

# Orpheus or the Soteriological Reform of the Dionysian Mysteries<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** In this paper, I present Orphism as a written reform of the myth of Dionysus and its ritual manifestations, perhaps initiated and influenced by Onomacritos, who acted as interpreter and editor, in the context of, and under the influence of, Attic synoecism; this last refers not only to a process of administrative unification mythically inspired by the figure and deeds of Theseus, but also to the political will to maintain the loyalty of the rural *dēmoi* to the urban *oikos*, with all the challenges and vicissitudes of life and conflict at the margins of society, during the tyranny, the democratic regime and the dissolution of the autonomy of the polis and the conflicts in the relations linking the centre and the periphery during the Hellenistic period. In support of the working hypothesis, a hermeneutic methodology is applied, reading ancient sources and making *ad hoc* use of Greek etymology in those cases where the reading suggests possible alternative interpretations. The final outcome of this hermeneutic exercise shows possible links between the Orphic ritual and the political and editorial activities of Pisistratus and Onomacritos. The conclusion reached is that, the principal characteristic of the Orphic reform of the Dionysian myth and ritual seems to be its soteriological content.

**Keywords** Synoecism, Soteriology, Orphism, Mysteries

Who knows if life be death and death life!  
-Euripides<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The figure of Orpheus emerges from its own narrative, marked not only by the ambivalence and dialectics of Dionysus and other deities of mystery (Demeter, Persephone), but also as guardian of a reputation in constant conflict with religion, literature and history.

In classical sources, he earns praise as a god and cultural hero, but at the same time, he is shown against a sordid shadow, a sad reflection of the gifts and superior qualities attributed to him by his apologists. For some, he is the greatest poet, creator of music and founder of all the mysteries<sup>3</sup>, while for others, he is a vulgar zitherist<sup>4</sup>,

lacking those conditions of value which Homer, with poetic mastery, had attributed to *aretē*, the essential virtues of Mycenaean heroes.

This stamp of ambiguity and lack of coherence in the image and prestige of Orpheus has come down to us through philology, philosophy and the comparative history of religion, with the same efficiency as the mask of the budding tragic actor: the same cloak of otherness, but showing a constantly varying state of mind, according to the needs of the drama.

Over the last two centuries, philological studies have been true to this strange tradition, on some occasions dithyrambic and on others parodic or indifferent, depending nearly always on the interpretative possibilities which are opened up by each discovery of new epigraphic, historical or literary sources. Thus, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until the 1930s, the apotheotic tendency was uppermost, exaggerating and distorting the figure of Orpheus at the cost of obvious anachronisms; this trend had begun during the Renaissance, driven by his appearance in modern drama and his rapid emergence in opera as from the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. However, from 1930 on, philological and historical research became cautious about exaggerated interpretations of Orpheus and his influence. Nonetheless, from the 1960s, this attitude, which had become hypercritical, began to change again due to new archaeological finds, especially the Derveni Papyrus. Judging by current enthusiasm, it

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<sup>2</sup> Polydus, Fr. 638. Cited by Plato *Gorgias* 492e Burnet

<sup>3</sup> See Aristophanes *The Frogs* 1033-4 F.W. Hall (T 90 K): "... revealed the mysteries and taught us to reject bloody sacrifices"; see also Diodorus of Sicily 5, 64, 4 Dindorf-Vogel. Some authors even consider him the founder of Greek theology. See Thomas Taylor, *The mystical hymns of Orpheus* (London, 1824) vii.

<sup>4</sup> Plato *Symposium* 179D Burnet. See John Makowski, "Bisexual Orpheus: Pederasty and parody in Ovid," *The Classical Journal* 1 (1.996): 25-38.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Owen Lee, "Orpheus and Eurydice: Some modern versions," *The Classical Journal* 56 (1.961): 307.

would seem prudent to remember the position of Aristotle who habitually put scare quotes around the name of Orpheus<sup>6</sup> and everything regarding his possible influence on the mysteries and on Greek philosophy.

In what follows, I will present a brief excursus, based on classical sources and recent research, on the myth of Orpheus, the basic doctrine attributed to him and the aetiology or possible socio-political components of it.

## 2. Mythos<sup>7</sup>

The narrative of the Orpheus myth unfolds in four basic *mythemes*<sup>8</sup>:

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle *On the Generatio of Animals* 734a 16 Ross, prudently speaks of “the so-called poems of Orpheus.”

<sup>7</sup> For the *mythos*, doctrine and related aspects, I follow the classical sources: Pindar fr. 139, 11-12 T 56 Kern, *Pythians*, IV, 176-177 T 58 Kern; *Olympians*, 2,56-72 J. Sandys; Simonides fr. 384 Tb47 Kern; Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1629-1630 Page; Herodotus 2,53,3 Godley; Euripides *Alcestis* 357-362, 962-972, *The Bacchae*, 562 G. Murray, *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1211s, *Cretans* fr. 3 Cantarella, *Hippolytus* 952-954, *Cyclops* 646-648 G. Murray, *Hypsipyle* fr. 1,3,8-14 T 78 Kern, fr. 64, 2,93-102, fr. 57, 20-25; Diodorus of Sicily I,96; III, 65; IV, 25; V, 77 Dinford-Vogel; Aristophanes: *The Birds* 693-702; *The Frogs* 1032-1033 Hall; Plato: *The Apology of Socrates* 41 a-b; *Euthyphro* 5 e-6 b; Ion 536b; *Protagoras* 315 a-b, 316d; *Phaedo* 70c; *Cratylus*, 402b-c; *Gorgias* 49abc, 493a, 524a; *Phaedrus* 248c-d, 249 a; *Philebus* 66c; *Timaeus* 40d-41a, 46d-41a; *Laws* 669d, , 715e-716a, ,809 d, 829 d-c; *Meno* 81abc Burnet; Isocrates 11,8; Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 5,8,49,3 F 33 Kern; Callimachus fr. 643 Pfeiffer; Apollonius de Rhodes *Argonautica* 1,494-511 Seaton,; Strabo 7, fr. 18 Jones.

<sup>8</sup> Hermann's version apparently contains the primary sources known up till that date. See G. Hermann and J. Hibbert, trans., *The Book of Orphic Hymns, Together with the Principal Fragments of Other Hymns Also Attributed to Orpheus* (1827). For revisions (based on the complete Greek texts), see: Giorgio Colli, *La sabiduría griega* (Madrid: Trotta, 1.998); R. Parker, “Early orphism,” in *The Greek World*, ed., Anton Powell (London: Routledge, 1.995), 483-510; Alberto Bernabé, *Poetae Epici Graeci: Testimonia et Fragmenta Pars II Fascs. I-II* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007); Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Rituales órficos* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2006); Bernabé, “Orfeo...” in Bernabé y F. Casadesús, *Orfeo y la tradición órfica: un reencuentro* (Madrid: Akal, 2008), 61 ff. For a thematic review of sources: Marco Antonio Santamaría Álvarez, “Orfeo y el orfismo. Actualización bibliográfica (1.992-2003),” *Revista de Ciencia de las religiones* 8 (2003): 225-264. I use the term ‘mytheme’ in the sense given to it by Lévi-Strauss: “[the mythemes] “Nous savons qu’elles ne sont assimilables ni aux phonèmes, ni aux morphèmes, ni aux sémantèmes, mais se situent à un niveau plus élevé (...) Il faudra donc les chercher au niveau de la phrase. (...) ne sont pas les relations isolées, mais des paquets de relations...” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie*

### a. Cultural hero

Born as son of Apollo (or, according to some versions, of Oiairos the river god) and the Muse Calliope, Orpheus inherits a magic ability for music, singing<sup>9</sup> and communication with the mysterious forces of nature<sup>10</sup>. This is why his art makes all creatures experience great delight and quiets the forces of nature<sup>11</sup>. The iconography shows him strumming a lyre, nearly always in a rural setting, surrounded by animals – including big cats – who listen to him attentively, as portrayed by the sculptor Luca Della Robbia on the bell tower in Florence, or by the composition of a 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD mosaic from Tarsus in Turkey, now found in the Archaeological Museum in Palermo, Sicily.

### b. Argonaut

In the classical catalogues, Orpheus appears third in the list of the Argos's crew, after Jason and Tiphys. As we know from the two stories by Apollonius of Rhodes and Apollodorus<sup>12</sup>, the Argos sails for Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece. Orpheus's participation in this maritime expedition is essential.

His magic powers in music and communication with the sacred determine his role as priest-magician on the expedition.

On the voyage, Orpheus has three roles: 1) to set the beat for the oarsmen with his music<sup>13</sup>; 2) in his priestly role, to hold a ritual for the crew of the ship<sup>14</sup>; 3) as musician-magician, during stormy weather, to harmonize

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*Structurale*, trans, Claire Jacobson (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 211.

<sup>9</sup> See Pindar *Pythians*, 4, 176-177 T 58 Kern; Euripides *Alcestis*, 357-362 Murray. Other sources: Ibycus fr. 17 Diehl, fr.265 Page, Simonides fr. 384 Page; however, his genealogy makes him a cult figure not as a god but as a cultural hero. See William K. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1.993), 41. It has even been claimed that Orpheus not only inspired the “author of the Iliad” but revealed its contents to him. See L. de Sept-Chênes, *The religion of the ancient Greeks* (London, 1788), 71.

<sup>10</sup> See Pseudo-Euripides *Rhesos*, 943-947 Murray; Apollodorus i.3.2 Frazer. He is also credited with the invention of writing. See Alkidamas *Ulysses* 24 T 123 K; Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 1, 21, 134, 4 T 87 Kern.

<sup>11</sup> The Orpheus myth could be considered as a great *aition* of music, in the etymological sense, which as μουσική (*mousikē*) included dance. In this sense, his sphere of influence would include three *topois*: the world of the gods, nature and the human world. See Francisco Molina, “Orfeo musico,” *Cuadernos de filología clásica: Estudios griegos e indoeuropeos* 7 (1997): 288.

<sup>12</sup> Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* Seaton; Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans., James George Frazer (London: William Heinemann, 1921).

<sup>13</sup> Euripides, *Hypsipyle* fr. 1, 3, 8-14 T 78 Kern.

<sup>14</sup> The voyage of the argonauts has been interpreted as *aition* of a rite of passage; the young Jason would be undergoing initiation. See Mar Llenares García, “Mitología e iniciaciones: el problema de los Argonautas,” *Gerion* 5 (1.987): 15-42.

the forces of nature and calm the fears of the heroes on the ship, above all to protect them, with the sounds of his marvellous lyre, from the fatal seduction of the sirens who are consummate singers.

#### c. Katabasis

But the most famous of Orpheus's scenes, for many reasons, is his descent into Hades in search of his wife Eurydice, which began to acquire its iconographic status with the vivid and moving description by Vergil in the fourth book of the *Georgics*, and later by Ovid in his *Metamorphosis*<sup>15</sup>.

Eurydice was a nymph or daughter of Apollo. In one scene, which is reminiscent of other similar ones in Greek mythology, she is walking on the banks of a river in Thrace when she is assaulted by Aristaeus (doctor, seer, beekeeper and also son of Apollo and the nymph Cyrene) who attempts to rape her. Fleeing, Eurydice is bitten by a snake and dies: "While the newly wedded bride was walking through the grass, with a crowd of naiads as her companions, she was killed, by a bite on her ankle, from a snake, sheltering there"<sup>16</sup>.

Orpheus, unable to accept the death of his wife, conceives a bold plan to enter and descend into Hades to bring her back, trusting to his magical-priestly powers. Thus, he bewitches Charon, Cerberus<sup>17</sup> and all the creatures of the underworld, including Hades himself and his wife Persephone<sup>18</sup> who grant his wish to recover Eurydice, on condition that he not look back at her during the ascent, but only on coming out into the light, beyond the shadows of Hades. Orpheus does as they bid, but, when he looks back thinking that he is already beyond the bounds of the labyrinthine underworld, his loved one disappears forever into the kingdom of death.

#### d. The death of Orpheus

This is one of the most confused *mythemes* because of the many differing versions of it. The oldest is from Aeschylus

<sup>15</sup> Arthur S. Way, trans., *The Georgics of Vergil* (London: MacMillan, 1.912). See also, Wade Stephens, "Descent to the Underworld in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *The Classical Journal* Vol 53, No. 4 (1958), pp. 177-183 and Russ VerSteege and Nina Barclay, "Rhetoric and Law in Ovid's Orpheus," *Law and Literature* Vol. 15, no. 3 (2003), pp. 472-482.

<sup>16</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, X, 8.

<sup>17</sup> "(...) Even the very mansions of death, the most deeply hidden part of Tartarus, were astonished, as were the Eumenides who tie their hair with bluish serpents. Cerberus kept his three mouths open and the wheel of Ixion stopped in the wind." Vergil, *Georgics* IV, 481-484.

<sup>18</sup> But another version says he "... had the incredible audacity to descend to Hades and seduce Persephone with his music, till he persuaded her to agree to his wishes and permit him to rescue his dead wife from Hades, as had happened with Dionysus." Diodorus of Sicily 4, 25, 2-4 Dinford-Vogel. It should be remembered that Dionysus also descended to Hades and rescued his mother Semele; other sources: Isocrates 11, 38-39 F 17 Kern; *Scholia on Pindar*, 313a.

in his *Bassarids*<sup>19</sup>. In his suffering, Orpheus shuts himself away to practise mysteries based on his knowledge (gnosis) of Hades, mysteries to which only men are permitted access. In another version, he appears as a priest of Apollo. The Thracian women – Maenads for some authors – offended by his devotion to the memory of Eurydice and his obstinate rejection of feminine society<sup>20</sup>, by his presiding over a cult open only to men<sup>21</sup>, or even, for devoting himself to pederasty<sup>22</sup>, tore him apart and threw his remains into the sea (or the river Hebrus in some versions<sup>23</sup>). His head, carried away by the current, sang and prophesied,<sup>24</sup> until it arrived at the island of Lesbos (or Lemnos, in another version) where it was retrieved and made into a cult object while Orpheus himself became the patron of lyric poetry. Another version holds that, when Dionysus appeared in Thrace, Orpheus rejected the presence of the god, asserted the supremacy of Apollo and condemned the Dionysian sacrifices and the "licentious" behaviour of the Maenads. As a result, Dionysus filled the Maenads with destructive passion so that they would tear Orpheus apart. Yet another version has him die under a thunderbolt from Zeus for having taught in his mysteries secret knowledge about Hades<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> "... the vixens [Bassarids] tore him to pieces and strewed his limbs on either side. But the Muses appeared, gathered his scattered limbs and buried them in a city called Libethra." Pseudo-Eratosthenes 24 T 113 Kern.

<sup>20</sup> "In fact, it is said that, due to his ill luck with his wife, he came to detest all the female sex..." Conon fr. 45 Jacoby.

<sup>21</sup> This type of exclusion was common, especially in Asia Minor. See Jan N. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 42.

<sup>22</sup> John Makowski, "Bisexual Orpheus: Pederasty and parody in Ovid," *The Classical Journal* 1 (1.996): 25 According to Phanocles, Orpheus invented pederasty. Phanocles fr. 1 Powell.

<sup>23</sup> The Hebrus is the largest river in Thrace. It may have taken its name from the Thracian, Hebrus, a son of Cassandra who drowned in its waters. See John Lemprière, *A classical dictionary: containing a full account of all the proper names mentioned in ancient authors, with tables of coins, weights and measures in use among the Greeks and Romans, to which is now prefixed, a chronological table* (New York, 1827), 238.

<sup>24</sup> This can be seen in the Attic figures of Polignotus (440-430 BCE) which are in the Antikenmuseum Basel.

<sup>25</sup> Diogenes Laertius Proem. According to Strabo 7 fr. 13 "... believing himself worthy of greater things, he amassed a multitude of followers and great power". But Phaedrus (Plato, *Symposium* 179d) gives a less favourable version of the image of Orpheus: "But Orpheus, son of Oiagros, was cast out of Hades dissatisfied, shown a phantom of the women he had gone to seek, but without giving her to him in person, because, as he played the lyre, he seemed to them to be a weak man without the courage to die for love, like Alcestis, but interested only in being able to enter Hades alive. For that very reason, they condemned him and had him killed by women".

### 3. Theological-soteriological Ekdosis<sup>26</sup>

The so-called Orphic ‘religion’, or the Orphic ‘mysteries’, seems to set itself apart from its foundational (Eleusinian-Dionysian) narratives through an act of writing-edition. In *ekdotic* spirit, it sets out a new order of the pantheon but, above all, it passes the epiphanic-entheogenic<sup>27</sup> experiences of the Greek mysteries through the weft of writing. Formally bound by the epic form, it aims to introduce into the intimacy of an esoteric brotherhood the formalism of public religion, pure image and poetic word, yet separated from the *mysterium*; the latter was associated with the *epopteia*, the theophanies which perturbed sensory perception, leading the *mystēs* to renew the fertility *aitiai* (*causes*) and agricultural festivals until he became an *epoptēs*, someone who has “contemplated.” In this way, the psyche, through mystic or entheogenic experience, rooted in the *sōma*, kept the body of the *oikos* bound to a *topos*, a *chthonic* space ancestrally – and naturalistically!- linked to the germinal and sustaining powers of the ‘earth.’

But the *ekdotic* will of Orphism aims to convey the experience of the ‘mysterium’ through poetic syntax and morphology<sup>28</sup>, an (*ekdotic*) editorial act to be read, memorized and from whose understanding to derive the guarantee of knowledge, truth, a ‘revelation’ about death, the miasmas inherited from an archetypal atrocity and

<sup>26</sup> ἔκδοσις, *ekdosis*, giving forth, the action of giving, the action of giving (daughters) in marriage; to let; as a loan. ἐκ, adverb meaning outside, and δόσις, the action of giving, bequeathing or handing over. Here, I use the word in the technical sense of edition or publication of thought, in the manner of Aristotle, who appeared before his audience with a ‘written’ text, which presupposed (unlike the Socratic-Platonic dialogue) that the author had already replied – in the text – to the possible questions from the audience, because the ‘editorial’ act presupposed that the author-editor is the audience. See Hector D’Agostino, *Onomacriti. Testimonia et fragmenta* (Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2007) XXIV.

<sup>27</sup> Entheogenic, literally *en* (within) *theos* (god) *gen-*, (root from *gennaō*, to originate and *genos*, origin); thus, “god within” or “the divine made manifest within”, following the technical sense attributed by Robert Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann and Carl A. P. Ruck, in *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secrets of the Mysteries*, (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2008) 139. Hofmann, who coined the term on discovering the LSD-25 ring, applies the term ‘entheogenic’ to all psychoactive substances which produce feelings of ecstasy.

<sup>28</sup> Note the dialectic relation between Sophists and Orphics, the latter appealing to the popular scope of rationalist *logos* and the former to the enormous prestige of a *hieros logos* of Magna Graecia. See M.A. Santamaria, “Sabiduria alternativa para la polis: Órficos y Sofistas en la Atenas de Sócrates y Platón” (paper presented at the Inaugural Conference of “The International Association for Presocratic Studies, Provo (Utah), June 23-27, 2008.

lustral ‘grace’ which would erase the stigmas left by that ancestral stain.

This would seem to be the major difference, or the spirit of theological and soteriological reform, between ‘Orphism’, *lato sensu* and the earlier Greek mysteries. The textual dimension reorganizes the *mythos* symbolism, no longer as legitimizing an agricultural chthonic ritual – albeit containing Olympian ‘solar’ or incarnated chthonic elements<sup>29</sup> as in the Eleusinian and Dionysian cult – but as the word made *symbolon*, sufficient in itself to give an account of divine truth, as a book<sup>30</sup>.

Thus a ‘secret’ knowledge is instituted, but it is no longer the mystery truth of traditional ritual, which must not be communicated outside the orgiastic context; rather, it sets up the convention of a theological language which offers salvation (*soteria*) in exchange for acceptance of its discursive codes<sup>31</sup>, protected by secrecy<sup>32</sup> and isolating the initiate in a sect<sup>33</sup>, separated from the binding structure of the *oikos* and, therefore, assuming a certain autonomy as regards legislation. Lacking the ecclesiastic organization associated with the official religious calendar, its celebrants, no longer hierophants but Orphotelests, carried out their calls to ‘salvation’ in an itinerant manner, especially in the vicinity of elite and other urban *oikia*.

The supposition of this *ekdotic* – or *ekdoticizing* – spirit inspires interest because it gives a new meaning to the *hieroi logoi*, previously used to refer to poets who talked with the gods – and, as we know, those who talked with the gods (*theologoi*) were Homer and Hesiod – for these Orphotelests may well be called ‘theologians’, not in the sense of the classic poets, but in the *ekdotic* sense of a specialist who creates discourses about the sacred. In this way, the so-called ‘Orphic’ movement would have carried out a theological, soteriological *ekdosis* of the Dionysian mysteries and, possibly, of the Greek mysteries in general.

#### a. Doctrine<sup>34</sup>

The doctrine attributed to Orpheus is, like his image,

<sup>29</sup> As we can see in the Eleusinian and Dionysian cults.

<sup>30</sup> See Bernabe, “*Tendencias actuales*,” 23 y Jiménez, “*Rituales*,” 6, 393, 421, 592.

<sup>31</sup> See note 45.

<sup>32</sup> In the sense of ἀπόρητος. See Bernabe, “El silencio entre los órficos,” *Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* XIX (2007): 61.

<sup>33</sup> A sect subject to the tensions of self/other, “us”/ “them” binarism: the Orphics versus the “universalism” of the *polis*, its political-military strength and its identification with the civic *oikos*. See W. Burkert, “Craft Versus Sect: the problem of Orphics and Pythagoreans” in B. F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition III: Self-Definition in the Graeco-Roman World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Classical sources: Plato *Phaedo* 62b, 70c; *Cratylus* 400c; *Gorgias* 493<sup>a</sup>, 524a; *Phaedrus* 248c-d; *Republic* 364e -365<sup>a</sup>, 620<sup>a</sup>, 620e – 621b; *Seventh epistle* 335a; *The Laws* 701a-c, 782 c-d; Aristotle *Protreptic* fr. 10b; Theophrastus *The Characters* 16,11-13 Diels.

difficult to identify. Despite the fame of so-called ‘Orphism’ or of the ‘*orphicoi*’ as a religious or philosophical movement, the theoretical corpus of a coherent and stable organization is nowhere to be found among the currently available epigraphic evidence<sup>35</sup>. Nonetheless, the doctrinal elements which it has been possible clearly to identify are of the utmost importance for sociology and religious history. Their themes seem to pertain to a re-reading of the myth of Dionysus and its mystery practices, a reordering of Hesiod’s *Theogony* and, at a later date, explanations and interpretations taken from pre-Socratic philosophy.<sup>36</sup> This doctrinal base can be appreciated in the mytheme of the suffering and death of Dionysus<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> See Alberto Bernabe, *Textos orficos...*, 13; and A. Henrichs, “‘Hieroi Logoi’” and ‘Hierai Biblioi’: The (Un) Written Margins of the Sacred in Ancient Greece,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 101 (2003): 213-216.

<sup>36</sup> Pythagoras: a first similarity comes from Herodotus II, 81, in relation to the taboo on the use of wool in temples, and in II, 123, to the doctrine of metempsychosis, of Egyptian origin, according to him. Anaximander and Empedocles, by reason of the concept of Ananke and Dike: “penalty and retribution ... in accordance with the ordering of time” (Simplicius *Phys.* 24 [Anaximander]) and the theory of the four elements (fire, air, earth, water) which are mixed by Love and separated by Discord (Simplicius, *Phys* 25 [Empedocles]); Heraclitus ...Immortal world/mortal world = truth of the psyche/falsehood of the soma (See *Cratylus* 400c and *Phaedrus* 248); Parmenides, by reason of the conception of the “sphere” ... Anaxagoras for his pneumatic conception (ἀέρα, air)... ἀρχή = Zeus... and “all things were together” For these sources see G.S. Kirk y J.E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers. A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

<sup>37</sup> See Pausanias VIII, 37, 5 H. L. Jones; Christian writers: Firmicus Maternus *The Error of Pagan Religions* VI.5 Forbes; Clement of Alexandria *Protreptic* II, 17, 2 F 34 Kern; Arnobius *Adversus gentes* V, 19. Edmonds’s excellent, erudite refutation of the Zagreus myth as a discursively constructed Protestant Christian religious model, developed by late 19th Century scholars, does not, in my view, invalidate my hypothesis as to a soteriological reform of Dionysism in the context of the political and psychological needs of Attic synoecism, but rather the contrary. See Radcliffe Edmonds, “Tearing apart the Zagreus myth: A few disparaging remarks on Orphism and original sin,” *Classical Antiquity* 19 (1999), 35-73. This could also be interpreted in terms of Greek ideas preceding and coinciding with Christian doctrine and which may have been politically and propagandistically important for the latter’s diffusion in Hellas; it might be relevant to consider Jaeger’s text on his notion of Hellenism, which deals with Greek influence on Christianity, not the reverse. See W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 5-6, footnote 6. On the idea of an Orphic cult (not “church”), based on the idea of “a prior sin” and “a promise of salvation”, see Ana Isabel Jimenez San Cristobal, *Rituales orficos* 2, 23, 65, 90 note 315 and Jimenez San Cristobal, “Los libros del ritual orfico,” *Estudios Clásicos* 121

This is the central mytheme. Hera, jealous of the boy Dionysus, son of Zeus and Semele, incites the Titans to put the divine infant to death<sup>38</sup>. They manage to attract his attention by showing him a mirror;<sup>39</sup> they give him some toys<sup>40</sup>, take him by surprise, kill him and cut him to pieces. Then they cook his flesh in a pot over a tripod<sup>41</sup>, and after roasting it on a spit, eat it in a theophagic banquet. But the heart (or phallus) of the boy-god is rescued by the goddess Rhea (or Athena, according to a different version), who puts his limbs together again, after which he resuscitates<sup>42</sup>. Seeing this horrible spectacle, Zeus strikes the Titans with a thunderbolt. From their ashes is born the human race<sup>43</sup>.

Human nature, then, is essentially evil, due to its titanic content, but it contains a divine spark because the remains of Dionysus were amongst the ashes. This anthropogenic event forms the basis for the account of a dualistic doctrine which conceives of the human being as composed of two realities: the body (*sōma*) and the soul (*psychē*)<sup>44</sup>. The soul is of Dionysian origin, divine. But the body is titanic, earthly, perishable and impure<sup>45</sup>. In this morphology, the psyche is locked in the body like a prison or tomb (*sēma*), from which it must escape and save itself. Plato says: “... in the present, we are dead and the body is for us a tomb (σῆμα)...”<sup>46</sup>. But the same etymon, *sōma* (σῶμα) also

(2002): 117. I still find appealing the idea of Zagreus as a Thracian divinity. See Vittorio Macchioro, *Zagreus. Studi intorno all’ Orfismo* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore 1929), 148, 395, 507.

<sup>38</sup> See Pausanias VIII, 37, 5. For Eliade, the theophagic action of the Titans represents the survival of shamanic initiations: “they ‘kill’ the novice so that he may be ‘reborn’ to a higher world of existence.” Mircea Eliade, *Historia de las creencias y de las ideas religiosas. I. De la prehistoria a los Misterios de Eleusis* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1978), 387.

<sup>39</sup> The mirror is symbol of illusion and knowledge; of illusion because it is not a real image and of knowledge because, on seeing oneself in it, one obtains knowledge of one’s own image. See Giorgio Colli. *La sabiduría griega. Texto bilingüe Griego-Español* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998), 47. Nonnus describes it thus: “... with infernal sword the Titans did [him] violence, while he contemplated his false image in the deforming mirror”. Nonnus of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca* 6, 172-173.

<sup>40</sup> “the knucklebones, the ball, the top, the apples, the hoop, the mirror, the fleece”, Clement of Alexandria *Protreptic* 2, 17-18 F 34 Kern.

<sup>41</sup> See Callimachus, fr. 643.

<sup>42</sup> Euphorion, fr. 16 F 36 Kern.

<sup>43</sup> See “To the Titans”, Orphic Hymns, XXXVII 4-6.

<sup>44</sup> See Pindar, fr. 131b.

<sup>45</sup> The human race is “wretched”. See Malalas, *Cronografía* 4, 91.

<sup>46</sup> Plato in Gorgias 493<sup>a</sup>. On the etymology, see Francesc J. Casadesús Bordoy, “Nueva interpretación del ‘Crátilo’ platónico a partir de las aportaciones del papiro de Derveni,” *Emerita: Revista de lingüística y filología clásica* 68 (2000): 65 and I.M. Linforth, *The Arts of Orpheus* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 147.

means “corpse”<sup>47</sup>.

The doctrine, then, becomes clearer. The soul is united to the body as a consequence of a prior murder<sup>48</sup>, a grave sin against the divinity: a son of Zeus (Διός, in the genitive). It has been stained<sup>49</sup> by the stigma of the death of a god. But the soul can be saved through a *teletē*<sup>50</sup>, a ritual in which, after a number of lustral practices of purification, it relives the passion and death of the god.

Thus, a doctrine of salvation (soteriology) for the soul<sup>51</sup> is construed, which requires first a cathartic process, purifying of the ‘sinning matter’, and above all, an initiation into the Dionysian mysteries; a knowledge which was acquired by the living person, to be used as password and cartography<sup>52</sup> in Hades.

The *teletē*, then, implied a promise of salvation<sup>53</sup>. The

<sup>47</sup> See Florencio S. Yarza, *Diccionario Griego-Español* (Barcelona: Sopena, 1.964), 1240.

<sup>48</sup> The prior sin was committed by the Titans. See Papyrus Gurob, col. I line 5; Lamellae Thuriis, fr. 490 B (F. 32 c Kern).

<sup>49</sup> A complete study of the ‘miasma’ or stain can be found in Robert Parker, *Miasma: pollution and purification in early Greek religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>50</sup> See Jiménez San Cristóbal, *Rituales...*, 11-41.

<sup>51</sup> See Pindar fr. 131; Isocrates 11, 8 T 60 Kern. It should be remembered that soteriological events come from the mytheme of the ‘sōter’, the saviour: Dionysus is ‘saved’ by Zeus and Apollo; and although Orpheus is ‘saved’ by the Muses, he, in his turn, becomes a ‘sōter’ when he descends into Hades and saves the souls of the dead. See Isocrates 11,8. The evidence for ‘salvation’, which I have taken from the sources, is not literal, in the sense that it is necessarily derived from the word sōter; I have also taken into consideration words which, in context, suggest a similar idea to that of ‘salvation’ denoted by sōter. σῶσιόν με βριμῶ με [γάλη. Papyrus Gurōb (fr. 578 B; 31 K.) col. Line 5 Smyly and Eὐβου]λεῦ Ἰουκεπαίγυε, see lines 22a- 22b /23a. In fragment 131 of Pindar, the word λυσιπτόνων has the sense of ‘liberate’; similarly, Isocrates 11.8 [T60 Kern]: “to resuscitate” the dead implies the idea of ‘salvation’, although the word used is neither *lysis* nor *sōter*. It should also be remembered that the word sōter sometimes has a naturalistic denotation with no soteriological connotations, as in Diodorus of Sicily 4. 43. 1.

<sup>52</sup> **Passwords**: “like a sheep I fell into milk”, Lamella Thurii 1 fr. 487 B. (ff 32 Kern.); “Andricepedotirso, Andricepedotirso, Brimo, Brimo,” Lamella Thessalian fr. 493 B. Chrysostomou, See Jimenez San Cristobal, *Rituales...*, 659; **cartography**: Lamella Eleuterna fr. 482 B. See Jimenez San Cristobal, 654, and Lamella Petelia fr. 476 (F 32a Kern). Some of this esoteric, scatological and cartographic information could be considered to be “mnemonic tools”. See Fritz Graf and Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife: Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets* (London: Routledge, 2007), 97.

<sup>53</sup> “Because Dionysus, when he saw his image reflected in the mirror, began to pursue it and so was torn to pieces. But Apollo put [Dionysus] back together and brought him back to life because

initiate thus entered a mystic brotherhood with secret knowledge and hoped, on his death, not to wander through the shadows of Hades<sup>54</sup>, but to have an eternally blissful existence in the Fortunate Isles<sup>55</sup>, alongside Orpheus and all the great heroes, as seems to be the wish – or irony – of Socrates: “... What would any of you give to be with Orpheus, Mousaios, Hesiod and Homer? I am prepared to die many times over, if this be true”<sup>56</sup>.

What awaited the uninitiated (*amyetri*) was to be reincarnated indefinitely in human beings or animals<sup>57</sup>, unless he entered the brotherhood of the initiates. The *teletē*, then, holds ‘revealed’ truth, like a kind of scatological password for the soul, and like scriptural gnosis which only the *mystai* (initiates) could discover; knowledge, in the final analysis, as *alētheia*<sup>58</sup>, ‘memory’ of revelation through a sacred text (*hieros logoi*?) as we can read in the best known Orphic formulae: “I shall sing for the knowledgeable, close the doors to the profane” and “I shall speak for those for whom it is right, close the doors to the profane”<sup>59</sup>.

But purification obtained through cult *technē* had to be maintained with *orphikos bios*<sup>60</sup>, which meant a pure life, with very clear taboos against anything which could stain the soul. This implied puritan conduct, watchful against bodily appetites. In particular, this prescription is reflected in diet which is not only vegetarian but has specific restrictions within that regime. The rejection of meat can be understood as a consequence of the central mytheme: its consumption is a kind of anthropophagy, titanic conduct. But the restrictions within the regime are harder to explain, such as the taboo on eating broad beans<sup>61</sup>, for example.

he was a purifying god and the true saviour of Dionysus ...”

Olympiodorus. Commentary on Plato’s *Phaedo* 67c F 220 Kern.

<sup>54</sup> Derveni Papyrus, col. V T. Kouromenos.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Gorgias, 168, 524.

<sup>56</sup> Plato, *Apology* 41 a-c.

<sup>57</sup> See Proclus, Commentary on the Republic of Plato, II, 338, 17 Kern 224.

<sup>58</sup> See Olbian bone tablets fr. 464 B.; IOlb. 94b Dubois. I use the word in the strict etymological sense of ‘not-forgetting’ (α-λήθη), as it appears in the Lamella Pharsalia and, indirectly, in the Lamellae Hipponion and Petelia, as an implicit allusion in the word Mnemosyne, the source of ‘memory’, in the cartography of Hades, which permits the *mystēs* to obtain ‘complete’ knowledge, while the effects of drinking Lethe water were ‘forgetting’ of past existences, before re-entering the cycle of metempsychosis. See also Papyrus Gurob fr. 578 B; 31 K) col. I 22b/23a.

<sup>59</sup> “... But servants and uninitiated and rustics ... close your ears firmly”, Plato, *Symposium* 218b Burnet. This connotation of ‘secret’ is still found in the rhapsodic literature of the imperial age. See David Hernández, “Elementos órficos en el Canto VI de las Dionisiacas,” *Revista de Ciencia de las Religiones* 7 (2002): 20.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Plato *Leg.* 782c Burnet.

<sup>61</sup> See Aristotle, fr. 195 Barnes. For a review of this theme of broad beans and other dietary taboos, see Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal and Bernabé Pajares, *Rituales orficos* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2006), 109-113.

In synthesis, it can be said that so-called “Orphism” is a doctrine of salvation, with cult practices, for some, ‘mysteries’, in which lustrations and secret liturgy were performed.

#### 4. Aetiology

For the purposes of this paper, I will use aetiology in the sense of what is referred to as “cause”, or the conditions which enable us to understand an image, an event or a cult practice<sup>63</sup>. When a condition has a clearly causal meaning in the explanation, in our case, of an element of the *mythos* or of the ritual or of a political practice, it can be called *aition*.

Using this hermeneutic resource, I shall attempt to show the *aition* within the mythic narration itself, the information obtained from primary sources about the Orphic *teletē* and the psychosocial and political context in which this religious reform took place. The notion of *aitia* may be useful, methodologically, for establishing possible links between the vicissitudes of power in the polis and daily forms of worship. In the case of the ‘Orphic’ religion, this resource will be particularly helpful, since it represents a radical reform of mystery practices through a teleological discourse which distances it from polytheism and brings it close to henotheism (due to the centrality of Zeus and his role as liberator, *sōtēr*), thus creating a very propitious ethos for the arrival of the first monotheism in the Mediterranean (in a descriptive, not evaluative, sense).

##### a. Orpheus.

Like his alter ego Dionysus, Orpheus is a foreign god, coming perhaps from Thrace. Some sources mention his passing through Egypt where he would have come into contact with the Osirian mysteries and their funeral rites<sup>64</sup>. There are also evident similarities to near-eastern deities, for example, the river-god, or the doctor-god Zalmoxis, from Thrace itself.

His very name is noteworthy. Although the etymology is

<sup>63</sup> Although, in current medical usage, it refers to the cause of illness, its etymology (*αἰτία*) links it diachronically, first with *mythos* as the ‘cause’ or explanation of an event or phenomenon (for example the cycle of the seasons, or the domestication of cereals in the myth of Demeter-Persephone; or the culture of the vine and wine in the myth of Dionysus); then with *aitia*, as the ‘cause’ of a transgression or offence in the legal sense, and finally, it passes into Hippocratic medicine in the V century BCE, with the sense it has today. I will use the words aetiology, *aitia* and *aition* in the general sense mentioned above. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: los ideales de la cultura griega* (México: F.C.E, 1.985), 160 sees, in the famous and obscure fragment from Anaximander, the transition of the word *aitia*, from mythic-juridical ‘causality’ to naturalistic causality: “... so they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the ordering of time”. Simplicius *Phys.* 24, 13 Diels 12 A 9.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Diodorus of Sicily, 1, 96, 4-5.

strange, it could suggest the verbal action of “separating” and connotations of lack, orphanhood, ‘chthonic darkness’<sup>65</sup>. It is the name of someone who has experienced death but has returned to life through his own dissolution. This is a *pathos* ‘genealogically’ linked with shamanism, not only in the Mediterranean but, possibly, also in most of the world<sup>66</sup>. There is a magical cartography which sets out three levels of reality: heaven, earth and the underworld. The aspiring shaman, whose role will later be, in general, that of chief priest, doctor and judge, must begin the initiation process on earth, from the sacred space designated for the ceremony. Then he descends into the underworld, along an *axis mundi* or central shaft, where he undergoes processes of derealisation and bodily fragmentation and observes the horrors of the spirit world. If he gets past this part of the process, his parts are reunited and the initiand will ascend to heaven where he finds all the images and realities of protecting spirits and the structure of the world<sup>67</sup>. On his return, he is someone who has knowledge<sup>68</sup>, he is a shaman.

In line with the above, Orpheus seems to be a mythic figure with survivals of shamanic magic<sup>69</sup>, although his

<sup>65</sup> *Orphao* (archaic), lacking, yearning (orphan?); *orphe*, darkness; Robert Graves, *Los mitos griegos. I* (Madrid: Alianza, 1.987), 138 suggests *ophruoesis*, “on the river bank” relating it to the “funeral pipes made from the bark of alders” which grew on the banks of the Pineios and other rivers. A stranger etymology links it to ‘chthonic darkness’ (ὄρφνη): Maass, 1895, cited by J.L. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 453. For Guthrie, 68 the ending ‘-eus’ suggests a pre-Greek origin. See William K. Ch. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1.993), 68

<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Thrace may well be one of the points of entry of shamanism into Greece. See Pedro Lain, *La curación por la palabra en la antigüedad clásica* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2005), 75. However, the discussion of Greek shamanism (and that of Orpheus, in particular) is still valid, despite the skepticism of Fritz Graf, “Orpheus: A poet among men,” in J. Bremmer, ed., *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London-Sydney: Routledge, 1.987), 80-106. On shamanism in relation to Pythagoreans and Orphics See Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) 9, 133, 163, 165. For a comprehensive review on the subject see Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the after life*. (London: Routledge, 2002), 27-42. In favor of the shamanic hypothesis see Eric R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1.951), 135-156; Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (London: Routledge, 1.964), 391; Eliade, *Historia de las creencias*, Vol. 1 (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1.978), 290 ss; Martin L. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1.983), 6, 146 ff.

<sup>67</sup> See Eliade, *Shamanism...*, 391, note 66

<sup>68</sup> Plato describes something similar in *Phaedrus* 248 c-d.

<sup>69</sup> See David R. Slavitt and Palmer Bovie, eds., *Euripides. The Cyclops* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1.998),

name, according to classical sources, appears in historical narratives which go no further back than the VI century BCE, since he is not mentioned by Homer or Hesiod<sup>70</sup>.

b. Philosophical-religious syncretism.

The Derveni Papyrus, discovered in 1962 in a funeral pyre near Thessalonica, is the oldest and most complete source of its length on the subject of the cosmogony considered Orphic<sup>71</sup> and makes the legitimizing move to a philosophical discourse on it. Through the use of the written medium<sup>72</sup>, the events of the creation and the divine genealogies canonically established by Hesiod<sup>73</sup> are modified<sup>74</sup>.

The first point is the reorganization of the pantheon so that Zeus not only governs from on high, but, through his son Dionysus as his successor<sup>75</sup>, his power remains safe and

intact<sup>76</sup>, while the ‘phenomenology’ of the other deities is radically reduced, leading to a kind of henotheism<sup>77</sup> not to say monotheism.<sup>78</sup> Zeus *sōtēr* (σωτήρ), ‘saviour’<sup>79</sup>, is subtly insinuating himself through the suffering, the passion of his son Dionysus.

This soteriological desire for salvation may be explained with reference to the pre-Socratic notion of *logos*. In order to sustain the body-soul dualism, it appeals to Heraclitean oppositions: “... immortals, mortals; mortals, immortals ... the former living the latter’s death and the latter dying the former’s life”<sup>80</sup>, in support of its curious mytheme of a Zeus who has devoured his grandfather Uranus’s phallus, on the advice of his father Chronos, and has thus become pregnant with the world, being now – for that *aitia* – he who contains all<sup>81</sup>, it uses arguments based on functional and dynamic ideas taken from Empedocles<sup>82</sup>, and stoichiological considerations, of finite parts united according to the assumptions of the atomists<sup>83</sup>. As we follow the philosophical arguments of the exegete about the different mythemes, we sometimes see Parmenides<sup>84</sup> appear, sometimes Anaximenes and Anaxagoras<sup>85</sup> and more often Pythagoras<sup>86</sup>.

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646-648; Plato, *Protagoras*, 315 a-b; Strabo, 7, fr. 18. Jones. “There is every reason to assume a common source and continuous transmission of shamanic experiences at least to the time of the triumph of Homeric Olympianism.” Zdravko Planinc, *Politics, philosophy, writing: Plato’s art of caring for souls* (Columbia, MO, USA: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 105. A myth similar to that of Eurydice and the katabasis of Orpheus can be found among the Iroquois. See Andrew Lang. *Myth, Ritual and Religion* (New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1901), 77.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Bernabé, *Textos órficos*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> A. Bernabé, *Textos órficos*. This excellent work of philology has generated new interest in Orphism; about the ancient tendency to ‘archaize’ the Orphic tradition, it clarifies that, although this is the oldest Greek papyrus, its date is no earlier than the IV century AD. See Bernabé, *Poetae Epici Graeci*; see also the English translation with commentaries by Gabor Betegh, *The Derveni Papyrus: Cosmology, Theology, and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) and T. Kouremenos, G.M. Parássoglou, and K. Tsantsanoglou, eds., *Derveni Papyrus* (Florence: Olschki Editore, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Orpheus may appear to be the inventor of writing: “Certainly, Orpheus introduced the signs which he had learnt from the Muses ... he instructed Heracles, after having discovered for men writing and wisdom.” Alcidas, *Odysseus*, 24 Kern 123.

<sup>73</sup> In Hesiod’s theogony, in the beginning there is Chaos, but in Orphic cosmogony, in the beginning is Chronos and Eros-Phanes is presented as a creative force. See Bernabé, 102. The mytheme of the cosmic egg – so important in what we call Orphism – is not present in Hesiod. The oldest allusion to an Orphic cosmogony is in Aristophanes’s *The Birds* 693-702.

<sup>74</sup> ¿Onomacritus? The sources for this Orphic cosmogony are: Eudemus (according to Damascius), Jerome’s theogony and the Rhapsodic and Hellenic theogonies (and among this Hellenistic literature, the Derveni Papyrus). However, the oldest reference seems to be in Aristotle *F 7 R* Barnes (T 188 Kern).

<sup>75</sup> “... and Zeus appoints (Dionysus) as King of all the gods of the universe and confers on him the highest honours...” Proclus *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, 42d F 207 Kern; according to Olympiodorus, in his commentary on *Plato’s Phaedo* 61c F 220

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Kern: “Orpheus presents four kingdoms: Heaven, Chronos, Zeus and Dionysus.”

<sup>76</sup> Derveni Papyrus, T123 col. XII Bernabé, trans., *Textos órficos*, 169.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Alberto Bernabé, 151.

<sup>78</sup> “... first born from the king’s phallus, and in him all / all the immortals were conceived: happy gods and goddesses, / rivers, gentle springs and all the rest / everything which had then come to he, so he came to be the only one, and now is king of everything and always will be.” Derveni Papyrus, T 127, col. XVI. Bernabé, 173. “Zeus was born first and last, he of the blazing thunderbolt.” T 128, col. XVII. Bernabé, 174.

<sup>79</sup> This dimension as ‘saviour’ was not clearly evident in either the Eleusinian or the Dionysian mysteries. As Kerényi correctly states: “... the Greeks lacked the salvation complex”, Karl Kerényi, *La religión antigua* (Barcelona: Herder, 1.999), 202.

<sup>80</sup> Hippolytus fr. 62 Kirk 242.

<sup>81</sup> The idea of how the infinite generates the finite and how the latter is contained in the former comes from the same Dionysus-cosmocrator mytheme: “... it is said that Hephaestus made a mirror for Dionysus and that the god, seeing himself in it and contemplating his own image, decided to create all plurality.” Proclus *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* 33b, also 29a-b. Diels I 336,29 – 337, 1.

<sup>82</sup> See Simplicius, *De caelo* 587, 20 Diels 1, 147, 1.

<sup>83</sup> As the theologian-exegete of the Derveni Papyrus is at pains to prove. See Bernabé, 171.

<sup>84</sup> Derveni Papyrus T135 col. XXIV Bernabé, 171.

<sup>85</sup> Derveni papyrus T 125 col. XIV Bernabé, 170.

<sup>86</sup> According to Ion of Chios, 36B2 Diels. Pythagoras wrote under the name of Orpheus. For an extended review of Orphism’s relations with pre-Socratic philosophy, see William K. Chambers Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1.993), 216-246. For a

Even today, philologists have not reached agreement on the relations between what is known as ‘Orphism’ and philosophy. But it is perhaps not going too far to think that, among these relations, that of Orphic written exegesis is the one which has drunk most deeply from the fountains of the philosophical knowledge of its time<sup>87</sup>.

### c. Synoecism.

Among aetiological considerations, synoecism has a special place, as a hypothesis, in the hermeneutics of the mysteries which I am carrying out in a cycle of lectures about ancient Greek religiosity<sup>88</sup>. I wish here only to make brief mention of the fact that the word synoecism refers to the complex process of unification of Attica which began mythically with Theseus and historically from the VII and VI centuries BCE<sup>89</sup>. I have attempted to relate this major socio-historical process with the configuration of cult practices, above all those of the mysteries, to see whether their morphology and function reflect the internal and external political needs of the polis.

In this regard also, ‘Orphism’ shows great complexity.

Regardless of whether or not we accept the foundational roles of Orpheus<sup>90</sup>, or even the existence of an Orphic movement<sup>91</sup>, it is clear from the primary sources<sup>92</sup>, that the

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review and discussion of the relation between Orphism and the pre-Socratics, see Gregory Vlastos, “Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1952): 97/123; see also Sarah C. Humphreys, *The Strangeness of Gods: Historical Perspectives on the Interpretation of Athenian Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 57 ff.

<sup>87</sup> With the exception of Plato’s use of Orphic mythology in his doctrine of the soul; for some, Plato accepted not only Orphism’s theory of the soul but Orphism as such. Cf. W. E. Inge, “The place of myth in philosophy,” *Philosophy* 42 (1936): 143. Although Plato does not hesitate to scold the *agurtai kai manteis*, charlatans and fortune-tellers. Republic 363c5-365a3, J.B. McMinn, “Plato as a philosophical theologian,” *Phronesis* 5 (1.960).

<sup>88</sup> See note 56.

<sup>89</sup> Intimately associated with this process are the legislative and economic changes in cult processes and the strategies for fixing the internal and external boundaries of the polis. See E. Vanderpool, *Studies in Attic epigraphy, history, and topography* (ASCSA, 1982), 47; Miriam Valdez, “El proceso de sinecismo del Atica: cultos, mitos y rituales en la “primera polis” de Atenas,” *Gerion* 19 (2001): 135; Vélez, *La reorganización religiosa*, 605.

<sup>90</sup> “... Aristotle says that the poet Orpheus never existed,” Cicero *On the Nature of the Gods* I, 107 Kern 188.

<sup>91</sup> “And Onomacritos, having taken the names of the Titans from Homer, founded the secret rites of Dionysus and presented the Titans as authors of Dionysus’s sufferings,” Pausanias 8, 37, 5 W.H.S. Jones.

<sup>92</sup> For example, the Derveni Papyrus T 116 col. V Bernabé, 160. The contents of the Thurii gold tablets, fr. 490 B. (fr. 32 e K.), Jimenez San Cristobal, 657, discovered in 1879; show what seem to be the fundamental elements of an Orphic religion or movement. See Radcliffe G. Edmonds, *Myths of the Underworld Journey:*

literature known as ‘Orphic’ contains a profound reform of the Dionysian mysteries – and perhaps of the Greek mysteries in general<sup>93</sup>.

In the second half of the VI century, the tyrant Pisistratus conceived the project of editing the poetry of Homer and Hesiod<sup>94</sup> and the oracles of Mousaios who, as we know, appears in the mythography as friend and follower of Orpheus and who is, moreover, son of the bard, Eumolpos. It seems that the person responsible for this ekdotic editorial work was Onomacritos<sup>95</sup>.

After Pisistratus’s death, around 527 BCE, power passed to his sons Hippias and Hipparchus<sup>96</sup>. Onomacritos continued to work in the service of Hipparchus.

Pisistratus, a cultivated man, son of a philosopher and

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*Plato, Aristophanes, and the ‘Orphic’ Gold Tablets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>93</sup> Paros Marble, fr. 14 *FGrH* 29 A Jacoby; *FGrH* 239 A 12 y 13 Euphorion, fr. 16 Kern 36; Berlin Papyrus 44 Kern 49; see also: Miriam Valdez, Pausanias 1,14, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Strabo, IX, 394, 10 cited by Samuel Hart, “Pisistratus and his edition of Homer,” *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 19 (1908): 491. Supposedly it was also Pisistratus who organized the Panathenians, see María Eugenia de la Nuez Perez, “Las Panateneas: topografía de una fiesta,” *Gerion* 1 (2004):103. D’Agostino le llama: “editore rapsodico di Omero”. Hector D’Agostino, *Onomacriti*, XXIII.

<sup>95</sup> For Colli, 38, he was a “reorganizer of the traditions”. This is partially vouched for by Aristotle: “... since this epic poem does not seem to be by Orpheus, as Aristotle himself says in his treatise on philosophy: the ideas are his, but the one who put them into verse – he says – was Onomacritos.” Aristotle, *On philosophy*, fr. 7; Pausanias is more explicit: “And Onomacritos, having taken the names of the Titans from Homer, founded the secret rites of Dionysus and presented the Titans as authors of Dionysus’s sufferings,” Pausanias 8, 37, 5. The figure of Onomacritos is highly polemical, so much so that some authors doubt his historicity. See I.M. Linforth, *Arts of Orpheus* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 353. A more balanced position, with a complete translation of the primary sources and commentary is H. D’Agostino, *Onomacriti*, xxi, xxiv, xxvii. See also, Herodotus 7.6.3; Aristotle, *Politics* 2.1274a; Pausanias 1.22.7; 9.35.5.

<sup>96</sup> In fact, power passed to Hippias, but in any case, Hipparchus was close to the spheres of power, which circumstance is related to the conditions of his death in the agora. This is the century of the great ‘patrons’ or tyrants. On this point, see J.A. Davidson, “Literature and Literacy in Ancient Greece,” *Phoenix* 3 (1.962): 141; for others, it is a period of ‘resurgence’ of Orphism, which implies an anachronistic position, since we have no sources with evidence of Orphism prior to the VI century. Cf. Alfred Benn, “The ethical value of Hellenism,” *International Journal of Ethics* 3 (1.902): 285. In the apologetic chapter which Jaeger, 218 devotes to the Athenian tyrant, Hipparchus appears as “... the first aesthete, ‘lover of art and the erotic’” On the rol of Magna Graecia in the development of Orphism: Bernabé, “Imago Inferorum Orphica,” in G. Casadio, ed. *Mystic Cults in Magna Graecia* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2009), 95 ff

educator, victorious polemarch in the famous confrontation with Megara, in which the political and commercial influence of Athens over Eleusis and Salamis was in dispute, clearly understood the political necessity of controlling social tensions in the *dēmos*<sup>97</sup>, building many temples and the first theatres for Dionysian performances. The practice of the mysteries was intended to bring the demos closer to power<sup>98</sup> through participation in festivals, which in the civic-public or national religion, were attended mostly by the *aristoi* and the urban *dēmoi* – the elite of the polis. From the strictly political point of view, the rural *dēmos* was kept on the periphery, so that it would not converge with the city *oikos* and create social tension (except in major civic-religious festivals). This, apparently, was Pisistratus's strategy: to favour agriculture (for example, by reducing taxation and making loans, as Aristotle states<sup>99</sup>), so that the peripheral *dēmos* would not interfere in political affairs, and to regulate the mystery cults (above all those of Eleusis), these being the first historical regulations in Attica to be known from epigraphic sources<sup>100</sup>.

As I have shown elsewhere<sup>101</sup>, with this political strategy, the cult centre is displaced to the periphery where the mysteries are performed, introducing into the Eleusinian ritual the power of Zeus (in the figure of Dionysus) who represents the power of the elite; at the same time, on the date established by the civic religious calendar, the king archon and his wife publicly inaugurate the mystery festivals of Demeter-Persephone, in the Eleusinion in Athens, and the (public) festivals of Dionysus; the Basilina (queen), appears in a solemn procession with her venerable college of Gerarai (old women) to carry out the hierogamy, her sacred marriage to a god, in the Boukelion (stables) of

<sup>97</sup> Principally the rural *dēmoi*.

<sup>98</sup> See Louis Dyer, *Studies of the gods in Greece at certain sanctuaries recently excavated: Being eight lectures given in 1890 at the Lowell Institute* (Macmillan and Co, 1891), 121, 123-4. On the epigraphic sources, see P. J Rhodes and Robin Osborne, *Greek Historical Inscriptions, 404-323 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Some authors prefer to sidestep the *dēmos/aristoi* conflict and dissipate the division by proposing an internal conflict within the elite, in which the *dēmos* was not involved. Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making, 1200-479 BC*. (London: Routledge, 1996), 283ff presents an interesting analysis of this position in comparison with the image of Pisistratus and his political strategies in Herodotus and Aristotle. However, an alternative approach might locate the aristoi's conflict within the demos, since this was where the former held their wealth. See Julián Gállego, *Campesinos en la ciudad: Bases agrarias de la pólis griega y la Infantería Hoplita* (B. Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2005), 108.

<sup>99</sup> *The Athenian Constitution*, 13-17 F.G. Kenyon (J. Barnes 2348).

<sup>100</sup> See James P. Sickinger, *Public Records and Archives in Classical Athens* (Chapel Hill, NC, USA: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 53.

<sup>101</sup> Lecture given during a Forum on Europe, 2007 and 2008, as part of a cycle on ancient Greek religiosity. See note 1

the Basileus (king), next to the Pritaneion.

The division established by the *taxon*: public religiosity / private religiosity defined by different dates (and places) in the official calendar, which, in its turn, corresponds to the spring-autumn-winter seasonal cycle, is resolved by an implicit third element, originating perhaps in private ritual and legitimized in the publicly known *mythos* in agrarian festivals. This third element is Dionysus, both in the Eleusinian mysteries and in the Dionysian mysteries themselves. In the civic processions in spring, he appears as Iacchus<sup>102</sup>, and in the privacy of the cult, as the son of Persephone<sup>103</sup>. At this private level, Dionysus-Iacchus is the hypostatic reality of Zeus, representing the hegemony of a 'solar' dimension over the dark, chthonic forces of the lunar deities of the earth<sup>104</sup>. He is the patriarchal authority ('solar') over the polis introduced into (private) mystic experience in order, from there, to exercise symbolic control over the social margins. In the Dionysian festivals, above all in the Choes, Dionysus appears as a god of wine which has matured, of the vine which has been 'cooked' by underground fermentation and opens huge *pithoi* (of wine) for the consumption exclusively of the men.

Pisistratus kept nearly all the regulations concerning religious matters going and made them official<sup>105</sup>. But before this, during his first ten-year exile, he became rich as a trader in the gold and silver mines of Thrace. There he must have learnt about the shamanic practices of Zalmoxis<sup>106</sup> and, on its home territory, about the Orphic religion.

With the knowledge of Onomacritus and his possible political interests as well as the psycho-social conditions of the polis at that time, the reform of Dionysism begins to take shape, textually; one reform which leads perhaps to a

<sup>102</sup> As son of Zeus and Demeter.

<sup>103</sup> See Callimachus fr. 43 Pfeiffer.

<sup>104</sup> It should be remembered that the *teletai* of the major Demeter-Persephone mysteries were held in the city of Eleusis (on the periphery of Athens), at night, by torchlight. And the Dionysian orgies were held in the mountains (periphery) during the winter (dark, 'lunar'). But, *mutatis mutandis*, the public component of these mysteries was held showily and noisily in Athens, perhaps since the time of Solon, at least as far as its regulation is concerned, but possibly earlier, associated with or produced during the process of Attic synoecism.

<sup>105</sup> We know that VI century Athens was dominated by Pisistratus and his sons, although there is no epigraphic evidence for the making of laws in this period. This may be due to a stasis in the legislative activity of the Ekklesia. However, an inscription from the end of the century relates to regulation of the Eleusinian mysteries. It should be remembered that Hippias, son of Pisistratus, was expelled from Athens between 511 and 510 BCE. See Sickinger, 53; De la Nuez Pérez, 103.

<sup>106</sup> According to Herodotus 4, 94 A.D. Godley, the Thracians believed that they did not die, but that "the dead went to the god Zalmoxis", who may have been the bear-god of a secret brotherhood. See Loisy, 35.

conservative line for the *dēmos*<sup>107</sup> (and also the *aristoi*). This is a personal, liturgical line, subject now to the discourse of a theology which is neither epiphanic nor orgiastic and lacks the political-emotional influences of the bacchanalia<sup>108</sup>.

This line became a kind of itinerant priesthood, the Orpheotelests<sup>109</sup>, which, as had happened with the Eleusinian hierophants and the clergy of the Dionysian celebrations and liturgies, gradually degenerated into explicit forms of exploitation and profane handling of the access to the priesthood and the lustral activities they offered, especially to the *oikos* of the elite, to purify them of their wicked actions and give them passwords or ‘indulgences’ for a better stay in Hades, in exchange for ample monetary remuneration. Plato, in the Republic<sup>110</sup>, seems to refer to these so-called Orpheotelests (priests of Dionysus) who threatened terrible suffering to those who did not heed them.

Comparatively speaking, this is not a mystery religion or cult, like the Eleusinian or Dionysian mysteries, characterized by the liminality of rites of passage which do not set up a dialectic of exclusion with respect to epiphany and public festivals; it is rather a new form of political ethos, based on the closed dialectic of an exclusive binary opposition, taking the ideological form of a brotherhood or group which has privileged access to secret, written

<sup>107</sup> But in another way less conservative (in tragedy) the seal of religion would be evident, not only in the general sense of being “the confession of democracy,” as Bachofen, 212 has wisely suggested, but also in the qualitative aspect of an intention to purify through the tragic emotions aroused by the theatrical performances. See Richard Seaford, “Sophocles and the mysteries,” *Hermes* 3 (1994): 275. Tragedy could also reflect the political opposition *dēmoi* / *aristoi*, or masses / elite of Athenian democracy: the educated who write or speak for the uneducated *dēmos*. Josiah Ober and Barry Strauss, “Drama, Political Rhetoric, and Discourse of Athenian Democracy,” in John J. Winkler, F. Zeitlin, *Nothing to do with Dionysos?: Athenian drama in its social context* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 238 ff. For a linguistic-psychological approach to the tensions affecting the polis, especially the danger of *kinēsis politeia*, (political revolution), see Thucydides III 82ff Dent (especially III, 83.1).

<sup>108</sup> “The Greeks lacked a salvation complex” Kerenyi. *La religión Antigua*, 202. After the foundational writing of the soteriological reform of the mysteries by Onomacritos, the cult and its itinerant manifestations uttered by the Orpheotelests, undergoes great changes. For Colli, for example, these changes are of a reactionary nature: in the second half of the V century, we find written poetry, asceticism and vegetarianism (corresponding to Euripides’s time): in the first half of the IV century BCE, books, magic, punishments beyond the grave for the impure (mocked by Plato); in the second half: magic and charlatanism (here we find, for example, the picturesque passage by Demosthenes: On the crown 18, 259-260 Vince).

<sup>109</sup> See Theophrastus *The Characters* 16, 11-13.

<sup>110</sup> 362e-365a Burnet.

revelations; it lacks the ‘therapeutic’ option of a third element (as in the Eleusinian mysteries, in which Dionysus is that third element which offers a way out of the binary dialectic of exclusion between the public and private spheres) being the only ‘good’ choice possible, with Zeus as the supreme deity who governs through his son Dionysus<sup>111</sup> and his invocations. Apparently, it is here no longer a matter of a mystery ritual which turns to writing to validate its truth as *mythos*<sup>112</sup>, but the textual legitimization of an Apollonian-tyrannical power, a *logos politicos*, disseminated as *mythos*, as soteriological reform perhaps<sup>113</sup>, through the ekdotic-administrative functions of Onomacritos during the tyranny of Pisistratus and his sons. This religious reform represents a new form of “economy of salvation”<sup>114</sup>, made more radical by its distance from the naturalistic dimensions of the mysteries and more subtle when read as a binary grammar which situates it despotically amongst the necessities of an imperial vocation of the polis. This Orphic Zeus is a true *tyrant*, not so much in the popular sense of Zeus as all-powerful, but rather having the power of Uranus<sup>115</sup>.

## 5. Conclusions

The information which today we know as “Orphism”

<sup>111</sup> It should be remembered that Solon had established *Apollo Patroos* (a solar adjustment based on Helios) for the descent of the citizens of Athens. In the Homeric period, solarisation is based on Zeus. However, the cult of Pythian Apollo (a solar incarnation of Zeus) had already been introduced by Pisistratus as a political measure. See Mirian Valdés, “El culto de Apolo Patroos en las fratrias,” *Gerión*, 12 (1994)45- 61.

<sup>112</sup> Robertson has pointed out what he considers to be the error of considering the Orphic *teletai* to be a category in comparative religious history. According to this author, the traditional mystery *teletai* officiated in public worship like festivals in which the theme of the earth’s fertility is reproduced. In the case of Orphism, with a *mythos* written or reproduced *ad hoc* for the purpose of validating a *teletē*, this comparative condition does not hold. See Noel Robertson, “Orphic mysteries and dionysiac ritual,” in Cosmopoulos, 220-221. This idea of the rite as a naturalistic base for the myth had already been expounded by Loisy, 21.

<sup>113</sup> There is a change of faith, based on the notion that “human nature is fundamentally corrupt” See Otto, 180

<sup>114</sup> Loisy, 20.

<sup>115</sup> Colli points out that by the V century sectarian reaction and doctrinal decadence were evident. Plato, *Protagoras* 316d, for example, speaks of the “devotees of Orpheus and Mousaios”; Theophrastus describes the Orpheotelests, priests of Orpheus, *The Characters*, 16, 11/13. A writer in the V century AD gives an idea of how popular Orphism was and of its degradation: “Well, an old woman, for twenty mites or a pint of wine will spin you an Orphic spell...” Athanasius of Alexandria., cod. Reg. 1993 fr. 317 (fr. 822 B.; M. 26. 1320) See Jimenez San Cristobal, *Los rituales*, 608.

suggests a soteriological reform of the Dionysian mysteries and, perhaps, of the Greek mysteries in general, possibly initiated under the influence of Attic synoecism.

It is a reform which shows a shift or transition in the historical ethos of classical culture (based on valuing and caring for the *sōma* or body, which allowed expansion and orgasmic pleasure in the *psychē*, as its prolongation or epiphenomenon most famously exemplified in Dionysian *mania*) towards caring for the soul, which demanded condemning the body and its desires, for the sake of the promise of a perfect form of pleasure, purified pleasure, in the hereafter.

From the myth of Dionysus, comes the mytheme of his suffering in the various urban epidemics in which he is seen to be rejected or persecuted, his dreadful death at the hands of the Titans and his resurrection thanks to divine will. The suffering and death of Orpheus are akin to those of his *alter ego*, Dionysus. The knowledge of life and death which he has acquired is not transmitted through the experience of the Dionysian orgy, but through the text-word, in the sense of divine 'revelation.'

This word, as logos of a mythos, conserves its 'mysterious' character. But part of the mystery is understood through 'textual' interpretation. The central mytheme states that the wrongdoing of the Titans against the deity has been passed on to humans. But also a part of Dionysus. We find a precedent of guilt along with hope of salvation. Guilt requires expiation through a 'good life' Salvation requires 'revelation,' encrypted in the word, the key to avoiding wandering and getting lost in the afterlife.

It could be the path towards a personal god, who was at the same time the only god, who ruled over the others. A god for tyranny? A god for the *dēmos*? A god for democracy?

“ὕης αττης , αττης ὕης”<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> “Hyés attes attes hyés!” Demosthenes, *On the crown* 18, 259-260.
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