίοις να̣[σ]μοῖσιν ἀνεῖται.

> All the oaths shall bite you, those which you had sworn to Helgi, by the lustrous water of Leiptr and by the drizzle-cool stone of Unnr! (II.31, tr. PETTIT)[21]

From two other old Norse passages, we know that the Leiptr was a river.[22] It is not told how the water of this river was used exactly, but it seems not over-adventurous to infer from the evidence of these three cultures (Greek, Indian and Germanic) that swearing by the water of a river was part of an Indo-European oath ritual. I tentatively conclude therefore that the female nature of Styx may well go back to Indo-European times.

What else does Homer say of Styx? Let us start with the least specific qualification. In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, Apollo says to Hermes that he would act after his heart if he swore the god's great oath by nodding his head or 'upon the terrible water of Styx' (519: ἐπὶ Στυγὸς ὄβριμον ὕδωρ). The adjective is used only one other time for water in Homer, when the clashing of warriors is compared to the winter torrents joining their thundering 'mighty water' in a deep gorge (*Il.* 4.453), but it clearly has a terrifying meaning in that it is used of a spear (*Il.* 3.357, 4.529, etc), of Ares (*Il.* 5.845, 15.112) and of Hector (*Il.* 8.473, 10.300, 11.347, etc) and Achilles (19–408) in their capacity as formidable fighters.

The water of Styx is also called ἀμείλικτος (*HHDem* 259: ἀμείλικτον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ). *LSJ* gives its meaning as 'unsoftened, harsh, cruel', and indeed, the adjective denotes the opposite of being μείλιχος, 'kind, gentle'. In Homer and Hesiod, ἀμείλικτος is always applied to inanimate objects or speech, but from a more recently published papyrus we know that Archilochus (F 17a.11, 23 SWIFT; see also F 159) calls Telephus ἀμείλικτος, 'pitiless'. The translation better reflects the alpha privative in ἀμείλικτος and is also more fitting in describing the underworld, as our next example will show.

Its final and most discussed qualification is the 'obscure and sinister' (JANKO) ἀάατος, which is used when Hypnos calls upon Hera to swear an oath by ἀάατον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ (*Il.* 14.271). The adjective also occurs in the *Odyssey*, but it seems reasonable to assume that the solemn oath formula more accurately preserved an archaic usage than the non-formulaic connection of ἄεθλον ἀάατον (*Od.* 21.91) and ἄεθλος ἀάατος (*Od.* 22.5). In his commentary on *Iliad* 14.271, RICHARD JANKO (*ad loc.*) states that the adjective 'is best rendered "inviolable"'. However, a more recent linguistic investigation of the word and its poetical background has persuasively concluded that the 'obscure Homeric epithet ἀάατος is related to the Proto-Indo-European word for 'sun-

21 The parallel with the Styx was first noted by the Danish folklorist S. GRUNDTVIG, *Sæmundar Edda hins fróða: Den ældre Edda* (Copenhagen, 1874) 225.

22 In *Grímnismál* 28, Leiptr is a river in a catalogue of rivers in the mythic world and in Snorri's cosmogony (Snorra Edda, *Gylfaginning* 3) it is one of eleven rivers called Élivágr, which flow out of the primordial place called Niflheim (a place filled with ice). For a fuller discussion of these passages, see K. VON SEE et al., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda/Bd. 4, Heldenlieder: Helgakviða Hundingsbana* I, *Helgakviða Hiǫrvarðssonar, Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II (Heidelberg, 2004) 749–50 and id. et al., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda. Bd. 1, Götterlieder*, 2 vols (Heidelberg, 2019) 2.1346.

light' **séh$_2$u̯l̥*, **s(h$_2$)u̯éns* and goes back to a proto-form **ahāu̯ato-* < **n̥-seh$_2$u̯n̥to-* 'having no sunlight'; the juncture ἀάατον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ in the archaic oath formula (Ξ 271) can now be understood as 'the sunless water of the Styx'.[23] This interpretation also well fits the description of the Styx as flowing 'through the black night' (Hes. *Th.* 788) as well as Pindar's description of the underworld: 'from where sluggish rivers of black night belch forth their limitless gloom' (fr. 130 MAEHLER, tr. WILLCOCK). Indeed, in the Greek and Roman imagination the underworld is imagined as the opposite of the present world, as a cold and mirthless place where no sun ever shines.[24] As Zeus points out to Helios: 'you keep shining among the immortals and for the mortal men on the life-giving earth' (*Od.* 12.385–86), but he does not mention the underworld. The negative picture, exemplified by the alpha privative of ἀμείλικτος and ἀάατος, reflects a thought pattern that is more often explored in the other opposite of the land of the living, namely an imaginary paradise, which essentially functions in the same manner by picturing the underworld as the opposite of this world.[25]

With these passages we have come to the end of (the) Styx in Homer. If we now look back, we can see that Homer is mainly interested in the water of the Styx, which is described in negative ways, in connection with the oath of the gods, but not in the river as such. The Styx functions as an intermediary between heaven and earth, with whom it is mentioned in the oath by Hera (*Il.* 15.37, see also 2.755; Hes. *Th.* 784–92). At the same time, it is the symbol of the oath between divinities and the guarantor of that oath (*Il.* 2.755, 14.271), although Homer does not mention a punishment for the perjurer, of which we hear in Hesiod (§ 2). On the other hand, the oath takers do not touch the Styx or drink its water. In other words, the role of the Styx in the divine oaths is purely symbolic.

Homer pays hardly any attention to the riverscape, although it is once said that the Styx has a branch (Cocytus: above) and although the Styx is clearly represented as a river fast flowing downwards. It is not impossible that in a few other passages the Styx is meant to be evoked for the reader, as when Patroclus' ghost mentions 'a river' (*Il.* 23.73: ποταμοῖο) which he is unable to cross to reach Hades. This may well be the Styx,

23 A. NIKOLAEV, *Homeric ἀάατος: Etymology and Poetics*, in: *Die Sprache* 50 (2012/2013 [2015]) 182–239 at 220, which appeared probably too late to be taken into account by M. KRIETER-SPIRO, *Book XIV Homer's Iliad* (Berlin/Boston, 2018) 135; see also N. OETTINGER, *Die Runeninschrift von Eggja und indogermanische Phraseologie*, in: M. FRITZ et al. (eds.), *Maiores philologiae pontes. Festschrift für Michael Meier-Brügger zum 70. Geburtstag* (Ann Arbor / New York, 2020) 161–9.

24 Sunless: Hes. *Th.* 759–60, 788; Aesch. *Sept.* 859, *Pers.* 839, ?F 334 RADT; Eur. *Alc.* 437, 852, *HF* 607, *Hipp.* 1416, F 868 KANNICHT; K. MATIJEVIĆ, *Ursprung und Charakter der homerischen Jenseitsvorstellungen* (Leiden, 2015) 79; G. A. GAZIS, *Homer and the Poetics of Hades* (Oxford, 2019) 87–8; S. LYE, *Life/afterlife: revolution and reflection in the ancient Greek underworld from Homer to Lucian* (Oxford, 2024) 56–8. Roman: Verg. *Aen.* 6. 534: *tristis sine sole domos*.

25 M. DAVIES, *Description by Negation: History of a Thought Pattern in Ancient Accounts of Blissful Life*, in: *Prometheus* 13 (1987) 265–84; B. LINCOLN, *Death, War, and Sacrifice* (Chicago/London, 1991) 23–31 ('*On the imagery of Paradise*', first published in 1980).

and one may wonder if the avoidance of the proper name is not best explained by the 'soft' taboo on mentioning underworld powers by name.[26] In any case, in Patroclus' dream visit to Achilles a river divides the land of the living from the ultimate underworld; this is also the case when Athena mentions Heracles' *katabasis* and the crossing of the water of the Styx clearly indicates his leaving of the underworld.[27] In these cases, the Styx functions in the Greek imagination in the same way that many historical rivers have functioned as borders between two territories.[28]

It is also not impossible that Homer wants his readers to think of the Styx in a few other passages, such as in Priam's ransom journey to Achilles (*Il.* 24.349–53), where a river functions as a kind of boundary, and in the bloody battle at the Scamander in *Iliad* Book 21.[29] In any case, these passages evoke rather the *river*, whereas in most Homeric passages it is the *water* of the Styx that has Homer's attention. What we do not find in Homer is any reference to Styx as a goddess. For that we have to turn to our next important source: Hesiod's *Theogony*.

2. Hesiod and the early mythographers

In Hesiod, Styx is mentioned first in an enumeration of the daughters of Okeanos and Tethys.[30] The list begins with the great rivers of the ancient world, like the Nile and the Acheloios (338–45). After these male figures, Tethys 'gave birth to a holy race of daughters who, together with Lord Apollo and the rivers, raise boys so that they become men on the earth' (346–48, tr. Most). There follows a hodgepodge of names, not all of whom have anything to do with water or even with male education, such as Peitho, Chryseis or Tyche (349–61), but the list concludes with 'Styx, who is indeed

26 For this taboo, see A. HENRICHS, *Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus: Zur Ambivalenz der chthonischen Mächte im attischen Drama*, in: H. HOFMANN / A. HARDER (eds.), *Fragmenta dramatica* (Göttingen, 1991) 161–201.

27 *Il.* 8.366–69: εὖτέ μιν εἰς Ἀΐδαο πυλάρταο προὔπεμψεν
ἐξ Ἐρέβευς ἄξοντα κύνα στυγεροῦ Ἀΐδαο,
οὐκ ἂν ὑπεξέφυγε Στυγὸς ὕδατος αἰπὰ ῥέεθρα.
νῦν δ' ἐμὲ μὲν στυγέει, Θέτιδος δ' ἐξήνυσε βουλάς, etc.
'(Had I but known all this in wisdom of my heart) when Eurystheus sent him forth to the house of Hades the Warder, to bring from out of Erebus the hound of loathed Hades, then had he not escaped the sheer-falling waters of Styx', tr. A. T. MURRAY.

28 For the boundary function of the Styx, see CH. SOURVINOU-INWOOD, *'Reading' Greek Death* (Oxford, 1995) 61–3; more in general, see D. BRAUND, *River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World*, in: D. KENNEDY (ed.), *The Roman Army in the East* (Ann Arbor, 1996) 43–7; B. RANKOV, *Do Rivers make Good Frontiers?*, in: Z. VISY (ed.), *Limes XIX* (Pécs, 2005) 175–82.

29 C. J. MACKIE, *Scamander and the Rivers of Hades in Homer*, *AJPh* 120 (1999) 485–501; M. HERRERO DE JÁUREGUI, *Catabasis: El viaje infernal en la Antigüedad* (Madrid, 2023) 99–101.

30 For Styx as a goddess, see E. BETHE, *Styx* 3, in: *RE* IV A,1 (1931) 464–65, with old-fashioned speculations about Attic origins of the various mentions, mainly referring to his own work.

the most excellent of them all'. Clearly, from all of these, Styx is the most important daughter, as she is also the eldest one (777), and therefore placed last, even though Akousilaos (*FGrH* 2 F 1 = **1 FOWLER) states that Acheloios is the oldest and most honoured child of Okeanos. This mythographer's genealogy is an early testimony to the fact that Okeanos gradually replaced Acheloios as the origin of all the world's waters,[31] even though the latter still occupies a clearly more important place than Hesiod's Styx in Akousilaos' genealogy of the pantheon. Given that Styx had so many siblings, it is rather surprising that only once do we hear of a female being actually called her sister. That woman is Daeira, a shadowy figure connected to Eleusis (Pherecydes *FGrH* 3 F 45 = 45 FOWLER), but this is a unique case, presumably invented to tie Daeira closely to the underworld.[32] That underworld connection must also be the reason why Styx, not Demeter, is once mentioned as the mother of Persephone (Apollod. 1.13). Still, these kinship relations are clearly later inventions of mythographers and did not become accepted by the mainstream mythological tradition.

After a brief digression about other descendants of Ouranos, we hear why Styx occupies that outstanding position in Hesiod. Styx had intercourse with a certain Pallas (383), who is so shadowy that we have no idea about his place in the general early genealogy. Normally in Greek myth, the name of the male member of a male/female couple is fixed but that of the female one exchangeable,[33] but in this case the 'husband's' name is apparently uncertain, as Epimenides (*FGrH* 457 F 5 = F 7 FOWLER) calls him Peiras, even though nothing really is known about either of them. With Pallas, then, Styx gave birth to Zelos ('Rivalry'), Nike ('Victory'), Kratos ('Supremacy') and Bia ('Force'), and these divinities, as Hesiod states, always live very close to Zeus. Yet both their ancestry and their place of living are unique, and it is certainly possible that Hesiod has invented their connection to Styx as well as their abode next to Zeus.[34]

According to Hesiod, all that happened in agreement with the scheming of 'immortal Styx, Okeanos' daughter' (389). This looks rather like a recapping of the previous genealogy of Styx as being both a goddess and the daughter of Okeanos, and a stressing of her divinity.

The birth of Styx's children is connected to the struggle for power by Zeus, who had invited all the immortals to join him in the fight against the Titans (392). West (*ad* 391) notes that this is the only passage where Hesiod tells us something about the

31 G. B. D'ALESSIO, *Textual Fluctuations and Cosmic Streams: Ocean and Acheloios*, in: *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 124 (2004) 16–37.

32 For Daeira, see R. PARKER, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford, 2005) 340; R. L. FOWLER, *Early Greek Mythography*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2000–2013) 2.16–17; S. I. JOHNSTON, *Demeter, Myths, and the Polyvalence of Festivals*, in: *History of Religions* 52 (2013) 370–401 at 381–3; J. N. BREMMER, *The World of Greek Religion and Mythology* (Tübingen, 2019) 342.

33 J. N. BREMMER, *Becoming a Man in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Tübingen, 2021) 82–3.

34 Thus, persuasively, H. FRÄNKEL, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (New York/London, 1973) 99–101.

beginning of that epic struggle. Unfortunately, the tradition regarding the war against the Titans is only very rudimentarily known, as the early poems about it have been lost. Even the name of the poet credited with the *Titanomachy* of the Epic Cycle is not certain, although Eumelos' poem, if it was by him, contained some older material than Hesiod's work.[35] It is in line with the importance attached to Styx by Hesiod that he lets her come first with her children 'through the plans of her dear father' (398) among those supporting Zeus: although he was a Titan, Okeanos stayed aloof from the struggles but clearly favoured Zeus.[36] It is this immediate reaction of Styx that Zeus, thus Hesiod, 'established her to be the great oath of the gods' (400). Whereas in Homer the oath by the water of Styx is called 'the greatest oath for the blessed gods' (*Il.* 15.38; *Od.*5.15), for Hesiod swearing by Styx is simply a great oath. The narrative ends with the comment that Zeus kept his promises and 'rules mightily and reigns' (403). The verse implies the successful end of the war against the Titans, but gives no details or insight as to how this happened. For that we have to wait until later in the poem.

After a fearsome battle (664–720), the rebellious Titans were locked up in Tartarus. Hesiod's description of Tartarus is not wholly transparent, but a good case has been made that we have to see the underworld as being divided into two storeys: Tartarus proper and Hades, the latter being the upper storey.[37] It is in this upper storey that Hesiod situates the living space of Styx. The fact that she is mentioned immediately after the description of the 'echoing houses' of the 'infernal god' (767: θεοῦ χθονίου)'[38] – one more example of the soft taboo on mentioning the infernal powers by name (above, § 1) – suggests that her abode was not that far from that of Hades and Persephone. This makes sense as Hesiod has aligned her closely to Zeus in the battle against the Titans. Given her important role there, her place in the underworld should not be out of line with her contribution to the decisive battle. Still, being a 'goddess hateful to the immortals' (775), she could not be too close and therefore 'she lives far from the gods in her famous house roofed over with great rocks. On every side it is lifted up to heaven on silver pillars' (777–79). There is something enigmatic about these pillars, which have not been satisfactorily explained. The great James George Frazer (1854–1941), in

35 For Eumelos' *Titanomachy*, see M. L. WEST, *"Eumelos": A Corinthian Epic Cycle* (2002), reprinted in his *Hellenica I* (Oxford, 2011) 363–91, to be added to A. DEBIASI, *Eumelo: un poeta per Corinto* (Rome, 2015) 54–7.

36 See *Il.* 14.200–04; Apollod. 1.1.4; *Orphicorum fragmenta* 186 BERNABÉ; J. N. BREMMER, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 2009) 81.

37 J. S. CLAY, *A Stroll Through Hesiod's Tartarus*, in: M. CHRISTOPOULOS / M. PAÏZI-APOSTOLOPOULOU (eds.), *The Upper and the Under World in Homeric and Archaic Epic* (Ithaca, 2020) 393–412.

38 The expression 'house of Hades' goes back to Indo-European times, see B. LINCOLN, *The House of Clay* (1982), reprinted in his *Death, War, and Sacrifice* (Chicago/London, 1991) 107–18; M. JANDA, *Eleusis. Das indogermanische Erbe der Mysterien* (Innsbruck, 2000) 69–71; M. L. WEST. *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 2007) 388.

his still informative commentary on Pausanias, wonders, after having seen the historical Styx (§ 3):

> Is it fanciful to see in the "silver pillars" the enormous icicles which in winter must hang over the cliff? It is said that when a cloud rests on the summit of the precipice, the water of the cascade seems to drop straight from the sky. In winter the clouds must often be down on the mountain, and the icicles will then look like "silver pillars propped against the sky".[39]

This is certainly imaginative, but whatever the solution is, it is equally important to note that Styx does not live in a proper mansion but in a kind of cave. In the mythological imagination, caves were typical of wild or aboriginal beings. People lived in caves before houses, as did monstrous figures like the Homeric Cyclopes, the snake Echidna, whose description by Hesiod closely resembles that of Styx (301–3), or the terrible Harpies.[40] In other words, the house of Styx marks her out as somebody outside civilisation, despite her silver pillars.

We hear a bit more about the Styx when Hesiod shifts his attention from Styx as goddess to the Styx as a river. In case of divine quarrels or lies, he says, Zeus sends the messenger Iris to fetch 'from afar' (785: τηλόθεν), thus stressing the distance between Olympus and Hades,

> the celebrated water, cold, which pours down from under a high, steep rock. It flows from deep under the wide-pathed earth out of the holy river through the black night – a branch of Okeanos, and one part in ten is allotted to it. With nine silver-swirling streams he (Okeanos) winds about the earth and the broad back of the sea, and then falls into the sea; but she (the Styx), as one portion (out of ten), flows out from a rock, a great woe to the gods (785–92).

The passage adds a few more details about the Styx. Its water is cold and flows from a steep rock.[41] Unlike in Homer, though, the water is not depicted as coming from a waterfall but rather from underneath a steep rock, just like many subterranean rivers

39 J. G. FRAZER, *Pausanias's Description of Greece IV* (London, 1898) 253. On Frazer's Pausanias, see S. MACCORMACK, *Pausanias and his commentator Sir James George Frazer*, *Classical Receptions Journal* 2 (2010) 287–313; A ANGUISSOLA, *The Description of Greece*: *Frazer lettore di Pausania*, in: F. DIMPFLMEIER / F. DEI (eds.), *"Il coro disvela una legge segreta." James G. Frazer fra antropologia, studi classici e letteratura* (Rome, 2023) 29–47.

40 G. SIEBERT, *Imaginaires et images de la grotte dans la Grèce archaïque et classique*, in: *Ktema* 15 (1990 [1994]) 151–61; R. BUXTON, *Imaginary Greece* (Cambridge, 1994) 104–8; K. SPORN, *Espace naturel et paysages religieux: les grottes dans le monde grec*, in: *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 227 (2010) 553–71; M. AGUIRRE / R. BUXTON, *Cyclops* (Oxford, 2020) 47–50.

41 Hes. *Th.* 785–87: ὕδωρ, ψυχρόν, ὅ τ' ἐκ πέτρης καταλείβεται ἠλιβάτοιο ὑψηλῆς. Note the resemblance with the description of water in a grove close to town in *Od.* 17.309–10: κατὰ δὲ ψυχρὸν ῥέεν ὕδωρ ὑψόθεν ἐκ πέτρης.