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Teaching and preaching in the Derveni papyrus: Observations on *mantike techne* in Archaic and Classical Greece

Аннотация. По свидетельству целого ряда античных авторов, в том числе и в составе недавно обнаруженного трактата Галена «О моих воззрениях», Протагор предлагал усомниться в отношении всего того, что касается богов и их сущности. Примечательным образом Филострат (Жизнеописания софистов 1.10.2) источник этого сомнения усматривает в «персидском воспитании» Протагора, так как, по его мнению, персидские маги, продолжая взывать к богам в своих тайных ритуалах, не признают это публично, опасаясь, что в противном случае люди, осознав, что их сверхъестественные способности связаны с божественными влияниями, перестанут к ним обращаться. Иными словами, так рассуждая, маги стремились не потерять работу. Следует ли нам принимать историчность этого странного сообщения Филострата или же считать его отражением типичного для эллинистической и римской историографии стремления усмотреть «восточный след» во всяком учении или искусстве? Ответить на этот вопрос нам может помочь знаменитое высказывание из Папируса из Дервени (кол. XX), фундаментальное для понимания авторства папируса. Мы увидим причины, по которым невозможно однозначно ответить на вопрос о том, был ли автор папируса практикующим τελεστής. Однако нам станет ясно, что он противопоставляет себя не практикующим мистерии (в том числе и профессионально), но тем, кто участвует в них, не понимая смысла происходящего и «даже не задавая вопросов». Напротив, он намерен дать ответы на возможные вопросы и раскрыть истинный смысл авторитетного текста экзегетическими средствами. Попытаемся мы ответить и на вопрос о том, с какой целью автор папируса стремился использовать различные космологические ассоциации. Имеем ли мы дело с древним «филологом-комментатором», или же, ассоциируя Зевса с воздухом, Мойру с пневмой, а Деметру и другие женские божества с землей, неизвестный автор стремится раскрыть тайну, намеренно скрытую в поэме и понятную лишь посвященным?

Ключевые слова: мистицизм, античные гимны, комментарии, аллегория, орфика

Для цитирования: *Afonasin E. V.* Teaching and preaching in the Derveni papyrus: Observations on *mantike techne* in Archaic and Classical Greece // Шаги / Steps. Т. 10. № 2. 2024. С. 140–153.

Поступило в редакцию 28 ноября 2023 г.; принято 18 марта 2024 г.

https://doi.org/10.22394/2412-9410-2024-10-2-140-153

Shagi / Steps. Vol. 10. No. 2. 2024
Articles

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Teaching and preaching in the Derveni papyrus: Observations on *mantike techne* in Archaic and Classical Greece

Abstract. According to a number of ancient authors, including the recently discovered treatise by Galen, "On my own opinions," Protagoras suggested doubting everything that concerns the gods and their essence. Remarkably, Philostratus (*Lives of the Sophists* 1.10.2) sees the source of this doubt in Protagoras' "Persian education" because, in his opinion, the Persian magi, while continuing to call on the gods in their secret rituals, would not admit it publicly, fearing that otherwise people, having realized that their supernatural abilities were linked to divine influences, would stop turning to them. In other words, in this way of reasoning, the magi were anxious not to lose their jobs. Should we accept the historicity of this strange message of Philostratus, or should we consider it a typical reflection of the Hellenistic and Roman historiographic stance to see an "eastern trace" in every doctrine or art? A famous statement from the Derveni papyrus (col. XX), which is fundamental to understanding its authorship, may help us answer this question. We will see the reasons why it is impossible to unequivocally answer the question of whether the author of the papyrus was a practicing *telestes*. However, it becomes clear that he contrasts himself not with the practitioners of the mysteries (including professional *mantis*), but with those who participate in them without understanding the meaning of what is going on and "without even asking questions." On the contrary, he intends to provide answers to possible questions and to reveal the true meaning of the authoritative text by exegetical means. We shall also try to answer the question regarding the purpose for which the author of the papyrus sought to utilize various cosmological associations. Whether we are faced with an ancient philologically oriented "commentator," or whether, by associating Zeus with air, Moira with *pneuma*, and Demeter and other female deities with the earth, he seeks to uncover the secret intentionally concealed in the poem and understandable only to the initiated?

Keywords: mysticism, ancient hymns, commentaries, allegory, Orphica

To cite this article: Afonasin, E. V. (2024). Teaching and preaching in the Derveni papyrus: Observations on *mantike techne* in Archaic and Classical Greece. *Shagi / Steps, 10*(2), 140–153.

Received November 28, 2023; accepted March 18, 2024

https://doi.org/10.22394/2412-9410-2024-10-2-140-153

1

Since ancient times Orpheus was steadily associated in the minds of the Greeks with the idea of a distant journey, a dangerous transition, as well as personal transformation under the influence of "divine" poetry, music and dance. Moreover, the mysterious son of Calliope was regarded as one of the most ancient initiates, as well as the founder of a number of mystery cults. Thus, he was thought to have undergone initiation into the Samothracian mysteries along with the Argonauts and, according to some marginal accounts, to have founded or transformed the Eleusinian.

Leaving aside Argo's journey, let us focus on the second and third aspects of his personality, namely his passage to the underworld and his outstanding poetic abilities.

We do not know whether any of the mysteries were associated directly with Orpheus, or whether they were from the beginning incorporated into the Bacchic ones and subsequently evolved with them. Many scholars tend to think this way, speaking therefore not of Orphic mysteries, but of Orphic literature and an "Orphic-Bacchic" type of religiosity realized in various ritual forms.

Circa 500 BCE we hear of "Bacchic" mysteries at Ephesus. We do not know what they were, but it is clear that our source, Heraclitus, is at least skeptical of their participants. He notes not only the reprehensible nature of their rituals, but, more importantly, the lack of understanding by the participants of the eschatological meaning of the mysteries: Hades and Dionysus are one and the same. The testimony of Iamblichus, who, also in connection with Heraclitus, notes that these rituals were regarded by their participants as a form of healing (ἄκεα), is also remarkable.[1]

The ecstatic mysteries in Olbia, attested by Herodotus (*History* 4.76) and in the famous bone tablets, where we find not only the "Heraclitean" oppositions (peace–war, truth–false) and the cyclic nature of life and death (life–death–life), but also the inscription "Dionysus — Orphics" (or: "Orphic"), are also dated to the middle of the 5th century BCE [Rusiaeva 1978].

To this time are also related the famous *bebakcheumenon* inscription on the tomb in Cumae[2] and, most probably, the oldest of the Italian "Orphic poems"

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[1] (B 14 DK) Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.22.2: "To whom does Heraclitus of Ephesus address his prophesies? To night-wanderers, Magi, Bacchants, Maenads, and initiates. It is to these that he threatens what comes after death, to these that he prophesies the fire. For they are initiated impiously into the mysteries that are recognized among men" (νυκτιπόλοις, μάγοις, βάκχοις, λήναις, μύσταις· τούτοις ἀπειλεῖ τὰ μετὰ θάνατον, τούτοις μαντεύεται τὸ πῦρ· τὰ γὰρ νομιζόμενα κατ' ἀνθρώπους μυστήρια ἀνιερωστὶ μυεῖνται).

(B 15 DK) Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.34.5: "If it were not for Dionysus that they performed the procession and sang the hymn to the shameful parts, most shamefully would they be acting; but Hades is the same as Dionysus, for whom they go mad and celebrate maenadic rites" (εἰ μὴ γὰρ Διονύσωι πομπὴν ἐποιοῦντο καὶ ὕμνεον ἄισμα αἰδοίοισιν, ἀναιδέστατα εἴργαστ' ἄν· ὠυτὸς δὲ Ἀίδης καὶ Διόνυσος, ὅτεῳ μαίνονται καὶ ληναΐζουσιν).

(B 68 DK) Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 1.11: "Heraclitus calls them [i. e. obscene rituals and hymns] cures (ἄκεα)" (trans. A. Laks and G. Most [LM]).

[2] On the Cumae text, cf. [Jeffery 1961: 240, no. 21; Turcan 1986: 227–246].

describing Orpheus' descent to Hades. The latter allowed their authors to paint a detailed picture of the afterlife, as well as meet the need for personal religion, the main goal of which was to achieve a posthumous reward for a righteous life. The preaching of this kind of religion became the task of the wandering *telestes*, through the efforts of which the ecstatic Bacchic mysteries must have been "enriched" with a new "Orphic" content.

It was not until the middle of the 5th century that these ideas reached Athens, as evidenced, in the words of Theseus, by Euripides:

> Continue then your confident boasting,
> take up a diet of greens and play the showman with your food,
> make Orpheus your lord and engage in mystic rites,
> holding the vaporings of many books in honor.
> (Euripides' *Hippolytus*, 952–954, trans. David Kovacs [1994])

Therefore, the most characteristic features of the way of life, which the adherents of this cult must have led, included vegetarianism, reading the works of "Orpheus," modesty and piety, perhaps contrived, with which Plato seems to agree:

> ...and begging priests and seers go to rich men's doors and make them believe that they by means of sacrifices and incantations have accumulated a treasure of power from the gods that can expiate and cure with pleasurable festivals any misdeed of a man or his ancestors, and that if a man wishes to harm an enemy, at little cost he will be enabled to injure just and unjust alike, since they are masters of spells and incantations that constrain the gods to serve their end... And they produce a hubbub of books of Musaeus and Orpheus, the offspring of the Moon and the Muses, as they affirm, and these books they use in their rites (*Rep*. 364b–e, trans. P. Shorey [1969]).

Note that these itinerant diviners seem to rely on the traditional poetry of Homer and Hesiod to support their words. A generation later Theophrastus (*Characters* 16), speaks of an Orphic religious specialist, *telestes*, who opened his "business" in Athens and engaged in advising gullible citizens for money on matters of ritual purity and righteous living. Likewise, in *Meno* 81a Plato mentions an Orphic priestess who must have handled the affairs of numerous female members of the cult.

No doubt, all this made Orphic religion attractive to educated people striving for personal perfection and concerned about the fate of their souls after the death of the physical body. Moreover, as Jan Bremmer astutely observes, external sociopolitical circumstances may have accompanied this popularity. Indeed,

> In the fifth century, the traditional position of aristocracy in society had increasingly come under pressure, on the one hand through the rise of tyrants, especially in southern Italy, and on the other through the rise of democracy elsewhere. It now became more and more difficult to gain fame — the Homeric *kleos aphthiton* — in this life, and aristocrats will have looked to the next life for compensation. We

> may compare Max Weber's thesis that the rise of religions of salvation, such as Christianity, was the consequence of a depoliticisation of the *Bildungsschichten* [Bremmer 2014: 80].

So we see that Orphic religion came to Attica from the "backwaters" of the ancient world in the early 5th century BCE, primarily from Thrace, Asia Minor and southern Italy, and settled permanently in classical literature from Plato to Marsilio Ficino.

2

The most important source that reveals not only the content of the Orphic hymns, but also the rituals associated with them, is the Derveni Papyrus.

The papyrus was found in 1962 among the remains of a funeral pyre in an ancient burial site near a narrow mountain gorge, Derveni, through which passes the road leading from Thessalonica to eastern Macedonia and Thrace, and is now preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki. On the basis of coins, vessels, and pottery, the burials are dated to the late 4th or early 3rd century BCE [Themelis, Touratsoglou 1997: 221].

All that has come down to us is the charred upper third of the papyrus scroll, and the question of how it ended up in this place continues to intrigue researchers. The first columns of the papyrus are particularly poorly preserved and have been restored by the publishers after painstaking work over many years to collect over two hundred charred fragments and compile them into what can be at least approximately perceived as a complete text.[3]

The anonymous author of the Derveni Papyrus,[4] not unlike Plato, warns us against "begging priests", but nonetheless with important qualifications (col. XX):

> But those (who believe that they learned) from someone who makes a profession (τέχνη) of the rites deserve to be wondered at and pitied: wondered at because, although they believe before they perform the rites that they will learn, they go away after performing them before having learned, without even asking further questions, as if they knew something of what they saw or heard or were taught; and pitied because it is not enough for them that they paid the fee in advance — they also go away devoid even of their belief (γνώμ ης).[5]

[3] For the complete text, cf. now [KPT]. A new commented edition is being prepared by A. Bernabé and V. Piano (forthcoming).

[4] Some names have been proposed, but according to Kouremenos [KPT: 59], "attempting to identify the Derveni author in the light of the available evidence seems to be an exercise of rather low epistemic value." Cf. also [Betegh 2004: 64–73], where the question of the papyrus' authorship is briefly considered, as well as the problem of identifying the cultural and religious context in which it can be placed.

[5] Hereafter I quote the Derveni Papyrus in the translation adapted from [KPT: 129–139].

We do not know whether the author of the papyrus was a practicing τελεστής, but it is clear that he contrasts himself not with professional priests, that is, those criticized by Plato and Theophrastus, but with those who participate in purification rituals and mysteries without understanding the meaning of what happens and "without even asking questions." On the contrary, he intends to provide solutions to possible doubts and to reveal the true meaning of the authoritative text by exegetical means.

Many scholars have attempted to answer the question of how the author of the papyrus sought to use cosmological associations as possible instructions to the initiates by combining the eschatological myth associated with the mysteries with an analysis of the relationship between the primordial elements. Mark Edwards [1991: 210] is inclined to think that he was a sort of philologist, commenting the literary work. In contrast to this, Dirk Obbink[6] believes that, by associating Zeus and the Ocean with air, Moira with *pneuma*, and Demeter and other female deities with the earth, he seeks to reveal a mystery deliberately hidden in the poem and understood only by the initiated. In this capacity he appears to be a kind of sophist, like Prodicus or Hippias, revealing a cultural code without any desire to fit it into a specific religious scheme [Obbink 2010: 19].[7] It has also been suggested that this column is only an obscure digression and even a quote (the latter is incorrect [Laks, Most 1997: 44–45]).

Some interpreters prefer to see the author as a philosopher who seeks to provide a rational explanation of religious texts, freely using the tools of modern physics and cosmology.[8]

The majority of scholars, however (G. Betegh, A. Bernabé and, more recently, among others, A. San Cristóbal),[9] seems to believe that the author of the papyrus most likely belonged to those priests who wanted to explain the meaning of the rituals they performed and the doctrine of the soul they preached. In a word, they have nothing to do with the "begging priests" of the *Republic* 364b–e, being similar to those "priests, priestesses and wise men" whom Plato mentions in the famous passages of *Meno* 81a and *Gorgias* 493a–b.

It appears that the main task of the author of the papyrus was to confirm his qualifications in interpreting Orphic hymns, that is, to offer his future clients something that other wandering *telestai*, according to him, are not capable of: to supplement the ritual actions (τὰ δρώμενα) and the ritual visions (τὰ ὁρώμενα,

[6] Dirk Obbink, "Cosmology as Initiation" (in [Laks, Most 1997: 39–54]). He has remarked upon the Derveni author's focus upon cult and ritual practice as a significant difference from Plato. Again, the mainstream contemporaries of the Derveni author would have been unlikely to distinguish between sophists, physicists, seers, and initiators, however vociferously certain practitioners among these marginal groups might have tried to distinguish themselves from one another.

[7] Cf. also Janko [2001: 6], who maintains that "the Derveni papyrus is the work, not of a seer, but of a sophist".

[8] "On the contrary, he is wholeheartedly committed to what can be called a 'proto-scientific' / naturalistic worldview and has no use for mystery cults with their obscurantist conception of the world as subject to capricious intervention, not only of supernatural powers but also of mere humans, and the related eschatological concerns" [KPT: 52].

[9] See [Betegh 2004; Bernabé 2007]. Cf. also [Edmonds 2008; San Cristóbal 2019].

to offer something which constitutes the core of purification and initiation practices, a kind of a story (τὰ λεγόμενα) — something designed to add some value to what has just been staged or listened to. The commentator by no means belittles the ritual itself or the purifications that precede it. On the contrary, he seeks to warn those undergoing initiation that some of his "colleagues" do not know how to do it properly. But this kind of polemic is also characteristic of doctors, rhetoricians, and philosophers of different schools, and also typical for internal school polemics. In this connection, it is essential to understand, as R. Edmonds [2008] has astutely observed, that for his contemporaries the distinction between physiologist, sophist, sage or, broadly speaking, a specialist in some form of *mantike techne* was not as meaningful as it seems to modern scholars. Like Pythagoras, Empedocles and, say, Plato, our author was quite capable of combining religious ideas with natural philosophy.[10]

But what was his priority? In other words, was he a philosophizing Orphic or a natural philosopher with profound interest in the Orphic religion? The question does not seem idle, if only because our author, at least in the extant part of his commentary, does not touch on such essential elements of Orphic doctrine as the guilt of the Titans and metempsychosis. Nor does he mention food prohibitions, although it is characteristic that all the mentioned offerings to the gods are of vegetable origin and the sacrifice of birds is carried out, apparently, by letting them go free (*P Derv*. col. VI). Of course, it is not excluded that we have only a part of the work in which only the central episode of the Orphic hymn, connected directly with Zeus, is analyzed, and about everything else he could tell in other, not preserved, parts of his commentary. Still, it now seems clear that this highly polemical text was written by a scholar rather than a preacher. Convincing his readers, and, in the manner of a preacher, supporting his words with quotations from "sacred sayings," he nevertheless seeks to add rational arguments to them, or to offer new interpretations of these sayings by various exegetical means, of which allegory and etymology prove to be the most important. It is in this sense that "the Derveni author is an Orphic but not a magician, a specialist in *teletai* for the *mystai* but not one of the *magoi*" [Edmonds 2008: 35].

Nevertheless, could col. XX (coupled with col. V) show that the author may have been a *practicing diviner* (μάντις), perhaps ὀνειροκρίτης, interpreter of dreams, τερασκόπος, interpreter of signs, or a bird-guesser (if the reading ὀρνίθειον in col. II and VI is correct), who wished to explain some of the professional secrets to the initiated or to those aspiring to initiation (which may explain the apologetic style of these sections and the demarche against hired magicians in col. XX), rather than a *theoreticaly oriented theologian* systematically interpreting a religious text? We may only guess.

3

Let us now briefly illustrate this with an example, which shows *what exactly*, according to the unknown author, people, uninitiated in the mysteries, are un-

[10] Cf. Hippocrates, *Morb. Sacr.* 1.10, Plato, *Leg*. 720a–e and 857c–d.

able to grasp and *how* it must be, to the best of his knowledge, properly understood.

We do not possess the full text of the commented poem, so we must rely on the good faith of the commentator, compounded by the fact that only the upper part of the papyrus scroll has come down to us. Of course, we are helped by scattered testimonies and direct quotations from Orphic hymns in later literature up to late antiquity, which clarify (or, on the contrary, obscure) this or that element of the commented teaching.

The author of the poem seems to be developing an original version of the genealogy of the gods centered around the figure of Zeus. This concentrated and enigmatic text, as is easy to see, was rather small. This is clearly not a poem like Hesiod's *Theogony*, but a short work, not larger than a hymn. Perhaps it was a hymn, like the ancient Homeric or the later Orphic hymns. In any case, this text seems to be dated to around 500 BCE, universally regarded as the oldest example of Orphic theogony available to us. The structure of the poem and its commentary show, quite remarkably, that, first of all, the "genealogy" is not developed sequentially. Apparently, the author of the poem refers listeners to information they know about the gods, interpreting it in the way he wants. Besides, it is quite conspicuous that the polemical element is initially present in the narrative itself. It seems that the Orphic author argues with the traditional version of theogony, so that its individual events are assessed retroactively through the introduction of flashbacks.[11]

Whatever the purpose of the Orphic commentary and whoever its author may have been, it is clear from the first columns that the subsequent interpretation of the theogony is placed in an eschatological context: "Dike punishes pernicious men through each of the Erinyes," and "everyone acquires a daimon as healer" (col. III).[12] It is in this context that the quotation from Heraclitus (frs. 3 + 94 DK) appears, noting the cosmological role of the Erinyes (col. 4), and expressing surprise at the unbelief of those who deny the "terrors of Hades" despite clear predictions and prophetic dreams. The argument concludes with an almost Heraclitean identification of unbelief and unreason: they learn nothing, says the commentator, and even if they see everything with their own eyes, even then they will not believe (col. V). In the meantime, he says, we should offer sacrifices to the Eumenides as the Athenians agreed to do in the famous scene of the trial of Orestes in the third part of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (esp. l.967 ff.), comparing, in a remarkable way, this Greek national ritual with the actions of certain "magicians" and speaking quite approvingly of the latter (col. VI):

[11] The contrast of initial positions becomes evident from the comparison of the line of the Orphic poem (col. VI) "...which were born of Zeus, the great king" and the words of Hesiod in the *Theogony* (106) "which were born of the Earth and the starry Sky." We see that, unlike Hesiod, Zeus is the first deity and creates the world alone, without a female partner.

[12] Compare again: Heraclitus (B 68 DK) ap. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 1.11: "Heraclitus calls them [i. e. obscene rituals and hymns] cures (ἄκεα)" (trans. A. Laks and G. Most [LM]).

> ...prayers and sacrifices appease the souls, while the [incantation] of the magi is able to drive away the daimons who are hindering; hindering daimons are vengeful souls. This is why the magi perform the sacrifice, just as if they are paying a retribution (ποινὴ[ν] ἀποδιδόντες).[13]

Martin West [1997: 82 f.] connected this column with col. XX. As in his earlier work [West 1983], here he asserted that the papyrus belonged to a type of literature which circulated among the followers of the eschatological cult of Dionysus (by its designation "Orphic-Bacchic cult society"), so that the commentary included both modernist tendencies (explaining the Orphic poem by means of modern science) and archaizing ones, going back to the Oriental tradition of commentary — the very "magicians" whose practice is mentioned in this column. Considering the magi to be "real," Babylonian and Assyrian, M. West further provided a number of interesting parallels, in particular, examples of "etymological" interpretation of the names of the gods and certain mythological events in the Babylonian tradition, which we cannot discuss here in detail.[14] We do not know whether this is true or not, but it is clear that such parallels are part of the interpretive strategy of the unknown author of the papyrus. It is important for him, on the one hand, to fit his approach into the context of Greek traditional religion, without, on the other hand, forgetting its foreignness and isolation, which must have appeared attractive to his clients. Is not this how modern occultism works, speculating on various "secret" Jewish, Tibetan and other teachings which similarly have nothing to do with either Judea or Tibet?

By illustrating his story with quotations from Orphic hymns, the commentator shows how, having absorbed the "First-born king," Zeus becomes "the sum-total of everything" — the beginning, the end and the middle, and how he then, having become the center of all power and authority, combining male and female, fire and air, etc., gives birth to the whole world, having for this purpose copulated with his mother. At this point, the extant text ends, and Dionysus, who plays such a crucial role in the later Orphic theogonies, is neither mentioned nor alluded to.

But before Zeus begins to create a new world from the previous entities he "absorbed," he turns to the Night (col. XI), the most ancient being "invisibly" present at the core of the universe. This Night is characterized as "unsetting" (ἄδυτον), because unlike the daylight visible against it, it never sets (δύνει). The

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[13] See also the interpretation of the cult described in the Greek and Iranian context in Tsantsanoglou [1997: 110 f.]). In his view, the description of the rituals of the "magi" refers to the Iranian spirits, *fravashis*, who helped Ahura Mazda to maintain the world in a proper state and fight against the *daevas* who sought to break the established world order; as for the sacrificial bread, the equivalent is the Iranian *darun* or *draona*, a flat ritual tortilla pierced with a nail, which was offered to the *fravashis* and to the spirit Sraosha, who played an important role in the trial of souls (notably, the rooster was associated with him).

[14] On migrating masters and, in particular, Oriental healers and magicians in Greece, see [Burkert 1992: 41 ff.; 2004: 117 ff.]. See also K. Tsantsanoglou in [Laks, Most 1997: 110–115]. [1997]. G. Betegh [2004: 78 ff.], A. Bernabé [2006], G. Most [1997] and others suggest putting these magi in a Greek context. Finally, Jourdan [2003: 37] admits that in this case the word *magi* is used in a pejorative context, as is typical of the Greek.

purpose of Zeus' appeal is to receive a prophecy of what he is "allowed to accomplish," that is, in a way, to legitimize his own seizure of power and to learn what must be done in order to then retain it. It is in this context that the poem only once discusses Zeus' progenitors, Uranus, Gaia, and Kronos.

The mythological story of Zeus' "pregnancy and childbirth" is then explained allegorically, in the spirit of Plato's *Cratylus* and the early Stoics, and also given a cosmological and, in a sense, scientific interpretation. This is probably the commentator's purpose: first, to explain the meaning of Zeus' "androgyny," and then to give new meaning to the story of his intercourse with his mother, sister, and daughter.

All those who interpret the myth too literally fail to understand, according to our author, the main thing: the action performed by Zeus represents not birth, as it occurs in the case of living organisms, but creation, like the making of a product by a skilled master:

> Zeus is the head, Zeus is the middle, from Zeus all is made (τέτ[υκται]) (col. XVII).

Resources are required to perform the action, and they are provided to him by the sun, the universal source of energy, which is identified with the "procreative organ" of Uranus that he "swallows" (col. XIII). Of course, for the archaic myth "having something in the bosom" is equivalent to pregnancy.[15]

The energy with which Zeus is filled is of an "intelligent" nature, with Uranus representing the "determining Mind", as it is inherent in "determining" (ὁρίζειν) the creation, while Cronus is the "striking Mind" (from κρούειν), as it is responsible for the further evolution of creation, the movement of particles under such processes as rarefaction — condensation, and heating — cooling (col. XIV). Both of these are in Zeus, which supports his creative ability and allows him to control energy and time. Zeus himself in one of his hypostases turns out to be air, i.e., that space in which particles of matter (ἐόντα) are distributed and which does not allow them to merge into one (the first lines of col. XV). Possibility does not yet mean action, and this latter is ensured by Metis, the wisdom contained in Zeus.[16]

So Zeus, as if returning in time, re-created the world — Uranus, Cronus, gods and goddesses, rivers, springs and everything else, but he himself, as it is written in the poem, "remained in solitude." Why? Because "the Mind, being alone, is always worth (ἄξιον) everything, as if the rest were nothing" (col. XVI).

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[15] The mythological parallels include the story about the Hittite (originally Hurrian) god Kumarbi ("Father of the Gods") who became pregnant having swallowed the penis of the sky god Alalu (Anu). Teshub ("God of thunder") appeared out of his head. Cf. also the Egyptian myth in which Atum ejaculates Shu in the form of bright air (see [Burkert 1999: 82; 2003: 100; Brisson 2003]).

[16] Daughter of Oceanus and Tethys and the first wife of Zeus in traditional mythology (*Theogony* 886), she is known to have been absorbed by Zeus, who as a result became both father and mother of Athena. In the subsequent Orphic tradition, the male version of Metis is identified with the First-born (Hesiod's Eros or Orphic Phanes). The fact that Zeus is androgynous is stated in a famous place in the Orphic hymn: "Zeus is born male, Zeus is an immortal virgin (ἄφθιτος νύμφη)."

Therefore this world is the skillful creation of the wise architect — the result of his Metis.

Zeus' timeless nature is affirmed in the next column (col. XVII). "...Out of Zeus all things are made (τέτ[υκται])," the poem states. Therefore, says the commentator, "it (Zeus-air) existed before it was named. Then it was named. For air existed before the now existing things (ἐόντα) were set together, and will always exist. For it did not come to be but existed" (col. XII). For the same reason, what is said in the poem, "Zeus was first born" (col. XVIII), should not be understood in the sense that there was a time when Zeus did not exist. He has always been, and the poet's line informs only that from a certain time he bears that name.

Here the commentator also mentions Moira, the "breath" of Zeus, which seems quite appropriate, since Zeus not only creates the world, but also constantly sustains it, both by himself and with the help of other gods, above all Aphrodite, but also Persuasion (Peito, Πειθώ) and Harmony (col. XXI). Again, one may note that the use of the word "conceived" (ἐμήσατο, col. XXIII) points rather to the creative activity of Zeus, who creates the world according to a certain plan, as indicated in particular by the creation (in the next column) of the moon, traditionally considered as a measure of time.

The conclusion of the poem, and with it the commentary, is very remarkable. Having completed the creation, Zeus, for some reason, contemplated joining with his mother (col. XXVI). This difficult place seems to comment on a line from an Orphic hymn well known from other sources (fr. 18, 2 Bern.): "Wished to copulate with his mother in love (ἤθελε μητρὸς ἑᾶς μιχθήμεναι ἐν φιλότητι)." The author of the papyrus offers another reading for it, noting that since the adj. poss. used in the line, ἑός, ἑή, ἑόν (his, my, his), is phonetically close to adj. qual. ἐύς (glorious, good), then by changing the thick aspiration to a light one and reading μητρὸς ἐᾶς, we can give this line a completely different meaning. It will then appear that Zeus copulated "with the good mother," and not "with his own mother" (μητρὸς ἑοῖο), as the uninitiated think, — clearly, because of their ignorance (ὑπ' ἀμαθίας, col. XXII). In support of his words, the commentator finds a similar usage in Homer (*Odyssey* 8.335 and *Iliad* 24.527–28), eliminating in an ingenious way the morally reprehensible meaning of this poetic line.[17]

The mother of Zeus, of course, was Rhea, who in mythological tradition is often identified with Demeter. Actually, in some hymns, as the commentator writes in col. XXII, all the most ancient female deities are identical with her. Now, the deeper meaning of the female part of the god, this mother of all things, according to the commentator, is his Mind. Then, having absorbed the penis of Uranus (= the sun) and thus having absorbed the male fiery nature, Zeus now wishes not to "copulate with his mother," as most people think, but to "breathe"[18] into himself the female nature, the air (Mind), and so become the fullness of everything. After all, in becoming one with his mother Zeus interrupts, as it were,

[17] A mistake is indeed possible. Cf. LSJ, s. v. ἐύς: "Some Gramm. wrongly took εηος to be a form of ἑός ('his') and conversely gave to ἑός ('his') the signf. 'good': hence the erroneous forms ἑῆος, ἑάων (but ἐῦς rightly)".

[18] Recall: the Breath-Moira is equivalent to the mind or the providence of Zeus.

the cycle of births, becoming his own offspring, which makes his creation eternal and unchanging, beautiful in its cyclicality and completeness.[19]

4

So, Zeus recreated the world anew. The meaning of this self-contained process, as A. Bernabé [2007: 127] suggests, may indicate the poet's desire to reflect the cyclicity of time, manifested in the alternation of the one and the many. Besides, this model may be related to the famous Orphic idea of the cyclic life of the soul.

It is also possible that we are facing here the first instance of a cosmological scheme later found in Heraclides of Pontus, and I think that it is no accident that the doxographer (or Plato's disciple himself) attributes it to the Orphics:

> Heraclides and the Pythagoreans (say that) each of the heavenly bodies exists as a cosmos which includes an earth, air and ether in the unlimited ether. These doctrines are reported in the Orphic (writings), for they (too) make each of the heavenly bodies into a cosmos. (Ἡρακλείδης καὶ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι ἕκαστον τῶν ἀστέρων κόσμον ὑπάρχειν, γῆν περιέχοντα ἀέρα τε καὶ αἰθέρα ἐν τῷ ἀπείρῳ αἰθέρι· ταῦτα δὲ τὰ δόγματα ἐν τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς φέρεται· κοσμοποιοῦσι γὰρ ἕκαστον τῶν ἀστέρων) (Aetius 2.13.15, trans. Mansfeld and Runia [2020]).

The eternally existent universe evolves thanks to the creative energy of the sky (Uranus), which is concentrated in the sun. Zeus recreates this universe on earth, building a small cosmos in which we inhabit, and all that we see. Developing this idea in the spirit of Giordano Bruno, we can assume that this or that deity, in the Orphic (and Pythagorean) view, recreates from the original material a unique cosmos on each of the celestial bodies, and the universe is populated by a variety of beings inhabiting all kinds of worlds.

Abbreviations

Bern. — Bernabé, A. (Ed.) (1996–2007). *Poetarum Epicorum Graecorum Testimonia et Fragmenta* (Pt. 2, Fasc. 1–3). Teubner.

[19] Numerous allegorical interpretations inevitably remind the reader of Stoicism. Take, for instance, the famous explanation by Chrysippus of the meaning of a picture from the island of Samos were Hera is depicted performing an act of fellatio to Zeus: the substance here, as the philosopher believes, "takes the seminal *logoi* of God and contains them in itself for the purposes of world order" (Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.48; SVF 2.2.1075); or Zeno of Cytium's position that "in every new world men are born from the sun by means of divine fire" and that "the seed of living beings is fire" (SVF 1.124 and 126). Could the author of the papyrus have been influenced by Stoicism? This assumption, expressed some time ago by several authors [Jourdan 2003; Casadesús 2005; Brisson 2009], is sharply criticized by G. Betegh [2007], who believes that possible "Stoic" influences thus identified can also be explained in the context of the earlier philosophy and that revision of the traditional dating of the papyrus in light of these new interpretations is not necessary.

DK — Diels, H., & Kranz, W. (Eds.). (1952). *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker.* Weidmann.

Kern — Kern, O. (Ed.) (1922). *Orphicorum fragmenta*. Berolini Apud Weidmannos (2nd ed. 1963).

KPT — Kouremenos, T., Parássoglou, G. M., & Tsantsanoglou, K. (Eds.) (2006). *The Derveni Papyrus.* Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki.

LM — Laks, A., & Most, G. (2016). *Early Greek Philosophy* (10 Vols.). Harvard Univ. Press.

LSJ — Liddell, H. G., Scott, R. (Compl.), Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (Rev. and Augm.). *A Greek-English lexicon* (with a rev. suppl.). Clarendon Press.

SVF — Arnim, H., von (Ed.) (1964) *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* (Vols. 1–4). Teubner.

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