

ἀλλὰ τίη μοι ταῦτα περὶ δρῦν ἢ περὶ πέτρην, indeed?: The Elemental Networks of the *Theogony*

The “oak and rock” (δρῦς, πέτρα) of *Theogony* 35 has undergone copious critical scrutiny and speculation since the earliest scholia. The binary image notably also appears in the *Iliad* (22.126) and the *Odyssey* (19.163). This triangulation in archaic Greek poetry has caused most readers to take the pair as a stock phrase or proverb of deep antiquity. Calvert Watkins (1995), building on other comparative work, explicated the Indo-European provenance of the “tree (**dru-*) (and) rock” formula. More recently, Carolina López-Ruiz (2010), expanding upon the work of Shawn O’Bryhim (1996), has widened the critical scope to include parallel phrasing in the ancient Near Eastern traditions as well.

However, much work remains to be done in the space between the vast and fascinating range of these comparative considerations and close readings of the *Theogony* itself. The middle course of this paper acquires much from the broader comparative approaches but applies their insights primarily to a reading of the resonances of the δρῦς and πέτρα formula and its components *within* the Hesiodic corpus. Although these and related images operate throughout the works of Hesiod, the present project confines itself to the formula’s immediate literary *Quelle* in the *Theogony*.

I call the loosely-gathered set of such components an “elemental network” within the poem. Elemental because this formula inherently deals with the natural world and a network being practically defined for the present purposes as a system of literary images linked by a common element into some kind of coherent pattern. My examples will not exhaust the full range of related images. Rather, they will examine what seem to be the most salient, provocative, or mysterious of the “tree (and) rock” images and consider how they inform each other.

I begin at the line in question itself, *Theogony* 35, orienting contemporary understanding of the language as it stands and examining its narrative position in the midst of the poem's long and complex formal introduction.

Next, I consider the replacement of Zeus with a stone (λίθος) in the narrative of his birth (481–91). Although not *precisely* a philological parallel to the πέτρα of 35, the membership of the λίθος in the semantic field of “*tree (and) rock*” seems clear. As a significant image of the divine, this stone has prompted examination within studies of Greek religion and comparatively with Near Eastern traditions. Here, I consider the place of the λίθος, which will indeed soon become the ὀμφαλός, as a kind of *narrative* navel around which events turn.

Finally, the roots of Tartarus at 728 and 812 will underlie and anchor my analysis near the end of the poem. More *semantically* distant from the precise expression of the δρυς and πέτρα, these ῥίζαι stand at some of the farthest reaches of the Hesiodic *cosmos* as well. The precise topography of Hesiod's gloomy underworld has puzzled and troubled commentators, David M. Johnson (1999) among them. As another member of the *Theogony*'s “problematic passages” (to use Jenny Strauss Clay (2009)'s phrasing), these roots of Tartarus share in the sense of shadowy interpretation my other examples evince. So too does reexamination back through the associated network of images help further illuminate the importance of this dark region in the overall system of Hesiod's cosmology.

Taking these three examples together, I argue that the elemental network connected to the “*tree (and) rock*” formula at *Theogony* 35 — a network whose members include the λίθος of Zeus and the ῥίζαι of Tartarus — raises certain engaging self-referential aspects. The comparative evidence demonstrates the infusion of the speaking and inspired composition into the meaning of the δρυς and πέτρα puzzle. My analysis uncovers the role of these linked images

in the *Theogony*'s narrative structure. In turn, although Hesiod is no neoteric, the confluence of such evocative images of inspiration and their narrative importance strongly encourages metapoetic readings.

Thus, the nodes of the elemental network I have begun to lay out in this project seem to raise important literary questions by the very nature of their problematic or puzzling status. Rather than a series of disconnected mysteries, the seemingly proverbial δρῦς, πέτρα, and related images in the *Theogony* may in fact be a key to better understanding Hesiod's programmatic poetics.

Bibliography

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