Reinterpreting Rhianus fr. 1 Powell through the Intertexts of Homer and Hesiod

This paper argues that we can better understand the third century BCE poet Rhianus' purpose in fr. 1 Powell by examining Homer and Hesiod as intertexts. The current *communis opinio* holds that the twenty-one hexameters are a fragment of one of Rhianus' lost epic works. However, their interpretation remains controversial. The lines condemn the folly of the poor man, who lacks the wherewithal of life, and the rich man, whom the goddess Ate will punish for committing several acts of hubris (e.g., courting Athena, fr. 1.14; striving to eat at the table of the gods, fr. 1.16). The long-held majority opinion reads Rhianus' reproach of the rich man as an invective against the divine pretensions of Hellenistic kings (e.g., Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1924, Jacoby 1964, Giangrande 1970). More recently, however, the view that Rhianus simply uses traditional gnomic language to denounce mankind's folly has found strong proponents (e.g., Cameron 1995, Leurini 2000). These scholars rightly criticize the former claims because they rely on the speculation that the poet never established himself at a major Hellenistic center and so, was "safe" to criticize openly. At the same time, though, the idea that the poem is exclusively moralistic is superficial and denies Rhianus any poetic ingenuity.

Surprisingly, scholars have declined to consider the full significance of the fragment's conspicuous allusions to Homer and Hesiod. Homer's presence is readily apparent in Rhianus' language (e.g. Hopkinson 1988), which incorporates a standard Homeric metaphor in line 8 (θυμὸν ἔδουσι; cf. eg. *Od.* 10.378-9) and two Homeric *hapax legomena*, πολυκοιρανίην in line 10 (*Il*. 2.204) and ὑπεροπλίη in line 12 (*Il*. 2.205). The most obvious connection with Homer is Rhianus' description of the goddess Ate in lines 17-21, which closely resembles her portrayal in 19.91-4 of the *Iliad*. Rhianus similarly draws upon Hesiodic idiom, such as ἁμαρτίνοοι in line 1 (e.g. *Theog*. 511) and ὄλβον ὀπάζῃ (*Theog*. 420) and εὐοχθῆισι, a *hapax* of Hesiod (*Op.* 477), in

line 9. Moreover, the appearance of Dike in the final line of the poem recalls the pointedly Hesiodic theme of justice among men. In short, Rhianus' close engagement with these poets demands further study.

The roles of Ate and Dike in Homer and Hesiod, respectively, are especially worth consideration. Ate appears in Homer in two distinct ways. First, in the passage Rhianus quotes, Ate is an external force that exclusively blinds kings into committing an act of folly that has negative consequences for others but minimal to no impact on the monarch himself. For example, under the influence of Ate, Agamemnon steals Briseis, an act that sends destruction upon his whole army (*Il.* 19.134-5, 270-4; 9.116-8). The extent of Agamemnon's suffering, however, is that he merely was unable to forget Ate's power while Hector was massacring his troops (*Il.* 19.136). The second aspect of Ate is punitive, which manifests itself in the only other Homeric passage where the goddess is personified (*Il.* 9.502-46). Here, the Litai complain of their maltreatment to their father Zeus and urge him to send Ate to punish the wrongdoers. It is this function that Rhianus' Ate explicitly embodies.

In the fragment, however, Rhianus writes that Ate bears favors not to the Litai, but to Dike (fr. 1.21). This swap cleverly calls the reader's attention to the allegory of Dike in the *Works and Days*, where the goddess is likewise a daughter of Zeus who demands punishment for injustices committed against her. Significantly, Hesiod identifies kings, whose hubristic actions cause their people to suffer (*Op.* 39-40, 261), as the violators of Dike (*Op.* 256-62). For the moment, Hesiod's monarchs go scot free and their people bear the brunt of divine wrath. However, the poet makes it clear that Zeus will punish the kings in the end. By examining the contexts of Rhianus' Homeric and Hesiodic models, it is possible to read the fragment's hubristic rich man as a prosperous but impertinent Hellenistic king and its poor man as the languishing

subject who pays the price for his ruler's impudence. Ate, though, will eventually punish the former. If this interpretation is correct, we should read Rhianus' fragment as a denunciation of the Hellenistic monarch's self-deification couched in traditional gnomic language.

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