

ALLEGORESIS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY BC

By

MIKOŁAJ DOMARADZKI

ABSTRACT: The article deals with the development of allegoresis in the fifth century BC. While the exegetical works of Metrodorus of Lampsacus and Diogenes of Apollonia are its main focus, the paper argues that the aim of these allegorists was not to exonerate Homer from the charges of immorality but rather to propagate the philosophical explanation of the world laid down by Anaxagoras. Thus, the parallel development of philosophy and allegory in the fifth century is taken to suggest that it was the flowering of the former that actuated the latter.

The purpose of allegorical interpretation is to discover the hidden meaning of a text. The practice arose in the sixth century BC as a result of attempts to exonerate Homer from the charges of impiety¹. In the fifth century, allegorical interpretation no longer served the purpose of exculpating the poet, since now its primary objective was to facilitate the process of replacing the mythological account of the world provided by Homer and Hesiod with a more scientific one put forward by the first philosophers. This development was reflected in two very important assumptions that were made with regard to Homer: the poet was assumed not only to have shared the full-fledged philosophical picture of the world offered by the Ionian thinkers, but also *intentionally* to have camouflaged it in his poems. Hence, the fifth-century allegorists participated in the process of rationalizing the then view of the world by interpreting the old narratives of Homer in accordance with the findings of Anaxagoras' new science as *deliberate* allegories. While this development is clearly illustrated by the exegetical work of Metrodorus of Lampsacus and, to a lesser degree, of Diogenes of Apollonia, the present paper will focus on the two thinkers as *strong* allegorists, i.e., interpreters who read into Homer the physical teachings of Anaxagoras on the assumption that Homer not only prefigured the profound philosophy of Anaxagoras but also purposefully disguised it as poetry². Accordingly, it will be shown here that

¹ The sixth century allegoresis lies beyond the scope of the present paper, but see n. 13 below.

² Thus, I agree with those scholars who assess that Metrodorus and, at least to some extent, Diogenes interpreted Homer allegorically precisely in the strong (i.e., *intentional*) sense, see especially NADDAF 2009: 117. Cf. also RICHARDSON 2006: 79 and LONG 2006: 215.