

STUDIA CLASSICA SERDICENSIA V

MONUMENTS AND TEXTS IN ANTIQUITY AND BEYOND

ESSAYS FOR THE CENTENARY OF GEORGI MIHAILOV (1915–1991)

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ORPHEUS – AN INDO-EUROPEAN FIGURE

0. In this paper I argue that the cognation of Germanic *elf*, Greek *Orpheus* and Vedic *Ṛbhu(s)* is quite valid. It was first suggested by A. Kuhn in 1855. Since then, although there have been some doubts and dissents (e.g. Estell 1999), it has been accepted generally by indoeuropeanists and M. Mayrhofer gives it unreservedly under *ṛbhú-* in his Etymological Lexicon (1986+). Apart from the cognate names (Orpheus-Ṛbhu-Elf) and the craftsmanship (for Ṛbhu-Elf) and the mental power (Orpheus-Ṛbhu) I shall treat at length the mythologem of the severed speaking head as exclusively Indo-European. The IE identity has, as I indicate below, some important repercussions in Hellenist studies. In that field, some views related to the Orphics especially and their connection with Pythagoreans may well be wrong since they do not take into account the Indo-European ancestry of Orpheus. But this is not an essay on Orphism, only on its Indo-European ancestry.

Hellenic and IE

1. Pure classicists rarely show much interest in the different IE (= Indo-European) cultures. Few do so, but only M. L. West (1971; 1978; 1983; 1988; 1997a/1966; 1997b; especially 2007) displays knowledge of the wider IE spectrum. Even he shows inadequate grasp of the Old Indic culture (see §3 end, below). Some express strong doubts about the existence of a Proto-Indo-European culture. Walter Burkert is one of them: in his *Orientalising Revolution* (1992) he disregards totally the rich evidence of parallels and affinities of many ideas, motifs, practices etc in the early Greek civilisation with those of other IE branches like the Celtic, Germanic, Baltic, Italic, Slavic, Hittite, Iranian and Vedic – to mention the more significant ones; instead, he seeks and finds parallels in the Near-Eastern cultures and assumes that the latter have influenced Greece even in cases where we obviously have an inherited IE element. So have done P. Walkot (1966), B. Dietrich (1974), C. Penglase (1996) and others. This is a pity, for in many cases, had the IE relations been taken into account, deeper understanding would have resulted producing new appreciations and different significations.

It is the same with the scholarship dealing with Orphism – the figure of Orpheus, the various orphic groups/movements/schools, the funeral tablets etc and the religio-philosophical doctrines associated with Orphism. There is now a plethora of articles and books on Orphism, particularly after the publication of the fairly reliable translation of the Derveni Papyrus in Most and Laks (1997) and later by Kouremenos et al. (2006) and the new *Fragmenta Orphicorum* by Bernabé (2007). There have appeared some few papers connecting elements of

Orphism with the Vedic texts, e.g. C. López-Ruiz (2011) and E. R. Luján (2011) but not really IE studies.

I myself wrote a paper on ‘Archaic Greece and the Veda’ arguing with considerable evidence that many instances in Greek texts presented by Burkert as Near-Eastern influences (1992) are most probably inherited elements of IE nature. The essay was published in 2001 in one of the most prestigious of Indian academic Journals (Kazanas 2001a). At that period I wrote also a paper for the *Journal of Indo-European Studies* on various IE deities with a section on Orpheus as an IE name with cognates in Germanic and Vedic (Kazanas 2001b). But M. Estell had already published a paper in the same journal ‘Orpheus and Ṛbhu revisited’ (1999), examining the parentage of Ṛbhus and elves, also showing the IE connection. A few years later I published a survey of Greek religio-philosophical thought up to Aristotle with, again, a section on Orphism wherein I traced some of the IE elements (Kazanas 2007).

In this essay I shall, among other concerns, present the severed head of Orpheus that continues to speak, sing, prophesy and counsel, as an exclusive IE motif.

Elf and Ṛbhu

2. The name ‘elf’ appears in Old English as *ælf* or *ylve* (*ylfe*), in Old Norse as *alfr* and in OHG (= Old High German) as *alp* (but does not appear in Gothic, which is understandable, given the small body of Gothic material). Understandably there are doubts about its correspondence with Gk (= Greek) *Orpheus* and S (= Sanskrit) *ṛbhu*. The r/l correspondence is not uncommon: S *ara-ṛa* ‘distant, foreign’ = L (= Latin) *alius*, **OHG *eli-lenti***; S *aratni* ‘elbow’ = Gk *ὀλένη*, L *ulna*, **OHG *el(I)na***; etc. The vowel equivalence is more problematic since the Germanic word is basically o-stem and different ablaut grades need to be assumed in the IE root *h₂elb^h-/h₂lb^h-. The Orpheus-ṛbhu correspondence is phonetically much easier as we find other parallels like S *ṛṇomi* ‘go, move, rise’ and Gk *ὄρνυμι* involving the o-grade.

The great indoeuropeanist Dumézil examined and amplified in his *Oubli de l’Homme* (1985) his finds on dwarfs and elves and the *ṛbhus* (and other Sanskrit/Norse relations) first formulated in *Tarpeia...* (1947).

In different sections of the Old Norse *Edda* we find several types of elves but they can all be reduced to three races or types. One is the *Ljosálfar*, the race of ‘Light-elves’ who live above ground, in air and sunlight, in Alfheim ‘Elf-home/world’, one of the nine regions of creation; in Alfheim lived also Freyr of the Vanir, perhaps overlord of the elves. Another is *Dökkálfar*, the race of ‘Dark-elves’ who live underground, in caves and dark forests and some times are identified with the dwarfs *dvergar*: they seem to be an intermediate race. Finally, there is also the *Svartálfar*, the race of ‘Black-elves’ about whom little is said but who are, like the Dark ones, usually identified with the *dvergar*.

The elves are mentioned as beings quite separate from the gods Aesir and Vanir. Nonetheless, the Light-elves were thought to partake of divinity since they re-

ceived, according to the evidence, a specific sacrifice *álfablót* which was believed to help heal battle-wounds. Moreover, a periphrastic term for the sun is *álfröðull* ‘elf-halo’ thus indicating another connexion. Then, Volund (English *Wēland*), the legendary smith (of Lappish descent) is known as *álfa lióði* or *visi álfa* ‘prince of elves’: this provides another link with the ṛbhús’ *craftsmanship*.

This is all of significance that we know about the elves. Thus first we have the resemblance of the three names *elf-Orpheus-Ṛbhu*. Then, there is the obvious connexion of the Light-elves with the sunlight. Just as Orpheus becomes a devotee (and later priest) of the Sungod Apollo so the Ṛbhús obtain immortality in the mansion of sungod *Savitṛ*. Moreover, though Orpheus did not receive worship or sacrifices, the Ṛbhús were elevated to godhood and partook of the Soma libations. Another affinity is the plural ‘elves’ and their three types, corresponding to the three Ṛbhu brothers. A further link with the Ṛbhús is the fact that, like the Vedic artificers, the elves as dwarfs are artificers using metals and precious stones.

3. In the *RV* (= *R̥gveda*) the Ṛbhús are invoked in 11 hymns and are said to be three brothers Ṛbhu(-kṣan), Vibhvan and Vāja (1.161.6; 4.4.3; etc., though in some places the number seems to vary). They are the sons of Sudhanvan ‘Good archer’ and are often referred to as one, with the name of the elder brother. They are also said to be ‘offspring *nápatah* of Manu’ (8.60.3) and several times ‘children of strength *sávasaḥ*’ (1.161.14; 4.34.6; etc.).

The name *ṛbhú*¹ is an adjective meaning basically ‘artificer, labourer, skilled’ – cognate with old Slavonic *rabъ* ‘servant’, Russian *rabota* ‘work’, Gothic *arbaiþs*, etc. Its cognate *arbha* ‘young’ also appears well distributed in IE branches: Gk *orpha-nos* and L *orbis* ‘bereft’, then Goth *arbi*, Irish *orpe*, and so on.

However, the Ṛbhús are not manual workers nor greedy for treasure like the elves/dwarfs. They had miraculous dexterity through unusual power of mind (1.20.2; 4.33.2; 4.36.2; etc.). Through this power and “with effective prayers” they performed some miracles, say the hymns: they revived a dying cow, or more often, created one called ‘all-forms’ *visvarūpā* (1.161); they rejuvenated the parents (Heaven and Earth, say some; their own parents, say others) and made heaven and earth to thrive (hymn 4.36); they fashioned a three-wheeled car for the Aśvins to go through space without reins or horses (4.36.1); they created two bay-steeds *harī* for Indra (4.33.10); they made four cups/ladles *camasas* out of the one which Tvaṣṭṛ, the creator-god, had fashioned (1.20.6).

¹ Indian scholars from the time of *Yāska* suggest various etymologies and explanations for Ṛbhus but most of them are far-fetched and not consonant with linguistic facts. One etymology says that they are called *ṛbhavaḥ* (plural) because they ‘shine widely’ *urubhānti* without explaining how or why the *uru* becomes *r* and the stems *bhā-* becomes *bhu-*! Most scholars think the name relates to $\sqrt{rabh/labh}$ ‘grasp, handle, work’ but this too is problematic. However *r* and *ra* are often interchangeable as in $\sqrt{kr} > kra-$ etc.

These achievements are said to be incomparable and wondrous. Because of them, though mortal, the sons of Sudhanvan obtained divinity (3.60); or as another hymn puts it, ‘being mortals they earned immortality *mārtāśas śāntas amṛtatvām ānasuḥ* (1.110.4). In 1.110 it is said they went to Savitṛ’s mansion *agohya* ‘that cannot be hidden’, there served as priests for a year and attained godhood and immortality.

We should note also that they performed (\sqrt{kr} or $\sqrt{takṣ}$) other deeds as well by force of mind, vision and knowledge (*dhī*, *dhīti*, *manas*, *māyā*) and *śaci* ‘skill, speech’. Apart from material things like the cups or the cart, they created prosperity *rayi-*, vision *dhī*, vitality *vayas* and fame *śravas* (1.20.2,4; 3.54.17; 3.60.1,2; 4.36.2,4,5,7). More important perhaps, they fashioned prayer (10.80.7) and sacrifice (3.54.12) also, they set apart the two worlds, heaven and earth (4.34.9) and support the sky (10.66.10). We need not give too much importance to the last two feats since they are ascribed to almost every god in the *RV*, but the statements show that the *Ṛbhus* were thought to possess great powers, not merely physical skills. It is this aspect that predominates in Orpheus (poetry, prophecy, song and enchantment of all creatures) and links him to *Ṛbhu*.

West finds that Orpheus and the *Ṛbhus* “have next to nothing in common”. This is understandable since wherever he mentions the Vedic figures (West 2007: 155–156, 297) he treats them as craftsmen in the context of other IE craftsmen like Hephaistos – because his only source is MacDonell’s *Vedic Mythology* which treats them likewise! I think I have given enough evidence on their visionary and mental creativity, like that of Orpheus.

Antiquity of Orpheus

4. Orpheus² is a semi-divine hero/musician/poet/prophet/singer of Greece. Although Homer and Hesiod do not mention him, there are several hints of evidence suggesting he is pre-Homeric.

The lyric poet Ibukos (6th cent. BCE) calls him *onomakluton Orphēn* ‘Orpheus of-famous-name’, description which suggests renown of many decades if not centuries. Perhaps earlier is the surviving group-sculpture at Delphi which includes among the Argonauts *Orphas* (= Orpheus), one of two singers: this is dated to ca. 570 BCE. The historian Pherekudēs (in mid-fifth century) confirms this, attesting to Philammon being the second singer on the Delphic metope. Graff and Johnston adduce one image of a singer with a harp between two Sirens (early 6th cent.) and another of a singer with lyre (early 7th cent.) among dancing warriors (Graff, Johnston 2007: 166); many scholars reject the identification with Orpheus since there

² Many etymologies have been proposed for this name, most of them inappropriate, like *orpnē* ‘darkness’ or the late *ōraia-phōnē* ‘beautiful voice’. The PIE **orbh* ‘put apart, separate’ in Pokorny (1959) and the *orpha-nos* word-family do not fit since both the Greek and the Vedic figures have known, definite parentage. I stay with *elf-orpheus-rbhu*, a phonetic and semantic cognation.

is no name here but, of course, both motifs are highly orphic. While Pindar calls him “father of songs”, the sophist Hippias of Elis unhesitatingly places Orpheus and Mousaios before Homer. Generally, it was believed by many that Orpheus and other poets had lived before Homer.

Herodotos in his *Histories* opines that “the poets who are said to have lived before [“Homer”] are later” (2.50). But if Homer himself mentions two earlier poets, Phēmios and Damodokos, why should we accept Herodotos’ opinion? ... After all, Herodotos has many inaccuracies, as when he says in the 2nd Book on Egypt that the Egyptians had the doctrine of reincarnation when it is fully established that they did not (Lichtheim 1973: 80; Clark 1993; Kazanas 2009: 270); or that Orphics and Pythagoreans borrowed some burial customs and that the Greek religion as a whole borrowed the names of gods from Egypt – as if the Greeks could not develop similar customs and as if the theonyms *Ēōs*, *Hēlios*, *Hestia*, *Zeus*, etc. are not of IE provenance. E. Rohde criticized Herodotus on this, in the 1890’s (*Psyche* ch. 10). In addition, Hellanikos (mentioned in Proklos), who is Herodotos’ contemporary, places Orpheus in the beginning of a long list of poets before Homer.

5. Another piece of evidence comes from Pausanias in the mid-second cent CE. In his *Hellados Periēgēsis* he mentions a sanctuary of *Dēmētēr* Eleusinian at Therae (near Taygetos in Peloponnese). In it, the Lacedaemonians told him, there was “a wooden Image of Orpheus fashioned by the Pelasgians” (3.13.1). Now, by all ancient and most modern accounts, the Pelasgians were the old natives of Hellas prior to the immigration of the Achaeans, Boeotians, Dorians, etc. Consequently by this testimony also Orpheus should be older than Homer. Can we take the Pausanias’ account at face value? Even if he is an honest reporter, are his sources trustworthy?

But let us reverse the common argument. Does it really matter that Homer and Hesiod do not mention Orpheus? ... Let us see.

Pausanias again (8.25.5) reports a tale narrated to him by the priests of a temple to Demeter in Arcadia (Peloponnese). The goddess there was known as *Dēmētēr Erinūs*. No such aspect of Demeter is found in Homer, Hesiod or any other ancient writer. Homer and later writers mentioned the *erinues* in the plural as god-sent avenging spirits that hound murderers. But in the much earlier Mycenaean tablets the name is found in the singular! The tale Pausanias heard was that Demeter assumed the form of a mare and grazed in that plain to escape Poseidon’s sexual harassment. The seagod found out, became a stallion and mated with her. From their union were born a splendid horse Areion and a girl called Despoina. What is the significance of Pausanias’ report? ...

In distant India, in the Vedic texts (*RV* 10.17.1–2 and *Bṛhad-devatā* 6.162ff) *Saraṇyū* ‘the Nimble one’ (note the phonetic resemblance with *erinūs*), the daughter of Creator god *Tvaṣṭṛ* and wife of Sungod *Vivasvat*, abandons husband and home and becomes a mare. *Vivasvat* discovers her, becomes a stallion and mounts her. Out of this union were born the two horse-deities, the *Aśvins*. And in equally

distant Scandinavia, in the *Edda* (35–36), Loki, the god of tricks, mischief and transformations, becomes a mare to lure away from work a giant-mason's stallion, Svadilfari, is impregnated and gives birth to wondrous Sleipnir, the eight-legged fastest racer in the world, which is given as a gift to Odin (for full details, Kazanas 2009: ch. 3).

Obviously this is a PIE motif with its not unexpected variants. Obviously, the Greeks, like the Germans, brought a version of this tale with them, since it is utterly improbable that they borrowed it, or that the three cultures produced it independently one from another. The goddess Erinus in Mycenaean times clearly ante-dates Homer and reappears 1600 or 1700 years later in the Arcadian story³. The only explanation is that in Greece, oral traditions flourished in diverse regions while communication between, say, Arcadia, Boeotia (where Hesiod dwelt) and Ionia (Homer's homeplace) was not that easy⁴. The tale of Erinus survived among the (learned?) people of Arcadia but not anywhere else.

Thus absence of something in Homer and Hesiod is by no means decisive.

Orpheus, the person

6. Back to Orpheus. The tradition that places him before Homer seems to be right. It is supported by the cognation *Elf-Orpheus-Rbhu* which makes the hero-musician an IE figure. It is also supported by his inclusion in the crew of Argo since this expedition took place in the pre-Homeric Age of Heroes. This again is corroborated by the fact that he was almost invariably described as “Thracian” and no source gave him a birthplace in Greece proper (say, south of the Thessalic plain) nor joined his ancestry in any known Greek genealogy like those found in Homer and Hesiod. This means that he came from the North or North-East, which is the area from which the IE Greeks rolled down into the Helladic peninsula.

Now, it is true that several early pieces of iconography on vases present Orpheus in Greek attire but very often among non-Greeks, while just as many and almost all after ca. 400 depict him in foreign clothes. Some scholars suggest he came from Phrygia in Anatolia across the Hellespont, on account of the boots and cap he wears in some depictions. The LIMC (1994: 7.1)⁵ and Graff and Johnston (2007: 167) take him decidedly as a Thracian, whether of the Kikones or the Odrysians.

³ Apart from *erinus*, the deities Zeus, Hera, Athena, etc. re-emerge in Homer and subsequent documents. In Mycenaean we find also goddess *diwija* = Vedic *divija* ‘skyborn’ and *Areimene* = Vedic *Aryaman* (= *Irmin* in Norse, *Ariomanus* in Gaul and *Eremon* in Ireland). See also Ventris, Chadwick 1973.

⁴ The unparalleled oral tradition in India needs no comments: it continues in some areas to this day. The Celts also, according to Caesar, had a strong oral tradition where some young men remained with their Druid masters “under training for 20 years ... and do not commit those teachings to writing ... [but] in almost all other matters make use of Greek letters” (*De Bello Gallico* 6.13–14). For the oral tradition in Greece, see Murray (1993: 100) and Kingsley (1995: 322ff).

⁵ The entries in question are by Maria-Xeni Garezou.

Bulgarian scholars naturally favour a Thracian origin and build much on this, but they too ignore the IE aspect.

However, even if Orpheus was thought to be a veritable Greek who travelled to Thrace, or Phrygia, and there infused a breath of refined culture, as Guthrie thinks (1952: 45), there are more aspects that connect him to R̥bhus and so add support to his PIE ancestry.

7. Earlier in § 2, we saw that Elves, R̥bhus and Orpheus have a close relationship with the Sungod. Furthermore, the ability to heal is common to the Elves and Orpheus; for Euripides ascribes to Orpheus therapeutic powers in his play *Alkēstis* (962–966), composed in 437 BCE. The R̥bhus display a similar power in rejuvenating the parents who were frail and decaying. Some think “the parents” are their own biological ones and others that they are Earth and Heaven. The rejuvenation, at least as far as Earth is concerned, may be indicated also when the R̥bhus directed the waters to the lowlands making the arid fields fair with grasses and plants (*RV* 4.33.7; 1.161.11). This act of fertility, again, links with the Greek hero’s aspect of being a spirit of vegetation, as Guthrie wanted to see him (1952: 53).

The epitaph on Orpheus’ grave, first reported by the orator Alkidamas (which may be a forgery), has many items of information. One of them tells us that Zeus killed him with a bolt. This is very different from the well-known version where the maenads rip him apart in their frenzy – exactly like Pentheus in Euripides’ *Bakchai* (see below, § 8). The epitaph states that he was nurtured by the Muses, that he was the son of *Oiagros* and, more important, that “he discovered for humans *grammata* ‘writing’ and *sophi[a]* ‘wisdom, knowledge, poetry’”. The last item (*grammata* and *sophi[a]*) may be a distant, tenuous parallel with the R̥bhus’s fashioning of prayer and sacrifice (above, § 3).

Unlike other heroes like Bellerophon, Heracles, Jason and Perseus given to adventure and battle, Orpheus was endowed only with power of mind expressed in music and song. With this he charms all creatures, animals, birds and plants. It is for this that the Argonauts take him in their expedition – to charm away dangers like the singing Sirens, who could not be overcome with the force of muscles and weapons. This skill in music and song is, like that of the R̥bhus, an inner power of mind given to Orpheus by Apollo.

This association with the Sungod furnishes another affinity with the R̥bhus. Again no other hero of note has special connection with this god. Zeus is connected with Herakles and Kastōr and Poludeukēs, Poseidon with Euphēmos and Pereiklumenos, Athena with Odysseus and so on. In his Pythian Ode 4, 177ff, Pindar (ca. 460 BCE) says that Orpheus is *ex Apollōnos* ... father of songs, *aidān patēr*, and illustrious, *euainētos*. The first phrase has been variously interpreted as “by the grace of Apollo” or “descending from Apollo”, i.e. being Apollo’s son (and even “coming from Apollonia”, which must be rejected). It is worth noting that here, too, he is “illustrious/renowned”, as with *onomaklutos*, which implies a long preceding

period. But whether we take the phrase to mean by Apollo's grace or fatherhood (and later sources do present him as the son of Apollo and the Muse Kalliope) makes little difference to my argument. What is important is the association with the Sungod – which is supported by another source. In a fragment of a lost play of Aischylos, the *Bassarides*, Orpheus is said to consider Helios the greatest god and rises early to see and honour him, in contrast to Dionusos whom he did not honour (*ouk etima*); for this reason Dionusos instigated his Thracian women (Bacchae, Bassarids or Maenads) to tear him apart. This rising early to honour the Sungod is also a widespread Vedic custom.

Pindar himself elsewhere and other sources give *Oiagros* as the name of Orpheus' father. All sources agree about the mother being Kalliope. But there is some speculation regarding the father, apart from Apollo's involvement. Some think the name means 'wild sheep' as *onagros* means 'wild ass'. Others say Oiagros was a Macedonian/Thracian king, a lone hunter, and still others think him to be a river-god. In any event the name also means 'cudgel-bearer', which is a distant echo of 'bow-bearer', the good archer *sudhanvan*, father of R̥bhu(s).

The severed speaking head in IE mythology

8. Another important aspect that makes Orpheus a descendant of the PIE culture is the motif of the severed singing/speaking head. This is not connected with the R̥bhhus, of course, as no such element is found in their lore.

I. Linforth collects together and discusses the sources and evidence for this element in the larger mythologem of Orpheus' death (1941: 128ff). When the maenads tore apart our hero, his head and lyre were cast into the river Hebros. The stream carried the severed head, still singing and enchanting every listener, into the Aegean and then the sea washed it out on Lesbos island. There an oracle was eventually established and the severed head gave out prophecies; the oracle became so famous that Apollo, fearing for the reputation of his own at Delphi, caused it to stop.

Although the mythologem of the severed speaking/singing/prophesying head has no place in the R̥bhu legend, it does appear elsewhere in Vedic mythology. Since it appears also in the Celtic and the Norse mythologies, we must regard it as an IE motif. However, other scholars bring in all kinds of heads and skulls and so miss the special nature of this motif and declare it to be universal. Linforth does so (1941: 135) citing the older studies of G. L. Kittredge (1916) *Gawain and the Green Knight* and W. Deonna (1925) *Orphée et l'oracle de la tête coupée*. More recently G. R. H. Wright examined the Orpheus story and his severed head (2003) and isolated three "constants" (= constituent sub-motifs or elements): the hacked head "remains vocal, speaks wisely and travels across water". He then cited parallels in other legends, in literature generally and in real history; thereafter his methodology became thoroughly "inconstant" as he piled up parallels that do not have his three constants but several have additional elements, connected our motif to Neolithic (and modern) head-hunters and ignored totally two important instances

of severed prophesying heads in the Germanic and Vedic mythologies. In the next section (§ 9) I examine Wright’s (wrong) parallels to show how unclear thinking can lead us astray.

9. (a) Wright’s first parallel is from Lucian of Samosata (2nd cent. CE) who wrote of the Syrian goddess at Hierapolis, east of Aleppo, and in the process adverted to the Adonis cult connecting it to the Osiris dismemberment. Consequently Lucian described (*De Dea Syria*, 6–7) the curious event whereby every year a head came from Alexandria to Byblos borne on the sea-waves – “a prodigious miracle”! And the women of Byblos, who had been lamenting the death of Adonis-Osiris, picked up from the shore the head and now cried out joyfully.

This is rather illegitimate on Wright’s part since the “head” was not a real head but one made of (compressed) papyrus, a kind of *papier-maché* effigy. Also, in the original tale (at least as narrated by Plutarch in his essay on Isis and Osiris) what the sea throws out at Byblos is not Osiris’ head but the chest in which the evil brother Seth had entrapped Osiris alive (!) and then had reinforced it with molten lead; this is eventually found under an over-growing tamarisk, taken and kept by the king in his palace in Byblos until Isis comes and reclaims her husband’s body.

Wright introduces, moreover, a new “constant”, that is the ladies mourning and rejoicing at Byblos. But this element is wholly contrary to the death of Orpheus since it is the women (maenads) that tore him apart and there is no rejoicing afterwards. Moreover, in the Egyptian legend, women had not participated in the death of Osiris, while Isis, sister and wife of Osiris, first mourns, then resuscitates Osiris in company with her sister Nephtys⁶ – again no parallel with the Orpheus story.

All this has little to do with the Orpheus head that retains its vitality, sings and gives oracular, wise utterances.

(b) Wright’s next case is the effigy of Christ’s head which Nikodemos, before embarking with Joseph of Arimathea to travel westward, cast into the sea and which miraculously was washed out in Tuscany (Italy)! This is a tale from the apocryphal *Gospel of Nikodemos* (4/5th cent. CE)! This too seems irrelevant and is too late to be of value.

(c) He also cites the head of John the Baptist which figures in all four gospels. Here he connects the maenads’ orgiastic dancing and their tearing of Orpheus with Salome’s dancing and her request, at her mother’s instigation, for John’s head on a platter! Later Rabbinic literature mentions a skull floating down the Jordan river – but neither singing nor prophesying! This tale also is too late and irrelevant.

In all these instances the severed head does not sing or counsel, which is the main, miraculous and most significant feature in the legend of Orpheus’ head.

⁶ There is another sequence in which evil Seth does rip apart the body of Osiris into 14/16 pieces (possibly symbolising the moon-phases) and scatters them in different places but Isis finds them and with her great magic reunites them and brings Osiris back to life.

(d) The head of Bran the blessed, son of sea-god Llyr, in the early Celtic (Welsh) mythology, although late (from the second branch of the *Mabinogion*, ca. 1100 CE), is quite relevant, but I leave it for later consideration (§ 10, below).

(e) Then, Wright examines modern practices of head-hunting, regarded by the practitioners as admirable since the heads brought to the tribe are necessary for its prosperity while in Borneo they also serve as marriage gifts to the brides (Wright 2003: 186). These modern practices are presented by Wright as continuing from ancient times, and even early Neolithic customs in the Middle East, ca. 10 000 BP (186). Then Wright closes with two literary examples. One is from Jalal Diwan Rumi, the mystic poet/teacher of Islam (in Turkey) who wrote (*Ode* 2.3) “When thou seest in the pathway a severed head ask of it... the secrets of the heart”. The other is from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* where, in the witches’ lair (Act 4, sc. 1), the prophecy about Macduff’s success is uttered by an armed head (Wright 2003: 187). These are obviously poetic, heavily symbolic tropes⁷ and are much too late.

10. Let us now turn to the Celtic tale of Bran the Blessed (Bendigeidfran). In the medieval Welsh *Mabinogion* (12th cent), Bran was king of the Britons, a giant of enormous stature. He had a sister, Branwen, who was mistreated by her husband, the king of Ireland. So Bran led his army in an invasion of Ireland. At one point he stretched across a chasm becoming a bridge for his men and then, while his host travelled in ships across the Irish sea, he simply waded through on foot! During the ensuing disastrous fighting, in which both armies were destroyed, Bran and seven of his warriors survived, but he was wounded by a poisonous spear. So he instructed his warriors to cut off his head and carry it back to Britain assuring them that it would offer them advice, protection, peace and prosperity. Bran’s head was miraculously preserved and indeed chatted merrily, sung and gave counsel as need arose. Finally, after many decades it stopped functioning and was buried in the White Hill, which is thought to be the location where now stands the Tower of London, and, for as long as it remained undisturbed, it safeguarded the realm against all foreign threats.

Here the main point is that the head remains “alive”, sings and speaks and gives advice and finally acts as talisman. That it is carried across the sea is incidental and secondary. The element of women does not appear, unless we stretch the role of Bran’s sister and say that she was the cause of his death.

⁷ He might have mentioned many other instances of severed heads in literature – like that in the medieval romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* which, bleeding at the hacked neck, is held high by the hand of the still living corpse of the Green Knight and with trembling lips, invites Gawain to the Green Chapel in a year’s time (1.19–20). The most recent is *The Dresden Files*, a series of books with the adventures of Harry Dresden, starting with the *Storm Front* in 2000. In these Dresden has as assistant a magical skull that has been passed down through many generations of wizards and so has amassed immense knowledge.

11. The Norse mythology furnishes another instance of a severed head that continues to live and give wise advice. Deonna (1925) does cite the Nordic Mimir and the Celtic Bran, as in § 10, above.

In the first written records of the *Prose Edda* and the *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway* (both 13th cent. CE), we find the shadowy figure of wise Mimir, whose name means ‘he who remembers’. He has a well that bears his name, *Mimirsbrunnr*, located by/under one of the three roots of the World-tree *Yggdrasil*. Its water is wisdom and Mimir is all-knowing because he drinks from it every day. Odin, the king of gods Aesir, sought to drink but the Spirit of the well would not allow him until he left in it one of his eyes as a pledge. This Odin did; so he acquired some knowledge and remained one-eyed!

During the war between the Aesir and the Vanir, two groups of gods that later merged, the Vanir decapitated Mimir and sent his head to Odin. He proceeded to embalm it and utter charms over it. The head was thus preserved and Odin, who had not obtained full wisdom with that one draught from the well, consulted it whenever he needed information from the other worlds (there being nine in all).

Here again the main feature is that the head retains its life-functions and gives wise counsel. No females are involved at all and it is not borne across water. The well’s water is explicitly said in the myth to embody wisdom and to infuse the drinker with this. Both Orpheus and Bendigeidfran had their special powers without the aid of water. So water was not a primary or essential ingredient in the mythologem. And this is even more obvious in the legend of the Medousa in Greece. Women are also not mentioned here nor in the legend of Dadhyañc in India. (Wright does not mention these last three mythologems – Mimir, Medusa and Dadhyañc.)

12. The story of Perseus and Medusa’s head is reconstructed from various sources from Herodotos, Simonides and Sophocles (*Antigonē*, 947ff) to Apollodoros (*Bibliothēkē* 2.37–39). Apollonios Rhodios (*Argonautika* 4.1511–1517) and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 4.792–802; 5.1–23). I include it because it is severed – but does not speak – and is, in this respect, related.

Perseus was a demi-god, son of Zeus and Danaē. Like many other heroes, he was given the task to kill Medusa, one of the Gorgons, and obtain the head, which had snakes instead of hair (due to a curse of Pallas Athena) and had the power to turn into stone anyone who gazed at her.

With Athena’s help, Perseus obtained some very useful accoutrements (a head-covering from Hades that made one invisible, the sandals of Hermes that enabled one to fly, etc.). Thus equipped, he beheaded Medusa and carried off the awful head in a special bag. Thereafter he used it on several occasions to destroy different foes, including king Polydektēs who harassed Perseus’ mother, Danaē.

Medusa’s head does not speak but I thought I would include it here since it retains its terrifying energy and is being used as a talisman-weapon.

13. I come now to perhaps the strangest myth of them all.

In *R̥gveda* 1.117.22 we find this cryptic stanza: “O Aśvins you placed a horse-head upon Dadhyañc, the son of Atharvan priest. Being honest, he told you about Tvaṣṭṛ’s honey that was hidden from you – you who accomplish wondrous deeds”.

The explication comes with the completion (?)⁸ of the story in later texts – in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.1.1.18–24 and Śaunaka’s *Bṛhaddevatā* 3.15.23. Briefly it runs as follows:

Dadhyañc knew the essence of all sacrifice (Tvaṣṭṛ’s honey). Lord Indra warned him that if he told this to anyone else he would behead him. The twin Aśvins (gods of medicine and succour generally) came to the sage but he would not accept them as students giving as reason Indra’s threat. They assured him that they could remove his (natural) head, put in its stead a horsehead and so, after giving them the secret knowledge, Indra would cut off the horsehead and they would put back his own head! And so it happened. In a remarkable feat of surgery the Aśvins replaced Dadhyañc’s head with a horse-head and then were taught by this the secret knowledge. Then Indra cut off the horsehead that had divulged the secret, but the Aśvins, in another miraculous feat, put back the human head.

Here it is not Dadhyañc’s severed head that talks; it is the severed horsehead (stuck on Dadhyañc’s body) that speaks and reveals wisdom, having drawn it magically from the sage’s subtle, non-bodily store of knowledge.

However, there is a sequel in *Bṛhaddevatā* where the horsehead, that had magically acquired wisdom, fell into a lake on the mountain Śaryañvat. Thereafter it rose up whenever some worthy suppliant came and asked for a boon. Here note that the water functions as a cooling factor because the horsehead had become literally too hot. In fact, later on Indra used the bone of the horsehead to slay a brood of demons, the Vṛtras (*RV* 1.84.13–15; *Bṛhaddevatā* 3.22.4.) – and this incident reminds us of Sampson in the *Old Testament* (*Judges* 15.15) who used an ass’s jaw-bone to slay a thousand foes. There are many tales, even Buddhist ones, referring to a fire or a fire-emitting horse in the depths of the ocean that will at the right time burn up the world and bring about the end of it.

Origin of severed speaking head?

14. We need to clarify two points: the IE nature of the mythologem of the severed, speaking head and its origin.

In the realm of myth, the severed, speaking head seems to be wholly Indo-European. Its distinctive feature is that it retains its vital function of speaking, it sings and offers wise advice or prophecies. As far as I know no other culture has it quite so early. All the other instances adduced by Wright (2003) lack this essential “constant”, to use his term. Thus at least this aspect of Orpheus (there are others, like the

⁸ I put a question-mark because, although the tradition and modern scholars do accept the later tale, we have no means of knowing that this is indeed the original myth.

name itself, cognate with Vedic *Rbhu*, Germanic *Elf-e*, Old Slavonic *rabъ* ‘servant’, etc.) belongs to the Proto-Indo-European culture, suggesting that **Orpheus seems to derive from a much older figure than we usually think.**

The tales we examined from the Celtic branch, the Germanic, the Greek and the Vedic have this constant (i.e. the speaking head) in common: some other elements are found in some tales, but not in others, and seem to be incidental or secondary.

Other speaking heads like that in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and so on (note 7) are much too late to count and are obviously based on the ancient mythical prototypes.

What is the origin of such a mythologem?

As was said earlier, Wright suggests that this motif of the severed head derives from ancient practices of head-hunting. This may be so, of course. But the suggestion really begs the question. In the very earliest literature of the world, Chinese, Vedic, Iranian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hittite and Greek there is no mention of collecting heads, except in the few cases examined above.

Why would the head-hunters, modern or, more so, ancient, expect that keeping a head, even that of a hero or nobleman, would ensure the prosperity and safety of their land and people? How would they know?

First of all, head-hunters do not hunt ‘noble heads’ but just heads, all and sundry. The only practical use of these heads is that they can offer the flesh and the brains for food and the skulls be turned into chalices, or they can be given as presents. The use of the heads as oracles or talismans belongs to the realm of speculation and sheer superstition. There has not been any evidence in modern reliable literature or in the known history that severed heads or skulls made the land fertile or ensured peace and safety.

We must assume rather that the practice had its origin in myth or some strange metaphysical belief/doctrine. But how did it start?

In a seminal study R. B. Onions (1951/1988) examines the belief in the powers of the head, both live and dead, and related practices in different ancient cultures the world over (p. 95–127, 530–543 and elsewhere), but does not really explain the origin of the belief that a severed head could prophesy.

So what is the origin of this myth? ...⁹

Some tentative conclusions

15. Some of the lore associated with Orpheus in Greece is inherited, especially where we find corroboration with parallels in other branches, like the connection with the Sungod and the severed speaking head.

In summary, again, according to the evidence herein examined, Orpheus derives from an unknown figure, or figures of the PIE culture. That culture dispersed into the known branches that emerge with certainty and with linguistic, legal and religious definitions, in the 3rd millennium and after. Most seem to have lost alto-

⁹ Much of this material is published in the Journal *Orpheus* № 20, 2014.

gether memories of the proto-Orpheus figure; the Germanic branch retained a weak memory of plurality in the semi-divine race of Elves; some Greek tribes retained the memory of a single figure – enchanter, hero, musician, prophet, singer, teacher; the Vedics as usual retained both: the many in the R̥bhus, the three brothers, and also the one name singular.

Now in Greece, we find many sources from diverse locations and periods. This fact creates acute difficulties for the hellenist scholar as interpreter and historian of ideas or of events. For as we saw in § 5 with the example of *Erinūs/Saranyū* which surfaces only in Pausanias (in mid-second cent. CE!), remoteness of a region or lateness of a period and absence of evidence in Homer and other early writers, constitute no decisive criteria in cases where we find parallels in other IE cultures like the Baltic, Celtic, Germanic, Slavic and Vedic. I leave out the Italic one because much of it from, say 150 BCE onward, may derive from Greece; the Hittite one has some genuine inherited PIE elements but on the whole it has absorbed much too much from the alien native and surrounding cultures; the Iranian culture is often too close to the Vedic one.

Where, of course, in the Greek (or any other IE) culture we find no parallel in at least two other branches, the scholars must rely on the available evidence. And if we are dealing with an occurrence or motif that has no parallel in the other IE branches but has one in the Near-Eastern (or Finno-Ugrian) cultures, then we must assume borrowing of the later text from the earlier one.

A good case in point is the Cosmic Egg. I trust the reader will forgive me this digression.

16. Briefly, the motif of the Cosmic Egg states that an egg floats on the Cosmic Waters or the energy flux of the Sky or Time, and from this, as it splits open, emerge the Creator-god and all worlds and all creatures. This mythologem does not appear in Mesopotamia but does appear in the Vedas, in (late) *Orphic cosmologies*, in *Egypt* (Clark 1993; Shafer 1991; Lichteim, vol. 1, 1973) and in the Finnish *Kalevala*, where the Egg is thrust upon the waves by Watermother Ilmatar (Onions 1988: 177). (For full details, see Kazanas 2009: 254–256.)

The Finno-Ugric issue can be resolved easily. The *Kalevala* is a comparatively late text. We know there were no significant contacts between Greece or Egypt and the Finno-Ugrians, whether in their Uralic or western habitat. But Finno-Ugric has several loanwords from Vedic: e.g. V *nāma* ‘name’ (Gk, L, Gmc cognates), Fin. *nime*; V *ūdhar* ‘udder’ (Gk, L, Gmc etc. cognates), Fin. *utar*/Mordwin *odar*; V *svasar* ‘sister’ (Gk, L, etc.), Fin. *sisar*/M *sazor*; V *śata* ‘hundred’ (Gk, L, etc.), Fin. *sata*/M *śaco*; etc. Therefore, the Finns most probably borrowed the Cosmic Egg from the Vedics. The latter have goddess Aditi bring *martāṇḍa* ‘one-from-dead-egg’, i.e. the setting Sungod, who will be reborn anew for the life and death of himself and other creatures (*RV* 10.72.9); *RV* 10.171.1 and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.6.1–2 have *Hiraṇyagarbha* ‘golden embryo = sun’ and *Prajāpati* ‘lord of

creatures'. The Orphic Egg has *Eros/Phanes/Protogonos* who (especially *Phanes* who 'makes manifest' and *Protogonos* who shines brilliantly) create the world. All-encompassing Time is also a factor in the cosmogony, proceeding from the Egg (Burkert 1972: 76; West 1988: 104, 187–188).

Now, Egyptian mythology/religion also has a creative Egg out of which spring Shu 'god of air and light' (*Coffin Texts* 223, 714; and *Book of the Dead* 85; etc.) and/or Rē 'Sungod' (*Pyramid Texts* 408; etc.); but time, as a separate entity, is not involved. The Phoenician cosmogony too has an Egg produced by Ūlōm 'Eternity/Time' who also produced Chusōr, the divine craftsman, and so creation begun (West 1971: 28f; 1998: 103).

However, in an independent study, I showed that the Egyptians probably borrowed much material from the Vedics or Proto-Indo-Europeans at an indeterminate period, since some 30 motifs common to both cultures are found in other IE branches which could not have had early contacts with Egypt and must therefore be considered to be of PIE provenance (Kazanas 2009: ch. 8, 244–276).

The Phoenician cosmogony's Egg is associated with the element of Time as is the Orphic mythologem and the Egyptian. But Time is involved also in the Vedic Tradition: in the *Atharvaveda* hymns 19.53 and 54 present Time *Kāla* as a cosmogonic Power which produces creator Prajāpati or Golden Embryo (born of an egg). But the Zoroastrian (= Iranian/Persian) cosmogony also has the 'infinite/ungendered Time' *Akarana Zurvān* engendering through Ohrmazd the metallic egg which became sky and earth.

The Cosmic Egg, connected with Time, occurs in Vedic, Iranian and Greek lore, i.e. in three branches of the wider IE family and so can be regarded as an inherited motif. It is therefore unnecessary to postulate borrowing from Egypt or Phoenicia on the part of the Greeks. It is much simpler and in no way problematic to accept that some Greek tribes retained the memory of this Egg.

End of the digression.

Re-embodiment and shamanism

17. Rebirth or re-embodiment (*palingenesis*, more common than *metempsychōsis* 'soul-transmigration') is another such issue. M. L. West and other Hellenists ascribe the origin of this idea to Egypt or India. Herodotus ascribed it to Egypt in antiquity. But as we saw earlier (§ 4) Herodotus is wrong since the Egyptians did not have this doctrine of reincarnation. In fact, no Near-Eastern culture had it, Babylonian, Assyrian, Phoenician, Hittite or whatever.

However some find the origin of transmigration in shamanism combining it with Orpheus' *katabasis* 'descent' into Hades to rescue his wife Euridikē. (Some early sources suggest he succeeded, others state that he failed and this is the better known tale.) This too is unnecessary. Shamanism is a fairly modern concept being in vogue until the 1970's. It was established by anthropologists and explorers in the second half of the 19th century and after, when they began to discover and study

communities/societies in Siberia, Africa, America and elsewhere: these they labelled “primitive” assuming them to have advanced only minimally from their ancient or proto-historic condition. Communities which continue with their shamanist practices show little ability to change and seem to be on the way to extinction. Instead of “primitive” they could be non-advancing or even decadent remnants of once much more vigorous cultures.

Be that as it may, in the *Ṛgveda*, which is one of the most ancient, if not the earliest IE document, there is no real evidence of shamanism. True, M. Eliade (1972) and others interpret some hymns in this vein: i.e. hymns 10.14–18 which deal with funeral and after-life aspects; 10.58 which addresses the departing spirit; 10.135 about a son and his dead father; 10.136 about the *keśin* ‘long-haired-one’, ascetic or yogi who imbibes a drug and rides the wind, sharing the experience with god Rudra (= later Shiva). But all these can be and have been interpreted without resource to shamanism¹⁰.

Shamanism is considered in most cases to induce altered, higher states of consciousness and with these the shaman has higher, super-normal powers to heal, cause rain, bring back from the dead (!), and the like.

Several Rigvedic hymns do speak clearly of altered states of consciousness but without the shamanist experiences of going into a trance after frantic dancing, or of being possessed and often severely tortured by spirits, as part of their ascent to a higher state. One hymn explains that higher consciousness is reached through ingesting the elixir Soma (8.48.3)

<i>āpāma sōmam-amṛtā abhūma</i>	We drank soma; we became immortal;
<i>āganma jyōtir-āvidāma devān</i>	We went to the light, found the gods.
<i>kiṃ nūnām asmān kṛṇavad-ārātiḥ</i>	What can selfishness do to us now,
<i>kīm-u dhūrtir, amṛta, mārtasya</i>	What, o immortal One, the mortal’s malignity?

Other ways leading to such a state are devotion to the god(s) and sacrificial rites, virtuous living with the exercise of generosity, meditation (“they found the spacious light while reflecting *didhyānāḥ*”) and other yogic practices. One poet declares (Kāṇva in 8.6.10): “Having received from my father/teacher the essential knowledge *medhā* of the Cosmic Order *ṛta*, I was born even like the sungod *Sūrya*”.

All such statements have no hint of the shamanist experiences as described in M. Eliade (1972) and G. Hancock (2005). We find no such experiences in the hymns concerning the *Ṛbhus* and their elevation (not descent) to the Sungod’s mansion where through service they obtained immortality. The limited lore concerning the *Elves* also is free of any shamanist experiences. Of course, it could

¹⁰ In fairness to Eliade, it should be stated that he admits that the *RV* passages may not be shamanist at all (1972: 407–413).

have been quite possible for the Greeks who had retained the memory of the *proto-Orpheus figure to have absorbed from alien peoples met in their wanderings some shamanist elements. But, really, apart from the *katabasis* motif there is absolutely nothing in Orpheus resembling shamanism; even the *katabasis* need not be shamanist at all!

Herakles too went to Hades (in the tomb of queen Alkēstis), fought with Death and won back the queen, who had died in place of her husband, for king Admētos (Kerényi 1958; March 1999). He can hardly be called a shamanist figure, but the tale provides a parallel with the Orpheus descent.

Then there is the story of Savitrī and Satyavan in the Vana-parvan ‘Book of the Forest’ (*Mahābhārata* 2nd Book). Here prince Satyavan dies, as foretold, but Savitrī, his devoted wife, chases Yama, god of death and justice, and manages to persuade him to give back Satyavan alive (after he had granted eyesight and sons to her blind father; she had asked nothing for herself)¹¹. This is another, if remote, link with Orpheus’s attempt to rescue Eurudikē. Here again there is nothing shamanist.

18. The doctrine of reincarnation came, I think, with Orphism, even though I find no clear attestation in early sources. But, then, apart from the name of Orpheus and its variants, we find no early attestation about anything “orphyic”. We find clear orphyic ideas and practices in some writers from the 5th century onward (Pindar, Herodotos, Aischulos, Euripidēs, Plato, etc.). But the rich body of orphyic material appears in the early centuries of the Common Era with the Orphyic Poems, the Rhapsodies, the long citations in doxographers and the Neoplatonic and subsequent scholiasts: here we find the cosmogonies, the theogonies and guiding rules for daily life. Time was when all these writings were considered by classicists generally interesting but late fabrications. But the discovery of the *Derveni Papyrus* altered radically the entire scenery. For this half-burnt document found in a grave of ca. 420 BCE contains interpretative comments by an unknown writer on an unknown Orphyic poem, describing a cosmogony/theogony stunningly similar to those found in the later texts!¹² The obvious inference is that Orphism, or a variety of orphyic teachings, was very much alive, just like the lore of Dēmētēr Erinūs in Arcadia, but was transmitted orally by and among devoted adherents. True, one can on this basis ascribe many things even absurdities to Orphism, but we can exercise caution and remain within the realm of only what our sources can support.

¹¹ This motif and its link with Heraklēs-Alkēstis and Orpheus-Eurudikē is not mentioned in Littleton (1973), in Watkins (2001) and in West (2007). I would be grateful if informed of its treatment elsewhere.

¹² The literature on the subject is already enormous (March 2014) and is increasing apace. Here I refer to a few seminal publications: Aldering 1981; West 1998 (1983); Lacks, Most 1997; Janko 2001; Betegh 2004; Bernabé 2002; Kouremenos et al. 2006; de Jáuregui et al. (eds.) 2011; there are many more.

Reincarnation or transmigration first appears with Xenophanes (late 6th cent.), then Pindar (early 5th cent.), Empedocles, Herodotus and so on¹³. There is no direct attestation of this doctrine for Orphism in the early sources, as said just above. Most modern hellenists are severely sceptical and negative but some others infer the doctrine “without undue rashness” from several sources (Dodds 1951: 149 and note 94). Two well-attested early Orphic ideas are (a) the pre-existence and immortality of the soul and (b) the incarnation of the soul for past sin(s) in the prison (or tomb) of the body until its final purification. And sure enough, it is not difficult to extract the idea of transmigration from these two.

Transmigration was also known among the Pythagoreans, though here again without adequate direct attestation in early sources. Consequently a question arose among classicists as to who first formulated this doctrine. Some favour the Orphics, others the Pythagoreans, as W. Burkert observes; and, although he notes that since the discovery of the *Derveni Papyrus* many established views downgrading Orphism have been thoroughly shaken, he tends toward the Pythagoreans (Burkert 1972: 125–133).

Moreover, there are some phrases in the (golden and other) tablets found in graves from the 4th cent. BCE and perhaps before, implying a cycle of birth-death-rebirth: Tablet 5 (Thurii 3) says: *kúklo[u] d' exéptan barupenthéos argaléioio* ‘I flew out of the difficult cycle of-heavy-suffering’ – says (being pure *kathará*), the soul of a dead lady to Queen Persephone. This may be a devotee of Dionysos, not necessarily Orphic, but certainly not Pythagorean (Graff, Johnston 2007: 12).

However, this doctrine, like the motifs of the Cosmic Egg, the Speaking Severed Head and others, is most probably PIE. We know that it was quite well established in the Old Indic culture. It was found by Caesar among the Celts in Gaul (*De Bello Gallico* 6.14). Some interpret this report as a belief in immortality, but Caesar’s words are very unambiguous: *non interire animas sed ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios* ‘the souls do not die but after death transmigrate from some [bodies/forms] to others’. This testimony was later corroborated clearly by Lucan (*Pharsalia* 1.454–462). We find the idea in Greece as well.

The repeating cycles of the dissolution of the world at Ragnarok in the Norse mythology (*Edda* 46–47, 54) and its re-generation afterwards, may also contain

¹³ I suspect it appears even earlier in Anaximander (early 6th cent.) if Simplicios in his *Physics* reports correctly Theophrastus’ account of the Milesian’s views. After postulating the *apeiron* ‘infinite, unlimited’ as the originating substance, instead of water (Thales) or any other element, Anaximander said that beings [*onta*] “pay the penalty and retribution to one another [*allēlois*] according to the *taxis* ‘assessing, ordering’ of time”. This is generally interpreted as referring to opposites (e.g. Khan 1982: 267; Vamvakas 2001: 116–117). This view may well be right but it does not preclude reincarnation with expiation of sinful acts. Other reports, like that of (pseudo-)Plutarch, say that genesis and dissolution occur in repeating cycles (*anaklōumen-*) from infinite time past. This repetition in cycles can apply to individuals, families and nations, as well as larger units like the combination of elements or the worlds; in this process individuals meet their deserts. (For the variant reports in Greek, see Kirk et al. 1999: 106–108.)

an echo of, and implies, reincarnation; this cosmic regeneration was present in the teaching of the Pythagoreans (“everything will be the same as it is now and time will be the same”), as Eudemus is reported to have said in Simplicios’ 3rd book of *Physics*.

19. I am aware that it is somewhat circuitous to say that this or that orphic motif, found in other IE branches, has a PIE ancestry and, then, since it is IE, it is early and orphic. But the argument does not really run circularly. There are other considerations as well.

The Orpheus figure is neither Greek nor Thracian in its origins. It is thoroughly Indo-European, according to all the evidence we examined in §§ 1–8: the name Elf-Orpheus-Ṛbhū cognation; the strong connection with the Sungod; the power of mind and healing; the Greek traditions that have him live before Homer and descend from the north; the speaking severed head; and so on. All these facts bespeak the PIE provenance.

Some scholars follow hellenistic and later sources or their own predilections and connect Dionysos, who is very popular in Orphism, with Indic Shiva. I fail to see any affinity between the two except that they are both gods. This is not an IE element. The later tale of the (attempt to) rescue Eurudikē from Hades does not appear in the lore of the Elves or the Ṛbhū. There is only the tenuous similarity of Savitrī pursuing Yama and securing the return of her husband. The only early motif remotely resembling the rescue of a female, but not from the Underworld, is that of the Baltic heroes, the *Dievo Sūnelai* ‘the [sky-] god’s lads’ who rescue from drowning, and escort the Sunmaiden *saules dukterys*. This has a distant reflex in the *Aśvins* (who rescue from tempests and other calamities) escorting *Sūryā*, the Sunmaiden, in the Vedic lore. It is, of course, possible that the Greeks preserved the mytheme of Eurudikē but we have no strong and direct corroborative evidence.

There are many more aspects of Orphism that I have not touched. But as I wrote in the beginning (§ 0, end), the object of this study is only the IE aspect of Orphism.

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Орфей като индоевропейски образ

Никос Казанас

Статията е посветена на индоевропейските аспекти на Орфей и орфизма. Авторът застъпва идеята за родството между германското *elf*, гръцкото *Orpheus* и ведическото *Ṛbhu* и проследява наследените индоевропейски мотиви в митовете за Орфей и орфизма. В известното за елфите се откриват различни черти, намиращи паралели както в образа на Орфей (напр. връзката със слънчевата светлина/слънчевия култ; лечителството), така и при ведическите братя *Ṛbhu* (напр. уменията в обработката на метали). Сред важните характеристики на *Ṛbhu* са сила на ума, дълбоки познания и дар слово, което ги сближава с Орфей.

И в литературните сведения, и в изображенията могат да се намерят достатъчно податки, че в Гърция образът на Орфей е бил познат още в предомирово време; той изглежда е част от протоиндоевропейското наследство. Анализът на паралели във ведическата, келтската и нордическата митология показва, че мотивът за отрязаната глава на Орфей, която запазва жизнените си функции и продължава да пее и пророкува, е изключително индоевропейски. Протоиндоевропейски произход може да се изтъкне като най-вероятен и за други мотиви и идеи, застъпвани в по-късните орфически учения, като космическото яйце и доктрината за прераждането.

✉ *Omilos Meleton Institute*
nkazanas@omilosmeleton.gr